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SHELL JEWELLERY - GIFT FROM THE SEA...
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'Parents have right not to send kids to school'

Our Correspondent
 Muscat

Parents have the right not to send their children to school but must also ensure their children's right to education, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has stated.

H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis bin Ali Ambusaidi, MoE Under-secretary, confirmed on Monday that children's education will not stop as the ministry has provided all available alternatives for continuing education.

He assured parents, saying, "We will not put our students at risk," and added that they have the right not to send their children to school. "But they must

adhere to a number of obligations that grant children's right to education. There is also the necessity of taking the tests assigned to students," H E Dr Ambusaidi said.

He congratulated the members of the teaching and administrative bodies at the start of the school year who returned to work on Sunday. He informed that teachers, administrators and supervisors have returned to school to train in all matters related to blended education.

"The training will be linked to instructional and technical aspects. They will also be informed of the precautionary measures that should be implemented in the sultanate's schools."



(For illustrative purpose)

About commencement of the new academic year, he said, "The efforts went well and this is all

due to the endeavors of the directorates and schools." On preparing schools to re-

ceive teachers, he said that work has started in a decentralised manner and entrusted to the ed-

ucational directorates in the governorates. "A lot depends on the effectiveness of schools in addition to the role of cleaning companies in providing the required services to adhere to the precautionary measures."

With regard to students re-

learn in the way available to us. The ministry will be able to find solutions to any challenge it faces."

He added, "The Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19 takes the decision regarding education, the ministry is

The ministry is ready and education must not stop, and we must learn in the way available to us. The ministry will be able to find solutions to any challenge it faces

H E DR ABDULLAH BIN KHAMIS BIN ALI AMBUSAIIDI

LAP OF NATURE



Photograph of Wadi Hawar by Muhannad Saeed Mohammed al Amrani. The adventurer promotes local tourism through his photographs. This time around, he turned his lens to this picturesque wadi in the wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid, North Sharqiyah. Full story on [Page 05](#)

Violation of precautionary measures punishable with arrest and fines

Shaddad al Musalmi
 Muscat

Reopening of activities does not imply a relaxation on gatherings but people continue to congregate defying the Supreme Committee guidelines even as officials reiterated offenders are punishable with arrest and fines.

On Sunday, a group of people was arrested for holding an event and gathering in North Batinah, while Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested a group of 60 people who violated Supreme Committee decisions on gatherings in a farmhouse in Dakhliyah governorate last weekend. 'Legal action against the offenders has been initiated,' the ROP said.

In another case, a restaurant owner in Muttrah is facing legal action after he organised a night party without permission. "We know there are groups that are



ROP arrested 60 people for gathering in a farmhouse in Dakhliyah governorate last weekend (Supplied photo)

gathering on beaches, farms and having parties, attending weddings and funerals and the end result is that the number of cases is going up," said H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health and member of the Supreme Committee.

Over a thousand offenders have been fined at congregations in the last few months who violated COVID-19 social distancing

rules. The recent spike in infections has been attributed to illegal gatherings at private farms, beaches, weddings or funerals.

The Supreme Committee has banned all types of gatherings and those found violating the rule will be fined RO 1,500 for hosting such events, while those taking part face a fine of RO100. "No one is safe until all of us are safe. We are in this together. The fact

is that people still gather in large numbers does not help reduce the infections. People should be aware that fines and legal action still exist and offenders will be punished," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

The death toll from the pandemic in Oman is rising too. As of Monday, the number crossed 920 while the total number cases has reached 98,057.

Continued on [Page 03](#)

Decision to open mosques by mid-November: MARA

Our Correspondent
 Muscat

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) has confirmed its keenness to reopen mosques and places of worship that were closed by a decision of the Supreme Committee for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The ministry said that it will take an appropriate decision regarding the opening of mosques and places of worship according to the prescribed precautionary measures in mid-November 2020.

On September 22, the Supreme Committee expressed



its concern about the developments of the pandemic with the rising number of deaths and infections locally and globally.

MARA affirmed that the continuing effects of the pandemic on public health require meas-

ures to be taken to protect lives. The ministry will rely on the decision of the Supreme Committee, as well as on the situational report on the spread of COVID-19, before taking any decision on reopening places of worship.

Al Nasr first Arab club to sign Israeli footballer

Dubai - An Arab club has for the first time signed an Israeli footballer, Diaa Sabia, less than two weeks after the UAE normalised ties with the Jewish state. The 27 year old attacking midfielder with China's Guangzhou R&F, signed a two-year contract with Dubai's Al Nasr, the club said in a statement Sunday. The transfer reportedly cost more than US\$2.9mn.

Sabia - who is of Palestinian origin - was born in northern Israel and rose through the ranks of a youth club before moving to Maccabi Tel Aviv in 2012.

AFP



02

Reopening of cinemas eagerly awaited, but is the magic over?



13

BP Oman reaches 1tn ft³ milestone at Khazzan



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39 killed as Azerbaijan, Armenia fight for second day



18

Global coronavirus death toll passes 1mn, infections 33mn



19

Salon at home: Care for your nails

IS THE SPELL OVER?

Despite cinemas being closed for five months and film buffs enjoying steaming services, the draw of the 35mm screen is still strong

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The closure of cinema halls for five months is unprecedented - in Oman or anywhere else in the world - ever since the magic of movies cast its spell. The ramifications of this seemingly unending closure are extensive with its ancillary industries being wiped out and many in the moviemaking business losing their livelihood.

According to a PwC report, cinemas have been one of the businesses worst hit by the pandemic. Several blockbuster releases around the world have been delayed for months, while cinemas have remained shut or operating at limited capacity. The global cinema industry will see a 66 per cent drop to US\$15.5bn in revenues this year.

While many believe that it's just a matter of time before an announcement regarding reopening of another package of activities that includes cinemas is all it'll take for the industry to bounce back, others are more circumspect.

Views may vary but in Oman, most fall in the former category who eagerly await that announcement and believe everything will fall in place when cinemas reopen. Even as an increasing number of film buffs have opted for streaming services including Netflix and Amazon Prime, they are eagerly awaiting the make-believe experience of the 35mm silver screen in a darkened hall.

The same PwC report said global revenues from online streaming videos surged 26 per cent in 2020 owing to the fact that people stayed at home. The figure is expected to keep rising strongly in the coming years, almost doubling in size from US\$46.4bn in 2019 to US\$86.8bn in 2024.

But Najeeb Mohamed, managing director of Prime Advertising, PR, Digital and Social, is of the opinion that cinema is here to stay. "Walt Disney created Mickey Mouse when the world was down in 1929 during the Great Depression. As soon as we are out of COVID-19, cinema halls

will come back with double the force. For the time being there is online streaming services."

Oman-based filmmaker Sami Sarang is another optimist confident of cinema bouncing back despite the long setback. "The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on the film industry in 2020, mirroring its impact across all art sectors. Across the world and to varying degrees, cinemas and movie theatres have been closed, festivals have been cancelled or postponed, and film releases have been moved to future dates or delayed indefinitely. Due to the closure of cinemas and movie theatres, the global box office has dropped by billions of dollars, and streaming has become more popular.

Yet I am hopeful of the revival of cinema again."

Though there is fear of the virus, film buffs are confident that measures like temperature check and wearing of masks will help prevent the spread of the virus in cinemas. Filmmaker Khalid al Khamis said, "It is a pleasure to watch a movie on a big screen. My favourite halls are Ruwi and Shatti VOX. I used to watch a Hindi or an English film every week. The big screen has a mesmerising effect. I want the halls to open soon."

His friend Sulaiman al Khalili, member of Oman Film Society, is confident that cinemas will come back stronger. "Though there are options online, watching a movie on a big screen is magic."

Among the people who foresees the 35mm screen soon playing second fiddle to online streaming services is P Chandrasekr, group general manager of Jawad Sultan Group.

"Cinemas are the place where people get together socially and has remained one of the prominent forms of entertainment for masses and a successful business

model," he noted. "Whilst the business has faced rough weather due to several innovations during the 80's, it coasted along and held on against competitive forces and also grew, thanks to numerous offering by way of audio-visual effects, ergonomic seats, grand design and look of auditoriums, etc. However, this is getting seriously threatened. Already, Netflix, Amazon and Hotstar are making deep inroads."

66%
drop in revenues for the global cinema industry in 2020

26%
surge in global revenue from online streaming services in 2020 as a result of people staying at home

Global revenue from online streaming services expected to double from **US\$46.4bn** in 2019 to **US\$86.8bn** in 2024

Don't lose heart during COVID-19

World Heart Day: Call to scale up prevention of heart attack and stroke despite pandemic

Shaddad al Musalmi
Muscat

As an initiative by the World Heart Federation to spread awareness on cardiovascular diseases (CVD), including heart diseases and stroke, September 29 is observed as World Heart Day. This year, the day is being celebrated amid COVID-19 with experts saying that treatment should be sought for heart diseases even in these days of the pandemic.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 17.9mn people die of CVDs every year, accounting for over 31 per cent of global deaths. One-third of these deaths are premature (below 70 years) and about 80 per cent of all CVDs manifest themselves as heart attacks or strokes, and 75 per cent cases come from low and middle-income countries.

"During the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is noted that world over there is a drastic decrease in the number of patients attending hospital emergency rooms and marked decline in the number of heart attack patients being admitted to emergency care. This is not actually because people became healthier, but because many are avoiding visits to clinics and often ignoring dangerous symptoms, especially concerning cardiac problems,"



said Dr Benny Panakkal, senior consultant interventional cardiologist, Badr al Samaa Hospital.

He said that a recent survey conducted in the US revealed that people are more afraid of getting infected by COVID-19 than having a heart attack.

"Emergency treatment should be sought even in these days of pandemic. All hospitals have mechanisms and triages to segregate suspected COVID-19 patients from other patients," Dr Panakkal said.

"All proper precautions are

mandatory in hospitals and in place under the Ministry of Health guidelines and supervision. So it's safe to go to a hospital and get treatment if you feel you are in need. And always remember to observe social distancing and to wear a mask while in public places, observe hand hygiene; stay safe and healthy," he added.

According to WHO, CVDs are the number one cause of death globally. Individuals at risk of CVD may show raised blood pressure, glucose and lipids.

Dr K P Raman, chairman and cardiologist, Al Hayat International Hospital, said COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weakness in healthcare delivery systems even in affluent countries. "We are not focusing on the basics of healthcare delivery which is prevention and primary healthcare. So on this year's World Heart Day, we once again emphasise on health education of the public on preventive cardiology," he said.

Dr Raman said there is need for lifestyle modification. "There

is need to stop smoking, avoid excess alcohol, daily exercise, eat healthy and prevent being overweight," he said.

"Also, there is need for periodic check-ups. This will help in detecting and treating high BP, diabetes and high blood cholesterol before they produce complications. We all need to be well informed about the goals of treatment. Insist on the doctor that he spares no efforts to help you achieve these goals.

"If these are achieved by increasing heart health awareness,



We are not focusing on the basics of healthcare delivery which is prevention and primary healthcare

DR K P RAMAN



Due to COVID-19, many are avoiding visits to clinics and often ignoring dangerous symptoms, especially concerning cardiac problems

DR BENNY PANAKKAL

we will be saving many lives as well as our resources," Dr Raman said.

WHO says the burden of CVDs can be reduced. Cost effective interventions that are feasible to be implemented even in low-resource settings have been identified by WHO for prevention and control of CVDs.

According to WHO, prevention measures include comprehensive tobacco control policies, taxation to reduce the intake of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, building walking and

cycle paths to increase physical activity, strategies to reduce harmful use of alcohol and providing healthy school meals to children.

'At the individual level, for prevention of first heart attacks and strokes, individual healthcare interventions need to be targeted to those at high total cardiovascular risk or those with single risk factor levels above traditional thresholds, such as hypertension and hypercholesterolemia,' WHO says.

@shaddadm

State institutes urged to speed up electronic transfer of salaries

Muscat - The Ministry of Finance has urged units of the state's administrative apparatus to complete steps towards the finalisation of electronic transfer of salaries.

In a Financial Circular (No 20/2020) on 'Processing of electronic transfer of salaries', the ministry stated that all ministries and government units need to speed up the finalisation of procedures and coordination with their respective banks for electronic transactions and salary transfer.

In its circular, the Ministry of Finance urged ministries and government units lagging behind



in the project to fill up the application form for electronic banking services (with banks), specify the names of system users and those authorised to disburse and deal with the designated bank

account provided the particulars/accounts are revised and audited by the internal auditing unit at each ministry and government establishment.

The ministry cautioned that

the current methods of receiving and processing salaries will cease at the end of December 2020.

The procedures and measures come within the context of government efforts to implement 'Electronic Transformation' and to protect information and data against any risks, the ministry stated.

It also reflect the sultanate's commitment to establish security criteria and an approach to tighten control over internal auditing and risks arising from transfers pertaining to government expenditures.

ONA

Violation of precautionary measures punishable with arrest and fines

Continued from Page 01

The recovery rate declined to 89.9 on Monday from 91 per cent last week. The number of recoveries is 88,234, according to an MoH statement.

As of Sunday, a total of 523 patients were admitted in health institutions, while 200 patients were in ICUs.

"The deaths are not limited to the elderly and chronically ill. A 15 year old person has also died.

We all have to take care to prevent more deaths. There is a person who lost six of his family members in less than two weeks due to COVID-19," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

MoH advises all citizens and residents to continue washing hands with water and soap, avoid touching the face, nose, mouth and eyes, and follow healthy habits when coughing and sneezing, besides maintaining social distancing.

CASES FROM SEPT 18 TO 28

Sept 18 to 20 (Average of 574)	1,722
Sept 21	576
Sept 22	660
Sept 23	628
Sept 24	568
Sept 25 to 27 (Average of 514)	1,543
Sept 28	607

Wheat production increases by 132% during 2019-20 season

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Wheat is one of the main staple crops cultivated in the sultanate and its production increased by 132 per cent during the 2019-20 season compared to the last season.

Land used for the cultivation of wheat and the number of farmers involved in its production also grew by 75 per cent and 78.7 per cent respectively.

According to statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), 1,627 farmers were engaged in wheat production.

The official figures announced by the ministry indicate that the total production of wheat in the sultanate during the current agricultural season recorded 2226.6 tonnes compared to 961.67 tonnes during the last agricultural season, while the area of cultivated land was 2,046.8 acres compared to 1,167.4 acres during the 2018-19 agricultural season.

The number of farmers work-



ing in wheat production increased from 1,627 to 2,907 during the current season.

An official at MoAFWR, said, "Dakhliyah produced more wheat than any other governorate, accounting for 53 per cent of the total. The total production of wheat in Dakhliyah was 1,170.5 tonnes, of which 386.5 tonnes were produced in Bahla, 272.6 tonnes in Al Hamra and 264.7 tonnes in Nizwa."

Dhahirah governorate came second, accounting for 33 per cent of the total. The wilayat of Ibbi recorded the highest produc-

tion with 528 tonnes, followed by 183.8 tonnes in the wilayat of Yanqul, bringing the governorate's total production to 729 tonnes.

The governorates of North and South Batinah ranked third, accounting for seven per cent of the total production each, and a total of 167.6 tonnes of wheat, while Dhofar produced four per cent of the total with a production of 80 tonnes.

The annual report of the ministry stated that it has devoted great attention to increase wheat yield.

Use of hotel banquet halls not for celebrations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has issued a circular forbidding the use of banquet halls in hotels for events, celebrations, weddings or any form of gatherings other than business meetings.

