

ZOO IN THE DESERT!

BESIDES BEING AN ATTRACTION, AL NU'MAN PARK PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROMOTING ANIMAL CONSERVATION



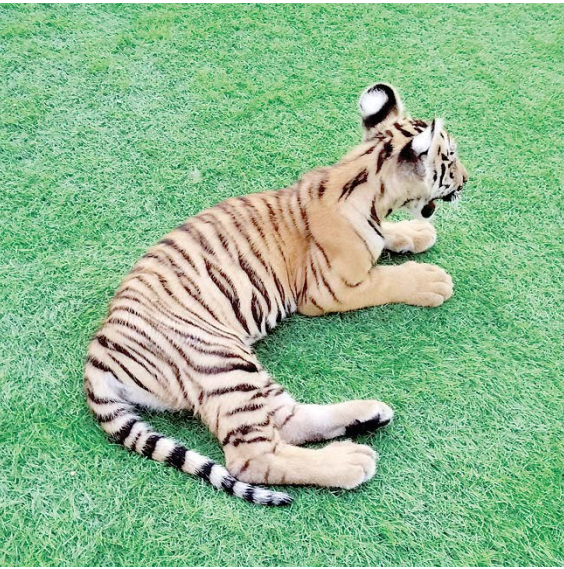
KABEER YOUSUF

Can the animals, birds and other creatures, ferocious and kind, which are found in forests, thick meadows and other pastures live happily in the middle of the desert?

The Sultanate is proving to be a haven for a wide range of animals with the one of its kind habitat, complemented with the love and care of humans.

The animals in the park include domesticated as well as wild animals, from predators to reptiles and birds. Lions, tigers, leopard, hyenas, foxes, nymphs, snakes, crocodiles and several species of monkeys, besides some unique ones such as raccoons, deer, horses and other animals are making this zoo top in the list of 'places to visit'.

The man behind the idea of a zoo in the desert of Al Batinah Governorate, Ahmed bin Abdul Rahim al Balushi, is still exploring ways to enhance the number of members in his vast zoo.



"I have always been passionate about animals and birds from my childhood days and the idea of establishing Al Nu'man Park traces roots to my hobby of giving a better house for the animals that I have in my possession for more than 20 years", says Ahmed al Balushi.

He brought several animals, rare and beautiful ones from the Sultanate, the GCC and other Asian countries and kept them in his farm. As he grew up, he started to

arrange sheds for the animals which led to the idea of a zoo.

"At that time, I had a very small farm but with his hard-earned money, he bought many neighbouring farms to make my farm bigger".

Al Nu'man Park, spread over 10,000 square metre opened on November 18, 2009, is located in the Wilayat of Barka in the village of Al Nu'man near Al Nu'man Heritage House. This park is one of the rare

parks that contains many attractions for tourists and visitors.

Al Nu'man Park has an accommodation for visitors who want to spend some time amid the natural attractions and other facilities such as a swimming pool, a special place for barbecue, in addition to a number of restaurants and shops to cater both domestic and international tourists.

A new section, called heritage section for old coins, postage

stamps, traditional old clothes, old machines, old office automation machines and copies of the old Omani newspapers are displayed in order to introduce the Omani heritage to visitors.

The idea of the zoo, according to him, is to make people happy by watching different animals. He says the country is in need of such rare recreational space for families and children to know more about the animals.

"Today, I am getting queries not only from Oman but from other countries as well to come and visit the zoo and do research on various animals and birds," he adds.

The zoo has a new attraction that's evoking queries from many quarters and visitors who yearn to see them.

The tiger couple, Pablo and Luna has parented Shathoo and Kapootho, twin cubs some three months ago making social media abuzz with their photos and videos.

"It was a great news to the zoo and me personally that twin sisters were born for the first time in the country", Ahmed al Balushi said.

INSIDESTORIES

4,300t of medical waste treated

MUSCAT: An estimated 4,300 tonnes of healthcare waste were treated and disposed of at dedicated treatment facilities established at key locations around the Sultanate last year, according to the Oman Environmental Holding Services Company (be'ah), the sole entity tasked with managing all solid waste in the country. As many as three state-of-the-art healthcare waste treatment facilities are currently in operation in the Sultanate. The largest of these is located at Al Multaqa in Muscat Governorate, while equally modern plants have been set up at Liwa (North Al Batinah Governorate) and Thamrait (Dhofar Governorate).

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Beirut fire smoke could be 'toxic'

BEIRUT: Greenpeace warned residents in Lebanon's capital on Thursday to protect themselves against "toxic" smoke after a huge fire broke out in a Beirut port warehouse said to be storing tyres. "Burning tyres produces a lot of fine particulates, visible smoke and ash but also a lot of volatile organic pollutants that can be inhaled even outside the smoke plume", the environment campaigners said. "The smoke can include highly toxic and carcinogenic compounds, black carbon and other particulates and acid gases", it warned.

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Britain 'baffled' by EU view

BRUSSELS: Britain rejects the suggestion by the European Union that it has not engaged with Brussels on talks over a future relationship, a British source said on Friday.

"We don't recognise the suggestion that we've not engaged, we've been engaged in talks pretty consistently for many months now", said the source, on condition of anonymity. "The problem is the EU seems to define engagement as accepting large elements of their position rather than being engaged in discussions".

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Wealthy keeping wallets closed

LISBON: As coronavirus cases rise again across Europe, spending data shows that fear of infection is deterring many wealthier consumers from splashing out. That spells trouble for retailers, luxury goods and leisure firms desperate to make up lost ground.

Consumer transaction studies in countries including Britain, Denmark, France and Sweden show a pattern also seen in the US: Even as shops re-opened, high-income consumers kept their wallets zipped up.

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT MAX: 39°C MIN: 28°C	SALALAH MAX: 31°C MIN: 26°C	NIZWA MAX: 43°C MIN: 30°C
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SUNRISE 05.52 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:37
DHUHR: 12:08
ASR: 15:35
MAGHRIB: 18:19
ISHA: 19:30



TOURISM



DID YOU KNOW THAT ALL PAPER CUPS IN THE WORLD HAVE PLASTIC LINERS WHICH ARE NOW BEING REPLACED WITH STAINLESS STEEL WASHABLE CUPS WITH NO WASTES? **SEE P2**

'Not seeing urgency': Communications failure blamed for climate inaction

LONDON: Humans' collective inability to stem planet-heating emissions — which continue to rise despite pledges to slash them — is largely the result of failures to communicate the risks effectively, government officials and activists said this week.

Even as scientific warnings grow clearer and more urgent, and climate-linked hazards such as more deadly wildfires and destructive storms and droughts affect more people, too few see the rising threats as urgent, they warned.

"Many people still do not seem to fully understand it is impacting our lives today", Britain's Prince Charles told an online event run by the Red Cross Red Crescent movement.

"We simply cannot sit back and wait for the climate to change around us and



'We fail in the way we engage with the community. We fail in the way we are able to communicate how deep the crisis is, how it is affecting millions and millions', says Francesco Rocca. — **Reuters**

accept these disasters as an inevitability", said the prince, who is president of the British Red Cross.

While slow progress on addressing the growing climate threat often is blamed on a lack of funding, political will or public acceptance of lifestyle changes, that could be reversed

if more people recognised the risks, panelists said.

"We fail in the way we engage with the community. We fail in the way we are able to communicate how deep the crisis is, how it is affecting millions and millions", said Francesco Rocca, President of the International Federation of

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

"This is something we must change", he added.

The task was particularly difficult because "the climate crisis has become political" in some countries, with scientific evidence used "to divide rather than unite", he said.

Kumi Naidoo, former secretary-general of Amnesty International, said many people are exposed to a "massive amount of disinformation and lies" about climate risks, and activists had not figured out how to counter that problem.

For most people, "the truth is we are not seeing the urgency — not only government and business but also the large majority of civil society", he told an online panel on Thursday run by Glasgow Caledonian University. — **Reuters**



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KEEPING UP WITH THE TREND: HOW HOTELS ARE ADOPTING GREEN PRACTICES

FROM REUSABLE COFFEE CUPS TO DIGITAL DOOR-HANGERS, HOTELS ARE CONSTANTLY INNOVATING WAYS TO DO THEIR BIT IN SAVING THE ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTING GUESTS WHO SHARE THE SAME VALUES

LIJU CHERIAN

DID you know that all paper cups in the world have plastic liners which are now being replaced with stainless steel washable cups with no wastes?

Even the 'do not disturb' signs, the door knob menus have gone digital and garbage bags made from cassava are being implemented for all wastes.

Most hotels in the Sultanate which claim to have banned plastics have a long way to go. This is not a small task by any means and each and every one of them involved needs to do much more.

The Intercontinental Hotel Group (IHG) is leading the fight not only locally in the Sultanate but globally in particular for IHG and also for Omran Company.

IHG globally are also driving change to eliminate plastics while Omran which has over a dozen hotels in the Sultanate are driving hotels to do more for the environment.

PAUL SCHENK, Hotel Manager, Crowne Plaza Muscat, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), is on a mission to eliminate plastics in his hotel and inspire others. They will soon be the first business hotel in the world to be 'plastic free.'

The hotel also aims to be the first business hotel in the world that has its own water bottling factory and has eliminated 250,000 plastic water bottles.

"We created a circular economy module which means to reuse, refill, reuse and refill as we have to do more for the environment faster," admits Paul who is on a mission to eliminate 100 per cent single use plastics. His ultimate aim is to save the planet and protect Oman's unique coasts and beaches.

However, **RENÉ D'EGLE**, Area General Manager for Shangri-La Resorts in Muscat says, "The current pandemic has unfortunately slowed down the plastic elimination plans around the globe, especially with the new health and safety standards and precautionary measures of COVID-19. The safety of our guests and colleagues during these critical times becomes our first and foremost priority."

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa has ensured that all the current plastics utilised for packaging is used temporarily and is either recyclable or biodegradable.

Since 2018, all plastic straws have been completely eliminated and the resort is now using paper straws.

Prior to COVID-19, Shangri-La had installed water fountains around the resort and metal bottles were being sold at cost price to encourage guests to reduce the usage of plastic water bottles. Unfortunately, water fountains are now non-operational to avoid any cross contamination during the pandemic.

Hotels globally are applauding IHGs innovation as they work with several product producers globally to trial and roll out new non-plastic solutions.

An example is the first Nespresso machine compatible coffee capsules in the world which are 100 per cent plastic free and are compostable and biodegradable. They also have the first cling film in the world that is made 100 per cent from vegetables.

Local suppliers like Al Zain have been ordered to change their supply of eggs to cartons, reducing 20,000 plastic trays per year or even A'Safwah Dairy to change from milk cartons to paper. They are also currently looking at a product for shampoo, conditioner and body lotion for the bathrooms.

However, Paul mentions that they have changed hundreds of products now and are putting more pressure on their suppliers. "Every single item we have changed costs us less money as we are also educating our guests."

He says the hotel informs their guests to bring their own cups for coffee as all paper cups are lined with a plastic bag.

