

A BENEVOLENT ALLY OF OMAN DEPARTS

Oman and Kuwait are rooted by ancient ties of amity, one destiny and common goals. Under the leadership of Sheikh Sabah, the relations further blossomed with cooperation between the governments of the two countries scaling high in many areas.

SAMUEL KUTTY
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With the passing away of Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait, the region lost the second world-renowned statesman, after the demise of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, in a short span of nine months.

For the Sultanate of Oman, the loss is not only that of a benevolent ally, but also a brother and friend.

Immediately after the announcement of the death of the Emir on Kuwait's national television, Omani citizens took to the social media to express their condolences.

Shaikh Sabah, the fifth Emir, who had ruled the country for nearly 15 years, had previously been foreign minister for 40 years, from 1963 to 2003. This made him one of the longest-serving foreign ministers in the world.

The Emir was known for pushing diplomacy to solve several regional issues and hosting major donor conferences for war-torn nations like Iraq and Syria. During his role as foreign minister, he restored his country's international relations affected due to the Gulf War.

Oman and Kuwait are rooted by ancient ties of amity, one destiny and common goals. Under the leadership of Shaikh Sabah, the relations further blossomed with cooperation between the governments of the two countries scaling high in many areas.

Even during the passing of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Shaikh Sabah braved his ill-health to come in person to offer his condolences to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said in Muscat to express condolences over the demise of Sultan Qaboos.

In addition to offering wholehearted condolences and solace to the Omani government and people, the late Emir also declared a three-day national mourning on the death of Sultan Qaboos.

Shaikh Sabah described "the late Sultan Qaboos a brother and a personal friend with whom I shared admiration and respect.

The world as well as the Gulf, Arab and Islamic nations had lost a very important figure who dedicated his life to the causes of Arab and Islamic countries."

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Dr Salman al Harbi, Kuwait Ambassador to the Sultanate, described relations between the Sultanate and Kuwait as deep-

rooted and exemplary under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait.

Oman and Kuwait are bound by ancient ties of amity, one destiny and common goals. These values became evident during times of crises, he said, adding that the two

countries work together towards the realisation of a two-pronged approach to development — with similar goals — based on "Kuwait Plan 2035" and "Oman Vision 2040".

He explained that the two long term programmes target investment in the sectors of fisheries, mining, petroleum, logistics and transport.

The late Emir evidenced his love for Oman by naming a road after the late Sultan His Majesty Qaboos. The decision was taken in appreciation of the important role that the late His Majesty played and the efforts he exerted in supporting the march of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the issues of the Arab and Islamic nations.

Emir of peace and prince of humanity

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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As the world paid respect to Emir of Kuwait, Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, people also remember him as the senior most diplomat in the Arab world who strived for peace not only for the GCC countries, but also for Palestine.

"It is with great sadness we have received the news of the loss of Emir of Kuwait who was a philanthropist and a person who has done so much for his country and put his country on the world map. We are proud of his work and he is an individual we like to associate with. Shaikh Sabah was a very close friend of Oman and our late father, Sultan Qaboos. He has visited us in Oman and has enjoyed his stay here," said Dr Waheed al Kharousi.

He added, "The Arab world will miss a person with great integrity, a person who has always believed in reconciliation, a person who believed in Arab unity and Islamic unity. He was a person who always supported the poor. He has received many awards because of his charitable work and we are going to miss him tremendously. We pray for him and his family and would like to give our condolences to the people of Kuwait. The Arab world and the Islamic world is in mourning for a great personality who has been very quiet but has been doing everything to support everyone."

Historian Ali Mohammed Sultan remembered him as the person who promoted peace all the



time. "He always tried to simplify tasks to maintain unity. He was also a promoter for the cause of Palestine. At 91 he was a pioneer in diplomacy as well as many initiatives and we have lost him now. Yasser Arafat had announced his organisation from Kuwait." In the early years of trade between the GCC countries, Shaikh Sabah was a family member, but Ali referring to historical papers and records said, "The family used to come to Muscat first on their way to India. Our commercial head in Muscat at that time was Haji Baqer and the building was on the Muttrah Sea Front.

"Shaikh Sabah's grandfather used to come there as he was the agent for them in Kuwait. But whenever he went to India they would stop in Muscat, if not then while returning from India, the family would stop over in Muscat." The western ports of India were exporting and importing the majority of the products through Oman and Kuwait.

"Of course there were also trade going to Iran, Yemen and Africa. According to Ali, Kuwait was an important trading port for Omani traders. There used to be cans and cans of ghee that would be brought from Salalah to Muscat and shipped

from Muscat to Kuwait and from there to Basra, Iraq, and other countries. From Kuwait, Omani produce such as pomegranates, lemon, dates, dry fish and Kasha etc were taken to other countries," he noted.

"In the 1940s and 1950s many Omanis attained scholarships to study in Kuwait," he added. In terms of commercial relations, leading business houses of Oman established their offices in Kuwait during the early years. "In those days when people used to travel to Kuwait they would take a letter from Towel Company, which stated the company is responsible for the individual," said Ali.

As an ex-employee of Kuwait Oil Company and with a total service length of more than 39 years which included before and after Kuwait/Iraq war, C Ramachandran has lots of memories of the land as he take in the loss of the leader, "I would like to avail this opportunity to pay my tribute and respect to the late Emir of Kuwait Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, who went to heavenly abode. Kuwait managed to reconstruct (Al Tameer Project) and bring the country back to its glory mainly because of leaders like him.

"Shaikh Sabah was a respected regional and international mediator due to his GCC leadership and his more than 40 years of service as Foreign Minister. Considering the achievements and approach of Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah on each issue, he has left a very difficult seat to fill and replace a satisfying (or) qualifying leader as competent as Shaikh Sabah."



‘We lost a great ruler who loved us’

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

"We lost a great leader, a face that I used to keep seeing since my childhood is no more. It's heart-breaking to see him no more," avers Fatma bint Mohammed al Ghailani. Fatma was born and brought up in Kuwait and finished her higher education in the capital city of Kuwait before she made it to the Sultanate of Oman.

"Memories of the Emir are very close to my heart and Kuwait is a sisterly country which always stood for peace just as the Sultanate does. Certainly, he will be missed. May Allah Almighty give him eternal peace," she noted.

Many senior citizens of Oman who once were in Kuwait

before the Renaissance of 1970 remember the then ruler of the State of Kuwait as a gentleman who always listened to his people.

Salem bin Ahmed al Fouri and Sultan bin Ahmed al Fouri, two elderly brothers who returned from Kuwait post 1970, are all love for the ruler who was known as the 'Prince of Humanity' among the Arab countries.

"We spent our young age in Kuwait and returned to the Sultanate after the national call by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970. We have very sweet memories of the ruler who used to visit our neighbourhoods as a very common man during weekends," Salem said, wiping the tears that rolled down the wrinkled face from his eyes.



Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos with Late Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah.

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Kuwait Emir struggled for Gulf unity

Kuwait City: The leader of Kuwait, Sabah al Ahmed Al Sabah, has died at 91, according to a royal court statement on Tuesday. Speculations about the Emir’s health have been ongoing for months, as he had been admitted to hospital several times since last year. Earlier in the day, lawmaker Saleh Ashour tweeted that Prime Minister Sabah al Khalid Al Sabah and Parliament Speaker Marzouk al Ghanem left in the middle of a parliamentary session to meet with the crown prince. Hours later, Kuwait’s state television stopped its usual programmes to broadcast a recital of verses from the Koran.

An announcer read the brief official statement before the Koran recital resumed along with a black and white photo of the Emir on screen. “With great sadness and sorrow, we mourn to the Kuwaiti people, the Arab and Islamic nations, and the friendly peoples of the world, the death of His Highness Shaikh Sabah al Ahmed al Jaber Al Sabah, the Emir of the State of Kuwait,” read the statement.

Afterwards, the official KUNA news agency tweeted a photo of the Emir alongside the words: “Farewell, the prince of humanity.” Sabah began his rule of oil-rich Kuwait in 2006. Although Kuwait has one of the Arab world’s most active parliaments, the Emir retains the most power, including the right to appoint the government. His rule was marked by efforts to calm regional disputes. He maintained good ties with Iran, and Qatar. Regional leaders mourned the Emir. “Today we lost a great brother and a wise leader,” Jordan’s King Abdullah said, as he announced a 40-day mourning period in the kingdom starting on Tuesday. Leaders of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt also mourned Sabah saying he was a great leader, and announced a three-day mourning period each.

WORLD MOURNS MASTER MEDIATOR

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

Oman lost a partner in peace-making and the world lost a master mediator in Kuwait’s Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah who left for heavenly abode on Tuesday.

Both countries’ belief in de-escalation, dialogue, trust-building and diplomacy helped them to persuade rivals to sit around a table for peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region.

He tirelessly worked for the unity of Gulf countries through his shuttle diplomacy and dialogue. He strived to protect the ‘ Al bait Al Khaleeji (Gulf House) which is our home’ from collapsing. In his opening speech to Kuwait Parliament in 2017, he said “the mediation of Kuwait is not merely a traditional mediation by a party between two parties. We are not a party but one party with two brothers.” He hoped that everyone would be fully aware of the risks of escalation with resulting implications of regional and international damage to the Gulf and its people.

The Emir warned that the history and future generations of the Gulf and the Arabs will not forgive anyone who contributes, even with one word, to fuel conflict or be part of it. He believed that GCC is a promising glimmer of hope in the darkness of Arab action and a model to be followed in cooperation.

He added that there is a greater need to approach the crisis in a calm manner and to avoid the conflict in an attempt to overcome the situation, saying “what brings us together is stronger than what divides us.”

The Emir was a respected mediator seen as the leader with the best chances of negotiating a settlement in many conflicts, given his long-time service

Shaikh Sabah tirelessly worked for the unity of Gulf countries through his shuttle diplomacy and dialogue. He strived to protect the ‘ Al bait Al Khaleeji (Gulf House) which is our home’ from collapsing

as Kuwait’s deputy prime minister and foreign minister (1965-2003) and prime minister (2003-2006).

“Kuwait and Oman have carved subtly different niches for themselves in the maelstrom of Gulf politics, in contrast to the muscular approach to regional affairs taken by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Oman, during the long rule of Sultan Qaboos bin Said (1970-2020), focused on facilitating talks between adversaries by passing messages and creating the space and conditions for meetings to occur, with the hosting of US-Iran back channel negotiations in 2012-13 a prominent example. Kuwait has placed greater emphasis on mediation with Emir Sabah al-Ahmad, himself a former foreign minister of 40 years’ standing, often engaging in shuttle diplomacy,” wrote Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a

middle east scholar recently.

The Kuwaiti mediation draws from a long history of successful intervention in dozens of conflicts across the regions. Kuwait also played a key role in the negotiations to set up the UAE Federation in 1971 and the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Abu Dhabi in 1981.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, then Kuwait’s deputy prime minister and foreign minister, had demonstrated his diplomatic clout by garnering international support and building up coalition forces from 35 nations led by the United States to free his country from the Iraqi invasion.

The late Emir also demonstrated humanitarian leadership in Syria, Iraq which faced terrible consequences of conflict. Communities in ruins; economies in free fall. Women and children struck down by bombs, guns and chemical weapons. Terrorised families running for their lives.

In response to this death and chaos, Kuwait led by the late Emir showed remarkable acts of kindness and generosity. Syria’s neighbours have opened their borders to millions of refugees. Humanitarian aid workers continue to support millions of people inside Syria with food, clean water and medical care every month. Kuwait has shown exemplary humanitarian leadership in supporting these operations under the compassionate and passionate leadership of the late Emir. Kuwait may be a small country in size but she has a big and broad and compassionate heart.

In the past several years, Kuwait has donated hundreds of millions of dollars for humanitarian operations, not only in

the Middle East, but in Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan.

Kuwait’s leadership and funding has saved tens of thousands of lives, and has galvanized others to participate in coordinated international action. “At a time when so many of our appeals are under-funded, it is good to know we can count on Kuwait’s generosity, and particularly His Highness, the Emir of Kuwait,” the then UN secretary-general Ban Ki Moon said.

The present United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, on an official visit to Kuwait in 2017, expressed gratitude to not only the Gulf country’s leadership in humanitarian action, but the “dialogue [...] and promotion of understanding Kuwait has shown in relation to all conflicts in the region...It’s not only the humanitarian leadership of Kuwait, it’s the wisdom, the dialogue, the promotion of understanding that Kuwait has shown in relation to all conflicts in the region,” explained Guterres, adding: “Kuwait has no agenda. The agenda of Kuwait is peace; is understanding.”

Bestowing Legion of Merit to Kuwait’s Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah President last week, Donald Trump said, “A leader in the Middle East for decades, the Emir has been a truly unwavering friend and partner to the United States...the Emir is also an unparalleled diplomat, having served as his nation’s foreign minister for 40 years. His tireless mediation of disputes in the Middle East has bridged divides under the most challenging circumstances.” The Legion of Merit is a rarely awarded decoration that can only be bestowed by the president, typically to chiefs of state or heads of government of other countries. The honour was last awarded in 1991.

SAMUEL KUTTY
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A staunch supporter of the national assembly, late His Highness Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, who was part of the government for more than five and a half decades, led his country on the founding principles of security, stability, and the rule of law.

