

ObserverWeekend



CLOSER TO HOME!

KABEER YOUSUF

Oman's domestic tourism is all set to receive a major fillip as the lockdown days are over and more and more sectors are opening up day by day attracting increased number of footfalls everywhere.

Citizens and residents can look forward to visiting the various local destinations which are at a short drive away, immerse in the historic museums and bask in the sun-light of Jebel Shams, take a dip in the blue turquoise water of Sharqiyah, and spend a holiday in the misty Dhofar.

However, various domestic tourism verticals, such as SME's and startups in the tourism sector, food and beverage outlets,

The substantial demand for domestic tourism will be complemented by the delay in opening the international ports and people's initial reluctance in making extensive international travel

the car rentals and adventure activities operators, will have to wait till the authorities give nod to open up the public tourism places which have been closed since the pandemic broke out in March this year.

"Domestic tourism will be the first sector that will make a major leap in the post-covid era, while other sectors will follow the local tourism surge," Renee Johnson, a travel and tourism expert told the *Observer*.

"This substantial demand for domestic

from parks to taxis to coffee shops, are sprucing up to embrace the new normal and offer the unmatched value-added services to the yearning visitors.

"We are excited of welcoming the first batches of domestic tourists from across different parts of the country. We are all decked up and the services will be unique," representative of a themed restaurant on the Muttrah Sea Road, which is frequented by hundreds of domestic tourists said.

However, going a step forward, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has stipulated various precautionary measures known as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for tourism and hospitality sectors to ensure the safety of all local tourists, both citizens, and residents when roaming in Oman when the tourism sector is open.

TRAVEL



HIS TRAVELS ACROSS THE SULTANATE HELPED HIM EXPLORE NEW LANDSCAPES AND INTERACT CLOSELY WITH LOCALS. **SEE P2**

Five years after refugee influx, Merkel 'would do the same'

BERLIN: Five years after Germany controversially took in hundreds of thousands of migrants, Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Friday she would do the same again as she rides a wave of popularity for her handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I would make essentially the same decisions," Merkel said at her annual summer press conference in Berlin, in response to a question about whether she regretted her 2015 policy to keep the border open to an influx of asylum seekers.

"When people are standing at the German-Austrian border or the Hungarian-Austrian border, they have to be treated like human beings," she said.

More than one million people filed asylum applications in Germany in 2015-2016 during a pivotal moment in Merkel's now 15-year



tenure. The influx deeply polarised Germany and fuelled the rise of the far-right AfD party, weakening Merkel's standing at home.

But as the veteran leader, 66, nears the end of her fourth term, her handling of the coronavirus pandemic has given her an unexpected popularity boost.

In a recent Infratest Dimap poll, 71 per cent of respondents

said they were very satisfied or satisfied with Merkel's work.

The AfD, on the other hand, has seen its ratings decline during the pandemic. "It's amazing to see how quickly things can change," notes Hans Vorlaender, a professor of politics at the TU Dresden university. "As a rule, crises are always a make or break moment for those in charge."

INSIDESTORIES

Abe resigning for health reasons



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced on Friday he will resign, ending his record-breaking tenure in a bombshell development that kicks off a leadership race in the world's third-largest economy.

Abe said he is suffering a recurrence of the ulcerative colitis that forced him to cut short a first term in office, and that he no longer felt able to continue as prime minister.

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Rupee posts biggest gain



MUMBAI: The Indian rupee rose to its highest level in nearly six months on Friday, gaining for a third straight session, with traders saying the central bank refrained from currency intervention as foreign investors piled into equity markets.

The rupee rose nearly 2 per cent for the week, its biggest weekly gain since the week ending December 21, 2018 when it rose 2.4 per cent.

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Deadly firefight in Lebanon



KHALDEH: A deadly battle between Lebanese overnight prompted warnings of more violence as the country is pushed to breaking point by a financial meltdown and political tensions. Two people — a 13-year-old Lebanese boy and a Syrian man — were killed in the Khaldeh area south of the capital in the shootout on Thursday night. Machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades were used in the fighting, which witnesses said lasted four hours.

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Pakistan faces record rainfall

KARACHI: Dozens of people have been killed in accidents and floods caused by torrential rains that have lashed Pakistan for days on end, officials said on Friday.

Precipitation reached record levels in Karachi, the country's largest city, where waist-deep rivers of trash-strewn floodwater swept down streets and into homes and businesses. Eighteen people died in the southern city on Thursday "in various rain-related accidents," a police spokeswoman said.

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 35°C
MIN: 29°C

SALALAH
MAX: 27°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 41°C
MIN: 28°C

SUNRISE 05.48 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:30

DHUHR: 12:13

ASR: 15:40

MAGHRIB: 18:33

ISHA: 19:45



LIJU CHERIAN

IT was a life changing experience for an Italian travel bug resident in Oman.

As he completes his work assignment after three years, what endears him the most is his innumerable Omani friends who helped him travel and explore this hospitable land.

His travels across the Sultanate helped him explore new landscapes and interact closely with local citizens.

Marco Schifano loves the Sultanate, its citizens, culture and nature. Most of his Italian friends whom he invited to Oman went back with memories of a lifetime.

Marco loves to engage and interact with Omanis. This personality has characterised his lifestyle, where he tends to step out of the traditional expatriate 'comfort zone' of malls and 5-star hotels to experience the 'real' Oman.

"The Sultanate may look very different from Italy in terms of lifestyle, history, culture and traditions, but I find rural Omani lifestyle close to the everyday life and social interactions in Castro, my village in the Apulia region of south-eastern Italy. We share many features of living in a small village or neighbourhood life where everybody helps each other," he mentions.

Teté, Gianluca, Silvia, Monica and Dario, his Italian friends, went back amazed at the warm, open hospitality of the locals. They imagined only desert and dust but were surprised at the diverse landscape with old villages, forts, sea and mountains.

They managed to experience Oman to the fullest, not only its wonderful landscapes but a full-immersion in a completely foreign culture, experienced by means of interaction among locals.

Oman stole the heart of Dario, his friend, who felt 'at home' just like they are used to in Italy. He

MARCO SCHIFANO, WHO WORKS FOR THE ITALIAN EMBASSY IN THE SULTANATE, SAYS HIS ASSIGNMENTS OFFERED ENCOUNTERS WITH A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT REALITY WHICH WAS FASCINATING BUT DIFFICULT TO GRASP IN ITS COMPLEXITY

Of Lasting Goodwill & Friendship



finally experienced the same strong emotions that make his eyes sparkle whenever he spoke about Oman. An exceptional guest who enjoyed Oman the most was Nunzio, Marco's dad. He had managed to gift himself with a trip to visit his son but left after a month with tears.

Marco, who works for the Italian Embassy in the Sultanate, says his assignments offered encounters with a completely different reality which was fascinating but difficult to grasp in its complexity.

"At the beginning I was almost wary of crossing cultural boundaries because I was not familiar with local traditions. But over a period of time this was not an issue," he admits.

His encounter with Suleiman in Jabal Shams exemplifies the friendly, hospitality nature among Omanis.

During an excursion, Suleiman invited him to stay with his family for the weekend during Eid festivities in his village in Al Hamra. As an amateur folk dancer during his days in Italy, he involved himself with traditional dances among Omanis in the village.

Ras Al Hadd will be his gateway with a special place in his heart mainly due to Fajel, a fisherman friend, who always invites him to undertake an adventure by boat.

At Misfat Al Abriyeen, Zahran and his family wait to greet him upon arrival and he loves the spot which gives him vibes of authentic Oman.

By September, his tenure in Oman comes to an end. As he gets set for another new assignment in Rome, he will be departing with a heavy heart, but will carry good experience of having stayed here and interacting with people from all over the world and creating deep human relationships.

"Oman transformed me completely from my conception about interacting with human beings, opening up my mind and horizons. This will definitely help me for my future adventures," Marco concludes.





DR YOUSUF ALI
AL MULLA

Impact of COVID-19 on sleep

Sleep is a basic human need as is breathing, eating and drinking. Many studies have highlighted the close links between the hours and quality of sleep we get and health problems that may develop as a result of lack of it such as high blood pressure, stroke and diabetes. So getting good sleep is crucial to ensuring good health and quality of life at the same time.

In light of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) during the past months, which has greatly corrupted every aspect of people's lives. It has affected in one way or another the working time, family time, play time and also our mood. And maybe our level of stress and our tolerance as human beings.

Home stay and physical distancing have also resulted in your symptoms of depression and completely disrupted your sleep cycle, destroying what would have been the most of the eight hours you could expect to be the quietest of your day.

However, it is important to mention that people who previously had insomnia, sleep disturbances and delayed sleep-wake phase disorder, will be most likely to be affected by the coronavirus related sleep disturbance.

Of course, insomnia disorder is usually characterised by difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep despite having adequate chance of sleeping. Not to mention that insufficient sleep adversely affects hormone levels, brain function and exercise performance, in addition it contributes to obesity and the risk of development of other diseases.

For instance, lack of sleep may weaken the body's ability to fight disease. When we do not get enough sleep, our bodies produce fewer cytokines — a type of protein that targets infection and inflammation, creating a vital immune response to effectively fight any virus.

The two main factors responsible for sleep deterioration are changes in stress levels and changes in sleep behaviours associated with this pandemic. This is a reality that everyone has noticed and how the coronavirus has created a set of new challenges even for people who previously did not have sleep problems. In other words, people are concerned not only about the virus and the disease itself, but because there are health issues that a person suffers from already, which has not been treated optimally, as well as financial problems and other psychological and personal stress.