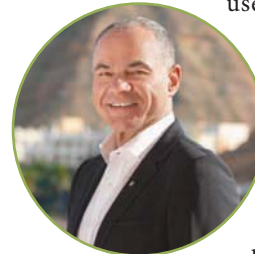
"If we have to give a take away cup then we tell the guest we care about the environment so we are not giving you a plastic lid unless you insist you need one," he informs. It is not surprising that many people understand and refuse the lid which saves money. They also have the first in the world coffee cup lid made from bamboo fiber which is 100 per cent non-plastic.

Take away coffee cups top is made from paper and will be the first to implement in the Middle East. The guests are also asked as to what they want to consider leaving it off for the environment. An example is of samples for in-room amenities, where each and every item is 100 per cent plastic free.

Last year, the hotel launched a new bottling factory project on the ground floor costing RO 10,000. They also have sparkling water or aerated water full of bubbles.

The Shangri-La Resort is also planning a water bottling plant project due to be launched before 2022 which will completely replace plastic bottles.

Other environmental initiatives at Crowne Plaza include an herbal garden, beehives and solar panels on the roof, 100 per cent LED lighting for the entire hotel, public area waterless urinals, public area motion detector water flow for sinks and many others.





DR YOUSUF ALI
AL MULLA

THE GHOST... AND THE TRAPPED VICTIMS!

During the past months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have always said: Stay home. Stay safe. The home is the place where you should feel safe and perhaps even being in it means, first of all you are in a place dear to you and totally protected.

Despite the necessity to slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), measures such as social distancing, travel restrictions and the closure of community institutions at some point during the pandemic are likely to have had a role in some way in increasing rates of family violence in most countries. One of the many unfortunate consequences of the pandemic is the escalation of family violence between spouses or against children.

It is undoubtedly behaviour intended to provoke fear or cause harm, whether physically or psychologically, or generate a feeling of humiliation leading to a threat. And here it certainly appears to us as observers, in light of the changes that we have witnessed during this pandemic, how many spouses are in one place all the time, and the resulting collision may result in the presence of children increasing the burden on the spouses and the emergence of conflict and violence between them sometime.

We can say that those significant changes that have occurred in our routine lives, such as social distancing guidelines and safety protocols, have led to isolation for most people. Not to mention that most of those patients who entered a quarantine as a result of being infected with the virus, or committed to social distancing, may develop symptoms of anger, confusion and post-traumatic stress syndrome. In addition to other societies whose members begin to use narcotic substances while they are subjected to home quarantine, for instance.

The families in particular face additional stress resulting from working from home and caring for children, either by helping them in school or by keeping them occupied during the summer months. Especially since there are definitely families who have also been affected financially or lost their job with its financial concerns, as well as the loss of social relationship and activities, which we all undoubtedly yearn for.

Some studies have indicated that the rate of domestic or family violence has increased by 20 per cent in the world during the pandemic. Moreover, schools may remain closed during the coming months and virtual learning continues as this debate continues in plain sight. Children often respond to stress and lose their usual routine with changes in behaviours such as tantrums and withdrawals. Besides crying and sleeping difficulties, they may not understand why they feel this way. Parents may misunderstand these behaviours as intentional, when in fact they are symptoms of stress.

It is important to realise that the risks may be exacerbated by the additional pressures that cause many parents to continue working full-time during this period of the pandemic. As such, parents leave their home to work; children face an increased risk of neglect (a lack of adequate supervision to prevent children from harming). Whereas when working from home, parents with young children are forced to try to fulfil the requirements of working while caring for those young kids at the same time.

Certainly, such changes in routine are annoying, confusing, and difficult for young kids. We sometimes see an increase in oppositional behaviour from the child and such behaviours are likely to provoke harsh reactions from parents and may lead to violence, abuse and neglect... and this leads me to an important question whether these pressures lead finally, to domestic or family violence, or did it help create a tense atmosphere at home? Will marital relations last during the pandemic, and how will they be after?

In fact, with the social distancing in the pandemic period, the harmony of family members supposed to increase, as they spend longer with their families. But have various reports and media reached out to the effect that there is an increase in family violence during the pandemic, blaming only social and physical distancing, or can we say that the causes are the same before the pandemic, but rather it increased in intensity with the pandemic?

Not to mention that domestic violence here does not stop at women only, or as we mentioned earlier among children, but it may be from children over their parents as a result of undermining their freedoms as they claim during the closure period in the past period, for instance, or through social distancing. Sadly, they get rid of negative energy by using violence as a way to impose control and emptying waves of anger.

It is clear that domestic violence has become a worrisome social issue and it may be an exceptional case during this pandemic, in which the conditions of the people have changed and this issue slowly infiltrated their life, accompanied by the spectre of coronavirus destroying the peace of families.

Consequently, it became necessary to create adequate awareness about the increased risks of violence during the pandemic or even crises and highlight the need for people to stay in contact with each other (taking into account the precautionary measures) and of course the great importance of reporting any fears of abuse.

It is also important to remember that maintaining social cohesion is an important strategy during times of isolation or social distancing (as with the pandemic) and more so with family or friends who you suspect may be at risk of domestic violence.

Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla, MD, Ministry of Health, is a medical innovator and educator. For any queries regarding the content of the column he can be contacted at: dryusufalmulla@gmail.com

Working virtually? Swap skyscrapers for ocean views



DON BURGESS

When the coronavirus pandemic hit and office workers were asked to work remotely, Abbie Shepherd saw it as an opportunity to swap London's skyscrapers for something more exotic.

Shepherd, who is chief of staff at Cameo, which sells personalised messages from celebrities, saw an advertisement on Facebook for Bermuda's \$263 one-year residency certificate for digital nomads and remote students.

She promptly booked a flight and flew out a week later to check out the North Atlantic archipelago, known for its coral reefs, pink-sand beaches and golf courses.

"I was always interested in moving to the Caribbean," said Shepherd, 24,

noting that the views of the ocean had soothed her during the pandemic. "It makes a difference to my mental state, especially while I'm working from home."

Bermuda is one of a number of locations such as Barbados, Estonia and Georgia that have started offering visas for digital nomads to temporarily relocate in order to boost their own economies as traditional tourism slumps.

"We're innovating to be responsive to the demands of people around the world who are looking for a safe and virtually COVID-free destination," said Bermuda Premier David Burt.

After imposing a strict lockdown at the start of its outbreak, the self-governing British overseas territory of some 64,000 managed to contain infections. It registered just six cases in the last two weeks and ranks sixth

in the world in testing per capita according to Worldometer.

As such, life has been able to return mostly to normal, with borders re-opening — subject to pre-arrival testing for coronavirus. But traditional tourism, which employs roughly 11 per cent of Bermuda's labour force, is expected to take months, if not years, to rebound.

So far, 317 people have applied for Bermuda's one-year residency certificate, with 144 approved, according to a government spokesperson.

Lynessa Lightbourne, business development manager for the Bermuda Business Development Agency, told applicants were mostly from Britain, the United States and Canada, but some came from as far afield as Australia.

Many are bringing their families

along, and early indicators suggest some of those applying are big spenders, which is good for the economy.

Penny MacIntyre, a partner at Rego Sotheby's International Realty, said the price range for accommodations run the gamut, from \$1,200 to \$200,000 a month.

Typically, they are looking at places in the \$4,000 to \$12,000 a month price range, she said.

Shepherd, who had once tried to get a US visa, an endeavour she described as "crazy," said the application for the Bermuda visa and general process of getting health insurance and opening a bank account was "very seamless."

"Getting the paddleboard down from a house to the water is my biggest challenge," she said. "Plus, paddleboarding is hard. I fall off every time." — Reuters

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#Living_with_COVID19

DR SALEH
AL FAHDI

THE ART OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Recently, after my lecture at the International Maritime College Oman in Suhar, a girl student asked an important question. How can I influence others when I speak?

The question was away from the lecture topic. I, however, answered her: "By being honest with yourself".

Years ago, I was listening to Julian Treasure (a sound and communication expert) on TED when he suggested, the four cornerstones or foundations to stand on if we want our speech to be powerful. He abbreviated it as 'HAIL'. H stands for honesty, A for authenticity, I for Integrity and L for love. After watching the show I was happy that my spontaneous answer to the student was right. "You have to be honest with what you are saying, as this is the first value to influence others when you speak".

We hear some people speaking in a high linguistic style, but our impression sometimes is that they are not honest about what they are saying because the speech is not merely words but body language, voice tone, and feelings that accumulate together. These elements allow us to make our judgement based on the influence of what we feel.

Authenticity, integrity and love are all associated with 'honesty'. Being honest means you are giving a clear reflection about you, seeing your ego in a clear mirror without touch ups and frills, and standing in your shoes. Being honest will make you authentic which means 'you are as you should be'. It also leads you to integrity so you become a trusted person, which you wouldn't be without being honest.

Finally, love in its broader form — seeing and wishing people well. Love is also connected to honesty because you cannot feel love for people without being honest to yourself.

Some of the people, who watched my programme, profoundly commented: "Your voice entered our hearts". They did not say: "Your words", which means that, if you are honest in what you are saying, people don't judge you upon your words. It doesn't matter the words are formulated 'nicely' or 'artistically'. They judge you upon other elements and find your voice like the voice of their own.

We thus have four cornerstones to rely on, to influence others when we speak. These elements or values should start with honesty which is the secret key to open the minds and hearts of others.

Stuck at home? 'Bunraku' puppets help kids



Kanjuro Kiritake, a Bunraku puppeteer, performs at National Theatre in Tokyo. — Reuters

JUNKO FUJITA

Stuck at home for weeks while Japan was under a state of emergency due to the coronavirus, renowned Japanese Bunraku puppet master Kanjuro Kiritake, all his performances cancelled for months, was stricken with deep anxiety.

His art, a traditional, male-only Japanese puppet theatre, was born in Osaka in the late 1600s, but in 2020 felt existentially threatened, he said.

"Many things crossed my mind: When would the pandemic end, when would performances resume, if my 87-year-old master could ever perform again", Kanjuro, 67, said in his home, which has a room dedicated to puppetry.

The solution was to spend his time at home making puppets for children. It is a rare pursuit for a Bunraku puppeteer. To him, it tied into decades of efforts he's made to keep the centuries-old art of Bunraku alive. He has been teaching Bunraku at Kozu elementary school in Osaka for 17 years.

Nearly 30 sixth graders took part in recent classes, with children practising their puppetry in a gymnasium amid scorching heat, as a T-shirt-clad Kanjuro instructed them.

In Bunraku, each puppet is operated by three people — the head puppeteer, and two others dressed in black, their faces covered. The head puppeteer



Kozu elementary school students touch puppets made by a Bunraku puppeteer Kanjuro Kiritake at Kozu elementary school in Osaka. — Reuters

manipulates the head and right hand, while one person manipulates the left hand and another both feet. Performances are accompanied by narrators, or *tayu* and traditional instruments. The five puppets Kanjuro made had comical faces framed by yarn hair. They also wore socks in neon-bright colours he had purchased online.

FROM THE FEET UP

Following his father's path, Kanjuro

started his career as a puppeteer at 14, becoming a disciple of Minosuke Yoshida, who at age 87 is now the oldest living puppeteer.

