

Job fund to ensure welfare of citizens

MUSCAT: The Royal directives on setting up a Job Security Fund (JSF) issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik after the Council of Ministers' meeting on March 3 were based on the Royal vision that youth constitute an essential element in nation building.

His Majesty the Sultan's donation of RO 10 million is testimony to His Majesty's deep conviction on the role of youth in rebuilding the nation.

The JSF assumes great significance because it will serve to secure basic care to citizens who lost their jobs and support them till they find other jobs. The JSF paves the way for citizens to join the



private sector and secure the future requirements of citizens and their families.

The Royal directives to establish the JSF assume special importance under the current crisis that pervades

the global economy. The JSF is entrusted to provide livelihood needs of stricken segments of society by providing a security cover for impoverished or laid-off workers.

TURN ON P2

HM congratulates President of Pakistan

Muscat: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent congratulations to President Dr Arif Alvi of Pakistan on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty the Sultan wished good health and happiness to President Alvi and the people of Pakistan further progress and prosperity.

NEW SCHOOL YEAR STARTS ON NOV 1

Classes to be conducted in schools and online

MUSCAT: The new school year for all students in the Sultanate will begin on November 1 while teaching staff and employees will resume work on September 27. This was announced by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 after its meeting chaired by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, at the Education Ministry's General Diwan on Thursday.

The resumption of classes is in line with the aim of conducting not less than 180 days of schooling. Holidays for students, members of teaching staff and employees in associated jobs shall be arranged in a manner that fits with the new schedule.

The committee studied efforts exerted by the Ministry of Education towards the reopening of



schools for the school year amid the persisting COVID-19 situation.

The committee reviewed suggestions presented by the Education Ministry after exploring regional and international systems under similar circumstances. It also reviewed studies conducted by a number of international organisations after coordinating with various sectors concerned in the Sultanate and social institutions.

TURN ON P2

Wanderlust Oman attracts women adventurers



MUSCAT: The Wanderlust Oman team, the first female adventure sports teams, is attracting large numbers of women to participate in its various programmes inside and outside the Sultanate.

Zainab bint Saif al Kiyoumi, founder of the Wanderlust Oman team said: "The team offers adventure sports with the highest levels of security,

safety and privacy. It encourages women to go out, get closer to nature and lead a healthy lifestyle. The team organises various sporting events like hiking, climbing caves, valleys and desert activities, as well as camping and karting, which is organised in cooperation with the Oman Automobile Association (OAA)."

TURN ON P2

Job fund to ensure welfare of citizens

FROM PAGE 1

Article 12 of the Basic Law of the State contains a number of social principles focused on justice and equality of opportunities among Omanis. These principles include encouraging solidarity and collaboration among citizens, fostering national unity and neutralising anything that might lead to disparity or dispute.

The same article states that the family is the kernel of society and that law has been enacted to protect the family's entity and values and establish conditions for its members to develop their skills and talents. Article 12 of the Basic Law also states that the State guarantees to the citizen and his family assistance during emergencies, disease, inability, disability and old age, as well as the State's bearing the burdens of families during catastrophes.

The article also states that the State caters to public health and provides all means of protection and treatment during epidemic outbreaks through hospitals and polyclinics under certain regulations, defined by law, that preserve the environment and protect it against pollution.

This is in addition to laws that protect the rights of workers and employers and regulate the relationship between them, as stated in Article 12 of the Basic Law of the State, which also considers public jobs as national service rendered to all citizens, who have equal rights to public jobs. — ONA

BEGGING AND MISUSE OF VISA STATUS PUNISHABLE OFFENCES

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Legal Affairs has issued warnings against begging, which has seen an increase in recent months.

"Please avoid dealing with beggars in order not to promote a practice that is against the law and puts the nation at risk," said the statement.

The ministry has alerted that using a minor or handing him to another person with an intention to involve the person in the act of begging is a crime punishable by imprisonment for a period up to three years and a fine of RO 100. The sentence is doubled if the offender is the minor's guardian, trustee or a person entrusted to his or her care or supervision. Begging at the mosques, roads, stores and public areas in general is a crime punishable by imprisonment



for a period of up to one year and a fine of RO 100.

Expats can work only with licensed employer

Another aspect that has been brought into focus by the ministry is the legal implications when an individual on a particular visa works for another organisation. According to the Ministry of Legal Affairs, leaving a non-Omani employee to another person by the employer is an offence punishable by imprisonment for one

month and a fine of RO1,000. The sentence is multiplied by the number of violating employees.

"Working without a permit from the concerned authorities by an expat or working for someone other than his licensed employer is an offence punishable by imprisonment for one month and a fine of RO 800 including deportation from the country and denying further access to the country," said the statement from Ministry of Legal Affairs.

New school year starts on Nov 1

FROM PAGE 1

As part of the committee's keenness on safeguarding the safety of students and members of teaching and

administrative staff, as well as all other individuals of society, it has been decided to conduct some classes in schools and other classes

online in accordance with basic terms and regulations to be issued by the Ministry of Education.

— ONA

Wanderlust Oman attracts women adventurers

FROM PAGE 1

She said the team also offers training in diving in cooperation with trainers to motivate women to explore undersea adventures and contribute to sustaining the marine environment.

Al Kiyoumi said the absence of official authorised bodies is a major challenge faced adventure enthusiasts in the Sultanate. She added that there is a need to provide professional training courses for tour guides to ensure his safety and the safety of his clients.

