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AUBAMEYANG UNDERLINES VALUE



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UNIQUE OMANI DIGITALISED SOIL MAP ON ANVIL



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INDONESIA DRIVE-IN CONCERT DELIVERS LIVE MUSIC AS CORONAVIRUS RAGES



OMAN

HM greetings to leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, King of Malaysia on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to King of Malaysia and his country's friendly people further progress and growth. His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of greetings to President Sooronbay Jeenbekov of the Kyrgyz Republic on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Paula Mae Weekes of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the occasion of her country's Independence Anniversary. — **ONA**

New e-service to rectify choices

MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Centre (HAEC) announced a new e-service to help students applying for university seats to rectify their choices when they select the wrong subjects of study. The service, termed "Wrong Classification of Electronic Selection" will be applied during the forthcoming academic year 2020/2021. Applications processed via this service will continue to be received by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation with effect from Wednesday (September 2). The HAEC will announce the results of applications through this service on Monday (September 7). **DETAILS ON P4**

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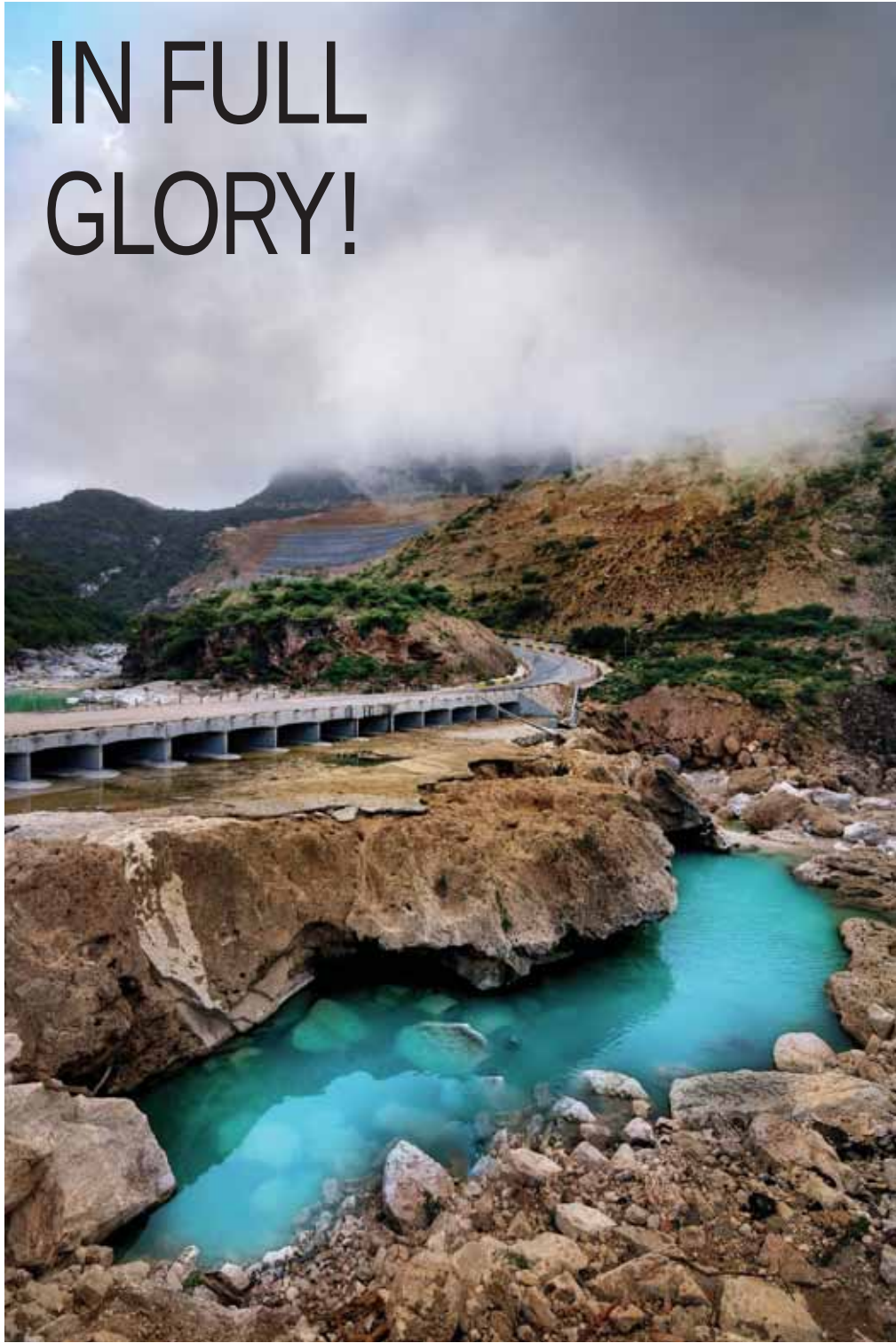
SYRIA TALKS END ON POSITIVE NOTE AFTER COVID SCARE

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UK GOVT SLUMPS IN POLLS AMID CORONAVIRUS CHAOS

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As khareef in Dhofar enters the final lap of the season, the scenic spots in the governorate are in full glory. After months being cooped up at homes due to coronavirus lockdown many people are venturing out to enjoy the beauty of nature. A scene from Dhalkout, south of Dhofar. PHOTO BY DR SACHIN SINGH

Retail market in the Sultanate is dynamic: Report

NEW DELHI: The retail market in the Sultanate is promising, competitive and dynamic, said a report published by the Indian Orbis Research and published on the Galus Australis website.

The report pointed out that the opening of new stores, acquisitions and the boom of e-commerce are driving the expectations of the retail industry in the Sultanate until 2026. Moreover, the strong merger and acquisition activity along with the expansion of distribution channels will benefit companies operating in the Omani retail markets.

The report said that increased consumer awareness, competition and costs involved in deploying advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and emerging unconventional vendors pose challenges to market growth.

The report pointed out that retail companies across the Sultanate focus on enhancing operational efficiency and diversifying revenues through e-commerce channels.

It stated that the recovery of the economy is accompanied by an increase in purchasing power and an increase in the disposable income of middle-class families, which strengthens the retail industry in the Sultanate.

It pointed out that at the global level, the size of the retail market is estimated at about \$4.8 billion, with North America dominating retail sales, followed by Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. — **ONA**

OMAN SEES SIGNIFICANT DROP IN MATERNAL MORTALITY

LIFE EXPECTANCY UP AT 77.2 YEARS IN 2019

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The Sultanate has made great strides in the area of health development, which was demonstrated by a significant improvement in the overall health of the society.

Death rates dropped remarkably over the past years, especially among infants and children under 5 years of age, which led to a rise in average life expectancy at birth.

The maternal mortality rate decreased significantly during the 10 years to reach 10.3 women per 100,000 live births at the end of 2019. The maternal mortality ratio stood at 26.4 per 100,000 live births in 2010.

The mortality rates for infants and children under five years decreased from 11.7 and 9.2 per 1,000 population in 2016 to 10.2 and 8 in 2019, respectively. The crude death, meanwhile, dropped from 3 per 1,000 in 2016 to 2.7 in 2019.

The figures posted on the Ministry of Health's Twitter handle also showed that the life expectancy at birth increased to 77.2 years in 2019.



All these achievements have enforced the Sultanate's commitment in realising the Sustainable Goals-2030 related to health

DR AHMED AL QASMI,
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF
PLANNING AND STUDIES
AT MINISTRY OF HEALTH

monitor their health condition, address risk factors and ensure that the mother and the foetus are in good health.

According to Sustainable Goals-2030 report, Oman has made tremendous headway in the area of health development, which was reflected positively in the main health indicators.

The World Health Organization calculates the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) index based on 16 tracer indicators selected for four service coverage categories, namely reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health; infectious diseases; non-communicable diseases; and service capacity and access. The UHC index in Oman was equal to 75 per cent in 2017.

Recovered from COVID... you are welcome to this island

RIO DE JANEIRO: Fernando de Noronha, an archipelago 354 km off Brazil's northeastern coast famous for abundant sea life, pristine beaches and dramatic mountainsides rising above the coast, is trying a novel method for fighting the coronavirus.

Only tourists who have already had COVID-19 and recovered will be allowed onto the island chain, according to statements released by local and state governments over the past week.

The move by the tourism

dependent archipelago, which has about 3,100 permanent residents according to the most recent census estimate, speaks to the unique ways that state, local and national governments are trying to return to a semblance of normal as new COVID-19 cases and deaths stabilise in many parts of the world.

There is significant debate as to the level and duration of immunity that coronavirus patients develop after a first infection. There have been cases of re-infection reported, including



in Brazil. However, such reports are relatively rare.

The new rules go into effect from September 1. For now, tourists are not allowed on the islands.

"There hasn't been community transmission on the island for a long time. We have to keep it that way", André Longo, the Health Secretary of the state of Pernambuco, said in a statement. "Obviously, this step is going to be done with an eye on safety and reactivating economic activity on the archipelago".

Fernando de Noronha has so far registered 93 confirmed cases of the virus and no deaths. It prohibited tourism starting in March. For a period from April to June, even residents who were on the mainland were not allowed to return.

Brazil is among the nations hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic, with over 120,000 known deaths and 3.8 million confirmed cases as of Saturday evening. However, new cases and deaths have begun to stabilise in recent weeks. — **Reuters**

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 36°C
MIN: 27°C

SALALAH
MAX: 25°C
MIN: 24°C

NIZWA
MAX: 43°C
MIN: 29°C

SUNRISE 05:48 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:31

DUHR: 12:12

ASR: 15:40

MAGHRIB: 18:31

ISHA: 19:43





Listen to citizens' views: Minister to governors



MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, held a meeting with governors at the ministry's premises on Sunday. The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy,

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, and Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Murdas al Busaidy, Secretary-General of Governorates Affairs at the Ministry of Interior. The Minister congratulated the governors for winning



the confidence of His Majesty the Sultan who granted them powers to enable them to better perform their duties. He said that the current stage of the blessed renaissance requires combing all efforts to promote the

governorates. The minister urged the governors to work towards the realisation of all that might achieve public interests. He asked them to listen to citizens' views and proposals aimed to develop their

respective governorates, including requirements submitted to walis' offices. The minister also asked the governors to remove hurdles that impede the transactions. In this respect, he advised the

governors to maximise benefits from available resources in their respective governorates. The governors expressed their gratitude for the Royal confidence and they pledged to do their best to develop the governorates. — ONA

Governors take oath of office



MUSCAT: The governors, Chairmen of the Municipal Councils in the governorates affiliated to the Ministry of Interior took the oath of office before Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior on Sunday. The oath comes as per article (10) of the Municipal Councils Law.

Dr Yahya bin Badr bin Malik al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah; Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar bin Muhammed al Shihi, Governor of North Al Batinah; Issa bin Hamad bin Muhammed al Azri, Governor of South Al Batinah; Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah; Shaikh Mu'dhid

bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Yaqoubi, Governor of Al Wusta; Najeeb bin Ali bin Ahmed al Rowas, Governor of Al Dhahirah; Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed bin Mishari al Shamsi; Governor of North Al Sharqiyah and Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed bin Saud al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi took the oath of office. — ONA



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Oman Vision 2040 Unit and Technology University sign pact

MUSCAT: A coordination meeting was on Sunday between Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences during which the two sides discussed a plan for Blended Learning Project, which was one of the outcomes of the education lab held in October 2019.

THE MEETING LOOKED INTO ALL RESPONSIBILITIES AND MISSIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY PROJECT'S COMMITTEES, APPOINTMENT OF THE PROJECT'S MANAGEMENT TEAM AND A REVIEW OF THE MERGER PROJECT'S INDICATORS

The lab culminated in the issuance of Royal Decree No. 81/2020, which stipulated the merging of Higher Technical College, technical colleges, colleges of applied sciences and Al Rustaq College of Education, bring them under one government university (University of Technology and Applied Sciences).

The meeting, held at the premises of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit in Al Khuwair, was attended by Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of "Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up", and Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaiee, Vice-



Chancellor of the University.

It was also attended by the Unit's team tasked with the education sector, the labour market and employment.

The meeting looked into all responsibilities and missions of the University project's committees,

appointment of the project's management team and a review of the merger project's indicators. It also discussed means of addressing challenges in accordance with work system proceedings. Dr Khamis and Dr Said signed the executive plan

of the merger which will ensure smooth running in line with clear-cut indicators of performance to be followed up by the Unit in its approach to facilitating all challenges that might emerge during the implementation stage. — ONA

Vodafone entry into Oman likely in 2021

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The third telecom operator in Oman will be ready to offer services in 2021, said the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in response to a query.

At the time when the agreement was signed last year, it was said that Vodafone would launch operations this year.

The strategic partner agreement of the third mobile operator in Oman was signed in September 2019 between Oman Future Telecommunications (OFT) and the British company Vodafone.

The pact included all essential

services for the establishment of the new company, including the use of the brand, technical support, and knowledge during the 15-year contract.

Under this partnership, the third operator will join the Vodafone Global Partnership Program, which will help consumers benefit from diversified promotion packages and special services from the company.

Vodafone has a significant market presence in Europe, Qatar, Africa and the Asia Pacific either through its subsidiary undertakings, joint ventures or associated undertakings and investments.

It also holds partnership

The strategic partner agreement of the third mobile operator in Oman was signed in September 2019 between Oman Future Telecommunications (OFT) and the British company Vodafone

agreements in big markets such as Russia, Argentina, and Canada.

The telecom sector has been preparing itself bracing for the arrival

of the third operator.

"The arrival of the third operator in Oman will have a profound impact on the current competitive dynamics," said Omantel in its Board of Directors' report of its operations for the six months ended June 30, 2020. "The market is showing signals of saturation and we are witnessing a decline in both core telecom market revenues (such as voice, data and messaging) and subscribers, as the number of expatriates is expected to decrease due to the overall economic impact. It is expected with the entry of the third operator will impose further challenges on the existing operators," the company said.

Shrimp season starts on September 8

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Shrimp fishing season will start on September 8 and it will last till November, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources announced on Sunday.

According to the ministry, the preparations for the season are complete, as several awareness activities have been carried out in this regard. There will be teams to intensify monitoring along the coasts of the three governorates during the season.

The coastal villages in the Governorates of Dhofar, Al Wusta and South Al Sharqiyah are expected to witness activities related to the fisheries, transport and services sectors.

The ministry, in its announcement, warned fishermen, companies, institutions, hotels, restaurants, and individuals whose business is related to buying, selling, trading and exporting shrimp, to adhere to the start and end dates of the shrimp fishing season. It said trading will not be allowed after the end of the season unless it is registered with the ministry.

The total production of shrimp from artisanal fishing in

2019 amounted to 863 tonnes, with a total value of about RO 2.9 million. Out of last year's total production, 320 tonnes were exported, while 543 tonnes were locally consumed.

The General Directorate of Fisheries Research in the Ministry, represented by the Center for Marine and Fisheries Sciences and the Center for Fish Farming, carried out several scientific studies on shrimp fishing equipment and methods as well as on ways to multiply shrimp production on the coasts of the Sultanate.

Moving forward to increase the contribution of the aquaculture sector to the GDP to reach RO 222 million by 2023, the ministry is working on several projects for fish farming, the most important of which are shrimp and abalone aquaculture using sea cages for some kinds of fish, in addition to the cultivation of seaweed.

Last June, the hugely promising segment of Oman's burgeoning aquaculture industry was boosted by the signing of a key contract for the establishment of a new shrimp production farm in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.



Oman Data Park unveils electronic signature

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Oman Data Park (ODP), the first provider of cloud and IT- managed services in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched e-sign, a secure document management service, to enable signing of documents electronically.

