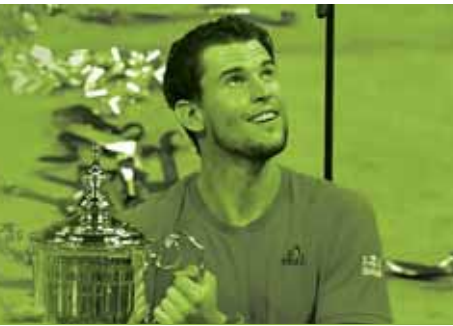


P12

THIEM CLAIMS
US OPEN TITLE
AFTER THRILLING
FIGHTBACK



P15

EU, CHINA
SIGN FOOD
PROTECTION
DEAL



P19

OMAN,
AN ARCHITECTURAL
BEAUTY



OMAN

HM greetings
to Presidents

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Daniel Ortega the Republic of Nicaragua, President Juan Orlando Hernandez of the Republic of Honduras, President Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei of the Republic of Guatemala, and President Nayib Bukele of the Republic of Salvador, on their countries' Independence Anniversary. In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the presidents and the friendly people of their countries further progress and prosperity. **DETAILS ON P2**

REGION

Hopes dim for
Lebanon govt

BEIRUT: Lebanon's prime minister-designate on Monday updated president Michel Aoun on talks on forming a new government, but did not submit proposals for a cabinet despite a looming French-imposed deadline. Premier-in-waiting Mustapha Adib "did not present a line-up" during Monday's meeting at the presidential palace, said a source at the president's office. "Developments over the past two days necessitated more negotiations," the same source said, adding that Aoun and Adib would meet again when consultations were completed. That dimmed hopes for a new cabinet by a mid-September deadline announced by French president Emmanuel Macron during his second visit to Lebanon since an August 4 explosion ripped through the capital, killing more than 190 people. **DETAILS ON P6**

INSIDE



WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 34°C
MIN: 28°C

SALALAH
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 42°C
MIN: 25°C

SUNRISE 05.53 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

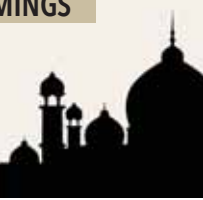
FAJR: 04:38

DHUHR: 12:07

ASR: 15:34

MAGHRIB: 18:16

ISHA: 19:26



FOCUS TO BE ON HOURS RATHER THAN CLASSES

MINISTRY'S MEASURES AIMED AT ALLEVIATING PARENTS' CONCERNS

SAMUEL KUTTY
@SAMKUTTYVP

Even as the schools in Oman are set to open after six weeks from now, the new academic year shortened by COVID-19, will witness an educational system based on hours rather than classes.

This announcement, along with other 'flexible' measures relating to physical presence of children in classes, announced by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, last week is seen as a step aimed at alleviating parents' concerns.

From a minimum of three hours a day for schools with low density to maximum of five hours for high density schools, the minister said that "the general framework of school operation is still flexible and, if deemed necessary, schools can be closed and full online education



applied again." As the pandemic continues to take its toll, parents are faced with the difficult decision of whether to send their children back to school in-person or online.

"Getting children to wear a mask all day may be difficult. But the new

protocol with reduced classroom timing will definitely make them adjust to the situation in the slow course of time," said Mubarak al Wahaibi, father of two primary school students.

Staying connected with friends,



Getting children to
wear a mask all day may
be difficult. But kids
will take time to adjust
to the situation in the
slow course of time

MUBARAK AL
WAHAIBI
A parent

virus is still here. "Still it is going to be weird for the children as they and their teachers are wearing masks and not having their normal play time."

Kevin George, father of a ninth-class student, said that children have already adjusted to the new normal with face masks, sanitisers and temperature checks. Still, he said, "going back to school won't look the same this year".

According to the minister, the new school operation programme divided schools into three categories. Low density schools will operate with not more than 16 students per class in a day for three hours. Medium density schools will run for four hours a day at half capacity during the first week and the other half during the week that follows. High density schools will operate for five hours a day at one-third capacity every week. **TURN TO P2**

Focus on Omanisation in private health sector

VINOD NAIR
@VINOT_NAIR

The government will intensify efforts to replace expatriates in the health sector with citizens.

The Ministry of Labour organised a joint meeting with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) represented by the Directorate General of Private Health Institutions, on Monday to discuss plans for recruiting Omanis in the health sector.

The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Nasr bin Amer bin Shuwain al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, in the presence of Reda bin Jumah al Salih,

OCCI Chairman; and Dr Mazen bin Jawad al Khabouri, Director-General of the General Directorate of Private Health Institutions in the Ministry's General Office; and officials from private health institutions.

PRIVATE HEALTH INSTITUTIONS TOLD TO CANCEL SUBCONTRACTS OF EXPATRIATE WORKFORCE

The under-secretary called on private health institutions to cancel subcontracts of expatriate workforce, which will contribute in generating job opportunities for Omanis in the future.

He said the ministry, in cooperation with the authorities in the Ministry of Health, is ready to provide training opportunities for the national workforce, which will help them in taking up jobs currently occupied by expatriates. **TURN TO P2**



ON HM DIRECTIVES, OMAN SENDS RELIEF TO SUDAN

In implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Sultanate on Monday operated relief aid flights to the sisterly Republic of Sudan, which experienced insurmountable rainwater flooding. The relief aid was airlifted onboard by Royal Air Force of Oman military aircraft, which took off on Monday morning from Musannah Airbase. **SEE ALSO P2**

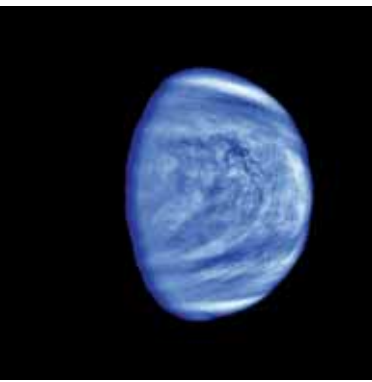
Scientists find gas on venus linked to life on Earth

WASHINGTON: Scientists said on Monday they have detected in the harshly acidic clouds of Venus a gas called phosphine that indicates microbes may inhabit Earth's inhospitable neighbour, a tantalising sign of potential life beyond Earth.

The researchers did not discover actual life forms, but noted that on Earth phosphine is produced by bacteria thriving in oxygen-starved environments.

The international scientific team first spotted the phosphine using the James Clerk Maxwell Telescope in Hawaii and confirmed it using the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) radio telescope in Chile.

"I was very surprised — stunned, in fact," said astronomer Jane Greaves of Cardiff University in Wales, lead author of the research published in the journal *Nature Astronomy*.



The existence of extraterrestrial life long has been one of the paramount questions of science. Scientists have used probes and telescopes to seek "biosignatures" — indirect signs of life — on other planets and moons in our solar system and beyond.

"With what we currently know of Venus, the most plausible explanation for phosphine, as fantastical as it might sound, is life," said Massachusetts Institute of Technology molecular

astrophysicist and study co-author Clara Sousa-Silva.

"I should emphasise that life, as an explanation for our discovery, should be, as always, the last resort," Sousa-Silva added. "This is important because, if it is phosphine, and if it is life, it means that we are not alone. It also means that life itself must be very common, and there must be many other inhabited planets throughout our galaxy." — **Reuters**



HM greets presidents of Latin American countries

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent cables of greetings to President Daniel Ortega the Republic of Nicaragua, and President Juan Orlando Hernandez of the Republic of Honduras on their countries' independence anniversaries.

In the cables, His Majesty expressed his best wishes of good health and happiness to President Ortega and the friendly people of Nicaragua, and President Hernandez and the friendly people of Honduras further progress and prosperity

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik has also sent similar cables of greetings to President Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei of the Republic of Guatemala, President Nayib Bukele of the Republic of Salvador, and President Carlos Alvarado of the Republic of Costa Rica on their countries' independence anniversaries.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes of good health and happiness to the leaders and the friendly people of the respective countries further progress and growth.

— ONA



Oman sends flood relief to Sudan

MUSCAT: In implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Sultanate on Monday operated relief aid flights to the sisterly Republic of Sudan, which experienced insurmountable rainwater flooding.

The relief aid was airlifted onboard Royal Air Force of Oman military crafts, which took off towards their destination in succession this morning from Musannah

Airbase.

The freight included basic human requirements and a variety of relief materials gathered in coordination with Omani Charitable Organisation.

The operation of such flights comes within the context of humanitarian assistance that the Sultanate extends to sisterly and friendly states during emergencies and exceptional conditions.

— ONA

NO ENTRY WITHOUT MOFA NOD: ROP



KABEER YOUSUF
@YUSEFKABEER

The Sultanate has started issuing residence permits for those who filed applications through ROP's e-visa platform. But the visa holder needs permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for entry into the Sultanate, a senior official of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) said on Monday.

"Work visas can be applied via the electronic visa website, but

an approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is necessary for the visa holder to enter the country," the official told the Observer.

"However, no visit or express visa will be issued until the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 gives nod to the same."

The Sultanate stopped issuing these visas in March end in the wake of the shutdown of airport and land borders.

Asked about the No Objection Certificate for the return of those expats who have stayed for more than 180 days away, he said that NoCs are still issued to foreign workers in such cases.

"No Objection Certificate to facilitate the return of any resident who has stayed more than 6 months away is issued based on the letter from the sponsor and a copy of the residence card details from the Sanad Center," a senior official from the ROP has said.

