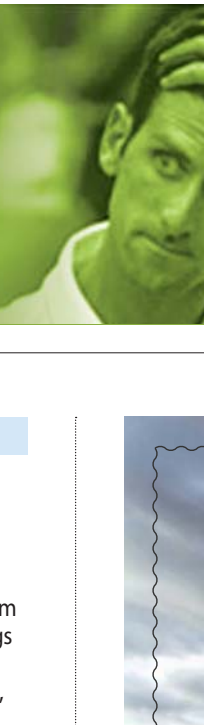


P11

ERRATIC
DJOKOVIC
DISQUALIFIED
FROM US OPEN



P15

'TENET' KICKS OFF
WITH \$20 MILLION
IN THE US, NEARS \$150
MILLION GLOBALLY



P20

SINGAPORE FACES
6% RECESSION AFTER
LOCKDOWN AND
PANDEMIC



OMAN

HM greetings to North Macedonia

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Stevo Pendarovski of the Republic of North Macedonia, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Pendarovski and the friendly people of North Macedonia further progress and prosperity. — ONA

REGION

Syria seeks Russian help in rebuilding

AMMAN: President Bashar al Assad said on Monday he wanted to expand business ties with Russia to help Syria cope with new US sanctions on its already crippled economy that threaten to undermine military gains Damascus achieved with Moscow's help. Assad spoke during a meeting in Damascus with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Lavrov told a news conference Syria needed international help to rebuild its economy. Borisov said Russia was helping Syria to fix its power plants but said oil output could not resume as the fields were in areas outside government control. SEE ALSO P6

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INSIDE



SAUDI KING CALLS FOR 'FAIR' PALESTINIAN SOLUTION

P6



TYPHOON HITS SOUTH KOREA AFTER BATTERING JAPAN

P7

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 38°C
MIN: 28°C

SALALAH
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 26°C

NIZWA
MAX: 40°C
MIN: 23°C

SUNRISE 05.51 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:35

DUHR: 12:10

ASR: 15:37

MAGHRIB: 18:23

ISHA: 19:34



Sultanate strikes gold in photography

The Sultanate, represented by the Photographic Society of Oman at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, won the honorary award and fifth place in 20th Biennial of Nature Photography in Russia, which is held by the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP) every two years for its member states. Omani photographer Hassan al Ghilani won the golden medal at the individual level for his photo of 'Al Alalan' tree.

DETAILS ON P14

WHO says working with China on COVID-19 vaccine approval

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) is working with China on requirements for international approval of any Chinese COVID-19 vaccine, a senior official said on Monday.

"WHO's office in China and WHO headquarters has been working with the regulatory authorities in China", Assistant Director-General Mariangela Simao told a briefing in Geneva.

"We are in direct contact, we have been sharing information and the requirements for international approval of vaccines". The chief executive of Sinovac Biotech Ltd said on Sunday about 90 per cent of the Chinese firm's employees and their families have taken an experimental vaccine it has developed under the country's emergency use programme.

The extent of inoculations under the emergency programme, which China launched in July but has released few details about, points to how actively it is using experimental vaccines in the hopes of protecting essential workers against a potential



COVID-19 resurgence, even as trials are still under way.

China has put its homegrown coronavirus vaccines on display for the first time, as the country where the contagion was discovered looks to shape the narrative surrounding the pandemic.

High hopes hang on the small vials of liquid on show at a Beijing trade fair this week — vaccine candidates produced by Chinese companies

Sinovac Biotech and Sinopharm.

Neither has hit the market yet but the makers hope they will be approved after all-important phase 3 trials as early as year-end.

A Sinovac representative said his firm has already "completed the construction of a vaccine factory" able to make 300 million doses a year.

BETTER PREPARED

Meanwhile, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the world must be better prepared for the next pandemic, as he called on countries to invest in public health.

More than 27.19 million people have been reported to be infected by the novel coronavirus globally and 888,326 have died, according to a Reuters tally, since December 2019.

"This will not be the last pandemic", Tedros told a news briefing in Geneva. "History teaches us that outbreaks and pandemics are a fact of life. But when the next pandemic comes, the world must be ready — more ready than it was this time". — Agencies

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS TO RESUME FROM OCTOBER 1

GENERAL FRAMEWORK ON EDUCATION APPROVED



VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

After a gap of over six months, international flights in Oman will resume from October 1.

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic said international flights can resume from October 1, provided the flights are scheduled according to the health data of destinations and the place of origin of airlines coming to Oman.

The meeting held under the Chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, reviewed updates about pandemic and preventive measures to curb its spread, as well as ways of tackling its different impacts.

After studying the issue of international air traffic, the Supreme Committee decided to set October 1 as a date to start scheduled international flights in line with agreements with other aviation companies.

The committee also okayed the "general framework on education" prepared by the Ministry of Education to operate schools in the Sultanate for the school year 2020/2021, despite the prevalence of the pandemic. The education framework consists of

executive procedures and schemes for the development of work mechanisms to ensure quality and comprehensiveness of education, as well as health precautions, for all students in the Sultanate, irrespective of the variation in styles. The committee will follow-up the assessment of health data associated with the educational process in the schools and take further decisions accordingly.

PROGRESSIVE PLAN

Oman Air said it is preparing to resume its scheduled operations from the beginning of October, amid precautionary measures that the company is committed to. "The national carrier has set up a progressive plan to restart flights to many points around the world". Scheduled flight operations were suspended from March 29, even though both national and foreign airlines were allowed to operate flights for repatriation of expatriates from Oman and citizens and residents to Oman.

"Our planes, staff and airports are ready. We will provide safe service to our guests, along with all travel-related information and requirements", Oman Air said in a statement.

TURN TO P2

Access to tourist sites blocked to avoid gathering

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, SEPT 7

Access to most of the tourist sites in and around Dhofar has been blocked keeping in mind COVID-19 precautions, to avoid gatherings and prevent people from catching the virus.

Even though Dhofar Governorate is under lockdown in terms of entry and exit at the governorate's borders, local people have fancy for those sites during khareef (monsoon) season.

"In normal times you hardly have space at those tourist sites. Sometimes there is a situation when you have to park your vehicle far behind, maybe

The authorities are more active on weekends keeping in mind movement on off days. Even then taking a small round on off days is not a bad idea

RESIDENT



one kilometre, to reach Wadi Darbat. But these days the site looks deserted. No cars, no people... moreover, the Royal Oman Police has put up barricades at some locations", said Rajesh, an avid traveller of tourist sites in Dhofar.

Water is there, spring is running, but the fear of the pandemic is holding people from visiting places. Some people are taking chance with full care of masks, sanitisers and moving with a limited number of people in a car to maintain social distancing, but they are missing the humdrum of the season which used to be during the normal days.

TURN TO P2



INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS TO RESUME FROM OCTOBER 1



FROM PAGE 1

Flights which pass through Omani airspace, domestic services to Khasab airport, and oil concession areas continued to operate as per the guidelines laid issued by the government.

Meanwhile, a group of 75 volunteers will help the authorities implement COVID-19 precautionary measures when Muscat International Airport reopens for normal traffic. The participation of the

volunteers was sought by a group called TaawonNetwork, which works under the supervision of the Omani Society for Human Resources Management. According to TaawonNetwork, 1,179 people registered to be volunteers, and the interview

process, currently held in batches, will be completed soon. Volunteers are required to ensure precautionary measures to deal with developments of the COVID-19 pandemic at the airport. Speaking to the *Observer*,

a member of TaawonNetwork said both citizens and residents were invited to be part of this volunteer group. Oman Airports will complete the installation, and operation of PCR testing solutions. Airports Council International

(ACI) said the airport industry is anticipating a -59.6 per cent reduction in passenger volumes in 2020 vis-à-vis the projected baseline (pre-COVID-19 forecast for 2020) and a -58.4 per cent reduction in passengers as compared to 2019.

Make face mask part of daily life: Experts

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

As Sultanate flattens the COVID-19 curve in the Sultanate, it is time now to take precautions to avoid the second wave of infections. People tend to become less vigilant when the curve flattens as it has been experienced in some countries, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH). Health experts are advising to continue wearing face masks as part of the anti-COVID-19 efforts. Wear a mask while going out, talking, and at the workplace. “Do not pull it down to your chin,” they insist. “Besides following standard health safety practices, one should pay attention to wearing face masks till the infection is fully under control,” said Dr Benny Panakkan, cardiology. Unfortunately, many people are not properly wearing the masks, he said. “It’s important to cover the nose and mouth while wearing a mask to serve the purpose of protection. Simple surgical masks or reusable cloth masks are sufficient for the general population; specialised masks or respirators like N95 masks are for hospital settings.” According to Dr Mathew Varghese, we are highly likely to



come in contact with probable asymptomatic patients or carriers, as most of the commercial establishments have now opened in most countries. “Strictly adhering to government guidelines will ensure

everyone’s safety. We need to focus on social or physical distancing, hand hygiene, and above all, and face masks. You have to assume that everyone around you is either affected or a carrier of the disease,” added Dr Mathew.

Dr Mahmud Rahbi, Head of Emergency at Al Nahdha Hospital, also insisted on following the safety norms against the pandemic. “People have become complacent, thinking that

Frequent touching and adjusting of face masks, lowering it to expose the nose and mouth while talking are bad practices that should be avoided. A mask used at the workplace should ideally be discarded after 6 hours of use

everything has become normal,” says Dr Dilip Singvi. “As we know the path of recovery is always difficult we should also bear in mind that although the numbers of COVID -19 patients are going down, it has not been eradicated yet. Transmission is still going on despite the fewer number of cases unlike before,” adds Dr Singvi. Frequent touching and adjusting of face masks, lowering it to expose the nose and mouth while talking are bad practices that should be avoided. A mask used at the workplace should ideally be discarded after 6 hours of use.



Access to tourist sites blocked to avoid gathering

FROM PAGE 1

“The authorities are more active on weekends keeping in mind movement on off days. We noticed the police directing the visitors to go away from the sites which are popular among the tourists. Even then taking a small round on off days is not a bad idea,” said another Salalah resident. Salem al Mashani works and stays in Salalah, but every weekend he visits his ancestral house in one of the mountain villages. He admits he misses the thrill of the season because this is the time relatives and friends from all over the country would visit Salalah to have fun. “It used to be a great reunion of family and friends, but in the current situation precaution is must to keep the pandemic under control.” “It is a good idea to keep these sites closed for some time to avoid gatherings. Now the authorities can do some minor or major maintenance of those sites and set strict guidelines for visits when they open again,” he said.

Agreement to boost veterinary research signed

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) signed a memorandum of cooperation on Monday with A’Sharqiyah University (ASU) on the veterinary medicine programme at the College of Applied and Health Sciences. The agreement was signed by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry for Agriculture and Prof Fuad Shadid, Vice-Chancellor of A’Sharqiyah University. The pact aims to build bridges that contribute to achieving the vision of the ministry and the university and to formulate cooperation in an equal framework that guarantees and achieves the interests of both parties. It also aims at making

use of the teaching and training cadres of ASU to develop Omani cadres and to provide advice to develop institutional performance in the fields of veterinary services needed by the ministry according to a regulatory framework and a programme prepared to achieve this goal. The two sides seek to consolidate, facilitate and enhance scientific and research exchange in the fields of animal health, in addition to developing the veterinary services in terms of devices and equipment for laboratories that are available at the university and can be used to perform some diagnostic, analytical and qualitative tests of samples drawn by veterinary clinics and quarantines. — ONA

Banks, money exchanges told to speed up Omanisation



MUSCAT: Money exchange and banks operating in the Sultanate were told to end sub contracting of expat workers and provide jobs for Omanis. This came in a meeting of HR managers of banks and money exchanges convened by Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosani, Under-

Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, on Monday. Al Hosani spoke about the labour ministry’s approach to revise policies and procedures pertaining to the employment of Omani job seekers. He pointed out that the ministry will work in coordination with other government

departments supervising various economic sectors to start steps to employ Omanis in the place of expatriates in the designated jobs. The meeting called for providing on-the-job training for Omanis to prepare them to take up the jobs. It urged private sector companies to speed up the ‘expat-replacement

process’. The managers showed their willingness to provide job opportunities for Omani job seekers as part of efforts to regulate the labour market. It was agreed during the meeting to form joint working teams to undertake the mission. — ONA

Online nod for discounts sought

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

Demands were raised for an online platform to submit requests for licences related to promotional discounts instead of applying manually to save time and effort.

This came after the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion tweeted that some institutions or companies offered discounts and advertised them through various social media without obtaining permission. "This act is in violation of the regulations governing promotional offers, and the ministry will take legal action in this regard," the ministry warned.

Many in social media demanded the introduction of online permission electronically, as the current situation



requires applying for approval through Sanad offices and then obtaining sanction from the Consumer Protection Authority and the ministry. Sulaiman Jumaa said it is preferable to introduce online permit and the process shouldn't exceed one working day.

Others suggested bringing social media celebrities and influencers under the legal ambit as they have become an integral part of promoting many services and products.

In general, the ministry's supervision process on discounts is very important to ensure fair prices. Khaled al Amri said. "Very nice and a good step to legalise ads, but please explain the mechanism that has been taken to guarantee the rights of the parties if an institution or individual

account on Instagram asks a celebrity to make an advertisement for his product."

As Suleiman al Hosni said, "It is a regulatory issue and in the interest of the consumer, not as some may see otherwise. There are many offers we see, but if we reach the selling site, we do not find that."

The ministry decided last year that Sanad offices in various governorates receive requests for promotional offers or discounts instead of submitting them to the ministry.

According to the conditions, the institutions and companies must apply at least 15 days before the start of the offer, provided that it meets the conditions and provisions specified in the regulations and decisions related to the offer and agreed by the ministry.

Number of SMEs up by 11.8 pc

MUSCAT: The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development at the end of July 2020 stood at 45,094, comprising an increase by 11.8 per cent compared to the same period of 2019, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with 34 per cent SMEs registered till the end of July 2020, followed by North Al Batinah with 16 per cent, Al Dakhiliyah with 13 per cent and the Dhofar with 8 per cent, while the rest of governorates comprised 29%.

The Governorate of Muscat registered 15,181 SMEs at the end of July, followed by the Governorate of North Al Batinah with 7,123, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah with 5,687, Governorate of Dhofar with 3,796, Governorate of South Al Batinah with 3,341, and the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah with 3,056 SMEs.

This was followed by the Governorate of Al Dhahirah with 2,662 SMEs, the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah with 2,606 SMEs, and the Governorate of Al Buraimi with 958 registered SMEs.

The Governorate of Al Wusta registered 511 SMEs and the Governorate of Musandam registered 173 SMEs, which is the lowest among governorates at the end of July 2020.

— ONA

More India repatriation flights

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Government of India has decided to add five more flights to India from Oman in Phase 6 of Vande Bharat Mission. As in the case of flights operated earlier under Vande Bharat Mission, passenger lists for all the above-mentioned flights will be finalised by the embassy on the basis of information received by it. Passengers are requested to provide details and confirmation to travel on a particular flight on the online form floated by the embassy for VBM Phase 6. All such people will be contacted by Air India directly for booking of tickets.

The passengers, after registering on the online form, may also approach Air India offices in Ruwi and Wattayah (National Travels, General Sales Agent of Air India) directly to book tickets on first come first serve basis. However, priority will be given to medical emergency cases, pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as to other Indian nationals who are stranded in difficult situations.

The cost of tickets will have to be borne by the passengers themselves. All passengers are required to confirm acceptance of all conditions of travel, including quarantine requirements in India as well as health requirements in order to board the flight.

