

P12

AL HABSI TO
FOCUS ON
ACADEMY



P13

TIKTOK SAYS
TO SUE TRUMP
ORDER



P19

A WOMAN'S
EFFORT TO
PRESERVE HISTORY



OMAN

HM greetings to
Ukrainian President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine, on the occasion of the anniversary of his country's independence. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the President and to the friendly people of Ukraine further progress and prosperity. — ONA

WORLD

Pompeo to visit
Sudan this week

KHARTOUM: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is to visit Sudan in the coming days, a Sudanese government official said on Sunday. Sudan has been normalising relations with the United States since the removal of former leader Omar al Bashir in April 2019 but is still seeking removal from a list of countries the US considers as state sponsors of terrorism. Pompeo is also due to visit Israel and the United Arab Emirates on Monday and Tuesday following an accord between the two countries this month to forge full relations. The Sudanese official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, declined to give details of Pompeo's visit. Ending the terrorism listing is a top priority for Sudan's transitional military-civilian ruling council and the government of technocrats that serves under it.

INSIDE


BALANCE

AS SOCIAL UNREST GROWS,
KURDISH IRAQI GOES AFTER MEDIA

P6


INDIA CORONAVIRUS CASES
CROSS 3 MILLION MARK

P7

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 32°C
MIN: 28°C

SALALAH
MAX: 28°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 43°C
MIN: 29°C

SUNRISE 05:46 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

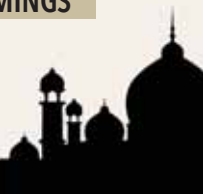
FAJR: 04:28

DHUHR: 12:14

ASR: 15:41

MAGHRIB: 18:37

ISHA: 19:51



NIZWA
SOUQ
SET TO
RECEIVE
VISITORS



With the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 allowing traditional markets to resume commercial activities, the popular Nizwa Souq is all set to receive visitors. The souq lies in the vicinity of the walls of the famous Nizwa Fort and the building embraces both traditional and modern architectural lines. Through its many alleys and divisions, Nizwa Souq has remained for hundreds of years home to a number of local industries, such as daggers, copper, spinning, livestock sale, fish, vegetables, and handicrafts.
DETAILS ON P4

Floating barriers not catch-all
for ocean plastic problem

BREMEN: Floating barriers at sea designed to collect plastic waste can only make a small contribution to the task of cleaning up the world's oceans, a new international study suggests. "Technologies such as those proposed by the Ocean Cleanup project will not help us solve the plastic problem," said Agostino Merico of the Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research in the western German city of Bremen. "We urgently need to rethink how we produce, consume and dispose of plastics and how we can promote sustainable alternatives," said Merico, co-author of the study published in the journal *Science of the Total Environment*. Several private initiatives, such as the Dutch NGO Ocean Cleanup, are removing waste from the oceans using floating barriers. But though admirable, these do not solve the wider problem, scientists say. There are an estimated 399,000 tonnes of plastic floating on the surface of the oceans, an amount expected to more than double by 2052. Many millions of tonnes more is found in deeper water. It is a major threat to the world's marine ecosystems. Fish and other inhabitants ingest plastic, often with fatal consequences. When plastic decomposes, toxic and hormonally active substances can enter the marine environment and eventually be absorbed by humans. By modelling the effects of 200



floating barriers collecting plastic over a period of 130 years, study authors found the devices could remove just over five per cent of the estimated global total. "Given the huge amounts of plastic waste that continuously pollute the oceans, this is a rather small contribution," says study co-author Soenke Hohn, also of the Leibniz Centre. Scientists also worry that such collection efforts will provide justification for further pollution, and raise questions about what to do with waste once it is pulled out of the sea. "There is only one solution: we must stop producing plastics and promote alternative, more sustainable solutions such as the use of biodegradable materials," said Merico. The study also involved Jacobs University, the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Berlin, Britain's University of Exeter and the organisation Making Oceans Plastic Free. — dpa

THE GATEWAY TO A
DEVELOPED NATION

TARGETS

Attract talent
in labour
market

To improve
educational
outcomes

Job security
in private
sector

Modern
teaching
techniques

Increase
in educational
quality

VISION-2040
SETS
AMBITIOUS
GOALS FOR
SULTANATE

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Oman's Vision-2040, the gateway to become a developed country under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik aims at promoting the country's position in different sectors over the next two decades. One of the ambitions goals in Vision-2040 is developing a favourable environment to attract talents in the labour market. For this purpose, it outlines, "a national system that empowers human capabilities in the educational sector and nurtures scientific research, innovation, and creativity to build a knowledge-based economy and society." The Vision-2040 stresses on improving educational outcomes that have become necessary to build Omanis' confidence in their identity and commitment to their social values. "This is attainable through increasing the quality of basic and higher education and developing scientific and educational curricula, so that graduates are acquainted with competitive qualifications and employability skills to enter the local and international labour market," it envisions. Such graduates, according to the programme, will have an adequate level of productivity and competitiveness to build a knowledge-based economy, enhance job security in the private sector and foster a participatory relation between the private and the public sectors. In addition to this, a developed educational system also entails the development of educational institutions, faculty and staff, the application of international standards for accreditation, the use of modern teaching and learning techniques, and the dissemination thereof as national culture.

TURN TO P2



Monthly Deposited Amount	Years	Total amount at maturity
25 (OMR)	10 Years	3,821,286 (OMR)
50 (OMR)	10 Years	7,642,571 (OMR)
100 (OMR)	10 Years	15,285,142 (OMR)
2000 (OMR)	10 Years	305,702,842 (OMR)

FUN WITH WAVES



Children playing at Al Hail beach on Muharram Holiday on Sunday. – Photo by Shamsa Al Harthiya

Vision-2040
sets ambitious
goals for
Sultanate

FROM PAGE 1

It emphasises that a leap is required in quality and quantity in the domain of scientific research and development, through the provision of diverse and sustainable sources of funding to support applied scientific researches to promote innovation in various fields.

“This will strengthen partnership between the academic and research institutions on the one hand and the private sector on the other,” the vision suggests. According to it, various stakeholders need to join forces to promote the role of citizens and society in advancing economic development.

“This necessitates the establishment of a stimulating educational and vocational training system to afford individuals high-level skills to enter the labour market, raise their productivity and improve the efficiency of the economy in general,” it outlines.

Values of competition and qualification should prompt individuals to seek high-ranking jobs based entirely on merit. This implies adherence to institutional values and a performance-based qualification system. Another aspect of joining forces also entails maximising national capabilities through a national system established to nurture talent, creativity and entrepreneurial potential. Vision-2040 defines the national priorities to be achieved through parallel work streams, with the aim of promoting Oman’s position in different fields over the next two decades. The vision equally outlines the strategic directions, goals and key policies to translate ambitions into action plans underpinned by clear milestones and timelines and progressing against a set of local and international indicators to measure and evaluate the performance in a transparent manner.

Newspapers hail
HM’s Royal Decrees

MUSCAT: A number of Egyptian newspapers hailed the Royal Decrees promulgated recently by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik restructuring Council of Ministers and State administrative apparatus.

Al Wafd Newspaper said, “Oman has witnessed comprehensive restructure that would help in implementing Vision 2040.”

It highlighted His Majesty the Sultan’s speech on February 23. “We are determined to undertake necessary measures to restructure the state’s administrative apparatus, modernising the schema of laws and legislations, work programmes and mechanisms, enhancing the values of work, its principles, and espousing and streamlining procedures and performance governance, integrity, accountability to guarantee complete harmony with the requirements and goals of our vision.” The newspaper said August 18 decrees included wise decisions to reorganise and restructure the state’s administrative apparatus. The royal decrees have merged and abolished some ministries, and reshaped the cabinet.

Another newspaper is *Masr Al Arabia* that affirmed that Royal decrees focussed on the economy and professionalize the government. They have had reduced the number of ministries, appointed technocrats as ministers, and delegated power to some ministers. — ONA

Priority for social security
families in housing

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, the newly appointed Minister of Social Development, said the government will step in to provide houses for families who come under social security net. She was replying to a tweet by a user who bought the issue to her notice.

“I wish if you can deliver the data about these families to our office as soon as possible. Thank you for your interest and your follow-up,” the minister tweeted.

The user called up on the ministry to urgently provide homes to many citizens who live in old, dilapidated homes, adding that he had a list of the names of those affected.

The Minister affirmed that following up these cases would be the priority. She welcomed the proposals to serve and develop social work in the Sultanate, and initiatives of volunteer work development. Al Najar, who was appointed through a Royal Decree last week, explained in another tweet that the ministry is constantly keen on providing service to those eligible while preserving the privacy of these families.



The Ministry of Social Development had stated that it was following up and interacting with tweeters on requests related to social security, cutting pensions, and others related to the housing

Earlier, the Ministry of Social Development had stated that it was following up and interacting with tweeters on requests related to social security, cutting pensions, and others related to the housing. It confirmed that it will study all these requests, and obtain details about them from the social development departments in the

various states of the Sultanate.

The ministry explained that its role in housing applications is to conduct social research for each request, confirming that social security cases have the “priority and continuous follow-up” with the relevant authority in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Start-ups set for battle of ideas at OmanX Challenge

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Participants have begun to register for the Omani Startup Challenge this week until September 3, 2020 with the objective to create solutions for the energy sector.

Organised by the Phase Ventures, the winners of the Omani Startup Challenge will be automatically selected to participate in the SparkLabs Energy Accelerator and will be eligible for seed fund for their go-to-market process.

“We are looking out for teams who can build software solutions to solve some of the most difficult challenges facing our corporate partners – PDO, OQ and others. Now it could be even others who had already been working on projects and they could come on the same day even and

present it. But I would recommend they register early so they can utilise the mentoring sessions and maybe refining their project on the technical side or the pitch itself. Some of the mentors are founders from our portfolio companies, others from our own team and representatives from the software world before their pitch,” said Abdullah al Shaksy, CEO of Phase Ventures.

The deadline is September 3 and the teams by then should present a functional software proof of concept in front of the judges. The pitch battle will be on and the winners will be declared on the same day. The link for participation is available on all of their social media platforms @phazeventures.

The winning team of the OmanX Challenge will be admitted to the

The deadline is September 3 and the teams by then should present a functional software proof of concept in front of the judges. The pitch battle will be on and the winners will be declared on the same day

third cohort of the SparksLabs Energy Accelerator Programme where they will be supported to take



their concept to the next level into a minimum viable product alongside

commercial partners. In addition, they will be awarded a grant of RO 10,000 to fund continued business development, as well as opportunity to receive up to RO 100,000 in equity investment at the end of the Accelerator Programme.

According to the organisers all it takes a team of two to five people, an Internet connection and skills.

“We are quite excited to see what the teams are going to come up. We are a venture capital firm and we have also started the first energy focused energy start up programme in the region three years ago and this year we are looking for digital solutions that are highly transformative. We are partnering with Petroleum Development Oman and OQ. OQ has a broad portfolio and PDO has the upstream core business and now

with the announcement of EDO we are obviously looking out at the renewable sector and other areas as well,” he said.

The spectrum could range from core business like exploration for PDO or support function of finance and administration, Information Technology, infrastructure, legal and so on.

“I think all of these areas are disrupted now. So we have been keen to identify the brightest start-ups form around the world to sole some of the problems. The challenge that we announced a week ago is specifically focused on Omani talent. So not only does the winner get RO 10,000 but they get to work with corporate and develop their project into a commercial viable product,” added Al Shaksy.

RAFO CARRIES OUT MEDICAL EVACUATION



KHASAB: A Royal Air Force of Oman aircraft evacuated a woman suffering from a critical condition from the Health Center in Lima to Khasab Hospital on Sunday. On Saturday, RAFO evacuated a 6-year-old boy suffering from a critical condition from the Health Center in Lima to Khasab Hospital in Musandam Governorate to receive the necessary treatment. This comes within the framework of the humanitarian services and efforts of the Sultan's Armed Forces and other departments of the Ministry of Defence. — ONA

Avoid gatherings in residences for festival

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Keeping in mind festival season of expatriates, the authorities have called up on all to stick to the COVID-19 precautions suggested by the Supreme Committee.

"All residents as well as citizens in the Sultanate are urged to abide by the Supreme Committee's decision that states not to gather outside or inside the homes," a spokesperson at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has noted.

"There is no relationship between religious rites and gathering because it is forbidden by the Committee's decision in the public interest."

Some people have special prayers and gatherings these days. Several families and bachelors gather at one place to offer special religious rites. They have been asked not to gather for any such purpose, which were possible had there been no COVID-19.

"We have been notified by authorities concerned that people have been gathering in residences, which is a violation of the social distancing directive," Dr Satish Nambiar, Chairman of the Indian Social Club Muscat, told the *Observer*.

"We hereby urge all, kindly refrain from being part of such gatherings and avoid penalties. Let's not jeopardise the lives of others," he said.

The Public Prosecution has prescribed RO 1,500 fine for attending gatherings at festivals, weddings, funerals, places of

THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION HAS PRESCRIBED RO 1,500 FINE FOR ATTENDING GATHERINGS AT FESTIVALS, WEDDINGS, FUNERALS, PLACES OF WORSHIP, AND ANY OTHER TYPES OF GATHERINGS, AND ANY INDIVIDUAL FOUND TO BE PARTICIPATING IN GATHERINGS CAN BE SLAPPED WITH RO 100 INDIVIDUAL FINE FOR VIOLATING THE SUPREME COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 INSTRUCTIONS.

worship, and any other types of gatherings, and any individual found to be participating in gatherings can be slapped with RO 100 individual fine for violating the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 instructions.

The Royal Oman Police may impose a direct fine on the violator at the moment of committing the violation or proceed with the legal procedures. The ROP also reserves the right to detain the violators for 48 hours, which may be extended by the Public Prosecution.

Environment Authority to enhance sustainability

MUSCAT: Among the Royal Decrees issued recently to restructure the administrative apparatus is the Royal Decree No 106/2020 converting Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA) into Environment Authority.

It has defined terms of reference of the authority that are proposing policies, strategic plans, requirements related to environmental protection and sustainability, pollution control, nature conservation and submitting them to the Council of Ministers for approval, follow-up, implementation, evaluation and development and ensuring environmental safety.

The Authority is also tasked for preserving different ecosystems within the framework of the basic goals of sustainable development, protecting wildlife, preserving nature, utilising renewable resources, contributing to developing scientific research horizons of the environmental aspect, exchanging experiences, collecting scientific data and benefiting from it, and working to spread awareness and instilling concepts of the requirements for dealing with the environment.



The Authority will also draft laws, regulations decisions, while ensuring follow-up on their implementation. It also works on developing cooperation with other concerned authorities regionally and international in order to implement decisions emanating from relevant international agreements.

The authority is also responsible for representing the Sultanate in regional and international conferences, events

and meetings related to the authority's specialisations, in addition to any other specialisations determined by laws and decrees.

The Royal Decree also approved the organisational structure of the Environment Authority. The decree clarified that without prejudice to the provisions of the Royal Decree No 85/2020 on the Public Authority for Civil Aviation, all allocations, assets,

rights and obligations of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs shall come under the Authority.