Nine-year-old honoured for bravery



MUSCAT: The nine-year-old child, Mutasim Ahmed Saleh al Shaqsi, who rescued his family members from a house fire recently, was honoured by the Director-General of Civil Defence on Monday. Mutasim not only saved his youngest brothers by pulling them out of burning house quickly, but also sought the neighbour's help to save his disabled mother. The heroic act of Mutasim has resulted in zero casualties with some material damage due to the fire caused by electric shock.

Focus to be on hours rather than classes

FROM PAGE 1

"Students belonging to medium and high density schools have to continue their education online via educational platforms and television channels during the course of the week in which they stay at home," the minister said.

Regarding the syllabus and assessment criteria, Dr Madeeha

said that the ministry adapted the content of the curricula to 180 days of teaching that imparts knowledge, skills and basic values to students.

Yet, the minister said, "the actual presence of students in the classrooms will be subject to assessment in liaison with the Ministry of Health and the Supreme Committee".

The ministry has also set a protocol and special conditions for cases that allow them to study only online. "If we need to shut down the schools, we will go for distance learning and TV channels. The ministry is keen to provide education for students who live in places where the Internet may not be available through TV channels," Dr Madeeha said.



LABOUR MINISTRY DISCUSSES OMANISATION



The Ministry of Labour on Monday organised a joint meeting with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of Private Health Establishments. Discussion covered plans for Omanisation and ways to generate job opportunities for Omani nationals.

— ONA

Move to speed up Omanisation in health sector

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry is working in coordination with government agencies in various economic sectors to start the process of replacing expatriate workforce with Omani cadre.

The human resources managers of private institutions have expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Ministry of Labour in implementing the replacement plans which will contribute to the stability of the job market. During the meeting, it was agreed to form a joint working committee between the Ministry of Labour, OCCI and the Directorate General of Private Health Institutions and a number of human resources managers to study the challenges faced by this sector.

Recently, the under-secretary of the Ministry of Labour had met human resources managers of finance and money exchange companies and banks operating in the Sultanate, and discussed issues related to sub-employment contracts given to the expatriates and the subsequent failure to ensure job opportunities for Omanis.

Omani students' body in UK resumes workshops

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 14

The Scientific Committee of the Omani Students Advisory Council in the United Kingdom resumed a series of scientific lectures and workshops which aim to develop students' knowledge and research skills.

In August, a workshop entitled Overleaf editing was presented by Musam Billah, an academic at the University of Roehampton, and a PhD researcher at the University of Staffordshire. Overleaf is a cloud-based website used for academic writing, which is effective in enabling research team members to work together.

The workshop discussed a number of themes including how to prepare a scientific paper through this website, how to organise the sections of the scientific paper, how to prepare tables and insert images and edit equations. The workshop also showed the possibility of editing the document by more than one author.

The second workshop entitled "Python" was presented by Maha al Anquodi, a PhD student in computer science at the University of Glasgow. Python is a programming language used for many purposes, the most



important of which are organising and processing data, modelling it, and performing the necessary statistical analyses. In the first theme of the workshop, an introduction to data structuring in Python was presented. Then, the calculations in Python and how to process them were explained. The workshop also covered teaching the machine in Python.

The committee is planning more workshops and lectures which will discuss problem solving and performance improvement through TRIZ methodology, leadership, labour unions in Oman and endnote programme.

Power bills continue to shock subscribers

ADDRESS COMPLAINTS: Electricity companies urged to resolve grievances, ensure no overcharging

ZAINAB AL NASSERI
@ZAINABALNASSERI

High electricity bills continued to shock many subscribers for the third consecutive month. Their grievances remain unresolved despite repeated complaints.

From an average of RO 20 to 30 to hundreds of riyals, the subscribers questioned the accuracy of meter reading and demanded a more detailed clarification from the electricity companies.

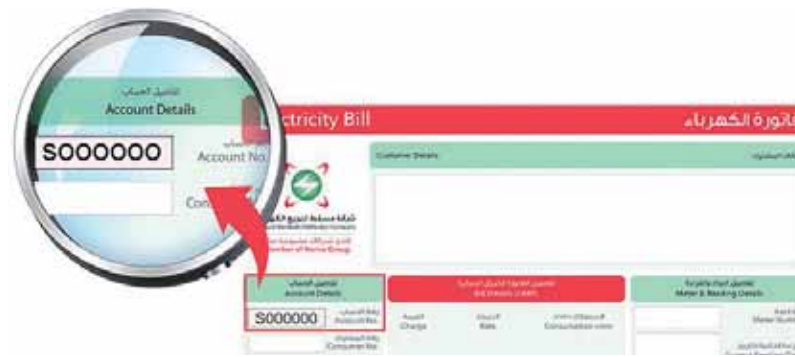
Ahmed al Khatri, a social activist, said, "A noticeable rise with everyone

almost. Please find a solution."

Mohammed al Hashli, a subscriber, added, "We completed a month since we filed a complaint. Still, there is no response."

Yet another subscriber, Bu Shalan, claimed to have visited the branch. "They said the reading is correct. How come this happens only for those three months?" he asked. Last August, the Social Committee of the Shura Council discussed the issue of high electricity bills in several Wilayats.

To resolve the problem, the members suggested possible alternatives



including monthly reading, cancelling the billing system currently in force, and obliging companies to record the

reading on time or activating the self-reading mechanism. The meeting also touched upon tariff governance frame-

works imposed on subscribers, requirements for supply licences, mechanisms of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (AER) in activating oversight over the application of those requirements, protecting the interests of subscribers, reports of following up on subscribers' complaints in terms of volume, quality, and means of treatment.

The Authority, weeks back, issued a statement urging power firms to address consumer complaints immediately.

It said that every subscriber has the right to communicate with the service

provider, and the company must respond to subscribers' complaints and clarify the bill details and the method of calculating the bill amount in a manner to avoid grievances.

However, this didn't appear to be the right solution as many subscribers notified that the statement wasn't convincing enough and many of them were told after filing the complaint that the readings were correct.

The Authority also asked companies to review all the bills in dispute to ensure that the subscribers are not overcharged.



Community wakes up to weed out invasive, poisonous plant

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, SEPT 14

People in groups engaged in some agriculture activity make every passerby curious about their engagement until they know that they are part of a drive to weed out a poisonous plant.

This is a drive launched by the citizens to weed out the highly invasive and poisonous plant parthenium which has occupied

most of the unorganised plain areas and mountains. The influence of the medium height parthenium plant is more prominent in places that are not regularly monitored.

The plant is so invasive that it almost crushes other nearby plants and spreads very fast. The community is facing another problem of parthenium being consumed by the camels, goats, and cows without knowing the harmful impact of the

plant.

Later the animals develop some health issues for which the villagers have to remain cautious and see that their cattle do not approach the areas, which are covered with parthenium.

The commitment of the community got due recognition from the authorities and they are being assisted by the civic bodies, environment and agriculture authorities.

An official of Dhofar Municipality admitted having full support to all those who are involved in the drive, while the Environment Authority has been serious in tackling the issue.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali bin Abdullah al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority, said the issue was under serious consideration and plans were being drawn to tackle it on a priority basis.

A group of people was seen removing the plants near Jabal Samhan. The group comprised of people from all age groups. The eldest in the group was around 80-year-old, while the youngest was 8-year-old. In between are committed youths with a serious objective to weed the poisonous plant out.

The group was working under the guidance of the eldest member who was seen telling others about the dangers the plant was posing.

Convinced with the problem, Salim, a grade 10 student of Salalah International School, chipped in to support the cause. Not at all perturbed over the invasiveness of the plant, Salim said, "It may take one year, two years but we have to get rid of this poisonous plant. It is dangerous for the native plants and our animals."

The parthenium is spread over most parts of the Dhofar Governorate, as it can be seen in prominence from Dhalkout, Rakhyout to Taqah and Mirbat. It needs the urgent attention of the authorities to develop some mechanism to control its spread.



Ways to combat desert locusts in Near East region explored



MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on Monday chaired the virtual technical meeting on combating desert locusts in the Near East (NE) region.

The Ministry was represented at the meeting by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture.

The meeting, which is supervised by the Central Region Locust Commission in cooperation with the Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in North Africa and Near East, aimed at exploring ways to combat the desert locusts in the Near East region.

Dr Al Bakri said that the regional

technical meeting on combating desert locust in the Near East region discusses the desert locust situation in the region with the aim of reaching practical recommendations to be presented to the regional conference that will be held September on 21 and 22, and then adopt them to limit the spread of this devastating pest.

He added that the region is under a fierce attack from the desert locust swarms; one of the most destructive migratory pests and the most dangerous to food security and livelihoods.

