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OMAN OBSERVER

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OMAN

HM GREETINGS TO THAILAND KING

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Maha Vajiralongkorn of the Kingdom of Thailand on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to King Vajiralongkorn and the Thai friendly people further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

RARE BABY GENETIC DISORDER FOUND

MUSCAT: Omani geneticists and a research team from the Genetic and Developmental Medicine Clinic at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and the Royal Hospital, have detected a rare genetic disorder that affects newborns and causes severe weight loss, weak development and poor growth associated with vomiting and diarrhoea. The newly-discovered disease has symptoms similar to those of the acute cow's milk protein intolerance (CMPI). The study combining detailed clinical evaluation and precise analysis of the genetic sequencing of the newly-detected disease, was published in Clinical Genetics Journal.

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JAPAN RETRIEVES ASTEROID SAMPLES IN HUNT FOR ORIGINS OF PLANETS

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New steps to make Oman an investment destination

VINOD NAIR

Oman plans to launch major economic measures in the new year as part of the plans to open up the economy to more cooperation, more trade and investment, and tourism.

Speaking at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IIS) Manama Dialogue on Saturday, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, said: “We have plans to extend visa-free entry for up to 30 days to citizens of more than 100 countries. There

will be significant developments in labour policy, which, in the next few weeks, will include the abolition of the No Objection Certificate system.”

He added, “The electronic transformation which is taking place means we will be cutting back on layers of regulations to make doing business in Oman far easier than ever before. These measures are part of a broader package of economic measures conceived together in Oman's Vision-2040 and fiscal policy, which will also involve the



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, addresses the Manama Dialogue security conference in the Bahraini capital on Saturday. — AFP

introduction of new taxation and an end to some long-standing subsidies.”

As the government designs and implements these policies, it is also taking particular care to make sure low-income families are properly protected. Security in the Middle East is nothing without the day-to-day security of its people, the foreign minister said.

He added, “Their security involves not living in fear of poverty just as much as it means not living in fear of bombs and bullets.”

TURN TO P2

Nurseries set to reopen safely

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

The Ministry of Social Development issued the standard operating procedures document and the executive plan to reopen childhood development institutions and nurseries in accordance with the instructions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19. There has been a decision to open such institutions from December 13.

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) specify the duties of the employees involved in early childhood development institutions to reduce the risk of COVID-19. The plan also specifies other measures to ensure safe reopening and successful implementation of the SOPs.

Through the document the ministry indicated that the purpose behind the reopening of these institutions is to bring back normal learning process among the children, while minimising the negative effects of the COVID-19.

TURN TO P2

SOPs document

Specifies the duties of the employees manning the centres

Necessary precautions to avoid the risk of infection

Periodic cleaning of surfaces, good ventilation, controlling entry and exit

Children with serious ailments need more care

Washing hands with soap, water, paper towels and sterilisers

DRAFT BUDGET SENT TO COUNCIL OF MINISTERS



The State Council on Sunday sent the draft of State Budget 2021 to the Council of Ministers, along with recommendations of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura. The step was taken after the State Council discussed the report of its Economic Committee on the budget projects and introduced amendments in light of the outcome of discussions.

DETAILS ON P2

Energy Development Oman formed

CONRAD PRABHU

The government has announced the formal establishment of a new corporate entity with a mandate to invest in conventional as well as renewable and alternative energy resources within the Sultanate's borders and beyond.

Energy Development Oman

SAOC (EDO), set up by Royal Decree 128/2020 published in the Official Gazette on Sunday, is envisioned as an Omani joint-stock company that will, among other things, acquire a shareholding in majority government-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Significantly, EDO will also

own an interest in the prolific Block 6 licence currently held by PDO and which contributes to the bulk of the country's hydrocarbon production.

The new entity will also invest in commercial activities across the upstream and midstream segments of the hydrocarbon value chain.

DETAILS ON P13

Britain gets ready for roll-out of COVID-19 vaccine

LONDON: Britain is preparing to become the first country to roll out the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine this week, initially making the shot available at hospitals before distributing stocks to doctors' clinics, the government said on Sunday.

The first doses are set to be administered on Tuesday, with the National Health Service (NHS) giving top priority to vaccinating

the over-80s, frontline healthcare workers and care home staff and residents.

Britain gave emergency use approval for the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech last week — jumping ahead in the global race to begin the most crucial mass inoculation programme in history. In total, Britain has ordered 40 million doses. As each person requires two doses,

that is enough to vaccinate 20 million people in the country of 67 million.

About 800,000 doses are expected to be available within the first week. Initial doses that have arrived from Belgium are being stored in secure locations across the country, where they will be quality checked, the health ministry said.

The rollout coincides with a



crucial and perilous moment in negotiations between Britain and the European Union on a post-Brexit trade agreement.

The Observer newspaper reported on Sunday that, under UK government contingency plans, tens of millions of vaccine doses could be flown to Britain by military aircraft to avoid delays at ports caused by Brexit.

— AFP

State Council refers the draft of State Budget 2021 to Council of Ministers

MUSCAT: The State Council on Sunday transferred the draft of State Budget 2021 to the Council of Ministers, along with recommendations of the State Council and Majlis AshShura.

The step was taken after the State Council discussed the report of its Economic Committee on the budget project and introduced amendments in light of the outcome of discussions.

The session, the second in the Council's second annual sitting (7th Term), was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah bin Ali al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

In its discussion of other topics of the agenda, the Council approved the minutes of its first ordinary session of the second annual sitting, 7th Term, and reviewed the report of the Secretariat-General on activities of the Council.

The chairman of the enhanced State Council's Economic Committee delivered the committee's report affirming that the tenths five-year development plan (2021-



2025) and the draft state general budget for fiscal 2021 coincide with a significant stage in the Sultanate's development march and constitute the stepping stone for the initial phase of the Oman Vision 2040 and they come on the background of exceptional conditions caused by a decline in oil prices and the

COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on economic activities. These two factors also have direct effect on the general financial estimates, expectations of economic growth as well as their social implications.

The committee chairman underscored the importance of con-

fronting the challenges facing the tenths five-year development plan and mitigating their impact on the national economy and the Omani citizens, noting that the National Programme for Fiscal Balance (Tawazun), being a medium-term plan, is the pillar on which the state general budget 2021 is based



and add a strategic dimension and more flexibility in adapting to the changes in both revenues and expenditure.

The tenth five-year development plan targets to achieve five objectives: enhancing human development, preserving human capital, incentivizing economic activities in partnership with the private sector, supporting the small and medium enterprises and expanding the base of the economic diversification and developing the production mechanisms and programmes, developing macroeconomic environment and achieving financial sustainability in addition

to achieving a balanced development in the governorates, the committee chairman said.

The committee came up with a number of recommendations regarding the state budget 2021 including affirming the importance of laying down conducive policies for enhancing the production base, activating the initiatives and activities that would boost the reliance on non-oil sectors and non-utilised resources, utilising the Omani potentials, enhancing revenues and drawing more investments and benefiting from the high-cost infrastructure, he concluded.

■ FROM PAGE 1

New steps to make Oman an investment destination

Those of us who enjoy prosperity and privilege owe it to our fellow citizens to make the kind of contribution that will guarantee the security of everyone else. Social security is an essential component for a successful fiscal policy. In other words, a solid social fabric at home is an essential foundation for the stable, open, and inclusive economic environment that makes multilateral engagement in the region more successful."

On foreign policy, Al Busaidy said: "We have a profound and enduring commitment to the resolution of conflict by peaceful means. If we are to avoid misunderstanding, we must maintain engagement and dialogue with everyone, so as to have the best possible relations and mutual confidence with everyone. Exclusion, rejection, or blockades are not in our diplomatic repertoire. I sincerely believe that it is only by engaging in activities outside of our comfort zone, not just talking to those with whom we are already in agreement, that we can build sustainable security structures in our region.

"This is also where the global context counts. For this kind of multilateral engagement to suc-

ceed, especially in today's hyper-connected world, it needs to involve multiple stakeholders, including friends and partners who are not strictly speaking a part of the region in a geographical sense but are very much part of it because of the contributions they make here and the interests they have. Wisdom invites us all to advance cooperation multilaterally and inclusively and not to lose sight of such values," he said.

Commenting on regional GCC issues he said, "There are presently encouraging signs on a number of fronts that there is a renewed willingness to resolve some of the difficulties and differences that are threatening regional security. We welcome the Kuwaiti statement yesterday on the positive results of the reconciliation efforts led by his late Shaikh Sabah al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, May God rest his soul, and the efforts made by Emir Shaikh Nawaf al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, and US President Donald Trump. All these efforts reflect the aspirations of the people of the region and we are optimistic that a permanent understanding can be reached.

"It also gives me cause to hope that a renewed American presence

in international organisations at a global level will be accompanied by efforts to restore what I still see as one of the most significant American successes in the region in a long time, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. It will be a positive development for a new climate of inclusivity if a way can be found, collectively, to get more regional parties to this plan, more fully and positively involved in it. Security in a global context, especially when multilateralism and inclusivity are emphasised, also depends upon an environment in which communication and exchange are encouraged."

The minister said, "I think it is easier to enter into multilateral engagement if diplomacy is underpinned by regular interactions at all levels. The better we get to know one another day-to-day, the better we will be at working to resolve problems and advancing common interests. This is why I wanted to say something today about some developments in Omani domestic policy which I very much hope will make a modest contribution to the cultivation of a regional environment in which an inclusive and a multilateral approach to regional security can thrive."

Govt office attendance rises to near 100%

SAMAUEL KUTTY
@samkutttyp

The work attendance in all the public sector offices witnessed near 100 per cent capacity on Sunday as a sign of return to normal life in the country.

While precautionary measures continue to be in place, employees were found to be wearing masks and following social distancing as maximum as possible to keep the coronavirus at bay.

"The present situation, obviously, is not the same as before a few months back when the virus was raging unabated. Still, we have to be careful", said Faiz al Lawati, an administrative staff at the Ministry of Health.

The Supreme Committee, dealing with the situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic, last week asked all employees in the government departments to return to work after visible improvement in the situation.

In the morning, traffic in most parts in the capital area was found swelling with people coming from their villages and others in the city heading towards the places of their work.

"Although we have been attending offices on alternative



days during the past months, still it was happy to see the office functioning to its full capacity for the first time after the breakout of the pandemic", said Hamed al Hadhrami, who works in the Ministry of Labour.

He said that when the officers were shuttered in the last week of March, "we expected it would be only for a short hiatus that we would be out of the office. But it was a long time", he said with a sigh of relief.

For Ameera al Balushi, the presence of all her colleagues together after months of gap was

very exciting.

"Even though the fear of the pandemic is still in the air with all precautionary measures around, the present ambience is inspiring, unlike the work from home situation. Returning to work is the right decision because you can only stay at home for so long," she said.

While announcing the decision of full capacity work in government offices, the Supreme Committee asked all department heads to ensure that health employees follow the safety protocols announced by the authorities.

Nurseries to reopen safely

This requires a balance between the epidemiological risks and the benefits of childhood development services. The ministry noted that these procedures are designed for the nurseries, child development homes and care centres which provide services for children between three months to 5.5 years and are subject to the ministry's supervision.

The instructions stipulate the necessity to take the necessary precautions to avoid the risk of infection, especially among the children who have chronic diseases or symptoms such as cancer, kidney problems, ob-

structive pulmonary issues, and immunodeficiency (weak immune system) due to solid organ transplantation, and obesity, if the body mass index is more than 30 kg.

It also involves serious cardiac diseases such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathy, sickle cell disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Children with complex health problems such as serious genetic, neurological or metabolic disorders, or those with congenital heart disease from birth, may be more likely to develop severe symptoms of COVID-19.

Reports, however, indicate prevalence of COVID-19 cases among children who suffer from intellectual and developmental disabilities more than others.

Through the document, the ministry has put in place many preventive measures to prevent the spread of virus infection. These include standard practices of washing hands with soap, water, paper towels and sterilisers.

It puts stress on periodic cleaning of surfaces, good ventilation, controlling entry and exit, physical distancing and providing support services.



■ VIRUS PRECAUTIONS AT SCHOOLS LAUDED



A number of school principals and teachers from several governorates lauded the preventive measures and the health protocols that were put in place following the reopening of schools on November 1, describing them as successful and fruitful and have effectively contributed to the containment of COVID-19 and the protection of students and teachers against the deadly pandemic.

Omani doctors discover rare baby genetic disorder

MUSCAT: Omani geneticists and a research team from the Genetic and Developmental Medicine Clinic at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and the Royal Hospital, have detected a rare genetic disorder that affects newborns and causes severe weight loss, weak development and poor growth associated with vomiting and diarrhoea. The newly-discovered disease has symptoms similar to those of the acute Cow's milk protein intolerance (CMPI). The study combining detailed clinical evaluation and precise analysis of the genetic sequencing of the

newly-detected disease, was published in the renowned *Clinical Genetics Journal*.

Dr Khalid bin Said al Thuhli, Clinical Genetics Consultant at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said that the disease, despite being rare, is so serious and can cause the death of infants in their first months if the diagnosis and treatment were delayed.

The majority of infected newborns have developed symptoms of severe diarrhoea or persistent vomiting since the early days of their lives associated with slimness, weight loss and poor growth.

557 new COVID-19 cases, 9 deaths

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 557 new cases of Coronavirus COVID-19 on Sunday, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 124,886. The total death cases reached 1,444, after nine people died in three days.

The total recovery cases reached 116,354, which is 93.2 per cent of the total cases reported so far.

Ten people were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 172, including 88 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

Migratory birds start arriving in Oman

KABEER YOUSUF

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With Oman's beaches opened and as visitors started to pour in, migratory birds have also begun to fly in to Oman's shores, complementing the flow of environment cycle.

Citizens and residents, both bachelors and families seem to be exploring their favourite, long-lost beaches and basking in the morning and setting sun.

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) decided to let many facilities and sectors open, beaches being an important area, after being closed for more than eight months.

Out of the migratory birds that visit Oman, cormorants, the annual visitors, take the advantage of spending summer away from their origin and Oman seemingly tops their 'list of preferences'.

"Cormorants are migratory coastal birds and annual visitors to Oman shores," said Maggie Jeans, one who observed the arrival of these birds.

Cormorants prefer to build

Get PCR test results online

STAFF REPORTER

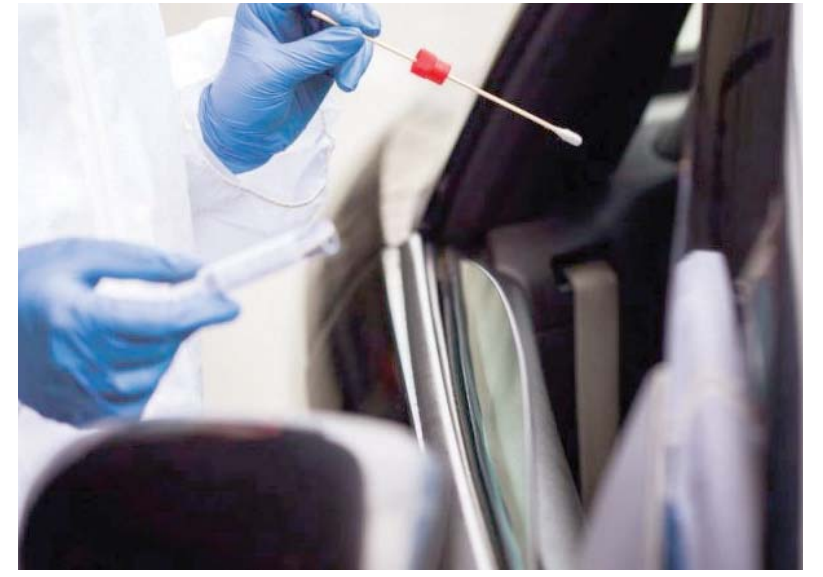
MUSCAT, DEC 6

The Ministry of Health said that the results of the COVID-19 examination (PCR) can be now fetched online.

PCR tests are conducted at Muscat and Salalah airports, drive through at Muscat and Salalah airports, Al-Dara Border crossing (Musandam), Medical fitness centres (Suhar, Musandam, Dibba, Nizwa and Rusayl).

The ministry added that the certificate can be obtained by login in with the passport / ID card and the date of birth at covid19.emushrif.om on payment of RO 6.

The Ministry of Health



said the certificate contains a digital stamp and a QR code for authentication and verification of

the validity of personal data, and users can download and print the certificate easily.



their colonies among cliffs, islets, shores and even trees.

Their body weight, according to research, can range from 0.35 to 5 kilograms with wing span of about 45-100 centimetres.

Their four toes are connected with webbing similar to that of a duck.

"They fly in formation like Canadian geese. When the leader sights a shoal of fish they land on the water and dive to catch them in a frenzy of splashing."

Cormorants then scramble onto the rocks to quickly dry out their wings before they take a leap to the next beach.

Oman plays host to the Socotra cormorant which is now an endangered species listed as vulnerable.

The Socotra cormorant is an almost entirely blackish bird with long neck and a total length of about 80 centimetres.

They can stay submerged for up to 3 minutes, the maximum for

a cormorant and they are capable of deep diving upto 45 metres.

Bird watchers say they fly here annually from the Socotra Island, off the coast of Yemen. The Qurum mangroves are spawning ground for fish, so an ideal location for cormorants and other sea birds.