“These are the rules upon which we all depend to maintain public life and continuing the services and facilities that make up all aspects of life. We must protect our national unity”, he advised his citizens.

Following the dissolution of the Kuwaiti parliament in 2000 and after calling for new elections, the late Emir decided to give voting and other political rights to Kuwaiti women. He was very much supportive of women’s rights. He also is a proponent of economic liberalisation and increased foreign investment in the Kuwaiti oil sector.

With an elected Parliament, blocs resembling political parties and sometimes vigorous public debate, Kuwaitis can participate in their government.

Born in Kuwait on June 16, 1929, His Highness the Shaikh Sabah was educated in Kuwait’s schools, completing his studies with private tutors. He was the fourth son of a former Emir, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who ruled from 1921 to 1950.

In 1962, he became minister for guidance and information, a year before being appointed foreign minister, a post he held until he became prime minister in 2003. In the 1970s and ’80s, he was information minister, in addition to foreign minister and deputy prime minister from 1978.

Shaikh Sabah was named Emir in 2006. Even before that, he had assumed the role of de-facto ruler when other leading family members were too ill or frail to do the job. He took the leadership mantle after Shaikh Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah, who was Emir for nine days, was voted out of office by parliament on the grounds that he was too ill to rule.

In 1985, he held the posts of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and became First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1992. He was a Member of the Organizational Body of the Higher Council and Member of the Building and Construction Council.

The architect and often the embodiment of Kuwait’s independent, non-aligned foreign policy, Shaikh Sabah was involved in many issues, particularly those involving relations with Iraq, Iran, and the United States, that forged Kuwaiti foreign policy.



Kuwait mourns veteran defender of Arab unity

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Emir Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad al Sabah's death plunged his country into mourning for a leader regarded by many Gulf Arabs as a savvy diplomatic operator and a humanitarian champion. The emir had been in hospital there since July following surgery in Kuwait that month. Flags were flying at half-mast in Kuwait, which announced 40 days of mourning. "Goodbye, Emir of Humanity," read a large banner on a street near the Kuwait Stock Exchange.

Kuwait Towers, a seaside landmark normally lit at night, went dark. Condolences poured in from Arab leaders and several countries in the region announced mourning periods. Shaikh Sabah sought to balance relations with Kuwait's bigger neighbours - forging close ties with Saudi Arabia, rebuilding links with former occupier Iraq and keeping open dialogue with Iran.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in an Arabic-language tweet, lauded Sheikh Sabah for fostering "moderation and balance" in Kuwait and the region. "Today we lost a big brother and a wise and loving leader ... who spared no effort for Arab unity," said Jordan's King Abdullah, also on Twitter.

Sabah kept strong ties with the United States, which led a coalition that ended Iraq's 1990-91 occupation of Kuwait and used the Gulf state as a launch pad for the 2003 Iraq invasion.

Under Kuwait's constitution the crown prince automatically becomes emir but assumes power only after taking an oath in parliament, for which elections are due this year. "I don't see a major change in foreign policy under the new emir, largely because Kuwaiti foreign policy is pretty popular domestically and regionally and is seen as effective," Courtney Freer, Research Fellow at LSE Middle East Centre, told Reuters. The succession is not expected to affect oil policy or foreign investment strategy through the Kuwait Investment Authority, one of the world's biggest sovereign wealth funds.

The new emir's choice of crown prince and premier - who would be tasked with managing the government's often difficult relationship with parliament - will be watched closely. "The new Emir will accede to the throne facing several tough challenges, including the coronavirus crisis, low oil prices, and delicate foreign politics," London-based Capital Economics said in a research note.

An immediate priority would be a long-awaited debt law allowing Kuwait to tap global markets to finance a budget deficit, it said. Parliament, which analysts say has posed an obstacle to reform efforts, has repeatedly rejected the law. Although most political power in Kuwait is in the hands of the emir, its parliament is one of the most influential elected bodies among Gulf monarchies.

— Reuters

NEW EMIR, SHAIKH NAWAF, TO BE SWORN IN TODAY

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's new emir will be sworn in on Wednesday at 11 am, parliament speaker Marzouq al Ghanim said in a tweet on Tuesday. Crown Prince Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad al Sabah was named emir by the cabinet to succeed his brother Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad al Sabah.

Kuwait's new ruler may find it harder than his predecessor to uphold his country's mediating role between Gulf powers, if only because he lacks his late brother's decades of experience as a conciliator in a polarised region.

Under Nawaf, 83, Kuwait is likely to continue to work for stability by staying on good terms with its powerful neighbours, instead of seeking a leadership role in the region, diplomats say. But he lacks the negotiating skills of the late emir, who spent four decades as Kuwait's top diplomat, earning the respect of his neighbours for rebuilding ties in the Middle East after Iraq's 1990 invasion of his small but hugely wealthy country.

While foreign policy is unlikely to change under Nawaf, OPEC member Kuwait may lose gravitas internationally, two sources close to the ruling family and one of the diplomats said.

Shaikh Nawaf largely kept a low profile as crown prince and also during previous roles as defence minister, at the time of the 1990 invasion, and interior minister. He is known as a founder of the country's national guard and has attempted to build security cooperation with Arab states. He had been widely perceived as a surprise choice by the emir in the succession line in 2006, and a reluctant ruler, who was encouraged to accept the role by senior members of the 250-year-old Al Sabah dynasty, said the diplomat.



Kuwaiti flags are lowered to half-mast outside the Dasman Diabetes Institute in Kuwait City on Tuesday as the country mourns the death of Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad al Sabah.

Diplomats and analysts expect he will delegate a larger portion of state affairs to his crown prince because of his low-key style and his age. This means that the person nominated by family consensus as his heir, a post which normally also holds the post of prime minister, will be closely watched. Dozens of senior Al Sabah family members have been jostling for position in anticipation of the choice of crown prince, a role that traditionally manages the government's often difficult relationship with parliament.

Friction between the cabinet and the assembly has led to frequent reshuffles or dissolution of parliament, holding up crucial investment and economic reforms. Shaikh Nawaf's discreet manner and openness to different points of view will be essential for maintaining balance, diplomats say, adding he could give more space for lawmakers to question senior ministers and allow some top cabinet posts to be held by people outside the Sabah family.

— Reuters



Bilateral ties with UAE reviewed

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received in his office on Tuesday Mohammed bin Sultan al Suwaidi, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the Sultanate. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. They also discussed aspects of the existing cooperation in various fields pertaining to culture, sports and youth and means of enhancing them. — ONA

Majlis meet reviews efforts to curb COVID-19 spread

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura Office held a meeting on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal Al Maauali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

The meeting reviewed the latest efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19, as well as the measures taken by the authorities concerned and the community to bring down the number of infections in order to control the virus spread and increase the recovery rate.

The meeting also discussed the outcomes of the dialogue session held by Majlis Ash'shura with representatives of the General Federation of Omani Workers (GFWO), before submitting the recommendations to the



Council of Ministers.

The meeting reviewed many responses and messages received from government agencies and from Majlis Ash'shura members

in various social, economic and educational aspects that affect citizens and meet their necessary needs.

The meeting was attended

by members of Majlis Ash'shura Office and Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. — ONA

Meetings with UN experts on intangible heritage ends



MUSCAT: The scheduled meetings between the Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the United Nations (UN) committee of experts tasked with assessing intangible cultural heritage filed short-listed to UN records, concluded on Tuesday.

The meetings, held this year via videoconferencing, were headed on the Sultanate's side by Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, who received the gavel for endorsing decisions that the UN panel was issuing.

The seven-day meetings studied the criteria used for assessing intangible cultural heritage files of member states. They discussed the files of intangible heritage offered for urgent conservation and the best practices in this field.

The meetings shaped proposals and recommendations on the nominated files. — ONA

Ambassador of Sudan bids farewell

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in his office on Tuesday Ahmed al Sadiq Abdulhai, Ambassador of the Republic of Sudan to the Sultanate to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed the bilateral relations between the

two brotherly countries.

The ambassador expressed his thanks to Sayyid Badr for the cooperation extended to him during his tour of duty in the Sultanate. Sayyid Badr thanked the ambassador for his good efforts, which contributed in enhancing relations between the Sultanate and the Republic of Sudan, wishing him success in his future duties. — ONA

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DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE THIRD QUARTER ENDED ON AUGUST 31, 2020

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to submit the unaudited Financial Statements of the company for the third quarter ended on August 31, 2020 along with related reports.

Revenue was RO 9,565,393 as against RO 9,627,291 in the corresponding period of previous year whereas net Profit after taxes for the period was RO 1,918,637 as against RO 1,908,171 in the previous year.

The total shareholders fund increased from RO. 22,361,665 as at the end of August 2019 to RO. 23,774,242 at the end of August 2020 and a result of this increase, the net assets per share has been increased to RO.3.529

On behalf of the Board of directors, I express our most sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour for his wise leadership and generous support to the private sector. Furthermore, I would extend our gratitude to his government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention of Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Muscat Security Market and Capital Market Authority.

I conclude this report by expressing our appreciation to our shareholders, Petroleum Development Oman, our bankers and customers for their valued support and cooperation.

For and on behalf of Board of Directors,

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Unaudited Consolidated Statement of Financial Position		
at 31 st August, 2020		
	2020 RO. '000	2019 RO. '000
Fixed assets	16,952	17,759
Current assets		
Inventories	18	25
Trade Receivables	5,002	4,842
Receivables from related parties	54	122
Bank and Cash	5,771	4,693
	10,845	9,682
Total assets	27,797	27,441
Current liabilities		
Trade and other Payables	777	1,216
Payables to related parties	1,515	956
Bank loans and over drafts	1,179	1,179
Tax liability	335	325
	3,806	3,676
Long term liabilities		
Bank loan	99	1,278
Deferred Tax liability	118	125
	217	1,403
Total liabilities	4,023	5,079
Net Assets	23,774	22,362
Shareholders' funds		
Share capital	6,738	6,125
Legal reserve	2,233	2,042
Retained earnings	14,803	14,195
Total shareholders' equity	23,774	22,362

Unaudited Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income		
For 9 months ended 31 st August 2020		
	2020 RO. '000	2019 RO. '000
Turnover/Revenue	9,565	9,627
Gross Profit	3,453	3,377
Depreciation	(802)	(763)
Administration & general expenses	(454)	(374)
Operating profit	2,197	2,240
Finance charges	60	5
Profit before taxation and minority interest	2,257	2,245
Taxation	(339)	(337)
Net profit attributable to ordinary Shareholders	1,918	1,908
Net profit margin	20%	20%

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such requests may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), PO Box 311, Postal Code 100, Muscat.



RELATIONS BETWEEN GCC, RUSSIAN FEDERATION DISCUSSED



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday took part in the joint ministerial meeting between the GCC countries and the Russian Federation. The virtual meeting was held on the sidelines of the 75th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. The meeting was attended by Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General, and a number of GCC ministers and under-secretaries, in addition to Sergei Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. The meeting dealt with cooperation relations between the GCC and the Russian Federation and ways to develop them. Views were exchanged on regional and international issues, as well as issues of common interest. — **ONA**

ELT conference begins on October 14

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

The Oman 20th ELT Conference, which will be held on October 14 and 15 online, is a must-attend event for academics in the field. The conference aims to bring together more than 800 participants from different countries and 140 working papers covering various aspects of English language teaching and learning.

Sultan Qaboos University, represented by the University's Centre for Preparatory Studies, is organising Oman 20th English Language Teaching (ELT) Conference virtually this year (AAA). The conference, which was scheduled to take place in April, was postponed due to COVID- 19.

The conference is considered as a hub for both English language teachers and researchers from local and international schools and universities to disseminate their research, share knowledge, establish networks with their peers, exchange teaching and research experiences, and learn about the latest theoretical and practical developments in this field.

The conference will feature more than 140 plenary and concurrent sessions across

various areas related to English language teaching and learning such as curriculum, assessment, online learning, teacher professional development and teaching English language skills. It is expected that more than 800 participants from inside and outside the Sultanate will attend these online sessions.

The Oman ELT Conference was established in 2001 and has been held annually since its inception. A large number of prominent authors, researchers in teaching and learning of the English language and thousands of English language teachers from inside and outside the Sultanate participated in the conference over the past 19 years.

The conference is annually accompanied by a book fair in which international and local publishers participate and showcase various publications and books about learning and teaching English.

However, this exhibition will be suspended this year due to COVID-19. The conference organising committee issues a journal after the conference. The journal reports original research methods and reports findings for the benefit of teachers and researchers in the field of English Language Teaching.

Treasury bills worth RO 17m allotted

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 524, was held at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week.

The results of the issue are as follows: the total value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 17 million, for a maturity period of 91 days, from September 30 until 30 December 30, 2020.

The average accepted price reached 99.800 for every RO 100 while the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.800 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.80102 per cent and 0.80262 per cent, respectively.

Note that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 1 per cent.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the CBO on behalf of the government, which help the licensed commercial banks to gainfully invest their surplus funds, with added the advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo) offered by the Central Bank.

Furthermore, Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the Government (MoF) may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — **ONA**

No expatriate lawyers in courts from 2021

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Expatriate lawyers will not be allowed to plead nor appear in higher courts of the Sultanate of Oman from January 2021, according to the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs.

