



VACCINE TRIAL RESUMES AS VIRUS CONTINUES GRIM MARCH

Clinical trials of one of the most advanced experimental COVID-19 vaccines resumed after a brief safety pause, as infection numbers continued to march upward in countries across the globe. The world's hopes for a reprieve from the pandemic were dealt a blow last week when pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca and Oxford University announced they had "voluntarily paused" their vaccine trial after a UK volunteer developed an unexplained illness. — AFP



P12

OSAKA WINS US OPEN TO CONFIRM STATUS AS NEW STAR



P15

ONCE AN AMERICAN FOE, NOW A FRIEND: OPEC TURNS 60



P19

BARR AL HIKMAN: A PERFECT WEEKEND GETAWAY



OMAN

HM thanked by Afghan leader

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Dr Mohammed Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan, in reply to his Majesty's cable of greetings to him on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. President Ghani expressed his utmost happiness and gratitude for His Majesty the Sultan's greetings. He expressed his determination to promoting the existing bilateral relations to achieve the interests of the two countries and their friendly peoples. President Ghani wished His Majesty good health and wellbeing and the Omani people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

Sultanate welcomes Bahrain initiative on Israel relations

MUSCAT: The Sultanate on Sunday welcomed the initiative of the Kingdom of Bahrain in view of the joint tripartite declaration on relations with Israel.

The Sultanate issued a statement

reading as follows: "The Sultanate welcomed the initiative undertaken by the Kingdom of Bahrain, as part of the Kingdom's sovereign rights, in view of the joint tripartite declaration on relations with Israel.

"The Sultanate hopes that this new strategic approach espoused by some Arab countries will be a practical step towards establishing peace based on the termination of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories

and the setting up of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital."

"This embodies the two-state solution as stipulated by UN charters and Arab decisions and, at the same

time, reflects the expectations and demands of all Arab countries and peace-loving people aspiring for fair, final and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the world at large."

— ONA

OCCI Board elects new chairman

MUSCAT: Members of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Board on Sunday elected Ridha bin Juma al Saleh as chairman after the post fell vacant. The board also elected Ali bin Salim al Hajri as Deputy Chairman of the OCCI Board for Administrative and Financial Affairs and Dr Salim bin Sleyem al Junaibi as Deputy Chairman of the OCCI Board for Economic and Branch Affairs. The new board will last till 2022. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Sunday met OCCI Board members after the elections. He underscored the OCCI's keenness to support and facilitate the mission of the private sector. **DETAILS ON P3**



TIME TO SWIM WITH GENTLE GIANTS

The whale sharks, one of the most incredible creatures on the planet, is back in Omani waters. September to November is the annual whale shark season when these 'gentle giants' and their pups migrate south to the warmer waters of the southern hemisphere. But this year they arrived as early as end of August as they make their way off the Daimaniyat Island. **DETAILS ON P2**

INSIDE



TURKEY CONFIRMS SHIP IN GREECE ROW HAS RETURNED TO COAST

P6



RUSSIA HOLDS REGIONAL POLLS IN SHADOW OF NAVALNY'S POISONING

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 35°C
MIN: 28°C

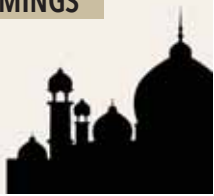
SALALAH
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 42°C
MIN: 27°C

SUNRISE 05:53 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:37
DHUHR: 12:07
ASR: 15:34
MAGHRIB: 18:17
ISHA: 19:28



Red tide planktons in Oman's waters are not toxic

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@ZAINABALNASSERI

Most of the phytoplanktons triggering red tide in the Sultanate's waters are not harmful, according to a new report published by Lynx, the monthly bulletin issued by the National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation of the Diwan of Royal Court.

According to the report, red tides were recorded 138 times in Omani waters between 1976 and 2019, but it has not caused direct problems to marine life.

As for the recorded deaths of the marine organisms, they were either due to a lack of dissolved oxygen levels, an increase in ammonia, or clogging of the fish gills.

The red tide occurs after sudden multiplying of one or more species of phytoplanktons that live in water whether in sea, oceans, rivers, and lakes. They are organisms that cannot be seen with the naked eye. These planktons are the source of food for marine life and contribute to the production of oxygen in the water.

Nevertheless the impact of this natural incident can be



reduced. The Centre of Marine and Fisheries Sciences continues to conduct studies and research on the understanding of the factors that cause the recurrence of the red tide. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is also currently implementing a strategic programme for the phenomenon of harmful algae flourishing (2020-2024) along with government agencies and institutions, to develop a mechanism for managing the phenomenon and its environmental, economic and health impacts.

TURN TO P3

SAMUEL KUTTY
@SAMKUTTYVP

The government's efforts to tame the spread of COVID-19 may turn out to be an exercise in futility if people do not follow precautions as the Sultanate reported 1,409 fresh cases and 18 deaths during the weekend.

While some traders are seen not adhering to the most basics of the safety rules by failing to apply proper sanitisation and temperature checks, customers are mingling freely without paying attention to social distancing measures.

This is despite the rules that "as a precautionary measure, people going to malls will be able to stay there for only two hours and those who have a body temperature above normal will not be allowed entry".

Similar to their usual habit of perusing every section in the hypermarket before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, people are aimlessly roaming around instead of shopping.

In another case of egregious non-compliance, some staff in malls and hypermarkets are servicing the customers without hand gloves, and improperly worn face masks, thereby exposing themselves and others to the risk of coronavirus infection.

TURN TO P5

FOLLOW RULES, TAME COVID-19

SOCIAL DISTANCING, MASK AND SANITISERS WEAPONS AGAINST VIRUS





No issuance of e-visa for now

KABEER YOUSUF
@YOUSEFKABEER

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has categorically said that no visas of any nature will be issued until the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 permits it to do so.

A video that is being circulated detailing the e-visa is about the steps to be followed while applying for e-visa when the service reopens.

“Right now, there is no approval for any kind of visa, including work visa, tourist or any other, and the video (issued by the ROP) is just for educating the general public about the steps for applying for e-visa,” a senior official at the ROP told the *Observer*.



As part of the precautionary measures against coronavirus, the ROP had suspended the issuance of all types of tourist visas since March. Most of the services offered by the ROP have been opened on

July 1 except visa issuance with strict adherence to safest measures.

“Issuance of visas still needs to get the approval from the Supreme Committee and with the video, we aimed at giving the people an understanding of what e-visa is and how this needs to be applied,” he added.

“The online application process requires the user to submit the Online Visa Application Form and make an online payment if the application is for renewal of an existing visa. The printout of the submitted application, along with necessary documents, needs to be deposited at the nearest ROP visa office for the issuance of the visa.”



Key services sector discusses strengthening coordination



MUSCAT: Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, met with a number of officials in the government sector in the presence of Eng Isam bin Saud al Zadjali, Chairman of Muscat Municipality.

The meeting aimed at developing a methodology and mechanism

for coordination between the governorate and the key service providers.

This meeting came within the framework of enhancing coordination between government agencies in the field of services within the Governorate of Muscat, in line with the priorities of Oman

Vision 2040 for the development of sustainable governorates and cities, and the priority of governance of the state's administrative apparatus.

The meeting touched on the challenges that the governorate faces in providing services and the necessity of joining efforts of all parties concerned. — ONA

TIME TO SWIM WITH GENTLE WHALE SHARKS!

Migratory whale sharks arrive early this year at Damaniyat Island

LIJU CHERIAN
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

THE whale sharks, one of the most incredible and elusive creatures on the planet, is back in Omani waters.

These 'gentle giants' and their pups usually migrate south to the warmer waters of the southern hemisphere from September to November.

But this year they arrived as early as end of August as they make their way off the Damaniyat Island.

Citizens and expatriates will get an opportunity to dive with these marvellous creatures or get closer to them.

In addition to being the biggest fish in the world, it is the largest animal that is not a mammal. It can live for over 100 years.

Although a member of the shark species, few people know that the Whale shark is, in fact, a type of carpet shark. The whale shark is a close relative to the zebra shark, which calls the Damaniyat Islands as its home. They generally stay for a month or more before leaving in the direction of Indian Ocean.

They travel all the way to feed on planktons (organisms that live in large bodies of water) and draw large numbers of tourists. At first glance, people get nervous when they hear about sharks of such size; however, these sharks are, in fact, filter feeders. They feed almost exclusively on plankton, which makes them harmless to people.

At Extra Divers Qantab, the divers find that the Whale shark is one of their favourite animals to spot underwater. Martine Gohier, General Manager, M&N Tours by Arabian Shining Touch, says the Sultanate is a blessed country for its nature and whale sharks adventure is one of them.

Martine says that sharks



remain close to the surface of the water so we can easily observe them with masks. Snorkelling next to these magnificent animals in respect of their life and environment is an unforgettable souvenir.

“We respect ‘social distancing’ with them and also with all people by accepting only 50 per cent of the boat capacity to families in order to follow the government instructions for COVID-19.”

‘An incredible experience,’ says Samuel Tanon, Operations Director at Oman Tower Company, after he went snorkelling off the coast of Seeb with his daughters aged 8 and 12.

“Whale sharks swim slowly, just below the surface with their huge mouth wide open. My daughters held my hand tightly, impressed by its size, but the Whale shark is incredibly peaceful, and does not seem to be bothered by nearby swimmers. This experience is an opportunity to change our prejudice on

sharks. Most shark species are endangered, and deserve protection.”

Gloria Mbaga, a Canadian preschool teacher in Muscat, recalls those 30 minutes of swim with Whale sharks. “It was an extraordinary experience to be with such huge fishes. We watched two girls and baby sharks dive together and enjoyed playing with them. They are gentle and harmless towards people. Being able to see these astonishing creatures completely took my breath away.”

Similar to our fingerprints, there are ways to identify individual whale sharks. Each shark has a unique pattern of white spots and stripes that cover their dark grey back. Whale sharks have five large pairs of gills on the sides of its head, which also carry this pattern. The pattern behind the gills can be used by conservation researchers to keep track of the whale shark populations and study their migration patterns.





Tender Announcement

OMAN DATES PRODUCTION & PACKAGING Co.(S.A.O.C)

TENDER NO. 8/2020/TUMOOR

Construction of A Dates Factory in Barka (South Batinah Region)

Oman Dates Production & Packaging Company is pleased to invite Excellent Grade Contractors to participate on the Tender for the Construction of Oman Dates Production & Packaging Head Office and its Dates Factory in Barka (South Batinah Region). The Dates Factory will be used for dates processing operations, packaging, warehousing other related manufacturing activities in accordance with the highest industry standards.

The Tender Documents will be available for collection from 14th September 2020 from the Tender Board platform 8/2020/TUMOOR (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/product/publicDash>)

Note:

- The Tender fee is OMR 2000/-
- Only Excellent Grade & International Contractors are allowed to participate in the Tender.
- After purchasing the Tender Documents through the Tender Board Platform (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/product/publicDash>) Tenderers must collect the drawings and all related documents from Oman Dates Production & Packaging Company office:

Office No. 6, 8th Floor, Al Nahdah Tower 2, Ghala Muscat, Oman | P.O.Box 830, P.C.130

- For any further information/clarification please send an email to tenders@tumoora.com or call 24476200

Ridha al Saleh is new chairman of OCCI



MUSCAT: Members of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Board on Sunday elected Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh as Chairman after the chairman's post fell vacant.

The Board also elected Ali bin Salim al Hajri as Deputy Chairman of the OCCI Board for Administrative and Financial Affairs and Dr



Salim bin Sleyem al Junaibi as Deputy Chairman of the OCCI Board for Economic and Branch Affairs. Membership of the new Board will last till 2022.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Sunday met OCCI Board members after the

end of elections. He underscored the OCCI's keenness to support and facilitate the mission of the private sector.

Al Yousuf called upon the OCCI Board to consider revising the OCCI system in a manner that copes with the requirements of the next stage of rejuvenated renaissance in the Sultanate under the wise leadership of His

Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Earlier, Al Yousuf issued a ministerial decision to form an election committee to see to elections and vacant seats at the OCCI under the chairmanship of Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. — ONA



Total 89,746 COVID-19 cases in Sultanate

MUSCAT: The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 89,746, while the number of recoveries stood at 83,771, comprising 93.3 per cent, the Ministry of Health announced on Sunday.

The ministry also pointed out that 52 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of current hospitalised COVID-19-infected patients stands at 470, of them 161 are in intensive care units (ICU). Total death cases stood at 780. — ONA

Red tide planktons in Oman's waters are not toxic



FROM PAGE 1

A study prepared by Ahlam al Kharusiyah, a marine environment specialist, revealed that winter is the most productive season for phytoplankton, while the spring and summer seasons recorded the lowest growth.

Taking Majis Desalination Plant located in the Sohar Industrial Zone as a sample location in her study, Al Kharusiyah said continuous monitoring programmes for the physical, chemical, and biological

changes of sea water using the latest technologies will help in the study of the species.

The report said that the number of marine phytoplankton recorded globally is about 5,000 species, 60 to 80 species of which cause harmful plankton bloom, while another 90 species are proved to be toxic to the marine environment and human health around the world.

Noctiluca scintillans cause 50 per cent of red tide occurrences in the Sultanate's waters. It belongs to the group of flagellates. This is

non-toxic, but it leads to a lack of oxygen and an increase in ammonia in the water. Light southerly winds following the storm are responsible for concentrating the red tide on the beaches.

Another type known as Margalefidinium polykrikoides was first detected in Omani waters in 2008. Like the first one, it is also not toxic, but it leads to death of fish and coral reefs. It affects traditional fisheries and affects coastal tourism and leads to the closure of many desalination plants and refineries bordering the coasts.



PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN

INVITATION TO ORDINARY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Al Fajar Al Alamia Co. SAOG (the "Company") are pleased to invite the shareholders for the company's Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 30th of September 2020, through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository Company ("MCDC") website (www.mcdc.gov.om). In the event that the quorum for the first AGM is not met, Wednesday, 07 October 2020, 3:00 pm will be the date of the second AGM, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors' on Company's activity and its financial position for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.
2. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors' on corporate governance for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.
3. To consider and approve the statutory auditors' report and to approve the financial statements and the profit and loss account for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.
4. To approve the sitting fees paid to Directors' for attending meetings of the Board and sub committees for the previous financial year and to determine the Directors' sitting fees for the upcoming financial year, as per (Annexure '1').
5. To consider the transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 30 June 2020 (Annexure '2').
6. Approve the proposed transactions that the company will carry out with related parties during the financial year ending 30th June 2021 as per (Annexure '3').
7. To inform the Shareholders of the amounts paid towards social responsibility activities during the year ended 30 June 2020, as per (Annexure '4').
8. To consider the allocation of an amount of RO 10,000/- for Corporate Social Responsibility for the financial year ending 30 June 2021.
9. To appoint statutory auditors for the financial year ending 30 June 2021 and determine their fees.
10. To elect the Board of Directors for a new term of office (from the shareholders and/or non-shareholders). Any person wishing to be elected to the Board of Directors may fill out the nomination form that can be obtained from the company's head office. The completed form should be delivered to the Company's head office at least 5 days prior to the Annual Ordinary General Meeting, not later than 1:00 p.m., Thursday, 24th of September 2020.