The Royal Decree indicates that the employees of MECA, except for its employees concerned with climate affairs, are transferred to the Environment Authority with the same financial ranks, in accordance with the terms set by the Council of Ministers.

— ONA

Formation of new varsity excites students

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, AUG 23

A section of students and faculty members are excited over the establishment of a new university under the name of 'University of Technology and Applied Sciences' as they find it an upgrade from college to university and more that they are going to be the part of the largest university in Oman.

The process of the formation of the university came as good news through a Royal Decree (76/2020) for the students and faculty members of the Higher Technology Colleges; Colleges of Technology; College of Education in Rustaq; and Colleges of Applied Sciences.

Through their merger in one unit of 'University of Technology and Applied Sciences', in all likelihood, this new university would be the largest in Oman in terms of the number of students, faculty, and its base in major parts of the Sultanate.

"Taken together all the seven



colleges of technology (including colleges of Higher Technology); five colleges of Applied Sciences; and College of Education in Rustaq, the new university is going to emerge as a huge higher education provider in the Sultanate," said a senior administrative staff of Higher Technology College in Muscat.

"If you look at the number of students, the contribution from colleges of technology only has more than 40,000 students. Then there are

add ups from Applied Science colleges and College of Education in Rustaq. Then there are faculty members, administrative, and technical support staff. It is going to be huge in terms of number and resources," he said.

Another staff member from Sur College of Applied Sciences called it one of the best decisions in recent times and hugely beneficial for the students. "Here, with the new university, the students and faculty members would have a wider reach to

resources for a better outcome."

For the sake of uniformity, courses would be uniform, grades would be uniform and there would be variety, which would facilitate competitiveness and broadmindedness among the students.

The students are equally excited over the news. When asked for a reaction, a student said spontaneously that when he took admission in Applied Science College he didn't know that he would get his graduation certificate from a university.

"I am excited to be part of the new system as I am in college for three more years. I may have to work hard, but this hard work would fetch me good results, and based on that I can get admission in post-graduate studies," Ali, a student of Salalah College of Applied Sciences said.

Since the colleges are not in session now, the students are not very clear about the new system to be followed but they are assured that the new university would certainly address their academic and job pursuits.

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#Living_with_COVID19



NIZWA SOUQ

ALL SET TO RECEIVE VISITORS



STAFF REPORTER MUSCAT, AUG 23

With the Supreme Committee allowing traditional markets to resume commercial activities, the popular Nizwa Souq is all set to receive visitors.

“The souq lies in the vicinity of the walls of the famous Nizwa Fort and the building embraces both traditional and modern architectural lines. Through its many alleys and divisions, Nizwa Souq has remained home to several local industries for hundreds of years. Sale of daggers, copper products, spinning, livestock sale, fish, vegetables, and handicrafts are some of the many attractions of the souq.”

The Nizwa Fort received 125,876 footfalls in 2018 with an increase of 9 per cent compared to 2017.

Oman had signed an agreement with a local company, Bawader International to manage the day to day operations of Nizwa Fort.

In 2017, Nizwa Fort emerged the most attractive landmark for the visitors to the Sultanate as it received 115,284 of the 319,152 visitors attracted by various forts and castles across the Sultanate.

The souq has different parts depending on what you want to shop for; in the mornings you will see locals buying vegetables and meat.

The rest of the souq sells unique souvenirs like caps, lamps, and fresh dates.

“This Souq is what makes your day. It gives you the real taste of Omani culture and architecture. It is well preserved and looks amazing,” said a review on Trip Adviser.

“A visit to the Souq is a must because it gives you a real taste for the vibrant life in Oman. The spices are not to be missed but what is likely to be a real highlight is the cattle market where goats and cows are auctioned. It only happens on Friday mornings, so choose your time carefully,” said another online review. — *Photos by Mohammed al Hudhrani*





Proponents of transparent masks include French secretary of state for people with disabilities Sophie Cluzel Ludovic Marin. – AFP

TRANSPARENT MASKS BOON FOR HARD OF HEARING

Transparent facemasks and shields are costly compared with classic counterparts but could prove a boon for the deaf and hard of hearing battling to communicate in the coronavirus era.

The concept has started to take off, aided not least by Youtube tutorials or the likes of American football coach Nic Saban, who makes a point of wearing his pitchside.

Other proponents include French secretary of state for people with disabilities Sophie Cluzel, who donned a mask with a see-through section to speak in parliament, and a sign-language interpreter at a Portsmouth hospital in southern England.

As Cluzel pointed out, the transparent window facilitates communication by permitting lip-reading and showing facial expressions.

“Lip reading is a plus for me,” says Vivien Laplane, born deaf and author of the French blog “Appendre à écouter” (learn to listen).

“You can imagine — or not — that with masks it’s tougher” to understand others and make oneself understood.

A deaf Indonesian couple working as tailors on the isle of Sulawesi, make and have been selling transparent masks since April.

Without them “it is impossible for a lip-reading deaf person to understand what others are saying,” says Faizah Badaruddin who, along with her husband, turns out around two dozen a day.

Such efforts are boosting communication during the COVID-19 pandemic not least for the deaf and the hard of hearing who number 70 million globally, according to the World Federation of the Deaf.

The French federation of speech therapists says that classic facemasks mean “patients find themselves deprived of the main source of the oral message: the mouth and facial expressions”.

Teachers say they too like the transparent model.

Rory Burnham Pickett, a professor based in Sapporo in northern Japan, says “I know it is frustrating that my pupils don’t see my mouth or facial expression. I made my own transparent mask as they are difficult to find.”

Governments are taking a proactive approach and placing orders.

Authorities in Quebec have placed an order for 100,000 for distribution across the health network in the Canadian province, local media say.

The provincial APDA association for the hard of hearing made an order for 100,000 washable transparent masks through local textile company Madolaine.

“Sales are going briskly,” says association director Marie-Helene Tremblay.

In the United States, private US medical firm ClearMask LLC said on Tuesday it had received clearance from the Food and Drug Administration for a fully transparent surgical mask for use in hospitals and clinics but also schools, retail and hospitality settings. The Baltimore-based form was already producing non-surgical versions.

MASKS FOR ALL

Anissa Mekrabeche, a 31-year-old deaf French woman, decided to create her own transparent prototype after finding that communication was difficult when she visited the local pharmacy wearing a standard mask.

She co-founded ASA Initia, based in Toulouse, in partnership with the French Association of the Paralysed to develop and retail an “inclusive mask”.

The mask, the first to gain clearance from French authorities, has earned 20,000 orders to date.

A second French variant, the “smile mask” from Odiora, a company based in Lyon, is now also coming to market and two more can expect clearance soon, says the French government.

Stephane Lenoir, who coordinates a collective of associations for the handicapped in France, welcomes what he sees as a step forward but feels bound to highlight the issues of general availability and cost of such masks.

The unit cost for the French masks ranges from 10.90 and 15 euros (\$12.80 to \$17.60), \$10.99 for the ones in Quebec, while ClearMask offer a bundle pack of 24 for \$67.

Burnham Pickett says the transparent masks found in Japan “come from the United States and are expensive”.

In France, the government is pondering whether to offer a subsidy or make public procurement orders at the behest of the associations.

For Cluzel, “promotion of transparent masks will enhance production, bringing down the costs of making them and hence prices”.

For Tremblay, the need is clear: “We must democratise the wearing of transparent masks.” — AFP

Pilots were alive after missile hit Ukraine jet: Iran

TEHRAN: The black boxes of a Ukrainian airliner mistakenly downed in Tehran have revealed the pilots were still alive after the first of two missiles hit the plane, Iranian officials said on Sunday.

Flight 752, a Ukraine International Airlines passenger jet, crashed shortly after taking off from Tehran’s main airport on January 8.

Iran admitted days later that its forces accidentally shot down the Kiev-bound Boeing 737-800 aircraft, killing all 176 people on board.

Tehran’s air defences had been on high alert at the time in case the US retaliated against Iranian strikes hours earlier on American troops stationed in Iraq.

The head of Iran’s civil aviation authority on Sunday revealed for the first time what was on the black boxes, which had been sent to France for analysis.

Touraj Dehghani Zanganeh said that the cockpit voice recorder registered a conversation between the pilot, co-pilot and an instructor between the two blasts.

“Up to 19 seconds after the first missile exploded in the vicinity of the aircraft, (they) noticed abnormal conditions and were in control of the aircraft until the last moment,” he said, quoted by state television’s website.

“The instructor indicates that the aircraft has an electronic problem and the auxiliary power has been activated,” he said.

“The pilots were notified that both engines of the aircraft were on.”

The black boxes stopped working 19 seconds after the first explosion, making it impossible to retrieve data on the impact of the second missile, he said. Analysis on the “effect of the second missile cannot be obtained from the black boxes,” said Zanganeh.

Iran, which has no means of decoding the black boxes, sent them to France for analysis in mid-July, nearly six months after the disaster. — AFP

Flash floods in Turkey kill five, 11 missing

ANKARA: Flash floods in Turkey’s northern Black Sea region killed five people, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday, and authorities were searching for 11 missing people.

Floodwaters caused by unusually heavy rainfall dragged debris and vehicles along a road, leaving them buried in mud, footage from the province of Giresun showed. Residents were seen clearing streets, as construction machines lifted the debris and cleared roads.

Speaking in Istanbul, Erdogan said the floods had spread to neighbouring provinces as well, causing injuries in Rize and Trabzon.

“In the initial reports we received, we had five dead and around 12 wounded as a result of heavy floods,” Erdogan said. “God willing, we will overcome the damage and destruction here rapidly,” he said.

Turkey’s Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) said it had sent a team for search and rescue operations and that teams in other provinces were also waiting on alert. In a statement, it said that there was no access to Giresun’s Dereli district via the main road after streams overflowed.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu said 153 people had so far been rescued and nearly 1,000 aid workers were searching for the missing people. He said power was restored in some areas, but there was extensive damage to the infrastructure.

“We were not expecting such a severe scene in the area,” he told reporters in Giresun, along with Environment Minister Murat Kurum, who said 17 buildings had collapsed and 361 others were damaged.

Rainfall in Giresun had exceeded averages for the month of August by 1.5 times, but agricultural damage in the region was less than expected, said Agriculture and Forestry Minister Bekir Pakdemirli. — Reuters



Turkey’s Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu visits the disaster area after the flash floods in northern province of Giresun. – Reuters



Kuwait to rebuild Lebanon's only large grain silo: report



A general view shows the severely damaged grain silo following the massive explosion in Beirut's port area. — Reuters

BEIRUT: Kuwait said it will rebuild Lebanon's only large grain silo that was destroyed by the massive Beirut port explosion, raising fears of food shortages in a country already in financial meltdown.

The destruction of the 120,000-tonne capacity structure at the port, the main entry point for food imports, meant buyers must rely on smaller private storage facilities for their wheat purchases with no government reserves to fall back on.

The port explosion killed at least 180 people, injured thousands and wrecked swathes of the Lebanese capital, pushing the government to resign

Kuwait's Ambassador to Lebanon, Abdulaal al Qenaie, said in comments to local radio VdL at the weekend that the silo was first built in 1969 with a Kuwaiti development loan.

The port explosion killed at least 180 people, injured thousands and wrecked swathes of the Lebanese capital, pushing the government to resign. The now caretaker economy minister, Raoul Nehme, has reassured the public that there would be no flour or bread crisis in Lebanon, which buys

almost all its wheat from abroad.

Plans for another grain silo in Lebanon's second largest port Tripoli were shelved years ago due to a lack of funding, a UN official, port official and regional grain expert said earlier this month.

Humanitarian aid has poured into Lebanon. But foreign donors have made clear they will not bail out the state without reforms to tackle entrenched corruption and negligence. — Reuters



Maj Gen Kenneth P Ekman, Deputy Commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, shakes hand with Brigadier General Salah Abdullah during a handover ceremony of Taji military base from US-led coalition troops to Iraqi security forces, in the base north of Baghdad. — Reuters

US-led alliance hands over military site to Iraqi army

BAGHDAD: The United States-led alliance fighting IS militants in Iraq handed over a military site to the Iraqi army on Sunday, military officials from both sides said.

"The international alliance forces today handed over site No 8 at Camp Taji to the Iraqi troops," a spokesman for Iraq's military Joint Operations Command, Tahsin al Khafaji, told Iraq's state news agency INA.

The site was used by US, Australian and New Zealand forces to train Iraqi soldiers.

"Other sites [in the camp] will be handed over according to a timetable," Al Khafaji added without providing more details.

The alliance said the transfer was due to the Iraqi security forces' success in an ongoing campaign against Islamic State remnants in the country.

The coalition commanders transferred 347 million dollars' worth of property and equipment to Iraqi forces, alliance spokesman Myles B Caggins III

added in a tweet.

Camp Taji, north of Baghdad, is the eighth military facility handed over by the anti-IS alliance to Iraq over the past months.

The alliance has supported Iraqi forces in a years-long campaign against IS. It has also backed Kurdish forces who defeated the extremist group in neighbouring Syria.

In January, the Iraqi parliament approved a resolution obliging the government to end the presence of foreign troops linked to the anti-IS alliance.

The move came after a US airstrike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian commander, and a deputy head of Iraq's Iran-allied Hashd al Shaabi militia.

Some military bases hosting the coalition forces in Iraq have since come under attack. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Iraq and the US agreed in June to continue reducing the number of troops stationed in Iraq as part of the anti-Islamic alliance. — dpa



Members of the self-proclaimed eastern Libyan National Army special forces gather in the city of Benghazi. — AFP

Libya's council rejects talks with eastern-based army

TRIPOLI: Libya's High Council of State has rejected dialogue with the eastern-based army, led by General Khalifa Haftar, and stressed the need for the UN-backed government to "control all the Libyan soil."

"The Council stresses (the need) to make serious efforts to end the rebellion through immediate cease-fire, and enable the Government of National Accord to take full control of all the Libyan soil," Xinhua news agency quoted the Council as saying in a statement.

"(The Council stresses) complete rejection to any form of dialogue with the war criminal Haftar," it said.

The Council also stressed that any dialogue or agreement must be based on the 2015 UN-sponsored Libyan political agreement.

The statement demanded reopening of the country's oilfields and ports, and called on the UN-backed government to provide basic services for the people, mainly electricity and infrastructure.

The Council also called for a referendum on the draft constitution and holding parliamentary and presidential elections.

On August 21, UN-backed Prime Minister, Fayez Serraj, and Speaker of the eastern-based House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh, issued statements calling for ceasefire in the country, reopening of the country's oilfields and ports, and holding elections.

The UN-backed government had been engaged in a deadly armed conflict against the eastern-based army, which is allied with the eastern-based House of Representatives, for more than a year over control of the capital Tripoli, before his government recently took over all of western Libya. Despite signing the UN-sponsored political agreement and appointment of the UN-backed government of national accord in 2015, Libya remains politically divided amid insecurity and escalating violence.

— Agencies

As social unrest grows, Kurdish Iraq goes after media

SULAIMANIYAH: Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq are cracking down on media outlets covering anti-government protests, journalists and rights defenders said, shattering the region's reputation as a liberal refuge.

For decades, Iraqis fleeing pressure by paramilitary groups, tribes and powerful politicians in the more conservative south sought safe haven in the Kurdish region.

