

DIALOGUE WITH THE PEOPLE

— HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK MEETS SOME SHAIKHS OF DHOFAR —

MUSCAT: To expand the engagement with the people of Oman, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday conferred with some shaikhs of wilayats of the Governorate of Dhofar at Al Hisn Hall in Al Shati quarter of the Wilayat of Salalah on Tuesday.

In an ambient atmosphere of direct dialogue between the leader and his loyal people, His Majesty Sultan Haitham gave his directives to ensure prosperity and progress of the Sultnate.

This blessed meeting reflects His Majesty the Sultan's keenness to engage with citizens in order to have a close look at their needs and sense the requirements of their respective wilayats. It is an opportunity to listen to their views and proposals about ways to improve development services and enhance the role of government departments tasked with extending these services to different parts of the country within the context of comprehensive and sustainable development plans.

The meeting was attended by His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sport and Youth; His Highness Sayyid Bal'arab bin Haitham al Said, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar; Deputy Governor of Dhofar and walis of of the wilayats in Dhofar.

— ONA



MEETING IS PART
OF DIALOGUE WITH
THE CITIZENS

REVIEW OF
NEEDS AND
REQUIREMENTS
OF THE WILAYATS

INTERACTION
IS TO LISTEN TO
PEOPLE'S VIEWS
ON DEVELOPMENT

TO EXPLORE WAYS
TO STRENGTHEN
THE ROLE OF
GOVERNMENT
AGENCIES

REFLECTS HIS
MAJESTY'S
KEENNESS TO
ENGAGE WITH
CITIZENS



HIS MAJESTY KEEN TO



ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE





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As many around the world look at COVID-19 as the pandemic which stole the joy of life, a section of people may see it as a "blessing in disguise". For them, the virus contributed to reducing marriage costs for many young people and removing the burden of dinner parties and many other things. It helped many new families in economic and social terms and changed the idea of marriages being a hugely costly affair.

This is due to preventing gatherings and closing of wedding halls as part of the government's decisions to limit the spread of coronavirus, which severely affected the shape and nature of life aspects and celebrations. As of now, it infected 90,222 people in the Sultanate and more than 29.3 million people around the world and led to the death of more than 927,000 globally.

There are many Omanis who get married at a much lower cost, where the cost of marriage before the pandemic amounted to thousands of riyals besides the dowry itself.

Not to mention the bride's gifts, dinner parties for the newly-weds' friends and relatives, engagement parties, and henna evenings in some families, where their expenses are almost equal to the whole wedding celebration. But in the time of Corona, with the directive of the competent authorities to limit weddings and close the halls, the expenses have decreased greatly.

Despite what some have promoted in favour of waiting until the end of the pandemic and holding 'the wedding of a lifetime', others called for not to postpone marriage and go ahead with the marriage plans at low costs. These marriages recorded a distinct model for completing marriages with the lowest costs and started already reshaping the prevailing concept of big weddings to family-limited ones.

Mahmoud al Rashidi, a citizen, said: "Now the marriages are taking place without exaggerated costs as a result of the precautionary measures against COVID-19.

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How COVID-19 has changed weddings

This reduced the psychological and material burden and re-focused on the real goal of marriage: raising a family"

Salem Mohammed, another citizen, talked about the importance of rationing the costs that burden the groom and his family and creates a financial load. In some cases, monthly instalments have to be paid by the husbands for years. He added, "I advise those who are getting married soon to care about the most important thing which is the marital relationship, future goals, establishing a family, and not strive to show off all the expenses which don't burden anyone but the husband."

F Ali, newly married, mentioned, "Thanks to the coronavirus, the costly marriage expenses began to decrease, as it prevented gatherings and cut costs of the henna night for the bride. Before Corona it was exaggerated and the amounts could reach thousands of Rials. This made young people avoid or postpone the idea of marriage."

"Also honeymoon was expensive. But with the closure of airports and the imposition of curfews, time is now spent with family at home," she added.

Muhammad al Balushi, a father of a newly-wed, explained, "Coronavirus helped review some matters, including marriage. From my point of view, I see that marriage is one of the things that can't be stopped due to a pandemic. We do not know when it will end. One of the positive things is the reduction in material costs, which was a major obstacle to those who were about to get married. This led to an increase in awareness and acceptance in society. Many individuals have reviewed themselves, rethought about the marriage as a concept and its various aspects."

Al Balushi continued, "Many think that marriage is not complete without an expensive and luxurious ceremony, or in the presence of a large number of people indicates generosity, all of which is not a criterion for achieving happiness."

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#Living_with_COVID19

Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature postponed till further notice

MUSCAT: In view of prevailing exceptional conditions resulting from the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the Sultanate, the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Sciences has postponed the 9th round of “Sultan Qaboos Award

for Culture, Arts and Literature” till further notice. The award, which was founded by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimour, celebrates feats of top performers in the fields of culture, arts and sciences. It has

reaffirmed the historical role of the Sultanate in consolidating cultural awareness, being the most important cycle in civilisational advancement of mankind, which reflects in supporting intellectuals, artists and men of letters.

The annual award is held in rotation across the local and regional arenas, so that it is exclusively dedicated to Omani contestants one year and becomes open for contestants from the whole Arab world in the subsequent year. — ONA



Oman ranks 3rd best GCC state in awarding projects

KUWAIT: The Sultanate won third place at the level of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the field of awarding contracts of projects in August 2020, according to a report issued by MEED and published by *Al-Anba* daily of Kuwait.

(\$720 million and \$617 million, respectively) while Oman and Bahrain ranked 3rd and 4th by awarding contracts worth \$428 million and \$282 million, respectively. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait took 5th and 6th places by awarding contracts worth \$158 million and \$72 million, respectively. MEED pointed out that MENA region saw the highest rate of contract awarding activities during August,

when \$6.6 million-worth of contracts were awarded since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. To highlight this topic, MEED gave an exclusive interview to the most senior project delivery executive in The Red Sea Development Company, Ian Williamson. Williamson reaffirmed that his company envisages awarding \$933 million-worth of new contracts by the end of

this year. He pointed out that the main sectors targeted in the company's tenders include designing, hotel construction and staff accommodations. Red Sea Development Company looks forward to establishing partnership between public and private sectors by carrying out projects associated with facilities, in addition to a 1-km-long flyover and an airport lounge. — ONA

INTOSAI capacity building panel reviews performance

MUSCAT: The State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI) took part in the steering committee meeting of the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Capacity Building Committee (CBC). The meeting was convened through video-conferencing with the participation of the member SAIs. A number of topics were discussed during the virtual meeting, relevant to the committee's work, such as: a report presented by CBC Chair and outcomes of CBC June 2020 thematic webinars, revision of SAI Performance Measurement Framework (SAI PMF) reports relevant to PMF governance, global implementation of the PMF and the SAI PMF Independent Advisory Group report. The virtual meeting also discussed and reviewed the report of the INTOSAI strategic planning process, in addition to the report of the goal chair collaboration of one of the INTOSAI crosscutting priorities. Oman's SAI is chairing the Capacity Building Committee of the Arab Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI) for the period 2020-2023. — ONA

University of Technology and Applied Sciences holds meet

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat held the 31st meeting of the Deans of Student Affairs at GCC universities and higher education institutions. During the virtual meeting, the participants reviewed activities carried out after their 30th meeting, as well as the activities to be organised after the current meeting. They also discussed the external student forums, the 6th student advisory council of GCC universities and higher education institutions, and the cultural and scientific forum for female students. The discussion focused on ways and proposals to resume the programmes and activities of the committee in the light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as reviewing the efforts of the Student Affairs Deanships in the GCC universities to deal with the current circumstances.



The meeting discussed the peculiar experiences in the field of student activities in the GCC countries and ways to develop them. It also discussed the student exchange programme and the importance of highlighting available opportunities between universities. The meeting

supported this approach, which would contribute to raising the level of exchange of experiences between member universities. The current session of the committee was chaired by Salim bin Hamad al Hajri, Acting Director of the Student Services Centre at the university. — ONA

Nurse dies of COVID-19

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Blessy Sam, a 37-year-old staff nurse hailing from the Indian state of Kerala, succumbed to COVID-19 after a month-long battle against the pandemic in Royal Hospital on Tuesday. Her death marks the first such case among frontline public health staff in the country. Earlier, a doctor who ran a private health clinic in Muscat had died of the coronavirus. She is survived by her husband Sam George and children Kezia Sam and Kevin Sam, class 6 and class 2 students of Indian School Wadi Kabir

Her family would remember her as a brave warrior who lost her life while on duty. “Blessy was passionate about caring for the ailing, those who suffer from pain and had a special affection for children,” remembered her husband George who runs his business in Wadi Kabir. “She knew she was going to attend to the coronavirus patients but was not hesitant to discharge her duties as a nurse.”

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, and MoH staff praised the selfless work by Blessy and expressed their condolences to the bereaved family. “With great sadness and sorrow, the Ministry of Health mourns the passing away of nurse Blessy Thomas at the Royal Hospital ICU due to COVID-19. This is the first death among health workers in MoH. The deceased was a true hero and a role model of hard and sincere work. The Minister of Health, as well as the MoH personnel and all health workers in Oman express their heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased,” the MoH said in a statement.

Blessy, who hails from Adoor in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala and a member of the Thiruvalla Vennikkulam Kumbholil family, has always been duty-bound and worked without fear facing death, her colleagues fondly remembered. “Blessy was with us in the Paediatric ward and she was transferred to COVID-19 ward in Royal Hospital. She returned to Sinaw to work in the COVID-19 ward at the hospital,” Varun, her colleague remembered. Blessy was admitted after testing positive for COVID-19 but later discharged after recuperating from the



Blessy's death marks the first such case among frontline public health staff in the Sultanate

infection. Later she was admitted to Ibra hospital followed by Royal Hospital where she breathed her last in the intensive care unit. Many took to social media to express condolences to the family of the deceased. They also praised the health workers as true warriors and angels. “When I see doctors, nurses, lab technicians and other hospital staff tirelessly take care of patients, I am so grateful,” a tweet said. At least 7,000 health workers have died around the world after contracting COVID-19. At least 1,320 health workers are confirmed to have died in Mexico alone, the highest known figure for any country, according to Amnesty International. It also recorded high numbers of health worker deaths in the US (1,077) and Brazil (634), where infection and death rates have been high throughout the pandemic, as well as alarming figures in South Africa (240) and India (573), where infection rates have soared in recent months. “There must be global cooperation to ensure all health workers are provided with adequate protective equipment, so they can continue their vital work without risking their own lives,” Amnesty said.

Total cases rise to 90,660

MUSCAT: The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 90,660, while recoveries stood at 84,113, comprising 92.7 per cent. The total number of deaths stood at 797, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry said 62 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total COVID-19 cases in hospital stood at 488, of whom 184 are in intensive care units (ICU). — ONA



PUBLIC PROSECUTION

TENDER NOTICE

The Public Prosecution invites interested companies to the following tender(s):

Tender Number	Description	Deadline for obtaining tender	Deadline for tender submission	GRADE (Group)	Tender document Cost (Non-refundable)
34/2020	IMPLEMENTATION & SUPPORT FOR ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT & RECORD MANAGEMENT AND CORRESPONDENCE SYSTEM (EDRMS).	22/09/2020	19/10/2020	Specialized	25
35/2020	SUPPLY OF FORENSIC EQUIPMENTS	22/09/2020	19/10/2020	Specialized	25

- Companies that are specialized in such works and who have a valid registration certificate from the Tender Board can participate and obtain technical specifications and tender documents from the website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- The bidder shall submit their offers electronically via the mentioned website.
- Each tender shall be accompanied by an electronic copy of the temporary insurance in the form of bank guarantee or check certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate at a rate of (1%) of the value of the bid valid for 90 days from the date of submission. The bidder shall submit the original bank guarantee to the FINANCE DEPARTMENT on the Second floor, in the Oman Public Prosecution Authority, head office in Al Khuwair.
- To help the contestants contact the technical support center at 24166670 and email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om.
- Public Prosecution is not bound to consent the lowest bid or any other tenders.



HRW: ‘Deadly consequences’ of Yemen aid obstruction



Interference by both sides in the war in Yemen is causing obstructions to aid deliveries. Millions will likely suffer as a result, Human Rights Watch warns.

DUBAI: Human Rights Watch warned Monday of “deadly consequences” as a result of the obstruction of aid in war-torn Yemen, where the humanitarian effort has already been badly hit by the coronavirus crisis.

