

P12

DJOKOVIC, NADAL INTO LAST EIGHT AS ITALIAN OPEN PREPARES FOR FANS



P13

OMAN TO VENTURE INTO OXO CHEMICALS PRODUCTION



P19

THE SALT FLATS OF SHANNAH, SALAR DE UYUNI AND BONNEVILLE





POMEGRANATE AUCTION

Al Jabal al Akhdhar farmers and pomegranate lovers gathered in the mountain villages to take part in the three-day auction. Prospective bidders tasted pomegranates before announcing the price. The bid is for one tree for one season. The auction lasted for three days, in the presence of a large number of buyers, including merchants.

DETAILS ON P2

MOVE TO CURB LABOUR
ACCOMMODATION AT SITES

KABEER YOUSUF
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Accommodating workers at construction sites will soon come to end as it is found to be violating the municipality norms and safety of workers.

The Public Affairs Committee at Muscat Municipality, during its fourth meeting of the year, reviewed the proposal to issue an order to

stop such practices. The members of the committee emphasised on the necessity to update rules on the establishment of a camp for workers at construction sites. However, the curbs don't apply to those companies which accommodate workers in properly maintained portacabins which meet the standards prescribed by the authorities.

TURN TO P5

• EXCISE TAX TO NET MORE REVENUE AND IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH •

SAMUEL KUTTY
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Beginning October 1, sweetened drinks will cost more in Oman as the government is all set to introduce a 50 per cent excise tax on these products.

The decision issued by the Tax Authority on June 18 last year included juices, fruit drinks, energy or sport drinks, canned coffee and tea products.

"Beverages containing added sugar or sweeteners which are ready-to-drink, concentrates, gels, powders, extracts, or any form that can be converted into sugar sweetened beverage, will be subject to a 50 per cent excise tax from October 1," says the decision issued by the Authority.

The list excluded some products such as 100 per cent natural fruit and vegetable juices, milk, and other dairy products that contain at least 75 per cent of milk, nutritional supplements, and beverages intended for special dietary and medical use.

The excise tax also referred to as selective tax was earlier introduced on June 15, 2019, and covered five products — carbonated drinks, energy drinks, tobacco products, pork and alcohol.

The scope of sugary beverages is expected to

be very wide as it will not only help increase the state revenue but will also improve public health.

According to health experts, tax is a major step that can reduce consumption of sugar drinks that will finally help the government trim a number of diseases.

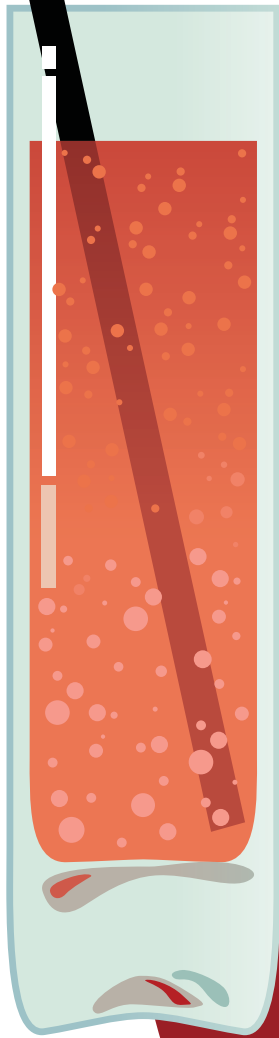
"Sugary drinks are a major source of sugar in the diet, and its consumption is increasing, especially among children and adolescents. Sugar is a major contributor to obesity, diabetes and related diseases," said Dr Hemant Keluskar, diabetologist.

The World Health Organization suggests that countries need comprehensive action plans that combine taxation, restriction of marketing of sugary products to children, and education to reduce over-consumption of sugar that will help halt non-communicable diseases.

Terming it as a move in the positive direction, Dawood Ismaili, an academic, said that the introduction of the selective tax will help those who are addicted to sugar drinks to get away with their habits.

TURN TO P5

SUGARY DRINKS
TO COST
MORE FROM
OCTOBER 1



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Students satisfied with online learning: Survey

STUDENTS BELIEVE THAT ONLINE EDUCATION CAN ENHANCE THEIR LEARNING

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 19

Students are more satisfied with online learning compared with the regular classrooms, according to a recent survey. Students found that the online platform was not difficult to use.

The survey was conducted among university students in Oman and Iran between April and June where all educational institutions used virtual learning platforms due to COVID-19. Some universities elsewhere are planning to remain closed for face-to-face classes for a longer period. For example, Cambridge University has already announced that it will continue to deliver lectures virtually until the summer of 2021.

The authors Seyedeh Khadijeh Taghizadeh, Salem al Abri, Syed Abidur Rahman, Davoud Nikbin, and Golam Mostafa Khan said the aim of the study was to analyse the online experience of students.



Contrary to the prevalent notion, students preferred online learning systems over traditional classrooms. Students believed that the system can enhance their learning experience. Students usually first test whether online learning systems can meet their expectations. Once students realise that the online learning system is better than the traditional learning system, then their level of satisfaction increases.

The study found that ease in using the system contributed to students' satisfaction. Therefore, the online platform should be user friendly and not very complicated. Hence, universities should work to resolve difficulties in accessing online learning.

The findings show that students enjoyed using the online learning systems. Therefore, universities should design the system in such a way so that students feel more motivated while

using an online learning system.

Furthermore, steps should be taken by universities in Oman and Iran to improve existing processes to meet the compatibility of online learning systems with the university's infrastructure. Thus, students can perceive that the online learning system is consistent with the existing values, experience, and needs.

Universities should provide students with needed technical support to use the system efficiently and help them in dealing with glitches.

COVID-19 has reshaped the way educational institutions provide their services. It has forced these institutions to rethink their business model and service delivery with high reliance on technology.

The study found the student enjoyed using these online systems due to user-friendly platforms, availability of technical support, and the level of interactivity.

Safety first while dining

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Soon after the decision to open international hotels the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 came up with a decision to allow general restaurants to operate. The restaurants quickly shifted from 'take away' practice to 'dine-in', but with lots of changes.

The biggest change is to be noticed in the sitting arrangement. Most of the restaurants have reduced sitting capacity almost to half of its pre-corona capacity to ensure social distancing and to ensure the customers that they are taking care of them in terms of health and safety.

"We have changed the sitting arrangement in our restaurant to ensure social distancing and level of sanitation has been upgraded manifold. All the front desk staff are equipped with facemasks and hand gloves," said manager of a restaurant, which specialises in Arabic cuisine.

The best of the sitting arrangement was seen in the Oasis Club, which is managed by Port of Salalah. The restaurant is strictly following safety norms as they have changed the old arrangement that involved big tables that accommodated many people, even 10 to 15 in case there was some group dining.

The biggest change is to be noticed in the sitting arrangement. Most of the restaurants have reduced sitting capacity almost to half of its pre-corona capacity to ensure social distancing and to ensure the customers that they are taking care of them in terms of health and safety

plates and using disposable cutlery to rule out any transmission of the virus. Our staff have been trained to maintain the best possible hygiene protocol, as we are requesting customers also to bear with us by not allowing them inside the restaurant area without masks," said an employee of the Club.

Commenting on customers' response after opening of the restaurants after a long gap, the employee admitted that it was not at the same pace as it was during pre-COVID days, but the general response is good and the customers, who are mostly Club members, keep on dropping in.

Besides ensuring general hand hygiene by putting up hand sanitisers and soaps, most of the popular restaurants have a barcode or QR code menu to avoid the touch of the hard copy menu that travels from one table to another and changes many hands.

"It is easy and handy. As soon as you scan the QR code, the whole menu is visible on your smartphone," said the manager of yet another restaurant.

It is safety first that matters during the pandemic and some of them are following the protocols in letter and spirit.



Pomegranate auction concludes

AMAL AL RIYAMI
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NIZWA: Al Jabal Al Akhdhar farmers and pomegranate lovers gathered in the mountain villages to take part in the three-day auction.

Prospective bidders tasted pomegranates before announcing their price. The bid is for one tree for one season.

The auction lasted for three days, in the presence of a large number of buyers, including merchants, and various companies. The price of one tree ranged from RO 50 to RO 70. The price of 9 trees reached RO 500 on the first day of auction. And it came to RO 600 for eight trees on the last day.

Adil al Daghari from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar said: "This price is considered low compared to the prices of pomegranates in last year. The reason for this is because the pomegranate flowers fell due to the high rains this season. This led to a decrease in the production. But the demand for its purchase is still very high."

The reasons for buying a pomegranate tree vary; some buy to sell them in the market while others buy it for their family.



PHOTOS BY SAMI AL HINAI

Investment opportunities in Nizwa Industrial City

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates-Madayn- is pleased to announce investment opportunities in Nizwa Industrial City for developers and investors as stated in the table below and as per the following procedures:

Bidding NO	Name of Project	Last Date for Purchasing the Bidding's Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission	Purchase Amount
NIZ/2/2020	Commercial Services Area	24/9/2020	29/10/2020	RO 70
NIZ/3/2020	Residential City	24/9/2020	29/10/2020	RO 50

1. Deposit the bidding document's amount in PEIE's Bank Muscat account no. (0378007322810019).

2. Email payment's receipt and contact's details along with bidding no. and project's name to Nizwa-finance@peie.om in order to receive bidding's documents and attachments electronically.

3. Last date for receiving inquiries and field visits falls on **1/10/2020**.

4. Bids are submitted in line with the bidding's document requirements at the Department of Operations at the Nizwa Industrial City before 12:00 pm on the designated date.

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Oman among first to submit SDGs to UN

ROAD TO PROSPERITY: Sustainable development goals key to 9th Five-Year Plan and Oman Vision 2040



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkutttyp

Oman is one of the first countries to submit its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) report to the United Nations on Friday.

"Oman is among the first countries in the world to present its Voluntary National Review (VNR) highlighting the Sultanate's plans and efforts to implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030," said an online statement from Oman Mission to the global body.

According to the statement, Dr Saeed bin Muhammad al Saqri represented the Sultanate in the UN's high-level meeting on SDG Moment, which took place on Friday.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015 by all UN Member States including the Sultanate of Oman, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet.

On the basis of broad community consultations, Oman's Supreme Council for Planning endorsed the SDGs in its third meeting on June 15, 2015.

Since then, the Sultanate has been keen on integrating the sustainable development dimensions and goals in its development plans and strategies, at the top of which are the 9th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) and Oman

Vision 2040, in a way that attests to the rigorous seriousness with which the government is implementing the SDGs, allocating budgets thereto, and devising programmes and policies that ensure the achievement thereof in the medium and long terms.

In the elaboration of its long-term vision and medium-term plan, the Sultanate relied on extensive community participation at national and local levels to complete the draft report.

Tens of discussion panels, workshops and dialogue sessions were held with various development partners ranging from representatives of government and private sector to civil society, youth and international organisations, with the aim of ensuring community ownership of the development agenda.

The VNR underscores that "the Sultanate is committed to achieving the SDGs in economic, social and environmental dimensions within the agreed deadline and that, despite considerable challenges, it is generally moving in the right direction towards that end, pursuing an approach based on broad community participation during the design, implementation and evaluation of plans, policies, and programmes aimed at tackling the aforementioned challenges and achieving the SDGs".

The VNR reflects in an integrated manner the progress made by the country towards achieving the 17 SDGs, says the summary.

It highlights national strategies and plans that were specifically designed to implement these goals, identifies future challenges and plans for the achievement of the SDGs, and reviews current practices and initiatives contributing to the attainment of national sustainable development objectives and priorities.

After reviewing the institutional framework, methodology and method adopted in the VNR preparation, the outcomes and goals of Oman Vision 2040 were aligned with the SDGs and their targets according to their corresponding sectors in the 2030 agenda.

Such alignment ensures that the 2030 SDGs and their targets are embedded in the Oman Vision 2040 components and are therefore granted the same level of attention as the goals of the national vision, thus guaranteeing that the necessary resources are allocated to their implementation.

"This will be done in accordance with the agreed timetable and that the national and international indicators required to measure the progress made towards the SDGs are available," the executive summary of the VNR adds.

Dhofar webinar on Sept 30

MUSCAT: A mega webinar will be organised later this month to discuss the future development roadmap for Dhofar governorate.

In recent years, Dhofar has emerged as one of the most progressive regions with a robust infrastructure, a growing manufacturing hub, a well-developed and connected seaport and airport, vibrant tourism, and an attractive climate.

A number of investors and business groups from within Oman, the GCC region, and international markets have invested over \$8.7 billion in Dhofar to date.

The strategic location between trade routes of the East and the West (with over \$2 trillion worth of goods passing through every year, Salalah is located right at the heart of world trade) gives Salalah a shipping cost

and delivery time advantage to relocating manufacturers when compared to China, USA and India as well as regional competitors.

In alignment with Oman's Vision 2040, Dhofar is continuing to move ahead on the path of sustainable development with its business-friendly policies, expansion of the infrastructure, and promotion of export-oriented industries.

Under this backdrop, the Webinar 'Dhofar — The Future Roadmap' is being organised on September 30 on Zoom.

The exclusive webinar dedicated to Dhofar's future development is endorsed by leading industry bodies including Madayn, Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OCCI), and Oman Manufacturer's Association. Muscat Overseas Group, Dhofar In-

surance Company, and Transom are the strategic partners for the webinar.

The Webinar 'Dhofar — The Future Roadmap' will emphasise on how Dhofar is continuing to move ahead on the path of sustainable development with the expansion of the infrastructure and promotion of export-oriented industries in alignment with Oman's Vision 2040.

It will also address the challenges faced by Dhofar due to COVID-19 and how it could overcome them with its competitive environment and a host of attractive business opportunities to the investors.

The industry leaders will be speaking on Dhofar's growth roadmap and new investment opportunities. The focus of the discussion will be on tourism, ports & logistics, manufacturing, food, and exports based industries.

Stone laid for RO 129 million Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health laid the foundation stone for the new Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah with a total cost of RO 129 million. The project, which will extend over a gross area of 200,000 m², will be constructed in four years.

The foundation laying ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of the Minister of Health and a number of officials.

Set over an area of 94,400 square metre, the main building consists of a ground floor and six storeys. The project mainly includes 700 beds across various specialties for men and women.

It contains 25 labor rooms, two operating rooms, an integrated accident and emergency unit.

The hospital includes, also, an isolation ward, and a radiology department, that has three x-ray machines, two CT machines, an MRI machine

and some other ultrasound devices. Designed for the purpose of meeting future demands, the hospital contains a pharmacy, medical laboratories, a day care unit, a room for minor operations, a physiotherapy unit and another for chemotherapy.

The project includes offices for administration, services building, medical warehouses, auxiliary electric generators and potable desalination devices.

— ONA



An artist's impression of the project

Al Dakhiliyah Governor reviews municipal affairs



AMAL AL RIYAMI
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IZKI: Governor of Al Dakhiliyah Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri recently met members of the Municipal Department Affairs Committee in Izki.

He stressed the importance of addressing citizens' requests and projects taking into account the general development of wilayats.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Ali al Busaidi, Wali of Izki; Chairman of the Municipal Department Affairs Committee, and Director-General of Al Dakhiliyah Municipality. The governor also reviewed the work of the municipality department in Izki. He urged the officials to facilitate procedures and resolve problems of the citizens on time.



The governor also directed those involved in the municipality department to coordinate with Sanad offices to overcome all difficulties while processing requests.

The governor also visited the headquarters of the Conciliation Commission in Izki. He met the committee's employees and committee's secretary, who is also the committee's

director, Majid bin Khalifa bin Mahfouz al Toobi. Al Toobi gave a presentation of the committee activities.

The governor visited the committee premises and thanked the staff for resolving disputes peacefully. The director of the committee thanked the governor for his visit as it is a motivation and an incentive for employees to move forward towards achieving goals.

Oman ranked 4th in Human Capital Index

MUSCAT: The Sultanate has been ranked fourth at the Arabic level and 64th at the global level in the Worldwide Human Capital Index 2020, according to an online bulletin released by the World Bank.

The index indicated that many countries have achieved steady growth in investing in child human capital during pre-COVID-19 period with advanced steps achieved noticeably by the low-income countries.

