



10-page supplement on India's 74th Independence Day with today's edition

His Majesty greets presidents of India, South Korea

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik congratulated Ram Nath Kovind, President of India, on the anniversary of the independence of his country. In his greetings, His Majesty the Sultan also wished good health and happiness to President Kovind and the friendly Indian people further progress and prosperity.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik also congratulated the President of the Republic of Korea on the anniversary of the independence of his country. In his greetings, His Majesty the Sultan wished President Moon Jae-in good health and happiness and to the friendly Korean people further development and advancement. — **ONA**

DUSK-TO-DAWN LOCKDOWN ENDS TODAY

KABEER YOUSUF/ONA

MUSCAT: The week-long dusk-to-dawn lockdown to contain the coronavirus spread will end on Saturday, the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 tweeted on Friday. The committee thanked the citizens and people for their support of the lockdown. These include social distancing, wearing face masks and temperature checking in shops. The people must also adhere to personal hygiene measures such as washing hands with soap and sanitisers, and refraining from social gatherings. **TURN TO P2**

Oman supports historic joint declaration

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the joint declaration between the UAE, the United States and Israel in a statement on Friday.

“An official spokesperson at the Foreign Ministry expressed the Sultanate of Oman's support for the decision of the United Arab Emirates regarding relations with Israel within the framework of the historic joint declaration between the UAE, the United States and Israel. The Sultanate hopes that this will contribute to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, in a way that serves aspirations of the peoples of the region in sustaining the pillars of security and stability and advancing the causes of progress and prosperity for all”. — **ONA**

DIGITAL DETOX

MAŁGORZATA PIECHOWICZ - PIETRUSZKA

You have probably already noticed how quickly in recent months many aspects of our lives have become Internet-dependent and extensively saturated with online services. The line between work and family life, study and rest is becoming increasingly blurry. And that perhaps is slowly getting its toll on your mental and physical health. Thankfully, there are some strategies, often referred to as digital detox, that help to deal with the information overload. Similarly to a juice cleanse for example, the best effects are achieved when we practise them regularly.

Phone-free zones
Making a conscious effort to truly be with our loved ones without constant phone checking for social media messages is crucial for any family's well-being. A dinner eaten and time spent at the table where there are no screens is of an entirely different quality to the one hectically consumed while scrolling down an instafeed. Also, our bedrooms should become the sanctuaries for our ever more tired minds and bodies, with no place for any kind of screens. It is proven that blue light effectively blocks a hormone called melatonin (the one responsible for making us sleepy) and upsets our sleep.

JOMO is better
Either it is a few hours, days or a week,



THE LINE BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY LIFE, STUDY AND REST IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY BLURRY. AND THAT PERHAPS IS SLOWLY GETTING ITS TOLL ON YOUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

and no matter how inconceivable it may sound at first, regular offline periods should become a part of our mental hygiene. The notion of FOMO - the fear of missing out - seems to be prevailing especially among young people who feel instantly stressed and distraught when not being able to check their social media. Why not try JOMO - the joy of missing out. It is now evident that in the age of constant movement sitting still and paying attention became a scarce skill. **TURN TO P2**

TRENDS



No takers despite lower rents

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: As fears in the job market and slowdown in businesses mount, small-time landlords say they are the worst hit either by way of vacant flats or reduced rent amount.

Already hit by supply-demand imbalance, their woes have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic effects.

“Leave alone the fall in rents, there are no takers even for brand new flats at less than 50 per cent of the rental value,” said Hamoud al Wahaibi, who owns a few flats in Ruwi.

The rental market, already flooded with new properties, is further hit by the en masse departure of expatriates as a result of the COVID-19 impact.

“This is equally as difficult a time for landlords or property investors as it is

for tenants. Still, some landlords are supporting those tenants who are financially affected due to the pandemic situation with reduced or delayed payments,” said Darwish Abubaker, manager for a contracting firm. Unlike large real estate companies that own multiple rental buildings, the so-called ‘mom and pop’ landlords cannot afford to keep their flats empty as most of these buildings are mortgaged to banks against loans.

“Three out of a total of eight flats in my apartment are vacant as the tenants left for their home countries. Two of them have not returned. There are no takers even though I reduced the rent by more than 50 per cent,” said Suleiman al Maskari.

He fears he may default on his bank loan — with which the building was constructed — if the situation continues. The Central Bank of Oman

in April allowed a three-month moratorium on payment of installments of loans in view of the coronavirus outbreak.

The woes of Hameed al Hadhrami, who lives in Izki, are different from other landlords.

“The building that is rented out in Muscat is our ancestral property. The income from the building, which is our livelihood, is shared by four seven of us including our sisters. For the last four months tenants are not paying full amount,” he said.

The worst hit are landlords who own three to four bedroom flats.

“Many expat families are shifting to small flats to cut expenses necessitated by reduced salaries or other reasons. Owners of high net worth buildings are finding difficulty in getting tenants,” said Rashid al Mubarak.

DIGITAL DETOX
FROM PAGE 1
No Wi-Fi holidays

‘No Wi-Fi holidays’ is a rapidly growing trend which shows that more and more people need and look for disconnection. Perhaps it is because ignoring work-related e-mails as well as constant social media notifications is a learning process that requires some strong willpower, that unfortunately not all of us have. Constant connectivity in the long run proves to be quite

draining and causes disharmony between our mind and soul.

Each of us, members and participants of the digital era can create their own ‘coping measures’, as I strongly believe humanity will be in the unprecedented need of in the nearest future. To calm a racing mind may soon become one of the priorities in keeping the current worldwide mental crisis at bay. In the end, nobody can argue that ‘a mind at rest is a mind at its best’.

DUSK-TO-DAWN
LOCKDOWN ENDS
TODAY
FROM PAGE 1

The people must also adhere to personal hygiene measures such as washing hands with soap and sanitisers, and refraining from social gatherings.

Meanwhile, the Sultanate’s recovery rates shot up by 93.6 per cent with a total of 77,427 infected people recovering from COVID-

19 while the total number of positive COVID-19 cases reached 82,743.

The Ministry of Health reported 212 new cases and six deaths on Friday. The total number of COVID-19 deaths stood at 557.

The ministry said 49 patients were admitted for treatment over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of hospitalised COVID-19 patients stands at 425, of which 153 are in intensive care units.