However, expatriates are allowed to work in other positions such as counsellors, clerks and the like in law firms.

The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs said in a statement tweeted: “The ministry calls on law firms, civil law firms and all concerned authorities in the Sultanate to adhere to this date to enforce the aforementioned provisions and to take all necessary measures to put them into practice.”

The ministry thanked the expat attorneys for the contributions they have made in order to advance the legal profession in the Sultanate.

Currently, there are nearly 400 expatriate lawyers in the country. Only 112 Omanis are practising at the Supreme Court while more than 254 expats appear at the same court.

“This move has been ongoing for the last eight years. In 2017 it was decided that the year

- There are nearly 400 expatriate lawyers in the country
- Only 112 Omanis are practising at the Supreme Court while more than 254 expats appear at the same court
- Expat lawyers were banned in the various primary courts of Oman since 2009 but were allowed at higher courts

is coming to an end by December 31, 2020, according to Article 66 of the Advocacy Law promulgated by Royal Decree 108/96.

“We are expecting many Omani youngsters to become lawyers and enrol in the various upper courts of the Sultanate of Oman by this year itself after which no expatriate can appear before the higher courts including the Supreme Court of Oman”, said Dr Zadjali, who is also the elected Majlis Ash-Shura member from Batinah governorate.

Statistics supplied by the OLA suggest that there are more than 1,100 Omani lawyers and more number of young lawyers pursuing their courses in law at Oman's Sharia College.

The decision, taken by the ministry on the basis of the directives of Council of Ministers, is expected to pave the way for more Omanis to enrol and practise law in the higher courts.

There are more than 400 individual lawyers' offices and nearly 60 law firms, the majority of which are in Muscat Governorate with 203 offices and 40 companies. North Batinah Governorate came second with 62 offices and 7 firms.

Dhofar Governor tours Salalah Airport



SALALAH: Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, on Tuesday went on tour to Salalah Airport to inspect the COVID-19 precautionary measures that will be taken when flights are resumed on 1 October.

During the tour, he was briefed by Salim bin Awadh al Yafei, Deputy CEO of Oman Airports Company (Salalah Airport) about the measures taken to limit the spread of infection among workers and passengers, in accordance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. — **ONA**



Officials inspect incomplete works on Batinah Coastal Road project

MUSCAT: A number of ministers and under-secretaries went on tour to the incomplete segments of Phase 1 of Al Batinah Coastal Road project to inspect the workflow of compensation and obliteration.

The officials visited the first part of the first phase of Al Batinah Coastal Road project, which starts from the Wilayat of Barka and ends at Widam Al Sahil, Wilayat of Al Musannah, with a length of 60 km.

They were briefed by Salem bin Mohammed Al Nuaimi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, who presented a detailed explanation of the segments of the project, the completed 45 km segments of the first part, in addition to 68 km

services roads, as well as 9,5 km dual linking roads that were opened to traffic earlier.

Eng Al Nuaimi pointed out that there are 15 km remaining segments of the first part's main road, in addition to 12 km service roads.

After that, the ministers and undersecretaries visited the fishing harbour in the Wilayat of Barka, to view the sites linking the port's entrances and exits with the coastal road.

They were briefed on the harbour's development project, which is considered one of the partnership projects with the private sector.

The official who participated in the visit were Dr Saud bin Hamoud Al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water



Resources, Dr Khalfan bin Said Al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Issa bin Hamad al Azri, Governor of South Al Batinah.

They were accompanied by Eng Salem bin Mohammed al Nuaimi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing, Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries and a number of specialists. — **ONA**

CAMEL RACES RECEIVE CONSTANT HM'S ATTENTION: SAYYID ASAAD



FROM PAGE 1

"Al Bashayer is one of the most advanced camel racing tracks and it meets all international specifications for this type of sport. Regular improvement is made to its facilities, including the range, metal fences, light posts and the main spectator ramps. Once all the components are readied, Al Bashayer will be qualified to host a variety of camel racing events for all age-groups, day and night," HH Sayyid Asaad said.

Besides camel races, Al Bashayer will also venue to other sports and cultural contests, so that it could perform its full role towards entertaining all segments of society, HH Sayyid Asaad added, noting that the field and track of Al Bashayer will, additionally, be a place of reception of tourist from within the Sultanate and abroad who are expected to flock to Oman to relish the country's diversity. Al Bashayer will also showcase various antiques peculiar to Al Bashayer and its

adjoining villages.

Asked about Al Bashayer camels and their feats, HH Sayyid Asaad said that Al Bashayer (camel breed) emerged as an idea that developed into a major project. He added that, from a mere idea in the aura of imagination, the project got moulded into tangible reality and took the name of Al Bashayer area. Internationally renowned camel slimming specialists were recruited, equipment set in place and the whole facility is being prepared to cater to

Al Bashayer camels and keep them on the lead. "We are totally satisfied with the accomplishments made in record time, not exceeding six years," said HH Sayyid Asaad.

Speaking about his vision for the future of camel sports, HH Sayyid Asaad said that camel sports receive attention from all segments of society and it has a wide audience that follows the various stages of races in the Sultanate and abroad. The prizes set for the races make the camel slimming persons and

owners in competition to contest the highest places. The owners take keen interest to obtain the best pedigrees and bring the best camel slimming specialists, said HH Sayyid Asaad, noting that preparations begin very early for the competitions, along with health feeding and training.

HH Sayyid Asaad also hailed the role of the media and social media in highlighting the events in full detail.

HH Sayyid Asaad reaffirmed the originality of Omani camel sports which, he said receives support at

all levels in the Sultanate and GCC states. He pointed out that the holding of joint camel racing events in GCC states gave a strong impetus for competition and earned the sport a wider audience every year.

HH Sayyid Asaad expressed the hope that organisers of camel sports would espouse a unified and advanced code, right from the start of the sporting season, so that all could participate in the events, have the time to prepare and give camels enough rest. — ONA

Two-state solution for ME peace

FROM PAGE 1

"In the same context, the international community has a duty to ensure that the resources to fight the pandemic, in particular the vaccines, are fairly distributed, especially in the least developed places, where medical facilities are limited. The COVID-19 pandemic has created thorny economic challenges. In this respect, we call on donor nations and institutions to do all they can to facilitate the process of debt restructuring and pay special attention to helping the most affected countries in a way that would accelerate the smooth flow of the economy and stimulate growth."

"His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has reaffirmed categorically that the Sultanate of Oman will follow the wise policy developed by late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the builder of modern Oman and the mastermind of its foreign policy and international relations over the past 50 years. The Sultanate of Oman follows the path of dialogue and encourages it. My country's government supports the values of tolerance, collective action and peaceful coexistence with all. We believe in the principles of justice, equality, good neighbourliness, the rule of law and non-interference in the internal affairs of others. We stress the peaceful settlement of disputes, based on the rules and principles of the UN Charter and international law, as an obligation that we all should honour."

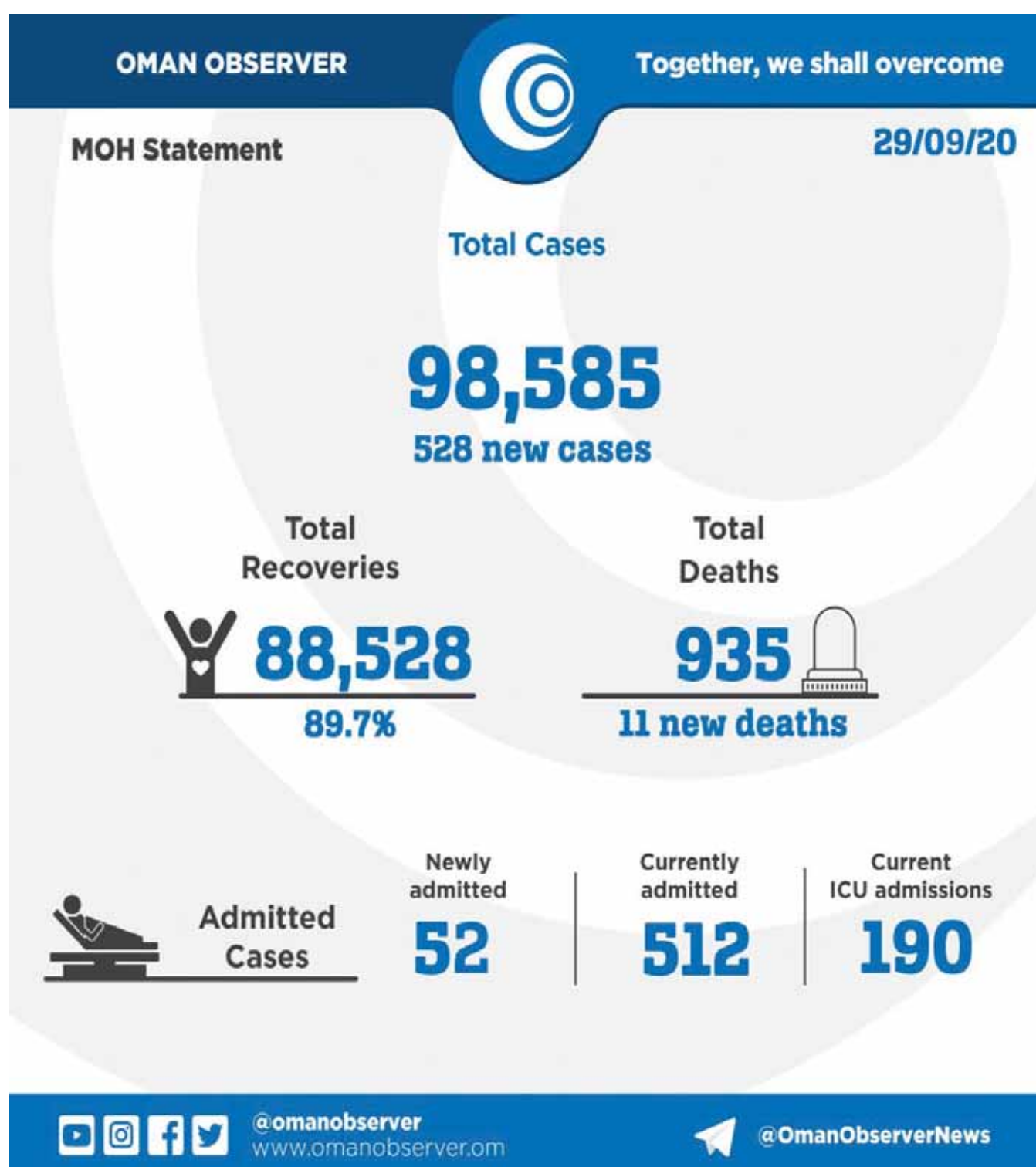
"While my country supports the sovereign right of states to determine whatever they deem as fit for their national interests, our common interests makes it incumbent upon us all to support peace and to participate effectively in efforts to disseminate it as a global culture by which people can progress and prosper. From this standpoint, the Sultanate of Oman reiterates, from this international platform, its support for the legitimate and just demands of the Palestinian people, and the establishment of an independent state of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions as well as the Arab peace initiative, which is based on the principle

of land for peace and the two-state solution."

"My country calls upon all the parties in the Republic of Yemen to rally around the table of constructive dialogue, in order to reach a peaceful and consensual solution to the ongoing conflict. In this regard, we call on all parties to support the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy to Yemen. We also call upon the international community, especially donor countries and organisations, to intensify efforts to provide and deliver humanitarian supplies, due to the critical situation and the tragic suffering of people in this Arab country."

"We would like to express our support for Lebanon. We call upon the international community to support Lebanon in its reconstruction efforts and help it grapple with the impact of the recent tragic explosion in the port of Beirut. Regarding Libya, the Sultanate of Oman welcomed the ceasefire agreement and the work to establish the mechanisms and arrangements for the resumption of oil production and export operations, and for the management of the revenue arising for the benefit of the people of Libya, for whom we wish security, stability and prosperity through the start of a peaceful settlement that would end division, build harmony and unity among one people and one country."

"This year, the Sultanate of Oman has taken important steps to restructure and modernise its administrative apparatus, in support of its current phase of economic development, within Oman Vision 2020-2040. This is all based on the principles of the Basic Statute of the State. I should mention in this respect, the principles of the market economy that guide the economic system of the Sultanate Oman. This will, without doubt, enhance the value of our geographic location and its importance in international trade in the 21st century. This is compounded by political stability, tourist potential and the diverse investment opportunities in several fields and lucrative development sectors. Oman has been an active participant in international and regional fora that produced the Sustainable Development Goals 2030."





In brief

■ TOKYO

POMPEO TO MEET AUSTRALIA, INDIA AND JAPAN MINISTERS

Top diplomats from the United States, India, Australia and Japan will gather in Tokyo next week for rare face-to-face talks on tackling the coronavirus and strengthening co-operation, Japan said on Tuesday. The four nations have in recent years formed a strategic grouping — known as the “Quad” — meant to serve as a counter-weight to China and promote their vision of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”.

The meeting on October 6 will be attended by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

■ MANILA

PHILIPPINES CONFIRMS 2,025 NEW VIRUS CASES, 68 MORE DEATHS



The Philippines’ health ministry on Tuesday reported 2,025 novel coronavirus infections and 68 more deaths. In a bulletin, the ministry said total confirmed cases have increased to 309,303, the highest in Southeast Asia, while deaths have reached 5,448.

