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OTC RETURNS TO ACTION WITH OMAN OPEN TRIATHLON



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ECB SET TO OUTLINE DETAILS OF FRESH STIMULUS AS PANDEMIC WORSENS



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A SPLENDID TRIP TO DISCOVER THE TASTE OF DHOFARI MILK



■ OMAN

**CRUDE PRICES AT \$47.33 A BARREL**

MUSCAT: Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) said that Oman oil price for January delivery reached \$47.33. The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil declined 53 cents, from the price of Tuesday, which was \$47.86. The average price of Oman oil for December delivery has stabilised at \$41.11, thus 49 cents per barrel lower than November delivery. Meanwhile, Muscat Securities Market (MSM) general index (30) on Wednesday lost 12.5 points, comprising a decline by 0.34 per cent to close at 3,633.63 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 3,646.09 points.

■ WORLD

**UK PM ‘OPTIMISTIC’ ON POST-BREXIT EU DEAL**

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson is “optimistic” about striking a post-Brexit deal with the European Union but ready for Britain to trade on new terms without one, aides said on Wednesday. “He is optimistic but he’s also always said that he is confident and comfortable that we would be OK without a deal”, Johnson’s press secretary Allegra Stratton told reporters. “If a deal can be struck that’s all to the good, but he’s also confident that we can move towards trading on what he calls Australia terms”, she said, referring to Johnson’s formulation for trading under World Trade Organization terms.

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INSIDE



UAE CELEBRATES 49TH NATIONAL DAY

P6



COVID-19 IS MAKING AMERICA'S INCOME AND RACE GAP BIGGER

P9

# Sultanate accords culture of peace a special status

NEW YORK: The culture of peace is accorded a special status in the Sultanate’s policy as reaffirmed by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. This was stated here on Wednesday before the United Nations General Assembly meeting during the Sultanate’s speech, quoting His Majesty the Sultan’s Royal address in February in which he said: “Oman’s

message of peace will continue to echo the world, conveying a great legacy and noble objectives, building rather than demolishing, working for rapprochement rather than distancing.” The Sultanate’s speech was delivered by Ahmed bin Dawood al Zadjali, Deputy Representative of the Sultanate to the United Nations.

Speaking on the occasion, Al Zadjali said that peace is one of the greatest bounties, since it is the mainstay of stability of nations and the factor which accelerates cooperation among countries. He said that the Sultanate has embraced peace and that it has strong conviction in its significance. “Oman espoused peace as a

permanent component of its foreign policy and a noble objective which it strives to achieve in its relations with all countries of the world”, said Al Zadjali, adding that the Sultanate will continue to be a supporter of culture of peace in its full sense, its values and ethical principles that encourage non-violence and non-utilisation of force — principles that advocate the

settlement of disputes by peaceful means. In his speech, Al Zadjali reaffirmed that “Peace cannot be achieved by words, but by proper action which conforms with international values and principles, without prejudice to the UN Charter the International Law.” — ONA

# Oman books 2.2 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines

Zero COVID-19 deaths for first time in 8 months

ASIM AL SHEDI AND VINOD NAIR

It was a day of small triumph in the national and local fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. While Pfizer and BioNTech got approval for the use of COVID-19 vaccines in the UK, Oman has reported no deaths for the first time since the outbreak of the disease at community level. The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 237 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 124,145. Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed

al Saeedi, Minister of Health, described the Sultanate’s reporting on Wednesday of zero deaths associate with COVID-19 for the first time in eight months as ‘a success for all’ and not for the ministry alone, adding that the people’s awareness and commitment has contributed to fall in both infections and mortality rate. The minister called on the public to show more commitment to preventive measures, considering it as the best solution for containing the pandemic. He considered the number of

hospitalised coronavirus patients as ‘comfortable’, and added that the Sultanate is seeing a record decline in the number of cases. Commenting on the Sultanate’s efforts to procure the vaccines, Dr Al Saeedi said the Sultanate has reserved 1 million doses of the vaccine from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) which represents 20 per cent of the Sultanate’s needs. However, the minister added that the delivery of this quantity depends on several factors including safety and effectiveness of the vaccine.

TURN TO P2

# Nurseries to open from December 13

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnasseri

Nurseries and kindergartens will open their doors on December 13 for the first time after more than eight months of closure due to the spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19), as part of the seventh package of commercial and industrial activities that the Supreme Committee has decided to reopen with full commitment to all health requirements and procedures to reduce the spread of the virus. A source in the Ministry of Social Development said conditions of reopening of nurseries will be announced soon by the ministry in different media channels. Nurseries were closed since March, which led to the emergence of several problems, including financial impact on nursery

owners, as they complained about lack of liquidity to pay building rents and salaries of supervisors and nursemaids. On the other hand, the closure has also affected working mothers who have depleted their annual leave balance to stay with their children. Besides, the emergence of unlicensed home nurseries which are not subject to any supervisory authority. The ministry then issued a warning against using such baby care entities, quoting the Child Law promulgated by a Royal Decree, as it stipulates in Article 31 that “it is not permissible to establish a nursery for children except after obtaining a licence to do so from the ministry”, calling on everyone to cooperate in order to avoid taking administrative and legal measures against those who violate these regulations and laws.

TURN TO P2

# 2020 one of three hottest years ever recorded: UN

GENEVA: This year is on course to be one of the three warmest ever recorded and could even top the record set in 2016, the United Nations said on Wednesday. The past six years, 2015 to 2020, are therefore set to make up all six of the hottest years since modern records began in 1850, the UN’s World Meteorological Organization said in its provisional 2020 State of

the Global Climate report. “2020 has, unfortunately, been yet another extraordinary year for our climate”, said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas. The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change calls for capping global warming at well below two degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level, while countries will pursue efforts to limit



The average global temperature in 2020 is set to be about 1.2° C above the pre-industrial level

PETTERI TAALAS  
WMO Secretary-General

the increase to 1.5° C. “The average global temperature in 2020 is set to be about 1.2° C above the pre-industrial level”, said Taalas. “There is at least a one in five chance of it temporarily exceeding 1.5° C by 2024.” The WMO said 2020 seemed on course to be the second-hottest year ever — but the difference between the top three is small and the picture

could change once this year’s data sets are complete. The years from 2015 to 2020 are therefore individually “likely to be the six warmest on record”, the report said. Temperature averages across the last five years, and across the last 10 year period, “are also the warmest on record”, it added. — AFP

FROM PAGE 1

Nurseries,  
Kindergartens  
to reopen  
from Dec 13



Regarding the reopening of nurseries, Fatima Saud, a working mother, said: “I am happy with the decision to open nurseries because the recent period was difficult by all standards, and I did not know where to put my child during my office timings. I am in favour of reopening while reducing the number of children and maintaining a daily sanitisation routine”.

Moza al Hinai, a mother of a child, said: “I was forced to drive long distance to leave my child with my relatives so that I can go to work. What worries me was their inability to deal with him as it is very difficult to handle him. Closing baby care centres stressed me out”.

According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), the pandemic and the closure of schools have deprived at least a third of students around the world, equivalent to 463 million children, from education, due to the inability to do so virtually. The UN estimates the number of children around the world who have been affected by school closures or isolation measures at about one and a half billion children.

# Oman books 2.2 million doses of vaccines

The minister affirmed that the Sultanate has directly contracted with Pfizer and booked 370,000 vaccine doses 20,000 of which will be delivered this month and the rest will arrive at the beginning of next year. A single dose of the vaccine arriving this month costs \$30, while the price of the vaccine which will arrive in 2021 has been set at \$24 for a single dose. People need two doses of the vaccine.

Dr Al Saeedi said that the Sultanate is also holding negotiations with AstraZeneca, another developer of coronavirus vaccine, and has reserved 850,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. However, the vaccine is yet to be approved. The company has set a fair price of \$5.5 for a single dose.

The minister pointed out negotiations are on with the Indian company manufacturing the Russian vaccine 'Sputnik V' will be clear within days. The price of a single dose of this vaccine is up to \$15.

The minister said there is also a Chinese vaccine, the final results of which we have not received formally. China has put a hefty price tag of \$145 for two doses of its vaccine. He expects China to reconsider the pricing of the vaccine in the light of the prices of other global vaccines.

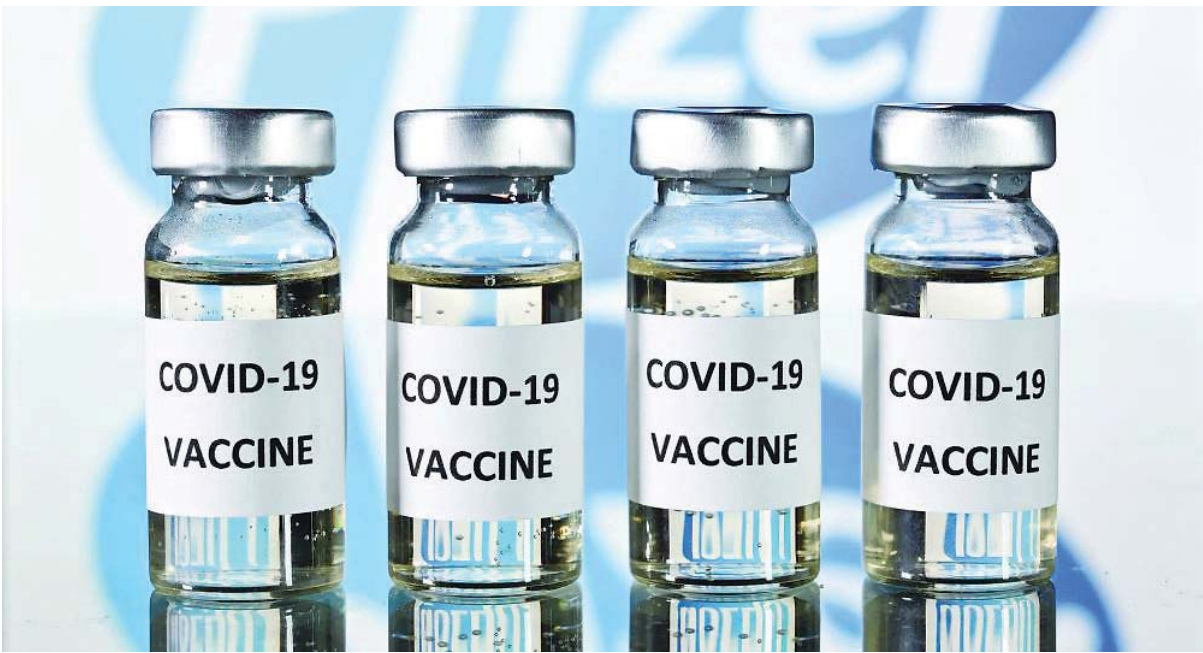
The minister said that vaccines will be given on a health basis only, noting that all countries are



The Sultanate is also holding negotiations with AstraZeneca, another developer of coronavirus vaccine, and has reserved 850,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. However, the vaccine is yet to be approved. The company has set a fair price of \$5.5 for a single dose

DR AHMED BIN  
MOHAMMED  
AL SAEEDI  
Minister of Health

prioritising medical professionals and frontline workers such as airports staff and those who come in contact with masses as well as people with chronic diseases. He noted that the vaccine won't be



mandatory, and that there is no law that forces anyone to take the vaccine.

### SURVEY

The Ministry of Health also announced the completion of the fourth round of the National Serological Survey.

“The Directorate-General extends its thanks and gratitude to all those who contributed to the completion of this national work, and extends special thanks to citizens and residents and appreciates their positive role in the rapid response and contribute to overcoming obstacles to reach the desired goal of the survey and benefit from the final results in



dealing with this pandemic.

“Whereas, we believe that the concerted efforts between the health sector, citizens and residents must bear fruit one day when the safety of the homeland and the safety of all its residents

is the first and supreme goal,” the ministry said.

The ministry will announce the final results of the sero-survey as soon as the laboratory tests are completed and the results will be analysed in the coming weeks.

## COVID-19 serological survey concludes

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday announced the conclusion of the four rounds of coronavirus (COVID-19) National Serological Survey.

The Ministry said that final results of the COVID-19 survey will be announced as soon as lab tests are completed and

analysis of data is conducted.

The Directorate-General of Disease Surveillance and Control would like to thank all citizens and residents who cooperated in the accomplishment of the project. It valued the prompt response of the participants whose positive role,

it observed, will help attain the desired objective of the survey.

The final results will be of great benefit in dealing with the pandemic and help shuttle the country into the sphere of safety, said the Directorate General.

— ONA

# People venture out with caution as activities reopen

MUSCAT: Parks, cinema halls and beaches opened their doors to the public, allowing the visitors to take advantage of the dropping temperatures and pleasant weather.

Parks, amusement centres and cinema halls including the popular chain VOX resumed operations for the first time since March.

With regards to health measures, cinema halls will be allowed to operate only at 50 per cent capacity and follow guidelines such as health checks for workers, the safe distance at all places, no use of touch screen machines, electronic booking systems and serving food and beverages to avoid sharing as much as possible.

Cinema halls should follow horizontal spacing by allowing two seats to customers and two seats empty.

Parks should have a single point for entry and exit to limit the number of visitors, parking lots at 50 per cent capacity, reduced visit hours and no family events and social gatherings.

Amusement centres in commercial centres will also operate at 50 per cent capacity.

— Pictures by Khalfan al Ruzaqi







Dima W’attayeen

# Most abundant in water



Dima W’attayeen is a wilayat in North Al Sharqiyah that borders Qurayyah from north, Ibra from south, Al Qabil and Bidiya from east and Al Mudhaibi and Bidbid from west. The wilayat offers a flavour of Oman that is distinctively unique with its mountainous landscape, and yet so abundantly blessed with water.