Pre-marital screening must to curb cystic fibrosis disease

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

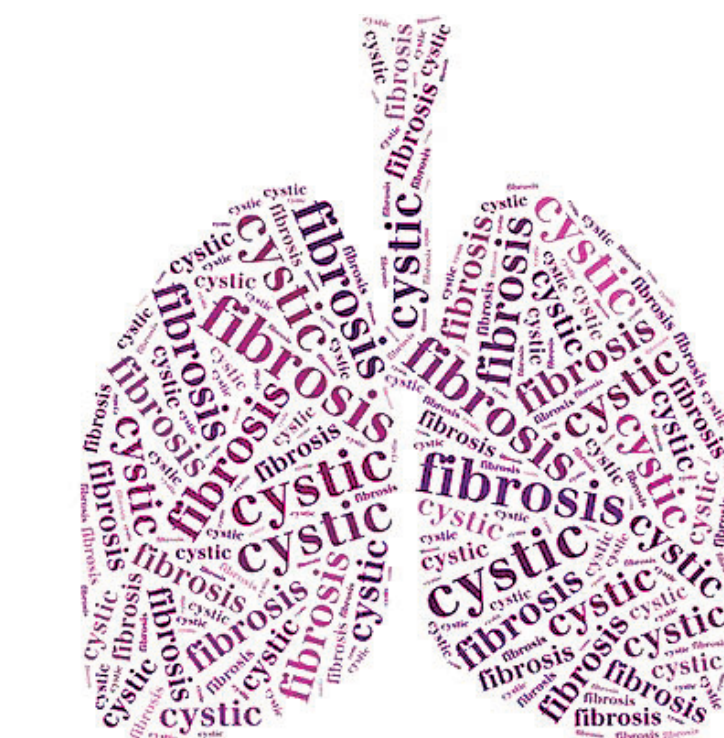
Worldwide Cystic Fibrosis Day is marked annually September 8 by patients and patient groups around the world.

While there is no cure yet for cystic fibrosis (CF), people with CF are living longer, healthier lives than ever before. In fact, babies born with CF today are expected to live into their mid-40s and beyond. Life expectancy has improved so dramatically that there are now more adults with cystic fibrosis than children.

CF is one of the recessive genetic diseases affecting children due to a genetic defect inherited from both parents carrying the same infected gene.

It is caused by a mutation in the gene of cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR). This results in thick and sticky mucus that accumulates all over the body, which causes a blockage in the tubes and channels, especially in the lungs and pancreas.

Dr Sumaiya al Araimi, Senior Consultant & Head of Pediatric Respiratory Unit at the Royal Hospital, pointed out that this disease



is being diagnosed at a very early age due to the onset of symptoms during childhood.

CF mainly affects the respiratory and digestive systems, where the patient suffers from frequent respiratory infections, stomach and eating problems, as well as poor

growth and overall weakness. She also added that the disease may get worse and lead to respiratory failure and death.

CF is most common in the Caucasian societies and rare among Asian people. 1 per 2,500 births is infected with this disease in the

CF patient suffers from frequent respiratory infections, stomach and eating problems, as well as poor growth and overall weakness

Caucasian societies. More than 2,000 gene mutations are linked to this disease.

The number of CF cases is significantly increasing annually in the Sultanate.

The disease is being diagnosed due to the advanced level of treatment at the Royal Hospital and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Since 2006 till date, CF cases numbered 224 cases and 51 deaths. 122 patients are undergoing treatment at the Royal Hospital.

The gene mutations in the Sultanate have been defined and found. Therefore, it is important to conduct premarital screening in order to reduce the number of cases.

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#Living_with_COVID19



HOTELS SWEETEN DEALS TO ATTRACT TOURISTS

COVID-19 protocol: Precautions at all hotels ensure safety of guests and staff

MUSCAT: Tourism activity in the Sultanate has resumed, in conjunction with the measures taken to ease restrictions on many economic activities.

Hafidh bin Mahfoudh al Hadhrami, Asset Manager at Omran Group, said that the group's hotels have taken all precautionary measures against coronavirus to ensure the safety of guests and workers in hotel facilities.

The official said Omran — the government executive arm responsible for the development of the tourism sector in the Sultanate — has launched “Within Oman”

campaign aimed at stimulating local tourism by encouraging citizens and residents to stay in the group's hotel and resorts in various governorates of the Sultanate.

Thirteen hotels and resorts are participating in the campaign, divided into three main accommodation packages: Enjoy, Chill and Relax. The offers will continue until the end of next October. Each hotel offers many advantages and additional tourism services that are designed to suit different tastes and needs of individual visitors and families.

The packages include free

accommodation for two children under the age of 12, which includes breakfast, in addition to exclusive offers for a set of entertainment activities and tours to add an enjoyable tourist experience.

Al Hadhrami expected the campaign would attract individuals and families to take advantage of the exclusive and distinct offers, especially after the resumption of the operation of hotel facilities and other activities at a time when many are looking forward to a distinguished vacation and a unique experience

in the Sultanate.

He said that all the necessary preventive measures have been completed in all participating hotels and resorts, stressing the keenness to achieve this goal to the fullest, so that visitors can spend an enriching and safe tourism experience.

The timing of the campaign coincides with the resumption of activities in various sectors in order to ease the COVID-19 impact as well as the desire to maximise tourism's contribution to the GDP.

The campaign is an opportunity to attract and encourage local

tourism and urge the target audience to explore the Sultanate's diversity through the experiences provided in all participating hotels and resorts.

Al Hadhrami explained that the group has invested all efforts and energies to attract local tourists, including individuals and families, by highlighting the unique experiences that can be enjoyed when booking at various hotels and resorts, in addition to marketing the tourist destinations close to these hotels, whether natural, heritage or cultural.

Qais bin Zahir al Hosni, Vice-

President for Government and Corporate Affairs at Omran, said: “We expect that the campaign “Within Oman” achieves its objectives to stimulate the local tourism activities in the Sultanate. We commend the efforts of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and our partners in the sector in advancing tourism development and promoting various tourism activities in the country. These efforts have a pivotal role in the recovery of the sector and stimulating tourism growth in the various vital tourism sites in the Sultanate.” — ONA

OMAN MARKS DAY OF CLEAN AIR FOR BLUE SKIES

MUSCAT: The Sultanate is joining other countries in the world today in marking the First International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies, following the United Nations' move to designate September 7 every year as “International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies”.

The celebration reflects the Sultanate's attention to the protection of the environment and the conservation of human health, wildlife and biological and physical components such as air, water, soil and seas.

The designation of this day stems from the great risk of pollution, which causes avoidable deaths and diseases at global level. As many as 6.5 million people are expected to be victims of early death across the globe due to air pollution inside and outside buildings.

Oman marks the event due to the importance of addressing this global problem and finding solutions at the domestic level, while at the same time sharing with other countries its experiences in preserving air cleanliness. — ONA



IN BRIEF

CSC 34th course begins

MUSCAT: The 34th course for the officers studying at the Command and Staff College (CSC) of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) was inaugurated today under the auspices of Brig. Abdullah bin Ali al Sulaimi, CSC Commandant. The college has taken all COVID-19 precautionary measures for the safety of the participants in the course and the teaching staff. Officers from the Sultan's Armed Forces and other departments at the Ministry of Defense, as well as other military and security agencies participate in the course.

Sultanate at Arab meet

CAIRO: The Sultanate took part in the 154th session of the Arab League Council in Cairo on Monday. The Sultanate's delegation was headed by Badr bin Hilal al Busaidy, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate. The Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate delivered the Sultanate's speech, after which the Palestinian side took over the presidency of the 154th session from the Sultanate to complete the agenda in preparation for the virtual meeting of the Arab League Council at the ministerial level scheduled to be held tomorrow (Wednesday).

SAI attends Asia meet

MUSCAT: The State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI) took part in the meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Auditing (WGEA) of the Asian Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ASOSAI). The meeting, which was attended by member SAI's, was held through video conferencing from the headquarters of the Secretariat of the ASOSAI in Vietnam on Monday. During the virtual meeting, the Secretariat's report on progress of the working group projects was discussed along with the work plan of the ASOSAI-WGEA (2020-2022). — ONA

Belarus arrests 600 as opposition figure 'kidnapped'

MINSK: Belarus said on Monday that police had detained more than 600 people at weekend protests and the opposition said a senior figure had been snatched off the streets, as authorities intensified efforts to end weeks of demonstrations.

The opposition's Coordination Council said one of its high-profile members Maria Kolesnikova had been "kidnapped by unknown people in central Minsk" along with a spokesman and executive secretary.

"Their whereabouts are unknown", it said, accusing President Alexander Lukashenko's regime of "openly using methods of terror".

Lukashenko's main rival Svetlana Tikhanovskaya said the abductions were an attempt to disrupt the work of the Coordination Council. It was set up to ensure a peaceful transfer of power after opposition candidate Tikhanovskaya rejected Lukashenko's claim to have won an August 9 presidential election with 80 per cent of the vote.

"The more they try to scare us, the more people will take to the streets", Tikhanovskaya said in a statement.

The Coordination Council demanded the detainees' immediate release and the free return of other activists who have left the country under official pressure. A spokesman for the European Commission, Peter Stano, said the EU's executive branch was trying to establish what happened and condemned the Belarusian authorities' actions as "unacceptable".

He said the EU hoped to impose sanctions "very soon" after drawing up a list of individuals responsible for police violence against protesters and rigged elections.

The disputed election has sparked demonstrations that have seen tens of thousands take the streets of the ex-Soviet country of 9.5 million on Russia's western borders, in an unprecedented challenge to Lukashenko's 26 years in power. — AFP

VIRUS-HIT MOROCCO LOCKS DOWN CASABLANCA, SHUTS SCHOOLS

RABAT: Morocco imposed a lockdown on Casablanca and shut its schools on Monday, the day pupils were due to return to classes, in a bid to stop the spread of COVID-19. The new measures, which include restrictions on movement and a night-time curfew, would be in place for two weeks in the commercial capital, the authorities said a statement.

"We risk being overwhelmed by the virus", said Health Minister Khalid Ait Taleb.

"Therefore, drastic measures are required, otherwise the situation may get out of control in the coming days", the official MAP news agency quoted him as saying.

Morocco has seen a spike in coronavirus cases in recent weeks. It recorded 2,234 new infections on Sunday, a record for a single day, with 42 per cent of them in Casablanca, home to 3.3 million people.

Since detecting its first case in early March, Morocco has recorded 72,394 cases of COVID-19 infection,

including 1,361 deaths.

The authorities blame the spread of COVID-19 on people's failure to adhere to health protocols.

Casablanca, along with Marrakesh, had already been subject to a series of restrictions three weeks ago, including beach closures and shortened business hours.

Authorities decided on Monday to close educational institutions including primary, middle and high schools as well as universities.

That came after epidemiologists voiced concern over the health system's capacity to respond to the crisis, and the additional risks posed by the start of the school year.

All exits to major cities were closed from midday, with travel only allowed with "exceptional authorisation" issued by local authorities.

The decision not to reopen schools drew criticism on social media from Moroccans expressing their disappointment.

"We spent the weekend labelling school supplies with the children,



Students attend the first day of classes amid measures put in place by Moroccan authorities in bid to stop the spread of COVID-19, in the city of Sale on Monday. — AFP

they were on cloud nine over returning to school tomorrow", wrote one father on Twitter. "How do you explain this to a six-year-old and an eight-year-old?" Another parent was also indignant: "They tell us, without any notice, without delay and late

in the evening... that we are being forced into semi-imprisonment", he tweeted.

Ahead of the planned opening, epidemiologists had raised concerns over the health risks of students returning to school and the capacity

of the health sector to respond to a further spike in cases.

Dr Tayeb Hamdi, Vice President of the national health federation had recommended postponing the start of the school year to "avoid schools becoming vectors of contamination", in an interview published on Monday by the news site Medias24.

But the head of the child psychiatry department of the largest hospital in Casablanca, Ghita Benjelloun, also flagged "extremely negative effects" of keeping schools closed after a long lockdown that generated among young people "a lot of fear, anxiety and insecurity".

Cases of suicide attempts, violence and conduct disorders among young patients — both children and adolescents — have tripled in her department since the lockdown, she said, according to Medias24.

In mid-June, the Moroccan Pediatrics Society had alerted authorities to the possible "devastating effect" of lockdown on youths. — AFP

FLOODS IN SENEGAL



A man carries a mattress on his head while walking in flood water in the Keurs Massar area in Dakar on Monday after heavy rains in Senegal. The capital and major swathes of the West African country were drenched with unusually heavy rains over the weekend. — AFP

Biden to mark Labour Day with union event

WILMINGTON: Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden is headed on Monday to the crucial electoral state of Pennsylvania, where he plans to accept a new round of union endorsements and speak directly to workers as the presidential campaign enters its homestretch.

The trip kicks off another flurry of travel to battleground states this week by both Biden and President Donald Trump as some opinion polls show the race tightening with less than 60 days to go until the November 3 election.

With the coronavirus pandemic and civil unrest over racism and police brutality gripping attention in recent months, Biden is seeking to maintain his edge by painting the Republican incumbent as an ineffectual leader who thrives on chaos and has left the working class behind.

Trump has struggled to change the contours of the campaign despite highly charged rhetoric on racial polarisation and "law and order" intended to motivate

his base and draw new supporters in suburban parts of key swing states, such as Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan.

Trump has also faced a new controversy after *The Atlantic* magazine, citing four unnamed people, reported last week that he had referred to Marines buried in an American cemetery near Paris as "losers" and declined to visit their graves during a 2018 trip to France. Trump vehemently denied the report. Trump announced on Twitter that he would be holding a news conference on Monday.

"Jobs number, and the Economic comeback, are looking GREAT. Happy Labor Day!" he tweeted. Trump plans to visit North Carolina, Florida, Michigan and Pennsylvania later in the week. Biden's campaign has said that as many as 16 states could be up for grabs in November, with doubts about Trump's coronavirus response and the battered economy making states like Arizona, Texas and Georgia more competitive for Democrats. — Reuters

PARIS: The archaeological crypt of Notre-Dame reopens on Wednesday with an exhibition retracing the cathedral's turbulent history nearly 18 months after it was ravaged by fire.

The April 2019 blaze toppled the spire of the cathedral and destroyed much of the roof of what is one of France's most cherished national treasures.

The crypt, situated below the square in front of the cathedral and containing the remains of fortifications and thermal baths, had to be cleaned of lead dust, an arduous job that took more than a year before visitors could be allowed back in.

The exhibition pays homage to French writer Victor Hugo and the architect Eugene Viollet-Le-Duc, the two men behind the resurrection of the cathedral in the 19th century.

Hugo's novel "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame", published in 1831, was instrumental in winning public backing for the restoration of the monument which had been left in a state of abandon and decay. "The exhibition starts with how the cathedral looked at the time the novel was published", said Vincent Gille, a curator at the Victor Hugo museum in Paris.

"It was a frightfully forbidding and dangerous building which bore no resemblance to a radiant and shining cathedral", he said, pointing to several of Hugo's

Notre-Dame crypt set to reopen after 18 months



Notre-Dame restoration work has been plagued by delays. — AFP

sketches as evidence.

The exhibition consists mostly of photographs, drawings, paintings and film excerpts illustrating the world's fascination with the cathedral, from the beginnings to the animated feature films of today.

Notre-Dame was badly damaged by vandalism in the early 19th century, and indifferent city authorities were planning to tear it down when Hugo called for

"War against the Demolishers" in a pamphlet published in 1825.

"There is perhaps not a single city in France today that is not thinking about, beginning, or completing the destruction of some national monument", he wrote. After the publication of "Hunchback", the exhibition shows, the French public swung behind the idea that Notre-Dame was worth saving and gave crucial support to Viollet-le-Duc's work

on the cathedral between 1844 and 1864, which laid the foundations for the national monument status it enjoys today.