Interference by the government and Ansar Allah fighters has hampered the delivery of aid in the country where the risk of famine looms large, the rights group wrote in a report.

Interviews with 35 humanitarian workers, 10 donor officials and 10 Yemeni health workers revealed a complex web of restrictions that hinder the flow of aid.

Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the Yemen conflict, which the United Nations describes as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

The United Nations warned in July that Yemen was at risk of returning to “the brink of a full-scale famine” as calls intensified for a ceasefire to help combat the novel coronavirus.

Long delays in approving aid projects, obstruction of aid surveys, and efforts to dictate allocation, alongside violence towards aid workers, all frustrated the flow of essentials, the report said.

Aid workers had to “push back” against Ansar Allah fighters who insisted they hand over cars, laptops and mobile phones when projects concluded in 2019 and 2020.

The UN’s World Food Programme last year temporarily suspended deliveries to rebel-held areas

following accusations of “diversion of food”, after which the Ansar Allah fighters dropped a threat to impose a tax on aid.

Obstacles to aid delivery in government-held areas in the south and east were also on the rise, HRW said.

The report also criticised aid agencies for giving in to illegitimate demands, potentially worsening the situation — particularly in Ansar Allah-held areas.

Their actions had “encouraged the authorities to seek ever-greater control... channelling vast amounts of money to clearly corrupt ministries”, HRW said.

The report urged both the government and the Ansar Allah fighters to “immediately lift all unnecessary obstacles” to the delivery of life-saving aid, demand for which has exploded since the coronavirus pandemic.

Yemen has so far recorded more than 2,000 COVID-19 cases, including 583 deaths, but numbers are likely much higher, the UN says.

More than three million Yemenis have been displaced and three-quarters of Yemen’s population of 29 million depend on some form of aid for survival, the UN says.

The UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, Lise Grande, said the UN was alert to the challenges of delivering aid in Yemen.

“For every programme we have underway, we identify the risks to principled delivery,” she said. — AFP

PALESTINIANS PROTEST DEAL



Palestinians take part in a protest against the deal with Israel to normalise relations in Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. – Reuters

Trail of Sudan’s ex-ruler Bashir adjourned to September 22

CAIRO: The trial of Sudan’s deposed strongman Omar al Bashir over his role in the 1989 military coup that brought him to power was adjourned to September 22, the judge said Tuesday.

The brief session, which was broadcast on Sudan TV, saw Bashir and other co-accused appear behind bars in the courtroom crowded with lawyers.

The judge said Tuesday’s hearing was “procedural”, and that requests were being considered to change the courtroom as it was hard to adhere to coronavirus precautions in the packed setting.

“The next session will be next Tuesday, September 22,” the judge said.

The trial, which began on July 21, has been delayed several times already.

If convicted, Bashir and 27 other defendants — including former top ministers — could face the death penalty.

In December, Bashir was convicted of corruption and sentenced to two years in a correctional centre.

Bashir seized power following an Islamist-backed military coup in 1989.

He stayed in power for 30 years before being overthrown on April 11, 2019 after several months of youth-led street demonstrations.



Sudanese chant slogans outside a court during a new trial against ousted President Bashir and some of his former allies outside a courthouse in Khartoum. – Reuters

Bashir is also wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to face charges of genocide and crimes against humanity in the western region of Darfur.

The United Nations estimates 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million displaced in the conflict since 2003.

Sudan’s transitional government have agreed that Bashir would face the ICC.



Sudan ousted President Bashir is seen inside the defendant’s cage at a courthouse in Khartoum. – Reuters

However, an August 31 peace deal with rebel groups includes the commitment to set up a special court for crimes in Darfur, and that Bashir should also stand trial before that.

WORST FLOODS: Sudan has appealed for more aid to combat the impact of catastrophic floods across the country, over which Khartoum has already declared a three-month state of emergency.

— Agencies

Third fire within a week panics residents in central Beirut

BEIRUT: Firefighters in Lebanon’s capital said on Tuesday they put out a fire at a building under construction, in what was the third blaze to hit the city since a massive explosion at the port. The building, located about 1.5 kilometres away from the city’s port in central Beirut, was designed by the renowned late British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid.

Footage shared on social media showed black clouds of smoke billowing off of bright red flames that climbed up the side of the curvaceous building with latticed covering.

AFP reporters at the scene saw firefighters use a crane to aim water hoses at its smouldering facade.

“What was on fire was the insulation that separates the outside from the inside” of the building, a civil defence officer said. “We were able in the fastest time possible to control” the blaze, he said.

It was not immediately clear what caused the fire.

The August 4 explosion at the port, one of the world’s largest non-nuclear blasts ever, killed 190 people, wounded thousands and ravaged building windows and doors in large parts of the city. It was followed by a small fire on Tuesday last week at the port and another huge fire on Thursday at a port warehouse where food aid was stored.

Both the explosion and port fires have revived popular outrage against a political class accused of being inept, corrupt and unable to ensure public safety. Preliminary government findings said sparks from a power saw could have caused Thursday’s blaze, echoing a theory that welding was also behind the August 4 explosion.

On Tuesday, local social media users speculated the cause of the new fire could also be welding.

Theatre director Yahya Jaber on Facebook expressed alarm at what he described as “Beirut’s pre-imagined, pre-designed and pre-welded



Lebanese firefighters douse the flames of a blaze that engulfed a landmark modern building in central Beirut. – AFP

assassination”.

Hadid, who died in 2016 at age 65, was famed for her architectural works of sweeping curves in countries around the world.

She was the first woman to win the prestigious Pritzker Prize for architecture, and best known for her designs for the Guangzhou Opera House in China and the aquatics centre used in the 2012 London Olympics.

“It’s terrible. It’s unbelievable,” said Joe Sayegh, 48, who had been on a jog through the city before coming to the scene. “Every day we have a problem.” Fire trucks quickly doused the flames that charred a corner of the futuristic building designed by the practice set up by the late Zaha Hadid, the renowned British-Iraqi architect.

The building near the seafront which has been under construction for years and its curved lines have become a prominent feature of the central commercial area rebuilt from the 1975-1990 civil war.

During the reconstruction, skyscrapers designed by international architects have gone up and historical Ottoman-era buildings have been renovated. But protests during an economic crisis that was caused by a mountain of debt had already driven many businesses out of the city centre and left many buildings scarred, before the August 4 port blast ruined another swathe of the capital. The government resigned after the port blast, which was blamed on highly explosive ammonium nitrate kept in poor storage conditions for years.

This month, a big port fire flared up among the ruined warehouses, adding to the devastation. France is pressing Lebanon to form a new government to tackle endemic corruption and implement reforms to unlock aid. But many Lebanese remain sceptical that Lebanon’s political elite can chart a new course. “With these people, if they are the same people, nothing will change,” Sayegh said. — Reuters

SOUTH KOREA SAYS NO USE OF N-WEAPONS IN JOINT PLANS WITH US

SEOUL: South Korea said on Tuesday none of its joint military action plans with the United States include any use of nuclear weapons, after a book by a US journalist sparked debate over whether scenarios of a full-blown war with North Korea would entail a nuclear attack from either side.

In his new book, titled "Rage," Washington Post associate editor Bob Woodward wrote that the United States had devised plans for a possible armed clash with North Korea, such as "the US response to an attack that could include the use of 80 nuclear weapons." The book was based on multiple interviews with US President Donald Trump.

The passage fuelled debate in South Korea over whether it meant Washington or Pyongyang would detonate 80 bombs against each other. Seoul's defence ministry said on Tuesday its joint operational plans (OPLAN) with the United States did not include any use of nuclear weapons, reiterating the view of the presidential office.

A presidential official said on Monday there must not be another



South Korean marines take part in a US-South Korea joint landing operation drill as a part of the two countries' annual military training called 'Foil Eagle', in Pohang, South Korea. — Reuters File Photo

war on the peninsula and any use of force cannot be implemented without South Korea's consent.

"I can say clearly that the use of a nuclear weapon does not exist in our OPLANs, and it is impossible

to use military force without our agreement," the official told reporters. Seoul officials say there

A presidential official said there must not be another war on the peninsula and any use of force cannot be implemented without South Korea's consent

appears to be confusion in the book because the OPLAN 5027 it referred to was not designed for nuclear war but to map out troop deployment plans and key targets.

"It might indicate the maximum levels of the bombs the North could resort to in an all-out war, but the number itself is too high and hardly comprehensible in any case without clear contexts," said Kim Hong-kyun, a former South Korea nuclear envoy. After trading insults and nuclear threats that had pushed their countries to the brink of war, US President Donald Trump and North

Korean leader Kim Jong Un held an unprecedented summit in Singapore in 2018.

But negotiations aimed at ending Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes have stalled since their second summit early last year. The two leaders continued to exchange letters, however, often expressing thanks for their previous meetings and at times calling for concessions, the book said.

In an August 2019 letter, Kim urged that South Korea-US military exercises be cancelled or postponed before working-level negotiation. Planned drills, which Pyongyang has called a rehearsal for war, were scaled back later on, and both sides described it as a move to expedite the talks.

"I am clearly offended and I do not want to hide this feeling from you. I am really, very offended," Kim wrote, referring to the exercises. Trump also said during their first summit that he did not want to "remove" Kim, and that North Korea could become "one of the great economic powers" if it abandons weapons programmes, the book said. — Reuters

Pakistani students back in school after more than six months

KARACHI: Millions of students in Pakistan returned to classes on Tuesday after a break of six months, as schools and colleges began to reopen for the first time since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Educational institutes were closed in March as the coronavirus began to spread in Pakistan, but, with daily infection numbers falling, the government last week announced a staggered resumption of classes.

"May God make us successful in this test, and may the loss suffered by the students be compensated," Minister of Education Shafqat Mahmood told reporters in Islamabad. Senior schools were the first to restart, with middle school set to go back next week and primary school the week after. The long closure led to the cancellations of exams and left academic calendars in disarray.

"Studies have been very badly affected," Naseem Akhtar, principal of a girls' school in the port

city of Karachi, said. "We appreciate the decision of the government to open schools from today," Mahmood warned that schools that did not following precautionary measures, including the wearing of masks and social distancing, would be closed. "The safety of these children is in our hands," Karachi teacher Sameera Chaudhry said.

Pakistan has recorded 302,424 cases of the coronavirus and more than 6,300 deaths but daily infections have been slowing from a peak of nearly 7,000, and 118 deaths, in one day in June. On Monday, authorities reported 404 new cases and six deaths.

"Online classes aren't as interesting as real-life classes. In regular classes, when we don't understand something, we can easily ask the teacher to explain," said student Dua Mohammad Saleem. She said she was pleased about the safety rules but some government officials were sceptical, saying younger children will not be able to follow the rules. — Reuters



Students wearing face masks attend a school in Karachi after the educational institutes were reopened after the spread of the coronavirus. — AFP

SCREENING FOR CORONA



Health workers wearing Personal Protective Equipments (PPE) get ready to conduct a COVID-19 Coronavirus screening in Mumbai. — AFP

Calls grow for Myanmar election delay as coronavirus cases spike

YANGON: Opposition parties in Myanmar are calling for November's election to be postponed as the country scrambles to control a coronavirus surge.

New infections are doubling every week — albeit from a relatively low base — and hospitals in the biggest city, Yangon, are overwhelmed in a nation with one of the world's poorest healthcare systems.

The sharp jump comes as Myanmar prepares to hold national elections on November 8, with leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) widely expected to be returned to power.

But calls are growing for the polls to be delayed. The head of the military-aligned opposition Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), Than Htay, said he was "very concerned" about holding the vote during the pandemic.

"The government should not sacrifice the people... If it's not suitable to hold the election, postpone it!"

In a Facebook post, the People's



Workers build new temporary shelters for COVID-19 novel coronavirus related cases in Yangon. — AFP

Pioneer Party also urged a delay to allow the vote to be held "fairly and without chaos".

Local media say at least three other parties are echoing the call.

So far, commercial hub Yangon, capital Naypyidaw and conflict-stricken Rakhine state are all under

lockdown, while domestic flights and long-distance bus routes have ceased.

Neighbours China and Thailand are boosting security on shared borders to try to stymie any spread of the outbreak. The NLD could not be reached for comment.

The Southeast Asian nation of

some 55 million had weathered the epidemic relatively well until late August, with case numbers under 400 and just six deaths.

But in under four weeks infections have steadily spread, jumping to 3,299 cases and 32 deaths by Tuesday.