Pursuant to the Company's articles of association and General Meeting regulations, by means of modern technology issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(a) A Juristic person, exclusively, has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.

(b) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date set for the Meeting until the end of the voting process on the day of the Meeting, and in the event that the shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be invalid, and he must re-vote again on the day of the Meeting.

Any questions relating to this Notice should be addressed to Ms. Laila Said Salim Al Hadi (Telephone No. +968 92432813 or email : laila@alfajar.co.om).

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisors



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THE FACE MASK HAS REMOVED HALF OF THE FACE FROM OUR
MOMENT-TO-MOMENT INTERACTIONS. WITH IT HAS COME A
REMOVAL OF CRUCIAL VISUAL CUES THAT PEOPLE HAVE USED FOR
MILLENNIA TO COMMUNICATE AND UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

Lost in communication

KABEER YOUSUF
@YOUSEFKABEER

Smile, they say, and the world smiles with you. Not if the world can't see your smile hidden behind the mask.

Many countries including the Sultanate mandate wearing masks against COVID-19 in public. Many citizens in countries without strict regulations wear them anyway to protect themselves and others from catching coronavirus. And in many countries, particularly in Asia, wearing masks – to guard against pollution, for example – was already the norm.

The face mask has removed half of the face from our moment-to-moment interactions. With it has come a removal of crucial visual cues that people have used for millennia to communicate and understand each other.

“Our minds light on the face like butterflies on a flower, for it gives us a priceless flow of information,” Daniel McNeill wrote in “The Face”, his 1998 book on its significance throughout human history.

Dr Abood al Sawafi, Vice Chancellor, University of Buraimi says that the two parts of communication, verbal and non-verbal are equally important in a communication process and one should complement the other in getting the right message across.

“Verbal communication, words, gestures deliver the message but raising voice and the body language, the way you stand and you look at the audience also really matter. One’s face reveals a lot of non-verbal messages to the audience and facial communication helps to pass your emotions to the audience,” Dr Abood, who is also a communication expert, said.

“Masks may hide the beautiful smile and expressions while preventing the virus from spreading. But remember, we have a bigger enemy to combat and our health is of top priority, we have to use the mask whether we

MASKING IS CHALLENGING FOR EVERYONE, BUT IT IS ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT FOR **PEOPLE WITH HEARING LOSS WHO USE SIGN LANGUAGE AND FACIAL EXPRESSIONS** FOR COMMUNICATION

like it or not,” says Ammujam Raveendran, an active social worker and environmentalist.

Shaheen Haris, Senior Sales Executive, Saud Bahwan feels that though the current pandemic scenario calls for wearing of masks as a necessary precautionary tool, a mask actually “masks” most of our facial expressions and also reduces our voice clarity thereby reducing the effectiveness of our communication greatly.

“Effective face-to-face communication happens with proper articulation of words combined with apt facial expressions, voice modulation and eye contact and this is not delivered properly when a mask is worn. However, we need to let go all these in view of public health.”

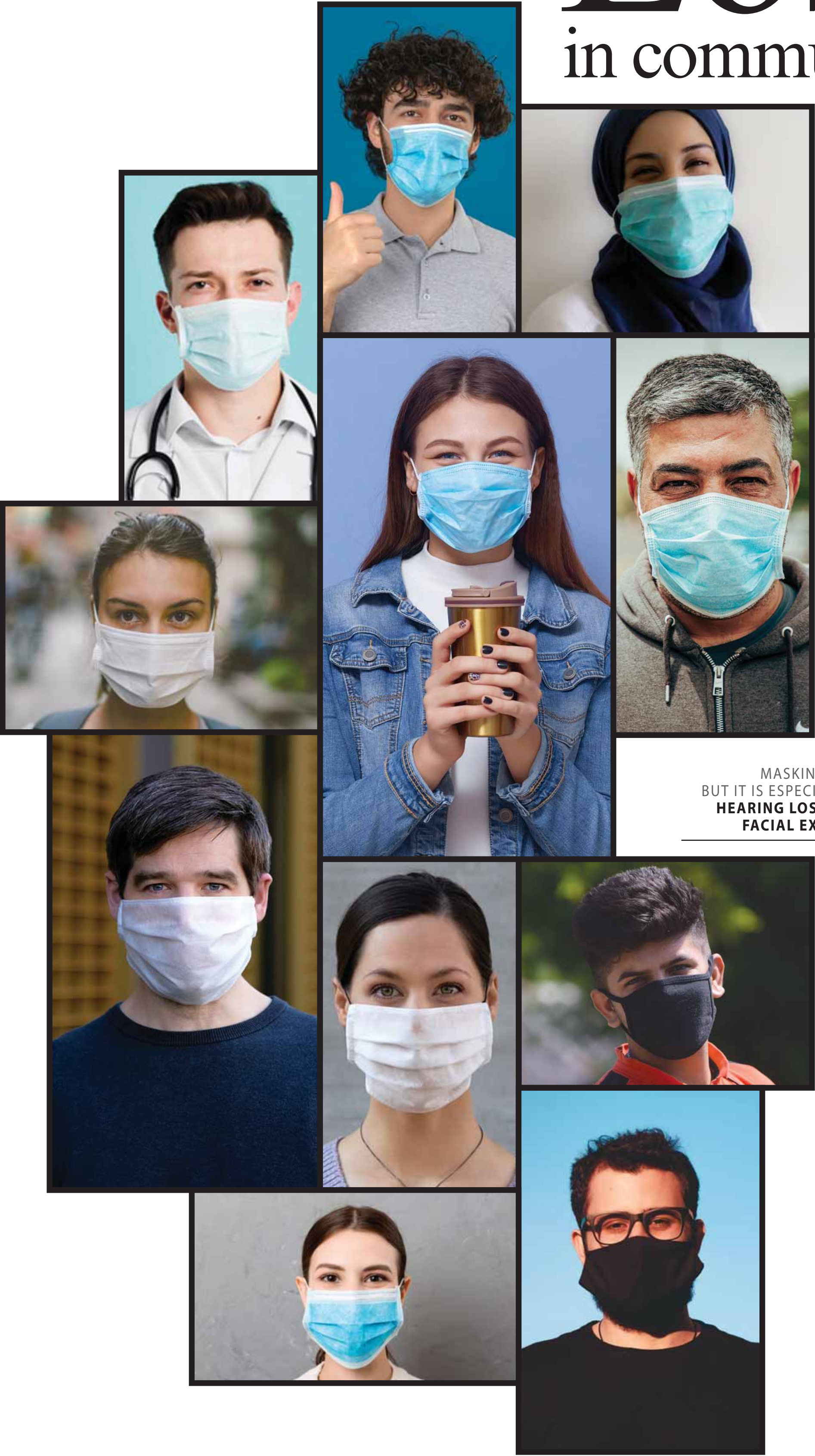
“For many, masks can make it difficult to communicate,” says Mohammad Osama Rawat, General Manager of Oriental Pharmacy, “but we are left with no choice. To avoid not being understood, it’s better to speak slowly and with a higher pitch of voice to help in making the communication better and clear.”

Anita Rajan, a housewife and an artiste, feels that masks are hindrance to our breathing and conversation.

“Masks prevent effective communication because the words get muffled and sound different. One cannot express one’s feelings through facial expression because three fourths of the face is covered. Having said, the enemy of the world can only be prevented from entering our body by wearing face masks along with other preventive measures,” opines Anita.

Masking is challenging for everyone, but it is especially difficult for people with hearing loss who use sign language and facial expressions for communication.

Masks slow down communication, no doubt. So we need to take time and ask people for clarification. For now, though, we still have the eyes. They’re windows to the soul. But, alas, only to a point.





Follow rules, tame COVID-19

FROM PAGE 1

When this issue of non-adherence was brought to the notice of Rashid Palayil, manager of a supermarket in Ruwi, he said: "We try our best to avoid crowding and also ask customers to use sanitisers and mask".

But it is hard to enforce compliance with personal hygiene habits, he said, adding, "Social obligation and commitment to abide by rules are more important factors."

Although rules stipulate that "all trolleys and surfaces should be sterilised with 70 per cent alcohol wipes and consumers should be provided with sanitisers at all times," these are ignored especially after the

gradual lifting of restrictions.

In one shop, one employee was found to be using a dirty piece of cloth to clean the trolleys without using sanitisers.

"We are constantly asking people to avoid physical contact and maintain a distance of at least one metre from others. The only way to combat the spread of the virus is to break the cycle of transmission by practicing social distancing," said an official in the Ministry of Health.

The Supreme Committee dealing with COVID-19 pandemic had earlier said that the virus could be brought under control only if people respected social distancing measures.

Challenges to e-learning programme reviewed



MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Education Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Chairman of Technical Committee for New School Year Preparations (2020-2021), on Sunday met a number of directors of the Online Instruction Programme (OIP) being endorsed as a medium of education under the circumstances of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Dr Ambusaidi had a close look at the OIP's updates, as well as

challenges and proposals to overcome the difficulties within the context of the main stage to train school principals, supervisors and teachers of classes from 5-12 and 1-4. The OIP also covers Special Education Schools and provides for training IT specialists to offer technical support to platforms designed to carry out the OIP.

The meeting included a visual presentation of models of online discussion groups and activities and

skills that were applied by instructors during the past period of the programme.

Haifa bint Mohsin al Lawatiyah, Director of Department for Feedback Assessment at an institute specialised in vocational training of teachers, spoke about the stages of the programme that preceded the preparation of online education platforms, e-discussion groups and a set of miscellaneous activities.

— ONA

Earthquake measuring 2.1 hits Bahla

MUSCAT: An earthquake measuring 2.1 on the Richter scale was recorded at 9:23 pm in Bahla on Saturday.

This was reported by the Earthquake Monitoring Center of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

Global food prices down by 9 per cent

MUSCAT: The general average of international foodstuff prices dropped by 9 per cent during the second quarter of this year, compared to the first quarter, according to information released by the Directorate-General of Food Security at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, whose data is collected from various international agencies such as UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Grains Council (IGC) and the International Sugar Organisation (ISO).

Statistics of the FAO show that the average of staple foods index dropped by 9 per cent during the second quarter of this year, compared to the first quarter of 2020. Sugar, whose prices dropped by 19 per cent, topped the list, followed by oil and fats (16 per cent down), meats and dairy products (6 per cent) and cereals (1 per cent).

According to the IGC data, the average of prices of cereals during the second quarter of 2020 maintained a steady rise at a marginal pace (1 per cent). — ONA

SMEDA CHIEF VISITS TRAINING, CRAFT PRODUCTION CENTRES



MUSCAT: Halima bint Rashid al Zariah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), visited a number of the Authority's branches and training and craft production centres in the Governorates of South and North Al Batinah and Dhofar. The visits aim to get acquainted with the workflow according to the set plans in the Authority's institutional integration project. The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority has started building its new system by holding a series of meetings and workshops in which the Authority's employees of various designations and ranks take part to develop appropriate strategies that achieve the objectives behind establishing the Authority. — ONA



RECHARGE DAM IN AL KHABOURAH



MUSCAT: A new underground recharge dam worth RO 97,000 is opened in Maihat Bani Kyum area in the Wilayat of al Khabourah under the auspices of Eng Suleiman bin Hamed al Sunaidy, Director General of Municipalities in North Al Batinah Governorate. The project has a storage capacity of 134,000 m2 and stretches for a length of 35 meters, height of seven meters and width of 12 meters. The project is expected to provide potable water through harvesting the rainfalls experienced in the wilayat throughout the year.

— ONA

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the *Observer* classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that **Ms. Fariba Ghorbanali Rahimi**, worked as a **Commercial Promoter**, holder of **Iranian Passport No. Y 33994819 & Oman Resident Card No. 116684105** is no longer employed with us. Hereafter, anybody dealing with her, company will not be responsible whatsoever towards the company.

Muneer Ahmed Sulaiman Trading
P.O. Box 568, PC 116, Mina Al Fahal, Sultanate of Oman
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Muscat Municipality

Announcement No. 45/2020

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tenders documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below:-

Tender No	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/050	2020/MM/Q5-36	ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT FOR DATA CENTER SYSTEMS (RE-TENDER) (E- TENDER)	Rial 25	08/10/2020	26/10/2020	Specialized

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the last date of bids submission mentioned above. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box for E-Tendering in the first floor at Directorate General Of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Directorate of Purchasing & Assets in Muscat Municipality Building, Ruwi, before 10:00 am as per the date mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).



BACK TO SCHOOL WITH MASKS



Syrian pupils, some wearing protective face masks, take their seats in class in the capital Damascus during the first day of the school year. – AFP

Sistani backs early election after UN meeting

NAJAF: Iraq’s top cleric on Sunday endorsed early parliamentary elections set for June 2021, following his first meeting in nearly a year with a senior United Nations official.

“The parliamentary elections scheduled for next year are of great importance,” said Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, 90, in an online statement after the bilateral meeting.

Iraqis should be encouraged to participate “widely,” he added, while warning that failing to hold the polls on time or in a free and fair way would “threaten the unity and future of Iraq’s people.”

Sistani does not make public appearances and typically issues a weekly Friday sermon through a representative.

He avoids meeting political figures, but has traditionally made an exception for the UN, which is seen as unbiased.

This year, the cleric has been quieter than usual — weekly prayers stopped in late February with the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, which also sparked fears for Sistani’s health.

On Sunday, Sistani hosted the UN’s top representative in Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert in his modest



Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert speaks to the press following a meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani in Najaf. – AFP

home in the shrine city of Najaf, 10 months since their last meeting.

“If done in the right way, in the right and credible way, they could open an important chapter for the country,” she said, referring to early elections.

Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi had announced in late July that Iraq would hold parliamentary elections nearly a year early, seeking to make good on one of the main promises he made when he came to power earlier this year. — AFP

Deadline for Lebanese govt formation looms

PARIS/BEIRUT: French President Emmanuel Macron has been pressing Lebanese politicians to deliver on promises to form a new government this week and haul the country out of its worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, his office said on Sunday.

Lebanon’s leaders promised Macron on September 1, during his visit to Beirut, that they would form a cabinet of technocrats without party loyalties in about two weeks to end a crippling economic crisis made worse by a huge August 4 blast in the capital.

An official source said Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib was expected to present his plan for a cabinet to Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Monday, seeking to accelerate a process that typically takes months of haggling over ministries.

“The (French) president continues his calls with the various political players in Lebanon,” the French presidential Elysee palace said, without giving details about any discussions.

Macron held phone talks on Saturday with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, a top politician, in an effort to remove an obstacle over the finance ministry post, which is traditionally controlled by others, a

Prime Minister-designate was expected to present his plan for a cabinet to Lebanese President Michel Aoun, seeking to accelerate a process that typically takes months of haggling over ministries.

political ally of Berri said. Berri, head of the Amal Movement, an ally of the politically powerful and heavily armed group Hezbollah, said in a statement on Sunday his group opposed the manner the cabinet was being formed, citing a lack of consultation, and did not want to join.

But he said he would cooperate to stabilise the nation. Donors have demanded reforms to unlock billions of dollars in aid that was originally pledged in 2018 but never disbursed. France has drawn up a detailed roadmap for tackling endemic



Supporters of Lebanese President Michel Aoun scuffle with security forces during a rally near the presidential palace in Baabda, east of the capital Beirut. – AFP

corruption and dealing with a host of other economic problems that have paralysed the banking system and sent the currency into tailspin, plunging

many Lebanese into poverty.