Israa bint Salem al Ajmi, media officer at the Wanderlust Oman, said the

team organised trips to the Philippines, Tanzania, China, Lebanon, Bali, Mexico and India. They also trekked to Jabal Shams and visited Bar Al Hakaman Reserve and Falaj Al Maysar in the Wilayat of Rustaq.

"In light of the suspension of all activities due to COVID-19, the team is taking advantage to develop skills in the field of adventure, safety and leadership through video calls," she said.

The team organised a virtual programme about diving for women, through which it aspires to groom a professional diving team of women. — ONA

COVID-19 cases hit 82,531

MUSCAT: The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 82,531, while the number of recoveries stood at 77,278, comprising 93.6 per cent.

The total number of COVID-19 related deaths stood at 551, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry also pointed out that 60 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital stands at 464, of whom 155 are in intensive care units (ICU). — ONA

Keep virus-related stress at bay as psychotic disorders seen rising

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: There are four categories of people suffering from psychosocial stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic for the individual and the society the individual is living in.

The first category consists of individuals who do not have any risk factors in developing any mental illness or psychiatric problem, but because of the rapidly changing circumstances around they develop psychiatric issues such as anxiety, depression and sleep-related problems, according to Dr Ashok Anthony, a Specialist Psychiatrist. This is the major group of people Dr Ashok has been coming across as out-patients.

"The second group is evolving now. They are people who are actually diagnosed with COVID-19 and then started developing psychiatric issues. It is related to the guilt of having contracted the illness and the guilt and worry that he might pass it on to the family members or colleagues at work.

"They worry about contracting COVID-19 because there is a lot of negative news



on that or being permanently affected by the virus. There are many who got it and recovered but are worried about the sequel," he said.

The third set of people do not have COVID-19 but have other multiple risk factors like diabetes, hypertension, which are risk factors for developing complicated case of COVID infection.

"The fourth and the last group are the people who are genetically vulnerable to psychiatric illness who, due to certain circumstances, have gone through psychotic breakdown. These are the groups I have been encountering but one of the groups – post COVID infection, is still evolving," he pointed out.

Psychotic breakdowns are

major problems, which require monitoring and maybe even admission to hospital. Over the last few months people diagnosed with psychotic breakdowns have been increasing.

"Just looking at the months of April and May, we have been coming across at least one case of psychotic breakdown per day.

The basic theme that comes up in a pandemic situation is uncertainty," he said.

Dr Ashok explained that it is at the micro and macro levels. At micro level, the uncertainty is for his family and the close members around him. Many plans that have been in place are all changing now for the near future.

The macro level is when people especially residents worry about their relatives back home and worry about how they are doing.

So what can family, colleagues and friends do to help an individual?

Ventilation is important. "What we have to understand is feeling of worry and anxiety is normal emotion which we all have to undergo in this situation. When you normalise it you will ventilate it. Ventilation with a family member, with a friend, a therapist or a psychiatrist can actually reduce the anxiety burden in a person.

"Normalisation of anxiety is the first thing, secondly when we cannot normalise it the body goes into a hyperactive mode. The worry is constantly on, and the brain and the mind cannot rest. That leads to sleep problems, lack of appetite and an emotional state and seeps into the normal schedule of the person. So maintenance of a normal schedule is something everyone must try. Maintaining a good sleep, hygiene, diet and regular exercise pattern will boost your immunity of the body," advises Dr Ashok.

Ban on fishing kingfish from tomorrow

MUSCAT: The ban on fishing and trading of kingfish in the Sultanate will take effect on Saturday, marking the beginning of the breeding season this year.

The two-month ban will be in force until October 15.

In implementing the ban, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries aims to preserve the stocks of kingfish, and to regulate the fishing process, in order to achieve a balance between the quantities of the stock

and the catch.

In preparation for the implementation of the ban, the ministry, represented by the directorates and fisheries departments in the coastal governorates of the Sultanate, carried out guidance and awareness activities among fishermen, transporters, companies and institutions.

The ministry has also prepared a monitoring system to implement the ban and take legal action against violators. — ONA

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Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

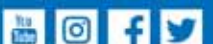
Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com



@omanobserver
www.omanobserver.om

#Living_with_COVID19

GCC health officials review steps against COVID-19

MUSCAT: The GCC Under-Secretaries of Ministries of Health held on Thursday their 10th video-conference meeting to discuss the latest developments of coronavirus (COVID-19).

On behalf of Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, Dr Saif bin Salim al Abri, Director-General of Diseases Surveillance and Control represented the Sultanate in the meeting along with Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Director-General of Primary Healthcare as well as a



number of MOH's senior officials.

The meeting reviewed minutes of the previous meeting.

Moreover, the meeting discussed the latest

updates on cases and procedures in the GCC countries including updating the precautionary measures after reopening process, along with the procedures for

opening borders and determining PCR checkpoints.

Proposals regarding back-to-school mechanisms were further highlighted. — **ONA**

Pandemic pastime

ACADEMICS SPEND TIME READING AND RESEARCHING

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Talk to anyone and no one will tell anything good about the time being passed during the COVID-19 pandemic. A section of people, however, are trying to find positivity amidst negativity and they are some academics who are finding this forced situation an opportunity to read some unfinished books and continue with research work.

Jyotirmayee Vandana has to stay back in Oman despite having her annual leave from her work. She works as Programme Director for Communication Studies course in the Ministry of Higher Education and aspires eagerly for her annual leave to meet her near and dear ones and complete some pending work back home.