Oman's Musandam too has a large number of cormorants often seen perched on the fjords, rocks that jut out from the sea and the mountains that face the sea.



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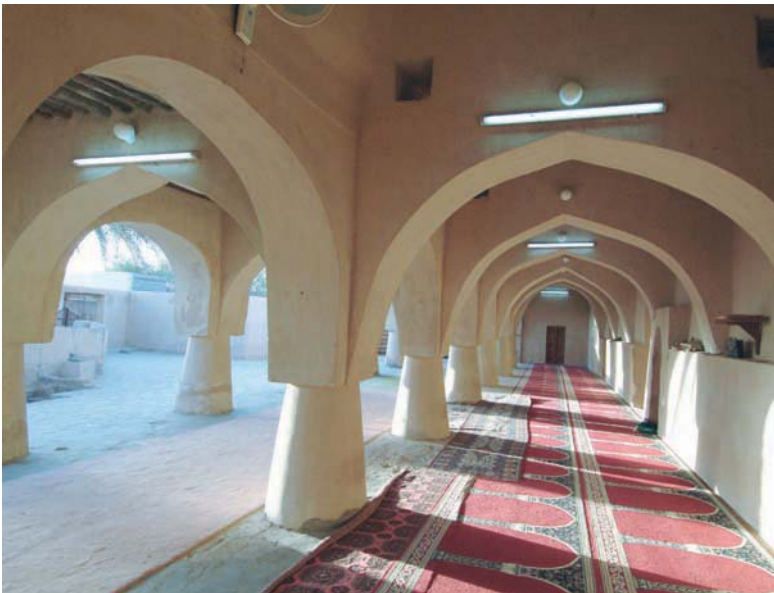
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Jaalan Bani Bu Ali



Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South overlooks the Sea of Oman and borders Al Wusta from the south, Sur from the north and Wilayats of Bidiya and Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan from the west.

The wilayat is distinguished for its environmental and geographical diversity that makes it an attractive tourist destination.

Jami al Hamoda Mosque is a unique structure having 52 domes and a falaj running through the courtyard, while Al Hamodah Fort has been chosen as the emblem of the place. Elaborately painted metal doors and traditional carved wooden gates seen at the town's residences, are features of the wilayat.

The town comprises a conglomeration of watchtowers,

old fortified houses, forts and ancient walls.

Jaalan Bani Bu Ali enfolds a number of historic and archaeological sites like Al Suwaih archaeological spot, Al Oud, Al Kaffi and Al Majlaj mosques.

The area is reputed for many traditional professions and occupations like khanjar making, weaving, welding, goldsmith and silversmith, livestock breeding and many others.

The people of the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali are famous for handicraft and manufacture while farming is the main occupation. Shipbuilding is one of the traditional occupation practised by people especially in Al Ashkharah.

The traditional souq is located in the south of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali about 1 km from the centre.

The people of Jaalan remarkably practise folk arts like Al Razha, Al Aazi, Al Wanna, Al Madima, Al Meghaidh, Bin Abbadi and Al Maidan.

The wilayat has a fishing harbour in Al Ashkharah and a road network that nearly covers the entire wilayat.

One of the prominent projects is Al Ashkharah- Shannah road that connects wilayats of Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta and serves a number of coastal villages.

The project has achieved a societal dimension as it helps in boosting tourism, land transport and fisheries.

Al Ashkharah fishing harbour secures high revenue for fishermen. Fishing is one of the most important basic services that have contributed to the

development of the sector.

The harbour facilitates the traffic of fishing vessels and boats, in addition to providing fuel, commodities, ice and all fishing requirements.

Niyabat Al Ashkharah is unique for its icy weather, sea breeze and wonderful location on the Arabian Sea.

Al Ashkharah experiences the autumn monsoon, and the light clouds are formed, which bring temperatures down to 22-28°C between June and September.

Al Ashkharah witnesses a remarkable influx of visitors who come to enjoy its beautiful weather.

Several options are available to the tourists to choose their camping, whether on the coast, on the soft sand dunes or the fishing harbour.





Oman Air offers discounts for new Sindbad members

MUSCAT: Oman Air is offering a one-time discount voucher of up to 10 per cent on tickets to everyone who enrolls in Sindbad, the airline's award-winning loyalty programme.

Sindbad members quickly earn valuable points which can be used for free tickets, upgrades, excess baggage and more.

The discount for enrolling applies only to international flights taken through December 31, 2020. Other terms and conditions apply, and are available at omanair.com.

Enrolling in Sindbad also provides valuable information including early access to sales and special offers for flights and vacation packages, along with news and information about the airline's destinations.

As Sindbad members earn points by travelling with Oman Air or pur-

chasing goods and services provided by Sindbad partners, they can also enjoy additional baggage allowances, access to airport lounges, priority check-in and more.

Guests who are planning to travel to Muscat, should visit the Civil Aviation Authority website, paca.gov.om, to ensure they are prepared to comply with requirements to enter the Sultanate.

Guests who are planning to depart from Oman should ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements and requirements during their flights, which are provided at omanair.com.

Additionally, all guests are encouraged to ensure they are aware of requirements and restrictions at their destination and remember that official policies are subject to change at short notice.

Over 197,000 registered with pension funds

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, DEC 6

The total number of Omanis registered in the public sector pension funds, which include funds at the Civil Service, the Diwan of Royal Court and the Central Bank of Oman, at the end of September 2020, was 197,489 Omanis, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The pensioners included 114,553 males and 82,936 females. Regarding the categories of contributory wage, 59,205 pensioners receive between RO 1,000 and RO 2,000, constituting the highest number among Omanis. This was followed by the category from RO 700 to less than RO 800, reaching 37,816.

The number of pensioners with wages between RO 800 and less than RO 900 reached 30,276 and those with wages from RO 600 to less than RO 700 was 19,935. There were 18,720 pensioners with wages ranging from RO 325 to less than RO 400, and 16,753 pensioners with wages from RO 500 to less than

600. The number of pensioners with more than RO 2,000 stood at 4,056.

According to the age groups, the largest number of those registered in the public pension funds remain in the age group between 35 and 39 years, with 54,088, followed those between 30 and 34 years, with 43,418 pensioners. Those between 40 and 44 years reached 40,815.

Merging pension funds project has been the table talk for years now, specifically since 2006. However, this project has not seen the light until today, noting that it has become a necessary imperative in light of the increasing public debt of the Sultanate and the increase in the actuarial deficits in pension funds.

After the issuance of the Royal Decree to establish the Omani Investment Authority, which placed all investment funds under one umbrella, and referred employees who have completed 30 years of service to retirement, there are indicators featuring the next phase of the merging 11 pension funds in the Sultanate.

SIX DRUG SMUGGLERS NABBED



The Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances at Royal Oman Police (ROP), in cooperation with the Coast Guard Police Command, arrested a drug gang comprising six foreigners smuggling drugs to the governorates of Muscat, South Al Sharqiyah and South Al Batinah and recovered more than 113 kgs of crystal meth and 39 kgs of morphine from them.

Poor visibility, rains forecast for today

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](https://twitter.com/vinot_nair)

Authorities have warned of a decrease in horizontal visibility during the late night and early morning periods of Monday in parts of the governorates of the South Al Sharqiyah, Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta, and some coastal areas of the Sea of Oman due to fog formations. The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre weather analysis said a trough of low pressure (Al Reham Trough) is expected to affect the northern parts of the Sultanate from Monday, December 7-9.

There are chances of rain occasionally thunder-showers may be associated with fresh winds, hail precipitation, and flash floods (wadis) over the Governorate of Musandam, extending gradually during the evening over North Al Batinah and Al Buraimi governorates. The governorates of South Al Batinah, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, North Al Sharqiyah, and South Al Sharqiyah will be affected by the trough on Tuesday and Wednesday following the passage of the trough, a moderate to fresh northeasterly wind is forecast to affect most of the Sultanate, leading to a noticeable drop in temperature.

Sea state will be moderate to rough along with the coastal areas of Musandam Governorate and Oman Sea with a maximum wave height of 2.5 meters.

**WEAR A MASK
STAY SAFE**



SRI LANKAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
Sultanate of Oman

STAFF VACANCIES SRI LANKAN SCHOOL MUSCAT

Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM) is based on ideology of imparting quality education to multinational students, under the EDEXCEL-UK curriculum, since 1989. Student population of the school is about 1200 studying from Foundation/early childhood to Advanced Level classes. The school is proud of producing top world rankers and keeping the name in the list of best international schools in Oman. The school is headed by a Sri Lankan principal and governed by a Board of directors selected from professionals of Sri Lankan parents in Oman. For additional information, visit www.sls.edu.om. The staff population of SLSM is over 80 members and the following POSITION is currently vacant;

Human Resource Manager (Omani Nationals only)

Applications are invited from dynamic energetic and responsible professionals who have hands on experience in all aspects of Human Resource Operations and Management

- Bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management or equivalent
- 3 years of relevant experience in a similar position
- Understanding and knowledge of Omani Labour law
- Fluency in spoken and written English
- Sound Computer Literacy
- Self-disciplined with strong interpersonal skills and team work.
- Age below 55 years

Candidates having required qualifications are requested to apply on or before 10th December 2020

Please email the detailed Curriculum Vitae including records of service, copies of academic / professional Certificates, two non-related referees with their contact telephone numbers and email addresses, to vacancies@slsm.edu.om chairman2021@slsm.edu.om and principal@slsm.edu.om Candidates should state the post applied in the subject line of the email.

Sultanate of Oman MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND YOUTH TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat,
hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
Re-tender 2/2020	Construction	GENERAL MAINTENANCE OF GRANDSTAND WITH UNDERCROFT FACILITIES AND SPORTS HALL AT MUSCAT SPORTS CLUB IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE	25/-	Second Grade
Re-tender 3/2020	Service	RENOVATION OF GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH WITH AUTOMATIC IRRIGATION FOR MUSCAT SPORTS CLUB AT MUSCAT GOVERNORATE	25/-	First & Second Grade
Re-tender 4/2020	Service	CONSTRUCTION OF SYNTHETIC TURF FOOTBALL PITCH AND FLOODLIGHT TO MAIN GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH MUSCAT SPORTS CLUB	25/-	First & Second Grade
Re-tender 6/2020	Service	RENOVATION OF GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH WITH NEW AUTOMATIC IRRIGATION FOR MAJES SPORTS CLUB IN NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	25/-	First & Second Grade
13/2020	Service	CONSTRUCTION OF SYNTHETIC TURF FOOTBALL PITCH AND FLOODLIGHT TO MAJES SPORTS CLUB, NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	25/-	First & Second Grade
14/2020	Service	RENOVATION OF GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH WITH NEW AUTOMATIC IRRIGATION FOR ITTIFAQ - IBRA BR. SPORTS CLUB IN NORTH SHARQIYA GOVERNORATE	25/-	First & Second Grade
15/2020	Construction	RE-PAINTING TO NIZWA SPORTS COMPLEX BUILDINGS	25/-	First Grade

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 19/12/2020.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 9:00am 18/01/2021.

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24166670 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Ministry of Tourism REQUEST FOR INTEREST

Rehabilitation, Restoration & Maintenance of Archeological Sites for Tourism Investment

Stemming from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's keenness to involve SMEs in the projects of restoration and maintenance of architectural heritage, the Ministry, therefore, invites establishments interested in executing consultancy works and providing maintenance, restoration, surveying, structural analysis, project management and producing & manufacturing heritage items services to sign up.

Interested establishments should provide the following papers;

The introductory portfolio of the establishment containing the following:

1. Registration papers with OCCI & Tender Board.
2. The establishment's activities.
3. The establishment's grade.
4. The establishment's organizational structure and authorized signatories.
5. Details on experience and previous achievements related to the proposed work.
6. Stating the establishment's capital assets.
7. Other supporting documents.

The documents should be submitted in closed envelopes at the Ministry's

Diwan General and is addressed to:
**The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism,
Projects of Restoration and Maintenance
PO Box 002/ PC 511 Sultanate of Oman**



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs Directorate of Projects and Maintenance

Tender Announcement

The Directorate of Projects and Maintenance, Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs floats the following tender for the year 2020:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Fees	Grade	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Bids Submission
06/2020 Re-Tender	Provision of Fire Prevention Systems on Annual Contract Basis	RO 25	Specialized	20/12/2020	7/1/2021

All specialized companies registered with the Tender Board in the aforementioned grade and interested in subscribing to the tender thereto may collect tender-related documents from the e-tendering website:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

The companies have to prove that the tender's fee has been paid and submit a receipt on the system prior to the bid submission.

The bids are submitted through the e-tendering website mentioned above and a banking bond or a certified cheque amounted to 1% of the bid's value and valid for 90 days from the date of bid submission has to be enclosed provided that the original receipt has to be submitted to the Ministry.

For further inquiries, kindly contact us on 24166670 or email to etenderhd@ita.gov.om and the Ministry has the right to accept or reject any bid without justification.

Sudan govt opposes army chief decree creating new council

KHARTOUM: A move by Sudan's army chief to create a new body with broad powers has put him at odds with the country's transitional government.

General Abdel Fattah al Burhan heads Sudan's sovereign council, a military-civilian body established in August last year.

It is Sudan's highest executive authority and is overseeing a fragile three-year transition to civilian rule after the April 2019 ouster of veteran strongman Omar al Bashir.

But a recent decree by Burhan has established a "Council of Transition Partners" (CTP) that is "responsible for leading the transition period, resolving differences (between those in power) and having all the necessary prerogatives to exercise its power", Sudan's SUNA news agency reported.

The decree was made public earlier this week.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's transitional government has rejected the move, saying Burhan has overstepped his prerogatives by conferring excessive powers on the new body.

Government spokesman Faisal Mohammed Saleh said in a statement on Friday that Burhan's decree contradicted the "constitutional declaration" signed in August last year between pro-democracy activists and military generals.

"It is imperative that we declare our discord with the creation of the CTP in its current form," said Saleh, who is also culture and information minister.

The government and the sovereign council have agreed to limit the tasks of the new body to "coordinating and resolving disagreements that might emerge during the transitional period", he added. — AFP

Kuwait opposition makes strong gains in parliamentary elections

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's opposition took nearly half of parliament's seats in weekend polls, but the sole female lawmaker lost her seat.

Twenty-four of the National Assembly's 50 seats were won by candidates belonging to or leaning towards the opposition, up from 16 in the last parliament, according to results announced on Sunday.

But while 29 women ran for office in Saturday's race, none were elected. Nevertheless, the election of 30 candidates under the age of 45 sent out a promising signal to youth hoping for change and reform.

The election, which takes place every four years, was overshadowed by COVID-19 and a consequent paring back of campaigns.

Five polling stations — one in each electoral district — were specially fitted out to allow citizens infected with coronavirus to cast their votes.

The polls were the first since the new emir, Shaikh Nawaf al



Candidate and former parliament speaker Marzouq al Ghanem celebrates with his supporters following the announcement of his victory in parliamentary election in Kuwait City, on Sunday. — AFP

Ahmad Al Sabah, took office in September following the death of his half-brother, Shaikh Sabah al Ahmad Al Sabah, at the age of 91.

The country has the Gulf's oldest elected parliament, but under the constitution the emir has extensive powers and can dissolve the legislature at the recommendation of the government. Thirty-one new faces will enter the new parliament,

results showed.

The Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) won three seats, while candidates from the minority population won six.

"There is a big change in the composition of the new National Assembly," Kuwait analyst Ayed al Manaa said.

"This is an indication of the voters' anger over the performance of the previous parliament and

of their desire for change in economic, health, education" and services, he said.

Kuwait's economy and state budgets have been slammed by the double whammy of the pandemic and the depressed price of oil, with the International Monetary Fund expecting the economy to shrink by about eight per cent this year.

Officials in the country, where foreigners make up 70 per cent of the 4.8 million population, have already said they want to slash that proportion to 30 per cent of the total population.

Lulwa Saleh al Mulla, head of the Kuwaiti Women's Cultural and Social Society, said she was hopeful about the new younger members in parliament, but disappointed by the lack of women's representation.

"Still, the people participated positively in the polls for change and toppled some of the corrupt elements that distorted the image of democracy and abused their positions in the assembly," she said. — AFP

In Iraq, virus revives traumas of IS survivors

BAJET KANDALA CAMP, Iraq: For half a decade, Zedan suffered recurring nightmares about militants overrunning his hometown in northern Iraq. The 21-year-old Yazidi was just starting to recover when COVID-19 revived his trauma.

Zedan had lost several relatives when the IS group stormed into Sinjar, the rugged heartland of the Yazidi religious minority in Iraq's northwest.

The militants killed Yazidi men, took the boys as child soldiers and forced the women into sexual slavery.

Zedan and the surviving members of his family fled, finding refuge in the Bajet Kandala camp near the Syrian border where they still live today.

"We used to be farmers living a good life. Then IS came," he said, wringing his hands.

In a pre-fabricated building hosting the camp's mental health clinic, Zedan shared his traumas with Bayda Othman, a psychologist for international NGO Premiere Urgence.

Zedan refers to the violence of



A view of the Bajet Kandala camp for displaced Yazidis near Dohuk, 430 km northwest of the Iraqi capital, by the border with Syria. — AFP

2014 vaguely as "the events".

The United Nations says they may constitute something much more serious: genocide.