But public anger at the Kurdish regional government (KRG) has grown in recent months, prompting protests over unpaid state salaries and Turkish incursions into border areas.

Demonstrators and rights defenders say the rallies have been met with a heavy-handed response from security forces — with reporters increasingly targeted.

"Despite laws guaranteeing press freedom in the region, when political and economic crises intensify, the limits on press reach a point of strangulation," warned the region's Metro Center for Journalist Rights and Advocacy.

In the first half of 2020, Metro recorded 88 violations against 62 journalists and media outlets, and says the pressure has intensified since mid-June.

This week, the Kurdish security forces, known as Asayish, forcibly shut down the Dohuk city offices of local television broadcaster NRT, which had been covering protests in nearby Zakho.

"After midnight, security forces stormed our Dohuk bureau and confiscated all coverage equipment," NRT's deputy chief Hawnar Ihsan



Journalists are pictured in the newsroom of Nalia Radio and Television in Sulaimaniyah city. — AFP

said. "Our Zakho correspondent Ahmad Zakhawi was arrested and has yet to be released."

Hours later, police shut down NRT's bureau in the regional Kurdish capital of Arbil, prompting condemnations from local and international rights groups.

"This escalating harassment of NRT is unfair and undemocratic, and begs the question why authorities are so scared of the broadcaster that they have to shutter its offices," wrote the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

'FROM BAD TO WORSE'

Like the rest of Iraq, media outlets in the Kurdish region are nearly all linked to political figures or parties. NRT is owned by a dissident from the New Generation Movement, a Kurdish opposition party.

Press freedoms in Kurdish Iraq

are guaranteed by a regional law from 2009, which was commended by the US-based Freedom House rights group at the time for giving reporters "unprecedented freedoms".

"Theoretically, the KRG has a margin of freedom because it has a law that is acceptable to a certain degree," said Yassin Taha, an independent journalist in the region.

In reality, few criticised the ruling elite — until the economic and public health situation became unbearable.

Protests erupted against government graft and waste, and discontent grew further when Turkey launched a rare ground and air assault against Kurdish militants in the region in June.

The Kurdish government kept silent on the operation, prompting criticism and accusations it was turning a blind eye to the deadly raids.

"The situation in Iraqi Kurdistan is

going from bad to worse, with the failures accumulating and the protests boiling," said Taha.

"Silencing outlets and shutting down (TV) channels cannot be the solution to successive setbacks during all these long years," he said.

CITIZEN JOURNALISM

In June, Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned that the KRG was using clauses on defamation and insults in the penal code and other laws to target protesters and journalists.

It said that an Iraqi Kurdish man was held in custody for 29 days for live-streaming a protest in January. The charges were ultimately dismissed.

HRW quoted another Iraqi Kurd who had faced criminal charges saying he paid money to the Asayish to be released. Afterwards "they told me, 'we might call you in at any time,'" he said.

The New York-based HRW watchdog urged the KRG to amend its laws to remove "vague provisions" allowing for pressure on media and activists. Others have appealed to the United Nations.

Six Kurdish members of parliament in Baghdad wrote to the UN's top official in Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert on Friday, urging her to "pressure KRG officials to respect the civil and political rights of citizens".

For Rahman Gharib from Metro, the crackdown could backfire.

"This will create thousands of NRTs — people will become their own correspondents everywhere," he said.

— AFP

THAI DEMOS



Thai police stand guard during a pro-democracy rally outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority headquarters in Bangkok on Sunday. Protesters have held near-daily demonstrations across the country for the past month to denounce Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha and his military-aligned administration. — AFP

Ukrainian ex-leader in serious condition with coronavirus

MOSCOW: Ukraine's former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and is currently in serious condition, her party's spokeswoman said on Sunday.

"Sadly, this is the truth," Marina Soroka, spokeswoman for the Fatherland party, said in a Facebook post.

The 59-year-old politician is "fighting" with a temperature of 39 degrees, Soroka said.

Local media reported that some members of Tymoshenko's family were also infected.

Tymoshenko was twice prime minister of Ukraine and became famous in 2004 as the face of widespread protests against corruption and election rigging, known as the Orange Revolution. She has also been jailed twice.

She stood for the third time in Ukraine's presidential elections



Yulia Tymoshenko

in 2019, but failed to gain sufficient support.

Ukraine has so far recorded 105,000 cases of the virus, and a death toll of 2,270. — dpa

India virus cases top 3m mark as economy opens up

MUMBAI: The number of coronavirus infections in India crossed the 3 million mark with 69,239 new cases reported on Sunday even as the country opened up various sectors from a lockdown that ground businesses to a halt and hurt economic growth.

With the fifth straight day of more than 60,000 new cases, India's tally stands at 3.04 million, federal health ministry data showed, behind only the United States and Brazil. Deaths in India from COVID-19 rose by 912 to 56,706.

India on Sunday issued guidelines to open up its media production industry with norms for social distancing, crowd management and sanitisation.

"The general principles behind the SOP will help create a safe working environment for cast and crew in the industry," Prakash Javadekar, India's union minister for information and broadcasting said in a tweet.

Top producers, distributors and actors from Bollywood, the movie industry in India's financial capital of Mumbai, had said in May it would take at least two years for them to recover financially from the pandemic, putting at risk tens of thousands of jobs.

Film production and theatres had been shut nationwide after Prime Minister Narendra Modi imposed a more than two month long lockdown in March to curb spread of the virus.

While India has been slowly opening up some industries with specific regulations, containment zones - areas identified as most affected by the virus - still remain under lockdown.

As its share in total worldwide cases has grown, India also reported nearly 2.2 million recoveries. Health ministry officials maintained that the country was controlling the pandemic effectively.

"India is in a better position than



A health worker collects a blood sample from a police official for antibodies test of COVID-19 in Kolkata on Sunday. — AFP

India on Sunday issued guidelines to open up its media production industry with norms for social distancing, crowd management and sanitisation

are reaching 3 million cases now. 2.2 million patients have recovered and another 700,000 are going to be cured very soon," he said.

He added that India had ramped up its testing - it was now conducting over 1 million tests everyday and a total of 30.5 million samples had been tested so far.

Cases have plateaued in some major cities including national

capital New Delhi and the financial hub of Mumbai after antibody surveys showed millions of residents could have contracted infections while being asymptomatic.

Several states have announced fresh restrictions amid spike in cases. While Haryana on Friday announced the weekend lockdown, another northern state, Punjab ordered daily night curfew in addition to a weekend lockdown.

Celebrations for an 11-day Hindu festival, Ganesh Chaturthi, have been scaled down across the country amid the outbreak.

Worldwide, the death toll has surpassed 800,000 with 23.2 million people being affected, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Several countries are working on a number of vaccines to fight the novel coronavirus, which causes Covid-19. Health minister Harsh Vardhan said India's first vaccine could be developed and available by the end of the year. — Reuters/dpa

Kabul police chief fired over surging violence



Afghan students walk inside the compound of their school in Herat on Sunday. — AFP

KABUL: Kabul's police chief has been fired, the Afghan interior ministry said on Sunday, following a mortar attack that hit the presidential palace last week and an uptick in small-scale bombings in the nation's capital.

Interior ministry spokesman Tareq Arian said that authorities dismissed Ammanullah Wahidi — who oversaw security in Kabul and surrounding districts — and at least two other mid-ranking security officials over "the recent rise in insecurity" in the capital.

Another top security official confirmed Wahidi's removal.

"The people are worried and the

president is upset over these attacks," the official said on the condition of anonymity. "There will be more changes in the security leadership of Kabul soon."

During Independence Day celebrations on Tuesday, at least three people were killed and 19 injured after more than a dozen mortars were fired at the city's heavily fortified green zone, home to a number of foreign embassies along with high-profile government installations.

The palace was hit, and several members of the president's elite security detail were among the injured. — AFP

Trump's sister slammed him over 'principles'

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's older sister described the US president as cruel and a liar whose lack of principles meant he could not be trusted, according to secretly made recordings published on Saturday.

It was the latest unflattering insider account to target the president, only instead of a jilted aide or business associate, it was from one of his closest relatives.

Maryanne Trump Barry, a former federal judge, slammed her brother over his immigration policy that saw children separated from their parents at the border and sent to detention centres.

"All he wants to do is appeal to his base," she said in recordings obtained by the Washington Post. "He has no principles. None."

The recordings were secretly made by the president's niece Mary Trump, who published last month a bombshell memoir of the "toxic family" that produced him.

The president's younger brother Robert, who died last week, went to court to try to block its publication — arguing that Mary was violating a non-disclosure agreement signed in 2001 after the settlement of her grandfather's estate, but to no avail.

Some 950,000 copies were sold the day of the memoir's release, with the White House calling it a "book of falsehoods".



Hundreds of boaters parade on Lake Winnepesaukee to support US President Donald Trump, in Laconia, New Hampshire. — AFP

At one point in the recordings, Barry said to her niece: "It's the phoniness of it all. It's the phoniness and this cruelty. Donald is cruel!"

The recordings also shed light on the source of an embarrassing claim in the memoir that the president paid someone to take a college entrance

exam for him.

"He got into University of Pennsylvania because he had somebody take the exams," Barry said, adding she even remembered the man's name.

In response, the White House released a statement to US media

from Trump that said: "Every day it's something else, who cares. I miss my brother, and I'll continue to work hard for the American people."

"Not everyone agrees, but the results are obvious. Our country will soon be stronger than ever before!"

— AFP



Warning against young-to-old transmission

PARIS: France’s health minister warned on Sunday of the danger of growing transmission of the coronavirus from the young to older, more vulnerable people.

The virus is circulating four times more often among people younger than 40 years of age than among those over 65, Health Minister Olivier Veran told the newspaper *Journal du Dimanche*. If the spread of the virus accelerates among younger people, there is a risk that older people, who are more likely to get the more severe form of Covid-19, will be infected, Veran said.

“We are in a risky situation,” emphasised the minister. France has seen the number of new infections rising again in recent weeks. Veran emphasised that this is not a “repetition” of the pandemic, as it has never stopped.

However, the situation is not the same as it was in February, as the virus is now circulating more among younger people who, although more often showed no symptoms, are not therefore immune, the minister said.

Testing capacity has also increased since the onset of the pandemic,he added. — dpa

Missing school greater risk to kids than Covid: UK minister

LONDON: The chief medical officers of the United Kingdom have said children should return to school after the summer holidays, warning that missing out on their education posed much bigger risks to them than catching COVID-19. The rare joint statement from the top health advisers to the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland represents a boost for British Prime Minister Boris Johnson who has said getting children back to school is a national priority.

Confidence in the government’s approach to schooling during the coronavirus pandemic took a hit last week when education minister Gavin Williamson was forced into an embarrassing U-turn over examination results.

“Very few, if any, children or teenagers will come to long term harm from COVID-19 due solely to attending school,” they said. “This has to be set against a certainty of long-term harm to many children and young



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has told allies that ‘failure to reopen schools is not an option’. — Reuters

people from not attending school,” the CMOs said in a joint statement.

Evidence showed that a lack of schooling increased inequalities, reduced opportunities and could

exacerbate physical and mental health issues, the statement said.

By contrast there was clear evidence of a very low rate of severe disease in children, even if they caught

COVID-19, and an exceptionally low risk of dying.

“The percentage of symptomatic cases requiring hospitalisation is estimated to be 0.1 per cent for children aged 0-9 and 0.3 per cent among those aged 10-19, compared to a hospitalisation rate of over 4 per cent in the UK for the general population,” the statement said. Johnson has said reopening schools in September is a social, economic and moral imperative, insisting they would be able to operate safely despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Separately, England’s chief medical officer was quoted as saying it would be foolish to count on a coronavirus vaccine being ready for use this year. “I think if we look forward a year, I think the chances are much greater than if we look forward six months and we need to have that sort of timescale in mind,” Chris Whitty told Sky News.

“So planning for the next winter, it would be foolish to plan on the basis we will have a vaccine.”

— Reuters

Sicily to expel migrants due to COVID-19 risks

ROME: The president of Sicily has issued a decree ordering the mass expulsion of asylum seekers from the island because of novel coronavirus contagion risks.

It is unclear how the drastic measure could be implemented, and whether the Sicilian has the authority to issue it. There was no immediate response to the move from the Interior Ministry in Rome.

“Sicily cannot be invaded, while Europe is turning a blind eye and the government is not enacting any pushbacks,” President Nello Musumeci wrote on Sunday on Facebook, publishing his decree.

The measure says all Sicilian migrant reception centres should cleared by midnight on Monday, with residents transferred elsewhere within Italy or Europe. It also bans all new migrant arrivals by sea.

The decree is valid until September 10 and suggests that incoming sea arrivals should be hosted on quarantine ferries — a solution that has only partially been adopted by the national government.

Musumeci, who leads a right-wing administration, was praised by national opposition leader Matteo Salvini, of the far-right League, and criticised by centre-left politicians.

In recent weeks Italy has recorded surging numbers of sea migrant arrivals and novel coronavirus infections, but most new virus cases have been linked to people returning from holiday, not migrants.

On Saturday, Italy’s daily virus caseload rose above 1,000 for the first time in more than three months.

Sicily reported 48 new infections, including 16 linked to new migrant arrivals. — dpa

ARMY 2020



Russian Topol intercontinental ballistic missiles is pictured during the 6th International Military Technical Forum ‘Army 2020’ in the military Patriot Park outside Moscow on Sunday. — AFP

ECOWAS team ‘hopeful’ after meeting Mali junta

BAMAKO: A West African delegation visiting Mali to push for a speedy return to civilian rule following a coup said it was “very hopeful” after meeting with the country’s military junta and the president it ousted.

The head of the delegation from the regional ECOWAS bloc, former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, said that detained Malian president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was doing relatively well.

“We saw him, he’s very fine,” said Jonathan, who had earlier met for half an hour with the soldiers who seized power on Tuesday, including new strongman Colonel Assimi Goita.

Jonathan said negotiations were going well and he was “very hopeful”.

Rebel soldiers seized Keita and other leaders after a mutiny on Tuesday, dealing another deep blow to a country already struggling with a brutal Islamist insurgency and widespread public discontent over its government.

Mali’s neighbours have called for Keita to be reinstated, saying the purpose of the delegation’s visit was to help “ensure the immediate return of constitutional order”.



A delegation of West African leaders headed by former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan arrives in Bamako. — AFP

ECOWAS Commission chief Jean-Claude Kassi Brou said late on Saturday that the talks took place in a “very open atmosphere and we felt a real desire to move forward”.

“We hope to be able to finalise everything by Monday,” he added.

Ismael Wague, spokesman for the junta which calls itself the National Committee for the Salvation of the People, also said the negotiations were going “very well”.

A source close to the junta said the ECOWAS envoys had made a “good impression”.

“We understand that heads of state, like Ivory Coast’s Alassane Ouattara, are working for an easing of tensions, for a peaceful solution, even if they have firmly condemned our seizing power. We are open to discussion,” the source said.

The envoys also visited the Kati military base outside the capital

Bamako where the coup began and which has become a new centre of power, the source said.

President Keita has been held at the base since the coup, along with prime minister Boubou Cisse and other high-ranking government figures.