She is finding book-reading a nice pastime during the pandemic as she has a very good collection of books, many of them she could not finish due to lack of time.



Since she is not going to office and spending most of the time at home she is happy with her books, notes, and music that is part and parcel of her life.

Dr Abdulraoof Ahmed Ismail, Faculty at CAS Salalah, is caught in a similar situation. He avoided travelling to his home in the Indian state of Kerala during the pandemic period.

He admits to having missed many occasions at home and family, but happy that he is coping up alone by reading books and working on pending research works. Pre-pandemic he did not know how to cook, but the situation has forced him to manage his food as well, as

he avoids going out during "the bad times of coronavirus."

"Though I missed several intimate things this vacation as a result of not being able to fly home, I could certainly use it for some other creative activities. I got time to complete my readings of a couple of books including Harari's bestseller 'Sapiens - a brief history of humankind'. This book makes you redefine your existence as a human being. The experience of reading the book is so intense that I am unable to see all the other activities I did during these days nothing other than an extension of the feel the book created in me," he said.

"The pandemic forced me to start cooking my food, being in a state of staying away from the family. I overpowered the boredom of cooking by connecting with our ancestors who first started using fire. I believed my cooking is a tribute to all those great people who passed over the basic lessons of survival!"

Commenting on how this time is helpful on the professional front, Dr Abdulraoof said, "Of course, the quest for knowledge is unique to Homo sapiens. So I enrolled for some online courses and engaged actively in writing some academic research papers, one of which is nearing completion. Apart from regular online contact with family and friends, watching movies and listening to music -- two examples for acts of culture -- were the other two important activities which kept me engaged this vacation. "Harari is right: we are the only species on this planet who have created culture!"

New regulations for non-Omanis owning properties

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing has announced regulatory measures as per the decision to complete the transfer of non-Omani ownership of land and real estate in the prohibited areas by November 19, 2020.

The regulations as per the ministerial decision 292/2020 include:

Land and real estate: The legal transfer of ownership of all land and real estate in the places limited to an Omani citizen no later than Thursday, November 19, 2020, with the possibility of extending the deadline for one year only after the approval of the ministry through the electronic form available on the website.

The legal disposal of ownership of the lands granted to non-Omanis by the state in the exclusion zones within two years from the date of losing the Omani nationality, revoking it or withdrawing it, subject to extension for one year only after the approval of the Minister of Housing – in vacant or occupied properties.

Land and real estate transferred by inheritance, will or gift:

The legal transfer of ownership of all lands and real estate located in the places of prohibition to an Omani citizen within two years from the date of transfer of ownership, with the possibility of extending the deadline for one year only after the approval of the ministry, through the electronic form available on the ministry's website: www.housing.gov.om.

The ministry will not receive any new requests that would cause a change in the nature of lands or real estate owned by non-Omanis in places of prohibition such as extension, division, sorting, change of use, or modification of the shape or height of the plot of land.



Omani doctor becomes member of HUPO

MUSCAT: Dr Adhara bint Abdullah al Za'abi from Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) has been given the membership of the arbitration panel of various international awards in the field of human proteins, being the first Omani and Arab female to obtain membership of the Human Proteome Organisation (HUPO).

In a statement on the accomplishment, Dr Adhara said, "For about one year, I have been engaged in joint research with an international team within HUPO, and I have been selected as member of the board of the global organisation to officiate at international awards within the arbitration panel of the global organisation, along with an elite team of scientists and researchers from world countries where not a single Arab state is represented."

She added, "My presence in the organisation will enhance international cooperation with the SQU, including cooperation with the HUPO and scientists organising global events aimed to foster scientific research."

Dr Adhara obtained MD from Sultan Qaboos University and she was the top of the batch. She also obtained PhD, with distinction, in the field of cancer research (breast,



Dr Adhara bint Abdullah al Za'abi is the first Omani and Arab female to obtain membership of the Human Proteome Organisation

colon) from the United States.

HUPO is an international organisation focusing on clinical research in human protein. It works to comprehend molecular structure of human proteins, being the prime mover of all other body functions, and then associate protein research with genes to form a comprehensive vision about the functions of human body, the causes of diseases and ways of treatment and protection against diseases.

— ONA

COVID-19 test must for travel via UAE-based airlines

MUSCAT: The Consulate General in Australia has issued a circular to all Omani nationals and students studying in Australia and New Zealand about new travel procedures issued by all airlines of UAE.

All passengers

travelling through one of the airlines of UAE, whether from or to one of the airports of UAE, must undergo the COVID-19 examination at the nearest health institution, and submit a medical report stating that the traveller is free of the coronavirus.

As per the rule that was implemented from August 1, tests must be conducted 96 hours before commencing the travel procedures.

All travellers with special needs and children under the age of 12 years are excluded from the procedure.