In the circular, the ministry clarified, 'Hotel facilities can be used for business meetings by strictly following precautionary measures to ensure the safety of customers and employees.'

The ministry said that in the event of non-compliance, necessary legal action will be taken against violators.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.43am
Sunrise	5.58am
Duhr	12.02pm
Asr	3.27pm
Maghrib	6.01pm
Isha	7.11pm

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MoAFWR calls on investors to set up fish collection, veterinary quarantine centres

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support the fish and livestock sectors, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) is re-offering a number of plots of land for investment in a few governorates.

The ministry is planning to set up four fish collection centres in Al Wusta, South Sharqiyah and Dhofar governorates and a veterinary quarantine centre for livestock in Buraimi.

The ministry has opened a



One fish collection centre will come up in the Ras Madrakah area in the wilayat of Duqm, Al Wusta governorate. The two centres in Dhofar governorate will be located in Shaleem and Halaniyat Islands, and the Hasik area. The fish collection centre in South Sharqiyah will be located in the wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

The ministry has also appealed to investors to bid for the proposed veterinary quarantine centre for animals in the Al Zaroub area of the wilayat of Mahdha in Buraimi.

tender inviting Omani companies to bid for setting up the fish collection centres and the veteri-

nary quarantine centre.

The last date for submission of bids is November 5.

'Transfer of students between schools possible till Oct 8'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Transfer of students of grades 2 to 12 from private schools to government schools or vice versa is possible till October 8, the Ministry of Education has announced.

In a statement, the ministry said, 'Parents who wish to transfer their children from a government school to a private school or from a private school to a government school can do so during the period from September 28 to October 8.'

The ministry stated that parents can request for transfer through its educational portal and added it received 7,000 requests in seven hours.

In the 2018-19 academic year, 2,046 schools offered education to 843,598 students.



Ministry hosts OOC chair, sports body heads

Muscat - The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth held a meeting on Monday, chaired by H E Rashad bin Ahmed al Hinai, Undersecretary for Sports and Youth in the ministry, with the chairman of the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) and heads of sports federations.

The meeting was held within the framework of the ministry's endeavour to follow up on the programmes and plans that the Olympic Committee and sports federations are implementing in the next stage and to activate joint cooperation frameworks



with them in a manner that serves the sports and youth sectors.

The attendees discussed the importance of applying precautionary and preventive measures that have been taken by the sultanate to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, especially with

the resumption of different kinds of sports and youth activities.

The meeting discussed the reports received from the committee tasked with studying and following up plans of the Olympic Committee, federations and sports committees.

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WINNERS OF WEEK 4

First Position:

Name: **Mohamed Adil Al Abduwani**

Second Position:

Name: **Mirudhula Madhu**

Guidelines

- ▶ The weekly quiz (**Every Tuesday**) is open to all the residents of Oman irrespective of their nationality.
- ▶ The link for accepting the answers will be active every Tuesday from 9 am till Wednesday midnight and will stop accepting responses after that.
- ▶ The quiz will have 2 winners per week namely the **FIRST** and the **SECOND**.
- ▶ In case of a tie or a greater number of participants with correct answers, the initial correct respondents will be declared as the winners (Timestamp of 9 am will be taken into account).
- ▶ The prizes for the winners will be announced during the Grand finale (10th October).

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NO ADDED SUGAR

Oman Air flights to Cairo to resume on Oct 1

Muscat - Oman Air, the national carrier of Oman, will return to scheduled services on October 1 with service to 18 cities in 12 countries including two flights per week connecting Muscat and Cairo. The flights will depart from Oman on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and return on Thursdays and Saturdays.

The airline will also serve the continent of Africa with twice-weekly flights to Zanzibar and

Dar es Salaam, in the Republic of Tanzania.

In a statement, Oman Air said it will maintain its comprehensive safety programme throughout all stages of the journey to ensure that guests fly confidently.

'Masks are required when guests are on board the aircraft and in Oman's airports. Distancing is maintained while guests board and exit the aircraft, which



are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of every day. Cabin crew all wear a full set of personal protective equipment, meal service has been modified to further ensure safety and a number of other steps have been taken to ensure that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times.'

People who are planning to travel to Muscat should visit the Civil Aviation Authority web-

site, paca.gov.om, to ensure they are prepared to comply with requirements to enter the sultanate.

Passengers travelling to Cairo, Zanzibar or Dar es Salaam should ensure they are aware of official entry requirements.

People departing from Oman should ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements and all other regulations during their flight.



Adventurer explores wadis of the sultanate

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muhannad Saeed Mohammed al Amrani, 23, from the wilayat of Nizwa in Dakhliyah governorate, has been capturing images of the stunning landscape of Omani wadis and promoting the tourism potential of the sultanate on various social media platforms.

Amrani has been exploring new spots and photographing Omani wadis since 2012.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Amrani said, "As an adventurer and a photographer, my goal is not just to take beautiful pictures of the place and gain the admiration of followers. My objective is to show the people the wonderful wadis in different parts of Oman."

Earlier this month, Amrani



As an adventurer and a photographer, my objective is to show the people the wonderful wadis in different parts of Oman

MUHANNAD
AL AMRANI

photographed Wadi Hawar, in the wilayat of Wadi Bani

Khalid, which is one of the most beautiful wadis in North Sharqiyah.

"It is a beautiful place for swimming and camping. There are many ponds. It's a difficult road to the top. I climbed about 100m to photograph the area. I hope to provide services in that region to attract tourists and Omani families to visit these places," Amrani said.

He has captured a number of picturesque landscapes of the valleys of Oman.

The places he has photographed include Wadi al Nakhr in the wilayat of Al Hamra, Wadi Tanuf in Nizwa in Dakhliyah, and Wadi al Abyad in Nakhal, South Batinah.

"I will continue to promote Omani tourism and attract tourists," he said.

National Museum holds Creative Imagination Programme

Muscat - The Learning Centre at the National Museum concluded the Creative Imagination Programme, presented by Dr Nasser Planji, associate professor in the Department of Fine Arts at the Scientific College of Design.

Twenty took part in the programme conducted with the support of BP Oman.

As per a statement, the programme had two classes in two stages - the first at the museum headquarters, and the second through visual conferencing.

The aim of the programme was to document Oman's historical and heritage images and patterns, by integrating elements, patterns and lines to create contemporary artworks related to the collections presented in the museum.

It also looked to enhance the participants' understanding of the composition of colours, the effects of light, shapes and shadow, and introducing the methods of creative imagination to add an element of creativity in their artwork and developing visual awareness.

The programme enabled participants to learn about creative imagination methods using col-



lage techniques, which integrate images of Omani archaeological collections and other materials in

different ways and methods of two and three dimensions that revive heritage and history anew.



The aim of the programme was to document Oman's historical and heritage images and patterns, by integrating elements, patterns and lines to create contemporary artworks

The centre includes many facilities for various educational programmes.

H E Sa'eedi receives Egyptian ambassador

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Ahmed Mohammed Al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, received at his office H E Mohammed Ahmed Fahmi, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the sultanate.

Both sides exchanged cordial conversations and discussed means of cooperation between the two brotherly countries in a number of aspects including health.

The Egyptian ambassador expressed the gratitude of the Egyptian government to the sultanate for its outstanding support to the Egyptian nationals and community living in Oman and dealing with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Furthermore, the epidemio-



logical situation of the current pandemic was highlighted during the meeting. The global efforts exerted in combating the disease and aspects of cooperation be-

tween the two sides in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic were underlined.

At the end of the meeting, the Minister of Health affirmed the

significance of exchanging visits between the two countries with the purpose of developing cooperation and exchange of experience in the health sector.

'Haya Water working towards achieving goals of Oman Vision 2040'

Muscat - While emphasising Haya Water's commitment to work towards Oman Vision 2040, an official said the company is proud to be one of the main pillars for preserving the environment and public health and making Oman greener.

Haya Water participated in the recent 9th Al Roya Economic Forum where Eng Sulieman bin Musallam al Rawahi, corporate affairs general manager, Haya Water, said Haya Water's participation in the forum came as one of the partners in the Oman Vision 2040.

"The company's role is to

work alongside other institutions to achieve the lofty goals of the vision," he said.

The conference was opened by Sayyid Fatik bin Fahr al Said, Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, at the Grand Millennium Hotel. This year's theme was 'The Road to Oman 2040'.

Responding to questions regarding the changes that the company is witnessing particularly after it was brought under the umbrella of Nama Group, Eng Rawahi said, "Based on the company's board of directors and its executive management; and under the direct supervision



of the acting CEO, the work is currently underway to harmonise the company's strategies in line with the government's directions and achieving the Oman

Vision 2040, especially those related to reducing the government's financial support and developing the national cadres."

He added, "These strategies

and plans, whether short or long-term, are linked to international standards and techniques in order to achieve best practices and improve work performance

in line with the company's aspirations to achieve distinguished results and to reach the break-even in the coming years, as well as to expand the wastewater services in various governorates."

He also elaborated on the company's corporate business plan which is currently being reviewed.

"We have been working on setting goals, measuring indicators and creating new investment opportunities. Our focus is to make financial profit that is expected to contribute in reducing the government's financial

support and achieving the desired goal of reaching a break-even."

In response to the 2040 Vision's direction to empower the private sector, Eng Rawahi noted that the company is working towards achieving this by encouraging the private sector establishments to invest and develop the sewage sector.

He informed that recently the company announced the first public-private-partnership project (PPP), which was regarding the construction of Al Misfa Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) and its facilities.

Bank Muscat signs pact to onboard Haya Water on its B2B platform

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, and Haya Water (Oman Wastewater Services Company), have signed an agreement to onboard the utility's operations to Bank Muscat's B2B platform. The new system will help the Government of Oman-owned wastewater services utility digitise its payments by completely onboarding the authority to the B2B platform with access to live support.

The bank's B2B solution will seamlessly and securely integrate with Haya Water's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to provide an automated, two-way data transfer service for high volume online payments. The corporate will be able to optimise the efficiency of its employees by saving on man-hours since personal visits and face-to-face interaction with bank employees will not be required on a



daily basis for payment processing and reconciliation.

Haya Water will be able to provide better service to its customers and other stakeholders because of the straight-through nature of online channels. It will be able to achieve a high degree of automation in payables reconciliation and minimise risks related to payment processes.

Tariq Atiq, DGM - Transaction & Public Sector Banking, said, "As the pioneer of digitali-



sation technologies in the country, Bank Muscat has collaborated with Haya Water to introduce state-of-the-art technology to digitise its operations and allow greater efficiency in the delivery of its services. A shift to digital typically brings in a host of benefits including efficiency, cost reduction, accountability, speed and scalability. In today's world, digitalisation is no longer an option for organisations. Going ahead, we expect

more organisations to take advantage of the high degree of automation and security that is made possible by the B2B Connect solution."

Sabiha al Kharusi, acting GM Finance at Haya Water, said, "We are proud to partner with Bank Muscat to use its state-of-the-art B2B Connect solution and greatly improve our operational efficiencies. Our customers, vendors and partners will find it easier to complete their transactions with us and we are confident that this will improve their satisfaction and ease of doing business."

The niche B2B Connect solution is an advanced version of online banking targeted mainly at large corporates. With the B2B Connect solution, corporates can carry out payment approvals in their ERP and the information can flow to the bank for processing. Through this so-

lution, institutions can build an efficient and robust payment and reconciliation system. The bank's corporate online banking platform serves as a key solution for corporate payments.

With the integration of corporate enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems with the online banking platform, a complete digitalisation process is now in place for corporate payables as well as reconciliation. Bank Muscat also offers corporates other tailor-made solutions such as the Direct Debit solution and Remote Deposit Capture (RDC), which allow corporate customers to smoothly transition towards efficient technology-focused processes. Bank Muscat's Transaction Banking team provides expert advice to institutional partners and can help them structure an automated and efficient accounts-receivables process.



Malabar Gold unveils its latest collection

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 250 outlets spread across ten countries, has unveiled the latest 'Everyday Jewellery Collection' showcasing a wide range of diamond jewellery at competitive prices starting from RO80.

This campaign showcases a huge collection of certified diamond jewellery, available across all their outlets in Oman.

This unique collection from Malabar Gold & Diamonds gives every woman the possibility of owning their favourite piece of diamond jewellery.

The collections in 'Mine' - Diamond Jewellery, 'Era' - Uncut Diamonds and 'Precia' - Precious

Gem Jewellery brands showcased as part of 'Everyday Jewellery Collection' are available at various price points starting from RO80.

Their huge collection of jewellery studded with classic and exquisite diamonds range from lightweight and daily wear to elegant party wear, providing the appropriate piece of jewellery for every occasion.

Also Malabar Gold & Diamonds gives their customers the advantage of converting their jewellery purchase into 'Easy Payment Plans' in association with Sohar International and Bank Muscat through which they can enjoy flexible payment options for up to 12 installments without paying any interest.

Future skills programme launched for students

HSBC and Potential.com have launched the third edition of future skills flagship programme, Tatawwar: Building Tomorrow's Minds, for students across the UAE, Egypt, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Algeria.

Tatawwar: Building Tomorrow's Minds is an interactive online and face-to-face programme that brings together students aged 15 to 18, schools, parents and the business community to innovate for a sustainable future by addressing the three United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- Climate Action
- Human Health and Well-being
- Clean Water and Sanitation

Tatawwar, which is translated to "to develop" in English, encourages students to develop core future skills in innovative design thinking, financial literacy, critical thinking, and entrepre-



neurship. It raises awareness of how business can help address social and environmental problems in their community through innovation.

The past two editions of Tatawwar: Building Tomorrow's Minds have seen more than

5,000 students from over 1,000 schools across the Middle East and North Africa region, register in the blended learning programme.

The Tatawwar team hosted 20 prototyping workshops for over 500 shortlisted students, in each of the programme's countries in partnership with local Fablabs and maker spaces.

Daniel Howlett, regional head of Commercial Banking, HSBC Middle East, North Africa and Turkey, said, "Education is a priority for governments across our region as they transition towards building sustainable and knowledge-based economies. As the region's leading international bank, HSBC is uniquely positioned to support the growth of this vital sector."

Students can now register for the programme at www.tatawwar.com.

OAB opens new branch in Sinaw

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has opened its new branch in Sinaw, in North Sharqiyah, after reallocating to the entrance of the wilayat, next to the Shell Petrol Station. Strategically positioned, the branch will allow easy access for OAB's customers to conduct their banking transactions.

Highlighting the importance of the branch transformation, Rashad al Shaikh, acting head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "The bank's strategy focuses on the development and transformation of our branch network to create a unique banking experience for all our customers and to enhance our share in the market with unparalleled level of services. We believe that our customers in Sinaw and the surrounding towns will be able to benefit from the location of the new branch."

The Sinaw branch features an enhanced brand identity, with a refreshed look and feel and contemporary design. The branch



transformation is further complemented by several facilities and systems that are a part of the bank's transformation strategy. The new branch seeks to provide an exceptional, integrated customer experience, starting from entering the waiting area to conducting the required banking transactions.

The branch also features screens that promote OAB's lat-

est products and services, moving monitors to allow for more private advisory spaces, as well as signature pads and ID card readers.

The new branch also features a dedicated reception desk, majlis, and RM offices for "Elite" customers to provide them with an exclusive, private and memorable banking experience. The objective is to bring together dis-

tinct designs and meet the bank's transformational goals, which revolves around enriching customer experience based on the high-level of offered services.

The design is inspired by the 'Omani Skyline', with the colour white representing Omani architecture, brown symbolising desert sands, grey a reflection of the mountains, and blue glass overhangs resembling the sky.