Thousands of jubilant Malians took to the streets of Bamako on Friday to celebrate the toppling of Keita, who was reelected in 2018 but became the focus of widespread discontent.

The rally, originally organised as an anti-Keita protest by a loose coalition that has led months of mass rallies against him, was recast to “celebrate the victory of the Malian people”.

“I am overjoyed! We won,” said Mariam Cisse, 38.

But it was a different story on Saturday, when several dozen people who tried to rally in Bamako were dispersed by police.

“We are here this morning to show that we do not agree with the coup. But people attacked us with stones, then the police took advantage of this aggression to disperse our supporters,” said Abdoul Niang, an activist of a pro-Keita party.

— AFP

IN BRIEF

London bridge still shut to traffic after glitch

LONDON: London’s famous Tower Bridge remained closed to traffic on Sunday after its two middle sections, which lift to allow tall ships to pass along the Thames river, became stuck open.

“Tower Bridge remains open to pedestrians only at present,” tweeted the Corporation of London, which owns the bridge. The bridge’s visitor attractions, including a high-level walkway, remained open, it added.

The bridge “experienced technical issues and was locked in a raised position” on Saturday afternoon, it said earlier.

“Mechanics are working to fix the bridge. Please find alternative routes,” the City of London Police tweeted. The landmark bridge, one of London’s major tourist attractions, was built between 1886 and 1894.

It was “the largest and most sophisticated bascule bridge ever completed,” the corporation said.

The bascules, from the French for see-saw, were operated by steam-powered hydraulic systems that have been driven by oil and electricity since 1976, it said. — dpa

N Korea launches anti-smoking website

SEOUL: North Korea has launched an anti-smoking website on its domestic-only Internet network, a state-media outlet reported on Sunday.

An anti-smoking research centre launched the “Anti-smoking 1.0” site on the country’s computer network system last month to provide the public with information about quitting smoking, Yonhap News Agency quoted the North Korean outlet, Meari as saying.

The website is not accessible from outside as the North’s strictly controlled computer network, Kwangmyongsong, is disconnected from the global Internet to prevent people from accessing outside information.

Meari said that providing science-based information is key to the anti-smoking campaign. — IANS

Nato denies troops on Belarus border

MINSK: Nato has denied “baseless” allegations by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko that “foreign powers” were organising a build-up of troops on the country’s border amid the ongoing tensions.

In a statement, Nato said it posed “no threat to Belarus or any other country” and had “no military build-up in the region”, the BBC reported.

“Our posture is strictly defensive,” it said. Nato’s remarks come after Lukashenko, dressed in military fatigues, said on Saturday that he had placed his armed forces on “high alert” and accused Nato of trying to split up Belarus and install a new president in Minsk.

He said troops in Poland and Lithuania were readying themselves, and that he was moving his armed forces to the country’s western border. — IANS

UK approached for Sharif’ extradition

LAHORE/ISLAMABAD: Declaring former prime minister Nawaz Sharif an “absconder”, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Accountability and Interior Shahzad Akbar has said that Sharif’s four-week bail on medical grounds expired in December last year and the government had already approached the UK government for his extradition.

“The government is treating him (Sharif) as an absconder and has already sent a request to the British government to extradite him,” Akbar said while addressing a press conference in Lahore.

“His stroll on London roads is a slap in the face of the judiciary and the government cannot allow this. There is nothing personal in it: we are only trying to implement the law and fulfil its requirements,” the adviser maintained.

— IANS

Hijri Year signifies a new era...

A

few days ago, Muslims all over the world have observed the New Hijri Year, marking the start of a new chapter in life. Possible, many non-Muslims would wonder how the Hijri year is different! Others might be questioning why it is observed and what does it mean?! Perhaps some might question whether there is a different calendar other than the Gregorian one or not!

This annually marked occasion commemorates the migration of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from the city of Mecca to Madina, both in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This was the central historical event in the early days of Islam. It marked a turning point

in the Islamic history as it led to the establishment of the first Muslim state at that time. As the Islamic Calendar is concerned, it similarly consists of 12 months that are different than the Gregorian ones.

Every month is marked not by the start of a new moon, but by a physical sighting of the curved moon at a given setting. The most important dates in this calendar are 1st of Muharram, Islamic New Year, 27th of Rajab, Ascension

Day, 1st of Ramadhan, first day of fasting, 1st of Shawwal, Eid al Fitr, 8-10 of Dhul Hijjah, Pilgrimage season and 10th of Dhul Hijjah, Eid al Adha.

As another year has passed, a new one



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has just started, mirroring the Prophet's migration as an honourable challenge for human excellence and presented several lessons of patience, control, knowledge and wisdom. It stands as an improvement for the future generations to take advantage of, so they will be able to clear up all the difficulties and overcome the hardships they come across.

The Prophet's migration was part of a mission assigned with guidance to renew the call for Islam; the religion of all Prophets and Messengers who came before him. All of them in succession conveyed the religion, which Allah accepts to their respective audiences

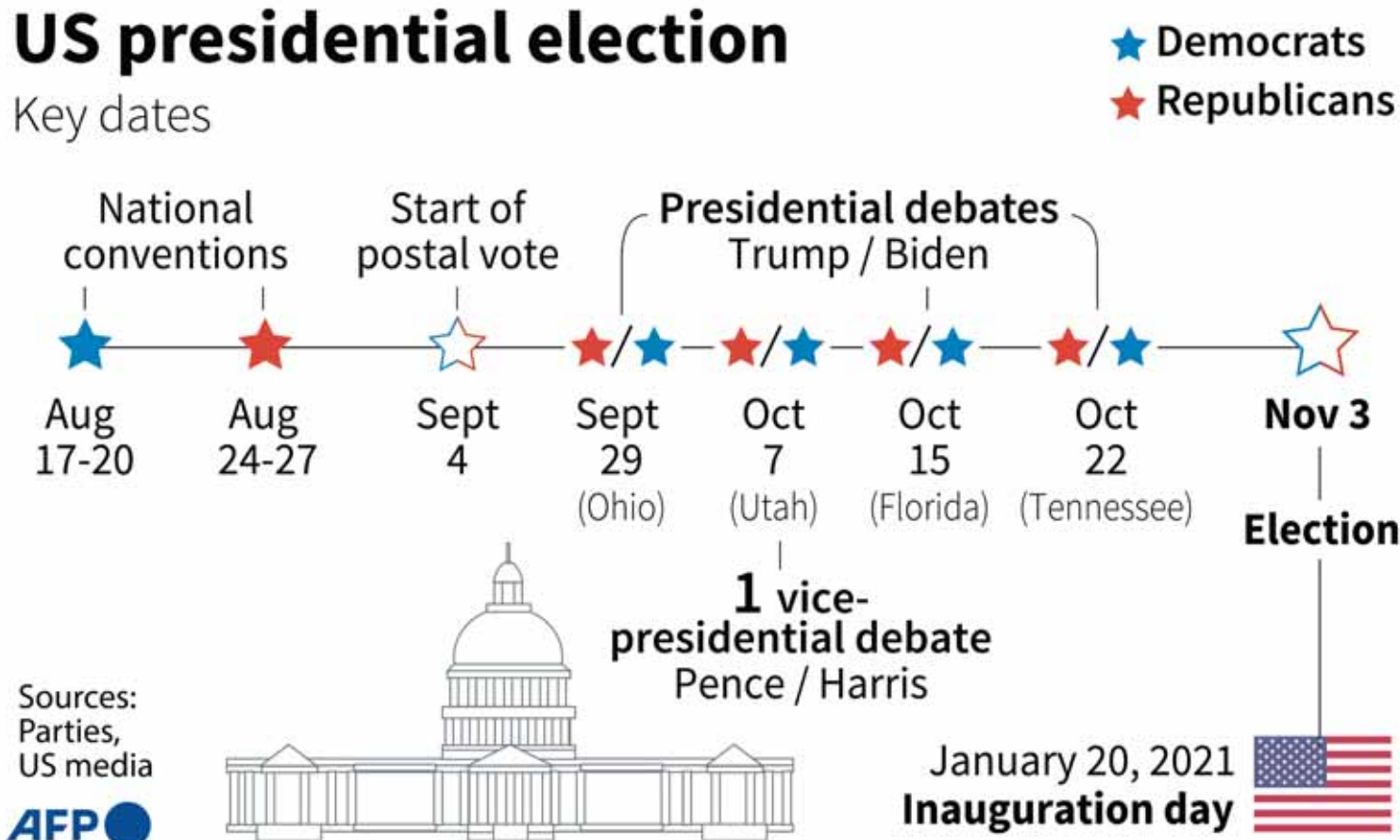
until the religion was fully completed by revealing the Holy Quran to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

As the verse confirms: "Say you we believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes of Al Asbat, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we submit to Allah in Islam."

The Prophet's migration marked a new era for he could unite all believers as if they all had a heart of a single man. It was a dawn that enticed millions of people from every corner of the world.

US presidential election

Key dates



Beirut blast final blow for trapped migrants

BAN BARKAWI

Thousands of migrants workers in Lebanon are desperate to return home as a coronavirus lockdown began last week, adding to woes caused by a financial crisis and this month's port blast that wrecked swathes of the capital Beirut.

The explosion has damaged homes where many migrant workers living in precarious conditions now risk eviction as job losses mount, said the United Nations migration agency, IOM, in an appeal for \$10 million to respond to the blast.

"I was very scared. I felt a very heavy wind and the building was shaking so hard as if it was going to fall," said Sierra Leonean migrant Lucy Turay who lives in an apartment with 20 people after escaping abusive employers.

"Everything is going from bad to worse. We just want to go home," she said from Beirut, adding that she can no longer find work as a domestic helper to pay for her siblings' education back home.

Lebanon hosts about 250,000 foreign workers, some working illegally, who are employed under the country's kafala sponsorship system which binds them to one employer and can lead to abuses, according to human rights groups. Migrants, mainly from Ethiopia, Bangladesh and the Philippines, make up about 25,000 of the 300,000 people affected by the explosion, and need food, shelter, cash for rent, medical aid, mental healthcare and support to return home, IOM said.

It said at least 15 migrant workers died and 150 were injured in the blast, which killed some 178 people in total, injured more than 6,000 and pushed the government to resign.

Workers who were laid off amid the crisis or are undocumented cannot afford tickets home and have been calling on their embassies to repatriate them, said Zeina Ammar, advocacy manager at Lebanese migrant rights group Anti-Racism Movement.

"There's more homelessness, there's more hunger, there are mental health conditions," Ammar said.

"The only way to save the lives of migrant workers... is to evacuate them from Lebanon as soon as possible." Days after the explosion, a group of Kenyan women, some whose homes were damaged, protested outside their honorary consulate in Beirut asking to be repatriated for free.

Lebanon's labour ministry said it was working with the consulate and humanitarian organisations towards finding practical solutions for their return.

The Kenyan Embassy in Kuwait, which oversees Lebanon, said in a statement that it would help workers with emergency documents and negotiate to waive overstay penalty fees but that returnees would have to fly back at their own expense.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

Republican convention can make or break Trump

SHABTAI GOLD

US President Donald Trump heads into the Republican National Convention on Monday still the most popular figure in the party and the undisputed king on the right, but he is trailing in polls and the four-day event will be crucial for his voter outreach.

After nearly four years in the White House, Trump is still running as an outsider fighting against the Washington "swamp" and the "deep state" that he alleges is seeking to crush his presidency.

He tells his fans that the Democrats will take away their guns, bring in socialism and denigrate religion. He warns that if his rival, Democrat Joe Biden, wins in the November election it would "hurt god," no matter that the opponent is a devout Catholic.

"I am the only thing standing between the American dream and total anarchy, madness and chaos. That's what it is. I am just representing you," Trump told supporters on Friday, as he seeks to present himself as the leader of law and order.

At a gun show in Florida ahead of the convention, the message resonates deeply.

"He's a business man. He wants to run this like a business instead of politicians who never get anything done," says Michael Lavigne, who runs a booth at the weapons event.

"I think the guy is a little coarse around the edges and stuff like that, but he doesn't hide what he feels — unlike politicians who never tell you anything," says Lavigne.

Biden, a former vice-president, is explicitly running as a decent, down-to-earth man who will govern in the old-fashioned, more boring style, without bullying on Twitter.

Trump himself admits he can turn people off with his brash attacks — but

After the Democrats held a well-regarded convention, President Trump will have four days to make his case as the Republicans hold their gathering. With the pandemic battering the nation, Trump is facing an uphill battle as the election campaign really gets under way.

says it's his record that counts.

In almost every speech Trump cites the low unemployment rate during his time in office, taking full credit for the economic expansion that began before he was elected.

However, that was pre-pandemic. Now, unemployment is in the double digits and polls show voters are increasingly upset with how the White House handled the coronavirus outbreak, leaving the US particularly hard hit compared to peer nations.

Trump is trailing Biden by several points nationally, and, crucially, he is lagging in a number of must-win swing states. "He made some mistakes," concedes Lavigne, a core supporter.

Trump, who rarely admits to errors, blames China for the pandemic and says he is the only one who can rebuild the economy.

He warns Biden will turn the country into Venezuela, a hyperbolic comment that has become a catch-phrase among Trump's loyalists.

The strategy of primarily feeding his core base creates high levels of enthusiasm among his supporters that, for now, seems to dwarf the Democrats' energy for Biden.

But, there is also evidence of increasingly ardent resentment towards Trump which is helping Biden invigorate a coalition of the left and the right against the incumbent.

Not only did left-wing stalwart Senator Bernie Sanders lend his full support to Biden, all but ensuring progressives will stay on board, but each night of the Democratic convention last week featured Republicans defecting to support the rival party.

Trump and his party will have four nights on the national stage to convince voters that he is more than a brash populist who divides the nation, and that the more than 170,000 deaths from the virus, and the millions of lost jobs, are not his fault.

One key difference between the Democrats and Republicans, is that Trump's party is determined to hold more of its convention in person.

The Democratic affair was almost entirely online, but Trump himself might show up in Charlotte, North Carolina and the roll-call of the nomination is scheduled to happen with the delegates in the room.

Whether this serves to show the president as the man determined to get the economy back up and running or turns off people already nervous about the pandemic, remains to be seen.

Parts of the convention will take place at the White House and will likely stoke criticism of Trump for using federal property for his campaign.

— dpa

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JAMES, DAVIS

DOMINATE

BLAZERS

MIAMI: LeBron James finished with 38 points as the Los Angeles Lakers outplayed the Portland Trail Blazers at both ends of the floor on Saturday for a 116-108 win in game three of their Western Conference play-off series.

James also had 12 rebounds and eight assists while Anthony Davis scored 23 of his 29 points in the second half as the Lakers grabbed a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven first round series in the NBA's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 13 points and Alex Caruso added 10 points and seven assists for the Lakers.

Game four is scheduled for Monday.

James said he is getting more comfortable at sharing the offensive load with Davis in key play-off games.

"We try to work off one another," James said. "There are going to be times when he has it going, so I try to do other things like make sure we keep offence going, and keep our pace flowing."

"Tonight we both had our opportunities. We just tried to make the most of it and live with the results. "There are no egos. We want both of us to succeed."

James also passed former San Antonio Spurs player Tim Duncan for the second most play-off wins (158) in league history.