WORLD

MPs APPROVE BEIRUT STATE OF EMERGENCY



Lebanese security forces stand guard outside the UNESCO Palace in Beirut during a parliamentary session on Thursday. — AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanon's parliament on Thursday approved a two-week state of emergency imposed by the government after last week's deadly port explosion that gives it legal authority to suppress resurgent protests. Calls had circulated on social media networks for protesters to prevent lawmakers from entering the session - the first since the August 4 blast that ravaged swathes of the capital. But turnout was too low

on Thursday morning, ahead of official visits by French Defence Minister Florence Parly and David Hale, the top career diplomat at the US State Department. Security forces outnumbered the dozen or so demonstrators who had gathered on a street near parliament. Demonstrators tried to heckle tinted vehicles dashing to the debate but they could not stop it reaching a quorum. The government had

already declared a two-week state of emergency the day after the explosion. But as the measure lasts more than eight days, Lebanese law requires that it be approved by parliament, according to The Legal Agenda, an NGO. The state of emergency allows the army to close down assembly points and prohibit gatherings deemed threats to national security, and expands the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians. — AFP

Israel halts fuel shipments to Gaza

TEL AVIV/GAZA: Israel said on Thursday it will stop shipments of fuel into Gaza in response to Palestinians in the enclave launching incendiary balloons that have torched tracts of farmland on the Israeli frontier. Palestinians in Gaza have launched dozens of helium balloons laden with incendiary material in recent days to pressure Israel to ease its blockade of the territory. Fuel shipments were stopped "in light of the continued launching of incendiary balloons from the Strip toward (Israel) and of the undermining of security stability," a defence min-



The halt in fuel shipments could shut down Gaza's sole power plant and lead to further electricity cuts. — Reuters

istry statement said. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum called the measure a "grave act of aggression" that would deepen Gaza's economic hardship. The halt in fuel shipments

could shut down Gaza's sole power plant and lead to further electricity cuts, said Mohammad Thabet, an official with Gaza's main power distribution company. — Reuters

IN BRIEF

NZ virus outbreak grows to 17 cases

WELLINGTON: New Zealand reported 14 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday, amid a second wave of the virus resurgence in the country. A positive case in managed isolation was a woman in her 30s who arrived in New Zealand from the Philippines on August 8, reports Xinhua news agency. She has been in managed isolation at the Distinction Hotel and tested positive around day 3 of her stay, Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield told a press conference. The 13 other cases were reported in Auckland and were all linked to the four people from the same family in the city previously reported, Bloomfield said. — IANS

Russian Deputy PM tests positive

MOSCOW: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yury Trutnev has tested positive for COVID-19. Trutnev's trip to the Far East as part of the visit of Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin has been postponed so far, according to a media report. In May, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov had tested positive for the coronavirus and was receiving treatment in hospital. Dmitry Peskov is the fourth senior government official to have fallen ill, after Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Culture Minister Olga Lyubimova and Construction Minister Vladimir Yakushev said they tested positive for the virus. — IANS

WORLD



Students at Newham Collegiate Sixth Form react after receiving their A-Level results in east London on Thursday. — AFP

6% OF ENGLAND’S POPULATION MAY HAVE HAD COVID: STUDY

LONDON: Nearly 6 per cent of people in England were likely infected with COVID-19 during the peak of the pandemic, researchers studying the prevalence of infections said on Thursday, millions more people than have tested positive for the disease.

A total of 313,798 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in Britain, 270,971 of which have been in England, or just 0.5 per cent of the English population.

313,798 PEOPLE HAVE TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 IN BRITAIN, 270,971 OF WHICH HAVE BEEN IN ENGLAND

However, a study which tested more than 100,000 people across England for antibodies to the coronavirus showed that nearly 6 per cent of people had them, suggesting that 3.4 million people had

previously contracted COVID-19 by the end of the June.

The results are consistent with other surveys, such as those conducted by the Office for National Statistics, which suggest higher levels of COVID-19 in the community during the pandemic than implied by daily testing statistics.

Healthcare and care workers were most likely to have been previously infected. — Reuters

N Korea nuclear site may be damaged by flood

SEOUL: Satellite imagery suggests recent flooding in North Korea may have damaged pump houses connected to the country's main nuclear facility, a US-based think-tank said on Thursday.

Analysts at 38 North, a website that monitors North Korea, said commercial satellite imagery from August 6-11 showed how vulnerable the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center's nuclear reactor cooling systems are to extreme weather events.

The Korean peninsula has been hammered by one of the longest rainy spells in recent history, with floods and landslides causing damage and deaths in both North and South Korea.

Located on the bank of the Kuryong River about 100 km north of North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, Yongbyon is home to nuclear reactors, fuel reprocessing plants and uranium enrichment facilities that are thought to be used in the country's nuclear weapons programme. — Reuters



IN BRIEF

US mulls changing shower rules

WASHINGTON: The US government has proposed changing the definition of a showerhead to allow increased water flow, following complaints from President Donald Trump about his hair routine, a media report said on Thursday.

Under a 1992 law, showerheads in the US are not allowed to produce more than 2.5 gallons of water per minute, said the BBC report.

The Trump administration wants this limit to apply to each nozzle, rather than the overall fixture.

The changes were proposed by the Department of Energy on Wednesday following complaints by Trump at the White House last month. — IANS

Rights charter for India taxpayers

NEW DELHI: To further digitise the Income Tax Department's functioning, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday launched the 'transparent taxation' platform among other reforms.

Consequently, the move brings into effect faceless assessment of taxpayers, faceless appeals and the Rights' Charter for the taxpayers.

With the 'Transparent Taxation Honouring the Honest' that is aimed at carrying forward the journey of direct tax reforms, the taxpayers would not be harassed or treated with suspicion here on. — IANS

Manila vows strict vaccine screening

MANILA: Philippine officials on Thursday assured the public that any vaccine against the novel coronavirus would have to go through strict regulatory screening before being made available to Filipinos.

Concerns over the safety of a new Russian vaccine against Covid-19 were raised after Moscow announced that it was ready to mass produce it in October and offered to supply the Philippines or to team up with local firms to manufacture it in the country.

