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DJOKOVIC REACHES QUARTERFINALS, SERENA CRASHES OUT



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OMAN AVIATION GROUP TO DEVELOP SEA-TO-AIR LOGISTICS



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UNEASY PEACE AS PANDEMIC CALMS MONTENEGRO'S TOURISM 'CHAOS'



# HM PRESIDES OVER CABINET MEETING

## RESTRUCTURING IN TANDEM WITH VISION-2040

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday, following a ceremony during which new ministers took the oath of office.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for plentiful bounties, security and stability with which He has endowed the Sultanate.

His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed that the restructuring of the State's Administrative Apparatus came in tandem with Oman Vision 2040 and in a manner that upgrades the competence of the administrative apparatus and corresponds to the evolution witnessed by the Sultanate during the past decades in developmental, economic and social aspects.

This is in addition to systematic tackling of financial and economic situations by promoting the national economy's competitive potential and realising institutional growth of the administrative apparatus so that it could keep pace with economic, social and developmental progression of the Sultanate, said His Majesty the Sultan, who also laid emphasis on the coordination of government efforts in all spheres of action.

His Majesty the Sultan thanked

the parties that elaborated on the issue of restructuring and commended the results of their studies which, he said, contributed to the formulation of the final outcome (procedures).

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt thanks, commendation and appreciation for former ministers, under-secretaries and other officials "who had an effective role in advancing the Sultanate's development march".

His Majesty the Sultan also welcomed the new members of the Council of Ministers who will take their turn in promoting the march of national action.

His Majesty the Sultan said that the State is embarking on empowering governorates, governors, according them full attention to foster growth and development while at the same time granting them discretion to shoulder the responsibility of activating the economy, investments and business away from centralisation.

Speaking about addressing the health challenges posed by coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), His Majesty the Sultan hailed the efforts exerted at all government departments concerned, led by the Supreme COVID-19 Control Committee, (and executed by) the health sector and all military and security sectors.

TURN TO P2



- Restructuring of the administrative machinery upgrades the competence of the state apparatus
- Systematic tackling of financial and economic situations by promoting economy's competitive potential
- Role of former ministers, under-secretaries and other officials in advancing the nation's march appreciated
- Sultanate embarking on empowering governorates, governors, according them full attention to foster growth
- Cooperation of citizens and residents and their role in alleviating the negative impacts of the pandemic hailed
- HM underlined the importance of education, even as a 'merged education' methodology has been announced





### His Majesty confers Royal Commendation Order on Alawi

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Royal Order of Commendation, First Class, on retired minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah. The conferment ceremony took place at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday. — ONA

## MINISTERS TAKE OATH OF OFFICE



Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, a number of their highnesses an excellencies took the oath of office at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

DETAILS ON P3



# HM PRESIDES OVER CABINET MEETING



**FROM PAGE 1**

His Majesty the Sultan also commended the cooperation of citizens and residents and their role in alleviating the negative impacts of the pandemic. In this context, His Majesty underscored the significance of maintaining approved precautionary measures. He prayed to the Almighty Allah to protect Oman and all residents on its land.

His Majesty the Sultan also underlined the importance of education, even as a 'merged education' methodology has been announced. In this respect, His Majesty the Sultan directed the competent authorities to accord full attention to educational procedures, since education constitutes a priority in national action.

In other statements, His Majesty the Sultan exhorted officials responsible for service establishments to streamline procedures to enable citizens and businesses to have easy access to the services rendered by those departments. He also called for further action to speed up steps towards the quick completion of electronic government.

On the foreign front, His Majesty the Sultan reiterated the permanent stance of the Sultanate's foreign policy which serves its interests, focused on good neighbourliness, preservation of Arab fundamentals, friendship and cooperation with all.

— ONA



# NEW MINISTERS TAKE OATH OF OFFICE

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, ministers took the oath of office at Al Baraka Palace on Wednesday. His Highness Sayyid Mansour bin Majid al Said, Special Adviser of His Majesty the Sultan; HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said,

Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth; HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Sultan bin Salim bin Said al Habsi, Minister of Finance; Dr Abdullah

bin Nasser bin Khalifa al Harrasi, Minister of Information; Dr Khalfan bin Said bin Mubarak al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning; Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim bin Said al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation; Eng Said

bin Hamoud bin Said al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Dr Said bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Saqri, Minister of Economy; Qais bin Mohammed bin Moosa al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment

Promotion; Laila bint Ahmed bin Awadh al Najar, Minister of Social Development; and Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour, took the oath. — ONA





# 10 million wild tree plantation project begins

**GREEN COVER:** PDO sponsored initiative to continue till 2030; Ghaf, Sumr, Sidr, Shue, Tiq, Talh, Mitan, Sarh and Alalan among species



**ZAINAB AL NASSRI**  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

The Environment Authority on Wednesday planted 1,800 seedlings wild trees in the Mina Al Fahl area on Wednesday as part of the national initiative to plant 10 million wild trees announced in January.

Sponsored by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the initiative is planned to continue till 2030. The Company believes that this is one of the most effective ways to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and contribute to addressing and promoting adaptation to climate change.

This is part of many other campaigns to be implemented in various governorates of the Sultanate in the coming days. Before this, the

project was dedicated to expand the nurseries, establish new nurseries, and provide them with seeds from the recently-established seed bank. Work teams were formed in cooperation with the community to collect these seeds of various types of wild trees in the Sultanate.

Since the announcement of the initiative, the Authority has sought to produce healthy seedlings that can withstand difficult climatic conditions in the appropriate places. The focus has been on the well-known wild trees including Ghaf, Sumr, Sidr, Shue, Tiq, Talh, Mitan, Sarh and Alalan.

Dr Thuraya al Sariri, Assistant DG for Nature Conservation, commented that this project aims to preserve biodiversity and increase the green area to create a public outlet for all. This will also support tourism. She



called upon everyone — whether private, government sector, civil society, and individuals - to participate, and contribute to the success of this

project.

This initiative aims to increase and improve green cover in pastoral, natural, and degraded areas, as well

as raise awareness of the importance of increasing green space and for its benefits to the environment and society. It also looks to attract

contribution of all segments of society in preserving the natural environment and exploit the economic benefits of some plant species.

## Dhofar stores potential for mushroom farming



**KAUSHALENDRA SINGH**  
SALALAH, AUG 26

If tapped properly, Dhofar mountains have huge potential for seasonal vegetables. Mushrooms, which are great in demand these days among health-conscious people, are abundantly available on the Dhofar mountains, which get regular monsoon rains during the Khareef season.

The quality of mushrooms found in the mountains during the Khareef season is far better than the imported ones in terms of taste and size.

“It tastes so good that it is sold at a very high price all through the season. Due to very limited production, its supply

remains limited only to Salalah that too in a limited quantity. The reason being the farming set up, which is not organised. Only some farmers do it out of passion and many do not even opt to sell. They distribute it among friends and relatives,” said a local farmer Said al Sahri.

“Not only they are fresh, their quality is so good that people love to have it. Since they are seasonal and grown naturally, the demand is very high. I suggest the farmers and policymakers take steps to grow mushrooms on a commercial scale. The quality shows that Salalah climate is suitable for mushroom farming,” said Ali Sahri.

Another farmer counted all the possible conditions for mushroom

farming present in the areas where there impact of monsoon in Dhofar.

“Not much light is needed to grow mushroom because mushrooms cannot extract nutrients from the sun as green plants do. So they do not need light. At the same time, mushrooms do not necessarily need a dark environment. This element is easily available in Salalah areas during the Khareef season. It has got a natural setting for mushroom farming,” he said.

Not an expert in agriculture, but an experienced farmer Ali calls moisture another important condition for mushroom. “Moisture is available all through the monsoon season. Mushroom thrives in moist environments. We have noticed good quality mushrooms growing



It tastes so good that it is sold at a very high price all through the season. Due to very limited production, its supply remains limited only to Salalah that too in a limited quantity. The reason being the farming set up, which is not organised. Only some farmers do it out of passion and many do not even opt to sell. They distribute it among friends and relatives

**SAID AL SAHRI,**  
*farmer*

organically in the mountains. Everyone knows there is a great demand for organic products these days.” Humidity is yet another condition for mushroom farming. Temperature is another factor and depends on the quality of mushroom. “Not very high temperature is needed for mushroom farming. During the Khareef season, the mountains mostly have 26 to 20 degrees of temperature. It suits mushroom,” he said.

Mushrooms mostly need nutrients from organic material. It can always be managed with the support of the authorities concerned. “This is an area which can be managed as mushrooms generally need sugar, starch, lignin, fats, protein, and nitrogen. With the abundance of cattle wealth and vegetation in Dhofar, the requirement of compost made from manure and straw is an easy resource.” Proper planning can lead to surplus mushroom farming in Dhofar. “We can be in a position to export it to other GCC countries,” said Ali

## Sultanate reports 166 new COVID-19 cases

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

The Sultanate reported 166 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, taking the total to 84,818. A total of 262 new COVID-19 cases have recovered in Oman in 24 hours, Ministry of Health said. The total recovered cases have now touched 79,409 in the country. The total number of COVID-19 deaths stood at 646.

The Ministry also pointed out that 56 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of hospitalised patients stands at 406, of them 148 are in intensive care units (ICU).

## University of Nizwa to take part in global COVID-19 webinar

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NIZWA, AUG 26

A virtual seminar is to take place on September 1 and 2 in collaboration with the University Teknologi Petronas (UTP), Malaysia; the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), USA; and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Brazil. The College of Economics, Management, and Information (CEMIS), is representing University of Nizwa in organising this international seminar.

Mohammed al Ismaeli, representing the university explained that “the unprecedented socio-economic crisis and global health crisis, human behaviours and post COVID-19 trends, will enable experts from these four corners of the globe to participate in the Virtual International Seminar (VIS), titled “The Global Pandemic: Impacts, Issues and Opportunities 2020 and Beyond.” The experts are expected to focus on business, trade, economy, banking and finance, oil and energy, higher education, health care and governmental responses to COVID-19.

Primary speakers will include, Prof Ahmed al Rawahi, the Chancellor, UoN; Muna al Darmaki, in-Country Value Strategy Lead, Ministry of Oil and Gas, Oman; Dr Mustafa Malik and Shamsuddin, UoN; Dr Firas al Abduwani, CEO, Hussam Technology Company; Dr Luis Dutra from the School of Chemistry, UFRJ, Brazil; Dr Sutan Hidayat, Director of Education and Research, National Committee on Islamic Economy and Finance, Indonesia; Dr Tilal al Aulaqi, Senior Policy Advisor, Petroleum Development Oman; Dr Waleed al Rajhi, Dean of Planning and Quality, UoN, and Dr S Arockiasamy, Dean CEMIS, UoN. Registration is free of charge, all attendees will receive an e-certificate, and registration can be done online at <https://uevent.utp.edu.my/virtual-international-seminar-2020/registration/Site/Register>

# Notify job vacancies to the ministry, private firms told

**OMANISATION:** Companies should not publish employment advertisements

**SAMUEL KUTTY**  
MUSCAT, AUG 25

Companies in the private sector have been told not to advertise job vacancies; instead they should notify them through the Ministry of Labour's website. In a statement, the ministry said they must submit their plans for Omanisation and existing job vacancies through the ministry's website at the earliest.

"All private sector institutions and establishments must follow the necessary procedures regarding submitting Omanisation plans and vacant job opportunities through the ministry's website," it said.

They have also been told "not to publish any advertisements with regard to the prevailing job opportunities, and must follow the procedures in force at the ministry", the statement said.

The move stems from the new ministry's initiative to reinforce its efforts towards employing the national workforce, provide them employment opportunities, and fill vacancies as needed in organisations.

The new Ministry of Labour was formed through a Royal decree merging the Ministry of Manpower,



Ministry of Civil Service, the National Training Fund and the National Center for Employment.

According to the statement, Omani job seekers should follow up with the ministry website for advertisements relating to job vacancies.

Between January 1, 2020 and June 3, 2020, as many as 16,338 nationals have found jobs through the National Center for Employment, which is now part of the ministry. Out of the total number, 1,925 were hired in government, civil, and mili-

tary jobs — while private sector contracts have touched 11,956.

Moreover, 531 Omanis found work in government companies, while 436 have received apprenticeships, and 1,490 pursued entrepreneurship.

## Omani women's role in workplace hailed

**MUSCAT:** *Gulf News* daily published an article on its website commending the role of Omani women in the public and private sectors and the government's encouragement to this role.

The article, titled "Oman: More women being employed in private sector", said that the Sultanate's labour market witnessed a steady increase in numbers of working women in the private sector, comprising 42 per cent of the total workforce, compared to 26.6 per cent in the government sector.

"The number of Omani women employed in the private sector in 2019 was 70,565 - a figure which is up by 5,502 compared to 2018," said the paper.

The paper credited the data to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), saying that it "throws light on a paradigm

**WOMEN ACCOUNT FOR 42 PER CENT OF THE TOTAL WORKFORCE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND 26.6 PER CENT IN THE GOVERNMENT SECTOR**



shift in the job spheres that were hitherto not so hot in women's job-radar."

It explained that spheres that saw a stronger presence of women workforce than men include education, health, social services, in addition to financial, insurance, information and communication activities.

The paper pointed out that Omani women are making rapid headways in sales in the age groups of 30-34, 35-39 and 25-29.

The paper opined that "Another positive indicator is that the vast majority of Omani women employed in the government sector are university graduates, followed by diploma holders.

The corresponding figure for the private sector indicates that most of them started working after their secondary school." — ONA

## MoH hosts workshop on stress management

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

The Ministry of Health's Directorate-General for Specialized Medical Care (DGSMC) represented by the Medical Rehabilitation Services hosted an online workshop on "Self-Development and Crisis Management Skills" to train the heads and supervisors of the medical rehabilitation departments on Wednesday. The workshop came within the interest of the Directorate General of Specialized Medical Care at the Ministry of Health in the light of the coronavirus pandemic.

The health care providers are under great pressure in supervision and setting up service priorities in fighting the coronavirus. Therefore, the health care professionals need to develop their personal skills in stress management and communication, said Dr Kadhim Jafar Sulaiman, SMC Director-General.

The online workshop witnessed the participation of 96 heads and supervisors of medical rehabilitation and physiotherapy departments in hospitals and specialised medical centres affiliated with the ministry, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, Armed Forces Hospital, Royal Oman Police Hospital and Sports Medicine Centre at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Ministry of Social Development.

The workshop aimed at enhancing leadership skills in dealing with stress at uncertain times and crisis management, introducing motivation strategies and mind Management techniques to create a positive environment in the workplace.

## Fake auto parts risk lives

**KABEER YOUSUF**  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

Using counterfeit spare parts and sub-standard accessories in vehicles can lead to serious consequences even with a minor accident, according to the Consumer Protection Authority.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) had earlier identified counterfeit spare parts being a major contributor to tragic accidents, which otherwise would have been minor.

"Do not use counterfeit or sub-standard spare parts and accessories to your vehicles because they can land you in trouble," a statement from the CPA said.

It further called on all suppliers to adhere to the provisions of the Oman Consumer Protection Law and its regulations and to adhere to transparency and credibility.

"One should also keep away from false and misleading advertisements and

suppliers should refrain from unfounded advertisements when promoting goods and services to avoid legal accountability," it further said.

In Oman, some motorists opt for fake spare parts just because they are sold at less than half of the original price. But it is jeopardising their and others' lives, according to PM Jabir, an insurance representative.

"There is a lack of awareness against counterfeit spares and obviously, the high cost of original products is something which deters many consumers from buying the original," according to him.