Like everyone else, he started with the puppets' feet, then moved on to the left hand. It can take more than 30 years until a puppeteer is allowed to manipulate the head.

"It is an invisible and tough role. Audiences do not know who you are and the applause goes to the main puppeteer",

he said, referring to operating the limbs.

Understanding how to manipulate the feet is crucial; the performer doing that touches the waist of the lead puppeteer, feeling how he moves. It was a lesson Kanjuro learned from his late father, who even after illness left him thin used his whole body to animate the puppet as head puppeteer.

"I learned from him that you would have to use your entire body — from your toes to fingertips — to make the puppet come to life", Kanjuro recalls. "And how a small and thin puppeteer could manipulate a big puppet by doing that". Kanjuro is one of Japan's best-known Bunraku performers, but he still worries about securing young talent.

The National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka provides a free, two-year training course that more than half the 83 current performers have graduated from. But the art's popularity was waning even before the pandemic, and only two students are in training as of September.

Perhaps, Kanjuro muses, people hired to open curtains or handout stage properties might fall in love with Bunraku and want to study it. Performances in Tokyo resumed on September 5.

"Like Sumo and Rakugo where foreigners are active, one day we may have foreign performers", Kanjuro said. "And it could only be a matter of time before women take part as well".

— Reuters

Legendry places of ancient Arabia

Like in any other culture, mythical cities also existed in ancient Arabia. A famous one is Iram That Al-Imad (Iram of the columns) that was mentioned in the Holy Quran and described as "incomparable".

But what's the story behind it? One of the many legends claim that it was built by a king Shaddad ibn Aad who was an avid reader of old religious books. King Shaddad was fascinated by the description of paradise and the comfort it encompasses that he decided to build something similar on earth.

The construction took three hundred years without stop. Having pretty good genes of the ancients, he lived to be nine hundred (hardly missing the inauguration of his legendry city). On that day, it's said that Shaddad was killed along with his entourage by God's wrath for his impiety.

Being mentioned in the Holy Quran meant that many Muslim

travellers went looking for it and claiming to come across it. The most famous mention of Iram That Al-Imad in Islamic history was at the time of Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, a companion of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the founder of the Umayyad Caliphate in the Levant.

It's stated that he had heard the story of another companion that came across the city by chance. The companion was shepherding some camels in the desert of Yemen when they got lost and he went looking for them. He said that he came across a grand city with a huge fort in the middle and high palaces surrounding it.

Thinking that the place was inhabited, he went up to ask about his lost camels to be welcomed by huge gates that he'd never seen the like of before. The gates were adorned with rubies that shone in the sun reflecting light between the fort and the city. The companion entered the abandoned place in awe to find that the fort was as big as a

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town with many palaces built on columns of peridot and rubies.

Each palace had stories of rooms built of gold and silver and adorned with pearls and other precious stones. He also saw rivers running through the city surrounded by trees of different fruits untouched. It's said that Muawiya consulted his famous historian Ka'ab Al-Ahbar who confirmed that it was the legendry Iram That Al-Imad indeed.

Many historians doubt this meeting ever happening as Ka'ab died almost thirty years before it.

Another legendry place that fascinated Arabs was the location of the tribes of Ya'jooj wa Ma'jooj (Gog and Magog) as their story was also mentioned in the holy book.

Many old historians describe it as being somewhere in Tibet where: "The mountains have snow that never melts, fog that never seize and many great snakes".

One of those historians — Ibn Al-Wardi — claimed that a traveller

at the time of the Abbasid Caliphate called Salam Al-Turjuman had reached the place. He saw the great wall that was built between the two mountains by Dhu Al-Qarnayn -still debatable if he was Alexander the Great or not — to stop the tribes from crossing and desolating neighbouring nations.

Ibn Salam knew forty languages and his trip took two years and four months. He alleges to have looked over the wall and witnessed the tribe who were: "Around three-foot-tall with perfectly round faces and round floppy ears that reaches their shoulders. They sleep on one ear and cover with the other. Their skin varies between white and red and their language is whistling. They have claws and fangs like beasts. They try escaping the wall on daily bases to be thrown down by a sudden gale".

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: *The World According to Bahja*. rashabooks@yahoo.com



RASHAAL RAISI



A health worker wearing Personal Protective Equipment suit collects a swab sample from a young girl to test for COVID-19, outside a bank in Ahmedabad on Friday. – AFP

Millions of COVID-19 cases went undetected in India, says study

MUMBAI: Millions of coronavirus cases may have gone undetected in India earlier this year, a research paper estimates, saying that for every confirmed case in May, there were 82 to 130 infections that were not recorded.

The paper, published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, estimated that the country had nearly 6.5 million cases as early as May.

Total cases stood at more than 180,000 in late May, according to the health ministry. Infections are growing faster in India than anywhere else in the world, and the health ministry reported another record daily jump of 96,551 new cases on Friday, taking the official total case load to 4.5 million.

The research paper, written by government scientists and other experts and published late on Thursday, said large numbers of cases could have gone under the radar earlier this year because testing was limited to symptomatic patients or states had varying testing rates.

During the period they surveyed, India was conducting around 100,000 tests per day. It has ramped that up to a current more than 1.1 million tests a day.

To determine the range of infections, the researchers looked at the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases on May 3 and May 11, and compared it with the number of individuals who displayed coronavirus antibodies during a nationwide survey conducted in May and early June.

The two dates were chosen so that infected individuals would likely display coronavirus antibodies, which start appearing by the end of the first week after the onset of

“Large numbers of cases could have gone under the radar earlier this year because testing was limited to symptomatic patients or states had varying testing rates”
SCIENTISTS

symptoms, the paper said.

The overall ratio of people who had been infected with the virus against the number of confirmed cases was then extrapolated to between 82 and 130.

India's COVID-19 fatality rate has so far remained relatively low. The health ministry reported 1,209 new deaths on Friday, taking the overall toll to 76,271.

The research paper's findings were in line with similar surveys conducted by large cities including New Delhi, Mumbai and Pune, which found that a much higher percentage of people were likely infected, compared to the number of confirmed cases.

“India is currently testing 38,285 per million population. Brazil is testing at about double this rate and the US, nearly 8.5 times,” Dr Rajib Dasgupta, a professor of community medicine at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, said.

— Reuters

FIREFIGHTERS PUT OUT BEIRUT BLAZE BUT ANGER SMOULDERS



Lebanese firefighters stand on a ladder amid billowing smoke as they extinguish the remaining flames at the seaport of Beirut, on Friday. – AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanese firefighters on Friday put out a blaze at Beirut port that brought back the trauma of last month's deadly dockside explosion and destroyed badly needed food aid.

Fire crews used cranes to hose down the last smouldering embers of the fire that swept through already damaged warehouses on Thursday.

But popular anger at the authorities' failure to provide public safety, even in the heart of the capital, was rekindled by the new blaze.

The fire broke out on Thursday afternoon as workers were carrying out repair work on some of the

warehouses still standing after last month's explosion.

Sparks from a power saw being used in the repairs were the likely cause of the blaze, according to the government's preliminary findings.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said one of the warehouses contained precious food aid for tens of thousands of needy families in Lebanon and in neighbouring Syria.

It said it had been working on moving the supplies out of the damaged warehouse ever since the August 4 blast but the operation had still been ongoing when the fire hit.

“Due to the rubble present and the danger involved, it is not possible to confirm the level of loss incurred at this time,” an ICRC statement said.

“The explosion and the fire will no doubt have an impact on the ICRC's humanitarian aid whether in Lebanon or Syria.”

The Lebanese presidency has said that 15,000 tonnes of rubble had been cleared inside the port area after the August 4 explosion.

On Friday, earthmovers were again at work clearing rubble from the port through which the vast majority of Lebanon's food and other

imports used to pass.

“The fire is very weak. There's just one area we're still dealing with. It's nothing,” said George Abou Moussa, operations director of Lebanon's civil defence agency.

‘PEOPLE WERE TERRIFIED’

The sight of a vast pall of smoke billowing over the port district on Thursday, barely a month after the colossal blast killed more than 190 people and ravaged tens of thousands of homes, sent terrified residents running onto the streets.

— AFP

Philippines urges amicable approach to Beijing

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Friday urged a peaceful way out of conflicts with China over the South China Sea and said international law must be followed, amid increased regional friction over military activities by Beijing and Washington.

Duterte made the remarks in a meeting with visiting Chinese

defence minister, Wei Fenghe, whose tour of four Southeast Asian countries coincides with some rhetorical sparring between the United States and China over the disputed waterway.

“We must always be guided by our commitments in international law. Any and all disputes must be resolved peacefully,” Duterte said in a

statement.

A defence ministry statement summarising the meeting said Lorenzana and Wei committed to resolve disputes amicably and advance mutual trust and interests. However, that statement contrasted sharply from one issued earlier and later retracted, which said Lorenzana had told Wei that any activities infringing

on Philippine maritime territory would be challenged by its navy.

Lorenzana said the Philippines would patrol its waters, according to the retracted statement, which referred to a 2016 arbitration ruling on the South China Sea that Lorenzana had told Wei would be adhered to “without any possibility of compromise or change”. — Reuters

Half million Oregonians evacuate as death toll in wildfires rises to 16

OREGON, US: Around half a million people in Oregon evacuated as dozens of extreme, wind-driven wildfires scorched US West Coast states on Friday, destroying thousands of homes and killing at least 16 people, state and local authorities said.

In southern Oregon, an apocalyptic scene of burned residential subdivisions and trailer parks stretched for miles along Highway 99 south of Medford through Phoenix and Talent, one of the worst hit areas, according to a Reuters photographer at the scene.

Blazes jumped from wildfires burning through scrub and forest to suburban firestorms as embers blew for miles. Online video from the Tacoma, Washington, area showed fires starting in a residential area and setting homes ablaze, and locals running from house to house to warn neighbours.



Ashley, 3, and Ethan, 2, look at a burned bicycle after wildfires destroyed a neighbourhood in Bear Creek, Phoenix, Oregon, on Thursday. — Reuters

“Everybody out, everybody out,” a man screamed as firefighters tried to douse flames. Since Monday, 11 people have died from fires in California, while four were killed in Oregon and a 1-year-old boy died in Washington state, police reported.

In Oregon alone the number of people under evacuation

orders climbed to some 500,000 — about an eighth of the state's total population — as Portland suburbs came under threat as two of the state's biggest blazes merged into one, the state Office of Emergency Management said.

Thousands more were displaced north and south in the neighbouring states of

Washington and California. Oregon bore the brunt of nearly 100 major wildfires raging across Western states, with around 3,000 firefighters battling nearly three dozen blazes and officials saying about twice as many people were needed. Police have opened a criminal arson investigation into the Oregon blaze, the Almeda Fire, which destroyed much of Phoenix and talent and started in Ashland near the border with California, Ashland Police Chief Tighe O'Meara said.

At least four Oregon police departments warned of “fake” online messages appearing to be from law enforcement that blamed left-wing anti-fascists and right-wing Proud Boy activists for starting the fires. The Oregon blazes tore through multiple communities in the Cascade mountain range as well as areas of coastal rainforest normally spared from wildfires. — Reuters



الخزائن
KHAZAIN
شركة الخزائن للخدمات النفطية ش.م.ع.
AL KHAZAIN OILFIELD SERVICES

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.