Eric Domingo, Director-General of the Food and Drug Administration, said the Manila government will be "very careful" in approving the vaccine, called Sputnik V. — dpa

ANALYSIS



Unesco-listed buildings in the old city of the Yemeni capital Sanaa. — AFP

BATTERED FIRST BY BOMBS, THEN FLOODS

ABDELKARIM AL MARANI AND HADBAA AL YAZIDI

Muddy waters lap overfoot in Sanaa’s Old City, inhabited without interruption for more than 2,500 years but now facing disaster after floods that threaten the collapse of irreplaceable houses.

The deluge risks finishing off the destruction of its distinctive buildings with their ochre brick facades and white latticework windows, experts say.

The foundations were already weakened by bombings in Yemen’s long war.

“Since dawn we have been trying to clean the mud off the roofs and drain the water — but it’s no use”, said Ali al Ward, a long-time resident. “We sleep with fear in the pits of our stomachs. We are between life and death”, said the frail man with a greying beard as he surveyed the damage in the Unesco World Heritage-listed site.

Flooding is common in Yemen at this time of year, blighting the poorest country on the Arabian peninsula that is in the grips of what the UN calls the world’s worst humanitarian disaster.

Torrential rains have also threatened other Unesco heritage sites in Yemen, including in Shibam further east, renowned for its high-rise mud-brick “skyscrapers”.

With water still lapping at the fragile structures, many of which have had no maintenance for years, there are fears that others will tumble.

The work of those involved in protecting the nation’s heritage was being hampered by dysfunction and a lack of political will. The war has claimed tens of thousands of lives, and displaced some three million people. About 24 million Yemenis — four-fifths of the population — are dependent on some form of humanitarian aid. — AFP

Tripoli filling in for Beirut

JANA DHAIBY

Lebanon’s northern city of Tripoli is readying its port to temporarily replace that of Beirut and ensure urgently needed food deliveries, officials said on Thursday, after the capital’s harbour was levelled in last week’s massive explosion.

Tripoli port’s capacity is smaller than the capital’s, through which the vast majority of Lebanon’s food and other imports used to transit.

A fire at Beirut port on August 4 spread to a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate, causing an explosion that devastated swathes of the city and killed at least 171 people.

Immediately after the disaster, Lebanon’s Supreme Defence Council ordered that the Port of Tripoli be set up for “import and export operations”.

The smaller ports of Saida and Tyre can also contribute to the effort but their capacity is limited and does not allow for bigger vessels to dock.

Lebanon relies on imports for 85 per cent of its food needs and the UN’s World Food Programme has warned that the destruction of the main port could worsen an already alarming situation.

Lebanon’s economic collapse in recent months has seen it default on its debt, plunged the local currency into freefall and sent poverty rates soaring, on top of the country’s COVID-19 outbreak.

Tripoli had already undergone major upgrade works in order to accommodate increased traffic expected in connection with the reconstruction effort needed in neighbouring, war-ravaged Syria.

The huge silos at Beirut port are still standing but unusable, with one side of the towering structure completely gutted by the explosion, whose epicentre was nearby.

The United Nations and several countries have sent thousands of tonnes of wheat and other commodities since the disaster to prevent a shortage of bread in Lebanon, where public anger against the government has boiled over into street protests.

Ships carrying emergency aid are still able to sail to Beirut and unload aid, usually with the help of the military.

Media reports suggest that several countries have already expressed interest in rebuilding Beirut port, including China, France and Turkey. — AFP

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Output from Oman's maiden wind farm tops 74 GWh

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Electricity output from the Dhofar Wind Power project — the first utility-scale wind farm facility in the Sultanate — totalled an impressive 74 gigawatt-hours (GWh) over the eight months since it came into operation late last year, underscoring the promising potential of wind resources as a sustainable energy source for Oman.

The wind farm, operated by the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) — part of wholly government-owned Nama Group -- came online last November, marking the advent of wind-based power generation in the Gulf region.

The 50-megawatt-capacity farm, featuring 13 wind turbines of around 3.8 MW capacity each, is located at Harweel — a windswept part of Dhofar Governorate in the south of Oman. Output from the plant is committed to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), also a subsidiary of Nama Group, under a long-term Power Purchase Agreement signed with Tanweer.

Oman is committed to harnessing renewable energy resources for at least 10 per cent of its domestic electricity requirement by 2025 – part of an ambitious strategy to reduce the Sultanate's long-standing dependence on valuable natural gas as the principal fuel resource for power generation. While solar energy will account for a dominant share of renewables-based electric-



ity generation, wind resources are envisioned to make a modest, but notable, contribution as well.

Ahead of the planned build-up of wind-based power generation capacity, OPWP – the sole procurer of new power generation and water desalination capacity under the sector law – has kicked off a wind resource assessment (WRA) programme, which is a prerequisite for evaluating the feasibility of a wind power project at a given location.

As part of the initiative, tall masts fitted with wind measuring instruments have been erected at locations tipped to host large-

scale wind power projects. At present, wind resource assessment studies are focused on two candidate locations: One in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, and the other in Duqm.

According to OPWP, Oman has excellent potential for wind energy development with wind speeds as high as 8-10 metres/second at numerous onshore sites, even during the summer months. Offshore development also may have large potential as well.

The next big commercial-scale wind project — a 100 MW capacity farm — is planned for development in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali during 2024. It will be the first wind power project within the Main Interconnected System (MIS) — the grid that covers much of the northern half of the Sultanate.