INFLUENCERS AS TEACHERS

LIJU CHERIAN

What did social media influencers do during lockdown? *Observer Weekend* caught up with a few of the leading lifestyle influencers in the Sultanate

Sharifa al Busaidi@sharifa_the_foodie

Lockdown is ideal for becoming creative in the kitchen and sharing cooking videos and recipes. This blogger did her best to encourage followers to step out of their comfort zones and experiment with something new.

Her posts helped realise the importance of meal planning during lockdown, and ensured that everything was done on time before lockdown began.

Sharifa believes her biggest influence has been on home business owners. She spent time in reviewing and promoting food that has been prepared by them as this was the ideal time to thrive despite the difficult circumstances.



Rosh Khanzada:@rosh_o_rama



She tried to spread awareness about the importance of wearing masks and using disinfectants along with light hearted humour. Rosh created content that relates to regular people which helps lift their spirits to be safe and responsible.

Her posts were about how to travel in and around Oman while maintaining social distancing and having a good time.

The pandemic drastically changed a lot for many. Rosh says this is not the time to brag or be ostentatious, rather a time to spread messages of love and hope.

During lockdown her cooking skills improved thanks to Pinterest which helped her out with some amazing recipes. They also started performing family yoga regularly which helped a lot to maintain sanity in these weird times.

Saleha Haroon:@thefancyblogger

As a food, fashion and mom blogger she shares the highlights of her everyday life on social media.

Saleha says it was challenging to come up with unique ideas but as an influencer, it is her responsibility to be positive. "We are all in this together and I strongly believe that with patience and hope we will get through this."



She made a strong connection with her followers who closely relate to her posts. She also has been sharing the current struggles in a very quirky way and adopted an honest approach.

Her main focus has been concentrating on activities to keep the kids busy as well as engage them in household chores.

Her quarantine recipes made many discover their inner chefs. From dressing up for a mini balcony vacation to presenting the current crisis in a positive light, her posts inspired many.

Rachel George:@itsrachelgeorge

Through lockdown ups and downs, Rachel tried to be as open on her platform as she could to show how even she has been taking it day-by-day. Her followers would inform how her posts were light, airy and a refreshing sight. She felt an added responsibility to be the kind of influence that promoted empathy, acceptance and gratefulness. She has tried and reiterated how it is acceptable to be not okay, but at the same time give it all to find the hope and strength to carry on.



Aleeza Hasan:@WanderingMumDiaries



The lockdown turned millennials into home chefs or bakers and pursued passions that were dormant.

Aleeza refocused her attention into creating content that centred on positive changes in lifestyle.

She believes it is her responsibility to deliver content that is relatable and uplifting, taking the altruistic route to find ways to get through the crisis with constructive suggestions.

She has pivoted to products and services that make sense for the 'new normal' of a quieter life at home. People's desire to engage with content that is authentic has fostered a new relationship with her audience and helped them connect better.

From trending Dalgona coffee and living room workouts she spent much time together with family. Their maiden 1,000 piece puzzle will be framed for posterity as '2020 lockdown memories.'

REVIEW

Ancient tales retold-2

The events of this legend take place in Yemen before Islam at the end of the Himyarite's reign (round 525 AD). The kingdom of Saba' (Sheba in English) was famous for being a prosperous nation of traders, controlling the routes of the frankincense and spice in Arabia and Ethiopia.

Saba' was also famous for its dam that controlled the flow of the river Arim and irrigated their capital Ma'rib. Many considered it an engineering wonder of the ancient world. So, what's the story behind the famous dam breach that caused its destruction and the scatter of Saba'? The story starts with Tareefa the soothsayer who had a bad dream. In it she saw a huge cloud that spread over Yemen and was bursting with thunder and lightning that burned everything under it. She woke up terrified and decided to head straight to the king to share her vision. On her way to the palace accom-



Rasha al Raisi

panied by her servant Sinan, she saw three gerbils standing on their hind legs and covering their eyes with their tiny feet.

Tareefa sat nearby and followed suit, covering her eyes with her hands and ordering Sinan to inform her when they stop. When he did, she continued her way to the palace to find a turtle flipped on its shell, trying to get back to its feet by pushing its tail on the ground and causing a mess.

Tareefa watched anxiously till the turtle finally succeeded in her mission and got back to the water. The soothsayer reached the King's palace and was at once admitted to his presence. She shared her dream and the signs she saw on her way that only had one explanation: an inevi-

table catastrophe. She ordered the king to go to the dam at once and watch out for the rats. If he finds them digging the dam and rolling down great boulders, then her prophecy would be fulfilled.

When the king saw her prediction, he went back to her and asked when the flood would hit. Tareefa estimated it to be within seven years. Much later, the king also had a dream of the flood and decided to flee the kingdom with his family, leaving the rest of his subjects behind to face their own fate. Afraid of being judged by his cowardice, he orchestrated a sly exit and invited everyone to a feast. He ordered his son Malik to pick an argument with him while feasting and imitate every move he did.

When the king slapped

his son to be slapped back, his innocuous subjects begged him to forgive the wrongdoing. Seizing the golden opportunity, the king announced that he'll go away and sell his possessions to whoever interested. After the sale and being gnawed by guilt, the king decided to share the news of the flood prediction. The subjects beseeched the wisdom of his brother Imran the soothsayer who recommended countries that they could flee to. So out of the ten tribes that fled Yemen, six settled in the Gulf region (including the Azd tribe in Oman and the Aws and Khazraj in Saudi) and the rest went to Iraq and Levant. The flood of Arim caused the displacement of 50,000 people around the Arabian Peninsula. It was mentioned in the Holy Quran in the Sura of Sa'ba as a reminder of being grateful to God's blessings at all times. Next week, I'll be relating another legend that involves a great queen and a cunning man.

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#Living_with_COVID19

SOCIETY

Asian cities virus-proof public transit with smart shelters, thermal scanners



A woman at a glass-covered bus stop in which a thermal imaging camera, UV steriliser, AC, CCTV and digital signage are set, to avoid the spread of COVID-19 in Seoul, South Korea.. — Reuters

RINA CHANDRAN

Taking a bus or the subway? Not without first checking your temperature in a smart shelter or touch-free kiosk.

From Delhi to Seoul, authorities have introduced mobile apps, temperature-check kiosks and smart bus shelters to make public transit safer as offices and businesses open after lockdowns to control the novel coronavirus.