ووفقاً 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 للمبايعين وجواز السفر للنساء والقصر الذين لا يحملون بطاقة شخصية.

المستشار القانوني

رئيس مجلس الإدارة

مراقب الحسابات



People wave British Union Jack flags as they celebrate in Parliament Square on Brexit day in London, on January 31 this year.
— Reuters file photo

EU BOOSTS ‘NO-DEAL’ PLAN AS UK REFUSES TO GIVE WAY

LONDON/BRUSSELS: The European Union stepped up planning for a “no-deal” Brexit on Friday after Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government refused to revoke a plan to break the divorce treaty that Brussels says will sink four years of talks.

Britain said explicitly this week that it plans to break international law by breaching parts of the Withdrawal Agreement treaty that it signed in January, when it formally left the bloc. Britain says the move is aimed at clarifying ambiguities, but it caused a new crisis in talks less than four months before a post-Brexit transition period ends in December.

The EU has demanded that Britain scrap by the end of this month the plan to breach the divorce treaty. Britain has refused, saying its parliament is sovereign above international law. “As the United Kingdom looks to what kind of future trade relationship it wants with the European Union, a prerequisite for that is honouring agreements that are already in place,” said Pascal Donohoe, chairman of euro zone finance ministers. “It is imperative that the government of the United Kingdom respond back to the call from the (European) Commission.”

As the atmosphere soured between London and Brussels, Japan and Britain said they had reached agreement in principle on a bilateral trade deal that meant 99% of the

Britain’s exports to Japan would be tariff-free.

NO DEAL

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier said on Thursday, after talks in London, that the bloc was increasing its planning for a no-deal Brexit at the end of this year after trade talks made little progress. “The UK has not engaged in a reciprocal way on fundamental EU principles and interests,” Barnier said.

“Nobody should underestimate the practical, economic and social consequences of a ‘no deal’ scenario,” Britain rejected Barnier’s view. “We don’t recognise the suggestion that we’ve not engaged, we’ve been engaged in talks pretty consistently for many months now,” a British source said.

“The problem is the EU seems to define engagement as accepting large elements of their position rather than being engaged in discussions.” Investment banks have increased their estimates of the chances of a messy end to Britain’s exit from the trading and political bloc it first joined in 1973, and sterling has fallen against the dollar and the euro.

European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic urged Britain to scrap by the end of September the main elements of new legislation put forward this week that would override parts of the Withdrawal Agreement, but Britain said parliament would debate the bill on Monday.

— Reuters

Greece sets up tents for migrants on Lesbos, locals oppose plans

■ Thousands are without shelter, forced to sleep in fields

■ We want all the migrants out, says senior local official

LESBOS: Greece began setting up tents on Friday for thousands of increasingly desperate migrants left without shelter on the island of Lesbos after a fire destroyed Greece’s biggest refugee camp on Wednesday.

With more than 12,000 former occupants of the notoriously overcrowded Moria camp now camping out in fields and along roadsides without food or water and threatened by a possible spread of coronavirus infections, the need for a solution has become increasingly urgent.

But the Greek government has been forced to tread warily due to growing anger among residents of an island whose location a few miles (km) off the Turkish coast has kept them on the frontline of Europe’s migrant crisis for years.

“Moria is a monstrosity,” Dimitris Koursoubas, a senior official responsible for migration in the northern Aegean islands, told Reuters, saying the fire which destroyed the camp presented a “tragic opportunity” to find a new solution. “We want all the migrants out, for national reasons. Moria is over,” he said.

The migrants themselves, most from Syria or Afghanistan, have been desperate to get off the island and a group of several hundred gathered a few miles outside the main port of Mytilene, near a supermarket where helicopters landed tents and supplies.

Shouting “Freedom!” and “No police!” and waving handmade signs reading “No new camp,” they faced



Refugees and migrants from the destroyed Moria camp protest to call for their resettlement, on Friday on the island of Lesbos.
— AFP



A man holds a child as refugees and migrants from the destroyed Moria camp protest after the news about the creation of a new temporary camp on the island of Lesbos, Greece on Friday. — Reuters

off against police who blocked them going down the road into the town.

Greek officials say they believe the fire in the Moria centre was deliberately lit by migrants reacting to quarantine measures after COVID-19 was detected in the camp last week. But the emergency has once again highlighted Europe’s patchy response to a multi-year crisis that has seen

more than a million migrants reach its shores, often on board flimsy vessels and fleeing wars and poverty in the Middle East and beyond.

SLEEPING AMONG THE GRAVES

“The clock has run out on how long Europe can be without a migration policy. Now is the time to change this,” Margaritis Schinas, the European

commissioner responsible for migration and asylum policy, said at a press conference in Brussels.

Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Italy where most migrant boats arrive, have long demanded that other EU states take in more asylum seekers but Hungary and Poland, among others, have refused to share the burden.

German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, speaking alongside Schinas, said France and Germany had agreed to take in most of around 400 minors who have been moved from Lesbos to the Greek mainland. But there has been no wider agreement on resettlement and Greek authorities have refused any mass transfers off Lesbos. “Life meets death here,” said Eftychia Sougioultzi, a 64 year-old local woman, visiting a cemetery where her daughter is buried.

“Yesterday I saw children sobbing, sleeping among the graves.” For the migrants themselves, the outlook is bleak. “Moria finished,” said Zohra, a 25-year-old Afghan woman.

— Reuters

Russia wants to send investigators to Germany in Navalny case

MOSCOW: Moscow said on Friday it would ask to send investigators to Germany in the case of Alexei Navalny, a proposal all but certain to be brushed off by Berlin, which says the Russian opposition politician was poisoned with a banned nerve agent.

The Kremlin has been facing calls from the West for strong action to punish Russia unless it provides an explanation for what Berlin has called an attempt to murder Navalny. Navalny, President Vladimir Putin’s

highest-profile critic, was airlifted to Germany last month after falling violently ill while travelling in Siberia.

German doctors say he was poisoned with novichok, a Russian nerve agent. Moscow says it has seen no evidence he was poisoned. Some senior German politicians have said Berlin should revoke support for Nord Stream 2, a big gas pipeline from Russia to Germany set to open next year. Such a move would amount to the most drastic economic penalty the

West has imposed on Russia since the Soviet era.

In a statement, the transport department of Russia’s interior ministry in Siberia said it wanted to send investigators to work alongside German colleagues on the case, after reports that Navalny had emerged from a coma.

“This request will include an application for the possible presence of Russian internal affairs investigators... and a Russian specialist when

German colleagues are conducting investigations with Navalny, doctors and experts,” the ministry said in a statement.

A German government spokesman said Berlin had received no such request from the Russian authorities so far. Russia has not opened a criminal investigation and is sticking to its position that it would first need hard evidence from Germany that Navalny was poisoned.

— Reuters

Biden joins Pence, Cuomo at masked New York 9/11 memorial

NEW YORK: Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, Vice President Mike Pence, and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, all masked, joined New York’s somber 19th anniversary of the September 11 attacks at the site of the destroyed World Trade Center.

Biden and Pence, both masked, bumped elbows in greeting, one of the many ways the anniversary ceremony has been changed by the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 190,000 people in the United States.

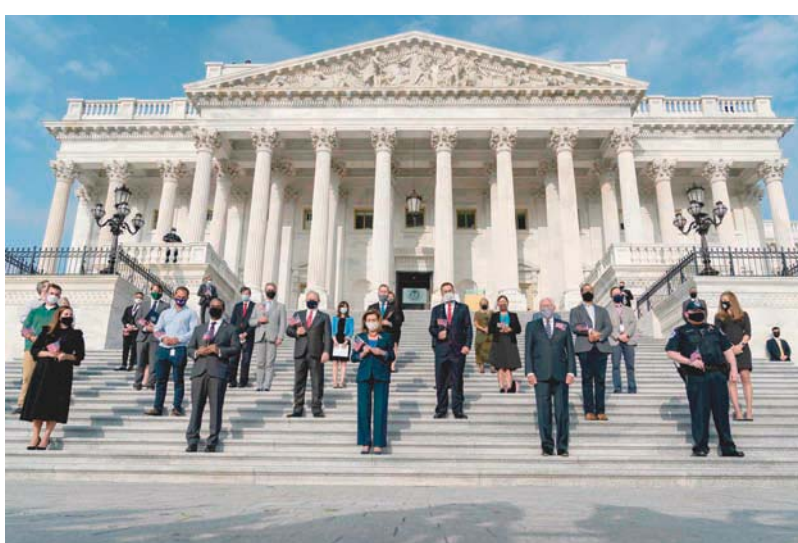
About 200 people joined the New York ceremony, where the names were read out of the nearly 3,000 people killed when two hijacked jets slammed into the Twin Towers, with a third hitting the Pentagon and a fourth taken

down in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, when its passengers rose up against the al Qaeda hijackers.

President Donald Trump and Biden are also due to visit Shanksville separately later in the day. Prior to boarding a plane from his Delaware home, Biden pledged not to make any news during the solemn day.

“I’m not going to talk about anything other than 9/11. We took all our advertising down. It’s a solemn day, and that’s how we’re going to keep it, okay?,” Biden said. The sun struggled to pierce hazy clouds in New York, a contrast with the 2001 morning of the attacks, which people present that day remember for its piercing, clear skies.

Trump left the White House to



US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (C) leads members of the House of Representatives in a moment of silence at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, to commemorate the 19th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, on Friday. — AFP

attend a morning ceremony at the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, a White House official said. The event, in remembrance of the 40 passengers and crew who died when the plane plunged into a field after they struggled with the hijackers, will be closed to the public because of coronavirus concerns, the National Park Service said.

Later in the day, the Bidens would visit the Shanksville site to pay their respects to the victims. The two candidates are not expected to cross paths in Pennsylvania, a battleground state that is vital to the November 3 election between Trump and Biden.

Flight 93, bound for San Francisco from Newark, New Jersey, never hit

its intended target - the four hijackers were believed to be planning to crash it into either the US Capitol or the White House - after passengers stormed the cockpit and attempted to regain control of the aircraft. The ceremonies marking the attacks are a regular stop for presidential candidates and officials. Trump visited Shanksville for the 9/11 anniversary in 2018, and has attended memorial ceremonies at the Pentagon. Biden went to memorials in Shanksville during his years as vice president under Barack Obama. During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump and Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton both visited the Ground Zero memorial in New York.

— Reuters

US Senate could be a narrow strait for Biden agenda

DAVID MORGAN

Even if Joe Biden wins the US presidential election and his fellow Democrats gain full control of Congress, his ability to secure passage of an ambitious legislative agenda may be limited by a stubborn Washington reality: The high hurdle for getting things done in the Senate.

A longstanding Senate rule requires 60 votes in the 100-seat chamber in most instances to take up and hold votes on bills. If Democrats in the November 3 election win the White House, maintain control of the House of Representatives and amass a Senate majority comparable to that currently held by President Donald Trump's fellow Republicans, Biden's party still would be limited in what they could get through Congress. Any bill would need to attract at least some Republican support in the Senate, a chamber beset by partisanship.

