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JAPAN'S SUGA SIGNALS ULTRA-EASY MONETARY POLICY TO CONTINUE



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RED WARRIORS TO START TRAINING ON SEPT 20



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AFTER FACTORY LAYOFF, FILIPINA CASHES IN ON 'LEAF ART' VENTURE



OMAN

E-Census 2020 begins today

MUSCAT: The E-Census of Population, Housings and Establishments for 2020 will begin from Sunday. "The E-Census-2020 programme includes visiting private sector institutions to complete the data and monitor the level of their coverage, which includes linking the addresses of establishments and workers with electricity account number to prove the geographical location. The E-Census-2020, fourth census to be implemented by the Sultanate, is different from other censuses as it is the first electronic census without field visits by the authorities to update information. **DETAILS ON P3**

REGION

New school year starts in Iran

TEHRAN: Iran began its new school year on Saturday, even though many students didn't return to their usual classrooms as the coronavirus pandemic and high infection numbers kept them home. The Education Ministry said that only students in cities that aren't currently in the red zone, indicating a high risk of infection, could return to their classroom. The others must take classes only online. In the capital, Tehran, which is considered a yellow zone, parents could decide whether or not to send their child to class. Due to the still-high virus caseload, many opted to keep their children at home. **DETAILS ON P6**

INSIDE


NEW MALI JUNTA OPENS TALKS ON TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN RULE **P5**


BRITISH NEWSPAPERS HIT BY CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIVISTS **P8**

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 36°C
MIN: 28°C

SALALAH
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 40°C
MIN: 25°C

SUNRISE 05.50 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

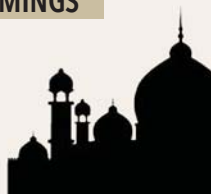
FAJR: 04:34

DHUHR: 12:10

ASR: 15:38

MAGHRIB: 18:25

ISHA: 19:37



A MESMERISING BEACH!



For all its glorious scenes, Mughsayl beach is a photographer's delight. Located 37 km away from Salalah, it takes around at least 30 to 45 minutes to reach. The drive is so scenic and one of its kind. Whether you plan to visit this place during khareef or in the month of December, the drive will coerce you to stare out of the car window. **PHOTO BY DR SACHIN SINGH**

US vote-by-mail begins as White House campaign turns ugly

WASHINGTON: The US election is officially open: North Carolina on Friday launched vote-by-mail operations for the November 3 contest between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden, which is getting uglier by the hour.

With two months until Election Day, Trump is seizing on fears over violent protests in US cities and questioning the integrity of voting by mail, while challenger Biden intensified his criticism of a "deplorable" leader who he said is not fit for office.

Worries about the unabated spread of coronavirus are expected to prompt a surge in the number of ballots cast by mail, as millions seek to avoid polling stations.

In a country on edge over the health crisis and a national reckoning about race, the next 60 days will test the ability of the world's largest economy to organise its election profoundly changed by a pandemic that has killed 187,000 Americans.

North Carolina was to begin mailing out more than 600,000 ballots, in response to a major spike in demand.

Other key battleground states such as Wisconsin — which both candidates visited separately in recent days — will follow in the coming weeks.

How Americans vote has become another flashpoint in an increasingly divisive political landscape.

A recent poll by USA Today and Suffolk University showed that 56 per cent of Republican voters surveyed said they would go in person to vote, while only 26 per cent of Democrats plan to do the same. **SEE ALSO P8**



SELF-REPORTING FACILITY FOR CORONAVIRUS CASES SOON

38% FALL IN HOSPITALISATION OF PATIENTS

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

A facility for self-reporting of suspected coronavirus cases will be implemented in the Sultanate soon, said Dr Saif bin Salem al Abri, Director General of Disease Control at the Ministry of Health.

Speaking at the weekend media briefing on the COVID-19 in the Sultanate, he said, "We hope that the self-reporting feature of suspected cases will be implemented through the smartphone application Tarassud Plus very soon".

Although he did not reveal whether it is mandatory, the director general said that the facility will be available in five languages Arabic, English, Hindi, Bengali and Urdu.

Tarassud Plus is a system that combines a mobile application using artificial intelligence with enhanced features that include up to date COVID-19 statistics, guidelines and best practices to prevent the spread of infection.

The application also enables access to medical hotlines and support staff so that patients can discuss their symptoms and be directed to facilities where they can access care.

Once patients are diagnosed, a medical tracking bracelet connected to the application ensures that they stay at home for the duration of their quarantine or isolation.

The Ministry of Health will monitor the pandemic situation in the Sultanate through three indicators — the number of hospitalised people, the number of patients in intensive care units and the number of deaths in 100,000 segments of the population — the general norms in many countries, said Dr Al Abri.

He said that COVID-19 is not



only a problem of the Ministry of Health but also a national concern that affects all sectors in the Sultanate.

"We do not rely on the number of tests to monitor the outbreak of the epidemic because it differs from one country to another. It depends on the number of inpatients and population density", he said.

According to Dr Al Abri, while the number of hospitalisations decreased by 38 per cent, the number of inpatients in intensive care units dropped by 40 per cent.

The number of those who tested positive to the infection dropped from 50 per cent in early July to 17 per cent recently and deaths decreased by 23 per cent.

The latest statistics from the Government Communication Centre indicates that isolation centres are free of isolated people.

According to statement from the centre, there have been 29 preventive isolation centres distributed throughout all the governorates of the Sultanate, and one activated centre, and the number of cases currently is zero inside the centre.

Spend less time on screen for good mental health: Study

SYDNEY: Researchers have found that less screen time and more green time are associated with better psychological outcomes among children and adolescents.

According to the study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, the prevalence of mental illness among children and adolescents is increasing globally.

Technological developments in recent decades have increased young people's engagement with screen-based technologies (screen time), and a reduction in young people's contact with nature (green time) has been observed concurrently. This



combination of high screen time and low green time may affect mental health and well-being.

But research investigating the psychological impacts of screen time or green time typically considers each factor in isolation and fails to delineate the reciprocal effects of high technology use and low contact with nature on mental health and cognitive outcomes.

To address this question, the research team from the University of Adelaide in Australia analysed the findings of 186 studies to collate evidence assessing associations between screen time, green time, and

psychological outcomes (including mental health, cognitive functioning and academic achievement) for children and adolescents.

In general, high levels of screen time appeared to be associated with unfavourable psychological outcomes, while green time appeared to be linked to favourable psychological outcomes. The findings showed that young people from low socio-economic backgrounds were underrepresented in the literature overall and may be disproportionately affected by high screen time and low green time, making this a priority group for future research.

— IANS



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Elders feel out of cage after lockdown curbs ease

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
SALALAH, SEPT 5

The COVID-19 pandemic has divided societies demographically and the two groups that saw changes in life style were individuals above 60 and children below 12.

These have been the two groups who have had to face challenges with the restriction of movement varying to isolation and the latter settling for online schooling. Now things are beginning to change. While both groups were not allowed to visit public places, the easing of entry to beaches saw families take their little ones and senior members to the seaside for fresh air.

Enclosed areas however have been a different ball game. On Thursday, the announcement from the Minister of Health at the press conference stated, “All institutions should end the ban on those over the age of 60. They should not be denied entry.”

There was excitement but it also meant that it is now a personal responsibility.

For Cris Talib, a businesswoman

from the Philippines, the statement was a great relief.

“The minute I saw the news I forwarded it to all my friends. We know COVID-19 is still around the corner and businesses are gradually reopening in Oman. The easing of restrictions is paving the way back to normal life. For many of us who are in the age group of 60 and above have been difficult as we could not go into malls or dine at restaurants once they were opened. We have been ready to follow the protocol of two metres distance. But this confinement felt like a punishment and the house had become a cage – all because of COVID-19. So, on the very first day, I stepped out to the mall and then went out for dinner.”

Ahmed al Balushi said his mother only visits her family and relatives. “But I do get worried when she goes out,” Ahmed said.

Thermal screening facilities are in place in most of these institutions where there is large movement of people in and out, pointed out N R Narayan, educator.

“We know COVID-19 is still around the corner and businesses are gradually reopening in Oman. The easing of restrictions is paving the way back to normal life. For many of us who are in the age group of 60 and above have been difficult as we could not go into malls or dine at restaurants once they were opened

CRIS TALIB,
Businesswoman



“Generally speaking, adults over 60 are responsible for their own health and hygiene. In addition, wearing of masks, social distancing and hand

sanitisers are mandatory. If the senior citizens are fit and healthy, there is no need for restrictions since they have to comply with the COVID-19

guidelines. However, senior citizens with lower immunity levels and co-morbidities should be on self-isolation and not allowed to move out of the house,” he reflected.

He looked at the international figures and added, “If you take the global census, 70 per cent of the persons affected are above 60 years and 83 per cent of persons who died had more than one ailment. A co-morbid condition is the most important factor in the elderly and is responsible for mortality. The common ailments are diabetes, asthma, renal disease and cancer. There was fear and loneliness due to restriction in movement. They could also slip into depression and I think this is where the family members ought to come in — to counsel them and keep them engaged.”

Muttrah Souq, meanwhile, has begun to see its all time favourite visitors — the senior citizens for whom the souq is part of their life. The souq itself is designed as such that it has seating area in the open air and now they are filled. The only difference from the past is everyone sports a mask.

RUSTAQ CENTRE TO OFFER ROP SERVICES FROM TODAY



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police’s Rustaq service centre will offer traffic, civil status and residency services on Sunday. A statement issued online by ROP said: “The Royal Oman Police announces that all services (traffic, civil status and residency) will resume in the new Rustaq service centre starting from Sunday instead of the existing centre in Al Hazm.

Virtual seminar discusses COVID-19

STAFF REPORTER
NIZWA, SEP 5

A two-day Virtual International Seminar (VIS 2020) jointly organised by the University of Nizwa, Oman, University Technology PATRONAS, Malaysia, Federal University of Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, and University Nebraska-Lincoln, USA, took place on September 1-2.

The seminar was conducted in four sessions, with researchers and industry professionals from Oman, USA, Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia presented their topics such as business, energy, health and safety, education, banking and finance and government responses to the pandemic.

The VIS 2020 was inaugurated with special addresses from Prof Mohamed Ibrahim Abdul Mutalib, from Malaysia, Prof Denise Pires Carvalho, Brazil, and Dr Josh Davis, USA.

Prominent speakers were Prof Dr Mohd Shahir Liew, Dr Mahzan Haron and Dr Affendi Isa from

Malaysia, Prof Luis Eduardo Duque Dutra, Prof Jose Orlando Gomes and Dr Hosanna Carina Rodriguez from Brazil, Maegan Stevens-Liska, Erika Hepburn, Prof Gary Keibel and Prof Michael Rayo from USA, and Dr Sutan Emir Hidayat from Indonesia.

The speakers from Oman include Prof Abdulaziz al Kindi, University of Nizwa, on the impact of the pandemic on higher education; Muna Al Darmaki, Ministry of Ministry of Energy and Minerals, on energy issues; Dr Firas al Abduwani, on SME’s; Dr Talal al Aulaqi and Dr Waleed al Rajhi on blended learning progress.

Dr Arockiasamy, Dr Malik, Dr Norizan and Dr Miah moderated various sessions across the two days. Dr Arockiasamy, Dean, College of Economics, Management and Information Systems and Co-Chair of VIS 2020, proposed the valedictory address for the seminar, which drew an online attendance of more than 1,100 participants from more than 25 countries.

Keep up good habits say no to coronavirus infection

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, SEPT 5

Amid the decision of allowing most of the businesses to operate and adapt to the new normal, this should be the responsibility of everyone to stick to the good habits of washing the hands, wearing face masks and maintaining social distancing as much as possible.

A wrong sense of confidence has settled in many people after seeing the fewer number of reported cases of COVID-19 in recent days as they are seen moving without masks, meeting and greeting as if the threat of the pandemic no more exists.

“They are living in wrong notions, as the threat of the pandemic is very much there, and it is going to be

there until some medical solution is available for the masses,” said medical practitioner Dr Harish, who has served in Oman for many years.

“Whatever improvements we see are due to the wise strategy of the government in raising awareness and making people realise the importance of face masks, gloves and social distancing.

“Closure of businesses was also part of the strategy, as it is difficult for the common man to convince in a very short period. The disease is so contagious that it is better not to take any chance.”

Since most people got trained to use masks and other pandemic protocols, it is a wise decision to bring the economy back on the rail

with certain restrictions on health and hygiene. While the government has played its role, this is time now for the people to respond to advisories and take care of the individual as well as community safety.

“I am noticing many people moving without masks and sitting in small gatherings here and there. It is painful to see them not maintaining social distancing because somehow they are convinced that the disease has gone. The disease is very much there and any irresponsible behaviour may lead to a surge in numbers again,” said a researcher and faculty member in a local college.

They are responsible as well as those who are taking care of the safety aspect of themselves and their



Single father applying pollution mask to his daughter

family members. It was good to see a small child (above 12) struggling with his mask to put on his face and his father was supporting him.

When asked, the boy’s father Abdullah, admitted “It is time for us to teach the coming generations about the importance of these small but good habits. If I don’t put a mask, my children will do the same.”

“This is the need of the hour to adhere to the norms set by the government and relevant authorities. Being brave is good, but living in denial is not good. And you should not show your bravery with a known disease. We must understand that the pandemic is very much there, we have to know how to live with it,” he said.

ELECTRONIC CENSUS STARTS TODAY

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The E-Census of Population, Housings, and Establishments for 2020 will begin from Sunday. "The E-Census 2020 programme includes visit to private sector institutions to complete the updating data and monitor the level of their coverage, which includes linking the addresses of establishments and workers with the electricity account number to prove the geographical location, from September 6," ONA said.

The E-Census 2020, fourth census to be implemented by the Sultanate, is different from other censuses as it is the first electronic census without field visits by the authorities to update information. The census aims to use electricity bills as base of information and as proof of residency and address.

The Electronic Census of Population, Housings and Establishments 2020 was launched based on Royal Decree 15/2015 issued

The Electronic Census of Population, Housings and Establishments 2020 was launched based on Royal Decree 15/2015 issued on May 6, 2015.

on May 6, 2015.

The project aims to promote statistical indicators by end of 2020 to provide decision makers with timely and accurate data. The E-Census 2020 is the fourth census to be implemented by the Sultanate since the Renaissance. The previous censuses were based on



field surveys, the most recent being in 2010.

For the correct collection of information, the e-census had launched a campaign called 'Your data, your identity' which is aimed at making people aware of any information. People will benefit from this census because it will make future procedures easier to complete. This will make finishing government services easily because not much paperwork and information will be required because all the information will be available in data.

According to NSCI, the data represents an important pillar for progress and growth because of the importance of spatial information to serve all individuals and institutions to contribute to the best services. The well-designed mechanism of the E-Census 2020 amplifies efficiency and effectiveness, as the project will provide the national registries with up-to-date data.

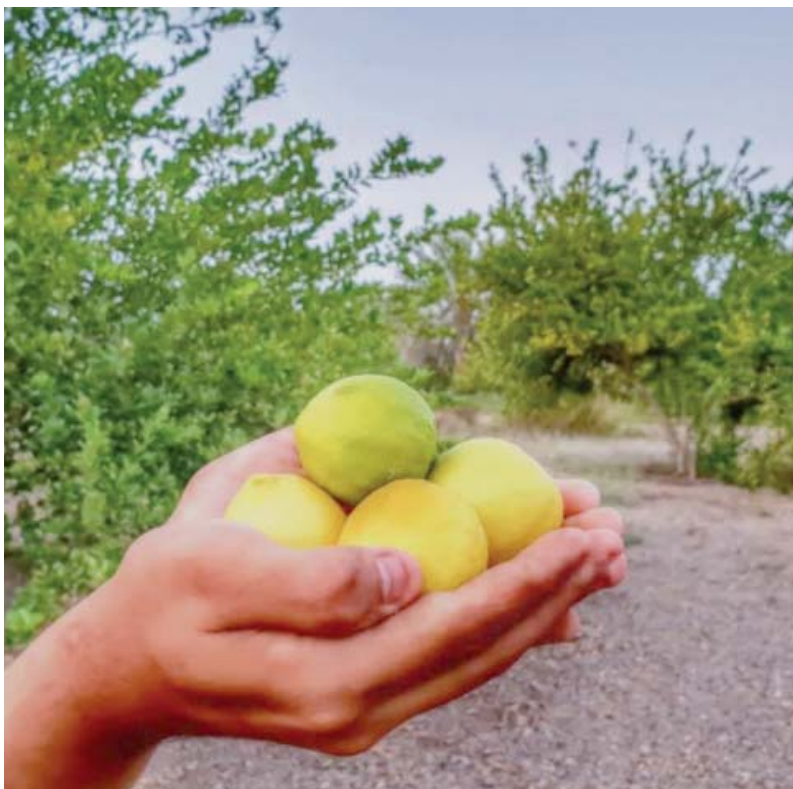
Plan to boost fruits and dates output

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources will implement a Fruit Tree Orchard Project that encourages farmers to cultivate dates, mangoes and citrus fruits. Those who wish to apply for the project should contact agricultural development centres across wilayats and submit the application before September 17. The ministry has the right to accept or reject the application that doesn't meet the given criteria.