The punishment for counterfeiting crimes is a minimum of three months imprisonment and a maximum of two years imprisonment along with a fine of RO 2,000 or more. The amount of punishment rises if the offense is repeated.

The Consumer Protection Authority conducts frequent raids to discourage such malpractice.

## FOR SALE

**SANDWICH PANEL HALL TYPE  
DOUBLE STORY & SINGLE STORY PORTA CABINS  
IN GOOD CONDITION**

**SANDWICH PANEL HALL TYPE  
12m x 3.6m  
DOUBLE STORY: 15 Nos**



**SANDWICH PANEL HALL TYPE  
12m x 3.6m  
SINGLE STORY 10 Nos.**

**Contact: Mr AHMED SAMIR  
Mobile & Whatsapp 99103511  
email ahmed\_samir\_1286@yahoo.com**



**Muscat Municipality  
Announcement No. 44/2020**

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

| Tender No  | No E-Tender     | Description of Tender                                                                  | Tender Fee | Last date to Collect the Tender | Tender Return Date | Grade      |
|------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| PRE/19/113 | (2020/MM/Q5/02) | Renewal Licenses of Citeix Solutions for Mobile Device Management (E-Tender) Re-call 3 | Rial 25    | 08/09/2020                      | 10/09/2020         | Specialist |

### Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be ( 1% ) of the tender value valid for ninety ( 90 ) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box for E-Tendering in the first floor at Muscat Municipality Building, Ruwi, before 10:00 am as per the date mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to ([etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)) or call (+96824166670).

## شركة النماء للدواجن ش م ع م A' Namaa Poultry Co. S.A.O.C

### Tenders for Leasing Trucks (Long Term Contract)

A' Namaa Poultry Company SAOC invites all companies dealing in leasing trucks and wishing to participate in the tender for leasing trucks, to apply to the company to purchase the tender and the details are as follows: -

| SR | Tenders Details                    | Tender NO       | No of trucks |
|----|------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1  | Prime Mover                        | ANP/LD/010/2020 | 37           |
| 2  | Distribution Trucks (Refrigerated) | ANP/LD/020/2020 | 16           |

- Obtaining the conditions of the tender from the Procurement Committee at the company's headquarters at the following address: Al Nahda Towers 2, Floor 7, Office No. 9, during working hours from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., on or before 31st August 2020 for a fee of OMR 100/- which is non-refundable for each tender.
- Submitting bids in sealed envelope with the tender numbers and name written on it.
- Attach the offers with the commercial registration details of the applicant.

**The last date for receiving applications is September 03, 2020.**

A' Namaa Poultry reserves the right to accept or reject any or all offers without giving any reasons.

Suppliers will be notified after the screening process according to the company's standards.

In case of any queries or further clarification on the process, please contact  
**Logistics Department**  
(Phone: +968 22504469; Email: [info@anamaa.com](mailto:info@anamaa.com))  
during office hours.



Members of Yemen's southern separatist forces gather in front of a base of the Saudi-led military coalition, on the outskirts of Aden, on Wednesday. – AFP

# Yemen's southern separatists withdraw from peace talks

**DUBAI:** Yemen's southern separatists said on Wednesday they had withdrawn from talks over a Saudi-sponsored power-sharing deal with the internationally recognised government, in the latest setback for the troubled process.

The Riyadh Agreement which was struck late last year was designed to mend a rift between allies in the war against Ansar Allah fighters who have seized much of Yemen's north.

It sought to quell the "civil war within a civil war" and was hailed as a possible stepping stone towards ending the wider conflict.

The Southern Transitional Council said in a statement that it had sent a letter to the Saudi authorities confirming "the suspension of its participation in the ongoing consultations to implement the (power-sharing) agreement"

But the on-again, off-again process saw the STC proclaim self-governance in the south in April, only to abandon that stance last month and pledge to implement the stalled peace deal.

The separatists said on Wednesday that their decision to pull out of the talks was due to ongoing military escalation in the flashpoint province of Abyan, and the rupture of an agreed ceasefire.

They also complained about the failure to pay public sector salaries, and a collapse of services in the south — a bugbear that helped trigger the declaration of self-rule in April.

The STC's Vice-President Hani Ben Brik said in a tweet that the separatists were committed to the original agreement but that their move was aimed at pushing for a full commitment to the deal.

There was no immediate reaction from the Saudi government.

The breakdown between the STC and the government has complicated the long and separate conflict between the Saudi-led military coalition and the Ansar Allah fighters who control the capital Sanaa.

The separatists said they came back to the Riyadh Agreement in late July under pressure from coalition partners, which had proposed a plan to "accelerate" the power-sharing process.

The plan called for the Yemeni prime minister to form a new government within 30 days, as well as the appointment of a new governor and security director for the second city Aden, where the government is now based.

— AFP

## Bahrain recommits to two-state solution in ME



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo meets with Bahrain King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa during his visit to Manama on Wednesday. – Reuters

**MANAMA:** Bahrain said on Wednesday it was committed to the creation of a Palestinian state in talks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Pompeo was in Manama as part of a Middle East trip aimed at building more ties between Israel and the Arab world after a landmark US-brokered deal with the United Arab Emirates.

However, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa said he told Pompeo that his country remains committed to the Arab Peace Initiative — which calls

for Israel's complete withdrawal from the Palestinian territories occupied after 1967, in exchange for peace and the full normalisation of relations.

"The king stressed the importance of intensifying efforts to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict according to the two-state solution... to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital," the official Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported.

— AFP

## Iran, IAEA strike deal on nuclear inspectors' access to sites

**DUBAI/VIENNA:** Iran said on Wednesday it had agreed to grant the UN nuclear watchdog access to two sites that the agency suspects once secretly hosted nuclear material or activities, easing a months-long standoff over the issue.

Wednesday's breakthrough in the dispute over the sites near Karaj and Isfahan was announced in a joint statement by Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency during a rare visit to Tehran by IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi.

US intelligence services and the IAEA believe Iran had a clandestine nuclear weapons programme that it halted in 2003 for fear of discovery. The Islamic Republic has long denied seeking to develop atomic bombs.

"Iran is voluntarily providing the IAEA with access to the two locations specified by the IAEA," Grossi and Iran's nuclear agency

chief Ali Akbar Salehi said in a joint statement, confirming an earlier report by Reuters.

"The IAEA does not have any further questions to Iran and further requests for access to locations other than those declared by Tehran," the statement said.

It said dates for IAEA inspectors to visit the sites had been agreed, without naming them, as well as the parameters of "verification activities" there.

Grossi arrived in Tehran on Monday to press for access to the two sites, which the IAEA suspects could still host undeclared nuclear material, or traces of it.

Iran said Grossi's visit was unrelated to a US move last week at the UN Security Council to reinstate UN sanctions against Tehran lifted under its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, from which the United States has withdrawn.

— Reuters

## Eiffel Tower of debris cleared from Beirut port

**BEIRUT:** French and Lebanese soldiers cleared 8,000 tonnes of steel and concrete equivalent to the weight of the Eiffel Tower from Beirut port which was devastated by a monster blast, an officer said on Wednesday.

Efforts have focused recently on clearing the parts of the port worst affected by the massive August 4 explosion that ripped across swathes of Beirut and killed more than 180 people. "It took me four days to clear 8,000 tonnes of concrete and steel," said Lieutenant Paulin, a French officer coordinating clearing operations at the port. "8,000 tonnes since we got here five days ago, that's the equivalent of the weight of the Eiffel Tower," said Paulin, who belongs to a French civil engineering regiment.

The Tonnerre, a huge French amphibious helicopter carrier, arrived in Beirut earlier in August with dozens of trucks and heavy machinery to clear the debris.

The blast, one of the largest in recent history, levelled entire sectors of the port, created a 43-metre-deep crater that was covered by the sea, and sent a shockwave that damaged property and wounded people several miles away. — AFP

# Gazan dies of coronavirus as lockdown continues

**GAZA:** Gaza reported one coronavirus death and at least 10 new cases of infection on Wednesday as the blockaded Palestinian enclave sought to control its first public outbreak of the disease.

Hamas-controlled security forces enforced a lockdown in all cities in the coastal territory, warning people to stay at home or to wear face masks if they had to go out for emergencies.

Health officials said the 61-year-old man who died had pre-existing conditions and had been on a respirator.

Ten more cases were reported on Wednesday, six of them in Maghazi refugee camp where the first four infections were discovered on Monday, and another four in Gaza City and the northern area of the enclave of 2 million people.

The new infections added to concerns among local and international health organisations about Gaza's potentially disastrous combination of poverty, densely populated refugee camps and limited



A police officer speaks with Palestinians riding a donkey-drawn cart during a lockdown after Gaza reported its first cases of COVID-19 in the general population, in Gaza City. – Reuters

hospital capacity.

Until Monday the 360 square-kilometre coastal strip had reported no infections outside border quarantine facilities for new arrivals.

Facing for the first time a situation that the rest of the world has been dealing with for months, Gazans have been going online to share experiences and voice their concerns.

"We are now alone with Corona, with the blazing sun and the power supply being cut off. Corona came to empty pockets and homes on the brink of sadness and anger," wrote

one Gaza resident on Twitter.

The 40 kilometre-long territory is sealed off from the outside world by Israeli walls, watchtowers and gunboats along 90 per cent of its border and coastline, and by Egypt along a narrow strip to the south.

Both countries impose tight restrictions on movement in and out of Gaza, citing security concerns.

The blockade is thought to be one reason why Gaza remained relatively virus-free, with many of its residents comparing their situation to a permanent lockdown.

The United Nations agency dealing with Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said it was considering alternative plans to continue under lockdown the health, education and food services it provides to more than half Gaza's population.

UNRWA spokesman Adnan Abu Hasna said clinics remained open but staffers were providing medical consultations over the phone, and some medication was being delivered to homes. — Reuters

IN BRIEF

France joins  
drill in east  
Mediterranean

**PARIS:** France is joining military exercises with Italy, Greece and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean amid a worsening dispute between Turkey and Greece over energy resources in the region, Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly said on Wednesday.

Tensions between Turkey and Greece escalated after Ankara sent its Oruc Reis survey vessel to disputed eastern Mediterranean waters this month, a move Athens has called illegal.

“The eastern Mediterranean is turning into an area of tension. Respect for international law must be the rule and not the exception,” Parly said on Twitter, adding that it “should not be a playground for the ambitions of some.”

Three Rafale fighter jets and a warship equipped with a helicopter will be part of the joint military exercises, she said.

Relations between France and Turkey have soured in recent months over Ankara’s actions in Nato, Libya and the Mediterranean. — **Reuters**

Two HK opposition  
lawmakers  
among held

**HONG KONG:** Two prominent Hong Kong opposition lawmakers were among more than a dozen people arrested on Wednesday in a police operation focused on last year’s huge protests, part of a widening crackdown against the city’s democracy camp.

Lam Cheuk-ting and Ted Hui were detained after early morning raids on their homes, adding to the mounting prosecutions targeting Beijing’s critics in the restless financial hub.

Both are minority Democratic Party lawmakers in the city’s partially elected legislature and vocal critics of Beijing as well as Hong Kong’s government and the police.

“This is out-and-out political persecution,” James To, a veteran lawyer and fellow party member, told reporters.

Police said on Wednesday’s arrests were related to two anti-government rallies last year — one on 6 July and the other on 21 July, the latter on a day that saw a notorious attack by government loyalists on protesters in the town of Yuen Long. — **Reuters**

EU eyes initial vaccination for  
at least 40pc of population



**BRUSSELS:** European Union nations, Britain and EU partners have agreed on a blueprint for a COVID-19 vaccination plan envisaging inoculation of at least 40 per cent of their populations, a step that may set back the World Health Organisation’s own vaccine blueprint.

The EU target for early vaccinations is twice as high as the goal set by the WHO, which is aiming to buy vaccines initially for 20 per cent of the world’s most vulnerable people through a global procurement scheme.

The EU estimates that the share of its population in need of

initial vaccination, should a shot be developed, would be at least 40 per cent, effectively reducing the availability of possible doses for less developed countries.

There is so far no approved COVID-19 vaccine, except one authorised in Russia before large-scale trials. The supply of the vaccines that might be successful is expected to be limited for a long period as production capacities are limited.

“Adding (up) all risk groups presently known will designate probably 40 per cent of the population, depending on the situation and demography in countries,” said the document,

\* Plan may deal new blow to WHO as EU shuns global procurement

\* EU vaccination targets twice as high as WHO’s global goal

\* Potential COVID-19 vaccines likely in short supply for long

\* EU sees single-shot COVID vaccines as unlikely, eyes boosters

adopted in late July by health experts from EU member states as well as Britain, Switzerland, Norway and Balkan countries.

The document classifies as belonging to “priority groups” over 200 million of the EU population of 450 million, including people with chronic diseases, the elderly and health workers.

Healthy people working in critical public services, such as education and public transport, are also included in the priority group although an estimate for their number is not available in the EU document.

Adding this group would raise the EU’s initial vaccination target

to more than 40 per cent of the population.

The objective of the plan is to reach herd immunity for the EU population, the document says, which could be achieved with further vaccination campaigns after the 40 per cent goal is met.

The document gives no timeline for how fast it would expect to be able to reach its target, but outlines logistics that need to be in place for a vast inoculation programme. They range from refrigerated transport to supplies of needles and setting up vaccination locations, with the possible involvement of the army and civil protection. — **Reuters**

N Korea’s Kim issues warning on virus as health speculation swirls

**SEOUL:** North Korean state media on Wednesday showed leader Kim Jong Un at a meeting of a top committee issuing warnings about the coronavirus and a looming typhoon, following international speculation over his state of health.

Kim’s comments come amid conjecture over his condition after South Korea’s spy agency said he had delegated some authority to his sister Kim Yo Jong to relieve his “governance stress”.

A former aide to late South

Korean president Kim Dae-jung even said on Facebook he thought the North’s leader was in a coma, though with no apparent evidence.

But Kim presided over a meeting on Tuesday of a top committee of the ruling Workers’ Party, the official KCNA news agency reported, where he assessed “defects in the state emergency anti-epidemic work for checking the inroads of the malignant virus”.

The impoverished North — whose crumbling health system



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attends an enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the 7th Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK), in Pyongyang, North Korea, in this image released on Tuesday by North Korea’s Korean Central News Agency. — **Reuters**

would struggle to cope with a major virus outbreak — has not confirmed a single case of the disease that has swept the world since first emerging in neighbouring China.

Pictures in the *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper showed Kim addressing the meeting, wearing a white suit and in one image apparently smoking a cigarette. Kim addressed “some shortcomings” in the preventive efforts and called for stronger measures to eliminate “defects”, KCNA said. — **AFP**

U-turn by govt: Face masks made  
mandatory in England schools

**LONDON:** It will be mandatory for pupils to wear face masks in communal areas of secondary schools in England in places with local lockdowns, Britain’s education minister Gavin Williamson said on Wednesday in a government U-turn on enforcing their use.

After failing to persuade schools to bring back all students before the summer, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is keen to make sure the reopening now happens as he urges people to get back to some kind of normality after the coronavirus lockdown.

Ministers had ruled out the need for pupils to wear masks in corridors despite updated advice from the World Health Organization (WHO) at the weekend, but Wednesday’s move shifted that stance.

“There are some areas of the country where we have had to do local lockdowns and we think it is right in those few areas that in secondary schools, in communal areas, that youngsters do wear face coverings,” Williamson told Sky News.

On a school visit in central England, Johnson later told students: “The risk to your health is not from COVID ... the greatest risk you face now is of continuing to be out of school.”



Prime Minister Boris Johnson takes part in an induction session in the gymnasium with year sevens as he visits Castle Rock school, Coalville, central England on Wednesday, on the pupils’ first day. — **AFP**

“That is why in the next week, in the succeeding days, we must have every pupil back in school in the way that you’ve come back to school,” he said.

