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DOMESTIC FOOTBALL SEASON LIKELY TO RESUME IN OCTOBER



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GEOLOGY RESEARCH IN THE OMAN MOUNTAINS



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OMAN TIPPED TO BECOME REGIONAL HUB FOR E-COMMERCE



OMAN

HM greets Tajikistan and North Korea

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emomali Rahmon of the Republic of Tajikistan on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Rahmon and the friendly Tajik people further progress. His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of greetings to Kim Jong-Un, First Secretary of the Workers' Party, First Chairman of the National Defence Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, on the occasion of the 72nd Anniversary of the Founding of the Republic. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Kim and his country's friendly people. — ONA

UK defence secy tours Musandam

MUSCAT: Ben Wallace, British Secretary of State for Defence, went on tour of Musandam Governorate, on Tuesday as part of his current visit to the Sultanate. The minister was accompanied during the visit by Air Vice Marshal Matar bin Ali al Obaidani, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman. Earlier, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received at the General Diwan of the Foreign Ministry, Ben Wallace. The meeting discussed aspects of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries and means of enhancing them between the two friendly countries and peoples. **SEE ALSO P2**

INSIDE



JAPAN RULING PARTY LAUNCHES RACE FOR ABE'S SUCCESSOR

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ONE IN EIGHT DEATHS IN EUROPE LINKED TO POLLUTION

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 39°C
MIN: 29°C

SALALAH
MAX: 29°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 39°C
MIN: 31°C

SUNRISE 05.51 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:35

DHUHR: 12:09

ASR: 15:37

MAGHRIB: 18:22

ISHA: 19:33



Royal Decree renames Supreme Committee for ND celebrations



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued a Royal Decree No 116/2020, amending some provisions of Royal Decree No 6/2020 on the Supreme Committee for National Day Celebrations.

Article (1) replaces the name of the “Supreme Committee for National Day Celebrations”, quoted in the above-mentioned Royal Decree No 6/2020, with the name “Secretariat General of National Celebrations (SGNC)”.

Article (2) adds a new article to Royal Decree No 6/2020 reading as follows: Article (4bis): In the Secretariat General of National Celebrations, an Executive Committee shall be formed, with the SGNC Secretary-General as Chairman and with membership of two

representatives whose grades shall be not less than “Ministry Under-Secretary”, or similar status, from the departments named: Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers, Royal Oman Police.

The Executive Committee shall also have a representative of COSAF and the Royal Protocols. Article (3) cancels all that contravenes this Decree or contradicts with its provisions.

Article (4) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

— ONA

FRAMEWORK READY

FOR OPENING OF SCHOOLS

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Authorities have started putting things in place to ensure a smooth back to school transition in Oman.

Schools in Oman has suspended conventional classes since March and have been allowed to gradually resume classes from November, in parallel with online education.

The Supreme Committee on COVID-19 on Monday cleared the general framework

prepared by the Ministry of Education.

The plan included operating schools in the Sultanate during the academic year 2020/2021, despite the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The education framework consists of executive procedures and schemes for the development of work mechanisms to ensure quality and comprehensiveness of education, as well as health precautions, for all students in the Sultanate, irrespective of

the variation in styles”, an official statement said.

The committee will follow-up on the assessment of health data associated with the educational process in the Sultanate's schools and take further decisions accordingly.

The Ministry of Health has been meeting with the schools to develop a procedural plan before the start of the next academic year.

The major plans include preparing a database of school students who suffer from

chronic diseases. Efforts are on to ensure that all students get vaccinations as per schedule and according to different age groups.

There will be a special press conference dedicated to the sector in the presence of the Minister of Education.

“The press conference will focus on the start of the school year and the procedures for the return of children to schools”, said the Minister of Health and member of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

Oman reaffirms support for Palestinian cause



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received a phone call from Dr Mohammed Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, dealing with developments in the region and their repercussions.

Dr Shtayyeh commended the Sultanate's permanent stand on the Palestinian issue.

HH Sayyid Fahd pointed out that the Sultanate's constant stance aligns with Arab solidarity and ensuing initiatives to reach fair and lasting solutions that end the existing conflict in that region to pave the way for reconstruction that is greatly needed by present and future generations.

Dr Shtayyeh conveyed the greetings of the Palestinian leadership to His Majesty the Sultan and its best wishes of success to His Majesty. The Palestinian leadership also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity.

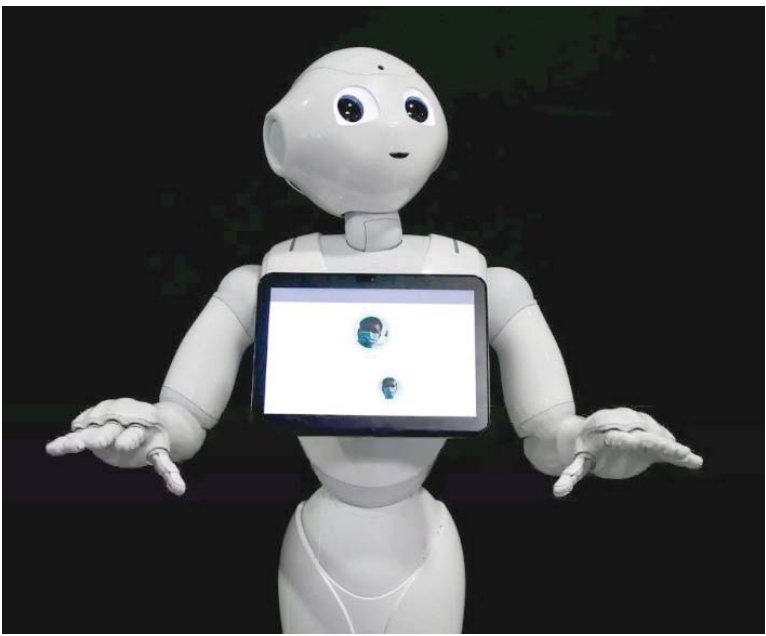
HH Sayyid Fahd asked the Palestinian Prime Minister to convey the sincere wishes of the Sultanate to President Mahmud Abbas of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, along with wishes of peace and stability for the brotherly people of Palestine. — ONA

The robot that reminds you to wear your mask!

PARIS: Engineers have developed a robot that can detect whether people are wearing a mask to guard against COVID-19 and, if not, politely remind them to put one on.

The feature is an upgrade of Pepper, a 120 cm high robot with human-like features that is already in operation in some countries welcoming visitors to shops, exhibitions and other public spaces.

Pepper's camera scans the faces of people approaching it, and if it detects the lower half of their face is uncovered, it pronounces the phrase: “You have to always wear a mask properly”. If it sees that the visitor then puts on a mask, the robot follows up with the phrase: “Thank you for having put on your



mask”.

The idea is not to have a robot police whether people are wearing masks, but to provide a friendly reminder, said Jonathan Boiria, head of sales in Europe for SoftBank Robotics, the company behind Pepper. “Shops have to assign people at the entrance, a lot of people, to ensure respect for the wearing of masks and sometimes that is a stretch”, Boiria said in Paris.

“A robot allows you to free up some people so they can focus on their normal tasks”.

“We're all human. Sometimes I take off my mask when I get off the bus and I forget to put it back on when I arrive at the office.

— Reuters



Sultanate calls for solidarity with Sudan

WELCOMES DECLARATION OF CEASEFIRE IN LIBYA

CAIRO: The Sultanate called for solidarity with the people of Sudan to overcome their current crisis of floods that devastated large parts of the country, causing loss of life and damage to properties. Oman offered its condolences to the Sudanese people.

This came in a speech delivered by Badr bin Hilal al Busaidy, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate to the Arab League (AL), at the 154th session of the AL Council in Cairo on Monday, under the presidency of Palestine.

Earlier, the Sultanate welcomed the peace accord inked by the government of Sudan and armed factions, said Al Busaidy, adding that the peace accord will bring security and stability to Sudan and achieve the aspirations of its brotherly people.

Al Busaidy also reiterated the Sultanate's fundamental principles which call for unity and stability of the Libyan state. He urged all Arab brethren to support the efforts of Libyan parties for the realisation of peace and stability.

In confirmation of this stance, the Sultanate welcomed the declaration of ceasefire in Libya that was issued by the Libyan Presidential Council and Council of Representatives. He called all to take this opportunity and reach a comprehensive and lasting peace in Libya

Al Busaidy pointed out that the 153rd session of the AL Council, headed by the Sultanate, saw developments in different files, including the Palestinian issue, which was discussed during the AL extraordinary session on 30 April 2020 during which the AL discussed the Israeli plans to annex parts of the Palestinian territories. In this context, the AL Council reaffirmed during that session the central nature of the Palestinian issue for the Arab nation, as well as unanimous concern for the Arab identity and the situation of Jerusalem as Capital of Palestine.

Al Busaidy pointed out that the Sultanate always acts in support for Arab rights at all levels and, accordingly, responded immediately to take up the issue of Renaissance Dam of Ethiopia, "considering Egyptian water security as a non-separable part of the Arab national security, thereby requiring solidarity and combination of stands with Egypt's effort which calls for the realisation of peace, security and stability in the African east."

Al Busaidy also referred to the explosion of Beirut seaport and the Arab initiative stated by Arab Secretary-General Ahmed Abulghheith for quick action in support of the brotherly people of Lebanon.

— ONA

Deputy Emir of Kuwait receives ambassador's credentials

KUWAIT: Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, Deputy Emir and Crown Prince of Kuwait, received credentials of Dr Saleh bin Amer al Kharousi as ambassador of the Sultanate to Kuwait at Bayan Palace in Kuwait City on Tuesday.

The ambassador asked the Deputy Emir to convey greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq along with his best wishes of speedy recovery to Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al

Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.

He also conveyed greetings of His Majesty the Sultan to the Deputy Emir and Crown Prince of Kuwait, wishing the government further progress and growth. The Deputy Emir of Kuwait expressed his pride of the strong relations between the two brotherly countries. He also wished the ambassador success in his assignments, and the Omani-Kuwaiti relations further progress and prosperity. — ONA

FOREIGN MINISTER RECEIVES UK STATE SECRETARY FOR DEFENCE



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister received Ben Wallace, UK State Secretary for Defence, at the General Diwan of the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday.

The meeting discussed aspects of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries and means of enhancing them between the two friendly countries and peoples.

This comes within the context of the joint friendship declaration, bilateral relations and the joint defence agreement.

During the meeting, they exchanged views on a number of current regional and international issues of common interest. The two sides stressed the importance of supporting all peaceful efforts that aim at strengthening ties of cooperation and understanding in a way that enhances pillars of peace and security in the region and the world.

The meeting was attended by Sir Edward Lister, Chief Strategic Advisor to the Prime Minister; Hamish Cowell, UK Ambassador to the Sultanate; Dr Abdullah bin Hamad al Badi, Head of the Minister's Office Department; and a number of officials at the ministry.

— ONA

Donate plasma to fight COVID-19

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

The Department of Blood Bank Services has appealed to all those recovering from COVID-19 to donate plasma for the treatment of those infected with the pandemic.

The convalescent plasma of a single recovered person contributes to the treatment of three patients. The antibodies present in the plasma strengthen the immune system of the infected person.

It said that donating blood or one of its components is considered a voluntary and humanitarian action. "To ensure the quality and safety of blood, we follow the recommendations of the World Health Organization, which stipulate that blood donation is voluntary and free of charge", the blood bank said in a statement.

The department explained that some procedures and conditions must be met before donating the plasma, including, more than 14 days



previously donated blood or donated a long time back, additional checks are done before commencing the plasma donation to ensure that he is free of infectious diseases, noting that these tests are repeated after donating. Women who have previously become pregnant cannot donate plasma.

Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, revealed, during the Press Conference for the Supreme Committee that the number of plasma donors reached 221 in August, with a total of 506 plasma units. The total number of donors reached 911 donors, with a total of 2,011 plasma units.

Donating plasma differs from donating blood as it is done by a device that draws and separates blood. This process takes from 40 to 60 minutes.

The donor can donate plasma once every 7 days, or three times a month. For details and appointments WhatsApp 94555648, or call 24591255.

If the recovered person has not

must have passed for the recovered person since the absence of symptoms and the end of the quarantine period; the recovered must be aged between 18 and 60 years; the recovered should not have chronic diseases, infectious diseases, blood diseases, etc.

COVID precautions major concern for flight operations

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

The focus now will be the implementation of the COVID-19 precautionary measures by the airport, airlines, and civil aviation authorities as the aviation sector open for traffic from next month.

The Supreme Committee on COVID-19 said international flights can resume from October 1, provided the flights are scheduled according to the COVID-19 situation in other countries where there is no decline in coronavirus cases.

Flights to India are suspended until September 30.

Currently, in Bahrain, passengers are subject to COVID-19 tests at their own expense and self-isolation until test results are ready. All passengers must wear a face mask.

Passengers to Kuwait are returning with a medical certificate with a negative COVID-19 PCR test result issued before departure. They must have been a maximum of four days abroad. Passengers are subject to medical screening and self-isolation for 14 days.

Passengers travelling as tourists arriving at Dubai (DXB) must have health insurance and are subject to medical screening. They must present a completed self-declaration health



form.

"Within the framework of travel procedures issued by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 and recommendations of the Civil Aviation Authority, we would like to inform you that the air traffic for international flights will be resumed from Thursday, October 1. We recommend that all passengers comply with the preventive measures announced by the Ministry of Health and the authorities concerned to prevent the spread of the virus and to check the airline's website for any flight information or updates

before heading to the airport," Oman Airports said in a statement.

A group of 75 volunteers will help the authorities implement the COVID-19 precautionary measures when Muscat International Airport reopens for normal traffic.

The participation of the volunteers was sought by a group called Taawon Network, which works under the supervision of the Omani Society for Human Resources Management.

Oman Air said it is preparing to resume scheduled operations from the beginning of October

amid precautionary measures that the company is committed to. "The national carrier has set up a progressive plan to restart employment to many points around the world."

As per The International Air Transport Association (IATA) statistics, the limited rise in global passenger volumes continues to be driven by domestic than international markets.

IATA has been calling on governments to work together to urgently find ways to re-establish global connectivity by re-opening

borders and to continue with relief measures to sustain airlines during the COVID-19 crisis.

Scheduled flight operations were suspended from March 29, even though both national and foreign airlines were allowed to operate for the repatriation of expatriates from Oman and citizens and residents into Oman.

"Our planes, people, and Oman's airports are ready. We will provide safe, careful service to our guests, along with all travel-related information and requirements," Oman Air said in a statement.

Flights that pass the Omani airspace, domestic services to Khasab airports, and oil concession areas continued to operate as the guidelines laid out by the government.

Volunteers are required to ensure precautionary measures to deal with developments of the COVID-19 pandemic at the airport.

Oman Airports has completed the installation and operation of PCR testing solutions.

Airports Council International (ACI) said the airport industry is anticipating a -59.6 per cent reduction in passenger volumes in 2020 vis-à-vis the projected baseline (pre-COVID-19 forecast for 2020) and a -58.4 per cent reduction in passengers as compared to 2019.

Workshop on child health care begins

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

A National Workshop on Integrated Child Healthcare (IMCI) for the health workers in the primary health care centres commenced on Tuesday under the auspices of Dr Sultan bin Yarub al Busaidy, MoH Advisor for Health Affairs.