It can substitute the process of signing on paper and scanning it as well as other traditional methods of transactions besides reducing the number of paper needed for transactions.

The surge in the use of electronic transactions in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic has led to an urgent necessity for the use of electronic signature in compliance with the rules and regulations of the Sultanate of Oman, according to the ODP.

The users of this solution will be able to request documents and sign them remotely from anywhere in the world, without compromising on the privacy of the transactions.

The E-sign solution is locally



hosted in their tier III data centres and helps any organisation to reduce time and minimise costs, enhance efficiency, improve visibility and accountability, and have control over the flow of documents and private papers.

"E-sign solution supports many sectors, including banking, finance, aviation, law, insurance, real estate, human resources, education, health care, and communications. It can be also be customised according to any business or industry," a statement

from ODP said.

This electronic signature solution can be used for the management of documents and papers on one central platform. They can be created, shared and stored as well as followed up from anywhere, anytime and from any device using this solution.

It can also be configured to facilitate seamless integration, as well as add value to the user's ERP and MIS systems by integrating with powerful applications and programming destinations.

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Honey production increases 38% in 2019

MUSCAT: The production of honey in the Sultanate increased by 38 per cent by the end of 2019, recording 615,752 kg of honey, compared to 443,477 kg in 2018.

The production of dates increased by 2.2 per cent by the end of 2019, reaching 376,982 tonnes compared to 368,940 tonnes in 2018, according to the data released in the statistical yearbook issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

According to the NCSI statistical yearbook, the highest production of honey in 2019 was recorded in the governorates of North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah with 202,259 kg, followed by the governorates of North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah with 185,391 kg. The Governorate of Al Dhahirah recorded a production of 83,702 kg of honey.

The statistical yearbook also pointed out that the production of honey in the Governorate of Dhofar reached 59,246 kg while the production in the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta reached 56,279 kg and 14,946 kg, respectively.

The production of honey in the Governorate of Al Buraimi reached 6,959 kilograms while the production in the Governorate of Muscat and the Governorate of Musandam reached 5,788 kg and about 1,182 kg, respectively, during the same period at the end of 2019.

As for the production of dates at the end of 2019, the NCSI statistical yearbook showed that the highest quantity of dates was produced in the Governorate of North Al Batinah,

North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah harvested 202,259 kg of honey, followed by North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah with 185,391 kg, and Al Dhahirah with 83,702 kg of honey.

reaching 78,572 tonnes, followed by South Al Batinah with 73,271 tonnes, and Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, which recorded a production of 67,607 tonnes.

The production of dates in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah reached 41,781 tonnes while the production of dates in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah reached 39,995 tonnes, and the production of dates in the governorates of Al Dhahirah and Muscat reached 37,930 tonnes and 13,425 tonnes, respectively.

The same statistical data in the yearbook stated that the production of dates at the end of 2019 in the Governorate of Al Buraimi reached 12,793 tonnes, and the production in the Governorate of Musandam reached 7,443 tonnes. The Governorate of Dhofar recorded dates production of 4,033 tonnes, and the production in the Governorate of Al Wusta reached 132 tonnes at the same period at the end of 2019.

— ONA



134 Omani doctors enrol in residency programme



MUSCAT: Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) hosted an online induction programme for 134 newly enrolled resident doctors for the 2020/2021 academic year and 144 doctors in the general foundation programme.

The orientation started with an introductory video presentation of the OMSB, followed by a welcome speech by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, OMSB Executive President.

Dr Hood bin Abdullah al Abri, Vice-President for Academic

Affairs, gave a presentation including an overview of graduate studies in the Board and the differences and similarities between university education in medical colleges and advanced education in medical specialties. It also prepare doctors for advanced medical education through introducing them to the basics and methods used in advanced medical training, and motivate them to strive and excel in residency training programmes.

The programme concluded with a discussion to answer the inquiries of doctors joining the Board and the training programmes. The induction programme contained several lectures and workshops aiming at giving a comprehensive idea of the training in the Board and the assessment and evaluating methods of doctors during their training programmes.

A short film was screened offering general recommendations to doctors, and an introductory

presentation was given about the Medical Simulation and Skills Development Center. Among the other topics discussed are the Board's programme for scientific research methodology, the scholarship system for advanced training abroad, as well as training doctors on using the electronic library and introducing its most important sources and related information databases, and the electronic management system for residents and doctors. — ONA

539 new COVID-19 cases, 27 deaths in two days

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The Ministry of Health reported 539 new cases and 27 deaths of COVID-19 in the past two days since Thursday. The total number of COVID-19 related death cases stood at 677, it said.

The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate

has reached 85,005, while the number of recoveries stood at 80,459, which is 94 per cent of cases reported. .

The ministry also pointed out that 35 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of hospitalised COVID-19-infected patients stands at 402, of which 156 are in intensive care units (ICU).

E-service to rectify students' wrong choices

MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Centre (HAEC) on Sunday announced a new e-service to help students applying for university seats to rectify their choices when they select the wrong subjects of study.

The service, termed "Wrong Classification of Electronic Selection" will be applied during the forthcoming academic year 2020/2021.

Applications processed via this service will continue to

be received by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation with effect from Wednesday. The HAEC will announce the results of applications through this service on September 7.

The service offers a second chance to students, both for those who got offers during the first sorting and those who have not been admitted, so that all could contest the seats that fell vacant after the first sorting. — ONA

IT IS RISKY TO USE COUNTERFEIT FACE MASKS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Using a counterfeit face mask against coronavirus infection can be more detrimental to one's health than not wearing it, according to experts. Such masks could trigger breathing difficulties, skin allergies and irritation. The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) recently seized stocks of such cheap quality masks after complaints from the public and

referred to the Public Prosecution for further action.

"We raided some warehouses and shops and found illegal masks and were referred for further action. Counterfeiting is a criminal offence and anything that harms public health," spokesperson from the Department of Market Watch at the Consumer Protection Authority said.

"Use an original, medically safe

mask to meet the purpose of wearing it or else it can not only let virus in but also cause pulmonary issues because of the contents in the mask," a specialist of respiratory diseases told the *Observer*.

"From a safety point of view you need to look at 3Fs — Filtration, Fluid Resistance and Fit. A good mask would have 99 per cent Bacteria Filtration Efficiency (BFE) to filter-out micro organisms, fluid-resistant

outer layer to reduce exposure to body fluids and a mask that can give your good fit and facial coverage," says Saju George, Managing Director of Al Farsi Medical Supplies.

"The authorities are keeping close vigil on such malpractice in the market especially during the pandemic," he added.

The price of an average quality face masks for a box of 50 pieces was around RO 1 before the pandemic

broke out when the use was limited to healthcare sector and barely in some sectors. But the prices went as high as RO 10 during the peak of COVID-19 and today, the same box is available for less than RO 1.

"The demand for face masks is so high that we are unable to meet the same and we depend upon some individuals who sell them the source of which is unknown," a local vendor said.



MINISTER VISITS SOUTH AND NORTH AL SHARQIYAH



SUR: Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, visited the headquarters of the General Directorate of Social Development for the governorates of South and North Al Sharqiyah on Sunday. The minister also visited Departments of Social Development in the wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. She was briefed on social programmes and services of these institutions. The minister also visited Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centres for Disabled Children in the Wilayat of Sur. She was briefed on the cases served by the centre and its efforts to follow up on other cases that receive home care. — ONA

HEIs brace for new session

COVID-19 PROTOCOL: Chronic patients, those who are pregnant exempted

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, AUG 30

The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are giving top priority to pandemic protocols even as they are all set to start with some days of delay due to COVID concerns.

The colleges and universities are ready with precautions in terms of health hygiene and social distancing, as most of them have their systems in place.

The newly established University of Technology and Applied Sciences has issued guidelines to the staff members of the Colleges of Technology stating that there should not be more than 30 per cent staff keeping in mind the decisions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

The staff members in both the setups of the Colleges of Technology and Applied Sciences have resumed duties after the summer break and getting ready for the new semester.

"All employees without exception must start work at the beginning of the academic year 2020/2021 to sign a return-to-work from after the annual leave on Sunday (August 30). The employees of academic centres and departments will be welcomed at their workplaces in batches and at different timings to ensure precautionary measures in coordination with the Risk, Health



and Safety Committee", said the University of Technology and Applied Sciences circular in its communication to the Colleges of Technology.

It added that the implementation of reducing the number of employees by no more than 30 per cent of the total number "will begin from Monday (August 31, 2020).

Employees suffering from chronic diseases and those who are pregnant are exempted from

attending office, as they have been allowed to carry out work remotely after furnishing official medical reports.

The Applied Science colleges are also adopting similar norms, as most of the academic staff have resumed work after the summer break. The academic session for the current CAS set up is starting from September 13.

"It is compulsory for all the staff members, students and visitors to

wear face mask, while at most of the major entrances there is a facility for temperature scanning", said a staff member of Salalah College of Applied Sciences.

A faculty member in Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) confirmed the readiness of the university for the upcoming session and stated that all the precautionary measures were in place as per the directives of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

MTC RECEIVES NEW BATCH OF STUDENTS



MUSCAT: The Military Technical College received students of the eighth batch after they passed medical examinations and personal interviews. MTC hosted induction programme for these students following COVID-19 precautionary measures such as wearing masks and gloves, social distancing and sterilization in MTC premises.

Shura to meet on Tuesday



MUSCAT: Majlis Ash-Shura will hold its 13th regular session on Tuesday. Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash-Shura, stated that Majlis Ash-Shura will devote its session to discuss the report of the Joint Committee between the State Council and Majlis Ash-Shura on articles of disagreement between the two councils on the value-added tax law referred by the Council of

Ministers as a matter of urgency, in addition to the vision of the Education and Scientific Research Committee on a draft cooperation agreement with the Government of Hungary in the field of higher education referred by the government. He added that Majlis Ash-Shura will also review a set of ministerial responses on requests previously put by the members during the current session. — ONA



A' Sharqiya Investment Holding Co. SAOG
Invitation to the Ordinary Annual General Meeting

INVITATION TO THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of A' Sharqiya Investment Holding Co. SAOG has the pleasure to invite the respected Shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to be held on Monday, 14 September 2020 at 3:00 pm via the electronic platform for convening general meetings online that can be accessed on Muscat Clearing & Depository (MCD) website (www.mcd.gov.om). If a quorum is not present, another EGM will be held on Tuesday, 15 September 2020 at 3:00 pm via the electronic platform for convening general meetings online that can be accessed through MCD website (www.mcd.gov.om) in order to discuss the following subject:

- Approve the amendments of the Articles of Association of the Company in accordance with Oman Commercial Companies Law No. 18/2019.

In accordance with the Articles of Association of the Company and the new rules for convening general meetings via electronic means issued the Capital Market Authority (CMA), we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- (a) Any juristic person may authorize any natural person to attend the meeting and vote on its behalf via electronic means, provided that the natural person must be holder of an investor number with MCD; and
- (b) Voting on any item of the agenda shall start not later than three (3) days prior to the AGM date up to the end of the voting process on the day of the AGM. If the Shareholder's share is changed by increase or decrease, the voting process shall be cancelled and the Shareholder shall have to revote on the AGM day.

For any queries please contact Mr. Bader Al Khaduri on telephone No (00968-24566160)

Chairman

Legal Advisor

Auditor



PUBLIC PROSECUTION TENDER NOTICE

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

Tender Number	Description	Deadline for obtaining tender	Deadline for tender submission	GRADE (Group)	Tender document Cost (Non-refundable)
32/2020	SUPPLY & IMPLEMENTATION & SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE SOLUTION	13/9/2020	12/10/2020	Specialized	RO 25/=

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



Japan's Defence Minister Taro Kono talks to journalists in Tokyo on Sunday. – AFP

Race for new Japan PM heats up

TOKYO: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga will join the race to succeed his boss Shinzo Abe as prime minister, local media said on Sunday, as the competition heats up to succeed Japan's longest-serving leader.

Suga, a longtime lieutenant of Abe's in a key supporting role, had denied interest in the top job but attracted attention with a series of interviews, to Reuters and other news organisations, in the days before Abe's abrupt resignation for health reasons.

A Suga government would extend the fiscal and monetary stimulus that defined Abe's nearly eight years in office. Abe's announcement on Friday, citing a worsening of a chronic illness, set the stage for a leadership election within his Liberal Democratic Party. The LDP president is virtually assured of being prime minister because of the party's majority in the lower house of

parliament.

Suga decided to join the LDP race judging that he should play a leading role, given expectations for his ability to manage crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Japan's deepest postwar economic dive, Kyodo news agency said, citing an unnamed source.

Calls to Suga's parliamentary office seeking comment on Sunday went unanswered.

Suga would join such candidates as former foreign minister Fumio Kishida and former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba.

Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, 39, the son of charismatic former premier Junichiro Koizumi and considered a future premier, has decided not to run, but he would back Defence Minister Taro Kono if he joins the race, NHK said.

— Reuters

Afghan president appoints team to push for talks

KABUL: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani revealed the appointed members and leadership of the High Council for Afghan National Reconciliation in a bid to push peace talks further.

The presidential decree issued late Saturday night said that the aim of the appointment of these national-level politicians was to create a national consensus to lead the peace talks.

High-profile politicians, leaders of political parties and renowned religious leaders were among the members of the council.

The decree tasked the high council with forming the general assembly of the council within a week from leading religious scholars, members of parliament, provincial councillors, the private

sector, renowned politicians and people from the Afghan media.

There was only one woman in the council leadership, which provoked criticism.

The head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Shaharzar Akbar, said that the leadership and membership of the council lack women and young people. "What message does this send about inclusivity as a key principle?" she tweeted.

Kabul-based journalist Bilal Sarwari said that the list was missing war victims. "This is a very elitist approach," he tweeted.

The high council for national reconciliation is a separate entity that oversees the 21-member negotiation team created for face-to-face talks with the Taliban.

— dpa

INDIA SETS GRIM RECORD WITH 78,761 VIRUS CASES IN A DAY

NEW DELHI: India on Sunday set a coronavirus record when it reported 78,761 new infections in 24 hours — the world's highest single-day rise — even as it continued to open up the economy.

Home to 1.3 billion people, India is already the world's third-most infected nation with more than 3.5 million cases, behind the US and Brazil.

It has also reported more than 63,000 deaths, according to the official health ministry toll.

The US set the previous record on July 17 with 77,638 daily infections, according to an AFP tally.

In his regular monthly radio address on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not comment on the milestone but called on Indians to observe health safety measures.

"It is important that every citizen is healthy and happy and we defeat coronavirus completely together," Modi said in Hindi.



An auto rickshaw driver wearing a facemask waits for passengers in New Delhi on Sunday. – AFP

Global cases cross 25 million

NEW DELHI: Global coronavirus infections soared past 25 million on Sunday, as countries around the world further tightened restrictions to try to stop the rampaging pandemic. A million additional cases have been detected globally roughly every four days since mid-July, according to an AFP tally.

Even nations such as New Zealand and South Korea, which had previously brought their

outbreaks largely under control, are now battling new clusters of infections. On the other side of the world, Latin America — the worst-hit region — is still struggling with its first wave, with COVID-19 deaths in Brazil crossing 120,000, second only to the United States.

More than 843,000 people have died of COVID-19 globally, and with no vaccine or effective treatment available yet, governments have been forced to resort to some form of social distancing and lockdowns to stop the spread of the virus.

— AFP

"We should develop mechanisms to capture suspected COVID-19 deaths... Even after doing this, a continuous triangulation of data with routine death surveillance should be done at district levels and state levels." The daily case record came a day after the government further eased its coronavirus lockdown, in place since late March, to boost the struggling economy.