The inspiration for some features, such as the malevolent chimeras overlooking Paris, came directly from Hugo's novel, which also, eerily, contained the description of a devastating fire.

Organisers see the exhibition as the first step towards a return to normality for the crypt's museum, which before the fire welcomed some 170,000 visitors a year.

"The project started very soon after the fire and was motivated by the wish to honour the cathedral", curator Anne de Mondenard said.

Work on Notre-Dame's reconstruction after last year's fire has been plagued by delays due to bad weather, concerns over lead pollution, and most recently the coronavirus pandemic.

It was only in early June that workers began the delicate task of removing tons of metal scaffolding that melted together in the fire — renovation work was underway when the blaze struck.

— AFP

شركة النماء للدواجن ش.م.ع
A' Namaa Poultry Co. S.A.O.C

Extension Announcement Tenders for Leasing Trucks (Long Term Contract)

A' Namaa Poultry Company SAOC invites all companies dealing in leasing trucks and wishing to participate in the tender for leasing trucks, to apply to the company to purchase the tender and the details are as follows: -

SR	Tenders Details	Tender NO	No of trucks
1	Distribution Trucks (Refrigerated)	ANP/LD/020/2020	37
2	Prime Mover	ANP/LD/010/2020	16

- Obtaining the conditions of the tender from the Procurement Committee at the company's headquarters at the following address: Al Nahda Towers 2, Floor 7, Office No. 9, during working hours from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., before 10th Sept2020 for a fee of OMR 100. which is non-refundable for each tender.
- Submitting bids in sealed envelope with the tender numbers and name written on it.
- Attach the offers with the commercial registration details of the applicant.

The last date for receiving applications is September 14, 2020.

A' Namaa Poultry reserves the right to accept or reject any or all offers without giving any reasons.

Suppliers will be notified after the screening process according to the company's standards.

In case of any queries or further clarification on the process, please contact Logistics Department (Phone: +968 22504469; Email: info@anamaa.com) during office hours



Saudi Arabia calls for permanent, fair solution to Palestinian cause

GLOBAL ISSUES: King Salman and Trump review G20 efforts to combat COVID-19



A member of Israeli security argues with a Palestinian demonstrator during a rally to protest Israel's plan to annex parts of the occupied West Bank. — AFP

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia supports a fair and permanent solution for the Palestinian cause, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud has told Donald Trump in a phone call, as the US President praised the kingdom for opening its airspace. In a phone call with Trump, King Salman appreciated the efforts made by the US to promote regional peace, affirming the “Kingdom’s keenness to reach a lasting and just solution to the Palestinian cause to bring peace, which he said is the main starting point for the Kingdom’s efforts and the

Arab Peace Initiative, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported. King Salman and Trump also discussed the efforts of the G20 group to combat the global COVID-19 pandemic. According to SPA, the two leaders reviewed the work of the G20 chaired by Riyadh this year, and the efforts made within its meetings to protect lives and livelihoods from the impact of the pandemic. They also reviewed the most prominent policies that have been agreed upon to reduce the negative aspects of the pandemic on peoples

and the global economy. King Salman stressed that Saudi Arabia will continue to support and coordinate the group to confront the effects of the global health crisis on the human and economic levels. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the G20 countries have been holding regular meetings to deal with impacts of the deadly virus in various sectors. During a summit in March, the G20 leaders vowed to pump more than \$5 trillion into the international economy. On Monday, King Salman and Russian

President Vladimir Putin discussed the possible joint production of a Russian coronavirus vaccine. In early August, Russia said it had developed the world’s first vaccine against the virus and claimed that more than a billion doses had been pre-ordered by 20 countries, including Saudi Arabia. Putin and Salman discussed “collective efforts aimed at overcoming the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic,” a Kremlin statement said, while noting the call had come at the Saudi king’s initiative. — **Agencies**

Swiss diplomat holds ‘fruitful’ talks in Iran

TEHRAN: Switzerland’s Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis said he had “fruitful” talks on Monday with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif regarding “peace, economic development and human rights”. The Swiss embassy in Tehran handles US interests in Iran, since ties were cut in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution. Cassis is also expected to meet President Hassan Rouhani as part of a three-day visit to Tehran, celebrating a century of diplomatic relations

between Switzerland and Iran. Tensions between Iran and the US have escalated since 2018, after President Donald Trump withdrew the US from an international nuclear agreement and reimposed tough sanctions on Iran. “Peace, economic development and human rights - fruitful discussion with my counterpart,” Cassis wrote on Twitter following the talks. Switzerland has also played a major role in prisoner swaps between Tehran and Washington.

Zarif called the talks “excellent” on Twitter and said “while appreciating Swiss efforts to mitigate US sabotage, a return to normal trade is global priority.” According to the US Department of State, Secretary Mike Pompeo had a phone call with Cassis before his Tehran visit, raising speculation the visit involved talks on Tehran-Washington relations. Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh denied the “speculations” on Monday, saying it

was a planned visit delayed over the novel coronavirus outbreak and “not related to Iran and the US”. “I’m glad we could establish together the Swiss Humanitarian Channel for the transfer of food and medical supplies to the people of Iran,” Cassis said on Twitter. Known by its acronym SHTA, the Swiss channel is a payment mechanism aimed to enable food, medicine and other humanitarian aid to be sent to Iran without breaking US sanctions. — **AFP**



An Algerian woman wearing a shirt bearing the portrait of journalist Khaled Drareni takes part in a rally in Algiers on Monday. Drareni was sentenced in August to three years in jail after covering demonstrations by the Hirak protest movement. — **AFP**

Algeria’s new constitution to meet protesters’ demands

ALGIERS: Algeria’s new constitution, due to be put to a referendum on November 1, would meet demands by a protest movement that ousted veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika last year, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said. Tebboune also vowed to amend other laws and continue fighting against corruption to enable the state to restore confidence after investigations in 2019 revealed the involvement of several senior officials in corruption cases. The referendum will be the first test for Tebboune since his election in December last year that followed mass street protests rejecting Bouteflika’s plan to seek a new term after 20 years in power, and demanding the departure of the whole ruling elite.

It includes mainly giving more powers to the parliament, prime minister and the judiciary as well as strengthening political freedoms. The implementation of this constitutional amendment - if approved by the people - “will require adapting a number of laws to the new stage as part of a comprehensive reform of the state and its institutions,” the statement quoted him as saying, without giving details. The protests, which broke out in February last year, were followed by a series of trials in which former senior officials, including prime ministers, ministers and businessmen, were jailed over corruption charges. Demonstrations were banned by the government in March this year to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Tebboune said the number of corruption cases handled by courts showed a “trust crisis” between rulers and the people over the past years. “The end of this crisis is a condition for building a new Algeria in which no one will be protected by immunity and influence,” he said. — **AFP**

28 killed in clashes in north Yemen

SANAA: At least 28 people were killed as fighting intensified between Yemen’s government forces and the rebel group in the country’s Al-Jawf province, a military official said on Monday. The official told Xinhua news agency that “armed confrontations that began on Sunday are still taking place between the government troops and the rebel group over the control of key areas in Al-Jawf province”. The victims comprised 18 rebels and 10 government personnel. The official indicated that the government forces were determined to expel the rebels from strategic areas in Al-Jawf, but fighting has expanded further in the province. “The rebels staged a stiff resistance and succeeded in impeding the progress of the government forces in Al-Jawf till the moment,” he added. Another Yemeni military official confirmed that the group made progress on-ground and captured areas in the neighbouring province of Marib. — **IANIS**

Russian FM meets Syria’s president on rare visit

DAMASCUS: Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad discussed economic cooperation on Monday with Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, as Moscow’s envoy made his first visit to war-torn Syria since 2012, the presidency said. Assad said “the Syrian government was determined to continue working with Russian partners” to implement signed agreements, and encourage the “success of Russian investments in Syria”, a statement from the presidency read. They discussed possible new agreements “in the interest of both countries and to alleviate the impact of a policy of sanctions” by Western countries against government-held areas of Syria, the statement added. Lavrov joined a Russian delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov, arriving in the Syrian capital on Sunday night, state news agency SANA said. Both countries have signed several deals in recent years in energy, construction and agriculture. They include one for Russian firm Stroytransgaz to take over Syria’s largest port of Tartous for 49 years. In 2018, Syria awarded the same company a 50-year concession to



Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov hold a joint press conference after meeting in Damascus, — **AFP**

extract phosphate in the central region of Palmyra. The Russian foreign minister later attended a news conference with his Syrian counterpart Walid Muallem, after which he was due to head to nearby Cyprus. President Vladimir Putin made his first trip to Damascus in Syria’s nine-

year-old war in January this year. The Russian leader also visited Syria in December 2017, but did not go to the capital, only stopping at the Russian base of Hmeimim on the Mediterranean coast. Russia has been a key ally of the Damascus regime throughout the Syrian conflict that erupted in

2011 with the repression of anti-government protests. Moscow’s military intervention in 2015 helped turn the tide of the war, with Russian air power allowing Syrian government forces to win back large parts of the country from rebels and IS. Russia already has a naval base in Tartous.

With UN-led peace talks floundering in recent years, Moscow and rebel backer Turkey have emerged as the main powerbrokers in alternative negotiations. The conflict has ravaged the Syrian economy, killed more than 380,000 people and pushed millions to flee their homes. — **AFP**

CHINA SHOWS OFF COVID-19 VACCINES FOR FIRST TIME

BEIJING: China has put its homegrown coronavirus vaccines on display for the first time, as the country where the contagion was discovered looks to shape the narrative surrounding the pandemic.

High hopes hang on the small vials of liquid on show at a Beijing trade fair this week — vaccine candidates produced by Chinese companies Sinovac Biotech and Sinopharm.

Neither has hit the market yet but the makers hope they will be approved after all-important phase 3 trials as early as year-end.

A Sinovac representative said his firm has already “completed the construction of a vaccine factory”

able to produce 300 million doses a year.

On Monday, people at the trade fair crowded around booths showing the potential game-changing vaccines.

China, which is facing a storm of foreign criticism over its early handling of the pandemic, has been trying to repurpose the story of COVID-19.

State media and officials are now emphasising the revival of Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the deadly pathogen surfaced, as a success story in the fight against the virus.

They are also touting progress on domestic vaccines as a sign of



Chinese leadership and resilience in the face of an unprecedented health threat that has pummelled the global

economy.

In May, President Xi Jinping pledged to make any potential

vaccine developed by China a “global public good”.

The potential vaccines on display are among nearly 10 worldwide to enter phase 3 trials, typically the last step ahead of regulatory approval, as countries race to stub out the virus and reboot battered economies.

Sinopharm said it anticipates the antibodies from its jab to last between one and three years — although the final result will only be known after the trials.

China’s *Global Times* reported last month that “the price of the vaccines will not be high”.

Every two doses should cost below 1,000 yuan (\$146), the report said, citing Sinopharm’s chairman,

who told media he has already been injected with one of the candidate vaccines.

China’s official Xinhua news agency reported on Monday that another vaccine candidate, developed by Chinese military scientists, can deal with mutations in the coronavirus.

As of last month, at least 5.7 billion doses of the vaccines under development around the world had been pre-ordered.

But the World Health Organization has warned that widespread immunisation against COVID-19 may not be on the cards until the middle of next year.

— AFP

25 militants killed in Afghanistan

KABUL: At least 25 militants were killed and eight others injured after Afghan security forces repelled a Taliban attack in Laghman province, a government spokesman said on Monday.

“The militants stormed security forces’ position in Jaibon locality in the north of provincial capital Mehtarlam at midnight. The ground forces called in an air support, and the Afghan Air Force struck the militants,” the spokesman Assadullah Dawlatzai told Xinhua. The victims included five of the Taliban’s Red Unit fighters, he said. The attackers came from nearby mountains, and the security forces found weapon and ammunition after the clashes.

The militant group is yet to comment on the development. — IANS

BACK ON TRACK

Metro services resume in India



A metro train is seen following the resumption of metro services in Chennai on Monday. — AFP

NEW DELHI: India restarted city metro services on Monday after a nearly six-month hiatus as the vast nation overtook Brazil to become the second-worst affected country in terms of coronavirus cases, behind only the United States.

Despite warnings that it could eventually overtake the US, India has been steadily re-opening its pandemic-battered economy.

Masked commuters sat in mostly empty coaches and flashed victory signs to journalists early on Monday at metro stations in the capital New Delhi — one of the most badly hit cities along with financial hub Mumbai.

Passengers can only sit on alternate seats, and after undergoing thermal screening.

“There was no problems commuting in the metro. Social distancing is being followed and... people are using facemasks and sanitising,” passenger Deepak Kumar, who took the subway to work in Delhi, said.

“For our lives to move on, we have to get out of our homes... so this is a good move by the government to start the metro trains.” The resumption of metro services came as the South Asian nation recorded 4.2 million infections since the pandemic

began, health ministry data showed.

It surpassed Brazil’s total, making it the second-highest tally behind the United States’ 6.25 million.

India has also recorded 71,642 deaths, fewer than the 126,203 in Brazil and 188,540 in the US.

Many experts, however, say it is not testing enough people and not properly recording many deaths, meaning the real numbers may be much higher.

Since August the country of 1.3 billion people, home to some of the world’s most densely populated cities, has been reporting the highest single-day rises in the world.

On Monday it reported an increase of more than 90,000 cases.

Its caseload had moved past four million on Saturday, only 13 days after hitting three million.

Delhi, a city teeming with 20 million people, recorded 3,256 new infections on Sunday — its highest single-day spike in 73 days. It was also the first time cases crossed the 3,000 mark during this period.

Virologist Shahid Jameel, who heads the Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance, said the key factor to watch is the growth rate in infections, which he called “quite alarming”. — AFP

SEOUL: A powerful typhoon lashed South Korea on Monday after smashing into southern Japan with record winds and heavy rains that left four people missing in a landslide.

Half a million people were without power after Typhoon Haishen roared past Japan’s southern-most main island of Kyushu, ripping off roofs and dumping half a metre of water in just a day.

Rescue workers were picking through mud and detritus after a hillside collapsed in rural Miyazaki.

Dozens of police officers were on their way to help. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters in Tokyo.

At least two other deaths had been reported during the storm, he said, although the causes were not immediately known.

Haishen, which came on the heels of another powerful typhoon, crashed into Okinawa on Saturday and moved northwards throughout Sunday.

Around 1.8 million people were told to seek shelter, for fears that the 200 kilometre-per-hour winds would wreak havoc on Japan’s wooden housing stock.

By lunchtime on Monday, the system had moved over South Korea, forcing the cancellation of hundreds of flights, and sparking landslides.

Traffic lights and trees were felled in and around Busan, streets were flooded and power was knocked out to thousands of homes.

Haishen was churning its way up the eastern side of the peninsula into the Sea of Japan, known as the East



A riverside park near the Taehwa River is flooded by heavy rain caused by Typhoon Haishen in Ulsan on Monday. — AFP

Sea in Korea, having lost some of its destructive force, but still packing winds of up to 126 kilometres per hour.

Haishen was forecast to make landfall again in Chongjin, North Hamgyong province in North Korea, at around midnight, according to South Korea’s Meteorological Administration.

North Korea is still reeling from the effects of Typhoon Maysak last week.

Leader Kim Jong Un appeared in state media over the weekend, where he was shown inspecting the damage. He also sacked a top provincial official

in South Hamgyong.

He ordered 12,000 ruling party members in Pyongyang to help with recovery efforts, and the official KCNA news agency reported on Monday that around 300,000 had responded to his call.