Seoul's Seongdong-gu district this week rolled out 10 bus shelters powered by solar energy, and equipped with ultraviolet sterilisers and thermal imaging cameras that check temperatures.

Ten more such shelters are planned.

"The Smart Shelters were introduced so that residents can experience technology in their daily lives. It is an inclusive service that everyone can benefit from", a spokesman for Chong Won-O, Mayor of Seongdong-gu, said in e-mailed comments.

In Singapore, touch-free kiosks with thermal sensors at busy bus stops and train stations allow passengers to check their temperature before boarding. A green light indicates they are free from fever, while an orange light shows a high temperature.

The kiosks will be rolled out in 70 locations in the city, according to the

Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, which is involved in the project.

While temperature screening at public transit points is not mandatory, the kiosks "encourage the public to remain vigilant by monitoring their temperature before commuting", a spokesman said.

In China and in Delhi, commuters must show that they are symptom-free with a mobile health app before boarding the subway, flights and to enter some offices.

While digital rights experts say these technologies raise the risk of surveillance and exclude marginalised populations who do not have smartphones,

authorities have said they are necessary to keep people safe.

"For as long as COVID-19 lurks in the community, we should expect measures that not only keep people as safe as possible from contagion, but also reassure them about the safety of the environment", said Marion Terrill, Director of the Transport and Cities Programme at the Grattan Institute in Melbourne.

"Even with distancing, hygiene and safety measures in place, though, many people will still avoid public transport. I expect to see a greater share of trips by car, as well as by cycling and walking", she said.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

Hard-hit countries step up virus measures as cases mount



New Zealand has now detected a cluster of 30 virus cases. — AFP

LONDON/WASHINGTON: Countries among the hardest hit by the coronavirus unveiled further control measures on Friday to battle rising cases, hitting summer tourism and aspects of everyday life around the globe.

The US Department of Homeland Security said it was extending a ban on non-essential travel through border crossings with Canada and Mexico throughout most of September “to slow the spread” of the disease.

The United States has suffered the most deaths at 167,253, fol-

lowed by Brazil with 105,463, Mexico 55,293 and India with 48,040.

Confirmed cases in France reached levels not seen since May on Wednesday and Thursday, at over 2,500 new cases per day.

Neighbouring Spain said it would close all nightclubs and ban smoking in the street where people are unable to stay at a safe distance, after the country reported almost 3,000 cases in 24 hours on Thursday.

“Personally I think it’s stupid, it’s over the top”, Madrid-based translator Julien Garcia said

about the smoking ban.

In Germany, the Robert Koch Institute for disease control added all of Spain except the Canary Islands to its list of regions where incoming travellers must show a negative test for COVID-19 or quarantine for 14 days.

Austria urged its citizens to return from popular Mediterranean destination Croatia before similar rules come into effect on Monday, while Serbia introduced mandatory testing for travellers from four neighbouring countries.

— AFP

WORLD LEADERS PRAISE ISRAEL-UAE DEAL

TEL AVIV: World leaders voiced hope on Friday that a historic deal between the UAE and Israel could kick-start moribund Middle East peace talks, even as the Palestinians and some of their supporters denounced the move to normalise ties as a betrayal of their cause.

Announced by US

President Donald Trump on Thursday, it was only the third such accord Israel has struck with an Arab country, and raised the prospect of similar deals with other Gulf states.

The deal sees Israel pledge to suspend its planned annexation of Palestinian lands, a concession welcomed by

European and some Arab governments as a boost for hopes of peace.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed Israel was not abandoning its plans to one day annex the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements across the occupied West Bank.

— AFP

IN BRIEF

Chinese shoppers wary of frozen food imports

BEIJING/SHANGHAI: Chinese shoppers on Friday expressed dismay at news that traces of the coronavirus had been found on imported frozen food, with some saying they would avoid the products. Two cities in China on Thursday found the virus in frozen chicken wings imported from Brazil and shrimp from Ecuador, raising public concern even though the World Health Organization downplayed the risk of the virus entering the food chain. Shanghai resident Wang Chao said he would go for more local foods now. “I won’t choose imported products, because right now the epidemic situation abroad is more serious than in China.” — Reuters

Kabul frees 80 of 400 Taliban prisoners

KABUL: The Afghan government has begun releasing the last Taliban prisoners from a final batch of 400 who the militants want freed before they agree to start peace negotiations, a security agency spokesman said on Friday. The government agreed on Sunday to release the 400 “hard-core” prisoners after consulting a grand assembly of elders and other community leaders, known as a Loya Jirga. “The government... yesterday released 80 Taliban convicts out of the 400 that the Consultative Loya Jirga sanctioned for release to speed up efforts for direct talks and a lasting, nationwide ceasefire,” said Javid Faisal, spokesman for the National Security Council. — Reuters

India’s virus toll reaches 48,040

NEW DELHI: India has overtaken Britain as the country with the fourth-highest number of deaths linked to Covid-19 in the world, according to data released by the Ministry of Health on Friday. A total of 1,007 deaths were reported on Thursday, taking the country-wide death toll to 48,040. This places India behind the United States, Brazil and Mexico, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). India, a country of 1.3 billion people, also reported 64,553 new infections on Thursday. This takes its total of people infected by the coronavirus to 2.46 million. — dpa

WORLD

Britons rush home from France to beat new quarantine rules

UK brings in 14-day quarantine for France, Netherlands, Malta

LONDON/CALAIS, France:

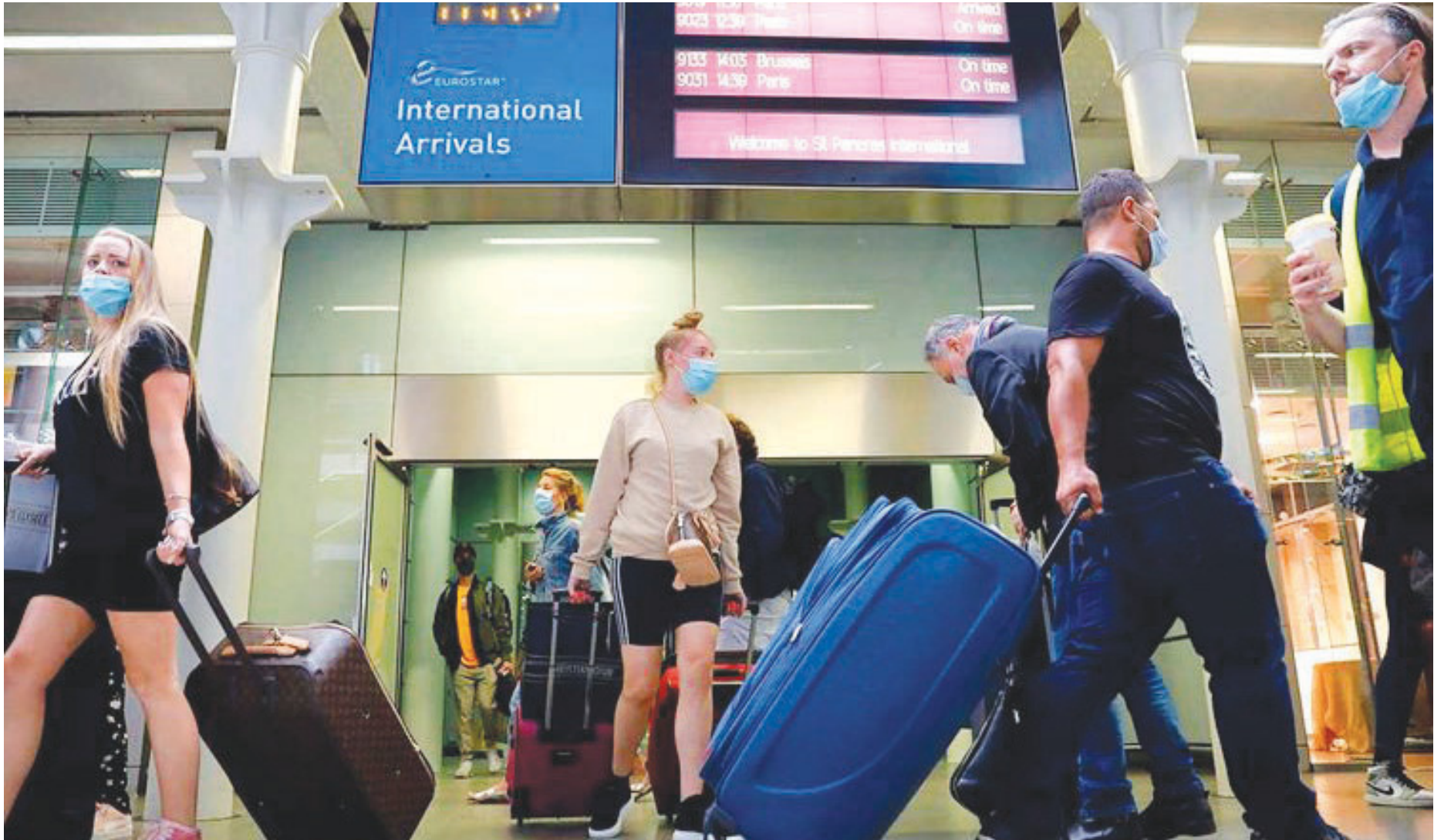
Britons rushed home from summer holidays in France on Friday after their government said it would soon impose a 14-day quarantine on travellers from across the Channel due to rising coronavirus infections there.

Britain's government announced late on Thursday that it would impose a quarantine from 0300 GMT on Saturday on arrivals from France, giving an estimated 160,000 UK holidaymakers there just over 24 hours to get home to avoid having to self-isolate once back.

The sudden rule change dealt a fresh blow to tourists, airlines and tour operators all hoping for holidays after the pandemic, which has left many travel groups cash-strapped and facing an uncertain future.

Many British tourists headed towards the French port of Calais hoping to catch a ferry or a shuttle train home in time.

"We've changed our plans when we heard the news last night. We decided to head back home a day early



Passengers wearing facemasks walk onto the main concourse at St Pancras International station in London on Friday after travelling to London on a Eurostar train from Paris. — AFP

to miss the quarantine," one British woman at a service station on the motorway to Calais said after her week in southern France.

In Calais, queues of cars were expected to build on Friday afternoon. Ferry companies were adding extra crossings to help more people get home before the deadline, Jean-

Marc Puissesseau, head of the Port of Calais, told Reuters.

The new quarantine rules apply to France, the second-most popular holiday destination for Britons, the Netherlands and the Mediterranean island of Malta, Transport Minister Grant Shapps said. Spain, the favourite holiday desti-

nation for Britons, came under British government quarantine rules on July 26.

France warned it would reciprocate, causing further headaches for airlines which might have to cancel yet more flights, meaning fresh financial pain and denying them the August recovery for which they'd hoped. — Reuters

Russian doctors wary of vaccine

MOSCOW: A majority of Russian doctors would not feel comfortable being injected with Russia's new COVID-19 vaccine due to the lack of sufficient data about it and its super-fast approval, a survey of more than 3,000 medical professionals showed on Friday.

Russia has said that the world's first vaccine for the novel coronavirus will be rolled out by the end of this month, with doctors among those set to be administered with it on a voluntary basis. The vaccine, called "Sputnik V" in homage to the world's first satellite launched by the Soviet Union in 1957, has yet to complete its final trials and some scientists said they fear Moscow may be putting national prestige before safety. — Reuters

Lebanese families seek intl probe

BEIRUT: Families of victims of a massive explosion that hit Beirut last week called on Friday for an international investigation, as the death toll in the blast climbed to 178 people. "We want an international probe. We want our leaders to stop playing with our lives like a chess game," said Paul Najjar, the father of a 3-year-old girl who died in the August 4 blast. "We want to know who killed our loved ones," he said at a press conference for the victims' families in Beirut. On Thursday, US Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, David Hale, who is currently in Beirut, said the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will join the investigation into the blast that has devastated large parts of the city. — dpa

Philippines delays start of school year

MANILA: The Philippines delayed on Friday the start of the school year by another six weeks to October as the country battles surging coronavirus infections and prepares to turn classrooms into quarantine facilities. Schools across the archipelago have been shut since mid-March when President Rodrigo Duterte's government imposed a months-long lockdown in a bid to slow the fast-spreading contagion.

The academic year usually starts in June but was pushed back to August 24. It is now scheduled to begin on October 5, the education department said, blaming the latest lockdown in the capital Manila and four surrounding provinces for "logistical limitations" in preparing for remote schooling. — AFP



President Donald Trump waves as he tours a section of the new US-Mexico border wall built in San Luis, Arizona, on June 23. — Reuters

Trump pushes anti-immigrant message as virus tops campaign

TED HESSON & CHRIS KAHN

US President Donald Trump is powering ahead with his anti-immigration agenda, even as voters say they are more concerned with the coronavirus pandemic and the economic destruction it has wrought.