Millions have lost their jobs since the start of the lockdown, with the poor particularly hard hit.

The Home Affairs Ministry said gatherings of up to 100 people would be allowed with face masks and social distancing at cultural, entertainment, sports and political events from next month.

Metro train services would also resume "in a graded manner" in major cities.

Schools remain closed but students can meet teachers on a voluntary basis on school premises if needed, according to the new guidelines.

— AFP

community medicine expert, added that India also needed to focus on reducing deaths — the fourth-highest in the world according to a tally by John Hopkins University.

The government collects fatality numbers from positive cases but not from suspected infections, raising concerns among scientists that the

true picture of the epidemic is not being reflected in the official toll, he said.

"It is a small subset like the tip of the iceberg," Shewade, who has been analysing India's official toll data, said of the government's decision to focus only on positive cases recorded within the official health system.

Protesters' bid to storm Reichstag condemned

BERLIN: German leaders on Sunday condemned the "unacceptable" attempt by protesters to storm the Reichstag parliament building during a mass rally against coronavirus restrictions.

Some of the protesters on Saturday carried the flag of the former German Reich which was used up until the end of the First World War.

"Flags from the Reich and far-right profanity in front of the German parliament are an unacceptable attack on the heart of our democracy," President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said on Instagram. "We will never accept this."

Police said some 38,000 people,



Police officers stand guard in front of the Reichstag Building in Berlin. – Reuters

double the number expected, had gathered in Berlin on Saturday to protest restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus, such as the wearing of masks and social distancing.

Late Saturday, several hundred broke through barriers and a police cordon to climb the steps leading to the entrance to the Reichstag.

They were narrowly prevented from entering the building by police, who used pepper spray and arrested several people.

Police initially appeared overwhelmed, as only a handful of officers were there to block the crowd.

— AFP

Russia releases secret footage of hydrogen blast



A scientist works on the so-called Tsar Bomba. – Reuters

MOSCOW: Russia has released previously classified footage of the world's largest nuclear explosion, caused when the Soviet Union detonated the so-called Tsar Bomba almost 60 years ago.

The hydrogen bomb, which carried the force of 50 million tons of conventional explosives, was detonated in a test in October 1961, 4,000 metres over the remote Novaya Zemlya archipelago above the Arctic Circle.

The footage shows an immense fireball and a 60-km high mushroom cloud rising after the explosion lit up the sky. The views were captured from several angles by cameras installed on the ground and on board two Soviet aircraft.

"The testing of an exceptionally powerful hydrogen load ... confirmed that the Soviet Union is in possession of a thermo-nuclear weapon with power of 50 megatons, 100 megatons and more," a narrator tells the audience.

The documentary was published online for the first time by Russian state nuclear agency Rosatom last week as part of events to mark 75th anniversary of Russia's atomic industry.

Developed between 1956 and 1961 as the Soviet Union engaged in a nuclear arms race with the United States, the Tsar Bomba - the King of Bombs - was the largest hydrogen bomb ever and was claimed to be 3,300 times as destructive as the weapon that levelled Hiroshima.

The 30-minute film, which opens with a 'Top secret' title, features all the test stages - from transportation of a 26-ton weapon in an aviation bomb casing by railway, to post-explosion measurements of the radioactive fallout.

The Tsar Bomba far surpassed the largest explosion the United States has ever conducted - a 15-megaton "Castle Bravo" hydrogen bomb detonated on Bikini Atoll in 1954. — Reuters

Syria talks end on positive note after COVID scare

ENCOURAGING: Opposition groups call on international community to help clinch a nationwide ceasefire deal

GENEVA: Talks on a new constitution for Syria wrapped up in Geneva without concrete progress but the UN mediator said the players had found “commonalities” and were keen to meet again.

UN envoy Geir Pedersen has voiced hope the tentative talks in Geneva between representatives of President Bashar al Assad’s government, the opposition and civil society could eventually pave the way for a broader political process in the war-ravaged country.

But the latest round of discussions ended without even an agreement on an agenda or date for the next session.

Pedersen acknowledged to journalists that after nearly a decade of conflict in Syria “obviously there are still very strong disagreements”.

But, he said, he had been “extremely pleased to hear the two co-chairs (of the government and opposition delegations) saying very clearly that they thought also there were quite a few areas of commonalities.” The chief opposition negotiator Hadi al Bahra agreed.

While “there were certain points of disagreements, ... I believe the commonalities were larger than the differences,” he said.

He also called on major powers to help clinch a nationwide ceasefire in coming months to pave the way for a political transition.

A source with the Syrian government delegation meanwhile told the Syrian state news agency SANA the delegations was “keen on continuing to work openly in upcoming rounds.”

Pedersen said he had received a clear message from all sides that they were eager to meet again, which he

said was “encouraging”.

He acknowledged that the discussions, which marked the first UN attempt to resume in-person diplomatic negotiations in Geneva since the novel coronavirus forced the city to close down in March, got off to a difficult start.

Just hours after the talks began on Monday they had to be put on hold after four delegates tested positive for COVID-19.

The committee members — 15 each from the government, the opposition and from civil society — were tested for the new coronavirus before they travelled to Geneva, and were tested again on arrival in the Swiss city.

Some delegates tested positive in Geneva.

Pedersen, whose office decided to resume the talks on Thursday afternoon after Swiss health authorities said it would safe to do so, said he believed the incident showed it was possible to move ahead with talks in a responsible manner.

“It is possible to handle even complicated cases as long as you follow strictly medical protocol and the advice you are receiving,” he said.

“That is why we also hope that it will be possible to have the next round here in Geneva,” he said.

The Constitutional Committee was created in September last year and first convened a month later, but disagreement over the agenda and the pandemic hindered further meetings until this week.

The United Nations has been striving for more than nine years to nurture a political resolution to Syria’s civil war, which has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced more than 11 million.

— AFP



An aerial view of Syrians gathering for a demonstration by the ruins of a building that was hit in prior bombardment, in the town of Ariha in the rebel-held northwestern Idlib province.

— AFP

Rocket falls inside Baghdad Green Zone; none hurt

BAGHDAD: A Katyusha rocket landed in Baghdad’s heavily fortified Green Zone, causing damage to an empty building and no casualties, Iraqi police sources said.

Sirens blasted from the US embassy inside the zone, which houses government buildings and foreign missions, and helicopters were hovering above, the sources said.

It was the second such attack in a week after three rockets landed in the Green Zone on Thursday, also causing no casualties.

— Reuters



Palestinian fishing boats are anchored at the seaport of Gaza City during a lockdown on Sunday.

— AFP

Israel renews strikes on Gaza

TEL AVIV: The Israeli army on Sunday morning said it again retaliated against explosive balloons launched from Gaza by firing at Hamas facilities in the area.

“Explosive balloons were launched from Gaza into Israel throughout the day, igniting fires on land across southern Israel. In response, our tanks just struck Hamas posts in Gaza,” the Israeli Defense Force said on Twitter.

After a coronavirus-related lull, Palestinian fighters have stepped up cross-border attacks from Gaza this

month setting ablaze agricultural fields in southern Israel with incendiary balloons. Israel suspended fuel shipments and closed its border crossings with the Gaza Strip in response to the attacks, resulting in the only power plant in the Gaza Strip being shut down for lack of fuel.

An Egyptian delegation has been shuttling between the two sides to try to broker a renewal of an informal truce under which Israel committed to ease its 13-year-old blockade of Gaza in return for calm.

— Agencies

UN says half of Lebanese could face food shortages

BEIRUT: More than half of Lebanon’s population risk facing a food crisis in the aftermath of a Beirut port blast that compounded the country’s many woes, a UN agency said on Sunday.

“More than half of the country’s population is at risk of failing to access their basic food needs by the year’s end,” the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) said.

“Immediate measures should be taken to prevent a food crisis,” ESCWA executive secretary Rola Dashti said.

Lebanon’s government, she said, must prioritise the rebuilding of silos at the Beirut port, the country’s largest grain storage. Lebanon was mired in an economic collapse even before the cataclysmic August 4 cataclysmic blast at Beirut’s port, which killed 188 people, wounded thousands and destroyed swathes of the capital.

Lebanon defaulted on its debt, while the local currency has plummeted in value on the black market and poverty rates have soared, on top of a spike in the number of coronavirus cases.

“The yearly average inflation rate is expected to be more than 50 per cent in 2020, compared with 2.9 per cent in 2019,” ESCWA said in a statement.

Lebanon relies on imports for 85 per cent of its food needs and the annihilation of the silos at the Beirut port could worsen an already alarming situation, aid agencies and experts have said.

— AFP

Property sharks circle Beirut after port explosion

BEIRUT: Ever since a monster blast ravaged the arches and high ceiling of his family home in Lebanon’s capital, Bassam Bassila says a real estate developer has been hounding him to sell.

“The owner of a tower block nearby is trying to pressure me into selling him my home so he can raze it to the ground” and “build a tall tower” instead, the 68-year-old said in Beirut’s Monot neighbourhood.

A massive explosion at the Beirut port on August 4 that many blame on official negligence killed more than 180 people, wounded thousands and laid waste to some of the capital’s most picturesque streets.

With survivors still picking through the rubble, property sharks are moving in to take advantage of distraught homeowners, sparking outrage over yet another disaster in the making, this time targeting the country’s heritage.

Standing inside his living room turned balcony after the wall separating them was blown off, Bassila said the developer had



A banner that reads ‘my house is not for sale’ hangs on a street in the Gemmayzeh neighbourhood in the Lebanese capital, which was devastated by the Beirut port blast.

— AFP

first approached him some time before the blast, offering to buy his apartment after acquiring the ground floor of the same building.

“Eventually you will leave,” the developer threatened at the time.

And now he is back, ramping up pressure on Bassila to sell the home

he inherited from his grandparents by refusing to prop up the ceiling of the flat below — meaning Bassila’s apartment could collapse.

A former photographer now eking out a living as a taxi driver, Bassila says he cannot afford to restore his family home without financial aid. But he is also determined not to give it up. “I was born in this house and my father was before me... I can’t live anywhere else.”

‘REAL ESTATE VULTURES’

Of 576 heritage buildings surveyed in the wake of the explosion, including 331 in the port’s immediate vicinity, the culture ministry says 86 were severely damaged.

Of those, 44 risk complete collapse, while a further 41 could partially fall down.

In the days after the explosion, Bishara Ghulam, the mayor of the Rmeil district near the port, said he received an unexpected visitor among those flocking to his office to report damage to their homes.

“A man turned up who said he was a real estate broker. He said he wanted to buy houses damaged in the blast, and would pay whatever the owners wanted,” Ghulam said. — AFP



MILLION PEOPLE MARCH



A protester stands in the road blocking the traffic as people gather in Westbourne Park to take part in the inaugural Million People March march from Notting Hill to Hyde Park in London on Sunday to put pressure on the UK government into changing the 'UK's institutional and systemic racism'. The march is organised by The Million People Movement, and takes place on the bank holiday weekend usually associated with the Notting Hill Carnival, this year cancelled due to the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

Italy struggling to deal with daily arrivals of hundreds of migrants

TRAMATIC: Boat carrying about 370 reaches Lampedusa, more on the way

ROME: A fishing boat carrying nearly 370 migrants landed overnight on the Italian island of Lampedusa, the country's news agencies reported on Sunday, as a nearby humanitarian ship carrying another 350 people sought a port of disembarkation.

Italy has been struggling in recent months to deal with daily arrivals of hundreds of migrants to its southern shores, a task complicated by security measures imposed by the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

The boat carrying 367 people, which was in danger of sinking due to high winds, was escorted by the Italian coast guard and police to the island's port, ANSA news agency said.

They were met at the port by a demonstration organised by the far-right, anti-immigrant League party.

The migrants, whose nationalities were not known, underwent temperature checks before they were taken to an emergency reception centre on the island which now houses some 1,160 people, 10 times its maximum capacity, Lampedusa's mayor, Toto Martello, told ANSA.

About 30 other small boats, mostly from the Tunisian coast, had already reached the island since Friday



The boat carrying migrants, which was in danger of sinking due to high winds, was escorted by the Italian coast guard. — AFP

carrying some 500 migrants, the Italian press reported.

"Lampedusa can no longer cope with this situation. Either the government takes immediate decisions or the whole island will go on strike. We can't manage the emergency and the situation is now really unsustainable," Martello told ANSA.

Nello Musumeci, the right-leaning leader of sister island Sicily, on Sunday

wrote on Facebook that he would ask the government for a meeting on the "humanitarian and health crisis".

"Lampedusa can't do it anymore. Sicily cannot continue to pay for the indifference of Brussels and the silence of Rome," he wrote.

The Italian coast guard on Saturday also transported 49 people who had been rescued in the Mediterranean by the *MV Louise Michel*, a vessel funded by the street artist Banksy.

The 150 other passengers on that ship were transferred late on Saturday to the humanitarian rescue boat *Sea-Watch 4*, which now has some 350 people on board and is looking for a port of disembarkation.

The crew of the vessel chartered by German NGO Sea Watch and medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) wrote on Twitter that it was treating people for "fuel burns, dehydration, hypothermia & traumatic injuries".

The German-flagged *Louise Michel* had said it needed aid after helping a boat carrying at least one dead migrant in the sea that divides Africa and Europe.

Its crew said the 31-metre (101-foot) ship had become overcrowded and unable to move, warning that some of the migrants had fuel burns and had been at sea for days.

The rescued migrants later said three people had died at sea before the arrival of the *Louise Michel*.

Banksy, who keeps his identity a secret, explained in an online video that he had bought the boat to help migrants "because EU authorities deliberately ignore distress calls from non-Europeans". — AFP

Boris Johnson govt slumps in polls

LONDON: Britain's Conservative government was on Sunday level with the Labour party in the polls for the first time in over a year amid a series of embarrassing U-turns and economic devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson can expect little respite when parliament returns on Tuesday, with economic gloom and rows over school returns and efforts to get workers back to the office set to dominate the agenda.

The Tories and Labour are now both polling at 40 per cent, according to an Opinium poll published in the *Observer* on Sunday, the first time they have been level since Johnson was elected leader last summer.

The Conservatives had a 26-point lead at the start of the coronavirus crisis, but criticism over the government's handling of the outbreak, which has claimed over 41,000 lives in Britain, and the economic fallout from the resulting lockdown has seen their popularity plunge.

"This is the first time Labour have drawn level since July 2019 when both main parties were in freefall," said Adam Drummond of Opinium.

"Since Boris Johnson became prime minister the Tories typically had a double digit lead, peaking in March/April this year when they were seen to be handling the pandemic and lockdown fairly well while Labour changed leader."

The latest polling drop comes after a damaging two weeks of U-turns over school exam results.

The government cancelled all exams for schoolleavers due to the virus, and instead asked Ofqual, the non-ministerial government department in charge of testing, to estimate results based on teacher assessments and other factors, including the historic performance of schools.

But it was forced to accept the teachers' estimated grades after thousands of pupils had their results downgraded by Ofqual's algorithm, which particularly hit children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It also backtracked on making pupils wear masks when they return to school next week.

Charles Walker, vice-chair of the influential 1922 committee of Conservative backbenchers, told the *Observer* that MPs were becoming restless.

"Too often it looks like this government licks its finger and



Prime Minister Boris Johnson can expect little respite when parliament returns on Tuesday.

sticks it in the air to see which way the wind is blowing. This is not a sustainable way to approach the business of governing and government," he said.

ECONOMIC GLOOM

The return to school threatens to be another flashpoint, with unions unhappy about the safety of staff and some parents concerned about their children.

