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MACRON HAILS GLOBAL TAX AGREEMENT AS 'MAJOR ADVANCE'



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BOTTAS WINS IN TURKEY, TITLE ADVANTAGE TO VERSTAPPEN



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IT'S ALL IN THE EYE, VETERAN PHOTOGRAPHER



The medical services of the armed forces continue to provide healthcare to the affected.

# Power restored to 90% households in Al Batinah

## RELIEF TEAMS REACH OUT TO AFFECTED AREAS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
@lakshmioman

With the Ministry of Defence clearing roads, the teams from the Ministry of Social Development have been able to reach remote areas and even mountainous areas, providing relief and shelter in the cyclone-affected Al Batinah area.

Mashal bin Abdullah al Farsi, representative of the Relief and Shelter at the Ministry of Social Development, said the emergency plans were already in place with higher committee meetings once the weather alert was on. The initial focus was on Muscat as the rains began

HM gets condolences on Shaheen victims

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received cables of condolences from a number of leaders, crown princes and senior officials of the brotherly and friendly countries on victims of the tropical cyclone Shaheen. In their cables, they expressed their heartfelt sympathies to His Majesty and the Omani people. They prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the departed souls in peace in paradise, grant their families fortitude to bear the loss and protect the Sultanate and its people against all harm. They stressed their solidarity with the Sultanate while it addresses impacts of the climatic condition. **DETAILS ON P2**

there, and immediately after that to North Al Batinah after the cyclone Shaheen made a landfall.

Earlier, the National Committee for Emergency Management said that power has been restored to more

than 90 per cent of the households in North and South Al Batinah, whereas 98 per cent of the telecommunications services were restored, fuel stations 99 per cent, paved roads 89 per cent and unpaved roads 57 per cent. **TURN TO P2**

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LEBANON ELECTRICITY BACK AFTER ARMY SUPPLIES FUEL

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SIXTEEN KILLED IN RUSSIAN PARACHUTISTS' PLANE CRASH

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Low turnout as Iraqis vote in early election

**BAGHDAD:** Iraqis voted on Sunday in a parliamentary election a year early as a concession to an anti-government protest movement but seen as unlikely to deliver major change to the war-scarred country.

Many of the 25 million eligible voters were expected to boycott the polls amid deep distrust in a political class widely blamed for graft, unemployment and crumbling public services in oil-rich Iraq.

Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi's future hangs in the balance, with few observers willing to predict who will come out on top after the usual political haggling between factions that follow Iraqi elections.

"This is an opportunity for change", Kadhemi said, casting his



ballot in Baghdad's fortified Green Zone. "Get out there and vote, change your reality, for Iraq and for your future." Three hours before polls were due to close at 15:00 GMT, voter turnout was estimated at just over 30 per cent, Electoral Commission Chief Jalil Adnan said.

Viola von Cramon, who heads a team of EU observers, lamented a "low turnout". The United Nations also sent observers. **SEE P6**

# A reminder of Arabian Peninsula's vulnerability

Oman is a country with a history of various cyclonic and storms which have resulted in loss of human lives, huge infrastructural damage and destruction of crops and animals.

On October 3, a powerful cyclone Shaheen made landfall in Oman, near Muscat, after barrelling up the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean and travelling through the Sea of Oman. Shaheen brought heavy rainfall and excessive flooding of the wadis and the cyclone's high winds generated massive storm surges along the coast.

It is not uncommon for tropical cyclones to form in the north Indian Ocean on the southeastern Arabian Sea. In the last two decades, cyclones

have become so frequent in the Arabian Sea that they have become threat to a vast population in the coastal areas.

Not just the frequency, the intensity and duration of the cyclones over the Arabian Sea too are changing, according to a paper published recently in *Springer's Climate Dynamics* journal.

Studies have found that the combination of warm sea surface temperatures in proximity to the equator, where the earth absorbs most solar radiation and atmospheric moisture (high relative humidity), creates suitable conditions necessary to generate tropical cyclones. **SEE P4**

MUSCAT

SAYYID FATIK RECEIVES AL ERADA CHAIRMAN

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Fatik bin Fahar al Said received at his office on Sunday Dr Ammar Bogis, Chairman of Al Erada Association for the Gifted and Disabled in Saudi Arabia. During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fatik conveyed the gratitude of His Majesty the Sultan to the guest for his sincere efforts in serving people with disabilities. The meeting reviewed areas of cooperation and ways to enhance them between the authorities concerned in the Sultanate and Al Erada Association. **SEE P5**





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# HM GETS CONDOLENCES ON SHAHEEN VICTIMS

**MUSCAT:** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received cables of condolences from a number of leaders, crown princes and senior officials of the brotherly and friendly countries on victims of the tropical cyclone Shaheen.

In their cables, they expressed their heartfelt sympathies to His Majesty and the Omani people.

They prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the departed souls in peace in paradise, grant their families fortitude to

bear the loss and protect the Sultanate and its people against all harm.

They stressed their solidarity with the Sultanate while it addresses impacts of the climatic condition.

His Majesty received cables from King

Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, President Dr Bashar al Assad of Syria, King Felipe VI of Spain, King Philippe of Belgium, Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime

Minister and Minister of Defence, Shaikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Deputy Emir and Crown Prince of Kuwait, and Shaikh Sabah Khalid Al Hamad al Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait.

— ONA

# Performing a big task of providing relief to cyclone-affected people



## Power restored to 90% households



### FROM P1

"As the cyclone has cleared out, we are here in North Al Batinah to provide relief and shelter for all people. We visited homes to understand everything they have gone through," said Mashal.

One of the first steps the teams took was to move people to the schools which were designated as makeshift shelters. Around 5,200 nationals and residents were provided accommodation, food and water.

"Once the cyclone hit, there was nothing — no electricity or water to drink other than a high level of flood water. Once the Ministry of Defence cleared roads, we could reach even to inaccessible places," said Mashal.

While most families have gone back to their homes, 300 people continue to live at the shelters. Meanwhile, the public has been pouring out to North Al Batinah to contribute in their own way and provide services.

"If people like to participate in the recovery process, they can register on the website of Oman Charitable Organisation. They can specify which areas they would like to contribute to or assist. We have made Al Suwaiq and Al Khabourah as sectors."

We have arranged camps where lunch is provided for almost 300 people daily, and has facilities to take rest. There are also guides who can assist the volunteers. If people want to donate cash or contribute towards electronic household appliances, they can do so through the website the same website. "All we want to say to the people is — don't panic, we are working, we will do our best and you are safe," said Mashal.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Social Development began field visits to assess and count the affected houses, while affected families continued to receive an amount of RO 1,000 as social benefit.

## Military panel reviews efforts

**MUSCAT:** The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Military Committee for Emergency Management held a meeting at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday to get updates from its sub-committees deployed in South Al Batinah and North Al Batinah where the SAF and other Defence Ministry departments are delivering relief aid to the cyclone-stricken areas.

The Military Committee took note of the collaboration among government and social parties towards the realisation of the supreme national goal of tackling the impacts of the recent tropical condition Shaheen. — ONA

# Teaching the world a lesson in unity and solidarity

On the 8th of October, all roads led to Al Batinah with more than 15,000 volunteers driving towards the governorate to participate in what would have been the largest national cleaning campaign in the Sultanate



## RUQAYA AL KINDI

Imagine waking up one morning with all your prized possession gone — your car, your home, your children and the peaceful neighbourhood you are so familiar with is in total disarray. Imagine waking up to a scene of chaos, that instead of the comfortable home and farms that took you years to build had been levelled to nothing more but “mud” and debris.

When the tropical cyclone “Shaheen” landed in Al Batinah, between the wilayats of Al Musannah and Al Suwaiq, this was what the inhabitants agonisingly experienced.

Accompanied by very intensive rain and strong winds, the cyclone caused heavy rains and floods. It was so remarkable that Suwaiq was reported globally as the number one place to have received the most rain in 24 hours with a weather observatory reporting it registered 305.8 millimetres of rain.

The terrifying night was followed by cities inundated in varying degrees of water levels with roads totally destroyed, communications totally cut-off, electricity and water supplies dismantled and hundreds of people in distress.

“After suffering during the evening

with the heavy barrage of heavy rains and strong winds, the residents of Al Suwaiq and Al Khabourah got even more distressed when in the early morning, water from the mountains descended towards the valley sweeping away everything and doubling the damage they already experienced the night before,” reported locals Suhail al Nahdi, Saeed al Alawi and Ahmed al Buraiki.

“The water level has risen dramatically which then led to the destruction of electric poles and breaking down of power stations. The water supply has been affected too as the main water pipes got broken in many areas,” they shared.

“The roads were also broken and mud and sand accumulated. Many of the roads cracked and were swept away resulting in them being inaccessible. Palm trees were also uprooted and were washed towards homes,” they added.

This eyewitness report was supported by photographs and videos shared across social media. Some homes have totally fallen down while those that remain got flooded. Vehicles got stuck in different nooks and crannies imaginable and the death of livestock has been massive.

But while the amount of devastation was mind-boggling, it has inspired the

nation to stand united in the face of adversity.

Efforts have not stopped since the cyclone ended. On the 8th of October, all roads led to Al Batinah with more than 15,000 volunteers (estimate provided by the Ministry of Finance) driving towards the governorate to participate in what would have been the largest national cleaning campaign in the Sultanate.

The state’s civil and military institutions, volunteer teams, individuals, young and old, and men and women from all governorates of the Sultanate were seen working with one spirit under the scorching sun in order to provide material and moral and physical assistance and contribute to restoring life to its normal state.

One volunteer who was in the massive event, Abdulmalik al Yaqoubi, shared on Twitter: “In one courtyard, each person just grabbed a shovel in a friendly atmosphere. They begin working until the mud faded. When it was time for a break, there was a light conversation going around. Everyone was asking ‘Where are you from?’ There were many answers.”

He added, “Someone eventually asked, ‘Who are the owners of the house?’ One

hand rose amongst 14 people. It became clear that everyone came by chance to help. It became clear to me and I felt that Oman is great with its people.”

The expat communities also came in droves to lend a helping hand. In a video circulating online, a Bengali volunteer said, “I have been here for 11 years. I love Oman and I must provide help. I am here like the rest. I have been providing assistance for 3 days in different areas cleaning and helping in water and food distribution.”

As college and university students will resume this week, many female entrepreneurs were also quick to provide assistance donating clothes, bags, shoes and many other supplies that will help them get back to their feet.

Donations also poured in from different organisations both from the private and public sectors with the money collected used to gradually compensate affected families not only with financial assistance but with water, food, clothing and other personal needs.

With tragedies like Shaheen usually causing massive psychological trauma, psychologists and other medical experts including individual volunteers created some programmes that provided

entertainment, especially for women and children.

October 8 will therefore go in history as an important date where the Omani people came together to stitch the wound with their own hands and an important date that showcase how the people of Oman rose despite the pain to shake the dust off their brother’s back.

This sense of unity and rising together in the face of adversity prodded by a deep sense of commitment and care for others is one of the lasting legacies that had been instilled by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, may God have mercy on him, to his people. It is through his leadership that we benefit from his foresight especially on national unity, interdependence and cooperation.

In the midst of the cleanup drive, Sultan Qaboos’ presence was felt as his name was always mentioned and praises were sung to him for being the role model and the teacher from whom Omanis draw their morals and behaviour.

Efforts are still ongoing as confirmed by the competent authorities. State agencies will remain in a state of emergency and one thing is clear, this will remain to be the case until every person gets back the dignity and return back to his normal life.



# A reminder of Arabian Peninsula's vulnerability

SAMUEL KUTTY

[@samkuttyp](#)

Oman is a country with a history of various cyclonic and storm events that have resulted in the loss of human lives, huge infrastructural damage and destruction of crops and animals.

On October 3, a powerful cyclone Shaheen made landfall in Oman, near Muscat, after barreling up the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean and travelling through the Sea of Oman.

Shaheen brought on heavy rainfall, and excessive flooding in the wadis and the cyclone's high winds generated massive storm surges along the coast.

While it wreaked havoc in many parts of the Sultanate, surrounding countries have also felt the effects in the form of enhanced rainfall and winds in the United Arab Emirates and Iran, with the latter suffering structural damages, injuries and fatalities.

It is not uncommon for tropical cyclones to form in the north Indian Ocean on the southeastern Arabian Sea. In the last over two decades, cyclones have become so frequent in the Arabian Sea that

they are a looming threat to a vast population in the coastal areas.

Not just the frequency, the intensity and duration of the cyclones over the Arabian Sea too are changing, according to a paper published recently in *Springer's Climate Dynamics* journal.

Studies have found that the combination of warm sea surface temperatures in proximity to the equator, where the earth absorbs most solar radiation and atmospheric moisture (high relative humidity), creates suitable conditions necessary to generate tropical cyclones.

But what are tropical cyclones? They are low-pressure systems that form over warm tropical waters, with gale-force winds near the centre. The winds can extend hundreds of kilometres from the eye of the storm.

Sucking up vast quantities of water, they often produce torrential rains and flooding resulting in major loss of life and property damage.

They are also known as hurricanes or typhoons, depending on where they originate in the world, when they reach sustained winds of at least 119 kilometres per hour.

**It is not uncommon for tropical cyclones to form in the north Indian Ocean on the southeastern Arabian Sea. In the last two decades, cyclones have become so frequent in the Arabian Sea that they are a looming threat to a vast population in the coastal areas**

According to Nasa observations, oceans soak up more than 90 per cent of the heat generated by greenhouse gases, leading to rising water temperatures.

Rising sea levels could also boost storm surges from cyclones, making them even more deadly and destructive. As cyclones draw their energy from warm waters, the rising temperatures are causing intense storms to become more common.

Almost half of the tropical cyclones that are generated in the Arabian Sea do not make landfall, and most that do in the Arabian Peninsula become severely weakened essentially downgraded in intensity to a depression.

According to Mohammed Mahmoud, Director of Climate and Water Programme and a senior fellow at the Middle East

Institute, some cyclones travel further west towards the Horn of Africa but tend to also lose intensity in that trajectory due to the relatively cooler waters of the western Arabian Sea.

Oman and Yemen have historically been the most impacted countries in the peninsula from cyclone activity due to the length of their combined coastline on the Arabian Sea.

While very few cyclonic storms make landfall in these two countries at the higher level of cyclone intensity they may have possessed when formed in the Arabian Sea, these storms still bring with them the triumvirate of corresponding calamities: Flooding, death and destruction.

"Compared to significant tropical cyclones of the past that originate in the North Indian Ocean, the behaviour of

cyclone Shaheen is somewhat unprecedented in the modern era and could represent a potential shift in how climate change is influencing the formation of extreme weather events that can afflict the Middle East", he points out in a report.

Traditionally, tropical cyclones forming in the Arabian Sea do not travel beyond the Sea of Oman or deep inland across the Arabian Peninsula. The dry air and reduced moisture over the Arabian Peninsula in comparison to the Indian Ocean is an impediment to that type of cyclone trajectory, robbing a potentially severe cyclone of its intensity and accelerating its eventual dissipation.

But the increased warming of the oceans and seas near the equator as evidenced by rising sea surface temperatures, coupled with climate projections of increased global warming in the future, signals the potential of more frequent and intense cyclones landing well into the Arabian Peninsula and surrounding regions.