In fact, postponement of study for over one billion children worldwide has resulted in huge financial losses. The pandemic has put at risk the progress made in building human capital, including improvements in health, survival rates and school enrolment, the index highlighted.

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DON'T THROW IT, BIN IT



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkutttyp

Donning a face mask has become a habit thanks to stiff penalties, but we are yet to learn to properly discard them. As single-use face masks are not recyclable, they should be properly put in bins or sealed in zipper bags before disposing.

Dumping used masks and gloves in beaches, streets and pavements pose serious health hazards not only to humans, but also to the environment, especially marine life.

In the Sultanate, except for littering, no harsh penalties or fines are imposed on indiscriminate disposal of personal protection equipment (PPE). Instead, the authorities are making efforts to create awareness among people about the adverse effect from the menace.

The Ministry of Health, Muscat Municipality, the Environment Authority, along with other entities have been emphasising on the need for proper disposal of face masks, gloves, body suits to avoid harming public health.

The Ministry of Health is pursuing best practices to manage medical waste to achieve the intended goals of this programme by developing plans and policies, as well as unifying all efforts to preserve the safety of everyone from risk of exposure through training and raising awareness among health workers.

be'ah, the state-owned waste management company, has circulated to all health institutions in the Sultanate the importance of following guidelines for separating the waste related to COVID-19 from the rest of the medical waste in accordance with the latest international standards recommended by the WHO.

With the COVID-19 pandemic spreading unabated, the spotlight is now on medical waste treatment management and how effective their measures are. While health institutions and private waste management companies are already stepping up their coronavirus-specific decontamination services, it is also equally important for governments to step up and find solutions quickly against the environmental impact of the pandemic

It is also taking all the precautionary procedures to ensure health and safety of personnel dealing with healthcare waste.

Along with the authorities, several social media users have also started voicing their concern and anger over tossing masks and gloves in public places.

"It's great everyone's staying protected, but please dispose of your gloves and masks properly in the litter bins after you're done with them, not in the parking lot or other places. Someone, somewhere will have to clean up after you — let's take care of each other," reads a Facebook post.

Their ire was expressive in some of the twitter posts, "Please stop littering, this is making more work and worry for the people having to pick up this trash, "Don't be thoughtless," "Don't leave your face masks and gloves in the shopping carts or parking slots..."

With the COVID-19 pandemic spreading unabated, the spotlight is now on medical waste treatment management and how effective their measures are. While health institutions and private waste management companies are already stepping up their coronavirus-specific decontamination services, it is also equally important for governments to step up and find solutions quickly against the environmental impact of the pandemic.

Face masks and gloves are often found floating on the sea threatening the marine

environment; some are left behind by beach users, others are washed in by the waves.

To this, nature lovers expressed their concern with tweets like, "This is a growing environmental hazard. The PPE is intended to help us fight a public health challenge, not create a plastic pollution problem".

According to Earth.org, the disposal of masks along with other items in the PPE, empty hand sanitiser bottles and soiled tissue papers will lead to a massive trail of clinical waste in the environment.

Used masks and gloves add to an already significant problem: At least eight million tonnes of plastic end up in the oceans every year, making up 80 per cent of all marine debris.

According to the WHO's health guidelines, soiled tissues and used face masks must be thrown only into lidded litter bins, while any medical gear used by affected patients and hospital staff must be sterilised and burnt at high temperatures in dedicated incinerators.

Having said, it is each individual's responsibility to follow the necessary guidelines while disposing of their masks and other medical gear.

After all, it is only through mutual empathy and goodwill that we will see the world emerge stronger from this global pandemic.

NEW BEACHFRONT RESORT IN MIRBAT



The Alila Hinu Bay Resort was inaugurated recently in Dhofar's Mirbat Wilayat. The property owned by Omani Investment Authority includes a five-star hotel with 112 rooms, villas and recreational facilities. Alila Hinu Bay offers serenity, exclusivity, and luxury where guests can witness untouched coastline, an incredible spectrum of marine life, and nature reserves, the Alila group said. The beachfront property lies 87 km from Salalah International Airport and offers thoughtfully designed spaces, unparalleled quality in detail, and comfort built for artisanal living.

NOC must for property rental in banned areas

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@samkutyvp

Close on the heels of regulations for the law prohibiting ownership of land and real estate by non-Omanis in certain places, the government rolled out guidelines for renting out properties in these specified areas.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning said that the new guidelines are being issued as part of the organisational measures to bring controls on real estate in the specified areas.

"Non-Omanis should obtain no objection certificate if they wish to rent properties in banned areas and those allocated for residential, commercial, industrial, or commercial-residential purposes before renewing or registering lease contracts," the ministry said in a statement.

The lease period should not be for more than one year, it said. Along



with the lease agreement showing the purpose of lease, a no objection certificate from the ministry should be submitted to the relevant municipality which registers the lease agreement.

Other documents are a copy of the title deed, a drawing of the property, a copy of the tenant's valid passport,

and a copy of the tenant's ID card should also be produced.

"A declaration that the leased property will not be rented to a third party should also be attached along with the application which should be completed using the electronic form available on the ministry's website," the ministry said.

Airlines can operate two flights weekly

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has allowed the airlines to operate two flights per week to each of its existing scheduled destinations from October 1. The authority said that it will soon announce operating procedures for the limited scheduled flights.

Salam Air CEO Mohammed Ahmed welcomed the decision of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 on the partial opening of Muscat International Airport. He described the decision as "a good initiative that will boost travel and tourism in the Sultanate".

He said despite the impact of COVID-19 Salam Air has been able to stay afloat due to its small size compared to major airlines in the region.

The Sultanate's low-cost carrier returned 30 per cent of its fleet and kept only six aircraft for its operations. Over the past few months, SalamAir operated 651 flights with over 67,000 passengers to 60 destinations. These flights eased the losses of the company caused by airport shutdowns since March.

Asked which destinations are likely to be of great interest to SalamAir passengers, Mohammed Ahmed mentioned Istanbul of Turkey, Shiraz of Iran and some GCC destinations like Dubai due to the deferment of the new school year to November.

He explained that the Sultanate is expected to see an influx of GCC tourists as the weather is turning moderate in Oman.

Ahmed promised customer safety is top priority for his airline. The company's new aircraft are fitted with hi-tech ventilation systems. "SalamAir signed contracts with some of the most specialised international firms to keep its aircraft free from viruses, microbes and germs. Any passenger who is onboard will be confident that he is entering a highly hygienic aircraft," said Ahmed, who advised his passengers to stick to health instructions and maintain social distance when in airports. — ONA

Inbound tourists spent RO 2.3 billion in 4 years



MUSCAT: The spending of inbound tourism increased in the last four years of the current five-year plan to RO 2.3 billion, compared to RO 2.1 billion in the previous five-year plan (2011-2015). This indicator reflects the tourism growth in the current five-year plan which started in 2016 and ends this year.

Tourism is one of the main sectors that the Sultanate focuses on in the current five-year plan. It has witnessed many positive indicators, supported by an increase in government investments in establishing infrastructure and an increase in private sector investment.

The annual statistical book recently issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that inbound tourism spending increased last year to about RO 685 million, compared to RO 364.7 million in 2015. The inbound tourism spending recorded successive annual growth over the past years amid the increase in the number of tourists, tourist's nights and average night stay.

The current five-year plan has witnessed the opening of many major tourism and infrastructure projects that support the tourism sector, most notably Muscat International Airport, which received in 2019 more than 16 million passengers on incoming and outgoing international and domestic flights, compared to 10.3 million passengers in 2015.

The current five-year plan also witnessed the opening of the Oman Convention and Exhibition

Center (OCEC), which hosted many local and international conferences and exhibitions that contributed to the revitalisation of conference tourism.

The tourist visa facilities provided by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) contributed to the increase in the number of tourists coming to the Sultanate. The statistical data indicate that 1.8 million inbound visitors arrived in Sultanate in 2019, with tourist visas, compared to 1.2 million visitors in 2015, a growth rate of 41.6 per cent.

The average spending per tourist in 2019 increased to RO 195.3, compared to RO 138.5 in 2015

The total number of tourists in 2019 reached 3.5 million tourists, compared to 3.2 million tourists in 2018, and 2.6 million tourists in 2015. The current five-year plan has witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of single-day visitors, whether they come to attend conferences or on board of cruise ships. The total number of single-day visitors in 2019 reached one million visitors, representing about 28.7 per cent of the total number of tourists coming to the Sultanate. In 2015 the number of single-day visitors reached about 725,000 visitors, representing 27.5 per cent of the total number of tourists during that year.

There was an increase in 2019

of 47 per cent in the total number of visitors onboard of cruise ships, with 283,488 visitors, compared to 193,467 visitors in 2018.

The average spending per tourist in 2019 increased to RO 195.3, compared to RO 138.5 in 2015.

The direct added value of the tourism sector in 2019 recorded an increase of 4.1 per cent, to reach RO 717.9 million, compared to RO 689.4 million in 2018. The contribution of tourism to the gross domestic product increased last year to 2.5 per cent, compared to 2.2 per cent in 2018.

The last four years witnessed a strong increase in the number of tourist nights, which jumped in 2019 to 19.9 million tourist nights, compared to 13.1 million tourist nights in 2015. The average night-stay per person rose last year to 8 nights, compared to 6.9 in 2015. In terms of the number of tourist nights, 2018 scored the best performance in the current five-year plan, with 20.3 million nights, and 8, 8 nights for the average stay. The global tourism sector was affected last year by the slowdown in global economic growth and geopolitical tensions. This year the tourism sector was affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Sultanate has a good infrastructure that encourages the tourism sector. The total number of hotel establishments at the end of 2019 reached 491 hotels, including 26 five-star hotels, compared to 318 hotel facilities in 2015 including 11 five-star hotels. — ONA

Move to curb labour accommodation at sites

FROM PAGE 1

"Some contractors resort to making labour accommodations on construction sites which are inconsistent with security and safety measures, and are distorting the national efforts to maintain the hygienic standards of the surroundings," said Qais bin Muhammad al Ma'shari, Chairman of the committee.

Many sub-contractors as well and some major companies find it convenient to provide labour accommodation to save rent, transport and time.

"This move to curb accommodating workers at the construction site is a good step towards supporting the builders and contractors," says Shahswar al Balushi, consultant of the construction sector. "Having said, this will affect the medium sized companies whose overheads are relatively high and the construction cost would go high with the

new decision. By and large, this sector accommodates nearly 250,000 workers."

"A set of HSE (Health, Safety and Environment) standards needs to be maintained at the portacabins on the construction sites, and we make it a point to implement the same in accordance with the prescribed standards," says Sheena Dath, Operations Manager, Rima Services Trading and Contracting LLC, which runs several construction sites in the city.

Appointing a HSE officer, maintaining HSE records, holding HSE meetings and inspection on a daily basis are some other measures to be followed while accommodating labourers at the construction sites, she said.

"The overhead expenses of the project are deterring many companies from implementing these measures."

Sugary drinks to cost more from Oct 1

FROM PAGE 1

"Like the tax on tobacco could cut down on smoking, the use of sugary drinks will also be reduced especially in view of the present situation that warrants people to cut spending," he said.

According to the statement, "businesses that serve or sell sweetened beverages will now be required to submit a notification

to the Tax Authority of their stock of these products and pay the tax thereon within 15 days from the start of the application of the tax." Oman is the third country in the Gulf Cooperation Council to introduce excise tax on sugar sweetened beverages. Saudi Arabia and the UAE introduced excise tax on sugar sweetened beverages from December 1, 2019.



Sultanate of Oman

The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary

Tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to submit the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
19/2020	PROVIDING SPECIALIST FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT	01/10/2020	22/10/2020	Excellent First Second Third Fourth	RO. 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below
website : (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders should submit their offers electronically via the aforementioned site and attach to each bid an electronic copy of the provisional insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a certified check from one of the banks operating in the country at a rate of (1%) of the bid value and is valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission The offers are meant in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee for Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, And based on the Tender Board Circular No. (07/2020), we confirm that the necessity of uploading the soft copy of the bid bond when submitting the tender in a support system while preserving the original bid bond without the need to hand it over to the board until the council is asked to hand over the original one.

- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:**
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tendering system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:**
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24166670
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



France ups pressure on Lebanon to pick cabinet

BEIRUT: A party founded by Lebanon's Christian president made a proposal to end a dispute that has blocked the formation of a new cabinet and threatened a French drive to lift the country out of its worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

The proposal, put forward on Saturday, involved handing major ministries to smaller sectarian groups in a country where power is shared between two groups. There was no immediate comment from officials in groups, who have insisted they choose who fills several posts.

Lebanon's efforts to swiftly form a new government have run into the sand over how to pick ministers in a country where political loyalties mostly follow sectarian religious lines. A September 15 deadline agreed with France to name a cabinet has passed.

Lebanon's efforts to form a new govt have run into the sand over how to pick ministers in a country where political loyalties mostly follow religious lines

Paris, which is leading an international push to haul Lebanon back from economic collapse, has voiced exasperation and told Beirut to act "without delay".

The leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, the party founded by



Gebran Bassil, a Lebanese politician and head of the Free Patriotic movement, in an interview in Sin-el-fil. – Reuters

President Michel Aoun and allied to Hizbullah, proposed "undertaking an experiment to distribute the so-called

sovereign ministries to smaller sects, specifically to the Druze, Alawites, Armenians and Christian minorities".

The statement was issued after Gebran Bassil, the party leader and son-in-law of the president, chaired a meeting of the party's political leadership. Bassil is a Maronite, Lebanon's largest Christian community. Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib, a Muslim under Lebanon's sectarian system, wants to shake up the leadership of ministries, some of which have been controlled by the same factions for years.

A group of former prime ministers backing Adib urged the prime minister-designate to press on with forming a government "as soon as possible."

But the two main groups — the Amal Movement and the heavily armed, Hizbullah — want to select the figures to fill a number of positions, including the finance minister, a top

position often called a "sovereign" ministry.

With the nation buried under a mountain of debt and with its banks paralysed, the finance minister will play a crucial role as Lebanon seeks to restart stalled talks with the International Monetary Fund, one of the first steps on France's roadmap.

Lebanon's army said on Saturday it has carried out a survey of more than 85,000 dwellings, businesses and other building units damaged by the massive Beirut port blast last month.

The August 4 explosion of hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored at Beirut port killed more than 190 people, wounded thousands and ravaged large parts of the capital.

"A total of 85,744 affected units have been surveyed," the army said. — AFP

COVID RESTRICTIONS EASED



A Palestinian man, wearing protective gear, disinfects shopping carts at a supermarket in Gaza City after the easing of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. – AFP

Haftar to lift Libya oil blockade to be lifted with conditions

BENGHAZI: Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar announced on Friday a conditional lifting of a months-long blockade on oilfields and ports by his forces.

"We have decided to resume oil production and export on condition of a fair distribution of revenues" and guarantee they "will not be used to support terrorism", he said on television.

Pro-Haftar groups supported by the Petroleum Facilities Guard blockaded key oilfields and export terminals from January 17 to demand what they called a fair share of hydrocarbon revenues.

Wearing military uniform, Haftar said his forces had "put aside all military and political considerations" to respond to the "deterioration of living conditions" in Libya, which has Africa's largest oil reserves.

The blockade, which has resulted in more than \$9.8 billion in lost revenue according to the National Oil Corporation (NOC), has exacerbated electricity and fuel shortages in the country.

Libya has been in chaos since a Nato-backed uprising toppled and killed longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

The main military fault-line pits Haftar and an administration in Libya's east against a UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), based in Tripoli.

Haftar's announcement comes after hundreds of Libyans protested last week in the eastern city of Benghazi, one of his strongholds, and other cities over corruption, power cuts and shortages in petrol and cash.

Protesters on Sunday set fire to the headquarters of the parallel eastern government in Benghazi



A bomb disposal robot operated by the criminal investigation department of the interior ministry reporting to Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) dismantles remnant explosives from conflict in the Salah al Din district south of Tripoli. – AFP

and attacked the police station in Al Marj.