The Republican president won the White House in large part due to his hard-line stance on immigration, a bedrock issue that animates his base. His administration has maintained that focus despite intense pressure to respond to the world's worst coronavirus outbreak and nationwide protests against police brutality and racism that have fuelled a summer of discontent.

Trump has amplified new issues this election cycle, including law and order in the wake of the protests, and unsubstantiated claims that a surge of mail voting due to coronavirus con-

cerns will lead to widespread fraud. Still, he has instituted sweeping new immigration policies during the pandemic and made it a campaign advertising priority on Facebook.

Recent policy changes include broad shutdowns of America's legal immigration system, such as blocking the entry of a range of temporary foreign workers and some applicants for permanent residence. With Trump trailing in the polls, the White House is preparing further restrictions in the run-up to the November 3 election, according to Stephen Miller, the architect of Trump's immigration agenda.

In an interview with Reuters, Miller said Trump's tough stance will contrast with that of his Democratic challenger Joe Biden. Permissive immigration policies, Miller claimed, will prove a "massive political vulnerability" in the coming election. — Reuters

Child malaria spikes in Sierra Leone as parents fear COVID-19

JULIE STEENHUYSEN

Doctors in a rural Sierra Leone hospital may be accustomed to treating severely ill infants, but they recently admitted one of the worst cases they had ever seen. An 18-month-old with pallid skin and thinning hair arrived on the wards in the eastern town of Hangha in July suffering from an alarming combination of pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria.

Even in a country with one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world, the toddler's case was abnormally critical.

"She couldn't sit and stand, she was too weak," said Adama Ansumana, holding her daughter on her lap in the intensive care unit.

The girl recovered, but doctors are warning that extreme cases such as hers are growing more common as patients avoid hospitals for fear of contracting COVID-19.

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF), which runs the free hospital in Hangha, near the city of Kenema, says it has received 40 per cent fewer patients since late March.

The dangers of avoiding healthcare are especially acute for children during the ongoing rainy season — when malaria cases

spike.

"We are facing a malaria pandemic, with severe malnutrition of most of the children that arrive at the hospital," said Laure Joachim, a paediatrician at the 63-bed facility.

The number of children affected nationwide is unclear, but it is likely high.

Health ministry records seen by AFP show that malaria cases usually account for about a quarter of hospital referrals in the West African state. The disease also kills thousands every year.

This year, NGOs and the government have to surmount a creaking health system and pervasive coronavirus misinformation to provide treatment.

Sierra Leone, though rich in diamonds, is one of the world's poorest countries.

It is still recovering nearly two decades after the end of a civil war which claimed some 120,000 lives, and from the 2014-16 West Africa Ebola outbreak which killed some 4,000 people in the country.

Health officials in Sierra Leone have recorded 1,937 coronavirus cases to date, with 69 fatalities — relatively low numbers compared to hard-hit countries such as Brazil and the United States.

— AFP

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BUSINESS

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Masirah Oil targets second well in Oman Block 50 early next year

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Seeking to build on its recent success in bringing Oman's first off-shore oilfield off the east coast into commercial production, Masirah Oil Limited (MOL) says it plans to drill a second production well targeting the newly operational Yumna field in Block 50 early next year.

The announcement was made by Singapore-based oil firm Rex International Holding Limited, which holds a majority stake in Masirah Oil through its indirect wholly-owned subsidiary, Rex Oman Ltd.

Dan Brostrom, Executive Chairman of Rex International, said the proposed Yumna-2 well will be drilled within January 2021, while a new exploration well targeting an identified prospect elsewhere in Block 50 is envisioned as well.

Announcing the company's financial results for the first half of 2020, Brostrom said the successful commencement of production from the Yumna field represents a "game-changing" start for Rex International.

The Yumna oilfield, previously known as GA South Field, is home to the GA South #1 discovery, which was made in early 2014. At the time, Masirah Oil announced a first-ever hydrocarbon find in the 17,000 sq km concession off the Sultanate's east coast. Last December, Masirah Oil began drilling the Yumna 1 well to appraise the Yumna oilfield. Early production testing commenced in January this year with oil produced during the field appraisal stored temporarily on an Aframax tanker.



Last month, Oman's Ministry of Oil and Gas formally approved the Field Development Plan for the Yumna Field and awarded the all-important Declaration of Commerciality (DOC) as well, enabling Masirah Oil Ltd to fully develop the Yumna Field while continuing to explore the rest of Block 50.

While early production had commenced amid a dramatic collapse in international oil prices earlier this year, a degree of stability has since returned to oil

markets boding well for the company's fiscal situation, said Rex International's Chairman.

"Sale of the Masirah crude started in April 2020 in the second quarter, when Brent oil price was at unprecedented lows due to the COVID- 19 pandemic. The oil price per barrel for sales between April and June was about half of the current August 2020 price of \$45 a barrel. We are going into the rest of 2020 with improved contributing factors, with Brent oil price at

PRODUCTION RAMP-UP:
Plan to drill Yumna-2 well by January 2021, while a new exploration well targeting an identified prospect is envisioned as well

a more stable a range of about \$45 per barrel. We remain in a good financial position and will now book recurrent income from production in the Yumna field in Oman", Brostrom noted.

"This will enable us to develop Block 50 according to the Field Development Plan approved by the Ministry of Oil and Gas in Oman. Within January 2021, the Yumna 2 well will be drilled and during 2021, there will be an exploration well from one of our already identified prospects", he further added.

The Yumna-1 well is currently producing over 8,000 bpd of oil through a 1-inch choke, having yielded more than one million barrels of oil by around the time the Declaration of Commerciality was issued by the Omani government on July 12.

Masirah Oil Limited is majority owned by Rex Oman Ltd (86.37 per cent) with minority stakes also held by Petroci, the National Oil Company of the Ivory Coast and Schroder & Co Banque SA.

Malaysian economy shrinks most in more than 20 years

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's economy suffered its worst contraction in more than 20 years during the second quarter, hit by a collapse in global trade and tough curbs to contain the coronavirus, the central bank said on Friday.

The economy shrank 17.1 per cent on-year in April-June – the first since the global financial crisis in 2009 and the deepest since the Asian financial turmoil 11 years before that – putting it on course for recession.