"This makes Shaheen both a reminder of the peninsula's vulnerability to extreme weather

events and an early indicator of how climate change is exacerbating that vulnerability", he points out in the report.

According to a research paper by Amna bint Mohammed al Ruhaili, the vulnerability of the Omani coastal zone, for instance, is also related to the area's socio-economic significance.

Sixty-seven per cent of the Omani population resides along the coast; population growth, infrastructure development, and economic activity, for example the fisheries and tourism industries, are also clustered in the coastal area.

"Frequent exposure to flash flooding of wadis as a result of the cyclones or short-term extreme weather events, serves to illustrate Oman's inability to mitigate such events", the research report points out.

Measuring exposure due to projected future sea level rise resulting from climate change, reveals vulnerabilities of Oman's population, cities, and infrastructure. "These flood events also demonstrate the urgency of the need for Oman to adapt to the consequences of climate change", it suggests.

## ■ MINISTERS RECEIVE BRITISH MINISTER



**MUSCAT:** General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Sunday James Cleverly, British Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

The meeting comes within the framework of interest attached by the Sultanate to the regional and international issues.

At the beginning of the meeting, Gen Sultan al Numani welcomed the guest, who expressed

his thanks and appreciation to the Sultanate for enhancing means of cooperation to achieve both countries' joint interests.

The two sides exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed march of the historical relations between the two friendly countries. They also discussed several matters of common concern. Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, also received James Cleverly.

During the meeting, the two sides several

areas of the existing cooperation within the framework of the Oman-UK Comprehensive Agreement of rooted friendship and joint cooperation between the two countries.

They also covered a number of economic programmes and projects. In addition to cooperation in the field of public health and overcoming the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. They expressed their interest in reaching a free trade agreement between the UK and the GCC countries. — ONA



## Sayyid Fatik receives Al Erada Chairman

**MUSCAT:** Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Fatik bin Fahar al Said received at his office on Sunday Dr Ammar Bogis, Chairman of Al Erada Association for the Gifted and Disabled in Saudi Arabia.

During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fatik conveyed the gratitude of His Majesty the Sultan to the guest for his sincere efforts in serving people with disabilities.

The meeting reviewed areas of cooperation and ways to enhance them between the authorities concerned in the Sultanate and Al Erada Association. The meeting was attended by Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, Abdullah Saud al Enezi, Saudi Ambassador to the Sultanate and members of the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA

## 2,386 laptops given to students in Thamrait and Al Mazyouna



**THAMRAIT:** Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) funded the provision of 2,386 laptops for school students in grades 7-12 in the company's concession area in the Wilayats of Thamrait and Al Mazyouna, Governorate of Dhofar.

The initiative is part of PDO's efforts in sustaining social projects and enhancing partnership with government departments concerned.

The aim of PDO's efforts is to upgrade the educational process by promoting the concept of e-learning, as well as providing the necessary tools for students and guardians to achieve this goal. — ONA

## New batch of trainees join police service



A new batch of trainees has joined the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences (SQAPS) after passing field and electronic tests, interviews and medical examinations, to work for the Royal Oman Police.

## Indian schools begin classes for senior section

**KABEER YOUSUF**  
@kabeeryousef

Indian schools in Oman opened gates for physical classes almost after 18 months. The opening of schools is a big relief for the students and teachers from online classes, which was in practice due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

All the 21 Indian schools, including the largest community school in the country, the ISM, opened their gates for the senior students for hybrid education within strict Covid-19 protocols soon after some private schools resumed regular classroom sessions.

Accordingly, Plus 2 students are given physical classroom sessions on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, while online classes are conducted on Mondays and Wednesdays. Lessons for Class 10 will begin next week.

"We have begun classes for students of senior sections in a phased manner after submitting our plans to the Ministry of Education (MoE), which they have approved. Although we were given nod to function months ago, we were working out the modalities of physical classes,



safety of children and teachers and other staff member and all aspects that would facilitate a smooth conducting of classes," Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman of Board of Directors of Indian Schools told the *Observer*. Students should have taken at least one dose of the approved vaccination before coming to school.

A number of regulations have been introduced after the schools commenced classroom sessions. The number of students in a classroom will be as per the MoE guidelines, and the lists of students in each class will be displayed at the entrances of the

school. Students should share a copy of the vaccination certificate with the class teacher.

Students are supposed to follow all Covid precautions, including wearing face masks, social distancing, and keeping their sanitisers with them. While some schools' canteens will remain closed because of the coronavirus spread, Physical Education, Fine Arts, Library and Work Experience classes will be conducted online and offline.

"Those students who travel back to Oman are advised to have self-quarantine at home for five days before coming to the schools."

The role of SMCs:

Dr Sivakumar further said that the School Management Committees (SMC's) of all schools have a significant role in the functioning of these schools.

"The efforts of the school management committees are invaluable in helping children get back to their classes. If all parties concerned, the children parents, teachers and others take Covid-19 protocols to the letter and spirit, more classes can be opened and life pushed back to normal," said the BoD Chairman.

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MOVEMENT LED BY SADR EXPECTED TO BECOME PARLIAMENT’S BIGGEST FACTION

# Iraq holds early vote in response to protests

**BAGHDAD:** Iraqis were voting in small numbers on Sunday in a parliamentary election that many said they would boycott, having lost faith in the democratic system brought in by the US-led invasion of 2003.

The established, ruling elite whose most powerful parties have armed wings is expected to sweep the vote, with the movement led by populist cleric Moqtada al Sadr, who opposes all foreign interference, seen emerging as parliament’s biggest faction.

Such a result would not dramatically alter the balance of power in Iraq or the wider Middle East, say Iraqi officials, foreign diplomats and analysts, but for Iraqis it could mean that a former insurgency leader and conservative could increase his sway over the government.

In Baghdad’s Sadr City, a polling station set up in a girls’ school saw a slow but steady trickle of voters.

Election volunteer Hamid Majid, 24, said he had voted for his old schoolteacher, a candidate for the Sadrist.

“She educated many of us in the area so all the young people are voting for her. It’s the time for the Sadrist Movement. The people are

with them,” Majid said.

An election official said turnout was low by mid-afternoon, without elaborating. Turnout was low across the country, Reuters witnesses said. In several parts of Baghdad, mosque loudspeakers were used to urge Iraqis to vote.

The election is being held several months early under a new law designed to help independent candidates — a response to mass anti-government protests two years ago.

“I’m not going to vote and my family won’t vote either, said Murthadha Nassir, a 27-year-old man in the southern city of Nassiriya, who participated in protests and watched friends gunned down by security forces.

“These groups being voted in, they’re all the ones who targeted us.”

Nonetheless, some Iraqis were keen to vote in what is Iraq’s fifth parliamentary vote since 2003 — and are hopeful of change. In the northern city of Kirkuk, Abu Abdullah said he arrived to vote an hour before polling stations opened.

“I came since early morning to be the first voter to participate in an event that will hopefully bring



Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission to Iraq, Viola von Cramon, speaks to the press at a polling station in Baghdad on Sunday. — AFP

change,” he said. “We expect the situation to improve significantly.”

At least 167 parties and more than 3,200 candidates are competing for parliament’s 329 seats, according to the election commission. Iraqi elections are often followed by protracted talks over a president, a prime minister

and a cabinet.

Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi is not running for election but the negotiations after the vote could yet see him get a second term. Kadhimi who is viewed as Western-friendly has no party to back him.

The Kurds have two main

parties that rule the autonomous Kurdistan region, and the majority this time have two main blocs.

Kadhimi told reporters as he cast his ballot: “I call on Iraq people: there’s still time. Go out and vote for Iraq and vote for your future.”

Kadhimi’s government called

the vote early in response to anti-establishment protests in 2019 that toppled the previous administration.

Protesters’ demands included the removal of a ruling elite most Iraqis view as corrupt and keeping the country in disrepair. The demonstrations were brutally suppressed and some 600 people were killed over several months.

Iraq is safer than it has been for years and violent sectarianism is less present since Iraq vanquished the IS in 2017 with the help of an international military coalition. But endemic corruption and mismanagement has meant many of Iraq’s 40 million people are without work, and lack healthcare, education and electricity.

“Why won’t I vote? Because I have no faith in people. Those we elected, what have they done?,” asked Mohammed Hassan, a resident of Basra.

“The same thing. Look at the garbage, the filth. Where are the projects? The previous government’s projects, where are they?”

Washington is removing all US combat troops as part of an agreement with the Iraqi government. — Reuters

## Aden car bomb targeting officials kills at least five



Policemen stand at the scene of a blast in Aden, Yemen, on Sunday. — Reuters

**ADEN:** A car bomb targeting the governor’s convoy shook Yemen’s southern port city of Aden on Sunday killing at least five people, security and local government sources said.

Governor Ahmed Lamalas and Agriculture Minister Salem al Suqatri, both members of a southern separatist group, survived a “terrorist assassination attempt”, the state news agency said.

Killed in the attack were the governor’s press secretary and his photographer, the head of his security detail and a fourth companion as well as a civilian bystander, a local government source said, adding that at least

10 others were injured.

A military spokesman of the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) earlier said at least five people were injured including three civilians, one of them a child. A body covered with a blanket lay on the street next to a charred vehicle in Al Tawahi district, which houses the STC headquarters. Firefighters and police were deployed to the area.

Lamalas is secretary general of the STC, which has vied with the Saudi-backed government for control of Aden and Yemen’s wider south. STC has also seen infighting among its ranks.

— Reuters

## Lebanon electricity back online after army supplies fuel

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon’s electricity grid was back online on Sunday after the army supplied fuel to two key power stations that had run out, a minister said, ending almost a day of total blackout.

The Deir Ammar and Zahrani plants ground to a halt on Saturday, causing the state electricity network to collapse completely for the second time this month.

The Mediterranean country is battling economic turmoil, and the cash-strapped state has in recent months struggled to import enough fuel oil for electricity production.

Most Lebanese saw no major change to their daily lives on Saturday, as the state has been barely providing one to two hours of power a day for months. Energy Minister Walid Fayad said on Sunday that the grid was back up and running.

“The network is back to normal, as it was before the gasoil ran out at Deir Ammar and Zahrani,” he said in a statement, implying production would revert to the



A file photo shows a view of a mesh of raised electricity lines along a street in a suburb of Lebanon’s capital Beirut. — AFP

previous few hours a day.

He thanked the army for handing over 6,000 kilolitres of gasoil, half of which he said went to each power station.

The state electricity company had said on Saturday that a shipment of fuel oil was expected to arrive that evening, and be offloaded at the start of next week.

Lebanon has witnessed rolling power cuts across the country

since the end of its 1975-1990 civil war, but the economic crisis has made matters drastically worse.

Lebanese who can afford it subscribe to private generators to keep appliances on, but even their owners have started to ration power supplies due to the scarcity of fuel.

The international community has long demanded a complete overhaul of Lebanon’s loss-making

electricity sector, which has cost the government more than \$40 billion since the early 1990s.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said that his country would continue to support Lebanon, which is suffering from a deepening economic crisis, and promised Tehran would send more fuel shipments.

“We continue to send oil derivatives to Lebanon, and we hope that in the future it will be within the framework of protocol agreements between the two countries,” Amir Abdollahian said after meeting Hassan Nasrallah, the head of the Lebanese Hizbullah group.

Iran is set to deliver more fuel shipments in the coming days to energy-starved Lebanon through neighbouring Syria for distribution by Hizbullah.

Last month, Nasrallah announced that Iran was ready to send supplies to Lebanon to ease the country’s crippling fuel shortage and economic crisis.

— Agencies

### SHORT TAKES

#### TELAVIV

##### Merkel kicks off final official visit to Israel

Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany still bears responsibility for Israel as she held talks with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on her final official trip to the country.

“The history of the Holocaust is of course a singular event for which we also continue to bear responsibility. In every phase of history, also in the future,” Merkel told reporters on Sunday.

“It’s about not being neutral and taking a clear position in favour of Israel’s security, no



matter how difficult the situation is.”

The chancellor also laid a wreath at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem in the presence of Bennett.

#### TUNIS

##### Tunisians rally ahead of government formation

More than 5,000 Tunisians rallied on Sunday against a presidential power grab in the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings a decade ago.

Despite checkpoints and security screening of protesters, it was the biggest in a series of Sunday rallies in central Tunis both pro and against the actions of President Kais Saied.

On July 25, after months of political stalemate, Saied sacked the prime minister, suspended



parliament and granted himself judicial powers, a move he followed up in September with measures that effectively allow the president to rule by decree.

#### TEHRAN

##### Iran has 120 kg of 20%-enriched uranium

Iran has enriched more than 120 kg of 20 per cent enriched uranium, the head of the country’s atomic energy agency said on state television on Saturday evening.

“We have passed 120 kg,” said Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. “We have more than that figure. “Our people know well that they (Western powers) were meant to give us the enriched fuel at 20 per cent to use in the Tehran



reactor, but they haven’t done so,” he added.

“If our colleagues do not do it, we would naturally have problems with the lack of fuel for the Tehran reactor.

## In brief

■ NEW DELHI



### DELHI WARNS OF LOOMING POWER 'CRISIS'

New Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal warned of a looming power crisis in the Indian capital, saying that some of the major coal-fired stations supplying the city barely have a day's stock left.

Several states in eastern and southern India have been hit by supply shortages, with utility providers resorting to unscheduled power cuts. The shortage in India, the world's second-largest coal-consuming country, follows widespread power outages in China that have shut factories and badly hit production and global supply chains.

■ BEIJING



### CHINA ADMINISTERED 2.22 BN COVID-19 DOSES

China had administered a total of 2.22 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccine as of October 9, data from the National Health Commission showed on Sunday.

According to the NHC, more than 1.07 billion people have received at least one dose of vaccine, which is 76 per cent of China's 1.4 billion population. Among them, over 889.4 million people have been fully inoculated. The country aims to achieve herd immunity by the end of this year.

"The efficacy of Chinese vaccines is about 70 per cent, so the country would need more than 80 per cent of the population to be vaccinated before establishing herd immunity", China's top respiratory expert Zhong Nanshan said.

■ KUALA LUMPUR



### MALAYSIA LIFTS TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS FOR FULLY VACCINATED

Malaysia on Sunday lifted interstate and international travel restrictions for residents fully vaccinated against Covid-19, as the country achieved its target of inoculating 90 per cent of its adult population. Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the government has agreed to allow fully vaccinated Malaysians to travel overseas without applying for permission. The new rules take effect on Monday. The government is preparing to shift into an endemic Covid-19 phase where it will not impose wide lockdowns again if cases rise, Ismail Sabri told a news conference.

## SOUTH KOREA'S RULING PARTY CANDIDATE HOPES TO OVERCOME SCANDAL



A ruling Democratic Party's contender for next year's presidential election candidate, Lee Jae-Myung speaks during the final race to choose their presidential election candidate in Seoul, South Korea. — Reuters

## Lee wins party primary in presidential race

SEOUL: Lee Jae-Myung became the presidential candidate for South Korea's ruling party on Sunday, hoping to overcome a property scandal and gather national support while conservative opponents trade barbs over anal acupuncture and fortune-tellers.

Lee, governor of Gyeonggi province and a party outsider often critical of incumbent President Moon Jae-In, sealed his victory in the primary to represent the Democratic Party in the March 9 presidential election. Moon cannot stand for re-election under Korean law.