Congressional aides, party strategists and political analysts said that could be a recipe for continued gridlock. Democrats have promised dramatic change should they take power in Washington including steps to make healthcare more affordable, combat climate change, protect voting rights, reform racial inequities in the criminal justice system and address crumbling US infrastructure.

Republicans, who hold 53 seats in the chamber, are sounding dire warnings



Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden

A LONGSTANDING SENATE RULE REQUIRES 60 VOTES IN THE 100-SEAT CHAMBER IN MOST INSTANCES TO TAKE UP AND HOLD VOTES ON BILLS

about a liberal insurgency as they raise money to defend their Senate majority even as Trump works to defeat Biden.

Senator Debbie Stabenow, who chairs the Senate Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, said the first priority of a Democratic-led Congress would be to work with Biden to craft a plan to combat the coronavirus pandemic, assist people and small businesses hit by the public health crisis and rebuild the economy through infrastructure spending and other job-creating initiatives.

"We have to get our arms around this pandemic", the Michigan Democrat said. "That has to be No 1. And then right with it is the continued impact on families and small businesses. And then we're going to focus on how to 'build back better'", Stabenow said, using a Biden campaign slogan. Democrats see an opening toward gaining a Senate majority. At least seven Republican incumbents face highly competitive challenges in states including Arizona and Colorado. But even optimistic forecasts do not envision Democrats getting to 60 seats.

THE FILIBUSTER

The need to attain 60 votes for legislation to succeed — even if passage itself requires only a simply majority — arises from a procedural tactic called the filibuster, which long has buttressed the power of the minority party. The House has no equivalent rule. To circumvent congressional gridlock, Biden could resort to executive orders to

implement policies, bypassing lawmakers as Trump and his Democratic predecessor Barack Obama did on occasion.

Biden already has plans to take such action to ensure that the federal government purchases primarily American-made goods and materials. Another option would be to eliminate the filibuster, which Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer has not ruled out.

Such a step, achievable with just 51 votes, faces resistance among some Democratic senators, with at least two — Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona — adamantly opposed. Democrats already have laid out some legislative priorities in a series of measures that passed the House with limited Republican support but went nowhere in the Senate under Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

The list includes measures to reduce prescription drug costs by allowing the federal government to negotiate prices with pharmaceutical companies, expanded healthcare coverage, police reforms, voting rights protections, infrastructure spending for broadband access and environmental initiatives to promote electric vehicles.

Republicans have used the specter of full Democratic control of Congress to raise funds as they fight to preserve their Senate majority, warning of policies backed by lawmakers on the Democratic Party's left including Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

— Reuters

SIPHONING OFF FUNDS

Graft mars Africa's gains in fight against pandemic

SUSAN NJANJI

New coronavirus infections are now steadily declining in many parts of Africa, but this good news has been marred by scandals over corruption and missing funds earmarked for the pandemic.

In countries that are already graft-weary, the public has been stunned by revelations of inflated contracts awarded to the politically connected, as well as inflated invoicing and plain theft.

Heading the scandal list is South Africa, where government investigators are probing more than 600 companies and institutions awarded five billion rand (\$300 million) in contracts to supply personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers and distribute relief aid.

Pocketing state funds is not a new phenomenon in South Africa — scandals date back years to the time of former president Jacob Zuma.

But the notion of funds being siphoned off for PPE and emergency help has stung many South Africans to the core. Plunderers have earned themselves the epithet "Covidpreneurs".

Health workers have staged rolling lunch-hour protests at their work places, culminating last week with a picket outside President Cyril Ramaphosa's office in Pretoria, to highlight the shortage of masks, gowns, gloves and goggles for frontline workers. They have already lost at least 240 of their colleagues to COVID-19 out of the more than 27,000 infected in the line of duty.

"We can no longer keep quiet anymore", complained nurse Frans Mokgope.

The country's chief tax collector, Edward Kieswetter, revealed on Thursday that 63 per cent of awarded PPE tenders were not tax compliant — and many companies that won tenders had no experience in PPE supplies.



Corruption related to PPE, lifesaving, for me it's actually murder

TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS
WHO official

AFGHANISTAN TALKS

Bitter foes with incompatible goals aim to end two decades of war

The Taliban will hold talks with the Afghan government on Saturday, but it will be no easy task for the foes to bridge their ideological differences and resolve the bitter legacy of two decades of war.

AFP takes a look at the main issues:

WHY NOW?

Afghanistan's war has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced millions more, killed some 2,400 US troops and cost the American taxpayer more than \$1 trillion.

Exasperated by what he has described as America's "crazy, endless wars", President Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed his determination to achieve a full military exit from Afghanistan.

The peace talks "are clearly driven by a US desire to disengage from Afghanistan", said Kate Clark, co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network.

"The main goal for the US is to leave, or to leave without leaving behind a bigger mess". Washington signed a deal with the Taliban in February that paves the way for all foreign forces to pull out of Afghanistan by May 2021.

In return, the Taliban — who control much of rural Afghanistan — gave some security guarantees and a promise to hold talks with Kabul after completing a lengthy prisoner exchange.

WHAT'S ON THE AGENDA?

The two sides are poles apart when it comes to the kind of Afghanistan they want, and at this stage, there is no certain agenda.

"The Taliban have always been clear about what they want and that is a pure Islamic government, which is incompatible with the current liberal



In this file photo taken on March 4, Afghan security forces stand guard at an Afghan National Army outposts after an attack by Taliban militants, in Kunduz Province. — AFP

AFGHANISTAN'S WAR HAS KILLED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AND SOME 2,400 US TROOPS

democratic Islamic political order", said Nishank Motwani, Deputy Director at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

The Taliban declared "victory" after signing the deal with the US and have often stated maximalist goals: They consider themselves Afghanistan's legitimate leaders and want to return to power.

"The Taliban's leadership, rank and

file fundamentally believe that victory is theirs and as victors, they will claim nothing short of power", Motwani said.

However, in a *New York Times* op-ed published in February, the Taliban's deputy leader Sirajuddin Haqqani expressed optimism over "intra-Afghan talks".

Some observers have suggested the militants would offer to negotiate a power-sharing deal. — AFP

MISSING GEAR, MISSING FUNDS

Africa has recorded 1.33 million cases and nearly 32,000 fatalities, according to official figures.

If the toll is accurate, the pandemic has had a far less severe impact on health than initially feared.

But for many countries, this success has come at crippling economic cost because of curfews and lockdowns — and despite a glaring lack of PPE for frontline workers and intensive-care equipment for the seriously ill. In East Africa, images posted by doctors and nurses of defective PPE distributed to hospital ICUs across Kenya have been circulated widely, embarrassing the government.

Under particular scrutiny is the Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA), where officials are accused of pilfering huge sums earmarked for PPE.

Investigators cannot account for some \$64 million, but activists say that is just the beginning.

A television expose called "COVID millionaires" that first aired the allegations claims the theft is many times larger, hovering around \$400 million.

In Uganda, four senior government officials face jail for allegedly skimming about half a million dollars from a food relief programme meant for the most vulnerable during the pandemic.

Uganda's ambassador to Denmark and her deputy meanwhile were recorded apparently plotting in a Zoom meeting to steal funds earmarked for the pandemic. The government has vowed to investigate.

In Somalia, nine ministry officials have been convicted of misusing funds and sentenced to prison terms between three and eight years.

In central Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo premier Sylvestre Ilunga Ilunkamba announced in May that he had disbursed \$10.7 million (\$8.4 million) to fight the virus.

But a month later the country's coronavirus tsar, Jean-Jacques Muyembe, said he had only received \$1.4 million from the government. — AFP

Cathay Pacific shuns some job subsidies



Cathay Pacific aircraft are seen parked on the tarmac at the airport, following the outbreak of the new coronavirus, in Hong Kong. — Reuters

SYDNEY: Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd said on Friday it would not apply for further government employment subsidies for its main business units, freeing up its ability to make major job cuts at Cathay Pacific and Cathay Dragon.

It has, however, applied for the support for budget carrier HK Express, Air Hong Kong, Cargo Terminal, Hong Kong Airport Service and Cathay Pacific Catering Services, the airline said in a statement. That financial support protects jobs from September to November, according to the government website.

Cathay, which received a \$5-billion rescue package led by the Hong Kong government, has so far refrained from large-scale job cuts but has warned it is reviewing all aspects of its business model with the results expected in the fourth quarter.

Cathay and its units had around 27,000 employees globally at the end of 2019, according to its annual report. So far the group has cut jobs of around 400 overseas cabin crew and offered voluntary early retirement to pilots.

"It is inevitable we will need to right-size our airlines to address the reduced travel market," Cathay General Manager Corporate Affairs Andy Wong said in the statement. — Reuters

Japan's new government should focus on digitalisation

TOKYO: Japan's new prime minister should focus on combating the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalising the economy and creating employment, a poll showed on Friday.

The poll of analysts forecast the world's third-largest economy to contract more than previously expected in the current fiscal year to March as the pandemic hits companies and households.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga (pictured), the frontrunner in the ruling party's September 14 leadership race, said preventing the spread of the virus would be his top priority.

Suga, on course to succeed incumbent Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, also stressed that his main task as the nation's leader would be to revive the economy.

Asked which areas the government should focus on under the new prime minister, 37 economists in the September 2-10 poll selected "response to the coronavirus pandemic" while 28 picked "digitalisation in society and among firms."

The coronavirus crisis has underscored technological shortcomings in Japan's government and companies as many of them remain in a paper-driven culture that experts say is hurting productivity. — Reuters



4,300 tonnes of medical waste treated in 2019: be'ah

EXPANDING INFRASTRUCTURE: A FOURTH MODERN HEALTHCARE WASTE TREATMENT FACILITY IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 11

An estimated 4,300 tonnes of healthcare waste were treated and disposed of at dedicated treatment facilities established at key locations around the Sultanate last year, according to the Oman Environmental Holding Services Company (be'ah), the sole entity tasked with managing all solid waste in the country.

As many as three state-of-the-art healthcare waste treatment facilities are currently in operation in the Sultanate. The largest of these is located at Al Multaqa in Muscat Governorate, while equally modern plants have been set up at Liwa (North Al Batinah Governorate) and Thamrait (Dhofar Governorate). A fourth facility is currently under construction in Musandam Governorate.

Built per international standards prescribed by the World Health Organization (WHO), be'ah's facilities use incineration and autoclave techniques to treat medical waste. "The autoclave technology shreds and sterilises waste to make it harmless, whereas the incineration completely burns pharmaceutical, cytotoxic and genotoxic waste," said the state-run agency in its newly published 2019 Annual Report.

According to the report, around 4,500 tonnes of medical waste are generated annually by healthcare institutions across the Sultanate. Generators include hospitals, clinics, dental practices, blood banks and veterinary premises, as well as medical research facilities and laboratories.

The lion's share of this waste (totalling over 3,000 tonnes last year) comes from Muscat

Governorate, which hosts a large concentration of government and private-run health establishments, including a number of referral and tertiary care institutions.