"I started having nightmares every night. I would see men in black coming to kill us," Zedan said, telling Othman that he had

attempted suicide several times.

He has been seeing her for years, learning how to cope with his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through breathing exercises that she taught him.

Earlier this year, his nightly panic attacks stopped. Finally, he

could sleep again. But only for a few months. In March, Iraq declared a nationwide lockdown to try to contain the spread of COVID-19. Zedan broke down.

"I fear that my family could catch the virus or give it to me," he said. "It obsesses me."

'THE NIGHTMARES RETURNED'

As lockdown dragged on, Zedan's brother lost his job at a stationery shop on the edge of the camp.

"There's no more money coming into the family now. Just thinking about it gives me a panic attack," he said.

"The nightmares returned, and so did my desire to die."

Out of Iraq's 40 million citizens, one in four is mentally vulnerable, the World Health Organisation says. But the country is in dire shortage of mental health specialists, with only three per one million people.

Speaking about trauma or psychological problems is widely considered taboo, and patients who spoke to this agency agreed to do so on the condition that only their first names would be used.

In camps across Iraq, which still host some 200,000 people displaced by violence, the pandemic has pushed many people with psychological problems into remission, Othman said. — AFP

Mob seizes UN peacekeeper equipment in south Lebanon

BEIRUT: A mob seized equipment from a UNIFIL convoy in south Lebanon after blocking its route, the UN peacekeeping force said on Saturday of its latest run-in with the local population.

The incident, which required the intervention of the Lebanese army, took place on Friday as the UNIFIL convoy passed through the village of Kaouthariyet al Saiyad on the way back to base, according to the statement.

"A large group of civilians... dispossessed the UNIFIL patrol of items and equipment," the statement said, without specifying what was taken. Lebanon and Israel are still technically at war, and the United Nations force patrols the border between the two. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BETHLEHEM

Bethlehem lights up Christmas tree

Bethlehem lit up its Christmas tree on Saturday evening but without the usual crowds, as novel coronavirus restrictions put a damper on the start of Christmas festivities in the holy city. Palestinian authorities last week announced measures, including a night-time curfew, across the Israeli-occupied West Bank for 14 days to fight a "worrying spread" of the virus.

Locals and pilgrims traditionally gather each year for the lighting of the tree in Manger



Square, near the Church of the Nativity, built on the site where Christians believe Jesus was born. But this year, only a small crowd of journalists was present due to coronavirus restrictions, an AFP photographer said. — AFP

ALGIERS

Italy, Algeria agree to expand cooperation

Algeria and Italy agreed to diversify cooperation beyond the energy sector, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio (pictured) said on Saturday during a visit to the North African country. Algiers and Rome have developed a "solid partnership" in the economic and commercial sectors, Di Maio said, according to the official Algerian news agency APS.

He hoped that Italy could "diversify its areas of cooperation



with Algeria, beyond the hydrocarbons sector", citing fields including infrastructure and technological innovation. The two countries also signed a memorandum of understanding to develop bilateral cooperation. — AFP

TEL AVIV

Israeli junior high pupils return to schools

Hundreds of thousands of junior high school pupils returned to schools for the first time in more than two months on Sunday, as Israel continued easing its second lockdown, despite newly climbing daily coronavirus cases.

Seventh to tenth graders became the last students to stay at home after Israel on September 18 became the first Western country to impose a second nationwide lockdown.

After being criticised for



easing the first March-May lockdown too quickly, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tried to avoid making the same mistake by lifting the second lockdown in stages, starting the process on October 18. — dpa



In brief

■ MELBOURNE

**BUSHFIRE THREATENS TOWNSHIP ON FRASER ISLAND**

Residents of a coastal township on Australia's World Heritage-listed Fraser Island were told to evacuate on Sunday as a bushfire approached. Since it was sparked by an illegal campfire seven weeks ago, the blaze has blackened half the island off Australia's north eastern coast, which is part of the Great Barrier Reef and famed for a tropical rainforest on sand dunes, and inland lakes.

"Leaving immediately is the safest option, as it will soon be too dangerous to drive," Queensland state's Fire and Emergency Services said on social media. — **Reuters**

■ KABUL

**PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN TO BE EDUCATED AT MOSQUES**

All Afghan primary school pupils in the first three years are to be educated at mosques to give students a "powerful Islamic identity," in an unprecedented move that has drawn widespread public criticism. The Ministry of Education plan foresees that students from grade one to three would attend their nearest mosque, according to a ministry statement published late on Saturday.

After completing their third year at a mosque, the students would continue their education at normal non-religious schools, the statement said. The plan is aimed at giving Islam a more central role in education, the statement said. — **dpa**

■ JAKARTA

**MINISTER ARRESTED OVER PANDEMIC AID CORRUPTION**

Indonesia's social affairs minister was arrested on Sunday for allegedly taking \$1.2 million in bribes linked to food aid for those hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Juliari Batubara was named as a suspect after Indonesian anti-corruption agents seized suitcases, backpacks and envelopes stuffed with cash equivalent to \$1.2 million in a sting operation on Saturday. He turned himself in on Sunday at the anti-corruption agency's headquarters, becoming the second minister in President Joko Widodo's government to be arrested over alleged graft in recent weeks.

Indonesia's economy has been hit hard by the pandemic. — **AFP**

Japan retrieves space probe that may hold clues to origin of planets

Capsule from Hayabusa2 lit up Australian sky ★ First time extensive asteroid samples brought to Earth

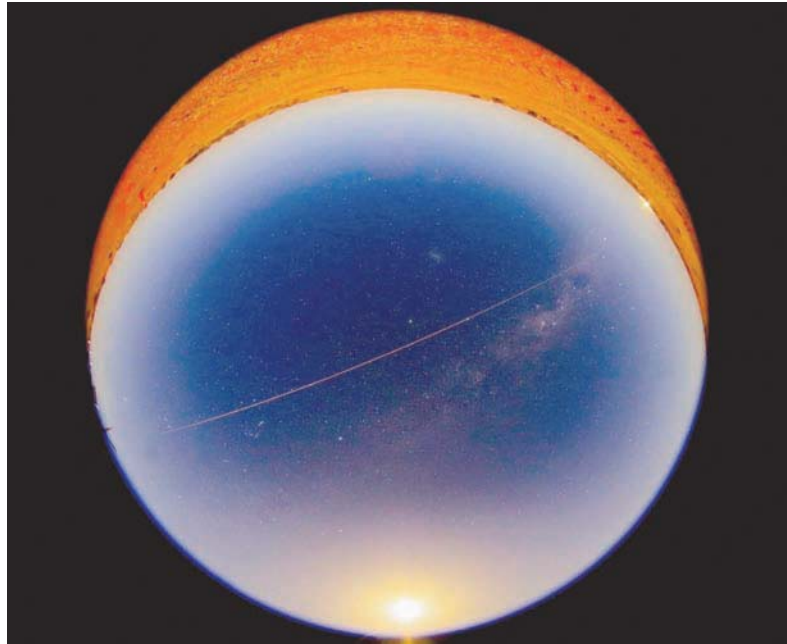
TOKYO/MELBOURNE: Japan has retrieved a space probe from Australia's remote outback after a six-year mission that may help reveal more about the origins of the planets, the Asian nation's space agency said on Sunday.

A capsule from the unmanned Hayabusa2, carrying the first extensive samples of dust from an asteroid, was flown by helicopter from the outback to a domestic research facility of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

The craft's mission seeks to answer some fundamental questions about the origins of the solar system and where molecules like water came from. "This is great," Yuichi Tsuda, a project manager for the agency, told Japanese broadcaster NHK.

"It was a beautiful re-entry. We are all very moved by this." The agency will hold a briefing later on Sunday. The spacecraft, launched from Japan's Tanegashima space centre in 2014, took four years to reach the asteroid Ryugu before gathering a sample and heading back to Earth in November 2019.

Spectators gathered at a theatre to view the return clapped and waved banners in NHK footage, with one woman in tears. They



In this handout image from Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), a fireball from Hayabusa2's capsule carrying the first extensive samples of an asteroid is seen as it re-entered the Earth's atmosphere while it is observed at Coober Pedy, Australia, on Sunday. (Right) A member of JAXA collects the capsule after it landed in the Woomera restricted area. — **Reuters**

wore masks and maintained a distance from each other in precautions against the coronavirus.

Asteroids are believed to have formed at the dawn of the solar system, and scientists say the sample may contain organic matter that could have contributed to life on Earth. "What we are really doing here is trying to sample this pristine rock that has not been irradiated by the sun," astrophysicist Lisa Harvey-Smith told the

Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Gases trapped in the rock samples could reveal more about conditions that prevailed about 4.6 billion years ago, she added.

Japan's space probe, named for the peregrine falcon, orbited above the asteroid for a few months to map its surface before landing. Then it used small explosives to blast a crater and collected the resulting debris. The capsule



lit up as it reentered the earth's atmosphere early on Sunday and landed in the Woomera restricted area, about 460 km (285 miles) north of Adelaide, to be retrieved by scientists and brought to a research station, JAXA said.

"The helicopter carrying the capsule arrived at local headquarters and the capsule was brought inside the building," the space agency said on Twitter.

— **Reuters**

Pakistani hospitals overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients

ISLAMABAD: Hospitals in Pakistan are struggling to cope with overwhelming numbers of coronavirus infections during a second wave of the outbreak in the country. "We are in a critical situation which is worsening everyday with new infections," Sajjad Qaisar, secretary general of the Pakistan Medical Association, said.

Qaisar said that hospitals have been filled up by seriously ill COVID-19 patients. "A new patient gets a bed if he is lucky or a patient is discharged," he said. There is a dearth of ventilators and sometimes a shortage of oxygen cylinders. At least seven patients died last night in a public hospital in the north-western city of Peshawar when doctors ran out of oxygen to treat them.

The provincial government

had launched an inquiry into the incident, local health minister Taimur Jhagra said. New infections are steadily increasing in Pakistan and the country reported more than 3,000 daily new cases since December 2. The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases rose to 416,499. Related deaths reached 8,361.

At least 3,308 new cases and 58 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, national Health Ministry data showed. But Qaisar said there were many who were staying at home and had not been tested for COVID-19.

Last month, Pakistan closed educational institutions and put virus hotspots under lockdown. However, markets, businesses, public transport are operating and opposition parties are holding massive rallies. — **dpa**

■ SINDHI CULTURAL DAY



People wearing traditional dresses dance to celebrate the Sindhi Cultural Day in Islamabad on Sunday. The day observed to highlight the culture of the province as well as the traditional Sindhi cap and other woven textiles such as ajrak. Sindh is one of the four provinces in Pakistan and is renowned for its various handicrafts and arts. — **AFP**

Curbs in Seoul tightened as virus cases hit 9-month high



A man wearing a face mask walks along a street beneath Christmas decorations in central Seoul. — **AFP**

Park Neung-hoo told a briefing, saying localised clusters have the potential to become a national outbreak.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 631 new cases as of midnight on Saturday — the largest daily tally since a peak in February and early March — bringing the country's total to 37,546, with 545 deaths.

Nearly a month of triple-digit daily infections has brought the number of active cases in South Korea to a record 7,873, the KDCA said, raising concerns over

the dwindling number of hospital beds. "Right now it is exceeding the level that we can control in our hospital system," Park said.

New beds are being added and for now there are enough to treat patients, but if the trend continues, the country could face a shortage of beds, he said. Many of the recent cases have been centred in Seoul, which on Saturday launched unprecedented curfews, shuttering most establishments at 9 pm (12:00 GMT) for two weeks and cutting back public transportation by 30 per cent in the evenings. — **Reuters**

Record US virus cases as reports say British queen to get vaccine soon

WASHINGTON: The United States notched a record number of coronavirus cases in 24 hours for the third day running, as it was reported that Britain's Queen Elizabeth II will get a vaccine within weeks.

A tally by Johns Hopkins University showed the world's worst-hit country — which has seen a dramatic virus resurgence in recent weeks — reached nearly 230,000 new infections and 2,527 COVID-related deaths on Saturday alone.

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

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

The coronavirus has now killed more than 1.5 million people and infected 66 million around the world since emerging in China last year, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

VACCINE FOR QUEEN

In Britain, it was reported that the 94-year-old monarch will receive the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine within weeks after UK regulators granted emergency approval. The rollout of the vaccine will begin next week.

The queen and her 99-year-old husband Prince Philip are in line to get the jab early due to their age and will not receive preferential treatment, the *Mail on Sunday* reported.

The newspaper said Britain's most senior royals would reveal they have been given the inoculation "to encourage more people to take up the vital jab", amid fears so-called anti-vaxxers could dent enthusiasm for it. British health officials are set to use criteria based on age and vulnerability to decide who gets the vaccine first. — **AFP**

Germany plans tougher local curbs as virus marches on

BERLIN: Germany's Bavaria region announced tougher coronavirus rules including local curfews and partial school closures on Sunday as case numbers remained high across the country despite five weeks of national restrictions.

From Wednesday, Bavarians will be asked to stay home unless they have a valid reason such as grocery shopping or visiting a doctor, state premier Markus Soeder told a press conference.

"The situation is unfortunately serious... We must do more, we must act," Soeder said, after insisting that a national partial shutdown introduced in early November was not enough.

Under a so-called "lockdown light", cultural and sporting facilities as well as restaurants and bars have been shut, with public gatherings limited but schools and shops remaining open.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and the leaders of Germany's 16 states agreed this week to extend the partial shutdown until January 10.

But under Germany's federal system, each state ultimately has the right to decide whether to impose the rules.

Soeder said a curfew will now apply in Bavaria after 9:00 pm (2000



BOMB THREAT: People leave their home area in the Gallus district in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, during an evacuation on early morning of Sunday. A 500 kilogram WWII bomb was found and is to be defused. Some 12,800 residents would be affected by the evacuation in a radius of 700 metres. — **AFP**

GMT) in so-called hotspots with more than 200 new virus cases per 100,000 inhabitants per week.

ONLINE LESSONS

Schools will be asked to switch some lessons online for older age groups, while those in hotspots will need to move all teaching online for older students. The number of new infections in Germany has plateau-

ed in recent weeks, with October's exponential growth brought to a halt.

But the number of infections remains high, with total case numbers passing the one-million mark last week and new cases regularly topping 20,000 a day.

The number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care nationwide has soared from just over 360 in

early October to more than 4,000 currently.

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) disease control centre reported 17,767 new COVID-19 infections within 24 hours on Sunday — a significant increase on last Sunday's 14,611 new cases. Numbers are usually lower on Sundays because of a lag in reporting new cases over the weekend. — **AFP**

Maduro eyes victory as Venezuela polls open despite opposition boycott

CARACAS: Polls opened early on Sunday in legislative elections set to tighten Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's grip on power and weaken his US-backed rival, Juan Guaido, who is leading a boycott of the polls he calls a fraud.

Victory will give Maduro's ruling Socialist Party control of an expanded 227-seat National Assembly — the only institution not in its hands.

The election, contested by about 14,000 candidates from more than 100 parties, comes with the country in a deep political and economic crisis — suffocated by runaway inflation, paralysed in endless queues for petrol, lacking water and gas supplies, and afflicted by sudden power cuts.

Since November 2019, inflation has reached 4,000 per cent.

"The time has come to vote



Poll workers assist an elderly voter at a polling station in a school in Caracas, on Sunday during Venezuela's legislative elections. — **AFP**

for peace, for the country, for the future!" Maduro said in a message to supporters on the Telegram messaging application, shortly before voting began at 6.30 am local time (1030 GMT).

The vote comes five years after the opposition won control of the

National Assembly by a landslide.

Maduro, a former bus driver who became president on the death of his mentor Hugo Chavez in 2013, was re-elected in 2018 in fraud-tainted polls, a victory which much of the international community branded illegitimate.

The United States, the European Union and many Latin American countries have long blamed Venezuela's crippling economic crisis on Maduro's repression and misrule.

Instead, they backed Guaido when the National Assembly speaker proclaimed himself interim president in January of last year.

Initial enthusiasm has waned, however, with critics seeing Guaido's plebiscite ploy as a desperate gamble.

Guaido, 37, called for a boycott on grounds that "free and fair" conditions for holding elections do not exist. He labelled Sunday's poll "a fraud." "Maduro's objective isn't even to gain legitimacy," he said in an interview this week, adding that the goal was instead to simply wipe out all semblance of democracy. — **AFP**

Ireland says UK threat a 'negotiating tactic'

DUBLIN/LONDON: Britain's plan to press ahead on Monday with legislation that would bring an earlier Brexit deal is a "negotiating tactic" which should not distract EU negotiators, Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said on Sunday.

Britain's upper house of parliament last month voted to remove the controversial clauses from the Internal Market Bill, but the government intends to reinstate them in the lower chamber on Monday, just as trade talks reach crunch time.

"The problem linked to those pieces of legislation may find a way of disappearing if we can get the negotiation agreed on the substance," Coveney told RTE radio. The British government has openly admitted that the clauses are a breach of international law. The European Union has repeatedly expressed its anger over the legislation, and the issue has contributed to acrimony in the trade talks.

The Internal Market Bill prompted fury in the EU when it was first introduced because it unpicked the terms of a divorce agreement both sides signed in January. London says the offending clauses are a "safety net" to prevent the EU from interpreting complex customs agreements between Ireland, an EU member, and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, in a way that would limit internal UK trade.