The leading contender among a fractured field from the main conservative People Power Party, Yoon Seok-Youl, has been caught up in scandals of his own — including murky ties to an anal acupuncturist — and criticism he relies on fortune-tellers.

"It used to be at most a single candidate who had such scandals, but the top two frontrunners are both embroiled in scandals in this election, which shows South Korea is regressing politically", Lee Jun-Han, professor of political science at Incheon National University.

Lee secured 50.29 per cent of the votes in an 11-round primary that ended on Sunday. His closest rival and initially the establishment favourite, former Prime Minister Lee Nak-Yon, finished with 39.14 per cent.

### CLOSER TIES

His outsider image was once seen as a liability in the face of establishment competitors with closer ties to the outgoing Moon, but Lee rose to prominence with an aggressive pandemic response and a populist economic agenda.

Dogged by a scandal involving a residential development plan

when he was mayor of Seongnam in 2015, Lee used his acceptance speech to pledge progress on policy issues, including a push for universal basic income and more affordable housing amid skyrocketing property prices. Next year's election represents "the ultimate battle against the corrupt establishment", he said.

Prosecutors and police have been investigating the Seongnam project amid controversy over Lee's ties to a former official, who has been arrested on corruption charges related to the deal.

Lee has denied any wrongdoing. His office did not respond to requests for comment.

Housing-related scandals are a particular sore spot for voters in South Korea, where home prices have soared beyond the reach of many. Lee's party has been damaged by allegations of property speculation. — Reuters

## Taliban tells US not to 'destabilise' its regime

DOHA: The Taliban warned the United States not to "destabilise" the regime during their first face-to-face talks since the US withdrawal, as a deadly sectarian bombing raised further questions about their grip on power.

As mourners in northern Afghanistan buried their dead from an attack on a mosque that killed 62, a Taliban delegation told US officials in Doha that any weakening of their government could cause "problems for the people".

Scores more worshippers were wounded in Friday's blast in Kunduz, which was claimed by the IS group — who appear to be attempting to further shake Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover. "We clearly told them that trying to destabilise the government in Afghanistan is good for no one", Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told the Afghan state news agency Bakhtar after the talks in the Qatari capital.

"Good relations with Afghanistan are good for everyone. Nothing should be done to weaken the existing government in Afghanistan which can lead to problems for the people", he said, in a recorded statement translated by AFP.

The Taliban are seeking international recognition, as well as assistance to avoid a humanitarian disaster and ease Afghanistan's economic crisis.

A State Department official said the US delegation would press the Taliban to ensure

Good relations with Afghanistan are good for everyone. Nothing should be done to weaken the existing government in Afghanistan which can lead to problems for the people

MUTTAQI

Foreign Minister

terrorists do not create a base for attacks in the country. It would also pressure Afghanistan's new rulers to form an inclusive government and to respect the rights of women and girls, the official said, stressing the meeting did not indicate Washington recognised Taliban rule.

"We remain clear that any legitimacy must be earned through the Taliban's own actions", the official said.

As the two-day talks began, Kunduz counted the cost of the bloodiest assault since US forces left the country in August.

A gravedigger in the cemetery overlooking the city said they had handled 62 bodies, and local reports suggested the final toll could be up to 100. The regional branch of IS, known as IS-Khorasan (IS-K), has repeatedly targeted minorities in Afghanistan. — AFP



## 'Father of Pakistan's bomb' A Q Khan dies at 85

ISLAMABAD: Abdul Qadeer Khan, celebrated as the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme died on Sunday at 85.

The nuclear scientist, who spent the last years of his life under heavy guard, passed away in the capital Islamabad, where he had recently been hospitalised with Covid-19.

Khan had long been hailed a national hero for transforming Pakistan into the world's first Islamic nuclear weapons power and strengthening its clout against India. But he was declared by the West a dangerous renegade for sharing technology with rogue nuclear states.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan joined a rapidly building chorus voicing grief at the news, lamenting that the country had lost "a national icon".

Arrangements were quickly made for a state funeral on Sunday afternoon at Islamabad's Faisal Mosque, with all government ministers and armed forces officers asked to attend. Flags were also ordered to fly at half-mast.



Abdul Qadeer Khan

Just hours after news of Khan's death broke, an orange mechanical digger was busy clearing a grave as mourners began arriving for the service at the giant mosque — the sixth-largest in the world.

It began raining heavily as Khan's coffin, draped with a

Pakistani flag, was carried through a sea of black umbrellas.

Amid tight security, a massive crowd gathered to bid him farewell, with many making videos and snapping pictures as the coffin was carried into a tent-covered area accommodating Khan's family

members, ministers and other top officials. Nearby, thousands of members of the public crammed into an uncovered enclosure, getting soaked as they prayed in the downpour.

Khan was lauded for bringing the nation up to par with India in the atomic field and making its defences "impregnable".

But he found himself in the international crosshairs when he was accused of illegally sharing nuclear technology with Iran, Libya and North Korea. He confessed in 2004, after the International Atomic Energy Agency — the UN nuclear watchdog — put Pakistani scientists at the centre of a global atomic black market.

Pardoned by the nation's military ruler Pervez Musharraf, he was only put under house arrest for five years.

"I saved the country for the first time when I made Pakistan a nuclear nation and saved it again when I confessed and took the whole blame on myself", Khan said in an interview in 2008.

After his house arrest was lifted, he was granted some freedom of movement around the leafy capital, but always flanked by authorities, who he had to inform of his every move.

On Sunday, journalists gathered behind barriers blocking off the street leading to his home in the capital as a procession of cars entered and left the property.

Born in Bhopal, India on April 1, 1936, Khan was just a young boy when his family migrated to Pakistan during the bloody 1947 partition of the sub-continent at the end of British colonial rule.

He did a science degree at Karachi University in 1960, then went on to study metallurgical engineering in Berlin before completing advanced studies in the Netherlands and Belgium.

His crucial contribution to Pakistan's nuclear programme was the procurement of a blueprint for uranium centrifuges, which transform uranium into weapons-grade fuel for nuclear fissile material. — AFP

## Austrian FM all set to replace embattled Kurz

VIENNA: Austria's top diplomat Alexander Schallenberg was on Sunday expected to take over the chancellorship, a day after Sebastian Kurz announced he would step down amid graft claims, capping the spectacular rise of one of Europe's youngest political leaders.

The 35-year-old conservative announced late on Saturday that he was stepping down as chancellor, bowing to pressure to resign after he was implicated in a corruption scandal.

Saying he wanted to "make space to prevent chaos," Kurz — who has headed two governments over the last four years — has suggested foreign minister Schallenberg to take over the chancellery. The 52-year-old diplomat met President Alexander Van der Bellen on Sunday following a meeting with Vice-Chancellor Werner Kogler of the Greens.

In brief comments before meeting the president, Schallenberg spoke of an "enormously challenging task and time, not easy for any of us".

"But I think we are showing an incredible degree of responsibility for this country," he told reporters.

Kogler already indicated late on Saturday that his party would support Schallenberg to keep the conservative-Greens coalition in government.

Pressure on Kurz to resign, including from the Greens, started after prosecutors on Wednesday raided several locations linked to his People's Party (OeVP).

They announced that Kurz and nine other individuals were under investigation over claims that government money was used between 2016 and 2018 in a corrupt deal to ensure positive media coverage. Kurz has denied any wrongdoing, reiterating on Saturday that allegations against him were "false" and that he would seek to clear up the matter while he continues as party leader and as a lawmaker in parliament.

The opposition has blasted the continued conservative-Greens coalition given the graft investigation, with Social Democrats (SPOe) leader Pamela Rendi-Wagner saying even on the back benches Kurz would remain a "shadow chancellor". — AFP



Austria's Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg leaves after meeting Austria's President at Ballhausplatz in Vienna. — AFP

## Sixteen killed in Russian parachutists' plane crash

MOSCOW: Sixteen people were killed when a plane carrying parachutists crashed in central Russia on Sunday, the emergencies ministry said.

The L-410 plane carrying 22 people crashed around 9:23 am near the town of Menzelinsk in the republic of Tatarstan, the ministry said on its Telegram channel. "Six people were rescued, 16 were taken out without signs of life," the ministry said.

The ministry had earlier said 15 people died and that the aircraft was carrying 23 people.

While the Menzelinsk club organises skydiving experiences for amateurs it has also hosted championships and training sessions for cosmonauts.

Images published by the ministry showed the aircraft broken in half with a severely dented nose.

The six survivors were taken to hospital, the local health ministry told the Interfax news agency.

Tatarstan head Rustam Minnikhanov, who travelled to the scene, said pilots had reported an engine failure and requested an emergency landing shortly after taking off.

He said the plane tried to avoid a nearby residential area as it approached for landing but "the altitude didn't allow it".

The plane hit a parked van with its wing and the aircraft turned over. All the survivors were sitting in the back of the plane, club instructor Oleg Shiporov told



Emergency specialists work at the crash site of the L-410 plane near the town of Menzelinsk in the Republic of Tatarstan, Russia. — Reuters

TASS news agency.

Russian investigators have launched a criminal probe over the violation of safety rules. Monday has been declared a day of mourning in Tatarstan.

According to Interfax, the plane belonged to the Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation and Navy of Russia, which describes itself as a sports and defence organisation.

The organisation was created in the 1920s and Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man to travel to space in 1961, has trained on its airfields.

The head of the Menzelinsk parachuting club said that it was not to blame for the accident.

**Pilots had reported an engine failure and requested an emergency landing shortly after taking off**

"We are the best, we are among the top five clubs," Ravil Nurmekhametov told TASS news agency, adding that the club had hosted European and World championships. "Cosmonauts train here," he said.

TASS cited a source as saying that the state Cosmonauts Training Centre has suspended its work with the club pending the

investigation.

In 2018, two amateur skydivers died while completing a group free-fall jump at the Menzelinsk club after their parachutes got tangled.

The Czech-built L-410 light aircraft was one of the two planes used by the club, according to its website.

Two L-410 planes suffered fatal accidents in Russia earlier this year, leaving a total of eight people dead.

Russia was notorious for plane accidents but has improved air traffic safety in recent years with major airlines switching from Soviet aircraft to modern jets.

— AFP

## Italian far-right group's leaders arrested after clashes

ROME: Rome police have arrested 12 people — including two leaders of a far-right party — after protests against coronavirus restrictions turned into serious riots, Italian media reported on Sunday.

The leaders of Forza Nuova, Giuliano Castellino and Roberto Fiore, were present during the violence in the Italian capital on Saturday after tens of thousands had taken part in an authorised march.

Police, who were involved in several clashes with demonstrators and were pelted with firecrackers, are also checking video footage to see who else should be detained.

About 30 people attacked the emergency room of a hospital late on Saturday where one of

the arrested protesters was being treated for an injury.

The rioters broke down the door and clashed with police as well as ambulance workers, the ANSA news agency reported. Four people were injured, including a nurse who took a bottle to the head.

According to media reports, some rioters tried to advance on the official residence of Prime Minister Mario Draghi, but were stopped by police water cannons. Authorities also used tear gas.

The headquarters of Italy's largest trade union CGIL was also stormed and three police officers were injured. Footage on social media showed rioters attacking officers with sticks and flagpoles. Politicians have reacted with



A protester during clashes with riot policeman following a protest against the mandatory sanitary pass called 'green pass' in the aim to limit the spread of the Covid-19 in central Rome. — AFP

shock. Violent protests are rare in Italy.

The country was the first in Europe to be badly hit by the pandemic in March last year but has managed the health crisis comparatively well since.

New measures against Covid-19 will come into force next Friday.

Every employee in the private or public sector must have a so-called "green pass," which shows proof of vaccination, recovery from or a negative test for Covid-19.

Critics have been campaigning against the measure, which is being introduced to allow further Covid-19 relaxations. Cinemas, theatres and concert halls will be allowed to operate at 100 per cent capacity again if visitors have a

green pass.

The attack on the union headquarters follows its support for the measure. CGIL leader Maurizio Landini spoke of an act of "fascist violence" and an "attack on the constitution."

Meanwhile, Italy reached the target of fully vaccinating 80 per cent of the population over the age of 12 against Covid-19, according to official data, achieving a goal Rome had set as a safety cut-off point, government data showed on Sunday.

According to a government website showed 43,229,551 people over-12, out of a total population of around 60 million, had completed their vaccination cycle as of October 10. — Agencies

### SHORT TAKES

#### KANO

##### Gunmen kill 19 traders in Nigeria market raid

Gunmen from gangs of cattle thieves and kidnappers have opened fire on a market in northwest Nigeria, killing at least 19 people, officials and local residents said. Northwest and central Nigeria are plagued by criminal gangs of cattle thieves and kidnappers for ransom called bandits, who raid villages, killing and abducting residents as well as looting and burning homes.

Officials and local residents said the gunmen raided a market



in Unguwan Lalle village in Sabon Birni district of Sokoto state, near the border with Niger. "They attacked the market in the afternoon, killing 19 people," said Aminu Al Mustapha Gobir, a local lawmaker representing the district in the Sokoto parliament.

#### PRAGUE

##### Czech president in hospital as govt talks start

Czech President Milos Zeman (pictured), was taken to a military hospital in Prague, a day after legislative elections delivered a narrow defeat to his ally, Prime Minister Andrej Babis. The CTK news agency reported on the 77-year-old's latest health problems citing a spokesperson at the Central Military Hospital, where Zeman has received treatment before.

Zeman had met with Babis, a populist billionaire that became prime minister in 2017, for about



45 minutes at his Lany Castle residence near Prague earlier on Sunday, CTK reported. Babis suffered a surprise defeat at the hands of an alliance of opposition parties, which won 108 of the 200 seats in the Chamber of Deputies after voting. — dpa

#### LA PALMA

##### Lava blocks size of buildings falling from volcano

Blocks of molten lava as large as three-storey buildings rolled down a hillside on the Spanish island of La Palma while a series of tremors shook the ground on Sunday three weeks after the volcanic eruption. There were 21 seismic movements on Sunday, with the largest measuring 3.8, the Spanish National Geological Institute (ING) said, shaking the ground in the villages of Mazo, Fuencaliente and El Paso.

The blocks of red-hot magma flowed down the side of the



Cumbre Vieja volcano were the size of three-storey buildings. The lava flow, with temperatures of up to 1,240 degrees Celsius destroyed the last few buildings that remained standing in the village of Todoque, the Canary Islands. — Reuters

# Macron still favourite, but faces risks

PAUL AUBRIAT AND STUART WILLIAMS

President Emmanuel Macron remains the favourite to win France's next election but six months before the polls he faces the uncomfortable situation of not knowing the identity of his main challenger. As the countdown begins to the first round on April 10 next year the centrist Macron can no longer be sure that the run-off two weeks later will be a repeat of the 2017 duel with far-right leader Marine Le Pen, which he won easily.

Instead, Macron faces a host of uncertainties and a hand of wild cards in a campaign that has already seen startling shifts. Assumptions have been upended in the last weeks by the surge of far-right TV pundit Eric Zemmour, dubbed a French version of Donald Trump, who threatens — if he decides to stand — to out-poll Le Pen and split the far-right vote.

The traditional right is not even close to settling on a candidate in a process that has caused internal feuding, with heavyweights like former minister Xavier Bertrand, Paris region chief Valerie Pécresse and ex-Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier in contention.