Headteachers in other areas will also have the discretion to recommend using masks in their schools for students aged between 11 and 18.

It is the latest U-turn by Johnson’s government which has come under fire for its handling of the pandemic and after a debacle this month when an algorithm-based system saw swathes of pupils awarded lower-than-expected exam grades.

The change on stance on masks also marks the latest occasion when Johnson has followed the devolved Scottish government in revising pandemic rules, after changes to the grading of exams and enforcing face coverings in shops.

Huw Merriman, chairman of parliament’s transport select committee and a member of Johnson’s party, said it felt like the government was making it up as it went along.

“It’s time we stopped hiding behind the science, which keeps changing, and we focus on the fact that we are in charge,” he told BBC Radio. — **Reuters**



Recall/Special  
Service Campaign



Date of Campaign : 27/08/2020  
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign  
Product Description : Multiple Models

| Production Year | Brand  | Vehicle Model                                                                               | Affected Vehicle Range                 | No. of Affected Vehicles |
|-----------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2013 to 2019    | TOYOTA | AVALON, CAMRY, COROLLA, HILUX, PRADO, FJ CRUISER, LAND CRUISER                              | MR0HU8CD8J0070157 to RKLBL9HE3K5269185 | 44161                    |
|                 | LEXUS  | ES350, GS350, GX460, LS300, LS350, LC500, LS500, LX570, NX200t, NX300, RC350, RX350, RX350L | JTJBARBZ8F2004832 to JTHB51FF1K5007250 | 11441                    |

**Description:**  
The subject vehicles are equipped with a low-pressure fuel pump, located in the fuel tank, that supplies fuel pressure to the fuel injection system. These fuel pumps may include impellers which have been manufactured with lower density. If these impellers are also of a type with lower surface strength or of a different type but were exposed to production solvent drying for longer periods of time, higher levels of surface cracking may occur. In this condition, excessive fuel absorption may occur, resulting in increased impeller deformation. In some cases, the impeller may deform to a point that creates sufficient interference with the fuel pump body to cause the fuel pump to become inoperative. An inoperative fuel pump due to these conditions could result in illumination of check engine and master warning indicators, rough engine running, engine no start and/or vehicle stall while driving at low speed. However, in rare instances, vehicle stall could occur while driving at higher speeds, increasing the risk of a crash.

**Procedure:**  
As per “Technical instruction” advised by Toyota Motor Corporation.

**For More Information:**  
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc. from 27/08/2020.

**Contact Details:**  
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs. after 27/08/2020.



# Two dead as gunfire erupts at Wisconsin protests

**KENOSHA:** A third night of street protests over the police shooting of a Black man erupted into gun violence late on Tuesday and early on Wednesday in Kenosha, Wisconsin, killing two people and wounding one, police said.

Social media videos showed chaotic scenes of people running and screaming amid a volley of gunfire and others tending to gunshot wounds. The bloodshed followed a night of skirmishes that had appeared to turn calm after police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters who defied a curfew.

The shooting broke out shortly before midnight, killing two people and wounding a third who was expected to survive, the Kenosha Police Department said in a statement.

Crowds chased a man running down the street with a rifle after they believed he had shot another man. One pursuer took a flying kick at him after he fell to the ground. Another man tried to grab his weapon and appeared to be shot at close range, falling to the ground.

Another video showed a man who appeared to be shot in the head as several people rushed to his aid, frantically trying to tend to his wound and keep him alert.

Yet another video showed a man with a severe arm wound sitting on the ground and being aided by an armed man as police approached.

Kenosha has been rocked by protests since Sunday, when police



Protestors run for cover as police shoots teargas in an effort to disperse the crowd outside the County Courthouse during demonstrations against the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin on Tuesday. — AFP

shot Jacob Blake, 29, in the back at close range.

After struggling with police, Blake broke free and walked away from them and around his car to the driver's side, where he was shot after opening the door, according to a bystander video that went viral. Three of his young sons were in the car, witnesses said.

Blake was hit by four of the seven shots fired and left paralyzed and "fighting for his life," his family and lawyers said on Tuesday, hours before the latest round of civil unrest broke out in the lakefront town between Milwaukee and Chicago.

Anti-racism protesters also clashed with police in Portland, Oregon, and

Louisville, Kentucky, on Tuesday night, part of a wave of national protests that have continued since the May 25 death of a Black man in Minneapolis, George Floyd, who was pinned to the street under the knee of a white police officer.

The Kenosha protests have drawn self-styled militias, patrolling the streets with rifles or standing guard

outside businesses to protect them from looters or arsonists.

**'LIKE A VIGILANTE GROUP'**  
"They're like a vigilante group," Kenosha County Sheriff David Beth told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, though he said he was unsure if the man at the centre of the outburst was

KENOSHA HAS BEEN ROCKED BY **PROTESTS** SINCE SUNDAY, WHEN POLICE SHOT JACOB BLAKE, 29, IN THE BACK AT CLOSE RANGE

linked to such a group. Beth predicted the main suspect would be caught, telling the newspaper: "I feel very confident we'll have him in a very short time."

Kenosha police, a separate agency from the sheriff's office, asked for witnesses to come forward.

Devin Scott, 19, told the *Chicago Tribune* he was in a group chanting "Black Lives Matter" when the gunfire began and that he tried unsuccessfully to revive one of the victims.

"This guy with this huge gun runs by us in the middle of the street and people are yelling, 'He shot someone! He shot someone!' And everyone is trying to fight the guy, chasing him, and then he started shooting again," Scott said in the *Tribune* report.

Scott said he hit the ground during the next burst of gunfire, then tried to aid a person who was lying prone in the street.

"I was cradling him in my arms. I was trying to keep this kid alive and he wasn't moving or nothing. He was just laying there," Scott said. "I didn't know what to do and then this woman starts performing CPR. There was no pulse. I don't think he made it." — **Reuters**

## India to hold college admission tests despite surging virus cases

**MUMBAI:** More than 2 million Indian students will sit for admission tests to medical and engineering colleges next week, the government said on Wednesday, despite growing concern that the move could fuel a jump in coronavirus infections.

India reported more than 60,000 infections, maintaining the world's highest single-day caseload since August 7, a Reuters tally showed. With 3.2 million cases, it ranks after the United States and Brazil, though its 59,449 deaths are far fewer.

Now the government is pushing for a return to normality to lessen the economic pain, after having imposed a strict early lockdown of

India's 1.3 billion people in March.

"We are very mindful of the safety of our students, we will take full precautions," Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal told state radio, adding that the tests had to be held to ensure students did not lose a year.

Already twice postponed this year, the tests will be spread over several days and held at more centres than usual, to ensure there is no crowding.

But many students have to travel long distances and there was a risk of infections, said the All-India Students' Union, a leftist group that represents university students.

It urged students to wear black armbands and join online protests to put pressure on the government to delay the tests until infections fall.

Swedish climate activist Greta Thurnberg also waded into the dispute, urging a postponement.

"It's deeply unfair that students of India are asked to sit national exams during the COVID-19 pandemic and while millions have also been impacted by the extreme floods," Thurnberg said on Twitter on Tuesday.

Parts of eastern India are also struggling with floods caused by annual monsoon rains.

— **Reuters**

## Melania Trump offers sympathy on virus, racial suffering

**WASHINGTON:** First lady Melania Trump offered sympathy for victims of the coronavirus pandemic and a plea for racial understanding in a Republican convention speech on Tuesday aimed directly at the women voters who have abandoned US President Donald Trump.

On the convention's second day, the speech's warm tone was out of step with a Republican gathering that featured harsh rhetoric about Democratic challenger Joe Biden and sometimes apocalyptic warnings about the dangers of Democratic governance.

Trump's wife acknowledged the pain of the pandemic in sharp contrast to most other speakers at the party's national convention, notably her husband, assailed by Democrats for his lack of solace during a US health crisis that has killed more than 178,000 people.

"I want to acknowledge the fact that since March, our lives have changed drastically," Melania Trump told a crowd seated in the White House Rose Garden, the president in the front row. "My deepest sympathy goes out to everyone who has lost a loved one."

"And my prayers are with those who are ill or suffering. I know many people are anxious and some feel helpless. I want you to know: You're not alone."

With opinion polls showing Trump shedding support among college-educated women turned off by his combative style, Melania Trump and other women featured on Tuesday appeared to be trying to sway the critical voting bloc ahead of the November 3 presidential election.

The first lady reflected on the racial unrest that has swept the country in the months since the death in May of a Black man, George Floyd, under the knee of a white policeman in Minnesota. Protests flared anew this week after a Black man was shot and left paralyzed by police in Wisconsin.

"I urge people to come together in a civil manner so we can work and live up to our standard American ideals,"



US First Lady Melania Trump addresses the Republican Convention during its second day from the Rose Garden of the White House on Tuesday in Washington, DC. — AFP

she said. "I also ask people to stop the violence and looting being done in the name of justice and never make assumptions based on the colour of a person's skin."

The speech by Melania Trump, whose 2016 convention address was marred by plagiarism of lines from a 2008 Michelle Obama speech, capped a day when Republicans sought to reshape the narrative around the economy by largely ignoring millions of jobs lost to the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump, 74, still scores well in opinion polls on the economy, even as approval of his handling of the pandemic and other issues has plunged.

An array of officials and everyday Americans cited Trump's efforts to loosen economic regulations, put "America First" in trade deals and preserve religious freedom as reasons to back him against Biden, 77, Barack Obama's former vice president.

"Our economic choice is very clear. Do you want economic health, prosperity, opportunity and optimism, or do you want to turn back to the dark days of stagnation, recession and pessimism?" White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said. — **Reuters**

## Flash floods kill 100 in Afghan city

**CHARIKAR:** Rescue workers in Afghanistan searched on Wednesday for survivors of flash floods that killed at least 100 people and destroyed hundreds of houses in a city north of Kabul, officials said.

Troops pulled dozens of victims from the rubble of collapsed buildings in Charikar, capital of Parwan province, after torrential overnight rains fuelled fierce floods that swept through the city. Officials and witnesses said many children were among the dead.

Local resident Mohamed Qasim, a 45-year-old farmer, said that 11 members of his family were killed in the floods.

"My sister, her husband, two of their daughters and their children were all sleeping in one house," Qasim said.

"When the flood hit, the house collapsed on them. Eleven members of my family were killed, most of them my nieces and nephews."

Piles of rocks from destroyed buildings were scattered across the city, with roads blocked by mud and debris and cars flipped on their side.

Afghanistan's state ministry for disaster management said the death toll from the floods had risen to 100, with about 100 other people injured and nearly 500 houses destroyed in the floods. In parts of Charikar anxious residents gathered to see if rescue workers using heavy machinery would be able to pull loved ones from the wreckage.

Many residents stood on rooftops



A villager reacts next to his destroyed house as rescuers search for bodies after a flash flood affected the area at Sayrah-e-Hopiyan in Charikar, Parwan province, on Wednesday. — AFP

under continued heavy rain, holding on to their salvaged belongings.

### EMERGENCY RELIEF

"I was alone when the flood hit. I grabbed the window and was holding it for two hours until the neighbours came to rescue me," said 70-year-old Hamida.

"I lost everything, my jewellery, money and all my property."

Flash floods were also reported in other provinces — including Nangarhar, Panjshir, Wardak, Loghar, Paktika and Kapisa — but there were no reports of casualties, the disaster management ministry said.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had ordered emergency relief to be sent to Charikar, the presidential palace said in a statement. Torrential downpours

and flash floods kill scores of people annually in Afghanistan.

Many poorly built homes, mostly in rural areas, are at risk of collapse during the rains in the impoverished country. Earlier this month, 16 people, including 15 children, were killed and dozens of houses were destroyed when flash floods ravaged a village in the eastern province of Nangarhar. — **AFP**

# Making sweeping reforms more effective...

T

he recent restructuring of the government and merger of ministries and authorities has generated a sense of satisfaction in the society. These sweeping changes which were brought in the institutions of the state, its administration as well as in ministerial positions for the first time in four decades have come as a fresh air. These moves have generated lots of hopes and confidence everywhere.

These significant steps should bring change in the entire system which runs the government apparatus. The work culture in the government units also need to be improved. These are the major requirements to be done and integrate the system of work in a swift and healthy manner. Only this is how it would be seen as a qualitative transformation in the working of the

country to address the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040.

This requires revisiting the laws, frameworks and the systems in the government to make them more compatible with future developments and aspirations. This is how the entire system can match well with everybody's hopes.

There is no doubt that the changes which took place in the government organisations through 28 Royal Decrees were aimed at fine-tuning them and pumping young blood into their arteries. This is also with the view that this will open space for scientific competencies to serve the country. This is what the government requires today.

We all understand well that this is the knowledge which develops nations,

strengthens the foundations laid by our forefathers and brings lot of positive changes in the surroundings and expedite national action in the service of the country. Now, it is most expected and natural that after these sweeping changes everywhere in the government and its various organisations at all levels, changes, updating and modernisation of laws will follow.

Changes are successful only if they are supported by strong and revised laws in which large-scale powers are entrusted to do the job effectively. This is how new horizons will open for actions for achieving the aspirations of the new Omani vision. People should also be educated about the laws and their changes. If there is popular support to these laws, it will bring positive results and will meet its

objectives. Any law needs innovative and creative skills from the minister or official concerned. Without 'out of box thinking' all these efforts will be futile.

Frameworks should determine the objectives of the organisations which have to be achieved at all costs. These efforts should be assessed quarterly, and looked into the challenges. If they are not regulated by an effective system, they will not be able to match the aspirations of the people. Nobody wants to ignore laws. Therefore, it is essential to have them updated and revised. If some laws are not in tune with times, they should be revisited.

While making all these moves, one should not ignore the work culture and ethics in the government agencies. They also need changes. The existing practices should be monitored and

revisited to make the office hours more productive and effective. Along with this, culture of protecting public properties should also be inculcated in the minds of the people. They should understand well that these public properties were not less important than private properties. All this requires massive media campaign to create awareness.

We are hopeful that there will be massive changes in the laws regulating the work of the government organisations, make them swift, simple and more responsive. The process requires careful and precise revision to reach right conclusions and bring changes. Everyone has to walk hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder to take the country to another height of development and progress.



ALI AL MATANI

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A demonstrator gestures during a rally of opposition supporters in Minsk on Tuesday. – AFP

## Belarus protest movement faces uphill battle

STUART WILLIAMS

rotesters in Belarus have shaken President Alexander Lukashenko with a movement unprecedented for the ex-Soviet state in its depth and diversity, but must gird for a long struggle if they are to realise their ambitions.

Analysts say never before have Belarusians from all walks of life — from hipster teenagers to factory workers — come together in nationwide protest on such a scale.

The group lacks a clear leader, but is united in its anger over August 9 elections in which Lukashenko claimed over 80 per cent of the vote even as the opposition cried foul.

Now comes the hard part, as Belarusians seek to oust Lukashenko after 26 years in power, force fair new elections and a democratic future for the country of 9.5 million wedged between the European Union and Russia.

After initially appearing uncertain, Lukashenko has moved to consolidate his position and has crucially kept the security forces and political elite on his side, with only a handful of high-profile defections.

"In terms of Belarusian history what we have seen has been unprecedented," said Olga Dryndova, expert on Belarus at the University of Bremen, Germany.

"The protest is broadly represented at every social layer," she said, adding people who were never politicised were also backing the movement.

"There never was such large-scale popular mobilisation in the history of Belarus," added Katia Glod, non-resident fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis, saying it exceeded even the outrage that followed the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in neighbouring Ukraine.