The current upsurge of desert locusts is one of the largest in recent decades affecting the Horn of Africa, Arabia and Southwest Asia, with the risk of spreading to the West Africa coast. — ONA



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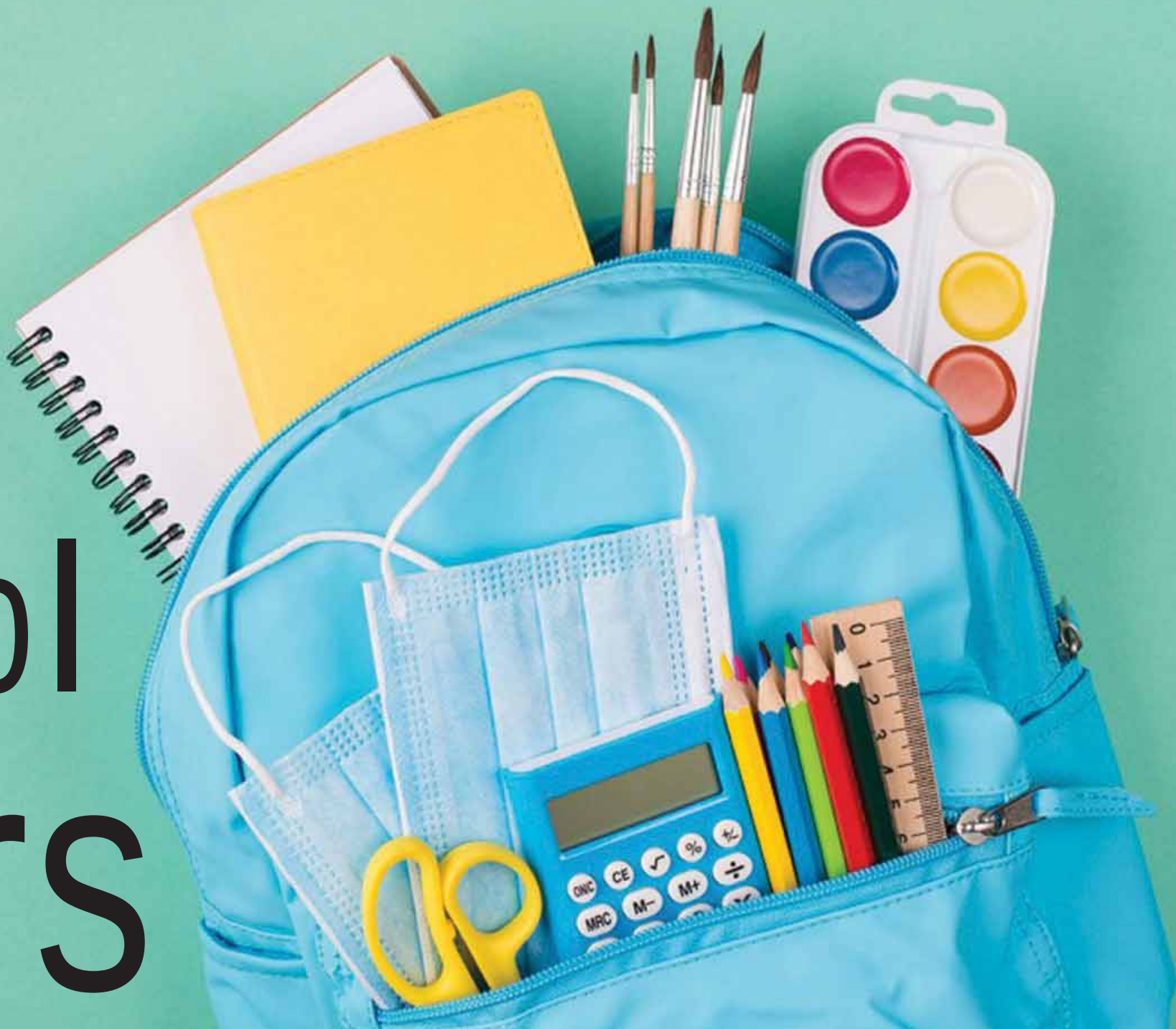
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#Living_with_COVID19



PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARE ANXIOUS OVER SAFETY FROM VIRUS AS NEW ACADEMIC YEAR LOOMS

Back to school jitters



ANNOUNCEMENT



RECALL CAMPAIGN 2014-2017 (KL) Jeep® Cherokee

Starting Date of Campaign: 15/09/2020
Recall Segment: **Software Flash**
Recall Type: **Safety**
Recall Code: **W47**



Product Description:

MODEL AND MODEL YEAR	CHASSIS RANGE	NUMBER OF UNITS AFFECTED
2014-2017 (KL) Jeep® Cherokee	From 1C4PJMB50EW275034	46
	To 1C4PJMB5XHW512682	

Note: This recall only applies to the above vehicle builds.

Description of Recall:

FCA, through its endeavor to deliver continuous quality improvement, has informed the Market that in a batch of 46 vehicles sold in Oman, the PTU on the above vehicles may have been built to allow relative movement between the differential input splines and the transmission output shaft. This condition may result in the teeth of the input splines wearing off, which may eventually cause a loss of engagement between the transmission and the differential inside the PTU. If this occurs, torque cannot be transferred between the front wheels and the transmission, which will result in a loss of motive power while the vehicle is in motion, and a loss of the PARK function while stationary. A loss of motive power or PARK function can cause a vehicle crash without warning and/or injury to others outside the vehicle.

Rectification Procedure:

Reprogram the affected vehicles with software for the Drive Train Control Module (DTCM) and the Electric Park Brake (EPB).

Parts Number	Description
See Recall	PTU Input Spline

Service Procedure:

Should your vehicle fall in the above range mentioned, please contact our Customer Centre at Dhofar Automotive at 24584530 to make an appointment for your vehicle to be repaired if required.

Contact Details:
Telephone No: +968 2458 4530

E-Mail:
info@da-oman.com



Wattayah, Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah, Mabela
For more information 245 845 30 | info@da-oman.com | www.dhofarautomotive.com



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@LAKSHMIOMAN

As schools are set to reopen in November amid no signs of fall in COVID-19 cases, parents are worried over the safety of their children. Aziza al Habsi says we are going through a period that makes you slow down on any decision making process. She feels parents are not ready to tackle it and children themselves are not ready psychologically as they have a lot of anxiety and fear. “I am not sure how comfortable I would be having my children go back to school under the current circumstances. The fear of infection would surely be a big problem.

I noticed that there has been an increase in cases since the removal of lockdown. I think the children going back to school will complicate the problem and there are solutions such as going online and this experience was carried out in the second half of the academic year where they studied from home. It taught us to review our mistakes perhaps because we were going through it for the first time. One of the issues of course was the Internet coverage. Having the assistance of Oman TV would be an option too so we can broadcast our educational lessons to our students,” reflected Aziza.

Having lessons broadcast on television gives opportunity for children to record their lessons so they can go back to them to review and communicate with their teachers.

“If it is not applicable for all grades it can be used for senior classes. This can overcome the lack of Internet coverage in certain areas. Lessons can also be broadcast on YouTube. Maybe each school can have their own YouTube channel, provided that experience is reviewed to correct the path and maintain quality. I think these experiences are learning experiences, which can be implemented in other sectors too.”

It is not just children who are preparing for back to school it is also parents. Karima Farid is getting ready

for all the changes one has to accommodate while working during the pandemic.

“I am starting work in two weeks and soon after my children will start online. Working from home and supervising them online with the kind of job I have is impossible. It is not a ‘Good morning’, to sip my coffee while watching them while going through my work over my laptop. And once at work it will be back with the meetings but the question is, ‘How will I ensure their safety in school?’

It is not just mothers, but fathers are also wondering about the safety. “In my view, we should wait for some more time to start sending our kids to school since COVID-19 continues its spread,” said Susanth Jiojio.

Would children follow the new norms, once at school? That is yet another major concern for the parents as they would not be there to supervise them.

“I am definitely worried especially that it is really difficult to avoid touching the face and wearing the mask itself for a long time is also a challenge on its own. I am also worried about the safety aspect especially of the school environment where many students will be gathering at one point.

Likewise, in spite of the fact that our children are missing going to school, it is challenging and boring for them to adopt the concept to study online where social interaction and the time for study is compromised,” pointed out Maryam Khalfan.

Meanwhile teachers are missing their students. Amal bint Khalifa al Saadi is a school teacher and she opines that she would prefer online teaching if it is still not safe for students and teachers.

A passionate teacher she continued helping her students in the month of March and April. “My little ones were in touch with me throughout that time. I managed to cover the portion with powerpoint and videos through WhatsApp. I feel as teachers we need to find our

innovative means to communicate with our students. Distance learning is something we could develop during this period. But the fact is I miss my students and seeing them and enjoying their energy and their little stories. We probably did not appreciate that much in the past.”



I am not sure how comfortable I would be having my children go back to school under the current circumstances. The fear of infection would surely be a big problem.

AZIZA
AL HABSI

NOMINAL GDP DECLINES BY 3.9% IN Q1 2020

MUSCAT: Data issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) indicated that the total deposits held with ODCs reached RO 23.8 billion at the end of July 2020, increasing by 3.5 per cent from July 2019. Total private sector deposits increased by 10.4 per cent to RO 16.5 billion.

The Monthly Statistical Bulletin issued by CBO indicated that Oman's nominal GDP declined by 3.9 per cent during the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same three-month period of last year, according to preliminary data released by National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The nominal contraction in the economy was driven by a 6.2 per cent decline in the non-hydrocarbon sector, mainly because of a drop in nominal GDP emanating from the non-petroleum industrial activities and services sector decreasing by 11.5 and 5.2 per cent, respectively.

On the other hand, the hydrocarbon sector inched up marginally by 0.7 per cent during the first quarter of 2020. The Omani oil price averaged \$48.6 per barrel during the first seven months of 2020 which is lower by 25.4 per cent over the corresponding period of last year.

Moreover, the average daily oil production decreased by 0.8 per cent to 962,400 barrel during this period. According to the latest data released by the NCSI, the Sultanate Consumer Price Index (CPI) witnessed a year-on-year negative growth of -0.5 per cent during January-July 2020.