President Rodrigo Duterte said on Monday partial coronavirus restrictions in and around the capital region will be extended for another month until October 31 to keep the spread of COVID-19 in check.

Members of the government’s coronavirus task force said they could not afford to be complacent even as they would like the economy to continue to move forward. In a late-night televised address, Duterte also appealed to the country’s top telecommunication firms to “do a better job” with public schools set to reopen with virtual classes on October 5.

■ BANGKOK

NEW THAI ARMY CHIEF PLEDGES DEFENCE OF MONARCHY



Thailand’s new army chief pledged on Tuesday to follow his predecessor, who has taken a hard line against anti-government groups and he emphasised the importance of protecting the monarchy. The appointment of General Narongpan Jittkaewtae, in an annual military reshuffle, comes as Thailand’s army and palace dominated establishment faces the challenge of more than two months of anti-government protests.

Narongpan made no specific mention of the protesters, some of whom have called for reforms to curb the powers of King Maha Vajiralongkorn’s monarchy. “I pledge to all of you that I will continue the obligations, responsibility, policies and ideology of the army chief, General Apirat Kongsompong, to the fullest of my ability,” Narongpan told a military ceremony.



Demonstrators shout slogans during a protest after the death of a rape victim inside the premises of Safdarjung Hospital in New Delhi, on Tuesday. – Reuters

Outrage in India as Dalit teenager dies after abuse

NEW DELHI: A Dalit teenager allegedly raped by four upper-caste men died of her injuries on Tuesday, sparking outrage from Indian activists, politicians and Bollywood stars.

India’s 200 million low-caste “untouchable” Dalits have long faced discrimination and abuse and campaigners say attacks have increased during the coronavirus pandemic.

The 19-year-old woman was brutally assaulted in Uttar Pradesh on September 14, according to a complaint filed by the family with police.

The four accused have been arrested, according to the authorities.

Found lying in a pool of blood and paralysed from injuries to her neck and spine, the woman

“She died during the course of treatment on Tuesday morning. We will ensure swift investigation and trial in the case”
VIKRANT VIR
Hathras district police chief

rushed to a local hospital before being brought to New Delhi on Monday as her condition worsened.

“She died during the course of treatment on Tuesday morning. We will ensure swift investigation and trial in the case,” Hathras district police chief Vikrant Vir said.

The news comes months after four men were hanged for the brutal gang rape and murder of a student on a bus in Delhi in 2012 — a case which came to symbolise the nation’s problem with sexual violence, gaining worldwide notoriety and being turned into a Netflix TV show.

Bollywood personalities and women’s rights activists took to social media to condemn this month’s attack.

“Sad, sad day. How much longer can this be allowed to go on,” wrote director-producer Farhan Akhtar.

Activist Kavita Krishnan said the attack reflected the “larger picture of structural violence” against Dalit women.

Priyanka Gandhi, a member of the opposition Congress party, blamed the assault on the deteriorating law-and-order situation in Uttar Pradesh, which is ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party.

Women in India are subjected to alarming levels of sexual assaults, irrespective of their caste or class.

Nearly 34,000 rapes were reported in the country in 2018, but the figures are considered the tip of the iceberg, with many victims too scared to come forward.

— AFP

Rights group Amnesty halts India operations

NEW DELHI: Human rights group Amnesty International stopped its work in India on Tuesday saying the government had frozen its bank accounts in the latest action against it for speaking out about rights violations. The group said it had laid off staff after facing a crackdown over the past two years over allegations of financial wrongdoing that it said were baseless.

“This is latest in the incessant witch-hunt of human rights organisations by the government of India over unfounded and motivated allegations,” Amnesty said in a statement. Its bank accounts were frozen on September 10, it said. Amnesty had highlighted rights violations in recent months in Jammu and Kashmir region as well as what it said was a lack of police accountability during riots in Delhi in February, and the government had sought to punish it, it said. There was no immediate response from government spokesmen to requests for comment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government has faced accusations that it is clamping down on dissent, including in Kashmir, where insurgents have battled government forces for more than 30 years.

The government denies any bias against any community. Opposition politician Shashi Tharoor said Amnesty’s exit was a blow. “India’s stature as a liberal democracy with free institutions, including media & civil society organisations, accounted for much of its soft power in the world.

Actions like this both undermine our reputation as a democracy & vitiate our soft power,” he said on Twitter. Critics of the organisation, however, cheered its departure, posting comments on Twitter such as “good riddance” and accusing the group of turning a blind eye to hate crimes against Hindus elsewhere in the region. — Reuters

The group said it had laid off staff after facing a crackdown over the past two years over allegations of financial wrongdoing that it said were baseless

Brother of dead S Korean ‘defector’ refutes official account

SEOUL: A South Korean fisheries official shot dead and allegedly burnt by North Korean soldiers last week would never have defected, his brother said on Tuesday, and appealed to Pyongyang to return his body.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un issued a rare apology after what he described as the “unexpected and disgraceful” killing of the official, who Seoul said jumped ship during an attempt to defect.

Citing intelligence sources, Seoul said the man — named only as Lee — was found adrift by North Korean troops who interrogated him in the water before shooting him and setting fire to his body as a precaution against coronavirus.

The coast guard said on Tuesday an initial investigation had ruled out a suicide attempt or accidental fall from the vessel, adding Lee had huge gambling debts.

But the brother, Lee Rae-jin, refuted the findings, saying there were no signs he was planning to defect and was proud of his job.

“They keep on bringing up my brother’s family issues and debts... then should all 50 to 60 per cent of ordinary South Koreans defect?” Lee said during a press conference



Lee Rae-jin speaks during a news conference in Seoul, on Tuesday. – Reuters

with foreign correspondents in Seoul.

“I talked to him two days before his death and he never once mentioned or gave signs to defect.”

In an earlier news conference, the Coast Guard said an investigation suggested Lee had voluntarily jumped ship with the aim of reaching the North.

“Some circumstances in which he expressed his intention to defect to North Korea have also been confirmed,” a senior coast guard officer told reporters

The possibility he had attempted to commit suicide was “extremely low” as he was wearing a life jacket.

The officer added Lee had some 330 million won (\$282,000) in debts — mostly from gambling. — AFP

Pakistan renews commitment to Afghan peace process

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Monday reaffirmed its “steadfast” support for the Afghan peace process during a visit by Afghanistan’s chief negotiator to Islamabad. “It is up to Afghan leadership to seize this opportunity,” Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said following talks with Abdullah Abdullah, head of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation.

Abdullah is in Pakistan to seek backing from a nation seen as crucial to securing peace in Afghanistan due to its influence on Taliban leaders. The visit comes after Abdullah met with Taliban representatives at the start of a US-backed reconciliation process in Qatar.

The Afghan delegation urged Islamabad to use influence with the Taliban to shore up the shaky peace process.

Qureshi and Abdullah meanwhile vowed to improve relations between the two countries to enhance cooperation as the peace process moves ahead. Islamabad and Kabul have been blaming each other for



Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi with Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah during an event in Islamabad. – AFP

using militants as proxies for cross-border attacks in both countries.

“Past mistakes should not be repeated; nor should past history dictate the future course of action,” Qureshi told Abdullah, according to a statement.

Abdullah, who is also set to meet with a number of other leaders during his time in Pakistan, is scheduled to address lawmakers, academia and journalists at a public

Abdullah is in Pakistan to seek backing from a nation seen as crucial to securing peace in Afghanistan

event organised by a think tank. The visit is Abdullah’s first in his capacity as head of the peace body and is considered key to his efforts

to boost negotiations with the Taliban.

The talks come days after Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan told the UN General Assembly his country would support Afghan reconciliation process until the end. Khan meanwhile warned in article published on Sunday that a hasty withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan would be unwise. — Agencies



Women react during the funeral of victims, who were killed in rocket attacks on the outskirts of Baghdad, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Iraqis decry insecurity at funerals of 7 killed in anti-US attack

BAGHDAD: Mourners hit out at Iraq's government over insecurity on Tuesday, during the funerals of five children and two women killed by a wayward rocket targeting US troops stationed at Baghdad airport.

Several among the hundreds of mourners in the village of Al Bouchaabane, a few kilometres from Baghdad airport, said that some of the children were killed by the rocket as they played in front of their home late on Monday.

"This village is like a microcosm of Iraq," one mourner said. "If the government isn't capable of protecting us, how can it ensure the security of Iraq as a whole?"

The latest attack targeting American interests — one of around 40 since early August, and many others stretching back months — comes after Washington threatened to close its embassy and withdraw its remaining 3,000 troops from Iraq unless the attacks cease.

The fatalities represent a new

stage in the standoff between Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi, head of the country's intelligence service long seen as close to Washington, and armed groups that are demanding US troops leave the country.

The death toll — up from an initial five, after two children died of their wounds in the hospital — place these armed factions in an uncomfortable position.

The public has become increasingly worn down by years of violence and armed groups holding the country to ransom.

Possibly anticipating a backlash, social media accounts that usually laud such rocket strikes were silent in the wake of this attack.

Several high-ranking officials attended the funerals in a bid to provide reassurance, but several among the hundreds of Iraqis surrounding the coffins said that they feel permanently unsafe.

— AFP

Virus deaths rise above a million in 'agonising' global milestone

GENEVA: The global coronavirus death toll rose past a million on Tuesday, according to a Reuters tally, a grim statistic in a pandemic that has devastated the global economy, overloaded health systems and changed the way people live. The number of deaths from the novel coronavirus this year is now double the number of people who die annually from malaria - and the death rate has increased in recent weeks as infections surge in several countries.

"Our world has reached an agonising milestone," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement. "It's a mind-numbing figure. Yet we must never lose sight of each and every individual life. They were fathers and mothers, wives and husbands, brothers and sisters, friends and colleagues."

It took just three months for COVID-19 deaths to double from half a million, an accelerating rate of fatalities since the first death was recorded in China in early January. More than 5,400 people are dying around the world every 24 hours, according to Reuters calculations based on September averages, overwhelming funeral businesses and cemeteries. That equates to about 226 people an hour, or one person every 16 seconds. In the time it takes to watch a 90-minute soccer match, 340 people die on average.

"So many people have lost so many people and haven't had the chance to say goodbye," World Health Organization (WHO) spokeswoman Margaret Harris told a UN briefing in Geneva. "...Many, many of the people who died alone in medical circumstances where it's a terribly difficult and lonely death." WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the world had to unite to



Commuters wearing face masks walk in a subway station as the spread of COVID-19 continues in Prague, Czech Republic, on Tuesday. — Reuters

fight the virus.

"History will judge us on the decisions we do and don't make in the months ahead," he said in *The Independent* newspaper.

INFECTIONS RISING

Experts remain concerned that the official figures for deaths and cases globally significantly under-represent the real tally because of inadequate testing and recording and the possibility of concealment by some countries. The response to the pandemic has pitted proponents of health measures like lockdowns against those intent on sustaining politically sensitive economic growth, with approaches differing from country to country.

The United States, Brazil and India, which together account for nearly 45 per cent of all COVID-19 deaths globally, have all lifted social distancing measures in recent weeks. "The American people should anticipate that cases will rise in the days ahead," US Vice President Mike Pence warned on Monday. US deaths stood at 205,132 and cases at 7.18 million by late Monday.

India, meanwhile, has recorded the highest daily growth in infections in the world, with an average of 87,500 new cases a day since the beginning of September. On current trends, India will overtake the United States as the country with the most confirmed cases

by the end of the year, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government pushes ahead with easing lockdown measures in a bid to support a struggling economy.

Despite the surge in cases, India's death toll of 96,318, and pace of growth of fatalities, remain below those of the United States, Britain and Brazil. India on Tuesday reported its smallest rise in deaths since August 3, continuing a recent easing trend that has baffled experts.

In Europe, which accounts for nearly 25 per cent of deaths, the WHO has warned of a worrying spread in western Europe just weeks away from the winter flu season. — Reuters

Moscow extends school holiday over COVID-19

MOSCOW: Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin extended an upcoming school holiday by a week on Tuesday to limit the spread of the coronavirus, days after sources said the capital's hospitals had been told to free up hundreds of beds. The Kremlin said last week it did not plan to impose severe lockdown restrictions despite a growing number of new cases of COVID-19, but Sobyenin advised anyone with chronic health problems or those older than 65 to stay home.

On Tuesday, Sobyenin said students would be off from school from October 5-18, and urged parents to keep their children at home.

"Today a significant proportion of the sick - who are often asymptomatic - are children," Sobyenin said on his website. "When they come home, they easily transmit the virus to adults and elderly family members who get much sicker." The upsurge in Moscow has escalated since Russia reopened schools on September 1. The number of new daily infections has more than doubled compared to late August.



First graders attend a ceremony marking the start of the new school year, as schools reopen after the summer break and the lockdown due to the outbreak of COVID-19, in Moscow on September 1, 2020. — Reuters

The rouble nosedived on Tuesday, hitting 93 against the euro and continuing its sharp downward trajectory from the previous two trading sessions. The falls were due to concern

over the rising rate of infections as well as clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh just beyond Russia's southern border.