Danube Home launches 'My Garden 2021' e-catalogue

Danube Home, the leading one-stop retail solution for all home interior and improvement needs in the region, announced the virtual launch of its latest Garden collection 2021 on September 24 at the Danube Home showroom. Adel Sajan - director Danube Home, Shubhojit Mahalanobis - general manager Danube Home and Sayed Habib - general manager, Business Development Danube Home addressed the media and other esteemed guests virtually.

"The COVID-19 pandemic made 2020 a challenging year with travel restrictions, social distancing, and fear in the air. At the same time, it offered a chance for individuals and organisations to reset and reshape the world in a more sustainable way. Following this shift with the new normal, Danube Home decided to take the paperless route with our all-new Garden e-catalogue 2021. The new exhaustive e-catalogue is loaded with Danube Home outdoor product range along with insightful information about each of them. It is designed to be easy-to-use, with



high-quality visuals all organised into easy-to-navigate sections," commented Sajan.

The concept of the new Garden Catalogue 2021 is - 'Bring in the outdoor'. With their new product offering, Danube Home brings the outdoor ambience to home exteriors. A major part of

2020 saw people working and staying home due to COVID-19.

With Danube Home garden solutions, customers can get the feeling of a mini-staycation every time they step out into their outdoor space. Balconies, terraces, backyards, and lawns can be designed to entertain family and

friends, provide a place for kids to take a break from their electronic devices and play outside or to simply relax and enjoy moments of solitude all the while staying safe at home.

"The Garden 2021 e-catalogue is seamlessly integrated with our e-commerce website. This

means that customers can simply click on the product they like on the e-catalogue to navigate to the specific product page on the site and find detailed information and videos of the product. Once they like what they see, they can add to cart and checkout with ease," said Habib.

"We consistently strive to provide the best product range for our customers and with our new Garden 2021 collection, our customers are sure to be spoilt for choice in all categories, whether it is outdoor flooring solutions, gazebos, umbrellas, sofas, balcony furniture, lighting, garden ornaments, kids play or outdoor bar and barbecue sets. We also have an expert team of professionals who can landscape with our lifelike artificial grass and plants that look great without the maintenance hassle. This year we have added many new products for the kids play area as well as barbecue sets, camping solutions, and artificial plants. I would like to thank my team for the efforts they have put to make a diverse portfolio of products available to appeal to the aesthetics of every customer," he added.

Danube Home also offers free garden design services which make them even more appealing.

"We are happy to see that customers are keener than ever to design their home exteriors. We've had customers who

wanted to convert even parking areas to a garden," Habib said.

At the launch, Danube Home also showcased customer testimonial videos featuring some of their happy customers and a look at how the designers at Danube Home completely transformed customers' outdoor spaces into dream gardens.

Mahalanobis said, "After experiencing a challenging period in March-April 2020, we have come back with a bang thanks to our diverse portfolio of products, our adherence to stringent safety protocols, and new and improved strategies in place.

"Since this period, the global furniture market has also been seeing steady growth as people are now focusing on improving their homes owing to the travel restrictions and COVID-19 related safety protocols. The demand for outdoor furniture is also rising as more and more people have started realising that living space is not just confined to the walls around them."

View the e-catalogue at oman.danubehome.com/my-garden2021.



Al Jenaibi Automobiles announces arrival of new BMW 4 Series Coupé

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group in Oman, has officially announced the arrival of the all-new BMW 4 Series Coupé, the next chapter in a coupé tradition shaped by numerous legendary BMW models.

The make-up of the new BMW 4 Series Coupé range reflects the emphasis placed on dynamic power in the car's conception. The latest generation of the sporty two-seater for the premium midsize segment comes with a vehicle concept that focuses on delivering dynamic driving satisfaction.

A small number of crisp lines and the use of clear, generously sized surfaces feed into a body design which exudes unadulterated driving pleasure from every angle. The striking front end of the new BMW 4 Series Coupé shines the spotlight on its stand-



alone character. The large, vertically emphasised BMW kidney grille angles forwards and extends down almost to the lower edge of the front apron.

Sales begin with two model variants that both obtain two four-cylinder petrol units, including the BMW 420i Coupé, generating an output of 135 kW/184 hp and the new BMW 430i

Coupé, generating an output of 190 kW/258 hp. Connected to an 8 speed steptronic transmission, it allows the BMW 430i Coupé to accelerate from 0-100 kmph in just 5.8 seconds, with a top speed of 250 kmph.

Cleanly designed surfaces, high-quality materials and the driver-focused layout of the cockpit define the premium am-

bience and singularly performance-centric interior design of the new BMW 4 Series Coupé. Sports seats and a newly designed sports leather steering wheel come as standard.

Together with the coordinated design of the instrument panel and door panel trim, the high-set centre console generates an enveloping environment for the front seat occupants. The standard acoustic glass for the windscreen further improves comfort over long distances.

Customers can enjoy lift-related dampers with bespoke tuning fitted as standard. There is an optional M Sport suspension with an even firmer set-up for dampers, mounts and anti-roll bars, plus additional body struts and variable sport steering.

Additional available options include an adaptive M suspension with electronically con-

trolled dampers, M Sport brakes with a choice of blue or red brake callipers and M Sport differential with fully variable locking function in the rear differential.

The BMW 4 Series Coupé has a significantly wider range of driver assistance systems than its predecessor model including, BMW Maps, BMW Intelligent Personal Assistant, smartphone integration and a Remote Software Upgrade.

The driver and passengers in the new BMW 4 Series Coupé will also benefit from the enhanced options for intuitive operation and the innovative digital services brought by the inclusion of BMW Operating System 7.0. Display content can be configured individually while the intuitive multimodal interaction between driver and vehicle can take place, depending on the situation, via the Control Display's

touchscreen, the proven iDrive Controller, the multifunction buttons on the steering wheel, voice control or optional BMW gesture control. The BMW Intelligent Personal Assistant with added functions is also at the customer's service as a standard feature in the new vehicle.

BMW Maps

When it comes to digital services, one of the standout new features for the new BMW 4 Series Coupé is BMW Maps. As well as calculating routes and arrival times with remarkable speed and precision, and updating real-time traffic data at short intervals, the new cloud-based navigation system also lets drivers enter any word when searching for a destination.

BMW Live Cockpit Plus and BMW Live Cockpit Professional also come with optimised smart-

phone integration. Alongside Apple CarPlay, the operating system for the new BMW 4 Series Coupé now also hosts Android Auto. Remote Software Upgrade is another new feature that enables improved vehicle functions and additional digital services to be imported into the car over the air.

Salim Sabbagh, acting chief executive officer of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, said, "We are delighted that the BMW 4 Series Coupé has finally arrived. The vehicle marks the next stage in the ongoing development of BMW in the sultanate."

"Oman continues to be an important market for BMW, and like its predecessors, we are sure the vehicle will provide to be popular with premium midsize segment customers who demand a high level of performance and comfort."

Alizz Islamic to hold special draw

As part of its efforts to reward its loyal customers, Alizz Islamic Bank will be holding a special Bushra Prize Savings account draw for on the 50th National Day on November 18, 2020. There will be 50 winners of RO1,000 each as hiba from the shareholders' funds in this special 50th National Day draw.

Alizz Islamic Bank's Bushra Prize Savings Account is Oman's first Sharia'a-compliant prize savings account and reflects the bank's commitment in pioneering innovative Sharia'a-compliant products and services that cater to customers' needs.

In addition, Bushra Prize Savings account customers also enter the daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and annual draws that are conducted by Alizz Islamic Bank.

Over the last seven years, Alizz Islamic Bank has been able to meet the needs of the local banking market in the sultanate by developing products that fully meet the needs of individuals and businesses.

The bank continues to make progress in achieving its objective to become the leading provider of Islamic banking



services in the Oman by providing exceptional customer service and superior innovative solutions.

The bank operates in accordance with transparent procedures and ensures the provision of comprehensive and innovative Sharia'a-compliant products and solutions to meet the diverse needs of individual and business customers at local and regional level. The bank also provides customised products and services to small and medium enterprises to contribute to their growth and meet their various needs.

Omantel takes firm steps to bolster cybersecurity

As businesses, organisations and individuals have begun to exceedingly depend on the Internet and telecommunications for business and services, the need for data security and cyber defence cannot be emphasised enough. Omantel, the sultanate's pioneering and trusted telecommunications service provider, has remained steadfast in aligning its efforts with Oman's national information security strategy, which is based on international best practices, while understanding national and regional service demands.

Abdullah Hamood al Barwani, GM Corporate Security from Omantel said, "Telecom networks are the backbone of any information exchange. They are usually the target of malicious and criminal attacks - especially with recent developments in IP-based communications networks. These systems are subject to all forms of digital sabotage, data privacy violation and theft. Therefore, data integrity and security become a priority for us at Omantel."

Barwani added, "Omantel understands these potential threats and works relentlessly to safeguard its systems on which Oman's corporate organisations rely on. The company is one of the pioneering organisations to adopt the best international standards, policies and practices in information security and was among the first companies globally to adopt and implement the ISO 27701 for privacy and data protection which is scheduled to be completed in 2020.

"It is worth mentioning that obtaining the ISO Certificate, Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCO-DSS) and Content Management Interoperability Services Certificate (CMIS-OEM) are a testimony of the company's data security initiatives. Omantel takes pride in maintaining a clean record while protecting the privacy of customers as the company does not sell, trade or lease any personal information. The company's advanced risk management framework is based on internationally recognised best practice."

Wyndham Garden Muscat prepares strategic plan to adapt to new changes

In preparation for the coming period and the post-coronavirus phase, the management of Wyndham Garden Muscat hotel is preparing a strategic plan that is flexible, ready and able to adapt to new changes and developments, which will help in making decisions in a faster way that ensures the safety of guests and the future performance of hotel facility.

"With the slow return to activities in accordance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee in charge of examining the mechanism of dealing with the coronavirus, we were well prepared to abide by the directives of the committee and the Ministry of Health, in addition to special hygiene and sterilisation protocols that restore reassurance to our dear guests, in addition to changing some habits related to food, drinks, activities and common spaces," said Ramy Hamdoun, director of Sales and Marketing at Wyndham Garden Muscat hotel.

He added, "As for our vision for the next stage, we believe



that the first quarter of next year will be a major turning point in the tourism and hotel sector, and we believe that the application of modern technology in all hotel activities will reshape what was considered the natural course of business."

With the current health conditions and the resumption of commercial activity, Windum Garden Muscat management takes into consideration the need to ensure the highest standards of hygiene and sterilisation to ensure the safety of our partners, team members and customers,

he added.

"To demonstrate this commitment, we launched the 'Depend on Us' initiative. A new, long-term initiative to help build trust among our customers, it represents an important step towards addressing these challenges."

Wyndham Garden Muscat offers distinctive modern accommodation, enjoying its location in Al Khuwayr, close to the commercial district, companies, and all government institutions.

The 143 rooms and suites are designed with all devices ensuring the utmost comfort and luxury. The hotel also contains a variety of restaurants, including the Brazilian restaurant 'Churrascaria', and is considered the first and only specialised restaurant in Muscat. It is expected to open next April.

The guests can also enjoy eating a wide variety of international cuisines offered by Al Andalus Restaurant. The management is pleased to provide room services around the clock, in addition to free WiFi.

DAILY CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Aniston flick, ____'s the One"

4 Ear bone

9 Capacitance unit

14 Null's companion

18 Vault

19 Smiling

20 Stun

21 Author Hunter

22 Hep

23 ____ Gras

24 "Hostess" Perle

25 Storm

26 Start of a seasonal verse

30 Deuce toppers

31 "Bus Stop" playwright

32 Derision

33 Melancholy

34 Milieu for 106

Down

37 Sine ____ non

40 The naked truth?

44 Eur. financial pact

45 Fountain treat

48 Crete's capital

49 Second line of the verse

56 '60s character

57 Actress Lenska

58 Infamous judge

59 Hindu deity

60 Like ____; probably

61 Composer Berg

62 Unheeding

64 Kind of sleep

65 Tyro

68 Sex classification

70 Legendary bird

73 Writer ____ Ephron

74 States positively

77 Part of NAS

81 Author Seton

83 Obsession

84 Bary Manilow's showgirl

85 Powerful political group

87 Third line of the verse

91 Santa ____ Park

92 ____ corpus

93 Laders' org.

94 Late

96 Lin. portion

97 Infant ferry?

99 Relatively suffix

102 Stable breeders

105 "To ____ His Own"

107 Type of physics

109 Last line of verse

116 Oppositionist

117 Le ____ of spydom

118 Tropical tubers

119 Kirgiz mountain range

120 Vienna, to Fritz

121 Shakespearean sprite

122 "Aida" or

"Lohengrin"

123 Bambi of theater fame

124 For a ____; cheaply

125 Eagle ex-coach

"Greasy"

126 Fortification

127 Unchanged

DOWN

1 Lady of Spain

2 Animosity

3 Adhesive ingredient

4 "La Douce"

5 Long and Vardalos

6 Sweater type

7 Destroyed

8 Bee's bite

9 Fortune's partner

10 Wall St. acronym

11 Grates

12 Nahuatl

13 Church official

14 Lanais

15 Track shape

16 Desdemona's nemesis

17 Plankton snare

18 Artists' residences

27 Ed.'s reading matter

28 Margarita base

29 Cease-fire

35 Garr of Hollywood

36 Frenzied

38 Deprive of

strength

39 Summer beverage

41 "Bombs bursting ____"

42 Tennis opener

43 Palindrome's first word

45 Ticket end

46 Stage whispers

47 Downed

49 Business deg.

50 "____, We Have No Bananas"

51 Dapper one

52 College town on the Thames

53 Austrian composer

Bruckner

54 Perry's creator

55 Hope-Crosby course

61 Tropical tree

63 Spar

66 Ballot

67 South Bend team

68 "Elegy" poet

Thomas

69 Rooting sounds

70 Trooper's trap

71 Quarterback's count

72 Doubter

74 Walk

75 "Star Trek: ____"

76 Trees in an O'Neill title

78 Appia or Dolorosa

79 Cuckoo

80 Preceded

82 Witness's activity

85 Actor O'Shea

86 Way out

88 African tribe

89 Wt. units

90 Sere

95 "Under the ____ Sun"

97 Roughen

98 "Krazy ____"

99 Roma's country

100 On the move

101 Sculptor Auguste

103 "Wreck of the Mary ____"

104 Damascene's land

106 Troupe member

108 Sell hot tickets

109 Shark film

110 Mussel genus

111 British gun

112 Turgenev's birthplace

113 Ubangi river feeder

114 "____ the Explorer"

115 "It ____ ancient mariner"

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES

MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today's skies present the strangest blend of hard and soft energies, Aries. The sleepy Pisces moon merges with spiritual Neptune; this summons you inward and calls you towards reconnecting with your sense of self. This is about alone time.



LEO

JULY 23-AUGUST 22

The universe has been doling you out your fair share of tests lately, Leo. Today's skies continue to push you to look deeper into your intimate relationships and explore what's happening beneath the surface, as the Pisces moon merges with Neptune.



SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Go easy on yourself. Your internal world is likely to be creating a ruckus, as self-motivated Mars locks into a frustrated encounter with wall-building Saturn, making it difficult to proceed with creative projects. Take a bath, take it easy, and slow down.



TAURUS

APRIL 20-MAY 20

Mental tensions are likely to rear their head. Aggressive Mars back peddles into its second square with Saturn, prompting you to explore limiting beliefs around your own self-assertion. Fortunately, relief is easy to find through your trusted friends.