The applicant must be an Omani citizen and own an existing agricultural holding or farm with a usufruct contract for the cultivation of the approved crops. Interested persons should submit a copy of the farm ownership deed or a copy of a valid usufruct contract with a copy of the survey drawing of agricultural land and a copy of a valid agricultural possession card.

Moreover, the location of the fields should be within the farming range and in areas that have suitable environment conditions for



cultivating date palm, mango and lemon varieties.

Modern irrigation system and a licensed well with the salinity of no

more than 1000 mg is required, too.

The area set for cultivation should be between five and 10 acres. The applicants have to plant the date palm

varieties like al Fardh, Khalas al Dahira, al Majhool and varieties of the mango and lemon.

The farmhands are requested to abide by the ministry's recommended agricultural operations when cultivating these crops. The applicant must agree for the specialists' visits to the orchards during the programme.

He also will be given a month to install the irrigation system; otherwise, he will be replaced by another beneficiary.

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Wear mask before going to beach



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

Those who visit the beaches must wear a face mask as part of the preventive measures against COVID-19.

"One needs to wear a mask if he or she is visiting the beach or taking a stroll along as part of the public health protective measures," an official from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) said.

On the other hand, he can take

it off if he's swimming in the water, according to the official.

"No mask is mandatory while you're in water," he adds.

Oman's beaches and public places were closed since April this year after the pandemic started widening. People were allowed to visit them after five months of closure recently.

However, a set of precautions while swimming or visiting the beaches

were advised by the Authorities.

"Going to the beaches is permitted as long as people stay away from each other and follow the precautions against COVID-19," said Dr Mohammed al Balushi, Specialist, Pulmonology.

"The beach is fine for fresh air and mild exercises for staying fit. Yet, make sure one stays away from group of people," he said.

جامعة التقنية والعلوم التطبيقية
University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Announcement - University Logo Design Contest

In order to engage the community and empower the role of entrepreneurs within creative fields, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) would like to announce a contest to design the university's logo in accordance with the strategic orientation of the national priorities in education, learning, scientific research and national capabilities within the framework of Oman Vision 2040, based on the following conditions:

General conditions

- The contest is open to Omani citizens and local private and specialized companies in the field.
- The logo should be inspired by the University's vision, which focuses on leading the technical and applied education, innovation, entrepreneurship, and the knowledge industry which assist the trends of the economic sectors locally, regionally and globally.
- The logo shall be modern and innovative reflecting the academic disciplines that keep pace with the regional and global changes.
- The designer has the right to participate in more than one design yet, not more than three.
- The logo shall not be imitative or similar to any other logos or designs, and the designer is responsible for the legal liability of the intellectual property.
- The University has the right to modify and add to the winning design as it deems appropriate, and the winner shall be committed to making the required modifications.
- The intellectual property of the winning design shall belong to the University, and the designer shall not be entitled to claim it or reuse it in any way.
- The University shall have the right to reject the entries that do not meet the terms and conditions of the competition.
- The University shall have the right to withhold the prize in case the required conditions are not met or the participants do not meet the criteria of originality and creativity.

Technical conditions

- The logo should be implemented by using vector-based software.
- The abbreviated letters of the University's name (UTAS) can be used in the logo design.
- The logo should be applicable to include the name of the University when it is added as part of the logo elements, with possibility of separating it when applied in different ratio and applications in both languages: جامعة التقنية والعلوم التطبيقية The University of Technology and Applied Sciences.
- The logo can be displayed in more than one colour scheme, as well as the black-and-white version.
- The design should be flexible to control the size and applicable to all various printed and digital media while ensuring the clarity of all its elements.

Those wishing to participate should send the following

- A copy of the logo designed in Adobe Illustrator (ai).
- A file that contains an explanation of the idea, philosophy, and elements of the logo, including the type of fonts and color values in PDF format.
- A copy of the civil ID or the Commercial Registration document of the local private enterprises.

Entries to the contest must be sent via this e-mail only, any another methods will not be considered.
Email: logo@cas.edu.om

The winning design will be awarded (RO 5,000).

The deadline for accepting submission: **Wednesday, September 30, 2020**



Sri Lankan Army chief Shavendra Silva (L) speaks during a press conference along with naval officer Rear Admiral Y N Jayarathna, in Colombo. — AFP

Stricken oil tanker pushed further away from Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: A fire-stricken oil tanker was pushed further away from Sri Lanka's coast and into deeper waters on Saturday, rescuers said, after successfully containing the blaze during a 36-hour operation.

The Panamanian-registered *New Diamond* carrying 270,000 tonnes of crude had drifted dangerously close to the eastern shores of Sri Lanka since issuing a distress message on Thursday morning.

The Indian Coast Guard and the Sri Lankan navy said the 330 metre vessel was towed overnight to deeper waters some 75 kilometres away from the coast.

"There is no oil slick reported", the Indian Coast Guard said as a joint effort by the two countries to prevent the tanker drifting closer to the island continued.

Sri Lankan navy officials said three powerful tug boats had been deployed to keep the rudderless craft in position to ensure there was no threat to the island's coast.

Apart from the Sri Lankan and Indian shores, the nearest landmass to the crippled *New Diamond* was nearly 1,500 kilometres to the east at Banda Aceh in Indonesia.

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa tweeted his thanks to the Indian and Sri Lankan forces for their "contribution in conserving

marine biodiversity by preventing a disastrous situation out in the ocean".

TANKER BOARDED

The country's navy said rescuers were still spraying foam on the vessel but that the blaze had been brought under control.

"The Indian coastguard as well as we have boarded the tanker to carry out a preliminary evaluation", Sri Lankan navy spokesman Captain Indika de Silva said.

"There is no immediate danger of the ship breaking up".

However, the Indian Coast Guard reported observing a two metre crack in the hull 10 metres above the waterline, but that was not considered a catastrophic structural failure.

The fire was triggered by an engine room explosion that killed a Filipino crewman on Thursday morning as the vessel was passing Sri Lanka on its way to the Indian port of Paradip.

It issued a distress signal 60 kilometres (37 miles) from Sri Lanka's eastern coastal town of Sangamankanda Point. Three tugboats — two Indian and one chartered by the owners — were brought into action on Friday night to push the vessel back into deeper waters amid fears of an environmental disaster should the oil leak. — AFP

China's CNBG, Sinovac find more countries to test COVID-19 vaccines

BEIJING: China National Biotech Group (CNBG) and Sinovac Biotech Ltd said on Saturday four more countries have agreed to run late-stage clinical tests of their coronavirus vaccine candidates, as China steps up its efforts in the global race.

Serbia and Pakistan are among the new countries agreeing to Phase 3 trials, as the two companies seek more data overseas amid dwindling new cases in China.

Serbia will test two vaccines developed by CNBG's Wuhan and Beijing units, and Pakistan will test the Beijing unit's candidate, the company told Reuters.

CNBG's Phase 3 trials are expected to involve 50,000 people in about 10 countries, said CNBG

Vice President Zhang Yuntao. Trials have already begun in United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Peru, Morocco, Argentina and Jordan. Zhang said foreign countries have expressed interest in ordering a combined 500 million doses of its vaccines.

CNBG is expected to be able to produce 300 million doses of vaccine a year once it upgrades manufacturing techniques, and is working on a plan to raise its annual capacity to 1 billion doses, Zhang said.

Sinovac's vaccine candidate CoronaVac, being tested in Brazil and Indonesia, also obtained approvals from two other countries for Phase 3 trials, said Helen Yang, Senior Director of Global Strategy

and Business Development at Sinovac. She declined to name the countries as the information is still confidential.

While the final stage of trials are still under way to prove the vaccines are safe and effective, China has already authorised the vaccine candidates from Sinovac and CNBG for emergency use for those in high-risk groups such as medical workers.

Several tens of thousand people have already taken CoronaVac through the emergency programme, Sinovac's Yang said.

CNBG will soon begin providing its vaccines to Chinese staffers working in overseas embassies and consulates, Zhang said. — Reuters

'Severe' punishment for N Korea officials after typhoon casualties

SEOUL: North Korea has pledged severe punishment for local officials it says failed to protect residents from a typhoon which caused a "serious incident" with dozens of casualties, the ruling party's newspaper reported. Typhoon Maysak brought heavy downpours across the country earlier this week, with footage showing a street inundated with water in the eastern port town of Wonsan, Kangwon province.

Saturday's *Rodong Sinmun*, an official newspaper, reported that leaders had decided to punish "irresponsible" city and provincial officials for causing "a serious incident involving dozens of casualties".

The report did not say how many were injured, missing or dead.

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

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

Maysak also hit the South, killing at least two people. More than 2,200 people were evacuated to temporary shelters in the southern city of Busan. Natural disasters tend to have a greater impact in the North due to its creaking infrastructure, and the country is vulnerable to flooding as many mountains and hills have long been deforested.

Punishing the local officials is a "way for the North Korean leadership to avoid blame" for the casualties, Ahn Chan-Il, a defector turned researcher based in Seoul, said.

"They are sending out a message that Kim Jong Un never does anything wrong, but damages occur only because those who work for him fail to follow his order". — AFP

Children study in back of truck in virus-hit Mexico



Volunteer Fatima Rodriguez (R) speaks with Maria Luisa Moreno (C) and her son Marcos Hernandez at the improvised street classroom called "Rinconcito de Esperanza" (Little Corner of Hope), set up as part of the "All For Leo Movement" in Heroes de Padierna neighbourhood in Mexico City — AFP

children began a new school year last month with distance learning via television in collaboration with four private channels.

Schools have been closed since March in Mexico, which has recorded more than 66,000 coronavirus deaths — one of the world's highest tolls.

Around 70 children between the ages of six and 15 have so far attended the "Little Corner of Hope" street school in a suburb of

the capital. The community effort relies on the support of several volunteer teachers, donations of electronic equipment, a blacksmith who allows the use of a workshop and a tortilla shop that provides a free Internet connection.

"The most difficult things are the weather, sometimes there's a lot of sun, a lot of noise, and it's difficult to teach a language in the street", said English teacher Eduardo Soto. — AFP



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Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com



Mali junta opens talks on civilian transition

BAMAKO: Mali's military junta began talks with opposition groups on Saturday on its promised transition to civilian rule after mounting pressure from neighbours to yield power in the weeks since it overthrew the nation's leader.

The West African country has long been plagued by chronic instability, a simmering militant revolt, ethnic violence and endemic corruption, prompting a clique of rebel colonels to detain president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita last month.

They pledged to step down after an undefined transition period, but the putsch has prompted Mali's neighbours and former colonial ruler France to demand a swift transfer of power to civilian rule, with fears the crisis could impact neighbouring states.

The talks in Bamako are being held under junta chief Assimi Goita but he was not present on Saturday, a military source said.

"Since August 18, we are charting a new history for our country," junta number two Malick Diaw told the opening session.

The 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc has imposed sanctions and closed borders to Mali as part of efforts to press the junta into handing over power quickly.

Saturday's summit was originally planned for last weekend but was called off at the last minute after a quarrel between the military and the June 5 Movement, which spearheaded the protests that led to the toppling of president Keita.

The opposition coalition of civil and religious leaders has demanded that the military rulers give it a role in



Supporters of the CNSP celebrate during a gathering at the start of two days of talks aimed at validating the terms of reference for a transitional government in Mali, on Saturday in Bamako. — AFP

the transition to civilian rule, but was not invited for the transition talks last Saturday.

It was then included for the re-scheduled talks on Saturday and Sunday, along with political parties, former

rebels, unions, civil society organisations and media representatives.

Parallel talks will take place in regional capitals, led by regional governors, according to the junta.

Members of the Malian diaspora

will also have their say, according to a spokesperson for the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), as the junta is known.

One of the key issues will be the length of the transition to civilian rule.

Originally the junta proposed a three-year transition, before bringing that down to two years.

The June 5 Movement has said it wants a transition period of 18-24 months.

West African leaders, who have called for elections within 12 months, will meet via videoconference on Monday with the Mali situation at the top of their agenda.

'NO BLANK CHEQUE'
The June 5 Movement led the protests against Keita for weeks before he was removed from power after seven years in charge.

It fears the junta is hijacking the coup and is demanding equal billing during the transition period.

Influential imam Mahmoud Dicko, a key player in the mass opposition protests that led to Keita's ouster, has insisted that the junta does not have "carte blanche".

"We will not give a blank cheque to anyone to run this country, that's over," he said.

"We led the fight. People have died and the soldiers who have completed (this fight) must keep their word."

Mali's security situation deteriorated in the lead-up to the country's fourth coup since it became an independent nation 60 years ago.

The ill-equipped army has the Herculean task of securing an area two-and-a-half times the size of France from different groups allied to Al Qaeda or the IS and various militia groups — some fighting for the government and others against it.

At least 10 Malian soldiers were killed in an overnight ambush in a central region near the Mauritanian border where armed militant groups are rampant, security and local sources said on Friday.

It was the third time Malian security forces have suffered heavy losses since the military took power. — AFP

Niger soldiers executed dozens of civilians, probe says



Niger has suffered years of conflict with militants operating in the vast and inhospitable Sahel desert, with thousands of soldiers and civilians killed to date. — AFP file photo

NIAMEY: Soldiers in Niger executed dozens of civilians during the counterinsurgency campaign against militants in the country's troubled Tillaberi region earlier this year, a probe into the deaths reported.

The West African nation has suffered years of conflict with militants operating in the vast and inhospitable Sahel desert, with thousands of soldiers and civilians killed to date.

The national armies of Niger and its neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso have been accused of war crimes in their response operations, including forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

Niger's National Commission on Human Rights was investigating reports by Amnesty International and other rights groups that 102 civilians had gone missing in the western province between March 27 and April 2 after an army operation.

"There have indeed been executions of unarmed civilians and the mission discovered at least 71 bodies in six mass graves," said Abdoulaye Seydou, the President of the Pan-African

Network for Peace, Democracy and Development, which participated in the probe, on Friday.

"It is elements of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) which are responsible for these summary and extrajudicial executions," he added, saying those killed were attacked with bladed weapons and small arms.

But he said the investigation was unable to establish whether senior levels of the military hierarchy were responsible for the deaths.

Militant violence resulted in 4,000 deaths in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso last year, the United Nations has said.

The UN has condemned what it said was a spike in criminal acts by national armies in the Sahel at the beginning of this year, including more than 100 extrajudicial executions by the Malian army between January and March.

Amnesty International reported in June that the armies of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso had been responsible for nearly 200 disappearances in the space of a few months. — AFP

Protest in Germany over eviction of squatters

LEIPZIG: A demonstration against the eviction of squatters from an occupied house in the eastern German city of Leipzig turned violent on Friday night, according to police.

A group of about 100 people dressed in black and wearing hoods reportedly threw cobblestones and firecrackers at police in the Connewitz district, a police

spokesperson said, as the protest continued for a second night.

Some garbage bins were also set on fire, and several trams were forced to stop due to burning barricades on the tracks.

Police used tear gas on the group and deployed a helicopter to the scene.

The police spokesperson did not

say whether arrests were made. The demonstrations started after police evacuated a house occupied by the group since August 21, in protest against gentrification and alack of affordable housing in the city. The owner of the house, which was otherwise empty, filed a criminal complaint for trespassing.

The Leipzig district court then

issued an eviction order. The police evacuated the house early on Wednesday. Several police were injured on Thursday night as scuffles turned violent, police said. Another house had been occupied in the Connewitz district, activists said on Twitter on Friday. Various groups have called for further protests to be held over the weekend. — dpa

Hundreds attend funeral of teen allegedly shot by S African police

ELDORADO PARK: Dozens of mourners on Saturday attended the funeral of a disabled teenager who was allegedly gunned down last week by police, setting off protests against racism and police brutality across the country.