The left have their own troubles, with the campaign of the Socialist mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo yet to find momentum and the Greens hurt by a bitter selection contest that failed to unify pragmatists and radicals. Their ratings are below those of extreme-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

“What worries Macron is he thought there was going to be a rematch with Le Pen and he is no longer certain of that,” said a pro-Macron MP, who asked not to be named.

“It is possible someone could get into the second round with just 15-16 per cent of the vote, so we don't know who is going to come out of the hat,” added a minister, also requesting anonymity.

Current polls project Macron winning the first round with around a quarter of the vote. But if Zemmour fragments the scene further, a score in the high teens may be enough to take a challenger to a run-off. Pascal Perrineau of Sciences Po university in Paris says the whole political order of the past four years is in the process of being shaken up. “What a change there has been in the last two weeks,” he said. — AFP

What worries Macron is he thought there was going to be a rematch with Le Pen and he is no longer certain of that

A PRO  
Macron MP



A MARCH FOR CLIMATE!

A woman looks on as she takes part in a Climate March ahead of the COP26 climate summit, in Brussels, Belgium, on Sunday. — Reuters

# A noble mission serving man and nation



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami  
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WHEN IT COMES TO HELPING OTHERS AND JOINING FORCES, OMANIS HAVE MADE A THRILLING STORY OF REBUILDING THE MOST AFFECTED AREAS

Catastrophic natural disasters are hard to tolerate as they bring unexpected impacts, damages and losses to one's life. Case in a point, the cyclone “Shaheen” hit the Sultanate over a week ago, leaving severe impacts on some parts of the country. It has affected the lives of many people, especially in the northern part of Al Batinah Governorate of Oman. People have lost their homes, cars and other properties. We all know exactly what happened over the two scary nights of the cyclone with the sky raining cats and dogs!

The cyclone's aftermaths were heartbreaking; homes were half-drowned, cars were pulled over upside-down, animals were scattered dead all over the place and roads were smashed leading to nowhere. Different painful scenarios of struggle have been made by the heavy rainfall and strong winds.

With a first-of-its-kind cyclone hitting the country, people have undergone a first-hand experience of horror movies, where they had fought to survive the heavy pouring of rain over the night.

The next morning was awfully horrible to them as they woke up on a stricken land where everything was a mess. Everything is gone with many had become homeless

and almost lost everything they had.

What a shock and disappointment to wake up with in a very early morning! Just one has to imagine the situation and be on their toes! The various scenes, which we have seen on TV, social media and WhatsApp could mirror the level of impact that the cyclone has had on the lives of people.

Lots of tragic stories could be narrated by residents of the most affected areas or those who have been there. In the aftermath of such a natural disaster or violent weather catastrophe, entire cities can be displaced, destroyed and become in urgent need of help. When the weather subsides, and the damage is done, reality sets it for those who have suffered through it.

Survivors and those effected first hand by these acts of mother nature need help, both near and far. From simple donations such as food and water to medical and psychological care, and much more.

When one observes the destruction and aftermath of a disaster personally, he/she might feel the need to lend a hand to rebuilding efforts. There are many ways, by which one can help volunteer for disaster relief and doing something that makes a difference. We all can help rebuild

and help others to get back to their normal life in the wake of adversity. Though, such phenomenon rip communities apart, but they come back together and heroic stories begin to be told. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

When it comes to helping others and joining forces, Omanis have made a thrilling story of rebuilding the most affected areas. Recently, they come from all over the Sultanate to spend a full day of volunteering to help the needy people. Individuals and teams, men and women, adults and children, along with the government authorities, corporates and charities, all have come together on a noble mission to serve man and nation. All have been heroes of the day, leaving all personal difference, challenges and commitments behind and responded to the nation's call.

Heroes do not hike tall buildings or stop bullets with an outstretched hand; they bleed and sacrifice their life, time and efforts to serve the nation and its subjects. So did Omani heroes; their superpowers were as simple as sharing compassion, love and philanthropy with their brothers and sisters in the most affected areas.

# Taliban return poses challenge for Indian diplomacy



Shashi Tharoor

A FORMER UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL AND FORMER INDIAN MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, IS AN MP FOR THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

In the weeks since the Taliban's returned to power in Kabul, the people of Afghanistan, particularly its women and girls, have been subjected to unimaginable suffering as the world's attention turns to other issues. But many other countries, and especially India, have reason to worry.

The Taliban's victory, following 20 years of unsuccessful American-led “nation-building” efforts in Afghanistan, will not only greatly embolden their fellow fighters, but will also shake up the region's geopolitics.

For evidence of the destabilising impact of Kabul's fall, just look at the reactions of Afghanistan's neighbours.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's response — notably his statement that the Taliban's return to power was

akin to throwing off “the shackles of slavery”.

This time, Pakistan's influence is supposedly a little less absolute, but that did not prevent ISI chief Faiz Hameed from travelling to Kabul soon after its fall to preside over the formation of the new Taliban government.

Less overtly but arguably more importantly, China has been working to make the best of a delicate situation.

The Chinese have invested \$62 billion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the single largest project of its transnational Belt and Road Initiative, and are anxious that Taliban do not jeopardise it. Significantly, Foreign Minister Wang Yi formally received a Taliban delegation in July.

With economic and strategic gains ripe for the taking, China has announced that it will do business with the Taliban. It is seeking to tap Afghanistan's considerable underexploited mineral resources, especially rare earths, and reopen the Mes Aynak copper mine. There is even talk of extending the CPEC to Afghanistan.

The warm overtures appear to be mutual, with Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Afghanistan's new first deputy prime minister, calling China a “trustworthy friend.”

China's priority vis-à-vis Afghanistan is to ensure that the Taliban do nothing to disturb the functioning of the CPEC. With the Taliban government desperately in need of patronage — 80 per cent of the previous Afghan government's \$5.5 billion

budget was financed by external assistance — China seems ideally suited to fill the breach.

These regional dynamics, with Pakistan and China becoming increasingly close, should be of enormous concern to Indian policymakers.

The last time the Taliban were in power, India made common cause with Russia and Iran in actively supporting the Panjshir Valley insurgency of the Northern Alliance under the late Ahmad Shah Massoud. This time, however, an increasingly pro-Chinese Russia has taken a neutral stance on Afghanistan's issues with India.

India has invested \$3 billion in Afghanistan — in dams, highways, electricity grids, hospitals, schools, and even the parliament building. With all this

now in Taliban hands, Indian policymakers may be forgiven for feeling despondent.

The Quad partnership strengthens India's maritime presence in the Indian Ocean. But the main security threats to the country are on its land borders with China and Pakistan, where the Quad is unlikely to be of much use.

India now has a Taliban regime to its northwest, a nuclear-armed state to its west, and a hostile superpower to its northeast, and it faces ongoing threats to its territorial integrity.

In this environment, maintaining national security and regional stability will pose an unprecedented challenge for Indian diplomacy in the months and years ahead.

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Oman players celebrate a wicket during the second T20 against Sri Lanka at Al Amerat Stadium. – Pics by Anuroop Athiparambath

# Oman show promise against Sri Lanka

ANUROOP  
ATHIPARAMBATH  
MUSCAT, OCT 10

Oman put up a spirited performance against Asian giants Sri Lanka in the two T20 matches played at Amerat Grounds as part of preparation for the T20 World Cup.

Oman will start their World Cup campaign with the opening match of Group B against PNG on October 17.

Sri Lanka will play their Group A matches in Abu Dhabi.

Overall, Oman's batting, bowling and fielding come up with some intense test in the two matches.

The team's, which has some good all-rounders, batting depth also came for a test ahead of the global showdown.

Though at the losing end in both the matches, Oman tested the Sri Lankan squad and were close to an upset win after missing out by 19 runs in the first match.

In another warm-up tie featuring Bangladesh and Oman A, the bench strength of Oman squad came to the fore after an impressive display by the Sultanate team.

In the second match on Saturday night, Sri Lanka survived some early scares to beat Oman by

five wickets.

Chasing 160 for a victory, the Lankans reached the target in 17.3 overs.

Avishka Fernando, who hit 33 runs from 18 balls, was adjudged the man of the match.

Earlier, Sri Lanka won the toss and invited Oman to bat.

Aqib Ilyas was the top-scorer for Oman with a well-made 60 from 38 balls. Ilyas also had the favour of some dropped catches by the Sri Lankan fielders.

Other contributors for Oman were Kashyap Kumar (22 from 19 balls) and Ayaan Khan (20 from 26 balls).

For Lanka, Lahiru Kumara and Chamika Karunaratne claimed two wickets apiece.

Oman lost first wicket when star opener Jatinder Singh was bowled by Binura Fernando in the third over with the score at 15.

Kashyap Prajapati made a 19-ball 22 before he was caught and bowled by Chamika Karunaratne to make it 2-36 in the sixth over.

Oman lost their third wicket when they lost captain Zeeshan Maqsood, whose misjudged shot in the air was well taken by Maheesh Theekshana with a diving effort.

Fernando collected his second wicket in the process to put Oman at 75-3.

Oman completed their 100 runs



Oman's Aqib Ilyas celebrates his fifty.

in 13 overs with Aqib Ilyas and Ayaan Khan in the crease.

Sri Lanka dropped some catches in the middle as well.

Aqib's shot in the air was dropped in the 15th over and Oman picked up two runs. After 15 overs, Oman were 112 for 3.

**AQIB HITS 50**

Aqib hit a straight six in 16th over and then took a double to complete his eventful 50.

Another six brought fetched 17 runs from the over.

But Aqib's innings ended when he hit straight to Shanaka in the bowling of Karunaratne.

The right-handed batter faced 38 balls which included three fours and four sixes.

Lahiru Kumara wrecked Oman middle order when he first bowled a well-set Ayaan and then accounted for the wicket of Naseem Khushi with score at 142 for 6.

All-rounder Mohammad Nadeem was run-out next when a direct throw from Avishka Fernando left him short of crease at the bowler's end without any addition to the total score.

After 19 overs, Oman were 153 for seven wickets.

In the last over, Sandeep Gaud holed out to Avishka Fernando at the boundary ropes who made

brilliant judgement to keep the ball inside.

Oman posted 159 for 8 in the 20 overs.

In reply, Sri Lanka made a good start but Dinesh Chandimal was dismissed for 18 and Oman checked the flow of runs as opener Pathum Nissanka also perished in effort to raise the run-rate.

The visitors collapsed in the middle overs when they lost three wickets in space of eight balls.

Sri Lanka reached 100 in the 13th over for the loss of five wickets.

Chamika Karunaratne and Bhanuka Rajapaksa steadied the boat and their 74-run partnership from 44 balls ensured a smooth passage to victory for the former T20 world champions.

Karunaratne sealed the win with a towering six against Kaleemullah with 15 balls to spare.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Oman 159 for 8 in 20 overs (Aqib Ilyas 59 – 3x4, 4x6, Kashyapkumar Prajapati 22 – 1x4, 2x6, Ayaan Khan 20, Zeeshan Maqsood 16 – 2x6. Lahiru Kumara 2-20, Chamika Karunaratne 2-39) lost to Sri Lanka 163 for 5 in 17.3 overs (Bhanuka Rajapaksa 35 not out – 2x6, Chamika Karunaratne 35 not out – 3x6, Pathum Nissanka 26 – 3x4, Dinesh Chandimal 18 – 1x4, 2x6; Mohammad Nadeem 2-22) by 5 wickets.



### Dananjaya among four changes in Sri Lanka WC squad

Sri Lanka have added spinner Akila Dananjaya, batsman Pathum Nissanka, and seamers Lahiru Kumara and Binura Fernando to their 15-man squad for the Twenty20 World Cup, the country's cricket board said on Sunday.



### Hampden Roar helped Scotland to dramatic win

The famous "Hampden Roar" propelled Scotland to a last-gasp victory in the World Cup qualifier against Israel and could have spooked their opponents, manager Steve Clarke said after Saturday's 3-2 win kept his side on course for Qatar.

# Do-or-die for Kolkata & Bangalore



All eyes will be on Sharjah, where two masters of entertainment will clash in the eliminator of the Indian Premier League. The winner will play qualifier 2 and loser would exit the tournament. Both teams are known for their aggressive and attacking gameplay on the field and some entertaining parties after that.

Both teams have showed the intent to go all the way and not give up. One team is led by the World Cup winning captain Eoin Morgan, while the other is led by the captain of the most popular cricket team — India. While, both captains are well experienced and extremely talented, but both have been far from their personal best this season.

Royal Challengers Bangalore – Banking on the form of Glenn Maxwell, Royal Challengers Bangalore have got this far, but to go all the way, Bangalore fans would be hoping for AB de Villiers, Virat Kohli and Daniel Christian to come back to their peak form. Devdutt Padikkal, has not been producing any impactful innings for a while now. While in the bowling, Chahal's return to form and some incredibly unbelievable bowling from Harshal Patel has brought Royal Challengers

Bangalore so far. Mohammed Siraj and Daniel Christian have also been pretty decent, but then comes the concern of the fifth bowler, which has troubled Virat for long now. With this being last season for Virat Kohli as captain, surely he would like to finish with a trophy.

Kolkata Knight Riders – One team that has looked like a team to beat is Kolkata Knight Riders. They have won five games out of seven in the UAE leg and those two games that it has lost were very closely fought games. In the batting, Shubman Gill, Venkatesh Iyer and Rahul Tripathi have piled up a lot of runs and given regular and consistent starts. With the ball, Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine have been incredible. The pace of Lockie Ferguson, has looked threatening. To add on, addition of Shakib al Hassan has brought more stability to both their batting and bowling departments. Eoin Morgan has used his resources brilliantly and Dinesh Karthik, behind the stumps has had a big role to play in the success of Kolkata Knight Riders.

#### HEAD-TO-HEAD

Kolkata has a marginal advantage with 15:13 in the 28 matches played between them. In this year's IPL, Bangalore won the first one, while Kolkata absolutely thrashed Royal Challengers Bangalore at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

**Banking on the form of Glenn Maxwell, Royal Challengers Bangalore have got this far, but to go all the way, Bangalore fans would be hoping for AB de Villiers, Virat Kohli and Daniel Christian to come back to their peak form**



What to expect from the match?

The match is at the legendary Sharjah Cricket Stadium and the wicket has something for

everyone. Average score here has been around 165 and teams chasing have generally been able to generate sufficient amount of pressure to squeeze the opponent

with some quality spin. Both teams would like to chase and have the target in front of them. The conditions should favour the Kolkata Knight Riders slightly

more than the Royal Challengers Bangalore, cause of the two quality mystery spinners. The team that wins here, could very well lift the trophy this year.

## Silverwood hails Root's influence over Ashes squad



**LONDON:** England head coach Chris Silverwood believes Joe Root's leadership played a key role in ensuring he could select the strongest possible squad for the Ashes tour to Australia.

For several months it seemed possible the Ashes would be cancelled due to the concerns of England's players and their families about Australia's tough coronavirus quarantine rules.

England vice-captain Jos Buttler was among the senior players to express doubts about taking part in the series, which starts in Brisbane on December 8.

But Silverwood said Test skipper Root's compassionate, diplomatic approach helped get the players to buy into the tour eventually. When Silverwood revealed England's 17-man Ashes squad on Sunday, there were no

objectors or opt-outs from the list.

"There were a lot of negotiations that went on and one thing we did see was a lot of class from our captain. He really did lead from the front," Silverwood said.

