

P11

DJOKOVIC
TURNS PAGE
ON US OPEN
EXIT



P15

US BROKE
TRADE RULES BY
PUTTING TARIFFS
ON CHINA



P17

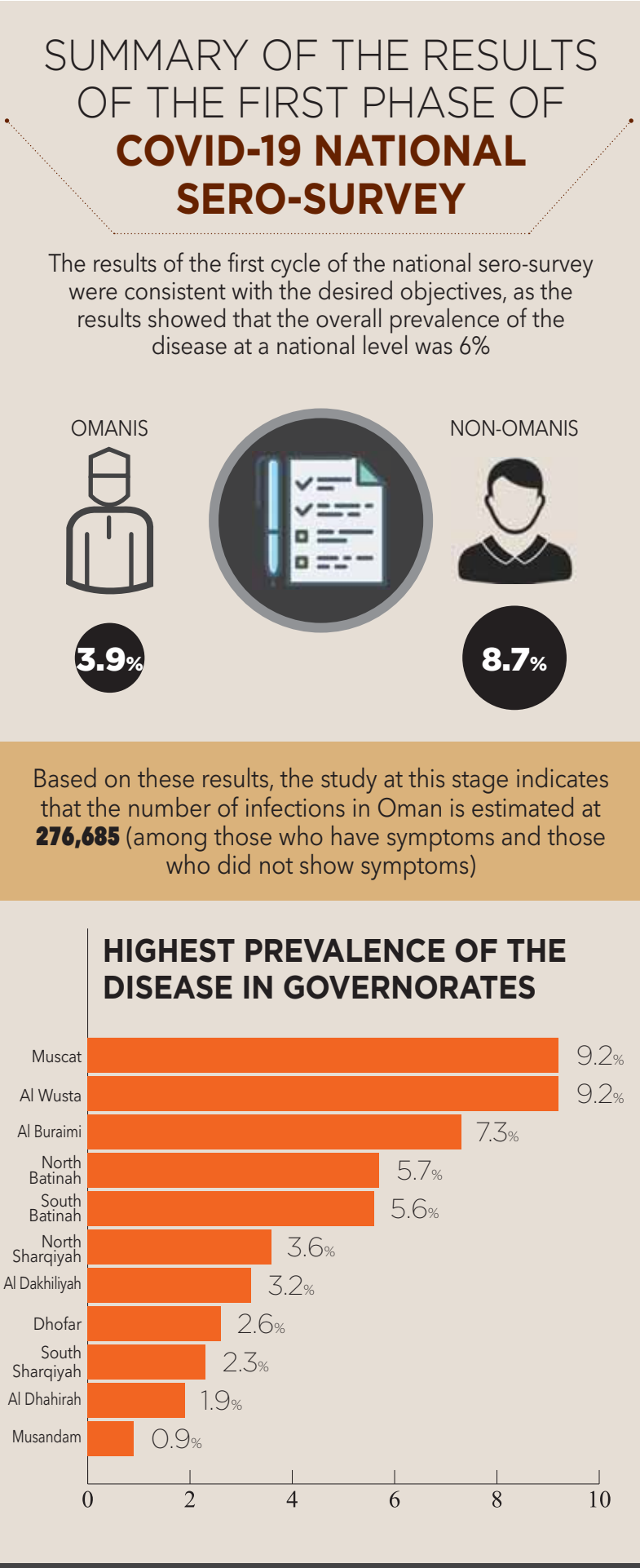
MOROCCO'S
MARRAKESH
'SUFFOCATES'
WITHOUT TOURISTS



6% OF POPULATION EXPOSED TO COVID-19

MUSCAT, AL WUSTA TOP IN CASES

VIRUS AMONG 8.7% OF EXPATS AND 3.9% OF OMANIS



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

A national serological survey conducted by the Ministry of Health found that six per cent of the population in the Sultanate was exposed to coronavirus. The infection is prevalent more among non-Omanis with 8.7 per cent testing positive and Omanis accounting for 3.9 per cent.

The survey helps the government in estimating the proportion of the population that might have been exposed to the virus causing coronavirus and developed immunity to it. This is done by checking for antibodies against Sars-CoV-2 in blood samples.

The cross-sectional survey includes all parts of the Sultanate, Omanis and expatriate volunteers whose blood samples are collected and tested as part of this exercise.

The first phase of results, which were released by the ministry on Wednesday, is significant as authorities prepare to reopen airports and schools in the coming months.

The survey will also benefit a lot in planning for the future in case vaccines are found in the coming six months.

It may be noted that 20,000 people will be examined in four phases over the next 10 weeks, and in each phase, 5,000 from all governorates will be examined at a rate of 400 people from each governorate. The Governorate of Muscat will have twice the number of samples because of the population density and other factors.

Among the governorates, Muscat and Al Wusta governorates had the highest prevalence of the disease at 9.2 per cent rate each.

Expatriates at 5-year low

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

Continuing with the recent demographic transition in the Sultanate, the total population has come down by 203,715 during the nine-month period this year.

However, the Omani population reached 2.735 million making up 61.3 per cent of a total of 4.461 people on September 14. The expatriate numbers dropped to its lowest level of 38.7 per cent to reach 1.725 million.

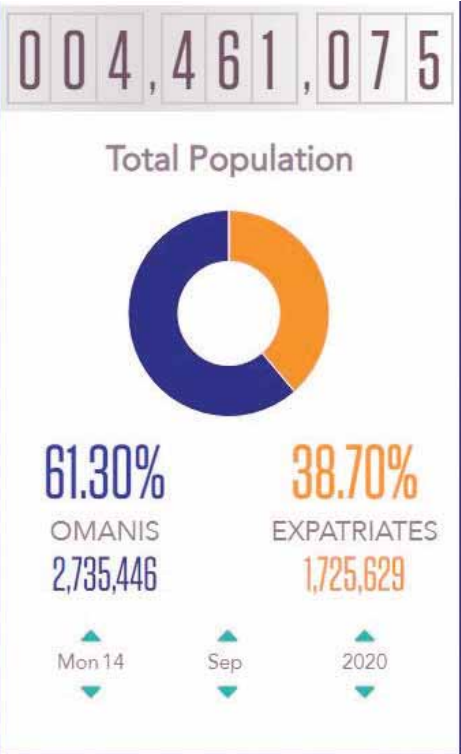
This is the lowest percentage of expat population, comprising mainly Indians, Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationals, since July 2015, when it made up 43.6 per cent of Oman's total population.

In the beginning of this year, the number of Omanis stood at 2,692 million or 57.70 per cent, while the number of expatriates reached 1.971 million or 42.30 per cent.

As of 2019, the annual growth rate in Oman was 3.56 per cent, down from 4.18 per cent in 2018. The birth rate in Oman is pretty on par with the rest of the world with 2.67 children being born to the average woman.

According to figures available from National Centre for Statistics and Information, Muscat continues to be home for the largest number of 1.380 million people even as the total population in governorate witnessed a drop of 3.08 per cent during the first seven months.

Except for Al Wusta, all the governorates witnessed across-the-board fall in the population. Dhofar is the second largest with 437,381 people against 442,082 in July.





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Astronomers find first giant exoplanet

LONDON: Astronomers have discovered a planet the size of Jupiter closely orbiting the smouldering remains of a dead star, the first time that an intact exoplanet has been discovered travelling around a white dwarf, according to research published on Wednesday.

Researchers said the fate of this giant planet, called WD 1586 b, offers a potential vision of our own Solar System when the Sun eventually ages into a white dwarf in around five billion years. When it has burned



through its stores of hydrogen, a star like the Sun enters its death-throes, first swelling enormously into an incandescent red giant that scorches and engulfs nearby planets. Then it

collapses, reducing it to its burnt-out core.

This is the white dwarf, an extremely dense stellar ember glowing faintly with leftover thermal energy and slowly fading over billions of years.

Previous research has suggested some white dwarfs can retain more distant remnants of their planetary systems.

But until now no intact planets had been detected in orbit around one of the dead stars. — AFP



His Majesty congratulates Japan’s new Prime Minister

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Yoshihide Suga, Prime Minister of Japan on the occasion of electing him as the new Premier. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes of success to achieve aspirations

of the friendly Japanese people towards further progress and prosperity, and the friendship relations between the two countries further development and growth.

**HM THANKED BY
PRESIDENT OF BELARUS**
His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik received thanks from President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, in reply to his Majesty’s congratulatory cable to him on the occasion of his country’s Independence Anniversary. President Lukashenko expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation

for His Majesty the Sultan’s congratulations. He wished His Majesty good health and wellbeing, and the Omani people further progress and welfare. He affirmed to continue developing the existing bilateral relations between the two countries for the interest of their friendly people.

**HM THANKED BY DEPUTY
EMIR OF KUWAIT**
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received thanks from Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al-Sabah, Deputy Emir and Crown Prince of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty’s condolences cable on the death of Sheikh Sabah Mohammed

Sabah Al Salman al Sabah. Sheikh Nawaf expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty the Sultan’s sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to the Almighty Allah to rest the deceased’s soul in peace and protect His Majesty against all harms. — ONA

COVID-19 child mortality rate less: WHO

KABEER YOUSUF
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COVID-19 deaths among children are lower than that of adults and elderly, according to Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of World Health Organization (WHO). In a virtual press conference convened by Unesco and Unicef on Tuesday, Dr Tedros said that the impact of COVID-19 among children and adolescents needs to be subject to research and further studies.

“We know that this virus can kill children, but that children tend to have a milder infection and there are very few severe cases and deaths from COVID-19 among children and adolescents.”

He further said that the data showed that less than 10 per cent of infection cases and less than 0.2 per cent of deaths are reported among people under the age of 20.

Oman reported the first death of a teenager, a 15-year-old boy, last week.



The press conference also attended by Audrey Azoulay, Unesco Director-General and Henrietta Fore, Unicef Executive Director, witnessed global media eagerly listening to the worldwide facts and figures pertaining to the

pandemic. “Although children have largely been spared many of the most severe health effects of the virus, they have suffered in other ways,” he added. In many countries, essential

services for nutrition and immunisation have been disrupted, and millions of children have missed out on months of schooling. The participants observed that keeping children safe and

Keeping children safe and at school is not a job for schools alone, or governments alone or families alone. It’s a job for all of us, working together

at school is not a job for schools alone, or governments alone or families alone. It’s a job for all of us, working together.

With the right combination of measures, schools and parents will be able to keep our kids safe and teach them that health and education are two of the most precious commodities in life.

During school closures, continuity of education should be guaranteed through distance learning.

The time during which schools are closed should be used to put in place measures to prevent and respond to transmission when schools reopen.

Sultanate and Germany seek to enhance cooperation

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, chaired on Tuesday the conclusion of the 15th session of the Omani-German Joint Committee which was held through virtual communication between Muscat and Berlin, co-chaired on the German side, by Marco Wandervitz, Parliamentary Minister of State at the Ministry of Economy and Energy.

The two ministers also held a virtual closed meeting, during which they exchanged views on confronting the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social repercussions, as well as ways to exchange information and enhance cooperation in this regard.

The two sides stressed the importance of the international community joining hands in ensuring the universal benefit for all countries in order to contain the pandemic and eliminate it.

At the end of the session, the two sides signed the joint agreed minutes on the work of the Joint Committee, in the presence of all its members from the public and private sectors of both countries.

The two sides expressed their joint keenness to expand and diversify the interests and benefits between the two friendly countries towards broader horizons and in various areas of cooperation, while giving more focus and follow-up to the development of bilateral trade and investments.

They also identified priorities for joint cooperation in the sectors of renewable energy, higher education, vocational training and research, and in the fields of tourism, health care, the environment, climate change, the transfer of science, knowledge and technology, in addition to the development of small and medium size enterprises. — ONA

Muscat and Al Wusta governorates top in coronavirus cases

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The Governorates of Muscat and Al Wusta have recorded the highest rate of COVID-19 cases, said the Ministry of Health on Wednesday.

Quoting from the results of the first phase of the National Serological Survey, the ministry said the two governorates registered 9.2 per cent cases each, followed by Al Buraimi with 7.3 per cent cases.

While the lowest rate was recorded in Musandam Governorate

with 0.9 per cent, North and South Al Batinah Governorates accounted for 5.7 per cent 5.6 per cent, respectively.

North Al Sharqiyah registered 3.6 per cent, Al Dakhiliyah 3.2 per cent, Dhofar 2.6 per cent, South Sharqiyah 2.3 per cent and Al Dhahirah 1.9 per cent cases.

The ministry, while stressing that the participation of individuals plays a crucial role in the survey, said “the participation in the survey process by both the nationals and non-

nationals should continue”.

Last week, Minister of Health Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi called upon people to take extreme caution, and exhibit greater alertness and responsibility in public places to deal with this health crisis.

“A second wave of coronavirus is inevitable, but we can avoid it through full commitment to precautionary measures that include wearing face masks and following up other healthy habits,” the minister said.

The minister said that COVID-19

infection and mortality figures are fluctuating and again started to rise in the recent weeks.

Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Regional Director of WHO, said that there is significant increase in the number of cases in some counties and it highlights an urgent need for more rigorous action. While an upsurge of cases was expected due to countries easing restrictions after months of lockdowns and with increased population mobility, governments

cannot continue to respond as they have been doing since the start of the pandemic.

“Individuals and communities must remain vigilant. We must find ways to address the resurgence of COVID-19 cases and limit the spread of infection. Millions of people are still at risk. Social measures such as mask use, physical distancing, and proper hygiene measures must be strictly followed. I cannot stress this enough,” Al Mandhari said.



Sultanate’s advanced e-payment system hailed

DUBLIN: A recent report released by Research and Market hailed the system of electronic payment in the Sultanate, describing Oman’s e-payment market as “dynamic and competitive”.

The report commended the Central Bank of Oman (CBO)’s introducing a (platform) system of clearing and settlement of payments via mobile phones. It reaffirmed that this platform allows for interoperability among financial services via the phone and mobile wallet services run by banks and e-payment providers. It enables users to transfer payments from one person to another and from one person to a government department through mobile phone numbers and quick response (QR) codes.

The report said that CBO published uniform specifications for the said platform, in addition to the criteria of a QR code to enable

payments via mobile phones in a single facet across different financial services applications on mobile phones and wallet services.

With increased preference to electronic payments, banks publish e-payment business portals to improve the flow of online transactions aimed to curb Internet fraud, said the report, adding that, in July 2020 Oman Air launched a business e-payment portal in cooperation with Bank Dhofar that allows for the payment of air tickets online in a secure and user-friendly manner.

The report pointed out that the bank established an agency specialised in the management of ‘national payment system’.

The report said that coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic enhanced the spread of non-touch (digital) payments in the Sultanate. It urged the CBO to endorse these methods as a substitute to cash payments. — ONA

Economic issues discussed with GCC official

MUSCAT: Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, on Wednesday met Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General.

The two sides reviewed directives of the GCC leaders in relation to achieving national priorities, the most important of which is the

economic and financial agenda that would enhance economic and financial integration among GCC countries towards achieving the GCC Customs Union and the Gulf Common Market, as well as the success of economic diversification programmes.

The two sides discussed joint

challenges in the light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the decline in oil prices and their impact on the economic and financial situation of the GCC states, in addition to the priorities sought by the GCC states to achieve joint economic and financial benefits.

