

P12

NADAL STUNNED BY SCHWARTZMAN IN ROME QUARTERFINALS



P15

GERMANY PLANS REFORM TO AVOID BANKRUPTCY WAVE DUE TO COVID-19



P19

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A JABAL AKHDHAR FARMER



OMAN

HM greetings to leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent cables of greetings to President George Vella of the Republic of Malta, Colville Young, Governor-General of Belize, and President Armen Sarkissian of the Republic of Armenia, on the occasion of their countries’ Independence Anniversary. In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the leaders, and the people of their countries further progress and prosperity. — ONA

WORLD

Britain warns of stricter lockdown

LONDON: Britain is at a tipping point on COVID-19, Health Minister Matt Hancock said on Sunday, warning that a second national lockdown could be imposed if people don’t follow government rules designed to stop the spread of the virus. COVID-19 cases have risen sharply in recent weeks, with 3,899 reported on Sunday. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has called it a second wave and stricter lockdown measures have been introduced in areas across the country. **DETAILS ON P5**

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INSIDE



INDIAN PARLIAMENT PASSES FARM BILLS AMID PROTESTS

P7



MANY DETAINED IN BELARUS AS PROTESTERS RETURN

P8

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 39°C
MIN: 27°C

SALALAH
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 26°C

NIZWA
MAX: 40°C
MIN: 25°C

SUNRISE 05.55 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:40

DHUHR: 12:05

ASR: 15:31

MAGHRIB: 18:10

ISHA: 19:20



Report hails Sultanate’s role in enhancing regional stability

WASHINGTON: The Sultanate’s role in fostering security and regional stability is of great significance, particularly for Britain and the United States. This was stated in a report published by Washington Institute which laid emphasis on the bilateral relations between the Sultanate and

Britain, and hailed continuous co-operation between the two countries in different fields. London capitalises on supporting its relation with Muscat, not least because of the efficiency of Omani moderation in the settlement of many regional problems, said the report, which touched on the recent visit of

UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace to the Sultanate. “London is investing heavily in supporting its relationship with Muscat, not least because Omani mediation can often be more effective than its own in fostering regional stability and security.” The report described the visit as

an opportunity “to renew a highly valuable relation.” It underscored the importance of maintaining Omani-British partnership under the current circumstances of Brexit and coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The promotion of cooperation between the two countries comes at a

time His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is exerting efforts to restructure and re-channel Omani economy into a proper path to overcome the twin impacts of COVID-19 and slump in oil prices, said the report, noting that Britain feels comfortable with the Sultanate’s policies and its approach of tolerance and moderation. — ONA

PRIORITY FOR BLENDED EDUCATION AND SAFETY OF STUDENTS NOD FOR SCHOOL REOPENING GUIDELINES

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

Blended education and safety of students are at the core of the regulations for reopening of schools in November. Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education, issued a decision approving the regulations for operations of schools. “The decision will help the Ministry of Education to prepare to implement the Supreme Committee’s decision to allocate the academic year 2020/2021 for blended education.” The ministry has been preparing plans to reopen schools in a manner that guarantees the safety of students, teachers and other staff, keeping in view the best regional and international practices. The framework for the operation of schools in the Sultanate will include a guide for teachers and

students for online education, the mechanisms for operating special education schools and private schools. The ministry said that the blended education will include classroom teaching in some classes and online learning in other classes. The attendance of students will be rotated weekly. As for the days when students are not attending the classes, they have to attend e-learning modules, which are prepared by the school administration according to the approved curriculum. The exams will be conducted at the end of the school year. “We have reduced the number of percentage weights of exams score and increased the percentage of continuous evaluation, which includes three standardised short tests for all groups,” the ministry said.



A RARE WINTER VISITOR!

Wattled Starling (*Creatophora cinerea*) is an uncommon and irregular migrant and winter visitor that was spotted in Salalah recently. The wattled starling is a nomadic resident in eastern and southern Africa. The breeding male has a white shoulder patch and a distinctive head pattern, with unfeathered yellow skin, and black forehead and throat wattles. The non-breeding male has a feathered head except for a small yellow patch behind the eye.

PHOTO BY Amardeep Singh (Salalah Photography Club)

Don’t fall prey to offers for ‘quick money’

SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttvyp

Police have warned both citizens and residents against the latest scam that involves fake investment schemes. The warning from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) followed the recent proliferation of investment scams in which one person was arrested. According to the Economic Crime Control Department at the ROP, the accused, whose nationality has not been revealed, enticed potential victims with lucrative returns in the form of monthly interest on their investments. “Most of the victims were people who wanted to make a quick money. The accused also offered attractive incentives to people who would bring new subscribers,” the police said, adding, “there have not been any such investment schemes with huge monthly returns.” While cautioning people to always verify the authenticity of financial investment companies and to check whether they have a valid trade licence to conduct business, the ROP said that there are clear guidelines for making investments in the Sultanate. “Typical scams might begin by an unknown person contacting you by phone, text messages or email and informing you of an amazing investment opportunity that will make you lots of money. Do not fall prey to their tricks,” the police warned. The ROP also called on people to be cautious while dealing with people and not to rush in order to obtain a quick financial profit.

Scientists say if you do not snooze you lose

WASHINGTON: Scientists are providing a fuller understanding of the essential role that sleep plays in brain health, identifying an abrupt transition at about 2.4 years of age when its primary purpose shifts from brain building to maintenance and repair. Researchers said they conducted a statistical analysis on data from more than 60 sleep studies. They looked at sleep time, duration of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, brain size and body size, and devised a mathematical model for how sleep changes during development. There are basically two types

of sleep, each tied to specific brain waves and neuronal activity. REM, with the eyes moving quickly from side to side behind closed eyelids, is deep sleep with vivid dreams. Non-REM sleep is largely dreamless. During REM sleep, the brain forms new neural connections by building and strengthening synapses — the junctions between nerve cells, or neurons — that enable them to communicate, reinforcing learning and consolidating memories. During sleep, the brain also repairs the modicum of daily neurological damage it typically



experiences to genes and proteins within neurons as well as clearing out byproducts that build up. At about 2.4 years of age, the

findings showed, sleep’s primary function changed from building and cutting connections during REM sleep to neural repair during both

REM and non-REM sleep. “It was shocking to us that this transition was like a switch and so sharp,” said Van Savage, a UCLA professor of ecology and evolutionary biology and of computational medicine. REM sleep declines with age. Newborns, who can sleep about 16 hours daily, spend about 50 per cent of their sleeping time in REM, but there is a pronounced drop-off at around 2.4 years. It drops to about 25 per cent by age 10 and to about 10 per cent to 15 per cent around age 50. — Reuters



Oman Air, SalamAir announce flight schedules from Oct 1

BACK TO SKY: Guests should ensure they are aware of all travel requirements

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman Air and SalamAir have announced the schedule of flights to be operated from October 1. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), which has allowed the airlines to operate two flights per week to each of its existing scheduled destinations, carried out an assessment of the new operating protocols at Duqm Airport on Sunday.

Oman Air will operate two flights a week to Muscat and London, Frankfurt and Istanbul.



Thursdays.

These schedules are valid from October 1 to 24. SalamAir has announced scheduled services to Alexandria, Doha, Bahrain, Dubai,

Tehran, Shiraz, Istanbul, Dhaka, Khartoum, Chattogram, Multan, Sialkot and Karachi from October 1.

Oman Air said it will maintain its comprehensive safety programme

throughout the journey to ensure that all passengers fly confidently. Masks are must onboard and at airports.

Social distancing will be maintained while passengers board and exit the aircraft, which are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of every day.

Cabin crew will wear a full set of personal protective equipment. Meal service has been modified to further ensure safety and a number of other steps have been taken to ensure that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times.

"Guests who are planning to depart from Oman should ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements, as well as the requirements at their destinations," Oman Air said.

MINISTER RECEIVES PAKISTAN AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, received K K Ahsan Wagan, Ambassador of Pakistan to the Sultanate, on Sunday. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed the Pakistani government's appreciation and thanks for the efforts exerted by the Sultanate to assist the Pakistani community during the pandemic. The two sides also reviewed bilateral cooperation aspects aimed at enhancing health services between the two friendly countries.

Two arrested for smuggling, possession of drugs



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested two persons of Asian nationality for smuggling and possession of large quantities of drugs, following monitoring and follow up operations.

The Directorate General of Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances said the two suspects were possessing five moulds of crystal drugs, 284 capsules of morphine, 629 tablets of psychotropic substances, two pieces of hashish and tools needed for the purpose of trafficking and processing narcotic substances.

The ROP has initiated legal actions against them. — ONA

International dialogue to mark world peace day

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Amidst all the tension of the COVID-19 Pandemic and rush for the vaccine, the world marks International Peace Day on September 21, 2020 with the theme, "Shaping Peace Together."

The message that is being conveyed is, "Celebrate the day by spreading compassion, kindness and hope in the face of the pandemic. Stand together with the UN against attempts to use the virus to promote discrimination

or hatred."

In Oman, Rajya Yoga Foundation is celebrating the UN International Day of Peace with two speakers bringing in their perspective on the concept of peace — Didi Sudesh from Germany and Hatim Harith al Abdulsalam followed by question and answer with other contributors as well.

"Peace is an essential part of our life. For many years we have struggled to maintain peace in our lives. COVID-19 has forced all of us to be at peace and with one another

and that is the ultimate goal," said Hatim reflecting on the day. He will be sharing his thoughts during the international dialogue on Zoom meet at 7.15 pm on Monday.

The day was established in 1981 by a unanimous United Nations resolution urging global society to build a culture of peace and look beyond differences.

Throughout the world various events take place ranging from a minute of silence at 12 noon across all time zones, peace education events, intercultural and interfaith dialogues

and workshops on the UN Peace Day theme along with meditation and prayer, along with other creative ways to mark the day.

On this day the efforts of those who have worked hard to end conflict and promote peace are recognised, in addition to being a day of ceasefire whether personal or political.

In 2020, as the nations together face the challenges of living through the pandemic period, the activities are mainly online but the spirit is the same — for world peace.

Plastic and PPE waste removed from beach



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Tonnes of waste mostly plastic materials and face masks were removed from Athaiba Beach in Muscat on Saturday in a campaign to mark the World Beach Cleanup Day, which falls on September 19. The trash included nets, chairs and other furniture

"Weekenders, please maintain our beaches clean. Remember they are not your trash bins," said Ammujam Raveendran, who is part of the 'Save Oman Beaches'.

"It took 69 people working for 2 hours to clean the beach. Beaches are to be used only for leisure and relaxation and we need to look after it," the volunteers said.

They thanked Be'ah, the state waste management company, which hauled the waste pile from the beach to its facility.

"Our volunteers from across the



world wore masks and we followed social distancing," said Augustin Delesalle, who spearheaded the campaign.

The coming together of Omanis, Indians, Filipinos, French, and Germans is a good example of

cooperation for a common cause, Pablo Nivon, one of the organisers said.

"We were able to collect more than 20 bags full of plastic bottles, diapers, used masks, fishing nets and the like," the volunteers said.



TENDER NOTICE

Haya Water hereby announces the following Tender :

TENDER NO:	DESCRIPTION	ELIGIBILITY	TENDER FEE	LAST DATE OF DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE
T/2321392 /2020	Construction of Wastewater Facilities in Wilayat Mahout	Local Companies Registered with Government Tender Board and have Sufficient Experience in the Works Mentioned	RO 25/- Non-refundable	01/10/2020	15/10/2020

The tender documents can be downloaded from Haya Water website from the date of publication of this announcement until 01/10/2020. The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall be provided with a login name and password to access the Haya Water e-tendering page ([iSupplier Login](#)).

All participating Companies shall submit a Bid Bond of %1 of bid value in a sealed envelope to Haya Water not later than 10.00 am on the bid submission date. Bid Bond must be obtained from a bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of Haya Water.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Haya Water e-tendering page not later than 10.00 am on the date specified above.

For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.haya.om or Email to: tender@haya.om

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عمان أكثر اخضراراً وصحة
Oman Greener & Healthier

COVID-19 field hospital to open next week

200 TO 300 BEDS: Facility at old Muscat airport premises will help ease pressure on general hospitals

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The Ministry of Health is all set to launch the first phase of COVID-19 field hospital by September-end in cooperation with the private sector.

The field hospital at old Muscat airport premises is equipped with all necessary COVID-19 treatment facilities amid rising positive cases and deaths, according Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, during the Supreme Committee media briefing last week.

The facility is likely to have a capacity of 200 to 300 beds. It will treat patients who do not require intensive care

The field hospital will help to ease pressure on hospitals so that they continue to provide services to non-COVID patients. The facility is likely to have a capacity of 200 to 300 beds. It will treat patients who do not require intensive care.

The hospital building plan has been assigned to an engineering company, while a medical team is currently working on completing the proposed project.

The building is ideal as it has easy exit and entry, via the bridge opposite the building. It is also better suited to receive the patients even from other governorates.

Dr Qasim bin Ahmed al Salmi, Director-General of the Royal Hospital, earlier said that the goal of the hospital was also to



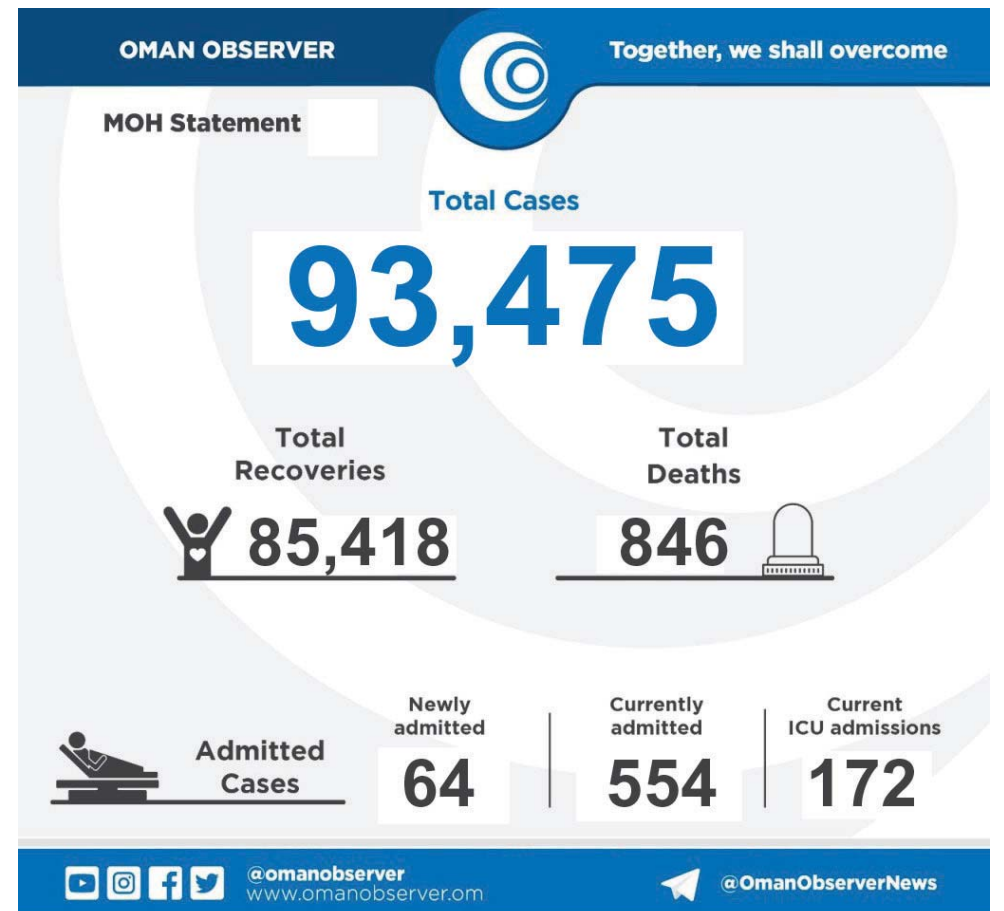
accommodate COVID-19 patients from outside the Muscat Governorate, mainly those who could not be admitted by the hospitals in other governorates.

