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33°C/24°C

MESSI TO STAY ON AT BARCELONA, THE CRISIS TOO
GO TO PAGE 10 SPORTS



DHOFAR IN FOCUS



Dhofar native photographer Mohammed Awadh al Hadi ba Omar's images of the stunning landscape in his governorate promote its tourism potential on various social media platforms

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COVID-19 field hospital to open by September-end

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said the first phase of a field hospital to handle COVID-19 cases is set to open by September-end.

"The field hospital will reduce pressure on health institutions in all governorates. This is in cooperation with the private sector," H E Dr Sa'eedi said on Thursday.

"Basic health services such as vaccinations, maternity and childcare have not been affected by the pandemic. The sultanate never reached a point where patients were deprived of intensive care beds due to lack of availability. The sultanate is witnessing a fluctuating number of infections, more on the decline," he added.

H E Dr Sa'eedi reiterated that everyone must focus on following the precautionary measures to prevent an increase in the number of infections. "The most important thing is to avoid social gatherings. The number of new cases has started to double in some countries after the reopening of activities. No country can pretend that the COVID-19 epidemic is over. Any activity that requires large human gatherings must be prevented."

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70% of government staff back to offices

The percentage of government employees who can report to work has been raised to 70 per cent, while the focus on work from home will continue.

"Department in-charges have been given the flexibility to decide on the percentage and ensure that services offered to citizens and residents are not affected," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

He said that government institutions must follow the precautionary measures to ensure that the virus is not transmitted.

Dhofar to remain under lockdown

Even though some procedures have been put in place for people to enter and exit Dhofar, overall, the governorate will remain under lockdown.

"If we open the governorate, the number of cases may increase and so will the burden on the healthcare workers. Lifting the lockdown will be announced in due course," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

Dhofar, Masirah Island, Duqm, Jebel Akhdar and Jebel Shams were locked down on June 13. Dhofar is now the only region still in lockdown.

eMushrif founder on Forbes ME's 30 Under 30 list

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Adnan al Shuaili, co-founder and CEO of eMushrif, has been named in *Forbes Middle East's* 30 Under 30 list. He is the only Omani to make the cut. eMushrif develops intelligent software that make sure children are safe in school buses by allowing educational institutions and parents to monitor buses and children in real time.

This *Forbes* list recognises a selection of the most impressive and highly accomplished young minds in the Arab world. 'Some of them have already built and scaled multi-million-dollar businesses, patented cutting-edge technology or made a considerable difference in the lives of other people and those less fortunate than themselves,' the magazine stated.

'Their achievements at such a



Adnan al Shuaili

Their achievements at such a young age are incredibly impressive

young age are incredibly impressive. Of course, they still have a long way to go, and their journeys will not be without challenges. But here we celebrate their abilities and potential within the context of a year that has presented nothing but chal-

lenges so far. The Class of 2020 won't give up easily,' it added.

Describing the criteria for choosing the 30 Under 30, *Forbes* stated that it is somewhat different to other lists. 'Among other things, for founders, we consider factors such as how established they are, their scalability, and the project's commercial viability, and for employees, we look at their scope, expertise and influence. But actually, many of the elements that go into choosing our final 30 are not quantifiable. For example, we uncover the candidates' missions and how committed they are to being a force for good and sustainability in the world. What impact do they want to have on their communities? We look for the innovators introducing new concepts to the Middle East or accelerating the use of new technologies. How disruptive are they?'

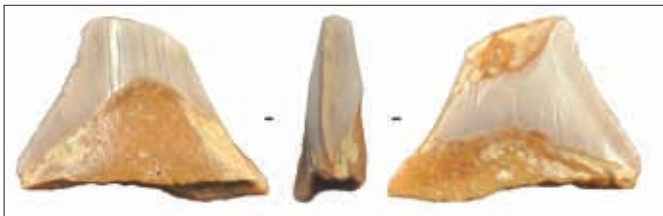
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10mn year old shark megatooth found in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A megatooth belonging to a Miocene fossil shark has been found along the shores of the Arabian Sea at one of the Neolithic domestic settlements in Sharbithat in Dhofar. Attributed to a specimen of the extinct genus *Otodus* (*Megaselachus*), the tooth is the first ever discovered in the Arabian Peninsula.

Revealing details, a research paper, published in the *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*,



by Vincent Charpentier from the Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives, France, described the shark as one that may have lived 10mn years ago.

Omani geologist Dr Mohammad al Kindi said that the find has

been made from an archaeological site dating back to 5,500 years. "Why did man collect these distinct fossils at the time? Was it for spiritual reasons or a sign of supremacy?" he asked.

The research stated that the shark, traditionally extensively

hunted on the shores of the Arabian Sea, is well attested in the region's Neolithic ichthyological assemblages.

'During this period, some groups of seaborne hunters were specialised in this form of fishing, which was indeed quite dangerous. But why did an individual 5,500 years ago collect this curio, an unusual fossil? The fossils of large sharks sometimes played an important part in ancient societies. Could this also have been the case in South-Eastern Arabia?' the study questioned.



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"I cannot imagine my world without art..."

State Council sends VAT draft law to HM the Sultan

Muscat – The State Council has forwarded to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik the draft of the Value-Added Tax (VAT) law referred by the Council of Ministers as a matter of urgency with the opinion of the two councils.

This was following extensive discussions and approval of the joint committee report between the State Council and Majlis A'Shura that studied the review of the observations received concerning the draft law.

This came during the 11th Ordinary Sitting of the first annual session of the seventh term of the State Council, headed by Dr Badria Ibrahim Khalfan al Shihi, vice chairperson, in the presence of the council members and Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi, secretary general of the council, along with the participating council members via video conferencing.

The vice chairperson in her opening speech valued the Royal Decrees issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, on re-organising and restructuring the state's administrative apparatus, providing it with competent work force having expertise in various fields, consolidating the principles of state institutions, and leading the fortification of Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Badria congratulated Sheikh Abdul Malik bin Abdullah al Khalili for his appointment as State Council chairman and



Dr Badria Ibrahim Khalfan al Shihi

Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi on his appointment as the secretary general of the council, and prayed for the success of their endeavours and guidance to be on the right path.

The council's vice chairperson extended on behalf of the council deepest gratitude to Dr Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, the former State Council chairman, and to Dr Khaled bin Salem al Saidi, former secretary general of the council for their sincere efforts exerted during their tenure at the council, and prayed to God Almighty for their success and long life.

Dr Badria reviewed the agenda of the sitting, and said that the council will devote the sitting to discuss the recommendations of the joint committee between the State Council and Majlis A'Shura regarding the articles in discrepancy between the

two councils on the draft of the VAT law referred by the Council of Ministers. She indicated that Majlis A'Shura had discussed the opinion of the joint committee and agreed to its recommendations at its 13th Regular Session, held at the beginning of this month.

She explained that the high orders of His Majesty the Sultan had postponed the dissolution of the current session until the Council of Oman concludes its decision on the draft law.

Dr Badria added that with the approval by the council of the recommendations of the Joint Committee, the council would end its work for the first annual session of the seventh period.

The approval of the report of the joint committee on the draft law came after extensive discussions by the council members.

SQU ranked in band 801-1000

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has got a rank range of 801-1000 in Times Higher Education's (THE) World University Rankings 2021. In THE's Asia University Rankings, SQU is placed in the rank range of 251-300.

SQU has been placed in the 801-1000 band since 2018. In 2016 and 2017, it was placed in the rank range of 601-800.

Universities are judged across all their core missions – teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook – to provide the most comprehensive and balanced comparisons available.

THE announced the results of its World University Rankings 2021 on Wednesday, which underline the shifting strength of higher education and research around the world. King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia remains the MENA region's highest ranked university appearing in the 201-250 band for the sixth consecutive year. Alfaisal University ensures Saudi Arabia holds the top two regional spots maintaining a 251-300 finish.

Elsewhere, Lebanon's American University of Beirut moves into the 301-350 band (351-400 in 2020).

The performance of these universities is all the more impressive given the increasingly competitive nature of the rankings with a record 1,527 institutions qualifying, up nine per cent from 2020 when 1,397 universities were ranked, THE stated.

The wider rankings see the UK's University of Oxford claim



top spot for the fifth consecutive year. The US dominates the top ten; mainland China's Tsinghua University becomes the first ever Asian university to break into the top 20 (joint 20th) since the current methodology launched in 2011.

The THE World University Rankings are the most balanced

search publications and included survey responses from 22,000 scholars globally.

The 17th edition of the rankings sees a record 18 countries and regions represented in the top 100, and 93 represented overall, demonstrating that geopolitical competition in the global knowledge economy is intensifying.

US's 20 best performing universities from the 2020 ranking failed to maintain their position. Over the past five years, the US has lost four positions in the overall top 200 (63 in 2016, 59 in 2021) as competition rises for the top places.

The THE World University Rankings 2021 sees 141 universities qualify for the first time. Furthermore, an additional 18 institutions from across MENA qualify since last year, with Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all seeing new entrants in the 2021 ranking.

Phil Baty, chief knowledge officer at THE, commented, "While Saudi Arabia continues to top the THE World University Ranking for MENA, with an impressive sixth consecutive year in the 201-250 band for King Abdulaziz University, it is testament to the growing strength of higher education across the Middle East to see Lebanon and Iran also move into the top 350."

SQU has been placed in the 801-1000 band since 2018. In 2016 and 2017, it was placed in the rank range of 601-800. In THE's Asia University Rankings, SQU is placed in the rank range of 251-300

and comprehensive global ranking, with 13 separate performance metrics covering the full range of core activities for research-intensive universities: teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. This year's ranking analysed over 86mn citations across more than 13.6mn re-

Notwithstanding the success story of the top ten, the UK's and US's roles as higher education superpowers is under challenge, as institutions from Asia continue to impress.

Of the UK's top 20 ranked institutions last year, only five were able to improve their position in the table, while 50 per cent of the

COVID-19 field hospital to open by September-end

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"Returning to life before January 2020 is not possible, but we must adapt and live with COVID-19," he said.

With regard to a vaccination for COVID-19, H E Dr Sa'eedi said, "We are in touch with all manufacturers of the vaccine. The sultanate has joined the Global Vaccine Alliance of the World Health Organization. Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, has placed orders with all companies that are in the last stage of testing the vaccine.

We intended to participate in clinical trials of vaccines, but most of the companies put impossible or difficult conditions."

Dr Saif bin Salem al Abri, director general of Disease Control, said the Ministry of Health currently does not rely on the number of tests to monitor the outbreak of the epidemic. The number of hospitalisations has decreased by 38 per cent, while the number of inpatients in ICU has come down by 40 per cent and deaths dropped by 23 per cent.

"We hope that the (self-reporting) feature of suspected cases will be implemented through the smart phone application (Tarassud+) very soon, in five languages. All this will help us more in monitoring the situation," he said.

Dr Hamad al Harthi, director of Al Nahda Hospital, said, COVID-19 can't be taken lightly.

"Do not be deceived by the simple symptoms of COVID-19. Sometimes complications appear in later stages," he said.

@shadadm

eMushrif founder on Forbes ME's 30 Under 30 list

Continued from Page 01

Dr Ahmed al Futaisi, former Minister of Transport, was the first one to congratulate Shauili on Twitter. "My sincere congratulations to Adnan al Shuaili on the occasion of his selection among the top 30 innovative people making a difference in the Middle East."

Speaking to Muscat Daily,

Shuaili said he was delighted and honoured to be on the list. "It is the result of great teamwork and coordination within the eMushrif family that has put us in Forbes 30 Under 30. This is also an achievement for Omani tech companies in general and a good indication that these companies can scale and compete in the region."

eMushrif serves more than 90

private schools and 60 public schools in Oman and Kuwait.

The company is currently closing a US\$2mn funding round at a valuation of US\$11mn. The company plans to expand to the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. It has also introduced face recognition to mark attendance in schools and partnered with Google to develop AI applications.

REGIONAL WEATHER				
ABU DHABI		DUBAI		MANAMA
Max	Min	Max	Min	Max
41°C	27°C	39°C	28°C	38°C
DOHA		KUWAIT CITY		RIYADH
Max	Min	Max	Min	Max
38°C	29°C	39°C	30°C	42°C
PRAYER TIMINGS				
Fajr	4.34am	Duhr	12.10pm	Maghrib
Sunrise	5.50am	Asr	3.38pm	Isha
				6.25pm
				7.37pm

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- NEW ZEALAND
- SINGAPORE
- THAILAND
- VIETNAM

Incorrectly worn masks defeat the purpose

Proper use of masks only weapon to fight the virus: Heath Minister

Shaddad al Musalmi
Muscat

As face masks, now coming in a variety of colours, styles and materials, appear on the faces of people around us, the good news is that many people are doing their part to slow the spread of the coronavirus. However, the bad news is that some people are wearing their masks in a wrong way.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is that they pull the masks under their noses or completely off their faces to rest under their chins.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said that no indicators, as of now, show that the virus is diminishing and that the only weapon so far to fight the virus is proper use of face masks.

"Wearing a face mask is the only weapon so far to fight the virus because till now there is neither medication nor vaccine in Oman," he said.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Sulaiman al Shereiqli, senior specialist in public health, Ministry of Health, said, "Wearing a face mask is a very important strategy to reduce the risk of transmission of airborne infection from ones with respiratory infection.

"It also saves us when we wear it from getting these infections by limiting the chance of breathing in air containing highly infected droplets from persons having the disease in case they



(Photograph for illustrative purpose only)

Both air passages need to be covered. That is the nose and mouth. The mask must seal as much as possible from the nasal arch down to the chin below at all times

DR SULAIMAN AL SHEREIQLI

suddenly cough."

"So, both air passages need to be covered. That is the nose and mouth. The mask must seal as much as possible from the nasal arch down to the chin below at all times when we are mixing or about to mix with others," he added.

Dr Shereiqli said face masks must be worn properly.

"Face masks must also be worn properly to avoid as much

as possible touching the likely contaminated inner or outer surfaces, and following this process with a proper hand wash with soap and water or rubbing them with a sanitiser," he said.

Dr Benny Panakkal, senior intervention cardiologist and MD, Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals, said, "Now as Oman is past the peak and all activities gradually normalise, it's important to keep the rate of COVID-19 infec-

tions under control by being stringent in taking proper precautions.

"Social distancing, wearing a mask and frequent hand washing are the cornerstones in this matter and is going to stay as a norm for many more days."

Dr Panakkal said wearing a mask properly is important rather than for the sake of doing it.

"A mask is used to prevent droplets of respiratory and oral secretions being transferred among persons who come in contact. For this it's important to ensure that the masks actually cover the nose and mouth of the wearer. Otherwise it will defeat its purpose," he said.

@shaddadm



Gaming booms during lockdown, restrictions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The coronavirus-imposed lockdowns and other restrictions all over the world affected thousands of industries, but one business has seen a boom during this time - the gaming industry.

Being stuck at homes, more and more people turned to their PS4s (PlayStation 4 home video game consoles) and even mobile phones to play games with online friends from around the world. While some were pros, most played for fun.

Games like *FIFA Football* and *War Commander* were among the most popular.

Between April and June this year, 51.2 per cent more mobile games were downloaded via the Google App Store than in the same quarter of the previous year, an increase of 4.2bn downloads, as per Kryptoszene.de, a news and information platform that publishes cryptocurrency forecasts, investment news and background reports.

In Oman too, more and more gamers who were stuck indoors,

opted to use the opportunity to continue with their passion.

Sultan Khalfan, an avid gamer for the last ten years, said, "It is clear that the gaming industry is benefiting from the crisis in other respects too. I always play games. Before COVID-19, for competitions we used to go to Japan or other countries as gaming was more of face to face, in person. But now with the global lockdown, we were stuck indoors and thus we played online. This means travel and accommodation expenses were saved and time too, which was good for us.