It is the oddity of nature that makes a tour to this wilayat so rewarding, both for nature lovers and those looking for some off-road driving adventure. The name of Dima W’attayeen is traced to the collapse of Marib Dam as Arab tribes emigrated to other places. Among them people of Tay tribe that settled in Wadi Tayeen.

The large majority of its residents live in some 51 villages, which mainly dot the fringes of the wilayat’s major wadis.

Numerous hilly byways will take you to remote stretches of the wilayat, across scores of gurgling streams and springs that are a ubiquitous sight around the wilayat.

Among the many scenic spots of the wilayat is a place called Al Madbagah located at the foot of Al Jabal al Abyadh (also called The White Mountain), which is part of Al Hajar range.



The wilayat is remarkably known for its springs, caves and aflaj. It includes 200 aflaj such as Al Aqdani, Al Qaryiah, Al Waili and falaj Al Taht. One of the main tourist landmarks is Wadi Dayqah that is the main feeder to Wadi Dayqah Dam. The biggest cave called Abu Haban was discovered recently in the wilayat.

Discovery also awaits those who trek up Al Jabal al Abyadh’s pathways leading up to its summit. Small communities of people continue to live at the summit of the

mountain, virtually a world away from the relative modern life down below.

The wilayat is blessed with many development projects that covered almost all sectors and infrastructure. Despite the rugged terrains, the area enjoys the services that fulfil the people’s needs and requirements. The government has worked on providing main services like education, paved roads, water, electricity and housing for people who come under social insurance.



# Agreement inked with Huawei to train 300 IT graduates

MUSCAT: Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, signed an agreement with Huawei for the training of 300 graduates of IT and telecommunication engineering for three years.

The agreement is aimed at providing training for the graduates so that they acquire the necessary skills that enable them to compete in the labour market as well as providing job opportunities to the outstanding trainees. As per the agreement, the company will receive three batches of trainees per year. The company will pay an allowance to the trainees and provide them with medical insurance during the training period.

Al Hosni underscored the importance of investing in the national cadres by training them so that they can cope with



the requirements of the labour market. He added that the trainees will be selected by the ministry and the company based on the students' GPA. The training programme will help the graduates greatly when they apply for job vacancies in the IT field.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Li Lingbing, Ambassador of People's Republic

of China to the Sultanate, commended the bilateral economic relations between the Sultanate and China affirming that this programme which is organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour stems from the company's firm belief on the importance of investing in youth and their role in economic development.

# Efforts to boost start-ups

MUSCAT: The working group formed by the State Council for dialogue with start-up companies in various sectors hosted a delegation from the international law firm Trowers & Hamlin.

The meeting, headed by Dr Maryam bint Abdullah al Awadiyah, discussed several axes of the Council's Technology and Innovation Committee study of the draft law on "Investment in Technology and Innovation", including discussion on the institution's perspective on the

legislative environment for investment in the Sultanate and a review of legislative models to attract investors in the technology sector, in addition to addressing the legislative requirements for the success of start-ups.

The Council has formed a special working group for dialogue with start-up companies in various sectors, believing in the importance of community participation with various relevant authorities to benefit from their experiences and visions.

# Oman Air launches 'My Space' campaign

MUSCAT: Oman Air is now offering 'My Space', an option that gives Economy Class guests the opportunity to ensure that the seat next to them is vacant.

The airline's programme makes it simple to travel with even more comfort and convenience. When guests check-in online 48 hours before their departure, they can select their seats via an interactive seat map and choose the option to ensure at least one seat next to them is vacant. If the option is not available for guests' chosen seats, they can select another seat that does have adjacent vacancies. Guests can choose "My Space" until 3 hours before their flight's departure time.

Oman Air CEO Abdul Aziz al Raisi said, "We are committed to providing a safe environment for our guests while offering options that will increase their comfort".

While the airline offers this choice, which is convenient and safe, it also continues to maintain its comprehensive safety programme throughout all elements of the travel journey, to ensure that guests fly confidently.

Oman Air Senior Vice President — Revenue Management, Pricing & Distribution Umesh Chhiber said, "Our guests appreciate flexibility and choices



while they are travelling. In cooperation with our trusted partner, Plusgrade, we are giving them the opportunity to fly with more space around them".

Masks are required when guests are on board the aircraft and in Oman's airports. Distancing is maintained while guests board and exit the aircraft, which are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of everyday. Cabin crew all wear

a full set of personal protective equipment, meal service has been modified to increase safety and a number of other steps have been taken to ensure that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times.

Guests who are planning to depart from Oman should ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements, which are provided at omanair.com, as well as the requirements at their destinations.

# UTAS Salalah conducts online Academic Advising workshop

STAFF REPORTER  
SALALAH, DEC 2

The Mass Communication Department at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Salalah organised an online workshop on academic advising on for Mass Communication faculty members of Salalah and Nizwa campuses.

The workshop entitled 'The importance of academic advising' was led by Muna al Shahri, Mass Communication faculty member and a member of the UTAS Academic Advising Committee.

Dr Nawal Salah El-Din, Head of the Mass Communication Department, UTAS Salalah and Dr Vandana Jyotirmayee, Mass Communication Programme Director, were also present during the workshop.

In her inaugural address, Dr Nawal said, "Academic advising is a high priority area of the department and such workshops are part of its ongoing operational plan."

Dr Vandana, who coordinated the event, highlighted the importance of academic advising in achieving departmental objectives and ensuring student satisfaction.

During the workshop, Muna al Shahri detailed the important aspects of academic



advising such as academic advising policy, roles and responsibilities of academic advisers, study plans and reading student transcripts.

The workshop also elaborated on various treatment plans and remedial measures to improve the academic performance of probationary students besides highlighting the responsibilities of the Academic Advising Coordinator, especially in following up the advising process in consultation with the heads of academic departments.

The discussion session at the end of the workshop was noted by the active participation of faculty members who said the programme was beneficial in gaining an insight into the academic advising procedures by way of the mutual exchange of their knowledge and experience.

The workshop comes as part of the academic cooperation among the Mass Communication fraternity of Salalah and Nizwa campuses of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.




## TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender:-

| Tender No. | Tender Subject                                                                    | Grade           | Last date for obtainment of tender document | Last date for tender Submission | Tender Document Price (non-refundable) |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 15/2020    | Maintenance Service for Database and Takaful System for IT Department in Ministry | Excellent & One | Thursday 10-12-2020 01:00 PM                | Sunday 20-12-2020 10:00 AM      | R.O. 25/=                              |

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Thursday 03/12/2020
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ The original (1%) bank warranty to be submitted at same day of submitting at tender box located in Directorate of Finance & Administration at MOSD HQ.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website ([reg@tenderboard.gov.om](mailto:reg@tenderboard.gov.om)) tel. (24402222 or 24166670)

*"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"*

[www.mosd.gov.om](http://www.mosd.gov.om)

## RE-TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Shared Services Company (NSS), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below;

| TENDER NUMBER | TENDER NAME                                                               | LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS | TIME & LAST DATE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION | TENDER FEE (OMR) |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Re NSS/2020/6 | ORACLE CLOUD E-TENDERING/ SOURCING SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION FOR NAMA GROUP | 10-December-2020                             | 23-December-2020                         | 100/-            |

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
  - Commercial Proposal
  - Technical Proposal
  - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at NSS reception before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Wednesday, 23 Dec. 2020.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website ([www.nama.om](http://www.nama.om)).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Nama Shared Services, Bank Muscat: 0423-048027270-017 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.

  
**نماء للخدمات المشتركة**  
**Nama Shared Services**

**Al Muzn Mail**  
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Emiratis attend celebrations of UAE's National Day on Wednesday. – AFP

# UAE celebrates 49th National Day

**ABU DHABI:** The sisterly state of United Arab Emirates (UAE) celebrated the 49th National Day on Wednesday.

Despite the challenges posed by coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in many parts of the world, the UAE succeeded in making major achievements across different sectors, as reported by Emirates News Agency (WAM).

The two sectors of space and energy come in the lead of strategic transformations after the launch of Al Amal probe and the announcement of the first Arab project for the exploration of the Moon.

This coincided with the official announcement that the UAE joined the nuclear energy club upon the start of operations at the nuclear reactor of the first station Baraka and commencement of production of environment-friendly electric power. In the

meantime, new oil and gas fields were discovered.

The UAE converted COVID-19 challenge into an opportunity in which it enhanced its presence in the international arena through emergency medical assistance to more than 100 countries. Its successful handling of the pandemic constituted one of the world's most prominent milestones by virtue of the number of infections, thereby surpassing all countries and become the first state to have made such an achievement.

Meanwhile, the UAE forged ahead with its message of tolerance, calling for transforming the region and the world into an arena of stability and co-existence. This approach culminated in the signing of the peace treaty with Israel known as the Abraham Accord. During 2020, the UAE consolidated its position among

leading countries in exploring the space through the launch of Al Amal probe on 20 July, thus joining the seven members of Mars Explorers.

In September, it launched the first environment safety satellite, Muzun Sat, the 11th it launched in the past 20 years, and later launched Rashid probe, 100% homegrown in terms of design and construction.

This made the UAE the fourth country in the world that participates in exploring the moon for scientific purposes, after the United States, the defunct Soviet Union and China.

In October, the UAE unveiled a new satellite project, MBZ-Sat, the second biggest satellite developed and built by UAE engineers after Khalifasat.

Then, the UAE entered the age of production of electricity from nuclear power after the Emirates

Nuclear Energy Establishment announced Nawah Energy Company's success in concluding the stage that precedes the start of operation of the First Station nuclear reactor.

This was followed by the completion of a safe connection of the station with the State's main electrical grid. Then, the first megawatt of environment-friendly electrical power began to be produced.

Thanks to this achievement, the UAE became the first Arab country and the 33rd globally to successfully develop nuclear power stations for the production of environment-friendly electricity.

The UAE also took the lead, for the fourth time in a row, among Middle East and North Africa, in the World Competitiveness Yearbook 2020 report, issued by World Competitiveness Center, Luzern, Switzerland. — ONA

## Pandemic, funding gaps seen fuelling violence in Yemen

**LONDON:** Gender-based violence has surged by 63 per cent since the conflict erupted in Yemen in 2015, aid groups said on Monday, warning that the pandemic was exposing inadequate funding for protection services in war zones around the world.

Globally, at least 40 million people affected by war are at risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking due to "chronically underfunded" protection programmes, said a report by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the United Nations.

"When people don't have any other option, they will take desperate measures which put them at high risk of trafficking, exploitation, abuse or forced labour," said Suze van Meegeen, NRC's interim director of advocacy.

"(We need) to actually start talking about protection and prioritising the protection of civilians because food isn't

**(We need) to actually start talking about protection and prioritising the protection of civilians because food isn't enough to keep people alive**

**SUZE VAN MEEGEEN**

*NRC's interim director of advocacy*

enough to keep people alive," van Meegeen said.

In Yemen, more than two-thirds of Yemeni girls are being married off by the age of 18 as economic fallout from COVID-19 exacerbates the country's woes, the report said. — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**



Yemeni women draw paintings on the wall of University of Sanaa to react to the ongoing war in Sanaa. – Reuters

# Lebanon says difficulties in border talks can be overcome

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon wants maritime border talks with Israel to succeed and difficulties that surfaced in the last session round can be overcome, President Michel Aoun told a US mediator on Wednesday, after the latest round was postponed.

The negotiations between the old foes were launched in October, with delegations convening at a UN base to try to resolve a dispute about their maritime border that has held up hydrocarbon exploration in the potentially gas-rich area.

But a session scheduled for Wednesday was postponed with US officials instead pursuing separate contact with the sides.

Aoun told visiting US official John Desrocher that Lebanon wanted the talks to succeed to strengthen stability in southern Lebanon and allow for oil and gas investment.

"The difficulties that appeared in the last round of negotiations can be removed through in-depth research based on international law and the articles of the law of



Lebanon President Michel Aoun

the sea," Aoun told Desrocher, the presidency said in a statement.

Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz said on Monday it had been agreed with the Americans that talks would be postponed for a few weeks.

The talks are the culmination of three years of diplomacy by Washington. Disagreement over the sea border has discouraged oil and gas exploration near the disputed line.

The Hizbullah, which fought a month-long war with Israel in

2006, has said the talks are not a sign of peace-making with Israel. The group exercises significant influence in the state and backed the new caretaker government of Hassan Diab.

Israel already pumps gas from huge offshore fields but Lebanon has yet to find commercial gas reserves in its own waters.

Meanwhile, President Emmanuel Macron will try to revive a French initiative on Lebanon when he hosts an international aid conference on

Wednesday evening, but with the country's fractious political class bickering, hopes of a breakthrough appear slim.

Four months after a massive explosion that killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital city, Lebanon is no closer to forming a credible government to overhaul the bankrupt state despite French efforts to convince politicians to introduce partial reforms to confront the emergency.

— **Reuters**

### SHORT TAKES

#### GAZA

##### Gloomy Christmas for Gaza handicraft workshop

Coronavirus lockdowns have made it difficult for the Zeina Co-operative Association to export its hand-crafted Christmas gifts from Gaza to Europe and to the Palestinian town of Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

About 24 Palestinian Muslim women, many of them veiled, work at the facility, making miniature Christmas trees, red-and-white puppets and Santa Claus marionettes.

But sales are down by half after a holiday boom a year ago,



scuppering expansion plans and changing business strategy. "We have turned from an international market to a local market," said Haneen Alsammak, executive manager of the cooperative, which aims to empower women in the Gaza Strip. — **AFP**

#### PALESTINE

##### UN agency for Palestinians pays salaries

The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees paid the salaries of 30,000 Palestinian staff across the Middle East for last month, but a funding shortfall may still hinder payment in December, officials said on Wednesday.

