

P8

MERKEL SEEKS TOUGHER CURBS TO FIGHT VIRUS SURGE



P12

RONALDO, JOHNSON TEST POSITIVE AS CORONAVIRUS SURGE HITS SPORT



P15

APPLE UNVEILS IPHONE 12 WITH 5G

iPhone 12



Oman 2nd in Arab world in Digital Access Pass Index

ATLANTA: The Sultanate took second place among Arab countries in the assessment of Digital Access Pass Index 2020, issued by the Atlanta-based Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication.

The Sultanate ranked third regionally (in the Middle East and North Africa region) and 16th internationally in the index in which Qatar took the lead by gaining 65.5 points.



The index listed the countries that strive to provide global standards for activists in empowering the disabled to assess and the progress these countries make and opportunities for the disabled to have digital access.

The report commended governments of world countries for publishing laws, policies and regulations that guarantee the disabled's right to digital access and total ICT services.

The report noted the persisting gap in levels of ability to execute procedures and the results received from ICT domains in the index this year. The report urges all stakeholders to increase investment in enhancing global and multilateral cooperation to ensure the disabled's access in light of relevant international conventions and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

— ONA

Oman facilitates release of Americans in Yemen

MUSCAT: In implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to help release a number of American citizens held in Yemen and, in pursuance of humanitarian and political endeavours, the departments concerned in the Sultanate contacted the authorities in Sanaa which, thankfully, responded to the Sultanate's request

and agreed to release the American citizens, who were later transported to the Sultanate on board Royal Air Force of Oman aircrafts in preparation for their return home.

The two flights operated to Sanaa also returned 250 Yemeni citizens who were receiving medical treatment in the Sultanate and abroad. — ONA

WORLD

Trump, Biden plan duelling town halls

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump and White House challenger Joe Biden will duel for airtime in rival televised town hall events on Thursday night, after their second head-to-head debate was scrapped following the president's COVID-19 diagnosis. Trump set up the scheduling clash by organising his own town hall on NBC at the same time as Biden had arranged his event on ABC. **SEE ALSO P8**

INSIDE



ARDERN SET TO WIN IN NEW ZEALAND'S 'COVID ELECTION' **P7**



AFGHANS FEAR MILITANTS' RETURN AFTER US FORCES EXIT **P9**

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 33°C
MIN: 22°C

SALALAH
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 24°C

NIZWA
MAX: 34°C
MIN: 22°C

SUNRISE 06.04 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:49

DHUHR: 11:58

ASR: 15:18

MAGHRIB: 17:46

ISHA: 18:56



SDGs INTEGRAL PART OF OMAN VISION-2040

SULTANATE COMMITTED TO UN SUSTAINABLE GOALS

NEW YORK: The Sultanate affirmed, in a speech before the Second Committee of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, that it has established an integrated system for monitoring and evaluating the indicators of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and a methodology for measuring progress in achieving the goals of sustainable development 2030.

The speech was delivered via videoconferencing by Sayyid Ahmed bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Economic Affairs Officer at the Sultanate's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York. Al Busaidy highlighted the Sultanate's efforts to fulfill its obligations to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Plan, referring to the voluntary national review it presented during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) held last year.

In the speech, he touched on the most prominent achievements made by the Sultanate in implementing the sustainable development plan.

He said: "The Sultanate has integrated the dimensions and goals of the sustainable development into development strategies and plans, and allocated budgets to ensure their achievement in the medium

The Sultanate has integrated the dimensions and goals of the sustainable development into development strategies and plans, and allocated budgets to ensure their achievement in the medium and long terms, to become a major component of Oman Vision 2040

SAYYID AHMED BIN HAMOUD AL BUSAIDY

and long terms, to become a major component of Oman Vision-2040."

He added that the Sultanate has formed a high-profile national committee to achieve the goals of sustainable development, pointing out that the committee includes members from relevant ministries and government agencies, the Council of Oman, representatives of the private sector and NGOs. — ONA

EMPOWERING WOMEN



The Wanderlust Oman team is organising a series of open water diving courses for girls with the aim of creating an Omani diving team, as part of the team's endeavour to empower and motivate women to put their hands in new experiences and contribute more effectively to society. So far, 25 girls have participated in the course. 16 girls have graduated till date with an international license from the PADI (International Association of Diving Instructors). Graduates with this license are able to dive anywhere in the world. The course included a theoretical and practical sides. The practical part took place in the Daymaniyat Islands Reserve. **DETAILS ON P4**

Barren no more: study finds millions of trees dot deserts

TOKYO: At first glance the apparently barren expanses of the Sahel and Sahara deserts feature little greenery, but detailed satellite imagery combined with computer deep learning has revealed a different picture.

In fact, some 1.8 billion trees dot parts of the West African Sahara and Sahel deserts and so-called sub-humid zone, a previously

uncounted bounty that overturns previous assumptions about such habitats, researchers say.

"We were very surprised that there are quite (so) many trees growing in the Sahara desert," lead author Martin Brandt said.

"Certainly there are vast areas without any trees, but there are still areas with a high tree density, and even between the sandy dunes

there are here and there some trees growing," added Brandt, an assistant professor of geography at the University of Copenhagen.

The survey provides researchers and conservationists with data that could help guide efforts to fight deforestation and more accurately measure carbon storage on land.

"For preservation, restoration, climate change and so on, data like

this are very important to establish a baseline," said Jesse Meyer, a programmer at Nasa's Goddard Space Flight Centre who worked on the research.

"In a year or two or ten, the study could be repeated... to see if efforts to revitalise and reduce deforestation are effective or not," he said in a Nasa press release.

Finding and counting the trees

was no simple task.

In areas with plenty of trees, thick clumps of growth appear relatively clearly in satellite images, even at low resolution, and are easily distinguishable from bare land.

But where they are more spread out, satellite imagery can be too low-resolution to pick out individual trees or even small groups. — AFP





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Monthly breast self-exam for cancer can save your life

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

When it comes to beating breast cancer, catching it early makes a big difference — yet many people skip a simple step that could save their life: the breast self-exam. Don't worry about going to hospital because of COVID-19, doctors are available on telephone to answer your queries and diagnose the problem.

Breast cancer is one of the cancers with the best cure rates. Detecting breast cancer early increases the chance of cure. When detected in the early stages, low risk breast cancer patients have the possibility of avoiding aggressive treatments like chemotherapy.

Many women say they don't need to do a self exam because they don't have a family history of breast cancer. Only 5-10 per cent of those diagnosed with breast cancer have an inherited risk. This means the vast majority of breast cancer cases are seemingly out of the blue.

Also, approximately 11 per cent of breast cancer cases occur in women under age forty-five. Since mammograms are generally not recommended for women until they reach age forty, this leaves many years where a younger woman's cancer can go undetected. Men account for about 1 per cent of breast cancer cases globally.

According to Oman's National Cancer Registry, women accounted for 53.1 per cent cases. As per global standard, the number of cases among women in the Sultanate reached 1,142 cases per 100,000 of the population, compared to 1,133 cases per 100,000 for



males. The National Cancer Registry report also indicated that breast cancer was the most common type of cancer among Omani women, while most men had colorectal cancer, followed by prostate cancer and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

In light of this, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has urged women to do self-exam every month and see a doctor if any abnormality is noticed. "October is the month for breast cancer awareness and let's pledge to go for our regular breast checkup as per the international recommendation. Women should take a promise to do a monthly self breast examination at home," a representative at the Ministry of Health said.

Only less than 15 per cent of cancer incidence is due to genes but almost 85 per

cent of the cancers especially breast cancers can be prevented, by living a healthy lifestyle – take regular exercise, eat vegetables and fruits and avoid fast foods and fizzy drinks.

Medics suggest that cancer has always been the number one worry of the human race but, with the arrival of coronavirus, cancer has taken a back seat.

"Cancer, which is a dreaded disease, has taken a backseat because of COVID-19. People have forgotten that they have to go for a regular checkup. It is important that they do a regular check up. Ninety per cent of cancers are curable if detected early," Dr Rajyashree N Kutty in an interview to a website said.

"It is important to remember that early detection saves lives, and is the key to

October is the month for breast cancer awareness and let's pledge to go for our regular breast checkup as per the international recommendation. Women should take a promise to do a monthly self breast examination at home

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

complete cure and survival – up to 95 per cent cases can be detected if early, regular check checkups are done," she says.

"Pinky", the app that helps diagnose breast cancer at an early stage can be downloaded on the smartphone. It is also called promise and alnoor app in Arabic and English languages.

One can also join the fight against breast cancer by wearing any shade of pink as well as showing that 'you care' by donating RO1 per month to Oman Cancer Association (OCA) through sms 90233 in PINKTOBER.

"Many hospitals and doctors are doing consultation and counselling by telemedicine, so there is reduced exposure, and less chance of COVID-19 infection, while making sure you are getting your regular check up done," doctors said.

Conference on English language teaching kicks off

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Titled "Twenty years of Oman ELT Conference: Building upon the Past, Envisioning the Future" Oman 20th International ELT Conference (October 14-15) started its sessions online on Wednesday.

The conference was inaugurated by Dr Badriya al Shihi, the Vice Chairperson of the State Council and the Director of the Center for Preparatory Studies at Sultan Qaboos University. The two-day conference's opening ceremony began with opening remarks by Dr Anfal al Wahaibi, the Conference Chair, followed by a welcome address by Dr Al Shihi.

The plenary speaker of the conference this year is Dr Saleh al Busaidy, the Dean of the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University.

In her welcome address, Dr Al Shihi said, "The year 2020 has forced educators and students to adapt to exceptional circumstances and experience new educational paradigms. This has been a huge challenge to all of us, but this experience has the potential to be a catalyst for principled, effective and inclusive change in the field of English language teaching. However, as we continue to develop our teaching during these difficult times, we must be mindful of the principles, ideals and achievements of the past." She also added that "we must ensure that learners with special educational needs are not excluded from our vision of future learning."

Welcoming the participants, Dr Al Wahaibi said, "Fortunately, the conference this year is intended to approach the changes as well as the challenges we as teachers, administrators, students, and parents faced in a somewhat non-traditional way, beyond the normal emphasis on materials, assessment, and traditional resources. The theme attempts to explore the opportunities that lie outside the classroom".

In his plenary session, Dr Al Busaidy focused on the issue of humanisation of English language teaching through the employment of modern technology. He also discussed the implications of this approach on curriculum developers, teachers and test developers. Other prominent speakers in this year's conference are Dr Joy Smiley Zabala, Dr Chris Boyle, Jonathan Hadley and Nathan Waller.

The 106 conference sessions this year cover a wide range of topics related to English language teaching, teaching methodologies, assessment, teacher professional development, inclusive education and others.



Printing of PCR test resumes at Muscat airport

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

The printed copy of the PCR test certificate is now available at Muscat Airport drive-through after a few days of suspension due to technical issues, said Oman Airports.

The service can be accessed from the drive-through PCR testing facility for RO5 from the parking area (P5) of Muscat International Airport.

"Our team has been working in the last few days on developing a new method to facilitate the process of obtaining the PCR test report and certificate in response to the feedback received on the previous process," the statement said. There were strong reactions

on the social media after the Oman Airports stopped issuing the printed PCR results.

All travelers coming to the sultanate must submit their full personal details through online registration and book an appointment for a PCR examination, said Oman Airports. Tests will have to be pre-booked and paid via Tarassud+ app.

It also indicated the need to complete payment processes in advance, via the following link: <https://covid19.moh.gov.om/#/traveler-reg>

Oman Airports stressed the importance of downloading the Tarassud+ or HMushrif apps to ensure the smooth passage of laboratory examination requirements



OCA virtual walkathon to be held in November

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

October is the month of Breast Cancer Awareness but the pandemic has brought about slight changes in the plans that typically would have Oman Cancer Association organise the Walkathon during the end of month.

The walkathon will now be done in November but in a different manner.

"We are developing a special platform for a virtual walkathon. We will hold it on November 27, 28, and 29. The timings will be announced shortly. People can register online and there will be no T shirts this year, instead we have done face masks to support the COVID-19 pandemic needs. The event will be virtual and there will be everything that will be done normally on our

previous walkathons," Dr Wahid al Kharousi, Chairman of Oman Cancer Association, said

OCA had to cancel the campaigns that used to be held in the malls during the whole month and depend solely on social media campaigns in spreading awareness. The Association also had to discontinue the usual classes that were in place for community education on self examination for early detection of breast cancer.

However other services continued such as the mobile mammogram although it was not moving around and was stationary at OCA headquarters in Al Ghubra, with the endorsement of the Ministry of Health with extra precautions in place.

"Mammography has been continuing taking into consideration



Dr Wahid al Kharousi

all the sterilisation and distancing. For the first time in 11 years we have asked people to take appointments so it is not overcrowded. Yet we are also doing ultrasound if the patients need

it and have been referred to us by the hospital or people who need the test after the clinical breast examination, which is a free service that is going on at our association. We have not been doing what we normally do in terms of awareness, but we have replaced them by doing it virtually," explained Dr Al Kharousi. The pandemic has been a great challenge for Oman Cancer Association when it comes to the funding that is usually supported by the business community. "The funding has been depleted because all the CSR from our partners has gone to the funding to combat COVID-19 through the Ministry of Health. But they have been supportive in many other ways," said Dr Al Kharousi.

As far as the pandemic is concerned to the cancer patients, a number of

them and their families do not have jobs or they are in a situation where they cannot work. This is where OCA has stepped in.

"The Association found for them Zakat, funding and Sadaka from different people to support the patients, be it meals cooked and sent during Ramadan as in Iftar or meals for them to survive as a family. It has been a challenge but we have been able to still organise meals for them until now," he said.