HOTELS FULL

In Japan, Typhoon Haishen first made its presence felt on a string of exposed, remote southern islands before sweeping past the Kyushu region.

As it approached Kyushu authorities issued evacuation orders for 1.8 million people, with 5.6 million

others told to take precautions.

In some places, residents checked into hotels to shelter from the storm.

Hotel Polaris in Shibushi city, Kagoshima, said all 73 of its rooms were sold out for the weekend.

“This is a large building for our area. I think our guests have chosen to stay with us to feel safe,” front desk employee Takayuki Shinmura said, adding that it was unusual for all of the hotel’s rooms to be occupied during typhoons.

Japan presses its municipal buildings and schools into action as shelters during emergencies. — AFP

300 migrants land in Indonesia after spending 200 days at sea

JAKARTA: Nearly 300 members of Myanmar’s ethnic Rohingya minority landed in Aceh province on Indonesia’s Sumatra island on Monday after spending more than seven months at sea, a Red Cross official said.

Locals immediately brought the migrants to beach huts in the town of Lhokseumawe as soon as they reached the shore around midnight, said Muhammad Waly, the head of the local Indonesian Red Cross.

The group consisted of 181 women, 102 men and 14 children, who started their voyage from Bangladesh with Malaysia as their destination, Waly said. “According to information from some of them, they spent six months at sea,” Waly said.

“They are weak and some of them are ill,” he added.

The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR said about 30 in the group died at



Rohingya migrants following their arrival by boat in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, on Monday. — AFP

sea after they embarked on their journey in February from Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees live.

“Their hazardous ordeal has

been prolonged by the collective unwillingness of states to act for more than six months,” said the UNHCR director for Asia and the Pacific, Indrika Ratwatte.

“The group had repeatedly tried to disembark over the course of more than 200 days at sea, to no avail,” he said in a statement.

UNHCR staff in Aceh were helping local authorities to assess the needs of the refugees, he added.

In June, Acehnese fishermen rescued nearly 100 Rohingya migrants who had been drifting several kilometres of the coast of North Aceh.

Thousands of Rohingya have become stranded in Aceh over the past five years after their boats drifted while en route to Malaysia and other countries.

UN investigators have accused Myanmar’s military of carrying out mass killings and other atrocities against the minority with “genocidal intent” during a 2017 campaign that forced more than 730,000 across the border into Bangladesh. — dpa



France warns Britain against harming ‘trust’ on Brexit

PARIS: France on Monday warned Britain against seeking to revisit key parts of the deal on its exit from the European Union, saying any undermining of trust would affect talks on London’s future relations with the bloc.

The foreign ministry said that the proper implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement for Brexit agreed in October 2019 was a “question of trust” between the sides.

“If that trust is called into question, negotiations over the future relationship will be affected,” it said in a statement.

Britain said on Monday it was seeking to “clarify” key parts of its EU divorce deal setting off alarm bells after reports that Prime Minister Boris Johnson was planning new legislation that would override parts of the deal he signed last year.

The government said it was taking steps to make clear how Northern Ireland’s trade will be handled after Brexit, but insisted it remained committed to its EU withdrawal agreement and the province’s peace process. President Emmanuel Macron said on Twitter on Monday he had had “very good” telephone talks with Johnson on issues including Britain’s future relationship with the EU but



A lorry passes an anti-Brexit pro-Irish unity billboard reading “No Hard Border”, on the border between Newry in Northern Ireland and Dundalk in the Irish Republic. — AFP

did not give further details.

Downing Street said that in the talks the two men “agreed on the importance of making progress this month and reaching a conclusion on talks quickly.”

Ireland’s foreign minister too said Dublin should not overreact to reports that Britain may seek to undermine its Brexit withdrawal agreement but

warned that such a move would be a very serious breach of trust and fundamentally undermine ongoing talks.

London is reportedly planning new legislation to override parts of the agreement and create frictions in British-ruled Northern Ireland where special arrangements had been made to avoid a hard border with Ireland to

the south that could be detrimental to a peace agreement.

“Is this political gamesmanship or is there really a piece of legislation that’s going to emerge this week, which is contrary to the withdrawal agreement. We’ll have to wait and see,” Simon Coveney told national broadcaster RTE in an interview.

— Reuters

Philippine police draw flak for plan to monitor social media

MANILA: Philippine police drew criticism from netizens and activists for a plan to monitor social media to enforce quarantine rules, with critics accusing the authorities of authoritarianism and double standards.

National Police Lieutenant General Guillermo Eleazar, head of a task force enforcing quarantine protocols, warned of fines and penalties of community service for people violating precautionary measures, while violators of bans will face “additional charges”.

“Police could use public postings on social media as leads, and these will be over and above the police visibility operations we are conducting and will complement tips we get from police hotline,” Eleazar said by phone.

Manila ended a second round of strict lockdown measures on August 19 to boost business activity, but people



A girl shops from her home in Las Pinas City. — AFP

still must wear masks in public and observe one-meter distancing, while children, the elderly and pregnant

women are urged to stay at home.

The plan to monitor social media, announced on Saturday, seems to show

the police agency “wants to use the pandemic to turn us into a police state, where every action is being watched by the authorities,” Renato Reyes, secretary general of left-wing activist group Bayan (Nation) said on Twitter.

Critics said the plan shows a double standard after a police chief was allowed to keep his post despite flouting a ban on social gatherings in May. Photographs on the police force’s Facebook page showed Debold Sinas, chief of the National Capital Region police, celebrating his birthday along with dozens of people without masks sitting close together. Sinas apologised. Eleazar said criminal and administrative cases have been filed against Sinas for the incident. The Philippines has recorded 234,570 coronavirus cases, the highest in Southeast Asia, with 3,790 COVID-19 deaths. — Reuters

Massive California fire caused by pyrotechnic device used at party

WASHINGTON: The El Dorado fire in California, which has burned more than 7,000 acres since it started on Saturday, was caused by pyrotechnics at a party, according to authorities.

A smoke-generating pyrotechnic device used during the party started the fire, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) in San Bernardino said in a statement.

CAL FIRE issued a reminder to the public that dry conditions and critical weather mean fires can start easily. The El Dorado fire was only 5 per cent contained as of late on Sunday.

California is currently experiencing one of its worst wildfire seasons on record. Last month saw unprecedented fires across the state, due in part to rising temperatures and ageing electrical infrastructure.

State Governor Gavin Newsom issued an emergency proclamation on Sunday for counties hit by the Creek Fire, El Dorado Fire and the Valley Fire. The blazes have burned tens of thousands of acres, destroyed homes and caused the evacuation of thousands of residents, Newsom said in a statement.

San Diego, close to the border with Mexico, San Bernardino, to the east of Los Angeles, and Fresno, some 300 kilometres north of Los Angeles, were



Firefighters battle fire along Japatul Road in California. — AFP

among the affected counties.

The state is under a fire weather watch until Wednesday due to gusty winds and low humidity.

On Sunday, record-breaking temperatures hit parts of the state.

The National Weather Service recorded a high of 49.4 degrees Celsius at Woodland Hills, which it called the highest official temperature ever recorded in Los Angeles County.

The previous record was 48.3 degrees in July 2006.

In Paso Robles, a city famous for wineries in San Luis Obispo County, the metal hit 47.2 degrees, surpassing the record of 46.7 degrees from 2017.

The city of Burbank, on the outskirts of Los Angeles, matched its all-time high temperature of 45.5, the National Weather Service said.

200 people trapped by the Creek Fire

in Sierra National Forest were rescued on Saturday night by helicopter from the Mammoth Pool Reservoir area. The California National Guard also warned that people across the state could face power outages over the Labor Day holiday weekend due to high temperatures.

Satellite imagery showed enormous amounts of smoke had entered the skies above the western state. — dpa

Latin America’s longest tunnel comes under criticism

BOGOTA: A road tunnel billed as the greatest achievement of Colombian road engineering came under scathing criticism for its cost, the duration of its construction and for being one-way. President Ivan Duque on Friday inaugurated the 8.5-kilometre La Linea tunnel, described in Colombia as the longest in Latin America, which passes through the Andes’ central mountain range.

The tunnel linking Cajamarca with Calarca saves drivers 21 kilometres of travel along a winding road at up to 3,600 metres above sea level.

It aims to reduce the time and cost of moving goods from the port of Buenaventura to the centre of the country.

The tunnel was “badly planned, badly designed, badly tendered, with bad contracts and ... badly executed,” wrote German Vargas Lleras, who was Colombia’s vice president from 2014 to 2017 while it was being built.

The construction time of 11 years was four years longer than planned, critics pointed out.

The government gave the cost as about 1 trillion pesos (\$270 million) — twice the original budget — but Vargas Lleras said the real cost was five times the

original budget.

Many Colombians were also surprised to find out that the tunnel is one-way, allowing only for travel from the south-west to the centre of the country.

Those travelling the other way must still take the old mountain road, though traffic there will be much easier now.

Transport Minister Angela Maria Orozco said it had not been possible to build two tunnels in the mountain at the same time.

Initial reports said the tunnel was getting another section leading in the opposite direction, allowing lorries to transport export goods to Buenaventura. But Orozco only said the government would consider possible offers from private companies to build it.

“There is little to celebrate,” Vargas Lleras concluded in a column in the daily El Tiempo.

Senator Gustavo Bolivar tweeted that the project had been “wrapped in corruption and cost overruns,” and some other politicians and media outlets also published critical comments.

The tunnel will form part of a transport infrastructure including more than 20 other tunnels and about 30 viaducts.

— dpa

Navalny taken out of coma

BERLIN: Russian dissident Alexei Navalny has been removed from his medically induced coma and is being weaned off mechanical ventilation, the Berlin hospital where he is being treated said on Monday.

A statement from the Charite hospital in the German capital said Navalny’s condition “has improved” and that he is responding to verbal stimuli.

“It remains too early to gauge the potential long-term effects of his severe poisoning,” the statement said.

Navalny, one of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s most prominent critics, was transported to Germany in a comatose state on August 22, two days after falling ill on a domestic Russian flight.

Germany has since said there is “unequivocal” evidence that the 44-year-old was the victim of a nerve agent attack, which Chancellor Angela Merkel described last week as an attempt “to silence him.”

A toxicology report conducted at a special military laboratory in Germany found in Navalny’s system traces of a chemical nerve agent from the Novichok group, a government spokesman said on Wednesday.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas then summoned Russian ambassador Sergei Nechayev in protest and called for a full and transparent investigation.

The Russian government denies any involvement in the poisoning. The Russian attorney general has issued a request for legal assistance from Germany on the Navalny case. Maas told broadcaster ARD that his country had approved that request.

Merkel is not ruling anything out in terms of a potential response to the incident, including a possible reconsideration of Germany’s Nord Stream 2 pipeline project with Russia, her spokesman said on Monday.

But Moscow must first answer serious questions about the Navalny incident, Steffen Seibert told reporters in Berlin.

Construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is nearly complete. It would double Russian deliveries of natural gas via a Baltic Sea route to Germany, Europe’s largest economy. The project, already criticised by the United States and some Eastern European countries, has come under increased scrutiny following the alleged attack on Navalny. — dpa

UK stabbings: suspect held

LONDON: A 27-year-old man has been arrested in connection with the mass stabbings in Britain’s second city Birmingham that left one person dead and two critically wounded, police said on Monday.

The man was held on suspicion of murder and seven attempted murders that were carried out after midnight on Saturday, West Midlands Police said. The suspect was detained in the Selly Oak area of the city at around 4 am (0300 GMT) and he remained in police custody for questioning.

A 23-year-old man suffered

fatal injuries in what was believed to be a random attack, while a man and a woman, aged 19 and 32, are in a critical condition in hospital.

Britain has been on high alert after two mass stabbings in London in the last year, which saw armed officers shoot dead both perpetrators — convicted extremists who had been released early from prison.

Birmingham is one of Britain’s most ethnically diverse cities with a population of more than one million, and has had an explosive recent history of gang violence. — AFP

The world needs more listeners

They are there talking to you and in another moment they are gone, leaving behind questions unanswered and words that should have been said long before the departure.

The earth has sudden movements known as the endogenic forces that are sudden such as earthquakes and results in creation of landforms. Our life too goes through sudden shocks changing lives forever. For those who leave we do not know much, but for those who are left behind it is a vacuum that only time can help in moving on.

An illness gives rest of the family members to mentally prepare for the fate but not for those who leave suddenly. What hurts is when people leave and we realise how we had failed to know their thought and sadness, which they had been able to cover up keeping those moments to oneself.

There seems to be a need for awareness about depression not just to get help, but for the family and friends to pick up traits and signs of depression in their loved ones. When there are successful campaigns for road safety and other health issues in large scale why not for everyone to detect signs of depression.

A decision to quit life might not be momentary and might have taken in depth planning or maybe it is an



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obsessive thought that might have gone around the mind, but it leaves everyone else changed, shaken and realising how vulnerable we are.

Maybe the world needs more listeners. We take training to develop writing and public speaking skills. We are constantly reminded on how to express ourselves concisely for professional benefits and job interviews. But we hardly ever give importance to the power of listening. To let the other person let down their guard and open up so they can share their concerns. They do not need solutions because once they let their weight off their chest they will find their own solutions.

Mind can build forts around it because there have been so many examples when people have been betrayed with their confessions. How often do we actually partake in a conversation intentionally wanting to know about the other person's welfare? On the other hand how often do you think it would be all right to confide in a person? How many secrets have you kept to yourself?

We still have not successfully reached out to the society to convey the importance of overcoming the stigma on mental health. They even use it as a joke, but the reality is anyone one can fall victim to mental health. It could be genetics or it could be emotions and

even physical health.

It is easy to ask, "Why did they do it?" But it is even more meaningful to ask why did his/her sadness go unnoticed? Why do we lose hope?

Hope comes in with faith. A friend said: "Any religion gives a pattern of discipline in life. The prayer, the efforts take one away from the immediate reality to a zone where there is hope".

And then there might be others who have the confidence to think anything they go through is a result of their actions. They might have the strength to get up and move on in life and walk out from situations that are not healthy for them.

Dr Hamad al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, while speaking on FRONTPAGE, Oman Observer's podcast, explained how bullying including cyber bullying, financial situation and health as well as stress can all have an impact on the mental health to an extent the individual decides to give up on life.

The feeling of hopelessness that leads to attempting suicide could be cry for help. But when the individual when there is nothing for him to live for it could be a family member or a friend who would have to remind him/her about the beautiful sunrise awaiting tomorrow and the opportunities it could bring in as a pleasant surprise.

DOWNWARD TREND

After months of heartache, signs of COVID-19 easing in Brazil

PEDRO FONSECA

Brazil's COVID-19 death toll appears to be easing for the first time since May, data shows, a sign the Latin American country could be descending from a long infection plateau that has seen it suffer the world's second-worst outbreak after the United States.

With nearly 4 million confirmed cases, the virus has killed over 120,000 people in Brazil. But the level of average daily deaths dropped below 900 per day last week — the lowest in three and a half months and below the rate of both the United States and India, according to a Reuters tally.

Researchers at Imperial College London also calculate that the transmission rate in Brazil, at which each person infected with the coronavirus infects another person, is now below 1, the level required for new infections to slow. However, the rate previously fell below 1 in August, only to rebound a week later, according to Imperial.



We are on a downward trend compared to previous high plateau. But we have to remain vigilant

R MEDRONHO
Diseases Expert

The government statistics are also volatile. On Tuesday and Wednesday, Brazil registered more than 1,100 deaths each day, and experts say it is too early to say the worst is over.

"We are on a downward trend compared to the previous high plateau", said Roberto Medronho, an infectious diseases expert at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. "But, the numbers are still high and we have to remain vigilant so that it doesn't grow again".