With Lukashenko's election opponent Svetlana Tikhanovskaya in exile in Lithuania, the protesters have mobilised through the popular Telegram messaging

**With Lukashenko's election opponent Svetlana Tikhanovskaya in exile in Lithuania, the protesters have mobilised through the popular Telegram messaging app, particularly its Nexta channel run out of Poland by 22-year-old blogger Stepan Putilo**

app, particularly its Nexta channel run out of Poland by 22-year-old blogger Stepan Putilo.

But they are set to be tested as Lukashenko refuses to budge, with state media showing a clip of him brandishing a rifle and his 15-year-old son Kolya in a flak jacket as opponents mobilised at the weekend.

A key part of the initial pressure were strikes at key industrial facilities. But these are petering out as the authorities threatened to sack strikers and arrested their leader Sergei Dylevsky.

When the governor of the Grodno region began a dialogue with protesters, Lukashenko replaced him with his loyal health minister.

"I think the only one realistic goal (for the protesters) is to perhaps force the authorities to refrain from excessive violence and torture we witnessed" in the aftermath of the election, added Glod. "But even that is not guaranteed."

Key figures in the protest movement, including Nobel Prize-winning author Svetlana Alexievich, have formed a coordinating council in a bid for a peaceful transition.

But analysts doubt if Lukashenko is

open to any dialogue.

Alexievich — whose book *Second Hand Time* describes how ordinary citizens experienced the fall of the USSR — has been summoned for questioning by investigators in a criminal probe into an alleged bid to seize power.

"The whole security system, military and interior ministry is still with Lukashenko. This is his last pillar. He has lost the pillar of society," said Dryndova.

Pointing to the image of the gun-wielding president, she said: "Lukashenko is still in power and he has absolute power. A lot depends on his emotional reaction. It is a dangerous moment now."

A giant protest in Minsk at the weekend showed that Lukashenko's opponents can still muster the numbers. Tikhanovskaya told the EU parliament on Tuesday a "peaceful revolution" was in progress.

Andrei Kolesnikov, senior fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center, argued that Belarus civil society "has no intention of going to sleep any time soon."

"His intransigence is a good lesson for such rulers in how to retain power in the short term. But it's a bad example in terms of ensuring his personal safety and a peaceful old age in the medium and long term."

Analysts say figures within the ruling elite could press the president to adopt a different strategy while the position of giant neighbour Russia was critical. Lukashenko has talked repeatedly to President Vladimir Putin in recent days.

In a piece for Belarusian news website tut.by, prominent Belarusian analyst Artyom Shraibman said sooner or later Lukashenko would have to face reality.

"The moment will come when Lukashenko — or enough people in his close circle — realise the risks from dialogue with opponents are fewer than the risks from trying to put the genie back in the bottle." — AFP

## Pressure mounts to disband Brazil's crack anti-graft squad

RICARDO BRITO

olitical pressure is growing in Brazil to disband a high-profile team of anti-corruption prosecutors that has put dozens of former executives and politicians behind bars, despite its strong popular support and hundreds of cases still pending.

Prosecutor General Augusto Aras will decide on September 10 whether to renew for another year the mandate of the team, which has repeatedly made headlines over the last six years with its sprawling 'Car Wash' corruption probe. Aras, who has not spoken about his intentions, declined to comment for this story.

But the country's top public prosecutor is facing pressure from influential politicians for the task force to be disbanded, as skepticism grows about President Jair Bolsonaro's commitment to a campaign promise to tackle corruption.

The 65-year-old former army captain took office at the start of last year amid popular anger at corruption under the former governments of the leftist Workers Party, but has since railed at investigations of alleged graft involving members of his own family.

Senator Major Olimpio, Bolsonaro's former right-hand man in Congress, said there was a broad political movement afoot to stop the task force's investigations and annul ongoing trials.

"Today there is a campaign to demonize Car Wash," said Olimpio. The right-wing senator cited pressure from politicians under investigation to shut it down, by opening a parliamentary inquiry that has questioned its work and appeals to the Supreme Court to terminate its probes.

Leftist Senator Randolfe Rodrigues has joined Olimpio in advocating for keeping Car Wash going.

"The conditions are there for Aras not to extend the work of the task force," he said.

With a raft of investigations opening in Brazil into alleged corruption in the purchase of medical equipment to combat COVID-19, there are abundant signs that graft is thriving despite the years of prosecutions.

The Car Wash investigation shocked many Brazilians by revealing the widespread use of political kickbacks on major state contracts, particularly at the massive state-run oil company, Petroleo Brasileiro SA (Petrobras).

A senior member of the task force, requesting anonymity, said there were still 400 ongoing probes by federal prosecutors and police stemming from the Car Wash investigation. A second source, directly familiar with their investigations, confirmed the figure.

"You just cannot stop all the relevant work that is still being done," the task force member said.

— Reuters

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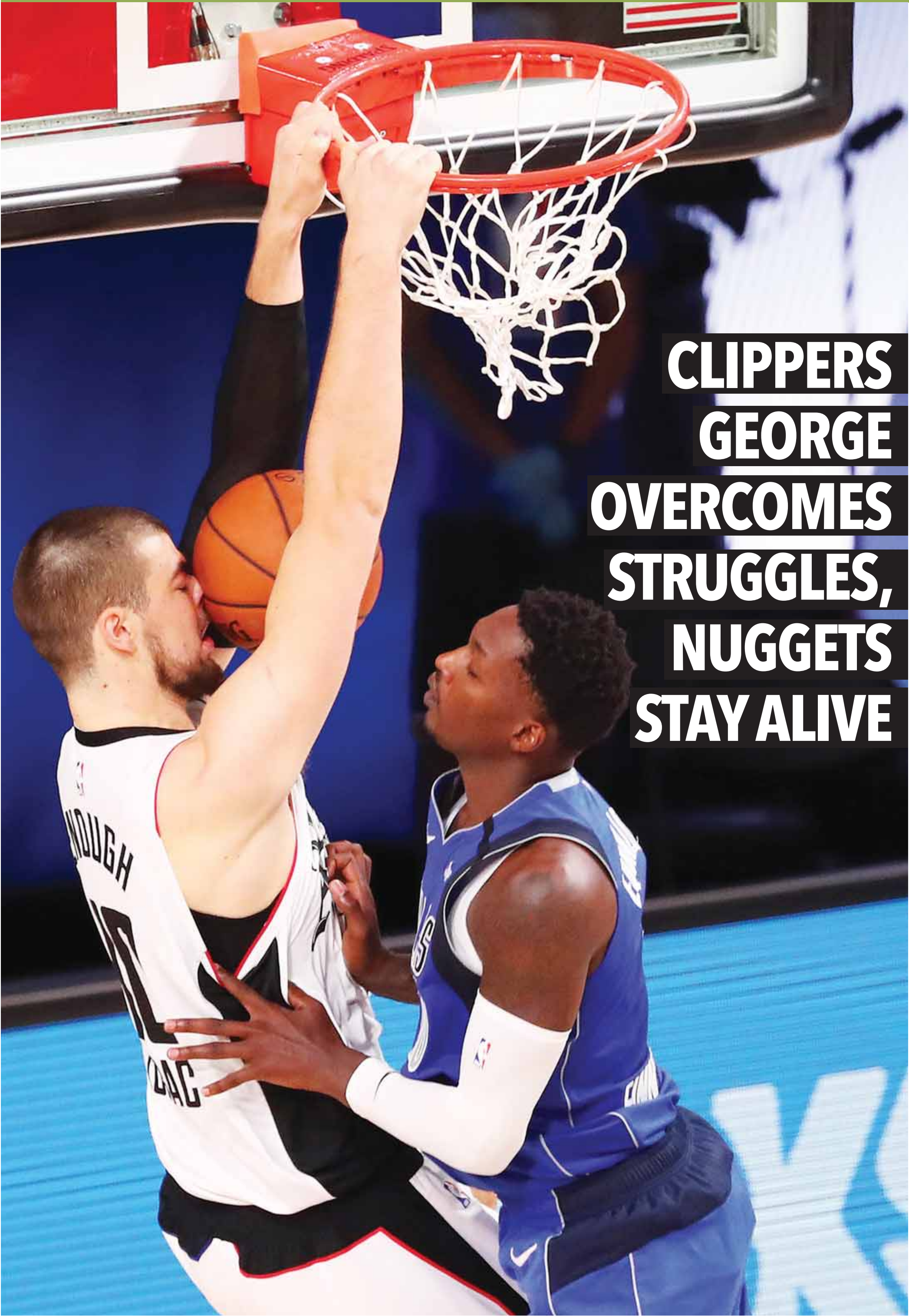
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CLIPPERS  
GEORGE  
OVERCOMES  
STRUGGLES,  
NUGGETS  
STAY ALIVE

**LOS ANGELES:** Paul George says his struggles are over as he scored a team-high 35 points on Tuesday to lead the Los Angeles Clippers to a dominating 154-111 playoff victory over the Dallas Mavericks.

George rebounded from three sub-par performances to combine offensively with Kawhi Leonard and give the Clippers a 3-2 series lead.

George opened up after the game about his struggles with coping inside the NBA's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida where the players have to adhere to strict health and safety measures and no spectators are allowed into the arena.

George says after being in a "dark place" he has finally got rid of the demons and is ready to help the Clippers with their playoff run.

"The bubble got the best of me. I was in a dark place," said George, who spoke with a team therapist before game five. "I wasn't here, I checked out.

"I was just in a bad place. I found my way. I am back and I look forward to the rest of this run. A shout out to people that stood behind me and were in my corner."

George said he is now using mental tricks to raise his level of play.

"It was hard to get into playoff mode with no intensity, no fans, and no atmosphere," he said.

"We created the energy. I came in with the attitude that this is Staples arena and the place is packed. I had to create my own energy."

Game six is Thursday.

The Clippers shot a spectacular 63.1 per cent from the floor and 62.9 per cent (22-of-35) from beyond the arc.

Leonard finished with 32 points and Montrezl Harrell added 19 points and 11 rebounds off the bench for Los Angeles.

Mavericks top scorer Luka Doncic finished with just 22 points after scoring 43 and nailing the game winner in overtime in game four.

Tim Hardaway scored 19 points and Trey Burke had 15 for the Mavericks, who were without star forward Kristaps Porzingis.

Also, Jamal Murray scored 42 points and Nikola Jokic had 31 as the Denver Nuggets avoided elimination with a 117-107 victory over the Utah Jazz in game five of their playoff series.

Denver looked tired in game three, but they bounced back nicely in games four and five and now trail three games to two in the best-of-seven Western Conference series.

Canada's Murray scored 33 of his points in the second half, taking over the game with four minutes to go and the score even at 101-101.

Michael Porter had 15 points and Jerami Grant added 13 for the Nuggets, who swept the regular season series over the Jazz.

The Nuggets also figured out how to slow down Donovan Mitchell, who finished with 30 points on Tuesday.

The third-year guard scored a career-high 57 points in the overtime loss in game one and was averaging 39.5 points heading into game five.

Mike Conley and Jordan Clarkson had 17 points each, and Rudy Gobert had 11 points and 12 rebounds for Utah. Joe Ingles added 13 points, and Royce O'Neale scored 10.

With 80 seconds to go in the fourth, Murray drained a step back jumper to put the Nuggets ahead 110-101. — AFP

TOP CLASS

Anderson has raised the bar, says Australia great McGrath

**LONDON:** England seamer James Anderson has raised the bar for fast bowlers around the world, much like India great Sachin Tendulkar did for batsmen, former Australia paceman Glenn McGrath said.

Anderson, playing in his 156th match, became the first seamer to capture 600 wickets in the game's longest format, as England settled for a draw against Pakistan after a rain-hit final day of the third test on Tuesday.

The 38-year-old's feat left him fourth in the list of leading test wicket-takers, with only spin bowlers Muttiah Muralitharan (800), Shane Warne (708) and Anil Kumble (619) ahead of him.

"He's set the bar a bit like Sachin has," McGrath, who previously held the record for most wickets by a pace bowler with 563, told the BBC.

"No one is ever going to catch Sachin in Test cricket for



the amount of runs he's scored (15,921) and the matches he's played (200). Jimmy's done the same for fast bowling.

"I didn't have the skill level Jimmy has. When he's swinging that ball, both ways, in control, there's no one better"

Former England skipper Michael Vaughan said they were "witnessing true greatness".

"I'd be lying if I said we thought we had a bowler that would get this many wickets. We thought we had a bowler of great promise and skill.

"I never in my wildest dreams thought 17 years later we'd be talking about him getting to 600." Stuart Broad said he had been inspired by Anderson throughout his career.

"He's a role model to follow for every English cricketer... He's always searching to be better and better and 600 won't be the stopping of him." — Reuters

# DJOKOVIC REACHES QUARTERFINALS, SERENA CRASHES OUT



Novak Djokovic hits the ball against Tennys Sandgren during the Western & Southern Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. — USA Today Sports

**NEW YORK:** An out-of-gas Serena Williams crashed out of the Western & Southern Open on Tuesday while Novak Djokovic laboured into the quarterfinals defeating Tennys Sandgren 6-2, 6-4.

Serena lost in three sets to 13th seeded Maria Sakkari 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 in New York.

The 23-time Grand Slam winner finished with a whimper at the end of the two-hour, 17-minute match as Sakkari clinched the victory with a backhand down the line that a dejected Williams just watched without making an effort to move.

At other points in the match, Williams flung her racket into the spectator-less stands and rebuked the chair umpire for slapping her with a time violation.

Sakkari, of Greece, advances to the quarter-finals of the no-spectator event where she will face Johanna Konta who cruised past Vera Zvonareva in straight sets 6-4, 6-2.

The joint WTA and ATP tournament was moved from Cincinnati to New York where the same quarantine bubble will house the US Open starting on August 31.

It was the second straight two-hour-plus match for Williams who at 38 was trying to become the oldest winner of the event. She still holds the record, having won this event in 2015 at age 33.

Williams survived a scare in her opening match, prevailing in a two hour, 48-minute marathon over qualifier Arantxa Rus. It was her longest match since 2012.

"It is hard to play the way I have been playing and stay positive," Williams said. "To play nine hours in a week is too much. I don't usually play like that. It is all new for me."

Williams made seven double faults and won just 66 per cent of her first serve points against Sakkari.

After losing the second set in a tiebreaker she tossed her racket over her shoulder into the empty stands behind her.

Williams, who has lost her cool at events in New York before, also admonished chair umpire, Aurelie Tourte of France, during a changeover for calling a time violation for slow play.

"I am walking all the way to get my towels... I mean, I am getting my own towels. That's not fair," said Williams.

"You didn't give me a warning. I am actually a really fast player. Next time you warn me. I'm done."

The ball people usually get the towels for the players but not in the COVID-19 bubble.

On the men's side, world No. 1 Novak Djokovic won his 20th straight match of 2020 with a hard-fought 6-2, 6-4 victory over Tennys Sandgren.

Djokovic, who captured the Australian Open in February, needed six match points to tough out the straight sets victory and reach the quarter-finals of the hardcourt tournament.

Djokovic breezed through the final game by winning four straight points, closing it out with a cross-court forehand winner to take it in 88 minutes on Tuesday.

"All in all it was a great performance," said Djokovic. "I felt better and played better than last night. I am going in a great direction."

American Sandgren, who is ranked 55th in the world, made the Serb work for the victory as he survived five match points in the ninth game of the second set.

Djokovic advances to the quarters where he will play German Jan-Lennard Struff, who defeated seventh seed David Goffin 6-4, 3-6, 6-4.

Djokovic had pulled out of doubles on Sunday with pain in his neck, but did not appear to be bothered by the injury against Sandgren.

"The neck is doing well," he said.