Amidst all this, Dar al Hannan has been going on just like before except with extra procedures and making sure the place is continuously sanitised.

"Our children with cancer have low immunity and we cannot expose them to anything else because of which we have restricted visitors. People are not

happy about that but we have to do it for the sake of the cancer patients. But once we explain that people understand. We are supporting cancer patients and survivors with prosthesis and orthosis if they want and the supplement they are having regularly as the chemotherapy and radiotherapy support, which we have been doing for more than a year.

"We are also supporting patients and families who have lost jobs by providing food making sure they have three square meals daily. This has been done with support from people's donations and philanthropists who want to donate to OCA through the special account named 'Patients Support'. We are very grateful to everyone who has been supporting this initiative," said Dr Al Kharousi.



NATION CELEBRATES ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The Sultanate celebrates the Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year, amid a number of achievements in various fields.

The day was set after the recommendations of the Omani Women Symposium, held in Saih Al Makarem in Suhar in 2009.

Omani women, thanks to the noble directives and generous care of His Majesty the late Sultan Qaboos, have achieved many accomplishments. The late Sultan always emphasised that women are a fundamental partner in development and that development can only be achieved by completing its two pillars, the man and the woman.

In the first speech after taking power, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

lauded the great role played by women in building the nation, saying "partnership of citizens in making the country's present and future is a fundamental pillar of national work, and we are keen to ensure that women enjoy their rights guaranteed by law and work side by side with men in various fields in the service of their homeland".

According to statistics by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, female illiteracy rates decreased from 12.6 in 2013 to 8.4 in 2017. The percentage of female graduates out of the total number of higher education institutions graduates in 2016 was 59.3 per cent.

Omani women occupied 21 per cent of administrative jobs in the civil service in 2017. The percentage of females in the government sector stood at 41 per cent in 2017, while in the private sector it was 46

per cent, and in crafts 88 per cent.

In addition to her social role as a mother and housewife watching over generations, Omani women have exercised her full role in serving her homeland, as she has took part in social, political, cultural and all sectors in the Sultanate without exception.

With regard to the presence of women in public life, the percentage of women members in the Oman Council reached 9 per cent in the period from 2015 and 2019; 17 per cent in the State Council and 1 per cent in the Majlis Ashshura. Women in municipal councils from 2016-2020 accounted for 3.4 per cent while women voters in municipal elections was 46 per cent during the same period.

Sustainable development goals represent one of the governing factors for the preparation of the ninth five-

year plan 2016-2020 for the Sultanate.

The plan stipulated keeping pace with developments in international charters, foremost of which is the "2030 Agenda for achieving sustainable development". The Ministry of Social Development works to include sustainable development goals and objectives within its plans and programs, especially the fifth goal concerned with "achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls", and other related goals.

The Omani Women's Associations are among the institutions that support efforts exerted in the field of empowering women. Their programs aim at integrating women into society and giving them an effective role in voluntary social work. They also empower women socially. The number of these associations increased from 60 associations in 2013 to 64 until

the end of 2018 across the governorates.

In fact, it was not easy for Omani women to reach their current status, whether in terms of education or in the field of public participation, as they faced many challenges despite the support of the political will. Omani society entered the era of civilisation in a relatively short time, and it was governed by many customs and traditions that is conservative towards allowing women to leave their homes and work with men. However, due to their ambition and determination in the face of social obstacles and with the constant support of the government, which dealt with them cautiously and gradually, Omani women were able to register many achievements. There is no doubt that Omani women still have many aspirations and hopes to achieve, as the future looks promising.



Empowering girl children can make society better

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

For a better global society, empowering the girl children is paramount as they constitute the backbone of any society, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

"Adolescent girls in the Arab States region constitute 8.9 per cent of the population, and they number 40 million girls and one in 5 girls marry before the age of 18," Dr Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director of the Fund said, adding that "the UNFPA is committed to empower girl children in the region and realise the rights of adolescent girls to enjoy a safe life and access to education and health at all stages."

Launching the mascot, "Mariam", the ambassador for the rights of adolescent girls at a virtual press conference, Luay said Mariam is one of the 40 million girls across the world.

"Mariam decided to devote her life



and time to demanding the fulfilment of the rights of these 40 million girls and all adolescent girls like her while promoting girls' empowerment and realising their human rights," Shabaneh said.

The declaration, which was made in cooperation with the League of Arab States, coincided with the celebrations of the International Day of the Girl Child, and constitutes another occasion to express the

firm support of the UNFPA, its steadfast standing and unwavering determination in support of girls' rights, including the right to obtain accurate information and relevant services Relevance to sexual and reproductive health.

"The initiative launched by the United Nations Population Fund, represented by the character of 'Mariam', the fifteen-year-old Arab girl, comes in line with the sustainable development goals and the goals of the plan Joint strategic work with the UNFPA," Ambassador Dr Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General — Head of the Social Affairs Sector, said.

"It focuses on achieving the three zeros by 2030 (zero unmet need for contraception; zero preventable maternal deaths; and zero gender-based violence), and reinforces the importance of the role that the media and social media play in achieving its sustainable goals," she said.

Dive under water to gain calmness



MUSCAT: The Wanderlust Oman team continues to organise a series of diving courses for girls with the aim of creating an Omani diving team, as part of the team's endeavour to empower and motivate women to put their hands in new experiences and contribute more effectively to society.

So far, 25 girls have participated in the course. Sixteen girls received an international licence from the PADI (International Association of Diving Instructors). Graduates with this license are able to dive anywhere in the world. The course included theoretical and practical lessons. The practical part took place in the Daymaniyat Islands Reserve.

Adventure enthusiasts have welcomed Wanderlust Oman's diving courses. Aisha al Ghailaniyah said, "Diving is an enjoyable sport I find it difficult to describe and it adds a new experience to me. As soon as you are under the surface of water, you get

rid of the speed that characterises our lifestyle today and get overwhelmed by unparalleled tranquillity that is never on land to explore the depths and secrets of the seas. It has always been my dream, and it has come true with the Wanderlust Oman".

Aisha bint Suleiman al Balushiyah said, "I found calmness in diving. I enrolled first to learn something new and spend my time with nature. I did not expect that diving would open new horizons in front of me to understand myself. I got to know the depths of the seas, which prompted me to be a part of preserving this beautiful marine environment, which faces very difficult situation, in a time of global warming".

The Wanderlust Women's Team continues its plans in supporting women's adventure sports with its various activities, which make women today able to enter the world of the oceans with greater energy and determination. — ONA



OTE

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Consumer Protection Authority

RECALL CAMPAIGN

For Universe(PY)



Date of Campaign : 15 / 10 / 2020

Campaign Type : Recall

Recall Segment : Mechanical

Product Description : UNIVERSE (PY)

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2020	UNIVERSE	UNIVERSE (PY)	KMJJKG18TXGC010174 KMJJKG18T8GC010173 KMJJKG18T6GC010172 KMJJKG18T4GC010171 KMJJKG18T2GC010170	05

Description:

Some vehicles might experience the gear Shifting Inoperable/hard to Operate.

Procedure:

Inspect the Clutch Booster, check the gap and replace with the new plate and bolt.

For More information:

Customers of affected vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment for further details/booking Appointment etc from Date - 15/10/2020

Contact Details:

Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.30 PM with effect from Date 15/10/2020

Oman Data Park bags award for virtual data centre

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Oman Data Park (ODP), the Sultanate's first IT-managed and cloud services provider, was presented with a special recognition award at the annual New Age Banking Summit - Oman 2020 held at Hotel Sheraton Oman on October 6.

The participants of the summit included leaders of top banks in Oman, 100 delegates and over 280 online viewers from over 100 BFSI and information technology companies from across the GCC and Middle East countries.

The summit, which was held under the auspices of Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President, Central Bank of Oman, focused on digital transformation for banking in future, Artificial Intelligence, the role of 5G technology in enhancing banking financial services, digital payments, mobile



banking, the next level of digital customer experience and cyber security .

The conference included honouring ODP with an appreciation award for its Industry Leadership in Virtual Data centres which was awarded for their Nebula Virtual Data centre Service. ODP is the first entity to establish a

for the banking and finance due to COVID-19, the need for collaboration with regulatory authorities to strengthen the banking and the finance sector, the changing dynamics of the financial services sector and the importance of developing an ecosystem of partnerships for innovative products and customer experiences.

In his speech, Maqbool bin Salim al Wahaibi, CEO of ODP, focused on the services that OPD provides to the banking sector, such as providing advanced data centres for saving data, reserve data centres for emergency use during times of disaster, and the advanced security systems that can be operated round the clock, in addition to hosting services, managing and securing electronic banking platforms and the secure remote work service (Desktop as a Service) (DaaS).

GDP falls 13.4 per cent in second quarter

The nominal contraction in the economy was driven by a 20 per cent decline in the hydrocarbon sector, as well as the decline in non-hydrocarbon sector by 9.9 per cent during the second quarter of 2020

MUSCAT: The Monthly Statistical Bulletin issued by the Central Bank of Oman indicated that Oman's nominal GDP declined by 13.4 per cent during the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period of last year.

The nominal contraction in the economy was driven by a 20 per cent decline in the hydrocarbon sector, as well as the decline in the non-hydrocarbon sector by 9.9 per cent during the second quarter of 2020.

The oil price averaged \$47.7 per barrel during the first eight months of 2020, which is lower by 26.3 per cent over the corresponding period of last year. Moreover, the average daily oil production decreased by 1.4 per cent to 957,300 barrels during this period.

According to the latest data released by the NCSI, the Sultanate's Consumer Price Index (CPI) witnessed a year-on-year negative growth of 0.6 per cent during Jan- August 2020. The combined activities of conventional and Islamic

banks provide a comprehensive picture of financial intermediation through the banking sector in Oman.

The total outstanding credit extended by other depository corporations (ODCs) grew by 2.0 per cent to RO 26.3 billion at the end of August 2020.

Credit to the private sector rose by 0.6 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 22.8 billion. Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 46.4 per cent and 45.1 per cent, respectively while financial corporations received 5.1 per cent and other sectors 3.4 per cent.

When looking at sector-wise analysis of private sector deposits; the share of households was largest at 50.6 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 31.7 per cent, financial corporations at 15.3 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent.

Inflation falls 1.22 per cent in September

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation fell by 1.22 per cent in September 2020 compared to the same month of 2019, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on consumer price index.

According to the report, the inflation rate in September fell by 0.43 per cent compared to August 2020. The price of food and non-alcoholic beverages witnessed a rise by 0.40 per cent; health by 0.29 per cent; education by 2.21 per cent and restaurants and hotels by 0.27 per cent.

However, the prices of housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels fell by 0.42 per cent; communication by 0.02 per cent; miscellaneous goods and services by 1.14 per cent; and furnishings, household equipment & routine household maintenance by 0.31 per cent in September 2020 compared to the same month of 2019.

Meanwhile, among foods and non-alcoholic beverages category, a marked rise was witnessed in the price of fruits, vegetables and meat by 4.02 per cent, 5.96 per cent and 1.02 per cent respectively.

However, the price of fish and seafood fell by 10.24 per cent, bread and cereals by 0.20 per cent and milk, cheese and eggs by 0.22 per cent.

Non-alcoholic beverages registered a price rise of 0.25 per cent, while those of clothing and footwear fell by 0.56 per cent in September 2020 against the same period of 2019. — **ONA**

In brief

■ MUSCAT

PHARMACIES CAN WORK DURING NIGHT LOCKDOWN



Pharmacies are allowed to operate during the night lockdown between 8pm and 5am, Ministry of Health said on Wednesday.

In a statement issued online MOH said pharmacies that are on duty during the night shift and those that work round the clock can operate across the country. "It was decided that only pharmacies on night duty as per the duty roster issued by the MOH's Directorate General of Pharmaceutical Affairs and Drug Control as well as the pharmacies operated 24 hours will be allowed to open during the night lockdown hours (8pm to 5am)."

The Supreme Committee has imposed a nationwide night movement ban in the wake of coronavirus outbreak until October 24.

■ MUSCAT

ROYAL HOSPITAL ANNOUNCES WHATSAPP/PHONE SERVICES

The Royal Hospital has announced the provision of many services for patients through phone and Whatsapp. This is in order to ensure the safety of everyone in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Inquiries about hospital services or submission of complaint dial 24599161/24599315 from 8am to 2pm; Inquiries about appointment, change or transfer from another hospital, medical report WhatsApp 90669066; birth or death notification form WhatsApp 71100822; request for medicines for heart patients, WhatsApp 71599100; for changing an appointment in the daily care department, call 24627172 and Request for medicine for cancer patients, WhatsApp 79323229

■ MUSCAT

REMOVE DAMAGED BOATS, FISHERMEN TOLD

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources urged fishermen to remove damaged and discarded boats and its equipment from the fishing port in Khasab.

In a statement the General Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources said it will take legal action against those violating the rules. "Kindly remove the damaged and discarded boats and equipment from the shore of the fishing port in Khasab. This spoils the beauty of the beach. Strict legal action will be initiated against those violating the rules," the statement said.

Environment Authority plants 1,000 mangrove seedlings



MUSCAT: The Environment Authority launched a campaign to plant 1000 seedlings of mangroves in Khour Ghawi in the Wilayat of Al Jazir, Governorate of Al Wusta.

The campaign aims to increase mangrove forest areas and increase the biodiversity of marine life. Badr bin Saif al Busaidy, a specialist in nature reserves, stressed the importance of this natural resource, its impact on social aspects, and its great contribution to enriching biodiversity and creating a balanced environmental system that complements the surrounding ecosystems.