UNRWA finds itself in limbo after the US election — President Donald Trump ended all US payments, but while Palestinians hope President-elect Joe Biden's administration will at least partially resume payments, that



could take months.

The agency said last month it had run out of money to pay salaries after two years of funding cuts by the US and other donors, including Arab Gulf states. — **Reuters**

#### DUBAI

##### Iran presents \$33.7 billion budget

Iran's government presented a draft state budget of about \$33.7 billion to parliament on Wednesday, promising less reliance on oil revenues and higher growth despite US sanctions that have crippled the Islamic Republic's economy, Iranian media reported.

The value of the draft budget is set about 8,413 trillion rials, up 74 per cent from last year's figures in rial terms but lower than last year's budget of \$38.8 billion in hard currency terms because of the sharp fall of Iran's currency.



"The next year's budget bill focuses on infrastructure reforms, health, creating jobs, non-oil exports and the nation's welfare," according to Iran's state news agency IRNA. Iran's next fiscal year starts on March 21.

— **Reuters**

## In brief

■ NEW DELHI



### INDIA EXPERIENCING DECLINE IN COVID INFECTIONS

India is experiencing a sustained decline in new COVID-19 infections, with less than 50,000 cases reported daily for the past 10 days, according to a Health Ministry statement issued on Wednesday.

The South Asian country has the world's second-highest number of COVID-19 infections after the US with a caseload of around 9.5 million and 138,122 deaths.

The Health Ministry said the number of active COVID-19 cases - the number of people currently suffering from the disease — dropped to 428,644 on Wednesday, it's lowest since July 23. — **dpa**

■ TOKYO



### JAPAN RESIDENTS TO GET FREE COVID-19 VACCINE

Japan will give free coronavirus vaccines to all of its residents under a bill passed on Wednesday, as the nation battles record numbers of daily cases.

The bill, which says the government will cover all vaccine costs for Japan's 126 million residents, was approved by the upper house of parliament, having cleared the powerful lower house.

The country has secured Covid-19 vaccines for 60 million people from pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, and for a further 25 million people from biotech firm Moderna.

It has also confirmed it will receive 120 million doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine. — **AFP**

■ HANOI



### VIETNAM SAYS TYPHOONS CAUSED \$1.3 BN DAMAGES

Natural disasters in the past two months caused Vietnam 30 trillion dong (\$1.3 billion) in economic damage and killed 192 people, with 57 still missing, authorities said on Wednesday, with its central provinces bearing most of the losses.

Vietnam's central region has had a tough year, with its important tourism industry crippled by the coronavirus pandemic long before the arrival of nine typhoons that wiped out crops and damaged homes of hundreds of thousands people.

The two-month toll surpassed losses for the whole of last year, when disasters killed 132 people and caused 6.2 trillion in damage, official data showed. — **AFP**

# Afghan peace talks to advance to next stage

**DOHA:** Peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Qatar are ready to advance to the next stage, both sides said on Wednesday after agreeing on rules for the talks.

The meetings, which began in September, had been bogged down by disputes on the agenda, the basic framework of discussions and religious interpretations.

Nader Nadery, a member of the government's negotiating team, tweeted that "procedures for the intra-Afghan negotiations... had been finalised and discussions on the agenda" would follow.

Mohammad Naeem, a spokesman for the Taliban, also tweeted that procedures for the talks had been "finalised and from now on, the negotiations will begin on the agenda".

The warring sides have been engaging directly for the first time following a landmark troop withdrawal deal signed in February by the insurgents and



Abdullah Abdullah (centre), head of the Afghan government's delegation, called for a humanitarian ceasefire. — **AFP File Photo**

Washington.

The US agreed to withdraw all foreign forces in exchange for security guarantees and a Taliban pledge to hold talks with Kabul.

Abdullah Abdullah, chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation, in a

tweet called the development an "initial major step".

Washington's special envoy on the conflict Zalmay Khalilzad also welcomed the breakthrough, tweeting that it was a "significant milestone".

He said the two sides had

agreed on a "three-page agreement codifying rules and procedures for their negotiations on a political road map and a comprehensive ceasefire".

"This agreement demonstrates that the negotiating parties can agree on tough issues," he added.

**The US agreed to withdraw all foreign forces in exchange for security guarantees and a Taliban pledge to hold talks with Kabul**

While both sides' negotiators had been ready to proceed with the talks, sources said that President Ashraf Ghani had objected to wording in the proposed ground rules that referred to his administration and the Taliban on an equal basis as "parties to the war".

It is unclear whether the wording was altered.

Outgoing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called for "expedited discussions" during a visit to Doha on November 21 during which he met with both Taliban and Afghan government negotiators. There has been a surge of violence in Afghanistan in recent weeks. — **AFP**

## Hundreds flee as Indonesian volcano spews lava, ash



Lava streams down from Mount Semeru as seen from Lumajang, East Java province. — **AFP**

**LUMAJANG, Indonesia:** Hundreds of Indonesians have fled their villages after a rumbling volcano spewed hot ash thousands of metres into the air and belched lava down its crater.

Mount Semeru on Java island spouted the towering column on Tuesday, prompting a call for around 500 people to temporarily evacuate their homes.

Footage from the scene showed dead livestock covered by pyroclastic flows — a fast-moving mixture of hot gas and volcanic material — as steaming debris flowed into a nearby river.

Local disaster agency chief Agus Triono warned on Wednesday that residents could still be at risk as heavy rains threatened to

trigger more volcanic flows from the still-spewing crater.

The eruption came days after Mount Ili Lewotolok roared back to life on the far eastern end of the archipelago nation.

Around 6,000 residents fled to shelters there after the crater ejected a thick tower of debris four kilometres into the sky on Sunday, triggering a flight warning and the closure of a local airport.

There were no reports of injuries or deaths.

Indonesia is home to about 130 active volcanoes due to its position on the "Ring of Fire", a belt of tectonic plate boundaries circling the Pacific Ocean where frequent seismic activity occurs.

— **AFP/Reuters**

## Second cyclone in a week threatens Sri Lanka, India

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka and southern India batted down the hatches for the second time in a week on Wednesday ahead of the scheduled arrival of another cyclone from the Bay of Bengal.

Burevi will pack gusts of up to 100 kilometres an hour when it makes landfall late on Wednesday in Sri Lanka before moving west and hitting India around 24 hours later, forecasters said.

Warning of a storm surge of a metre, and 20 centimetres of rain in places, Sri Lanka ordered a three-day closure of schools in the north and east and told fishermen to stay on land.

India's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said late on Tuesday it had deployed 26 teams across the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

"Ready for cyclone," tweeted the NDRF director general on Wednesday. The Indian Meteorological Department issued a red alert in several areas across both states and suspended fishing activity in some areas until Friday.

Last Thursday, a more power-



Residents prepare sand bags to protect their homes ahead of cyclone Burevi landfall in Sri Lanka's north-eastern coast in Trincomalee. — **AFP**

ful cyclone skirted northern Sri Lanka but hit Tamil Nadu with full force, uprooting trees and delivering 30 centimetres of rain in some areas.

But more accurate forecasting and the timely evacuation of several hundred thousand people were credited with keeping the number of people reported killed to three, a fraction of the death tolls in previous years.

Seven people were killed and some 20,000 lost their homes three years ago in Sri Lanka's northeast following a similar cyclone during the monsoon season. Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh depend on the monsoon for power generation as well as irrigation, but excessive downpours and storms cause casualties and destroy property almost every year. — **AFP**

## New Zealand's Ardern declares 'climate emergency'

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared a "climate emergency" on Wednesday, telling parliament that urgent action was needed for the sake of future generations.

Ardern said the science on climate change was clear and New Zealand had to acknowledge the threat.

The centre-left leader said the challenges posed by global warming meant parliament's declaration — an act undertaken by more than a dozen other countries — was warranted.

"In those cases where we do issue declarations, it is often where there is a threat to life, a threat to property, and civil defence

**If we do not respond to climate change, we will continue to have these emergencies on our shores**

**JACINDA ARDERN**  
New Zealand PM

emergencies," she told parliament.

"If we do not respond to climate change, we will continue to have these emergencies on our shores."

Lawmakers passed the largely symbolic emergency declaration by 76 votes to 43 after Ardern



New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaks during a press conference about the charges laid over the 2019 White Island volcanic eruption in Wellington. — **AFP**

urged them to back the move.

"Vote in favour of this declaration, be on the right side of history, be part of the solution we must collectively deliver for the next generation," she said.

Britain's parliament became the first in the world to declare a climate emergency, passing the motion in May last year, followed closely by Ireland.

According to The Climate Mobilisation, a US lobby group pushing for such declarations, more than a dozen nations have followed suit, along with 1,800 local authorities in cities and towns globally.

The group argues that such declarations represent a critical

first step in acknowledging the scale of the climate challenge and will spur action towards reversing global warming. New Zealand's centre-right opposition National Party rejected the climate emergency declaration, labelling it "virtue signalling".

"It can do harm in making people think that by declaring an emergency something has happened, when it hasn't," National leader Judith Collins told Radio New Zealand.

"It's quite false and misleading," Ardern last year committed New Zealand to become carbon neutral by 2050 and to generate all its energy from renewable sources by 2035. — **AFP**

# In world first, UK approves COVID-19 vaccine

**LONDON:** Britain approved Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday, jumping ahead of the rest of the world in the race to begin the most crucial mass inoculation programme in history with a shot tested in wide-scale clinical trials.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson touted the greenlight from the UK's medicine authority as a global win and a ray of hope amid a pandemic, though he recognised the logistical challenges of vaccinating an entire country of 67 million.

Britain's move raised hopes that tide could soon turn against a virus which has killed nearly 1.5 million people, hammered the world economy and upended normal life for billions.

Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) granted emergency use approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which they say is 95 per cent effective in preventing illness, just 23 days since Pfizer published the first data from its final stage clinical trial. "Fantastic news," Johnson told parliament, though he cautioned that people should not get too carried away.

"At this stage, it is very, very important that people do not get their hopes up too soon about the speed with which we will be able to roll out this vaccine." The world's



A person gets a dose of the COVID-19 vaccination of BioNTech and Pfizer in this undated handout photo. — Reuters

big powers have been racing for a vaccine for months to begin the long road to recovery, and getting there first may be seen as a coup for Johnson's government, which has faced criticism over its handling of the crisis.

The approval of a shot for use close to a year since the novel coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China, is a triumph for science, Pfizer boss Albert Bourla and his German biotechnology partner BioNTech.

Both the United States and the European Union's regulator are sifting through the same Pfizer vaccine trial data, but have not

**I booked a ticket to Kochi last week, but had to postpone it twice and then cancel it because of the non-availability of seats to other airports**

yet given their approval. Britain's breakneck speed drew criticism from Brussels where, in an unusually blunt statement, the EU's drugs regulator said its longer procedure was more appropriate as it was based on more evidence and required more checks.

British leaders said that, while they would love to get a shot themselves, priority had to be given to those most in need - the elderly, those in care homes and health workers.

Amid the celebratory rhetoric, Germany's ambassador to Britain Andreas Michaelis publicly scolded a British minister for presenting it as a national triumph.

"I really don't think this is a national story. In spite of the German company BioNTech having made a crucial contribution, this is European and transatlantic," Michaelis said.

— Reuters



Ethiopian children, who fled the Ethiopia's Tigray conflict as refugees, wait for food distribution in front of a warehouse at Um Raquba refugee camp in Gedaref, eastern Sudan. — AFP

## UN, Ethiopia reach aid pact for war-hit Tigray

**ADDIS ABABA/NAIROBI:** Ethiopia and the United Nations agreed on Wednesday to channel desperately-needed humanitarian aid to a northern region where a month of war has killed, wounded and uprooted thousands.

The pact, announced by UN officials, gives aid workers access to government-controlled areas of Tigray, where federal troops have been battling the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and captured the regional capital. The war is believed to have killed thousands, sent 45,000 refugees into Sudan, displaced many more within Tigray and worsened suffering in a region where 600,000 people already depended on food aid even before the flare-up from November 4. As hundreds of foreign workers were forced to leave, aid agencies had appealed for urgent safe access.

Food is running out for 96,000 Eritrean refugees in Tigray. And medics in the local capital Mekelle were short of painkillers, gloves and bodybags, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said at the weekend.

"The UN and the Federal Government of Ethiopia have signed an agreement to ensure that humanitarian will have unimpeded, sustained and secure access...to areas under the control of the Federal Government in the Tigray Region," UN humanitarian coordination agency OCHA said in a statement. The government has not commented on the agreement.

After phone and internet connections were largely shut down when the war began, telecoms in half a dozen towns in Tigray were partly restored, Ethio Telecom said on Wednesday.

— Reuters

# Climate change biggest threat to natural World Heritage sites

**GENEVA:** Climate change has become the biggest threat to UN-listed natural world heritage sites like glaciers and wetlands, and has pushed Australia's Great Barrier Reef into "critical" condition, conservationists said Wednesday.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) revealed in a new report that shifts due to the changing climate now imperil a full third of the 252 Unesco-listed natural sites around the globe.

Overall, 94 of the sites are facing significant or critical risk from a wide range of factors — including tourism, hunting, fire and water pollution — marking an increase from the 62 listed in the previous

study published in 2017.

The study also hinted that the COVID-19 pandemic was taking a toll on some of the world's most beautiful and precious natural places.

However, climate change is by far the biggest single threat. It constitutes a high or very high-risk factor at 83 of the sites, and has thus overtaken invasive and non-native species, which topped the threat list three years ago.