The prime minister-designate, has made few public comments. But sources say he wants to shake up the

leadership of ministries, some of which have been controlled by the same groups for years. Any government will need the blessing and support

of the main Christian and Muslim factions to function and ensure it conforms with Lebanon’s sectarian system of power sharing. Political sources say Berri’s position towards the new cabinet hardened after the United States imposed sanctions last week on allies of Hezbollah, a group Washington deems a terrorist group but which Paris says has a legitimate political role.

Meanwhile, Lebanon’s parliamentary speaker said his group opposed the way the prime minister-designate was forming a new cabinet and that it would not join on those terms, but that he would still cooperate to stabilise the nation in crisis, his office said. The office of Nabih Berri, head of the Amal Movement which is allied to the powerful Hezbollah group, listed in a statement criticisms of the way the cabinet was being formed by Mustapha Adib, including a lack of consultations.

“The problem is not with the French, the problem is internal,” Berri’s office said in its statement, after an ally said Berri had held a telephone call with French President Emmanuel Macron who is pressing for Lebanese reforms. — Reuters/AFP

Tehran defers new trial of UK-Iranian ‘hostage’

LONDON: Tehran on Sunday abruptly postponed a new trial of British-Iranian woman Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, according to her husband, who accuses the Islamic republic of holding his wife as a pawn in a dispute with London.

“Yes, today’s hearing was postponed,” Richard Ratcliffe said in London. Her Iranian lawyer was told “the case was not happening today,” he added.

There was no immediate comment from Iranian authorities.

Britain’s Foreign Office said: “We welcome the deferral of this groundless court hearing, and call on Iran to make Nazanin’s release permanent so that she can return to her family in the UK.”

Zaghari-Ratcliffe has spent more than four years in jail or under house arrest since being arrested in the Iranian capital in April 2016 while on a visit to see relatives with her young daughter.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who worked for the Thomson Reuters Foundation — the media organisation’s philanthropic arm — denied charges of sedition but was

convicted and jailed for five years.

Amnesty International UK accused Iran of “playing cruel political games” with Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and called on Britain to make it an “absolute priority” to get her home for Christmas.

She will turn 42 on Boxing Day, and was said by her British MP Tulip Siddiq to be “relieved, frustrated, stressed and angry” at Sunday’s postponement. “Once again she’s being treated like a bargaining chip,” Siddiq tweeted.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been on temporary release from Evin prison in Tehran and under house arrest since earlier this year because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Dashing hopes of a release soon, Iranian state media said on Tuesday that she and her lawyer had been notified of a new indictment, without giving further details of the charges or a trial date.

Ratcliffe had said last week that she was due to appear in court on Sunday, and that it was “increasingly clear” she was being held as a “hostage” against a longstanding UK debt to Iran. — AFP

Turkey confirms research ship in Greece row has returned to coast

ISTANBUL: Turkey on Sunday said the research ship at the centre of a row with Greece over energy exploration had returned to the Turkish coast, but insisted the move did not mean Ankara was “giving up”.

“There will be planned movements backwards and forwards,” Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar told state news agency Anadolu in Antalya, southern Turkey.

Akar said the movement away from contested waters did not mean Turkey “would be giving up on our rights there” during the interview broadcast live on Turkish news channels.

Tensions between Greece and Turkey escalated after the *Oruc Reis* research vessel backed by navy frigates was deployed to waters near the Greek island of Kastellorizo on August 10.

The mission was then extended three times despite protests from Greece and the European Union.

Athens says Ankara is violating



Turkish seismic research vessel *Oruc Reis* sails in the Bosphorus in Istanbul. – Reuters file

its sovereignty by exploring in Greek waters, but Turkey insists it has rights because of its nearby coastline.

Ship-tracking websites marinetrffic.com and vesselfinder.com showed *Oruc Reis* was just off the

coast of Turkey near Antalya on Sunday afternoon. The Turkish minister lambasted Greece’s “militarisation” of 18 islands, which was a “provocative” move that “increased tensions” between the neighbours.

But Akar reserved his harshest comments for French President Emmanuel Macron who has led the criticism of Turkey over its energy exploration in the region.

“It seems obvious that Mr Macron’s policies have failed,” Akar said during his visit to the Turkish seaside town of Kas in Antalya, only two kilometres from the Greek island Kastellorizo.

“The Greek people should not be overcome by Macron... or be used by him in his attempts to save himself,” the minister added.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Saturday announced a “robust” arms purchase programme, which included the acquisition of French-made Rafale fighter jets, as well as an overhaul of the country’s military.

Such moves were “provoked and encouraged” by Macron, Akar said, as he called for dialogue to resolve the problems. — AFP

At Afghan peace talks, the hard work begins in Doha

DOHA: Aghan government negotiators expressed cautious optimism for progress on thorny issues including ceasefires as peace talks with the Taliban were set to get down to business in Doha on Sunday.

A slick opening ceremony in Doha on Saturday saw the Afghan government, and allies including the US, call for a ceasefire.

But the Taliban, who have fought a guerrilla campaign against both since they were forced from power in 2001, did not mention a truce as they came to the negotiating table.

The head of the peace process for the Afghan government, Abdullah Abdullah, suggested the Taliban could offer a ceasefire in exchange for the release of more of their jailed fighters.

"This could be one of their ideas or one of their demands," Abdullah said.

Speaking later to journalists, he said the talks should continue in the "spirit of moving towards peace".

"There should first be a significant reduction in violence, then humanitarian ceasefires, and then a nationwide and permanent ceasefire."

Negotiations will be arduous and messy, delegates warned, and are starting even as bloodshed continues to grip Afghanistan.

"We will undoubtedly encounter many challenges in the talks over the coming days, weeks and months," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said as he called for the warring sides to "seize



Taliban delegates during talks between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents in Doha. — Reuters

this opportunity" to secure peace.

Nearly two decades since the US-led invasion that toppled the Taliban, the war still kills dozens of people daily and the country's economy has been shattered, pushing millions into poverty.

The Taliban have long worried that reducing conflict could lessen their leverage.

Even as technical committees from the two sides were due to meet to hammer out an agenda for the talks,

violence raged on the ground.

Officials said six police were killed in a Taliban attack in Kunduz overnight, while five officers were slain in Kapisa province.

A roadside mine blast in the capital wounded two civilians, and another explosion in Kabul district resulted in no casualties.

"Causing more bloodshed (during the talks) is a miscalculation. It is impossible for one side to win the war," said Abdullah, the chairman

of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation.

Nader Naderi, an Afghan government negotiator, said he was hopeful of an imminent meeting with the Taliban contact group.

"This will be the second working meeting between us. We are fired up and ready to go to end this fight," he said.

During a speech at the opening event, Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar repeated the

A comprehensive peace deal could take years, and will depend on the willingness of both sides to tailor their competing visions for Afghanistan and the extent to which they can agree to share power

insurgents' message that Afghanistan should be run according to Islamic law, highlighting a likely sticking point.

Baradar and Abdullah both met with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani on Sunday to discuss the process, according to Tamim's office.

A comprehensive peace deal could take years, and will depend on the willingness of both sides to tailor their competing visions for Afghanistan and the extent to which they can agree to share power.

President Ashraf Ghani's government wants to maintain the Western-backed status quo of a constitutional republic that has enshrined many rights, including greater freedoms for women.

Four of the 21 people on the Kabul negotiating team are women.

The Taliban, who stripped women of all basic freedoms while in power from 1996-2001, had no female negotiators.

"The Taliban have fielded a fairly diverse team of negotiators representing both hardliners and moderates, as well as individuals with strong Islamic credentials," said Ashley Jackson, a researcher at the Overseas Development Institute.

"They may not all agree and I anticipate internal differences but they are decision-makers — which cannot be said for the Afghan government side."

In a statement, Ghani called for "a lasting and dignified peace" that preserved "the achievements of the past 19 years".

Government negotiator Habiba Sarabi said the start of talks had been "very positive".

Abdullah said the process "could be the start of history made in the coming future — and hopefully sooner rather than later".

The US-backed negotiations come six months later than planned owing to disagreements over a controversial prisoner swap agreed in February.

Under the terms of that force withdrawal deal struck between the US and the Taliban, 5,000 Taliban prisoners have already been released in exchange for 1,000 government forces.

— AFP

South Korea eases virus curbs in Seoul region

SEOUL: South Korea will temporarily ease coronavirus curbs in the greater Seoul area after a decline in cases, officials said on Sunday.

The country largely overcame an early COVID-19 surge with extensive tracing and testing, but has battled several spikes in recent weeks raising concerns of a second wave of infections. The new cases, mainly in the greater Seoul region, home to half the country's 52 million population — prompted authorities to tighten social distancing measures last month.

But the measures on the metropolitan area will be eased starting on Monday for two weeks, South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun told a government meeting, as new local cases declined.

"We're not in a situation to relax yet but the effect of tightened quarantine measures has been showing little by little," he said.

From Monday franchise coffee-shops will resume normal operations, after restricting service to takeouts.

Restaurants and bakeries will return to normal hours, while indoor

gyms and hagwons — private cram schools — will reopen.

South Korea has seen triple-digit increases since August 14 with more than 120 new cases reported on Sunday, after several weeks with numbers generally in the 30s and 40s. But Chung warned of tougher social distancing rules during the Chuseok holiday — the Korean harvest festival — from September 30 to October 2 and urged people to stay home.

Chuseok is one of the country's biggest holidays with millions traveling across the country to visit family in the nation's largest annual migration. Although officials had earlier asked the public to skip the annual tradition, local reports said hotels at popular vacation spots were fully booked for the holiday.

"The long weekend is forecast to be the biggest crisis for quarantine efforts against COVID-19 in the second half of the year," Chung said.

Restrictions on large gatherings will remain, with nightclubs and karaoke bars still closed, authorities said. — AFP

THE RAINY RIDE



Commuters ride on rickshaws during rain in Dhaka. — Reuters

India reports over 94,000 new coronavirus cases, over 1,000 more deaths

MUMBAI: India reported 94,372 new cases of the novel coronavirus on Sunday, taking total cases past 4.7 million, as infection numbers rose in several states amid a gradual opening up of businesses.

The number of deaths rose to 78,586, with 1,114 new deaths, health ministry data showed. While several states showed a rise in infections, including the capital New Delhi and the central Chhattisgarh state, the highest numbers were from the India's biggest and richest state, Maharashtra, which reported 8,204 fresh cases.

Maharashtra's Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray in a news briefing on Sunday urged residents to wear masks and maintain social distancing, amid growing fatigue over a drawn-out lockdown that has made many lax about taking precautions. The western state recorded its millionth coronavirus infection on Friday



A worker checks the body temperature of a student before entering to take the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) at an examination centre in Amritsar. — AFP

putting it on par with Russia in the pandemic and stifling India's attempts to turn around the plummeting economy.

The state of 130 million people,

home to the densely-packed financial capital Mumbai, has pushed up infection numbers in India, which is likely to hit 5 million cases in coming days, behind only to the United States.

Meanwhile, the coronavirus vaccine might be ready by the first quarter of 2021, Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Sunday.

"While no date has been fixed for the vaccine launch, it may be ready by the first quarter of 2021," he said.

Harsh Vardhan also said that the government is considering emergency authorisation of COVID-19 vaccination to senior citizens and people working in high-risk settings. "This shall be done after a consensus has been reached," he added.

The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 is drawing up a detailed strategy on how to immunise the majority of the population, he said during the 'Sunday Samvad' programme where he interacted with his social media followers and answered their questions. — Agencies

Philippines reports 3,372 new cases, 79 more deaths

MANILA: The Philippines on Sunday recorded 3,372 new coronavirus cases and 79 more deaths. In a bulletin, the Department of Health said the Southeast Asian country's confirmed cases of infections had risen to 261,216, the highest in the region, while its death toll had climbed to 4,371.

Earlier, the Philippines on Saturday reported 4,935 new virus infections, pushing the country's caseload to 257,863. It also recorded 186 more deaths from COVID-19, bringing the national death toll to 4,292, eight months since the first corona virus infection was reported in the country. Fifty per cent of the latest cases and deaths were from the capital region of Metro Manila, officials said. More than 60 per cent of the latest deaths announced occurred in August and July, and 19 per cent were in September, while at least

one death was back in April, the Department of Health said.

Health experts warned that the number of infections was expected to rise as the government eases more restrictions in a bid to boost the local economy, which plunged into recession in the second quarter.

"We have not controlled (the outbreak)," former health secretary Manuel Dayrit told journalists on Friday.

"We're trying to control it, but we are not able to control it," Dayrit said the government "pretty much knows what needs to be done" to contain the spread of the virus, but added, "it's an issue of implementation, resources and the capacity to sustain resources."

The Philippine government has been lifting restrictions in the capital and other parts of the country since June 1.

— Agencies



Russia holds regional polls in shadow of Navalny's poisoning

NOVOSIBIRSK, Russia: Russians on Sunday voted in regional elections overshadowed by the poisoning of the main opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who had campaigned for tactical voting to push out the ruling party.

In 41 of the country's 85 regions, Russians are voting for regional governors and lawmakers in regional and city legislatures as well as in several by-elections for national MPs.

Voters went to the polls on Sunday wearing compulsory masks and gloves and undergoing temperature checks to protect against coronavirus infection, AFP journalists saw in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk.

The vote is seen as a key test for the Kremlin as the United Russia ruling party that backs President Vladimir Putin faces a popularity crisis amid simmering public anger over falling incomes and economic woes.

In Novosibirsk, Russia's third largest city, Vladimir Semyonov, a 57-year-old retired army officer, said he had voted for an opposition candidate, "to change something, so we don't have stagnation."

The poisoning of Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition figure, could also influence voters.

After he was evacuated from Siberia to Berlin, German doctors said Navalny had been poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent.

His associates believe the use of the banned chemical weapon shows only the Russian state could be responsible.

Navalny has set up an online system to help voters back the strongest candidates against the ruling party, which he calls the "party of swindlers and thieves."

He had been in Siberia to promote his "smart voting" campaign when he fell ill.

Elections in the country are for the



A woman casts a ballot during municipal elections in Tomsk, Russia. — Reuters

first time being held over three days and some polling stations for early voting were open-air.

Early voting began on Friday and Sunday is the main polling day.

Several regions recorded large turnouts in two days of early voting, with over 50 per cent of the electorate casting ballots early in the far eastern Jewish Autonomous Region and in Tatarstan.

The independent election monitor group Golos said it received a "stream of reports" that observers had been denied their legal rights to view documents and submit complaints, with conflicts sometimes ending in "fisticuffs."

It said it had also received reports of ballot stuffing and officials switching ballot papers cast by real voters for ones they had filled in.

SEVERAL REGIONS RECORDED LARGE TURNOUTS IN TWO DAYS OF EARLY VOTING, WITH OVER 50 PER CENT OF THE ELECTORATE CASTING BALLOTS EARLY

Electoral chief Ella Pamfilova decried "unobjective and mean" accusations at a briefing.

"Currently we do not see that many violations," she said.