"Last month, I represented Oman in a tournament for GCC. I am more into action games like *The King of Fighters* and *Samurai Shodown*."

He also played online with players from the US and Japan because he loves to challenge strong contestants, Khalfan added.

Another gamer, 31 year old Hamad Ali added that his favourite ones are *PUBG*, *FIFA Football* and *Fortnite World Cup*.

"I play these games for almost

90 minutes daily and all these years I had been playing with friends from Oman. This is a rare time where I got players from around the world who gave me hard times and I enjoyed it thoroughly. I also downloaded some other games for my cousins, mostly the free ones."

Though the gaming culture has picked up in the country, there is a concern about the Internet connection. Most of the tournaments test the Internet connection of the player and if the speed is not up to the mark then he is disqualified. Many of the players have raised this concern that the Internet speed in Oman is not apt for gaming and causes lagging.

"I got disqualified several times before the game because the connection was poor and it caused disturbance. So, we need to improve on that to have the culture of gaming thrive in Oman," said Khalfan.

According to forecasts, worldwide sales of video games are set to increase by 11.4 per cent this year compared to 2019. The e-sports sector is also growing.

ROP SERVICES RESUME IN RUSTAQ



Royal Oman Police has announced that all services - traffic, civil status and residency - will resume in the new Rustaq service centre starting from September 6 instead of the existing centre in Al Hazm

'Owners of commercial activities forced to close during COVID-19 need not pay rent'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Owners of commercial and industrial activities that were shut because of the precautionary measures announced by the government have the right not to pay rents for the period they were not operating.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health and member of the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19, said, "Owners of commercial and industrial activities who were asked to close their shops by a decision of the Supreme Committee, have the

right not to pay the rent for this closure period."

It is noted that many businesses, mostly SMEs were affected by the closure.

Those affected also included newspaper printing, hotels, restaurants, barbershops, beauty parlours and gyms among a host of other businesses.

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Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority

BMW SERVICE CAMPAIGN

BMW X5 (G05) & X6 (G06) & X7 (G07) - Model Year 2018 - 2019

Date of Campaign : 6/9/2020
Recall Segment : Checking the low-temperature coolant circuit coolant filling.
Recall Type : Performance Action

Product Description : 2018-2019 BMW X5 (G05) & X6 (G06) & X7 (G07)

Year	Make	Model	Affected vehicle VIN/Chassis range	No. of affected vehicles
2018	BMW	X5	LB14755 LB14863 LB14866 LB14869 LB14992 LB14847 LB14861 LB14862 LB14848 LB14849 LB14871 LB14984	12
2019	BMW	X5	LR59862 LR59983 LR59852 LR59974	4
2019	BMW	X7	LB37744 LB37754 LB37753 LB37550 LB37962 LB37755 LB37555 LB37557 LB37760	9

Description of Defect: It has been established that a high degradation of additives in the radiator antifreeze and corrosion inhibitor of the low-temperature coolant circuit may possibly occur.

Procedure Check : Checking the low-temperature coolant circuit coolant filling.

For More Information: Customers of affected vehicles may please contact Al Jenaibi Automobiles LLC for further Details/booking appointments from 6/9/2020 onwards.

Contact Details: Toll free no. 80050008 on all working days (Sunday to Thursday) between 8.00 A.M-5.30 P.M

Team formed to look into possibility of reopening mosques

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

As worshippers in Oman eagerly await the lifting of restrictions on congregational prayers at mosques, the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19 has formed a team to discuss the possibility of reopening places of worship.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'aedi, Minister of Health, said the decision to reopen mosques and places of worship will be taken at an appropriate time.

"A team has been formed under the supervision of the Ministry of Aqaf and Religious Affairs to discuss the possibility of opening mosques," he added.

Jamal al Jahdhami, a worshiper from Bausher, said, "For years, I have been praying at mosques and I find so much comfort there. It has been so long since I last prayed at a mosque and I feel I am missing something. Authorities should allow mosques to reopen as long as precautionary measures are taken."

Another worshiper from Seeb, Khalaf Khalfan, said, "I feel I am missing something in me that is



It is not always easy for people to find a suitable place to pray when mosques are closed. I think mosques should be allowed to reopen

KHAMIS AL HABSI

very important. The wait to reopen the mosques has been so long. I think putting on face masks and taking other precautionary measures like avoiding handshakes could be made

mandatory to enter mosques. We are already aware about COVID-19 and ready to take precautions."

Even though many are okay with praying at home, some say

mosques were so helpful for commuters who are always on the move. "Most of the time I am out of home and at the time for prayers I am on the move because I am a driving-school instructor. It is not always easy for people to find a suitable place to pray when mosques are closed. I think mosques should be allowed to reopen even though congregational prayers are not held," said Khamis al Habsi.

[@shadadm](#)



Over 71,000 Indians leave in 450 special flights

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 71,000 Indians have left the sultanate in over 450 special flights organised by authorities in Oman. Of the 450, Indian Embassy in Oman has till now organised 150 plus flights under its 'Vande Bharat Mission' (VBM), while 300 other flights have been arranged by private organisations and tour operators.

Meanwhile, the Indian government in cooperation with Omani authorities and the Embassy of India in Muscat, announced on Friday that it is adding 25 more flights to India from Oman in the Phase 6 of Vande Bharat Mission.

The embassy had earlier announced 21 flights from September 1-15, the additional 25 are scheduled from September 16-30.

As in the case of flights operated earlier under Vande Bharat Mission, passenger lists for the flights will be finalised by the embassy on the basis of information received by it.

"Passengers are requested to provide details and confirmation to travel on a particular flight on the online form floated by the Embassy for VBM Phase 6," it stated.

All such people will be contacted by Air India directly for booking of tickets. The passengers, after registering on the online form, may also approach

Air India offices in Ruwi and Wattaya (National Travels, General Sales Agent of Air India) directly to book tickets on first come, first served basis.

"However, priority will be given to medical emergency cases, pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as to other Indian nationals who are stranded in difficult situations," embassy said.

The cost of tickets will have to be borne by the passengers themselves.

All passengers are required to confirm acceptance of all conditions of travel, including quarantine requirements in India as well as health requirements in order to board the flight.

You simply can't lock down the beauty of Ayn Lagga Shalyon



Mohammed Awadh al Hadi ba Omar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Even as Dhofar continues to be under lockdown, photographer Mohammed Awadh al Hadi ba

Omar has been capturing images of the stunning landscape of the governorate and promoting the tourism potential of the region on various social media platforms.

A native of Dhofar, ba Omar

has been touring, exploring new spots and photographing the khareef season for some years now.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, ba Omar said, "As a photographer,

my goal is not just to take beautiful pictures of the place and gain the admiration of followers. My objective is to show the people the wonderful places in Dhofar."

On August 21, he pho-

tographed a spring called Ayn Lagga Shalyon which is close to the wilayat of Sadah. "It's a stunning setting with water falling from the top of the mountain. It's a difficult road to the top; I

climbed about 200m to photograph the area," ba Omar said.

A member of the Photographic Society of Oman, he has won several local and international awards and participated in

many photography exhibitions.

Every year during khareef, there's a flurry of activity on his Instagram account (@mohd_Alhadi) and Twitter handle (@mohd_Alhadi).



NO ADDED SUGAR

Individuals older than 60 now allowed in malls, public places

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

Individuals older than 60 will now be allowed to enter shopping malls and other public places, as Oman continues to gradually lift some of its enforced restrictions.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19 has decided to allow people over 60 years to enter malls.

"The Supreme Committee has decided to allow people over 60 years to enter malls, and we call on everyone to allow the elderly to enter shops and institutions.

"All institutions should end the ban on those over the age of 60. They should be not denied entry," he added.

Elderly people expressed their happiness saying malls and other public places are the areas they use to refresh their minds.

"Places like malls are ideal for me because I get to see many



things and feel refreshed. Moreover, being older than 60 does not mean your enjoyment is over. In fact, we may be much stronger with good immunity than some young people. So, I have no concern for my wellbeing at the malls or public places provided I take proper precau-

tionary measures," said Abdullah Nasser, a 65 year old retiree.

However, malls and other commercial centres are still out of bounds for children, and parents say it is now time for them to be allowed in.

"As far as I understand, children have stronger immune sys-

tem than adults. Now that the elderly are allowed into malls, children, with proper supervision, are eagerly waiting to be allowed to visit malls again. It has been long since they went out, given that public parks are still closed," said Asila Mohammed al Naamani, mother of three girls.

Places like malls are ideal for me because I get to see many things and feel refreshed. Moreover, being older than 60 does not mean your enjoyment is over

ABDULLAH NASSER

With parks and malls being out of bounds for children, parents feel their children are deprived of social activities.

"It has been so difficult for children not to engage in outdoor activities and I wish they could be allowed to go to public parks soon. I feel sorry for my children and above all they need some form of physical exercise since I stay in a flat," said Anwar al Musallami, father of four children.

@shadadm



Drifter arrested in Khasab

Muscat - The Musandam Governorate Police Command has arrested a driver on charges of drifting and disturbing public order in the wilayat of Khasab. Legal measures have been taken against him, the ROP said.

Thawani launches customised corporate e-wallet

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Continuing its strategy of creating specialised payment systems in response to growing market needs, and in line with Oman Vision 2040 towards digital transformation, Thawani has launched the 'Mojab Pro' institutional portfolio platform.

The first-of-its-kind in the



Eng Majed al Ameri

sultanate, the innovative system enables organisations to establish their own tailored e-wallets to remotely monitor and track corporate and employee expenditures, manage petty cash, transaction clearance, fuel expenses, work assignments and more.

Fully customisable and flexible, Mojab Pro is designed to fit the unique needs and nature of each company, giving them full

control and clarity on their expenditures, in real time. Thawani also provides beneficiaries with full training, part of its commitment to help maximise its customer experience while ensuring the best possible service.

Eng Majed al Ameri, CEO of Thawani Technologies, said, "Since the establishment of Thawani, we have sought to create smart solutions that address

some of the challenges facing the Omani market, whether at the level of users or institutions. In addition, by obtaining a licence for payment service providers from the Central Bank of Oman, it confirms the importance and belief that financial technology legislators have in the development of the field."

For more information visit www.Thawani.om.



CURB COVID-19

DON'T

TOUCH YOUR

FACE

Without cleaning your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water

an apex media

مبادرة INITIATIVE

آلة للإعلام

Embassy holds meet with Indian teachers

The Embassy of India, Muscat, organised an online interaction with Indian school teachers and faculty members in higher education institutes in Oman, on September 3. The event started with observance of one-minute silence as a mark of respect for late Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Former President of India.

Ambassador Munu Mahawar gave a brief speech and paid tributes to late Shri Pranab Mukherjee, who was a remarkable teacher and a global statesman. Ambassador expressed his gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Government of Oman for extending generous support.

He conveyed his best wishes to all the teachers and spoke about 'Teachers from India Campaign', that has been started by India's Ministry of Education, to honour and recognise the contribution of Indian teachers across the world. He appreciated the contribution of all teachers in Oman as being true ambassadors of India and commended them for their service and dedication.



A video of teachers from Oman who have won awards was played after the speech by ambassador.

Two teachers from Indian School Muscat, Eskalin Gonsalves and Venkatson Karthikeyan, who have recently won CBSE Teacher Award 2019 were commended for their achievement.

Dr Baby Sam, chairman - Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, also gave a short speech and thanked all

the teachers for ensuring continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main highlight was the open interactive session, where teachers and faculty members expressed their views and ideas on various topics with Ambassador Munu Mahawar. Ambassador in his concluding remarks appreciated the suggestions given by various participants and again conveyed his best wishes to all the teachers on the occasion of teachers' day.

Infiniti initiative supports road safety

Infiniti Middle East has reaffirmed its ongoing commitment to supporting the road safety agenda through its 'Eyes on You' initiative by donating infant car seats to parents of new-borns in the region.

Using a portion of proceeds from its successful Ramadan car auction, which saw the sale of multiple Infiniti QX80 SUV's entirely online, the infant car seats have been distributed to new parent's across select Dubai hospitals in August.

Working in partnership with RTA in Dubai, the hospitals have included Al Zahra Hospital, the International Modern Hospital and Latifa Hospital. Infiniti is also finalising plans to distribute further car seats within Abu Dhabi

hospitals later this year.

Mariam from Dubai was one of the new mothers at Latifa Hospital who received a car seat.

She commented, "This is my first baby and this initiative is really helpful especially that being in the car with your new born baby is a huge responsibility and we as parents need to ensure that we are taking the highest safety precautions."

Developed as part of Infiniti's long-running 'Eyes on You' road safety initiative, the brand aims to educate parents and empower children to be safe on the road. Promoting the use of infant car seats is a key part of the cause to ensure children are seated safely in vehicles, after a regional survey from the brand revealed that

1 in 3 parents were unclear of the legal age requirement for car seat usage.

"Road safety continues to be a key passion point for Infiniti, which is why this Ramadan, Infiniti set out to provide car buyers with the great savings, while giving them a chance to contribute to a positive driving culture in the UAE," said Karsten Jankowski, general manager Marketing, PR & Customer Experience, Infiniti International markets.

"We are delighted to be a part of the special journey for parents as they drive their new-borns home for the very first time. We will continue to make road safety a priority and to raise awareness of the importance of keeping children safe on the road."

Bank Muscat's Woqar improves financial inclusion

The Woqar Banking Package for pensioners launched recently by Bank Muscat has been hailed as an important tool to improve financial inclusion in the country. The package provides a range of banking facilities and services and allows pensioners to lead a dignified and financially secure life on their own terms.

Woqar was launched by the bank, which is the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, as part of its commitment to society and provision of banking facilities to all.

As the nation's leading financial services provider, Bank Muscat attaches great importance to social responsibility initiatives aimed at sustaining the country's progress and development and greatly improve financial inclusion. Bank Muscat launched the Woqar Banking Package after studying in great detail and understanding the needs of retirees who were working in both government and private institutions.

Flexible-term loans ranging from one to ten years and credit cards based on the value of the pension are a key part of the



Woqar banking package. Loan facility will be available for pensioners up to 70 years of age while credit card facility is available for those up to 75 years.

The bank has been encouraged by the large number of queries and applications that have come from across the sultanate after the launch of this new product. By addressing the financial inclusivity needs of this customer segment, the bank

hopes to further improve living standards for all segments of society.

Customers can get more information about Woqar products by visiting any of the bank's branches or by contacting the call centre on 24795555 or going to www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/details.aspx#wqoar.

Earlier, the pensioner segment was not served by any bank for flexible-term finance or credit cards based on their pension and

Bank Muscat was the first bank to extend a financing solution for pensioners in Oman.

This new product will enable pensioners live a dignified and financially secure life and is part of the bank's strategy to further improve financial inclusion in the country.

Bank Muscat continues to debut new financial products and services targeting different sections of society in step with the changing needs of its customers.



Mercedes-Benz S-Class: Luxury experienced in a new way

The S-Class stands for the fascination of Mercedes-Benz: legendary and traditional engineering expertise which defines the luxury segment in the automobile industry.

The new S-Class can be experienced with all the senses - seeing, feeling, hearing and smelling - while offering numerous innovations in the areas of driver assistance, protection and interaction. Mercedes-Benz is shaping the next generation of individual mobility with innovations that place the focus on people. The new S-Class uses digitisation for a car that responds empathetically to the needs and wishes of its driver and passengers.

"The S-Class is the world's best-selling luxury sedan. With the latest generation we want to offer our customers innovation, safety, comfort and quality as never before," says Ola Källenius, chairman of Daimler AG and Mercedes-Benz AG.