Britain's economy shrank by one fifth in the second quarter, more than any European neighbour, as the lockdown slammed businesses and plunged the country into its deepest recession on record.

City centre businesses have been hit particularly hard as people continue to work from home, with thousands of job losses announced by High Street stores and food chains.

Johnson is expected to launch a major publicity drive next week encouraging people to go back to the office.

The campaign will make the "emotional case" for face-to-face relationships with colleagues and reassure nervous workers that "the workplace is a safe place", said the *Daily Telegraph*.

A Morgan Stanley study published in early August indicated just one-third (34 per cent) of British office workers had returned to their desks, compared to 68 per cent in Europe.

The government is running a huge deficit as it attempts to mitigate the downturn, with sharp tax hikes expected to be announced soon, the *Sunday Telegraph* reported.

One glimmer of good news is the dramatic decrease in the number of people dying and being hospitalised with coronavirus. But government scientists are still concerned about a return in winter, which it warned could lead to more than 80,000 deaths in the "worst case scenario." — AFP

White House halts election security briefings to Congress

WASHINGTON: The White House has revealed it is to end in-person briefings to congressional intelligence committees about foreign election interference, sparking accusations that it was covering up Russian help for President Donald Trump's reelection.

The move comes two months ahead of the general election, with Trump playing down the threat of foreign interference and accusing Democrats of leaking sensitive information.

"Probably Shifty Schiff, but others also, LEAK information to the Fake News," the president tweeted, referring to House Intelligence Committee chairman Adam Schiff.

He offered no evidence for the claim, which he has made several times during his presidency.

"No matter what or who it is about, including China, these deranged

lowlifes like the Russia, Russia, Russia narrative. Plays better for them," he added.

Congress will still have access to classified written reports, but lawmakers will no longer be able to question officials from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) about what they learn.

Democrats in Congress reacted with fury, describing the move as "shameful" and accusing Trump of covering up Russian interference.

"As usual, President Trump is lying and projecting. Trump fired the last DNI for briefing Congress on Russian efforts to help his campaign," Schiff tweeted.

"Now he's ending briefings altogether. Trump doesn't want the American people to know about Russia's efforts to aid his re-election."



US President Donald Trump visits areas damaged by hurricane Laura in Lake Charles, Louisiana. — Reuters

Schiff and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called in a separate statement for the administration and intelligence community to resume the briefings.

"If they are unwilling to, we

will consider the full range of tools available to the House to compel compliance," they said.

DNI John Ratcliffe wrote to the top lawmakers from both parties in

the House and Senate intelligence committees explaining the change, in a letter dated August 28, which was circulated in US media on Saturday.

'UNPRECEDENTED

"I believe this approach helps ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that the information ODNI provides the Congress in support of your oversight responsibilities on elections security, foreign malign influence, and election interference is not misunderstood nor politicised," he wrote.

"It will also better protect our sources and methods and most sensitive intelligence from additional unauthorised disclosures or misuse."

White House chief-of-staff Mark Meadows said during a visit with Trump to hurricane-hit Louisiana and Texas on Saturday that "the last time

they gave briefings, a few members went out and talked to the press, disclosed information that they shouldn't have disclosed." But Senate Intelligence Vice Chairman Mark Warner called the decision to stop in-person briefings an "unprecedented attempt to politicise an issue — protecting our democracy from foreign intervention — that should be non-partisan."

Members of the US intelligence committee as well as former FBI chief Robert Mueller have said publicly that Moscow is reprising its 2016 campaign to help Trump win the election.

William Evanina, director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center, warned earlier this month that China, Russia and Iran were all seeking to interfere, using online disinformation and other means. — AFP

Never rue your day... !

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bad day does not mean that all your life is bad and worthless! Unfortunately, some people get frustrated once they come across any challenge in life. Regardless how small or big is the challenge, it spoils their day and might curse it too. Thus, they regret what they have done, wish to go back and fix what can be changed, though what is gone is gone! It is human willingness to go back and change things that they regret.

Perhaps, you personally have regretted a decision you had made in the past. I assume most of us have experienced such feelings; it is frustrating and hard to feel that you made a wrong or unlikable choice. If truth to be told, it is most maddening when it comes to making your mind on a matter related to money or job! Whenever you do not give yourself enough time to make a decision, you definitely get such a kind of feeling.

Don't you worry at all if it happens; this is just a very normal feeling and thought we all can, especially when not certain about the decision to make. As William Shakespeare advises, "Let's not burden our remembrance with a heaviness that's gone". However, what is upsetting is that those awful thoughts and emotions remain itching in our minds and boiling in our hearts. On the other hand, they help us recall things and decisions we have made or review an incident that has been taken sometime ago; which could be made in a hurry or unplanned.

Despite the critically distressing thinking that comes out of all these hard times and challenges, it could bring you an opportunity to discover your hiccups and mistakes, which you would learn from. As it might be hard and an intolerable experience; but with mistakes



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we learn lessons. Usually, people learn things from their reoccurring mistakes, so one can get things right the next time.

We all suffer one of the two things, the pain of discipline or the pain of regret or disappointment.

Hence, nobody shall regret taking

undesirable decision for it could be the right one and you might realise that later. Each experience you encounter in your life brings a lesson with it, which you might not discover on the spot. Yet, it is happening for one's own good and the message with every experience will be received sooner or later unless one regards it as curse or a failure.

What really counts is the way in which you perceive and look at things to get the right decision taken on time. If your eyesight first hocks the positive side, then you will never think that you are lost. There is nothing called a dead end or unsolved problem! Think positively and believe in the possibility to get things fixed the way you like. Every test in life makes us bitter or better, every problem comes to break or make us. The choice is ours whether we become victim or victor.

Just always remember that problems are only opportunities with thorns on them. Opportunities do not come with their values stamped on them. Always remember life is an experience and every day is an opportunity to make a new happy ending. Live the moment and have some faith and hope which is the last to be ever lost in life. As Helen Keller, American lecturer and creative author, said: "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement".

Sometime, you just need to be more positive and roll the dice to make things come the way you wish for. Likewise, fate is the justification we attribute to for what happens to us. True, it is fate that we always relate things to, but it depends on the way we look at things as well.

Our beliefs and confidence are behind our attitudes, perception of life and ultimately the decisions we make.

Protests over disputed elections in Belarus



Mexico courts allies across wide ideological spectrum

ANTHONY ESPOSITO AND ADRIANA BARRERA

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exico is pressing ahead with an effort to forge COVID-19 vaccine alliances across a wide ideological spectrum of countries from France to Cuba as a World Health Organization (WHO) vaccine initiative will fall short of its needs.

Mexico joined in early June the WHO's global COVAX plan, which aims to deliver at least 2 billion doses of approved vaccines by the end of next year and ensure "equitable access". But Martha Delgado, a Mexican Deputy Foreign Minister whom President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador put in charge of Mexico's international response, said its share of that programme was unlikely to be enough to provide the roughly 200 million vaccine doses Mexicans will need.

"We can't depend on it", said Delgado. "COVAX promises to help with 20 per cent of the population — we need a bigger quantity of vaccines and so do other countries as well". Delgado's boss, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard, has been reporting in regularly to Lopez Obrador about the latest developments in the effort to secure a vaccine — or vaccines — that will curtail Mexico's novel coronavirus outbreak, she said, an effort embracing all major superpowers and their allies.

Left-wing populist Lopez Obrador has raised eyebrows in some quarters by forging a close alliance with US President Donald Trump. But Ebrard has also assiduously courted China, which has provided Mexico with such equipment as ventilators and masks. And Lopez Obrador has offered to personally test the Russian vaccine despite misgivings among some scientists.

The foreign ministry underscored, in an emailed statement, that "vaccine nationalism" should be avoided because "no one will be safe until everyone is safe, and for that reason, negotiation, diplomacy and multilateralism play a crucial role". Delgado said her daily schedule is packed talking to healthcare sector representatives, ambassadors, foreign ministries, laboratories and doctors.

"We have chosen to do this via our diplomatic channels, get access to information and pharmaceutical companies through cooperation with other countries", Delgado said.

"Why go this route? Firstly, the countries themselves are going to certify their vaccines, their safety, not the pharmaceutical companies.

"And secondly because Mexico has diplomatic prestige", said Delgado, pointing to a United Nations resolution it successfully sponsored to guarantee universal access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19.

The strategy seems to be working. Mexico will take part in clinical trials of the Italian GRAD-COV2 vaccine and has agreed for 2,000 volunteers to participate in trials of Russia's "Sputnik V" vaccine.

— Reuters

Rural students left behind as schools go online

NELLIE PEYTON

W

ith coronavirus sweeping through their rural district, the children of Francis Marion School in Perry County, Alabama, started school online this week. But for many, logging on for class was out of the question.

Only about half of the school's 600-odd students have reliable Internet at home and one in five has no connection at all, said principal Cathy Trimble.

"Our district cannot afford to get devices for our students. And then the biggest thing is connectivity. No broadband", she said.

Perry County is one of the poorest in the state, and Francis Marion School ranks near the bottom of Alabama schools on test scores. Ninety-nine per cent of its students are Black. As the pandemic forces schools across the country to switch to virtual learning, a technology gap that has existed for decades has suddenly become visible and of urgent concern.

Some 16 million children, or 30 per cent of all US public school students, lack either an Internet connection or a device at home adequate for distance learning, according to a recent study by Boston Consulting Group.

One in three Black, Latino and Native American students lacks a broadband connection, compared to one in five white students, according to an analysis by four educational advocacy groups in July.

While donors, states and phone companies have stepped up with plans to connect more students for free or at discounted rates during the pandemic, the programs are temporary and do not reach everyone, educators and analysts said.

"There's no big federal imperative or

There's no big federal imperative or mandate to ensure that every school kid has access to technology

NICOL TURNER LEE
A senior fellow

mandate to ensure that every school kid has access to technology", said Nicol Turner Lee, a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think-tank.

"I think what schools are doing in the interim... is a critical move. But it in no way addresses the Herculean effort that is going to be needed to cover all of America", she said.

Before the pandemic, most schools did not know how many of their students lacked home Internet. Since then they have scrambled to connect as many as possible, but devices are backordered, funding is limited and time is running out.

On the Friday before classes were due to start, Trimble had fewer than 100 hotspots for an estimated 300 children who might need one, she said. Some parents had already returned them because they were not picking up a signal where they lived.

At least 18 million Americans, or 6 per cent of the population, live in areas where fixed broadband service is not available,

according to the Federal Communications Commission. Many more have access to the internet, but cannot afford to pay for it.

In Marion County, South Carolina, both poverty and a lack of coverage keep more than half the population offline, said Miko Pickett, a former IT professional who runs a local foundation called Neighbors Helping Neighbors.

"We are a broadband desert", she said. The majority of Marion County's residents are Black, and a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line, according to US Census data.

When students were first sent home in March, residents and local charities rushed to find solutions.

"I was on LinkedIn and everything, begging people for laptops. It was horrible", said Pickett, who shared her own Wi-Fi hotspot with neighbours so their children could do homework.

South Carolina has earmarked \$50 million from its federal coronavirus relief funds to expand internet access, and Marion County schools are expecting laptops and hotspots to arrive next month.

But students will be playing catch-up to those who transitioned seamlessly to digital learning earlier this year, said Pickett.

"We're worried that for children who were already far behind, they will be farther behind", said Phyllis Martin, CEO of the Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative (TCCC), which works to boost educational equity in South Carolina.

In the three counties where TCCC works, the racial gaps in educational attainment are already vast.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



BUCKS ADVANCE AFTER TRIGGERING SHUTDOWN

LAKERS SNAP PLAY-OFF WIN DROUGHT, KEEP HOPES ALIVE



Milwaukee Bucks’ Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) drives to the basket against Orlando Magic’s Evan Fournier (10). – USA Today Sports

MIAMI: The Milwaukee Bucks powered into the second round of the NBA play-offs on Saturday, three days after their refusal to take the court in the wake of a police shooting in Wisconsin brought the post-season to a halt.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 28 points and grabbed 17 rebounds and the Bucks led by as many as 21 on the way to a 118-104 victory over the Orlando Magic.

Milwaukee won the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series 4-1 to line up a second-round clash with the Miami Heat, who swept the Indiana Pacers 4-0.

In the Western Conference, Anthony Davis scored 43 points and LeBron James kept his perfect first-round play-off record alive as the Los Angeles Lakers beat Portland 131-122 to clinch their series in five games.

James won all 14 play-off first-round series in which he has played.

“We knew this was a hot Portland team. We wanted to come in and get better and better as the series went on, and we did that,” said James.

Just days earlier there was a real chance that players would opt out of the remainder of the post-season in the NBA’s coronavirus quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

The Bucks were prepared to forfeit game five against the Magic on Wednesday after the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

But the Magic, and eventually the rest of the teams remaining in the bubble, backed their action, to launch hours of discussion among players, coaches and league officials on how they could unite to combat racial injustice and police brutality.

The Bucks players were able to contact Blake’s family.

“We were able to get his family’s number,” Antetokounmpo said. “And, we came together as a team, went in a circle, talked to his dad and his dad was tearing up telling us how powerful what we did on that day was for him and his family, and that’s bigger than basketball to me.” With plans in place for concrete action to promote voting and civic engagement, and support police and criminal justice reform legislation, the season resumed.

There were signs of rust early from both the Bucks and Magic, who hadn’t played since Monday.

Both teams connected on less than 40 per cent of their shots from the field in the first quarter, but Milwaukee picked up the pace in the second led by Antetokounmpo’s 6-of-6 shooting.

After Orlando reserve Terrence Ross drained a three-pointer to level the score at 31-31, an Antetokounmpo dunk launched a 13-0 scoring run for

the Bucks who led 67-50 at the half.

Milwaukee quickly pushed the lead to 20 after the interval and took a 90-79 lead into the final frame.

“Just keep getting better,” was Antetokounmpo’s prescription for Milwaukee as they moved ahead. “Keep getting better every game, playing hard always. Defensively we’ve just got to pick it up a little bit, just make it as tough as possible for whoever we play.”

MOMENT OF SILENCE

There was a sombre mood to the restart with moment of silences before the games in memory of former Trail Blazers star Cliff Roberts, Hall of Fame coach Lute Olson and actor Chadwick Boseman, who all died this week.

Roberts, 53, helped the Trail Blazers reach two NBA Finals in his 18-year career that included an All-Star nod.

Olson, 85, mentored future NBA

stars as he made the University of Arizona a college basketball power.

Boseman, star of the ground-breaking superhero movie Black Panther died at the age of 43 after a battle with cancer. Lakers star Davis finished with 43 points and James had 36 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists as the Lakers won their first play-off series in eight years.

Davis shot 14-of-18 from the floor and James made 14-of-19 shots for the Lakers, who hadn’t won a series since beating the Denver Nuggets in the first round of the 2012 post-season.

The Lakers will face either Houston or Oklahoma City in the next round. Houston leads that series three games to two. “We have an opportunity to decompress just a little bit and wait for our next opponent,” James said.

CJ McCollum recorded 36 points and seven assists and Carmelo Anthony added 27 points for the Trail

Blazers, who were missing Damian Lillard. Lillard left the pandemic bubble during the latest shutdown and returned to Portland to have his injured right knee looked at by team doctors.

Elsewhere, James Harden scored 31 points and Robert Covington finished with 22 points and seven rebounds as the Houston Rockets routed the Oklahoma City Thunder 114-80 to take a 3-2 series lead. — AFP

NBA PLAY-OFF RESULTS	
(ALL SERIES BEST-OF-SEVEN):	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
Milwaukee bt Orlando 118-104 (Milwaukee win 4-1)	
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
Houston bt Oklahoma City 114-80 (Houston lead 3-2)	
LA Lakers bt Portland 131-122 (Los Angeles win 4-1)	

Naqvi to continue bid for Arjuna Awards honour

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Eminent sports personality SAS Naqvi is disappointed a lot but vowed to continue his efforts after missing out on Arjuna Awards -- India's national awards for sports in 2020.