"Equipping such field hospitals is not an easy process. It needs time. It is not just a bed, a doctor and a nurse. Rather it includes the entire chain of providing health services starting from treatment, providing medicines, sterilisation

materials, to bigger things like assistive devices such as ventilators," he mentioned.

According to the statistics issued by the Ministry of Health on Sunday, 1,722 new COVID-19 infections in the last three days pushed the total number of COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 93,475.

In the last three days 28 patients died taking the death toll to 846. The number of recovered



stood at 85,418 while 64 patients hospitalised in the last 24 hours bringing the total number of those admitted to health institutions to 554, while the total number of those in intensive care is 172.

The rise comes amid fears of a second, fiercer wave after several countries in the world also witnessed a surge of new cases and deaths.

The Ministry of Health has urged citizens

and residents to follow social distancing, wear masks, use sanitisers, and stay at home if they have any symptoms of the COVID-19. The Supreme Committee also continues to urge public and private institutions that employees at workplace should not exceed 70 per cent, to conduct temperature checks, provide spacing between employees, as well as ensure adherence to wearing masks and provide sanitisers.

Effect of COVID-19 on treatment of NCDs

MUSCAT: The Non-Communicable Diseases Department at the Directorate General of Primary Healthcare, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), organised recently the annual NCDs virtual forum for the central officials in the governorates.

Dr Shatha al Raisi, Director of Non-Communicable Diseases and UNFPA representative to the Sultanate, delivered speeches during the forum.

The forum reviewed the status and impact of non-communicable diseases services provided to patients with chronic diseases in the primary health care institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the measures that have been taken to protect the medical staff and clients from infection.

Furthermore, the meeting discussed the challenges faced by health workers, suggestions and experience sharing.

The appointments at the chronic disease clinics have been reduced in order to avoid infection transmission to the clients and to enable the health workers to provide the essential services to the suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19.



Public sector pensioners reach 199,827

MUSCAT: The number of pensioners registered with public sector pension funds in the Sultanate at the end of June 2020 stood at 199,827, comprising a drop by 0.2 per cent compared to the previous month of May 2020. According to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total number of pensioners at the end of June 2020 included 116,287 males and 83,540 females. The highest number of pensioners was in the wage category from RO 1,000 to less than RO 2,000, reaching 61,274 pensioners. — ONA

NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that **Mr. Jean Vincent Chantreau, who worked as Chief Operations Officer, holder of French Passport No. 17AZ25871 & Oman Resident Card No. 115892093** is no longer employed with us. Hereafter, anybody dealing with him, company will not be responsible whatsoever towards the company.

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CORONAVIRUS PREVENTION



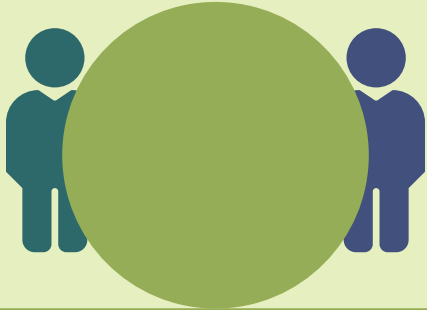
WASH YOUR HANDS
WITH SOAP



USE SURGICAL FACE MASK FOR
MORE PROTECTION



DISINFECT WITH HAND SANITIZER



MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING



AVOID HANDSHAKE AND HUGGING

PREVENT
COVID-19,
DON'T
DENY IT

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Some people still have doubts about the pandemic. The increasing number of COVID-19 cases, readiness for the second wave of infections, and deaths that the pandemic is claiming on a daily basis, are strong messages for them to realise the seriousness of the situation and abide by health safety norms.

They should understand the fact that the disease was under control when strict measures to ensure social distancing was in force. The numbers came down drastically all over. They became so comfortable that many of them even dropped their face masks and started mingling freely despite advisories by the competent authorities to abide by the norms.

This is the time to adjust with the reality and understand that the government's move to open certain businesses doesn't mean the end of the pandemic threat, but a move to train people to live with the pandemic with full protection so that the threats of uncertainty and subsequent mental stress can be managed.

Agreeing with the efforts to curb the disease and simultaneous opening of the businesses, a researcher at the Salalah branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries, said, "This is not the time to argue and fall into the trap of the pandemic. This is the time to listen to the government advisories and let things move, even at a slow pace."

"Many people were not taking the pandemic seriously until a young but experienced corporate executive passed away

due to COVID-19 recently. It gave them a strong message to be careful, as the disease is a disease. Any carelessness can lead to any consequences. It is highly contagious and tricky sometimes in terms of symptoms and. Some with mild fever are becoming serious, while many others do not know that they have the virus until some check-up is done," said Amer bin Ali bin Said al Maashani.

We have to live with caution until there is some treatment for the disease. Those who do not understand the magnanimity of the situation are not only harming themselves but harming the community, society, and the country by being part of the pandemic chain.

As a responsible citizen of the country, Amer advised people not to doubt intentions about the pandemic, because it is real and the steps taken by the authorities are well researched in line with the global trends and global institutions like the World Health Organisation

Wearing face masks, using sanitisers, social distancing and cleanliness necessary to curb spread of coronavirus infection

(WHO). In the middle of the pandemic, the WHO noted that the world must learn to live with the coronavirus and fight it with the available tools. It put stress on general awareness keeping in mind the generations that didn't even imagine the shape and size of the pandemic.

"No one had any clue that the scale of the pandemic would be so big. Since it is prevailing we do not have any option but to abide by pandemic protocols," said a health official.

Prevention is the only cure at this point. Sanitation, social distancing, and all other preventive measures may have to be practised for a longer time.

Plan to review labour regulations

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttvyp

The Ministry of Labour is planning to review the legislation to regulate the labour market in its efforts to improve working conditions that will benefit the national workforce.

“The new regulations, to be rolled out in cooperation with other relevant authorities, will be in line with professional standards that can stimulate the work environment and contribute to the national economy”, the ministry said in a statement.

According to the statement, a review of the legislation is required in view of the current situation that demands to improve the labour market conditions and provide job protection to the national workforce.

The ministry, while confirming that the work contracts of the Omani nationals in private sector establishments are registered online, it said the process is done with the agreement of both parties.

The rules mandate that the agreement with the new employee should be registered online following which a notification will be sent to



the candidate to accept or reject the contract.

The ministry also stated that the terms of the contract resulting

from the wages and bonuses will be determined by agreement between the two parties to the contract without interference by the ministry.

However, the parties should commit themselves to the minimum wage law that has been stipulated in the Omani Labour Law.

A review of the legislation is required in view of the current situation that demands to improve the labour market conditions and provide job protection to the national workforce.

Last week, Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosani, Under-secretary of the Ministry of Labour, said that the ministry in coordination and cooperation with all government agencies across different economic sectors will replace the expatriate workforce with Omanis.

While meeting officials of private health institutions, money exchanges and banks operating in the Sultanate, he called for the need to train the Omanis workforce and prepare themselves to take over from the expatriates and take advantage of all job opportunities available for employment. “Private sector companies should speed up the replacement process,” he said.

Dress code for shoppers likely

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Muscat Municipality has discussed a proposal to enforce a dress code for those going to shopping centres. People should not wear clothes that reveal their body and avoid tight or low cut dresses at public places and shops.

Chaired by Qais bin Muhammad al Ma'shari, the Public Affairs Committee of Muscat Municipality proposed to issue a decision or a local order to apply the legislation on decent dressing for shoppers.

“This decision to implement dress modestly is in accordance with the submission of opinions and recommendations on developing municipal systems and services within the governorate,” said a member of the committee.

The committee discussed awareness campaigns and the need to enforce the Omani Disciplinary Law No 7/2018 and its article 294/A that make it a punishable offence to appear in public in a manner that outrages decency or violates Oman's traditions.

Britain is at COVID-19 tipping point

LONDON: Britain is at a tipping point on COVID-19, Health Minister Matt Hancock said on Sunday, warning that a second national lockdown could be imposed if people don't follow government rules designed to stop the spread of the virus.

COVID-19 cases have risen sharply in recent weeks, with 3,899 reported on Sunday.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has called it a second wave and stricter lockdown measures have been introduced in areas across the country — with London possibly next in line.

“The nation faces a tipping point and we have a choice,” Hancock told Sky News.

“The choice is either that everybody follows the rules... or we will have to take more measures.”

Hancock later told the BBC that a second national lockdown was possible option. “I don't rule it out, I don't want to see it,” he said.

Johnson announced fines of up to £10,000 (\$12,900) on Saturday for people in England who break new rules requiring them to self-isolate if they have been in contact with someone infected with COVID-19.

In addition to tighter rules on social gatherings across the country, several cities and regions in Britain have



People watch a street performer in Leicester Square amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in London. — Reuters

had ‘local lockdowns’ imposed, limiting even more strictly when, where and how many people can meet up socially.

Asked about comments from London mayor Sadiq Khan, who said on Friday new restrictions were increasingly likely in the capital, Hancock said: “I've had discussions this week with the Mayor of London, and the teams are meeting today to discuss further what might be needed.”

Hancock was also asked on Times Radio about the possibility of London-

ers being told to work from home later this week, and said: “Well, I wouldn't rule it out.”

The opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer said he would support whatever measures the government brings forward, but criticised the government's testing system for not having the capacity to deal with increased demand as schools returned.

LABOUR CONFERENCE

Meanwhile, UK opposition leader Keir Starmer launched a digital edition of his Labour party's annual con-

ference on Sunday, promising to move on from years of bitter ideological infighting and stinging electoral failure.

The three-day “Labour Connected” event, held in place of the traditional conference because of coronavirus, is the first major gathering of members since the former chief state prosecutor and human rights lawyer took over in April.

Starmer, 58, is trying to turn Labour around after its worst election defeat since the 1930s in December, when Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson swept to office on a promise to get Britain out of the European Union.

Under his hard-left predecessor Jeremy Corbyn, the party of former prime minister Tony Blair was plagued by splits over policy, particularly on Brexit, as well as claims of widespread anti-Semitism. Starmer said on Sunday the election defeat was “devastating” for the entire Labour movement, and promised “new leadership” focused on winning power at the next scheduled election in 2024.

“I've spent the last six months listening and asking for conversations with people that are difficult rather than easy, and changing and focusing on the future,” he told Sky News television. — Reuters/AFP

German ordnance disposal team defuses two WWII bombs



MUENSTER: Following one of the largest evacuations in recent German history, ordnance disposal experts in the western city of Muenster have defused two aerial bombs dating back to World War II, officials said on Sunday.

Around 16,000 residents were evacuated from their homes in the Mauritz district on Sunday for the bomb disposal operation, a regular occurrence in German cities, where unexploded bombs continue to be discovered during construction work.

During the operation, experts found two unexploded bombs

weighing 125 kilograms and 250 kilograms.

The evacuation was long planned in order to allow five suspected bombs at three locations to be examined in greater detail.

“It is one of the largest evacuation measures in German history,” Mayor Markus Lewe said on Sunday morning.

Several emergency shelters were set up. The city also installed shipping containers filled with water in three places designed to provide protection from pressure waves in the event of detonations. — dpa

Cruise ship evacuated after running aground

STOCKHOLM: A Finnish passenger cruise ship ran aground off the island of Aland in the Baltic Sea, the cruise line said on Sunday, with emergency services adding they were preparing to evacuate the vessel.

The ship was headed towards Stockholm from Turku in Finland and ran aground outside the city of Mariehamn on the autonomous Finnish island of Aland near the Swedish coast.

“There are no personal injuries and no one's life is in danger, and the situation aboard is stable,” Eleonora Hansi, head of information for Viking Line Scandinavia, said.

The ship, *Amorella*, is 169 metres long and does daily trips between Stockholm in Sweden and Turku in Finland.

Normally it carries between 1,800 and 2,000 passengers but due to the pandemic the number was heavily reduced, Hansi said.

“There are about 200 passengers and about 80 crew members onboard,” Hansi said.

Local media reported that passengers had gathered on deck and were wearing life jackets.

Finnish maritime rescue services said on Twitter that the ship had moved closer to shore after the hit to “beach itself and stabilise the situation.”

“*Amorella* stands firmly on the bottom. The 281 people onboard are not in immediate danger but the captain has decided that all extra people be evacuated from the ship,” the West Finland Coast Guard said.

— AFP



MS Amorella is seen off the island of Aland in the Baltic Sea, after it ran aground. — AFP



France for swift Lebanon government formation

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s top Christian cleric took a swipe at leaders of the Muslim community on Sunday for making demands he said were blocking the formation of a new government and causing political paralysis in a nation in deep crisis.

Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al Rai, leader of the Maronite church, did not mention the community directly but asked how one sect can demand “a certain ministry”.

Politicians have said they must name the finance minister. Sunday’s sermon adds to tensions in a nation facing its worst crisis since a civil war ended in 1990 and where power is traditionally shared out between Muslims and Christians. France has been pushing Lebanon to form a new cabinet fast. But a deadline of September 15 that politicians told Paris they would meet has been missed amid a row over appointments, notably the finance minister, a post controlled for years.

Politicians say they must choose some posts because rivals are trying to use “foreign leverage” to push them aside. “In what capacity does a sect demand a certain ministry as if it is its own, and obstruct the formation of the government, until it achieves its goals, and so causes political paralysis?” the patriarch of Lebanon’s biggest Christian community said.

He said the Taif agreement, a pact that ended the 1975-1990 civil war, did not hand specific ministries to specific sects. Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib wants to appoint specialists and shake up the leadership of ministries. The main groups — the



A demonstrator is seen near a bank on fire during unrest, as an economic crisis brings demonstrations back onto the streets in Beirut. — Reuters File Photo

Amal Movement and the Hizbullah — want to select the figures to fill several posts, including the finance minister, a vital position as Lebanon navigates through its economic crisis.

A French roadmap for Lebanon includes the swift resumption of talks with the International Monetary Fund, a first step to helping deal with a mountain of debt and fix Lebanon’s

broken banking sector. But it first needs a government.

Meanwhile, Lebanon’s army said it had found 1.3 tonnes of fireworks during a search of Beirut port, which

was devastated last month in a huge blast that was blamed on a large quantity of chemicals kept in poor condition.

The army said in a statement,



Lebanese Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al Rai. — Reuters

Politicians say they must choose some posts because rivals are trying to use ‘foreign leverage’ to push them aside

released on its website that 1,320 kgs of fireworks were found in 120 boxes in a warehouse during a search of the port.

It said army engineers disposed of them. The port and a swathe of central Beirut was ruined by the huge blast on August 4 that killed at least 190 people. It was blamed on 2,750 tonnes of highly explosive ammonium nitrate kept at the port for years in poor condition. Warehouses and concrete grain silos at the port were destroyed.

Lebanon’s army said on September 3 it had also found a further 4.35 tonnes of ammonium nitrate near the entrance to Beirut port, which the army said at the time it was dealing with. — Agencies

Turkey may resume talks with Greece, warns against EU sanctions

ISTANBUL: Turkey and Greece could soon resume talks over their contested Mediterranean claims but European Union leaders meeting this week will not help if they threaten sanctions, Turkey’s presidential spokesman said on Sunday.