— ONA

COVID-19 cases hit 91,196

MUSCAT: The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 91,196, while the number of recoveries stood at 84,363, comprising 92.5 per cent. Meanwhile, the total number of deaths rose to 805, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry said 65 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of COVID-19 patients in hospital stood at 488, of whom 179 are in intensive care units (ICU). — ONA

Sultanate's health care system is 'resilient despite rise in cases'

STAFF REPORTER
SALALAH, SEPT 16

The Sultanate's health care system is resilient and coherent despite increase in the number of hospitalised cases, especially the cases that need intensive care and despite many other challenges the system is facing, said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, during his visit to Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah.

The Health Minister appreciated the role of health workers for their tremendous efforts, patience and perseverance in fulfilling their humanitarian mission in providing health care to citizens and residents in the light of the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Al Saeedi met with a number of administrative and technical officials in the health services in the Governorate of Dhofar to view and check on all health measures and measures taken regarding COVID-19 in the presence of Dr Muhammad bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs and Dr Khaled bin Muhammad al Mashikhi, Director General of Health Services in the governorate, in the directorate's meeting hall.



The minister praised the efforts of the medical staff at Sultan Qaboos Hospital and the rest of the health institutions in the governorate, stressing that the health institutions, thanks to God and then thanks to your efforts and your colleagues in all governorates of the Sultanate, are still resilient and coherent despite the increase in the number of hospitalised cases, especially the increase in the number of intensive care cases and despite the challenges it faces.



The minister also stressed the importance of adhering to the precautionary measures — issued by the Supreme Committee in charge of examining a mechanism for dealing with developments resulting from the spread of COVID-19 — such as wearing a mask, physical distancing, washing hands with soap and water, using sterilizers and antiseptics, and avoiding gatherings of all kinds.

After that, the minister listened to the questions and interventions of

the attendees and responded to them, stressing that the ministry is working according to a scientific methodology in covering the various needs throughout the governorates and states of the Sultanate, appreciating the care and high attention of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his generous and continuous support to achieve the goals of combating the virus and reducing its negative effects on citizens and residents of the Sultanate alike.

Bringing drones without permit is 'smuggling'

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Bringing wireless aircraft or drones to the country without making a disclosure to the customs will be considered as a smuggling-related crime, the Directorate General of Customs (Oman Customs) warned on Wednesday.

Drones can be brought to the country only with the approval of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) after the payment of customs tax.

Oman Customs said in a statement that its list of restricted goods and commodities includes wireless aircraft equipped with cameras that are used by individuals or institutions in aerial photography for commercial, tourism, and entertainment purposes.

CAA is the competent authority to issue permits for the use of remote control aircraft and drones in accordance with the Civil Aviation Law issued by Royal Decree 76/2019.

"To protect society from any security breach that threatens the homeland and its civil and military institutions or the private life of individuals, the recently issued regulations state that the use of drones or unmanned aircraft is allowed with the approval issued by the concerned authorities in accordance with the applicable customs procedures



and controls," the statement said.

Article 3 of the regulations state that the owner of the leased unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) brought into the Sultanate should remove them

from the Sultanate's territory upon completion of his licensed mission and the CAA has the right to reject the licence application or renew it in line with the prevailing regulations.

BE INTERACTIVE AND CREATIVE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Maybe the pandemic brought in many challenges with it, but for one passionate teacher who wanted to help her students learn it has been a period of creativity.

Meet Amal Khalifa al Saadiyah, whose young students learning English were a bit confused when the talk of COVID-19 came about and subsequently interrupted the class. For Amal it was a question of how to complete the set portions and keep them practising what they have learnt – the more you practise the better.

All her students come from Arabic speaking families and in her quest to keep up with the lessons she sought the help of technology. Initially it was powerpoint presentations and short videos through WhatsApp to complete the units.

"Afterwards it was my friend who requested the methods that I use to teach my little ones. And that brought about the You Tube Channel. I am very happy that I was able to help many children and most importantly mothers," said Amal.

Amal has been teaching first and second graders and her focus is mainly Jolly Phonics Project.

"I felt as a teacher we must find alternative ways to reach our young students. For example, distance learning is something we can focus on during this time. So I have been trying hard to develop myself on my own to catch up with technology and programmes and some websites that can help us. So I thought of the YouTube Channel to teach reading and other units. I am not sure what more I can do but what I am looking forward to is to get into more advanced technology for incorporating tools into my teaching and facilities that helps us to be more creative and excel in areas we had never thought about before," Amal reflected.

On the other hand, she points out that she is missing her young students in school who are a source of energy and inspiration.

"When you have that energy

“



I realise we need to be more interactive than before the pandemic. So I am looking forward to being more professional during this part of my life as a teacher

AMAL KHALIFA
AL SAADIYAH

in school it gives life and I think I am missing seeing them and their stories and ideas that they share with me. It is a very good part that we probably did not look into much earlier. Maybe I did not appreciate it much. But it is only a period and we will pass it with God's grace. I believe we might be going through some discomfort now but we will come out of it with more benefits," she noted.

She was always keen on design activity booklets but it is during this period she realised about the importance of interaction.

"I realise we need to be more interactive than before the pandemic. So I am looking forward to being more professional during this part of my life as a teacher," she said.

So far she has been attending online classes, "Until now I have been an attendee and now I would like to be the presenter and use the methods to teach my students and hopefully I will succeed," Amal said with hope and confidence.

No wonder she is known as the Teacher Hope – the name of her YouTube Channel.

Hybrid learning may push up demand for laptops

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Supreme Committee's decision to allow retailers to start promotional campaigns, including discounts, coincides with the reopening of several activities, including schools.

While the Ministry of Education has prepared a framework for hybrid education, according to academic sources, the mainstay will be online education as the pandemic scare still looms large in Oman.

The Ministry of Health officials, including Dr Mohammad al Hosni, Under-Secretary for Health Affairs, have clarified that the decision to open schools will be revisited if COVID-19 cases increase.

Under these circumstances, it is necessary that gadgets such as tablets and personal laptops are available easily and at affordable prices in the country.

"The demand for laptops will be unusually more in some homes with more than one child. Two or even three may be needed. We are coordinating with manufacturers and suppliers to get affordable and



customised tablets and laptops for specific markets," said a senior purchase manager of an electronic retail group. "Laptops are more likely to be preferred over tablets for their durability and the staying power of the battery. Students need limited and specific software and applications. We have also been approached by the Ministry of Education to ensure the availability of such products in the market by November."

In line with changing market and community needs, laptops developed by budding Omani engineers are expected to hit the market soon.

The first of its kind locally-designed laptop, Onsor, is developed by Muath al Hinai, Yazin al Musafir, Hamza al

Numani, and Meher al Kindi.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Muath al Hinai said, "We will soon announce the technical details and the price at a press conference. We are also in the process of finding the right distributor for our product."

He added, "We will be also talking to the Ministry of Education as the focus has shifted to online and distance education in the current pandemic situation."

Layla al Balushi, an Omani parent of three children, said, "Online education is coming to stay for even if it is in a hybrid form. In the current economic climate, not all parents can afford to buy laptops worth around RO 50 or even more."

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HEALTH WORKER'S SAFETY IS PATIENT'S SAFETY

WORLD PATIENT SAFETY DAY,
WHICH FALLS ON SEPTEMBER 17,
IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
SHARING BEST PRACTICES IN
HEALTH CARE BY RAISING
AWARENESS ABOUT THE
IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH
WORKER SAFETY AND ITS ROLE
IN PATIENT SAFETY



STAFF REPORTER

The Sultanate marks World Patient Safety Day today, which falls on September 17 every year. This year's theme, 'Health Worker Safety: A Priority for Patient Safety', highlights the most significant national achievements that have been accomplished in the field of patient and health workers safety. The celebration is also an opportunity for sharing best practices in health care by raising awareness about the importance of health worker safety and its role in patient safety.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted unprecedented pressure on health systems worldwide. A knowledgeable and skilled health workforce is critical for the provision of safe care to patients. Therefore, strict adherence to safety standards to maintain the safety of both the health cadres and patients is required. It is also a time to express our thanks and gratitude to medical and allied medical cadres, administrative and technical personnel who are the first line of defence against the pandemic.

This year's WPSD highlights core themes related to the safety of health workers such as occupational and environmental safety at

workplace; mental and psychosocial health; means and importance of following precautionary measures to prevent epidemic at workplace; and training professional competitive personnel to counter pandemics.

The Ministry of Health's aim is to provide high quality health services on par with international standards. The health institutions in Oman have contributed to improving the delivery of health services and simultaneously the level of patient safety.

Moreover, both public and private health institutions in Oman have collaborated with international institutions and organisations, notably the World Health Organization (WHO), to develop policies to improve the delivery of health services.

The Sultanate was selected as a WHO

Collaborating Centre on Quality of Care and Patient Safety in the fourth quarter of 2018 for its contributions to the significant progress made by the country over the past 10 years in the field of quality and patient safety.

Oman is continuously working to develop standards and practices to improve patient safety. The MoH has adopted the Patient Safety Friendly Hospital Initiative (PSFHI) in 2015 with a plan to cover all hospitals under the supervision of the Ministry of Health, including private hospitals, within the five-year development plan.

The following has been achieved in this

regard: MoH hospitals in Khoula, Nizwa, Rustaq, Suhar, Ibri, Sur, Sinaw, Khasab, Ibra, and Buraimi have implemented this initiative and were evaluated and accredited by the WHO.

Three private hospitals (Starcare-Al Mawaleh, Badr Al Samaa-Ruwi, Aster Al Raffah Hospital, Ghubra) have completed the implementation of the initiative and were assessed and accredited by the WHO.

The initiative was launched in MoH hospitals (Sultan Qaboos, Al Nahdha, Al Masarrah, Masira, Jalan Bani Bu Ali, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan) and were assessed by an internal team from MoH's Quality Assurance centre.

The initiative was launched in seven private hospitals (Al Hayat-Muscat Private, KIMS, LIFELINE-Suhar, Apollo, Burjeel, Gulf Specialized Hospital). Staff were trained in the implementation of the initiative using patient safety international standards.

During the Patient Safety Global Ministerial Summit in 2016, the Sultanate proposed to dedicate a national day for patient safety, which commenced in 2018. Given Oman's trustworthy reputation among international organisations, particularly WHO, it was recommended for launching the EMR Patient Safety Day initiative, approved by the WHO during a meeting in Geneva, May 2019. This demonstrates the Directorate General for Quality Assurance Center's (DGQAC) commitment to carry out its responsibilities to join in the development of the health services system in line with the future vision.

Foreign Minister receives GCC Secretary General

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in his office on Tuesday Dr Nayef Falah Mubarak al Hajraf, GCC Secretary General.

The meeting discussed several topics of interest to the GCC march

and enhancing the joint cooperation to serve the GCC countries and peoples, as well as their joint interest.

The meeting was attended by Khalifa bin Said al Abri, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Development Affairs at the GCC

Secretariat General, Dr Abdullah bin Hamad al Badi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, Saud bin Ahmed al Barwani, Head of the GCC Department and some officials at the Foreign Ministry.

— ONA



Oman ratifies accession to UN logistics convention



DIGITALISATION OF ROAD TRANSPORT, STANDARDISING CONTRACTS TO HELP REDUCE COSTS

MUSCAT: In line with its Logistics Strategy 2040 (SOLS 2040), aimed at promoting Oman as a global logistics hub, the government ratified its accession to the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Good by Road (CMR) and the Additional Protocol on the Electronic Consignment Note (e-CMR) under the Royal Decree No. 114/2020.

The accession to e-CMR marks a significant step forward for Oman's wider global adoption of digital transport and logistics systems – including customs transit. Oman recognises that the e-CMR will support the efficiency of logistics supply chain- enabling a streamlined and a more secure flow of goods. By joining this UN Convention, Oman will stand

at the forefront of digitalisation of road transport, standardising contracts both locally and internationally.

“CMR is another building block towards the finalisation of national frameworks and legislations designed to enhance Oman's transport system and help reach the goal of more effective GCC trade integration. Being a key logistics player in the region, Oman is keen on adopting the best international practices for foreign trade facilitation,” said Ahmed bin Suleiman al Yarubi, Director of the Land Transport Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

“Thanks to a standardised bill of lading and clear-cut responsibilities among the contracting parties, CMR will help regulate the international

road transport operations of the private sector in Oman,” said Hilal bin Salim al Kharousi, Senior Trade Facilitation Strategist at Asyad Group. “CMR keeps pace with the rapidly changing global supply chain, addressing the operational hindrances of trade by road, reducing error rates and increasing overall efficiency of logistics,” he said.

“The United Nations Convention ratified by 55 countries provides a competitive environment for carriage of goods among the member states and the rest of the world. This is enabled through the various contractual partners including freight forwarders, transit operators as well as road transport and customs stakeholders,” he added.

Al Kharousi confirmed that

Oman's accession to CMR will not only see a rapid reduction in TIR costs and related guarantees but will also regulate carriers' liability for total or partial loss of goods or late delivery; ensuring easier, safer and more reliable processes.

“By joining e-CMR, Oman's accelerated digitalisation will improve work performance and quality; cutting costs and saving time,” he said. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Asyad Group have played a pivotal role in developing Oman's requirements for ratifying CMR. Through introductory seminars, they managed to engage the business community stressing the CMR's importance for the private sector and its relationship with its international counterparts.

— ONA

False COVID-19 notions cause for concern

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

As the authorities are trying their level best to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, some are refusing to admit that the COVID-19 is real. They are living on some false notions to support their claims and cite rumours as justification to their belief.

Abdullah from Mirbat is a hard-working employee in the government sector. He is always on his toes to get things done and tries to wind up the day's work as early as possible. But he is not convinced that the pandemic is real.

He was seen conversing with his friend, who was duly masked and trying to maintain social distancing at a fuel station. He was polite enough to ask whether he can shake hands, to which his friend could not say 'no' and told Abdullah to just touch.

After picking up the conversation, Abdullah said, “This corona is fake. I have been working daily, moving here and there, meeting clients and wearing masks only when pointed out by someone or places where entry without a mask is not allowed, and this is going on for the last six months.”

He was trying to convince his friend, “Look nothing has happened to me despite not wearing a mask and not maintaining social distancing.”

Abdullah is not the only one who is thinking on these lines. Many are not following the pandemic protocols and putting the government's efforts of containing the pandemic at risk. Somehow or the other they are not breaking the chain either by becoming victims of the disease

Many are not following the pandemic protocols and putting the government's efforts of containing the pandemic at risk. Somehow or the other they are not breaking the chain either by becoming victims of the disease themselves or spreading it to others

themselves or spreading it to others.

A senior doctor, who did not want to be named, called for more awareness about the disease. “It is not that they are deliberately defying. They are not following the protocols out of ignorance. No one in generations has seen a pandemic like this. There are examples that whenever a phenomenon of this magnitude occurs many good and bad theories erupt. This is everyone's responsibility to rule out those rumours and support the authorities in checking the virus's spread.”

“There are facts that masks are hugely effective in containing the virus. This small initiative along with social distancing can be hugely effective in containing the disease until a proper medicine or vaccine is introduced,” he said.

6% of population exposed to COVID-19

FROM PAGE 1

“The survey has become one of the main pillars supporting the national strategy to respond to the pandemic by assessing the prevalence of COVID-19 infection by age groups, monitoring of laboratory-diagnosed cases, assessing the level of infection in various governorates in Oman as well as the

proportion of infections in those who have not shown symptoms, and assessing the impact of the closure of the governorates,” the statement from the ministry said.

Launched in July, the first phase of the study revealed that the number of infections is estimated at 276,685 (those who have symptoms and those who did not show symptoms).