The report "reveals the damage climate change is wreaking on natural World Heritage, from shrinking glaciers to coral bleaching to increasingly frequent and severe fires and droughts," IUCN director-general Bruno Oberle said in

a statement. "This report signals the urgency with which we must tackle environmental challenges together at the planetary scale."

The coronavirus crisis had shown the need for the global community to "stand together and work as one for the common good," the IUCN report said.

Since its assessment had begun before the novel coronavirus first surfaced late last year, IUCN said it had systematically recorded how the crisis was affecting the World Heritage sites. But the report said it was becoming clear that the pandemic and associated restrictions were impacting or had the potential to impact more than 50 of the sites. — AFP

## CALL TO PROTECT INSECTS



Environmental activists of Campact group stage a protest with some 200 oversized cardboard bees installed in front of the Chancellery in Berlin, to call for more insect protection. One of the topics of Wednesday's cabinet meeting is the insect protection law. — AFP

## SHORT TAKES

### VIENNA

#### Austria allows skiing over Christmas

Austria's ski lifts will open on December 24 but hotels, bars and restaurants will remain closed throughout the holiday season, the government announced on Wednesday. A second lockdown has failed to dramatically lower coronavirus infection rates, which remain at around 5,000 new cases per day, but the Alpine nation will slowly begin reopening measures, starting with schools and shops on Monday.

"Our expectation is that we can push the infection rates down



until Christmas so that we can celebrate a dignified Christmas and so that outdoor sports — the keyword being skiing — will be possible," Chancellor Sebastian Kurz told a press conference.

— AFP

### VATICAN CITY

#### Pope condemns 'atrocities' in Nigeria

Pope Francis on Wednesday condemned the massacre of farm workers in northeast Nigeria, which was claimed by the Boko Haram group and left at least 76 people dead.

"I want to assure my prayers for Nigeria, where blood has unfortunately been spilt once more in a terrorist attack," he said in his weekly general audience.

Remembering those who he said were "brutally killed", he said: "May God welcome



them in his peace and comfort their families, and convert the hearts of those who commit similar atrocities, which gravely offend his name." Gunmen on motorbikes attacked the area outside Borno state's capital Maiduguri on Saturday. — AFP

### MOSCOW

#### Putin orders 'large-scale' vaccinations

President Vladimir Putin told health officials Wednesday to start widespread vaccinations next week, adding that Russia has produced close to two million doses of its Sputnik V vaccine.

The announcement came on the day Britain approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for a rollout starting next week. Last week Russia reported interim test results showing Sputnik V was 95 per cent effective, rivalling international competitors for efficacy. Sputnik V — dubbed after the



Soviet-era satellite — is currently in its third and final stage of clinical trials involving some 40,000 volunteers. "I would ask you to organise the work so that by the end of next week we will have started this large-scale vaccination," Putin said. — AFP

# Key to success of industrial progress

As the industry is being considered a mainstay of the economy in any country, and one of the most important indicators of the countries progress, the development of Omani industries is not only the responsibility of government, which play a major role in this regard, but rather it is a responsibility of all segments of the society. And as the output of the different industrial fields constitute the main inputs of all kinds of manufacturing, the strengthening of the industrial sector in Oman paves way for the development of all other economic, productive and service sectors.

Accordingly, the promotion of industry by the state and society within the framework of a harmonious and integrated approach is a bet that the government relies on in developing the industrial sector by spreading the culture of promoting local products, based on the quality of the Omani products, in addition to keenness to enhance the status of Omani product as well. Therefore, the “Made in Oman” campaign, which led by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in coordination with a number of government agencies and the private sector, is considered as part of this trend to support the Sultanate’s industry to achieve the success we are looking for.

In this context, the national



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THE  
STRENGTHENING  
OF THE  
INDUSTRIAL  
SECTOR IN  
OMAN PAVES  
WAY FOR THE  
DEVELOPMENT  
OF ALL SECTORS

responsibility necessitates all of us to consolidate our national industry and give it full confidence to prove its existence, so that the Omani products become our only option, while purchasing as a mark of support that each of us must offer. There is no doubt that there is no doubt over the quality and specifications of the Omani products, that is due to the effectiveness and rigour of quality control efforts, and high standards that imposed by the authorities in order to enhance its competitive capabilities. Due to its conformity with international specifications, especially European and American, the quality of the Omani products has contributed in their acceptance in all foreign markets, which has increased the pride of our local products. Not only that, our national products are also welcome in all local and regional markets for one genuine reason, which is the (quality), which is the main pillar of all kinds of industry. Therefore, quality always motivates us as citizens and residents to buy Omani products wherever they are found in various markets.

This kind of approach will contribute in enhancing the quality points of our Omani products as well as affirming our loyalty to them. This loyalty which stems from the national motives rooted in our hearts, like people in all countries, who

prefer their national products whenever it receive the quality award, while we do believe that, the community preference for local products, will never come if the quality is below standards.

Perhaps the success of Chinese products is one of the most important examples of the loyalty of the Chinese citizens to their country’s products, and this was a fundamental factor in the rise of China as an industrial giant, which threatens all major industrial countries, and is moving with confidence to be ranked as the first in the global industry and technology.

When we emphasise the inevitability of contributing to support the Omani industry by preferring and purchasing its products to complement the estimated government efforts in this regard, we must obviously point out that the improvement of Omani industry will also contribute in enabling the Omani youth to get job opportunities in this large and promising sector. Further the existence of Industrial Innovation Centre can also contribute in the development of Omani manufacturing sector by carrying out its role in developing industrial innovation and creating new innovative national products which keep pace with developments in the field of manufacturing and promoting innovation of industrial activities.

## HARSH REALITIES

### Women turn anti-trafficking crusaders in India

ANURADHA NAGARAJ

Separated from her parents, Jayashree Ponrajan spent most of her teenage years trapped in a form of bonded labour — forced to live and work in the spinning mills of southern India.

It took Ponrajan years to find a way out, but ever since then she has been denouncing the recruitment of teenagers in India’s textile and garments industry and the harsh conditions they face. That made her an obvious candidate for a new initiative that will train victims of forced labour and human trafficking to be campaigners in communities at high risk from modern slavery.

“I tell everyone my story — how I went to a spinning mill when I was 14, cried when I was not allowed to meet my mother, lost the nails of my right hand and learnt to continue work with my left”, Ponrajan said. Now 43, she has been recruited to a team of 50 female slavery survivors and hopes her voice will be heard by those who can change the way business and work is conducted in the Indian garment industry, which employs at least 12 million people.

The initiative wants to “bring the lived experience of women and survivors to the

anti-slavery movement”, said Claire Falconer, who heads the Freedom Rising project, launched by anti-trafficking nonprofit the Freedom Fund. “The aim is to give an authenticity to the voice of the movement as their (survivors’) perspective is critical to the work of changing the conditions

I tell everyone my story – how I went to a spinning mill when I was 14, cried when I was not allowed to meet my mother

JAYASHREE  
PONRAJAN  
A victim

that lead people to be exploited”, she added.

About 2,260 cases of human trafficking involving more than 6,000 victims were reported in India last year, with sex trafficking and forced labour the most common offences. Networks of former victims across various Indian states play a key role in helping anti-trafficking groups reach people still trapped in modern slavery — from bonded labour in brick kilns to labour abuse in garment factories.

In December, survivors from 11 Indian states turned campaigners by roping in their communities to write more than 110,000 postcards to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to bring in an anti-trafficking law. Several state governments are also working with survivor networks and community groups to track down and help victims. Under the new programme, being launched online on Wednesday, each cohort of 50 leaders in different states will get a minimum of 12 months of mentoring, leadership and technical training, before graduating to join the Freedom Rising alumni network.

“Besides building capacity of individuals, we want to change organisations culturally. For example, many organisations working to protect the rights of female garment workers are led by men”, Falconer said.

Following the pilot project in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, the Freedom Fund will roll out the programme to other parts of India, Nepal, Thailand and Ethiopia. For Ponrajan, who eventually graduated in social work and now works as a field coordinator for nonprofit Centre for Action and Rural Education (CARE), her new role is an opportunity for personal growth as well as a chance to help others.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

## DRAINED OUT

# How COVID-19 is making America’s income and race gap bigger

DON LEE

The first symptom was diarrhoea. Then Mitchell Hughes had trouble breathing and broke out in a feverish sweat. By the time he recovered from COVID-19 this summer, the 52-year-old Black janitor in St Louis had missed more than a month of work and drained his \$4,000 savings to keep up with the mortgage and other bills after his sick pay fell short.

He and his wife, Crystal Simmons Hughes, 53, a nursing assistant who cares for the elderly, made it through the illness but were left depleted and anxious about the resurgence in infections.

Unlike the Hugheses, Scott and Kristin Ladewig, a white couple who live about 15 miles away, have maintained their well-paying IT jobs from the relative safety and comfort of their home since March. They, too, are concerned about the future, especially for Kristin’s mum, who is in an assisted living home. But, financially, Scott, 51, and Kristin, 49, may be even slightly ahead.

So far the pandemic has left them with more money in their pockets as they save on car expenses, gas, lunches and other outlays. Their stocks have recovered and then some, and they have been able to invest some of their savings to make long-delayed home repairs.

About the only economic pinch they’ve felt is a temporary suspension of employer contributions to Scott’s retirement plan.

“To be honest, not really”, he said, when asked if he’d seen any negative financial impact from the pandemic. What’s true for these two hard-



A CORE (Community Organised Relief Effort) worker talks to people waiting in line for coronavirus tests in south Los Angeles, California, on Tuesday. – AFP

THE PANDEMIC  
HAS DEEPENED THE  
ECONOMIC AND  
RACIAL DIVIDE  
AMONG THE  
HOUSEHOLDS

working, home-owning families is true across much of the nation.

Although their educational backgrounds and financial prospects began at starkly different places, the pandemic has only deepened the economic and racial divide between the two households, and countless others like them across America.

“The pandemic affects everybody. It pushes everybody back”, said Trina Clark, 48, who is Black and a regional manager for Microsoft in St Louis. “But we aren’t starting at the same starting line. We’re pushed back further.”

The health and economic crisis has

been deeply personal for Clark. Two of her friends died from COVID-19 in September, one of them in her early 50s. A dozen other friends and people in her social network got the virus, she said, and a number of her relatives and family members, including her adult son, have lost jobs or seen significant pay cuts. There’s no question that the coronavirus has disproportionately affected lower-income people, particularly Black Americans, who not only have higher infection and death rates, but also face sharper employment and income losses.

— dpa

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# sport



REAL MADRID DEFEAT HEAPS PRESSURE ON ZIDANE

## JONES PUTS LIVERPOOL THROUGH

PARIS: Curtis Jones sent a depleted Liverpool through to the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday, while Zinedine Zidane dismissed suggestions he might walk away from Real Madrid after another defeat by Shakhtar Donetsk left their European hopes in the balance.

Liverpool were without a host of key players for the visit of Ajax to Anfield in Group D, with 22-year-old Irishman Caoimhin Kelleher starting in goal in the absence of Alisson.

Teenager Jones scored the only goal just before the hour, tucking the ball in after Ajax 'keeper Andre Onana thought he could afford to let a Neco Williams cross sail over his head.

The result was vital for the Premier League champions after their home loss to Atalanta a week ago, and it allowed them to secure a spot in the knockout phase.

"Honestly since I was at Liverpool that feels like one of the biggest Champions League nights. Without supporters in, it was the most important, most difficult, most exceptional," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp told BT Sport.

They will go through as group winners after Atalanta had to come from behind to draw 1-1 at home to Midtjylland, Cristian Romero heading in a late equaliser in response to Alexander Scholz's thumping opener for the Danes.

Atalanta are a point clear in second from Ajax, with the sides meeting in Amsterdam in their last game next week.

Two-time former European champions Porto also sealed a last-16 spot after drawing 0-0 at home to Manchester City, who were already through and are now guaranteed to top Group C.

Porto would have qualified regardless, because Olympiakos lost 2-1 to Marseille in France, with Dimitri Payet scoring two penalties in the second half to turn the game around after Mohamed Mady Camara fired the Greeks in front.

The result ends Marseille's Champions League record run of 13 straight defeats and means they could yet pip Olympiakos to third place and the consolation of a Europa League berth.

### LUKAKU DOUBLE, ATLETICO HELD

Real Madrid could yet be consigned to a similar fate after they went down 2-0 to Shakhtar in Kiev, their second defeat this season by the Ukrainians.

Substitutes Dentinho and Manor Solomon scored second-half goals in Kiev as Shakhtar stunned the 13-time European champions again, having won 3-2 in Madrid in October.

Shakhtar had lost their last two Group B matches against Borussia Moenchengladbach by an aggregate score of 10-0, but now move above Real into second place with one game remaining.

Gladbach are top by a point, while Shakhtar have the upper hand on Real thanks to their superior head-to-head record.

However, the damage was limited for Real after Inter Milan won 3-2 away to Gladbach to keep their own hopes alive.

Matteo Darmian put Inter ahead and Romelu Lukaku scored twice for Antonio Conte's side. Alassane Plea netted a brace for Gladbach but was denied a hat-trick, and a late equaliser, because of an offside call.

It means Inter are bottom of the

Honestly since I was at Liverpool that feels like one of the biggest Champions League nights. Without supporters in, it was the most important, most difficult, most exceptional

JURGEN KLOPP  
Liverpool manager

group but could still qualify, while Real will definitely qualify as long as they win at home to Gladbach.

Madrid have made it out of their group in every year since 1997 and so failure to qualify would be seen as a disaster, but Zidane is not considering stepping down.

"I am not going to resign, not at all. We are always going to have difficult moments, and we are on a bad run, but we need to keep going," said the Frenchman.

Real's city rivals Atletico Madrid will also still have it all to do in their final group game after being held to a 1-1 draw at home by a weakened Bayern Munich.

