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COMAN PUTS BAYERN IN SIXTH HEAVEN



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GERMANY LAUNCHES FIRST 'GREEN' BONDS



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THE AFLAJ OF OMAN



OMAN

HM greetings to Uruguay leader

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luis Lacalle Pou of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Lacalle Pou and the friendly people of Uruguay further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM thanked by Lebanon President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Michel Aoun of the Lebanese Republic, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable to him on victims of the explosion that took place at Beirut Port. In his cable, President Aoun expressed his gratitude for His Majesty's condolences and sympathy to him and the Lebanese brotherly people. President Aoun thanked His Majesty the Sultan for supporting the Lebanese Republic. He also commended the strong fraternal relations binding the two brotherly countries and peoples. — ONA

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UN SYRIA TALKS HALTED AS DELEGATES TEST POSITIVE

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TRUMP HOPES TO CHANGE AMERICA'S TUNE

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT

MAX: 32°C
MIN: 28°C

SALALAH

MAX: 28°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA

MAX: 43°C
MIN: 29°C

SUNRISE 05:46 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

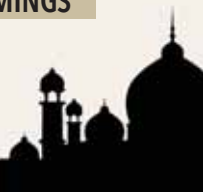
FAJR: 04:28

DHUHR: 12:14

ASR: 15:41

MAGHRIB: 18:37

ISHA: 19:50





PPE WASTE
PLAGUES SEAS

ALARM OVER GLOVES, MASKS PILING UP ON BEACHES

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Plastic waste has long plagued our seas and posed a threat to marine ecosystems, but now there is a new threat — personal protective equipment (PPE), widely used to curb the spread of coronavirus.

Face masks and gloves are often found floating on the sea threatening the marine environment; some are left behind by beach users, others are washed in by the waves.

The pollution will worsen as PPE becomes part of the new normal, and more people frequent beaches after months being cooped out at home.

Earlier, littering of personal protection equipment was limited to streets and sidewalks as the movement of people was restricted.

“It is not that all people throw them on the beaches or even on to the sea. The culprits are those who do not care for the health of others and the environment”, said Atif Mohammed, with his fingers pointed at a mask floating on the seawater in Qurum.

The oil and gas engineer, who is also a nature lover, likened the discarded masks to plastic bags or straws that could prove fatal to sea creatures and contaminating sea water.

According to him, “this is another contribution from the pandemic to the environment and a legacy to the next generation.”

The civic authorities have been continuously calling on people to dispose of used gloves, masks and other items safely in garbage bins.

Reacting to the apathetic attitude of the people, Zainab al Nassri, a senior journalist, said that monitoring of people on the beaches should be tightened.

“It is not that the offenders lack education. It’s mere negligence and recalcitrant attitude behind this heinous act,” she said. “Just because many of us are using masks and gloves doesn’t mean they have to end up left out as litter.”

TURN TO P2

Sayyid Shihab receives US ambassador



His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office at Mu'askar Al Murtafa on Monday Leslie M Tsou, Ambassador of the United States of America (USA) to the Sultanate. The guest was accompanied by senior defence representative at the US Embassy in Muscat. The two sides reviewed the good relations between the two friendly countries. They also exchanged viewpoints on matters of common concern. — ONA

Sultanate committed to joint plans on youth

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, has reiterated the Sultanate's resolve to continue efforts towards the execution of joint plans and programmes in implementation of GCC leaders' directives to empower youth across all sectors of action.

The minister made the statement during the 33rd meeting of GCC ministers of youth and sports.

The meeting, held via videoconferencing, saw the participation of Dr Nayef Falah Mubarak al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General. The meeting discussed 12 clauses constituting the Riyadh Declaration, following the 40th session of GCC Supreme Council.

The meeting recommended adoption of mechanisms to achieve advanced global rankings for GCC youth through the proper management of future plans and programmes.

The first clause dealt, among other issues, with the formulation of



HH SAYYID THEYAZIN BIN HAITHAM AL SAID

a unified database for distinguished youth projects and initiatives, as well as exploring the best international experiences in the field of entrepreneurship.

The second clause underlined efforts made to address coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. The GCC Secretariat General documented all initiatives of youth, through contact with ministries of youth and sports in member states, and published the findings in a report titled “GCC Youth During Coronavirus Pandemic Phase: Challenges and Opportunities.”

TURN TO P2

WHO urges countries to join forces in vaccine plan

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday urged countries to join its plan to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines so they can work together in a coordinated manner.

Bruce Aylward, the WHO's emergencies chief, told a news briefing that “the critical thing is to ensure that some vaccine gets to all countries as early as possible”.

The organisation said some 172 countries are engaging with the COVAX facility designed to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, but more funding is needed and countries need now to make binding commitments.

Countries wishing to be part of

the global COVAX plan have until August 31 to submit expressions of interest, WHO officials said, with confirmation of intention to join due by September 18, and initial payments due by October 9.

WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the facility was critical to ending the COVID-19 pandemic, and would not only pool risk for countries developing and buying vaccines, but also ensure prices are kept “as low as possible”. “Vaccine nationalism only helps the virus,” he told a media briefing. “The success of the COVAX facility hinges not only on countries signing up to it, but also filling key funding gaps.”

172 countries are engaging with the COVAX facility designed to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, but more funding is needed and countries need now to make binding commitments

COVAX is co-led by the GAVI vaccines alliance, the WHO and the CEPI Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and is designed to guarantee equitable access globally to COVID-19 vaccines once they are developed and authorised for use.

It currently covers 9 candidate COVID-19 vaccines and its aim is to secure supplies of and deliver 2 billion doses across countries that sign up by the end of 2021.

“Initially, when there will be limited supply (of COVID-19 vaccines), it's important to provide the vaccine to those at highest risk around the globe,” Tedros said.

He said this included health

workers on the front lines of the pandemic, who were “critical to saving lives and stabilising the overall health system”.

VACCINE TRIALS

Italy kicked off human trials of a potential COVID-19 vaccine on Monday, joining a global effort to develop a response to the virus which has shown signs of resurging in Europe.

Rome's Lazzaro Spallanzani institute, a hospital specialising in infectious diseases will conduct trials on 90 volunteers over the coming weeks, with the hope a vaccine may be available by spring of next year.

— Agencies



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IN BRIEF

CBO welcomes new chairman

MUSCAT: The executive management of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), under the chairmanship of Tahir bin Salim al Amri, executive president of the CBO, and on behalf of all CBO staff, has welcomed His Highness Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad al Said. 'Extending our congratulations to His Highness on earning the Royal Trust by being appointed in the position of chairman of the board of governors of CBO, and praying to Allah to grant the board of governors all means of success for the development of Oman's economic and banking sector,' the CBO said in a statement on its website.

Average population density rises

MUSCAT: The average population density in the Sultanate increased during 2019 by 0.1 per cent, recording 14.9 people per square kilometre compared to 2018. The average population density was 14.8 people per square kilometre, according to the data contained in the statistical yearbook issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

India adds 21 repatriation flights from Sept 1

MUSCAT: India has added more flights from Oman under Phase 6 of Vande Bharat repatriation Mission, starting September 1. Passenger lists for all the above-mentioned flights will be finalised by the Embassy. Passengers are requested to provide details and confirmation to travel on a particular flight on the online form <https://forms.gle/V1ueBAZUD7VqDU2g9> for VBM Phase 6. As many as 70,000 Indians have already been repatriated from Oman in the last four months.

ROP allows to transfer beehives to Dhofar

MUSCAT: Even though Dhofar Governorate is under lockdown, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has allowed beekeepers to transfer their beehives to the governorate after obtaining a permit from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR). In a statement, ROP said, "It was agreed to allow beekeepers who want to transfer their beehives to Dhofar Governorate after obtaining a permit from MoAFWR. Interested beekeepers can submit their applications to the agriculture development departments in their wilayats."

93 arrested for theft related crimes

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested 93 people for 86 theft-related crimes from various governorates of the Sultanate. It also arrested two expats on charges of trading in alcoholic beverages. A statement issued online by the ROP said: "Al Mudhaibi Police arrested two people on charge of trading alcoholic beverages. They were transporting 120 bottles of alcoholic drinks in a private vehicle for sale."

US Embassy announces resumption of some visas

MUSCAT: The US Embassy has announced resumption of non-immigrant visas for tourist/business (B1/B2) and applicants in the F-1, M-1 and J-1 categories who qualify under the Interview Waiver (IW) programme. To be eligible for the IW programme, an applicant must be re-applying to renew a B1 / B2, F1, M1 or J1 visa that has not been expired for more than 12 months and that was issued at US Embassy Muscat. For F, J and M applicants can visit www.ustravel-docs.com/om, complete and submit Form DS-160, visit your profile to pay the online application fee.

Then, they can scan the DS-160 confirmation sheet, fee payment receipt, form I-20 (first page), and previous F/M/J visa to ConsularMuscat@state.gov. On receipt of your email, the consular staff will contact to drop your package in the consular drop-box at the entrance of the embassy. Drop-box hours are 8 to 11 am on Mondays only and documents to be submitted are: Payment receipt DS-160 confirmation sheet; original passport; one recent photo (2X X 2X in size) taken on a white background without head covering or eyeglasses; and original Form I-20.

AMBASSADOR TO SUDAN PRESENTS CREDENTIALS COPY



KHARTOUM: Omar Qamar al Din Ismail, Acting Foreign Minister of Republic of Sudan, received in his office Ali bin Sulaiman bin Said al Darmaki, who presented copies of his credentials as the Sultanate's Ambassador appointed to Sudan, in Khartoum on Monday. The Sudanese Acting Foreign Minister welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in his assignments, and the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries further progress and growth. The two sides discussed the bilateral relations between the two countries and means to develop them in a manner that serves their joint benefits. — ONA

Sultanate committed to joint plans on youth

FROM PAGE 1
The third clause dealt with a proposal to allocate a "daily sports class", compulsory in all stages of education, after the Secretariat General provides the ministerial committee with a unified vision to enhance sports practice across different segments of society. The preparation of sports formula has been entrusted to the GCC Health Council and the Arab Education Bureau. The fourth clause covered the strategic plan of GCC Youth and Sports Ministers. It comprised the regulatory report of the strategic plan's committee which stemmed from the GCC Youth and Sports under-secretaries, prior to its final endorsement. The fifth clause dealt with a budget to enhance joint activities and programmes. The meeting also discussed the decision of GCC ministers of financial and economic cooperation which recommends forwarding the budget to support youth activities and programmes to the GCC ministers of youth and sports. The budget will be reviewed by the Secretariat General and the Youth Committee in the respective youth and sports ministries, prior to its submission to the GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee. The sixth clause was dedicated to the implementation of recommendations of youth workshops. The GCC Secretariat General will coordinate with the Arab Youth Centre in Abu Dhabi to organise a proposed GCC youth forum. The ministers reviewed the tasks undertaken by technical youth and sports committees, which covered a wide spectrum of programmes ranging from training to felicitation of youth projects.



The eighth clause dealt with international cooperation in the field of joint youth affairs. The Secretariat General has been tasked with communicating and coordinating with regional and international organisations to find joint programmes that benefit GCC youth. The ministers discussed, in the 9th clause, the member states' short-listing their respective best performers (3rd category) in the field of youth initiatives for the year 2020. Honouring of best performers in the first and second categories has been postponed due to inability to hold the ministerial meeting in a normal way. The host country will bear the cost of honouring the 3rd and 4th categories. The 10th clause has been allocated to a topic titled "Gold Register

Project". The general framework of the project has been approved and the Secretariat General has been tasked with preparing its executive plan. Its budget will be discussed in the next meeting of the specialised committee. The 11th clause deals with designating a permanent hall for the GCC youth at the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Youth Centre, which is scheduled to host all GCC activities. The 33rd meeting of GCC Youth and Sports Ministers concluded by discussing the 12th clause of the Riyadh Declaration, which recommends that the Secretariat General will coordinate with the country which will host the next meeting to discuss the venue and timing of the 34th meeting of GCC Ministers of Youth and Sports and its preparatory meeting. — ONA

Alarm over masks, gloves piling up on beaches

FROM PAGE 1
According to her, officials should monitor those on the beaches so that the violators should be caught red handed. According to Matheo Francis, a Spaniard, another beachgoer, many of the items in personal protection

equipment contain plastics that are not recyclable or biodegradable, and they need to be treated as they pose risks to both humans and wildlife. "It damages our environment in addition to spreading the coronavirus contagion. This is infectious waste and should not be littered around",

he said. The government led by the environment authority emphasises on the need to use the correct means to get rid of the masks because of the health and environmental risks they pose. "Disposing of masks and other protective equipment randomly on

the roads and especially on beaches can pose an environmental and health hazard. Therefore, they should be disposed of properly in order to preserve the health of our society and to adhere to the guidelines of the Basel Convention on environmentally-sound waste management", it said.

Environmentalists have already warned of a threat posed to oceans and marine life by skyrocketing plastic pollution. As much as 13 million tonnes of plastic goes onto oceans each year, according to a 2018 estimate by UN Environment. — Photo by Shamsa al Harthiya



SAI TAKES PART IN GCC MEETING



MUSCAT: The State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI) is taking part in the 17th meeting of GCC officials responsible for the protection of propriety and control of corruption. The two-day meeting, held via video-conferencing, discusses views of member states about the guideline (instructional directory) on protecting reporters, witnesses and victims in the GCC states. The GCC instructional directory has been one of the core systems of reference for adopting global standards in building capacities and improving institutional performance in member states. — ONA

Volunteers sought to ensure COVID-19 measures at airport

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Volunteers have been invited to help the authorities implement the COVID-19 precautionary measures as when Muscat International Airport reopens for normal traffic in the coming days.

The participation of the volunteers has been sought by the group called TaawonNetwork, which works under the supervision of the Omani Society for Human Resources Management.

"In preparation for the return of operations at Muscat International Airport, as soon as the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) directives are issued, the Taawon Network in cooperation with Oman Airports invites the volunteers to register online."

It added that the volunteers are required to ensure precautionary measures to deal with developments of the COVID-19 pandemic at the airport.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a member of TaawonNetwork said that both citizens and residents are invited to be part of this volunteer group.

As per the details, volunteers should be able to speak fluently in Arabic and English while dealing with air travellers, priority will be given to those who speak more languages. Alongside having good appearance and behaviour, the dress code will be



traditional dishdashas for males and modest dresses for females.

The volunteers on the evening shift must be male-only.

It may be noted that Oman Airports has been working on the

installation, and operation of PCR testing solutions.

Worldwide, airports and airlines have their own style of COVID-19 prevention and protection, but the two most consistent solutions to

prevention are physical distancing in the queues and required face-coverings. Seeing constant reminders to wear a face mask in the airport terminal is going to be a common occurrence for quite some time.

94pc of cases ruled in favour of consumers

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUG 24

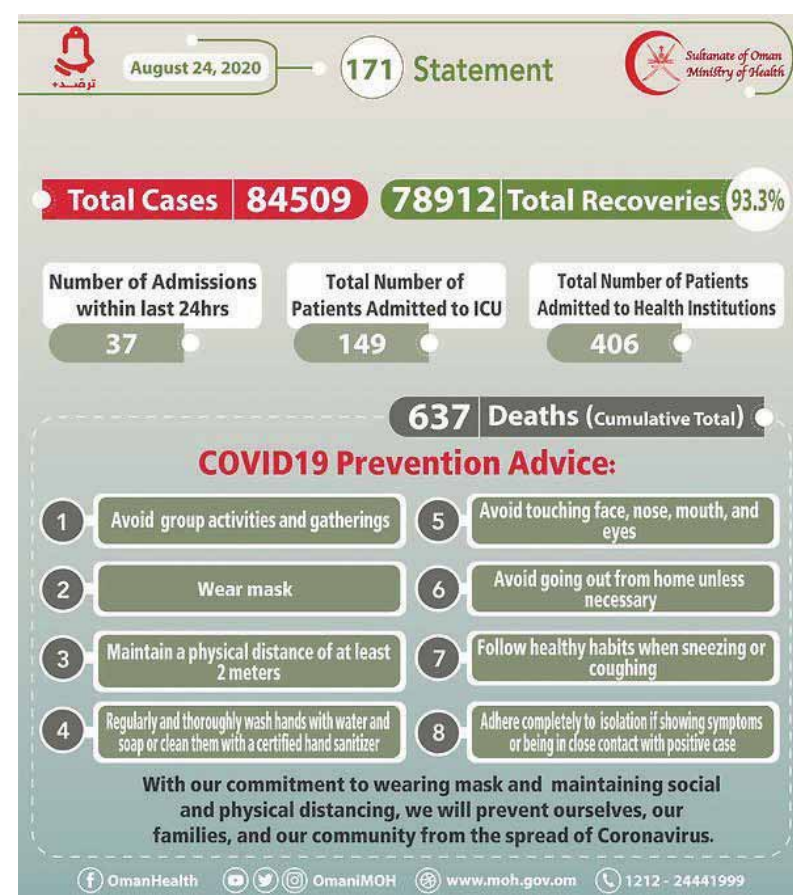
The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) resolved 94 per cent cases in favour of the consumers by taking into consideration the occasions when a customer can be gullible and misled by some traders while six per cent of the cases were ruled in favour of the businessmen on justifiable grounds, the report prepared by the General Directorate for Studies and Development of the

Authority said.