Sultanate marks World Patient Safety Day

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Directorate General of Quality Assurance Center, on Wednesday organised a virtual conference on patient safety to mark the Third National & Second World Patient Safety Day held under the theme “Health Worker Safety: A Priority for Patient Safety”.

The event, held under the patronage of Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH's Under-Secretary for

Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, in the presence of Dr Sultan Yarub al Busaidy, MoH's Adviser for Health Affairs, witnessed a wide participation from different stakeholders worldwide.

Regarding this year's theme, Dr Al Saeedi emphasised in a recorded address that the health cadres are the greatest weapon in encountering any challenge in the field of patient services and their safety, and they are a wealth that cannot be replaced;

they are the biggest aid to the patient, and ensuring their safety guarantees providing safe and high quality health care services to patients.

Meanwhile, the chief guest affirmed that the ministry is committed to supporting its health workers and gives priority to their well-being and safety, since they are the first line of defence during crises and health emergencies - as it was perceived amid this paramedic. She added

that the ministry relies on the application of the latest occupational safety strategies to practise the medical profession to safeguard its human cadres, and is committed to applying the World Health Organization protocols for the treatment and safety of patients.

The event further announced the hospitals that passed the WHO Patient Safety Friendly Hospital Initiative final assessment, namely Ibri and Al Buraimi hospitals. — ONA



Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries

Wealth and Water Resources

Tender Notice

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender Document Price (RO)	Class	Last date for Collection of Documents	Last date for Submission of Documents
453/2020-39	The Implementation of Aerial Spraying Operation to Control Dubas Bug Insect on Date Palm Plantations /Spring Generation 2021	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 4/10/2020	Wednesday 14/10/2020
454/2020-40	Supply of Pesticides for Dubas Bug Control in Date Palm Trees/ Spring and Autumn Generation 2021	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 4/10/2020	Wednesday 14/10/2020

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24166670 or etenderhd@ita.gov.om
- Note: Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



YEMEN WARRING PARTIES TO DISCUSS PRISONERS RELEASE

UNITED NATIONS: Delegations from Yemen's warring parties are due to meet in Switzerland this week for talks on a UN-backed prisoner exchange deal, which UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths said on Tuesday he hopes will result in the release of some detainees.

Griffiths told the UN Security Council that "logistical arrangements permitting" the talks would resume in Switzerland this week between the two delegations. A UN source said the talks were due to start on Thursday.

"The parties committed to release conflict-related prisoners and detainees back in 2018 in Stockholm, and furthered their discussions to fulfil that commitment in Amman earlier this year," Griffiths told the council. "What I hope is that this meeting will actually result in the release of some prisoners."

Mohammed Abdulsalam, chief negotiator of the Ansar Allah movement, said his group's committee is set to leave Sanaa on a UN plane. The Ansar Allah and Yemen's government are trying to reach an agreement to end a years-long war and ease a humanitarian crisis in the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country.

Griffiths told the 15-member UN Security Council he sent an "advanced draft" of a ceasefire deal to Yemen's warring parties last week and "now is the time for the parties to swiftly conclude the negotiations."

He also said the political importance of gas-rich Marib — the last government stronghold where fighting has raged over the past year — should not be underestimated and that "military shifts and consequences and events in Marib have ripple effects on dynamics of the conflict across Yemen."

Meanwhile, two senior UN officials



A fighter loyal to Yemen's Ansar Allah movement stands guard during a rally in Sanaa. — AFP File Photo

voiced concerns about the worsening situation in Yemen, warning of the risk of famine and slamming several donors, for failing to deliver on their pledges.

Fighting in Yemen over the last six years has claimed tens of thousands of lives, mostly civilians, and sparked what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

UN envoy Martin Griffiths told the Security Council that Yemen could "slip back away from the road to peace." He cited "increased fighting, greater humanitarian needs and the

UN envoy Martin Griffiths told the Security Council that Yemen could 'slip back away from the road to peace'

COVID-19 pandemic" as among the factors in play.

Griffiths said he had sent all warring parties a draft of a "joint declaration" reflecting what had been said in previous rounds of talks.

"Now is the time for the parties to swiftly conclude the negotiations and finalise the Joint Declaration," he said.

The internationally recognised government in Yemen has been battling the Ansar Allah since 2014, when the fighters seized much of the north including the capital Sanaa.

— Agencies

UN experts demand release of jailed Algerian journalist

GENEVA: A journalist jailed for his coverage of mass protests in Algeria must be released, United Nations independent experts said on Wednesday.

Khaled Drareni was jailed for two years on Tuesday as a crackdown on dissent intensifies after a year of anti-government demonstrations.

He was jailed for his coverage of the protest movement that toppled the North African country's longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika last year.

Drareni was initially handed three years but his sentence was reduced by a year on appeal.

However, his lawyers were shocked that he was not handed a more lenient judgment or an acquittal.

"We condemn in the strongest possible terms this two-year prison sentence imposed on a journalist who was simply doing his job, and call on the Algerian authorities to reverse it and set Mr Drareni free," the experts

said.

The experts do not speak for the UN but report their findings to it.

Although his sentence was reduced, "it is still grossly inappropriate because the charges brought against him are a blatant violation of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and of association", they said.

The eight signatories included the special rapporteurs on peaceful assembly, freedom of opinion and human rights defenders, along with members of the UN working group on arbitrary detention.

They said they were alarmed that the Algerian authorities were increasingly using national security laws to prosecute people who were exercising their rights.

"Drareni, and all the others currently in prison, or awaiting trial simply for doing their job and defending human rights must be immediately released and protected," they said. — AFP



Algerian protesters gather outside the court in Algiers in support of journalist Khaled Drareni during his appeal. — AFP

LONG ROAD TO PEACE



A Palestinian woman passes the scene of an Israeli air strike at Hamas site in the northern Gaza strip. — Reuters

Sudan arrests 41 for possessing explosives

KHARTOUM: Sudanese authorities on Wednesday said they arrested 41 people for possessing a large amount of explosive materials, including the same compound that caused a catastrophic explosion in Lebanon last month.

"Forty-one people were arrested in possession of explosives, enough to destroy (the capital) Khartoum," said public prosecutor Tagelsir al Hebr in a press conference, adding that his office had opened an investigation.

Intelligence gathered since August on "the movements of terrorist groups" led to the arrests, according to Jamal Jumaa, spokesman for the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

"We fear now that some Sudanese people will resort to carrying out sabotage and

bombings," he said.

"This is a threat to Sudanese national security."

Jumaa said the materials seized included the same explosive compound that caused the massive blast in the Lebanese capital on August 4.

The explosion of tonnes of ammonium nitrate at Beirut's port killed at least 190 people and devastated large swathes of the city.

Sudan is currently led by a transitional government, which took power months after the April 2019 ouster of longtime president Omar al Bashir.

The government has vowed to rebuild the economy, beleaguered by decades of US sanctions and internal conflict under Bashir's rule.

But the country has continued to suffer severe economic hardship,

which played a key role in triggering the unprecedented anti-Bashir protests in December 2018.

Meanwhile, 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.

"The health situation in Sudan wasn't at its best anyway, and it is becoming more and more challenging," Sudan's Foreign Affairs Minister Omar Qamareddine said, as emergency aid from Bahrain arrived on Monday.

Over 110,000 homes have been damaged or destroyed by floodwaters, according to the government, increasing the risk of water-borne diseases and hampering efforts to stem the spread of novel coronavirus. — AFP

Ancient inscription reminds modern Egypt of drought risk

ASWAN: A granite inscription tells us that for seven years during the reign of the ancient Egyptian king Djoser, the Nile failed to go through its annual flooding cycle, causing a devastating drought and famine.

The hieroglyphs on Nile's Sehel Island near Aswan in southern Egypt are more than 4,000 years old, but worries about the natural rhythm of the Nile, which provides 90 per cent of Egypt's fresh water, are of no less importance today.

"The Nile does not reach its previous levels in the winter and summer flows," said 52-year-old Abdel Hares Mohamed, a resident of Aswan



Dr Zahi Hawass, egyptologist, during an interview at his office in Cairo. — Reuters



The entrance gate ruins of Egyptian temple 'Khnum, God of Water' located at Elephantine Island at Aswan. — Reuters

who gives Nile boat rides to tourists.

Officials say Egypt currently has around 570 cubic metres of water per person per year.

Experts consider a country as water poor if its supply is less than 1,000 cubic metres per person annually. Experts blame population growth, climate change and a giant hydropower dam built by Ethiopia on the Blue Nile, which Egyptian authorities say poses a threat to its water security.

Ethiopia says it has taken the needs of Egypt and Sudan into account in the construction and scheduled fillings of its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

While modern day Egyptians can still empathise with King Djoser's plight, the measures he took to counter the drought would not get much support today.

The ancient pharaoh was instructed by Imhotep, the designer of his famous Step Pyramid, to offer a sacrifice to Khnum, God of the Nile.

"When Egypt had a famine for seven years, he (King Djoser) made a council... And Imhotep told him: we have to give an offering to Khnum," said egyptologist Zahi Hawass. "Because Khnum controlled the water from the Nile." "The Nile is the soul of Egypt," he said. — Reuters

Vietnam plans to evacuate 500,000 as tropical storm Noul nears

HANOI: Vietnam is readying plans to evacuate up to half a million people as it braces for a tropical storm expected to make landfall in the Southeast Asian country's central coastline later this week.

Tropical Storm Noul is gaining strength and forecast to make landfall later on Friday with wind speed of up to 135 km per hour, according to the government's weather agency.

The tropical storm was more than 200 km southeast of the Paracel islands in the South China Sea as of late on Wednesday and was heading to a swath of coastline stretching from Quang Binh province to Danang, the agency said. "This is a very strong storm that will make landfall at high tide," Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung said in a statement.

"Provincial authorities need to help people to evacuate and protect their properties," Dung said. An estimated of 500,000 people in the path of the storm will need to be evacuated. He also urged authorities to brace for possible floods and landslides triggered by heavy rains.

Noul is forecast also to hit southern Laos and northern Thailand. Vietnam is prone to destructive storms and flooding due to its long coastline. Natural disasters - predominantly floods and landslides triggered by storms - killed 132 people and injured 207 others in the country last year.

Noul is forecast to dump up to 400 millimetres of rain in parts of central Vietnam over the coming days, the forecasting agency said.

Meanwhile, Vietnam said on Tuesday it will resume international commercial flights to and from six Asian destinations, months after a suspension due to the coronavirus.

The communist nation of 95 million people has been widely lauded for its handling of the pandemic and went nearly 100 days without recording a locally transmitted infection until July.

An outbreak that month in the beach resort of Danang put the country back on high alert, but it has once again gone almost two weeks without a locally transmitted case. According to a statement on a government website, flights in and out of the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, Tokyo, Seoul and Taipei would resume on Tuesday.

From September 22, flights to and from Phnom Penh and Vientiane will also begin again, the statement said. — **Agencies**

Yoshihide Suga becomes Japan's new PM

TOKYO: The Japanese parliament confirmed ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leader Yoshihide Suga as the country's 99th prime minister on Wednesday, with the new premier facing the immediate challenge of tackling the COVID-19 pandemic at home and a battered economy.

Suga, who won a resounding victory in the LDP leadership race on Monday, was approved by both chambers of the parliament which is controlled by the LDP and junior coalition partner Komeito.

The 71-year-old, who has pledged to continue predecessor Shinzo Abe's policies, formed a new cabinet, reappointing many of the members under Abe such as Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Finance Minister Taro Aso, who also retained his post as deputy prime minister.

Suga, who is not from a political family unlike Abe, tapped hereditary lawmakers for his cabinet posts, such as Taro Kono, ex-defence minister, who serves as administrative reform minister.

Kono's father Yohei Kono was a long-time speaker of the House of Representatives. Suga also named Nobuo Kishi, Abe's younger brother,

Suga, who is not from a political family unlike Abe, tapped hereditary lawmakers for his cabinet posts, such as Taro, ex-defence minister, who serves as administrative reform minister

as defence minister. "I will create a cabinet that works for the people," Suga said on Monday.

The governing coalition has vowed to promote "women's active participation" for years, however, of the 20 new members, only two women will participate in Suga's cabinet, compared with three under Abe. The two women named by Suga are Yoko Kamikawa, who becomes justice minister, and Seiko Hashimoto, who retained her post as Olympic minister.

Suga also reappointed Toshihiro Nikai as the LDP's secretary general



Japan's newly-elected Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga arrives at his official residence in Tokyo. — **Reuters**

while naming four men for the party's four other top jobs. The line-up attracted criticism from some observers. "The LDP is not political party anymore. It is a club for selfish old men for selfish old families," Michael Thomas Cucek, assistant

professor of Asian Studies at Temple University in Tokyo, wrote on Twitter.

Suga, who served as chief cabinet secretary after Abe took office in late 2012, has said that the virus represented an "unprecedented national crisis." He vowed to prevent

the further spread of the coronavirus while protecting jobs and restoring the economy, which has been hard hit by the pandemic.

Japan has so far confirmed more than 77,000 coronavirus infections and about 1,480 COVID-19 related deaths. Some experts and opposition lawmakers criticised Abe's government for limiting tests and urged Suga to ramp up testing capacities.

Rocked by the pandemic and a consumption tax increase last year, the economy shrank a record annualised 28.1 per cent in the April-to-June period, marking the third straight quarterly contraction.

Suga, who has no economic background, promised to continue supporting the former premier's "Abenomics" economic policy, which is based on the "three arrows" of fiscal stimulus, monetary easing and structural reforms. The new prime minister has yet to propose any major new ideas to help the economy.

In late August, Abe announced that he was stepping down after he was diagnosed with a recurrence of an intestinal illness called ulcerative colitis.

— **dpa**

KOREAN MINISTER VISITS DEMILITARISED ZONE



South Korean Unification Minister Lee In-young gets a briefing from a US Army official at the truce village of Panmunjom inside the demilitarised zone separating the two Koreas. — **Reuters**

Bahrain team in Nepal despite virus ban

KATHMANDU: A mountaineering team including a Bahraini prince arrived in Nepal on Wednesday, expedition organisers said, after officials made an exception to a coronavirus ban on foreign arrivals.

Nepal closed its borders in March and grounded international flights just ahead of the busy spring climbing season, devastating the local tourism sector. But an 18-member party from Bahrain were given permission to climb the 8,163-metre Manaslu, and the 6,119-metre Lobuche.

The ban on foreign tourists is in place until October.

Mingma Sherpa, of Seven Summit Treks, said the team — including three Britons — would quarantine in a Kathmandu hotel for a week before flying via helicopter to the climbing base camp.

More than 50 Sherpas will take part in the expedition, he added.

The identity of the royal climber was not disclosed.

The Bahrain Royal Guard team is next year planning to climb Mount Everest. The only other team with a permit for the autumn season is an all-Nepali expedition planning to summit 7129-metre Baruntse.

Nepal re-opened its mountains — including Everest — in late July ahead of the autumn climbing season and



A member of the Bahrain Royal Guard arrives at the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu. — **AFP**

in anticipation of international flights resuming in mid-August.

But a jump in virus infections in recent weeks saw the government delay allowing flights. Limited international flights resumed this month, but only for citizens and foreign diplomats.

The country of 28 million people has recorded an average of 1,000 daily infections since August, for a total of more than 58,000 cases and 379 deaths.