Also on the men's side, hard-serving Canadian Milos Raonic routed Brit Andy Murray 6-2, 6-2 and third seeded

Daniil Medvedev, of Russia, swept past Aljaz Bedene 6-3, 6-3.

In other women's action, fourth seeded Naomi Osaka rolled over Dayana Yastremska in straight sets 6-3, 6-1 to advance.

Osaka, who is the only top 10 player left in the women's draw, clinched the victory when Yastremska was called for a foot fault while serving on match point.

Japan's Osaka blasted eight aces, won 83 per cent of her first serve points and broke Yastremska's serve four times. Osaka moves to the quarter-finals where she will face Anett Kontaveit, who defeated Marie Bouzkova 6-3, 6-3.

Yastremska, who at 20 was the youngest player left in the field, made six double faults and won just 38 per cent of her second serves. — AFP

## Konta may find new coach tough to work with, says Robson

**LONDON:** Briton Johanna Konta's decision to appoint Thomas Hogstedt as her coach to replace Dimitri Zavialoff is a "weird choice" as the Swede can be difficult to work with, her former Fed Cup team-mate Laura Robson has said.

Hogstedt, who previously worked with Maria Sharapova, Caroline Wozniacki and Victoria Azarenka, is Konta's fifth coach in four years.

Konta has made a strong start under Hogstedt's guidance and reached the quarter-finals of the Western and Southern Open as she

prepares for next week's US Open.

"Thomas Hogstedt seems like a very weird choice for me to pair with Johanna Konta because they are so individual and so dead set on whatever they think is best," Robson said while doing commentary on Amazon Prime.

"He's known to be quite difficult to work with to the point where I remember Sharapova would not go for dinner with him. I think they (Konta and Hogstedt) might have a couple of long weeks inside the bubble."

Konta, who will be chasing her maiden Grand Slam triumph at Flushing Meadows, brushed off Robson's comments.

"Laura doesn't know me very well and I don't know her very well. I think she's just basing that on what she knows about me, which is fair enough," The Times quoted Konta as saying.

"I take it day by day and am enjoying getting to know him, I have a lot of respect for him, he has had a lot of success with a lot of players."

— Reuters



# sport

## MESSI TELLS BARCELONA HE WANTS TO LEAVE

### Lionel Messi

Argentine football star has announced his intention to leave Barcelona

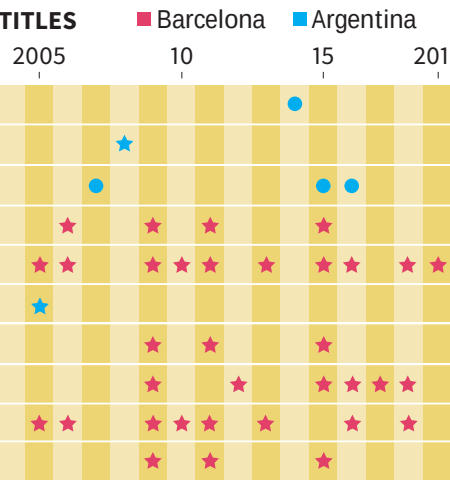
Born: June 24 1987  
at Rosario (Argentina)

1.69 m  
72 kg

► FORWARD • AGE:33

 Club: Barcelona (ESP)  
(since 2004)

 For Argentina  
138 matches • 70 goals



6 x Ballon d'or  
2 x best player of the year UEFA  
Best player of the World Cup 2014  
Best player of the Copa America 2015  
6 x top scorer in the Champions League  
6 x top scorer of la Liga  
Best player of the Olympic Games 2008  
Best player of the World Cup - U20 2005  
Prix Laureus 2020

AFP Photos/Rafael Marchante/Fabrice Coffrini

AFP

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi has informed Barcelona he wants to “unilaterally” terminate his contract with the Spanish giants after a calamitous end to the season, a club source confirmed to AFP on Tuesday.

Lawyers for the Argentina star sent Barcelona a fax in which they announced Messi’s desire to rescind his contract by triggering a release clause, sending shockwaves throughout the world of football.

Barcelona have yet to officially react but are understood to believe the clause expired in June and that he remains under contract until the end of the 2021 season.

“In principal, this clause expired on June 10, but the unusual nature of this season disrupted by the coronavirus opened the way for Messi to ask to be released from his contract now,” wrote Spanish sports daily *Marca*.

“It’s the first step towards opening negotiations over his departure, on the basis of which his release clause amounts to 700 million euros (\$828 million)”

Messi joined Barcelona’s youth academy at the age of 13 and made his debut in 2004 as a 17-year-old.

The six-time Ballon d’Or winner is the club’s record scorer with 634 goals and has won the Champions League four times.

But his future at Barca was thrown into serious doubt following a humiliating 8-2 loss to Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarterfinals in Lisbon 11 days ago.

It marked the first time Barca had conceded eight goals in a game since losing to Sevilla 8-0 in the 1946 Spanish Cup.

The humbling defeat sparked drastic changes within the club. Coach Quique Setien was sacked after barely six months in charge while sporting director Eric Abidal was also dismissed after Barca’s first season without a trophy since 2007.

Argentine sports daily *Ole* described Messi’s wish to leave as a “complete bombshell”, but he has had regular disagreements with the club’s board in recent times.

‘More out than in’  
According to Spanish media, Messi met with new Barca coach Ronald Koeman last week and told the Dutchman he saw himself “more out than in” the club.

Koeman has vowed to “fight to put Barca back on top” and said at his unveiling he was hopeful Messi would remain at the club for several more years.

Since his appointment though Koeman has reportedly told Luis Suarez he is no longer part of Barca’s plans, delivering a similar message to Arturo Vidal, Ivan Rakitic and Samuel Umtiti.

“The club needs changes,” said defender Gerard Pique following the Bayern demolition. “Nobody is untouchable, least of all me. Fresh blood is needed to change this. We’ve hit rock bottom.”

The loss, Barca’s heaviest in Europe, exposed an ageing team that Messi repeatedly had said was simply not good enough.

He said it in February and again in July, when a rant in the aftermath of handing Real Madrid the title turned into a brutal, but honest, assessment of their season.

As his relationship with the club hierarchy grew increasingly strained, Messi also reacted publicly when Abidal appeared to blame the players for the sacking of Ernesto Valverde in January. He also led the fightback from the Barcelona players over a dispute with the board in March regarding pay cuts during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Respect and admiration, Leo. All my support, friend,” tweeted Barca great Carles Puyol, a long-time former team-mate of Messi, to which Suarez replied with two applause emojis.

Vidal also posted a cryptic message on Twitter. “When you shut a tiger in a cage he doesn’t give in, he fights back,” he wrote.

Messi’s reported salary of nearly one million euros per week would limit the number of potential suitors able to afford his services while respecting UEFA’s Financial Fair Play regulations. Manchester City, Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Milan are among those to have been linked with an audacious swoop for one of football’s all-time greats.

“I don’t see him anywhere else. I can’t believe it. I prefer to think it’s an ultimatum given to management for Bartomeu to go,” said Ruben Tejero, a 28-year-old Barca fan among a group of around 100 supporters who gathered in front of the Camp Nou, calling for the resignation of under-fire president Josep Maria Bartomeu. — AFP

# business

MUSCAT  
STOCK  
MARKET

3,747.96

CRUDE  
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$45.35  
Brent Crude \$46.43  
Light Crude \$43.64

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making life easy

## OQ and OMIFCO sign major granular urea offtake agreement

**BUSINES REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

OQ, Oman's globally integrated energy company, via its commercial arm OQ Trading, has announced the signing of a three-year agreement with OMIFCO to offtake and trade one million metric tonnes per annum of granular urea.

OQ's Supply & Trading business will be lifting the urea from OMIFCO's captive terminal in Sur, Oman in bulk carriers and delivering it to end-users in international markets such as India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the United States, Brazil, Vietnam, Thailand and China. The new agreement between the two companies commenced on August 1, 2020, and the first vessel with 49,500 metric tonnes departed to Brazil on August 2, 2020.

"OMIFCO has positioned itself strategically in the urea and ammonia market globally, and we are quite proud of that. Now we have a great opportunity ahead of us; targeting new markets for the Omani urea," said Talal al Aufi, Chief Executive, Commercial, OQ.

This agreement will expand OQ's Supply & Trading portfolio into the nitrogen fertiliser market, complementing its existing dry bulk portfolio, whilst leveraging its mature logistics and risk management capability as well as its strong industry network.

An additional agreement also saw the debut of Urea Oman in the local market, being marketed under the OQ brand, once again expanding OQ's robust portfolio of energy and petchems

**LANDMARK PACT:  
OQ'S SUPPLY & TRADING BUSINESS WILL BE LIFTING THE UREA FROM OMIFCO'S CAPTIVE TERMINAL IN SUR IN BULK CARRIERS AND DELIVERING IT TO END-USERS IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS**

products.

"We are pleased with the achievements that OMIFCO has accomplished during its first 15 years. OMIFCO has enhanced its mandate and enabled its growth; not just as a supplier for its founding companies, but also to offer high quality urea and ammonia products to the rest of the world," said Hilal al Kharousi, Chairman of OMIFCO.

Celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, OMIFCO is a joint venture between (50 per cent) OQ, (25 per cent) Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) and (25 per cent) by Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (KRIBHCO).

It was established as a strategic initiative between the Omani and Indian Governments to construct, own and operate a modern, world scale ammonia-urea fertiliser manufacturing plant in Sur, Oman.

OMIFCO plays a critical role in strengthening the relationship between the two countries, and meeting Oman's vision to diversify the Omani economy.

## Oman Aviation Group to develop sea-to-air logistics



**CONRAD PRABHU**  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

Oman Aviation Group (OAG), which is overseeing the development of a thriving aviation sector suitably aligned with the country's tourism and logistics growth strategies, says it is exploring opportunities for investment in 'Sea-to-Air' logistics and cargo transportation centring on the Sultanate's international airports in Sohar and Salalah.

Sea-to-Air logistics are part of an ambitious portfolio of initiatives being pursued by the state-owned umbrella organisation in a bid to leverage the country's already well-developed airport and aviation infrastructure to catalyse investments in, among other areas, air-freight, e-commerce and airport-related free zones.

But while Muscat International Airport is already being positioned as the hub of a far-reaching national aviation ecosystem, key roles are being envisaged for Sohar and Salalah airports as well. Details of Oman Aviation Group's vision for Sohar and Salalah airports, in

addition to Muscat International Airport, were shared during an 'InvestinOman' webinar held recently.

Investment opportunities linked to Sohar International Airport stem from its positioning as a "stopover crossroads" for narrow-body airlines on longer missions that require a technical stop. This concept has the potential to attract a wide array of airlines and aircraft types to Sohar, including charter airlines operating narrow body (long-haul), scheduled airlines attempting narrow body low-risk entries, and scheduled airlines operating seasonal holiday services.

Additionally, as a 'stopover crossroads', Sohar airport can also appeal to light and medium sized business jets, cruise line flights, and ferry and delivery flights operating technical stops, according to OAG.

Adding to Sohar International Airport's investment appeal is its proximity to the to the major commercial, industrial, and economic centres of Sohar, including the Sohar Port's freezone. Spread

over an area of 20 sq km, Sohar Airport will be an integral part of an ambitious multimodal system envisioned in the industrial port city, encompassing road and railway networks in the future, says OAG.

Sohar Airport currently caters to a number of local, regional and international airlines, notably Air Arabia, Qatar Airways, SalamAir, QeshmAir, Oman Air (alternate airport), and several private jets and charter flights.

Salalah International Airport, located not far from Port of Salalah – a thriving transshipment and logistics hub overlooking the Indian Ocean – holds equally promising air-cargo related logistics opportunities.

Salalah's global location, connectivity and cost competitiveness provide a unique advantage in terms of reach, enabling global sourcing and exporting from and to the world, and competitive total landed costs, said OAG.

A trade hub in its own right, Salalah port offers the swiftest transit times to Europe and Asia

from a single location at 32 per cent lower costs than competing ports. The port handles over 3,000 vessel calls per annum from lines such as Maersk, MSC and APL.

Air-cargo transportation opportunities stem from Salalah's significance as an inter-modal hub with sea, land and air connections across short distances. Additionally, a bonded corridor connects the customs controlled area with Salalah Free-zone located nearby. Besides, Salalah's proximity to Yemen can also be exploited to support humanitarian aid supplies to that country, Oman Aviation Group noted.

A signature initiative of Oman Aviation Group is to support the development of Airport Cities anchored by its international gateways. "Oman Airport Cities will offer world-class commercial, retail, hospitality, MICE, leisure and logistics hubs and clusters in close proximity to Muscat International Airport, Sohar International Airport and Salalah International Airport," it added.

## UK economy loses £22 billion as virus ravages tourism

**LONDON:** Britain's economy will lose about £22 billion (\$29 billion) this year on the coronavirus-induced collapse of global travel, which could imperil three million jobs, an industry body forecast on Wednesday.

International visitor spending could plunge by 78 per cent from 2019, equating to a loss of £60 million per day or £420 million a week, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) predicted in a key

report.

"Travellers and tourists are staying away from the UK in droves because of continuing uncertainty around travel restrictions designed to curb the spread of COVID-19," the WTTC stated.

It continued: "The severe impact on UK travel and tourism is laid bare by WTTC as the economic fallout from coronavirus continues to burn its way through the sector.

"Nearly three million jobs in the



UK supported by travel and tourism are at risk of being lost in a 'worst case' scenario mapped out by WTTC economic modelling."

The nation's economy shrank by one fifth in the second quarter, more than any European neighbour, as the lockdown plunged the country into its deepest recession on record.

Tourists remain reluctant to visit because Britain is the European country worst hit by the coronavirus.

Travel has also been discouraged

after the UK government recently re-imposed quarantine on those returning from nations including Austria, Croatia, France, the Netherlands and Spain.

"The economic pain and suffering caused to millions of households across the UK, who are dependent upon Travel & Tourism for their livelihoods, is evident from the latest figures," added WTTC President Gloria Guevara in the report.

— AFP

# Madayn holds meeting with new Board Chairman



BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, the newly appointed Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and Chairman of Madayn's board of directors, visited on Wednesday the headquarters of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

He was briefly about the key projects in the various industrial cities of Madayn, available investment opportunities in the industrial cities including for the SMEs, Madayn's institutional transformation and strategic plan in line with Oman Vision 2040, in addition to review of Madayn's financial position and financing of existing and future

projects.

Dr Masan was also introduced to the vision of Madayn in enhancing the Sultanate's position as a leading regional centre of manufacturing, ICT, innovation and entrepreneurship excellence, and its mission in attracting industrial investments and providing continued support, through regionally and globally competitive strategies, good infrastructure, value adding services, and easy governmental processes.

Madayn officials delivered a presentation on Oman Investment and Development Holding Company (Mubadrah), which was established by Madayn to develop and improve the operational processes, competitiveness, infrastructure and facilities of the various industrial cities. Mubadrah also aims at strengthening

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and attracting international developers and operators in accordance with best practices in the development of industrial cities.

The officials also highlighted Masar Service Centre, which is designed to offer an investment window with a unified system that facilitates and simplifies the procedures for the investors, which allow the investors to obtain approvals, permits and licenses required for their projects under one roof and during specific time period.

Additionally, Madayn officials delivered a presentation on the National Business Centre (NBC), which offers promising Omani entrepreneurs a platform to develop their business ideas into growing ventures.

Moreover, a presentation was

delivered on Madayn Industrial Academy which was established by Madayn with the aim of developing national human cadres of Madayn, and the companies and factories based in the various industrial cities.