"I can't emphasise enough how classy he was within those negotiations and the way he listened to both sides of the argument.

"He showed a lot of empathy and a lot of really good leadership skills to get the players to this point. His players have got behind him and will follow him, so will I and my staff.

"What it has done, I think, is galvanise his position as a leader. All the boys have recognised that, all my staff have recognised that and it has made us all pull in behind him."

## England name strongest available squad for Ashes minus Stokes, Curran

**LONDON:** England on Sunday named their strongest available squad for the Ashes tour to Australia as all-rounders Ben Stokes and Sam Curran missed out but seamer Stuart Broad was included despite the calf injury he picked up in the test series against India.

Stokes was unavailable as he continues his indefinite break from cricket to focus on his mental health, while also recovering from a second operation on a broken finger. Curran was omitted due to a stress fracture in his lower back.

There were no uncapped players in the 17-member squad that included recalls for batsman Zak Crawley and spinner Dom Bess.

Fast bowler Jofra Archer was also unavailable after he suffered a recurrence of a stress fracture in his elbow and Olly Stone was ruled out with a back injury.

The series had been in doubt following concerns over touring conditions in a country where international arrivals have to isolate in quarantine hotels for 14 days, regardless of Covid-19 vaccination status.

England players had expressed concerns about the tour due to "bubble fatigue" and because their families would not be able to



travel with them due to Australia's strict Covid-19 protocols, but the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) gave conditional approval for it to go ahead on Friday.

The first test is due to begin in Brisbane on Dec. 8, followed by a day-night match in Adelaide from Dec. 16 before the traditional Boxing Day test in Melbourne.

Sydney will host the fourth match and the final test will be in Perth starting on Jan. 14.

**Stokes was unavailable as he continues his indefinite break from cricket to focus on his mental health, while also recovering from a second operation**

Australia retained the Ashes when the teams last met in 2019 in England after a 2-2 series draw. — Reuters

**Squad:** Joe Root (captain), James Anderson, Jonathan Bairstow, Dom Bess, Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Jos Buttler, Zak Crawley, Haseeb Hameed, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Dawid Malan, Craig Overton, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood

# Bottas wins in Turkey, title advantage to Verstappen

ISTANBUL: Valtteri Bottas ended his year-long drought with a dominant victory in Turkey on Sunday while unhappy Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton finished fifth and lost the Formula One championship lead to Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

Verstappen, 24, was runner-up and 14.584 seconds behind the Finn at a wet Istanbul Park to overturn a two-point deficit to Hamilton and walk away six points clear with six races remaining.

Red Bull team mate Sergio Perez finished third with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc fourth and ahead of seven-times world champion Hamilton, who had started 11th due to an engine penalty.

"It's been a while, but feels good. I think from my side probably one of the best races I've had ever," said Bottas, who started on pole position and was never threatened.

"Apart from that one little slide, everything was under control."

The victory was the Finn's first since Russia in September last year.

Verstappen, who started on the front row, had a quiet race and said it had all been about tyre management.

"I'm happy to be on the podium. I think it's been close the whole year and I'm pretty sure in Austin it will be a good battle with Mercedes, so we just have to keep pushing, keep trying," he said.

The US Grand Prix in Texas is the next race on October 24.

Hamilton might have also been on the podium but Mercedes called him in, against his judgement, for a late stop from third place for a fresh set of intermediate tyres with the track drying.

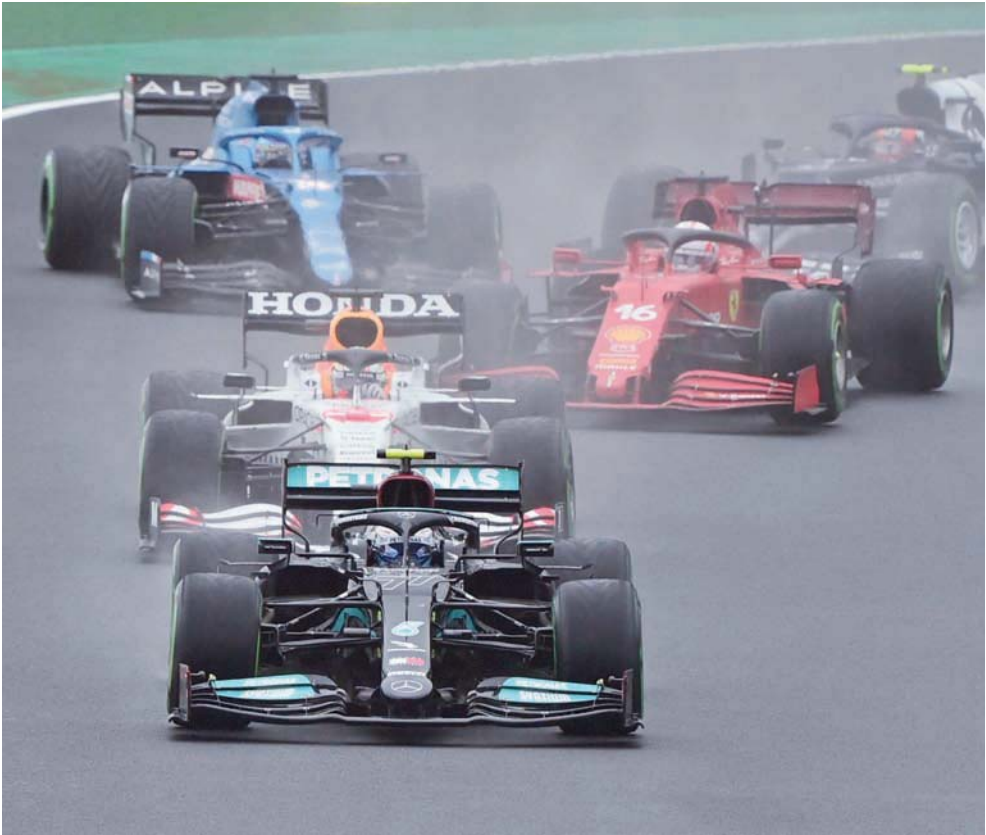
"We shouldn't have come in man. Massive (tyre) graining. I told you," said the angry Briton in heated radio exchanges as he realised he had lost two places in the pits. He pointed out afterwards that Alpine driver Esteban Ocon, who finished 10th, had managed to make one set of tyres last the entire race. Had he stayed out and kept third, Hamilton would be only a point behind Verstappen. "We thought we could finish third without stopping or, if a dry line emerged, maybe going to a soft tyre," said Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff.

"Then we saw Leclerc dropping off and Lewis was dropping off and it was clear we wouldn't make it to the end." Spaniard Carlos Sainz was voted driver of the day for going from the back of the grid, due to power unit penalties, to eighth for Ferrari. — Reuters



“It’s been a while, but feels good. I think from my side probably one of the best races I’ve had ever. Apart from that one little slide, everything was under control

VALTTERI BOTTAS  
Mercedes driver



Mercedes' driver Valtteri Bottas drives ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc during the Formula One Grand Prix of Turkey at the Intercity Istanbul Park in Istanbul. — AFP



Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas celebrates with the trophy on the podium after winning the race. — Reuters

# Ayman, Luqman advance at 2021 WTT Youth Contender



ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, OCT 10

Oman's paddlers Ayman al Shehi and Luqman al Farsi progressed into second round of the 2021 WTT Youth Contender Muscat which began in Muscat on Sunday.

Al Shehi managed to earn the direct ticket to the next round after beating UAE's player Dhiyab al Balushi 3-0 ( 8-11, 8-11, 9-11) in fifth group of U17 Boys' Singles. Luqman al Farsi registered a 3-0 win over Nigerian Adegoke Muizz Olawale.

In the fifth group, Ayman al Shehi positioned as the runner up in the fifth group with three points while Saudi Arabia Salim al Suwaleim led the group by four points.

In the knock out stages at last 32 round, Qatar's Ali Yousef beat Oman's Ayman al Shehi 3-0 while Loqman al Farsi knocked out by Bangladesh's Ridoy Mohutasin Ahmed. Indian players dominated in the U-17 singles as four paddlers secured in last 16 round including Jian Payas, Shankhadip, Ankur Bhattacharjee and Preyesh Raj Suresh.

**PLAYERS PERFORMANCE**  
Coach Adnan Fawakhergi, technical supervisor, expressed his satisfaction on the players performance at 2021 WTT Youth Contender Muscat. "Despite lack of preparatory camps due to Covid pandemic impact on the sports field, our players managed to compete with different

ranking players and showed top performance. We hope better show form our paddlers in the U-15 and U-19," he ended.

Jose Benets, competition manager from ITTF, appreciated all the arrangements made by the Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA). "Thanks to OTTA for all the set up for the venue and providing all the requirements for the success of the event. The venue and all the provided facilities are perfect and looking for an exciting tournament," he concluded

The competition of U-11, U-15 and U-19 will take place on Monday. All the group matches will be held in the morning sessions while the knockout stages will be held during evening session.





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WHY A CATASTROPHE FUND IS A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE – I

Cyclone Shaheen caused huge uninsured losses: OCCI

CONRAD PRABHU  
@conradprabhu

The destruction unleashed by Cyclone Shaheen as it slammed through North and South Al Batinah governorates of eastern Oman last week has been described as “catastrophic” with echoes of Gonu — the monstrous storm that hit the Sultanate in 2007, says a key official of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Murtadha M J Ibrahim al Jamalani (pictured), Chairman of OCCI’s Finance & Insurance Committee, has been a leading voice in shaping the insurance landscape in the Sultanate — from the private sector’s standpoint.

“Cyclone Shaheen inflicted huge damage as it swept through these governorates on October 3-4, claiming several lives, but also destroying infrastructure and disrupting economic activity on a major scale. Besides inundating private residential buildings and vehicles, floodwaters unleashed by the storm also destroyed farms, livestock and fishing boats, while also causing immense economic harm to shops, supermarkets, commercial and residential real estate and construction activity across these regions.”

BUSINESS LOSSES

In remarks to the *Observer*, the official warned that Shaheen, as with a succession of cyclones and storms that have hit Oman with increasing frequency in recent years, is threatening to inflict severe pain on the financials of insurance companies operating in the Sultanate.



“We envision a significant impact for the operating results and balance sheets of insurance firms because of the scale of the exposures, encompassing their Motor, Property and Engineering classes of the business insurance portfolios. Furthermore, business interruption is also key risk and can represent a significant contribution to the overall claims cost,” he said.

While an accurate estimate of the losses inflicted by the cyclone across the Al Batinah coast is yet to be fully assessed, Al Jamalani believes that the bulk of these losses are essentially uninsured, meaning that the burden of recovery, repair, rehabilitation and compensation essentially falls on the government and the survivors themselves.

IN THIS TWO-PART DEEP DIVE INTO CYCLONE SHAHEEN’S DEADLY AFTERMATH, THE OBSERVER SPEAKS TO A VETERAN OF OMAN’S INSURANCE INDUSTRY FOR HIS INSIGHTS ON POLICY MEASURES AND INITIATIVES THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED BY AUTHORITIES TO MITIGATE THE DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF NATURAL DISASTERS ON THE OMANI ECONOMY

He explained: “The insurers’ exposure to storm, tempest and floods events, at least on their property books, is limited by the low level of insurance

penetration for personal property and home contents insurance in particular. Property Insurance underwriting restrictions do not permit the commercial insurance companies to offer insurance protection to certain properties constructed from inferior materials and situated in certain areas i.e. the mouth of wadis, built on hillsides or mountainsides, located close to the sea and in the low-lying areas, and so on. As a result, my guess is that total insured losses resulting from Cyclone Shaheen and the ensuing floods may be low, but the uninsured losses could be huge, not including the economic disruption and other inconveniences imposed on local communities.”

In any event, given the



Murtadha al Jamalani

relatively modest size of the insurance economy in the Sultanate, the insurance industry does not have the wherewithal to absorb exposures to losses linked to natural disasters and catastrophes, the official warns.

Total gross direct written premiums of insurance companies across all classes of insurance amounted to RO 465.895 million in 2020, which was down 4.3 per cent from the previous year’s total of RO 486.582 million, according to CMA figures. Gross written premium in the Motor Insurance class declined 12.7 per cent to RO 113.364 million in 2020, down from RO 129.802 million in 2019. In the Property Insurance class, gross written premium rose 23.4 per cent to RO 71.376 million, up from RO 57.845 in year. Gross written premium for the Engineering Insurance class (Construction All Risks) dipped 3.1 per cent to RO 22.312 in 2020, down from RO 23.024 million in 2019.

PREMIUM RETENTION

The net insurance premium retention ratio of the insurance

companies, which is a key indicator of the overall financial health of the sector, fell 4 percentage points to 56.2 per cent for all classes of the insurance business in 2020, down from a ratio of 60.54 per cent in 2019, said Al Jamalani.

“For the Motor Insurance Class, the premium retention ratio was 90.09 per cent in 2020, down from 91.44 per cent in 2019, a drop of 1.4 percentage points. The corresponding ratio for the Property Insurance class was 10.32 per cent, which was down 2.6 percentage points from the previous year’s figure of 12.95 per cent. For the Engineering Insurance class of the business, the premium retention ratio was 14.90 per cent in 2020, which was lower by 3.5 per cent from the previous year’s figure of 18.16 per cent in 2019.”

Compared with the overall size of Omani economy, the insurance sector’s share of the GDP continues to be paltry — a reflection of low insurance penetration in the Sultanate, Al Jamalani lamented.

Lack of awareness continues to be the bane of the sector although four decades have elapsed since the Insurance Companies Law was introduced in 1979, he noted.

“Insurance awareness is the responsibility of both insurance companies and the regulator,” the official stressed. “Awareness by the companies comes through advertising and public relations exercises. Awareness by the regulator can be built introductory programmes and the implementation of rules and regulations governing this industry.”

(Tomorrow – Part II)

Cyclone Relief: Corporates extend support

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 10

**OQ Group:** OQ, the Sultanate’s integrated energy group, announced a joint contribution, along with Omifco, Abraj Energy Services and Vale, of RO 2.65 million towards relief and rehabilitation efforts targeted at cyclone affected neighbourhood in North and South Al Batinah.

The state-owned group also announced the start of an employee volunteering and donation campaign in support of flood relief efforts.

**Sohar Aluminium:** Sohar Aluminium, in line with national relief efforts,

announced an allocation of RO 386,000 to families impacted by Cyclone Shaheen. The donation will be channelled through Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO), the company stated.

**OUI:** In a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Sunday, Oman United Insurance Company SAOG said its Board of Directors has approved a donation of RO 100,000 in support of cyclone-impacted communities of north Oman.

**Credit Oman:** Credit Oman pledged a contribution of RO 10,000 towards cyclone recovery and relief work as part of its CSR commitments.



**Ooredoo:** Ooredoo’s Goodwill team were on the ground and provided food supplies to local communities in Al Batinah, one of the most impacted areas due to Cyclone Shaheen.

The company also provided unlimited WhatsApp data for three days to residents in Al Suwaiq, Saham, Al Khabourah and Al Musannah to stay connected with loved ones. Extending support, Ooredoo collaborates with Oman’s Charitable Organisation and Dar Al Atta’a on a campaign to raise funds for people in the affected areas.