Meanwhile, an earthquake measuring 6 magnitude struck Nepal on Wednesday morning, the country's seismological centre said, and tremors caused by the quake were felt in the capital, Kathmandu. — **AFP**

India cases soar as EU warns against 'vaccine nationalism'

NEW DELHI: Coronavirus infections in India soared past five million on Wednesday, as the EU's chief warned against "vaccine nationalism" in the frantic global race to battle the disease.

Worldwide cases are rapidly approaching 30 million, with more than 935,000 known COVID-19 deaths, the global economy devastated and nations struggling to contain new outbreaks since the virus first emerged in China late last year.

India, home to 1.3 billion people, has reported some of the highest daily case jumps in the world recently, as a World Health Organization special envoy described the global pandemic situation as "horrible" and "grotesque".

"It's much worse than any of the science fiction about pandemics," David Nabarro told British MPs on Tuesday.

"This is really serious — we're not even in the middle of it yet. We're still at the beginning of it."

The spread of the virus has

accelerated in some of the most populous parts of the world such as India, where the latest million infections were detected over just 11 days.

And some experts have warned that the total number of cases could be far higher in the vast nation, which has been easing one of the world's strictest lockdowns recently despite the surge to help its reeling economy.

"People have lost their fear or are too tired (of) being cautious. They want to be out and earn a living right now," Jayant Surana, a New Delhi-based entrepreneur, said.

"Everything has now been left to god's will."

With scientists rushing to find an effective vaccination seen as the way to end the pandemic, nine candidates are in late-stage human trials — the final stage of clinical testing, according to the WHO.

But the United States has led wealthier nations already buying



A medical worker collects a swab sample from a man for a Rapid Antigen Test for the COVID-19 coronavirus, at a government health centre in New Delhi. — **AFP**

up millions of doses of promising models, prompting the WHO to call for cooperation to equitably distribute doses to ensure poorer countries have access.

In an implicit swipe at US President

Donald Trump's approach, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said Europe would lead the world in the search for vaccine and support multilateral bodies like the WHO.

"None of us will be safe until all

The spread of the virus has accelerated in some of the most populous parts of the world such as India, where the latest million infections were detected over just 11 days

of us are safe — wherever we live, whatever we have," she said. "Vaccine nationalism puts lives at risk. Vaccine cooperation saves them."

The United States remains the worst-hit nation in the world in terms of both infections and deaths, and Trump is under intense pressure over

his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

The Republican leader said on Tuesday that a vaccine may be available within a month — an acceleration of even his own optimistic predictions.

But experts are worried that world-renowned American institutions responsible for overseeing the approval and distribution of vaccines have become increasingly compromised by political pressure, and corners may be cut to get one ready before the presidential election in November.

There was also a bullish claim earlier this week from China, where the virus first emerged late last year, with an official telling state media that a China-developed vaccine could be ready for the public as early as November.

Germany's health minister Jens Spahn said on Tuesday the country aims to reach herd immunity through a voluntary coronavirus vaccine expected to be widely available by mid-2021. — **AFP**



A Mobile Police Department vehicle drives down Government Street during Hurricane Sally in Mobile, Alabama. – Reuters

Hurricane Sally bears down on US coast

MOBILE: Hurricane Sally brought heavy winds and massive flooding as it landed on the US Gulf Coast on Wednesday morning as a Category 2 hurricane, the latest in what has been a busy season of dangerous storms in the United States.

Some parts of the Gulf Coast have already been inundated with more than 18 inches of rain in the last 24 hours, with more precipitation expected throughout the day even as the storm's winds slow. Parts of Pensacola, Florida, were swamped with floods as high as five feet, the National Hurricane Centre said.

The region could see as much as 3 feet of rain, as the storm moved at a slow 7 km-per-hour pace towards the Alabama-Florida border, similar to other recent US storms that caused massive flooding and property damage.

More than 500,000 homes and businesses were without power in Alabama and Florida early on Wednesday, according to local utilities, with more outages expected. Upon landfall at Gulf Shores, Alabama, winds were clocked at 105 mph. At the Gulf State Park, a section of the pier broke, according to local media.

Officials across the South called on residents of low-lying areas to shelter away from rain and winds. In Pensacola, wind gusts clocked 77 mph on Wednesday, and images on social media showed major floods. One witness reported hailstorms in the city as well. Winds were also strong in Mobile, Alabama, where windows shook downtown, and trees and power lines swayed. Dexter Hart, who lives near the city, relocated to a hotel in the area because his house is surrounded by trees. "It's

More than 500,000 homes and businesses were without power in Alabama and Florida

scary right now," he said. "It's been keeping me up all night."

Sally is the 18th named storm in the Atlantic this year and the eighth of tropical storm or hurricane strength to hit the United States. Two other named storms have also recently formed in the Atlantic, and the hurricane season runs through the end of November. "We've only got one name left," said Jim Foerster, chief meteorologist at DTN, an energy, agriculture and weather data provider, referencing the procedure to name storms.

"That's going to happen here soon, Wilfred, and then we'll be into the Greek alphabet." Damage from Sally is expected to reach \$2 billion to \$3 billion, said Chuck Watson of Enki Research, which tracks tropical storms and models the cost of their damage.

That estimate could rise if the heaviest rainfall happens over land, Watson said.

Ports, schools and businesses were closed along the coast as Sally churned. As the storm track shifted east, ports along the Mississippi River were reopened to travel on Wednesday.

But they were closed to vessel traffic from Biloxi, Mississippi, to Pascagoula, Florida. Energy companies also shut more than a quarter of US Gulf of Mexico offshore oil and gas production, and some refiners halted or slowed operations. — Reuters

European Union chief pledges green recovery from corona crisis

BRUSSELS: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen vowed on Wednesday that Europe would lead the global search for a coronavirus vaccine while rebuilding its shattered economy with a green recovery plan.

In her first annual State of the European Union address, the president of the European Commission also warned Britain not to breach its Brexit withdrawal treaty and Turkey not to threaten its neighbours.

And she recommitted the bloc to fighting racism and homophobia, denouncing the so-called "LGBT-free" zones set up by some towns in EU member state Poland, and urging member states to step up for refugees.

Addressing the European Parliament in Brussels, von der Leyen said: "The people of Europe are still suffering."

In an implicit swipe at US President Donald Trump's approach to the pandemic, von der Leyen said Europe would lead the world in the search for a vaccine and support multilateral bodies like the World Health Organization.

"None of us will be safe until all of us are safe — wherever we live, whatever we have," she said. "Vaccine nationalism puts lives at risk. Vaccine cooperation saves them."

Europe's own economy has been devastated by the epidemic and the ensuing economic and social lockdowns, but von der Leyen touted her Commission's green recovery plan as a way back.

She said that Brussels would urge member states to set a more ambitious goal of cutting greenhouse



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a plenary session at the European Union Parliament in Brussels. – AFP

emissions by 55 per cent by 2030, up from a target of 40 per cent.

"For us, the 2030 target is ambitious, achievable and beneficial for Europe," she added.

The new target is backed by EU powers France and Germany, as well as big business, but faces stern resistance from eastern member states that depend on coal for their energy needs.

"We're concerned about the European Commission's proposal to increase the emission reduction target by 2030 to 'at least 55 per cent' without presenting measures

to implement it," the Polish climate ministry said.

Warsaw recently earmarked billions for its first nuclear power plants. Slated to go online by 2033, they are meant to ease the transition away from coal, but Poland is keen to secure transition funding from Brussels.

EU leaders will attempt to agree on the target at a summit in October, which would then need the approval of European Parliament, where a majority of MEPs want a still more ambitious target.

Von der Leyen said that 30

per cent of spending from the 750-billion-euro (\$ 890-billion) plan would be devoted to climate-friendly projects and financed through so-called green bonds.

In a broadside aimed at Poland's populist government, von der Leyen also declared that so-called LGBT-free zones have "no place in our union."

"I will not rest when it comes to building a union of equality... a union where you can be who you are and love who you want — without fear of recrimination or discrimination," she said. — AFP

DEMO AGAINST DUTCH COPS



Community service officers of 'Dutch boa's' force demonstrate against aggressions towards enforcers on Dam Square in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. — AFP

UN urges faster Lesbos asylum rulings as arson suspects charged

LESBOS ISLAND: The UN refugee agency on Wednesday urged Greece to speed up asylum processes on the island of Lesbos, so that thousands of migrants still sleeping rough a week after their camp burned down in an apparent arson attack can be removed.

"The idea is not that people remain for ever on the island of Lesbos, but that processes are accelerated so that people can leave gradually and in an orderly way" to capital Athens or elsewhere on the mainland, the UN agency's chief in Greece Philippe Leclerc told reporters.

Greece's police minister Michalis Chrysochoidis this week said that "half" the migrants on Lesbos should be able to leave "by Christmas" and "the rest by Easter". Over 12,000 people including entire families with elderly and newborns were left homeless when

Europe's largest asylum-seeker camp Moria burned down on September 8.

Six young Afghans have been arrested in connection with the incident, with four of them brought before a Lesbos magistrate on Wednesday.

They face a host of charges including arson, fomenting unrest, property damage, illegal use of force and attempting to injure police.

Two others, both aged 17, had initially been taken off the island in a mass operation to put unaccompanied minors out of harm's way, and will be charged at a later date, a court source said.

Greek officials had insisted from the start that the fires that destroyed the Moria camp were the result of arson.

Late on Tuesday, another camp of over 4,700 people on the island of



A girl waits to fill bottles with water near a temporary migrant camp on the Greek Aegean island of Lesbos after the Moria camp was destroyed by a fire. – AFP

Samos was threatened by fire. Three migrants are being questioned by police over the incident.

On Lesbos, crews this week hastily put together another

tent camp which according to EU home affairs commissioner Ylva Johansson will eventually accommodate up to 9,000 people.

On Wednesday, the Greek

migration ministry said roughly 1,200 of the 12,000 Moria migrants had been housed at the site.

"We expect 2,000 will enter by tonight," a migration ministry source said.

Of those in the camp, 35 have tested positive for coronavirus.

But thousands have been sleeping on the street for the past week, with limited access to food and no sanitation for families including elderly and newborns.

"This is the 21st century! Supermarkets are closed, there are no toilets... we are not animals!" raged Ange, a 23-year-old asylum-seeker from DR Congo who was a mechanical engineer in his homeland.

A migration ministry source in Athens on Wednesday said coronavirus lockdown restrictions had been removed for camps on the islands of Chios and Kos for the

first time in months.

But they remain in place for the camps on Samos and Leros until September 29, after three positive cases among residents, the official said.

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

In Brussels, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the bloc would "abolish" the existing Dublin Regulation, which makes asylum-seekers the responsibility of the first member state where they set foot.

Von der Leyen promised "a new European migration governance system" with "common measures on asylum and return and... a strong solidarity mechanism".

— AFP

Protect society from promotions!

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion keeps a close watch on commercial promotional activities in the Sultanate of Oman. It regulates advertisements of promotional offers and provides licenses for the purpose to protect consumers from being exploited. Some companies and shopping malls announce rebates misguiding individuals and the society. The ministry has issued a circular asking owners of the shopping centres and companies to get licenses before starting any sorts of the promotional activities and giving rebates etc. It is not new that such promotions have many times misunderstood and proved misleading. This is the reason the initiative taken by the ministry should be welcomed and appreciated.

The means used for promotions at the entrances of the shopping centres, posters and pamphlets as well as the materials disseminated through social media is changing along with the changes in the form of electronic media channels. It is natural. But their regulation and organisation of such schemes in the correct manner is required so that they are not misunderstanding. It is important for consumers that the message reaches them in clear and straight forward manner without any requirement of interpretation. Otherwise, there would always be chances of misunderstanding.



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THE MINISTRY
SERIOUSLY
WORKS WITH
THE PRINCIPLE
'DON'T HARM
AND DON'T GET
HARMED'

The ministry's circular has sparked reactions in some of the social media circles which ignored the brighter and positive aspect of this initiative. This circular which was meant for regulating promotional activities had protected interests of all sides. The ministry seriously works with the principle 'don't harm and don't get harmed' as envisaged by the Sultanate.

There is no doubt that the advertisements in all countries of the world are regulated and licensed by the authorities. This practice has many objectives, most important of them is to safeguard the credibility of the shopping centres which go for promotions and protect the interests of the consumers as well. This helps in avoiding misunderstanding and unhealthy as well as improper practices.

The circular issued by the ministry is related to establishments which go for promotions through social media. It wanted that for such promotions also proper licenses should be taken as for the traditional form of promotions. It declares that organising rebates and promotional offer schemes without proper licenses would be considered illegal and suitable legal action would be taken against them. This regulatory activity is purely to protect the society from being misled by promotions.

One of the most important objectives of licensing for discounts is to ensure that some products being offered under

such schemes are not damaged or are not being disposed due to their expiry of validity. This is important for protection of consumers and the commercial system of the Sultanate.

The circular issued by the ministry was not for regulating the advertising, but it is for the owners of the shopping centres and companies urging them to work under the promotional norms of the ministry. It was noticed recently that some of the commercial establishments were offering promotional schemes on social media without any licenses. This is violation of the ministerial order No 239/2013. The Article 3 of the order says that it is not allowed for the commercial, industrial or services establishments to offer promotional schemes or advertise them without required permits or license of the ministry.

Not only this, but article 11 of the ministerial order No 129/2015 which was amended by ministerial order No 218/2015 states that it is not allowed to announce the discounts by means of publicity and publication before obtaining licenses. In all cases, the announcement must include first and last date of the reductions and its percentage as well as its minimum and highest limits. All the details published in this regard should be in the same font size. The Article 6 of the law related to holding exhibitions also says that for its announcement on any media platforms a license should be taken.

UNSUNG HEROES

Pandemic 'hero' Filipino nurses struggle to leave home

KAREN LEMA & CLARE BALDWIN

From across the Philippines, they gathered to pray by Zoom. They were praying to be allowed to leave: To be allowed to take up nursing jobs in countries where the coronavirus is killing thousands in hospitals and care homes.

In recent months, these care workers have taken to calling themselves “priso-nurses.” With infections also surging in the Philippines, the government in April banned health care workers from leaving the country. They were needed, it said, to fight the pandemic at home. But many of the nurses on the two-hour Zoom call on August 20, organised by a union and attended by nearly 200 health workers both in the Philippines and abroad, were unwilling to work at home.

They said they felt underpaid, unappreciated and unprotected.

Nurses have been leaving the Philippines for decades, encouraged by the government to join other workers who send back billions of dollars each year.



We were insured, we had free lodging so my salary was intact and I could send more to my family

APRIL GLORY,
Nurse

economy, the Philippine ban squeezed a supply line that has sent hundreds of thousands of staff to hospitals in the United States, the Gulf and Britain, where some commentators have called the nurses “unsung heroes” of the pandemic.

The Philippines' health care system is already short-handed. In Germany there are 430 doctors and nurses per 10,000 people, in the United States 337 and in Britain 254, International Labour Organization data shows.

The Philippines — where the coronavirus death rate is one of the highest in Southeast Asia — has 65.

The April ban has stopped more than 1,000 nurses from leaving the country. Of those, only 25 have applied to work in local hospitals, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III told journalists late last month.

The Department of Health did not reply to a request for an updated figure. The government has since partially eased the restrictions, but sometimes also tightens them, so nurses are still clamouring to get out.

On the Zoom call in August, someone played a recording of the Philippine national anthem. A Catholic priest prayed and a man with a soft voice crooned a song about passing off your burdens to God.