"He lived in the post-season," James said of Duncan. "That was his address. For me to be linked with the Big Fundamental, it means a lot."

Portland's Damian Lillard tallied 34 points and seven assists while playing with a dislocated finger.

CJ McCollum finished with

NBA PLAY-OFF RESULTS	
(ALL SERIES BEST-OF-SEVEN):	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
Milwaukee bt Orlando 121-107 (Milwaukee lead 2-1)	
Miami bt Indiana 124-115 (Miami lead 3-0)	
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
Oklahoma bt Houston 119-107 (OT) (Houston lead 2-1)	
LA Lakers bt Portland 116-108 (Lakers lead 2-1)	

28 points and eight rebounds for the Trail Blazers, who also relied on 36-year-old veteran Carmelo Anthony for much of their offence.

Anthony, who played the entire fourth quarter, finished with 20 points, but also had five fouls.

The Lakers shot 50 per cent from the field and made 10 of 30 threes. Los Angeles was 28 of 43 from the

free-throw line, while the Trail Blazers were just 18 of 19.

"It came down to the fourth quarter. They made their perimeter shots and we came up empty too often," said Portland coach Terry Stotts. "I hate to put it that simply, but that is the way it was."

BUCKS BACK IN BUSINESS

The Milwaukee Bucks looked more like the team with the best record in the NBA as they rolled to a 121-107 victory over Orlando to take a 2-1 lead in their play-off series.

Giannis Antetokounmpo — in the running for a second straight NBA Most Valuable Player Award — scored 35 points and pulled down 11 rebounds as the Bucks edged ahead in the best-of-seven East series that saw them stunned by the Magic in game one.

Antetokounmpo was a model of efficiency in 30 minutes on the court, connecting on 12 of 14 shots from the field, including two of three from three-point range.

"It was a lot easier because we played defence," said Antetokounmpo. "Once we play defence, we're able to run in transition and it makes the game easy."

Khris Middleton added 17 points for Milwaukee after he was limited to two in the Bucks' game-two victory, and Brook Lopez chipped in 16.

The Bucks were already up 53-34 when Marvin Williams of the Bucks and Orlando's James Ennis were ejected after a second-quarter scuffle that began when they tangled under the basket.

Ennis then shoved Williams, who pushed back and grabbed Ennis's jersey before Ennis appeared to swing

a fist in a bid to free himself.

The ejections were likely costlier to the already injury-depleted Magic, and the Bucks closed the half on a 25-9 scoring run.

Elsewhere in the East, the Miami Heat pushed Indiana to the brink of elimination, withstanding a furious Pacers rally for a 124-115 victory.

Jimmy Butler scored 27 points for the Heat, Goran Dragic finished with 24, including five baskets from beyond the arc, and Bam Adebayo had 22 points and 11 rebounds as Miami took a commanding 3-0 series lead.

Oklahoma City Thunder's Chris Paul drained a three-pointer as part of a 12-0 run to begin overtime as his team edged the Houston Rockets 119-107 after being locked 104-104 at the end of regulation. The Rockets lead the series 2-1. — AFP

LOCAL FLAVOUR

74 players take part in Asian karate webinar



MUSCAT: The Oman Karate Committee participated with 74 male and female players in the Kata Webinar conducted by the Asian Karate Federation (AKF) via distant video communication on Saturday.

The webinar was opened by Major General Nasser Abdul Razzaq Al Razooqi, AKF President and First

Vice President of the International Karate Federation, in presence of Jin GM Shen, AKF Director, with the participation of 921 players from 29 Asian countries.

Nasser al Razooqi welcomed the participants in the tournament and wished them success.

Karate expert Tsuju Sakamoto

from Japan, a member of AKF, along with a group of players, made a presentation of some of the kata techniques and the transitional movements in it.

The Oman Karate Committee will also participate with a group of male and female players in the kumite webinar next week.



OOC issues annual report for 2019

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) has issued the Annual Report 2019 named 'Highlights 2019', which documented Oman sports results for 2019 in the context of the general Olympic scene and the attendance, activities and plans of OOC and its programmes implemented in the past year.

The 128-page report is in Arabic and English languages.

The report 'Highlights 2109' includes chapters, namely: Oman Olympic Committee (foundation, vision, mission and objectives) and the 2019 Olympic Committee programmes graded along the year, in addition to a speech from the chairman.

The book reviews the meetings held by OOC Board of Directors in 2019, the meetings of the Executive Board, the ordinary general assembly meeting held on April 18, 2019, and the general meeting to elect a new chairman for the committee.

The report devotes a chapter to the support and sponsorship agreement between Zubair Foundation and Oman Handball Federation and displays the sport events held by OOC at the Salalah Tourism Festival 2019, as well as the sports programmes, courses and workshops carried out during the past year. It deals with the committee's participation in the GCC, continental and international meetings, tournaments and championships.

The report also includes a detailed schedule of the achievements and programmes implemented by the



sports federations and committees in the Sultanate, along with monitoring the attendance and activities of sup-committees of OOC.

In the opening of the report, Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, OOC Chairman, said: "This annual report represents a renewed opportunity for Oman Olympic Committee to establish the principle of continuous communication and contact with the various components of the national Olympic movement and with its

partners from institutions and bodies working in sports field."

He added: "If the aim of this report is to document the activities carried out by Oman Olympic Committee, then it is at the same time a tool for recording the most important milestones and achievements of the events witnessed by Oman sports in 2019."

The electronic version of the 'Highlights 2019' will be available on Oman Olympic Committee website www.ooc.om

ANDERSON NEARS 600 MARK AS PAKISTAN STRUGGLE

SOUTHAMPTON: England great James Anderson moved to within three wickets of becoming the first paceman to take 600 in Tests on a rain-marred morning against Pakistan at Southampton on Sunday.

Pakistan had slumped to 41-4 in reply to England's mammoth first innings 583-8 declared, a deficit of 542 runs, when rain stopped play at 11:14 GMT and led to an early lunch on the third day of the third Test.

Anderson, 38, had done all the damage in a superb return of 4-21 in 11 overs.

The only bowlers with more Test wickets than the Lancashire swing specialist's haul of 596 are three retired spinners — Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan (800), Australia's Shane Warne (708) and India's Anil Kumble (619).

England, pressing for their first series win over Pakistan in a decade at 1-0 up in a match campaign, resumed in total command after Anderson had reduced the tourists to 24-3 on Saturday.

Even though they slumped to 11-2, Pakistan opted against a night watchman only for Anderson to have star batsman Babar Azam lbw for 11 with what turned out to be the last ball of Saturday's play.

New batsman Asad Shafiq's low run of scores continued as Anderson struck again on Sunday when the right-hander, on five, limply hung his bat outside off stump and edged to England captain Joe Root at first slip.

Pakistan were now 30-4, but almost as soon as Shafiq been dismissed rain stopped play for 25 minutes.

The players briefly got back on the field before fresh rain led to another stoppage in a match that, in common with all internationals in England this season, is being played behind closed doors because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Pakistan captain Azhar Ali was 10 not out and Fawad Alam, whose near 11-year wait for a Test recall ended with a four-ball duck in the weather-interrupted drawn second Test at Southampton, was unbeaten on five.

England's huge total was built on a national record fifth-wicket stand of 359 between Zak Crawley and Jos Buttler.

Crawley's 267, the 22-year-old Kent rising star's maiden Test century, was the tenth highest score by any England batsman at this level, while wicketkeeper Buttler's 152 was just his second hundred in 47 Tests. — **AFP**



England's James Anderson bowls against Pakistan during the third Test at Ageas Bowl, Southampton. — **Reuters**



Andy Murray serves against Frances Tiafoe. — **USA Today Sports**

Murray makes winning return

NEW YORK: Andy Murray claimed a hard-fought 7-6(6), 3-6, 6-1 first-round win over American Frances Tiafoe at the Western and Southern Open on Saturday, as the ATP Tour made a jarring return from a five-month COVID-19 hiatus.

From a tournament normally played in Cincinnati but moved to New York because of the coronavirus pandemic to masked ball boys and girls, there was very little normal about the return of professional men's tennis.

With no spectators allowed into the sprawling Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, matches were played in eerie silence under the shadow of the massive Arthur Ashe Stadium that will be centre stage when the US Open starts on August 31.

Working his way back to match fitness after undergoing a second hip surgery in January, Murray got

his first tournament of 2020 off to a positive start by surviving a near two-hour, 30-minute challenge from Tiafoe to reach the second round where a sterner test awaits in fifth seed Alexander Zverev.

"My goal is to come in and my hip to be feeling good," said three-time Grand Slam champion Murray.

"That's what I wanted so I don't mind how much tennis I get to play, I know that will come the practice, the more matches I get but the concern for me is my hip going to be well enough," the 33-year-old Briton added.

If Murray's game showed rust, his battling instincts remained sharp, particularly in the first set tiebreak when he trailed 5-2 before fighting back to take control.

Tiafoe secured his only break to go up 5-4 in the second on the way to levelling the match but Murray, twice Western and Southern champion,

broke the young American at the first opportunity in the third and closed out victory.

Canadian 12th seed Denis Shapovalov showed little rust in his first tournament since February as he reeled off nine aces to dispose of 2016 champion Marin Cilic 6-3 6-3.

With the win, Shapovalov, who faced just one break point over the course of the contest, improved his head-to-head record against the Croatian to 3-1.

Big-serving Canadian Milos Raonic fired 19 aces to topple Sam Querrey 6-4, 6-4 and set up a second-round clash with either Dan Evans or Russian 10th seed Andrey Rublev.

SAKKARI OUSTS GAUFF

Women's play began with a rematch of the Shenzhen final in January and another upset as Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova toppled ninth seed Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan 7-5, 7-6(6).

Croatian 15th seed Donna Vekic was also a first-round casualty, falling 6-2, 6-3 to twice Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka of Belarus.

The tournament also lost one of its marquee names when 13th-seeded Greek Maria Sakkari dispatched Coco Gauff 6-1 6-3 to spoil the 16-year-old American's Western and Southern debut.

After a run to the Lexington semifinals last week Gauff was put under pressure by her Greek opponent, committing 24 unforced errors and hitting only six winners.

Amanda Anisimova eased to a 6-3 6-3 victory in an all-American clash against 11th seed Alison Riske, while seven-time Slam champion Venus Williams was another high-profile casualty as she fell to Ukrainian 16th seed Dayana Yastremska 5-7 6-2 7-5.

— **Reuters**

Tokyo Olympic stadium gets a test run

TOKYO: Japan's top athletes put the new Tokyo Olympic stadium through its paces at a track meet on Sunday, one year ahead of the Games which have been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The televised competition was held behind closed doors, with only athletes and a few hundred journalists and officials in attendance at the 60,000-seat facility, which is still undergoing construction work on its exterior.

High jumpers got the Golden Grand Prix 2020 meet underway as up-tempo music and the lively voices of stadium announcers filled the air.

The jumpers however had no spectators to ask for slow hand claps to find their rhythm as they sped down the runway. Sprinters likewise rushed to the finish line but there were no cheers of excited fans and no collective sighs greeted the failed jumps of the pole vaulters.

A handful of male javelin throwers took matters into their own hands and offered slow claps in unison for each other as they took their turns.

"It's great to be back at my place of work," javelin throw winner Genki Dean told reporters. "It's so fun to compete."

The event was held as Japan takes cautious steps to reopen its economy, with professional baseball, football and sumo resuming in front of limited number of fans. But the nation is also seeing a rebound in new infection figures, particularly in urban areas including Tokyo and Osaka.

Japanese Olympic organisers have said the Games will take place from July to August next year but have yet to decide details, including how many



Athletes compete in men's 400m during the Golden Grand Prix 2020 athletics event at the National Stadium in Tokyo. — **AFP**

spectators to allow.

Many athletes voiced frustration about the postponing of the Olympics and the difficulty training during the pandemic, which closed many tracks and prevented group practices.

"I am turning 32 years old and, when thinking about my age, I was very, very disappointed (by the delay). I was performing particularly well so it made it even more difficult for me to change my mindset and move on," said Yukari Ishizawa, who took second place in the women's 3,000m steeplechase.

"Even when I was practicing, I could not tell what all this practice was leading to," she said.

"I finally realised that I was fortunate to have the opportunity to push myself to take on this challenge" of trying to qualify for the Olympics, she added.

— **AFP**



Japan's Ori Ushiro competes in the women's javelin throw during the Golden Grand Prix 2020 athletics event at the National Stadium in Tokyo. — **AFP**



AL HABSI

TO FOCUS ON ACADEMY

GOALKEEPING GREAT TO ANNOUNCE HIS FUTURE PLANS SOON

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Sharing his vast experience to the new generation is the top agenda for Oman goalkeeping legend Ali al Habsi, who called time on his 22-year career on Friday.

The Sultanate sports icon said he is ready to serve the country in any position related to sports during the coming period.

“I’m ready to share my knowledge and technical experience in the game for the development of sports in Oman, football in particular,” Ali told Oman TV in an interview.

In March 2018, the former goalkeeper of Bolton Wanderers fulfilled his dream of launching a football academy in Muscat.

“I will focus more at the academy and my future objective is to produce potential players from Al Habsi Football Academy who can shine in professional leagues. Definitely, the academy will be the right platform where I can share my international experience to the young generation. I hope to teach the right skills to the players and produce new talented players who can join Omani clubs and national teams. Later, we can see the potential players going abroad,” he said.

On a query whether he will take any



coaching position with the national teams, he replied: “I am fully ready to take any position related to my technical experience. It is an honour for anyone to be in any top technical head positions of the national teams. I believe it is necessary to attend some coaching courses which I will do in later stages.”

On chances of joining as analyst in sports TV channels, Ali said: “It is expected after my retirement but not confirmed. As a player in different domestic, GCC and Premier League teams, I have dealt as an Arab player with the top professional players as well as coaches during the last 16 years. It may make me the right person to provide the technical analysis for the Premier League. However, I have my own plans and priorities which I will announce very soon.”

Ali Habsi, who was the best goalkeeper in four consecutive Arabian Gulf Cups, affirmed that the national team is moving in right direction towards the World Cup qualification.

“The team is second in the group and is very close to the next stage of the qualification. Better physical preparation is required for the players in the next phase as it will feature the top teams in Asia. I wish all the best for my former team members,” he concluded.