The Under-Secretary was also briefed on Shumookh Investment and Services, which was established in 2010 to develop globally competitive industrial infrastructure in the industrial cities of Madayn and create the best environment for the growth of industries in Oman through the attraction of strategic partnerships to invest and implementation of diverse infrastructure development projects in the industrial cities of Madayn. Briefs were also highlighted on the security system of Madayn, masterplan of Samayil Industrial City, and the existing projects at Al Mazunah Free Zone.

## Mazoon Dairy partners with SIG to roll out products in carton packs

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

Mazoon Dairy, the largest integrated dairy company in the Sultanate of Oman, and Switzerland-headquartered SIG Combibloc Obeikan, one of the world's leading systems and solutions providers for aseptic packaging and filling machines for food and beverages, have announced the launch of a full range of liquid dairy products in various carton packs from SIG.

This latest step marks another significant step closer to Mazoon Dairy's goal in establishing the Sultanate as a self-sufficient dairy producer and a hub for food manufacturing. Mazoon Dairy takes advantage of SIG's flexible filling technology for different product categories including white milk, flavoured milk and juice.

These products will be available in four different volumes (150ml, 200ml, 250ml and 1,000ml) and various varieties: chocolate, banana and strawberry in the segment of flavoured milk as well as orange, mango, guava, pomegranate, mixed berry and cocktail in the juice segment. This unique flexibility provided by SIG will give Mazoon product differentiation across its beverage categories to accommodate families as well as single users.

Dr Arjun Subramanian, CEO Mazoon Dairy, said: "This launch represents another milestone in our journey of growth. It brings us closer to our bigger goal of fulfilling our national vision for economic development by establishing a self-sufficient economy. Today we are offering the Omani and other regional markets a wider range of products that appeal to every age category, using the highest standards and best practices in the industry. This could not have been possible without the support of our partner, SIG Combibloc Obeikan."

Abdelghany Eladib, Chief Operating Officer SIG Combibloc Obeikan, said: "Oman currently imports 70 per cent of its dairy products and Mazoon Dairy is determined to reduce this to 10 per cent. We are honoured to play a role in supporting the Sultanate and Mazoon Dairy's mission in boosting local self-sufficiency and meeting rising demand. This also falls in line with our strategic expansion into the Sultanate of Oman. By providing the latest product innovations and efficient flexibility solutions, we look forward to continuing our partnership with Mazoon Dairy in their journey towards growth."



## Be'ah signs MoU to support PDO's Renewable Energy Award

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUG 26

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) has remotely signed an agreement with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to provide promotional and educational support to PDO's Renewable Energy Award that targets students from private and public schools in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

The award aims at spreading awareness on the importance of renewable energy (biofuels) for the economy and the environment, as well as encouraging creative and innovative skills among school students.

The agreement was signed by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Harthy, Executive Vice President



of the Strategic Development Sector from be'ah, and PDO External Affairs and Value Creation Director Engineer Abdul Amir al Ajmi. The signing ceremony was also attended by other representatives from both companies.

This collaboration goes in-line with be'ah's vision to conserve beautiful Oman for future generations and comes as a step

forward towards achieving the company's strategic goal to divert waste from landfills and transform the current linear economy approach to a circular greener economy. In addition, PDO has always been keen to connect with the local community through various initiatives that focus on the best utilization of renewable resources in Oman.

As per the agreement, be'ah in collaboration with the Ministry of Education will provide full technical support for PDO's Renewable Energy Award.

The award's main objectives are to embrace students innovative projects in the field of power and renewable energy, elevate and enrich the innovation culture in the Sultanate, increase awareness about renewable

energy's contribution in developing the country, and to guide students who are looking to forge a career path in the renewable energy sector.

Executive Vice President - Strategic Development at be'ah Mohammed Sulaiman al Harthy said: "be'ah will be implementing a number of awareness workshops for the award participants on different topics including biofuel and other subjects related to the environmental aspect of the award. In addition, be'ah will construct a complete program that focuses on two main subjects; self-development and the technical part of waste management." Al-Harthy added "that this pact and its associated programs promotes pivotal concepts among students and would contribute to their academic development; giving their innovations more exposure".



Sultanate of Oman  
Consumer Protection Authority

Campaign Vehicles

**Bentley**





**Date of the Campaign** : 27 / 08 / 2020

**Campaign type** : Safety campaign.

**Campaign section** : Faulty fuel hose.

| The number of affected vehicle | VIN Number                                      | The year of production | Vehicle model |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| 9 Vehicles                     | From SJAAL1ZVXJC022850<br>To: SJAAL1ZV3LC030064 | 2018 – 2020            | Bentayga      |

**Description:** The fuel quick connect on V8 petrol engines could be subjected to temperatures above the design operating temperature limit. Should this occur, the fuel quick connect material could soften, potentially resulting in a fuel leak.

**Action:** As a precaution, Bentley will replace the existing fuel quick connect for one made of an improved material and also upgrade the engine cooling fan software where required.

**Contact Dealer:** Service Center - Phone - 22579822 During normal office hours.



On the move...



Sultanate of Oman  
The Public Authority for Consumer Protection



OTEGROUP  
THE SYMBOL OF CARE

**RECALL CAMPAIGN**

**FOR CHEVROLET SILVERADO AND GMC SIERRA MODEL VEHICLES**



**Date of Recall:** 27.08.2020

**Campaign Type:** Safety

**Recall Segment:** Seats

**Product Description:** Chevrolet Silverado 2019-2020 / GMC Sierra 2019-2020

| Model Year | Division  | Vehicle Model | Affected Vehicle Vin Range                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman |
|------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2019-2020  | Chevrolet | Silverado     | 1GC4Y9E77LF100117 to 1GC4Y9E72LF156644<br>1GCPY9ED0KZ100198 to 1GCPY9ED7KZ413300<br>1GCRW9ED8KZ100593 to 1GCRW9EK3LZ138877<br>1GCRY9ED8KZ0217EX to 1GCRY9ED1KZ400910<br>1GCRY9ED7LZ138943 to 1GCRY9ED2LZ140096<br>1GCUY9EL6KZ100202 to 1GCUY9ED1KZ408581<br>3GCNW9EF7KG192988 to 3GCNW9EF7KG275031<br>3GCNW9EH9LG144931 to 3GCNW9EF6LG156226<br>3GCNY9EF0KG100291 to 3GCNY9EF1KG283300<br>3GCNY9EF6LG100068 to 3GCNY9EF0LG156233<br>3GCPY9ED5KG180260 to 3GCPY9ED5KG208137<br>3GCPY9ED8LG142197 to 3GCPY9EK9LG155796<br>3GCUY9EL6KG192637 to 3GCUY9EL5KG202137<br>3GCUY9EF2LG142068 to 3GCUY9EF9LG156310<br>1GC5Y9E77LF100364 | 47                               |
| 2019-2020  | GMC       | Sierra        | 1GT499E70LF100103 to 1GT499E78LF150036<br>1GTP99EK6KZ100587 to 1GTP99ED4KZ406561<br>3GTN89EF3KG194960 to 3GTN89EF5KG220426<br>3GTN89EH0LG144343 to 3GTN89EF3LG153374<br>3GTN99EFXKG100313 to 3GTN99EF4KG282929<br>3GTN99EF7LG100027 to 3GTN99EF4LG159021<br>3GTP99ELXLG143226 to 3GTP99ED6LG158976<br>3GTU99EL6KG180257 to 3GTU99ED8KG202610<br>3GTU99ED3LG142351 to 3GTU99EL0LG157039<br>3GTP99EL1KG180258, 1GTU99ELXKZ376234<br>1GTR99EL9KZ100584, 1GTR89EK1KZ100590                                                                                                                                                        | 140                              |

**DESCRIPTION:**  
Some of these vehicles cause the front seatbelt pretensioners to deploy, the exhaust from the deployed pretensioner may be diverted through an opening in the pretensioner bracket and ignite cotton fibers in the carpet floor near the B-pillar. Following a crash that causes the seatbelt pretensioner to deploy.

**PROCEDURE:**  
Dealers will install a feature that will close off the opening in the pretensioner bracket so that exhaust gasses vent away from carpet material as designed.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
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# Japan signals push to re-open economy

**BERLIN:** German: Japan wants to avert another state of emergency and needs to consider more stimulus to revive the economy, the top government spokesman said, signalling Tokyo's resolve to focus on re-opening businesses hammered by the coronavirus pandemic.

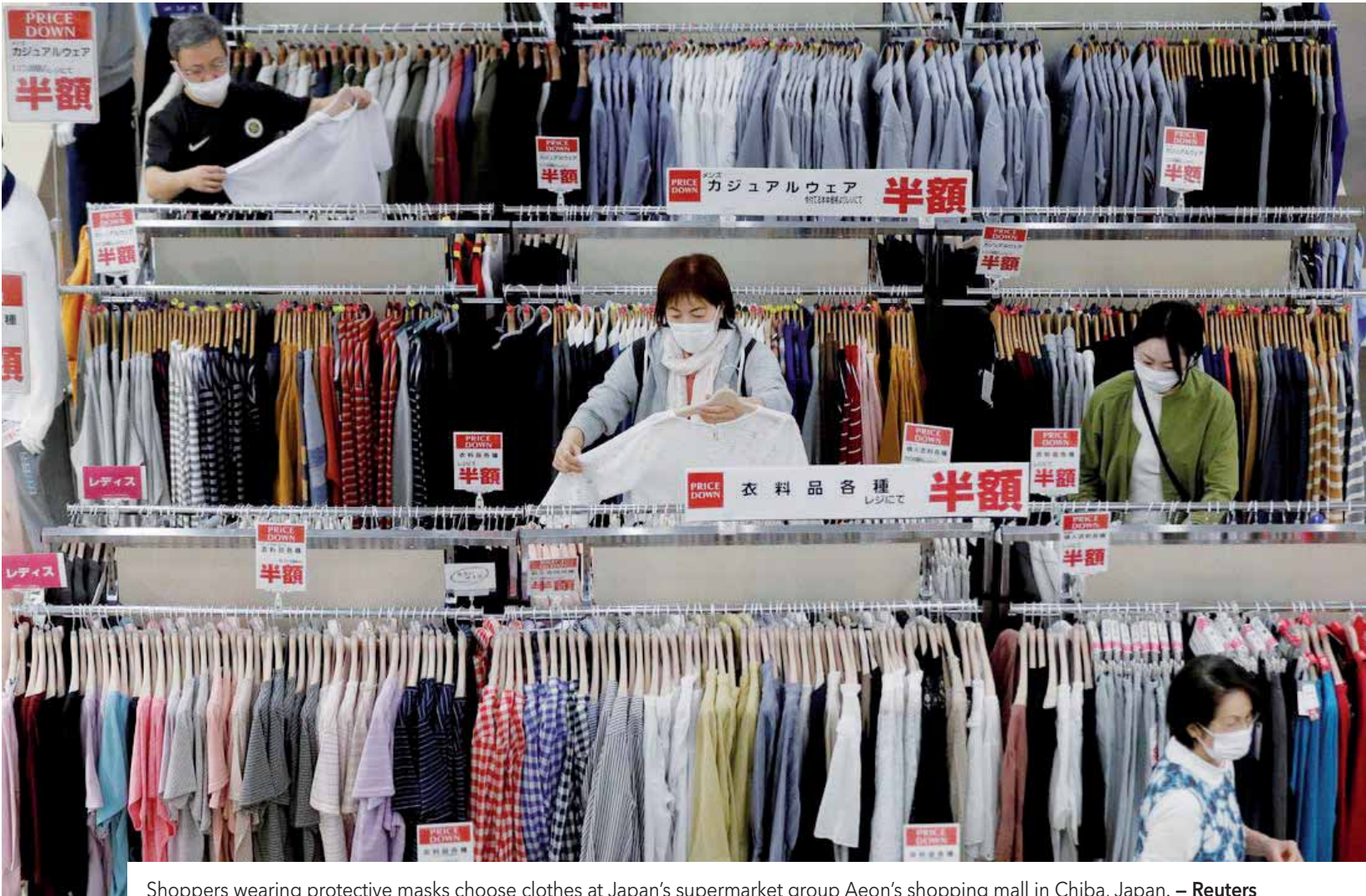
Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga also dismissed speculation that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may step down for health reasons, saying Abe's comments on Monday that he would continue to do his best in his job "explains it all".

Suga — widely seen as one of the main contenders to succeed Abe — said he had no intention of pursuing the post, even if urged to do so by associates. He said he "never thought about" taking on the position.

Japan has seen a resurgence of COVID-19 infection numbers after ending nationwide state of emergency measures in late May, posing a dilemma for the government as it struggles to contain the virus without deepening the economic downturn.

"We want to avoid another state of emergency that could have a big negative impact on the economy," Suga said on Wednesday, sending a clear message the emphasis was on spurring economic growth over tightening restrictions to contain the virus.

Promoting tourism would be



Shoppers wearing protective masks choose clothes at Japan's supermarket group Aeon's shopping mall in Chiba, Japan. — Reuters

among measures to help revive the economy, Suga said. "Japan will do

whatever it takes to host the Tokyo Olympic Games next year," he added.

The summer games had been scheduled to take place in late July

and early August this year, but were postponed to 2021 due to the

pandemic.

The world's third-largest economy suffered its biggest economic slump on record in the second quarter as the pandemic hit consumption and exports, keeping policymakers under pressure to take bolder action even after deploying massive monetary and fiscal support this year.

"We need to consider what we can do to prevent the economy from falling off a cliff," he said, when asked whether Japan may deploy another spending package to cushion the blow from the pandemic.

Suga also said it was "very important" for the Bank of Japan to work closely with the government preemptively, when asked whether any fresh spending measures should be accompanied by additional monetary easing.

A loyal lieutenant of Abe, Suga is considered a key decision-maker on economic policy. He has been seen as a leading candidates to take over from Abe, whose term as head of the ruling party, and therefore prime minister, ends next September.

Abe has been to hospital twice in the last two weeks, sparking concern about his ability to stay on as leader and heightening speculation about the possible transition of power.

"I meet the prime minister twice a day, but I don't see any change in his health," Suga said. — Reuters

## Watchmakers meet in Geneva to try to nurture recovery



A man checks a watch at the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie watch fair in Zurich. — Reuters

**ZURICH:** Luxury watchmakers Bulgari and Breitling and a handful of Swiss brands are gathering in Geneva this week for a scaled-down industry exhibition, braving the coronavirus pandemic to try to revitalise demand.

The big Swiss watch fairs in Basel and Geneva, which usually attract thousands of visitors, were cancelled earlier this year because of the virus.

This week's gathering, the first of what will be known as "Geneva Watch Days", will be very different. Instead of using a big exhibition centre, the event will be spread over a number of the city's luxury hotels.

Jean-Christophe Babin, the boss of Bulgari, who devised the new format to help to "rekindle the flame", said the new setting along with strict hygiene rules would help to prevent infection.

"It is important to physically meet our customers," Babin said. "We hope the event will help us gain market share."

"This is sending a strong signal that we are determined to grow whatever happens."

Bulgari expects about 60 retailers and 100 journalists, bloggers and influencers to attend.

Demand for luxury watches has collapsed during the pandemic as the Chinese, the industry's biggest customers, could not travel or shop.

Swiss watch exports plunged 68 per cent in May, but the downturn slowed in June and July as mainland Chinese started shopping again.

But Babin said global demand was not back to pre-crisis levels with the virus still very present in North and Latin America. South Korea and mainland China had rebounded nicely, but not enough to make up for declines in America and Europe, he said. — Reuters

## US to spend \$625m in quantum information research hubs

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The US Department of Energy on Wednesday said it will provide \$625 million over the next five years for five newly formed quantum information research hubs as it tries to keep ahead of competing nations like China on the emerging technology.