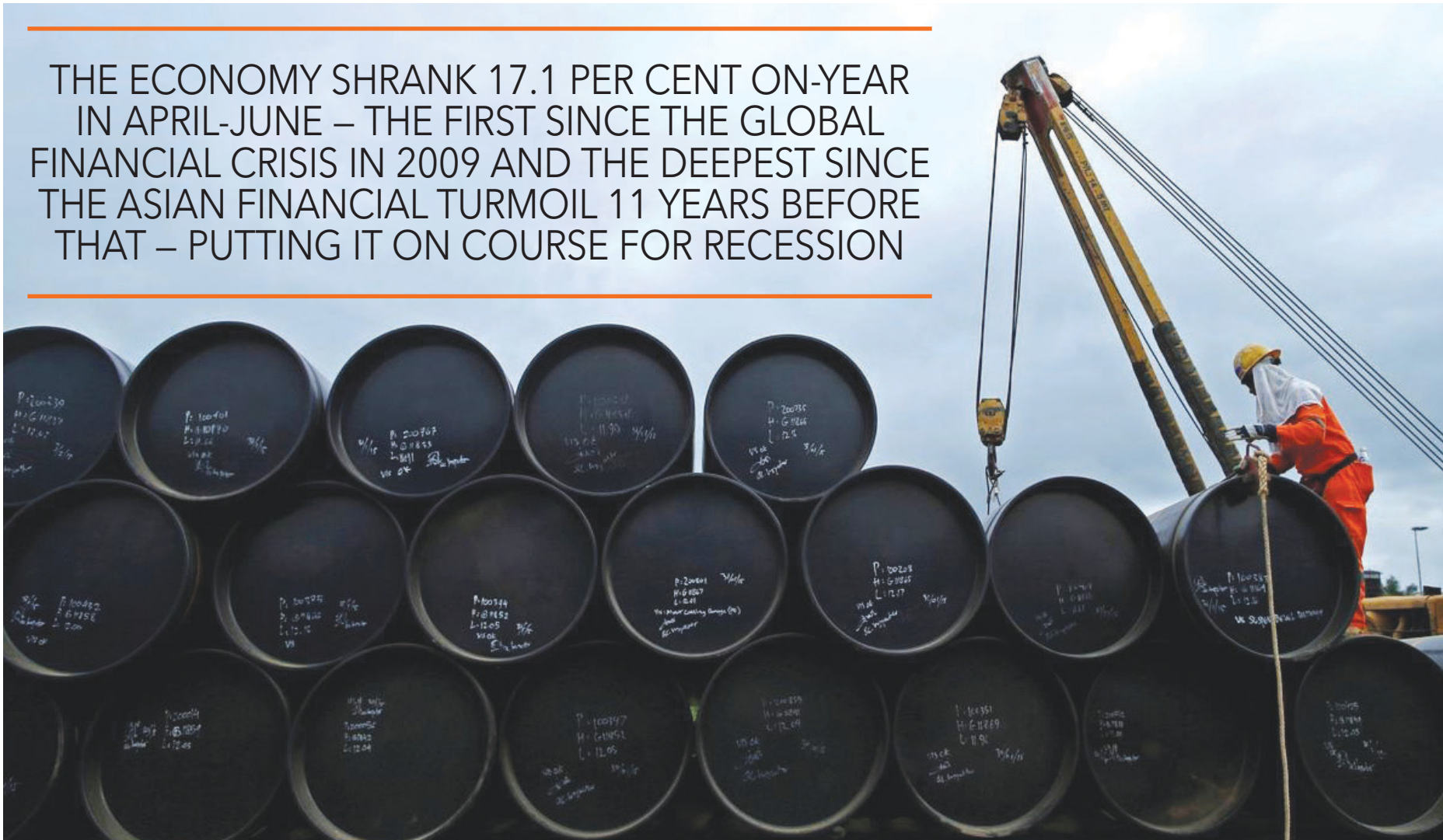
The reading was much worse than the 10.9 per cent drop forecast in a survey by Bloomberg News, despite interest rates being cut to record lows. It shrank 16.5 per cent on-quarter.

Wan Suhaimi Saidi, an economist at Kenanga Investment Bank, warned that the trade-dependent economy was “heading into a recession since there is no sign of a full recovery in demand and business activity”.

He told AFP he expects a full-year contraction of between four and six per cent, more than the central bank's estimate of 3.5-5.5 per cent.

But Nor Shamsiah

THE ECONOMY SHRANK 17.1 PER CENT ON-YEAR IN APRIL-JUNE – THE FIRST SINCE THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS IN 2009 AND THE DEEPEST SINCE THE ASIAN FINANCIAL TURMOIL 11 YEARS BEFORE THAT – PUTTING IT ON COURSE FOR RECESSION



A worker prepares to transport oil pipelines to be laid for the Pengerang Gas Pipeline Project in Pengerang, Johor, Malaysia. — Reuters

Mohamad Yunus, head of the central Bank Negara Malaysia, said the economy was poised for a recovery in the current quarter as virus-related restrictions are eased.

“We are likely to see a trough in the second quarter. The economy is poised for a recovery in the second half and rebound further in 2021”, he said at a virtual news conference. “I am cautiously optimistic

the worst is behind us”.

Bank Negara said the second-quarter decline “reflected the unprecedented impact of the stringent containment measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic globally and domestically” imposed from mid-March to early June.

The restrictions, which included businesses being shut down and people confined to their homes, “resulted in demand and supply

shocks”, with border control measures globally hitting tourism arrivals, the central bank added.

The country's outbreak has been relatively small – recording just over 9,000 cases and 125 deaths – but the lockdown's toll was heaviest on the economy.

Malaysia is highly dependent on trade and tourism, with its key exports including palm oil, crude oil and natural gas. — AFP

Pandemic to hit Japan's economy more than expected

TOKYO: Japan's economy will contract more than previously expected and suffer mild deflation during the current fiscal year, analysts predict, underscoring the fragile nature of the recovery from the devastating coronavirus pandemic. Analysts also see renewed, escalating tensions between the United States and China as an additional source of concern for the world's third-largest economy, which is heavily reliant on exports, a Reuters poll showed on Friday.

“Economic activity will continue to face restric-



A teller counts Japanese yen to exchange them into US dollars at a foreign exchange booth at a business district in Tokyo. — Reuters

tions from social distancing measures” needed to prevent the spread of the virus, said Taro Saito, Executive Research Fellow

at NLI Research Institute.