"This is a positive sign that the Sultanate is a favourable country for consumers as well as businessmen where legitimate cases are finalised in favour of the consumers and the interests of the businessmen are protected," a top official at the Research Department said.

The report further indicated that the total number of cases referred to the judicial authorities until June this year stood at 864, compared with 746 during the same period last year.

740 new COVID-19 cases, 28 deaths



MUSCAT: The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 84,509, while the number of recoveries stood at 78,912, which is 93.3 per cent of new cases reported.

The Ministry of Health reported 740 new cases and 28 deaths and it is to be noted that no cases were reported during the weekend and

public holiday.

The total number of COVID-19 related death cases stood at 637, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry also pointed out that 37 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of hospitalised patients stands at 406, of which 149 are in intensive care units (ICU). — ONA



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TOURISM RECOVERY DEPENDS ON DOMESTIC TOURISTS



LIJU CHERIAN
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Many tourism destinations in Europe, Asia and Middle East have to focus their efforts towards a national tourism strategy in promoting and developing local tourism markets and packages for a new segment of tourists, says Prof Angelo Battaglia, Professor in Tourism Planning and Strategy at Oman Tourism College (OTC), Head of Tourism and Management Department.

After the end of COVID-19 pandemic, this could define 'domestic tourists' which the professor hopes the global tourism market to recover soon, taking back the same numbers of international tourist arrivals experienced during the last 5 years from 2014-2019, where many countries as developed and emerging destinations have seen a growth of their respective tourism markets.

Prof Battaglia told *Observer* that with a specific reference to the Sultanate market and tourism landscapes, he strongly believes that the new emerging tourism experiences for the incoming season from October-November should focus on the Omani communities and domestic tourism as new segments of growth.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), the local and regional authorities and the hospitality sector are planning a very important strategy addressed to develop internal and domestic market, he adds.

He also believes that it will be very interesting to understand and



analyse the priorities of these new tourism segments based in the Sultanate and develop and design a number of packages specifically customised for Omani and expatriate-resident communities based here.

The great 'beauty' of the Sultanate, he says, is its different natural ecosystems, landscapes and resources spread over a variety of natural environments and cultural features which represent a crucial dimension in implementing and

developing a domestic market that could appreciate the 'multi-dimensional offer' of the Sultanate.

Domestic tourism is the present and the future of tourism in the Sultanate as main category of visitors and represents a vibrant market that

can discover the different dimensions of tourism; paying attention to the hospitality capacity or offers based on new and consolidate structures, resorts and hotels.

Prof Battaglia believes the most relevant thing for developing



Prof Angelo Battaglia

this new kind of tourism defined these days from UNWTO and other international organisation as 'staycation', which provides specific promotion to local Omani communities.

He also suggests that it will be strategically important to develop a marketing tourism campaign promotion by social media namely Instagram, Facebook or Twitter or designing special offers and family-special-packages for Omani people and their communities.

"I am sure that the domestic tourism will be exciting and will be a surprise for the tour-operators and tourism stakeholders for the next 12 months, until we will be sure that the international tourism market will start again globally, respecting and following all the safety measures in terms of health regulations, visa procedures and flight connections related to COVID-19 issue," concludes Prof Battaglia.

Boy's green passion wins him accolades

SOCIAL MEDIA STAR: Environment Authority presents the boy with a new set of gloves for the lost ones

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, AUG 24

It was a pleasant surprise for everyone who found a boy crying for the lost gloves while working to weed out a hugely invasive plant Parthenium, which is found in Dhofar. His innocent reaction for the lost gloves took the attention of social media and no sooner had it flashed, the Chairman of the Environment Authority took note of it and asked the officials of the Environment Authority in Salalah to reach out to the boy and honour him with a new set of gloves and a dress as a mark of encouragement for his 'great job' of conservation of environment.

Some citizens in Dhofar have launched a drive against the Parthenium plant due to its highly invasive nature. It has been growing very fast, suppressing other native plants and destroying the soil also. Impressed with the stories which he heard from his parents, the

10-year-old Osama Mohammed Ahmed Qaitoon al Shahri decided to join the campaign. He, however, misplaced his gloves while working. Thinking that he would no longer be part of the campaign, started crying inconsolably. Some curious participants recorded his innocence and posted on social media accounts.

It reached quickly to Dr Abdullah bin Ali bin Abdullah al Amri, the newly appointed Chairman of Environment Authority.

He asked some officials in Salalah to contact Osama and provide him a new set of gloves.

Talking to the *Observer* Dr Abdullah al Amri said, "It was a pleasant surprise to me as soon as I saw the clipping. I took it as a great message for the conservation of the environment being passed by a 10-year-old young boy. It is very important to understand the value of the environment and if people

start understanding, most of our problems are solved. I appreciated the boy, his innocence, and his commitment to the environment."

Dr Al Amri also appreciated the social activities of the people involved in the eradication of the Parthenium plant and called everyone to work for the conservation of the environment.

In an earlier statement, the Environment Authority had reiterated its commitment to address the issue.

"The Environment Authority appreciates all the efforts made by community members in Dhofar Governorate and public and private entities to combat the Parthenium plant. In this regard, the Authority will form, with the relevant authorities, a working group to support the efforts and study what this plant is, the reasons for its spread, and the extent of its impact on the environment," said the statement.

Ministry launches e-learning

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs launched Masar programme for training and e-learning under the patronage of Dr Mohammed Said al Maamari, ministry's Under-Secretary.

In an online statement to the media, Al Maamari said, "the ministry has inaugurated a number of successful online programmes that helped facilitate procedures and easing transactions for beneficiaries. Examples of these programmes are Hajj online programme, Waqf, Quran e-learning, Zakat online programme, in addition to other applications and programmes.

"The programme was prepared and designed according to educational concepts related to distance education. Masar is a simple and interactive interface that can help the trainee to easily and effectively access information," Project Director said.

The programme primarily targets ministry employees, while non-employees can avail the training courses available in the Masar programme. The number of courses available in the programme is 22, including 8 training courses for employees and 14 for the public. The launch of such programmes comes as a part of the important plans and systems that aim to develop the capabilities of employees and reinforce their skills by providing specialised and general electronic courses remotely. — ONA



Over 70 feared trapped in India building collapse

MUMBAI: At least 70 people were feared trapped after a five-storey apartment building collapsed late on Monday in western India, police said, with a local legislator warning that the number could be as high as 200.

The structure comprised 47 flats, police in the town of Mahad — 120 kilometres south of Mumbai — said in a statement.

The cause of the accident was not immediately clear but building collapses are common during India's June-September monsoon, with old and rickety structures buckling under the weight of non-stop rain.

"Fifteen injured people have been rescued and taken to hospital," Mahad police said.

Three rescue teams, armed with specialised equipment and sniffer dogs, had been deployed to the scene of the accident, a statement from India's National Disaster Response Force said, with Home Minister Amit Shah tweeting that he was "praying for



Rescue workers search for people in the rubble of a five-storey apartment building after it collapsed in Mahad. — AFP

everyone's safety".

Local residents and police combed through tin sheets, metal rods and other wreckage in a desperate search for survivors as ambulances ferried victims to nearby hospitals.

Mahad legislator Bharat Gogawale told the local TV9 Marathi channel that early estimates seemed to suggest that "over 200 people are stuck inside".

"Our primary goal is to rescue as many people as possible who are trapped under the debris".

"We cannot yet ascertain the reason for the collapse", he added.

'SCARY SITUATION'
Local politician Manik Motiram Jagtap told the channel that the structure was 10 years old and built on "weak" foundations. — AFP

GOOD RESPONSE TO CMYF BLOOD CAMP



MUSCAT: Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, conducted a blood donation camp last Friday. The camp held at the Bausher Blood Bank, received good response as many volunteers turned out to donate blood. CMYF founder-president Ramdas Chandaka thanked all those who came forward for this humanitarian cause. The CMYF has been honoured by the Ministry of Health on several occasions in recognition of its continuing support for blood collection services in the Sultanate.

France to reciprocate Britain's quarantine rule

PARIS: French authorities will in coming days reciprocate Britain's decision to impose a 14-day quarantine on all arrivals from France, the junior minister for European affairs said on Monday.

Britain said on Friday travellers from the United Kingdom to France are required to self-certify that they are not suffering coronavirus symptoms or have been in contact with a confirmed case within 14 days preceding travel.

Since August 15 British authorities have also required travellers returning from France to self-isolate upon their return due to high COVID-19 infection rates in France.

"We will have a measure called reciprocity so that our British friends do not close the border in one single way," French Junior European Affairs Minister Clement Beaune told French TV France 2.

"For travellers returning from the United Kingdom, there will probably be restrictive measures decided in the next few days by the Prime Minister and by the Defence Council."

— Reuters



شركة مطاحن صحار
SOHAR FLOUR MILLS

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

DGE/8190388/SFM/2020/RO/3

Sohar Flour Mills LLC, Sohar hereby announces the following tender:-

Tender No	Description of Works	Grade	Tender Fee	Date of Submission	Place of collection of tender and submission of tender documents
DGE/8190388/SFM/2020/RO/3	INSTALLATION / ERECTION WORKS FOR SHIP UNLOADER FOR PROPOSED GRAIN SILOS PROJECT FOR SOHAR FLOUR MILLS LLC AT SOHAR INDUSTRIAL PORT AREA	Grade – 1, 2 and Excellent grade registered in Chamber of Commerce and Tender Board	RO 25/ each.	23 rd September 2020	Sohar Flour Mills LLC P.O Box: 307, Falaj Al Qabil, P.C.: 322, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 26644800

Remarks:

- The interested contractor who are qualified for such type of works are invited to contact "Sohar Flour Mills P.O Box: 307, Falaj Al Qabil, Postal code: 322, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 26644800 or 98213510 for tender guidelines & to collect the full tender documents. The document price quoted above is non-refundable.
- Contractors to provide full contact detail for tender correspondence during collection of tenders & Bidders can send tender queries to the below mentioned email id: info@soharflourmills.com
- The **Sohar Flour Mills LLC** has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.



SULTANATE OF OMAN

University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Declaration of tenders

RECALL OF TENDER-2

University of Technology and Applied Sciences
(COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES IBRI)
invites Tenders Contractor firms for the:

Tender No	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for buying Tender papers	The deadline for submission of bids
12/2020	Operation and Maintenance of Sewage Treatment Plant at CAS-Ibri	Specialized in providing regained service and registered with the Tender Board	(RO 25/-) Twenty Five Rial Omani	03/09/2020	13 /09/2020

- Companies Specialized in such activities who have valid Tender Board Certificate may collect Tender Documents starting from Tuesday 25/08/ 2020, starting at 8:00 am from the website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bids must be submitted online through the above mentioned website and must include a copy of a temporary insurance in the form of a bank bond or a certified check from a bank operating in the Sultanate of at least (1%) of the tender value and valid up to (90) days from the date of submitting bids.
- The Original bid bonds of (1%) must be submitted in an enclosed envelope to Ibri College of Applied Sciences (Finance Affairs Section) before the deadline date for submission of bids.
- For any enquires or explanations about the Tender : Please do it through the website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- For any enquires or Technical Support about E-Tendering System: Please contact number: +968 241 66670 or E-mail: etenderhd@mtc.gov.om.
- The College is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.



WHO: 172 COUNTRIES ENGAGING WITH COVID-19 VACCINE PLAN

GENEVA/LONDON: Some 172 countries are engaging with the COVAX facility designed to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, the World Health Organization said on Monday, but more funding is needed and countries need now to make binding commitments.

Countries wishing to be part of the global COVAX plan have until August 31 to submit expressions of interest, WHO officials said, with confirmation of intention to join due by September 18, and initial payments due by October 9.

WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the facility was critical to ending the COVID-19 pandemic, and would not only pool risk for countries developing and buying vaccines, but also ensure prices are kept “as low as possible”.

COVAX is designed to guarantee equitable access globally to COVID-19 vaccines once they are developed and authorised for use

“Vaccine nationalism only helps the virus,” he told a media briefing. “The success of the COVAX facility hinges not only on countries signing up to it, but also filling key funding gaps.”

COVAX is co-led by the GAVI



People wearing protective masks walk in a street in Nantes, France. — Reuters

vaccines alliance, the WHO and the CEPI Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and is designed to guarantee equitable access globally to COVID-19 vaccines once they are developed and authorised for use.

It currently covers 9 candidate COVID-19 vaccines and its aim is to secure supplies of and deliver 2 billion doses across countries that sign up by the end of 2021.

“Initially, when there will be limited supply (of COVID-19 vaccines), it’s important to provide the vaccine to those at highest risk around the globe,” Tedros said.

He said this included health workers on the front lines of the pandemic, who were “critical to saving lives and stabilising the overall health system”.

— Reuters

Finland premier calls for shortening working hours

HELSINKI: Finland’s Prime Minister Sanna Marin called for cutting the current eight-hour working day in her keynote speech to her Social Democratic Party on Monday, arguing shorter hours could be offset by increased productivity.

Marin, who floated the idea of a six-hour day before becoming prime minister, would need to convince the other four parties in her coalition to push through a reduction in the working day amid rising unemployment due to COVID-19.

“We need to create a clear vision and concrete steps as to how Finland can proceed towards shorter working hours and Finnish employees towards better working life,” the 34-year-old leader told her party members, who had elected her chairwoman of the Social Democrats on Sunday.

Marin, one the world’s youngest serving prime ministers, has led Finland’s centre-left government since December 2019, after an ally in the coalition forced her predecessor Antti Rinne to resign. Together with Rinne, who continued to chair the party until Sunday, Marin has steered the government to the left, raising pensions and cancelling some of the previous government’s spending cuts.

Earlier on Monday, her party conference rejected a proposal to experiment with a six-hour working day, adopting instead the objective of shortening hours or introducing more flexibility into working life.

Marin said shorter working hours could become possible by increasing productivity and were not in conflict with strong public finances or the government’s goal of lifting Finland’s employment rate from the current 73.7 per cent to at least 75 per cent. — Reuters

SCHOOL FOR SANTAS!



A woman dressed as an elf takes temperature of attendees of the Ministry of Fun Santa School outside Southwark Cathedral in London on Monday. — Reuters

Cyprus denies media ‘passport’ claims

NICOSIA: The Cypriot government has hit back at claims in a media investigation that its controversial pathway for wealthy investors to acquire passports has been exploited by criminals under criminal investigation, international sanctions or serving prison sentences.

But Nicosia insisted that the claims related to a past era before the scheme was tightened.

The channel said it obtained the information from a substantial leak of passport data pertaining to the period 2017 to 2019, but did not reveal its source. Cyprus has faced pressure from Brussels to reform its citizenship-for-investment scheme, which the European Commission has said may help organised crime gangs infiltrate the EU. In February 2019 Nicosia updated its criteria for obtaining passports, imposing what it describes as more stringent due diligence procedures.

The leaked data showed wealthy, Kremlin-linked Russians, as well as Chinese nationals were “prepared to pay millions of dollars for a EU passport”, Al Jazeera said.

Thirty successful applicants to the programme face criminal charges, have been convicted, or

are sanctioned, according to the Al Jazeera investigation. It is unclear if or how many of these 30 individuals received passports.

Forty other successful applicants were found to hold politically sensitive roles in their homelands, making them high-risk under Cypriot and European rules, Al Jazeera said.

“All the individuals mentioned, especially in the Al Jazeera report, were evaluated according to the criteria that were in force at the given time and which they met,” Cyprus’ Interior Ministry said in a statement.

“It is well known that the Republic of Cyprus has made successive changes to improve the Cyprus Investment Programme, following the recent vote, of Regulations by the House of Representatives.

“The most important change is that the regulations ensure transparency, credibility and continuous control, both before submitting an application and after obtaining a Cyprus passport.” The Mediterranean island’s government has previously faced intense pressure over the scheme after it emerged that top Cambodian officials had obtained passports in 2016 and 2017. — AFP

After Beirut blast, foreign workers want to go home

BEIRUT: After struggling first through Lebanon’s economic crisis and then the coronavirus pandemic, Ethiopian worker Tarik Kebede said the deadly blast that ripped through her Beirut home was the final straw.

Inside the small house she shares with four friends, she pointed to the window frames covered by sheets, because the glass was smashed out by the August 4 explosion.