The funding is part of \$1.2 billion earmarked in the National Quantum Initiative Act in 2018.

Researchers believe quantum computers could operate millions of times faster than today's advanced supercomputers, making possible potential tasks ranging from mapping complex molecular structures and chemical reactions to boosting the power of artificial intelligence.

"It's absolutely imperative the

United States continues to lead the world in AI and quantum. We know our adversaries around the world are pursuing their own advances," US Chief Technology Officer Michael Kratsios said during a White House press briefing announcing the quantum information research funding and another \$100 million plus investment into the National Science Foundation's AI Research Institutes.

The five research hubs are each led by the Energy Department's Argonne, Brookhaven, Fermi, Lawrence Berkeley and Oak Ridge national laboratories.

The hubs are comprised of top research universities, other national labs and big tech companies in the quantum computing space such as International Business Machines

Researchers believe quantum computers could operate millions of times faster than today's advanced supercomputers

Corp, Intel Corp, Microsoft Corp, and quantum computer startups Rigetti & Co and ColdQuanta Inc. An Italian research lab and a Canadian university are also taking part.

Missing from the list are Google parent Alphabet Inc, considered one of the top firms in quantum computing, and Honeywell International Inc, which unveiled its quantum computing



A handout picture shows Sundar Pichai and Daniel Sank (R) with one of Google's Quantum Computers in the Santa Barbara lab, California, in this file photo. — Reuters

business in the past year. The Energy Department spokesperson declined to comment on whether they had been part of a proposal that didn't receive funding. Paul Dabbar, under-

secretary for science, said the private sector contributed another \$340 million worth of labour, equipment, lab space and other assets to the project. — Reuters

## Oil holds near five-month high on US output cuts and inventories



Oil tanks and the Bayway Refinery of Phillips 66 are seen in Linden, New Jersey. — Reuters

**LONDON:** Oil held near \$46 a barrel on Wednesday, close to its highest since March, lifted by US producers shutting most of their offshore Gulf of Mexico output ahead of Hurricane Laura and a report showing a drop in US crude inventories.

Renewed worries over the COVID-19 pandemic, which has squeezed demand and sent

prices to record lows in April, capped gains after reports this week of patients being re-infected, raising concerns about future immunity.

Brent crude slipped 14 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$45.72 a barrel by 10:50 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude fell 17 cents, or 0.4 per cent, to \$43.18. Both benchmarks settled at a five-month high on Tuesday.

"Oil traders will be preoccupied with the hurricane today," said Tamas Varga of broker PVM. "Once the danger passes, demand considerations will come into focus again."

The US energy industry was preparing on Tuesday for a major hurricane strike. Producers shut 1.56 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude output, representing 84 per cent of the Gulf of Mexico's offshore production and close to the 90 per cent outage that Hurricane Katrina brought 15 years ago.

"We do see some support on the back of hurricane activity," Dutch bank ABN AMRO said in a report. "The threat of being infected by the COVID-19 virus threatens a further recovery in oil demand."

Oil was also boosted on Tuesday by US and Chinese officials reaffirming their commitment to a Phase 1 trade deal. Further support came from American Petroleum Institute figures API/S showing US crude stocks fell more than expected.

A record oil output cut by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allies including Russia has helped to lift Brent from April's 21-year low below \$16. The US government's Energy Information Administration report will be in focus to see if it confirms the API figures. — Reuters

## Alibaba shares leap after Ant Group IPO filing

**HONG KONG:** Shares in Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba jumped to a new record on Wednesday morning, a day after the group's financial arm filed paperwork for a joint Shanghai and Hong Kong listing.

The IPO for Ant Group, the financial technology arm of Alibaba, is being billed as one of the world's largest listings, potentially eclipsing the record \$29 billion raised by Saudi Aramco last year.

The company filed paperwork on Tuesday evening for a joint listing closer to home as tensions spiral between the United States and China.

It did not detail a timetable for its public offering or how much money it hopes to raise. But the filing has already created a buzz.

As the market closed for lunch, Alibaba's Hong Kong shares were up 3.57 per cent at HK\$ 278.8.

Alibaba, which is listed in both Hong Kong and New York, is China's largest e-commerce conglomerate and is owned by billionaire Jack Ma.

Ant Group is a behemoth in the Chinese e-payments market, operating Alipay, one of the two dominant online payment systems in China, a country where cash, cheques and credit cards have long been eclipsed by e-payment devices and apps.

Bloomberg News say Ant group is targeting a valuation of about \$225 billion, with a \$30 billion IPO if markets are favourable. — AFP



TOUGHER TASK

# Powell starts hard sell for higher inflation

After a nearly two-year review, US Federal Reserve officials feel they've hit on a better way to meet their key goals of steady inflation and maximum employment.

On Thursday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell begins what may be the tougher task: convincing the public that the central bank can and will deliver in the wake of a pandemic that has arguably eroded trust in US institutions and put a huge chunk of the labour force on the unemployment rolls.

It is a hard sell on a confusing topic — the thrust involves telling Americans that higher inflation will be good for them in the long run — and analysts have already begun second-guessing whether a new Fed “framework” will fare any better than the current one in an environment where monetary policy may be nearing the limit of what it can do to help the economy.

“The situation is really perilous right now and there is little that monetary

WITHOUT SOME INFLATION, INTEREST RATES REMAIN LOWER THAN NORMAL, AND THAT AFFORDS LITTLE ROOM TO HELP THE ECONOMY BY REDUCING THEM WHEN RECESSIONS HIT, AS HAPPENED THIS YEAR

policymakers at this point have left in their arsenal,” said David Wilcox, former head of the Fed's research division and now a senior fellow at the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Wilcox said he feared the Fed's new framework, expected to be unveiled soon, will seem abstract unless it is coupled with new steps to enforce it, such as massive new bond-buying or the setting of explicit unemployment goals.

The minutes from the Fed's last policy meeting indicated those steps may be coming further down the road, giving the central bank time to see how the economy behaves at this stage of the

coronavirus pandemic. It has already chopped interest rates to zero, started some bond-buying, and approved massive lending programmes.

Powell, in online remarks on Thursday to the Kansas City Fed's annual economic symposium, will speak about the central bank's framework review, an initiative that included public hearings and research to explore how monetary policy should adapt to changes in the economy.

Normally held at the mountain resort of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, but being conducted virtually this year because of the pandemic, the symposium has been used in the past by Fed chiefs to signal policy shifts,

and that will be the expectation when Powell begins speaking on Thursday.

Fed Vice Chair Richard Clarida and Fed Governor Lael Brainard also are scheduled to speak next week in events sponsored by think tanks in Washington.

The topic may seem deep in the weeds of monetary policy, centred on convictions that weak inflation and low rates of unemployment can't coexist because wages and prices spiral if too many people are working.

Until the pandemic, however, they had. Unemployment crept to historically low levels without inflation even hitting the Fed's 2 per cent target.

Expectations about inflation, considered key to the future pace of price hikes, also lagged.

That has become a chronic problem not only for the Fed but for central bankers around the world. Without some inflation, interest rates remain lower than normal, and that affords little

room to help the economy by reducing them when recessions hit, as happened this year. Central banks are then faced with cutting rates quickly to zero and using politically more difficult tools like bond-buying or credit programmes to support businesses and families.

“There is a growing realisation that a 2 per cent inflation target as originally put in place in the US and around the world is not quite enough,” St. Louis Fed President James Bullard said. Changing the framework could help “shore up the target and get expectations to stay at 2 per cent,” he said.

The Fed first put the inflation target in place in 2012, and has missed it most of the time since.

Financial markets indicate the expected US inflation rate 10 years out is just 1.75 per cent, a level reflecting little worry about the risk of a jump in inflation and little faith in the Fed's sway over the one economic variable a central bank is thought to control. — Reuters

COMPENSATION BILL



The headquarters of Deutsche Bank is pictured in Frankfurt, Germany.

— AFP

## Banks in bonus balancing act as economies shrink

Major international banks may still pay out big bonuses to high flyers this year even as the pandemic saps the global economy, as fears of losing talent to rivals during a trading boom trump worries of a big compensation bill.

While the likes of HSBC and Deutsche Bank are making redundancies to trim costs, other banks are taking a more relaxed approach to job, salary and bonus cuts across their workforces, remuneration consultants say.

A poll in June of 75 financial firms by Pearl Meyer, a global remuneration consultant, showed 63 per cent have neither made nor contemplated changes to bonus structures in the face of the pandemic, even though 70 per cent expect COVID-19 to have a moderately or slightly negative impact on their businesses.

Bonus plans also come despite a regulatory frown in Britain and elsewhere on bumper cash payouts in the early days of the pandemic, as banks were urged to conserve capital.

“These banks move broadly in lockstep, no one wants to cut anything first,” said Simon Patterson, managing director at Pearl Meyer, which advises more than 1,000 companies on employee compensation structures annually.

Sources at two global banks said it was too early to speculate on bonus outcomes for specific units, though many traders will expect big payouts after a surge in revenue at market divisions propped up investment bank profits in the first half of the year.

Research from compensation consultant Johnson Associates this

month suggested 2020 bonuses for fixed-income traders for instance could rise by more than 30 per cent from last year.

But that will need to be balanced against performances in other units, with low interest rates and an expected rise in defaults set to hit earnings in retail and corporate banking.

BONUS PLANS ALSO COME DESPITE A REGULATORY FROWN IN BRITAIN AND ELSEWHERE ON BUMPER CASH PAYOUTS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PANDEMIC, AS BANKS WERE URGED TO CONSERVE CAPITAL

“Financial markets are cyclical but what we face is so unprecedented, no one truly knows whether next year is a feast or famine,” Patterson said.

Britain's Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) banned bonus payments to top management and material risk takers at the UK's biggest deposit-taking banks when Europe's COVID-19 crisis escalated in March, meaning some top traders could miss out.

Some senior managers at Barclays, Lloyds Banking Group and NatWest Group waived scheduled pay rises and took voluntary salary cuts.

But the PRA has not made clear how long the ban will stay in place and some banks are already planning for future payouts, the Financial Conduct Authority

(FCA) noted last month, though it urged them to align payouts with long-term business plans.

The PRA said it will reassess firms' distribution plans beyond 2020 in the fourth quarter.

Its assessment will be based on the current and projected capital positions of the banks and will take into account the level of economic uncertainty and market conditions at that time.

The European Central Bank said last month that EU-regulated firms must “adopt extreme moderation with regard to variable remuneration payments until 1 January 2021”, though this restriction ends before most EU lenders set bonuses for 2020.

Longer-term, it encouraged banks to consider whether a larger part of variable pay could be deferred for longer or paid in other instruments rather than cash.

A source at a major global bank said firms were reluctant to dismantle bonus structures, because doing so could deter bright graduates from applying for entry-level roles and demotivate existing staff needed to power the business through tough times.

There may however be pressure to adapt their models, in a bid to keep costs in check and avoid a backlash over huge payouts during a recession.

Some are reducing the amount paid to new hires. data from recruitment consultant Morgan McKinley showed the average salary rise for those moving from one UK finance job to another dropped to 15 per cent in the first half of 2020 compared with 19.8 per cent a year before. — Reuters

BROADER EQUITY

## Hong Kong skyscrapers will scale new heights again

It's the long views that elevate Hong Kong's skyscrapers. Hongkong Land, for example, has owned most of the buildings in its central Landmark complex since 1901; Swire Properties' involvement in the once-industrial area of Quarry Bay dates to 1882. Shorter-term investors should put some faith into these now-struggling developers.

Between June 2019, when the anti-government protests started, and the pandemic-induced trough in mid-March, shares in \$9 billion Hongkong Land and \$16 billion Swire Properties roughly halved. Those of Sun Hung Kai Properties, the \$38 billion owner of the city's iconic IFC and ICC towers, home to international banks, law firms, and fund managers fell 30 per cent. All three have partially recovered along with broader equities.

Commercial rents in Hong Kong slumped 11 per cent year-on-year in the first six months of 2020, and are expected to drop 17 per cent for the full year, according to property services outfit CBRE.

Commercial rents in Hong Kong slumped 11 per cent year-on-year in the first six months of 2020, and are expected to drop 17 per cent for the full year, according to property services outfit CBRE. It's the weakest forecast for any big city globally. Geopolitical tension is weighing on the market, with a new national security law stoking fears about the city's future.

That helps explain why Hongkong Land, Swire and Sun Hung Kai are trading at 26 per cent, 44 per cent and 51 per cent of book value, respectively — all near-decade lows. There are good reasons to think they can get back to their 50-60 per cent averages over the last five years, though.

One is working patterns. Hong Kong has one of the highest office densities and people living in some of the tightest quarters. That should curb the burgeoning work-from-home effect. Despite concerns about an exodus of foreigners, fresh demand may pick up from mainland China.

The city centre is likely to hold up. Vacancy rates there have reached a 14-year high, at 5.6 per cent, but below the citywide rate of 7.9 per cent. For the newer Kowloon-side eastern office area it's 13.9 per cent.

Any rebound will be gradual. Hong Kong isn't getting the same quick boost from the mainland as it has following past crises. After the SARS epidemic in 2003, property stock prices recovered in four months.

It took five months after the global financial crisis. The climb back up is steep, but history suggests tower landlords can scale new heights again. — Reuters



A man with a protective face mask takes his lunch breaks at the financial Central district, in Hong Kong. — Reuters



# Uneasy peace as pandemic calms Montenegro's tourism 'chaos'

**G**liding across Montenegro's majestic, mountain-ringed Kotor bay, captain Ivan Gvido Krivokapic revels in the unusually tranquil waters of a destination that has become a tourist magnet in recent years.

But any joy brought by the pandemic-triggered peace is tinged with anxiety about the economic future of a tiny country, which heavily depends on its tourism industry.

Boat passengers will "probably never again experience such an empty bay and see all the beauties of our city," Krivokapic says wistfully on a picture-perfect summer afternoon, framed by the rocky mountain slopes that jut into the Adriatic's deep blue waters.

Gone are the gargantuan cruise ships that have become a daily feature of Kotor's port and the tour groups that clog up the charming alleyways of the walled Old Town, steeped in history.

And yet it is hard to feel at ease as fear mounts over the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, which is weighing heavily on the minds of voters ahead of parliamentary elections on Sunday.

"People are enjoying (the peace) but they are not happy, because the economic moment is crucial," said Branko Radulovic, who rents out apartments in Kotor.

"We are now in some ways aware of how dependent we are on the summer crowds and chaos," he said.

Tourism contributes to around a quarter of Montenegro's economy in normal times, and employs nearly 20 per cent of the workforce.

Economists say the pandemic has exposed the dangers of "putting all your eggs in one basket", revealing an urgent need to diversify an economy that otherwise rests on agriculture — which



**Tourism contributes to around a quarter of Montenegro's economy in normal times, and employs nearly 20 per cent of the workforce**

accounts for 50 per cent of GDP — services and a small industrial sector.

This summer, tourist arrivals and spending have plummeted around 90 per cent compared to last year, according to official data.

That is a bigger-than-expected drop and will likely send shock waves across the economy.

According to the International Monetary Fund's latest forecasts, Montenegro is on course for its largest contraction — nearly nine per cent — since its

2006 independence.

## 'TOO MUCH VACATION'

Tourism operators are desperate for any help they can get.

"It's wonderful that there are no traffic jams and that I quickly travel about 20 kilometres (12 miles) from home to work, but the price is too high," said the owner of a local travel agency in the coastal town of Budva, Danica Kazanegra Gregovic.

Last year, the company, through leading global tourist

operator TUI, brought 72,000 tourists to Montenegro, mainly from Western Europe, Nordic countries and Russia.

This year, it has brought 300.