Police responded with live fire, leaving at least one dead and several wounded, according to witnesses and the UN mission in Libya.

Haftar has the backing of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia, while the GNA is supported by Turkey. The country's oil revenues are managed by the NOC and the central bank, both based in Tripoli.

In a statement on Friday before Haftar's announcement, Mustafa Sanalla, the head of the NOC, lamented the "politicisation" of the oil sector.

"We cannot accept or close our eyes to these practices, which have turned Libya's lifeblood into a political instrument," he said.

It would be "impossible to lift" an ongoing force majeure at oil installations when they remain occupied by "foreign mercenaries", he said, alluding to the Wagner Group, a shadowy private security firm reportedly close to Moscow.

Haftar launched an offensive against Tripoli in April last year, but after 14 months of fierce fighting, pro-GNA forces pushed his troops back to Sirte, the gateway to key oil fields and export terminals. — AFP

US military strengthens Syria deployment

WASHINGTON: The US Army announced on Friday it was stepping up its military deployment — both troops and equipment — in northeastern Syria despite a push to limit its presence there, a move that follows tensions with Russia in the region. US Central Command (Centcom) "has deployed Sentinel radar, increased the frequency of US fighter patrols over US forces, and deployed Bradley Fighting Vehicles to augment US forces" in the area, which is controlled by the US and its Kurdish allies, spokesman Captain Bill Urban said in a statement.

The number of armoured vehicles sent as reinforcement did not exceed half a dozen, and "less than 100 people" were sent to manoeuvre them, a US official who spoke on condition of anonymity said. Without mentioning Russia, Urban said the moves were meant "to help ensure the safety and security of Coalition forces," and that the US "does not seek conflict with any other nation in Syria, but will defend Coalition forces if necessary."

The US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity,

said however that the actions "are a clear signal to Russia to adhere to mutual de-confliction processes and for Russia and other parties to avoid unprofessional, unsafe and provocative actions in northeast Syria."

US Bradley Fighting Vehicles were pulled out of the region last October by President Donald Trump, who tried in early 2019 to recall all US troops from Syria, before agreeing to leave a few hundred to protect oil wells.

Several incidents in recent weeks have pitted the US military against Russian forces now deployed along the Turkish border under an agreement with Ankara.

At the end of August, seven American soldiers were injured in a collision with a Russian vehicle.

Videos posted on Twitter, apparently filmed by witnesses and the Russians themselves, showed Russian armour and helicopters attempting to block American vehicles and then force them out of the area.

The tanks were flown in from a base in Kuwait, anti-jihadist coalition spokesman Colonel Wayne Marotto said in another statement. — AFP

Yemen prisoner exchange talks open in Switzerland

GENEVA: Rival parties in Yemen's war opened UN-sponsored talks on Friday aimed at an exchange deal for the release of more than 1,400 prisoners, the United Nations said.

The government, supported by a military coalition, and Ansar Allah fighters agreed to exchange some 15,000 detainees as part of peace deal brokered by the United Nations in Sweden in 2018.

The two sides have since made sporadic prisoner swaps, but the release of 900 loyalists in exchange for 520 insurgents — if it materialises — would mark the first large-scale handover since the war erupted in 2014.

"The #Yemen Prisoners & Detainees Committee meeting started today. I am grateful to #Switzerland for hosting it & to @ICRC for co-chairing," UN envoy Martin Griffiths tweeted, without giving an exact location for the talks.

"My message to the Parties is: conclude discussions, release detainees swiftly, bring relief to thousands of Yemeni families," he

THE TALKS IN SWITZERLAND WOULD 'LAY OUT THE FINAL TOUCHES' AFTER AGREEMENT WAS REACHED WITH THE ICRC 'ON ALL LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS'

wrote.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, for its part, said it was ready to help with the return of detainees to their families.

A source close to Yemen's presidency said on Wednesday that the talks in Switzerland would "lay out the final touches" after agreement was reached with the ICRC "on all logistical arrangements".

General Nasser Mansour Hadi, brother of Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, along with 19 Saudis and other politicians and journalists, would be among those released, he



Students shout slogans during a ceremony at the end of summer courses held by Ansar Allah movement in Sanaa. – Reuters

said.

A former senior intelligence official, the general has been held by the fighters ever since they overran Sanaa in late 2014.

The Yemen conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, and sparked what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, Kuwait announced on Thursday it would donate \$20 million towards humanitarian aid for war-ravaged Yemen, two days after UN officials called the country for not honouring its pledges, diplomats said.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmad Nasser Al Mohammad al Sabah made the announcement during a video conference meeting behind closed doors.

The session — organised by Germany, Kuwait, Sweden and Britain — also included the four other permanent Security Council members (China, France, Russia and the United States) and the European Union.

— AFP

Thai protesters kick off weekend of rallies

The show of force is expected to be the largest since the 2014 coup – student activists are hoping for a turnout of more than 50,000

BANGKOK: Pro-democracy protesters took to the streets of Bangkok on Saturday as a rally expected to draw tens of thousands of people kicked off calling for PM Prayut Chan-O-Cha to step down and demanding reforms to the monarchy.

The kingdom has seen near-daily gatherings of youth-led groups since mid-July calling for the resignation of Prayut, the former army chief behind the 2014 coup, and a complete overhaul of his administration.

Some are also demanding reforms to Thailand's ultra-wealthy and powerful monarchy — a once-taboo topic in Thailand due to its tough royal defamation laws.

The burgeoning movement, partly inspired by Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests, remains largely leaderless.

But the weekend's demonstration is organised by students of Bangkok's Thammasat University — a group that has been among the most vocal about the royal family's role in Thailand.

At noon a crowd of hundreds



Anti-government protesters gather in Sanam Luang during a pro-democracy rally in Bangkok as the Grand Palace is seen in the background. — AFP

forced open the locked gates of the campus, chanting "Down with dictatorship, long live democracy!" and "Prayut get out!"

"We have to support the students," Rianchai, 55, said.

"We only want equality."

Prominent student activist Panusaya Sithijirawattanukul said on Friday reforming the monarchy was at the top of the agenda, asserting that they hoped "to adapt it to our society".

Wearing ponchos, face masks and carrying umbrellas to shield

themselves from rain, demonstrators held up three-finger salutes, made popular by the Hunger Games film trilogy.

Protesters are expected to move on to the historic Sanam Luang field in front of the royal palace, where

they plan to spend the night before marching to the Government House on Sunday — a move authorities have warned against.

The show of force is expected to be the largest since the 2014 coup — student activists are hoping for a

turnout of more than 50,000.

Some 10,000 uniformed and plainclothes police patrolled the area as the crowd grew, setting up tents selling t-shirts, flags and beer along a main road outside the university.

A cycle of violent protests and coups has long plagued Thailand, with the arch-royalist military stepping in to stage more than a dozen putsches since the end of royal absolutism in 1932.

The latest wave of student-led demonstrations has largely been peaceful.

But unprecedented calls from some protesters for frank discussions about the monarchy have sent shockwaves through the kingdom.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn sits at the apex of Thai power, buttressed by the kingdom's military and billionaire clans, and commands a fortune estimated to be worth up to \$60 billion.

The student demands include greater accounting of the palace's finances, the abolition of royal defamation laws and a call for the king to remain outside of politics.

They also want a rewrite of the 2017 military-scripted constitution, which they say tilted last year's election in Prayut's favour, and for the government to stop "harassing" political opponents.

So far, authorities have arrested more than two dozen activists, charging them with sedition before releasing them on bail.

The weekend demonstrations will prove a test for the pro-democracy movement, analysts say.

— AFP

Duterte keeps up social distancing rule

MANILA: Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has decided to retain the three feet social distance requirement on public transport to reduce coronavirus infections, rejecting moves to reduce it to 30 centimetres, his spokesman said on Saturday.

Health experts have warned that reducing gaps between passengers in trains, buses and jeepneys could result in a surge of infections in the Philippines, which has the most confirmed COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia.

Duterte studied recommendations and decided to retain the 1 metre distancing requirement, including a ban on eating and speaking in public transport, presidential spokesman Harry Roque told state-run PTV4 network.

Passengers still need to wear face shield and mask at all times, he added. The transport ministry, which cut the distance to 75cm on Monday, 50cm on September 28 and 30cm on October 12 to accommodate more passengers returning to work as the economy gradually reopens, said it will comply with the president's decision.

"We shall aggressively comply and strictly enforce the 1-metre physical distancing in all public transport as envisioned and mandated," the transport ministry said in a statement on Saturday. — Reuters

MYANMAR CAMPAIGN HEATS UP



Supporters of the National League for Democracy (NLD) on a motorcade pass supporters of the opposition Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), during a campaign in Wundwin, near Mandalay. — AFP

ABE VISITS SHRINE FOR WAR DEAD

TOKYO: Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine for war dead on Saturday, his first visit since December 2013, after refraining from doing so for most of his term to avoid angering China and South Korea.

Abe announced the visit on his official Twitter account along with a photo of himself at the shrine, just days after Yoshihide Suga succeeded him as Japan's leader.

Japan's longest-serving leader announced his resignation in late August, citing health problems. The shrine is seen by Beijing and Seoul as a symbol of Japan's past military aggression because it honours 14 Japanese wartime leaders convicted as war criminals by an Allied tribunal as well as war dead.

Abe had visited the shrine in person

once during his last tenure as prime minister but regularly sent offerings via an aide on the anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War Two and during the shrine's spring and autumn festivals. His pilgrimage to the shrine in 2013 sparked outrage in South Korea and China and an expression of "disappointment" from the United States.

On Saturday, South Korea's foreign ministry released a statement expressing "deep concern and regret" that Abe paid respect at the shrine "immediately" after his resignation as prime minister. Suga, who was the chief government spokesman under Abe, was not among the Abe cabinet ministers who visited the shrine on the 75th anniversary of the end of World War Two on August 15.

— Reuters

India parliament session may be cut short due to virus

NEW DELHI: India's parliament session that began this week is likely to be cut short after 30 lawmakers were found infected with the coronavirus, two senior parliament officials said, as the number of cases in the country rose to 5.3 million.

The Indian parliament met for the first time in six months on September 14 and was to function until October 1, but the two officials said its duration could be reduced by a week.

"Since the commencement of the session the number of positive cases have gone up so the government is thinking of cutting short the session," said one of the two officials, who are involved in the functioning of parliament proceedings. The government has also mandated daily tests for journalist entering parliament to cover the session from Saturday.

Piyush Soperna, joint director at the country's upper house's secretariat, said in an email response that it has no information on the issue

The government has also mandated daily tests for journalists entering parliament to cover the session

of prematurely ending the parliament session next week.

India, which recorded 93,337 new infections in the last 24 hours, has been posting the highest single-day caseload in the world since early August, according to a tally.

India is the second-most badly hit country after United States with total recorded coronavirus cases at 5.3 million. However, deaths in India have been relatively low. The virus has killed 1,247 people in last 24 hours, taking the total death toll to 85,619, government data showed on



A health worker conducts a COVID-19 Coronavirus test at a temporary Coronavirus testing centre settled by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, in Ahmedabad. — AFP

Saturday.

The lawmakers who have been infected include Nitin Gadkari, highways and medium and small enterprises minister in Prime Minister's Narendra Modi's cabinet.

On Wednesday, India's federal government ordered its states not to hoard oxygen supplies and allow free movement to cope with the rising number of cases.

AL QAEDA MILITANTS HELD: Meanwhile, India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) said on Saturday it has arrested nine Al Qaeda militants who were planning attacks in several locations including the capital New Delhi. "The group was planning to undertake terrorist attacks at vital installations in India with an aim to kill innocent people and strike terror in their minds," the country's main counter-terrorism arm said in a statement.

Those arrested "were motivated to undertake attacks at multiple places" including the capital region. Six of the militants were arrested in the eastern state of West Bengal and while three in the southern state of Kerala, the NIA said, adding the individuals were "associated with sponsored module of Al Qaeda".

A spokesman for Pakistan's foreign office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Pakistan has often denied giving material support to militants. — Reuters



Trump urges SC nomination ‘without delay’

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Saturday urged Republican lawmakers to back his upcoming nomination for the Supreme Court “without delay” as the issue roiled the election campaign.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a liberal stalwart, died Friday, opening a crucial vacancy on the court and setting off a fierce political battle before the November 3 vote.

Trump tweeted that the “most important” decision that Republicans had been elected to make was “the selection of United States Supreme Court Justices.”

“We have this obligation, without delay!” he added.

Coming just before the election in which Trump lags his Democratic rival Joe Biden in the polls, the vacancy offers the Republicans a chance to lock in a conservative majority at the court for decades to come.

Democrats have demanded a delay in the nomination until after the election — an uphill battle given the control Republicans have in the Senate, which must approve the president’s nominee.

Trump said in August he would have no qualms about naming a new justice so close to the election, and last week he unveiled 20 names of possible choices, all deeply conservative.

Even before Ginsburg’s death, Trump had made public a list of potential nominees. Trump’s



Candles are lit next to an illustration of Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg as people mourn her death at the Supreme Court in Washington. – Reuters

US Supreme Court justices

Liberals					Conservatives			
Stephen Breyer	Ruth Bader Ginsburg	Elena Kagan	Sonia Sotomayor	Brett Kavanaugh	Samuel Alito	Neil Gorsuch	John Roberts	Clarence Thomas
Age: 82	87	60	66	55	70	53	65	72

The US Supreme Court

The country's top judicial body

Final arbiter on fundamental legal matters such as abortion, racism, gay marriage rights, death penalty

Justices are appointed for life

Source: US Supreme Court

© AFP

Democratic opponent in the presidential race, Joe Biden, on Friday night said the winner of the election should be the one to make the selection and that Trump should not move forward with a nominee.

Chuck Schumer, the Senate’s top Democrat, agreed. McConnell pledged that the Senate would vote on any Trump nominee. For liberals

who considered Ginsburg a heroine, the grief they have expressed over her death was tinged with fear over what happens next.

Conservative activists for years have sought to get enough votes on the Supreme Court to overturn the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that legalised abortion nationwide.

During the 2016 campaign, Trump

promised to appoint justices who would overturn that decision. But the court in July, even with its conservative majority, struck down a restrictive Louisiana abortion law on a 5-4 vote.

The two justices who Trump already has appointed were Neil Gorsuch in 2017 and Brett Kavanaugh in 2018.

Kavanaugh’s confirmation process

was particularly heated, as he faced accusations by a California university professor, Christine Blasey Ford, that he had assaulted her in 1982 when the two were high school students in Maryland.

Kavanaugh angrily denied those accusations and was narrowly confirmed.

Republicans risk the possibility

of liberals embracing more radical proposals should Trump replace Ginsburg but Democrats win November’s election, with some activists on the left suggesting even before Ginsburg’s death that the number of justices on the court should be expanded to counter Trump’s appointees.

— Reuters

SAVING LIVESTOCK FROM STORM



Sheep breeders save their animals from a flooded area, following a storm near the village of Megala Kalyvia, in central Greece. – Reuters

Belarus police detain hundreds at women’s protest

MINSK: Riot police on Saturday detained hundreds of women as opposition protesters marched through the Belarusian capital Minsk demanding an end to President Alexander Lukashenko’s rule.

Around two thousand women took part in the “Sparkly March”, wearing shiny accessories and carrying red-and-white flags of the protest movement.

Police blocked the women and began dragging them into police vans as they stood with linked hands, swiftly detaining several hundred, an AFP journalist saw.

The march was the latest in a series of all-women protests calling for the strongman to leave following his disputed victory in elections last month.

His opposition rival Svetlana Tikhanovskaya also claimed the victory.

In a statement released ahead of the march, Tikhanovskaya, who has taken refuge in Lithuania, praised the



Belarusian opposition supporters hold a rally to protest against police brutality and to reject the presidential election results in Minsk. – Reuters

“brave women of Belarus.”

“They are marching despite being constantly menaced and put under pressure,” she said.

Among those detained on Saturday was Nina Baginskaya, a 73-year-old activist who has become one of

the best-known faces of the protest movement. Police released her outside a police station shortly afterwards.

Police detained so many protesters that they ran out of room in vans, releasing around 10 women.