Ooredoo technology team was leading a 24/7 special operational room to run the

restoration of affected sites due to Cyclone Shaheen. Dr Ahmed bin Abdullah al Abri, Chief Technology & Information officer said “All our technology teams were putting special preparations including additional teams, additional power generators and other logistics. The teams are working around the clock to rectify the affected sites to keep our customers connected”

Ooredoo’s CEO Noor al Sulaiti visited various areas to assess and check on network outages and resolve any disruptions caused by the cyclone. Technical teams are currently working around the clock to ensure services are restored to peak performance.

# Mazoon Electricity, ‘be’ah’ safely dispose of used oil

MUSCAT: Mazoon Electricity Company (MZEC), the leading electricity provider in Oman, in cooperation with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah) has succeeded in safe disposal of 1,500 litres of transformer oil used for maintenance operations.

The company classified the hazardous waste produced during various operations and used appropriate environmental protection standards to safely dispose the materials.

Additionally, the company created a tracking mechanism for the waste materials, which included collection, loading and transportation from warehouse by using recommended and approved tools and equipment for the purpose as per the laws in force in the Sultanate.

The objective of this project was to increase the recyclable value of these materials in comparison with previous disposal practices, enhance environmental culture with internal and external stakeholders and follow permitted



environmental practices.

Majid bin Nasser al Busaidy, Chief Operations Officer-Distribution in Mazoon Electricity said, “Our activities are in line with the core values of Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) commitments.

The company is devoted to work processes and products, which has enabled us to help protect and reduce environmental impact and secure the wellness,

health and operational safety of our employees and community. Mazoon Electricity pursues business activities that promote environmental protection and conservation. The company recognises that acts such as safe disposal of transformer oil, contributes to preserving the environment and creating a healthy global environment.”

Kumail bin Ahmed al Lawati, Head of Business Development,

be’ah said, “We are pleased to partner with Mazoon Electricity which has a strong commitment towards the environment. We are keen to work with them towards safe disposal of oil. We will use the latest international standards to achieve the standards of sustainability. In line with the national strategy for managing the waste in Oman, we seek to protect the environment from the risks of random disposal of waste.”

## Renaissance launches next-gen leadership programme

MUSCAT: Renaissance Services, Oman’s leading services solutions company, has introduced the Renaissance Accelerated Learning Initiative (RALI), an intensive programme aimed at grooming talented young Omanis as future managers.

RALI was launched on September 20 at the company’s head office with CEO Stephen Thomas introducing the inaugural batch of 11 trainees to the company’s operations and values.

As a responsible private sector entity focused on Omanisation and ICV, Renaissance has aligned RALI with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 which emphasises driving positive local impact and creating an indirect value chain by enhancing the skills and employability of young Omanis.

Welcoming the trainees on board, Stephen said, “Good organisations will always value the



fresh ideas, energy, innovations, and disruptive approach that young talent brings with it. RALI is also aligned with Renaissance 2.0, a move towards grooming the next generation of leadership, and young Omanis like these will lead the company to greater heights.”

Under the eight-month intensive programme, this group will be equipped with essential skills along with on-the-job experience through rotational

deputation in Renaissance’s various departments and its sites of operation across Oman, including Renaissance Village Duqm.

Renaissance partnered with Competence HR, a leading HR and management development consultancy, to invite, screen, select and train candidates for this initiative. The benchmarks for selection were excellent communication skills, passion

to achieve, desire to learn, and willingness to be part of a continually growing and evolving organisation. The RALI trainees were short-listed from a pool of over 1,000 applicants after a rigorous, multi-layered selection process.

Munir al Lawati, Senior Manager — Human Resources, added, “These trainees are breaking all stereotypes. They are hard-working, engaged, motivated and full of new ideas. Renaissance will find some superstars among them.”

Renaissance is the leading accommodation, services solutions and IFM company in Oman, listed on Muscat Stock Exchange. As of 2020, the company has invested over \$ 500 million in Oman employing over 2,350 Omani nationals contributing to local growth, building potential and creating opportunities.

## ahlibank holds graduation of employees from Etimad programme



MUSCAT: ahlibank recently celebrated the graduation of six of its employees from the coveted Etimad programme. These employees presently hold leadership and supervisory positions within the bank, and their participation in the programme will lead them to take on further career enhancing roles in the future. A National Leadership Programme, Etimad aims to create qualified Omani leaders in middle and senior management positions in the private sector.

The ceremony was held at ahlibank’s Head Office, in the presence of Said Abdullah Al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, a number of senior management members, and select employees. An initiative stemming from the Labour Market and Employment Lab at the National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh), Etimad represents a real partnership between the public and private sectors in Oman. ahlibank’s participation in the programme reaffirms the bank’s commitment to upskill its Omani team members and make them future ready for competitive roles. Said al Hatmi thanked the undeterred efforts of the government in devising a programme that is focused on building leadership and inter-personal skill sets of mid-and senior level employees of the national workforce. He highlighted that the bank’s great interest in employee coaching, noting its importance in refining the skills of employees and developing their practical

abilities. He explained that the bank’s interest is reflected in the volume of initiatives and programmes launched over the past years, which embraced many outstanding national competencies, empowered them through trainings and skills enhancement.

Congratulating the graduates on this achievement, Mohammed al Mufargi, AGM-Head of Human Resources, ahlibank, said, “At ahlibank, the personal and professional achievements of our team members bring us great pride as we believe that by fulfilling their self-actualisation needs, they are able to better contribute to their workplace. This not only helps them define and achieve their career goals, but also contributes to meeting business goals.” Expressing her happiness on the successful completion of the ‘Etimad’ programme, Zahra bint Mushtaq al Lawatiyah, Relationship Manager-Corporate Banking at ahlibank, said, “I have immense gratitude for my employer ahlibank, as it has always been committed to developing solutions and mechanisms that support our capabilities, and help us improve the level of our practical performance. As employees, we appreciate the Bank’s interest and continuous efforts to motivate us to keep moving forward and participate in programmes that ensemble our future ambitions. On behalf of all my fellow graduates, I thank our management for providing this opportunity and honouring us on this day for successfully completing the programme.”

## Go bold in the Toyota Yaris hatchback with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The powerful, dynamic and exciting Toyota Yaris hatchback does extremely well at drawing all attention. Giving drivers more reasons to enjoy thrilling experiences is the power packed performance that takes you places without a worry.

Customers owning the Yaris hatchback can benefit with Service 2 Years/20,000 kms, one-year insurance or cash gift in Lieu of Insurance RO 125. Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.

The Toyota Yaris hatchback has an attractive profile that is defined by colour keyed radiator grille, colour keyed front & rear bumpers, colour keyed outside door handles, halogen headlamps,

colour keyed power outer mirrors, LED high mount stop lamp, rear fog lamps, rear window defogger, shark fin antenna and black luggage door garnish.

Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the Yaris hatchback is equipped with a 1.5-Litre engine with a 106 hp and 14.3 kg-m of torque and is mated to the CVT transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with excellent fuel efficiency.

The Yaris hatchback’s interior is thoughtfully loaded with a distinctive design, offering convenience and comfort with a layer of luxury. The centre console of the Yaris has been designed to create a greater sense of integration. The Yaris hatchback is loaded with audio system with Bluetooth and 4 speakers, silver



and urethane steering wheel, electric power steering wheel with tilt, day/night inner view mirror, and more. Increasing the levels of convenience in the Yaris hatchback are features like keyless entry system and cruise control.

As with any other Toyota

model, safety remains a top priority for the Yaris hatchback, which includes a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants, such as anti-lock braking system (ABS), electronic brake force distribution (EBD), brake assist (BA), anti-theft

engine immobiliser, driver and front passenger airbags, vehicle stability control (VSC), traction control (TRC), tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS), child restraint system with ISOFIX and 2 tether anchors, rear parking sensors and more.

Customers interested in the Yaris Hatchback Premium will benefit with 15” alloy wheels, sporty projector headlamps with follow-me-home function, clearance lamps with line guide, daytime running lights, LED rear combination lamps with line guide, leather steering wheel, with red stitching, control switches and paddle shifters, sporty front seats, sporty seat fabric with red stitching, front fog lamps, leather shift lever and knob, multi-information display, glossy black retractable outer mirrors with turn signal and sporty red line, door inner trim ornamentation with red stitch silver painted door inside handles, glossy black with red line mesh type sporty radiator lower grille and black luggage door garnish with red line.



## In brief

■ PARIS



### MACRON HAILS GLOBAL TAX AGREEMENT AS 'MAJOR ADVANCE'

French President Emmanuel Macron hailed the "historic" agreement of 136 countries on setting a minimum tax rate for multinationals as a major advance in fiscal justice. The OECD-brokered deal, which sets a global tax rate of 15 per cent, is aimed at stopping international corporations from slashing tax bills by registering in nations with low rates.

The international push for a minimum international tax on big corporations moved closer to reality as one of the last holdouts, Hungary, agreed to join a reform that now counts 136 countries. Hungary's announcement came a day after another opponent, Ireland. — AFP

■ SYDNEY



### FIJI TO REOPEN FOR TOURISM AS IT HITS VACCINE MILESTONE

Fiji will ease Covid-19 restrictions and announce its reopening for international travel after the country hit a vaccination milestone. Changes to the country's virus restrictions was announced after 80 per cent of the adult population received both doses of a Covid-19 vaccine, Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama said. "A full three weeks ahead of schedule! I'm grateful to everyone who's rolled up their sleeves to help make Fiji safe", Bainimarama said in a tweet.

"I'll announce the easing of Covid restrictions at home and our plan to reopen Fiji to the world." — AFP

■ TRIPOLI



### LIBYA'S NOC SAYS OIL SPILL UNDER CONTROL

Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) has brought under control an oil spill at an offshore storage facility, the company said on Sunday.

The leak at the Farwah facility owned by Mabruk Oil Operations occurred while a tanker was loading oil on Friday, NOC said. In a statement posted on its Facebook page, the NOC said the leak occurred in one of the supply lines of the Dahra oilfield.

"Technical teams were able to complete the work and halt the leak", the statement said, while the cause of the spill was not announced. According to the oil corporation, the leak did not affect production operations. Dahra oilfield is one of the oldest oilfields in the country.

— Reuters

# Oil recovery, export diversification to slash Oman's 2021 deficit: WB

## UPBEAT OUTLOOK:

Rebounding oil sector coupled with non-oil exports set to shrink current account deficit to 5 per cent of GDP in 2021: World Bank update

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

The World Bank has projected a gradual rebound in the Omani economy, propelled in part by higher oil prices, rising non-oil exports, accelerating vaccine coverage and fiscal consolidation supported by reforms.

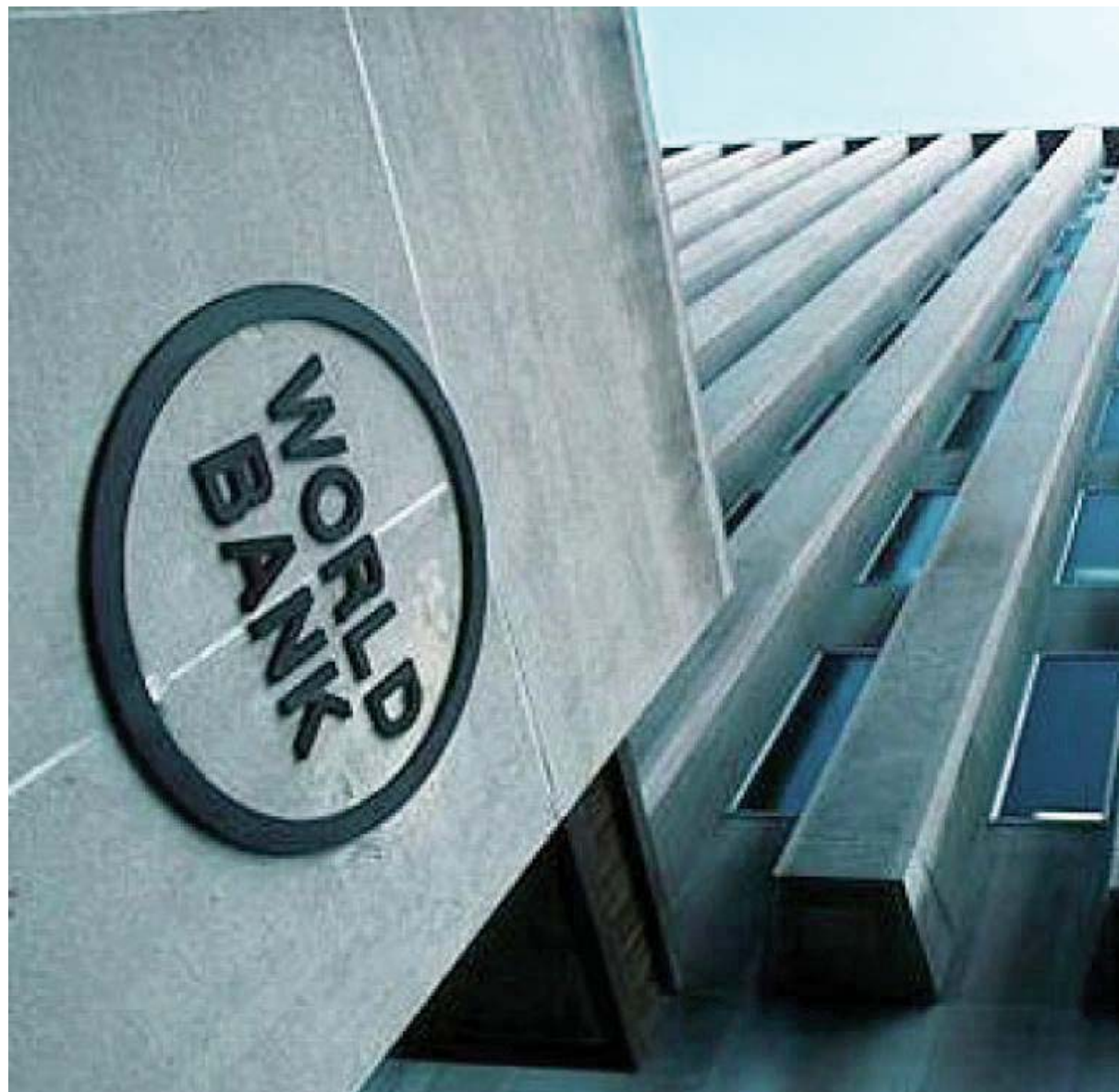
The positive outlook — the latest in a flurry of upbeat economic assessments provided by leading international institutions — validates far-reaching initiatives and reforms enacted by the Omani government over the past two years to help return the national economy, derailed by the downturn and pandemic, back on track for growth.

"The economy is expected to recover gradually after a difficult 2020", said the Washington DC-headquartered global financial institution.

"Oil and non-oil growth are projected to rebound as oil production increases and widespread vaccine distribution boosts domestic activity. Fiscal and external deficits are projected to swing into surplus driven by the oil market recovery and the fiscal adjustment, putting the debt on a downward path", it added in its latest update of GCC economies published late last week.

A rebounding oil sector coupled with diversifying non-oil exports is projected to shrink the current account deficit to 5 per cent of GDP in 2021, according to the World Bank report.

This outcome, it noted, will help reverse the nearly 14 per cent of GDP deficit observed in 2020. "The current account balance will significantly



improve in 2021-23 driven by the diversification efforts, but to remain in negative territory given large import inputs. Following a \$1.7 billion decline in 2020, gross foreign reserves are estimated to remain stable at \$15 billion (over 5 months of imports) in 2021 and beyond supported by more favourable terms of trade", it stated.