Nathaniel Julies, a 16-year-old with Down syndrome, was shot dead on August 26 near his home in Eldorado Park, a township ravaged by drugs and crime.

Wearing T-shirts branded with Julies' face, angry mourners sang apartheid struggle songs and demanded justice.

"We knew that Nathaniel would at some time have to pass, but not in that fashion," his uncle Cyril Brown told local television station eNCA.

His family said the boy, whose speech was impaired, was out to buy biscuits from a shop when he was shot by police on patrol.

Community members claim Julies was killed by police after they became frustrated with his responses to their interrogations.

The teenager's death sparked outrage in both Eldorado Park, south of Johannesburg, and around the country, renewing calls for tougher action against police brutality.

But Brown appealed to the community to refrain from rioting in



Nathaniel Julies' mother (C) cries as she follows family members carrying the casket containing the remains of her son outside the family house during his funeral service in Eldorado Park, near Johannesburg, on Saturday. — AFP

protest.

"Today is about Nathaniel Julies, the justice will come after that," he said.

Three police officers have been charged in connection with the boy's death and will make their second appearance in the Protea magistrates court on Thursday.

Police presence was especially high during the funeral ceremony,

increasing agitation among mourners.

"It's like a gangster is being buried here," bemoaned MP and opposition party leader Kenneth Meshoe who was in attendance.

"It is insulting and provoking."

Bridget Harris, the boy's mother, told mourners that she has forgiven the officers arrested in connection with her son's death.

— AFP

Nigerian doctors to strike over pay

LAGOS: Doctors in state-run hospitals in Nigeria will go on strike next week to demand a pay rise, better welfare and adequate facilities, union leaders have said.

The strike by the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), which represents some 40 percent of doctors, is the latest in a string of stoppages by medics to hit Africa's most populous nation as it struggles to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

"NEC (national executive council) resolved to proceed on an indefinite nationwide strike action from Monday," said NARD president Aliyu Sokomba in a statement late on Friday. The action would not be called off until the government provides "life insurance and death in service benefits for all health workers" as well as paying outstanding salaries and allowances. He said the union wanted pay parity for both doctors in federal and state health institutions. Strikes by medics have been common in Nigeria where the health sector is underfunded.

The authorities fear any reduction in capacity could severely hamper its ability to tackle the pandemic as the number of cases continues to rise. In June, NARD staged a week-long strike over welfare and inadequate protective kits but doctors treating virus cases remained on the job. — AFP

PALESTINIAN DEMONSTRATION



A Palestinian demonstrator, wearing protective face masks, stands in front of burning tyres during clashes with Israeli security forces following a demonstration to protest Israel's plan to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, in the village of Kfar Qaddum. — AFP

30 dead as locals fight off militants in Somalia

MOGADISHU: At least 30 people are dead following clashes between villagers and militants in central Somalia, local officials said on Saturday.

“We have reports that nearly 30 people, including 16 militants, are being killed in the Shabeelow village, where civilians... took up arms [to] battle the terrorists,” said Osman Isse Nur, a spokesperson for authorities in the Galmudug region.

Dozens of local freelance

militiamen are among the fatalities, according to the authorities.

“Armed villagers opted to fight militants to defend their livestock animals from the terrorists,” said the spokesperson.

Five hours of fierce battle on Friday left 14 villagers dead and scores of others hospitalised in the town of Galkayo, local elder Abdi Siyaad said.

But local elders like Abdi Siyad says villagers are engaging in self-defence against what he describes

as “brutality” and intimidation by militants, which has de facto control of large parts of Somalia.

“They have been putting pressure on locals living in Shabeelow in Mudug in order to force them [to] surrender their arms and livestock animals for war for many years. Locals are tired of the group’s pressure,” said the elder.

He asked the Somali government to provide weapons so villagers can defend themselves. — dpa

New school year begins in Iran amid virus concerns

TEHRAN: The school year in Iran began on Saturday after a near six-month shutdown due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, with parents voicing concerns despite authorities pledging to enforce health protocols.

Some 15 million pupils in the Islamic republic returned to class, mostly remotely, as the country continues to battle its COVID-19 outbreak, the deadliest in the Middle East with over 22,000 killed and more than 384,000 infected since the first cases were confirmed in February.

The first day of classes at Nojavanan high school in northeastern Tehran was attended by a slew of officials and journalists, as well as students.

President Hassan Rouhani appeared in a video to inaugurate the new academic year at the school.

Education Minister Mohsen Haji-Mirzaei looked to assuage parents’ concerns in a speech after he rang the bell to launch the new school year.

“I hope that families trust us and rest assured that the ministry will exercise utmost vigilance” regarding health protocols, he said.

Pupils and other attendees wore masks and were required to pass through a disinfection tunnel, have their temperatures checked and sit socially distanced in the schoolyard.

Other anti-virus measures at schools include keeping classes to 35 minutes and requiring students and staff to stay one metre (three feet) apart and wear masks, according to Iran’s anti-virus taskforce.

During his video address, Rouhani emphasised the need to for students to observe health protocols, calling for the “utmost discipline” in respecting measures.

Rouhani’s government had come under fire before schools reopened, with the head of Iran’s medical council, Mohammadreza Zafarghandi, writing an open letter in which he called proposed health



Some 15 million pupils went back to school across Iran on Saturday after an almost six-month break. . — AFP

protocols counterproductive, as students could spread the virus if they were infected but asymptomatic.

‘STRESSFUL’

This concern was shared by some teachers, parents and students at Nojavanan high school.

“Controlling (Covid-19’s spread) is very difficult... as is teaching kids how to follow health protocols and social distancing,” school principal, Nasrin Mobini, said.

“We are all concerned — my colleagues, the parents, everyone.”

Literature teacher Amiri, 60, said the return of students to school was “stressful”, but that it was important that the first classes be held in person so teachers and students can get to know each other.

One parent, only giving her

surname as Azaraksh, said she brought her son for the opening day with “concern”, but she preferred in-person education if health protocols were “really” observed.

Many students shared their parents’ worries, but were pleased to be back at school.

“We’re happy that schools have reopened, but... it’s still dangerous for us and others,” said 14-year-old Askhan.

Most classes are expected to be held remotely, though some pupils, including those in preschool and elementary school will attend classes in person intermittently.

Ava Golkar, 33, the English department head at Soroush elementary school in northern Tehran, said only five pupils attended the opening day in person, while the rest watched via video streaming. — AFP

Search continues for survivor month after Beirut explosion

BEIRUT: Chilean and Lebanese rescue teams were searching on Saturday, for the third consecutive day, for a possible survivor under the rubble in Beirut, more than a month after a massive blast hit the city.

Beirut was devastated on August 4 by a powerful explosion at the city’s port, killing some 190 people and injuring 6,000 others.

Lebanese engineer Riad al Assad, who is working closely with the Chilean team, said the Chileans had done a test with their machines and “they could hear a respiratory signal again.”

Al Assad said rescuers’ are trying to access the source of the signals with operations from three different spots.

Amid the early morning lull, work continued at the devastated site in Beirut’s Gemmayze neighbourhood.

“We are still working with hope,” said a Lebanese civil defence volunteer at the scene.

Hopes for finding a survivor under the rubble were kindled on Thursday when Chilean rescue workers and their sniffer dog detected a sign of life from under the rubble of a collapsed building in Gemmayze.

Francisco Lermenda, the leader of the Chilean “Topos” rescue team, told reporters on Friday that they were continuing their work, but he could neither confirm nor rule out that there was anyone still alive under the building ruins. — dpa



Volunteers dig through the rubble of buildings which collapsed due to the explosion at the port area, after signs of life were detected in Gemmayze, Beirut. — Reuters



Commuters drive along a road on the outskirts of Amritsar on Saturday after the government imposed lockdown norms in the state for weekends and public holidays as a preventive measure against the COVID-19. — AFP

INDIA VIRUS CASES HIT 4M MARK

HAVOC:

COVID-19 has killed 870,000 people and infected more than 26 million worldwide

NEW DELHI: India has become the third country to pass four million coronavirus infections, setting a new record daily surge in cases on Saturday as the pandemic shows no sign of peaking.

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

The growing caseload comes after the World Health Organization said on Friday it did not expect widespread immunisation against COVID-19 until mid-2021, insisting it would never endorse a vaccine that has not been proven

safe and effective, over concerns around the rush to develop a jab for the virus.

As governments around the world enforce measures to slow the virus, police in Australia — which has reported 26,200 cases and 748 deaths — arrested more than a dozen protesters in Melbourne on Saturday for deliberately flouting the city's stay-at-home orders.

The Indian government has eased restrictions in a bid to revive the economy but faces the world's fastest growing number of cases at more than 80,000 a day and the highest daily death toll at more than 1,000.

The country's caseload has soared from three to four million in just 13 days, faster than the US and Brazil. The pandemic is now spreading through rural areas which have poor health facilities but is also resurging in big cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

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

a quarter of the new daily cases across the country of 1.3 billion.

ECONOMIC HAVOC

Worldwide, COVID-19 has killed more than 870,000 people and infected more than 26 million, as well as upending hundreds of millions of lives and wreaking havoc on the global economy.

Around the world, businesses and individuals are counting the cost of the pandemic, as flare-ups continue to force governments into imposing restrictions.

France registered its highest daily figure on Friday since last March, as Paris and other cities start requiring face masks in all public areas, including for children above 11 who returned to school this week.

Even in areas where curbs have eased, those who can work from home often prefer to keep doing so rather than return to the office.

In London's normally bustling centre, eateries once packed with customers are suffering.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government is trying to

encourage people to return to the office, but that is easier said than done. Oil giant BP has been actively encouraging non-frontline staff to work from home, with many of Barclays, HSBC and Lloyds banks staff also working remotely. However, some sectors have seen big gains.

Suppliers of personal protective equipment have seen orders rocket.

Malaysian rubber glove manufacturer Top Glove said Friday it is seeing orders for 11-12 billion a month, compared with 4.5 billion prior to the pandemic. And it does not appear that demand for such equipment is likely to vanish soon.

While the UN health agency welcomed the fact that a "considerable number" of vaccine candidates had entered final stage trials — which typically involve tens of thousands of people — it tempered expectations for a quick silver bullet.

WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said that "in terms of realistic timelines, we are really not expecting to see widespread vaccination until the middle of next year". — AFP

India, China agree to ease border tension

NEW DELHI: India and China said on Saturday they had agreed to work towards reducing tensions along their contested border, following a meeting of the defense ministers of the nuclear-armed Asian giants.

Both sides deployed additional forces along the frontier running through the western Himalayas after a clash in June.

In the highest level face-to-face political contact between India and China since tensions first flared along the border in May, defence ministers Rajnath Singh of India and General Wei Fenghe of China met late on Friday on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Moscow.

Both countries agreed that "neither side should take any further action that could either complicate the situation or escalate matters in the border areas", India's defense ministry said.

Wei said the two sides should promote peace and stability and work to cool current tensions, China's Ministry of Defence said in a news report about the meeting posted on its website.

He said, however, that blame for the recent tensions lay "entirely with India", adding that China was determined to safeguard its national sovereignty and territory.

China called on India to strengthen control of its frontline forces, refrain from provocative actions and "refrain from deliberately hyping and disseminating negative information". — Reuters

Suspected gas blast kills 17 in Bangladesh



Relatives of a suspected gas explosion victim mourn in a hospital in Dhaka on Saturday. — AFP

DHAKA: A suspected gas pipeline explosion at a mosque in Bangladesh killed 17 people and injured dozens as worshippers were about to end their prayers, officials said on Saturday. The blast, which fire service officials suspect was caused by a leak from a gas pipeline, occurred on Friday night at a mosque in Narayanganj district, just outside the capital Dhaka.

At least 37 people were rushed to Dhaka's specialist burn and plastic-surgery hospital, most of them with severe

burns, doctors said. Seventeen people, including a child, died after they sustained burn injuries, said Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of the burn unit. The death toll could rise further as many of them were in critical condition, he said.

"I saw smoke was belching out of the mosque after the sudden explosion with a big bang and people were screaming. Some were rolling on the street as they tried to put out the flames on their bodies", said local resident Mohammad Ratan. — Reuters

Violent typhoon heads for Japan packing 'record' winds, rain

KAGOSHIMA: An extremely powerful typhoon was barreling towards southwestern Japan on Saturday as authorities issued evacuation advisories to thousands of residents, warning of unprecedented violent winds, heavy rain and high waves. Haishen churned near Okinawa in southern Japan and was expected to approach Kyushu last night or early on Monday, the meteorological agency said.

The storm is expected to affect Japan from late on Saturday, with winds of up to 290 kilometres per hour, making it a "violent" storm — the top level on the country's classification scale.

"There is a danger of record winds, heavy rain, high waves and storm surge", Yoshihisa Nakamoto, an agency officer, told a news conference, calling for an early evacuation and "maximum caution". Yuhei Takamura, a government official, told the conference: "A disaster will occur. There is almost no doubt about it". About 4,600 people in Tarumizu, Kagoshima, were urged



Waves batter the coastline as typhoon Haishen approaches Makurazaki on Saturday. — AFP

to evacuate swiftly, while authorities in other areas of Kyushu were warning their residents to prepare.

Satoshi Sugimoto, another agency official, said the latest typhoon could generate high waves as powerful as a tsunami.

"It's going to be the last chance to flee" when the agency formally issues the nation's highest storm warning, Sugimoto told reporters.

Authorities on Minamidaitojima instructed about 1,300 residents to evacuate as the storm was

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

TRANSPORT SUSPENDED

Footage showed troops escorting dozens of people at a heliport in Kagoshima, southern Kyushu, after they evacuated from another remote island by a military helicopter. — AFP

PAKISTAN FLOOD SITUATION



Men ride a horse-drawn cart on a flooded street during heavy monsoon rains in Lahore. More than 100 Pakistanis died in August because of the monsoon, which has also destroyed more than 1,000 homes. — AFP



Extinction Rebellion demonstration in London. – Reuters

British newspapers hit by climate change activists

LONDON: The distribution of several British newspapers was disrupted on Saturday after Extinction Rebellion climate change activists blockaded printing presses used by Rupert Murdoch's News UK, the publisher of *The Times* and *The Sun*.

The group said nearly 80 people had blocked roads leading to two printworks, at Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, north east of London, and at Knowsley, near Liverpool.

Hertfordshire police said they had made 42 arrests, while Merseyside police said they had made 21.

The Murdoch-owned Newsprinters works also print the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times*.

Extinction Rebellion said it took the action to highlight what it regards as the newspapers' failure to accurately report on climate change.

The protests, which continued through to Saturday, were condemned by Interior Minister Priti Patel.

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

"This attack on our free press, society and democracy is completely

unacceptable."

A Newsprinters spokeswoman said the disruption meant printing had to be transferred to other sites.

"We apologise sincerely to any readers of *The Sun*, *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times* who may be unable to buy their usual newspaper this morning due to late deliveries," she said.

"This attack on all of the free press impacted many workers going about their jobs. Overnight print workers, delivery drivers, wholesale workers and retail newsagents have faced delays and financial penalty. This is a matter for the Police and the Home Office."

The blockade is part of a week of protests by Extinction Rebellion, including on Wednesday in Parliament Square where demonstrators lay under white sheets to represent corpses.

The group says an emergency response and mass move away from polluting industries and behaviours is needed to avert a looming climate cataclysm.

It said it plans further protests in central London on Saturday. — **Reuters**

North Carolina issues first ballots as voting season starts in US

VOTE-BY-MAIL: 56 per cent Republicans say they would go in person to vote

WASHINGTON: The US election is officially open: North Carolina on Friday launched vote-by-mail operations for the November 3 contest between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden, which is getting uglier by the hour.

With two months until Election Day, Trump is seizing on fears over violent protests in US cities and questioning the integrity of voting by mail, while challenger Biden intensified his criticism of a "deplorable" leader who he said is not fit for office.

Worries about the unabated spread of coronavirus are expected to prompt a surge in the number of ballots cast by mail, as millions seek to avoid polling stations.

In a country on edge over the health crisis and a national reckoning about race, the next 60 days will test the ability of the world's largest economy to organise its election while profoundly changed by a pandemic that has killed 187,000 Americans.

North Carolina was to begin mailing out more than 600,000 ballots, in response to a major spike in demand.