— Agencies

New UK lockdown likely sooner rather than later

LONDON: Britain is likely to need to reintroduce some national coronavirus lockdown measures sooner rather than later, a leading epidemiologist and former senior government health advisor said on Saturday.

Neil Ferguson, a professor of epidemiology at London’s Imperial College, told the BBC the country was facing a “perfect storm” of rising infections as people return to work and school.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday that he did not want another national lockdown but that new restrictions may be needed because the country was facing an “inevitable” second wave of COVID-19. “I think some additional measures are likely to be needed sooner rather than later,” Ferguson said.

Ministers were on Friday reported to be considering a second national lockdown after new COVID-19 cases almost doubled to 6,000 per day, hospital admissions rose and infection

rates soared across parts of northern England and London.

“Right now we’re at about the levels of infection we were seeing in this country in late February, and if we leave it another two to four weeks we’ll be back at levels we were seeing more back in mid-March, and that’s going to — or could — cause deaths,” Ferguson said.

Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon asked Johnson to meet her and the leaders of the devolved governments of Wales and Northern Ireland within the next 48 hours to try to ensure coordinated measures across different parts of the United Kingdom.

“We know from experience earlier in the year that speed and decisiveness of action is important in the fight against COVID,” she said.

Britain has suffered Europe’s highest death toll from COVID-19, with more than 41,000 deaths on the government’s preferred measure.

The sharp increase in infections



Members of the public enjoy the weather along the Thames in southwest London. – AFP

has not yet led to a similar rise in new fatalities — in part because cases have been concentrated among younger

people — but hospital admissions are now beginning to rise. Ferguson served on the government’s main

scientific advisory board until May, when he stepped down after breaking lockdown rules himself.

He said future lockdown restrictions did not need to be as strict as those introduced in March to be effective in slowing the renewed spread of the disease.

More than 10 million people in parts of northern and central England are already under some form of lockdown restriction, such as a ban on inviting friends or family to their homes, or visiting pubs and restaurants after 10 pm. London’s mayor, Sadiq Khan, said on Friday that tighter lockdown measures were becoming “increasingly likely” for Britain’s capital. Britain’s capacity to test for coronavirus infections has also come under strain since schools in England reopened this month, with many people reporting that tests were unavailable or only possible at locations hundreds of miles away.

“We have a perfect storm right now, of people — as they have been told to do — getting back to normal, schools reopening, a surge in cases,” Ferguson said. — Reuters

Not all effort is rewarded, and not all progress is earned

Bill wanted to be a carpenter, a woodworker who was known as a ‘chippy’ back in the day, because you would always find them at work surrounded by woodchips and shavings, as they constructed doors, kitchen units, tables, chairs, cupboards, beds, and goodness knows what else in their carpenters shops, not unlike the carpentry units you will find in the industrial sectors around the Sultanate, except that at the beginning, and at the end of the day, their workshops were so immaculately clean you could “eat your dinner off the floor,” as they used to jest.

Anyway, my mate left school and signed up to be a carpenter’s apprentice for five years. The agreement, a formal one, was registered with the government agencies, and was signed by the employer, the apprentice’s parents, the lad himself and an industry overseer. The deal was that the apprentice would work for five years, be given a half-day each week to attend skills and assessment classes at the local technical college, be developed as a carpenter by the employer and his journeymen, and at the end of their time would be certificated and



Ray Petersen
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ALL DAY HE
TOILED AT THE
WORKSHOP,
AND DID A
GOOD JOB TOO
APPARENTLY

registered as a tradesman, with the provision that he had reached an appropriate level of knowledge and skill, and displayed sufficient good character to represent the industry.

I’ll never forget how excited he was on his first day going off to work, with his lunchbox, and a thermos full of hot tea, and I swear he must have been half an hour early for work on day one. He was introduced around the team and showed where everything was, given a ‘chippy’s’ apron, but no toolbelt or tools, just a broom, brush and shovel, and told to keep his eyes and ears open, and keep ‘the place’ clean! “Oh, I know what this is,” he thought, “this is a prank they play on the new boys. So, I’ll say nuthin’ and just fit in till they have had their fun.”

All day he toiled at the workshop, and did a good job too apparently, but he admitted he was terribly disappointed not to be ‘tooling’ with the others. A few days later, at the end of the week, everybody downed tools at 4 pm, instead of five, and Bill was the last one left working. The boss stuck his head out of the door and gruffly asked if Bill was going to “sleep in the workshop, or pick up his pay and go home?” The new apprentice didn’t need asking twice, and hung up his

apron, stored his brushes and stud away, and, a bit bashfully entered the office not knowing how to ask for his pay, or, well... anything.

“Here you go lad,” said the boss. “That’s your pay, and there’s a slip inside that tells what tax, you pay, the tool money, and how much you’re left with, okay? So, how’s your first week been?” Bill said he mumbled a bit about the sweeping and cleaning, finishing with, “but it’ll be alright.” The boss looked at him and his face must have softened a bit as he said, “You’ve got a lot more cleaning up ahead of you boy, but I tell you, everyone of those boys that work on the shop floor said good things about you.

You haven’t sulked, haven’t sniveled or complained, when many would have. And with a cheery chuck around the ears, told Billy to keep his chin up, “You’ve done alright, and you’ll be alright lad, coz it looks like you’re made of the right stuff!”

Bill never forgot that life is not about what you want, what you hope for, wish for, or think you deserve, but rather more what can be achieved with hard work, good grace and dignity. Entitlement is little more than a parcel of selfishness, wrapped in a lack of respect.

PRAGMATIC GOALS

‘Suganomics’ will target quick wins, not grand visions

LEIKA KIHARA & TETSUSHI KAJIMOTO

Japan’s new prime minister will pursue economic structural reforms through a mixed bag of policies that target specific industries, rather than a grand strategy to reshape society and boost long-term growth.

Armed with a strong grip on Japan’s bureaucracy, Yoshihide Suga knows which levers to pull to get results, say government and ruling party officials who know him or have worked with him. But an initial need to consolidate popular support means he will first target quick policy wins that will later give him the political capital to pursue tougher reforms, they said.

“He isn’t after visions. He’s someone who wants to accomplish small goals one by one,” said political analyst Atsuo Ito, a former ruling party staff.

“He’ll initially focus on pragmatic goals that directly affect people’s livelihood.”

Suga has said he will continue his predecessor Shinzo Abe’s pro-growth “Abenomics” strategy aimed at pulling Japan out of deflation with heavy monetary and fiscal stimulus coupled with structural reforms. But unlike Abe, Suga’s plans for structural reforms will focus more

on spurring competition, rather than deeper social change. For Suga, economic reform will be a political priority in its own right, unlike Abe, whose reforms were wrapped up in a broader political agenda that included the thorny challenge of revising Japan’s

pacifist constitution.

Suga must act quickly as his current term lasts for only a year unless he calls a snap election to win the public’s mandate to run a full, three-year term. That means he will first seek “quick-hit” achievements that directly channel money to households.

Among the sweeteners would be to slash cellphone charges by around 40 per cent, raise the minimum wage and increase payouts to cushion the blow from the pandemic.

“At this moment, he has to focus on very short-term issues like how to stimulate economy,” said Heizo Takenaka, who served in the cabinet of reformist former premier Junichiro Koizumi.

Removing protections in industry will be one such objective, even if that riles some parts of corporate Japan.

“Introducing competition among mobile phone carriers could be a very symbolic policy for Suga because he loves competition,” said Takenaka, who retains close contact with Suga.

“He hates people with vested interests.” If successful, Suga could pursue bolder reforms such as liberalising the heavily protected medical sector, consolidating weak regional banks and breaking barriers that hamper competition among small- and mid-sized firms.

Having served as Abe’s top spokesman, Suga already knows his way around Japan’s massive bureaucracy. Suga relaxed visa requirements to boost inbound tourism, overcoming push-back from the justice ministry. He also cut through bureaucratic opposition and expanded a scheme that gave tax breaks for donations to Japan’s regional areas.

“Suga may not be charismatic, but he gets things done,” said Taimei Yamaguchi, a ruling party lawmaker close to Suga. “Some of the best advice I got from him was to make the most of the expertise the bureaucrats have.” — Reuters

FUELLING TENSIONS

Surge in Turkish COVID cases pits doctors against politicians

EZGI ERKOYUN AND TUVAN GUMRUKCU

Resurgent coronavirus cases in Turkey are fuelling tensions between doctors who say the official figures underplay the scale of the outbreak and politicians who accuse the country’s medical association of undermining efforts to contain it.

More than 1,600 new cases and 60 deaths from COVID-19 are now reported daily, well off peak levels in April but rising steadily, with average numbers of deaths now three times the rates recorded between June and August. Doctors across Turkey wore black ribbons last week to commemorate colleagues who have died, part of protests which also included a social media campaign with a message for the government: “You can’t manage it; we are exhausted”.

Many doctors question the official COVID-19 numbers, saying that although they don’t have their own independent nationwide data, the scale of cases they see at a local level does not tally with the bigger picture presented by the government.



Two women wear protective face masks while walking along the street in Ankara. — AFP

“The numbers of just one city, or the numbers unveiled by just one or two medical chambers are almost equal to the (official) numbers for the whole country,” doctor Halis Yerlikaya said at a hospital in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir.

“This process is not handled transparently,” said Yerlikaya, who is a member of the medics association’s central committee. Wearing a black

MANY DOCTORS
QUESTION
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ribbon on his white medical coat, he said doctors wanted to highlight the challenges and risks they faced.

“We have tried to convey the voice of our colleagues who caught COVID-19, who are fighting for their lives in hospitals... Therefore we kicked off these protests.” The doctors’ campaign prompted a blunt rebuke from President Tayyip Erdogan’s

parliamentary ally, who accused them of treachery and called for the medics association to be shut down.

“The Turkish Medics Association is as dangerous as coronavirus and is disseminating threats,” tweeted Devlet Bahceli of the Nationalist Movement Party, whose alliance with Erdogan’s AK Party sustains the president’s parliamentary majority. — Reuters



Lakers dominate Nuggets in NBA Western finals opener



Denver Nuggets’ Jamal Murray (27) looks to pass while defended by Los Angeles Lakers centre Dwight Howard (left) guard Alex Caruso (centre) and Anthony Davis (right) during the second quarter in game one of the Western Conference Finals of the 2020 NBA Playoffs. – USA Today Sports

MIAMI: Anthony Davis scored 37 points and pulled down 10 rebounds as the Los Angeles Lakers dominated the Denver Nuggets 126-114 on Friday in game one of the NBA Western Conference finals.

LeBron James added 15 points with 12 assists and six rebounds for the Lakers, who shot out of the gate after dropping their opener in each of their previous two playoff series in the NBA’s coronavirus quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

After a close first quarter ended with the Nuggets up by two, the Lakers seized control in the second quarter, out-scoring Denver 34-21 to take a 70-59 lead into halftime.

Lakers reserve Alex Caruso converted a three-point play to spark a 17-1 scoring run, the Nuggets going without a basket for more than five minutes to start the second quarter.

“It took a quarter for us to kind of figure it out,” James said. “I’m not saying we fully figured them out because it’s too early in the series to say that.

“But we started to get a better feel,

just started to get in a better rhythm defensively and we started to get some stops in that second quarter and we were able to build that lead up going into halftime.”

Well aware that the Nuggets had proved their resilience with some big second-half comebacks against the Los Angeles Clippers in the previous round, the Lakers kept the pressure on after the break.

Denver trimmed the deficit to nine points midway through the third quarter.

But their efforts were hampered with star Nikola Jokic, Jamal Murray and Paul Millsap all in early foul trouble, and that was the closest they would get in the second half.

Jokic and Murray both scored 21 points to pace the Nuggets. Michael Porter added 14 off the bench.

But Denver coach Mike Malone said the Nuggets did not do enough on defence.

“Even in that first quarter we didn’t guard anybody,” said Malone, whose team shot better than 63 per cent from the field in an opening period

punctuated by Murray’s three-pointer as time expired. “Our offense was able to score the ball but there was little defence.”

But Malone said the Nuggets would have to figure out how to get stops without fouling, noting that in the Lakers’ massive second quarter they shot just 42.9 per cent from the floor but went to the free-throw line 24 times. “Twenty-four times in one quarter, and we were called for 16 personal fouls in that quarter,” Malone said. “On top of that seven turnovers, again fueling their break.”

Murray said the Nuggets aren’t surprised to see foul calls to go the Lakers’ way.

“We know how it’s going to be,” he said. “We know we’re the younger team. We’re just going to play through it.

“We’re going to find a way and we’re not going to go away so easy.”

THREE MORE TO GO

Davis had 33 points by the end of the third quarter, his hook shot with 36.4 seconds left in the third pushing the Lakers’ lead to 23 points.

The Lakers, back in the conference finals for the first time since 2010 — when they won their most recent NBA title — remained well aware that they had plenty of work to do against a Nuggets team that erased 1-3 deficits in each of their previous two series.

“We haven’t done anything special,” Davis said. “We basically took care of home court. We have three more to go.”

The best-of-seven series continues with game two on Sunday, and James said having a chance to battle for a place in the NBA finals was more important than his runner-up finish to Milwaukee’s Giannis Antetokounmpo in voting for the Most Valuable Player award.

James did admit to being “pissed off” at receiving just 16 first-place votes to Antetokounmpo’s 85 from the group of sports writers and broadcasters who voted. That might be a good thing for the Lakers.

“It definitely sparks him and, like, he got a chip on his shoulder like he’s got something to prove,” Davis said.

— AFP

LOCAL FLAVOUR

OFA assembly approves board term extension to 2021



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 19

The general assembly of Oman Football Association (OFA) agreed on Saturday on the extension of the current term of the board until 2021.

The decision which was approved in the meeting came in line with the government’s instructions to postpone the election for one year due to the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on sporting events and advancing the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games to 2021.



The annual general meeting of OFA began with a welcoming speech delivered by Shaikh Salim al Wahaibi, OFA Chairman, and he thanked all the efforts taken by the clubs to make the domestic competitions happen despite the current situation. During the meeting, the OFA board shared the 2019 audited budget with lists of the profit and loss for the same year.

The discussions included revision on the election policy and schedules of domestic competitions after the permission of the related government bodies for resumption of footballing business. A committee with representatives of Saham, Al Ettihad, Bausher and Bahla members was formed to propose a plan for the domestic competition schedule for the next season 2020/2021. The assembly of OFA agreed to have the election of the next term of the board in May 2021.

Mirbat club representative queried on the percentage of the OFA sponsorship to the clubs.

The officials at OFA responded that the commercial team will try to find more sponsors despite the difficulty of attracting more sponsorship due to the current situation.

Mirbat’s representative recommended on reimbursement for the teams for cancellation decision to the junior leagues. The OFA response was that there are no clauses that mention this part and according to the instructions from government to reduce the budget, it is difficult to provide the reimbursement.

Majees’ representative suggested on returning the footballing schools project which is missing now for many years. The OFA’s response was that the technical director will revise this project intensively in coordination with the technical development and studies department.

The recommendations will be raised to the board to take the necessary decision.

Bausher club chairman recommended on cancellation of the professional league due to high financial expenses. The OFA officials said that this decision cannot be taken as it is one of the essential requirements by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to take part in its competitions.

The OFA general assembly meeting was attended by representatives from AFC and Fifa through video conference.

Reed grabs US Open halfway lead, Tiger misses cut

MAMARONECK: Former Masters champion Patrick Reed put his sterling short game on display to grab the US Open halfway lead on Friday while Tiger Woods finished well outside the cut in windy conditions that humbled many of the game’s top golfers.

Reed only hit five fairways on a tough scoring day at Winged Foot but made a slew of stunning recoveries and needed only 25 putts en route to an even-par 70 that left him at four under on the week and one shot clear of Bryson DeChambeau (68).

“I feel like the game is where it needs to be. I feel good,” said world number 10 Reed.

“I just need to tighten a few things up here or there, but the short game is sharp, and when I play around a place like this, that’s what you need.”

Reed, who started the day one shot back of overnight leader Justin Thomas, grabbed the outright lead with a birdie on his final hole, the par-five ninth, where his shot from a greenside bunker settled five feet from the cup.