Significantly, around 15-20 per cent of healthcare waste comprises hazardous material that can pose serious risk of infectious contamination and injury, says be'ah. "Healthcare waste can contain infectious agents, sharp objects, toxic material, hazardous chemicals or pharmaceuticals, and can be radioactive and genotoxic. All individuals exposed to hazardous healthcare waste are potentially at risk, including those within healthcare establishments and those who handle such waste. Mismanagement or careless handling of such waste can have serious consequences on public health," the agency warns.

be'ah says it provides healthcare waste management to all governmental and private healthcare institutions across the country on a commercial basis. Waste treatment centres are integrated with disposal facilities based on the latest scientific methods and technologies. In recognition of these world-leading standards, be'ah was presented with the Middle East Waste and Recycling Award for Best Medical Waste Treatment Practices in 2019.

Experts predict a significant uptick in healthcare waste generation during 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which has necessitated the use of prodigious quantities of, among other consumables and disposables, personal protection equipment (PPE), in the testing and treatment of people afflicted with the disease.

ECB policymakers highlight risk from strong euro

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank policymakers warned on Friday against complacency over low inflation and highlighted risks from a strong euro, nuancing the bank's benign message from a day earlier, which some argued denied difficult realities.

Speaking a day after the ECB took an unexpectedly relaxed stance on growth and inflation at its regular policy meeting, chief economist Philip Lane and French central bank chief Francois Villeroy de Galhau both highlighted risks from a strong currency, noting that it clearly mattered for policy because it curbed price pressures.

ECB President Christine Lagarde had on Thursday said the ECB would merely "carefully" monitor the exchange rate, the weakest form of verbal intervention, which actually sent the euro up as investors started to

doubt the ECB's resolve to add to stimulus.

But Friday's comment, including Lane's emphasis that more data in the coming months would help calibrate policy, is likely to reinforce market expectations that the ECB will eventually expand its 1.35 trillion euro (\$1.6 trillion) Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme, possibly as soon as December.

"Inflation remains far below the aim and there has been only partial progress in combating the negative impact of the pandemic on projected inflation dynamics," Lane said in a blog post. "It should be abundantly clear that there is no room for complacency."

Villeroy also took aim at the euro, which has firmed 8 per cent against the dollar since the start of the coronavirus crisis in spring, and earlier this month hit \$1.20, a



ECB President Christine Lagarde gives a signature which will be implemented on the newly printed euro banknotes at the bank's headquarters in Frankfurt, in this file photo. — Reuters

key psychological level that has in the past triggered ECB concern.

"We don't target exchange rates," Villeroy said in a speech. "But

The recent strength of the euro has fuelled expectations that ECB may have to take further action as it weakens both growth and inflation

obviously the exchange rate does matter for inflation and monetary policy."

Both policymakers also repeated the ECB's standard message that the bank was ready to do more, if needed.

The euro was trading around \$1.1840 early on Friday, not far from its levels before the ECB meeting. It is generally expected to firm over the coming months after

the US Federal Reserve shifted strategy, suggesting it would raise rates more slowly than in the past and so encouraging investors to seek returns elsewhere.

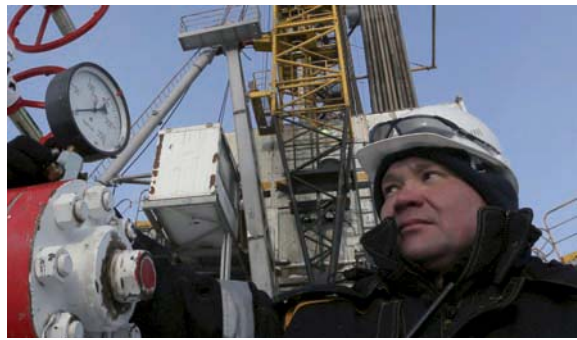
But sources close to Thursday's discussion said the ECB had opted for the benign message because 1.20 is not far from what they consider the equilibrium exchange rate and is no longer the key threshold it once was.

Still, Lane echoed Villeroy's message on the euro, arguing that its recent appreciation dampens inflation, which is expected to remain persistently below the ECB's target of almost 2 per cent.

Lane added that inflation in the 19-country euro zone would remain negative for the rest of this year, even if August's especially weak underlying inflation readings were skewed by exceptional factors.

— Reuters

Russian oil flows back to Europe from Asia, pricing weakens



A worker checks a pressure gauge at an oil pumping station near the Rosneft company owned Suzunskoye oil field, north from the Russian Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk

MOSCOW: Sluggish demand in Asia and rising fuel flows to Europe have dampened pricing for Moscow's flagship Urals crude oil blend, setting the stage for a protracted period of weak prices for the Russian oil, traders said.

Urals differentials to the benchmark Brent blend in northwestern Europe, a key metric for the pricing, reached an all-time high of \$2.35 per barrel at the end of April, in line with a long-term goal of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He had long complained about Urals' discount to Brent, questioning if the pattern was justifiable.

The Urals' differentials improved in late spring when demand in China, where economic activity got revitalised following an easing of the coronavirus-related lockdowns and appetite for the relatively cheap Russian oil increased.

In May and June, some 1.5 million tonnes of Urals each month were redirected to Asia from Europe as part of the arbitrage deals, according to Refinitiv Eikon data.

US weekly jobless claims stuck at higher levels



A man carrying a stack of job listings listens to a discussion at the One Stop employment centre in San Francisco, California. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits hovered at high levels last week, strengthening views that the labour market was settling into a more gradual path of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits totalled a seasonally adjusted 884,000 for the week ended September 5, matching the number of applications received in the prior week, the Labor Department said on Thursday. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 846,000 applications in the latest week.

Though claims have dropped from a record 6.867 million at the end of March, layoffs persist across industries as many companies have exhausted loans from the government to help with wages and the coronavirus lingers. A weekly unemployment supplement, credited for the sharp rebound in economic activity, starting with record retail sales growth in May, lapsed in July. — Reuters

Fear and frustration: Europe's wealthy keep wallets closed

LISBON: By this time of year, Ilene Steele, 63, would usually have several trips behind her: one to visit family in the United States, a holiday in Italy, and a few days excursions in London, where she lives with her retired therapist husband Mike.

She'd be meeting friends for drinks and dinners, and enjoying manicures and pedicures with her daughter.

But not this year, even after lockdowns to counter the COVID-19 pandemic eased.

"We hardly go out, really," the retired jeweller said. "We haven't travelled. We thought about going to Greece — in a way it's so appealing when you know there aren't many tourists — but honestly, I'd feel pretty stupid if I died."

As coronavirus cases rise again across Europe, spending data shows that fear of infection is deterring many wealthier consumers from splashing out. That spells trouble for retailers, luxury goods and leisure firms desperate to make up lost ground.

Between the risk of contracting the virus and the hassle of safety measures — from needing to put on paper socks before trying on trainers, to plastic screens dividing customers at the hairdresser — the fun of going out is lost, Steele feels.

"It's like being at an operating table," she said of images she'd seen of restaurants with barriers between diners. "I just wouldn't enjoy that."

Consumer transaction studies in countries including Britain, Denmark, France and Sweden show a pattern also seen in the United States: even as shops re-opened, high-income consumers kept their wallets zipped up.

British consumers earning £40,000 (\$51,250) or more after tax accounted for around 35 per cent of spending in 2019, but 45 per cent of the decline in the second quarter of 2020, a study of card transaction data by London Business School professor Paolo Surico and others showed.

"High-income groups spend in areas with a so-called 'multiplier effect' — non-essential services which employ lower-income groups," Surico explained. "We want to engineer a situation where the young and the poor can save a bit more, and the older spend. But it's happening the wrong way around."

A comparative study by economist Asger Lau Andersen and others analysed spending from March to May by 860,000 consumers in Denmark, which imposed heavy coronavirus restrictions, and Sweden, which did not, but saw more infections.

The data showed spending in



A man is seen wearing a protective face mask at Waterloo station in London. — Reuters

Denmark falling by just 4 per cent more than in Sweden, and the elderly in Sweden actually cutting back more than the same age group in Denmark.

"Our interpretation is that the higher COVID incidence in Sweden made this high-risk group more cautious, despite stronger formal restrictions in Denmark," Andersen said.

The resurgence of the virus, coupled with the winding down of furlough schemes in some countries, could further dampen demand on the lower-income side of the spectrum, particularly in sectors like grocery which until now have proved resilient.

Data scraped by analytics firm StyleSage from online clothing companies' websites including Zara, Asos, Mango, Net-A-Porter and New Look in August showed 6-10 per cent

As coronavirus cases rise again across Europe, spending data shows that fear of infection is deterring many wealthier consumers from splashing out

more products on discount than last year at 2-4 per cent lower prices, as retailers pre-empt a fall in purchasing power.

Surico's study of the UK, where a furlough scheme is being gradually

phased out, showed those receiving government benefits returned to 2019 spending levels in June, while those not on government support remained 30 per cent below last year's levels.

Still, card transaction data from analytics firm Fable Data shows UK retail sales rose in August, recovering to just above 2019 levels by the end of the month. Consumers shifted spending from entertainment, leisure and transport towards cars, car maintenance, home improvements and sporting goods, it showed.

Grocery retailers are for now still benefiting from people eating in, rather than out. Sales of fresh fruit and vegetables in Germany at Aldi, Europe's second largest grocery retailer, continue to be higher than usual, a spokeswoman said. — Reuters

Citigroup's next CEO has Herculean task: turning the bank around for real

NEW YORK: When Jane Fraser (pictured) takes the helm of Citigroup Inc in February, she will have some big tasks ahead of her.

Citigroup, the third-largest US lender, has struggled for years to convince Wall Street that management's vision of a global bank with a hodgepodge of profitable, if unrelated, businesses will work.

Profit targets set years ago by CEO Mike Corbat proved hard to reach even after revisions and major cost cuts. And although Citigroup is a much different bank than the one that required a \$45 billion bailout to survive the 2007-2009 financial crisis, it still carries a stigma from failures that led it there.

Citigroup's legal battles with hedge funds after mistakenly sending them \$900 million of its own funds suggests that it has ongoing technology issues, analysts, investors and insiders said. Those problems have been a sticking point with regulators, which have pushed Citi to fix them in order to pass annual stress tests.

Although Fraser's promotion

CITIGROUP'S LEGAL BATTLES WITH HEDGE FUNDS AFTER MISTAKENLY SENDING THEM \$900 MILLION OF ITS OWN FUNDS SUGGESTS THAT IT HAS ONGOING TECHNOLOGY ISSUES. THOSE PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN A STICKING POINT WITH REGULATORS, WHICH HAVE PUSHED CITI TO FIX THEM IN ORDER TO PASS ANNUAL STRESS TESTS

was celebrated on Thursday as a sign that women can get ahead on Wall Street, analysts and investors said the halo will last only as long as she can deliver results.

"The job of this woman is to get new business, solve the problem with the government on the technology — and get new business," said Dick



Bove, a longtime bank analyst with Odeon Capital Group. "That's her job, and I think if anybody can do it, she can."