The controversial three-day system was first used this summer for a national vote on constitutional amendments that made it possible for Putin to stay in power until 2036.

One of the highest-profile

campaigns is taking place in Novosibirsk, Siberia's largest city.

The head of Navalny's office in the city, Sergei Boiko, has created an opposition alliance to counter United Russia and the Communist Party.

Boiko's "Novosibirsk 2020" coalition has put forward around 30 candidates for the city legislature and campaigned with volunteers from Navalny's Anti-Corruption Fund.

"This is an opportunity to show the whole of Russia that democratic forces can unite," Boiko said on Sunday.

One voter, Damir Adgamov, a 26-year-old dental technician, said he backed Boiko's coalition after watching Navalny's videos on YouTube.

"I decided to try," he said. "I don't know if things will be better with Navalny or Boiko or worse, but at least we'll see." — AFP

European nations pin hopes on new measures as virus cases mount

PARIS: Austria and Britain were among European nations grappling with mounting coronavirus infections on Sunday, while restrictions were eased in the South Korean capital Seoul and work resumed on a much-hyped potential vaccine.

New cases in the UK reached more than 3,000 in 24 hours for the second day in a row on Saturday, with the *Sunday Times* newspaper reporting that around one-third of those were at elderly care homes where the virus has roared back.

"I think one would have to say that we're on the edge of losing control," Mark Walport, the British government's former chief scientific adviser, told BBC radio.

After a spate of local lockdowns this month, new government restrictions come into force across England on Monday, limiting social gatherings to no more than six people.

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz told citizens the country was already facing "the beginning of the second wave" as new daily infections climbed towards 1,000.

Kurz said the government would further restrict events and extend the areas where mask-wearing is mandatory to include all shops and public buildings.

Meanwhile France reported 10,000 new infections on Saturday, close to the peak of the first wave in April.

Prime Minister Jean Castex declined to announce any new major restrictions on Friday despite noting a "clear worsening" in the country's outbreak.

Around the world, 921,219 people had died of the virus from among 28.8 million cases on Sunday.

In South Korea, authorities in Seoul said they would ease some infection control measures introduced in recent weeks after a spike in cases in



A woman holds a small bottle labelled with a "Vaccine COVID-19" sticker and a medical syringe.

— Reuters file photo

the capital region, home to half the country's 52 million population.

Coffee shops, restaurants and bakeries will return to normal service while gyms and private cram schools can reopen.

While the country largely overcame an early COVID-19 surge with extensive tracing and testing, it has seen triple-digit daily new cases since mid-August after weeks with numbers in the 30s and 40s.

Police arrested dozens of participants in an anti-lockdown demonstration in the southern Australian city Melbourne on Sunday that drew around 250 people.

Defying stay-at-home orders, the crowd gathered at the central Queen Victoria market where they were met by a heavy police presence.

"Many protestors were aggressive and threatened violence towards officers," the Melbourne police said.

The Australian event followed a number of demonstrations in Germany and Poland on Saturday at which people protested against anti-coronavirus measures and defied mask-wearing rules. — AFP

Search on for survivors as wildfires torch millions in US West



Margi Wyatt reacts after returning to find her mobile home destroyed by wildfire as her husband Marcelino Maceda (background) searches in the ruins in Estacada, Oregon. — AFP

PORTLAND: Crews were to resume searching for the dead on Sunday among blackened ruins left by massive wildfires raging in three western US states, where millions of acres have burned in weeks and "mass fatality" incidents are feared in Oregon.

A blitz of wildfires across Oregon, California and Washington has destroyed thousands of homes and a half dozen small towns this summer, scorching a landscape the size of New Jersey and killing more than two dozen people since early August.

After four days of brutally hot, windy weather, the weekend brought calmer winds blowing inland from the Pacific Ocean, and cooler, moister conditions that helped crews make headway against blazes that had burned unchecked earlier in the week. Still, emergency officials worried that the shifting weather might not bring much relief to southern Oregon, where an apocalyptic scene

of charred residential subdivisions and trailer parks stretched for miles along Highway 99 south of Medford through the neighbouring communities of Phoenix and Talent.

"We're concerned that the incoming front is not going to provide a lot of rain here in the Medford region and it's going to bring increased winds," Bureau of Land Management spokesman Kyle Sullivan said in a telephone interview on Sunday. Oregon Governor Kate Brown called the perilous blazes a "once-in-a-generation event" and the director of Oregon's office of emergency management, Andrew Phelps, said authorities were bracing for the possibility of "mass fatality" incidents. At least ten people have been killed in Oregon, according to the office of emergency management. Brown has said that dozens of people remained missing across three counties. — Reuters

Tens of thousands rally as Belarusians stage one of biggest protests in Minsk

MINSK: Riot police in balaclavas harshly detained some 250 demonstrators as tens of thousands of people gathered for an opposition protest on the eve of talks between President Alexander Lukashenko and his main ally, Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Masked agents in uniform and plain clothes snatched people from the streets as they assembled for the "March of Heroes" demonstration, often pushing or punching them, video posted on the Belarusian news site TUT.BY showed.

"Some 250 people were detained in various districts of the capital," the interior ministry said in a statement, adding that those detained were carrying flags and "offensive" placards.

Access to mobile Internet was limited and central metro stations closed, with authorities moving police vans, military vehicles and barbed wire into the centre ahead of the protest.

Despite the violent detentions, tens of thousands of protesters gathered in the city centre for a new massive march, an AFP correspondent said.

"I came out for freedom and I am going to protest until we win it through peaceful means," Oleg Zimin, a 60-year-old protester, said.

He said he did not vote for Lukashenko. "He always lied to us," he said.

Belarusians have been demonstrating against Lukashenko's disputed re-election for a month, with more than 100,000 people flooding the streets of Minsk for four straight weekends.

The new march came as Lukashenko's security forces have stepped up arrests of protesters and



A protester holding a flag of Belarus rides during a rally against police brutality following protests to reject the presidential election results in Minsk. — Reuters

senior opposition figures who are still in Belarus.

The opposition announced the protest slogan "We won't let him sell the country" ahead of Lukashenko's first face-to-face meeting with Putin since demonstrations began, which is set to take place in Russia on Monday.

Analysts say Putin may seek to exploit Lukashenko's political vulnerability to wring concessions from him, but any agreements compromising Belarus's sovereignty and independence are likely to enrage Belarusian protesters further.

After a massive protest last Sunday, Maria Kolesnikova, one of three prominent women opposition figures, was jailed after she resisted expulsion

The unprecedented protests broke out after Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet state for 26 years, claimed re-election with 80 per cent

and tore up her passport.

More than 600 people were detained last Sunday in one of the largest waves of arrests since the early days of the demonstrations.

On Saturday, masked riot police

violently detained dozens of women demonstrators and threw them into vans during a smaller protest in Minsk.

Presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who the protest movement says won the vote on August 9 but was forced out of the country, paid tribute to demonstrators ahead of the march.

"Over the past month we have become a truly heroic people," Tikhanovskaya, a political unknown until the election, said in a video address.

"We are continuing our fight for freedom," said the 38-year-old former stay-at-home mother, who was forced into exile in neighbouring EU member Lithuania. — AFP

Child adoption, a two-sided social umbrella

To have a child at some point in life is the desire of every woman, whether as a first thought or a wish or already in planning form. Since the start of human history, women have become mothers as part of the natural process and a passion of almost all women. However, for some women, this aspiration may remain unfulfilled even after many attempts, which can often be associated with great sadness, and they look for alternatives.

Adopting a child could be one of the ways which can make woman a mother. Child adoption is a common social and historical issue exists to satisfy mutual needs of parents without children and children without parents. Adoption is the social, emotional and legal process in which children, who will not be raised by their parents at birth, become full and permanent legal members of another family, while maintaining the genetic and psychological connections to their family of birth.

Child adoption is a lifelong journey for all members involved in the adoption triangle, natural parents, adopted children and adoptive parents. It brings a chance of satisfaction for the biological parents because they might not be able to meet the needs of their



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ADOPTION IS A
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children for being poor or physically or mentally not healthy. Therefore, placing their children for adoption will make them more comfortable with a realisation that they chose in the best interest of their children.

The third party in this triangle is the adoptive parents, who are regarded the first beneficiaries of adoption. They will be able to satisfy their parental needs or other purposes they are seeking from adoption. Likewise, adoption is a helpful replacement for adopted children, who might be lucky for having somebody to take care of them. Case in a point, the mother of Prophet Moses, in an attempt to save her child from death by the Pharaoh's decree, placed her child in a reed basket at the edge of the Nile River. Pharaoh's family formally adopted Moses and his birth mother served as his nurse during Moses' infancy.

In contrast, the love and care given by the adoptive parents might never be a substitute for the natural love of the biological parents. This is like the difference between natural milk and the enriched one; both are called milk, but they are not alike as the natural one is much healthier. A child could once be a complete stranger for birth parents.

On the other hand, adoption sometimes brings psychological issues

for a child as it affects the emotional stability. The adopted child might experience loss, grief, lack of identity and confused self-concept. The adoptive parents might be ignorant of the fact that an adopted child is emotionally challenged. Separating a child from the real parents is depressing and could be a lifetime scar for the child.

Adoption affects all triad members, adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents and other birth and family members throughout life. Adoption could be a social umbrella spreading unfair parts of shade to all the involved members in this process. In fact, the placement itself has great impacts on a child, for better or worse, as s/he will be raised by non-biological parents, with all the challenges. Sometimes, the adoption experience is based on the gender and age of the adopted child and adoptive parents in order to build the chemistry between both parties.

Adoption is not a decision to be simply taken; one should think twice before placing a child for adoption or welcoming an adopted child in the family. An adoptive parent shall bear all the consequences of such critical decision. Adopting an infant is never like adopting a teenager and adopting girl or a boy is not alike too!

GLOBAL WARMING

As wildfires rage, voters still divided on climate

ISSAM AHMED

Wildfires are burning out of control in the western United States, cities are choking on toxic air, and Hurricane Laura battered the Gulf Coast just weeks ago. So why isn't the threat of global warming dominating the election contest between President Donald Trump and former vice-president Joe Biden?

Climate change has in fact risen near the top of Democrat voters' concerns since surveys first began two decades ago, but remains anchored to the bottom of Republicans' priorities, meaning that the candidates don't need to spend much time sparring over the issue.

Talking about it helps Biden connect with his party — but this year green issues have been partly crowded out by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, as well as racial justice protests, experts say.

Jon Krosnick, a professor of political science at Stanford University, said that while the absolute number of people concerned by climate

change was at its highest ever, it remained only one of several concerns.

"If he talks only about climate, he's hurting himself because he has to talk about other issues," he said.

Trump, a famous climate-denier, has been silent on the issue. There is little point in him using the issue to try to appeal to California, the state worst-hit by

the fires, because it is so solidly Democratic. If Biden has to weigh how much time he spends on climate change against other issues, and balance how an aggressive green agenda might turn off swing state voters in places like the Midwest, other Democratic lawmakers are more willing to go on the offence. "It is just a fact that the Trump administration has the worst environmental record in history," New Mexico Senator Tom Udall, who is among the most green lawmakers in Congress, said.

"The Trump administration stands with the special interests at the expense of everyone else," he continued, citing the president's withdrawal from the Paris agreement and axing of numerous environmental and wildlife regulations. One group of voters who are particularly charged by climate issues is the left of the Democratic party, said Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. Among Democrats who call themselves liberal, it is now the second most highly ranked issue, while it's the eighth for moderate Democrats, according to Yale's latest survey published in April.

That's why every Democratic candidate in the primaries had to make a climate pitch during the party's primaries and vowed to re-enter the Paris accord. Indeed, the Biden campaign's goal of carbon neutrality by 2050 would have been considered a radical idea when he himself was vice-president, just five years ago.

Paul Bledsoe, a lecturer at the Center for Environmental Policy at American University, said it was notable that when Biden invokes the climate, he does so through the lens of economic opportunity.

— AFP

While the absolute number of people concerned by climate change was at its highest ever, it remained only one of the several concerns for voters

JOHN KRONSNICK
A professor

THE GUN CULTURE

Free speech, gun rights on collision course in the United States

BRAD BROOKS

The robust American traditions of free speech and gun rights are clashing at anti-racism protests this year in a way rarely seen before in the United States, legal scholars and law enforcement leaders say.

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees citizens the right to free speech, and the Second the right to bear arms. But they are colliding in new ways, as "open carry" of guns to demonstrations becomes more common, officials at six police departments along with six legal scholars said. Some worry that US democracy will suffer if guns intimidate would-be protesters from voicing their opinion. The gun culture and the exercise of free speech and assembly are "all competing in the same space," said Timothy Zick, a law professor at the College of William and Mary who studies armed protests.

Mostly peaceful mass protests in several US cities for racial equality following the May 25 death of George Floyd in the custody of Minneapolis, Minnesota police are sometimes being met by people with weapons.

On August 25, the issue came to a head when Kyle Rittenhouse, 17, used a rifle to kill demonstrators Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, during a protest against police brutality in Kenosha, Wisconsin. His lawyers say he acted in self-defence. In Portland, Oregon, Michael Reinoehl, 48, a self-described supporter of the



A demonstrator participates in a walk in support of Black Lives Matter organised by the Portland Buddhist Peace Fellowship in Portland, Oregon.

— Reuters

THE GUN
CULTURE AND
FREE SPEECH
AND ASSEMBLY
ARE COMPETING
IN THE SAME
SPACE

far-left movement Antifa, was charged in the fatal August 29 shooting of Aaron Danielson, 39, who was in a caravan of President Donald Trump's supporters who clashed with anti-racism demonstrators.

Zick and Gregory Magarian, a law professor at Washington University in St Louis, are part of a group of scholars who are researching how

the First and Second Amendments began to collide following a landmark 2008 Supreme Court ruling. It struck down a Washington DC ban on private handguns, saying "the Second Amendment protects an individual right to possess a firearm unconnected with service in a militia," essentially giving every person the right to carry a gun.

— Reuters



OOO BOARD OF DIRECTORS HOLDS ITS FIFTH MEETING THIS YEAR



Yesterday morning, OOC Board of Directors held its fifth meeting for this year headed by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad Al Busaidy, where the minutes of the fourth meeting held on June 25 were approved, and the decisions that were implemented in the last period (2017) - 2020) were reviewed, the topics included in the new agenda were reviewed and appropriate decisions were taken in this regard.

LeBron leads Lakers to NBA West
finals with rout of Rockets



Houston Rockets’ Austin Rivers (25) dribbles between Los Angeles Lakers’ Markieff Morris (88) and Rajon Rondo (9) in the first half of game five of the second round of the 2020 NBA Playoffs. — USA Today Sports

MIAMI: LeBron James had 29 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists as the Los Angeles Lakers advanced to their first NBA Western Conference final in a decade with a 119-96 blowout win over the Houston Rockets on Saturday.

Anthony Davis tallied 13 points and 11 rebounds, Kyle Kuzma had 17 and Markieff Morris finished with 16 for the Lakers, who eliminated the Rockets in five games in the quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

Los Angeles advanced to their first NBA final four since the Kobe Bryant-led Lakers beat Phoenix for the conference title and then defeated Boston for the 2010 NBA championship, the last time they won.