The NATO members and neighbours have been locked in a bitter dispute over the extent of their continental shelves in the eastern Mediterranean.

Tensions flared last month when Turkey sent a vessel to survey for gas and oil in contested waters. European Union member Greece condemned the move as illegal and pressed, along with Cyprus, for a strong response from EU leaders when they meet on Thursday. Ankara withdrew the Oruc Reis vessel last week.

It described the move as a routine maintenance stop but later said it opened up the chance for diplomacy to reduce tensions with Athens.

“At this point, the climate has become much more suitable for negotiations to begin,” presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin told Dogan News Agency. “...Exploratory talks may start again.”

Last month Greece and Turkey were on the verge of resuming those “exploratory” talks, suspended in 2016.

But Turkey broke off contact and sent Oruc Reis into disputed waters after Greece signed a maritime demarcation deal with Egypt, angering Ankara.

Erdogan has had talks with EU Council president Charles Michel, who chairs the meetings of EU leaders, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is seeking to ease the crisis.

But Cyprus, protesting the presence of two Turkish exploration vessels in waters off the divided island, insists on sanctions against Ankara and has blocked EU action against Belarus for alleged election fraud until its demands are met.

“Threats of blackmail and of sanctions against Turkey does not give results,” Kalin said. “European politicians should know this by now.” Erdogan tweeted at the weekend that Turkey believed the dispute could be resolved through dialogue while still defending its rights in the region. — Reuters

Peers of Sudan filmmaker, jailed for ‘public nuisance’, urge release

KHARTOUM: Film industry professionals have called for the release of five Sudanese artists, including a prize-winning filmmaker, after they were sentenced to two months in prison for causing a “public nuisance”.

Filmmaker Hajooj Kuka was sentenced on Thursday, along with four fellow artists belonging to the “Civic Lab” collective after being convicted on the charge, according to their lawyer.

The collective was formed in the wake of — and inspired by — mass protests that last year brought down autocrat Omar al Bashir.

Steven Markowitz, who produced Kuka’s recent film “aKasha” — shown at the Venice film festival — took to Twitter to condemn what he called “fake charges”.

“Write 2 Sudan Embassy in yr country for their release,” Markowitz urged. Cameron Bailey, the artistic director and co-head of the Toronto International Film Festival, said “Hajooj Kuka is an exceptional filmmaker... now he’s been jailed in Sudan. We need to make some noise about it”.

Another Kuka film, “Beats of the Antonov”, won the People’s Choice Documentary Award at the 2014 Toronto film festival, and the Sudanese filmmaker was recently invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts



Sudanese filmmaker Hajooj Kuka won the People’s Choice Documentary Award for ‘Beats of the Antonov’ at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2014. — AFP File photo

and Sciences, the body responsible for the Oscars.

“Beats of the Antonov” features the music and dancing of people in Sudan’s Nuba mountains, a long marginalised area that was repeatedly bombed by Bashir’s regime with Antonov planes during the 1983-2005 civil war and again for much of the last decade.

Lawyer Othman al-Basri said that Kuka and the four other artists were sentenced to two months in jail and a fine of 5,000 Sudanese pounds (\$90) by a court in the central district of

Hajooj Kuka is an exceptional filmmaker... now he’s been jailed in Sudan. We need to make some noise about it
CAMERON BAILEY,
artistic director

Khartoum. Kuka had in August said on Twitter that he and others were “attacked during a theatre workshop in #khartoum by instigators. The police stood by the attackers and arrested us”.

Sudan is undergoing a precarious political transition under a joint civilian-military government that was formed on the back of months of protests following Bashir’s ouster in April last year.

Bashir had come to power in a coup in 1989. — AFP

B R I E F B I T E S I N S I D E

DAMASCUS

SYRIA SLAMS DUTCH LEGAL ACTION ON RIGHT’S RECORD

The Syrian government lambasted the Netherlands on Saturday for launching a new bid through international bodies to hold it responsible for alleged gross human rights violations.

A foreign ministry source quoted by state news agency SANA accused the Netherlands of abusing its position as host of a number of the bodies concerned. — AFP

RIYADH



YEMEN ATTACK ON SAUDI VILLAGE WOUNDS 5

A projectile fired by Yemen’s Ansar Allah fighters hit a village in Saudi Arabia’s southern Jizan province, wounding five civilians, state media reported. The civilians had been rushed to hospital after suffering “minor injuries” from flying shrapnel, the official Saudi Press Agency reported late on Saturday. Three cars were also damaged in the border village, it said, without naming the village. — AFP

CAIRO

EGYPT DISCOVERS 14 ANCIENT TOMBS

Egypt’s antiquities ministry announced on Sunday the discovery of 14 coffins in the Saqqara area that had lain buried for two and a half thousand years.

The tombs were found two days ago during an archaeological dig, and follow 13 wooden sarcophagus discovered in the same burial spot

last week, the ministry said in a statement. — AFP

THE HAGUE



CONVICTED MURDERER SWORN IN AS MP

The International Criminal Court on Wednesday dismissed an appeal against a decision not to probe Israel over a deadly raid on an aid flotilla to Gaza in 2010.

Nine Turkish citizens died when Israeli commandos stormed the Mavi Marmara ship, which was trying to breach the embargo on Gaza. One more died in hospital in 2014.

— AFP

Thai protesters install symbolic plaque

Protest leaders declared victory after handing police a letter detailing their demands

BANGKOK: Openly challenging the monarchy of Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn, thousands of protesters marched in Bangkok on Sunday to present demands that include a call for reforms to curb his powers.

Protesters have grown ever bolder during two months of demonstrations against Thailand's palace and military-dominated establishment, breaking a longstanding taboo on criticising the monarchy — which is illegal under lese majeste laws.

The Royal Palace was not immediately available for comment. The king, who spends much of his time in Europe, is not in Thailand now. The marchers were blocked by hundreds of unarmed police manning crowd control barriers. Protest leaders declared victory after handing police a letter detailing their demands.

Phakphong Phongphetra, head of the Metropolitan Police Bureau, said the letter would be handed to police headquarters to decide how to proceed. "Our greatest victory in the two days is showing that ordinary people like us can send a letter to royals," Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, told the crowd before it dispersed.

At the biggest demonstration in



An anti-government protester uses a loudhailer in front of the police during a pro-democracy rally in Bangkok. — AFP

years, tens of thousands of protesters on Saturday cheered calls for reform of the monarchy as well as for the removal of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former junta leader, and a new constitution and elections. Shortly after sunrise on Sunday, protesters cemented a plaque near the Grand Palace in Bangkok in the area known as Sanam Luang, or Royal Field.

It reads, "At this place the people have expressed their will: that this country belongs to the people and is not the property of the monarch as they have deceived us".

Government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri said police would not use violence against protesters and it was up to the police to determine and prosecute any illegal speech.

Bangkok authorities would need to determine whether the plaque was illegal, and if it was it would be removed, Bangkok's deputy police chief Piya Tawichai told reporters. After the protest, people queued up to take pictures next to the plaque, which also features a hand giving the three-finger salute adopted by pro-democracy protesters.

But far from all Thais support the

new plaque, which resembles one that had commemorated the end of absolute monarchy in 1932 and which was removed from outside a royal palace in 2017, after Vajiralongkorn took the throne. Prominent right-wing politician Warong Dechgitvigrom said the actions of the protesters were inappropriate and that the king was above politics. "It didn't achieve anything," he said.

"These actions are symbolically against the king, but the king is not an opponent." Thai authorities have said criticising the monarchy is unacceptable in a country where the



A commemorative plaque placed by pro-democracy protest leaders on the Sanam Luang pitch is seen in Bangkok. — AFP

king is constitutionally "enthroned in a position of revered worship".

Protests that began on university campuses have drawn increasing numbers of older people. That includes "red shirt" followers of ousted populist Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra who had clashed for years with pro-establishment "yellow shirts" before Prayuth seized power in 2014.

"The new generation is achieving what their parents and grandparents didn't dare. I'm very proud of that," said Somporn Outs, 50, a red shirt veteran. "We still respect the monarchy, but it should be under the constitution."

Protesters say the constitution gives the king too much power and that it was engineered to allow Prayuth to keep power after elections last year. He says that vote was fair.

The next protest is scheduled for Thursday. Protest leaders called on Thais to take October 14 off work to show their support for change. Other measures they sought for were for people to withdraw deposits from Siam Commercial Bank, in which the king's Crown Property Bureau owns more than 23 per cent of the shares, and to stop standing for the royal anthem in cinemas. — Reuters

HK ACTIVISTS SEEK HELP



Pro-democracy activists Eddie Chu and Owen Chow with relatives of some of the 12 Hong Kong activists detained at sea, as they reportedly sailed to Taiwan for political asylum, speak to media before reporting to the police to seek help in Hong Kong. — Reuters

Taliban demands 'religious council' to select national leader

KABUL: The Taliban militant group on Sunday demanded the creation of an "elite religious council" to replace democratic means of selecting Afghanistan's leaders in a future Islamic system.

Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid told a Dutch broadcaster the group sought to establish the powerful council of religious leaders to select the country's future rulers.

Such councils select the Caliph, or leader, of Muslim states and form central parts of political systems based on Islam. Taliban founder Mullah Omar was himself appointed Afghan leader by such a council after the group took power in 1996.

In the same interview, Mujahid rejected the Afghan constitution — which guarantees the rights of religious minorities and women,



A man mourns next to the grave of his relative who was killed in an attack two years ago, as Afghan government officials and the Taliban hold talks in Doha. — Reuters

media and freedom of expression — saying the law was created with the help of occupying forces. The

comments come after a week of intra-Afghan peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in the Qatari capital Doha.

The Afghan government has repeatedly asked the Taliban to observe a ceasefire during the talks, but the militants say they will not stop the conflict until the root causes are resolved.

Responding to criticism that no women were included in the Taliban's negotiation team, Mujahid said women were not responsible or capable enough to participate.

However, in a slight softening of the group's position, Mujahid said women would be allowed to play a limited role in the country's judicial, education and health sectors in the future "true Islamic system" sought by the group. — Agencies

India passes farm bills amid protest from opposition parties

NEW DELHI: India's parliament on Sunday passed new bills the government says will make it easier for farmers to sell their produce directly to big buyers, despite growing protest from opposition parties and a long-time ally of the ruling party.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the new laws will reform antiquated laws and remove middlemen from agriculture trade, allowing farmers to sell to institutional buyers and large retailers like Walmart. The bills also make contract farming easier by providing a new set of rules.

But Modi's food processing minister from an alliance party resigned on Thursday in protest calling the bills "anti-farmer", and the opposition parties have said farmers' bargaining power will be diminished by allowing retailers to have tighter control over them.

On Sunday, some opposition lawmakers raised slogans, tore documents and tried to grab the speaker's microphone in the Upper

The passage of farm bills in parliament is indeed a landmark day for Indian agriculture, says Rajnath Singh, Modi's senior cabinet minister

House of India's parliament, before two controversial bills were passed by a voice vote.

"The passage of both the bills in parliament is indeed a landmark day for Indian agriculture," one of Modi's senior cabinet ministers, Rajnath Singh, said on Twitter.

Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Modi's former food processing minister, is from a regional party which has a strong base in the northern state of Punjab and believes the bills will increase farmer suffering in the breadbasket state. Her party believes the laws will destroy wholesale markets which ensure fair and timely payments



Farmers shout slogans as they march following the passing of agriculture bills in the Lok Sabha on the outskirts of Amritsar. — AFP

to farmers, weaken the state's farmers and the overall state economy. Many farmer organisations have in recent

days held street protests in Punjab and the neighbouring Haryana state near New Delhi. On Sunday, India's main

opposition Congress party criticised the government.

"We will make sure that the

government will have to step down on its knees before the farming community of this country," said Randeep Surjewala, a party spokesman. "It will be farmers one side and big businesses on the other side, how will they fight?," he added.

LOAN TO MALDIVES: India on Sunday announced a \$250 million loan to the Maldives to boost its coronavirus-battered economy in a further bid to counter China's growing financial footprint in South Asia.

The Indian Ocean archipelago, renowned for its luxury resorts, has been badly hit by the pandemic, with foreign tourists failing to flock back in large numbers after international flights restarted in mid-July.

India's High Commission in the Maldives said the loan was being provided after a request by Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih for "financial assistance to overcome the difficult economic situation."

— Reuters



Trump to name woman to succeed Ginsburg

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Saturday said he would nominate a woman to succeed late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

The president's desire to "to move quickly" on the process, despite Democrats' vehement opposition, is likely to dominate the campaigns — alongside other hot-button issues such as the coronavirus and America's ongoing racial reckoning — ahead of the November 3 election.

"I think it's going to move quickly actually," Trump told reporters outside the White House Saturday, adding that he thought his choice would be made "next week."

Addressing a rally in Fayetteville, North Carolina later that day, he took an impromptu poll from the crowd, asking them to cheer for either a woman or a man to be his pick. The crowd cheered considerably louder for the former.

"That's a very accurate poll because that's the way I feel. It will be a woman. A very talented, very brilliant woman, who I haven't chosen yet — but we have numerous women on the list."

The 87-year-old Ginsburg, immensely popular among Democrats, died on Friday after a long battle with cancer.

Her death, just weeks before the



US Senator Elizabeth Warren waves to the crowd as people pay their respects to Ruth Bader Ginsburg near the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC. — AFP

presidential election, offers Republicans a chance to lock in a conservative majority for decades to come, on a court where justices are appointed for life.

The stakes are high as the decision could affect such weighty issues as abortion, healthcare, gun control and

The 87-year-old Ginsburg, immensely popular among Democrats, died last week after a long battle with cancer

gay rights.

They are pushed even higher in a bitter election year when the justices can play a decisive role in legal wrangling over a contested result — such as when they ruled in George W Bush's favour to end the 2000 election debacle.

Trump has already named two justices during his term as president, Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch, giving conservatives a 5-4 majority before Ginsburg's death, though that does not guarantee rulings in Trump's favour — there have been several recent examples of conservatives siding with their progressive colleagues.

Trump, who is lagging in the polls behind Democratic opponent Joe Biden, has another powerful incentive to move ahead: providing a jolt of enthusiasm among his anti-abortion and evangelical supporters.

But, with 45 days to go before the election and early voting already begun in some states, galvanised Democrats are pushing back furiously.

Biden said Friday that "the voters should pick the president and the president should pick the justice for the Senate to consider."

While Democrats' options seem limited, Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer told party members Saturday that if Republicans press ahead, then "nothing is off the table," according to media reports.

"This vacancy should not be filled until we have a new president," Schumer said Friday, carefully echoing the words of Republican Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell in 2016 when he blocked Obama nomi-

nee Merrick Garland.

Republicans in theory have the Senate votes to push through a Trump nominee, but could be blocked by only a handful of defections.

Republican Senator Susan Collins became the first to break ranks when she announced Saturday she would not support a vote on any Trump nominee before the election.

The Maine lawmaker is among a handful of moderate Republican senators — including Lisa Murkowski of Alaska — who have already expressed doubts about a rushed vote.

"I totally disagree with her," Trump said of Collins' stance, referring to his 2016 election in adding that "we have an obligation as the winners to pick who we want."

One prominent Democratic member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which will oversee the confirmation hearings, is none other than Senator Kamala Harris, Biden's running mate.