The different sleep and wake times can also have a detrimental effect on sleep itself. I might exaggerate if I said that (routine is important), the worst thing you can do is to change the time of going to bed and waking up longer and spoiling your body clock. Consequently, your sleep will not be good and you will face more sleep problems. It is first for anyone to aim for a fairly consistent waking time and not spend more time in bed than you need to sleep!

On the other hand, many people complain and report strange dreams and the truth of this, is a direct result of increased anxiety, when people are more anxious and have this excessive alertness during a 24-hour period, here your body produces more of the stress hormone cortisol, and this may keep your body awake and activate your mind leading unfortunately to interrupted sleep and insomnia.

In addition, during this pandemic, most people were restricted to work at home, as they do not have a specific time to wake up every day or eat meals. Thus remarkably disrupted the body's natural sleep and wake cycle or the body's circadian rhythm, especially as some spent less time outside his house in the sunshine every day. Regrettably, this resulted in a lot of us staying in front of the screen longer than ever before, whether by watching TV or other tablets, which in one way or another lead to the emission of blue light from these devices, ending with disrupting the body's production of melatonin at night, a hormone that helps in regulating the sleep-wake cycle.

Fortunately, insomnia will be a temporary condition for most people, as we are in this pandemic. It is important for individuals to focus on maintaining good sleep habits, a regular sleep and wake schedule and avoiding naps and prolonged time in bed.

Of course, you should avoid coffee and related stimulants, for instance, six hours before bed and continue to exercise regularly and be exposed to daylight every day, especially in the early morning. Additionally, during this period, individuals are likely to spend more time on the Internet or using electronic devices. To prevent such behaviour from interfering with sleep, they should use a low blue light filter during the evening and try to stop using the device at least an hour before bed. Most importantly, if you are awake in the middle of the night and have a hard time getting back to sleep, take a break from trying to sleep, focus on relaxing and do something relaxing like reading or listening to content you enjoy.

At the end, in these times of stress, it is extremely important to engage in strategies that can help manage stress such as regular exercise, healthy meals and relaxation. We do not want people to lie in bed afraid of not being able to sleep, instead everyone should focus on trying to maintain a regular sleep pattern and adhere to good sleep practices, in order to avoid the development of chronic insomnia disorder, or related sleep disorders that require specialist intervention in such cases.

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It only works if you wear it

USE FACE MASK WHEN YOU ARE IN PUBLIC PLACE TO SAVE YOURSELF AND OTHERS



SAMUEL KUTTY

Despite making it mandatory and punishable under law, some people are stepping out onto the streets, beaches and other public places without wearing face masks while others carry them in their hands or pockets.

"Most people are complying with the law; many others have begun acting as if the coronavirus pandemic is over. It is too early to abandon basic precautions. It is like digging our own graves," said Dr Basheer Alikaparambil, specialist in Internal Medicine.

According to Royal Oman Police (ROP), the fine for not wearing masks is RO 100, and it includes public places, markets, shops and workplace.

A number of people have already been handed fines by the police in different governorates in the Sultanate.

According to Dr Basheer, masks are not primarily about self-protection. They are about protecting others. Individuals who test positive

for COVID-19 without symptoms show viral loads as high as those with symptoms.

Individuals who are infected with the virus can feel fine but still transmit the virus for days before they develop any symptoms.

"Wearing an appropriate mask, along with physical distancing and proper hygiene, is a crucial means of reducing transmission of the virus. The virus is transmitted by droplets and close contact. Droplets play a very important role in the spread of the microbe," said Dr Basheer.

Wearing masks can prevent droplets that carry the virus from escaping and infecting others and their lives, he said.

According to World Health Organisation, face masks should be used as part of a comprehensive strategy of measures to suppress transmission and save lives. But the use of a mask alone is not sufficient to provide an adequate level of protection against COVID-19.

Last week, the global body issued guidance saying children over the age of 12 should wear masks, in line with recommended practice for adults in their country or area.

It admits little is known about how



Wearing an appropriate mask, along with physical distancing and proper hygiene, is a crucial means of reducing transmission of the virus. The virus is transmitted by droplets and close contact. Droplets play a very important role in the spread of the microbe

children transmit the virus but cites evidence that teenagers can infect others in the same way as adults.

For children aged between six and 11, the WHO advises taking into account how widespread the transmission of the virus is and whether the child is interacting with high-risk individuals such as the elderly.

It also stresses the need for adult supervision to help children use, put on and take off masks safely.

For teachers, the WHO says: "In areas where there is widespread transmission, all adults under the age of 60 and who are in general good health should wear fabric masks when they cannot guarantee at least a one-metre distance from others.

"This is particularly important for adults working with children who may have close contact with children and one another."

Adults aged 60 or over, or those with underlying health conditions, should wear medical masks, it says.

The WHO guidance does not specify whether a child over the age of 12 should wear a mask in school, but it may yet become a feature of the classroom as the new academic year begins.



The story of blue-eyed woman of Yamama!

Tassam and Jadees were Arab cousin tribes who inhabited the area north of Yemen called Al Yamama between 110 BC – 525 AD. They had a great civilisation that ended by the hands of king Hassan Al Himyari of Yemen. But what's the story behind their brutal massacre and how is it linked to the woman with the sharpest vision known at that time?

Both tribes were ruled by a king called Imleeq (in other sources: Imloooq. Both are derivative of Al Amaleeq, an Arab tribe that lived in the Levant and were descendants of Prophet Noah). Imleeq was a tyrant who had an evil vice: violating brides on their wedding night. His action brought dishonour to the tribes who felt helpless towards their king's whim and didn't see a way out. Till it was the wedding night of Al Shumoos, a famous poetess whose brother Al Aswad ibn Affar was a nobleman

from Jadees. Coming out from Imleeq's bedchamber in tatters and covered in blood, Al Shumoos went back to her tribe and tore her shirt in lamentation while versing: "Degradation befell Jadees, is this a way to treat a bride? What freeman would accept that after paying her dowry? The husband would rather die than face her!"

Her heart-rending words reached her brother who came to her aid at once before going back to his tribe to plot his vengeance. His plan was to invite the king and his court — that also included men from their cousin tribe Tassam in high positions — for dinner and take off their weapons at the tent's door.

Everyman from his tribe would sit next to someone from the king's company — including Al Aswad who'd sit next to Imleeq — while hiding their swords under the sand.

The minute the company starts reaching for food is the time when every man in their tribe would pull

IT'S SAID THAT THE VEINS OF ZARQA'A'S EYES WERE BLACK FROM USING AL ATHMAD, A TYPE OF KOHL THAT IS KNOWN TO IMPROVE VISION, AND SHE WAS THE FIRST TO USE IT. ARABS STILL BUY IT FROM LOCAL MARKETS FOR THE SAME REASON

out his sword and stab them to death. With Imleeq gone, Al Aswad would then become the new king.

The plan succeeded but a few men of Tassam managed to escape the massacre and head south to king Hassan in Yemen asking to avenge their dead. King Hassan seized the opportunity as it was always his wish to expand his kingdom northwards to include Al Yamama.

On their way, a man called Riyah ibn Murrah approached the king to share an interesting inside information. His sister Zarqa'a was married from the tribe Jadees and was known as Zarqa'a Al Yamama.

She had a rare gift: the sharpest vision that made her distinguish grey hair in white milk and spot travellers a day and night away. Darkness enhanced her vision even further.

Riyah, the utterly loving brother, was afraid that she'd spot them and forewarn her people. He suggested to cut the trees in their

surrounding area and that every soldier carry a branch in front of him while heading towards Al Yamama.

Meanwhile, Zarqa'a spotted the proceeding branches and warned her people of Himyar (Yemen) approaching with men in moving trees. Nobody paid her heed which resulted in an attack in the early morning that left death and devastation in the tribe.

King Al Aswad managed to escape to the mountains near Yemen and survived for a while before being killed by a bandit who recognised him.

As for Zarqa'a, her eyes were gouged out before being crucified. It's said that the veins of her eye were black from using Al Athmad, a type of Kohl that is known to improve vision, and she was the first to use it.

Arabs still buy it from local markets for the same reason. They also still say: as sharp as Zarqa'a's sight.



RASHAAL RAISI

Webinar Etiquettes – Virtual & Real

PRITI SWARUP

The word 'etiquette' means 'the customary code of polite behaviour in society or among members of a particular profession or group'. The present pandemic situation has made human beings come up with a new and sustainable way of communication, i.e. communicating online and webinars. In the context of online connect, etiquettes are a set of rules and socially acceptable behaviours, that must be followed while communicating on the web.

UNIVERSAL RULES:

1 Respecting everyone's time: It is the foremost yet often forgotten aspect of online communications. Time must be used judiciously and applies both to the presenter and the attendee. The presenter must start and finish within the allocated time, which shows the professional conduct of the presenter. Similarly, attendees should be present in the webinar well before time so that it doesn't cause any disturbance to the host and hassles of allowing the guest to join in after the meeting has started, can be well avoided.

2 Appropriate attire and dress code: It is imperative to follow the dress code and protocol while attending any meeting online. Not just the presenter is required to be formally and appropriately dressed, the attendees are also expected to follow the dress code specified. Hair should be properly done and fiddling during the session is not welcome. Casual attire like shorts, loose clothing and revealing clothes is a straight no and must be avoided under all circumstances.

3 Background set up and noise: Both the presenters and the attendees should preferably sit against a plain background with minimal décor and wall colours with neutral hues. This ensures better visibility, avoids distraction and helps in understanding the body language well. Also, sitting against the window should be avoided as it blocks the light and the person appears darker. The attendees should also follow this, even if most of the time their webcam and mic is off.

4 Snacking or munching: Now this is a big NO for both sides. Not only munching, eating, or even chewing gums is distracting for



the audience as well as the presenter, it also indicates bad manners and indifferent attitude. The presenter can always keep a bottle or glass of water beside them and can also keep some candies handy to overcome the stage anxiety or nervousness. For longer sessions, the attendees also may consume water or light snacks if the need is, provided the video and audio are in off mode.