Joao Felix gave Atletico the lead against a Bayern side who had already won Group A. Thomas Mueller won and then converted a late penalty to earn the defending champions a draw.

Salzburg can snatch a last-16 place if they beat Atletico at home next week, after the Austrians won 3-1 away to Lokomotiv Moscow.

Mergim Berisha scored twice in the first half for Salzburg, and Karim Adeyemi got their third goal after Anton Miranchuk converted a penalty for the railway-backed side. — AFP



### UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS

- Group A  
At Madrid  
Atletico Madrid (ESP) 1 (Felix 26) Bayern Munich (GER) 1 (Mueller 86-pen)
- At Moscow  
Lokomotiv Moscow (RUS) 1 (Miranchuk 79-pen) Salzburg (AUT) 3 (Berisha 28, 41, Adeyemi 81)
- Group B  
At Moenchengladbach, Germany  
Borussia Moenchengladbach (GER) 2 (Plea 45+1, 76) Inter Milan (ITA) 3 (Darmian 17, Lukaku 64, 73)
- At Kiev  
Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 2 (Dentinho 57, Solomon 82) Real Madrid (ESP) 0
- Group C  
At Marseille, France  
Marseille (FRA) 2 (Payet 55-pen, 75-pen) Olympiakos (GRE) 1 (Camara 33)
- At Porto, Portugal  
Porto (POR) 0 Manchester City (ENG) 0
- Group D  
At Bergamo, Italy  
Atalanta (ITA) 1 (Romero 79) Midtjylland (DEN) 1 (Scholz 13)
- At Liverpool, England  
Liverpool (ENG) 1 (Jones 58) Ajax (NED) 0

## In brief

■ PARIS



### WTA ALIGNS WOMEN'S TOURNAMENTS WITH ATP

The WTA on Wednesday announced that it was changing the classification of its tournaments to put its tour in line with that of the men's ATP tennis tour. The tour's highest Premier Mandatory and Premier 5 tournament categories will from 2021 be renamed WTA 1000, mirroring the ATP 1000 tournaments which are one step down from the Grand Slams.

The Premier tournaments will become WTA 500, the Internationals will be renamed WTA 250 and the 125Ks will take the name WTA 125.

"The WTA worked with the ATP to create consistency and alignment across professional tennis," the WTA said. — **AFP**

■ MELBOURNE



### AUSTRALIAN OPEN 'DELAYED' TO FEBRUARY 8

The Australian Open Grand Slam will start three weeks late on February 8, reports said on Wednesday, with players cleared to train during quarantine following lengthy negotiations with state authorities. According to Australian media, the start date was announced to players by tournament Director Craig Tiley. If confirmed, it will join the three other major tournaments in being disrupted by the coronavirus. "It's taken a while, but the great news is it looks like we are going to be able to hold the AO (Australian Open) on February 8", Tiley was quoted as telling players in a leaked letter. — **AFP**

■ MADRID



### PEREZ GETS 8-YEAR BAN FOR MATCH FIXING

Spanish tennis player Enrique Lopez Perez has been banned from the sport for eight years for his involvement in match-fixing activities in three separate instances in 2017, the tennis Integrity Unit (TIU) said on Tuesday. Perez, 29, who reached a career-high singles ranking of 154 in 2018 and a best doubles ranking of 135 last year, was also fined \$25,000. "The disciplinary case was heard by anti-corruption hearing officer Richard McLaren on November 5", the TIU said. "He found that Enrique Lopez Perez breached the rules of the tennis Anti-corruption Programme three times at tournaments in 2017, with two further charges unproven." — **Reuters**

# Schumi's son takes first step on F1 journey

“She was like ‘Yeah, I was sure you were going to make it’, so I always felt the greatest support from her side and from everybody in the family’

**MICK SCHUMACHER**

## Mick Schumacher moves to F1 in 2021

The son of seven-time world champion Michael will race for Haas

Age: 21

Born: Switzerland



|           |                                        |
|-----------|----------------------------------------|
| 2008      | Begins career in karting               |
| 2015-2016 | Formula 4                              |
| 2017-2018 | Formula 3                              |
| 2019-2020 | Formula 2*<br>● 2 wins<br>● 10 podiums |
| 2021-     | Signs for the Haas Formula 1 team      |

\*leads F2 championship with one race to go

AFP Photo

Source: Official website **AFP**

buy under the rules.

"I've been working with FDA since the beginning of 2019", Schumacher, who will be taking part in opening practice at the season finale in Abu Dhabi next week, told reporters on Wednesday. "I wouldn't be here now without them... I'm looking forward to keep working with them next year." Congratulating Schumacher on his promotion,

the FDA in a statement said that like with Bianchi and Leclerc, its plan is to see him progress with the "eventual aim of one day driving for the Scuderia." Ferrari, with whom Michael won five of his seven titles, has already signed Spaniard Carlos Sainz to drive alongside Leclerc in 2021 and 2022.

Even if a seat becomes available in the future, Schumacher, who

won the European Formula 3 title in 2018, will have to earn any promotion with his performances on track as well as fight off other Ferrari juniors.

Schumacher, who will face intense scrutiny as embarks on his Formula One career, said for now he was simply overwhelmed to be following in his father's footsteps and called his promotion a dream come true. However, it came as no

surprise to his mother Corinna. "My mum? She was actually quite unsurprised in a way.

"She was like 'Yeah, I was sure you were going to make it', so I always felt the greatest support from her side and from everybody in the family."

He said he would use 47, a combination of two numbers that mean a lot to him, as his race number. Four was the number he raced to the F3 title with and while he has chosen seven partly in tribute to Schumacher senior's seven world titles.

"And then... what let's say underlined it was the fact that if you calculated all the birthdays of our family together it would equal 47", he said.

"It just underlined that we should choose that number."

Michael Schumacher, who retired in 2012 after a three-season comeback with Mercedes, has not been seen in public since suffering severe head injuries in a skiing accident in the French Alps in 2013. — **Reuters**



Mick Schumacher drives the Ferrari F2004 of his father Michael Schumacher during a display run before the Tuscan Grand Prix race at Mugello, Scarperia e San Piero, Italy, on September 13. — **Reuters**

# OTC returns to action with Oman Open triathlon

**ADIL AL BALUSHI**  
MUSCAT, DEC 2

As many as 50 triathletes will get back to business on Friday at Oman Open Triathlon Championship. Oman Triathlon Committee (OTC) will return to its domestic activities with this event after an absence of more than eight months due to the impact of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Oman Open Triathlon meet will begin at 4 pm at Al Musannah Millennium Resort.

The OTC has completed all the logistics and technical preparations for the event. It was supposed to be held with large number of participants but due to the current situation, the organisers reduced the number of participants. The championship will be held under full implementation of the medical protocol that will ensure safety of the triathletes from COVID-19. The medical measures will



feature preventing the triathletes from exchanging the personal items, implementing the social distance and avoiding those with any symptoms related to high temperature and any other related symptoms of COVID-19.

The OTC aims from this event to shape the Sultanate's triathletes to compete at the regional and international triathlon events. Also, OTC will support the local triathletes to improve the international rankings after

obtaining the point approvals from the top triathlon federations.

The triathlon event, which consists of swimming, cycling and running, will be organised according to the top standards. The swimming distance is for

1.5 kilometres along with 40 km cycling and 10 km run.

Prior to the championship, the OTC will organise an umpiring course for 18 referees on Thursday and Friday. The course will be delivered by Tunisian lecturer Mohammed al Munaif. The umpiring workshop will provide the basic knowledge to the participants for evaluating the triathletes during the championship. Also, the course will graduate domestic referees and develop them for future local and international events.

On the other hand, OTC officials attended the World Triathlon and Asian Triathlon Confederation (ASTC) remotely. During the ASTC online meeting, the Sultanate received the confirmation to host the Asian Triathlon Championship in December 2021. Also, Oman will host many umpiring courses for senior level and that will feature participants from Gulf countries.



# INDIA WIN TENSE FINAL ODI

**CANBERRA:** India survived a blistering Glenn Maxwell half-century to hold their nerve for a 13-run victory and deny Australia a one-day international series clean sweep in Canberra on Wednesday.

While the explosive Maxwell was at the crease Australia were on track to reel in India's 302-5 total.

But Jasprit Bumrah got the crucial breakthrough bowling Maxwell with a trademark yorker for 59 off 38 balls studded with three fours and four sixes.

That left Australia 38 runs away from victory with three wickets and 35 balls left, but India claimed the remaining wickets to clinch victory with three balls left.

Australia won the opening two matches in Sydney by 66 runs and 51 runs, but India emphatically ended their five-game ODI losing streak — their worst since January 2016 — to pull off an exciting victory ahead

of Friday's first of three Twenty20 matches against the Australians in Canberra.

India's victory was made possible by an unbroken 150-run partnership between man-of-the-match Hardik Pandya and Ravindra Jadeja to swing the momentum after Josh Hazlewood once again proved Virat Kohli's nemesis.

"I have been working hard to play for my country, happy that I've got the opportunity," Pandya said.

"You need to be on your toes when it comes to playing against Australia. You got to push hard and face the challenge against them."

Hazlewood again got the measure of the India master batsman, dismissing him for 63 not out off just 47 balls at Newlands on Tuesday and now has 915 points in the International Cricket Council rankings.

Kohli's exit threw down the gauntlet to Pandya, who finished

Bumrah got the crucial breakthrough bowling Maxwell with a trademark yorker for 59

top-scorer with 92 off 76 balls with some late fireworks with Ravindra Jadeja 66 (50), who seized the momentum for India, adding 76 runs in the last five overs.

"We were put under the pump in the first half and in the second half of Australia's innings," Kohli said.

"I would have liked to go on for a bit longer, but it was a great

| SCOREBOARD                                                                                                                                  |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>INDIA</b>                                                                                                                                |            |
| S Dhawan c Agar b Abbott .....                                                                                                              | 16         |
| S Gill lbw Agar .....                                                                                                                       | 33         |
| V Kohli c Carey b Hazlewood .....                                                                                                           | 63         |
| S Iyer c Labuschagne b Zampa .....                                                                                                          | 19         |
| KL Rahul lbw b Agar .....                                                                                                                   | 5          |
| H Pandya not out .....                                                                                                                      | 92         |
| R Jadeja not out .....                                                                                                                      | 66         |
| <b>Extras (b1 lb1 nb2 w4) .....</b>                                                                                                         | <b>8</b>   |
| <b>Total (50 overs; for five wickets) .....</b>                                                                                             | <b>302</b> |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-26, 2-82, 3-114, 4-123, 5-152                                                                                     |            |
| <b>Bowling:</b> Hazlewood 10-1-66-1, Maxwell 5-0-27-0, Abbott 10-0-84-1, Green 4-0-27-0, Agar 10-0-44-2, Zampa 10-0-45-1, Henriques 1-0-7-0 |            |
| <b>Australia</b>                                                                                                                            |            |
| M Labuschagne b Natarajan .....                                                                                                             | 7          |
| A Finch c Dhawan b Jadeja .....                                                                                                             | 75         |
| S Smith c Rahul b Thakur .....                                                                                                              | 7          |
| M Henriques c Dhawan b Thakur .....                                                                                                         | 22         |
| C Green c Jadeja b Yadav .....                                                                                                              | 21         |
| A Carey run out (Kohli/Rahul) .....                                                                                                         | 38         |
| G Maxwell b Bumrah .....                                                                                                                    | 59         |
| A Agar c Yadav b Natarajan .....                                                                                                            | 28         |
| S Abbott c Rahul b Thakur .....                                                                                                             | 4          |
| A Zampa lbw Bumrah .....                                                                                                                    | 4          |
| J Hazlewood not out .....                                                                                                                   | 7          |
| <b>Extras: (lb6, nb2, w9) .....</b>                                                                                                         | <b>17</b>  |
| <b>Total: (49.3 overs; all out) .....</b>                                                                                                   | <b>289</b> |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-25, 2-56, 3-117, 4-123, 5-158, 6-210, 7-268, 8-278, 9-278                                                         |            |
| <b>Bowling:</b> Bumrah 9.3-0-43-2, Natarajan 10-1-70-2, Thakur 10-1-51-3, Yadav 10-0-57-1, Jadeja 10-0-62-1                                 |            |

partnership between Pandya and Jadeja.

"The team needed that kind of a boost. That's needed when you play a team like Australia."

Kohli was out when a review instigated by wicketkeeper Alex Carey picked up a faint spike on 'Ultra-Edge' off Hazlewood which reversed the on-field decision.

It was Hazlewood's third dismissal of Kohli in the three-match series and a massive breakthrough for the Australians who had reduced India to 152-5 in the 32nd over.

"I thought we fought really well," said Australia captain Aaron Finch, who top-scored for his team with 75 off 82 balls.

"It was a great partnership between Hardik and Jadeja. If we got one of those wickets, we could have chased 240 max."

Marnus Labuschagne, promoted to open the innings in David Warner's injury absence, played on T Natarajan for seven

bringing Steve Smith early to the crease after century-plus opening stands in the first two games.

India got the vital breakthrough in the 12th over dismissing Smith, coming off man-of-the-match centuries in the first two games, for just seven to an innocuous leg-side flick off Shardul Thakur.

"They have been close back-to-back games," Smith said. "A good series of cricket against a quality outfit. I think this wicket did more with the new ball, it was a bit different as compared to Sydney."

Alex Carey was run out by Kohli for 38, ending a productive partnership with Maxwell.

Maxwell produced a prodigious reverse sweep for six off Yadav which covered 100m high into the stands in arguably the biggest hit of the season and then he brought up his half-century with another six of Natarajan. — AFP

## England's Malan reaches highest rating in T20 history

**LONDON:** England batsman Dawid Malan has set a ranking-points record for batsmen in international Twenty20 cricket after smashing 173 runs in England's 3-0 whitewash against South Africa.