The Muscat-based veteran is one surviving member who played during the golden era of Indian hockey, rubbing shoulders with the ever-time legend Dhyanchand.

“I had the greatest honour to play hockey with Dada Dhyanchand, captain of 1936 Berlin Olympics, Dada Kishan Lal, captain of 1948 Olympics London, KD Singh Babu, captain of 1952 Olympics Helsinki,” Naqvi said.

However Naqvi, who was the first hockey coach of Oman, feels sad after his contributions to Indian hockey was left unrecognised for another year.

“I had hoped that my close link with the golden generation players including Dada Dhyanchand and others and my contribution for

spreading hockey will be recognised this year,” the 90-year-old, who had played in India from 1947 to 82, told Oman Observer.

In 1975, NIS Patiala had nominated Naqvi to be the assistant coach for the initial Indian camp for World Cup at Malaysia. The camp later shifted to the Chandigarh and this Indian team had won the World Cup 1975 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

In 1978, Naqvi was appointed the Indian women’s hockey team chief coach for the 1978 World cup at Madrid and tour of Holland, France and UK.

“I feel that the present generation is not aware of the hockey golden generation players and their contributions, which I think resulted in the omission of my case for the Arjuna Awards. However, I will not stop my efforts for recognition not only for me but also the golden era players of hockey.”

During his Indian career, Naqvi had



also played with Balbir Singh Senior, captain 1956 Olympics Melbourne. L. Cladius, captain 1960 Olympics at Rome, Charanjit Singh, captain 1964 at Tokyo Japan, joint captains Prithipal

Singh and Guru Bux Singh 1968 Mexico, Harmik Singh, captain 1972 Olympics at Munich, Guru Bux Singh, 1976 captain Mountrail Olympics at Canada and V Bhaskaran, captain of

1980 at Moscow Olympics.

Naqvi’s application for Arjuna Awards were supported by former Indian hockey great Dhanraj Pillay, and other top sports personalities

including Mir Ranjan Negi, Joquim Carvahlo, MM Somaya and Marvin Fernandes.

From Oman, Dr Hammad Hamed Abed Al Ghafri, former Advisor, Ministry of Civil Service, former President of Oman Olympic Committee and presently Member of State Supreme Council, also backed the credentials of Naqvi among many other eminent sports personalities and top administration officials including Indian Ambassador to Oman.

Naqvi, who made significant contribution to the establishment of Oman Olympic Committee, was honoured by the International Hockey Federation (FIH) and Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) with the ‘Lifetime Achievement Award’ in 2015.

Oman had also recognised the sports personality’s contributions with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011, presented by Dr Ali Bin Masoud Ali Al Sunaidy, the then sports minister.

DOMINANT HAMILTON CRUISES TO BELGIAN GP WIN



SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, Belgium: Lewis Hamilton extended his lead at the top of the overall Formula standings with an unchallenged drive to victory in Sunday's Belgian Grand Prix.

The Briton, who started from pole and led every lap, crossed the line 8.4 seconds ahead of team mate Valtteri Bottas who gave Mercedes a one-two finish.

Max Verstappen, taking his sixth consecutive podium finish in his Red Bull, was third.

Hamilton's win at a sunny Spa-Francorchamps circuit on Sunday, which left him two short of Michael Schumacher's record tally of 91 victories, was his fifth in seven races.

It lifted him 47 points clear of Verstappen in the overall standings after 10 of this season's 17 races. Bottas closed the gap to Verstappen but remained third.

Daniel Ricciardo, who took the extra point for fastest lap, finished fourth ahead of team mate Esteban Ocon who snatched fifth from Red Bull's Alexander Albon on the final lap.

Lando Norris, the sole McLaren

Belgian Grand Prix

Spa-Francorchamps circuit		
1	L. Hamilton (GBR)	1h24:08.761
		Mercedes
2	V. Bottas (FIN)	at 8.448 secs
		Mercedes
3	M. Verstappen (NED)	at 15.445 secs
		Red Bull
4	D. Ricciardo (AUS)	at 18.777
		Renault
5	E. Ocon (FRA)	at 40.650
		Renault

in the race after team mate Carlos Sainz failed to make the start due to an exhaust issue, was seventh ahead of Pierre Gasly who scythed through the field in his Toro Rosso

on his hard compound tyres in the early laps.

The Racing Point pair of Lance Stroll and Sergio Perez rounded out the top 10.

Driver standings	
Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	157
Max Verstappen (NED)	110
Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	107
Alexander Albon (THAI)	48
Charles Leclerc (MON)	45
Teams	
Mercedes	264
Red Bull	158
McLaren	68
Racing Point	66

Ferrari, winners in Belgium for the last two years, finished out of the points.

Already enduring a miserable weekend, their lack of speed was laid bare down the Spa track's long straights, with rivals picking them off with ease.

Sebastian Vettel, once again questioning the team's strategy, was 13th. Charles Leclerc, winner last year from pole position, could do no better than 14th.

The Italian team's form even drew a shake of the head from Sainz, who is set to replace Vettel at the Maranello-based squad next season.

The race was largely incident-free with the exception of an early safety car sent out after a crash involving Alfa Romeo's Antonio Giovinazzi and George Russell in a Williams.

The Italian lost control of his car at the exit of the fast Fagnes chicane.

Russell, running behind Giovinazzi, collected a loose wheel that came off the Alfa Romeo, leaving debris strewn across the track. — Reuters



Novak Djokovic (SRB) poses with the trophy following his win over Milos Raonic (CAN) in the Western & Southern Open. — USA Today Sports

Djokovic tunes in perfect for US Open

NEW YORK: Off-court distractions and a neck injury could not prevent Novak Djokovic from extending his winning run this year to 23 matches and the Serbian could not be in more intimidating form ahead of the US Open.

Djokovic clinched his 80th career title and equalled Rafael Nadal's record of 35 Masters 1000 wins when he rallied from a set down to beat Milos Raonic 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the Western & Southern Open final on Saturday.

"I am trying to make the most of my career, trying to use this time when I feel that I am physically, mentally, emotionally, game-wise at (my) peak and playing some of the best tennis that I have ever played," the world number one told reporters.

"Going on an unbeaten run so far this year obviously brings even more confidence each match. I'm just trying to enjoy it and embrace the process.

"How long that journey is going to last and what kind of legacy I'm going to leave behind, that's on somebody else to really judge and evaluate."

In the absence of his rivals for the title of greatest men's player of the modern era, Djokovic is odds-on favourite to win his fourth crown at Flushing Meadows for an 18th Grand Slam triumph that would put him one behind Nadal and two behind Roger Federer.

The 33-year-old will open his US Open campaign

against Damir Dzumhur in the evening session on an empty Arthur Ashe Stadium on Monday.

He looked unbeatable in his early matches at the Western & Southern Open at Flushing Meadows before coming to within two points of losing to Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut in the semifinals.

Raonic broke Djokovic's serve twice to win the opening set of the final 6-1 but Djokovic again shifted to a higher gear to emerge victorious.

Before the 2020 season was halted in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he had won the ATP Cup with Serbia, an eighth Australian Open and a fifth Dubai title.

It was not all plain sailing on court last week, however, as he needed medical attention on a neck injury a few times and there have been off-court issues to deal with.

Djokovic resigned as president of the players council of the men's ATP Tour and floated a breakaway association for the athletes, facing stiff resistance from the governing bodies as well as Federer and Nadal.

"There's been a lot of off-court things that I kind of had to be involved in directly or indirectly," he said on Saturday.

"It was not easy, definitely, especially in the last three, four days. It has been challenging mentally and emotionally for me to stay sane and be able to compete on the highest level and win this title." — Reuters

CORONAVIRUS CHAOS IN PREMIER LEAGUE TOP CLUBS

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, AUG 30

With the start of the football season less than a fortnight away, the pandemic is causing disruption to Premier League clubs' pre-season plans as well as the international football calendar. Several stars are forced to train at home after returning from holidays in countries requiring quarantine and others contracting the virus.

At Chelsea – who are in the Champions League for the new season – where pre-season training has already started, as many as eight players are in quarantine, either with the virus or as a result of returning from restricted countries. Two of them, Mason Mount and Tammy

Abraham, have been included in the England squad for the forthcoming Nations League matches against Iceland and Denmark. Mount, Abraham, Christian Pulisic, and Fikayo Tomori all visited Mykonos while Jorginho Ross Barklay, Emerson Palmieri and Michy Batshuayi are also in quarantine.

Arsenal goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez completed his quarantine period just in time to help his side beat Liverpool in the Community Shield match on Saturday.

Tottenham Hotspur have had problems too with midfielder Tanguy Ndombele testing positive for the virus and was removed from the France squad. He will now undergo a 14-day quarantine period. During the pre-season, Spurs have



Socially distanced fans watch from the stands during the pre-season friendly between Brighton and Hove Albion and Chelsea in Brighton. — AFP

already had to make do without striker Harry Kane, their top scorer in the Premier League last season, due to quarantine issues. He had travelled to the Bahamas and did not leave the country before it was added to the UK's quarantine travel list. Manchester United's Paul Pogba withdrew from the France squad after testing positive for Covid-19, disrupting France's preparation. "At the very last minute I've made a change in the (squad) list, because Paul Pogba, who was previously on the list, unfortunately for him he carried out a test which returned as positive," France manager Didier Deschamps confirmed.

Pogba will now self-isolate, joining defender Aaron Wan-Bissaka, who faces a two-week

quarantine period due to holidaying in Dubai. Both players will miss Manchester United's pre-season match next Wednesday. It is proving to be far from an ideal off-season for United after captain Harry Maguire was arrested in Greece and found guilty of aggravated assault and attempted bribery before an appeal by his legal team was accepted.

United and Manchester City — the latter in running for the big prize of signing Lionel Messi if the Argentinian is able to leave Barcelona — will begin the new Premier League campaign a week later than other clubs after competing in Uefa's mini-tournaments to decide the Europa League and Champions League in August.



sport



Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and team-mates celebrate with the trophy after winning the FA Community Shield. – Reuters

AUBAMEYANG

ARSENAL EDGE LIVERPOOL ON PENALTIES TO WIN COMMUNITY SHIELD

UNDERLINES VALUE

LONDON: Mikel Arteta claimed Arsenal captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is close to signing a new contract after the Gunners beat Liverpool 5-4 on penalties following a 1-1 draw in the Community Shield on Saturday.

Aubameyang put Arteta's side ahead in the first half at Wembley with a typically eye-catching strike.

Japan's Takumi Minamino equalised with his first goal for Liverpool late in the second half of the annual pre-season friendly between the Premier League champions and FA Cup winners.

In the shoot-out, Liverpool's young striker Rhian Brewster was the only player to miss, hitting the bar with their third penalty before Aubameyang calmly dispatched the decisive spot-kick.

As if Arteta needed any reminding, it was another sign of the influence wielded by his captain Aubameyang, who is yet to commit his long-term future to the club as he enters the final year of his contract.

Gabon forward Aubameyang has kept Arsenal waiting nervously during protracted talks and he demurred when asked in a post-match interview if he was ready to sign the club's contract offer.

"We are going to see, today we will just take the trophy and that is it," he said.

Arteta has remained confident the 31-year-old will stay and he insisted his talisman's status will be resolved to his satisfaction before the Premier League season starts on September 12.

"We are close," Arteta said of the



Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang celebrates winning the penalty shoot-out. – Reuters

contract. "He was magnificent in the FA Cup final and again today.

"I try to do my job, which is convince him that he is in the right place, that he has the environment here to produce the moments like he's done today and he's done here three weeks ago.

"I am very positive that he's going

to sign but a lot of time there's a lot of things involved in a contract deal and we are trying to show him."

For Liverpool, it was the second successive season they have lost the Community Shield on penalties after being beaten by Manchester City last term.

That is unlikely to concern coach Jurgen Klopp too much given the champions' lack of rest and preparation since winning the title for the first time in 30 years.

"For these type of games you need the final punch. We created enough, had the ball quite a lot, but had to be

careful of their counter-attack," Klopp said. "A penalty shoot-out is always a little bit of a lottery and we were unlucky there, so congratulations to Arsenal."

The Community Shield traditionally serves as the curtain-raiser to the new English season.

But Liverpool and Arsenal were back in action just 34 days after the end of the coronavirus-delayed Premier League campaign and only six days after the Champions League final concluded the entire 2019-20 season.

TACTICALLY ASTUTE

After only one week of pre-season training, it was a more encouraging result for Arteta, whose team emulated their FA Cup final win over Chelsea with another determined, tactically astute display.

Liverpool were without the injured Trent Alexander-Arnold and the naivety of his teenage replacement Neco Williams was exposed by Aubameyang in the 12th minute.

Cutting in from the left to reach Bukayo Saka's pass, Aubameyang was given too much time and space by Williams.

Aubameyang made him pay with a superb curler into the far corner from the edge of the penalty area, celebrating the goal by crossing his arms in tribute to "Black Panther" actor Chadwick Boseman, who died on Friday aged 43.

It was Aubameyang's fifth goal for Arsenal at Wembley, making him the club's joint highest scorer at the national stadium with Alexis Sanchez.

He scored a brace in each of his previous two Wembley appearances against Manchester City and Chelsea.

Liverpool equalised in the 73rd minute when Minamino slotted home from close range for his first Reds goal in his 15th appearance since his January move from Salzburg. — AFP



DUQM PORT TO HANDLE FISHERIES CARGOES P14



RELIANCE TO PAY \$3.4 BN FOR FUTURE GROUP'S RETAIL EMPIRE P15



LEBANON CENTRAL BANK CLEAN-UP RAISES DOUBTS P16

Dhofar Cattle Feed unearths RO 245K fraud

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Dhofar Cattle Feed Company SAOG, a publicly traded company listed on the Muscat Securities Market (MSM), revealed on Sunday that it has been defrauded of an amount of around RO 245K by unknown employees of the firm.

In a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA), the Salalah-based dairy processor and foodstuff manufacturer said it unearthed the fraud during a review of an unexpected spike in expired and damaged finished products.

“On a detailed scrutiny, we found some employees of the company have committed fraud to the extent of approximately RO 245K”, said the company in its filing.

“The company has revamped its systems and processes and brought additional measures of internal control. We are in the process of filing the case in the court with the help of our independent legal accounting consultant and the company’s lawyer”, it added.

Oman's real estate sector impacted by pandemic and low oil prices

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Leading real estate advisory services firm Savills says it expects to see increasing challenges for the Sultanate's real estate sector stemming from difficult economic conditions and the exodus of expatriates.

Ihsan Kharouf, Head of Savills Oman, said in the company's latest market report that the reduction in the expatriate population, which declined by 17.6 per cent between 2016 to Q1 2020, will be accelerated by the economic downturn and the pandemic.

“Expatriates play a significant role in influencing demand for real estate”, said Kharouf. “Market conditions in both the residential and office space rental sectors in Muscat were already in slowdown/recession prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of slow economic growth and negligible net population growth.

The ongoing pandemic has further deteriorated the economic landscape. While the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on the sector are currently unclear, it is evident that there will be increasing challenges over the coming months”.

According to Ihsan, recent years have seen a gradual decline in achievable rental values in Muscat as a result of increasing supply relative to moderate demand. Savills estimates that there is currently around 350,000



sqm of better-quality office space for the rental market in Muscat with a further circa 100,000 sqm of office space under construction between Qurum and Muscat Hills which is due to be completed in the coming 12 to 18 months.