Al Busaidy added that the project for planting seedlings of mangrove began in 2001, and the Authority has already planted about 685,000 mangrove



seedlings in 32 locations across the Sultanate. "The studies and field visits showed a tangible increase in biodiversity due to the presence of the mangrove ecosystem in the lagoons.

It contributed to the increase of wildlife species such as crustaceans, mollusks and other small marine organisms that support the surrounding ecosystems. It also contributed to the increase in the number of birds whose habitats depend on the mangrove environments".

The mangroves are among the most complex ecological systems. It was recently discovered that they are among the largest ecosystems that store high amounts of carbon circulating in the atmosphere due to human activities. — **ONA**

OMRAN board members visit projects in Muscat

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of OMRAN, the Sultanate's executive arm for tourism development, toured several projects and development partnerships in Muscat.

Mohammed bin Salim al Busaidy, Chairman of the Board of Directors, accompanied by the board members visited Mina Al Sultan Qaboos Waterfront, the flagship project, which is currently being reassessed by the Oman Investment Authority and OMRAN.

The Board of Directors were briefed on the project plans under review and the various assets associated with it under Muttrah Tourism Development Company LLC (MTDC), which was established to redevelop Port Sultan Qaboos into a mixed-use tourism and residential community.

The process of restructuring the ownership of shares between the partners in the project was completed recently by transferring all the shares to OMRAN.

The Board members then visited the Jebel Sifah project, a joint venture between OMRAN Group (30 per cent) and Orascom Development Holding (70 per cent), and the Muscat Bay project, which is an equal partnership between OMRAN and Eagle

Hills.

Touring both integrated tourism projects, OMRAN officials were briefed on the status of the construction phases, completed facilities and further examined the various operational and administrative aspects, as well as the sales and marketing programmes.

Al Busaidy said, "OMRAN possesses a large development and investment portfolio that supports the tourism sector's infrastructure and attracts foreign direct investments. Through the various residential, tourist, leisure and commercial facilities, these integrated tourism complexes play a fundamental role in steadily growing this vital sector and boosting the in-country value and domestic spending, which consequently contribute to developing the local businesses and creating more opportunities for SMEs".

The Jebel Sifah is a 6.2 million sqm Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) venture developed by Muriya, a joint venture between OMRAN Group and Orascom Development Holding (ODH). The project encompasses a wide range of residential units, hospitality facilities, restaurants and various recreational facilities.



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Health calls upon all companies and firms dealing with it at the MOH Headquarter level or at the level of its affiliated Directorates-General of Health Services at all governorates to submit all their invoices to the concerned authorities as soon as possible, not later than 15/11/2020, to settle them before the end of fiscal year 2020.



Lebanon, Israel hold maritime border talks

NAQURA, Lebanon: Lebanon and Israel held unprecedented talks under UN and US auspices on Wednesday to settle a maritime border dispute and clear the way for oil and gas exploration.

The talks mark a “first step in the thousand-mile march towards the demarcation” of the sea frontier, Brigadier General Bassam Yassin, the head of Lebanon’s delegation, was quoted as saying in an army statement released after the session ended.

“Based on the higher interests of our country, we are looking to achieve a pace of negotiations that would allow us to conclude this dossier within a reasonable time.”

Following years of US shuttle diplomacy, Lebanon and Israel this month said they had agreed to begin UN-brokered negotiations, in what Washington hailed a “historic” agreement.

The talks, held at a UN peacekeeping force base in the Lebanese border town of Naqura, lasted for around one hour and came weeks after Bahrain and the UAE became the first states to establish relations with Israel since Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

This has prompted suspicions that the flurry of US-sponsored diplomacy relating to Israel is linked to President Donald Trump’s re-election campaign.

The second round of negotiations will be held on October 28, a Lebanese military source and the official National News Agency (NNA) said. The Naqura talks, which focused



Vehicles of the UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL are pictured in the southernmost area of Naqura by the border with Israel. — AFP

exclusively on the disputed sea frontier, came at a sensitive time as Lebanon, battered by multiple crises, hopes to continue exploring for oil and gas in a part of the Mediterranean also claimed by Israel.

Security was tight, with roads in the area blocked by UN peacekeepers and Lebanese troops, and helicopters

flying overhead.

US envoy David Schenker facilitated the opening session along with US ambassador to Algeria John Desrocher, who was the mediator in the talks.

Israel said there would be “direct negotiations”, something Lebanese officials have denied.

Israel sent a six-member team, including the director-general of its energy ministry, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s foreign policy adviser, and the head of the army’s strategic division.

Lebanon’s four-member delegation comprised two army officers, an official, and a maritime border law

expert.

Israel and Lebanon have no diplomatic relations and Wednesday’s talks were a rare official interaction. Lebanon insists that the negotiations are purely technical and don’t involve any soft political normalisation with Israel.

Lebanon’s main parties Hezbollah and

A second round of negotiations will be held on October 28, a Lebanese military source and the official news agency said

Amal issued a statement late Tuesday bemoaning the presence of civilians in the Lebanese negotiating team.

“This harms Lebanon’s position and interests... and amounts to giving in to the Israeli logic that seeks some form of normalisation,” they said.

Lebanon, mired in its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, is looking to settle the maritime border dispute so it can press its offshore quest for oil and gas.

In February 2018, Lebanon signed its first contract for drilling in two blocks in the Mediterranean with a consortium comprising energy giants Total, ENI, and Novatek.

Exploration of one of the blocks is more controversial as part of it is located in an 860-square-kilometre area claimed by both Israel and Lebanon.

A senior source at Israel’s energy ministry said that the border dispute “can be concluded hopefully in a few months time.”

“This is a limited effort to resolve a well-defined, limited problem,” he said. “We have no illusions. Our aim is not to create here some kind of normalisation or peace process.” — AFP

Tunisians protest after man dies in kiosk demolition

KASSERINE, Tunisia: Angry residents took to the streets of an impoverished Tunisian town on Tuesday after a man died when authorities demolished an illegal kiosk where he was sleeping.

The shop in Sbeitla, in the central province of Kasserine, was demolished in the early hours on the orders of local authorities, security sources said.

Abderrazek Khachnaoui, the father of the shop’s owner, was killed in the operation, according to the same sources and his son.

“I was not informed of this decision... and agents of the municipality proceeded with the destruction without checking if there was someone inside,” said the son, 25-year-old Oussama Khachnaoui.

“My father, who was only 49 years old, died on the spot. Security agents fired tear gas at my family who had tried to approach my kiosk to save my father,” he said.

The death sparked angry protests by residents who blocked roads and set fire to a municipal vehicle in Sourour district, where the shop selling newspapers and cigarettes was located, witnesses told a



A member of the Tunisian security forces fire tear gas as protesters take to the streets of the impoverished Tunisian town of Sbeitla after a man died when authorities demolished an illegal kiosk where he was sleeping. — AFP

correspondent.

The protesters also threw stones and other objects at the security forces, the interior ministry said, while the defence ministry added that military and security forces had been deployed “as a precaution” to protect sensitive sites.

Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi announced an enquiry into the incident, but Sbeitla residents voiced scepticism.

“Will an enquiry tell us anything? There have already been lots of cases like this in Tunisia,” said resident Anis Ouled Ben Jama.

“People die in these kind of circumstances but afterwards, nothing happens. We find the case has been closed.”

- Regional officials sacked - Sbeitla, in Tunisia’s economically marginalised centre, has often seen protests in the past over lack of jobs

and investment.

Young people often turn to selling newspapers and bread on the informal market in order to support their family’s incomes while out of work.

Mechichi on Tuesday voiced his support for Khachnaoui’s family, saying he had sacked two top regional officials, a district security chief and Sbeitla’s police head.

He also despatched Interior Minister Taoufik Charfeddine “immediately” to offer “moral and material” support to the victim’s family.

Inland regions of Tunisia have higher unemployment than the already dire national average, which is currently at 18 per cent and could top 21 per cent by the end of the year.

Khachnaoui’s death came as Tunisia prepares to mark 10 years since a revolution sparked when a young street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself alight to protest against police harassment.

Meanwhile, a migrant boat sinking off the coast of Tunisia over the weekend left at least 21 people dead, a court said Tuesday, after four more bodies were found. — AFP

■ TAKING PRECAUTIONS AGAINST VIRUS



Iranians wear face masks as a coronavirus pandemic precaution in Iran’s capital Tehran. — AFP

BERLIN

Egypt top recipient for German defence exports

The German government approved defence exports worth \$4.9 billion in the first nine months of 2020, around a third less than the same period last year, according to Economy Ministry data. Defence export permits during the whole of 2019 made for a total of 8.02 billion euros, marking a record year.

So far this year, the top recipient of German-manufactured arms and defence equipment is Egypt with exports totalling 585.9 million euros, the ministry said in response to a request for information from hard-left party Die Linke. Arms shipments to



Egypt are controversial in Germany.

Egypt receives submarines from German naval defence manufacturer ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems, the fourth of which was christened with water from the Nile at the company’s shipyard in Kiel two weeks ago, in a ceremony attended by the commander of the Egyptian Navy.

ISTANBUL

Turkey resumes seismic exploration

A Turkish gas exploration vessel has resumed research in contested waters in the eastern Mediterranean, Turkey’s Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said on Wednesday. “Oruc Reis has arrived at its operation area in the eastern Mediterranean,” Donmez told an energy conference in Istanbul, referring to the ship, according to state news agency Anadolu.

“Tests began yesterday and we will start receiving the first seismic data today,” Donmez said, without elaborating. Turkey said over the weekend the ship would continue exploration of gas reserves south of the Greek island of Kastellorizo until October 20. Nato members Turkey and Greece have for weeks been at loggerheads over natural gas reserves and maritime boundaries, with both claiming the right to prospect and drill for energy resources in the same part of the eastern Mediterranean.

Ankara called Oruc Reis back to port in mid-September for what it said was maintenance work before agreeing to start direct exploratory talks with Athens. Greece, Germany and the US on Tuesday protested the ship’s return to the area. — dpa

KHARTOUM

East Sudan governor fired after unrest

A provincial governor of eastern Sudan was fired on Tuesday, state news agency Suna announced, after deadly inter-tribal unrest in the region and a blockade of the country’s lifeline port.

It said Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok fired the governor of Kassala state, Saleh Ammar, a civilian and member of the Beni Amr tribe who was only named in July.

His appointment led to clashes with the rival Beja tribe that left three dead and dozens injured at the end of August.

Tensions have since been running



high in the region.

Port Sudan on the Red Sea port reopened last week after a three-day blockade by Beja protesters over an October 3 peace deal in which they said their tribe was sidelined. — AFP

In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES TO POST MARITIME MILITIA IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

The Philippine Navy is hiring maritime militia forces to patrol and protect fishermen in the South China Sea from intruding Chinese forces.

Navy chief Vice Admiral Giovanni Carlo Bacordo told reporters on Tuesday that it is preparing to send over 200 militiamen to the disputed South China Sea. One company is to watch the islands occupied by the Philippines in the Spratly archipelago — also known as Nansha islands in Chinese — and another company to secure Scarborough Shoal — Huangyan island in Chinese.

At a senate budget hearing on Monday, Bacordo said the maritime militia force would help protect the country's territorial waters. — dpa

■ KABUL



9 DEAD AS CHOPPERS COLLIDE IN AFGHANISTAN

Two helicopters have crashed in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand, killing nine people aboard, the ministry of defence said on Wednesday. In a statement, the ministry said that the helicopters crashed overnight due to "technical issues" while taking off.

The incident is under investigation. Two local officials said that the helicopters collided when they were evacuating wounded soldiers from a battleground in the province's Nawa district and were forced to land immediately. — dpa

■ BANGKOK



MALAYSIAN OPPN HEAD FAILS TO PROVE MAJORITY

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim met King Abdullah on Tuesday to prove he has the parliamentary support needed to become the South-East Asian nation's prime minister, but the palace said he failed.

Following their brief meeting, Anwar said he provided the monarch with proof, only for the palace to release a statement saying Anwar "would not present the list of parliamentarians to support his claim."

Anwar demanded Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin resign after claiming on September 23 to have won the support of a "formidable" majority of lawmakers. — dpa

Thai anti-govt protesters stage major rally

BANGKOK: Thai anti-government activists staged a major protest in Bangkok on Wednesday, which was met with a counter demonstration and a heavy police presence.

Thousands of anti-government protesters were marching towards Government House on Wednesday afternoon to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's government. The activists are also demanding a rewrite of the constitution and reform of the monarchy.

Hundreds of rival royalist supporters donning yellow shirts were also nearby to show support for the monarchy. They briefly clashed with the anti-government demonstrators on Wednesday morning but mostly kept apart from them. Police said they have deployed around 15,000 officers for the demonstrations.

Anti-government activists have said they plan to camp out at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok until their demands are met or until King Vajiralongkorn orders them to disperse.

Police have also blocked several roads where the demonstrations are taking place. Activists have asked police to let them pass through certain routes for their march



A pro-democracy protester gestures as he skateboards past police standing guard during an anti-government rally in Bangkok. — AFP

towards Government House. A royal motorcade is also expected to travel through the area on Wednesday.

Anon Nampa, a leading member of

the anti-government movement, told protesters not to use offensive words if they see the royal motorcade to raise a three-finger salute, a gesture of

defiance towards totalitarian regimes borrowed from the "Hunger Games" film franchise.

The anti-government activists

Hundreds of rival royalist supporters donning yellow shirts were also nearby to show support for the monarchy

charge that Prayuth, a former army chief who seized power in a 2014 coup, strictly follows the interests of Vajiralongkorn and the royal family and see the monarchy as the root of Thailand's political problems.

"This could be the last fight for Thailand's democracy," said 18-year-old Attaporn, who travelled from the kingdom's northern Pichit province to join the rally.

"I have to do this if I want a better future."

The youth-led pro-democracy movement is the latest in Thailand's modern history, which has seen a cycle of opposing political factions taking to the streets in violent protests followed by coups from a putsch-happy army.

Wednesday's demonstration is intended to commemorate the 47th anniversary of the October 14, 1973 student uprising against a hated military dictatorship during which 77 people were killed. — Agencies

■ HEAVY RAINS LASH SOUTH INDIA



Residents carrying their belongings help a woman while making their way on a flooded street following heavy rains in Hyderabad, India. — AFP

China tests entire city for virus

BEIJING: China rushed on Tuesday to test an entire city of nine million people within days after a minor coronavirus outbreak in the sprawling country, a far cry from the struggle in Europe to tackle surging infections with tough new steps including partial lockdowns.

The virus is still spreading rapidly worldwide, with over one million deaths and 37 million infections, and many nations that suppressed their first outbreaks now face a second wave. Without a vaccine, governments are wary of allowing the virus to spread unchecked.

China — where COVID-19 first emerged late last year — launched a drive to test all residents of Qingdao after a handful of cases were detected on Sunday.

More than four million samples had been collected and 1.9 million results returned as of Tuesday afternoon, Qingdao authorities said, adding that no new cases had been found beyond



People line up in the rain to be tested for the coronavirus as part of a mass testing programme following a new outbreak in Qingdao in China's eastern Shandong province. — AFP

already confirmed infections.

Chinese officials intend to test the entire city — around 9.4 million people — by Thursday.

In scenes contrasting with the fumbled testing efforts elsewhere, health workers in protective clothing swiftly set up tents and residents

queued deep into Monday night to provide samples.

With the pandemic already claiming more than one million lives worldwide, scientists in different nations are rushing to develop vaccines and effective treatments.

— AFP

Ardern set to win in New Zealand's 'COVID election'

WELLINGTON: There were no masks on display as about 1,000 university students gave Jacinda Ardern a rock-star reception during her final Wellington campaign rally this week — and the New Zealand prime minister was fine with that.

Ardern, also without a face covering, happily posed for selfies alongside dozens of youthful supporters, rubbing shoulders with a disregard for social distancing that would spark outrage almost anywhere else in the world. Success containing COVID-19 means masks and distancing are no longer mandatory in New Zealand, an achievement upon which Ardern has staked her political future in Saturday's general election.

"When people ask, is this a COVID election, my answer is yes, it is," the charismatic centre-left leader said when launching her bid for another three-year term.

Indications so far are that the strategy is working, with Ardern's Labour Party enjoying a strong lead in opinion polls after a campaign light on policy detail but full of references to quashing the coronavirus.

"Who's better placed to keep New Zealand safe and who's better placed to get us on track to recovery?" the 40-year-old asked during a debate with Judith Collins, leader of the main opposition National Party.

Ardern's Labour Party enjoys a strong lead in opinion polls after a campaign light on policy detail but full of references to quashing the coronavirus

New Zealand has recorded just 25 COVID-19 deaths in a population of five million and its response has been singled out for praise by the World Health Organization.

Aside from closed borders and a pandemic-induced recession, everyday life on the South Pacific nation is near-normal, as unrestricted crowds flock to sporting events and bars without fear of infection.

The pandemic upended the election, which was initially poised as a cliffhanger, with some criticising Ardern's policy shortcomings while others praised her leadership after last year's Christchurch mosques terrorist attack in which 51 people died.

The students cheering in Wellington on Tuesday said the coronavirus crisis had reinforced their support for Ardern.

For history major David Coyle, it was enough to overcome disappointment with her failure to meet promises on issues such as



New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on her campaign trail speaking to students at Victoria University in Wellington ahead of general elections. — AFP

housing affordability and reducing child poverty.

"This year's all about the COVID and she's done a pretty damn good job on that," he said after Ardern's appearance at Wellington's Victoria University. Geography student Alyssa Thomas said Ardern, an adept user of social media, had earned the right to mingle with supporters ahead of Saturday's polls.

"Most of my friends follow her... I think she compares pretty well to (US President) Donald Trump at the moment, some of my friends are from America and they like her," Thomas

said.

As Ardern was being feted before adoring students, Collins was across town at a more modest meeting in a tiny suburban community centre attended by about 30 National Party faithful.

The combative 61-year-old, nicknamed "Crusher" for her hardline policies while police minister under a former government, has performed well in debates but so far failed to generate campaign momentum.

She took over in July as the National Party's fourth leader since the last election, but is polling at 31 per cent,

16 points down on the conservative party's support when it last won an election in 2014.

Collins has attacked border failures that likely led to a second wave of infections in Auckland in August and argues the National Party is best placed to steer New Zealand through its economic crisis.

However, the Auckland spike has now been eliminated and National's economic credibility was damaged when its proposed budget plan proved to be out by at least NZ\$4.0 billion (\$2.7 billion).

"I never give up, I'm a fighter, always keep going and I'm utterly positive for our country, I've got a vision to sell," Collins said.

About 3.4 million people are registered to vote in the election, which was originally set for September 19 but delayed by the Auckland outbreak.

Labour currently holds power in coalition with the Greens and the New Zealand First party, led by Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, who will struggle to remain in parliament.

However, polls suggest Labour has a chance of winning office with an outright majority, a situation unprecedented since New Zealand adopted a German-style mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system in 1996. — AFP

US POLLS: BIDEN, TRUMP DUEL IN BATTLEGROUND STATES



US President Donald Trump campaigns at John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County Airport in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. — AFP

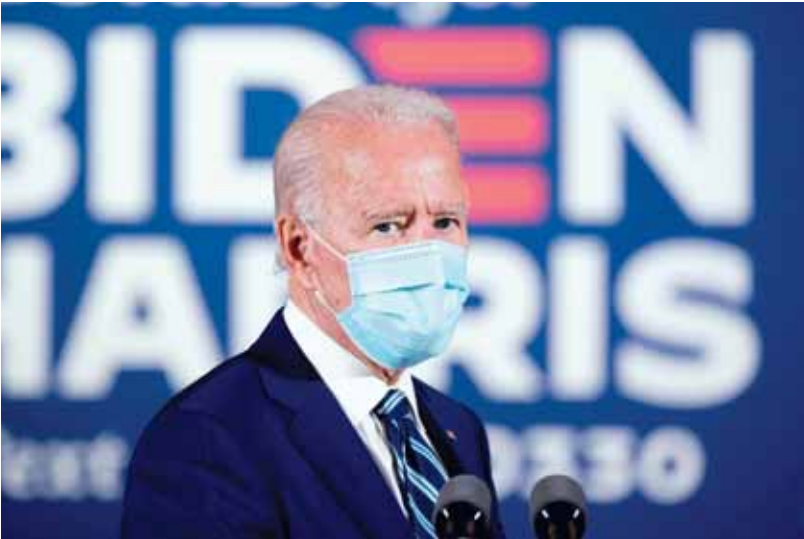
JOHNSTOWN, United States: President Donald Trump told a Pennsylvania crowd Tuesday that he's fighting "Marxists" and "lunatics" while his Democratic challenger Joe Biden accused him in Florida, another key electoral state, of having treated Americans as "expendable" during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With only 21 days until the November 3 election and badly down in the polls, Trump fired every lurid exaggeration about the Democrats and insult about Biden's mental state that he has in his arsenal.

He said Biden was "choking like a dog" during their televised debate, called him mentally "shot," and claimed the Democratic frontrunner was the pawn of communists.

"He is handing control to the socialists and Marxists and left-wing extremists," Trump told the large, raucous crowd in Johnstown. "He can't stand up to the lunatics running his party."

Going even further on his long-



Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden speaks during a campaign event in Florida. — AFP

running narrative that 77-year-old Biden is too frail for the presidency, Trump, 74, tweeted a crudely faked picture purporting to show Biden in a wheelchair, surrounded by elderly wheelchair-bound people in a room.

"Biden for president," the caption

said, with "p" struck out to change the word to "resident."

The mocking presentation of the infirm elderly was somewhat surprising given the president's apparently growing problems in retaining the loyalty of seniors, an

important electoral force.

In Johnstown, Trump reprised the outsider image that he developed for his surprise 2016 victory, telling the crowd that he was combating a "selfish and corrupt political class" back in Washington.

But even as he delighted the crowd with his greatest rhetorical hits, Trump once more showed that despite his poor poll showing he has no intention of trying to reach across to Democrats in a deeply divided nation.

"This will end up being a large-scale version of Venezuela if they get in," he said, painting a nightmarish anti-immigrant vision of a country where Democrats give free hospital care to "illegal aliens" while "decimating Medicare and destroying your Social Security."

The coronavirus, which has claimed more than 215,000 lives in America, was largely an afterthought, even if Trump himself was hospitalised for three nights after testing positive at the start of October. — AFP

President backs new Kyrgyz PM to calm crisis

BISHKEK: Kyrgyzstan's president on Wednesday gave his blessing to populist Sadyr Japarov as prime minister, with the Central Asian state seeking a path out of 10 days of crisis following an annulled election.

Sooronbay Jeenbekov, facing the gravest challenge of his three years in office after violence that erupted after in the wake of disputed elections, had initially sent the appointment of Japarov back to parliament.

But signs were growing that politicians were taking steps to end the impasse in the ex-Soviet country on China's western border, which has been dogged by political volatility for much of its three decades of independence.

Japarov, who was freed from jail by supporters amid chaotic scenes last week, had made several unsuccessful attempts to secure the post since unrest over the parliamentary election.

But on Wednesday, more than 80

lawmakers from the 120-member legislature attended an extraordinary session and parliament voted to confirm Japarov and his proposed cabinet.

Jeenbekov then signed a decree confirming the naming of Japarov as premier as well as his cabinet, the presidency said in a statement.

Kyrgyzstan, a landlocked republic of 6.5 million people, has had two presidents overthrown by street protests since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

The unrest has worried its ally Russia, coming as post-election protests rock ex-Soviet neighbour Belarus and clashes persist over the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's deputy chief of staff Dmitry Kozak flew in for talks with Jeenbekov and Japarov this week in a move that appeared to strengthen the position of the pro-Moscow president. — AFP



Supporters of Sadyr Japarov rally to demand President Sooronbay Jeenbekov's resignation in Bishkek. — AFP

Vaccine reluctance linked to belief in virus hoaxes: study

PARIS: Up to a third of people in certain countries may believe coronavirus misinformation and in turn be less open to immunisation, scientists said Wednesday, warning that development of a vaccine "might not be enough".

Researchers in Britain and the Netherlands conducted surveys in the UK, United States, Ireland, Mexico and Spain and found that while most people rejected COVID-19 conspiracy theories, some of these false stories had taken root in "substantial sections" of the population.

The World Health Organization has warned that the pandemic has been accompanied by a damaging "infodemic" that has made it hard for people to cut through the misinformation.

The study found the conspiracy most believed by participants was the claim that the virus was deliberately engineered in a laboratory in the

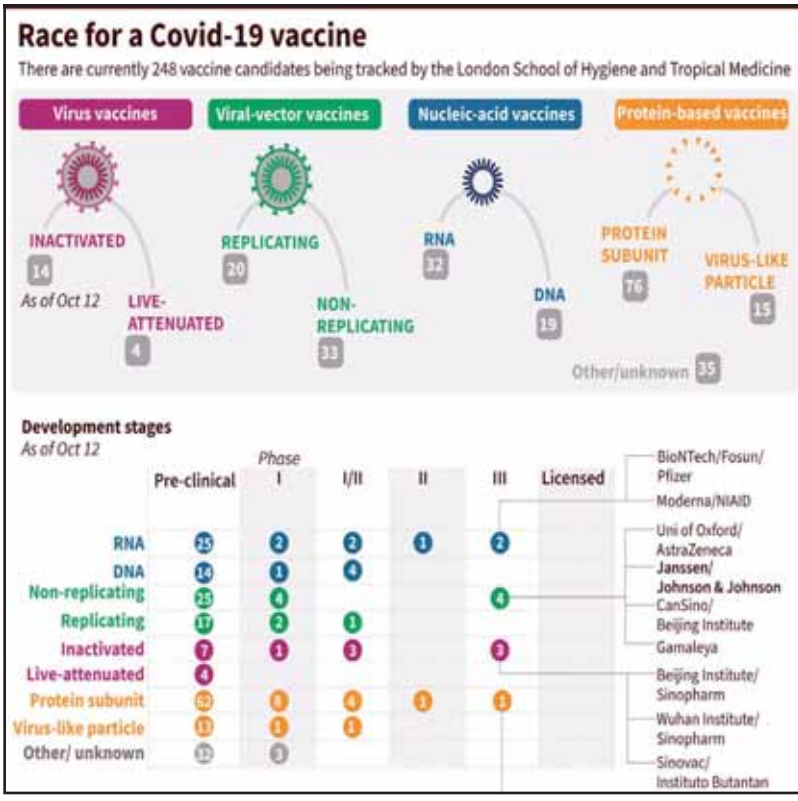
The WHO has warned that the pandemic has been accompanied by a damaging 'infodemic' that has made it hard for people to cut through the misinformation

Chinese city of Wuhan, where the epidemic first emerged.

Between 22-23 per cent of respondents in the UK and US rated this assertion as "reliable", rising to 33 per cent and 37 per cent Mexico and Spain respectively.

The hoax that COVID-19 symptoms are worsened by 5G phone networks was deemed reliable by 16 per cent of respondents in Mexico and in Spain, 12 per cent in Ireland, and 8 per cent in both the UK and US.

The study, published in the journal



Royal Society Open Science, found "a clear link" between believing coronavirus conspiracies and hesitancy around any future vaccine, said co-author Sander van der Linden, director of the Cambridge University Social Decision-Making Lab.

"As well as flagging false claims, governments and technology companies should explore ways to increase digital media literacy in the population," he said.

"Otherwise, developing a working vaccine might not be enough."

Researchers conducted two surveys in the UK in April and May with 1,050 and 1,150 participants respectively, while there were also 700 participants each in the US, Mexico, Spain and Ireland.

They were also asked to rate the reliability of coronavirus claims on a scale of one to seven.

On average, the study found that an increase by one-seventh in someone's

perception that misinformation was reliable was associated with a drop of 23 per cent in the likelihood they would agree to get vaccinated.

By contrast, a one-seventh increase in trust in scientists was associated with a 73 per cent increase in the likelihood of getting vaccinated.

Jon Roozenbeek, the lead author and a postdoctoral fellow at Cambridge's Department of Psychology, said people were dealing with "a deluge of statistics" in the pandemic.

"The fostering of numerical skills for sifting through online information could well be vital for curbing the 'infodemic' and promoting good public health behaviour," he said.

Researchers found that high levels of trust in scientists and numeracy levels were "significantly and consistently" associated with imperviousness to misinformation across all countries studied. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Merkel seeks tougher curbs to fight virus surge

German Chancellor Angela Merkel wants measures toughened up to fight a surge in coronavirus infections, including requiring masks in more places and limiting numbers of people gathering for private events, according to a draft policy paper.

The proposals to be discussed with premiers from Germany's 16 states later Wednesday would see the restrictions kick in once an area records 35 new infections per 100,000 people over seven days.

Previously, Germany had used a yardstick of 50 new infections per 100,000 as the threshold when



tougher restrictions would apply.

Merkel has in recent days repeatedly voiced alarm about contagion growing again and urged the country not to squander its early success in keeping numbers manageable.

MOSCOW

US-Russian crew docks at ISS in record time

Two Russian cosmonauts and a US astronaut completed a three-hour flight to the International Space Station (ISS) in a Soyuz rocket on Wednesday. The flight time of three hours and seven minutes was a record for a manned space flight, according to the flight control centre near Moscow.

The rocket with Sergey Ryzhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchikov of Russia and Kate Rubins of the United States on board was launched according to plan at 0545 GMT in picture-perfect weather from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in the steppes of the ex-Soviet republic of Kazakhstan in Central Asia, Russian space agency Roscosmos showed on Twitter. The Soyuz space capsule then docked at 0852 GMT at the outpost of humanity around 400 kilometres above the Earth. The previous fastest flight to the ISS was three hours and 18 minutes, but for an unmanned space freighter. The duration of traveller transport can vary depending on the flight path. A Soyuz flight to the ISS usually takes around six hours. The three crew members are expected to remain on the ISS until the spring of 2021. The already high level of safety regulations for space travellers have been tightened again because of the global coronavirus pandemic. — dpa

BRUSSELS

EU agrees Russia sanctions over Navalny poisoning

The EU on Wednesday agreed to impose sanctions on six people and one entity over the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent, diplomats said.

Ambassadors from the 27 EU countries approved sanctions after France and Germany proposed measures last week, saying Russia was responsible for the poisoning.

In line with usual EU practice, those targeted by the sanctions — travel bans and asset freezes — will not be named until the measures take legal effect on Thursday, but



they are likely to be Russian officials.

Paris and Berlin said last week they wanted to target individuals "based on their official function" and an entity "involved in the Novichok programme". — AFP

Together we can defeat the virus!

There is a popular saying that the cauterisation is the final treatment. Similarly, the final treatment to stop the spread of coronavirus is 'lockdown' of all public activities and places as well as imposing restrictions on movement.

The state and the citizens are equally affected by this. The economic activities and those who practice it were also affected due to lack of compliance with the mandatory preventive measures. With the initial restoration of certain activities, everything became normal as it was before the onset of this virus. There were largescale violation of rules and regulations in spite of the efforts to create awareness among people.

Earlier, it was the impression that the country knows the threat of the coronavirus, how to prevent it and stop its spread. It was thought that the awareness campaign has achieved its objectives. But unfortunately, it was not the case.

There is no doubt that the new measures taken by the Supreme Committee have surprised many. It has decided to restrict movement from 8 pm to 5 am. It has banned even walking on beaches and closed certain activities. Also there are many other measures taken by the



Ali Al Matani
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THERE ARE MANY MEASURES TAKEN BY THE SUPREME COMMITTEE WHICH HAVE PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS

Supreme Committee which have played a crucial role in this time of crisis. Whatever decisions were taken by the Supreme Committee went viral. Everybody was forwarding the statements and decisions on social media. Many blamed each other for failure in stopping the spread of the coronavirus and re-imposition of restrictions. We made heavy losses which will take many years to compensate. Everyone was effected due to the crisis. The owners of small and medium enterprises were the most hit.

The implications of lockdown are huge. We cannot ignore its economic, social and humanitarian value. But at the same time, it is important to look into the facts which led to re-imposition of these measures. Aren't we demolishing our own houses with our own hands? Aren't we responsible for bringing things to this state?

Everywhere in the world and in all walks of life, awareness is the key. It has high value. If there are certain measures announced, aware and cultured societies adhere to them without any excuse. Abiding by rules and guidelines are considered the responsibility of every individual and the society. It has its own benefits. This has been the approach of the government for over 50 years. It has

made extraordinary efforts to build the society.

But we have not succeeded much in developing a human being who is aware and sensitive to his or her responsibilities towards the nation. This is because many of us remained ignorant of the level of responsibility we should have shown during lockdown meant for restricting the movement.

Of course, we all know very well that this problem which we are confronted with is just not local. It is a global issue. But we should not compare ourselves with those who are severely affected. We should not compete with those who did not comply with the measures taken to prevent the spread of this pandemic. We should emerge as a model for all. We should set an example of our awareness and sensitivity towards such issues.

We should hope that this lockdown is the last such measure to control the spread of the virus. We should be aware of our role in this situation. We have to tread this difficult path and support the government.

This situation is not less than an emergency. This is the time when the efforts of the government and every individual should be in the same direction for the sake of this country and its people.

STRIKE IT RICH

Pandemic spurs illegal gold rush in Zimbabwe mountains

FARAI SHAWN MATIASHE

Known for their rugged ranges, grassy plains and forest waterfalls, the Chimanimani mountains in eastern Zimbabwe have long been a popular destination for tourists — and gold miners hoping to strike it rich.

Travel restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19 have kept the tourists away, although some attractions reopened last month. But illegal mining has surged as miners take advantage of the lack of visitors, leaving a trail of environmental destruction in their wake, say researchers and activists.

“The waters are being polluted; the biodiversity poisoned; endemic plants dug up (and) trampled; animals and birds poached; (and) litter strewn all over the mountains,” said Julia Pierini, head of BirdLife Zimbabwe, a non-profit.

Activists, industry experts and some of the miners themselves say rangers employed by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Zimparks) to protect Chimanimani National Park are involved in the illicit activity.

“For the past couple of years, we have been seeing illegal gold miners in the mountains, but suddenly during lockdown we started to see hundreds of them,” said Collen Sibanda, vice chairman of the Chimanimani Tourist Association (CTA).

“Zimparks is recruiting people. They are organising these syndicates,” Lenny Kwaramba said that he had been mining in the mountains without a license since March. “I thought it was legal because we were working with the rangers,” said Kwaramba, whose name has been changed to protect his identity.

“We were given a target, we would sell about 40 grams of gold per day,” he continued, explaining that as the miners came back down the mountain, the rangers would take the gold and pay them in US dollars. That was until August, when the military and police were deployed to help the rangers evict the miners.

“I had to run for my life,” Kwaramba said. “They were firing at us. Some (miners) were injured and others are missing.”

Zimparks spokesman Tinashe Farawo said the authority was looking into claims that the park's rangers had a hand in the illegal gold mining. “We have heard such reports. We are currently investigating the allegations,” he said in a phone interview.

“We are calling upon (everyone) to forward any evidence that our officers are involved. We want to ensure we protect these forests for the benefit of the future generations.”

There is no official data on the number of illegal gold miners in the Chimanimani Mountains, but authorities note that around the country their ranks have risen in recent years. As Zimbabwe experiences its worst economic crisis in a decade, with crippling hyperinflation and unemployment, young people are venturing into illegal gold mining in a bid to earn a living.

Gold panning in Chimanimani is mostly small-scale and informal, according to a 2016 research paper by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in London.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

MILITANT RESURGENCE

Afghan villagers fear militants' return outside shadow of US forces

NOORULLAH SHIRZADA

Living in the shadow of a US military base had provided protection to villagers in eastern Afghanistan, but locals now say the recent withdrawal of foreign troops has left them exposed to militant attacks.

“When the Americans were here, there were drones in the air 24 hours a day and there were no Taliban and IS,” said Kameen Khan, who lives near one former US base in the Achin district of Nangarhar province.

“In the months since they left the area, the Taliban and IS have restarted their activities,” he said.

Dozens of US special forces set up shop in Achin — and at another base in neighbouring Haska Mina — to fight IS after the militants seized large parts of Nangarhar in 2015 and established a foothold in Afghanistan.

For a while, the province was terrorised by militants, who sometimes beheaded locals or forced them to sit on bombs before detonating them.

They also destroyed health centres and forced schools to close. For many in nearby towns and villages, the US arrival provided a welcome respite: attacks dropped dramatically as drones and jets pummelled militant positions.

The Pentagon focused significant resources on the area, including in 2017 when it deployed the military's largest non-nuclear weapon, the MOAB, nicknamed “Mother Of All Bombs”, on an IS cave complex.

“Security got better, people were



Internally displaced people with their belongings flee from Nadali district to Lashkar Gah during the ongoing clashes between Taliban fighters and Afghan security forces, in Helmand province, on Monday. — AFP

THE WITHDRAWAL OF US TROOPS HAS BEEN A CORNERSTONE OF TRUMP'S PLANS TO END AMERICA'S LONGEST WAR

happy,” said Haska Mina governor Rizwanullah Basharmal.

Haji Gul Shinwari, who lives in Achin, said the American presence had meant farmers could return to their fields in relative safety.

“But since they left, we cannot go outside at night, as we worry the Taliban or IS will come again,” he said.

Living alongside a US military base also allowed trade to flourish, and the presence of nearby troops provided

some stability to industries such as talc mining.

But now several nearby mines have shut down, said Hayatullah, whose relatives were involved in the extraction of the mineral used in products ranging from baby powder to paint. “Over the years, traders came here to invest in mines, but when US forces left, they too left,” said Hayatullah, who like many Afghans goes by one name. — AFP

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Salalah retain online national chess title



Hamood al Busaeedi

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Salalah club retained the title of the online National Chess Championship on Wednesday after tough competition with Mirbat and Al Bashayer. With this accomplishment, Salalah clinched its third title in history respectively. The champion ended all the matches from nine rounds on a winning note except one match against the neighbours Mirbat in which they were positioned in third place.

Al Bashayer impressed during the top domestic event as they claimed podium through positioning in second place. Al Dhakhiliyah team managed to register eight victories and suffered one loss against the champion. Al Bashayer team comprised from the talented junior team's Anas al Darwashi (who recently impressed all at ISF World Schools Championship Online Chess 2020 as he qualified to the final round and ranked 22nd), Mohammed al Saeedi, Hamood al Busaidy, Abdulrahman al Zadjali d Wafia al Ghafri.

Salalah, the top domestic chess team in the Sultanate, featured from the best ranking players including Salim Shemas, Manaa al Kathiri, Ahmed Fadhil, Rawan al Balushi and Anaa al Essai. Many of the team players are

representing the national chess team. Dhofar representative team focused on chess as one of the top sport in the team. The team in coordination with Oman Chess Committee (OCC) had a dedicated chess training centre which provides an excellent environment to learn chess and graduate potential players with high skills.

Defending champions Salalah had commenced their campaign at the event strongly as all the teams (A, B and C) secured a spot in the finals. The qualification phase registered advancing Salalah A and Al Suwaiq from group A while Salalah B and Saham booked direct tickets to the next round from group B.

The tournament which was based on "Zoom" platform is conducted on Lichess system and it is the same format which is followed by the FIDE. The tournament was monitored by the head coach of the national chess team, Basheer al Qudaimi. The Yemeni coach had attended the tournament and observed the performance of each player to select the top players for the forthcoming events. OCC is keen to organise different chess events and encourage the domestic teams to take part to provide a better technical platform for competitions.



Cricket season kicks off with T20 bash

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, OCT 14

When A Division champion Arm Alpha takes on star-studded IT Works in a Premier Division T20 League opener tomorrow, nobody will quite know how the country's showpiece cricket competition will pan out without the participation of Passage to India (PTI) and Assarain, the top two teams of the last season.

Although all the star players from the two champion teams have joined most of the six premier sides in the tournament, it is still anybody's guess who will go on to claim the most coveted cricket trophy in Oman.

A much stronger Muscat CT, fancied Al Turki, AER and Renaissance complete the line-up in which most teams fancy their chances of landing the T20 title. With Oman pacers Bilal Khan and Kaleemullah likely to represent Alpha, it will be its bowling versus IT Works' batting that includes big names like Zeeshan Maqsood, Khawar Ali, Adnan Ilyas, Muhammed Nadeem and Khurram Khan.

"Apart from a strong batting line-up, we have a lot of all-rounders in our squad which is sure to help us go after our maiden Premier League title. With the kind of team we have formed this season, we know we are among the title favourites and will doing everything we can to rise to the occasion," said Jibran Yousuf, coach and mentor of IT Works.

The afternoon game pits Al Turki against Muscat, which could well



Sajeed Ahmed captain AER

be a dress rehearsal for a possible title showdown later this season. While Al Turki is bolstered by the inclusion of experienced players like Mehran Khan, Sindo Michael and Gustav Burger, Muscat has been further strengthened by the arrival of explosive cricketers like Naseem Khushi, Amir Kaleem, Kashyap Prajapati and young Waseem Ali.

"Since players from Assarain and PTI are distributed in all the Premier Division sides, I don't think we can single out one team as hot favourite. We are going to have six strong teams competing against each other and that will make this competition very intense and interesting," said the veteran Rajeshkumar Ranpura, Muscat captain and former Oman player.

Al Turki skipper Twinkle Bhandari is buoyed by the variety of players under his command this season and



Jibran Yousuf IT Works coach

comes to his side's opening game with high hopes.

"As we have a nice bunch of incredibly talented cricketers in our team, we are definitely hoping for the best this season. While we had shown great improvement in all areas of the game last season, we are confident of doing even better with a stronger batting and bowling unit," added Bhandari, who has also played for Oman.

The tournament is sure to provide a big platform to some of the best young players in the country and many of them have been picked up by AER, one of the two teams, along with Alpha, to have been promoted from A Division.

"Our team is full of young players, mostly from under-19 and under-16 age groups, who will be playing alongside some very good senior cricketers. These young players want



Twinkle Bhandari captain Al Turki NMC

to play fearless cricket and I am sure they will be helped by their seniors in the squad. It will be our common goal to fight hard without thinking too much about the end result," said AER captain Sajeed Ahmed, who has stuck to the same squad that won the team promotion to Premier Division after emerging as A Division runner-up.

AER's Danish Mohammed was the A Division's highest scorer with 482 runs in 7 games including two hundreds and 27 sixes in the competition last season.

Renaissance completes the six-team T20 league which will be followed by the fancied 50-over league next year.

Premier Division T20 League games on Friday, October 16 at Oman Cricket Ground 1 in Amerat: Arm Alpha vs IT Works (8.45 am). Al Turki NMC vs Muscat (1.30 pm).

Andy Murray exits first round of Cologne's ATP event

COLOGNE, GERMANY: Former world number one Andy Murray suffered a first-round exit at the indoor ATP tournament in Cologne as he lost in straight sets to Spain's Fernando Verdasco.

In the last game of the day, Verdasco converted his fourth match point just after midnight early on Wednesday morning to seal a 6-4, 6-4 win over Britain's Murray.

This is only the fourth tournament Murray has played in 2020 during a season disrupted by injury which has seen his ranking drop to 115th.

The two-time Olympic champion is struggling to refine his form after hip surgery earlier in the year.

"It was tough, I had a few chances, but I didn't serve that well and these courts are quite slow, so it's important to get breakpoints which I didn't get," Murray said in Cologne.

"He played better than me." Murray hopes to use the back-

to-back tournaments in Cologne to relaunch his season after a loop-sided first-round exit to Stan Wawrinka at the French Open last month and will stay on for next week's indoor event.

"I plan to stay and play next week, get some practice in the next few days," he said.

"It wasn't that big an improvement (on defeat to Wawrinka), I need to practise, play matches and get better."

This was Murray's third straight defeat to Verdasco, ranked 62nd, who last beat the Scotsman twice in 2018, once at the Shenzhen tournament and also at that year's US Open, yet Murray still leads the head-to-head 13-4.

Murray had the chance to level the second set with three break points at 5-4 down, but Verdasco kept up the pressure by firing down his sixth ace of the match to wrestle back control and eventually seal the win.

In the second round, the Spaniard



Murray4

faces Germany's Alexander Zverev. Anderson is ATP Player Council chief

Paris: South African Kevin Anderson has succeeded Novak Djokovic as president of the ATP Player Council.

The Serbian World No.1 quit before the US Open in September to launch a breakaway organisation.

The ATP said in a statement that Anderson would step up from vice-

president of the Player Council to take over as president.

"Congratulations Kevin" Tennis South Africa tweeted on Tuesday in recognition of Anderson's new responsibility.

It said that Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime, Frenchman Jeremy Chardy, Australian John Millman and British former world No.1 Andy Murray were voted on to the council by their fellow players.

They replace Djokovic, Americans John Isner and Sam Querrey and Canadian Vasek Pospisil who all resigned in September.

The ATP Player Council has 12 members, including Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who beat Djokovic on Sunday to win the French Open at Roland Garros for the 13th time.

Djokovic is behind the creation of a new men's professional tennis players' association (PTPA), independent of the ATP, which runs the circuit. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Watson, bowlers propel Chennai to crucial IPL win

Shane Watson's 42 and disciplined bowling helped Chennai Super Kings bounce back from two losses to beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by 20 runs in the Indian Premier League on Tuesday.

Watson, who came in at number three, put on a key third-wicket stand of 81 with Ambati Rayudu, who made 41, to guide Mahendra Singh Dhoni-led Chennai to 167 for six in Dubai.

The bowling led by West Indies quick Dwayne Bravo, who returned figures of 2-25 from his three overs, kept David Warner's Hyderabad to 147 for eight.

New Zealand's Kane Williamson struck 57 off 39 deliveries but his



first half-century of the season went in vain as Hyderabad kept losing wickets. — AFP

LONDON

Arsenal ambition convinced Partey to join club

New Arsenal signing Thomas Partey has revealed seeing the club hold on to captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang proved to him that they are serious about matching his ambitions.

Partey was a long-term target for Arsenal, who finally landed the Ghana international from Atletico Madrid on transfer deadline day as they paid his release clause, reported to be £45 million (\$58 million).

Arsenal also added Brazil international Willian on a free transfer from Chelsea and signed defender Gabriel Magalhaes from Lille in the transfer window.



COLOGNE

Loew questioned as Germany stumble again

Another 3-3 draw in Cologne may have provided entertainment but Tuesday's Nations League thriller with Switzerland has provided coach Joachim Loew with more questions than answers.

Joachim Loew has reiterated that the semifinals at next year's delayed Euro 2020 is the minimum goal for his team despite another frustrating Nations League draw with Switzerland.

Tuesday's match in Cologne brought a second 3-3 draw after the friendly with Turkey opened the international triple-header last week.

Loew cited coming back from 2-0 and 3-2 down as positives but others were less convinced.





Dhoni slammed for bullying

DUBAI: Cricket fans have slammed icon Mahendra Singh Dhoni for apparently bullying umpire Paul Reiffel into changing a wide call during an Indian Premier League game.



Shastri urges ABD to come back

NEW DELHI: India coach Ravi Shastri on Tuesday urged South African batsman A.B. de Villiers to come out of international retirement after he hit an explosive 73 in the Indian Premier League.



Ex-NZ player Reid dead

WELLINGTON: New Zealand great John R. Reid, who led the nascent cricketing nation to their first Test victory in 1956, has died aged 92, officials said on Wednesday, hailing him as a “colossus”.

Neymar hat-trick fires Brazil past Peru, Argentina labor



MONTEVIDEO: Neymar scored a hat-trick to become the second highest scorer in Brazil's history as the Copa America champions won 4-2 away to 10-man Peru in a World Cup qualifier on Tuesday.

The goals took Neymar to 64 international strikes, two more than Ronaldo but still well behind Pele's record of 77.

Elsewhere, Joaquin Correa scored the winner 11 minutes from time as Argentina labored to a 2-1 victory over Bolivia to maintain their 100% record after two matches.

Peru twice took the lead through Andre Carrillo and a heavily deflected strike from Renato Tapia, but two controversial Neymar penalties, an injury time third and a close range strike from Richarlison maintained the Selecao's winning start to qualifying for Qatar 2022.

Carrillo opened the scoring on six minutes with a dipping volley from 20 yards after latching onto Marquinhos's weak clearance.

Peru Goalkeeper Pedro Gallese then denied Firmino from point blank range after he seemed certain to tap home from Richarlison's cushioned header.

Brazil dominated the ball but Peru's pacey forwards looked dangerous on the counter-attack and visiting goalkeeper Weverton had to be alert to keep out a shot from Christofer Gonzales.

But Neymar sent Gallese the wrong way from the spot after Yoshimar Yotun was penalised for tugging his shirt in the box.

Out of nowhere, Tapia's speculative long-range strike took a wicked deflection off Rodrigo Caio and wrong-footed Weverton on 59 minutes.

The lead lasted only a few minutes before Richarlison touched a Firmino header from a corner over the line to restore parity.

The winner came seven minutes later for a stray elbow that caught Richarlison and Neymar drilled home the final nail in Peru's coffin after Gallese spilled a shot from Everton Ribeiro.

Worse was still to come for Zambrano as he was sent off minutes later for a stray elbow that caught Richarlison and Neymar drilled home the final nail in Peru's coffin after Gallese spilled a shot from Everton Ribeiro.

FARCICAL EQUALISER

Lionel Scaloni's Argentina earned a second narrow victory in a row following Thursday's 1-0 win over Ecuador.

Marcelo Moreno Martins had given hosts Bolivia a deserved lead but

Argentina scored a fortuitous equaliser through Lautaro Martinez.

Bolivia should have been ahead on six minutes when Argentina goalkeeper Franco Armani was caught off his line but Moreno Martins sent his header from an angle onto the roof of the net.

Moreno Martins made amends on 24 minutes as he rose between Argentina's center-backs to power home a header from eight yards after Alejandro Chumacero was allowed to run from halfway into the visitors' box before crossing from the left.

Argentina's equaliser came in comical fashion as Jose Carrasco tried to clear the ball out of his six yard box after cutting out Martinez's cross, but he shanked the ball off the forward's shin and past goalkeeper Carlos Lampe.

Lionel Messi, who had an otherwise

quiet game, and Martinez then combined to tee up Correa to thrash home the winner.

- Ecuador work of art -

Ecuador totally dominated Uruguay in a 4-2 victory in Quito.

They took the lead on 15 minutes as Moises Caicedo flicked home a header from an Angel Mena cross.

Both sides had a goal ruled out following a VAR review before Michael Estrada doubled the advantage on the stroke of half-time, rifling home from inside the box after a mistake by veteran Uruguay center-back Diego Godin.

Uruguay were denied again by VAR before Ecuador went straight up the other end where Estrada cracked home Valencia's backheel from 20 yards.

Ecuador's final goal was a work of art as Alan Franco's reverse pass bemused Uruguay's defence and

Gonzalo Plata rolled his foot over the ball to commit both sliding defender Ronald Araujo and goalkeeper Martin Campana before stroking the ball into the far corner.

Luis Suarez scored his record-extending 61st and 62nd goals for Uruguay with a pair of late penalties that were no more than a consolation.

Radamel Falcao scored an injury time equaliser as Colombia salvaged a point in a 2-2 draw in Chile.

Jefferson Lerma gave Colombia an early lead but Chile turned the match in Quito around by half-time with strikes from Arturo Vidal and Alexis Sanchez.

Gaston Gimenez scored a late winner before goalkeeper Anthony Silva saved a penalty from Yangel Herrera as Paraguay won 1-0 in Venezuela.

— AFP



After Nadal loss, Djokovic seeks solace at Bosnia's 'energy pyramids'

SARAJEVO: Novak Djokovic visited a Bosnian 'pyramid park' on Tuesday to benefit from the site's purported healing powers and miracle cures, 48 hours after his demolition by Rafael Nadal in the French Open final.

The Serbian world number one is known for unorthodox and sometimes controversial new-age

spiritual views and practices.

And two days after being swept aside 6-0, 6-2, 7-5 at Roland Garros he made a trip to Visko's Valley of the Pyramids and its 25,000-year-old tunnels beneath whose "energy" is claimed to bring about miracle cures.

Although some hills in the region resemble a pyramid shape, the European Association of

Archaeologists debunked the claims as pseudo-science over a decade ago.

"I would invite all athletes to come here to spend time in the tunnels, which are very beneficial for the increase of oxygen in the lungs," he told public TV station FTV.

"It has a direct effect on regeneration, on recovery, which is very important for athletes," he said.

According to local media, visitors to the pyramid park have increased since Djokovic's earlier visit in July after he and his wife contracted Covid-19 following a tennis tournament Djokovic organised in the Balkans.

"If there is paradise on earth, then it is here," the Serbian player said at the time. — AFP

sport

RONALDO, JOHNSON

TEST POSITIVE AS CORONAVIRUS SURGE HITS SPORT

PARIS: Football superstar Cristiano Ronaldo and men's golf world number one Dustin Johnson both tested positive for the coronavirus as a surge in cases cast a shadow over the return of professional sport.

Ronaldo, the 35-year-old five-time Ballon d'Or winner, is asymptomatic but has withdrawn from Portugal's Nations League game against Sweden on Wednesday. He played in Sunday's 0-0 draw against France.

"We have respected all the health measures... and yet it happened," Portugal coach Fernando Santos said. The rest of the Portugal squad, and France's players, have all tested negative.

New Zealand also scrapped next month's friendly against England on Wednesday as the coronavirus played havoc with the return of international football.

America's Johnson, 36, was forced out of this week's CJ Cup in Las Vegas as he became the highest-profile golfer to test positive for Covid-19. Johnson said he was "very disappointed".

The positive tests by two of the world's top athletes highlight a rash of cases coinciding with the resumption of many sports competitions in recent weeks, often in bio-secure "bubbles" and behind closed doors.

The cases, seen everywhere from football

to cycling, rugby union, rugby league, American football and Formula One, also mirror a surge in Covid-19 across much of the world, including Europe and the United States.

Professional sport was brought to a halt worldwide as the pandemic advanced in March, threatening an industry estimated to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

RONALDO 'SUNBATHING'

Many competitions have now emerged from their shutdowns, but international travel remains a major challenge. New Zealand said travel restrictions and quarantine measures would have made it impossible to field a strong team at Wembley on November 12.

"Looking at the restrictions currently in place, as well as the rising number of Covid-19 cases across Europe, it just isn't possible to put a competitive squad together," said All Whites coach Danny Hay, adding that he was "gutted".

Ronaldo's Juventus team-mate Giorgio Chiellini attempted to play down the positive test by one of the world's best paid athletes, saying the forward was "fine and sunbathing".

However, the incident renews controversy over his departure from Turin, where health

authorities said it was a breach of virus protocols after two Juventus staff members tested positive.

Elsewhere, Scotland and Ireland's plans for crucial Euro 2020 playoff matches were also disrupted by coronavirus cases, while others were forced into self-isolation after team-mates tested positive.

China-based Italy forward Stephan El Shaarawy tested positive and then negative before a friendly against the Netherlands in Bergamo, intended as a tribute to the city which was hard-hit by the pandemic.

Coach Pavel Hapal was among nine cases in Slovakia's camp ahead of Wednesday's Nations League match against Israel. And Senegal's home friendly with Mauritania was called off after the visitors reported eight positive tests.

England manager Gareth Southgate, whose team play Denmark on Wednesday earlier defended the decision to press ahead with international games.

"The reality of the world at the moment is we don't know what the rules will be. In this day and age you have to live from week to week," Southgate said.

"There is no reason international football should be a higher risk."

— AFP



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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Dhawahi Al Bandar Al Jadeed for Commerce LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **4121805**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO **73,000.000** to **15,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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Keeping the banking system safe from dirty money

Despite the recommendations issued by the Bank for International Settlement (BIS) and its keenness advise central banks on stronger regulation of global banking transactions, notably in the context of combating money laundering, recent revelations that some international banks have indulged in money laundering have shocked governments and central banks around the world.

It is estimated that as much as \$2 trillion was laundered over the past

two decades.

A key question being asked in this regard is what have the control, supervision, and auditing bodies in the central and commercial banks, as well as the financial intelligence and security agencies around the world, doing all these years? And why is it that this huge scam being leaked only today?

The news report by ICIJ confirms that the laundered funds are profits from wars waged over the past two decades, including in the Arab region, the proceeds of gangland drug sales, human trafficking, and



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT AS MUCH AS \$2 TRILLION WAS LAUNDERED OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES

the illegal trade in arms and wealth looted from some developing countries, in addition to funds stashed away by smugglers.

Most of the gangs operating in this regard have succeeded in laundering these dirty funds using several major international banks, some of which operate in this region.

The report dealt with thousands of documents leaked about suspicious activities that were submitted to the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) of the US Treasury Department, which works to monitor the funds transferred,

whether inside or outside the US.

Some of these documents bear the names of Arab companies working in the field of oil and gas production, and others for institutions operating in countries in Latin America, and in many countries of the world, which confirms that criminals were able to exploit loopholes in the banking system to launder dirty money.

The coming days will reveal more secrets about these dirty transactions.

Many of the banks named in the scam have been involved in evaluating the creditworthiness of

countries, as well as managing assets and loans for banking and financial institutions, and in financing international activities.

Can the Bank for International Settlements, through its advisory to central banks around the world, avert another global financial crisis in the coming years amid a proliferation of thousands of shell companies uncovered by the latest scandal? What matters to us here is to keep our Gulf banks untainted by this scam and prevent our banking system from being exploited by corrupt elements.

be'ah and APSR ink pact to support circular economy



Pictured (left) Amal al Zadjali, Communication and Media Manager at the Authority for Public Services Regulation; (right) Kumayl al Lawati, Head of Business Development at be'ah.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) and has signed an MoU with the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) to support the latter's 'Kafaa wa Ata'a' initiative.

Signing on behalf of the Authority was its Chairman, Shaikh Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, while be'ah was represented by its CEO Eng Tariq bin Ali al Amri.

According to the agreement, both parties will work on strengthening environmental cooperation by supporting green initiatives that help transform linear economy to a circular one and reduce the increasing amount of generated waste across the Sultanate.

"This MoU aims at supporting 'Kafaa wa Ata'a' initiative which was launched by the Authority for Public Services Regulation in collaboration with Dar Al Ata'a Charity and be'ah.

Our part of the agreement will be ensuring safe and efficient disposal of used Air

Conditioners by directing this waste stream to a local certified dismantling facility that follows strict regulations and policies. be'ah is currently exploring the market for SMEs to run recycling facilities for this specific type of waste," said Kumayl bin Ahmed al Lawati, Head of Business Development at be'ah.

Amal Shihab al Zadjali, Communication and Media Manager at the Authority, stated: "The MoU will greatly support the initiative which aims at providing high-quality Air Conditioners to families in need with the goal to reduce their energy consumption. We trust that this initiative will have a great impact as all collaborators are experienced in initiatives that give back to the environment and the community."

Environmental goals set out under Oman Vision 2040 focus on transforming the national economy into a circular approach that would ensure a sustainable future for natural resources, create more opportunities, and tackle health and environmental issues caused by pollution.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Global hospitality company Hakkasan Group, in partnership with Alfardan Group, a premier hospitality and development firm, announced plans to work together to introduce two new, luxury high-end restaurants in Muscat, including the 11th location of Hakkasan and a new Japanese restaurant concept being unveiled to the world in Oman called Kamasaka.

Hakkasan is a world-famous, award-winning restaurant with its two London locations each holding a Michelin-star.

Elegant yet playful, Hakkasan is an internationally renowned brand that creates a multi-sensory experience that intrigues the taste buds and keeps guests always wanting more. The menu is a modern interpretation of authentic Cantonese cuisine, using the finest ingredients and expert traditional techniques to create



timeless yet innovative signature dishes.

Established in 2001 in London, Hakkasan now has 10 restaurants around the world located in the United States, Middle East, India, Asia and Europe.

Hakkasan will officially open its 11th location at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat in 2022.

Kamasaka will also open at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat in 2022, serving as the latest addition to Hakkasan Group's ultra-luxe, Asian-inspired restaurant collection and the company's first new brand to open since 2018. Coalescing the rich and varied history of ancient Japan, Kamasaka will present highly ceremonial cuisine in a modern,

party-centric setting.

"Between the arrival of our flagship restaurant, Hakkasan, and the grand opening of our newest culinary masterpiece, Kamasaka, the possibilities to treat yourself at the exquisite St Regis hotel are endless," said Angela Lester, Executive Vice President of Business Development for Hakkasan Group.

"Since 2013, we have worked alongside our talented partners at Alfardan Group to dazzle and delight our guests and can't wait to unveil these new restaurants."

"As a business enterprise built around traditional family values, strong relationships are at the core of our group. We are happy to have partners like Hakkasan, combining both our talents in the luxury sector with our expertise in the Middle East," said Omar Hussain Alfardan, President and CEO of Alfardan Group.

First phase of Oxy's .nxt programme kicks off

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

The first phase of the 'nxt, the Oxy Programme for Entrepreneurial Development in Frontier Technology, kicks off this week. The programme, which aims at building the Sultanate's technical talent base and innovation capacity, will continue until July 2021. The programme is exclusively sponsored by Occidental Oman.

About 1200 participants are enrolled in this phase, 1,000 of which are recent technical graduates, and 200 are higher education technical



students.

The first phase will include online training that runs from October to December 2020, during which participants are expected to complete all the technical skills materials. By the end of this stage, participants will

be evaluated, and a smaller pool will be selected to move to the next stage.

In Phase One, participants will be concentrating on the 12 following subjects: data science & business intelligence, artificial intelligence & machine learning, Big Data, cloud computing, cybersecurity, DevOps, software development, Agile and Scrum, IT services & architecture, project management, quality management and digital marketing.

The Oxy Programme for Entrepreneurial Development in Frontier Technology aims to create

new technology-based businesses and improving employment opportunities in order to grow the economy and address strategic challenges, and to attract and nurture innovative projects nationally and internationally that will benefit the Sultanate.

The .nxt programme has been designed, developed and implemented by the Science, technology and Innovation Division (STID) of Etco (International Emerging Technology Company) and it is exclusively sponsored by Occidental Oman Inc."

SHORT TAKES

MUSCAT

BANK MUSCAT CONDUCTS NAJAHİ TALKS SESSION ON THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF BUYING AND SELLING BUSINESSES

In line with its commitment to strengthening support to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Bank Muscat's Retail Enterprises unit (Najahi) recently organised a discussion on the legal aspects to be considered while buying and selling a business.

The online session, which was telecast through the bank's social media channels was moderated by Abdullah al Jufaili, Head, Retail Enterprises Unit (Najahi), Bank Muscat, and hosted Basma al Kiyumi, lawyer and the founder of the BK Legal Consultancy. The session dealt with a number of important topics, which have to be considered while starting, buying or selling a business.

Basma al Kiyumi (pictured), who is authorised to practice law



in the courts of England and Wales and in Oman and is also the author of the book, "The Constitutional Experience in Oman", spoke about the legal aspects and considerations that must be taken by sellers and buyers of commercial projects.

She pointed out how it was important to know both the business and legal details before making any decision.

MUSCAT

OMANTEL COOPERATES WITH CISCO INTERNATIONAL TO PROVIDE MERAKI WI-FI SOLUTIONS

Omantel announced its cooperation with Cisco International to provide 'Meraki Wi-Fi' service to Omantel's SME and corporate customers. The service offers an ideal choice for high speed and high capacity Wi-Fi service.

Baha Mohammed Ridha al Lawati, Omantel's Vice President of Enterprise Business Unit, said, "The signing of this agreement comes within the framework of Omantel's strategy in building partnerships with major global technology companies and providing advanced products to various customers from the public and private sectors. Omantel has established this partnership with Cisco International to bring the latest technologies that help companies and institutions, including SMEs, enhance their business operations and support



their digital transformation journey. The introduction of this service cements our leading position in the telecommunications and digital transformation in the Sultanate."

Traditional Wi-Fi solutions require having a talented and well-trained IT team to install and operate the service. As for Meraki, which is the easiest solution to implement Wi-Fi, only access points will be installed, after which the customer will be able to manage their own dashboard on the Internet.

MUSCAT

OAB RECEIVES NOTABLE ACCOLADE AT NEW AGE BANKING SUMMIT

Oman Arab Bank recently participated in the New Age Banking Summit, held on October 6, 2020. The event was held at Hotel Sheraton Oman and saw the Bank take part in discussions around the theme of "The Future of Banking and Fintech". During the summit, OAB was bestowed with the 'Leadership in Agile Banking' award, reinforcing its dedication to the provision of high-quality customer experience.

Highlighting the importance of the event, Asma al Zadjali (pictured), Head of Banking Operations Group, said, "Finding means to incorporate or implement FinTech innovations as part of our services is an integral part in our efforts to help accelerate the e-commerce industry and bring about a new



age of digital banking. This is why we are and have always been keen on holding workshops catered to delivering value-added skill sets, experiences and networking opportunities to FinTechs, so that they may play a role in creating a thriving innovative banking ecosystem. With key programmes and initiatives to develop innovation, local talent and entrepreneurship in place, we will be able to contribute significantly towards building the Sultanate's knowledge-based economy and create value for the community at large."

In brief

■ SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE HOLDS MONETARY POLICY AND SAYS EASY STANCE TO STAY

Singapore's central bank left its monetary policy unchanged on Wednesday and said its accommodative stance will remain appropriate for some time as the city-state's economy emerges from its coronavirus slump.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) manages policy through exchange rate settings, rather than interest rates, letting the Singapore dollar rise or fall against the currencies of its main trading partners within an undisclosed band.

"As core inflation is expected to stay low, MAS assesses that an accommodative policy stance will remain appropriate for some time," MAS said in its semi-annual policy statement.

— Reuters

■ LONDON

OIL PRICES EASE AS CORONAVIRUS SPIKE STOKES DEMAND CONCERNS

Oil prices edged down on Wednesday under pressure from growing concerns that a recovery in fuel demand will be stalled by soaring coronavirus cases around the world.

Brent crude futures for December fell by 6 cents to \$42.39 a barrel by 0953 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate futures were down 5 cents at \$40.15.

"There is a risk that the demand recovery is stalled by the recent increase in COVID-19 cases in many countries," the International Energy Agency said.

"The longer term offers little encouragement for producers; the curve shows prices not reaching \$50 per barrel until 2023. Truly, those wishing to bring about a tighter oil market are looking at a moving target."

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cut its oil demand forecast on Tuesday, citing economic dislocations caused by the virus.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, discussed the situation in energy markets during a telephone call, the Kremlin said. — Reuters

■ NEW YORK

GOLD GAINS ON US ELECTION UNCERTAINTY, ECONOMIC WORRIES

Gold firmed on Wednesday after last session's sharp drop spurred demand for the safe-haven metal from investors worried about global economic recovery and uncertainty surrounding next month's US presidential election.

Spot gold was up 0.2 per cent to \$1,895.41 per ounce by 0947 GMT, after shedding as much as 1.9 per cent on Tuesday in reaction to the dollar's jump. US gold futures gained 0.2 per cent to \$1,899.20.

"We're seeing some price recovery as lower prices generated buying interest by investors since the general backdrop of gold is still positive," said Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch.

"Low interest rates, expansion of monetary policy, ballooning public debt, uncertainty regarding US elections; all these factors are supportive for gold prices," he added.

Gold is considered a hedge against inflation and currency debasement amid the unprecedented levels of global stimulus to ease the economic blow from the pandemic. — Reuters

German economy to shrink 5.4pc in 2020

Pre-crisis levels of economic output will 'probably not be reached until the end of 2021', the report said, with GDP set to grow 4.7 per cent next year, compared with an earlier forecast of 5.8 per cent.