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S AFRICA RETAILERS FEEL PAIN FROM PANDEMIC P15



ALGERIA CHAFES AGAINST EU FREE TRADE AGREEMENT P16

IN BRIEF

Chinese premier says economy could grow this year



BEIJING: Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said the country's economy could grow this year, state radio reported on Sunday, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The world's second-biggest economy grew 3.2 per cent year on year in the second quarter, recovering from a record contraction as coronavirus lockdown measures ended and policymakers stepped up stimulus to combat the shock from the crisis. Li also said the government expects more than 9 million new urban jobs to be created this year. — Reuters

UK plans to drop 'Facebook tax'



LONDON: British finance minister Rishi Sunak plans to drop a tax on technology companies such as Facebook and Google because it does not raise much money and could hurt a push for a US trade deal, the *Mail on Sunday* newspaper said. Britain introduced the digital services tax in April after slow progress in global negotiations over how to tax tech giants, many of which are US companies. The tax is expected to raise about 500 million pounds a year for Britain's public finances. That represents only a fraction of the 200 billion pounds in extra debt the country has racked up since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. — Reuters

Satellite tech to detect leaks in water networks in Oman

HIGH TECH: LEAK DETECTION USING IMAGERY FROM SATELLITES HELPED SAVE AN ESTIMATED 4.2 MILLION CUBIC METRES OF POTABLE WATER ACROSS WATER NETWORKS IN 2019.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Satellite technology is among an array of tools being deployed by the Public Authority for Water (Diam) to combat leaks in the country's ever-expanding water transmission, distribution and supply networks — leaks that potential costing the government millions of Omani riyals in commercial losses annually. According to the Authority, leak detection using imagery from satellites helped save an estimated 4.2 million cubic metres of potable water across the network in 2019. The technology, coupled with a plethora of other innovations adopted by the Authority, helped cut "commercial losses" down to 28 million m3 last year, from 40 million m3 in 2018, Diam noted in its 2019 Annual Report. Diam estimates the natural rate of rise of leakage at approximately 4 million m3/year, stemming from a combination of factors including pressure in the network, age of pipes, and pipe material and quality. Besides harnessing state-of-the-art satellite imagery to tackle leaks in the network, Diam has also rolled out an 'Active Leakage Detection' programme – an initiative entailing the proactive pinpointing and repair of leaks. The programme has helped reduce commercial water losses by an estimated 5 million m3 last year compared to figures for 2018. A further saving of 1.8 million m3 in potential commercial losses was achieved following the installation of 25 pressure management devices across various networks. More than 150 pressure



reducing valves, which are activated in the event of a leak, have been installed across the country's networks since the programme was launched in 2016. The valves decrease the pressure in the network and reduce the likelihood of a pipeline rupture and rate of flow in the event of a leak. Additionally, the targeted replacement of faulty pipes helped reduce savings by a further 0.5 million m3 last year, said Diam, noting that pipe rehabilitation is an

A further saving of 1.8 million cubic metres in potential commercial losses was achieved following the installation of 25 pressure management devices across various networks

ongoing priority for the Authority centring on the replacement of poorly performing pipes. "These activities have delivered savings to offset the natural rate of rise and provide a reduction

in real losses on a like for like basis. The overall impact of the reduction in both commercial and real losses have been to reduce the subsidy requirement for Diam," the Authority added.

Oman's potable water sector received RO 154.2 million in government subsidy last year, down from RO 155.9 million a year earlier. Although a heavily subsidised service, state subsidy to the water sector has been on the downtrend in recent years in line with Diam's mandate to, among other objectives, dramatically reduce government assistance to the industry. From a high of RO 185.7 million in 2016, it dipped to RO 172.3 million a year later.

TikTok says to sue over Trump crackdown order

NEW YORK: Video app TikTok said on Saturday it will challenge in court a Trump administration crackdown on the popular Chinese-owned platform, which Washington accuses of being a national security threat. As tensions soar between the world's two biggest economies, President Donald Trump signed an executive order on August 6 giving Americans 45 days to stop doing business with TikTok's Chinese parent company ByteDance — effectively setting a deadline for a potential pressured sale of the app to a US company. "To ensure that the rule of law is not discarded and that our company and users are treated fairly, we have no choice but to challenge the executive order through the judicial system," TikTok said in a statement. "Even though we strongly disagree with the administration's

concerns, for nearly a year we have sought to engage in good faith to provide a constructive solution," it said. "What we encountered instead was a lack of due process as the administration paid no attention to facts and tried to insert itself into negotiations between private businesses." ByteDance said in a separate statement that the suit would be filed on Monday, US time. TikTok's kaleidoscopic feeds of short clips feature everything from dance routines and hair-dye tutorials to jokes about daily life and politics. It has been downloaded 175 million times in the US and more than a billion times around the world. Trump claims TikTok could be used by China to track the locations of federal employees, build dossiers on people for blackmail, and conduct corporate



US flags are seen near a TikTok logo in this illustration picture. — Reuters

Trump claims TikTok could be used by China to track the locations of federal employees, build dossiers on people for blackmail, and conduct corporate espionage

espionage. The company has said it has never provided any US user data to the Chinese government, and Beijing has blasted Trump's crackdown as political. The US measures come ahead of November 3 elections in which Trump, behind his rival Joe Biden in the polls, is campaigning hard on an increasingly strident anti-Beijing message. Trump has increasingly taken a confrontational stance on China, challenging it on trade, military and economic fronts. Shortly after Trump announced his moves against TikTok this month, the United States slapped sanctions on Hong Kong's leader over the Chinese security clampdown after last year's pro-democracy demonstrations. Microsoft and Oracle are possible suitors for TikTok's US operations.

Reports have said Oracle — whose chairman Larry Ellison has raised millions in campaign funds for Trump — was weighing a bid for TikTok's operations in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Trump administration has also given ByteDance a 90-day deadline to divest in TikTok before the app is banned in the United States. The measures move away from the long-promoted American ideal of a global, open Internet and could invite other countries to follow suit, analysts said. "It's really an attempt to fragment the Internet and the global information society along US and Chinese lines, and shut China out of the information economy," Milton Mueller, a Georgia Tech professor and founder of the Internet Governance Project said previously. — AFP

Oman Aviation Group becomes global member of WTTC



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Oman Aviation Group, represented by GCEO Mustafa al Hinai, is now a Global Member of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), a leading organisation which supports the global private sector of Travel & Tourism and promotes awareness of issues and developments impacting the sector.

As Global Member, Oman Aviation Group now stands alongside over 200 thought leaders and visionaries from various industries around the world to share knowledge and best practices for one of the world's largest economic sectors.

With aviation and tourism having a vital and interconnected role in Oman's economic development,

WTTC membership will allow Oman Aviation Group to contribute positively to key aviation issues and advocate for Oman's growing prominence on the international stage.

The Global Member standing comes at a crucial time when countries around the world are keen to open borders and restart economies; coordinated efforts between airlines and tourism stakeholders are crucial for enacting safe travel measures in this unprecedented time of crisis.

Membership in WTTC underscores the aviation sector's importance as an enabler of tourism and as a national catalyst to advance the growth potential of Oman and bring about economic diversification in line with Vision

2040 objectives.

Established in Muscat in February 2018, Oman Aviation Group is an economic catalyst tasked with empowering the Sultanate's aviation sector and enabling the tourism and logistics sectors with the aim of stimulating economic revitalisation, development and growth.

Comprising core business units Oman Air, Oman Airports and Transom, it works diligently towards building an integrated aviation supercentre to lead Omani national aviation interests into the future. Oman Aviation Group is headquartered in Muscat and oversees its core sectors across the Sultanate of Oman. Its vision is to build a world-renowned national aviation ecosystem for a thriving Oman.

MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

Financial sector buoys MSM30 Index

MUSCAT: The MSM30 Index ended the week up by 1.79 per cent and its main sub-indices were all up as well, led by Financial Index which was up by 2.53 per cent. The Industrial index and Services Index were also higher by 0.29 per cent and 0.48 per cent, respectively. Traded value during the week was higher on w-o-w basis by 5.18 per cent.

Dhofar International Development and Investment Holding recorded a gain of RO 44.94 million in 1H20 on deemed acquisition of Associates because of IFRS 10/3. Company which as per its initial results announced profit of RO 466k for 1H20, published its detailed financials and announced profit attributable to shareholders of RO 45.41 million. Change in profit was largely because of gain on deemed acquisition of associates amounting to RO 44.94 million. This resulted because of the Company took a decision on January 7, 2020 whereby the Company ceased to be an Investment Entity and adopted equity accounting for investment in subsidiaries.

Voltamp which earlier did not disclose the profit/loss attributable to shareholders, disclosed net loss of RO 28.6k for 1H20 while the total profit of the company stood at RO 100.9k (non-controlling part of profit at RO 129.5k).

The Sultanate's oil production, including condensates, stood at 177.30 million barrels at the end of June 2020, according to the latest data released by the NCSI. Of the total production, crude oil production was down by 4.6 per cent at 147.76 million barrels while condensates production rose by 41.8 per cent to touch 29.54 million barrels.

Oman recorded a daily average crude oil production of 964,200 barrels at the end of June 2020, against 970,600 barrels over the same period of 2019. However, the average price of Oman Crude fell by 20.6 per cent to reach \$51.1 per barrel at the end of June 2020, from \$64.3 per barrel in the same period of 2019.

China retained its position as the leading destination for the Sultanate's crude oil exports at the end of June 2020, with the country importing 129.75 million barrels of crude oil from Oman. This was followed by South Korea (4.99 million barrels),

Category	6M19	6M20
Crude Oil	154,943	147,765
Condensate	20,828	29,540

Source: NCSI

India (3.43 million barrels) and Japan (608.2 million barrels).

The 65th GDB issue, received applications worth RO 239 million, subscribed 1.20x. Total allotment was RO 200 million. The average yield was 5.43 per cent while the highest yield was 5.70 per cent and the lowest was at 5.25 per cent. The 7-year bond carries a coupon rate of 5.5 per cent per annum and will be issued on 18/08/2020 with maturity on 18/08/2027. Last 7-year GDB # 63 issued in February 2020 carried coupon of 5.25 per cent with average yield at 5.10 per cent.

Oman reported 5M-2020 numbers for public finance. Government revenue dropped by 7.2 per cent in 5M-2020 to RO 4.37 billion compared to RO 4.71 billion in 5M-2019. Oil revenue was down by 4.2 per cent while the gas revenue was down by 22 per cent.

Expenditure was down by 10 per cent to RO 4.57 billion compared to RO 5.07 billion in 5M-2019. Current expenditure dropped by 5.5 per cent while investment expenditure was down by 23.7 per cent. Defence and national security expenditure aided in the drop of current expenditure. Defense expenditure was down to RO 1.08 billion in 5M-2020 compared to RO 1.27 billion in 5M-2020. Civil ministries expenditure also dropped to RO 1.65 billion in 5M-2020 compared to RO 1.75 billion in same period last year. Overall deficit reduced by 44.6 per cent in 5M-2020 to RO 198 million compared to RO 358 million in same period last year. Deficit in the month of May was RO 394 million.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Maximising the coefficient of value for Oman



ENG MICHAEL KATZ

Last week's flurry of Royal Decrees issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, effectively restructuring the government apparatus and system, promises to maximise the efficiency and productivity of ministries. It's a great new beginning that will have a very positive long-term impact on all Omanis.

We now have the time and the alwareness of local need to plan our future that incorporates developments that serve first and foremost the entire local community. We need to review carefully how we utilise our precious resources as well as considering what is the most positive impact of all spending on the economic, environmental, cultural, and social welfare of all Omanis.

"The world is changed by your example, not by your opinion." Paul Coello

We live in an incredibly beautiful country with an abundance of natural resources that include a sincere hard-working and resourceful indigenous population. Oman has been at the forefront of sustainable design, environmental awareness and conservation since the 1980s. Before his accession, His Majesty Sultan Haitham spent



decades enhancing and preserving the culture and heritage that makes Oman so unique and a world leader in sustainability and environmental preservation.

"Great leaders don't set out to be a leader.... They set out to make a difference. It's never about the role, always about the goal."

There are many opportunities in the sustainable development of a variety different industries where the maximum coefficient of benefit can be positively achieved from the aquaculture and fisheries sector to

There are many opportunities in the sustainable development of a variety different industries where the maximum coefficient of benefit can be positively achieved from the aquaculture and fisheries sector to scientific research and development, education, healthcare and most especially the hospitality industry.

scientific research and development, education, healthcare and most especially the hospitality industry.

We now have an extraordinary opportunity to refocus development

planning initiatives on country needs projects and eco-development that directly benefits local communities. With a renewed sense of a collective connection not only within our local

communities but regionally and internationally, we need to leverage our renewed awareness of local needs to drive positive and inclusive local initiatives. There is a need to look at projects from a perspective that maximises the coefficient of benefit to local and country wide development.

The advent of lower oil prices and contraction of economies worldwide have resulted in governments having to tighten fiscal budgets. These conditions will necessitate the reduction of government spending

through the consolidation of ministries and government agencies.

Since the government, sovereign wealth and pension funds are generated by all Omanis, it should follow that the priority for investment of all funds should be in developing projects that maximise the coefficient of benefit for local and countrywide development.

We need to reinforce our mandates to hire local SMEs all over the country, local service providers, local suppliers, and local consultants. This includes supporting regional and international consultants that have invested in setting up offices and local companies working together with Omani SMEs as a priority.

There is a need to create a measurement and/or mechanism that rates how ministries distribute their resources to maximise the coefficient of benefit or value with the greatest positive impact on the economic, environmental, cultural, and social welfare of the local Oman community. We need reward systems in place for innovation and value creation.

We are facing a challenging future economically which will drive a reduction in government spending that will include cutting government personnel. A safety net of a thriving private sector will need to be supported to provide competitive employment in the private sector, while public sector funds must be prioritised to have the maximum impact on the local community.

[Eng Michael Katz is a long-standing resident/investor in Oman, specialising in the development of sustainable and efficient solutions for EcoTourism, Hospitality, Aquaculture, Alternative Green Energy, Deep Ocean Water and Ecological ESG compliant projects]

S Africa retailers feel pain from pandemic

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's retail industry is feeling the pain from the coronavirus pandemic on two fronts — store closures during lockdown and the sharply reduced purchasing power of households.

South Africa, the continent's most industrialised economy, went into strict lockdown at the end of March, with people only allowed to shop for essential items such as food, medicine and winter clothing.

It is also the African country that has been hardest hit by COVID-19, with more than 600,000 cases and at least 2,500 deaths.

Restrictions have been gradually rolled back since June. Alcohol and tobacco sales were allowed to resume this week and, generally, business is now almost back to normal.

Nevertheless, retailers are reeling from the economic effects of months of suffocating restrictions.

South Africa's Massmart — majority-owned by US giant Walmart — said that it expected half-year losses to widen by as much as 42 per cent as a result of the nationwide lockdown. Massmart was already in dire straits before the pandemic and closed a 23-store electronic retail chain and 11 wholesale outlets shortly before the lockdown came into effect.

"Retailers that were already taking the strain" in an economy that was contracting even before the outbreak have found themselves vulnerable to the virus fallout, said Casperus Treurnicht, portfolio manager at Gryphon Asset Management.

South African shoppers have had to get used to wearing a mask, having their temperature taken at the door and using hand sanitisers.

And even as the economy



A fruit and vegetable vendor sits in a market in Cape Town.

— AFP

reopens, shops will continue to enforce such measures in order to protect both staff and customers.

Investment analyst Lulama Qongqo suggested that customers were likely to favour stores with visible hygiene measures.

"Retailers who cannot signal that it's safe to shop in their locations are probably going to lose, and perhaps

those are the ones more likely to be plagued by the question: 'Can we survive?'" Qongqo said.

But the measures come at a cost. Since the start of lockdown, South Africa's second-largest supermarket chain Pick n Pay has had to budget for protective equipment, a voluntary severance programme taken by 1,400 of its 9,000 employees

and bonuses for front-line workers.

The company, which has a market capitalisation of over \$1.2 billion, warned that its profits in the first half could be halved as a result of the fallout from coronavirus.