Other key battleground states such as Wisconsin — which both candidates visited in recent days — will follow in the coming weeks.

How Americans vote has become another flashpoint in an increasingly divisive political landscape.

SEEDS OF DOUBT

A recent poll by USA Today and Suffolk University showed that 56 per cent of Republican voters surveyed said they would go in person to vote, while only 26 per cent of Democrats plan to do the same.

One out of every four Biden voters said that if the Democratic former vice-president loses on November 3, they would not be ready to accept a



Election workers stuff absentee ballot applications at the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections office in Charlotte, North Carolina. – AFP

Trump victory as "fairly won." About one in five Trump voters said a similar thing.

As he seeks a second four-year term, Trump has for months sowed doubt among his base about the legitimacy of an election with a significant number of mail-in votes.

Trump — who himself votes by mail in his adopted home state of Florida — has repeatedly, and without evidence, said mail-in voting could lead to widespread fraud.

He even has suggested to his supporters that they try to vote twice to test the system — earning him scorn on social media and from Democrats.

'LOSERS'

The tense campaign battle heated on Thursday when *The Atlantic* magazine reported — citing four anonymous sources who said they had firsthand knowledge of the discussions — that

Trump had referred to US Marines buried in a World War I cemetery in France as "losers" and "suckers" for getting killed in action.

When visiting France in November 2018 for the centenary of the end of the Great War, Trump did not visit the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery near Paris — officially because bad weather grounded his helicopter.

The backlash was swift, and Trump sent a barrage of tweets to defend himself.

"*The Atlantic* magazine is dying, like most magazines, so they make up a fake story in order to gain some relevance," wrote the president, who went on to assail the report as "a disgrace" in a briefing to White House reporters.

Trump's allies launched a swift counteroffensive, flooding social media with images of the president

in company of US soldiers — but others were quick to dig up campaign comments from 2016 when he mocked late senator John McCain, a prisoner of war for years in Vietnam.

'SO UN-AMERICAN'

The report left Biden as angry as he has appeared on the campaign trail.

"I just think it is sick, it is deplorable, it is so un-American, it is so unpatriotic," Biden said of Trump's quoted remarks, which the Democrat said he believed were accurately reported.

"Who the heck does he think he is?" Biden turned personal in mentioning his son Beau, a US military veteran and former Delaware attorney general who died of cancer in 2015.

When Beau "went to Iraq for a year, and won the Bronze Star and other commendations, he wasn't a sucker," Biden said. — **AFP**

US university professor admits she posed as black woman



A professor at George Washington University in the US capital has sparked controversy after admitting she has lied about being black for years. – AFP

WASHINGTON: A US university has launched an investigation after a professor admitted she had lied for years about being black and is in fact white — a stunning admission amid a tense national reckoning on race issues including cultural appropriation.

In a post on the platform Medium, Jessica Krug — a history professor at George Washington University in the US capital focusing on Africa — said she had been pretending "for the better part" of her adult life.

"I have eschewed my lived experience as a white Jewish child in suburban Kansas City under various

assumed identities within a Blackness that I had no right to claim," she wrote.

Krug, who is light-skinned, said she first claimed "North African Blackness, then US rooted Blackness, then Caribbean rooted Bronx Blackness."

One of her former students told CNN that Krug voiced pride in her Bronx roots, but told another student she was from Puerto Rico.

Krug said on Medium that her actions were the "very epitome of violence, of thievery and appropriation, of the myriad ways in which non-Black people continue to use and abuse Black identities and cultures."

The professor called herself a cultural "leech."

The university said: "While the university reviews this situation, Dr Krug will not be teaching her classes this semester." It did not say what will happen now with her.

"We want to acknowledge the pain this situation has caused for many in our community," it added.

Krug's situation brought to mind the case of controversial US activist Rachel Dolezal, who made headlines in 2015 after saying she identified as black, even though both of her parents are white. — **AFP**

SERBIA AND KOSOVO AGREE TO NORMALISE ECONOMIC TIES

WASHINGTON: Former foes Kosovo and Serbia agreed on Friday to normalise economic relations in a US-brokered deal that the administration of President Donald Trump touted as a major diplomatic success — but which leaves political normalisation on hold.

The two sides signed a statement in the White House Oval Office committing to a raft of measures to improve transport infrastructure and border crossings, cut trade tariffs and share energy and water resources, and to implement earlier agreements on opening highway and rail links.

They also agreed, as part of their commitments, to improve their relations with Israel. Serbia will move its embassy from Tel

Aviv to Jerusalem while Kosovo will formally recognise the Jewish state.

In turn, Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia in 2008, gained formal recognition from Israel.

"A truly historic day," Trump said, with Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic sitting beside him in the Oval Office.

"By focusing on job creation and economic growth, the two countries were able to reach a real breakthrough on economic cooperation across a broad range of issues."

Trump praised his special emissary Richard Grenell for bringing the two sides together, two decades after they fought a war

that left 13,000 dead.

"It took decades because you didn't have anybody trying to get it done," Trump said of the agreement.

"There was a lot of fighting and now there's a lot of love," he said. "Economics can bring people together."

'BIG STEP'

Apparently because they do not formally recognise each other, the two sides appeared to sign parallel statements of intent rather than a formal bilateral agreement.

But a Trump administration official stressed it was a pact between the two sides.

"They have normalised their economic relations," said White House national Security Adviser Robert O'Brien. — **AFP**



COVID-19 frustrations fuel righteous indignation

Professor Guy Hall, Associate Professor and Academic Chair of Criminology at Murdoch University in Western Australia, writes that “Frustration Aggression Hypothesis (FAH) offers the best insight into the underlying process of understanding aggression, otherwise known as the attribution of hostile intent.”

He contends that “aggressive acts are dependent upon the interpretations, values, thoughts, and repertoires of the individual,” and are stimulated by similar collective actions, and the greater the magnitude of the slight, or offence taken, the greater the build-up in frustration, and if the response is unexpected, that can fuel their aggression, and that premise is easy enough for most of us to accept. However, in the pandemic situation for example, some people who are required to self-isolate, or face severe restrictions, and feel they

are being punished. Wearing a mask, social distancing, not associating with others, no schools, no coffee mornings, no sporting outlets for enthusiasm and aggression, are the absolute antithesis of humanity and sociology. So, you can expect people in these circumstances to become aggressive because they find the isolation and restrictions difficult.

Hall writes, “we can expect an upsurge in violence as the level of frustration increases.” We, being human, and feeling more and more vulnerable, then react more aggressively. How we interpret our societal world, then becomes pivotal to our attribution of hostile intent among others, and our own level of response, and we may react very much in an out-of-character manner, to threats of harm to ourselves, and our loved ones, damage to our property, and ironically, more deeply

to threats to our freedom, rights or liberty, or to unfairness, intolerance, inequality or disrespect, as these have already been ‘assaulted,’ by the isolation and restrictions.

Few of us have lived through any form of even a ‘bad flu virus,’ and especially here in the Sultanate where both Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome, Sars, became an issue in 2003, or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, Mers, in 2012, but neither with any excessive impact. There has been no plague of biblical proportions, certainly no European Black Plague that killed an estimated 200 million during the 14th century, and no ‘Spanish flu’ H1N1 that affected half a billion people from 1918 to 1920.

The Asian flu, H2N2, never really reached here from East Asia in 1957, H3N2 killed around a million globally during 1968, though mostly

in America, and half a million died during the 2011 H1N1 outbreak, again mainly in the states. So, most of us have never, genuinely, been forced into a punitive situation that has required governments to take what are sometimes drastic and draconian looking action, to save us from ourselves really. COVID-19 broke all the rules! The main issues that face researchers are clearly a lack of defined etymology for COVID-19, as unlike every other pandemic outbreak, where the origins have informed scientific and medicinal responses, the Wuhan based origins appear to be of the smoke and mirrors variety, the consequence of a national unwillingness to accept any blame or responsibility for the outbreak, to provide full and frank disclosures, in fact to obfuscate where possible.

The World Health Organization too, and its Director-General, Dr

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who ironically writes on the WHO website, “We need a WHO fit for the 21st century, efficiently managed... with a focus on transparency, accountability, and value for money,” must be put under pressure when the ‘blame game,’ starts.

We are indeed fortunate that in Oman, most of the residents are of modest temperament, generous disposition and good nature, however there is an overwhelming desire, at all costs, to be respected, and flashes of anger are sometimes apparent when people need to be reminded to wear masks, to wear masks properly, or to practice social distancing. Don’t be angry, indignant, or aggressive, they are only trying to stay safe themselves, and keep others safe too. And at the end of the day... they are right! Stay masked, stay distant, and stay safe!



RAY PETERSEN

petersen_ray@hotmail.com



Members of the Lebanese army and the French military walk at the damaged site of the port area in Beirut. – Reuters file photo

Agonising memories still haunt Lebanese!

WEEDAH HAMZAH

Beirut resident Nabil Houssami is still traumatised by the memory of the explosion that struck his city exactly a month ago. Within just a few seconds of the blast on August 4 at 6:07 pm, Houssami lost his apartment, his nearby fashion boutique, as well as his father’s shipping office in Beirut port.

“I will never forget that moment,” Houssami said. His flat is on the 24th floor of Beirut’s famous modern-design Skyline building, which has a direct view over the sea port where the explosion took place. It now looks like it was struck by a hurricane. The facade is damaged. Shards of glass are scattered across his living room floor. Doors and furniture are ripped apart.

Luckily, Houssami was not badly injured, even though he was on the balcony of his flat, filming what he then thought was simply a large fire at the port. He survived the massive explosion that devastated the Lebanese capital’s port and surrounding area, killing at least 190 people. Some are still missing, but not all hope has been lost of finding survivors. Rescuers are still looking for a possible survivor after detecting a sign of life on Thursday. The blast, caused by the detonation of nearly 2,700 tonnes of ammoniumnitrate stored at Beirut’s port, brought back dark memories of Lebanon’s 15-year civil war that ended in 1990.

“I am usually an optimistic person, but now I have regrets as I was living outside Lebanon and came believing I can build a future here,” said Houssami, 40. “Now I have a feeling of regret, doubt

One month after a massive blast reduced a large part of Beirut to ruins, residents are still trying to gather what remains of their homes, their businesses and their memories

and uncertainty,” he added, choking up as he spoke. “I am just heartbroken.”

The blast caused serious or minor damage to buildings across one third of the Lebanese capital and displaced some 300,000 people. One of them, Doris Tobagi lost her family home in the Mar Michael district, which is just a short distance from the port. “I lost all my beautiful memories and the home that my grandfather built in 1898. I have nothing left,” Tobagi said with tears welling up in her eyes.

The blast struck an exhausted nation, wracked by a deep financial crisis and worsening political instability. For Tobagi, the blast destroyed her final hope for Lebanon to rise to its feet again. “I lost faith in this country, only a miracle can revive it (the country),” the 60-year-old said. “I came today to collect what is left of my beautiful memories and put them in boxes,” said Tobagi, who is now living with relatives outside Beirut.

The powerful explosion transformed Beirut port into a desert of twisted steel and damaged cars. It also hit

residential areas known for their old and captivating architecture. Bars and restaurants in nearby streets hosted the bustling nightlife of Beirut, but this too has been obliterated. The explosion has deepened an already wide rift between the ruling class and Lebanese citizens who denounce rampant corruption and what they say is government incompetence. Residents of areas where the blast hit the hardest have so far refused to allow visits by any state officials, kicking them out if they come to inspect the damage. Civil society groups and charities are therefore leading efforts to clear the rubble and rebuild the ruined sites.

Maroun Karam, 29, is an activist and co-founder of the non-governmental organisation “Baytna Baytak,” or “Our home is your home” in Arabic. Karam and other volunteers have set up a makeshift centre at a bus station in Mar Mikhael district to help people rebuild their lives. “We have people here who distribute food daily to families that were hard hit by the explosion. We have doctors to meet their demands and also — and this the main part — engineers and architects to help repair their houses,” Karam said.

His group has mainly depended on public donations. He said they have so far repaired 200 houses out of the 1,000 which they have assessed. “Some 4,000 houses in areas directly around the port have been hit, 70 per cent of them suffered medium damage, such as losing glass windows, doors and shutters. We have 30 per cent which have major structural damage,” Karam explained. — dpa

Germany faces delays on reunification monument

ANDREW MCCATHIE

Germany had planned to unveil next month a new 17-million-euro (\$20-million) monument marking the nation’s reunification three decades ago. But a series of setbacks have delayed the launch of the Monument to Freedom and Unity, with construction now not expected to be finished possibly until the end of the year.

The German parliament agreed to the monument in 2007 with plans to begin the building work in 2013 on a site next to the rebuilt imperial Berlin Palace, which is also due to open later this year. The original plan was to unveil the monument in the German capital’s historic heart as part of celebrations next month marking the country’s 30th birthday. But the 50-metre-long interactive monument, which has been dubbed the unification seesaw because of its curved bowl-like shape, has been dogged by string of preservation orders, environmental and financing problems as well as the construction work under way on other nearby projects. This also resulted in scraping plans to unveil the monument during last year’s 30th anniversary of the breaching of the Berlin Wall. It is designed by the German architectural group Milla & Partner in collaboration with the Berlin choreographer Sasha Waltz. The monument will gently move as groups of people walk across its large seesaw-like platform.

“The memorial honours the courageous citizens who in 1989 made possible through a peaceful revolution the fall of the Wall and the reunification of Germany” the Milla group said setting out its plans for the monument.

More recently, the monument has faced new concerns. Once completed, the structure is to bear the inscription: “Wir sinddas Volk, Wir sind ein Volk” (We are the People, We are One People”) which was the rallying cry in 1989 of those in the nation’s former east seeking an end to the region’s communist state. But the slogan has also now been co-opted by far-right groups seeking to promote their agenda in Germany.

The Milla group’s plan emerged as the winner but only after the authorities were forced to mount two competitions for the design of the project after the jury set up for the first competition failed to reach a majority decision on any of the entries.

Four years ago, the federal parliament’s budget committee called for the project’s construction to be halted in part because of the increased costs resulting from the resettlement of a colony of bats living in the area where the monument was to be sited.

The delays in building the project also opened up a fresh debate about whether erecting the monument next to the city palace was the correct location and whether another site would be more appropriate such as near the nation’s parliament building, the Reichstag, 3.5 km away. However, the building work was finally launched in May this year after the project secured the renewed backing of the parliament. — dpa

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HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
24649451, 24604563, 24699437
Fax: 24699643

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
Fax: 23293909

NIZWA OFFICE

Tel: 25411099
P.O. Box 955, P.C. 611

ADVERTISING

AL OMANEYA ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 3303,
P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: SWITCHBOARD: 24649444
DIRECT: 24649430/24649437/24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT

Al OMANEYA for Distribution & Marketing, P.O. Box 974,
P.C. 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

Website: omanobserver.om

e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om

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Heat surge late to push Bucks to brink

MIAMI: Jimmy Butler powered the Miami Heat to a 115-100 victory over Milwaukee on Friday that pushed the top-seeded Bucks to the brink of elimination in the NBA play-offs.

Butler scored 17 of his 30 points in the Heat's scorching fourth quarter, Miami out-scoring the Bucks 40-13 in the final period to seize a 3-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semi-final series.

It was the most lopsided final period in a play-off game since the NBA introduced the shot clock in 1954.

Western Conference top seeds Los Angeles Lakers were also beaten in the NBA's coronavirus quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida, falling 112-97 to the Houston Rockets in game one of their conference semi-final series.

A near triple-double of 21 points, 16 rebounds and nine assists from the Bucks' reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo was simply not enough as the Heat remained unbeaten in the play-offs.

"I'm not surprised", Butler said of the fifth-seeded Heat's commanding position. They can close out the series on Sunday.

"I think everybody else in the world might be, but not us here. We've got so much fight, we never give up. We always give ourselves a chance to win".

The Bucks, who took the best record in the league into the post-season, must now try to do what no NBA team has done before in 139 prior attempts: Rally from an 0-3 deficit to win a best-of-seven play-off series.

Antetokounmpo said the Bucks could be the first if they take it not game-by-game but "play-by-play, possession, by possession.

"We've got to believe in ourselves", he said. "We can do it".

Bam Adebayo added 20 points and 16 rebounds for the Heat. Jae Crowder scored 17 points, Goran Dragic added 15 and Tyler Herro chipped in 13 off the bench.