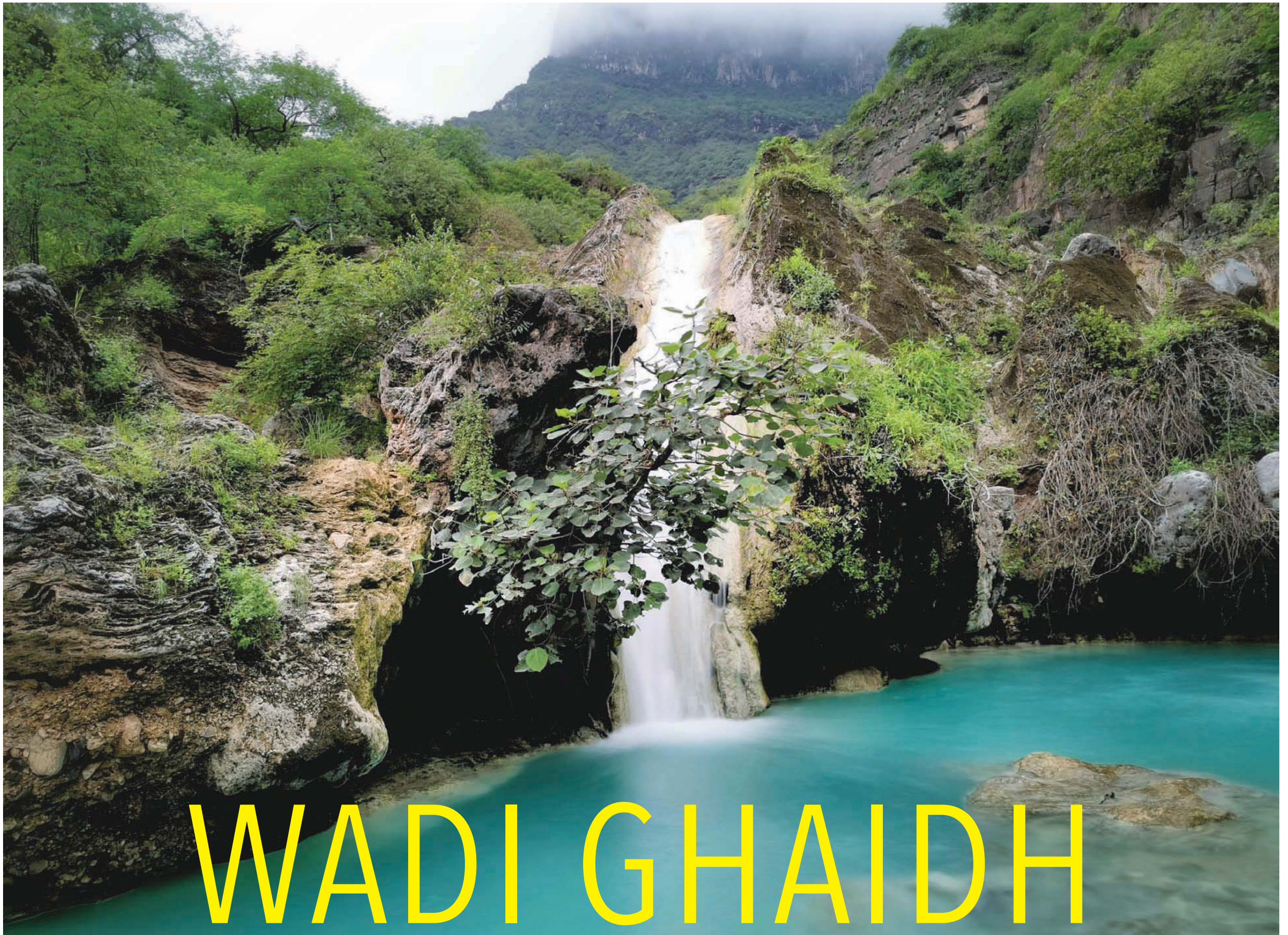
The virtual workshop, which is organised by the Ministry of Health (MoH), attended by a number of pediatrics, family doctors, nurses, health educators and nutritionists from various health institutions in the Sultanate.

The two-day National Workshop aims to qualifying the health workers to implement the IMCI for children under 5-year in the health institutions and enhancing the role of the community in providing health services for children under the age of five.

The workshop is presented by a number of speakers from the World Health Organization Office in the Sultanate and from the MoH child health departments of various governorates.

Dr Fanna al Fannah, IMCI Expert, pointed out that the Sultanate has started implemented the IMCI since 2000. She also highlighted the achievements that have been achieved to reduce the mortality and morbidity rates, as well as promoting the public health of children under five years.

The workshop touches upon a number of important issues, the most important of which are child health records, routine child health visits, nutrition of children under-five-year, challenges facing children and others.



WADI GHAI DH

OFFERS A REWARDING TREK

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DR SACHIN SINGH

Wadi Ghaidh is about 30 minutes' drive south of Salalah. It's a hidden stunning valley with crystal clear water flowing through it and within the valley, there are numerous untouched waterfalls surrounded with lush green mountains that you should not miss when you are there. In order to get

there, you will have to hike for about 2 hours, which is approximately 4 km one way and for those who like to enjoy a cool swim during a rewarding trek, there are natural blue and green pools to refresh. Travel with adequate amount of water on your treks, as it is easy to get dehydrated when trekking.

Most trails are well-marked with flags, but some can be fairly slippery with loose rocks, so it is important to wear good shoes.

It's advised to wear long trousers to avoid getting snapped by thorns.

Oman takes great care in being an eco-friendly country. While going on treks, do carry a spare bag for trash to avoid littering these trails.

Don't damage any of the plants along the way or pollute any of the water bodies.

As long as you keep these tips in mind, it should be a worry-free time hiking in Oman.





TALK ABOUT DEPRESSION INSTEAD OF HIDING IT

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

As numbers increase in suicide cases, experts feel there are ways and a need to bring in early intervention in mental health.

There are questions that arise what leads individuals to take the drastic step towards ending one's life by committing suicide, says Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

He feels there is a need to talk more about suicide and bring in awareness on the mental health from this perspective because studies have proven that suicide is the second most cause of death among teenagers.

"Internationally it has been proven that between the age of 18 and 24 as per the World Health Organization suicide is a second cause of death. People who are depressed tend to go into negative thoughts and feelings that there is no hope to carry on with in the future. They also have the sense of guilt that whatever they have achieved is worthless. So they get to the point where there is no hope," explained Dr Hamed.

Historically in Europe people used cooking gas to give up life until the government introduced natural gas that came directly to the house. "This limited the number of people dying from gas

intoxication. People cause self harm because they are crying for help and they want the people around them to know they are in pain. One of the problems is that people around the individual may not notice that he/she is going through depression. If a person has had an accident people will visit the individual with chocolates and cards to cheer them up, but when it comes to depression, many people will not understand it or relate to it," he pointed out.

Teenagers, for example, might be going through bullying, which is becoming a constant factor especially with the current prevalence of social media and adults might be going through financial and even relationship problems.

"Adults might feel trapped in which it is difficult and not take a step because it is considered a taboo and feels it is a selfish act. Some families feel guilty wondering why they did not sense the person's mental state before. Sometimes it is the religion that stops them from ending their life. Few years ago, we had come across a person who had attempted but could not handle the pain so called out for his wife to help. They brought him to the hospital but later he said he felt ashamed when people came to visit him. His family members were anxious to keep knives around and even felt he was safer in the hospital. He could not be trusted with



Internationally it has been proven that between the age of 18 and 24 suicide is a second cause of death. People who are depressed tend to go into negative thoughts... So they get to the point where there is no hope

DR HAMED AL SINAWI
Senior Consultant Psychiatrist

his own life," Dr Hamed explained.

When it comes to expatriates many times they are without their family so it might be difficult for others to even detect the changes in a person.

"Expatriates are one of the highest groups who are at risk of committing suicide because they could be lonely, or going through social issues or financial issues at home. They can be homesick

and overworked. They do not have the social support. We have that even if it is not a solution; we have people who could listen to us when we go through problems. Loneliness is another factor of mental health problem leading to depression. Sometimes it is a financial problem they feel they are stuck with and other times it is grieving for someone whom they have lost. All these emotions can push a person to feel suicidal." This is one of the reasons, Dr Hamed feels, there ought to be some social service needed because WHO last year for World Mental Health Day the focus was on 'Let's talk about suicide', and this was to take away the stigma and urge countries to have initiatives.

"Sometimes they may not talk about it to the doctors and other times doctors may not know how to handle all this information. Often basic information could be missed and the person might go home feeling miserable and feels nobody cares for him. This is an important issue and we all need to learn about it. We need to know what triggers it. The person himself may not realise why he is feeling negative. Getting treatment is the first thing and not necessarily medication, but having the support of family and friends," concluded Dr Hamed al Sinawi. Family and friends could all be part of the early intervention to heal a person from depression.

Ambassador to Sudan presents credentials

KHARTOUM: Gen Abdel Fattah al Burhan, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council, Republic of Sudan, received Ambassador Ali bin Sulaiman al Darmaki who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's accredited and resident ambassador to Sudan. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Gen Al Burhan along with His Majesty's best wishes of good health and happiness to him and the brotherly people of Sudan further progress and prosperity.

On his turn, Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council asked the ambassador to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people permanent welfare and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. During the meeting, Gen al Burhan welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in his tour of duties and the bilateral relations between the two countries further progress and growth. — ONA

Muscat airport registers higher cargo traffic

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Muscat International Airport handled 240,284 tonnes of cargo in 2019. The volume is 3.8 per cent more than the previous year that recorded 230,284 tonnes of cargo, according to Mustafa al Hinai, CEO of Oman Aviation Group.

"By strengthening the air logistics at Muscat Airport City, the Sultanate will be able to attract more international investors and leading logistics players to Oman and is a key component of Oman's National Aviation Strategy 2030 which considers air cargo as an essential building block for the future." Oman has a long-term strategy to increase air cargo throughout the Sultanate to 730,000 tonnes by 2030.

"The National Aviation Strategy launched in 2020 identified the potential to grow market share in our established markets, including the GCC, and expand to new secondary markets in Asia, Africa and Europe," Al Hinai added.

Reports suggest until the global pandemic, Oman regularly reported a cargo growth of around 10 per cent per annum compared to the same period the year before. Welcoming the Supreme Committee's decision to reopen the airports in the country after six months, he said, "We are continuing our operations without a halt. Our team is fully prepared for the reopening."



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#Living_with_COVID19

Brexit turmoil: UK may break law in 'limited way'

LONDON: Britain headed into a fresh round of Brexit trade talks on Tuesday acknowledging it could break international law but only in a "limited way" after reports it may undercut its divorce treaty with the European Union.

As the pound fell sharply on fears of a no-deal exit, the government's legal department head quit in disagreement with a plan to overwrite parts of the Withdrawal Agreement treaty signed in January.

Britain left the European Union on January 31 but talks on new trade terms have made little headway as the clock ticks down to an October deadline and then the end of the status-quo transition arrangement in late December.

As diplomats gauged whether Johnson was blustering or serious

about allowing a tumultuous finale to the four-year saga, Britain insisted it would abide by the treaty.

Asked if anything in the proposed legislation potentially breached international legal obligations or arrangements, Northern Ireland minister Brandon Lewis said: "Yes, this does break international law in a very specific and limited way". "We are taking the powers to disapply the EU law concept of direct effect required by article 4 in a certain, very tightly defined circumstance", he told parliament.

He added that the government supported the Northern Ireland protocol of the Withdrawal Agreement and there was "clear precedence" for what Britain was planning.

TRUST AT STAKE



European Parliament President David Sassoli gives a press conference following his meeting with Head of EU task Force for Relations with United Kingdom, on Tuesday in Brussels. — AFP

Amid warnings from the EU that if it reneged on the divorce deal there would be no agreement governing the roughly \$1 trillion annual trade, former prime minister Theresa May said the government risked serious

damage to its international image.

"The government is now changing the operation of that agreement," May, who resigned after her own Brexit deal was repeatedly rejected, told parliament. "Given that, how

can the government reassure future international partners that the UK can be trusted to abide by the legal obligations of the agreements it signs?" May asked.

The *Financial Times* said the government's "very unhappy" legal head Jonathan Jones walked out in protest over the possible plan to undercut the withdrawal agreement in relation to the protocol for British-ruled Northern Ireland. The prospect of a messy divorce between the EU's \$16 trillion and United Kingdom's \$3 trillion economies pushed sterling to two-week lows with traders betting there was more volatility to come.

"We need to see more realism from the EU about our status as an independent country," said David Frost, Britain's top Brexit negotiator, adding that Britain was ramping up

no-deal preparations.

The latest round of negotiations in London are likely to be tough: Britain says the EU has failed to understand it is now independent — especially when it comes to fishing and state aid.

The EU, weary of wrangling, says it needs specifics from London and that Britain cannot make its own rules and have preferential access to its markets.

"A disorderly Brexit would not be good for Europe, it would be a real disaster for Britain and its citizens", German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz told Reuters. British officials say they can make do with an Australia-style arrangement. Australia is negotiating a free trade deal with the EU to improve its market access, but for now largely trades with the bloc on World Trade Organization terms.

— Reuters

Detained Belarus opposition figure resists 'forced expulsion'

MINSK: Belarus on Tuesday said it had detained a leading opposition figure, Maria Kolesnikova, as she tried to flee across the Ukrainian border but Kiev said she was being held after resisting a forced deportation.

There were conflicting reports of whether Kolesnikova was trying to leave Belarus or being removed, with some saying she had torn up her passport to prevent being taken across the border.

She played a major role in the campaign of opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, who claimed victory over President Alexander Lukashenko in a disputed election last month, and has since spoken at huge protests against his rule.

Belarusian border guards said they detained Kolesnikova after she was apparently pushed out of a vehicle while attempting to flee across the border early on Tuesday.



Belarusian opposition figurehead Svetlana Tikhonovskaya talks to the media during a briefing with Norwegian prime minister at the residence of the Norwegian Ambassador to Lithuania in Vilnius, Lithuania, on Tuesday. — AFP

They said she was travelling with two other members of the opposition's Coordination Council, press secretary Anton Rodnenkov and executive secretary Ivan Kravtsov.

Ukraine confirmed that Kravtsov

and Rodnenkov had crossed the border but said Kolesnikova had resisted moves to force her to leave Belarus.

"This was not a voluntary departure. It was forced expulsion", Deputy Interior Minister Anton Gerashchenko wrote on Facebook.

He said Kolesnikova "took actions" to prevent her leaving. The Interfax-Ukraine news agency cited a source as saying she tore up her passport.

Fellow Coordination Council member Pavel Latushko, who himself is in Poland, told Russia's TV Rain he "received information from the Coordination Council that Maria ripped her passport while crossing the border".

Both her companions were "safe" in Ukraine and were to give a press conference later on Tuesday, the Coordination Council said.

Tikhonovskaya called for Kolesnikova to be immediately

freed.

"By kidnapping people in broad daylight, Lukashenko is showing his weakness and fear", she said in a statement from Lithuania, where she has taken refuge.

Kolesnikova went missing on Monday, with witnesses saying she was bundled into a minibus on the street in the capital Minsk.

One of the strongest opposition speakers, she had insisted she would not leave Belarus voluntarily.

Lukashenko in an interview to Russian media claimed Kolesnikova and her companions "were fleeing to Ukraine" and said the guards "detained her as was required".

"The people in the car hit the gas. And she was apparently thrown out of the car as it was moving", he said. He said he would not talk to the Coordination Council because he did not know the members or recognise them as opposition.

— AFP



Ministry of
Higher Education,
Research &
Innovation

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research & Innovation announces the tendering of the tender shown in the following table:

Tender No	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for buying Tender papers	The deadline for submission of bids
16/2020	Annual Maintenance Contract for Non-Comprehensive of CCTV, Access Contract & Intrusion Alarm system for Ministry of Higher Education, Research & Innovation	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: EXCELLENT and FIRST	(RO 25/-) Twenty Five Rial Omani	27/09/2020	17/10/2020

The purchasing of the tender documents, please visit the following link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of Tender Committee
Ministry of Higher Education, Research & Innovation



LIMITED TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Shared Services Company LLC (NSS), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below;

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	TIME & LAST DATE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION	TENDER FEE (OMR)
NSS/2020/6	ORACLE CLOUD E-TENDERING/ SOURCING SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION FOR NAMA GROUP	24-September-2020	18-October-2020	100/-

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at NSS reception before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Sunday, 18 Oct. 2020.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website (www.nama.om).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Nama Shared Services, Bank Muscat: 0423-048027270-017 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00pm
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.


نماء للخدمات المشتركة
Nama Shared Services

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Assange warned he will be removed from hearings

LONDON: Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder who is fighting to avoid extradition to the United States from Britain, was warned by a judge on Tuesday he will be removed from the courtroom and tried in his absence if he continues to interrupt proceedings.

The proceedings were briefly adjourned after Assange shouted "nonsense" as James Lewis, acting for the US government, told a witness that Assange was facing extradition proceedings over the publication of informants' names and not for handling leaked documents. Judge Vanessa Baraitser told Assange, who was in the dock, that he must not speak out even though he will hear things he disagrees with.

"If you interrupt proceedings and disrupt a witness who is properly giving their evidence, it is open to me to continue without you in your absence", Baraitser said.

"This is obviously not something I wish to do. I am, therefore, giving you a clear warning". The US authorities accuse Australian-born Assange, 49, of conspiring to hack government computers and of violating an espionage law in connection with the release of confidential cables by WikiLeaks in 2010-2011.

Assange's outburst occurred as the court heard on Tuesday from Clive Stafford Smith, founder of the London-based charity Reprieve, who argues that the Wikileaks disclosures had been instrumental in challenging the US on illegal drone strikes and the secret detention of suspects. Stafford Smith, a dual US-UK national, said the leaked information had contributed to court findings that criminal proceedings should be taken against senior US officials. "I say this more in sadness than anger. I would never have believed that my government would do what it did", he said.

"We are talking about criminal offences of torture, kidnapping, rendition, holding people without trial". Assange and WikiLeaks enraged the US government a decade ago by publishing thousands of secret American documents. Assange's supporters see him as a champion of free speech exposing abuses of power and hypocrisy by Washington.