“It’s the reason I wanted to be a part of this franchise is to take them back to a place they were accustomed to being. And that’s competing for a championship,” said James.

“It’s an honour for me to wear the purple and gold and for us to just try to continue the legacy and just play great basketball for our fans.”

This will be James’s 11th career conference finals but when asked by reporters how it feels, he changed the subject to talk about the group as a whole.

Anthony Davis tallied 13 points and 11 rebounds, Kyle Kuzma had 17 and Markieff Morris finished with 16 for the Lakers, who eliminated the Rockets in five games in the quarantine bubble

“Every game is a learning experience for us. Every game is another opportunity for us to get better. We want to continue to build,” said James.

They will face either the Los Angeles Clippers or the Denver Nuggets in the next playoff round. The Clippers lead that series 3-2.

The Lakers got off to their best start of the series, dominating the opening plays to take a 35-20 lead at the end of the first quarter.

Their only lull of the game came in the start of the second quarter when Houston briefly woke from their slumber and cut the lead to seven, 38-31.

But the Lakers outscored the Rockets 33-18 in the third to take full command.

They drained 19 three-pointers and shot 52 per cent from the floor.

With the game in hand, the Lakers sat three-time NBA champion James and Davis for much of the fourth quarter.

“Everything is falling into place. When I got here the goal was to win a championship and now we are eight wins away,” said Davis.

‘A piece away’

Once again the James Harden-led Rockets put up little resistance as Houston, after surprising the Lakers in game one of the series, lost their fourth straight and their third in a row by more than 10 points.

Harden led the Rockets with 30 points and Russell Westbrook scored just 10 in the loss.

Harden had a disappointing series, delivering another series of fourth-quarter playoff disappearing acts that have pockmarked his career.

“Tough season for us. Obviously it didn’t end the way we wanted it to. So, we just got to figure it out,” he said.

In the past five years, Harden has shot less than 25 per cent from beyond the arc in post-season fourth quarters and overtime. He finished two-of-eight from three-point range on Saturday.

Harden said Saturday all they need to become great is to add one more piece to the puzzle.

“It’s very, very frustrating. Especially the amount of work individually I put in,” he said. “But I’ve got to keep chipping away. I’ve got to keep going and keep going until I can’t go anymore.”

“I feel like we’re a piece away and we’ve just got keep trying to figure it out. Keep trying to put the pieces around me and Russ to get us where we want to go,” said Harden.

Temper flared in the fourth quarter both on and off the floor. The brother of Lakers Rajon Rondo now has the dubious honour of being the first fan thrown out of a bubble game after he exchanged words with Houston’s Westbrook.

The public is not allowed in the arena because of the coronavirus pandemic but players are allowed to invite a limited number of family and friends to watch the games in person.

Rockets coach Mike D’Antoni, whose contract expires at the end of the season, couldn’t say whether he will be back.

“We’ll see what happens. I had four years. Hopefully it keeps going, but you just never know,” he said. — AFP

Stuard, Hahn, Percy share
PGA Tour lead

SAN FRANCISCO: Brian Stuard rolled in a six-foot birdie putt at the 18th to join a three-way tie for the US PGA Tour Safeway Open lead on Saturday alongside James Hahn and Australian Cameron Percy.

The trio topped a crowded leaderboard on a day when more than half a dozen players held or shared the lead at Silverado Resort in Napa, California.

Stuard, chasing a second career PGA title to go with his 2016 Zurich Classic crown, started the day five adrift.

But he got rolling with birdies at the third fourth and fifth.

He made a four-foot birdie putt at 12 and a two-footer at 14 before picking up a stroke at the par-five 18th, despite finding the rough off the tee.

“You’ve got to make a bunch of birdies, that’s the name of the game this week,” said Stuard, whose six-under 66 put him on 16-under 200.

Hahn also played without a bogey, firing five birdies in a five-under 67 for his share of the lead.

“I just had a goal in mind today just to kind of have a clean scorecard,” said Hahn, who returned in January after being sidelined almost eight months with an elbow injury.

“Would have been nice to birdie a couple of the par fives, but anytime you birdie three out of the four par threes I think

you’re doing something good.”

Percy carded a four-under par 68, moving to 16-under with his fourth birdie of the day, with a 32-foot putt at the 10th.

Bogeys at 11 and 14 followed, but he birdied 16 and 17 to get back atop the board in the quest for a first US PGA Tour title at the age of 46.

“It would mean the world to me,” said Percy — who struggled throughout the round with a flare up of pain in his ribs.

“This week it freed up, and then today the last few shots on the range really hurt,” he said, adding that it prevented him from turning completely after impact with the ball.

“But I managed to keep it in play and hit a few nice wedges at the end there and got around in a good score.”

Overnight leader Sam Burns struggled to a one-over par 72 that left him a stroke off the lead on 201.

He was tied with Mexican-born Norwegian Kristoffer Ventura, who carded a 66, and Harry Higgs, who followed his second-round 62 with a 70.

Stewart Cink, the 2009 British Open champion, carded a 65 to head a group on 202 that also included Argentina’s Emiliano Grillo (65), Scotland’s Russell Knox (70), Doug Ghim (69) and D.J. Trahan (70).

— AFP





SALAH HITS HAT-TRICK AS LIVERPOOL OUTGUN LEEDS

Liverpool, UK: Mohamed Salah scored a hat-trick, including two penalties, as Liverpool began their Premier League title defence with a hugely entertaining 4-3 win over promoted Leeds United at Anfield on Saturday.

Leeds, making their return to the top flight after a 16-year absence, fought back from behind three times and played the brand of intense, attacking football that their Argentine manager Marcelo Bielsa established during their promotion campaign last season.

The champions will be concerned with some slack defending but once again did what they have done so well in the past two seasons — finding a way to win at the end.

A season beginning with fans still barred from the grounds due to COVID-19 restrictions needed a start to spark some excitement among frustrated fans and this high-energy, incident-packed encounter certainly delivered.

Juergen Klopp's side grabbed a fourth minute lead after referee Michael Oliver harshly ruled that Leeds' debutant German defender Robin Koch had handled a Salah shot which deflected off his thigh on to his outstretched arm.

Salah himself blasted home the spot-kick and Leeds looked as though they may be in for a very long day.

But eight minutes later Jack Harrison, on loan from Manchester City, brought Leeds level with a fine solo goal, picking the ball up on the left-flank and cutting inside, skipping past Trent Alexander-Arnold and Joe Gomez, before drilling into the bottom corner.

Liverpool restored their lead in the 20th minute and this time Leeds had only themselves to blame, leaving

the obvious threat of Virgil van Dijk unchallenged with the towering Dutchman heading home an Andy Robertson corner.

But Leeds showed their resolve again with Patrick Bamford slotting home after Van Dijk had uncharacteristically failed to deal with a ball over the top, his casual attempt to control the ball finding the Leeds striker with keeper Alisson out of position.

Salah, sporting a new short hair-cut, blasted Liverpool back in front, 12 minutes before the break, when he pounced on an attempted header clear from Pascal Struijk with a first-time shot which gave Illan Meslier no chance.

Leeds felt for a moment they were level again when, after Harrison's lob over an advancing Alisson, Alexander-Arnold bizarrely headed into his own goal but the linesman subsequently flagged for offside.

But there was to be a third comeback — Helder Costa's low ball into the box found Polish midfielder Mateusz Klich whose deft touch earned him space for a low drive past Alisson to make it 3-3.

Van Dijk had the ball in the net, blasting in from close range after a free kick only for it to be ruled out for a foul by substitute Curtis Jones on Koch.

But, with just two minutes remaining, Liverpool secured the points with another Salah penalty after Rodrigo Moreno clumsily brought down Fabinho.

It was cruel on Leeds but the Yorkshire club will take huge encouragement from their display while Liverpool, now unbeaten in 60 league games at Anfield, are up and running again.

— Reuters

OMAN FUTSAL TEAM TO BEGIN INTERNAL CAMP ON TUESDAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 13

Oman national futsal team will be back in action after a break due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and will begin their internal preparatory camp in Muscat on Tuesday.

The head coach of the national futsal team Younis al Fahdi has announced the squad for an first preparatory camp after resuming the footballing activities.

The camp is scheduled to take place from September 15 to October 4 in Muscat. The training camp will serve as a preparatory exercise for the team to the top assignment at the AFC Asian Futsal Championship in Kuwait.

The AFC announced on Thursday the new dates of the championship which will begin from December 2 to 13 instead of November.

The Sultanate futsal team players will be tested for

COVID-19 on September 15 at Badr Al Sama Hospital according to the OFA medical protocol. After completion of 72 hours from the COVID-19 test, all the players who tested negative can resume the training from ground with full implementation of the medical protocol.

The national futsal team coached by the national coach Younis al Fahdi will begin by the individual training for the earlier weeks. Then, the team will move on to the smaller group training sessions until reaching the bigger technical and tactical training sessions. Prior each training session, all the players will be tested for the routine medical check up and any player have any symptoms of COVID-19 will be avoided from the training session.

In a previous interview to *Oman Daily Observer*, coach Younis al Fahdi, said the team will have more than ten preparatory games



during September and October ahead of the Asian Championship assignment.

The friendlies will be against Kuwait, Thailand, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The upcoming stage of the team's preparation will depend on the domestic camps while the overseas camps may come in later stages.

Oman Futsal team members had trained remotely during the last period through using the "Zoom" application under supervision of coach Ricardo Silva.

The Sultanate futsal team's fitness coach had delivered many sessions since last April. The technical staff focused on

COACH YOUNIS AL
FAHDI ANNOUNCES
SQUAD FOR
PREPARATORY CAMP

maintaining the fitness level of the players besides developing the strength and endurance skills.

The AFC Futsal Championship draw clubbed Oman in Group A besides Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Vietnam. Japan, one of the favourites, are clubbed in Group B alongside Lebanon, Kyrgyz Republic and Kuwait. Group C

comprised four-time runners-up Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Bahrain and China.

Iran, title holders of the last edition, were grouped in Group D alongside Korea Republic, Saudi Arabia and Thailand.

The upcoming edition of the Asian Futsal Championship will be the final stage of Fifa Futsal World Cup qualifying.

The top five teams at the AFC Asian Futsal Championship will represent the continent at the Fifa Futsal World Cup Lithuania 2020.

The squad (probables): Hisham al Wahaibi, Abdulaziz al Raqadi, Moosa al Raqadi, Younis al Aweisi, Muhannad al Shibli, Essa al Balushi, Mohammed al Adawi, Loai al Wahaibi, Mutaism al Shamsi, Zamil al Balushi, Khalfan al Maawali, Samer al Balushi, Mohammed al Hasani, Ammar al Busaidy, Mansoor al Hadi, Essa al Jabri, Mohammed al Lawati and Mukhaled al Raqadi.

SPORTS

THE WIN ENSURED
OSAKA'S THIRD GRAND
SLAM TROPHY AFTER
HER VICTORIES AT THE
2018 US OPEN AND
2019 AUSTRALIAN OPEN

OSAKA WINS US OPEN TO CONFIRM STATUS AS NEW STAR

Naomi Osaka of Japan celebrates winning against Victoria Azarenka of Belarus in the US Open women's singles final.
– USA Today Sports



NEW YORK: Naomi Osaka ended Victoria Azarenka's dream run to claim her second US Open title in three years with a 1-6, 6-3, 6-3 comeback win on Saturday which cemented her status as the sport's leading light both on and off the court.

Unlike the 22-year-old Japanese's first US Open win in 2018 over Serena Williams, which was played in a frothing Arthur Ashe Stadium, Saturday's drama unfolded in a strangely quiet arena as COVID-19 health and safety protocols prevented fans from entering the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center.

But the lack of buzz around the stands did not stop the two former world number ones from producing a dazzling display of shot making. As Osaka walked off with a third Grand Slam title, Azarenka was denied a

US Open crown for a third time having also finished runner-up in 2012 and 2013.

Still it was a remarkable and unexpected run for the 31-year-old Belarusian, who reached her first major final in seven years. It was the second time in two weeks Azarenka, twice a winner at the Australian Open, and Osaka had set up a final showdown. The pair had been set to meet in the Western and Southern Open final on August 29 until Osaka withdrew due to a hamstring injury.

"I actually don't want to play you in more finals," Osaka told Azarenka with a smile during the victory ceremony. "I didn't really enjoy that. "That was a really tough match for me. "And yes, really inspiring for me because I used to watch you play here when I was younger so just to have the opportunity to play you is really great and I learned a lot."

NAOMI
OSAKA

 JAPAN
PROFESIONAL
SINCE 2013

WINS US OPEN AND PRAISE FOR PROTESTS AGAINST RACIAL INJUSTICE	
WTA RANKING	9*
GRAND SLAM TITLES (US Open 2020, Australian Open 2019, US Open 2018)	3
TITLES	6
PRIZE MONEY \$US million	18

*Before US Open win
Source: WTA/US Open

Osaka before final wearing mask with the name of Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old African-American boy shot dead by police in Cleveland in 2014



AFP/Getty Images: Matthew Stockman



AGED 22
1.80 m
Right-handed

COVID-19 ERA
The presentation ceremony showed the precautions everyone has had to take during the COVID-19 era, with the two finalists having to pick up their respective prizes themselves from a table placed on court, while everyone stood socially distant for the obligatory photocall.

As she has done in every match over the past fortnight, Osaka appeared on court with her left thigh strapped and a facemask with the name of a Black American victim of police brutality or racial injustice.

For the final it was Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy shot by police in 2014 while playing with a toy gun in a playground. Osaka had already replaced Serena Williams as top earner and now has assumed the leadership mantle that goes with it.

With the United States rocked by unrest following the shooting of

Jacob Blake, a Black man, just three weeks ago by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Osaka had withdrawn from her semifinal at the Western and Southern Open in protest. The men's and women's tour responded by postponing all the matches that were due to take place on the day of the protest by 24 hours and persuaded Osaka to contest the rescheduled match.

By taking the stand, the 22-year-old activist had made her point.

Azarenka, who ended Serena Williams bid for a record equalling 24th Grand Slam title in the semifinals, carried that momentum into the final with a near flawless first set. One of top returners in the women's game, an energised Azarenka broke the fourth seed to start the final and twice more in a lopsided opening set that took just 27 minutes. — Reuters

business



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Private investor to develop 3 Oman Post sites

PPP MODEL: Leading real estate developer inks pact to build modern Oman Post complexes integrated with commercial developments at three locations in Muscat



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

Oman Post, the wholly government-owned postal and logistics services provider, has roped in a private Omani investor to construct post office complexes as part of mixed-use commercial developments at three locations in Muscat Governorate.

Bayan Investment House, a leading investment vehicle for real estate developments, announced over the weekend that it has signed an agreement with Oman Post for the establishment of modern post offices at Al Khuwair, Qurum and Al Khoudh. Signing on behalf of Bayan was its Chief Executive Fahd al Khalili, while Oman Post was represented by its CEO, Abdulmalik al Balushi.

The landmark pact – the first by Oman Post under the Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) model – marks an early



success for parent Asyad Group, the integrated transport and logistics flagship of the Omani government, in tapping private investment in the development of Oman Post complexes on a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) basis.