FOR PRESENTERS: IN ADDITION TO ABOVE-

1 Timely login: The presenters should acquaint themselves with the webinar platform that is being used for the session. It is advisable to log in at least 30 minutes prior to the scheduled

time. This leaves a margin to take up the tech issues beforehand that may arise during the live session. The external plugins like cameras and mics should be tested earlier. Browser settings, operating system, and Internet speed should be taken care of well before time.

2 Practice and rehearse: It requires a lot of effort before going live in front of an audience. Practice, practice and practice; is the key to overcome nervousness and stage fear. Features like screen sharing and slide presenting must be familiarised beforehand. Practicing the whole session in front of your family members or real audience is never a bad idea. Even the most skilled and

experienced speakers fail sometimes, if not rehearsed well.

3 Be professional in your conduct: Use appropriate posture while sitting and presenting. Slouching in the chair or sofa are signs of unprofessional behaviour. In case of unexpected issues like background noise or tech issues, stay calm and composed and look for the best solution. Use the chat box option, if available, to apprise the audience in case of any issue and engage the audience positively.

4 Talking and listening: It is better to wear a good quality noise-cancellation headset. Use the mute button, if not talking and nod your head often. Try to

look into the camera instead of reading from the slides throughout. Stop now and then, to allow the attendees to process and retain more information. Avoid overcrowding of information on one slide and use graphics whenever possible. Repeat the questions for all the viewers and answer the queries in a poised manner.

FOR ATTENDEES

1 Webcam and mic: Keep these in turn off mode and switch on only when asked by the presenter.

2 Avoid chatting: Chatbox option of the webinar platform should be used very sparingly as it becomes disruptive

for others. If there's a need for communicating with someone personally, text them individually or speak directly, and only after the webinar is over.

3 Wait for your turn: Look for cues and use chat box option to raise relevant queries when necessary.

Ask questions that are pertinent to the ongoing discussion and not just to tease or make fun of the presenter in any form.

Any kind of distraction is a deterrent to the success of any online communication. Following protocol and etiquette are imperative for learning and sharing the information for benefit of all, as it does in the real world.

Japan’s PM Abe resigns as coronavirus hits economy and endangers legacy

TOKYO: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan’s longest-serving premier, announced his resignation because of poor health on Friday, ending a stint at the helm of the world’s third-biggest economy in which he sought to revive growth and bolster its defences.

Abe has battled the disease ulcerative colitis for years and two recent hospital visits within a week had fanned questions on whether he could stay in the job until the end of his term as ruling party leader, and hence, premier, in September 2021.

“I cannot continue being prime minister if I do not have the confidence that I can carry out the job entrusted to me by the people,” Abe, 65, told a news conference as he announced his decision to step down.

He said he wanted to avoid a political vacuum as the country copes with the novel coronavirus.

“I apologise from the bottom of my heart that despite all of the support from the Japanese people, I am leaving the post with one full year left in my term,” Abe said, at times blinking back tears and his voice choking up.

It was the second time Abe has resigned as prime minister because of poor health.

As news of the resignation spread, Japan’s benchmark Nikkei average fell 2.12 per cent to 22,717.02, while the broader Topix shed 1.00 per cent to 1,599.70. The selling wiped \$47 billion off Tokyo’s \$5.7 trillion stock market value, which had more than doubled during Abe’s tenure.

The resignation will trigger a leadership race in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) — most likely in two or three weeks — and the winner must be formally elected in parliament. The new party

Shinzo Abe
Japan's longest-serving prime minister



Age: 65

1977
Graduated from Seikei University

1979-1982
Worked at Kobe Steel before turning to politics

1993
First time elected to parliament

2006-2007
First term as prime minister

Resigned citing health problems in part

Since 2012
Second term as PM

Aug 28, 2020
Announced resignation over health problems

- Born September 21, 1954 in Tokyo
- Son of a former foreign minister and grandson of a former PM
- Leader of Liberal Democratic Party

AFP Photo/Kazuhiko Nogi

leader will hold the post for the rest of Abe’s term. Former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba and former foreign minister Fumio Kishida both expressed interest in the top job, media reported. Among others whose names have been floated is Abe’s close aide, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga.

Whoever wins the party poll is likely to keep Abe’s reflationary “Abenomics” policies as Japan struggles with the impact of the novel coronavirus but may have trouble emulating the political longevity that may be Abe’s biggest legacy.

“The broad picture remains in tact. In terms of economic and fiscal policy, the focus remains very much on reflation,” said Jesper Koll, senior adviser to asset manager WisdomTree Investments.

“Longevity will be a struggle.” On Monday, Abe surpassed a record for longest consecutive tenure as premier set by his great-uncle Eisaku Sato half a century ago.

“As head of the ruling party he worked hard on Abenomics for eight years,” said Naohito Kojima, 55, a brokerage employee.

“There were various problems but if someone else had been leader, it’s questionable whether they could have maintained a stable government as long as Mr Abe. He did various diplomatic negotiations and I think the pros outweighed the cons.”

Abe won praise for reasserting Japan’s presence on the global stage after years of revolving-door premiers.

His resignation comes amid an uncertain geopolitical environment,

including an intensifying confrontation between the United States and China and ahead of the US presidential election in November.

FALLING SUPPORT
The conservative Abe returned as prime minister for a rare second term in December 2012, pledging to revive growth with his “Abenomics” mix of hyper-easy monetary policy, fiscal spending and reforms. He also pledged to beef up Japan’s defences and aimed to revise the pacifist constitution.

Abe was also instrumental in Japan’s successful bid to host the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, though they were delayed to next year because of the coronavirus.

Doubts persist as to whether the Games will go ahead then.

“We must fulfil our responsibility as the host country of the Olympics,” Abe told the news conference. “Of course, I believe my successor will work to host the Olympics under the same belief.”

Under fire for his handling of the coronavirus and scandals among party members, Abe has recently seen his support fall to one of the lowest levels of his nearly eight years in office.

Japan has not suffered the explosive surge in virus cases seen elsewhere — it has had nearly 67,000 cases and 1,255 deaths — but Abe drew fire for a clumsy early response and what critics saw as a lack of leadership as infections spread.

Japan’s economy suffered its biggest slump on record in the second quarter as the pandemic emptied shopping malls and slashed demand for cars and other exports, bolstering the case for bolder action to avert a deeper recession.

— Reuters

South Korea doctors’ strike escalates, Seoul imposes new rules

SEOUL: The South Korean government ramped up efforts to end a strike by thousands of the country’s doctors on Friday, as Seoul took the unprecedented step of restricting eateries in the capital in a bid to blunt a surge in coronavirus cases.

The Health Ministry extended a back-to-work order for doctors to the entire country and filed a complaint with police against at least 10 doctors it said have not abided by an order that has been in place in Seoul since Wednesday.

The escalation in the dispute between doctors and the government comes as South Korean officials grapple with a fresh wave of COVID-19 infections.

After aggressive tracing and testing contained a large outbreak earlier this year, the country suffered a setback this month when a church cluster spread to a political rally.

Officials reported 371 new infections as of midnight Thursday, bringing the country’s total to 19,077, including 316 deaths.

“To protect lives and safety of the citizens in a grave crisis of nationwide coronavirus transmission, the government inevitably expanded the back-to-work order for trainee and professional doctors today nationwide,” Health Minister Park Neung-hoo said.

Almost 16,000 intern and resident doctors have been on strike since August 21 over the government’s plans to boost the number of doctors in the country over the

coming decade, which it said is necessary to better prepare for public health crises.

The student doctors, however, argued that extra funding would be better spent improving the salaries of existing trainees, and addressing systemic issues.

“We strongly denounce the government for filing complaint for criminal charges within just a day for refusing to comply with the order,” Choi Dae-zip, president of the Korean Medical Association, said at a news conference in front of a Seoul police station.

Thousands of teaching hospital doctors, trainee doctors and private practice physicians began a three-day strike on Wednesday to express solidarity with the intern and resident doctors.

The intern and resident doctors form the backbone of healthcare services in key places such as emergency rooms and intensive care units, and major hospitals have reported delays and disruptions since the walkout. The striking doctors have volunteered their services at temporary testing centres to help with the outbreak.

Public opinion on the high profile strike and government response has been mixed according to recent polls. “I understand the doctors, too, but now is not the time,” Lim Soon-ja, 71, a thyroid cancer patient, said outside Seoul National University Hospital. “I wish they would express their opinions once the outbreak is settled.”

— Reuters

TRIAL OF STRENGTH



Anti-government protesters scuffle with police outside a police station in Bangkok on Friday as student leaders were summoned by the police following series of pro-democracy rallies. — AFP

Floods kill 23 in Karachi amid house collapses, power cuts

KARACHI: Pakistan’s flooded financial capital of Karachi was plunged into chaos on Friday with power cuts, streets under water and cellphone outages caused by heavy rain as authorities said at least 23 people had been killed in downpours the previous day.

Record torrential rainfall flooded major city streets and damaged homes and other buildings on Thursday, with more rain expected on Friday.

“At least 23 people, including women and children, died in different

accidents like wall and roof collapses and drownings,” Ghulam Nabi Memon, Karachi’s police chief, said.

The provincial government declared a public holiday to avoid residents having to commute on Friday with Chundrigar Road, home to the central bank, stock exchange and head offices of several banks, flooded.