The timing of the bill's return to the House of Commons is acutely sensitive as Johnson is due to speak to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Monday evening, potentially to either agree on a deal or agree not to sign one. The *Financial Times* reported that there would be a way out for Johnson if he felt that a deal was close but the clauses were standing in the way. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

PARIS

95 arrests at French security law protests

Police arrested 95 people during protests across France against a planned security law, and 67 officers were injured during the demonstrations, Interior Minister Gerard Darmanin said on Sunday. In Paris, the site of the worst violence, 48 police officers or gendarmes were injured during Saturday's street clashes, the interior ministry said on Twitter. A firefighter was also injured in the capital after being hit by a projectile, a police source said. Paris police



held 25 people, including two minors, said the prosecutors' office. It was the second weekend of violence in the capital during protests against a security bill currently going through French parliament. — **AFP**

ICA

Peru farmworkers block highway again

Striking Peruvian workers temporarily erected new blockades on the Pan-American Highway on Saturday, a day after they had ended a five-day blockade following the shelving of a controversial agricultural law. "We want to solve the salary issue," said a worker manning a blockade near the city of Ica, 275 kilometres south of the capital Lima. The workers, demanding that agro-exporting companies raise their salaries from \$11 to \$18 a day, used rocks, burning



tires and an overturned minivan to block the highway. The blockade near Ica began shortly before noon. Within minutes, buses carrying some 200 police arrived and three hours later the protesters dispersed. — **AFP**

MINSK

Belarus opposition rallies in latest protest

Opposition protesters in Belarus rallied on Sunday in the latest of nearly four months of demonstrations against the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko.

Belarus has been gripped by massive protests since August after Lukashenko, 66, won a sixth term as president of the former Soviet republic. The opposition believes the election was rigged and political novice Svetlana Tikhanovskaya — who ran against Lukashenko in the place of her jailed husband — was the



true winner of the vote.

Authorities have imposed a heavy crackdown in recent weeks, detaining hundreds of protesters and preventing gatherings in the centre of the capital Minsk. — **AFP**

Never dislike others’ abilities...

People are created with unlikely different characteristics, which they have nothing to do with it. Some are born with certain disabilities and challenges, while others are blessed with good merits and talents.

Although some are deprived of their senses, organs or mind, but alternatively, they are bestowed other blessings in return as everyone has some special personal characteristics. There is always a reason behind the way things have been created in the universe; some reasons remain hidden for our own good.

It is not anyone’s fault to be born with a disability; it is their fate to be how they are! However, it is not something bad for a disability is also a blessing where a person is being challenged to have in return the mercy and grace of the Almighty Allah.

Likewise, the compensation for having such a difficulty is undoubtedly big as many disabled people are very talented. As Helen Keller said: “Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties.”

To you personally, what is first comes to your mind when you see or meet a person with a disability?! Do you get that feeling of sympathy? Why do some people consider disabled as



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PEOPLE ARE
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abnormal people?! Perhaps, when they hear the word “disability”, immediately they think of people who cannot walk, talk, see or do anything that people take for granted. Just because one lacks the use of eyes does not mean s/he lacks vision.

It is so strange and inhumane how some people think about disabled people! Yes, they are different in a way that their ability to do things is limited unlike healthy people. However, they are human like us too; sharing similar feelings, attitudes and the needs that everyone else has. In contrast, almost everyone is likely to experience a form of disability, temporarily or permanently at some point in life.

Despite there is over one billion people worldwide living with a disability, history has proved that many of the disabled are more talented and mentally superior than normal and healthy people. We shall never undervalue any person, regardless how s/he looks; being disabled does not mean being disqualified. There are humble people, but inside them comes the real value; unique talents, discoveries or inventions. The world is blessed with many renowned disabled inventors, scientists, actors and others more.

Among those who served the world’s education movement is the

American lecturer and creative author Helen Keller. Though both blind and deaf, she travelled over the world fighting for improvement in education and life of the physically disabled. She also wrote around dozen books and several articles during her life. She never thought of her disability as an obstacle, but as a challenge to bring the best out of her.

The world famous American Hollywood actor Tom cruise was suffering from dyslexia, which is a disability in reading. He was diagnosed of having this disability since the age of 7, and he was trying to hide it from his peers. However, at the age of 19, when he embraced the love of acting, he worked hard on his disability and refused to let his dyslexia stand in the way of his acting career.

Another example is Thomas Edison, the greatest inventor, who was had a learning disability as he couldn’t read till he was 12 years old.

Dear disabled people; with your disability, do not let people dislike your ability. Having a physical or mental disability is a part of you, but not a definition of who you are! The only disability in life is a bad attitude. Thus, turn your disability into an ability. You are to be seen not as a disabled, but as a person who has and will continue to bloom.

A FIXED DEAL

Trump shows no surrender in first rally

ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS

President Donald Trump made clear on Saturday he had no intention of relinquishing his baseless claims that last month’s election was stolen from him, telling a raucous crowd at his first post-poll rally he would somehow still win.

In a speech remarkable for its twisting of reality more than a month after the November 3 election, the outgoing president launched into another litany of allegations that the polls won handily by Democrat Joe Biden were rigged.

The crowd in Valdosta, Georgia for what was nominally a rally in support of two Republican Senate candidates facing a hugely consequential runoff election roared in support, at one point chanting “fight for Trump.”

Even with COVID-19 cases surging nationwide, there were few masks in the crowd and many ignored social-distancing rules. In a nearly two-hour speech Trump, 74, declared he would not concede, at times sticking to his script but regularly going off-the-cuff for his more incendiary claims.

“We’re winning this election,” Trump told the rally, which was similar to his many gatherings prior to the election, down to the soaring country

“
The swing states
that we’re all
fighting over now, I
won them all
by a lot

DONALD TRUMP
US President

song “God Bless the USA” played as he took the stage with First Lady Melania Trump. “It’s rigged. It’s a fixed deal.” It was yet another example of Trump breaking democratic norms, engaging in conspiracy-

mongering and presenting falsehoods in ways unprecedented in US history.

His stance has raised the question of how he will react when Biden’s January 20 swearing-in date arrives.

“The swing states that we’re all fighting over now, I won them all by a lot,” Trump said, falsely. “And I have to say, if I lost, I’d be a very gracious loser. If I lost, I would say, I lost, and I’d go to Florida and I’d take it easy and I’d go around and I’d say I did a good job. But you can’t ever accept when they steal and rig and rob.”

Trump has barely left the White House since Biden was projected winner of the election on November 7, though he has made a number of trips to his nearby golf course. There had been concerns from some Republicans over whether Trump’s continuing claims of fraud would drive down voter turnout among Republicans in the upcoming election, making his appearance in Georgia somewhat of a gamble. The runoff election will decide which party controls the US Senate, and Trump in his speech continued his fear-mongering about rival Democrats.

“The voters of Georgia will determine which party runs every committee, writes every piece of legislation, controls every single taxpayer dollar,” he said. “Very simply, you will decide whether your children will grow up in a socialist country or whether they will grow up in a free country.”

If Democratic challengers Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff defeat Republican senators Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue, the Senate will be evenly divided at 50-50, meaning Democratic Vice-President Kamala Harris would cast any deciding votes, as the Constitution dictates.

The race has drawn enormous attention. One measure of the intense interest: With donations pouring in from across the country, the candidates have already spent more than \$315 million, the AdImpact website reported, an astounding figure for senatorial races. — AFP

FORTUNE OR FORESIGHT?

AstraZeneca and Oxford’s stories clash on COVID-19 vaccine

LUDWIG BURGER AND
ABHIRUP ROY

AstraZeneca and Oxford University have given conflicting accounts of how they came upon the most effective dosing pattern for their COVID-19 vaccine, a rare instance of public dissension between major institutions collaborating on a pivotal project.

The discrepancy, reported for the first time by Reuters, centres on the regimen administered to a smaller group of volunteers in the late-stage trials, of half a dose followed by a full dose. This diverged from the original plan of two full doses, given to the majority of participants. The half-dose pattern was found to be 90 per cent effective, versus the 62 per cent success rate of the two-full-dose main study, based on interim data.

AstraZeneca’s research chief said 10 days ago, when interim trial data was released, the half-dose was given inadvertently as a first shot to some trial participants, and emerged as a stroke of fortune - “serendipity” - that scientists expertly harnessed. This narrative was refuted by a leading Oxford University scientist, however, who said last Monday that the half-dose shot was given deliberately after thorough consultations.

Uncertainty over how the dosing regimen came about raises questions about the robustness of the data, according to some experts who said it risked slowing down the process of gaining regulatory approval for the shot and denting public confidence.



An NHS pharmacy technician holds a vial as she simulates the preparation of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine, at the Royal Free Hospital in London on Friday. – AFP

THE TWO HAVE
GIVEN CONFLICT-
ING ACCOUNTS OF
HOW THEY CAME
UPON THE MOST
EFFECTIVE DOSING
PATTERN

“These differing accounts are worrying,” Eleanor Riley, a professor of immunology and infectious disease at the University of Edinburgh, said.

“Trust is at a premium when it comes to vaccines and we must not do anything that might in any way undermine it”

There is also the potential impact on AstraZeneca, whose shares have underperformed rival vaccine developers that have also announced

successful results, partly due to concerns from scientists about the relatively small sample size for the half-dose sub-group that led to the 90 per cent efficacy finding.

AstraZeneca declined to comment about the conflicting accounts. An Oxford University spokesman said that a media briefing would be held once the detailed interim trial results are peer-reviewed and published in a scientific journal. — Reuters

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BARCA LOSE AGAIN AS ZIDANE GETS BREATHING SPACE

MADRID: Lionel Messi's Barcelona suffered a fourth defeat of the campaign with a 2-1 loss at Cadiz, while Real Madrid eased the pressure on Zinedine Zidane with their first league win since October following a 1-0 victory at Sevilla.

Barca remain a distant seventh, 12 points off leaders Atletico Madrid after struggling against promoted Cadiz.

Barca coach Ronald Koeman made three changes from the midweek win at Ferencváros with goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, at fault for both goals at the Estadio Ramon de Carranza, coming in for Neto.

Ter Stegen's first costly error in Andalusia came after eight minutes as Alvaro Gimenez claimed his second goal in as many games.

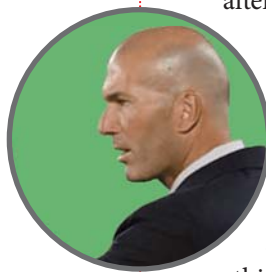
The Barca defence failed to clear a corner which fell to Ter Stegen, whose weak parry onto his own line was tapped in by Gimenez.

Koeman's men were all-square after 56 minutes as Jordi Alba's low cross was deflected into his own goal by defender Pedro Alcala.

But Ter Stegen's worst howler of proceedings came eight minutes later.

Clement Lenglet made a hash of Alba's throw in before Ter Stegen failed to clear under pressure from Negredo, the former Manchester City striker claiming his third goal league goal of the campaign.

'DIFFICULT TIME'
At the Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan, under-pressure Zidane said



Madrid's victory was significant after a testing run of games.

Sevilla goalkeeper Bono guided Vinicius Junior's effort into his own net in the second half, allowing Zidane's side to take the three points and move up to third in the table.

Following two defeats in the past three games, including a 2-0 defeat to Shakhtar Donetsk in midweek that leaves Real's Champions League qualification hopes in the balance, Spanish press reports have linked former Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino and ex-Madrid forward Raul to Zidane's job.

Zidane said his side could be satisfied with their narrow win after a "difficult" time.

"These are three very important points for us. It's a well-deserved win, against a very good opponent, who can put you in trouble at any time. We got through this," he said.

"It has been a bit difficult lately, today we have to enjoy it, be happy, but nothing more."

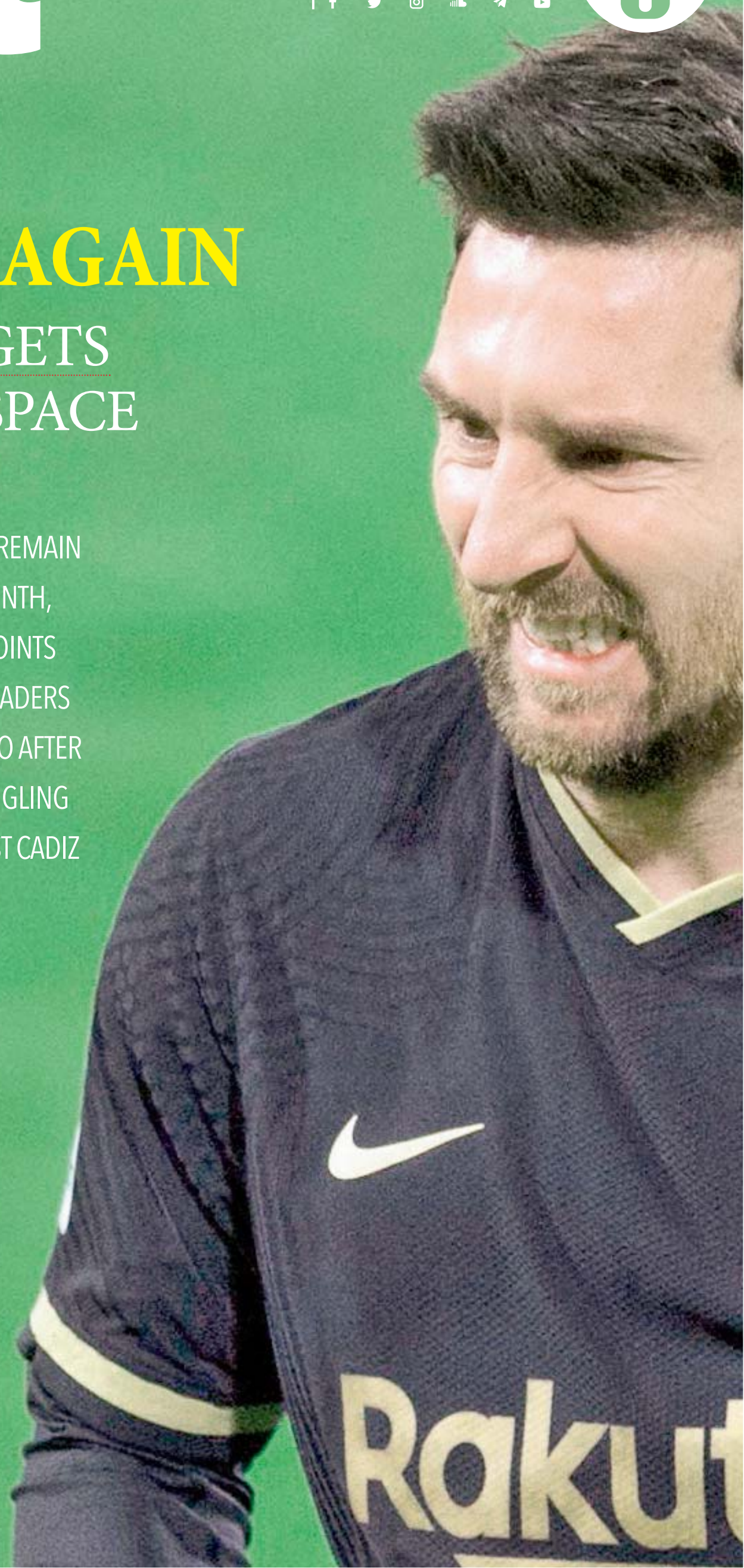
Atletico, now unbeaten in 26 games in La Liga, moved to the top of the table with a 2-0 win over Real Valladolid.

France international Thomas Lemar and Spain midfielder Marcos Llorente scored for Diego Simeone's men, who are among five clubs to remain without a domestic defeat in Europe's main five leagues.

Real Sociedad, who have lost just once in the league this term but now trail Atletico by two points, travel to Deportivo Alaves on Sunday.

— AFP

BARCA REMAIN
SEVENTH,
12 POINTS
OFF LEADERS
ATLETICO AFTER
STRUGGLING
AGAINST CADIZ



Man Utd storm back in fans return, Chelsea go top of EPL

LONDON: Manchester United roared back to beat West Ham 3-1 on Saturday, while Chelsea moved top of the Premier League by the same scoreline over Leeds as fans returned to the English top-flight for the first time in nine months.

United fell behind at the London Stadium, but for the fifth consecutive away league game came back to win as a three-goal blitz from Paul Pogba, Mason Greenwood and Marcus Rashford turned the tables in a 13-minute spell after half-time.

United, who have won nine successive league games on the road, are now fourth in the table, one point ahead of Manchester City, who earlier cruised past Fulham 2-0.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer started with Bruno Fernandes and Rashford on the bench in an attempt to keep two of his star

men fresh for Tuesday's crucial Champions League trip to RB Leipzig.

But they were needed to inspire a second-half turnaround after Tomas Soucek's goal seven minutes before half-time gave West Ham a deserved lead at the break. Cheered on by 2,000 fans in their cavernous 60,000-seat stadium, the Hammers should have been further ahead but squandered their chances.

Pogba started the fightback in the 65th minute with a superb strike from distance and minutes later United were ahead, Greenwood turning and firing home in the area.

Rashford struck a post as United looked to extend their lead, and it was the England striker who made it 3-1 12 minutes from time.

"When you are 1-0, 2-0 down the boys still believe and that



Manchester United's Mason Greenwood scores their second goal. — Reuters

character is important," said Solskjaer. "At the end of the season you don't care about the performance."