With 1,167,805 cases, Russia has the world's fourth-highest number of

infections. On Tuesday, the authorities said that 160 had died from the virus in the last 24 hours, pushing the country's official death toll to 20,545.

— Reuters

Armenia, Azerbaijan defy calls for calm

YEREVAN: Azerbaijani and Armenian forces claimed to have inflicted heavy losses as fighting raged for a third day on Tuesday over Azerbaijan's breakaway region of Nagorny Karabakh.

Renewed US calls echoed by Germany and Russia for a halt to the fierce clashes that erupted on Sunday went unheeded by the ex-Soviet rivals that have been locked for decades in a territorial dispute.

The UN Security Council was scheduled to meet on Tuesday for emergency talks on the military escalation over the ethnic Armenian region, where the intense fighting has caused nearly 100 confirmed deaths.

Both sides said fighting was continuing on Tuesday, despite urgent international pleas for a ceasefire.

In bellicose televised remarks, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev

vowed to continue fighting.

"If the international community is not capable of stopping Armenia's reckless dictator, then Azerbaijan will do it," he declared.

The Armenian defence ministry said separatists in Karabakh had repelled Azerbaijani attacks along the frontline and that "the enemy suffered serious losses in manpower".

It said Azerbaijan's military had suffered major losses since the clashes erupted, with nearly 50 drones and six helicopters downed, and 80 tanks destroyed.

While accusing Azerbaijan of escalating the conflict, Armenia threatened to use longer-range weapons with greater destructive power. In Baku, officials dismissed claims by the separatists that Armenian-backed troops had regained control of the territory they lost in Sunday's fighting. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

GENEVA

100m extra vaccine doses for poorer countries

Up to 100 million additional doses of any eventual COVID-19 vaccines will be secured for delivery to poorer countries in 2021, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, announced on Tuesday.

The announcement doubles the number of doses already secured from the Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine manufacturer by volume, by Gavi and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, following an initial agreement last month.

"This brings the total number of vaccine doses to be covered by the partnership between SII, Gavi, and



the Gates Foundation to an aggregate of up to 200 million doses," Gavi said in a statement.

It stressed that the agreement "provides an option to secure additional doses, potentially several times the 200 million dose total," if needed, adding that the vaccines will have a ceiling price of \$3 per dose.

BRUSSELS

EU executive snubs Hungarian demand

The European Union executive on Tuesday snubbed a demand by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban that it dismiss its top rule of law official for comments about Hungary's "ailing democracy".

Orban, 57, has repeatedly clashed with the EU over his headline stance on migration and minorities, as well as moves to increase state control of the courts, media, academics and NGOs.

Critics in the EU, as well as international watchdogs say he defends nation-states and ethnic majorities at the expense of

fundamental human rights and democratic checks and balances.

In an interview with Reuters last week, Orban rejected that criticism. "When somebody says that democracy can be only liberal it's an oppression," Orban said, adding that accusations that Hungary violates the rule of law were "simply blah, blah, blah".

On Monday, Orban wrote to EU Commission head Ursula von der Leyen, demanding that she dismiss her top rule of law official at the Brussels-based EU executive, Vera Jourova.

LONDON

Meghan loses latest court battle with newspaper

Meghan, Britain's Duchess of Sussex, has lost the latest skirmish in her privacy lawsuit against a tabloid newspaper after London's High Court ruled on Tuesday the paper could amend its case to include details from a recently published biography.

Meghan, the wife of Queen Elizabeth's grandson Prince Harry, is suing publisher Associated Newspapers over articles the Mail on Sunday printed last year that included parts of a handwritten letter she sent to her estranged father, Thomas Markle, in August 2018.



Ahead of a trial due to start next year, the Mail had applied for permission to amend its case, arguing that the couple had cooperated with a biography about them, "Finding Freedom", which was published in August.

We should change our behaviour and help in fighting the virus

The reason why we wear a mask is not only that we don't get infected, but it also helps to slow the spread of the virus and makes us less likely to transmit the virus to others. Despite initial skepticism, the consensus is that we wear them mandatorily.

Similarly, social distancing, also called physical distancing, is the other important measure suggested by health experts around the world to combat the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Other measures like personal hygiene including washing hands are done regularly, so this cannot be made mandatory, but can only be advised to be followed.

But why do some people are reluctant to wear a mask or do not bother to keep a distance while in public places? Why do people blatantly violate the laws and engage in secret meetings whether for socialising or religious purposes?

Even as our authorities are trying their best, including warnings and imposing punitive measures like fines, banning public gatherings, violations continue unabated as people



Samuel Kutty
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PHOTOS AND VIDEOS OF PEOPLE GATHERING AT BEACHES AND TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN OMAN ARE STILL MAKING ROUNDS ON DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

congregate secretly.

Photos and videos of people gathering at beaches and tourist destinations in Oman are still making rounds on different social media platforms as many concerned citizens and residents call for tougher action. Leave alone the general public, some meetings are held with participants not wearing face masks are aplenty on social media.

While people across the country are following the social distancing guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, plenty of people are not.

Last weekend at Qurum beach, I found a citizen screaming out of his car asking people to put on their masks.

"We can't get things better if we don't speak up. In these moments of uncertainty we all suddenly feel the need to police our own behaviour, but also police other people's behaviour as well," he told me after parking his car.

As restrictions have been lifted and more premises are open to the public, physical distancing and wearing of masks are as important as ever as more people interact with each other.

COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact for a prolonged period. The virus is transmitted when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and the droplets from their mouth or nose are launched into the air and land in the mouths or noses of people nearby.

Why do we forget the fact that every one of us has a role and responsibility to play in slowing the spread and protecting ourselves, our kith and kin in particular, and the society in general.

In addition to practising personal hygiene to prevent the virus, wearing masks and keeping the specified distance with others are the best tools that we can take to avoid being exposed to pandemic.

Apart from fines for non-adherence to preventive measures against COVID-19 spread, a law should be enacted making the violation of social distancing rules a criminal offence. If measures like social distancing and wearing of masks are not strictly followed, then it may lead to further spike in cases, putting pressure on the entire healthcare system as our health minister warned.

WORST CRISIS

Lebanese despair at leaders after Macron's rebuke

EDMUND BLAIR AND LAILA BASSAM

Lebanese are in despair at their sectarian leaders who have left the nation without government during the worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war that has already driven many into poverty.

Emmanuel Macron, president of Lebanon's former colonial power France who has led international efforts to offer support, also rebuked politicians after his initiative faltered when the prime minister-designate quit amid bickering for ministerial posts.

With politics deadlocked and the economy crushed by debt, Lebanon's pound took a further dive, adding to the pain of citizens, many of whom have struggled to make ends meet since the economic crisis erupted last year.

"The first thing we need is a government," said Taleb Tamer, a 31-year-old baker in Beirut, which was hammered by a devastating port blast last month that killed almost 200 people. "I have rent, household expenses and the pound is finished. God willing, they will form a government to fix the situation. But it needs time," he said.

The ruling elite have yet to signal how they will solve the crisis in a nation where politics relies on power-sharing between sects. The challenge of finding an exit deepened on Saturday when Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib, named on August 31, stood down. His efforts to form a cabinet of non-partisan ministers ran into the sand after Lebanon's two main groups, the Amal Movement and the Hezbollah, demanded that they name several ministers, including the finance post.

Lebanon, dubbed the Switzerland of the Middle East before its civil war, has been trying to rebuild since the conflict. But its plans stumbled as debts mounted amid fractious, sectarian politics that have provided fertile ground for regional rivalries.

I have rent, household expenses and the pound is finished. God willing, they will form a government to fix the situation. But it needs time
TALEB TAMER
A 31-year-old baker

NEW PHASE OF UNCERTAINTY

Unravelling of Trump policies a distant hope for separated immigrants

KRISTINA COOKE AND MICA ROSENBERG

A Venezuelan father waiting in Mexico to plead his US asylum case who has yet to meet his newborn daughter. An Iraqi refugee stuck in Jordan despite his past helping US soldiers. A mother sent back to Honduras after being separated at the US-Mexico border from her two young children. A Malian package courier deported after three decades in the United States. And an Iranian couple kept apart for years under a US travel ban.

They have all experienced firsthand the effects of Republican President Donald Trump's signature domestic policy goal in his nearly four years in office — the overhaul of the US immigration system.

A multitude of new bureaucratic hurdles to entering or staying in the United States have upended the lives of hundreds of thousands of people around the world. Trump says the changes were necessary to fix an immigration system he has characterised as broken and riddled with loopholes.

As he campaigns for a second term, immigration is once again a key plank of his platform. While immigrants have faced hurdles settling in the United States for generations and illegal immigration has bedeviled both Republican and Democratic administrations, critics contend no recent administration has moved faster and more aggressively to carry out a restrictive immigration agenda.

Now, many immigrants are in a new phase of uncertainty, waiting



Karla Anez holds her child as she poses for a photo in Chicago, Illinois. — Reuters

A MULTITUDE OF NEW BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES TO ENTERING OR STAYING IN THE US HAVE UPENDED THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

to see who will win the November presidential election — Trump, or his Democratic opponent Joe Biden. Trump plans to expand and solidify his changes to the immigration system in a second term, while Biden has vowed to undo many of them if he wins. But the sheer number of new policies mean that many people waiting in limbo are affected by not only one new Trump measure but several layered on top of each other.

Many families have been waiting

years to resolve their immigration cases, and regardless of what happens in the election, those waits are likely to drag out further.

"A lot of people have it in their mind that a Biden administration would come in and reverse everything," said Sarah Pierce, a policy analyst with the Migration Policy Institute, a Washington-based think tank, but "a lot of the policy changes were layered with the intent of making them difficult to walk back." — Reuters



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Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova makes a return to Egypt's Mayor Sherif at the Roland Garros. – AFP

PLISKOVA STRUGGLES PAST EGYPTIAN TRAILBLAZER

DJOKOVIC BEGINS FRENCH OPEN CAMPAIGN WITH EASE

PARIS: Second seed Karolina Pliskova ended Mayor Sherif's fairytale Grand Slam breakthrough to set up a Roland Garros second round clash against former champion Jelena Ostapenko on Tuesday.

Pliskova, a semifinalist in 2017, squandered eight set points in the opening set as world number 172 Sherif, the first Egyptian woman to play in the main draw at a Slam, took a shock lead.

However, the Czech's greater experience eventually told as she recovered to progress 6-7 (9/11), 6-2, 6-4.

"I think she was playing very smart today. Of course she had a lot of confidence just winning three matches from qualies," said Pliskova of her 24-year-old opponent. "She had nothing to lose."

Latvia's Ostapenko, the world 43, won her first match at the French Open since sweeping to her shock 2017 title when she fired 46 winners past Madison Brengle of the United States to win 6-2, 6-1.

"After I won here it was a tough time. I had to get used to the pressure but now it's all gone," said the 23-year-old Ostapenko.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic eyes the ball as he returns it to Sweden's Mikael Ymer. – AFP

Meanwhile, a row was brewing after French player Kristina Mladenovic suffered a controversial exit against Laura Siegemund when the German player won a point off what appeared to be a double bounce.

The incident, which came with Mladenovic 5-1 ahead and holding a set point in the opener, was missed by chair umpire Eva Asderaki.

World number 44 Mladenovic pleaded in vain and her German opponent took full advantage, racing into the next round 7-5, 6-3.

It was a second successive

miserable Grand Slam for the 27-year-old Frenchwoman who was withdrawn from the doubles at the US Open earlier this month in a row over coronavirus.

Denmark's Clara Tauson, just 17 and a qualifier, unleashed 48 winners to knock out American 21st seed and US Open semi-finalist Jennifer Brady 6-4, 3-6, 9-7.

Tauson also saved two match points on her way to a first career main draw win.

DJOKOVIC CRUISES
Novak Djokovic's bid to become

the first man in half a century to win all four Grand Slam titles twice got off to a straightforward start with a 6-0, 6-2, 6-3 victory over Sweden's Mikael Ymer.

It was the world number one's 32nd win in 33 matches in 2020, his only loss coming when he was defaulted from the US Open.

World number one Djokovic, bidding for a second French Open title and 18th career major, will play either Hugo Dellien of Bolivia or Lithuania's Ricardas Berankis for a place in the last 32.