Trump has already named scores of conservatives as federal judges, and Democrats fear a deep and lasting shift in balance at the Supreme Court.

"If he's allowed to put more conservatives in, this is going to be disastrous for the next 40 to 50 years," Gloria Browne-Marshall, a civil rights attorney, said on CNN. — AFP

MIGRANTS IN CRISIS



Men speak through the barbed wire at a new temporary camp for migrants and refugees, on the island of Lesbos, Greece. — Reuters

Many detained in Belarus protests

MINSK: Uniformed men in balaclavas were seen detaining large numbers of peaceful demonstrators in the Belarusian capital Minsk on Sunday and bundling them into prison transporters. Hundreds of police and army were out in force to prevent a fresh mass protest against President Alexander Lukashenko called by activists for the sixth Sunday in a row.

Soldiers in combat uniforms armed with assault rifles were seen waiting at the Palace of the Republic and in side streets as people streamed into the city centre on foot.

Authorities had closed metro stations and mobile Internet services were down in an attempt to stop the demonstrators. Last weekend an estimated 150,000 joined protests despite similar restrictions.

A heavy police presence was also seen guarding Lukashenko's presidential palace, where the 66-year-old has twice appeared armed with a Kalashnikov to prevent the building being stormed.

Anti-government protesters have remained largely peaceful throughout an increasingly violent crackdown by security forces. In a video clip ahead of the planned rally, opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya called on her



An opposition supporter waves a flag of Belarus during a rally to demand the resignation of Belarusian President Lukashenko in Minsk. — Reuters

fellow Belarusians to continue fighting for a country in which it is worth living in the so-called "March of Justice."

"Every week you show yourself and the world that the Belarusian people are a force," the 38-year-old said from exile in the European Union. Demonstrations were also seen in other cities, including Grodno, Gomel, Vitebsk and Zhodino.

The protests are organised by a group called Nexta Live, communicating to its 2 million subscribers through Telegram.

There, the group also published the names and details of 1,000 members of the security forces involved in the brutal suppression of protests, with the help of a group of hackers called Cyber-Partisans.

Nexta Live said they had warned the security forces ahead of the move not to carry out the government's "criminal orders." The security forces are clad in balaclavas and uniforms without identity badges, in violation of Belarusian and international rules, human rights activists said. — dpa

Italy votes in referendum on downsizing parliament

ROME: Italians headed to the polls on Sunday for a constitutional referendum over the slimming down of parliament and local elections expected to favour the right-wing national opposition bloc. Voting began at 7 am and ran until 11 pm on Sunday.

Voting continues on Monday from 7 am to 3 pm. Results are expected later on Monday. Some 51.6 million people are eligible to vote in the referendum on reducing the number of lawmakers in Italy's two chambers by roughly one third.

The Chamber of Deputies would go from 630 lawmakers to 400, and the Senate from 315 to 200. No minimum turnout is needed for the vote to be valid, amid expectations that the reform will be approved. Early turnout was sluggish, with 12.25 per cent of the eligible voter shaving cast their ballot by Sunday afternoon.

Elections are also taking place in seven regions and just under 1,000

cities, including Venice in the north and Reggio Calabria in the south. Turnout for the regional polls was 13.1 per cent by Sunday afternoon, with the main national government parties — the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) — bracing for a poor showing.

The national opposition, led by Matteo Salvini of the far-right League, is expecting to win in at least three regions, including Veneto and Liguria in the north.

The PD is confident of victory only in Campania, the region around Naples, and is desperate to avoid defeat in Tuscany, a former leftist stronghold where a League candidate could achieve a historic win. The M5S has no strong candidates, but is likely to console itself with a referendum win.

It considers reducing the size of parliament part of its quest to end perks and privileges for politicians.



Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte votes during a referendum on proposed cut in the number of Italian parliamentarians in Rome. — Reuters

Critics of the constitutional reform say it produces minimal cost savings and risks undermining the

democratic system by weakening the authority of parliament.

In any case, a defeat for the

The Chamber of Deputies would go from 630 lawmakers to 400, and the Senate from 315 to 200

government parties is unlikely to topple Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, as the PD and M5S have strong incentives to try to hold on to national power together.

One is the prospect of managing more than 200 billion euros (\$238 billion) in loans and grants from the European Union due to arrive from 2021 as part of the bloc's post-coronavirus recovery fund. Another is the opportunity to influence the parliamentary election of the next Italian president, due in January 2022, and avoid snap national polls, which the PD and M5S would likely lose. Pandemic-era restrictions were in place across all polling

stations, many of which are located in school buildings.

Voters currently in self-isolation due to the coronavirus were permitted to vote from home on submitting an application on a one-off basis.

The poll is going ahead despite warnings against opening polling stations while COVID-19 case numbers are on the rise.

While Italy currently has fewer new cases than Britain, France or Spain, it is still recording more than 1,500 daily.

"The country is in a state of emergency; it is utterly contradictory to be massing people together at polling stations, particularly in light of the trend in Europe," Professor Massimo Galli, infectious diseases chief at Milan's Sacco hospital, said.

But Lorenzo Salvioni, a student in Rome, said he hoped "the country's difficulties caused by COVID" would mobilise Italians to vote.

— Agencies

When it goes beyond human power...!

As the rate of COVID-19 infections is fluctuating in the Sultanate, the world is expecting a second wave of the pandemic.

So frustrating and strange what is happening with this coronavirus as the mysterious secret behind it is yet to be discovered! The battle is certainly unfair between the virus and the warriors in hospitals all around the world.

Doctors and nurses are on an aggressive fight with the virus, sparing no effort to help coronavirus patients, while striving to protect themselves too.

Nobody knows how worse the next round of this pandemic would be, especially with the latest announcement of a potential second attack! Even doctors were almost clueless and frightened when started dealing with the virus and infected people at the very early days of the pandemic. The rapid spread of this highly contagious disease right from the beginning pressed the emergency alarm button calling healthcare sectors to be ready for the battle.

Initially, the positive cases of COVID-19 were only found in people who had a history of international travel. Hence, the situation was somehow under control at that time, but it got worse afterwards with the infection



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THIS PANDEMIC IS A SERIOUS CALL TO STOP WARS, DISCRIMINATION AMONG PEOPLE AND NATIONS

spreading among others. The increasing deaths of infected patients made it even worse and worked as a psychological source of threat. The situation worldwide got awfully complicated, spreading fear and tension.

It was not easy at all; even medical staff had panicked and realised how big would be the sacrifice! Undoubtedly, most of them have never had a good night sleep due to the day and night shifts, all-week-round calls and never had time with their families. However, definitely they make these sacrifices with no regret for the sake of saving patients' life. All what they say deep down in their hearts is "we won't rest until the virus is defeated and human lives are saved".

Generally, medical staff acquire strength from their belief in pain as a temporary challenge, which may last for a minute, an hour, a day or a year, but eventually it will disappear and something good will take its place.

They always try to live by these words as many lives depend on what they do on various cases at hospitals. With all the stress and panic, they hold all their own tears and start drawing smiles on patients' faces. May the Almighty Allah bless all doctors and nurses for sacrificing their lives, time and effort, day and night all round the year!

In contrast, despite all what humans

did to combat the spread of coronavirus, the battle is not yet over with all the attempts made worldwide! What happened to those wise people and experts?! Did not they think they have all the answers? Did not the Almighty Allah show that the wisdom of this world is worthless and incompetent without His power? Allah, the Creator of everything, is the sole possessor of all beings and power of the whole universe.

Yes, all medical staff work hard in saving lives in hospitals and experts leave no stone unturned looking for a vaccine to defeat this virus. However, in addition to all the sacrifices and efforts that humans are making to fight the virus, they need the power of Allah to support them to win the battle. It could be a reminder for all of us to revert to Allah, God, as the Creator of universe and seek His support.

All should remember that this pandemic could be a test from Allah and a lesson to all humans that we all belong to one another. Possibly, it is a serious call to stop wars, discrimination and colonisation between people and nations. It could be the time to work towards having mercy, peace and prosperity. Otherwise, humans will come across more hardships and only Allah can change the most hopeless situation into the best moment in your life.

MYRIAD SOLUTIONS

UN marks anniversary facing world split by COVID-19

PHILIPPE RATER

The United Nations will mark its 75th anniversary on Monday, celebrating the mantra that "multilateralism is not an option but a necessity," even as the coronavirus underscores the fragility of international cooperation.

The anniversary will kick off the global body's annual General Assembly, when normally the leaders and representatives of nearly 200 countries gather en masse to sound off about the world's problems and offer myriad solutions.

But this year, a part of Manhattan will not be sealed off for the "UNGA"; there will be no endless limousine convoys, and no busy beehive of diplomats, journalists and translators in the halls of the UN.

Instead, with COVID-19 still limiting global movement, just one representative from each of the 193 UN members will be allowed, and only someone already in the United States. Everyone else will have to appear by videoconference, including some 160-170 heads of state and government planning addresses.



Diplomacy, to be effective, requires personal contacts, and I am very sorry that we are not going to have the opportunity to bring together leaders of countries
ANTONIO GUTERRES
UN Secretary-General

Appearing by video on Tuesday will be Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping, who in the past have let their top diplomats speak for them; and US leader Donald Trump.

On Wednesday, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, who much of the world sees as illegitimate, will address the

assembly by video. Missing as speakers are the leaders of Syria and North Korea.

"Diplomacy, to be effective, requires personal contacts, and I am very sorry that we are not going to have the opportunity to bring together leaders of countries," said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Even so, he said, there would be "many virtual meetings" on the sidelines of the assembly, convening by teleconference on subjects such as climate change, biodiversity and the conflicts in Libya and Lebanon.

The event kicks off with a joint declaration full of good intentions and a call to combat unilateralism.

But that belies the reality of what has happened since COVID-19 erupted early this year, with borders closed, cooperation limited and countries forced to go it alone.

Bertrand Badie, professor at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, said the great powers missed a chance with the coronavirus to strengthen global cooperation.

Instead, cooperation broke apart amid allegations that China and the World Health Organization moved slowly on the initial outbreak, and the US declared it would act alone and pulled out of the WHO.

The superpowers' behaviour has "caused the failure, even the collapse, of the UN Security Council," which was set up to lead on such world-shaking challenges as a pandemic, Badie said.

The powers have clung to a "very conservative vision of security, that humanity is only threatened by rivalries between countries," Badie said, calling it "a very bad sign for the future." — AFP

EXISTENTIAL FIGHT

Sudden SC vacancy a new ‘wild card’ in American presidential race

SIMON LEWIS AND JAMES OLIPHANT

The death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has injected a volatile new element into the last stretch of a turbulent US presidential race, potentially shifting the focus away from the coronavirus pandemic and the stagnant economy into a political battle over her successor.

The sudden vacancy on the nation's high court means the November election has become much more than a battle between President Donald Trump and his Democratic opponent Joe Biden for the White House and control of Congress, political strategists say.

Now, they say, it is an existential fight over civil rights, abortion, immigration, and the future of healthcare for millions of Americans that will further galvanise voters and activists in both parties in a contest that had already reached a fever pitch.

"This interjects a real wild card into the race," said Jim Manley, a former aide to Senator Harry Reid when he was the Democratic leader of the Senate.

The death of Ginsburg, a fierce advocate for women's rights and the court's leading liberal voice, gives Trump a chance to expand its conservative majority with a third appointment at a time of deep divisions in America and fewer than 50 days before the election.

Trump said on Saturday that he

TRUMP SAID THAT HE WOULD MOVE TO NOMINATE A SUCCESSOR 'WITHOUT ANY DELAY'



Flowers, candles, and signs are pictured at a makeshift memorial outside of the US Supreme Court as people pay their respects to Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Washington. — AFP

would move to nominate a successor "without delay." The coming tumult over that nominee could bolster Trump's efforts to shift the election away from his much criticised handling of the coronavirus pandemic and the moribund economy, experts say.

At the same time, it likely will energise both Trump's conservative and evangelical base who oppose

abortion, as well as Democrats fearful of a true shift in the balance of power on the high court.

"This is going to set off a titanic battle. This could seriously affect the election," said David Gergen, a political adviser who has served four US presidents, both Republican and Democratic.

— Reuters



Boston Celtics' Jayson Tatum (0) dribbles the ball against Miami Heat forward Bam Adebayo (13) during the second half of game three of the Eastern Conference Finals of the 2020 NBA Playoffs. — USA Today Sports

CELTICS

strike back with 117-106 win over Heat

MIAMI: The Boston Celtics hit back on Saturday, leading wire-to-wire in a 117-106 victory over the Miami Heat that cut the gap in the NBA Eastern Conference finals to two games to one.

Jaylen Brown scored 26 points and Jayson Tatum added 25 points and 14 rebounds for the Celtics, who avoided falling into an 0-3 hole from which no NBA team has rallied to win a best-of-seven playoff series.

After their 17-point lead slipped away in a game-two loss on Thursday — the second straight game they surrendered a double-digit lead in defeat — Celtics players could be heard exchanging heated words in their locker room.

But they were all on the same page on Saturday, displaying a sense of purpose in the NBA's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida, and maintaining their poise as the Heat narrowed a 20-point fourth-quarter deficit to five with less than a minute to play.

Marcus Smart, a perfect 10-for-10 from the foul line, produced a string of clutch free throws and the Celtics hung on for the win.

"Down 0-2 in the series, we played some games we thought we should have played better," Brown said. "We wanted to make it an emphasis to come out tonight and play 48 minutes, and we did."

Center Bam Adebayo led the Heat with 27 points, 16 rebounds and three steals. Rookie Tyler Herro scored 22 points for Miami and star forward Jimmy Butler scored 17.

But Boston outscored Miami 60-36 in the paint and held the Heat to 38.8 per cent shooting from the floor.

"They came out, Boston did, with great force in this game," heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "You do have to credit them for that. "They sustained it for the better majority of the game. We were on our heels most of the game."

The Celtics were buoyed by the return from injury of playmaker Gordon Hayward, who played 30 minutes off the bench and scored six points with five rebounds and four assists in his first game in more than four weeks.

"The first five minutes I was gassed," admitted Hayward, adding that he was feeling it in the right ankle he sprained in game one of the Heat's first-round series against Philadelphia.

Hayward left the bubble to rehabilitate the injury, returning and going through quarantine before he could return to the court.

Boston led 31-22 at the end of the first quarter, and were up by 12 early in the second before the Heat surged back.

CELTICS FAMILY

Miami, led by Herro's 16 points in the period, twice cut the deficit to three points before the Celtics reasserted themselves to take a 62-50 lead into halftime.



Miami Heat's Tyler Herro (middle) makes a basket over Boston Celtics' Kemba Walker (left) and guard Jaylen Brown (7) during the second half of game three of the Eastern Conference Finals of the 2020 NBA Playoffs. — USA Today Sports

"There's some great guys in that locker room," Brown said of the Celtics' unity. "A lot of emotion, a lot of passion, but we're a family and we're here for each other."

"We exemplified that when we came out together and stayed together during some tough moments. They made a big run I think at the end of the second quarter, Tyler Herro made some big plays."

"We didn't hang our heads, we kept our will high and persevered to win this game."

Celtics coach Brad Stevens acknowledged that his

team was challenged emotionally by the two tough defeats in the first games of the series.

Game three, he said, "was more about what are we going to show ourselves to be."

"The first time we were pushed to more emotions that challenged us, we got better," Stevens said. "And that's encouraging."

The Celtics will try to level the series in game four on Wednesday. Brown could barely wait.

"Looking forward to the next game," he said. "We all are."