They had already lost their jobs — as domestic workers, or in supermarkets or restaurants — but now their home too is at risk.

“I’m scared to sleep here,” the 22-year old said, showing the deep cracks running down the bedroom’s walls, saying she feared the building “will collapse on top of us”.

Thousands of foreign workers were already stranded in Lebanon, after months of dollar shortages and then the coronavirus pandemic.

Then came the blast in Beirut’s port that killed more than 181 people, wounded thousands and devastated swathes of the city.

Many say it was just one disaster too many, and now they need to leave.

“I love Lebanon, but I don’t want to live here anymore,” Kebede said.



Children play outside a Unicef tent put in place to provide psychosocial support to people affected by a massive explosion in Beirut’s port area. — Reuters

“There’s no more work. How will I eat?” Some foreign workers also say they feel sidelined by aid efforts.

In the neighbourhood of Karantina, Kebede’s neighbour Hana claimed

aid workers sometimes put fellow Lebanese first.

Next door, 31-year-old Romane Abera recounted how she hid beneath a parked car to hide from the explosion.

“Once, a truck came to distribute food boxes but they said: ‘Only give them to the Lebanese,’” Hana said.

Today her damaged home is barely held up by scaffolding, with hot gusts

of summer air sweeping through a huge hole in the wall.

“I wish Lebanon could go back to how it was before,” said Abera, who left behind her baby boy in Ethiopia and recently lost her job.

Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers of multiple nationalities — including at least 250,000 housekeepers and carers — toil in Lebanon for cash to send home.

They enter Lebanon under a controversial sponsorship system called “kafala”, which has been repeatedly denounced by rights groups as enabling a wide range of abuses.

Under kafala, a worker cannot terminate their contract without the permission of their employer or they will lose their legal immigration status.

Many foreign workers have reached breaking point.

Outside the Gambian consulate in Beirut, around 30 Gambian women clamoured for help.

“We want to go home,” they chanted.

Zeina Ammar, from Lebanon’s Anti-Racism Movement (ARM) organisation, urged countries to fund evacuations, and provide travel documents when needed. — AFP

UK foreign minister to press for renewed Israel, Palestine dialogue

LONDON: British foreign minister Dominic Raab will meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week to press for renewed dialogue between their governments to pursue a negotiated two-state solution.

"The UK remains committed to Israel's security and stability, and the recent normalisation of relations between Israel and the UAE (United Arab Emirates) was an important moment for the region," Raab said in a statement on Monday.

"Israel's suspension of annexation is an essential step towards a more peaceful Middle East. It is important to build on this new dynamic, and ultimately only the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority can negotiate the two state solution required to secure lasting peace."

ISRAEL STRIKES GAZA

Meanwhile, the Israeli army on Monday again hit Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip, in retaliation for incendiary balloon and rocket attacks launched from the Palestinian enclave.



A worker with the Israel Nature and Parks Authority extinguishes a fire in a field near Kibutz Alumim that was reportedly caused by an incendiary balloon. — AFP

Israel has bombed Gaza almost daily since August 6, while balloons carrying fire bombs and, less frequently, rocket fire have hit Israel from Gaza.

been trying to broker a return to an informal truce. Israeli fire-fighters meanwhile continued to put out blazes on farms and scrubland caused by the incendiary balloons.

flare-ups of violence in recent years to prevent any repetition of the three wars Israel and Hamas have fought since 2008.

The latest Israeli strikes came just before US Secretary of State Mike

Pompeo touched down in Tel Aviv to kick off a five-day trip to the Middle East. The Palestinians have warned the Trump administration against trying to sideline them in the Middle East diplomatic push. — AFP/dpa

Iran presidential election set

TEHRAN: Iran's presidential election will be on June 18, 2021, the Interior Ministry announced on Monday.

Given the coronavirus crisis, it remained unclear how the election campaign and voting could take place, said Jamal Araf, head of the electoral office, part of the Interior Ministry.

The Foreign Ministry would gather information from countries that also conducted elections during the pandemic, Araf said, according to news agency ISNA.

After two terms in office, President Hassan Rowhani cannot stand for re-election. Monitors expect a three-way competition between candidates from the reformers, conservatives and hardliners.

Possible candidates are already being discussed on social media, including Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, and former presidents Mohammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, though none have officially announced their candidacy.

IAEA CHIEF VISITS IRAN

UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi was scheduled to hold high-level meetings in Tehran in an attempt to make progress on one of the issues that have led to growing tensions between Iran and the United States.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Grossi said ahead of the trip that he would push for access to two sites where the IAEA has indications of past nuclear activities.

The IAEA started asking questions about the locations one year ago but has not received satisfactory answers, and its nuclear inspectors have not been allowed to visit them. — dpa

SYRIA CONSTITUTION TALKS UNDER WAY AT UN

GENEVA: Members of Syria's Constitutional Committee, tasked with amending their war-torn country's constitution, met at the UN in Geneva on Monday for the first time since a failed attempt at talks last November.

Delegations from President Bashar al Assad's government, the opposition and civil society arrived at the United Nations in separate minivans, with all delegates wearing facemasks, to start a week of discussions.

Ahmad al Kuzbari, who is heading the government delegation, and Hadi al Bahra, leading up the opposition, both waved as they entered the building but delegates did not speak to reporters.

A UN spokeswoman confirmed shortly before noon that the week-long session had begun.

UN special envoy for Syria Gail Pedersen said he had met with co-chairs of the government and opposition delegations and with

civil society representatives over the weekend.

"I am looking forward to a week of substantial discussions on the agenda and moving the process forward," the Norwegian diplomat said on Twitter.

The full constitutional review committee is made up of 150 delegates divided equally three ways into government, opposition and civil society groups.

But only 15 members from each of those groups were due to take part in this week's small-scale meeting.

The Constitutional Committee was created in September last year and first convened a month later.

A second round of talks, planned for late November, never got going after disagreement on the agenda prevented government and opposition negotiators from meeting.

Since then talks have been delayed by the coronavirus crisis.

The UN has been striving for



Syrian MP Ahmad al Kuzbari arrives for a meeting of Syria Constitutional Committee at the UN Office in Geneva. — AFP

more than nine years to try to help find a political resolution to Syria's civil war, which has killed more than 380,000 people and has displaced more than 11 million.

Constitutional review is a central part of the UN's peace plan for Syria, which was defined by Security Council resolution 2254, adopted in December 2015.

Pedersen on Friday stressed the urgent need to build confidence between the parties.

He told reporters nobody expected "a miracle or a breakthrough"; rather the meeting is about looking towards identifying areas where progress might be made.

PIPELINE ATTACK

Meanwhile in Damascus the government on Monday blamed a "terrorist" attack on a gas pipeline for a nationwide blackout, in the latest such alleged assault on its energy infrastructure.

Caretaker electricity minister Zuhair Kharboutli said a pipeline explosion in the Damascus area late on Sunday "led to an electricity blackout across Syria", according to state news agency SANA.

The caretaker oil and mineral resources minister, Ali Ghanem, said the explosion of the gas pipeline, between Adra and Dmeir, was "the result of a terrorist attack".

James Jeffrey, the US pointman on Syria, told journalists in Geneva that the US was still looking into who was responsible for the pipeline attack.

"But it was almost certainly a strike by IS," Jeffrey said.

Kharboutli said the explosion was the "sixth of its kind on the pipeline in that area", without giving a timeframe.

SANA published pictures of firefighters working to put out a blaze, followed by images a mangled land pipeline missing a large chunk.

— AFP

Youths find ancient gold treasure while digging

CENTRAL ISRAEL: Israeli youths have unearthed hundreds of gold coins stashed away in a clay vessel for more than a thousand years.

The treasure was discovered on August 18, the Israel Antiquities Authority said on Monday, by teenagers volunteering at an excavation in central Israel where a new neighbourhood is planned to be built.

"The person who buried this treasure 1,100 years ago must have expected to retrieve it and even secured the vessel with a nail so that it would not move. We can only guess what prevented him from returning to collect this treasure," said excavation director Liat Nadav-Ziv.

The area it was found in housed workshops at the time the treasure was hidden and the identity of the owner is still a mystery.

"It was amazing," said Oz Cohen, one of the volunteers who found the



A trove of 425 gold coins dating to the Abbasid Caliphate discovered near Tel Aviv. — AFP

treasure.

"I dug in the ground and when I excavated the soil, saw what looked like very thin leaves. When I looked again I saw these were gold coins. It was really exciting to find such a special and ancient treasure."

Dating back to the ninth century Abbasid Caliphate period, the 425 24-carat pure gold coins would have been a significant amount of money at the time, said Robert Kool, a coin expert at the Antiquities Authority.

— Reuters



Sultanate of Oman
The Public Safety & Consumer Protection



SAUD BAHWAN Group

Recall/Special Service Campaign



Date of Campaign : 25/08/2020
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign
Product Description : Prius

Production Year	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
2014 TO 2019	TOYOTA	Prius	JTDKB3FU6G3500297 to JTDKB3FU4J3585647	3381

Description:

In the driver's seat belt reminder system, due to an improper assembly of the electrical contacts in the reminder switch, there is a possibility that abnormal wear at the contacts may occur after repeated use of the seat belt and residue may be deposited. In this condition, the seat belt reminder could not be turned off even when the seat belt is correctly fastened due to a short circuit between the contacts.

Procedure:

As per "Technical instruction" advised by TMC.

For More Information:

Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc. from 25/08/2020.

Contact Details:

Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs. after 25/08/2020.



14 DEAD, 75 WOUNDED IN TWIN BOMBINGS IN PHILIPPINES

JOLO: At least 14 people were killed and 75 wounded — including members of the security forces and civilians — in twin bombings on Monday involving a suicide attacker on a southern Philippine island that is a stronghold of militants, officials said.

The apparently coordinated attacks happened in Jolo in Sulu, where government-backed security forces have long been fighting the militant group.

Seven soldiers, a police officer, and six civilians were killed in the two bombings, the first at around midday when an improvised explosive device attached to a motorcycle parked outside a supermarket blew up, Lieutenant General Corleto Vinluan said.

That was followed by a second blast a short time later in the same street when a suicide attacker blew herself up as security forces cordoned off the area, Vinluan said.

A soldier had been trying to apprehend the bomber when she detonated her explosives, he added.

A total of 48 civilians were also wounded along with 21 soldiers and six police.



Soldiers help colleagues at the scene of a bombing in the town of Jolo. — Reuters

A soldier saw a person leave the motorbike outside the grocery store “where there were a lot of people” including members of the military. It

immediately detonated, Lieutenant Colonel Ronaldo Mateo said.

“Our soldiers are conducting security operations. That was the time

that the improvised explosive device detonated,” he said. The militants were “most probably” behind the double bombing, Mateo said.

BLASTS FOLLOW ARREST

Monday’s attacks come after the arrest earlier this month on the southern island of Mindanao.

Security forces had been on alert for possible reprisal attacks after detaining Abduljihad Susukan, who is accused of kidnapping and beheading several foreigners.

He has been charged with 23 murders, five kidnappings and six attempted murders, police have said.

President Rodrigo Duterte’s spokesman Harry Roque condemned the “dastardly attacks” and issued condolences to the families and loved ones of those killed.

“We call on the residents of Jolo to stay vigilant and report suspicious personalities and unattended items in their areas,” Roque said.

The Philippine Coast Guard issued a “red alert” for Sulu and several other areas in the restive south as it assists the military and police in responding to the incident.

The explosions happened near a cathedral in Jolo where two suicide bombers blew themselves up in January 2019 killing 21 people. It was blamed on militants. — AFP

IN BRIEF

Tourists locked out of Bali

JAKARTA: Foreign tourists won’t be allowed to visit Bali for the rest of 2020 due to coronavirus concerns, its governor said, scrapping a plan to open up the Indonesian island from next month. The holiday hotspot re-opened beaches, temples and other tourism spots for domestic visitors at the end of July and had said it would let foreign tourists return on September 11. But the plan has now been cancelled over concerns about Indonesia’s mounting virus cases and with many foreign nationals subject to travel bans in their home countries.

Jakarta is also yet to lift its ban on foreign tourists entering Indonesia. “The situation in Indonesia is not conducive to allow international tourists to visit Indonesia, including… Bali,” the island’s governor I Wayan Koster said in an official letter. — AFP

Austria to expel Russian envoy

VIENNA: Austria is expelling a Russian diplomat for breaching the Vienna Convention governing diplomats’ privileges and immunities, an Austrian Foreign Ministry spokesman said, declining to elaborate further on the case, including on details reported in the *Kronen Zeitung* newspaper.

The Russian Embassy responded on Twitter: “We are outraged by the unfounded decision of the Austrian authorities, which is damaging to constructive relations.” *Kronen Zeitung* said that for years the Russian had engaged in spying on an Austrian high-tech company with the support of an Austrian working at the firm. The Austrian turned himself in and identified the Russian as his handler. The newspaper did not identify the firm. — Reuters

Rohingya Internet ban to be lifted

KUTUPALONG: Bangladesh will restore Internet access to nearly a million Rohingya stuck in refugee camps “very soon”, the government said on Monday, on the eve of the third anniversary of their escape from Myanmar.

Authorities in Bangladesh cut mobile Internet access to the sprawling, teeming camps in the country’s southeast a year ago, citing security concerns, sparking international condemnation.

Foreign Secretary Masud bin Momen said on Monday that the spread of “baseless rumours and misinformation” could create panic and destabilise the camps, where a few Rohingya have been killed in internal clashes in recent years.

“However, responding to the requests from our friends and also for the need of imparting education and COVID-19 response, for greater Internet connectivity, we have taken a decision on lifting the restrictions on 3G and 4G mobile networks, which will be effective very soon,” Momen said. — AFP

Way forward for Afghan peace

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Afghan Taliban political negotiators arrived in Pakistan on Monday to discuss the possible start of negotiations with the administration in Kabul, raising hope for a push towards peace.

The six-member team led by the Taliban’s chief negotiator, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, was expected to have a meeting with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Tuesday. The Taliban were invited by Islamabad to discuss the “way forward in the Afghan peace process,” Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zahid H Chaudhri said in a statement.

The visit coincides with a decision by Taliban chief Malawi Haibatullah Akhundzada to set up a 20-member team of negotiators to begin peace talks with the Afghan government.

The Afghan government and the Taliban were set to open talks in April following a peace deal between the United States and the militia signed in Qatar in February to end two decades of war. — dpa

Abe becomes Japan’s longest-serving PM

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters on Monday that a visit to the hospital on the day he became the country’s longest-serving prime minister had merely been for “additional tests.”

The return to the hospital, a week after a “regular checkup” drew questions. In July 2007, Abe abruptly quit as prime minister due to health issues, only one year into the job.

Despite few significant accomplishments, Abe, who returned to power in December 2012, has marked 2,799 consecutive days in office as prime minister.

He surpassed the previous record, set by his great-uncle Eisaku Sato, who served from November 1964 to July 1972.

“You will be judged on what you have accomplished, not on how many days you have been in office,” Abe said.

The new record comes as Japan is struggling with a resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, its economy in the second quarter shrank a record annualised 27.8 per cent, compared to the previous three-month period.

Abe’s government has been criticised for failing to ramp up testing capabilities for the virus and spending taxpayers’ money on pro-



‘You will be judged on what you have accomplished, not on how many days you have been in office,’ Abe said on Monday.

— AFP

moting tourism amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Overall, Japan has so far reported more than 63,400 confirmed cases of the virus and about 1,200 deaths, according to the Health Ministry.

A weekend survey conducted by Kyodo News showed 58.4 per cent of those polled have been dissatisfied with his government’s handling of the pandemic, while 34 per cent were satisfied.

According to the same survey, 70.8 per cent think Abe should convene an extraordinary parliamentary session to discuss measures to help contain the spread of the virus, while 22.6 per cent do not think he needs to do so. — dpa

Storm causes death, destruction in Haiti, Dominican Republic

MIAMI: At least nine people died in Haiti and two were missing, when heavy rainfall from Tropical Storm Laura buried large swaths of the country under murky flood waters and threatened to over power the country’s only hydroelectric dam.

Four people died in Haiti’s neighbour, the Dominican Republic. Laura was headed for a possible hit later in the week on the Louisiana coast as a hurricane, along with Hurricane Marco. But first, it was expected to make landfall somewhere between the Cuban provinces of Santiago de Cuba and Granma, then move near the southern coast of the island.

“The waves are already spilling over the Gibara seawall. Many residents have already left the area for fear of flooding,” Guillermina Montejo, a resident of the coastal Cuban city of Holguin, told *el Nuevo Herald*.

The centre of Tropical Storm Laura passed into Haiti on Sunday after moving from Puerto Rico and through the Dominican Republic, where it also left at least four dead and a destructive trail of floods, heavy rains and wind in its wake.