A planned interconnection between the MIS and Duqm, the site of a mega industrial and economic free zone, will enable the development of wind farms that capitalize on the huge wind potential of the hinterland of Al Wusta Governorate. Onward interconnectivity with the Dhofar Power System in the south of the country will also open up Thamrait and other parts of Dhofar to investments in new wind power capacity, according to OPWP.

Majority state-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the country's largest producer of hydrocarbons, is also actively weighing investments in wind farms as part of a commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.

**LOW-CARBON
ENERGY:**
Successful
operation
of Gulf's first
utility-scale
wind power
project bodes
well for growth
of wind power
capacity in the
Sultanate

BUSINESS

Russia's Novak expects no hasty OPEC+ decisions this month

MOSCOW: Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak does not expect any hasty decisions on output cuts when an OPEC+ group monitoring committee meets next week as the oil market has been stable, Russian news agencies reported on Thursday.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, have been cutting output since May by around 10 per cent of typical global demand to tackle the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last month, the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) a ministerial advisory panel to OPEC+, decided to ease the cuts beginning this month to around 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) until December from a previous reduction of 9.7 million bpd.

Novak said there have been no additional propos-



als to change the deal among OPEC+ producers, the reports said.

"I think no-one is putting forward any hasty moves, additional proposals," he said. "The market is more or less stable and we are seeing gradual balancing."

The JMMC is scheduled to convene next week against the backdrop of an oil price

LCOcl recovery to above \$45 a barrel from a 21-year low of below \$16 in April.

Russia's flagship Urals crude oil blend is under pressure as its top buyers in Europe scramble for better refining margins by replacing Urals with cheaper grades including light oils coming from the United States, Kazakhstan and

even gas condensate, traders said.

Urals for loading from Baltic Sea ports is now \$0.55 per barrel cheaper than Brent and down from record-high premiums seen in June.

At the same time, condensate is being offered at \$5 per barrel below Brent, traders said. — **Reuters**

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I think no-one is putting forward any hasty moves, additional proposals. The market is more or less stable and we are seeing gradual balancing

Jerry Colangelo, Hall of Fame spokesman

ALEXANDER NOVAK,
RUSSIAN ENERGY MINISTER

IEA lowers 2020 oil demand forecast citing dismal aviation sector

LONDON: The International Energy Agency (IEA) cut its 2020 oil demand forecast on Thursday, warning that reduced air travel due to the coronavirus pandemic would lower global oil demand this year by 8.1 million barrels per day (bpd).

The Paris-based IEA slashed its 2020 outlook by 140,000 bpd to 91.9 million bpd, its first downgrade in several months.

"Jet fuel demand remains the major source of weakness," the IEA said in its monthly report.

"In April the number of aviation kilometres travelled was nearly 80 per cent down on last year and in July the deficit was still 67 per cent ... The aviation and road transport sectors, both essential components of oil consumption, are continuing to struggle."

Damage to demand



A fuel tanker moves past Air India passenger jets parked at an airport in Kolkata. — **Reuters**

wrought by less cross-border travel was mitigated somewhat by recovery in industry and e-commerce that was supporting trucking, but the IEA still predicted 2021 oil consumption would be slightly lower than in 2019.

Data cited by the IEA indicated that mobility in many regions had reached a pla-

teau but was increasing in Europe, though a rise in COVID-19 cases caused the agency to cut demand estimates for gasoline.

The agency said that while supply exceeded demand in June, uncertainty over future demand along with increased output by top producers means re-balancing oil markets will be

"delicate".

Oil production was recovering in the United States, Canada and Brazil at the same time producers from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies such as Russia, a group dubbed OPEC+, were easing their output cuts, the IEA said.

— **Reuters**

BUSINESS

FRENCH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HITS 37-YEAR LOW



A man visits a National Agency for Employment office in Antibes, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 in France. — Reuters

PARIS: French unemployment fell to a 37-year low in the second quarter, as a multi-year downturn was exaggerated by a coronavirus lockdown that meant people couldn't look for work, data from statistics agency INSEE showed on Thursday.

The jobless rate fell to 7.1%, from 7.8% in the first quarter, dropping to its lowest since the second quarter of 1983, when it stood at 7.0%.

INSEE warned that unemployment data for the first two quarters of 2020 was skewed because of the mid-March to mid-May lockdown, which reduced the number of those classified as unemployed by making it impossible for them to look for jobs.

The International Labour Organisation defines being unemployed as not working but being available to work and actively seeking a job - which was virtually impossible in most industries during lockdown.

"The sharp drop in unemployment in the second quarter of 2020 is not the result of an improving labour market but is an effect of the lockdown," INSEE said. INSEE said the number of

people who want a job but are not considered unemployed under the ILO definition had increased by 1.9 percentage points to 6.0% of the active population.

This was the highest level since INSEE started measuring this statistic in 2003 and the main reason for the fall of the Q2 unemployment rate.

The agency also said that weekly jobs data show that following the end of lockdown and the restarting of the economy, the unemployment rate at the end of the second quarter was comparable to the level before lockdown. In the last quarter of 2019, unemployment had fallen to 8.1%, continuing a downtrend from 9.5% in the second quarter of 2017, when President Emmanuel Macron took office and started liberalising France's labour market.

The French jobless rate stood above 10% throughout the 2012-2017 term of Macron's predecessor, Francois Hollande. It had been nearly continuously above 10% from mid-1993 to mid-1999 before falling back to 7.2% in the first quarter of 2008, just before the financial crisis hit. — Reuters

Wind and solar produced 10 per cent of global electricity in H1 2020



Solar panels and wind turbines are pictured on a barren mountain at Shenjing Village in China. — Reuters

LONDON: Wind turbines and solar panels produced a record 10 per cent of the world's electricity in the first half of 2020 as coal-power declined, but steeper change is needed to meet targets set under the 2015 Paris climate agreement, a report said on Thursday.