The virus hotspots are Yangon, a teeming metropolis of over seven million, and northwestern Rakhine state, where fighting between the military and armed rebels has forced some 150,000 from their homes.

Officials are scrambling to provide extra health facilities in Yangon, creating two tented hospitals with hundreds of extra beds.

Several members of Suu Kyi's office have tested positive, but the government confirmed on Tuesday the leader was in "good health".

After detecting several new cases in the Chinese border city of Ruili — separated from Myanmar by a shallow river Officials there said they would crack down on illegal immigrants and promised to test all 210,000 residents.

— Agencies



Sally rumbles towards US Gulf Coast, historic flooding possible



Waves crash along a pier as Hurricane Sally approaches in Gulf Shores, Alabama. — Reuters

GULF SHORES, ALABAMA: Hurricane Sally drew closer to the US Gulf Coast on Tuesday morning, threatening historic floods, the National Hurricane Center said, with more than two feet of rain expected in some areas.

The second strong storm in less than a month to threaten the region, Sally's winds decreased to 85 miles per hour, and early Tuesday was 100 km east of the mouth of the Mississippi River, the NHC said, moving at a glacial pace of two miles per hour.

It could wallop the Mississippi, Alabama and Florida coasts on Tuesday with massive flash flooding and storm surges of up to 9 feet in some spots. Its slow speed recalls 2017's Hurricane Harvey, which brought several feet of rain over a period of days to the Houston area. Samantha Frederickson, who recently moved to Gulf Shores,

Alabama, hit the beach on Tuesday to catch a view of the storm surf.

"At the moment, we're riding it out," she said amid light rains and winds.

"When it gets to the point we don't feel comfortable, we'll take off. Nearly 11,000 homes are at risk of storm surge in the larger coastal cities in Alabama and Mississippi, according to estimates from property data and analytics firm CoreLogic.

Mobile, Alabama Mayor Sandy Stimpson warned residents he expected a "tremendous amount of flooding" and said the city was barricading intersections likely to see high water.

The governors of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana called for evacuations of low-lying areas and President Donald Trump made emergency declarations for all three states, which helps coordinate disaster relief. Ports, schools and businesses closed along the coast.

The governors of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana called for evacuations of low-lying areas and President Trump made emergency declarations for all three states

The US Coast Guard restricted travel on the lower Mississippi River from New Orleans to the Gulf, and closed the ports of Pascagoula and Gulfport, Mississippi, and Mobile. Energy companies buttoned up or halted oil refineries and pulled workers from offshore oil and gas production platforms.

More than a fifth of US offshore oil production was shut. The hurricane is expected to dump between 10 and 20 inches of rain on the coast, with isolated 30-inch downpours. Mississippi appears more likely for landfall, but Sally's biggest threat is that it will be a "rainmaker" across a wide swath of the Gulf Coast, with 3 to 4 inches in areas as far inland as Atlanta, said Jim Foerster, chief meteorologist at DTN, an energy, agriculture and weather data provider.

Sally is the 18th named storm in the Atlantic this year and will be the eighth tropical storm or hurricane to hit the United States - something "very rare if not a record" said Dan Kottowski, senior meteorologist at AccuWeather, noting that accurate data on historic tropical storms can be elusive.

— Reuters



Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny and his family members at Charite hospital in Berlin. — Reuters

Poisoned dissident Navalny to return to Russia

MOSCOW: Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny shared a photograph from a Berlin hospital on Tuesday, sitting up in bed and surrounded by his family, and said he could now breathe independently after being poisoned in Siberia last month.

The photo - the strongest evidence yet of Navalny's advancing recovery after emerging from a coma last week - was swiftly followed by confirmation from his press spokeswoman that he planned to return to Russia. "Hi, this is Navalny. I miss you all," he wrote in the caption to his Instagram followers.

"I can still hardly do anything, but yesterday I could breathe all day on my own. Actually on my own." The leading opponent of President Vladimir Putin, fell violently sick while campaigning on August 20 and was airlifted to Berlin. Germany says laboratory tests in three countries have determined he was poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent, and Western governments have demanded an explanation from Russia. Moscow has called the accusations groundless.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated on Tuesday that Moscow was open to clearing up what happened to Navalny, but needed access to information on

his case from Berlin.

He said Moscow did not understand why, if French and Swedish laboratories had been able to test his medical samples, Russia was not being given the same access.

The case has further strained relations between Russia and the West, already at a post-Cold War low since Moscow's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and the attempted poisoning of a former Russian double agent with the same Novichok nerve agent in England in 2018.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has faced calls to punish Russia by suspending work on Nord Stream 2, a nearly completed pipeline bringing gas from Russia to Germany.

The photograph showed Navalny looking towards the camera, with his wife Yulia supporting him with her arms and their two children looking on. The New York Times on Tuesday quoted a German security official as saying Navalny had spoken to a German prosecutor about the incident and said he planned to return to Russia as soon as he recovered. Confirming the report, Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh wrote on Twitter: "No other options were ever considered." — Reuters

UKRAINE PRESIDENT VISITS AUSTRIA



Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen, first lady Doris Schmidauer, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his wife Olena Zelenska attend a welcoming ceremony in the inner yard of Hofburg Palace, in Vienna. — Reuters

Anger flares up in Ivory Coast over polls

ABIDJAN: Opposition figures reacted angrily on Tuesday after Ivory Coast's top court rejected 40 candidates for upcoming presidential elections, validating the contested bid of head of state Alassane Ouattara but sidelining his predecessor, Laurent Gbagbo.

Tensions in the West African state are running high ahead of the October 31 polls — more than 3,000 people died in post-election violence in 2010-11.

One of the four accepted candidates, former prime minister Pascal Affi Nguessan, said the country was "descending into a spiral

of exclusion", a phenomenon he described as "the most consummate sign of the regime's tyrannical nature."

Nguessan, 67, served under Gbagbo and heads the party he founded, although he is struggling to win over loyalists who want the former president to be their flagbearer.

Gbagbo was forced out by Ouattara after a brief civil war following the elections in 2010 and was then prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of crimes against humanity.

He was released by the ICC in January 2019 and lives in Brussels

pending the outcome of an appeal against the ruling.

But Gbagbo's application for the October 31 elections — submitted in his name by followers — was rejected by the Constitutional Council as he had been sentenced to a 20-year term in absentia last November over the looting of a regional bank during the post-election crisis.

Another notable rejection was an application by former rebel leader turned prime minister Guillaume Soro, 47, who fell out with Ouattara, and had been sentenced to 20-years in absentia over alleged embezzlement.

— AFP

Germany to take in 1,500 refugees from Greek islands

BERLIN: Germany plans to offer refuge to 1,500 migrants currently taking shelter on Greek islands, government sources said Tuesday, as immigration shot up the EU's political agenda again after a huge fire destroyed an overcrowded camp.

Thousands of former occupants of Moria camp on Lesbos island in Greece have been sleeping rough in abandoned buildings, on roadsides and rooftops, after their shelters were destroyed by the blaze on the night of September 8.

Five "young foreign nationals" were arrested in Lesbos in connection with the fire, Civil Protection Minister Michalis Chrysohoidis said according to Greek state news agency ANA.

He added a sixth suspect is believed to be "at large". A local police source, who refused to be named, said that person had already fled the island.

Greek officials have said several times that the fire was started by migrants who faced isolation after testing positive for coronavirus.

With pressure growing on the EU to respond to the humanitarian crisis and help Greece, Berlin joined a European initiative to take in 400 unaccompanied minors from the burn-out camp.

In addition to accepting around 150 of the minors, Germany also plans to welcome families with



Migrants rescued after their boat capsized near the island of Crete rest at the port of Sitia. — AFP

children who have already secured refugee status in Greece but may not be from the Moria camp, according to a plan agreed by Chancellor Angela Merkel and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, government sources said.

The outlines of the plan emerged as German cities and towns urged Berlin to do more.

Five years after the arrival in Europe of over a million asylum seekers, many fleeing war in Iraq and Syria, the question on how the bloc should share out its refugee responsibilities remains a sensitive one.

Opposition from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia over taking on refugees has

been a major stumbling block in the EU's attempt to reform its migration and asylum policies.

Even in Germany, politicians are wary of seeing the same scenes of huge migrant arrivals than in 2015, which the far-right capitalised on to gain a foothold in parliament.

This time round, Merkel's government has repeatedly insisted it is key to find a European solution to the issue rather than going it alone.

European Council chief Charles Michel, in Athens for talks with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, said that the EU must provide a "just, strong and efficient response" to the problem.

— AFP

Japan’s Suga faces tricky call on snap election

YOSHIFUMI TAKEMOTO

As Japan’s next prime minister, Yoshihide Suga will face an early and difficult leadership decision: whether to call a general election before his honeymoon with voters fades or wait and risk seeing ratings slide.

The decision will affect Suga’s chances of holding office beyond the remainder of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s term, which expires next year. A successful early election may also help him gain momentum to push his agenda, including deregulation and smashing bureaucratic silos.

Suga won a ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership poll on Monday, and the party’s parliamentary majority means he is virtually guaranteed to replace Abe, who is resigning after nearly eight years as prime minister because of illness. Suga acknowledged on Monday that the question of timing for a lower house election was a tough call amid worries about the coronavirus and a slumping economy. A poll for the powerful chamber must be held by late October 2021.

A dozen years ago, Taro Aso was expected to call a snap election soon



Yoshihide Suga

A SUCCESSFUL
EARLY ELECTION
MAY HELP HIM
GAIN MOMEN-
TUM TO PUSH
HIS AGENDA

after taking office as premier, while his ratings were relatively high. He waited, his popularity declined and when he called an election in 2009, the LDP lost power for three years. The memory of that trauma lingers, although the LDP’s opposition is far weaker now.

“There’s only a year left, so the timing of when to dissolve the lower house is a vexing problem,” Suga told a news conference after a landslide victory in the party vote. Speculation has swirled that Suga would call a lower house poll for as early as next month. Aso, now finance minister, said on Tuesday an early election should be considered because the Olympic Games will be held in Japan next year. On Monday, Suga sounded cautious, saying his priorities were to end the coronavirus outbreak and revive the economy.

A robust LDP election performance would boost Suga’s chances of winning a full three-year term next year. Long seen as more of a backroom operator than a top leader, Suga’s ratings have jumped since he began running for the LDP post. Some party insiders fear that rise could be short-lived.

“Mr Suga is good at making deals, but he’s not especially talented at answering questions in parliament,” said one LDP senior official, speaking on condition of

anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Scenarios floated for an early election include October 25, November 1 and December 6, which is Suga’s birthday. An early poll would also diminish chances the LDP would lose seats because the newly unified opposition would have less time to prepare.

“Objectively, it is certain that sooner is better for the LDP,” said independent political analyst Atsuo Ito. Abe’s success in leading the LDP to big wins in six national elections — aided by a weak opposition and low turnout — was key to his tenure as Japan’s longest-serving prime minister.

Before Abe, Japan suffered a succession of short-lived leaders. The LDP’s junior coalition partner, the Komeito party, is against an early election, and opinion polls show the public is more focused on steps to fight COVID-19 and reboot the economy than going to the polls. Voter surveys measuring Suga’s popularity after he takes office on Wednesday could guide the decision.

“It’s true calls in the LDP for an early election are growing but Suga is cautious,” said Tomoaki Iwai, a Nihon University professor. “We have to see the opinion polls.” — Reuters

POLITICAL UPHEAVAL

In Mali’s conflict-hit north, the coup seems far away

MAIMOUNA MORO AND
AMAURY HAUCHARD

Malian army lieutenant Abdoul Kadri leads a patrol through the bustling streets of the desert city of Timbuktu, gun by his side.

The concerns of the capital Bamako, still reeling after last month’s military coup that ousted president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, seem far away.

“We go from checkpoint to checkpoint,” Kadri says, explaining that his unit patrols the whole city, which was once a centre of medieval Islamic scholarship.

Kadri’s soldiers patrol in vehicles mounted with high-calibre machine guns — a reminder of the lingering threat of violence in Timbuktu. Since it first broke out in the north in 2012, Mali has struggled to contain a brutal insurgency, which has since spread to central Mali as well as neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. Thousands of civilians and soldiers have died in the conflict, which has also exacted a heavy economic toll on the West African state.

Exasperation over the situation contributed to a wave of protests against Keita, which led up to his ouster the August 18 coup.