The World Bank update envisions a significant role for the oil sector in spurring the Sultanate's economic recovery. "The oil sector will remain the driving force of the economy, which is projected to grow by 3.5 per cent in 2021 and accelerate to 6 per cent by 2023, driven by higher oil output", the report said.

The non-oil economy, on the other hand, is expected to post a modest recovery of 1.8 per cent in 2021 before picking up pace to reach an average of 2.5

per cent by 2022-23, spurred by the resumption of tourism activity, the global body said. Inflation is projected to pick up to 3 per cent in 2021, buoyed by growth in domestic demand and introduction of VAT, it pointed out.

Part of the turnaround is credited to the Omani government's Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (MTFP) spanning the 2020 — 2024 period, the report said. The Plan enshrines a number of fiscal adjustment reforms aimed at, among other goals, boosting non-oil revenues, rationalising expenditure and reining in public debt. The World Bank, however, acknowledged challenges in implementing some of the initiatives, as was evident in the proposed rollback of electricity subsidies.

"The key challenge is to translate the government

reforms plan into concrete and credible actions to ensure inclusive growth", the report commented.

Importantly, the Work Bank update broadly accords with a similarly favourable outlook issued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a report following its Article IV consultations with Oman's authorities last month.

The world body commended the wide spectrum of initiatives rolled out by the government to help mitigate the severe health, economic and social impacts of the crisis.

More recently, S&P Global Ratings — the largest of the Big Three international ratings agencies, revised the outlook on Oman to positive from stable. It also affirmed its 'B+/B' long- and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings.



### OCCI chairman to open practical masterclass on VAT

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 10

A practical Masterclass on VAT hosted by Crowe Oman will be inaugurated by Redha bin Juma al Saleh (pictured), Chairman, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Qurum on Tuesday, October 12.

"The objective is to bring awareness among the business community at large on the significance of the requirement to comply with the rules and regulations of Value Added Tax", said Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner, Crowe Oman.

"Though VAT was introduced from April 16 of this year, we find that there are so many businesses who are yet to comply with the regulations while a few others are not in full compliance with the rules and regulations especially with regard to registration", added Antony Kallukaran, Associate Tax Advisory Partner at Crowe.

The significance of Oman VAT is that it is structured in such a way that most of the goods and services essential to the common man are either exempted or zero rated like food items, medicine, education, healthcare, inland goods and passenger transportation, and sale and rental of residential properties, among other categories, he noted.

The one-day workshop is targeted at finance professionals across a wide spectrum of the businesses in Oman.

# Oman Air Holidays launches 'Stopover in Oman' packages

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 10

Oman Air Holidays has announced the launch of Oman stopover packages giving Oman Air-ticketed passengers the flexibility to discover some of the most desirable tourist spots in and around Muscat: The capital Muscat, Nizwa, Jabal Al Akhdhar and Al Musannah. Also available is a fully bespoke 8-hour Muscat city day tour stopover.

Recently reopened for vaccinated travel, Oman is an alluring and desirable destination among discerning global travellers and offers an abundance of attractions.

The 'hidden gem' of the region, the country offers a vibrant palette of nature, climate, leisure, culture and history, and Omanis are renowned the world over for their authentic hospitality and shared sense of openness and respect.



"Oman discovery stopovers combine convenience, diversity and affordability for anyone who wants to experience more Oman on their next trip", explains Mundher al Shaikhani, Senior Manager Oman Air Holidays. "Each package is designed to offer visitors a distinct taste of some of our leading tourist spots, whether on a quick overnight escape or an immersive week-long excursion,

and are priced for value with discounted rates and exciting add-ons."

Enabling the country's flourishing tourism potential is something Oman Air Holidays does exceptionally well, and the launch of stopover packages adds to Oman's growing inventory of custom stays and experiences. Oman Air Holidays' five stopovers can be further

customised to include local tours and excursions, type of transportation and flexible length of stay.

### MUSCAT DISCOVERY STOPOVER

The captivating capital of Oman, Muscat is a favourite stopover with its characteristic low-rise city scape and meandering coastline. Hotel package includes free second night and discounted additional nights. A 25 per cent discount on food and beverage applies throughout the stay.

### NIZWA DISCOVERY STOPOVER

Located just over a one-and-a-half-hour drive from Muscat, Nizwa is best known for Nizwa Fort and its adjoining marketplace. Hotel package includes free second night and discounted additional nights. A 25 per cent discount on food and beverage applies throughout the stay.

### JABAL AL AKHDHAR DISCOVERY STOPOVER

Nestled in the Al Hajar Mountains, Jabal Al Akhdhar offers visitors a welcome respite from the heat and serves up spectacular views of the surrounding landscape. Hotel package includes free second night and discounted additional nights. A 25 per cent discount on food and beverage applies throughout the stay.

Musannah Discovery Stopover Only an hour's drive from the capital, Musannah is a coastal resort town popular with tourists and locals alike. Hotel package includes free second night and discounted additional nights. A 25 per cent discount on food and beverage applies throughout the stay.

8-hour Muscat City Day Tour Stopover

Package includes saloon car transportation, lunch and lounge access at Muscat International Airport.

Green energy springs from abandoned UK coalmine

Dawdon coalmine in northeast England was abandoned three decades ago, but is being brought back to life as the unlikely setting for a green energy revolution. The carbon-intensive colliery, near the town of Seaham on the windswept northeast English coast, hauled coal from deep underground until its closure in 1991.

Dawdon has long since flooded with water because part of the mine is below sea level, and is heated by geothermal energy.

Authorities now want to capture and harness this valuable and unlimited green energy source to power a new garden village development.

“The heat is basically coming from the ground,” said Durham County Council official Mark Wilkes, whose portfolio includes climate change.

Water deep inside the mine heats up underground to about 20 degrees Celsius.

At the colliery’s entrance, where thousands of miners once rushed to work, the vast pipes of a treatment plant now suck up the equivalent of a bathtub of warm water every two seconds, which is used to heat up a separate water supply.

In turn, this water circuit is heated via a pump until it reaches 55-60 degrees Celsius.

The plant treats the highly acidic and ferrous water in order to prevent contamination of local beaches and water supplies.

Its heat will eventually power local homes, while the treated water is released back into the sea.

“We are taking what was from the industrial revolution — and we’re using it for the green revolution,” Wilkes said.

Heat from the water has so far only been used for the heating of the facility. But in two years’ time the local authority will create a new village of 1,500 homes nearby — entirely heated by the plant.

“It is an unlimited source of energy: the water is coming through all the time,” added Wilkes.

“There are costs with the technology, but hopefully this will help to keep the cap on those costs going forward.” This is the first geothermal project on such a large scale in Britain, and Wilkes hopes it could also heat nearby businesses.

Britain is heavily dependent on natural gas for electricity generation, although Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who hosts the COP26 climate summit next month in Glasgow, wants to shift all UK energy production to renewable sources by 2035 to help reach carbon neutrality by 2050.

The urgency of the move was underlined by a surge in gas prices last week to record heights, stoked by economies reopening after coronavirus shutdowns and fears of spiking demand in the upcoming northern hemisphere winter.

Durham County Council has yet to name the company that will operate and partly finance the Dawdon plant.

The geothermal heating will not be cost-free but authorities hope it will be cheaper than using gas.

— AFP

“There are costs with the technology, but hopefully this will help to keep the cap on those costs going forward”

MARK WILKES  
Durham County Council official



ALL SET FOR WORLD BANK, IMF ANNUAL MEET

A man walks past a poster announcing the upcoming the annual meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund outside of the IMF headquarters in Washington, DC. The annual meetings are running from October 11-17, 2021. — AFP

The Bretton Woods credibility crisis



ANNE O KRUEGER,  
Senior Research Professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Development at Stanford University

THE WORLD BANK AND THE IMF PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY PRECISELY BECAUSE THEIR INDEPENDENT RESEARCH IS UNIVERSALLY TRUSTED

Despite setbacks like the Great Recession and the Covid-19 pandemic, the world economy has had a massively successful run since World War II. That success was underpinned by the post-war global economic system and its central institutions: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (previously the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade).

In joining the Bretton Woods institutions, countries around the world agreed to subject their economic behaviour to an international rule of law.

These institutions all have governing bodies with representatives from member states, as well as highly qualified technocratic staff to carry out their work.

The periodic reports they produce have been essential sources of information and analyses. But one of these reports, the World Bank’s annual Doing Business index, has become the source of enormous controversy.

The point of Doing Business was to report on each member state’s regulatory environment, elements of which include legal procedures, wait times, start-up costs, the efficiency of the judicial system, and the accessibility and reliability of basic utilities like electricity. These and many other factors determined each country’s overall ranking. In the 2018 report, for example, New Zealand ranked highest, and Somalia the lowest.

While no measure is perfect, the procedure for determining the rankings was transparent, and the indicators in each report were as objective as possible, even if they did rely also on anecdotal evidence.

The Doing Business reports were highly respected and thus widely used, not only by national policymakers as an indication of how their country’s regulations and performance compared with others’, but also by independent researchers and firms and financial institutions contemplating investments abroad. It was not uncommon for a head of government to instruct his ministers to pursue policies geared toward climbing the rankings.

Many observers, including me, regarded the Doing Business reports as the World Bank’s single most important publication. The Bank published the individual results alongside the overall ranking, so anyone who questioned the weights could apply her own. While some governments instituted Potemkin reforms – all façade and no substance — there were many more instances of Doing Business-inspired policies that reduced costs and increased productivity. As with all publications from international economic institutions, Doing Business’s credibility was the key to its success.

But following the 2018 report, there were complaints about the data that had been used, leading the World Bank to commission the highly regarded law firm Wilmer Hale to investigate. Its report, issued last month, found serious irregularities with respect to China’s ranking in the 2018 report.

The investigators report that Kristalina Georgieva, the Bank’s then-CEO (second in command) who has since become managing director of the IMF, urged staff to reconsider the results for China, and then “explored ... ways to change the

methodology to raise China’s ranking.”

The report also points out that the Bank had an interest in placating China, because it was seeking Chinese support for a capital increase at the time.

All told, the investigators provided sufficient evidence of Georgieva’s involvement to raise serious doubts about Doing Business’s credibility and integrity. The current president of the World Bank, David Malpass, has suspended publication of the 2021 report and discontinued future ones. The Bank will surely examine and amend its procedures to prevent similar efforts at manipulation in the future.

Credibility is essential for the critical work the IMF and World Bank do. Both employ highly respected researchers, world-class economists and statisticians, and dedicated officials. They know they are civil servants and not politicians; all are highly committed to their jobs. True, in some cases (some of which are known to me), there has been pressure at the political level to support a certain lending programme or policy position. But a central part of the leadership’s job is to shield staff from undue interference in their reports and analyses.

Attempting to massage the ranking for one country in a cross-country report is egregious not only because it undermines the credibility of the report but also because it harms the other countries whose rankings are changed as a result. When a country falls in the rankings, its ability to attract foreign investors and businesses can be diminished.

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Financial services organisations hit by ransomware



John Shier  
A senior research scientist at Sophos

THE BEST APPROACH IS TO ASSUME YOU WILL BE A TARGET AND TO BUILD YOUR DEFENCES ACCORDINGLY

The State of Ransomware in Financial Services 2021 report released by Sophos shows how mid-sized financial services organisations worldwide spent more than \$2 million on average recovering from a ransomware attack.

This figure exceeds the global average of \$1.85 million, even though the results also show the financial sector is among the most resilient against ransomware.

Nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) of victims surveyed in this sector were able to restore their encrypted data from backups. The survey studied the extent and impact of ransomware attacks during 2020.

Other findings include:

- 34 per cent of the financial services organisations surveyed were hit by ransomware in 2020
  - 51 per cent of the organisations impacted said the attackers succeeded in encrypting their data
  - Only 25 per cent paid the ransom demanded to get their encrypted data back. This is the second lowest payment rate of all industries surveyed. The global average was 32 per cent.
- Financial services are among the most highly regulated industries in the world. Organizations must adhere to myriad regulations, including

SOX, GDPR, and PCI DSS, that include pricey penalties for non-compliance and data breaches.

Many of these organisations are also required to prepare business continuity and disaster recovery plans to minimise any potential damage from data breaches or operational disruptions stemming from a cyberattack.

Strict guidelines in the financial services sector encourage strong defences. Unfortunately, they also mean that a direct hit with ransomware is likely to be very costly for targeted organisations.

If you add up the price of regulatory fines, rebuilding IT systems and stabilising brand reputation, especially if customer

data is lost, you can see why the survey found that recovery costs for mid-sized financial services organisations hit by ransomware in 2020 were in excess of \$2 million.

Two other slightly worrying data points are the fact that a small, but significant, 8 per cent of financial services organisations experienced what are known as ‘extortion’ attacks, where data is not encrypted, but stolen and victims are threatened with the online publication of their data unless they pay the ransom.

Backups cannot protect against this risk, so financial services organisations should not rely on them as an anti-extortion defence.

Further, 11 per cent of the financial organisations surveyed believe they won’t get hit because they are ‘not a target.’ This is a dangerous perception because anyone can be a target.

The best approach is to assume you will be a target and to build your defences accordingly.

Of the financial services organisations that believe they’ll be hit by ransomware in the future, 47 per cent said this is because attacks are now so sophisticated they have become harder to stop. Forty-five per cent feel they’ll become a target because other organisations in their industry have already been targeted with ransomware.

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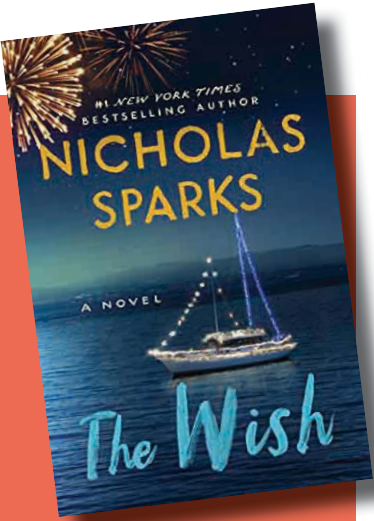


## It's all in the eye

It's the eye that makes a photograph, not the camera, says a veteran photographer

### ENTERTAINMENT

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BY NICHOLAS SPARKS  
Maggie Dawes, a renowned travel photographer, struggles with a medical diagnosis over Christmas.

## Kristen Stewart brings Princess Diana film 'Spencer' to London

**AMERICAN ACTRESS** Kristen Stewart premiered drama 'Spencer' at the London Film Festival on Thursday, saying she was excited to bring her portrayal of the late Princess Diana to British audiences. The 31-year-old has won rave reviews for her performance in the movie. Set over three days, it follows Diana as she reluctantly heads to

Sandringham House for a Christmas gathering with the British royals as her marriage to Prince Charles crumbles. Directed by Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larrain, 'Spencer' first screened at the Venice Film Festival last month, with some critics touting Stewart, who rose to global fame in 'The Twilight Saga' movies, for a best actress Oscar nomination.

