

OVER 83,000 COVID-19 PATIENTS RECOVERED

The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 88,337, while the number of recoveries stood at 83,325, comprising 94.3 per cent. Meanwhile, the total number of COVID-19 related deaths stood at 762, the Ministry of Health said. The ministry also pointed out that 55 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals stands at 442, of whom 161 are in intensive care units (ICU). — ONA



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BRENT OIL BENCHMARK DIPS BUT STAYS OVER \$40/BBL



P10
ATOUM DELIVERS COACHING BASICS TO OSSA MEMBERS



P6
HOW A SMALL GROUP OF US LAWYERS PUSHED VOTER FRAUD FEARS



OMAN

MoF circular to Govt units

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance on Thursday issued Financial Circular No 19/2020 directing all ministries, government units, authorities and public establishments to stick to procedures and ensure the availability of credit allocations in the budget prior to concluding contracts while at the same time getting contract procedures endorsed by the Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry of Finance has also directed the government units to provide its Treasury Department with detailed statements of all sums expected to be disbursed (whether on current, capital or developmental budget) within the cash liquidity approved for each department on a quarterly basis. P2

Cooperation with industrial cities

SUHAIR: With the aim of exploring cooperation opportunities in scientific research, innovation and technical and vocational training in the industrial cities, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, visited Sohar Industrial City, which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayan.

Al Mahrouqiyah was accompanied by Muna bint Salim al Jardaniyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation for Vocational Training. P2

INSIDE



EU PARLIAMENT CUTS SUV KYI FROM RIGHTS PRIZE HONOREES

P4



LESBOS MIGRANTS SLEEP ON ROADSIDES, HOUSING THEM TO TAKE DAYS

P5

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 37°C
MIN: 27°C

SALALAH
MAX: 29°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 42°C
MIN: 32°C

SUNRISE 05.51 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:36
DHUHR: 12:09
ASR: 15:36
MAGHRIB: 18:20
ISHA: 19:31



HM issues decree forming CBO Board of Governors



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Thursday issued a Royal Decree, No 117/2020, forming the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Article (1) structures the Central Bank of Oman's Board of

- Governors under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad bin Tarik al Said, and with membership of the following:
- Minister of Economy (as Deputy Chairman)
 - Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance
 - Chief Executive Officer of Capital Market Authority
 - Maqbool bin Ali bin Sultan al Lawati
 - Shaikh Mohammed bin Saud bin Salim Bahwan al Mukhaini
 - Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Abri
- The Board's membership will be for 5 years from the date of enforcement of this decree.
- Article (2) cancels all that contravenes this decree or contradicts with its provisions.
- Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced with effect from its date of issue.
- ONA



Sultanate, US discuss military cooperation

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Mu'askar Al Murtafa' on Thursday General Kenneth McKenzie, Commander of the US Central Command.

The two sides reviewed existing military cooperation between the Sultanate and the United States of America. They also discussed issues of mutual interest between the two friendly countries.

The meeting was attended by Leslie M Tsou, US Ambassador to the Sultanate, and the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA

HM CLOSELY MONITORING EDUCATION PLANS

Education Minister outlines school reopening plan for the academic year 2020/2021 starting on November 1

COVID-19 infection figures are fluctuating and again have started rising since last week, warns Health Minister



MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, has said that the education sector is being accorded great attention by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, notably under the current exceptional conditions.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to make School Year 2020/2021 as a year of Blended Learning, an approach to education that combines traditional classroom-

based methods of teaching with online classes or distance learning through electronic platforms or television channels.

The minister added that, in implementation of the Royal directives, the Ministry of Education continued to exert efforts to prepare plans and programmes for the operation of schools in a manner that guarantees the health and safety of pupils and teaching and

administrative staff. Towards this end, the ministry consults the best regional and international experiences and practices that fit in the Sultanate's educational context, said Dr Madeeha, noting that the efforts produced the General Framework of Operation of Sultanate's Schools.

The minister made the statements during the 15th press conference of the Supreme Committee tasked with

tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19).

During the press conference, the minister outlined plans for the forthcoming School Year 2020/2021 (which starts in full swing by 1 November 2020), noting that the Education Ministry devised a General Framework of Operation of Sultanate's Schools.

The minister explained that a set of health procedures termed "Health

Protocol" is among the salient features of the Sultanate's education system. The Health Protocol features the roles of all segments pertaining to the school community, including pupils, teachers and parents — who are all exhorted to undertake precautions like maintaining social distancing, wearing face masks, washing hands, using sanitisers and operating school buses at half capacity.

TURN TO P2

Massive fire breaks out at Beirut port

BEIRUT: A large fire erupted on Thursday at Beirut port, sending a huge column of smoke above the city a little more than a month after a massive blast devastated the port and surrounding residential area of the Lebanese capital.

The blaze erupted in the shattered duty free zone of the port and one official said it was limited to that area. But it jangled nerves in a nation

grappling with a deep economic crisis that has posed the biggest threat to Lebanon's stability since its 1975-1990 civil war. "For sure we were scared, it's only been a month since the explosion that destroyed Beirut. We saw the same thing happening again," said 53-year-old Andre Muarbes.

The army said a store of oil and tyres had burst into flames, although it said the cause was not immediately

clear. Television footage showed an army helicopter dropping water on the fire, as firefighters battled the blaze on the ground.

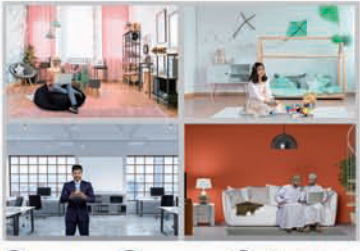
The head of civil defence told Lebanon's Al Jadeed television it was not certain what materials were burning. But he urged the public to stay calm, saying the fire was limited to one place.

— Reuters



Lebanese firefighters try to put out a fire that broke out at Beirut's port area on Thursday. — AFP





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Govt units told to secure and endorse fiscal cover before finalising contracts

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance on Thursday issued Financial Circular No 19/2020 directing all ministries, government units, authorities and public establishments to stick to procedures and ensure the availability of credit allocations in the budget prior to concluding contracts while at the same time getting contract procedures endorsed by the Ministry of Finance in line with the provisions of the Financial Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 47/1998 and its Executive Bylaw issued under Royal Decree No 36/2008, as well as the provisions of Royal Decree No 48/1976 on signing foreign and local financial transactions.

The circular instructs the above-mentioned departments not to float



any new tenders or assign any works or enter into any new contractual financial obligations by banking on the current budget. In addition, no operation orders or letters of good intent shall be issued to engage companies or establishments to carry out government projects or offer supply tasks or services unless prior approval has been obtained from the Ministry of Finance. Only after obtaining approval shall the Ministry

of Finance be approached for financial ratification procedures.

The Ministry of Finance directed government units to provide its Treasury Department with detailed statements of all sums expected to be disbursed (whether on current, capital or developmental budget) within the cash liquidity approved for each department on a quarterly basis.

The ministry said it will continue to advise ministries and government units to rearrange their spending priorities in a manner that conforms with available financial resources. It is also asking the departments in question to fully adhere to government directives aimed to cut down general expenditure and limit the State's Budget deficit. — ONA

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES US MILITARY OFFICIAL



MUSCAT: General Sultan bin Mohammed al Nuamani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Thursday Gen Kenneth F McKenzie, Commander of the US Central Command, and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, Gen Al Nuamani welcomed the US official,

who expressed his thanks and appreciation for the Sultanate. He also expressed his appreciation for all that enhance ties of the existing cooperation between the Sultanate and his country.

The meeting reviewed march of the strong and historic relations binding the two sides in all fields and means

of enhancing them to serve the joint interests between the two friendly countries.

It also reviewed a number of current regional and international issues, besides touching on several matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by the US ambassador to the Sultanate. — ONA



Higher Education Minister visits Sohar Industrial City

SUHAR: With the aim of exploring cooperation opportunities in scientific research, innovation and technical and vocational training in the industrial cities, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, visited Sohar Industrial City, which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates — Madayn.

Al Mahrouqiyah was accompanied by Muna bint Salim al Jardani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation for Vocational Training, Dr Bakhait bin Ahmed al Mahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation for Higher Education, Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation, and Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

During the meeting, Eng Abdullah bin Salim al Kaabi, Director-General of Sohar Industrial City, elaborated on the key development indicators and current projects in the industrial city, stating that, "During 2019, the volume of investments in Sohar Industrial City amounted to RO 2,165,632,684 with an estimated growth rate of 1.16 per cent compared to 2018.

In fact, Sohar Industrial City had the highest increase in the total volume of investments during 2019 compared to other industrial cities of Madayn, as the total investments during 2019 increased by RO 24 million. This increase in the total investments of Sohar Industrial City is owed to the investments of companies that were

introduced in the industrial city during 2019."

The number of workforce in Sohar Industrial City during the same year exceeded 17,000 with an Omanisation rate of 36 per cent. "By the end of 2019, the number of projects touched 416 in Sohar Industrial City, of which 285 are existing projects, 72 are under construction, and 59 projects were allotted with space. It should be noted that the total area of Sohar Industrial City during the same period reached 29,883,548 sqm, of which 21,157,520 sqm have already been developed," Al Kaabi pointed out.

The visit included a tour at phase 7 of the Industrial City, which is being implemented by Madayn on an area of 8.5 million sqm. The project includes road works, water and sewage networks, sewage treatment plant, rain drainage channels, water tanks in addition to safety and security requirements.

The Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation also visited Sohar Aluminium Company, which was formed in September 2004 to undertake a landmark greenfield aluminium smelter project in Oman.

Moreover, the minister visited Omani Euro Food Industries Company, which was established in 1997 at Sohar Industrial City. The company is manufacturing HACCP & ISO 22000-2005 certified baby food and health food, which include baby cereals, biscuits, rusks, among other products. The company is implementing all food quality and safety requirements in addition to hygiene and public health procedures to match the highest international quality standards.

— ONA

HM closely monitoring education plans

FROM PAGE 1

Another feature of the Sultanate's educational system this year is the School Operation Program, which endorses the system of hours rather than the system of classes, said the minister, who explained that schools have been put in three categories, depending on density as follows:

Low density schools that operate with not more than 16 students per class in a day at a rate of 3 hours per 'school day'.

Medium density schools that operate at a rate of 4 hours a day at half capacity (number of students) during the first week and the other half during the week that follows.

High density schools operate at a rate of 5 hours a day at one-third capacity in every week. Students have to be put in three sets (to attend in three weeks), except 12th Class students, who will be put in two sets, with the first group attending in the first week and the second in the week that follows.

It is stated clearly that students belonging to medium and high density schools have to continue their education online via educational platforms and television channels during the course of the week in which they stay at home.

The minister explained that the third feature of the educational system in the Sultanate this year pertains to the syllabus and assessment criteria. The ministry adapted the content of the curricula to 180 days of teaching that imparts knowledge, skills and basic sound values to students. The ministry also developed a learning assessment system that tallies with the syllabus and styles of direct and online teaching/learning, said Dr Madeeha, noting that her ministry endorsed an ongoing assessment method and a system of one-time examination to be taken at the end of the school year.