Bove and others put Fraser's challenges into three buckets: growing revenue, addressing costly operational issues and truly repairing Citi's brand, which has been tarnished for over a decade.

Fraser, 53, has a reputation as a "fix-it" executive, and many expressed faith in her abilities.

A former Goldman Sachs investment banker and McKinsey consultant, Fraser cleaned up Citigroup's toxic mortgage book after the financial crisis, then its Latin America business after scandals erupted in Mexico, and has been leading its global consumer bank — which Citi is trying to grow — since October.

Although Fraser had been seen as a front-runner to succeed Corbat for awhile, many analysts found the

change to be abrupt. Most expected a longer-term transition that might take a year or two, with some questioning why Citigroup made the announcement on a seemingly random Thursday in September.

Some investors had hoped Citigroup would appoint an outsider with a fresh perspective as its next CEO, KBW analyst Brian Kleinhanzl said in a note predicting an underwhelming share reaction to the news.

Citigroup shares fell 0.9 per cent on Thursday, compared with a 1.8 per cent decline in the S&P 500 index.

The 43 per cent total return shareholders have gotten since the beginning of Corbat's tenure in 2012 through Wednesday's close pales in comparison to the 137 per cent return for JPMorgan Chase & Co shares and 169 per cent for Bank of America Corp shares during the same time frame, according to Refinitiv data.

Out of the top six US Wall Street banks, Citigroup's total return is higher only than that of Wells Fargo

& Co, which has been plagued by various scandals since 2016.

A Citigroup executive who spoke to Reuters said staffers were happy with Fraser's appointment. The person, who was not authorised to speak to the press, said she is seen as someone who understands Citigroup's key businesses and can repair ties with investors and the government.

The person noted Fraser's success with regulators who scrutinised Citigroup's woes in Mexico, which ranged from bad underwriting in mortgages to oil loans that were later found to be fraudulent.

One major investor said Fraser may be the CEO who can turn Citigroup around. The person described her as someone who has shown she can cut costs and invest in businesses appropriately, and comes across as truly caring about Citigroup's welfare. But it will not be a cakewalk for Fraser to get the bank to perform in line with peers again.

"She will start in 'prove-it' mode," the person said, "and there is a lot to prove." — Reuters



DOMESTIC CLUBS GEAR UP FOR RESTART OF SEASON

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 11

After an absence of more than six months from the actual training, the domestic teams will begin soon gearing up for resumption of the 2019-2020 season. According to the medical protocol of Oman Football Association (OFA), all the local teams have to apply for the COVID-19 test. Many of the clubs completed the test and had submitted the results to the medical team at OFA including: Saham, Al Oruba, Seeb, Fanja, Al Nahda, Al Nasr, Al Suwaiq, Ibri, Al Ittihad and Sur teams.

The officials at OFA affirmed during the press conference which was held on Tuesday on the necessity of implementing the precautionary measures which was stated in the medical protocol. After submitting the COVID test to the medical team at OFA, all the local teams are requested to provide the latest health status of all the players and technical staff to the medical focal point in each governorate in a continuous basis to avoid spreading the virus among the players.

All the technical staff of the local teams have five weeks to prepare the players for the restart of the season.



The resumption of the domestic football will start in mid of October. It is expected some of the clubs will commence their training on Sunday with full implementation of the medical protocol. Seeb team officials announced the start of the individual training on Sunday while Suwaiq board management team instructed

for full sanitisation of the club premises facilities prior to training sessions, which will begin very soon.

In the earlier weeks of technical preparation, the teams will miss attendance of the foreign coaches and players due to the current situation of flight movement. The OFA has offered to provide all the facilities to

the teams. A dedicated OFA team will be available to coordinate with the relevant government entities to ease the procedures for coaches and players from abroad to enter the country. They have to undergo home quarantine for 14 days according to the Supreme Committee and Ministry of Health's medical regulations.

Lakers dominate, Rockets on brink



Los Angeles Lakers' Anthony Davis (3) dribbles against Houston Rockets' Austin Rivers (25). – USA Today Sports

ORLANDO: Anthony Davis had 29 points and 12 rebounds as the Los Angeles Lakers dominated the Houston Rockets 110-100 to take a commanding 3-1 lead in their NBA Western Conference series on Thursday.

The Rockets were no match for the Lakers' intensity and skill as Los Angeles outscored them 62-24 in the paint and 19-2 in fast break points in the quarantine bubble at the Disney resort in Orlando, Florida.

"We played defence. We did a good job of defending the three", said Davis. "For the most part we executed our game plan".

The Lakers didn't need a big offensive night from LeBron James in their wire-to-wire victory.

James finished with just 16 points, but grabbed 14 defensive rebounds and had nine assists for the Lakers, who are trying to reach their first Western Conference finals since the 2009-10 season when they were led by Kobe Bryant and Pau Gasol.

"We had our game plan and we executed it. If you are going to execute your game plan for that long you are going to come out victorious", said James.

James Harden had an

uninspiring performance with 21 points and Russell Westbrook finished with 25 for the Rockets in the loss. Harden went two-of-11 from beyond the arc and committed three fouls.

"Just a lack of spirit", said Houston coach Mike D'Antoni. "We got down and lost our way a little bit".

Los Angeles dominated in almost every aspect of offence and defence and look poised to advance to the NBA final four if they can win in game five on Saturday.

"Elimination games are always the toughest. We got to come out with a killer mindset", said Davis.

The Lakers capped their win in style as James had a Showtime dunk and guard Alex Caruso nailed a three-point dagger on their final two possessions of the contest.

Harden hit two free throws with 58 seconds left to get the Rockets within five at 105-100, but Caruso drilled a three-pointer with 34 seconds left. Caruso came off the bench to score 16 points.

After winning the first game of the series 112-97, Houston has now lost three straight, the last two by 10 points. — AFP

Korda fires 66 to seize lead at LPGA ANA Inspiration



Nelly Korda reacts after her putt on the 17th green during the 2020 ANA Inspiration tournament at Mission Hills Golf Club. – USA Today Sports

LOS ANGELES: Nelly Korda closed with a five-foot birdie putt to fire a six-under par 66 and seize a one-stroke lead after Thursday's opening round of the LPGA ANA Inspiration tournament.

The 22-year-old American daughter of Czech tennis star Petr Korda, the 1998 Australian Open champion, went one stroke under her best prior round at Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California.

Korda credited her success in the second major of a COVID-19 disrupted season to more putting work on practice greens.

"At the end of the day, golf is all about confidence", Korda said. "If I give myself shorter par putts, it makes it a lot easier".

Korda, whose best showing in the event was a share of 13th, said hot summer desert conditions had made the course different from its usual April set-up but no less formidable.

"It's very firm out here. Very different", she said. "It's like a different

monster actually". Korda won last year's Women's Australian Open and French Ladies Open while defending her title at the LPGA Swinging Skirts Taiwan event.

Korda opened with birdies at the first and third holes before taking her lone bogey at the fourth. She birdied the seventh, the par-5 ninth and par-5 11th as well before closing with birdies at 16 and the par-5 18th.

South Korean Chun In-gee, whose major titles include the 2015 US Women's Open and 2016 Evian Championship, and Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom, whose only win came in January at Boca Rio, were second on 67.

"I really tried not to be hard on myself on the course", Chun said. "I wanted to have fun out there and work really well and I made a great round".

After a bogey at seven, her 16th hole of the day, Sagstrom sank a 15-foot birdie putt at the par-3 eighth and saved par from deep left rough at nine to stay one back.

"Staying in the fairway is really

important. I'm happy I kept it in play to get that birdie back on eight". Sagstrom said. "My game is developing every week. I've worked hard to stay on top of my short game". A pack on 68 included Malaysia's Kelly Tan, American Danielle Kang, Canada's Brooke Henderson, Denmark's Nanna Madsen and China's Liu Yu.

"Just hit a lot of fairways and a lot of greens and kept giving myself the chances for birdies", Tan said. "Just really good driving day overall".

World number two Kang, who won the LPGA's first two return events last month, closed with a birdie.

"It's more so just having the confidence in my golf game, having the belief I can pull off the shots", she said. "I made some good putts".

Henderson, playing on her 23rd birthday, began on the back nine and birdied four of her last eight holes to leap up the leaderboard.

"It wasn't exactly the start I wanted but I made a few birdies on the (second) nine", she said. "It was a good day and a solid start".

Her sister was among the caddies who rode in a cart to help cope with the heat. "We got pretty lucky to be early off, so I feel like the temperature was pretty fine because I live and practice in Florida", said Liu. "I'm definitely very happy about my start, just staying very steady out there". — AFP

LPGA ANA INSPIRATION FIRST-ROUND SCORES (par 72, USA unless noted):
66 - Nelly Korda
67 - Chun In-gee (KOR), Madelene Sagstrom (SWE)
68 - Brooke Henderson (CAN), Liu Yu (CHN), Danielle Kang, Kelly Tan (MAS), Nanna Madsen (DEN)
69 - Mel Reid (ENG), Georgia Hall (ENG), Hannah Green (AUS), Kristen Gillman, Lydia Ko (NZL), Brittany Lincicome, Lin Xiyu (CHN), Park Sung-hyun (KOR), Kim Sei-young (KOR), Lee Mi-hyang (KOR)
70 - Christina Kim, Stephanie Meadow (NIR), Carlota Ciganda (ESP), Brittany Lang, Hinako Shibuno (JPN), Lexi Thompson, Anna Nordqvist (SWE), Anne van Dam (NED), Sarah Schmelzel, Megan Khang, Nasa Hataoka (JPN), Stacy Lewis, Lee Mi-rim (KOR), Maria Fernanda Torres (PUR)

BOTTAS COMPLETES ‘DOUBLE TOP’ IN TUSCAN PRACTICE



Mercedes’ Valtteri Bottas drives during the second practice session at the Mugello circuit ahead of the Tuscany F1 GP in Scarperia e San Piero. – AFP

MUGELLO, Italy: Valtteri Bottas completed a controlled ‘double top’ as he outpaced Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton in Friday afternoon’s crash-hit second practice for this weekend’s first Tuscan Grand Prix.

Bottas clocked a best time of one minute and 16.989 seconds around the spectacular 5.245-kms Ferrari-owned Mugello circuit, two-tenths quicker than championship leader Lewis Hamilton with Max Verstappen a familiar third for Red Bull.

It is the fifth Friday at successive events that the Finn has been fastest in at least one session. But he went better this

time by topping both sessions, boosting his bid to close the 47-point lead that Hamilton has built up in the title race.

The afternoon session was stopped twice for red flags after Lando Norris crashed his McLaren after spinning and, later, Sergio Perez of Racing Point collided with Kimi Raikkonen’s Alfa Romeo.

Alex Albon was fourth in the second Red Bull ahead of the two Renaults of Daniel Ricciardo and Esteban Ocon, Perez and last Sunday’s Monza winner Pierre Gasly of Alpha Tauri.

Raikkonen was ninth for Alfa Romeo and Charles

Leclerc tenth in his Ferrari, as the Italian team showed a solid improvement after two pointless weekends before this weekend’s celebration of their 1000th Grand Prix.