— Reuters



CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

The Internal Tender Committee at the Civil Aviation Authority
Invites for the following Tender:

Tender Name	Companies who can participate in this Tender	Last date for purchasing the document	Date for submission of tender
Operation and Maintenance Services in Civil Aviation Authority Buildings at Dhofar Governorate	Experienced Local and international Companies in collection of unpaid arrears and registered with the Tender Board with Grade 1 or above.	23/9/2020	18/10/2020

The Tender Document can be obtained through the E-tendering portal (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>), starting from 9/9/2020 and provided that the value of the document is paid through the same portal.

The Tenderer should submit the Tender in the above website and attach with his Tender a Tender Bond or a certified check issued by a locally registered bank for the sum of (1%) of the Tender Value and valid for 90 (Ninety) days. The original Tender Bond should be Address to (H.E. CEO of Civil Aviation Authority Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee), and placed in the Tender Box at Civil Aviation Authority at Muscat (Technical Services Department) before 10 :00 am for the tender submission date.

Tenders should be submitted through the above mentioned website before ten o'clock in the morning for the tender submission date, and tenders submitted after this date will not be taken into consideration, regardless of the reasons for delay. Civil Aviation Authority is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender: submitting inquiries related to the project through the website (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic tendering system: - Providing inquiries related to technical support for the electronic tendering system via e-mail and phone number shown below:
phone number: - +968024166670
e-mail:- https://etendering@ita.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE

Outgoing minister, security chiefs to testify in Lebanon blast probe

PEOPLE’S CONFIDENCE: Italy’s Conte calls for government that can gain public trust

BEIRUT: A Lebanese judge leading the probe into Beirut’s catastrophic port blast has summoned an outgoing minister and two security agency heads to testify, a judicial source said on Tuesday.

Judge Fadi Sawan is to hear caretaker transport and public works minister Michel Najjar and State Security agency head Tony Saliba on Thursday, the source said.

“If it turns out there had been negligence on their part, they could become suspects and be interrogated as such,” it said.

Sawan will also hear the account of the influential head of the General Security apparatus, Abbas Ibrahim, next Monday.

Twenty-five suspects are in custody over the monster August 4 monster that killed more than 190 people, wounded thousands, and ravaged homes and business across large parts of the capital. Hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate had been stored unsafely in a port warehouse for at least six years, it emerged after the explosion.

The disclosure sparked widespread outrage over alleged official negligence that many said was to blame for the blast.

Some 2,750 tonnes of the ammonium nitrate were initially stored at the port, but experts believe the quantity that ignited was substantially less than that.

After the explosion, State Security said it had warned the authorities of the danger of the unstable chemicals stored in the port’s warehouse 12, and signalled that some of it had been stolen



Volunteers dig through the rubble of buildings which collapsed due to the explosion at the port area, after signs of life were detected, in Gemmayze, Beirut. — Reuters

due to a hole in a wall. In the week of the blast, workers had begun repairs on the decrepit warehouse.

Security sources have suggested the welding work could have started a fire that triggered the blast, but some observers have rejected this as an attempt to shift the blame for high-level failings.

Those arrested so far include top port and customs officials, as well as Syrian workers who allegedly carried out the welding hours before the explosion.

Lebanon has rejected an international investigation into the country’s worst peace-time disaster, but its probe is being aided by foreign experts, including from the FBI and France.

ITALIAN PM’S CALL

Meanwhile, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte called on Tuesday for the formation of a new Lebanese government that would gain the trust of the people and work on reforms.

“This is the time to roll up the sleeves and to look to the future, despite the tragedy ... and to do this you also need to rebuild the citizens’ trust, trust among citizens and in institutions, to start a new era of national unity,” Conte told reporters after meeting Lebanese President Michel Aoun.

He expressed hope that the new government would be formed as soon as possible in order for it to work on reconstruction and an “urgent programme of reforms.” — AFP/dpa

IN BRIEF

Syria Kurds transfer some families from camp

QAMISHLI, Syria: Syrian Kurds have started to transfer the “least radical” foreign women and their children linked to the IS group out of an overcrowded in northeast Syria to begin rehabilitation, an official said on Tuesday.

So far 76 families have been transferred since July from Al Hol to the Roj camp at their request after showing remorse over their ties to the militant group, Kurdish official Sheikhmous Ahmed said.

He did not give their nationalities, but Kurdish authorities say foreigners in Al Hol hail from around 50 countries.

After years of spearheading the fight against IS with backing from a US-led international coalition, Syria’s Kurds hold thousands of foreigners suspected of supporting the extremist group in their custody.

These include alleged fighters in jails, but also thousands more women and children related to them in displacement camps — many in the sprawling tent city of Al Hol. — AFP

Egypt tries plasma treatment to fight pandemic

CAIRO: Mohamed Fathi, an Egyptian man who has recovered from COVID-19, winced as he watched tubes running down his arm to donate blood plasma, but insisted: “If I can help just one person, that’s a very good thing”.

The 25-year-old land surveyor from Cairo caught the disease in May, on the eve of the Eid al Fitr festival, becoming one of over 100,000 reported cases in Egypt, where more than 5,500 people have died of the novel coronavirus.

“Losing the sense of taste was a terrible experience,” he said at Egypt’s National Blood Transfusion headquarters in Cairo, describing just one of his symptoms. “You feel like you’re eating for the sake of it”.

Things got worse for the family when his elderly father was also infected, making Egypt’s blistering hot summer months a hellish period of fretting over his recovery from a loud, dry cough and constant fevers.

The idea is to harvest the plasma and inject it into other patients to give them an immunological boost that helps fight the same infection.

The scientific community is divided on using plasma to treat COVID-19, but proponents say the technique has proven effective in small studies to treat other infectious diseases, including Ebola and SARS. — AFP

42 virus cases among UN employees, families in Syria

BEIRUT: More than 40 members of UN staff and their families have caught coronavirus in Syria, a UN official said on Tuesday, warning the illness was spreading in the war-torn country.

There were about 200 people including “staff and dependents, spouses, children, parents, who have displayed symptoms of COVID-19,” said Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“From these 200, there are 42 staff and dependents who have been confirmed positive with COVID-19,” he added, speaking to AFP from Geneva, without specifying the nationalities of the infected personnel.

Three people had had to be medically evacuated, but most of the others had only “mild” symptoms. The suspected cases were self-isolating for a 14-day period, he said, adding the virus had sickened people working in different UN agencies across the country. — AFP

Turkish-Greek military talks put off

ANKARA: Talks between Turkish and Greek officials at Nato headquarters on how to avoid military escalation in the eastern Mediterranean have been postponed by two days to September 10, Turkish Defence Ministry sources said on Tuesday. The sources said the delay was requested by the alliance’s military committee. Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said last week that the two Nato members had agreed to talks to avoid accidents amid an escalating dispute over the extent of their continental shelves and rival claims to potential energy reserves in the Mediterranean. — Reuters

Jordan resumes international flights six months after shutdown

AMMAN: Jordan is resuming regular international flights to and from around 40 countries on Tuesday, almost six months after it suspended all commercial travel due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In mid-March, the government halted all flights as part of a series of lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus. Authorities planned to reopen Amman’s Queen Alia International Airport for international flights in August, but postponed it several times.

The move comes as the kingdom hopes to stimulate the economy, expected to shrink by 3.4 per cent this year. Strict measures since March left Jordan with significantly lower infection rates compared with its neighbours.

Jordan has registered some 2,478 COVID-19 cases, including



In mid-March, the government halted all flights as part of a series of lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus.

17 deaths. However, as restrictions eased, the number of daily reported cases increased in August.

Passengers entering Jordan

must provide negative results of a COVID-19 test carried out 72 hours before travel. Another obligatory test must

be carried out on arrival. The government is dividing a list of around 40 countries into three categories according to the epidemiological situation there.

All passengers will need to isolate for at least five days at home or up to a maximum two weeks depending on where they are coming from. Some of the countries listed are yet to resume international flights, including Saudi Arabia.

Two Syrian refugees at Jordan’s Azraq camp have tested positive for coronavirus, becoming the first confirmed cases to be reported inside a refugee camp in the kingdom, the UN said on Tuesday.

“These are the first confirmed cases of coronavirus inside refugee camps in Jordan,” the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) in Jordan said in a statement. — dpa

Mosul war victim struggles to make ends meet through pandemic

MOSUL: When the Iraqi city of Mosul went into lockdown in March, Mohammed Sattar, who lost both his legs when his house was shelled in 2017, found himself unable to see the old friends whose support he and his family relied on. Lockdown was eased two weeks ago, but the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic has left Sattar’s friends unable to help him to the same degree.

The 39-year-old says his best hope is the government compensation that hundreds of civilians in Mosul were promised after being injured during the campaign by Iraqi and US forces to liberate the city from IS. But three years on, Sattar still waits.

Sattar used to work as a porter at Mosul’s Bab Al Saray market, pushing merchants’ goods on a wooden cart through the Old City’s narrow streets. Today, his former home, where his mother and sister died in the bombing is nothing but a pile of rubble. All his

belongings and all his memories were destroyed, he said.

“Since the liberation, I depend on God and on charitable people”, he said. Since lockdown eased he goes to the market where he once worked and where he receives food, other necessities and small amounts of cash from old friends.

“At times, I was unable to feed my children”, Sattar says of the lockdown. He lives with three of his boys while a fourth child is being raised by relatives. Mirwa Salim, who heads the Fajir Al-Hadba volunteer group that assists victims of the war, said it is taking a lot of time for those eligible to receive compensation.

“Recently, more compensation requests were processed, but under very difficult conditions. Each case needs about two or three years. Some of them have not yet received any compensation,” he said. The head of the compensations’ committee of



Sattar used to work as a porter at Mosul’s Bab Al Saray market. Today, his former home, where his mother and sister died in the bombing is nothing but a pile of rubble. — Reuters

Iraq’s Nineveh governorate, Oglah Al Juhayshie, said that “patients have to provide a medical report to prove their case, sometimes we have to get a written statement from their doctor.”

This can prove difficult, he added, given that the medic who treated the applicant three years ago at the time of their injuries might have passed away, moved to an unknown address or was a member of the Islamic State. When Sattar tried to apply, he managed to provide certificates from some agencies but he was then asked to bring a doctor’s certificate.

“Where am I supposed to get it, given that the doctor who amputated my legs was an American?,” he asked. Al Juhayshie said if a victim cannot get a medical report and can’t reach the doctor who treated him, he can get a medical report from the forensic authority in Mosul, and witnesses from the neighbourhood and the mayor. — Reuters

Striking doctors return to work as S Korea battles second virus wave

SEOUL: Thousands of trainee doctors in South Korea returned to work on Tuesday after ending a more than two-week strike as the country grappled with sustained three-digit rises in new daily coronavirus infections.

The Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) reported 136 new cases as of midnight on Monday, after the rate fell to a three-week low of 119 a day earlier. The total infections rose 21,432, with 341 deaths.

The daily tally has steadily dropped since it reached a peak of

441 last month after the government imposed unprecedented social distancing rules to blunt a second wave of outbreaks from churches and political rallies.

Efforts to curb the latest epidemic has been complicated by the strike launched on August 21 by some 16,000 intern and resident doctors against the government's medical reform proposals.

The trainee doctors restarted work after agreeing to end the walkout on Monday, though many medical students continued to resist final licensing exams as

Efforts to curb the latest epidemic has been complicated by the strike launched on August 21 by some 16,000 intern and resident doctors against the government's medical reform proposals

part of the protest. The intern and resident doctors are the backbone of healthcare services in emergency rooms and intensive care units, and hospitals increasingly grappled with delays and disruptions amid constant rises in COVID-19 patients.

Authorities are weighing whether to extend the social distancing curbs ahead of Chuseok, one of the country's biggest holidays this month, which would see tens of millions of people travel nationwide. President Moon Jae-in said the daily numbers are expected to drop below

100 by the holiday, though health officials have urged against visits and gatherings.

The curbs, including limiting the operation of on-site dining after 9 pm (1200 GMT) in the Seoul metropolitan area, were extended for another week until September 13. Seoul city on Tuesday imposed an entry ban on some of the biggest parks along the Han River which saw a surge in the number of nightly visitors since the restrictions took effect. Cafes, convenience stores and parking lots in all 11 riverside parks will be closed after 9 pm. — **Reuters**

IN BRIEF

Taj Mahal to reopen even as virus rages in India

NEW DELHI: India's top tourist attraction the Taj Mahal is set to reopen more than six months after it was shut, officials said on Tuesday, even as the vast nation battles soaring coronavirus infections.

India, home to 1.3 million people, on Monday overtook Brazil to become the world's second most-infected nation with more than 4.2 million cases, behind only the United States.

"The Taj Mahal will reopen on September 21. All COVID-19 protocols, like physical distancing, masks will be followed," northern Uttar Pradesh state's Tourism Department deputy director Amit Srivastava said.

Visitors will be limited to 5,000 a day, down from the usual daily average of 20,000, he added.

One of the New Seven Wonders of the World, the shining marble mausoleum south of the capital New Delhi has been closed since mid-March as part of India's strict virus lockdown. — **AFP**

Thailand's oldest hippo celebrates birthday

THAILAND: As children and other spectators sang to mark her 55th birthday, Thailand's oldest hippopotamus Mae Mali chomped on an assortment of fruit and vegetables arranged in the shape of a cake. Mae Mali, which means "Mother Jasmine" in Thai, who moved to a compound at Khao Kheow Open Zoo in eastern Thailand two years ago from a zoo in Bangkok, and has already outlived a hippo's typical life expectancy of around 40 to 50 years old.

"Mae Mali is now a grandma. We have been taking great care of her regarding her health, food, and environment," said zoo director Attaporn Srihayrun. Mae Mali gave birth to numerous calves, and her descendants now number 21 hippos residing in zoos across the Southeast Asian country. — **Reuters**

Pakistan mine accident toll rises to 19

ISLAMABAD: The death toll from a rockslide in a marble mine in north-western Pakistan has risen to 19 as rescuers retrieve more bodies from the rubbles, officials said on Tuesday. A huge boulder fell on the labourers in the Mohmand district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province overnight on Tuesday, local police chief Tariq Habib said. At least seven more bodies were retrieved from the rubble on Tuesday morning when the rescue was resumed after a brief pause, Habib said. At least 20 to 25 workers might still be trapped, local administration chief Iftikhar Ahmed said, amid fears that the death toll could still rise. — **dpa**

India helps battle tanker blaze off Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: India on Tuesday sent fresh supplies of firefighting chemicals to help battle a new blaze on a stricken tanker loaded with a massive cargo of crude oil off Sri Lanka's eastern coast.

The New Diamond has been burning since Thursday, and a huge blaze believed to have been extinguished on Sunday reignited because of strong winds on Monday, raising fears of another environmental disaster in the Indian Ocean. Rescuers and salvage experts have said there is no sign of a leak in the Panama-flagged supertanker, which was carrying 270,000 tonnes of crude and another 1,700 tonnes of diesel as its fuel.

Ramping up the rescue effort, an Indian Coast Guard aircraft was expected to bring dry chemical powder on Tuesday, which would then be dropped by helicopters on the ship, the Sri Lankan navy said. — **AFP**

Convicted murderer sworn in as MP

COLOMBO: A Sri Lankan politician sentenced to death for murder was escorted out of prison on Tuesday to become the first convict to be sworn in as a member of parliament, to heckles from opposition MPs.

Premalal Jayasekara from the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Party (SLPP) was convicted in August of murdering an opposition activist after opening fire at an election rally in 2015.

But the 45-year-old's conviction and sentence came after nominations for the August 5 poll, meaning he could still contest the election and take up his seat.

Jayasekara was a no-show when the current parliament held its first session on August 20 as prison authorities refused to let him out. — **AFP**

Suu Kyi vows poll victory as campaign starts

YANGON: Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi launched her re-election bid on Tuesday ahead of polls set for November, vowing victory at a scaled-down ceremony in the capital after her original plans were scuppered by a surge in coronavirus cases.

"Today, our victory campaign has begun," she said, before hoisting the party's flag at the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) headquarters in Naypyitaw at an event broadcast on her Facebook page.

The election is set to serve as a test of the country's first democratic government in half a century and is seen by analysts as an important test of Myanmar's transition away from direct military rule as it grapples with crises on multiple fronts.

Suu Kyi, who rules as state counselor, had planned to launch her campaign in the commercial capital of Yangon but cancelled the trip on Monday on advice of the health ministry. Wearing a red mask decorated with a peacock, the emblem of the NLD, and a plastic face shield, she thanked supporters for flying the party's red flag at their homes across the country.

"I'd like to say that to make our victory flag long-lasting means making the nation's peace, development, and prosperity long-lasting," she said.