One nurse, 34-year-old April Glory, had already spent years away from her young son and had been about to leave again when the ban kicked in. Even before the pandemic, she said separately, she was better off in a war zone in the Middle East than at home. Soon after she arrived in Yemen in 2011, a bullet pierced the wall of her private hospital, she said.

Staff moved patients to safety. Still, she said, “we were insured, we had free lodging so my salary was intact and I could send more to my family.” Abroad, there was no need to do any work outside her job description: “You are not expected to sweep the floor.”

It's mainly money that drives the Filipinos abroad. A nurse in the United States can earn as much as \$5,000 per month; in the Middle East it's \$2,000 per month, tax free. — Reuters

MUSTERING SUPPORT

Beirut in race to save heritage buildings before rain returns

ROUBA EL HUSSEINI

Beirut has only “days” left to preserve damaged heritage buildings before the rain finishes off the destruction caused by the August 4 port blast, Lebanon's antiquities chief warned on Tuesday.

“There are 100 historical buildings that need covering before the rain,” said Sarkis Khoury, head of the Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities.

“There are 45 buildings that require total shoring up lest they collapse, and another 55 need partial shoring up,” he said. He was speaking after a meeting with the heads of three international heritage organisations, who were visiting Beirut to muster support for the Lebanese capital.

One of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history, originating from a stock of ammonium nitrate at the Beirut port, ripped through the city and gutted some of its most historical streets six weeks ago.

Lebanon was already experiencing a deep social, economic and political crisis when the explosion — which left more than 190 people dead and wounded thousands — occurred. Foreign powers, international organisations and Lebanese volunteers have taken the lead in rescue efforts, filling the vacuum left by a government that has no body's trust and is blamed by many Lebanese for the blast.

“We're playing against time, we're talking about days, weeks at most, to do all this work. It's really going to be very difficult,” said Khoury.



▶ A Lebanese artist paints murals inside an art gallery which was damaged in the explosion at Beirut's port area, in Beirut, Lebanon. — Reuters

THE SURSOCK
MUSEUM LIES
IN ONE OF THE
AREAS THAT
SUSTAINED
SERIOUS
DAMAGE FROM
THE BLAST

Valéry Freland, the head of the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), signed a deal for an initial package of \$5 million to support protection efforts.

“We need to work fast to protect these historical buildings because the rainy season is just around the corner,” he said during the meeting, held in

the Sursock Museum. Khoury said he estimated around \$300 million would be needed for the restoration of Beirut's heritage. The Sursock Museum lies in one of the areas that sustained serious damage from the blast.

Its director, Zeina Arida, said that a preliminary estimate put the cost of restoring the museum and its collections at around \$3 million. — AFP



Denver Nuggets guard Jamal Murray (27) shoots past Los Angeles Clippers forward Marcus Morris Sr. (31) during the first half in game seven of the second round of the 2020 NBA Playoffs at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. – USA Today Sports

NUGGETS STUN CLIPPERS, HEAT EDGE CELTICS

LOS ANGELES: Jamal Murray scored a game high 40 points and Nikola Jokic had a triple double as the Denver Nuggets stunned the Los Angeles Clippers 104-89 in game seven to reach their first Western Conference finals in 11 years.

The underdog Nuggets became the first team in NBA history to rally from a 3-1 series deficit twice in the same postseason.

Jokic completed his triple double by the third quarter of Tuesday night's contest in the NBA's quarantine bubble in Florida, finishing with 16 points, 13 assists and 22 rebounds.

His rebound count is the most by a Nuggets player in an NBA play-off game, breaking his old record of 19. Denver's dynamic duo combined for 56 points.

"We are just improving. We have talks, we have fights, everything. We are like a couple," Jokic said of playing with Murray.

An odd couple for sure. A Serbian and a Canadian dynamic duo that has engineered the biggest upsets of the 2020 postseason so far.

Denver will once again be the underdogs when they face LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers in

the conference finals beginning on Friday.

"Nobody wants us here," insisted Jokic.

But Murray issued a warning for people who think the Lakers' juggernaut is going to steamroller them.

"They got to worry about us too," Murray said.

The Nuggets found themselves down by 12 in the first half. They also trailed 61-54 with 10:50 left in the third when they stepped it up and went on a 35-13 run to compile a 15-point lead in the fourth.

"Next is Lakers, another tough opponent," Jokic said. "But we are going to be out there having fun. It is simple for us, effort and energy."

ADEBAYO BLOCKS BOSTON

In the Eastern Conference finals, Bam Adebayo made a clutch block with 2.5 seconds left in overtime as the Miami Heat beat the Boston Celtics 117-114 in the opening game of the series.

Adebayo leapt high to take what appeared to be an easy dunk away from Celtics star Jayson Tatum to preserve the Heat's slim lead, 116-114.

Adebayo then capped the scoring

by sinking a free throw at the other end.

"He is the heart and soul of our team on the defensive end," Jimmy Butler said of Adebayo. "We love and appreciate him. I know I sure do."

Tatum, who finished with a game high 30 points, missed a desperation 29-foot three-pointer at the buzzer.

"He made a great play," Tatum said of Adebayo's block. "That's all it is. He made a good play, can't do anything about it." Game two is on Thursday night in Orlando.

Goran Dragic scored 29 points, Jae Crowder had 22 and Jimmy Butler finished with 20 for the Heat, who eliminated the Celtics from the playoffs in 2011 and 2012.

Butler gave the Heat the lead for good, 115-114, with just 12 seconds left in overtime when he willed in a shot in that was delivered while he was falling backwards and guarded closely at the side of the basket.

"My job is to help our team win in the fourth and overtime. I try to pull through as much as I can," said Butler, of the game-winning basket.

Miami are seeking to get back to the NBA finals for the first time since a four-year run of consecutive

appearances during the James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh era ended in 2014.

"It was a great win. We're up 1-0, but we got three more to get," Adebayo said.

Tatum also had 14 rebounds and five assists, Marcus Smart tallied 26 points and Jaylen Brown delivered 17 for the Celtics who are playing for an NBA finals spot for the third time in four years.

"Gotta tip your hat off to those guys," Smart said. "They executed very well down the stretch, we didn't."

The Heat trailed by as much as 13 in the first quarter before outscoring the Celtics 37-29 in the second. Miami shot 68.1 percent in the second period, including six of eight from beyond the arc. — AFP

NBA Play-off results

(all series best-of-seven):

Eastern Conference Finals
Miami Heat bt Boston Celtics 117-114 (OT) (Miami lead 1-0)

Western Conference Semifinals
Denver Nuggets bt Los Angeles Clippers 104-89 (Denver win 4-3)

LOCAL FLAVOUR

OOA organises course on sports injury rehabilitation



MUSCAT: The Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation of Sports Injuries course organised by the Oman Olympic Academy began 'remotely' on Tuesday.

The course which will continue till Thursday aims to spread the scientific and practical knowledge and contribute to the development of sports culture among specialists in the treatment of injuries in various sports, and to ensure the safety of athletes, after the increase in injuries in sports fields, whether through training, matches, or local and international competitions.

Dr Saif bin Said al Riyami - Senior Physiotherapist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, lectures in the course, with 25 attendees from Oman Olympic Committee, federations, sports committees and military sports.

The course includes many topics including joint movement mechanics, articular movement mechanics in the spine, causes of the most common sports injuries in the Sultanate, first aid for the most serious injuries, and an explanation of the therapeutic rehabilitation programme, in addition to muscle, tendon and cartilage injuries.

It also deals with the modern treatment methods in sports injuries, research and recent experiences in treating various injuries.

Oman attends OCA media meeting



MUSCAT: The first meeting of the Media Committee of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) was held on Tuesday headed by Charles Law and with the participation of the members. The Oman Olympic Committee was represented by Ahmed bin Saif al Kaabi, a member of the Media Committee.

Law made a detailed explanation of the roles and tasks expected from media committee during the next phase, including general supervision of media

content for covering all activities of the OCA, in addition to facilitating the tasks of the media professionals during the coverage of the various competitions organised by the OCA.

During the meeting, various social media platforms and the websites of the Olympic Council of Asia were reviewed, and the latest media preparations for the Sixth Asian Beach Games scheduled to be held in Sanya, China, from April 2 to 10, 2021 were discussed.

Former IAAF chief Diack gets jail for corruption

PARIS: Lamine Diack, the former head of world athletics' governing body, was convicted in France on Wednesday of corruption in a Russian doping scandal and sentenced to spend at least two years in jail.

Diack, 87, was found guilty of taking bribes from athletes in return for orchestrating the cover up of test results that enabled them to continue competing, including in the 2012 London Olympics. Diack was also found guilty of accepting Russian money to help finance Macky Sall's 2012 presidential campaign in Senegal, his home country, in exchange for slowing anti-doping procedures, the court ruled.

The court had heard how Diack solicited bribes totalling 3.45 million euros (\$4.1 million) from athletes suspected of drugs cheating and paid



Former IAAF president Lamine Diack leaves after the verdict in his trial at the Paris courthouse. – Reuters

off other officials at the International Association of Athletics Federations to aid with the cover up.

The presiding judge said the former long-jumper's actions had "undermined the values of athletics and the fight against doping".

The court handed Diack a four-year prison sentence, two years of which are suspended, and imposed the maximum fine of 500,000 euros (\$594,000).

Diack's lawyers called the judgement against him unfair and inhumane, and said they would appeal.

Diack was once one of the most influential men in the sport, leading the IAAF, now known as World Athletics, from 1999 to 2015.

In his testimony, he acknowledged slowing the handling of Russian doping cases between 2011-2013 to

save a sponsorship deal with a Russian bank and avoid public scandal. But he denied the corruption allegations.

At the heart of the corruption scam alongside Diack was his son, Papa Massata Diack. The court sentenced Papa Massata, who fled from France to Senegal after the French investigation began, to five years in prison and imposed a 1 million euro fine on him. It also ordered both men to pay World Athletics 5 million euros in damages for breach of trust.

Four other defendants were charged in the case: Habib Cisse, Diack's former lawyer at the IAAF; Gabriel Dollé, who oversaw doping tests at the IAAF; former head of Russian athletics Valentin Balakhnitchev, and former Russian athletics' head coach Alexei Melnikov. All four were found guilty of corruption offences. — Reuters



Serbia's Novak Djokovic in action during his second round match against Italy's Salvatore Caruso at the ATP Italian Open at Foro Italico, Rome. — Reuters

Djokovic turns page on US Open exit

HALEP ADVANCES IN ROME DESPITE SLUGGISH START

ROME: Novak Djokovic turned the page on his contentious US Open exit and began his claycourt season with a convincing 6-3, 6-2 victory over wildcard Salvatore Caruso in the second round of the Italian Open on Wednesday.

The world number one was disqualified in New York after accidentally hitting a line judge with a ball during his fourth round match against Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta.

Djokovic's frustration boiled over after dropping his serve against Carreno Busta in the opening set at Flushing Meadows but 10 days on in Rome he did not face a single break point in an imperious display against the unseeded Caruso.

"Obviously I had an early exit (at the US Open) so had more time to prepare," Djokovic said courtside. "I did practice for a week now and tried to play more sets coming into this ATP 1000 match. "Caruso is a claycourt specialist and it was a great challenge today."

On arrival in Rome, an

apologetic Djokovic vowed to be "the best version" of himself on and off the court and he kept his emotions in check against local hope Caruso.

Four-time Rome champion Djokovic, who received an opening-round bye, broke Caruso's serve in the eighth game before serving out the opening set. Caruso, who battled past American Tennys Sandgren in the opening round for his first ATP Masters 1000 match win, dropped his serve in a see-saw third game of the second set which lasted nearly 12 minutes.

With momentum firmly on his side, top seed Djokovic broke his opponent for a third time in the match before celebrating victory by blowing kisses into the empty stands at the Foro Italico.

Having recorded 51 victories in 60 matches, Djokovic is the second most successful player in the tournament's history — just behind nine-time champion Rafael Nadal. Djokovic has won 27 of his 28 matches this year and will resume his hunt for

Italian Open ATP and WTA results

MEN (SECOND ROUND)
Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Salvatore Caruso (ITA) 6-3, 6-2; Matteo Berrettini (ITA x4) bt Federico Coria (ARG) 7-5, 6-1; Marin Cilic (CRO) bt David Goffin (BEL x6) 6-2, 6-2

WOMEN (SECOND ROUND)
Simona Halep (ROM x1) bt Jasmine Paolini (ITA) 6-3, 6-4; Danka Kovinic (MNE) bt Belinda Bencic (SUI x6) 6-3, 6-1; Elise Mertens (BEL x11) bt Magda Linette (POL) 6-2, 6-4

an 18th Grand Slam title at the French Open, which begins on September 27.

"My best results have come on hardcourt but I enjoy competing on clay," said Djokovic.

"It's a demanding surface where you have to be patient and construct your points." Djokovic will face either fellow Serb Filip Krajinic or Italian Marco

Cecchinato for a place in the last-16.

HALEP OVERCOMES HICCUPS

Top seed Simona Halep overcame a couple of hiccups in her first match at the Italian Open in Rome to beat wildcard Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 6-4 to move into the third round on Wednesday.

The 28-year-old Wimbledon champion has only lost twice this year but found herself a break down in both sets before she recovered to seal her first victory since winning the Prague Open a month ago.

World number two Halep, who had skipped the US Open due to COVID-19 concerns and opted to stay in Europe and practice on the claycourts ahead of the French Open, looked sluggish at the Foro Italico with 14 winners offset by 15 unforced errors.

"I was a little bit tight at the beginning, it was tough to get a rhythm in the whole match," Halep told reporters. "It's always tough in

the first match of the tournament and she played really well."

"I felt like I played very well when needed. Mentally, I was very strong and I didn't give up at all and I wasn't upset on court. I'm trying to improve in that direction and today it was a big plus."

Halep had received a bye into the second round but was far from her best on serve and was broken five times in the match. However, Paolini was also let down by seven double faults in the match while both players struggled to win games on serve, with six consecutive breaks marking the early stages of the second set.

Halep capitalised on Paolini's second serve, winning 15 of 17 points to take the opening set. She switched gears late in the second to take the game away from the Italian, who was playing a top 10 player for only the second time in her career, as Halep finished the match after converting her eighth break point. — Reuters

Arsenal keep Aubameyang with new 3-year deal

LONDON: Arsenal striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has signed a new three-year deal, the Premier League club said on Tuesday, ending speculation over a potential exit as he entered the final year of his contract. Aubameyang's decision to stay with Arsenal will be a major boost to manager Mikel Arteta who said he wanted to build the squad around the Gabon international after they won the FA Cup last month. "Signing for this special club was never in doubt," Aubameyang said in a statement.

"It's thanks to our fans, my team mates, my family and everybody at this club that I feel like I belong here. "I believe in Arsenal. We can achieve big things together. We have something exciting here and I believe the best is to come for Arsenal."

British media reported Aubameyang's new contract makes the 31-year-old one of the highest earners at the club alongside midfielder Mesut Ozil.

Aubameyang's return of 72 goals for Arsenal in 111 appearances since his arrival in 2018 has made him a vital member of the squad, with the striker even taking the captain's armband in the second half of the season last year.

With Arsenal in danger of missing out on European football for the first time in 25 years following an eighth-placed league finish, Aubameyang led from the front to help Arteta's side win the FA Cup and qualify for the Europa League.

The striker scored twice in the semifinal victory over Manchester City and repeated his heroics in the final in a 2-1 comeback win over Chelsea. Aubameyang ended last season as the club's top scorer with 29 goals — which included 22 in the league, one goal shy of Golden Boot winner Jamie Vardy. He was also the only Arsenal player named in the Team of the Year.