"The new S-Class underpins our claim to produce the best automobile in the world," states

Markus Schäfer, member of the Board of Management of Daimler AG and Mercedes-Benz AG; responsible for Daimler Group Research and Mercedes-Benz Cars COO.

"This is where covetable luxury meets the greatest possible safety and highest level of comfort."

The market launch in the Middle East will commence in January 2021.

Modern luxury attains the next level in the interior of the S-Class. The designers have created a feel-good ambience with lounge character marked by elegance, high quality and lightness. The dashboard with its new architecture, modern surface design and ergonomic display arrangement is a particular highlight.

But the feel-good aspect goes even deeper: with high ride quality and low noise levels as well as an extensive range of Energizing Comfort programmes, the S-Class looks after the well-being of its passengers. They also stay fit thanks to the effective air fil-

tering system, which signals its newly gained capability with the new name Energizing Air Control.

The new Mercedes-Benz S-Class has become more intelligent in many areas, and the driving experience is at the next level. Digital innovations such as in MBUX (Mercedes-Benz User Experience) are joined by innovations that increase driving enjoyment while making driving even safer: among them are rear-axle steering with a large steering angle and safety innovations such as the rear airbag.

As a new function of Pre-Safe Impulse Side, the active E-Active Body Control suspension can raise the vehicle body (on both sides) just before an impending side impact.

Following systematic further development, the driving assistance systems are a further step towards autonomous driving. Thanks to improved environmental sensors, for example, the parking systems give the driver even better support when manoeuvring at low speed. The in-

tegration into MBUX means that the level of visualisation has now entered a whole new dimension.

The S-Class is the centrepiece of the brand: legendary engineering expertise and a heritage of craftsmanship meet progressive digital innovation.

The S-Class combines artificial intelligence with the experience gained from 135 years of automobile engineering.

Around 70 years ago, Mercedes-Benz laid the foundations for this model series with the model 220. Since its market launch in 1951, more than 4mn S-Class Sedans have been delivered to customers around the world.

The designation "S-Class" was officially introduced with the 116 series in 1972. In the last ten years the S-Class Sedan has been particularly popular in China, the USA, South Korea and Germany.

All in all, since the launch of the generation that is now in its runout phase, more than 500,000 S-Class Sedans have been sold.

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OTE-Hyundai service offers periodic maintenance normal service in just one hour. This facility is available at all 17 OTE-Hyundai service centres with OTE pre-booked appointments that are spread across the sultanate.

Regular service schedule and usage of genuine parts in your Hyundai car can make it run smoothly and reduce the risk of it breaking down and incurring expensive unexpected repairs. Wear and tear due to usage requires timely maintenance; if delayed it can fast become a costly

major repair or replacement requirement.

Scheduled maintenance by trained Hyundai technicians at OTE-Hyundai Service at competitive prices extends the reliable life span of the vehicle and fetches better resale value. At OTE - Hyundai Service, only Hyundai trained technicians carry out work on the car as per Hyundai specifications/standards.

Also, all efforts are made to fix the vehicle right the first time with the help of hi-tech diagnostic tools. These apart, any updates and campaigns recommended by Hyundai from time-to-time are checked and performed free of charge during every visit to the service centre.

OTE - Hyundai Service has been regularly recognised over the years for its service excellence and has been presented with numerous awards and accolades at various regional and global platforms by Hyundai. The recent one being, bronze medal in the biennial Hyundai World Skill Olympics, held at the Hyundai

Cheonan Global Learning Center in Korea after fiercely competing with 66 entrants from 51 countries from across North America, Central and South America, Europe and Russia, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa.

OTE Group constantly innovates to offer best ownership experience to its customers throughout the ownership cycle. OTE -Hyundai service offers tailor made service/maintenance packages to suit individual customer as well as high-running fleet customers. More details on

the service/maintenance packages can be obtained from the nearest OTE -Hyundai service centre.

OTE - Hyundai Service also offers the convenience of maintaining your car without the burden of making the payment in one shot. 12 interest free installments are offered through Bank Muscat Credit Card, for all service/repair bills above RO150.

Usage of Hyundai Genuine Parts is important in safeguarding the safety of the occupants, as these are designed and engineered specifically for the model.

Over the years, significant investments in R&D have been made by Hyundai to study the design, material selection and internal construction of the parts.

Also, they are tested under various simulated extreme conditions to ensure quality, optimum safety, performance, durability and reliability. Apart from quality assurance, all Hyundai Genuine Parts are backed by a Hyundai Replacement Parts Limited Warranty.

Hyundai Genuine Parts not only prove to be a sound investment for your car, but also ensure that the safety of your family and yours is not compromised.

OTE Group represents Hyundai Motors in the sultanate. With a nationwide network of showrooms and service centres, OTE Group ensures that Hyundai customers are never far from getting high quality service. For more details contact 800-50003 (toll-free) or visit the nearest OTE - Hyundai service centre.



OAB launches online ‘charity’ competition

To commemorate the International Day of Charity, celebrated on September 5, Oman Arab Bank launched a special competition on its social media platforms for all its followers. The competition aimed at increasing awareness of the need to contribute to charitable foundations and organisations, which in turn will have a positive impact on society.

Commenting on the launch of this competition, Hilal al Siyabi, head of Corporate Communications at Oman Arab Bank, said, “We believe that individuals play an integral role in helping out people who are in need. This is why the bank has tied up with several active charities and charitable associations over the years

to instill a culture of giving. With the OAB App customers can easily make donations to their local charity of choice within seconds. This competition reaffirms our efforts to encourage and promote a spirit of charitable contribution among all members of the OAB family.”

To enter the competition, followers will have to answer the question, ‘How many charities and funds can you donate to via the OAB Online App’. Those who answer correctly will be entered into a draw, with the bank donating RO500 on behalf of the winner to the charity of their choice from those listed on the mobile application.

“Through this competition, we aim to bring people together who

believe in the need for carrying out charitable work while simultaneously raising awareness within the community about the importance of donations. We are confident that the response from our customers and social media followers will be a testament to this cause,” Siyabi added.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate.

Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 55 branches and representative offices and 152 ATMs spread across Oman. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services for personal banking, corporate banking and investment clients.

At IFA 2020 LG presents its ‘Life’s Good from Home’ vision

At IFA 2020, LG Electronics (LG) presented a new consumer experience unlike any previous IFA show. LG CTO Dr I P Park took to the stage in hologram form to talk about ‘Life’s Good from Home’, the company’s vision for the future. LG’s future vision maximises three core home values of care, convenience and entertainment.

“These unprecedented times have made us more uncertain about the future,” remarked Dr Park.

“LG believes this presents a unique opportunity to make real change in the world by realising a new potential for the home. As a leading lifestyle innovator, we’ve doubled-down on our commitment to develop new and improved products and services that provide a good life for consumers the world over.”

LG’s AI platform, LG ThinQ, continues to evolve and innovate to create new services, solutions and business models to lead change.

“LG ThinQ is the beating heart of our life-enriching innovative experiences,” Dr Park said when demonstrating how the updated LG ThinQ app delivers a user-centric experience that extends from customer support to purchasing supplies.



Using the app, the AI-based Proactive Customer Care (PCC) can analyse and report back the operational status of appliances and even provide maintenance or repair advice. LG has spearheaded innovation that transcends the home, investing in wide-ranging technologies as it pursues improving everyday life. LG’s CLOi line of robots can provide a safe, socially distant way to deliver services in restaurants and hospitals and since July 2020 LG CLOi ServeBots have been deployed in commercial locations throughout Korea.

As a pioneer in robotics, LG has set its sights on expanding the robot ecosystem through its CLOi platform, focusing on automated driving, situation analysis, and movement control by reducing the time it takes to develop cutting edge products, a driving force for the industry’s growth.

Dr Park highlighted how CLOi 2.0 could serve as an efficient substitute for human interaction, compatible with the open source Robot Operating System (ROS) 2. LG is also developing technology for remote healthcare management as part of its digital

transformation efforts. Dr Kim Kyung-ho, executive vice president of the LG’s Business Solutions Europe, followed Dr Park on stage to introduce LG ThinQ Home.

An actual living space and complete home solution in the South Korean city of Pangyo known as Korea’s Silicon Valley, ThinQ Home is a real demonstration of LG’s Life’s Good from Home vision as the ideal future residence designed to deliver a safer, more convenient lifestyle through the company’s latest appliances and IT technologies.

[illegible]

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1 Minute quantity
 5 Lion's family
 10 Uruguayan city
 15 La Scala
 performance
 16 Madagascar
 mammal
 17 Appropriate
 summarily
 18 Stuffed menu
 item
 21 More bluish than
 myrtle
 23 Son of Hermes
 24 Exams
 25 Stipend
 27 Fashion
 28 Doggy
 29 Van Susteren
 30 Trade center
 31 Sugar or candy
 32 Greek
 marketplace
 34 Religious group
 36 Clans
 37 Utters
 38 Issue
 40 Concended
 42 Patriotic assn.
 43 One in bondage
 45 Ecological stages
 46 Most authentic
 49 Does surveillance
 51 North Dakota

Indian tribe
52 Petroleum
54 Supplicate
57 Come suddenly
59 Small weight
60 Hayseed
61 Verge
62 Envious
64 Nickname for a moppet
65 English river
67 Eye
68 Type of stance?
70 Throne
71 Buncombe
73 ___ Alamos
74 Be consistent
76 Raised money
77 Encircles
79 Protuberance
80 Adams or Poehler
81 Underground passages
83 Sewing basket item
87 Yearn
89 Food voucher
90 Solemn ceremony
92 DC comics
"Green ___"
93 Reverberate
94 Center fielder ___ Speaker
95 Uttered
97 ___ de France

98 Command to a horse
99 Castle, et al.
101 "___ le veut"
102 "___ well that ends well"
103 Scottish seaport
105 Hibernia
108 Respirations
109 Card game misplay
110 Cast off
111 Be aware of
112 Open areas in forest
113 French sea
DOWN
1 Opportunely
2 Justin Bieber fan
3 Hematite
4 Landed estate
5 Folded
6 Supplants
7 Mischievous children
8 Rightful
9 Sins
10 Vilifies
11 Severed
12 Dull
13 Caucasian goat
14 Without a reciprocal feeling
15 Model railroad measurement

17 Jamaica, e.g.
 18 College officials
 20 Ike
 22 US humorist Bill
 23 Mast
 26 French
 girlfriends
 29 Part of petal
 31 Life's work
 33 Out of practice
 35 Old unit of liquid
 measure
 36 Oft replaced joint
 37 Brother of Faisal
 39 Nimble step
 41 Inexperienced
 person
 42 Kettle or snare
 44 Chastised
 46 Goods as part
 payment
 47 Immerse
 48 Leg bone
 50 Unfriendly
 52 Moved along
 slowly
 53 For fear
 54 Buggy
 55 Competitor
 56 Soap-substitute
 plant
 58 Born
 59 Gyroscope
 package abbr.

63 Spring festival
66 Arizona Indian
67 ____dokey
69 Sign
70 Gibe
72 Hoarfrost
73 Dust bunnies
75 Epitome
77 Aspect
78 Split
81 Believes
82 Temporary
 warehousing
84 Military
instructor
85 Drooped
86 Sheep
87 Sour
88 Salute!
89 Christmas
 display
91 French schools
93 Roll or white
94 Moves briskly
96 Back
99 ____ instant:
 pronto
100 Mil. man: var.
101 Horne or Olin
102 Tennis ace
104 Shoe width
106 Mr. Brooks
107 Doctrine

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19 Today's skies begin to lighten things up after an emotionally-trying week. Lover Venus departs from mopey Cancer and moves forward into bold and bright Leo, returning your shine and helping you dazzle people with your creative energy.	LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22 Leos were not born to hide their light behind the scenes. Today's skies make sure to remind you of that, as charming Venus departs from overly-sensitive Cancer. Venus' time in your sign draws all eyes towards you and increases your magnetism.	SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21 Does it feel like a weight has been lifted today? You're finally done with exploring the heavier aspects of intimate relationships this afternoon, as lover Venus moves forward into bold and proud Leo, where she remains until early October.
TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20 Part of your mission in life is to find a way to cultivate a strong sense of unshakable, inner peace. That's no easy feat—especially after this past week's trials and tribulations! Fortunately, today's skies make it easy to unwind.	VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22 Your craving for quiet is about to become increasingly more important to you, Virgo. Bond-builder Venus steps forward into self-aware Leo this afternoon, pulling your heart behind the scenes for an insular review of your relationship patterns.	CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19 Today's skies put an end to the inner tensions you've been battling all week. The moon slides into sensual Taurus, increasing your need for a good time and sheer enjoyment of life's little pleasures, which you should indulge in now.
GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21 You need a hard break from social-interaction! The moon slips into Taurus, summoning you inward for a restful recharge. Find a way to reground yourself through a slow, solo, earthy adventure. Venus adds a charming dash of flair to your voice.	LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22 Libras are social creatures, as part of your life work is to explore the dynamics occurring in all relationships. Today sees your ruling planet, Venus, on the move once more. Venus moves forward into playful Leo, warming up your connections to community.	AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18 The goddess of love, Venus herself, moves forward into your opposite sign of Leo this morning. Venus' time in romance-hungry Leo brings sweet times and pleasantries to all of your one-on-one connections, from now through early October.
CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22 Close your laptop and walk away from your desk! You've worked hard. With the moon's entrance into easygoing Taurus, it's time to relax with your good friends. Venus departs from your sign, glowing her magnetic light on your finances.	SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21 It's your time to shine and ask for what you want from the universe. Magnetic Venus steps into creatively self-expressive Leo calling attention to your reputation and career, potentially helping you make the right connections or receive rewards for your work.	PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20 It's time to get serious about the work you want to be doing, Pisces. Magnetic Venus steps forward into self-expressive Leo this morning, where she'll remain until early October. Venus in Leo draws fortunate circumstances to your work situation.



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

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

Y	U	L	S
S	S	T	O
S	W	H	A
U	B	P	N

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other.

The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on.

Valid words must be at least three letters long.

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

8	7	6	8	9	3	5	3	9	4	1	6	8
5	2	3	9	1	7	8	4	2	5			
4	6	3	9	1	7	8	4	2	5			
3	8	4	1	5	6	2	7	3	9			
2	1	6	7	2	5	9	8	4	3			
1	5	8	3	7	4	1	6	9	2			
0	4	9	2	6	8	3	5	1	7			
9	1	4	8	2	7	3	5	6				
8	3	7	6	1	5	2	8	4				
7	2	5	8	4	3	6	9	7	1			

[illegible]

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

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



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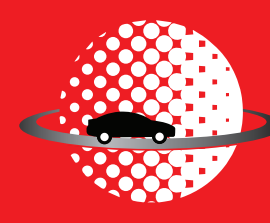
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QUICK RUN

Chelsea add Havertz to near US\$265mn spending spree

Chelsea took their summer spending spree to nearly US\$265mn with the signing of German international Kai Havertz from Bayer Leverkusen on a five-year deal on Friday. Havertz's arrival at Stamford Bridge for a reported US\$94mn is the Blues' latest statement of intent as they seek to cut the gap on Liverpool and Manchester City at the top of the English Premier League. The 21 year old, who can play as an attacking midfielder or as a forward, joins international teammate Timo Werner, Hakim Ziyech, Ben Chilwell and Thiago Silva in joining the club for Frank Lampard's second season in charge.

Ceballos rejoins Arsenal on loan from Real Madrid

Dani Ceballos has rejoined Arsenal for a second season on loan from Real Madrid, the English Premier League club announced on Friday. The Spanish international scored two goals in 36 appearances for the Gunners last season, helping Mikel Arteta's side win the FA Cup. The Spanish international scored two goals in 36 appearances for the Gunners last season, helping Mikel Arteta's side win the FA Cup.