— **Reuters**

DEVASTATING LANDSLIDE



Police (in blue) conduct search and rescue operations at the site of a landslide in the village of Shiiba in Miyazaki Prefecture on Tuesday, after Typhoon Haishen grazed the southern Japanese island of Kyushu the day before. The powerful typhoon went on to lash South Korea on Monday after smashing into southern Japan with record winds and heavy rains that left up to eight people dead or missing. — **AFP**

Japan ruling party launches race for Abe's successor

TOKYO: Japan's ruling party on Tuesday kicked off the race to pick Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's successor, with his powerful right-hand man Yoshihide Suga commanding an all-but-insurmountable lead.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, the 71-year-old son of a strawberry farmer, has already secured the support of major factions in the Liberal Democratic Party ahead of its leadership vote on September 14.

But he isn't running unchallenged, with a popular former defence minister and the party's policy chief standing against him.

Thanks to the LDP's solid legislative majority, the race's winner is certain to win a parliamentary vote on September 16 and be named the country's next prime minister.

The LDP race began after Abe, Japan's longest-serving premier, abruptly announced late August that he would resign for health reasons.

There is now speculation that the next prime minister may call a snap election to shore up public support.

But Suga hinted that an immediate general election would



Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party leadership candidates - Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga (C), former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba (R) and former foreign minister Fumio Kishida - pose for photographs during a news conference at the LDP headquarters in Tokyo on Tuesday. — **AFP**

be unlikely, saying a new cabinet should make its top priority fighting the pandemic.

"What people most expect from the government is to curb infections and regain a secure way of life as soon as possible," Suga said at a press conference with his contenders.

Representatives for Suga and his

rivals — former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba and party policy chief Fumio Kishida — formally registered their candidacies on Tuesday morning.

Suga said he had decided to run to help avoid a "political vacuum" after Abe's departure, and that he would prioritise coronavirus

containment while rebuilding an economy now in recession.

Ishiba meanwhile pledged a "great reset", and said he would "pour my whole body and soul into regional revitalisation".

Kishida said he too would focus on balancing infection measures with kickstarting the economy, and

vowed to build a capable team.

The candidates will hold two public debates before the vote, which will poll LDP lawmakers and three party representatives from each of Japan's 47 regions.

Whoever takes the top office will face a raft of challenges — from the pandemic and a tanking economy to ensuring the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games can go ahead.

None of the three candidates is seen as offering a policy platform that would differ significantly from Abe's.

Former banker Ishiba, 63, is popular with the electorate and consistently topped polls before Abe's resignation.

A defence policy wonk, he supports strengthening the role of the country's Self-Defence Forces in the pacifist constitution.

But he is still regarded with suspicion by some in the LDP because he left the party for a time, serving as an independent and then with a rival party, before returning.

Kishida, also 63, was long viewed as Abe's heir apparent and considered the prime minister's favoured successor. — **AFP**



US, European COVID vaccine developers pledge to uphold testing rigour

FRANKFURT: Nine leading US and European vaccine developers pledged on Tuesday to uphold the scientific standards their experimental immunisations will be held against in the global race to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

The companies, including Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca, issued what they called a “historic pledge” after a rise in concern that safety and efficacy standards might slip in the rush to find a vaccine. The companies said in a statement they would “uphold the integrity of the scientific process as they work towards potential global regulatory filings and approvals of the first COVID-19 vaccines”

The other signatories were Johnson & Johnson, Merck & Co, Moderna, Novavax, Sanofi and BioNTech. The promise to play by established rules underlines a highly politicised debate over what action is needed to rein in COVID-19 quickly and to jumpstart global business and trade.

The head of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said last month COVID-19 vaccines may not necessarily need to complete Phase Three clinical trials — large-scale testing intended to demonstrate safety and efficacy — as long as officials are convinced the benefits outweigh the risks. This prompted a call for caution from the World Health Organization (WHO).

- * Companies pledge to uphold integrity of scientific process
- * Debate about speed of development has become heated
- * Mass testing with control groups are needed, says statement



Developers globally have yet to produce large-scale trial data showing actual infections in participants, yet Russia granted approval to a

COVID-19 vaccine last month, prompting some Western experts to criticise a lack of testing. The head of China’s Sinovac

Biotech has said most of its employees and their families have already taken an experimental vaccine developed by the Chinese firm under the country’s

emergency-use programme. Chinese companies or institutions, which are involved in several leading vaccine projects, did not sign the statement.

PROMISE ON SAFETY AND EFFICACY

“We want it to be known that also in the current situation we are not willing to compromise safety and efficacy,” said co-signatory Ugur Sahin, chief executive of Pfizer’s German partner BioNTech. “Apart from the pressure and the hope for a vaccine to be available as fast as possible, there is also a lot of uncertainty among people that some development steps may be omitted here.”

BioNTech and Pfizer could unveil pivotal trial data as early as October, potentially placing them at the centre of bitter US politics before the November 3 presidential election.

President Donald Trump has said it is possible the United States will have a vaccine before the election. His Democratic rival, Kamala Harris, has said she would not take his word alone on any potential coronavirus vaccine. The nine companies said they would follow established guidance from expert regulatory authorities such as the FDA. Among other hurdles, approval must be based on large, diverse clinical trials with comparative groups that do not receive the vaccine in question.

— Reuters

House Democrats call for US postal chief’s suspension

WASHINGTON: The head of the House Oversight panel on Tuesday urged the immediate suspension of US Postmaster General Louis DeJoy following reports that he illegally reimbursed former employees for political contributions, and announced an investigation.

House Oversight and Reform Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, in a statement, said if the allegations are true, DeJoy faced “criminal exposure” not only for violating the law with the transactions, but also for lying to Congress when he denied making them at a recent hearing.

“We will be investigating this issue, but I believe the Board of Governors must take emergency action to immediately suspend Mr DeJoy, who they never should have selected in the first place,” she said.

The move follows accusations by former workers at DeJoy’s company that he reimbursed employees for campaign contributions to his preferred Republican politicians, an arrangement that would violate federal campaign finance law. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* both reported the allegations over the weekend, citing multiple unnamed former employees.

President Donald Trump on Monday said he would support an investigation into campaign contributions involving DeJoy, a Trump donor who is already facing a political fire storm after changes he implemented ahead of the November election that critics said could delay mail-in balloting. — Reuters

One in eight deaths in Europe linked to pollution



A traffic policeman checks licence plates during traffic restrictions intended to curb air pollution in Madrid, Spain. — Reuters

BRUSSELS: Environmental factors such as air pollution and heatwaves exacerbated by climate change contribute to around 13 per cent of all deaths in Europe, the European Environment Agency (EEA) said on Tuesday.

A total of 630,000 deaths in the European Union’s 27 countries plus Britain were attributable to environmental factors in 2012, the latest year for which data are available, EEA said in a report.

“These deaths are preventable and can be significantly reduced through efforts to improve environmental quality,” it said. Air pollution is the biggest environmental health risk in Europe, contributing to more than 400,000 premature deaths each year.

Prolonged exposure to pollutants can cause diabetes, lung disease and cancer, and early evidence suggests air pollution may be linked to higher death rates among COVID-19 patients.

Europe’s pollution levels plummeted amid lockdowns imposed during the coronavirus pandemic, but the dip is expected to be temporary and most EU countries are on

course to miss their targets to cut air pollutants in the next decade.

EEA said the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the connection between the environment and human health, demonstrating the increased risk of passing diseases from animals to humans as a result of environmental degradation and meat production.

“COVID-19 has been yet another wake-up call, making us acutely aware of the relationship between our ecosystems and our health,” EU health chief Stella Kyriakides said in a statement.

The European Commission has proposed EU targets to make agriculture more sustainable, by ringfencing natural habitats and curbing pesticide use, although farming groups have warned the goals could curb crop yields.

EEA said drinking water quality is consistently high across the EU, but it raised the alarm over the release of antibiotics through waste water treatment plants, which can spread antimicrobial resistance. Infections from drug-resistant bacteria cause roughly 25,000 deaths in the EU each year. — Reuters

‘Don’t kill your gran’: Britain sounds COVID alarm

LONDON: British ministers and medics are urging the public to get serious again about the coronavirus after a sharp rise in infections raised fears the outbreak was slipping out of control in some parts.

Close to 3,000 new cases were recorded on Sunday and again on Monday — a sudden jump from numbers much closer to 1,000 for most of August, and the highest since May.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said young people had become too relaxed about social distancing and could endanger older relatives through complacency. “Don’t kill your gran by catching coronavirus and then passing it on. And you can pass it on before you’ve had any symptoms at all,” he told a BBC radio programme aimed at younger audiences.

Some 41,554 people have died

within 28 days of testing positive for COVID-19 in Britain, the worst fatalities toll in Europe, though in recent weeks infection numbers had been lower than in several European neighbours. “The numbers have been going up and we’ve seen in other countries where this leads, and it is not a good place,” Hancock added. England’s Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jonathan Van-Tam warned

of a “creeping geographic trend” as higher infection rates were being seen in many parts.

“That is really a signal that we’ve got to change this now, got to start taking it seriously, very seriously again,” he told Channel 4 News. Britain enforced a relatively strict lockdown between late March and early July, but has been gradually easing it since.

— Reuters

Smoke hampers rescue as California fires burn record 2 million acres

NORTH FORK, US: Wildfires in California have torched a record more than two million acres, the state fire department said on Monday, as smoke hampered efforts to airlift dozens of people trapped by an uncontrolled blaze.

The Creek Fire in northern California has so far spread to 135,525 acres, destroyed 65 structures and is out of control, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) said in an update.

Several communities in the area northeast of Fresno have been ordered to evacuate due to immediate threat to life.

Dozens of people have been trapped by the rapidly-expanding fire and Fresno Fire Battalion chief Tony Escobedo said smoke was hampering efforts by military choppers to rescue them.

“The difficulty of the helicopters trying to get through the smoke has proven a challenge during the day,” he told reporters on Monday.

“They weren’t able to land several times, several attempts throughout the day,” he said.

“We are going to try to do it again this evening with their night vision capability. We have reports in excess of 50 people or more,” (trapped in several



A home is engulfed in flames during the ‘Creek Fire’ in the Tollhouse area of unincorporated Fresno County, California, early on Tuesday. — AFP

locations) he said.

Fresno Fire Department tweeted that “military pilots tried valiantly to land but heavy smoke conditions prevented a safe approach, another effort will be made shortly to evacuate the

trapped people in Lake Edison and China Peak using night vision.”

People trapped were currently safe in temporary areas of refuge, said Lieutenant Brandon Purcell from Fresno Sheriff’s Office, calling the fire

“an unprecedented disaster for Fresno County.”

Over the weekend, military helicopters rescued more than 200 people trapped by the fire near Mammoth Pool Reservoir. — AFP

Is Navalny's poisoning a fatal blow for Nord Stream 2?

OUERDYA AIT ABDELMALEK

The alleged poisoning of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny may be the final nail in the coffin of the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Europe through the Baltic Sea.

Germany, the pipeline's main supporter in Europe, now won't rule out withdrawing its support for the 10 billion euro (\$11.7 billion) project if Moscow fails to thoroughly investigate the alleged weapons-grade nerve agent attack on Navalny.

The gas pipeline, initially scheduled to come into service in early 2020, would double the capacity of its predecessor Nord Stream 1, which has been fully operational since 2012. They aim to be more secure than other pipelines travelling through Ukraine, which have been disrupted several times due to the ongoing conflict between Moscow and Kiev. The project involves Russian giant Gazprom, which has a majority stake, and an international consortium including France's Engie, Germany's Uniper and Wintershall, Austria's OMV and the Anglo-Dutch oil major Shell.



Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny

THE GAS PIPELINE, INITIALLY SCHEDULED TO COME INTO SERVICE IN EARLY 2020, WOULD DOUBLE THE CAPACITY OF ITS PREDECESSOR NORD STREAM 1

Poland, the Baltic states and Ukraine have a dim view of it. They fear that Moscow could use dependence on Russian gas to apply political pressure on Europe.

They have also criticised sacrificing the interests of Ukraine, which derives significant income from the transport of Russian gas.

The announcement of Nord Stream 2 in 2015 was made at a "very sensitive" time politically, a year after the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine by Russia, foreign policy analyst Kirsten Westphal said. The pipeline will "bypass or at least reduce transit through Ukraine", she said.

The gas pipeline project is economically and geopolitically damaging to the eastern European nation, the very country that the EU claims to support in its conflict with Russia, the German daily *FAZ* wrote on Monday. The government's support for the pipeline was "a mistake from the start", it said.

The project has also run into opposition from environmental activists who are against gas-related infrastructure, and from EU regulation on gas transport, which calls for splitting production and distribution activities.

EU member Denmark only gave the project the greenlight to cross its waters in October 2019.

US President Donald Trump said in 2018 that Germany was "a captive to Russia" because of Nord Stream 2 and demanded that the project be abandoned.

And although the pipeline's 1,230 km are almost complete, the project has been at a standstill for months because of the threat of US sanctions against the companies involved. But the US has other reasons to be opposed. It is a major producer of natural gas, and recently launched an offensive in search of new commercial opportunities, including in Europe.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced the abandoning of nuclear power in 2011 in the wake of the Fukushima disaster in Japan and the country has begun to move away from coal, which is highly polluting. Gas is seen as a good compromise.

In 2019, gas accounted for 25 per cent of Germany's total energy consumption, and Russian gas is particularly cheap.

Germany also is concerned about the heavy financial cost of abandoning the project. — Reuters

TUMULTUOUS FINALE

UK ramps up no-deal Brexit preparations

ANDREW MACASKILL

Britain went into Tuesday's fresh round of Brexit trade talks with a warning to the European Union that it was ramping up preparations to leave without an agreement as both sides bickered over rules governing nearly \$1 trillion in commerce.

Britain left the EU on January 31 but talks on new trade terms have made little headway as the clock ticks down to an October deadline for a new deal and then the end of the status-quo transition arrangement in late December.

As diplomats try to gauge whether Prime Minister Boris Johnson is blustering or serious about allowing a tumultuous finale to the four-year Brexit saga, his chief negotiator said yet again that Britain was not afraid of a no-deal exit. That prospect scares business and weakened the British pound on currency markets.

"We have now been talking for six months and can no longer afford to go over well-trodden ground. We need to see more realism from the EU about our status as



We have now been talking for six months and can no longer afford to go over well-trodden ground

DAVID FROST
Britain's top Brexit negotiator

an independent country", David Frost, Britain's top Brexit negotiator, said in a statement. "If they can't do that in the very limited time we have left then we will be trading on terms like those the EU has with Australia, and we are ramping up our preparations for the end of the year". The EU warned Britain on Monday that its international reputation as a

pillar of the West would be tarnished and that there would be no trade deal after the *Financial Times* reported that London might simply undercut the Withdrawal Agreement treaty signed in January. Britain said it was committed to the treaty but that it needed minor clarifications and a backup plan to support the 1998 Northern Ireland peace deal.

European diplomats said Britain was playing a game of Brexit chicken by threatening to collapse the process and challenging Brussels to compromise first. Some fear Johnson may view a no-deal exit as useful distraction from the coronavirus crisis.

Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin said Britain's trade talks with the EU would be pointless if the Brexit withdrawal agreement it signed up to is not implemented in full, "The withdrawal agreement is an international treaty and we expect the UK government to implement and to adhere to what was agreed. We trust them to do so or they would render the talks process null and void", Martin told the Irish Examiner.

The latest round of negotiations in London are likely to be tough: Britain says the EU has failed to understand that it is now an independent country — especially when it comes to fishing and state aid. The EU, weary of wrangling over Brexit, says it needs specifics from London and that Britain cannot make its own rules and have preferential access to its markets.

As Johnson says mid-October is the deadline for a deal, diplomats said the public posturing was to be expected. "As you get closer to the deadline, it's not surprising people ramp up the pressure", one EU diplomat said. — Reuters

TROUBLE WITH THE WHITE BASE

Supporters who helped Trump win lagging in motivation this year

CHRIS KAHN

With less than two months to go until the US election, President Donald Trump is having trouble energising his core supporters, especially white voters without college degrees who were key to his victory in 2016, a Reuters polling analysis shows.

The analysis, based on Reuters/Ipsos national opinion polling from May to August and 2016 exit poll data, found that Trump has lost support among non-college educated whites, who made up 44 per cent of the US electorate four years ago and heavily favoured the Republican over Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Trump is still more popular with this group than Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, with 46 per cent saying they would vote for Trump, compared with 34 per cent who back Biden. But his 12-point advantage in August is down from a 21-point lead in May, and well below the 34-point advantage he had over Clinton.

What is more worrisome for Trump, however, is that the constituency's commitment to voting has remained flat this year, while interest has risen among groups that lean toward Democrats: Minorities, women, urban and suburban residents and people with below-average incomes.

The data suggests that this time, there will be greater pressure on the Republican Party — and not the Democratic Party — to boost voter turnout to win.



Trump supporters and protesters demonstrate in front of the Kenosha Courthouse in Kenosha, Wisconsin. — AFP

TRUMP IS STILL AHEAD WITH 46% SAYING THEY WOULD VOTE FOR HIM, COMPARED WITH 34% BACKING FOR BIDEN

"This is rare, and it's an interesting indication of how energised or agitated the electorate is", said Donald Green, a political scientist at Columbia University.