Unlike the first round when 21 players finished under par in soft



Patrick Reed plays his shot from the sixth tee during the second round of the US Open at Winged Foot Golf Club. – USA Today Sports

conditions, Winged Foot proved a much sterner test on Friday as DeChambeau, Bubba Watson (69) and Hideki Matsuyama (69) were the only players from a 144-player field to break par. DeChambeau, who has turned heads this year with his new physique and prodigious length off the tee, went out in the morning wave and muscled his way around a scorecard-shredding Winged Foot course like few others can.

The world number nine finished his round with a monstrous eagle at the par-five ninth hole where, after a 380-yard drive, he stuffed a pitching wedge to six feet.

“Confidence is at an all-time high right now, driving it well, iron play is fantastic, wedging is getting better each and every day, and I’m putting it like I know I can,” said DeChambeau, whose best major finish was a share of fourth place at this year’s PGA Championship.

FRUSTRATED WOODS

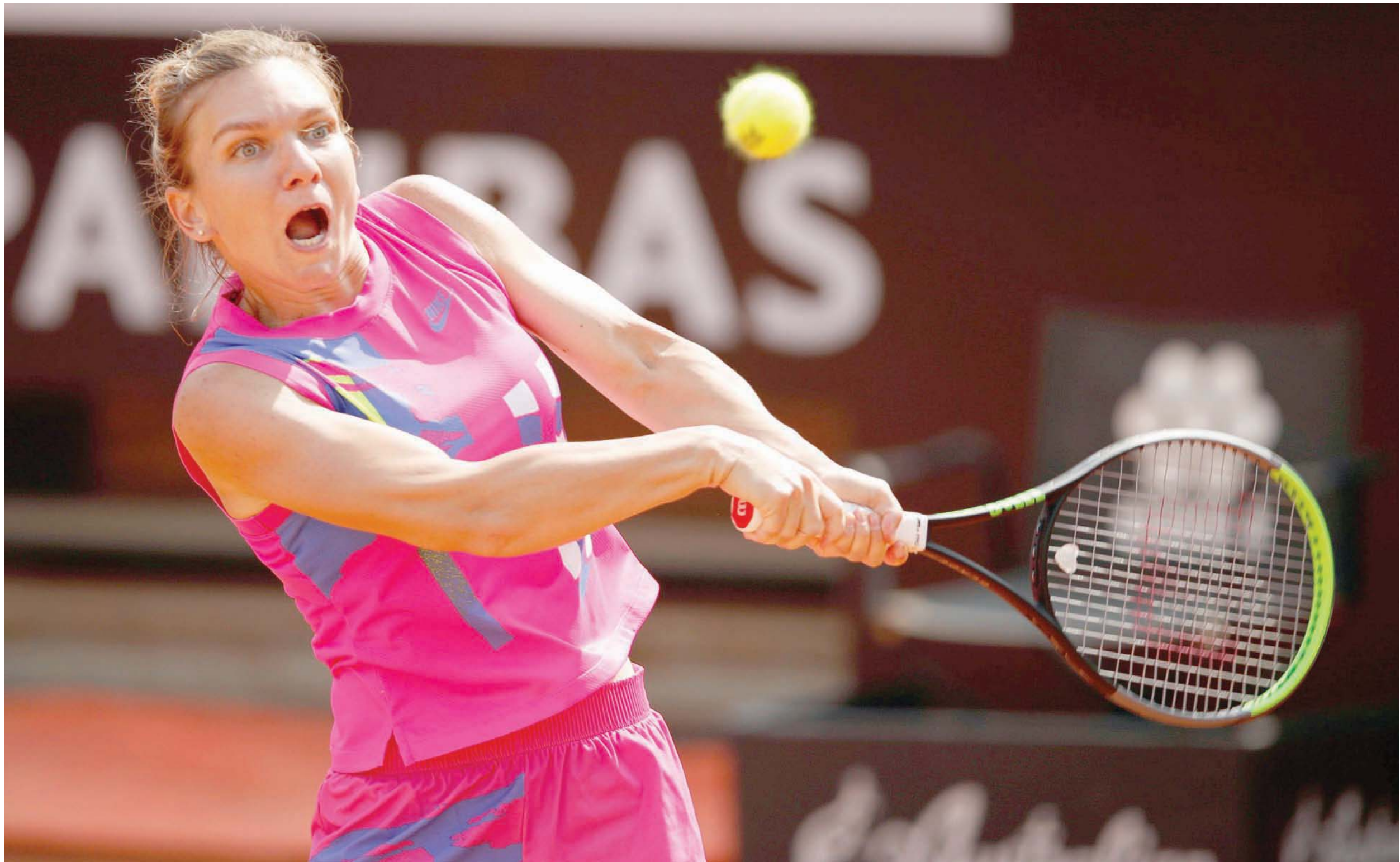
Thomas (73), Spain’s Rafa Cabrera Bello (70) and Harris English (70) were all two shots off the pace heading into

the weekend of a tournament that was originally scheduled for mid-June but postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Masters champion Woods (77) missed the cut for the eighth time in his last 15 majors after a round during which he made five bogeys and two double-bogeys over a miserable 11-hole run.

“Physically it was frustrating that I didn’t drive the ball as well as I needed to,” said Woods. “Iron play was pretty much the way it has been. It’s been good, and I finally putt well. But on this golf course it’s imperative that you hit fairways, and I did not do that.”

Phil Mickelson’s latest bid to complete the career Grand Slam of golf’s four majors fell apart as the six-times runner-up carded a 74 and missed the cut after posting one of the worst 36-hole scores of his major career.

Among the others to miss the cut were defending champion Gary Woodland, PGA Championship winner Collin Morikawa, and top-20 players Tyrell Hatton, Tommy Fleetwood, Matthew Fitzpatrick and Justin Rose. — Reuters



Romania's Simona Halep in action during her quarterfinal match against Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva. — Reuters

TOP SEEDS HALEP, PLISKOVA INTO LAST EIGHT IN ROME

ROME: Simona Halep and defending women's champion Karolina Pliskova both eased into the quarterfinals of the Italian Open on Friday.

Top seed Halep rallied from 3-0 down in the first set to see off Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska in a 7-5, 6-4 victory that took one hour and 28 minutes.

"Big picture, I think it was a great match and gives me confidence that even in these conditions with a big hitter that I could win in two sets," said Halep.

The two-time Rome finalist next meets Yulia Putintseva, who battled

back from 6-4, 5-2 down to see off fellow Kazakh Elena Rybakina, the 10th seed, 4-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2.

"I expect a tough battle but I feel fit," said former French Open champion Halep, a runner-up in Rome in 2017 and 2018.

"I feel good with my body. I'm ready to face her and tomorrow, hopefully, I will play better than today."

Halep is warming up on clay for the French Open, a tournament she won in 2018, after skipping the US tour because of coronavirus fears.

Her last win was in Prague a month ago.



Big picture, I think it was a great match and gives me confidence that even in these conditions with a big hitter that I could win in two sets

SIMONA HALEP

World number four Pliskova dominated 65th-ranked Anna Blinkova 6-4, 6-3 in their third round match.

The second-seed Czech, who defended her Brisbane title in January, got off to a stumbling start with two double faults in the opening game allowing Blinkova to break.

But the 22-year-old Russian was unable to build on her advantage against the former world number one, who next meets 11th seed Elise Mertens after she got past Daria Kasatkina retired injured in their first set tiebreak.

Ninth seed Garbine Muguruza

advanced to her sixth quarter-final this year with a straight-sets win over last year's Rome finalist Johanna Konta.

Both players hit 15 winners each but Briton Konta paid for 22 unforced errors to the Spaniard's 13.

Muguruza prevailed 6-4, 6-1 against seventh-seeded Konta to reach the last eight in Rome for the third time.

The former French Open winner will next face US Open finalist Victoria Azarenka who advanced after Russian Daria Kasatkina retired injured in their first set tiebreak.

Former Rome winner Elina

Svitolina got past two-time Grand Slam champion Svetlana Kuznetsova 7-6 (8/6), 6-4.

Fourth seed Svitolina beat Halep in both the 2017 and 2018 finals to lift the Rome title.

"I'm really thankful to play my first tournament in Rome where I have great memories," said the Ukrainian after her six-month coronavirus-enforced break.

She next plays Czech 12th seed Marketa Vondrousova who battled past Slovenian Polona Hercog 1-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/5).

— AFP

No fond farewell but Zidane praises 'spectacular' Bale impact

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said he did not say anything to Gareth Bale before he left to sign for Tottenham Hotspur but insisted he had no personal issue with the Wales forward and praised what he did for the Spanish club.

Bale travelled to London on Friday to finalise a return to Tottenham on loan after seven years at Real which witnessed a remarkable haul of trophies and goals but ended with the player barely featuring at the end of last season.

"I did not speak to him," Zidane told a news conference ahead of Real's first game in La Liga away to Real Sociedad on Sunday, where they will begin their title defence. "But I know what he has done for this club. He always proved his quality and what he has achieved with the club cannot be argued with."

While Bale was key to Real win-



Gareth Bale and Sergio Reguilon arrive at the Tottenham Hotspur Training Centre. — Reuters

ning the 2016 Champions League in Zidane's first season, he was absent from most of the second campaign due to injuries and never managed to

re-establish himself as a first-choice player for the Frenchman, even after scoring twice in the 2018 final against Liverpool.

But Zidane disagreed with the perception he forced Bale out. "It's not like that. It's more complicated. With Bale it's always about one side against the other. But I've never had a problem with Gareth.

"There will always be things that happen. Now he's making a change, all we can do is wish him the best... These things happen in football, but I've always said he was a spectacular player." There will now be more expectation on Real's joint-most expensive player, Eden Hazard, although the Belgian is unlikely to feature against Real Sociedad. Hazard's debut season at Real was marred by two ankle injuries and other fitness troubles. Zidane said he would not rush him back to action.

"We have more time to prepare for the season and all he needs to do is ensure he gets to 100 or 120% fitness," he said. — Reuters



Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane reacts. — Reuters

sport

DJOKOVIC, NADAL INTO LAST EIGHT AS ITALIAN OPEN PREPARES FOR FANS



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Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays a forehand to Serbia's Filip Krajnovic in Rome. – AFP

ROME: World number one Novak Djokovic and defending champion Rafael Nadal welcomed the decision to allow a limited number of fans to watch the Italian Open as the top men's seeds advanced to the quarterfinals on Friday.

Italy's government have said that 1,000 spectators can be present at the Foro Italico from Sunday's semifinals, with matches so far being played in empty courts.

"If it's safe enough, fantastic," said Nadal after sweeping past Serb Dusan Lajovic 6-1, 6-3 in his third round match.

Djokovic battled past fellow Serb Filip Krajnovic 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, to remain on a collision course for a final showdown with Nadal for a second consecutive year.

"A thousand people is better than no people, for sure, because we all miss the fans," said Djokovic.

Men's fourth seed Matteo Berrettini, the only Italian remaining in the tournament, regretted he could not benefit from spectators for his quarterfinal against Norway's Casper Rudd on Saturday.

"A thousand people isn't insignificant, it's a thousand motivations," said Berrettini.

Nadal proved too strong for 25th-ranked Lajovic, who had valiantly but vainly launched a fightback after trailing 4-0 in the second set to the Spaniard.

But Krajnovic made long-time friend Djokovic work hard to reach the quarterfinals for the 14th time, just one fewer than Nadal.

Djokovic double faulted on the first of his three set points in the first-set tiebreak but a quick break in the second put him through in a tournament he has won four times.

"Never easy, I think, emotionally to play against someone that is one of my best friends for many years," said Djokovic.

The top seed is warming up for the French Open in 10 days time, having made the switch from the American hard court tour where he won the Cincinnati tournament played in Flushing Meadows before the US Open from which he was disqualified.

He next plays German qualifier Dominik Koepfer who ended the run of Italian teenager Lorenzo Musetti 6-4, 6-0.

World number two Nadal takes on Argentine eighth seed Diego Schwartzman, who dropped a set before recovering to see off Poland's Hubert Hurkacz 3-6, 6-2, 6-4.

Nadal, 34, won his first Rome title back in 2005, and is bidding for a third consecutive crown on clay in the Italian capital and 10th in total.

The 12-time French Open champion is returning to competition, having not played since winning in Acapulco in February.

HALEP, PLISKOVA ADVANCE

Top women's seed Simona Halep and defending champion Karolina Pliskova also eased into the quarterfinals, along with two-time Rome winner Elina Svitolina.

Halep rallied from 0-3 down in the first set to see off Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska in a 7-5, 6-4 victory in one hour and 28 minutes.

The two-time Rome finalist next meets Yulia Putintseva, who came back from 6-4, 5-2 down to dispatch fellow Kazakh Elena Rybakina, the 10th seed, 4-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2.

"I expect a tough battle but I feel fit," said former French Open champion Halep, a runner-up in Rome in 2017 and 2018 to Svitolina, who got past two-time Grand Slam winner Svetlana Kuznetsova 7-6 (8/6), 6-4.

— AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action during his third round match against Serbia's Dusan Lajovic. – Reuters

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OMAN TO VENTURE INTO OXO CHEMICALS PRODUCTION

EMERGING HEAVYWEIGHT: Five world-scale oxo-chemical units to be integral part of Duqm Petrochemicals Complex

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 19

The Sultanate’s longstanding ambitions to add oxo chemicals — intermediate chemicals used in the manufacture of a wide array of products of everyday use — to its domestic production capabilities are set to become a reality.

It follows a decision by OQ (formerly Oman Oil & Orpic Group), the wholly Omani government-owned integrated energy flagship of the Sultanate, to licence the domestic production of oxo chemicals for the first time in Oman.

Oxo intermediates and oxo derivatives encompass a range of alcohols, polyols, carboxylic acids, specialty esters, and amines — ingredients used in the manufacture of, among other products, high-quality coatings, lubricants, cosmetics and pharmaceutical products, flavourings and fragrances, printing inks and plastics. Many of these chemicals are an integral part of the global construction, automotive and Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) economies.

OQ, by virtue of its 100 per cent ownership of OQ Chemicals (formerly Oxsea), the German-headquartered global manufacturer of oxo chemicals and oxo derivatives, is already a world-leading producer of these intermediate chemicals.

The erstwhile Oxsea, which was acquired by OQ’s predecessor Oman Oil Company in December 2013, operates a global network of plants in the United States and Europe, offering a total production capacity of over 1.3 million tonnes per annum of oxo intermediates and oxo derivatives. Rebranded recently as OQ Chemicals, this overseas network generates revenues of about €1.2 billion annually through the production and sales of more than 70 oxo intermediates and oxo derivatives.

OQ Chemicals owns and operates a network of production units in the US and Europe.

Following a recent agreement, these critically important chemical intermediates will be manufactured for the first time in the Sultanate as part of a megapetrochemicals complex currently in the early stages of design and development at the

Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm.

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemicals Industries Company (DRPIC), a joint venture of OQ (50 per cent) and Kuwait International Oil Company (50 per

cent), is developing the grassroots petrochemical complex downstream to the Duqm Refinery construction of which continues to advance at the SEZ.

Total investment in the petrochemicals complex, featuring

an array of units that seek to maximise value generation from crude and other feedstocks flowing downstream from Duqm Refinery as well as other sources, is estimated at over \$10 billion.

Last month, DRPIC awarded 12 licence packages to international licensors for the supply of technologies linked to the diverse units that form part of the integrated petrochemical complex. One such licensor is OQ Chemicals which has entered into an agreement to licence its advanced proprietary technology for the production of ethylene and propylene derivatives to DRPIC’s petrochemicals scheme.

In a statement issued over the weekend, OQ Chemicals said it has entered into the design phase for five world-scale production units for the manufacturing of propanol, butyraldehyde, neopentyl glycol (NPG), 2-Ethylhexanol (2EH), and 2EH acid.

The company will supply a process design package and support contractors during the design and construction phase. After commissioning the new units, OQ Chemicals will provide various services, including support for operations, maintenance, troubleshooting, training, and ongoing process optimisation at Duqm.

