

The military transport ship of the Royal Navy of Oman on Wednesday arrived at Sudan Port carrying necessary humanitarian needs and relief materials on board, following the floods in Sudan. The Sultanate's relief trips to Sudan comes within the framework of the humanitarian efforts provided by Oman to brotherly and friendly countries in emergency and exceptional cases, and in coordination with the Omani Charitable Organisation. — **ONA**



P5

ARMENIA,
AZERBAIJAN
REJECT TALKS AS
FIGHTING RAGES



P7

SUGAR-SWEETENED
DRINKS IN OMAN
TO BE PRICIER
FROM TODAY



P12

THIRD SEED
SVITOLINA SURVIVES
MEXICAN QUALIFIER
ZARAZUA



OMAN

HM greets China,
Nigeria, Cyprus

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq sent a cable of greetings to President Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, on the occasion of the 71st anniversary of the founding of the Republic. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Xi and the friendly Chinese people steady progress and prosperity. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Muhammad Bukhari of Nigeria, on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty also sent a cable of greetings to President Nikos Anastasiades of Cyprus, on the occasion of the anniversary of his country's independence. — **ONA**

Kuwait's new Emir calls for unity at tense time for region

KUWAIT: Kuwait's new Emir was sworn in at parliament on Wednesday as the country laid to rest late ruler Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad al Sabah, a Gulf Arab elder statesman who helped steer his people through some of the Middle East's most turbulent decades.

The cabinet named designated successor Crown Prince Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad al Sabah as ruler on Tuesday after the death of Shaikh Sabah, 91, whose body arrived in Kuwait on Wednesday from the United States, where he had been hospitalised since July.

Shaikh Nawaf, 83, pledged to work for the Opec member country's prosperity, stability and security after taking the oath of office, raising both hands to his



Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad al Sabah after being sworn in as new Emir at the National Assembly in Kuwait City, on Wednesday. — **AFP**

head as lawmakers applauded.

"Our dear nation today faces difficult situations and dangerous challenges that can only be overcome... by unifying ranks and working hard together", he told the National Assembly.

Dignitaries from around the world paid respects to the seasoned diplomat and savvy politician, widely respected as a humanitarian who strove to heal rifts in the Middle East, mending ties with Iraq, maintaining dialogue with Iran and championing the Palestinian cause.

"We honestly feel like we're going to be lost without his guidance", said Fajer, a Kuwaiti woman. — **Agencies**

DETAILS ON P4

HIS MAJESTY GREET'S
KUWAIT EMIR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on the occasion of his swearing in the constitutional oath and assuming the reins of government in the sisterly State of Kuwait.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the Emir of Kuwait for continuous health and wellness, praying to the Almighty to help him in leading the Kuwaiti people to achieve more progress and prosperity. — **ONA**

WORLD

Schools, cinemas
to reopen in India

NEW DELHI: Schools, cinemas and swimming pools will be allowed to reopen in India after months-long coronavirus lockdown, the home affairs ministry said on Wednesday, even as experts warn that the vast nation is on track to becoming the world's most-infected. India, home to 1.3 billion people, has recorded more than 6.2 million cases so far — second only to the United States.

INSIDE



BELGIUM FORMS NEW GOVERNMENT AFTER 16-MONTH DEADLOCK

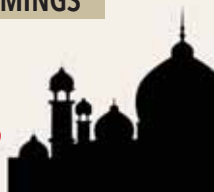
P5



FRACTIOUS PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE UNLIKELY TO MOVE NEEDLE FOR TRUMP

P6

WEATHER TODAY		
MUSCAT MAX: 36°C MIN: 26°C	SALALAH MAX: 29°C MIN: 23°C	NIZWA MAX: 38°C MIN: 25°C
SUNRISE 05.59 AM		

PRAYER TIMINGS	
FAJR: 04:44	
DHUHR: 12:02	
ASR: 15:26	
MAGHRIB: 17:59	
ISHA: 19:09	

END SUFFERINGS OF
PALESTINIANS: OMAN

BUILDING OF SETTLEMENTS BY ISRAEL
VIOLATES UN RESOLUTIONS

GENEVA: The Sultanate affirmed that ending the tragedy of the Palestinian people and the violations they have been subjected to for decades can only be achieved by granting them the right to self-determination, ending the occupation, returning refugees and recognising their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the two-state solution based on the principle of land for peace, withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese territories, and recognition of their unity and sovereignty. This is the hope for path towards realising the principles of the United Nations to establish a just, secure and lasting peace in the Middle East.

This came in the Sultanate's speech before the 45th session of the Human Rights Council



A Palestinian girl cries as she is comforted by her uncle after Israeli forces demolished her family's house near Hebron on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

on "The situation of human rights in Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories", delivered by Ambassador Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Sultanate's permanent representative to the United Nations and international organisations in Geneva. The session will continue until October 7.

Speaking on the occasion, the ambassador said that Israel continues to build settlements on Palestinian lands, forcibly expelling their Palestinian owners, demolishing their homes, and attacking them in clear violation of the relevant UN resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"The continuation of detentions without relying on a legal argument is nothing but oppression by Israel on the Palestinian people and is a clear exploitation of the conditions that the world is going through, especially in the Middle East, which are a result of this occupation."

Al Khanjari said that what Israel is doing in East Jerusalem is an attempt to obliterate the Palestinian Arab identity and the illegal excavation work under the Al Aqsa Mosque

TURN TO P2



HARAT AL SHEIKH
TO GET FACELIFT

Harat al Sheikh village in Wadi al Ma'awal in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, will undergo restoration as part of the government's initiative to preserve the heritage villages and to turn it into a tourist destination. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has started a project to restore the village, which is rich in history, ancestral legacy and home to unique customs and traditions. It is a fine example of ancient architectural patterns. **DETAILS ON P2**

Scheduled flights to resume after six months

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The skies of Oman will be reopened for scheduled flights for the first time in six months. The Sultanate had shut its airport for commercial flights in March to curb the spread of coronavirus as per the directives of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

Passengers must comply with any prevention measures that will

be announced by the Ministry of Health and told travellers to check with their airlines for updates before travelling.

"Normal scheduled services will resume from midnight of October following all health and safety guidelines", Khamis Muqaimi of Oman Airports told the *Observer*.

Ahead of reopening, volunteers took part in a trial for testing operational readiness of Muscat



International Airport last week. The airport also trialed a drive-through COVID-19 testing facility with the help of volunteers.

As the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) allowing the airlines to operate only two flights per week to each of its existing destinations, first flights out of Muscat from the midnight will be operated to Salalah (SalamAir), Dubai (FlyDubai), Lahore (PIA), Doha and Dubai (Oman Air). **TURN TO P2**

It also has a mosque which was built on a high platform. The mosque's yard is reached via a staircase enclosed with a wooden gate carved with decorative motifs. In the middle of the mosque's courtyard, there is an old well. There is also a staircase in the yard leading to the roof of the mosque.



IT IS TIME FOR THEM TO IMAGINE THE SITUATION WHEN CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGIES LIKE MODERN-DAY HOSPITALS AND 21ST-CENTURY VENTILATORS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN THERE. PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BEEN DYING IN FAR MORE NUMBERS EVEN WITHOUT KNOWING ABOUT THE PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND REASONS

Don't Give up Hope

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

There had never been so fierce a fight between hope and despair on a global level when humanity was put on a test of a disease. The issues, pattern of behaviour, and the models of protection were the same — no one would have believed this uniformity some months ago.

The problem, reaction, and sufferings are almost the same with some degree of cultural variation.

There are people in every country who are taking the disease seriously, there are those who are yet to digest its reliability despite sufferings in close quarters and there are people who are working on some solution or the other to get humanity rid of the situation.

The debate over wearing the mask or throwing the mask is everywhere that is demanding the governments' intervention to come out with measures to enforce the social distancing and health hygiene protocols.

Agreeing with the situation the psychologists and sociologists are suggesting restraint and follow up measures to convince the masses that the disease is real and their co-operation is a must to stop the disease from spreading too fast.

"This is not a common situation. Many of us might have heard about a pandemic, but would never have faced it. Doubts are natural, here lay the responsibility of the socially conscious people to convince the community to maintain restraint and follow the government-sponsored announcements. Because all those announcements are well researched and taken

into consideration only after consultation with the global community," said a clinical psychologist who has several years of working experience in Oman.

Some sections of people are questioning the limitations of science and technology, which is so developed that has found ways for the moon, mars, and many other unbelievable things, without understanding the magnanimity of the disease which has hit the globe in the form of COVID-19.

It is time for them to imagine the situation when cutting edge technologies like modern-day hospitals and 21st-century ventilators would not have been there. People would have been dying in far more numbers even without knowing about the preventive measures and reasons.