Among the dead: two, possibly three, children.

In Haiti, a 10-year-old girl in the southeastern town of Anse-a-Pitrenear the Haiti-Dominican border was killed when a tree fell on her house. A 10-month-old baby boy was



Water runs along the streets of Santo Domingo causing the collapse of houses as tropical storm Laura batters the region. — AFP

missing after his mother’s car got stuck in the mud in Tabarre and the two appeared to have gotten swept away by flash floods. The lifeless body of the mother, who was identified by a friend as Jessica Jeanniton, a paediatrician, was later found, but not the child.

In the neighbouring Dominican Republic, 7-year-old Darwin Frias and his mother, Clarissa, 44, died when their house collapsed in Santo Domingo, the capital, which saw severe flooding and damaged homes.

Videos posted on Twitter showed Dominican Civil Defense workers pulling trapped residents out of the rubble in at least one area of Santo

Domingo known as Palmarejo.

“We want to show solidarity with the pain of these families; we ask God to bring them comfort and we… will be there to help them with their needs,” Juan Manuel Mendez Garcia, the director of the Center of Emergency Operations, said in a news conference.

Visiting one of the hard-hit neighbourhoods, La Yuca, newly sworn-in Dominican President Luis Abinadar promised the crowd he would implement a plan to prevent tragedy around the ravines and rivers in urban areas that are particularly vulnerable to dangerous floods during storms. — dpa

Virus-hit Indian resort turns pool into fish farm

KOCHI: A luxury resort in southern India has turned its swimming pool into a fish farm to stop the business sinking amid the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Normally the 150-metre pool at the Aveda Resort in Kerala state is packed with European tourists. Now thousands of pearl spot fish are causing the splash.

The complex was forced to shut in March when a nationwide coronavirus lockdown was ordered. Few hotels have been allowed to reopen since.

Of those which are still shuttered, not many boast a pool with 7.5

million litres of water, which can be put to alternative use.

“We have had zero revenues, so in June, we put around 16,000 two-month-old pearl spot fish in the pool,” Aveda’s general manager Jyotish Surendran said.

The fish, which takes about eight months to reach full size, is a popular ingredient in dishes in southern India.

“We plan to harvest by November and will export,” Surendran said, predicting about four tonnes of pearl spots growing in the swimming pool could be worth \$40,000 on the market.



A luxury resort in Kerala has turned its swimming pool into a fish farm to stop the business sinking amid the pandemic economic crisis. — AFP

The makeshift farm would not cover the losses from the pandemic, which has driven many hotels to bankruptcy, said the hotel boss.

But Surendran was hopeful that the money would help cover basic bills so the business can keep running until tourists return.

And the Aveda plans to keep faith with the pearl spot even when business resumes.

“We can’t continue with this farm in the pool, but we are trying to find alternative land where we can build up this knowledge for bigger projects,” he said.

— AFP

The three 'Rs' we should hold onto...

R

is a beautiful alphabet.

It stands tall reminding us of many key words that hold important place in this era.

'R' for recycling — we have been hearing about it for a while. While we do not have an infrastructure to recycle most of the products yet, there are many ways we can recycle some of the commodities that pass through our hands to dustbin.

Someone in Cameroon has come up with the idea of making boats out of plastic bottles, while a Tanzanian recycling plant has gone on to use plastic bottles to make face shields and hospitals could not be happier.

Earth must be letting out a sigh of relief as well for that many bottles are not going to enter the ocean to suffocate it. But there is a newcomer in the shores

floating on the waves back and forth and you might notice it at times entangled around your foot. It is supposed to have been a shield to protect one-self and others but now it is abandoned where so many others have come to take in the energy and fresh air.

This is where the other 'R' comes in — Responsibility. Sure enough we must be excited than ever before to come out to the beach after the lockdown, especially with other beaches still beyond access. People have been rushing to nature to take a break but we have proven that we have not changed much. Just after the sun has gone beneath the horizon, a walk on the shore reveals what people had at the picnic. Would we do that at home — let bottles, chips bags and other snack covers leave around and not to forget the new comer — the mask? If it is not good

enough for us, then it is not good enough for the beach either.

In life too we often think about our benefits only and try to dumb or leave behind emotional baggage for others to handle. We meet people and the first thing people often think is 'would they be of any use?' Not knowing that in reality we never know whose help would we require in the future.

What gives us the right to discard our waste at the beach, beauty of which is what lured us there? We think we can do as we please even when we know what is good for us. Out of fear for the authority and fine is why we have been abiding by the law when it comes to traffic safety. The fine amount increased and we began to be conscious about wearing the seat belt and speed limit.

And the same with the facial masks

only the fines made sense to us, not the medical advisories.

What would make us respect nature? Oil bottles that were used for the boat has a place to dispose off. We were probably more conscious about these subtle etiquettes when we were children but somewhere along it became someone else's job to keep the environment clean.

But one thing is for sure just like the theory of understanding a person from the way he/she looks after a car, we can tell a lot about how one behaves when they are outdoors especially at a beach for instance — it is part of the person's personality reflecting values.

An ancient wisdom explains to us that nothing really belong to us. We are walking across the earth like millions have done so before. But they have always or at least tried to respect nature.

Our generation is more aware about what is good for us and pops up the question, "How does it benefit me?" fast enough to analyse the situation but the waste we produce is someone else's problem.

The truth is we are interrelated. If the sea is not inhaling and exhaling right it is not just harmful for marine life but us too for we depend on the sea from food chain to salt and water through desalination.

In fact, it should be in the core of our conscience. Shall we renew our commitment towards our environment? No, no we do not even have to go for beach cleaning. We just have to take back all our waste back with us and leave nothing but footsteps. So that is our third 'R' — Renew, for renewing our contract of commitment with nature.



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

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President Donald Trump with White House counsellor Kellyanne Conway at the White House in Washington.

— Reuters

Trump hopes to change America's tune

SEBASTIAN SMITH

P

resident Donald Trump will draw on all his showman's instincts at the Republican convention starting on Monday to get Americans to look beyond his handling of the coronavirus crisis and return him to the White House for a second term.

Facing anger over the pandemic and ensuing economic pain, Trump badly trails his Democratic opponent Joe Biden in the polls.

He is also weighed down by the growing turmoil in his inner circle, with former chief strategist Steve Bannon arrested last week on fraud charges and a current top adviser, Kellyanne Conway, announcing late on Sunday that she was stepping down to spend time with her family.

But the Republican insists he can replicate his surprise 2016 win — and hopes the convention, where he will be nominated to seek reelection November 3, will launch the comeback.

Unlike standard party conventions, where the candidate stays mostly out of the way until the last night, Trump is expected to be in the limelight all four days. His family, which has had an unusual amount of influence and access at the White House during his tumultuous first term, will also be omnipresent.

There'll be First Lady Melania Trump's speech in the Rose Garden on Tuesday and addresses by the president's children, including right-wing firebrand son Don Jr, daughter-advisor Ivanka and daughter-in-law Lara Trump.

The nomination itself will be made on Monday in Charlotte, North Carolina, where Republican delegates are gathering to conduct the roll call. Trump will also be speaking in the state.

But Trump's main speech accepting the nomination is set for Thursday at the White House itself — a show of power

Unlike standard party conventions, where the candidate stays mostly out of the way until the last night, Trump is expected to be in the limelight all four days. His family, which has had an unusual amount of influence and access at the White House, will also be omnipresent

trampling over the custom of separating political campaigns from the office of president.

In another move stretching etiquette, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will make a speech on his behalf while conducting an official trip to Israel.

Democrats put on a well-honed production at their all-online convention last week, culminating with Biden's emotional pledge to be an "ally of the light" after the "darkness" of Trump's first term. Trump, though, has years of his own experience in television and has reportedly brought in two of the producers on his old reality TV show "The Apprentice" to help out.

For all his bullshiness, Trump faces an uphill struggle against Biden, who is tapping into unhappiness with the president's handling of the pandemic, unrest over racial inequality and fear of

long-term economic damage from the coronavirus shutdown.

Beyond bread and butter issues, Trump's abrasive style, his habit of insulting people in public, his demonisation of journalists, and almost total inability to talk to Democratic leaders has left the country divided and exhausted.

In a potential new flashpoint, protests erupted in the critical electoral state of Wisconsin after police there shot a black man in the back. While details were still unclear, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers compared the incident to other incidents where outrage has erupted over excessive use of force.

Trump is attempting to reverse the Democrats' narrative that he is to blame for the deep gloom in the country, saying that their convention "spent four straight days attacking America as racist and a horrible country that must be redeemed." On Sunday, he told Fox News his convention would be "uplifting and positive." Trump's number one message is that the economy, reeling from the shock of the nationwide shutdown earlier this year, will come back soon.

He told Fox News he will be promising tax cuts and "the best economy ever." But the sunny tone is likely to get heavy competition from Trump's other favourite themes — his often outlandish claims that Democrats want to take away Americans' firearms, unleash anarchy in the streets, encourage mass illegal immigration, and even repress religious freedom.

Earlier this month, Trump told a crowd that Biden will "hurt the Bible, hurt God" — a statement that quickly drew outrage and ridicule.

Asked by Fox News whether a kinder, gentler kind of Trump might be seen in a second term, the president said: "I'd like it to be calm, too." — Reuters

In Mexico, now parents turn to state schools!

LIZBETH DIAZ AND NOE TORRES

M

illions of students returned to classes virtually in Mexico on Monday after a hiatus lasting months caused by the coronavirus pandemic that has sparked an exodus from private schools.

Mexico has yet to publish official data, but private-school bodies consulted by Reuters said almost 2 million students at all levels were expected to quit private schools because of the crisis to join an already overcrowded public system.

The lack of both in-person teaching and access to facilities has left many parents unwilling to shoulder private-school costs.

"We're facing a tremendous crisis," said Alfredo Villar, head of the National Association of Private Schools, which groups more than 6,000 institutions nationwide. "Many schools are running out of people and will very likely have to close." Supporters of private schools worry the turmoil could stretch the education system, especially after President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador last year cancelled a reform that the previous government said would improve teaching standards in Mexico, one of the worst-performing countries in the 37-nation Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Schools were among the first institutions the government ordered into lockdown in March, taking over 30 million students from some 216,500 public schools, and 5 million private students, out of classrooms.

Mexico has since recorded more than 60,000 deaths from COVID-19, the third-highest toll from the pandemic globally.

In an attempt to hold on to students and the payment of fees, private schools are trying to make deals with parents, offering more discounts, scholarships and other benefits. It has not been enough for some.

"It's ridiculous. They reduced (tuition) 3 per cent, but before that they raised it 30 per cent in the previous cycle," said housewife Alicia Martinez, 37, who from the beginning of the crisis began struggling to support her two children in a paying school.

The pandemic has recently eased, but the government decided that infections remained too high to risk reopening schools.

So students must start the new academic year with a home-learning programme broadcast by major television networks until infection rates are deemed sufficiently low.

The outlook has forced over 48,000 private schools to delay a return to classrooms and instead move online — a major setback for many centres whose reputation rests on their facilities. At least 15 parents who spoke to Reuters in recent days said they had withdrawn their children from private schools to put them in the public system. The government says it can pick up the slack.

— Reuters

OMAN ٱلْجَزَائِر DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED ON 15 NOVEMBER 1981

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Website: omanobserver.om

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman



JOHNSON POWERS TO WORLD NO. 1 WITH NORTHERN TRUST TRIUMPH



US PGA TOUR NORTHERN TRUST SCORES Final round (par 71, USA unless noted):

- 254 - Dustin Johnson 67-60-64-63

265 - Harris English 64-66-66-69

266 - Daniel Berger 66-66-67-67

267 - Kevin Kisner 65-66-70-66, Scottie Scheffler 70-59-67-71

268 - Jon Rahm (ESP) 69-67-67-65, Webb Simpson 70-64-68-66

269 - Ryan Palmer 67-67-68-67, Russell Henley 64-67-70-68, Alex Noren (SWE) 69-68-64-68

270 - Brian Harman 67-66-73-64, Harry Higgs 67-66-66-71
- 271 - Robby Shelton 66-71-71-63, Jason Kokrak 68-68-70-65, Mackenzie Hughes (CAN) 68-68-66-69, Charley Hoffman 65-68-68-70, Louis Oosthuizen (RSA) 65-65-68-73

272 - Viktor Hovland (NOR) 68-70-68-66, Sebastian Munoz (COL) 65-71-69-67, Matt Kuchar 69-69-66-68, Tilor Gooch 66-72-65-69, Cameron Smith (AUS) 69-68-66-69, Danny Lee (NZL) 66-64-69-73, Bubba Watson 65-68-67-72

NEW YORK: Dustin Johnson seized the world number one ranking in emphatic style on Sunday, firing an eight-under par final-round 63 to win the US PGA Northern Trust by 11 strokes. Johnson finished with a 30-under par total of 254 at TPC Boston, with Harris English a distant second on 265 after a closing 69. Johnson's 22-under third-round total had given him the largest 54-hole lead on tour this season — five strokes — and he was quick to build on it on Sunday. He set the tone with an eight-foot eagle putt at the second, set up by a magnificent seven-iron over the water.

He tapped in for birdie at the fourth and rolled in a four-foot birdie at the fifth. Birdie putts of 10 and 13 feet at the seventh and eighth saw him make the turn five-under for the day, and he rolled in another four-foot birdie at the 12th.

The only thing that slowed him was a weather delay, the horn sounding just after he teed off on 17. Johnson returned and birdied the par-five 18th in near darkness and steady rain.

He matched the second-lowest score in relation to par in a 72-hole US PGA Tour event.

Ernie Els holds the record of 31-under shot at Kapalua in 2003, and Jordan Spieth won the 2016 Tournament of Champions with a 30-under total.

His margin of victory was the largest on tour since 2006. "It is a big margin, and I'm definitely really proud of that," Johnson said. "I played really good. I knew I was playing well and I knew the guys were going to shoot low."

"So I was trying to get 30-under — holed a nice little putt on the last hole to get to 30."

After a tough putting round on Thursday, Johnson put himself on the path to victory with an impressive 11-under 60 on Friday — when he was 11-under through 11 holes before paring his way to the clubhouse. Told his 30-under total didn't give him a record, Johnson wasn't bothered.

"That's all right," he said, "next time."

OOSTHUIZEN SQUEEZES IN

Former US Open champion Johnson toppled Spain's Jon Rahm from the top of the rankings, and will also lead the US tour's FedEx Cup standings going into the second playoff event, the BMW Championship.

"Something that I'm very proud of is to be number one in the world, and I'd like to stay there for a little while," Johnson said.

"Obviously it's been jumping around a bunch here the last few months, but you know, the last time I was number one I think I stayed there for quite some time, and that's another goal of mine is just to see how long I can stay at number one."

South Africa's Louis Oosthuizen grabbed the final spot in the 70-man BMW field with a birdie at the final hole on Sunday, coming back after the rain delay and capping a two-over 73. That put him in a tie for 13th, and knocked Doc Redman out of the top 70 in the play-off standings. — AFP

Oman Cricket extends registration deadline

MUSCAT: Pleased by the teams' enthusiasm and excitement for the new season, Oman Cricket (OC) has decided to extend the registration deadline on their demand so that they get enough time for the required approvals from their companies, institutions and sponsors.

"We are pleased to announce that even in the current situation as many as 53 teams have already registered for the Senior League alone and more are expected to enroll for Oman Cricket's domestic season 2020-21," said Duleep Mendis, OC's Chief Development Officer on Monday.

"Therefore, OC has extended the registration and payment deadline for the Senior Division

till August 31," he added.

Further details can be had from OC office by calling 24970018.

With more teams set to join its multi-layered annual competition, Oman Cricket is anticipating another mega season which is likely to kickstart in late September after necessary approvals and COVID-19 guidelines are received from the concerned authorities.

The well-structured domestic season comprises Premier League, Senior League, Junior League and Women's League competitions across various formats on various grounds including lush green grassy outfields in Amerat.



OOC chairman felicitates Al Habsi



OOC Chairman Sayyid Khalid al Busaidy honours Ali al Habsi.

SPORTS REPORTER MUSCAT, AUG 24

Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), felicitated Oman goalkeeping great Ali bin Abdullah al Habsi, who announced his retirement last Friday.

The OOC chairman received former Oman captain at his office on Monday.

Sayyid Khalid thanked Al Habsi on behalf of OOC and sports fraternity in the Sultanate for his contribution to Oman football and appreciated Ali's remarkable presence in GCC and foreign clubs.

Taha bin Suleiman al Kishry, OOC General Secretary, and Mohsin al Masroori, OOC Board member,

were present.

The 38-year-old announced his retirement on Friday through his official Twitter page.