The political upheaval has shown few signs of changing facts on the ground, however. Twenty Malian soldiers have been killed since the coup.

Colonel Boubacar Sanogoh, commander of Timbuktu’s military zone, said Mali’s new political reality demanded extra caution.

“We must be vigilant because in such situations, the enemy lurking in the shadows could take advantage of negligence,” he said.

Mali’s military junta on Saturday backed an 18-month transition government, after three days of talks on restoring civilian rule with political officials and civil society figures in Bamako. As the talks were proceeding, junta officers also visited army camps around the country to ensure military unity, an army officer who requested anonymity said.

But beyond Bamako, life in Mali’s turbulent north and centre has changed little. The region’s many farmers, for example, are focused on the rainy season. United Nations bodies and many NGOs in Mali have also worked through the coup without pause.

Jo Scheuer, the head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Mali, said the agency’s activities never stopped.

“The immediate question (after the coup) was whether humanitarian access could be maintained, and that was resolved within days,” he said. The UNDP has warned about the economic impact of the coup, however.

The Economic Community of West African States has shut borders to the Sahel nation of some 19 million people in response to the coup, as well as banning trade.

That move is causing concern in the regional hub of Timbuktu. “Everything comes from outside,” said Baba Djitey Wangara, a city shopkeeper, worried about restrictions.

Timbuktu’s mayor, Aboubacrine Cisse, had similar fears. “These sanctions cause more harm to the people more than to the government itself,” he said. — AFP

The immediate question (after the coup) was whether humanitarian access could be maintained, and that was resolved within days

JO SCHEUER, UNDP

BATTLING THE BLAZES

Blazes in Brazil wetland deliver severe climate warning

JAKE SPRING

A fire has been burning since mid-July in the remote wetlands of west-central Brazil, leaving in its wake a vast charred desolation bigger than New York City. A team of veterinarians, biologists and local guides arrived in late August to prowl the bumpy dirt road known as the Trans-Pantanal Highway in pickup trucks, looking to save what injured animals they could.

Jaguars were wandering the blackened wasteland, they said, starving or going thirsty, with paws burnt to the bone, lungs blackened by smoke. They saw bodies of alligator-like caiman, jaws frozen in silent screams, the last act of creatures desperate to cool off before being consumed by flames.

This massive fire is one of thousands of blazes sweeping the Brazilian Pantanal — the world’s largest wetland — this year in what climate scientists fear could become a new normal, echoing the rise in climate-driven fires from California to Australia.

The Pantanal is smaller and less-known than its famous cousin, the Amazon jungle. But the region’s normally abundant waters and strategic location — sandwiched between the rainforest, Brazil’s vast grasslands and Paraguay’s dry forests — make it a magnet for animals.

The fires are now threatening one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet, biologists say.

The Pantanal is home to roughly 1,200 vertebrate animal species,



A volunteer walks along the Transpantaneira Park Road as he and other volunteers monitor wildfires in the wetlands of the Pantanal, Brazil, on Monday. — AFP

THE FIRES
ARE NOW
THREATENING
ONE OF THE
MOST BIODIVERSE
ECOSYSTEMS
ON THE PLANET,
BIOLOGISTS SAY

including 36 that are threatened with extinction. Across this usually lush landscape of 150,000 square kilometres in Brazil, rare birds flutter and the world’s densest population of jaguars roam. Fire is not new here.

For decades, ranchers have used flames to cheaply return nutrients to the soil and renew pasture for their beef cattle. But those blazes, fuelled by drought, now burn with historic force,

racing across desiccated vegetation.

The biggest fires in the Pantanal this year are quadruple the size of the largest fire in Brazil’s Amazon rainforest, Nasa satellites show.

A record 23,490 square kilometres have burned through September 6 — nearly 16 per cent of the Brazilian Pantanal, according to a Federal University of Rio de Janeiro analysis.

— Reuters



Team Coorg’s Kuttappa bids adieu after memorable stint

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 15

Bellu Kuttappa, one of the founder members of the Team Coorg Muscat hockey team, is bidding adieu to the Sultanate after staying in the country for 35 years.

Oman Hockey Association (OHA) aptly honoured the veteran hockey manager as OHA Chairman Talib al Wahaibi termed him as “one of the early supporters of Oman hockey.”

“Bellu Kuttappa has contributed to the growth of hockey in Oman by forming Team Coorg Muscat and I wish him success in his retired life,” Talib told the *Observer*.

The OHA chief presented a memento to Kuttappa acknowledging his support to Oman hockey during a farewell function organised at the OHA headquarters on Monday.

Kuttappa thanked OHA and the hockey fraternity in the Sultanate for the great support during the past years. “It has been a tremendous journey after me and some of our veteran players from Coorg set up



the team in 2007 with the help of SAS Naqvi, former coach of Oman national team.”

Team Coorg were very active participants in local tournaments namely Renaissance Day Cup, National Day Cup, Indian Independence Day Cup, Indian Republic Day Cup and Dyan Chand



Day Cup, claiming title many times in the events that spread hockey among the community in Muscat.

The tournaments were supported by OHA and Indian Embassy and jointly organised by ‘Friends of Naqvi Group,’ and Team Coorg Muscat.

Hockey’s grand old man, Naqvi said, “Kuttappa is a great friend and

great lover of hockey.”

“Team Coorg are losing a great jewel. Kuttappa’s contributions are worthwhile in organising the local tournaments marking the Oman and Indian national events. He always supports plans to hold tournaments for hockey,” Naqvi said.

Kuttappa said Team Coorg



Muscat had made their mark in the Gulf tournaments also by emerging champions in the Gulf Cup hockey for seven times.

“The Gulf Cup hockey was started 10 years ago between the regional clubs and Team Coorg are champions for the last three times consecutively and overall we have won the title

seven times,” the 60-year-old said.

PROMISING PLAYERS

On his opinion about Oman national hockey players, the veteran hockey manager said they hold lot of promise. “The present bunch of Omani players are really talented and can go further. The team under the current set up of OHA is full of young players with good skills.”

“I am sure these talented youngsters under the guidance of hockey great Tahir Zaman can reach further heights.”

“I feel Oman players will get better and better by participating in more tournaments,” the hockey veteran said in review of his close observation of the game in Oman.

Being spent 35 years in Oman, Kuttappa wishes to provide the glimpses of Coorg’s hockey tradition to some local players.

“My one ambition is to take some players from Oman to Coorg to show them the flavour of hockey in Coorg and its way of life and nature. Coorg has got hockey in its blood,” Kuttappa signed off.

Marin fires Al Ahli into ACL last 16



Al Ahli’s German midfielder Marko Marin runs with the ball. – AFP

DOHA: Former Germany and Chelsea midfielder Marko Marin struck the only goal of the match as Saudi Arabia’s Al Ahli beat Iraq’s Al Shorta to become the first team to qualify for the knockout phase of the Asian Champions League on Monday.

The tournament, which resumed after almost seven months following the outbreak of the new coronavirus pandemic, is being played in the Qatari capital where spectators are barred and players and officials subject to regular testing under strict health protocols.

Two-times runners-up Al Ahli progressed to the last 16 after the UAE’s Al Wahda were considered withdrawn from Group A as they failed to travel to Qatar following several positive tests among the squad for COVID-19.

That meant the Saudi side had to secure only three points to guarantee a top-two finish in the three-team group, and Marin’s 87th-minute strike from close following a pass from Abdulrahman Ghareeb ensured just that at the Khalifa International Stadium.

In a fast-paced match both teams missed close chances with the goalkeepers called into play several times.

Al Shorta were reduced to 10 men seconds before the first half ended with Ali Mhawi earning his second yellow card, but that didn’t seem to matter much as the Iraqis still managed to create pressure for their rivals.

However, Al Ahli gained control towards the final 20 minutes and following an exchange of passes Marin produced a calm finish from six yards to help his team earn three points.

Marin, who was named player of the match, was delighted with his team’s win. “Of course, I am very happy to be named player of the match, but I have many other reasons to be happy,” said Marin, who played in the 2010 World Cup for Germany. “I am happy to play an official game after a long time on the sidelines. I am happy that I am fit again and fully recovered after weeks of absence from training.” — AFP

K E R B E R FALLS AT FIRST HURDLE IN ROME

CZECH SINIAKOVA UPSETS FORMER WORLD NO 1, RUBLEV ADVANCES

ROME: Former world number one Angelique Kerber fell to a straight sets defeat to Czech Katerina Siniakova in the Italian Open on Tuesday as Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev eased through to the second round of the men’s tournament.

Three-time Grand Slam winner Kerber, seeded 15th in the Rome clay-court tournament being played behind closed doors at the Foro Italico, crashed out 6-3, 6-1 in 68 minutes.

Siniakova, ranked 61, achieved her first win over the 32-year-old German in four meetings and next plays either Daria Kasatkina or Vera Zvonareva, with the two Russians playing later.

Top women’s seed Simona Halep opens against Italian wildcard Jasmine Paolini, with the Romanian warming up in the doubles on Tuesday, having skipped the US tournaments.

The switch from hard court at the US Open to clay proved tricky for Kerber, who reached the fourth round at Flushing Meadows.

The Rome tournament is a warm-up for the French Open on September 27, the only Grand Slam tournament which Kerber has not won.

She paid for 23 unforced errors, twice as many as her Czech rival, although she saved three match points to hold serve in the second set.

Elsewhere Czech 12th seed Marketa Vondrousova, last year’s Roland Garros runner-up, dropped a set before seeing off Japan’s Misaki Doi 6-1, 4-6, 6-4.

In the men’s event, US Open quarterfinalist Rublev eased past Argentine qualifier Facundo Bagnis 6-4, 6-4 and next meets Poland’s Hubert Hurkacz.

Rublev hit 25 winners for his 20th match win of the season, winning two ATP Tour titles this year in Qatar and Adelaide before the season was suspended.

Australian John Millman recovered from 2-4 down in the second set to overcome lucky loser Joao Sousa 7-5, 7-6 (7/2) and next meets Argentine Diego Schwartzman. — AFP

Italian Open ATP and WTA results

Men (first round)
Federico Coria (ARG) bt Jan-Lennard Struff (GER) 6-1, 7-6 (7/5); John Millman (AUS) bt Joao Sousa (POR) 7-5, 7-6 (7/2); Andrey Rublev (RUS x9) bt Facundo Bagnis (ARG) 6-4, 6-4
Women (first round)
Katerina Siniakova (CZE) bt Angelique Kerber (GER x15) 6-3, 6-1; Arantxa Rus (NED) bt Iga Swiatek (POL) 7-6 (7/5), 6-3; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x12) bt Misaki Doi (JPN) 6-1, 4-6, 6-4



Czech Republic’s Katerina Siniakova in action during her first round match against Germany’s Angelique Kerber. – Reuters

SPECIAL OLYMPIC ATHLETES TO GET EXPERT COACHING

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 15

The Special Olympics Oman (SOO) plans a safe return to sports activities after taking major steps to ensure expert coaching and training to athletes.

Seven agreements were signed on Tuesday with different educational and sporting entities at the SOO premises in presence of the officials and media representatives. The seven signed MOU's with different private bodies covered football, equestrian, swimming, educational and cultural activities.

According to these agreements, the domestic heroes of Special Olympics will be trained by the experienced coaches and staff to develop their skills in different sports and cultural areas. Saif al Rubaiee, Chairman of Oman's Special Olympics, signed on behalf of the SOO while top officials signed for the other parties.

Commenting to the media, Saif al Rubaiee said that the signing of all these agreements aim to ensure a proper starting for the special Olympic activities.

"All the MoU's will secure a safe continuity to the sporting and cultural events after receiving the permission from the related government authorities in the forthcoming days. Private sector is one of the top stakeholder and strategic partner for Oman

Special Olympics. Our heroes will receive the right training and will have the best exposure from the specialists in different fields. All the programmes will be available in all the parts of the Sultanate and that will guarantee best approach to all the special Olympic players," he added.

Al Rubaiee affirmed that the top concern is to fully utilise the Special Olympic athletes and provide them required skills and experience at sporting and cultural activities as others.

"We have different programmes, events and activities set for the whole year. There are sporting events which aimed to develop the skills of the players as well as different social and cultural events. There are many panels at Oman Special Olympic and each panel will announce the activities in the coming days," the chief said.

The Special Olympic follows a programme under title of preparing the leaders. "This is one of the top programmes that aim to develop the player's leading abilities and enable him to state his opinions and discuss with others," he added.