VIRGO

AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your relationship energy is likely to be all over the place today, Virgo. The moon saunters through your opposite sign of Pisces, directing your emotional attention to a partner or love interest. Luna's conjunction to Neptune can make for added idealism.



CAPRICORN

DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's hard to get a grip on what you're feeling today, Capricorn. On one hand, the poetic Pisces moon's union with escapist Neptune stirs your need for meaningful exchanges. On the other, irritable Mars creates frictions on the home front.



GEMINI

MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's easy to get frustrated by the contrasting energies in your environment today. The moon spends the day floating through dreamy Pisces, merging with psychedelic Neptune on her path. This draws your energy and attention towards career matters.



LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You're in need of some inner organisation and realignment. Take a moment to slow down and get back into your body through your exercise routine. The Pisces moon merges with Neptune too, suggesting that you commit to a small meditation practice.



AQUARIUS

JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Don't expect your communications to come across clearly. Some mental roadblocks stand in the way of your forward progress, as self-assertive Mars locks into a harsh square with heavy Saturn. There's mental and verbal friction.



CANCER

JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your desire for escape can frustrate the reality of your current circumstances. The moon floats through Pisces this afternoon, conjoining drifting Neptune on her path. This makes you pine for adventure and an escape from your average life.



SCORPIO

OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's easy to feel like your progress has been halted. Your ruling planet, Mars, spends the day in a hard exchange with dutiful Saturn, churning any mental stresses that have gone unacknowledged. Take a moment to stop and reassess your job trajectory.



PISCES

FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You come equipped with hyper-sensitivity to the world around you. The moon spends the day emphasising this, as she moves through your sign and merges with Neptune. Feel your feelings and express yourself through dance, poetry, or music.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1) DRDL stands for?

a. Defence Research and Development Laboratory

b. Department of Research and Development Laboratory

c. Differential Research and Documentation Laboratory

d. None of the above

2) Who was the first Indian Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army ?

a. Gen K M Cariappa

b. Vice-Admiral R D Katari

c. Gen. Maharaja Rajendra Singhji

d. None of the above

3) FRS stands for?

a. Fellow Research System

b. Federation of Regulation Society

c. Fellow of Royal Academy

a. None of the above

Answers: 1: a 2: c 3: c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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BOGGLER

Y	S	O	C
O	P	H	P
O	O	K	I
R	L	P	I

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution

20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

4	7	2	1	8	9	6	5
8	1	6	5	2	4	7	9
6	9	4	7	1	3	8	2
3	4	1	2	6	9	7	8
2	8	7	9	4	5	6	1
5	6	9	8	7	1	2	4
9	3	8	7	4	1	6	2
1	2	6	5	3	8	9	4
7	4	5	6	9	2	8	1

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (SEPTEMBER 28)



WORD BUILDER

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count



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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Juventus' forward Cristiano Ronaldo (right) celebrates after scoring a penalty against Roma at the Olympic stadium in Rome on Sunday

Ronaldo rescues a point for Juventus

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice to salvage a point for ten-man Juventus in a 2-2 draw at Roma as Napoli hammered Genoa 6-0 in Serie A on Sunday.

Champions Juventus were trailing 1-2 and a man down after an hour at the Stadio Olimpico after a Jordan Veretout brace for the hosts and Adrien Rabiot's sending off. But a towering Ronaldo header grabbed the equaliser in the 69th minute to avoid handing new Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo a first defeat.

Edin Dzeko was back on the Roma front line after his move to Juventus fell through, the Bosnian having missed last week's trip to Verona which ended in a forfeit defeat for the capital side for fielding an unregistered player.

Instead new Juventus signing Alvaro Morata got his first start after his move from Atletico Madrid earlier this week.

But the champions were pushed hard by the hosts with Veretout opening from the spot in the 31st minute after a Rabiot handball.

The French midfielder added a second shortly before the break just after Ronaldo had equalised

as Napoli swept past coronavirus-hit Genoa 6-0 while AC Milan continued their winning run without Zlatan Ibrahimovic with a 2-0 victory against promoted Crotone.

"The result is a bit misleading, if we hadn't scored the second

The result is a bit misleading, if we hadn't scored the second goal quickly in the second half, I would probably have changed the set-up

GENNARO GATTUSO
NAPOLI COACH

for the first time.

Another handball, this time Lorenzo Pellegrini's, resulted in Juventus being awarded a penalty allowing Ronaldo to slot in.

The Portuguese got his second with 20 minutes to when his head met a Danilo cross seven minutes after Rabiot was sent off for a second yellow card.

Hirving Lozano scored twice

goal quickly in the second half, I would probably have changed the set-up," said Napoli coach Gennaro Gattuso.

"In the first half, we suffered a bit, even with a lot of opportunities, we almost conceded a goal. We lacked a little balance, we still have to improve."

Other results: Spezia 1 Sassuolo 4, Hellas Verona 1 Udinese 0.

FRENCH LEAGUE

Icardi ends goal drought in PSG win

Paris, France - Mauro Icardi broke a long scoring drought by netting both goals in Paris Saint-Germain's (PSG) comfortable 2-0 win at Reims on Sunday.

PSG, who opened the league season with two losses, won 2-0 for a third straight league game and are now seventh, four points behind leaders Rennes.

For the first time since the French Cup final on July 24, PSG started their all their 'Fantastic Four', of Kylian Mbappe, Neymar, Angel di Maria and Icardi.

The quartet have been kept apart by positive COVID-19 tests, an injury to Mbappe, a suspension to Neymar and coach Thomas Tuchel's decision to drop Icardi to the bench for the Champions League semifinal and final.

In another match, hosts Angers beat Brest 3-2.

AFP

Messi scores in first game since transfer dispute

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Lionel Messi scored in his first game since trying to leave Barcelona as Ronald Koeman began his tenure as coach by overseeing a 4-0 La Liga demolition of Villarreal on Sunday.

Messi converted from the spot ten minutes before half-time and then the Argentine's cross forced Pau Torres into an own-goal, after an early double from the 17 year old Ansu Fati had put Barca in charge.

It meant Barcelona's past, present and future were all among the goals on the same afternoon as Luis Suarez, whose departure was confirmed on Thursday, marked his Atletico Madrid debut by scoring twice in a 6-1 win over Granada.

In a farewell message to his best friend and former neighbour last week, Messi took another swipe at the Barca board by saying he was not surprised by the clumsy way Suarez's exit had been handled.

His complaints raised doubts

about his state of mind heading into the season and at the end of a traumatic summer in which Barcelona's greatest ever player admitted he was being forced to stay against his will.

Koeman insisted on Saturday that Messi had been 'leading by example' in training and his confidence was repaid at Camp Nou, where the striker, and club-captain, delivered an excellent display.

"It is always important to win games, you gain confidence," said Koeman. "This result helps us to improve and be clear about what we want."

Messi's anger over Suarez shows he is still at odds with Barcelona's president Josep Maria Bartomeu and his long-term future remains uncertain, but on the pitch, he delivered.

Victories and goals could encourage him to stay, not to mention the talented Fati, who on this evidence can be a huge asset for his captain's hopes of winning back the title.

"Ansu [Fati] is a young

player who has to seek consistency in his game and in his performances," said Koeman.

"He has shown that he has a great future at Barca and I am very happy with him."

Fati became Spain's youngest ever international scorer earlier this month and the teenager, deployed on the left of Barcelona's attacking trio, made an explosive start to the season for his club.

He fired Jordi Alba's pull-back into the top corner and then drove a second inside the post after Philippe Coutinho was allowed to carry the ball forward and spread it wide.

Fati then won the penalty, his feet too quick for Mario Gaspar, and Messi slid in his first goal of the season before his cross, aimed for Sergio Busquets, was poked into Villarreal's net by Pau.

Other results: Cadiz 1 Sevilla 3, Valladolid 1 Celta Vigo 1.

German League: Freiburg 1 Wolfsburg 1.

AFP



Barca's Lionel Messi tries to get past Villarreal's Manuel Trigueros and Vicente Iborra (right) on Sunday

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Persepolis to meet Pakhtakor after stunning Xavi's Al Sadd

ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Iran's Persepolis were drawn against Uzbek team Pakhtakor in the AFC Champions League quarterfinals on Monday after their shock 1-0 win over Al Sadd, who are coached by Barcelona legend Xavi.

Issa Alekasir's brilliant late header ousted Al Sadd on Sunday, leaving Xavi furious as the Qatari team were denied a second-half penalty.

"In my humble opinion, it's a big shame that this competition, the best in Asia, does not have VAR. It's a big shame," Xavi said.

Persepolis's reward was a quarterfinal on Wednesday against Pakhtakor, who beat Iran's Esteghlal in the last-16.

The other West Zone quarterfinal will be a Saudi derby between Al Nassr and Al Ahli.

Al Sadd thought they deserved a penalty after Pedro Miguel was brought down in the second half but the referee ruled the foul was committed just outside the area.

"If we had VAR today, there would be a penalty for us. I don't want to talk about referees because I know that their job is



Iran's Persepolis' Issa Alekasir (centre) celebrates his goal against Qatar's Al Sadd at the Education Stadium in Al Rayyan, Qatar, on Sunday

really difficult, and sometimes football is very fast, and you have to make decisions in seconds," said Xavi.

Xavi, however, admitted that his team didn't make most of the opportunities that came their way after Issa Alekasir scored the only goal of the match following a corner as the Iranians Persepolis advanced.

Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr also advanced with a similar margin with Moroccan Abderrazak Hamdallah on target in the 75th minute against domestic rivals Al Taawoun in the late match.

Al Hilal, the Saudi winners of the tournament last year, were sensationally thrown out of this year's event on Thursday after a spate of coronavirus infections within the squad prevented them from fielding the required number of players during their group stage match against the UAE's Shabab Al Ahli.

The West Zone games are being held in a bio-secure hub in Qatar. East Zone fixtures are yet to resume since the Champions League was interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic in March.

AFP

QUICK RUN

Mainz sack head coach Beierlorzer

Mainz sacked head coach Achim Beierlorzer on Monday after just two games of the new German League (Bundesliga) season. Beierlorzer has overseen two defeats in those two games, the second on Saturday when Mainz were thrashed 4-1 at home by newly-promoted Stuttgart. The 52 year old manager arrived at Mainz in November 2019 and successfully led the club away from potential relegation last season. Beierlorzer's sacking is the second in as many days, Schalke having shown David Wagner the door on Sunday.

Real Madrid's Kroos suffers thigh strain

Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos, 30, has suffered an injury to the back of his left thigh, the Spanish League club confirmed on Monday. Kroos was forced off in the first half of Madrid's 3-2 win over Real Betis on Saturday and is expected to be out for around two weeks.

AFP



IPL 2020



QUOTE OF THE DAY
Look that is T20 cricket. The game keeps you humble all the time. It is okay to have one bad game. Good that it happened early in the tournament.

KL Rahul
Punjab skipper, after his team's loss to Rajasthan, on Sunday



KOHLI'S BANGALORE WIN SUPER OVER THRILLER



Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli (right) celebrates after hitting the winning runs in the Super Over against Mumbai Indians in Dubai on Monday

Dubai, UAE – A day after IPL 2020 delivered an incredible thriller with the highest ever successful chase, the Mumbai Indians and the Royal Challengers Bangalore went one better, with the highest ever tied score in an IPL game on Monday. Mumbai were behind all through their chase of 202. They were still behind when Kieron Pollard reiterated his T20 G.O.A.T. status by smacking around Adam Zampa and Yuzvendra Chahal for an imagination-defying 49 runs in two overs. They were still behind when Ishan Kishan - back in the XI due

to a Saurabh Tiwary niggles - was out for 99 to make it five needed off the last ball. Pollard hit a four, of course he did, to bring the match to a Super Over. As comebacks go, there was still one left in the match though, and Navdeep Saini delivered a standout Super Over to keep Pollard, Hardik Pandya and Rohit Sharma to just seven for one. Jasprit Bumrah, who had gone for 42 runs in four wicketless overs during regular play, then turned up with some excellent Super Over bowling of his own, though his gamble to bounce

AB de Villiers with fine leg up went for a top-edged four. Virat Kohli then used his wrists to put the final ball away and ensure Mumbai's story of comebacks ended on the last ball of the Super Over. Ten days into the IPL, the Royal Challengers have two wins in three games - a start they haven't been used to of late. Before Mumbai mounted their incredible fight back, the Royal Challengers seemed to be coasting to victory, powered to 201 for three on the back of half-centuries from openers Aaron Finch (52 off 35) and Devdutt Padikkal (54 off 40),

both of which were overshadowed by a barnstorming de Villiers 55 not out off 24. For almost three quarters of the chase after that, a revamped bowling attack stuck to its plans as Mumbai struggled. Pollard's arrival and Kishan's fine knock unravelled those plans, but not to the finish. Speaking at the post-match presentation, Kohli said, "I don't have words because it was such a rollercoaster. We batted really well to get past 200 and the start with the ball was outstanding as well. "They [Mumbai Indians] played well in the middle overs,

patiently, waiting for the dew to kick in. I hope we didn't think we'd done the job [at 90 off five overs]. Fielding is something we have to keep working on. If we'd taken out chances again it wouldn't have been so close." On the Super Over, the Bangalore skipper said: "I thought about Jasprit's [Bumrah] going to bowl and use the longer boundary. "Thought about who are the best guys to come back for twos and it was me and AB [de Villiers]. It was a good match with Jasprit being the best bowler they have. We felt he's in the game, we're in the game, and

that's what the people love. But not for the captains involved." Kohli's counterpart, Rohit said: "It was a great game. We were not in the game at all when we started with the bat. "Great innings by Ishan [Kishan] to get us back. Polly [Pollard] was brilliant as usual. Just that we didn't start well, I thought we could have got 200 with the batting we have. "With Polly being there, anything can happen, and Ishan can hit it. We had the belief that we could do it. They held their nerves although we put pressure." Cricinfo

TODAY'S MATCH
ABU DHABI, 6PM

DELHI CAPITALS

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
DC	2	2	0	0	4	+1.100
RR	2	2	0	0	4	+0.615
RCB	3	2	1	0	4	-1.450
KXIP	3	1	2	0	2	+1.498
MI	3	1	2	0	2	+0.654
KKR	2	1	1	0	2	-0.767
CSK	3	1	2	0	2	-0.840
SRH	2	0	2	0	0	-0.730

P: Played, **W:** Won, **L:** Lost, **NR:** No Result, **PTS:** Points, **NRR:** Net Run-Rate

CSK: Chennai Super Kings
RCB: Royal Challengers Bangalore
DC: Delhi Capitals
KKR: Kolkata Knight Riders
KXIP: Kings XI Punjab
MI: Mumbai Indians
RR: Rajasthan Royals
SRH: Sunrisers Hyderabad

SCOREBOARD

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

D Padikkal	c Pollard b Boult	54 (40)
A Finch	c Pollard b Boult	52 (35)
V Kohli	c Rohit b Chahal	3 (11)
AB de Villiers	not out	55 (24)
S Dube	not out	27 (10)
Extras	(lb 7, w 3)	10
TOTAL: 201 for three		
Fall of wickets:	1-81, 2-92, 3-154	
Bowling:	T Boult 4-0-34-2, J Pattinson 4-0-51-0, R Chahal 4-0-31-1, J Bumrah 4-0-42-0, K Pandya 3-0-23-0, K Pollard 1-0-13-0	
MUMBAI INDIANS		
Rohit Sharma	c sub (Negi) b Sundar	8 (15)
O de Kock	c sub (Negi) b Chahal	14 (15)
S Yadav	c de Villiers b Udana	0 (2)
Ishan Kishan	c Padikkal b Udana	99 (38)
H Pandya	c sub (Negi) b Zampa	15 (11)
K Pollard	not out	60 (24)
K Pandya	not out	0 (1)
Extras	(w 5)	5
TOTAL: 201 for five		
Fall of wickets:	1-14, 2-16, 3-39, 4-78, 5-197	
Bowling:	I Udana 4-0-45-2, W Sundar 4-0-12-1, N Saini 4-0-43-0, Y Chahal 4-0-48-1, A Zampa 4-0-53-1	
Match tied (Royal Challengers Bangalore won the one-over eliminator)		