"It was important for Pierre-Emerick to stay with us... He's an important leader for the team and a big part of what we're building," Arteta said.

"He wants to be up there with the best players in the world and leave his mark. He can achieve that here." Aubameyang's contract extension follows the addition of Chelsea winger Willian to Arsenal's ranks after the Brazilian became a free agent as well as defender Gabriel Magalhaes from French side Lille. — Reuters



Mumbai Indians attempt back-to-back IPL titles

NEW DELHI: Already regarded as the world's richest and most successful Twenty20 cricket team, the Mumbai Indians will now attempt to underline their status by claiming their first back-to-back titles in the Indian Premier League.

Led by senior Indian batsman Rohit Sharma and owned by Nita Ambani — wife of India's richest man, Reliance Industries billionaire Mukesh Ambani — Mumbai have won an unsurpassed four IPL titles.

So far they have been unable to match the Chennai Super Kings' feat of 2010 and 2011 by winning the world's most lucrative T20 league twice in a row.

But Mumbai, who open the

coronavirus-delayed IPL season against the Super Kings in Abu Dhabi on Saturday, head into the tournament as the bookies' favourites for a fifth trophy.

Mumbai's financial clout is formidable. Ambani, who bought the franchise for more than \$100 million in 2008, has been rated by Forbes as the world's second richest sports team owner behind former Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer, who owns the Los Angeles Clippers.

According to an Economic Times estimate, the Indians are worth \$115 million, the highest among the eight IPL franchises.

The team has an impeccable



Mumbai Indians' Lasith Malinga (3L), team captain Rohit Sharma (C), Hardik Pandya (R) and team members gesture and celebrate as they travel in a open bus after winning title in IPL 2019, in Mumbai. — AFP

playing pedigree too. Their founding captain was the now retired Sachin Tendulkar, the record-breaking batsman who is worshipped by Indian fans. Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting is another ex-skipper.

'ABSOLUTE GREATS'

But it was only when Sharma was appointed captain in 2013, after Ponting stepped down due to loss of form, that the team became a force to be reckoned with.

The 33-year-old star batsman has led by example, scoring 3,728 runs since joining Mumbai in 2011 and captaining the team to IPL trophies in 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019.

Sri Lankan legend Mahela Jayawardene is the coach, while West Indian big-hitter Kieron Pollard and India quick Jasprit Bumrah add power to the team.

Australia paceman Nathan Coulter-Nile, part of the Indians' first title win in 2013, returns this season after being snapped up for \$1.12 million in the December auctions.

"It's good to come back to the most successful T20 franchise of the world," said Coulter-Nile.

"Obviously the team I was involved with then was filled with absolute greats. Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar, Harbhajan Singh, Rohit Sharma. — AFP



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OMAN CAMP SHIFTED TO NOV

SULTANATE TO PLAY JORDAN IN FRIENDLY DURING DUBAI CAMP: IVANKOVIC

ADIL AL BALUSHI
@adilalbalushi4

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic announced that the scheduled domestic preparatory camp scheduled for September 20 has been postponed to November.

The Croatian coach clarified in his statements at the press conference in Seeb Stadium on Wednesday that the minor modification in the team's preparation plan came to provide sufficient time for players with their local teams in the domestic competitions.

"We had planned for many internal and external camps but due to the ongoing pandemic many of it were cancelled and postponed during the past months. The overseas camp of the team in Dubai is confirmed and it will include a friendly match against Jordan. There is communication with Kuwait Football Association for another preparatory match and the team is still awaiting the confirmation," he said.

The 65-year-old affirmed that the team focus and priority will not be on the fitness part despite the long break.

"The camp should cover all the technical parts not only fitness. I hope all the players will be in a better shape with restarting of the league with their local clubs. Moreover, the players are initially back to their teams and began the training sessions. We need as national coaching staff to focus on the tactical points and then implement on the style of playing. In six weeks duration, all the players will be at the clubs and we will continue to monitor their fitness," he added.

Commenting on Dhofar and Al Nahdha teams players, he responded:



"Unfortunately, I did not see Dhofar players due to their participation at AFC Cup at that time. However, all the players from Dhofar and Al Nahdha will join the camp after completion of the semifinals of the HM Cup on November 6 and 7. We are expecting a full attendance of players for the Dubai camp."

SEASON SET FOR DEC

According to the OFA agenda, the new domestic footballing season 2020/2021 will start by beginning of December.

"In December, January and February, we will keep track of the players performance in the league matches. The comprehensive

technical preparation for the national team to the joint qualification of the World Cup and AFC Asian Cup will begin in March. From December to March, the players will be busy with their local teams. However, we will try to utilise the Fifa days to arrange camps for 10 days or for a shorter period," he added.

The Red Warriors are currently positioned second in Group E with 12 points while Asian champions Qatar are topping the group with 13 points from five games. Afghanistan are placed third with four points. India (3 points) and Bangladesh (1 point) are in the third and fourth positions respectively.



We need as national coaching staff to focus on the tactical points and then implement on the style of playing. In six weeks duration, all the players will be at the clubs and we will continue to monitor their fitness

BRANKO IVANKOVIC
OMAN HEAD COACH

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making life easy

Muscat residential rental market set to become more tenant-friendly

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

An on-going exodus of expatriate professionals, long the mainstay of Muscat’s once-thriving residential rental market, is expected to see landlords doling out incentives to attract and retain tenants amid a glut in capacity.

According to a leading real estate advisory services firm, Oman’s expatriate population has declined by around 220,000 people since 2016 – a trend that has accelerated in 2019 and during the first half of this year in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic slowdown. With expatriate professionals more likely to reside in Muscat, where much of the country’s economic activity is concentrated, the outflow is expected to have a significant impact for the residential rental market in the capital city.

However, one trend likely to be witnessed amid continuing pressure on the property sector is the emergence of tenant-friendly market conditions, a key expert at Savills Oman, specialists in real estate services, pointed out. These concessions will include, among others, more favourable payment and lease terms, said Matthew Wright, Head of Research and Consultancy.

“Rents for residential properties were historically paid annually in advance, but in recent years payments were being made every six months. However, we will see a trend of more tenant-friendly payment terms over the coming



KEY TRENDS: Expatriate outflow, on-going supply of apartments weigh on residential rental segment

months. We can expect leases to be drawn on a monthly or quarterly payment basis,” he commented.

Participating in a panel discussion on Oman’s property market, hosted recently by Savills Oman, the expert warned that the sector is expected to continue to face pressure owing to the pandemic and economic slump. “We expect to see an on-going decline in the expatriate

population living in Muscat and that will result in a reduced market size and therefore reduced demand over the coming months.”

But the downtrend in the expatriate population precedes the current pandemic-induced crisis, according to the expert. In Muscat City alone, expatriate numbers surged from around 660,000 in 2012 to 930,000 in 2016, entailing a

jump of nearly 50 per cent. However, since 2017, the expat population has dropped by around 100,000 people, driving down residential rental demand and market size, he said.

In particular, the departure of expatriate professionals is having a stronger impact on the rental market in the capital region. At end of June this year, there were 30,000 fewer expat professionals in comparison to 2015 figures, with much of this outflow likely to have come at some cost to the rental market in Muscat.

Additionally, average rental values for residential apartments – particularly in the 2BHK category – have been under downward pressure

in recent years. “The apartment sector has been harder hit than the villa sector.

At a very high level, there has been an average drop of 30 – 40 per cent in achievable rental values for apartments from 2014 to 2019,” said Wright, attributing the reason partly to slumping demand as a result of the expatriate outflow.

But also compounding the situation for the residential rental market is the on-going increase in the supply of apartments. For example, around 1,000 new apartments have been completed in the Boulevard area of Muscat Hills over the past two years. While many of these are investment properties, they are likely to be eventually introduced into the rental market, thereby having an impact on achievable rental values.

However, relatively unscathed are 4-bedroom villas in prime locations such as Muscat Hills, Al Mouj and Shatti Al Qurum, said Wright. Average monthly rents have remained reasonably stable over recent years, primarily because the supply of villas and townhouses in these desirable locations is limited relative to demand in these places.

Since June, the overall demand for residential rental property, while almost negligible during the period of the lockdown, has begun to pick up, according to the expert. Many tenants have also been looking for reduced rental values in comparison to asking prices, he said, adding that average rental values have dropped by around 10 – 20 per cent since the start of this year.

Beijing welcomes WTO ruling on US tariffs



A logo is pictured on the headquarters of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland. – Reuters

BEIJING: China on Wednesday welcomed the World Trade Organization’s ruling that US sanctions imposed on Chinese goods in 2018 were “inconsistent” with international trade rules.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China “appreciates the objective and fair ruling” by the team of WTO experts.

Wang said the decision shows that “it is the US that really violates international rules” and “abandons” international organisations when they do not serve US interests.

The WTO dispute settlement body announced in a report on Tuesday that the US had not adequately justified the need to protect its markets from unfair competition through applying tariffs of up to 25 per cent on hundreds of Chinese goods. — dpa

MORE ON PAGE 15

Oman begins export of N95 masks

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Oman has begun to export locally made N95 respirator masks to other countries with the first consignment bound for Qatar.

Al Farsi National Enterprises LLC, a leading Omani supplier of medical equipment to government and private hospitals based out of Al Misfah Industrial Area, also launched Oman’s first tie-type masks.

The company, which produces N95 particulate respirators under the brand name Trusta, says it meets international NIOSH testing standards verified by independent laboratories.

“We are happy to announce that we have rolled out the first locally made N95 respirator masks to the local and international markets with our first consignment to Qatar, with further orders from India, Germany and the UK”, Issam al Farsi, Chairman of Al Farsi National Enterprises told the Observer.

“By this venture we have expanded our activities to include manufacturing of critical Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE) for healthcare institutions in Oman. With the opening of our new facility, Oman has become only the second country within the GCC region to have local N95 respirator production.”

The new facility currently has an Omaniisation rate of over 70 per cent and the company plans to recruit an additional 10 nationals to the current complement of 15 staff as the demand picks up providing advanced training in the PPE manufacturing skills.

“We keep up the ICV for the Sultanate and thank the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and other government entities for their exceptional support and encouragement during this time in providing approvals and valuable advice on the project. We will be taking user feedback from the Moh and carry out product improvements from time to time”, said Saju George, Managing Director

Spread over 20,000 square feet, the facility situated in the Misfah Industrial Area has dedicated assembly lines for N95 respirators, Ear loop Masks and Tie-On Masks. This first Omani company will also start surgical instrument production line during October 2020.



Investments in Al Rusayl Industrial City total RO 733 million

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met on Wednesday with industrialists and investors at Al Rusayl Industrial City.

The meeting was attended by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, Chief Executive Officer of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), and Eng Said bin Nasser al Rashdi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Manufacturers Association.

The meeting aimed at discussing ways to enhance the Sultanate’s industrial sector, highlighting current obstacles facing the industrialists, and exploring mechanisms to advance the business environment in future



STREAMLINING PROCEDURES: Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion meets investors at Al Rusayl Industrial City

and attract more local and foreign investments to be along the lines of the Manufacturing Strategy 2040.

Speaking at the meeting, Eng Mohsin bin Zahran al Hinai, CEO of Al Rusayl Industrial City Company, stated that the total volume of investments in Al Rusayl Industrial City touched RO 733.705 million at the end of 2019, marking a growth

rate of 0.16 per cent compared to 2018.

“The number of the workforce at the industrial city increased to 21,725 during the same year, and the number of investing projects reached 334.

Of these projects, 266 are operating, 47 are under construction and 21 have been allotted with

spaces,” Al Hinai said, adding: “The total area of Al Rusayl Industrial City amounted to 10,864,310 sqm during the same period, of which 6,698,757 sqm have been developed.”

Oman Investment and Development Holding Company (Mubadrah) is currently implementing several projects at Al Rusayl Industrial City.

Phase (2A) at the industrial city was launched at a cost exceeding RO 32 million, in addition to the redevelopment and rehabilitation project of the entrances to Al Rusayl Industrial City and the introduction of new entrances at a cost of approximately RO 3 million.

In addition, the logistics project has been completed at Al Rusayl Industrial City at a value of RO 1.5 million.

Moreover, the company has begun preparing technical and consulting studies for the development of phase (2B) and rehabilitation of the entire old area, which extends to nearly 5 million square metres.

TURN TO PAGE 14



Transom SATS Cargo wins key certification for pharma logistics

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Transom SATS Cargo, the main handler of air cargo at Muscat International Airport, has achieved IATA's Centre of Excellence for Independent Validators in Pharmaceutical Logistics (CEIV Pharma), an industry leading certification that safeguards the integrity of healthcare products across the air cargo ecosystem.

The certification recognises the quality of Transom SATS' operations, world-class facilities, state-of-the-art technology and warehouses, and industry best practices to ensure that all pharmaceutical shipments meet the highest international standards for handling Pharmaceutical Logistics. The achievement confirms the consistency of medical product handling services and the quality of air cargo services in line with TRANSOM's vision to provide exceptionally high standards in all areas.

Achieving CEIV Pharma certification is a major step towards reaching Total Quality Management in air cargo operations and enabling capabilities to focus on the safety and security of pharmaceutical shipments. CEIV Pharma is one of the most important international certifications granted to air cargo companies and recognises their commitment to meeting strict



standards set by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). It helps them better manage their operations and raise efficiency levels to achieve international specifications while expanding business scopes to achieve additional international certifications in the years ahead.

Eng Naif al Abri, Acting CEO of TRANSOM, said that obtaining CEIV Pharma certification was an important achievement for Transom and fits within the company's framework to achieve the highest quality standards and services for commercial expansion and to enable airports across the country to position Oman to become a global

transshipment hub. Aligned with the strategic plans set by Oman Aviation Group as part of the National Aviation Strategy 2030, it includes improving air cargo capabilities and empowering the logistics sector through a comprehensive air cargo and logistics strategy.

"We aim to develop our services with a strong commitment to applying the highest international standards — most importantly those focused on quality, security and safety management — in a manner that contributes to raising the performance level of all services. We are continuously working to enhance our operations to meet growing demand and investing in advanced

technologies to provide high-quality, professional services that meet our customers' requirements and aspirations," said Al Abri.

S T Tan, CEO of Transom SATS Cargo, explains, "These certifications reflect our level of commitment to air cargo as we apply international best practices for quality management systems. They allow us to further develop our capabilities, especially with the development of advanced facilities characterised by state-of-the-art technology and global capabilities. Certification confirms that the necessary procedures have been implemented so we can progress at a steady pace towards industry

The certification recognises the quality of Transom SATS' operations, world-class facilities, state-of-the-art technology and warehouses, and industry best practices to ensure that all pharmaceutical shipments meet the highest international standards for handling Pharmaceutical Logistics.

leadership and sustainability in the field of air cargo services."

Transom SATS Cargo operates a cargo terminal of 32,000 square metres with an annual handling capacity of 350,000 tonnes. Transom SATS Cargo plays a vital role enhancing air cargo capabilities in the Sultanate and enabling economic diversification and growth. Transom's air cargo routes and volumes are rapidly expanding and a strategic vision is in place to raise the total volume of air cargo throughput from the current 240,000 tonnes to more than 730,000 tonnes per year by 2030, and subsequently 1.5 million tonnes per year by 2040 at Muscat International Airport.