Special Olympics is a global organisation that serves athletes with intellectual disabilities working with hundreds of thousands of volunteers and coaches each year. Oman's Special Olympics was established as a Special Olympics Founding Committee in 2016.



Flamboyant Dhoni set to 'rule roost' in UAE

NEW DELHI: India's Mahendra Singh Dhoni may have signed off from international duties but he'll be at the heart of the action in the Indian Premier League — a tournament he helped inspire, and where he remains a towering figure.

Dhoni, who has led the Chennai Super Kings to three titles and five runner-up finishes in the IPL's 12 editions, will feature in the opening match on Saturday against the Mumbai Indians, the defending champions.

The game comes more than a year after the 39-year-old last played for India in their semifinal loss to New Zealand in the 2019 World Cup.

After much speculation, the wicketkeeper-batsman finally announced the end of his 16-year international career last month.

And without the pressure of having to play well to keep his place in the national team, the flamboyant Dhoni is expected to shine in UAE, the IPL's temporary home as India battles a rampant coronavirus problem.

"He is very fit and I believe he is working very hard on it. Plus he has stopped playing international cricket so there will be less burden on his body," Saba Karim, another former India wicketkeeper, said.

"Global cricket still needs an icon like MS Dhoni to continue."

Dhoni's captaincy began with India winning the inaugural T20 World Cup title in 2007, a success that triggered the birth of the IPL — the world's most popular and richest cricket league — a year later.

"Dhoni played an instrumental role in kick-starting the IPL because of the way he brought a different dimension to the shorter format of the game because of his aggressive side with the willow," Karim said.

"Also with his calm exterior behind the stumps."

Dhoni, once hailed as the world's best finisher, has played 190 IPL matches, scoring 4,432 runs including 23 half-centuries.

An exemplary leader with fast glove work, Dhoni has made Chennai one of IPL's most loved franchises with almost 200,000 people following the team's fan club



on Twitter.

'SOUL OF CHENNAI'

Chennai chief executive Kasi Viswanathan says Dhoni remains key to the team's plans and they expect him to keep playing till the 2022 edition.

The team has been under scrutiny after arriving in the UAE last month with two players testing positive for the coronavirus.

Senior batsman Suresh Raina and veteran spinner Harbhajan Singh later opted out of the competition.

"I swear if Dhoni pulls out of IPL, there's no IPL for me this year!" a Twitter user wrote after the

He is very fit and I believe he is working very hard on it. Plus he has stopped playing international cricket so there will be less burden on his body. Global cricket still needs an icon like MS Dhoni to continue
SABA KARIM
Former Indian wicketkeeper

withdrawals.

Cricketer-turned-commentator Aakash Chopra said Dhoni is "the biggest strength of the team and the entire franchise is dependent on him".

"He is the soul of Chennai Super Kings. As long as he is there, CSK's heart keeps beating and they move forward. MS Dhoni, the player and the captain, has a great impact," Chopra said on his YouTube show.

"Dhoni is going to rule the roost once again as a captain, as a batsman."

Chennai and Dhoni were plunged into controversy in 2015, when the team were banned from

the IPL for two years for match-fixing.

But Dhoni and his team — which includes many players aged over 35, including Australia's Shane Watson and South African Imran Tahir — came back with a bang.

Labelled 'Dad's Army' by the media, Chennai returned to lift the title in 2018 and establish themselves as one of the most consistent teams in IPL history.

"Dhoni is Chennai, Chennai is Dhoni. If Dhoni is doing well. Chennai is doing well," veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle said on Cricbuzz.com.

— AFP

Ali Khan becomes first American in IPL

NEW DELHI: Fast bowler Ali Khan has become the first player from the United States to join the Indian Premier League after being included in the Kolkata Knight Riders squad.

The Pakistan-born Khan replaces England's Harry Gurney, sidelined by a shoulder injury, in the Knight Riders team for the Twenty20 tournament starting on Saturday in the United Arab Emirates.

"Welcome to the #KKRfamily @lamAlkhan23 ! Enjoy @IPL & the experience. Tough luck @gurneyhf . Get well soon. You will be missed," Knight Riders chief executive Venky Mysore wrote on Twitter.

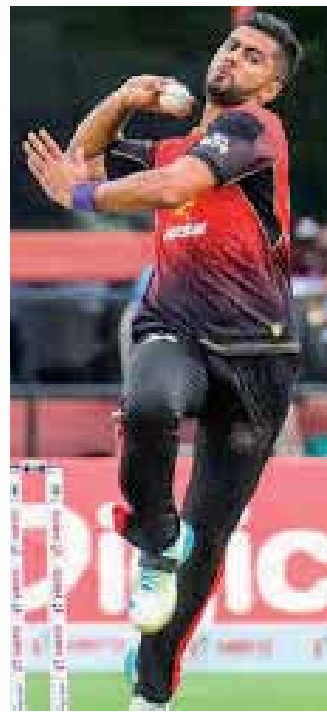
Gurney, a left-arm quick who has played 10 ODIs and two T20 internationals, pulled out of the IPL and England's T20 Blast due to surgery on his shoulder.

Khan comes into the IPL after winning the Caribbean Premier League with the Trinbago Knight Riders — the same parent company as the Kolkata Knight Riders — who won all 12 matches to seal the title.

The right-arter was spotted at the 2018 Global T20 Canada by West Indian all-rounder Dwayne Bravo, who brought him to the CPL.

Khan, 29, played a key role in the US gaining ODI status at the World Cricket League Division Two event in Namibia last year.

— AFP



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Chelsea's Timo Werner in action against Brighton & Hove Albion.
— Reuters

BIG-SPENDING CHELSEA START BRIGHT

BRIGHTON, United Kingdom: Frank Lampard believes Chelsea are already showing the benefits of his £200 million (\$257 million) spending spree as they kicked off their Premier League campaign with a 3-1 win at Brighton on Monday.

Blues boss Lampard has splashed out on a host of new signings and the early returns on his lavish investment were promising.

Germany striker Timo Werner, a £53 million recruit from Leipzig, won the penalty that Jorginho converted to put Chelsea ahead.

Kai Havertz, who made a £70 million switch from Bayer Leverkusen, wasn't quite so impactful, but Lampard will be confident there are better days to come from the young Germany

forward. "Timo's speed to win the penalty showed he is sharp and he was a threat all night. He is very mobile and I liked his performance," Lampard said.

"With Kai we saw a lot as well. To get these minutes will only be good and both of them will be huge players for this club."

Chelsea goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga was guilty of another mistake when Leandro Trossard equalised for Brighton.

But Reece James' superb strike put Chelsea back in front before Kurt Zouma's deflected effort sealed the points.

It was an encouraging result for Lampard, who has accepted he is under pressure to deliver a title

challenge after spending more than any other club so far in the summer transfer window.

"I think to expect everything to click on day one is very difficult. But what they did do was show a bit of determination," Lampard said.

I really liked the work ethic and the discipline of the team. We've been together as a team for four days after the international break. We had a lot of quarantines before that and new signings.

"We might have dropped points in this game last season. I'm not getting excited by that on day one, but it had a little bit of determination and resilience about it I thought."

Chelsea finished 33 points behind champions Liverpool in fourth last

season before a disappointing FA Cup final defeat against Arsenal, but they are primed to improve if Lampard can get his new signings.

Lampard's other expensive recruits, former Ajax playmaker Hakim Ziyech and ex-Leicester left-back Ben Chilwell, were both sidelined by injuries, while Thiago Silva wasn't available as he returns to training following his free transfer from Paris Saint-Germain.

The historians among Chelsea's fanbase will have noted this was the third time they have started a Premier League campaign with a Monday night victory, with the Blues going on to win the title on the previous occasions in 2014-15 and 2016-17.

The only frustration for Lampard

was Kepa's howler. The world's most expensive keeper was already under pressure to improve after an error-strewn season and with Chelsea having spoken to Rennes about Senegal keeper Edouard Mendy, his days as first choice might be numbered.

Insisting he has not written off Kepa yet, Lampard said: "I am happy with Kepa, I saw confidence in him, he is here, he is our keeper and I am happy with him."

CLASSY WERNER

Werner was Chelsea's central striker while Havertz lined up on the right flank in the three-man attack.

It was Werner who showed all his class as Chelsea took the lead in the 23rd minute. — AFP

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS

ON MONDAY:

Brighton 1 (Trossard 54) Chelsea 3 (Jorginho 23-pen, James 56, Zouma 66)

Sheffield United 0 Wolves 2 (Jimenez 3, Saiss 6)

ON SUNDAY

West Brom 0 Leicester 3 (Castagne 56, Vardy 74-pen, 84-pen)

Tottenham 0 Everton 1 (Calvert-Lewin 55)

ON SATURDAY

Crystal Palace 1 (Zaha 13) Southampton 0

Fulham 0 Arsenal 3 (Lacazette 9, Gabriel 49, Aubameyang 57)

Liverpool 4 (Salah 4-pen, 33, 88-pen, Van Dijk 20) Leeds 3 (Harrison 12, Bamford 30, Klich 66)

West Ham 0 Newcastle 2 (Wilson 56, Hendrick 87)

business

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Muscat Airport City set to make further headway

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 15

Having snagged one of the world's largest logistics players as an investor in its growing airfreight business, Oman Aviation Group (OAG) – the Sultanate's aviation and air-logistics flagship – says it has lined up new initiatives to support the development of its signature Muscat Airport City project.

Spread over a total area of over 350 hectares, Muscat Airport City integrates five different gates or clusters each dedicated to a specific aspect of OAG's core business objectives behind the development of an Airport City around Muscat International Airport. The largest of these is the Free Zone Gate, covering an area of 152 hectares, followed by the Business Gate (114 hectares), Aviation Gate (53 hectares), Logistics Gate (24 hectares), and Hospitality Gate (12 hectares).

"We have initiatives under Muscat Airport City in the pipeline, and we expect to make an announcement before the end of this year," said Mustafa al Hinai, Group CEO – Oman Aviation Group. "At the moment, we have a prioritisation roadmap (for the development of the Airport City) and our first priorities are the Logistics and Aviation Gates. With regard to the Free Zone and other gates, we are in the process

of getting the final approvals from the authorities concerned to obtain the right license for them, and we expect to make announcement at the appropriate time."

Last week, OAG announced a strategic tie-up with global logistics giant DHL to support air-logistics at Muscat International Airport. As part of the arrangement, DHL has committed to setting up a 50,000 sq metre capacity storage facility within

the Logistics Gate – an investment that promises to position Oman as a regional hub for its airfreight business in the future.

Besides Muscat, Airport Cities are also planned in the proximity of Salalah International Airport and Sohar International Airport as part of a network of 'Oman Airport Cities'. These developments will "offer world-class commercial, retail, hospitality, MICE, leisure

and logistics hubs and clusters," says wholly government-owned Oman

GROWING INTEREST:
New investment initiatives to be unveiled before the end of this year, says Oman Aviation Group

Aviation Group. Airport Cities envisioned at Muscat and Salalah are being positioned as destinations for investment opportunities across a variety of clusters. For example, light manufacturing and assembly operations dependent on air transport will be concentrated in an area reserved for Light Industries. Also promising are opportunities for processing of high value fish,

regional distribution hubs for pharmaceutical manufacturers, distribution hubs for aircraft manufacturers, and fulfilment centres for ecommerce players eager to set up their regional operations at these airports.

Importantly, Free Zones will be an integral part of the Airport Cities, according to Oman Aviation Group. These will house investments related to free zone storage, light industrial activities, industrial value adding activities oriented towards re-export), and distribution services. The overall goal is to support Oman's ambition to evolve into a major hub for air cargo and logistics in the region.

Oman Aviation Group oversees the operations of national carrier Oman Air, Oman Airports, Transom (encompassing Ground Handling, Catering, Hospitality, Cargo and Muscat Duty Free services), Oman Airport Cities. It also serves as the National Tourism Operator.

MSM releases new list of Sharia compliant companies

MUSCAT: Muscat Securities Market (MSM) approved 20 public shareholding companies to be included in the Sharia index for the second quarter of 2020 . These companies business practices conformed to the Sharia rules approved by the Islamic Financial Accounting and Auditing Organisation.