England's Reid rolls to LPGA Portland lead

LOS ANGELES: Mel Reid fired seven birdies in a seven-under par 65 on Saturday to take a two-stroke lead over defending champion Hannah Green in the LPGA Portland Classic.

England's Reid, a six-time winner on the Ladies European Tour who is chasing a first LPGA title, heads into Sunday's final round on 12-under par 132.

"Put myself in great position, a position that everyone wants to be in, so I'm excited for the opportunity tomorrow," said Reid, who strung together four birdies in a row from the sixth through the ninth and rolled in her final birdie of the day at the 18th.

"Just keep doing the same thing and see where tomorrow afternoon takes us," added Reid, who shared seventh at the ANA Inspiration in Rancho Mirage, California, last week.

"I felt like I hit it really good last week, so kind of took that momentum going into this week," said Reid, who said she benefitted from the day off on Thursday after the tournament at Columbia Edgewater was reduced to 54 holes because of poor air quality due to wildfires.

"I think it did me a favour having an extra day off," she said. "I was pretty tired from last week."

Australia's Green, who shared the first-round lead with American Cydney Clanton, followed her opening 66 with a four-under par 68 for a 10-under total of 134.



She shook off a bogey at her opening hole, the 10th and put herself alone in second with a birdie bomb at her final hole, the ninth.

"I got off to such a great start, so it's always hard to back up a low round," said Green, whose two wins last year included her Portland triumph and her first major title at the Women's PGA Championship.

"But I'm really happy with my last putt — holed a long bomb there so gives me positive momentum for tomorrow."

South Korean Amy Yang and American Amy Olson shared third on nine-under 135.

Yang had seven birdies with one bogey in her six-under 66 while Olson had four birdies without a bogey in her 68.

Clanton tumbled out of contention with a five-over 75 that included five bogeys and a double bogey to go with two birdies. — AFP

Wolff steals show at US Open, leads DeChambeau by two

MAMARONECK, NY: Matthew Wolff, playing in only his second major, stole the show at an unforgiving Winged Foot with a scorching start and steady finish to grab an unlikely two-shot lead over big-hitting Bryson DeChambeau after the third round on Saturday.

Wolff, 21, began the day four shots behind overnight leader Patrick Reed but erased that deficit in seven holes en route to a five-under-par 65 that tied the low round of the week and brought him to five under overall.

"I like to go out there and do what I feel comfortable with, rip dog and see how it goes from there," said Wolff, who will look to become the first player to win the US Open in his tournament debut since Francis Ouimet in 1913. "I feel comfortable with every part of my game so I don't like to shy away from things when I'm feeling confident, and I'm probably going to do the same tomorrow."

The front nine at Winged Foot is one of the more daunting stretches in golf but a steadfast Wolff came out firing lasers at tricky pin positions and reached the turn with a blistering five-under 30 after five birdies.

Wolff, who hit just two of 14 fairways, made his lone bogey at the par-four 16th but responded in style with a birdie at the last after sticking his approach shot to 10 feet.

It was another difficult day of scoring at Winged Foot as only seven players managed to break par on a layout renowned for its narrow fairways, thick rough and wildly undulating and speedy greens.

Among those who struggled under the tough conditions and faded from contention were former world number ones Justin Thomas and Jon Rahm after matching 76s.

REED STUMBLES

DeChambeau (70), who began the day one shot back of Reed, made a bogey-bogey start but leaned on his power to chase down Wolff and squandered a chance to finish within one shot of the lead when he two-putted from six-feet for a closing bogey.



Matthew Wolff reacts to his putt on the 13th green during the third round of the US Open at Winged Foot Golf Club - West. — USA Today Sports

"Tomorrow I've just got to make sure my speed is a little bit better than it was starting out the round and hitting the driver in the fairway," said DeChambeau, who finished in a share of fourth at last month's PGA Championship. "Today was pathetic and it needs to be better than that to win a US Open."

Former British Open champion Louis Oosthuizen (68) was alone in third place, four shots back of Wolff, while Hideki Matsuyama (70), Xander Schauffele (70) and Harris English (72) were each a further shot adrift.

Four-times major champion Rory McIlroy was six shots back of the lead. World number 10 Reed (77) drained a nine-foot birdie at the ninth to share the lead but fell apart over a nightmarish inward nine during which he made six bogeys and a double-bogey to fall into a share of 11th place, eight shots back of Wolff.

"Well, I got all my bad shots out of the way," said former Masters champion Reed. "You know, it was just one of those days. I couldn't find a fairway, and from there trying to guess out of the rough all day, it was just hard. It was brutal." — Reuters

FANTASTIC FAF STEERS CHENNAI TO VICTORY IN IPL OPENER

NEW DELHI: South Africa's Faf du Plessis took three catches and hit a quick-fire half-century to guide Chennai Super Kings to victory as the virus-hit Indian Premier League started in the United Arab Emirates on Saturday.

The cash-rich league is being played outside of India because of the coronavirus pandemic, but organisers did their best to replicate the raucous atmosphere with recorded crowd noise and cheerleaders on video screens.

Chennai, led by Mahendra Singh Dhoni who retired from international cricket last month, outplayed defending champions Mumbai Indians to win by five wickets in Abu Dhabi.

Du Plessis made an unbeaten 58 and put on a key third-wicket stand of 115 with Ambati Rayudu, who hit 71, to help Chennai chase down a target of 163 in 19.2 overs and celebrate in the empty stadium.

"It was completely different from what we are used to having, so many people cheer for us at the stadium," Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma said after the loss.

"But we knew there won't be anyone at the stadium. I think IPL did a great job making sure that there is some noise going around, which was good. But this is the new normal for us for a while."

Dhoni's bulging biceps also attracted much attention as the former India captain strode out to lead Chennai more than a year after he last played for India in their semifinal loss to New Zealand in the 2019 World Cup.



Du Plessis made an unbeaten 58 and put on a key third-wicket stand of 115 with Ambati Rayudu, who hit 71 to help Chennai chase down a target of 163 in 19.2 overs

"You had the liberty during lockdown to spend some time on yourself," Dhoni said after winning the toss and electing to field first.

"Could not do a lot of physical running and all, but yes, being at home for four-five months what was the best thing to do so hit the gym, trying to do as much as possible and maybe look fit."

The fitness seemed to have rubbed on his team-mates with Du Plessis taking three outfield catches including two stunners to help check Mumbai to 162 for nine.

England's Sam Curran smashed 18 off six balls after being sent up the order by Dhoni who batted at seven and remained unbeaten with Du Plessis hitting the winning runs.

"To be honest very surprised I went in but he's a genius and he obviously thought something," Curran said of his captain.

"But great win in the end and great start. It was a six or out mentality so that's how you have got to play this game — go out and have a risk and if it comes off it comes off and if it doesn't it doesn't."

— AFP

“I’m not perfect,” says Djokovic after losing cool at Italian Open

ROME: Less than two weeks after being disqualified from the US Open, Novak Djokovic's frustration boiled over once again as he smashed his racket in a fit of rage during his 6-3, 4-6 6-3 win over Dominik Koepfer in the Italian Open quarterfinals on Saturday. The top-ranked Serb was broken to love in the sixth game of the second set following which he threw his racket on the ground, drawing a warning from the chair umpire.

"Well, let me tell you it's not the first nor the last racket that I'll break in my career," Djokovic, 33, told reporters.

"I have done it before, I'll probably do it again. I don't want to do it, but when it comes, it happens." "That's how I guess I release sometimes my anger. And it's definitely not the best message out there, especially for the young tennis players looking at me."

"I don't encourage that, definitely. But, look, we're all people. We all do our best. There were times and periods when I don't do that, and there are periods when I do," he said. The Serb was disqualified from the US Open after inadvertently hitting a ball into a line judge's throat during his fourth-round match against Pablo Carreno Busta.

Djokovic, who apologised at the time and vowed to take away valuable lessons from the incident, reiterated that he was working on his "mental and emotional health" to try and help keep a lid on his emotions.

"It's always been part of my, I guess, training and recovery, as well, developing strong character and understanding myself on different levels, holistic approach to life," the 17-time Slam champion said.

"That's just me. Of course I'm not



Serbia's Novak Djokovic pretends cheering the crowd in an empty central court, after winning his quarterfinal match of the Men's Italian Open against Germany's Dominik Koepfer in Rome. — AFP

perfect. I'm doing my best." Djokovic, who faces Norway's Casper Ruud in the semifinals, will fancy his chances of sealing a record 36th Masters 1000

crown following nine-time champion Rafa Nadal's shock exit at the hands of Diego Schwartzman.

— Reuters

Halep rallies past Muguruza to reach third Italian Open final

ROME: Top seed Simona Halep ousted Spaniard Garbine Muguruza in three sets to advance to her third final at the Italian Open on Sunday, played on front of a small number of spectators for the first time.

The Romanian dropped her second set on clay in Rome before seeing off Muguruza 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 in a battle of former French Open champions before Roland Garros in a week's time.

Halep — the 2018 French Open winner — will next play either Czech defending champion Karolina Pliskova, the second seed, or Marketa Vondrousova for a place in the final.

Halep, 28, has finished runner-up in her two previous finals at the Foro Italico in 2017 and 2018.

Ninth seed Muguruza, the 2016 Roland Garros champion, fell to her fourth semifinal defeat in Rome, the furthest she has gone in the tournament.

Wimbledon champion Halep extended her winning streak this season to 13 consecutive victories.

She won the Dubai title in February, before the coronavirus lockdown, coming back to claim victory in Prague last month having skipped the US Open.

— AFP





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Diego Schwartzman reacts after winning 5-4 in the second set during his quarterfinal match of the Men's Italian Open against Rafael Nadal at Foro Italico in Rome. – AFP



NADAL STUNNED BY SCHWARTZMAN IN ROME QUARTERFINALS

ROME: Defending champion Rafael Nadal crashed out of the Italian Open with a stunning 6-2, 7-5 defeat by Argentine Diego Schwartzman in the quarterfinals on Saturday. The nine-times Rome champion, who had won all nine previous meetings against Schwartzman, struggled with his serve throughout the match and made a series of uncharacteristic unforced errors that proved to be his undoing.

The Italian Open was the Spaniard's first tournament in over seven months and while he cruised through the previous two rounds, his rustiness showed from the outset against

the 15th-ranked Schwartzman.

Nadal committed 30 unforced errors to Schwartzman's 17 and had his serve broken five times. "Losing that many serves, you can't expect to win a match," Nadal said.

"So that's something that I have to fix. I know how to do it," Nadal will now travel to Paris, where he will look to clinch a record-extending 13th French Open title.

Schwartzman will face Denis Shapovalov in the semifinals after the Canadian defeated Grigor Dimitrov 6-2 3-6 6-2 for his 100th tour-level match win.

Earlier in the day, Novak Djokovic

overcame a mid-match wobble against Dominik Koepfer before securing a 6-3 4-6 6-3 win over the unseeded German and a semifinal spot.

The top-ranked Serb had sailed through the previous two rounds, his first matches since being defaulted at the US Open for hitting a line judge with a ball, but faced a potentially tricky test when Koepfer levelled the contest at one set apiece.

However, Djokovic regained his focus to close out the victory and stay on course for his 36th ATP Masters 1000 crown.

He takes on Casper Ruud for a place in

the final after the Norwegian battled past fourth seed and local hope Matteo Berrettini 4-6 6-3 7-6(5) in their last-eight clash.

"Clay is definitely Casper's preferred surface. This is where he feels most comfortable. It's semi-finals and it's anybody's game," said Djokovic, who will be targeting his 30th victory from 31 matches this year.

"I'll do some homework and be ready for that one." In the women's draw, 2018 French Open champion Simona Halep advanced to the semis when her opponent Yulia Putintseva retired due to a lower back injury

while trailing 6-2 2-0.

The top-seeded Romanian will now meet Spain's ninth seed Garbine Muguruza, who survived an early scare against Victoria Azarenka to beat the US Open runner-up 3-6 6-3 6-4.

Halep said: "Every time I played well against her (Muguruza), I was as much as possible aggressive. "If I play my best game, and if I feel great physically on court, I have a big chance to win the match. But every time is different, because she's playing so hard. You don't really know what to expect. It's tough." — Reuters



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CBO instructs banks to enforce Common Reporting Standard

ANTI-TAX AVOIDANCE: In all, 32 countries are participating along with Oman in the automatic exchange of information for tax purposes

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has directed commercial banks, as well as finance and leasing companies (FLCs), operating in the Sultanate to begin scrupulously implementing the provisions of the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on the Exchange of Financial Information – an international convention that seeks to, among other things, combat offshore tax evasion.

A recent circular signed by CBO Executive President Tahir Salim al Amri has called on all banking and financial institutions to comply with the requirements of the Common Reporting Standard (CRS), which forms the centrepiece of the agreement.

The Common Reporting Standard (CRS) is described as a global standard developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to support the automatic exchange of financial account information.

Following the promulgation of Royal Decree 34/2020 on March 25, 2020, which approves the Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters Agreement, the



Sultanate has effectively ratified the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on the Exchange of Financial Information.

The Common Reporting Standard requires, among other things, financial institutions to identify customer tax residencies and report financial accounts held directly or indirectly by foreign tax residents to local tax authorities. It also obliges tax authorities to exchange this information in a transparent and regular manner. More than 100 countries, including all financial centres around the

world, have committed to CRS.

In line with its commitments, the Sultanate has mandated all financial institutions to ascertain the tax residency status of all account holders, whether belonging to individuals, legal entities or ‘controlling persons’.

This measure is being implemented in two distinct steps: firstly, new accounts opened with effect from July 1, 2019 must necessarily be accompanied by a ‘Self-Certification Form,’ which determines the tax residency status of the account holder; secondly, with

regard to existing accounts (also known as ‘pre-existing accounts’), financial institutions are required to do due diligence and obtain the tax residency status of the account holders.

Financial account information of account-holders that are not residents of Oman in terms of their tax status — also known as ‘reportable accounts’ — will be shared with any country with which the Sultanate has an agreement.

In all, 32 countries are participating along with Oman in the automatic exchange of information

THE COMMON REPORTING STANDARD (CRS) IS DESCRIBED AS A GLOBAL STANDARD DEVELOPED BY THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) TO SUPPORT THE AUTOMATIC EXCHANGE OF FINANCIAL ACCOUNT INFORMATION

for tax purposes.

The list includes: Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, China, UK, Austria, India, Japan, Greece, Spain, Estonia, Italy, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Singapore, France, Finland, Cyprus, Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Malta, Hungary and the Netherlands.

Banks and FLCs are required to submit periodical reports to Oman’s Tax Authority for sharing with the 32 countries participating in the Automatic Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes.

GCC petrochem producers embrace steps to tackle plastics pollution



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

The Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA), which includes a number of Omani petrochemical producers as members, has adopted a new initiative aimed at improving sustainability and best environmental practices at plastic manufacturing and logistics operations in the GCC.

The initiative has been rolled out as part of activities marking World Cleanup Day 2020. Practiced in over 60 countries and thousands of plants around the world, Operation Clean Sweep (OCS) arrives in the region for the first time to enable good housekeeping and pellet containment practices at plastic resin handling operations.

The global initiative is aimed at ultimately achieving zero pellet, flake, and powder loss and contributing to global efforts by plastic producers today to protect the environment and minimise their environmental footprint.

The initiative is of great significance for the region, as Arabian Gulf plastic producers manufacture 32.3 million metric tons of polymers annually. Pellet, flake, and powder loss is a growing problem, which can have an economic and business cost in the tune of \$1.5 billion every year excluding environmental and reputational damage among local communities.