"After years in which I had the honour to represent a number of clubs, today I announce the end of my career as a football player. I express my sincere thanks to everyone who has supported me throughout my career, confirming my continued service to my country from other locations."

Omani fans took to social media to thank the sports icon. His decision was appreciated by all after a successful journey of 135 international matches in different events and tournaments.

The appreciation from OOC comes with regard to Al Habsi's

top performance as goalkeeper according to FIFA.com website. The lanky player's 22-year career was eventful with several achievements for the Oman national team and English clubs including Bolton Wanderers, Wigan Athletic and Reading FC.

He started his football career with home town club Al Mudhaibi in 1998. Then, he joined Al Nasr before moving to Norwegian outfit Lyn. Later, he began new journey at Premier League as he had joined English club Bolton Wanderers and then moved to Wigan, Brighton & Hove Albion and Reading teams. Ending his stint in England, Ali moved to Saudi Arabian giants Al Hilal. Three years later, he went back to England to join Championship

side West Bromwich Albion in his final act of playing career.

Ali's journey with the national team started in 2002 and he played for Oman in the AFC Asian Cup in 2004. He was named the best goalkeeper in five editions of the Arabian Gulf Cup and was instrumental in handing the Sultanate its first ever Gulf Cup in 2009.

Fifa tweeted on their Arabic page: "Our sincere congratulations to legendary Omani goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi on his wonderful football career, which he decided to end today after years of brilliance at club and national levels. Thank you for the memories and the great conduct, Captain Ali. Our best wishes for success in your future endeavours."



France's Alize Cornet beat Sofia Kenin.

PLISKOVA, KENIN SENT SPINNING OUT

KUDERMETOVA, CORNET AND TSITSIPAS ADVANCE TO LAST 16

NEW YORK: Top-seeded Karolina Pliskova and No 2 Sofia Kenin crashed out of the Western & Southern Open on Sunday, falling in their opening matches at the National Tennis Center in New York.

Russia's Veronika Kudermetova, ranked 41st in the world, toppled world number three Pliskova of Czech Republic 7-5, 6-4 in their second-round clash.

France's Alize Cornet notched her first win over a top-five player in two years when she shocked Australian Open champion Kenin 6-1, 7-6 (9/7) to reach the round of 16.

It was a stunning turn of events on a day that saw men's fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas lead the way into the round of 16 with a 6-1, 6-3 victory over two-time Grand Slam finalist Kevin Anderson.

Greece's Tsitsipas needed just 69 minutes to subdue Anderson, pressuring the towering South African's second serve as he broke four times.

He didn't face a break point himself until the fifth game of the second set, when Tsitsipas fell into a 0-40 hold but won five straight points to escape the jam.

"That was a crucial game, being able to come back there and maintain the focus that I needed to be back in the match and not be a break down, that was a very good effort from me," Tsitsipas said.

He gained the lone break of the second set when Anderson double-faulted on break point in the eighth game, and finished off the match on his second match point when Anderson sailed a return of a second serve long. Tsitsipas was the first of the top eight men's seeds to see action as all enjoyed first-round byes.

DJOKOVIC OPENS CAMPAIGN

World number one and top seed Novak Djokovic was scheduled to open his campaign on Monday against qualifier Ricardas Berankis.

The Serbian star remained on Monday's slate despite pulling out of doubles on Sunday citing pain in his neck.

US star Serena Williams, seeded third, is also set to open her campaign on Monday with a second-round clash with Arantxa Rus — a 6-2, 6-3 winner over Alison Van Uytvanck.

Tsitsipas, seeking his sixth ATP title, next faces either 16th seeded American John Isner or Australian John Millman, both first-round winners on Sunday.



Venus Williams (USA) serves against Dayana Yastremska (UKR). — USA Today Sports



Russia's Veronika Kudermetova toppled Karolina Pliskova of Czech Republic.

Isner beat his doubles partner Hubert Hurkacz of Poland 7-5, 6-4. Millman rallied to beat France's Adrian Mannarino 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/2).

In other first-round action, Argentina's Diego

Schwartzman defeated Casper Ruud 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 to advance.

While the tournament is being played without fans — as well as without line judges with the electronic "hawkeye" line calling system making all the calls — Schwartzman still found himself waving out of habit to the non-existent crowd after the win.

"Obviously it's a different feeling, going on court without people," Schwartzman said.

The tournament normally played in Cincinnati is being held at the US Tennis Association's Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, allowing players to remain in a controlled environment to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The US Open will begin at the venue on August 31.

Pliskova, the 2016 US Open runner-up, can only hope she can regroup by then.

Kudermetova, who laboured to a three-set first-round victory over Australian Ajla Tomljanovic on Saturday, rallied from a 1-4 deficit in the first set, and reeled off the last three games of the match to score the upset.

"I tried to not think about the score. I tried to fight, tried to continue play every ball," Kudermetova said. "I tried just to fight and enjoy it."

Pliskova had seemed in full control when she held at love for a 4-1 lead.

The big-serving Czech peppered Kudermetova with 11 aces but still faced 13 break points in the match.

PRAYING FOR THE BEST

Cornet almost let her chance against Kenin get away.

Up 6-1, 5-2, she squandered two match points before pulling off the upset in the tiebreaker.

"Somehow I let it go a little bit, and I got really tight, so I never thought I could win the set the way I did," said Cornet. "In the tie-break, oh my God, I was just praying for the best on every single shot."

Kenin, the world number four who shot to prominence with her Australian Open win in January, next faces either two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka or French compatriot Caroline Garcia, who defeated 2017 US Open champion Sloane Stephens 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) in a first-round clash. — AFP

Japan's Sato wins Indy 500 race

* FIRST FROM JAPAN TO WIN INDY 500 * CRASH DENIES DRAMATIC FINISH * NO FANS AT THE BRICKYARD

TORONTO: Japan's Takuma Sato won the Indianapolis 500 for the second time in four years on Sunday after a late crash saw the 'Greatest Spectacle in Racing' come to a less than thrilling end under caution.

Sato, who had been locked in a ferocious battle with Scott Dixon, cruised across the finish line unchallenged after Spencer Pigot crashed hard into the wall with five laps to run, bringing out the yellow caution flag.

The 43-year-old driver was already the first from Japan to win the Indy 500 after putting his car on Victory Lane at the famed Brickyard in 2017.

Billed as the world's biggest single day sporting event, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway would normally be packed with 300,000 fans. But with no spectators allowed into the sprawling facility because of COVID-19 safety protocols, Sato was denied the thundering ovation that usually goes with victory.

He was, however, able to chug from the traditional quart of milk as members of his Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing team celebrated around him across from the empty grandstands.

"When you're driving obviously we (are) concentrating on what's happening on the track, but we see the grandstand all the time," said Sato, who moved to IndyCar after racing several years in Formula One. "Every driver, every single lap, every single corner... just the gray grandstand. That was a little bit sad."

"But you (are) always hungry to win the race, no matter who you are, how many races. "There's just an energy that is Indy 500."

After 190 laps around the 2.5-mile (4 km) oval the race had come down to a two way battle between Sato and IndyCar five-time drivers champion Scott Dixon, who had spent much of the afternoon out front, leading for 111 laps.

But with Dixon, the 2008 Indy 500 winner, stalking Sato and poised to make a move the race was denied a dramatic conclusion when Pigot lost control coming out of Turn Four, slammed the outside wall and spun across the track into the barrier lining the pit lane.

With debris from Pigot's demolished car spread across the track Sato was able to coast home to a relaxed win ahead of a frustrated Dixon, who had hoped for a red flag to stop the race setting up a final lap shootout for the crown.

"It's definitely a hard one to swallow for sure," said Dixon. "I thought they were definitely going to throw a red flag, which would have been exciting for the last four or five laps — it's hard when it slips away like that."

While Dixon and Sato both started on the front row, the buildup to Sunday's race was focused on the driver alongside them, pole sitter Marco Andretti.

The Andrettis have ruled over open wheel racing in the United States with a string of victories that have connected generations — father (Mario), to son (Michael), to grandson (Marco). But for all their success at circuits around the world, Mario's Indy 500 victory in 1969 stands alone — the clan's cruel luck at the Brickyard giving rise to the "Andretti Curse".

In the end the curse remained intact, Marco was overtaken by Dixon before they had reached the first turn finishing in 13th.

Fernando Alonso's bid to become just the second driver to complete the Triple Crown of Motorsport, which also includes wins at the Monaco Grand Prix and Le Mans 24 Hours, ended in disappointment and a 21st place finish. — Reuters



Takuma Sato (30) during the 104th Running of the Indianapolis 500 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. — USA Today Sports



Pakistan's Shan Masood hits a four during the third Test against England. — Reuters

Frustration for England as Pakistan dig in

SOUTHAMPTON: Pakistan's openers frustrated England on the fourth morning of the third Test as they reached 41 without loss in their second innings, having been forced to follow on.

Abid Ali was 22 not out and Shan Masood was on 13 as Pakistan remained 269 runs shy of making England bat again.

Rain forced an early lunch break, although the forecast for Southampton is more encouraging

for the rest of the day as England aim to wrap up a 2-0 series victory.

A scrappy morning in the field for England was summed up when James Anderson, who is two wickets short of becoming the first fast bowler to take 600 Test wickets, saw wicketkeeper Jos Buttler fail to pouch a routine catch in his third over when Masood edged the ball outside off stump.

It is the fourth time in the match that Anderson has been deprived of

a wicket due to a dropped catch.

England also gifted Pakistan four overthrows early on, while Ollie Pope left the field after appearing to hurt his shoulder making a scrambling stop near the boundary rope.

Pakistan's openers are hoping to give their side a chance of avoiding an innings defeat, having been bowled out for 273 on Sunday in reply to England's 583-8 declared, in which Zak Crawley made 267.

— Reuters

Sport



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Bayern Munich's Manuel Neuer (C holding trophy) and teammates celebrate after winning the Uefa Champions League final. – AFP

LISBON: Bayern Munich became kings of Europe for the sixth time on Sunday as Kingsley Coman's goal gave them a 1-0 victory over Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final in Lisbon, completing a fantastic season for the German giants and leaving their opponents still searching for the trophy they covet more than anything.

It was often a cagey final, with a bit of needle, but chances too, especially before former PSG player Coman appeared at the back post to head in Joshua Kimmich's inviting 59th-minute cross and wrap up a treble for a team who had already won the Bundesliga and German Cup.

PSG will regret not taking any of the chances that were offered up to them on a surreal occasion at an empty Estadio da Luz, but it is an extraordinary success for Hansi Flick, who was only appointed last November to replace the sacked Niko Kovac.

"I am proud of the team. When I started in November, all the headlines were about 'no more respect for Bayern', but the way the team has developed has been sensational," he told Sky Germany.

"PSG have really good forwards, but we deserved to win the final."

However, the outcome might have been different had Kylian Mbappe done better than shoot straight at Manuel Neuer just before half-time.

The World Cup-winning forward had spoken of his determination to go down in his country's history by helping PSG become just the second French winners of European football's greatest prize.

But they will have to wait for the chance to match Marseille, winners in 1993.

"We gave all our heart on the field. You can expect that from your team, but you can't control the result," PSG coach Thomas Tuchel told French broadcaster RMC.

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

PSG's Qatari owners spent a combined 402 million euros (\$474m) on Neymar and Mbappe in 2017 to win this competition. Yet in the end it was one who got away from Paris who denied them.

Coman was born in Paris and started his career at PSG, but left aged 18 in 2014 for Juventus, sensing he wouldn't get regular football if he stayed put.

"It is an extraordinary feeling. I'm so happy but I'm also a bit sad for Paris," Coman said.

The winger had been on the bench in the semifinal against Lyon but was promoted to the starting line-up for the final.

Now he may not be welcome back in his home city again.

COMAN PUTS BAYERN IN SIXTH HEAVEN



Bayern Munich's Kingsley Coman celebrates scoring their first goal with Thomas Muller. – Reuters

Bayern Munich



Founded in 1900 (GER)
President: Herbert Hainer
Coach: Hans-Dieter Flick

Titles

Champions League  1974, 1975, 1976, 2001, 2013, 2020

UEFA Cup/Europa League  1996

Cup Winners' Cup  1967

Intercontinental Cup  1976, 2001

Club World Cup  2013

German Championship

 30 titles

German Cup

 20

League Cup

 6

Source: Club



Bayern were last European champions in 2013. Their tally of six victories puts them back level with Liverpool, winners last year. Only Real Madrid and AC Milan have won more.

NOT NEYMAR'S NIGHT

Flick's team ended the season with 21 straight wins and are unbeaten in 30 matches. They deserved to be crowned in a full stadium.

However, only a few hundred invitees were inside Benfica's ground to see the denouement of the 'Final Eight', at the end of a competition so long delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The strangest of finals pitted together two clubs who have taken very different routes to becoming part of Europe's elite, with Bayern the traditional German powerhouse and PSG transformed by the Qatari takeover of 2011.

But on and off the pitch right now they are almost perfectly balanced, and that translated into the kind of proper match-up on the field that neither side often experiences these days.

Bayern almost opened the scoring midway through the first half when Lewandowski — looking for his 56th goal of the season — turned and shot against the post.

He also came close with a header that was saved by Keylor Navas, but PSG should have punished them at the other end in the first half.

Neymar was denied by Neuer after being set up by Mbappe, while Mbappe contrived to fire straight at the goalkeeper after David Alaba gifted him possession in the box.

— AFP

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COVID-19 CONTRIBUTES TO RECORD GOLD PERFORMANCE P14



THAILAND EXPORTS FALL 11.37 PER CENT Y/Y P15



CREDITORS CALL FOR REFORMS FROM LATAM DEFAULT DUO P16

Oman receives biggest ever shipment of live fish for aquaculture project

GROWTH AMBITIONS: Blue Waters’ mandate is to develop finfish aquaculture projects in Oman, while boosting the contribution of aquaculture to GDP and food security.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Underscoring the Omani government’s ambitions to develop a thriving aquaculture industry in the Sultanate, Blue Waters (BW) — a group company of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) wholly owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — recently took delivery of the largest shipment of fish fingerlings for its maiden fish farming project currently under implementation off Qurayyat in Muscat Governorate.

The consignment — comprising two million fish fingerlings — was the biggest shipment of live fish to be handled by Transom, the air services arm of Oman Aviation Group overseeing ground handling, air cargo, catering, hospitality and Muscat Duty Free.

With the arrival of the fish fingerlings, work on state-owned Blue Waters’ flagship finfish aquaculture project is set to make headway, according to a top official of the company.

“BW’s mandate is to develop finfish aquaculture projects in Oman and contribute to making aquaculture projects as one of the contributors to the country’s GDP and food security in the future,” said Nabeel al Ruwaidhi, General Manager.

“Our first project is concerned with growing up Gilthead European Seabream fingerlings in offshore floating cage farms to commercial, marketable sizes. The farm has a



“

Aquaculture is the future of the fisheries industries as the world is suffering from overexploiting and the fast depletion of several species.

NABEEL AL RUWAIDHI
GENERAL MANAGER,
BLUE WATERS

capacity of 3,000 tonnes per year. In order to achieve our production capacity, we need to accelerate the stocking of seabream fingerlings. At this stage, we have to import the fingerlings live from Europe till such



Aquaculture contribution to global production currently is around 45 per cent and is expected to rise to more than 65 per cent by 2030

time we have our own hatchery in Oman.”

In remarks to the *Observer*, Al Ruwaidhi noted that seabream production from the project is targeted at around 1,300 tonnes this year, rising to 3,000 tonnes in 2022 with accelerated stocking of fingerlings. Also by 2020, Blue Waters’ first hatchery for such fingerlings is due to be operational,

with a maximum capacity of nine million fingerlings.

Significantly, Qurayyat is proposed to be the epicentre of Blue Waters’ aquaculture investments, according to the official. “We have quite an ambitious plan to build up capacity of up to 10,000 tonnes of fish farming in Qurayyat in the long term. We are hoping in the coming five years to expand the seabream

farm to 5,000 tonnes capacity. We have plans also for investing in a tuna fattening farm by the end of 2021 and a project for farming some local species such as Cobia. In order to cater for the future 10,000-tonne capacity, we are currently putting up the plan for a comprehensive support centre in Qurayyat fisheries port that includes packaging plant, storage, maintenance workshops and offices.”

Al Ruwaidhi estimates Blue Waters’ investments in finfish aquaculture projects to rise to more than \$50 million over the next five years — part of parent company FDO’s broader vision to ignite the growth of a wider aquaculture industry in

the Sultanate.

Emphasising the importance of a strong sector for the Sultanate, he stated: “Aquaculture is the future of the fisheries industries as the world is suffering from overexploiting and the fast depletion of several species.