In the coastal city of Tivat, only two planes are arriving daily — compared to last summer's average of 50 planes and 9,000 passengers a day.

Locals say they can't remember such a quiet season, even during a devastating 1979 earthquake, or the 1990s wars in former Yugoslavia.

"This is currently at the level of a catastrophe," says Dejan Radjenovic, who works for his family's restaurant in Budva.

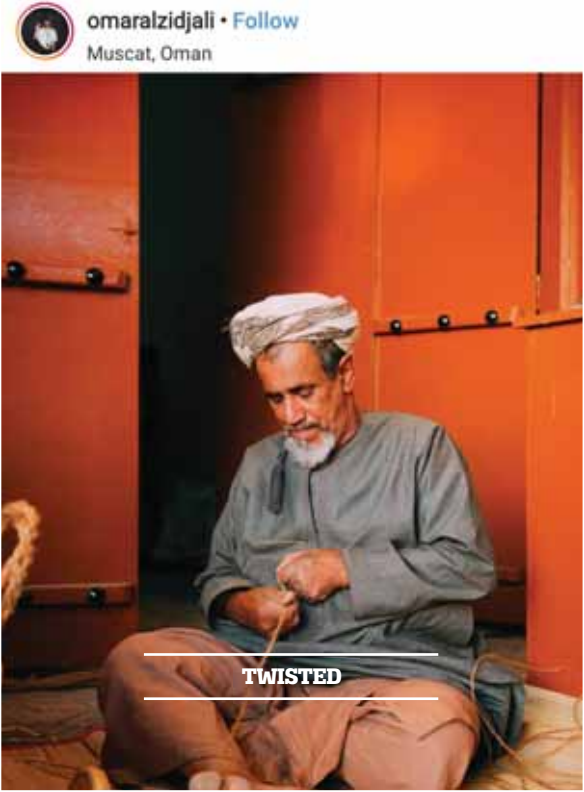
Stefan Petrovic, a 29-year-old who manages a restaurant in Kotor, says young people are already struggling with high unemployment, at more than 18 per cent, and low wages averaging just over 500 euros a month.

"For us young people, who want to work and make money, this has not been pleasant," he told AFP.

"This is too much of a vacation for us." —**AFP**



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



FASHION

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Top fashion and food firms test ways to nurture nature

From helping Mongolia's goat herders produce cashmere more efficiently to counting insects on "biodiversity plots" planted on farms, some of the world's biggest brands are blazing a trail with innovative efforts to nurture nature.

Sustainability researchers say businesses have shown a surge of interest in limiting the harm their operations do to the planet, as scientists have outlined more clearly the threats to forests, water, soil, plants, animals, birds and people.

"For decades we have been trying to get companies on

board with this journey but in the past six to 12 months, I have never seen so much interest," said Eva Zabey, Executive Director of Business for Nature, a coalition lobbying for stronger government policies and more corporate action.

At least 400 firms have signed up to international commitments to protect nature, and more than 1,200 companies already are taking some steps in their operations, she added.

"The key message is that your business can't continue to have negative impacts while still expecting to benefit from the positive aspects of biodiversity," she told a webinar on business and nature

this month.

Already nature "is in a perilous state", she added.

A 2019 flagship report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warned that up to 1 million animal and plant species out of an estimated 8 million are at risk of extinction, particularly due to industrial farming and fishing.

Numbers like these — together with greater recognition of the role forests play in absorbing planet-heating carbon — are pushing water utilities, mining companies, food manufacturers and others to address the environmental impact of how they

source raw materials.

**CASHMERE AND COTTON**

The University of Cambridge institute has worked with Asda, France-based luxury goods group Kering, and other companies to produce practical tools for businesses to manage their supply chain risks associated with nature and ultimately become "nature-positive", which means enriching rather than harming the natural world.

In July, Kering — which owns Gucci, Saint Laurent and Balenciaga, among other top fashion houses — published a biodiversity strategy with a series of targets to achieve what it calls a "net positive" impact by 2025.

That includes regenerating and protecting 2 million hectares — about six times the total land footprint of its supply chain — in the next five years.

Half of the target covers land in agricultural areas where the company sources its materials. It plans to restore that land through a 5-million-euro (\$5.9-million) fund it has set up.

The rest it hopes to achieve by supporting UN-backed and other external schemes to protect forests, reduce carbon emissions and improve local livelihoods.

Since 2014, Kering has helped herding families in Mongolia's South Gobi region boost the amount and quality of cashmere they get from their goats, while accessing meat and dairy markets.

The programme has enabled them to keep fewer animals — to reduce pressure on grasslands — and to better understand their potential role in protecting wildlife such as antelope and snow leopards, according to Kering.

"It's quite easy for people to forget about the tight connection between fashion and agriculture — all of our clothes come from farms and managed forests and so on," said Katrina ole-MoiYoi, a sustainable sourcing specialist with Kering.

But to make a wider impact on the planet, ole-MoiYoi said collaboration was needed within the fashion industry, because stopping biodiversity loss is "not something any one company can do alone."

If businesses could team up on projects to transform cotton production, for example, it could be a "big win for everybody", she said.

That is the kind of thinking behind The Fashion Pact, which brings together more than 250 brands and suppliers, representing about 35 per cent of the industry, to work jointly on climate change, biodiversity and ocean health issues, she noted. — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

LATEST TRENDS

In China, a Trump wax statue maker laments virus impact



**SHANGHAI:** For Zeng Sheng, the manager at Shanghai Maiyi Arts, this autumn should have been a boon for business: with the US presidential election, demand for the centre's wax replicas of Donald Trump should have been off the charts.

Instead, the spread of the coronavirus has halted new orders and stalled overseas travel, including to and from the United States. He is now holding off on producing a replica of Joe Biden.

Un, martial arts star Jackie Chan, and others.

Zeng says that by 2019, the company was shipping up to 700 figures annually to customers, with about one-third going overseas.

The virus, however, hit orders twice: first in China, when factories and tourist sites closed, and then overseas.

Business remains about two-thirds its normal size, Zeng says.

Zeng says that the hardest part of making a replica is the face. It can take a month alone to design and



"Tourist sites, amusement parks, houses of famous people are temporarily not open," Zeng said. "Since they can't resume work, we can't get new orders."

Shanghai Maiyi Arts was founded in 2012 as a manufacturer and supplier of wax figures.

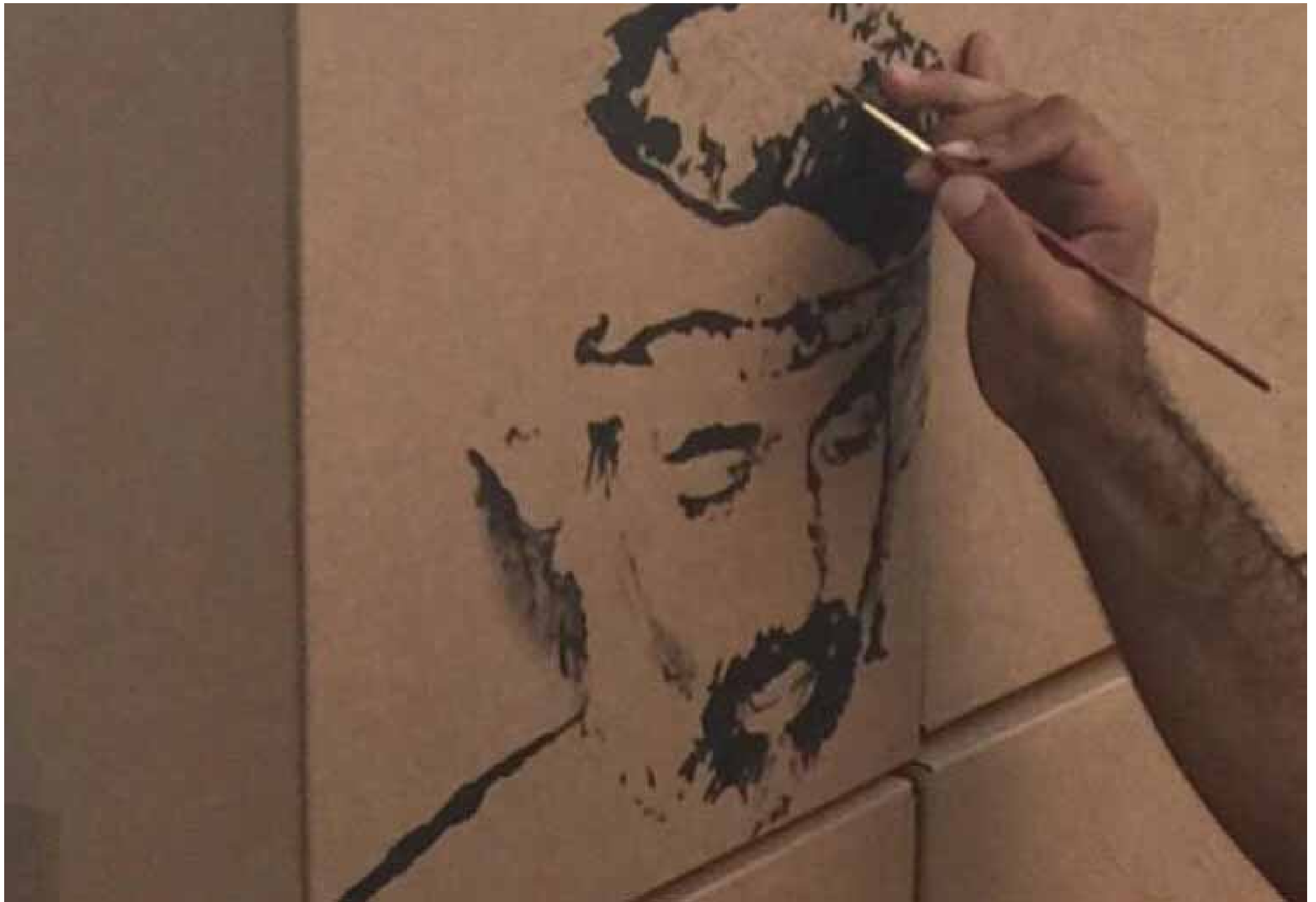
Located in the outskirts of Shanghai, about an hour's drive from the city centre, its exhibition hall also doubles as makeshift museum, where guests can pose next to replicas of North Korean leader Kim Jong-

sculpt perfect features.

The company uses specialists to make a replica's hair and clothing. It can take three months to bring a figure to fruition, from start to finish.

Although Trump is the company's best-selling model in the United States, in China, the top seller is something closer to home: a replica of a security guard, asleep and slumped in a chair, brings in the most orders.

Last year, the shop produced 16 Trump wax statues, six of which went abroad. — **Reuters**



# A book and a studio: Station of dreams for young artists

STAFF WRITER

**T**he spontaneous moments spent with an artist in a coffee shop, away from life commitments, tell the unique characters they have. Known as mysterious people, staying with them for a couple of hours might lead you to change your mind.

Artists are given the extraordinary talent at reading faces, incidents and the surroundings very carefully. This is also found in young talented artist Harith al Naabi.

"I started drawing, as all kids who liked to pick a pencil and make incomprehensible scribbles when I was little but a teacher noticed that my skill was advanced for my age. It was then when he encouraged me to draw and practice more," he said.

"Practice, paying close attention to what I see and cultural knowledge are important things that helped me enhanced my skills. I went to art school and read related literature to my passion. I analysed and researched. From my initial interest in drawing faces and different facial expressions, I branched out to other areas such as portraiture and landscapes. Now, I settled with the school of Cubism. I'm taking my time to appreciate the beauty of this art genre," Al Naabi said.

Harith has an interesting philosophy regarding the imitation of the work of others especially the masters. He explained that there two kinds of imitation — one kind is benign and the other is malicious.

"Imitation is the first step towards creativity, where the junior painter imitates his predecessors to learn and develop. Imitation for learning and enhancing is good. Creativity cannot be produced out of anything. The artist cannot produce a unique work without going through the stage of copying the paintings of other artists or simulating the things surrounding him, and then unleash the uniqueness of his creativity and ideas," he said.

Asked of who inspired him as an artist, Harith said, "I once heard the artist Youssef al Nahawi saying: We must 'try' to learn. Till now, his words stayed with me. I see his choice of colours is unique, bold and unprecendented."

"Recently, I began to read on cubism more than anything else, although I am a realistic artist. I follow classical and realist schools. But this comes in an artist's life where he explores other schools of ideas. Eventually once learning, they may continue with their newfound passion or return to their original school of thought. The artist Paul Cézanne, for example, painted in the Impressionist school, and he had a great influence in many artistic movements such as brutality, cubism

and abstraction, and his style caused a major change in the history of modern art," he shared.

"I love to support beginners in art. I like to give lessons and workshops for free. When I was a beginner like them, I wished that someone gave me a similar workshop," he said.

Asked if there is ever a subject he will not paint, he said, "I will never paint myself. There are a lot of artists who paint themselves, but I feel that if I draw myself it will be an unfinished drawing. I will keep repeating it hundreds of times because it will not satisfy me."

On his plans, Harith said, "One of my artistic projects will soon see the light in the coming weeks. It is a 'studio': an artistic environment that brings together artists, talents and those interested in drawing under one roof, providing a free space for practice, development of art through workshops and art exhibitions that will be held in the studio."

"The studio consists of various complementary sections that help the artist to harness his/her creative potentials, and it also provides all the necessary and basic technical tools for any artwork.

He shared, "I am currently working on writing a book on the use of engineering perspective in art paintings. All that I use in the book are Omani models and in a simplified manner for students and for everyone who wanted to learn."



# features

## A book and a studio: Station of dreams for young artists

Harith al Naabi has always shown potential as an artist since he was just a child. He grew up to be a prolific artist who explored different genres from portraiture to landscape and now cubism. But just as he learned from his mentors and other artists, he is also sharing what he knows to those who are interested to delve into his chosen profession... **P19**



### DAILY PICKS

#### TRAVEL



#### EXPLORE WADI DAMM

"Wadi Damm is situated near Al Ayn Village, Wilayat Ibri, Al Dhahirah region of Oman, and is about 45km from the proper city of Ibri. It is a seasonal wadi that is dry most time of the year. Along the way, you will find beehive tombs that resemble the ones at Bat necropolis," shared by Instagram/ @vibes\_of\_oman

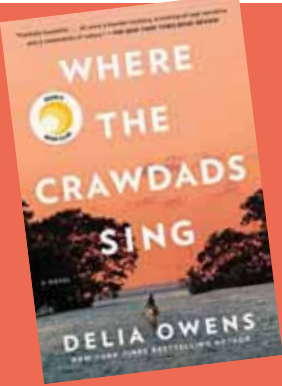
#### EAT



#### CHICKEN MOUSSAKA

This dish needs a lot of patience to make but all the efforts will be worth it. Moussaka is simply a layered casserole dish made of bread, onion and chicken. Make sure to maximise the taste of the ingredients. Get the recipe here: <https://bit.ly/34wb6pr>

#### READ



#### WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING BY DELIA OWENS

In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a young woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect.

#### WATCH



#### MULAN

"Mulan" is the epic adventure of a fearless young woman who masquerades as a man in order to fight Northern Invaders attacking China. The eldest daughter of an honoured warrior, Hua Mulan is spirited, determined and quick on her feet. When the Emperor issues a decree that one man per family must serve in the Imperial Army, she steps in to take the place of her ailing father as Hua Jun, becoming one of China's greatest warriors ever.

#### CELEBRATE



#### NATIONAL THOUGHTFUL DAY

August 28th brings with it an opportunity to demonstrate how we value each other. National Thoughtful Day sets aside a celebration meant to bring goodwill in a variety of ways. By serving the day with a spirit of generosity toward others, a ripple effect takes place.