Dr Salim al Huthaili, CEO of DRPIC, remarked: “DRPIC is proud to have reached a major milestone with the conclusion of Front-End Engineering Design. We selected OQ Chemicals in a competitive global bidding process. As an international know-how leader, they convinced us with an excellent long-term solution to the challenge of integrating different production technologies and efficient operation of the new plants. This will support DRPIC to better serve the growing demand in Asia-Pacific.”

Registrations of ten most active business activities reach 22K in Q2

One Stop Shop المحطة الواحدة

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that the number of the ten most registered commercial activities during the second quarter of this year reached 21,981. It said that investors’ approach to submit their transactions through online portal “Invest Easy”, has resulted in speedy and easy completing of their applications. It is a major and important factor of the increase despite the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Statistics Department of the Ministry said that the building and construction contracting activity was the most registered activity the number which reached 4,080, followed by export and import offices with 3,122. The grocery stores were on third position with 2,372 registrations, the coffee shops which also serve foods was fourth with 2,001, followed by refrigerator activities which came fifth with 1,886 registrations.

The activity of coffee shops which mainly serve drinks was on sixth position with 1,869 registrations, tailoring and sewing Arab women clothes was on seventh position with 1,783 registrations and the procurement activity was eighth with 1,757 registrations. The activity of men’s hair cutting, hairdressing and shaving was on ninth position with 1,617 registrations and road transport of goods and equipment by trucks was on tenth position with 1494 registrations.

PROMISING POTENTIAL

Investments in Raysut Industrial City soar to RO 438m

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 19

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, visited recently Raysut Industrial City, which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). The minister was introduced to the industries based at Raysut Industrial City and discussed topics related to scientific research, innovation, and technical and vocational training.

During the meeting, Hamad bin Hamoud al Qasabi, Director-General of Raysut Industrial City informed that Raysut Industrial City has received 23 investment

applications during 2020 up to the current month, of which 12 projects have already been localised in the industrial city. He added that the total volume of investments in Raysut Industrial City has exceeded RO 438 million by the end of 2019.

“The number of the workforce at the industrial city increased to 3,671 during the same year, and the number of the investing projects reached 205. Of these projects, 116 are operating, 44 are under construction and 45 have been allotted with spaces,” Al Qasabi said, adding: “The total area of Raysut Industrial City reached 3,947,024 sqm during the same period. The leased area in the industrial city is divided into

industrial projects (82.7 per cent), service projects (12 per cent), residential projects (4.9 per cent), in addition to commercial projects (0.4 per cent).”

Speaking about the industrial projects operating in Raysut Industrial City, Al Qasabi elaborated there are 30 factories under the food sector which are

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION MEETS OFFICIALS AT RAYSUT INDUSTRIAL CITY

specialised in fish freezing and canning, flour and pasta, frozen chicken, vegetable oils, drinking water packaging, biscuits, and potato chips. He added that there are 55 factories under the construction materials industry which manufacture cement products, gypsum products, pipes and tanks, packaging materials, marble, and industrial stones.

Moreover, there are three factories at Raysut Industrial City which specialise in medical products and medicines. Other sectors present at Raysut Industrial City focus on the production of agricultural fertilisers, plastic products, paper products, recycling, dry storage, commercial projects, oil and petrochemical projects, aluminium products, animal feed, and boat and shipbuilding.

During her visit to Raysut Industrial City, the Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation visited Oman Pharmaceuticals Products Company, Dhofar Fisheries and Food Industries Company, and National Cable Factory



Big brands (must) go online

The global economy, with or without pandemic, has substantially changed over the past 10 to 20 years. I still remember the times when I needed to convince my clients to have a website in the early 2000. Less than a decade later I had to insist for them to have social media accounts. Then again, 5 to 8 years ago, I was advocating for them to begin selling online both goods and services. The market responds slowly to significant trends, we know that, but now that it is established how essential it is to be present online, those companies who are too slow at adapting, face serious consequences, regardless of their size. During the Autum of 2017, the toys distributor Toys“R”Us,

Inc. officially filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in the USA, in order to give it flexibility to deal with a whopping \$5 billion in long-term debt, borrowing \$2 billion so it could pay suppliers for the upcoming holiday season and invest in improving current operations. Only 6 months later the company announced that the plan did not work and most of the physical shops were to be closed. The case of Toys“R”Us is an emblematic example of incapacity to adapt to new trends. While consumers throughout the world began buying online regularly, Toys“R”Us’ pinnacle of innovation was a mobile app to collect points on purchases. Something that was fashionable a decade earlier. So with fewer offline revenues, the cost of maintaining the cumbersome real



STEFANO VIRGILLI

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For a large offline retailer, it is not so easy to simply jump ship and go fully offline. Selling online presents challenges that offline are minimised or do not exist at all

estate, sank the ship.

In the past weeks, another giant, the British textile firm TopShop, operating in some of the largest countries in the world, has

announced to close down all the outlets in Singapore, one of the most expensive markets for retail rental.

As a result, TopShop has kept an online-only presence in Singapore,

and rumors are indicating that other countries might follow suit.

The company was founded in 1978 and failed to adapt to the evolving market, maintaining an offline-first approach throughout.

However, for a large offline retailer, it is not so easy to simply jump ship and go fully offline. Selling online presents challenges that offline are minimised or do not exist at all.

For instance, offline retailers require few large shipments to their stores, and when moving to fully online stores, the logistics model changes completely.

Customer service is also completely different. There is no need for uniforms and grooming, but the ability to communicate promptly and efficiently is much more in demand for online than

for offline.

Another issue lies with the management of returns and refunds. If the retailer relies on third party platforms for their distribution, then it must adhere to the marketplace’s guidelines, in exchange for higher visibility.

Such opportunity comes with much tougher competition, as the competitor’s products might be displayed right on the same page. On the other hand, if the retailer establishes presence through a dedicated website, then the biggest hurdle is to grow traffic, either organically or through the many marketing tools (paid traffic).

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised and accelerated the possible decline of offline retailers. In the next few quarters, some other giant might fall.



MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

Financial sector sell-off pulls down MSM

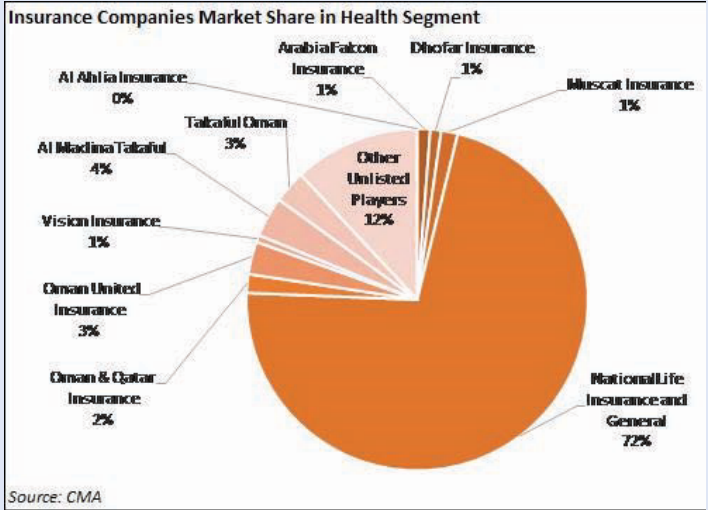
MSM30 ended the week down by 1.05 per cent, led by Financial Index which was down by 1.29 per cent. Other sub-indices were higher w-o-w. The Industrial index and Services Index were higher by 0.08 per cent and 0.10 per cent, respectively. Traded value during the week was higher on w-o-w basis by 2.2 per cent.

Last week MSM announced the revised list of Shariah Compliant Companies. Twenty companies are Shariah compliant and the changes were: Included — Oman Education & Training, Oman Packaging, and Gulf Mushroom; Excluded — Oman Cables, Shell Oman and Salalah Port Services.

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 Ministry indicated that to meet financing requirements of the year, development bonds amounting to RO 550m in value have been issued so far this year, while the government recently obtained a bridge loan of RO 770m. This is in addition to withdrawals from state reserves, among other funding methods. Work is also underway to issue an integrated package of measures, it added.

As per CBO’s latest statistics, Oman banking sector’s total credit stood at RO 26.18bn (-0.6 per cent MoM and +1.7 per cent YoY) as at the end of Jul’20. Total deposits stood at RO 23.82bn (-0.6 per cent MoM and +3.5 per cent YoY). Total private sector credit stood at RO 22.83bn, (-0.9 per cent MoM and 1.1 per cent YoY). Loan-to-deposit Ratio stood at 109.91 per cent in Jul’20 (stable from Jun’20) and down from 110.2 per cent in May’20, as monthly credit and deposit declines were the same.

Conventional credit growth has slowed to 0.7 per cent YoY in Jul’20 as compared to 1.5 per cent YoY in Jun’20. Total conventional credit reached RO



Index were higher by 0.08 per cent and 0.10 per cent, respectively. Traded value during the week was higher on w-o-w basis by 2.2 per cent.

22.05bn (-RO 171m on MoM basis or -0.8 per cent MoM). Conventional credit slowed largely on account of a 1.3 per cent MoM contraction in private sector credit (contracted by RO 245.1m), which forms about 86 per cent of the total. Credit to non-residents also declined by about 47 per cent (down RO 136.1m). This is in spite of a rise in credit to the Government and Public Enterprises (+RO 210m). Conventional deposits growth also slowed to 3.3 per cent in Jul’20 vs. 3.4 per cent in June’20 and 5.7 per cent YoY in May’20. Total conventional deposits stood at RO 20.24bn (-RO 164.2m on MoM basis or -0.8 per cent MoM). Sector Loan-to-deposit (LTD) ratio decreased to 108.9 per cent (flat from Jul’20) and down from 109.5 per cent in May’20. Conventional deposits declined on MoM basis largely on account of a 7.6 per cent MoM (RO 371.2m) decline in Government deposits (total at RO 4.52bn or 22.3 per cent of total conventional deposits). Public enterprises’ deposits expanded by 1.1 per cent or RO 30m. The share of Government & Public Enterprises deposits has dropped to 27.7 per cent Jul’20 from a simple average of 32.0 per cent over the trailing 12 months. Private sector deposits, which

account for about 70 per cent of total conventional deposits, rose by 1.3 per cent MoM and 10.9 per cent YoY.

Islamic Banking financing (Banks & Islamic Windows) reached RO 4.13bn (+0.6 per cent MoM and +10.1 per cent YoY). Islamic deposits reached RO 3.57bn (+0.9 per cent MoM and +4.8 per cent YoY). Islamic financing stands at 15.8 per cent of total Oman banking credit, and Islamic deposits form 15.0 per cent of total bank deposits. Islamic Financing-to-Deposit Ratio stood at 115.5 per cent vs. 115.8 per cent in Jun’20 and 114.3 per cent in May’20, on MoM deposit expansion outpacing credit growth.

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has joined hands with health insurance companies to support the introduction of a standard unified health insurance policy to cover COVID-19 testing and treatment in the Sultanate. The product, which is currently the subject of deliberations among insurance companies, will be rolled out once it is reviewed and approved by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), according to a key official associated with the initiative. Chairman of OCCI’s Finance & Insurance Committee, said: “They are currently exploring the initiative to launch a special product for COVID-19 insurance coverage in the Sultanate. Discussions have already commenced with insurance companies on the scope and features of the policy. It will be offered to the market once it is certified and approved by the CMA, which is the regulator of the insurance sector in Oman.”

[Courtesy: U Capital]

BUSINESS REPORTER MUSCAT, SEPT 19

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is urging innovators to participate in the Fifth Korea International Youth Olympiad (KIYO 4i 2020), which will be held this year remotely. This is to fine-tune the skills of Omani inventors and introduce them to the international inventors in different countries of the world.

The Ministry has said that these exhibitions were an opportunity to showcase innovations to companies to attract their investments. In addition to this, these exhibitions will help innovators to know the international standards used for evaluation of participating innovations and the way innovations are presented in international exhibitions.

By participating in such exhibitions, innovators can benefit from the knowledge they gain and further develop their innovations.



Ali bin Hamad al Maamari (pictured), Director of the Intellectual Property Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said: The fifth Korea International Youth Olympiad (KIYO 4i) is being held remotely this year, due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The GCC Patent Office (GCCPO) of the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) may allocate an electronic link (goo.gl/9VctEZ) to register for this Olympiad. The ministry said that the deadline for registration is

September 20, 2020. The World Women Inventors and Entrepreneur Association (WWIEA) organises and sponsors this Olympiad under the auspices of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Eurasian Patent Organization (EAPO) and other international organisations.

He said that the programme of the Fifth Korea International Youth Olympiad (KIYO 4i) was comprised of various competitions, lectures and events. As far as competitions are concerned, there would be two sections for students, “The Best Invention” and “The Team Competition”. He invited innovative students to form teams of four creative students to participate in the “Team Competition”.

Omani inventors nominated by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion represented the Intellectual Property Department in previous international exhibitions. They have

BUSINESS ALERT

Perfect 10 for OHI Leo Burnett

MUSCAT: OHI Leo Burnett secured 10 awards, including 2 Gold, 1 Silver, 2 Bronze and 5 ‘Highly Commended’ awards at the 2020 Transform Brand Awards MEA held in Dubai recently.



The coveted awards recognised excellence in branding and attracts participation from leading international and regional branding agencies active in the Middle East Africa region. “OHI Leo Burnett was recognised across branding process disciplines – from Content, Strategy, Project Management, and also specialisation in key Sectors. At a time of unprecedented challenges in the industry, this is a win that we hope will bring confidence to the industry as a whole”, said Narayan Iyer, GM, OHI Leo Burnett.

OHI Leo Burnett’s tally of 10 awards included a Gold, Bronze and a High Commendation for the Port of Duqm brand narratives, guidelines project across multiple categories; Gold and Silver for the work on the brand identity for Oman Future Skills for best use of Visual Property and for Best strategic and creative development; and a host of another awards for a number of clients including Al Ahlia, Al Bashayer, Bank Muscat and Meethaq Islamic Banking.

Amal al Rashdi, Associate Creative Director, OHI Leo Burnett said, “We are proud to be representing Oman on the regional stage at the Transform Brand Awards every year. Knowing that we compete with the best global consulting firms pushes us hard, and deliver work that not only stands out in Oman, but is truly distinctive in today’s global ecosystem and digital platforms. We thank all our clients who trust us, as an Omani firm, to develop their work, and we hope to continue to win laurels to the Oman industry.”

Chevrolet celebrates 67th year of the iconic Corvette

THE Corvette recently celebrated its 67th anniversary, making it the world’s longest running continuously produced passenger



car. The first Corvette sports car went into production in Flint, Michigan on June 30, 1953. Over the past six-plus decades, Chevrolet has built as many as 1.75 million Corvettes over its lifespan. More importantly, Chevrolet has pushed the envelope consistently to offer leading-edge technology to deliver unprecedented performance which has culminated in the 2020 Corvette Stingray, the first-ever mid-engine Corvette.

But where did it begin? The original Corvette debuted as a concept vehicle at the General Motors Motorama in New York City on January 17, 1953. Given its futuristic design and performance promise, it received immense public and critical acclaim. This spurred General Motors to launch a limited production run of 300 Corvettes just a few months later. The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

Interestingly, all 1953 models were Polo White with a red interior and were priced at \$3,498. But such is the allure of the gen-one Corvette that in 2006, the third 1953 Corvette ever produced sold for a then-record of \$1.06 million at auction, underscoring the devotion of the brand’s followers.

While the all-new Chevrolet Corvette Stingray follows a different formula, with a V-8, mid-engine layout, the original Corvette was exclusively available with an inline six-cylinder engine until 1955. However, Chevrolet did provide an optional all-new small block V-8 engine, which was ordered by just seven buyers. Corvette has been available exclusively with V-8 power since 1956.

China launches counter mechanism to US sanctions list

NEGATIVE MARK

SHANGHAI: China said on Saturday it had launched a mechanism enabling it to restrict foreign entities, a much-anticipated move seen as retaliation to US penalties against Chinese companies such as telecom giant Huawei.

An announcement by the ministry of commerce did not mention any specific foreign entities, but broadly spelled out the factors that could trigger punitive measures, which may include fines, restrictions on import-export business or investment in China, and the entry of personnel or equipment into the country.