Responsible and sustainable fishing is a must, however, compliance all over the world is an issue. As such, aquaculture projects are seen as providing an eco-friendly and sustainable solution. Aquaculture contribution to global production currently is around 45 per cent and is expected to rise to more than 65 per cent by 2030. In Oman, we need to catch up as our aquaculture projects contribute less than 1 per cent of the country’s fish production.”

Additionally, aquaculture can open up substantial opportunities for SMEs, international investors and R&D houses, said the General Manager. “We currently work closely with Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources along with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to commercialise some of the opportunities. We are happy to collaborate with SMEs to explore potential interest areas.

We welcome any investor interested in our projects that can transfer know-how, introduce new technology and/or develop local capabilities. We are currently exploring a number of projects with technical partners and hope to conclude some of them by next year,” he further added.

RO 113, 000 embezzled from listed firm

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Oman & Emirates Investment Holding Company SAOG (OEIHC), a publicly traded firm listed on the Muscat stock exchange, announced on Monday that it has been embezzled to the tune of over RO 113K.

Acting CEO Raffy Kozadjian stated in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that the fraud was uncovered during a review of the company’s accounts.

“We would like to inform that, upon reviewing the company’s bank account statements, it became clear that the accountant had committed forgery and fraudulently embezzled an amount of RO 113,342.400. The company is pursuing recovery of the embezzled sums in coordination with the investigation authorities of the ROP,” he further noted.

OEIHC posted a net loss of RO 2.166 million for the six months ended June 30, 2020, compared to a net profit of RO 374K for the corresponding period of 2019.

Germany launches first ‘green’ bonds

FRANKFURT: Germany on Monday announced details of its first “green” bond placing, tapping financial markets to fund environmental projects for the first time.

The finance ministry said it would raise up to 11 billion euros (\$13 billion) in 2020 to support climate-related projects.

The first issue in September of a 10-year bond, or Bund, will have a minimum of four billion euros in volume.

The German government announced late last year that it would launch the bonds in the second half of 2020 as part of its efforts to combat climate change.

The country earmarked 54 billion euros in spending to 2023 as part of a climate package that includes introducing a carbon tax to cut greenhouse gases by 55 per cent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels.

Rita Schwarzeluehr-Sutter, parliamentary state secretary for environment, said the bonds will contribute to the government’s efforts.



The coal power plant of Niederaussem of German utility RWE is pictured in west of Cologne, Germany. — AFP

The green bonds will be ‘twin bonds’, issued alongside conventional federal bonds with the same maturity and coupon

“Green federal bonds create a clear incentive. In this way, we are showing how green and climate-friendly economic activities can be made transparent and predictable,” she said.

The green bonds will be “twin bonds”, issued alongside

conventional federal bonds with the same maturity and coupon, the finance ministry said.

It means investors will be able to swap their bonds from one variant to the other, with the aim of making them more attractive to investors, according to Joerg

Kukies, parliamentary secretary to the finance ministry.

Germany joins the green bond trend relatively late. Poland launched the world’s first sovereign green bonds in 2016 and France, currently the world leading issuer of the instrument, in 2017.

Yet environmental issues are high on the German political agenda: Greta Thunberg and representatives of the environmental activist group Fridays For Future had an audience with Chancellor Angela Merkel last week.

Green bonds accounted for 2.85 per cent of global bond issuance in 2019, or around \$205 billion, according to the European Central Bank.

Almost half of green bonds issued worldwide last year were in euros, the ECB added.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde said in July that climate protection was a top priority for the bank, after it unveiled a plan worth 1.35 trillion euros to help the European economy recover from the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

Gold recoups early losses as dollar eases

SINGAPORE: Gold prices changed course to rise on Monday as the dollar dipped, making bullion cheaper for holders of other currencies, but hopes for progress in the treatment of COVID-19 limited further gains in the safe-haven metal.

Spot gold was up 0.4 per cent at \$1,947.38 per ounce by 0955 GMT, off an earlier low of \$1,929.69, while US gold futures were 0.5 per cent higher at \$1,955.80.

“The dollar is softer today and if we look at the larger picture, the world economy is still trying to recover from the effects of coronavirus,” said Saxo Bank analyst Ole Hansen. “Along with that, the risk of inflation continues to attract investors to gold.”

The dollar index was down 0.4 per cent after climbing to a more than one-week high in the previous session.

Investors are eyeing US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell’s address to the bank’s annual symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, for signs of how aggressively it will seek to handle the long-term recovery from the pandemic.

“The US central bank should reiterate its pledge for ultra-low rates, providing some support for gold,” Avtar Sandu, a senior commodities manager at Phillip Futures, said in a note. — Reuters



Pacts signed to
set up fodder,
innovation units

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 24

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Industrial Innovation Centre yesterday signed two cooperation agreements; one to lease an animal feed processing unit and the other to establish a food and beverage innovation unit at the Directorate General of Agricultural and Livestock Research.

The agreements were signed by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture, and Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, CEO of Industrial Innovation Centre.

The first agreement seeks to contribute to establish a suitable climate for supporting nascent enterprises undertaken by youth and enable innovators and entrepreneurs to make unconventional foodstuffs. The second agreement seeks to set up new firms and develop the products of their existing companies. The agreements come within the context of enhancing economic diversification, youth employment, innovation and entrepreneurship while at the same time achieving growth, sustainability and ideal use of natural resources.

Market uncertainty due to COVID-19 contributes to record gold performance

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 24

The coronavirus pandemic has caused a series of unprecedented events for the gold market, driving gold price performance relative to other asset classes. Gold has traditionally been the 'go to' asset for safety because of its reputation as a stable store of value. As such, investors have been turning to gold as a safe haven against market volatility and negative economic effects caused by COVID-19.

Alessio Cirillo, Sales Director at Invesco EMEA, says, "In terms of investment behaviour, we have seen significant inflows into gold and gold products this year as investors are looking to protect their portfolio against slowing economic growth, market volatility, geopolitical risks and the risk of inflation.

According to our analysis, gold ETPs listed in Europe alone raised more than \$10bn of net new assets in 2020 to the end of July, with \$1.4bn of inflows occurring during the final month alone."

The price of gold recently passed \$2,000 an ounce for the first time, surpassing a major hurdle as real yields remain low and investor fear continues over the impact of coronavirus on global economies.



GO-TO ASSET: INFLOWS TO GOLD-BACKED EXCHANGE TRADED PRODUCTS SURGE AMID INVESTOR DEMAND FOR EXPOSURE TO GOLD

Amid this demand, growth in gold-backed exchange traded products such as exchange-traded certificates (ETC) has surged. ETCs are structured as a debt instrument that is secured against physical gold being held in a vault.

ETCs provide investors with

an efficient and liquid way to gain exposure to the performance of the gold price without having to buy and store the physical precious metal.

The low cost of investing through ETCs and ease of access that it offers means this product is a good vehicle for adding gold to a portfolio as a

long term strategic position.

There are many gold exchange-traded products (ETPs) available on the market, including several that are sharia compliant which appeal to investors in the Middle East. And given the increase in demand for gold performance, the number of gold-backed ETPs has grown. ETPs that are more attractive to investors are those that track very closely to the gold price, have high liquidity, allow ease of access to invest and sell, and offer a low cost advantage.

Omani entrepreneurs set to launch unique F&B Container Park

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUG 24

The first F&B Container Park, an innovative Omani concept aimed at attracting tourists while offering the local populace a different experience altogether, will come up in Bausher.

'Thy Yard', a novel initiative conceptualised by 2 young Omani entrepreneurs in 2018, consists of 7 unique containers and 2 commercial buildings which will be occupied by different F&B brands serving some of the best treats for every kind of cravings and taste buds.

Each container in Thy Yard will have its own theme and design to attract all age groups and make it a perfect go-to-place for friends and families.

"We are thrilled to establish Thy Yard concept in Oman, introducing our F&B clients to open in an innovative location. We worked hard to provide the best quality and ideas to our audience," said Wasan Badar al Malki and Hamyar Sulaiman al Brashdi, Founders of Thy Yard.

Thy Yard also is consciously incorporating recycled materials in its design, keeping sustainability as a priority by being environment friendly and creates a joyful atmosphere for everyone, marking yet another landmark in its tourism map.

69 per cent of MENA consumers say COVID-19 has changed their way of living

CHANGING TRENDS: MENA CONSUMERS DO PLAN TO REMAIN FRUGAL AND KEEP CUTTING THEIR SPEND, FAR MORE THAN GLOBAL CONSUMERS, WITH ONLY 9 PER CENT PLANNING TO "GET BACK TO NORMAL" — VERSUS 40 PER CENT GLOBALLY.

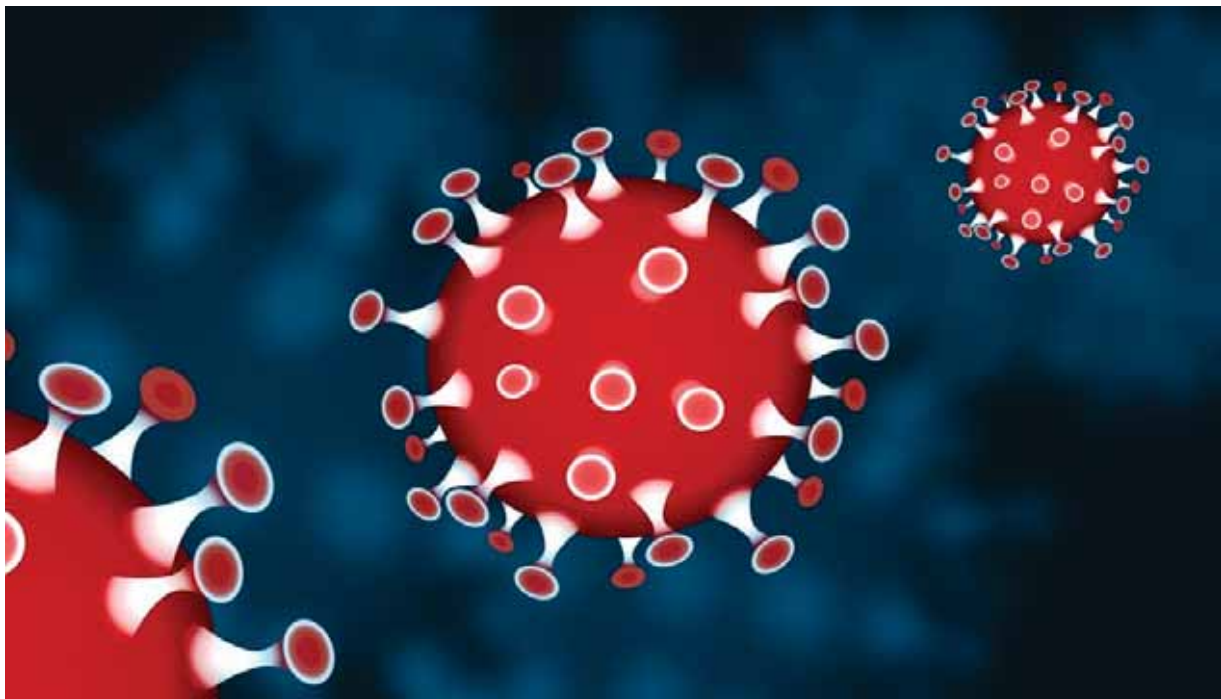
BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Sixty-nine per cent of consumers in the MENA region believe that the way they live their lives will significantly change in the long term as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the latest EY Future Consumer Index.

From the start of the pandemic, 84 per cent of consumers declared that they have changed the products they buy with a greater focus on value for money, and an increased commitment to consume locally made products. Many consumer segments in the MENA region are adopting such values for the first time, with 68 per cent saying that their values have changed, and they look at life differently. This will have implications for what and how they consume in the future.

For example, consumers expect to make deep and lasting changes, with 78 per cent saying they will be more aware and cautious about physical health. In addition, 73 per cent will be more focused on value for money in the future, with 67 per cent planning to decrease the amount they spend on non-essentials.

MENA consumers do plan to remain frugal and keep cutting their spend, far more than global consumers, with only 9 per cent planning to "get back to normal" — versus 40 per cent globally. While there has been a general ease of restrictions across some countries in the region, many consumers are still uncomfortable returning to their pre-COVID activities. For



Many consumer segments in the MENA region are adopting such values for the first time, with 68 per cent saying that their values have changed, and they look at life differently. This will have implications for what and how they consume in the future.

instance, only 26 per cent of MENA consumers are comfortable going to a mall.

Ahmed Reda, MENA Consumer Industry Leader, EY, says: "One of the many things that both organisations and individuals have learned from the shared experience of the pandemic is how resourceful and adaptable they can be.

Now attention is turning to what the world might be like once the crisis is behind us. While companies can't forecast with certainty what consumers will be doing 18 months

from now, they will need to anticipate the consumer requirements and values they will be trying to serve."

"As consumers re-evaluate their approach to personal consumption and adopt new habits, preferences, and attitudes for the future, companies will also need to ensure that their products meet expectations to either maintain or brand loyalty. This will have a pivotal impact on consumption patterns and consumer identities over the next few years."

Of the consumers surveyed,

29 per cent said that their biggest priority was to protect their health and the health of their family, which will guide the choices that they make. They prefer brands and products that they trust to be safe and will minimise unnecessary risk as much as they can. For example, they would rather shop online than in store because it feels safer. Moreover, 64 per cent have increased spend on household products and home hygiene, while 57 per cent would pay more for products that promote health and wellness.

The second largest segment of consumers at 25 per cent put affordability first as part of their decision making. They focus on living within their means and don't care much about the brands they buy but that the product delivers what they need. The 74 per cent of affordability first consumers have identified price as increasing in importance, while 21 per cent think it will take years for their financial stability to reach pre COVID-19 levels.

For 20 per cent of MENA consumers, putting society first is their biggest priority. They pay attention to the social impact of what they purchase and consume as well as look for brands that have a clear purpose and align with their own values. In putting society first, 60 per cent of these consumers will be more attentive to the social impact of what they consume for the long term, while 51 per cent will support domestic brands produced locally for the long term.

Also focusing on social impact are the 17 per cent of consumers who will take a 'planet first' approach to consumption choices, with 40 per cent willing to pay more for sustainable products.

Lastly, 9 per cent of consumers will be taking an 'experience first' approach to life beyond COVID-19 and are intent on living in the moment, with 58 per cent comfortable with going to the mall just days or weeks after the pandemic and 30 per cent willing to pay a premium for luxury food and drink items.

Oman's hotel revenue falls by 54.5 per cent

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 24

The total revenue of Omani hotels in the three-to-five-star category fell by 54.5 per cent to RO 58 million until the end of July 2020 compared to RO 127.60 million for the same period of the previous year.

Hotel occupancy rates fell by 44.6 per cent to reach 29.5 per cent until the end of July 2020 against 53.3 per cent for the same period of 2019, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Meanwhile, the total number of guests in Omani hotels fell by 56.6 per cent in the first 7 months of 2020, reaching 428,884 guests from 989,218 guests for the same period of 2019.

Among the nationalities, Europeans constituted the maximum number of visitors, reaching 156,026. This was followed by 150,760 Omani guests and 38,753 Asian tourists until the end of July 2020, the data released by NCSI revealed.

There was an overall drop in the number of guests of all nationalities until the end of July 2020, with American and GCC guests falling by 60.9 per cent and 69.6 per cent to reach 14,959 and 32,666 guests, respectively.

There was also a drop in the number of African, Oceanian and other Arab guests by 56.1 per cent, 46.3 per cent and 67.3 per cent to reach 2,874; 4,668, and 13,865 guests, respectively.

Omani hotels received 1.77 million guests and the hotels generated a total revenue of RO 229.5 million in 2019.

Thailand exports fall 11.37 per cent y/y, smaller drop than forecast



A worker stands next to shipping containers at a port in Bangkok. – Reuters

BANGKOK: Thailand's exports in July dropped by a smaller-than-expected 11.37 per cent from a year earlier, with the US shipments jumping, while most markets remained under pressure from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the commerce ministry said on Monday.

The fall compared with a poll forecast for a decline of 17.8 per cent in exports, and against June's 23.17 per cent slide.

The ministry still expects exports to fall by 8 per cent—9 per cent this year, Pimchanok Vonkorporon, head of the ministry's Trade Policy and

Shipments of cars and car parts declined 30.9 per cent in July from a year earlier after June's 43.2 per cent plunge. Gold exports rose 37 per cent year-on-year after a 86 per cent fall in the previous month

Strategy Office, told a briefing.

"Overall exports recovered with a check-mark shape. We are hoping there will not be more lockdowns in

other countries which will disrupt trade," she said.

Shipments of cars and car parts declined 30.9 per cent in July from a year earlier after June's 43.2 per cent plunge. Gold exports rose 37 per cent year-on-year after a 86 per cent fall in the previous month.