Faced with rising unemployment and uncertainty about the future, South African households are tightening their purse strings. And

that, in turn, makes it difficult for retailers to draw in customers.

The central bank has slashed lending rates by 300 basis points since January to boost spending, but economists fear it will not be enough.

"The consumer will be trading down and the operator with the best price and ease of buying will

44

Retailers who cannot signal that it's safe to shop in their locations are probably going to lose, and perhaps those are the ones more likely to be plagued by the question: 'Can we survive?'

LULAMA QONGQO,
INVESTMENT ANALYST

come out on top," said Treurnicht of Gryphon Asset Management.

On the other hand, digital services and e-commerce are booming.

South Africa's largest online shopping platform Takealot, which had estimated sales of around one billion rand (\$57.9 million) per month between January and March, recently reported a surge in demand.

"South Africans have embraced online shopping in a more natural fashion and this trend is looking likely to continue," said Matthew Leighton, spokesman for OneDayOnly, another digital sales platform.

Traditional brick-and-mortar retailers are also developing their omni-channel trade. — AFP

Turkey expects big drop in gas imports after Black Sea find



Turkey's drilling vessel Fatih sails in the Bosphorus, on its way to the Black Sea in Istanbul. — Reuters

ANKARA: Turkey expects its energy imports to fall significantly following a major Black Sea natural gas find and more discoveries could be made in another area now being evaluated, Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said on Saturday.

President Tayyip Erdogan announced the discovery of a 320 billion cubic metre (11.3 trillion cubic feet) gasfield on Friday that could come on stream as soon as 2023 and said Turkey was determined to become a net energy exporter.

If the gas can be commercially extracted, it could transform Turkey's dependence on Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan for energy imports, which cost the country \$41 billion last year.

Any reduction in Turkey's energy imports would also boost government finances and help ease a chronic current account deficit that

has helped drive the lira to record lows against the dollar.

"With the discovery, we expect a serious fall in imports. We have established the groundwork for our citizens to use natural gas at much more economic costs," Donmez told reporters.

"There is a new area of 6,000 square kilometres ahead of us. The evaluation of our experts is that we may see similar structures there too," he said in Istanbul.

"We can already say that the gas we will produce ourselves will be more economic than the gas we import... It is inevitable for prices to fall where the product is abundant."

Turkey has also been exploring for hydrocarbons in the Mediterranean, where its surveys in disputed waters have drawn protests from Greece and Cyprus. Greek and Turkish warships shadowing a Turkish survey vessel collided there last week. — Reuters

China approves BlackRock, Temasek and CCB joint wealth venture

BEIJING: China has approved a wealth management joint venture between US asset manager BlackRock Inc, Singapore state investor Temasek Holdings (Pte) Ltd and China Construction Bank Corp (CCB), as China gradually opens up its financial sector to international firms.

The announcement, was announced on the website of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC) on Saturday.

The article gave no further details about the venture or what services it would be offering.

The deal comes as China's government looks to open up its financial market to foreign firms, offering potentially rich rewards for international fund managers and others in the broader financial sector.

Top global financial players have long sought to increase their presence in the relatively fast-growing Chinese economy, and in October last year China scrapped some restrictions on foreign banks' operations in the country.

Two months later France-based Amundi, Europe's largest asset manager, and Bank of China Wealth Management won approval from Chinese regulators to set up a joint venture, while banks including UBS and JPMorgan Chase have won approval to set up majority-owned China ventures.

— Reuters

BUSINESS BRIEF

Delta Air Lines to resume more flights on international routes

WASHINGTON: Delta Air Lines Inc on Friday said it plans to resume 50 flights on the international route this winter and in 2021 that were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"While significant hurdles remain in the global fight against the pandemic, we are ready to connect customers to the people, places, opportunities and experiences they're longing for," said Joe Esposito, senior vice-president for network planning.

Delta said its resumed service would include daily flights from Seattle to Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing and Shanghai.

In June, Delta said it would resume flights between Seattle and Shanghai, making it the first US airline to restart operations between the United States and China after flights were suspended in February due to the pandemic.

The US airline said earlier this week that it would continue blocking middle seats through at least January 6, covering the key holiday season, but would raise the cap on the number of passengers on its flights in October. — Reuters



A Delta Airlines jet takes off from Washington National Airport in Washington. — AFP

S Africa seeks proposals for 2,000 MW of emergency power

CAPE TOWN: South Africa has issued a request for proposals to procure 2,000 megawatts of emergency power, a step needed to help plug a severe energy shortage, the department of energy said on Saturday.

South Africa's state-owned power utility Eskom has been forced to cut power regularly, hobbling economic growth in Africa's most industrialised country as unreliable coal-fired plants struggle to generate enough electricity to meet demand.

Scheduled blackouts, known as load shedding, have resumed as South Africa has eased strict lockdown restrictions to contain the new coronavirus and has re-opened power-hungry industries, such as mining, in a bid to kick-start a weak economy.

During load shedding, which is meant to protect the national power grid from complete collapse, residents and businesses are typically left without electricity for a couple of hours at a time.

In December, South Africa issued a request for information (RFI) to source between 2,000 and 3,000 megawatts (MW) of generation capacity to be connected in the shortest time, at the least cost.

"All power procured under this programme is expected to be fully operational by not later than the end of June 2022," the department said in Saturday's statement, adding it expected to attract around 40 billion rand (\$2.33 billion) of investment.

— Reuters

Citigroup files third lawsuit over accidental Revlon payment

NEW YORK: Citigroup Inc filed a third lawsuit on Friday in its latest attempt to recoup nearly \$1 billion it mistakenly sent to lenders of Revlon Inc.

The third largest US bank has so far sued a dozen firms after an "operational error" that caused it to transfer \$900 million of its own funds to Revlon creditors one day after the troubled cosmetics company was sued over its restructuring tactics.

Several hundred million has already been returned the bank, Citi said in an emailed statement. But it has had to take legal action to recover over \$500 million from lenders who are refusing to return the payment.

"All of the funds owed to Citi have now either been returned or frozen by court order," the bank said in the statement. "We believe the law is on our side and that we will recover the outstanding funds."

— Reuters



A trader for Citigroup Inc works at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. — Reuters



SOARING MARKET

This is the great American comeback!

The record highs attained by Wall Street last week might come as welcome news for US President Donald Trump.

But the booming stock markets will offer little solace to the many millions of people who have lost their jobs and livelihoods as the coronavirus pandemic pushes economies around the globe ever deeper into recession.

“This is the great American comeback!” tweeted Trump’s deputy Mike Pence last Tuesday, after the S&P 500 stock index soared to a fresh historic high and the tech-rich Nasdaq notched up one record after the other in recent weeks.

However, the disconnect between the financial markets and the real economy could not be starker as coronavirus lockdowns destroy untold numbers of jobs and push even traditional economic powerhouses such as the US, Britain and Germany into unprecedented contractions.

The US economy, the world’s biggest, contracted by 9.5 per cent in the second

THE US ECONOMY, THE WORLD’S BIGGEST, CONTRACTED BY 9.5 PER CENT IN THE SECOND QUARTER, BRITAIN’S ECONOMIC OUTPUT SHRANK BY 20.4 PER CENT AND GERMANY’S BY 10.1 PER CENT

quarter, Britain’s economic output shrank by 20.4 per cent and Germany’s by 10.1 per cent.

For many, then, the party mood on stock markets might appear “indecent,” said Saxo Banque economist Christopher Dembik. But that was a “misunderstanding,” he said, as it is an investor’s job to place bets on the longer-term economic outlook.

And with governments and central banks currently pumping vast amounts of money into their financial systems to avert a meltdown, and some companies in the S&P 500 upgrading their earnings forecasts for 2020 and even for 2021, the outlook could actually be rosier than the current economic data suggest.

“The stock market is not the

economy,” said Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor.

A number of companies are already starting to publish better-than-expected earnings with activity picking up again as many countries begin to ease the draconian lockdowns imposed in the second quarter.

At a time when working from home, online streaming and social networks are an increasingly integral part of everyday life, it is technology companies that are currently tending to shine, while other sectors of the economy pick up the pieces from the economic disaster wrought by the pandemic.

Apple, for example, booked net profit of \$11 billion in the three months to June. And its share price has doubled

since March, taking its market valuation to over \$2 trillion, the highest ever seen on Wall Street.

In 2016, tech stocks accounted for 20 per cent of the S&P index. But their share has since risen to a third, according to Nicholas Colas, co-founder of the US firm, dataTrek Research.

“Whether technology stocks have further to run is the multi-billion-dollar question,” said Richard Hunter at Interactive Investor.

Patrick O’Hare, chief analyst at Briefing.com, appears to think they do. “The stock market remains convinced that the (US Federal Reserve) is never going to let any worst-case trading scenario unfold for the stock market.”

By slashing interest rates to zero and rolling out massive bond purchasing programmes, central banks such as the US Fed have placed a sheltering hand over their financial systems.

In March, the US Congress approved a mammoth \$2.2-trillion recovery package, topped up by nearly \$500

billion in April, and another one is under discussion. This is encouraging investors to bet on ever riskier assets in their hunt for returns, with stocks the prime candidates.

While Wall Street fizzles, financial markets in other parts of the world are also performing well — Japan’s Nikkei index and Germany’s blue-chip DAX are similarly near their all-time highs — even if the mood is not quite so exuberant.

“All the excess cash is systematically channelled into the American market, rather than to Asia or Europe,” said Christopher Dembik at Saxo Banque.

Some of the enthusiasm had petered out by the end of the week and Wall Street’s performance on Friday was tepid.

“One can’t necessarily take for granted that it will translate into a lower close for the stock market,” said Briefing.com analyst O’Hare.

It was a “well-known fact that this stock market has generally greeted any weakness as a buying opportunity.”

— AFP

DEADLINE LOOMS



Algeria’s main commercial harbour for importing and exporting goods is pictured in Algiers.

– AFP

Algeria chafes against EU free trade agreement

Days ahead of a final deadline, activation of a long-planned Algeria-EU trade deal risks unravelling as political and business leaders in the North African country warn it will undermine economic sovereignty.

The deal is meant to come into effect on September 1, a decade and a half after the two sides initially agreed their Free Trade Agreement as part of a wider pact setting out economic, social, cultural and judicial cooperation.

But as the clock ticks, concern has grown in Algiers about the coronavirus-hobbled economy’s ability to cope without tariffs on steel, textiles, electronics and vehicles — protective measures originally meant to end three years ago.

For Ali Bey Nasri, chairman of Algeria’s exporters’ association, “the agreement was badly negotiated from the start.”

“When the deal was ratified in 2005, the EU had only 15 members, while now it is 27 strong and in a few years the membership will grow,” said Nasri.

A free trade zone would be a “disaster for the national economy,” he added.

In early August, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune called on commerce Minister Kamel Rezig to reassess the European Union deal.

The head of state insisted that the deal “must be the subject of special attention, asserting our interests for balanced relations”, an official statement said.

Algeria’s hydrocarbon-dependent economy is in an extremely fragile state, as the effects of policies around the world to contain the coronavirus pandemic have hit already diminished oil and gas

revenues.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts that Algeria’s economy will shrink 5.2 per cent this year.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad pledged a thorough review of the country’s trade terms and promised to revise all economic and commercial agreements “harmful to the country”. Djerad did not mention the EU free trade deal explicitly, but he was clearly alluding to it.

ALGERIA’S HYDROCARBON-DEPENDENT ECONOMY IS IN AN EXTREMELY FRAGILE STATE, AS THE EFFECTS OF POLICIES AROUND THE WORLD TO CONTAIN THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC HAVE HIT ALREADY DIMINISHED OIL AND GAS REVENUES

The EU is Algeria’s largest trading partner, and Algeria is the EU’s third-largest supplier of natural gas after Russia and Norway, according to the European Commission.

Algeria imported \$320 billion in goods from the EU between 2005 and 2019, according to Nasri, mainly in the form of machinery, transport equipment and agricultural products.

This figure is more than 20 times the \$15 billion in non-oil and gas exports Algeria sent to the EU over the same period.

Algiers has repeatedly asked to renegotiate the terms of the agreement.

It says the EU has failed to respect a part of the deal concerning the transfer of technology and the movement of people, with Algerian nationals finding it extremely difficult to obtain EU visas.

Algiers has also asked the EU to encourage European companies to invest in the country, but to little avail.

“The Algerian-EU partnership did not fulfil its promises for Algeria,” said economics professor Nadji Khaoua.

The deal is not a fair one for the country, the economist contends, and opening up its markets to foreign consumer goods will do little to create an economy less dependent on oil revenues, nor will it make it more productive.

“A pause is needed to discuss afresh fundamental issues that are hindering a fair distribution of economic benefits,” Khaoua said, adding that Algeria should renegotiate the deal with the EU.

Nasri agreed that a rebalancing of relations with the Europeans is sorely needed.

“They want to sell (to us) and we are cash-strapped,” he said. “I am one of those who says ‘basta’, said Nasri, using an Italian term for ‘enough’.

“The EU does not want Algeria to implement measures to protect our already fragile production,” he added.

Asked about the looming deadline for implementation of the trade deal, the ministry of commerce was vague.

An official said only that an inter-ministerial working group had been formed and tasked with “evaluating” the agreement, without giving further details. — AFP

GIANT SHOWCASE

Alibaba polishes its crown and half-hidden jewels

Alibaba is showcasing all its jewels. Quarterly sales growth at its main shopping business has rebounded. But cloud computing is growing nearly twice as fast while fintech affiliate, Ant, is on track for an epic initial public offering.

Things are back to normal for the e-commerce giant. Sales at the core Chinese business, which includes its shopping sites and supermarkets, topped \$14.3 billion in the three months to June, up a healthy 34 per cent year-on-year. That’s roughly in line with rival JD.com.

THINGS ARE BACK TO NORMAL FOR THE E-COMMERCE GIANT. SALES AT THE CORE CHINESE BUSINESS, WHICH INCLUDES ITS SHOPPING SITES AND SUPERMARKETS, TOPPED \$14.3 BILLION IN THE THREE MONTHS TO JUNE, UP A HEALTHY 34 PER CENT YEAR-ON-YEAR

Even so, peers including arch-rival Tencent and local challenger Pinduoduo are smashing it. The latter, whose stock has more than doubled this year, is expected to deliver a 66 per cent rise in quarterly sales on Friday, analyst forecasts on Refinitiv show.

Boss Daniel Zhang has other gems too. Revenue at the company’s cloud computing division jumped 59 per cent, to \$1.7 billion, as more Chinese enterprises shift their operations online. The business is an early leader in China’s nascent but fast-growing cloud sector. Analysts at HSBC optimistically estimate it could ring in 80 billion yuan (\$11.6 billion) in sales by 2022. On 6.4 times forward sales — a discount to more mature global competitors - the bank calculates Alibaba’s cloud business could be worth \$74 billion.

Ant’s upcoming debut is another bright spot. Alibaba converted a profit-sharing agreement with its payments affiliate into a 33 per cent stake in 2018. That same year, Ant raised funds at a \$150 billion valuation.