The combined activities of conventional and Islamic banks provide a comprehensive picture of financial intermediation through the banking sector in Oman. The total outstanding credit extended by other depository corporations (ODCs) grew by 1.7 per cent to RO 26.2 billion at the end of July 2020. Credit to the private sector rose by 1.1 per cent to RO 22.8 billion. Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate



Total deposits with the banking sector at the end of July stood at RO 23.8 billion; Private deposits increase by 10.4pc to RO 16.5bn

billion at the end of July 2020, recording a growth of 7.3 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 4.8 per cent to RO 3.6 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows stood at RO 4.9 billion and constituted about 14 per cent of the banking system's assets as at end-July 2020.

Monetary aggregates data indicates narrow money (M1) at the end of July 2020 increased by 7.8 per cent to RO 5.6 billion on a year-on-year (Y-o-Y) basis. Likewise, quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits) registered a significant increase of 10.9 per cent during this period. Broad money supply M2 (M1 plus quasi-money) grew by 10 per cent and stood at RO 19.1 billion.

The weighted average interest rate on RO deposits increased marginally from 1.954 per cent in July 2019 to 1.969 per cent in July 2020, and the weighted average RO lending rate increased from 5.426 per cent to 5.441 per cent during the same period.

Meanwhile, the overnight Rial Omani domestic inter-bank lending rate fell significantly to 0.977 per cent in July 2020 from 2.770 per cent a year ago, reflecting transmission of policy rate cuts by the Federal Reserve. The average Repos rate for liquidity injection by the CBO also stood lower at 0.5 per cent during July 2020 in comparison with 2.834 per cent in July 2019.

— ONA

sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 46.4 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively, while the financial corporations received 5.3 per cent and other sectors the remaining 3.4 per cent.

Total deposits held with ODCs reached RO 23.8 billion at the end of July 2020, increasing by 3.5 per cent from July 2019. Total private sector deposits increased by 10.4 per cent to RO 16.5 billion. When looking at sector-wise analysis of private sector deposits; the share of households was largest at 50.9 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 31.1 per cent, financial corporations at 15.6 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent.

The combined balance sheet



of conventional banks indicates an annual growth of 0.6 per cent in total outstanding credit as on end-July 2020. Conventional banks' credit to the private sector decreased marginally by

0.3 per cent to RO 18.9 billion. Conventional banks' overall investments in securities amounted to RO 3.9 billion. Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 21.3 per cent over

the year to RO 1.8 billion. Banks also invested RO 265.8 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO 1.1 billion at the end of July 2020. Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased to RO 20.2 billion in July 2020, registering a growth of 3.2 per cent over the level a year ago. Government deposits with conventional banks decreased by 15 per cent to RO 4.5 billion, while deposits of public enterprises increased by 2 per cent to RO 1.1 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 70.3 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 10.6 per cent to RO 14.2 billion.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.1

Nama Group launches 'Naqla' to empower national workforce

MUSCAT: Nama Group launched the third edition of "Naqla", a programme under the Economic Pillar of the Group's Sustainability Policy, to support electrical technicians.

The programme comes as part of Nama Group commitment to boost the Group's In-Country-Value (ICV) in supporting the sustainability aspect in the local community and contributing to the national economy.

The Group targets to empower the national workforce in the Electricity Sector and upgrade the capabilities and skills of Omani professional cadres, by training the participants in the programme to obtain electrical licenses. The programme intends to help the trainees to establish and manage SMEs and increase Omanisation rates.

The programme was designed to target electrical technicians (High Diploma and Bachelor degree holders in electrical engineering or equivalent) of various educational institutions from all the Sultanate Governorates. The main objectives of the programme include providing the trainees with a set of skills required in the labour market, training them on professional skills that will help them build their career path. The programme also aims at qualifying the trainees for work environments to keep pace with the labour market changes, as well as



empowering them and enhancing their roles in building the society.

Despite of the current situation regarding the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), Nama Group developed the programme this year after the achievements made in the project in the previous years. The training will be conducted virtually over a period of two months by Numo Institute for Competency Development, a member of Nama Group. The institute built an integrated educational platform for the programme that includes all training curricula and programmes.

Last August, the online registration in the programme was announced by the educational platform, as the number of applicants reached to approximately 700, and

around 500 applicants underwent the initial examination. Recently, names of the selected trainees have been announced (125 trainees), who will be distributed into 4 training batches in the programme based on the project approved plan for 2020. The selection process was based on the applicants' data to be matched with the registration requirements, in addition to their qualifications and academic degrees (GPA) as well as the programme admission tests.

The programme will cover both practical and theoretical aspects that will provide the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of field and technical work in dealing with electricity and the applicable laws and regulations.

— ONA



شركة الفجر العالمية ش.م.ع.م.
AL FAJAR AL ALAMIA CO. SAOG

PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN

INVITATION TO ORDINARY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Al Fajar Al Alamia Co. SAOG (the "Company") are pleased to invite the shareholders for the company's Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 30th of September 2020, through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository Company ("MCDC") website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum for the first AGM is not met, Wednesday, 07 October 2020, 3:00 pm will be the date of the second AGM, to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors' on Company's activity and its financial position for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.
- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors' on corporate governance for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.
- To consider and approve the statutory auditors' report and to approve the financial statements and the profit and loss account for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.
- To approve the sitting fees paid to Directors' for attending meetings of the Board and sub committees for the previous financial year and to determine the Directors' sitting fees for the upcoming financial year, as per (Annexure '1').
- To consider the transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 30 June 2020 (Annexure '2').
- Approve the proposed transactions that the company will carry out with related parties during the financial year ending 30th June 2021 as per (Annexure '3').
- To inform the Shareholders of the amounts paid towards social responsibility activities during the year ended 30 June 2020, as per (Annexure '4').
- To consider the allocation of an amount of RO 10,000/- for Corporate Social Responsibility for the financial year ending 30 June 2021.
- To appoint statutory auditors for the financial year ending 30 June 2021 and determine their fees.
- To elect the Board of Directors for a new term of office (from the shareholders and/or non-shareholders). Any person wishing to be elected to the Board of Directors may fill out the nomination form that can be obtained from the company's head office. The completed form should be delivered to the Company's head office at least 5 days prior to the Annual Ordinary General Meeting, not later than 1:00 p.m., Thursday, 24th of September 2020.

Pursuant to the Company's articles of association and General Meeting regulations, by means of modern technology issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(a) A Juristic person, exclusively, has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.

(b) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date set for the Meeting until the end of the voting process on the day of the Meeting, and in the event that the shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be invalid, and he must re-vote again on the day of the Meeting.

Any questions relating to this Notice should be addressed to Ms. Laila Said Salim Al Hadi (Telephone No. +968 92432813 or email : laila@alfajar.co.om).

Chairman	Auditors	Legal Advisors
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Hopes dim for Lebanon govt as French deadline looms

BEIRUT: Lebanon's prime minister-designate on Monday updated president Michel Aoun on talks on forming a new government, but did not submit proposals for a cabinet despite a looming French-imposed deadline.

Premier-in-waiting Mustapha Adib "did not present a line-up" during Monday's meeting at the presidential palace, said a source at the president's office.

"Developments over the past two days necessitated more negotiations," the same source said, adding that Aoun and Adib would meet again when consultations were completed.

That dimmed hopes for a new cabinet by a mid-September deadline announced by French president Emmanuel Macron during his second visit to Lebanon since an August 4 explosion ripped through the capital, killing more than 190 people.

Macron said on September 1 that Lebanese leaders had promised to form a new government within two weeks.

Adib, who was designated premier just hours before the start of Macron's latest visit, kicked off consultations to form a new government the next day.

But the little-known former diplomat, who has received backing from most of the country's main political parties, has kept silent on the progress of talks.

Government formation usually takes months in Lebanon, a multi-



Relatives of inmates at Roumieh prison stage a demonstration outside the ministry of justice in Beirut calling for a general amnesty and for the protection of prisoners following the spread of COVID-19 in the facility. — AFP

confessional country constantly gripped by political deadlock because of a power-sharing arrangement that requires consensus from major parties on major decisions.

Macron and other world leaders have urged officials to form a new cabinet in record time to kick-start

reforms and help lift the disaster-hit country out of its worst economic crisis in decades.

But the process has been hit by a series of snags.

Speaker of parliament Nabih Berri said on Sunday that his Amal Movement would not take part in the

government because he opposed Adib's approach to forming a cabinet.

The Lebanese newspaper *Annahar* reported Friday that the speaker did not want to relinquish control of the finance ministry, which has been headed by an Amal movement representative since 2014. — AFP

Iran says supports Opec if its interests are protected

LONDON: Iran supports the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) as long as the group protects Iranian interests alongside other members, Iran's Opec Governor Amir Hossein Zamaninia said on Monday.

Sixty years after its formation, Opec's founding members, Iran and Venezuela, have been sidelined by US sanctions while its kingpin, Saudi Arabia, has shown it would rather go with Washington than risk losing US support, according to current and former Opec officials.

"All Opec members should denounce, in words and in practice, use of oil as a political tool for imposition of sanctions and pressures on producing countries," Zamaninia was quoted as saying by the oil ministry's news agency SHANA.