Exports to most markets were lower in July, with ones to China down 2.7 per cent year-on-year, but those to the United States jumped 17.8 per cent, helped by electronics and rubber products, the ministry said.

While a rise in exports to the United States, accounting for 14.5

per cent of the total in January-July, the largest share, could be scrutinised over trading practices, several shipments, including semi-conductors, were from US companies in Thailand, Pimchanok said.

Last month, the central bank said Thailand had not intervened in the baht for any competitive trade advantage following a media report that Thailand could be added to a US watch list for currency manipulation.

In January-July, exports, a key driver of Thai growth, contracted 7.72 per cent from a year earlier, while imports fell 14.69 per cent.

— Reuters

DOUBLE WHAMMY

Nigeria's economy shrinks in second quarter on oil crash



Nigerian naira banknotes are seen in this picture illustration. – Reuters

LAGOS: Nigeria's economy contracted by 6.1 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 from a year earlier, the statistics office said on Monday, with lockdowns in its two main cities and low oil prices taking their toll.

The West African country — Africa's largest economy and the continent's top oil producer — reported its first coronavirus case in late February. Lockdowns were imposed for just over a month in the commercial hub Lagos and the capital Abuja, ending in early May.

"The decline was largely attributable to significantly lower levels of both domestic and international economic activity during the quarter, which resulted from nationwide shutdown efforts aimed at containing the COVID-19 pandemic," the statistics office said.

Crude oil production was 1.81 million barrels a day in the second quarter, compared with 1.98 in the same 2019 period. A global oil price crash due to reduced demand from the pandemic saw the oil sector shrink by 6.63 per cent in the second quarter. The non-oil sector declined by 6.05 per cent, which the statistics said was the first decline in real non-oil GDP growth in nearly three years.

Nigeria's economy was already grappling with sluggish growth before the pandemic in the wake of a 2016 recession. The International Monetary Fund has said it sees Nigeria's GDP falling 5.4 per cent this year, while the government expects the economy to shrink by as much as 8.9 per cent.

"Given that lockdown measures have been loosened in recent months and oil prices have picked up, Q2 might be the trough of this year's recession in Nigeria," said John Ashbourne, global emerging markets economist at Fitch Solutions.

The World Bank has warned that Nigeria potentially faces its worst financial crisis in four decades due to the crash in oil prices and the pandemic. However, the bank is also unlikely to approve a much-needed \$1.5 billion loan for Nigeria due to concerns over desired reforms, sources familiar with the talks said this month.

Inflation in Nigeria rose to 12.82 per cent in July, its highest level in more than two years, and the unemployment rate stood at 27.1 per cent in the second quarter, according to data released earlier this month. — Reuters

Hong Kong buyers rush for UK properties after security law

LONDON: Hong Konger Winnie Tong aims to move to Britain with her family in two years, but is stalling on plans to buy a house there after prices jumped almost 15 per cent since April.

The 40-year-old who used to be in two minds about leaving Hong Kong now wants to settle in Birmingham as she is concerned about an increasingly politicised environment for her young children.

"Last year because of the anti-extradition law protests I wanted to migrate more, and it's pretty much this year, because of the national security law that I'm determined to move."

Property agents said they sold more than double the number of apartments to Hong Kong buyers in the past two months, with the spike in purchases mainly for personal use. "The good quality houses are all sold out and prices are more expensive," Tong said. "Too many Hong Kong people are snatching up (property) in the UK now."

The UK government in July offered about 3 million British National Overseas passport holders in Hong Kong a path to British citizenship after Beijing imposed sweeping new security legislation in Hong Kong.

"We have never received so many calls from existing clients," said Marc von Grundherr, director of London estate agent Benham and Reeves, which lets UK properties for about 1,000 clients in Hong Kong.

A weaker pound since 2014 and a stamp duty holiday in Britain for homes priced below 500,000 pounds (\$654,400), have also encouraged Hong Kong buyers to invest in the UK.

Property agent Arlington



A man looks in the window of real estate agents, following the outbreak of COVID-19, in Hale, Britain. – Reuters

Residential in London said it completed more than 10 deals in the past two months, a figure it would normally achieve in a year. Centaline in Hong Kong said it sold around 60 apartments in July alone, adding that they had a waiting list of clients due to a shortage of supply.

Hong Kong investors buy homes anywhere from 300,000 pounds to 50 million pounds (\$390,000-\$65.50 million) and are increasingly looking outside London, such as in Manchester and Bristol, for cheaper options.

"Because of the situation in Hong Kong, those who didn't know

Property agents said they sold more than double the number of apartments to Hong Kong buyers in the past two months, with the spike in purchases mainly for personal use

the UK very well are now also looking...and they don't want to commit too much yet because their economic power is not as strong," said David Hui, Centaline Property sales director.

Hong Kong buyers have climbed a notch to become the fifth largest

foreign investors in central London in the past 12 months, Knight Frank data showed, after China, the United States, India and Russia. They accounted for 4 per cent of purchases, up from 2.5 per cent in 2016.

Guy Bradshaw, head of London

Residential at Sotheby's International Realty UK, said Hong Kong buyers are nervous about the political situation and want to ensure their families are safe and their income is protected.

Some of his clients are well-known and ultra high net worth families who are "ready to pounce if need be" to relocate the whole family, he added.

The surge in interest has prompted some UK developers to pick Hong Kong for their first international launch, versus Shanghai or Singapore previously, agents said. — Reuters

Singapore's core inflation gauge hits lowest in over a decade

SINGAPORE: Singapore's core inflation gauge fell to its lowest level in more than a decade in July, official data showed on Monday, amid soft consumer spending due to the coronavirus pandemic and a steep fall in electricity prices.

The measure, which strips out more volatile indicators and is closely watched by the central bank, fell to minus 0.4 per cent year-on-year, hitting its lowest level since January 2010, according to official data.

Economists had expected a fall to minus 0.3 per cent in the core consumer price index.

Headline inflation also dropped to minus 0.4 per cent year-on-year, data from the trade ministry and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) showed, compared with economists estimates for a sharper fall to minus 0.65 per cent.

Authorities in the city state, battling its deepest ever recession due to the pandemic, expect both core and headline inflation to average between minus 1 per cent



A visitor speaks to security officers at the building of the Monetary Authority of Singapore in Singapore. – Reuters

and 0 per cent in 2020. OCBC Bank's head of treasury research and strategy Selena Ling said the outlook remains tepid with reflationary pressures possibly not re-emerging until next year. — Reuters

Oil edges up as storms take aim at Gulf of Mexico

SINGAPORE: Crude oil prices nudged higher on Monday as storms bore down on the Gulf of Mexico, although gains were capped by ongoing concerns about demand from coronavirus lockdowns.

Hurricane Marco and Tropical Storm Laura tore through the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico on Sunday, forcing energy companies to pull workers from offshore platforms and shut down oil production.

Oil producers had shut 58 per cent of the Gulf's offshore oil production and 45 per cent of natural gas production. The

region accounts for 17 per cent of total US oil production and 5 per cent of US natural gas output.

Brent crude oil futures added 8 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$44.43 a barrel by 00:40 GMT while US WTI crude was up 7 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$42.41 a barrel. Both benchmark contracts fell about 1 per cent on Friday on economic concerns and rising crude supply.

"Crude prices rose higher as double trouble in the Atlantic could lead to huge disruptions with oil operations in the Gulf of Mexico," said Edward Moya, senior market analyst at OANDA in New York. — Reuters



LASTING LEGACY

In the service of the nation and its people



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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It is very important for the newly appointed ministers and officials, regardless of their positions, not to lose sight of the fact that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has named them, first and foremost, to serve the Omani nation and its people.

This requires that they show humility towards others, be resolute in addressing citizens' issues, fight bureaucracy, and combat corruption. Bureaucracy is a bane when the legitimate interests and concerns of citizens are not addressed promptly and effectively.

It's clear to everyone that positions in high office do not last forever. But good deeds, integrity and a selfless commitment to the responsibilities of the office will leave a lasting legacy.

IT'S CLEAR TO EVERYONE THAT POSITIONS IN HIGH OFFICE DO NOT LAST FOREVER. BUT GOOD DEEDS, INTEGRITY AND A SELFLESS COMMITMENT TO THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICE WILL LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY

Around the world, we see examples of how some ministers shun privilege when going about their normal official work. They commute using public transport or use their own personal vehicles to get to office or to go about their tasks. We too can be inspired by such examples.

We should shun expenditure in lavish offices with ostentatious design and architecture that will cost the exchequer sizable amounts to operate and maintain, aside from recurrent electricity, water

and other costs.

Instead, we should keep in mind the government's commitment to reducing costs and thereby easing the growing fiscal deficit.

The merger and consolidation of different government ministries and bodies will result in the transfer of employees and thereby free up space, which can be used for exhibitions and museums. In many countries around the world, such free space is leased to private

businesses to help generate revenue. This can be explored in Oman as well.

The Sultanate is on the verge of achieving more good things in the new era of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the country and its people.

Oman is blessed with many resources and well developed infrastructure in a number of economic sectors, but it needs competent and inspirational officials to unlock this potential by harnessing modern technology and innovation to fuel development across the length and breadth of the Sultanate — from Musandam Governorate in the north to the land of frankincense in Dhofar in the south.

This is the fervent aspiration of citizens in the coming period.

DEBT REFORM



Two young men pass by a wall covered with posters against the payment of Argentina's debt, in Buenos Aires.

— Reuters

Creditors call for reforms from LatAm default duo

As serial defaulters Argentina and Ecuador near the finishing line on their latest sovereign debt overhauls, foreign creditors are nervy about investing again without macroeconomic reforms and International Monetary Fund support.

On the surface, the prospects for both countries look brighter. Absent complicated negotiations with the IMF, a clean slate post-debt restructuring will allow them to focus on reviving their COVID-19-ravaged economies with much less concern about looming foreign debts to repay.

But both governments will be painfully aware they need to woo back investor support to ensure their path to recovery — not an easy challenge given their tarnished track-records that combine for about 20 defaults.

Argentina's government hopes to wrap up its latest \$65 billion debt restructuring by end-August. Ecuador, having gained support for its plan relatively quickly, is also finalising its \$17.4 billion foreign debt revamp.

"In of itself, these deals are a positive first step but there is a lot more work to be done to firm up the outlook for investment," said Graham Stock, an emerging markets strategist at BlueBay Asset Management, and a creditor to both countries.

"There's plenty of goodwill (from creditors) but there's a question of (government) actions rather than just good intentions."

Most immediately focus will turn to engagement with the IMF.

Ecuador's deal was predicated on a fresh agreement with the IMF, giving many investors faith in the commitment of President Lenin Moreno's administration to revamp the stalled \$4.2 billion IMF lending programme.

Argentina's talks may be trickier. Economy Minister Martin Guzman has warned of "tough" negotiations that may not lead to a deal on a new programme

until early 2021.

"It's going to be a very difficult discussion," said Mauro Roca, emerging markets sovereign research managing director at TCW.

"The IMF will ask for some policy conditionality and Argentina at this point doesn't seem willing to accept important changes in the direction of policy. That would be seen as interventionist, so that discussion is going to be difficult and it's going to take a while."

Ecuador's sovereign bonds have generally outperformed Argentina's since May, which analysts said partly reflected Quito's friendlier talks with creditors.

ARGENTINA'S GOVERNMENT HOPES TO WRAP UP ITS LATEST \$65 BILLION DEBT RESTRUCTURING BY END-AUGUST. ECUADOR, HAVING GAINED SUPPORT FOR ITS PLAN RELATIVELY QUICKLY, IS ALSO FINALISING ITS \$17.4 BILLION FOREIGN DEBT REVAMP

Hopes of generating economic revival while ensuring debt sustainability — expected to stabilise at about 100 per cent of GDP in Argentina's case — hinges on politics.

"It's going to depend on the macroeconomic conditions and the policy regime, particularly the direction of economic policy," TCW's Roca said. "If those policies are not considered to be sustainable nobody would put money to work, particularly in FDI or something that requires looking down the road."

A "glass half-full" scenario could see Argentina at the start of a virtuous circle, propelled by the "right policy mix" initiated by a Alberto Fernandez

administration that had more political capital than his predecessor Mauricio Macri could have dreamed of, said Patrick Esteruelas, head of research at EMSO Asset Management.

"The problem is that glass half full is full of holes," he said. "The historical fiscal multiplier in Argentina is very low which means any debt service relief does not translate into real activity gains. You need to see wholesale changes to a medium-term economic programme that I don't think this government, despite its political capital, is willing to endorse."

Goldman Sachs said it was sceptical about prospects for comprehensive tax reform.

In Ecuador's case, investors are wary after unsuccessful attempts last year by Moreno to push through tax and monetary reforms intended to cut a burdensome fiscal deficit with elections coming up in 2021.

"With elections round the corner, and with the COVID-19 impact, the space and willingness to undertake difficult measures could be lower," said Raza Agha, head of emerging markets credit strategy at Legal & General Investment Management.

Currency woes raise another red flag as locals have piled savings into the US dollar in recent years.

Argentina could see more foreign exchange controls amid still latent dollar demand, said Siobhan Morden, head of Latin America fixed income strategy at Amherst Pierpont Securities.

Lack of domestic confidence in Argentina's peso was a "massive problem" that needed fixing before investment would flow properly, said Carl Ross of GMO.

The currencies of both nations were overvalued, the Institute of International Finance (IIF) said this month, and real depreciation was needed to prevent unsustainable current account deficits.

— Reuters

SAFE BET?

Sovereign funds rethink once-reliable real estate

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced sovereign wealth funds to think the previously unthinkable.

With prime office blocks lying empty around the world, hotels half-vacant and retailers struggling to stay afloat, the funds are retreating from many of the real estate investments that have long been a mainstay of their strategies.

Sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) invested \$4.4 billion in the sector in the first seven months of 2020, 65 per cent down from the same period a year ago, according to previously unpublished data by Global SWF, an industry data specialist.

WITH PRIME OFFICE BLOCKS LYING EMPTY AROUND THE WORLD, HOTELS HALF-VACANT AND RETAILERS STRUGGLING TO STAY AFLOAT, THE FUNDS ARE RETREATING FROM MANY OF THE REAL ESTATE INVESTMENTS THAT HAVE LONG BEEN A MAINSTAY OF THEIR STRATEGIES

The nature of property investments is also shifting, with funds increasingly investing in logistics space, such as warehousing, amid a boom in online commerce during the pandemic, while cutting back on deals for offices and retail buildings.

Such shifts in behaviour can have seismic effects on the global real estate market, given such funds are among the largest investors in property and have interests worth hundreds of billions of dollars in total.

Three sovereign funds sit within the top 10 largest real estate investors, according to market specialists IPE Real

Assets.

A big question is whether the changes are structural for the funds, for which property is an asset-class staple at about 8 per cent of their total portfolios on average, or a temporary response to a huge, unexpected and unfamiliar global event.

"Real estate is still a big part of sovereign wealth fund portfolios and will continue to be so," said Diego López, managing director of Global SWF and a former sovereign wealth fund adviser at PwC.

"What COVID has accelerated is the sophistication of SWFs trying to build diversification and resilience into their portfolio — and hence looking for other asset classes and industries."

Sovereign funds have been more bearish on property than public pension funds, another big investor in the sector, Global SWF found. While they have outstripped the pension funds in overall investment across most industries and assets this year, by two to one, that ratio is reversed for real estate.

Funds are nursing hits to their existing property portfolios stemming from the introduction of lockdowns and social-distancing restrictions. While other parts of their portfolio, such as stocks and bonds, have rebounded from March's trough, a real-estate recovery is less assured.

Property capital value globally is expected to drop by 14 per cent in 2020 before rising by 3.4 per cent in 2021, according to commercial real estate services group CBRE. Analysts and academics question whether the pandemic's impact may prove long-lasting, with more people working from home and shopping online. — Reuters

Sovereign wealth fund property holdings



Note: Data for China Investment Corporation not included
Source: Preqin / Data for Norway, Alaska funds from those funds



Gold-hunting diggers destroy Sudan's priceless past

When a team of archaeologists deep in the deserts of Sudan arrived at the ancient site of Jabal Maragha last month, they thought they were lost. The site had vanished.

But they hadn't made a mistake. In fact, gold-hunters with giant diggers had destroyed almost all sign of the two millennia-old site.

"They had only one goal in digging here — to find gold," said shocked archaeologist Habab Idriss Ahmed, who had painstakingly excavated the historic location in 1999.

"They did something crazy; to save time, they used heavy machinery."

In the baking-hot desert of Bayouda, some 270 kilometres (170 miles) north of the capital Khartoum, the team discovered two mechanical diggers and five men at work.

They had dug a vast trench 17 metres (55 feet) deep, and 20 metres long.

The rust-coloured sand was scarred with tyre tracks, some cut deep into the ground, from the trucks that transported the equipment.