Bangladesh tour of Sri Lanka postponed again
Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh's three-Test tour of Sri Lanka has been postponed yet again following a stalemate between the two cricket boards - Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) - over quarantine requirements, with weeks of negotiation failing to yield an agreement. The length of the quarantine, which the Sri Lankan health authorities had insisted be 14 days, with the players' movement strictly limited to their hotel rooms, was the main proposal the Bangladesh board refused to agree with. BCB president Nazmul Hasan said on Monday that the tour was not cancelled yet but this one crucial disagreement between the two boards forced them into asking SLC to reschedule the tour, the first Test of which was supposed to start on October 23 in Pallekele. A proposed schedule in Sri Lanka had the first two Tests in Pallekele and the third in Colombo. Cricinfo

'Superman' Pooran wows IPL with 'unbelievable' six save



Nicholas Pooran of Kings XI Punjab making the acrobatic save against Rajasthan Royals on Sunday

Dubai, UAE - Nicholas Pooran stunned the cricket world and social media with a gravity-defying piece of fielding to prevent a six on a record-breaking night in the IPL on Sunday. Pooran dived cat-like to grab the ball at full stretch six feet (two metres) over the boundary before twisting in mid-air and backhanding it over the rope a

split-second before he hit the ground. The West Indian's acrobatics to deny Rajasthan Royals batsman Sanju Samson a six weren't enough, however, to stop his Kings XI Punjab side losing to the biggest run chase in IPL history in Sharjah. India cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar called it 'the best save I have seen in my life. Simply in-

credible!!' - prompting thanks to the '#godofcricket' from Punjab's fielding coach Jonty Rhodes. "(There) really is NO question about it being THE best save, EVER. Fantastic work by @nicholas_47 who inspired the rest of the @lionsdenkxip fielders to put on 1 of the best defensive fielding displays I have ever seen," Rhodes tweeted.

Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen, commentating on television, was blown away by Trinidad-born Pooran's 'unbelievable' exploit, which resulted in two runs being taken instead of six. "No way, no way, no way. That is unbelievable! The save of T20 cricket ever, that is the best I have seen," Pietersen said. The video of the spectacular effort lit up social media. "Nicolas Pooran save for the boundary was inhuman extraordinary, he has redefined the human thinking capability, take a bow," said one Twitter user. Another said: "Wowza, superman Nicolas Pooran". "Pooran has just produced one of the greatest fielding saves I have ever seen. That was almost two yards over the rope and to pull it back....Wow! Where is this standard of fielding going to take us next....," wrote well-known commentator Harsha Bhogle on Twitter. AFP





NADAL OFF TO FLYING START AS THIEM ACES CILIC TEST

Serena overcomes patchy start to reach second round

Spain's Rafael Nadal serves the ball to Belarus' Egor Gerasimov during their men's singles first-round match at the Philippe Chatrier court on day two of The Roland Garros 2020 French Open in Paris on Monday (AFP)

FRENCH OPEN

Paris, France - Rafael Nadal got his bid for a 13th Roland Garros title off to a comfortable start on Monday with a 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 win over Egor Gerasimov of Belarus.

World No 2 Nadal can level Roger Federer's record of 20 Slam titles with victory in Paris. The 34 year old will take on Mackenzie McDonald of the United States for a place in the last-32.

Earlier, Serena Williams made a slow but successful start to her latest pursuit of a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at Roland Garros while US Open winner Dominic Thiem navigated a testing first-round tie against former major champion Marin Cilic.

The American star is chasing an elusive 24th Grand Slam title to match Margaret Court's all-time mark, but clay is her least favoured surface.

An error-prone beginning from Serena left world No 102 Kristie Ahn serving for the first set before the three-time Roland Garros champion prevailed 7-6 (7-2), 6-0.

Serena, playing at the French

Open for the 18th time, dropped serve twice as Ahn moved 5-4 ahead in the opener in a rematch of their first-round encounter at Flushing Meadows. But the sixth seed forced a tie-break that she sealed with an ace after a 74-minute slog before charging to an ultimately easy win.

"She played very well in the first set, it wasn't easy for me and she hit a lot of winners," said Serena.

"It was important for me to stay focused."

Serena, seeded sixth here, has not gone beyond the last-16 in Paris since her defeat to Garbine Muguruza in the 2016 final.

Her last major came at the 2017 Australian Open while pregnant.

Also on Monday, Spain's Muguruza came back from 0-3 down in the third set to defeat Slovenian Tamara Zidansek 7-5, 4-6, 8-6 in a match that lasted three hours to reach the second round.

Meanwhile Thiem, the

runner-up to Nadal in Paris the past two years, defeated 2014 US Open champion Cilic 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in their second meeting at a major this month.

"My level was good. I was very happy with the way I played from the beginning to the end basically," said Thiem.

Having captured his maiden Slam in New York, Thiem is trying to become the only man in the Open era to win his first two majors at successive tournaments.

A steady display from Thiem saw the Austrian break Cilic six times under the roof of Court Philippe Chatrier on another gloomy day at Roland Garros, pushed back from its customary May-June slot due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I really love this tournament, it's by far my best Grand Slam tournament so far," said Thiem, who plays American qualifier Jack Sock in the second round.

"I'm from Austria so I know

how it is to play in these cold conditions. I love it when it's not too fast. I felt well from the first moment I came here."

Play on Monday was initially delayed by more persistent rain.

Twice Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova defeated Oceane Dodin 6-3, 7-5 in the only match to start on time under the new roof on Philippe Chatrier court.

Dutch fifth seed Kiki Bertens recovered from a poor start once conditions improved to overhaul 112th-ranked Ukrainian Katarina Zavatska 2-6, 6-2, 6-0.

Third seed Elina Svitolina scrapped past Varvara Gracheva of Russia 7-6 (7-2), 6-4 while last year's runner-up Marketa Vondrousova was bundled out 6-1, 6-2 by 2018 junior champion Iga Swiatek.

Also on Monday, Italian qualifier Lorenzo Giustino outlasted France's Corentin Moutet 0-6, 7-6 (9-7), 7-6 (7-3), 2-6, 18-16 in the second longest match in French Open history at six hours and five minutes. World No 157 Giustino secured his first Grand Slam main draw win after a final set lasting 180 minutes in a match

held over from Sunday. Moutet won more points than Giustino - 242 to 217 - but the 29 year old journeyman emerged the victor in a contest that fell 28 minutes short of the record tie between Fabrice Santoro and Arnaud Clement in 2004. Giustino will next play Diego Schwartzman.

SEEDED PLAYER RESULTS:

(x denotes seeded player):

Men first round: Yoshihito Nishioka beat Felix Auger-Aliassime (x19) 7-5, 6-3, 6-3; Mikhail Kukushkin beat Fabio Fognini (x14) 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (7-1), 6-0; Casper Ruud (x28) beat Yuichi Sugita 6-1, 6-3, 6-1. **Saturday:** Taylor Fritz (x27) beat Tomas Machac 7-5, 7-6 (7-2), 1-6, 2-6, 6-3; Norbert Gombos beat Borna Coric (x24) 6-4, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Diego Schwartzman (x12) beat Miomir Kecmanovic 6-0, 6-1, 6-3.

Women first round: Amanda Anisimova (x25) beat Tamara Korpatsh 6-2, 6-0; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova beat Svetlana Kuznetsova (x28) 6-1, 2-6, 6-1; Christina McHale beat Karolina Muchova (x22) 6-2, 6-4.

AFP



Serena Williams serves the ball to Kristie Ahn during their women's singles first-round match in Paris on Monday (AFP)



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton reacts on the podium after finishing third in the Russian Grand Prix in Sochi on Sunday (AFP)

Stewards acted fairly against Hamilton, says FIA

Sochi, Russia - Race director Michael Masi has hit back at Lewis Hamilton's claim that Formula One's rulers are trying to stop him winning races - and said Sunday's Russian Grand Prix stewards acted fairly by penalising him.

Hamilton, who led from pole position, was hit with two five-second penalties for pre-race misdemeanours that wrecked his bid for a record-equalling 91st Grand Prix win.

Masi, who took over as the top official at races representing the International Motoring Federation (FIA) in the aftermath of Charlie Whiting's sudden death in Melbourne last year, flatly rejected Hamilton's post-race comments.

"I think from an FIA perspec-

tive we are there as a sporting regulator to administer the regulations," the Australian said late on Sunday.

"We have the stewards as an independent judiciary to adjudicate those.

"There was an infringement and it doesn't matter if it was Lewis Hamilton or any one of the other 19 drivers - if a breach has occurred they will consider it on its merits.

"Further to that, I would say they adjudicate it equitably and fairly in the circumstances, taking all of the key elements into account."

Hamilton was penalised for performing irregular pre-race practice starts in the pit lane exit road and for inconsistent speed on the reconnaissance lap.



Michael Masi

The sanctions, widely seen as too severe, effectively ended his hopes of winning in Sochi and levelling with Michael Schumacher's record of 91 Grand Prix victories.

Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff and described it as 'far-fetched' but the team's track

engineering director Andy Shovlin admitted he was not surprised. "We didn't see the first one (start) and when we saw the second one, we thought 'they're not going to like that', but we didn't think it was dangerous," Shovlin said.

"When we saw the car position, it wasn't a complete surprise that they didn't like it and, no doubt, there may have been teams who flagged it up - as much as whether the FIA or the stewards spotted it themselves."

'Door always open'

Hamilton finished a furious third behind Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas and Red Bull's Max Verstappen, his lead in the drivers' title race trimmed from 55 to 44 points by the Finn.

Masi ruled out any bias against Hamilton and said his door 'is always open', a phrase he used after a similar spat at the Italian Grand Prix at Monza where the Briton received another penalty that prevented him winning.

"From my perspective, it's very simple that if Lewis wants to raise something - as I have said to him before and said to all of the drivers numerous times - the door is always open," said Masi.

"I'm more than happy to discuss anything."

Hamilton was also given two penalty points on his racing license, but this was cancelled after a review. Instead, Mercedes were fined US\$29,000 for each infringement.

AFP



EU TO FIGHT APPLE TAX VERDICT
The European Commission plans to appeal against a ruling that Apple does not have to pay €13bn in back taxes to Ireland. The EU said paying the correct amount of tax was ‘a top priority’

BUSINESS

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MARKET WATCH

MSM30	3,621.41
BSE Sensex	37,981.63

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	191.87
Pakistani Rs	430.97
Bangladeshi Taka	220.66
Philippine Peso	126.14
Sri Lankan Rs	481.91

*Rates as on September 28
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US appeals WTO ruling in Canada timber dispute

The United States said on Monday it had appealed a World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling that favoured Canada in a longstanding battle over timber imports, describing the decision as ‘deeply flawed’.

The WTO’s dispute settlement body (DSB) - long a target of attacks by Washington - agreed last month with Canada’s complaints that Washington had violated trade rules when imposing duties on timber widely used in construction.

US Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Lighthizer had immediately slammed the decision as ‘erroneous’ and said they ‘prevent the United States from taking legitimate action in response to Canada’s pervasive subsidies for its softwood timber industry’.

And on Monday, the US notified the body of its decision to appeal the panel report, according of a written version of comments made to a DSB meeting.

Siemens’ energy unit spinoff lags expectations in market debut

German industrial giant Siemens on Monday spun off its energy division, with a below-expectations valuation of €16bn, in one of the largest stock market debuts in Europe this year.

Shares in Siemens Energy traded at €22.01 at open, before sliding back to €21.68 at 0834 GMT.

The valuation lagged expectations, with analysts having predicted the new company’s market cap to reach between €17bn and €24bn. In March, Siemens said the energy unit had equity of about €17.3bn.

“As an independent company, we now have the entrepreneurial flexibility we need to help shape the global transformation of the energy markets in a sustainable and economically successful manner,” said Siemens Energy’s CEO Christian Bruch.

Commerzbank names Manfred Knof as new CEO

Commerzbank, Germany’s second largest bank which has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic and the Wirecard scandal, on Saturday named Manfred Knof from rival lender Deutsche Bank as its new chairman.

The appointment is a bid to end turmoil after Martin Zielke resigned at the start of July, following sustained criticism by shareholders of his performance and the bank’s losses.

Knof (55) was Deutsche Bank’s German retail head but spent a large part of his career in the insurance business, working for German giant Allianz.

BP Oman reaches one trillion cubic feet milestone at Khazzan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

BP Oman has reached a milestone of the total one trillion cubic feet of gas production since commencing the output three years ago at the giant Khazzan gas field in Block 61.

‘There are trillion reasons for us to be excited. Since the start-up of production at Block 61 in 2017 we have produced a trillion cubic feet of gas, enough to generate electricity for 1mn homes for 12 years,’ BP Oman announced in a tweet on Thursday.

In late September 2017, BP started production from phase 1 of the Khazzan gas field. Phase 1 of Khazzan is made up of 200 wells feeding into a two-train central processing facility, with production reaching 1bn cubic feet of gas per day.

Once the phase 2 of the Khazzan project is fully up and running in 2021, production is expected rise to 1.5bn cubic feet of gas per day, as per the latest information available on BP’s website. Approximately 300



One of the rig sites at the Khazzan field (BP)

wells are expected to be drilled over the estimated lifetime of the Khazzan field.

The phases 1 and 2 will together develop an estimated 10.5tn cubic feet of recoverable gas resources. The second phase of the project, known as the Ghazeer extension, was sanctioned in early 2018.

BP is a major investor in Oman and one of the world’s pioneers in tight gas production, bringing technology and experience to develop one of the Middle East’s largest unconventional gas resources - the Khazzan field in Block 61.

In June this year, in a statement to Oman News Agency,

Yousuf al Ojaili, president of BP Oman, said that the company is bracing for the launch of a 500mn cubic feet gas project at Ghazeer field whose installations are 99 per cent ready for the start of production.

Ojaili had confirmed that the production of gas from BP Oman’s Khazzan gas project

The phases 1 and 2 of giant Khazzan gas field will together develop an estimated 10.5tn cubic feet of recoverable gas resources

now stands at 1bn cubic feet per day and will rise to 1.5bn cubic feet per day. The company also produces 35,000 barrels of condensates per day, and this rate is set to double by the start of production at Ghazeer gas project, he added.

BP is the operator of Block 61 and holds a 60 per cent interest. OQ subsidiary Oman Oil Company for Exploration & Production holds a 30 per cent interest and PC Oman, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Petronas, holds 10 per cent.

Muscat Finance CEO resigns

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Finance Company on Monday announced that Ma-neesh Srivastava has resigned from his position as the chief executive officer of the company.

‘This is to inform that Ma-neesh Srivastava, chief executive officer, has resigned from the services of Muscat Finance Company on September 24, 2020 for personal reasons. The board of directors have accepted his resignation and wish him all success for his future,’ Muscat Finance Company said in a disclosure filed to the Muscat Securities Market.

Srivastava was appointed as the chief executive officer of Muscat Finance Company in December 2017 with over 24 years of experience in financial services and consumer products industries. Prior to joining Muscat Finance Company, he was the CEO of Muthoot Housing Finance Company Limited in India, where he was engaged in building an affordable housing business venture from the ground up.