Dr Madeeha said that the Ministry of Education, as part of its keenness to provide all types of support to teachers, is conducting a number of training programmes to augment the competency of performance in the field of online education.

In other comments, Dr Madeeha said that, in keeping with the policy of decentralisation, the ministry granted



DR MADEEHA SAID THE MINISTRY GRANTED ITS DIRECTORATES GENERAL FULL DISCRETION TO UNDERTAKE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF STUDENTS AND ALL OTHER EDUCATION WORKERS

its directorates general full discretion to undertake precautionary measures to protect the health of students and all other education workers.

The minister pointed out that school buses will operate at half capacity, since the number of students will not exceed 16 in one classroom (low density schools) or half classroom capacity (medium density schools) or one-third of number of students (high density schools). She added that only 97 schools will work with full capacity (in terms of number of students per classroom) because those schools fall beyond the range of Internet cover.

Yet the actual presence of students inside classrooms will be subject to assessment in liaison with the Ministry of Health and the Supreme Committee, said the minister, adding that a number of committees have been formed for this purpose to closely follow up the condition of students. The minister explained that the General Framework of School Operation is flexible and, if deemed necessary, schools can be closed and full online education can be applied again.

As for students who reside in places that get no Internet access, the ministry will enrich their experience through the operation of specialised television channels.

Dr Madeeha pointed out that the Health Protocol sets out clear-cut health procedures, including temperature tests, use of sanitisers and

application of social distancing inside classrooms. She added that, according to the World Health Organisation, First Cycle pupils need not wear face masks.

On his turn, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, member of the Supreme Committee, said that (COVID-19 infection and mortality rate) figures are fluctuating and again started to rise since last week. He explained that the Sultanate is experiencing the first wave, hoping that the new high is provisional, not constant.

A second wave of coronavirus is inevitable, "but we can avoid it through full commitment to precautionary measures (wearing face masks and following up healthy habits), said the minister, adding that the government does not mull partial or total lockdowns. He stressed that any further lockdown that might turn to be necessary in future, God forbids, may entail serious losses for the national economy.

Dr Ahmed reaffirmed that the Sultanate is in continuous contact with most vaccine production firms that reach advanced stages in COVID-19 drug production, but no regulatory agency or drug monitoring institution will allow the distribution of the vaccine to humans before proper checks on its validity and safety.

In reply to a question, the minister said that a committee was formed last week to devise a plan for the re-

opening of mosques and the plan will be announced later by the departments concerned. The ministry's job is to set precautionary measures for mosques, he added.

Meanwhile, Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, said that the General Framework explains the Blended Learning concept (explained earlier), using classroom teaching, TV channels, CDs and electronic materials, not only online education.

He referred to the fact that some bilingual and community schools already started the school year last week because they are linked to international curricula, but they will revert to direct education by November 1.

On his turn, Dr Saif bin Salim al Abri, Director-General of Disease Surveillance and Control at the Ministry of Health, said that his ministry is still maintaining epidemiological detection despite the decline of infection cases. A daily report on the number of cases is being maintained because the ministry detected a rise in number of infection cases in governorates where no high numbers were registered before."

Dr Saif added that the Ministry of Health submitted (to the Supreme Committee) a list of chronic diseases whose patients can be considered for non-attendance at the workplace or school. This has been made in response to a large number of requests from different parties, he said.

Dr Saif urged any person who experiences serious symptoms of infection not to go to the workplace or any other place, and this includes students. He also said that the results of the National Survey on COVID-19 will be released next week.

Dr Zuweina bint Saleh al Maskariyah, Director-General of the Centre for Educational Assessment, reaffirmed the Education Ministry's keenness to calibrate assessment regulations and documents to come up with a uniform measure of assessment. This is because the volume of syllabi has been cut down by 30 per cent, said Dr Zuweina, adding that the uniform assessment system will be in favour of students, notably because examinations will be taken only once at the end of the school year.

— ONA



INDIA HAILS ‘GAME-CHANGER’ FRENCH JETS

AMBALA, India: India’s defence minister hailed the formal commissioning on Thursday of the country’s first new French Rafale jets as a “strong message” to its adversaries, amid escalating border tensions.

The first five of a \$9.4-billion order for 36 Rafale aircraft formally entered service following a ceremony in Ambala in northern India.

“The induction of Rafale is a strong message for the world and especially for those who challenge India’s sovereignty,” Defence Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted.

“Our country will not take any step to disturb peace anywhere.



Indian Air Force personnel march past a Rafale jet during its induction ceremony into the Indian Air Force at the Ambala Air Force Station on Thursday. — AFP

We expect the same from our neighbours,” Singh added.

Earlier this week shots were fired for the first time in 45 years on the Himalayan border with China, after a medieval-style battle in June that saw 20 Indians killed.

India and China’s foreign ministers were due to meet in Moscow later on Thursday in a bid to cool tensions between the world’s two most-populous nations.

Since the deadly June 15 clash — which also resulted in an unknown number of Chinese casualties — both sides have sent tens of thousands of extra troops to the mountainous border, that has never been demarcated.

Even before relations with China nosedived, India was moving strategically closer to the West, deepening security cooperation with the United States, Japan and Australia in the Asia-Pacific region.

It has also embarked on a \$130-billion modernisation of its armed forces — including ordering attack helicopters from the United States and a missile defence system from Russia.

Manoj Joshi, a defence and foreign policy expert at New Delhi based think-tank Observer Research Foundation, said the new French jets were a “morale booster for the country’s defence forces”.

— AFP



Vehicles are seen in Jakarta on Thursday. — AFP

As Jakarta heads into lockdown, doctors warn of buckling health system

JAKARTA: Doctors in Indonesia’s capital warned on Thursday the coronavirus pandemic is “not under control” with Jakarta intensive care units nearing full capacity and the city ordering new lockdown measures amid a spike in infections.

Indonesia posted a record high 3,861 positive cases on Thursday, while the capital has recorded more than 1,000 new coronavirus cases on average each day this month, placing considerable strain on hospitals in the world’s fourth most populous nation. The occupancy rate of isolation rooms at 67 coronavirus referral hospitals is currently at 77 per cent, while the ICU occupancy is 83 per cent, according to the Jakarta administration.

“It is like we have been running a marathon since March, we are exhausted,” said Erlina Burhan, a pulmonologist from Persahabatan Hospital, “This is not to be underestimated. The situation is not under control.”

The number of patients being treated for suspected cases of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus, tripled from July to August at Persahabatan, Jakarta’s main referral hospital.

“The government should anticipate the rise in cases by adding more medical facilities in hospitals — but the need of the medical workers needs

to be anticipated as well,” Halik Malik, spokesman for Indonesia’s medical association, said, acknowledging that pressure on the health system was high.

“Doctors are forced to work overtime, fatigued amidst the low protection,” he added. Fears that the city’s healthcare system may be soon pushed to the brink saw Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan on Wednesday reimpose lockdown measures starting on September 14, with residents told to work, study and pray at home.

“Right now, this is an emergency — more pressing than the start of the pandemic,” he said. Without tighter social restrictions, hospitals may be forced to turn coronavirus patients away by as early as next week, data from the Jakarta government showed. Indonesia has been battling the pandemic since March, drawing criticism from public health experts for prioritising economic over public health concerns.

The Southeast Asian nation has recorded more than 203,000 cases of the coronavirus and 8,336 deaths, the highest COVID-19 death toll in East Asia. On Wednesday Baswedan told Jakartans: “Please don’t go out, don’t leave home and do not leave Jakarta unless necessary.”

— Reuters

EU parliament cuts Suu Kyi from rights prize honorees

BRUSSELS: The European Parliament on Thursday removed Myanmar’s civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from the “Sakharov Prize community” because of her “acceptance” of state crimes against the Rohingya community.

The EU assembly awarded the former democracy campaigner its top human rights prize in 1990, a year before she received the Nobel Peace Prize, but she will no longer take part in events for laureates.

A source close to the parliament said the prize had been awarded for Suu Kyi’s work before 1990 so could not be withdrawn, but that this exclusion was the strongest sanction available to MEPs.

A statement from the speaker and the group leaders in parliament said the decision was “a response to her failure to act and her acceptance of the ongoing crimes against the Rohingya community in Myanmar”.

Majority-Buddhist Myanmar’s Muslim Rohingya minority has long been discriminated against and around 740,000 people fled to Bangladesh in August 2017 to escape a military offensive.

INTERNATIONAL PARIAH

Suu Kyi, a former political prisoner who fought to end military rule and is now the country’s most powerful civilian official as “state counsellor”, was once honoured around the world as a champion of freedom.

But she has been accused of turning a blind eye to, or even condoning, abuses against the Rohingya.

Myanmar’s election campaign began this week, with Suu Kyi’s party hoping to build on its 2015 victory and secure its role as a counterweight to the still powerful military establishment.

But the refugees have been



Supporters ride vehicles decorated with the National League for Democracy party flag and portrait of Myanmar’s de-facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, during a motorcade campaign in Yangon on Wednesday for the upcoming November 8 general election. — AFP

disenfranchised and most of the 600,000 Rohingya still in Myanmar have been stripped of citizenship and rights, despite pressure from Suu Kyi’s former international admirers.

Suu Kyi’s loss of her Sakharov Prize privileges is largely symbolic.

She is already a pariah in world capitals, especially after she travelled to the International Court of Justice in The Hague to rebut allegations against her country of rape, arson and mass killings.

At the court last year, Suu Kyi defended the military that once kept her locked up, arguing that her

A statement from the speaker and the group leaders in parliament said the decision was “a response to her failure to act and her acceptance of the ongoing crimes against the Rohingya community in Myanmar”

country was capable of investigating any allegations of abuse and warned that the case could reignite the crisis.

“The Sakharov Prize Community connects MEPs, laureates, and civil society to increase cooperation on human rights action in Brussels and internationally,” the parliament said, confirming the 75-year-old had been “formally suspended” from all laureate activities.

“It serves as a channel of communication that enables the laureates and Parliament to address jointly human rights violations and issues.” — AFP

‘Koala war’ throws Australian state into political chaos

Australia’s koalas

Phascolarctos cinereus



Conservation status: Vulnerable
Adult population: 300,000 (est.), decreasing

Adult weight: male: 4-14 kg female: 4-10 kg

Characteristics
• Unique to Australia
• A marsupial, not a bear
• Sleeps high up in eucalyptus tree for up to 20 hours a day

Diet
• Eucalyptus leaves only (around 0.5 kg a day)
• Fussy eaters. Diet limited to just a few varieties of eucalypt

Threats
• Bushfires
• Climate change (drought, heatwaves)
• Deforestation, urban development
• Disease (chlamydia)

Sources: IUCN/WWF/NSW govt/AFP Photos: Torsten Blackwood

AFP

SYDNEY: A dispute over policies to protect koalas has split the governing coalition in the Australian state of New South Wales in a political drama dubbed the “koala war”.