“Japan's economy will likely rebound next fiscal year but won't recoup the huge losses incurred this

year”, he said.

The economy is forecast to shrink 5.6 per cent in the current fiscal year to next March, the poll of 32 economists showed, more than a 5.3 per cent contraction projected last month. In a worst case scenario it will shrink 8.0 per cent.

The downgrade came as many analysts revised their forecasts for April-June gross domestic product (GDP) to a 27 per cent contraction – last month's worst case forecast – from a nearly 24 per cent drop projected in July.

— Reuters

BUSINESS

Chinese firms hit by new import hurdles in India

NEW DELHI: Chinese firms like Xiaomi are facing delays getting approvals from India's quality control agency for their goods, five industry sources said, as the business environment deteriorates after a clash on their Himalayan border.

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has in recent weeks delayed approvals for mobile phone components and televisions, jeopardising the plans of firms such as Xiaomi as well as Oppo, industry sources in India and China said.

The most serious border tension in decades between the Asian giants has hurt already hurt their economic ties and Indian officials expect the damage to get worse.

"The relationship has gone south dramatically", said one official, adding India was unlikely to immediately approve several investments proposals from Chinese companies. "We cannot do business as usual".

India had mandated the screening of investment flows from China in April but the government has been slow in approving any since the clash.

A senior Indian official said the government was working on a new standards policy - likely to be announced by the end of August — in a bid to target low-quality products from China and elsewhere.

But those deliberations have stalled approvals for even branded Chinese companies' hoping to step up sales, one Indian industry source said.

"The products are not getting clearance as quality standards are being upgraded because of which many product lines could be affected" said the official, who



Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi walk past each other at the BRICS Summit in Xiamen, in this file photo. — Reuters

declined to be identified.

Chinese smartphone brands, including Oppo and Xiaomi, account for eight of every 10 smartphones sold in India. While the two companies assemble most of their models in India, several components are imported from China.

Modi has in recent weeks called for a "self-reliant India", urging industry to focus on boosting domestic production.

Under the BIS's registration scheme, certain electronic goods — whether imported or locally made - need to meet India's standards. After companies get their products tested in a certified laboratory, BIS approves the applications.

A source briefed at a smartphone maker in

THE BUREAU OF INDIAN STANDARDS (BIS) HAS IN RECENT WEEKS DELAYED APPROVALS FOR MOBILE PHONE COMPONENTS AND TELEVISIONS, JEOPARDISING THE PLANS OF FIRMS SUCH AS XIAOMI AS WELL AS OPPO

China, which has been affected by delays, said BIS applications were typically processed within 15 days but had now "been left in limbo".

As of Friday, 643 applications were pending for registration, with 394 pending for more than 20 days, the BIS website said. It did not say how many

were from Chinese companies.

The CP-UP Certification Technology Service Co, an agency based in China's Guangzhou city which helps clients with such clearances, told its customers in an August 4 notice that BIS had stopped processing applications from "non-Indian manufacturers" from July 23 "due to the trade war between China and India".

It was not immediately clear whether imports from countries other than China were also being held up.

A BIS official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said additional checks were being made in consultation with several ministries before clearing any applications.

— Reuters

Gold rush at Turkish bazaar a test of trust for lowly lira



A goldsmith wearing a protective face mask arranges golden bangles as the other talks to customers at a jewellery shop at the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. — Reuters

ISTANBUL: Hasan Ayhan followed his wife's instructions last week and took their savings to buy gold at Istanbul's Grand Bazaar as Turks scooped up bullion worth \$7 billion in a just a fortnight.

With memories of a currency crisis which rocked Turkey's economy only two years ago fresh in his mind, the retired police officer was among those playing it safe as he queued in the city's sprawling covered market, where a screen showed the gold price rise by one Turkish lira (\$0.1366) in just 10 minutes.

"I think it is the best investment right now so I converted my dollars to buy gold", the 57-year-old said, adding: "I might withdraw my lira and buy gold with it too, but I am scared to go to the bank right now because of coronavirus".

The day after Ayhan bought his gold on August 6,

TURKS HAVE TRADITIONALLY USED GOLD AS SAVINGS AND THERE MAY BE AS MUCH AS 5,000 TONNES OF IT 'UNDER MATTRESSES', WITH MORE ADDED AFTER THE RECENT BUYING SPREE

the lira hit a historic low and has remained skittish since, laying bare concerns that Turkey's reserves have been badly depleted by market interventions, which are showing signs of fizzling out.

Turks have traditionally used gold as savings and there may be as much as 5,000 tonnes of it "under mattresses", with more added after the recent buying spree, Mehmet Ali Yildirimturk, deputy head of an Istanbul gold shops association, said.

Although bullion has never been more expensive, vendors at the Grand Bazaar said almost no one is coming to sell their gold jewellery. There are only buyers.

"I've been chatting with hundreds of people who are thinking about selling their cars or houses to invest in gold" Gunay Gunes, whose busy booth is near the market's entrance, said.

In the last three weeks, as selling gripped the lira, local holdings of hard assets such as dollars and gold

jumped \$15 billion to a record of nearly \$220 billion.

There is no evidence suggesting people are about to pull savings from banks, and this week the lira has hovered around 7.3 versus the dollar, although it remains among the worst emerging-market performers this year.

Demand has eased since Turks withdrew some \$2 billion in hard foreign cash from their banks during a March-May period in which a lockdown was imposed and the lira hit its last low, according to central bank banknote data.