CHELSEA GO TOP
Chelsea also came from a goal

down to win 3-1 as fans made a return to Stamford Bridge for the first time since March.

"It was nice to feel their support," said Chelsea boss Frank Lampard. "2,000 doesn't sound

like a lot, but the noise they can generate was incredible. It's a tentative step but pleased to have them back."

Patrick Bamford gave Leeds a shock early lead as he took advantage of hesitation in the Chelsea defence to round Edouard Mendy and slot home his eighth goal of the season.

However, Lampard's men are now unbeaten in 16 matches in all competitions and showed why they are serious title contenders by storming back to win comfortably.

Timo Werner denied Giroud a quick response by clearing his strike partner's goalbound header onto the crossbar.

However, Giroud, who earned a rare Premier League start after scoring four against Sevilla in the Champions League on Wednesday, levelled on 27 minutes from Reece James's low cross.

Illan Meslier in the Leeds goal ensured Werner continued to have a frustrating night in front of goal, but Chelsea finally made their chances count when Kurt Zouma headed home Mason Mount's corner.

And in stoppage time, Werner turned provider for Christian Pulisic to secure all three points.

CITY CRUISE
City, who had won just four of their opening nine matches, are showing ominous signs they are returning to their best form after building on their 5-0 mauling of Burnley last week.

They made a superb start at the Etihad, with Raheem Sterling putting them ahead inside five minutes to end his recent goal drought after a delightfully weighted Kevin De Bruyne through-ball. — AFP



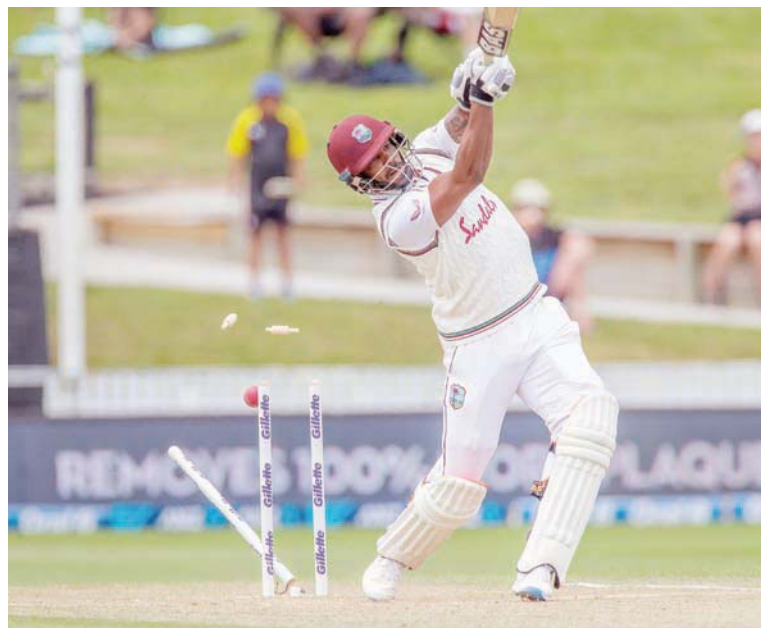
COVID-19 hits England tour of South Africa

Two members of England cricket's touring party in South Africa have tested positive for COVID-19 and the re-scheduled first one-day international was cancelled on Sunday. — **Reuters**



Missing training 'hurting' Pakistan's preparations in NZ

Not being allowed to train in their managed isolation in Christchurch has affected Pakistan's preparation for the series against New Zealand, head coach Misbah-ul-Haq said on Sunday. — **Reuters**



West Indies' Shannon Gabriel is clean bowled by New Zealand's Neil Wagner on the fourth day of the first Test at Seddon Park in Hamilton. — **AFP**

NZ wrap up record win over Windies

WELLINGTON: New Zealand wrapped up a record innings and 134-run victory over West Indies before lunch on the fourth day of the first Test in Hamilton on Sunday after finally breaking a rearguard action from Jermaine Blackwood and Alzarri Joseph.

The victory margin was the largest by New Zealand over West Indies, surpassing the innings and 105-run win at Wellington's Basin Reserve in 1999, and gave the hosts a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. New Zealand had been cruising to victory inside three days, and were close to the rare feat of dismissing a side twice in one day, before Blackwood and Joseph came together at 89-6 and shared a 155-run partnership.

Blackwood completed his second Test century on Sunday but fell for 104 shortly after Joseph was caught in the deep for 86 and Neil Wagner finished off the innings at 247 when he bowled

Shannon Gabriel for a duck.

"We were fortunate to get off to a good start and to be able hold that position," New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said.

"Coming into today we knew the West Indies batted deep and they showed that. It was great the guys stuck with it."

The hosts had scored 519 for seven declared on the back of man-of-the-match Williamson's career-best 251 and dismissed the tourists for 138 in their first innings midway through the third day. Williamson had little hesitation imposing the follow-on and his bowlers again ripped through the West Indies batting, leaving them teetering before Blackwood and Joseph counter attacked in the final session.

Blackwood resumed on 80 on Sunday and survived a dropped catch by Ross Taylor on 89 before he brought up his second Test century with a single off Kyle Jamieson. — **Reuters**

RS Venture Connect boats for para-sailors unveiled

MUSCAT: In partnership with bp Oman, Oman Paralympic Committee and Oman Sail have marked today the International Day of Persons with Disabilities by officially unveiling the RS Venture Connect boats, specifically-designed for the region's first para-sailing initiative programme, SailFree. The event was held under the patronage of Rashad bin Ahmed bin Mohammed al Hinai, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, in front of Oman Sail's Headquarters at Al Mouj Muscat Marina.

As part of the celebration event, Oman Olympic Committee launched a dedicated website to be the destination for its members to obtain latest information about the events, programmes and services offered by the Committee.

On the occasion, Dr Khamis al Jabri, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Sail, said: "SailFree aims to make sailing accessible to all and will introduce people with physical impairment to the sport of sailing. The programme, targeting both men and women aged between 16 and 30 years to train at Oman Sail's sailing schools in Al Mouj Muscat and Sur under guidance from the Oman Paralympic Committee. Participants will learn sailing, leadership, teamwork and communication skills using the highly-adaptable RS Venture Connect SCS sailing dinghy which can be quickly configured to suit sailors with a wide range of physical impairments and has been adopted by World Sailing for the Paralympic double-handed class".

Eng. Yousuf al Ojaili, President of bp Oman, added that: "We are



The 30 candidates will be selected to try sailing, and 12 from this stage will be chosen to join Oman's national para-sailing team, to represent Oman in international regattas including the 2022 Para Sailing World Championships

proud to support and sponsor this programme, which is the first of its kind in our region and we hope that to re-enter this sport in the Paralympic Games through this programme and to establish a national team to represent the nation at the 2022 Para Sailing World Championships. We wish the participants all the success and we are proud of their efforts."

Dr Mansoor al Tauqi, President of the Oman Paralympic Committee, commented: "This programme has great potential to change the

lifestyles of hundreds of people with disabilities in the Sultanate. It provides a link for them to connect with their peers that practice this sport as well as positions Oman as a leader in para-sailing and Oman Sail as the model for others to follow, by creating a representative national Omani team. In addition, the committee's official website was launched to develop a communication link between the community, partners and shareholders to highlight the achievements of the Omani champions

with disabilities."

The first group of 31 SailFree participants were selected in March 2020 for a three-day leadership and sailing workshop at Musannah Sports City which included many sailing training workshops and activities to develop their various skills associated such as leadership and critical thinking skills. 30 participants will be selected from the total of 105 at the end of the first phase of SailFree to progress onto the second and the third phase of the programme.

The 30 candidates will be selected to try sailing, and 12 from this stage will be chosen to join Oman's national para-sailing team, to represent Oman in international regattas including the 2022 Para Sailing World Championships.

Bank Muscat, Orient Travels, Ideal and Khalsa post victories

MUSCAT: Asghar Khan led an amazing chase with an unbeaten 77 off 57, steering Bank Muscat to an impressive 7-wicket victory against OCT Ruwi in a 30-over B Division clash at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Openers Wasim Ismail al Balushi (62 off 35) and Mohammed Ali Akbar (46 off 51) got OCT Seeb to a flying start, putting together a 99-run partnership in just 9 overs.

However, Wasim's departure started the slide that saw the whole side being dismissed for 200 in the last over.

Mohsin Nazir and Ajay Hirlekar were Bank Muscat's most successful bowlers, taking three wickets each.

Bank Muscat's response was equally good after a 58-run opening partnership between Rehan Khan (43) and Manan Tufail (39). Man of the match Asghar Khan continued the offensive, putting on 60 runs for the third wicket with Rehan and an unbroken 86-run partnership with Rameshbabu Paulsamy who remained not out at 32 as Bank Muscat complet-

ed the victory in 26 overs, scoring 204 for 3. Mohammed Ali Akbar claimed 2 for 33.

Brief Scores (B Division): Oct Ruwi 200 all out in 29.5 overs (Wasim Ismail 62 - 11x4, 1x6, Mohammad Ali Akbar 46 - 4x4, 2x6, Mohsin Nazir 3-10, Ajay Hirlekar 3-40, Ashish Gupta 2-37, Muhammed Jamil 2-35) lost to Bank Muscat 204 for 3 in 26 overs (Asghar Khan 77 - 11x4, Rehan Khan 43 - 4x4, Manan Tufail 39 - 4x4, 2x6. Mohammad Ali Akbar 2-33) by 7 wickets.

ARIF'S TON LIFTS ORIENT'S TRAVELS

In another B Division encounter, former Assarain star Arif Hussain slammed a scintillating 148 off 96, helping Orient Travels/Gitacs thrash Zubair CT by 107 runs at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

Arif's big knock, containing 21 fours and a six, was instrumental in Orient posting a big 233 for 9 in 30 overs.

Mohan Parthiban was the pick of Zubair bowlers, taking 4 for 34 while Mir Abdul Aziz bagged 3 for 39.

No one except opener Muhammed Amjad (41 off 31) was



Bank Muscat's Asghar Khan was declared the man of the match.

able to make a notable contribution and Zubair was bundled out for a lowly 126 in the 23rd over. Abid Ali led the way with a superb spell, taking 4 for 35 to plot Zubair's fall.

Brief scores (B Division): Orient Travels/Gitacs 233 for 9 in 30 overs (Arif Hussain 148 - 21x4, 1x6, Mohan Parthiban 4-34, Mir Abdul Aziz 3-39) beat Zubair 126 all out in 22.4 overs (Muhammed Amjad 41 - 6x4, Abid Ali 4-35, Rafique al Balushi 2-8, Ihsan Ullapool Khan 2-11) by 107 runs.

BHANDARI LEADS IDEAL TO EASY WIN

A solid 57 off 34 by Deepak Bhandari led Ideal International to a thumping 86-run win over Al Waad Trading in a C Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 2.

Faizan Dawnik was the other main contributor with 33 off 18 as Ideal scored 205 for 6 in 20 overs. Shine NV claimed 3 for 46.

Al Waad Trading failed to mount a decent fight, collect only 119 for 7 in its quota of overs. Muniyasamy top-scored with 34 while Nikhil Versani and Salman Khan took two wickets each.

Brief Scores (C Division): Ideal International 205 for 6 in 20 overs

(Deepak Bhandari 57 - 7x4, Faizan Dawnik 33 - 3x4, 1x6, Shine NV 3-46) beat Al Waad Trading & Contracting Enterprises 119 for 7 in 20 overs (Muniyasamy Muthumurugan 34 - 6x4, Nikhil Varsani 2-8, Salman Khan 2-21) by 86 runs.

MIRAJ POWERS KHALSA

In another C Division match, Miraj Hossain's unbeaten 62 off 42 helped Khala United trounce OCT Al Amerat by 54 runs at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

Miraj's fluent half century was the highlight of Khalsa's 175 for 6 which was kept in check by brilliant bowling by Moosa Mohammed who claimed 4 for 23.

Al Amerat side failed to rise to the occasion, falling meekly for a disappointing 121 in 20 overs.

Nasser Haider was the only batsman to offer resistance with a solid 45 off 38. Kadam Sushil, Majid Rafique and Abdul Lathif all took two wickets each.

Brief Scores (C Division): Khalsa United CT 175 for 6 in 20 overs (Miraj Hossain 62 - 9x4, Moosa Mohammed 4-23) beat Oct Al Amerat 121 all out in 20 overs (Nasser Haider 45 - 6x4, Kadam Sushil 2-15, Majid Rafique 2-16, Abdul Lathif 2-24) by 54 runs.



India's Hardik Pandya celebrates after the match. — Reuters

Pandya powers India home in thrilling finish

SYDNEY: Hardik Pandya smashed two sixes in three balls in the final over to power India to a thrilling six-wicket T20 series victory over Australia in Sydney on Sunday.

Chasing 25 runs in the final two overs in pursuit of Australia's target of 195, Pandya was India's hero with a series of powerful strikes — including the winning six off debutant Daniel Sams with two balls to spare. Pandya finished with 42 off 22 balls after Shikhar Dhawan clubbed 52 from 36 and skipper Virat Kohli 40 off 24 in India's 195 for four.

The victory gave India the T20 series with a game to play in Sydney on Tuesday after they lost the preceding 50-over ODI series 2-1.

"I have been in these situations many times and I learnt from my mistakes in the past," Pandya said.

"My game is always around the confidence which I carry; it has that fine line where I back myself"

Kohli was proud of his team's effort to take the series in such dynamic fashion.

"The fact that two of our established players are not playing, and to win like this, makes me very proud of this team," he said.

"Pandya now realises that this is the time to establish in the finishing role and play match-winning knocks for us.

"He plays with all his heart and he certainly got that competitive nature about him, and also has the skill to execute that at the highest level."

Shikhar Dhawan and KL Rahul gave India a flying start and had 56 runs on the board in five overs before Rahul was caught in the deep for 30 off 22.

Sweepson then took a safe

SCOREBOARD	
AUSTRALIA	
M Wade (run out)	58
D Short c Iyer b Natarajan	9
S Smith c Pandya b Chahal	46
G Maxwell c Sundar b Thakur	22
M Henriques c Rahul b Natarajan	26
M Stoinis (not out)	16
D Sams (not out)	8
Extras (LB-1, W-8)	9
Total (for 5 wkts, 20 overs)	194
Fall of wickets: 1-47, 2-75, 3-120, 4-168, 5-171	
Bowling: Chahar 4-0-48-0, Sundar 4-0-35-0, Thakur 4-0-39-1, Natarajan 4-0-20-2, Chahal 4-0-51-1	
INDIA	
KL Rahul c Sweepson b Tye	30
S Dhawan c Sweepson b Zampa	52
V Kohli c Wade b Sams	40
S Samson c Smith b Sweepson	15
H Pandya (not out)	42
S Iyer (not out)	12
Extras (LB-1, NB-1, W-2)	4
Total (for 4 wkts, 19.4 overs)	195
Fall of wickets: 1-56, 2-95, 3-120, 4-149	
Bowling: Sams 3.4-0-41-1, Abbott 2-0-17-0, Tye 4-0-47-1, Maxwell 1-0-19-0, Sweepson 4-0-25-1, Henriques 1-0-9-0, Zampa 4-0-36-1	

skied catch off Dhawan who tucked into leg-spinner Adam Zampa on 52 in his 36-ball stint with four fours and two sixes.

“I have been in these situations many times and I learnt from my mistakes in the past. My game is always around the confidence which I carry; it has that fine line where I back myself

HARDIK PANDYA
India all-rounder

Newcomer Daniel Sams got the prized wicket of Kohli. He bowled a wide delivery, and Kohli chased it — getting a thin

nick behind to Wade just when the India skipper was looking dangerous, with two fours and two sixes off 24 balls.

Earlier, new skipper Matthew Wade and Steve Smith hit half-centuries to lift Australia to 194 for five. Wade — who was promoted to the captaincy instead of an injured Aaron Finch — smacked 58, while Smith chipped in with a breezy 46 after India won the toss and opted to bowl.

"Maybe we were a little bit short with the bat," said Wade.

"Unfortunately we didn't execute well towards the end with the ball"

Wade was run out in farcical conditions when he was dropped at the third attempt by Kohli, but turned his back and failed to make his ground from the throw to wicketkeeper Rahul.

It was a big wicket for India

after Wade had belted 10 fours and a six off 32 balls.

Smith was caught at the third attempt by Pandya at long-off from leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal off 38 balls with three fours and two sixes.

India removed danger man Glenn Maxwell before too much more damage was inflicted — caught by Washington Sundar at point off Shardul Thakur for 22 off 13 balls with two sixes.

Thangarasu Natarajan was the best of India's bowlers with two for 20.

Australia crucially went into the game without their pace spearheads Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood.

Starc was withdrawn on compassionate grounds due to a family illness and will miss the final two matches of the series, while Hazlewood has a back injury. — AFP





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Energy Development Oman set up by Royal Decree

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

The Omani government has announced the formal establishment of a new corporate entity with a mandate to invest in conventional as well as renewable and alternative energy resources within the Sultanate's borders and beyond.

Energy Development Oman SAOC (EDO), set up by Royal Decree 128/2020 published in the Official Gazette on Sunday, is envisioned as an Omani joint stock company that will, among other things, acquire a shareholding in majority government-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), presently the largest producer of crude oil and natural gas in the Sultanate.