It covers “foreign enterprises, other organisations and individuals”, it said.

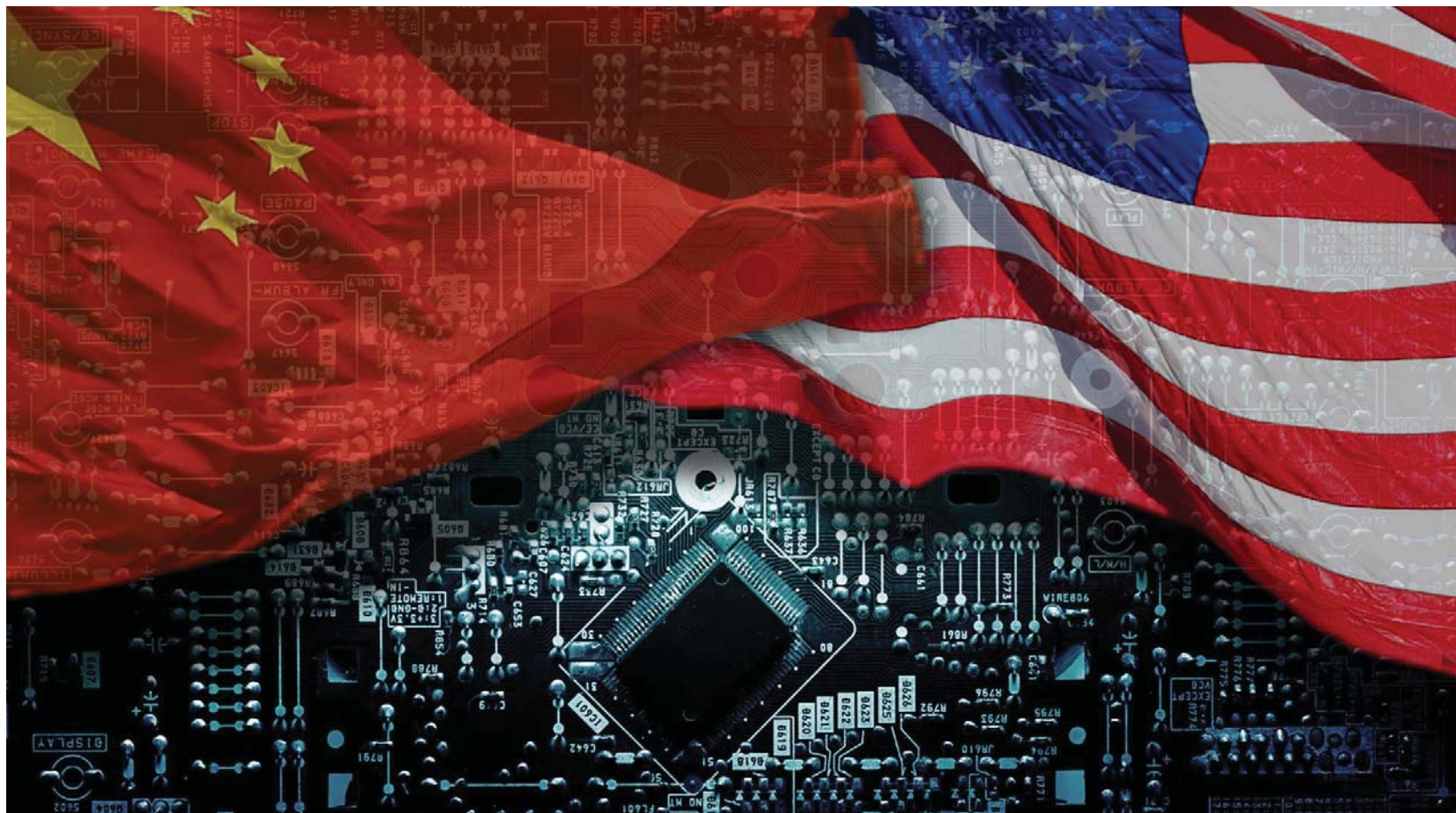
The launch of the “unreliable entities list” ups the ante in the escalating commercial fight with the Trump administration, which has used its own “entity list” to bar Huawei from the US market on national security grounds.

The announcement also came a day after the United States ordered a ban on downloads of popular video app TikTok and effectively blocked the use of the Chinese super-app WeChat on similar grounds, which prompted a threat by China to strike back.

Beijing would consider sanctions on entities whose activities “harm China’s national sovereignty, security and development interests” or violate “internationally accepted economic and trade rules”.

That language closely tracks wording that Beijing has used to repeatedly denounce US actions against Chinese companies.

The ministry said that if an entity is suspected of violating the



Chinese and US flags are seen on a computer motherboard in this picture illustration. – Reuters

Beijing would consider sanctions on entities whose activities ‘harm China’s national sovereignty, security and development interests’ or violate ‘internationally accepted economic and trade rules’

Huawei, the world’s leading supplier of telecoms networking equipment, has been a particular target.

Washington has used its own entity list to essentially ban Huawei from the US market and prevent

China’s government and Huawei deny that, saying the US has offered no evidence supporting the claim.

Under a US order on Friday, the Tencent-owned WeChat app would lose functionality in the United States from Sunday. TikTok users will be banned from installing updates but could keep accessing the service through November 12.

China has for years blocked or restricted big US tech companies from operating in its market, including Facebook, Twitter and Google. — AFP

US details up to \$14bn in new aid for farmers



A soybean farmer overlooks his farm outside Baton Rouge, in Erwinville, Louisiana, in this file photo. – Reuters

CHICAGO: The US Agriculture Department on Friday released details of a second round of COVID-19 aid for farmers, which will pay up to \$14 billion to growers of major crops such as corn, soybeans and wheat, as well as livestock, dairy and tobacco.

President Donald Trump announced the assistance on Thursday night at a campaign rally in Wisconsin, a crucial battleground state. Farmers widely backed Trump in 2016.

The aid follows a \$19-billion relief programme announced in April to help US farmers cope with disruptions to the food supply chain and plummeting demand from restaurants during the pandemic. Less than \$10 billion has been paid out to date.

“We listened to feedback received from farmers, ranchers and agricultural organisations about the impact of the pandemic on our nations’ farms and ranches, and we

developed a programme to better meet the needs of those impacted,” Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said in a statement.

The administration has been criticised for the \$28 billion spent over 2018 and 2019 to compensate farmers for lost sales during a tariff war with China.

“Once again, the Trump administration is funnelling too much money to farmers that do not need it and not enough to those that are facing economic ruin,” said Scott Faber, senior vice-president of government affairs at the Environmental Working Group. “The only plausible explanation is that this is just old-fashioned vote buying.”

The new aid package will largely be funded by the Commodity Credit Corp, a Depression-era programme created to support farm income. Funds from the corporation do not need to be approved by Congress.

— Reuters

Indonesia, US agree on finance deal

JAKARTA: Indonesia has signed an agreement with the United States to strengthen infrastructure financing through private sector investment, Indonesia’s Finance Ministry and the US Treasury Department said on Friday.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin signed the agreement with Indonesia’s Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati remotely on Friday, according to a statement

posted on the US Treasury Department’s website.

Rahayu Puspasari, spokeswoman for Indonesia’s Finance Ministry, said in a separate statement that the agreement would bolster the development of capital markets and financial instruments to “facilitate and reduce the barriers to private sector investment in infrastructure.”

Puspasari added that the agreement would help improve

asset recycling capacity, impact assessment for the financing already given and credit enhancement.

“The engagement supports the broader US Government Indo-Pacific Strategy by complementing ongoing efforts under the Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy (Asia EDGE) and the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network,” said the US Treasury Department. — Reuters

Green bonds could slide into irrelevance

LONDON: Green bonds are booming. Everyone from JPMorgan to Germany is issuing securities earmarked for environmentally friendly projects. Yet the benefits of the \$800 billion market in channelling new money to green causes are less obvious.

Green bonds just mean a company issues securities and earmark proceeds for projects like wind farms. That gives the investor certainty how the money is spent. This year as much as \$350 billion of the bonds could be created, the Climate Bonds Initiative reckons. Yet the securities may not always be used for very green ends. Oil and gas group Repsol’s 2017 bond, for example, was used to make refineries more efficient.

The market is getting more vigilant. Dirtier bonds are excluded from indexes, and third-party firms scrutinise how funds are used. The European Commission’s Taxonomy, which says what’s green and what isn’t, will tighten the screw.

However, even the darkest



A wind farm is shown in Movave, California, in this file photo. – Reuters

green bonds only serve a narrow purpose. They tell investors a lot about the projects they fund, but not much about the company that issues them. An issuer can allocate funds for renewable projects, but that doesn’t make its overall business any greener.

A recent report showed that green bonds issuance does not lead to falling or even comparatively

lower carbon emissions by the firms selling them.

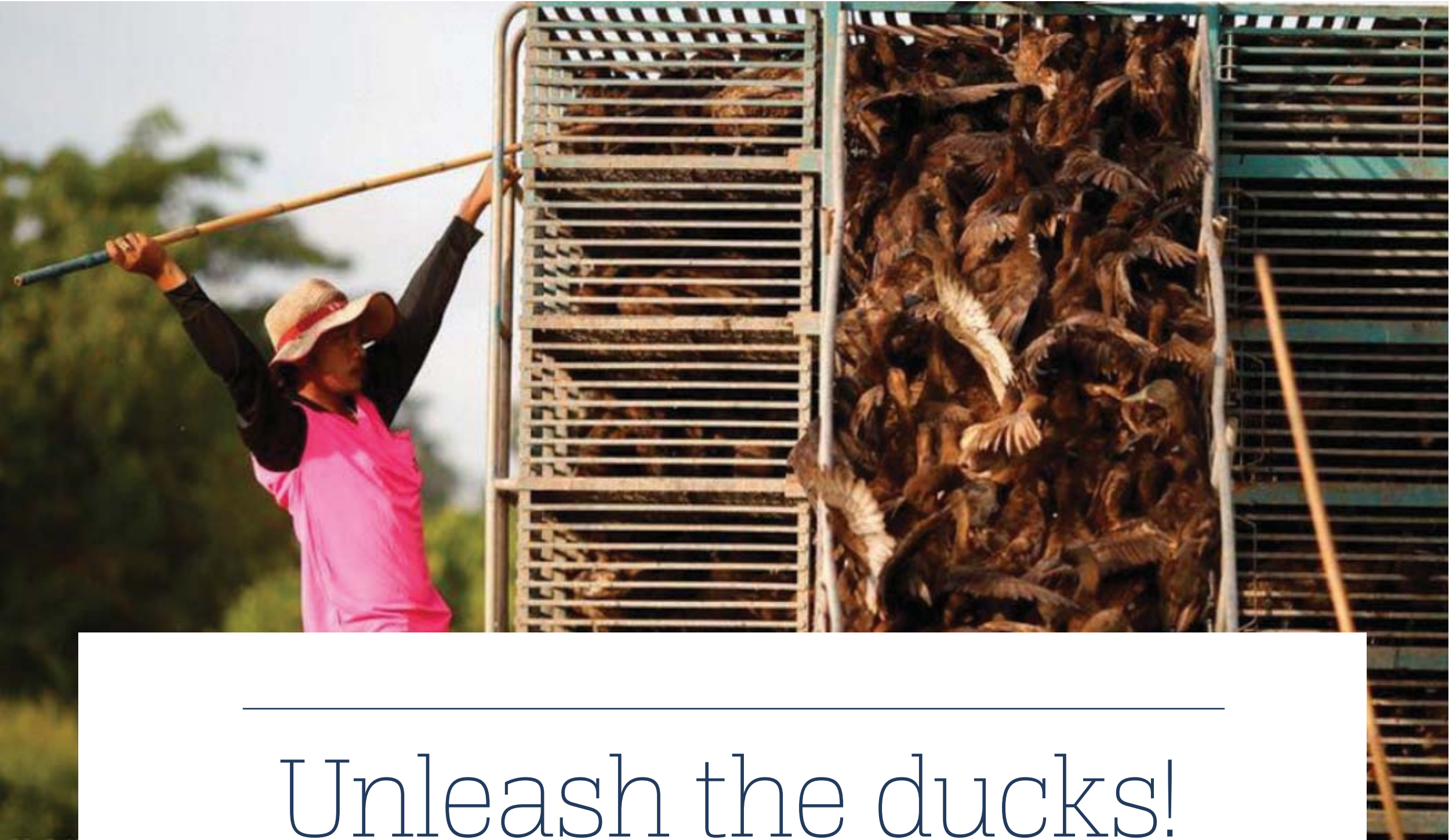
Green bonds could become more useful if they stimulated new green investment by giving companies a new, cheaper source of funding. Yet that is unlikely, because the credit risk of green bonds is exactly the same as an issuer’s other bonds.

If yields on green bonds fall too

GREEN BONDS COULD BECOME MORE USEFUL IF THEY STIMULATED NEW GREEN INVESTMENT BY GIVING COMPANIES A NEW, CHEAPER SOURCE OF FUNDING.

much out of whack with similar dirty bonds, investors will arbitrage the difference. While there is sometimes a green premium, or “greenium”, it is usually tiny.

One solution would be to require issuers to also abide by emission reduction targets. Italian utility Enel has gone a step further; abandoning green bonds in favour of debt with coupons linked to its sustainability goals. Even so-called bonds like these may just be a stopgap. — Reuters



Unleash the ducks! Thai drought worries threaten farming tradition

NAKHON PATHOM, Thailand: After harvesting the rice crop in this part of central Thailand, a flock of around 10,000 ducks is released from a pen and instinctively stream towards the flooded fields to devour pests such as snails hiding in the rice stubble.

This way of raising ducks in rice-growing areas has long been a tradition in the area and other parts of the region. Thais call it “ped lai thoong”, which means “field chasing ducks”.

The Khaki Campbell ducks, a British breed, are brought to the fields after 20 days in nursery and will be raised on the move for the next few months.

After roaming free for about five months, they are returned to the farm to produce eggs for up to three years.

“The benefit (for the breeder) is that we reduce costs to feed the ducks,” said Apiwat Chalermklin, 34, a breeder who took over the business from his father.

“And in return, for the rice farmer the ducks help eat pests from the farm and the farmers can reduce the use of chemicals and pesticides.”

On Sunday, Apiwat’s ducks appear to be finding plenty of pests such as snails and insects to feed on during their field-cleaning job that he expects to last a week in this 15 acre (67 hectares) farm.

Apiwat has four flocks of ducks that move around different rice fields in Nakhon Pathom province where farm-

The Khaki Campbell ducks, a British breed, are brought to the fields after 20 days in nursery and will be raised on the move for the next few months

ers typically cultivate three rice crops every year.

“They help eat golden apple snails and remains of unwanted rice husks that drop into the field from last harvest. The ducks also step on the rice stubble to flatten the ground and make it easier to plough,” said farmer Prang Sipipat.

For now, farmers say the system works well for both the duck raiser and rice grower, but even though there has not been drought in Nakhon Pathom they are worried about the threat.