The row revolves around a new policy that restricts construction in the habitats of the marsupial, an Australian emblem. An inquiry in June found koalas, which live in eucalyptus forests, could become extinct by 2050 in New South Wales unless the government immediately intervened.

Land clearing for agriculture, urban development, mining and forestry had been the biggest factor in the loss of habitat. But State Deputy Premier John Barilaro of the Nationals said his rural-

THE ROW REVOLVES AROUND A NEW POLICY THAT RESTRICTS CONSTRUCTION IN THE HABITATS OF THE MARSUPIAL, AN AUSTRALIAN EMBLEM

focused party would no longer support government legislation unless changes were made to the koala habitat protection policy. The policy unfairly limits the way rural land owners can manage their land, he said. The Nationals plan to introduce a bill next week to repeal the conservation policy.

Barilaro maintained his party supported conservation and wanted to see the population double. “We are not anti-koala,” he said.

But State Premier Gladys Berejiklian, leader of the centre-right Liberals, gave Barilaro and other National members of the state cabinet until Friday morning to decide whether they wished to stay in her cabinet or quit the coalition.

“They cannot do both,” Berejiklian said in a statement, threatening to swear in a new ministry. The *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper has called the dispute “koala war”. The Liberal Party and the Nationals have a decades-old partnership in both state

and federal politics which sees power shared across cabinet positions when in government.

The Nationals hold 13 seats in the lower house while the Liberals hold 35, giving the coalition a majority in the 93-member house. Corey Bradshaw, professor of global ecology at Flinders University, said New South Wales — Australia’s most populous state — had some of the country’s weakest anti-clearing laws.

“Koalas live in and eat trees — you don’t need a university degree to predict what will happen when you continue to destroy their already highly degraded habitats,” Bradshaw said.

— Reuters

Lesbos migrants sleep on roadsides, housing them to take days

LESBOS: Thousands of migrants were stranded without shelter on Lesbos on Thursday after fires razed their camp to the ground, and the government said it would take days to find housing for all of them.

Some who fled the fires on Tuesday and Wednesday night tested positive for COVID-19 after an outbreak of the disease in the camp, further complicating attempts to round up migrants and get them into alternative accommodation.

"Today we will undertake all necessary actions to house families and the vulnerable while food distribution continues," government spokesman Stelios Petsas told reporters.

Bracing for a possible surge in COVID-19 cases, authorities were sending 19,000 test kits to the island. Petsas added that a passenger ferry had docked at the island's port of Mytilene to house families.

Petsas said Tuesday's fire, which reduced the Moria camp holding some 12,500 people to a mass of smouldering steel and melted tent tarpaulin, was started by asylum-seekers reacting to quarantine measures after COVID-19 infections were detected. He did not provide evidence.

"Some do not respect the country hosting them. They take advantage of any excuse to set every solution on fire," he said. Earlier, Greek authorities had sent 406 unaccompanied children and teenagers from the camp — notorious for its poor



Migrants sleep on the ground after spending the night on the road near Mytilene, as a fire destroyed Greece's largest Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, early on Thursday. — AFP

living conditions — to the mainland on three chartered flights. But thousands more people remained stuck in Lesbos with nowhere to sleep and little to eat.

Local attitudes to the migrants, on an island at the forefront of the European migrant crisis in 2015-2016, have turned largely hostile in recent years as the number of people

in the camp gradually rose.

Families slept on roadsides and in fields across the island overnight after a second fire broke out at the camp late on Wednesday, destroying what was left from the first inferno. On a parking lot outside a supermarket, more than 1,000 migrants including families with small children waited in the sunshine for bottled water and

food to be distributed.

SPARE A BISCUIT?

The 406 unaccompanied minors have been taken to safe facilities in northern Greece where they will stay temporarily, while the programme of their relocation to other EU countries is ongoing. An eight-year-old Congolese girl Valencia, who

was barefoot, gestured to a Reuters reporter that she was hungry and asked for a biscuit.

"Our home burned, my shoes burned, we don't have food, no water," she said. Both she and her mother Natzy Malala, 30, who has a newborn infant, slept on the side of the road.

— Reuters

Vaccine still possible this year: AstraZeneca

LONDON: Drugs giant AstraZeneca on Thursday said a COVID-19 vaccine could still be available by as early as the end of the year, despite a randomised clinical trial being paused.

"We could still have a vaccine by the end of this year, early next year," the UK-based company's chief executive Pascal Soriot said in comments at a media event.

AstraZeneca announced on Wednesday it had "voluntarily paused" its trial of a drug developed alongside Oxford University after a UK volunteer developed an unexplained illness.

An independent committee was drafted in to review safety but the company said it was a "routine action" designed to maintain the integrity of the trials.

"We will be guided by this committee as to when the trials could restart, so that we can continue our work at the earliest opportunity," Soriot said in a statement.

AstraZeneca's vaccine candidate is one of nine around the world currently in late-stage Phase 3 human trials.

In the US, the company began enrolling 30,000 volunteers across dozens of sites on August 31, and smaller groups are being tested in Brazil and elsewhere in South America.

The vaccine, called AZD1222, uses a weakened version of a common cold-causing adenovirus engineered to code for the spike protein that the novel coronavirus uses to invade cells.

— AFP

EU ponders legal action against Britain over plan to break Brexit deal

LONDON/BRUSSELS: Britain and the European Union held emergency talks on Thursday over Prime Minister Boris Johnson's plan to undercut parts of the Brexit divorce treaty, with Brussels exploring possible legal action against London.

As Britain pushes ahead with its plan to act outside international law by breaching the divorce treaty, EU negotiators are trying to gauge how to deal with London. European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic expressed concern about the plan before a meeting with British counterpart Michael Gove in London, taking place alongside trade talks

between chief negotiators Michel Barnier and David Frost.

EU diplomats and officials said the bloc could use the Withdrawal Agreement to take legal action against Britain, though there would be no resolution before the end-of-year deadline for Britain's full exit.

One EU source said Britain would not succeed if it aims to try to use the planned breach of the Withdrawal Agreement as a threat to extract concessions from the bloc in trade talks. "If they try to do that, it will fail," the EU source said on condition of anonymity.

A note distributed by the EU



EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier leaves Europe House, the headquarters of the EU delegation in the UK, London, on Thursday. — AFP

executive to the 27 EU member states said the Withdrawal Agreement gives the bloc up to four years to launch a legal procedure against Britain, if it violates EU rules during a transition period this year.

The British government says its planned law, put forward on Wednesday, clarifies ambiguities in the Withdrawal Agreement, and its main priority is the 1998 Northern Irish peace deal that ended decades of violence. It said the bill would be debated on Monday.

Europe's leaders have been handed an ultimatum: accept the treaty breach or prepare for a messy divorce. Britain

signed the treaty and formally left the EU in January, and leaves the single market when the status quo agreement expires at the end of this year. Sterling, which tends to fall when Brexit hits a snag, has tumbled in recent days.

The currency was flat at \$1.2999 on Thursday, but overnight implied volatility, an indicator of investor jitters, rose to 13 per cent, its highest since March 26.

IRELAND

Talks on a trade deal have been stuck over state aid rules and fishing. Without an agreement, nearly \$1 trillion in trade between the EU

and Britain could be thrown into confusion at the beginning of 2021, compounding the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The latest dispute centres on rules for Northern Ireland, which shares a land border with EU member Ireland. Under the 1998 agreement, there must be no hard border in Ireland. To ensure that, the British-EU divorce pact calls for Northern Ireland to continue to apply some EU rules. But Britain's new bill unveiled this week would assert the power to override many of those EU rules, acknowledging that London would be violating international law by doing so. — Reuters

BELARUS OPPOSITION FIGURE URGES PROBE INTO 'ABDUCTION'

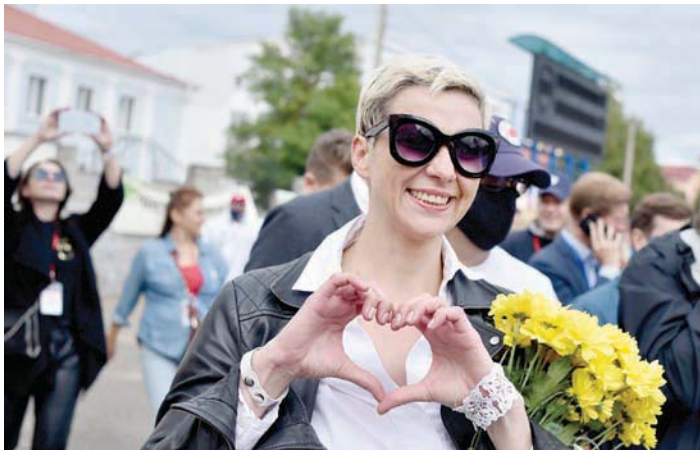
MINSK: Belarusian opposition figure Maria Kolesnikova on Thursday called for security officers to face criminal charges for abduction and death threats after she disappeared and was imprisoned.

The 38-year-old activist helped spearhead a protest movement after strongman Alexander Lukashenko claimed to have defeated political novice Svetlana Tikhonovskaya and won re-election with 80 per cent of the vote last month.

In extracts from a statement she gave to lawyers from a Minsk jail, Kolesnikova said officers from the KGB security service and organised crime police abducted her and pressured her to leave with threats of violence.

"They said that if I didn't leave Belarus voluntarily, they'd take me out anyway, alive or in pieces," she said.

"They also threatened to jail me for up to 25 years."



In this picture taken on July 31, Maria Kolesnikova, Viktor Babaryko's campaign chief, makes a heart sign with her hands during a campaign rally of presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhonovskaya in the town of Maladzyechna, some 70 km northwest of Minsk. — AFP

Her statement gave names and ranks of the officers responsible, her lawyer said.

Relatives only learnt of Kolesnikova's imprisonment on Wednesday following her Monday disappearance.

Her allies said she foiled an attempt to force her across the

border into Ukraine by ripping up her passport.

"After the KGB officers realised I wouldn't leave Belarus voluntarily, they put a sack on my head, pushed me into a minibus and drove me to the Belarus-Ukraine border," Kolesnikova's statement said.

"After I ripped up my passport, making it impossible for me to enter Ukraine, they put me back in the minibus," she added, after which she was held by border guards and jailed.

Her lawyer submitted a formal request to the head of the Investigative Committee to open a criminal case over abduction, unlawful imprisonment and threats of murder.

Kolesnikova is the most prominent opposition figure still in Belarus as the authorities have pressured many into leaving, including Tikhonovskaya, who was given shelter by EU member Lithuania.

Belarus has claimed that Kolesnikova was detained while attempting to flee into Ukraine by car with two other opposition figures, who themselves did cross the border.