In Savills' experience, the majority of recent demand has been focused on smaller, fully finished office units with around 90 per cent of demand coming from companies with an existing presence in Oman: Demand from new market entrants has been limited.

Recent years have seen a gradual decline in achievable rental values in Muscat as a result of increasing supply relative to moderate demand

The longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices on the office rental market in Muscat will only become clear over

the coming months but the sector is highly likely to experience downward pressure in terms of both demand and achievable rental values in the short term.

“With rental values at historically low levels, however, Savills considers that landlords are increasingly likely to agree to incentives such as extended initial rent-free periods and/or assistance with office fit-outs for shell & core space rather than notable further drops in rental values.

Good car parking and property management will remain key features

in attracting and retaining tenants”, said Savills in its report.

The residential rental market in Muscat has also seen a notable increase in supply over recent years, although Ihsan notes that the supply of mid to higher grade apartments with facilities and compound townhouses/ villas remains relatively limited.

The residential rental market in Muscat is driven by expatriates and the drop in expatriate numbers since 2017 has resulted in a shrinking market size for residential rental properties.

As a result, realistically achievable rental values for better quality apartments were generally around 30 per cent to 40 per cent lower at the end of 2019 in comparison to 2014. In comparison, rental values for villas and townhouses in the prime locations of Shatti Al Qurum, Muscat Hills and Al Mouj saw greater resilience, according to the report.

While better quality residential units are likely to show a more stable performance, the expected drop in the number of expatriates in Muscat over the coming months will place the residential market under increased downward pressure in terms of both reduced demand and achievable rental values. Savills does, however, foresee potential interest from existing tenants to look to upgrade from their existing rental property at more affordable values.

KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM: First-ever Android-based Interactive Omani Soil Map project by students of Sultan Qaboos University gets under way

Unique Omani digitalised soil map on anvil



SQU research students collecting soil samples for the map project.



We aim to know what is so distinctive about the soil types found in these areas that were used in the construction of historical buildings, such as fortifications, watchtowers or such other structures

NOOF AL MUKHAINI
Research team member

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 30

A group of researchers at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has begun preparing an interactive-digitalised platform to unveil the richness, colour, characteristics

and diversity of Omani soils — a unique initiative that promises to yield fascinating insights with potential benefit to, among other sectors, agriculture, tourism, education, heritage and culture, project and infrastructure development, and scientific research.

The year-long research study, funded by The Research Council (TRC), is being conducted by BSc. students of SQU's Department of Soils, Water and Agricultural Engineering from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, jointly with the Department of Computer Sciences from the College of Science. The title of their study is “Omani Soil Map Interactive Platform: Android On-Demand Access Application to Digital Citizen Assisted Science”.

The students' goal is to develop a mobile app that helps users — whether students, researchers, tourists, professionals, farmers, geoscientists or even project managers — understand and benefit from the digitally available form of soils information and characteristics when traversing the length and breadth of the country.

“The Android-based Omani Soil Map platform is the first such

initiative of its kind that will serve as a comprehensive resource on the rich diversity of soils to be found across the Sultanate”, said Noof al Mukhaini, a member of the research team. “This resources will be made available via an interactive app which, along with GPS features, will enable users to have a glance about the main physico-chemical properties of soils across different topographic landscapes and to understand how the soil in a given area has had an impact on, for example, local vegetation, cultivated crops, building and construction, and other aspects of the local ecosystem”. Through the Omani Soil Map platform, the public will have an opportunity to participate, share, collaborate and digitally exchange information and knowledge about Omani soils, she said.

According to the researcher, the Sultanate is home to a wide array of soil types that differ in colour, texture and type. Black colour in soil, for example, indicates the presence of organic matter. Reddish soil points to the presence of iron oxide, while grey-coloured soil has ferrous concentrations that haven't been oxidized and may indicate anaerobic conditions.

Whitish soil, on the other hand, has concentrations of salts.

Soil sampling and analysing is planned at several sites in Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and North and South Al Batinah during the initial part of the study. Sampling at each site typically involves soil profile descriptions and soil classification.

Of particular significance is the sampling of soils in areas that are home to historical landmarks, said Noof. “As part of the Omani Soil Map, we aim to know what is so distinctive about the soil types found in these areas that were used in the construction of historical buildings, such as fortifications, watchtowers or such other structures.

We wish to study the composition of these soils, so we understand how structures built ages ago with these soils have remained stable and sustainable over the centuries. Part of our goal is to try and understand what motivated Omanis in times bygone to choose simple construction materials to build their homes and other structures without resorting to the use of complex construction materials or tools. They were simple, yet innovative, in their choices”. **TURN TO PAGE 14**



Duqm Port to handle fisheries cargoes

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed on Sunday a memorandum of understanding with the Port of Duqm Company to support the handling of fish imports and exports at the commercial port. Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary for Fisheries, represented the Ministry at the signing, while the port was represented by its CEO, Reggy Vermeulen.

With the agreement, Port of Duqm will be formally approved by

the Ministry as an authorised port for the handling of commercial and coastal fishing vessels operating in compliance with the rules of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). It will also be authorised to handle imports and exports of fresh and chilled fish, animal and agricultural resources in line with the regulations of the Ministry and other stakeholder agencies.

For its part, the Ministry will provide data on the owners of commercial and coastal vessels, whether registered or unregistered, or in



A NUMBER OF
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WHICH IS PRESENTLY
FOR TWO YEARS

default of national and international laws and regulations.

A number of technical personnel will be appointed and employed to support the handling of imports and exports for the duration of the MoU, which is presently for two years.

Significantly, Omani fish exports totalled about 205K last year valued at RO 104 million, representing 35 per cent of the total fish productions for the year. Omani fish was exported to about 57 countries around the world including East Asian countries (41 per cent) and GCC (35 per cent). — ONA

Local firm manufactures condensate stabilisation unit

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Local Omani engineering workshop ELCO International Engineering Co LLC (ELCO) has manufactured a high quality condensate stabiliser skid, a completely made in Oman product, for the Sadad North EDF Phase 1 project of PDO. The client is Enerflex Middle East LLC, which selected ELCO to manufacture pressure vessels and the condensate stabilisation skid for their contract.

Abdullah al Ajmi, manager of Human Resource and Administration, ELCO said, “We are proud to announce the completion of manufacturing condensate stabilisation skid which has a ‘Made in Oman’ tag. The initial plan was to integrate the vessels and piping on the site. However, a construction execution strategy change was made after the award and Enerflex project management team approached us to build a complete skid



package at ELCO’s workshop where pressure vessels were being fabricated. We were given the responsibility to complete integration of vessels into skid including structure, piping, isometrics, complete with integration of skid including Instrumentation and Electrical.”

Pact signed for handling of grain cargoes at Sohar Port

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

C Steinweg Oman, the operator of the multipurpose general cargo terminal at Sohar Port and Freezone, has signed an agreement with Sohar Flour Mills for the handling of shipments of wheat and grain at the port.

Hendrik van Mierop, CEO of C Steinweg Oman, said the pact overs the handling of grain commodities sourced from various countries, and their storage in warehouses. This will also aid Oman’s efforts to strengthen the country’s food security, he noted.

For his part, Raid bin Mohammed al Rubaiey, Chief



Executive Officer of Sohar Mills Company, said a special berth has been allocated for the handling of the company’s grain cargoes and finished goods — a gesture that would enhance the competitive

appeal of its investments in the port.

At the same time, the company is developing a complex of grain silos at the port with technology provided by a Swiss firm, he added.

Bank Muscat launches BM Remit App in 5 languages



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has launched a new BM Remit app to enable customers to remit funds quickly and securely to their families. The new app will particularly benefit those who have to physically visit a branch or a money exchange for making remittances as they are not tech-savvy or comfortable using mobile banking apps available until now.

BM Remit, which can be downloaded from Google Play or Huawei AppGallery, has language options like Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, Tamil and English, to cater to the bank’s wide range of customers, including those from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

The app boasts of a simple user interface for easy navigation and will make Speed Transfers available 24/7 for a large segment of customers in their respective native languages. BM Remit also has some other commonly-used features including Mobile Top-ups and account enquiries like Available Balance, Mini Statement etc.

Amjad Iqbal al Lawati (pictured), AGM – Cards & eBanking, Bank Muscat, said: “The bank has launched this completely new lightweight app for the benefit of customers who want only a few features to cover simple banking and fund transfer needs. Customers from the subcontinent will particularly appreciate the ease of use of the new remittance app.

It can be easily downloaded from Google Play or Huawei AppGallery and installed on mobile phones in just a few seconds. Importantly, it allows customers to make Speed Transfers 24/7 to their families in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan easily, securely and at their convenience.”

Customers will particularly appreciate the fact that the bank offers the best exchange rates in the country and charges only RO 1.5 for Speed Transfers.

This is much lower than the charges available elsewhere and allows the bank’s customers to get the best deal possible. The lightweight app simplifies banking and making remittances for those who do not need the full features of Bank Muscat’s Omni channel Internet and Mobile Banking, which was launched earlier in 2019. Customers will particularly enjoy the promotional offer whereby Speed Transfers to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan will be available free of charge till 15 September 2020.

Unique Omani digitalised soil map on anvil

FROM PAGE 13

At Nizwa Fort, for example, soil sampling will also take into account the soil type and texture, as well as soil pH and salt concentrations. These findings will be shared via the app for the benefit of tourists eager to under the local ecosystems and environments that support certain kinds of vegetation, construction activity in the past, and so on, she noted.

“We anticipate that this study will foster the ethical and ecological appreciation of Omani soils in the mindset of a wide spectrum of people including school pupils, educators, researchers, decision makers, officials, tourists, and historians, among others,” she added.

Supervised by Dr Said al Ismaily, the Oman Soil Map research project is also supported by Noof al Mukhaini, Maimouna al Wahaibi, Yousuf al Rawahi, Ishaq al Naabi, Salha al Balushi, Ashraf al Sabahi, Al Hussain al Thuhli, and Abdullah al Shibli. The project is funded by the TRC as part of the Faculty Mentored Undergraduate Research Award Programme (FURAP) in the field of environmental and biological resources research.



SQU research students collecting soil samples for the map project.

Holistic approach to change



DR AHMED HASSAN AL BALUSHI

Undoubtedly the recent changes announced by the Omani government are meant to improve the quality of, and effectiveness and accessibility to, public services.

A particularly smart move on the part of the government is its decision to delegate power and decentralise its authority, thereby promoting innovation in decision-making and services. This has to be well taken and professionally practiced.

On the other hand, injecting private sector expertise into public institutions helps in reorienting public services while emphasising the importance of productivity and efficiency in providing services to the public. With this comes accountability and responsibility on the part of individual employees. Management mindsets and working patterns also have to change if the desired objectives are to be achieved. Just changing the locations of officials and the authorities they report to will not bring about change.



A particularly smart move on the part of the government is its decision to delegate power and decentralise its authority, thereby promoting innovation in decision-making and services

Real change takes place when employee attitudes, thinking and working patterns, and values are transformed. These changes require a lot of training and induction. Management at different levels needs to make courageous decisions in implementing the government’s new vision. A deep understanding of the reforms initiated by the government is essential to comprehend the objectives and make suitable strategies and operational plans accordingly. The task at hand is not easy as a change in attitudes is a prerequisite.

Having said that, any pause in

the delivery of services until further notice at some government centres indicates a misreading of the essence of what is being planned and envisioned by the government. We have to move away from this kind of limited thinking.

Imagine what would happen if we close or stop factories or production because the management of a company has changed? Often, there are leadership changes in the banking sector, for example, but we don’t close the banks and stop serving customers during the transition period. Imagine what would happen to our economy if financial

services are stopped due to a change in the management or governing bodies!

Similarly, a pause in the provision of government services while the recent structural changes are effected can negatively impact the overall productivity of society. We look forward to the swift return of public sector services, delivered with better quality and efficiency. We welcome the reform measures and accompanying change and anticipate better outcomes.

(Dr Ahmed al Balushi is Dean of the College of Engineering, National University of Science and Technology)

India's Reliance to pay \$3.4 billion for Future Group's retail empire



Mukesh Ambani poses for photographers before addressing the annual shareholders meeting in Mumbai, India, in this file photo. — Reuters

MUMBAI: Indian conglomerate Reliance is acquiring the retail, wholesale and logistics businesses of the Future Group for \$3.38 billion, the oil-to-telecoms giant announced late on Saturday, strengthening its presence in the country's hugely competitive e-commerce sector.

Reliance, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, has been locked in battle with US tech behemoth Amazon and Walmart-backed Flipkart for a share of India's lucrative online market, establishing its digital platform JioMart in May.

After spending years battling local mom-and-pop shops for customers,

After spending years battling local mom-and-pop shops for customers, the online retailers are now trying to work hand-in-hand with the smaller stores that dominate India's towns and hinterlands to bring them online.

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stores that dominate India's towns and hinterlands to bring them online.

Future Group owns some of the country's best-known supermarket brands such as Big Bazaar but its founder Kishore Biyani, once known as India's retail king, has struggled in recent years, with the coronavirus pandemic dealing a heavy blow to his empire.

Ambani's daughter Isha, director of Reliance's retail subsidiary RRVL, said the deal would give a big boost to India's retail sector and was "a strong strategic fit" for her company.

"We hope to continue the growth momentum of the retail industry

with our unique model of active collaboration with small merchants ... as well as large consumer brands", she said in a press release.

"This will help Reliance retail to accelerate providing support to millions of small merchants in increasing their competitiveness and enhance their income during these challenging times," she added.

The acquisition will bolster Reliance's presence, adding another 1,800 stores to its retail portfolio, which already covers some 11,000 stores in more than 6,700 Indian towns and cities, including wholesale operations. — Reuters

SECRET WEAPON

China's new tech export controls could give Beijing a say in TikTok sale



TikTok logos are seen on cellphones in front of a displayed ByteDance logo in this illustration. — Reuters

BEIJING: China's new rules around tech exports mean ByteDance's sale of TikTok's US operations could need Beijing's approval, a Chinese trade expert told state media, a requirement that would complicate the forced and politically charged divestment.

ByteDance has been ordered by President Donald Trump to divest short video app TikTok — which is challenging the order — in the US amid security concerns over the personal data it handles.

Microsoft Corp and Oracle Corp are among the suitors for the assets, which also includes TikTok's Canada, New Zealand and Australia operations.

However, China revised a list of technologies that are banned or restricted for export for the first time in 12 years and Cui Fan, a professor of international trade at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said the changes would apply to TikTok.

"If ByteDance plans to export related technologies, it should go through the licensing procedures," Cui said in an interview with *Xinhua* published on Saturday.

China's Ministry of commerce added 23 items — including technologies such as personal information push services based on data analysis and artificial intelligence interactive interface technology — to the restricted list.

It can take up to 30 days to obtain preliminary approval to export the technology.

TikTok's secret weapon is believed to be its recommendation engine that keeps users glued to their screens. This engine, or algorithm, powers TikTok's "For You" page, which recommends the next video to watch based on an analysis of your behaviour.

Cui noted that ByteDance's development overseas had relied on its domestic technology that provided the core algorithm and said the company may need to transfer software codes or usage rights to the new owner of TikTok from China to overseas.

"Therefore, it is recommended that ByteDance seriously studies the adjusted catalogue and carefully considers whether it is necessary to suspend" negotiations on a sale, he added. ByteDance did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Sunday. — Reuters

Value bulls bang drum for cheap stock resurgence on Fed

NEW YORK: As US stocks hit record highs, some investors are betting the market's future gains will be increasingly driven by some of its lesser-loved companies.