"People who would ordinarily not make it past the likely voter screen are doing so because they're so decisively hostile towards the president".

In the August poll, 69 per cent of

registered African-American voters and 61 per cent of registered Hispanic voters said they were "certain" to cast their ballots in November, up 7 and 6 percentage points, respectively, from May. The number of committed voters rose by 5 points each among women, suburban and urban residents, and people who make less than \$50,000 a year. — Reuters

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DOMESTIC FOOTBALL SEASON LIKELY TO RESUME IN OCTOBER

ADILAL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 8

The Oman Football Association (OFA) received the permission from the Supreme Committee for the resumption of domestic footballing activities for 2019/2020 and commencement of new season 2020/2021 with full implementation of precautionary measures that will prevent spreading of the COVID-19 virus.

The domestic season is likely to begin sometime in October, with the specific dates for resumption of the 2019/20 season and the commencement of the new season to be announced by Sunday.

The OFA officials unveiled all the relevant details for restarting of the season in a press conference held at Seeb Stadium on Tuesday in presence of Said Othman al Balushi, the General Secretary of OFA, Hisham al Adwani Director of

Professional League Union and Dr Majid al Wardi, director of medical team.

Hisham al Adwani said the decision on the resumption of footballing activities will begin by completing the 2019-20 season.

“There will be a one month break between completion of the current and the new footballing season. On Sunday, we will announce all the dates and schedules of the three remaining rounds of Omantel League, the HM Cup and first division league. The announcement of the new schedule depends on different factors including our agreement on TV broadcasting with the Ministry of Information, he said.

The Director of professional league added in his statement that all the domestic teams will be given five weeks to prepare for the resumption for the 2019/2020 season which may start somewhere in October.



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS
Said Othman al Balushi stated that all the teams are requested to provide the list of the foreign technical staff and players.

“We will share the list with all the relevant government entities to ease the facilities of abroad coaches and players to enter the country taking into consideration the implementation of all the precaution measures which

was approved by the Supreme Committee and Ministry of Health,” he added.

Al Balushi said that the instructions from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and OFA to Supreme Committee on restarting the remaining local competitions. The Supreme Committee accepted the request with ensuring the implementation of the medical protocol and preventive measures.

“The announcement of

resumption of the footballing activities came in line with the previous coordination between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and OFA to Supreme Committee on restarting the remaining local competitions. The Supreme Committee accepted the request with ensuring the implementation of the medical protocol and preventive measures.

In addition to that, all the sports

complexes of the ministry will be in full readiness to begin the season in a few weeks time,” he pointed out.

Dr Majid al Wardi said that the implementation of the medical protocol began with Dhofar team.

“We have focal point in all the governorates and beside to that we have randomized teams with all the necessary preventive tools and equipments. All the players will be tested for COVID-19 test (PCR) besides applying the social distancing, wearing the face masks and preventing the use of the water bottle by more than one player. All the masks, sanitisers and temperature guns will be provided to all the teams. Prior to the commencement of the training sessions, there will be a regular check by the medical team and any players who have COVID-19 symptoms will not be allowed to take part in the match,” he ended.



Dominic Thiem in action. — USA Today Sports file photo

Serena enters quarters; Thiem, Medvedev march on

NEW YORK: Serena Williams battled into the quarterfinals of the US Open on Monday as top men's seeds Dominic Thiem and Daniil Medvedev sailed through to the last eight at Flushing Meadows.

After Williams kept her bid for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam singles title alive, second seed Sofia Kenin was sent crashing out in the last 16 by Belgium's Elise Mertens.

Williams had to summon up every last ounce of strength to depose 15th seed Maria Sakkari in three hard-fought sets.

The 38-year-old American needed almost two and a half hours to dislodge her 25-year-old Greek opponent 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 6-3 inside an empty Arthur Ashe Stadium in New York.

"She's such a good competitor. It was a really intense match," said Williams, who had been dumped out of a US Open tune-up tournament by the same opponent last month.

"I felt like she almost played better today. I was a little fatigued last time and had some cramps. Just felt like I was able to compete longer," Williams added.

There was little separating the players throughout the energy-sapping contest, with Williams notching 107 total points to Sakkari's 99.

Williams won 72 percent of points off her first serve while Sakkari won 73 percent. Sakkari also outdid Williams on aces, by 13 to 12.

Williams rallied from two games down in the deciding set, pumping

herself up with loud screams that echoed around the spectator-free arena as she broke Sakkari twice to clinch the last-eight spot.

"I'm super passionate. This is my job. This is what I wake up to do. This is what I train to do 365 days of the year," Williams said afterwards.

The American will play Tsvetana Pironkova for a place in the semi-finals after the Bulgarian ousted France's Alize Cornet in another draining three-setter.

'ABSOLUTELY UNREAL'

Pironkova, playing her first tournament in three years after a lengthy break in which she gave birth to her son, prevailed 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 at the Louis Armstrong Stadium.

"It's absolutely unreal, I really can't believe it," said Pironkova, whose

last tournament appearance before this year's US Open was the 2017 Wimbledon championships when she exited in the second round.

Mertens ousted Kenin, this year's Australian Open champion, 6-3, 6-3 in 1hr 14 mins to set up a last-eight tie with former world number one Victoria Azarenka.

The Belarusian overcame 20th seed Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic 5-7, 6-1, 6-4 in 2 hours 30 minutes at Louis Armstrong Stadium.

In the men's draw, second-seeded Thiem raced into the round of eight with a three-set demolition of Canadian rising star Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Thiem dismantled the 20-year-old 15th seed 7-6 (7/4), 6-1, 6-1 in 2 hours 7 minutes.

"I played a great match today, the best one from my whole America trip," said Thiem.

He will play Australia's 21st seed Alex de Minaur for a spot in the semi-finals after the Australian breezed past unseeded Canadian Vasek Pospisil 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 6-2, in 2 hours 17 minutes.

Third seed Medvedev blew away unseeded American France Tiafoe 6-4, 6-1, 6-0 in only 1 hour 38 minutes.

"I'm pleased with the fact that I've won all of these sets and didn't have to stay long on the court. That's always good when you're playing a Grand Slam," said the Russian.

Medvedev will face compatriot Andrey Rublev for a spot in the last four after the 10th seed ousted Italy's

sixth seed Matteo Berrettini 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-3.

The men's competition was blown wide open on Sunday after world number one Novak Djokovic was thrown out for accidentally hitting a line judge after smashing a ball in frustration during his last-16 match.

His departure means the US Open will this year produce a first-time Grand Slam winner in the men's competition.

Williams is seeking to equal Margaret Court's record for the most women's Grand Slam singles titles.

A tournament victory at the weekend would also see her break away from Chris Evert, on six titles, as the most decorated US Open champion of the women's game in the modern era.

— AFP

Azarenka downs Muchova to reach last eight

NEW YORK: Victoria Azarenka had a huge smile on her face after reaching her first Grand Slam quarterfinal in more than four years by beating Czech Karolina Muchova 5-7, 6-1, 6-4 in the fourth round of the US Open on Monday.

The former world number one had to rally from a set down on Louis Armstrong Stadium to set up a last eight date with Elise Mertens, her first at that stage of a major since she lost to Angelique Kerber at the 2016 Australian Open.

The 31-year-old, twice a champion at Melbourne Park and twice a finalist at Flushing Meadows, has struggled to reach the heights she enjoyed before she took time out to have her son, Leo.

Azarenka won her first title in four years at the Western & Southern Open in the lead up to the US Open, however, and will head into the quarterfinals

The former world number one had to rally from a set down on Louis Armstrong Stadium to set up a last eight date with Elise Mertens, her first at that stage of a major

with a 9-2 record this year.

"It's been a while," she told ESPN. "It's a quite challenging time in the world right now so to have this opportunity to enjoy myself and do what I love to do with a smile on my face, I'm so grateful."

Muchova, the 20th seed, broke Azarenka's serve three times in the

opening set but looked increasingly hampered by a problem with her upper left thigh as the unseeded Belarusian whipped through the second set to even up the contest. The Czech took a lengthy medical timeout and returned heavily strapped for a decider in which she showed glimpses of the all-court game that has marked her out as someone with a big future.

Azarenka moved her around the court as much as she could, however, and sealed the victory with a vintage forehand winner that just kissed the right-hand corner of the court.

With Serena Williams and Tsvetana Pironkova already through, Azarenka is one of three mothers in the last eight. "That's remarkable, I'm so proud of the ladies," Azarenka said. "I hope it's inspiring others to keep going for their dreams and not just define themselves as mothers." — Reuters



Victoria Azarenka in action. — USA Today Sports file photo

CLIPPERS OUTGUN NUGGETS

CELTICS PUSH NBA CHAMPIONS RAPTORS TO BRINK

MIAMI: Paul George scored 32 points and the Los Angeles Clippers turned up the heat defensively on Monday in a 113-107 victory over the Denver Nuggets for a 2-1 lead in the NBA Western Conference semifinals.

Kawhi Leonard added 23 points, 14 rebounds and six assists for the Clippers, coming up big on both ends of the floor as Los Angeles powered to the finish in the see-saw battle.

Denver, blown out in game one but coming off a convincing game-two victory, led 78-68 midway through a third quarter that featured nine lead changes.

It was tied up at 101-101 with less than five minutes remaining and the Clippers closed it out with a 12-6 scoring run.

“The game came down to one of the two teams was going to play some defense,” Clippers coach Doc Rivers said.

“For three and a half quarters both teams were basically scoring and the last six minutes it was our defence.”

Leonard contributed a breathtaking block, reaching to deny Jamal Murray’s dunk attempt with his fingertips at the rim with 1:47 left to play.

“That play by Kawhi was amazing,” Rivers said. “I don’t even know where he came from.”

Nikola Jokic scored 32 points with 12 rebounds and eight assists for Denver and Murray scored 14.

The Nuggets had their chances late, but after Denver took a 97-90 lead early in the fourth quarter the Clippers came back with eight straight points.

Ivica Zubac’s dunk — assisted by Leonard — tied it at 101-101 and he followed with a free throw to give the Clippers the lead for good.

“We got stops,” George said. “It’s going to be a battle, (Denver) is a great offensive team.

“We’re up for the challenge.”

‘Job isn’t done’

There was no suspense in the Boston Celtics’ 111-89 blowout victory over the Toronto Raptors, which pushed the reigning NBA champions to the brink of elimination in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

The Celtics, who had lost two straight as the Raptors clawed their way back into the best-of-seven series, took a 3-2 lead and can clinch a place in the

conference finals with a win on Wednesday.

They dominated defensively to hold the Raptors to 20 per cent shooting in the first quarter, emerging from the opening period with a 25-11 lead.

The Raptors never recovered from the early body blow.

The Celtics’ 37 points in the second quarter were two more than the Raptors managed in all of the first half.

They trailed 62-35 at half-time, and despite a noticeable uptick of energy to start the third, there was too much ground to make up.

“The job isn’t done,” said Jaylen Brown, who led all scorers with 27 points. He grabbed six rebounds and made three of Boston’s five steals. “We’ve got to come out and play with the same intensity.”

Kemba Walker added 21 points, four rebounds and seven assists, Jayson Tatum delivered 18 points and 10 rebounds, Daniel Theis and reserve Brad Wanamaker scored 15 apiece and Marcus Smart chipped in 12 for the Celtics.

Boston coach Brad Stevens kept his starters in for much of the fourth quarter, comfortably keeping the lead in double digits.

Fred VanVleet led the Raptors with 18 points, Kyle Lowry and Pascal Siakam scored 10 apiece.

OG Anunoby, who drained the buzzer-beating three-pointer that gave the Raptors their first win of the series in game three, scored seven points — all in the first quarter.

“Our offense, we didn’t make shots, we weren’t aggressive enough,” Lowry said. “They were very comfortable from the jump. We weren’t as assertive as we should have been.”

Lowry brushed off suggestions that the Raptors were feeling the effects of the every-other-day schedule in the NBA’s quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

“Nope,” he said when asked if fatigue played a part. “We just didn’t play well enough.” — AFP

NBA Play-off results
(All series best-of-seven):
Semifinals
Eastern Conference
Boston Celtics bt Toronto Raptors 111-89
(Boston lead 3-2)
Western Conference
LA Clippers bt Denver Nuggets 113-107
(LA Clippers lead 2-1)



LA Clippers guard Terance Mann (14) attempts a shot over Denver Nuggets guard PJ Dozier (35) during the second half in game one of the second round of the 2020 NBA Play-offs at AdventHealth Arena. – USA Today Sports

Johnson claims Tour crown, pockets \$15m FedEx Cup



Dustin Johnson watches his tee shot on the 3rd hole during the first round of the Tour Championship tournament at East Lake Golf Club. – USA Today Sports

WASHINGTON: World number one Dustin Johnson capped a two-under-par 68 with a birdie at the last to seal a three-stroke victory in the US PGA Tour Championship and earn the \$15 million FedEx Cup play-off title on Sunday.

Johnson finished with a 21-under-par total at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta — three shots clear of Americans Xander Schauffele and Justin Thomas.

“I hit the fairways when I needed to coming down the stretch,” said Johnson, who started the day with a five-shot lead.

He rolled in an 18-foot birdie putt at the third, a 10-footer at the fifth and a three-footer at the sixth.

But bogeys at the seventh and eighth — where he was in a fairway bunker — opened the door just a crack for Thomas and Schauffele.

Neither could do enough, never getting the deficit below two strokes as Johnson parred nine straight, a run that included a 21-foot par-saving putt at the 13th.

He was in the fairway at the par-five 18th, but his approach hit the bank in front of the green and bounced back into the greenside bunker. He blasted out to five feet and made the putt for a closing birdie.

The 36-year-old claimed his 23rd US PGA Tour title and his third since the tour resumed in June after a three-month coronavirus shutdown.

He’s the first overall points leader since 2009 to win the season-ending showdown for the \$15 million play-off prize.

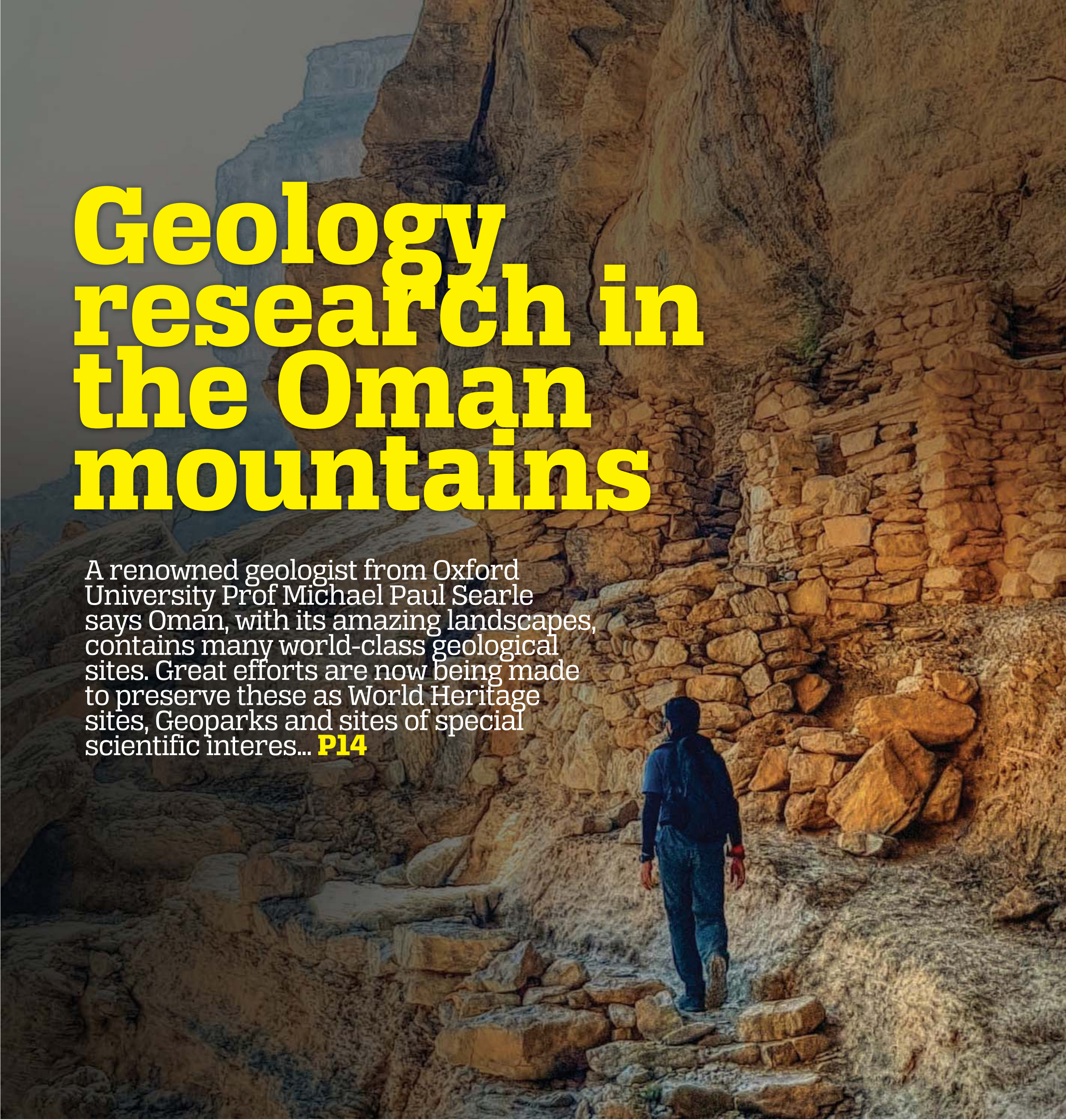
Johnson had a head start coming into Eastlake. He began the week on 10-under thanks to his season points edge.