— AFP



دعوة لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية
عن السنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١
شركة الخزائن للخدمات النفطية (ش.م.ع.م)

يتشرف مجلس إدارة شركة الخزائن للخدمات النفطية (ش.م.ع.م) بدعوة المساهمين الكرام لحضور الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية للسنة المالية المنتهية في: ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١. والمقرر عقدها يوم الأحد الموافق: ٢٠٢٠/٠٩/٢٧ - بفندق شيراتون عمان - بمسقط، وذلك في تمام الساعة التاسعة صباحاً، وفي حالة عدم اكتمال النصاب القانوني حسب التاريخ المحدد، فسيتم عقد الجمعية العمومية يوم الاثنين الموافق ٢٠٢٠/٠٩/٢٨، لمناقشة جدول الأعمال التالي:

١. دراسة تقرير مجلس الإدارة عن السنة المالية المنتهية في: ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١، والموافقة عليه.
٢. دراسة تقرير مراقب الحسابات والموافقة على الميزانية العمومية وحساب الأرباح والخسائر عن السنة المالية المنتهية في: ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١، والموافقة عليه.
٣. دراسة مقترح توزيع أرباح نقدية على المساهمين وذلك بنسبة (٣٠ ٪) من رأس المال بما يعادل (٣٠٠) بيسة لكل سهم والموافقة عليه.
٤. دراسة مقترح توزيع مكافآت على أعضاء مجلس الإدارة وذلك عن السنة المالية المنتهية في: ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١، والموافقة عليه. (حسب المرفق).
٥. التصديق على بدل حضور جلسات مجلس الإدارة والذي تقاضاه أعضاء مجلس الإدارة عن السنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١، وتحديد مقدار البديل للسنة المالية التي ستنتهي في ٢٠٢٠/١٢/٣١. (حسب المرفق).
٦. تعيين مراقب حسابات للسنة المالية التي ستنتهي في ٢٠٢٠/١٢/٣١، والموافقة على تحديد أتعابه.

وفقاً للنظام الأساسي للشركة يحق لأي مساهم أن يفوض خطياً أي شخص آخر ما عدا أعضاء مجلس الإدارة لحضور الاجتماع والتصويت على القرارات المتخذة نيابة عنه على ألا تزيد عن نسبة ٥ ٪ من رأس مال الشركة عن كل مساهم، ويجب للشخص الطبيعي أن يرفق بطاقة التفويض نسخة من البطاقة الشخصية للبالغين وجواز السفر للنساء والقصر الذين لا يحملون بطاقة شخصية.

مراقب الحسابات رئيس مجلس الإدارة المستشار القانوني

Is a chaotic Brexit looming after latest Brussels-London spat?

GABRIELA BACZYNSKA

The risk of a “no-deal” Brexit has increased since Britain presented new legislation that would undercut its divorce treaty with the European Union, angering the bloc and undermining trade talks.

The two sides were holding emergency talks on Thursday. If they fail to provide enough assurances that London will stick to its legal commitments, the bloc would take legal action against Britain.

The EU hopes Britain’s Internal Market Bill put forward on Wednesday will be altered. Otherwise, both sides are likely to step up contingency planning for an abrupt split at the end of Britain’s post-Brexit transition period ending on December 31.

Here is a possible schedule of potential next steps.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

The Internal Market Bill must pass through both houses of British parliament before becoming law.

The legislation will be debated in principle in the lower house on Monday, and then in detail over four further days. Lawmakers can propose and vote on changes, testing Johnson’s

PRIME MINISTER
BORIS JOHNSON
HAS SAID HE
WANTS A DEAL
WITH THE EU
BY OCTOBER 15,
OR BRITAIN
WILL LEAVE
TRADE TALKS
AND FOCUS ON
CONTINGENCY
PLANS FOR
A NO-DEAL
ECONOMIC
SPLIT FROM
THE EU

authority and the strength of his 80-seat majority.

JOINT COMMITTEE

Eyes are also on what progress on defusing the row can be made in coming weeks through a Joint Committee headed by European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic and senior British minister Michael Gove.

For trade talks, the EU needs clarity before the next negotiating round on Britain’s state aid plans.

MORE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

More negotiations on a new relationship between the EU and Britain are due in Brussels in the week of September 28-October 2.

Keen to avoid being assigned blame if talks break down, the EU has said it will not walk away from the table despite the spat over implementing the divorce treaty.

TUNNEL?

The EU says applying Britain’s Withdrawal Agreement is a separate track from future partnership negotiations, though controversy around putting the divorce deal into practice weighs on trade talks.

OCTOBER 15 DEADLINE/EU SUMMIT

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said he wants a deal with the EU by October 15, or Britain will leave trade talks and focus on contingency plans for a no-deal economic split from the EU.

EU leaders are due to meet in Brussels on October 15-16. If a deal is not in the making by then, the summit would be likely to underline the need for contingency preparations by the EU, highlighting the risk of a ‘no-deal’.

FIRST DAYS OF NOVEMBER

The EU has said Brexit negotiators must have a deal ready by the end of October — or the first days of November at the very latest — to allow time for ratification in the European Parliament and many of the bloc’s national assemblies by the end of the year.

END-YEAR/JANUARY 1, 2021

Britain’s post-Brexit transition period ends. If there is no new trade deal, close-knit ties will be severed and the sides will fall back on general World Trade Organization trade provisions.

That would mean introducing tariffs and quotas for trade exchanges between the EU and Britain from January. 1, 2021. — **Reuters**

FROM SAD TO WORRIED

World wildlife plummets in 50 years

PATRICK GALEY

Global animal, bird and fish populations have plummeted more than two-thirds in less than 50 years due to rampant over-consumption, experts said on Thursday in a stark warning to save nature in order to save ourselves.

Human activity has severely degraded three quarters of all land and 40 per cent of Earth’s oceans, and our quickening destruction of nature is likely to have untold consequences on our health and livelihoods.

The Living Planet Index, which tracks more than 4,000 species of vertebrates, warned that increasing deforestation and agricultural expansion were the key drivers behind a 68 per cent average decline in populations between 1970 and 2016.

It warned that continued natural habitat loss increased the risk of future pandemics as humans expand their presence into ever closer contact with wild animals.

2020’s Living Planet Report, a collaboration between WWF International and the Zoological Society of London, is the 13th edition of the biennial publication tracking wildlife



My view of the Taliban changed forever because of what happened in 1996, and I haven’t seen or heard anything to make me believe they have truly changed their ways

LAMBERTINI
WWF Director-General

populations around the world.

WWF International Director-General Marco Lambertini said of the staggering loss of Earth’s biodiversity since 1970.

“It’s an accelerating decrease that we’ve been monitoring for 30 years and it continues to go in the wrong direction,” he said.

“In 2016 we

documented a 60 per cent decline, now we have a 70 per cent decline.

“All this is in a blink of an eye compared to the millions of years that many species have been living on the planet,” Lambertini added.

‘STAGGERING’ FALL

The last half-decade has seen unprecedented economic growth underpinned by an explosion in global consumption of natural resources.

Whereas until 1970, humanity’s ecological footprint was smaller than the Earth’s capacity to regenerate resources, the WWF now calculates we are over using the planet’s capacity by more than half.

While aided by factors such as invasive species and pollution, the biggest single driver of species lost is land-use changes: normally, industry converting forests or grasslands into farms.

This takes an immense toll on wild species, who lose their homes.

But it also requires unsustainable levels of resources to uphold: one third of all land mass and three quarters of all freshwater are now dedicated to producing food.

The picture is equally dire in the ocean, where 75 per cent of fish stocks are over exploited.

And while wildlife is declining rapidly, species are disappearing faster in some places than others.

The index showed that the tropical regions of Central and South America had seen a 94 per cent fall in species since 1970.

“It is staggering. It is ultimately an indicator of our impact on the natural world,” said Lambertini. — **AFP**

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

How a small group of US lawyers pushed voter fraud fears into the mainstream

SIMON LEWIS,
JOSEPH TANFANI

For months, President Donald Trump has tried to convince Americans that the November 3 election will be “rigged,” claiming without evidence that mail voting will open the door to mass cheating.

“The greatest Election Fraud in our history is about to happen,” Trump wrote on Twitter on August 23.

In making these claims, Trump has seized upon the idea that US elections are vulnerable to rampant fraud. That once-fringe theory has become a staple of Republican politics, due largely to the efforts of a small network of lawyers who have promoted it for two decades, funded by right-wing foundations.

This year, the Trump campaign and the Republican Party have cited concerns about voter fraud in a nationwide legal battle with Democrats and voting-rights advocates over election procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic. These lawyers have played an important role, arguing for restrictions on mail-in voting in the closely-watched states of Arizona, Georgia and North Carolina.

Four nonprofits run by or linked to this network of lawyers — the Public Interest Legal Foundation, the American Constitutional Rights Union, Judicial Watch and True the Vote — have been involved in at least 61 lawsuits over election rules since 2012. More than half have been



▶ Voting sign is seen outside The Rock Dam Rod and Gun Club, which serves as the polling place for 96 voters in Foster Township, Wisconsin. — **Reuters**

LAWYERS HAVE
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ON MAIL-IN
VOTING

initiated since Trump took office in 2017, including 11 cases concerning absentee or mail-in voting.

These groups have helped lead a larger movement in the Republican Party that has seen states pass restrictions on voting, including strict voter identification laws passed by nine states since 2005. They have sought purges of voter rolls that could disproportionately affect minority voters, who tend to vote for the Democratic Party, according to voting-

rights advocates and election officials who have opposed these efforts.

Trump, saying he wanted an investigation into supposed voter fraud, appointed Christian Adams, president of the Public Interest Legal Foundation, and Hans von Spakovsky, who runs the election integrity programme at the conservative Heritage Foundation; to an election integrity commission in May 2017. It disbanded after less than a year without finding evidence of fraud. — **Reuters**

Uptick in Oman crude exports to Myanmar, Japan and Malaysia

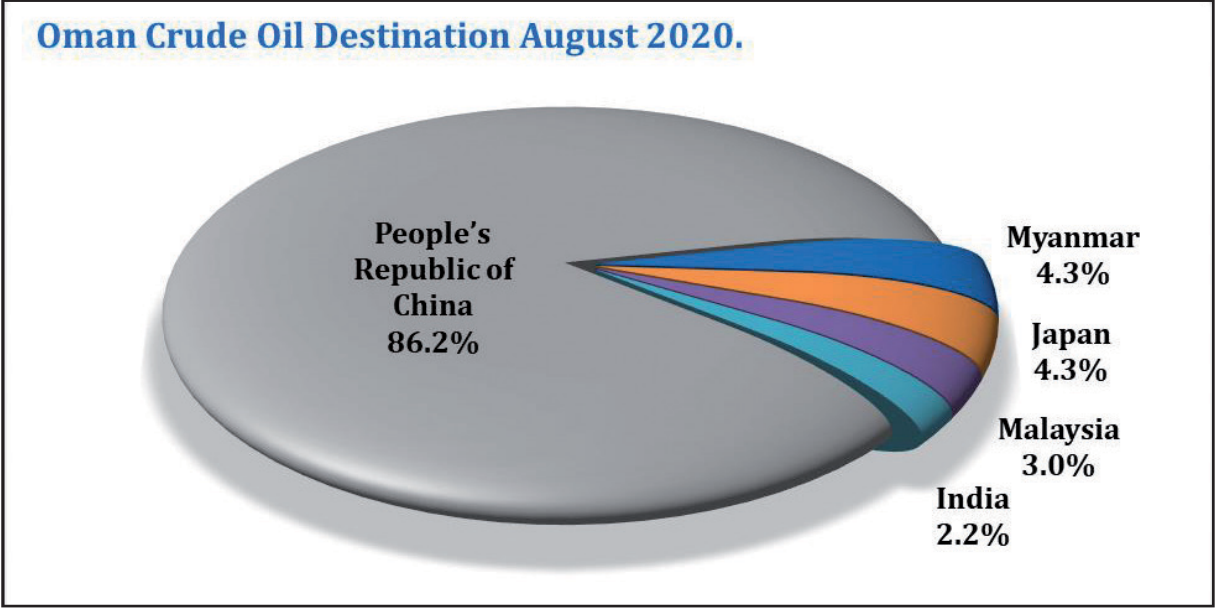
JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