UAE’s Sanad signs deal worth AED1bn with Pratt & Whitney

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Sanad, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mubadala Investment Company, announced on Monday a new AED1bn deal with Pratt & Whitney and International Aero Engines (IAE). The new agreement will see Sanad Aerotech providing IAE with expanded maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services for its V2500 engines, which powers the Airbus A320 family of aircraft.

The announcement of the new deal came during the Global Aerospace Summit in Abu Dhabi, where industry leaders convened to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the aerospace, defence and space industries. This agreement expands the co-operation between Sanad and IAE in the field of MRO of aircraft engines.

Under the agreement, IAE, the manufacturer of V2500 engines,

will offload V2500 engines for MRO services to Sanad’s state-of-the-art facility in Abu Dhabi Airports Free Zone.

Mansoor Janahi, deputy group CEO of Sanad, said, “We are signing this new agreement at a critical stage in the history of the aviation industry. This agreement is another testament to Abu Dhabi’s established position as a reliable global centre for the aerospace industry and its state-of-the-art engineering services.”

Dave Emmerling, vice president - commercial aftermarket at Pratt & Whitney, said, “The relationship between Pratt & Whitney, IAE and Sanad is strong and we look forward to continuing to strengthen it for years to come. We expect our V2500 customers will benefit greatly from the MRO services provided by Sanad.”

WAM

Commerce ministry and PDO sign deal for public and private sectors

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), as part of the ministry’s endeavours to enhance cooperation between the public and private sectors.

The MoC was signed at the ministry’s headquarters by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Abdul Amir bin Hussein al Ajmi, PDO’s external affairs and value creation director.

The MoC aims to strengthen the partnership between the public and private sectors. Both the ministry and PDO aim to support Oman’s industrial sector by supporting the current industrial establishments and identifying future industrial investment opportunities to boost the competitiveness and generate in-



country value (ICV) for the local economy. The deal also aims at supporting exports, creating job opportunities and enhancing integration between all sectors to support SMEs and augment services trade.

The MoC between PDO and the ministry included four industrial areas. The first area sup-

ports the Industrial Strategy 2040. The second area supports studying the sectors targeted in the ICV project, namely health, services, mining, transportation, logistics, technology, communications, tourism and waste management.

The third area aims to encourage strategic investment in these

sectors through the 100 investment initiatives, in addition to the oil, gas and technology sectors. The fourth area targets developing an analytical industrial information platform to keep pace with the 4th Industrial Revolution and technological developments.

ONA

Qatar Airways gets \$2bn state aid after huge losses

Doha, Qatar - Qatar Airways said on Sunday it received US\$2bn in state aid to weather the coronavirus crisis, as it posted huge annual losses after enduring one of its ‘most difficult years’.

Qatar’s national carrier said that the combination of the coronavirus pandemic, a boycott by Gulf neighbours and the liquidation of 49 per cent-owned Air Italy - which announced its bankruptcy in February - had resulted in a near doubling of losses.

This brought the carrier’s net loss for the year to end-March to US\$1.92bn.

‘Qatar Airways is familiar with facing exceptional challenges; however, 2019-20 has been one of the most difficult years in the airline’s history,’ the carrier said



in a statement.

The airline confirmed that Qatar had joined a list of governments that have stepped in to

support their national carriers through the coronavirus shutdown, which has pummelled global travel and the aviation

industry.

The carrier will issue 730mn shares to the government after receiving ‘an advance of US\$2bn’

after annual losses exceeded 50 per cent of share capital, it said in its annual report.

“If not for the exceptional circumstances of fiscal year 2020, our results would have been better than the year before,” said the airline’s chief executive, Akbar al Baker.

The report also said that over the 12 months, revenue increased 6.5 per cent to QR51.1bn, seat capacity increased by 3.2 per cent, and freight handled rose by 2.8 per cent.

The pandemic compounded an already difficult environment for Qatar Airways. The United Arab Emirates, which was a key market for the Gulf carrier, along with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt, have enforced a boycott of Qatar since June 2017.

They accuse Doha of links to extremist groups and being too close to Iran - charges Qatar denies - and have closed their airspace, borders and markets to Doha.

Qatar Airways is the second largest airline in the Middle East after Dubai-based Emirates, operating a modern fleet of 250 aircraft - although some remain grounded during the pandemic.

Qatar in July won a ruling at the International Court of Justice in its fight against airspace restrictions by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.

It said it will seek US\$5bn in compensation from the other Arab states for closing their airspace to the flag carrier.

AFP

EU-UK trade talks resume under Brexit bill cloud



Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove (right) and vice president of the European Commission in charge of inter-institutional relations and foresight, Maros Sefcovic (right) with EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier (centre - on video conference) attend the third meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee in Brussels, Belgium on Monday (AFP)

Brussels, Belgium - Negotiators for the EU and Britain are hoping for a breakthrough in trade talks this week, despite feuding over a controversial UK bill that threatens to scupper a post-Brexit deal.

Scores of officials assembled in Brussels on Monday in efforts to forge a compromise on negotiating positions that have not budged on key areas since the talks on future relations began six months ago.

Both London and Brussels say a deal on a free trade agreement must be struck by mid-October to allow time for it to be ratified before coming into force from January 1 next year.

Failure to do so would see trade conducted on World Trade Organization rules, with higher tariffs and quotas and almost certain economic chaos for Britain and Europe.

Chief negotiators Michel Barnier and the UK's David Frost met last week to prepare the round of talks, in meetings that London characterised as 'constructive'.

European diplomats remained cautious that a breakthrough was possible, seeing this round of meetings as laying the necessary groundwork for a final push later in October.

"Next week, a path to a deal

should be identified," an EU source said. "If we have zero movement, the process will be in big trouble."

'Rough patch'

Also on Monday senior EU and UK officials met in Brussels to try to find an understanding on the highly contentious issue of the withdrawal bill.

EU Commission vice-president Maros Sefcovic met his British counterpart Michael Gove as joint chair of an EU-UK coordination committee overseeing the implementation of the divorce agreement.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon

Coveney, whose country has more to lose than most if talks break down, said Brussels will not rubberstamp a trade agreement if London keeps threatening to breach its divorce.

EU capitals were incensed by Johnson's decision to push an Internal Markets Bill in his own parliament that his own government admits would break international law by overwriting the withdrawal treaty.

Brussels intends to launch legal action against the measure, but decided to continue talks on a trade deal as the bill passes through the Commons and House of Lords.

"When you have a family

member who is going through a bit of a rough patch and loses it a bit, you can't cut him off from the rest of your life," an EU source said.

The two sides are still divided on rules for a 'level-playing field' of fair competition between companies, on state aid or subsidies for EU and UK firms and on access for EU boats to British fishing waters.

Diplomats are hoping for significant progress in time for a summit of EU leaders later in the month, though expectations are that the wrangling could slip into November.

AFP

China says US govt 'abusing power' by squeezing TikTok

Beijing, China - Beijing on Monday accused the Trump administration of abusing 'national power' by trying to ban TikTok, as a federal court gave the video app's US operations a stay of execution.

A US government order had sought to ban new downloads of the Chinese-owned app from midnight (0400 GMT Monday) - but allow use of TikTok until November 12, when all use would be blocked.

President Donald Trump claims the popular app poses a national security threat and harvests data for Beijing via its Chinese parent company ByteDance - allegations the firm vehemently denies.

Describing the order as 'bullying behaviour', Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said it was evidence of 'abusing national power to unreasonably suppress other countries' enterprises'.

Instead, the US should 'provide a fair, just, open, and non-discriminatory business environment for companies around the world investing and operating in the country', Wang added.

China says Trump is strong-arming the company into giving up full ownership of a lucrative app - with 100mn US subscribers - to an American rival.

But late on Sunday a US federal court issued a temporary block on the order after TikTok's lawyers successfully argued it was a 'punitive' ban motivated by politics rather than genuine se-



curity fears. Details of the injunction remain sealed for now by the court in Washington.

The US squeeze on TikTok is one of a litany of issues souring relations between the rival powers, spanning tech, defence, human rights and contested seas.

US tech giants have also raised concerns over the precedent a ban could set for a free Internet - and the prospect of reprisals against American firms operating in China's vast market.

ByteDance has begun discussing a complex transfer of ownership to Silicon Valley giant Oracle.

A tentative deal unveiled last weekend would make Oracle the technology partner for TikTok and a stakeholder in a new entity to be known as TikTok Global.

TikTok said on Sunday it would 'maintain our ongoing dialogue with the government' on the plan, which has received preliminary approval from Trump.

But it was still unclear whether the deal would be approved by Beijing, where some consider the US move an unjustified appropriation of Chinese technology.

AFP

China industrial profits see continued steady growth

Beijing, China - Profits of China's major industrial firms maintained steady recovery in August as the production and operations of enterprises further improved, official data showed on Sunday.

Profits of China's major industrial firms totaled 612.81bn yuan (about US\$90bn) last month, increasing by 19.1 per cent year-on-year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed.

The growth narrowed 0.5 percentage points from July.

The recovery momentum of industrial profits was further consolidated last month as supply and demand gradually improved, said senior NBS statistician Zhu Hong.

In August, profits of the equipment manufacturing sector reported relatively fast growth, up 23.1 per cent year on year, while those of the auto manufacturing industry went up 55.8 per cent.

Profits of the mining sector were also apparently restored, while those of the raw materials manufacturing industry saw faster expansion due to improving demand as well as increasing

prices of global commodities including crude oil and iron ore.

The profitability of industrial firms improved as operating costs were further reduced, thanks to the implementation of tax and fee cut policies, according to Zhu.

The Chinese economy has withstood the test of the COVID-19 epidemic, with recovery since the second quarter better than expected, said Wang Yiming, national political advisor and former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council.

Without huge impacts from uncertain external factors, the growth of the Chinese economy in the third and fourth quarters will outpace growth in the second quarter, according to Wang.

In the first eight months of the year, the profits of major industrial firms declined 4.4 per cent to 3.72tn yuan, narrowing 3.7 percentage points from the January-July period.

Profits of state-controlled industrial firms dropped 17 per cent from one year earlier to 950.94bn yuan, while those of

private industrial firms shrank 3.3 per cent year-on-year to 1.07tn yuan.

During the January-August period, profits of the mining industry slumped 38.1 per cent, and manufacturing industry profits decreased by 1 per cent.

Profits in 16 of the 41 surveyed industrial sectors rose compared with the same period last year, while 25 sectors saw their profits fall, according to the NBS.

However, industrial enterprises still face pressure in maintaining profit growth as January-August revenues and profit growth remained in the negative territory amid a complicated internal and external environment, Zhu said.

Next, China will further tap into the potential of domestic demand, stimulate the vitality of market entities and continuously consolidate the outcomes of economic recovery, according to Zhu.

Major industrial companies are those with an annual business turnover of at least 20mn yuan.

Xinhua

Volkswagen to pump €15bn into China's electric cars

Frankfurt, Germany - German car giant Volkswagen (VW) on Monday announced a fresh €15bn splurge on China's vast electric vehicle (EV) potential.

Global car makers are pegging hopes on an increasingly electric future with China at the forefront as a customer base and manufacturing hub.

Beijing has targeted a 25 per cent adoption of energy-saving vehicles by 2025.

Volkswagon's commitment - made with its three Chinese joint ventures - see the firm double down on EV manufacturing and the linked infrastructure between 2020 and 2024 and takes its total investment in the sector to nearly €40bn.

China accounts for around 40 per cent of the Wolfsburg-based automaker's sales and has become the world's largest car market in recent years.

The group's stable of 12 brands includes names such as Porsche and Audi.

Fifteen 'models across the group's brands will be produced locally in China' by 2025, Volk-



Staff members clean a Volkswagen New Phideon car at the Beijing Auto Show in Beijing, China on Saturday (AFP)

swagen said in a statement and '35 per cent of its product portfolio in the country will be electrified models'.

Earlier this month, Chinese President Xi Jinping vowed the country would go carbon neutral by 2060, pledging to reach peak emissions in 2030.

Production at two new dedicated 'MEB' facilities in China - a battery-powered platform forming the basis for a whole range of vehicles - will begin next month.

Locally-produced new energy vehicles in China will be equipped with batteries from

Chinese supplier CATL from this year.

But questions hang over the viability of expensive EVs in a vast country which will require huge investment in charging points to turn buyers from petrol cars.

AFP

US ride-hailing giant Uber wins London licence after appeal

London, UK - US ride-hailing giant Uber on Monday won an appeal to operate in London after a judge ruled it was a 'fit and proper' firm despite safety concerns.

Uber - which has 3.5mn customers and 45,000 drivers in the British capital - overturned Transport for London's (TfL) refusal last year to renew its operating licence around the issue of unauthorised drivers.

The San Francisco-based company was permitted to continue operating in London during the appeal process.

"Despite their historical failings, I find them, now, to be a fit and proper person to hold a London PHV (private hire vehicle) operator's licence," said deputy chief magistrate Tan Ikram, sitting at a central London court.

He noted that Uber had sought to explain how breaches



had taken place and how they would be remedied.

The judge did not state the length of the licence - but Uber said in a separate statement that it would be for 18 months and welcomed the ruling.

"This decision is a recognition of Uber's commitment to safety and we will continue to work constructively with TfL," said Jamie Heywood, regional general manager for northern and east-

ern Europe. "There is nothing more important than the safety of the people who use the Uber app as we work together to keep London moving."

Heywood admitted that Uber's behaviour over the problem of unauthorised drivers had been wrong.

"It was not what we would do now. It was inadequate, we could have done better," he said.

In November last year, the

transport authority argued there was a 'pattern of failures' at Uber in the capital. Some trips took place with unlicensed, suspended or dismissed drivers, according to the authority.

Ikram on Monday said the company appeared to be addressing those concerns.

"Uber does not have a perfect record but it has been an improving picture," Ikram said.

AFP

39 killed as Azerbaijan, Armenia fight for 2nd day



The Karabakh leader, Arayik Harutyunyan, chairs a Security Council meeting in Nagorny Karabakh’s main city Stepanakert on Sunday (AFP)

Yerevan, Armenia - Azerbaijan and Armenian forces battled for a second day on Monday after dozens were killed in an outbreak of heavy fighting that has raised fears of an all-out war between the longtime enemies.

Defence officials in both countries confirmed that intense clashes had continued overnight after erupting on Sunday along the frontlines of Nagorny Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian region that has broken away from Azerbaijan.

The separatists said on Monday that 15 more of their fighters had been killed, bringing the total reported death toll from both sides to 39.

With each side blaming the other for the latest fighting, world leaders have urged calm as fears rise of a full-scale conflict that could draw in regional powers Russia and Turkey.

Ex-Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan have been locked in a territorial dispute over Nagorny Karabakh for decades, with deadly fighting flaring up earlier this year and in 2016.

The region declared its independence after a war in the early 1990s that claimed 30,000 lives but is not recognised by any country - including Armenia - and is still considered part of Azerbaijan by the international community.

The Karabakh Defence Min-

Azerbaijani forces are striking enemy positions using rocket artillery and aviation... and have taken several strategic positions around the village of Talysh

ARMENIA'S DEFENCE MINISTRY

istry said on Monday 32 of its fighters had been killed in the latest clashes. Seven civilian fatalities were reported earlier, including an Azerbaijani family of five and a woman and child on the Armenian side.

Azerbaijan has yet to announce military casualties but Armenian Defence Ministry spokeswoman Shushan Stepanyan claimed that 'dozens of corpses of Azerbaijani soldiers'

lay on territory won back overnight.