Scientists say huge cuts to greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector are required over the next decade to limit global warming and curb the worst impacts of climate change such as floods, droughts and loss of species.

Generation from wind and solar rose by 14 per cent during the first half of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019 while output from coal plants fell by 8.3 per cent, the report by independent climate think tank Ember said.

Overall electricity demand fell by 3 per cent during the six months due to coronavirus lockdowns, the report said.

Despite the drop, coal plants still produced 33 per cent of the world's electricity during the period.

"To keep a chance of limiting climate change to 1.5 degrees, coal generation needs to fall by 13 per cent every year this decade," Ember senior analyst Dave Jones said in a statement with the report.

Europe and the UK saw the largest contributions from wind and solar, at 21 per cent and 33 per cent respectively during the first half of the year, with China at 10 per cent and the United States at 12 per cent, the report said.

Coal power generation in the US and Europe fell by 31 per cent and 32 per cent respectively while coal power in China was down just 2 per cent, the report said.

Ember's report examined data from 48 countries which make up 83 per cent of global electricity production. — Reuters



President Donald Trump and China's President Xi Jinping attend a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Osaka, Japan, in this file photo. — AFP

In China, fears of financial Iron Curtain as US tensions rise

SHANGHAI: A sharp escalation in tensions with the United States has stoked fears in China of a deepening financial war that could result in it being shut out of the global dollar system — a devastating prospect once considered far-fetched but now not impossible.

Chinese officials and economists have in recent months been unusually public in discussing worst-case scenarios under which China is blocked from dollar settlements, or Washington freezes or confiscates a portion of China's huge US debt holdings.

Those concerns have galvanised some in Beijing to revive calls to bolster the yuan's global clout as it looks to decrease reliance on the greenback.

Some economists even float the idea of settling exports of China-made COVID-19 vaccines in yuan, and are looking to bypass dollar settlement with a digital version of the currency.

"Yuan internationalisation was a good-to-have. It's now becoming a must-have," said Shuang Ding, head of Greater China economic research at Standard Chartered and a former economist at the People's Bank of China (PBOC).

The threat of Sino-US financial "decoupling" is becoming "clear and present", Ding said.

THE ULTIMATE SANCTION
WOULD INVOLVE US SEIZURES
OF CHINA'S US ASSETS –
BEIJING HOLDS OVER \$1
TRILLION YUAN IN US
GOVERNMENT DEBT – WHICH
WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO
IMPLEMENT AND A SELF-
INFLICTED WOUND FOR
WASHINGTON

Although a complete separation of the world's two largest economies is unlikely, the Trump administration has been pushing for a partial decoupling in key areas related to trade, technology and financial activity.

Washington has unleashed a barrage of actions penalising China, including proposals to bar US listings of Chinese companies that fail to meet US accounting standards and bans on the Chinese-owned TikTok and WeChat apps. Further tension is expected in the run-up to US elections on November 3.

"A broad financial war has already started ... the most lethal tactics have yet to be used," Yu Yongding, an economist at the state-backed Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) who previ-

ously advised the PBOC, said.

Yu said the ultimate sanction would involve US seizures of China's US assets — Beijing holds over \$1 trillion yuan in US government debt — which would be difficult to implement and a self-inflicted wound for Washington.

But calling US leaders "extremists", Yu said a decoupling is not impossible, so China should make preparations.

The stakes are high. Any move by Washington to cut China off from the dollar system or retaliation by Beijing to sell a big chunk of US debt could roil financial markets and hurt the global economy, analysts said.

Fang Xinghai, a senior securities regulator, said China is vulnerable to US sanctions and should make "early" and "real" preparations. "Such things have already happened to many Russian businesses and financial institutions," Fang told a June forum organised by Chinese media outlet Caixin.

Guan Tao, former director of the international payments department of China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange and now chief global economist at BOC International (China), also said Beijing should ready itself for decoupling.

"We have to mentally prepare that the United States could expel China from the dollar settlement system," he said. — Reuters



DODGERS PITCHER KELLY

has suspension reduced to five games

NEW YORK: Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Joe Kelly's suspension for throwing a pitch near the head of a Houston Astros batter and taunting another was reduced from eight games to five, the Major League Baseball (MLB) team said on Wednesday.

Kelly, 32, was penalised after throwing a 96 mile per hour fastball that sailed over Astros third baseman Alex Bregman in the sixth inning of the Dodgers' 5-2 victory at Minute Maid Park last month. He also exchanged words and made faces at Astros short-stop Carlos Correa after striking

KELLY, 32, WAS PENALISED AFTER THROWING A 96 MILE PER HOUR FASTBALL THAT SAILED OVER ASTROS THIRD BASEMAN ALEX BREGMAN IN THE SIXTH INNING OF THE DODGERS' 5-2 VICTORY AT MINUTE MAID PARK LAST MONTH.

him out.

The MLB's players union said it was extremely disappointed with the five-game ban.

"While we understand the concerns raised by the league with respect to a bench-clearing incident during this challenging season, we're extremely disappointed by the decision," a union official was quoted as saying by the Los Angeles Times.

"It was an unfair result for Kelly given the cases presented."