The 33-year-old left-hander climbed to number one in the world in September after a

relentlessly consistent period of scoring in the format and has followed up with a man-of-the-series performance.

He hit a match-winning 55 on Sunday before scoring a superb 99 not out off just 47 balls at Newlands on Tuesday and now has 915 points in the International Cricket Council rankings.

Australia's Aaron Finch held the previous record with exactly 900 points and he remains third on the updated list, behind second-placed Babar Azam of Pakistan.

Malan's performance helped England leapfrog Australia to take the top position in the team rankings.

The Yorkshire player has been criticised for starting slowly but has made himself an integral member of Eoin Morgan's star-studded side.

He has played 19 T20 internationals and averages an impressive 53 runs per innings at a strike rate of nearly 150 runs per 100 balls. — AFP



Dawid Malan hits a six against South Africa during the third T20. — Reuters

# business

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## Singapore approves sale of lab-grown meat in world first



A man holds the world's first lab-grown beef burger during a launch event in west London, in this file photo. – Reuters

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore has given US start-up Eat Just the green light to sell its lab-grown chicken meat, in what the firm says is the world's first regulatory approval for so-called clean meat that does not come from slaughtered animals.

The meat, to be sold as nuggets, will be priced at premium chicken prices when it first launches in a restaurant in Singapore “in the very near term”, co-founder and CEO Josh Tetrick said.

Demand for alternatives to regular meat is surging due to concerns about health, animal welfare and the environment. Plant-based substitutes, popularised by the likes of Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods and Quorn, increasingly feature on supermarket shelves and restaurant menus.

But so-called clean or

cultured meat, which is grown from animal muscle cells in a lab, is still at a nascent stage given high production costs.

Singapore currently only produces about 10 per cent of its food but has set out ambitious plans to raise that over the next decade by supporting high-tech farming and new means of food production.

Josh Tetrick said the San Francisco-based firm was also talking to US regulators but that Singapore was a “good bit” ahead of the United States.

“I would imagine what will happen is the US, Europe and others will see what Singapore has been able to do, the rigours of the framework that they put together. And I would imagine that they will try to use it as a template to put their own framework together,” he said.

— Reuters

## Biogas-to-power technology set to make Oman debut

**GREEN ENERGY:** Oman LNG, Mazoon Dairy and Ejaad Partner join hands to support the development of the first-of-its-kind Biogas to Power generator at Buraimi site

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, DEC 2

Oman LNG has signed a key agreement with Ejaad and Mazoon Dairy to support the development of the Sultanate's first-of-its-kind Biogas to Power generator at Mazoon Dairy's site in Al Sunainah in Buraimi Governorate.

This collaboration demonstrates the value of cross-industrial collaboration under Ejaad's umbrella between the food sector (represented by Mazoon Dairy) and the energy sector (represented by Oman LNG) in the technology demonstration, localisation and innovation aspects.

In addition, the agreement will facilitate the deployment of biogas to power technology to demonstrate at large scale the feasibility of biogas to power for the first time in the Sultanate. Mazoon Dairy began working on the country's first biogas plant last year.

The generator, supplied by Oman LNG, will assist in producing energy by utilising the biogas currently produced from organic waste at Mazoon Dairy and convert it to a sustainable green energy source yielding less environmental emissions.



**In addition, the agreement will facilitate the deployment of biogas to power technology to demonstrate at large scale the feasibility of biogas to power for the first time in the Sultanate**

Biogas is a renewable and clean, source of energy that promotes the sustainability of ecological systems and replenish their resources, contribute to social welfare, and alleviate pressures on fiscal management – which are key pillars of the Oman 2040 Vision.

Oman LNG will also appoint the right expertise for inspection of the delivered biogas generator at the port of delivery prior to the journey to Mazoon. Mazoon Dairy will install commission and operate the biogas to power generator to produce green energy for utilisation within its

operations.

“As our country is blessed with an abundance of renewable energy, we continue to dedicate our efforts to deliver sustainable development to Oman and its people through clean energy sources for generations to come.

This partnership, with Mazoon Dairy and Ejaad, also ties in well with our In-Country Value (ICV) efforts where we aim to transfer technology and expertise to boost the added value to our local economy,” commented Harib al Kitani, CEO of Oman LNG.

Ejaad, through this agreement, will facilitate and advice biogas research and development, a forward-looking step that supports future research with both local and international academia and industrial partners. This will enable Ejaad to provide knowledge management and capture learnings from this collaboration to benefit the wide Ejaad members.

Mohammed al Naseeb, Oman LNG's Chief Operating Officer, commented: “We are delighted to partner with Mazoon Dairy and Ejaad, where Oman LNG will bring Biogas to Power technology for the first time in Oman. Such support does not only showcase our robust in-country value efforts, but also reflects our on-going strive to capitalise on sustainable green energy solutions.”

Ahmed al Ghafri, Chief Support Officer of Mazoon Dairy, commented: “We are proud of our world-class facilities and the eco-friendly solutions strictly followed across functions, and delighted today to partner with Oman LNG and Ejaad to take the existing biogas plant to the next level of power efficiency. We are eager to display the utmost professionalism to enable safe installations and operation of the generator for a sustainable source of energy at Mazoon Dairy.”

## VAT implications for Oman's oil & gas sector



**T**he Oil & Gas sector remains an important and significant part of Oman's economy. The sector has businesses operating in 'upstream' exploration and production activities, 'midstream' transport and storage activities, 'downstream' refining and marketing activities, and service companies providing support services to the sector. The introduction of VAT in Oman will have different impacts on each type of sector participant.

The supply of crude oil, its derivatives, and natural gas would be subject to zero-rated for VAT purposes in Oman.

Zero-rate means that VAT should be charged at zero per cent on such supplies and any VAT incurred in relation to making these zero-rated supplies can be recovered.

Businesses making such supply should consider the cash flow impact, as they would be required to pay VAT on their purchases, and values of which can often be significant for capital and operational expenditure. Where VAT is not refunded immediately by the authorities, significant funds would be tied up in funding the VAT.

The scope of the Oil & Gas sector and the goods and services provided by the businesses in the sector are quite broad and generally include engineering, designing, construction, drilling, seismic survey, installation, maintenance, leasing of vessels, storage, and refinery services. It is important to consider the specific VAT treatment of each of these supplies.

In absence of Oman VAT



Executive Regulations, there is uncertainty on the VAT treatment of goods and services provided in the Oil & Gas value chain. Where these services are not specifically zero-rated in Oman VAT law, these should be subject to VAT at standard rate of 5 per cent.

Complexity in VAT determination: The following are some of the most common scenarios where determining the VAT treatment can be a challenge:

**Cash Calls:** There is no global

accord on how cash calls ought to be treated from a VAT perspective. Cash calls are generally not addressed within the VAT legislation with the tax authorities deciding their own approach at a policy level rather than on a pure VAT technical basis.

**Flash Title Sales:** In Flash Title supplies, goods are sold between several parties before being physically exported outside Oman. This creates a variety of chain transactions to analyse from

**The sector has businesses operating in 'upstream' exploration and production activities, 'midstream' transport and storage activities, 'downstream' refining and marketing activities, and service companies providing support services to the sector**

a VAT perspective, including the application of indirect export.

**Supply of accommodation in labour camps:** Where business provides accommodation for its staff in a labour camp, businesses must determine whether it is making an exempt supply of the residential building to its staff. Any costs which directly relate to the provision of that residential accommodation to the employee, for example, utility costs, should be treated as relating to an exempt supply and therefore any VAT incurred on such expenses should not be recoverable.

**Long term contracts:**

Contracts spanning beyond the VAT implementation date would create enormous challenges for the business in determining the correct VAT treatment for goods or services supplied partially before and after the VAT implementing date.

In conclusion, the Oil & Gas sector has several complexities and the introduction of VAT in Oman would add additional considerations for businesses across the supply chain.

VAT in principle should not be a cost to the business, however, it is almost certain that sector participants will feel a cash flow impact. Businesses within the sector should examine their operations to determine the VAT implications and to ensure compliance with the VAT law and avoiding any disruption to the business. [Author Alkesh Joshi is Partner, Oman Tax Leader & MENA Energy Tax Leader at EY; Co-author Hussnain Ali Rao is Assistant Manager, Indirect Tax at EY]



# International hotels adapt to new pandemic normal

Countries around the world, without exception, have seen their once-flourishing tourism sectors being impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Not surprisingly, every country is eager to get its hands on an effective vaccine to help enable their economies to recover. Some of them have begun to take steps to open their tourism sectors while dishing out incentives to tourists, easing restrictions and alleviating the suffering of those working in this industry. Nevertheless, they have

stressed the importance of continued pandemic mitigation precautions in the form of social distancing and hygiene in light of the continuing threat posed by the virus. Turkey is one such country that continues to attract significant numbers of Arab tourists and others without mandating PCR testing, which is a prerequisite for international travel in a number of countries. Others are considering similar moves to open up their tourism sectors after the prolonged closure. Oman decided recently to allow the issuance of tourist visas but is limiting the facility to holiday



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NOT SURPRISINGLY, EVERY COUNTRY IS EAGER TO GET ITS HANDS ON AN EFFECTIVE VACCINE TO HELP ENABLE THEIR ECONOMIES TO RECOVER

groups facilitated by hotels and tourism companies. Already, hotel establishments are putting in place physical measures to safeguard their guests, as well as their staff, from potential exposure to the virus. Glass barriers have been placed between arriving tourists and workers in the reception areas of some international hotels. Notices and warnings have been strategically displayed in lounges and other locations reminding the guests to exercise precautions, avoid gathering together, use mobile apps to register and use the hotel's services, and so on. In the washrooms, soaps and

shampoos are available in small, disposable packages as opposed to large dispensers that were previously in place. Face masks, as well as the use of sanitizer, are mandatory in public areas, including restaurants, poolside, and so on. Receipts and bills for any hotel services are forwarded to the guests via email or their mobile phones. Besides, some international hotels have started to increase the frequency of cleaning and sterilization exercises to multiple times a day. Some countries have also begun to use digital health passport for tourists and travellers to offer a

higher degree of safety to their guests. This digital document allows holders to move quickly through international airports and avoid multiple medical screenings. This facility has begun to be activated in some international airports, which will facilitate easier travel between countries of the world for passengers of different age groups. Today, all countries of the world need to adapt to these new normal in order to support the speedier recovery of the tourism sector, which has suffered losses estimated at about \$ 1.2 trillion globally.

## Thailand plans \$1.4 billion stimulus to spur consumption

**BANGKOK:** Thailand plans 43.5 billion baht (\$1.44 billion) of additional stimulus to boost domestic consumption and an increase in benefits for local travel, officials said on Wednesday, as the government tries to revive a flagging, pandemic-hit economy. Some 22.5 billion baht will be offered to 5 million new consumers, or 3,500 baht (\$115.78) each, under the current co-payment scheme. The 10 million consumers who had already signed up would get a further 500 baht, finance ministry official



A woman holds a Thai baht banknote in Bangkok. — Reuters

Pornchai

Theeravet told a briefing. The new package would be given in small amounts from January to March, while 1,500 baht would be offered to some 14 million low-income earners, he said, as “New Year gifts”. — Reuters

# Omani payment platform launches virtual wallet

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, DEC 2

In alignment with global developments in the financial technology sector, Omani smart payment solutions provider Thawani Technologies has launched several new updates on its pioneering payments platform. One of the most important updates added to the new system is the Mojab Virtual Wallet, in addition to the smoother registration and the ability to distinguish bank cards. Meanwhile, the virtual wallet supports money transfers to individuals via their phone numbers. The process of searching for merchants and paying them remotely through the platform



has also become a lot easier with the remote payment feature “Wayyak Bill” and “Barq”. For fast payment on the service site, the Thawani Check

Out feature allows website and application owners to connect with the platform within few hours and access additional features, as well as improvements to the bill payments service. Shaikh Khalid al Zubair, Co-Founder and Chairman of Thawani Technologies, said, “Thawani provides innovative solutions that are on par with global developments in financial technology and we are constantly enhancing them in response to the growing demand for e-commerce. Time and again our solution has proved its efficiency, effectiveness and ability to adapt to crises, while defining frameworks that achieve governance principles for financial systems and contribute to the legalisation of revenue

collection.” Eng Majed al Amiri, Founder and CEO of Thawani Technologies Company, added, “Another advantage of the electronic wallet is that it can be accompanied by a card that can be linked to the user's account, allowing them to pay quickly and safely at the same time. Moreover, our new system fulfills all security and privacy standards in line with the Central Bank of Oman's own systems and global systems. We are always keen to use international expertise to evaluate our own system and check the quality of its performance, which is why in just a few short years we have become the leading platform for e-transactions and payments set-up.”

# ECB set to outline details of fresh stimulus as pandemic worsens

**BERLIN:** European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde is expected to unveil new stimulus measures next week to help restore economic confidence in the coronavirus-hit euro zone and to fend off the threat of deflation posed by a strong euro. The centrepiece of the measures is likely to include ramping up the ECB's 1.35 trillion euro (\$1.63 trillion) emergency bond-buying programme (PEPP) by a further 500 billion euros and extending the scheme by six months until at least the end of next year. The PEPP was launched in March at the height of the pandemic's first wave. After Lagarde in October flagged plans to “recalibrate” the ECB's response to the worsening pandemic, “the only question is not if but what the ECB will announce” said Carsten Brzeski, ING Bank global head of macroeconomics. The new stimulus measures are also forecast to include further improvements in borrowing conditions for euro zone banks under the ECB's targeted longer-term refinancing operations (TLTROs). The TLTROs have emerged as crucial policy tools in the bank's battle to defend the euro zone economy against the virus' impact across the region, as governments ponder extending lockdown measures into the new year.