The Bucks got a scare midway through the first period when Antetokounmpo rolled his right ankle on a drive.

Despite a few wincing he insisted it didn't trouble him, and Milwaukee looked like clawing back a victory when they led 57-50 at halftime and 87-75 going into the fourth quarter. Butler and Miami took control from there.

Adebayo's hook shot with 4:20 remaining — with an assist from Butler — put the Heat

up 100-99.

Two free throws and a driving shot by Butler stretched the lead and it was Butler, thwarted on a drive to the basket, who found Crowder for a three-point dagger that put Miami up 107-100 with 2:15 remaining.

"I think everybody knew, Jae was making that shot", said Butler, who was celebrating before the ball was through the net.

HARDEN FUELS ROCKETS

James Harden's 36 points fueled the Rockets, whose size disadvantage against the Lakers proved no handicap.

Russell Westbrook added 24 points, nine rebounds and six assists and Houston harried the Los Angeles team led by superstar LeBron James and Anthony Davis — who sat out the waning minutes with the game out of hand.

"Our defence, that's going to get us to where we want to go", Harden said. "This (Lakers) team is the best team in the West, if we can hold them under 100 points, defensively we've got something".

Harden bounced back from a poor shooting night in the Rockets' game-seven win over Oklahoma City on Wednesday.

The Lakers hadn't played since polishing off the Portland Trail Blazers six days earlier, but the Rockets made them look sluggish.

Houston forced 17 Lakers turnovers that led to 27 Rockets points never trailing after the first quarter and taking firm control with a 14-0 scoring run in the fourth quarter.

"Offensively, we've got to clean up the turnovers", said James, who finished with 20 points, eight rebounds and seven assists.

Davis led the Lakers with 25 points and 14 rebounds.

"I think it's the speed, they play with a lot of speed both offensively and defensively", James said of the challenge posed by the Rockets.

"You can watch it on film, but until you get out there (you don't) get a feel for it. And that's what we did tonight. We got a feel for their speed and we should be fully aware of that going into game two". — AFP

NBA Play-off results

(all series best-of-seven):
Semi-finals
Eastern Conference
Miami bt Milwaukee 115-100
(Miami lead 3-0)
Western Conference
Houston bt LA Lakers 112-97
(Houston lead 1-0)



Miami Heat's Jimmy Butler (22) dunks over Milwaukee Bucks' Donte DiVincenzo (0) at The Field House. – USA Today Sports

Rahm ties Johnson for Tour Championship lead

WASHINGTON: Spain's second-ranked Jon Rahm fired a five-under par 65 to match world number one Dustin Johnson for the lead after Friday's opening round of the US PGA Tour Championship.

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

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

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

Johnson, who shot 67, began on 10-under by virtue of his season points lead. Rahm was next on 8-under with third-ranked American Justin Thomas on 7-under and other rivals starting up to 10 strokes adrift in the staggered start system.

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

Thomas, the 2017 play-off champion, had three birdies in his first four holes on the way to a 66 to stand third on 11-under, two strokes ahead of world number four Rory McIlroy, who shot 64 to leap into contention.

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

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

"It's nice to have this little four or five



Spain's Jon Rahm in action. – USA Today Sports

hours to myself. I played really well, as good as I have in a long time and that was very encouraging".

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

"It was fun playing out there with Jon",

Johnson said. "Pretty solid."

Johnson sank a six-foot birdie putt at the second and dropped his approach inches from the cup at the par-5 sixth for a tap-in birdie to reach 12-under. But he made bogey at the eighth and par-3 ninth after missing the fairway and 10-foot par putts.

"Need to hit it a little straighter", Johnson said. "I didn't hit enough fairways... if you hit it in the fairways, there's not a hole you can't

get after".

Rahm made a 19-foot birdie putt at the second, took bogey at three, then dropped his approach inches from the cup to set up a birdie at six.

"It was hard the first four or five holes, not uncomfortable but just doubtful of the dynamics of everything", Rahm said. "After that I was a little bit more comfortable".

Johnson and Rahm each birdied the 12th,

13th and par-3 15th, the world's top-ranked players bringing out the best in each other.

After Rahm made a 29-foot birdie putt at 12, Johnson followed him from 27 feet. At 13, Rahm sank a 12-footer for birdie and Johnson topped him from 10 feet.

On the par-3 15th, Rahm sank a 23-foot birdie putt and Johnson made a 16-footer behind him.

Rahm, followed with a 16-foot birdie putt at 16 after Johnson missed from 25 feet, leaving them both at 13-under.

"I putted as well as I ever have on Bermuda greens in my life", Rahm said.

At the par-5 18th, Johnson blasted out of a greenside bunker to 4 1/2 feet but lipped out on his birdie putt while Rahm lipped out on his bunker bid for birdie and settled for a tap-in par.

RORY'S 'SANCTUARY'

Four-time major winner McIlroy, who celebrated Poppy's birth on Monday, went four days without touching a club.

"Golf was the furthest thing from my mind the first few days this week", said McIlroy. "That meant I could come here and somewhat focus on what I'm supposed to do".

Golf provided McIlroy an escape into his usual challenges.

"It's sort of a sanctuary", he said. "Great start. I played some nice golf".

McIlroy has not managed a top-10 finish since the US PGA Tour returned from a three-month COVID-19 shutdown in June, impending fatherhood and spectator-less events taking a toll.

"It was a perfect storm", he said. "I've seen signs my game is getting better. I was coming in with no expectations... I'm happy to start the way I have". — AFP

Coric ‘Houdini act’ floors Tsitsipas

DJOKOVIC SAILS TO LAST 16 ▲ OSAKA, KVITOVA AND KERBER ADVANCE

NEW YORK: Novak Djokovic sailed into the last 16 of the US Open on Friday as off-court intrigue forced the delay of a men’s singles match over issues linked to coronavirus.

Djokovic outclassed Germany’s Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 in a routine victory for the world number one, who is chasing an 18th Grand Slam singles title.

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

The intervention led to a back and forth between tournament organisers and the state government and resulted in the match, which Zverev won in four sets, starting over three hours late.

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

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

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

OSAKA STRUGGLES
Earlier, Japan’s Naomi Osaka battled into the last 16 of the women’s draw.

The two-time Grand Slam winner required three sets and 2hr 33 min to dislodge 18-year-old Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk in an early game at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The Japanese fourth seed, who threw her racquet in frustration after losing the second set on tie-break, prevailed 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2 against the world number 137.

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

Her experience came to the fore in the deciding set as she held her serve and broke Kostyuk twice to set up a match against 14th seed Anett Kontaveit of Estonia for a place in the quarterfinals.

Elsewhere, sixth seed Petra Kvitova breezed past American Jessica Pegula 6-4, 6-3 to set up a last-16 encounter with Shelby Rogers, also of the United States.

Eighth seed Petra Martic of



Borna Coric



Novak Djokovic

Croatia swept aside unseeded Russian Varvara Gracheva 6-3, 6-3.

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

Germany’s 17th seed Angelique

Kerber also progressed to the fourth round, making light work of American Ann Li 6-3, 6-4.

Kerber, the 2016 US Open champion, will go up against Jennifer Brady for a quarterfinal spot after the American 28th seed knocked out

France’s Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-3.

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

TSITSIPAS STUNNED
In the men’s draw, Croatia’s 27th



Petra Kvitova

seed Borna Coric staged a remarkable Houdini act to stun fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in a 4hr 36min late-night thriller.

Coric appeared to be heading for certain defeat after Tsitsipas, leading by two sets to one, opened up a 5-1

lead in the fourth.

But Coric rallied superbly, saving six match points and fighting back to take the set 7-5 to force a decider.

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

Twelfth seed Denis Shapovalov recovered from 5-2 down in the fourth set to pip American number 19 seed Taylor Fritz 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2

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

“I think we both deserved to win,” said Shapovalov. “It was great tennis and I think I just got a little bit lucky.”

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

Britain’s involvement in the singles ended on Friday with both Dan Evans and Cameron Norrie exiting.

France’s Corentin Moutet knocked out Evans 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) 7-6 (7/1) as they resumed their second round match that was postponed Thursday because of rain. — AFP

US Open results

Men (third round)

Novak Djokovic (SRB x28) bt Jan-Lennard Struff (GER x28) 6-3, 6-3, 6-1; Denis Shapovalov (CAN x12) bt Taylor Fritz (USA x19) 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Pablo Carreno-Busta (ESP x20) bt Ricardas Berankis (LTU) 6-4, 6-3, 6-2; David Goffin (BEL x7) bt Filip Krajinovic (SRB x26) 6-1, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Jordan Thompson (AUS) bt Mikhail Kukushkin (KAZ) 7-5, 6-4, 6-1; Alejandro Davidovich (ESP) bt Cameron Norrie (GBR) 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-2, 6-1; Alexander Zverev (GER x5) bt Adrian Mannarino (FRA x32) 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-2, 6-2; Borna Coric (CRO x27) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x4) 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/4); Corentin Moutet (FRA) bt Daniel Evans (GBR x23) 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/1)

Women (third round)

Jennifer Brady (USA x28) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA) 6-3, 6-3; Angelique Kerber (GER x17) bt Ann Li (USA) 6-3, 6-4; Yulia Putintseva (KAZ x23) bt Aliaksandra Sasnovich (BLR) 3-6, 6-2, 6-1; Petra Martic (CRO x8) bt Varvara Gracheva (RUS) 6-3, 6-3; Naomi Osaka (JPN x4) bt Marta Kostyuk (UKR) 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2; Anett Kontaveit (EST x14) bt Magda Linette (POL x24) 6-3, 6-2; Shelby Rogers (USA) bt Madison Brengle (USA) 6-2, 6-4; Petra Kvitova (CZE x6) bt Jessica Pegula (USA) 6-4, 6-3

Second round: Iga Swiatek (POL) bt Sachia Vickery (USA) 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4; Elise Mertens (BEL x16) bt Sara Sorribes (ESP) 6-3, 7-5; Caty McNally (USA) bt Ekaterina Alexandrova (RUS x21) 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2)

Hamilton on pole with record lap in Monza



Ferrari’s Sebastian Vettel stands at the Parabolica curve as Mercedes’ Lewis Hamilton drives past during the qualifying session in Monza. — AFP

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

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

The session proved another humbling experience for out-of-sorts Ferrari with Sebastian Vettel going out in Q1 and Charles Leclerc, who won at the circuit last year, in Q2.

This means no Ferrari inside the top 10 at Monza for the first time since 1984.

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

It was Hamilton’s record-increasing 94th career pole position, his sixth in seven races and his seventh in Italy.



Mercedes’ Lewis Hamilton competes during the qualifying session at the Autodromo Nazionale circuit in Monza. — AFP

“It wasn’t too bad,” said Hamilton, with a hint of a smile.

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

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

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

in the second Red Bull and Pierre Gasly of Alpha Tauri.

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

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

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

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



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sport

RED WARRIORS TO START TRAINING ON SEPT 20

FULL PRECAUTION TO BE TAKEN
AHEAD OF CAMP: BRANKO



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The Oman national football team will return to field training on September 20 after a six-month break due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, according to head coach Branko Ivankovic.

In exclusive remarks to *Oman Daily Observer*, the Croatian coach said all precautionary measures will be taken ahead of the first camp.

"The players will resume training with a camp in Muscat starting on September 20. All the players will be tested for COVID-19 on September 20 and next three days all the players will be in isolated quarantine. After completion from the test results, the players with negative cases can only resume the individual training on September 23 as per the approved medical protocol," the 'Red Warriors' coach said.

The national team will regroup after the last gathering in February before the sporting activities were

stopped in the Sultanate due to the coronavirus outbreak.

FOCUS ON FITNESS

The 65-year-old mentioned that the previous proposal for training was supposed to begin on September 1 but was postponed. "The restarting of the warm-up sessions will be in very careful mode as all the players were away from the ground training since very long period. This is as well a precautionary step to avoid the players from the injuries that could happen from this long break. Our technical plan depends on a gradual system with the physical shaping sessions until reaching to the required levels of the fitness," he added.

On August 17, the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19 allowed some of the sports venues for specific teams to resume their trainings as they have some external participations including Oman national football team and Dhofar club.



Branko Ivankovic

"A dedicated thanks to the Supreme Committee and the Oman Football Association for their efforts on allowing the national team players to resume field training. The only domestic club under training currently is Dhofar and we hope the Supreme Committee will announce soon on allowing the resumption of other local footballing competitions

which will support all the players to begin their gradual comeback to the actual training," Branko pointed out.

"I realise that the performance of the team players in this camp will not be same before the pandemic. However, the gradual comeback to the training field will enable the team members to register the normal technical performance after some

period. As I mentioned, we have to be very careful at this stage specially we may expect some injuries due to the long break," the former coach of Iran added.

Commenting on the top areas he will focus during the first preparatory camp, the coach responded that this local camp will be the first camp after long break and it should be done according to the medical protocol.

"The first week will focus on the individual training sessions while in the second week, we will begin small group training sessions. Few weeks later, I believe we will be in a better position to have larger groups of technical and tactical trainings sessions. With this technical plan, we can reach to the better technical positions and then move to the competing levels," he said.

'BETTER TO PLAY WC QUALIFIERS THIS YEAR'

The Croatian coach was not happy with the Fifa and AFC decision on moving the qualification of Fifa

World Cup and AFC Asian Cup to 2021. "I preferred if we could play in this year rather than moving to the year later. This postponement could impact negatively on the players due to the lengthy period of the qualification. Anyhow, we will try to utilise the Fifa days and to arrange different international friendly matches which will enter the players to the status of the international competitions. Moreover, there is a plan for better preparation with comprehensive training camps and training sessions," he explained.

The national team head coach had arrived to the Sultanate in mid of August and then was isolated in home quarantine for 14 days according to the Sultanate procedures. Then, the coach held discussions with the OFA officials on the resumption programme. The Oman head coach is expected to announce the list of probables for the upcoming preparatory camp in the coming days.



HOW CYBER ATTACKERS ‘CASH OUT’ FOLLOWING HEISTS P14



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Goldman Sachs joins syndicate for Ant IPO of up to \$30 billion

HONG KONG: Goldman Sachs has joined the growing list of investment banks working on Chinese financial technology firm Ant Group’s mammoth initial public offering of up to \$30 billion, two people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Ant, backed by Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, plans to list simultaneously in Hong Kong and Shanghai, in what sources have said could be the world’s largest IPO and come as soon as October. Wall Street major Goldman Sachs has been hired as a joint lead manager on the Hong Kong leg of the IPO, said the people, who declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to the media on this subject.

A spokesman for Goldman Sachs, which also acted as a joint lead manager on Alibaba’s \$12.9 billion secondary listing in Hong Kong last year, declined to comment.

The IPO of Ant, already the world’s most valuable unicorn, would be the first simultaneous listing in Hong Kong and Shanghai’s year-old STAR Market.

The Hong Kong leg of the IPO is being sponsored by China International Capital Corp (CICC), Citigroup, JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley. Credit Suisse is working as a joint global co-ordinator.

The top-ranked banks in a Hong Kong IPO are known as sponsors and carry legal liability for the accuracy of the prospectus. Under them are joint global coordinators, and on the bottom rung are joint lead managers.

Ant’s STAR Market listing is being led by CICC and China Securities Co.

China’s largest brokerage, CITIC Securities is set to get a joint underwriter’s role on the mainland tranche, four people with knowledge of the matter said. Ant’s mega IPO size means a large syndicate of investment banks, especially those with strong retail investor networks, is expected to work on the deal as it progresses towards a possible launch in October. — Reuters

Oman ranked 84th in Global Innovation Index 2020

KEY FINDING: The Sultanate performs best in Human Capital & Research and its weakest performance is in Knowledge & Technology outputs.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The Sultanate has been placed 84th among a total of 131 economies ranked in the latest edition of the Global Innovation Index (GII) — the world’s foremost indicator of the importance accorded by nations to innovation as a driver of economic development.

GII 2020, issued over the weekend, is co-published by Cornell University, INSEAD — one of the world’s largest graduate business schools, and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), a specialised agency of the United Nations.

Currently in its 13th edition, the Index has established itself as both a leading reference on innovation and a ‘tool for action’ for world economies that incorporate the GII into their innovation agendas.

Notably, Oman has registered a year-on-year slide in its ranking over the past three years, down from 69 in 2018 to 80 in 2019, according to the report.

The rankings capture each country’s innovation capabilities based on roughly 80 different indicators grouped into innovation inputs and outputs.