Late last year, Asyad Group invited private developers to compete for

the opportunity to develop as many as five sites across the capital region on a DBFOT basis. The proposed locations and corresponding land areas were identified as: Ruwi (1,581 sq metres), Qurum (1,660 sq metres), Al Khuwair (2,350 sq metres), Al Khoud (3,040 sq metres) and Al Ghubrah (2,184 sq metres).

Oman plans sovereign sukuk offering

MUSCAT: Oman's Ministry of Finance announced at the weekend its intention to launch the third issuance of a sovereign sukuk denominated in Omani riyals within the framework of its sovereign sukuk programme unveiled in 2019. The bond will be issued via a book-building subscription process and will include a segment for small investors.

The third issue of the sovereign sukuk programme is expected to contribute to promoting the rapid growth of the Islamic financial sector in the Sultanate, and it is part of the government's strategy to deepen the capital market and expand its scope in order to enable it to play a greater role in local economic growth.

The Ministry of Finance has appointed the Islamic window of Bank Muscat to manage the issuance which can subscribed through all licensed banks operating in the Sultanate.



KEY FEATURE: Islamic bond issuance to be based on book-building process

The Ministry said the Sultanate is facing financial challenges as a result of the decline in oil prices and the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, which have directly contributed to the sharp decline in global oil prices since the beginning of this year. Other production sectors have been impacted as well. Also having a negative

bearing on the fiscal situation are production cuts agreed by Oman in line with its commitment to the Opec+ grouping of producers.

Nevertheless, the Sultanate has adopted a number of fiscal measures to rein in government spending and reduce the size of the growing deficit, notably by trimming public expenditure.

The Ministry indicated that to meet financing requirements of the year, development bonds amounting to RO 550 million in value have been issued so far this year, while the government recently obtained a bridge loan of RO 770 million. This is in addition to withdrawals from state reserves, among other funding methods.

The Ministry stressed however government's commitment to monitor and evaluate its financial performance.

Work is also underway to issue an integrated package of measures, it added. — ONA

Explaining the rationale behind its decision to enlist private investment in the development of the sites, Asyad Group said: "Asyad and its subsidiaries have sizable land banks in different parts of Oman, some of them are located at prime locations, which can be developed with the help of private developers to generate an additional source of revenue, reduce dependence on the Ministry of Finance (MoF), achieve development objectives and expansion requirements without additional funding from MoF and can play vital role in improving the lives of citizens and help boost the economy of the Sultanate of Oman."

Under the DBFOT model, the selected developer is granted sub-usufruct rights to invest in a mixed use development that includes commercial and residential components, hotels, public facilities, and retail shops, offices and medical centres, according to Asyad.

TURN TO PAGE 14

AL FAJAR AL ALAMIA CO. SAOG				
PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN				
Consolidated Audited Financial Results for the year ended 30 June 2020				
Chairman's Report	Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income			
I have great pleasure in presenting to you on behalf of the Board of Directors on the activities and performance of the Al Fajar Al Alamia Company SAOG ("the Parent Company") and its subsidiaries ("the Group") for the year ended 30 June 2020.	GROUP		PARENT	
	30.06.2020 RO.	30.06.2019 RO.	30.06.2020 RO.	30.06.2019 RO.
Operating Results I am pleased to report that despite the pandemic situation, pressure from severe competition and the squeeze on cash flows in our industry in both the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE, your Group has managed to achieve a net profit of RO. 200K.	Revenue	16,224,720	20,245,116	5,397,030
	Cost of Sales	(13,461,315)	(15,654,530)	(3,681,006)
The total consolidated revenue for the year was RO 16.225 million (previous year – RO 20.245 million) and the Parent Company achieved a revenue for the year of RO. 5.397 million (previous year – RO 5.711 million). Gross profit at the consolidated level was RO 2.763 million (previous year 4.591 million) and Parent Company was RO 1.716 million (previous year 1.942 million).	Gross Profit	2,763,405	4,590,586	1,716,024
	Other Income	820,730	434,358	84,009
Consolidated net profit after tax was RO 0.200 million (previous year - RO 1.802 million) and the Parent Company's net profit was RO 0.250 million (previous year –RO. 0.333 million).	Administration & General expenses	(1,822,059)	(1,744,475)	(557,362)
	Sales & Distribution expenses	(305,691)	(421,772)	(295,374)
Details of the consolidated performance of the Group for the year and comparison with previous year's figures are shown in the Management Discussion and Analysis Report forming part of this Annual Report.	Finance Charges	(1,287,707)	(1,059,646)	(647,172)
	Profit from Operations	168,678	1,799,051	300,125
Operations Summary Like other business in the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE, our business also was impacted by the unfortunate pandemic condition. The explosives and drilling and blasting sectors in the Sultanate of Oman was also affected due to delays in collecting receivables which resulted in stoppage of blasting activities in certain projects. Your Group also faced intense competition with the few projects that commenced blasting during the year. As a result, the revenue was lower than target and that of same period of previous year.	Profit on transfer of a subsidiary	-	234,405	-
	Share of loss from Investment in an associate	(6,099)	(14,396)	(6,099)
During the financial year 2019/2020, the UAE drilling and blasting market continued its upward momentum and your subsidiary company, TDB, capitalised on these favourable conditions and achieved better results this year. This situation is expected to continue considering projects in hand and anticipated in the year 2020-2021.	Profit before taxation	162,579	2,019,060	294,026
	Taxation	37,804	(217,355)	(43,749)
We are currently operating at full capacity production at Aswad Quarry and planning to do some modification work at the Crusher that will enhance the current production level. This will bring additional revenue to the Group in the coming years.	Net (Loss)/Profit and total comprehensive income	200,383	1,801,705	250,277
Consolidated Statement of Financial Position				
GROUP		PARENT		
As at 30.06.2020 RO.	As at 30.06.2019 RO.	As at 30.06.2020 RO.	As at 30.06.2019 RO.	
Fixed Assets	7,811,838	6,688,122	864,727	894,719
Right-of-use asset	202,271	-	104,804	-
Intangible asset	3,631,053	147,011	2,746	4,341
Goodwill	22,228,249	22,228,249	579,717	579,717
Investment in Subsidiary	870,139	867,604	37,038,488	32,955,563
Investment in an Associates	411,853	311,831	870,139	867,604
Deferred Tax	-	-	20,761	16,084
Current Assets	21,553,646	17,327,310	3,587,946	2,665,013
Total Assets	56,709,049	47,570,127	43,069,328	37,983,041
Non-current Liabilities	10,047,510	4,104,208	7,270,315	2,251,875
Current Liabilities	20,457,174	17,155,958	10,021,431	9,957,209
Total Liabilities	30,504,684	21,260,166	17,291,746	12,209,084
Net Assets	26,204,365	26,309,961	25,777,582	25,773,957
Shareholders' Fund	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025
Share Capital	1,391,007	1,365,979	1,294,851	1,269,823
Legal Reserve	579,717	579,717	579,717	579,717
Special Reserve	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576
Share premium account	5,750,040	5,880,664	5,419,413	5,440,816
Retained earnings	-	-	-	-
Total Shareholders' equity	26,204,365	26,309,961	25,777,582	25,773,957
Your Group started operations at newly acquired gypsum quarry albeit slowly due to current COVID-19 pandemic situation. We hope that Awam Minerals will operate at full fledged capacity as soon as travel restrictions are lifted and resources available.				
In order to expand its footprint, your Group has plans to venture into drilling and blasting and mining other materials such as limestone, chromite, etc. as part of its diversification plan and is planning to expand its footprint in the African continent, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. We are in the process of registering a JV company in Kenya for drilling and blasting business that is delayed due to COVID-19 pandemic.				
Competition The competition witnessed in the recent years would continue in the future as new entrants view the drilling and blasting business in a simplistic approach of buying a few rigs and hiring some drilling and blasting personnel. They pin their hope of securing business by reducing prices to unrealistic levels to attract the unwary customer. However, marketplace is all about the survival of the fittest and it automatically eliminates weaker entities. I would like to state that your Group will win business purely on merit by offering quality products and efficient performance to the utmost satisfaction of our customers.				
Omanisation I am happy to report that Omani nationals are currently working at various levels of operation of the Group and your Board and management take all efforts to induct more Omanis in all aspects of the Group's operations.				
Other Information The Corporate Governance Report for the year forms part of this Annual Report. Your Board is fully committed to ensuring compliance with all the applicable laws, rules and regulations of the Sultanate of Oman.				
Your Group is operating in a safe and efficient manner in accordance with the Internal Operations and Safety Manuals. There were no major health, safety and environmental issues during the year.				
Acknowledgements On behalf of the Board of Directors, I sincerely thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimur and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for their successful and continued efforts to improve development and prosperity within the country. I also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police for their valuable cooperation and support.				
To conduct our business, we are dependent on our customers, bankers, trading partners and shareholders. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each one of them for all the support that they have extended to us.				
On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank each and every one of the Al Fajar Group employees and management of the Group for their commitment and dedication during this very adverse and challenging market conditions.				
Saleem bin Qassim bin Ahmed Al Zawawi Chairman				
Note The complete accounts shall be delivered to any shareholder or beneficiary upon request, in Arabic or English, within 7 days from receiving the application.				



ECB's Lagarde shifts burden to governments to aid recovery

FRANKFURT: Euro zone governments must keep spending heavily to aid the bloc's recovery from its historic pandemic-induced recession, complementing already super-easy monetary policy, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde (pictured) said on Sunday.

With debt levels blowing past 100 per cent of GDP this year, concerns are rising that politicians will struggle to push through more support and some subsidies, raising the risk that employment and income schemes could abruptly end.

"Confidence in the private sector rests to a very large extent on confidence in fiscal policies," Lagarde said in a speech. "Continued expansionary fiscal policies are vital to avoid excessive job shedding and support household incomes until the economic recovery is more robust."

Employment subsidy schemes have already been extended in several countries but some are advocating longer, one- or two-year extensions to bolster confidence while the bloc recovers from recession that could slash 8 per cent from output this year.

"Keeping job support schemes in place is critical to avoid a sharp increase in unemployment later in the year," she said.

Lagarde also urged a final deal on the EU's 750 billion euro recovery fund, which is still under negotiation and subject to political bickering. — Reuters

New regulations to strengthen investments in industrial cities

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Decision 169/2020 issued by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) in May this year effectively empowers the Authority to enhance the investment appeal of industrial cities established across the Sultanate.

The amendments introduced via the Decision will undoubtedly contribute to attracting more local and foreign investments in the various industrial cities, according to Hasan bin Marhoon al Marhoon, Director General of Planning and Business Development at Madayn.

The investment regulations play a key role in setting rules, procedures and legislative frameworks to organise the process of attracting local and international industrial developers to invest in building, managing and operating specialised investment cities; determining the period of usufruct contracts and investment agreements for developers to be 99 years according to the project; and opening the way to attract global and regional experiences and expertise in the field of building, managing and operating economic cities, and organising the contracting with them according to management and operation agreements of up to 25 years.

The regulations also grant the managements of the industrial cities in the various governorates full authority to approve investment applications of up to 100,000 square metres for industrial lands.

In addition, the regulations set a maximum period of ten days to answer the investor regarding the investment request, and specify a period of 30 days from the date of approval of the investment application to sign contracts and complete investment procedures in Madayn's various industrial cities.

The investment regulations link



The investment regulations link the practice of investment activities in the industrial cities with activity license that is renewed annually, and this shall not be granted or renewed except to investors who meet the conditions specified in the law

the practice of investment activities in the industrial cities with activity license that is renewed annually, and this shall not be granted or renewed except to investors who meet the conditions specified in the law.

One of the major conditions is achieving the Omanisation rate in the projects. The rights of investors and obligations are clearly defined and so are Madayn's obligations towards investors. Moreover, the cancellation or suspension of the license is only made in specific and restricted cases in a manner that guarantees the interests of investors and does not threaten their investment activities.

Al Marhoon added that in order to ensure Madayn's commitment to development and use of best

management practices in providing services, the investment regulations include specific dates and time periods for granting approvals and licenses.

The regulations clarify that lease contracts are set for investors for a period of thirty years, renewable for a similar period, and restrictions have been put in place for subletting and not allowing except the license holder to engage in any activity inside the industrial cities to limit shadow investment and not perform any activities that conflict with applicable laws and regulations.

The regulations also include clear procedures for handling the status of buildings and facilities set up by investors and developers upon the expiry of contracts and in a manner

that guarantees their rights and those of others.

Furthermore, the regulations allow investors and developers in the event that their projects falter and cannot continue under exceptional circumstances to sell buildings and establishments built on the leased lands according to specific procedures, provided that selling is to investors who are authorised to engage in the same specific activities according to the uses of lands and facilities.

Besides, the regulations play an important role in setting the relationship between investors, cargo transport companies and transportation intermediaries, with specifying periods of time to provide service to investors and not allowing

empty means of transportation to enter the industrial cities except with a permission and request from an investor working in the industrial city.

The regulations also give emphasis on the employee's relationship with investors, ensuring their rights and those of investors, while setting restrictions and requirements for the workers' housing and ensuring the provision of humanitarian requirements in accordance with the best standards and relevant conditions.

The regulations set strict restrictions regarding insurance on establishments, buildings, property and utilities in a manner that achieves the highest levels of maintenance. To work according to the best standards of transparency and clarity with the investors, a list of violations has been developed indicating the value of the violation and the clear and defined measures to be taken with an illustration of a table showing the possible violations.

Forum to spotlight digital advances in fintech and banking

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

With the wave of fintech solutions challenging the legacy systems all over, the need to incorporate technology as an enabler to help enhance the customer experience, business profitability and the product portfolio in a secured environment, is a top priority for the banks.

It will be the focus of the New Age Banking Summit 2020 to be held on October 6 at Hotel Sheraton, Muscat.

The Summit will showcase the evolving financial eco-system in this digital age and how the banks can be future ready by adopting digital strategies, innovating in products and services offered and reaching customers on digital channels while proactively combating cyber risks.



The Summit will also focus on how new business models will make the banks relevant for next generation customers through adoption of new technology

The Summit will also focus on how new business models will make the banks relevant for next

generation customers through adoption of new technology and what measures has to be taken today.

The fifth edition of annual event, New Age Banking Summit, will have Tahir bin Salim al Amri (pictured), Executive President, Central Bank of Oman as the Chief Guest and keynote speaker.

The one-day event will include presentations and discussions involving a cross-section of the industry experts from Oman, rest of the GCC and international market. Some of the subjects that will be covered include digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, fintech, cyber security, Banking as a Platform, digital payment, mobile banking, enterprise data architecture and digital customer experience.

Private investor to develop 3 Oman Post sites

FROM PAGE 13

The investor will also be responsible for the master planning, design, build, finance, operation and maintenance of the entire development for a period of 25 years, upon the completion of which, all of the assets will transfer

to Oman Post.

Importantly, the PPP model ensures that neither Asyad Group nor Oman Post incurs no financial outlay during the contract term, neither in terms of explicit cash payment nor in the form of any assets except provision of land.

"The agreement provides for redeveloping existing Oman Post locations (Al Qurum, Al Khuwair and Al Khoudh) into modern post offices complemented with quality retail outlets," added Bayan Investment House in a tweet on Thursday.