OCS is a product stewardship programme of the American Chemistry Council’s Plastics Division and Plastics Industry Association in the US.

It is aligned with GPCA’s commitment to the Declaration of the Global Plastics Associations for Solutions on Marine Litter, specifically focusing on area #6 – “to address marine litter at the source through plastic pellet containment”.

Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun, Secretary General, GPCA, commented: “GPCA is steadfast in its resolve to champion this important initiative in the Arabian Gulf and empower both our member companies and their employees to drive change from the ground up.

As demonstrated in our recent Responsible Care Performance Metrics report, the regional chemical industry is in the leadership position in environment, health, safety, and security (EHS&S) performance, and its commitment to sustainability will only be strengthened by Operation Clean Sweep. When compared to alternative materials, plastics reduce environmental costs by nearly four times, and adopting more robust pellet containment practices will help improve the industry’s sustainability impact even further.”

China’s ByteDance seeks \$60 billion TikTok valuation



NEW YORK: China’s ByteDance Ltd is seeking a valuation of \$60 billion for TikTok as Oracle Corp and Walmart Inc take stakes in the short-video app’s business to address US security concerns, Bloomberg News reported on Sunday, citing an unnamed person familiar with the matter.

Oracle will take a 12.5 per cent stake in TikTok Global and store all its US user data on its cloud to comply with US national security requirements, the companies said earlier. Retail giant Walmart said it would take a 7.5 per cent stake in TikTok Global.

The two companies would pay a combined \$12 billion for their stakes if they agree to a \$60 billion asking price, Bloomberg reported.

—Reuters

Fiscal fizzle saps US economic recovery

WASHINGTON: This week’s economic data offers fresh hints that the US recovery will slow without new federal aid, a possible blow to President Donald Trump’s reelection bid, especially since any new spending before the November 3 presidential election seems unlikely.

A slowdown in US consumer spending in August provided the clearest evidence this week that as millions of Americans lost the extra unemployment benefits that had sustained their finances in the early months of the COVID-19 recession, they have begun to cut back.

In an economy where consumer spending accounts for two-thirds of the total output, less shopping means less overall growth.

The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment dropped less than expected, and applications for the week before were revised up, suggesting the labour market recovery has plateaued.

Meanwhile, a Fed survey released on Friday showed that American households were better off financially in July than they were in the first months of the crisis, in large part because of their access to government aid.

Other data this week indicate the recovery is ongoing in some parts of the economy.

US factory production increased for a fourth straight month in August, and confidence rose to a record among single-family homebuilders, who saw a boost to demand from low interest rates and pandemic-fueled demand for homes suited to remote work.

Broad consumer sentiment also picked up in September, a report showed Friday. Democrats grew more upbeat about the economy’s outlook while Republicans’ enthusiasm dipped, but overall



Engines assembled as they make their way through the assembly line at the GM manufacturing plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee, in this file photo. — Reuters

In an economy where consumer spending accounts for two-thirds of the total output, less shopping means less overall growth

consumer optimism is still down compared with before the crisis.

Next week Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell is scheduled to address lawmakers at three separate hearings, where he will undoubtedly make

the same observation he has repeatedly made for months, including after this week’s policymaking meeting: more stimulus “is likely to be needed” for the recovery to continue.

The House, controlled by Democrats, and the Senate, controlled by Republicans, are deadlocked on any stimulus bill, and there’s little chance of it passing before the election.

Eventually, Congress will pass some pandemic relief, no matter who wins the presidential contest. But it’s likely to be less under Trump, a Republican, than under Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden. —Reuters

SEE ALSO PAGE 15



More than 6K
import permits
for automotive
shipments
issued in 1H



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

The number of import permits given for the release of shipments of cars and motorcycles and their tyres reached 3,346 from the beginning of January till the end of June 2020. During this period, the number of certificates of conformity with GCC standards issued for cars and motorcycles and their tyres reached 3,093.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that these transactions were done via e-mail.

This facility was started to continue the work remotely in view of the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). It said that it was looking into the documents submitted, attesting the certificates of conformity, and issuing a no-objection document for the release of the shipment as well as payment of the fee.

The General Directorate for Standards and Metrology of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that new tire manufacturers must submit Gulf conformity certificates for new cars and tires electronically through the GCC Standards Organization website according to the relevant forms of Gulf technical regulations. It should also be accompanied by the required test reports.

The authority can request for samples to conduct these tests in neutral laboratories approved by the authority.

The ministry said that conformity certificates were required to ensure that they meet the standard specifications and technical requirements. Registering and classifying the certificates and the completion of financial procedures were also required. The authority looks into the certificates and test results. In case of rejections, the manufacturer is notified with details of the reasons of the decisions. The certificate is sealed with the approved encrypted electronic stamp to prevent forgery.

If the authority deems necessary, it is possible to request a visit to the manufacturing company to see the production lines and assess the level of quality control therein. It can also request for inspection of the company's laboratories and its sample testing. The authority reserves the right to request for the outcome of tests conducted in neutral and accredited laboratories.

It is worth noting that the Omani-Gulf Standard Specifications GSO 51 / 2007- GSO 52/2007 and GSO645 / 2005 are concerned with general requirements for new pneumatic passenger cars, nomenclature, marking, explanatory data, dimensions, loads and inflation pressures for new tyres of pneumatic passenger cars, multi-purpose cars, trucks, buses, and trailers.

Report outlines steps for destination marketers to reboot tourism sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

The impact of COVID-19 has been far and wide, and one industry, in particular, has been hit the hardest. A new report released this week by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in collaboration with Google, titled "Actions for Destination Marketers to Navigate in a COVID-19 World" assessed the effects of the pandemic on the global travel and tourism business and its impact on Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs).

The report highlights that the global travel and tourism business has recorded sustained and successful growth over the past 20 years, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5 per cent, amounting to \$4.7 trillion in 2019. With the effects of COVID-19, a decline in international and commercial passengers around the globe could lead to a loss of up to 58 per cent of jobs (190 million) in the travel and tourism industry and cut the industry's contribution to global GDP by up to \$5.5 trillion (62 per cent).

"The continued success of the global travel and tourism industry in the last two decades can be attributed directly to DMOs, as they generate the required demand for tourism by building destinations' brands and raising traveller awareness about their respective destination offerings," said Pablo Martinez, Managing Director and Senior Partner, BCG. "The unpredictable nature of the pandemic has made it quite challenging for DMOs to plan and develop their tourism strategies. Our new research with Google is intended to provide DMOs with a perspective on how consumers' attitudes toward travel have changed in response to the pandemic and imperatives to navigate the coming future."

Trends in consumer preference in travel demands have shifted, creating the unpredictability nature in DMOs businesses. Google searches



KEY MEASURES: New report looks at how people's attitude towards travel changed and how destination marketing organisations can prepare for the eventual resumption of travel or more unexpected future changes

in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) show that "cancel flight" queries increase by 259 per cent in March 2020, compared to January 2020. Moreover, the growth of "staycation" related searches increased by over 400 per cent since March.

"These shifts in consumer sentiment towards travelling are real, as the fear of catching the virus grows, and accordingly leisure travel is no longer an option or a priority," said Abdullah Alassaf, Industry Manager, Google. "However, the need to travel is inherent. We found in our research that consumers rate leisure travel as the top activity they miss the most and 31 per cent surveyed in the report hope to plan leisure travel once they feel safe

enough to do so."

As the travel industry continues to adapt to the changes caused by the pandemic, DMOs must be at the forefront to ensure that they are ready for the eventual resumption of travel or more unexpected changes on the horizon. A fundamental building block of responding to the pandemic is the right use of technology and in specific the use of data. Proper gathering and analysis of real-time data and business intelligence will allow DMOs to gain actionable insights required in a highly volatile travel environment and remain agile. With this, DMOs can begin plan ahead for the long-term in three key activities:

1. Product and service development: Guide deployment of

new products and services, health and safety standards, measure and regulations, and operational measures.

2. Stakeholder engagement: Inform stakeholders (including governments and healthcare officials and travel industry suppliers) of unified communication messages and collaborate with them on setting travel and health standards.

3. Marketing: Reallocate marketing spend by channel, and guide campaign messaging and timing.

In preparation for the next immediate step for DMOs, BCG and Google have developed a 'five-R' approach to guide travel marketers in adapting to the changing industry trends:

■ Reassess their offerings and value proposition in light of evolving traveller preferences, needs, and concerns.

■ Reassure travellers on the safety of travel to their chosen destination by addressing their health concerns.

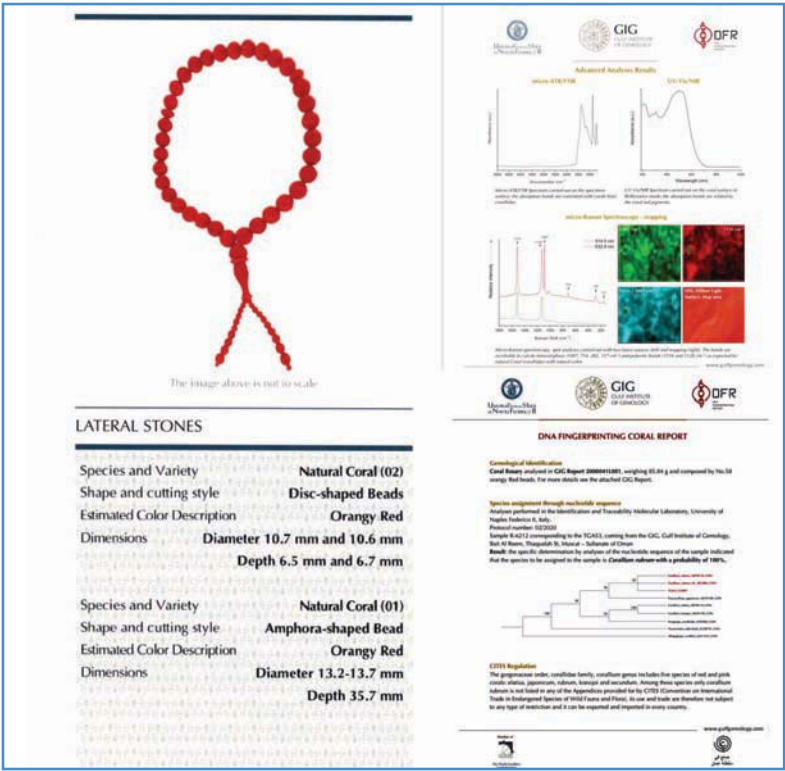
■ Raise awareness of the destination, including added safety measures and local government regulations, to inspire consumers.

■ Remove barriers in converting consumers to travellers by making the case for travelling with conscientious health and safety measures in place.

■ Revive spend in the local economy by supporting tourism.

Looking and planning ahead, beyond COVID-19 is imperative for DMOs. As the world moves towards a phase of recovery, focusing efforts on enhancing technology and data collection with the 'five-R' approach will be of use for the travel and tourism industry in the long run.

First DNA fingerprinting report issued for precious coral



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

The Oman-based Gulf Institute of Gemology, the only facility of its kind in the entire Gulf region, has issued its first DNA Fingerprinting Report (DFR) on a precious coral.

The DFR details the species of the coral sample through DNA analysis and details its comprehensive trace elements. The report further sets forth clear data that ensures the test sample is free of any treatment.

The issuance of the DNA Fingerprinting Report is the result of the collaboration between

Fabio D'Amico GIG, the CIBJO Coral Commission, headed by its President Enzo Liverino and the University of Naples Federico II, in particular Professor Di Cosmo.

The coral which came from the Mediterranean Sea has been worked, fashioned and polished by 1894 Liverino srl — and will be available for purchase.

The Muscat-based Gulf Institute of Gemology (GIG) is the region's leading research, analysis and luxury education institute and is considered one of the top ten in the world.

BUSINESS ALERT

Alizz Islamic Bank offers special finance facilities

MUSCAT: To honour the Sultanate's Armed forces, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and health personnel, Alizz Islamic Bank has announced the provision of special finance facilities for them towards the purchase and construction of homes or to buy a land.

The offer comes as tribute by the bank to these customers for their unrelenting commitment to the community while battling against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The promotion coincides with the bank's campaign to commemorate the 50th National Day.

Among the benefits that the Armed Forces, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and Ministry of Health employees will receive when applying for real estate financing, whether it is to build a house, buy ready-made property, or buy land, is to enjoy a special reduced profit rate of 5.25 per cent. They will also be exempted from transaction fees and offered easy and flexible procedures. All they need to do is submit simple documents to complete the financing process by going to their nearest Alizz Islamic Bank branch.

Alizz Islamic Bank also announced an additional offer to all bank customers who wish to avail new finance with a moratorium period of four months from September until end of December, with a profit rate of 5.95 per cent.

Moreover, Alizz Islamic Bank affirmed through its third offer for its customers which extends an exemption from transaction fees and a reduced profit rate of 5.75 per cent when applying for finance to buy a ready-made property or build a property or buy a land through diminishing musharaka financing. Mohammed al Ghassani (pictured), AGM — Head of Retail Distribution and Wealth Management at Alizz Islamic Bank said, "The brave men and women from the armed forces, the Royal Oman Police and the employees of the Ministry of Health were and still are on the front lines confronting this pandemic which continues to affect the Sultanate."



All-new Toyota Hilux Adventure now in Oman

THE tough, powerful, uncompromising, all-terrain performer — the all-new Toyota Hilux Adventure is now in Oman. The much awaited Toyota Hilux Adventure is a result of Toyota's passion, commitment and willingness to listen to what its customers desire. And offer them a specially designed vehicle that exceeds their expectations.

Since its introduction in 1968, the legendary Toyota Hilux has been pushed to the limits, traversed unknown terrains, explored new frontiers and made a distinctive mark wherever it went and whatever it was used for.

The all-new introduction takes this unique ability even further with a robust mix of adventurous and sophisticated design, leading technology, a list of thoughtful safety features and roomy and detailed interiors. To make work or pleasure, a recreational experience.

With the all-new Hilux Adventure, active adventure seeking individuals and families alike, can look forward to fun and memorable moments.

Whether they are enjoying an unplanned weekend in the wadis, or driving by the countryside for some break from the city's chaos. Or even just taking a swim in the seas.

The Hilux Adventure's space, comfort and remarkable capability, encourages you to just go ahead and realise your wishes, wherever, whenever.

The Hilux Adventure is designed to reflect a robust and adventurous look with a new bold & powerful integrated trapezoidal grille with 'interlocking' skid plate and front bumper treatment. This striking new exterior is further enhanced by LED headlamps and fog lamps, exclusive overfenders and a new machine finish and black 18" alloy wheel design.



Germany plans reform to avoid bankruptcy wave due to COVID-19



A worker wears a protective mask at the Volkswagen assembly line in Wolfsburg, Germany, in this file photo. — Reuters

**KEEN TO AVOID
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RELIEF MEASURES AS
GERMANY BRACES
FOR ITS BIGGEST
SLUMP SINCE WW2**

BERLIN: Germany would relax insolvency rules under proposals set out on Saturday to help avert a wave of bankruptcies in Europe's biggest economy, provided companies hit by the COVID-19 crisis have a robust business model.

Keen to avoid bankruptcies and mass layoffs, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government has launched a range of stimulus and relief measures as Germany braces for its biggest slump since World War Two, having shrunk by an unprecedented 9.7 per cent in the second quarter.

"Companies that can show

creditors a realistic prospect of restructuring should be able to implement their concept outside insolvency proceedings," said Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht.