Among the 19 economies of North Africa and West Asia covered in the report, the Sultanate garners the 15th position.

“Oman performs better in innovation inputs than innovation outputs in 2020”, the latest Index notes. “This year Oman ranks 68th in innovation inputs, lower than last year and lower compared to 2018. As for innovation outputs, Oman ranks 109th. This position is lower than last year and lower compared to 2018”, it states.

Importantly, the report finds Oman strongly positioned —

GLOBAL INNOVATION INDEX 2020
Who Will Finance Innovation?



The rankings capture each country’s innovation capabilities based on roughly 80 different indicators grouped into innovation inputs and outputs. Among the 19 economies of North Africa and West Asia covered in the report, the Sultanate garners the 15th position

relative to other economies — with regard to five of the seven key pillars used to evaluate the innovation performance of the 131 countries.

These ‘strengths’ (with their corresponding scores) are identified as: (i) Institutions (70): exhibits strengths in the indicator Ease of starting a business (30); (ii) Human capital & research (43): shows strengths in the sub-pillars Education (24) and Tertiary education (12) and in the indicators Government funding/pupil (6), Pupil-teacher ratio (36) and Graduates in science & engineering (1); (iii) Infrastructure (56): demonstrates strengths in the sub-pillar General infrastructure (29) and in the indicators ICT access (37), Electricity output (23) and Gross capital formation (21); (iv) Business sophistication (95): reveals strengths in the indicators University/industry research collaboration (38), State of cluster development (27) and FDI net inflows (24); and (v) Creative outputs (94): displays strengths in the indicator Trademarks by origin (38).

Relative to GDP, Oman’s performance is below expectations for its level of development, according to the GII 2020 findings. The country also produces less innovation outputs relative to its level of innovation investments, it notes.

On the issue of ‘Credit’, Oman secures a distant 118th ranking in the 2020 Index, up from 67th a year earlier.

However, with the Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a) now fully in operation under the auspices of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), this ranking is poised to only improve going forward.

Omani SWF supports innovation

MUSCAT: A selection of featured articles on the theme, ‘Who Will Finance Innovation’, includes an insightful piece on the role of Oman’s sovereign wealth fund (SWF) in fostering local economic development through investments in technology start-ups, capacity building to enhance domestic economic competitiveness, R&D and knowledge transfer.

The article, co-authored by Hamid Hamirami — Senior Economist at Oman’s Ministry of Finance, cites the contribution of Oman Investment Fund (OIF) — which was recently incorporated into the newly integrated Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — in this regard. Titled ‘Sovereign Wealth Funds and Innovation



Investing in an Era of Mounting Uncertainty’, the article illustrates the example of Omani SWF’s investment in Oxford Sciences Innovation (OSI), an innovative venture capital structure that incentivises research commercialisation on a campus.

OSI raised \$700 million in its initial fundraising by bringing together SWFs Oman Investment Fund (now part of Oman Investment Authority) and Temasek of Singapore, along with value added tech investors Google Ventures and Sequoia Capital.

Japan’s Suga signals ultra-easy monetary policy to continue

TOKYO: Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, a frontrunner to be the next prime minister, said he would like the central bank to continue its ultra-loose monetary policy as the economy is still struggling with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

In an interview that ran on Saturday in the Nikkei newspaper, Suga also said he would consider compiling another economic stimulus package by the end of this year to “put the pandemic to an end and shift the economy to a new stage”.

“I highly approve of his handling of monetary policy”, Suga said of BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda, who undertook bold easing steps that were part of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s “Abenomics” stimulus strategy.



Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga attends a news conference in Tokyo, in this file photo. — Reuters

“I want to carry over (the bold easing steps)”, he was quoted as saying by the paper.

The remarks reinforce expectations that Suga will continue with many of Abe’s pro-growth

What people want most from the government is to deal with the pandemic and create a safe environment to live

YOSHIHIDE SUGA, CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY

economic policies as the pandemic adds to the pain of an economy already in deep recession.

Suga told Nikkei he would take steps to revitalise smaller firms by promoting consolidation and boosting competitiveness.

He also expressed hope of creating a new government agency to promote digitalisation of government services and various industries such as healthcare, as delays on this front have slowed payouts to companies and households hit by COVID-19.

“I know there could be resistance, but we should move forward on this”, Suga said of his plan to allow clinics to permanently offer medical treatment online.

Japan currently allows online treatment only as a temporary step to accommodate patients having

difficulty visiting hospitals due to COVID-19.

Suga is widely expected to win the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) leadership election on September 14, set after Abe’s decision to step down. The winner is virtually assured of becoming premier due to the LDP’s parliamentary majority.

Markets have been rife with speculation that Suga, upon becoming prime minister, may call a snap election in coming months to solidify his political grip.

“What people want most from the government is to deal with the pandemic and create a safe environment to live”, Suga told a television programme, when asked whether he would call an early snap election if he becomes Japan’s new leader. — Reuters



How cyber attackers ‘cash out’ following large-scale heists

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

A new report published last week that describes the complex web of money mules, front companies and cryptocurrencies that criminals use to siphon funds from the financial system after a cyber attack.

The report, jointly issued by SWIFT, the world's leading provider of secure financial messaging services, and BAE Systems Applied Intelligence, highlights the ingenuity of money laundering tactics to obtain liquid financial assets and avoid any subsequent tracing of the funds.

For instance, cyber criminals often recruit unsuspecting job-seekers to serve as money mules that extract funds by placing legitimate sounding job advertisements, complete with references to the organisation's diversity and inclusion commitments.

They use insiders at financial institutions to evade or undermine the scrutiny of compliance teams carrying out know-your-customer (KYC) and due diligence checks on new account openings. And they convert stolen funds into assets such as property and jewellery which are likely to hold their value and less likely to attract the attention of law enforcement.

SWIFT commissioned BAE Systems to investigate this element of the money laundering process as part of its Customer Security Programme (CSP). The CSP continually helps the financial community to strengthen its cyber defences through a range



of measures including mandatory controls, intelligence sharing and thought leadership.

Although there has been much research into the methods that cyber criminals use to conduct attacks, there has been less investigation into what happens to funds once they have been stolen.

The aim of this report is to illuminate the techniques used by cyber criminals to ‘cash out’ so that SWIFT's global community of over 11,000 financial institutions, market infrastructures and corporates can better protect themselves.

Brett Lancaster, Head of the Customer Security Programme at SWIFT, said: “The threat posed by

Money laundering:
The activity from cyber criminals and gangs across the world is estimated to result in over \$1.5 trillion in annual losses

cyber attacks to the financial sector has never been greater. Attackers are well-resourced, constantly evolving their modus operandi and using untraceable money laundering techniques.

“The report highlights how the growth in cyber attacks is increasing

the need for the convergence of anti-money laundering, fraud and cyber security processes in financial institutions. It calls for them to increase information sharing, tighten due diligence requirements and smartly invest in maintaining systems to strengthen their defences.”

Simon Viney, Cyber Security Financial Services Sector Lead at BAE Systems Applied Intelligence, said: “The activity from cyber criminals and gangs across the world is estimated to result in over \$1.5 trillion in annual losses. This report focuses on money laundering-related activities necessary for cyber attackers to conduct and ‘cash out’

a successful attack and avoid the money subsequently being traced. As technology and criminals’ techniques evolve at a rapid pace, so will the need for institutions, both private sector and law enforcement, to collaborate and maintain awareness of evolving money laundering techniques, in order to reduce the opportunities for threat groups to benefit from committing high-value cyber heists.”

Among the other findings in the report:

Front companies: Cyber criminals tend to focus on textile, garment, fishery and seafood businesses to obfuscate funds. They find it easier to operate in parts of East Asia where less stringent regulations make it easier to conduct their activities.

Cryptocurrencies: While the number of identified cases of money laundering through cryptocurrencies is low so far, there have been a couple of major incidents involving millions of dollars. Digital transactions are appealing because they are conducted in a peer-to-peer manner that circumvents the compliance and KYC checks conducted by banks, and often require only an e-mail address.

Experience: The method chosen by cyber criminals to cash out and spend the stolen funds is indicative of their levels of professionalism and experience. Some inexperienced criminals have immediately made extravagant purchases drawing the attention of law enforcement agencies and leading to arrests.

Sohar Islamic new website goes live

MUSCAT: With a key focus on digitalisation, Sohar Islamic, Sohar International's Islamic Window, announced its new corporate website which reflects innovation and agility to improve customer experience. Highlighting the Bank's value-added ecosystem of products and services, the carefully crafted and developed website offers a dynamic look and feel in line with the Bank's brand identity and is accessible on www.soharislamic.com.

Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer of Sohar International, said: “Highlighting the digitalisation strategy, the new Sohar Islamic website reflects the Bank's brand identity stemming from its customer-centric vision.

“The website provides more value through engaging content, more velocity through quick and easy access to information, and more vision by demonstrating how the Bank facilitates a winning journey for all stakeholders. The feature-rich website serves as a gateway to all other activities of the Bank that contribute towards helping people to benefit from a diverse range of responsive banking solutions for their dynamic world.”

Highlighting the Bank's digital capabilities, the new website features an enhanced user-friendly and mobile-responsive design providing a consistent superior customer experience optimised across all browsers and smart devices. Incorporating the international best practices to bring the best of the world to customers, the website provides more ease and convenience for visitors.

Oman lab launches COVID-19 screening for UAE-bound visitors

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

Apex Laboratory, the leading stand-alone diagnostic centre, has been selected by Pure Health, the largest laboratory network in the UAE, to test airline passengers flying into the United Arab Emirates, in accordance with the UAE's requirement for travellers to prove they are not infected with COVID-19. Pure Health has been appointed by the UAE's government to launch this pioneering project to promote safe travel.

“We are delighted to support Pure Health in their efforts to control the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitate safe travels for passengers flying into the UAE,” said Deepti Ruparel, Apex Laboratory, Business Development Manager. “As one of the largest stand-alone diagnostic centre facilities in Oman, we are ideally placed to successfully deliver this ambitious initiative, and we are grateful for the trust placed in us.”

Apex Laboratory has tied up with Badr Al Samaa Hospitals for sample collection from all their facilities across Oman. Currently, There 10 collection centres across Oman. The programme is already up and running in Ruwi, Al Khuwair, Al Khoudh, Barka, Suhar, Falaj Al Qabil, Suwaiq, Nizwa, Sur and Salalah.

The UAE issued regulations that require all travellers flying into the UAE to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test. Travellers without such a certificate are refused entry into the flight. The system is similar to the ESTA process in the United States. The traveller visits screening. purehealth.ae, chooses a testing location, selects a time slot and completes the test at the agreed time and place. Test results are then transmitted to the UAE authorities, who use the data to cross-check arriving travellers against the border control database.



MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

MSM ends week higher supported by financial sector

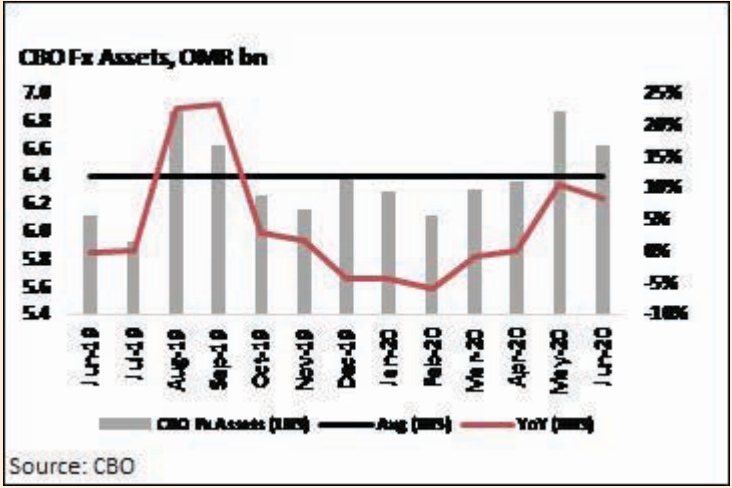
Last week, the MSM30 Index continued on its positive trajectory from the last two weeks, and ended the week up by 0.23 per cent. Within the sub-indices, only the Financial Index was up by 0.25 per cent.

The remaining indices ended lower w-o-w, with the Industrial index and Services Index falling by 0.24 per cent and 0.16 per cent, respectively.

Traded value during the week was lower on w-o-w basis by about 30 per cent as the previous week saw a special deal.

During the week, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik stressed streamlining procedures of government services for investors and customers through the prompt finalisation of their transactions in the shortest possible time, particularly electronic services.

Speaking about the merging of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Public Authority for Investment Promotion (Ithraa) and the Centre for Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention under Royal Decree No 97/2020, the Minister said that the merger will expedite investment-related transactions and cut down the duplication of licence providers.



This, he affirmed, will establish an investment-friendly climate in the Sultanate at a time all world countries are competing to attract investments.

The MSM market witnessed the highest foreign inflow in the previous week (23-27 August) at \$8.4 million since the beginning of the year 2020, bringing the total foreign investment in the market to -\$77.45 million (RO -29.43 million).

For conventional banks, CBO data reveals that the weighted average Oman Rial interest rate spread (calculated as lending rate minus deposit rate) contracted by 4.3bps on year-on-year basis (YoY), at 3.430 per cent during the month of June 2020, as the deposit rate grew and lending rate contracted. On a month-on-month (MoM) basis, the spread deteriorated by 2.5bps as deposit rate expanded by 1.7bps and lending rate declined

by 0.8bps.

It must be noted that the weighted average deposit rate on RO deposits at 1.951 per cent is still below the peak of 2.089 per cent (since March 2010).

Weighted average FCY spread softened by 10.4bps on month-on-month (MoM) basis.

The FCY spread is lower by 111.2bps when compared to that recorded in June 2019.

Weighted average interest rate on private sector RO time deposits expanded by 3.7bps MoM and 27.7bps YoY, creeping up to 4.064 per cent. Weighted average interest rate on ALL private sector deposits (RO) was 1.425 per cent (+1.4bps MoM and +0.1bps YoY).

CBO's foreign assets stood at RO 6.66 billion as at the end of June, having increased by 8.3 per cent YoY but decreased by 3.4 per cent MoM or RO 235 million during the month. The MoM

decrease is brought on by a 6.2-per cent MoM drop in placements abroad (which account for half of the total foreign assets), a 0.6-per cent MoM decrease in securities held (49 per cent of total).

There is a marginal (0.3 per cent MoM) increase recorded in RO reserve assets but bullion is flat. CBO's foreign assets are above the trailing 12-month simple average of RO 6.40 billion. These assets include bullion, International Monetary Fund reserve assets, placements abroad and foreign securities.

This week marked the launch of Saudi Arabia's first derivatives market product. The first exchange-traded derivatives product is MT30 Index Futures, an index futures contract based on the MSCI Tadawul 30 Index (MT30). This new market offering provides regional and international investors the necessary hedging tools to manage risk, and to expand exposure opportunities to one of the largest and most liquid markets in the world, the Saudi market.

As the market infrastructure develops, Tadawul plans to roll out more derivatives products such as Single Stock Futures, Single Stock Options and Index Options. The launch of the derivatives market in Saudi Arabia is one of the Financial Sector Development Programme's (FSDP) key initiatives under the Saudi Vision 2030.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

US employment growth loses speed as fiscal stimulus ebbs



A man carrying a stack of job listings listens to a discussion at the One Stop employment centre in San Francisco, California, in this file photo. — Reuters

NONFARM PAYROLLS INCREASED BY 1.371 MILLION JOBS LAST MONTH AFTER ADVANCING 1.734 MILLION IN JULY. GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT ROSE 344,000, WITH 238,000 TEMPORARY WORKERS HIRED FOR THE DECENNIAL CENSUS.

WASHINGTON: US employment growth slowed further in August and permanent job losses increased

as money from the government started running out, raising doubts on the sustainability of the economy's recovery from the deep COVID-19 recession.

Nearly a fifth of the job gains reported by the Labour Department on Friday were from the government's temporary hiring for the 2020 Census. While the unemployment rate fell below 10 per cent, it was biased down by a continuing misclassification problem.

The slowdown pressures the White House and Congress to restart stalled negotiations for another fiscal package and is likely to become political ammunition for both Democrats and Republicans with just two months to go until the presidential election.

"The labour market has entered

a frustratingly slower second phase of the recovery," said Lydia Boussour, a senior US economist at Oxford Economics in New York. "With one in two laid-off workers still unemployed and Congress unable to pass urgently needed fiscal aid, slower and more volatile job growth represents a significant risk for the economy."