EU chief warns hopes for Brexit deal fading



BRUSSELS: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen complained on Wednesday that hopes of a post-Brexit trade deal are fading and warned Britain not to unilaterally modify the withdrawal deal.

"With every day that passes, chances for a timely agreement do start to fade," the president of the European Commission said in her annual State of the European Union address.

"Negotiations are always difficult, and we are used to that... But talks have not progressed, as we would have wished. And that leaves us very little time."

Von der Leyen warned the attempt by Prime Minister Boris Johnson to override parts of the withdrawal treaty he signed last year is illegal and unacceptable.

"This withdrawal deal took three years to negotiate," she said. "And we worked relentlessly on it line by line, word by word, and together we succeeded." — AFP

Investments in Al Rusayl Industrial City total RO 733 million

FROM PAGE 13

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, then toured Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives, which was established in 1982 with a total production capacity of around 9,000 tonnes per year and with only one production line.

Of recent, the production capacity of Areej reached more than 240,000 tonnes per year.

Al Yousuf also visited Oman Fiber Optic, which was established to manufacture world-class optical fiber and optical fiber cables. He also visited the National Pharmaceutical Industries Company, which has been operating since 2001 by manufacturing world-class pharmaceuticals in its various facilities.

Global net zero emissions goal requires \$2 tn investment a year

LONDON: Achieving net zero emissions by mid-century would cost an estimated \$1-\$2 trillion a year of additional investments, or 1-1.5 per cent of global gross domestic product, a report by the Energy Transitions Commission (ETC) said.

To limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius this century, global greenhouse gas emissions will need to reach net zero. When this is achieved, the reduction in 2050 living standards in developed and developing countries would amount to less than 0.5 per cent of global GDP.

Since 2000, global warming has cost the US and the EU at least \$4 trillion in lost output and tropical countries are 5 per cent poorer than they would have been without climate change impacts, according to Stanford University.

The ETC is a global coalition of 40 energy producers, industrial companies and financial institutions, including ArcelorMittal, HSBC, BP, Shell, Orsted and Bank of America, which are committed to achieving a carbon-free economy by 2050. The additional investments required "are easily affordable, given current global savings and investments, particularly in the prevailing macroeconomic context of sustained low interest rates".

The report said dramatic improvements in energy efficiency will have to be made; global electricity supply will have to grow four to five times to reach 90,000-115,000 terawatt hours and the annual pace of wind and solar capacity will need to be five to six times the increase achieved in 2019. — Reuters

US Fed expected to raise economic forecasts, extend vow to keep rates low

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve is expected to wrap up its latest policy meeting on Wednesday with somewhat rosier economic forecasts but a renewed pledge to keep interest rates low for as long as the world's biggest economy needs to recover from its deepest downturn in decades.

The two-day meeting is the US central bank's first under a newly adopted framework that promises to shoot for inflation above 2 per cent to make up for periods, such as now, where it is running below that target. The strategy means the Fed will not take its foot off the monetary gas pedal even if unemployment continues to drop at a faster-than-expected pace.

Fed officials don't appear ready to translate that framework into an explicit promise to keep the central bank's key overnight lending rate in its current range of 0 per cent to



A cyclist passes the US Federal Reserve in Washington. — Reuters

0.25 per cent until certain economic benchmarks — say, 2.5 per cent inflation — are met.

The rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee is scheduled to release its policy statement and a summary of fresh economic projections. Fed Chair Jerome Powell is due to hold a virtual news briefing half an hour later.

"We expect the Committee to

adopt this type of outcome-based forward guidance by the end of the year," Lewis Alexander, chief US economist at Nomura, wrote in a note ahead of this week's Fed meeting.

But the Fed is likely to close out this meeting with other signals for its long-term commitment to easy monetary policy, Alexander and other analysts said. — Reuters

Boeing, FAA failures to blame for 737 MAX crashes

WASHINGTON: Two Boeing 737 MAX crashes that killed all 346 passengers and crew aboard were the "horrific culmination" of failures by the planemaker and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), a US House panel concluded after an 18-month investigation. The crashes "were not the result of a singular failure, technical mistake, or mismanaged event," the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Democratic majority said in its highly critical report released on Wednesday.

"They were the horrific culmination of a series of faulty technical assumptions by Boeing's engineers, a lack of transparency on the part of Boeing's management, and grossly insufficient oversight by the FAA."

The 737 MAX was grounded in March 2019 after the crash of

Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 near Addis Ababa which killed all 157 aboard. In October 2018, a Lion Air 737 MAX had crashed in Indonesia killing all 189 on board.

"Boeing failed in its design and development of the MAX, and the FAA failed in its oversight of Boeing and its certification of the aircraft," the report said, detailing a series of problems in the plane's design and the FAA's approval of it.

Boeing said it "learned many hard lessons as a company from the accidents... and from the mistakes we have made".

It said it had cooperated fully with the House committee and that revised design work on the 737 MAX had received intensive internal and external review involving more than 375,000 engineering and testing hours and 1,300 test flights. The FAA said in a statement it would



An aerial photo shows Boeing 737 MAX airplanes parked on the tarmac at the Boeing Factory in Renton, Washington. — Reuters

Boeing failed in its design and development of the MAX, and the FAA failed in its oversight of Boeing and its certification of the aircraft.

work with lawmakers "to implement improvements identified in its report."

It added it was "focused on advancing overall aviation safety by improving our organisation, processes, and culture."

The report said Boeing made "faulty design and performance assumptions" especially regarding a key safety system, called MCAS, which was linked to both the Lion Air and Ethiopian Airlines crashes. MCAS, which was designed to help counter a tendency of the MAX to pitch up, could be activated after data from only a single sensor.

The FAA is requiring new safeguards to MCAS, including requiring it receive data from two sensors, before it allows the 737 MAX to return to service.

The report criticised Boeing for withholding "crucial information

from the FAA, its customers, and 737 MAX pilots" including "concealing the very existence of MCAS from 737 MAX pilots."

The FAA "failed to ensure the safety of the travelling public", the report said. Lawmakers have proposed numerous reforms to restructure how the FAA oversees aircraft certification. A Senate committee will take up a reform bill on Wednesday.

Lawmakers suggested Boeing was motivated to cut costs and move quickly to get the 737 MAX to market.

"This is a tragedy that never should have happened," House Transportation Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio told reporters. "We're going to take steps in our legislation to see that it never happens again as we reform the system." — Reuters

WTO finds US broke trade rules by putting tariffs on China

GENEVA: The World Trade Organization found on Tuesday that the United States breached global trading rules by imposing multibillion-dollar tariffs in President Donald Trump's trade war with China, a ruling that drew anger from Washington.

The Trump administration says its tariffs imposed two years ago on more than \$200 billion in Chinese goods were justified because China was stealing intellectual property and forcing US companies to transfer technology for access to China's markets.

But the WTO's three-member panel said the US duties broke trading rules because they applied only to China and were above maximum rates agreed to by the United States. Washington had not then adequately explained why its measures were a justified exception, the panel concluded.

"This panel report confirms what the Trump administration has been saying for four years: the WTO is completely inadequate to stop China's harmful technology practices," US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said in response.

China's Commerce Ministry said Beijing supported the multilateral trading system and respected WTO rules and rulings, and hoped Washington would do the same.

The decision will have little immediate effect on the US tariffs and is just the start of a legal process that could take years to play out, ultimately leading to the WTO approving retaliatory measures if it is upheld — moves that China has already taken on its own.

The US is likely to appeal the ruling. That would put the case into a legal void, however, because Washington has already blocked the



Cars to be exported sit at a port in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, in this file photo. — Reuters

The decision will have little immediate effect on the US tariffs and is just the start of a legal process that could take years to play out, ultimately leading to the WTO approving retaliatory measures if it is upheld — moves that China has already taken on its own.

appointment of judges to the WTO's appellate body, preventing it from convening the minimum number required to hear cases.

The WTO panel was aware it was stepping into hot water. It noted that it had looked only into the US measures and not China's retaliation, which Washington has not challenged at the WTO.

"The panel is very much aware

of the wider context in which the WTO system currently operates, which is one reflecting a range of unprecedented global trade tensions," the 66-page report concluded.

The panel recommended the United States bring its measures "into conformity with its obligations", but also encouraged the two sides to work to resolve the overall dispute.

"Time is available for the parties to take stock as proceedings evolve and further consider opportunities for mutually agreed and satisfactory solutions," it said.

During a two-year trade war with Beijing, Trump threatened tariffs on nearly all Chinese imports — more than \$500 billion — before the two countries signed a "Phase 1" trade deal in January. Extra tariffs are still

in place on some \$370 billion worth of Chinese goods, and \$62.16 billion in duties have been collected since July 2018, US Customs data here show.

Trump has described the WTO as "horrible" and biased towards China, often threatening to quit.

However, during an ABC News town hall, Trump continued to back a trade deal signed with China in January, and suggested Beijing was now buying record amounts of US corn, soybeans and beef because Chinese leaders knew he was "very, very unhappy" about their handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

— Reuters

Oil jumps above \$41 as storm hits output, inventories drop

SINGAPORE: Oil rose for a second day on Wednesday, gaining more than 2 per cent, as a hurricane closed US offshore production and an report showed US crude inventories unexpectedly decreased.

More than a quarter of US offshore output was shut due to Hurricane Sally. The American Petroleum Institute on Tuesday said crude inventories fell 9.5 million barrels, rather than increased as analysts expected.

Brent crude rose 86 cents, or 2.1 per cent, to \$41.39 a barrel by 1012 GMT, while US crude

added 85 cents, or 2.2 per cent, to \$39.13. Both contracts rose by more than 2 per cent.

"Oil prices were lent further support by the APE and the weather," said analyst Eugene Weinberg. "Despite an unfavourable fundamental and technical backdrop."

Oil prices collapsed to historic lows as the coronavirus crisis hit demand. A record supply cut by Opec and its allies, known as Opec+, and an easing of lockdowns has helped Brent recover from a 21-year low below \$16 in April. — Reuters

US consumer spending slows in August

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending appeared to slow in August as extended unemployment benefits were cut for millions of Americans, offering more evidence that the economic recovery from the COVID-19 recession was faltering.

Core retail sales, which correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of gross domestic product, fell 0.1 per cent last month after a downwardly revised 0.9 per cent increase in July, the commerce Department said on Wednesday.

This category, which excludes automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, was previously reported to have advanced 1.4 per cent in July. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast core retail sales rising 0.5 per cent in August.

Overall retail sales increased 0.6 per cent in August, in part as higher gasoline prices supported receipts at service stations. The report followed data this month suggesting the labour market was losing speed after astounding employment gains in May and June as businesses reopened



A customer opens his wallet at a Macy's cash register in New York, in this file photo. — Reuters

after being shuttered in mid-March to control the spread of the coronavirus.

Job growth slowed further in August and new applications for unemployment benefits remained perched at extraordinarily high levels in early September.

— Reuters

BUSINESS BRIEF

British Airways boss defends virus job losses



LONDON: British Airways chief executive Alex Cruz (pictured) on Wednesday defended heavy job cuts at the airline after coronavirus decimated demand, declaring that customers were "still afraid of travelling".

Cruz was appearing at parliament's transport select committee one week after BA parent group IAG announced it would slash more flights because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and quarantine rules.

"COVID has devastated our business, our sector. We're still fighting for our own survival," Cruz told lawmakers on the committee.

"Last week we flew 187,000 passengers in and out of the UK. Same week the previous year (it was) under one million."

He said British Airways is operating around a quarter of its normal schedule, adding that "fewer flights means fewer people required to actually service them".

In response to the global health emergency, IAG embarked upon a massive jobs-slashing efficiency drive, in line with carriers like Air Canada, American Airlines and Lufthansa. — Reuters



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

Opec+ compliance in August seen at 101 per cent

LONDON: Compliance with oil production cuts in August among Opec+ members was seen at around 101 per cent, three Opec+ sources said on Wednesday.

A technical committee of the alliance of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as Opec+, plans to hold a meeting later on Wednesday to discuss market fundamentals and compliance.

The compliance figure may be adjusted at the meeting of the committee, one of the sources said.

An Opec+ ministerial monitoring committee meets on Thursday, and is unlikely to announce recommendations for expanding the oil cuts further, sources said this week.

The meeting, instead, is expected to extend the compensation period for countries like Iraq and Nigeria for their past overproduction.

The meetings come against the backdrop of worsening demand forecasts, including from Opec.

In its monthly report, the organisation said it expected world oil demand to fall by 9.46 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, more than the 9.06 million bpd decline expected a month ago.

The Opec forecast chimes with a worsening demand outlook outlined by the International Energy Agency and major oil industry producers and traders.

— Reuters

Hitachi scraps plan for Britain nuclear plant

LONDON: Japan's Hitachi on Wednesday scrapped its multi-billion-pound nuclear plant project in Wales in face of the deteriorating investment environment, in a blow to Britain's atomic energy programme.

The project in Anglesey, already suspended for 20 months because of financial difficulties, was cancelled as "the investment environment has become increasingly severe due to the impact of COVID-19", Hitachi said in a statement.

The company said it would consult with the UK government and others regarding the fate of its licences and the Wylfa Newydd site that would have housed two reactors.

"We recognise that this will be very disappointing news for the people of North Wales," the British



The proposed power plant in Anglesey, Wales, Britain, that has been scrapped is seen in this still image. — Reuters

government said in a statement.

It insisted, however, that "nuclear power will play a key role in the

UK's future energy mix" as the country transitions "to a low-carbon economy".

The cost of building the Anglesey plant had been estimated at up to £20 billion (\$25.4 billion).

Its targeted production capacity was nearly three gigawatts — enough to supply around six per cent of Britain's electricity needs.

As recently as last month, Hitachi's Horizon Nuclear subsidiary had insisted it was still committed to the project.

Hitachi had been waiting for the British government's latest energy strategy, which could potentially include new financing models for the nuclear industry.

Tom Greatrex, chief executive of Britain's Nuclear Industry Association, said Hitachi's decision "underscores the urgent need for progress on new nuclear projects in the UK if net zero carbon emissions

is to become a reality".

The government "can secure these economic and environmental opportunities for future generations by setting out a clear pathway for new nuclear power in forthcoming policy announcements," he said in a statement.

Britain's nuclear power plants built in the last century have either closed or are coming to the end of their lifespan.

But the country wants to maintain the 20 per cent of electricity it generates from nuclear power to help meet its pledge to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 and tackle climate change.

The Hinkley Point scheme in southwest England, the only nuclear project under construction, is due to be completed in 2025. — AFP

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Morocco's Marrakesh 'suffocates' without tourists

Marrakesh: Snake charmers, storytellers and crowds of tourists; the legendary Jamaa El Fna square of Morocco's Marrakesh is almost as famous for the number of visitors as its colourful performers.

But with tough government restrictions imposed to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus, the tourism industry on which Marrakesh depends screeched to a halt.

Now the 11th century UNESCO World Heritage site is almost empty, and the city is facing an unprecedented crisis.

"Before, you had to wait your turn to get a table," said Bachir, a waiter who has worked in the square for two decades, waving at the empty cafe terrace.

His neighbour Mohamed Bassir worries for the future.

"This is the first time I've seen the Jamaa El Fna so empty," the orange juice seller said, sitting behind his stall decorated in plastic fruit.

"It makes me sad," Bassir said, waiting to squeeze fruit for customers who do not come.

Usually teeming with people, the square lies forlorn and empty of the musicians, souvenir sellers and fortune tellers who ordinarily ply their trade.