The Chief Minister of Sindh province, Murad Ali Shah, ordered schools be used to accommodate displaced families, whose homes had been dam-

aged or were unreachable. Among the victims, nine people, including four children, were killed when a wall collapsed on them, a spokesman for Shah said. A 56-year-old disabled woman drowned at home, according to a hospital official. Cellphone services were disrupted and much of the city was plunged in darkness overnight with the main power utility company K-Electric saying the “unprecedented situation” was hampering efforts to restore electricity. — Reuters

Hundreds protest against exams in India as virus cases hit new peak

MUMBAI: Hundreds of masked protesters demonstrated in major Indian cities on Friday against a government plan to hold exams for millions of students during the coronavirus pandemic, as the daily tally of infections hit a record.

The health ministry reported 77,266 infections, taking the nation’s tally to 3.3 million, with a toll of 61,529 deaths. India, with the most infections in Asia, has posted the highest single-day increase worldwide every day since August 7.

“Stop the exam during the pandemic,” read one placard carried by protesters in the eastern city of Kolkata, while others scuffled briefly with police in the western industrial city of Ahmedabad.

More than 2.4 million students are set to take tests next week for admission to medical and engineering schools, which the federal government has declined to defer, despite growing pressure from students and opposition parties.

“It’s important that the government listens to students,” Rahul Gandhi, a leader of the opposition Congress party, said in a video on social media, as he urged no compromises on the safety of students.

Usually held in April and May,



Activists of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee take part in a demonstration demanding the government to postpone JEE and NEET exams over COVID-19 concerns, in Guwahati on Friday. — AFP

the exams have already been postponed twice this year.

But some students want another delay, for fear of rising infections as well as difficulty travelling to exam centres because of virus-linked curbs on transport and lockdowns in some places.

However, further delays risk costing students the academic year, Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal told the *Times of India* newspaper.

As infections unfurl outwards

from crowded cities into sprawling rural areas, health officials have launched the second round of a nationwide survey to assess the spread. It will screen for antibodies in 28,000 people across 70 districts, yielding results by late September, said Manoj Murhekar, director of the National Institute of Epidemiology.

“The survey will tell us what proportion of the rural population is also exposed to the virus,” he added. — Reuters

Egypt's mosques reopen for Friday prayers after five-month suspension



Worshippers, mask-clad and distanced from each other due to the coronavirus pandemic, perform the Friday prayers in the courtyard of the historic Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo. — AFP

CAIRO: Egypt's mosques on Friday reopened for the weekly congregation prayers, ending a five-month suspension prompted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Worshippers attended weekly prayers inside mosques in the country while observing strict health measures.

The faithful wore protective face masks and used personal rugs while maintaining social distancing.

The resumption of Friday prayers comes after Egypt has loosened virus-induced restrictions in recent weeks.

The government allowed daily prayers to begin again in mosques from June, but the larger Friday prayers remained suspended until now.

Authorities instructed mosque preachers that their pre-prayer sermons should be capped at a maximum length of 10 minutes.

In a televised sermon, Minister of Awqaf (Islamic endowments) Mohammed Mokhtar, prayed for an end to the pandemic.

"We pray to God to terminate epidemic in Egypt and all other countries and not to deprive us again of praying in His houses [of worship]," the official said inside a Cairo mosque.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country with over 100 million people, has so far reported more than 98,000 coronavirus infections and 5,342 related deaths. — dpa

New reckoning for WHO vaccine plan as governments go it alone

LONDON/BRUSSELS/GENEVA: The World Health Organization will next week receive a raft of pledges of support for its plan for COVID-19 vaccines for all.

But the agency has already had to scale back its ambition.

The United States, Japan, Britain and the European Union have struck their own deals to secure millions of COVID-19 vaccine doses for their citizens, ignoring the UN body's warnings that "vaccine nationalism" will squeeze supplies.

If other countries that can afford it pursue a similar approach, the WHO's strategy for fighting the coronavirus pandemic globally and equitably risks coming undone, experts warn.

"If that were to happen, it's fairly clear that there would be insufficient volumes of vaccine available for any other countries, particularly in the first six to nine months," said Alex Harris, head of global policy at the Wellcome Trust health charity.

Countries wishing to be part of the WHO initiative, dubbed COVAX, must submit expressions of interest by Monday.

More than 170 countries, including Canada, Norway, South Korea and Britain, have submitted non-binding expressions of interest to participate in the scheme, which the WHO has touted as the only global initiative to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available



An employee is seen at the Reference Center for Special Immunobiologicals (CRIE) of the Federal University of Sao Paulo (Unifesp) where the trials of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine are conducted, in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — Reuters

worldwide to rich and poor countries alike. It has signed up nine COVID-19 vaccine candidates and set out plans to obtain and deliver 2 billion doses by the end of 2021 across countries that sign up.

But it has struggled to get wealthier countries on board in full beyond pledges of funding and warm words about donating surplus vaccines.

Last week, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus criticised nations that hoard vaccines, warning the strategy will worsen

the pandemic. In a last-ditch call for support ahead of Monday's deadline, he wrote letters to members urging their participation.

The EU Commission is "fully committed" to the success of COVAX while it enters into parallel talks with vaccine manufacturers for supplies for the bloc, a spokeswoman said.

Britain said it was supporting COVAX to ensure equal access to vaccines, including funding, while doing its own bilateral supply deals.

White House did not

immediately comment on the situation. The United States did not participate in the launch of the programme in April or a fundraising event in May.

DEAL-MAKING

The EU's aggressive dealmaking for vaccine supplies and tepid statements about COVAX have in particular undermined the initiative, which is co-led by the WHO, the GAVI vaccines alliance and the CEPI Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

The European Commission is likely to pledge cash for COVAX but it is also securing its own supply deals for member states, deeming COVAX too slow and expensive.

Brussels has told countries they can help fund COVAX, but can't seek to buy vaccines via both schemes, a Commission spokesman said. Forced to choose, some countries have pulled out of COVAX entirely.

The Czech Republic and Portugal were listed as early backers, but government support appears to have cooled after joining the EU vaccine procurement programme.

Prague has opted for the EU programme instead.

Portugal has asked for an initial delivery of 6.9 million doses of vaccine when the EU programme becomes available, the government has said. — Reuters



Lebanese army soldiers patrol near burnt shops in the aftermath of clashes in Khaldeh, Lebanon, on Friday. — Reuters

Deadly firefight in Lebanon prompts warnings of trouble

KHALDEH: A deadly battle between Lebanese sections overnight prompted warnings of more violence as the country is pushed to breaking point by a financial meltdown and political tensions.

Two people — a 13-year-old Lebanese boy and a Syrian man — were killed in the Khaldeh area south of the capital in the shootout on Thursday night. Machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades were used in the fighting which witnesses said lasted four hours.

The Lebanese army, which was heavily deployed in the area on Friday, said the problem spiralled out of a row over a poster put up by a section of the people.

The violence triggered a flurry of contacts among Lebanese politicians seeking to contain tensions. The country is still grappling with the aftermath of the August 4 port blast which killed 180 people and the financial crisis seen as the biggest threat to stability since the 1975-90 civil war.

Men in face masks fired AK-47s in the air.

Divisions between Lebanese sections opened up after the 2005 assassination of Rafik al Hariri, the former prime minister.

A building set on fire during the fighting was still smouldering and its windows were peppered with bullet holes.

"We (will) take our rights with our

own hands," Riad Zaher, the tribe's leader, said. He expressed doubt the authorities would bring anyone to justice. "We know that the government will take them in one door and let them out the other," he said.

PM CHOICE

Meanwhile, Lebanon is to begin parliamentary consultations on the choice of a new prime minister on Monday, some three weeks after the government resigned over a deadly Beirut blast, the president's office said on Friday.

French President Emmanuel Macron is due to land in Lebanon the same day to hammer home the message of the need for change which he made on his last trip to the country on August 6, two days after the explosion that killed more than 180 people and disfigured the heart of the capital.

Representatives of the country's parliamentary blocs and independent lawmakers are to head to the presidential palace from Monday morning to announce who they would like to head a new government. No consensus has been reached so far on a candidate, and former prime minister Saad Hariri said this week he had no intention of returning to the post.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian warned on Thursday that Lebanon risked "disappearing" as a country if serious reforms were not undertaken. — Reuters/AFP

Merkel says pandemic to worsen in coming months

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned on Friday that the coronavirus pandemic would worsen in coming months, and that life would not return to normal until a vaccine against it had been developed.

Western Europe's longest serving leader also called on the world to accelerate the fight against global warming, and for Germany and Europe to maintain dialogue with



other major powers through difficult times while beating the drum for democracy.

But as Merkel makes preparations to step down before the next national election in October 2021, she made clear that she expects the pandemic to define her last year in office.

Urging citizens not to drop their guard against the virus as Germany's daily infection rate rises, she told a

news conference: "This is a serious matter, as serious as it's ever been, and you need to carry on taking it seriously."

Even though Germany would not fully repay debt incurred to fund relief measures offsetting the impact of COVID-19 until 2058, such stimulus was essential as the economy could not be allowed to grind to a halt, she said. — Reuters

What the conventions reveal for Biden and Trump

JAMES OLIPHANT

The back-to-back presidential nominating conventions that concluded with Donald Trump’s speech on Thursday showed both sides intend to fight for the sliver of independent and moderate voters that will decide the election, each with a wildly different strategy in the final sprint to November 3.

A self-styled showman, Trump used all of his reality-show talents during the Republican convention this week to try to win back supporters alienated by his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, with a dire warning of a lawless America if his Democratic rival Joe Biden takes power.

That illustrated the Republican strategy for the next two months: change the subject from a pandemic that has killed 180,000 Americans and shackled the US economy, and

blame Democrats for the violence on the streets.

Republicans largely abandoned talk of the health crisis as if it had abated, in favour of reminding voters of the robust economy that existed beforehand. During the Democratic convention the previous week, Biden put the focus on holding Trump accountable for his actions during the outbreak.