Value stocks — shares of economically sensitive companies trading at multiples that are usually below those found on growth names — have been among the laggards in the market's blistering rally from its March lows.

Some investors believe the relative cheapness of value stocks, which include energy companies, banks and industrial conglomerates, will catapult them to leadership if the nascent US economic revival gains momentum, shifting focus from the big technology-related stocks that have led markets during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Russell 1000 Value index trades at almost 18 times earnings, up from 14 a year ago, and is up some 45 per cent since late March. By comparison, the Russell 1000 Growth index trades at a multiple of 31, up from 22, and has gained over 70 per cent in the same period.

"It's an important part of validating the market's rise, to have cyclical and value sectors move," said Nicholas Colas, co-founder of DataTrek Research.

"At the end of the day I think value can outperform, but it's going to be very episodic."

Hopes of economic healing got a second wind, when Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell rolled out a sweeping policy rewrite that puts more focus on fighting unemployment than controlling inflation, sending shares of banks like Wells Fargo and Citigroup higher on the day.

Investors in the coming week will



The 'Fearless Girl' statue facing the New York Stock Exchange is pictured in New York. — Reuters

be keeping a close eye on Friday's US non-farm payrolls data, looking for a snapshot of how the country's economic recovery is faring.

Other arguments for a value resurgence have been fuelled by signs of progress on a vaccine against COVID-19, which some investors believe could accelerate business reopenings and a return to in-person schooling across the United States.

US President Donald Trump has said a vaccine for the novel coronavirus could be available before the Nov 3 presidential election, sooner than most experts

Hopes of economic healing got a second wind, when Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell rolled out a sweeping policy rewrite that puts more focus on fighting unemployment

anticipate.

Some analysts, including those at Goldman Sachs, believe a vaccine could be approved as early as the end of this year.

That could take the S&P 500 as high as 3,700 by year-end and spur a rotation to value names, especially

if the news flow regarding a vaccine continues to be encouraging, Goldman's analysts said earlier this month. The index recently hovered near 3,500. Plenty of market participants doubt value will return anytime soon, or that such a move can be timed profitably.

Value sectors such as retail have struggled for years with lackluster earnings or business models that are being disrupted in a shift to a more tech-driven world, a process that accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Valuation alone doesn't drive stock prices. It's the combination of valuation and improving fundamentals," said Richard Bernstein, CEO and chief investment officer at Richard Bernstein Advisors in New York. "For value to outperform, one typically needs profit growth to accelerate. That's not happening yet," he said. — Reuters

Saudi bourse Tadawul officially launches derivatives market

RIYADH: The Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) launched the kingdom's first exchange-traded derivatives market and clearing house on Sunday, as part of its strategy to make its equity markets more attractive to foreign investors.

Using Nasdaq technology, the Saudi Futures 30 (SF30) Index Futures Contract is based on the MSCI Tadawul 30 (MT30), the first exchange-traded derivatives product.

"This is a significant step in introducing sophisticated market products and creating a trading environment that is attractive to local as well as international investors," said Tadawul CEO Khalid al Hussan.

In a separate statement it said Goldman Sachs Saudi Arabia has become a member of Tadawul with the right to conduct brokerage services for derivatives trading and to deal as a principal and as an agent for the new market launch.

Saudi authorities have introduced a raft of reforms to attract overseas share buyers and issuers as part of efforts to lure foreign capital and diversify the oil-dependent



A man heads to the stock market with the start of Aramco's IPO, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in this file photo. — Reuters

economy.

In 2019, the Saudi market joined the FTSE Emerging All Cap Index and the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, triggering more foreign fund inflows. — Reuters

Britain's treasury officials pushing for tax hikes

LONDON: Treasury officials in Britain are pushing for tax hikes to plug holes blown in public finances by the coronavirus pandemic, two leading British newspapers said.

Such hikes will enable the exchequer to raise at least 20 billion pounds (\$26.70 billion) a year, and some could be introduced in the November budget, the *Sunday Telegraph* said.

The *Sunday Times* newspaper said officials were drawing up plans for a 30-billion-pound "tax raid" on the wealthy, businesses, pensions and foreign aid.

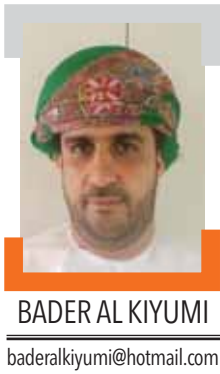
In its budget, the government also plans to raise both capital gains tax and corporation tax, the *Sunday Times* added.

Finance Minister Rishi Sunak is considering a proposal to boost corporation tax to 24 per cent from 19 per cent, a move that would raise 12 billion pounds next year, rising to 17 billion in 2023-24, the paper said.

Britain's economic recovery from the shock of the pandemic has gathered pace, data showed this month, but government borrowing has exceeded 2 trillion pounds and fears of future job losses are mounting. — Reuters

GOOD ECONOMICS

Corporate governance is key to sustainability



BADER AL KIYUMI
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The word ‘governance’ is being used more often these days. It is ringing in our ears. The Oman government has also paid greater attention towards implementing governance and modern methods in all national economy sectors. It is expected to further reflect positively in supporting the national economy.

For several decades, ‘governance’ has played a leading role in developing global businesses by providing good results of business performances. Many economic experts, government decision makers and stakeholders are calling to implement governance in their own countries’ economies, both at the government and private-sector levels.

Most international organisations define governance as follows: “Corporate governance involves a set of relationships between a company’s management, its board, its

‘CORPORATE GOVERNANCE’ IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE MAIN ASSISTANCE FACTOR IN TERMS OF MONITORING THE COMPANY’S OBJECTIVES AND IN HELPING TO HAVE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH.

shareholders and other stakeholders.”

‘Corporate governance’ is considered to be the main assistance factor in terms of monitoring the company’s objectives and in helping to have sustainable growth. If these methods are employed well by setting and following the best practices of strategies, policies, vision and mission, and ethical standards, then business performance can be monitored.

The Sultanate is going forward towards implementing governance which is one of the key tools in the Oman Vision 2040. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq in his speech has stressed on the performance

governance, accountability and integrity that aims to ensure complete harmony with ‘Vision 2040.’

Recently, I had read an interview with Sayyid Hamid bin Sultan al Busaidy, Executive Director of the Oman Center for Corporate Governance and Sustainability (OCCGS). He has confirmed about the government’s Companies Charter which is ready. “The charter which will be issued by the Capital Market Authority and will be mandatory to all government’s companies is expected to cover many aspects of good governance practices,” he says.

However, we need to evaluate previous reports issued by different auditors including the State Audit. The evaluation should cover the gap analysis, as well as monitor the actions that were recommended by them and if they are implemented or not. If the management does not take action, then it needs to examine the reasons for failing to do so.

In addition, the concerned departments should reinforce the concept of transparent, accountability and disclosures among the entities’ employees. The awareness should also assist to ensure that everyone from either top management or workers can welcome constructive criticism and answer all the auditors’ queries about their duties and tasks without being sensitive. They have to make the job descriptions clear of every member, including board, executive leadership, managers and employees so everyone is held to account for their respective roles.

At a recent programme that I had the opportunity to attend, a specialist auditor mentioned that when the foreign investors realise that a company gives priority to transparency, honesty, accountability, integrity and fairness, they will be encouraged to invest in that particular company.

The governance charter is considered to be only rules that can organise the relation among all parties. However, the company’s culture plays a vital role in cultivating this concept among their employees and in the future the practices will stem from the institutions and their employees conviction rather than the governance charter. Personally, I believe that the charter will add value to the country’s national economy and also contribute in activating the business sector to a large extent.

RESCUE PLAN



A retired army officer protests in front of the Lebanese Central Bank in Beirut, in this file photo.

— AFP

Lebanon bank clean-up raises serious doubts

Bankers and analysts have voiced scepticism about attempts by Lebanon’s central bank to clean up the country’s banks, warning they must form part of a wider rescue plan to fix its broken financial and economic system.

In a series of circulars, the central bank told domestic banks to raise fresh capital, urge their big depositors to move funds back to the country and provision for a 45 per cent loss on their Eurobond holdings.

The move follows a further downward spiral in Lebanon’s fortunes since an explosion this month at Beirut’s port. Even before the blast, which led to the government’s resignation, Beirut was grappling with its worst financial crisis in the wake of protests and a default on its foreign currency debt in March.

“These ad-hoc policy decisions will add to Lebanon’s credit and banking woes and risk undermining the little progress made in talks with the IMF,” said Alia Moubayed, managing director at Jefferies, referring to already-stalled negotiations with the International Monetary Fund over a bailout.

“Nor are they anchored in a revised macro-fiscal and debt restructuring plan that factors in the deteriorating socio-economic context and worsening debt dynamics after the blast.”

The bank’s initiative comes ahead of a visit next week by French President Emmanuel Macron, who is pressing Lebanese leaders to make political and financial reforms to unlock foreign aid and ease the economic crisis, including by making a full audit of state finances and the central bank.

Lebanon’s banks, at the centre of the crisis because of their large holdings of the government’s debt, were told by the

central bank to raise their capital by 20 per cent by the end of February 2021 or leave the market.

That timeframe was “unrealistic” given that the formation of a new government usually takes months in Lebanon, said an adviser to the banks association, adding that clarity was needed about the government’s fulfilment of its legal duty to restore the central bank’s solvency.

THE CENTRAL BANK TOLD DOMESTIC BANKS TO RAISE FRESH CAPITAL, URGE THEIR BIG DEPOSITORS TO MOVE FUNDS BACK TO THE COUNTRY AND PROVISION FOR A 45 PER CENT LOSS ON THEIR EUROBOND HOLDINGS.

“The necessity to have a cleaning in the banks after the default is there because we want banks to resume their role and activity,” Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh said when asked about the purpose of the circulars.

But lenders wouldn’t be able to resume activity without sufficient funds with their correspondent banks, he said.

Several analysts reacted cautiously.

“It is difficult to see why the private sector would pump fresh equity capital into the banking system unless a full asset clean-up has first taken place,” said Rahul Shah, head of financials equity research at Tellimer.

Analysts also questioned how the requirement for banks to take a 45 per cent loss on Eurobond holdings tallies

with a rescue plan released earlier this year by the now-caretaker government that proposed 75 per cent haircuts on external debt and 40 per cent on domestic debt.

The 45 per cent loss also does not reflect the current market value of the bonds, which plummeted deeper below 20 cents to the dollar, in the wake of the circulars and comments from French government officials that aid will not be forthcoming without reforms.

“We do not know how the negotiation between Lebanon and the creditors will end up, but we have taken the normal provision that follows such a default,” Salameh said, adding the 45 per cent level could be readjusted “in both ways”, depending on negotiations.

The provision level could signal a desire to pursue smaller haircuts or treat bank holdings differently from foreign holdings of Eurobonds, said Patrick Curran, senior economist at Tellimer.

Banks were told that the provisions, which also included a 1.89 per cent loss on their hard currency deposits with the central bank, should be in place within five years, but were extendable to 10 years with the approval of the central bank.

The timetable was likely an effort to ensure that banks, already struggling to remain solvent, did not flout international regulatory capital floors, said analysts.

“It’s camouflage,” said a former senior central bank official. “They’re trying to dress things up, to put a fresh coat of paint on a crumbling building.” There was also wariness about attempts by the central bank to require large depositors to return some of their funds from overseas, with analysts viewing it a precursor to some depositors having to share financial losses. — Reuters

DEAD-END POLICY

Spain struggles to put in place basic income scheme

Three months after Spain rushed to launch a minimum basic income scheme to fight a spike in poverty due to the coronavirus pandemic, the programme is at a dead-end because of an avalanche of applications.

The measure was a pledge made by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s leftwing coalition government, which took office in January, bringing together his Socialist party with far-left Podemos as the junior partner.

The scheme — approved in late May — aims to guarantee an income of 462 euros (\$546) per month for an adult living alone, while for families, there would be an additional 139 euros per person, whether adult or child, up to a monthly maximum of 1,015 euros per home. It is expected to cost state coffers three billion euros (\$3.5 billion) a year.

The government decided to bring forward the launch of the programme because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit Spain hard and devastated its economy, causing queues at food banks to swell.

Of the 750,000 applications which were filed since June 15 when the government started accepting requests, 143,000 — or 19 per cent — have been analysed and 80,000 were approved, according to a social security statement issued on August 20.

But Spain main civil servant’s union, CSIF, paints a darker picture. “Nearly 99 per cent of requests have not been processed,” a union spokesman, Jose Manuel Molina, said.

The social security ministry has only really analysed 6,000 applications while 74,000 households that already receive financial aid were awarded the basic income automatically, he added.

For hundreds of thousands of other households, the wait is stressful. Marta Sanchez, a 42-year-old mother of two from the southern city of Seville, said she applied for the scheme on June 26 but has heard nothing since.

“That is two months of waiting already, when in theory this was a measure that was taken so no one ends up in the streets,” she added.

Sanchez lost her call centre job during Spain’s virus lockdown while her husband lost his job as a driver. The couple has had to turn to the Red Cross for the first time for food.

“Thank God my mother and sister pay our water and electricity bills,” she said, adding their landlord, a relative, has turned a blind eye to the unpaid rent. — AFP



A Spanish flag flutters behind a red traffic light at Plaza Colon square in Madrid. — AFP



Indonesia drive-in concert delivers live music as coronavirus rages

JAKARTA: As night fell in the Indonesian capital, pop ensemble Kahitna took to the stage for a drive-in concert nearly two hours long that attracted eager listeners in rows of hundreds of parked cars.

The eight performers played yearning, sentimental tunes, capitalising on patrons' nostalgia for the group's 1990s heyday, with listeners honking and flashing their lights as the band launched into its hit tune, "Cerita Cinta" or "Love Story".

That was a reminder of the good times before the coronavirus pandemic brought the music industry to a juddering halt, said Chaeruddin Syah, one of the concert organisers.

"Our economy has declined for four to five months, we have not worked at all and have not made any money," Syah told Reuters.

"We hope this concert can provide solutions and inspiration to the entertainment industry".

The eight performers played yearning, sentimental tunes, capitalising on patrons' nostalgia for the group's 1990s heyday, with listeners honking and flashing their lights as the band launched into its hit tune, "Cerita Cinta" or "Love Story"

Indonesia, which is grappling with a surge in virus infections, racked up its biggest daily increase in cases for a third straight day on Saturday. The Southeast Asian nation has tallied about 170,000 infections and 7,261 deaths.

The organisers of Saturday's event said they had prioritised safety, asking listeners to provide negative test results and

wear masks.

The concert, which will be followed by another on Sunday, drew a crowd of about 900 people in 300 cars, all of whom had to stay in their vehicles.

Each car tuned into an FM radio channel to hear the concert. Each was sprayed with disinfectant on arrival, and received a carbon dioxide detector to alert occupants to open their

windows if levels of the dangerous gas rose too high.

"This concert is an extraordinary initiative", said one listener, a 45-year-old who gave her name only as Emilia.

"This is really good, especially when we don't know when the pandemic will end".

A city of 10 million, Jakarta has recently recorded the highest daily increase in infections among Indonesian regions and maintains curbs on public transport and businesses, although this week its governor said cinemas would re-open soon.