Two world records as Farah makes track return

Mo Farah blitzed to a new world record in the rarely-run one-hour event on his return to the track on Friday at an empty Brussels stadium in Belgium that also saw Sifan Hassan set a new best in the women's equivalent race. Farah ran 21.330km over the 60 minutes behind closed doors at the Brussels Diamond League meet and bettered Ethiopian Haile Gebrselassie's previous best of 21.285km, set back in 2007, by 45m. Ethiopian-born Dutch runner Hassan smashed the women's world record. Hassan produced a thrilling kick over the final minute to see off Kenya's world marathon record holder Brigid Kosgei (who was later disqualified) and notch up 18.930km. Hassan's final distance added 413m - more than a lap - to the previous record of 18.517km set by Ethiopian Dire Tune Arisssi in 2008.

Ogier and Lappi on top after first stage in Estonia

Six-time world champion Sebastien Ogier in a Toyota and M-Sport Ford's Esapekka Lappi led the Rally of Estonia after the first world championship stage held in almost six months on Friday. Ogier, who led the championship by eight points from teammate Elfyn Evans when the competition was halted in March due to the coronavirus, clocked 1min 17.1sec, the same time as Lappi in Tartu, Estonia, . Home hope and reigning world champion Ott Tanak, in a Hyundai, was just a fraction behind after the special stage played out in parkland on the edge of the city. In all, the Rally of Estonia will consist of 17 stages over 232km on Saturday and Sunday. Craig Breen was fourth on the day with Evans in fifth.

AFP



MESSI TO STAY AT BARCA

Madrid, Spain - Lionel Messi's grudging acceptance that he will have to stay put at Barcelona after losing his stand-off with club president Josep Maria Bartomeu has left the Argentine superstar's future still in doubt.

The 33 year old, who was absent from Barcelona training on Saturday the day after announcing he would reluctantly stay at the club, launched a stinging attack on Bartomeu claiming he had broken his word to let him leave.

The absence of any new contract means that even if he is not allowed to leave this summer, Messi could enter negotiations with other teams from January 1 and leave for free when his current deal expires in July.

The feeling that Messi's reluctant decision was by no means the end of the affair was clear in Spanish daily *Marca's* headline: 'Messi stays, the crisis too'.

Bartomeu could yet respond with his resignation, having previously indicated he would step

Deportivo described as his 'devastating' interview with Goal website on Friday. "They are always juggling and plugging gaps."

Messi believed he had a clause in his contract that meant he could leave for free at the end of last season but Barca said that

The president always said that at the end of the season I could decide if I wanted to go or stay. In the end he didn't end up keeping his word

LIONEL MESSI

down if Messi publicly said he was the problem and agreed to stay. "It has been a long time since there has been a project or anything at all," Messi said in what another sports daily *Mundo*

option expired on June 10.

"The president always said that at the end of the season I could decide if I wanted to go or if I wanted to stay. In the end he didn't end up keeping his word,"

Messi said. "And this is the reason why I am going to continue in the club... because the president told me that the only way to leave was to pay the 700mn-euro (US\$823mn) release clause."

He described that as 'impossible', adding that he could never take 'the club that I love' to court.

Messi failed to appear at Barca's Joan Gamper training complex for Saturday's training session attended by players including Gerard Pique, Jordi Alba and Philippe Coutinho.

According to local media, he must first pass the COVID-19 test he deliberately missed last Sunday with a return to the squad possibly on Monday.

He could then figure in new

coach Ronald Koeman's first fixture, a friendly against third division Nastic on September 12.

Barcelona responded to Messi's pledge by posting a picture of the striker on Instagram in the club's new kit, with the caption: "I'm going to give my best. My love for Barca will never change".

Barcelona ended the season without a trophy for the first time since 2008, which also extended Messi's unsuccessful run in the Champions League to five years.

He has scored 634 goals and won 34 titles with the club that he joined as a 13 year old and where he came through the ranks at La Masia.

Despite his unhappiness at having to stay, the Argentinian

insists he will give his all for the team next season under Koeman, who is trying to overhaul the squad.

"I am going to continue at Barca and my attitude is not going to change, no matter how much I have wanted to go," Messi said.

"There is a new coach and a new idea. That's good, but then we have to see how the team responds and if it means we can compete or not. What I can say is that I'm staying and I'm going to give my best."

Koeman said he wanted Messi to be the cornerstone of his project at Camp Nou but he also said: "I only want players who want to be here."

AFP

Bergwijn guides Dutch past Poland, Italy held by Bosnia



Dutch's forward Steven Bergwijn (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the UEFA Nations League match against Poland at the Johan Cruyff Arena stadium, in Amsterdam, on Friday (AFP)

NATIONS LEAGUE

London, UK - Steven Bergwijn ensured the Netherlands did not feel the absence of recently departed coach Ronald Koeman to beat Poland 1-0 in the Nations League, while Italy's record winning run came to an end in a 1-1 draw with Bosnia and Herzegovina on Friday.

Koeman left to take charge of Barcelona last month, less than a year before he was due to lead his country to a major international tournament for the first time.

A rejuvenated Netherlands reached the final of the inaugural

Nations League under Koeman and Bergwijn is one of a number of exciting young talents alongside Frenkie De Jong and Matthijs de Ligt that make the Dutch among the favourites for next year's Euros.

The Tottenham winger netted his first international goal by tapping home from close range on the hour mark to give caretaker boss Dwight Lodeweges the perfect start.

Also in League A Group 1, Italy extended their two-year unbeaten run but a run of 11 straight wins came to an end in Florence. Edin Dzeko put the

visitors in front in the country where he plays his club football for Roma before Stefano Sensi levelled ten minutes later.

"We're disappointed not to win, but there was no sharpness," said Italy boss Roberto Mancini.

Scotland and Israel drew 1-1 in a dress rehearsal of their Euro 2020 playoff semifinal back at Hampden next month.

Ryan Christie's penalty late in the first-half masked a poor performance from Steve Clarke's side, who were pegged back 17 minutes from time when Eran Zahavi drilled high into the far

corner. In the other game in the group, the Czech Republic shrugged off the disruption of key players Tomas Soucek and Patrik Schick being forced to self-isolate after coming into contact with a backroom staff member who tested positive for coronavirus. The Czechs beat neighbours Slovakia 3-1 in Bratislava.

Gavin Whyte's goal four minutes from time salvaged a 1-1 draw for Northern Ireland in Romania despite being down to ten men for over 50 minutes after Josh Magennis's first half red card.

Erling Haaland's first international goal for Norway was not enough as the hosts lost 1-2 to Austria in Oslo.

Michael Gregoritsch and Marcel Sabitzer's penalty put the visitors 2-0 in front before the Borussia Dortmund striker's deft finish opened his international account.

In League C, Kazakhstan beat Lithuania 2-0, while Albania were 2-0 victors in Belarus.

Thursday results: League A (Group 4): Germany 1 Spain 1, Ukraine 2 Switzerland 1; **League B (Group 3):** Turkey 0 Hungary 1, Russia 3 Serbia 1, **Group 4:** Bulgaria 1 Republic of Ireland 1, Finland 0 Wales 1; **League C (Group 3):** Moldova 1 Kosovo 1, Slovenia 0 Greece 0; **League D (Group 1):** Latvia 0 Andorra 0, Faroe Islands 3 Malta 2.

AFP

Rahm and Johnson share lead in Atlanta

PGA TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

Atlanta, US - Second-ranked Jon Rahm of Spain fired a five-under par 65 to match world No 1 Dustin Johnson for the lead after Friday's opening round of the US PGA Tour Championship in Atlanta.

Rahm managed to find only three of 14 fairways at East Lake but reached 14 of 18 greens in regulation to equal Johnson at 13-under after 18 holes in a 30-man season-ending showdown in Atlanta for a \$15 million playoff prize.

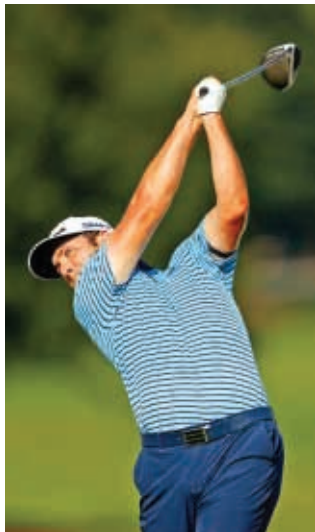
"I kind of survived the first six or seven holes, took it on the back nine and played a really solid round of golf," Rahm said.

"My driving could use a little improving. It was just a little bit of every which way. I was a little hesitant off the tee and that's what I'd like to change."

Johnson, who shot 67, began on ten-under by virtue of his season points lead. Rahm was next on eight-under with third-ranked American Justin Thomas on seven-under and other rivals starting up to ten strokes adrift in the staggered start system.

"I'm pleased with the way I played," Johnson said. "It's a decent score. I need to keep doing what I'm doing and giving myself some looks."

Thomas, the 2017 playoff champion, had three birdies in his first four holes on the way to a 66 to stand third on 11-under, two strokes ahead of world No 4 Rory McIlroy, who shot 64 to



Jon Rahm of Spain plays his shot during the first round (AFP)

leap into contention.

New dad McIlroy, who began seven behind Johnson, is chasing his third US PGA playoff crown in five seasons and still thinking of daughter Poppy.

"I was like, 'OK, there's a feeding coming up.' It's natural - between shots you think of other things," McIlroy said.

"It's nice to have this little four or five hours to myself. I played really well, as good as I have in a long time and that was very encouraging."

Last-pair partners Rahm and Johnson continued their duel from last week's BMW Championship, when Johnson sank a long putt on the 72nd green to force extra holes and Rahm made a 66-footer for birdie to capture the playoff.

AFP

Morgan hails bowlers as England clinch final-ball T20I thriller

**ENGLAND VS AUSTRALIA
FIRST T20I**

Southampton, UK – Skipper Eoin Morgan has hailed his bowling attack's belief in their own strengths after Australia's late-innings implosion allowed England to squeeze out a two-run win in the first T20I at the Ageas Bowl on Friday night.

Tom Curran held his nerve as England beat Australia by two runs in a final-ball thriller as the visitors required 15 off the last over.

Australia needed 39 from 36 balls at the start of Adil Rashid's final over, but he removed both Steven Smith and Glenn Maxwell to give England an opening.

That meant Morgan gave Jofra Archer and Mark Wood their respective final overs earlier than anticipated as he looked to expose Australia's main weakness – their lack of power below No 4 – and he was rewarded when they removed David Warner and Alex Carey respectively.

Morgan admitted that Australia had been 'in command for the majority' of the run-chase, but he credited his bowlers' ability with the old white ball for delivering a series of breakthroughs, allowing them a foothold in a game that appeared to have slipped away.

"We have talked as a side about making inroads and when we do, we have threats to take maybe two or three at a time," Morgan said. "Some of our pace bowlers and Adil have posed that threat, making it particularly difficult for people coming in and facing them straight away."

"I think after Moeen's over, things started to turn for us. We got the ball reverse-swinging a little bit, but again, creating that opportunity with Adil getting Maxwell and Smith created that opportunity."



England's captain Eoin Morgan (left) celebrates with Tom Curran after winning the T20I against Australia (AFP)

"I thought we might end up running out of our best bowlers earlier, but they seemed to continue to take risks, particularly against Adil and then Jof came back earlier as a consequence of that."

Morgan said that after Aus-

tralia's fast start – Aaron Finch and Warner put on 98 for the first wicket in 11 overs – England had little choice but to look for wickets, and he was prepared to lose the game by a significant margin rather than take it deep but never look like getting back

into it. "We needed to take wickets to try and stay in the game. I don't mind if we lose the game inside 16 overs," he said. "To try and win the game is the priority, so you have to chase your tail a little bit or come up with different things."

Quite nice not to be abused: Warner

Southampton, UK – David Warner said it felt 'bizarre' to be playing England without a crowd following Australia's two-run defeat by their arch-rivals in a Twenty20 international at Southampton on Friday that marked the tourists' first competitive match in nearly six months.

All of England's home fixtures this season are being played behind closed doors in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's the first time I have been here (England) and not been abused, which is quite nice," said Warner.

There were no fans present at the Ageas Bowl to roar on England as the hosts, with Australia seemingly cruising to a victory target of 163 at 124 for one, hit back with a burst of four wickets for nine runs in 14 balls.

Warner was subjected to repeated crowd jeering during last year's World Cup in England following his part in a ball-tampering scandal in South Africa.

Asked if he atmosphere had felt like an England-Australia match, Warner told reporters

after stumps: "From a crowd perspective, no."

He added: "It was a bit bizarre (the lack of any spectators). But we're just grateful to be back and playing," he added after what was Australia's first competitive match since they beat New Zealand in a one-day international in Sydney on March 13.

Warner and Australia captain Aaron Finch (46) put on 98 in

11 overs, with both openers lamenting the fact that neither of them finished the job as England went 1-0 up in a three-match series.

"Towards the end they (England) bowled exceptionally well, they knocked us over quite comprehensively," said Warner.

Jofra Archer (2-33), removed both Finch and Warner in what was the fast bowler's first white-ball international in more than a year since he bowled the Super Over that sealed England's World Cup final win over New Zealand at Lord's.

"I missed a yorker – a very good delivery," said Warner. "There's no excuses there. The guys were outplayed to be honest."

Earlier, England were indebted to David Malan's 66 – his eighth score of fifty or more in just 14 T20 international innings – which revived the hosts from the depths of 108 for five after opener Jos Buttler's dashing 44.

Malan's 43-ball innings contained three sixes, all off leg-spinner Adam Zampa who saw his last over go for 22.

AFP



"I'm delighted the guys showed belief and courage to do something to take wickets, and that was displayed a lot in the last six overs when we held our length a lot because it was the hardest to hit."

Morgan gave particular praise

to Tom Curran – who held his nerve after being hit for six by Marcus Stoinis to leave Australia needing nine to win from the final four balls – and Chris Jordan, who bowled a brilliant 19th over on the night he won his 50th T20I cap.

Brief scores: England 162-7 (D Malan 66, J Buttler 44; A Agar 2-32, K Richardson 2-13, G Maxwell 2-14) **beat Australia** 160-6 (A Finch 46, D Warner 58; J Archer 2-33, A Rashid 2-29).

Cricinfo

Mustafizur denied NOC to play in IPL 2020



Dhaka, Bangladesh – The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has denied a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to Mustafizur Rahman for IPL 2020, a Bangladesh Cricket Board director said on Friday.

Akram Khan, the cricket operations chairman, said that Bangladesh's tour of Sri Lanka in October and November was the reason for the denial.

ESPNcricinfo understands Kolkata Knight Riders were interested in Rahman at one point to replace Harry Gurney. "There was an offer from the IPL but since we have a tour coming up, we didn't give him the NOC. He is an important cricketer for us and this upcoming series is also important," Khan told the Dhaka-based bdnews24.com.

There was an offer from the IPL but since we have a tour coming up, we didn't give him the NOC. He is an important cricketer for us

AKRAM KHAN

Rahman, however hasn't been in Bangladesh's Test plans since March 2019. He took 20 wickets in the 2019 World Cup, after which he has only played ODIs and T20Is for Bangladesh.

He last played in the IPL in

2018, turning out for Mumbai Indians. In seven matches that season, he took seven wickets at an average of 32.85.

Rahman had much more success with Sunrisers Hyderabad, who he played for in 2016 and 2017, although he featured in just one game in 2017. In 17 matches for SRH overall, he collected 17 wickets at 26.16 and an economy rate of 7.14 – his figures somewhat spoiled by his solitary outing in 2017 in which he bowled 2.4 overs for 34 runs without picking up a wicket.

He had returned from his stint in 2018 with an injury, after which BCB president Nazmul Hassan had said he won't be allowed any more NOCs to participate in overseas leagues.