She said heavy fighting continued on Monday morning along the frontline and claimed Armenian forces had won back positions taken Sunday by Azerbaijan.

But Baku claimed further ad-

ing to attack rebel positions using heavy artillery, while Azerbaijan's Defence Ministry accused separatist forces of shelling civilian targets in the town of Terter.

Baku claimed to have killed 550 separatist troops, a report denied by Armenia.

The escalation has stirred an outpouring of patriotic fervour in both countries.

"We have been waiting for this day for so long. The fighting must not stop until we force Armenia to return our lands," Vi-dadi Alekperov, a 39 year old waiter in Baku, told AFP.

'I'll happily go to the battlefield'

In Yerevan, 67 year old Vardan Harutyunyan said Armenia had been anticipating the attack.

"The (Karabakh) question can only be resolved militarily. We are not afraid of a war," Harutyunyan said.

Fighting between Muslim Azerbaijan and majority-Christian Armenia threatened to embroil regional players Russia,

which is in a military alliance with Yerevan, and Turkey, which backs Baku.

Armenia accused Turkey of meddling in the conflict and sending mercenaries to the battlefield.

France, Germany, Italy, the United States, the European Union and Russia have urged a ceasefire.

Armenia and Karabakh declared martial law and military mobilisation on Sunday, while Azerbaijan imposed military rule and a curfew in large cities.

Talks to resolve the conflict - one of the worst to emerge from the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union - have been largely stalled since a 1994 ceasefire agreement.

Analysts told AFP on Sunday international brokers needed to step up their efforts to prevent an even worse escalation.

France, Russia and the United States have mediated peace efforts as the "Minsk Group" but the last big push for a peace deal collapsed in 2010.

AFP



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (left) and North Macedonia's Deputy Prime Minister for Economy Fatmir Bytyqi share an elbow bump greeting before a meeting, in the northern city of Thessaloniki on Monday (AFP)

Pompeo begins Greece talks to calm tensions

Athens, Greece - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo began talks on Monday in Greece to de-escalate tension in the eastern Mediterranean and boost tentative steps at dialogue between Athens and Ankara.

Pompeo began his two-day visit by meeting Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias in Thessaloniki. Neither side has released a statement.

'Thrilled to be back in Greece, a vital US partner with whom we share a common strategic vision,' the secretary of state tweeted on Monday.

'The strength of our bilateral relationship is at an all-time high, and I'm looking forward to a productive visit.'

Ahead of the trip, a senior US official said Washington was keen to tamp down the tension, reduce the likelihood of 'accidents or incidents' and for Greece and Turkey to complete an agreement.

The two NATO members are at loggerheads over energy exploration in disputed waters after Ankara stepped up hydrocarbon research in the sea.

The row has roped in other European powers, raising concern about a wider escalation.

But last week Athens and Ankara said they were ready to start talks.

"Let's meet, let's talk and let's seek a mutually acceptable solution. Let's give diplomacy a chance," Mitsotakis said on Fri-

day to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in an address to the virtual UN General Assembly.

Pompeo will fly to the Greek island of Crete on Tuesday and tour the NATO naval base of Souda Bay.

Mitsotakis - who is hosting Pompeo at his family home on Crete - wants closer military ties with the US.

The Secretary of State signed defence agreement last October allowing US forces a broader use of Greek military facilities.

A key element of the October deal was the northern Greek port of Alexandroupolis, a Balkans and Black Sea gateway of strategic value to the US navy and NATO.

The US has been granted priority status to the port after paying roughly US\$2.3mn to remove a sunken dredging barge that had blocked part of the harbour since 2010.

At the time, Greek officials said the Pentagon was expected to invest over US\$14mn on the Greek airbase of Larissa and around US\$7mn at Marathi, part of the Souda base. The visit to Thessaloniki is also intended as a sign to the Balkans on American willingness to invest in the region, the State Department said.

Pompeo will sign a bilateral science and technology agreement, and host an energy sector gathering of business leaders.

AFP

1 in 4 Beirut children could miss school

Beirut, Lebanon - A quarter of school-age children in Lebanon's capital risk missing out on school after last month's deadly port explosion, the International Rescue Committee aid group warned Monday.

'With 163 schools damaged by the Beirut explosion, at least one in four children in the city are now at risk of missing out on their education,' it said in a statement.

IRC said the estimations were based on the impact of the blast alone, and did not take into account that of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

'Over 85,000 pupils were registered at the schools damaged by the blasts and it will take up to a year for the most severely damaged buildings to be repaired,' it added.

The massive explosion of a stockpile of ammonium nitrate at Beirut port on August 4 killed more than 190 people, wounded thousands more and ravaged

buildings in surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

It was a devastating blow to a country already facing its worst economic crisis in decades and series of lockdowns aimed at stemming the spread of COVID-19.

IRC said the slow pace of rebuilding, parent concerns over the cost and safety of transport to alternative schools, and children being sent to work to help their struggling families could all keep pupils out of class.

"Overall, we are expecting to see far fewer children enrolled in schools this September and a high drop-out rate as the year progresses," said the aid group's acting Lebanon director Mohammad Nasser. Schools in Lebanon have not yet re-opened over a spike in coronavirus cases, which have risen in the wake of the explosion to more than 35,000 infections including at least 340 deaths since February.

AFP

Exiles return to rebuild post-Bashir Sudan

Khartoum, Sudan - After 33 years in exile, El Sadig Mohamed gave up the easy life in Canada to return to help rebuild Sudan as it emerges from three decades of autocratic rule.

"After the revolution... I thought it's the right time to come back... despite the luxury people enjoy in the West," said Mohamed, who now heads the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company's health and environment department. "It's my country and I have to do it."

The SMRC supervises exploration, production and taxation of Sudan's mining sector, notably its star asset, the gold mines.

Ousted president Omar al Bashir ruled the country with an iron fist for 30 years until his overthrow in April 2019 after months of demonstrations.

"The Bashir regime, for 30 years, destroyed everything," said the 55 year old civil engineer and ex-University of Calgary professor, who came home in November, six month's after Bashir was toppled.



The headquarters of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company in the capital Khartoum (AFP)

"I believe it is my duty to take part in... building a new Sudan." SMRC's Director General, Mubarak Ardol, was in exile for eight years.

His home in Sudan's southern Nuba Mountains was attacked by government forces, and Ardol had led rebel forces against them.

He fled to Uganda in 2011.

"I thought the regime would not last long. We worked with all our might to overthrow the regime," said Ardol. "I felt certain I would return home very soon."

So when Bashir was forced out, Ardol returned from Kampala as quickly as he could.

"I came back immediately," he said. "I was the head of the first armed group which arrived in Khartoum on May 10, 2019."

He was appointed by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok - a fellow returnee, who has made striking peace with the rebels who fought Bashir a priority.

Ardol aims to boost the revenues of SMRC, the African country's top moneymaker.

"We far exceeded our targets," he said.

Among the hundreds of exiles streaming in from around the world since last year, Mohammed Abdulhamid said he is 'happy and proud' to have come back to take the reins at the state news agency SUNA.

"We knew it was a big challenge... I'm back home because I wanted to return, because I feel I can be a part of what is happening," said the journalist, in the agency's Khartoum offices.

Abdulhamid lived in Yemen before moving to the Netherlands where he launched Arabic-language radio and television broadcasts. "It was not a matter of money... I used to earn around US\$3,000 a month.. Now I earn 80,000 Sudanese pounds, which is US\$180," he said.

"I am proud of what I am doing, and I never regretted my decision."

AFP

New US threats to Iraq widen rifts

Washington has threatened to close its Embassy in Baghdad due to near-daily attack on its interests

Baghdad, Iraq - Enraged by near-daily attacks on its interests in Iraq, Washington has threatened to close its Embassy in Baghdad, in a blow to a prime minister seen as a bulwark against Iran.

Iraq has long been caught in a tug-of-war between its allies Iran and the US, rendered rockier by Washington's 'maximum pressure' policy against Tehran since 2018.

In a new escalation, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Iraqi President Barham Saleh last week to deliver an ultimatum, Iraqi and foreign officials said.

Unless Iraq's government puts an end to the rockets raining down on US military and diplomatic sites, Washington would shutter its embassy and recall its troops, the sources said.

"The Americans aren't just angry. They're really, really, really angry," one Iraqi official told AFP.

Another said, "The honeymoon is over."

The US still has hundreds of diplomats in its mission at the high-security Green Zone in Baghdad and around 3,000 troops based in three bases across the country.

Since 2019, dozens of rockets and improvised explosives have targeted these sites, with US and Iraqi officials blaming Tehran-backed factions including Kataeb Hezbollah.

Washington has twice retaliated with strikes on Kataeb Hezbollah in Iraq and threatened earlier this year to bomb more than 120 further sites if the rocket attacks cost American lives, a top Iraqi official told AFP.

The frustration failed to ease even after Mustafa al Kadhemi, seen as Western-leaning, took office as Prime Minister in May. Ahead of Kadhemi's visit to



The Iraqi and US flags flatter in the wind outside a hotel in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on Sunday (AFP)

Washington in August, the US signalled it was 'unsatisfied with his actions' against pro-Iran armed groups, an Iraqi official said.

The US declined to comment on Pompeo's latest call, but a State Department official told AFP that 'Iran-backed groups launching rockets at our embassy are a danger not only to us, but to the Government of Iraq'.

Growing rift

Fresh in the minds of Iraqi officials and armed groups is the US drone strike in January that killed

top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, the deputy head of Iraq's state-sponsored Hashed al Shaabi.

Since then, many pro-Iran paramilitary leaders have gone into hiding lest they be subject to American strikes or sanctions.

The new US threats seem to have deepened the growing rift between factions loyal to Iran and those less willing to enter into a full confrontation with the US.

After months of silence, influential cleric and political leader

Moqtada Sadr took to Twitter this week to call for 'the creation of a security, military and parliamentary committee to investigate' the rocket attacks.

Within minutes, Kadhemi and other top government figures endorsed the recommendation.

"There's a consensus on condemning these attacks. Kataeb Hezbollah and other hardliners are isolated and left without political cover," an Iraqi official said.

Even the Hashed al Shaabi slammed rocket attacks as 'illegal military acts', denied involvement and formally sidelined a

pair of commanders seen as too Tehran-leaning.

But the hardliners, too, are organising.

A half-dozen previously unheard-of groups have claimed responsibility for rocket attacks on the US and even threatened the United Nations in recent months.

Iraqi intelligence officials and political sources say Iran has been gathering the most headline among its Iraqi allies into these new formations.

PM in hot water?

These reconstituted groups see

Kadhemi as Washington's man in Baghdad and are irked by his vows to rein them in.

"They're sending a message from Iran to the US: The recent political developments have changed nothing. We can still hit you hard, and no leader can implement your agenda in Iraq," said a source from Iraq's Shiite political network.

That has left the Prime Minister in a precarious position.

A US withdrawal could hand his rivals an unintended propaganda win, a Western diplomat in Baghdad told AFP.

"If Washington follows through and withdraws its people, these groups will be able to brag that they kicked the Americans out of Iraq at little cost," the official said.

Iraq's parliament voted after Soleimani's killing to oust foreign troops posted in the country to help fight extremist remnants, but Kadhemi has tried to slow-walk the decision.

He has also embarked on an anti-corruption drive, launched a strategic dialogue with Washing-

If the US really closes its embassy, it will leave [Prime Minister Mustafa al] Kadhemi in a very weak and dangerous position, opening the door for militias to expand and maybe take action against the state

ALI MAMOURI

ton and sought to fast-track deals with US companies that would decrease Iraq's reliance on Iranian energy imports.

His downfall, Western diplomats and analysts said, could be a nightmare for Iraq's stability.

"If the US really closes its embassy, it will leave Kadhemi in a very weak and dangerous position, opening the door for militias to expand and maybe take extreme action against the state," said Ali Mamouri, an analyst and editor of the Iraq Pulse at Al-Monitor news website.

AFP

Belarus opposition leader calls for Macron to mediate

Vilnius, Lithuania - Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya on Monday urged French President Emmanuel Macron to mediate in the political crisis in her homeland, saying he could involve Russia in opening a dialogue.

Tikhanovskaya told AFP the EU should expand planned sanctions to include businesses that support the authoritarian government of President Alexander Lukashenko.

"The protests are not going to stop," she said in an interview in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius where she fled after running against Lukashenko in an election on August 9.

"People will not accept the regime under which they have lived all these years."

She said she hoped to meet Macron during his two-day visit



Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya during an interview in Vilnius, Lithuania on Monday (AFP)

to Lithuania, which starts later on Monday.

The French President would be Tikhanovskaya's most high-profile meeting so far since the disputed election and the weeks of unprecedented mass

protests which she has helped inspire.

She has previously met leaders in neighbouring Poland and Lithuania, which have taken a lead in European diplomacy on Belarus, and with EU foreign min-

isters in Brussels.

She said the French leader was known as a mediator in international crises who could open a dialogue between the government and the opposition, and also involve Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

"Now is the moment when Belarus needs help in starting dialogue," she said, adding that Macron could be 'one of the mediators' in the crisis.

The EU is considering personal sanctions against Lukashenko and other high-profile figures seen as responsible for a violent crackdown.

But Tikhanovskaya said it could go further and adopt 'economic sanctions against businesses, individual businessmen who support the Lukashenko regime'.

AFP

Merkel visited me in Berlin hospital: Navalny

Moscow, Russia - Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said on Monday that German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited him at a Berlin hospital where he was treated after being poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent.

"I am very grateful to Chancellor Merkel for visiting me at the hospital," the anti-corruption campaigner wrote on Twitter following reports of the meeting in German media.

The 44 year old Kremlin critic was discharged from Charite hospital in Berlin last week after receiving treatment over several weeks for exposure to Novichok.

He fell ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow in August in what his allies say was a state-sanctioned attack - labs in France, Germany and Sweden confirmed he had been poisoned. German magazine *Der Spiegel*



Russian leader Alexei Navalny in Berlin's Charite hospital (AFP)

reported on Sunday that Merkel had visited Navalny in what it described as a 'secret' meeting at Charite hospital that underscored the Chancellor's personal

commitment to Navalny's case.

Navalny confirmed the meeting but argued the label 'secret' was not accurate, saying: "Rather, a private meeting and conversation with the family."

The Kremlin has denied allegations of involvement in the poisoning and accused Western leaders of launching a disinformation campaign over the opposition leader's illness.

Russia insists medical tests carried out by doctors in Omsk found no poison in Navalny's body. It says it lacks grounds for a criminal investigation, despite international calls for a transparent probe.

Navalny's spokesperson Kira Yarmysh has said the Kremlin critic plans to return to Russia but will remain in Germany until he has recovered.

AFP

Macron opponents claim victory in France Senate poll

Paris, France - The rightwing opposition on Monday claimed victory in elections for France's upper house, underlining the political struggles of the centrist ruling party of President Emmanuel Macron.

The Senate's members are not directly elected by voters, but instead by tens of thousands of local councillors who are themselves elected by the people.

After Macron's Republic on

The poll - held every three years for half the chamber's seats - was not a disaster for the ruling LREM, which was expected to hold on to its current 23 members



Republicans leader Christian Jacob

the Move (LREM) party performed woefully in local elections earlier this year, it was never expected to make any significant impact in the Senate vote.

While the chamber has some authority, especially over constitutional issues, it lacks the power of the National Assembly lower house, which has been controlled by LREM since 2017.