“These two conventions have offered very different pictures of reality, in terms of where our country is now and what our future may hold,” said Christopher Devine, an expert in US elections at the University of Dayton in Ohio.

Trump’s convention depicted the president as a champion of “law and order,” taking aim at voters who do not approve of his divisive and inflammatory rhetoric but may be jittery about months of protests over

racial injustice and police brutality that have sometimes turned violent.

“This is their attempt to nail down the base and mobilise them to get out and vote,” said Kathleen Dolan, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

“But I do think he is trying to peel away some of those undecided women, the people who he’s calling the ‘suburban women.’”

Biden holds a seven point lead over Trump nationally, about the same position he held before the conventions, according to the Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll conducted during August 19-25. But it showed the race for suburban voters narrowing, a worrying sign for the former vice-president who had previously expanded his lead with the crucial voting group.

Suburban women — a cohort considered key to the election —

have become less critical of Trump than they were in June, and Biden’s advantage with this group has narrowed to nine points in the latest poll, compared to a 15-point advantage over Trump in a similar Reuters/Ipsos poll in June.

The August poll also showed Biden with a 5-point lead with college-educated white Americans, compared with his 7-point lead in July and an 11-point advantage in June.

But in reaching out to suburban voters with unapologetic tough-on-crime messages, while showing little empathy for the protesters who demand racial justice, Trump may have further bolstered Black American support for Biden, already strong.

Trump’s message would have been more powerful before the pandemic, said Kyle Kondik, an analyst for the University of Virginia Center for

Politics. “It could be successful if COVID is not as much of a focus in the fall as it is now. That seems hard to imagine, but it’s possible,” he said.

PITCH TO THE MIDDLE

While lauding Trump at every turn, his convention was just as much about convincing wavering Republicans or undecided voters that Biden — who ran largely as a centrist candidate in the Democratic primary — would be beholden to the far-left elements of his party.

A bevy of speakers accused Biden of turning a blind eye to the crime and violence that have marred mostly peaceful protests over racial justice, sparked by the police killing in May of George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis. The latest police shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black man, in Kenosha, Wisconsin, led to a fresh wave of protests. — Reuters



Mexico’s President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador speaks during a news conference at the National Palace in Mexico City on June 30. – Reuters

Mexican president forges crucible for graft fight

DAVE GRAHAM

Gearing up for a key election next year, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has wielded corruption as both a stick with which to beat political adversaries, and a lightning rod to deflect criticism from his record in office.

Now, videos of his brother receiving cash from a political ally have cast doubt over Lopez Obrador’s upright image, undermining his argument that entrenched corruption has fed chronic gang violence and held back Mexico’s misfiring economy.

The coronavirus pandemic has plunged Mexico into its worst slump since the Great Depression, and the road to recovery looks long and hard with the central bank forecasting gross domestic product (GDP) could shrink by almost 13 per cent this year.

Firing up his base ahead of congressional elections next June by raking through allegations of graft by Mexico’s past leaders, Lopez Obrador has proposed twinning the vote with a referendum on whether to allow ex-presidents to be impeached.

“These are the two competing narratives: corruption versus economic crisis,” said Francisco Abundis, head of Mexican polling firm Parametria. “I think this is going to be what takes us into 2021. And I’m not sure which one will prevail.”

If Lopez Obrador loses the lower house of Congress, he may struggle to roll back the opening of the oil and gas market enacted by his predecessor, which he argues was mired in graft.

If Lopez Obrador loses the lower house of Congress, he may struggle to roll back the opening of the oil and gas market enacted by his predecessor, which he argues was mired in graft

To fend off that risk, he is using the trial of Emilio Lozoya, a former boss of state oil company Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) charged with bribery and money laundering, to air allegations against former presidents and their business allies.

Polls suggest voters want to see past leaders face justice for what Lopez Obrador casts as decades of rigging the economy in favour of private interests at the expense of the people.

The crusade against corruption has buttressed his approval ratings, which, while down from the peaks of his first few months, remain well above 50 per cent in most polls.

‘HYPOCRISY’

Nevertheless, his carefully cultivated persona as a scourge of corruption suffered a blow last week with the

publication of videos from 2015 showing one of his brothers receiving cash from a man who later served in Lopez Obrador’s government.

Though he ordered the two to be investigated, Lopez Obrador described the video leaks as an act of revenge by adversaries angered by his efforts to clean up government.

Portraying the cash as grass-roots donations to his cause of social transformation, Lopez Obrador said the incident was incomparable to the scale of corruption he was tackling.

That explanation was not good enough for Adrian Gonzalez, a Mexico City lawyer who said he felt “betrayed” after voting for Lopez Obrador in 2018 and would not be doing so again.

“It’s hypocrisy,” the 34-year-old said. “If you’re going to tackle corruption, you need to set an example.”

Although it is gaining in importance, graft is not even the main worry of many voters. A Parametria poll in late July said 43 per cent of respondents saw the economy as Mexico’s biggest problem, versus 16 per cent who chose corruption.

Lopez Obrador’s threats to tear up business contracts awarded by past governments have helped to crimp investment from companies that could lift the economy, contributing to a recession even before the pandemic began. Opposition politicians are pitching themselves as a more modern alternative to Lopez Obrador’s economic agenda, which has sought to reassert state control of key areas like energy.

— Reuters

New Amazon health wristband gauges happiness

Amazon on Thursday unveiled a wristband that goes beyond simply tracking activity to gauging how happy a person is by the sound of their voice.

Amazon Halo combines data gathered by a sensor-packed wristband with artificial intelligence tools to provide wearers with feedback regarding their physical and mental health, the Internet titan said.

“Despite the rise in digital health services and devices over the last decade, we have not seen a corresponding improvement in population health in the US,” Amazon Halo’s principal medical officer Dr Maulik Majmudar said in a release.

“We are using Amazon’s deep expertise in artificial intelligence and machine learning to offer customers a new way to discover, adopt, and maintain personalised wellness habits.”

People in the US were invited to request early access to Amazon Halo, which was priced at \$65 and included six months’ membership access to AI-powered analytics.

Monthly cost of membership after that will be \$4, according to the Seattle-based company.

Amazon Halo takes on Apple Watch and Fitbit wristwear that provide people with insights about activity levels, sleep patterns and more that could be used to make healthy lifestyle decisions.

Halo can discern intensity of activity, distinguishing walking from running, and reliably assess a wearer’s level of body fat, according to Amazon.

With the help of microphones in the wristbands, a Tone feature is designed to analyse “the positivity and energy” in someone’s voice to assess how happy, sad, tired or excited they sound, the company said.

“You might see that in the morning you sounded calm, delighted, and warm,” Majmudar said.

“Tone results may reveal that a difficult work call led to less positivity in family discussions, an indication of the impact of stress on social well-being.”

To protect privacy, speech samples are analysed on a wearer’s smartphone — which syncs to their Halo wristband — and then deleted after the process, Majmudar said.

People can turn off Halo microphones by pressing a button on the wristband, he added.

Amazon Halo apps have been tailored for smartphones powered by Apple and Google-backed Android software, according to Amazon.

— AFP

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Indian rupee hits over 5-month high on dollar inflows

MUMBAI: The Indian rupee strengthened to its highest level in nearly six months on Friday morning, helped by foreign inflows into the equity markets and amid a noticeable absence of any dollar buying by the central bank.

The partially convertible rupee rose to a high of 73.28 per dollar, its strongest since March 5. It was trading at 73.34/35 at 0645 GMT compared to its close of 73.83 on Thursday.

"It's difficult to say if Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is totally missing today but clearly they are not defending a level any more. We could see a breach of 73 next week if we close below 73.50," a senior trader at a private bank said.

The RBI has been regularly seen buying dollars via state-run banks to prevent a sharp appreciation in the local unit which had kept the currency in a tight range.

The intervention, however, seems to have eased over this week and has triggered a rally in the rupee. Dollar inflows into the stock market and gains in other Asian peers have also aided.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have bought \$6.2 billion worth of shares so far in August and the US Federal Reserve's recent policy shift could further boost inflows, said traders.

The US Federal Reserve on Thursday rolled out a sweeping rewrite of its approach to its role of achieving maximum employment and stable prices and promised to aim for 2 per cent inflation on average, suggesting interest rates may stay near zero for much longer than anticipated.

The RBI is however expected to keep intervening intermittently and continue building its forex reserves, which are up \$60 billion at \$535.35 billion so far this fiscal year. — **Reuters**

\$400m contract awarded for Oman's first bitumen refinery project

VITAL VENTURE: THE PROJECT'S STRATEGIC NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE LIES IN THE FACT THAT WHEN FULLY OPERATIONAL BY 2023, IT WILL GO A LONG WAY IN ALLEVIATING OMAN'S LONGSTANDING DEPENDENCE ON BITUMEN IMPORTS FOR ROAD PAVING AND RELATED APPLICATIONS

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 28

Marking a key milestone in the implementation of a long-awaited and strategically vital project, an Oman-based company has signed a contract with a well-known Chinese engineering contracting firm for the construction of the Sultanate's first bitumen refinery with an investment of over \$400 million.

Muscat-registered Sohar Asphalt LLC has tapped the China Chemical Hualu Engineering Company for the execution of the bitumen plant at Sohar Industrial Port. An engineering-procurement-construction (EPC) contract, valued at \$408 million, was signed by the two sides in a virtual setting late last week, it is learnt.

Sohar Asphalt LLC was established in 2015 to set up a 30,000 barrels per stream day (BPSD) capacity bitumen refinery designed to process heavy crude into bitumen as the main product, as well as atmospheric and vacuum distillates as byproducts. Annual production is estimated at one million tons of bitumen and 600,000 tonnes of naphtha, straight-run distillates and vacuum gas oil (VGO).