Cricinfo



England pacer Onions forced into retirement

London, UK – Graham Onions, the Lancashire and former England fast bowler, has announced his retirement from the game on Friday.

Onions, 37, suffered a back injury ahead of the start of this year's Bob Willis Trophy and has taken medical advice to end his professional playing career.

Onions played nine Tests between 2009 and 2012, taking 32 wickets at 29.90, and would likely have featured more if not for injuries.

He claimed a five-wicket haul on debut against West Indies to get on the Lord's honours board, and featured in three out of five Tests as England reclaimed the Ashes in 2009.

Although not renowned for his ability with the bat, he was twice the hero on England's 2009-10 tour of South Africa, seeing his side to draws at Centurion and Cape Town nine wickets down – Makhaya Ntini and Morne Morkel both denied by the No 11 in their final overs.

Cricinfo

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DJOKOVIC BREEZES INTO LAST-16

Bizarre delay shrouds Zverev vs Mannarino match, Coric downs Tsitsipas in a thriller

New York, US - Novak Djokovic sailed into the last-16 of the US Open on Friday as off-court intrigue forced the delay of a men's singles match over issues linked to coronavirus.

Djokovic outclassed Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 in a routine victory for the world No 1, who is chasing an 18th Grand Slam singles title.

Far from routine was a last-minute attempt by New York health officials to prevent France's Adrian Mannarino from playing his last-32 encounter against German fifth seed Alexander Zverev.

The intervention led to a back and forth between tournament

Tsitsipas stunned

Also Croatia's 27th seed Borna Coric staged a remarkable Houdini act to stun fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in a 4hr 36min late-night thriller.

Coric appeared to be heading for certain defeat after Tsitsipas, leading by two sets to one, opened up a 5-1 lead in the fourth. But Coric rallied superbly, saving six match points and fighting back to take the set 7-5 to force a decider.

Tsitsipas went a break up once more in the fifth but couldn't press home the advantage as Coric forced a tie-break before clinching a 6-7 (2-7), 6-4, 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7-4) win.

It was a weird situation for me. I was just laying on the sofa still trying to be focused just in case I would go on court

ADRIAN MANNARINO AFTER HIS DEFEAT



organisers and the state government and resulted in the match, which Zverev won in four sets, starting over three hours late.

"It was a weird situation for me," said Mannarino, one of 11 players put under enhanced safety protocols earlier this week after compatriot Benoit Paire was withdrawn from the tournament after testing positive for coronavirus.

"I was just laying on the sofa still trying to be focused just in case I would go on court," he said, following Zverev's 6-7 (4-7), 6-4, 6-2 victory.

Zverev will now play unseeded Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the last-16 while Djokovic will play Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta for a place in the quarterfinals.

Twelfth seed Denis Shapovalov recovered from 5-2 down in the fourth set to pip American No 19 seed Taylor Fritz 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7-5), 6-2

Fritz, 22 was within two points of victory before the 21 year old Shapovalov completed a remarkable comeback.

The Canadian will do battle with seventh seed David Goffin for a place in the quarterfinals after the Belgian brushed aside Serbia's 26th seed Filip Krajnovic 6-1, 7-6 (7-5), 6-4.

Britain's involvement in the singles ended on Friday with both Dan Evans and Cameron Norrie exiting. France's Corentin Moutet knocked out Evans 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7-5) 7-6 (7-1) as they resumed their second round match that was postponed



Novak Djokovic celebrates his third-round win against Jan-Lennard Struff on Friday

'Women to be part of new players' association'

New York, US - Novak Djokovic said Friday that women will be a part of his proposed new players' association that is sending shock-waves through world tennis.

The world No 1 said he had been talking to women players at the US Open this week to try get them onboard. "There's been a lot of talk about this being an only men's association and it's not true," Djokovic told reporters on Friday.

He said he hoped women would join the controversial new union 'in big numbers'. The Serbian added that he

had spoken to Serena Williams and Sloane Stephens about the project.

Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal spoke out against the proposal when it was announced at the weekend. They called for 'unity, not separation'.

Djokovic says the new association is intended to bring players together to give them a louder voice in decision-making. He insists it would not form a rival tour to the ATP or WTA, or seek to boycott tournaments.

AFP

Thursday because of rain.

Osaka struggles

Earlier, Japan's Naomi Osaka battled into the last-16 of the women's draw. The two-time Grand Slam winner required three sets and 2hr 33 min to dislodge 18 year old Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk in an early game at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The Japanese fourth seed, who threw her racquet in frustration after losing the second set on tie-break, prevailed 6-3, 6-7 (4-7), 6-2 against the world No 137.

"I just felt like I had so many points that I didn't capitalise on. I think when I went up, I became a bit passive and then she came in because she has no fear," said Osaka, 22.

Osaka now takes on 14th seed Anett Kontaveit of Estonia for a place in the quarterfinals.

Elsewhere, sixth seed Petra Kvitova breezed past Ameri-

can Jessica Pegula 6-4, 6-3 to set up a last-16 encounter with Shelby Rogers, also of the US.

Eighth seed Petra Martic of Croatia swept aside unseeded Russian Varvara Gracheva 6-3, 6-3.

Martic will play Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan in the last-16 after the 23rd seed powered past Vera Lapko of Belarus 6-3, 6-3.

Germany's 17th seed Angelique Kerber also progressed to the fourth round, making light work of American Ann Li 6-3, 6-4.

Kerber, the 2016 US Open champion, will go up against Jennifer Brady for a quarterfinal spot after the American 28th seed knocked out France's Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-3.

Garcia had provided the biggest upset of the tournament on Wednesday when she eliminated top seed Karolina Pliskova.

AFP

Yates clings to Tour lead amid mountain shake up

TOUR DE FRANCE

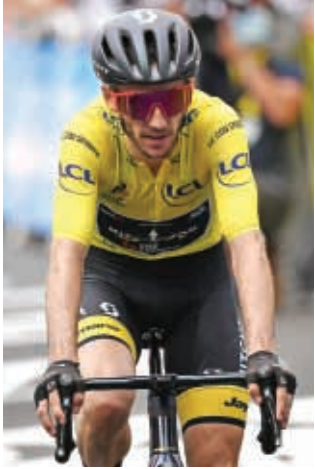
Loudenvielle, France - Nans Peters scored a first home stage win on the Tour de France on Saturday with Britain's Adam Yates clinging on to the overall lead on a tough Pyrenean stage that caused a shake up.

Chief amongst the day's victims was fancied French climber Thibaut Pinot, who dropped out of the race for the overall standings entirely on the penultimate climb.

Peters achieved his win over three major mountains, producing a brilliant long-range solo breakaway. "I told myself, believe, believe believe," said the AG2R rider who finished the 141km run from Cazeret-sur-Garonne to Loudenvielle in just over four hours.

But there was also a ferocious battle on the final climb of the dreaded Col de Peyresourde.

Yates, defending Tour de France champion Egan Bernal and French climber Romain Bardet were all dropped and appeared doomed. All three, however, swooped down the daredevil final descent to dra-



Adam Yates crosses the finish line at Loudenvielle on Saturday (AFP)

matically claw their way back closer to the two form men, Primož Roglic and Nairo Quintana.

Slovenian rookie Tadej Pogacar conversely managed to break from this group and gain 37 seconds back of the valuable time he lost on Friday.

Sunday's stage nine is a 153km mountain stage between Pau and Laruns with two category one mountains, a tricky final descent and an 8km flat run to the finish line.

AFP

Hamilton on record pole, Ferrari woes deepen

FORMULA ONE

ITALIAN GRAND PRIX

Milan, Italy - Lewis Hamilton claimed pole position with a new lap record at Monza for Sunday's Italian Grand Prix with Valtteri Bottas taking second in Saturday qualifying for another Mercedes front row lock-out.

McLaren's Carlos Sainz posted the third fastest time and is joined on the second row by Sergio Perez for Racing Point.

The session proved another humbling experience for out-of-sorts Ferrari with Sebastian Vettel going out in Q1 and Charles Leclerc, who won at the circuit last year, in Q2. This means no Ferrari inside the top-ten at Monza for the first time since 1984.

The championship leader and six-time champion clocked a fastest lap in one minute and 18.887 seconds to beat the Finn by 0.069 seconds. In pure speed, Hamilton's track lap record performance produced an unconfirmed fastest lap in F1 history.

It was Hamilton's record-increasing 94th career pole

It wasn't too bad. It was a fantastic performance from the team - in terms of timing, when they put us out on the track

LEWIS HAMILTON



position, his sixth in seven races and his seventh in Italy.

"It wasn't too bad," said Hamilton, with a hint of a smile.

"It was a fantastic performance from the team - in terms of timing, when they put us out on the track," said Hamilton, referring to Mercedes' avoidance of the jostling mass of cars seeking a slip-streaming tow from each other.

"It was not the easiest as you saw how close it is between us all so it demanded a really clean lap - and I felt I got that, so I am very happy."

Max Verstappen was fifth for Red Bull, Lando Norris qualified sixth in the second McLaren ahead of Daniel Ricciardo of Renault, Lance Stroll in the second Racing Point, Alex Albon in the second Red Bull and Pierre Gasly of Alpha Tauri.

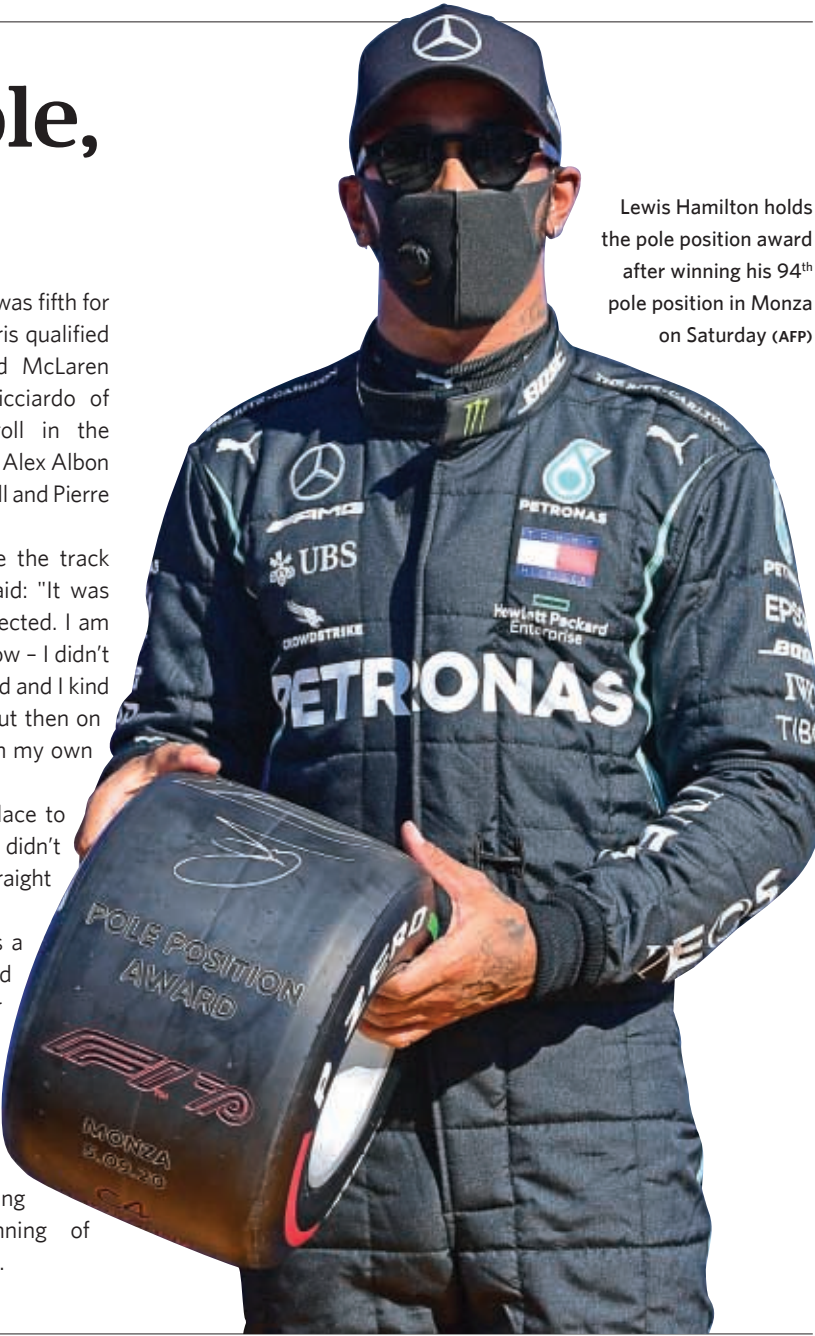
Bottas also broke the track record twice and said: "It was really close as I expected. I am not sure about the tow - I didn't have any until the end and I kind of felt the benefit, but then on the final lap I was on my own again.

"It was a good place to be, but obviously we didn't get any gains in a straight line."

Sainz said: "I was a bit nervy, but I needed a final strong corner so I risked the lot and went for it."

This was Hamilton's 68th pole as a Mercedes driver in the first qualifying following the banning of engine 'party modes'.

AFP



Lewis Hamilton holds the pole position award after winning his 94th pole position in Monza on Saturday (AFP)



AMAZON TO ADD 10,000 JOBS
Amazon plans to add 10,000 permanent jobs to a suburb of the west coast US city of Seattle in the coming years in the growing tech behemoth's latest expansion near its headquarters

BUSINESS

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COVID-19 impact: GCC banks report lowest profits since 2012

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic, that is being felt across sectors in the GCC has resulted in historic declines in corporate profits. The GCC banking sector is no exception as the sector reported its lowest quarterly profits since 2012.

The GCC banking sector's total net profits in the second quarter of 2020 came at US\$4.3bn (excluding Bahraini banks due to lack of quarterly data), a year-on-year decline of 53.2 per cent, according to a sector report released by Kuwait-based Kamco Invest.

Profits during the second quarter were affected by falling revenues for the banking sector in addition to higher loan loss provisions as banks took COVID-19 related provisions. The sharp decline came mainly on the back of a quarterly loss of US\$1.83bn reported by Saudi Arabia's SABB during the second quarter this year on the back of the goodwill impairment charge it took during the quarter. Excluding SABB's losses, profit for the GCC banking sector reached a six-quarter low of US\$6.1bn, Kamco Invest said.

It said the loan loss provisions continued to rise during the second quarter to reach a new re-



Saudi Arabia's SABB reported a loss of US\$1.83bn during the second quarter this year

cent record of US\$4.6bn for the GCC banking sector (excluding Bahraini banks), an increase of 10.3 per cent as compared to the previous quarter. The GCC banking sector has taken total provisions of US\$9.1bn in the first two quarters of 2020 as compared to US\$12.6bn provisions during the full year 2019, the report added.

However, GCC banks continued to show resilient asset growth during the first half of 2020. The total assets grew by 4.3 per cent to reach US\$2.5tn as

of the end of June 2020 as compared to US\$2.4tn at the end of 2019.

Listed banks in Saudi Arabia once again reported the biggest increase in assets during the first half of 2020 with a growth of 7.7 per cent followed by the UAE at five per cent growth. The only exception was Omani banks as they reported an aggregate contraction in balance sheet size by 0.3 per cent in the first half of 2020 to reach US\$77bn, according to Kamco Invest report.

Asset growth in the GCC banking sector was once again supported mainly by Islamic banks that grew assets at 7.2 per cent during the January-June period of 2020 as compared to 3.4 per cent for conventional banks.

As per the report, GCC banks showed continued growth in lending with both gross loans and net loans showing growth since the start of the year. Gross loans (excluding Kuwaiti banks) increased by 3.5 per cent during the first half of 2020 to

US\$1.38tn, while net loans (including Kuwaiti banks) also increased by 3.5 per cent to US\$1.49tn as of June 30, 2020.