"The kind of cooperation the global community is getting from each other is also praiseworthy. If it has raised many questions in front of the world community it has paved the way for many answers. It has shown our strengths and weaknesses and forced us to draw plans accordingly," said Dr Khalid, a social thinker and a writer.

For this global problem, there will be a global solution in which local input will be very important. Take, for example, tourism. There is a perception of tourists. A tourist is not a tourist until he comes from some other country.

Today the hospitality industry is deriving ways to woo local tourists. It is forcing authorities to look for policies for domestic tourism, which is most likely a reality very soon.

The level of cooperation among the global scientific community is a ray of hope for everyone and there is certainly some light at the end of the tunnel.



The kind of cooperation the global community is getting from each other is also praiseworthy. If it has raised many questions in front of the world community it has paved the way for many answers. It has shown our strengths and weaknesses and forced us to draw plans accordingly

DR KHALID

A social thinker and a writer





In brief

■ DUBAI

UAE ANNOUNCES
CANDIDACY FOR UN
COUNCIL SEAT

The United Arab Emirates has announced its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2022-2023 term, state media said.

In June 2021, the UN General Assembly will elect five member states to serve on the Security Council, which has a total of 10 non-permanent members who serve overlapping two-year terms.

“My country will follow the same steps and principles upon which it was founded to maintain international peace and security in cooperation with the members of the Council”, Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan said in New York. — AFP

■ WASHINGTON

US BLACKLISTS
SYRIAN INDIVIDUALS,
13 ENTITIES



The United States on Wednesday blacklisted 13 entities and six individuals, including the governor of the Central Bank of Syria, in a fresh round of sanctions aimed at cutting off revenue for the Syrian government of President Bashar al Assad (pictured). The US Treasury Department said in a statement that the sanctions targeted “key enablers” of Assad’s government, as Washington tries to push the Syrian government back to United Nations-led negotiations and broker an end to the country’s nearly decade-long civil war.

The move targeted the head of the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate and the governor of the Central Bank of Syria, as well as a Syrian businessman the Treasury said was connected to the Assad government.

■ TEL AVIV

LAW TO LIMIT
PROTESTS DURING
‘VIRUS EMERGENCY’



Israel’s parliament approved a law early on Wednesday restricting demonstrations as part of a coronavirus-related state of emergency, that critics say is aimed at silencing protests against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The law, which passed its final reading by 46 votes to 38, was meant to be part of a slew of measures approved by parliament on Friday tightening a second nationwide lockdown.

But debate on the measure was put off as the government struggled to secure the necessary votes amid an opposition outcry and a protest outside parliament on Tuesday. — AFP



Funeral prayers are performed for late Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed al Sabah, during his funeral procession. — Reuters

KUWAIT BIDS FAREWELL TO LATE RULER AS NEW EMIR TAKES OVER

KUWAIT: Kuwait on Wednesday laid to rest late ruler Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad al Sabah, a Gulf Arab elder statesman who helped steer his nation through some of the region’s most turbulent decades, in funeral rites closed to the public due to COVID-19 concerns.

His successor and brother, Emir Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad al Sabah, 83, headed the rites after being sworn in at parliament, pledging to work for the Opec member state’s prosperity, stability and security.

“Our dear nation today faces difficult situations and dangerous challenges that can only be overcome... by unifying ranks and working hard together”, he told the National Assembly.

Shaikh Nawaf takes the reins of the nation, which holds the world’s seventh-largest oil reserves, at a time when low crude prices and the coronavirus have strained the finances of a country with a cradle-to-grave welfare system. His succession is not expected to change oil or investment policy and he is seen maintaining a foreign policy that saw Kuwait balance ties with larger neighbours.

Dignitaries from around the world paid respects to Shaikh Sabah, a seasoned diplomat and savvy politician widely respected as a humanitarian who strove to heal rifts in the Middle East, mending ties with former occupier Iraq and championing the Palestinian cause.

“He will be long remembered by all who work for regional stability, understanding between nations and between faiths, and for the humanitarian cause”, Britain’s Queen Elizabeth said in a statement tweeted by Buckingham Palace.

‘DIFFICULT TIMES’

Shaikh Sabah, who died on Tuesday in the United States where he was hospitalised since July, had ruled the country since 2006, and steered its foreign policy for over 50 years. Shaikh Nawaf was at the airport when the plane brought the body back home, wrapped in a white shroud and the Kuwaiti flag.

Shaikh Sabah was buried in



Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad al Sabah reads a statement after being sworn in as new Emir at the National Assembly, as Parliament Speaker Marzuq al Ghanem (L) looks on, on Wednesday. — AFP



The body of late Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed al Sabah is carried by family members on its way to the graveyard during his funeral procession. — Reuters

“Our dear nation today faces difficult situations and dangerous challenges that can only be overcome... by unifying ranks and working hard together

SHAIKH NAWAF AL AHMAD AL SABAH
Emir of Kuwait

Sulaibikhat cemetery alongside his kin, after prayers at Bilal bin Rabah mosque where mourners, including Qatari Emir Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, all wore face masks. The UAE said it was represented by its deputy premier, who is also interior minister, and the minister of tolerance and coexistence, both members of Abu Dhabi’s ruling family.

When Kuwait’s previous emir, Shaikh Jaber Al Ahmad al Sabah, died in 2006, thousands of Kuwaitis attended the funeral and many, along with expatriates, lined the streets.

“I am sure all the men would have loved to go... and we as women would have loved to somehow pay tribute to our emir”, Khadija, a Kuwaiti fitness instructor, said. “I wish we could have young leadership and new visions... I want to see change in our economy, education, and implementation of many promises that didn’t take place”, she said, adding that other Gulf states saw change under a new generation of leaders.

Shaikh Nawaf is likely to focus on domestic matters such as naming a crown prince who would manage ties with a parliament that has often clashed with the government and hindered economic reform efforts, diplomats and analysts say.

Under the constitution, the emir chooses the crown prince but traditionally the ruling family convenes a meeting to build consensus. Parliament also has to approve the choice. — Reuters

Insults, intrusions mar first Trump-Biden debate

★ TRUMP AND BIDEN ENGAGE IN FIRST OF THREE DEBATES ★ 'WILL YOU SHUT UP, MAN?' BIDEN ASKS

CLEVELAND: President Donald Trump and Democratic rival Joe Biden battled fiercely over Trump's record on the coronavirus pandemic, healthcare and the economy in a chaotic and bad-tempered first debate marked by personal insults and Trump's repeated interruptions.

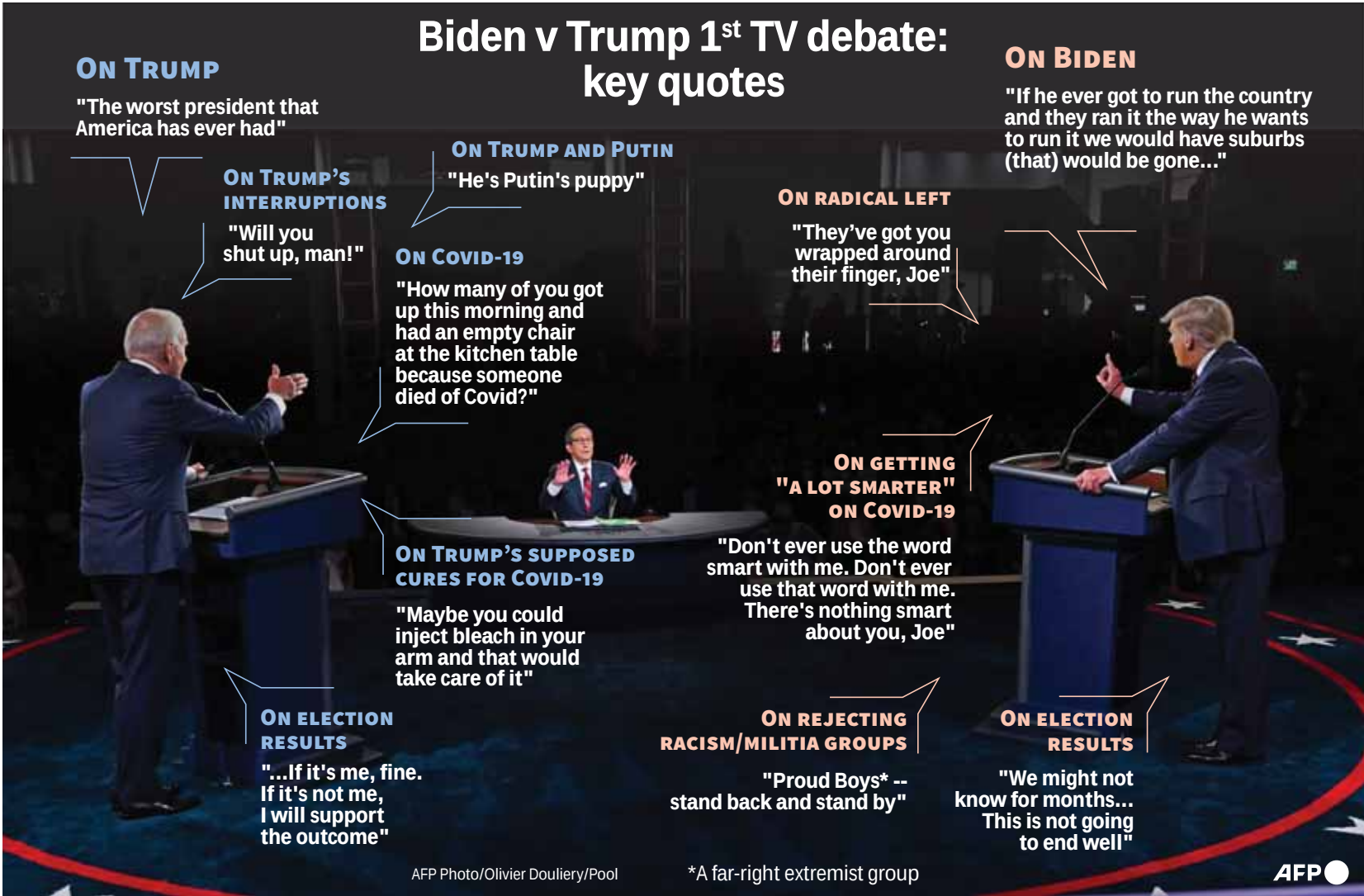
Trump bulldozed his way through the 90-minute debate, trying to goad Biden nearly every time he spoke, claiming that Democrats were trying to steal the November presidential election with mail-in ballots and declining to condemn white supremacist groups when asked to do so.