Under the draft reform, which would take effect at the start of 2021, the deadline for firms to file for insolvency would be extended to six from three weeks and authorities will apply more relaxed benchmarks when examining over-indebtedness.

The government has already taken steps such as allowing firms in financial trouble due to the pandemic to delay filing for bankruptcy until the

end of the year, extending an original deadline of the end of September.

Helped by these measures, the number of firms declaring insolvency in Germany fell 6.2 per cent to 9,006 in the first half of this year from the same period last year. Critics say suspending insolvencies delays, but does not prevent, the collapse of "zombie companies" artificially kept afloat.

However, defenders of insolvency protection steps say they have helped to spare Germany deeper economic contraction and prevent a spike in unemployment. — Reuters

BUSINESS BRIEF

Indonesia halts exports from seafood producer after virus tests

JAKARTA: Indonesia has suspended exports from an Indonesian seafood company PT Putri Indah into China after its frozen fish products tested positive for the coronavirus, the country's fisheries ministry said in a statement on Saturday.

The ministry said that an investigation was underway and that the suspension would only apply to PT Putri Indah "whereas the others can still do export activities as usual."

The virus was detected on the outermost side of the package, not on the fish, the ministry said.

The seven-day suspension began on Friday, it said.

A person in charge of marketing, answering a number listed for PT Putri Indah, hung up the phone without replying.

China's General Administration of Customs said on Friday that it would stop accepting import applications from PT Putri Indah for one week after a batch of frozen hairtail fish from the company tested positive for the coronavirus.

— Reuters

Banks agree \$545m for Congo Republic economy



Traders display new Congolese currency bills in the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital Kinshasa. — Reuters

BRAZZAVILLE: A group of banks has agreed more than \$545 million worth of funding to boost Congo Republic's long-suffering economy, officials said on Saturday.

The oil-producer was hit by a sharp drop in crude prices in 2014, leaving it with debt of nearly \$9.5 billion, much of it owed to China and Western oil traders and amounting to 85.5 per cent of the Central African country's gross domestic product (GDP).

The IMF agreed a three-year \$449 million bailout last year, but the coronavirus pandemic is expected to cause an economic contraction of 9 per cent in 2020, the government has said.

A group of banks including Gabon-based BGFI Bank and Togo's Ecobank agreed the package of 300 billion CFA francs, BGFI's chief executive officer Henri-Claude Oyima told reporters after a meeting with President Denis Sassou N'Guesso. — Reuters

US consumer sentiment increases, current account deficit widens

WASHINGTON: US consumer sentiment increased in early September, with Democrats growing more upbeat about the economy's outlook ahead of the November 3 presidential election while Republicans' optimism waned slightly.

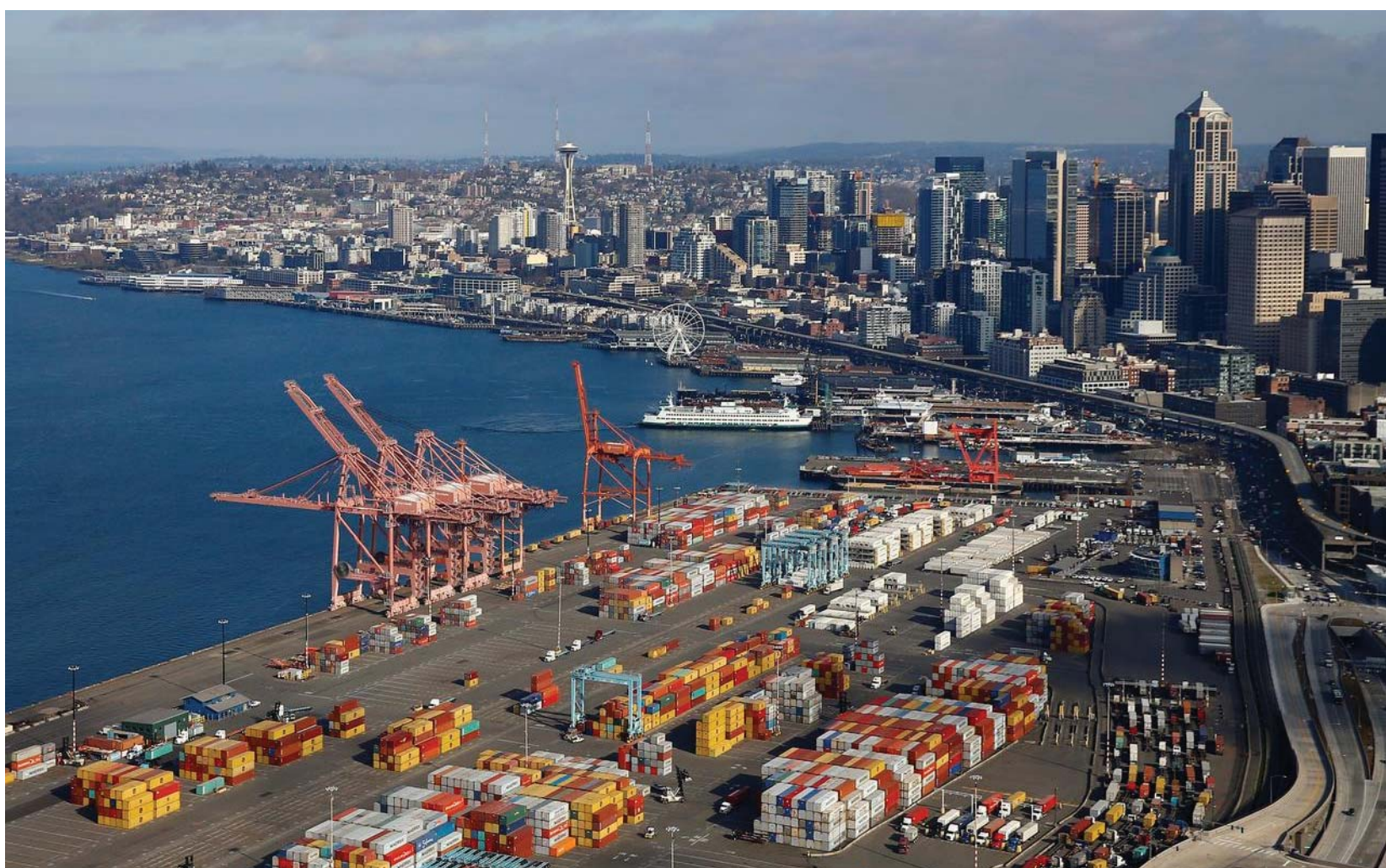
The survey from the University of Michigan on Friday, however, showed President Donald Trump, a Republican, and his Democratic Party challenger, former Vice President Joe Biden, in "a virtual tie" when assessing consumers' responses between July and September on which candidate they thought would win the election, not whom they favoured or how they intended to vote.

"The September gains were primarily in the outlook for the economy, and it was Democrats that posted gains in economic prospects while optimism about the economy weakened among Republicans," the University of Michigan Surveys of Consumers chief economist Richard Curtin said in a statement.

The University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index rose to 78.9 in the first half of this month from a final reading of 74.1 in August. The index remains 22.1 points below February's level. Economists had forecast the index edging up to a reading of 75 in early September.

Consumer sentiment among Democrats increased to 68.4 from a reading of 57.6 in August. It slipped to a reading of 95.7 among Republicans from 98.6. Among independents, consumer sentiment rose to 75.4 from 72.4 last month.

Though consumers believed Trump would be better for the economy, 40 per cent did not expect either candidate would have an



An aerial photo looking north shows shipping containers at the Port of Seattle and the Elliott Bay waterfront in Seattle, Washington. — Reuters

impact on their personal finances.

The survey also showed consumers gloomy about their current financial situation and less upbeat about future finances, likely reflecting the expiration of an unemployment benefits subsidy, and suggests consumer spending could slow further.

Nearly 30 million people remain on unemployment benefits six months after the pandemic started in the United States. Retail sales and production at factories slowed in

Nearly 30 million people remain on unemployment benefits six months after the pandemic started in the United States. Retail sales and production at factories slowed in August, indicating that economic recovery from the COVID-19 recession is stalling

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"More respondents reported

an income decline rather than gain for the first time since 2014," said Tim Quinlan, a senior economist at Wells Fargo Securities in Charlotte,

North Carolina. "Lower-income households reported a decline more frequently."

A separate report from the Conference Board on Friday showing its measure of future US economic growth increased 1.2 per cent in August after advancing 2.0 per cent in July. It said last month's modest rise in the leading economic index "suggests that this summer's economic rebound may be losing steam heading into the final stretch of 2020." — Reuters

Libyan oil facilities restart operations

BENGHAZI: Workers at Libya's major Sharara field have restarted operations, two engineers working there said, after National Oil Corporation (NOC) announced a partial lifting of force majeure.

They said flaring had restarted at the field and shared a video of it, and added that engineers had been returning to the area since Wednesday. It was unclear when production might restart and there was no comment from the NOC.

Two other NOC companies said they had issued directives to staff to start working to prepare to recommence production as soon as possible.

Libya's oil sector has stood almost entirely quiet since January, when eastern-based forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar imposed a blockade on energy exports during their



An oil tank is seen inside Ras Lanuf port Oil and Gas Company in Ras Lanuf, Libya, in this file photo. — Reuters

ultimately foiled assault on Tripoli.

Haftar said on Friday the blockade would be lifted but NOC has demanded that his forces and allied mercenaries that it says pose a danger to its staff must leave all oil facilities.

On Saturday it lifted force

majeure on what it described as "safe" fields and ports but not on any where fighters remain, though it did not name these. The NOC has said facilities were degraded during the shutdown and during years of conflict, which could slow any recovery.

Sharara has been plagued by security problems in recent years that have caused repeated full or partial shutdowns. The field is operated by the NOC in a joint venture with Spain's Repsol, France's Total, Austria's OMV and Norway's Equinor.

Elsewhere, Arabian Gulf Oil Co, an NOC company that had been producing around 300,000 barrels per day early last year, said it was ordering staff to start operations to prepare for a resumption in output as soon as possible. — Reuters

EU seeks new powers to penalise tech giants

BRUSSELS: The European Union wants to arm itself with new powers to penalise big technology companies, the *Financial Times* (FT) reported.

The proposed plan includes forcing tech giants to break up or sell some of their European operations if their market dominance is deemed to threaten the interests of customers and smaller rivals, the newspaper said.

The commission is set to propose new rules called the Digital Services Act by the end of the year, which will increase social media's responsibilities

and liability for content on their platforms.

EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton, in an interview with the FT, said the proposed remedies, which would only be used in extreme circumstances, also include the ability to exclude large tech groups from the single market altogether.

Brussels is also considering a rating system that would allow the public and shareholders to assess companies' behaviour in areas such as tax compliance and the speed with which they take down illegal content. — Reuters



London's music goes underground to beat lockdown blues

London: London's hard-hit live entertainment sector is hoping to prove it can resurrect itself from the coronavirus shutdown — and a series of gigs from a maze of tunnels could show the way to do it.

“Lockdown Town”, which opens on October 2, will see socially distanced performances of American music from the 1920s to 1950s in a network of vaulted venues near Waterloo station.

Audiences will have their temperatures checked during staggered arrival times, move from one venue to the next wearing masks, and not stay in one area for more than 15 minutes.

The number of spectators has been capped at a maximum of 360 each evening — well below the 500-700 capacity in normal times.

“We have created a really flexible model,” “Lockdown Town” director Kerri McLean said, adding ingenuity was key to getting the event on track.

“We are just a tiny little piece in a huge puzzle but it does feel that we are giving an opportunity and a boost to these many talented people who haven't had a gig for seven months.”

Organisers expect to employ more than 300 musicians playing ragtime to rock 'n' roll, with the event described as London's first Covid-safe “immersive experience”.

Carpenters, sound engineers and musicians were busy this week preparing the

“Lockdown Town”, which opens on October 2, will see socially distanced performances of American music from the 1920s to 1950s in a network of vaulted venues near Waterloo station

30,000 square feet (2,800 metres) of space that once served as parking lots before the opening night.

The activity is a stark contrast with the scene at most theatres and nightspots in central London, which were shut in late March as part of the nationwide coronavirus lockdown.

The government has allowed venues to partially reopen but many nightspots, particularly older theatres, remain closed because of strict social distancing rules.

One study published in June estimated that theatres and concert venues face a £3-billion (\$3.9-billion, 3.3-billion-euro) shortfall in revenues this year.

‘GHOST TOWN’

“It's been horrendous for the creative industry,” said McLean of the shutdown.



“It has affected every single industry but for the live industry, the bounce back is really, really tough.”

The government this week tightened restrictions on socialising because of a surge in coronavirus cases, and imposed local lockdowns across swathes of the country.

Under current rules, groups of more than six people from different households are not allowed to mix to curb the close-contact spread of the virus.

Fears of another wider shutdown persist but organisers One Night Records remain optimistic and say they have shifted “lots of tickets”, which are priced at £52.

Some dates are already sold out.

Production manager Joanna Penso said London, which is normally packed with tourists and revellers, had been trans-



formed into a “ghost town” by the pandemic.

But the gigs could be just the tonic the city needs.

“The public really want to see something at the moment... I've been craving to go dancing and listen to live music,” she said.

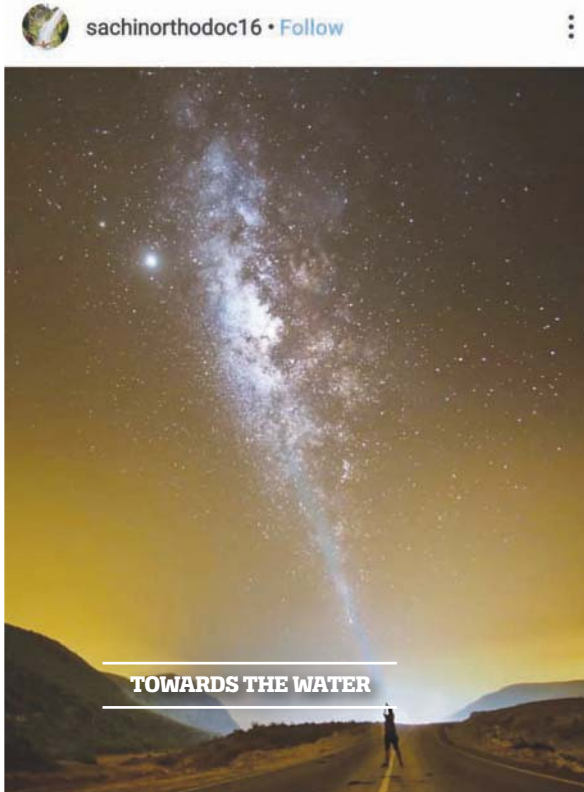
“It's something that we have all been missing.”

During the shows, a costumed character with a cane will ensure health and safety regulations are strictly enforced.

Penso predicted that would be the biggest challenge “but also that audiences are feeling safe enough to actually enjoy themselves”. — **AFP**



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



FASHION

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Scaling up, French firm fashions fish skins for luxury market



SAINT-FONS, FRANCE: A French company is collecting fish skins that would otherwise wind up in restaurant trash cans, turning them into leather for use in watch straps and wallets, and pitching them at the high-end luxury market.

Turning fish skin into leather is an age-old craft. It is experiencing a revival — driven by its environmentally-friendly credentials — but has yet to break into the rarefied end of the fashion industry.

Three friends, who met when studying chemical engineering near Paris and taught themselves the tanning process from scratch, are trying to change that.