The project's strategic national significance lies in the fact that when fully operational by 2023, it will go a long way in alleviating Oman's longstanding dependence on bitumen imports for road paving and related applications.

A 27-hectare site has already been earmarked for the project adjoining the Sohar Refinery of OQ — the Sultanate's integrated energy company — at Sohar Port.



Representatives from Sohar Asphalt LLC and the Chinese contractor signing the EPC agreement in a virtual setting last week.

Heavy crude as raw material for the bitumen refinery will be sourced from a number of international producers, including from Central and South American producers

Heavy crude as raw material for the bitumen refinery will be sourced from a number of international



producers, including from Central and South American producers.

The feedstock will be shipped by crude carriers to the Port of Sohar and stored at the Liquid Terminal operated by Oiltanking Odjell Tank Terminal (OOTT) at the port. Dedicated storage facilities will also be constructed at the site of the bitumen refinery.

Importantly, the project's output of straight-run bitumen, which is primarily used in road paving, will be exported to a number of markets in the Gulf and the Indian-continent. The Omani market is expected to be an important consumer as well.

US Federal Reserve to target 2 per cent average inflation

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve rolled out an aggressive new strategy to restore the United States to full employment and lift inflation back to healthier levels in a world where weak inflation, low interest rates, and slow growth appear here to stay.

Under the new approach, laid out in a fresh statement on the Fed's longer-run goals and monetary policy strategy approved by all 17 of its policymakers, the US central bank will seek to achieve inflation averaging 2 per cent over time, offsetting below-2 per cent periods with higher inflation "for some time."

The new statement also pledges to make sure employment doesn't fall short of a "broad-based and inclusive goal" of maximum employment, a nod to racial equity and its role in promoting economic growth.



Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell holds a press in Washington, in this file photo. — **Reuters**

The changes also acknowledge, the Fed said, that "downward risks to employment and inflation have increased," and include a new promise to use the central bank's "full range of tools" to achieve its goals of stable prices and a strong labour market.

"Our revised statement reflects our appreciation for the benefits of a strong labour market, particularly for many in low- and moderate-income communities, and that a robust job market can be sustained without causing an unwelcome increase in inflation," Fed Chair

It is hard to overstate the benefits of sustaining a strong labour market, a key national goal that will require a range of policies in addition to supportive monetary policy

JEROME POWELL,
US FED CHAIRMAN

Jerome Powell said in a speech explaining the changes.

"It is hard to overstate the benefits of sustaining a strong labour market, a key national goal that will require a range of policies in addition to supportive monetary policy," he said.

With tens of millions of people out of work because of fallout from the pandemic, the US economy in a deep economic crisis and just months before Americans vote in a contentious election, the Fed's new approach is both an acknowledgment of fundamental changes in the economy that began well before the coronavirus pandemic, and a map for how the Fed plans to conduct policy in a world where weak growth, low inflation and low interest rates are seen as here to stay.

The Fed's transformation of the way it manages monetary policy

could result in it keeping rates lower for longer than previously expected, although the Fed made no explicit promises on that front. Indeed, Powell said the Fed's new approach to inflation would not be dictated by an explicit mathematical formula.

As Powell spoke, Treasury yields fell, with the benchmark 10 year last at 0.6607 per cent and the 30-year last at 1.3763. US stocks were trading mostly higher and the dollar edged up against a basket of currencies.

Powell was addressing the Fed's symposium, usually held in the mountain resort of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, but is being conducted virtually this year because of the pandemic. After this week's event and the mid-September policy meeting, Fed officials will not meet again until the day after the election. — **Reuters**

Argentina's day of reckoning arrives as creditors decide on \$65 bn debt deal

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's day of reckoning has arrived. After four months of tense debt talks, multiple pushed deadlines and amendments since an initial low-ball offer in April, bondholders will decide on Friday whether to accept the country's \$65 billion restructuring proposal.

The main three creditor committees holding a large chunk of the bonds backed a deal earlier this month, bolstering confidence that the government will get the required level of support to allow a full deal to go ahead without holdouts.

A deal is key to pulling Argentina out of default and reviving the country already in its third straight year of recession as economy Minister Martín Guzmán turns his attention to the next step: renegotiating a failed \$57 billion deal with the International Monetary Fund.

"After circling around each other for the better part of 2020, we have finally reached 'D-Day,'" said Patrick Esteruelas, head of research for Emso Asset Management in New York.

He added it was "highly unlikely" that legal thresholds on the bonds needed for a deal would not be reached. Collective action clauses mean the government needs holders of between 66.67 per cent-85 per cent of eligible bonds depending on the bond series.

The restructuring invitation expires at 5 pm Eastern Time (2100 GMT) unless further extended. The new bonds are scheduled to be issued on September 4 if a deal is struck.

Argentina's government made a breakthrough with its main creditor groups — the Ad Hoc Group, Argentina Creditor Committee and the Exchange Bondholder Group — on August 4, when all three agreed to support an amended offer.

The bonds include so-called "Exchange" bonds, involved in a previous restructuring, and which have tougher legal clauses. The other "Macri" bonds were issued during the previous administration of conservative President Mauricio Macri.

Argentina needs support from holders of 85 per cent of the Exchange bonds, and between 66.67 per cent-75 per cent on the Macri bonds, though individual bond series can have lower levels of support. — **Reuters**



A man shows Argentine pesos outside a bank in Buenos Aires' financial district, Argentina. — **Reuters**

Abenomics fails to deliver as Japan braces for post-Abe era

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's signature shock-and-awe 'Abenomics' stimulus strategy was already faltering even before his decision on Friday to step down due to health reasons.

That blunt assessment by many Japan observers underlined the daunting political challenge Abe has faced in his efforts to pull the economy out of decades of economic stagnation.

And the coronavirus crisis may have just put the final nail in the coffin to his 'three arrows' reform programme as the economy sinks deeper into recession, analysts say.

After sweeping to power in late 2012, Abe deployed his three arrows of Abenomics — large-scale monetary easing, fiscal spending and structural reforms — to reignite the world's third biggest economy after years of subpar growth and falling prices.

There were some quick-hit successes.

The Bank of Japan's "bazooka" stimulus programme lifted business sentiment and helped weaken the yen, giving exporters windfall profits that trickled down to wages and new jobs.

Corporate governance reforms drew in huge amounts of overseas money, pushing up foreign ownership of Japan's listed stocks to a record 31.7 per cent in 2014 from 28 per cent in 2012. It stood at 29.6 per cent in 2019.

"We were able to end 20 years of deflation with the three arrows of Abenomics," the prime minister told a news conference on Friday announcing his resignation, when asked what he thought were his legacies.

But Abe will leave behind a pile of unfinished business for his successor.

"The focus at the moment will be on the coronavirus recovery and controlling the infection, regardless of who will be the next prime minister," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

"There has been talk that Abenomics has been having a harmful impact, so I think the focal point will be on suggestions how to make changes to it."

The biggest disappointment for the prime minister, and many Japan observers, is that the third-arrow reforms to reshape an economy hobbled by low



Birds fly in front of Mt. Fuji and a crane at a port in Tokyo, Japan, in this file photo.

— **Reuters**



“

We were able to end 20 years of deflation with the three arrows of Abenomics.

SHINZO ABE
PRIME MINISTER

productivity, a rapidly ageing population and a rigid labour market, have proved elusive.

"Abenomics has singularly failed to deliver Japan the domestic conditions that would spark higher growth beyond more reliance on external demand," said Brian Kelly, Managing Partner at Asian Century Quest.

Now, Japan is paying the price as COVID-19 wipes out the short-term benefits brought by Abenomics, such as an inbound tourism boom, reflat growth and rising job availability.

Abe's failure to entice companies to spend more on capital expenditure has given Japan Inc a huge cash-pile that served as a liquidity buffer to weather the pandemic's shock.

But the experience may give firms an excuse to keep hoarding cash rather than spend on new business opportunities, which could stifle innovation and weigh on Japan's potential growth — factors Abe was focused on addressing through the third arrow.

"COVID-19 may have reassured

corporate executives that cash is indeed king," said Hideo Hayakawa, a senior fellow at the Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research. "My fear is that companies may feel even more inclined to save rather than spend."

Social distancing policies and other business constraints to contain the virus may cripple potential growth — already low due to slow progress in deregulating highly-protected medical and agriculture industries, and accepting more foreign workers to address chronic labour shortages.

Japan's potential growth rate, which used to exceed 4 per cent in the 1980s, slid near zero last year from around 1 per cent before Abenomics began, according to BoJ estimates.

"Structural reform, or the third arrow, has been the declaring failure of Abenomics," said Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. "Even the government's signature immigration reform last year was much ado about nothing, in practice." — **Reuters**

Musk confirms Tesla factory was target of cyberattack

NEVADA: Elon Musk said on Thursday that Tesla Inc's factory in Nevada was a target of a "serious" cybersecurity attack, confirming a media report that claimed an employee of the company helped the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) thwart the attack.

News website Teslarati said that the electric carmaker was the unnamed company in a statement issued by the US Department of Justice on Tuesday about a Russian

national's arrest, in connection with a planned attack on an unidentified company. "This was a serious attack," Musk said in a tweet, in response to the Teslarati article.

The Justice Department said that Egor Igorevich Kriuchkov was arrested and charged with conspiracy to intentionally cause damage to a protected computer by trying to recruit an employee to introduce a malware into a system. The malware was aimed at extracting data

from the network and then to threaten the company for ransom money, the statement said.