Significantly, EDO will also own an interest in the prolific Block 6 licence currently held by PDO and which contributes the bulk of the country's hydrocarbon production.

Thus in addition to engaging in hydrocarbon exploration and production activities in the Sultanate, the new entity will also invest in commercial activities across the upstream and midstream segments of the hydrocarbon value chain.

Crucially, a key part of EDO's remit centres on renewables, alternative energy resources and related trends and technologies.

According to Article 4 of the Royal Decree, the new entity is authorised to "undertake any projects, operations, activities directly or indirectly, related to renewable energy in Oman, and all activities which are necessary or incidental to or which may be conducive to any of the foregoing, including but not limited to the purchase of, or otherwise acquire, or import, procure, manufacture, produce, store, transport, trade in, distribute, sell, supply, market, export or deal in renewable energy products and technologies, including without limitation,

LANDMARK MOVE:
New Omani joint stock company to acquire shareholding in PDO as well as own an interest in Block 6 licence, which contributes the bulk of the country's hydrocarbon production

solar panels and electric vehicle charging facilities".

Commenting on the significance of the announcement, a market expert who did not wish to be identified said: "This announcement has been in the works for some time. In essence, EDO will be positioned as a holding company of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) with a primary focus on renewables and

appointed by Royal Decree. The Board will appoint a Chief Executive Officer, among other high-level executives to manage the company.

Earlier this year, in a briefing to company employees, PDO Managing Director Raoul Restucci outlined the vision behind the establishment of Energy Development Oman (EDO).

"What that means is twofold: One, EDO will be a holding company of PDO and a number of investments. For PDO, it will enable us to corporatise the entity and thus enable us to secure the funding and resources which the government at the moment is securing for us at very high cost. We will be able to deconsolidate that debt and secure it at substantially more attractive terms; Second, EDO is also about energy transition as well. We have a number of businesses, a number of investments that are very keen to partner with us," he had stated then.

Omantel unveils e-SIM through app

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecom services in the Sultanate, has announced the introduction of an e-SIM through its mobile application.

The new addition to the recently upgraded mobile application, which was carefully designed, sets new benchmarking for enriching mobile users' experience. The application has now become an easy platform to get many valuable services including the eSIM.

"We are very happy to be the first in Oman in providing our customer with eSIM from the electronic channel thus eliminating the need to visit our outlets considering the limitation of movement and restrictions due to COVID-19. Our customers can now buy new SIMs and select both the number and plan through easy and simple steps at their mobile phones," said Eng Aladdin Bait Fadhil, Vice-President of Omantel's Consumer Business Unit.

"To activate the service, you need to click the icon for new eSIM, ensure that the phone is compatible with the eSIM, select the prepaid plan or postpaid plan, select the prepaid or postpaid number.

The application will then request to submit a copy of the ID or passport or residence card together with a personal photograph.

Last-ditch effort to save Brexit talks from failure

BRUSSELS: British and EU negotiators embarked on probably their final two-day scramble to secure a post-Brexit trade deal on Sunday, after failing for eight months to reach agreement.

David Frost arrived in Brussels for more talks with EU counterpart Michel Barnier, ending a two-day pause after a fruitless week of late-night wrangling in London.

"We're working very hard to try to get a deal. We'll see what happens in the negotiations today," Frost told reporters as he arrived at the Gare de Midi train station in Brussels.

A European official said the negotiators would meet later in the day at the EU's Berlaymont headquarters in Brussels and that talks could go on late.

Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will reportedly lobby European leaders, after a call with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Saturday ended with the sides still facing "significant differences" on the key issues.

The pair's next call will be on Monday evening and then the 27 EU leaders will gather in Brussels on Thursday for a two-day summit planned to tackle their own budget dispute, but which will now once again be clouded by Brexit worries.

Johnson and von der Leyen issued a downbeat joint statement after their call, with divisions still wide over fishing rights, fair trade rules and an enforcement mechanism to govern any deal.

"Whilst recognising the seriousness of these differences, we agreed that a further effort should be undertaken... to assess

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the European Commission in Brussels. — AFP

Britain's chief Brexit negotiator David Frost arrives at Brussels-South railway station in Brussels. — AFP

whether they can be resolved," they said.

Britain formally left the EU in January, nearly four years after a referendum on membership that split the nation down the middle and two months after Johnson won an election touting what he claimed was an "oven ready" Brexit deal.

The UK is bound to the EU's tariff-free single market until a post-Brexit transition period expires the end of the year — an immovable deadline by which time the two sides must try to agree on new terms of their future relationship.

"It's in a very difficult position, there's no point denying that"

British Environment Minister George Eustice told Sky News.

"We're going continue to work on these negotiations, until there's no point in doing so any further," he said.

Without a deal, the bulk of cross-Channel trade will revert to World Trade Organization terms, a return to tariffs and quotas after almost five decades of close economic and political integration.

Johnson has insisted Britain will "prosper mightily" whatever the outcome of the talks, but he will face severe political and economic fallout if he cannot seal a deal.

"If there is no deal now, I see huge international implications... because we would be in an economic war with Europe that would cost us very dearly," former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown told Sky News.

European capitals have remained remarkably united behind Barnier through the fraught Brexit process, but some internal fractures have now begun to surface.

On Friday, France threatened to veto any deal that falls short of their demands on ensuring fair trade and access to UK fishing waters, where they have demanded a durable agreement, whereas Britain wants frequent renegotiations.

"We know that 100 per cent access to fishing waters in the UK maritime zone is finished," European Affairs Minister Clement Beaune told *le Journal du Dimanche*.

"But we need lasting access. The British can't have total access to our EU single market and exclude fish." — AFP

ECB to beef up stimulus as second virus wave bites

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: The European Central Bank is set to unleash more stimulus for the eurozone at its last meeting of the year on Thursday, as the region's battered economy grapples with a second coronavirus wave.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde (pictured) in October all but promised that extra support was on the way, when she said the Frankfurt institution would "recalibrate" its instruments in December.

The ECB will also unveil fresh economic forecasts likely to have been revised downwards after a spike in virus cases forced renewed shutdowns across Europe, although the prospect of mass vaccinations from next year could brighten the longer term outlook.

Analysts widely expect the ECB's governing council to add another 500 billion euros (\$600 billion) to its 1.35-trillion-euro pandemic emergency bond-buying programme (PEPP), and extend it beyond the current deadline of June 2021.

The purchases are aimed at keeping borrowing costs low to encourage spending and investment and bolster economic growth.

The ECB could also offer more ultra-cheap credit to banks for longer under a scheme known as TLTROs, whereby banks get loans at

highly favourable interest rates in return for lending on to the wider economy.

The central bank is all but

The central bank is all but certain to keep interest rates at historic lows but may increase its pre-pandemic asset purchases

certain to keep interest rates at historic lows, but may increase its pre-pandemic asset purchases from the current 20 billion euros a month.

At Thursday's press conference, Lagarde is likely to reiterate pleas for governments to share the load through fiscal stimulus, as EU member states bicker over a 750-billion-euro recovery fund that has been blocked by Poland and Hungary. — AFP



OPEC+ deal lifts oil to nine-month high



OLE S HANSEN

THE post-November 9 surge in risk appetite on vaccine optimism extended into December with stock markets, led by Asia, continuing higher while the Bloomberg Dollar Index, which tracks the performance of ten leading global currencies versus the US dollar, slumped to a 32-month low. These developments combined with additional stimulus being discussed in the US and Europe and OPEC+ reaching a sensible compromise on post-pandemic production increases helped boost crude oil and metal prices, both industrial and precious. The agricultural sector paused

following a 25 per cent rally since June with cocoa, wheat and coffee the main losers. Scraping the bottom was once again natural gas which slumped by more than 10 per cent with milder-than-normal US winter weather raising doubts about demand at a time of robust production. Overall, these developments left the Bloomberg Commodity Index close to unchanged in a week that, following the monthly US jobs report, normally signals the beginning of slowing trading activity ahead of the Christmas and New Year period. Still down on the year following the Q1 lockdown-led collapse, the index has made a strong recovery since then. A trend that vaccine optimism strengthened further this past month and which is likely to be carried forward into 2021. This on the assumption that we will see a strong post-pandemic rebound in growth, the potential for further dollar weakness, rising inflation concerns and weather developments. All of these could drive the index towards potentially its best year in more



than decade and in such a scenario key commodities such as copper, crude oil, soybeans and gold are all expected to perform well. Rising food prices continue to add fuel to the inflation theme which may only strengthen further into 2021 was highlighted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in its monthly Food Price Index for November. The index, which tracks the average of 95 food prices spread across five commodity groups, jumped to a six-year high and recorded a

year-on-year rise of 6.5 per cent. All sub-indices registered gains in November, with the vegetable oil subindex rising by a stunning 14.5 per cent from October and 31 per cent from the same month last year. Crude oil reached a nine-month high after the OPEC+ group of producers, following another nail-biting week of discussions, agreed on a compromise deal that will see production rise in stages over the coming months, starting with 500,000 barrels/day in January.

With the expected vaccine-driven recovery in global fuel demand this deal will go a long way to ensure the price of oil remains supported until it can stand on its own feet. The fact that the market rallied despite having priced in a postponement of the previously agreed 1.9 million barrels/day production increase was due to the flexibility of the deal. Meaning that production can be raised but also cut back should the recovery turn out to be slower than expected. Overall, analysts

are now expecting that the road towards a balanced market has been shortened and on that basis expectations for higher crude oil and fuel prices into 2021 have been given a boost. Adding to these supportive developments, a cut this year by the oil majors of more than \$80 billion in longer-term capital spending will likely start to feed through to higher oil prices in 2022 and beyond. Unless this past year has changed dramatically the way global consumers will work and travel and thereby consume fuel going forward, only time will tell. Brent is likely to print \$50/b sooner rather than later with already strong Asian demand eventually being joined by others once the COVID-19 cloud lifts. Just how much further it may rally in the short term depends on how Europe and especially the US tackle the current and not-yet-under-control second wave of the COVID-19 outbreak. [Ole S Hansen is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank]

SPOTLIGHT

Weekly 'Made in Oman' series



An ocean of opportunity



We're targeting young people as well as families, providing them with fast and healthy food

ENG FARAH AL KINDI

Founder & CEO, Sea Delight

What was the inspiration behind your business idea?

I saw an opportunity to take traditional Omani fish products and give them an innovative twist. We worked on improving recipes, testing products, streamlining production and supply chains, upgrading our branding, labelling and marketing. We wanted to produce quality fish products that could compete here at home as well as overseas.

What defines Sea Delight's way of doing business?

We produce a number of fish products, ranging from traditional Omani Malleh and gourmet fish burgers to marinated cuttlefish. These items are special, for the fact that they're created with traditional ingredients that set them apart from any others in the market. We're offering unique Oman-made fish products.

Describe Sea Delight's typical customer

We're targeting young

people as well as families, providing them with fast and healthy food. But from a bigger perspective, given population growth, climate crisis and concerns over sustainability people are changing their lifestyles, focusing on what they eat and where their food comes from. This shift in consumer mindset has led to an increased demand for fish. You've got to remember, fish is the primary source of protein for one billion people and a source of about 20 per cent of the proteins consumed by another three billion people.

What were your biggest challenges when establishing your business?

We've faced any number of challenges, as all start-ups do. Perhaps worth mentioning were the difficulties we faced getting our products onto supermarket shelves and attracting young local talent to work in the fisheries sector. With the support of many great people we've overcome these challenges. As we build our business, we're creating job opportunities for others, that's an achievement.

What drives you to be so enterprising?

Our approach to business is all about experimenting, we run tests; we look at the results, and use that data to inform our decision making. We also understand the need for flexibility, talking to our customer base and responding to their needs. To be a truly innovative entrepreneur you've got to keep dreaming, experimenting and seeking out new ideas, that's what we do each and everyday.

Is there one person in your industry that inspires



you the most?

A whole host of people have inspired me along the way, Engineer Younis Zinati, an expert in fisheries processing has been a great help, guiding us on any number of business issues. His insight and advice has been invaluable. The women I work with are hugely inspirational, they're such a motivation for me.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

Everything is easier in hindsight. But if I had to do things over, I'd I spend more time working on our market strategy and the way in which we introduce new products, taking into consideration how long it takes to convert a consumer and build brand loyalty. One big thing I've learned is before we go chasing new customers, it's important we keep existing clients happy.

What advice would you give to someone starting out?

Top of my list would probably include: learn to manage cash flow; establish ambitious but reachable financial goals; limit your fixed expenses in the beginning; time is money, don't waste it; focus on customer care; have a strong digital presence, particularly on social media; network; and communicate, communicate, communicate.

BANK MUSCAT ANNOUNCES OVER RO 1M AT 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. Details regarding the upcoming draw will be posted on the bank's social media channels in the coming days.

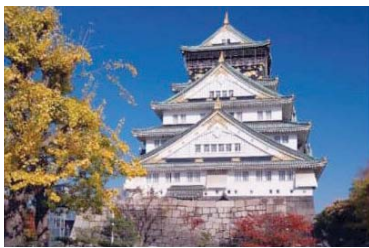
Two lucky Al Mazyona customers will special prizes of RO 250,000 each or a total of half a million rials in the top two prizes in the draw. Asalah Priority Banking customers are eligible to be entered into the draw to win 3 special prizes of RO 50,000 each and 5 special prizes of RO 25,000 each to win a total of RO 275,000. Customers who maintain a minimum balance of RO 30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts will be automatically entered into the draw for these mega prizes.

Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers who maintain a minimum balance of RO 10,000 in their accounts will be eligible to participate in the draws for 3 special prizes of RO 25,000 each and 5 special prizes of RO 15,000 each. Al Jawhar customers can thus win a total of RO 150,000. Twenty eight regional winners will also be chosen to win special End-of-Year prizes of RO 5,000 each, with a total of RO 140,000 to be given away in the regional category. All Al Mazyona customers maintaining a minimum of RO 1,000 in their account are eligible to participate in the regional draw.

Essay competition on Oman-Japan relations

MUSCAT: Omani nationals have been invited to participate in an essay competition organised by the Japanese Embassy in the Sultanate, focusing on the theme, 'Oman-Japan Relations Based on My Experience'.

The contest has been divided into two categories: one for Omanis under 18 years of age, and the other for national 18 years and older. According to a statement issued by the Japanese Embassy, only Omani citizens are eligible to



participate in the contest. While the first category is for Omanis under 18 years old, a representative such as the contestant's parent can submit the essay on the minor's behalf.

All entries must be in Arabic of no more than 700 words. The deadline for submission of entries is December 25. The names of the winners and the prize-winning entries will be announced in early January. Prizes will include Japanese gift items and certificates of commendation from the Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman. Further details about the competition may be obtained by e-mailing: embjapan@mc.mofa.go.jp.



Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) is extending a wide range of offers for the patrons of the Nissan Pathfinder. The seven-seat vehicle Nissan Pathfinder offers enhanced driving dynamics such as controlled ride and handling, less vibrations on turns and easier manoeuvring.

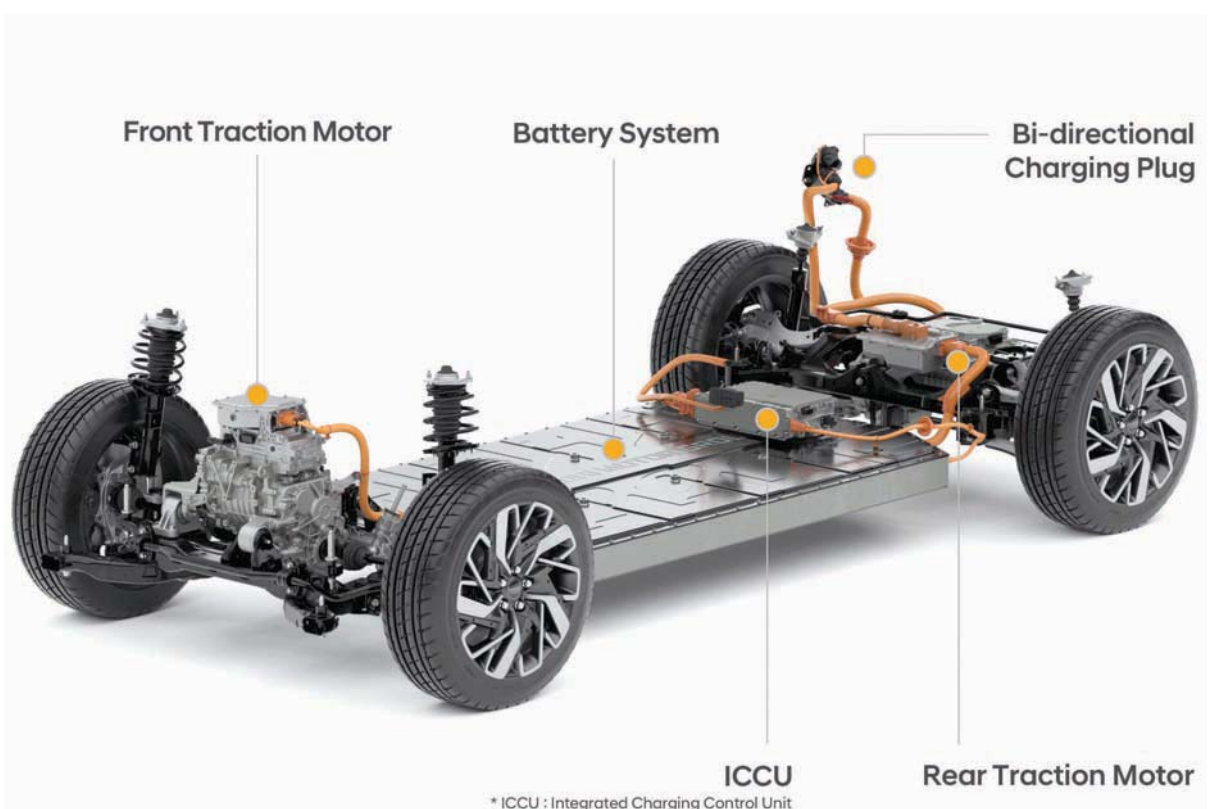
As part of the special offer, Nissan Pathfinder customers will be entitled to 0 per cent interest up to three years. Other interest slabs for the model include 1.99 per cent for four years or 2.49 per cent for five years or 2.99 per cent for six years.