Moderator Chris Wallace of Fox News never established control of the debate, with Trump repeatedly ignoring his calls to let Biden speak.

The two White House contenders talked over each other and lobbed insults in a breathtaking political brawl that made it hard for either to make a point. At one point, an exasperated Biden said after Trump's repeated interruptions: "Will you shut up, man? This is so un-presidential".

Wallace tried in vain to reel in Trump, who ignored his time limits and talked over Biden. "I think that the country would be better served if we allowed both people to speak with fewer interruptions. I'm appealing to you, sir, to do that", Wallace said.

As of Tuesday evening, more



than 1.3 million Americans already had cast early ballots. With time running out to change minds or influence the small sliver of undecided voters, the stakes were enormous as the two candidates took the stage five weeks before the November 3 Election Day.

For Trump, 74, Tuesday's debate represented one of the few remaining chances to change the trajectory of a race that most opinion polls show him losing, as the majority of Americans disapprove of his handling of both the pandemic and protests over

racial injustice.

Biden, 77, has held a consistent lead over Trump in national opinion polls, although surveys in the battleground states that will decide the election show a much closer contest. It was hard to determine whether the debate

would move the needle.

Trump repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to fluster Biden and force him into a gaffe, but largely neglected to make any affirmative case for why he is the candidate best suited to tackle fundamental election issues. The

hyper-aggressive performance would almost certainly draw raves from his core supporters, but was unlikely to win back critical swing voters, especially suburban women who have turned away from the president over his divisive and combative rhetoric, political strategists say.

Trump has more debates with Biden scheduled for October, while Vice President Mike Pence and Biden's vice presidential running mate, Kamala Harris, have a debate next week. Tuesday's debate followed months of racial justice protests over police brutality against Black Americans, which were mostly peaceful but sometimes led to violent clashes between liberal and right-wing protesters.

Trump, who has seized on the unrest to push a "law-and-order" message, was asked if he was willing to also condemn white supremacists and tell them to stand down. He initially said he would be willing to do anything for peace but then said most of the violence was from the left wing.

"This is not a right-wing problem. This is left wing", he said. Trump also repeated his unfounded complaints that mail-in ballots would lead to widespread election fraud and declined to commit to accepting the results of the election or commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he loses the election.

— Reuters

Belgium forms new govt after 16-month deadlock

BRUSSELS: Belgium formed a new government on Wednesday, 16 months on from an inconclusive election, with caretaker finance minister Alexander De Croo named as the new prime minister.

After weeks of talks, seven parties spanning the French-Dutch language divide agreed to form a coalition to replace the caretaker administration of Sophie Wilmes, which was appointed at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in March. Belgium has not had a fully fledged government since December 2018, when a four-party coalition collapsed.

The two largest parties, the French-speaking Socialists and Flemish separatist N-VA, have struggled to overcome their differences, leaving the unwieldy,



Belgian Minister of Cooperation Development and Finance, Alexander De Croo attends a news conference in Brussels, on Wednesday. — Reuters

seven-party "Vivaldi" coalition across four political groups as the only viable option. De Croo's government will officially start work on Thursday when he and fellow ministers are sworn in by King Philippe. "We have done what appeared impossible for long, too long, in our country... namely the formation of a federal government," De Croo said in a short statement to reporters at the venue for the talks.

De Croo, 44, comes from a family deeply involved in politics and has written a book on how feminism also liberates men. Under Wilmes' caretaker administration he took charge of finance, overseeing stimulus to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and a deal to save Brussels Airlines.

— Reuters

Armenia, Azerbaijan reject talks as fighting rages

YEREVAN: Armenia and Azerbaijan rejected international calls for negotiations and a halt to fighting as fierce clashes over the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh spilled over into a fourth day on Wednesday.

Armenian and Azerbaijani forces are engaged in the heaviest fighting in years over Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian province that broke away from Azerbaijan in the 1990s during the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The long-simmering conflict erupted on Sunday with the two sides trading heavy fire and blaming each other for the outbreak of violence.

Nearly 100 people are confirmed to have died in the flare-up and both sides are claiming to have inflicted heavy losses on op-



A view shows what is said to be the wreckage of a SU-25 warplane of the Armenian air forces shot down during fighting over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, in this handout picture released on Wednesday. — Reuters

posing forces.

Azerbaijan has not admitted any military deaths but an AFP journalist in the southern Beylagan region saw dozens of women wailing over the coffin of a soldier killed in the clashes, before men with Azerbaijan flags recited prayers at a burial.

There has been increasing international pressure for a ceasefire, as fears grow that the conflict could escalate into a devastating all-out war and draw in regional powers like Turkey and Russia.

Defence officials in Yerevan on Wednesday accused Turkish jets of performing "provocative flights" along their shared border and of violating Armenia airspace, a day after Yerevan said a Turkish jet had downed one of its warplanes. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

First patient cured of HIV dies after cancer returns

Timothy Ray Brown, the first person known to be cured of HIV when he had a unique type of bone marrow transplant, has died in California after relapsing with cancer, his partner said.

"It is with great sadness that I announce that Timothy passed away... this afternoon surrounded by myself and friends, after a 5 month battle with leukaemia", his partner, Tim Hoeffgen, said in a post on Facebook.

He said Brown was his "hero" and "the sweetest person in the



world". Brown, born on March 11, 1966, became known as the "Berlin Patient" after his HIV was cleared by treatment there in 2007.

PARIS

Parisians rattled by sonic boom from military jet

A huge noise that panicked residents of Paris on Wednesday was caused by a sonic boom as a military jet broke the speed of sound, police in the French capital said.

"A very loud noise was heard in Paris and in the Paris region. It was not an explosion, it was a fighter jet crossing the sound barrier", Paris police said on their Twitter account, urging people to stop calling emergency phone lines.

The noise, which was heard all across the city and shook windows, rattled Parisians already on edge after a knife attack outside the former offices of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* last week that the government has called an act of terror.

Wednesday's incident led to confusion, with people asking on social media about a noise heard throughout the city but that left no trace of damage.

NEW DELHI

Anger after police cremate gang-abuse victim

Indian police were accused on Wednesday of cremating the body of a teenaged Dalit woman against her family's wishes after she died following an alleged gang-rape by four upper-caste men — the latest sexual assault to shock the country.

The 19-year-old from India's marginalised Dalit community was left paralysed following a brutal attack two weeks ago in fields outside a village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

She was found lying in a pool



of blood after going missing while collect fodder outside her home village of Bool Gahri. The woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, was later taken to hospital in New Delhi, around 200 kilometres away, but died on Tuesday from her injuries.

A writer who pens from his heart!

I never knew him as a writer and a journalist. He wrote what his heart wanted him to write about this country. His pen expressed his loyalty and reverence to Omanis. He appreciated the respect he himself, his co-countrymen — Sudanese and other residents enjoyed on this most revered land known as the Sultanate of Oman. He and others like him regarded Oman as another homeland.

I was surprised when I found what Al Rasheed was writing about this country with his heart and soul. He wrote, “Goodbye, O’ good people.” He loved this country sincerely. Why not. He had lived here among us for full 40 years. The farewell he wrote will always be remembered by the country. It is a testimony of the care, justice, respect and legal protection enjoyed by the residents at par with citizens. This is the reason they loved Oman where they were treated not less than citizens. Barring voting rights, they have all equal privileges. This is the reciprocal love and affection of the land.

When he expressed his loyalty and love for this country, he also got a lot of affection from this land. It was not less than a love affair between the two. This is the characteristic of this country that whomsoever is sincere to it is greeted by this land with open arms. This country treated him and others like him as guests and its citizens.

Al Rasheed’s mother visited him some time ago. When one of the officials



Ali Al Matani
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AL RASHEED
LOVED OMAN
SINCERELY. HE
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HE WROTE
WILL ALWAYS BE
REMEMBERED BY
THE COUNTRY

of the Royal Oman Police completed the procedures of arrival with respect and compassion, she was bewildered. It was a traditional Omani expression of respect and hospitality which impressed her. It has left a positive impact on his mother. Immediately after this, her expression was that she was now satisfied with her son.

Al Rasheed was an integral part of this country, he lived with us and shared our joys and sorrows. He lived throughout the years of the Omani Renaissance and saw with his own eyes the wheel of development moving forward and covering every nook and corner of this country. This is how he became an integral part of this country.

Al Rasheed, by virtue of spending long years here, was dear to us. He was familiar with every inch of Oman due to his work as a communications engineer for the Oman Telecommunications Company. He visited all the wilayats of the country and its villages, providing them communication lines and Internet network to connect people with each other and link Oman with outside the world.

When I started my relationship with “Omantel”, I heard everyone talking about him. If the phone breaks down, the cable is cut, or if there are any other related problems, everybody had the word on his or her tongue “Call Al Rasheed.” Al Rasheed responded swiftly and always with a smiling face. Therefore people were overwhelmed by him.

A friend of all, Al Rasheed was always known for his kindness, good qualities, high morals, and good manners. Everybody knew him. None of the 4,000 employees of Omantel can say they he or she did not know him. Everybody loved him and it was a mutual love and affection.

Talking about Al Rasheed people never got bored. He left living memories. He was a living link between Oman’s past and present. He saw and experienced every phase of the Renaissance. Al Rasheed could write what he saw and experienced. Everything was from his own experience and not a story narrated by others. He had a remarkable memory. He could draw a picture of everything he had seen with all the precise details as if it just happened under his nose. He had his own style of narrating a story and drawing a picture.

He was seen everywhere in all social functions. Due to his good manners, he was easily noticed even in large gatherings. He was loved by Omanis. Whosoever came across him became his friend and a well-wisher. He adopted all Omani traditions in his life and protected them. With these qualities, he was regarded as people’s ambassador to Sudan free from all sorts of protocols and official nitty-gritty.

Al Rasheed would always be remembered as a legend for his love for Oman and lives in our hearts and minds. He was a testimony that Oman is for all.

PAINT IT BLACK

UK postboxes change colour to honour Black Britons

ESTELLE SHIRBON

Four of Britain’s distinctive red postboxes have been painted black and gold and adorned with images by or of illustrious Black Britons, in a novel way of celebrating Black History Month.

One of Britain’s most recognisable symbols, red pillar boxes appear on countless postcards and souvenir items, while tourists can often be seen posing for photographs next to the postboxes.

The Royal Mail said it had selected one postbox in each of the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - and had them painted black with gold trim at the top. They will remain that way for the whole of October, which is Black History Month.

In England, the chosen postbox is located close to the Black Cultural Archives heritage centre in Brixton, an area of south London that has long been a hub for the Caribbean community and other Black minority groups. The Brixton postbox features an image of the painting “Queuing at the RA” by British-

Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare, which appeared on a limited edition stamp issued by the Royal Mail in 2018 to celebrate the Royal Academy art gallery.

Shonibare is known for works that grapple with cultural identity and the legacies of colonialism, such as “Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle”, a replica of the ship HMS Victory enclosed in a giant bottle and with 37 sails made from an African fabric.

According to the UK Art Fund which acquired the artwork for display in London, it “considers the legacy of British colonialism and its expansion in trade and Empire, made possible through the freedom of the seas and new trade routes that Nelson’s victory provided.”

The Scottish black postbox, located in Glasgow, features an image of Walter Tull, who was the first Black player signed by the city’s Rangers soccer team before being killed in action during the First World War.

In the Welsh capital Cardiff, the black postbox features an image of Jamaican-born nurse Mary Seacole, who cared for wounded soldiers during the 1853-1856 Crimean War. In the Northern Ireland capital Belfast, the selected postbox features a picture of comedian Lenny Henry, who the Royal Mail said was “instrumental in helping a multi-cultural society to embrace multi-cultural comedy”.

The Royal Mail is the latest institution to have engaged with Britain’s Black heritage in recent months, jolted by the Black Lives Matter movement and by the toppling of the statue of a slave trader by protesters in the city of Bristol in June.

Among other changes, another slave trader statue was removed by officials in London, a concert hall in Bristol renamed itself and a charity that runs hundreds of grand country estates published an in-depth report about how the properties benefitted from slavery and colonialism. The trend has been met with a backlash, with parts of the media and some politicians dismissing it as “wokery”. — Reuters

BULLYING HIS WAY

Fractional presidential debate unlikely to move needle for Trump

JAMES OLIPHANT

Down in the opinion polls with five weeks to go until the November election, US President Donald Trump sought to use the first presidential debate to bully his way back into the race.

Repeatedly interrupting and sparring with opponent Joe Biden, the Republican Trump tried to knock the Democratic former vice president off his feet on Tuesday night and alter the dynamic of a contest he has been losing for months. It was unlikely the president succeeded, largely because of his own combative and chaotic behaviour but also because the insult-filled and often fact-free affair may have left the few undecided voters watching at home more dispirited than engaged.

“It’s doubtful that this mentally exhausting debate changed any minds,” said Ron Bonjean, a Republican strategist in Washington who advised Trump’s 2016 transition team.

“Each side walked away with something, but the shock of the personal attacks against one another probably turned many people off.”

Trump drew raves from some diehard supporters for his show of aggression towards Biden.

But he spent little time attempting to persuade swing voters, particularly women who have been critical of his tone and tactics, that he is the candidate best suited to tackle



A woman waves a flag as President Trump supporters watch the presidential debate in Katy, Texas, on Tuesday. — AFP

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fundamental election issues such as the coronavirus pandemic, health care and race relations.

The debate was held in Ohio, where Biden will campaign on Wednesday and one of a group of Midwestern states where the race is expected to remain competitive.

With Biden chipping away at Trump’s base in battleground states that decide elections, the president may have squandered a chance to reach voters he needs.

Reuters/Ipsos polling this month found that four in 10 white non-college-educated likely voters in Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin said they were backing Biden this year, up from 2016 when Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton was supported by about three in 10 non-college whites in those states.

The polling shows Biden with a sizable lead overall nationally but with a smaller edge in those key states.

— Reuters



A man wearing a protective mask disinfests a seat screen inside a plane. — Reuters

Travel slump threatens 46 million jobs

PARIS: The impact of the coronavirus on travel may cost as many as 46 million jobs globally, according to projections published on Wednesday by an aviation industry group.

The Air Transport Action Group (ATAG) predicted that the travel slump and a slow recovery will threaten 4.8 million aviation workers and more than half of the 87.7 million total jobs supported directly or indirectly by the sector, in related leisure industries and supply chains.

“We know that a lot of jobs in air transport and the wider economy relying on aviation are at risk”, said Michael Gill, who heads the group representing airlines, airports, aircraft makers and other sector players.

The warning came after airlines cut their 2020 traffic forecast amid renewed coronavirus outbreaks and travel restrictions that darkened the outlook. — Reuters

Sugar-sweetened drinks in Oman to be pricier from today

INVENTORY DISCLOSURE: “The transitional return must be submitted no later than October 15, 2020 so to avoid any additional tax, penalties and fines stipulated in the Excise Tax Law”, the Authority stated in the announcement posted on its website

CONRAD PRABHU
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Sugar-sweetened beverages will be dearer by around 50 per cent effective from today, October 1, 2020, as the expanded scope of the Excise Tax Law comes into force across the Sultanate. The levy applies to virtually every category of sweetened drink and beverage (with the exception of a limited number of natural juices and milk-based beverages) sold in stores, malls, restaurants and hotels around the country.

Ahead of the implementation of the levy, the Tax Authority urged importers and traders of sugar-sweetened drinks and beverages to provide an account of any goods stored on their premises or warehouses as of September 30, 2020. The filing — known as a ‘transitional return’ (disclosure of inventory) — is required to be made within a



The transitional return must be submitted no later than October 15, 2020 so to avoid any additional tax, penalties and fines stipulated in the Excise Tax Law

prescribed timeframe along with the applicable excise duty on these stocks, it said.

“The transitional return must be submitted no later than October 15, 2020 so to avoid any additional tax, penalties and fines stipulated in the Excise Tax Law”, the Authority stated in the announcement posted on its

website.

Excise Tax — also dubbed ‘Selective Tax’ — generated around RO 40 million in additional revenue to the government last year, following its maiden introduction with effect from June 15, 2019.

Included in its coverage then were tobacco and its derivatives,

energy and fizzy drinks, alcohol and pork products. Now, with the scope of the levy enlarged to cover a broad range of sugar-sweetened drinks and beverages, the upshot will be sizable uptick in revenue for the government from this source.

According to tax experts, a multitude of product types fall within the scope of sweetened drinks and thus liable to the new tax. The Tax Authority’s Decision 34/2020 defines sweetened

beverages as any drink in which sugar, sugar derivative or other sweetener has been added. Included in this definition are concentrates, powders, gels, extracts or compounds to which sugar, sugar derivative or other sweetener is added and which can be converted into a sweetened beverage.

Also liable to excise tax are juices, sport drinks, barley drinks (malt drinks and non-alcoholic beer), ready to drink/ packaged coffee and tea and artificially flavoured powders and concentrates (capable of being converted into beverages) that contain sugar, sugar derivative or other sweetener.

Sweetening agents can range from sugar, sugar derivatives and other sweeteners (such as sucrose, glucose, fructose, lactose, galactose, coconut sugar and sugar cane) or sugar substitutes like stevia, saccharine, neotame, sucralose, aspartame, erythritol and acesulfame potassium.

But exempt from the purview of the new tax are the following: Natural fruit and vegetable juices; Milk and milk substitutes; Ready-to-drink beverages containing at least 75 per cent milk; Ready-to-drink beverages containing at least 75 per cent milk substitutes; Artificial baby milk, baby formula or baby food; Beverages intended for special dietary/nutritional needs; and Beverages intended for medical needs.

MARKET CONTROL

China prepares antitrust probe into Google

It also comes as China embarks on a major revamp of its antitrust laws with proposed amendments including a dramatic increase in maximum fines and expanded criteria for judging a company’s control of a market



A Google sign is seen during the China Digital Entertainment Expo and Conference in Shanghai, in this file photo. — Reuters

administration to hobble Chinese tech companies, citing national security risks.

This has included putting Huawei on its trade blacklist, threatening similar action for Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp 0981.HK and ordering TikTok owner ByteDance to divest the short-form video app.

It also comes as China embarks on a major revamp of its antitrust laws with proposed amendments including a dramatic increase in maximum fines and expanded criteria for judging a company’s control of a market.

A potential probe would also look at accusations that Google’s market position could cause

“extreme damage” to Chinese companies like Huawei, as losing the US tech giant’s support for Android-based operating systems would lead to loss of confidence and revenue, a second person said.

The sources were not authorised to speak publicly on the matter and declined to be identified. Google did not provide immediate comment, while Huawei declined to comment.

China’s top market regulator, the State Administration for Market Regulation, and the State Council did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The US trade blacklist bars Google from providing technical support to new Huawei phone

models and access to Google Mobile Services, the bundle of developer services upon which most Android apps are based.

Google had a temporary licence that exempted it from the ban on Huawei but it expired in August.

It was not immediately clear what Google services the potential probe would focus on. Most Chinese smartphone vendors use an open-source version of the Android platform with alternatives to Google services on their domestic phones. Google’s search, email and other services are blocked in China.

Huawei has said it missed its 2019 revenue target by \$12 billion, which company officials have attributed to US actions against it. Seeking to overcome its reliance on Google, the Chinese firm announced plans this month to introduce its proprietary Harmony operating system in smartphones next year.

Chinese regulators will be looking at examples set by their peers in Europe and in India if it proceeds with the antitrust investigation, the first source said.

“China will also look at what other countries have done, including holding inquiries with Google executives”, said the person. — Reuters



A man wears a protective face mask as he walks past Banco de Espana, amidst concerns over coronavirus outbreak, in Barcelona. — Reuters

Spain’s debt soars as virus slams economy

MADRID: Spain’s public debt soared in the second quarter to its highest level in at least 20 years as government spending leapt in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The government announced that it would have to suspend fiscal rules, which EU-member states must normally meet, in 2020 and 2021 as a result of the pandemic’s impact on the economy.

“The government has decided to suspend budgetary rules in an extraordinary fashion for 2020 and 2021”, Finance Minister Maria Jesus Montero said.

Montero insisted however that Spain would maintain a “fiscally responsible” approach overall as figures showed the national debt ballooning to around 110 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the second quarter, way above the EU limit of 60 per cent.

data from the Bank of Spain put total debt at 1.29 trillion euros (\$1.5 trillion), up from 1.22 trillion or about 99 per cent of GDP in the first three months of the year.

For much of the second quarter, Spain was in lockdown with the economy in “hibernation” to fight the spread of the virus. — AFP

Movie halls business faces uncertain future

Three decades ago, the advent of video rental stores had an enormous impact on attendance at movie halls, reducing viewership by around 40 per cent.

Now, cable TV and Internet-based international entertainment services firms are doing the same, adversely impacting the domestic cinema industry in a number of countries around the world, particularly in this region.

Experts believe there is intense competition in the cinematic world with many regional players facing a sharp decline in revenues in the face of international content streamed

into homes in various languages.

Huge television screens manufactured by electronics giants from Japan, Korea and elsewhere have enabled this trend, making it possible for every home to have the tools to enjoy cable and streaming services.

Today, people young and old watch programmes and films at home aired in different languages and at different times to suit all viewers.

It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a major negative impact on the local cinema industry with movie halls shuttered in many countries as a precaution against the spread of the virus. There are



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THE INFLUX OF MAJOR INVESTORS HAS SPURRED THE GROWTH OF THE MOVIE THEATRE BUSINESS IN THE REGION

hopes expressed by businesses operating in this sector that the authorities will accelerate the reopening of cinema houses while putting in place measures to control the number of attendees.

The influx of major investors has spurred the growth of the movie theatre business in the region.

Many shopping malls and commercial centres in the Gulf region feature multiplexes with several screens showing different films simultaneously, enabling members of the same family to watch different movies at the same time, but based on their individual choices.

All of these issues were

discussed in a forum hosted recently as part of the ‘Majlis Al Khonji’ series of virtual seminars.

At the event, Abdul Redha Sultan, an executive director at his father’s establishment, traced the history of the movie hall business in Oman prior to the country’s modern renaissance and its growth ever since.

In addition to commercial films and documents screened in cinema halls, there were also screenings in private homes, camps, boards (diwaniyas) and large companies such as the Petroleum Development Company, he said.

The British consulate introduced screenings in 1950, complemented by the Indian

consulate in the early 1960s with weekly shows of Indian language films for a certain amount.

The popularity of these screenings grew after the introduction of electricity by owners of some mansions in 1959. Movie screenings at such homes typically attracted 30 to 35 people per show, he said.

The trade flourished after 1970 through the establishment of modern cinema halls and the establishment of joint-stock companies in this field.

Today, there are 23 movie halls in the Sultanate featuring a total of 108 screens — a fiercely competitive sector facing an uncertain future because of the pandemic.

BUSINESS ALERT

MUSCAT

NEW RAMADA ENCORE HOTEL OPENS IN MUSCAT



Ramada Encore by Wyndham Muscat is part of Al Khaleel Group, a trading and contracting company in Oman.

Strategically located on Sultan Qaboos Street, the new hotel – opened on August 1, 2020, aims to redefine the concept of midscale business and leisure travel, offering a comfortable and consistent environment with state-of-the-art facilities.

Located 15 minutes away from Muscat International Airport and the city’s major landmarks such as Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Qurum Beach, the Royal Opera House, the hotel attracts visitors from across the globe.

The 163-room hotel is aesthetically designed for the guests to enjoy their stay with prime comfort.