Epidemiologists see Brazil's example as a warning to some countries, like India, that are now seeing cases surge. "Brazil is a cautionary tale", said Albert Ko, a professor at the Yale School of Public Health who has decades of experience in Brazil.

"The epidemic hit hard and many evidence-based interventions were not implemented or done properly in many places".

Social distancing, held by most public health experts as the key tool for containing the spread of the virus while no vaccine exists, was poorly implemented from the start in Brazil, sustaining the long peak in infections and deaths, experts say.

Data suggests that has been weakening too. A Reuters analysis of Google mobility data, which collates cellphone movement, showed that the number of people coming and going from places of work in Brazil went from a 37.8 per cent reduction from pre-pandemic levels in April to down just 16 per cent in August.

Movement at transit hubs has also increased substantially, the data showed.

"We have to work, because we pay rent and the cost of living is very expensive", said waitress Patricia Lima, who returned to her restaurant in Rio de Janeiro this month after three months at home.

Aboard the crowded bus she takes to get to work, many people don't wear masks, she said. Stay-at-home measures have been loosened across almost the entire country amid pressure from President Jair Bolsonaro, who has criticised them as harmful to the economy.

— Reuters

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

Brexit back in crisis as Britain threatens to undercut divorce pact

ELIZABETH PIPER

Britain's tortuous divorce from the European Union veered into fresh crisis on Monday after London signalled it could undermine the exit agreement with Brussels unless free trade terms are agreed by next month.

In yet another twist to the four-year saga since Britain voted narrowly to quit the EU, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government was reportedly planning new legislation to override parts of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement it signed in January. That could potentially jeopardise the whole treaty and create frictions in British-ruled Northern Ireland where special arrangements had been made to avoid a hard border with Ireland to the south that could be detrimental to a peace agreement.

Britain said it would honour the deal and was simply offering clarifications to avoid any future legal difficulties.

But the *Financial Times* newspaper cited three people as saying the proposed internal market bill was expected to "eliminate the legal force of parts of the withdrawal agreement" in areas including state aid and Northern Ireland customs.

EU diplomats were aghast, cautioning that such a step — leaked on the eve of new talks in London — would tarnish Britain's global prestige and heighten chances of a tumultuous final disentangling from the bloc on December 31. Sterling fell against the



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson leaves 10 Downing Street in central London last Tuesday. — AFP

LONDON HAS
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15
AS DEADLINE
TO STRIKE A
DEAL

dollar and euro.

Britain said it was committed to the divorce deal. "We are taking limited and reasonable steps to clarify specific elements of the Northern Ireland Protocol in domestic law to remove any ambiguity and to ensure the government is always able to deliver on its commitments", a spokesman for Johnson said.

"As a responsible government, we

cannot allow the peace process or the UK's internal market to inadvertently be compromised by unintended consequences of the protocol".

Britain left the EU on January 31 but talks on a new trade deal before the end of a status-quo transition arrangement in December have snagged on state aid rules and fishing. London has set a deadline of October 15 to strike a deal.

— Reuters



OSSA launches e-database for school sports members

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) recently launched the electronic database for all its members at schooling sports. The e-database featured details of all the sporting teachers, supervisors and specialists in different areas. The electronic platform will ease the process for the OSSA officials to deal with its stakeholders and partners. It will also aim to prepare future programmes that match

in developing the career path of the sporting persons. Moreover, it is a supported tool for preparing a general database that included specialised members in different fields including coaching and umpiring. Ahmed bin Darwish al Balushi, the General Secretary of the OSSA said that the new platform will classify the sporting teachers and supervisors in areas of refereeing and umpiring under title of “Database of Schooling Sports members”. “We are

delighted with the announcement of this project and I hope to accomplish all the set objectives in near future. This electronic database aims in developing of the project to strengthen the relation of OSSA with all its stakeholders including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Olympic Committee (OOC),” he said. The OSSA official added in his statement that through this project our members will receive the right skills and experience with best exposure in coaching and



umpiring from the specialists. “There will be a series of workshops and webinars in different areas that will support our members to have the required technical growth and development,” he pointed out. The classification of the members according to their majors and favourite sports is the main element for this database. “The recently launched database will expedite the process of reaching the desired data through the developed searching to the required sporting major. It also

will provide the necessary assistance for the association in providing the right development for the national personnel,” he ended. As many as 435 participants took part in the initial online sporting awareness programme that organised by the OSSA since first of August. The programme which will end in October delivered more than 41 webinars in different sporting courses in athletics, swimming, table tennis, sporting media and other majors.

James. Davis star as Lakers hold off Rockets to even series

ORLANDO, US: LeBron James and Anthony Davis combined for 62 points and 21 rebounds, and the Lakers needed to hold off the fourth-seeded Rockets’ second-half rally to win 117-109 on Sunday night to even their Western Conference semifinals series 1-1 at ESPN’s Wide World of Sports Complex near Orlando. James narrowly missed a triple-double, finishing with 28 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists. What began as a Lakers blowout turned tight in the second half. The Lakers led by as many as 21 points early in the second quarter, but needed to survive the Rockets’ surge after intermission. The Lakers outscored the Rockets 27-17 in the fourth quarter, flipping a 92-90 deficit into an eight-point win. A James turnaround jumper to give the Lakers a 117-109 lead with 32.3 seconds to play all but sealed the win. Sunday’s fourth quarter was a turnaround from Friday’s Game 1, when the Rockets pulled away in the final period to clinch a double-digit victory. The Rockets’ third-quarter surge was, predictably, sparked

by the three-point shot. Houston went 9-of-13 from deep in the third quarter alone. That included a four-point play by Robert Covington to cut the Lakers’ lead to 80-79 with 5:07 left in the period, and another 3 by Covington to give the Rockets an 82-80 lead. Overall, Houston outscored the Lakers 41-23 in the third quarter, and led by as many as five points. But James started the fourth quarter with a driving dunk to tie the score at 92. Less than two minutes later, a Rajon Rondo pull-up gave the Lakers a 96-94 advantage, before Alex Caruso found James for a one-handed, alley-oop slam. The run extended to 23-9, with a Davis driving finish giving the Lakers a 113-101 lead with less than four minutes to play. James said following Game 1 that his team had needed live action to adjust to the Rockets’ speed. Early on Sunday night, the Lakers were the team dashing through the open court for 16 fast-break points in the first quarter. The Lakers were much more successful on Sunday against a



Rockets defence that entered on Sunday as the NBA’s best in the playoffs. The Lakers shot 56.6 from the field and scored 54 points in the paint. They also scored 27 points off 17 Rockets turnovers. Davis took advantage of the Rockets’ “micro-ball” style throughout, scoring 34 points in a variety of ways on 15-of-24 shooting. Markieff Morris

scored 16 points off the bench. James Harden finished with 27 points and seven assists. Eric Gordon scored 24 points, including a 6-of-12 mark from 3-point range, and P.J. Tucker totalled 18 points and 11 rebounds. Russell Westbrook struggled, making just four of 15 shots and committing seven turnovers. The Lakers built a 16-point first-quarter lead by holding the Rockets

to a 3-of-15 start from the floor and forcing five turnovers. The Lakers also got a massive jolt from their bench in the period. Morris went 4-of-4 from 3-point range to score 12 points and three minutes, and Rajon Rondo dished out six assists in six minutes. That Lakers’ advantage grew to 21 on a James dunk early in the second quarter. Houston trimmed that gap

to 51-42 on a Danuel House layup with less than five minutes to play, but the Lakers finished the half on a 16-9 run to take a 67-51 lead into the locker room. Lakers starting center JaVale McGee went to the locker room with left ankle pain late in the third quarter and did not return. He played eight minutes and did not score.



ERRATIC DJOKOVIC DISQUALIFIED FROM US OPEN

NEW YORK: A petulant swipe at the ball after having his serve broken brought a sensational end to Novak Djokovic's US Open on Sunday after the world number one was disqualified for striking a line judge in the throat.

The dramatic moment came when the overwhelming title favourite reacted angrily to going 5-6 down to Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta in the first set of their fourth-round encounter at an empty Arthur Ashe Stadium.

What would have been an innocuous incident had the ball flown a foot either side of the official instead left her lying on the ground, clutching her throat and screaming in pain.

There was no question that Djokovic

hit her inadvertently, and he quickly rushed to apologise, but it was a clear breach of Grand Slam rules forbidding the physical abuse of anyone within the tournament precincts.

Tournament referee Soeren Friemel came out and spoke to chair umpire Aurelie Tourte and Andreas Egli, the Grand Slam supervisor, before a long chat with the three-times US Open champion. Djokovic, who was clearly making the point that he had not intended to hit the official, was overheard saying "she doesn't have to go to hospital for this" but after 12 minutes of pleading his case his fate was sealed.

"I don't think that there was any

chance of any opportunity or any other decision than defaulting Novak," Friemel later told reporters. "The facts were so clear and so obvious ... (the line judge) was clearly hurt and Novak was angry, he hit the ball recklessly, angrily back."

A tournament spokesman told Reuters the line judge appeared to be okay and was "not brought off-site". Her identity is not known. Djokovic eventually walked over to shake hands with a stunned Carreno Busta and trudged off the court before leaving the grounds without attending a press conference. The 33-year-old Serbian later posted an apology on Instagram.

"This whole situation has left me

really sad and empty," he wrote. "I'm extremely sorry to have caused her such stress. So unintended. So wrong. "I apologise to the (US Open) and everyone associated for my behaviour."

NEW GRAND SLAM CHAMPION

Extraordinary even in a year when the coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc in the sporting world, the disqualification ended Djokovic's 26-match winning streak in 2020 and what, at times, looked like a charge towards his 18th Grand Slam title. That would have brought him within one title of Rafael Nadal's tally of 19 and two of Roger Federer's record 20 major triumphs.

The USTA said Djokovic would lose all the ranking points earned from the event and be fined \$250,000 — his prize money for reaching round four. Consensus among former champions turned pundits and his fellow players was that Djokovic had accidentally hit the line umpire but, while unfortunate, the decision to disqualify him had been correct.

"It's the right decision," Tim Henman, who was disqualified from Wimbledon for a similar incident in 1995, told Amazon Prime. "He is not aiming for the line judge, but has hit the ball away and you have to be responsible for your actions." With defending champion Nadal

and Federer absent this year and no other former winners of the major four tournaments left in the men's draw, Flushing Meadows is now guaranteed to welcome a new member into the Grand Slam champions club. Djokovic's humiliating exit continues what has been a turbulent few months for him off court. He was criticised for organising the Adria Tour exhibition event in June in which he and several players were tested positive for COVID-19.

He then dropped a bombshell on the eve of the US Open by announcing he had resigned as president of the ATP Player Council to front a new players' association. — **Reuters**

Osaka restores order after champions exit US Open

NEW YORK: Naomi Osaka stood firm after a parade of champions exited the US Open on Sunday, blasting her way into the quarterfinals with a 6-3 6-4 win over Anett Kontaveit.

On a dramatic day seven, three-times champion Novak Djokovic was disqualified from the men's draw for hitting a ball into a line judge's throat and 2016 women's champion Angelique Kerber was dumped out by American Jennifer Brady.

But 2018 winner Osaka restored order in the final match at Arthur Ashe Stadium with an impressive display of power and patience against the giant-killing Estonian. After whipping through the first set in 28 minutes, frustrations grew for Osaka as the two-time Grand Slam champion failed to convert five match points and eight out of nine break points in the second set.

Aware that Djokovic had been sent packing after losing his cool mid-match against Pablo Carreno Busta, Osaka was mindful of keeping her emotions in check. "I didn't really see what happened live (with Djokovic). I was sleeping because I knew I was going to play a very late match but yeah I saw it afterwards, the aftermath," she said in an on-court interview.

"For me, that's definitely like a warning to never do that." Osaka's left thigh was heavily strapped as she continues to manage a hamstring injury but the 22-year-old moved superbly against Kontaveit to set up a clash against unseeded



American Shelby Rogers.

World number 93 Rogers was courage personified as she saved four match points before knocking out twice Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova 7-6(5) 3-6 7-6(6). Osaka has a 3-0 losing record to Rogers, who defeated Serena Williams last month in Lexington, but their last match came in 2017 at Charleston, when the Japanese number one was barely on the radar.

"I don't know. It feels like such a long time ago. I have to definitely watch a couple more matches of hers," Osaka said of Rogers. "Yeah, I have Alzheimer's," she joked, after her match finished post-midnight. "I had a hard time remembering how to play Anett today. I don't remember. "I think (Rogers) has a great serve and she's a good returner. But I have to study ... It's late. I don't know what I'm saying any more." — **Reuters**



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OMANI REFEREES GEAR UP TO OFFICIATE AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

Oman's top international referee Ahmed al Kaaf began his first part of the technical warming up session last week at the Al Dhareez beach in Dhofar Governorate and under Khareef season.

Oman's other football international referees as well resumed their technical preparations for the upcoming Asian Football Confederation (AFC) participations as the Sultanate's umpires will officiate at AFC champion league in the coming few days.

Al Kaaf had completed the first part of the warming up session which started last week at Al Dhareez beach in Dhofar. The training session focused on raising the fitness level for the umpires as there were not any footballing events during the last six months due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The other Sultanate international referees including Omar al Yaqoobi, Yaqoob AbdulBaqi, Abu Baker al Amri and Rashid al Ghaithi started their technical practice as well in Muscat on Sunday. The technical preparation programme was done under supervision of the referee's fitness specialist Abdullah al Hilali.

Omani international referees Ahmed al Kaaf, Abu Baker al Amri and Rashid al Ghaithi were selected to officiate in the 2020 AFC Champions League finals which will take place in Qatar from September 14 to October 3 while International referee Mahmood al Majrafi will officiate in the 2020

AFC Cup competitions for Group F matches. The group matches which will be held from September 23 until 29 in Vietnam will feature the following teams: Ho chi minh City FC (Vietnam), Houagang United FC (Singapore), Lao Toyota FC (Laos) and Yangon United (Myanmar).

The Sultanate international referees Omar al Yaqoobi and Nasser Ambusaidi will officiate at the AFC Asian U-19 which is scheduled to take place in Uzbekistan during October 14 to 31. Oman's referees will be among the other eleven main umpires and the same number as assistant referees.

The national referees' presence at the Asian footballing events had impressed everyone due to the top umpiring performance. AFC had nominated Omani umpires many times to officiate at the continental level. Al Kaaf had officiated more than 30 matches at AFC Champions League and 16 games at the AFC qualification for Fifa World Cup.

Moreover, Al Kaaf was the main referee for the U-23 AFC final clash between Vietnam and Uzbekistan in China in 2018. The refereeing team also comprised Omanis Abu Baker al Amri, Rashid al Ghaithi and Omar al Yaqoubi as fourth official. Also, Oman's experienced referees, Ahmed al Kaaf and Abu Baker al Amri, had received many awards from AFC as they officiated many finals of AFC competitions including AFC Champions League final and AFC Asian Championship final.

LISBON: Portuguese media and fans were on Monday anticipating Cristiano Ronaldo's 100th international goal after the attacker hinted on social media that he was fit to return to face Sweden.

Ronaldo missed the opening game of his country's Nations League defence against Croatia with a toe infection, but posted "happy to be back" on Instragram on Sunday, along with photos showing him training with the squad for the first time since last Tuesday.

Portugal play Sweden on Tuesday in Solna, the scene of a memorable Ronaldo display in the second leg of a World Cup qualifying playoff in 2013.

Ronaldo had scored the only goal in the first leg, and then exchanged goals with Zlatan Ibrahimovic in the second. Ronaldo hit a hat-trick between the 50th and 79th minute while the Swedish star hit two in four minutes in the middle of the outburst.