China, the dominant importer of Oman Export Blend, saw its share dip slightly by 2.58 per cent to 86.2 per cent of exports totalling 744,736 barrels per day during August 2020 versus figures for July 2020, according to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

India's share too dropped 9.03 per cent m-o-m to 2.2 per cent of total exports for the month. However, three other markets saw their shares rise in August: Japan (4.3 per cent), Myanmar (4.3 per cent) and Malaysia (3.0 per cent)

According to the monthly report of the Ministry, the Sultanate's average daily production of crude oil during August 2020 reached 720,300 bpd, which was up 7.26 per cent m-o-m compared with July 2020. Exports of Oman Blend crude averaged 744,736 bpd, representing a decline of 4.3 per cent over the previous month.

Oil prices for all reference crude oil grades around the world experienced a bullish trend during the trading days of August 2020 — for October 2020 delivery —



The Sultanate's average daily production of crude oil during August 2020 reached 720,300 bpd, which was up 7.26 per cent m-o-m compared with July 2020

compared with trading for July 2020.

The average price of West Texas Intermediate Crude Oil at the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX) settled at \$42.75 per

barrel, an increase by \$1.84 only. The average price of North Sea Oil (Brent) at the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) in London averaged \$45.02 per barrel, a rise by \$1.80 compared with trading during July

2020.

The average price of Oman's Crude Oil futures contract on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange similarly increased by 1.6 per cent compared with the previous month.

The monthly official selling price for Oman Crude oil for October 2020 delivery — traded during August 2020 — was announced to be \$44.32 per barrel, rising by \$0.70 compared with the July 2020 official selling price. The daily trading marker price ranged between \$42.85 per barrel and \$45.74 per barrel.

“Crude oil prices experienced an overall optimistic sentiment during the trading of August 2020 due to several factors, which had direct and positive impact on prices.

The main factors that supported positive trading sentiments were significantly the decrease in US inventories and the devaluation of the US dollar's exchange rate, in addition to the full commitment of Opec+ producers with their global agreement on cuts in July.

What helped in the price increase was also a statement by US officials that China adhering to the first stage of the trade agreement between the two countries.

Also, the suspension of more than half of the production in the offshore platforms in the Gulf of Mexico prior to Hurricane Laura was a factor,” said the Ministry.

METAL RESERVE

Thai central bank to allow gold trading in dollars soon



The Bank of Thailand logo is pictured in Bangkok. — Reuters

BANGKOK: Thailand's central bank will allow gold trading in US dollars soon but it will not be mandatory, an assistant governor said on Thursday, as it tries to curb the impact of the precious metal on a stubbornly strong baht currency.

The revised rules should help reduce exchange rate volatility as domestic gold prices are linked to global gold prices, Vachira Arromdee told reporters.

“This is to provide more options for gold investors, such as for online trading,” she said.

The central bank has sent to the finance ministry adjusted rules on foreign currency deposit accounts to support gold trading in dollars, Vachira said.

The baht strengthened by 0.3 per cent to 31.29 per US dollar at 06:15 GMT, which exporters say is much stronger than the 33-34 baht rate that they need for shipments.

The central bank has said gold shipments add upward pressure on the baht.

Thai households have invested a lot in gold and typically sell it whenever gold prices go up, or during economic hardship. The gold sold would be exported.

In January-July, gold shipments jumped 107 per cent from a year earlier with a share of 7.1 per cent of overall exports, which fell 7.7 per cent during that period.

On August 28, central bank Governor Veerathai Santiprabhob said that rules on foreign currency deposits would be relaxed “to make sure that gold trading will not have an unnecessary impact on exchange rates”.

“The use of foreign currency deposits in gold trading in US dollars is one example,” he said in the interview, adding Thais could also keep savings in foreign currency deposits. — Reuters

Lloyd's of London says coronavirus claims could reach \$6.5 billion

LONDON: Lloyd's of London on Thursday raised its estimate for the total amount it expects to pay out in coronavirus-linked claims as the cost of the global pandemic continues to mount for insurers.

The world's largest insurance market said in a statement that it now expects to pay out up to £5.0 billion (\$6.5 billion in claims, compared with an earlier estimate of \$4.3 billion in May.

Lloyd's said it expects to recoup £2 billion of the payouts from reinsurers.

“The first half of 2020 has been an exceptionally challenging period for our people, our customers, and for economies around the world,” chief executive John Neal said.

“The pandemic has inflicted catastrophic societal and economic



A woman wearing a mask walks past the Tower Bridge in London. — Reuters

damage calling for unparalleled measures to stifle the spread of the virus, and to get businesses and economies back on their feet.”

Lloyd's said its COVID-19 claims after reinsurance recoveries totalled

£2.4 billion in the first half, pushing it into a pre-tax loss of £438 million.

In May, Lloyd's estimated that pandemic would cost the global insurance industry more than \$200 billion. — Reuters

German insolvencies fall despite crisis

BERLIN: The number of firms declaring insolvency in Germany was 6.2 per cent lower than in the first half of last year despite the coronavirus crisis, the Statistics Office said, partly because of a rule designed to keep firms afloat in the pandemic.

In March, the government gave companies that find themselves in financial trouble due to the pandemic a respite by allowing them to delay filing for bankruptcy. That was later extended until the end of the year.

The fact that insolvency numbers fell even as Europe's largest economy shrank the most in its post-war history will lend ammunition to critics who say that suspending compulsory insolvencies is merely keeping afloat “zombie companies” whose collapse has merely been delayed, not prevented.

There were 9,006 corporate insolvencies in the first half of

2020, a sixth of them in the retail sector, which was especially hard-hit by lockdowns to stem the virus's spread. Construction and hospitality also notched up more than 1,000 insolvencies.

Companies that had declared insolvency had total estimated debts of 16.7 billion euros, up from 10.2 billion euros in the first half of 2019.

“The economic pain many companies have suffered in the coronavirus crisis is not so far reflected in the number of declared insolvencies,” the Office said. “One reason is that the obligation to declare insolvency has been suspended on March 1.”

Germany's economy shrank by an unprecedented 9.7 per cent in the second quarter, a contraction that without government countermeasures would ordinarily have been accompanied by a wave of bankruptcies and mass unemployment. — Reuters

Brent oil benchmark dips but stays over \$40/bbl

LONDON: Oil prices dipped on Thursday after data showed US crude stockpiles rose last week and the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) downgraded its oil demand outlook, although the Brent benchmark stayed above \$40 a barrel.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures dipped 61 cents to \$37.44 a barrel at 08:08 GMT, after climbing 3.5 per cent on Wednesday. Brent crude futures fell 53 cents to \$40.26 a barrel, after rising 2.5 per cent the previous day.

The EIA will release official weekly inventory data later on Thursday, a day later than normal following this week's US Labor Day holiday.

The EIA already cut its 2020 world oil demand growth forecast by 210,000 barrels per day to 8.32 million bpd.

Industry data from the

The EIA already cut its 2020 world oil demand growth forecast by 210,000 barrels per day to 8.32 million bpd

American Petroleum Institute (API) showed on Wednesday the country's crude stockpiles unexpectedly rose by 3 million barrels in the week to September 4 with coronavirus cases rising in several US states.

“If the EIA confirms a crude oil build later today, it would be the first US stock build since mid-July,” ING analysts said.

On China's oil imports which have supported oil in recent months, Bank ANZ said they were likely to level off as ‘teapot’, or independent refineries, reach their maximum annual crude import



A 3D printed oil pump jack is placed on dollar banknotes in this illustration picture. — Reuters

quotas.

In a further bearish sign, leading commodity traders are booking tankers to store crude oil and diesel on the water, with supply outpacing consumption, according to trading sources and shipping data. The rising stockpiles come ahead of a meeting on September 17 of the market monitoring panel of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allies including Russia, together known as Opec+, which in August trimmed supply curbs from earlier this year on expectations demand would improve.

“Despite the recent slide in oil prices, we think that the Opec+ leadership will continue to direct its efforts towards securing better compliance rather than pushing for deeper cuts at this stage,” RBC analysts said. — Reuters



BUSINESS BRIEF

Worldline offers EU concessions over \$9.2 bn Ingenico deal

BRUSSELS: French payments company Worldline has offered concessions in a bid to gain EU antitrust approval for its 7.8-billion-euro (\$9.2 billion) acquisition of rival Ingenico, a European Commission filing showed on Thursday.

The move by Worldline, once part of Atos, could help it stave off a full-scale, four-month investigation by the EU competition enforcer.

The Commission, which did not provide details in line with its policy, extended its deadline for a decision to September 30.

It is now expected to seek feedback from rivals and customers before deciding whether to accept the concessions, demand more or launch an investigation. EU antitrust regulators typically prefer asset sales to address competition concerns.

— Reuters

India’s Reliance offers Amazon \$20 billion stake in retail arm

BENGALURU: India’s Reliance Industries is offering to sell a roughly \$20 billion stake in its retail arm to Amazon.com Inc, Bloomberg News reported on Thursday, citing one unnamed person with knowledge of the matter.

The oil-to-telecoms conglomerate led by billionaire Mukesh Ambani, which has already raised \$20 billion in this year from investors including Facebook and Google, is willing to sell an up to 40 per cent stake in the retail business to Amazon, the agency reported.

Asia’s richest man, Ambani is turning his focus toward retail after successfully building India’s top telecom network by customers in less than four years, hoping to take a dominant position as India’s huge consumer market comes of age.

Amazon has held talks about investing in Reliance Retail and expressed interest in negotiating potential deals but has made no decision, report said. — Reuters

Reform hopes rise as China focuses on inward economic shift

XI IN MAY PROPOSED A ‘DUAL CIRCULATION’ STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN WHICH CHINA WILL RELY MAINLY ON “DOMESTIC CIRCULATION” — AN INTERNAL CYCLE OF PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION.

BEIJING: Chinese reform advocates are hoping President Xi Jinping’s proposed new economic model, expected to be the centrepiece of a key conclave next month, is an opportunity to quicken changes to spur domestic demand and tackle structural woes.