His Ferrari team-mate Sebastian Vettel, who is leaving the team at the end of the season, ended the session stranded out on the track after the engine of his gleaming burgundy-red car cut out.

NORRIS CRASH

The session ran in balmy conditions with an air temperature of 29 degrees and the track at 45, perfect weather for the few paying spectators,

from the official Ferrari Fan Club, allowed inside for the first time in this coronavirus-hit season.

After a flurry of action led by Norris, the burgundy-liveried Ferraris joined the fray and Leclerc spun on his hard tyres on his out-lap, returning immediately to the pits as Verstappen went fastest for Red Bull.

Bottas then picked up where he had left off in the morning by going top in 1:18.019, a time he soon trimmed before Norris crashed at the exit of Turn Three after running wide and into the gravel.

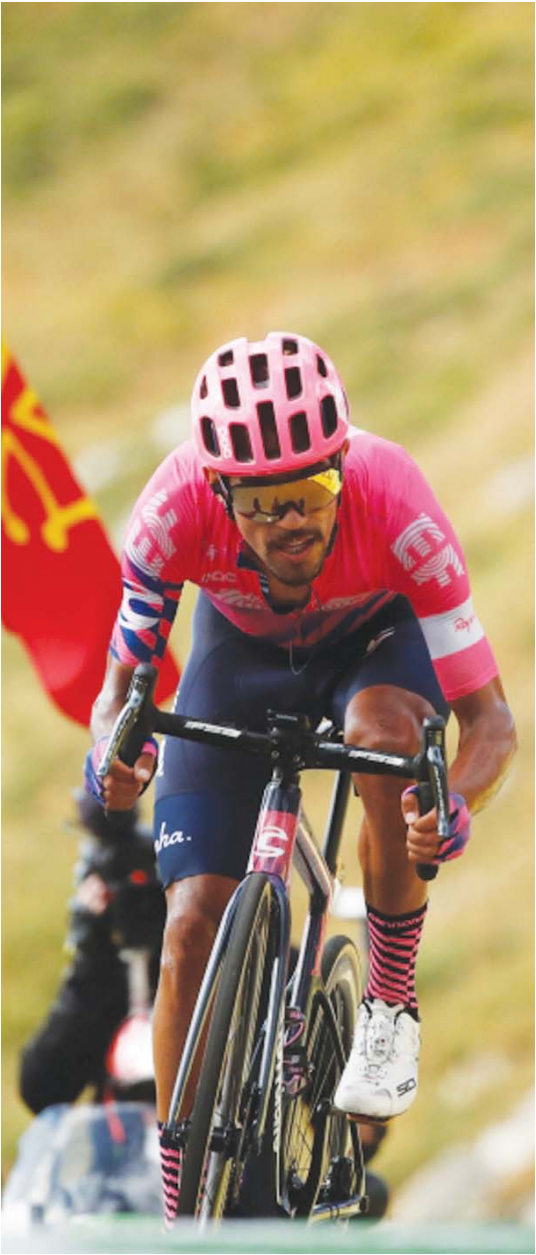
The impact as he slid into the

barriers tore the front wing off his McLaren car before he slid to a halt. He was unhurt and walked away, but the session was red-flagged for eight minutes to allow for the wreckage to be cleared.

On resumption, Bottas was quick again on soft tyres as he cut his lap to 1:16.989, enough to keep him two-tenths ahead of team-mate Hamilton.

Next, it was Vettel who found limits of his Ferrari and the track when he ran off at Turn 13, prompting a brief yellow-flags period after a full spin before Perez clipped Raikkonen’s Alfa Romeo at Turn One, sending the Finn into a gravel trap. — AFP

TOUR DE FRANCE



Daniel Martinez celebrates as he crosses the finish line at the end of the 13th stage. – AFP

Martinez wins mountain struggle

MURAT, France: Daniel Martinez scored a first Tour de France stage win for US team Education First on Friday as Slovenia’s Primož Roglič extended his lead at the top of the overall standings after a titanic mountain struggle.

Defending champion Egan Bernal dropped time over the final kilometre of the 13th stage while Colombia’s Nairo Quintana and Frenchman Romain Bardet also fell further behind Roglič.

As the race hit a nine-per cent incline on the day’s sixth and final climb, Roglič and Pogacar managed to drop an elite clique of riders in the running to win the 2020 Tour.

Bernal now looks under severe pressure from Vuelta a Espana champion Roglič, who has a powerful team around him.

Bernal’s team Ineos said their 23-year-old leader was improving each day from a bad back.

“We will do better on the really tough stages,” Ineos director Benjamin Rasch said.

The holder of the green jersey, Irishman Sam Bennett, and the vastly experienced Peter Sagan will likely renew their struggle for sprint points on Saturday’s 194-kilometre run over five small hills between Clermont-Ferrand and Lyon. — AFP

CSA rejects SA bid to sideline embattled board

CAPE TOWN: Cricket South Africa (CSA) has rejected a resolution by the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) to suspend its board while a task team investigates its conduct.

SASCOC said on Thursday night that the embattled board of CSA was asked to step aside after, among other things, failing to share a damning report that led to the sacking of former chief executive Thabang Moroe some nine months after he was first suspended.

It also follows heavy criticism from sponsors and national team players, the latter accusing the board of “self-interest” in failing to deal adequately with the contents of the report, and the postponement of an Annual General Meeting scheduled for September 5 which was to elect a new president after Chris Nenzani resigned last month.

“CSA does not agree with the resolution taken by SASCOC and has not had the opportunity to engage



with SASCOC on various issues raised in the communication,” CSA said in a statement on Friday.

“In addition, CSA is taking legal



advice regarding the basis on which SASCOC has sought to intervene in the business affairs of CSA.

“CSA does, however, commit to

engaging further with SASCOC to understand its position and to find common ground with it in the best interests of cricket.”

SASCOC acting chief executive Ravi Govender said on Thursday the intervention was needed to allow a thorough investigation of the board’s

conduct that has drawn widespread criticism.

“We are deeply concerned about the issues that have been permeating around CSA recently,” Govender said.

“We met with the board and requested sight of the elusive forensic report, which has not been forthcoming.

“The International Cricket Council have also expressed some concerns (about the running of CSA) and we believe our decision is warranted, and that it will be embraced by the ICC,” he said.

Govender later confirmed on Friday that the CSA board have requested to meet SASCOC on Monday to discuss the matter further, and says for now their resolution stands. SASCOC is the macro-body that oversees sport in South Africa and has the power to rein in its federations, of which CSA is one, if deemed to be acting improperly.

— Reuters



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Victoria Azarenka of Belarus reacts after her match against Serena Williams of the United States.
— USA Today Sports

AZARENKA STOPS SERENA RECORD BID

OSAKA ENDS BRADY CHALLENGE TO ENTER US OPEN FINAL

NEW YORK: Victoria Azarenka came from a set down to stun record-chasing Serena Williams on Thursday and set up a US Open final against Japan's Naomi Osaka.

Azarenka recovered from a 6-1 hammering in the first set to win the next two 6-3, 6-3 and schedule her first Grand Slam final appearance in seven years.

The former world number one is enjoying a remarkable renaissance in New York that the Belarusian credits to finding humility, following several years disrupted by injury and a custody battle over her son.

"I think when you're coming up from kind of nothing, then you become a number one player in the world, sometimes you can start to think you're invincible and that you're better than everybody, and it's not true," Azarenka said.

"So the ego starts to grow. It's very hurtful when it gets damaged. Instead of getting the ego damaged, I tried to remove that and learn from my mistakes," she added.

After a first set plagued by double faults and unforced errors, Azarenka turned the tide in the second, upping her service game and getting more

returns in play as she began to dictate lengthy rallies.

"I knew I needed to step up with my aggressivity, play a little smarter, play with a little bit more width of the court and bring the intensity up," Azarenka explained.

Two-time Grand Slam winner had never beaten Williams before in a Grand Slam.

Her last appearance in a Grand Slam final came in the US Open in 2013 when Williams beat her.

Azarenka also suffered a heartbreaking loss to Williams in the 2012 US Open final, when she served for the match at 5-3 in the third set only to lose 7-5.

Azarenka was determined that history would not repeat itself. Serving for the match, she hit a double fault before smashing her fastest serve of the night at 109 mph.

'RESPONSIBILITY'

When Williams then challenged and lost an ace that was called in on the next point, it was Azarenka's match.

"I've been there before. Today was gonna be different," Azarenka said.

Williams said she started the 1 hr 56min-match "really strong."

"(But) then she just kept fighting. She just changed and started playing better and better. Maybe I took a little too much off the gas pedal at some point," the American added.

The defeat ended Williams' hopes of winning a record-equalling 24th singles Grand Slam at Flushing Meadows.

Azarenka has been smiling and dancing on court, and even meditating during breaks.

"I started taking more responsibility for what I do, for what happens to me, and responsibility of how I'm going



Naomi Osaka of Japan celebrates after match point.

to react to situations.

Azarenka faces a formidable opponent in two-time Grand Slam winner and fourth seed Naomi Osaka, who defeated 28th seed Jennifer Brady 7-6 (7/1), 3-6, 6-3.

Osaka, of Haitian and Japanese heritage, walked onto the court wearing a facemask emblazoned with the name of Philando Castile, a black man who was shot dead by a police officer during a traffic stop in Minnesota in 2016.

The 2019 Australian Open champion says she is getting strength from wearing different masks honouring victims of racial injustice and police brutality throughout the tournament. — AFP

Happy Days — Pavic, Soares lift men's doubles trophy

NEW YORK: Mate Pavic of Croatia and Brazilian veteran Bruno Soares won the US Open men's doubles final in straight sets on Thursday.

The unseeded pair defeated eighth seeds Croatian Nikola Mektic and the Netherlands' Wesley Koolhof 7-5, 6-3, in 1 hr 31 min inside Arthur Ashe Stadium.

It marked a third Grand Slam men's doubles title for the 38-year-old Soares and a second at Flushing Meadows after his victory with Britain's Jamie Murray in 2016.

"It means a lot," said Soares. "I'm extremely happy. It's been a tough year for everyone.

"I'm really glad for the work that everyone put into this event to give us the opportunity to get back on the court.

"It's a very positive way to come



It marked a third Grand Slam men's doubles title for the 38-year-old Soares and a second at Flushing Meadows after his victory with Britain's Jamie Murray in 2016

back for us — happy days. Hopefully we get back to normal soon but very grateful for everything," he added.

For the 27-year-old Pavic, it is a second Grand Slam men's doubles title after victory at the Australian Open in 2018. "We had tough matches," said

Pavic. "We were a break down serving for the match after the opening set of the second round," he added, referring to their hard-fought 6-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 victory over Americans Jack Sock and Jackson Withrow.

"So we got through tough moments throughout the week. Very happy to be here lifting the title," he added.

Soares and Pavic have also enjoyed success in mixed doubles in recent years.

Soares won the US Open mixed doubles in 2012 and 2014. He also triumphed at the Australian Open mixed in 2016.

Pavic lifted the mixed at Flushing Meadows in 2016 and at the Australian Open in 2018.

The mixed doubles event was cancelled at this year's US Open due to the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP