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ROYAL CAVALRY
RIDERS QUALIFY
FOR WORLD
CHAMPIONSHIP



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BANKS, INVESTORS
PIVOT TOWARDS BIDEN
WIN AFTER TRUMP TESTS
POSITIVE FOR COVID



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YOUNG AFGHAN FEMALE
MOUNTAINEER PLANS NEXT
SUMMIT TO 'SHOW THE
WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO'



OMAN

Work on Liwa city under way

LIWA: Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, inspected the new residential city in the Wilayat of Liwa in North Al Batinah Governorate, to review the workflow and the stages of implementation of the project in accordance with the schedule. The new city currently under implementation as part of an integrated residential scheme includes 2,963 residential lands occupying an estimated 1,256 hectares with 3,400 houses. The city has infrastructure projects such as roads, sewage and water networks, lighting in addition to service facilities like schools, mosques and health centres, petrol stations, parks and commercial centres. **DETAILS ON P2**

Bus services in city to resume

MUSCAT: Mwasalat will begin city services in Muscat from Sunday as per the directives of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19. In the first phase, bus services between cities were resumed from September 27. Services within Salalah will start on October 18, while operations in Suhar will be announced later. The company will levy an additional 100 baisa on ticket fares of city services and 500 baisas on intercity services for sterilisation and cleaning procedures. Mwasalat buses are equipped with IVMS, free Wi-Fi for passengers, AC bus stops and routes are available on Google Maps. **DETAILS ON P2**

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TRUCK BOMB IN EASTERN AFGHAN PROVINCE KILLS AT LEAST 15

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FAKE NEWS
TRUMP TESTED POSITIVE



TRUMP'S POSITIVE UNDERSCORES THAT THIS IS THE VIRUS ELECTION

P9

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 39°C
MIN: 27°C

SALALAH
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 23°C

NIZWA
MAX: 38°C
MIN: 24°C

SUNRISE 06.00 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

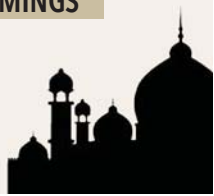
FAJR: 04:45

DHUHR: 12:01

ASR: 15:24

MAGHRIB: 17:56

ISHA: 19:06



Oman Vision-2040 committed to protection of environment

MUSCAT: The Sultanate has affirmed that it is striving to realise the sustainable development goals with regard to preserving natural resources and protecting and boosting biodiversity and the wildlife in their natural environments. The Sultanate is conducting several studies and field research in diversity management and the endangered species in particular.

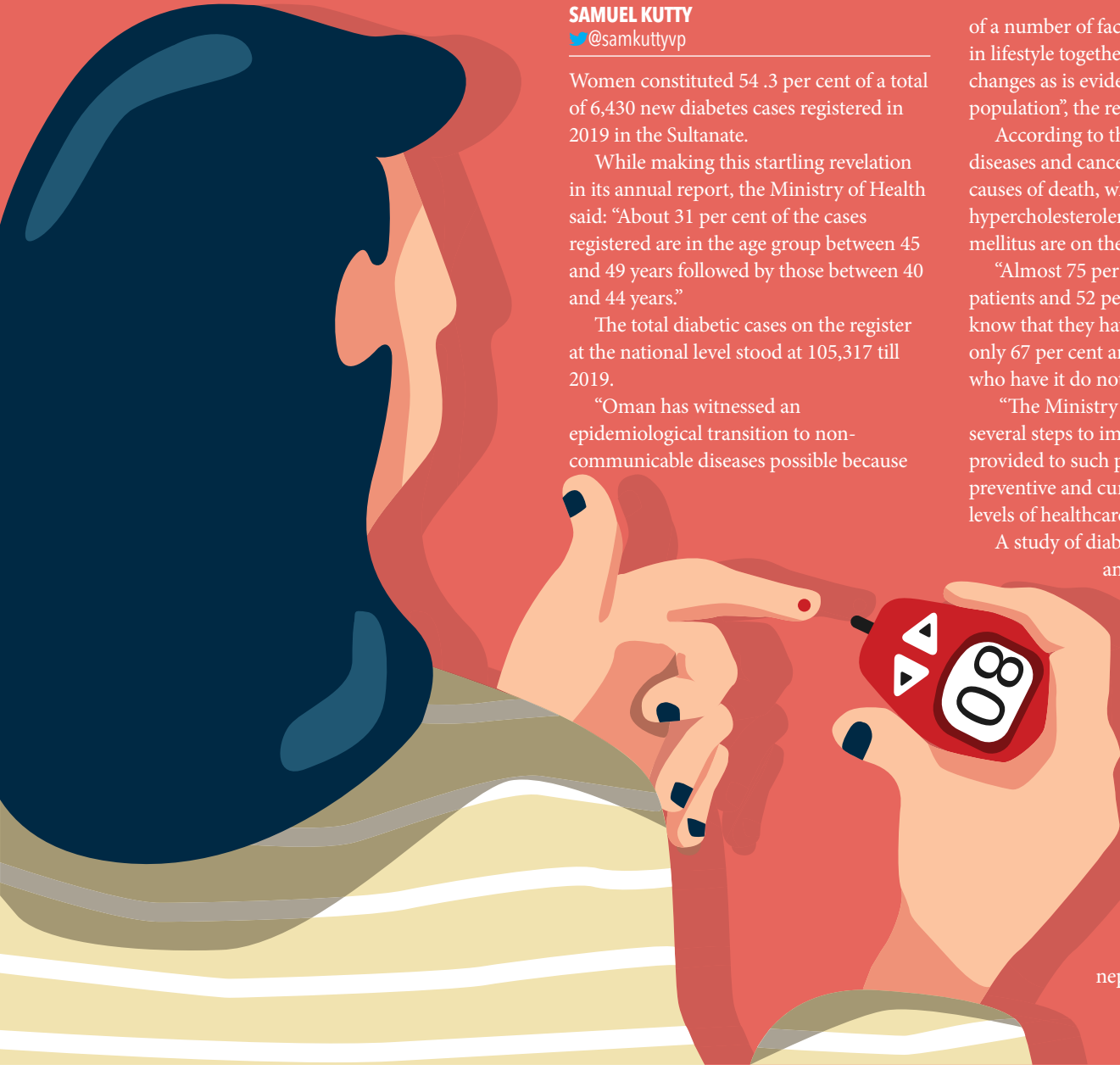
This was stated during the participation of the Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority, at the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity which was convened on the sidelines of the 75th meeting of the UN General Assembly.

The summit highlighted the crisis facing the humanity from the degradation of biodiversity, and the urgent need to accelerate action on biodiversity for sustainable development. It provided an opportunity for Heads of State and Government and other leaders to raise ambitions for the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the 15th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2021. This framework, and its effective implementation are aimed to put nature on the path to recovery by 2030 to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and realise the Vision of “Living in harmony with nature”.

The Sultanate was represented at the meeting by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Environment Authority Chairman. Speaking at the conference, Dr Al Amri spoke about Oman Vision-2040 which, he said, included protection of the environment and natural resources as one of the government’s priorities as it seeks to realise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), protect humans from adverse environmental impacts as well as efficiently manage the environment to create a safe surrounding for a thriving community. — ONA

Women account for 54% of diabetics

31% registered cases are in the age group between 45 and 49 years



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttvyp

Women constituted 54.3 per cent of a total of 6,430 new diabetes cases registered in 2019 in the Sultanate.

While making this startling revelation in its annual report, the Ministry of Health said: “About 31 per cent of the cases registered are in the age group between 45 and 49 years followed by those between 40 and 44 years.”

The total diabetic cases on the register at the national level stood at 105,317 till 2019.

“Oman has witnessed an epidemiological transition to non-communicable diseases possible because of a number of factors including changes in lifestyle together with the demographic changes as is evident by ageing of the population”, the report said.

According to the report, cardiovascular diseases and cancer are the leading causes of death, while hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, obesity and diabetes mellitus are on the rise.

“Almost 75 per cent hypertensive patients and 52 per cent diabetics do not know that they have these diseases and only 67 per cent and 64 per cent of those who have it do not control it.”

“The Ministry of Health has taken several steps to improve the healthcare provided to such patients including both preventive and curative measures at all levels of healthcare”, said the report.

A study of diabetes complications among 2,551 patients in Oman, with median diabetes duration of four years, has shown that 52 per cent of subjects were treated for hypertension, 40 per cent for dyslipidemia, 37 per cent had microalbuminuria, and 5 per cent had overt diabetic nephropathy.

TURN TO P2

Sultanate welcomes Sudan peace deal

MUSCAT/JUBA: The Sultanate has welcomed the peace agreement signed in Juba between the transitional government of the Republic of Sudan and the revolutionary front and mediated by the government of South Sudan.

The Sultanate was represented at the signing ceremony by Ali bin Sulaiman al Darmaki, Sultanate’s Ambassador in Sudan.

The peace agreement is aimed at resolving decades of conflict which left millions displaced and hundreds of thousands dead. Three major groups signed a preliminary deal in August — two factions from the western region of Darfur and one from the southern region — after months of talks hosted by South Sudan.

Another powerful rebel group, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North led by Abdelaziz al Hilu, which had not participated in initial peace negotiations, agreed last month to join new talks hosted by South Sudan.

Dancers from Darfur and the Nile states performed on the stage before the signing in Juba. The US Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Donald Booth, said: “This historic achievement addresses decades of conflicts and suffering, it will also require firm and unwavering commitment to implement the agreement fully and without delays.” **SEE ALSO P6**

Mecca to reopen for limited pilgrims after 7 months

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia will reopen the holy places for the year-round umrah pilgrimage on Sunday, scaled back and with extensive health precautions, seven months after coronavirus prompted its suspension.

The umrah, the pilgrimage that can be undertaken at any time, usually attracts millions of faithful from across the globe each year.

It will be revived in three stages, with the initial phase seeing just 6,000 citizens and residents already within the kingdom allowed to take part each day.

“In the first stage, the umrah will be performed meticulously and within a specified period of time”, Haj Minister Mohammad Benteen told state television last week.

He said pilgrims will be divided into groups to ensure social distancing within the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

Worshippers will on Sunday be able to perform the ritual of circling the sacred Kaaba along socially distanced paths.

On October 18, the number of pilgrims will be increased to 15,000 per day, with a maximum of 40,000 people allowed to perform prayers at the mosque.

Visitors from abroad will be permitted from November 1, when capacity will be raised to 20,000 pilgrims, with 60,000 people allowed into the mosque.

The decision to resume the pilgrimage was in response to the “aspirations of Muslims home and



abroad” to perform the ritual and visit the holy sites, the interior ministry said last month. It added that the umrah would be allowed to return to full capacity once the threat of the pandemic has abated.

Until then, the health ministry will vet countries from which pilgrims are allowed to enter based on the health risks. Those wishing to perform the umrah must apply through two mobile applications: One to register they are free from the virus, and another from which they can obtain a permit. Saudi Arabia suspended the umrah in March and scaled back the annual Haj over fears that the coronavirus could spread to the holiest cities. — AFP

SEE ALSO P3



Housing minister inspects Liwa residential city

LIWA: Dr Khalfan bin Said bin Mubarak al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, inspected the new residential city in the Wilayat of Liwa in North Al Batinah Governorate, to review the workflow and the stages of implementation of the project in accordance to the schedule.

The project manager presented a visual display of the developments at the new city currently under implementation as part of an integrated residential scheme which includes 2,963 residential lands occupying an estimated 1,256 hectares with 3,400 houses.

The residential city has infrastructure projects such as roads,

sewage and water networks, lighting in addition to service facilities like schools, mosques and health centres, petrol stations, parks and commercial centres.

Additionally, two electricity stations will be constructed at a cost exceeding RO 3 million in cooperation with Majan Electricity Company.

— ONA



Women account for 54% of diabetics

FROM PAGE 1

The study published in *Oman Medical Journal*, pointed out, cardiovascular complications are common in such subjects where 10 per cent, 2.6 per cent, 2.3 per cent and 2.1 per cent reported history of coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular accident, heart failure and coronary artery bypass graft, respectively.

“Through such complications, diabetes kills 5 million people annually worldwide and most of them prematurely,” the report said.

Current global estimates indicate that this condition affects 415 million people and is set to escalate to 642 million by the year 2040. A further 193 million people with diabetes remain undiagnosed due to the often mild or asymptomatic nature of this condition especially in Type 2 diabetes mellitus.

On the economic side, the report said, “healthcare expenditure for people with diabetes are on average two times higher than people without diabetes”.

According to the International Diabetes Federation, healthcare spending on diabetes care in the MENA region was the highest compared to other regions, and mounted to 15 per cent of the total healthcare expenditure.

Bus services in Muscat Governorate from today



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Mwasalat will begin city services in Muscat from Sunday as per the directives of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

In the first phase, bus services between cities resumed from September 27.

Services within Salalah will start on October 18, while operations in Suhar will be announced later.

The company will levy an additional 100 baisa to the ticket fares of city services and 500 baisas to the intercity services for sterilisation and cleaning procedures.

The precautionary measures to be followed for the safety of employees and passengers are the sterilisation of buses before

Mwasalat will levy an additional 100 baisa to the ticket fares of city services and 500 baisas to the intercity services for sterilisation and cleaning

the start of the trip and after its completion; measuring the temperature of passengers for trips between cities; no standing passengers onboard, and providing hand sanitisers inside the buses.

Personal protection equipment (PPE) tools will be provided to all drivers.

The company that operates 14 routes in Muscat transported more than 9.2 million passengers nationwide in 2019.

Mwasalat buses are equipped with IVMS, free WiFi for passengers, AC bus stops and routes are available on Google Maps.

The company earlier cited that there will be a significant reduction in the passenger capacity of buses, as well as trip frequencies.

“In the capital region, for example, from a total of 14 routes operated in pre-pandemic times, this number will be reduced to 12, said the official, noting that the actual number and choice of routes will ultimately be based on the management’s decision,” a senior official told the *Observer*.

Veteran Omani photographer passes away



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Fadhel bin Abdul Wahid al Hamdani, a veteran Omani photographer who worked for *Oman Arabi* daily and the *Observer*, for more than 40 years passed away at his residence in Barka on Friday.

Fadhel, who captured some of the rarest sights in Oman history, leaves behind a rich tradition of photography among the local populace and scores of disciples spread across the region.

Fadhel was a pioneer in embracing digital archiving in the Sultanate and was an inspiration for budding shutterbugs. Khalid al Maharbi, a journalist and an author, remembers him as a fatherly figure who mentored him throughout his life. “Fadhel

al Hamdani was like a father to all of us in my genre as we could approach him for any matter. The feeling of him being not there for us is heartbreaking but we cannot deny the destiny,” Khalid said.

“I worked for 10 years with him as a photographer for the two newspapers and it was his help and support that groomed me since my beginning at the paper,” remembered another photographer Faisal al Balushi. “It was the idea of Fadhel to archive the photographs of the 70s as they needed to be preserved for the generations to come.”

“Fadhel was loved by one and all and he worked very closely with the journalists who sought his assistance for any coverage,” said photo journalist Amer bin Abdullah al Ansari.

OMANI LENS WOMAN BAGS INTERNATIONAL PRIZE



MUSCAT: Omani photographer Marwa al Yarubi’s photograph ‘A Mask’ won top prize at a competition conducted by the International Federation of Photographic Art on the theme ‘Stay at Home’.

The Omani Association of

Photography members participated in the competition, which aims to urge people and photographers to stay at home and practise their hobbies from home to protect themselves from COVID-19.

Al Yarubi wanted to express,

through the black and white image, the coronavirus pandemic situation, and the importance of wearing mask to prevent the virus.

The image, which skillfully used light and shade, was shot with Canon 600 D.

Al Yarubi was honoured at a ceremony held by the International Federation of Art Photography via video call, which was attended by representatives of member states and a number of professional photographers.



Oman calls for ME to be free of nuclear weapons



NEW YORK: The Sultanate participated in the high-level meeting for celebrating the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, which was held at the UN headquarters. Dr Mohamed al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, stressed the Sultanate's firm attitude to free the Middle East region from nuclear weapons. The UN urges its media organisations spread all over the world to increase awareness about nuclear weapons in order to realise the common goal of reaching a nuclear weapons-free world. — ONA

Investment spending crosses over RO 816 million

MUSCAT: The volume of investment spending in the first six months of 2020 has amounted to RO 816.9 million, according to the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

According to preliminary data, the Sultanate reduced its spending in the first half of this year by 8.4 per cent from RO 6.1 billion to RO 6.5 billion, but at the same time it completed the implementation of a number of development projects, the most prominent of which is the duplication of the Muscat-Salah road.

This year witnessed a focus on accelerating the pace of implementation of a number of development projects, as the volume of investment spending in the first half of this year — according to preliminary figures — amounted to about RO 816.9 million, NCSI reported. — ONA

Sultanate to send Umrah pilgrims in November



The Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah has announced a three-phase Umrah plan to maintain the comfort and safety of pilgrims and ensure smooth and peaceful performance of Umrah rituals. — AFP

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Pilgrims who wish to perform Umrah in the holy land would be able to do so by November this year, according to sources at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA).

Saudi Arabia announced that it would be allowing pilgrims to visit the holy site from October 4. But entry would be limited to citizens and residents of the Kingdom.

"We are expecting to send pilgrims from the Sultanate from November this year as they will allow people from outside the country from November 1," a senior official from the ministry told the *Observer*.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs welcomed the decision on Holy Haj taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

MARA also urged all citizens and residents to abide by the decision and not to try to visit the holy land and to limit their prayers inside their homes.

"We advise all citizens and residents in the Sultanate to abide by the decision taken by the Kingdom on Umrah and not to try to enter the holy land during the period", said Abdulaziz bin Masoud al Ghafri, Assistant Director-General of the General Directorate of Preaching and

We are expecting to send pilgrims from the Sultanate from November this year as they will allow people from outside the country from November 1

SENIOR OFFICIAL
Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs

Guidance at the ministry.

The capacity and the number of people to be allowed to perform Umrah will be increased and by October 18, nearly 40,000 people will be allowed per day and 75 per cent of the capacity will be utilised.

By November 1, 100 per cent of the place and resources will be put into use for a congregation of 20,000 people and for facilitating the prayers for nearly 60,000 people per day.

The Kingdom announced a temporary stoppage of Umrah earlier this year after the COVID-19 became widespread and subsequently, performing Haj too was limited to residents and citizens.

Major water project completed in Muscat



MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Water (Diam) has announced the completion of a water transmission project from Bausher to Seeb. With 5 pumping stations and 5 water reservoirs that have a total capacity of 451,000 cubic metres, the project will allow the transmission of water via pipelines with a total length of 145 km from Al Ghubra Desalination Plant to the main reservoirs in Al Khoudh. The pipeline constitutes a major link in the water supply system between the governorates of Muscat, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah.

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#Living_with_COVID19



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The authorities have ramped up facilities at Muscat Airport to ensure that all incoming passengers are able to meet the conditions set by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

A new drive-through PCR facility has also been launched at the parking lot of the airport where people can get tested for COVID-19 for RO 24 at the airport instead of going to a health clinic. "Passengers can receive the results of their PCR test for RO 24, approved by the Ministry of Health."

Speaking to the *Observer*, officials at Oman Air, which handles the bulk of the scheduled flights out of Muscat, said operations have been smooth due to awareness campaigns.

Saif al Masroori, in-charge of airport operations, Oman Air, at Muscat Airport, said, "There is always scope to streamline things but all facilities are in place at the airport. As passengers leave the aircraft, they have to fill a declaration form, which can be also done through the mobile apps. The PCR tests are done before the immigration process is completed. PCR tests cost RO 25, including RO 6 for the tracking bracelet."

The air bubble agreement between Oman and India is now in place, which will allow passengers with valid visas from both sides to travel freely. Under the temporary agreement, airlines will be permitted to serve 11 Indian cities on an average of two flights a week per airline, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said. These airlines are permitted with no more than 10,000 passengers a week from either sector, CAA said.

"Further widening the scope of

INCOMING PASSENGERS
MUST TAKE PCR TESTS
COSTING RO 25,
INCLUDING RO 6 FOR THE
TRACKING BRACELET

PUBLIC CAN GET COVID-19 TEST FOR RO 24 AT MUSCAT AIRPORT

international air connectivity, happy to announce that bilateral air bubble arrangement is now in place for flights between India and Oman. Carriers of India and Oman will operate between the two countries," India civil aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri said in a statement.

The agreement will be effective from October 1 till November 30. The designated carriers of both countries are now permitted to operate services between India and Oman with the following conditions:

Both Indian and Omani airlines while operating inbound flights into India can carry the following passengers — Indian nationals stranded in Oman, All Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders holding passports of Oman, nationals of Oman (including diplomats) holding a valid visa issued by an Indian mission in any category covered under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) guidelines dated June 30, as amended from time to time.

While operating outbound flights from India, both Indian and Omani airlines can carry the following passengers — Nationals/residents of Oman, any Indian national holding a valid residency permit of Oman and destined for Oman only.

"It would be for the airlines concerned to ensure the Indian nationals are eligible to enter Oman before the issue of ticket/ boarding pass to the Indian passenger."

The operations will be subject to strict adherence to the SOP issued by the civil aviation authorities and other COVID-19 related guidelines issued by the authorities of both sides. Earlier, India extended the ban on normal international passenger flights till October 31 in wake of an unrelenting rise in coronavirus cases.

Prince George and siblings inquire about animals



Britain's Prince George and his younger sister and brother appeared in rare video footage on Saturday. — Reuters

LONDON: Britain's Prince George, third-in-line to British throne, and his younger sister and brother appeared in rare video footage on Saturday, asking David Attenborough questions about extinction, spiders and the naturalist's favourite animals.

Seven-year-old George, five-year-old Charlotte and two-year-old Louis, whose voices are rarely heard in public, asked the 94-year-old broadcaster questions about the natural world in footage recorded at Kensington Palace last month.

The three children seem set to follow their father, Prince William, Queen Elizabeth's grandson, and their grandfather, Prince Charles, in pursuing environmental causes.

Pictured in a red school polo

shirt, George says: "Hello David Attenborough, what animal do you think will become extinct next?," while his sister Charlotte, in a grey school dress, reveals she likes spiders. "Do you like spiders too?," she asks.

Louis asks: "What animal do you like?" Last month, Attenborough was pictured in the gardens of Kensington Palace after joining the young family to watch an outdoor screening of his film *David Attenborough: A Life On Our Planet*.

To celebrate that occasion, the naturalist gave George a fossilised shark tooth but the gift sparked controversy when Malta, where Attenborough discovered the fossil, initially asked for it to be returned before saying the prince could keep it. — Reuters

Salvini migrant case delayed, judge summons Italy PM

ABSURD TRIAL: Far-right leader in court for blocking ports for refugees and migrants

CATANIA: An Italian judge reviewing charges against far-right leader Matteo Salvini that he illegally detained migrants at sea delayed the hearing until November 20 so he could hear from senior members of the government, including Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

Salvini made no comment as he went into the closed door hearing at the Catania court house which was held to determine whether he should face trial on charges that he abused his powers as then-interior minister to block 116 migrants from disembarking from the Italian Gregoretti coastguard boat last year, under his so-called "closed ports" policy.

He faces a maximum sentence of 15 years.

If the opposition leader and head of the anti-immigrant League party is convicted for more than two years, he could well also be barred from holding public office for six years, preventing him from running for prime minister at the next election in 2023.

Salvini's defence counsel as well as the prosecutor called for the case to be dismissed.

But Judge Nunzio Sarpietro decided instead to hear from current Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese and Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, along with Prime Minister Conte, before making such a decision.

Salvini, who had some sharp words on the hearing earlier in the week, appeared satisfied with the outcome.



Matteo Salvini speaks during a press conference on Saturday. — Reuters

"It is not a political process. I found the judge to be a free person," he said, after having previously berated the local authorities for pursuing him while not doing anything about the mafia and serious crime.

"The Italian justice system is a system which works," he said on Saturday.

RALLIES, DEBATES

Salvini arrived in Catania on Thursday for three days of rallies, dinners and debates on issues from immigration to security in the city's port area.

The League printed t-shirts and advertised cheap flights for the "Italians choose freedom" festival, which will feature fellow far-right head Giorgia Meloni, of the Brothers of Italy party, and bigwigs from ex-premier Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia.

Fellow rightwing travellers in Italy backed Salvini, with Giovanni Toti, regional president of Liguria and a Forza Italia member, slamming what he termed "the most absurd trial in the history of the Italian Republic." A 500-strong police force was tasked

with preventing clashes between Salvini fans and leftwing protesters.

Salvini had vowed to "plead guilty of having defended Italy and Italians".

Among his accusers are a Nigerian family who claim they were "treated worse than animals" and are a civil party in the case.

'ITALIANS WILL DECIDE'

The 116 migrants, mainly from Sudan, as well as central and western Africa, were rescued in the Mediterranean in two separate operations on July 25 last year after five days at sea. — AFP

Drought forces Namibia to auction buffalo

WINDHOEK: Drought-hit Namibia said it was putting 100 wild buffalo up for sale to reduce the animals' population, in a bid to alleviate pressure on diminishing grazing in its parks.

The semi-arid southern African country said the animals will come from Waterberg Plateau Park, a national reserve located in central Namibia.

"The auction is... to reduce pressure on the grazing vegetation in the park," environment ministry spokesman Romeo Muyunda said.

"This is also (an) intervention to manage the impact of drought in that park," added Muyunda.

The auction was first announced through adverts placed in local newspapers on Thursday, offering 70 female and 30 male animals.

"The buyer will bear all the risks during and after the capture," said the advert.

Last year, the government offered for sale around 1,000 animals including 600 buffalo, 150 springboks, 60 giraffes and 28 elephants.

Meanwhile, the government has launched an investigation into the deaths of 16 buffalo whose carcasses were discovered in a river inside the northeastern Bwabwata National Park on Wednesday.

"The buffalos are suspected to have drowned on Tuesday, possibly while fleeing from predators," the environment ministry said in a text message to the media on Friday.

Three years ago, Namibia had a buffalo population estimated at around 7,000. — AFP

■ UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS



A South African National Defence Force member directs suspected undocumented Zimbabwean nationals into a vehicle after attempting to illegally cross the border fence to smuggle goods and fuel into Zimbabwe from South Africa near the Beitbridge border post, near Musina. — AFP

Czech elections overshadowed by coronavirus

PARAGUE: Overshadowed by a record rise in coronavirus cases, the Czech Republic's two-day regional and Senate elections ended on Saturday, with a low turnout apparent hours before polls closed.

Voters, who had to cover their mouth and nose, disinfect their hands and keep distance, had until 2 pm (1200 GMT) to cast their ballot.

They were selecting representatives in 13 administrative districts outside the capital, Prague, as well as members of the Senate, with candidates standing in one third of all districts.

By noon, however, it was clear that turnout figures were going to be on the lower side. It's estimated that turnout was about 30 per cent of the approximately 8 million voters who were eligible to take part.

Results are expected later on Saturday or early on Sunday.

The Czech Republic reported a record level of infections on Friday, with nearly 3,800 new virus cases in the space of the past day — more than any other daily figure reported since the pandemic began.

In total, more than 78,000 people are now infected, with almost 700 dying in connection with COVID-19. — dpa

Malaria cases spike in northern Mali

KIDAL: Malaria cases in northern Mali have spiked, according to medical workers, claiming 23 lives in the often lawless desert region last week alone.

Mali's ministry of health said this week that 59 people have died of malaria in the north since the start of the year, almost double the number of deaths over the same period last year.

Already struggling to curb coronavirus, the poor Sahel country is also fighting a brutal insurgency active in the north and centre of the country.

Medical workers in the north registered 13,000 malaria cases between September 21 and 27, marking an 88 per cent increase on the previous week.

Twenty-three people also died over that period, the health ministry said.

"At the moment, the health system



Mali's ministry of health said this week that 59 people have died of malaria in the north since the start of the year, almost double the number of deaths over the same period last year. — Reuters

is really overwhelmed," said Cheick Ag Oufene, a health centre administrator in the northern town of Kidal, who called the situation "very alarming".

Mahamadou Sangare, a doctor in the northern town of Aguelhok, said malaria has been wreaking havoc since the arrival of the rainy season.

Treating severe cases is difficult in the remote north, he added, raising the likelihood of fatalities.

Malaria claims hundreds of thousands of lives across the African continent each year.

But the World Health Organization warned in April that the coronavirus pandemic could disrupt campaigns against the mosquito-borne disease, leading to a spike in cases.

Rudy Lukamba, a Red Cross doctor in Mali, said that COVID-19

"has absorbed a lot of attention and redirected some of the funds, which has caused delays in prevention activities".

"Cleaning up wetlands, clearing brushwood, drying up puddles, distributing mosquito nets and raising public awareness requires resources," he said.

Swathes of Mali lie outside government control after an insurgency emerged in 2012 and triggered a deadly conflict which has since spread to the centre of the country.

Failure to end the long-running conflict contributed to anger towards president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, whom young military officers toppled in a coup on August 18.

— AFP



Sudan’s government and rebel groups ink landmark peace deal

JUBA: Sudan’s government and rebel groups on Saturday inked a landmark peace deal aimed at ending decades of war in which hundreds of thousands died.

Ululations and cheers rang out as one by one, representatives from the transitional government and rebel groups signed the deal, a year after the peace talks began, at a ceremony in the South Sudanese capital Juba.

“Today we have reached a peace agreement. We are happy. We have finished the mission,” Tut Gatluak, head of the South Sudanese mediating team said shortly before the signing took place. Ending Sudan’s internal conflicts has been a top priority of the transitional government, in power since last year’s ouster of longtime dictator Omar al Bashir in a popular pro-democracy uprising.

Sudanese paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo — best known by his nickname “Hemeti” — signed the deal on behalf of Khartoum.

A representative of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) and others from the groups making up the coalition, also signed.

The SRF comprises rebel groups from the war-ravaged western Darfur region, as well as the southern states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

Guarantors of the deal from Chad, Qatar, Egypt, the African Union, European Union and United Nations also put their names to the agreement.

The deal covers a number of



Sudan’s Sovereign Council Chief General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir and Chad President Idriss Deby attend the signing of peace agreement between the Sudan’s transitional government and Sudanese revolutionary movements to end decades-old conflict, in Juba on Saturday. — Reuters

tricky issues, from land ownership, reparations and compensation to wealth and power sharing and the return of refugees and internally displaced people.

However two other powerful rebel groups did not sign, reflecting the challenges still facing the peace process.

Sudan has been torn by multiple conflicts between the Arab-dominated government that was led by Bashir

Today we reached a peace agreement. We are happy. We have finished the mission

TUT GATLUAK
Head of South Sudanese team

for three decades and rebels drawn from non-Arab ethnic groups in its far-flung regions. In Sudan’s vast rural areas, settled ethnic minority farmers have frequently competed for scarce resources with Arab herders, who have often been backed by Khartoum.

Multiple civil wars have raged since independence in 1956, including the 1983-2005 war that led to the secession of the south. — AFP

Schools and mosques closed in Tehran as virus cases rise

TEHRAN: Schools, libraries, mosques and other public institutions in Tehran were closed for a week on Saturday as part of measures to stem a rapid rise in COVID-19 cases, state media cited authorities in the Iranian capital as saying. The closure plan, which will also affect universities, seminaries, libraries, museums, theatres, gyms, cafes and hair salons in the Iranian capital, came after Alireza Zali, head of the Tehran Coronavirus Taskforce, called for the shutdown to help control the epidemic.

Zali warned in an interview on state television that if the spread of the epidemic continues at the current rate in Tehran, there would be a three- to five-fold increase in cases and a rise in the fatality rate to between 1.5 per cent and 3 per cent. The lockdown which also applies to all social and cultural ceremonies and conferences will run to Friday October 9.

Iran’s death toll from the coronavirus rose by 179 on Saturday to 26,746, and identified cases by 3,523 to 468,119, health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari told state TV.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said anyone concealing a COVID-19 infection should face a

Iran’s death toll from the coronavirus rose by 179 on Saturday to 26,746, and identified cases by 3,523 to 468,119

severe penalty. “Anyone who feels ill and it’s clear to them that they are ill, must not hide their illness,” Rouhani said in televised remarks. Otherwise, he added, they will be committing “the highest offence” that will demand “the highest punishment”. Those not wearing a mask in public will be fined, said Rouhani, adding the amount of fines and other penalties will be determined at the next meeting of the government-run Coronavirus Taskforce.

Government employees who fail to observe regulations face measures ranging from warnings to their one-year suspension from their posts. And government offices where people go for services cannot serve people who do not observe health protocols, such as wearing masks. Businesses that flout regulations could face closure. — Reuters

Egypt unveils sealed wooden coffins buried 2,500 years ago



Egyptian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Khaled al Anani (L) and Mustafa Waziri (R), Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, open a sarcophagus excavated by the Egyptian archaeological mission working at the Saqqara necropolis, 30 km south of Cairo. — AFP

SAQQARA: Archaeologists in Egypt said on Saturday they had found 59 well-preserved and sealed wooden coffins over recent weeks that were buried more than 2,500 years ago.

Opening one of the ornately decorated sarcophagi before assembled media, the team revealed mummified remains wrapped in burial cloth that bore hieroglyphic

inscriptions in bright colours.

The dramatic find was unearthed south of Cairo in the sprawling burial ground of Saqqara, the necropolis of the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis, a Unesco World Heritage site.

“We are very happy about this discovery”, said Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Since the find of the first 13 coffins was announced almost three weeks ago, more have been discovered in shafts at depths of up to 12 metres.

An unknown number of additional coffins may still lie buried there, the tourism and antiquities minister, Khaled al Anani, said at the site, near the 4,700-year-old pyramid of Djoser. — AFP

In Iraq’s Mosul, new statues rise from ashes of IS rule

MOSUL: As sunset nears, the residents of Iraq’s Mosul flock to a golden-tinted statue of a woman looking out over their scarred city with an expression of steady defiance.

It is one of a half-dozen works by local artists that have been erected across the northern Iraqi city since the IS group lost control of it three years ago. The artworks are helping residents shake off memories of brutal punishments meted out by IS in squares and roundabouts, even as much of their city remains in ruins.

“My Lovely Lady” was the first, erected in September 2018 in a traffic circle where IS fighters used to behead or lash residents who had broken its ultra-conservative rules.

“By placing this statue here, I was trying to erase these dark, terrifying images from people’s minds,” said Omar Ibrahim, the 35-year-old artist behind the work.

“My Lovely Lady” represents Mosul’s beauty, its rebirth after overcoming all the obstacles of this nerve-wracking period”, he said.

Nerve-wracking it was: Ibrahim created the sculpture in a secret basement studio while the IS was still controlling Mosul.

When they first overran the city, the militants smashed works of art,



Men pray together on a lawn near the statue of “My Lovely Lady” erected in the centre of a square in Mosul. — AFP

musical instruments and millenia-old artefacts, deeming them violations of their ultra-conservative views.

They banned artists from working under penalty of death.

It was a devastating blow for Mosul, which had been known for centuries as a hub for musicians, writers and artists. One favourite destroyed by IS was “The Spring Girl”, a young woman carrying a bouquet and buffeted by the wind.

Mosul is known as “The Mother of Two Springs” because of its mild

weather in both spring and autumn.

A remake of the sculpture of a woman with flowing hair and a sly half-smile was erected this year against a backdrop of a bullet-riddled building, a reminder of Mosul’s grim recent history.

Another was “The Licorice Man”, which dated back to the 1970s and depicted a street peddler with the beloved candy. A team of young sculptors has made a new version, which has become such a landmark that the whole area is now dubbed the “Licorice Circle” by residents. — AFP

BEIRUT

Syria clashes kill 18 pro-govt fighters

Clashes in northern Syria between pro-government fighters supported by Russian air strikes, and IS group militants have killed at least 18 fighters since Thursday, a war monitor said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Friday that 11 regime and allied fighters and seven militants were killed in clashes in an area of the Badia desert where the provinces of Raqa, Aleppo and Hama meet, and in another area in the east of Homs province.

Russian aircraft carried out strikes



in support of their Syrian regime ally, the Britain-based Observatory added. — AFP

TUNIS

Hospitals struggling to cope with spike

Tunisian authorities have warned that hospitals are struggling to cope with an influx of COVID-19 patients and urged residents to respect anti-virus measures to avoid another lockdown.

“If we don’t manage to flatten this curve, which is really going up, we risk being overwhelmed”, Dr Hechmi Louzir, spokesman of the scientific committee for the fight against COVID-19, said.

“The capacities of the Tunisian health system have not yet been saturated but we are starting to have

some problems” in greater Tunis and the coastal city of Sousse, he said, warning of “a lack of human resources” in intensive care units.

Louzir said 345 COVID-19 patients were hospitalised, and 120 of them required oxygen support, as of October 1. Tunisia, which had virtually contained the pandemic at the end of June, recording some 1,000 cases and 50 deaths, lifted most of the restrictions over the summer.

But the number of confirmed cases has now reached 20,000, including nearly 300 deaths.

NABLUS

15 Palestinians hurt by Israeli troops

Israeli troops in the West Bank wounded 15 Palestinians with rubber bullets on Friday in clashes marking 20 years since the start of the second intifadah, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

The incident took place in the village of Kfar Qaddum, near Nablus in the north of the occupied territory, it said, adding that four of the injured were taken to hospital and the others treated on the spot.

The Red Crescent told AFP that it had also aided “dozens” of protesters who inhaled tear gas fired by Israeli



forces. The Israeli army said it had no knowledge of clashes in the village.

— AFP

In brief

■ KUALA LUMPUR

**MALAYSIA SAYS
WILL NOT RE-IMPOSE
VIRUS CURBS**

Malaysia will not re-impose widespread coronavirus restrictions on travel despite a recent spike in infections, which a government minister said was partly caused by migrants from neighbouring countries. Malaysia imposed a nationwide lockdown in March but has been gradually lifting the curbs, though authorities have warned that they could be reinstated if daily increases in infections reached triple-digits.

The Southeast Asian country has seen a steady climb in cases in the past week and on Saturday reported 317 new infections, the highest daily rise since it began tracking the pandemic. But Security Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the government did not see the need to reimpose the lockdown as the majority of cases were being reported in detention centres and isolated districts. — Reuters

■ BEIJING

**VLOGGER SET ON FIRE
BY EX-HUSBAND**

The tragic case of a rural livestreamer who died after being set alight by her ex-husband has triggered outrage over domestic violence on Chinese social media.

The 30-year-old woman, named Lamu, died on Wednesday after efforts to save her life failed, according to a statement from police in Jinchuan county, in the remote northwest of Sichuan province.

She had more than 885,000 followers on Douyin — the Chinese version of TikTok — and regularly posted videos of her daily life foraging in the mountains, cooking and lipsyncing to songs dressed in traditional Tibetan clothing.

— AFP

■ WELLINGTON

**ADVANCE VOTING
BEGINS IN NZ POLL**

Early voting began in New Zealand on Friday with Prime Minister and Labour Party leader Jacinda Ardern seen securing a second term in office on the back of her success in handling the coronavirus pandemic and other crises. Voters can head to the polls with about 450 advance polling stations opened across the country in the lead-up to election day on October 17. The election commission said advance voting has become steadily more popular. It accounted for 47 per cent of all votes in 2017 and could reach as much as 60 per cent this time round. In a Facebook message, Ardern said she voted early on Saturday. — Reuters

S Korea police set up 'bus walls' to prevent protests



A general view shows police buses blocking access to public areas in the central Gwanghwamun district of Seoul, on Saturday. — AFP

SEOUL: South Korean police mobilised hundreds of buses to head off any political rallies in the capital, Seoul, on Saturday with authorities determined to prevent another cluster of novel coronavirus cases emerging from a protest. South Korea has been held up as a coronavirus mitigation success story but it saw a flare-up of more than 1,800 infections linked to a church and a big anti-government rally in August.

The spread of the virus has slowed in recent weeks but the government has banned more than 100 demonstrations planned for Saturday's National Foundation Day, warning of strict punishment for any illegal protest.

Police parked buses along main avenues and around a central Seoul square to seal them off. They also set up some 90 checkpoints to prevent vehicles bringing protesters while the subway did not stop at several stations at protest venues.

The move drew some scepticism, with opposition lawmakers calling the lockdown of the square an "excessive response" aimed at silencing voices critical of the government. A group of citizens who took part in the August protest issued a statement accusing the government of violating people's freedom of speech and rights to assembly.

The government did not respond to the criticism but had said before it would take stern action to control the pandemic. Police said the measure was necessary to prevent potential sources of the spread of the virus.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 75 new infections by midnight on Friday, a third day of double-digit increases, taking the national tally to 24,027 cases, with 420 deaths.

The government had eased some social-distancing rules after new cases edged lower but imposed special measures for the Korean harvest festival holiday of Chuseok, which began on Wednesday. The rules include banning dining at motorway rest areas and nursing home visits and requiring temperature checks at all stations. — Reuters



An injured youth is carried to a hospital following a car bomb attack that targeted a government building, in the Ghani Khel district of Nangarhar province, about 35 km from Jalalabad, on Saturday. — AFP

Truck bomb in Afghan province kills 15

KABUL: Attackers set off a truck bomb in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province on Saturday, killing at least 15 people and wounding dozens, according to provincial officials, as violence continues in the war-torn nation despite peace talks taking place in Qatar.

Attallah Khugyani, a spokesman for the provincial government, said the number of casualties, most of whom were civilians, could rise and that dozens of people were also injured by the blast in Ghani Khel district.

Obaidullah Shinwari, the Nangarhar provincial council's member, said 52 people were injured in the blast. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Ministry of Interior spokesman Tariq Arian blamed the insurgent Taliban for the attack, saying in the last two weeks they had carried 650

attacks which had killed 69 civilians and wounded 141 people. The Taliban did not immediately respond to calls requesting comment.

Afghan government negotiators are holding talks with the insurgent Taliban in Doha in attempts to end decades of conflict, but calls by the government and international community for a ceasefire or reduction in violence have so far been rejected by the Taliban.

Violence has escalated since a reduction in violence period that led up to the United States signing a troop withdrawal with the group, designed to usher the way to peace negotiations, in February.

The Ministry of Interior also said in a Tweet that Afghan forces had killed a key member of the Taliban and arrested five others on Friday night in northern Balkh province.

— Reuters

Police increase patrolling in Australia's COVID-19 hotspot

MELBOURNE: Police in Australia's coronavirus hotspot state of Victoria stepped up patrolling on Saturday as hundreds of people in the city of Melbourne breached stringent lockdown restrictions and flocked to beaches on the warmest weekend in months.

Under the restrictions,

nearly five million people in Melbourne, Victoria's capital, may exercise or socialise outdoors for a maximum of two hours a day, but must stay close to home. People must wear masks in public places.

But television and social media footage showed crowds, many people without masks, at some of Melbourne's beaches as temperatures soared ahead of summer in the southern hemisphere.

"A number of fines were issued to people who breached directions.... and Victoria Police will be conducting increased patrols of popular public spaces this weekend", police said in a statement. Fines for not wearing masks reach A\$200 (\$143) and for breaching public health orders are more than A\$1,600.

— Reuters

Singaporean 'ant-repreneur' sells tiny six-legged pets

SINGAPORE: Ants scurry around in transparent boxes stacked outside a Singaporean store that is tapping into an unlikely but growing local trend of keeping the six-legged creatures as pets.

John Ye says he became fascinated with the "altruistic, compassionate" creepy-crawlies after receiving some as a gift from his brother-in-law.

The 41-year-old eventually ditched a job in electronics distribution to open "Just Ants" in January and cater to fellow enthusiasts.

"I wish to have a place where people can gather and share insights, and share their ant-keeping journey", Ye said.

The shop sells ant farms along with specialist equipment, including mini handheld vacuums for catching the insects, tiny feeding dishes and mealworms used as feed.

It was forced to close for a period due to a coronavirus lockdown earlier



Colonies of ants inside a formicarium at the "Just Ants" pet shop in Singapore. — AFP

this year but has reopened since restrictions were eased, and business is picking up.

It stocks 30 to 40 species, sourced from ant-keeper friends or collected by Ye and his team around Singapore.

Catching the creatures is no easy task. It is usually only possible during so-called "nuptial flights" — when new queens and winged male ants take to the air in the hope of finding a mate.

PETS OR PESTS?

The queen ants are then placed in test tubes or small tanks, where they give birth to a colony of worker ants if they have mated.

Ye's personal collection includes

tens of thousands of marauder ants, a species of the creature commonly found across Asia, housed in a large box.

The number of ant aficionados in Singapore is small but growing, according to Ye — a Facebook group where keepers exchange advice and information has nearly 4,000 members.

But Ye knows he has his work cut out to convince people in Singapore, where ant-keeping is rare, that the creatures are pets and not pests.

Most Singaporeans believe "you should actually not keep ants because ants... are poisonous, they are dirty, disgusting, they carry diseases", he conceded.

"We always fear something that we don't understand."

Beginner ant-keeper Wei Sern Lim visited the shop to buy a box of food and a new home for his colony.

— AFP



Trump to stay at military hospital

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump was in a military hospital on Saturday for treatment after testing positive for COVID-19, an extraordinary development that upended the presidential race a month before the November 3 election.

Roughly 17 hours after he made his diagnosis public, Trump walked slowly on Friday from the White House to a waiting helicopter to be taken to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. He wore a mask and business suit and did not speak to reporters.

“I think I’m doing very well, but we’re going to make sure that things work out,” Trump said in a brief video message posted on Twitter.

Early on Friday, he had tweeted that he and the first lady, Melania Trump, had contracted the virus. Trump will work in a special suite at the hospital for the next few days as a precautionary measure, White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said.

Trump had no public events scheduled on Saturday. Online video showed a small group of Trump supporters outside Walter Reed late on Friday waving Trump 2020 flags, most not wearing masks. Trump, 74, has a mild fever, according to a source familiar with the matter.

White House doctor Sean P Conley said late on Friday that Trump was doing very well, did not need supplemental oxygen, and had received a first dose of Remdesivir, an intravenous antiviral drug sold by Gilead Sciences Inc that has been shown to shorten hospital stays. Conley is scheduled to provide an update on Trump’s condition at 11 am (1500 GMT).

In a tweet late on Friday, the president wrote: “Going well, I think! Thank you to all. LOVE!!!” The diagnosis was the latest setback



White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows watches as President Donald Trump walks off Marine One while arriving at Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland on Friday. – AFP

for the Republican president, who is trailing Democratic rival Joe Biden in opinion polls ahead of the November 3 presidential election.

Trump has downplayed the threat of the coronavirus pandemic from the outset, even as the disease has killed more than 200,000 Americans and hammered the US economy. A number of other prominent Republicans also tested positive on Friday, including former White House senior adviser Kellyanne Conway and Republican Senators Mike Lee and Thom Tillis.

On Saturday, a third senator

was diagnosed with COVID-19: Republican Ron Johnson, Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee. Vice-President Mike Pence, who would take over presidential duties if Trump became severely ill, tested negative, a spokesman said. The former Indiana governor, 61, is working from his own residence about three miles from the White House.

Trump is at high risk because of his age and weight. He has remained in apparent good health during his time in office but is not known to exercise regularly or to follow a healthy diet.

TREATMENT

Conley said earlier on Friday that Trump has received an experimental treatment, Regeneron’s REGN-COV2, one of several experimental COVID-19 drugs known as monoclonal antibodies, which are used for treating a wide range of illnesses. Trump is also taking zinc, Vitamin D, famotidine, melatonin and aspirin, Conley said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who was himself hospitalised with COVID-19 in April, said on Saturday he had no doubt Trump would make a strong

French peace call to Armenian and Azeri leaders falls on deaf ears

YEREVAN/BAKU: Armenia said on Saturday it would use “all necessary means” to protect ethnic Armenians from attack by Azerbaijan, as the opposing sides pounded each other for a seventh day and the latest international peace call fell on deaf ears.

Azerbaijan said Armenia bore full responsibility for the new outbreak of the decades-old conflict, which threatens to drag in regional powers such as Russia and Turkey.

The death toll rose to at least 230 in the fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijan that broke away from its control in the 1990s.

A day after French President Emmanuel Macron phoned Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azeri President Ilham Aliyev with a new proposal for mediation, the rhetoric on both sides appeared if anything to be hardening.

“The president of Azerbaijan placed the entire responsibility on the leadership of Armenia for the break-off of negotiations and the armed confrontation,” Aliyev’s press service said in its summary of the call. Armenia’s armed forces have so far held back from entering the war alongside those of Nagorno-Karabakh.

But Pashinyan, in a televised address, portrayed the conflict as a national struggle and compared it to the country’s war with Ottoman Turkey in the early 20th century. “This is a new Sardarapat, and each of us should be ready to dedicate himself to one aim, the name of which is victory,” he said.

The Armenian foreign ministry said Armenia, as the guarantor of Nagorno-Karabakh’s security, would take “all the necessary means and steps” to prevent what it called “mass atrocities” by the forces of Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey.

— Reuters

Two killed, 25 missing as rain hits parts of France, Italy

PARIS/ROME: Two people died and 25 people were missing in France and Italy after a storm hit border regions of the two countries, bringing record rainfall in places and causing heavy flooding that swept away roads and damaged homes, authorities said on Saturday.

The storm, dubbed Alex, ravaged several villages around the city of Nice on the French Riviera. Nice Mayor Christian Estrosi called it the worst flooding disaster in the area for more than a century after flying over the worst-hit area by helicopter.

“The roads and about 100 houses were swept away or partially destroyed,” he told French news channel BFM.

“I have been particularly shocked by

what I saw today,” French Prime Minister Jean Castex told a news conference after visiting affected areas, adding he was concerned that the death toll could rise. At least eight people were missing in France, authorities said.

These included two firemen whose vehicle was carried away by a swollen river, according to local witnesses cited by several French media.

Television images from both countries showed several roads and bridges had been swept away by flood water and numerous rivers were reported to have burst their banks. In Italy, at least two people died — one a fireman and another a man in his 30s whose car was swept into a river after a road subsided, local authorities said.

Seventeen people were also miss-

ing. Six German trekkers were among the missing after failing to return from a trip in the mountains in the province of Cuneo.

Officials in the Piedmont region reported a record 630 mm of rain in just 24 hours in Sambughetto, close to the border with Switzerland.

The Piedmont regional chief Alberto Cirio called on the government to declare a state of emergency. The water level in the River Po jumped by 3 metres in just 24 hours.

Eric Ciotti, a member of French parliament who is from one of the worst affected villages in the area, Saint-Martin-Vesubie, said several villages were cut off as they are located in steep-sided valleys of the mountainous region.

— Reuters



This aerial view taken on Saturday shows flood waters surging through Saint-Martin-Vesubie, southeastern France, on Saturday. – AFP

SHORT TAKES

ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia’s ethnic group holds thanksgiving fest

Members of Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group gathered on Saturday under heavy security in Addis Ababa for a scaled-back version of their annual thanksgiving festival against a backdrop of unrest and political division.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s government said it was restricting attendance for the Oromo group’s Irreecha festival to around 5,000 people to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, just as it did for an Orthodox Christian holiday last week.

But some Irreecha attendees said



the regulations were designed to prevent anti-government protests at a time when Oromo opposition politicians are behind bars and security forces stand accused of using heavy-handed tactics against civilians in the Oromo region surrounding the capital.

ISLAMABAD

Polish mountaineer falls to death

A Polish climber has fallen to his death while attempting to summit a peak in northern Pakistan, an official from the country’s Alpine Club confirmed on Saturday.

Ilczuk Michael Jakob fell on Thursday as he was attempting to scale Dhee Dastre Sar, an approximately 6,000-metre mountain in the Karakoram range.

“The rescue team confirmed the death of Mr Ilczuk Michael Jakob, who fell down during climbing and got a serious injury,” Karrar Haidri, spokesman for the Alpine Club of Pakistan, said.

His climbing partner Bodganski Jakob had attempted to render aid but Ilczuk Jakob succumbed to his injuries and harsh weather on Friday, Haidri said.

Bodganski Jakob was later rescued and picked up from base camp by an army helicopter.

Northern Pakistan is a magnet for mountaineers and is home to some of the world’s tallest mountains, including K2.

At 8,611 metres, K2 is the world’s second-highest peak but is a more challenging climb than Mount Everest.

WARSAW

Poland reports new record of 2,367 daily cases

Poland broke its record for new daily coronavirus cases for the third day in a row on Saturday. Authorities recorded 2,367 new infections within 24 hours, the Health Ministry said, the highest since the pandemic began.

The new record beats the previous one set on Friday by 75 cases, while Thursday’s record had been just 1,967 infections. The most affected regions included Lesser Poland in the south, which had 290 new cases, the region around the capital, Warsaw, with 277 infections and Pomerania in the west with 244. However, a Health



Ministry spokesman said that there was no one epidemic hotspot, with most of the cases scattered across the country, according to the Polish news agency PAP.

COVID-19 defiance, climate change extremism, and BLM. Really? Now?

It is 2020, and tens of thousands are dying all around the world, and yet we still have groups and individuals around the world intent upon thrusting their particularly obtuse agendas upon us. Why?

Here and now, make no mistake, we are in a fight for survival, yet in our own communities throughout the Sultanate the level of non-compliance with COVID-19 directives from the Supreme Committee is nothing short of atrocious. Not wearing masks, wearing masks on chins, wearing masks not covering the nose, taking part in large gatherings, participating in small and family gatherings, visiting grandpa and grandma, aunts and uncles, and still having kiddies birthday parties and celebrations.

These things are going on all around me, and it is taking all of my fortitude to stay quiet, as both Lena and I have suffered at least at least dismissal (no problem!), indignation (who are you to tell me?), ridicule (who cares?) and even abuse (we may not understand the language, but tone and manner are easily translated), for requesting those around us to wear their masks properly, or to social distance, on the rare occasions we do venture outside our house. This is appalling!

Reluctantly, for the very first time



Ray Petersen
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DO THESE
PEOPLE NOT
UNDERSTAND
THE DAILY
DEATH TOLL,
THE NUMBERS IN
INTENSIVE CARE,
OR THE NUMBER
OF NEW CASES?

since COVID-19 befell us all, I must reflect that while we have made all the right moves in fighting the threat, it is clear that in not seeking full and complete compliance from the entire population, we have proven to be unsuccessful. It is certainly not our fault, but in hindsight, now, it is easy to say that having consequences for non-compliance is one thing, using them is yet another. They must surely be disappointed that our appeals to the populace on the grounds of common decency, and common understanding of the threat, have fallen upon largely deaf ears. What is newly disappointing is the actions of a few in promoting, advocating, supporting the rejection of the masking policies that are keeping many of us safe, therefore alive!

Do these people not understand the daily death toll, the numbers in intensive care, or the number of new cases? Have they emerged from their fascination with the idea that COVID-19 (which has killed tens of thousands in India and South America alone as a global conspiracy or an 'irrelevance?' Have they also found a new place 'to land,' after the 5G link has been so clearly discredited? They are causing greater stress, distress, and loss of life with their half-baked, untested, burbling theories full of contradictions, and I am so upset.

I don't force my opinions or beliefs

on anyone else, because I believe it is bad manners, or 'poor form,' to do so. I will discuss my stance, beliefs, opinions, and even theories with anyone, but to take a quantum leap from having one's own opinion, and even advocating it, to ramming it down someone else's throat is tantamount to assault!

Looking beyond COVID-19, we have climate activists parading and protesting. With Piers Corbyn and Greta Thunberg the most prominent names. I care about the environment, but like millions of others, I will do my bit in a practical manner by de-littering beaches and streets, picking up rubbish someone else has discarded, and binning it! That subtlety may be lost on they and their ilk however.

We also have the spectre that has unfolded in the United States particularly, of the Black Lives Matter movement, their identification, disorder, and confrontation. Of course, black lives matter, but so do brown, pink, yellow, and white! And by seeking separatism through colour, by highlighting their issue through the medium of colour, they create a rod for their own back. Looting and militarism have invoked hostile reactions and muted much of the empathy your true cause has garnered... and really... is this... now... the time for all this?

A SILVER LINING

Pandemic makes less food waste in the world

THIN LEI WIN

When the coronavirus pandemic forced Rohini Singh to work from her house, she realised the grocery bill was likely to rise since her family of three would be mostly eating at home. She also didn't want to waste food, with shelves in some supermarkets emptying in the early days of the crisis, and trips to stock up becoming more perilous.

"I think the pandemic made me more conscious about saving money and not wasting (food) if I can help it," the university professor, who lives in Ohio, said.

To try to achieve both goals, she signed up to Imperfect Foods, which delivers produce and other foods rejected by grocery stores and supermarkets for cosmetic reasons. "Instead of getting thrown out, if (the foods) were to be sent to consumers who don't mind the bumps and blemishes, it seemed... a way to cut down on waste," Singh said. Advocates against food waste say the pandemic has made some consumers in rich countries reconsider how much food they bin, a habit they hope will stick even after the health crisis is over.

Rachael Jackson, who runs Eat or Toss — a website that helps people assess if foods such as apples with black spots or sweet potatoes with purple sprouts are still safe to eat — said her traffic tripled between February and May.

"People didn't

DOWNPLAYING THE DANGER

Trump's positive test underscores that this is coronavirus election

**JAMES OLIPHANT AND
MICHAEL MARTINA**

President Donald Trump's positive test for COVID-19 confirmed what most voters already knew: This is the Coronavirus Election.

During the closing stretch of the presidential race, Trump had worked furiously to shift public attention away from the virus and his handling of the pandemic, urging more states to open up fully and claiming the worst was over.

But the disclosure of Trump's illness last Friday shredded those arguments, returning the virus to centre stage with just a month to go until the November 3 election, and reminding voters yet again of the biggest public health crisis in a century that has killed more than 200,000 of their fellow Americans.

"The more of the spotlight is on coronavirus, the worse it is for the president," said Dennis Darnoi, a Republican strategist in the key battleground state of Michigan that Trump won by less than a percentage point in 2016.



▶ A demonstrator holds a placard reading 'Fake news' in Konstanz, southern Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

Even worse for the president, however, may be that his downplaying from the outset of the danger posed by the virus has come back to haunt him in the most personal way, making Democrat Joe Biden's prudence during the campaign look prescient.

A White House official said on Friday that Trump will move into a special suite at the Walter Reed military hospital near Washington for the next few days as a precaution,

WITH TRUMP'S
HEALTH
UNCERTAIN, HIS
BATTLE AGAINST
BIDEN COULD BE
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OF TIME

adding doctors urged the move so he could get immediate care if needed.

With Trump's health uncertain, his battle against Biden could be on hold for an indefinite period of time, with Trump unable to travel, stage his signature rallies or attend fundraisers during the election's final phase as millions are already casting their votes. More than 2.8 million Americans have

voted early for November's election, according to the US Elections Project at the University of Florida.

At this point in 2016, fewer than 75,000 people had submitted early ballots. The White House said on Friday it was exploring ways for Trump to communicate with the public during his quarantine.

— Reuters

“People didn't want to go out as much, and things they found in their kitchen that normally they would throw away — now they were interested in doing research to find out if it was still okay to eat,” the Washington-based journalist said. Since then, the site's traffic has neatly followed the US pandemic's curve, slipping a little when shops and restaurants

People didn't want to go out as much, and things they found in their kitchen that normally they would throw away — now they were interested in doing research to find out if it was still okay to eat

RACHAEL JACKSON
Journalist

re-opened and climbing again since July as the virus resurged, Johnson said.

Dana Gunders, executive director of ReFED, a non-profit focused on reducing food waste in the United States, is optimistic pandemic-sparked behaviour changes — such as eating more leftovers and being careful about waste — will last.

"Certainly in the United States this pandemic is stretching out long enough that it is building new habits," she said. People are likely to continue to eat more at home for the foreseeable future and do more food shopping online, which tends to result in less waste, she said. Before the pandemic, almost a third of the food that makes it to the market was wasted at shops and homes, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

Studies in parts of Europe show food waste declining. A survey of nearly 7,000 people in Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain, published on Tuesday by Euroconsumers, a cluster of consumer organisations, found the number of people who said they threw away almost no food doubled to 70 per cent during lockdown. WRAP, a British non-profit focusing on sustainability issues, similarly found in an April survey that households were wasting a third less of four key products — potatoes, bread, chicken and milk — than before the virus lockdown.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



Los Angeles Lakers forward Anthony Davis (3) dunks the ball against Miami Heat forward Kelly Olynyk (9) during the fourth quarter in game two of the 2020 NBA Finals at AdventHealth Arena. – USA Today Sports

JAMES, DAVIS PROPEL LAKERS TO SECOND WIN

MIAMI: Anthony Davis and LeBron James powered Los Angeles to a 124-114 victory over the Miami Heat on Friday that put the Lakers two wins away from their first NBA title since 2010.

The injury depleted Heat hung on as best they could, but 33 points from James and 32 from Davis were just too much.

Davis, playing in his first NBA Finals, overpowered a Heat defence sorely missing injured Bam Adebayo. He added 14 rebounds as the Lakers took a two games to none lead in the best-of-seven NBA Finals in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

"He's a big-time player," James, playing in his 10th championship series, said of Davis, whose 14 rebounds included eight offensive boards. "He understands the position we're in."

Davis made 14 of his first 15 shots from the field, finishing with 15 baskets in 20 attempts.

For the second straight game James approached a triple-double, adding nine assists and nine rebounds.

Rajon Rondo added 16 points off the bench and Kyle Kuzma and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 11 points apiece

for the Lakers.

Jimmy Butler led the Heat with 25 points and Kelly Olynyk added 24 off the bench as the Heat had to make do not only without Adebayo but with star guard Goran Dragic, who was sidelined by a left foot injury.

Even without them, James said, Miami remained a dangerous team, adding that the Lakers need to clamp down harder defensively.

"Myself, coach and AD were not happy with our defensive presence tonight," James said. "We can do a lot better."

"Myself and AD, we're not satisfied with just the win. We want to be great."

"They have five guys on the floor that's a threat, as they showed tonight," James added of Miami. "So we have to continue to stay on our P's and Q's and cross our T's and dot our I's through the course of a game."

Stung by the Heat's quick start in game one, the Lakers came out of the blocks hot.

Chasing a record-equalling 17th NBA title but their first in a decade, the Lakers dominated inside, outscoring the Heat 18-6 in the paint in the first quarter

to emerge from the opening period six points up.

Danny Green's three-pointer pushed the Lakers lead to 13 three minutes into the second quarter.

The Heat got the deficit down to four three times, but Rondo, a former NBA champion with the Boston Celtics, came up big off the Lakers' bench, delivering impressive alley-oup passes first to James and then to Davis, whose dunk and free throw made it 64-49 with 1:48 remaining in the first half.

Rondo himself drove for a layup in the final minute of the half that stretched the Lakers' lead to 17 points, and they took a 68-54 advantage into the break.

The Lakers connected on 55.5 per cent of their shots from the field in the opening half. They were less successful from three-point range but not from lack of trying, connecting on nine of their whopping 27 first-half attempts from beyond the arc.

They finished with 16 three-pointers on an astonishing 47 attempts.

Davis poured it on in the third quarter, piling up 15 points on an array of shots — jumpers, a step-back three and a driving floater just the beginning.

MOMENTS OF TRUTH

Although the Lakers stretched the lead to 18 points multiple times, the Heat wouldn't go away.

They out-scored Los Angeles 39-35 in the period — but in the end they just didn't have sufficient stopping power and they couldn't get the deficit below nine points in the final quarter.

"We need a little bit more from everybody, whatever that is," Olynyk said.

Heat coach Erik Spoelstra acknowledged that the Heat face a tough challenge against the bigger, physical Lakers.

"In those moments of truth when we had opportunities to get the game closer it usually seemed to end up in an offensive rebound or something near the basket," Spoelstra said.

"But this is the deal. If you want something badly enough you'll figure out how to overcome it."

"They have great size and Anthony Davis is an elite player. We're trying to get something accomplished and you just have to go to another level," added Spoelstra, whose team will try to do just that in game three on Sunday. — AFP

Oman chess players set for busy month

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

Oman's chess players in different categories are set for busy month of October as three top chess events will be organised through online approved application. The Arab Singles Chess Championship, The World School Chess Championship and Asian Chess Championships are the main three events which are scheduled to take place in the current month.

Basheer al Qudaimi, head coach of the national chess team, is making efforts for the technical preparation of the players for these significant participations. The training is done through Zoom and Lichess platforms due to the current pandemic situation and to adapt the players with the new mode of the online tournaments.

During the non-action sporting period in the Sultanate due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Oman Chess Committee (OCC) had organised series of e-tournaments through Zoom and Lichess platforms. Moreover, Oman's players took part in different international and regional chess events in the past few months besides regular online training sessions under Al Qudaimi.

The national chess players are now well versed with the rules and regulations of the online tournaments and have prepared well for these kind of events. This will enable them to register top results in the online championships.

The technical staff of the national chess team have selected the top 27 players for the above mentioned tournaments to represent the Sultanate team. The selection criteria depended on the latest results of the online domestic and regional online events during the past few months. Eleven players are selected for the junior team (junior ladies team) for the World School Chess Championship including: Rawan al Balushi, Ghaidaa al Saidi, Zeina al Hinai, Maryam al Balushi and Manar al Dhuli while the boys junior team probables included Abdulrahman al Zadjali, Anas al Daroushi, Hamood al Busaidi, Mohammed al Rashdi, Ahmed al Rahbi and Suhaib al Rubaie.

The Sultanate team at the Asian Chess Championships will be represented by Salim al Amri, Ameen al Ansi, Mohammed al Amr, Hamood al Busaidi and Abdulrahman al Zadjali while the ladies team will include Anaa al Essai, Wafia al Ghafri, Afraa al Balushi, Kamila al Ghafri and Rawan al Balushi.

In August, national team player Salim al Amri had claimed the senior title in the National Singles Online Chess Championship after he had earned 6.5 points as overall credit while Ameen al Ansi had claimed the runner-up position with six points.

Anaa al Essai was the junior champion of the National Singles online Chess championship, while

Arab Singles Chess Championship, World School Chess Championship and Asian Chess Championships are scheduled for October



Afra al Balushi was positioned in second place with six points and Alanood al Ghafri came in third place.

SHORT TAKES

MISSISSIPPI

Bradley grabs two-shot lead

Keegan Bradley rolled in eight birdies in a seven-under par 65 on Friday to seize a two-shot lead in the US PGA Tour Sanderson Farms Championship in Jackson, Mississippi.

Bradley, who started the day two shots off the lead, opened his round at the Country Club of Jackson with three straight birdies and he closed with four birdies in his last six holes.

That included a birdie at the 18th, where he stuck his approach less than four feet from the pin to take his 36-hole total to 13-under par 131.

"What a great day, and I'm bringing a lot to the weekend that I'm happy about," said Bradley, whose four US PGA Tour victories include a major title at the 2011 PGA Championship.



Bradley was two strokes in front of fellow Americans JT Poston and Charley Hoffman.

Hoffman, who was part of a four-way tie for the first-round lead, had seven birdies and four bogeys in a three-under par 69. — AFP

NEW YORK

Hataoka grabs one-stroke lead

Japan's Nasa Hataoka fired a four-under par 67 to seize a one-stroke lead over South Korea's Lee Mi-hyang and England's Mel Reid after Friday's second round of the LPGA ShopRite Classic.

Hataoka made five birdies against a lone bogey at the Seaview resort in Galloway, New Jersey, to stand on 11-under 131 for 36 holes.

"I wasn't striking the ball as well as yesterday, but I was able to convert my birdie chances where I wanted to and that was good," the 21-year-old Asian star said. "The pin placements were pretty difficult, so just didn't really change from the first hole."

Reid fired a bogey-free 64 to share second on 132 with Lee, who



stumbled late with bogeys on two of her final four holes, while France's Celine Boutier and American Amy Olson shared fourth on 133.

After a birdie-bogey start, Hataoka made back-to-back birdies at the fourth and fifth holes and closed strong with birdie putts from four feet at the 16th and three feet at the par-5 18th. — AFP

LONDON

Bekele withdraws from London Marathon

Ethiopia's Kenenisa Bekele has withdrawn from Sunday's London Marathon with a calf injury, robbing an athletics-starved audience of a showdown with Kenyan world record holder Eliud Kipchoge.

"I am very disappointed that I cannot race on Sunday," said Bekele.

"I was in good shape but then I picked up a niggle in my left calf after two fast training sessions close together in the last weeks of preparation."

Sunday's marathon around the British capital has been touted as one of the most eagerly anticipated running events of the coronavirus-hit year.

Bekele, who set a personal best



of 2hr 01min 41sec in the Berlin Marathon last year, would have pitched himself against Kipchoge, who holds the world record of 2:01:39 — just two seconds faster than the Ethiopian.

— AFP

COVID-19 CASES IN GENOA SQUAD RISE TO 17

The number of players positive for coronavirus at Genoa has risen to 17 after three more cases were discovered in the squad, the Serie A team said. Genoa said that defenders Davide Biraschi and Domenico Criscito and young Swiss forward Darian Males were positive for COVID-19 following tests carried out on Friday.



PERSEPOLIS' ALEKASIR GETS 6-MONTH BAN

Iranian striker Issa Alekasir has been handed a six-month ban by the Asian Football Confederation for a "discriminatory gesture" just hours before he was due to lead his club Persepolis into the semifinals of the Asian Champions League. The 30-year-old received the ban after making a slant-eyed gesture to television cameras after scoring.

Chilwell stars as Chelsea crush Palace

LONDON: Ben Chilwell scored his first Chelsea goal as the defender's dynamic display on his Premier League debut for the Blues inspired a 4-0 thrashing of Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Hampered by a heel injury, Chilwell had a delayed start to his first season with Chelsea following his £50 million (\$64 million) move from Leicester in August.

But the England left-back is making up for lost time after delivering an influential performance in his third game following a pair of League Cup outings.

While Chelsea boss Frank Lampard has invested in a host of attacking talent since the end of last season, here it was Chilwell efforts that broke down Palace's stubborn defence at Stamford Bridge.

Chilwell's thumping finish put Chelsea ahead soon after half-time and he provided the assist for Kurt Zouma's header as the Blues doubled their lead.

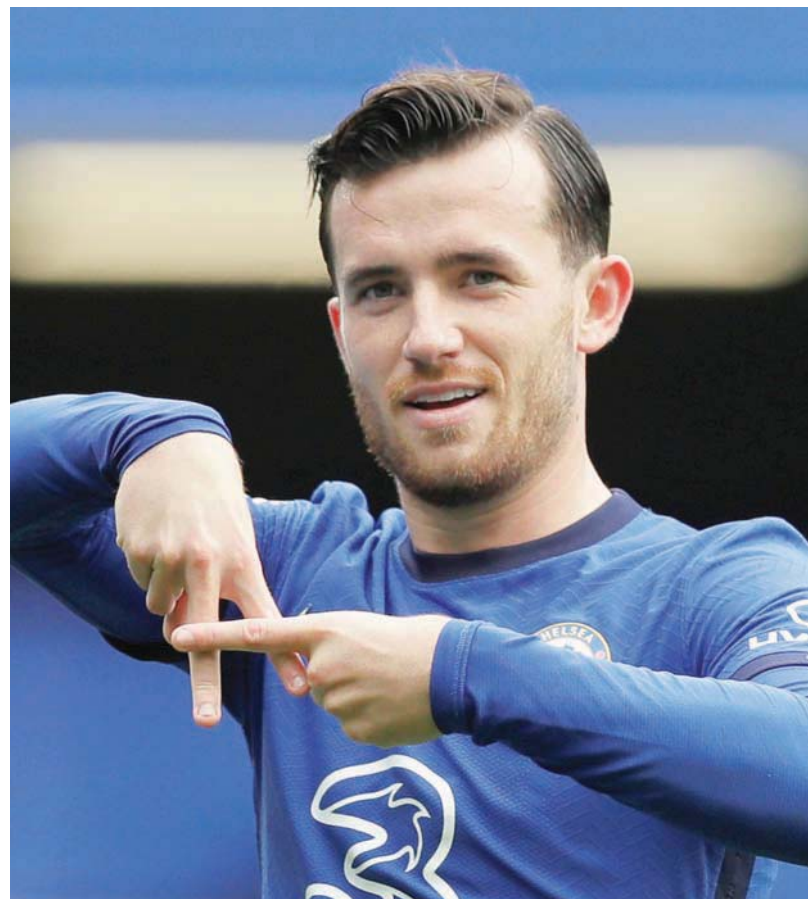
Jorginho added a pair of late penalties for Chelsea to complete the rout, although the second caused some angst for Tammy Abraham as the Blues striker argued with Cesar Azpilicueta about who should take it before losing the heated debate with his captain.

That spat shouldn't take the gloss off a composed display from Chelsea, who bounced back from their midweek League Cup defeat against Tottenham and ended a run of two successive league games without a win.

The defensive blunders that contributed to their 3-3 draw at West Bromwich Albion were erased



Chelsea players celebrate their first goal against Crystal Palace at Stamford Bridge, London. — Reuters



Chelsea's Ben Chilwell celebrates scoring their first goal. — Reuters

and, crucially, Lampard's men found their cutting edge against defensive opponents.

Capping an encouraging day for Chelsea, Christian Pulisic came off the bench after injury for his first appearance of the season.

KNOCKOUT BLOW

Lampard makes six changes to the side that fell three goals down at West Brom last weekend, with Senegal keeper Edouard Mendy starting for the first time in the league after his

move from Rennes.

With the experienced Azpilicueta and Jorginho back in the starting line-up, Chelsea looked more stable and mature.

They monopolised possession in the first half without being able to prise open a Palace side sitting deep inside their own half.

Kai Havertz made a driving run and picked out Timo Werner, but the German's shot lacked the accuracy to beat Palace keeper Vicente Guaita.

Jorginho fired just over after

Thiago Silva nodded down Chilwell's free-kick. It was a familiar pattern for Chelsea, who often dominated games without applying the knockout blow last season.

But this time they had the solution as the lively Chilwell finally broke the deadlock in the 50th minute.

Palace defender Mamadou Sakho made a hash of clearing Callum Hudson-Odo's cross and Azpilicueta hooked the ball to Abraham, whose determined header allowed Chilwell to fire home from six yards.

Chilwell's goal was a reward for an enterprising display from the England defender, whose excellent set-piece deliveries continued to pose a problem for Palace as Zouma glanced his header just wide.

Palace had to come out of their shell now and Mendy made his first save to keep out Andros Townsend's deflected effort.

But Chilwell was proving impossible for Palace to contain and he was catalyst for Chelsea's second goal in the 66th minute.

Whipping a teasing cross into the Palace area from wide on the left, Chilwell found Zouma and the defender towered over Sakho to head home.

Chelsea were in control now and Jorginho made it three in the 78th minute when he slotted in a penalty after Abraham was fouled by Tyrick Mitchell.

Sakho conceded another penalty four minutes later and, after Abraham's tantrum, Jorginho kept his focus to make it four. — AFP

Honda to withdraw from F1 at end of 2021 season

PARIS: Honda said on Friday it will withdraw from Formula One at the end of the 2021 season as part of the car industry's move away from internal combustion engines.

The Red Bull and Alpha Tauri teams use power units made by the Japanese manufacturer.

Honda said its industry was undergoing a "once-in-one-hundred-years period of great transformation" and it was pursuing "carbon neutrality by 2050" using "future power-unit and energy technologies, including fuel-cell vehicle and battery technologies".

"To fulfil the expectations of its fans, Honda will work together with Red Bull Racing and Scuderia

AlphaTauri to continue competing with its utmost effort and strive for more victories all the way to the end of the 2021 season," said the Honda statement.

Red Bull Team Principal Christian Horner said: "The shifting focus within the automotive industry has led to Honda's decision to re-deploy their resources and we understand and respect the reasoning behind this.

"Their decision presents obvious challenges for us as a team but we have been here before and with our strength in depth we are well prepared and equipped to respond effectively, as we have proven in the past."

The decision leaves Red Bull looking for a new engine supplier, a

situation it will need to resolve quickly to prevent its in-demand Dutch driver Max Verstappen seeking a new challenge at another team.

Honda's glory years in Formula One came in the 1980s with McLaren and the defining rivalry of that era time between Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna, who each spent five years at the team.

Its move into team ownership between 2006 and 2008 ended largely in failure as it recorded a single victory, with Jenson Button at the wheel at the 2006 Hungarian Grand Prix.

Honda later left the sport, returning in 2015 but struggled for three years working with McLaren.

The company transferred its attention to Red Bull's junior team Toro Rosso for 2018 and then Red Bull for 2019, and have won a total of five races over the last two years.

But they have been unable to sustain a challenge to Mercedes who have increased their stranglehold on the sport this season.

Honda's decision leaves Formula One reliant on three engine companies — Renault, Mercedes and Ferrari.

The Japanese giant's commitment to new technology also underlines the dilemma faced by the sport as it seeks to deal with the challenge of the evolution of the wider auto industry towards greener solutions. — AFP



IPL FLAVOUR

Stokes set to join Rajasthan Royals

DUBAI: England all-rounder Ben Stokes is set to join his Indian Premier League side Rajasthan Royals after missing the first two weeks of the Twenty20 tournament, the team said on Saturday.

Royals tweeted a picture of their star player on a flight after asking a question, "How long does it take from Christchurch to UAE (United Arab Emirates)?"

Captain Steve Smith was happy to hear of Stokes' arrival at Royals, where he will join countrymen Jos Buttler, Jofra Archer and Tom Curran.

"Ben (Stokes) is a quality player, adds to our squad once he's arrives," Smith said during the toss for Saturday's IPL match with Royal Challengers Bangalore.

New Zealand-born Stokes was in Christchurch with his ailing father, who has been battling cancer, and pulled out of the Pakistan Test series in August.

Stokes, 29, put up a picture with his family on instagram on Friday with a caption, "goodbyes never get easier".

Stokes started practising for his IPL stint last month with a red ball at the Sydenham Cricket Club in Christchurch as he posted a video on social media saying, "Wrong colour ball but training's training."

The star player will have to undergo a six-day quarantine in the UAE, according to the IPL rules, before being available for selection in the Smith-led squad.

Dhone most-capped player



India's Mahendra Singh Dhoni has become the most-capped IPL player even as his Chennai Super Kings team — currently bottom of the table — faltered in yet another run chase.

The 39-year-old has now played 194 Indian Premier League matches, and overtook on Friday his former India and CSK team-mate Suresh Raina, who has 193 games.

Dhoni has now played 164 of his 194 games for the CSK franchise. The others he played for Rising Pune Supergiant. Even Dhoni's leadership has come under criticism this year, with his otherwise successful franchise uncharacteristically only winning once in the first four games. — AFP



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ROYAL CAVALRY RIDERS QUALIFY FOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

Oman's riders from Royal Cavalry secured four spots at the Longines FEI Endurance World Championship 2021 which will take place in Italy in May 2021.

The Sultanate's riders who will represent the Sultanate in the top equestrian event will include rider Mahmood al Fouri on 'Dalila' after his impressive show at the racecourse Fontana Freida Race in Italy. Rider Ahmed Salim al Hamdani on 'Feneord' claimed the world direct ticket at the Kastle Segrat race in France. Hussain Ali al Farsi on

'Rafal De Carrier' made the mark after successful completion at the Ermelo endurance race (2 Star) in the Netherlands.

The International Equestrian Federation (FEI) had announced the postponement of the FEI Endurance World Championship from September 2020 to May 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic crisis. The new date of the event will enable the riders and horses for better technical preparations as well as the countries are expected to lift the travel restrictions next year.

Oman's riders delivered a solid performance in the Netherlands at



the Ermelo endurance race which was organised under supervision of FEI and concluded recently. The race, which was attended by the Brigadier Abdulrazak al Shahwarzi, Commander of Royal Cavalry, featured four stages and each stage with a distance of 30 km. Adil Said al Balushi on 'Tharaa' claimed the second place while Ahmed Salim al Hamdani on 'Kasba' finished third. Hisham Saleh on 'Kash' ended in the fourth place. With the results, all the three riders booked their tickets for the International horse race for 160 km.

Brigadier Abdulrazak stated

that Oman's presence at the FEI Endurance World Championship 2021 in Italy in May 2021 is another accomplishment for Royal Cavalry and it reflects the development of Royal Cavalry at the international and top equestrian events.

"There was a comprehensive training plan to prepare the riders for this top class equestrian tournament. Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, our national riders managed to secure four direct spots in the FEI Endurance World Championship and we are looking forward to more in the forthcoming races", he added.

Qualifier Altmaier stuns seventh seed Berrettini

LONDON: German qualifier Daniel Altmaier upset Italy's seventh seed Matteo Berrettini at the French Open on Saturday with a 6-2, 7-6(7-5), 6-4 victory to enter the fourth round in his first Grand Slam tournament.

Altmaier faces Spanish US Open semifinalist Pablo Carreno Busta in the last 16 after he bested Davis Cup team-mate Roberto Bautista-Agut 6-4, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 after a 3-hours-and-22-minutes battle.

Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was too good for Slovenia's Aljaz Bedene, who pulled out of their contest when he was losing 6-1, 6-2, 3-1.

On the women's side, reigning Australian Open champion and fourth seed Sofia Kenin advanced after the American easily dispatched Romania's Irina Bara 6-2, 6-0. But eighth seed Aryna Sabalenka was knocked out by Tunisian Ons Jabeur, who prevailed in three sets 7-6 (9-7), 2-6, 6-3.



Germany's Daniel Altmaier celebrates after winning against Italy's Matteo Berrettini at the Roland Garros in Paris. — AFP

In the men's draw, Russian Andrey Rublev is through after the 22-year-old brushed past South Africa's two-time major finalist Kevin Anderson 6-3, 6-2, 6-3.

The 13th-seeded Rublev goes on to face Hungary's Marton

Fucsovics, who continues his run after eliminating fourth seed Daniil Medvedev with a 7-5, 6-1, 6-3 success over Brazilian Thiago Monteiro.

The 22-year-old Altmaier, who is ranked 186th in the world, broke



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur reacts during her third round match against Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in Paris. — Reuters

Berrettini's serve twice to claim the first set before battling back from 5-3 down in the second to double his advantage by edging a tie-break. "I was always believing I can be here, I can perform good, I can play well and beat those guys",

Altmaier explained his successful run after previous wins over Feliciano Lopez and 30th seed Jan Lennard-Struff.

"I was working really hard with my team to be in this position, to feel stable, to really play well and

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (THIRD ROUND)

Pablo Carreno-Busta (ESP x17) bt Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP x10) 6-4, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4; Daniel Altmaier (GER) bt Matteo Berrettini (ITA x7) 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Andrey Rublev (RUS x13) bt Kevin Anderson (RSA) 6-3, 6-2, 6-3

WOMEN (THIRD ROUND)

Ons Jabeur (TUN x30) bt Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x8) 7-6 (9/7), 2-6, 6-3; Sofia Kenin (USA x4) bt Irina Maria Bara (ROU) 6-2, 6-0; Zhang Shuai (CHN) bt Clara Burel (FRA) 7-6 (7/2), 7-5

compete against the top guys of the game."

Berrettini, world No 8, was frustrated in the third set as the errors from his racket mounted and he offered a decisive break at 2-2 with a wildly hit volley. — dpa

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Investments in developmental projects total RO 816m in H1

VISION 2040 BLUEPRINT: French multinational bank praises Oman's economic diversification efforts.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 3

Investments in developmental projects totalled RO 816.9 million during the first half of this year, underscoring a drive by the Omani government to accelerate the implementation of key infrastructure schemes.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), said the tally of investments in developmental projects is expected to rise significantly once an adjustment of the amounts currently listed under 'Expenses Under Settlement' is completed. Listed under this column are around RO 430 million in investments, Oman News Agency (ONA) said in a report, citing NCSI figures.

Oman reduced its spending in the first half of this year by 8.4 per cent to RO 6.5 billion, down from RO 6.6 billion for the corresponding period of last year.

During this period, a number of key infrastructure projects were completed.

The list includes the dualisation of the Nizwa-Thamrait



carriageway, for which three contracts covering a total length of 401 kilometres were awarded at a total cost of RO 251.4 million.

In addition, contracts were awarded for the construction of two flood protection schemes in Dhofar Governorate totalling RO 46.8 million in investment, and a new hospital at Al Mazayounah at a cost of RO 15.3 million.

The value of the tenders awarded by the Tender Board during the first half of this year

totalled RO 357.2 million. Awards included consultancy contracts for several road development projects, maintenance services for key government departments, supply of medical equipment to Royal Hospital, rehabilitation of road infrastructure damaged by recent adverse weather events, and the rental of premises for government offices.

Meanwhile, French multinational investment bank and financial services group

Société Générale has praised the Omani government's efforts to diversify the national economy. In a recent report, the Paris-headquartered institution lauded actions adopted by the government to put the national economy on the right track and to reduce the country's dependence on hydrocarbons.

Oman, it noted, has put in place measures to diversify its economy under the "Vision 2040" plan, which aims to increase investment

Oman reduced its spending in the first half of this year by 8.4 per cent to **RO 6.5 billion**, down from **RO 6.6 billion** for the corresponding period of last year

in tourism, financial services and logistics activities, stressing these measures are bearing fruit, as confirmed by the fact that the non-oil and gas economy now accounts for more than two-thirds of GDP, while inflation fell to 0.1 per cent in 2019.

Oman has experienced exceptional economic development since 2004, mainly due to the exploitation of its oil reserves, but growth rates in 2019 fell to 0.5 per cent, with oil production remaining limited by the Opec+ production cut agreement, as well as a slowdown in household consumption, the French bank said.

It noted that in accordance with updated IMF projections, given the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, GDP growth is expected to decline to 2.8 per cent in 2020 and rise to 3 per cent in 2021, fuelled by an economic recovery, and an uptick in oil and gas output.



France's central banker sounds alarm bell over public spending

PARIS: Growth in France's public spending is reaching dangerous levels even when taking into account the exceptional stimulus plan to support the coronavirus-ravaged economy, the country's central bank head said on Saturday.

"There's a real alert and it is time to regain control (over public spending)", central bank head Francois Villeroy de Galhau (pictured) told France Inter radio station.

"We can't afford everything all the time", he added, saying that France's public spending has grown at a pace of 1 per cent in real terms over the last 10 years. France announced a 100 billion euro stimulus package last month.

This equates to 4 per cent of gross domestic product, meaning France is ploughing proportionally more public cash into its economy than any other big European country.

— Reuters

LEGAL FORM

One-person firms brought under scope of Oman Income Tax Law

NEW PROVISION: The definition of enterprise in the Income Tax Law has now been amended to include the Omani company that takes the form of a one-person company.

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Sultanate's Income Tax Law, amended recently by Royal Decree 118/2020, brings for the first time the so-called 'One-Person Company' within the ambit of the statute, adding them to a broad range of commercial enterprises that are liable to submit their tax returns.

According to a leading tax, audit and advisory services firm, the 'One-Person Company' — also known as sole proprietorships — was legalised for the first time as part of the new Commercial

Company Law issued earlier this year vide Royal Decree 18/2020.

It introduces, among other things, a new corporate vehicle, the sole shareholder company, which is a limited liability company with only one — either natural or juristic — shareholder. Under the old version of the Commercial Company Law, limited liability companies had to have a minimum of two shareholders.

"In line with the new Commercial Company Law, which introduced the legal form of companies named the 'One-Person Company', the definition of enterprise in the Income Tax Law has now been amended to include the Omani company that takes the form of a one-person company", said PwC Middle East in a recent advisory to clients.

"The amendments further introduced a new provision on the Principal Officer of the one-person company to be the owner, or the responsible manager", it noted.



The inclusion of sole-shareholder companies within the scope of the Income Tax Law is part of a slate of far-reaching amendments made to the statute following the promulgation of Royal Decree 118/2020 on September 14, 2020. The specifics of these amendments were published in the Official Gazette a week later.

All of the changes introduced by the Royal Decree are effective from the day following their publication in the Official Gazette

(i.e. September 21, 2020), with the exception of Article 140, which is effective for tax years starting on or after January 1, 2020, according to PwC.

Notable amendments to the Income Tax Law include, among other measures, the repeal of provisions relating to the filing of Provisional & Final Returns of Income, and replacing them with a new rule mandating the filing a single 'Return of Income'; defining the concept of Tax Residency; replacing the term 'contestation'

It introduces, among other things, a new corporate vehicle, the sole shareholder company, which is a limited liability company with only one — either natural or juristic — shareholder

PWC MIDDLE EAST

in the Law with 'grievance'; and introducing provisions related to Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI).

The most striking of the amendments is the overhaul of the system of filing of tax returns. "For tax years starting on or after January 1, 2020, taxpayers will be required to file only one income tax return, referring to it in the Royal Decree as 'Return of

Income', which will be due within four months from the end of the accounting year.

This provision is replacing the requirement for filing the Provisional and Final Returns of Income, which was due within three and six months from the end of accounting year respectively. This would now imply that the audit of the financial statements needs to be completed within four months from the end of the accounting period", said PwC in its advisory.

The multinational professional services firm however noted that the amendments did not indicate whether or not an extension of time would be granted to taxpayers in terms of the due date for filing the Return of Income.

"However, the Tax Authority, in practice, has been granting such extensions to taxpayers on a case to case basis, a position that is yet to be tested on whether it will continue to be the same under the newly introduced amendments to the Income Tax Law", it added.

Three ways to avoid getting scammed online

Every now and then I receive a very welcomed e-mail from my Omani bank that reminds me how to stay aware of online scams.

Scammers have become certainly more creative and sophisticated, it is therefore essential that the public awareness is constantly kept up to date with the latest trickery.

I must praise the Omani financial institutions for their active role in protecting the savings of their clients.

Here is a short list of red flags to be aware of:

1. Do not trust big names on face value only

Many scammers contact their victims via phone calls operated

from busy and noisy customer care services, claiming to be calling from a large organisation, usually an Internet provider or a computer manufacturer.

Some victims are brought to believe the genuineness of the caller ID based on the realism of the surrounding sounds, thinking that a large organisation must have busy call centres.

Do not fall for it. The background noise that you hear might seem like a large global team at work, but it takes very few people to make a small room crowded. Some leaked camera footages taken in organised scam centres show no more than 10 to 12 people at work in close proximity.

With thousands of potential victims to call, their lines are



Stefano Virgilli
stefano@virgilli.com

SCAMMERS HAVE BECOME CERTAINLY MORE CREATIVE AND SOPHISTICATED, IT IS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL THAT THE PUBLIC AWARENESS IS CONSTANTLY KEPT UP TO DATE WITH THE LATEST TRICKERY.

always busy.

Always ask to verify the employee's full name and if they claim that you are using their service (for instance Internet contract) always make sure that they can state your customer ID number, not just the name. Scammers harvest names and phone numbers only.

Go as far as asking them to read for you the outstanding amount due in your latest bill. Inevitably, if they are scammers, they will not be able to source that number and they will never call you back.

2. Never let anyone take remote control over your computer

This is an essential part of the most common "tech support" scam. The scammer would claim

that your Internet connection is at risk and will request you to download a software so that they can take control over your computer.

Once they do so, they would likely open the display settings and reduce the luminosity to zero, so that you cannot see what they are doing.

3. Do not always trust what you see

In a very common scam, victims are asked to login in their online banking where the balance will be shown. At that point the scammer would want to take remote control of the computer.

Then, within the browser (such as Explore, Safari or Chrome) they will enter in Developer mode — a default

feature available on all browsers — and within the inspection panel of the browser, they will edit the HTML code displayed when the screen is blanked out.

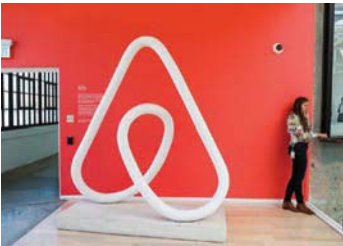
At that point they will show the victim an updated balance, which is usually higher than the actual one.

For instance, if your bank balance was RO 20,000, they would change it to RO 22,000 then they will start claiming that there was a glitch and now you have to return them the extra RO 2,000.

But be aware, the RO 2,000 were never added to your account, they were only displayed by your browser through the inspector panel.

[The author is a member of the International Press Association]

Airbnb aims to raise roughly \$3 billion in IPO



A woman talks on the phone at the Airbnb office headquarters in San Francisco, California. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Home rental company Airbnb Inc is aiming to raise around \$3 billion in its upcoming initial public offering (IPO), people familiar with the matter said on Friday, taking advantage of the unexpectedly sharp recovery in its business after the COVID-19 pandemic roiled the travel industry.

Airbnb will be one of the largest and most anticipated US stock market listings of 2020 which has already been a blockbuster year for IPOs, featuring the likes of record label Warner Music Group, data analytics firm Palantir Technologies and data warehouse company Snowflake Inc.

Airbnb said in August it had filed confidentially for an IPO with US regulators.

The company's current plan is to make its filing publicly available in November after the US presidential election and is targeting an IPO some time in December, the sources said, requesting anonymity as the plans are private.

The sources cautioned that the timing is subject to change and market conditions, in particular volatility that could come from the election.

The company could achieve a valuation of more than \$30 billion in the IPO, the sources added, again cautioning this was subject to market conditions.

This would be substantially higher than the \$18 billion Airbnb was valued at in April when it raised \$2 billion in debt from investors. Airbnb's most recent independent appraisal of the fair market value of its stock pegged its worth at around \$21 billion.

The push to go public and the growth in its potential valuation underscores Airbnb's dramatic recovery from earlier this year when it secured emergency funding from investors and the outlook for the travel industry was uncertain. — Reuters

Eleven countries in the Middle East have opened their borders to regional and international air travel.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 3

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) warned that the damage being done to the Middle East aviation industry and on economies by the shutdown of air traffic owing to the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened.

According to new data published over the weekend by the Air Transport Action Group of which IATA is a member:

- 1.7 million Middle East jobs will be lost in aviation and industries supported by aviation in 2020. This is nearly half of the region's 3.3 million aviation-related employment.
- 323,000 jobs will be lost in aviation alone in 2020. This is about 46 per cent of the region's 595,000 aviation related jobs (airlines, airport operators, other on-airport staff, civil aerospace,



air navigation service providers).

- GDP supported by aviation in the region will fall by up to \$105 billion. This is 49 per cent below pre-COVID-19 levels.

"This latest research highlights the urgency of restarting aviation in the Middle East.

Normally aviation contributes \$213 billion to the region's GDP. Closing borders has reduced this to \$108 billion. That loss

has severe consequences, not least of which is the loss of 1.7 million jobs. Governments in the Middle East must protect their citizens from COVID-19 while also protecting their livelihoods," said Muhammad Albakri, IATA's Regional Vice-President for Africa and the Middle East.

To minimise the impact on jobs and the broader Middle East economy, an accelerated recovery

of air transport across the region is paramount. This can be achieved through COVID-19 testing as an alternative to restrictive quarantine measures.

Eleven countries in the Middle East have opened their borders to regional and international air travel.

However, in nine of these countries, passengers are still subject to a mandatory quarantine.

Normally aviation contributes \$213 billion to the region's GDP. Closing borders has reduced this to \$108 billion.

MUHAMMAD ALBAKRI
IATA's Regional Vice-President for Africa and the Middle East

This effectively stops people from travelling. IATA is calling for the systematic testing of passengers before departure.

This will enable governments to safely open borders without quarantine and better support recovery efforts.

"Quarantine measures are crippling the industry's recovery and hampering its ability to support social and economic development. Testing for COVID-19 will enable the Middle East and the world to safely reconnect and recover," said Albakri.

SHORT TAKES

VIENNA

LUFTHANSA'S SWISS UNIT PLANS 1,000 JOB CUTS OVER TWO YEARS THROUGH ATTRITION

Lufthansa unit Swiss International Air Lines plans to cut roughly 1,000 jobs over the next two years through voluntary measures rather than layoffs, its outgoing Chief Executive Thomas Kluehr said in remarks published on Saturday.

The Swiss government has granted the airline more than 1 billion euros (\$1.17 billion) in loan guarantees to help it cope with the collapse in air travel due to the pandemic. Like many of its peers, it decided to shrink its staff and fleet.

"We are initially relying on three socially acceptable measures: a hiring freeze, part-time models with salary reductions and early retirement," Kluehr told newspaper *Schweiz am Wochenende*, adding that based on staff fluctuations in recent years it should be possible to cut 1,000 jobs without layoffs.

Swiss and Edelweiss Air, a much smaller sister airline, have 10,475 employees, according to the Lufthansa Group's second-quarter financial report here. Swiss has roughly 9,500 staff, *Schweiz am Wochenende* said.



Lufthansa unit Swiss International Air Lines Chief Executive Thomas Kluehr smiles during a media presentation at Zurich airport, Switzerland, in this file photo. — Reuters

Kluehr, whose successor has yet to be announced, said the airline industry's current crisis should last three to five years. In terms of job cuts much would depend on how quickly the market recovers, he added.

"If, in the medium to long term, we expect Swiss's business to shrink by 20 per cent — and that is what we expect at the moment — then the 1,000 jobs would suffice, yes," said Kluehr.

"If we see in the first quarter, looking towards the summer, that the situation is not improving, particularly in long-haul, then the 1,000 jobs will not be enough." — Reuters

NEW DELHI

PAYTM, OTHER INDIAN STARTUPS VOW TO FIGHT 'BIG DADDY' GOOGLE'S CLOUT-SOURCES

Dozens of India's technology startups, chafing at Google's local dominance of key apps, are banding together to consider ways to challenge the US tech giant, including by lodging complaints with the government and courts, executives said.

Although Google, owned by Alphabet Inc, has worked closely with India's booming startup sector and is ramping up its investments, it has recently angered many tech companies with what they say are unfair practices. Setting the stage for a potential showdown, entrepreneurs held two video conferences this week to strategise, three executives said.

"It's definitely going to be a bitter fight," said Dinesh Agarwal, CEO of e-commerce firm IndiaMART. "Google will lose this battle. It's just a matter of time."

He said executives have discussed forming a new startup association aimed chiefly at lodging protests with the Indian government and courts against the Silicon Valley company. Nearly 99 per cent of the smartphones of India's half a billion users run on



Google's Android mobile operating system.

Some Indian startups say that allows Google to exert excessive control over the types of apps and other services they can offer, an allegation the company denies. The uproar began last month when Google removed popular payments app Paytm from its Play Store, citing policy violations.

This led to a sharp rebuke from the Indian firm's founder, Vijay Shekhar Sharma, whose app returned to the Google platform a few hours later, after Paytm made certain changes. In a video call on Tuesday, Sharma called Google the "big daddy" that controls the "oxygen supply of (app) distribution" on Android phones, according to an attendee. — Reuters

Banks, investors pivot towards Biden win after Trump tests positive for COVID

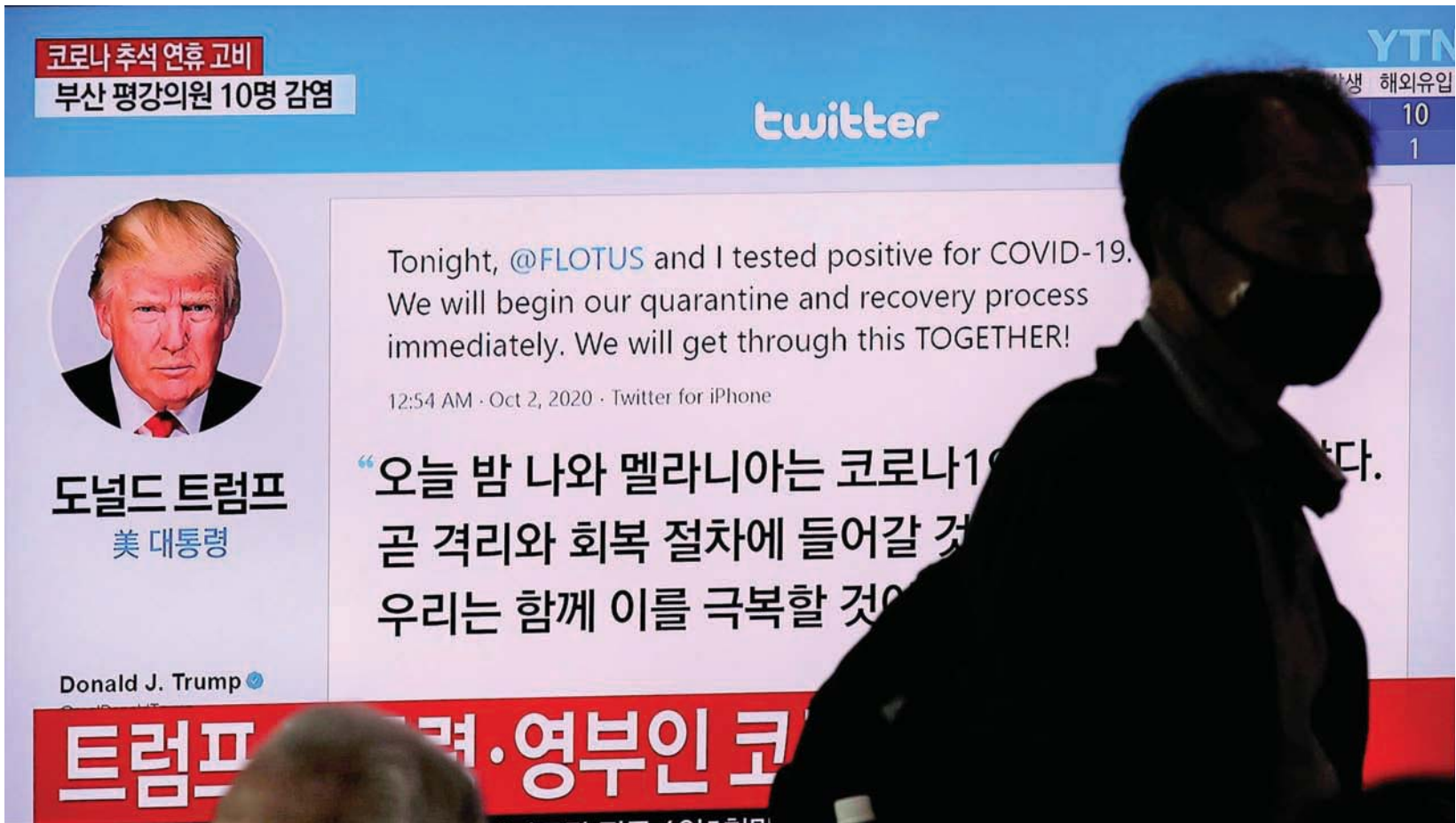
Major banks have been running simulations to ensure they can cope with a spike in market, liquidity and credit risks in case of a contested election or even a constitutional crisis.

NEW YORK: Global banks and investors said they were stepping up their preparations for a victory by Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden after his rival Republican President Donald Trump revealed he had tested positive for COVID-19 early on Friday.

The development was the latest dramatic twist in an extraordinary election year that had many banks and investors planning for no clear winner on November 3 with a global market panic expected to ensue, media reported.

By Friday, they were quickly shifting gears on the basis that Trump's positive result would deal a blow to his campaign and lessen the overall chances of a contested election outcome.

"Trump contracting the coronavirus will elevate institutional money's preparation for a Democratic White House and all the tax, trade and budget implications that go along with it," James McDonald, CEO of Los Angeles-based fund manager



A man walks near a screen reporting about US President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump during a news programme in Seoul, South Korea. — Reuters

Hercules Investments wrote in a note.

"We expect institutional investors to start de-risking portfolios and increasing hedges in preparation for market volatility."

Oil prices dropped on the news and stocks saw an initial selloff in a volatile morning trading session.

Major banks have been running

simulations to ensure they can cope with a spike in market, liquidity and credit risks in case of a contested election or even a constitutional crisis.

One senior capital markets banker said on Friday that their institution was still stress testing for all scenarios, but that it had tilted the focus of the simulations more towards a clear Biden

victory and what that would entail in terms of volatility and hedging strategies.

"This increases Biden's chances and reduces the chance of lawsuits and recriminations," said another banker. The bankers declined to be identified because the internal plans are private.

Biden, who tested negative for COVID-19 on Friday, has a nine-

point lead over Trump following their combative first debate on Tuesday, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll published on Thursday.

The White House said on Friday that the president was displaying mild symptoms and was self-isolating with first lady Melania Trump who also tested positive. His campaign said it was rescheduling or postponing

several planned events. It was unclear if the next television election debate scheduled on October 15 would still go ahead.

One of the bankers added that Trump's predicament would shift the election focus back towards the pandemic and away from the US economy, a signature policy for Trump on which he had led Biden in approval ratings. In a further blow for the president, US employment growth slowed more than expected in September, Friday data showed here.

"He'll be losing valuable time to campaign and it brings the issue that he's dismissed right back front and centre," said another major investor. "He has been trying to put the COVID topic in the rear view mirror and now it comes right back as topic number one."

Even with the risk of a contested election abating, some investors said they were still planning for heightened volatility.

"I don't think volatility suddenly disappears right after the election," wrote Jason Brady, President and CEO at Thornburg Investment Management, a New Mexico-based asset manager with \$41 billion in client assets.

"Up and down markets will be with us into December and January as second order effects from the transfer of power with a new administration — or tweaks to an existing one — get priced in." — Reuters

In brief

■ NEW DELHI

INDIA TO WAIVE INTEREST LEVIES ON LOANS IN COVID-19 RELIEF

The Indian government has told the Supreme Court it will waive certain interest levies on loans up to 20 million rupees (\$272,888) under a COVID-19 support plan, a legal filing showed, in a move that will bring relief to millions of borrowers.

An Indian optician from the northern city of Agra had challenged the plan which allowed skipping repayments for six months but levied an additional "interest-on-interest" on delayed payments which borrowers called unfair. Other borrowers, such as real estate companies and power utilities, also challenged the plan.

In a filing on October 2 with the Supreme Court, the government said it had decided to waive the compounding interest component on small-business and some other loans related to education and housing, and credit card dues. — Reuters

■ LONDON

UK PM LAUNCHES TRANSPORT REVIEW TO BOOST ECONOMY



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson launched a review aimed at improving transport links across the UK, including a possible bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland, as part of a plan to boost the pandemic-hit economy and strengthen ties between its member nations.

The study will consider air links within the country, road and rail links in Scotland, the Welsh rail network, as well as the cost and practicality of building a "fixed link" with Northern Ireland. Johnson has in the past spoken of his desire for a 20-mile plus bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland. — Reuters

■ WASHINGTON

US TO PROBE VIETNAM'S CURRENCY PRACTICES

The United States is opening an investigation into whether Vietnam has been undervaluing its currency and harming US commerce, the US Trade Representative's office said in a statement.

The probe was launched at President Donald Trump's direction, according to the statement.

Vietnam has been on Washington's watch list of currency manipulators because of its trade surplus with the United States, a large current-account surplus and a perception that its central bank has been actively buying foreign currency. — Reuters



Noble Energy shareholders approve \$4.1bn sale to Chevron

HOUSTON: Noble Energy shareholders on Friday approved a deal to sell the oil and gas producer to Chevron Corp, making Chevron the No 2 US shale oil producer and giving it international natural gas reserves close to growing markets.

The all-stock deal values Noble Energy at around \$4.1 billion, excluding \$8 billion in debt, and the vote cements the first big energy deal since the coronavirus crushed global fuel demand.

The addition of Noble will boost Chevron's US shale oil holdings, making it the No 2 producer behind EOG Resources, according to data from Rystad Energy. It also adds nearly 1 billion cubic feet of natural gas reserves.

Noble's Leviathan in Israeli waters, one of

The all-stock deal values Noble Energy at around \$4.1 billion, excluding \$8 billion in debt, and the vote cements the first big energy deal since the coronavirus crushed global fuel demand.

the world's biggest offshore gas discoveries of the last decade, began pumping gas from the

field late last year.

While 89 per cent of Noble shareholders voted in favour of the deal, just 60 per cent voted for merger-related executive payouts, according to regulatory filings.

Proxy adviser Glass Lewis had recommended voting for the deal but against "excessive" executive payments, which would be triggered by the sale of the company.

The deal has become even cheaper for Chevron since it was announced in July with a value of \$5 billion, as shares of both companies have traded down alongside oil.