The list included A Safa Foods, Al Batinah Development and Investment Holding Company, al Jazeera Services, Al Kamil Power, Medina Takaful, Al Maha Ceramics, Nizwa Bank, Computer Stationery Industry, Oman Building Material, Dhofar Beverages Company, Gulf Mushroom Industries, Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo), Majan College, National Biscuits Industries, Omani Educational, Oman Flour Mills, Omani Packaging Company, Desert Hospitality, Salalah Mills and Oman Takaful Insurance.

It may be noted that Sharia-compliant list is being revised every three months by adding companies that are compliant with standards and eliminating companies that lose their eligibility.

The Sharia index includes the best 15 companies compliant with the Sharia standards for a full fiscal year. Three companies, namely Oman Cable Industry, Shell Oman Marketing and Salalah Port Services Company, were dropped for breaching the financial standards according to the Islamic Financial Accounting and Auditing

The list included A Safa Foods, Al Batinah Development and Investment Holding Company, al Jazeera Services, Al Kamil Power, Medina Takaful, Al Maha Ceramics, Nizwa Bank, Computer Stationery Industry and Oman Building Material

Organisation. Three companies entered the sample, namely Oman Educational, Omani Packaging Company and the Gulf Mushroom Industries.

Muscat Securities Market

clarified that investors and interested parties can review the criteria for selecting Sharia-compliant companies through the Sharia-compliant MSM Index available on its website. — ONA

دليل النفط ش.م.م.

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AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Company would like to announce an open invitation to the general public to participate in a sealed auction described in the table below.

Auction No.	Material Type (Description)	Location	Visit Date	Bid Date	Bank Guarantee Amount
PRCR-20-225	BMW 740 Li	Head Office Azaibah	20 th Sep. 2020 to 23 rd Sep. 2020	From 8:00 am 23 rd Sep. 2020 to 10:00 am 24 th Sep. 2020	OMR 500

In accordance with the following terms & conditions:

1

Bidders shall be required to submit a Bank Guarantee prior to have access for online bidding, where the date of online auction will be From 8:00 am 23rd September 2020 to 10:00 am 24th September 2020. This is a refundable amount and shall be returned to the non-successful bidders after bid evaluation.

2

Items offered for sale can be viewed as stated in the above table from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm and "As it is-where it is" basis, and it will be shown in the E-auction platform.

3

Interested Bidders shall be required to register and submit their offer on this link <https://mazad.om/owner/32>

4

The successful bidder shall pay 3% of the awarded amount to Mazad.om as an "Auction Fees".

5

The successful bidder shall pay full bid amount within five (5) working days from the date of notification of award. In the event that awarded bidder fails to pay the outstanding amounts within the specified period, the bidder shall be disqualified and the guarantee provided as part of the bid will be forfeited

6

The successful bidder is responsible to follow Company's instruction & HSE procedure and to provide all the necessary arrangement for loading and transporting Vehicles.

7

The successful bidder shall collect the vehicles within a maximum period of 10 (Ten) working days. Failing to do so will result in paying penalty charges of 50 OMR for each day of delay beyond the above period.

8

The Ministry of Energy & Minerals and Daleel Petroleum L.L.C reserves the right to take any action it seems appropriate without giving any reason.

For more information with regards to the online bidding registration, please contact info@mazad.om or mobile number +968 91900950



Employment slows down for MBA students

During these surreal days there comes more disappointing news in areas of employment with more than a third of employers who recruit MBA students said they will be bringing in “a lot fewer” management leaders in 2020 than in 2019, as the economic chaos wrought by COVID-19 takes its toll even on the holders of these coveted higher education degrees.

The survey, carried out by trade bodies the Association of MBAs and the Business Graduates Association, polled 1,047 of their members who reported that they were decision makers in the recruitment of MBAs for the organisation at which they work.

While 35 per cent said they will recruit fewer of them, 28 per cent said they believe that overall, there

are too many candidates for too few jobs.

A total of 28 per cent of these respondents were based in Europe, a further 15 per cent in the UK and 7 per cent in North America and the Caribbean, while 9 per cent of the responses came from consultancies, with the next biggest sectors represented being engineering and IT both with 7 per cent, and banking and finances at 6 per cent.

Surveyed online for two months to the end of May, the reason recruiters cited for hiring fewer MBA graduates included a focus on core business survival rather than growth, and an aversion to hire and train “expensive” talent.

On the other hand, employers who said they would be recruiting higher numbers of MBA students explained it was to help address challenges brought on by the pandemic. Others said that the



ANDY JALIL

andyjalil@aol.com

The reason recruiters cited for hiring fewer MBA graduates included a focus on core business survival rather than growth, and an aversion to hire and train ‘expensive’ talent

pandemic had not affected their company, or had affected it positively, allowing them to continue to hire business management graduates, and some also needed a boost to innovation.

Curiously, in spite of these difficult times, investors have been

more supportive currently of chief executive pay, following a drop in the size of salary packages and a promise from companies to monitor remuneration. The FTSE 30’s top executives have seen their median pay packages drop by 7 per cent last year to £5.9m compared with £6.4m

the previous year, an analysis by Deloitte has found.

The report also noted that salaries for top executives across the entire FTSE 100 have remained the same at around £3.7m. This drop in pay was accompanied by a “quieter shareholder season”. The number of FTSE firms who were rebuked on pay by more than a fifth of their shareholders has dropped to 4 per cent this year, down from 7.5 per cent last year and 13 per cent in 2018.

Deloitte linked those figures to commitments from companies to cut bosses’ generous pensions, and keep a closer watch on the remuneration of their most senior executives.

According to Deloitte, excessive CEO pensions, a major issue for investors last year, have now been addressed by many companies following pressure from the

Investment Association (IA), the trade body for UK fund managers, late last year.

The IA had warned that if companies did not embrace their strengthened guidelines “they should brace themselves for more shareholder revolts.” Deloitte found that 80 per cent of FTSE 100 companies have promised to cut existing executive pensions, with the majority also committed to align the pensions of executives with the rest of the workforce by 2022.

“Pensions have been the hot topic during AGMs and are an example of the growing investor focus on pay fairness across the entire workforce. Shareholders have demonstrated that they will hit hard where companies fall foul of expectations in this area,” said Stephen Cahill, vice chairman at Deloitte.

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.)

Middle East economies to contract 7.6 per cent in 2020

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 15

The Economic Outlook report from Oxford Economics, commissioned by ICAEW (the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales) forecasts a 7.6 per cent contraction in GDP this year for the Middle East, almost double the 3.9 per cent contraction which they predicted in April. However, growth is expected to return to 4 per cent in 2021 and 2022 as lockdowns are fully eased, global travel picks up and Brent oil prices move closer to \$50 per barrel.

ICAEW held a webinar to accompany the release of the report and share its insights on the global and regional economic outlook. In focus were the most exposed industrial sectors facing a long-term recovery – particularly the oil sector and travel and tourism industry.

Panellists included Tim Fox, Economist and former Emirates NBD Group Head of Research & Chief Economist; Zibo Cao, Associate Director of Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Assets Fund; and Dr Ernest Kan, Chief Advisor of Capital Markets China. The session was led by Scott Livermore, ICAEW



Economic Advisor and Chief Economist at Oxford Economics. He explained that during the first half of this year the global economy shrank at a pace unprecedented since World War II, as national governments implemented social distancing measures to battle the spread of COVID-19. While stringent lockdowns implemented in the second quarter of the year (Q2) appear to have been successful in limiting the spread of the virus

NEW INSIGHTS:
THE OUTLOOK FOR
THE NON-OIL
ECONOMY IN GULF
COOPERATION
COUNCIL (GCC)
COUNTRIES REMAINS
CHALLENGING

in most countries, they have put a significant strain on economic activity.

The outlook for the non-oil economy in GCC countries remains challenging. It is likely that travel restrictions will be a fact of life for some time, weighing on global tourist activity, an important pillar of the non-oil economy.

Oxford Economics’ forecast assumes that globally, international visitor arrivals will decline 55 per

cent in 2020 and will not recover to pre-crisis volumes until 2023. While economic factors will play a role in the global recovery, how quickly travel restrictions are lifted and the speed at which people are prepared to resume foreign travel, will be more important.

The region’s dependence on expat workers in vulnerable sectors means the burden of job losses will mainly fall on the expat population. With expat visas depending on employment and the lack of a social safety net, an expat exodus is likely as travel restrictions are eased. This could result in the population declining by between 4 per cent in Saudi Arabia and Oman, and around 10 per cent in the UAE and Qatar.

Michael Armstrong, ICAEW Regional Director for the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA), said: “What makes this global recession extraordinary is both its severity as well as the speed at which it took place. The issues we face are global in nature and require an international, collective solution. To rebuild the economy, Middle East governments must remain resilient and think long-term to make better-informed decisions.”

BUSINESS ALERT

Oman Arab Bank introduces new department for change and development



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank has announced the establishment of a new change and development department, a move that further positions the Bank at the forefront of the local banking sector. The department will primarily be responsible for overseeing the implementation of OAB’s change and development strategy, which has been undertaken over the last few years. This strategy is based on the Bank’s four main pillars, which focus on innovation, strategic partnerships, talent development, and the continuous improvement of the customer experience.

Adil al Rahbi, Head of Human Resources Division at OAB, said, “The Bank has made remarkable progress enhancing banking operations over the last years by employing the latest technologies to create new and advanced solutions. This is complemented by our efforts to build an effective and highly qualified team and the provision of a suitable work environment. This, in turn, enables OAB staff to utilise modern practices in project management, ensuring added value when innovative strategic initiatives are implemented. To expand on this objective in the future, a specialised division was established to oversee all developmental efforts across different fields. Our colleague Omar Abdulaziz al Kharousi (pictured), who has over 19 years of experience in project management, has been appointed as the head of this strategic department.”

Omar al Kharousi holds an MBA from Franklin University in the United States and has a proven record in project delivery and transformation strategies. Embodying strong leadership skills, he has extensive experience in managing people, systems and change management at major local banks.

ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK LAUNCHES LIMITED EDITION CREDIT AND DEBIT CARDS TO MARK THE 50TH NATIONAL DAY



To mark the Sultanate of Oman’s 50th National Day, Alizz Islamic Bank has introduced special limited edition credit and debit cards. The cards have been embossed with the official logo created to commemorate the 50th National Day, which will be celebrated on November 18. The issuance of the cards comes as part of a multi-faceted 50th National Day campaign launched by Alizz Islamic Bank to celebrate the special day.

Customers who wish to replace their cards are required to go to their nearest Alizz Islamic Bank branch and request to replace their card and the card will be issued instantly, with terms and conditions to be applied.

Alizz Islamic Bank utilizes the three-dimensional security system ‘3D Secure’ on both the debit card and credits. 3D Secure is an authentication payment system that uses a One-Time-PIN (OTP) to authenticate the cardholder’s purchase. This system allows Alizz Islamic Bank customers to shop online securely with their debit cards and credit cards with an added layer of protection on their online transactions.

Moreover, all Alizz Islamic Bank debit and credit cards feature a ‘contactless payment’ option, which is safe for consumers to purchase products or services through the use of radio frequency identification technology (RFID) or near-field communication technology (NFC).

All Alizz Islamic Bank credit cards are based on the Islamic concept of ‘Qard Hasan’ which is adopted by numerous leading Islamic banks all over the world and applied to all credit card products. A customer can pay the amount shown in the credit card statement of account at the end of the month or settle it in form of deferred installments according to minimum payment option.

Alizz Islamic Bank’s customers can also enjoy the benefits and facilities provided by the Titanium, Platinum and World credit cards which comply with the principles of Islamic Shari’a and offer a wide range of benefits and rewards to customers. The cards offer premium features and privileges that provide cardholders with a range of lifestyle experiences.

Oman Post strengthens SME competitiveness



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 15

Trade facilitation for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is a topic that Oman Post, an Asyad member company, is taking on by leveraging its infrastructure and host of tailored postal and logistics services, building a marketplace that is conducive to sale and distribution of products for these businesses. The company has recently launched the International Premium Express Mail (IPEX), a new premium international document and parcel shipping service.

Considered as engines of growth for Oman, SMEs currently constitute over 90 per cent of businesses in the Sultanate. Meeting the evolving needs of today’s e-Commerce customers is a key focus for Oman Post now and moving forward. With IPEX, Oman Post customers can ship internationally to

over 220 destinations. Door-to-door deliveries to major GCC cities can be completed within 24-hours, while other GCC locations can be reached within 48-72 hours.

Abdulmalik al Balushi, CEO of Oman Post said, “Enabling e-commerce is particularly important for small businesses, who can access new customers via Oman Post’s domestic and international delivery network.