FRANKFURT: Germany's economy will shrink more than expected in 2020 and not regain strength until end-2021, leading research institutes said on Wednesday, as a coronavirus resurgence weighs on the recovery.

German gross domestic product will contract by 5.4 per cent, deeper than a previous prediction made in April of 4.2 per cent, according to five think-tanks including Ifo, DIW and RWI in their annual autumn report.

"Although a good part of the slump from the spring has already been made up, the remaining catch-up process represents the more arduous route back to normality," said Stefan Kooths, head of economic research at Ifo Kiel.

Pre-crisis levels of economic



View on the Container Terminal Tollerort of Hamburg Hafen und Logistik AG Ports is seen in Hamburg. — AFP

output will "probably not be reached until the end of 2021", the report said, with GDP set to grow 4.7 per cent next year, compared with an earlier forecast of 5.8 per cent.

For 2022, the experts predict 2.7 per cent growth.

Sectors dependent on close social contacts, such as food and drink, tourism and events, have been particularly hurt by the pandemic

and will "continue to suffer for some time to come and will not participate in the recovery process until infection control measures are largely eliminated," Kooths said.

The downgraded forecasts add to a string of gloomy data coming out of Europe's top economy.

On Tuesday, a closely watched survey by the ZEW institute showed that investor confidence plummeted

in October on rising coronavirus numbers and renewed Brexit tensions.

The German economy initially bounced back sharply after it emerged from the spring lockdowns in early May, allowing consumer spending and exports to ramp up.

But the momentum has slowed in recent weeks and fears are mounting about the impact on Germany's

ECB's Lagarde urges more green finance

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank head Christine Lagarde (pictured) said there should be a greater push to invest in "green" projects if countries are serious about meeting their climate protection goals.

"There is not enough finance going in the green direction," Lagarde told an online meeting of the UN Environment Finance Initiative.

The former French finance minister said the European Union would need to invest 290 billion euros each year to meet its commitments under the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

However, only 100 billion euros was committed to green initiatives last year.



A lack of clear criteria for green bonds also makes it hard for investors to discern just how environmentally friendly an investment is, she said.

"So what it calls for is more involvement, continued intervention and support to correct market failures in green finance," she said. "Is it up to a central bank to do that? No. But legislators, regulators, have a role to play." — AFP

Philippines central bank revises 2020 c/a forecast to \$6 billion surplus

MANILA: The Philippine central bank said on Wednesday it has revised the 2020 balance of payment projections, with the current account now expected to yield a \$6-billion surplus, taking into account the gradual recovery of a pandemic-ravaged economy.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) revised its current account projection to a surplus equivalent to 1.6 per cent of gross domestic product, from a May forecast of a \$1.9-billion deficit, or 0.5 per cent of GDP, to reflect an expected narrower trade gap. It expects a current account surplus of \$3.1 billion for next year, or 0.8 per cent of GDP.

In a statement, the BSP said it now expects a BOP surplus of \$8.1 billion this year, or 2.2 per cent of GDP, significantly higher than the May projection of \$0.6 billion, or 0.2 per cent of GDP.

It sees a BOP surplus of \$3.4 billion, or 0.9 per cent of GDP, for next year.

The Southeast Asian country's gross international reserves are expected to reach \$100 billion by end-2020, higher than the May forecast of \$90 billion, and rise to \$102 billion next year. Exports are still projected to contract 16 per cent this year, but will likely recover in 2021 with a 5 per cent growth rate, the BSP said.



Workers construct beams of a building in Navotas City, Metro Manila. — Reuters

However, imports are seen declining 20 per cent this year, steeper than the previous forecast of an 18-per cent drop, before rising 8 per cent next year, it said.

Despite the improved BOP outlook, however, the BSP warned that uncertainty remains over the duration, direction and extent of the pandemic's impact on the economy. — Reuters

■ PRODUCT LAUNCH

Apple unveils iPhone 12 with 5G



Apple CEO Tim Cook poses with the all-new iPhone 12 Pro at Apple Park in Cupertino, California. — Reuters

millimeter wave 5G, the fastest variant of the technology, as well as lower-frequency bands. Some rival Android devices support only the lower-frequency versions of 5G.

Apple said it had tested 5G on more than 800 carriers in 30 regions globally. Shares of Apple fell over 3 per cent during the event, erasing \$77 billion worth of stock market value.

In China, the biggest online video platforms, including Tencent Holdings and Bilibili Inc, canceled

Apple's livestream event without explanation, Bloomberg News reported.

Apple also announced a HomePod Mini smart speaker that will come in white and gray, cost \$99 and be shipped starting on November 16.

The new HomePod offers features like allowing use by multiple users in a home and sending information to car-based systems. For example, a user can tee up driving directions to a store after asking the HomePod

Apple also introduced a 'Mini' version with a 5.4-inch screen for \$699 and a 'Pro' version with three cameras starting at \$999.

what time it closes. Many of the features serve as a catch-up to similar offerings from Amazon.com Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google.

The annual launch event is nearly one month later than normal and comes as the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted Apple's well-oiled machine for designing and churning out its biggest-selling product.

The iPhones announced on Tuesday will test whether Apple can keep up that streak and ride a wave of consumer excitement around 5G wireless data networks, whose speediest variants outstrip their predecessors' data rates multiple times over.

Android devices from Samsung Electronics Co Ltd and others have featured the new networking capabilities for months, and analysts say 5G phones are driving upgrades.

— Reuters

IEA says oil producers may struggle to gauge demand



LONDON: Global oil stocks which rose during the height of the pandemic are being steadily reduced, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Wednesday, but a second wave is slowing demand and will complicate efforts by producers to balance the market.

OPEC+ producers plan to boost supply by 2 million barrels per day (bpd) from January and the IEA predicts a ceasefire in Libya will raise output there to 700,000 bpd in December from 300,000 bpd currently.

"There is only limited headroom for the market to absorb extra supply in the next few months," the IEA said in its monthly report. "Those wishing to bring about a tighter oil market are looking at a moving target." — Reuters

VAT registration in Oman to start in January

KEY CRITERIA: Subject to any transition period or rules, businesses reaching the GCC set mandatory registration threshold (\$100,000 or RO 38,500 of taxable turnover in a year) would have to compulsorily register.

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Businesses in the Sultanate that fall under the remit of the Value Added Tax (VAT) regime when it comes into force with effect from April 2021 will be required to get registered with the Tax Authority — a process expected to commence from January next year.

According to tax experts, the GCC VAT Agreement, which Oman has signed up to, provides for different types of registrations based, for example, on turnover, group size, non-residential status, free zone status, and so on. Registration is however mandatory for firms with a taxable turnover reaching \$100,000 per annum.

Well-known multinational professional services firm Deloitte



explained in an advisory to clients on the implications of Oman's VAT announcement for local businesses.

"Subject to any transition period or rules, businesses reaching the GCC set mandatory registration threshold \$100,000 or RO 38,500 of taxable turnover in a year) would have to compulsorily register. Details of how this will work — a mechanism of both looking forward

and back — are expected shortly."

Deloitte noted however the likelihood of relief given to businesses making only zero-rated supplies. "Such businesses would have an option to seek exemption from registration, subject to the prior approval of the Tax Authority. Once again details to be confirmed," it stated.

On the other hand, businesses

Significantly, businesses operating within free zones, special economic zones and duty free zones are subject to special VAT rules.

earlier this week promulgates the VAT Law prescribing a five-per cent tax on a wide array of goods and services consumed in the Sultanate with effect from April 2021. But several categories of basic products and essential services have been either zero-rated for VAT or exempt altogether.

Included in this list is a broad range of food items, notably dairy products, fruits and vegetables, fresh eggs, water, tea and coffee beans, sugar, salt, bread, grains, baby food products, fish, meats, according to Deloitte.

Also zero-rated for the new tax are medicines and medical equipment; investments in gold, silver and platinum; International or intra-GCC transport of goods as well as passengers, plus related services; Crude oil, oil derivatives and natural gas; Supply of means of transport like aircrafts, vessels, and so on; and Exports of goods and services. Exempt from VAT

are, among other areas, financial services, healthcare and education, bare land, and renting or resale of residential property.

Significantly, businesses operating within free zones, special economic zones and duty free zones are subject to special VAT rules. Deloitte's advisory elaborated: "Based on our experience, certain concessional VAT treatments are likely to be applicable for supplies within, to and from the customs duty suspension zones, free zones or special zones. Importers, who are availing themselves of customs duty suspension benefits under the GCC Common Customs Law, would also likely be eligible for similar benefits under VAT — we expect some clarifications in the coming weeks."

Similarly, non-resident businesses will likely have to be registered for VAT if they trade in taxable goods and services in the Sultanate, according to the firm. "There is no minimum registration threshold for non-resident persons as per the GCC VAT Agreement. A non-resident business would likely to have an option to appoint an agent in Oman — we understand that the agent does not have to be jointly and severally liable, nor a fiscal representative of the principal. More will emerge in the VAT Law and the Executive Regulations," it added.

CBO BULLETIN

Banking credit in Oman climbs to RO 26.3 billion

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

Total outstanding credit extended by licenced commercial banks and Islamic banks in the Sultanate (together referred to as Other Depository Corporations/ODCs) grew by 2.0 per cent to RO 26.3 billion as of end-August 2020, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) stated in its latest monthly bulletin for August.

Credit to the private sector rose by 0.6 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 22.8 billion. Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 46.4 per cent and 45.1 per cent respectively, while financial corporations received 5.1 per cent while other sectors got the remaining 3.4 per cent.

Total deposits held with ODCs reached RO 24 billion at the end of August 2020, increasing by 4.4 per cent from August 2019.

Total private sector deposits increased by 10.8 per cent to RO 16.5 billion. The share of households was largest at 50.6 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 31.7 per cent, financial corporations at 15.3 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent, the Bank said.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks indicates a Y-o-Y growth of 1.2 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-August 2020. Conventional banks' credit to the private sector decreased marginally by 0.7 per cent to RO 18.8 billion. Conventional banks' overall investments in securities amounted to RO 3.8 billion. Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 15.1 per cent over the year to RO 1.7 billion. Banks also invested



RO 276.8 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO 1 billion at the end of August 2020. Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased to RO 20.4 billion in August 2020, registering a growth of 4 per cent over the level a year ago.

Government deposits with conventional banks decreased by 16.9 per cent to RO 4.5 billion, while deposits of public enterprises increased by 14.6 per cent to RO 1.1 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 70 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 11.5 per cent to RO 14.3 billion.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.1 billion at the end of August 2020, recording a growth of 6.6 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and Windows increased by 6.8 per cent to RO 3.6 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows stood at RO 4.9 billion and constituted about 14 per cent of the banking system's assets as of end-August 2020, the bulletin added.

SEZAD hands over support infrastructure to Port of Duqm

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) handed over the buildings of the Customs Station at the Port of Duqm, including vehicles registration building and One-Stop Shop building after completing their construction as part of the port's infrastructure projects.

This move comes ahead of the start of operations of the Customs Station at the Port of Duqm. The buildings were handed over in the presences of a number of officials from SEZAD, Port of

Duqm Company and Oman Company for the Development of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Tatweer).

The handover process included an inspection tour to the buildings to ensure the readiness of all facilities before starting actual operations.

Eng Yahya bin Khamis al Zadjali, In-Charge of Managing the Operations of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, said the facilities handed over include buildings for Customs, agriculture, fisheries and water resources, and the clinic of the Ministry of Health.

Al Zadjali added that all

infrastructure facilities of the Customs Station have been designed according to the latest international specifications of ports, while taking into account the future expansion of import and export activities at the Port of Duqm, as well as the suitability of those facilities to the customs clearance system to facilitate the process of customs inspection for importers and exporters across the commercial berth in Duqm Port.

With the imminent start of Customs services, Duqm Port is a step closer to commencing full-scale commercial operations.

Recall/Special Service Campaign



Date of Campaign : 15/10/2020
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign
Product Description : Celica and RAV4

Brand	Production Year	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
TOYOTA	1998	CELICA	JT2DP02T2X0132104 to JT2DP02T3X0132734	15
	1997 to 1999	RAV4	JTB72SC11W0154914 to JT3HP10VXY0226935	665

Description:
The subject vehicles are equipped with a single-stage non-azide front driver airbag inflator (Takata-designated NADI) as original equipment; these inflators do not contain phase stabilized ammonium nitrate (PSAN) propellant. Although not confirmed at this time by Toyota with regard to the subject vehicles, according to a Defect Informations Report filed by Takata on November 26, 2019 (19E-080), the propellant in some of the involved inflators may absorb moisture over time, which Takata believes is related to the foil seal of the inflator. The absorption of moisture into the propellant over time could lead to slow deployment or inflator rupture in situations where the airbags are commanded to deploy. The potential for such abnormal deployment scenarios to occur may require or be exacerbated by other factors and variables beyond propellant moisture absorption and are not yet fully understood by Takata or Toyota. If an abnormal deployment of the driver airbag occurs, this could increase the risk of injury in the event of a crash. The likelihood of such an occurrence in the subject vehicles is unknown, but, out of an abundance of caution, Toyota is submitting this report.

Procedure:
As per "Technical instruction" advised by TMC.

For more information:
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc. from 15/10/2020.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs. after 15/10/2020.

BRIEF BITES INSIDE

JOINT VENTURES

TWO UPSCALE RESTAURANTS TO BE LAUNCHED IN OMAN



Hakkasan Group, in partnership with Alfardan Group, announced plans to work together to introduce two new, luxury high-end restaurants in Muscat.

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NATIONAL BUDGET

PHILIPPINES REVISES 2020 C/A FORECAST TO \$6 BN SURPLUS



The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas revised its current account projection to a surplus equivalent to 1.6 per cent of gross domestic product.

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