Spain’s second-ranked Jon Rahm was next on 8-under with third-ranked Thomas on 7-under and others up to 10 shots adrift in the staggered start system.

Rahm, who edged Johnson in a play-off at the BMW Championship a week earlier, finished alone in third on 17-under after closing with his second straight 66. — AFP

features

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Geology research in the Oman mountains

A renowned geologist from Oxford University Prof Michael Paul Searle says Oman, with its amazing landscapes, contains many world-class geological sites. Great efforts are now being made to preserve these as World Heritage sites, Geoparks and sites of special scientific interest... **P14**

TRAVEL TALES

Thailand conducts virtual roadshow as it prepares to welcome back visitors from GCC

AS PART OF ITS recovery plans for the tourism sector, the Tourism Authority of Thailand hosted The Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow 2020 yesterday, September 9 which served as a digital B2B platform, connecting travel professionals from the GCC and tourism establishments in Thailand.

With over 75 per cent of the Middle East visitors to Thailand travelling from the GCC, The Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow 2020 conducted over 2,000 appointments between travel partners from the GCC and tourism stakeholders in Thailand to promote the destination and generate awareness of the country's latest tourism offerings, taking into

consideration new health and safety protocols.

The virtual roadshow hosted over 40 tourism stakeholders from Thailand, including hotels and resorts, health and wellness centres, shopping establishments and attractions, as well as and tour operators and DMC's, who represented a variety of regions and major cities across Thailand including Bangkok, Pattaya, Krabi, Koh Samui, Phuket and more.

"The current pandemic has drastically impacted the travel and tourism industry, and establishments across the world have had to adapt and reinvent their offerings while addressing the health

and safety concerns of their clients", said Pichaya Saisaengchan, Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Dubai and Middle East office.

"The Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow 2020 is the ideal platform for our travel partners in the region to learn more about the measures taken to ensure safety of visitors, as well as new offerings that will be available once we start to welcome visitors from the region back to our shore".

The Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow 2020 took place on the morning of September 9, 2020. Information about the country can be found at www.TourismThailand.org.





Geology research in the Oman mountains

LIJU CHERIAN

Singapore-born Michael Paul Searle is a professor of Earth Sciences in the University of Oxford who has been actively researching on the geology of Oman mountains for three decades.

His interest in geology started as he was a rock climber and mountaineer. He organised and climbed Himalayan peaks in India, Nepal and the Karakoram of Pakistan from 1980-2010 including expeditions to Masherbrum, K2, Biale and Trango Towers (Pakistan), Shivling (India) and Langtang Lirung, Everest and Makalu in Nepal and ShishaPangma in Tibet.

After obtaining his PhD, he concentrated on work along the Karakoram and Himalaya where he continues to work.

He first visited the Sultanate in 1968 when he was 16 years old and Geoff Searle, his father worked as a Finance Manager in PDO from 1967-1978 and retired. Michael continued working in Oman and has been visiting each year during winter with colleagues and students from Oxford University.

His mum held several local jobs including working with Don Bosch Mission Hospital in Muttrah and later as a Reuters correspondent in Muscat.

The Sultanate has remained his first love when it comes to training geologists to explore the landscapes and geology of Oman.

According to this famed researcher, the Oman mountain range is globally famous for its exposures and structure of the Semail Ophiolite, a thrust sheet of rocks formed in the Tethyan Ocean around 95 million years and emplaced from the ocean onto the Arabian continental margin during the Late Cretaceous (from 95 to circa 70 million years ago).

He recently published a new book Geology of the Oman mountains, Eastern Arabia, by Springer in 2019. His PhD was on the structure and metamorphism of rocks beneath the Oman Ophiolite in 1980.

The ophiolite rocks include the full range of oceanic crust, including pillow lavas with inter-leaved radiolarian cherts, fossiliferous deep-water sediments, sheeted dykes, and lower crust gabbros, overlying a thick sequence of upper mantle peridotites.

Michael says that “these ocean

crusts and mantle rocks are only rarely exposed on-land as ophiolites, thrust sheets emplaced onto continental margins during the early stages of mountain building. The Sultanate and UAE have the largest, best-exposed, and most intensively studied ophiolite in the world.”

The entire thrust sheet, up to 15 km thick, was emplaced from NE to SW as a single structural unit providing unique exposures for geologists to determine the structure, composition and age of the oceanic crust and mantle.

A thin sheet of metamorphic rocks exposed along the base of the ophiolite, originally basalts

The Oman Mountains were originally studied in the 1970s by a Shell team headed by Ken Glennie (1928-2019)... their reports and maps provided the foundation for all subsequent works

and sedimentary rocks now metamorphosed to amphibolites and greenschists, record pressures and temperatures of formation during the initiation of the subduction zone.

Oceanic rocks originally deposited on the ocean floor between the continent and the ophiolite (called the Hawasina and Haybi complexes) were emplaced onto the continental margin as thrust sheets beneath the ophiolite, Prof Michael explains.

All these rocks were thrust above the shelf carbonates which were formed along with the Arabian plate between the Permian (ca 250 million years ago) and the Late Cretaceous (about 95 million years ago).

These rocks form many of the oil reservoirs in the interior and are now beautifully exposed in the cliffs and wadis around the Musandam peninsula, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Saih Hatat.

During the later stages of the ophiolite emplacement process

the leading margin of the Arabian plate was subducted to great depths, around 100 km deep into the mantle, and then ejected back along the same subduction zone.

These high-pressure eclogite facies rocks are seen around the North East coastline around As Sifah. Later uplift and folding on a huge scale exposed the ophiolite as the dark-coloured spikey mountains surrounding the massive anticline folds of Jebel al Akhdhar and Saih Hatat.

The Oman mountains were originally studied in the 1970s by a Shell team headed by Ken Glennie (1928-2019), a petroleum geology legend and one of the giants of the oil industry.

Their reports and maps provided the foundation for all subsequent works.

Field studies and mapping provide the building blocks for all geological research, but recent advances in many fields, notably satellite geodesy, geochronology, geochemistry, and geophysics have provided incredible new data with which to interpret the geological structure of the Oman mountains.

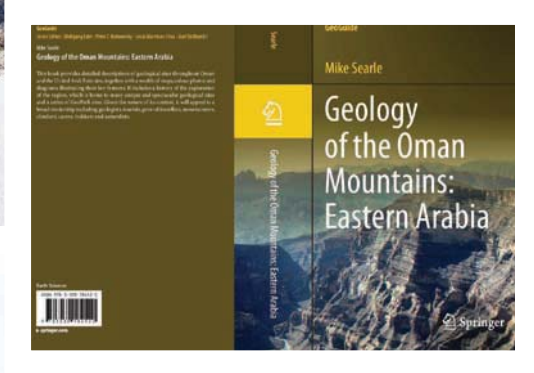
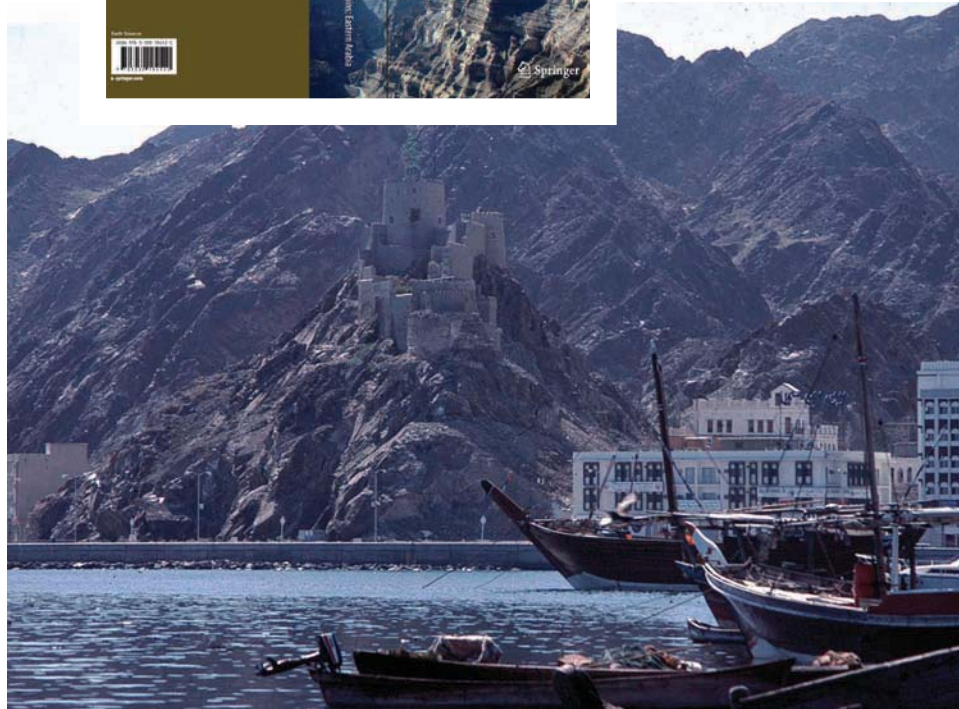
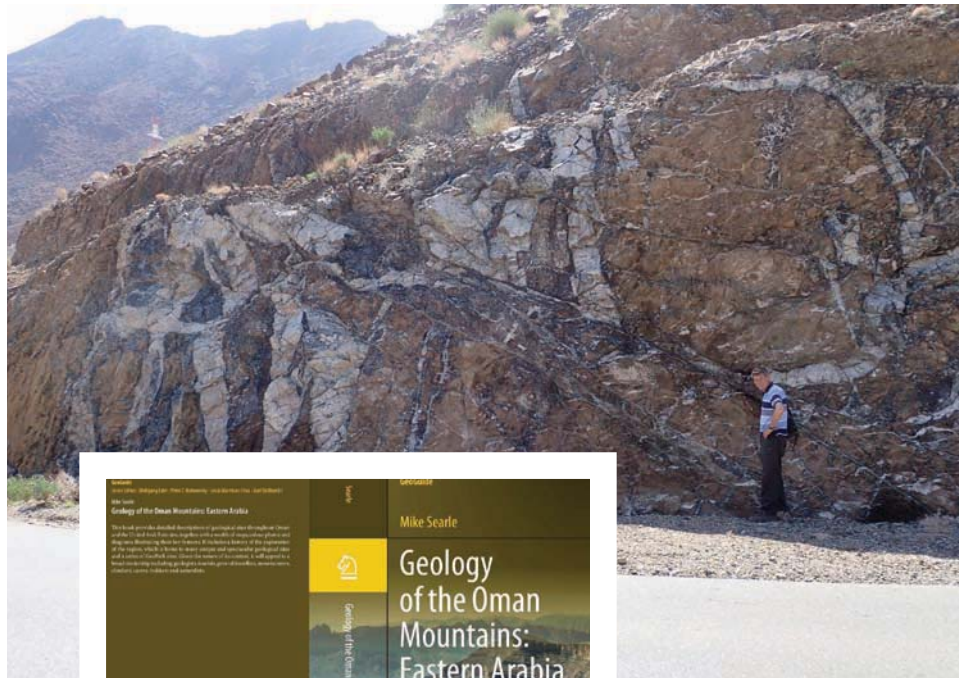
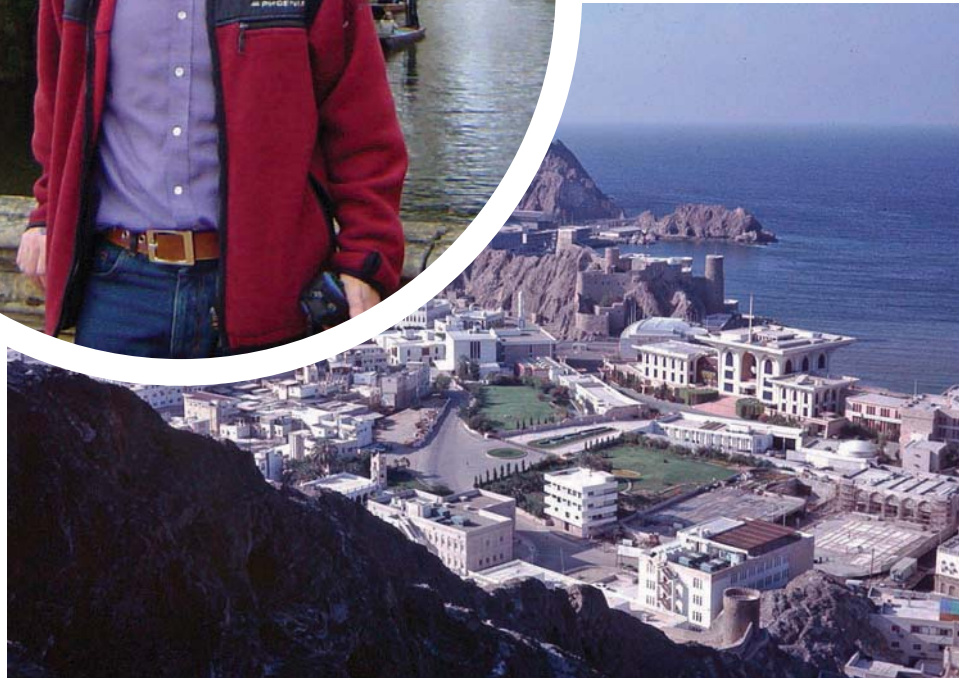
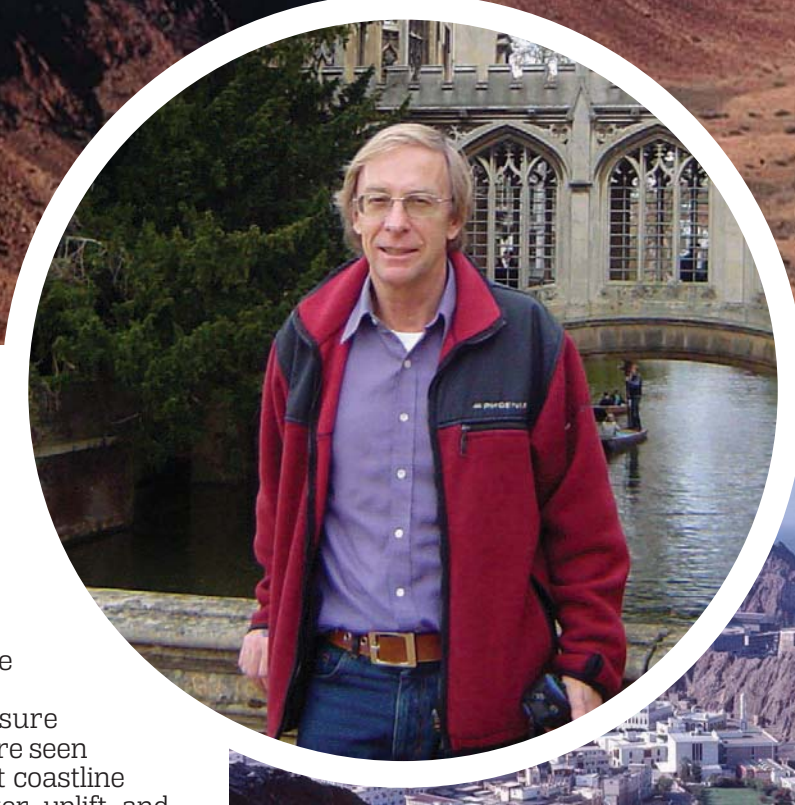
Oman contains many world-class geological sites, and great efforts are now being made to preserve these as World Heritage sites, Geoparks, and sites of special scientific interest, by Omani and foreign geologists and the government.

Prof Michael hopes that these unique scientific sites will be preserved from future developments.

“The preservation of these unique sites will ensure that Oman remains at the pinnacle of geological research and geo-tourism for decades to come,” he mentions.