We want to support them in delivering their products to their customers conveniently and efficiently. Our services including parcel delivery, express mail, and the recently launched IPEX service offer peace of mind as we handle the entire process, from pick-up and packaging to transportation towards the final destination of the products and customs procedures in case of international shipments.”

POSITIVE MOOD

German investor confidence hits 20-year high



A worker stands amid sparks of raw iron coming from a blast furnace at a ThyssenKrupp steel factory in Duisburg, Germany. — Reuters

FRANKFURT: Investor confidence in Germany unexpectedly soared to a 20-year high in September despite a resurgence in coronavirus cases and Brexit tensions, a key survey showed on Tuesday.

The ZEW institute's monthly barometer measuring investor expectations in Europe's largest economy leapt to 77.4 points, the highest reading since May 2000.

The figure marked a rise of 5.9 points from August, when confidence hit a near 17-year high.

The reading surprised analysts who were expecting a fall in German investor confidence to 70.0 points this month, according to a survey by FactSet.

"Experts continue to expect a noticeable recovery of the German economy" following the pandemic-induced shock earlier this year, ZEW president Achim Wambach said in a statement.

"Stalled Brexit talks and rising COVID-19 cases could not dampen the positive mood."

However, a still negative outlook for the banking sector reveals concerns of a rising number of loan defaults in the coming six months, he warned.

In March, the survey by Mannheim-based ZEW crashed to its lowest rating since the 2008-9 financial crisis as coronavirus lockdowns started to batter the economy. — AFP

UK jobless rate rise gives warning for bigger job losses ahead

LONDON: Britain's unemployment rate rose for the first time since the coronavirus lockdown began in March, sending a warning signal ahead of an expected surge in job losses when a huge government job subsidy programme expires next month.

The unemployment rate increased to 4.1 per cent in the three months to July from the 3.9 per cent it had clung to since early 2020, in line with the median forecast in a Reuters poll of economists. The government's coronavirus job subsidy scheme has shielded millions of workers and there were fewer job losses than feared in the figures published on Tuesday.

Redundancies increased by 48,000 on the quarter to 156,000, the biggest rise in over 10 years, but the level remained well below that seen during the 2008 downturn. Samuel Tombs, an economist with Pantheon Macroeconomics, said job losses were likely to accelerate in September and October when employers will have to pay more towards the cost of the furlough scheme.

"The number of people searching on Google for phrases including 'redundancy' rocketed to a record high in July, consistent on past form with the official measure of redundancies peaking in September," he said.

A single-month estimate for the unemployment rate — which is more timely but less representative than the three-month data — jumped to 4.4 per cent in July and an experimental weekly estimate hit 4.8 per cent in the last week of the month.

Tax data showed the number of



Commuters walk through Canary Wharf in London. — Reuters

staff on company payrolls fell by a monthly 36,000 in August. That was more than job losses of 20,000 in July but still only a fraction of mass layoffs in April and May. The ONS had previously reported 114,000 job losses for July, but revised this down sharply after receiving more data.

Overall, the payroll numbers fell by 695,000 between March and August — lower than the previous estimate for job losses between March and July. Similarly, official

The number of people searching on Google for phrases including 'redundancy' rocketed to a record high in July, consistent on past form with the official measure of redundancies peaking in September

data for the three months to July showed a much smaller-than-expected fall in the number of people in employment of 12,000, a tenth of the Reuters poll forecast.

However, the Office for National Statistics said its figures might be "slightly impacted" by a change in the way it interviews households since the COVID-19 pandemic

swept Britain. The surveys, which now rely on telephone calls rather than face-to-face interviews, over-represent homeowners who are less at risk of unemployment, the ONS said.

Sterling briefly rose after the data was published. The Bank of England has forecast that the unemployment rate will hit 7.5 per cent at the end of this year, when it is expected to expand its bond-buying stimulus programme again. — Reuters

IEA sees oil demand recovery decelerating



A worker walks on oil pipe at West Qurna oilfield in Iraq's southern province of Basra. — Reuters

LONDON: The International Energy Agency (IEA) trimmed its 2020 oil demand forecast on Tuesday, citing caution about the pace of economic

recovery from the pandemic.

The Paris-based IEA cut its 2020 outlook by 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 91.7 million bpd in its second downgrade in as many months.

"We expect the recovery in oil demand to decelerate markedly in the second half of 2020, with most of the easy gains already achieved," the IEA said in its monthly report.

"The economic slowdown will take months to reverse completely... in addition, there is the potential that a second wave of the virus (already visible in Europe) could cut mobility once again."

Renewed rises in COVID-19 cases in many countries and related lockdown measures, continued remote working and a still weak aviation sector are all hurting demand, the IEA said.

China — which emerged from lockdown sooner than other major economies and provided a strong prop to global demand — continues a strong recovery, while a virus upsurge in India contributed to the biggest demand drop since April, the IEA

said.

Increasing global oil output and the downgraded demand outlook also mean a slower draw on crude oil stocks which piled up at the height of lockdown measures, it added.

The agency now predicts implied stock draws in the second half of the year of about 3.4 million barrels per day, nearly one million bpd less than it predicted last month, with July storage levels in developed countries again reaching record highs.

However, preliminary data for August showed industry crude oil stocks fell in the United States, Europe and Japan.

As output cuts eased among producers from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allies such as Russia, global oil supply rose by 1.1 million bpd in August.

After two months of increases, recovery among countries outside the Opec+ pact stalled, with production in the United States falling 400,000 bpd as Hurricane Laura forced shut-ins. — Reuters

Oil edges higher but bleaker demand outlook weighs

LONDON: Oil prices edged slightly higher on Tuesday, but forecasts of a slower than expected recovery in global fuel demand due to the coronavirus pandemic weighed.

Brent crude was up 33 cents, or 0.8 per cent, at \$39.94 a barrel by 0910 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up 31 cents, or 0.8 per cent, at \$37.57 a barrel. Both contracts fell on Monday.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) on Tuesday trimmed its 2020 outlook by 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) to

91.7 million bpd, citing caution about the pace of economic recovery.

"We expect the recovery in oil demand to decelerate markedly in the second half of 2020, with most of the easy gains already achieved," the IEA said in its monthly report.

Its revision chimes with forecasts from major oil industry producers and traders, with Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries downgrading its oil demand forecast saying demand might have peaked in 2019. — Reuters

US pulls back from import bans for China's cotton, tomatoes

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration on Monday shelved plans for a broad import ban on cotton and tomato products from China's Xinjiang region while announcing narrower bans on products from five specific entities.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) acting Deputy Secretary Kenneth Cuccinelli said the new "Withhold Release Orders" (WROs) on cotton, textiles, apparel, hair products and computer parts are aimed at combating China's use of forced labour by detained Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

The US actions "violate the rules of international trade, and disrupt global industrial, supply and value chains," said Wang Wenbin, foreign ministry spokesman, at a daily news conference in Beijing on Tuesday.

"The so-called forced labour issue is entirely fabricated by some organisations and people in the US and the West," he said, adding that China will take all necessary measures to protect its companies' legitimate rights and interests.

Cuccinelli told reporters on a conference call that the administration was conducting more legal analysis of the region-wide import bans. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials said last week that they had prepared the broader bans on cotton, cotton textiles and tomatoes, among China's biggest commodity exports, along with the orders announced on Monday.

CBP acting Commissioner Mark Morgan said on Monday the agency's investigations into the



A worker carries a sack of cotton at a cotton purchasing station in Wuhu, Anhui province. — Reuters

region-wide orders were continuing. Two people familiar with the Trump administration's internal deliberations said that concerns

about the broad orders and their effect on supply chains were raised by officials, including Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, US Trade

Representative Robert Lighthizer and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue.

China is the world's top exporter of tomato paste, made with tomatoes mostly grown in Xinjiang. Leading processor Cofco Tunhe Sugar Co Ltd, a subsidiary of China's state-owned COFCO Group, produced 250,000 tonnes of paste last year at its 13 Xinjiang factories and claims to supply firms including Heinz and Unilever.

China also had agreed to buy increased quantities of US cotton under the countries' Phase 1 trade deal, which could be put at risk by a US ban on imports from China's dominant cotton-producing region. But Cuccinelli said it was legal concerns, not trade, that prompted the need for more study of the

region-wide import bans.

"We want to make sure that when we do get challenged — and we assume that we will be challenged, legally — that we will prevail and none of the goods we would ultimately would seize under such a WRO would be shaken loose and released into the United States," he said.

The Withhold Release Orders allow US Customs and Border Protection to detain shipments based on suspicion of forced-labour involvement under long-standing US laws to combat human trafficking, child labour and other human rights abuses.

Shippers can send the products to other countries or seek to prove that they are not produced with forced labour. — Reuters

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

SUPPER flat. 273 sqm. Opposite Grand Mall near Ramez Shopping. Three rooms, servant room with toilet, laundry, spacious family lounge, sitting and dining.

Refurbished four bedroom flat. Separate family lounge, sitting and dining. Al Hail South near Balqis Pharmacy. **99207840.**

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

FLAT for rent. **95397442.**

2 BEDROOM flat Al Khuwair. **99322344.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For Rent

APARTMENTS for rent in Bausher Al Amin Mosque area 1) Apartments for rent and offices in the district Al Amin Mosque two rooms, hall, kitchen and two bathrooms system RO 250 negotiable equipped and divided offices for rent to companies an area of 600 metres 2). We have furnished and unfurnished apartment rooms for monthly rent all over Muscat to communicate. **96444111 or 96672277.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact **99657906**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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6 bedroom villa with maid room and store room.
Near sultan center, 18th Nov street, Azaiba.
Contact: 94947862

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

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

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Used vehicles for sale on as-is-where-is basis. Further we have scrapped steel, cables, etc, for sale. These cab be inspected at NTS Camp in Ghala. Interested parties may contact on 99259157/ 93677827. Sealed offers with item-wise quote should be submitted on or before 24th September 2020 with security deposit.

Institution Licence contact **95595512.**

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

FLATS in Al Mabella. **99323957, 95490842.**

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

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

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

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

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

1) A LAND in HALBAN behind GUtech is offered for sale. The land enjoys a permit for twin-villa.
2) A LAND is for sale in Mabaila 8 owner. **95959166.**

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

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WANTED scraps HMS1 & HMS2 scrap all kind of copper scrap. Connect us: **90765659.**

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CLASSIFIED SECTION

RUWI 95919344/ 24649594/ 99841230/ 99639264/ Behind Royal Oman Police, Adjacent to Dhofar Building, Ruwi.



Camel racing storms back in Sinai after virus hiatus

Desert El Tih, Egypt: Spread out at the foot of a vast plateau in the Sinai desert, hundreds of excited Bedouins gathered to race their camels after a six-month break due to coronavirus.

Shrouded in a vast sand cloud kicked up by the hump-backed beasts, more than 500 camels were loudly cheered on by their owners dressed in traditional jalabiyas and headdresses.

Camel racing is a popular traditional sport in many Arab countries, most notably in the Gulf region. And in Egypt, Bedouins of the South Sinai desert have kept up the tradition.

But race events have been suspended since March following the COVID-19 outbreak, and orders only came down at the beginning of the month that they could resume last weekend.

The camels ran around a two-kilometre (1.2-mile) track in the Tih plateau, completing it in a matter of minutes, as they were followed by spectators and owners riding in SUVs to get a close-up glimpse of the action.

The competition “is a training for the international race, which should take place in October in Sharm el-Sheikh,” Saleh al Muzaini, head of the Nuweiba camel club, said.

One group of camels after another, placed in different categories according to age and whether they were male or female, made their debut on the dirt track lined by sand embankments on each side.

On their backs sat mechanical jockeys wearing racing jerseys and brandishing whips, which are lighter than human riders.

In a different race, young boys mount the camels to complete a 10-kilometre course.

- CRAZY CAMELS -
Among the audience was 32-year-old Mostafa Abu Al Fadl, a geologist at an oil company in Cairo, who came specially to watch.



“When I heard they were organising the race again, I told my friends how crazy, how wonderful it is... We had to come and see,” he said.

To the Bedouins, the race is a way of keeping a traditional heritage alive.

“There was camel racing in the past, but we revived it” in recent years, Sheikh Hassan, of the Alegat tribe, which organises the event, told AFP.

“Camels will not disappear for us. We can use them for centuries. If the camel goes away, the Bedouins will also go away.”