The new development model will be discussed at a meeting of the ruling Communist Party in October, where policies are expected to be built into the next five-year road-map for the economy, policy insiders said.

Xi in May proposed a “dual circulation” strategy for the next phase of economic development in which China will rely mainly on “domestic circulation” — an internal cycle of production, distribution and consumption.

That will be supported by “international circulation”, in which China further integrates with the global economy, opening its doors to more foreign goods, capital and investment.

As tensions between Washington and Beijing rise, the potential decoupling of the world’s two largest economies presents significant risks, a prospect that is firming China’s resolve to shift reliance to its own vast domestic market, policy insiders said.

The gathering of the Central Committee, the largest of the Communist Party’s elite decision-making bodies, will focus on the 2021-2025 plan for the country’s social and economic development. It will be the 14th such plan since China embarked on rapid industrialisation under its first five-year plan in 1953-1957.

“It (dual circulation) will be a pivot of the 14th five-year plan. There will definitely be difficulties to



A farmer drives his tractor past his fields in Dongfeng village, Hunan province, China. — Reuters

make it work,” said a policy insider.

Guided by the new strategy, elements of the 2016-2020 plan, including supply-side reforms and policies to spur urbanisation and innovation, are expected to be taken to the next level, the details of which will be unveiled at the annual parliamentary session next year.

Few details have been published on the scheme itself, but economists and think tanks are proposing various reforms that they deem crucial to steering a more self-reliant economic course and building long-term growth drivers, they said.

China’s State Council Information Office did not immediately respond

to a faxed request for comment.

Government advisers have called for faster reform of China’s land and residency systems — key obstacles to its goal of building a highly urbanised, consumer-driven economy — and tackling a yawning rich-poor gap that has weighed on spending.

Overhauling giant state companies would help tackle deep-rooted economic distortions and help level the playing field for struggling private firms, they argued.

“Domestic circulation won’t take off if we cannot do a good job on reforms,” said a government adviser who declined to be identified.

At a meeting with Chinese economists on August 24, Xi pledged to take more measures to break down “deep-seated institutional barriers”, and reaffirmed a long-standing pledge to let markets play a decisive role in resource allocation.

In April, China’s cabinet issued guidelines on improving market-based allocation of “production factors”, including land, labour, technology and capital, in a bid to deepen market-oriented reforms.

To be sure, rebalancing the economy to rely more on consumer spending and less on inefficient investment and volatile exports has been a key policy goal for the past

decade.

But many Chinese advisers and economists are disappointed over the pace of reform in recent years, as a stability-obsessed government has plucked lower hanging fruit and delayed more painful reforms first unveiled at a key party meeting in 2013.

Increased control by the ruling Communist Party over all aspects of society has raised doubts about faster changes. “If we want to rely on domestic circulation, we must push reforms to unleash growth potentials,” said Jia Kang, head of China Academy of New Supply-side Economics, a think tank. — Reuters

Take-off for BA owner IAG’s planned \$3.2 billion coronavirus capital hike

LONDON: British Airways owner IAG launched a heavily discounted rights issue on Thursday to raise 2.74 billion euros (\$3.2 billion) to help strengthen its pandemic-hit finances, in a first test of faith in its new boss Luis Gallego.

Airline group IAG said that its largest shareholder, Qatar Airways Group, which has a 25.1 per cent holding, had undertaken to subscribe for its pro-rata entitlement in the fully underwritten capital increase.

The funds will be used to reduce debt and help IAG withstand a prolonged downturn in travel, the group said, as it also warned that the outlook for the rest of the year and 2021 had worsened since the rights issue was announced in July.

IAG expects its September to December capacity to be 60 per cent lower than 2019’s level, a cut from its previous estimate of a 46 per cent drop, and said in 2021 capacity is expected to fall by 27 per cent, worse than the 24 per cent previously predicted.

This underlines the scale of the challenge facing Gallego, the Spanish insider who took over from long-time boss Willie Walsh this week. Budget competitor Ryanair slashed its annual passenger target on Wednesday, as most airlines signal capacity cuts due to resurgent COVID-19 infections and as travel restrictions dent recovery hopes.

Under the terms of the fundraising, which was announced in July and approved by shareholders on Tuesday, investors are being offered new shares at a 36 per cent discount and can subscribe to three new shares for every two they own.

IAG, which also owns Vueling and Aer Lingus, said that despite the downgrades it still expected



A British Airways Airbus A380 aircraft arrives over the top of residential houses to land at Heathrow Airport in west London. — Reuters

to reach breakeven from operating activities in the last quarter of 2020, and progress was being made with job cuts at BA.

Shares in IAG were flat at 200 pence at 0800 GMT after the group said the 2.97 billion new shares would be at a subscription price of 0.92 euros, a 36 per cent discount to the theoretical ex-rights price based on the closing price.

An IAG spokeswoman said a full prospectus, including a timetable, would be published later

on Thursday. BA, which is aiming to shed 13,000 jobs as a result of the crisis, has already made over 8,000 redundancies, IAG said, adding that the airline has also reached agreement in principle with Unite, which represents cabin crew.

A consultative ballot is expected shortly, which could end a bitter row with the union. IAG said that it expected to report restructuring charges of 330 million euros in 2020 due to redundancies. — Reuters

Turkey, Libya discuss energy exploration deals

ISTANBUL: Turkey is discussing oil and natural gas exploration projects with the UN-recognised government in Libya, a top official said, as it squares off with Greece over Mediterranean drilling rights.

The talks with the Tripoli government come against the backdrop of rising tension over hydrocarbon resources and naval influence in the eastern Mediterranean that has sparked fears of conflict.

“We are discussing with the Libyan government and relevant authorities, the National Oil Company, (both) fields onshore and offshore for oil and gas,” a senior Turkish energy ministry official told reporters.

The official said Turkey was also looking into power generation projects “and also network development, potential pipeline operation and pipeline construction”.

Libya holds Africa’s largest oil reserves and has historic ties to Turkey stretching back to the Ottoman Empire.

Tripoli and Ankara struck an agreement last November that extended Turkey’s claims to waters that run over a planned natural gas pipeline connecting eastern Mediterranean fields with Greece.

Greece signed an exclusive economic zone deal with Egypt in August that stakes its own claims to



Turkish drilling vessel Yavuz sets sail in Izmit Bay, on its way to the Mediterranean Sea, off the port of Dilovasi. — Reuters

some of those waters.

The emerging crisis has seen the two Nato members stage rival navy drills near an area where Turkey’s Oruc Reis energy exploration vessel is conducting seismic studies off the coast of Greece’s Kastellorizo island.

Turkey joined the search for offshore eastern Mediterranean riches in 2018, but has so far failed to discover any oil or gas.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan did announce last month that Turkish has discovered a field in the Black Sea holding an estimated 320 billion cubic metres of gas.

But he said the find — which he hopes to convert into energy for the national power grid by the time Turkey celebrates its centennial in 2023 — would not slow the country’s eastern Mediterranean push.

The energy ministry official said Turkey currently imports 92 per cent of its crude oil and almost all of its natural gas. — AFP



Toronto Raptors' Kyle Lowry in action against the Boston Celtics. – USA Today Sports

Raptors outlast Celtics to stay alive

MIAMI: With their season on the brink and title repeat hopes in jeopardy, the Toronto Raptors outfought Boston for a dramatic series-tying 125-122 double-overtime triumph on Wednesday in the NBA play-offs.

Kyle Lowry led Toronto with 33 points and Norman Powell added 23 off the bench in an emotional thriller that resembled the intensity of a heavyweight boxing match-up.

Defending champions Raptors equalised the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semifinal with a winner-take-all game seven set for Friday, a conference final against Miami awaiting the winners.

"We play every possession like it's our last and find ways to pull out victories," an exhausted Lowry said after playing 53 minutes.

"That was two hard teams playing hard. Win or go home. Get it done. Don't matter who has to do it. Ready for game seven."

The Raptors won their first NBA crown last season but NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Kawhi Leonard left in the off-season for the Los Angeles Clippers, who defeated Denver 96-85 in a Western Conference semifinal to seize a 3-1 edge over the Nuggets.

Leonard just missed his first career NBA play-off triple double with 30 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists to spark the Clippers, who can advance with a victory on Friday.

Powell made a crucial steal and fast break lay-up plus a free throw to lift Toronto ahead 121-117 with 38 seconds remaining.

"I was just really focused on the

defensive end and let that spill over to the other end," Powell said.

"I pride myself on making winning plays. The game called on me to be aggressive and that's what I did. It's what I play for. It's what I pride myself in playing for."

Boston's Jayson Tatum answered with an inside jumper but Lowry hit a fall-away jumper — Toronto's sixth successful shot in a row — to put the Raptors ahead 123-119.

Tatum sank a 3-pointer to pull Boston within a point with 6.2 seconds remaining but Powell sank two free throws and Marcus Smart missed a last-chance 3-pointer for Boston.

"We didn't play as poised as we needed to down the stretch," said Boston's Jaylen Brown. "We didn't take care of the ball as well as we needed to. We had some turnovers that just killed us."

"Got to embrace the challenge. This is what adversity is about. We have to give everything for game seven."

Brown scored 31 points and grabbed 16 rebounds to lead Boston while Tatum had 29 points, 14 rebounds and nine assists and Smart managed only his second career triple double with 23 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists.

Fred VanVleet added 21 points for Toronto, and German centre Daniel Theis had 18 points for Boston.

"They are defending champs. We'll get their best every time," Boston's Kemba Walker said. "We fought hard. We made plays. I'm confident. We have a good group of guys. I know we will respond."

"We have to find a way."

Teams exchanged emotional words as they departed the court, cooler heads preventing more as intensity

nearly bubbled over before Friday's decider.

"A lot of emotions and things like that swirling," Brown said. "It's an intense series. It's a lot of testosterone. Things like that happen. Grown men should be able to keep it respectable."

FIFTY YEARS OF FUTILITY

The Clippers have never reached a conference final since the franchise began play in 1970 as the Buffalo Braves, but they are on the verge of ending a half-century of futility by advancing past the second round of the play-offs for the first time.

The team spent eight seasons in Buffalo and six more as the San Diego Clippers before moving to Los Angeles in 1984.

The Clippers jumped ahead 26-12 after the first period and the Nuggets never led as Leonard's squad shined despite shooting a season-low 41.8 per cent from the court.

"We just focused, came out knowing the game plan, gave our energy in those first five minutes and it carried over from there," Leonard said.

When it comes to closing out the series on Friday, Leonard said the Clippers must "just be consistent, play defence, share the ball, everybody having the mindset of playing every possession."

Nikola Jokic led Denver with 26 points and 11 rebounds. — AFP

NBA PLAY-OFF RESULT

(all series best-of-seven):
Semifinal
Eastern Conference
Toronto Raptors bt Boston Celtics 125-122 (2OT)
(Series level 3-3)

Two-time winner Koepka withdraws from US Open

NEW YORK: Two-time US Open winner Brooks Koepka said on Wednesday he has withdrawn from next week's US Open golf showdown at Winged Foot, still struggling with injuries.