Well equipped with reliable services and amenities, Ramada Encore by Wyndham Muscat will offer an unparalleled experience for business and leisure visitors.

The hotel also provides distinctive benefits making travel successful and offers guests single, double and suite accommodations.

Property highlights include a rooftop pool with sundeck, a fully-equipped fitness centre with professional equipment, an Italian cuisine all-day dining, a coffee shop, a multipurpose meeting room, and a lobby lounge. Rooms feature amenities such as complimentary Wi-Fi, flat-screen television, safe deposit box, rollaway beds, and a high-tech touch panel to control the lighting and temperature of the room.

Guests also have access to an exhaustive choice of local and international channels for entertainment.

GLOBAL TRANSACTIONS

M&A spikes in record third quarter

A deal frenzy in September led to a record third quarter with more than \$1 trillion worth of transactions around the world, mostly focused on coronavirus-resilient sectors such as technology and health care

LONDON: Mergers and acquisitions came back with a bang in the third quarter as executives rushed to revisit deals left on hold at the height of the coronavirus pandemic and boardrooms regained confidence after a roller-coaster year.

A deal frenzy in September led to a record third quarter with more than \$1 trillion worth of transactions around the world, mostly focused on coronavirus-resilient sectors such as technology and health care, according to Refinitiv data. The third-quarter spike, however, failed to take up all the slack after a lacklustre start to the year.

M&A deals overall were down 21 per cent at \$2.2 trillion in the first nine months of 2020, with US transactions coming in at \$800 billion, a 43 per cent slump from the same period last year.

“The way out of this crisis is through M&A and we have started to have really engaging conversations with CEOs and boards around strategic positioning post-COVID,” said Alison Harding-Jones, Citigroup’s CN head of M&A for Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) and vice chairman of EMEA banking, capital markets and advisory.

“People have realised they need to consolidate to create stronger and better-equipped businesses to



The Fearless Girl statue is seen outside the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City, New York. – Reuters

deal with what the world looks like going forward,” she said.

M&A activity in July, August and September leapt 80 per cent from the previous quarter when the spread of COVID-19 triggered global lockdowns and brought business to a standstill.

In the United States, deal volumes rose threefold to \$414 billion from the second quarter, Europe was up 21 per cent at \$231 billion and Asia Pacific spiked 67 per cent to \$274 billion.

“The market is picking up quite rapidly. Ironically, the prospects for M&A activity are stronger now than they were pre-COVID,” said Peter Weinberg, founding partner and chief executive of Perella Weinberg Partners.

The latest transaction to become a casualty of the pandemic was LVMH’s \$16 billion takeover of US jeweller Tiffany, which is hanging in the balance after the French luxury

giant said it could not meet a deal deadline.

While that was a blow for transatlantic mergers, the deal flow between the United States and Europe was partly restored by Nvidia’s \$40 billion swoop on British chip designer Arm Holdings.

German health firm Siemens Healthineers and French drugmaker Sanofi, meanwhile, spent billions on US takeovers, buying Varian Medical Systems and Principia, respectively.

Other big deals included PetroChina’s sale of its oil and gas pipelines for \$49 billion and a \$42 billion move by Altice’s Franco-Israeli founder Patrick Drahi to take the telecoms firm private.

The third-quarter deal frenzy, however, gave mid-market mergers the biggest boost. Transactions in the \$5 billion to \$10 billion range are up 24 per cent so far this year

while combinations worth more than \$10 billion have dropped 37 per cent.

Dealmakers said the looming US presidential election on November 3 was a factor for companies considering acquisitions but a sustained economic recovery should help stimulate merger activity, regardless of the winner.

“The election is in focus with clients right now. But if you look back, the underlying strength of the economy and the capital markets are better predictors of M&A activity than any single event like the election,” said Chris Roop, co-head of North America M&A at JPMorgan Chase & Co.

In Europe, a long-awaited season of banking deals kicked off over the summer with Spanish and Italian banks finalising merger discussions, raising expectations that German and Swiss rivals might follow suit.

— Reuters

Shale giant Oasis Petroleum files for bankruptcy

TEXAS: Oasis Petroleum Inc filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on Wednesday, the latest US shale producer to seek court-aided restructuring as the energy industry reels under an unprecedented crash in oil prices due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shares of the company, which earlier this month skipped interest payments on some bonds, fell over 24 per cent premarket.

Virus-led lockdowns, which decimated travel and fuel demand, have forced many shale producers to halt oil drilling, leaving them with no source of cash to repay their massive debts.

Oasis had long-term debt of \$2.76 billion with just \$77.4 million in cash and cash equivalents as of June 30.

The company said it expects to cut debt by \$1.8 billion through the restructuring and secured \$450 million in debtor-in-possession financing.

US oil prices have so far fallen by nearly a third from over \$60 a barrel at the beginning of the year and briefly turned negative in April.

In July and August, 13 North American oil producers filed for protection from creditors, according to a report by law firm Haynes and Boone.

— Reuters



Oil extends losses as rising virus cases spur demand worries



A worker fixes a fuel dispenser machine at a gas station Caracas. – Reuters

TOKYO: Oil prices fell for a second day on Wednesday as rising coronavirus cases prompted concerns about further restrictions on global economic activity that could curb fuel demand.

Brent crude for November delivery dropped 63 cents, or 1.56 per cent, to \$40.40 per barrel by 1005 GMT. West Texas Intermediate fell 50 cents, or 1.3 per cent, to \$38.79.

The November Brent contract expires today, to be replaced by the December contract, which was down around 1.4 per cent at

\$41.00.

The benchmarks fell more than 3 per cent on Tuesday as global COVID-19 cases passed 1 million, having doubled in three months.

“The increasing number of COVID-19 cases continues to raise alarm bells on energy demand,” said Avtar Sandu, senior commodities manager at Phillip Futures.

“Concerns about stagnating demand and the return of Libyan exports continue to put pressure on oil prices,” said Norbert Rucker from Julius Baer.

ING Economics also pointed out in a note: “Whilst demand is an issue for the market, the supply side of the equation is not helping either.”

Libya’s Sarir oilfield, which was producing more than 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) last year, restarted output after an eight-month blockade.

Chief Executive Officers of the world’s biggest trading companies are forecasting a weak recovery for oil demand and little movement in prices in the coming months and potentially years.

— Reuters



Miami Heat forward Jimmy Butler (22) and Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum (0) compete for a jump ball. — USA Today Sports

BUTLER SHRUGS OFF 'UNDERDOG' TAG AS HEAT BRACE FOR LAKERS

ORLANDO: Jimmy Butler says the Miami Heat don't see themselves as NBA Finals underdogs despite starting the season as rank outsiders for the title.

Miami take on the Los Angeles Lakers in game one on Wednesday with a chance of becoming one of the longest-odds champions in basketball history.

Before the season tipped off 11 months ago, Miami were regarded as 60-1 shots of finishing the campaign as champions. Some bookmakers pegged them at 110-1.

Even before the season restarted in Orlando in July, the Heat were a generous 30-1 to win the title, with the dominant Milwaukee Bucks expected to emerge as the Eastern Conference representatives in the finals.

But fifth seeds Miami, the third lowest seeded team to reach the NBA Finals since 1984, have shredded the form book en route to Wednesday's opener.

The Indiana Pacers were swept in the opening round before the vaunted Bucks were dismantled in five games in the conference semi-finals. The Heat then defeated

Boston in six games to reach the championship round.

"A really good team. That's it", Butler said on Tuesday when asked to assess the Heat's status. "Not going to say that we're any better than anybody else, but I just don't think that we're underdogs. I don't. 'WE TRULY DON'T CARE'"

"So what that nobody picked us to be here? That's okay. Pretty sure nobody is picking up to win, either.

"But we understand that. We embrace that, because at the end of the day we truly don't care. We're just going to go out here

and compete, play together like we always have, and I'm going to see where we end up.

"But at the end of the day we're going to do this our way, the Miami Heat way, and that way has worked for us all year long."

Butler says the Heat have become a tight-knit group during the months spent in the Orlando bubble in Florida, where teams have been based since the restart in order to ward off the threat of COVID-19.

"I think we enjoy each other's success so much, man, that you can tell every single day when

we're in the hotel", Butler said.

"We talk about the game, but we also talk about how much joy it brings us to play with one another and how you can't take this for granted.

"With this group we've got the right number of young guys who are super confident, older guys who are super confident, and then guys right in the middle who are super confident. It brings us pure joy to watch us continually grow as a team."

Butler, who is playing in the Finals for the first time, admitted though that nerves could be

a factor for Miami's relatively inexperienced squad.

"We'll see as the game goes. But I think there's a lot of nerves for a lot of people, including myself", Butler said. "This is the first time being here, so I just want to make sure that everybody is comfortable.