Saudi Arabian banks reported the biggest increase in net loans at 7.2 per cent followed by Kuwaiti banks at 3.8 per cent growth in the first half of 2020.

Customer deposits also reported growth of 4.6 per cent during the first half of 2020 to reach US\$1.87tn, resulting in an aggregate loan-to-deposit ratio of 79.7 per cent for the GCC banking sector.

OPEC postpones 60th anniversary celebrations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The celebrations of OPEC's 60th anniversary, which were originally scheduled this month in Baghdad, Iraq where the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries was founded, have been postponed.

Ihsan Abdul Jabbar Ismaeel, Iraq's Oil Minister and head of its delegation to OPEC, said in a letter to Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo, OPEC's secretary-general, that it is 'genuinely disappointing not to be able to host the 60th anniversary' following months of preparations for the historic event.

"The health and safety of all are of utmost importance," the minister emphasised, according to a press statement on the OPEC website.

The OPEC secretary-general expressed his sincere gratitude for Iraq's gracious initiative to host OPEC's Diamond Anniversary in the Al-Shaab Hall in Bab Al-Muaadham, Baghdad, the site of OPEC's founding in 1960.

"It is very unfortunate that we are unable to mark OPEC's Diamond Anniversary in September at the same site where the historic 'Baghdad Conference' was held between 10 and 14 September 1960. It was a historic meeting in all senses that saw the common vision and wisdom of



our founder members and led to the creation of a foresighted organization that grew in stature and influence to become a distinguished entity within the global energy community," Barkindo said.

"Yet we look forward with high anticipation to attend OPEC's homecoming in the very near future," he added.

OPEC is an intergovernmental organisation that was established on 14 September 1960 in Baghdad by its five founder members: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. Its membership has grown since then to 13 oil-producing countries.

This month, OPEC is also marking the 55th year since the organisation's secretariat moved to the Austrian capital of Vienna.

US sanctions Chinese, UAE and Iranian firms

Washington, US - The US on Thursday imposed sanctions against 11 Iranian, Chinese, and UAE firms accused of helping to bypass the American embargo on Iran's oil exports.

'Iran must stop exploiting its natural resources to fund terror and destruction across the region,' US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned in a tweet.

It was the latest in a series of sanctions that Washington has slapped on foreign companies doing business with Tehran.

US President Donald Trump in 2018 pulled out of the international agreement signed with the country to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons, which he said was ineffective, and immediately re-established and tightened US sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

The US State Department imposed punitive measures on

Iran-based Abadan Refining Company, three China-based companies (Zhihang Ship Management CO Ltd, New Far International Logistics LLC, Sino Energy Shipping Ltd), and another based in the UAE (Chemtrans Petrochemicals Trading LLC). Three executives from Abadan, New Far, and Sino Energy were also targeted.

Meanwhile, the US Treasury Department has added to its blacklist six firms also based in those countries for doing business with Trilience Petrochemical, a company sanctioned in January. The newly blacklisted companies are the Iranian firms Zagros Petrochemical Company, UAE-based Petrotech FZE, and Trio Energy DMCC, and Chinese firms Jingho Technology Co Ltd, Dynapex Energy Ltd, and Dinrin Ltd, based in Hong Kong. AFP

Abu Dhabi issues \$5bn multi-tranche bond

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi has successfully completed a US\$5bn multi-tranche bond offering, which represents a continuation of Abu Dhabi's commitment to fiscal sustainability.

Underpinned by strong investor appetite, the bonds are priced at historic low yields. The issuance comprises three tranches: A US\$2bn three-year tranche, a US\$1.5bn long ten-year tranche, and a US\$1.5bn 50-year tranche.

The 50-year tranche is the longest term for a bond issued by a GCC sovereign issuer, which underscores Abu Dhabi's robust credit fundamentals and the investors' trust in the emirate's future economic prospects.



ture economic prospects.

As the only AA-rated sovereign issuer by all three global rating agencies in the GCC region, Abu Dhabi's proactive medium-term debt management strategy optimises the capital structure of the emirate and taps into diverse

funding sources, while maintaining the current credit ratings.

The bond issuance was 4.8 times oversubscribed (at peak orderbook), with orders coming from over 60 new accounts and an orderbook which peaked at US\$24bn.

The 50-year bonds were particularly well received by international investors, who accounted for 95 per cent of the final geographical allocation, showcasing trust in Abu Dhabi's ability to deliver sustained, long-term economic growth.

Jassem Mohammed Buatbah al Zaabi, chairman of the Abu Dhabi Department of Finance, said, "The success of this bond issuance, in the midst of the COVID-19 global crisis, demonstrates the robust credit fundamentals and more broadly the strength of Abu Dhabi's economy. The 50-year tranche is a first for not just Abu Dhabi but also for the GCC, and a reflection

of formidable investor confidence in our economy, credit strength and long-term outlook."

The proceeds of the bond issuance will allow Abu Dhabi to focus on sustaining pronounced non-hydrocarbon sector expansion as the emirate continues to diversify its sources of funding.

The tranches achieved unprecedented pricing at 0.83 per cent for three-year bonds, 1.732 per cent for ten-year bonds, and at 2.7 per cent the 50-year notes. Citi, Deutsche Bank, First Abu Dhabi Bank, Morgan Stanley, and Standard Chartered were joint lead managers and joint bookrunners. WAM

Major oil producers affirm commitment to renewables

Hannover, Germany - Ministers from the UAE, the Russian Federation, and Indonesia, three of the world's major fossil fuel exporters, discussed efforts to diversify their economies and shift towards a green economy at the #GMIS2020 Virtual Summit, which took place from Friday to Saturday.

The Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit (GMIS) is a joint initiative by the United Arab Emirates and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

According to a press release, Suhail Mohamed Faraj al

Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure of the UAE, said the UAE took a long-term approach to energy planning and tackling climate change, with green energy expected to provide half the country's energy by 2050.

"In 2017 we looked at our options from energy sources and we looked at the targets and how we can make our cities among the world's most liveable in the future," he said. "And by 2050, we plan to shift from 100 per cent reliance on natural gas in 2017 to produce 50 per cent from green forms of energy."

Solar will become the domi-



UAE's Energy Minister Suhail Mohamed Faraj al Mazrouei

nant contributor in the UAE energy mix with a 44 per cent share which will cut CO₂ emissions by 70 per cent and produce savings of US\$190bn versus natural gas. The UAE is also the first country in the Middle East to develop nuclear power, with the first of four reactors at the Barakah nuclear power now online. Nuclear will provide 24 per cent of the country's power when all four reactors are eventually commissioned.

Mazrouei said that addressing climate change had become even more important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic because environmental factors

are a contributor to better health and the UAE is targeting cleaner cities in terms of CO₂ emissions.

Alexander Novak, Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation, spoke of the need to reduce dependency on carbon-based energies.

He said, "The time is now. The structure of our energy balance is changing. The pandemic has influenced consumer behaviour but it was already changing. Demand for oil is falling at the moment and there's a larger portion of non-carbon sources in the energy mix. Now hydrocarbons account for 85 per cent of that mix,

but it needs to reduce to 74 per cent by 2040 and we're seeing an investment increase of five per cent in green and renewable energy sources compared to last year."

Novak said Russia is making steady progress towards developing renewable energy, having launched a programme in 2014 with the target of adding 6,000MW over a ten-year period to 2024 supported by government subsidies.

Currently natural gas provides just under half of Russia's energy production, with nuclear and hydroelectric power providing almost 20 per cent each.

Pharma chiefs vow no 'cut corners' in their coronavirus vaccine race

Geneva, Switzerland - Pharmaceutical company executives have insisted that they would not try to bring COVID-19 vaccines or treatments to market that did not meet rigorous safety and efficiency standards.

Across the world, governments are hoping to announce a vaccine as soon as possible and roll out treatments for the novel coronavirus, which has killed more than 860,000 people and infected over 26mn.

But the sense of urgency has raised fears that companies and regulators might rush through testing meant to ensure that vaccines or treatments can be used safely and will actually be effective against the disease.

"We will not cut corners," Pfizer chief Albert Bourla told reporters in a virtual briefing.

Pfizer and its partner BioNTech hope to wrap up final-stage Phase III trials of their COVID-19 vaccine candidate as early as next month.

Several other top pharmaceutical executives in the briefing, hosted by the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA), also committed to upholding stringent standards for safety and efficiency before

requesting authorisation for new coronavirus vaccines or treatments.

Will not sacrifice safety

Before taking such products to regulators, 'we first meet our own standards for safety and efficacy, which are high', said Dave Ricks, head of Eli Lilly.

"We will not sacrifice safety under any set of circumstances," agreed Merck chief executive Kenneth Frazier.

Their comments came a day after it was revealed that Washington has urged US states to get ready for a potential COVID-19 vaccine rollout by November 1, sparking concerns President Donald Trump's administration is rushing to begin distributing a vaccine before the November 3 elections.

Under normal procedures, test administrators must wait for months or years to verify that vaccine candidates work and are safe.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) however has raised the possibility that a vaccine might be given emergency authorisation before the end of trials.

The FDA has faced allegations



A woman walks inside the Research Centers of America in Hollywood, Florida, US on August 13 (AFP)

from the medical community, which it has denied, that it is bowing to political pressure from Trump, who is trailing Democratic challenger Joe Biden in the polls.

"I understand also that they are sceptical... because there is so much politicisation [of] the science right now," Pfizer chief Bourla said.

"We will never ourselves sub-

mit for authorisation or approval any vaccine before we feel it is safe and effective," he stressed.

Bourla told journalists that more than 23,000 people were already enrolled in the trial,

across 125 sites mainly in the United States and Brazil and that the companies expected to reach the necessary 30,000 participants 'in a few days'.

He expected by the end of

October 'to be able to have enough events to say if the programme works or not'.

Daniel O'Day, head of Gilead, insisted that the process of obtaining an emergency use authorisation is no easy feat, pointing to his company's experience obtaining one for its antiviral drug remdesivir, which has been shown to be effective in treating COVID-19. "It is a very thorough process," he noted.

Severin Schwan, head of Roche, said the industry had demonstrated its commitment to transparency in the data and was dedicated to keeping testing standards high despite pressure for results.

He pointed to his company's disappointing findings that its arthritis drug tocilizumab - sold under the brand name Actemra - was not by itself an effective treatment for COVID-19, as anecdotal evidence had suggested.

"There is no way that we can lower the standards in conducting our trials," he said, adding that the Actemra trials 'demonstrate the very point'.

Roche is still testing whether Actemra could be effective when combined with other drugs, including Gilead's remdesivir.

AFP



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (front) walks with workers during his visit to the Solihull Interchange construction site for the HS2 high-speed railway project, near Birmingham, UK on Friday (AFP)

Britain begins work on new high-speed railway project

London, UK - Britain on Friday formally began building HS2, its new high-speed railway set to deliver thousands of jobs to the country's virus-ravaged economy.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the project - which is to cost more than £100bn funded mostly by the state - will play a part in helping the country get back on its feet following the pandemic.

Prior to the virus outbreak, Johnson saw HS2 as a key infrastructure project aimed at helping drive Britain's post-Brexit economy.

"HS2 is at the heart of our plans to build back better (following the pandemic) and with construction now formally underway, it's set to create around 22,000 new jobs," Johnson said in a statement on Friday.

The start of construction comes amid huge financial losses for Britain's rail sector as office workers shun public transport to work from home during the virus outbreak.

Despite this, Johnson later told an event to mark the start of building works that he has 'absolutely no doubt that mass trans-

port infrastructure is going to be crucial for our country, not just now, but in the decades ahead'.

HS2, while quickening train journeys between London in southeast England and major cities in the north, will also ease pressure on existing lines and possibly help rebalance a UK economy that is heavily centred on the capital.

"As the spine of our country's transport network, the project will be vital in boosting connectivity between our towns and cities," Johnson said.

AFP

France sees digital tax solution in 2021

Paris, France - French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire forecast on Friday there would be a European solution next year on taxing digital giants should global talks at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) hit a wall.

After months of technical talks, 137 countries met in January under the auspices of the OECD to negotiate a deal on how to tax multinational tech firms.

Big EU countries say the so-called GAFA group - Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon - unfairly exploits tax rules that let them declare profits in low-tax havens, depriving other governments of their share.

France, Britain, Spain, Italy and others have imposed taxes on the largest digital firms but officials in Washington say that amounts to discrimination against US firms.

On Friday, Le Maire said, "If there is no OECD agreement we shall have a European solution during 2021."

"On the European level there is total mobilisation, notably with European (Economy) Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni," Le Maire said. He noted a 'reticence above all in the US' on the issue but said opposition was falling away in EU states.

AFP

US job cuts surged 231% in 2020

Washington, US - US job cuts so far this year surged 231 per cent compared to the same period of 2019 as the coronavirus wreaked havoc on the once-healthy economy, according to a new report.

Though the pace of announced layoffs is slowing, the number of job cuts announced by US-based employers through August already surpassed the previous full-year record set in 2001, according to outplacement and coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

The data are the latest indication of the awful employment situation facing many American workers as the country weathers the world's worst coronavirus outbreak.

All told, employers have announced nearly 2mn cuts this year, and COVID-19 was cited as



Workers are seen on a construction site in Miami, US on Friday (AFP)

the reason for more than half.

"The leading sector for job cuts last month was transportation, as airlines begin to make staffing decisions in the wake of decreased travel and uncertain federal intervention," said Andrew Challenger, the firm's

senior vice president.

"An increasing number of companies that initially had temporary job cuts or furloughs are now making them permanent."

Airlines have been badly hit by a slump in passenger demand caused by the pandemic, and

transportation has cut 131,571 jobs this year, nearly 500 per cent higher than 2019, the report said. And that was before United Airlines on Wednesday announced another 16,000 layoffs in October.

The Labor Department later Thursday is set to announce the tally of new claims for unemployment benefits filed last week, a metric that saw an unprecedented spike starting in March when business shutdowns to stop the virus's spread began.

Around 27mn people continue to receive some form of government unemployment assistance, according to the latest Labor Department data, and the Challenger reports shed further lights on the grim hiring situation in the world's largest economy.

AFP

GM and Honda announce North America car alliance

New York, US - General Motors (GM) and Honda announced on Thursday they were establishing a strategic alliance in North America to share vehicle platforms and development costs.

The venture builds on existing partnerships on electric cars and fuel cell systems and comes as automakers face pressure to develop autonomous driving and other envelope-pushing technologies amid uncertain vehicle demand in the wake of the economic downturn due to the coronavirus.

A joint press release said the venture would save money from shared vehicle platforms and propulsion systems, joint purchasing, and shared research and development spending.

GM's US rival Ford has teamed up with German giant Volkswagen to jointly develop electric and self-driving vehicles, and a pending merger between Fiat Chrysler and Peugeot also



aims to hold costs down.

Morningstar analyst David Whiston said there few details offered on the extent of the financial savings to either firm, but that 'the alliance can make sense' if Honda makes headway in some of the truck segments where it lags and GM benefits from Honda's expertise with smaller cars.

"We see the agreement as a low-risk and potentially high-reward move for both firms, and their prior history lowers the risk of tension and poor cooperation," Whiston said.

AFP

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Australia arrests scores after 'Freedom Day' protests against lockdown

Melbourne, Australia - Over a dozen anti-lockdown protesters were arrested on Saturday in Melbourne, as those deliberately flouting stay-at-home orders clashed with Australian police.

Ignoring official warnings and public health orders, several hundred people gathered at an illegal protest - promoted by several virus related conspiracy theory groups online - calling for an end to lockdown measures.