BUSINESS ALERT

Alizz Islamic Bank wins Best Islamic Banking Brand award



MUSCAT: In recognition of the bank's exemplary marketing efforts, Alizz Islamic Bank recently won the 'Best Islamic Banking Brand in Oman' honour at the Global Brand Awards. The Awards was established with the aim of honouring excellence in performance and rewarding establishments across different sectors. The award honours organisations who have performed extraordinarily well in the field of banking, finance, education, hospitality, lifestyle, automobiles, and technology.

Murtadha Jawad al Lawati, — AGM — Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications said, "We are pleased to receive this prestigious award, and to be recognised for our continued investment to provide innovative Shari'a compliant solutions to our customers. The award reflects the Bank's commitment to implement the best services and products for our customers and our commitment to continuous quality and service delivery to all of the valued customers. Once again, I would like to emphasise that it is not about having a digital strategy, but more about having a strategy for a digital world."

Al Lawati added, "We have recently enhanced our digital strengths in marketing of the bank and we aim to be a class apart from our competitors. The bank's core strategic focus is to deliver an exceptional and quality customer experience through continual enhancement of our services through state-of-the-art digital technology."

OAB announces winners of July Hasaad Savings Draw

O M A N Arab Bank (OAB) has announced the names of 132 winners from its July monthly



Hasaad Savings Scheme. This included 95 winners from the monthly branch draws of RO 500 each, ten winners of RO 100 from the Children's Account draw, twenty RO 100 winners from the Youth Account draw, five winners of RO 500 from the Bank's Salary Transfer draw and two winners of RO 10,000 of the Elite draw from the Muscat branch.

Commenting on the results of the draw, Rashad al Shaikh, Acting Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB said, "We continue to see a rise in the amount of savings from our bank's customers, especially since the last few months and we are proud to see how the Hasaad scheme has contributed to this culture. It is important that we highlight and promote the need for having savings, which is beneficial for every individual's financial stability in the long run.

We continue to roll out exciting prizes until the end of the year as part of this highly successful scheme, with each month's draws bringing in even more incredible prizes."

The Hasaad scheme sees 95 lucky winners, with a minimum of one winner per month per branch, receiving a prize of RO 500 and RO 1,000 at the quarterly draws. In addition, ten winners are selected from the Children's Account holders (aged 18 and below) and receive RO 100 each.

Twenty winners are selected from the Youth Account holders (aged between 18 and 27), each receiving a prize of RO 100. There also two Elite winners of RO 10,000 each per month.

EXTRA BUDGET

Japan's Suga says
no limit to bonds
govt can issue

TOKYO: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga (pictured), who is set to become prime minister this week, said on Sunday there was no limit to the amount of bonds the government can issue to support an economy hit by the Coronavirus pandemic.

He also indicated he could look to a third extra budget to fight the downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic if needed, adding the government had enough resources to tap at present.

"Only when we have economic growth can we push through fiscal reform. What's most important is to create jobs and protect businesses," Suga said on a television programme.

"I don't think so," he said, when asked if there was a limit to bond issuance. "What's important now is to improve current (economic) conditions," he added.

Suga made the remarks on a programme where he appeared alongside his two rivals in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) leadership election, to be held on Monday.

Speculation is mounting that Suga, who has seen his popularity rise in opinion polls since announcing his bid for the top job, may call a general election as early as next month to improve his chances of winning a full three-year term as LDP leader in a party election that must be held in September 2021.

Finance Minister Taro Aso told supporters in eastern Japan on Sunday that Suga's cabinet may be criticised for not having a popular mandate and that in that case, "imminent" snap elections could be possible, the *Nikkei* daily said.

LDP junior coalition partner Komeito has spoken against snap elections anytime soon. Suga has been vague on the subject.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said last month he would resign due to ill health. — **Reuters**

Once an American foe, now a friend: Opec turns 60

LONDON: In 1973, Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries brought the US economy to its knees. Now, the cartel created 60 years ago is more likely to do Washington's bidding.

Since Saudi Arabia and other Arab Opec members imposed their famous oil embargo as retribution for US support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War, shifts in global politics and a surge in America's oil production have tamed the group.

Opec's most hawkish members, Iran and Venezuela, have been sidelined by US sanctions while its kingpin, Saudi Arabia, has shown it would rather appease Washington than risk losing US support, current and former Opec officials say.

While Opec as a bloc resisted US pressure to lower oil prices for decades, its record over the past three years has largely been one of capitulation, these officials say.

Founded in Baghdad on September 14, 1960 to counter the power of seven US and British oil companies, Opec has repeatedly yielded to pressure from Washington to pump more oil since US President Donald Trump took office at the start of 2017.

Trump has regularly called for lower gasoline prices to help US consumers.

And when prices got too low for US drilling companies to make money this year, Opec hashed out a deal to bring them back up slightly, in an agreement spurred on by Washington's threat to reduce its military backing for Riyadh, sources said.

"Trump orders from Saudi Arabia what he needs for the oil price — and he is served," Chakib Khelil, who was Algeria's oil minister for a decade and Opec's president in 2001 and 2008, said. "So indeed Opec has changed."

Saudi Arabia has been the leading Opec producer for decades, giving it the biggest sway over policy, but the sidelining of Iran and Venezuela has only increased its influence.

Iran's share of Opec output has nearly halved to 7.5 per cent since 2010 while Venezuela's has collapsed to 2.3 per cent from almost 10 per cent, according to Reuters calculations based on



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed Opec logo in this illustration. — **Reuters**

Opec data. Saudi Arabia's share, meanwhile, has risen 7 percentage points to 35 per cent.

Iran and Venezuela, which founded Opec along with Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, had routinely opposed any moves to bring oil prices down in the face of

since 2010, while Opec's has fallen.

Opec teamed up with Russia and nine other oil producers in 2016 to form a group known as Opec+ to boost their collective leverage but a senior Trump administration official said even the new group's influence had waned as US output

US production more than doubled in a decade to reach over 12 million barrels a day in 2019, according to the Energy Information Administration, as improved drilling technology made previously untapped basins accessible.

US pressure.

The increased dominance of Saudi Arabia within Opec has also come at a time of higher US oil and gas production, which has turned the United States into the world's biggest petroleum producer and slashed its dependence on foreign fuel.

US production more than doubled in a decade to reach over 12 million barrels a day in 2019, according to the Energy Information Administration, as improved drilling technology made previously untapped basins accessible.

Opec figures show the US share of the global oil market has doubled

soared.

Trump has engaged more actively with Opec than his predecessors, often taking to Twitter to comment on production decisions and oil price moves.

Trump has also developed a close relationship with Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman, or "MbS", who relies on the United States for weapons and protection against regional rivals such as Iran.

"There has never been a US administration more involved in international oil policy and Opec than the Trump presidency," said Gary Ross, founder of Black Gold Investors and an Opec expert.

In 2018, as oil prices spiked over \$70 a barrel, a level Washington viewed as too high for US consumers, Trump fired a barrage of tweets at the cartel.

"Oil prices are too high, Opec is at it again. Not good!" he tweeted on June 13, 2018, nine days ahead of an Opec meeting. As Opec gathered in Austria on June 22, Trump wrote: "Hope Opec will increase output substantially. Need to keep prices down!"

Later that day, Opec agreed to raise its output by a million barrels a day.

Two Opec officials, who asked not to be identified due to the sensitivity of the issue, said a Trump intervention on oil prices effectively nudges the organisation to discuss, or even adjust, its production policy.

And Trump's Twitter feed has become a source of anxiety.

"I hope no tweet will follow," one top Opec official said on April 9, 2019 after oil prices hit \$71 a barrel, a five-month high at the time.

Oil market watchers including Opec officials say the irony is that the price rises in 2018 and 2019 were both due mainly to Washington's sanctions on Iran and Venezuela — policies that slashed some 3 million barrels off daily oil

BUSINESS BRIEF

Uganda, Tanzania sign deal for construction of crude oil pipeline

NAIROBI: Tanzania and Uganda signed an agreement on Sunday paving the way for the construction of a crude oil pipeline running from Ugandan oilfields to the Tanzanian port of Tanga, a Tanzanian government spokesman said.

Uganda discovered oil reserves in 2006 and needs the planned 1,445-km (900-mile) East African Crude Oil Pipeline to be in place to start commercial production. The pipeline is estimated to cost \$3.5 billion, according to the two governments.

Hassan Abassi, Tanzania government spokesman, said on Twitter that 80 per cent of the pipeline will run through Tanzania.

Tanzania will earn 7.5 trillion shillings (\$3.24 billion) and create more than 18,000 jobs over the next 25 years, or more, that the project is in place, Abassi said after the signing ceremony attended by Tanzania's President John Magufuli and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni in Chato, northwestern Tanzania.

Iran's rial hits new low against dollar as economy reels



DUBAI: The Iranian rial fell to a new low against the US dollar on Saturday as the economy reels under the COVID-19 pandemic.

The dollar was selling for as much as 263,500 rials on the unofficial market, up from 257,000 on Friday, according to foreign exchange site Bonbast.com. The economic daily *Donya-e-Eqtesad's* website gave the dollar rate as 260,800, up 5,100 rials from Friday.

The currency has lost about 49 per cent of its value in 2020 as a drop in oil prices has deepened the economic crisis in the country, which also has the highest COVID-19 death toll in the Middle East.

In mid-July, the US dollar rose to around 255,000 rials but the rial then recouped some of its losses to trade at around 220,000 in August.

The official exchange rate — used mostly for imports of state-subsidised food and medicine — is 42,000 rials per dollar. — **Reuters**

Oil producers evacuate US Gulf of Mexico platforms

HOUSTON: US Gulf of Mexico oil producers evacuated offshore facilities as a tropical storm brewing off the Florida coast was forecast to strengthen into a hurricane and threaten the prime oil region.

Chevron Corp and Murphy Oil Corp on Saturday started removing workers from offshore oil and gas platforms. Royal Dutch Shell, BHP, BP and Hess Corp said they were monitoring the storm and prepared to take action if needed.

Tropical storm Sally crossed the tip of Florida overnight and moved into the eastern Gulf of Mexico. The latest forecast by the National Hurricane Centre calls for its maximum sustained winds to reach 80 miles per hour (129 kmph) ahead of landfall next week.

Chevron has begun evacuating all staff from its Blind Faith and Petronius platforms and initiated shut-in procedures, a spokeswoman said, while production at its other offshore platforms was unaffected.

Murphy Oil was preparing to evacuate non-essential personnel from its most easterly facilities and monitoring the storm for potential impact on other properties.

US Gulf of Mexico offshore oil



Men in construction hats are seen aboard Chevron's Petronius oil platform, located 100 miles off the coast of New Orleans, in the Gulf of Mexico. — **Reuters**

production accounts for about 17 per cent of US crude oil production and 5 per cent of total US natural gas production. As much as 1.5 million barrels per day of oil output was shut last month as Hurricane Laura tore through the Gulf of Mexico.

Sally was forecast to strengthen in the next several days and head for an area between southeastern Louisiana and Alabama.

If Sally becomes a hurricane, it would be the second to hit the US Gulf Coast in less than a month. Hurricane Laura struck Louisiana with devastating, 150 mph winds, levelling coastal towns and putting two oil refineries out of commission for weeks. — **Reuters**

India's listing plan for firms joining foreign markets irks investors

NEW DELHI: Indian companies that list overseas will have to later launch on a domestic bourse under policy changes being considered by government officials, sources said, a move that global investors fear will harm valuations.

India said in March it would allow local firms to directly list abroad to better access foreign capital for growth, but the rules have yet to be decided. Currently only certain types of securities such as depository receipts are able to be listed in foreign markets, and only after the companies go public in India.

The new policy, aimed at helping local firms achieve better valuations, could be a shot in the arm for Indian unicorn start-ups valued at over \$1 billion and Reliance's digital unit which is eyeing a US listing after raising over \$20 billion from global names like KKR & Co.

But in recent weeks Indian officials told global investors and companies in meetings they were



Labourers rest in front of an advertisement of Reliance Industries Limited at a construction site in Mumbai. — **Reuters**

considering mandating a secondary listing for local companies on Indian bourses after they list abroad, five sources said.

The time period under consideration for such a requirement ranges from 6 months to 3 years, sources said.

A separate senior regulatory source in India said "dual listing was being considered by the (finance) ministry for sure," but a final position on the matter has not been reached.

Japan's SoftBank and an Indian payment firm it backs, Paytm, as well as Reliance and US-based

Sequoia Capital have conveyed to the government the secondary listing provision risks splitting trading volumes, hurting long-term valuations and raising compliance needs and costs, the sources added.

"To require companies to subsequently list in India will make these rules meaningless," said a senior executive working at a global venture-capital firm.

SoftBank and Sequoia have invested in various Indian firms like ride-hailing company Ola and hospitality firm Oyo. Foreign listings could provide exits for such investors at higher valuations but also allow Indian firms, especially from the tech sector, to access specialised investors abroad who can better value their companies.

The rules are being drafted by the finance and corporate affairs ministries, in discussion with the capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), and will be finalised in coming weeks. — **Reuters**

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NEW family flats in Darsait near the beach, 5 bedrooms, hall with AC, 4 bathrooms, balcony with sea view, RO 450 per month. Contact: ☎99315986.

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A VILLA with 3 bedrooms and 3 toilets, a sitting room and a kitchen is for rent in North Al Ghubrah, 18 November Street. Contact ☎92433668.

FLAT for rent. ☎95397442.

2 BEDROOM flat Al Khuwair. ☎99322344.

2-FLOOR villa in South Al Maabela, consists of 4 bedrooms, a sitting room, a toilet for every room, kitchen, store and air conditioners. It is located in a place opposite to industrial area and is served government water. ☎99700908.

FLATS for rent in Al Khuwair, Al Hail, Wadi Kabir, Al Falaj, MBD and Muttrah. ☎99119699/ 95250300/ 24813002.

FLAT for rent at Al Khuwair 33, 4 bedrooms, majlis, 2 halls, kitchen and store. ☎99383446.

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

NEW penthouse, N Ghubra — 2 bedroom + 3 toilets + 1 maid room

with toilet and 1 big hall ☎99370300.

For Rent

SUBSTANTIAL villa at Hay Al Shatti. Suitable for Embassy with residences for the Ambassador and staff. Call ☎99238012/ 24704994.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHOWROOM and flats FLATS for rent near Diwan Zafraniya area end of Muttrah Corniche close to (Muscat Shiva Temple), family, bachelor. Contact ☎99083071, 99323015.

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

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

NEW Flats For Rent at Darsait near to Ministry of Sports Affairs, Mumtaz area The flats include: 1 Living Room, 2 Bedroom, Kitchen, 3 Toilets, Every room with split A/C, High quality finishing. Rent per flat is RO 320/- Interested persons, please contact. ☎00968-92225523.

For Rent

APARTMENTS for rent in Bausher Al Amin Mosque area 1) Apartments for rent and offices in the district Al Amin Mosque two rooms, hall, kitchen and two bathrooms system RO 250 negotiable equipped and divided offices for rent to companies an area of 600 metres 2). We have furnished and unfurnished apartment rooms for monthly rent all over Muscat to communicate. ☎964441111 or 96672277.

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

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

1BHK & 2 BHK flats for rent at Ruwi and Al Khoudh. ☎93994402, 93994403, 24834644.

FURNISHED flats for rent in Muscat Grand Mall ☎99445771, 93204595 93203481.