The deal is worth about \$4.1 billion based on Friday's closing price for Chevron of \$71.19. Noble investors will receive 0.1191 shares of Chevron for each Noble share. — Reuters

■ WEAK CONFIDENCE

Japan August household spending to fall for 11th straight month

TOKYO: Japanese household spending is expected to have fallen for a 11th straight month in August, a poll found on Friday, suggesting the coronavirus crisis is still weighing heavily on consumer confidence.

Analysts say the economy is rebounding gradually after suffering its worst post-war contraction in the second quarter, but the jobs and wage situation remain weak.

New COVID-19 cases in Japan have been on a general downward trend recently but appear to be levelling off.

Household spending likely fell 6.9 per cent in August from a year earlier, the poll of 14 economists showed, after a 7.6



Shoppers wearing protective masks are seen at a supermarket in Tokyo. — Reuters

per cent fall in July.

Compared with the previous month, household spending is forecast to have risen 3.2 per cent in August from a 6.5 per cent

decline, the poll found.

"As the coronavirus cases resurged in Japan, people's self-restraint stance towards spending on entertainment and tourism

persisted," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

Wage pressures such as lower summer bonuses are expected to result in lacklustre consumer spending for some time.

The government is continuing to urge restaurants and shops to take measures to prevent infections, such as giving enough distancing and good ventilation to customers.

Other data next week is expected to show the current account balance was in a surplus of \$18.74 billion in August, up from 1.47 trillion yen in July, partly helped by a pick-up in exports on the back of the global economic recovery. — Reuters



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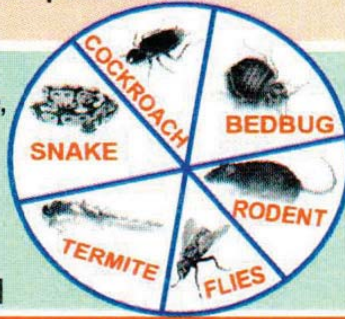
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- English Speaking with good communication skills.
- Traveling to multiple sites, Holding Oman Driving license

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Young Afghan female mountaineer plans next summit to ‘show the world what we can do’

Eighteen-year old Fatima Sultani gazes at the peak of a mountain near Afghanistan's capital Kabul after completing a morning climbing session, considering her next challenge.

She and her team of nine young Afghan mountaineers, including three women, are hoping to climb Afghanistan's Mir Samir mountain and after that travel to Nepal to summit the world's highest peak, Mount Everest.

"My main goal is to show the world that Afghan women are strong and can do the most challenging work that men do," she said. "When I became aware that women from foreign countries come here to conquer high peaks I thought... why can't we Afghan

women conquer these peaks?"

Sultani has continued climbing throughout the coronavirus pandemic, in August

She and her team of nine young Afghan mountaineers, including three women, are hoping to climb Afghanistan's Mir Samir mountain and after that travel to Nepal to summit the world's highest peak, Mount Everest.

making it to the summit of the 7,492-metre (24,580 feet) Noshakh Peak in the Hindu Kush mountain range in northern Afghanistan, becoming the youngest woman in the world to do so.

But as the Islamist Taliban hold peace talks with the Afghan government in Doha, many women in Afghanistan worry the militant group may exert its influence through

formal political channels.

When the Taliban ruled the country between 1996 and 2001, they banned education for females and barred women from leaving the house without a male relative.

The group says it has changed but many women remain sceptical.

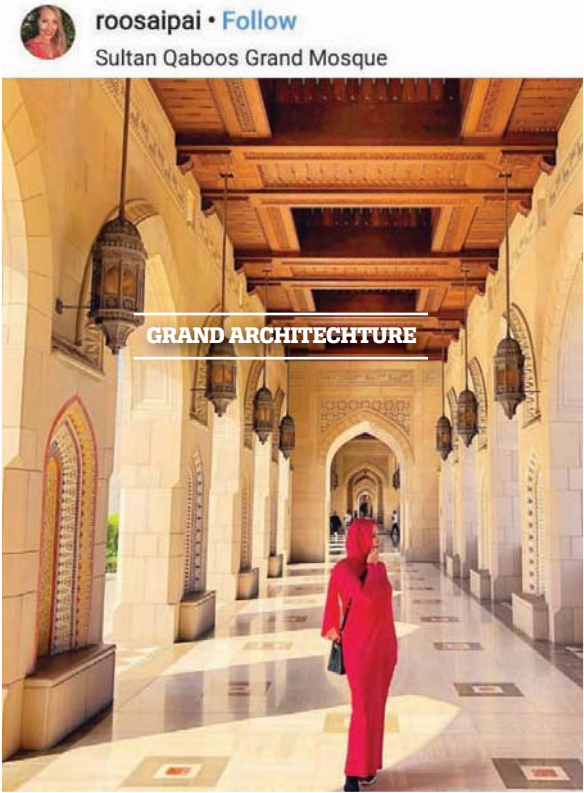
"When I got into sports, I knew that I would face some problems in the future, for example, one of the issues was that maybe the Taliban would hinder sport for women, but still I'm ready to face the challenge," Fatima said.

When she's not training in the mountains, Fatima lives in Kabul with her parents, younger sister and cat. Her father said he will continue to celebrate Fatima's achievements but has lingering concerns about her safety.

"I am worried about this, (the Taliban) oppose women's sports," Abdul Wahed Sultani said. "(But) I told Fatima that you are free to do whatever sport you want to, even mountaineering, and I will support her as much as I can." — **Reuters**



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



COOK LIKE A CHEF

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Chili Tuna with Coconut & Leche De Tigre



CHOCOLATE GALORE

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

CEVICHE

1 small sweet potato
1 ear of corn, husked
1/2 aji limo or habanero chile, seeded, halved lengthwise
200 Gm Fresh Omani Tuna, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
30 Ml Coconut Milk
1 small red onion, quartered and thinly sliced, divided
Kosher salt
Cilantro leaves

PREPARATION METHOD

Pour water into a large pot fitted with a steamer basket to a depth of 1 inch bring to a boil. Add sweet potato, cover, and cook until just fork-tender, about 30 minutes.

Transfer to a plate let it cool. Meanwhile, add more water to the same pot, if needed, to measure 1 inch; bring to a boil.

Add an ear of corn to pot and steam until crisp-tender, 2-3 minutes.

Transfer to a plate; let cool completely. Halve potato lengthwise. Using a small melon baller, scoop out potato Cut kernels from the cob.

Rub a large bowl with cut sides of Tuna, 2/3 of onion, leche de tigre, Coconut Milk and 4 large ice cubes in bowl stir well. Let marinate for 2 minutes; remove ice. Fold in potato and corn; season with salt.

Using a slotted spoon, divide ceviche into whole coconut or small bowls.

Drizzle ceviche with leche de tigre garnish with remaining onion and cilantro.



INGREDIENTS:



LECHE DE TIGRE

Leche de Tigre
2/3 cup fresh lime juice
2 garlic cloves, smashed
1 tablespoon (packed) chopped fresh cilantro leaves
1/2 aji limo or habanero chile, seeded, halved lengthwise
1/2 small red onion, chopped
1/2 cup bottled clam juice (optional)
Kosher salt

PREPARATION

Set a fine-mesh sieve over a small bowl. Purée first 4 ingredients and 4 large ice cubes in a blender until smooth. Add onion; pulse 3-4 times. Strain liquid into a medium bowl. Stir in clam juice, if desired season with salt. Cover and chill.



ABOUT THE CHEF
CHEF ADIL SHAIKH

Executive Chef
Sheraton Hotel, Muscat

Adil Shaikh is currently the Executive Chef of Sheraton Oman Hotel located in Muscat. He has been associated with the hotel since its re-opening in 2016.

With an enriching career of over 15 years, he has successfully launched award-winning restaurants as an integral game changer in hospitality operations. Having won several prestigious recognitions and awards including Battle of the Chef Dubai and participated at several distinguished culinary platforms in the Middle East, he draws immense inspiration from the ever-evolving culinary world. His illustrious career spans across the Middle East & Asia in renowned Luxury, Business & Leisure Hotels & Resorts.

An avid foodie Adil is a strong advocate of 'Go Local.' He is committed to showcasing the flavours and tastes of lesser-known local ingredients, farm-fresh produce and regional cuisines. An astute, hands-on chef, Adil curates bespoke dining experiences that delves deep into authentic flavours, traditions and intricate nuances of each cuisine.

Off duty, you will spot him being an absolute foodie and exploring local cuisines of various cultures. On other days, he uses his kitchen as an interactive platform to celebrate the love for great food and memorable dining experiences that stand the test of time with his guests and loyal clientele.

FASHION



With masked guests, Dior returns to catwalk in Paris

PARIS: Christian Dior kicked off Paris Fashion Week in earnest on Tuesday with a socially-distanced runway show as models paraded around an art installation recalling Gothic-style stained-glass windows to a live choir performance.

Fashion brands are hesitantly returning to the catwalk after holding off for many months due to the coronavirus pandemic. Paris' fashion week, which runs until October 6, will include a mix of physical and digital events.

prints, tie-dye stripes or floral patterns.

The styles contained nods to female figures or writers, including a couple of long, buttoned up white shirts, a style Susan Sontag has been pictured in.

"This social distance in some way doesn't help us to have a dialogue with the other", Chiuri said in an interview. "So probably it's also for that that I want this dialogue with other women, I don't want to close myself in a room, to stay alone."

A mix of materials,



At Dior, guests wore face masks and were given temperature checks, with crowds limited to 300 rather than the 800 to 1,000 the label, owned by LVMH, would normally invite.

The COVID-19 crisis also influenced the collection, womenswear designer Maria Grazia Chiuri said, including with the looser, flowing lines of some outfits meant to "support us, to feel better".

The label's normally structured and cinched classic Bar jackets got a softer makeover, while some looks came with a Japanese twist, including kimono-like spring coats, in an array of paisley

including Indonesian ikat fabrics, also echoed the "collage" theme, as did the illuminated windows of the decor by Italian artist Lucia Marcucci, containing a patchwork of photos and newspaper clippings.

Some celebrities welcomed the low key nature of the show.

"I actually feel this new environment that we've created with more space and more respect for one another — I actually think that it's a much more pleasant way of viewing the shows, and consuming art," said "Games of Thrones" actress Maisie Williams. — **Reuters**



■ ENVIRONMENT

What happen to tyres once they served their purpose?

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

End-of-life tyres are waste materials that become an environmental problem for the consumer countries, but with the right knowledge and information can be turned into great economic wealth.

The status quo today is that many people tend to burn tyres and this behaviour, unfortunately, causes great danger to humans and the environment. Oman Environment Holding Company be'ah said that tyres are usually burnt to extract the metals inside.

be'ah warned that extracting these minerals through burning is dangerous as not only it pose danger in human health, but also to the environment.

The Sultanate produces an estimated 45,000 tonnes of end-of-life tyres annually according to be'ah and this number is expected to increase in the future.

It takes a very long time for end-of-life tyres to decompose and as such causes serious environmental damage if left in landfills. Thus, the traditional method of

throwing them in landfills is not an appropriate solution. Burning them also results in the emission of toxic gases that are harmful to human.

Fortunately, countries, including the Sultanate of Oman, now rely on a circular economy, which is the most important axis of economic diversification (diversification of sources of income in the economy) for these countries. Industry experts define a circular economy as "an economic system of closed loops in which raw materials, components and products lose their value as little as possible, renewable energy sources are used and systems thinking is at the core."

Intending to convert 30,000 tonnes per year of end-of-life tyres to fuel that can be used in cement production operations, at the beginning of this year, be'ah has signed an agreement to supply or provide alternative derived fuels from end-of-life-tyres with Oman Cement Company.

Using waste as an alternative fuel is considered the first of its kind in the Sultanate.

"This agreement seeks to achieve be'ah's strategy by adopting practices that

ensure waste management is conducted in a sustainable manner," said Eng Tariq bin Ali al Amri, CEO of be'ah.

Al Amri said that by enforcing the circular

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economy, they ensure that they are making the most from the materials that are being disposed of, and properly recovering their value whether in energy production or extracting raw materials and finding other added values.

Al Amri emphasised

that "this matter is directly reflected on conserving and sustaining the environment for future generations."

"This agreement will achieve our strategic goals regarding the diversification of energy sources and the use of other sources to convert fuel that will be used for cement production," said Eng Salem bin Abdullah al Hajri, CEO of Oman Cement Company,

The agreement includes many other positive dimensions. Al Hajri added that the agreement will contribute to the national economy and will provide business opportunities for small and medium enterprises through the production and transportation of fuel from engineered landfills to the cement factory where approximately 30,000 tonnes per year of expired tyres will be processed.

Al Hajri emphasised that "the project includes positive dimensions in terms of using tyres as an alternative fuel and thus preserving the environment of the Sultanate."

The two companies, during the past two years, have studied ways of cooperation to take advantage of waste as an alternative fuel for natural gas.

The study concluded that the factory systems are ready to deal with gas emissions resulting from tire burning operations with a safely, soundly and without any damage to the surrounding environment, and several precautionary procedures have been proposed for safety and security measures.

Outside of the be'ah initiative, the common citizens can also do their part in helping old tyres not become an environmental problem. There are many methods in properly utilising end-of-life tyres, the most prominent of which is recycling. These tyres can be used in garden design and vertical farming and used in the floors of children's play areas to protect them during falls.

Old tyres can also be used in the making of garbage bins and some household furniture such as chairs and tables. They can also be used in the ports to keep boats from crashing on the bay or marina among others.

To contribute to saving the environment, it would need, however, people's commitment to finding a better use for their old tyres. Dumping them on landfills or burning them should not be one of the options.

features

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What happen to tyres once they served their purpose?

It takes a very long time for end-of-life tyres to decompose and as such causes serious environmental damage if left in landfills. Burning them also results in the emission of toxic gases that are harmful to humans and the environment. Here's what you should do if you end up with old tyres... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

CULTURE



YOUNG AFGHAN FEMALE MOUNTAINEER PLANS NEXT SUMMIT TO ‘SHOW THE WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO’

Eighteen-year-old Fatima Sultani gazes at the peak of a mountain near Afghanistan's capital Kabul after completing a morning climbing session, considering her next challenge.... Story on **Page 17**

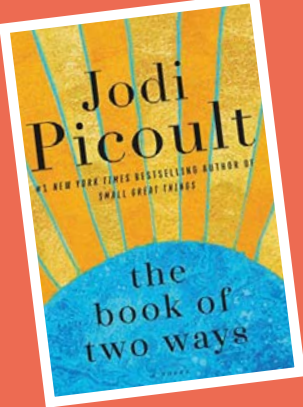
WHAT TO EAT



CHILI TUNA WITH COCONUT & LECHE DE TIGRE

Launching their Seafood Night at Asado every Wednesday, Sheraton Hotel's Chef Adil is sharing the recipe to one of their light yet enjoyable dish you can prepare at home.... Story on **Page 18**

READ



THE BOOK OF TWO WAYS
BY JODI PICOULT

After surviving a plane crash, a death doula travels to Egypt to reconnect with an old flame who is an archaeologist.

FASHION



WITH MASKED GUESTS, DIOR RETURNS TO CATWALK IN PARIS

Christian Dior kicked off Paris Fashion Week in earnest on Tuesday with a socially-distanced runway show as models paraded around an art installation recalling Gothic-style stained-glass windows to a live choir performance.... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE



WORLD ANIMAL DAY

Happening every October 4, World Animal Day started in Italy in 1931 and is celebrated to highlight the important role that animals play in the world. To celebrate today, make a commitment to never buy fur or products that were tested on animals.