"I'm excited to bring it home... We came at this with such love. Even if everyone hated it, it kind of would be OK because we really did just put everything we had into it", Stewart told Reuters on the red carpet. "And we love her so much and just wanted to understand her... I hope everyone loves it as much as we love her." 'Spencer' paints Diana as increasingly isolated from members of the royal family and desperate to free herself from stifling traditional rules. It also shows her close relationship with her sons, Princes William and Harry. "I was influenced by Pablo's audacious confidence... he literally was just like 'I think you definitely need to do this movie with me'", said Stewart, who is also known for 'Seberg', 'Clouds



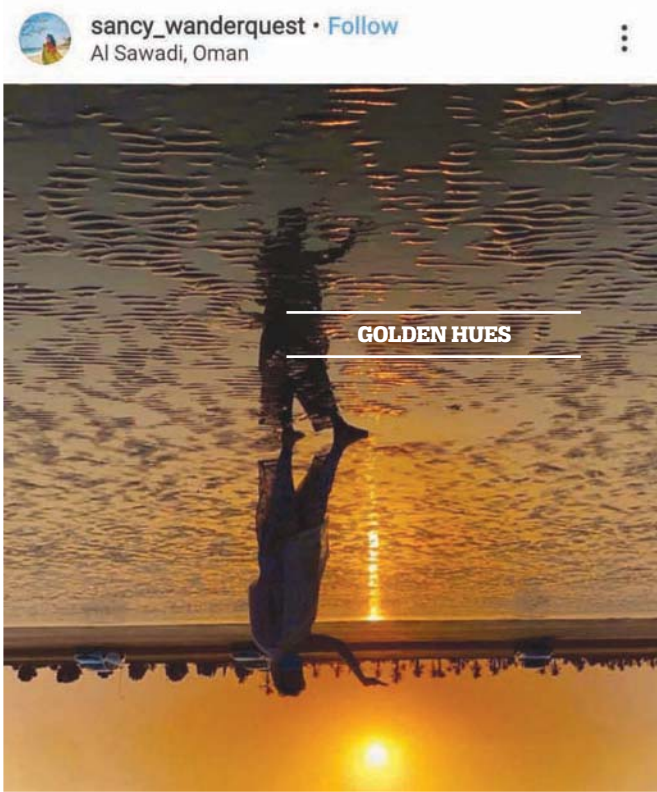
of Sils Maria' and 'Personal Shopper'. "I couldn't resist the temptation. She's a real draw. I was drawn to her." The London Film Festival,

which runs until October 17, has seen a return to red carpet premieres this year following a mainly virtual event last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. — Reuters



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It's all in the eye

FRANÇOISE KADRI

**I**t's the eye that makes a photograph, not the camera," says 90-year-old Jacques Perez, who has forever retained his curiosity for his homeland Tunisia.

An exhibition of his work named "Souvenirs d'Avant l'Oubli" (Memories before Oblivion) is being held until the end of October in a palace in the medina of Tunis, the old city where he was born and still lives.

"I didn't study to take photos — no need. It's above all about seeing. I like to look at 360 degrees and show what I saw," he said. "This was not a vocation, it came on its own."

Perez said he began photography at the age of 11 or 12: "I was lucky to have a German mother and an Italian grandmother who gave me illustrated magazines" and educated his eyes.

After 15 years of amateur photography alongside a teaching job, he was commissioned by a major Tunisian publisher to create a photo book of Sidi Bouzid, a poor but picturesque blue-and-white city, that launched his career.

In the exhibition, all his works are "inhabited" by people, Perez said. "People speak to me, their faces intrigue me, I would like to know what's behind them."

This idea is at the core of the work of Perez, a photographer of international repute, from the United States to France.

He "is a humanist photographer," like those who inspired him, including Robert Doisneau, Henri Cartier-

Bresson and Elliot Erwitt, said exhibition curator Hamideddine Bouali.

**IT'S ALL INTUITIVE**

Perez has only ever wanted to photograph his own country, in all its diversity.

"I feel concerned only by Tunisia," he said.

The 70 photos in the exhibition cover the breadth of his work: the sea and fishermen, the daily life of Tunisians, the old arts and crafts.

Some of the most striking images are portraits of women, including "Lady of Chebika" and "Lady with a Lion".

Both were spontaneous portraits by Perez, who likes to interact with his subjects and has shunned "stolen" images or those shot from far away with telephoto lenses.

In the Lady of Chebika, wrinkled with age, "her face interested me but I did not know if I could approach her," Perez said. "I got closer, she did not react. I got closer again and she gave me a sign of assent. I took the picture."

"It's all intuitive," he said, stressing that "photographers have this ability to predict the next move".

He himself is surprised that he was able to capture the moment when a drop fell from the jar of a water carrier.

It's all about "patience," he said, knowing how to "wait for the right moment without provoking it".

But he remains humble, stating that "I do not take myself seriously. I am neither the father, nor the cousin, nor the grandfather of the Tunisian photo. I am just a photographer in Tunisia."

— AFP



People view the photographs of Tunisian photographer Jacques Perez.



A visitor views the photographs of Tunisian photographer Jacques Perez during the launch of his exhibition.



Tunisian photographer Jacques Perez attends the launch of his exhibition.



Rachael MacIver  
Instagram: @rachael\_maciver

The mechanic turned his head to look at us, and my heart skipped a beat. How was this possible? Who would ever have thought that Freddie Mercury, the frontman of the rock band 'Queen', had a twin brother working in Salalah???

The adventures of a blonde and a very old car

**"DON'T STOP ME NOW..."**

Mrs J was singing a well-known Queen hit in a low voice.

I sent her one of my 'stop-that-right-now-or-else..' looks every mother or wife knows so well. Mrs J ignored me and kept humming.

We were standing inside the grimy yard of the only garage in Salalah prepared to repair my Pajero. Spread out around us were car wrecks with years of accumulated dirt and dust, random car parts, flat tyres, empty oil canisters, and oddly enough, a child's bike with a stabiliser wheel missing. It was like a scene from a Mad Max movie. My Pajero was far from ready, that much was obvious.

The mechanic turned his head to look at us, and my heart skipped a beat. How was this possible? Who would ever have thought that Freddie Mercury,

the frontman of the rock band 'Queen', had a twin brother working in Salalah??? The similarities were uncanny. The protruding front teeth, the moustache, the slicked-back hair, the face — everything pointed towards the fact that we had found Freddie's twin. This would of course explain Mrs J's potpourri of Queen's greatest hits; she had spotted this long before me.

"Do you really think..?" I whispered and nodded towards the mechanic, arm deep in my car engine. Mrs J quickly consulted Google and held her phone screen 2 cm from the mechanic's face. "Do you know this guy?" she asked him. Salalah-Freddie looked for a brief moment, smiled sweetly and went back to what he was doing. Not a flicker of recognition.

"Surely they must have heard of

Freddie Mercury even in Salalah", Mrs J mumbled. She found a video clip of Freddie Mercury in concert, wearing super-tight sequined lycra and bare-chested, singing his heart out. The mechanic watched fascinated and pulled out his own phone. He quickly found a clip from his cousin's wedding to show us in return. Men dancing and clapping their hands, all appropriately dressed. It wasn't Queen, that's for sure.

"Will you let it go? I hissed at Mrs J who was trying sneakily to take photos of our busy mechanic. "But this could be a goldmine", she snapped back suddenly all paparazzi. "the right magazines will pay a fortune for this"

"It isn't Freddie Mercury's brother!" I insisted to end the nonsense.

Out of nowhere, a woman appeared with a tray, timidly

pulling her scarf over her face when she saw us. Lunch was ready. Mechanic-Freddie was too busy to eat but gestured for us to follow her towards a peeling door half-hidden behind a stack of engine parts. The room was hardly big enough for the bed and a shelf holding up the chunky old fashioned TV. This was their home. A baby lay swaddled in an old sari next to a toddler who had climbed onto the bed to watch cartoons on TV, in a language he didn't understand. Their lives consisted of what was in that tiny room. Plastic bags with belongings, a couple of nails from where their clothes hung, and a hotplate right outside the door, directly on the concrete floor. That was it. And yet, the mother smiled and gestured for us to take a seat on the bed next to her children. She gingerly

placed the tray with dal and bread next to us and encouraged us to eat. She might have very little in life, yet, she was prepared to share what she had.

Mrs J looked at me, notably touched to the core, torn between being polite and accept a morsel of food, yet painstakingly aware that every bite would mean less for the little family.

We were both quiet in the taxi going back to our hotel; both reflecting on the unknown factors that determine just how one's life turns out. Worshipped by thousands in sequined tights on stage, — or loved by a few, in an oil-soaked shirt, working underneath a broken car.

Perhaps the faces were the same, but the opportunities were not. You can't always choose your path in life — but you can always choose to be kind.



# Turkish fires endanger world pine honey supplies

## Shaken and starred: Bond star Craig honoured on Hollywood Walk of Fame



**BRITAIN'S FAVOURITE** superspy left his mark on Hollywood on Wednesday when Daniel Craig got a star on the Walk of Fame. The world's suavest action hero was immortalised — appropriately — outside 7007 Hollywood Boulevard, next to fellow Bond actor Roger Moore.

"I never thought I'd hear myself saying this but you know it's an absolute honour to be walked all over in Hollywood," Craig quipped as his star was unveiled.

"And if happiness is measured by the company we keep, then, me being on this pavement surrounded by all of these legends, makes me a very, very, very happy man."

Further down the storied street, where over 2,000 stars pay homage to some of the biggest names of film, television and music, fans gathered to toast their gadget-wielding hero. With martinis, naturally.

Craig's fifth and final turn as Ian Fleming's secret agent hits screens around the world this month.

"No Time To Die" has received rave reviews — much to the relief of studio bosses, who are banking on the blockbuster to get audiences back after the Covid hiatus.

Actor Rami Malek, who plays Bond's rival in the 25th installment of the mega franchise, was on hand to offer praise for the star, who he said had been a delight to work with.

"If you're lucky enough to play a bad guy, you'd better make sure the good guy is legendary. This good guy's the best," he said. — **AFP**

## Eurovision heads for Turin in 2022



**THE EUROVISION** Song Contest will next year be held in the northern Italian city of Turin, organisers announced on Friday.

Italy is hosting the 66th edition of the kitschy competition in May after the victory of lederhosen-wearing Italian rockers Maneskin this year in Rotterdam.

That event, watched by 183 million people, was Italy's third Eurovision win and its first for three decades.

Turin, which was home to the 2006 Winter Olympics and is hosting the ATP Finals tennis tournament next month, beat off competition from 16 other Italian cities that bid to host Eurovision 2022.

"We won! Turin has won!" mayor Chiara Appendino enthused in a statement posted on Facebook.

The event will be held at the PalaOlimpico arena, with the semifinals scheduled for May 10 and 12, 2022, and the final on May 14.

Turin follows in the footsteps of Naples, which hosted Eurovision in 1965, and Rome, which hosted it in 1991.

The demands on venues are strict — hosts must provide an air-conditioned venue with a capacity of up to 10,000 in the main hall alongside space and facilities for a set, and room for artist, staff, audience and press facilities.

Eurovision Executive Supervisor Martin Osterdahl said Turin, a stately cultural centre situated at the foot of the Alps, was "the perfect host city".

"As we saw during the 2006 Winter Olympics, PalaOlimpico exceeds all the requirements needed to stage a global event of this scale and we have been very impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment from the City of Turin who will welcome thousands of fans next May," he said.

Maneskin's Eurovision victory earlier this year kicked off a summer of successes for Italy after a devastating year of dealing with coronavirus.

Italy went on to win the Euro 2020 football championship, and sprinter Lamont Marcel Jacobs took the 100-metre title at the Tokyo Olympics. This week, Italian Giorgio Parisi was one of the recipients of the Nobel Physics Prize. — **AFP**



**BEEKEEPERS MUSTAFA** Altı and his son Fehmi were kept busy tending to their hives before wild-fires tore through a bucolic region of Turkey that makes most of the world's prized pine honey.

Now the Altis and generations of other honey farmers in Turkey's Aegean province of Mugla are scrambling to find additional work and wondering how many decades it might take to get their old lives back on track.

"Our means of existence is from beekeeping, but when the forests burned, our source of income fell," said Fehmi, 47, next to his mountainside beehives in the fire-ravaged village of Cokek.

"I do side jobs, I do some tree felling, that way we manage to make do."

Nearly 200,000 hectares of forests — more than five times the annual average — were scorched by fires across Turkey this year, turning luscious green coasts popular with tourists into ash.

The summer disaster and an accompanying series of deadly floods made the climate — already weighing heavily on the minds of younger voters — a major issue two years before the next scheduled election.

Signalling a political shift, Turkey's parliament this week ended a five-year wait and ratified the Paris Agreement on cutting the greenhouse emissions that are blamed for global warming and abnormal weather events.

But the damage has already been done in Mugla, where 80 per cent of Turkey's pine honey is produced.

Turkey as a whole makes 92 per cent of the world's pine honey, meaning supplies of the thick, dark amber may be running low worldwide very soon.

**SPECIAL INSECT**

Turkey's pine honey harvests were already suffering from drought when the wildfires hit, destroying the delicate balance between bees, trees, and the little

insects at the heart of the production process.

The honey is made by bees after they collect the sugary secretions of the tiny Basra beetle (Marchalina hellenica), which lives on the sap of pine trees.

Fehmi hopes the beetles will adapt to younger trees after the fires. But he also accepts that "it will take at least five or 10 years to get our previous income back".

His father Mustafa agrees, urging President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government to expand forested areas and plant young trees.

"There's no fixing a burnt house. Can you fix the dead? No. But new trees might come, a new generation," Mustafa said.

For now, though, the beekeepers are counting their losses and figuring out what comes next.

The president of the Mugla Beekeepers' Association, Veli Turk, expects his region's honey production to plunge by up to 95 per cent this year.

"There is pretty much no Marmaris honey left," he said.

"This honey won't come for another 60 years," he predicted. "It's not just Turkey. This honey would go everywhere in the world. It was a blessing. This is really a huge loss."

**'SO MUCH LOSS'**

Beekeeper Yasar Karayigit, 45, is thinking of switching to a different type of honey to keep his passion — and sole source of income — alive.

"I love beekeeping, but to continue, I'll have to pursue alternatives," Karayigit said, mentioning royal jelly (or "bee milk") and sunflower honey, which involves additional costs.

"But if we love the bees, we have to do this," the father-of-three said.

Ismail Atici, head of the Milas district Chamber of Agriculture in Mugla, said the price of pine honey has doubled from last year, threat-



ening to make the popular breakfast food unaffordable for many Turks.

He expects price rises to continue and supplies to become ever more scarce.

"We will get to a point where even if you have money, you won't be able to find those medicinal plants and medicinal honey," Atici said.

"It's going to be very hard to find 100 per cent pine honey," beekeeper Karayigit agreed. "We have had so much loss."

**'WE MUST CONTINUE'**

Looking ahead, the president of the Turkey Beekeepers' Association, Ziya Sahin, suggests selectively introducing the Basra beetle to new areas of Mugla, expanding coverage from the current seven to 25 per cent of local pine forests.

"If we conduct transplantation of the beetle from one area to another and continue this for two successive years, we can protect the region's dominance in the sector," Sahin said.

"There will be a serious drop in honey production if we don't do this," he added, calling this year the "worst" of his 50-year career.

Yet despite the pain and the troubled road ahead, the younger Altı has no plans to quit.

"This is my father's trade. Because this is passed down from the family, we must continue it," Fehmi said. — **AFP**