A huge police presence responded, arresting 17 as the crowd chanted 'freedom' and 'scam' towards lines of officers who repeatedly attempted to move people on.

Two protesters were seen raising their arms in a Nazi salute at officers and yelling 'Heil Dan', comparing the state of Victoria's premier Daniel Andrews to Adolf Hitler, while standing on the forecourt of the Shrine of Remembrance - a war memorial which partly commemorates Australians killed fighting in World War II.

Demonstrators moved to a nearby park before being sur-



A protester confronts police at the Shrine of Remembrance during an anti-lockdown rally, in Melbourne on Saturday (AFP)

rounded by police and eventually dispersing.

Officers said they issued 160 fines for breaching health orders and were expecting to hand out

more in coming days.

Several attendees told AFP they were protesting the government's response to the pandemic, which has killed more

than 865,000 people around the world, labelling it overblown or an outright 'scam'.

"We are in a city where the cure from Daniel Andrews is actually worse than what's happening," protester Fiona Kat said.

The 'Freedom Day' events were largely promoted by several loosely-connected groups online that espouse anti-vaccination and virus related conspiracy theories.

Rallies were also held around the country, with 14 people arrested at protests in Sydney and Byron Bay.

Despite Victoria's second wave, Australia has dealt relatively well with the virus allowing the rest of the country to roll back restrictions.

The nation has recorded over 26,200 cases and 748 deaths in a population of 25mn.

Before the protest, Victorian premier Andrews told people to stay home and warned the gathering could jeopardise a path out of lockdown, which is expected to be outlined on Sunday.

AFP

Iraq warns it may lose control after rise in cases

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq on Friday recorded its highest single-day rise in Covid-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, prompting authorities to warn hospitals may 'lose control' in the coming days.

According to the Iraqi Health Ministry, 5,036 new coronavirus infections were confirmed on Friday, bringing the total number of cases across the country to 252,075, of which 191,368 had recovered, but 7,359 had died.

The Health Ministry attributed the spike to recent 'large gatherings' that took place without recommended safety measures, including mask-wearing or social distancing.

That included the marking on August 30 of Ashura, a major day of mourning that commemorates the killing of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Hussein in 680CE.

On that day, tens of thousands of Shiites converged on the holy city of Karbala in southern Iraq.

Karbala's authorities introduced new measures to stem the spread of the virus, including restricting access to areas of worship and widespread spraying of disinfectants.

But the Health Ministry warned the measures weren't enough.

AFP



This file photo shows Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (right) welcoming IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano, in Tehran on August 26 (AFP)

IAEA team gains access to one of Iran sites

Vienna, Austria - The UN's nuclear watchdog said on Friday that Iran had granted its inspectors access to one of two sites where undeclared nuclear activity may have taken place in the early 2000s.

'Iran provided Agency inspectors access to the location to take environmental samples,' an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report seen by AFP said.

'The samples will be analysed by laboratories that are part of the Agency's network,' it added.

One diplomatic source told AFP the results of this analysis could take up to three months.

An inspection at the second

site will take place 'later in September 2020', the report said.

Iran had denied the agency access earlier this year, prompting the IAEA's board of governors to pass a resolution in June urging Tehran to comply with its requests. Tehran announced last week it would allow the IAEA access to the two sites, following a visit by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi.

In a separate report also issued on Friday, the IAEA said Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium now stands at more than ten times the limit set down in a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

AFP

India 3rd country to pass 4mn cases

New Delhi, India - India has become the world's third country to pass four million coronavirus infections, setting a new record daily surge in cases on Saturday as the crisis shows no sign of peaking.

The 86,432 new cases took India to 4,023,179 infections, third behind the United States which has more than 6.3mn and just trailing Brazil on 4.1mn.

While the government has eased restrictions in a bid to re-



A worker demonstrates how to use a no-contact travel card reader at a metro station, in the southern Indian city of Chennai on Saturday (AFP)

vive the economy, India now has the world's fastest growing number of cases at more than 80,000 a day and the highest

daily death toll at more than 1,000. The country's caseload has gone from three to 4mn in just 13 days, faster than the

United States and Brazil.

The pandemic is now spreading through rural areas which have poor health facilities but is also resurging in big cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

Maharashtra state, which includes Mumbai, has been at the centre of the crisis in India since a nationwide lockdown was imposed in March.

It still accounts for nearly a quarter of the new daily cases across the country of 1.3bn.

AFP

Hopes fade for Beirut blast survivors

Beirut, Lebanon - Rescue teams kept up their search for survivors in Beirut on Saturday even as hopes raised by sensor readings of a pulse beneath the rubble of last month's blast began to fade.

The cataclysmic August 4 explosion in the port of Beirut killed at least 191 people, making it Lebanon's deadliest peacetime disaster. One month on, seven people are still listed as missing.

On Wednesday night, a sniffer dog deployed by Chilean rescuers detected a scent beneath a collapsed building in the heavily

damaged Gemmayzeh neighbourhood adjacent to the port.

High-tech sensors confirmed an apparent heartbeat and, a full month after the August 4 blast, rescue teams took up the search.

But despite removing piles of masonry, they have yet to find the source of the sensor reading.

"Search operations have been going on since the day before yesterday but the chances are very low," the civil defence agency's operations director, George Abou Moussa, told AFP.

AFP

Climate activists disrupt UK newspaper deliveries

London, UK - Climate change protesters in Britain blockaded two newspaper printing sites early on Saturday, disrupting the distribution of titles including *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun*.

Activist group Extinction Rebellion (XR) said it targeted both the plants, just north of London and near Liverpool in northwest England, 'to expose the failure of these corporations to accurately report on the climate and ecological emergency'.

Dozens of demonstrators arrived at the sites late on Friday and used vehicles and other ob-

stacles to block roads outside, with police making 13 arrests overnight.

XR said in a statement it was aiming to disrupt newspapers that are part of News Corp., controlled by Rupert Murdoch's family, as well as rightwing titles *The Daily Mail* and *The London Evening Standard*. 'The groups are using disruption and their consistent manipulation of the truth to suit their own personal and political agendas,' it added.

Newsprinters, the firm which owns and runs the presses, said printing had been transferred to other sites and apologised to



A handout photo released by Extinction Rebellion on Saturday, shows their members blocking the entrance to the News Corporation's printing office at Broxbourne, north of London on Friday (AFP)

customers 'due to late deliveries'.

"This attack on all of the free press impacted many workers going about their jobs," a spokeswoman said.

"Overnight print workers, delivery drivers, wholesale workers and retail newsagents have faced delays and financial penalty," she added, noting it was 'a matter for the police' and government.

The Times apologised to readers unable to buy the newspaper and said on Twitter it was 'working to get newspapers delivered to retailers as soon as possible'.

Interior Minister Priti Patel hit out at the protests. 'This morning

people across the country will be prevented from reading their newspaper because of the actions of Extinction Rebellion,' she said on Twitter.

'This attack on our free press, society and democracy is completely unacceptable.'

XR kicked off ten days of renewed demonstrations across the country on Tuesday, targeting Westminster and several other sites so far this week. Police have been taking a tougher approach towards the group as it stages its third major wave of UK demonstrations in a year.

AFP

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Russia defies sanctions threat over Alexei Navalny poisoning

Moscow, Russia - Russia defied threats of new sanctions over the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, as US President Donald Trump said on Friday he had not yet seen proof that the Kremlin critic was a victim of Moscow's Novichok programme.

A new crisis in ties between Russia and the West broke out after Germany said this week there was 'unequivocal evidence' that President Vladimir Putin's top foe had been poisoned using the Soviet-era nerve agent.

Western leaders and many Russians have expressed horror at what Navalny's allies say is the first known use of chemical weapons against a high-profile opposition leader on Russian soil.

The 44 year old lawyer fell ill on a Siberian flight last month and was evacuated to Germany for treatment. He has been in an artificially induced coma for the past two weeks.

The Kremlin again denied responsibility for the attack on Friday. "A whole number of theories including poisoning were considered from the very first days," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "According to our doctors, this theory has not been proved."

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Germany's Justice Ministry had so far failed to share any findings with Moscow's



This file photo shows Alexander Murakhovsky (centre), chief doctor at Omsk Emergency Hospital No 1 where Alexei Navalny was admitted after he fell ill in what his spokeswoman said was a suspected poisoning, speaks to the media in Omsk, Russia on August 21 (AFP)

prosecutors, adding that Russian authorities had 'nothing to hide'.

Trump said Friday he had yet to see proof from Berlin that Navalny had been poisoned. "I don't know exactly what happened. I think it's tragic, it's terri-

ble, it shouldn't happen," the President told the media.

'Stress and dieting'

Over the past few days, pro-Kremlin figures have wheeled out a number of eyebrow-raising

theories, including that Navalny might have been poisoned by Germans in Berlin or even have poisoned himself.

On Friday, a toxicologist claimed the opposition politician's health could have deterior-

ated due to dieting, stress or fatigue, insisting no poison had been found in his samples in the Siberian city of Omsk.

"Any external factors could have triggered a sudden deterioration. Even a simple lack of

breakfast," said the chief toxicologist for the Omsk region, Alexander Sabayev.

On Thursday, Belarusian strongman Alexander Lukashenko also muddled the waters, claiming his security forces had intercepted German calls showing Navalny's poisoning had been faked.

Russia has in the past denied responsibility for a 2018 Novichok attack on former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in England, as well as a litany of similar incidents.

In Brussels, NATO called for an international probe into Navalny's poisoning and demanded Moscow reveal details of its Novichok nerve agent programme to the OPCW global chemical weapons watchdog.

After an emergency meeting of NATO's ruling council, alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg said all members were united in condemning the 'horrific' attack on Navalny.

Germany briefed the other 29 nations on the case and Stoltenberg said there was 'proof beyond doubt' Novichok was used. "The Russian government must fully cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on an impartial international investigation," Stoltenberg said.

AFP

N Korea to punish officials severely

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea has pledged severe punishment for local officials it says failed to protect residents from a typhoon which caused a 'serious incident' with dozens of casualties, the ruling party's newspaper reported.

Typhoon Maysak brought heavy downpours across the country earlier this week, with footage showing a street inundated with water in the eastern port town of Wonsan, Kangwon province.

Saturday's Rodong Sinmun, an official newspaper, reported that leaders had decided to punish 'irresponsible' city and provincial officials for causing 'a serious incident involving dozens of casualties'. The report did not say how many were injured, missing or dead.

The officials failed to 'immediately organise a project to thoroughly identify properties at risk and evacuate all residents' despite being ordered by the ruling Workers' Party of Korea headed by leader Kim Jong-Un, it added.

"A decision was made to impose severe party, administrative, and legal punishment to those responsible for the casualties."

Maysak also hit the South, killing at least two people. More than 2,200 people were evacuated to temporary shelters in the southern city of Busan.

AFP



A man walks past a poster, depicting portraits of Indian soldiers killed in a hand-to-hand fight with their Chinese counterpart on June 15 (AFP)

India, China trade blame over clashes

New Delhi, India - India and China traded blame for rising tensions over their disputed Himalayan border on Saturday following their highest level meeting since a deadly clash in June.

India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart General Wei Fenghe released rival statements accusing each other of inflaming the showdown after talks late on Friday on the sidelines of an international meeting in Moscow. Singh said they had 'frank' discussions on the dispute and the strained relations between the world's two most populous countries.

Their troops have had a number of showdowns since a clash in the Ladakh region on June 15 in which 20 Indian troops died. China has also acknowledged suffering casualties but not given figures. Both sides have since sent tens of thousands of troops to the remote, inhospitable region which sits at an altitude of more than 4,000m.

Singh emphasised that the actions of the Chinese troops, including amassing of large num-

ber of troops, their aggressive behaviour and attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo were in violation of agreements between the neighbours, said an Indian statement.

India wanted to settle the dispute through talks 'but at the same time there should also be no doubt about our determination to protect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity'.

The Chinese minister took a similarly tough line.

"The cause and truth of the current tension on the border between China and India are very clear, and the responsibility lies entirely with India," said General Wei. "China's territory cannot be lost," he added, calling on India to 'strengthen control of frontline forces' and 'refrain from any actions that may cause the situation to heat up'.

Both ministers were at a meeting of the eight nation Shanghai Cooperation Council. India has withdrawn from military manoeuvres organised by the group where its troops would have been alongside Chinese forces.

AFP

Search for ship survivors halted as typhoon nears

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese authorities on Saturday temporarily suspended their search for dozens of missing sailors from a cargo ship that sank in a typhoon, as waves and strong wind caused by an approaching storm hampered the operation.

The Japan coastguard found a second survivor on Friday after the Gulf Livestock 1, which was carrying 6,000 cows and had 43 crew on board, issued a distress call on Wednesday near Amami Oshima island as Typhoon Maysak passed through the area.

Typhoon Haishen, a much stronger storm, is expected to affect Japan from late on Saturday, with winds of up to 290km per hour, making it a 'violent' storm -



People barricade a house before Typhoon Haishen approaches in Kagoshima, Kagoshima prefecture on Saturday (AFP)

the top level on the country's classification scale.

"We resumed our search operation this morning by dispatching an airplane, but it returned without any clues," a local coast-

guard official said. "Now we plan to suspend our entire operation" until Haishen passes over the country, the official told AFP. The storm is scheduled to pass the country on Monday.

A first survivor was found on Wednesday evening, with the body of a second crew member recovered at sea on Friday.

The Philippine Foreign Ministry said the two survivors - both Filipino - had been in contact with their respective families.

The crew was made up of 39 Filipinos, two New Zealanders and two Australians.

The boat, which had experienced engine problems before, had been travelling from Napier in New Zealand to the Chinese port of Tangshan.

Haishen was barreling towards Okinawa in southern Japan Saturday morning and was expected to slightly shift course north towards western Kyushu,

prompting the government to warn residents to prepare.

Satoshi Sugimoto, an official at the meteorological agency, said the latest typhoon could generate high waves as powerful as a tsunami. "It's going to be the last chance to flee" when the agency formally issues a storm warning, Sugimoto said.

Authorities on Minamidaito-jima island instructed some 1,300 residents to evacuate as the storm was expected to hit the remote island, east of Okinawa.

"We urge all of our islanders to be on full alert as winds are getting stronger and expected to be violent," said Hidehito Iha, a local government official.

AFP

Bach the remedy for troubled times, says Chinese pianist Lang Lang

Beijing, China - In times of crisis star Chinese pianist Lang Lang believes music is the best medicine, especially Bach, who he says penned the perfect soundtrack for these pandemic-troubled times more than 250 years ago.

The globe-trotting performer, born in northeastern Shenyang in 1982, became famous playing the great romantic composers and has been 'keeping his hands warm' returning to them in recent months.

But mastery of Bach has been the quest of a lifetime, he says.

"Music is a good remedy in these particular times," he told AFP ahead of the release of his version of the Goldberg Variations on Friday.

"Bach, if we compare him to other great composers, has an even greater healing power."

To tackle the 'Variations' - one of the most difficult pieces in Bach's repertoire due to its great variety of styles - Lang Lang drew



Chinese pianist Lang Lang performing before a ceremony marking the release of his new album of studio recordings and live performances of Johann Sebastian Bach's Goldberg Variations, in Beijing on Friday (AFP)

deep into his past.

The pianist played the 30 Variations 'at the age of 10' and knew them entirely by heart seven years later. "Memorising them wasn't that hard, because I started early."

But 'to be ready... 27 years.

That's the truth,' he said.

"I have been waiting to really get to know the piece better."

With the live entertainment world thrown into disarray by the virus, Lang Lang - a prolific performer who used to give at least 90 concerts a year before the

pandemic - says he has missed playing in front of audiences.

"What I missed the most is the stage," said Lang Lang, adding that he hoped a medical breakthrough could help end the disruption.