Iran's share of Opec output has nearly halved to 7.5 per cent since 2010 while Venezuela's has collapsed to 2.3 per cent from almost 10 per cent, according to Reuters calculations based on Opec data. Saudi Arabia's share, meanwhile, has risen 7 percentage points to 35 per cent.

"We support Opec as long as the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran are served in a balanced way with other members. Otherwise, membership of no international organisation is mandatory," Zamaninia said. He added that he believed remaining in Opec and strengthening the organisation was currently in Iran's interests.

To tackle a drop in demand, Opec and its allies - a grouping known as known as Opec+ - agreed to a record supply cut of 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) that started on May 1, while the United States and other nations said they would pump less.

In August, Opec+ eased its cuts to 7.7 million bpd as demand partially recovered. The Opec+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) will meet on Thursday to discuss the performance of the deal so far. Opec said on Monday world oil demand will fall more steeply in 2020 than previously forecast due to the coronavirus and recover more slowly than expected next year, potentially making it harder for the group and its allies to support the market. — Reuters

Libyan protestors torch eastern govt offices

BENGHAZI: Protesters in Libya's second city Benghazi set fire to the headquarters of the parallel eastern administration controlled by strongman Khalifa Haftar, a security source said Sunday.

"In the early hours of Sunday, a group of demonstrators attacked the cabinet building," an official from the interior ministry in the eastern government said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"They set it on fire before fleeing," the source said.

Police and firefighters quickly arrived, but the fire destroyed the main entrance to the building.

Protests, which are rare in areas under the control of Haftar, also erupted in the eastern town of Al Marj and police opened fire after demonstrators forced their way into the police station.

At least five people were injured, according to witnesses and the hospital.

Recent protests in Libya have been mainly in the western region in the capital Tripoli, seat of the UN-recognised Government of National

Accord (GNA), a rival power-base to Haftar.

However, protests began on Thursday in Benghazi in the east, as anger boiled at regular power cuts, cash shortages and high fuel prices.

The eastern administration warned protesters "not to exceed their right to demonstrate and express themselves".

But in a video posted online Sunday, Haftar's spokesman Ahmad al Mismari said the strongman and his forces support "peaceful protesters".

"We back this street movement... but we will not allow terrorists and the Brotherhood to take advantage of the situation and infiltrate the ranks of the protesters," Mismari said.

He also warned against any attempt at "undermining security in eastern Libya".

The main military fault line in the North African nation is between forces loyal to the GNA and those backing Haftar, who launched an offensive to seize Tripoli last year.

Haftar was beaten back earlier this year by Turkish-backed GNA forces.

— AFP

SPECTACULAR TURKISH AIRSHOW



Helicopters perform with S-70A-28E Black Hawk during the 5th Sivrihisar Airshow in Sivrihisar district of Eskisehir in Turkey. — AFP

Social networks in Algeria blocked to prevent exam fraud

ALGIERS: Algerians were unable to access social media accounts on Sunday as students sat national exams in the North African country where authorities are cracking down on cheating.

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were inaccessible, an AFP journalist said, while the Internet faced disruptions across the country.

The move came a day after the justice ministry announced that a teenager had been sentenced to one year in jail for having shared the results of an Arabic-language test online.

The boy was sentenced Wednesday by a court in the northeastern city

of Guelma in line with a penal code amendment adopted in April that criminalised cheating during the brevet and baccalaureate examinations, usually taken at the end of secondary and high school, respectively.

After a spike in cheating during national exams in recent years, authorities in the North African country adopted legislation under which those found guilty of wrongdoing could face up to 15 years in jail.

According to the justice ministry, courts in Algeria have begun to hand down jail sentences to individuals accused of having leaked exam papers or results during the brevet earlier



Algerian protesters call for the release of journalist Khaled Drareni in Algiers. — AFP

this month.

In 2016, authorities temporarily blocked access to social networks to prevent cheating after leaked papers forced hundreds of thousands of students to resit the baccalaureate exam.

Authorities then arrested dozens of people, including the heads of national exam centres and teachers on suspicion of leaking the final exam papers. There was no official comment Sunday from authorities or telecom officials on the internet disruptions and the lack of access to social networks.

The baccalaureate exams, which began on Sunday, are due to last until September 17.

Earlier, last week supporters of jailed Algerian journalist Khaled Drareni called for his immediate release on health grounds.

Drareni, sentenced in August to three years in jail for his coverage of Algeria's anti-government protests, attended an appeal hearing on Tuesday, media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said.

"The national and international Khaled Drareni Support Committees call for this journalist's immediate and unconditional release on health grounds after seeing how thin and weak he looked when brought before a court in Algiers at the start of his appeal hearing on 8 September," RSF said. — AFP

Afghan govt presses truce demand in Taliban talks

DOHA: The Afghan government on Monday pressed its calls for a truce with the Taliban, reiterating its desire for a long-term ceasefire at historic talks in Qatar.

The two sides are in the early stages of meetings in Doha as they try to hammer out a deal that would bring 19 years of bloodshed in Afghanistan to a close.

The Afghan government and its allies, including the United States, called for the warring sides to lay down their arms at Saturday's opening ceremony.

But the Taliban, who fought a years-long guerrilla campaign against American and Afghan forces after they were toppled in a 2001 US-led invasion, did not mention a truce as they came to the negotiating table.

The head of the peace process for the Afghan government, Abdullah Abdullah, suggested however that the Taliban could offer a ceasefire in exchange for the release of more of their jailed fighters.

Afghan presidential spokesman Sediq Seddiqi tweeted on Monday that the presence of government negotiators at the talks "is aimed at achieving a ceasefire, ending the violence and ensuring lasting peace and stability in the country."

The United States struck an agreement with the Taliban in February that will see it withdraw troops from Afghanistan.

The deal, which paved the way for the Doha negotiations, did not commit the insurgents to any reduction of violence, only requiring that it be "an



Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers train at the Zafar army training centre in Guzara district of Herat Province. — AFP

item on the agenda" in negotiations.

But Crisis Group analyst Andrew Watkins said "the Afghan government needs a ceasefire because without current levels of US support, it would

very likely continue to lose ground to the Taliban".

Schedules and a code of conduct for the talks were discussed in meetings on Sunday and were due to continue on

Monday, according to the government side, but talks on substantive issues are yet to get underway.

Afghan government delegates warned that negotiations, which take

place even as fighting continues in Afghanistan, would be arduous and messy.

Nearly two decades since the US-led invasion that toppled the Taliban,

Afghan govt delegates warned that negotiations, which take place even as fighting continues in Afghanistan, would be arduous and messy

fighting still kills dozens of people daily and the country's economy has been shattered, pushing millions into poverty.

Officials said six police were killed in a Taliban attack in Kunduz at the weekend, while five officers were slain in Kapisa province.

A roadside mine blast in the capital also wounded two civilians, while another blast hit Kabul district, although no casualties were reported.

Abdullah, chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation, called the recent upsurge in violence a "miscalculation". But he has stressed the process "could be the start of history made in the coming future — and hopefully sooner rather than later". During a speech at the opening event, Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar repeated the insurgents' message that Afghanistan should be run according to Islamic law, highlighting a likely sticking point.

— AFP

Philippines reports record number of daily fatalities

MANILA: The Philippines on Monday reported 259 deaths from COVID-19, the highest number of daily recorded fatalities, due to a revision of misreported data.

Most of the recorded fatalities dated back to July and August, as 253 of the deaths were initially recorded as recovered patients, but upon validation turned out to have died, the Department of Health said. The latest figures bring the total death toll in the country to 4,630 as of Monday.

Commenting on the correction, the Department of Health said it was striving to report "data that is as accurate and complete as possible." "We are reliant on what is being submitted to us and there will sometimes be instances wherein our regional epidemiological surveillance units, local government units and health facilities, upon further validation, correct their own initially reported recoveries and re-tag them as deaths," it said.

"We are constantly reminding local government units and disease reporting units to immediately report deaths," it added.

The department also reported 4,600 additional coronavirus infections, pushing the national caseload to 265,888. Health experts warned that infections and deaths are expected to rise as the government eases restrictions in a bid to boost the local economy, which plunged into recession in the second quarter.

The government has been lifting restrictions in the capital and other parts of the country since June 1. Limitations however remain in place for many businesses and the country is still closed to international visitors.

Meanwhile, it was reported that cemeteries in the Philippine capital will be closed on All Saints' Day for the first time, officials said on Monday, preventing millions in the Catholic-majority country from visiting their dead loved ones as the coronavirus rages.

Filipinos usually pour into graveyards on November 1, blending expressions of faith and grief with a party-like atmosphere and impromptu family reunions.

But as the number of virus infections continues to rise, mayors across Metro Manila have agreed to shutter the cemeteries for the annual rite to prevent further spread of the contagion. — Agencies

THE LATEST FIGURES BRING THE TOTAL DEATH TOLL IN THE COUNTRY TO 4,630 AS OF MONDAY

Japan's Suga headed for premiership

TOKYO: Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, a loyal aide to outgoing prime minister Shinzo Abe, won a landslide victory in a ruling party leadership election on Monday, paving the way for Japan's first change of leader in nearly eight years.

Suga, 71, who has promised to continue Abe's key policies, said his big win would give him the backing to pursue his reform goals - including deregulation and breaking down bureaucratic silos - and that containing the coronavirus and reviving the economy were conditions for

calling a snap general election.

"As I got big support in numbers today, the environment in which I can pursue my policy agenda in a stable manner has been secured," Suga told a news conference. Suga won 377 votes out of 534 votes cast, and 535 possible votes, in the leadership election by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members of parliament and representatives of its 47 local chapters.

Rival Shigeru Ishiba, a former defence minister, won 68 votes and ex-foreign minister Fumio Kishida got



Newly elected leader of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party Yoshihide Suga poses at the party's headquarters in Tokyo. — AFP

89. Suga is virtually certain to be elected prime minister in a parliamentary vote on Wednesday because of the LDP's majority in the lower house.

He will serve out Abe's term as party leader through September 2021.

Suga had emerged as frontrunner in the race after Abe, Japan's longest-serving premier, said last month he would resign because of ill health, ending nearly eight years in office. Speculation is swirling that Suga will call an election for parliament's lower house as soon as next month to boost his

chances of winning a full three-year term as LDP chief next year. A vote for the chamber must be held by late October 2021.

On Monday, however, he sounded a cautious note. "What's important now is to contain the pandemic while also reviving the economy. I don't think we can immediately (dissolve the lower house) just because the pandemic is contained," he said. "That's a decision that must be made looking comprehensively at various factors."

— AFP

VACANCIES

A Company Specialized in Oil and gas projects looking for Omani's in senior administrative and engineering positions with incentives and advantages.

Sl.no	Category	Qualification	Type	No's	Experience / Criteria
1	Site Manager - Civil	Degree in Engineering Bachelor of science / Bachelor of Engineering (B.Sc. /B.Eng.)	Omani	3	Minimum of 7-8 years' experience in construction and general project management, with a minimum of 5 years' experience as a construction / site manager in Oil Field Civil Projects.
2	Project Services Manager (Cost, Planning, Control, Procurement, Logistics & IM)	Degree in Engineering Bachelor of science / Bachelor of Engineering (B.Sc. /B.Eng.)	Omani	1	Minimum of 10 years Post-Graduate experience with Proven emphasis on Oil and Gas Engineering, construction activities related business and /or a contracting company servicing at Oil & Gas projects. And minimum 5Years of Project Management experience in Primavera and SAP. Mandatory Civil Engineering.
3	Quality Assurance & Quality Control Manager	Degree in a relevant engineering discipline (B.Sc./M.Sc./B.Eng.) and membership of internationally accepted applicable professional Institute. Qualification Shall have a registration as a "Lead Assessor" with the institute of Quality Assurance or at least has a "Lead Assessor" qualification recognized by the institute of Quality Assurance.	Omani	1	Minimum of 10 year's QA management experience. General Minimum of 10 year's management experience in the establishment and operation of a quality management system compatible with the requirements of ISO 9001. Minimum of 5 years' experience in the Middle East
4	Lead Quantity Surveyor	Should have a QS degree and would be an Associate of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Recognized Institute of Quantity Surveyors.	Omani	1	Shall also have more than 10 years post qualification experience in Civil Minimum 5 years' experience in the Oil & Gas industry.
5	Project Control & Planning Engineer	HND or Bachelor of Engineering from an approved University	Omani	1	Minimum 5 years' experience with project control and planning, primavera P6 and SAP on oil and gas engineering, construction activities related business and/or a contracting company servicing at Oil & Gas projects.
6	Quality Control Inspector	Shall be HNC or HND or graduate or equivalent in Civil Engineering	Omani	1	Shall have a minimum of 4 years of quality control and inspection experience in construction activities (civil and structural). The experience shall include works involving soil excavation and earth works, concrete works, block works, roads and paving, tank pads, bunds and other general activities associated with civil and building works. Shall be thoroughly familiar with civil construction materials and construction methods, testing of civil construction materials, international codes and standards for civil design.

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Putin offers support to Belarus strongman as protests continue

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin bestowed a \$1.5 billion loan on Belarus on Monday in a gesture of support for its leader Alexander Lukashenko, who flew to entreat his patron for help as demonstrations showed no sign of abating.

A day after more than 100,000 protesters demonstrated in Minsk for the fifth straight weekend to demand his resignation following an election they say was rigged, Lukashenko, who has led Russia's closest ally for 26 years, met Putin in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

"First of all, I want to thank you... personally thank you and all Russians, all those, and I will not list them, who were involved in supporting us during this post-election time," Lukashenko said after the talks. Putin gave few details about the new loan, which he said Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin had agreed during a recent visit to the Belarusian capital.

The Russian leader also signalled support for Lukashenko in other ways and said defence cooperation would continue. Hours earlier, Russian news agencies reported Moscow was sending paratroopers for joint exercises. Putin also backed plans Lukashenko has previously announced for constitutional reform, which the opposition has dismissed as a stunt to keep power after the



A protester stands in front of law enforcement officers during a rally against police brutality following protests to reject the presidential election results in Minsk. — Reuters

August 9 presidential election.

"We want Belarusians themselves, without prompting and pressure from outside, to sort out this situation in a calm manner and through dialogue and to find a common solution," Putin said. Despite aggressive action from his security forces, Lukashenko has failed to reclaim the streets from demonstrators, who taunted him on Sunday with chants of "You're a rat!"

Lukashenko calls the demonstrations a Western plot and has placed his fate in Moscow's hands, requesting economic support and military aid. Since the election, which Lukashenko denies rigging, thousands of people have been

The Russian leader also signalled support for Lukashenko in other ways and said defence cooperation would continue

arrested and nearly all opposition leaders jailed, deported or forced into exile. Police said they detained 774 people on Sunday. The opposition says it fears Lukashenko could try to sell out Belarusian independence for Putin's support.

Opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said no agreement reached by Lukashenko with Putin would be valid. "I want to remind Vladimir Putin: whatever you accept and whatever you agree upon during the meeting in Sochi will have no legal weight," she wrote on social media site Telegram.

"All the agreements signed with an illegitimate Lukashenko will be revised by the new leadership," she said. "I am very sorry that you have decided to engage in dialogue with a dictator and not the Belarusian people."

The West has acted carefully, balancing sympathy with the pro-democracy movement against fear of provoking Russian intervention. European leaders have repeatedly phoned Putin to express concern. French President Emmanuel Macron was the latest, with Paris saying he repeated calls for a peaceful solution respecting the will of the Belarusian people.

Lukashenko, 66, has been a prickly ally of Russia in the past, and has had an awkward personal relationship with Putin. But the Kremlin has made clear it does not want to see an ally toppled by street protests. Putin said last month he had set up a "reserve police force" at Lukashenko's request, to be deployed if needed.

— Reuters



Russian opposition leader Navalny during a rally to support opposition and independent candidates after authorities refused to register them for elections to the Moscow City Duma.

— AFP File photo

Navalny allies claim symbolic win in regional vote

NOVOSIBIRSK: Russia's political opposition on Monday claimed a symbolic victory in regional elections that were dominated by pro-Kremlin candidates and marred by allegations of fraud.

The vote was overshadowed by the alleged poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny in the Siberian city of Tomsk during a trip to promote opposition candidates ahead of the ballot.

Germany said on Monday that lab tests in France and Sweden confirmed the Kremlin critic was attacked with a Novichok nerve agent in an incident French President Emmanuel Macron described as "attempted murder" during a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The elections came a year ahead of a parliamentary ballot and were seen as a test for Putin as the ruling United Russia party faces sinking popularity and public anger over economic woes.

Russians in dozens of the country's 85 regions voted from Friday to Sunday for governors and lawmakers in regional and city legislatures as well as in several by-elections for national MPs.

Candidates from the ruling United Russia party that dominates the country's political landscape despite declining popularity claimed a majority of the seats.

But Navalny's allies made unprecedented gains in highly anticipated city council votes in Siberian cities of Novosibirsk and Tomsk. In an effort to fight Putin's electoral machine, Navalny had urged voters back candidates against the ruling party.

The 44-year-old lawyer and Kremlin critic was in Siberia promoting a "smart voting" campaign when he fell ill last month.

His supporters believe the use of the banned chemical weapon shows that only the Russian state could be responsible.

Putin on Monday condemned "unsubstantiated" accusations over Navalny's poisoning during a call with Macron and said Germany should hand over biological materials and coordinate with Russian doctors.

Two allies of the opposition leader won parliament seats in Tomsk, the city where Navalny's allies say he drank tea that was laced with the nerve agent before a flight to Moscow.

United Russia suffered heavy losses in the city of some 500,000, winning just 24.46 per cent of the overall vote compared to 52.27 per cent in 2015.

Ksenia Fadeyeva, the 28-year-old head of Navalny's Tomsk office who won a city council seat, put her success down to the opposition leader's voting strategy saying, "we really campaigned under the Navalny brand".

The result was "a big blow" to United Russia ahead of legislative elections of next year, she said, and also disproved the myth that the opposition only has 2 or 3 per cent support.

"But the work continues. No time to rest yet," she said.

In Russia's third-largest city of Novosibirsk, which Navalny also visited before the vote, his ally Sergei Boyko won a seat on the local council beating out a veteran Communist Party candidate.

— AFP

WILD FIRE WOES



Hansel Valentine inspects the remains of the burnt down property of her relatives, as the wildfire continues in Estacada, Oregon, US. — Reuters

India's parliament meets after six months as Covid cases surge

NEW DELHI: India's parliament met for the first time in six months on Monday, as novel Coronavirus cases across the country rose by more than 90,000 in the space of a day and the total number of infections neared 5 million.

Members, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, wore masks and sat in seats enclosed by glass partitions designed to prevent the spread of the virus.