Egypt has so far registered over 100,000 coronavirus cases, and more than 5,500 fatalities.

Strict measures, including banning large gatherings, have been imposed in the country since March to prevent contagion.

Camel races — held every two or three months — often attract large audiences of tourists, visitors and Bedouins to the middle of the Sinai desert.

Sheikh Hassan, however, says the sparsely populated peninsula with its breezy and dry weather had been only mildly affected by the pandemic, and there were no coro-

Camel racing is a popular traditional sport in many Arab countries, most notably in the Gulf region. And in Egypt, Bedouins of the South Sinai desert have kept up the tradition.

navirus measures noticeably in place for the racing.

Suspending the races caused heavy losses for the camel owners, who still had to pay for their animals’ training, food and health checkups.

Over the six months alone, the owners lost some 10 and 15 million Egyptian pounds (between \$625,000 and \$940,000), accord-

ing to Sheikh Hassan.

- COSTLY PASSION -
For owner Soleiman Hamad, Saturday’s race ended on a high note as his animal came first in its category.

There is no prize money, but the winners carry off a prestigious trophy which also helps boost their animal’s value.

For Hamad and others, camel racing represents a source of additional income, provided they also have the means to train, feed and care for the animal.

“It’s costly, but it’s our passion,” he said.

Each camel costs up to 2,000 Egyptian pounds monthly to feed.

A well-trained camel can sell for up to two million Egyptian pounds, says Sheikh Hassan.

Bedouin of South Sinai usually eye Gulf countries, where camel racing is a popular and lucrative activity.

Now they are hoping for precious support with a visit due next month by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to the peninsula, which could give a vital boost to their business.

— AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



HEALTH

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om

How to tell difference between COVID-19, flu, common cold, allergies

Flu season is unpredictable in any year, depending on such factors as how many people get the vaccine and how well it matches circulating strains of the virus. This year, throw in the wild card of COVID-19.

Physicians say if we stick with the social distancing and mask-wearing to prevent COVID-19, those precautions could reduce spread of flu in the bargain. That theory is supported by lower-than-usual flu numbers so far this year in some parts of the southern hemisphere, where flu season is nearing its end.

But amid uneven compliance with these preventive measures in much of the United States - whether due to pandemic fatigue or a misguided belief that the crisis is exaggerated - infectious-disease specialists warn that we could face a double whammy of COVID-19 and flu this fall and winter.

Among those urging vigilance is Jeanne Marrazzo, a director of the Infectious Diseases Society of America and a physician researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "The big concern this year, of course, is that we are going to see what could be a perfect storm," she said. "We really can't be complacent about this." The difficulty is not just that flu and COVID-19 will be circulating at the same time, said John Zurlo, chief of the division of infectious diseases at Thomas Jefferson University. It is hard to tell one disease from the other.

Both illnesses can be characterised by fever, aches, and shortness of breath. Among the few distinguishing features is the sudden loss of smell experienced by some COVID-19 patients. Flu can impair the sense of smell, too, but in that case the culprit is a stuffy nose, where as in COVID-19 the reason is temporary damage to olfactory cells, Zurlo said.

Another way to tell one illness from the other is laboratory testing. The Jefferson health system and others plan to use "multiplex" tests that will analyze a patient's nasal swab for evidence of both viruses. Such tests might be used more for older patients and others who are at greater risk of complications from the flu, he said.

The results would help physicians determine whether to



administer an antiviral drug, which can reduce the severity of flu if given soon enough. If there are delays in testing or if supplies run short, the fallback option would be to treat any severe respiratory illness as a potential case of COVID-19, Marrazzo said.

Patients with either illness should isolate in any case, but if there is a suspicion of COVID-19, health departments may wish to notify others with whom infected people have come into contact. And above all, get a flu shot, she said. That reduces the risk of flu for the

Both illnesses can be characterised by fever, aches, and shortness of breath. Among the few distinguishing features is the sudden loss of smell experienced by some COVID-19 patients. Flu can impair the sense of smell, too, but in that case the culprit is a stuffy nose, where as in COVID-19 the reason is temporary damage to olfactory cells

individual and lessens the burden on the health care system. "If there's ever a year that you need to get your flu vaccine and get your kids vaccinated, this is the year," she said. — dpa

ENTERTAINMENT

Not so white Emmys: a blip, or real progress on diversity?



LOS ANGELES: From "Insecure's" 20-something women to the Muslim-American star of "Ramy," Sunday's Emmy line-up is an unprecedented showcase for people of colour.

But the television industry needs to take concrete action on pledges to nurture non-white writers and directors to ensure that the 2020 awards ceremony is not just a blip triggered by a summer of protests over systemic racism in the United States, observers say.

"I'm sure the last thing the Television Academy wanted was to have an 'Emmys so white' controversy in the middle of all that," said Eric Deggans, TV critic for National Public Radio. "So I'm not surprised they paid special attention to the work of Black performers," said Deggans, author of the 2012 book "Race Baiter."

Record Emmy nominations for people of colour included nods for Kerry Washington ("Little Fires Everywhere") and "American Son"), Sandra Oh ("Killing Eve"), Billy Porter ("Pose"), Regina King ("Watchmen"), Issa Rae ("Insecure") and Sterling K Brown ("This is Us" and "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel").

"Watchmen," the superhero alternative reality drama infused with racial themes, led nominations with 26 nods.

Nominations open doors for other Blacks, Asians and Latinos and shape perceptions beyond the world of entertainment, said Rashad Robinson, president of social justice organisation Color of Change.

"What these awards represent is the industry's way of creating a system of letting people in, of creating access to jobs and opportunities," Robinson

said. "It dictates the stories we get to see in the world about who we are, and that has deep implications on the unwritten rules about how we are treated in hospitals, by judges and at schools."

The Emmy nominees came from shows that were made before America began a painful cultural reckoning over racism this summer.

More are on their way, including documentary "Driving While Black," "Woke" about a Black cartoonist who has an encounter with police, abolitionist drama "The Good Lord Bird," and "Enslaved" about the history of the slave trade.

Robinson said that exciting as it is to see Black artists and stories break through, more structural changes such as inclusion riders, diversity in writers rooms and fully rounded characters are needed to ensure lasting change.

"It's not enough to care. It's not enough to be aware," he said. "We have to have people willing to act and to make real changes."

Deggans noted that Latinx talent is still largely overlooked at the Emmys, even though Latinos form America's second largest ethnic group after whites.

"It's regrettable that so much of the recognition fell on Black performers and there wasn't a little bit more in regard to Latinx people especially," said Deggans, noting that shows like "Gentefied," "Vida" and "One Day at a Time" were largely overlooked.

"The cause of Latinx representation in Hollywood is a little further back — where Black people were, say, 10 years ago," Deggans added.

The Emmy Awards will be handed out on Sunday at a virtual ceremony televised on ABC. — Reuters



Giving new life to scraps and plastic

BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY

It isn't new news anymore that plastic has not only been overflowing out of our landfills but also choking our oceans and threatening the lives of fauna on land and in the seas. Plastic waste is a growing issue that we face everywhere around the world.

Even though it is undeniable that plastic provides various benefits in our society, it is not enough to say that we overuse it, without thinking about the consequences. Our beaches are covered in trash from used bottles, plastic bags, and the newest culprit — used masks.

A recent article showcasing the beauty of Oman's beaches printed here in *Oman Daily Observer* was met with complaints as many of Oman's residents had witnessed the wanton disregard for the environment by the overpowering majority. From the remote shores of Barr al Hikman to the secret beaches in Sur, and even the coastal waters of Muscat including the popular "Love Road" — these areas faced the perennial problem of improper waste disposal.

A recent visit to the cliffs of Shiya, one of Sur's most beautiful of beaches, proved to be disappointing as tons of plastic — from water bottles to shopping bags littered nearly a half kilometre of rocky shores.

Several netizens have also reported that even though Masirah Island is already

remote, it did not escape from the improper plastic waste disposal. This trash can often be mistaken by animals as food and not only destroy the beauty of the place but also disrupt the lives of many of Oman's animals including many of the endangered sea turtles.

Single-use plastics have been creating havoc, and in the recent past, more eco-friendly alternatives to single-use plastics have popped up, which are not only better for the environment but also look very cute.

When looking for alternatives, Oman's very own Bader bin Mohammed al Raisi, a young local has taken up the fight against plastic and started his brand, making everyday commodities and reusable products from scraps found in Oman.

Currently, a student, Bader describes himself as a "plastic fighter" and whilst reusing and recycling became a major part of his life, he joined ventures with Ali al Hajri and started scrap_om.

"We are a brand that is all about recycling waste materials, fabrics, and tools. Using scrap, we like to create new things, functional, little trinkets, bags, and pouches — for both everyday use and for shopping trips," said Bader.

He showed some of the samples that they have been developing. They lend new life to items that would have otherwise found themselves in the landfills.

"I followed my passion which growing up I always had for maintaining the environment, currently living through a pandemic, it has been hard on all of us, both mentally and financially

When looking for alternatives, Oman's very own Bader bin Mohammed al Raisi, a young local has taken up the fight against plastic and started his brand, making everyday commodities and reusable products from scraps found in Oman



and this business was a part of me reflecting my love for keeping the environment healthy and by selling my products hoping that like me, people would also join in on the mission of a better, healthier and plastic-less environment" he added.

As can be seen on the page, it isn't just reusable bags made from scrap fabric, but little knick-knacks all handcrafted and hand-painted right here in Oman.

An empty shell of a coconut? In their hands, it became cute, ethnic accessories and necklaces. Bader himself creates pendants, necklaces, and wind-chimes made out of coconut shells that are one of kind. Along with these also found on the page are hand-painted bamboo incense burners and a variety of functional bags.

Scrap_om has just begun their journey towards contributing to the environment. True to any initiative, it would need the public support for it to flourish and for the idea to go far. But while the task is daunting, the owners of Scrap_om are committed to pursuing what little they could do to help the environment.

For a full range of their products and to kickstart that reduced waste lifestyle, follow them on their Instagram @scrap_om and join Bader on his fight against plastic waste.

"Recycling and reusing and reducing plastic in our everyday lives is a challenge, but its good to believe in yourself and follow through as every little change you make, adds up to result in making something big happen."

features

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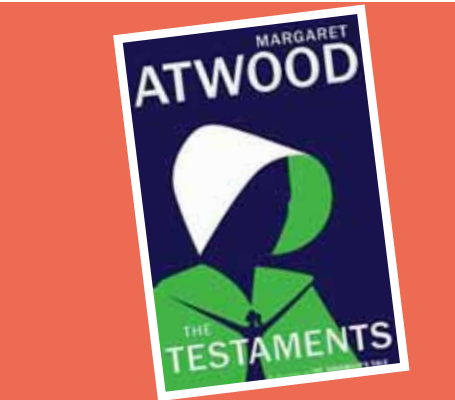


Giving new life to scraps and plastic

Story by Titash Chakraborty

One of the challenges we have to contend with as a society today is plastic. They are everywhere even in the remote shores of Oman. While recycling, reusing and reducing plastic in our everyday lives is a challenge, a duo has come together to create Scrap_om — a lifestyle brand dedicated to giving new life to scraps and plastic... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

TRADITION  CAMEL RACING STORMS BACK IN SINAI AFTER VIRUS HIATUS Spread out at the foot of a vast plateau in the Sinai desert, hundreds of excited Bedouins gathered to race their camels after a six-month break due to coronavirus.	LIFESTYLE  OMAN'S FOUR KEY TOURIST SITES INSPIRED NEW AMOUAGE FRAGRANCE What do the fjords of Musandam, the majestic Al Hajar Mountains, the coast of Ras Al Jinz, and the refreshing khareef of Dhofar have in common?	READ  THE TESTAMENTS BY MARGARET ATWOOD In a sequel to "The Handmaid's Tale," old secrets bring three women together as the Republic of Gilead's theocratic regime shows signs of decay.	ENTERTAINMENT  NOT SO WHITE EMMYS: A BLIP, OR REAL PROGRESS ON DIVERSITY? Burberry said on Monday it would livestream its Spring/Summer 2021 fashion show this week in partnership with live video-streaming service Twitch, becoming the first luxury brand to do so... Story on Page 18	CELEBRATE  WORKING PARENTS DAY Being a parent is difficult. You have to find a balance between work and running a household. Working Parents Day was created to celebrate our moms and dads who work hard to provide for their families. To celebrate today, honour your parents by volunteering to take responsibility for one of the house chores.
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