— AFP

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (FIRST ROUND)

Christian Garin (CHI x20) bt Philipp Kohlschreiber (GER) 6-4, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4;
Marc Polmans (AUS) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 6-2, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3; Lloyd Harris (RSA) bt Alexei Popyrin (AUS) 6-4,

6-4, 7-6 (9/7); Matteo Berrettini (ITA x7) bt Vasek Pospisil (CAN) 6-3, 6-1, 6-3; Dusan Lajovic (SRB x22) bt Gianluca Mager (ITA) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-1; Kevin Anderson (RSA) bt Laslo Djere (SRB) 6-2, 6-3, 6-4;

Alejandro Davidovich (ESP) bt Harold Mayot (FRA) 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 7-5

WOMEN (FIRST ROUND)

Nao Hibino (JPN) bt Marta Kostyuk (UKR) 6-4, 6-0; Clara Tauson (DEN)

bt Jennifer Brady (USA x21) 6-4, 3-6, 9-7; Danielle Collins (USA) bt Monica Niculescu (ROU) 2-6, 6-2, 6-1; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x14) bt Sorana Cirstea (ROU) 6-0, 6-3; Irina Maria Bara (ROU) bt Donna Vekic (CRO x26)

6-3, 6-4; Alison Van Uytvanck (BEL) bt Rebecca Peterson (SWE) 2-6, 6-3, 6-1; Ana Bogdan (ROU) bt Timea Babos (HUN) 6-4, 6-2; Sofia Kenin (USA x4) bt Liudmila Samsonova (RUS) 6-4, 3-6, 6-3; Laura Siegemund (GER) bt

Kristina Mladenovic (FRA) 7-5, 6-3; Jelena Ostapenko (LAT) bt Madison Brengle (USA) 6-2, 6-1; Karolina Pliskova (CZE x2) bt Mayor Sherif (EGY) 6-7 (9/11), 6-2, 6-4

OTTA takes part in first virtual ITTF AGM



MUSCAT: The Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) took part at the ITTF AGM which was held virtually for first time ever to enable the safest possible solution amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Oman's delegation were represented by OTTA Chairman Abdullah BaMukhalef and Vice-Chairman Sajjad Mohammed Baqir.

During the virtual AGM, ITTF announced that the 2023 ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals will be staged in Durban, South Africa, after Member Associations

voted during the 2020 ITTF AGM held on September 28.

It's first time that the ITTF's most prestigious event is being held in South Africa and the first time on the African continent since Cairo, Egypt, in 1939.

The vote vindicates the new format for the ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals, coming into place in 2021, which sees continental qualification precede the Finals event, thus making it more feasible for more countries to host.

Durban won 90 votes (69.77 per

cent) to beat off competition from the other candidate city, Dusseldorf, Germany, which won 39 votes (30.23 per cent).

Dusseldorf had been bidding to stage the event again following the resounding success of the 2017 edition.

"Congratulations to both South Africa and Germany on presenting very strong bids to host the 2023 ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals. We are continuing to see benefits from the forthcoming changes to the format of the World

Championships Finals, which will be introduced from next year onwards, leading to more countries bidding from different regions of the world. This also reflects the ever-increasing international appeal of table tennis, which is extremely pleasing to see as we continue to work hard to make the sport more global in the future," Khalil al Mohannadi, ITTF Deputy President, said.

"I am obviously ecstatic. The sleepless nights and all the hard work have paid off. I want to say to Germany that their presentation was

absolutely superb. I did not want to take our success at all for granted, given all their experience, and I am certain that they will come up again (to host the World Table Tennis Championships Finals) in future. I want to thank the world of table tennis and the ITTF for entrusting us with the confidence with the team that we have, the city that we have, and the support from the government that we have to host this event. We are certain that we will make everyone who supported us extremely proud of having placed their trust in us to take

the baton forward and host a World Championships worthy of the trust that you have given us," Joe Carrim, President of the South African Table Tennis Board (SATTB), said.

ITTF Deputy President Khalil al Mohannadi, ITTF Executive Vice-President of Finance Petra Sorling, ITTF CEO Steve Dainton, ITTF Secretary General Raul Calin, ITTF Chief Financial Officer Michael Brown and ITTF Member Relations Director Mounir Bessah spoke from Doha, Qatar, to deliver messages across a number of key topics.



Sajjad Mohammed Baqir



Abdullah BaMukhalef

CONDOLENCES

The Board of Directors,
Executive Management
and all employees of

**Oman Telecommunications Company
“Omantel”**

express their deepest condolences to

**His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Sabah,
Emir of Kuwait
the Royal Family
and the people of Kuwait**

on the sad demise of

**His Highness Sheikh Sabah
Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah
*Late Emir of Kuwait***

*We pray that The Almighty will shower his mercy
upon His Highness and elevate his soul to the
highest level of paradise.*

May his soul rest in peace

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Oman’s Dhamani e-platform to connect 1,700 health care service providers

ROBUST NETWORK: The e-Health System represents the core of a comprehensive medical insurance system catering to an around 2.5 million insured private-sector employees and their dependents, as well an estimated 3.5 million visitors and tourists annually

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

An e-platform currently under development to support the roll-out of the Unified Health Insurance Scheme (Dhamani) for private-sector employees and their dependents, as well as visitors and tourists, will eventually link up an estimated 1,700 health care service providers in the Sultanate when it is fully deployed.

A contract for the establishment and operation of the e-Health System, which will integrate all of the stakeholders playing a role in the effective implementation of this mandatory health care insurance scheme, was signed by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) last week.

The platform will be developed and rolled out over a two-year



timeframe with the first phase set to be fully operational in the second half of 2021.

According to the CMA, which regulates the insurance sector alongside the capital market in the Sultanate, the Dhamani platform represents the core of a comprehensive medical insurance system catering to an estimated 2.5 million insured people in addition to 3.5 million visitors and tourists

annually.

All seven of the country’s seven licensed health care insurance services providers will be connected to the network, in addition to a number of Third Party Administrations and related service providers.

Also due to be integrated with the platform are a number of government regulatory agencies and stakeholder institutions,

including the CMA, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Royal Oman Police, and Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

More importantly, all of the estimated 1,700 businesses that form part of the health care ecosystem in the Sultanate will be connected to the e-platform. They include hospitals, polyclinics, diagnostic centres and labs,

optometrists and opticians, optical labs, radiology labs, pharmacies, medical equipment vendors, occupational therapy centres, hearing aid dispensaries, and other related service providers.

In a tweet, the CMA – which has been spearheading the implementation of the Dhamani scheme – said a proposed mobile app will make it possible for

Besides gaining full access to their coverage details and benefits, individuals can also pinpoint their nearest service provider using GPS, request quotes, make appointments via service provider networks, and request ambulance services

insured customers to access a range of services and facilities via the platform.

Besides gaining full access to their coverage details and benefits, individuals can also pinpoint their nearest service provider using GPS, request quotes, make appointments via service provider networks, and request ambulance services. Further, they can submit claims, lodge complaints and seek medical reports.

While private data will remain essentially confidential, the e-platform will help in, among other things, the accurate collation of health information, studying mortality trends and causes, prioritising health care investment and resource allocation, and evaluating the overall performance of the sector, it added.

KEY PROVISIONS

New Tax Grievance Committee to hear tax appeals

The amended Income Tax Law introduces provisions for the first time to establish the residential status of tax entities

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The newly revamped Income Tax Law, amended by Royal Decree 118/2020, mandates the establishment of a ‘Tax Grievance Committee’ to adjudicate on appeals filed by taxpayers.

According to KPMG, well-known multinational professional services firm, the Tax Grievance Committee replaces the ‘Income Tax Committee’ that has hitherto deliberated on appeals filed against the ‘objection’ decisions of the Head of the Tax Authorities. Tax appeals will also henceforth be referred to as ‘tax grievances’ under the newly amended law, the audit, tax and advisory services firm noted in an advisory circulated to clients.



“The Tax Grievance Committee shall be constituted by virtue of a decision of the Head of the Tax Authority following endorsement by the Council of Ministers. The composition of the committee continues to be the same: a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and three Members,” KPMG said, adding that the presence of two committee members in addition to the Chairman and/or Deputy Chairman will be compulsory to convene the Committee.

Significantly, a number of existing procedural provisions in

the Income Tax Law related to the committee’s hearings have been scrapped.

“Royal Decree 118/2020 provides that a decision shall be issued by the Head of the Tax Authority to specify the work procedures of the Committee, convening its sessions, deliberation and adjudication procedures and manner of notification of decisions by the Committee. A decision on these matters is awaited from the Head of the Tax Authority,” it said.

In other amendments to the

Income Tax Law, provisions have been introduced for the first time to establish the residential status of tax entities.

A ‘natural person’ is characterised as a resident of the Sultanate if they reside in the country for 183 days or more “continuously or intermittently” during the tax year in question.

A ‘juristic person,’ on the other hand, is regarded as a resident of the Sultanate if it is either incorporated in Oman in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations or if the place of effective management is in Oman.

Notably, the reference to ‘foreign person’ has been supplanted with ‘Non-Resident’ in the amended law, specifically in relation to ‘withholding tax (WHT)’ provisions.

“This would imply that a foreign individual person staying in Oman for 183 days or more would be a “Tax Resident” in Oman and accordingly, should now not be made subject to the

WHT provisions in Oman.

This is particularly relevant for passive income such as dividends or interest (which are currently under suspension until May 5, 2022),” KPMG explained.

“The concept of ‘residency’ is important to establish residence under Common Reporting Standard and also to avail benefits under tax treaties Oman has concluded,” the multinational services network further noted.

Other key amendments made to the Income Tax Law vide Royal Decree 118/2020 include enabling provisions to facilitate the Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) between tax jurisdictions.

Besides, it requires taxpayers to file only one tax return within four months from the end of the tax year. This is in place of the previous practice requiring taxpayers to file a provisional return of income within three months and an annual return of income within six months from the end of the accounting year.



Germany’s debt costs hit historic low

BERLIN: Germany expects its debt servicing costs to more than halve this year and reach their lowest level despite the government’s decision to take on record new borrowing in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lower-than-expected borrowing costs, partly enabled by the European Central Bank’s loose monetary policy, could create a windfall of several billion euros which would reduce the pressure to cut spending once the coronavirus is contained.

Chancellor Angela Merkel (pictured) have since March unleashed an unprecedented array of rescue and stimulus measures to help Europe’s largest economy recover as quickly as possible from the COVID-19 shock. — Reuters

Finance bosses prepared if Brexit ends badly

With disagreements in the talks between the EU and the UK hampering progress, the Brexit negotiators on both sides have ramped up their rhetoric around the likelihood of the UK crashing out of the European Union without a deal. For finance firms, news of such a split is nothing new. They have been preparing themselves for it ever since the referendum took place in 2016.

A poll conducted by consulting firm Ernest Young of 138 financial services heads, even as far back as July, found about 75 per cent of them said they did not expect a financial services deal would be agreed by January 2021. One of the main stumbling blocks in the talks has been the matter of equivalence.

The UK had hoped to secure a Brexit deal for financial services based on an improved version of the EU's current framework to non-members, where its regulators declare financial rules equivalent on a piecemeal basis.

Finance company executives accepted equivalence wouldn't be granted when the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, in June, accused the UK of trying "to keep as many single market benefits as it can", in spite of choosing to leave the European Union.

The EU financial services chief Valdis Dombrovskis has also since warned London finance firms that any equivalence decisions would likely not be made before the end of 2020.

A partner at law firm Clifford Chance, Simon Gleeson said: "The EU has made clear that



Andy Jalil
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THE UK HAD HOPED TO SECURE A BREXIT DEAL FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES BASED ON AN IMPROVED VERSION OF THE EU'S CURRENT FRAMEWORK TO NON-MEMBERS, WHERE ITS REGULATORS DECLARE FINANCIAL RULES EQUIVALENT ON A PIECEMEAL BASIS

its decision on equivalence and market access will be unilateral, and will not be subject to any agreement with the UK." He added: "That effectively takes financial services out of the negotiation process." The global chairman of financial regulatory practice at law firm Latham and Watkins, Rob Moulton said; "Whether you like that position or not, it is at least clear."

With the possibility of a no-equivalence Brexit, company bosses in the financial district of London hope that regulators on both sides of the argument will provide the solutions required to prevent any major upheavals after 1st January.

Regulators in the UK and EU are expected to help to ensure that financial companies in both the UK and EU can help share data with each other in case of a

no-deal Brexit.

Without regulatory intervention in case of no-deal, UK financial firms could lose access to the European markets overnight and find themselves unable to serve their EU clients from London. Gleeson said trust between regulators matters much in a no-equivalence Brexit and seemed "to be a good deal stronger between UK and EU bodies".

Moulton said the general agreement within London finance firms is that where financial regulators could solve problems arising from Brexit negotiations, they will.

The Brexit head at the UK's Financial Conduct Authority, Nausicaa Delfas said in late 2019: "There will be continuity in our relationships and agreements with regulators around the

world, and our EU relationships will remain strong." Thousands of staff in firms in the financial district of London have been tasked with preparing for a crash-out exit since the vote to leave the EU over four years ago. With Brexit just 90 days away, that preparation would now seem most convenient.

Managing director for public affairs, policy and research at trade body TheCityUK, Emma Reynolds said: "The industry has already taken significant action" for a no-deal outcome.

"This will only accelerate between now and the end of 2020." With the outcome of Brexit negotiations gradually becoming clearer, some are beginning to draw conclusions while others are still of the opinion of a last gasp deal. *(The author is our correspondent based in the UK)*

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK

Study reveals rapid growth in ETFs with exposure to ESG

KEY FINDING:
Majority of investors believe ESG can enhance performance in the long run in normal market conditions



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

More than half of institutional investors (55 per cent) believe the majority of their ESG (environmental, social and corporate governance) investments will be held in passive products such as exchange traded funds (ETFs) by 2025, according to new research study from Invesco.

Institutional investors with ESG exposure in their portfolios said that, on average, one fifth (21 per cent) of those assets are currently held in passive vehicles such as ETFs. Just under half (45 per cent) of those investors plan to increase the amount they invest in ESG ETFs over the next two years. Only 5 per cent said they plan to decrease passive exposure.