"I wait for the vaccine, I get a

shot and I go on a trip."

He has not been entirely absent from his audiences. In April he accompanied Celine Dion, Lady Gaga, Andrea Bocelli and John Legend in a virtual concert celebrating health workers.

And despite his renown on the piano, he said he would not force his children into learning - unlike thousands of Chinese parents whose children learn from a young age.

"If he or she wants to be a pianist, then they have to work and I don't know if I'll be pushing or not," he said. "Certainly I don't want to have a very tough time with my kids." But, he acknowledged, 'you have to work hard, there is no way to escape'.

The album, distributed by Deutsche Grammophon, contains a studio version and a concert version, recorded in March at St Thomas Church in Leipzig, where Johann Sebastian Bach is buried.

AFP

Trump team pushes social media limits as poll looms

While negative campaigning has long been a fixture of US politics, the open use of digitally-altered images in 2020 has tech giants worried

Washington, US - A message saying you ‘won’t be safe’ in Joe Biden’s America. The former vice president shown ‘sleeping’ during a television interview. Biden ‘hiding’ - alone - in his basement.

In three videos featured in social media of President Donald Trump and his team as recently as the past week he sought to close the gap on his Democratic rival. And each was labeled as false or manipulated content by social media giants and fact checkers.

While negative campaigning has long been a fixture of American politics, the open use of digitally-altered images by Trump and other candidates in 2020 has tech giants worried.

Twitter has cracked down by removing or labeling several of the President’s tweets. Facebook, citing the risk of civil unrest, announced on Thursday that it would not allow new political ads on its platform in the last week of the November 3 race.

There remain questions whether such messages - almost impossible to stop once they become viral - are working on voters but a line has already been crossed.

“There’s a long tradition in politics of competing politicians presenting their opponents’ words or beliefs in edited ways, right? That’s part of politics,” Ethan Porter, assistant professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University, told AFP. “On the other hand, the Trump campaign is in part running a campaign entirely detached from reality, in ways that have little to no precedent in American political history.”

Biden’s campaign has yet to receive the same kind of censure as Trump’s.

But can a willingness to manipulate highly visible political ads and videos produce results?

The Real Clear Politics poll average barely changed after the Republican Convention, where Trump ramped up his attacks on Biden who is seven points ahead nationally. But swing states remain a toss-up.

‘One-sided’

“Manipulated media for the most part has been used by the Trump campaign to try and have more, let’s say, ‘tactile-looking’ evidence, for the claims that they’re making. Because there’s not actual evidence,” said Shannon McGregor, an assistant professor at the Hussman School of Journalism and Media, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

It’s similar to the approach used in 2016, but technology has made manipulations easier and more sophisticated.

The Trump campaign accused tech companies of double standards over the Biden videos.

“Big tech is in Joe Biden’s pocket but the liberal coastal

Liberal coastal elites in Silicon Valley are blatantly one-sided when it comes to how they define manipulated media
Samantha Zager

elites in Silicon Valley are blatantly one-sided when it comes to how they define manipulated media,” Samantha Zager, deputy national press secretary, said.

However, McGregor, who studies the role of social media in political processes, said that rather than aiming to attract different constituencies, ‘the rhetoric is really polarising and it’s sort of digging into Trump’s base of supporters and trying to activate them to vote’.

An example came in an August 30 Facebook post by Donald Trump Jr, after the shooting death of Aaron Danielson (39) in Portland.

‘WARNING, HORROR: Antifa Targets And Executes Trump Supporter,’ the President’s eldest son said in his post, which included video that was viewed more than 780,000 times, and liked almost 50,000 times.

A suspect said to be a supporter of the Antifa anti-fascist



US President Donald Trump waves as he arrives for a campaign event at Arnold Palmer Regional Airport in Latrobe, Pennsylvania on Thursday (AFP)

movement was shot and killed on Thursday night as police tried to arrest him.

‘Drinking their Kool-Aid’

The violence in Portland came just before Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg announced the restrictions on political ads, saying misinformation about mail-in voting, and concerns about de-

layed counting of ballots, meant the 2020 election is not business as usual.

Porter said the Trump team is convinced its approach is a winner. “In some ways they seem to have drunk their own Kool-Aid. They believe that their social media use and strategy in 2016 won them the election,” he said.

“It’s not to say he won’t win. It’s just to say that if he does win

I can’t imagine that will be one of the top or most likely causes,” Porter added, maintaining that fact-checking of false information does work.

Cyrus Krohn, who managed digital campaigning for the Republican National Committee ahead of the 2008 election, says this year’s race ‘does appear to be tightening’ and ‘you can attribute that to the fear factor that

the internet is creating’.

That means, he said, that manipulated media are working for the Trump team.

Although the Biden campaign is not ‘as overt’, Krohn said, “There are factions on the left who would like to see the (former) vice president elected that are deploying the same tactics as the official Trump campaign.”

Man tried six times for one crime; charges dropped

Washington, US - US prosecutors dropped charges on Friday against a black man who was tried six times and spent more than 20 years in prison for the same murders.

Curtis Flowers served 23 years for a quadruple murder committed in Mississippi in 1996. He has always maintained his innocence.

The prosecutor in all six trials was ultimately accused last year by the US Supreme Court of trying hard to keep black people off the jury and eventually resigned from the case.

Flowers - who has been sentenced to death four times in the case - was released on bail in December, although another trial was still possible.

But on Friday Mississippi’s attorney general dismissed the charges against him.

‘I am finally free from the injustice that left me locked in a box for 23 years,’ Flowers said in a statement. ‘The day I’ve prayed for is here at last.’

Under US law, a suspect acquitted of a crime cannot be tried again. Still, Flowers was tried six times.

His case became well known in a podcast called ‘In the Dark’.

Each of the convictions and death sentences in the first three trials was overturned by the Mississippi Supreme Court for prosecutorial misconduct. The next two ended in hung juries.

AFP

12 killed in Bangladesh mosque gas explosion

Dhaka, Bangladesh - A suspected gas explosion tore through a Bangladesh mosque killing at least 12 people while dozens suffered life-threatening burns, police said on Saturday.

Worshippers were at Friday evening prayers when the blast sent a ball of flames through the mosque in the central district of Narayanganj, emergency services said. Investigators suspected a spark from an air conditioner - which came on after a power cut - set off the gas. “Leaked gas entered the mosque,” Narayanganj fire chief Abdullah al Arefin said.

“When they shut the windows and doors and switched on the air conditioners there was an electricity spark that led to the explosion inside the mosque.”

AFP

California braces for record-setting heatwave, fires

Los Angeles, US - California is bracing for record-breaking temperatures and dangerous fire weather conditions this Labor Day weekend, with the National Weather Service urging people to limit outdoor activity and to stay hydrated.

“Saturday and Sunday will be about 20 to 30 degrees above normal across the entire area,” Frank Fisher, a NWS meteorologist for the southern part of the state, told AFP.

“By Monday, we should be 10 to 20 degrees above normal ... but still very warm and dangerous outside,” he added.

Fisher said temperatures are expected to peak to 108 degrees Fahrenheit (42.2°C) in the Los Angeles area on Sunday and to 118 Fahrenheit (47.8°C) further inland in Woodland Hills.

Excessive heat warnings



This photo shows people shopping on the boardwalk as many come to the beach to escape the heatwave in Venice Beach, California on Friday (AFP)

through the holiday weekend and possibly beyond have also been issued in other western states including Arizona and Nevada.

The warm temperatures in California come as the state is recovering from another heatwave in mid-August and devastating wildfires that have burned some 1.5mn acres in the last three weeks.

That heatwave also set records, with Death Valley - located near the border with Nevada - recording a high of 130 degrees, one of the hottest temperatures ever measured on Earth with modern instruments.

Weather forecasters said red flag warnings indicating the potential for dangerous fire conditions had been issued in many parts of California for the weekend, notably in the Santa Barbara mountains, north of Los Angeles.

“We have the heat, winds and low humidity,” a perfect cocktail for fires, Fisher said.

“Our big issue with this excessive heat,” he added, “is the fact that it’s a holiday weekend and a lot of people are going out.”

He said the National Weather Service was recommending people refrain from outdoor activities such as hiking and remain indoors during the day.

Once the sun sets, however, evening temperatures are not expected to bring much relief.

‘Warmest nighttimes’

“This is going to be the warmest nighttimes we are going to have in a while,” Fisher said.

“We are looking for temperatures to be in the upper 70s and even upper 80s, the warmest being Saturday night.”

And if you’re expecting to go to a restaurant in the Los Angeles area or other regions, where only outdoor dining is allowed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, you may want to think twice.

“Outdoor dining is not going to work this weekend,” Fisher said.

The situation is not expected to be any better further north - in the Bay Area and beyond - where dangerous hot conditions are also predicted.

“It’s certainly gonna be hot all over,” said Jonathan Garner, a NWS meteorologist for that region. “In areas like Ukiah, the record of 108 degrees could be exceeded by one or two degrees,” he told AFP, referring to a city about 185km north of San Francisco.

AFP



Having to work from home has shone a brighter spotlight on how we find a healthy work-life balance

LESSONS LEARNT BY WORKING FROM HOME

The recent transition to widespread working from home has shown that the experience has been both educational and eye-opening for many. Working at home means learning to cope with distractions, space constraints, managing time with family and learning new skills. And, according to new consumer research, it has also meant reassessing what is most important.

Connecting with loved ones

The most striking survey results show the importance of close relationships. Social distancing has caused many to reassess who is most important to them, and how much they may have taken friends and family for granted. The global health crisis has turned socialising into a more deliberate act. Most homebound people said they felt closer to loved ones than before the outbreak.

Managing work-life balance

For many people, juggling priorities and obligations was difficult even before the switch to remote working. But having to work at home has shone a brighter spotlight on how we cope and find a healthy work-life balance.

Many say they take frequent short breaks to balance work and home responsibilities. Some say they started work earlier and were able to manage schedules better.

Mastering technological challenges

Most people affected by the crisis say they have had to master (or learn from scratch) how to complete their work entirely from home, including the new norm of conducting video conferences from somewhere in their home. Technology has been crucial to this adaptation. Many have discovered a new app or service they say they now can't live without - especially video chat apps that have helped them learn how to communicate better with colleagues and loved ones.

Reevaluating life's priorities

Overall, the experience of working from home has had everyone reassessing what - and who - is most important to them. Among those who said they've discovered new apps, digital services or technology, many said that they were spending significant time using it for family or relationship management.

As a result of spending some more time at home, many have been rethinking their priorities. No matter what your work-from-home experience has been, chances are it's changed one's attitudes about work and family life - and how to balance the two - in ways that will stay long into the future.

(BPT)

BOTTLE ART

Jipsy Mathew, an Indian housewife residing at Ghala, has put her creative instincts to use by transforming used bottles into pieces of art. And, in the bargain, in her own small way, she recycles stuff that otherwise would be discarded.

While most people consign used bottles to the trash bin, Jipsy visualises the beautiful artwork that she could create whenever she confronts an empty bottle. Without any formal training, Jipsy uses the basic knowledge that she gained during her school days to prepare interesting table décor with used bottles.

Most of her creations are prepared in vibrant hues with acrylic paint and simple embellishments like beads and tassels. She has made an entire collection for herself besides making a few pieces for friends and relatives, too.

"This task gives me great joy. Apart from using bottles that would be thrown away, it also enables me to keep my creative instincts alive and spend my spare time fruitfully," says Jipsy, adding that she would be happy to share her skill with anyone who wishes to learn it.

"There are no rules in this art. Your own creativity can guide you to be as creative as possible," she adds.



Jipsy Mathew



TIME FOR BIKING

With things surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic slowly getting back to normal, and parks still being closed, the best bet for children who are longing to hit the outdoors in a big way may be

riding bicycles.

There can be plenty of good reasons for anyone to get outside and ride a bike. Especially during this time of social distancing, bike riding offers the

perfect opportunity to stay away from contact during play and safely enjoy fresh air. And children in different residential localities seem to be making the most of this opportunity.

Benefits of bike riding

It gets children away from digital screens to enjoy fresh air and get plenty of vitamin D.

- It promotes cardiovascular health.
- It builds muscles, while improving balance and coordination.
- It improves mental health by helping reduce anxiety or stress.
- It is good for the environment, offering an emissions-free mode of transportation.
- It helps build self-confidence and relationships with others.

Safety tips

Along with the benefits of biking, it is also important to remember some safety tips which will ultimately make each experience truly enjoyable. Children heading out on their bikes, whether within the compound of a residential complex or on streets in the vicinity of apartment blocks, should follow basic guidelines to protect themselves:

- Always wear a helmet, even for a short trip.
- Be visible by wearing bright clothing and using reflectors
- Always use sunscreen to protect exposed skin from UV rays.
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids.
- Stick to bike paths, rather than riding on the street.
- Obey all traffic laws. Stay alert while riding.
- Don't use headphones that could prevent one from hearing traffic.
- Never use your phone or text while riding.



Photos by Syed Fasaiddin

Living with Art

A PATH TO HAPPINESS

“I cannot imagine my world without art, it is present in every aspect of my life, every single day,” says Sushmita Gupta, a self-taught Indian artist in Muscat, whose home has art oozing out of every space

Hubert Vaz

As she wakes up each morning, she admires the art all around in her home, and when she retires each night, she goes to bed with intricate thoughts about some unfinished work and how she could approach it the next day. For Sushmita

Gupta, a self-taught, self-styled Indian artist, art is something filled in every moment, every breath, every thought, each day.

When you enter her home, in a high rise apartment block in Ghala, the main door seems to announce that you would invariably be walking into an art gallery.

And when you settle into a settee, with colourful cushions, carefully chosen traditional artefacts, and canvasses, neatly installed all over the parlour, you realise that you cannot possibly escape the overwhelming embrace of art. And what follows would be (you guessed right) an artistic conversation.

Sushmita admits that she got down to creating artworks on canvas just about a decade ago, but from her childhood itself, she never spared any empty surface that screamed for her attention, be it a wall, furniture, pottery, even the clothes she wore. “Even now,” she says, “When I view an empty space, I start imagining how it could be artistically transformed and made to come alive, if given a chance.”

The artist, who received much encouragement from a former Indian diplomat in Muscat, who propped up her talent and

egged her to strengthen her passion, as well as organise a group of like-minded individuals, says her journey in art has gone through many waves of change over the past few decades. It often represents the stages in life she has gone through as well as the meaningful encounters she has had with people, events, and issues that always set her mind ticking in search of solace, if not a solution.

Hailing from a family wherein her mother was an artist who surrounded herself with art, and a father who had a penchant for poetry, Sushmita found creative expression for both of those aspects in her work, often writing poetry that complemented some of her artworks. “Usually, I am able to generate happiness through my art. I believe, there is an exterior world and an interior world, and my internal world has been strengthened by the artistic influence of my parents,” she asserts.

Sushmita’s home has art in every corner of every room. Apart from her canvases on display, she also has special table décor, furniture, and various elements of her interiors laid out in a way that seem to conform to a pattern in her own mind. And though her family members (husband, son and daughter) might be a tad put off by the overdose of art within their home, she somehow tries to strike a balance between what pleases her and what would work best for all.

THE OUTCASTES

One of a set of paintings inspired by an ostracised community in an Indian state which made her introspect over the real essence of religion.



HAND-PAINTED SAREES

Toying with varied media, Sushmita has painted a few of her own sarees in vibrant hues and free-hand abstract patterns.



THE SIGNATURE ROBIN

This set of paintings, representing her sister and early stages of her life, include a robin which went on to become a signature of sorts.



COLLAGE FROM ‘THE GENE POOL’

This painting, a collage made from bits of paper, is representative of Sushmita’s own persona that, she says, is a combination of resilience and inner strength.