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 1.371 million jobs last month after advancing 1.734 million in July. Government employment rose 344,000, with 238,000 temporary workers hired for the decennial census.

Excluding government, payrolls rose 1.027 million. Private sector employment gains were led by the retail sector, with 249,000 jobs created. Though professional and

business services added 197,000 jobs, more than half of the gain was in temporary help services, reflecting the uncertain economic environment.

Employment in leisure and hospitality increased by 174,000 jobs, but hiring has stepped down from June and July when 2.0 million and 621,000 jobs were added respectively. Manufacturing employment rose 29,000 and construction added 16,000 jobs.

Programmes to help businesses pay wages have either lapsed or are on the verge of ending. Economists credited government largesse for the sharp rebound in economic activity after it nearly ground to a halt following the shuttering of businesses in mid-March to control the spread of the coronavirus. — Reuters

LANDMARK SHIFT

Fed policymakers signal comfort with higher inflation

WASHINGTON: In the week since the Federal Reserve made a landmark shift in its approach to monetary policy, details are emerging on what it could look like in practice, with two Fed policymakers on Thursday saying they'd be comfortable with leaving interest rates near zero even if inflation rises to levels not seen on a sustained basis in some 30 years.

Remarks from a number of Fed policymakers in recent days suggest that a shift to a more accommodative stance in pursuit of higher inflation isn't imminent and that most feel the next move to support the economy needs to come from Congress.

"Partisan politics threatens to endanger additional fiscal relief," the president of the Chicago Fed, Charles Evans, told the Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce in Hammond, Indiana, in one of the sharpest rebukes yet from a Fed policymaker to lawmakers who have been at loggerheads for months over the size of a new relief package. "A lack of action or an inadequate one presents a very significant downside risk to the economy today," Evans said.

But once the coronavirus is under better control and unemployment has come down somewhat, he said, the Fed may need to shift its accommodative policies into higher gear.

That push, he said on Thursday, could take the form of promising to keep interest rates pinned near zero until inflation reaches 2.5 per cent, well above current low levels and modestly above the US central bank's inflation target of 2 per cent.

"I'd be comfortable with inflation going up to 2.5 per cent as long as we were trying to average off very low inflation rates," Evans told reporters on a call.

The US central bank announced last week that it was revising its approach for setting monetary policy to focus more on addressing shortfalls in employment and less on inflation. — Reuters



Chicago Federal Reserve Bank President Charles Evans speaks in Mexico City, Mexico, in this file photo. — Reuters

China's exports seen keeping solid momentum; imports flat

BEIJING: China's exports likely posted a second month of solid gains in August as more of its trading partners relaxed coronavirus lockdowns and reopened their economies, while imports edged back into growth, a Reuters poll showed on Friday.

China's export performance, boosted by record shipments of medical supplies and robust demand for electronic products, has not been as severely affected by the global slowdown as some analysts had feared, adding to hopes for a sustained economic recovery.

Exports in August are expected to have risen 7.1 per cent from a year earlier, according to a median estimate of a Reuters poll of 23 economists, compared with a rise of 7.2 per cent in July.

Imports likely rose 0.1 per cent on year, the poll showed, still sluggish but improving after falling 1.4 per cent the previous month.

A private survey on manufacturing activity showed Chinese factories reported the first increase in new export orders this year in August as overseas demand slowly revives. The pick-up in business also led to a further expansion in production, marking the sharpest gain in almost a decade.

Stronger exports could signal a faster and more balanced recovery for the Chinese economy, which is rebounding from a record first-quarter slump thanks largely to domestic stimulus measures.

July exports confounded analysts' expectations by rising the most this year, while some raw material imports hit record highs.

"Exports are back in play to be the key driver for Asia's biggest economy," Prakash Sakpal, an



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

economist at ING, said in a note this week.

However, external demand could suffer if virus control measures have to be re-imposed by trade partners later this year on a resurgence of the epidemic.

China also is looking to reduce its reliance on overseas markets for its development as US hostility and the pandemic increase external risks that could hamper longer-term progress.

Already heightened US-China

Stronger exports could signal a faster and more balanced recovery for the Chinese economy, which is rebounding from a record first-quarter slump thanks largely to domestic stimulus measures.

tensions are expected to escalate ahead of the US presidential election. China remains well behind on its pledge to boost purchases of US goods under an agreement that

was launched in February.

Top US and Chinese trade officials reaffirmed their commitment to a Phase 1 trade deal in a phone call last week. "Both sides see progress

and are committed to taking the steps necessary to ensure the success of the agreement," the US Trade Representative's office said.

The US Trade Representative's Office said on Tuesday it had extended tariff exclusions for a wide range of Chinese goods such as smartwatches and some medical masks but only through the end of 2020, a move that may create some leverage for Washington in trade negotiations but increases uncertainty for businesses. — Reuters

Philippines to begin trading in gold to keep 10 per cent of reserves

MANILA: The Philippine central bank will shift from passively holding gold to actively trading the precious metal with the aim of keeping it at around 10 per cent of total international reserves, its governor said on Saturday.

The Philippine's reserves totalled \$98.6 billion as of the end of July, with gold accounting for 13 per cent, thanks to an increase in international bullion prices, and giving the central bank an opportunity to sell some of its gold.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Benjamin Diokno said the monetary authority plans to maintain an "optimal" ratio of gold to total international reserves, which studies say should be at 10 per cent.

"The Monetary Board decided to shift from passive to

active trading largely because of the change in the price dynamics of gold," Diokno told reporters in a phone message. He said the central bank was not trading gold earlier.

Gold broke above \$2,000 per ounce in August, making the precious metal one of 2020's best performing mainstream assets.

Diokno was elaborating on remarks he made on Friday, when he revealed the central bank was considering selling gold to bring down the ratio to 10 per cent, and keep it there.

The bank "will always be opportunistic in its reserves management," Diokno said. — Reuters

Ryanair CEO bonus challenged as crisis sparks pay scrutiny

PARIS: Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary's proposed 458,000 euro (\$540,600) annual bonus came under fire on Friday, as an influential investor advisory firm urged shareholders to oppose the package in a non-binding vote later this month.

Proxy adviser Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) said the pay award for the financial year ended in March "raises concerns" and was hard to justify amid the unprecedented aviation crisis sparked by COVID-19.

The pandemic is increasing pay

scrutiny at companies that have taken government aid or slashed jobs. Criticism of O'Leary's package follows an ISS recommendation against British Airways owner IAG's £883,000 (\$1.17 million) send-off for retiring CEO Willie Walsh.

While both votes are non-binding, any rejection of pay plans by IAG investors on September 8 or Ryanair's September 17 meeting would be highly embarrassing for either of the companies, which have both used Britain's COVID Corporate Financing Facility. — Reuters



CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

Upcoming trends for online shopping

STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

As I keep receiving requests from my dear Omani readers to talk more about e-commerce, I came across a really interesting report recently published by Google that describes consumer behaviours in Southeast Asia in 2019 and 2020.

Gathering those diverse data, I am attempting to take a snapshot projection of the upcoming global trends.

We all know too well that the GCC consumers love shopping in malls, especially when the freezing air-conditioner provides a relief from the scorching hot outdoor temperatures.

However, over the past couple of years, the populations of countries such as Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates have been relying more and more frequently on

USERS RELY ON OTHER CONSUMERS SHARING OPINIONS ABOUT THEIR SHOPPING EXPERIENCE, AND ‘SAVE’ A TRIP TO THE MALL. IN OTHER WORDS THEY ‘VIRTUALLY’ GO TO THE MALL THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHER CONSUMERS

online shopping.

In order to boost such behaviour it is essential to understand the reasons why we usually prefer to shop in person. One of the top ranking factors is the ability to test the product whilst at the store, something that is virtually impossible for shopping online.

Some may think that an option could be to order online first, then return the item if dissatisfied, but such process delays gratification (delivery time) and risks to incur with additional trouble shall the product

fail to match our expectations (return time). However, Google reports a 12x surge in “shop with me” videos being posted on Youtube.

In essence, users rely on other consumers sharing opinions about their shopping experience, and “save” a trip to the mall. In other words they “virtually” go to the mall through the eyes of other consumers.

According to Google’s research, with data surveyed in July 2020, the top growing category for online shopping is Electronics. Countries

such as Malaysia have seen growth up to 70 per cent year on year.

The runner-up categories are Apparel as well as Health and Beauty, most probably boosted by the popular “shop with me” videos that describe in detail the faults and the benefits of products that usually need accurate precision.

For instance, a skin lotion can have completely different reactions depending on the skin type, but thanks to online shoppers sharing their entire journey with the product, stay-at-home consumers can quickly gather all the comparable data they need to make a decision.

Similarly with any clothing items, virtual shoppers can compare their body type with the one of the “shop with me” video authors and decide accordingly.

According to Google, 1 in 2 shoppers claimed that a video they watched helped them decide to buy a product instead of another.

If we were to combine all the product review videos uploaded on Youtube in 2019 by people in Southeast Asia alone, it would sum up to 65 thousand years of content.

Given the diversity of languages in the region as well as the segmentation in product categories, customers can pretty much find anything they want being already reviewed in their own language.

In the Middle East this trend has not started yet and could be a great opportunity for both content creators as well as businesses operating in the online shopping community.

RAPID RISE



ECB President Christine Lagarde gives a signature on the newly printed euro banknotes at the bank’s headquarters in Frankfurt, in this file photo. — Reuters

No cause yet for ECB alarm over euro strength

How concerned should policymakers be by the euro’s rapid rise to 28-month highs? Those tracking the currency’s effects on growth, inflation and exports reckon it’s still some way off levels that would start to dent economic recovery.

Since mid-May, the currency has risen nearly 10 per cent versus the dollar and futures markets show it has drawn a record number of bullish bets.

On a trade-weighted basis, the gauge watched by the European Central Bank, the euro is up nearly 5 per cent.

That pace of gains was last seen in mid-2017, a time of optimism about economic growth — in marked contrast to the current appreciation that coincides with the deflationary and recessionary impact of a pandemic.

As inflation turned negative in August for the first time since 2016, some economists placed the blame on the euro and piled on the pressure for the ECB to act.

European Central Bank chief economist Philip Lane delivered the first salvo, saying the exchange rate “does matter” for monetary policy, while the *Financial Times* quoted unnamed ECB sources as saying euro strength was concerning.

Yet it may be premature for the ECB to announce any steps at its September 10 meeting.

Euro strength stems not solely from US assets’ vanishing interest rate advantage over Europe, but from improved sentiment towards Europe’s proactive response to COVID-19 that included a 750 billion euro (\$886.28 billion) fund seeded by joint debt sales.

ECB board member Isabel Schnabel said she was “not worrying too much

about exchange rate developments”, as a weak dollar usually lifts global trade and growth, offsetting the euro effect for local firms.

Nomura analyst Jordan Rochester agreed and said the euro was up for “good reasons”.

“A strong currency due to positive macro fundamentals is not that much of a bad thing for policymakers and its inflation impact is temporary in nature”, he said.

IN COMMON WITH OTHER CENTRAL BANKS, IT MAY BE FORCED TO RETHINK LONGER-TERM MONETARY POLICY GIVEN THE US FEDERAL RESERVE’S LANDMARK SHIFT TO A MORE TOLERANT INFLATION STANCE, WHICH COULD WEAKEN THE DOLLAR FOR YEARS

A cut to Germany’s value-added tax may have hit August prices, which was predicted by the ECB, according to minutes of its July meeting, he added.

The ECB still has no room for complacency.

In common with other central banks, it may be forced to rethink longer-term monetary policy given the US Federal Reserve’s landmark shift to a more tolerant inflation stance, which could weaken the dollar for years.

But as of now, the euro’s rise should

not inflict major damage. At current levels, the trade-weighted euro would take 0.1-0.2 percentage point off ECB inflation projections in the coming year, ABN Amro strategist Nick Kounis estimated.

This is bad news in a deflationary environment, but “not the end of the world”, Kounis said.

Another 3-4 per cent rise in the trade-weighted rate was, he said, “where (the ECB) would be thinking not only about what strategy to use to boost inflation but also specific measures to target the euro”.

For many, the level to watch is a year-on-year 10 per cent appreciation. From current levels that would take the euro near \$1.30.

A 10 per cent gain is also the level analysts say would knock 0.4 per cent off the euro zone’s annual economic growth and around 6 per cent of earnings-per-share at regional firms.

Dhaval Joshi, investment strategist at BCA Research cited past ECB claims that a 10 per cent euro rise shaves 0.4-0.5 percentage point from inflation.

“I think the ECB are watching the rate of appreciation of the euro with perhaps 10 per cent year-on-year as a point of concern... another 2.5 per cent appreciation would be a trigger point to act in my view”, Joshi said.

A further consideration is that, even after its rally, the euro is not expensive and sits in the middle of its two-decade trading range of \$0.80-\$1.60.

Adjusted for inflation differentials against its peers such as dollar, sterling and yen, the euro is 5 per cent below its long-term average, Nomura’s Rochester says. — Reuters

LYING REGULATOR

Aussie finance scandal offers universal truths

There’s more than one Australian bar tale about hitting rock bottom — and then starting to dig. The struggles of wealth manager AMP, which effectively put up a “For Sale” sign this week, is destined to become a case study on the subject for financiers everywhere.

The 171-year-old AMP is a household name renowned for backing privatisations and other big deals.

Its demutualisation in 1998 was arguably a high point. Flush with cash and an \$18 billion market capitalisation from an initial public offering, the company embarked on an ill-advised international expansion spree.

Things mostly spiralled from there. Over the last couple years, AMP’s decline accelerated. Its equity value has slumped to \$4 billion.

A 2018 public inquiry into the financial sector found the company had charged thousands of customers for advice it never gave them. Managers admitted lying to the regulator, prompting both the chairman and CEO to resign.

Most recently, shareholders revolted over the promotion of an executive to run AMP Capital, its fund management crown jewel, after it emerged that he had been punished earlier for breaching the company’s code of conduct in dealings with a female colleague.

As a result, Chairman David Murray — a grandee of Australian finance brought in to help turn things around — quit last week. So did John Fraser, a board director and former deputy treasury secretary.

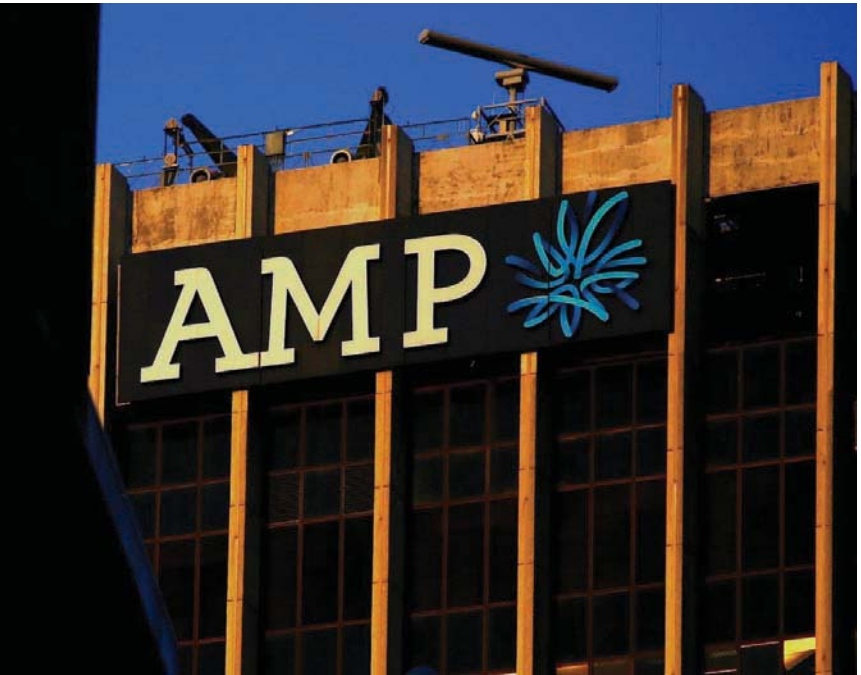
Having initially blamed its fee scandal on a few bad apples, the development sparked fresh concerns about corporate culture. Other financial institutions have wrestled with similar problems.

Wells Fargo, for one, continues to suffer fallout from a fake account disaster that erupted four years ago. The chairman resigned in March after more damning revelations.