According to the Justice Department, Kriuchkov had promised the employee an incentive of \$1 million upon introducing the malware into the system. But the employee alerted the FBI, who were successful in thwarting the attack, a complaint filed by the FBI's Las Vegas Field Office showed. — **Reuters**

DEBT

RESTRUCTURING

Distressed funds eye EU firms as virus support schemes ease

LONDON: Funds which buy debt companies are no longer able to repay are getting ready to deploy their large cash piles in Europe, betting the easing of widespread government economic support schemes will lead to a pick-up in corporate restructurings.

Central bank bond buying along with fiscal support and markets receptive to capital hikes has meant the number of large companies forced to restructure their debt has been relatively low this year despite the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Swissport last week became the first high-profile distressed investment in Europe since the virus took hold, with a consortium of funds led by Apollo Global



Swissport last week became the first high-profile distressed investment in Europe since the virus took hold. — **Reuters**

It's not just companies in the travel, aviation and retail sectors which are expected to need funds to help them through a painful period of low growth. Oil and gas companies are also struggling with debt.

Management moving in.

The deal is likely to be the first in a string of major restructurings in Europe slated for this autumn, lawyers and distressed investors said.

"We expect a pick up in distressed trades as companies that need to restructure come to the market," said Eric Larsson, a portfolio manager for special situations funds at Alcentra, part of BNY Mellon. "Half-a-dozen high profile high-yield and

leverage loan deals (are likely) to emerge," he added.

It's not just companies in the travel, aviation and retail sectors which are expected to need funds to help them through a painful period of low growth. Oil and gas companies — including Britain's Premier Oil which recently announced a \$530 million debt restructuring — are also struggling with debt.

Dutch retailer Hema is set to

be taken over by its bondholders through a debt-for-equity swap here while Spanish paper producer Lecta Group, already in the hands of bondholders, is still working on a recapitalisation, banking sources said.

Distressed funds have been raising capital in recent years in anticipation of an economic downturn at the end of a long economic cycle. So-called "dry powder" at these funds stood at a record \$84.9 billion globally in August, data from Preqin shows.

As the pandemic triggered the downturn, many distressed investors stepped up their fund-raising efforts. Preqin shows \$9.6 billion raised in the second quarter, the highest in two years. — **Reuters**

MATSUYAMA GRABS LEAD WITH STUNNING LATE BIRDIES

WASHINGTON: Hideki Matsuyama birdied two of the last three holes, including a spectacular closing 67-foot putt, to seize the lead after Thursday's first round of the PGA's BMW Championship.

The 28-year-old Japanese star, seeking his first US PGA victory since the 2017 WGC Bridgestone Invitational, fired a three-under par 67 in windy conditions at Olympia Fields.

That gave him a one-stroke lead over American Tyler Duncan and a two-shot edge on Canada's Mackenzie Hughes, the only other players to break par in the US PGA Tour play-off event.

"I'm not sure really what I had going today," Matsuyama said. "But that last putt, that long putt that went in, very happy with that one, so we'll remember that one."

The top 30 players in FedEx Cup points after the BMW advance to next week's Tour Championship at East Lake in Atlanta, with Duncan and Hughes needing to move up to reach the season finale.

The suburban Chicago layout, host course for the 2003 US Open, imposed the highest scoring average of any 2019-20 PGA opening round, more than 2.5 strokes over par.

Matsuyama opened bogey-birdie-bogey on the back nine, added a birdie at 14 but another bogey at 18, but his fortunes changed on the front side.

Matsuyama tapped in for birdie at the par-5 first, sank an 11-footer for birdie at the second, dropped in a 21-foot birdie putt at the seventh and seized the lead with a stunner at the ninth.

"I made some mistakes early but I was able to come back and play good golf toward the end, so it was a good day," Matsuyama said.

"Greens were firm and playing really tough. There's some water holes that you've got to avoid, but all in all, I played good and was able to stay out of trouble."

Duncan, who sank two birdies from inside six feet to begin his round, answered his lone bogey at 12 with a 13-foot birdie putt at 14. He made all 16 putts he had inside 10 feet.

"It was a grind," Duncan said. "I drove it well and scrambled well and those were the two biggest factors I thought it

was going to take to do well this week.

"It's firm and fast and the rough is long. It's all you want."

Hughes opened with a 32-foot birdie putt at the 10th hole, sank a 22-footer at one to start his back nine and dropped in a four-foot birdie at the third, but followed it with back-to-back bogeys.

"The course wasn't giving up a lot of birdies," Hughes said. "You had to be patient and accept you were going to make birdies here and there. It was a great test."

LATE BOGEYS FOIL TIGER

Tiger Woods ranks 57th in points, needing a top-six finish to have a chance at reaching Atlanta, but the 15-time major winner closed with three consecutive bogeys to shoot 73.

Woods, who began on the back nine, took a bogey at the 11th but answered by rolling in a 28-foot birdie putt at 14. He missed a par putt from just inside five feet at the par-3 16th but pulled level again on a seven-foot par putt at the par-4 second.

Reigning Masters champion Woods, who found only six of 14 fairways, rescued par from eight feet at the third hole, just under five feet on the fourth and from six feet on the fifth to stay two off the lead.

But he came up nine feet short from 35 feet out of greenside rough at the par-4 seventh and missed his par putt to fall from a share of eighth, then missed a four-footer to bogey the par-3 eighth and found a fairway bunker on his way to a bogey at nine.

"Not the way I wanted to finish," Woods said. "But the golf course is playing difficult for sure." — AFP

BMW CHAMPIONSHIP FIRST-ROUND SCORES (USA unless noted, par 70):

67 - Hideki Matsuyama (JPN)
68 - Tyler Duncan
69 - Mackenzie Hughes (CAN)
70 - Harry Higgs, Tony Finau, Billy Horschel, Lanto Griffin, Sebastian Munoz (COL), Matthew Fitzpatrick (ENG), Carlos Ortiz (MEX), Mark Hubbard, Rory McIlroy (NIR), Abraham Ancer (MEX)
71 - Ryan Palmer, Dustin Johnson, Jim Herman, Joel Dahmen, Tom Hoge, Patrick Cantlay, Viktor Hovland (NOR)
72 - Brendan Steele, Brian Harman, Alex Noren (SWE), Adam Long, Joaquin Niemann (CHI), Kevin Na, Dylan Frittelli (RSA), Bubba Watson, JT Poston, Adam Scott (AUS), Matthew Wolff, Kevin Kisner, Michael Thompson, Louis Oosthuizen (RSA)



Hideki Matsuyama reacts after making a long birdie putt on the 9th hole to take the lead at 3 under par during the first round of the BMW Championship.
— USA Today Sports

LPGA returns with 54-hole event, Park misses out

WASHINGTON: Seven of the world's top-10 players will tee off in Friday's first round of the LPGA's Northwest Arkansas Championship, but reigning champion C won't be among them.

The world number three from South Korea remains self-quarantined in her homeland due to the COVID-19 pandemic that halted the LPGA season until last month and disrupted the schedule.

"As the unexpected COVID-19 turned into a prolonged pandemic, it is certainly regrettable that I cannot attend games and show my support by participating," Park said in a posting on the LPGA website.

"As an athlete though, I was grateful to have heard the news of peoples' plans to continue the event despite the many hurdles that might arise."

There will be no spectators for this week's event at Pinnacle Country Club in Rogers, Arkansas, and players will be tested as part of



Park Sung-hyun

COVID-19 safety measures allowing the LPGA season to resume.

It's the last tune-up for the year's second major, the ANA Inspiration

at Rancho Mirage, California, on September 10-13. The tour is back on US soil after Germany's Sophia Popov won the year's first major at

the Women's British Open last week.

Park captured her seventh career LPGA victory last year at Pinnacle, edging Kim Hyo-joo, Park In-bee

and Danielle Kang by a stroke.

World number two Kang has already won twice this year, taking the Drive On Championship and

Marathon Classic earlier this month in the tour's return events after shutting down for 166 days following only four events.

Eighth-ranked Park In-bee had been in South Korea due to the pandemic until going to Scotland last week, where she finished fourth at Royal Troon.

"I was a little bit worried taking six months off," she said. "Am I going to have my putting feel back? Yeah, there was a little bit of that worry. After playing in Scotland, it gave me definitely a little bit of confidence."

The aftermath of Hurricane Laura was set to dump heavy rain on the area, setting up soft conditions for the event.

"I think greens are going to be soft and you're going to have to hit into some pins really high and attack the pins," Park In-bee said.

"I think this week will be you have to try to definitely go for birdies, whether it is rainy conditions or not."

— AFP



Jurgen Klopp

KLOPP RULES OUT MESSI MOVE TO LIVERPOOL

LONDON: Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp says he would be interested in adding Barcelona captain Lionel Messi to his Premier League-winning squad but there is no chance it would happen because of the astronomical amount of money involved.

Messi stunned world soccer earlier this week when he expressed his desire to leave Barcelona after nearly two decades with the Catalan club. When asked if he would like to bring the Argentine forward to Anfield, Klopp said: "Interest? Yeah, who doesn't want Messi in their team. The numbers are absolutely not for us. We don't even start thinking about it. No chance! But... good player."

A study by French newspaper *L'Equipe* earlier this year said Messi earns 8.2 million euros per month from Barca, way more than Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo and Paris St Germain striker Neymar, who earn 4.5 million and 3 million respectively.

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City, who finished 18 points behind champions Liverpool last season, appear to be the favourites to sign the six-time world player of the year who has won every major title with Barcelona.

Some of Messi's best moments on the Camp Nou pitch came under the guidance of former Barca coach Guardiola.

"It would make it even more difficult to beat them (City) which was already very difficult," Klopp told a news conference ahead of Saturday's Community Shield clash with FA Cup winners Arsenal at Wembley.

"For the Premier League, it would be great having the best player in the world in the league. I'm not sure the Premier League needs a boost but it would be.