Koepka won his first major at the 2017 US Open at Erin Hills and defended the crown in 2018 at Shinnecock, the first player to win back-to-back US Open titles since Curtis Strange in 1988 and 1989.

"Unfortunately, I have decided to withdraw from next week's US Open," Koepka tweeted on Wednesday. "I'm looking forward to getting healthy and competing at 100 per cent again very soon."

Koepka, who was a runner-up last year to Gary Woodland in his bid for a US Open three-peat, also won the 2018 and 2019 PGA Championships but shared 29th in last month's PGA at TPC Harding Park in San Francisco.

Koepka injured his left knee in early 2019 and reinjured the knee last year in South Korea. He sat out almost five months and missed the cut or withdrew from three of five starts before the March COVID-19 season shutdown.

He was a runner-up last month at the WGC St. Jude Invitational but, the following week, Koepka needed hip treatment on the course during the second round of the PGA, where he faded with a final-round 74.

He missed the cut the next week at Greensboro and withdrew from the playoff opener to end his season. — AFP



LEWIS INSPIRED BY TENNIS-PLAYING MUMS

NEW YORK: Stacy Lewis begins her bid for a second victory at the LPGA Tour's ANA Inspiration on Thursday and the former world number one says she has taken inspiration from the performances of tennis-playing mothers at the US Open Grand Slam in New York.

The women's singles draw at Flushing Meadows featured nine mothers, with two — Serena Williams and Victoria Azarenka — advancing to the semifinals.

Lewis, who won the Scottish Open last month for her first title since becoming a mother in 2018, said she knows exactly how much of a challenge it is to return to elite sport.

"I was watching the tennis these last couple days and thinking they're finishing at 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, you have to have somebody help get the baby to bed on time," she said.

"You know the challenges they're going through, as well, and I think it was Azarenka, she was so excited to win her match the other night, because you get it. "You understand what it's like, the work that you put back into it to get to that point again. So it definitely gives you motivation to see other women doing it."

The 35-year-old American has fond memories of the Mission Hills Country Club having won the ANA Inspiration, one of five majors on the women's circuit, in 2011.

"I've been really excited with the way my golf swing has felt... over this last month or so," said Lewis, who has registered two top-10 finishes in her last four starts.

"Putting just needs to be a lot better this week. It's kind of been hit-or-miss. If I can putt it good this week, I feel like I can have a chance come Sunday." — Reuters



Stacy Lewis



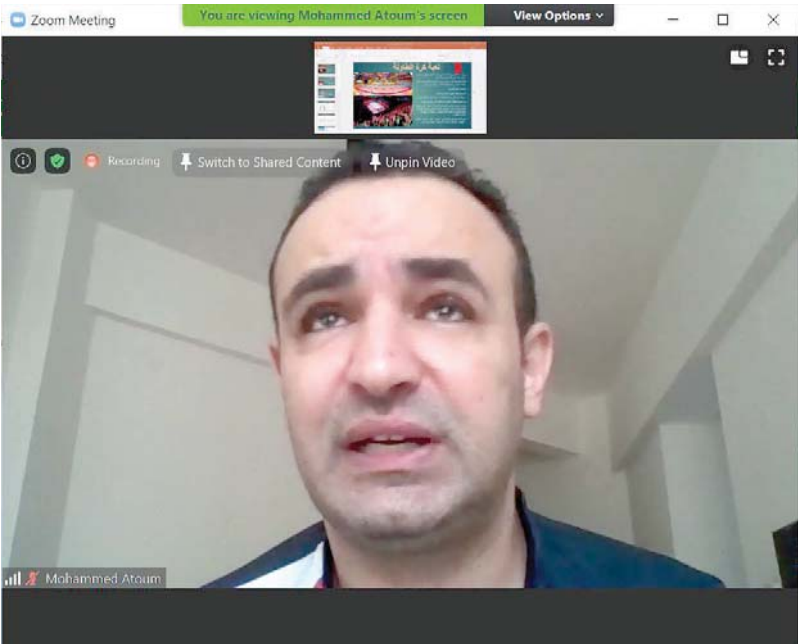
Atoum delivers coaching basics to OSSA members

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

Oman national table tennis coach Mohammed Atoum presented a webinar on table tennis coaching fundamentals to the members of the Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) as a part of sporting awareness programme.

Atoum commenced his online course through a brief introduction on some basics of table tennis. “There are more than 100 million table tennis players around the world. It is the top favourite sports in China as more than 27 million TT players are registered in China. The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) is the top world’s association with 226 members. Table tennis was ranked as a Olympic sport in 1988 in Seoul Olympic Games. The table tennis sport focused on the speed and rotation of the player,” he said.

Then, the Jordanian coach explained about the TT in Oman. “Table tennis is one of the sports followed and played by many people in the Sultanate. The sport’s history can be traced to earlier 1970’s in Oman and the first association was established in 1988. Oman had joined as a member in Arab Table Tennis Federation in 1980



while the membership at ITTF was in the following year. The membership at Asian Table Tennis Union was in 1984. In 2014, Oman Table Tennis Committee was formed and in 2020 the status of the committee was upgraded to the association status,” he added.

RIGHT COACHING METHODS
The Oman head coach affirmed that the TT coach should use different

easy technical approaches to deliver the right coaching to his players. “The player can receive the training instructions via auditory, visual, kinesthetic and sensory. The training of kids should focus on learning, joy and full activeness. There are proper technical techniques to be followed while handling the TT paddle with the palm,” he pointed out.

The discussion of the technical

aspects featured the player’s proper standing position during the match and his best ways to respond to various shots. Also explained were the leg position during serving and returning shots and the proper method to control the ball and play shot to the opponent’s side.

Concluding the presentation, coach Atoum stressed on developing TT at the school level.

“The top potential players are normally spotted from schools. I recommend adding a specialised course of table tennis for the students in school. Moreover, another recommendation that can support the improvement of table tennis in the Sultanate is assisting the schools with the necessary equipment. I suggest a weekly class on table tennis as sporting activity for the students. Allocating some schools in each governorate as a centre for learning table tennis will be good move. The students can come, learn and play TT at this centre. With the above mentioned recommendations, we may grow and took some ahead steps on development of the technical level of table tennis in the Sultanate,” he ended.

AFC Cup cancelled, ACL further delayed

KUALA LUMPUR: Asia’s football body on Thursday cancelled this year’s AFC Cup because of the coronavirus pandemic — and also announced further delays to Champions League matches in what it said were “tough times” for the sport.

The Asian Football Confederation had hoped to restart its long-delayed Cup competition next month in four host countries, but following a meeting of the executive committee Thursday they blew the whistle on the plans.

“These are tough times for everyone connected with football — and sport in general,” said AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

Officials also said some matches in the Asian Champions League (ACL) — the region’s showpiece tournament, which resumes next week in Qatar — would be further delayed.

The single-leg final will now take place on December 19. Officials previously said it would take place on December 5.



AFC general secretary Windsor John during the official draw for the 2020 AFC Champions League in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

East Zone group matches, originally scheduled from mid-October to early November, will now be played from November 15 to December 13.

Officials had already announced that West Zone group games will be in Qatar this month, while matches in two of the East Asia groups will be played in Malaysia.

Other venues are yet to be announced. — AFP



Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal players celebrate their victory in 2019 AFC Champions League final against Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds in Saitama. — AFP

Liverpool don’t need to spend like Chelsea: Klopp

LONDON: Spending huge amounts of money in the transfer market, like Chelsea have done this summer, does not guarantee success as clubs must do the hard work on the training ground to integrate new signings, Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp (pictured) has said.

Chelsea, owned by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich, have spent around 200 million pounds (\$259.88 million) to bring in Timo Werner, Kai Havertz, Hakim Ziyech and Ben Chilwell, while Thiago Silva and Malang Sarr arrived on free transfers.

Premier League champions Liverpool, who finished 33 points ahead of Frank Lampard’s side last season, have signed only left-back Konstantinos Tsimikas from Olympiakos Piraeus.

“We live in a world at the moment with a lot of uncertainty,” Klopp told BBC.



“For some clubs it’s less important how uncertain the future is: those owned by countries, oligarchs, that’s the truth. We’re a different kind of club. “We got to the Champions League final two years ago, we won it last year, and became Premier League champions last season by being the club we are.

“We cannot just change overnight and say, ‘So now we want to behave like Chelsea’. They are signing a lot of players. That can be an advantage but that means they have to fit together pretty quickly.

“You cannot bring in the 11 best players and hope a week later they play the best football ever. It’s about working together on the training ground.”

Liverpool begin their title defence against newly-promoted Leeds United on September 12 while Chelsea face Brighton & Hove Albion two days later.

— Reuters

Premier League rejects Newcastle claim over Saudi bid

MANCHESTER: The Premier League has rejected Newcastle United’s claim that they had turned down a takeover bid from a Saudi consortium saying the suggestion is incorrect.

Newcastle said on Wednesday that the Premier League had rejected the bid made by PCP Capital Partners, the Reuben Brothers and the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia (PIF).

The Premier League had never stated that they had rejected the bid and the consortium itself stated in July that it had “withdrawn” the proposal, citing the lengthy process. “The club and its owners do not accept that Premier League chief executive Richard Masters and the Premier League have acted appropriately in relation to this matter and will be considering all relevant options available to them,” said the club statement.

But the league responded on Thursday saying they were “disappointed and surprised” at the club’s statement. “The club’s assertion that the Premier League has rejected the takeover is incorrect,” the league

said in their statement.

“The Premier League Board has, on a number of occasions, given its opinion about which entities it believes would have control over the club should the consortium proceed with the acquisition. That opinion is based on legal advice.

“This means the potential takeover could proceed to the next stage should the relevant entities provide all appropriate information. They would then be subject to a suitability assessment by the Board. As an alternative, the Board has repeatedly offered independent arbitration as a way forward since June.

“It is also incorrect to suggest these decisions were taken by any individual; they were agreed unanimously by all Premier League Board members,” concluded the league.

Masters said on Wednesday that the process of evaluating takeover bids was being evaluated. The review of the ‘Owners and Directors Test’, previously known as the ‘Fit and Proper Persons’ test, was already underway before the Newcastle case, which had prompted



Newcastle United fans during their match against West Ham United in the 2019 Premier League Asia Trophy tournament in Shanghai. — AFP

criticism from the club and their fans.

The Premier League, along with the Football League (EFL), had committed to a review of the rules and procedure following the demise of League One club Bury after its ownership problems. “Generally speaking, (with) the owners’ and directors’ test, we are in the process of having a look at it anyway and all of our rules require a fresh look every now and then,” said Premier League CEO Richard Masters.

“We were doing so in concert with the FA and EFL post Bury in any event. So I think that will continue,” he told reporters. Masters had said that he understood why fans were frustrated with the lack of information through the process but said that it was a tricky balancing act for the league.