Fixing the cultural rot was part of the remit when AMP hired Francesco De Ferrari from Credit Suisse two years ago to be CEO. Since then, the company has offloaded its life insurance business and shaken up others.

It also has been grappling with virus-induced market volatility and government rule changes allowing customers to draw down pensions. It can be hard to keep values and behaviour atop any strategic priorities list. AMP’s experience is a stark reminder of why it pays to start digging sooner. — Reuters

FLUSH WITH CASH AND AN \$18 BILLION MARKET CAPITALISATION FROM AN INITIAL PUBLIC OFFERING, THE COMPANY EMBARKED ON AN ILL-ADVISED INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION SPREE



The logo of AMP Ltd adorns their head office located in central Sydney. — Reuters



After factory layoff, Filipina cashes in on 'leaf art' venture

BINAN, Philippines: When the coronavirus struck and cost Mary Mae Dacanay her factory job in the Philippines, the 23-year-old came up with a unique new source of income - turning leaves into celebrity art.

Dacanay saw her redundancy as chance to enjoy her favourite pastime - art - but at first had dif-

ference because of the strict lockdown," she said, speaking at her home in Laguna province, south of the capital Manila.

"The only way was to buy online but it was also difficult. I experimented using leaves as a makeshift canvas and it turned out really nice."

After gaining thousands of followers on Facebook, Dacanay has sold hundreds of pieces of

With no luck finding canvas, Dacanay has instead picked leaves from a jackfruit tree outside her home, intricately cutting away tiny pieces to reveal well-known faces, from Robert Downey Jr and Oprah Winfrey to Michael Jackson and even the Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte.

difficulty sourcing materials in a country that has had in place some of the world's longest and strictest coronavirus measures.

With no luck finding canvas, Dacanay has instead picked leaves from a jackfruit tree outside her home, intricately cutting away tiny pieces to reveal well-known faces, from Robert Downey Jr and Oprah Winfrey to Michael Jackson and even the Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte.

"Because of this pandemic, I wanted to try making artwork but purchasing art supplies in my town was very difficult

her "leaf art", each for about 400 pesos (\$8.24). The exact price varies according to the level of detail in each piece.

Now, instead of working seven days a week at the factory, plus overtime, she said her new venture allows her to enjoy her hobby, take things easier and still pay the bills.

"This leaf art has helped me so much financially during this pandemic," she said.

"The money I use to pay bills, buy food for my family, and our other daily expenses are from my earnings from commissioned work." — **Reuters**





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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Gogob



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Yiti, Masqat, Oman



 **sachinorthodoc16** • Follow
Mughsayl, Zūfār, Oman



COOK LIKE A CHEF

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.com

Coffee braised short rib, Pommies puree, fried onions, roasted carrots, own jus



LUXURIOUS DINING

Just last week week, the luxurious Al Bustan Palace reopened its door to much anticipation. Kicking the opening in high gear, the Palace has also done major changes and upgrades to their restaurants and kitchens to meet the government requirements of the new normal. To give everyone an opportunity of some of the delicious dishes they have in store for their patrons, the busy chefs of the Al Bustan Palace is sharing some of their best menus for everyone to copy at home.

PREPARATION AND COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Season each short rib generously with salt. Coat a pot large enough to accommodate all the meat and vegetables with olive oil and bring to high heat. Add the short ribs to the pan and brown very well, about 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

While the short ribs are browning, puree all the vegetables and garlic in the food processor until it forms a coarse paste. When the short ribs are very brown on all sides, remove them from the pan. Drain the fat, coat the bottom of the same pan with fresh oil and add the pureed vegetables. Season the vegetables generously with salt and brown until they are very dark and a crud has formed on the bottom of the pan, approximately 5 to 7 minutes. Scrape the crud and let it reform. Scrape the crud again and add the tomato paste. Brown the tomato paste for 4 to 5 minutes. Lower the heat if things start to burn. Reduce the mixture by half.

Return the short ribs to the pan and adds 600ml of veal stock or until the stock has just about covered the meat. Add the thyme bundle and bay leaves. Cover the pan and place in the preheated oven for 3 hours. Check periodically during the cooking process and add more water, if needed. Turn the ribs over halfway through the cooking time. Remove the lid during the last 20 minutes of cooking to let things get nice and brown and to let the sauce reduce. When done the meat should be very tender but not falling apart. Serve with the braising liquid and add 5 ml of espresso.

Roast the carrots until tender.

INGREDIENTS:



400 gms Beef Short rib
20 gms each, mire poix vegetables (onion, carrot, celery, leeks)
600 ml Veal stock
1 tsp Tomato paste
2 pcs Baby Carrots Heritage
20 gms Broccolini-15 Gms
20 ml Espresso
Salt

POMMES PUREE

120 gms Potatoes: Yukon or Ratte
30 gms Chilled butter cut into small cubes
30 gms Milk/ Cream (half-half)

TEMPURA ONION

3 pieces White onion
30 gms Tempura flour
50 ml soda
3 gms salt

SIDE DISH PREPS:

FOR MASHED POTATO

Boil the potatoes in salty water for 25 minutes - keep the skins on and stop when tender. Leave potatoes to cool before peeling the skins. Add milk and slowly warm.

Run the peeled potatoes through a food mill on the smallest setting into a pan. Heat the potatoes on medium heat for around five minutes to remove excess moisture. You want to dry them out. Turn the potatoes to low heat and slowly start to add small cubes of the chilled butter as you stir. You have to stir the potatoes a lot and fast to give them a perfectly creamy consistency.

Once the butter is mixed well, add the warm milk and whip quickly and energetically to make them smooth. Taste and season. Finally, pass the puree for an extra silky texture.

CRISPY TEMPURA ONION

Prepare the batter by mixing the flour, soda and salt for tempura. Coat onion rings with batter, letting excess drip back into the bowl. Fry onion rings in the hot oil in small batches, turning once, until just beginning to colour. Drain on paper towel. Repeat process, skimming oil of tempura batter bits as necessary until all onion rings have been fried. If oil becomes dark, begin again with fresh oil. Serve immediately.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF ANOOB
ASHRAF

Executive Sous Chef
Al Bustan Palace, Muscat

Hailing from the Southern part of India, Chef Anoo has developed the passion at a very early age from his father who managed to transform daily meals into something delicious and beautiful. He officially began his culinary journey right after finishing 12th grade and joining a culinary institute. By 18, he was already working for his first job at Le Meridian Hotels.

After 3 years, he travelled to Malaysia working for an Indian and Thai restaurant until he decided to join The Oberoi Groups of hotels in India a year later. Further developing his skill for Indian cuisines, he would embark in his Middle East journey in 2008 landing in Jeddah for Rosewood Hotels. He worked with Award-winning French Australian and Moroccan Chefs and also learned a lot about Arabic cuisine and the European Cuisine as well finally becoming a junior sous chef in 2010.

He joined The Ritz Carlton Hotels in Doha in 2011 as Assitant Chef de Cuisine. He joined Al Bustan Palace in 2015 and from Chef de Cuisine would rise into the ranks and become the Executive Sous Chef for the palace in 2016. From the renovations to the reopening of the Palace, Chef Anoo has been instrumental in rebuilding the entire culinary team. As of today, Chef Anoo also specializes in Fully Buy out Indian Weddings, exclusive weddings, and gala dinners.



ENTERTAINMENT

Robert Pattinson's positive test on 'Batman' set underscores challenges for Hollywood



LOS ANGELES: British actor Robert Pattinson has tested positive for COVID-19, news media reported on Thursday, halting production of "The Batman" and highlighting the industry's struggles to get back to business after months of a pandemic-induced shutdown.

Movie studio Warner Bros. said in a statement that "a member of 'The Batman' production" in Britain had tested positive for the coronavirus, but did not give a name. "Filming is temporarily paused," the studio's statement added, but did not say for how long.

Variety, the Hollywood Reporter and Vanity Fair all cited sources as saying the person who tested positive was Pattinson, the film's star.

Warner Bros. and Pattinson's representatives did not return calls seeking comment. It was not clear to what extent Pattinson, 34, best known for his breakout role in the vampire movie series "Twilight," was suffering COVID-19 symptoms.

Filming of "The Batman" had resumed north of London only three days ago after being shut down in mid-March, along with dozens of other movies and TV

shows around the world due to the coronavirus.

The movie, in which Pattinson stars as the comic book hero, has about three months of material left to shoot, according to Hollywood trade outlets. Its release was pushed back earlier this year from June 2021 to October 2021.

Movie and TV production has been slow to get going again in the United States under complex safety procedures that include testing, quarantine and social distancing on sets that employ dozens of crew members, makeup artists, actors, extras and other production staff.

Some productions, including Universal Pictures' "Jurassic World: Dominion," have restarted in London or in Eastern Europe, while the cast of the "Avatar" sequel is back at work in New Zealand, where the coronavirus has been kept in check.

Tom Cruise in July got permission to shoot parts of the next "Mission Impossible" thriller in Norway without having to follow quarantine requirements. However, Variety reported that the production has hired two cruise ships to house the crew to keep them apart from locals. — Reuters



Fusing the smooth blend of jazz and rock

TITASH CHAKRABORTY

An Omani guitarist and composer, Shabib Al Balushi is known for his smooth blends of jazz and rock with hints of middle eastern music creating a sound that is unique to him. From playing with friends at parks to playing all around the world, in conversation with Oman Daily Observer, this is what he shared.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF?
I started playing the guitar in 2003, At first, it was a tough road, learning was difficult and hard for me but I fell for the instrument and I was determined and learned the skill to play from my friends. We used to play together and practice in Riyam Park in Muttrah and my father was a big supporter of mine throughout it all. Fast forward to 2020, I have performed all over the Sultanate and outside in Dubai, KSA, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Thailand, India, and Italy.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SOUND AND VIBE?
Honestly speaking, I love experimenting and playing all sorts of genres but I started off playing along to rock, especially along with my then band. Although the band is no more, I continue playing with various well-known artists from around the region. I have my recording studio

where I love spending time composing and creating original tracks from both local and foreign artists in the region.

WHO WAS YOUR INSPIRATION?
Growing up, I was inspired by Steve Vai, Pink Floyd and the scorpions, rock played a major role in inspiring me to pursue my musical talent, and someday I would love to meet my idol, Steve Vai, a three-time grammy-winning and fifteen-time nominee guitar famously known for his incredible guitar skills.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THE FUTURE?
My aim in life is to work hard, work and promote artists from the region along with bettering my skills as a musician until I can reach the likes of my idol and work with international artists from around the world and as soon as I can make my dream come true, I would love to bring that platform to Oman for our local artists, by building a big music studio for myself and others like me along with a shop dedicated to everything guitar in Oman and the region.

Follow Shabib on Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat **@shabi-brock_** for a view into his incredible guitar skills and unique sound and support this upcoming artist right here from the Sultanate.

"Never give up, keep practising and play any and all genres of music until you find what you love. Don't lose hope, and keep working hard until you get what you deserve." — Shabib al Balushi



THEATRE



Russia's Bolshoi Theatre reopens with a socially distanced 'Don Carlo'

MOSCOW: Russia's opera aficionados will flock to the Bolshoi Theatre for the first time in almost six months on Sunday, wearing masks and sitting apart in a half-empty auditorium for a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's "Don Carlo".
The landmark venue in central Moscow closed its doors on March 17 as coronavirus cases mounted in and around the capital, the worst-hit region in the country.
Initially managers said the shutdown would last for a few weeks, but finally said they would reopen on Sept. 6, as Russia started to relax some of its toughest restrictions.
Couples, or friends who bought their tickets together will be able to sit next to each other. But the hall will be no more than half full due to new curbs to contain the pandemic, said the Bolshoi's director, Vladimir Urin.
Temperatures will be checked and anyone over 37 Celsius (98.6 Fahrenheit) will be turned away at the door.

The lockdown cost the theatre more than 850 million roubles (\$11.27 million), Urin said in an interview with state television. He urged visitors to follow the safety precautions.
"It's most often the people who don't understand the need to follow these measures who grumble. There is after all an alternative: close the theatre!"
The shutdown has played havoc with performers' rehearsal schedules, said dancer Alyona Kovaleva, who will be appearing in "Four Characters in Search of a Plot", which includes four one-act ballets.
"We were at home for several months, unable to work in a dance room or stay in shape," she told Reuters.
"So, getting ready was tougher. We started gradually - at first we only did classes, then we added rehearsals. Now the period when we just work on a play without performing it on stage is longer." — Reuters

CONSERVATION



With songs and sedation, experts aim to rescue Kaavan the Islamabad elephant

ISLAMABAD: The trick to calming an unhappy elephant? Sing him Frank Sinatra songs, according to one of the vets tasked with assessing whether Kaavan can be moved from poor conditions in a zoo in Pakistan's capital to a sanctuary in Cambodia.
Amir Khalil, a vet who has worked in war zones to rescue animals, is now in Islamabad with welfare organisation Four Paws to determine whether Kaavan is safe to travel after a Pakistan court ruled in May that all animals at Islamabad's zoo must be set free or transferred to a better environment.
"When we arrived 10 days ago ... I started to train him and to sing to him and he accommodated me so we have a relationship," he said, adding he chose Sinatra's hit "My Way".
Animal rights advocates have long raised concerns about conditions at Islamabad's zoo, where dozens of animals including six lion cubs have died in the past four years.

The court decision came after a four-year global campaign, backed by American singer Cher. Plans are under way to move Kaavan, to Cambodia if possible. The 36-year-old elephant has spent most of his life in a small enclosure with meagre shelter, and the last eight years alone after his companion elephant died.
But even with Sinatra, it is no easy feat moving an elephant thousands of miles.
Four Paws experts fired darts with a sedative so they could give the sleepy animal a comprehensive check up.
As Kaavan woke up to eat some apples, Four Paws elephant specialist Frank Goeritz analysed his blood samples. Though it will be a few days before he files a formal report, Goeritz said despite Kaavan being obese, unhappy and having malformed nails that put him at risk of serious infection, the outlook was hopeful.
"Let's wait until we have all the results, but so far I don't see a big problem with him travelling ... he is facing a good life." — Reuters

features

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Fusing the smooth blend of jazz and rock

With support from his father even at the very early stages of his career, jazz and rock fusion singer Shabib al Balushi has risen up from playing in Riyam Park for practice to conquering stages not only in Oman but also in different major cities all over the world. Oman Observer reached out to Shibab to see how he has been doing and how his music has been... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

TRAVEL



CRUISE CONTROL

While Dubai has a well-curated and elaborately built artificial river, Oman is Au Naturel with the historical city of Sur. The dhow cruising beneath one of the most beautiful beaches in Oman is one of the finest views you can enjoy. The view alone is possibly one of the reasons why the phrase #BeautyHasAnAddress was coined. [Photo by Yeru Ebuen]

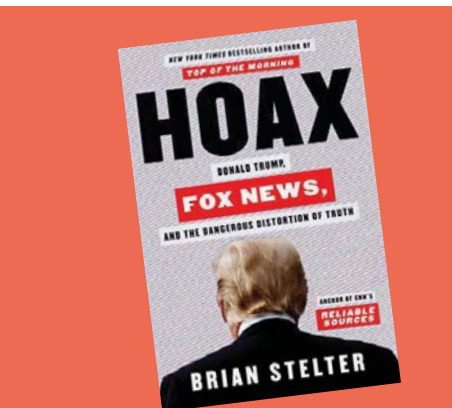
EAT



COFFEE BRAISED SHORT RIB, POMMES PUREE, FRIED ONIONS, ROASTED CARROTS, OWN JUS

Chef Anoob is giving us a preview of what's being served at the luxurious Al Bustan Palace as it reopened its door for guests and visitors. Story on **Page 18**

READ



HOAX

BY BRIAN STELTER

The CNN anchor and chief media correspondent examines the inner workings of Fox News and its relationship with President Trump.

WATCH



ENOLA HOLMES

The film chronicles the adventures of Sherlock Holmes' younger sister Enola, as she embarks on a quest to find her missing mother.

Director: Harry Bradbeer

Starring: Millie Bobby Brown, Sam Claflin, Henry Cavill, Helena Bonham Carter

CELEBRATE



READ A BOOK DAY

Reading a book for some people is a form of relaxation while can be a total chore for others. The idea behind the celebration is to encourage everyone to to pick a book and read one, not necessarily the whole book but possibly a chapter. To mark the day, you can donate or simply offer to read one story of your kids or siblings.