The research also found that

more than two-thirds (68 per cent) of institutional investors believe that the COVID-19 pandemic will accelerate the development and take-up of ESG investments further over the next two years.

In these unprecedented times, businesses have had to adapt in an extraordinary fashion. Employee welfare, access to healthcare, corporate culture and supply-chain sustainability are all core social ('S') ESG issues that rose to the forefront during the pandemic. Corporate response will become more vital during tumultuous times as investors look at actions and behaviours as indicators of corporate culture.

Alessio Cirillo, Sales Director at Invesco EMEA, said: "In the

Middle East, we have seen certain investor segments in the region further rethink their strategy post-COVID, as clients push to adopt ESG principles into investment processes. While climate change has been a growing concern among regional investors over the last two years, the global COVID health pandemic has really brought forward the social focus of ESG investing."

According to a separate analysis of EMEA market flow data by Invesco, ETFs incorporating ESG criteria have been growing rapidly over the last five years, from \$4 billion in assets under management (AuM) as at June 2015 to approximately \$48 billion – around 5 per cent of total AuM

In the Middle East, we have seen certain investor segments in the region further rethink their strategy post-COVID, as clients push to adopt ESG principles into investment processes

ALESSIO CIRILLO
Sales Director at Invesco EMEA

in Europe — as at the end of June 2020.

In an indication of the market focus on ESG, across the first half of 2020, \$11.5 billion of net new flows were into equity ESG products in the EMEA region, with the rest of the equity ETF market seeing net outflows on an aggregated basis, according to Bloomberg data. By comparison only around 7 per cent of the \$19 billion of net flows into fixed income ETFs over the first half of the year were into funds with ESG considerations.

Invesco's survey among

institutional investors found that half (51 per cent) believe that the majority of flows into ESG ETFs over the next 12 months will go into equity ESG ETFs with a quarter (24 per cent) believing that the majority will go into fixed income ESG ETFs. The latter is a relatively new but growing segment of the ETF market, with currently only 36 funds available in Europe, less than a third of equity ESG ETFs.

Gary Buxton, Head of EMEA ETFs and Indexed Strategies at Invesco, said: "For the growing number of investors looking for funds with ESG considerations, it is clear that ETFs are playing an increasingly central role in helping them gain exposure. Investors are often first attracted to ETFs due to their low costs and simplicity, but as we have seen so far this year, ESG ETFs have also been able to deliver on performance objectives."

Invesco, as one of the largest providers of exchange-traded funds, manages several ESG ETF products including a suite of MSCI ESG ETFs, a global equity multi-factor ESG ETF and the first Sterling corporate bond ETF in Europe that incorporates ESG criteria.

Octal wins ISO 45001 certification

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

Marking another milestone in compliance excellence, PET packaging manufacturer Octal recently achieved the ISO 45001 certification for its main site in Salalah.

The upgrade to the latest Safety Management System is a significant step forward for the company, demonstrating its proactive approach to occupational health and safety and the wellbeing of its team.

This is the latest in a string of international accreditations the company has earned as it continues to maintain exemplary standards in health and safety, while reducing the environmental impact of its industrial operations.

Robert Khoury, Site Director, Manufacturing & Supply Chain at Octal, said, "We recognise the importance of strong ethical principles and good stewardship within our business, and aim to be a role model for preventing workplace accidents and providing a healthy work environment.

The ISO 45001 certification is a testament to our commitment to site and employee safety and validates our approach of looking at risk reduction as a business process instead of a traditional standard.

In addition, it reiterates the importance of personnel and contractor engagement in ensuring the best possible working conditions and safety norms.

These are things that we are constantly improving as we seek to stay at the very top of international standards and be an organisation that people are proud to be part of."

Octal's reputation as a global leader in PET manufacturing has been driven by its strong dedication to international standards at every stage of production.

From its dedicated hub in the Sultanate's southernmost governorate of Dhofar, the company has won accolades for its stringent health, safety, security and operational policies.

BUSINESS ALERT

MUSCAT

KHIMJI'S HOUSE OF TRAVEL FACILITATES THE 100TH COMMERCIAL CHARTER FLIGHT



As the Thiruvananthapuram flight took off from Muscat this morning, Khimji's House of Travel completed the facilitation of 100 commercial charter flights. The onset of the pandemic in March created a serious situation for thousands of people who were stranded and the necessity for the charters was urgent and immediate.

Speaking on this occasion, Bhupesh Chowdary COO, Projects & Logistics Cluster of KR stated, "We thank all regulatory authorities, associations, trade partners, our airline partners, and finally our team members for their support in ensuring that all arrangements are carried out smoothly. We are also grateful that our clients trusted us completely to be able to service them during these difficult times."

MUSCAT

RENAISSANCE HELPS ORGANISATIONS ADOPT WORKPLACE SAFETY GUIDELINES

As business opened their doors and welcomed employees back to work, Renaissance Services, Oman's leading people services and facilities management company helped guide them through best practices when it comes to workplace and people safety following the COVID19 pandemic.

The campaign titled #BackToWork that was developed by Renaissance encouraged business leaders to download a best-practices guide that was made available through the company's website and social media handles during the weeks of August and September when organisations prepared to open their offices.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way organisations are functioning globally. With the new normal of work from home, remote access and virtual meetings, it is of paramount importance for companies to build a framework to help reacquaint employees back into the workplace safely," said Adil Bahwan, COO, Renaissance Services.



MUSCAT

NEXEN TIRE AND MANCHESTER CITY ANNOUNCE MOMENTOUS THIRD TERM PARTNERSHIP

Nexen Tire is proud to announce the renewal of its partnership with Manchester City Football Club — now in its third term.

This latest partnership is expected to further boost co-branding opportunities, media and marketing partnerships, and much more for both parties. Nexen Tire has been supporting Manchester City since 2015 and became the first official sleeve partner in 2017, the first announcement of its kind in the Premier League. As part of the agreement, the Nexen Tire logo will continue to appear on the left sleeve of playing shirts and expand to all available City teams and competitions. This will include both men's and women's playing kit, men's training kits, the Elite Development Squad (EDS) and eSports players.

Over the course of this strategic partnership, both parties have achieved great success and growth: Manchester City was twice crowned Premier League champions, and Nexen Tire completed its four major global R&D and production networks allowing the company to achieve its global expansion strategy.



In brief

NEW YORK

MUSK PLANS IPO FOR SPACEX’S STARLINK BUSINESS



Tesla Inc Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk (pictured) plans to list SpaceX’s space Internet venture, Starlink, several years in the future when revenue growth is smooth and predictable.

“Public market does *not* like erratic cash flow haha,” the billionaire entrepreneur tweeted here on Monday.

Musk said last year that Starlink was an important new revenue stream for his California-based Space Exploration Technologies, or SpaceX.

SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell in February floated the idea of spinning Starlink off for an IPO in the coming years.

SpaceX is racing to build out its Starlink satellite constellation to offer broadband Internet commercially by the end of 2020.

Musk, in his tweet, also said he is a “huge fan” of small retail investors and will ensure they get top priority. — AFP

MOSCOW

RUSSIA’S GAZPROM EXPECTS 2020 GAS EXPORTS TO EUROPE TO TOP 170 BILLION CM



Russian gas giant Gazprom expects its gas exports to Europe, the key source of the state-owned company’s revenue, to reach at least 170 billion cubic metres (bcm) in 2020, compared with 199 bcm in 2019, a company manager said on Tuesday.

Gazprom is facing challenges in the European gas market, where it accounts for a third of the region’s supplies, which also include Norwegian gas and sea-borne liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports from the US.

Sergei Komlev, in charge of pricing at Gazprom’s exporting arm, also told an online conference that the company’s average gas price in Europe is expected to be close to \$130 per thousand cubic metres this year.

Natural gas exports from Gazprom to Europe, including Turkey, fell 18 per cent in the first half of the year to 78.94 bcm as gas demand was depressed by the coronavirus crisis. The decline in exports to Turkey has been particularly pronounced, at more than 40 per cent.

Komlev said the company expects its gas exports to Turkey to rise, but the subsequent increase is unlikely to offset the previous decline by the end of this year.

Gazprom started gas supplies to China in December via the Power of Siberia pipeline. It plans to raise gas exports to the country to 38 bcm by 2025 and has been in talks with China on additional gas supplies via other routes. — Reuters

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vietnam’s growth climbs, resisting global downturn

HANOI: Vietnam’s economic growth picked up in the third quarter, boosted by a rally in exports as the country slowly emerges from a virus-induced slowdown.

Vietnam has long been one of Asia’s fastest growing economies, and it is heavily reliant on exports, particularly after reaping the benefits of a trade spat between Washington and Beijing over the past two years.

With much of the world economy effectively shut down for long periods in the first and second quarter, gross domestic product expanded just 0.36 per cent on-year in April-May, though that was better than most countries which suffered painful contractions.

But the General Statistics Offices said on Tuesday the economy grew 2.62 per cent in July-September.

The figure was helped by a surge in exports, which were up

The figure was helped by a surge in exports, which were up

34 per cent from the previous quarter, and 11 per cent up on-year

34 per cent from the previous quarter, and 11 per cent up on-year.

However, the growth reading was still the slowest for a third quarter in nearly a decade.

“In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which seriously affects all socio-economic aspects of countries across the world, this is a great success for our country in disease prevention, economic recovery and development,” the GSO added in a statement.

Oil falls as virus count mounts

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Tuesday as Europe and the United States grappled with a surge in new coronavirus infections and investors were cautious ahead of the first US presidential debate.



A pump attendant refuels a car at a gas station in Beijing. — Reuters

Brent’s November contract, which expires on Wednesday, fell 11 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$42.32 per barrel by 1023 GMT. The more-active Brent crude for December fell 12 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$42.75 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude fell 13 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$40.47 a barrel.

More than one million people have died of COVID-19 worldwide as of Tuesday, according to a tally, a bleak milestone in a pandemic that has devastated the global economy and fuel demand.

“Rising numbers of new corona cases in the United States and Europe are limiting the upside potential (for oil prices),” said Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch.

The heads of the world’s largest trading houses predicted tepid oil demand recovery and flat prices due to the coronavirus pandemic in coming months and possibly even years.

Investors will be looking for signs of growth in US demand from American Petroleum Institute data on Tuesday and from the Energy Information Administration on Wednesday. — Reuters

Former IMF chief Rato acquitted in Spain bank trial



Rodrigo Rato gestures during a news conference in Madrid, in this file photo. — Reuters

Rato, 71, who led the International Monetary Fund from 2004 to 2007, led the merger in 2010 of Caja Madrid, which he headed at the time, and six other struggling regional savings banks into Bankia

MADRID: A Spanish court on Tuesday acquitted former International Monetary Fund chief Rodrigo Rato and all other defendants of fraud and falsifying the books during the botched 2011 floatation of Spain’s Bankia, a symbol of the country’s banking crisis.

The National Court, which handles major criminal cases, said the bank’s stock listing had received approvals “from all necessary institutions”.

The listing was very popular with small investors, who lost their shirts when the state had to nationalise the bank the following year and inject 22 billion euros (\$25.7 billion) to keep it from collapsing at a time when the Spanish economy was mired in crisis.

That in turn prompted the state to borrow 41 billion euros from the European Union to keep the rest of Spain’s banking sector afloat as investor confidence had been shaken.

Rato, 71, who led the International Monetary Fund from 2004 to 2007, led the merger in 2010 of Caja Madrid, which he headed at the time, and six other struggling regional savings banks into Bankia.

The image of a smiling Rato ringing the bell and sipping champagne on July 20, 2011 to mark the start of Bankia’s listing has since become a symbol of the scandal.

More than 300,000 small shareholders bought share packages for a minimum of 1,000 euros, attracted by a major advertising campaign and the profits boasted by the bank.

But in 2012, after a disastrous year that saw its share price collapse, the bank admitted that in the year it listed, it had actually made a loss of close to three billion euros.

Rato, head of the bank at the time, was accused of falsifying the books and fraud to the detriment of investors. He faced a jail

sentence of eight and a half years if he had been convicted.

The 31 other people and entities also on trial, among them Bankia, were also cleared.

In its ruling, the court said the prospectus for the listing contained “more than sufficient information for investors... to form a reasoned opinion on the value of the company” and contained a “comprehensive and clear description of the risks”.

It also argued that the procedure which led to Bankia’s listing was “intensely and successfully supervised” by the Bank of Spain and financial market authorities which approved it.

During the trial, Rato said Spain’s central bank was fully aware of everything that went on at the lender.

“The Bank of Spain would tell us ‘do this, do that’. And if at some point we did something they didn’t feel was good, it said no,” he told the court.

A group of activists dubbed “15MpaRato”, which launched one of the first lawsuits that led to the trial, called the ruling “shameful” and said the listing was a “scam”.

Both sides have five days to appeal the ruling. — AFP

THE AMISH MODEL

France puts 5G mobile frequencies on the block

PARIS: France on Tuesday began to auction off radio frequencies for the deployment of ultrafast 5G mobile technology, a process that will add billions of euros to the government’s depleted coffers.

Operators Orange, SFR, Bouygues Telecom and Free are bidding for 11 frequency blocks that are currently unused, with the aim of offering 5G services in some French cities by the end of the year.