The fintech giant is now readying a dual Hong Kong-Shanghai listing that could value it at more than \$200 billion. Alibaba’s stake, along with its cloud arm, account for roughly a fifth of the e-commerce giant’s \$676 billion enterprise value.

Shares of Alibaba have risen 23 per cent since the start of the year, outpacing the broader S&P 500 but trailing many technology peers. Alibaba’s stock now fetches 27 times forward earnings, Refinitiv data shows, below Tencent’s 32 times — suggesting a stubborn valuation discount has widened over two years.

Crystallising a valuation for Ant might help to close the gap and a listing of the cloud business could make sense too. Zhang has multiple levers to pull on. — Reuters



Employees work at a logistics base of Suning ahead of the Singles Day online shopping festival in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, China. — Reuters



Facing COVID-19 and climate threats, Nairobi ramps up green efforts

WESLEY LANGAT

Peter Njeru used to live in central Nairobi's rundown Michuki Memorial Park because he had nowhere else to go. Now the 28-year-old is restoring and guarding the green space, one of about 200 jobless former park residents hired to help with the work.

"This park was my home with other street families, though people were dumping here illegally," he said, noting that he used to collect and sell plastic bottles and metal scraps to buy food.

But after being evicted in 2017, he was hired for a few months to help clear trash in the park — and began guarding it in his spare time.

Now he has a full-time job keeping clean the once trash-choked Nairobi River that runs through the green space, earning enough to rent a house for himself and his family.

Kenya's capital city is one of the fastest-growing in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the United Nations, and more people, trash and homelessness have taken a toll, along with new challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

But a government effort to better protect and restore parks in the city — particularly along the Nairobi River — is now having a significant payoff, not just in jobs but in green spaces to beat the heat and cope with virus restrictions, backers say.

The effort is part of a broader push to expand green infrastructure in Kenya's capital, including ensuring widened road corridors have good sidewalks and drainage to prevent flooding, as well as more trees.

Maurice Kawai, an environmental compliance officer with Nairobi City County government, said such changes, including better water service and waste management, will help residents cope not just with the coronavirus crisis but with worsening climate change impacts and future pandemics.



Already it's improving air quality and making the city a more pleasant place to work, said Loyd Ngere, a carpenter who sells wood furniture near expanded sidewalks along the road to Ngong.

The roadside is much less dusty, he said, and "my wares are visible to customers who often pass by because many people prefer walking due to good and safe pedestrian sidewalks".

The effort to improve Michuki Memorial Park began in March, when the government allocated 30 million Kenyan shillings (\$278,000) to rapidly rehabilitate the park to create more green space for social distancing, said Julius Wanjau, who runs Nairobi's central business district.

"Early this year, the place was a criminal hideout, a (space for) illegal charcoal dealing, a dumping site, a home to many street families in Nairobi," he said, with evicted families continuing to move back into the park.

But since the park was again cleared, 1,200 tonnes of garbage removed, and other improvements made, "now the place is clean with cool air and you can even find fish in the Nairobi River, which were never there before", Wanjau said.

By asking former residents of the park what they wanted to see change, and giving them priority doing casual work to improve it, the project has also created what Wanjau calls "ambassadors" for the green space, committed to protecting it.

"They understand this place," he said.

The timing of the work also has, coincidentally, helped cushion many of the city's most vulnerable families economically through the city's pandemic lockdown, providing work as other jobs dried up.

Phillip Dinga, who works for the C40 alliance of cities pushing for climate action and advises Nairobi officials, said the kind of changes Nairobi is making are crucial across Africa, both to cater for swelling urban populations and cut disaster risks.

Carrying out such work is a good way to use government spending to spur economies trying to recover from the COVID-19 economic slowdown as well, he said.

"We want to transition Nairobi to a world-class resilient city," he said, including with air quality that meets World Health Organization standards.

Nairobi is moving towards that both by installing air quality monitors and working to make non-motorised transport - such as walking and cycling — easier and more pleasant, Dinga said.

Clement Ngoriaren, of the Kenya Forest Service, said his agency and others also are trying to identify more open spaces in the city that could be managed as urban forests to provide cooling, fresh air and recreation spaces.

Chris Kiptoo, principal secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forest, said green, environmentally smart policy was key to both making cities more liveable and recovering effectively from the virus slowdown.

"The solutions lie with us," he said during an online event, particularly in terms of finding "a deal that balances nature and people".

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

sanjoysengupta • Follow
Grand Mosque, Muscat, Oman

roy.subhajt9 • Follow
Ayn Athoum

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A life’s work shattered:
STAINED GLASS ARTIST
COUNTS COST OF
BEIRUT BLAST

Two decades of Maya Hussein’s work to restore stained glass windows destroyed in the Lebanese civil war was lost in an instant in the seismic port explosion in Beirut.

“I can say that in this blast, 20 years of my professional life was on the ground,” said Hussein, 60, who has worked on historic landmarks including many of Beirut’s churches. “Part of me has gone.”

The August 4 detonation of a massive quantity of explosive chemicals stored unsafely at Beirut port killed at least 178 people, injured some 6,000 and damaged buildings across a swathe of Beirut, carpeting streets in broken glass.

Damaged buildings included the Sursock Museum, a modern and contemporary art museum reopened in 2015, whose vibrant stained glass had been painstakingly restored by Hussein.

Its windows, which were particularly eye-catching at night when they were illuminated, were blown out by the blast.

At least 10 of the projects Hussein has worked on since the 1975-90 civil war have been destroyed. “Every day I am getting phone calls,” she said at her workshop on the outskirts of Beirut.

Hussein learnt her craft in France, sent by her father, a church engineer who used to order stained glass from overseas as leaded, stained glass was not common in Beirut prior to the war.

One of the projects in which she took greatest pride was the 19th century St Louis Capuchin Cathedral in the Bab Idriss district of Beirut’s historic city centre, an area where she recalls going to drink lemonade with her friends as a child.

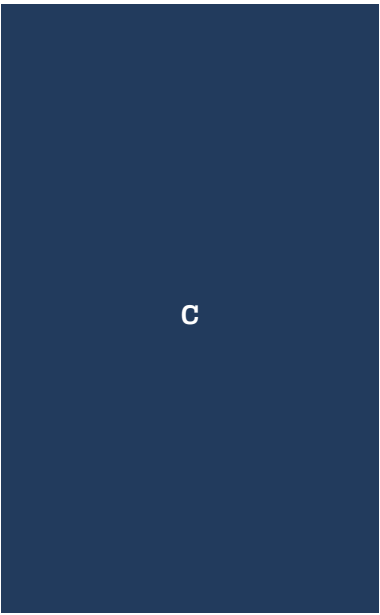
The windows of the church, which was destroyed in the war, were restored by Hussein over two years in a project completed around four years ago.

“I had tried, as much as possible, to feel the history of this church,” she said. “At that point I broke down, it was as if I was injured, certainly not physically, but emotionally.”

Hussein said she had been thinking about stopping work in two years but her plans had now changed.

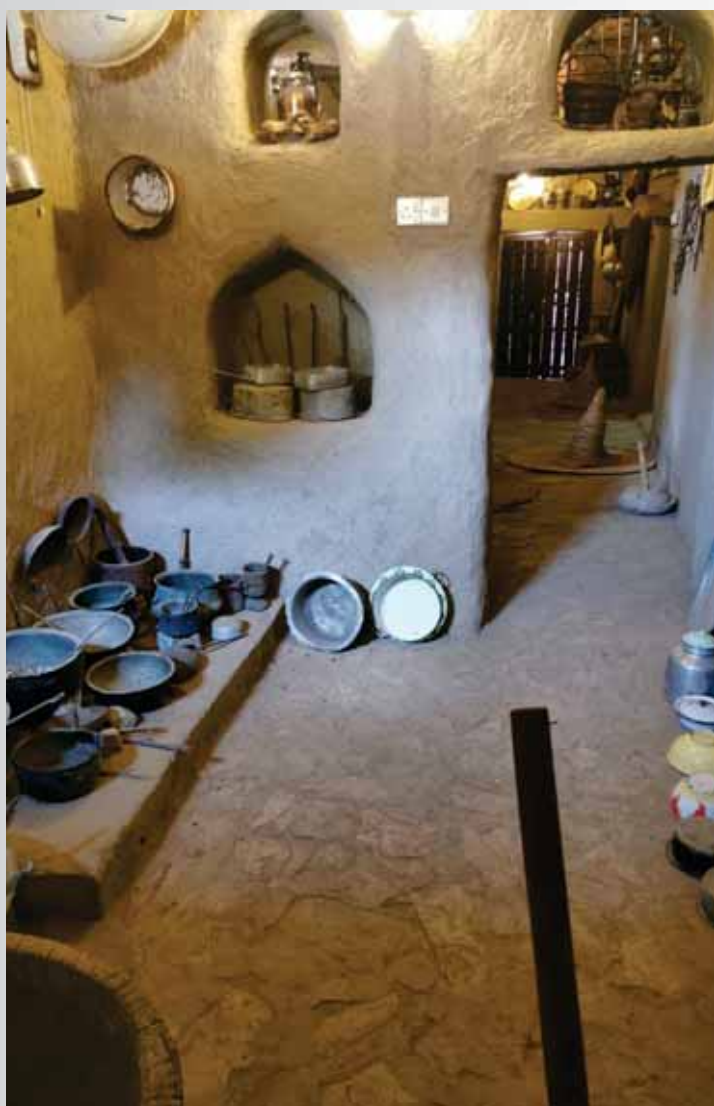
“Even if 20 years of my work has gone — and perhaps I won’t last in this work for another 20 years ... we will rebuild.”

— Reuters





A WOMAN'S EFFORT TO PRESERVE HISTORY



Ever wondered when a woman, keen in preserving the past and sharing the experience with the generation next, decides to convert the huge house bequeathed to her by her ancestors into a place for all?

"Bait al Gharbi", a must-see house of relics in the Wilayat of Rustaq converted an old house to a museum is the result of such a thought borne by Zakia al Lamki, a young national who believes in leaving a trail of culture and tradition of a bygone era.

Standing in close proximity to the Rustaq fort, this museum with relics and artifacts dating back to 300 years was the house of Zakia's father who gifted it to her. However, she didn't want it to go unnoticed and hence she transformed it into a house of rare curios.

The big family house with 14 rooms located in the village of Qasra was abandoned for long 26 until one of the family's children, Zakia bint

Nasser al Lamki stepped forward to change the home into a museum.

"It all began with my unyielding passion for heritage and culture and those small curios that make up history. I thought it was important to value the historical evidence left behind by our ancestors",

Zakia told the *Observer*, adding, "It has a lot of treasures inside and I wished this history to be

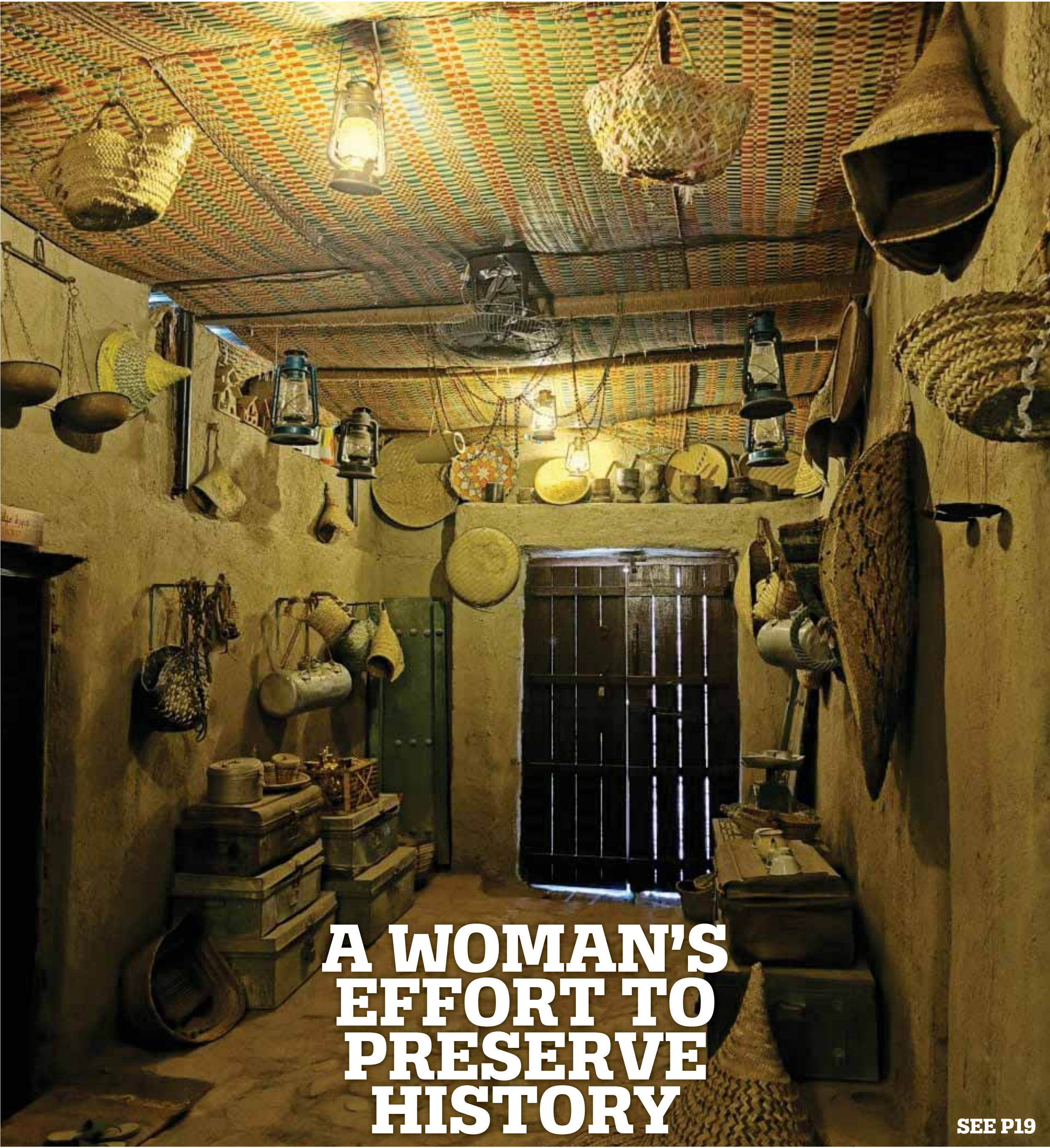
enjoyed by all from Oman and beyond."

Today, Bait al Garbi contains lots of precious objects starting with old books, swords, ancient coins, kitchenware, pots and potteries that talk about bygone eras. A magnificent array of aged perfumes, incense, bags, and other objects such as silver and bracelets give the colossal rooms an aromatic feel. Adding to its rustic look are different handicrafts, old mattresses, old copper and metal vessels, and manufacturing tools used in the production of milk and dairy products.

The historic village of Rustaq has other popular attractions Al Hazm Fort and Ain al Kasafa, vis-a-vis Bait al Gharbi which is also grabbing the international attention with the visitors being the honorary ambassadors of the Omani museum. The one of its kind museum which is open to visitors from Saturday to Friday from 9 am to 1 pm and from 4.30 pm to 8 pm has more than a thousand visitors in a month and school children from various wilayats top the list.

features

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SEE P19