Portugal won the match and the playoff.

The 35-year-old Juventus star has now scored 99 international goals and is chasing the men's record of 109 by Ali Daei of Iran.

Yet while Portuguese media were on Monday excited by the prospect, the emphatic 4-1 win over Croatia led some to suggest Portugal could free itself from its "Ronaldo-dependance".

"Never has Portugal had so many quality attacking players," wrote Manuel Queiroz in sports daily *O Jogo*, singling out Bruno Fernandes of Manchester United, Bernardo Silva of Manchester City and Joao Felix of Atletico Madrid. He added that the country has "a great deck of cards even without the fourth ace."

Other publications praised Manchester City right back Joao Cancelo, who opened the scoring with a curling left-foot shot and others mentioned Ronaldo's replacement Diogo Jota of Wolves. — AFP

CHASING A CENTURY, RONALDO HINTS AT RETURN AGAINST SWEDEN



features

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Sultanate wins honorary award at 20 Biennial of Nature Photography tilt

The Sultanate, represented by PSO and 10 member photographers and in behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, won the honorary award and fifth place overall of the 20 Biennial of Nature Photography for Printed Pictures... **P14**

TRAVEL TALES

Indulge in the authentic Maltese lifestyle

Malta; the hidden gem of the Mediterranean, where travellers from all around the world come seeking an adventure of a life time, roaming the dazzling natural terrain of the island. There are many ways tourists can enjoy Malta, with its beautiful scenery, crystalline beaches, historical sites, and rich culture, there are really limitless possibilities to how the typical traveller can enjoy himself. However, in light of the current circumstances, many travelling families would appreciate a more authentic and remote experience by renting historic farmhouses in Gozo, or luxurious palazzos and villas in Malta, to avoid the risk of sharing a space with others. These private properties

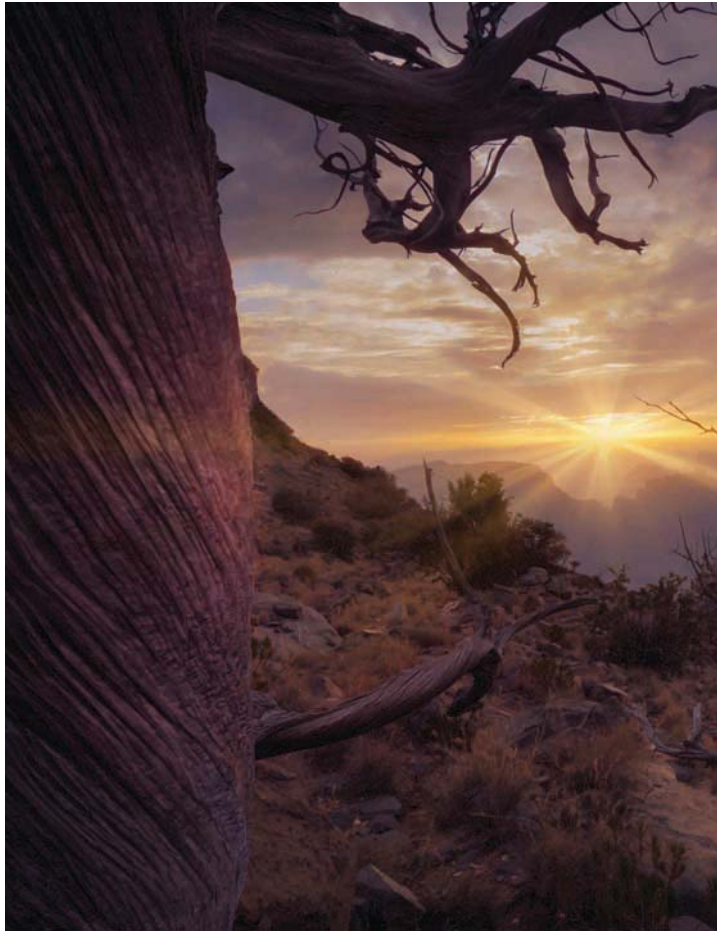
also provide a unique opportunity for tourists to immerse in the local cuisine and culture. Most of the farmhouses in Gozo are equipped with modern amenities, private pool and offer stunning views of the island. With the island being relatively small, all attractions are in close proximity. Being home to beautiful beaches and coves, renowned diving sites, historic sites and cosy traditional restaurants, Gozo presents a charming authentic experience for all travellers. Not to mention, these farmhouses usually are pre-stocked with fresh local ingredients or one can enjoy gourmet meals prepared by a private chef. Likewise, the capital Valletta is an ideal place to rent a luxurious villa, palazzo or apartment. These private

accommodations normally come with breath-taking views, private swimming pools, private gyms and saunas. Visitors could then leave their comfortable residences and go around exploring the city on foot, where they can discover the many cultural sites, boutiques, local restaurants and get a taste of the thriving nightlife. The Maltese authorities have produced an online brochure which outlines the safety measures and procedures the government has required from all establishments based on social distancing and testing. For information on farmhouses, check out <https://www.visitmalta.com/en/farmhouses>. For information on villas, visit <https://www.visitmalta.com/en/villas>.





Sultanate wins honorary award at 20 Biennial of Nature Photography tilt



STAFF REPORTER

Under different lights of day, the juniper trees of the mountains of Oman juxtaposed against the country's stark and scenic landscapes are a photographer's dream.

This year's entry of the Photographic Society of Oman to the 20 Biennial of Nature Photography for Printed Pictures held in Russia centred around this profound beauty leading to Oman gaining an honorary award at the prestigious event.

The Sultanate, represented by PSO in behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, won the honorary award and fifth place overall after gaining a total of 155 points.

The event which is held by the International Federation of Photography "FIAP" every two years, also awarded Omani photographer Hassan al Ghailani the gold medal at the individual level in the same theme with a picture entitled The Juniper Tree.

Each FIAP member state participates with ten photos by ten photographers. PSO has participated under the theme 'Scenes from the Nature of the Sultanate of Oman'. The participating photographers were Hassan al Ghilani, Ayman al Balushi, Shathan al Siyabi, Abdulrahman al Hinaei, Abdulrahman al Aghbari, Abdullah al Hadhrami, Haitham al Shanfari, Anas al Theeb, Muhammad al Zadjali, and Qasem al Farsi. The trees were the main focus of all the pictures.

About 30 member states participated in the event.

Italy was the clear victor of the nature photography World Cup after earning a total of 181 points ahead of South Africa

who snatched the second prize with 179 points.

Russia won third place with 174 points and Great Britain ranked fourth with 172 points. Ireland won sixth place with 154 points, then Belgium with 153 points. Serbia, Germany and Spain comprised the 8th, 9th and 10th place with 152, 146 and 142 points, respectively.

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, is keen to participate in the photography biennials organised by the FIAP every two years, and in

Each FIAP member state participates with ten photos by ten photographers

recent years it has won various advanced places and medals which made the Sultanate, with its young photographers, occupy a distinguished position on the map of photography in the world.

The biennial in the field of photography is an international art exhibition held every two years in a country that is a member of the International Federation for the Art of Photography in which the works of the member states are presented. each country participates with ten pictures under a specific theme, and at the end of each biennial, the organising committee selects the winning countries. In addition to the individual works award winners, they are awarded medals and honorary awards.

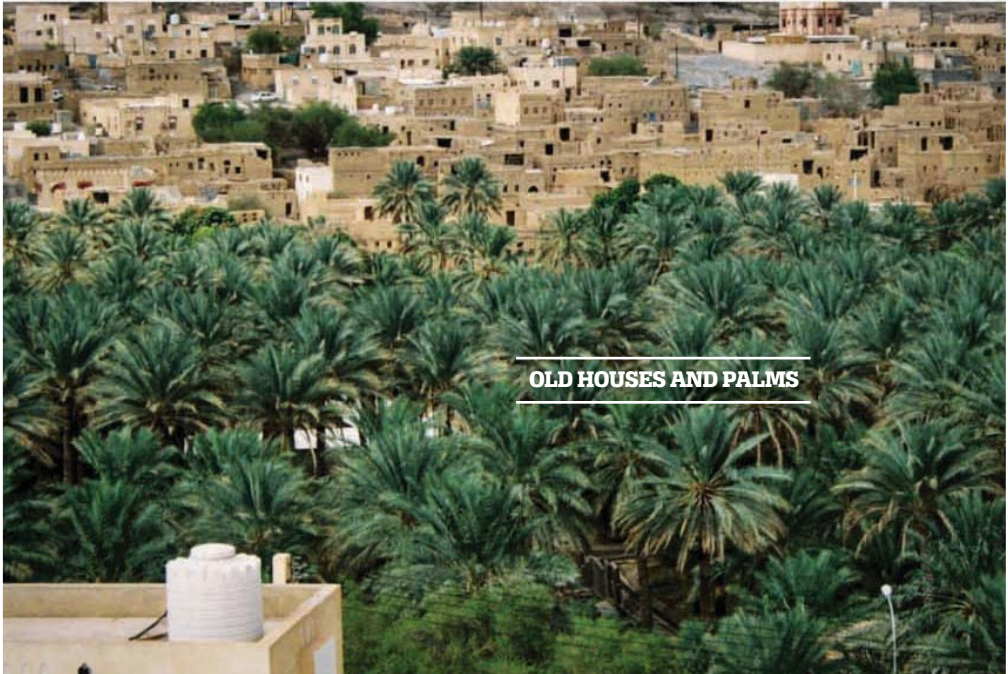




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ENTERTAINMENT

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Box Office:
‘Tenet’ kicks
off with \$20
million in the
US, nears \$150
million globally

After months of delays, Christopher Nolan's sci-fi epic "Tenet" finally arrived in US theaters and generated \$20.2 million over Labor Day weekend. Ticket sales, though difficult to dissect given the uncharted waters of the coronavirus era, are roughly in line with expectations for a new release during a pandemic.

The espionage thriller is already nearing the \$150 million mark globally, thanks to a stronger showing at the international box office. Overseas, "Tenet" earned another \$78.3 million this weekend, bringing its world-wide haul to \$146.2 million.

Warner Bros, in a note on Sunday afternoon to press, said the studio was "very pleased" with initial results, stressing that the rollout of "Tenet" will be "a marathon not a sprint" — meaning it doesn't need splashy inaugural weekend grosses to justify its release.

"There is literally no context in which to compare the results of a film opening during a pandemic with any other circumstance," the studio said. "We are in unprecedented territory, so any comparisons to the pre-COVID world would be inequitable and baseless."

The domestic debut for Nolan's latest includes ticket sales from preview screenings that started on Monday in the US and Canada. In pre-coronavirus times, "Tenet" would have seen much more substantial opening weekend figures. However, it's launching in a vastly different environment since numerous theaters in the country are out of operation.

"With a significant number of key US states and cities still closed, this is a fair opening," said David A Gross, a box office analyst at FranchiseRe. "Business in the US is improving, but large numbers of moviegoers are not back yet. For now, this is as good as it gets."

"Tenet" was able to play in about 2,800 cinemas across the country, a smaller footprint than normal for a wide release of this size. But Warner Bros, the studio behind the twisty thriller, is banking on it being enough to rationalise unspooling the mega-budgeted film after months of delays.

Currently, about 65-70 per cent of multiplexes in the US have reopened, though influ-

ential markets like New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle and San Francisco are still off limits. That likely shaved millions of dollars off of "Tenet's" grosses.

Drive-in theaters have been a boon for cities where indoor cinemas can't reopen yet. However, Warner Bros issued guidelines that restricted the areas where "Tenet" can play outdoors.

They mandated that the film can only screen at drive-in theaters if indoor venues in that particular city are open. That means drive-ins in Los Angeles and San Francisco, both of which have been doing robust ticket sales during the pandemic, didn't have access to one of the buzziest titles of the year.

The domestic debut for Nolan's latest includes ticket sales from preview screenings that started on Monday in the US and Canada. In pre-coronavirus times, "Tenet" would have seen much more substantial opening weekend figures.

"Tenet" is the first major blockbuster to debut in the US after the pandemic forced theaters to close in March. It was originally slated to bow in July but was delayed multiple times as cases of the virus continued to surge. While other anticipated titles — like "Fast and Furious" entry "F9" and Marvel's "Black Widow" — pushed their openings into late 2020 or 2021, "Tenet" remained fluid with the hopes of welcoming audiences back after prolonged shutdowns.

Warner Bros domestic distribution chief Jeff Goldstein said the studio opted to forge ahead with the release of "Tenet" given its appeal to overseas audiences.

"As a strategy, we looked at this movie and said [ticket sales will be] two-thirds

international and one-third domestic," he said. "Clearly the rest of the world was in a better place in terms of figuring out how to move forward."

Though "Tenet" started playing in theaters on Thursday, Warner Bros opted not to report grosses until Sunday. Hollywood has been looking to "Tenet" as an indicator of the viability of the movie theater business during a global health crisis. Many exhibitors reopened their cinemas in time to screen "Tenet," and they are banking on pent-up demand to see a movie on the big screen for the first time in months.

Ticket buyers who ventured out to see "Tenet" in theaters opted to see it in the best quality possible. Imax screens accounted for \$11.1 million of global sales this weekend.

China, where "Tenet" premiered on Friday, pulled in more than \$8 million in ticket sales on opening day and \$30 million over the weekend. When it comes to restarting business, the country is well ahead of the US. Already, China has seen notable success with war epic "The Eight Hundred," which has grossed over \$300 million to date.

"Though the box office trajectory in North America will look quite different for 'Tenet' than in the international marketplace, the film may actually see its fortunes rise in the coming weeks as more and more cities open their multiplex doors," said Paul Dergarabedian, a senior media analyst with Comscore.

The hope, among studios and theater owners alike, is that extensive safety measures will make audiences feel more comfortable returning to indoor spaces in the coming weeks.

"Tenet," led by John David Washington and Robert Pattinson, cost \$200 million to make — and many millions more to globally promote. That means the time-bending thriller needs to pull in robust ticket sales to turn a profit. Audiences gave the film a "B" CinemaScore, lower than usual for Nolan's filmography.

In weeks since theaters have started to resume business, a handful of new releases, such as "The New Mutants," Russell Crowe's road-rage thriller "Unhinged" and "The Personal History of David Copperfield" starring Dev Patel, have debuted. — **Reuters**



Race against rain to save historical homes of Beirut

Built in 1920, the house that Riad Asad's family has called home for decades outlasted 15 years of civil war but took what could be a fatal blow in last month's mammoth, port-side explosion.

Asad says his family - who has sought refuge outside Beirut - wants to restore the elegant home, with its high, ornate ceilings, arched windows and marble floors.

It faces quite a task.
The roof is caved - right to the dusty floor - and its structural bones are in danger of total collapse.

In the sitting room, a grand piano sits shrouded in blankets, lit by the warm afternoon sunlight. The glassless windows give onto Beirut's once-lively Gemmayse neighbourhood, its many cafes shuttered a month on from the blast.

What's left of Asad's home is skeletal; many walls, windows and wooden shutters went while the house awaits its rebuild.

"We have about 40 days until the weather shifts, it's a tight window," said Asad, a structural engineer, his voice riven with anguish. "It's a race against the rain."

Restoration is right off the agenda for now, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation; the aim is just to strengthen the walls and cover the roof with plastic sheets.

"What we're doing now is trying to prevent the worst - a total collapse. Restoration is a longer, more expensive

process, which will take months, years even. It's not compatible with a state of emergency."

On August 4, an explosion stunned the Lebanese capital, killing at least 182, injuring more than 6,000 and damaging about 50,000 homes when 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate blew up in the port.

The blast - hundreds of metres from Beirut's historic heart - rocked streets long lined with grand French- and Ottoman-style homes, balconies and terraces overlooking mosques and churches.