The fifth-generation successor to 4G technology promises radically quicker transfers of data, heralding major changes to an array of products and services from self-driving cars to remote surgery.

France was to launch the sale of the frequencies in April, but postponed the auction because of the COVID-19 crisis.

France is lagging behind other countries that have already launched 5G services, with South Korea and China the most advanced.

More than a dozen EU countries



A man speaks in his phone while the Eiffel Tower is seen in Paris. — Reuters

have also started operating 5G services, but none as developed as the Asian frontrunners.

Activists and leftwing lawmakers in France have tried to halt the 5G rollout because of health and environmental concerns, but President Emmanuel Macron’s government has pressed on regardless.

Macron, eager to cast France as a start-up nation embracing cutting-edge technologies, this month even derided 5G opponents as wanting to impose “the Amish model.”

He said “France is going to pursue the shift to 5G because it’s the shift towards innovation.”

The government expects to

Everybody knows that this is extremely important for the economic recovery and for the future of the industry

CEDRIC O
France Digital Minister

make at least 2.2 billion euros (\$2.6 billion) from the sale, a welcome windfall at a time when it is throwing all its financial firepower into the fight to limit the coronavirus pandemic’s economic fallout.

The deployment is also seen as a crucial boost for French industry, under pressure from new restrictions curbing economic activity.

“Everybody knows that this

is extremely important for the economic recovery and for the future of the industry,” Digital Minister Cedric O told Europe 1 radio on Tuesday.

The main auction for frequencies is scheduled to last for 10 days, after which a second auction will determine the exact positioning of operators on each band, with the centre of bands less prone to interference than the edges.

One complicating factor is the heavy restrictions placed on the use of equipment by Huawei, which some governments, especially the US, suspect of potentially helping China eavesdrop on western networks.

The absence of the Chinese behemoth, considered by many experts to produce the most advanced 5G equipment for the best price, will force SFR and Bouygues Telecom especially to switch to rival suppliers Ericsson and Nokia, a move requiring a big revision of their investment plans. — AFP



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Kenya harnesses fly larvae's appetite to process food waste

Rotten bananas? Mushy avocados? Pulped oranges? Talash Huijbers wants them all.

The 25-year-old is the founder of Insectipro, a Kenyan farm rearing black soldier fly larvae for animal feed. In the 10 days it takes for them to grow, the larvae need to be fed too - and fruit waste from factories and food markets in the capital Nairobi is just the thing.

"We take all the green waste in Nairobi and we turn it into something of high value, animal protein," said Huijbers at their farm in Limuru, 28 kilometres (17 miles) from Nairobi. "From waste to gold."

Every day, the farm processes around 20 to 30 tonnes per day of fruit waste and produces 2 and 2.5 tonnes of larvae, which are then dried and turned into animal feed. Any remaining waste is used as manure, some of it on the farm, and the rest is sold to farmers in neighbouring farms.

The firm is the biggest in a wave of investment into larvae farming, seen as a lucrative and environmentally friendly way to dispose of organic waste and generate the animal feed as concern rises over environmental pollution and sustainable eating.

"The end product of the waste goes to produce crops. And then the larvae that you get goes in to feed our livestock," said Chrysantus Mbi



Tanga, a research scientist at the Nairobi-based International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE).

The institute has trained 2,000 black soldier fly farmers in Kenya in the past year and a half, but almost all are small operations. Insectipro, which began with an investment of \$850,000 two years ago, is the biggest. They will have their first profit before the end of the year, Huijbers said.

The company says it can't keep up with orders and hopes

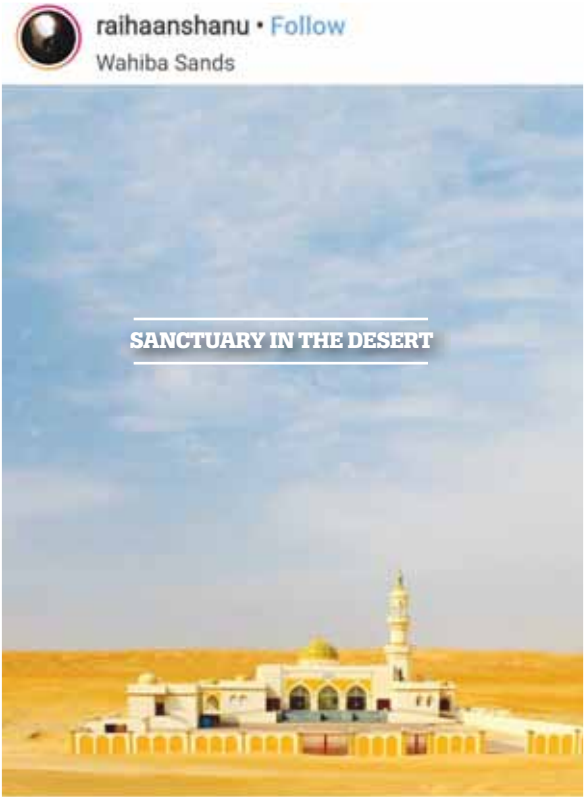
Every day, the farm processes around 20 to 30 tonnes per day of fruit waste and produces 2 and 2.5 tonnes of larvae, which are then dried and turned into animal feed

to double or triple production by the end of the year when it gets a bigger dryer.

Now Insectipro is researching the production of chitin, a byproduct of the black soldier fly's pupa as it turns into an adult. The pharmaceutical industry uses it in compounds for dressing wounds.

"The anti-microbial properties, anti-fungal, anti-bacterial properties, when you put them in wounds, it helps to eliminate these bacteria that are causing decay," Tanga said. — **Reuters**

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FASHION

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Thailand's 'rule breaker' school uniforms challenge tradition



In Thai classrooms, showing a rebellious or creative streak through what you wear is difficult. School uniform rules are strict, down to how pupils' hair should be cut and the type of socks and shoes they are allowed to wear. But as students around the country push back against what they call archaic rules and join a broader pro-democracy movement, a young clothing designer is throwing his support behind them in a colourful way. Tin Tunsopon has taken the typical uniform of pleated skirts and white sailor shirts for girls and neat shorts and white shirts for boys and blown them up into exaggerated versions with huge collars and sleeve ruffles made from shoe laces. "By re-creating these

uniforms and giving them various designs...people can see that we should no longer be attached to the (traditional) uniforms anymore," 23-year-old Tin said. The clothing line labelled the 'rule breakers' was launched in collaboration with the Wacoal lingerie brand in June with prices ranging from \$100 to a top end of \$475, for a long pleat skirt with a big bow. Tin said they are designed for "modern day girls, who are not afraid to express themselves and move with confidence". "The uniforms break away from the traditional forms, although still resembles a uniform... I want to support kids to be as creative as they can," said Tin. Tin has named his label 'Post-Thesis', a nod to his

The clothing line labelled the 'rule breakers' was launched in collaboration with the Wacoal lingerie brand in June with prices ranging from \$100 to a top end of \$475.

graduation project at Bangkok University, where he examined the purpose of uniforms and how they can be changed. The rebellious movement sweeping through Thai high schools has been dubbed "Bad Student" by its leaders. Students have worn white ribbons, publicly hacked off their hair and made "Hunger Games" salutes in a bid to shake up the country's rigid education system. — Reuters

DISCOVERY



Colombian miners strike fossilised gold: A mastodon

BOGOTA: Fossils of a mastodon, a giant pre-historic relative of today's elephants, have been discovered at an artisanal gold mine in central Colombia in a find which researchers say could herald a trove of similar specimens. Gold miners working a tunnel near the town

what they were like and how they lived, and if humans lived alongside them." Experts study the mastodon remains and remove those still inside the mine, where a complete tusk measuring 1 metre 10 centimetres (3.5 feet) long can still be seen.



of Quinchia, in Risaralda province, came across what they soon realised were bones on Tuesday. The discovery is the first of its kind in the province but mastodon remains have also been found in Cundinamarca and Valle del Cauca provinces, as well as along Colombia's Atlantic coast, said Carlos Lopez, an anthropologist at a university in Risaralda's capital Pereira. "These animals attract attention due to their large size — a giant bone doesn't go unnoticed," Lopez said. "It really takes us in a time machine... to think about

"They sent us some photos, which we sent to expert anthropologists in the area and they determined they belonged to megafauna... that died out between 2 million and 10,000 years ago," said Julio Gomez, director of the regional environmental authority for Risaralda. The discovery could herald similar finds in the region. "More (remains) could be found," Lopez said. "These animals lived in herds, they didn't live alone, a little like the herds of elephants we see in Africa today." — Reuters



■ CONSERVATION

Booklet on raptors of Oman to bolster conservation and public engagement

BY YERU EBUEN

Sooty Falcons breed in north coastal Oman and on the Daymaniyat and Fahal Islands. Steppe Eagles visit Oman in the winter, having migrated from breeding areas, mostly in central Asia. Lappet-faced vultures are the largest breeding bird in Oman and can range over thousands of square kilometres in search of food. Egyptian vultures, sacred to ancient Egyptians, scavenge on small remains of meat, rubbish and food scraps and can be often found in dumpsites and landfills. Ospreys dive under water to catch fish while golden eagles drop tortoises and hedgehogs from high in the air to break and eat them. These are just some of the tidbits of information that can be found in the recently released booklet by the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) titled “Raptors of Oman”.

Continuing to raise awareness on the Sultanate’s unique environmental heritage, the booklet is available online for free, and offers an introduction to the various raptors, or birds of prey, found in Oman, their diet, status and ways to identify them. Written in both English and Arabic, it includes fun illustrations to appeal to children. Made possible with proceeds from the ‘Wild Oman’ art exhibition by Violet Astor, this booklet is part of ESO’s efforts to engage the public and bolster Oman’s conservation commitment to the important raptors that live here seasonally or year-round.

CHAMPIONING RAPTOR CONSERVATION

Other than the six raptors mentioned, the booklet also include details about the Steppe eagle, the Bonelli’s Eagle, the Verreaux’s Eagle, the Eastern Imperial Eagle, the Western Marsh Harrier and the common kestrel. These are the raptors that are identified and some

habits are known which is why details were given about their habits, preferences etc. There are more than 28 others that live and visit in Oman but these raptors are more difficult to see and study. Maïa Sarrouf Willson, Research and Conservation Manager at ESO, said, “The Sultanate is a stronghold for several raptors whose declining populations are a cause for concern, several of which are listed as endangered or vulnerable on the International Union

for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.” She added, “Our research work continues to focus on ensuring their survival and resources like this booklet are important ways to transmit knowledge and love for these magnificent birds, and ultimately, contribute to their conservation.” She said, “We have collaborated with the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group to ensure it reaches a wider and diversified audience.” Contributor Dr Michael McGrady, Director of International Avian Research, shared, “Global threats to raptors are varied, and include habitat loss and degradation, changes in food availability, human disturbance and persecution, and illegal trafficking. Climate change is likely to affect raptors, too.” He specified, “In Oman, disturbance, persecution, electrocution, decline in prey populations and food availability, and inadvertent poisoning are the main threats. As they play a key role in the eco-system, the

protection of these species is not only important to Oman, but to the rest of the world.” ESO summarised that around 39 species of raptors occur in Oman, either as residents or visitors, including the Egyptian Vulture, the Steppe Eagle, the Lappet-faced Vulture, the Saker Falcon, the Sooty Falcon, the Eastern Imperial Eagle and the Greater Spotted Eagle. They explained that 11 species are featured in detail in the booklet, with photos and illustrations. The other 28 species are listed in a table format along with their status in Oman and their IUCN conservation status. The booklet is part of a wider campaign from ESO, which includes field surveys, satellite tracking and outreach activities. A panel discussion with prominent raptor experts was organised online to launch the booklet. To view the 40-page booklet along with a downloadable poster, visit http://eso.org.om/UserFiles/files/RaptorsBooklet_Online.pdf

The booklet is part of a wider campaign from ESO, which includes field surveys, satellite tracking and outreach activities.

features

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Booklet on raptors of Oman to bolster conservation and public engagement

Written in both English and Arabic, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) has released a new booklet, 'Raptors of Oman' to engage the public and bolster Oman's conservation commitment to the important raptors that live in the country seasonally or year-round... **P19**



Photo by Sreenivasan TP

DAILY PICKS

HUMAN INTEREST



KENYA HARNESSES FLY LARVAE'S APPETITE TO PROCESS FOOD WASTE

Rotten bananas? Mushy avocados? Pulped oranges? Talash Huijbers wants them all. The 25-year-old is the founder of Insectipro, a Kenyan farm rearing black soldier fly larvae for animal feed. ... Story on **Page 17**

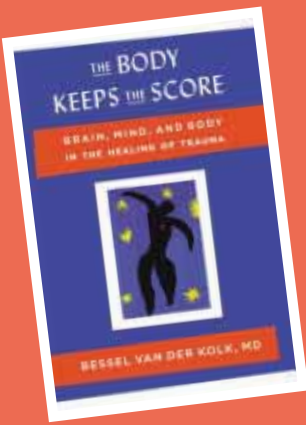
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Established by the International Federation of Translators, the International Translation Day pays tribute to the important work that translators do in breaking the language barriers and allowing the easy flow of information and literature. To celebrate today, learn some basic words from another language and try using it in a conversation.