European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde speaks in Brussels, Belgium, in this file photo. — Reuters

About 12 months into her tenure as ECB chief, Lagarde's term has been largely dominated by the coronavirus, which emerged early this year in Europe. The ECB faces additional pressure to act due to the solid gains in the euro, which has helped fuel worries the euro zone could face deflation, as the economic slowdown triggered by the pandemic undercuts inflation, the bank's prime policy measure. The euro climbed to a two-and-half year high this week of \$1.2084. Up until now, Lagarde

has rejected talk of deflation, but she has warned that inflation in the region is likely to remain negative into next year. The euro zone's annual inflation rate remained stuck at a negative reading for the fourth consecutive month in November at minus 3 per cent, the European Union's statistics office Eurostat said. Consumer prices have now undershot the ECB's annual inflation target of just below 2 per cent for the last seven years. Next week's ECB announcement on fresh emergency measures

will also coincide with the bank releasing its new economic and inflation forecasts. The so-called staff projections indicate how the bank sees economic life in the euro zone changing with the expected roll-out of a vaccine next year. But it remains an open question whether the Frankfurt-based ECB will move to trim interest rates, and in particular whether it might lower the deposit rate further below zero in a bid to boost bank lending. — dpa

## PRESS RELEASE

### BANK MUSCAT TO GIVE AWAY OVER RO 1 MILLION AT END-OF-YEAR AL MAZYONA DRAW

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, in line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’ and commitment to partnership in promoting a strong savings culture in Oman, has announced the special End-of-Year Al Mazyona savings prize draw for its 2020 scheme with over RO 1 million in prizes to be given away to lucky winners during the special draw. The draw will be livestreamed across the bank's social media channels on Instagram, Twitter and YouTube keeping in mind the keen interest of the bank's customers and the general public in following the largest prize draws in the country. Abdullah Taman al Mashani, Deputy General Manager — Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said that all bank customers have the opportunity to win valuable and exciting prizes and that the bank would offer more chances in proportion to higher savings balances in customers' accounts. He added that the bank is always developing the programme to further help its customers achieve their dreams and aspirations while also further popularising the concept of savings among all members of society.



Abdullah Taman al Mashani, Deputy General Manager — Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said that all bank customers have the opportunity to win valuable and exciting prizes and that the bank would offer more chances in proportion to higher savings balances in customers' accounts. He added that the bank is always developing the programme to further help its customers achieve their dreams and aspirations while also further popularising the concept of savings among all members of society.

### MUZN CELEBRATES OMAN'S 50TH NATIONAL DAY WITH SPECIAL INITIATIVES

Muzn, NBO's pioneering Islamic Banking window, is marking the occasion of the Sultanate's 50th National Day with a string of engaging events throughout November and December. Four weekly draws will be held for mobile app users, who stand to win RO 50 on any transaction. In addition, Muzn will be giving RO 50 each to the first 50 customers to open a new Kids Wakala account with a minimum deposit of RO 5,000. For a limited time, the bank is also offering exclusive rates on its Auto, Consumer Goods and Education financing products, providing the ideal opportunity for customers to make that special purchase. Held under the theme, “From the nation's bank, to the nation”, they are part of a number of exciting ways Muzn and NBO are celebrating National Day with their customers. Salima al Marzuqi (pictured), Head of Muzn Islamic Banking, said, “The Sultanate has traversed a remarkable path since 1970 and as Oman's first Islamic banking window, we are part of the journey. Our special initiatives are a thank you to our customers for being with us on this journey and our way of helping them on theirs.”



## Biden says will not kill Phase 1 trade deal with China immediately



**“I’m not going to make any immediate moves, and the same applies to the tariffs. I’m not going to prejudice my options”**

**JOE BIDEN**

*US president-elect*

**NEW YORK:** Joe Biden will not immediately cancel the Phase 1 trade agreement that President Donald Trump struck with China nor take steps to remove tariffs on Chinese exports, the *New York Times* on Wednesday quoted the US president-elect as saying.

In an interview with *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman that gave clues to how the new administration will proceed on foreign policy, Biden said his top priority was getting a generous stimulus package through Congress, even before he takes power.

This week media reported that Trump was eyeing more steps to box Biden into hardline positions on Beijing, backed by the anti-China sentiment in Congress that has often unnerved financial markets in the past four years.

“I’m not going to make any immediate moves, and the same applies to the tariffs. I’m not going to prejudice my options,” President-elect Biden told Friedman.

Biden said he would pursue policies targeting China’s “abusive practices,” such as “stealing intellectual property, dumping products, illegal subsidies to corporations” and forcing “tech transfers” from US companies to Chinese counterparts.

But he also stressed the need to develop a bipartisan consensus at home and focus government efforts on investments in research and development, infrastructure and education that would allow companies to compete better with Chinese rivals. — **Reuters**

# Australia exits first recession in 30 years

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the figures ‘can give Australians cause for optimism and hope’, declaring that Australia ‘has performed better on the health and on the economic fronts than nearly any other country in the world’

**SYDNEY:** Australia has exited its first recession in almost 30 years, after official figures on Wednesday showed the economy grew 3.3 per cent in July-September compared with the coronavirus-hit previous quarter.

With local transmission of Covid-19 largely under control, official data showed businesses have begun to rebound and consumer spending has surged.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics said household spending largely drove the economic bounce, rising 7.9 per cent compared with the previous quarter.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the figures “can give Australians cause for optimism and hope”, declaring that Australia “has performed better on the health and on the economic fronts than nearly any other country in the world”.

However, central bank governor Philip Lowe warned



Women shop for clothes on a store in a shopping mall in Sydney's central business district in Australia. — **Reuters**

that positive economic indicators masked lingering difficulties.

“These figures... cannot hide the reality that the recovery will be uneven and bumpy and that it will be drawn-out. Some parts of the economy are doing quite well, but others are in considerable difficulty,” he told lawmakers.

Australia’s central bank has predicted the economy will not return to pre-pandemic levels until the end of 2021.

The economy has yet to fully recover from the coronavirus-fuelled recession, recording a 3.8

per cent slump for the year to September.

The return to economic growth followed a record seven-per cent decline in the June quarter and a 0.3 per cent dip in the first quarter of 2020.

A recession is generally defined as two successive quarters of economic contraction.

The return to growth comes despite Victoria state — which accounts for about 25 per cent of Australia’s economic output — spending much of the September quarter in one of the world’s

strictest lockdowns, curtailing economic activity.

In a pattern repeated across the globe, economic shutdowns to curb the spread of the coronavirus sent Australia tumbling into recession as whole industries ground to a halt.

Around a million people lost their jobs and many more were forced to take pay cuts or saw their hours slashed.

In response, the government and the central bank have embarked on a vast stimulus spending programme, pumping

billions into the economy to avert a full-blown depression.

Last month, the Reserve Bank of Australia also cut interest rates to a record low of 0.10 per cent as it attempted to help hasten the recovery.

“There is a lot of ground to make up and many Australian households and many Australian businesses are doing it tough — very tough,” Frydenberg said. “Many challenges do remain,” he added.

“The global economic environment remains uncertain as many nations experience an increase in COVID-19 cases and new lockdowns.”

Higher unemployment is expected to linger in Australia, with the jobless rate rising to seven per cent in October. Closed borders continue to drag on the economy, with exports falling due to weaker demand for Australian mining commodities and travel restrictions.

Wednesday’s figures were roughly in line with economists’ expectations, coming as Australia continues to roll back virus restrictions and open domestic borders after largely containing major outbreaks. The country has been relatively successful in its pandemic response, recording just under 28,000 cases and 908 deaths. — **AFP**

## Oil prices drop on US stock build



A worker is seen near valves of oil pipes at West Qurna oilfield in Iraq's southern province of Basra. — **Reuters**

**SINGAPORE:** Oil prices extended losses on Wednesday, hit by a surprise build in oil inventories in the United States and as Opec and its allies left markets in limbo by delaying a

formal meeting to decide whether to increase output in January.

Brent crude oil futures were down by 41 cents, or 0.9 per cent, at \$47.01 a barrel by 0358 GMT, while West Texas Intermediate

crude was down by 46 cents, or 1 per cent, at \$44.09.

Industry data from the American Petroleum Institute showed US crude inventories rose by 4.1 million barrels last

week, compared with analysts’ expectations in a Reuters poll for a draw of 2.4 million barrels.

The numbers came after the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), Russia and other allies, a group known as Opec+, postponed talks on next year’s oil output policy to Thursday from Tuesday.

Earlier this year the group imposed production cuts of 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) as the coronavirus pandemic cut into fuel demand. It had been widely expected to roll those reductions over into January-March 2021 amid spikes in COVID-19 cases.

“The risks of the Opec+ alliance failing to reach an agreement are high,” ANZ analysts said in a note on Wednesday.

“A resurgent virus has seen restrictions on travel increase across Europe and the US,” they said, adding the market surplus could be as high as 1.5 million to 3 mbpd in the first half of next year, if the group does not extend cuts. — **Reuters**

## German retail sales rebound

**BERLIN:** German retail sales rebounded more than expected in October, data showed on Wednesday, as consumers stocked up on essentials before a second partial lockdown to contain the coronavirus.

Germany’s restaurants, bars, entertainment venues and gyms have been closed since November 2 in an attempt to slow the pandemic’s spread. Schools, factories and shops remain open with social distancing conditions.

Retail sales — a notoriously volatile indicator often subject to revisions — rose 2.6 per cent month on month and 8.2 per cent year on year in October in real terms, the Federal Statistics Office said.

The month on month data followed an upwardly revised drop of 1.9 per cent in September and, compared with February — the month before the pandemic started in Germany — sales were 5.9 per cent higher. — **Reuters**

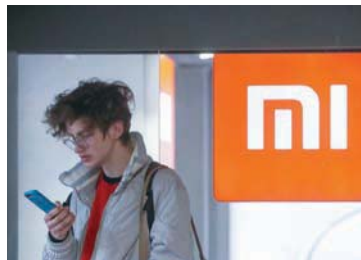
### SHORT TAKES

#### HONG KONG

### Xiaomi trade halted in Hong Kong by delay

China’s number two smartphone maker Xiaomi briefly suspended trading of its shares in Hong Kong on Wednesday after failing to disclose a multibillion-dollar top-up placement in time for the market to open.

The unusual halt came just after business began with a brief statement to the stock exchange and remained in place throughout the morning. Trading began again in the afternoon once a full disclosure of a share and bond sale was



published, though shares were down more than six per cent. In that later filing to the stock exchange Xiaomi said it plans to sell 1 billion shares at HK\$ 23.70 a piece, raising \$3.1 billion.

— **Reuters**

#### MADRID

### Tourists visiting Spain from abroad fell 87 per cent

International tourist arrivals to Spain fell 87 per cent year-on-year in October, official data showed on Wednesday, after authorities across Europe imposed new travel restrictions to curb an increase in coronavirus infections. The new restrictions accentuated the blow to Spain’s tourism industry, after a hoped-for recovery in the summer failed to materialise.

The year-on-year decline in October was similar to the decline in September and steeper

than the 76 per cent decline in August. Over the first ten months of the year, some 17.9 million foreign tourists visited Spain, around 76 per cent fewer than in the same period of 2019, the National Statistics Institute (INE) said.

France now accounts for the largest group of foreign tourists after the number of Britons — who last year made up a fifth of international visitors — plunged 82 per cent between January and October. — **Reuters**

#### FRANKFURT

### Electric cars to double global electricity demand

Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk (**pictured**) said that electricity consumption will double if the world’s car fleets are electrified, increasing the need to expand nuclear, solar, geothermal and wind energy generating sources.

Increasing the availability of sustainable energy is a major challenge as cars move from combustion engines to battery-driven electric motors, a shift which will take two decades, Musk said in a talk hosted by publisher Axel Springer.



“It will take another 20 years for cars to be fully electric. It is like with phones, you cannot replace them all at once,” Musk said in a talk streamed on the Bild.de web site, adding that around 5 per cent of vehicles are replaced every year. — **Reuters**

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**Top Story**

**BREAKING NEWS**

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

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

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- Fishermen village in Ras Madrasah closed 19/04/2020
- Turkey's coronavirus cases overtake Iran, highest in Middle East 19/04/2020
- Oman launches project to cover internet in rural areas 19/04/2020
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# features



## A splendid trip to discover the taste of Dhofari milk

During this time of the year, Spring in Dhofar, which is known “Surb” in Shehri/ Jabbali language, is considered a superb season for camping outdoors. Among the locals, preparing maa'theeb-pish milk has become a camping tradition. Here's an interesting anecdote of what the Dhofari milk tastes like... **P18**

### INSIDE STORIES

#### FASHION



#### THE VIETNAMESE DESIGNER CONVINCING THE YOUNG TO CHOOSE TRADITION

Made from delicate silk, intricately embroidered and with vast, flared sleeves: Vietnamese 19th-century outfits do not seem a perfect fit for life in the country's hectic modern cities... **Story on Page P20**

#### ENTERTAINMENT



#### 'CINEMA UNDER THE STARS' OFFERS INDONESIANS SAFE ENTERTAINMENT AMID PANDEMIC

Perched on a hilltop overlooking the Indonesian city of Bandung neat lines of teepee-style tents are set up each evening on a patch of lawn in front of a large screen... **Story on Page 19**

#### READ



#### RHYTHM OF WAR BY BRANDON SANDERSON

The fourth book in the Stormlight Archive series. Technological discoveries and an ensuing arms race change how a war is fought.