“Salmon skin has a suppleness, and a finesse, it's less than half a millimetre thick, but with a resistance which is nearly equivalent to cow

Turning fish skin into leather is an age-old craft. It is experiencing a revival — driven by its environmentally-friendly credentials — but has yet to break into the rarefied end of the fashion industry

leather,” said Benjamin Malatrait, one of the three friends, who co-founded a company called Ictyos.

“It has a grain which is



more marked, with the scales that are a bit reminiscent of lizard,” he said at his firm's workshop near the French city of Lyon.

“Visually its quite exotic.” Their firm has been given a six-month stint inside a start-up incubator run by Paris-based global fashion giant LVMH, owner of brands such

as Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior. The idea is that the incubator's graduates land deals with LVMH fashion houses. Malatrait said Ictyos is working with 250 clients — big brands and artisan producers — who are testing the products for use in watch straps, bags, and clothes. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL TALES

World's first centre for traditional Arabic Islamic medicine to rise in Qatar



DOHA, QATAR: It is envisioned as the world's first centre for Traditional Arabic Islamic Medicine (TAIM), a wellness destination that will make Qatar's Khasooma, a private coastal area north of the country, the haven of wellness enthusiasts.

Launched recently, Zulai Wellness Resort spreads across an area of 280,000 square metres and will feature family Wellness Resort of 120 elegant guestrooms and suites, and an adults-only

Drawing on Chiva-Som's philosophy on holistic wellness, the resort presents the opportunity for families to experience, learn and practice wellness together, effectively introducing children to healthy living from an early age, as well as offering individuals and couples the exclusivity of totally immersing in the ultimate wellness retreat.

Traditional Arabic Integrative Medicine (TAIM) is a prominent traditional healing sys-



resort of 60 suites and villas, catering to guests of all ages and needs.

Chiva-Som International Health Resort and Msheireb Properties, Qatar's leading Real Estate developer worked together to make the project possible with the goal of shaping the face of the wellness tourism industry in the region and establish its first wellbeing haven.

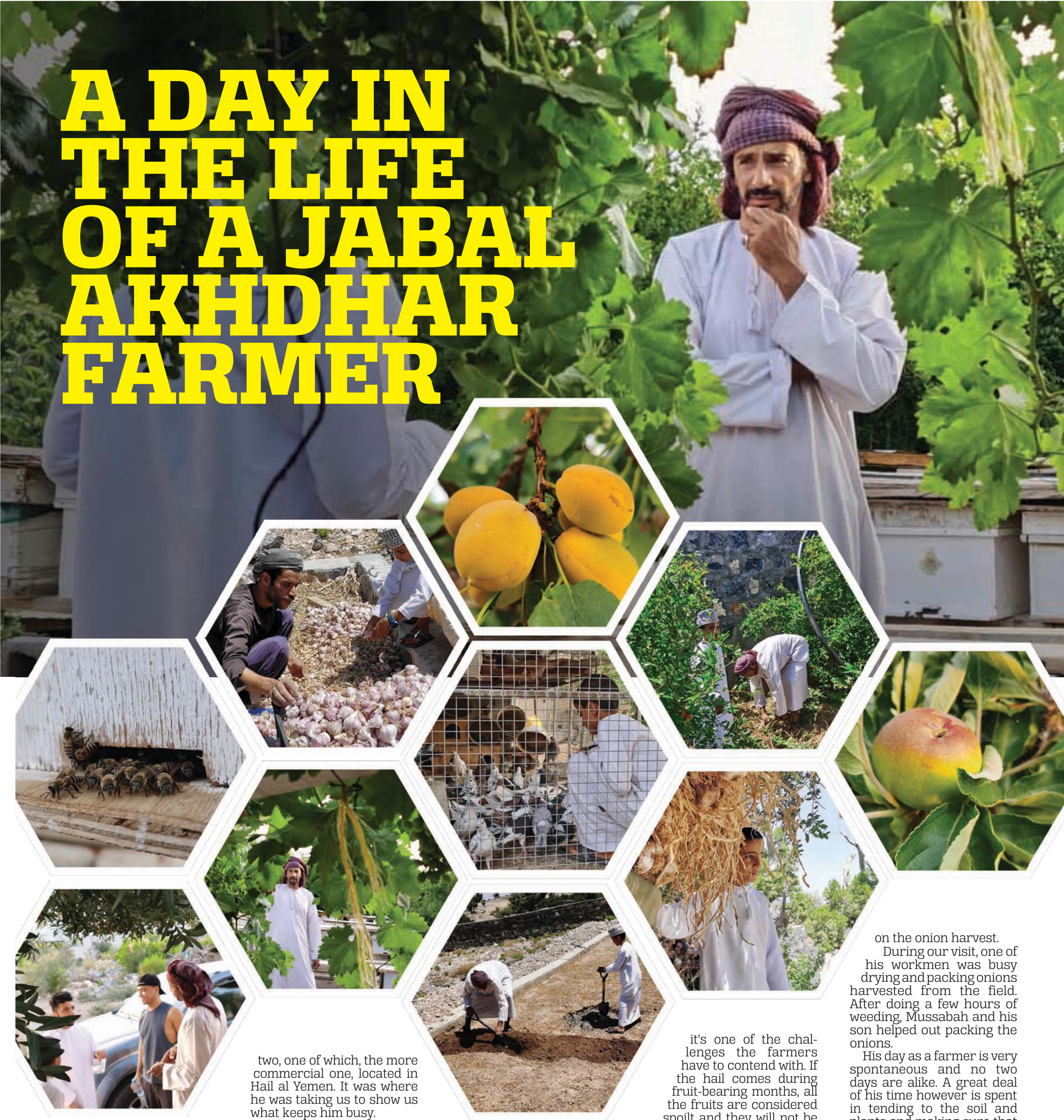
The name “Zulai”, which refers to “purified water”, is inspired by the people's historic journey across the Arabian Peninsula and their ever-present search for water, the seed of life.

tem in the world refers to healing practices, beliefs, and philosophy incorporating herbal medicines, spiritual therapies, dietary practices, mind-body practices, and manual techniques, applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose, and prevent illnesses and/or maintain wellbeing according to Alrawi SN and Feters MD in their research titled Traditional Arabic & Islamic medicine: a conceptual model for clinicians and researchers.

The wellness resort is looking to have its soft opening in December 2020.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A JABAL AKHDHAR FARMER



BY YERU EBUEEN

More than half a dozen olives lined up the gates of his home. Many of the branches were heavy with green fruits. "We have several kinds of fruit-bearing trees surrounding the property but not as many as you will find in the farm," Mussabah al Awaimari said in Arabic. His home is located a stone's throw away from the famed Alila Jabal Akhdhar, it's sturdy, rustic and luxurious buildings a scenic backdrop to Mussabah's home. When he said his farm, our team from Oman Daily Observer thought he meant his ancestral family's farmland located deep within some hidden corners of Jabal Al Akhdhar. It was only later we realised that he has

two, one of which, the more commercial one, located in Hail al Yemen. It was where he was taking us to show us what keeps him busy. Mussabah's home speaks volume of his profession. By the driveway are tonnes of onions just sitting in one corner. His son, 12-year-old Munther, was inside the pigeon's cage located behind the house, cleaning it up and feeding the birds. He has several grape vines neatly arranged into rows. They too were heavy with green fruits. "It's gonna take a few more weeks before they become ripe," he said. We timed our visit with the fig fruit harvest season. There were several of them surrounding the house but not a lot of fruits on the trees. Surrounding the house, he has about 6 apple trees, three different varieties of figs, several pomegranates that will ripen in a few days among others. He also has his own bee farm which is a good source of honey. His farm in Hail al Yemen is a different story though. Sitting in nearly a hectare of space, it was far bigger with each section designated for a specific plant.

Mussabah and farmers like him however have adapted to the different conditions of Jabal Al Akhdhar. While the figs may have suffered, they can still depend on the onion harvest.

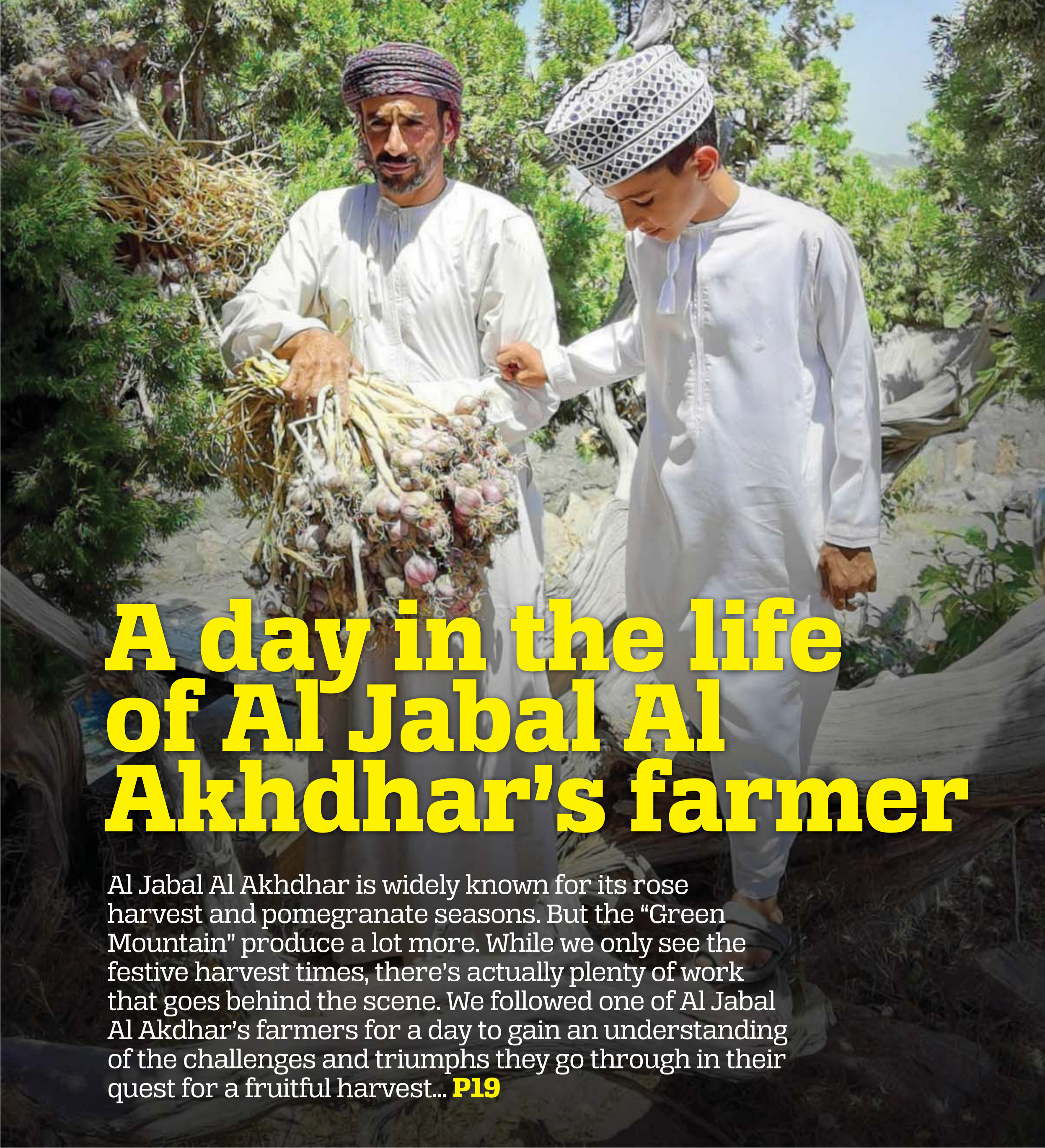
"We had some hail a few months back. That was bad for our plant," he shared. Contrary to popular opinion, while many who don't live in Jabal Al Akhdhar are excited and celebrate when it rains peanut-sized hails,

it's one of the challenges the farmers have to contend with. If the hail comes during fruit-bearing months, all the fruits are considered spoilt and they will not be able to make a profit. "Hail, when it hits the fruits, usually cut it into half or causes physical deformity. This either kills them or causes for their taste to sour," he said. The small pieces of ice also destroy the leaves and the tree itself so for this season, Mussabah said that it was hopeless to get anything from the fig fruits. Loses had been a part of Mussabah's life as a farmer. One cannot put all the eggs in one basket. A problem can arise anytime – whether it's the temperature fluctuating, less water or more pests, they have to learn to adapt with what nature gives them. Sometimes, they are also challenged by less manpower to work on the farm which is why even Munther helps in his little ways. Mussabah and farmers like him however have adapted to the different conditions of Jabal Al Akhdhar. While the figs may have suffered, they can still depend

on the onion harvest. During our visit, one of his workmen was busy drying and packing onions harvested from the field. After doing a few hours of weeding, Mussabah and his son helped out packing the onions. His day as a farmer is very spontaneous and no two days are alike. A great deal of his time however is spent in tending to the soil and plants and making sure that they are properly watered every day. "My son is a big help. I'm glad he is developing a passion for cultivating plants. He is not afraid to get his hands dirty. It's good that at an early age, he has learnt that this is our source of livelihood," Mussabah said. As for Munther, he spent a great deal of his time with working adults and have gotten a lot of their belief system. He was excited to be able to continue the work that his father started. "After school, I always spend my time with my father. I like being on the farm. I can eat fruits and I can feed the birds. There are many things to do and I want to learn caring for these plants as I grow old," Munther said. This provides relief to Mussabah. A proud father, he thinks that while other children are embarrassed to work in the field, he is thankful that his child has a better understanding of life.

features

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A day in the life of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's farmer

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is widely known for its rose harvest and pomegranate seasons. But the “Green Mountain” produce a lot more. While we only see the festive harvest times, there’s actually plenty of work that goes behind the scene. We followed one of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar’s farmers for a day to gain an understanding of the challenges and triumphs they go through in their quest for a fruitful harvest... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

ENTERTAINMENT



LONDON'S MUSIC GOES UNDERGROUND TO BEAT LOCKDOWN BLUES

London's hard-hit live entertainment sector is hoping to prove it can resurrect itself from the coronavirus shutdown — and a series of gigs from a maze of tunnels could show the way to do it... Story on **Page 17**

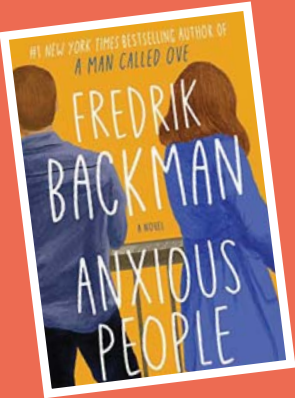
FASHION



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READ



ANXIOUS PEOPLE

BY FREDRIK BACKMAN

A failed bank robber holds a group of strangers hostage at an apartment open house.

TRAVEL TALES



WORLD'S FIRST CENTRE FOR TRADITIONAL ARABIC ISLAMIC MEDICINE TO RISE IN QATAR

It is envisioned as the world's first centre for Traditional Arabic Islamic Medicine (TAIM), a wellness destination that will make Qatar's Khasooma, a private coastal area north of the country, the haven of wellness enthusiasts... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE



INTERNATIONAL WEEK OF HAPPINESS AT WORK

As we all spend nearly 8 to 10 hours in the workplace, it usually is the source of many of our anxiety and stress. Started by two Dutch women in 2015, International Week of Happiness aims to bring back happiness in the workplace. To celebrate today, try having an impromptu potluck with a few games. Nothing better can cheer everyone than with good food and some lighthearted games.