"We've been playing a certain way this entire year. I'm not getting away from that. I think that's winning basketball for us, me making sure that everybody is involved. I think that's part of my role on this team, so we'll take it as the game goes, and we'll figure it out." — AFP

Tewatia keen to make most of new role at Rajasthan Royals

JAIPUR: Rajasthan Royals' Rahul Tewatia said he is relishing the responsibility placed on his shoulders by skipper Steve Smith after his heroics in Sunday's record run chase in the Indian Premier League.

Tewatia struck seven sixes, including five in one over, in his 31-ball 53 as Rajasthan reached their target of 224 — the highest run chase in the Twenty20 tournament's history — to defeat Kings XI Punjab by four wickets with three balls left.

Tewatia, picked as a leg-spinner in the Rajasthan squad, was promoted to the number four spot ahead of batsman Robin Uthappa, with the team needing 124 runs from 11 overs. "They sent me at number four and the plan was to simply take on the bowlers", Tewatia told reporters.

"I knew my role clearly because it was discussed with me before the tournament started. "I realised that if they are sending me up the order,



they have belief in me. It was also an opportunity to prove myself."

With 51 needed off three overs, Tewatia hit five sixes off West Indies bowler Sheldon Cottrell to turn the game on its head. "From the beginning, I was trying to bat as per the required run rate but I

wasn't able to initially hit the ball well," the 27-year-old added. "But I knew that once I could start hitting big... we would get closer to our target. So it happened in that over... I could hit the first six and the rest of the sixes kept coming."

— Reuters

LeBron says 'bubble' season the toughest challenge of his career

ORLANDO: LeBron James says leading the Los Angeles Lakers into the NBA Finals after nearly three months inside the league's "bubble" in Orlando ranks as the biggest challenge of his career.

The 35-year-old superstar is readying for a 10th NBA Finals appearance on Wednesday when the Lakers face the Miami Heat in the championship round of an unprecedented season that began 11 months ago.

The coronavirus pandemic forced the NBA to shut down in mid-March, and anger over racism and police brutality almost prompted James and the Lakers to abandon the season in August.

James, who is hoping to win a fourth championship ring with a third different team after previous victories with Miami and Cleveland, said on Tuesday that this year's disjointed season ranked as the toughest of the lot.

"It's probably been the most challenging thing I've ever done as far as a professional, as far as committing to something and



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James. — USA Today Sports

actually making it through", James told reporters.

"But I knew when I was coming what we were coming here for. I would be lying if I sat up here and knew that everything inside the bubble, the toll that it would take on your mind and your body and everything else, because it's been extremely tough.

"But I'm here for one reason and one reason only, and that's to

compete for a championship. That was my mindset once I entered the bubble, once I entered the quarantine process the first two days. The main thing was for us to finish the season and compete for a championship."

James who in July jokingly compared entering the bubble in Orlando to starting a prison sentence, said he had lost track of time in Florida. — AFP



MESSI'S HAPPINESS NOT IN MY HANDS, SAYS KOEMAN



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (right). — Reuters

MADRID: Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman has said Lionel Messi's happiness is not in his hands but admits he was pleased to hear the Argentine saying on Tuesday he wants to end his disputes with the club.

Koeman also confirmed Ajax defender Sergino Dest is "almost certain" to join Barca, with the 19-year-old expected to complete his medical on Wednesday before completing the move.

The signing of Dest would continue the shake-up at Barcelona, who have allowed Luis Suarez, Ivan Rakitic, Arturo Vidal and Nelson Semedo all to leave as they try to reduce the wage bill and refresh their squad.

Messi was forced to stay and expressed his disappointment at the way Suarez was pushed out to Atletico Madrid but in an interview with *Diario Sport* published on Tuesday, the 33-year-old said he wanted to "put an end" to the "disagreements".

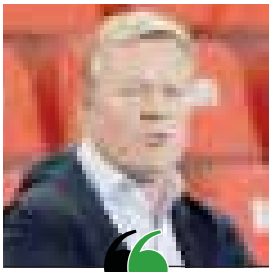
"I don't know if after Messi's words I will have a quiet life as coach of Barcelona, I don't think so, there is always something, but of course it is very positive that the captain has come out like that asking us to be united," Koeman said in a press conference on Wednesday.

"This was very positive and hopefully everything will be a bit quieter than it has been recently."

Koeman was asked if he thinks Messi is happy at Barcelona. "I don't know if I have that sort of thing in my hands. As a coach, we have to look to make a better team for him, where he can shine, and look for a position in the team where he can deliver the best performances that he has always delivered for this club.

"I have seen in these four weeks that he lives for football, even in training matches he does everything to win and I think that winning matches is the remedy for Leo to be happy in this team."

Dest will offer competition at right-back after Semedo was sold to Wolves. "Sergino is doing his medical and still the contract has to be signed so until he has signed, I prefer not to give an



I don't know if after Messi's words I will have a quiet life as coach of Barcelona, I don't think so, there is always something, but of course it is very positive that the captain has come out like that asking us to be united

RONALD KOEMAN
Barcelona coach

opinion," Koeman said. "But it's almost certain that he will be here and then we will have a young full-back. It's also a matter of changing things, having young players for the future of this Barca."

Koeman said the future of Ousmane Dembele, who has been linked with a move to Manchester United before the end of the transfer window, is not up to him.

"The first thing to say is it's up to the club and the player," said Koeman. "While the player is with us, I am going to count on him. He has not played the last match because there are other players and Ansu (Fati) has shown he is a very good player for this team so he has to wait for his chance to play.

"He was better physically in the first few weeks, he had a little dip last week, but today he has trained well, so I want to say I am counting on him."

Barcelona play away at Celta Vigo on Thursday after winning their opening La Liga game 4-0 against Villarreal on Sunday. — AFP

Tottenham optimistic about bringing in new striker, says Mourinho

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur are hopeful that they can sign a striker as a backup for Harry Kane before the transfer window closes on Oct. 5, manager Jose Mourinho said on Wednesday.

Kane, who struggled with a hamstring injury last season, was on the bench and came on late in Tuesday's penalty shootout win over Chelsea that earned Tottenham a spot in the quarter-finals of the League Cup. Spurs are already without winger Son Heung-min after the South Korean injured his hamstring in their 1-1 Premier League draw

with Newcastle United while new loan signing Gareth Bale will not be match-fit before the October international break.

"I'm optimistic (of signing a new striker) but more than that I like the feeling that we're trying everything to do it," Mourinho told reporters before Thursday's Europa League playoff against Israel's Maccabi Haifa.

"My club and structure are trying everything to do it. If we succeed, great, I believe so and if we don't, that's football. "Sonny of course is not playing tomorrow. He's a doubt for Sunday (in



Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho with Harry Kane before he comes on. — Reuters

the league against Manchester United), a big doubt. I don't want to say he doesn't play and then he does because my position is in doubt." Bale's return to his former club from Real Madrid has cast doubts on the future of midfielder Dele Alli, who has lost his place in Mourinho's side.

"I cannot confirm if Dele is playing or not. The only thing I can say is that he's being very professional," Mourinho added. "I have respect for him. Even yesterday he trained well and hard. He has the respect of his teammates." — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BRUSSELS

Hazard must prove fitness for Belgium start

Eden Hazard will have to play some football for Real Madrid in their next two games or will be left out of Belgium's squad for their three internationals in October, coach Roberto Martinez said on Wednesday. Hazard, 29, has yet to play this season as he has struggled with an ankle injury and faces a race to be fit for Real's La Liga matches against Real Valladolid on Wednesday and at Levante on Sunday.

"If Eden gets onto the pitch at Real he will join us but if not, then he will stay and train individually in Madrid," said Martinez.



MANCHESTER

Solskjaer calls for clarity on handball rule

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says managers need more clarity on the Premier League's handball rule following a series of controversial decisions in the opening weeks of the season.

Tottenham Hotspur were denied a victory on Sunday after Newcastle United were awarded a penalty in stoppage time for handball by Eric Dier, who was facing in the opposite direction to the ball when he jumped.

Manchester United defender Victor Lindelof was



also on the receiving end of a harsh penalty decision during their 3-1 defeat by Crystal Palace in their season-opener. "I think football has changed," Solskjaer said.

LONDON

Historic FA Cup fetches £760,000 at auction

West Ham United co-owner David Gold has sold the oldest surviving FA Cup trophy for 760,000 pounds (\$978,044.00) at an auction.

Gold bought the trophy, which was the second version of the FA Cup presented to winners of the competition between 1896-1910, 15 years ago for 478,000 pounds during his time as chairman of Birmingham City.