#### CINEMA



#### 'THE CROODS 2' LEADS SLUGGISH THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY WEEKEND

Thanksgiving is traditionally one of the most popular times to go to the movies. Crowd pleasers like "Frozen," "Coco" and "Knives Out" have propelled attendance and generated many, many millions in ticket sales over the holiday weekend in years past, cementing various box office records to boot. **Story on Page 19**

#### CELEBRATE



#### DISABILITY DAY

Did you know that 15 per cent of the population across the world has some form of disability? Disability Day has been created so that we can all think about how we can create a society that is inclusive and caters to everyone's needs. Celebrate today by reaching out to communities that support disability groups.



# A splendid trip to discover the taste of Dhofari milk

BY AMER AL MASHANI

A couple of weeks ago I was offered to join my elder brother and his friends for an overnight stay in Dhofar Mountains. I accepted the offer without any hesitation. I'd had a busy week, and I was eager to document the preparation of milk in the Dhofari way "maa'theeb-pish" literally means cook-

ing milk with stones in the Jabbali language (a language that is spoken by some tribes in Dhofar), so within a blink of an eye I was gearing up for the trip. During this time of the year, Spring in Dhofar, which is known "Surb" in Shehri/ Jabbali language, considered superb for camping outside Salalah, the trees in the mountain are celebrating the sun's arrival by spreading their captivated smell everywhere, while the yellowing grasses play the breeze. On a given day we went in a band of five, my brother and I in one car, his

friends in the other car, and we headed to Samhan Mountain, to a place called Greeb, a lush greenery area located at the top hills of Samhan Mountain, roughly the trip took 30 minutes drive from Salalah. "We are lucky not so many people are familiar with this site yet, otherwise it would be impossible, in this time of the year, to find this decent site unoccupied," said Said one of my brother's friends. He was right. Most of the spots in Jbhat camping area, the first choice for camping in Dhofar, often are

Preparing maa'theeb-pish milk, however, is not a piece of cake, and it really takes time and effort. Still, the group seemed happy while sharing the cooking tasks. In fact, it has become their new tradition while camping out

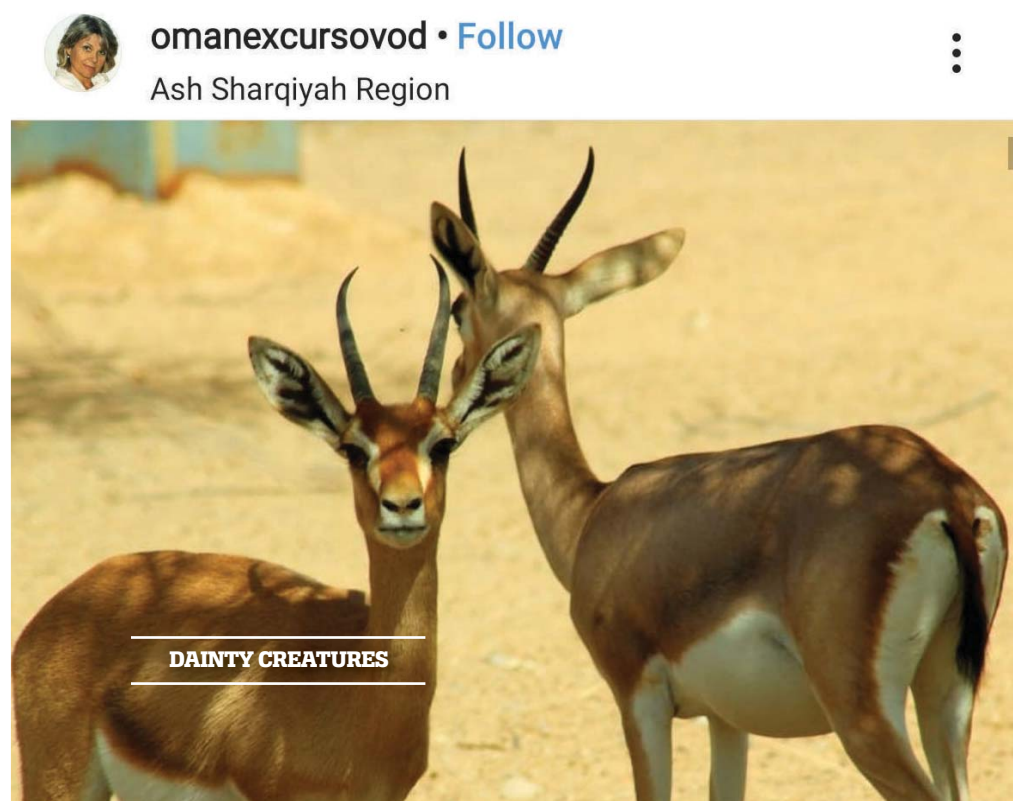
each layer contained five-piece structured in parallel, there was a room lifted for stones, so I placed them between the layers. 30 minutes later, the fire had settled, my brother Salim took 3 pieces of the heated stones and he threw them in a saucepot using a piece of tongs, then Ali poured the locally fresh milk into the pot, and the smoke immediately arose from the pot carrying a delicious smell. "It's best to bring the milk to a simmer, and you may need to add some unheated milk to keep the milk below boiling to give it a creamy taste" my brother added while he was stirring the milk. The night was getting dark, and the group had gathered around the campfire when the maa'theeb-pish milk was finally served in paper cups." yummy, the milk taste is out of this world" said Ahmed, after taking a sip of his cup, and moving his head admirably. The Group members confirmed that the distinct taste is a result of flavourful smoke that's absorbed by the stones while cooking wood is burned. We then spent the time relaxing and enjoying a taste from the past. A taste that evokes memories. Preparing maa'theeb-pish milk, however, is not a piece of cake, and it really takes time and effort. Still, the group seemed happy while sharing the cooking tasks. In fact, it has become their new tradition while camping out. Personally, I don't blame them, the milk really tastes mighty good, it has something different to offer, a new experience, a taste from heaven, a nostalgic feeling of the good old days.





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## ENTERTAINMENT

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# 'Cinema under the stars' offers Indonesians safe entertainment amid pandemic

**P**erched on a hill-top overlooking the Indonesian city of Bandung neat lines of teepee-style tents are set up each evening on a patch of lawn in front of a large screen. Known as 'Cinema Under the Stars', the outdoor camp-style movie space opened two months ago in the capital of Indonesia's most populous province of West Java with the aim of keeping people both entertained and socially distanced.

"Movies are usually watched indoors... but now we have this outdoor cinema with the view of Bandung", said 20-year-old local resident Lidia Utari. "And what's more interesting is that they use tents here, so I wanted to give it a try", she added. Supplied with pillows, blankets and snacks, each tent is also equipped with hand sanitiser and disinfectant in line with health protocols, organisers say. Moviegoers sit at the entrance to the tents with small tables in front with food and drink, all lit up by candlelight. No more than three people are allowed to use each of the 28 tents, which are spaced about 1.5 metres to 2 metres apart (5 to 6.6 ft).



The cost for each tent is 215,000 rupiah (\$15.25) per movie. "We started this business during the pandemic, that's why we were brainstorming about how to attract visitors as people have a thirst for entertainment in times like these", said Ilham Fahri Suhada, one of the organisers. With more than 530,000 infections and 16,000 deaths, Indonesia has the highest number of coronavirus cases and fatalities in Southeast Asia. Some health experts say limited testing and contact tracing, as well as a high positivity rate — the infection rate per person tested — indicate actual rates may be far higher. Unlike many neighbours, the world's fourth most populous country with 270 million people has not had national lockdowns but has

instead imposed localised social restrictions. While tents may not provide much additional protection from the virus, film-goers seem content with the setup. "I don't have to worry (about COVID-19) here because they carry out proper health protocols", said Juliatun Hasanah, 21. — **Reuters**

## CINEMA

## 'The Croods 2' Leads Sluggish Thanksgiving Holiday Weekend



**THANKSGIVING IS** traditionally one of the most popular times to go to the movies. Crowd pleasers like "Frozen", "Coco" and "Knives Out" have propelled attendance and generated many, many millions in ticket sales over the holiday weekend in years past, cementing various box-office records to boot.

This year, studios and movie theatre owners are settling for scraps. Only one new movie, Universal and DreamWorks' "The Croods: A New Age", was released in theatres. The animated sequel to 2013's unexpected hit "The Croods" surpassed expectations, generating \$9.71 million over the weekend and \$14.22 million since opening on Wednesday. That's considered a success in the age of coronavirus, but it's hardly what Universal was expecting when the studio initially greenlit the follow-up. "This level of business is a far cry from typical Thanksgiving weekend releases, but success and failure in the middle of a pandemic should be viewed in relative terms", says Shawn Robbins, chief analyst at Box Office Pro. To Robbins' point, past holiday hits were able to play in more than 4,000 theatres nationwide.

With the majority of multiplexes closed, including those in major markets like New York and Los Angeles, "The Croods 2" could only screen in 2,211 venues. Even with those limitations, "The Croods 2" is eyeing a pandemic-era record. Final tallies are usually reported on Monday. If estimates hold, "The Croods: A New Age" would eclipse "Tenet" for the biggest opening weekend since movie theaters reopened.

Christopher Nolan's latest grossed \$9.35 million in its first three days of release. "For this film to outperform expectations in a less-than-half operational market indicates that moviegoers, especially families, miss the big screen experience and are seeking it out where safe and possible to do so", Robbins says. "The industry still has a

challenging road ahead through winter. But Croods' debut is a preliminary sign of the resilience cinemas can show in the long run." Overseas, "The Croods 2" amassed \$20.8 million from seven international markets for a global tally of \$35 million.

China alone accounted for \$19.2 million of weekend earnings. Universal, compared to rivals, has been active in releasing movies during the pandemic. That's because the studio forged unprecedented deals with AMC Theatres and Cinemark, two of the country's biggest movie theatre-chains. Typically, movies play exclusively in theaters for 75 to 90 days before they move to online rental services. But under Universal and AMC's new agreement, the studio can put new films on premium video-on-demand within weeks of their theatrical debuts. In return, the cinema circuits are expected to get a cut of the digital profits. "The Croods: A New Age" is scheduled to land on home entertainment in time for Christmas. "The Croods: A New Age" was the only movie to surpass \$1 million in ticket sales over the weekend. Body-swap horror movie "Freaky", also from Universal, landed in second place with \$770,000 over the weekend.

In total, the R-rated thriller has made \$7 million in three weeks. Robert De Niro's "The War With Grandpa" continues to show rare staying power two months after it debuted. The family comedy secured the No 3 spot with \$643,936, which boosts its total to a surprisingly strong \$17.2 million. "Let Him Go" and "Come Play", both from Focus Features, rounded out the top five. "Let Him Go", a suspense drama starring Kevin Costner and Diane Lane, brought in \$453,000 over the weekend. After four weeks in theatres, the movie has made \$8.7 million. Falling not far behind, the thriller "Come Play" scraped together \$387,000 between Friday and Sunday for a domestic tally of \$8.7 million. — **Reuters**



# The Vietnamese designer convincing the young to choose tradition



Made from delicate silk, intricately embroidered and with vast, flared sleeves: Vietnamese 19th-century outfits do not seem a perfect fit for life in the country's hectic modern cities.

But Nguyen Duc Loc, a 28-year-old entrepreneur, together with his 11-strong production team in Hanoi, is convinced the attire of their ancestors can make a return to modern-day living.

"My ambition is that in any Vietnamese wardrobe, as well as suits, trousers, dresses, there will be at least one outfit based on an ancient style to wear on important occasions," like festivals and weddings, he said.

Based on his own research, Loc and his company Y Van Hien reproduce outfits largely from the Nguyen dynasty that spanned close to a century and a half from 1802 — a time when the ruling class wore extravagant, brightly

coloured designs embellished with symbols of power, such as dragons.

He wants everyone, both men and women, to appreciate the "astounding beauty" of ancient imperial-style dress, he says, and understand the part this clothing plays in Vietnam's cultural history.

In one of their first major commissions, Y Van Hien was asked to produce costumes for Phuong Khau, an 18-episode YouTube drama about the emperor and empress of the Nguyen Dynasty.

The company — which was set up in 2018 — has also designed costumes for singers, music videos and fashion shows.

## PRESERVING CULTURE

Despite some criticism that the designs have strayed too far from the originals, they are also seeing a growing interest among young people.

Many choose to rent an outfit for a photoshoot, with prices starting at \$17.

"I think ancient-style costumes... are part of Vietnamese culture that we need to preserve," said Pham Trang Nhung, a 22-year-old student who had come to see Loc's designs.

"I think young people today know more about Western dress."

Blossoming curiosity over outfits worn by generations past comes as officials from the sports and culture department in the central province of Thua Thien-Hue began wearing the traditional "ao dai" — a long tunic worn over trousers — one day a month as a way to promote and preserve cultural values.

Although a far more comfortable and modern prospect than royal 19th-century clothing, some say they are too restrictive and impractical in today's world.

Nevertheless, a simplified version of a woman's ao dai still forms part of some school uniforms in the south and central regions, is worn by flight attendants on flag

carrier Vietnam Airlines and is embraced by many on special occasions.

Social media shows plenty of pictures of young women posing in traditional dress — and with more than a dozen Facebook groups catering to those interested in ancient designs, some aficionados have even banded together to create a rival design company to Loc's.

Nguyen Duc Binh, an editor of an arts magazine and an expert on traditional culture, said the attraction among the young stems from a desire to assert themselves, and their pride in their country, in a similar way to the youth of other Asian nations.

"In some more developed countries such as Japan and South Korea, traditional costumes can be seen as icons for the young people to look at," he said.

Young Vietnamese "admire those countries' development" and "they have tried to find some traditional things" from their own country's past to celebrate. — AFP