The assembly's hours have been truncated; the Lower House will sit in the morning and the Upper House in the afternoon. "There can be no laxity when there is no medicine. We hope that a vaccine is available soon, whichever part of the world it comes from," Modi said in remarks to the

media before the session began.

Federal Home Minister Amit Shah, Modi's close aide, was absent from Monday's session. He spent most of August in hospital after contracting the virus, and returned to hospital over the weekend for what hospital authorities said was a check-up. Infections in India have been rising faster than in any other country and it lags only the United States in total infections.

On Monday, the health ministry said it had recorded 92,071 new cases of the Coronavirus in the previous 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 4.85 million.

Modi said, thanking lawmakers for allowing the parliament to meet. He also delivered a message on the



A health worker collects a swab sample to test for the COVID-19 Coronavirus at a testing booth in Ahmedabad. — AFP

border dispute with China ahead of the session. "We hope the parliament and all members will unitedly send the message that the nation stands with our soldiers."

India and China have been holding talks to defuse tensions along their Himalayan border in the Ladakh region, where 20 Indian soldiers were killed in June, the worst confrontation between the nuclear-armed neighbours in 45 years.

Opposition parties led by the Indian National Congress said they would demand answers over the government's handling of relations with China and its failure to contain the Coronavirus pandemic.

India is the second-most affected country after the United States, with

more than 4.8 million Coronavirus cases, over 90,000 daily infections and 79,722 fatalities in total. Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi targeted Modi for implementing an "unplanned lockdown" which resulted in the surge in virus cases.

It has been estimated that this decision prevented approximately 1.4 million to 2.9 million cases and 37,000 to 78,000 deaths," he said. Parliament is also to discuss the Indian economy, with gross domestic product shrinking by almost 24 per cent in the quarter ending June. India had imposed a strict lockdown from March 25 that saw a loss of millions of jobs although it has started lifting curbs since mid-May to revive business activities and the economy. — Agencies

There is so much more to this world we live in...

Our perception is limited to our conditionings and so are our judgments.

We are quick to give our opinions and it has become ever so convenient in the millennium with social media becoming part of our daily lifestyle, not even realising the social media performance has become part of our personality.

Anyone who wants to know more about you, whether a potential employer or a business partner, he has to just visit the social media profile. The statements one makes and the likes and dislikes are all points to ponder and insight to the person they might be dealing with in the future.

Now does that mean we have to keep this in our mind all the time and be someone else in totality? Not quite so, but the fact is the profile and the postings are part of you. In many countries there are also situations where telephone conversations and WhatsApp chats are made public when the situation rises.

For some reason even polite persons tend to be political when online. Is it because of the distance and the impact of collective audiences but us social beings are already making our judgments and while our opinions might not matter human resources experts might have plenty to analyse on what to expect from the person.



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

ANYONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOU, WHETHER A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER OR A BUSINESS PARTNER, HE HAS TO JUST VISIT THE SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE

Now on the other hand the online classes have an interesting trend. In a typical classroom the students only face the teacher. The view of their teacher depended on where the students were seated. Now however they are in clear view of the teacher as well as their classmates. In the classroom they would only see the back of their classmates' heads, but not so in an online class when the videos are switched on, definitely there must be a change in their mind set. No one is hiding behind someone else and virtually there are no back benches.

The kids are getting their own screen time and exposure to technology from apps that connect them to their classrooms to using scanners. They might be the youngest generation to start using AI (Artificial Intelligence) naturally even not realising what they are into. Everything to enhance intelligence and knowledge, but at no time should we forget that education is not completed if we do not develop their understanding about cultures, tolerance and respect for each other.

It is wholesomeness of a classroom that takes the students through a collective experience. While online classes have achieved quite a bit under the circumstances the time children get to spend with each other is precious as well for they learn a lot from each other. At the same time the peer pressure probably eased up

during these days of studying online.

Our experiences and education condition us and that is something that is passed on to the younger generation. An example is how we look at mud. We try to get children away from playing in the dirty for good reasons as well, but it was not until I happened to see a video post by R.E.S.C.U.E — community united for elephants. The caretakers of the baby elephants who are orphans were being given showers but at the same time they were throwing sand on them.

If you are a fan of elephants you must have seen them do it often on their own. But up until reading this Instagram post I had not thought about it so much. The caretakers explained, the benefits of a daily dirt bath are thermoregulation, sun protection, removal of parasites and soothing of any scratches or injuries.

Now of course elephant skin is very different but the value of dirt is at a different level for them. We might have a mud bath in a spa but for the elephants it is a daily affair important for their survival. There must be so much more we need to learn to get earth back its balance away from viruses, global warming and climate change. And one thing is for sure — man will continue to innovate but now let us hope we will keep nature in mind too as well as humanity whether it is a vaccine or technology.

SECOND PEAK

Virus dents big, fat Turkish weddings

FULYA OZERKAN

Her bridal hair and makeup done just right, Ayse Keles looked ravishing and relieved: she managed to sneak her wedding day in before Turkey's latest wave of coronavirus restrictions hit.

"I have a close friend who had to delay her wedding five times," the 28-year-old said in her white bridal gown while preparing for a photo shoot on the Asian side of Istanbul.

Lavish weddings with fancy cakes, sparkly dresses and wild parties are a huge deal, laying the foundation for a new life for millions. But the joyous day drew the government's wrath when videos of raucous street parties with mask-free, arm-to-arm dancing went viral just as Turkey's infection rate began to edge back up to levels last seen in May.

In the Black Sea city of Trabzon, dozens who celebrated henna night — a wedding custom gathering the bride's female friends and family before she leaves her mother's home — all had to be quarantined after one of them tested positive.

The government's hammer fell on September 4, when weddings, engagement parties and circumcision ceremonies were limited to an

Turkey is living through "a second peak of the first wave" of the pandemic, which has officially claimed nearly 7,000 lives

FAHRETTIN KOCA
Health Minister

hour in length and banned from having dances or serving food.

Keles married the love of her life, Alp Colak, on August 21, just in time for a real wedding but still two months later and slightly smaller than planned because of uncertainties about what was being allowed.

"It was fun but we had bigger plans that didn't come through

because of the restrictions," Colak recalled.

"Still, if it were now, even that would be a dream."

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca says Turkey is living through "a second peak of the first wave" of the pandemic, which has officially claimed nearly 7,000 lives in the nation of 83 million people spanning Europe and Asia.

Koca specifically blamed "carelessness during religious festivals and weddings" for the rise.

But while not popular anywhere, uncertainties over weddings can be especially traumatic in places such as Turkey, where most couples live with their parents before becoming husband and wife.

"Every couple would like to have a wedding like a fairy tale. But we, the 2020 corona brides, we are all anxious," Keles said.

Turkey has 600,000 weddings annually. Contracts for their organisation are concluded months in advance and often involve sums equal to households' yearly incomes. In return, gold coins, jewellery and money gifted to the couple help reduce their families' debts.

"We are talking about a 60 billion lira sector (\$8 billion) if we think an average of 100,000 lira (\$13,000) is spent on each wedding," said Emek Kirbiyik, who heads dugun.com, Turkey's biggest wedding planning website.

He estimated that the industry will suffer a \$2.6 billion loss this year, although it could be even more.

Zeynep Ece Dundar, an Istanbul wedding planner, said she has so far managed to organise 10 events this year, compared to 70 in 2019. "We barely make ends meet," she said.

— AFP

BASELESS RHETORIC

In bastion of democracy, worries over US election integrity

MICHAEL MATHES

The only way we're going to lose this election is if the election is rigged.

President Donald Trump's astonishing remark last month — and his escalating efforts to sow doubts about the integrity of November's vote — have highlighted a growing concern: can the United States, one of the world's oldest democracies, assure a free and fair election in 2020?

The American voting system may be facing its most serious threat in decades — fuelled by baseless presidential rhetoric, record mail-in voting due to the coronavirus pandemic, worry about ageing machines, and accusations of voter suppression. Complicating matters, the foreign interference that marred 2016 is being repeated in 2020, made clear by last Thursday's US Treasury sanctions against an "active Russian agent" for stoking conspiracy theories advanced by the White House.

But while the 50 US states are on guard against intrusions from Moscow and elsewhere, the most prominent threats may be coming from within.

"The conduct of these elections will be the most challenging in recent decades," said the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which has monitored elections for decades in various.



A supporter shows a ring featuring the face of US President Donald Trump during a campaign rally in Minden, Nevada. — AFP

AMERICAN VOTING SYSTEM IS FACING ITS MOST SERIOUS THREAT IN DECADES

COVID-19 measures could "have an impact on the level of trust" and integrity of election administration and "ultimately cast doubt in the outcome," the OSCE said in a July report.

The nonpartisan Carter Center, founded by former president Jimmy Carter, has monitored elections in 39 countries since 1989 and is turning its

attention to the US for the first time.

"Why? Americans are losing faith in the US electoral process," the centre's Jason Carter wrote in late August.

"The country is deeply polarised, and people on both the right and left are concerned about threats to the security of the election and the credibility of the process." — AFP

NUGGETS RALLY PAST CLIPPERS TO LEVEL NBA PLAYOFF SERIES

MIAMI: Denver's Nikola Jokic had game highs of 34 points, 14 rebounds and seven assists on Sunday, powering the Nuggets over the Los Angeles Clippers 111-98 to level their NBA playoff series.