Nevertheless, the leader of the rightwing Republicans Chris-

tian Jacob told France Inter radio: "We have renewed ourselves with this victory."

The party claimed to have upped its Senate seats by ten to 154 in the 348-seat chamber.

The election showed that the opposition is not complacent, said Bruno Retailleau, head of the Republicans in the Senate.

However, because of the volatile nature of political affiliation in the Senate, the full breakdown will probably only become

clear on Thursday when it meets to elect its speaker.

The poll - held every three years for half the chamber's seats - was not a disaster for the LREM, which was expected to hold on to its current 23 members.

Meanwhile, the Greens said they expected to return at least ten senators and the Socialist Party was expected to lose some seats but maintain its status as the second biggest faction.

But the health of LREM, and in particular its failure to put down roots at the local level, is a growing headache for Macron as he prepares to seek re-election in 2022.

Roughly two dozen MPs defected from LREM to other groups earlier this year, robbing the party of its overall majority, although the make-up of the National Assembly means it can still pass legislation.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Global coronavirus death toll passes 1mn, infections 33mn

Paris, France - More than one million people have died from the coronavirus, according to an AFP toll, with no let-up in a pandemic that has ravaged the world economy, inflamed diplomatic tensions and upended lives from Indian slums and Brazilian jungles to America's biggest city.

Sports, live entertainment and international travel ground to a halt as fans, audiences and tourists were forced to stay at home under strict measures imposed to curb the contagion.

Drastic controls that put half of humanity - more than four billion people - under some form of lockdown by April at first slowed the spread, but since restrictions were eased, infections have soared again.

By 0630 GMT on Monday, the disease had claimed 1,001,093 victims from 33,112,474 recorded infections, according to an AFP tally collected from official sources by journalists stationed around the world, and compiled by a dedicated team of data specialists.

The United States has the highest death toll with more than 200,000 fatalities, followed by Brazil, India, Mexico and Britain.

For Italian truck driver Carlo Chioldi, those figures include both his parents, whom he lost within days of each other.

"What I have a hard time accepting is that I saw my father walking out of the house, getting into the ambulance, and all I



People walk among thousands of Spanish flags, representing the Spanish victims of COVID-19, in the Roma park, in the capital Madrid on Sunday (AFP)

could say to him was 'goodbye,'" Chioldi (50) told AFP.

"I regret not saying 'I love you' and I regret not hugging him. That still hurts me."

'A crisis like no other'

With scientists still racing to develop a vaccine, governments have again been forced into an uneasy balancing act: Virus controls slow the spread of the disease, but they hurt reeling economies and businesses.

Europe, hit hard by the first wave, is now facing another surge in cases, with Paris, London and Madrid all forced to introduce controls to slow infections threatening to overload hospitals.

Masks and social distancing in shops, cafés and public transport are now part of everyday life in many cities around the world.

Mid-September saw a record rise in cases in most regions and

the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned virus deaths could even double to two million without more global collective action.

Frustrations, protests

The least privileged around the globe have been the hardest hit by the breakneck spread of the virus, which has also infected some among the powerful, rich and famous.

British Prime Minister Boris

Johnson spent a week in hospital. Madonna and Tom Hanks also tested positive.

As the restrictions tighten, protests and anger are rising as businesses worry about their survival and individuals grow frustrated about their jobs and families in the face of another round of lockdown measures.

Authorities have clashed with anti-lockdown protesters around the world. While many are reacting to economic pain,

supporters of widely debunked conspiracy theories about the pandemic have also come out in the thousands from Melbourne to London.

Along with the turmoil, though, lies some hope, with Wuhan now appearing to have controlled the disease.

"Life has returned to the kind of flavour we had before," resident An An said. "Everyone living in Wuhan feels at ease."

AFP



A mask is fixed on a fence at Viktoriapark in Berlin's Kreuzberg district (AFP)

Merkel concerned over rise in virus cases

Berlin, Germany - Chancellor Angela Merkel is deeply worried about sharply rising new coronavirus infections in Germany, her spokesman said on Monday, urging citizens to keep to strict hygiene measures including masks if social distancing cannot be maintained.

"The development of infection numbers is of great concern to us," Steffen Seibert said. "We can see from some of our European friends where that could lead."

In a meeting with her CDU party's top brass, Merkel warned that new infection numbers - currently at around 2,000 a day - could leap to 19,200 daily by Christmas if the trend 'continues in this way', party sources said.

The Chancellor's warning came a day before she is due to hold a video conference with the premiers of Germany's 16 states on the next measures to take to keep infections down.

Germany began to ease stringent measures from late April. But with travel picking up again, contagion has returned swiftly.

AFP

Beijing passes law to protect medical whistleblowers

Beijing, China - Beijing's city government will protect 'non-malicious' medical whistleblowers under a new law, passed months after a Chinese doctor was punished for sounding the alarm at the very beginning of the pandemic.

China's leaders suffered a rare wave of public outrage after ophthalmologist Li Wenliang died of the disease in Wuhan, the city where the coronavirus first emerged late last year.

He had attempted to warn authorities about the new infection but was instead reprimanded for 'spreading rumours'.

Other medical whistleblowers in Wuhan later told Chinese media they were punished by government officials for discussing the outbreak without permission from superiors.

The new Beijing law, which came into effect from Friday, states that anyone whose tip-offs are later verified would be rewarded, and suffer no penalties.

But the regulations do not cover anyone 'fabricating or deliberately disseminating false information' about developing public health emergencies, according to a government notice on Saturday.

AFP

India's virus cases 6mn; death rate lowest

New Delhi, India - India reported its six millionth coronavirus case on Monday as it surged closer to the United States as the most-infected nation, and authorities pressed ahead with reigniting the economy.

The vast nation is home to 1.3bn people, some of humanity's most densely populated cities, for several weeks it has reported around 90,000 new cases daily - the highest in the world.

Health Ministry data showed a rise of 82,000 cases on Monday, taking the total to 6.1mn and closing the gap on the United States, which has recorded 7.1mn infections. India could leapfrog the US in the coming weeks.

India has a much lower death rate than other worst-hit nations with almost 100,000 fatalities



Municipality staff members fumigate a COVID-19 isolation centre as a preventive measure against diseases-carrying mosquitoes during the monsoon season, in Mumbai on Monday (AFP)

so far - fewer than half the grisly toll of 205,000 recorded in the US, which has roughly a quarter of the population.

Brazil has meanwhile recorded 140,000 deaths.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called on people to

keep wearing face coverings when they ventured outside of their homes.

"These rules are weapons in the war against corona. They are potent tools to save the life of every citizen," Modi said during his monthly radio address on

Sunday.

The virus initially hit major metropolises including financial hub Mumbai and capital New Delhi, but has since spread to regional and rural areas where healthcare systems are even more fragile and patchy.

"In several of the pockets where the transmission is active, the infection has gone into the community," former health secretary Sujatha Rao said.

"It is difficult to control transmission in such situations and a dramatic turnaround can perhaps be possible only through a rigorous implementation of a lockdown and preventive measures like mask wearing."

No Lockdown 2.0

The government is unlikely to reimpose major restrictions after a lockdown in March bat-

tered the economy and wrecked the livelihoods of millions of people, particularly the poor.

Some schools have now reopened, and trains, metros, domestic flights, markets and restaurants have been allowed to operate with some restrictions. The Taj Mahal also opened again for tourists this month.

Anand Krishnan, a community medicine professor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi, said authorities should focus on treating people who contract the virus.

"The only thing that we can do is take care of people who are ill - identify them faster and treat them better. And follow the social-distancing norms" he said.

"Beyond that, I don't think there is anything specific that can be done."

AFP

Rebound, reflection in Wuhan as virus claims million lives

Wuhan, China - As the coronavirus claimed its millionth life, people in Wuhan expressed sadness Monday at the continuing global impact of the pandemic - more than nine months after it emerged in the central Chinese city.

Pride at the city's resilience in the face of the calamity is tinged with sadness at the mounting death toll elsewhere.

"One million people dead, maybe relatively speaking in terms of the total global population it's not a lot," said Hu Lingquan, a scientist and Wuhan resident.

"But these are actually all real people's lives," he told AFP.

"Every person has a family."

On Monday children clasped their parents' hands as they navigated their way to school through rush-hour traffic in the nearly back-to-normal city.

As the global death toll hit one million - and with resistance to the threat of new lockdowns building from London and Madrid to Melbourne - China has been celebrating its emergence from the virus.

The economy is bouncing back, with factories re-opened and consumers returning to shops - the epidemic smothered by months of strictly enforced blanket lockdowns and mass testing and contact tracing.



Women wearing face masks visit the Moshan Scenic Area near East Lake, in Wuhan on Sunday (AFP)

Wuhan, the central Chinese city and ground zero of the virus, has flaunted its rebound with packed pool parties and bustling amusement parks.

But those optics have played badly across a world still struggling to control the virus spread and economic fallout, while demanding accountability from China for the causes of the outbreak.

The virus was felt sharply in the city of 11mn with 50,340 confirmed cases and 3,869 deaths - the most infections and fatalities in China.

But there have been no new cases in the city since May, and many in Wuhan now question

the global response to a pandemic which China appears to have successfully stifled for now.

Beijing has also stirred doubt into the Wuhan outbreak origin story, prodding outrage from worst-hit nations, led by US President Donald Trump who refers to the disease as the 'China virus'.

"From China's point of view they've really done badly," said scientist Hu. "Maybe they never really comprehended how serious this thing is."

The World Health Organization warns the toll will keep rising until an effective vaccine is found and distributed globally.

AFP

SALON AT HOME

CARE FOR YOUR NAILS

It's good to keep your nails in good shape, whether you do it as an indulgence or just routine maintenance. Healthy nails require an investment of time, not just money spent at a beauty salon.

Apart from procedures and beauty products, the best route to stronger, longer nails is mostly through simple lifestyle habits. It also means getting rid of bad habits, such as using your nails as a knife or a tin/can opener. For good looking strong nails, follow these tips:

Moisturise your nails

Moisturising is a well-known secret to healthy skin, but it's often overlooked in nail care. While dry, brittle nails can be the result of many factors, they're ultimately a cry for moisture, so consider proper moisture the foundation of your nail care routine. So, when applying hand lotion, give your nails a little extra attention.

Leave your cuticles alone

It's common practice to cut, push back, or try to get rid of cuticles altogether, but cuticles are not the enemy. In fact, the cuticle is the nail's natural protective seal. Messing with your cuticles can do far more harm than good to your nails. It can also cause infection and injury.

Avoid contact with water

Pay attention to ways you can reduce the time your nails spend in contact with water because excessive water contact can weaken nail structure. Just as wet hair is especially vulnerable, the same caution applies to nail care, too. You may consider wearing gloves while doing the dishes or other wet work. Excessive water exposure can put significant strain on delicate nail

cells (called onychocytes), which can lead to brittleness, peeling, and breakage. This is also why soaking nails before a manicure is bad practice.

Be gentle

The best nail care is gentle care, say dermatologists. It is not advisable to dig under your nails as it can separate the nail plate from the underlying bed and lead to a bacterial fungal infection. Never use your nails as kitchen tools - there are plenty of creative ways to open a can of soda. Also remember, when you peel off acrylic or gel nails, you're really peeling off layers of the nail and that's going to weaken your nails.

Treat your nails like your hair

It's the new golden rule. Hair and nails are both composed of keratin proteins, so it makes sense that many of the same rules apply for both. Hair and nails can both become dehydrated and damaged from over-processing. Frequent polish removal, gels, and acrylics do to nails what dyes, chemicals, and heat application do to hair. Hair. Also, just as you would condition your hair with a conditioner, you can do the same with your cuticles to promote healthy, growing nails.

Watch the weather

Winter can be a rough time for skin, hair, and nails alike. Not only can cool, dry weather cause nails to get extra brittle, but the extreme swings in temperature from going outdoors to indoors can cause nail cells to contract and expand repetitively, resulting in a weakening between the cells, leading to breakage. So, it might be a good idea to wear gloves in the winter after moisturising your hand and nails.



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SHELL JEWELLERY

Summer's soul

Hubert Vaz

Shell jewellery is always a popular trend during summer. In fact, it had been a craze last year and it continues into 2020 with the same enthusiasm. So, if you love to walk away from convention, how about trying some shell jewellery this summer? While top designers the world over included shell jewellery in their shows, the trend has found its way into many

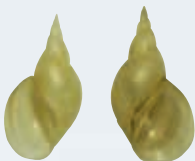
branded collections available in different markets, also in the Middle East. Shell jewellery come in combination with beads as well as imbedded in gold, silver and other metals, each piece having a class of its own. Style glossies say, influencers such as Lendra Medine, Pandora Sykes, Monikh and Lizzy Vdligt were early-adopters, and it wasn't long before everyone else was in on it. It's definitely holiday-inspired fashion,

which, according to Lisa Aiken, fashion director of Moda Operandi, is the secret to its lasting power, an article in Marie Claire, UK's popular international style magazine, stated. 'Shells are one of those things that feels like the memento you brought home from your holiday. There is a memory attached to it. That's why I think this trend has staying power,' says Aiken. Most designers say shell jewellery may

be reminiscent of holidays, but serious fashion stores have incorporated high quality shells in jewellery, embellished with crystals or mounted in intricate gold settings, giving them a unique elegance. From necklaces and bracelets, to earrings and pendants, there are innumerable picks for those who like to get off the beaten track and buy jewellery that are more than just mementos.



Most expensive shell
The 'Conus Gloriamaris' is among the 12,000 species of seashells found in the Philippines and is considered the rarest and, possibly, the most expensive seashell in the world. The shell is remarkably beautiful but it is its rarity that contributed to its worldwide fame for two centuries.



Opening to right
Most shells are dextral, meaning they open to the right, though there are some that are sinistral, or left opening. Shell collectors always look out for sinistral specimens which are shells of a gastropod which is 'left-handed'. Chirality can be one factor that influences the value of the shell.



Body part
A seashell is actually the body part of a sea creature such as a mollusk. When the mollusk is alive, the shell protects the soft body inside as a sort of protective layer. After the animal is no more, the soft body might be eaten by other creatures or decompose naturally, leaving behind the shell.



Currency
Seashells were once used as currency. A white cowry shell was the kind that became an important monetary unit in some countries in ancient times. It was once deemed valuable in East Asia, Africa, and South Asia. Cowrie shells were particularly used as currency in China over 3000 years ago.



Gardening
Shells have high levels of calcium carbonate, an element that's found in soil conditioners and fertilisers. To use seashells in gardens, you have to grind them to a fine powder before mixing with soil. The more they're mixed into the ground, the more the garden will benefit from their nutrients.

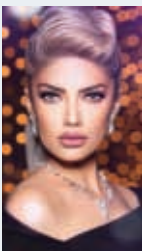


Patterns
When we look at mollusk shells, we notice very neat patterns on them. This isn't a coincidence but rather part of the animal's own actions. The shell is part of their outer body, so the sea creatures have to make them grow along with them, often making layers using the impurities around them.

Gift from the sea...



Sushmita Gupta
ARTIST
"I love anything made of earth, wood, shells and flowers, and cowrie shells are a top favourite. It's like a gift from the sea. I wear them often - earrings, bracelets, anklets, necklaces, the list is endless.



Areejal Balushi
FASHIONISTA
Yes, I like shell jewellery for summer or for the beach, though it is not my favourite. I always prefer diamonds and gemstones for astrological reasons."



Balqees al Hassani
PRESIDENT, KNOWLEDGE OMAN
"I love shell jewellery. I am in love with the sea, with sea creatures, and with shells of all kinds. Shell jewellery makes me feel a connection with nature."