Morocco declared a state of health emergency in mid-March and shut its borders to stop coronavirus from spreading.

The North African nation of 35 million inhabitants has recorded over 1,500 deaths from coronavirus and more than 86,600 confirmed cases.

'COLLAPSED'

In the labyrinth of alleys leading from the Jamaa El Fna, the narrow streets once packed with stalls selling everything from slippers to spices are largely shuttered.

Only a few are open, but the



shopkeepers have little hope.

"Most of the traders have closed their shops," said Mohamed Challah, who sells flowing caftan robes.

"The others are opening to kill time because there is nothing to do at home," he said, adding that his store "no longer sells anything".

After the initial pandemic restrictions were eased, traders and tourist operators hoped domestic tourism might mitigate their losses.

But then the surprise announcement of new restrictions, including the closure of Marrakesh and seven other cities, shattered hopes of a revival.

Last year, the city attracted three

of the 13 million tourists who came to the country.

For Jalil Habti Idrissi, who runs a 45-year-old travel agency, it will be "very difficult to bounce back".

"We have experienced major crises in the past, but never of this magnitude," Idrissi said, adding his business had "collapsed".

On social media, there are calls to "save" the city, with many using the hashtag "Marrakesh suffocates".

'COLOSSAL LOSSES'

But many are also worried about the COVID-19 crisis itself, posting images of patients suffering from the virus.

They show patients sleeping on the floor in the hospital in Marrakesh.

The city's testing laboratories were overwhelmed.

Marrakesh, along with the economic capital Casablanca, is among the most affected cities.

Like all governments, the authorities have to weigh lockdown measures against the need to keep the economy alive.

Official figures predict the pandemic could push the country into its worst recession since 1996, with a contraction of more than five per cent of its GDP.

In desperation, some took to the streets to protest, calling on the government for help.

"The coronavirus will not have time to kill us, hunger will take care of it before," read one banner held by protesters in Marrakesh on September 11.

Tourist operators cling on to a glimmer of hope, with the government allowing travellers not needing a visa to fly to Morocco — upon the presentation of a hotel reservation and a negative coronavirus test.

But it is only a "partial opening of borders", said Ibtissam Jamili, who runs a five-star hotel in Marrakesh, mourning what he calls "colossal losses". — AFP

The North African nation of 35 million inhabitants has recorded over 1,500 deaths from coronavirus and more than 86,600 confirmed cases.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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COOK LIKE A CHEF

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.com

Grilled prawns, garlic tomato concasse



LUXURIOUS DINING

The luxurious Al Bustan Palace reopened its door to much anticipation. Kicking the opening in high gear, the Palace has made major changes and upgrades to their restaurants and kitchens to meet the government requirements of the new normal. To allow everyone to taste some of the delicious dishes they have in store for their guests, the busy chefs of the Al Bustan Palace are sharing some of their best menus for everyone to copy at home.

DID YOU KNOW?

People sometimes mix up prawns and shrimps. To an untrained eye, they look pretty similar. They are after all both decapod crustaceans and belong to the same sub-order with ten legs protected by hard exoskeletons. Except for these similarities, however, shrimps and prawns are two distinct animals with their own characteristics.

Prawns lack body segmentation that is seen in shrimps. They also have straighter bodies. One thing not many know about is that shrimps exclusively live in salty marine water while prawns live in fresh or brackish waters. Taste-wise, shrimps are saltier even when unseasoned while prawns are reportedly sweeter.

In today's Cook Like A Chef, Chef Anoob is showcasing an easy to prepare a meal that you can whip up for your family.



ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF ANOOB
ASHRAF

Executive Sous Chef
Al Bustan Palace, Muscat

Hailing from the Southern part of India, Chef Anoob has developed the passion at a very early age from his father who managed to transform daily meals into something delicious and beautiful. He officially began his culinary journey right after finishing 12th grade and joining a culinary institute. By 18, he was already working for his first job at Le Meridian Hotels. After 3 years, he travelled to Malaysia working for an Indian and Thai restaurant until he decided to join The Oberoi Groups of hotels in India a year later. Further developing his skill for Indian cuisines, he would embark in his Middle East journey in 2008 landing in Jeddah for Rosewood Hotels. He worked with Award-winning French Australian and Moroccan Chefs and also learned a lot about Arabic cuisine and the European Cuisine as well finally becoming a junior sous chef in 2010. He joined The Ritz Carlton Hotels in Doha in 2011 as Assitant Chef de Cuisine. He joined Al Bustan Palace in 2015 and from Chef de Cuisine would rise into the ranks and become the Executive Sous Chef for the palace in 2016. From the renovations to the reopening of the Palace, Chef Anoob has been instrumental in rebuilding the entire culinary team. As of today, Chef Anoob also specialises in Fully Buy out Indian Weddings, exclusive weddings, and gala dinners.



INGREDIENTS:



- 3 pieces Prawns U -10
- 2 tbsp Tomato Concasse
- 1 no's Basil Leaves-Torn
- 1 gms Thyme
- 2 pcs Cherry tomato(Halved)
- 2 gms Sliced garlic
- 4 gms Maldon Sea salt

METHOD:

Marinate the prawns with salt, pepper, thyme. Leave for a few minutes.

Once marinated, grill the prawns until half tender.

In a large nonstick frying pan, heat the oil over moderate heat. Add the Prawns, garlic, salt and black pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until the prawns are just done, about 5 minutes. Remove the prawns with a slotted spoon.

Add the tomato Concasse and reduce to half.

Once the sauce is reduced to half, add the grilled prawns and finish with cherry tomatoes and basil.

Serve hot with sautéed asparagus & grilled Cherry tomatoes.

HEALTH CHECK:

Prawns come in different sizes. The biggest of them is the Jumbo Prawns that are packed with flavour and are best for grilling and adding to salads. Super Large prawns are somewhat smaller in size than the Jumbo prawns. These are perfect for barbecues.

The large prawns suggested in this recipe are usually easier to find in Oman and is perfect for a hearty meal.

Prawns are naturally rich in Omega-3 fatty acids that are good for the heart. It is also rich in calcium that is good for the bones and Vitamin B12 that helps combat fatigue, anaemia and even depression. It also has selenium that is an effective antioxidant and Zinc that helps develop a healthy immune system.

CONSERVATION

Wanted: Animal Godparents for Chilean Zoo in 'Bleak' Year



SANTIAGO: Oliver the rhinoceros, King Julien the lemur, Chilly Willy the penguin and their friends are urgently seeking sponsors for their bed and board in a Chilean zoo as visitors have dwindled to zero with the arrival of coronavirus.

Buin Zoo, on the outskirts of the capital Santiago, is ordinarily one of the city's top attractions but it is struggling to stay afloat in an extraordinary year.

Visitor numbers dropped off during wide-

each month, and 7,200 bales of oats and alfalfa annually.

"The amounts are quite breathtaking. There are many mouths to feed," said Idalsoaga.

The zoo, which will reopen on September 29 with new health protocols, has turned to habitual visitors for help.

"Godparents" can pay \$2,500 (\$3) to \$90,000 (\$118) to receive photos, certificates, educational files and cuddly toys of 15 "emblematic" animals, as



spread social protests over inequality that started in October with looting and arson attacks at their fringes. The coronavirus outbreak in March shut down the zoo, capping a "bleak" year, Ignacio Idalsoaga, the zoo's director, said in an interview.

The home to 2,500 animals from around the world with massive appetites is struggling to find its \$400,000 - \$500,000 monthly operating costs, he said.

Its residents consume 400 kilos of apples and 1,000 kilos of fish each week, 2,500 kilos of meat

well as entry passes for when it reopens.

Carlos Casanova, a local teacher with three kids, is now godfather to several animals as well.

"It's a nice institution which does a lot of good for children and treats its animals well, so it made us sad to see them struggling," he said.

Chile is gradually lifting its lockdowns after hitting the peak of infections in June and July. So far, the country has had more than 430,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus and more than 11,800 deaths. — **Reuters**



Is it time to move away from body positivity?

BY BOSKY DUTIA
CONTRIBUTOR

Like millions of women all over the world, I have struggled to love my body for years. Through my childhood and the throes of my teens, I was told I was too big, too fat, too ugly... the adjectives were endless but my patience with myself was not.

There is no diet or exercise I did not try. I punished myself with starvation and self-deprecation. Today, although I am more at peace with my body, I cannot claim body love.

We are often our harshest critics; associating the potency of the word love with family and friends but often leaving ourselves out - body and mind.

Living in a world that constantly tells us that we need to change our appearance to be happy or feel worthy doesn't really help our case. The ever-changing diet culture and impractical filters on social media have convinced us that 'perfect' is greater than real and that our fairy tale is just around the corner if we only drastically alter the way we look.

Whilst the body-positive momentum is giving women a much-needed respite from the slippery slope that is the need to be flawless; our excursion to know our bodies is far from over.

I can hear the affirmative chants ringing incessantly in my ear - love your body - through any means necessary. Endorsing a never-ending love affair with our bodies is a huge part of that unrealistic perfect utopia that leaves me discontent.

Standing before a mirror, seeing a muffin top, or large thighs and no



After a draining decade in body image, I'm hoping that until the messy little business of restructuring the world in order to find true equality is completed, the message of the next 10 years will be, not to love your body, but instead, find peace with it

thigh gap, where am I? For all the journeying we appear to have done, it feels to me as though we have not moved forward, instead, veered just a little to the side.

Angst with yourself for your appearance is natural, for the heart always wants just a little more. There's absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to be leaner, fairer or taller and we shouldn't be made to feel guilty for it either.

I strongly believe that we go through seasons with our bodies depending on the current situation and changes we experience in life. Whether it is contentment and gratitude you feel or resentment; both these extremes are entirely valid.

Although feeling confident in the skin you're in is amazing, it is certainly not plausible to expect this to be an everyday norm. Also, that's quite a lot of pressure to carry on your shoulders to live life in that way.

Instead of loving our bodies, which for me right now seems out of reach, I am in a place of acceptance, which I think is far easily achievable for many. Body acceptance feels easier to get to grips with because loving your body seems very all-or-nothing.

Acceptance conveys the fact that perhaps you're not content, but still in the mindset of being kinder and appreciative of your body.

Which is why I support a move away from body positivity, and towards a new era of body neutrality. Of proud ambivalence.

Here, there's plenty of room, both for those who revel in their physical strength and beauty, and those who don't want their bodies to be political statements, or even to think about them much at all.

After a draining decade in body image, I'm hoping that until the messy little business of restructuring the world in order to find true equality is completed, the message of the next 10 years will be, not to love your body, but instead, find peace with it.



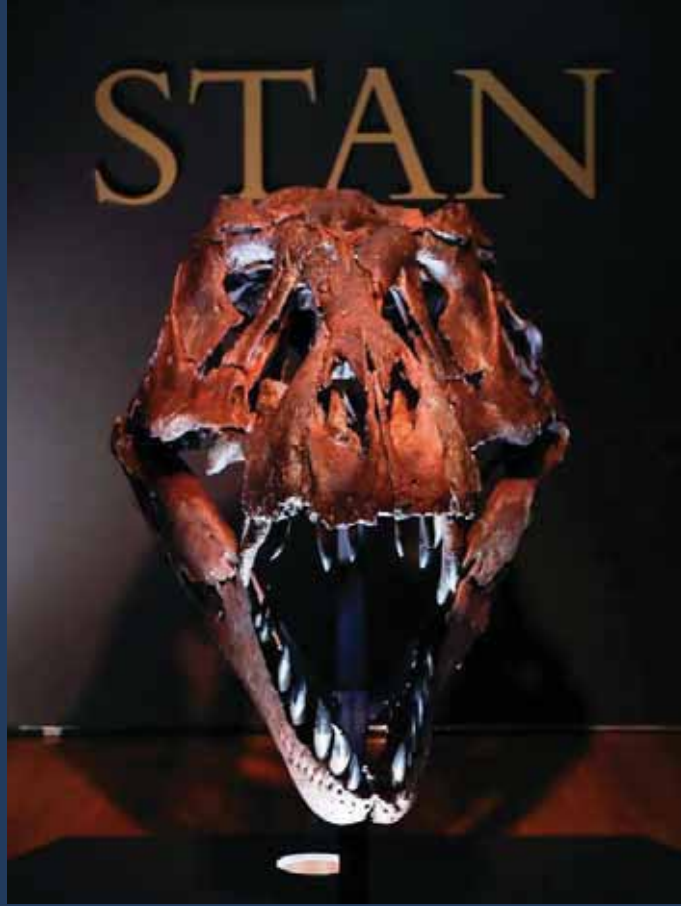
One of largest known T. rex skeletons up for auction at Christie's

THE BRITISH AUCTION house Christie's plans to sell the skeleton of one of the largest known Tyrannosaurus rexes in early October, the company said on Wednesday.

The dinosaur known as "STAN," approximately 67 million years old, was discovered in 1987 in South Dakota by amateur paleontologist Stan Sacrison.

"He showed it to scientists at the time who unfortunately misidentified it as a triceratops," James Hyslop, Christie's head of Science and Natural History, said.

Triceratops remains are relatively common in the paleontological world, so the bones failed to garner much interest until Sacrison took them to the Black Hills Institute in South Dakota in 1992.



Researchers there "realised pretty quickly that they had something special in their hands," said Hyslop. They recategorised STAN as a T. rex and mounted a new search to uncover the rest of the bones. They recovered 188 out of an estimated 300 total for any T. rex, Hyslop said.

Most T. rex skeletons are held by museums and private institutions. The auction is an opportunity for a private collector or institution to acquire the bones, Christie's said.

STAN is 40 feet long and 13 feet high, Christie's said. He is also notable for two fused vertebrae scientists have identified in his neck, suggesting the dinosaur broke his neck and survived during his lifetime. "The clue is in the name, the Tyrannosaurus rex," Hyslop said. "He is the tyrant lizard king."

Christie's will display the dinosaur from Wednesday to mid-October at its Manhattan, New York location, the company said. It plans to book socially distant viewings for the public.

"We've got the skull displayed at ground level so that you can get really up close and personal with him and just see the serrations on his teeth," Hyslop said. "His longest tooth is 11 inches long. It's just terrifying to behold."

Christie's has estimated the value of the dinosaur at between \$6 million and \$8 million. — **Reuters**

features

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Is it time to move away from body positivity?

In this contributed piece, Bosky Dutia reminisces her struggles of attaining the ideal body weight and proposes that while women everywhere are thankful for the body-positive momentum, it's time to finally move away from it towards a new era of body neutrality. Read more of what she meant... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

TRAVEL TALES



MOROCCO'S MARRAKESH 'SUFFOCATES' WITHOUT TOURISTS

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WHAT TO EAT



GRILLED PRAWNS, GARLIC TOMATO CONCASSE

In today's Cook Like A Chef, Chef Anoob of the luxurious Al Bustan Palace is showcasing an easy to prepare a meal that you can whip up for your family... Story on **Page 18**

CONSERVATION



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HUMAN INTEREST



ONE OF LARGEST KNOWN T. REX SKELETONS UP FOR AUCTION AT CHRISTIE'S

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CELEBRATE



LOCATE AN OLD FRIEND DAY

It's easy to assume that just because everyone is now connected via social media, that you won't lose touch with any friend at all. This could not be any farther from the truth. Locate an Old Friend Day is celebrated to allow people to get in touch with people they might have forgotten to get in touch with. Celebrate today by searching online for a dear friend you might not have said hi to in a while.