The area, now destroyed, was beloved by locals and visitors alike; a place where cultures sometimes at odds mingled easily over a morning coffee or an evening glass of wine.

LABOUR OF LOVE

Like many Lebanese engineers and architects, Asad has been working for free ever since the explosion, not only taking on the rescue of his family home, but of several others, too.

"The damage is so vast, we have to do what we can," he said.

While Gemmayse's streets have been cleared, many houses lie in rubble, missing windows and doors, pillars

and balconies.

The Ministry of Culture says more than 300 historical buildings in the immediate area of the explosion were damaged - 86 are in critical condition.

Work is underway on just 14, according to Asad.

Independent heritage architects and structural engineers teamed up to form the Beirut Built Heritage Rescue 2020 two days after

Independent heritage architects and structural engineers teamed up to form the Beirut Built Heritage Rescue 2020 two days after the blast, a collaborative of 40 Lebanese professionals intent on restoring the city's oldest houses - as well as turning them back into homes

the blast, a collaborative of 40 Lebanese professionals intent on restoring the city's oldest houses - as well as turning them back into homes.

"We try to have people back in their buildings as soon as possible, but if the structure is at risk, the move will have to be delayed until international funds have arrived," explained architect and archeologist Yasmine Makaroun.

Makaroun said many Beirutis had moved in with relatives after the blast or had fled to nearby mountains.

Juggling priorities is hard,

she said.

"We are trying to find the right balance between making houses habitable again quickly and renovating heritage, which requires specific, precise skills and is much slower. But right now, the priority is to secure houses before the rain."

HIGH COST

Given the economic climate in Lebanon - with months of political turmoil essentially bringing the economy to a halt - spending scarce money on old houses may not be a top priority amid a slew of competing interests.

Structural engineer Michel Chalhoub, also part of the collective, estimates that restoring a historical home - officially any house that predates 1935 - could cost \$1,200 per square metre, a sum most homeowners cannot afford.

All restoration plans need the Ministry of Culture's approval, which is a lengthy process, he added.

And the money needs to be found, too.

Even before the explosion, Lebanon had debts several times the size of its economy and was in talks for a bailout.

"Reconstruction funds will come from abroad - from Unesco and non-governmental organisations, as well

as from the private sector," the Ministry of Culture's press attache Amal Mansour told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

She refused to specify what financial role - if any - the government will play in the rebuild.

Abbas Mortada, Lebanon's Minister of Culture, told a press conference that the state and the president are keen to preserve heritage buildings, but the population is sceptical, citing past controversy over reconstruction.

According to Save Beirut Heritage, a non-profit founded in 2010 to preserve architectural heritage, Beirut had about 4,000 heritage buildings when the civil war ended, many of them damaged. Numbers have since decreased to about 600.

"Around 80 per cent of the buildings could have been saved," said Beirut Heritage's Founder Naji Raji.

"Today it (downtown) is barely recognisable and has lost its heart. We don't have any laws to protect heritage buildings."

Almost a month after the explosion, shops and businesses are slowly opening again in Gemmayse.

Engineer Chalhoub said so many people were donating time and expertise to restore the vibrant neighbourhood.

"It's not only about restoring cultural buildings; it's the social culture, the life, the neighbourhood dynamics that need restoration. Eventually we hope we can do just that." — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

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Oman announces second stimulus package for economic revival

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has unveiled a slew of policy measures — the second since March this year — designed to strengthen the ability of banks and Finance & Leasing Companies (FLCs) to support the country’s economic revival.

The new measures, set out in a circular issued by CBO Executive President Tahir bin Salim al Amri (pictured) on Monday, grant a further extension of the timeline for the existing loan deferment scheme, enhance the tenor and limit of the Forex Swap facility provided by the Central Bank, revise the Loan to Value (LTV) ratio for housing loans and allow consideration of a relaxation of the Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR) for banks.

“In order to provide further stimulus for economic revival in the context of the prevailing situation and to (enable) banks and FLCs to continue supporting the affected borrowers, the following additional policy measures are announced by the Central Bank of Oman, which would come into force with immediate effect”, said Al Amri in the circular.

Importantly, as part of the latest measures, the apex bank has extended the validity of its



BOLSTERING GROWTH: The new measures, set out in a circular issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), grant a further extension of the timeline for the existing loan deferment scheme, enhance the tenor and limit of the Forex Swap facility provided by the Central Bank, revise the Loan to Value (LTV) ratio for housing loans and allow consideration of a relaxation of the Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR) by banks.

Loan Deferment Scheme, which were unveiled at the onset of the pandemic in March this year, till

the end of the first quarter of 2021. “It has been decided to further extend the availability of the

deferment scheme of loans/instalments/interest for affected borrowers particularly SMEs,



without adversely impacting the risk classification of such loans, till March 31, 2021,” the Central Bank stated.

Additionally, the maximum limit of the Central Bank’s Forex Swap facility was increased to 100 per cent of a bank’s net worth, up from the current joint ceiling on the Swap and Rediscounting of commercial papers facilities (25 per cent of a bank’s net worth). Further, the tenor of the facility was extended up to a maximum period of one year. The maximum limit for Rediscounting of Commercial Papers facility will remain at 25 per cent of a bank’s net worth, it noted.

Seeking to provide relief to housing loan applicants, particularly first-time buyers of housing property, the CBO decided to reduce the Loan to Value (LTV) margin for housing loans to 10

per cent, down from the existing requirement of 20 per cent. This measure, it stressed however, is permitted only in respect of first-time home buyers of residential properties for own purposes. Nevertheless, banks are permitted to include the cost of registration and insurance in the value of the housing property while computing the LTV in respect of all housing loans, it said.

Finally, on the issue of Liquidity Coverage Ratios (LCR), the Central Bank affirmed that the minimum standard currently remains unchanged at 100 per cent for LCR. “However, in case of genuine liquidity stress faced by a bank, the Central Bank of Oman may consider relaxation, on a case by case basis, by allowing the bank to temporarily operate below the minimum LCR requirement of 100 per cent but not less than a minimum LCR of 75 per cent”, Al Amri said, adding that the relaxation facility is likely to be available until March 31, 2021.

The latest initiatives come just under six months since the Central Bank announced a raft of policy measures and financial incentives designed to unlock an estimated RO 8 billion in additional liquidity for the benefit of businesses impacted by the economic downturn and the COVID-19 threat.

Bassah Beach to be transformed into resort destination

ASAAS inks pact for development of four-star resort and public park to cater for the growing number of tourists visiting pristine Bassah Beach

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

National Development and Investment Company (ASAAS) announced the signing of a usufruct agreement with the Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Musandam to develop the Bassah Beach site in the Wilayat of Khasab, Musandam Governorate.

This will add further momentum to the company’s ambition to help in diversifying the national economy by forging strong partnerships and aligning with the government’s vision to boost tourism contribution to the national GDP while also offering career opportunities for locals.

The agreement was signed recently by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, and Abdullah bin Humaid al Maamari, Chairman of ASAAS.

The agreement involves developing a land area of about 73,000 m2 that will feature two key components; a four-star resort as well as a public park to cater for the growing number of tourists visiting this pristine beach.

One of the most beautiful sandy beaches nestled between the rugged dark mountains of Musandam,



مشروع تطوير شاطئ بحة Bassah Beach Project

إس‌إس‌إس ASAAS

Musandam is blessed with natural beauty and has huge investment potential for such projects

Bassah Beach is strategically located near Khasab Airport, only 2.6 km from Khasab’s city centre.

Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, stressed on the importance of such tourism projects and the value they will add to the governorate as a whole. He said that Musandam is blessed with natural beauty and has huge investment potential for such projects.

Abdulsalam Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said that the Authority plays a key role in empowering national developers and investors with priority and trust in such tourism projects, especially that such companies have proven capacity to deliver world-class tourism projects. He added that such an approach is in alignment with the national strategy towards tourism development and economic

diversification.

On his part, Abdullah bin Humaid al Maamari, Chairman of ASAAS said: “With this agreement, we restate our continued strategic partnerships with the government and our commitment to the shared national objectives towards making Oman a leading tourism destination for all. We at ASAAS will put forward years of experience to deliver a project that lives up to the expectations of the people of Musandam and to add another unique attraction to the national tourism landscape”. ASAAS has established a strong focus and strength in boosting the hospitality industry across most of its projects.

It has already attracted reputed international operators by opening the first Hilton in Muscat within its Al Khuwair garden and hotel project, the redevelopment of the Institute of Public Administration, which will also include the first InterCity branded hotel in Muscat, A’Sharq project in Barka, and Al Haffa project in Salalah. By adding more hotel and hospitality units to the industry, ASAAS is steadily supporting the national strategy to raise tourism contribution to the GDP significantly and is already making tangible progress in this arena.

CMA directs insurers to extend coverage of pensioners

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Capital Market Authority (CMA), which also regulates the insurance sector in the Sultanate, has instructed insurance companies to extend death and disability insurance coverage for borrowers who recently left government service pursuant to the Royal Directive requiring employees with over 30 years of service to retire. Coverage hitherto limited to 60 years has now been extended to 70 years, enabling the retirees to reschedule their personal loans, the Authority announced on Monday.

The decision addresses concerns voiced by the retirees who said they faced difficulty in rescheduling their personal loans following their retirement from public service. These pensioners had left government service in line with the Royal Directive requiring at least 70 per cent of Omani employees with over 30 years of service to retire.

The insurers agreed to extend the insurance coverage for death and disability up to 70 years for borrowers without charging any additional premiums or administrative fees, the Authority said.



Rethinking investment opportunities

Some financial institutions in the region are advocating the need for investors to explore new opportunities in the global economy in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the decline in interest rates offered by banking institutions.

As for governments, they urge countries to refocus their energies on economic diversification in line with previous economic policy, as well as invest in digital transformation, technologies and industries that serve national needs, including food security, technology, and innovation in health care and medical technology.

There are several projections for the remaining months of the current

year according to the report issued by Mashreq Bank, that deals with the most prominent investment trends and emerging developments in world and regional markets in light of the difficulties caused by the decline in oil prices, and pandemic-related impacts for the economy as a whole.

There are several developments cited in the report that have had an impact on the economies of the region and the world. Global growth was projected to rise from 2.9 per cent in 2019 to 3.3 per cent during 2020.

But the trade wars between America, the world, and China had a great impact on the global economy, at a time when the world was surprised by the uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus, which



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

There are several developments cited in the report that have had an impact on the economies of the region and the world. Global growth was projected to rise from 2.9 per cent in 2019 to 3.3 per cent during 2020

led to the disruption in the global business as a result of the closure of many productive and economic sectors, especially in the field of aviation, hospitality, restaurants, retail, service and labour industries,

among others, leading to massive unemployment across the world.

The closure of institutions also led to a sharp slowdown in the growth of global economic output, which declined by 12 per cent in the first quarter of this year, while the International Monetary Fund expects a contraction of the global economy by 4.9 per cent this year, representing the largest slowdown in the global economy since the 1930s.

Most of the countries in the region and the world are now working to reform their economies having run up huge deficits in the face of reduced revenues, which has affected spending and investment, leading to a slowdown or decrease in economic growth.

As a result, most of the GCC countries have experienced a

decline in their credit ratings due to the double whammy of the strict closure of sectors on the one hand, and the decline in international oil prices on the other hand, which has directly affected the public budgets of governments that remain under severe financial pressures.

The report of the banking corporation recommends that investors (without commitment) consider investing in preferred stocks and bonds, along with a cautious and prudent approach in choosing assets and securities, while maintaining sufficient diversity of these assets, and accelerating investment in the fields of cloud computing, artificial intelligence, digitisation and e-commerce.

This must be done during the coming period.

Mazoon Electricity embraces well-structured maintenance strategy

MUSCAT: Oman's leading electricity provider Mazoon Electricity Company's well-structured maintenance strategy has been helping to accomplish optimum performance at all its electrical distribution network.

The company's maintenance strategy focusses on varying aspects including human and safety, service continuity and stability, power infrastructure augmentation, equipment protection, energy efficiency among others.

Mazoon Electricity's maintenance management system for primary stations are managed through Enterprise Asset Management system (EAM) which is supported by computerised maintenance management system. Moreover, the rest of the network asset maintenance management will be covered in the system in the next 3 years.

The company's maintenance team enhanced the network reliability by applying new condition monitoring technology such as thermal scanning, partial discharge, and DGA to assess the asset condition. Using these techniques, the team manages to repair assets before it causes network outages.

It may be noted that Mazoon Electricity adopted Condition Based Risk Management system (CBRM) for power transformers and high voltage switchgears to assess the health index of those assets in order



to prioritise the maintenance and future investments.

Recent results of the CBRM module shows that most of the power transformers and switchgears are in good condition. Plans are on to add more to the module to have robust outputs of the CBRM in the future.

The scope of maintenance work at the company includes replacements of defective equipment, identifying and rectifying faults to short circuits, replacement of defective LT insulators, replacement of old and defective energy metres and installation of smart metres, carry out load shedding programmes, carry out line patrolling of the 33KV, 11KV and LT lines among others.

Besides, the maintenance team's role comprises asset security inspection, testing of new/existing assets for grid/primary substations, cleaning services of grid stations, transport materials to be utilised by the contractors for any emergency work from company stores to the respective districts and other works.

Al Mazunah Free Zone to add third phase

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

In line with ongoing efforts to implement a unified system for the One-Stop Shop in the special economic zones and free zones, Eng Ahmed bin Hassan Al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, visited Al Mazunah Free Zone, which is managed and operated by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

Royal Decree 105/2020 to establish the Authority stipulates that the Authority's competences include implementing the One-Stop Shop system in the special economic zones and free zones taking into consideration the experience of the One-Stop Shop in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

During the visit, Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Director General of Al Mazunah Free Zone, pointed out that the free zone is currently implementing key projects as development project of phase one and two of the free zone is being implemented, and a third phase has been added to the project.

"The completion rate of the project has touched 90 per cent and is being built on a developed area of about 1.5 million square metres that includes all basic



The project offers an ideal investment environment that enhances competitiveness in attracting local and foreign investments

services," Al Balushi said, adding: "The implementation of the Facility Building project in the free zone has commenced on an area of 11,337 square metres through Shumookh Investment and Services, the investment arm of Madayn.

Moreover, work is currently underway to assign the security fence project with an area of 8.5

km, in addition to the design project of phase 4 to develop an area of 3 million square metres in the free zone."

Al Balushi emphasised that these projects aim to keep pace with the remarkable growth of the projects in the free zone and offer an ideal investment environment that enhances competitiveness in attracting local and foreign investments. The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones was established as per the provision of the Royal Decree no. 105/2020 to oversee the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, free zones in Suhar, Salalah and Al Mazunah and any other special economic zone or free zone in the Sultanate.



Octal automates its banking transactions

MUSCAT: Continuing to build on its digital transformation prowess, Salalah-based PET packaging manufacturer Octal, along with its partner, Capita Integrity Solutions (CIS), have completed the successful implementation of the SAP Bank Communication Management (BCM).

The state-of-the-art function has enabled Octal to streamline and automate its banking transactions into a single, efficient channel, making its payments cycle quicker, more transparent, and more secure. Completed remotely in just three months during the current challenging circumstances, the integration is part of Octal's ongoing commitment to harnessing innovation, optimising its processes to better meet the ever-evolving needs of its customer base.

"Octal is a technology-driven company that not only makes digital improvements, but combines human and technological capabilities to make a difference and improve all its business practices.