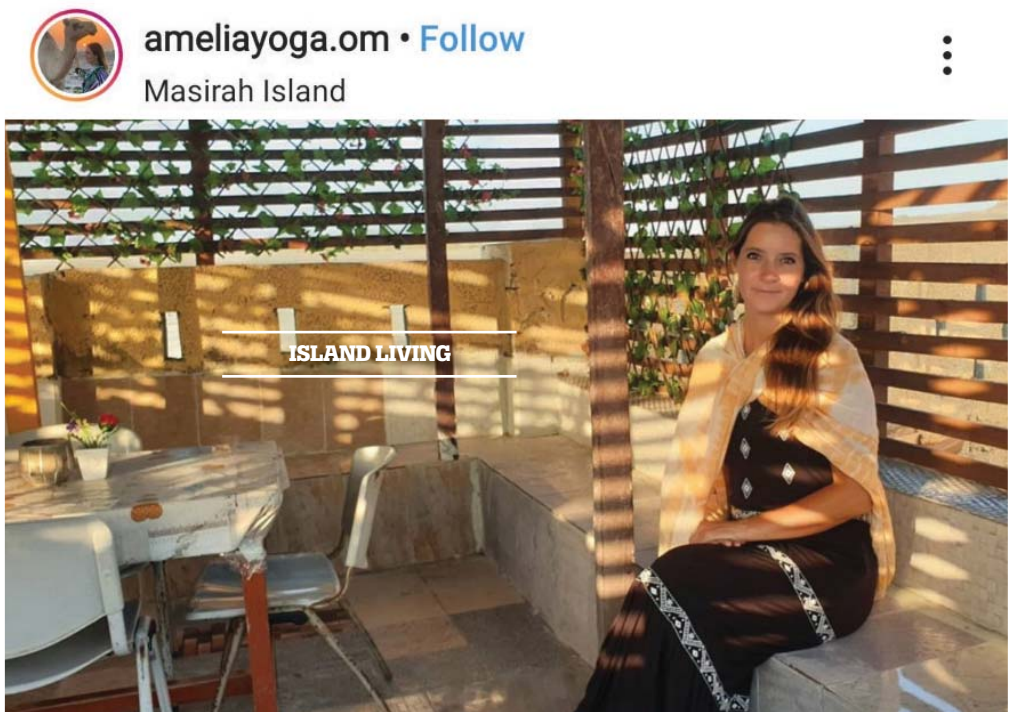
Thailand, which is the world’s second-biggest rice exporter, faces a prolonged drought affecting many growing areas this year. — **Reuters**





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

3 hours ago • See Translation



COOK LIKE A CHEF

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Slow Braised Ribs & Cheeks



CULINARY JOURNEY

Asado at the Sheraton Oman has won several distinguished awards through the leadership of its current executive chef, Adil Shaikh. As the restaurant adapts to the new normal, they are bringing back some of the favourites that have put them on the map as one of the go-to destinations for memorable dining. Currently offering Gaucho Night every Thursday where they showcase some of the best barbecues inspired by the American cowboys, they are also relaunching Seafood Wednesday providing even better diversity in Oman's culinary scene. To give you a taste of what they offer, Chef Adil is sharing four of their beloved dishes — something to surprise your family with when you have the time to cook them something extra-special.

PREPARATION METHOD

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in an ovenproof 6-quart wide heavy pot over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking. While oil is heating, pat beef cheeks & ribs dry and season with salt and pepper. Brown beef, without crowding, on all sides, about 20 minutes total, and transfer with tongs to inserts. Pour off fat from pot, then add remaining 2 tablespoons oil and cook onion, carrot and celery over moderately low heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 10 minutes. Preheat oven to 64 degrees. Increase heat to high and boil until liquid is reduced by half, about 10 minutes. Return cheeks & ribs (with any juices) to the pot and add tomatoes with juice, salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer, then braise, covered, in middle of oven until very tender, about 32 hours.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF ADIL SHAIKH
Executive Chef
Sheraton Hotel, Muscat

Adil Shaikh is currently the Executive Chef of Sheraton Oman Hotel located in Muscat. He has been associated with the hotel since its re-opening in 2016. With an enriching career of over 15 years, he has successfully launched award-winning restaurants as an integral game changer in hospitality operations. Having won several prestigious recognitions and awards including Battle of the Chef Dubai and participated at several distinguished culinary platforms in the Middle East, he draws immense inspiration from the ever-evolving culinary world. His illustrious career spans across the Middle East and Asia in renowned Luxury, Business & Leisure Hotels & Resorts. An avid foodie, Adil is a strong advocate of 'Go Local.' He is committed to showcasing the flavours and tastes of lesser-known local ingredients, farm-fresh produce and regional cuisines. An astute, hands-on chef, Adil curates bespoke dining experiences that delve deep into authentic flavours, traditions and intricate nuances of each cuisine. Off duty, you will spot him being an absolute foodie and exploring local cuisines of various cultures. On other days, he uses his kitchen as an interactive platform to celebrate the love for great food and memorable dining experiences that stand the test of time with his guests and loyal clientele.



INGREDIENTS:



- RIBS & CHEEK**
- 4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 (12-oz) beef cheeks & ribs trimmed of excess fat
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 medium carrot, finely chopped
- 1/2 celery rib, finely chopped
- 1/2 tsp unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 can whole tomatoes including juice, (28 to 32 oz)
- chopped (3 cups)
- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper

SWEET POTATO PUREE



- 2 medium size sweet potato
- Preheat oven to 200C / 400F and line a baking tray with baking paper/foil.
- Wash and dry the potatoes. Using a fork, pierce the potatoes several times, on both sides.
- Place in the oven and roast for around 50 mins (checking after 45 mins), or until the potato is wrinkled and tender.
- Allow the sweet potatoes to cool for around 10 minutes, peel the potato and place the flesh in a food processor. Blend until smooth.

FASHION

Designer Bora Aksu presents pandemic-inspired collection at London Fashion Week



LONDON: Turkish designer Bora Aksu said the coronavirus pandemic inspired his latest collection, which looks back over one hundred years to the Spanish flu pandemic and the end of World War One. COVID-19 meant that Aksu's fashion show on Friday was one of only four taking place at London Fashion Week, according to the British Fashion Council, compared with the 46 shows that took place at the

the 1918 flu pandemic and the accompanying time of mourning at the end of the war, and the much more optimistic period that followed. The floaty white dresses with long socks and white boots reflected the minimal dressing of the nurses who treated the war wounded and those suffering from flu, he said. Parading in London's autumn sunshine, models, wearing sheer face veils, also showed off



event last September. The designer said that after such an isolating period earlier in the year due to the pandemic, he felt that not having a traditional show would have been "cutting off that human touch, I really couldn't do it." He said of the pandemic: "It has so kind of affected all our lives and the way we operate and work that I could not take myself out of it." It made him think of

tiered dresses in pastel shades of pink and blue, and dark purples, with prints and lace. "The collections and the fashion actually should reflect the times that we be going through," Aksu said. He said he wanted to send a message of hope by reminding people that after World War One and the Spanish flu pandemic, good times followed for many in the early 1920s. — **Reuters**



The Salt Flats of Shannah, Salar de Uyuni, and Bonneville



BY RAY PETERSEN

“Sugar may sweeten your life, but salt will preserve it.” So said John Christian Bovee. Perfect sense in the time of a pandemic, and slightly ironic, I guess.

You probably have, like us, come across the Shannah salt flats by default, on the way to the Masirah Island ferry. It is almost uncanny to be driving along surrounded by desert and sand, with some glimpses of the sea as we travelled across the interior from Dakhiliyah. Oh, and did I mention what a stunningly good road takes you from Sinaw to Mahout? It is brilliant!

Anyway, it's only, I guess, half an hour from Mahout to the Ferry Wharf at Shannah, an experience in itself, and to be greeted by a 'snowfall' on one side of the road was interesting and demanded a 'stop'n'look' session, with Lena taking some photos. These salt flats are large tracts of tidal, or estuary flats, that once covered in sea (salt) water, have the estuary bulldozed to retain the water.

The Omani sunshine then works its magic, evaporating the water, leaving the salt baking on the ground. The equation for a successful harvest is simple. If evaporation (sunshine), exceeds precipitation (rainfall), salt will be harvested. “Salt,” said Pythagoras (yes, he of the theorem), “Has the purest of parents... the sea and the sun.” I never saw them at work, but apparently groups of labourers harvest the salt by hand, for later processing in Muscat.

Now, the story does not begin and end there, as there was of course, a surfeit of white salt, but there were also tranches, or areas of pinkish salt affected sand, to provide balance for the photos. I thought pink salt was only harvested in the Himalayas, in the form of Himalayan Rock Salt, so I'll take that with a grain of salt. It is a shame too, that in days past salt was used as currency,

and soldiers of ancient Rome were paid in salt rather than coin, and that's the origin of your monthly 'salary'. Truly!

The largest salt flat in the world is the Salar de Uyuni, located in Bolivia, South America. It extends over a massive 10,000

I doubt that Shannah will ever become a haven for 'speed freaks,' as it is too inconsistent, being inches thick, whereas Bonneville is 5 feet thick at its thickest. Even those few inches of salt though, spread over a few square kms, add up to a lot of saltshakers filled up

sq kms and is higher above sea level than Jabal Akhdhar. It is also a world-renowned breeding ground for the beautiful pink flamingoes. It is a transport route across the high plateau of Central South America and is also rich in mineral deposits.

The Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, in the United States are less than a tenth of the size, but are much more famous as the testing grounds for numerous vehicles, and is the acknowledged 'home' of the most World Land Speed records than any other location. First used for motor sports in 1912, it was immortalised by Sir Malcolm Campbell in 'Bluebird' when he exceeded 300 mph (485 kph) for the first time in 1935.

Thirty years later American Gary Gabelich, in 'Blue Flame,' exceeded 1000 kph for the first



TOP TO BOTTOM:

The salt flat of Shannah

The incredible Salar de Uyuni, in Bolivia
(Photo: Wanderlust)

Bonneville, where the speed happens!

Sir Malcolm Campbell's Bluebird
(Image: Graham Coton)

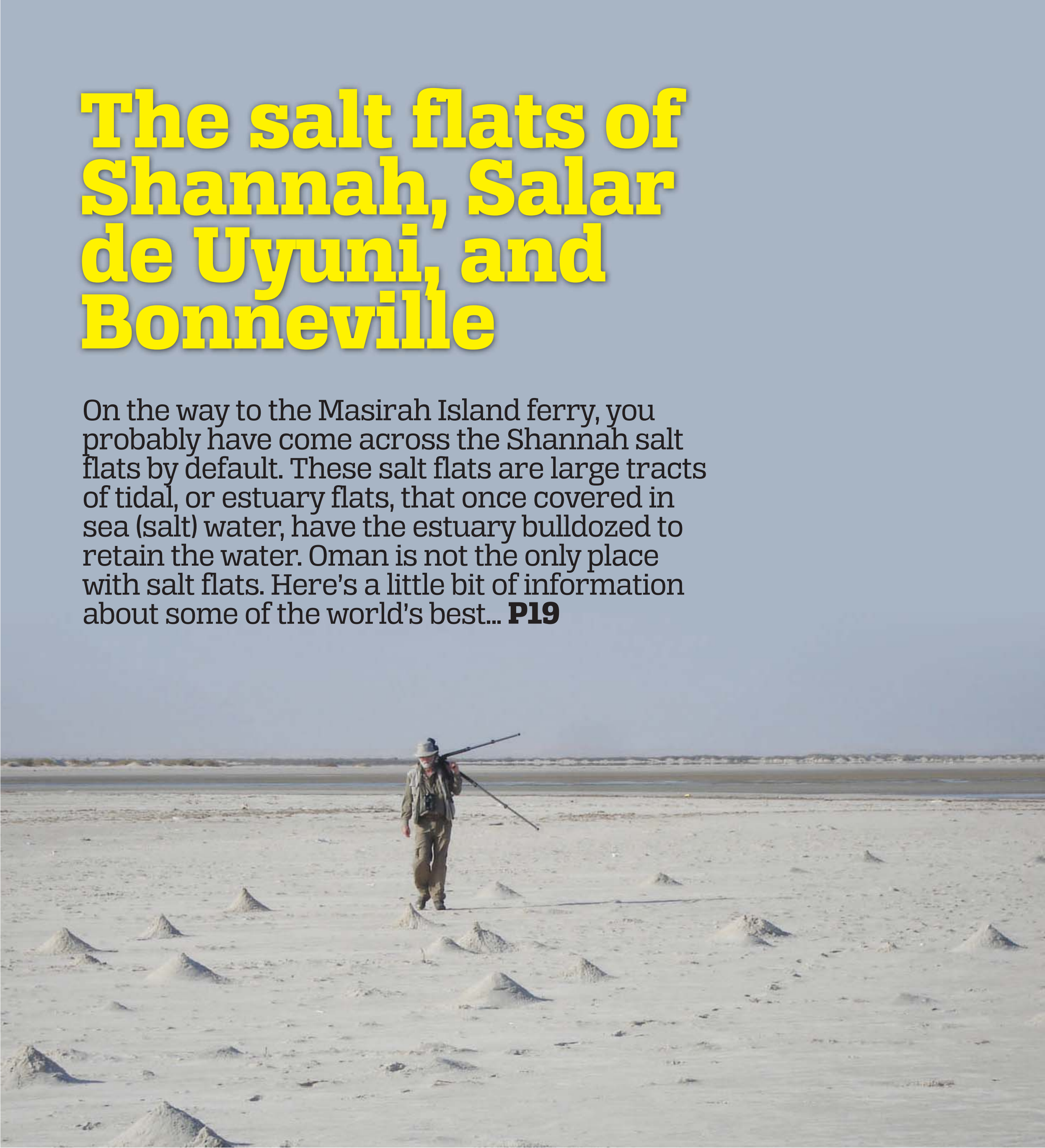
time. Only two years later, New Zealand pensioner and inventor Burt Munro achieved the world's fastest speed in his category of motorbike, an adapted Indian bike, and is immortalised in the film, 'The World's Fastest Indian,' portrayed by Anthony Hopkins. Of course, speed means accidents, and ten 'speed merchants' have perished on 'the flats,' the most recent being Ralph Hudson, just last week.

I doubt that Shannah will ever become a haven for 'speed freaks,' as it is too inconsistent, being inches thick, whereas Bonneville is 5 feet thick at its thickest. Even those few inches of salt though, spread over a few square kms, add up to a lot of saltshakers filled up. Salt, you see is quite unique, as in cooking, its presence is barely noticed, but its absence... always!



features

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The salt flats of Shannah, Salar de Uyuni, and Bonneville

On the way to the Masirah Island ferry, you probably have come across the Shannah salt flats by default. These salt flats are large tracts of tidal, or estuary flats, that once covered in sea (salt) water, have the estuary bulldozed to retain the water. Oman is not the only place with salt flats. Here's a little bit of information about some of the world's best... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

TRAVEL TALES



UNLEASH THE DUCKS! THAI DROUGHT WORRIES THREATEN FARMING

After harvesting the rice crop in this part of central Thailand, a flock of around 10,000 ducks is released from a pen and instinctively stream towards the flooded fields to devour pests such as snails hiding in the rice stubble... Story on **Page 17**

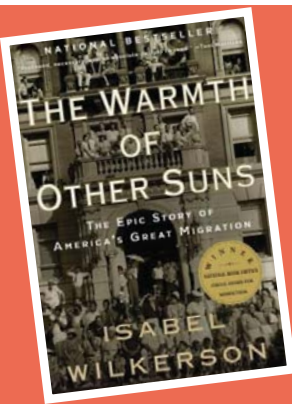
WHAT TO EAT



SLOW BRAISED RIBS AND CHEEKS

Chef Adil Shaikh of Sheraton Muscat is sharing one of their best kept secrets – their in-demand slow braised ribs and cheeks. Something to surprise your family with... Story on **Page 18**

READ



THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS

BY ISABEL WILKERSON

An account of the Great Migration of 1915-70, in which six million African-Americans abandoned the South.

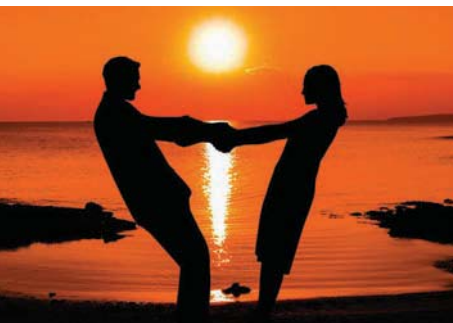
FASHION



DESIGNER BORA AKSU PRESENTS PANDEMIC-INSPIRED COLLECTION AT LONDON FASHION WEEK

Turkish designer Bora Aksu said the coronavirus pandemic inspired his latest collection, which looks back over one hundred years to the Spanish flu pandemic and the end of World War One... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE



WIFE APPRECIATION DAY

Married life is a challenging life and it does not necessarily get better with time. For some men, it is hard to show romance. Wife Appreciation Day is an opportunity to show your wife how much you love her. Take some time today to make your wife feel special. Treat her to a day out. Surprise her with flowers or accessories but the best thing of all is to give her your time.