“It’s right that in situations of commercial transactions there is an expectation of confidentiality and we certainly support that. That has to be balanced off against I think of the ability to keep fans updated if things do become complicated and do take longer than normal,” he said.

— Reuters



Victoria Azarenka



Serena Williams

SUBLIME SERENA SETS UP AZARENKA BATTLE

TOP SEEDS THIEM AND MEDVEDEV BOOK SPOTS IN LAST FOUR

NEW YORK: Serena Williams battled into a US Open semifinal showdown with Victoria Azarenka on Wednesday as top men's seeds Dominic Thiem and Daniil Medvedev booked their spots in the last four.

Williams, seeded third, came from a set down to overcome unseeded Bulgarian Tsvetana Pironkova and keep alive her bid for a 24th singles Grand Slam title at Flushing Meadows.

Later, Azarenka blew away Belgium's Elise Mertens as she continues her hunt for a first Grand Slam title in seven years.

Williams' comeback included two astonishing shots with her left hand that contributed to winning points.

"At that point I was fighting so hard. I was just trying to do

everything I can whether righty or lefty," she said.

A sluggish start saw the American lose the first 6-4, but she fought back to take the next two 6-3, 6-2, in 2hr 12min inside Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"I never give up and you know I just gotta keep going," Williams added.

Williams smashed 20 aces, the most she has had in eight years, taking her tally for the tournament to 64 so far.

The record for the most number of aces in a US Open in the women's singles is 70, set by Williams in 1999 when she won for the first time.

"Sometimes when I'm serving, I just tell myself, I don't care if my arm falls off, I'm going to keep serving," she said.

Williams is looking to match Margaret Court's record for the most number of singles Grand Slam wins.

It has been more than three years since she won her 23rd at the 2017 Australian Open — when she was already pregnant with daughter Olympia.

Williams has come close since, reaching four major finals only to come away empty handed.

In the last four she will renew her rivalry with former world number Azarenka who demolished Mertens 6-1, 6-0 in just 1hr 13 min.

Williams defeated Azarenka in the final of the US Open in 2012 and 2013.

AZARENKA 'HAPPY'

The last few years of Azarenka's career have been interrupted by a

US Open results

Men (quarterfinals)

Daniil Medvedev (RUS x3) bt Andrey Rublev (RUS x10) 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 7-6 (7/5)

Dominic Thiem (AUT x2) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x21) 6-1, 6-2, 6-4

Women (quarterfinals)

Serena Williams (USA x3) bt Tsvetana Pironkova (BUL) 4-6, 6-3, 6-2

Victoria Azarenka (BLR) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x16) 6-1, 6-0

custody battle over her son who was born in 2016.

Azarenka said she found it "hard to accept losses" when she was young and at the top of her game,

but was now benefiting from a more philosophical attitude.

"I enjoy the moment no matter what it is. I take life as it comes," Azarenka said.

"It took me a long road to come here with a lot of struggles, a lot of understanding, forcing me to find this route, this path, if you can say that. But I'm here and I'm happy."

'FRIENDLY FIGHT'

In the men's draw, Russia's third seed Medvedev downed compatriot and childhood friend Andrey Rublev 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 7-6 (7/5).

Twenty-two-year-old Rublev raced to a 5-1 lead in the first-set tie-break before Medvedev, last year's US Open runner-up, hauled back to win it 8-6 with an ace.

Medvedev, 24, smashed 16 aces and won 89 per cent of first-serve

points. He made 75 per cent of returns to Rublev's 54 per cent.

"One point decided two sets so it was a really tough match and Andrey was playing unbelievable actually," Medvedev said.

Medvedev will play second seed Thiem who demolished Australia's Alex de Minaur, seeded 21st, 6-1, 6-2, 6-4.

"I had a great feeling from the first moment on," said the Austrian.

Fifth seed Alexander Zverev of Germany faces Spain's 20th seed Pablo Carreno Busta in the competition's other semifinal.

The disqualification of Novak Djokovic for accidentally hitting a line official with a ball during the last 16 means the US Open will crown a first-time Grand Slam winner on Sunday.

— AFP

England must adapt to spin pitches: Morgan

LONDON: Eoin Morgan believes England must adapt to spinning pitches if they are to successfully defend their World Cup title in India, and hopes that work can begin during the one-day series against Australia.

Captain Morgan is anticipating a gentle turner at Old Trafford, where the arch-rivals will play three ODIs over the next week, with the weather conditions and wicket likely to favour slow bowlers.

England's rise to top spot in the 50-over rankings was built around posting big totals on good batting tracks and their tournament triumph last year was driven by their pace attack.

But with the next edition due to be held in India in 2023, as well a T20 World Cup there next year, Morgan is embracing the need for change.

"It's a huge benefit to us playing at Old Trafford, particularly if we play on the wicket I think we're going to

play on, which will hopefully be slow and take a lot of turn," he said.

"It's been overcast and that makes it tacky. That's the sort of wicket we will be more than likely to play on in India in the World Cup of 2023 and to play on that for a period of time will expose us in different areas we need to get better at."

He said over the past few years England had had to wait to play at Cardiff or Old Trafford to experience such conditions, and that more exposure would help them.

"I think going away from what we are strong at will do us good for a period of time," he said. "It allows us to focus on things that are our weaknesses as a side, so it creates a new dynamic."

RASHID THREAT

A powerful batting order might need to evolve its methods, while Jofra Archer and Mark Wood will hope to balance their outright speed with other tools.



England's Eoin Morgan

Test skipper Joe Root, arguably England's least explosive batsman, could play a crucial role on sub-continental style pitches, while leg-spinner Adil Rashid will be a key weapon.

"For me he's the number one variation bowler in the world at the moment," said Morgan of Rashid. "He's continuing to improve his game. He's been in as fine form as

I've seen him."

As for Root, who was disappointed to be overlooked for England's recent Twenty20 series win over Australia, the Dubliner added: "Joe is one of the best players in the world. Throughout the last World Cup it was clear what a valuable player he is to us and I think he's undersold a lot of the time in white-ball cricket."

England have a fully fit squad ahead of Friday's opener, including the returning Jason Roy, with Morgan also clear after missing the final T20 in Southampton with a dislocated finger.

Morgan is fully committed to the captaincy but said England were planning for the future.

"The age-old saying of not thinking of captaincy before you're given it, we're trying to get rid of that stigma and build not one leader but a group that will support them and drive things forward," he said.

— AFP

Hirschi solos to maiden win

SARRAN, France: After two agonising near misses, Swiss Marc Hirschi finally claimed his maiden Tour de France win, and his first as a professional, when he completed a solo break to take the 12th stage on Thursday.

Having finished second in the second stage in Nice and third in the ninth stage in Laruns after a long solo breakaway in the Pyrenees, the former Under-23 world champion held off a group of chasers to prevail following a bumpy 218-km trek that ended in former French president Jacques Chirac's hometown.

France's Pierre Rolland was second and Hirschi's Sunweb team mate Soren Kragh Andersen of Denmark took third place as Slovenian Primož Roglic retained the overall leader's yellow jersey.

"It's unbelievable, I was twice really close and actually today I never believed that I could make it," said the 22-year-old Hirschi. "I went full gas. It's super nice. Actually I was always doubting, I had the picture in my mind of the



Marc Hirschi celebrates as he crosses the finish line of the 12th stage. — AFP

last two stages. My first victory as a professional, it's incredible. I know I'm strong. It just gave me extra power, it was now or never."

It was a quiet day for the main contenders but sparks could fly on Friday when the 13th stage takes the peloton to Puy Mary, at the top of the ascent to the Pas de Peyrol (5.4km at an average gradient of 8.1%). — Reuters



FOUR-TIME F1 CHAMPION VETTEL SIGNS FOR ASTON MARTIN

MUGELLO, Italy: Former world champion Sebastian Vettel has signed for the renamed Aston Martin team for the 2021 season “and beyond”, the ambitious British Formula One outfit announced on Thursday.

The 33-year-old German won four consecutive titles from 2010 to 2013 with Red Bull before joining Ferrari, but the Italian team has not renewed his contract.

Signing Vettel was “a clear signal” to the racing world, said Racing Point, which will take the Aston Martin name next year after Canadian billionaire owner Lawrence Stroll’s investment in the British brand.

Vettel will drive alongside Stroll’s son Lance and replace Mexican driver Sergio Perez who announced on Wednesday he will leave Racing Point at the end of the season.

“It’s a new adventure for me with a truly legendary car company. I have been impressed with the results the team has achieved this year and I believe the future looks even brighter,” said Vettel. “The energy and commitment of Lawrence to the sport is inspiring and I believe we can build something very special together.”

He added: “I still have so much love for Formula 1 and my only motivation is to race at the front of the grid. To do so with Aston Martin will be a huge privilege.”

Vettel has spent six seasons with the Italian team without repeating his title-winning heroics at Red Bull.

This term has proved particularly difficult

with Vettel sinking to 13th place in the championship ahead of Sunday’s Tuscan Grand Prix at Mugello in Italy as Ferrari have suffered a miserable season.

The last of Vettel’s 53 victories — the third most in F1 history — came at the 2019 Singapore Grand Prix. Only Michael Schumacher (91) and Lewis Hamilton (89) have won more races.

Vettel has also finished on the podium a further 67 times.

‘NEW ERA’ AT ASTON MARTIN

“Everybody at Silverstone is hugely excited by this news. Sebastian is a proven champion and brings a winning mentality that matches our own ambitions for the future as Aston Martin F1 Team,” said team principal Otmar Szafnauer.

“On a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, Sebastian is one of the best in the world, and I can’t think of a better driver to help take us into this new era. He will play a significant role in taking this team to the next level.”

Racing Point’s current season has been marred by controversy with accusations they had copied Mercedes’ brake ducts.

On Sunday, Racing Point dropped their appeal against a 15-point deduction and 400,000-euro (\$472,000) fine.

Vettel’s arrival means that the team will dispense with the popular Perez, a dependable and fast racer who played a prominent role in saving the former Force India team during a financial crisis two years ago before it was taken

over by the consortium that renamed it Racing Point.

“It hurts a bit as I bet on the team during very rough times; we managed to overcome obstacles and I am very proud of saving jobs of several my teammates,” Perez said on Twitter.

Vettel was informed brusquely by Ferrari in May prior to the launch of the coronavirus-hit 2020 season that his contract was not being renewed. His name was linked immediately with Racing Point ahead of most other teams, notably because they made a very strong start this year with the so-called “pink Mercedes” car, claimed to be essentially a copy of last year’s title-winning Mercedes. Vettel helped rebuild Ferrari into title contenders in 2017 and 2018 but the team fell short both years, partly as a result of several driver errors.

He was then outshone by the highly-rated Charles Leclerc last season, finishing fifth overall and 173 points behind championship winner Hamilton. Ferrari, set to celebrate their 1000th race at the Tuscan Grand Prix, are the sport’s most successful team but their 2020 slump hit a new low last weekend when they failed to qualify at least one car in the top 10 on home soil for the Italian Grand Prix for the first time since 1984.

— AFP