TWO new apartment for rent in Al Qurum near Mina al Fahal. ☎94664635, 95850345.

FLAT for family for rent, Alaom Al Akhtar shop, behind Irani Bank, Abu Abdullah ☎99627724, Abu Abdulrahman ☎99315490.

FAMILY flat, air-conditioner, middle Al Khuwair ☎93663380.

HOUSE room, sitting room + kitchen toilet in South Al Maabela, served government water located near Nesto and opposite to Starcare in Al Maabela. ☎99700908.

3 BHK Flat & studio flat in central Ruwi & 2 BHK in Medinat Al Ilam. Call ☎99238012/ 24704994.

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

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

Acc Available

ACCOMMODATION for company personnel/ executives at Qurum Beach Hotel on short/ long term basis. Contact Mr Shafiq ☎99470124/ 24564066.

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Situation Wanted

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOR RENT

6 bedroom villa with maid room and store room. Near sultan center, 18th Nov street, Azaiba.

Contact: 94947862

For Sale/Rent

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

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

For Sale

Institution Licence contact ☎9595512.

DIESEL Tanker, 1,600 gallon Volvo, 1987. ☎92836774.

FLATS in Al Mabella. ☎99323957, 95490842.

RESIDENTIAL building in Al Hamriya. Income RO 1,200. Required RO 115,000. ☎92273379.

RESTAURANT in an excellent location in Salalah with equipment and workers. ☎93397812.

FOR sale: Extravagant and furnished residences for female students in Al Khuwair, Al Mawaleh and Al Khoudh along with all assets. ☎99001332.

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

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

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Sheeala Al Haya for Trading LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1072971**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **50,000.000** to **10,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

Buying

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

We buy used and broken cars which have instalments in cash. ☎920202090.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Situation Vacant

A LOADING and unloading fishing company seeks to hire labourers who have NOC to change sponsorship. Age is 27 years old and less. To connect: ☎90111010.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Al Salhi United Projects LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1016906**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **80,000.000** to **10,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **New Al Salhi Projects LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1111539**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **30,000.000** to **10,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.



With no live audiences, NY Fashion Week tries to support US designers

New York: With almost no live audiences and few major names, New York Fashion week, which opens on Sunday in city that was ravaged by the pandemic, is not giving up — and is trying to help American designers survive an unprecedented crisis.

Don't bother looking for Michael Kors, Tommy Hilfiger or Ralph Lauren, regular heavy-hitters on the lineup. They won't be attending this Fashion Week, which will last only three days, from Sunday evening to Wednesday.

Eager to sell off some of the considerable stock accumulated since the start of the pandemic and sometimes held back by a much-slowed production chain, the big designers are showing their new collections later, separate from the usual fashion calendar.

Marc Jacobs has given up his spring-summer 2021 collection altogether.

The only fashion giant attending this week will be Tom Ford, who will show his new collection virtually for the closing event on Wednesday night.

His presence is a symbol of the willpower of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA), of which Ford is the chairman, to support American design houses of all sizes — many teetering on the brink.

Historically, American high-end ready-to-wear designs have relied heavily on department stores, which were in bad shape themselves and have fallen like dominoes during the pandemic, from Barneys and Lord & Taylor to Neiman Marcus.

In-person fashion shows have practically vanished from the calendar this season, with a few (very rare) exceptions, including Jason Wu's opening show on Sunday, or Rebecca Minkoff, whose presentation is on Tuesday.

Even if New York has become one of the stronger case studies in recovery, the US has struggled to get the coronavirus pandemic under control, which explains the discrepancies with Paris, Milan or London fashion weeks, where live fashion shows were much more frequent.

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'MOVING FORWARD'

Apart from health risks, "when trying to simply pay as many employees as I can and not have to make further cuts or furloughs, to spend several million dollars on a show makes no sense," Ford said in an interview with industry publication *Women's Wear Daily*.

Ever the pragmatist, the 59-year-old, generally clad in a black suit, doesn't anticipate a "normal" season before fall 2021.

In order to help American designers hang on, the CFDA invested in a new platform — named Runway360 — that is accessible to designers for free and lets fashion houses show their collec-

tions and create virtual events around their designs.

More than 50 of the 70 or so designers on the agenda for New York Fashion Week are using Runway360. Some of them have filmed their shows in New York in advance and will stream the videos at their appointed time.

But even without in-person shows, "fashion is a business, and Fashion Week is a platform for designers to do business," CFDA CEO Steven Kolb said.

Crucially, "Fashion Week is about jobs... it's about people's livelihoods. It's about moving forward, but cautiously, with safety in mind," he said.

Many young designers view this uncharted period as "an opportunity to get exposed," said Geoffrey Owens, an African-American designer showing his very first collection for his label Zoonek at the Flying Solo show.

Just one year ago, Owens, also a minister, was cutting hair in his salon in Virginia Beach, dreaming of fashion.

Already skilled in drawing, he learned how to sew in just 30 days and was able to "activate that gift."

"Doors have been opening ever since," he said.

Fellow newbie Fashion Week presenter Mohamed ElMadawy echoed the hope: "Those big brands are not showing as aggressively anymore, so I think I have a better chance" of breaking through, he said.

ElMadawy is Egyptian and has been living in New York since 2012. He is showing his first collection at Fashion Week for his brand Elmadawy on Sunday, also at the show by Flying Solo, a cutting-edge boutique in SoHo that scouts and promotes emerging designers.

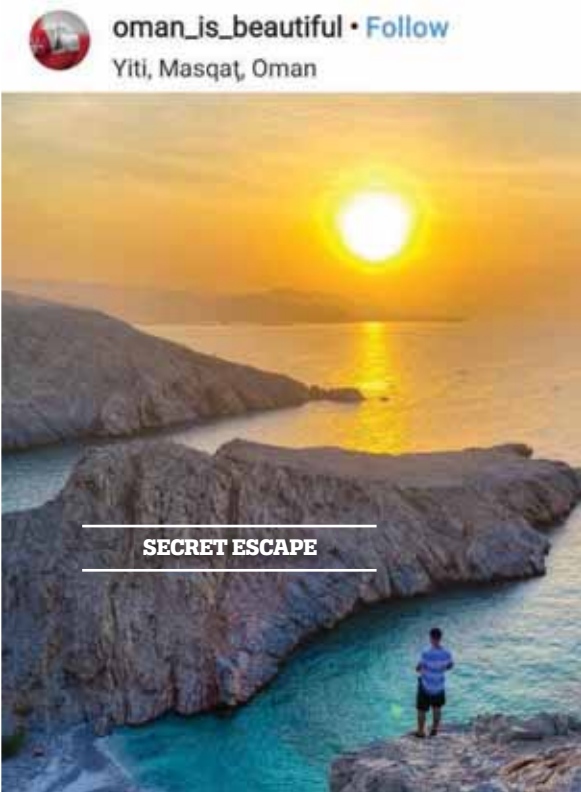
For Owens, a designer's role is to "set the bar" for society and "bring us out of... that dark place" of the past six months.

"Let's live again," he said. — AFP





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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TRAVEL TALES

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Notre-Dame crypt reopens with exhibition 18 months after blaze

The archaeological crypt of Notre-Dame reopens on Wednesday with an exhibition retracing the cathedral's turbulent history nearly 18 months after it was ravaged by fire. The April 2019 blaze toppled the spire of the cathedral and destroyed much of the roof of what is one of France's most cherished national treasures.

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

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

'FORBIDDING AND DANGEROUS'

Hugo's novel "The

Hunchback of Notre-Dame," published in 1831, was instrumental in winning public backing for the restoration of the monument which had been left in a state of abandon and decay.

"The exhibition starts with how the cathedral looked at the time the novel was published," said Vincent Gille, a curator at the Victor Hugo museum in Paris.

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

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

'WAR AGAINST THE DEMOLISHERS'

Notre-Dame was badly damaged by vandalism in the early 19th century, and indifferent city authorities

were planning to tear it down when Hugo called for "War against the Demolishers" in a pamphlet published in 1825.

"There is perhaps not a single city in France today that is not thinking about, beginning, or completing the destruction of some national monument," he wrote.

After the publication of "Hunchback," the exhibition shows, the French public swung behind the idea that Notre-Dame was worth saving and gave crucial support to Viollet-le-Duc's work on the cathedral between 1844 and 1864, which laid the foundations for the national monument status it enjoys today.

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

Organisers see the exhibition as the first step

towards a return to normality for the crypt's museum, which before the fire welcomed some 170,000 visitors a year.

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

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

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

President Emmanuel Macron in July gave his blessing to a faithful reconstruction of the cathedral's spire, in a change of heart after previously calling for a "contemporary" touch. — **AFP**

MUSIC

Hungarian orchestra conductor invents music-enhancing face mask



BUDAPEST: When he saw a sea of face masks around Budapest, Hungarian orchestra conductor Ivan Fischer had an idea; turn an unpopular pandemic necessity into a tool of music appreciation.

Fischer's music-enhancing face mask has two plastic cups shaped like life-size palms attached to the mask's strings and designed to fit around the wearer's ears, allowing concertgoers in the age of Coronavirus to enjoy improved acoustics.

"I got to this idea that it should look like a hand because when we put our hands here..." he said, cupping his palms around his ears, "... we always understand the other person easier, we hear the consonants, and the music sounds much more beautiful."

Speaking as the orchestra rehearsed for an evening of

Beethoven and Strauss, Fischer - the chief of the Budapest Festival Orchestra - said his masks help to emulate church acoustics, with warmer undertones and clearer, sharper contours.

Fischer's invention is proving popular with concertgoers, with dozens of people wearing the mask as they took their seats at Friday's performance.

The acoustic mask, which costs 8,000 forints (\$27) if ordered through the orchestra's website, comes in glittery and black and white versions.

Audience member Zsuzsa Hunyadi-Zoltan said the sound was "clearly better" with the special mask in place.

"It focused the music more. I tried it, I took it off and put it back on and one can clearly feel the difference," she said. — **Reuters**



Barr al Hikman: The shorebird paradise that's also a perfect weekend getaway

TEXT BY YERU EBUEN
PHOTOS BY AHMED AL JABRI

We arrived in Barr al Hikman a little past noon two weeks after the COVID-19 lockdown was lifted. Had we come a week later, the condition would have been perfect as there will be more exposed sand than what we were seeing.

Photographer and local explorer Ahmed al Jabri was in contact with one of the residents of Mahout. He met the guy, also named Ahmed, in his previous trip when they have to call for help because they got stuck in the tricky mudflats.

As a caveat, while Barr al Hikman is

houses and barastis owned by the fishermen but these are temporary. Some fishermen stay in these barasti for days as they collect enough fishes to sell back when they get to the city.

The evenings can get really dark as there is no single light post built here but it offers a great opportunity to gaze at the star-filled nights. The loud crash of the waves on the white sandy shores will lull you to sleep and set up tent in the wrong spot and you'll wake up with a nesting turtle throwing sand your way. This is, after all, still a part of the network of nesting sites of sea turtles.

Conservationists and environmentalists had always known of the beauty of Barr al Hikman. The fishermen had always been aware of its impressive, nearly pristine shores but after years of secrecy, the public has started to take notice of its beauty.

WHITE SAND EMBRACED BY AN EMERALD SEA

It has the longest natural sand bar in the Middle East expanding several kilometres into an emerald sea. Nearly six hours drive from Muscat, there's a reason why not a lot venture into this part of Oman.

In winter, it is home to half a million migratory birds making it one of the most important coastal wetlands worldwide.

When coming here, one should bring along camping gears and provisions and knowledge of tides and season is important.

Based on what we saw, even four-wheel-drives had a hard time navigating through its mudflats. But the reward of the long drive is going to be worth it as just like what you see in photos, the sand is as fine as powder and Barr al Hikman has some of the best pools for swimming.

The number of visitors going to Barr al Hikman has more than doubled just this year alone. Although not based on official records, local fishermen noted that there had been more visitors coming compared to the previous years.

It will take some time for Barr al Hikman to be developed to its full potential. Some reports said that the area will be developed as a tourism destination but this is met with a dire warning from conservationists.

In a book published in 2018 called 'Barr al Hikman, Shorebird paradise in Oman,' the authors sounded "Its remote location has helped safeguard the pristine condition of Barr al Hikman so far, but emerging threats and plans of development in the area indicate that the natural protection of its remoteness can no longer be relied upon."

While there are still no proper checks and balances in place and people have the freedom to do whatever they want in the area, it is wise to also think about the overall beauty of the place. If in case you are visiting here to take a glimpse of Oman's very own Maldives, remember the old cliché, "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints."

Conservationists and environmentalists had always known of the beauty of Barr al Hikman. The fishermen had always been aware of its impressive, nearly pristine shores but after years of secrecy, the public has started to take notice of its beauty

indeed as beautiful and stunning as the Maldives, it is lagging very far behind in development.

Ask anyone who visited the area and chances are, two out of three will tell you stories of horror — of how they have to shovel their way out of being stuck.

No paved roads are going to Barr al Hikman. The only stable roads are the ones that have hardened because of the constant use of the locals. Take the wrong turn and you'll end up in a menacing debacle which Al Jabri shared has been the case for their last trip.

"We were helping out this other car that got stuck but we ended up getting stuck ourselves," he said.

From the main village in Mahoot, it takes another 30 to 40 minutes drive towards the beautiful sands of Barr al Hikman that is seen in the pictures here. You would have to pass through salt flats and muddy shores and if you didn't time your trip, have to wait out the tide to go low. That's one of the challenges going here — you also have to check the ebb and flow of the tide.

There are no permanent fixtures in Barr al Hikman, at least, as far the protected site is concerned. There are still



features

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Barr al Hikman: The shorebird paradise that’s also a perfect weekend getaway

To environmentalists and conservationists, it is the winter getaway for thousands of migratory birds. For the local fishermen, it is one of the best spots to fish. These groups had always known the beauty and potential of Barr al Hikman. For the rest of us, we are just beginning to discover that it is indeed worthy to be called the “Maldives” of Oman.... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

FASHION



WITH NO LIVE AUDIENCES, NY FASHION WEEK TRIES TO SUPPORT US DESIGNERS

With almost no live audiences and few major names, New York Fashion week, which opens on Sunday in the city that was ravaged by the pandemic, is not giving up — and is trying to help American designers survive an unprecedented crisis... Story on **Page 17**

TRAVEL TALES



NOTRE-DAME CRYPT REOPENS WITH EXHIBITION 18 MONTHS AFTER BLAZE

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

READ



THE LYING LIFE OF ADULTS

BY ELENA FERRANTE

In this coming-of-age story, Giovanna seeks her true reflection in two kindred cities.

MUSIC



HUNGARIAN ORCHESTRA CONDUCTOR INVENTS MUSIC-ENHANCING FACE MASK

The Warner Bros movie studio on Friday postponed the debut of superhero sequel “Wonder Woman 1984” until Christmas Day as many theaters remain closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE



BOSS/EMPLOYEE EXCHANGE DAY

No matter how ideal the working environment, there is always a gap between employees and management. The Boss/Employee Exchange Day is the perfect opportunity to swap roles and understand where each party is coming from. This is the perfect time to exchange ideas, to improve processes and foster a harmonious working relationship.