Prof Michael who has supervised a number of PhD, DPhil and research students has published over 220 papers in leading international peer-reviewed journals. He also has published more than 100 scientific papers on the geology of the Himalayas, Karakoram and Tibet.

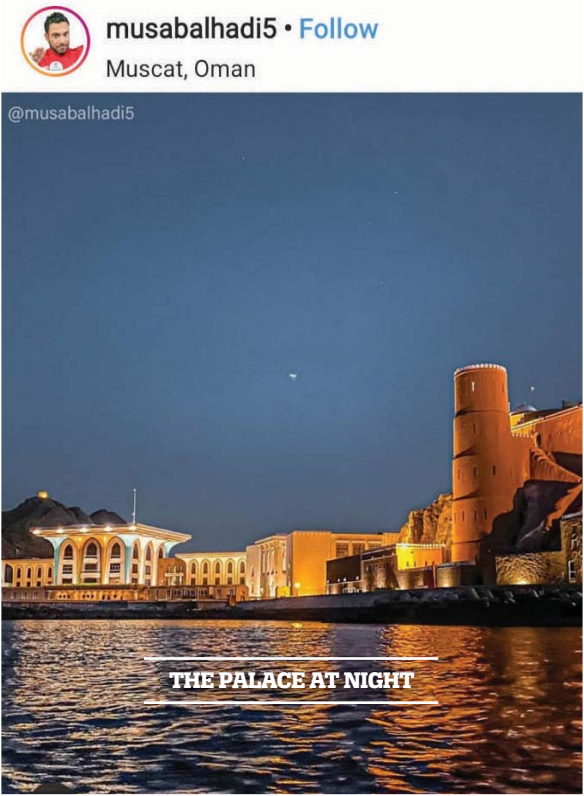
Some of the key areas he worked include Himalayan ranges of North Pakistan, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, Karakoram, Hindu Kush, Pamir ranges of central Asia. This also included the Ophiolite formation and obduction processes in Oman, UAE, Ladakh, South Tibet, Indo-Burma ranges, Jade Mines (Burma), the Andaman Islands, and Lizard complex (Cornwall).





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Beach Pavilion Seafood Chowder



LUXURIOUS DINING

Just last week, the luxurious Al Bustan Palace reopened its door to much anticipation. Kicking the opening in high gear, the Palace has made major changes and upgrades to their restaurants and kitchens to meet the government requirements of the new normal. To allow everyone to taste some of the delicious dishes they have in store for their guests, the busy chefs of the Al Bustan Palace are sharing some of their best menus for everyone to copy at home.

PREPARATION AND COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

In a large pot over low heat, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter, add the bacon cook until crisp and Add the mirepoix of vegetables, stir, and cook until soft, about 5 minutes.

Dust the flour on the mixture Add the potatoes and 6 cups of stock, and bring to a simmer. Season with salt and pepper. Cook for about 20 minutes, until potatoes begin to soften.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium-high heat, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter. Add f the seafood and sauté for about a minute or so. Set aside.

Add seafood to onion and potato mixture; stir over medium heat. Add milk and cream, basil; adjust seasoning with additional salt and pepper. Serve hot with olive crostini.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF ANOOB
ASHRAF

Executive Sous Chef
Al Bustan Palace, Muscat

Hailing from the Southern part of India, Chef Anooob has developed the passion at a very early age from his father who managed to transform daily meals into something delicious and beautiful. He officially began his culinary journey right after finishing 12th grade and joining a culinary institute. By 18, he was already working for his first job at Le Meridian Hotels. After 3 years, he travelled to Malaysia working for an Indian and Thai restaurant until he decided to join The Oberoi Groups of hotels in India a year later. Further developing his skill for Indian cuisines, he would embark in his Middle East journey in 2008 landing in Jeddah for Rosewood Hotels. He worked with Award-winning French Australian and Moroccan Chefs and also learned a lot about Arabic cuisine and the European Cuisine as well finally becoming a junior sous chef in 2010. He joined The Ritz Calton Hotels in Doha in 2011 as Assitant Chef de Cuisine. He joined Al Bustan Palace in 2015 and from Chef de Cuisine would rise into the ranks and become the Executive Sous Chef for the palace in 2016. From the renovations to the reopening of the Palace, Chef Anooob has been instrumental in rebuilding the entire culinary team. As of today, Chef Anooob also specialises in Fully Buy out Indian Weddings, exclusive weddings, and gala dinners.



INGREDIENTS:



- 1.5 kg Seafood diced
- 1/2 litre Full-fat Milk
- 1 cup Cream
- 1 Tbsp Butter
- 50 Gms Bacon
- 1 pc Carrot
- 1 stick Celery
- 1 stick Leeks
- 1 pc White Onion
- 3 pc Potatoes(Peeled and Diced)
- 3 cloves Garlic
- 2 gms Basil
- 1 gm Thyme
- 1 tbsp Flour
- 50 gms Salt
- 600 ml Fish Stock
- Olive Tapenade
- 453 gms Kalamata olives
- 3 cloves Chopped garlic
- 1 tsp Anchovy paste
- zest lemon
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 3 gms Salt

SIDE DISH PREP:

FOR OLIVE TAPENADE
CROSTINI

Place 453 Gms of pitted Kalamata olives, 1 large clove of garlic, 1 Tbsp. anchovy paste, the zest of 1 lemon, 1 Tbsp. lemon juice, 1/4 cup minced chives and a pinch of salt and pepper in a food processor.

Grate the garlic into the food processor using a Microplane for best results.

Pulse just until the mixture is combined. Try not to over-pulse or the tapenade or it may become mushy. Place in a small bowl and serve immediately or store in the fridge for a few hours.

Serve with the toasted crostini or your favourite crackers.

Disney's 'Mulan' sparks backlash over Xinjiang, Hong Kong



SHANGHAI: Walt Disney Co's release of "Mulan", which is set in China and meant to appeal to audiences there, has provoked a backlash on social media over its star's support of Hong Kong police and for being partly filmed in the Xinjiang region. Hong Kong democracy activist Joshua Wong and Internet users in Taiwan and Thailand are among those who promoted hashtags "#BoycottMulan" and "#BanMulan" on Twitter, following this month's launch of the film on Disney's streaming platform. It will also be shown in cinemas in China — an increasingly important market for Hollywood studios - from Sept 11.

Criticism of the live-action remake of a 1998 animated version began last year when Mulan's star, mainland Chinese-born actress Liu Yifei, expressed support on social media for police in Hong Kong, which was rolled at the time by anti-government unrest. Liu did not immediately respond to a request for comment via her account on Weibo, a popular Chinese microblogging site. Calls for people to boycott the film gathered pace this week over its links to the western region of Xinjiang, where China's clampdown on ethnic Uighurs and other Muslims has been criticised by some governments, including the United States, and human rights groups. Several state organisations in Xinjiang appeared in the film's credits, according to social media posts. "In the new #Mulan, @ Disney thanks the public security bureau in Turpan, which has been involved in the internment camps in East Turkistan," the Munich-based World Uyghur

Congress tweeted on Monday. Asked about the reaction to the film's Xinjiang shooting, foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian restated Beijing's denial of the existence of re-education camps in the region, calling facilities there vocational and educational institutions and accusing anti-China forces of smearing its Xinjiang policy. Activist Wong accused Disney of "kowtowing" to China, citing Liu and another actor's support for Hong Kong police and the movie's credits mentioning state organisations in Xinjiang. "We urge people around the world to boycott the new Mulan movie," he said on Tuesday. Disney did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The movie, reported to have cost \$200 million to produce, had been scheduled to reach theatres in March, but its release was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Last month, Disney said Mulan would skip most theaters and go directly to its Disney+ platform. However, it is set to premiere in Chinese cinemas from Friday, and the studio hopes it will do better than the animated version more than 20 years ago. That release was delayed after Disney's relations with China soured over "Kundun," its 1997 movie based on the life of the exiled Dalai Lama, whom China has branded a dangerous separatist. In February, director Niki Caro told The Hollywood Reporter that Disney had tested the film with Chinese audiences, removing a kissing scene between Mulan and her love interest after feedback from its Chinese executives. — Reuters



US — Canada towns marooned by border closure brace for winter trapped in isolation

They are small towns along the Canadian-American border, marooned by geography, whose residents' lives have already been upended by the border closure due to the coronavirus pandemic.

But with winter approaching, residents of Campobello Island in Canada's Atlantic province of New Brunswick and the small US town of Point Roberts in Washington state are bracing for continued isolation adding to winter blues, exposing how tightly intertwined are communities that straddle an international border.

Campobello Island, located off the coast of the US state of Maine, is accessible only by a private ferry service that runs during the summer or by driving through Maine, which connects to the island via a bridge.

The lack of easy access to the rest of Canada has long been an issue, but is compounded by the pandemic, said Justin Tinker, 34, a civil engineer whose family has lived on Campobello Island for 10 generations.

Residents of the island have to pass through the United States to go to a hospital on the Canadian mainland, but they now could wind up being turned away from the hospital because they've been to the US within the last two weeks, Tinker said.

"Campobello's

always come together when it needs to, but there's anxiety," said Tinker, who blames the province for dragging its feet on the lack of a solution. "Once that ferry stops running we can't get to Campobello Island within our own province."

Across the continent, Point Roberts, a town of around 1,300

KIDS AND ISOLATION

Carleton has been raising the alarm about an impending mental health crisis among residents in Point Roberts as their isolation looks likely to drag on into the winter. His efforts bring more attention to the plight of Point Roberts residents, though pressure on state and federal politicians

Calder said, citing a 90-per cent drop in business as soon as the border closed.

She described life in Point Roberts during the pandemic as "eerie."

"If we can't get back to what was the normal, I don't see how we can survive," she said.

Sandra Procter, 52, another Point Roberts resident, said she has cried every day since she and her husband made the decision to send their 16-year-old son to live with friends on the Canadian side of the border in late August so he can continue attending school in Vancouver, British Columbia. Point Roberts' school only goes up to Grade 3, after which age children attend schools in Washington or Canada.

Although education was considered an essential reason to cross the border in June, when schools in British Columbia reopened, that's no longer the case.

Public Safety Canada said the policy barring Americans from crossing the border for school will remain in place as long as the border closure continues. The US-Canada border is closed for non-essential travel until September 21.

The change in policy "came out of the blue," Procter said. "For the mental health of a 16-year-old, being as isolated as he is here, it's not healthy."

"We're not asking for the border to be opened up, we're just asking that our kids' education is considered essential." — **Reuters**

Campobello Island, located off the coast of the US state of Maine, is accessible only by a private ferry service that runs during the summer or by driving through Maine, which connects to the island via a bridge.

year-round residents in Washington state, sits on the tip of Canada's Tsawwassen Peninsula. Its proximity to Canada has made the local economy reliant on Canadian visitors, but also means that locals rely on an open border to access health care and other facilities.

"We have five gas stations. We don't have five gas stations for 1,000 people," said Christopher Carleton, fire chief for Point Roberts, explaining the reliance on Canadians, who cross the border to buy gas that is roughly a third cheaper.

hasn't paid off so far.

Washington state Governor Jay Inslee wrote to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in August, asking him to address the "unique hardships" faced by Point Roberts residents.

Beth Calder, 48, manages Point to Point Parcel, a package receiving business mainly serving Canadians who drive to Point Roberts to collect parcels, dodging expensive or unavailable international shipping.

"Without the Canadians coming down and using our service, it's crippling our company,"





Gender equality a concern for UK firms

In spite of pressures of gender equality, men are still getting most top roles at financial firms in the UK.

Only one in five of the most senior positions at firms were awarded to women last year, according to a survey from law firm Pinsent Masons. It showed that despite the well-intentioned initiatives little progress has been made around diversity.

The recent survey found that of the 4,000-plus individuals it canvassed taking up senior roles in financial services companies, 833 were women and 3211 were men.

The sample covered banks, insurers, fund managers, hedge funds and private equity funds. Partner at Pinsent Masons, Elizabeth Budd said: "Given the attention that gender diversity has given in recent years, I expect many firms will be disappointed that this is not being

reflected in the number of women put forward for senior roles."

Gender diversity has been a major talking point in the financial district (known as the 'City') of London for several years now.

In 2017 the Women in Finance Charter was set up by the government to increase the number of females at the top of UK financial services, while the 'MeToo' movement shone a spotlight on the industry's widespread sexism.

But despite these recent developments, Pinsent Masons said its research shows that the financial services sector is still failing to promote and hire women into their most senior positions.

It was revealed in July that the Financial Conduct Authority failed to attract a diverse pool of applicants to the chief executive role. The regulator received only seven applicants from women. The



ANDY JALIL

andyjalil@aol.com

The recent survey found that of the 4,000-plus individuals it canvassed taking up senior roles in financial services companies, 833 were women and 3211 were men

regulator's incoming chief executive has vowed to make diversity in "all its dimensions" one of his top priorities during his five-year tenure.

Similarly, Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey said it was looking likely the central bank will

fall short of its 2020 gender diversity target, despite pledging to place diversity at the heart of its cultural agenda. Both the FCA and Bank of England are signatories of the Women in Finance Charter.

One of the excuses given by the

businesses about the low number of women in top jobs is the testing combination of long hours and childcare responsibilities. However, Budd said that the coronavirus has dispelled the myth of inflexibility long office hours and will hopefully lead to a lasting cultural change.

"The coronavirus crisis has upended working practices, organisational and operational structures. As a result, women will be hoping that City employers are going to be much more receptive to flexible working requests and this won't be used as an excuse for the low levels of women at senior levels," Budd said.

Pinsent Masons said that the firms should be committed to cultural change that "allows women to excel in financial services" and although there hasn't been a major shift in the industry yet, still recommended signing up to the Women in Finance

Charter to achieve this as it has helped to move the sector in the right direction. Latest analysis from New Financial of 187 Women in Finance signatories found 64pc had increased the proportion of women in senior roles last year, while 12 per cent maintained the same level of representation.

On this issue, it is interesting to note that US bank JPMorgan which prides itself on the long-tenure of its employees, promoted a record number of women in the latest round of promotions.

It promoted 116 people to managing director in its corporate and investment bank. Of this number, around 30pc were based in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Of the overall cohort of promotions, 36 per cent are women – up 6 per cent from its record last year.

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Omran launches 'Within Oman' competition

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Omran Group, the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development, has launched an interactive Instagram competition as part of its staycation campaign #WithinOman.

The contest offers 30 lucky winners the chance to enjoy a complimentary one-night stay at of one of Omran's hotels and resorts by simply following @OmranGroupOM on Instagram and mentioning friends and family members. The accommodation voucher includes complimentary stay with breakfast for two guests, in addition to two kids below 12 years.

The competition is open to Omani nationals and residents, and 5 winners will be drawn weekly and contacted with instructions on how to redeem the prize and additional reservations can be made via Omran website. All offers will be subject to terms and conditions applicable to each hotel and resort.

The 2020 'Within Oman' campaign aims to encourage visitors from across the country to enjoy a wide array of tourism offerings with heavily discounted rates on room and hotel experiences. Guests can choose from three categories designed to



The campaign aims to encourage visitors from across the country to enjoy a wide array of tourism offerings

suit every holidaymaker. Room rates range from RO 25 per night to RO 65 per night to allow guests to Relax (RO 65), Chill (RO 45) and Enjoy (RO 25) at the property of their choice and create their own

staycation with free stay for two kids aged below 12 and substantial reductions on additional leisure experiences including health and wellness, culinary journeys, cultural discovery, beach escapes and sea activities.

To learn more about the 2020 'Within Oman' summer holiday campaign, please visit <http://Omran.om/withinoman> or follow Omran Group's social media accounts by searching @OmranGroupOm and share your lifestyle experiences using the hashtag #WithinOman.

Russia to build up unfinished oil wells to regain market share

MOSCOW: Russia believes it is extremely important to quickly regain, or even raise, its oil market share once demand recovers, as it readies to build up its fleet of unfinished oil wells, Energy Minister Alexander Novak (pictured) said.

To ensure Russia has not lost market share after a global production cut agreement finishes in 2022, Moscow has worked out a programme of unfinished oil wells, which could start operating once the deal expires.

"Once (oil) demand starts returning to the pre-crisis levels, it will be extremely important for Russia and for other oil producing countries to quickly regain market share, or even to raise it," Novak said.

Sources said the plan had stalled over the finance ministry's unwillingness to provide funds amid the need to address the economic impact from coronavirus.

On Tuesday, Novak did not say if the programme of unfinished wells, a scheme widely used by US shale oil producers, has been approved by the government after being first announced in May. The finance ministry has not replied to a request for a comment.

Last week, the ministry said that ways to support oil service companies were under discussion, without using the state budget or sovereign wealth fund as sources



of financing. Opec and its allies, a group known as Opec+, are cutting output by 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) until December to support prices as the pandemic hammers demand.