The special offer will be available till January 16, 2021 on applicable models purchased for personal use. As part of the special offer, Nissan Oman is also offering periodic maintenance service, cash gift, free registration and free insurance.

Special rate of interest is available on Nissan Pathfinder. On select MY19/MY20 stocks of Nissan Pathfinder customers can get 0 per cent up to three years or 1.99 per cent for four years or 2.49 per cent for five years or 2.99 per cent for six years.

For all tenures beyond six years, normal interest rates will apply for the full tenure of the loan. This rate is applicable for individual purchase with private registration only and is subject to Finance/Credit approval. Customers can opt for only one of the interest rate options. EMIs will be highest for 0 per cent for three years scheme.

NEW E-VEHICLE FOCUSED MODULAR PLATFORM



Hyundai's new electric vehicle-focused modular platform Electric Global Modular Platform (E-GMP) is seen in this handout picture provided by Hyundai Motor Group. — Reuters

Work set to resume on Stream 2 pipeline

BERLIN: Work looks set to resume on the controversial NordStream 2 pipeline that will bring Russian gas to Germany despite a fresh protest from the United States on Saturday.

German shipping authorities have issued an advisory for the Baltic Sea area where the final few kilometres of the pipeline are set to be laid, warning vessels to avoid the zone from December 5-31.

Ship-tracking website Marinetraffic.com also shows Russian pipe-laying ships Fortuna and Akademik Cherskiy moving towards the area.

These indications coincided with a statement from the acting US ambassador to Germany calling on Berlin and the EU to halt construction of the 1,200-kilometre (750-mile) pipeline, which is also opposed



by many eastern European states. "Now is the time for Germany and the EU to impose a moratorium on the construction of the pipeline," acting ambassador Robin Quinville told business daily Handelsblatt. This would send a signal to Russia that Europe was not willing to accept "its ongoing malicious behaviour", the diplomat said.

"The pipeline is not only an economic project, but also a political tool that the Kremlin is using to bypass Ukraine and divide Europe." Nord Stream 2 is a 10-billion-euro (\$11-billion) pipeline that will run beneath the Baltic Sea and is set to double Russian natural-gas shipments to Germany, Europe's largest economy. — AFP

Ivory Coast cocoa producers end chocolate war with Hershey's

ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast's cocoa producers have ended their row with Hershey's after the US chocolate giant committed to paying a premium above the market price under an initiative to help lift the incomes of poor farmers.

Ivory Coast and Ghana, the world's number one and two cocoa producers respectively, on Monday accused confectionery giants Hershey's and Mars of sidestepping a deal to pay the living income differential (LID), a bonus of \$400 per tonne of cocoa, the raw material for chocolate.

Millions of small farmers in Ivory Coast and Ghana, which together grow 60 per cent of the world's cocoa, live in grinding poverty.

The LID is part of a programme run by the multinationals to certify that their chocolate is ethically produced — meeting standards of sustainability and free of child labour — allowing them to sell it at higher prices to Western consumers.

Ivory Coast's Coffee Cacao Council said on Friday it had lifted the suspension of Hershey's sustainability certification programmes after the firm committed to paying the premium, according to a letter to the US company.

"This lifting of the suspension follows your final commitment to pay the LID," CCC head Yves Kone wrote to Hershey's.

Hershey's said on Saturday that it recognised "the importance and the value of the LID as a means



to reach and improve the lives of farmers across the entire Ivorian and Ghanaian cocoa farming industry".

"We were the first chocolate company to publicly support the LID, and are disappointed that others in the industry have recently chosen different purchasing routes," a Hershey's statement said.

Ivory Coast and neighbouring Ghana on Monday had launched an unprecedented media offensive against Hershey's and Mars, accusing the chocolate titans of avoiding paying the LID after Hershey's reportedly made a large cocoa purchase on the US futures market.

The two firms had denied the charges and assured that they supported the mechanism, imposed by Ivory Coast and Ghana in 2019.

In his letter, Kone indicated that lifting the suspension was decided following a video interview with Hershey officials

on December 1, the day after the public denunciation.

The CCC hopes that "in the interest of producers, in your own interests and those of the cocoa sector, our organisation will no longer have to suspend the Hershey programmes in Ivory Coast again," Kone wrote.

It was not immediately known whether Ghana had also lifted its sanctions.

The public accusations, which escalated on Thursday as Ivorian cocoa farmers threatened to boycott multinational chocolate makers, could be costly in terms of image and sales to the groups, already in the hot seat for several years over ethical issues.

The world's chocolate market is estimated to be worth more than \$100 billion, concentrated in a small number of multinational corporations. But only six per cent of the bonanza trickles down to the farmers in tropical countries which grow the raw product. — AFP

Dutch 'vegetarian butcher' carves new niche for Unilever

ETTEN-LEUR, Netherlands: When ninth-generation Dutch farmer Jaap Korteweg turned vegetarian and set up a shop selling meat-free products over a decade ago, his friends thought he was joking.

But the founder of "The Vegetarian Butcher" had the last laugh when the company was gobbled up by British-Dutch consumer giant Unilever in 2018.

Unilever has now put the firm at the heart of its plans to carve out a one-billion-euro (\$1.2-billion) a year slice of the increasingly juicy global market for meat-free products.

"It's a dream that comes true for me," Korteweg said at the site of a grass-roofed, eco-friendly house he has built on former farmland that has been returned to nature.

"I'm a ninth-generation farmer, grew up on the countryside of the Netherlands, between the bulls and the cows for milk," he adds.

"So it's not logical maybe that I did it this way for the Vegetarian Butcher. But what I now see is that my family and my brother and sisters are very positive about this transformation and the new business."

Once a self-confessed "big meat lover," Korteweg says his conversion came 20 years ago, when he was asked to store dead pigs in his cold storage areas during a swine fever outbreak.

"For me, that was the moment to stop it, I'd had enough of that system using animals for meat," he said — although giving up eating meat was "not easy" and



A plate of 100 per cent plant-based chicken chunks is displayed at The Vegetarian Butcher concept store in The Hague. — AFP

"like stopping smoking or drugs".

Korteweg then created a small "butcher's shop" in The Hague using expert chefs to come up with vegan and vegetarian alternatives to bacon, meatballs, mince, kebabs and other meat products.

"My goal was to become the biggest butcher in the world as soon as possible, and at that time people laughed at it because they don't take it seriously," he said.

"But for me I took it seriously because I wanted to create an alternative for industrial meat." The company expanded and its profile rose, producing a range of quirkily-named vegan products for sale in supermarkets, including "Little Willies" sausages, which made headlines in Britain for their risqué name. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DENMARK

Denmark agrees on deal to have electric cars

Denmark agreed on a deal with parliament to put at least 775,000 electric or hybrid cars on Danish roads by 2030 in its latest move to reach its ambitious target reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 70 per cent in 2030.

The government also announced a broader aim of having as many as one million low or zero-emission cars on the road by 2030, but the current deal would secure financing for the first 775,000.

There are currently only



around 20,000 electric cars in Denmark, a fraction of the 2.5 million cars currently on Danish roads.

Under the new deal, taxes and levies on cars propelled by fossil fuels will gradually increase.

GERMANY

Lufthansa to shed staff by year end

Lufthansa will have shed 29,000 staff by the end of the year and the German airline will cut another 10,000 jobs in its home country next year as it struggles to cope with the coronavirus, a newspaper reported on Sunday.

The airline and its subsidiaries, Eurowings, Swiss, Austrian and Brussels Airlines, have slashed their schedules, fleet and staff, with air travel not expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels before 2025.

Citing unnamed company sources, the Bild am Sonntag newspaper said that Lufthansa would cut 20,000 jobs outside of Germany, while it is also selling its catering unit LSG, which employs 7,500 people, bringing the total staff down to 109,000.

Next year, a further 10,000 jobs will be cut in Germany. It has already burned through 3 billion euros (\$3.64 billion) of the 9-billion-euro government bailout it secured earlier in the year, the paper said.

AUSTRIA

Former Austrian FM jailed for corruption

A former Austrian finance minister has been sentenced to eight years in prison for his role in a high-profile corruption scandal.

Karl-Heinz Grasser was found guilty on Friday of embezzlement, receiving bribes and falsification of evidence in a deal to sell thousands of publicly owned apartments.

The court in Vienna said Grasser was involved in kickbacks of more than €9 million. He denies wrongdoing and will



appeal.

Grasser became the youngest finance minister in the country's history in 2000. The case involved 14 defendants facing an array of charges, which included money laundering, fraud and falsifying evidence.

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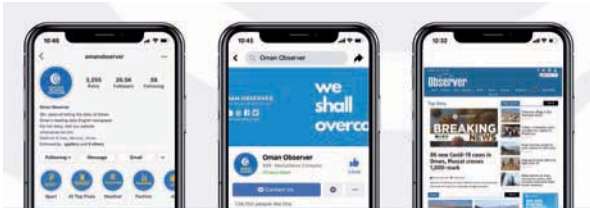
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features

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The Changing Face of Misfat Al Abriyeen

[The Coffee Shop at the Top]

Misfat Al Abriyeen has been quietly growing, more as a 'staycation' type of destination for Omani and expat families. To create another attraction, one young local man offers a significant point of difference with his Alstromeria Café located at one of the highest peak of the village with an amazing view of the surrounding landscape... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



BIRDING IS SOCIALLY DISTANCED NEW YORK'S HOTTEST HOBBY

Dozens of people gathered in the wooded rumble area of Central Park on a recent sunny morning in New York to focus on elusive owls... **Story on Page P20**

TRAVEL TALES



VENICE GOLD BRIGHTENS HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Saint Mark's Square and the Rialto Bridge across the Grand Canal in particular benefit from special lighting and projections that give inhabitants some comfort in this time of coronavirus. **Story on Page 19**

READ



READY PLAYER TW BY ERNEST CLINE

In a sequel to "Ready Player One," Wade Watts discovers a technological advancement and goes on a new quest.

FASHION



UK FASHION AWARDS RECOGNISE TURBULENT YEAR

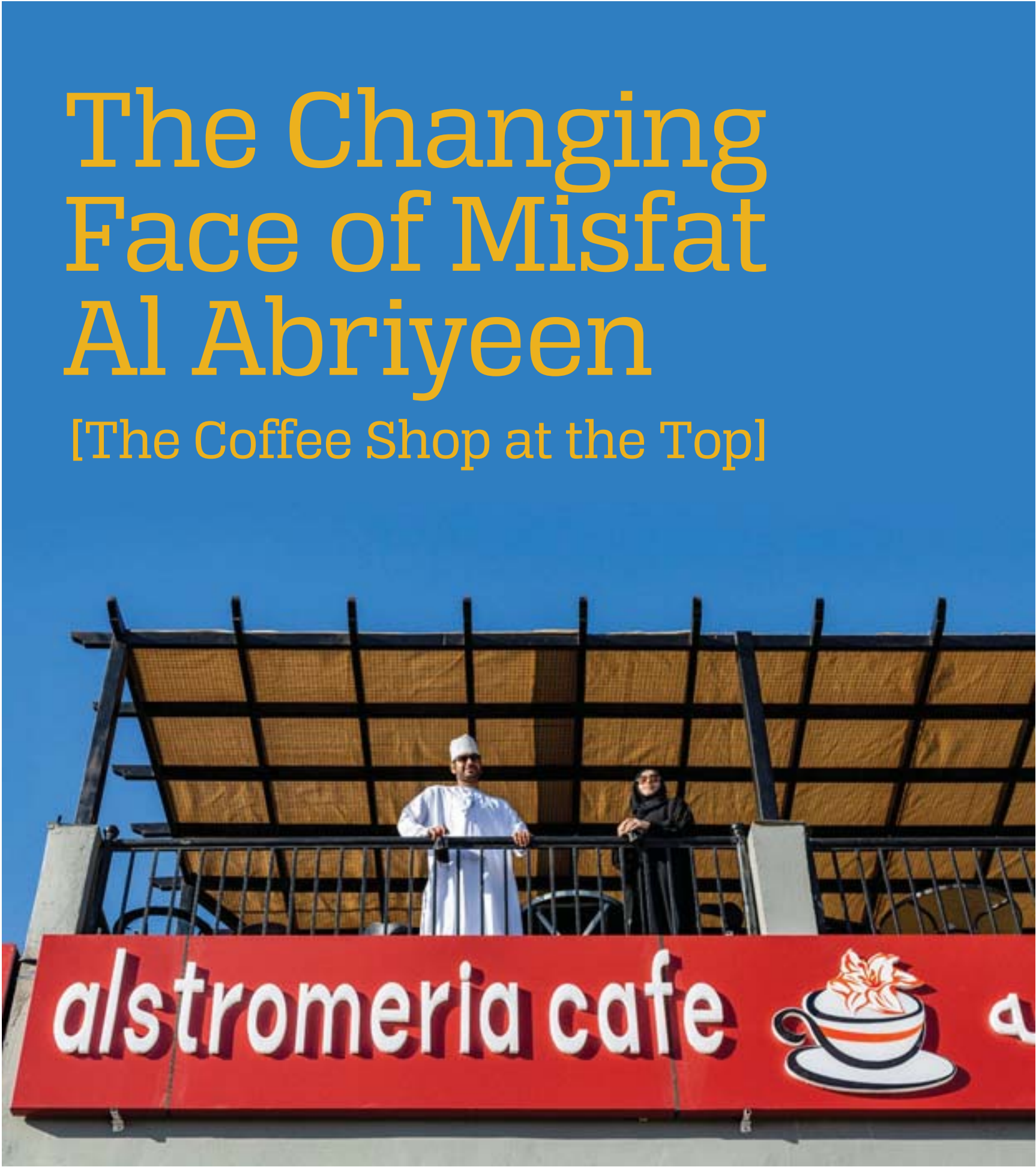
In a break from tradition to mark a tumultuous year, the British Fashion Council's (BFC) annual awards on Thursday honoured 20 individuals and brands, including Chanel and Burberry, who "led change in the industry"... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION DAY

International Civil Aviation Day celebrates the science, art, and sport of aviation that grew out of this initial glide, and the men and women who push the frontiers of it today. To celebrate today, take time to visit museums dedicated to aviation and learn about its history.



STORY BY RAY PETERSEN
PHOTOS BY LENA PETERSEN

The stunning authentic and organic nature of the Misfat Al Abriyeen tourist experience is what sets it apart from so many other tourist destinations in the Sultanate is in the throes of significant regeneration, and one young local man offers a significant point of difference with his Alstromeria Café a standout, given its location and amazing views from the top of the town, so to speak.

The Alstromeria is the beautifully scented Peruvian Lily, otherwise known as the 'Lily of the Incas,' and is that which inspired Emily Dickinson as she wrote, "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul And sings the tune without the words And never stops at all." In such beauty and hope, youthful Al Hamra Mathematics teacher Yussuf Suliman Abdullah al Abri, married to 'Um Asalah,' and with children Asalah, 12; Sulaiman, 7; and Abdullah, 3; set out to create something different for his home region, yet complementary to its unique geographic location and tourist potential, because, as he said, "The market asked me to."

Misfat Al Abriyeen has been quietly growing, more as a 'staycation' type of destination for Omani families, for expatriate residents as a truly Omani experience, for other GCC citizens and residents, and of course, tourist groups from overseas.

Currently however, there is a noticeable amount of construction, reconstruction, and refurbishment taking place as the town seeks to build on its increasing tourist profile, given a genuine boost by Oman by UTMB Ultra Race last year, which was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19 this year. However, this may yet prove to be a god-send, as the town should be ready for the big event next November.



Al Abri originally established a café under his brand in Al Hamra, just a few short kilometres away, on the Jabal Shams Road, however, like everyone else who visits Misfat Al Abriyeen, he was captivated by the view that took in the farms, the old township, and the mountainous backdrops, finding the fresh air exhilarating, the quietness relaxing, and decided he could do something in the way of investing in 'his' region, and growing his business.

Alstromeria Café now occupies a prime aspect adjacent to the tourist vehicle carpark for the 'old town,' and offers Italian coffees, 'to die for,' an amazing variety of taste-tempting cakes and pastries, and so much more.

During the weekends especially, Al Abri noted the foot traffic is significant, and has great faith in both the old town and the potential of his café.