The site, dating from the Meroitic period between 350 BC and 350 AD, was either a small settlement or a checkpoint. Since the diggers came, hardly anything remains.

"They had completely excavated it, because the ground is composed of layers of sandstone and pyrite," said Hatem al Nour, Sudan's director of antiquities and museums.

"And as this rock is metallic their detector would start ringing. So they thought there was gold."

ESCAPE JUSTICE

Next to the huge gash in the ground, the diggers had piled up ancient cylindrical stones on top of each other to prop up a roof for their dining room.

The archaeologists were accompanied by a police escort, who took the treasure-hunters to a police station — but they were freed within hours.

"They should have been put in jail and their machines confiscated. There are laws," said Mahmoud al Tayeb, a former expert from Sudan's antiquities department.

Instead, the men left without charge, and their diggers were released too.

"It is the saddest thing," said Tayeb, who is also a professor of archaeology at the University of Warsaw.

Tayeb believes that the real culprit is the workers' employer, someone who can pull strings and circumvent justice.

Sudan's archaeologists warn

that this was not a unique case, but part of a systematic looting of ancient sites.

At Sai, a 12-kilometre-long river island in the Nile, hundreds of graves have been ransacked and destroyed by looters. Some of them date back to the times of the pharaohs.

Sudan's ancient civilisations built more pyramids than the Egyptians, but many are still unexplored.

Now, in hundreds of remote places ranging from cemeteries to temples, desperate diggers are hunting for anything to improve their daily lives.

GOLD FEVER

Sudan is Africa's third largest producer of gold, after South Africa and Ghana, with commercial mining bringing in \$1.22 billion to the government last year.

In the past, people also tried their luck by panning for gold at the city of Omdurman, across the river from Khartoum, where the waters of the White and Blue Niles meet.

"We used to see older people with small sieves like the ones women use for sifting flour at home," Tayeb said, recalling times when he was a boy. "They used them to look for gold."

But the gold they found was in tiny quantities.

Then in the late 1990s, people saw archaeologists using metal detectors for their scientific research.

"When people saw archeologists digging and finding things, they were convinced there was gold."

'REASON FOR PRIDE'

Even worse, local authorities have encouraged the young and unemployed to hunt for treasures while wealthy businessmen bring in mechanical diggers alongside.

"Out of a thousand more or less well-known sites in Sudan, at least a hundred have been destroyed or damaged," said Nour. "There is one policeman for 30 sites... and he has no communication equipment or adequate means of transport."

For Tayeb, the root problem is not a lack of security, but rather the government's priorities.

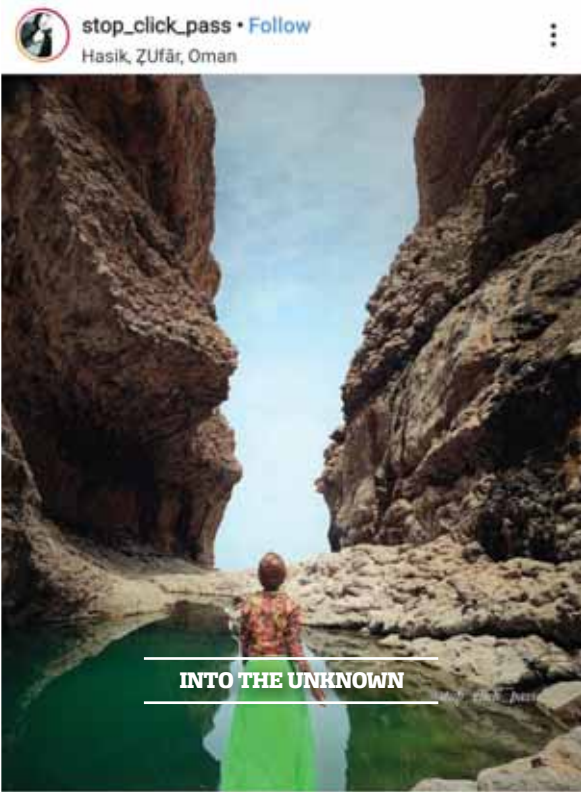
"It's not a question of policemen," he said. "It is a serious matter of how do you treat your history, your heritage? This is the main problem. But heritage is not a high priority for the government, so what can one do?" — **AFP**

Sudan is Africa's third largest producer of gold, after South Africa and Ghana, with commercial mining bringing in \$1.22 billion to the government last year.





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



ENTERTAINMENT

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PET CARE



Celebrating 60 years of the Beatles

Hamburg marked 60 years to the day that the Beatles played their first gig in the city with a live concert of their music on Monday, but fans attended digitally rather than physically, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Beatles fan Stefanie Hempel and her Rock'n'Roll Special band took the stage at Club Indra for the 'Stream and Shout' concert broadcast, playing numbers from the first set played by the Fab Four, as well as later hits.

Artists including Bernd Begemann, Jimmy Cornett and the Kaiser Quartet, appeared as guest artists during the two-hour show.

Video greetings from celebrities such as Otto Waalkes and Howie Casey were shown during the broadcast, as well as messages from people who saw the Beatles during

Originally planned as a festival with about 40 bands, the anniversary concert had to be downsized due to the coronavirus pandemic. It will be made up for later, however, according to the organisers.

their original run of shows in the St Pauli district. Fans from all over the world could



ask guest questions in a live chat.

Originally planned as a festival with about 40 bands, the anniversary concert had to be downsized due to the coronavirus pandemic. It will be made up for later, however, according to the organisers.

The city's Elbphilharmonie concert hall kicked off its own commemoration event an hour earlier in more sedate fashion, with a concert by

Pet clothing designer inspired by ancient Chinese beauties



LIU LIU IS A fashion designer's dream model and muse — happy to spend hour upon hour being measured and dressed, and posing in tailored couture outfits and artistic designs. Liu Liu is also a cat.

Her doting owner, Wu Qiuqiao, makes a living from designing miniature versions of traditional flowing Chinese gowns known as "hanfu" for cats and dogs that sell for up to 500 yuan (\$70).

After quitting her job as

in popularity among young people — and now pet owners.

"Some of my regulars may have already bought all the clothing in my store and occasionally ask me to introduce new designs," Wu said.

Wu got the idea for making historic garb for pets after failing to find suitable styles for Liu Liu.

And she clearly is not the only one who likes her furry companion dressed in something traditional.

Wu sells up to a thou-



a copy editor last year, the 26-year-old works from her apartment in the central city of Changsha designing pet-sized dresses out of pastel-coloured chiffon and decorated with embroidery, beads, frills and motifs that she sells online.

Liu Liu ably models the creations inspired by the historic costumes of the Han ethnic majority that are seeing a resurgence

sand pieces a month from her online store Chunfeng Daxiaoqiao and she regularly rolls out new designs to satisfy demand.

"I think hanfu is a heritage of history, and is also very beautiful," Wu said.

"(My business) can allow people who enjoy traditional culture, or young people who enjoy hanfu... to be able to adopt ideas they like through pet clothing." — AFP



The aflaj of Oman: Smart human solution that made life in dry environment possible

TEXT BY RAY PETERSEN
PHOTOS BY LENA PETERSEN

Perpetual and ubiquitous, the falaj system of the Sultanate has long sustained life in what could have otherwise become an arid, inhospitable environment.

Collectively, or plurally known as an aflaj system, comprising more than one falaj, their origins are believed to be Persian, where they were known colloquially as the Qanat. Omani Researcher, Zaher al Suleimani explains that aflaj exist in many dry regions of the world, such as China, Pakistan, and Turkey, though singular examples exist in Asia and the Americas. Al Suleimani contends that most of the aflaj were constructed in the period under Persian rule, between 1500 and 2000 years ago, though a second researcher Waleed al Tikriti, in 2002, established the local origins to be consistent with the ancient legends of King Solomon, who ordered djinns to "dig one thousand aflaj, every day," to save the nation.

In each falaj water is channelled, mainly underground, from a mother source, called an Um Al Falaj, or 'Mother of the Falaj,' and gravity fed to provide domestic water and to irrigate farmlands, especially in Al Dakhiliyah, Sharqiyah, and Batinah regions, where the Daris, Khatmeen, Malki, Jeeta, and Mayassar aflaj, are all Unesco World Heritage sites. The management of the water, and its division between its shareholders, is managed by a falaj-keeper, or Wakeel, a hereditary position in most situations, where the water is allocated between the government, local landowners and residents according to their needs, hereditary rights, and contributions to the upkeep of their local falaj, with channels to be opened or closed, feeding the 'shareholders,' according to their share.

The timings are still calculated today at Lizagh, according to the ancient measurements of an upright pole, adjacent to the falaj, with stones marking the beginning and end of each share, where the Wakeel is Rashid al Nadabi, who, like his father before him, still observes the age old tradition. The Falaj Al Malki, near Izki, has suffered from diminishing rain-falls in recent years, but a government programme during 2018/19 has seen a number of inspection holes drilled, and wells upgraded, to ensure the level of maintenance required is achieved, with the local Wakeel, Salat al Tobi, leading a volunteer operation to clean and refurbish the damaged elements of the system, with gratifying results.

At Birkat Al Mouz, at the foot of the mighty Jabal Akhdhar, the Al Khatmeen

falaj is perpetually delivering cool, clean, clear water to the local farms, from which the town derives its name. Khamis al Dughaishi is the local Wakeel, incredibly passionate about his community role in managing the town's falaj, and for him, it is a 'labour of love.' Falaj Al Jeela, near Tiwi, is of a quite different type, owing much of its engineering construction to the Ancient Roman aqueducts, and it is accordingly known as the 'Hanging Falaj.'

Dates, crops, green-feed, melons, cucumbers, corn, bananas, are all sustained by the aflaj, and according to Unesco, the five protected sites alone, sustain some 1500 hectares directly. In fact, across the Sultanate, according to Al Suleimani's research, 26,500 hectares are supported by the aflaj system, which in total supplies 36 per cent of the nation's freshwater requirements. Diversity is being further encouraged by Oman's newest generation of horticultural entrepreneurs as well, with diverse hydroponic production of lettuces, herbs and the like showing promising returns.

The aflaj, how it works and how it may be enhanced are being thoroughly researched by a small team headed by Dr Abdullah al Ghafri, of the Aflaj Research Unit of the University of Nizwa, who told an International Conference on Khattaras and Aflaj, in Morocco in 2018, "Oman is the gift of aflaj, a smart human solution that made living in a dry environment like Oman possible." And finally, the statement in the Holy Quran that "We have made from water every living thing," may never be truer than in the Sultanate.

MAIN PHOTO:
Falaj Al Jeela,
the Hanging
Falaj

TOP: Al Nadabi,
the Lizagh Wakeel,
demonstrates how
the water is allocated

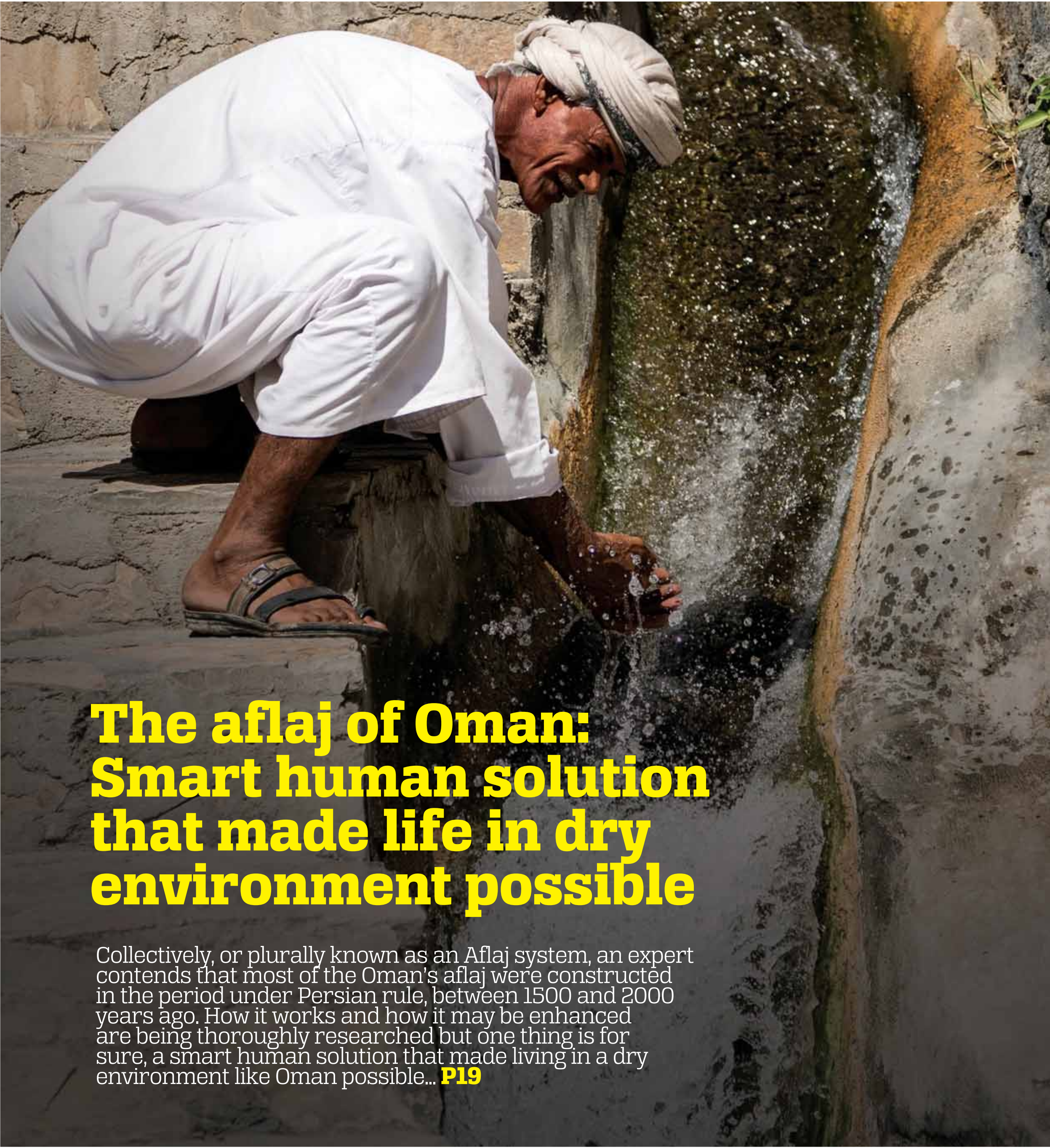
BOTTOM: Repair work
at the Falaj Al Malki has
revitalised the efficiency of
the historic system. (photo:
Observer/ONA)

INSET: Dr Abdullah Al Ghafri,
Head of the Aflaj Research
Unit of the University of Nizwa



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The aflaj of Oman: Smart human solution that made life in dry environment possible

Collectively, or plurally known as an Aflaj system, an expert contends that most of the Oman's aflaj were constructed in the period under Persian rule, between 1500 and 2000 years ago. How it works and how it may be enhanced are being thoroughly researched but one thing is for sure, a smart human solution that made living in a dry environment like Oman possible... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

TRAVEL



THE IGLOO HOUSES OF ASH SHWAYMIYYAH

They looked like they are straight from a movie like Star Wars located in a stark landscape in the middle of nowhere. Ash Shwaymiyyah "Igloo" houses are becoming beautiful attractions which allow visitors to experience a distinctive kind of Oman. [Photo by Insta/ @kumkum_nature_sl]

EAT



SEA BASS CAMEMBERT AND AVOCADO MUSTARD SAUCE

Camembert cheese came about sometime in the mid to late 1700s and is described to be white, bloomy rinds with pale interiors made from cow's milk. It has intense, deep and earthy notes with wheels measuring around 5 inches across. Because of its soft nature, this cheese is perfect for seabass and balances out the taste providing that intense earthy notes similar to tasting mushroom, egg and garlic. Try this recipe today. [https://bit.ly/3hghD8D]

READ



REFUGEE BY ALAN GRATZ

A *New York Times* bestseller, Alan Gratz' *Refugee* is a timely and timeless novel that tells the powerful story of three different children seeking refuge. All will face unimaginable dangers — from drownings to bombings to betrayals. But there is always the hope of tomorrow.

WATCH



COMING IN SEPTEMBER

American Horror Story actress Sarah Paulson reunites with showrunner Ryan Murphy for this series that follows the titular antagonist of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in the time before the events of that 1975 film. Paulson plays the title role in this arguably unnecessary, but beautiful-looking show.

CELEBRATE



NATIONAL WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY

Women had fought long and hard to be given a seat at the table. Even to this day, they are still at a disadvantage in many areas of work and life. To celebrate the Women's Equality Day, take the time to delve further into the history of women struggle and learn about the efforts of advocates in your country.