Novak said the government considered offering three-year tax breaks for companies engaged in the programme from early 2022, estimating the number of the unfinished wells at 2,700. Banks are to provide part of the funds under guarantees by the state bank VEB and while the tax breaks are estimated at 32 billion roubles, the budget is set to regain 1.15 trillion roubles (\$15 billion) once the wells are operating, he said.

Total spending by oil companies themselves is seen at 300-400 billion roubles, Novak said.

To provide some respite for the industry, he suggested companies should engage in "green" energy production until oil demands recovers. — Reuters

BUSINESS ALERT

Achieve your children's higher education aspirations

MUSCAT: As part of its belief that future planning is essential, BankDhofar provides the chance for customers to achieving their children's dreams for higher education, with the best competitive interest rate of up to 5.5 per cent.

Commenting on the Long Term Deposit Plan for Education, Dr Tariq Taha (pictured), Chief Retail Banking Officer noted: "At BankDhofar, we are aware that planning for children's future is significant for all parents, therefore, through the Long Term Deposit Plan for Education, customers may achieve their children's aspiration. All they need to do is to save a monthly amount for a specific period and get an increased amount rate after the deposit period."

With the Long Term Deposit Plan for Education, customers may save a monthly amount for specific deposit period and enjoy additional credit facilities. Customers may benefit from the interest rate of up to 5.5 per cent.

For example, if a customer saves RO 50 for 18 years, the amount will be more than RO 18,000 at the end of the period and the customer will get interest amount of more than RO 7,000.



Amazon's Bezos tops Forbes richest list, pandemic knocks Trump lower

WASHINGTON: Amazon Chief Executive Jeff Bezos (pictured) topped Forbes' list of richest Americans for the third year in a row, while US President Donald Trump's ranking dropped as the coronavirus pandemic slammed his office buildings, hotels and resorts, the magazine said.

The aggregate wealth of the Forbes 400 list rose to a record \$3.2 trillion, as the richest Americans continued to do well even though the pandemic has devastated the economy and caused more than 1.8 million Americans to lose their jobs.

Eric Yuan, chief executive officer of Zoom Video Communications, which has become ubiquitous in the work-from-home era, was one of 18 newcomers on the list with a net worth of \$11 billion. Trump's ranking dropped to No 352 from 275 last year as his net worth fell to \$2.5 billion from \$3.1 billion, as office buildings, hotels and resorts, have suffered during the pandemic.

The annual list can serve as a way to track the wealthiest people in the country who hold the most power, said Kerry Dolan, assistant managing editor of wealth at Forbes. "As a society, we all should know who is behind the biggest companies and what they're doing with their money," she said. — Reuters



Italy's statistics office sees 'widespread signs' of economic recovery

ROME: The Italian economy is getting back on its feet after the "unprecedented" slump brought about by the novel coronavirus, according to national statistics office Istat.

"Starting from May, the Italian economy has been characterised by widespread signs of recovery," Istat said in a monthly bulletin, released on Tuesday.

The agency mentioned positive readings for industrial production, manufacturing orders and foreign trade, with, for example, a month-on-month increase in exports of 14.4 per cent in June. Istat recalled that business and consumer confidence were up in August and that employment rose month-on-month by 0.4 per cent in July, in the first increase since March.

Italy was the first country in the West to be hit with the novel coronavirus pandemic, and went into national lockdown in early March, with restrictions lasting until May-June. The lockdown paved the ground for a record economic contraction. — dpa



A woman walks past a shop in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan. — Reuters

Indonesia raises \$1.5 billion in rupiah bonds, but demand drops

JAKARTA: Indonesia raised 22 trillion rupiah (\$1.49 billion) in a bi-weekly bond auction on Tuesday, above its indicative target, the finance ministry said in a statement, although total bids fell to their lowest in more than four months.

The weighted average yields of the bonds were higher than the comparable bonds at an auction on August 25. Bids for the bonds in Tuesday's auction were 52.26 trillion rupiah, the lowest demand since April 28. The total incoming bid in the previous auction on Aug. 25 was 78.35 trillion rupiah, in which the government also raised 22 trillion rupiah.

The lower incoming bid was "understandable" as the central bank has recently expanded its open market operation to absorb excess liquidity from the banking system, Deni Ridwan, director of sovereign bonds at the Finance Ministry said. Meanwhile, market prices for Indonesian sovereign bonds this week have been lower and the rupiah weaker compared to during the previous auction, which may have also reduced demand, Handy Yunianto, a bond analyst with Mandiri Sekuritas, said. — Reuters



An Indonesia Rupiah note is seen in this picture illustration. — Reuters

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NEW apartment for rent, one room, 2 toilets, kitchen and dinning. Location, Al Khoudh Market, Red Taj building, 7th floor. Per month rent RO 190/-. **92838118.**

APPROVED residential for labour camp available. Near Sohar Port. Area 15,000m². Water and electricity available. For contact **91577774, 96198460.**

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APARTMENT for rent in Maabala 8 in Muscat. It's the highest one of the other two. 3 rooms with 3 toilets one family room, small store and air-condition. **71136222.**

NEW apartment in Ruwi near church consists of 2 rooms with its facilities. Contact: **94664635, 95850345.**

SHOWROOM and flats FLATS for rent near Diwan Zafraniya area end of Muttrah Corniche close to (Muscat Shiva Temple), family, bachelor. Contact **99083071, 99323015.**

FLATS for rent in Al Khuwair, Al Hail, Wadi Kabir, Al Falaj, MBD and Muttrah. **99119699/ 95250300/ 24813002.**

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APARTMENTS for rent in Bausher Al Amin Mosque area 1) Apartments for rent and offices in the district Al Amin Mosque two rooms, hall, kitchen and two bathrooms system RO 250 negotiable equipped and divided offices for rent to companies an area of 600 metres 2). We have furnished and unfurnished apartment rooms for monthly rent all over Muscat to communicate. **96444111 or 96672277.**

Acc Available

ACCOMMODATION for company personnel/ executives at Qurum Beach Hotel on short/ long term basis. Contact Mr Shafiq **99470124/ 24564066.**

SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact **99657906**

Situation Wanted

LADY Indian English teacher with over 25 year experience, currently seeks full time position in colleges or training institutions. Responsibilities in English language teaching or soft skills trainer with preference for aviation sector. Possess valid Omani driving license. Contact GSM **92541510**

PAKISTANI male driver, 8 years experience in Oman, knows Arabic, seeks job. **96551602.**

MECHANICAL engineer. 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact **96511338.** Email: rkhdhanush11@gmail.com

I NEED a driver job, urgent, with NOC paper. My name: Masum Billah. **968 94991705.**

INDIAN female with Oman experience — Admin/ Accounts, seeks job **91719246.**

CIVIL engineer/QS engineer, 11 years in UAE, freelance & Oman driving licence available, looking for full-time or part-time job **97299165.**

SALES/Marketing/retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact **93920174.** Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

INDIAN male 26, BBM & MBA with UAE 2 years experience presently on visit visa in Oman seeks suitable opening willing to join immediately contact **78119897** Email: mohammedraiyan25@gmail.com

SUDANESE, 3 years experience in KSA, firefighting and fire alarm field, Nebosh (IGC) holder, driving licence: **79318246**

CLASSIFIED SECTION

RUWI **24649594/ 9984 1230**

Behind Royal Oman Police, Adjacent to Dhofar Building, Ruwi.

For Sale/Rent

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact **94272979, 96252664.**

(NEW 3 STOREY VILLAS for sale/ rents **WADI KABIR/ AL KHUWAIR**), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir). **96596348.**

AL Awsad Modern LLC, electronic and furniture used. **99834373.**

We buy used and broken cars which have instalments in cash. **90202090.**

For Sale

Institution Licence contact **95595512.**

FLATS in Al Mabella. **99323957, 95490842.**

RESIDENTIAL building in Al Hamriya. Income RO 1,200. Required RO 115,000. **92273379.**

RESTAURANT in an excellent location in Salalah with equipment and workers. **93397812.**

FOR sale: Extravagant and furnished residences for female students in Al Khuwair, Al Mawaleh and Al Khoudh along with all assets. **99001332.**

PAINTING, Plumbing, Building maintenance, Excavation, Stone Pitching, Gabion. **99057348.**

MAINTENANCE: 1. AC Maintenance & Servicing; 2. Fridge, Washing Machine & Dish washer repairing; 3. Painting & cleaning services; 4. Electrical & Plumbing Carpentry work. Contact: **99447257, 97014234, 24504281.**

PAINTING/ plumbing/ building maintenance. Excavation/ stone pitching/ gabion. **99057348.**

PROFESSIONAL movers company number **94551284.**

JEWELLERY workshop attached with showroom for sale at Walja, Way Number 4301, Al Fursan Street, shop Number 25. **24835276, 93035380.**

1) A LAND in HALBAN behind GUTech is offered for sale. The land enjoys a permit for twin-villa.

2) A LAND is for sale in Mabaila 8 owner. **95959166.**

HOUSE for sale in Wadi Udai for RO 27,000 (neg). **99462401/ 99243291.**

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) **99242445, 99327939.**

A SHOWROOM in Al Qurum in strategic location with extravagant interior design on 280 sqm is offered for sale at RO 25,000. **92470024.**

PICK-UPS, Double Cabin, Buses, Cranes, Primover & Trailers. **99465358 & 99454660.**

ESSCO

QUALITY, RELIABILITY & DURABILITY

Job Vacancies

Position:
Administration Section Head (HR/Finance)

Experience:

- Not less than 7 years of Experience in Oil & Gas Industry.
- Omani National.

Interested candidates, please share your cv with supporting documents to Recruiting@esscollc.com on or before 20th September, 2020.



Exxon downsizes global empire as Wall Street worries about dividend

JENNIFER HILLER

Ill-timed bets on rising demand have Exxon Mobil Corp facing a shortfall of about \$48 billion through 2021, according to a tally and Wall Street estimates, a situation that will require the top US oil company to make deep cuts to its staff and projects.

Wall Street investors are even starting to worry about the once-sacrosanct dividend at Exxon, which in the 20th century became the world's most valuable company using global scale, relentless expansion and strict financial controls.

Exxon weathered a series of setbacks last decade and under Chief Executive Darren Woods sought to return to past prominence by big bets on US shale oilfields, pipelines and global refining and plastics.

It also bet big on offshore Guyana, where it discovered up to 8 billion barrels of oil, six years of production at its current rate.

But Exxon's ability to finance that global expansion is no longer assured. This year the company borrowed \$23 billion to pay its bills, nearly doubling its outstanding debt. In July, it posted its first back-to-back quarterly losses ever. It faces a full-year \$1.86 billion loss, according to Refinitiv, excluding asset sales or write downs.

The looming shortfall of about \$48 billion through 2021 was calculated using cash from operations, commitments to shareholder payouts and costs for the massive expansion programme Exxon had planned.

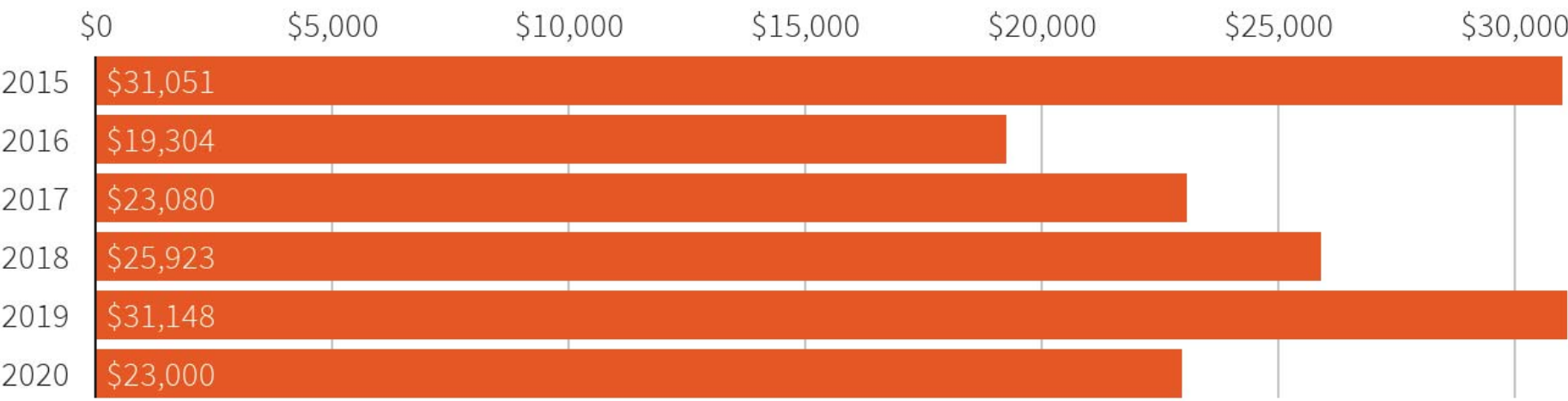
Now the company is embarking on a worldwide review of where it can cut expenses, and analysts believe the once unthinkable dividend cut has grown more likely.

JOB REVIEWS, BENEFIT CUTS

This year's sharp drop in oil demand and pricing has shredded Woods' plan to spend at least \$30 billion a year through 2025 to revive production and earnings by expanding in oil processing, chemicals and production, and by taking a commanding role in US shale and liquefied natural gas, markets that then looked promising.

Instead, he must prepare Exxon to

Exxon pulls back on capital and exploration spending



Note: In millions of dollars; 2020 spending is estimated
Source: Company reports

operate in a world of weaker demand for its oil, gas and plastics. The company has been dropped from the Dow Jones index of top US industrial companies after 92 years.

It is exposing up to 10 per cent of US staff to harsh reviews that could push thousands out of the company, and is taking away lavish retirement benefits that had career employees staying 30 years on average.

"We remain committed to our capital allocation priorities — investing in industry advantaged projects, paying a reliable and growing dividend, and maintaining a strong balance sheet," said spokesman Casey Norton.

A review of projects now underway aims to "maximise efficiency and capture additional cost savings to put us in the strongest position" as energy markets improve, he said.

Oil prices have dropped 35 per cent from the start of 2020 as demand collapsed during the COVID-19 pandemic. BP, Royal Dutch Shell, Total and Repsol and others have cut billions of dollars off the value of their oil and gas properties, something Exxon has yet to do.

The European majors also are adding renewable energy and electricity to their portfolios, a hedge against permanently reduced oil and gas demand. BP plans by

2030 to reduce its fossil fuel production by 40 per cent. It plans to sell even more fossil fuel properties if oil prices have a sustained rally.

Wall Street investors are even starting to worry about the once-sacrosanct dividend at Exxon, which in the 20th century became the world's most valuable company using global scale, relentless expansion and strict financial controls.

DEBT NEARLY DOUBLES

Exxon's cash from operations — estimated to be about \$17.4 billion this year — is \$20 billion below the funds needed for this year's already pared investment plan and shareholder dividend, an analysis showed.

The company's stock price closed on Friday at \$39.08, off 56 per cent since Woods became CEO. He raised \$23.19

billion in new debt this year to bolster finances, but has vowed not to borrow more and as recently as July insisted the dividend was sacrosanct.

Investors say the commitments will be difficult to keep.

"At \$41 or \$42 [per barrel] crude, you can't put those puzzle pieces together and have them make sense," said Mark Stoeckle, senior portfolio manager at Adams Funds, which holds about \$70 million in Exxon shares.

Exxon must cut its dividend if the share price remains depressed, Stoeckle said. "Something has to give. Wherever the give comes hurts management credibility," he said.

A cut would be "cataclysmic" for Exxon's stock, said equity analyst Paul Sankey of Sankey Research, given that executives in July reiterated its importance.

Exxon's weak cash flow worries investors that hold the stock for its nearly 9 per cent dividend. Matrix Asset Advisors has it on a "watch list in terms of our conviction and their ability to defend and grow the dividend," said David Katz, chief investment officer at the New York firm.

SPENDING CUTS, DEFERRALS

Exxon will slash spending in the Permian Basin shale field this year to

about \$3 billion from an original \$7.4 billion budget, consultancy Rystad Energy estimates.

The company has said it plans to reduce the number of drilling rigs there to 15 or fewer, from 55 early this year, and the company's pullback "will continue," senior vice-president Neil Chapman said in a July call. Spending on refining and chemicals plants that take years to design and complete, "is really a question of deferral," he added.

A \$10-billion chemical plant in China remains subject to permits, the Exxon spokesman said.

Spending limits will further constrain its oil, refining and plastics businesses and could revive pressure on the company to divest some operations.

"Each of our core businesses could be a powerhouse in its own right," Woods said when he rolled out the vision in early 2017.

At the time, he was pushing back at calls to spin off businesses to boost lagging returns.

Woods stuck to the growth targets last year, putting this year's potential earnings at \$25.1 billion with oil at \$60 a barrel and assuming flat refining and chemical margins. That forecast included 2020 cash flow and asset sales targets that have become unreachable since the pandemic hit. — Reuters