"We want to offer 'different' taste experiences to locals, 'a 'taste of home' to tourists and expatriates, and some-

where to relax and enjoy the view. The way we see it," he said, "they will come, see the museums, farms and enjoy the local sights and sounds, and then before their departure, enjoy the Alstromeria experience, something that, day or night, from this amazing setting, anyone can enjoy an aromatic coffee, a refreshing gelato, a savoury snack, a tempting sweet, and some contemplation, even meditation. It is that kind of setting."

Misfat Al Abriyeen then is changing to embrace the possibilities tourism offers, as a 'niche' destination it offers unique insights into the Omani culture, wonderful, enlightening farm walks, museums, displays, and more.

Even, excitingly, a 'zipline' is proposed for a unique adventure tourist activity. Who knows what else lies ahead for this wonderful little corner of the Sultanate, with the Alstromeria Café a little bit of Europe, amid an iconic Omani experience?

ART

Miami's art week takes on new look as galleries, artists get creative



MIAMI: For almost two decades the first week of December in Miami has been synonymous with artists, art fairs, champagne-soaked parties, pop up installations, an explosion of new graffiti, and traffic gridlock.

But the Florida city looks far different this year.

After the coronavirus pandemic forced Art Basel Miami Beach to announce in September that it was cancelling this year's fair, the galaxy of satellite fairs around the city followed suit.

Art Basel is typically one of the busiest times for Miami, and the jolt could not have come at a worse time for this tourism-and-hospitality driven city hit hard by COVID-19.

Earlier this year, Florida saw the newest cases of the novel coronavirus of anywhere in the world. In South Florida businesses rely on the influx of tens of



thousands of additional visitors, as do the local governments collecting taxes.

Still, in the absence of the global elite of the art world, Miami-based artists and institutions have pressed ahead with their work and found a silver lining.

Lauren Shapiro, a ceramics artist who collaborated with a friend and oceanic researchers, worked with more than 100 socially distanced volunteers to build a massive installation of monolithic blocks veneered with clay imprints of dead coral.

The piece, called Future Pacific, is a meditation on the increasing fragility and disappearance of coral reef ecosystems. The unfired clay will be destroyed after the four-month exhibit, reflecting hundreds of thousands of years of life and growth lost as reefs around the globe die out.

"We knew we were going to do it during art week so we were very excited about the prospect of having international exposure ... and as it got closer to the date and Basel finally cancelled it was a bit disappointing," Shapiro said.

However, Shapiro was able to make one-on-one appointments to view the installation.

"I was able to bring a lot of curators, collectors, and just people that were interested in the work to give them personal tours through the exhibit and connect with them on a more personal level."

Oil painter Thomas Bils echoed a similar sentiment. "I'm a little disappointed I don't get to see my favourite national, international artists, but what I am seeing instead is watching a lot of my friends and colleagues doing much larger projects and sort of flourishing," said Bils. — Reuters



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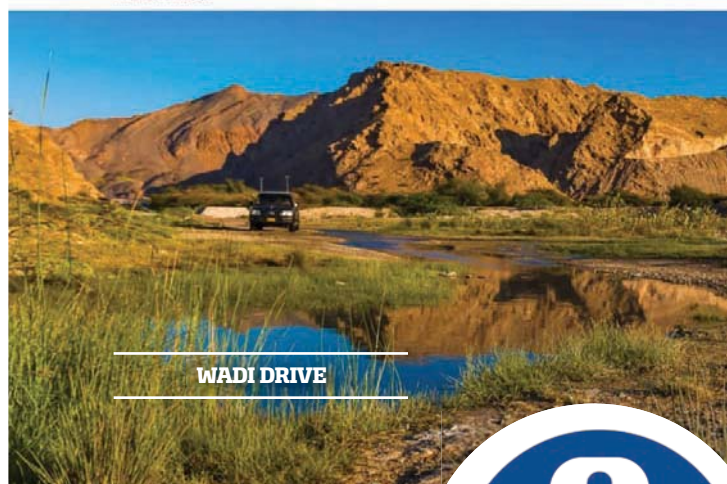
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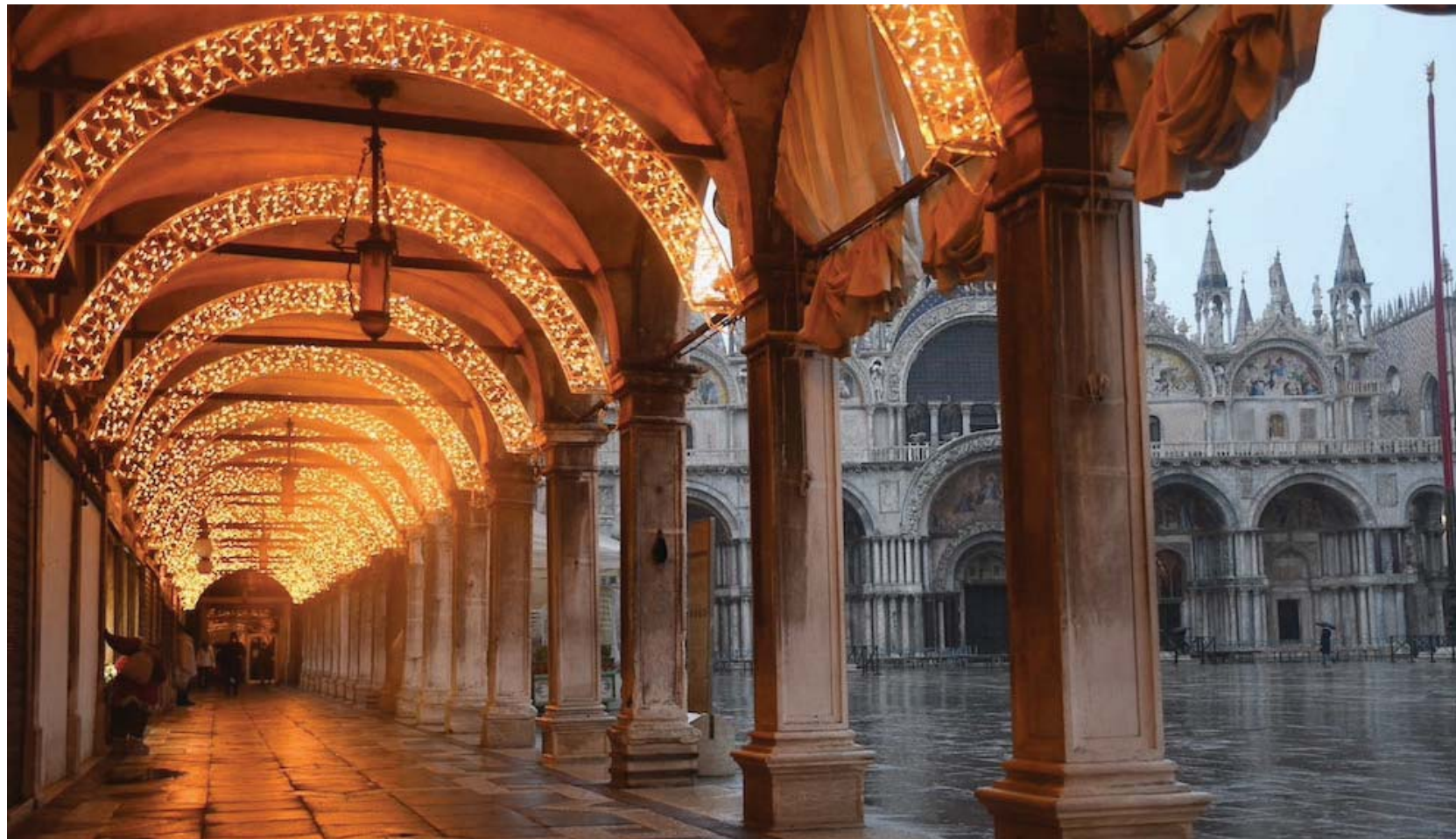
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TRAVEL TALES

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Venice gold brightens holiday spirit

Saint Mark's Square and the Rialto Bridge across the Grand Canal in particular benefit from special lighting and projections that give inhabitants some comfort in this time of coronavirus.

Italian artist Fabrizio Plessi created a Christmas tree on the square with huge rectangular screens that project a golden light.

They flood the area with warm light at night, reflecting off wet paving stones.

"My purpose is to light up this town, which needs light, which needs culture, which needs new emotions," Plessi told AFPTV.

Owing to the pandemic, "this Christmas is different from the others," said Plessi, who with his white beard could himself pass for Santa Claus.



"We have this problem like other people all around the world, but I strongly believe in positivity," he said.

The artist explained his choice of light screens to build a Christmas tree by saying: "I work a lot with digital and all contemporary instruments, because I think that an artist must use all the means which

his/her times makes available."

Plessi placed a second piece at the end of the square, called "The Golden Age" and which also projects yellow light that resembles molten gold.

RIALTO IMAGES

Another celebrated symbol of the city, the Rialto

Bridge, has been transformed into a screen for light shows once night falls.

Angels dance on the span's ancient arches and then make way for the gold lion on a red background that is the symbol of Venice.

The images are reflected in the Grand Canal, creating an atmosphere full of fantasy and life. — **AFP**

FASHION

UK fashion awards recognise turbulent year



IN A BREAK from tradition to mark a tumultuous year, the British Fashion Council's (BFC) annual awards on Thursday honoured 20 individuals and brands, including Chanel and Burberry, who "led change in the industry".

The honourees, revealed in a video posted online, were recognised for their contribution to one of four categories — community, creativity, environment and people — with many honoured for their contribution during the coronavirus pandemic.

They included French

called "inspiring and extraordinary".

The people category recognised those who encouraged "equal, diverse, empowered workforces from head office to supply chain and shop floor."

They included New York-based designer Aurora James, who was honoured for her campaign calling on retailers to commit to dedicating 15 per cent of their shelf space to black-owned brands, while others received accolades for their work with Black Lives Matter. British big-hitter Stella McCartney was hon-



fashion house Chanel, which "moved manufacturing to support the production of PPE" and British giant Burberry, which joined the coronavirus fight by repurposing its trench coat factory to make non-surgical gowns.

More than 800 members of the international fashion industry were asked to nominate who they thought should receive an accolade, with the list being whittled down to a final 20.

Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas was among those presenting the awards, as was Formula One great Lewis Hamilton.

Other honourees included London-based designer Michael Halpern, whose tribute at London Fashion Week to frontline health workers and contribution to the production of PPE was

oured in the environmental category for having "raised the bar for the industry as a whole with creativity and sustainability shaping the brand's DNA."

Fellow British designer Jonathan Anderson, founder of the JW Anderson label, picked up an award in the creativity category, for those who have "defined the shape of global fashion."

"This year, Jonathan Anderson redefined the possibilities of what a show can be with COVID-19 restrictions by pioneering show-in-a-box and show-on-the-wall concepts for both JW Anderson and Loewe," said the BFC.

"The collections were a defiant celebration of fashion and craft."

The Fashion Awards is the annual fundraiser for the BFC Foundation. — **AFP**



Birding is socially distanced New York's hottest hobby

Dozens of people gathered in the wooded rumble area of Central Park on a recent sunny morning in New York to focus on elusive owls.

Autumn leaves are as the guide "Birding Bob", who has been planning birdwatching tours in the park for over 30 years since the coronavirus pandemic struck the city in March, guides them along a winding road. Crunch under their shoes.

Suddenly, bird lovers lifted their cameras with binoculars and a powerful telephoto lens to look into Barry looking into the barred pine, which arrived to please the people of New York about a month ago. It was.

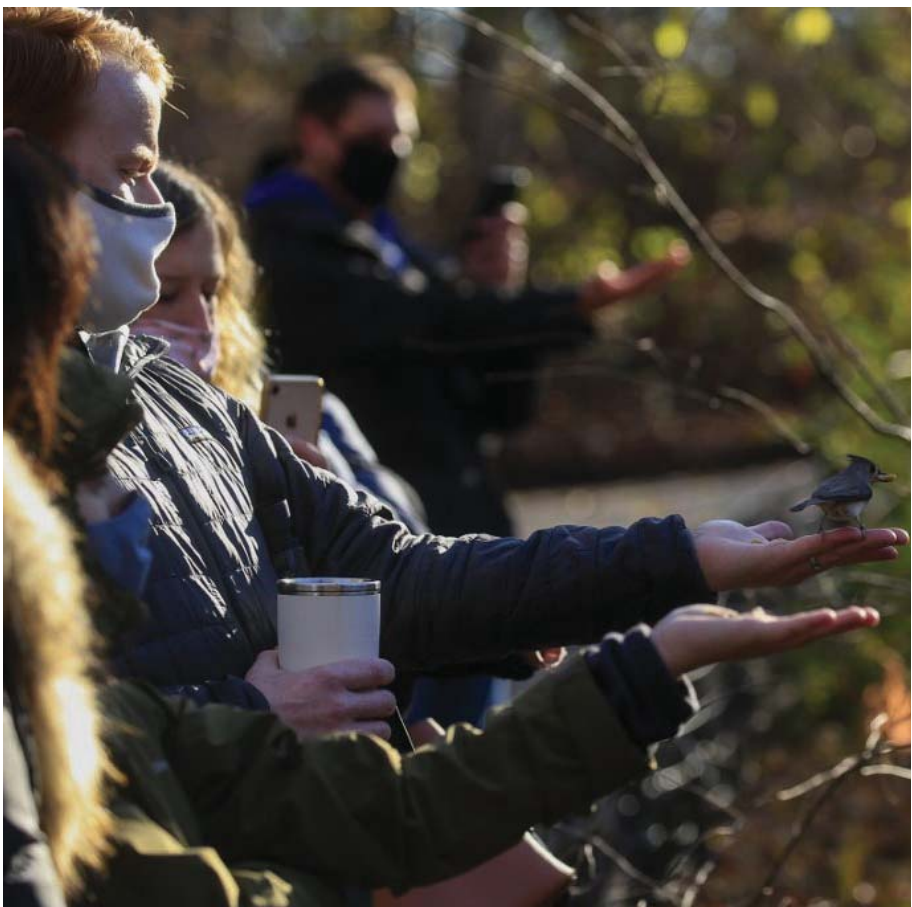
About 220 species of birds frequently visit Central Park each year. Despite the city's 8.6 million inhabitants, Central Park is considered one of the best bird-watching locations in the world, with particularly good views during the migration period.

During the pandemic era, bird watching became more popular, and since spring, theatres and clubs have been closed indefinitely due to the coronavirus, which has killed more than 24,200 people in the city.

"There's not much to do in New York City, and what you can do internally is limited or cancelled," tour guide Robert Decandido-born birdwatching Bob said.

"So people are doing something outside. That's a good thing. And these walks are only \$ 10, so it's really a good deal ... trying to find something in New York City for less than \$ 10. I know it's impossible!"

Barred Owl's recent arrivals at Central Park meander from one side to the other-or perhaps there are two species, one of the city's current mysteries-along with large horned owls. A New



Yorker who is curious about and struggling to find birds on a tour of De Candido.

Rumble is the best bird watching place in the park. It was also there that Amy Cooper, a white woman walking with her dog tied up, unfairly called a black man birdwatching to the police and demanded that the dog be detained.

The May incident, the same time George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, caused anger and was charged with filing a false police report with Cooper.

Tarini Goyal, who moved to New York a few months ago, said her new hobby helped her cope with pandemic stress and help her socialise as the city experienced a resurgence of the virus. It was.

"It helped me feel more natu-

rally connected to the community," said a 28-year-old doctor offering nuts from her palm to a black hooded chick and tufted titmouse.

About 220 species of birds frequently visit Central Park each year. Central Park is considered one of the best places for bird watching in the world.

David Barrett, who founded the Twitter account Manhattan Bird Alert, said he had soared to the status of a local celebrity by tracking the exotic mandarin duck, a non-native bird that fascinated New Yorkers two years ago. It has been "tremendously" since the outbreak of the pandemic and currently boasts about 30,000 followers.

"Bird watching is a self-help activity. You can do it in a park where you can stay away from

people," said a 56-year-old mathematician and investor, saying he discovered 282 species in his life. I am. Most of the specialist e-Bird databases.

"It's great to do these times."

In an isolated section of the park, birdwatching Bob dashes back and forth avoiding the red piranha woodpecker he attracted in the recorded song while the spectator scrambles to take a picture.

"This guy has testosterone problems," the guide laughs and mentions the aggression of this particular bird.

Some critics argue that bird-watching Bob should not use pre-recorded sounds to attract birds, or that disseminating his hobbies was to undermine the once chaotic rumble. I will.

But some, like Barrett, say that DeCandido respects the environment and is willing to democratise entertainment. "The more people there are, the more likely it is that scarcity will be found."

Barrett pushed his hobby to the limit in 2012, competing with renowned ornithologist Andrew Farnsworth to find someone who could find the most species in Manhattan.

Barrett won and shared his experience in his book, Big Man Hattan Year: Tales of Competitive Bird Watching.

For others like DeCandido, Barrett, and Deborah Allen, a 60-year-old photographer who worked with "Birding Bob", leisure activities have become virtually full-time jobs.

"When I first moved to New York, I was a little scared of New York's urbanity," Allen said. "Everything is happening and everyone is busy and in a hurry ... there is glass and steel."

"But then I would go to Central Park at lunch," she said. "And I noticed the bird."

"So I was it. I was done with it." — **Reuters**