The implemented module was a result of our IT team continuously striving to achieve operational innovation through new technology," said Scott Ewen, Chief Financial Officer of Octal. He added, "As the most relevant functionality of its kind available on the market, SAP will enhance our workflow capabilities, helping us to be more innovative and resilient, especially in light of the challenges of COVID-19. This will have a positive impact, not just for our internal operations, but throughout our supply chain. We are grateful to our partners, Capita Integrity Solutions, for their support in deploying the new functionality throughout the organisation and helping us to become a more efficient, and more dynamic company."

Ravi Anandan, Chief Executive Officer, CIS, added, "An intuitive status monitor, the SAP BSM provides complete visibility across the entire payment lifecycle and streamlined bank communications. This in turn means our clients can improve their straight-through processing rates and internal compliance. As a trusted partner to many mid and large companies across India, the Middle East and the United States, we are proud to have been chosen by Octal, as we support it on its digital transformation journey.

Global IT solutions provider CIS offers smart SAP applications specially designed for the growth of each individual business. With a philosophy based on the two q's, 'quick and quality', it employs industry best practices and implementation templates certified by SAP, helping companies drive down costs, optimise business processes, while staying ahead of the competition.

BUSINESS ALERT

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OTE - Hyundai Service has been regularly recognized over the years for its service excellence and has been presented with numerous awards & accolades at various regional and global platforms by Hyundai. The recent one being, bronze medal in the biennial Hyundai World Skill Olympics, held at the Hyundai Cheonan Global Learning Center in Korea after fiercely competing with 66 entrants from 51 countries from across North America, Central and South America, Europe and Russia, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa.



National Bank of Oman brings in global expert for online event on European equity markets

Continuing to bring in global industry knowledge to investors in the Sultanate, National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently held a virtual event in collaboration with Franco-German financial group, Oddo BHF, to discuss the outlook for European Equity Markets in 2020 and beyond.

Led by Pascal Riégis, Global Co-Head of Fundamental Equities and Head of European Small & Mid Cap Equities, the WebEx-based event offered a macro-economic review of the largest European financial markets, discussed the impact of COVID-19 and the ongoing recovery in corporate sales and profitability, and finally, what to expect in 2021.

This was the latest dialogue held as part of a series of monthly events that the bank has hosted virtually on a range of pertinent topics, helping its clients make sound financial decisions, while supporting learning in the banking and investment sector.

Yaseen Hassan al Lawati (pictured) - Head of Investment Banking Division, said, "NBO is the leading trusted investment advisor and manager in Oman and as such we are focused on providing investment management services to help our clients in achieving their strategic goals. Part of our pro-active approach is to bring in experts from around the globe that can contribute their unique perspective.

Since the current pandemic has halted physical events, we have kept the information flowing by moving to online platforms, continuing to support our clients' prosperity despite a challenging and ever-changing financial environment."



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FLATS for rent in Salalah European design, farm view, good situation in the centre near the sea, new flats. ☎92181524 WhatsApp.

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FOR rent in Salalah, north Auqadain. Call ☎91711118.

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INDUSTRIAL land 5,500 sqm in Jufnin ☎95490842, 97928817.

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EXECUTIVE offices, including ACs/water & electricity in central Ruwi ☎99238012/ 24704994.

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A VILLA in the old Al Filaij, Al Tayibeen District, 5 bedrooms, 6 toilets, a living room, a majlis, two kitchens & a store, building area 333 sqm, land area 637 sqm, the villa is 1 km far from Al Maabelah RO 300.000. Call ☎92111892.

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ONE bedroom flat at Darsait near Medical RO 170/-. Two BHK Al Khuwair RO 300/-. Athaiba behind Zubair RO 300/-. (24790449, Fax: 24790559.

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NEW apartment for rent, one room, 2 toilets, kitchen and dinning. Location, Al Khoudh Market, Red Taj building, 7th floor. Per month rent RO 190/-. ☎92838118.

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APPROVED residential for labour camp available. Near Sohar Port. Area 15,000m². Water and electricity available. For contact ☎91577774, 96198460.

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WELL maintained 1&2 BHK and office space/store available at Rex Road. Contact ☎92227165

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APARTMENT for rent in Maabela 8 in Muscat. It's the highest one of the other two. 3 rooms with 3 toilets one family room, small store and air-condition. ☎71136222.

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SHOP in Seeb market. ☎95250300/ 99110600/ 24182000.

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NEW apartment in Ruwi near church consists of 2 rooms with its facilities. Contact: ☎94664635, 95850345.

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LADY Indian English teacher with over 25 year experience, currently seeks full time position in colleges or training institutions. Responsibilities in English language teaching or soft skills trainer with preference for aviation sector. Possess valid Omani driving license. Contact GSM ☎92541510

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PAKISTANI male driver, 8 years experience in Oman, knows Arabic, seeks job. ☎96551602.

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MECHANICAL engineer. 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact ☎96511338. Email: rkdhanush11@gmail.com

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I NEED a driver job, urgent, with NOC paper. My name: Masum Billah. ☎968 94991705.

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INDIAN female with Oman experience — Admin/ Accounts, seeks job ☎91719246.

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CIVIL engineer/QS engineer, 11 years in UAE, freelance & Oman driving licence available, looking for full-time or part-time job☎97299165.

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SALES/Marketing/retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact ☎93920174. Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

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INDIAN male 26, BBM & MBA with UAE 2 years experience presently on visit visa in Oman seeks suitable opening willing to join immediately contact ☎78119897 Email: mohammedraiyan25@gmail.com

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SUDANESE, 3 years experience in KSA, firefighting and fire alarm field, Nebosh (IGC) holder, driving licence: ☎79318246

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WE have a farm for rent. The fee is RO 1/metre. The farm is located on Muscat-Yeti road. It is suitable for labour residency or for storage purposes. Contact ☎99639269.

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FLATS in Al Wadi Al Kabir near to the Al Kuwaiti Mosque. ☎99425958.

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SEMI furnished 2 & 3 BHK flats at Bausher — near Atlas Hospital. ☎99348493/ 93200424/ 24502254.

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For Sale/Rent

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact ☎94272979, 96252664.

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(NEW 3 STOREY VILLAS for sale/ rents WADI KABIR/ AL KHUWAIR), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir).☎96596348.

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Buying

AL Awsad Modern LLC, electronic and furniture used. ☎99834373.

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For Sale

Institution Licence contact ☎95595512.

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RESIDENTIAL-commercial land in Nizwa, Hail Farq beside LuLu and Grand Mall

JEWELLERY workshop attached with showroom for sale at Walja, Way Number 4301, Al Fursan Street, shop Number 25. ☎24835276, 93035380.

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1) A LAND in HALBAN behind GUtech is offered for sale. The land enjoys a permit for twin-villa.

2) A LAND is for sale in Mabaila 8 owner. ☎95959166.

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HOUSE for sale in Wadi Udai for RO 27,000 (neg). ☎99462401/ 99243291.

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WE supply quantities of excellnt mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) ☎99242445, 99327939.

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A SHOWROOM in Al Qurum in strategic location with extravagant interior design on 280 sqm is offered for sale at RO 25,000. ☎92470024.

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PICK-UPS, Double Cabin, Buses, Cranes, Primover & Trailers.☎99465358 & 99454660.

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PROFESSIONAL movers company number ☎94551284.

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PAINTING, Plumbing, Building maintenance, Excavation, Stone Pitching, Gabion. ☎99057348.

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MAINTENANCE: 1. AC Maintenance & Servicing; 2. Fridge, Washing Machine & Dish washer repairing; 3. Painting & cleaning services; 4. Electrical & Plumbing Carpentry work. Contact: ☎99447257, 97014234, 24504281.

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PAINTING/ plumbing/ building maintenance. Excavation/ stone pitching/ gabion. ☎99057348.

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PROVIDES all kinds of legal works, LLC registration, agreements, contracts. Takes all kinds of cases of companies. ☎97351649.

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INDUSTRIAL land for sale. Area of 20,500 square metres in the Rusayl area, Price RO 70/- per square metre. ☎99369192.

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Situation Vacant

ELECTRICAL Engg. Diploma/ ITI electrical, with 5-6 years industrial experience. Send CV to e-mail: info@omanipackaging.com or Fax: 24446654.

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Announcement

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company Al Mahrooqi Inter LLC, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1527568, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 250,000.000 to 150,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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Situation Wanted

SINGLE, 27-year-old Tunisian national, Oman experience+driving license, looking for a job in admin, customer service, marketing, stock receiving/ management and any other related field. ☎96286678

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CIVIL diploma, 2+ years experience, Oman-DL, NOC available, seeking job. ☎99488438, e-mail: abdulrahman 9035239249@gmail.com

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China exports beat forecasts, imports falter

BEIJING: China's exports expanded more than expected last month as key markets eased virus containment measures, official data showed on Monday, but imports unexpectedly shrank despite a push to boost domestic demand.

Overseas shipments have been hit less than feared by the pandemic, thanks to global demand for medical supplies but economists cautioned that a resurgence in new infections in some regions meant the outlook remained uncertain.

Exports spiked 9.5 per cent on-year in August, the Customs Administration said, beating the 7.5 per cent prediction of a Bloomberg news poll of analysts.

Slowing export growth was "something that we need to watch for", Iris Pang, ING chief economist for Greater China.

She added that export growth was patchy across different sectors — while medical equipment and integrated circuits saw strong improvement over the first eight months, shipments of clothing and shoes remained in double-digit decline in the same period.

Tommy Xie, head of Greater China research at OCBC Bank, added that exports to the United States remained relatively strong, in part "due to frontloading" with rising concerns over US-China tensions.



Shipping containers are seen at a port in Shanghai, China. — Reuters

Imports, which collapsed in May but have since improved, contracted 2.1 per cent — much worse than the 0.5 per cent growth tipped by analysts. But economists said the outlook is less grim once price effects are adjusted for, with Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics, estimating import volumes rose 9.5 per cent from a year ago.

Customs data showed that imports of meat have seen the biggest spike, rising 73.4 per cent on-year from January to August.

Monday's data also showed that China's trade surplus with the US surged by more than a quarter last month.

Tensions between the US and China have escalated on various fronts, including Beijing's handling of the pandemic, its policies in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, and on technology.

But top negotiators from both sides last month agreed to push ahead with the phase one trade deal signed in January, which obliges China to import an additional \$200 billion in American products over two years.

HSBC economist Chen Jingyang said in a recent report that agricultural imports are likely to remain on the rise "on the back of the fulfilment of the phase one deal with the US." — AFP

Singapore faces 6 per cent recession after lockdown, pandemic

BANGKOK: Singapore's central bank on Monday said that the country's economy, the wealthiest per-capita in South East Asia, could shrink by 6 per cent in 2020.

Based on a survey of 26 economists by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), the projected decline tops previous warnings of a 5.8 per cent contraction and comes after a worse-than-expected 13.2 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) slump during the second quarter.

"A tightening in global financial conditions, an escalation in the global COVID-19 situation, as well as heightening of US-China tensions" are to be the main causes of recession, according to the MAS.

Singapore, a tiny city-state that depends on foreign trade and investment, saw its economy hit hard by an April 7 to June 2 lockdown that forced many businesses to close and year-on-year retail sales to fall by more than half.



Singapore currency notes are seen through a magnifying glass, in this photo illustration. — Reuters

Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry previously warned that the economy could shrink by up to 7 per cent in 2020.

The government has revised the 2020 budget four times, pledging fiscal spending of around 20 per cent of GDP to try thwart the impact of the pandemic and related restrictions.

Though tourist arrivals are still not allowed, Singapore is resuming "essential" or business travel with several countries. — dpa

German industry's post-lockdown recovery slows

BERLIN: German industry's recovery from the impact of coronavirus lockdown measures slowed from a sprint to a crawl in July, according to government data released on Monday.

Production was up 1.2 per cent compared to June, in the third consecutive month of growth, the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) reported.

However, analysts had forecast a much stronger rebound in July of 4.5 per cent. And production growth had been much stronger

in June at 9.3 per cent, Destatis said, revising up its initial estimate for that month of 8.9 per cent. Sweeping restrictions intended to slow the spread of the pandemic led to sharp falls in industrial production in Europe's largest economy in March and April.

Despite signs of recovery since then, the year-on-year data illustrates the severe toll that the crisis has taken on industry. In July, production was down 10 per cent on the same month last year, Destatis said. — dpa



Employees of German car manufacturer Porsche work on chassis at the Porsche factory in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Germany. — Reuters

Samsung Electronics wins \$6.6 billion Verizon 5G order

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics clinched a \$6.6 billion agreement to provide 5G network equipment to Verizon in the United States, a regulatory filing showed on Monday, expanding its presence in the strategically crucial market.

The South Korean tech giant said the massive deal was equivalent to 3.4 per cent of its total worldwide sales last year, and a "long-term strategic contract".

Washington has banned US telecom firms from using network equipment manufactured by Samsung's Chinese rival Huawei on security grounds. Samsung Electronics is the flagship subsidiary of

the sprawling Samsung group, by far the biggest of the family-controlled South Korean conglomerates that dominate business in the world's 12th-biggest economy.

The order comes after the firm defied the coronavirus pandemic to post a 7.3 per cent rise in second-quarter net profits thanks to strong demand for memory chips.

Samsung Electronics shares closed up 1.6 per cent on Monday.

The US is considered behind other countries such as China and South Korea when it comes to deploying

the potentially transformative technology.

To catch up, Washington announced last month that 100 megahertz of coast-to-coast spectrum long reserved for the military would be auctioned off to telecommunications firms for use in 5G networks.

First-generation mobile networks enabled wireless phone calls, and the second generation added texting.

Third-generation mobile networks could handle more data, such as sending pictures and using basic apps, while the current 4G networks can carry bigger loads such as streaming video. — AFP

MONTHLY FALL

Oil falls after Saudi cuts prices, China slows imports



General view of Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura oil refinery and oil terminal is pictured in Saudi Arabia — Reuters

The world's top oil exporter Saudi Arabia cut the October official selling price for Arab Light crude it sells to Asia by the most since May, indicating demand remains weak. Asia is Saudi Arabia's largest market by region.

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Monday as Saudi Arabia made the deepest monthly price cuts for supply to Asia in five months and uncertainty over China's oil demand cloud oil markets' recovery.

Brent crude was at \$42.04 a barrel, down 62 cents or 1.4 per cent by 0859 GMT, after earlier sliding to \$41.51, the lowest since July 30.

US West Texas Intermediate crude skidded 63 cents, or 1.6 per cent, to

\$39.14 a barrel after earlier dropping to \$38.55, the lowest since July 10.

The world's top oil exporter Saudi Arabia cut the October official selling price for Arab Light crude it sells to Asia by the most since May, indicating demand remains weak. Asia is Saudi Arabia's largest market by region.

"The mood has turned somewhat pessimistic in the second half of last week and the immediate risk is

skewed to the downside," said oil broker PVM's Tamas Varga.

China, the world's biggest oil importer which has been supporting prices with record purchases, slowed its intake in August and increased its products exports, according to customs data on Monday.

"There are so many uncertainties with regard to the Chinese economy and their relationship with key industrialised countries, with the US and these days, even Europe," Keisuke Sadamori, director for energy markets and security at the International Energy Agency, said.

"It's not such an optimistic situation — that casts some shadow over the growth outlook."

The Labour Day holiday on Monday marks the traditional end of

the peak summer demand season in the United States and that renewed investors' focus on the current lacklustre fuel demand in the world's biggest oil user.

Oil is also under pressure as US companies increased their drilling for new supply after the recent recovery in oil prices.

US energy firms last week added oil and natural gas rigs for the second time in the past three weeks, according to a weekly report by Baker Hughes Co on Friday.

However, hopes for potential COVID-19 vaccines lend support to prices after Australian officials said they expected to receive their first batches of the vaccines in January, and said the vaccines could offer "multi-year protection". — Reuters