Kelly, who is currently on the injured list, will serve his suspension when he returns. — Reuters

SPORTS



GAUFF

UPSETS SABALENKA IN LEXINGTON

NEW YORK: Coco Gauff survived a match that lasted nearly three hours on Wednesday to upset second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus 7-6 (7-4), 4-6, 6-4 and advance to the quarterfinals at The Top Seed Open in Lexington, Ky.

Both players struggled with their serves in the first tournament in the US since the hiatus caused by the coronavirus pandemic, with a combined 19 double faults (11 by Sabalenka) and 14 breaks of service (seven each).

Gauff rallied from a break down in the first set, then blew a 5-3 lead

BOTH PLAYERS STRUGGLED WITH THEIR SERVES IN THE FIRST TOURNAMENT IN THE US SINCE THE HIATUS CAUSED BY THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, WITH A COMBINED 19 DOUBLE FAULTS (11 BY SABALENKA) AND 14 BREAKS OF SERVICE (SEVEN EACH).

by being broken in back-to-back service games. But Gauff broke right back to force a tiebreaker, where she stormed out to a 5-0 lead before wrapping it up.

Gauff hung on temporarily late in the second set but then dropped it on her own serve. In the third, Sabalenka rallied from a break down to even it twice, but Gauff

broke again at 4-4 and served out to win in 2 hours, 48 minutes.

Sixth-seeded Magda Linette of Poland also fell to an American, as Jennifer Brady cruised to a 6-2, 6-3 victory in just 68 minutes.

In other matches on Wednesday, No. 8 Ons Jabeur of Tunisia overcame a rough start to beat Olga Govortsova of

Belarus 3-6, 6-2, 6-4, and the Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova downed Russia's Anna Blinkova 6-4, 6-2.

PRAGUE OPEN

Kristyna Pliskova of the Czech Republic upset second-seeded Petra Martic of Croatia 6-1, 7-5 to advance to the quarterfinals. Pliskova, ranked 69th, had nice aces and just one double fault in downing her 14th-ranked opponent. Pliskova will face Ana Bogdan of Romania in the next round.

Bogdan advanced when Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko withdrew due to a rib injury. — **Reuters**



ANAA WINS NATIONAL SINGLES ONLINE U-17 TITLE

ADIL AL BALUSHI

Muscat: Oman Chess Committee (OCC) concluded the National Singles online Chess championship for the junior category late on Thursday.

Before two days, the females in the above 17 years category ended their competitions as well and Anaa al Essai won the title and claimed the first place award with seven points. Twelve players advanced to the finals of the female above 17 years category and competed at seven rounds through an approved online “Lichess” platform.

Afra al Balushi was positioned in second place with six points while Alanood al Ghafri came in third place. Kamila al Ghafri and Wafia al Ghafri ended at fourth and fifth place respectively.

The finals of the senior category will conclude on



Sunday and it is expected to register tough competitions as the most participants from the national team. Oman’s top senior chess players will be available in the events besides Mohammed al Omri, Salim al Omri, Ameen al Ansi, Salim Shimas and Salim al Mashikhi.

More than 140 players took part at the National Singles online Chess championship which started on Sunday.

OCC implemented the

Afra al Balushi was positioned in second place with six points while Alanood al Ghafri came in third place. Kamila al Ghafri and Wafia al Ghafri ended at fourth and fifth place respectively

‘Swiss classic’ system for the championship and the qualification stage comprised seven rounds while the finals featured nine rounds. The sixth edition of the tournament, which was run by OCC, was monitored carefully by the umpiring team from “zoom” application to ensure the success of the tournament and avoid any penetration to the rules and regulations. The international referee, Musallam al Wadhai, is in charge for the umpiring task with the assistant of the international referee Hamdan al Hinai besides many domestic umpires.

OCC had launched since April a series of virtual activities including the training webinar and e-tournaments which opted as several tournaments were cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

SPORTS

Lou Williams had 23 points and seven assists off the bench for the Clippers, who clinched the No 2 seed in the Western Conference. They will meet the Dallas Mavericks in the first round of the NBA playoffs, starting next week.

CLIPPERS LOCK UP NO 2 SEED WITH WIN

LOS ANGELES: Paul George scored 27 points and Kawhi Leonard added 26, and the Los Angeles Clippers defeated the Denver Nuggets 124-111 on Wednesday night near Orlando.

Lou Williams had 23 points and seven assists off the bench for the Clippers, who clinched the No 2 seed in the Western Conference. They will meet the Dallas Mavericks in the first round of the NBA playoffs, starting next week.

The Nuggets will be the conference's No 3 seed.

Ivica Zubac had 15 points on 7-of-9

shooting and grabbed 12 rebounds for the Clippers.

Reserve forward Jerami Grant scored 25 points and pulled down six rebounds for Denver. Nikola Jokic finished with 17 points, 13 assists and seven rebounds while Michael Porter Jr chipped in 11 points. Jamal Murray was held to 10 points, and Torrey Craig also had 10.

Indiana Pacers 108 - Houston Rockets 104

Doug McDermott scored 10 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter and Indiana held off a late rampage by

James Harden — and an injury to T J Warren — to beat Houston.

By virtue of a win in its second-to-last regular-season game, Indiana clinched at least the fifth seed in the Eastern Conference and a first-round playoff matchup with the fourth-seeded Miami Heat.

The Pacers rested Warren, whom Pacers head coach Nate McMillan said is dealing with plantar fasciitis. According to reports, the injury isn't expected to keep Warren from playing in the postseason.

— Reuters