The original version of the trophy was stolen in 1895. "The trophy charts the transformation of the game from one dominated by public school players to the



popular mass participation sport that it became and remains," auction house Bonhams said.

The cup had been on display in the National Football Museum in Manchester. Sheffield United were the first winners of the new trophy in 1896.

ANISIMOVA STEAMROLLS INTO THIRD ROUND

PARIS: Teenager Amanda Anisimova muscled her way into the third round of the French Open with a 6-2 6-0 demolition of fellow American Bernarda Pera on Wednesday. The 25th seed was barely bothered as she set up a meeting with either world number one Simona Halep or another Romanian, Irina-Camelia Begu.



AZARENKA THRASHED BY SCHMEIDLOVA

PARIS: Victoria Azarenka's unhappy French Open campaign ended on Wednesday as the former world number one was beaten 6-2 6-2 by Slovakia's Anna Karolina Schmiedlova in the second round. The Belarusian capitulated in feeble fashion against her 161st-ranked opponent. — AFP

National swimmers conclude domestic camp on successful note



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

Oman's national team swimmers recently completed the domestic camp at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex under supervision of the head coach Srdan Filipovic.

The preparatory camp which began on September 20 and lasted for ten days featured more than 17 training sessions.

The internal camp was within the comprehensive plan for gearing up to the forthcoming participations including the GCC swimming tournament (short course for 25 metres) in Qatar in next February and GCC Games in Kuwait in next March.

The Serbian coach Srdan Filipovic told *Oman Daily Observer* that he is delighted with the quick response of the national swimmer's shape which returned to the previous technical status as before the pandemic.

"Oman team swimmers were the last among the GCC countries which returned back to the sporting action in July. However, during the last period all the swimmers had managed properly with a fast return to the normal shape before the pandemic crises", he added in his exclusive remarks.

As many as twelve players took part in the domestic camp at the Olympic swimming pool in Al Rustaq Sports Complex. "The camp ended in a successful note. It was great that all the swimmers had got the chance for two time training sessions daily in morning and evening sessions. Moreover, it was a great chance to have the proper spirit among the swimmers after non swimming action. I am delighted with the new Al Rustaq Sports Complex which features a wonderful Olympic swimming pool and that is 50 metres in length. I hope we return back again here for another camp", coach explained.

The national swimming team probables featured the following: Noaf al Qasmi, Aiman al Qasmi, Naif al Qasmi, Abdulrahman al Kulaibi, Shihab Aladyn, Mohannad Auladthani, Omar al Balushi, Nasser al Kindi, Hamis al Hassani, Bashar al Kulaibi and Adam al Raisi

The national team swimmers got back to their training at the Olympic swimming pools at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex since August. The swimming teams were among the first national football and tennis teams which was allowed by the Supreme Committee to resume their trainings as they have some external participations.

The national swimming team will take part in various future scheduled events including the GCC Games in next March and April and swimming Championship end of this year.



Focus on safety, discipline as new cricket season starts on October 16

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

Soon after the Supreme Committee's green signal for resumption of sports activities in the country, Oman Cricket (OC) has finalised its plans for an eventful 2020-21 season that will see the games being played under the strict safety guidelines and health protocols issued by the competent authorities.

With the resumption of sports activities, Oman Cricket Academy has also opened its doors to all the youngsters looking for quality coaching and training at its world class indoor and outdoor facilities.

Close to hundred teams will be seen in action as OC looks to bring its domestic season in line with International Cricket Council (ICC) standards and practices. The first phase will start on Friday, October 16 with T20 games across all Senior Division tournaments which will see as many as 57 teams in action without the presence of spectators which are currently not allowed. Junior Division has attracted 31 teams so far. The final number of teams will be known only when the schools open. A total of six sides will compete for Women's League honours.

"Focus on human safety, strict enforcement of discipline and increased use of technology will be the highlights of the new season which is expected to help us prepare well for our international assignments", said Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket.

"All the games will be held under the strict safety guidelines including social distancing and proper sanitizing of dressing rooms, sitting area, washrooms and dining rooms before, during and after the play. Teams will be advised to follow the health protocols before the games start", added the Sri Lankan great.

Focus on players' development will be another highlight of the new season. Oman Cricket will lend a helping hand to Premier Division teams by making match videos available to them

soon after the game on NV Play website.

"We know the bulk of Oman national team talent comes from the Premier Division and that's why we are helping them to work on their strengths and weaknesses so that they come better prepared for international tournaments", explained Mendis, who is also Oman's head coach.

Oman Cricket has also introduced the ICC-adopted concussion replacement rule for the Premier and A Division competitions this season which will see a pre-nominated player in for a concussed player.

Adopting a zero tolerance approach to dissent and indiscipline, OC is going to award demerit points on code of conduct violations in Premier and A Division games.

"We felt the need to enforce strict discipline, particularly in the top tier of our competitions, so that our players are used to ICC's demerit points system", added Mendis.

Training sessions at Oman Cricket Academy will resume on Sunday, October 4.

"Players who had already registered before the COVID-19 lockdown was enforced are welcome to join us. We would be happy to welcome new youngsters who want to learn the game or improve further to go ahead and register at Oman Cricket's website and make the full use of our wonderful facilities and highly experienced coaching staff", said Evert Laubscher, OCA Manager and Oman National Team Trainer.

"There is no change in the fee structure and session timings and we will be in contact with all those who had registered in March. There is no age restriction at the moment. With regards to group sessions, we have put in place strict safety measures and health protocols and we will be looking at a maximum of five students and one coach as against ten students and one coach prior to the lockdown. We have enough space available in our indoor facility with eight nets which means we can adhere to all the social distancing regulations and protocols", Evert added.





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THIRD SEED SVITOLINA SURVIVES MEXICAN QUALIFIER ZARAZUA



PARIS: Third seed Elina Svitolina recovered from a mid-match meltdown to defeat fearless Mexican qualifier Renata Zarazua 6-3 0-6 6-2 and advance to the third round of the French Open on Wednesday.

The 178th-ranked Zarazua, who became the first Mexican woman to win a Grand Slam main draw match in more than 20 years during her first round, came into the contest having never faced a top-20 player

in her career. She understandably made a nervous start under the closed roof of Court Philippe Chatrier as Svitolina quickly jumped into a 4-0 lead. Zarazua, celebrating her 23rd birthday on Wednesday, soon found her footing, started converting her errors into winners and won three straight games to get back to 4-3.

It was, however, not enough as Svitolina took the opening set with another break of serve. But if Svitolina

hoped for a quick outing, having played in Rome and then winning the title in Strasbourg on Saturday, she was in for a rude shock as Zarazua used the momentum from the first set to hand her a bagel to level the match.

The Ukrainian was almost reduced to tears as her frustration grew with her unforced errors going up to 16 from six in the opening set.

"Well, honestly I'm still questioning myself because I was a bit of a drop.

I don't remember much of the second set. Also maybe I was dreaming today," she told reporters.

"It's very tough to say. I was going maybe for too much. In the end, when I was playing really good, I was playing aggressive, I was going for my shots. Maybe a few mistakes here and there.

"Then in the end she was quite solid from the baseline, took her chances, didn't miss so much. It was dreamy second set to be fair."

The world number five, however, managed to calm herself down in the decider and after an initial trade of service breaks, she shifted gears, breaking Zarazua twice more to seal the victory on her first match point.

Svitolina has now made the third round at Roland Garros for the sixth straight year and will next meet Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova, who defeated Australian Astra Sharma 6-3 6-3. — **Reuters**

Serena pulls out of French Open with Achilles injury

PARIS: Serena Williams withdrew from the French Open with an Achilles tendon injury on Wednesday shortly before she was supposed to face Tsvetana Pironkova in the second round on Wednesday.

The 39-year-old American, a three-time former champion at Roland Garros, was striving to claim a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title. "Struggling to walk," Williams told a news conference.

"I felt like I needed to walk with a limp." Williams had suffered the problem during her semifinal loss to Victoria Azarenka in the US Open and said ahead of her Roland Garros campaign that she was not at 100% physically but had recovered sufficiently to play.



She spoke again of the injury after her first-round win over fellow American Kristie Ahn and apparently aggravated it while practising for her second-round match.

"An Achilles injury is not one you want to play with as it can get worse," she said. Williams said she was yet to decide whether she would play again this season, saying she needed two weeks of complete rest, but said she still wanted to continue her career.

"I love playing tennis. I love competing. It's my job and I'm pretty good at it still... I'm so close to some things and I feel like I'm almost there... that's what keeps me going." Williams also pulled out of the French Open in 2018 before a last-16 clash with Maria Sharapova. — **Reuters**