"It would be interesting too because Messi has never played in another league apart from Spain. I would like to see it but I'm not sure if I will."

Both sets of players will take



a knee at Wembley in support of the Black Lives matter campaign which has again been in the news after the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin on Sunday — an incident that has provoked widespread protests in sports across the US.

"I've followed it in America, racism, Black Lives Matter, all these things, dealing with it all will stay with us for a long time," Klopp said. "As long as people don't really get or understand it, we have to mention equality."

Klopp confirmed centre back Virgil van Dijk is fit to face Arsenal after recovering from a head injury

sustained during Liverpool's pre-season friendly with RB Salzburg.

"He looks not good because he has the cut there, but apart from that it should be fine," Klopp added.

Jordan Henderson is also set to play but Trent Alexander-Arnold may miss out because of injury. "Trent's very close but we have to make a decision about him tomorrow," Klopp said.

With the transfer window open until October, Klopp said Liverpool would "look constantly for improvement" but is satisfied with the size of his squad. "We will see how much we can and want to spend," he said. — Reuters

Birthday boy Bottas fastest in opening Belgian practice



SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS: Valtteri Bottas set the pace ahead of Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton in Friday's opening practice session for the Belgian Formula One Grand Prix.

The Finn, who turned 31 on Friday, lapped the seven km Spa-Francorchamps track in one minute 44.493 seconds, beating Hamilton by just 0.069 seconds on a cool and cloudy morning.

Max Verstappen was best of the rest again in third for Red Bull.

The Dutchman, who has a Belgian mother and is missing the support of his army of orange-clad supporters who usually throng the

grandstands at Spa, was hot on the Mercedes pair's heels, ending the session just 0.081 seconds off the pace.

Hamilton, winner of four of this season's six races and currently in the form of his life, leads the overall standings by 37 points from Verstappen.

Bottas, who won the season-opening Austrian Grand Prix in July, is third 43 points behind his team-mate.

With 11 of this season's 17 races still to run, he needs to start turning the tide if he is to have any hope of denying Hamilton a record-equaling seventh title at the end of the



Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas during practice at Belgian Grand Prix at Spa-Francorchamps, Spa, Belgium. — Reuters

year. Sergio Perez was fourth in his Mercedes-inspired Racing Point ahead of Canadian team-mate Lance Stroll.

Alexander Albon, who drove his first race for Red Bull at Spa last year after moving up from junior team Toro Rosso now rebranded Alpha Tauri, was sixth.

Esteban Ocon, who made his Formula One debut in Belgium

in 2016, was seventh for Renault ahead of McLaren's Carlos Sainz.

Daniel Ricciardo was ninth in the other Renault with Briton Lando Norris rounding out the top-10 for McLaren.

Ferrari, winners for the last two years in Belgium, continued to struggle.

Charles Leclerc, who took his maiden Formula One win at the

Spa circuit last year, was only 14th ahead of departing four-time champion Sebastian Vettel in 15th.

The session was largely uneventful.

All cars carried special stickers in memory of Frenchman Anthoine Hubert, who suffered fatal injuries in a Formula Two race on the Saturday of the Belgian Grand Prix weekend last year.

Power unit issues sidelined both Haas cars. Technical issues limited Alfa Romeo's Antonio Giovinazzi to just two laps.

Bottas suffered a late-session puncture but returned to the pits without incident. When informed about it on the radio he quipped: "I'm getting used to these punctures, I had a puncture last weekend in my road car." — Reuters

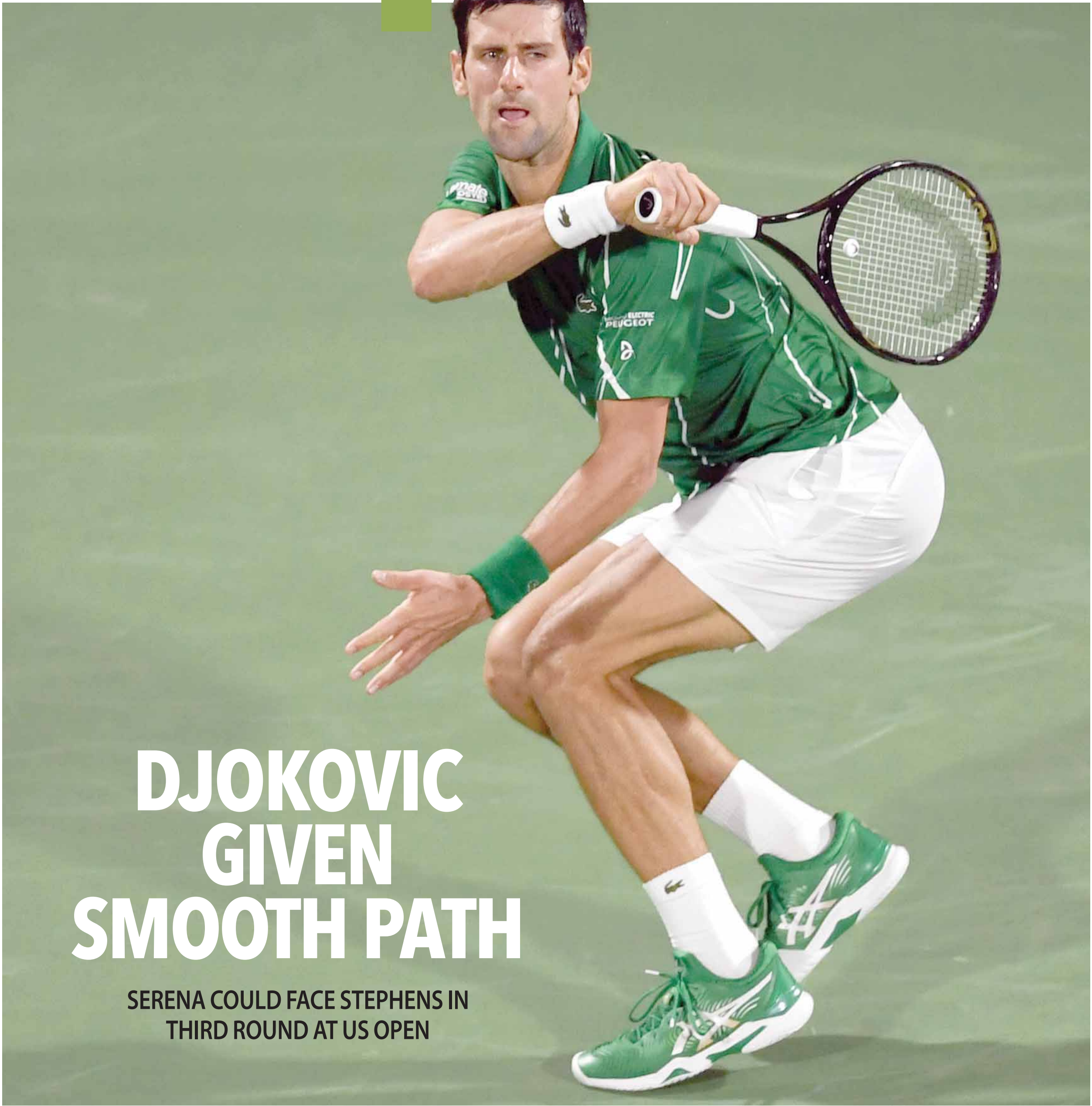


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DJOKOVIC GIVEN SMOOTH PATH

SERENA COULD FACE STEPHENS IN
THIRD ROUND AT US OPEN



NEW YORK: Top seed Novak Djokovic was handed a comfortable-looking draw on Thursday as he bids for a fourth US Open title but Serena Williams could face danger early on as the American prepares for another attempt to win a 24th major singles crown.

World number one Djokovic will play Bosnia's Damir Dzumhur in his opening match at Flushing Meadows which will be held without fans this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The earliest seed he could meet would be a possible third-round clash with number 28 Jan-Lennard Struff who he beat easily at the Western & Southern Open in New York this week.

Dominic Thiem, seeded two in the absence of reigning champion Rafael Nadal, opens against Spaniard Jaume Munar.

Williams, seeded three, plays compatriot Kristie Ahn in round one but a meeting with 2017 US Open champion Sloane Stephens, seeded 26th, is likely in round three.

Williams, bidding to win her

home slam for a seventh time, is also chasing a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title having lost her last four major finals, including the past two years in New York.

Serbian Djokovic, who tested positive for COVID-19 after an exhibition event he organised in Croatia this year, is seeking an 18th Grand Slam title which would leave him just one behind Nadal and two short of Roger Federer who is out injured.

The highest seed he could face before the quarterfinals is number 16 John Isner in round four.

Djokovic has a perfect record this year, winning all 21 matches he has played.

Last year's runner-up Daniil Medvedev is seeded third and plays Argentina's Federico Delbonis in round one.

Fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas is up against Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas in round one but another young gun, fifth seed Alexander Zverev, has been handed a tough first hurdle with a match-up against big-serving Kevin Anderson who

reached the final in 2017 and the Wimbledon final in 2018.

Former champion Andy Murray, given a wildcard as he continues to climb back from two hip surgeries, will face Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in his first Grand Slam singles match since the 2019 Australian Open.

With six of the women's top 10 skipping the tournament, the Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova is top seed and she begins her quest for her first Grand Slam title against Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina.

Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin is seeded second and faces a tricky start against Belgium's Yanina Wickmayer.

Serena's unseeded sister Venus, playing in her 22nd US Open at the age of 40, takes on 20th seed Karolina Muchova.

Former champion Naomi Osaka, who led a protest against racial injustice this week, plays fellow Japanese Misaki Doi.

Wildcard Kim Clijsters, who made a second comeback from retirement this year, plays 21st seed Ekaterina Alexandrova. — **Reuters**