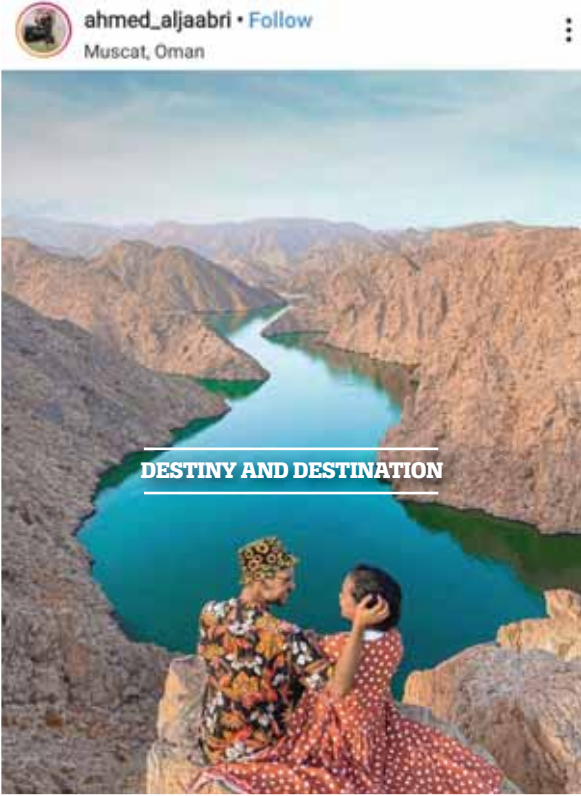
The adverse impact of the virus had forced musicians and their crews to adapt, said Adib Hidayat, who tracks music trends for the Indonesian industry.

"If the (drive-in) concept could have a strict protocol and a tight discipline from the audience, it could be one of the new breakthroughs", he shared to the media. — **Reuters**





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



AT THE CINEMA

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Hollywood thriller
‘Tenet’ tests fans’
appetite for cinemas

LONDON: The hopes of Hollywood were riding on the opening of “Tenet” on Wednesday as the Christopher Nolan spy thriller tests the appetite of movie fans to return to cinemas and rescue an industry hammered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The biggest release since schedules were torn up in March - and the only one of 2020’s potential summer blockbusters to make it to the screen in the holiday season - “Tenet” launched in 70 countries on Wednesday ahead of the United States next week.

The movie has already won over some critics, but fans could be a harder sell given changes to the movie-going experience.

The actor Tom Cruise, whose “Top Gun: Maverick” was pulled from a release earlier this summer, donned a face mask to attend a preview showing of “Tenet” in London.

“Great to be back in a movie theatre everybody,” he said on Tuesday. “I loved it.”

Film critic Kaleem Aftab said “Tenet”, which cost AT&T’s Warner Bros more

The biggest release since schedules were torn up in March - and the only one of 2020’s potential summer blockbusters to make it to the screen in the holiday season - “Tenet” launched in 70 countries on Wednesday ahead of the United States next week

than \$200 million to make according to reports, was exactly the kind of film the industry needed.

“Tenet” is an intelligent blockbuster made with loads of money, with big explosions and big bangs, exactly what we’d expect from Christopher Nolan, who made films like ‘Interstellar’, ‘Inception’ and ‘Dunkirk’, he said.

Movie theatres are where the money is made, he added.

“If ‘Tenet’ is a success we’re going to see a quick rush of releases, we’ll see Bond come out for sure in November. The worry is if ‘Tenet’ is a flop they’ll decide to wait until next summer,” said Aftab.

While cinemas have tentatively re-opened around the world, they have mainly relied on classics to test COVID-secure measures, along with a few new releases such as Russell Crowe’s thriller “Unhinged”. Other films will go straight to streaming platforms, notably Disney’s “Mulan”.

Major UK cinema chain Cineworld, which owns Regal in the United States and Cinema City in Europe, said it was pleased by pre-release bookings for “Tenet”, which were tracking at a similar level to that of a blockbuster released pre-COVID.

“We hope that it helps to

restore confidence in attending the cinema ahead of other high profile releases later this year, including the latest Bond, ‘Wonder Women 1984’, ‘Black Widow’ and ‘A Quiet Place II’,” a spokesman said.

Tessa Street, general manager of the Odeon Luxe in London’s Leicester Square, was confident the film starring John David Washington and Robert Pattinson would be a hit.

“It’s vitally important that ‘Tenet’ is successful and that we deliver a great experience for our guests so they want to come back,” she said.

Capacity at the cinema, which has hosted numerous premiers, has been reduced by 40 per cent, with adjacent seats automatically kept empty when film goers booked and masks required in the foyer but not the auditorium.

Film goer William Taylor was excited to be back.

“Everyone is wearing masks, they are social distancing in the cinema and all the staff are wearing masks, so (I feel) pretty safe,” he told Reuters, heading to his seat. — **Reuters**

MUSIC

New Blackpink-Selena Gomez
‘Ice Cream’ song
and music video
released



SEOUL: K-pop power girl group Blackpink and singer-actress Selena Gomez released their eagerly awaited new single “Ice Cream” on Friday to furious fan approval.

Doused in shades of pink and other pastels, the music video here opens with Gomez in a red-and-white striped outfit and sailor hat in the driver’s seat of an ice cream van, while Blackpink members Jisoo, Jennie, Rose and Lisa later dance holding ice cream in a bright pink

songs,” said one fan with the username Ariel Ari. “It’s a new side and concept that really suits them. I can’t wait for the new album!”

The 17-second teaser for the music video, released on Thursday, had over 14.5 million views on YouTube as of 0400 GMT on Friday.

“Ice Cream” also loosely ties in with Gomez’s new cooking show “Selena + Chef”, in which famous chefs appear remotely to teach the former Disney



ice cream parlour.

Blackpink’s management agency, YG Entertainment, said “Ice Cream” was perfect for summer and completely different from previous songs “Kill This Love” or “How You Like That”. Both had a more dynamic and aggressive club beat while “Ice Cream” has a lighter, bubbly vibe.

“I really like that this song is sort of different than Blackpink’s previous

star to cook dishes such as omelettes, octopus, tacos and cookies. The 10-episode unscripted series debuted on the HBO MAX streaming platform this month.

When released two months ago, Blackpink’s “How You Like That” broke YouTube’s 24-hour viewing record with 82.4 million views on its first day of release on the video platform, according to Variety. — **Reuters**



How to Reduce Risk of Infections as the Lockdown Eases

MARY OOMMEN

As the lockdown eases and businesses across the Sultanate begin to reopen, people have begun contemplating if, and how, they should plan their visit to malls, hotel, restaurants, barber-shops and salons. As things begin to limp back to a semblance of normalcy, it is natural to be optimistic and forget the lurking dangers.

The recent announcement of the opening up of restaurants, salons and malls has been cautiously welcomed by people. However, before you walk into your favourite salon for that much-needed TLC, there are certain precautions to be observed. This is especially important as the beauty industry involves physical contact with clients, whether it's a simple hair-cut or even basic grooming. Do a thorough check to ensure that salons are following strict hygiene and safety protocols.

Hair dressers, barber-shops and salons have been advised to stagger appointments to ensure that only a certain number of people are serviced at a time. The fewer people in an enclosed space, the better to reduce the potential risk of infections. It is also mandatory now for stylists and salon staff to not only sanitise tools

being used between each client, but they are also required to disinfecting chairs and surfaces and ensure that they wash their hands before attending to each customer as well. "I've already booked an appointment for a haircut, but am apprehensive about my visit to the salon," said Tasneem Sheikh who admitted that, "while, I've been waiting for the salon to open, I am going to exercise a lot of caution and will return home if I find too many people."

Like Tasneem, many of us have begun to struggle with the decision of whether we should be stepping out to salons, restaurants and malls or stay home and minimize the risk of infection. Scientists agree that the corona virus primarily spreads between people via droplets that move through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks. What is even scarier is that the virus can be transmitted by symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals alike. Clearly, it is better to err on the side of caution rather than be careless.

Doctors suggest that the best way to ensure your safety is to completely avoid places where people congregate, and if that is not possible, minimise how much time you spend in enclosed public spaces. Studies have shown that the risk of infection is higher in poorly ventilated, crowded areas than it is outdoors.

Keeping this in mind, the most important risk assessment Othman al Hashmi makes when

Cafes and restaurants have been advised to follow stringent rules and ensure social distancing as much as possible. Eateries are required to space tables at least 2 meters apart, provide sanitisers and ensure that both customers and staff wear masks. From restaurants at the famed Shangrila Barr al Jissah (top photo) in Muscat, to Alila Jabal Akhdhar and Salalah's iconic hotels, these measures are strictly enforced by luxury international chains and the same is expected from smaller hotels and inns

choosing to visit his favourite restaurant, for example, is how well he can maintain his distance from other customers while inside. "As restaurants and cafes begin welcoming patrons back, it is very tempting to plan a

night out with family and friends, especially over the weekend. However, I feel that this could well be a recipe for disaster. As a family, we have taken the decision to continue ordering in occasionally and may not be visiting restaurants immediately," shared Othman.

Aware of the risks involved, cafes restaurants have been advised to follow stringent rules and ensure social distancing as much as possible. Eateries are required to space tables at least 2 meters apart, provide sanitisers and ensure that both customers and staff wear masks. From the restaurants at the famed Shangrila Barr al Jissah in Muscat, to Alila Jabal Akhdhar and Salalah's iconic hotels, these measures are strictly enforced by luxury international chains and the same is to be expected from smaller hotels and inns. Customers can now expect to receive disposable menu's or even better should look up menus online instead of asking for a physical menu. It might also be

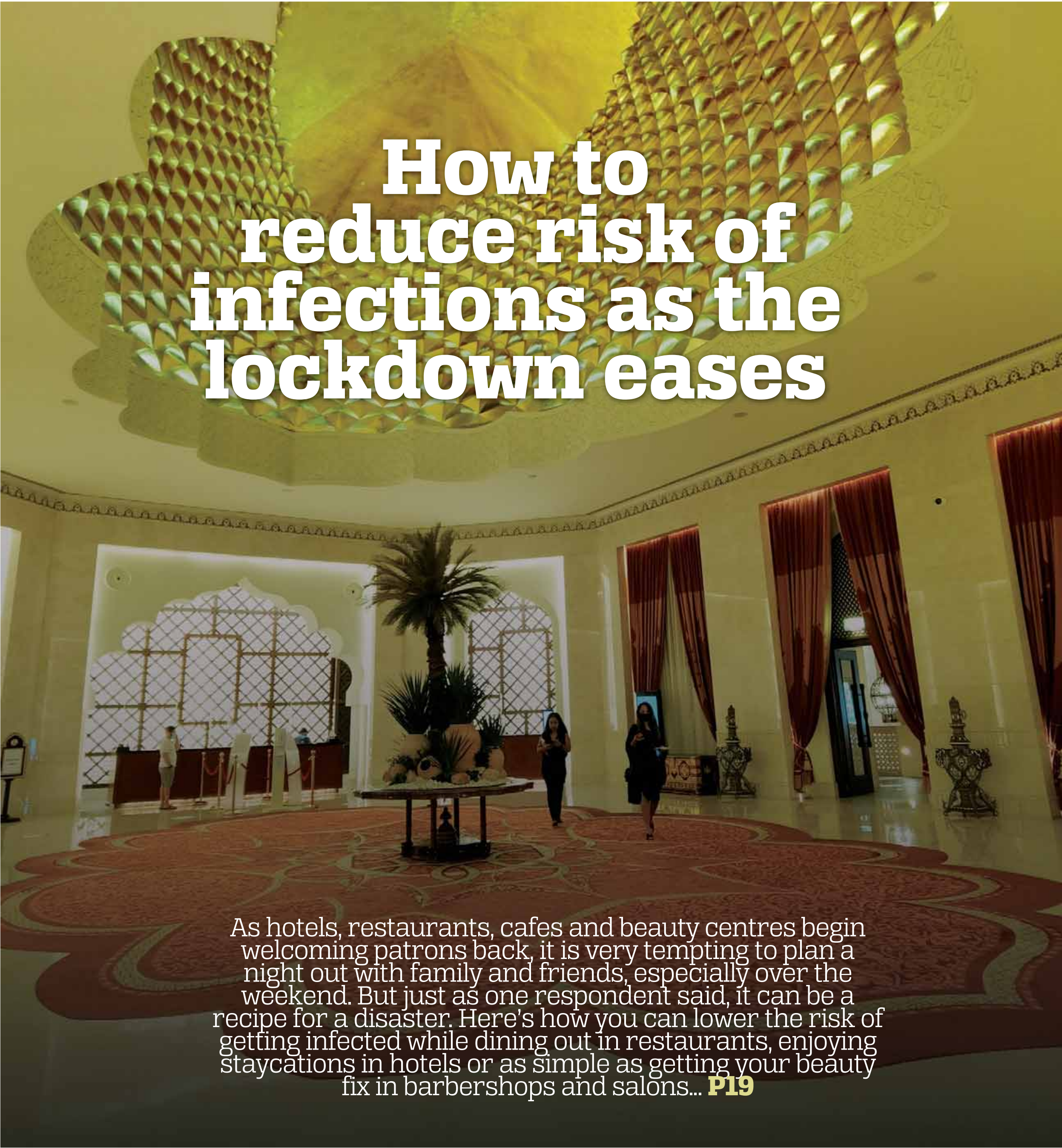
best to avoid "all high touch surfaces" like salt and pepper shakers and the bill folders that staff use to present checks.

Similar precautions need to be taken when visiting shops and malls. Amanda Williams says that she plans ahead and makes a list of what she needs before stepping out for grocery shopping. "I also try plan my trips to the mall when I know that there will be fewer people around, like early in the morning or around lunch time." She suggests strictly following recommendations made by health professions, including the mandatory covering of the nose and mouth with a mask. "As an added precaution don't touch items you don't intend to buy. Avoid touching your mask, eyes, or other uncovered parts of your face for the entirety of your errand," she says.

No one can predict just how long this virus will be around. So, let's take all necessary precautions to stop the virus from spreading and ensure the safety of our family, friends, and community.

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As hotels, restaurants, cafes and beauty centres begin welcoming patrons back, it is very tempting to plan a night out with family and friends, especially over the weekend. But just as one respondent said, it can be a recipe for a disaster. Here's how you can lower the risk of getting infected while dining out in restaurants, enjoying staycations in hotels or as simple as getting your beauty fix in barbershops and salons... **P19**

WHAT TO READ

At 29, Dutch author youngest International Booker Prize winner

'THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING', the debut novel written by 29-year-old Dutch author Marieke Lucas Rijneveld and translated from Dutch by Michele Hutchison, has been announced as the winner of The 2020 International Booker Prize. Rijneveld has become the youngest author to win prestigious award.

The Dutch edition was a bestseller in the Netherlands, where it won the ANV Debut Prize.

The £50,000 prize will be split between Marieke Lucas Rijneveld and Michele Hutchison, giving both the author and translator equal recognition. The winner

was announced by chair of the judges, Ted Hodgkinson at a digital live-streamed event.

'The Discomfort of Evening' tells the story of Jas and her devout farming family in a strict Christian community in rural Netherlands. One winter's day, her older brother joins an ice skating trip. Resentful at being left alone, she attempts to bargain with God pitting the life of her pet rabbit against that of her brother; he never returns. As grief overwhelms the farm, Jas succumbs to a vortex of increasingly disturbing fantasies, watching her family disintegrate into a darkness that threatens to derail them all.

'The Discomfort of Evening' was chosen from a shortlist of six books during a lengthy and rigorous judging process, by a panel of five judges, chaired by Ted Hodgkinson, Head of Literature and Spoken Word at Southbank Centre. The panel also includes: Lucie Campos, director of the Villa Gillet, France's centre for international writing; Man Booker International Prize-winning translator and writer Jennifer Croft; Booker Prize longlisted author Valeria Luiselli and writer, poet and musician Jeet Thayil, whose novel Narcopolis was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2012. — **IAN S**