Analysts say that if Ankara cannot boost confidence in the currency, which has fallen almost 20 per cent this year, import-heavy Turkey risks inflation and even a balance of payments crisis that will worsen fallout from the coronavirus crisis. — Reuters

SPORTS



PORTLAND WILL HOST THE NINTH-SEEDED GRIZZLIES ON SATURDAY, NEEDING JUST ONE WIN TO ENSURE A PLAYOFF BERTH. IF THE BLAZERS LOSE, THE TEAMS WILL PLAY AGAIN ON SUNDAY, WITH THE WINNER CLAIMING THE FINAL PLAYOFF SPOT. THE WINNER WILL DRAW THE TOP-SEEDED LOS ANGELES LAKERS IN THE FIRST ROUND OF THE PLAYOFFS

LILLARD, BLAZERS

CLAIM FINAL PLAY-IN BIRTH



ORLANDO, US: Damian Lillard scored 42 points, and the Portland Trail Blazers escaped with a 134-133 victory over the Brooklyn Nets on Thursday night near Orlando to clinch the eighth seed in the Western Conference and a berth in the play-in series against the Memphis Grizzlies. Following games of 51 and 61 points, Lillard helped Portland (35-39) clinch by scoring 12 points in the fourth quarter, including a 3-pointer from the edge of the NBA logo at half-court. He produced his 11th game of at least 40 points this season by

shooting 13 of 22, including 8 of 14 on 3-point attempts. Portland will host the ninth-seeded Grizzlies on Saturday, needing just one win to ensure a playoff berth. If the Blazers lose, the teams will play again on Sunday, with the winner claiming the final playoff spot. The winner will draw the top-seeded Los Angeles Lakers in the first round of the playoffs. Lillard's biggest play down the stretch actually came on the defensive end. Portland took a 134-130 lead on a jumper by C J McCollum with 53.4 seconds left, after Lillard poked the ball from behind while defending Caris LeVert just past midcourt. LeVert responded with a 3-point play to get within one, but his step-back attempt to win it just before the buzzer was short. Memphis Grizzlies 119 — Milwaukee Bucks 106

Jonas Valanciunas and Ja Morant each recorded a triple-double, helping Memphis gain a spot in the NBA play-in game with a victory over Giannis Antetokounmpo-less Milwaukee. Dillon Brooks led all scorers with 31 points for the Grizzlies (34-39), who will be the ninth seed in the West and must beat the Trail Blazers twice to reach the postseason. The Bucks (56-17) had already clinched the top seed in the East. They will open the playoffs on Tuesday against eighth-seeded Orlando. Phoenix Suns 128 — Dallas Mavericks 102 Devin Booker scored 23 of his game-high 27 points in the first half, and Phoenix completed an unexpected undefeated run through the NBA bubble with a victory over Dallas.

— Reuters

Oman U-16 coach waits for confirmation on friendlies



MUSCAT: The Oman U-16 football team head coach Hilal al Oufi, said that the team has received different requests from GCC teams to have preparatory matches including Saudi Arabia.

Al Oufi added in his remarks to Oman Daily Observer that they preferred to wait until they get more clarity regarding the resumption of the domestic sporting activities.

Al Oufi commented on the postponement of the educational year 2020/2021 until November and he admitted that this will serve the national team to gear up with more internal camps later and after the resumption of sporting activities for the top assignment at the AFC U-16 Championship Bahrain 2020. "The recent decision issued by the

Supreme Committee will support the team to prepare well technically for the Asian event," coach said.

"The team's preparation is still at remote training sessions only. We are having four sessions every week with one day of rest in between. The warming up programme depends on giving the players a weekly schedule which includes some physical training to ensure the fitness level of all the players. Technical strengthening, running exercises, withstand speed and other training," he added.

Responding to monitoring the technical progress of players at virtual training, coach Hilal said they normally select three play-

ers randomly and request them to send their videos of training through "what-sapp" application to ensure that they are performing the right methodology of the training sessions. It is necessary at this stage to keep maintaining the fitness level of the players," the U-16 football team coach said.

Oman will play against Tajikistan, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates teams in Group B at the AFC U-16 Championship. "All of our competing teams in the group began their technical training sessions in the ground. The UAE team commenced their training on 18 July while the Yemen team started as well and Tajikistan did not stop their training since June.

All the GCC teams preparatory plans are in implementation status currently except the Sultanate. I hope we start very soon and that will support to shape the player's technical readiness for the top Asian task. Qatar team confirmed their external camp in Croatia and Bahrain commenced their training from green yard since end of July," Al Oufi added.

On a query about the team's upcoming camps, coach Hilal responded that it is quite difficult to travel with the current movement restrictions situation. "According to the rules, the person should be at home quarantined for 14 days which may impact negatively on the team's plan. We have different plans and scenarios instead of the external camps" he said



SPORTS

SERENA WILLIAMS,
THE TOP SEED IN THE
EVENT, IMPROVED TO
19-12 IN THE ALL-TIME
SERIES BETWEEN THE
SISTERS, WINNING THE
FIRST MEETING SINCE
THE THIRD ROUND OF
THE 2018 US OPEN



SERENA RALLIES PAST VENUS IN LEXINGTON

NEW YORK: Serena Williams overcame a shaky opening set on Thursday to rally past her sister, Venus Williams, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 and reach the quarterfinals at The Top Seed Open in Lexington, Ky.

Serena Williams, the top seed in the event, improved to 19-12 in the all-time series between the sisters, winning the first meeting since the third round of the 2018 U.S. Open.

She got off to a hot start by breaking Venus' serve in the game's opening set, but Venus responded with consecutive breaks of Serena and cruised to take the first set.

After Serena converted one break point to take the second set, she again blew a lead in the third, but this time responded calmly. Trailing 4-2, she broke Venus' service twice in a row and then served out for the victory.

"I'm super relaxed," Serena Williams said afterward. "Having no crowd sort of makes things more relaxing." "I've practiced in louder places than this court," she added with a laugh.

The only other seeded player in action lost, as Switzerland's Jil Teichmann made quick work of fifth-seeded Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan in a 6-2, 6-2 victory.

In the day's other two matches, Shelby Rogers downed Leylah Fernandez of Canada 6-2, 7-5, and Catherine Bellis dispatched fellow American Jessica Pegula 6-3, 6-2. Rogers will face Williams on Friday.

PRAGUE OPEN
Top-seeded Simona Halep of Romania recovered from a slow start to rally for a 3-6, 7-5, 6-2 victory over Barbora Krejckova of the Czech Republic to reach the

quarterfinals. Both struggled mightily with their serves, combining for 16 breaks of service (with Halep converting nine of 14 chances) and 13 double faults, including 10 by Halep. The former world No. 1 — currently ranked No. 2 — Halep dropped four set points on her own serve in the second set before winning it three games later. She then came from a break down in the final set with three straight breaks of Krejckova's serve to finish the match.

Halep will next face Magdalena Frech of Poland, who survived Dutchwoman Arantxa Rus 6-3, 2-6, 6-4. In other action, Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo cruised by Germany's Laura Siegemund 6-2, 6-3 and Canada's Eugenie Bouchard outlasted Slovenia's Tamara Zidansek 7-6 (2), 6-7 (2), 6-2. — **Reuters**