The Nuggets, who also had 21 points from Jamal Murray and Gary Harris, recovered from a 19-point deficit in the third quarter to match the Clippers at 3-3 in the Western Conference semi-final, setting up a winner-take-all game seven on Tuesday.

"We don't have pressure," Jokic said. "All the pressure is on them. We have to play at a high level and give our best."

"To us it's just another game seven. We're going to go out there and play."

It's the fourth consecutive playoff series over two seasons in which the Nuggets have faced a seventh game. They are 5-0 in elimination games and have rallied from 16-point or worse deficits in the past three such games.

"The effort was amazing," Jokic said. "We were down 16 last time, down 16 to Utah — we don't want it but maybe we like it. We're good at it."

"The whole team played well. It was an amazing game for us."

The 25-year-old 7-foot (2.13m) Serbian centre hit 13-of-22 shots, 4-of-6 from 3-point range and 4-of-5 from the free throw line.

"I think it's defence," Jokic said. "When we get a couple stops, we are flying and the ball is moving. When we start running the offense, we're a really good team."

The Clippers, who have squandered a 3-1 series edge, have never reached a conference final in their 50-year history. They missed 10 shots in a row in the third period during a 17-0 Nuggets run.

"They came down and scored or got fouled in the third quarter and we



Denver Nuggets' Jamal Murray (27) and PJ Dozier (35) celebrate after beating the LA Clippers in game six of the second round of the 2020 NBA Playoffs. — USA Today Sports

couldn't buy a basket," Clippers star Kawhi Leonard said.

"We've just got to leave it all out on the floor, communicate and play hard on the defensive end."

Paul George scored 33 points and Leonard, last year's NBA Finals Most Valuable Player for Toronto, added 25 to lead the Clippers, who were outscored 64-35 in the second half.

"It was beautiful playing," Clippers coach Doc Rivers said. "Then we stopped moving the ball, stopped playing. That's what let them get back in the game."

"We clearly have the right formula. We just lost it. We lost our pace."

The Nuggets became the first team since the 1970 Los Angeles Lakers to force multiple game sevens in the

Lee wins ANA Inspiration and first major in playoff



NEW YORK: South Korea's Mirim Lee eagled her final hole of regulation to force a three-way playoff with American Nelly Korda and Canadian Brooke Henderson at the ANA Inspiration on Sunday, then birdied the first extra hole to walk off with a maiden LPGA major title.

It was a wild finish on a scorching hot afternoon in Rancho Mirage which ended with Lee taking the winner's traditional cool plunge into Poppy's Pond that rings the 18th hole at Mission Hills Country Club.

Korda, who had led after every round, had looked poised to claim a first major victory when she stepped onto the 18th tee with a one shot lead

but a few minutes later found herself in playoff.

As Korda prepared to tee off on the last hole of regulation, ahead of her on the par-five 18th, Lee was chipping in from off the green for an eagle and a final round five-under 67 to join the American at 15-under.

Henderson would follow with a birdie at the last for a three-under 69 while Korda could do no better than par, also for 69.

Back on 18th for the first playoff hole Lee once again relied on her wedge chipping to within five feet and making a nervy putt for birdie with Henderson and Korda both carding pars. — Reuters

Cink ends title drought with clinical Safeway Open triumph

SAN FRANCISCO: Stewart Cink ended an 11-year drought with a victory in the US PGA Tour Safeway Open on Sunday, his first win since his 2009 British Open triumph.

Cink fired eight birdies in a seven-under par 65 at Silverado Resort in Napa, California, his 21-under total of 267 giving him a two-shot win over Harry Higgs.

Cink, 47, acknowledged that he sometimes wondered in the years since he out-dueled Tom Watson in a playoff at Turnberry if he would reach the winner's circle again.

But he kept his nerve Sunday, following a three-putt bogey at 17 that reduced his lead to one stroke with a birdie at the par-five 18th — where he reached the green in two and two-putted from 44 feet.

"When you get (to be) 47 like I am, you just don't really know if you're ever going to be able to close the door on another one," said a beaming Cink.

"I've been at times in the position to get it done and haven't. This was just a really special week where I've had a lot of good things going with my golf."

Cink started the day two shots off the lead shared by Brian Stuard, James Hahn and Cameron Percy and one stroke behind Higgs.

He birdied four holes on the front nine, chipped in for birdie at 11 and drained a 20-foot birdie putt from the



fringe at the 15th.

He pushed his lead to two strokes with a birdie from the greenside bunker at 16, blasting out to eight feet and making the putt.

But it was close after his bogey at 17, in part because Higgs eagled the 16th despite finding the rough off the tee.

Higgs, ranked 132nd in the world,

same playoff run.

No team has ever recovered from a 3-1 deficit twice in the same playoff run but the Nuggets could be the first.

"I'm running out of superlatives to say about our team. I love our team. I love our toughness," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said.

"We were down 16 at half. We weren't down on ourselves. We knew what we were going to have to go through. The question was how are we going to get out of it."

"One of the best third quarters I can ever remember in my five years."

'LOT OF WORK TO DO'

Malone has no idea what gives his team the ability to climb out of deep deficits.

"I think it's an inner belief, a confidence. We believe we have what it takes to win a championship," said Malone.

"We have a tremendous belief and confidence in who we are, how we play and what our talent level is. We're enjoying this. We're embracing this."

"But we have a lot of work to do."

Tuesday will also see Miami and Boston meet in the Eastern Conference final opener. All games are being played without spectators in a coronavirus quarantine bubble at Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

Torrey Craig's 3-pointer a minute into the fourth quarter gave the Nuggets an 82-79 lead, their first edge since 8-7 in the first quarter.

Jokic scored 11 points, including three 3-pointers, in a decisive 21-9 Denver run to give the Nuggets a 109-93 lead.

The Clippers closed the second quarter with a 16-2 run for a 63-47 half-time lead, but Jokic and Murray sparked a 17-0 run and seized command in the fourth quarter.

— AFP



Everton's Dominic Calvert-Lewin celebrates scoring their first goal with team-mates. – Reuters

EVERTON SHOW MUCH PROMISE FOR NEW SEASON

ANDY JALIL
LONDON

Tottenham Hotspur finished just about high enough in the Premier League last season to qualify for European competition this year but going by their performance, in their 1-0 defeat to Everton in their opening fixture, they have little hope of success on the continent or of a chance to play their next season. Their disappointed manager, Jose Mourinho hinted a blame at COVID-19 as well as on his players

saying: "Some players didn't even have a pre-season (game) and some players had a wrong state of mind. I did not like my team today. And I did not like so many referees and officials to allow the free- kick to be taken six metres from where it should have been. We did not have physical condition. We had no intensity. Harry Kane has trained with us once and Moussa Sissoko has trained just twice." Mourinho added "We had cases of positive Coronavirus tests, we had other players who had to

quarantine, other players away with national team. Matt Doherty is normally a player of incredible fitness but he was struggling to play, I could not expect them to be sharp, intense and agile. But I was expecting much more. Of course, that disappoints me." Everton on the other hand were sharp and in control for long periods. Spurs were outclassed, outwitted by the opposition who were buoyed by their three big new players. James Rodriguez, the £20 million signing from Real

Madrid showed his super star quality, Brazilian midfielder Allan dominated and his partnership with Abdoulaye Doucoure proved most effective. The visitors' margin of victory would have been greater had they not missed several chances. The most glaring was when Brazilian Richarlison somehow missed from point blank range after sixteen minutes. Later he sent a header wide when it should have easily been in the back of the net. Spurs best chance came to Dele Alli whose shot

was pushed over the bar and Jordan Pickford then also made another brilliant save with his legs from Doherty's firm drive. Everton's goal came 10 minutes into the second half when Dominic Calvert-Lewin climbed above Eric Dyer and Toby Alderweireld to meet a Lucas Digne's free-kick with a powerful header. Everton's manager Carlo Ancelotti said: "I am pleased with the performance of all the players at a difficult stadium against difficult opponents. We showed we can

compete and that was the most important message we sent from the game." "We said before the start of the season that our target was to push for a European place and that is what we want to do. It gives us more confidence for the future. For the players it was important to show what they can do. We can compete with this squad in all competitions. The spirit and the attitude were good and I could not have asked for more from the new signings," Ancelotti added.

SEEB PLAYERS RESUME TRAINING, GEAR UP FOR OMANTEL LEAGUE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 14

League leaders Seeb began their training sessions on Sunday to gear up for the resumption of the remaining matches of Omantel League for 2019/2020 season. The earlier warm up sessions focused on raising the fitness level of the players due to the long break of non-action of sporting activities during the past few months. The post two weeks training will include the other technical and tactical sides sessions. According to the official Seeb media account in twitter, all the training sessions of the team are in closed doors currently and that are in line with the directions of the Supreme Committee and only the authorised personnel can attend the trainings.

Seeb will face Oman club at ROP stadium on October 23 as a first official match for both teams since stopping of footballing business in the Sultanate in mid of March due to COVID-19 pandemic. The pre-final match of Seeb will be against Muscat at the same venue on October 28. The final match is scheduled to take place on November 1 against Saham at Seeb Stadium. The Portuguese coach Prono Migel will continue as a head coach for Seeb club in the new season of 2020/2021 according to the confirmation of Seeb board of directors. Coach Prono and his technical staff had managed to lead Seeb into the top of the domestic league order. Extending the contract of the coaching staff will serve to stable the technical performance of the team



beside full awareness on all the players including the key members. The Muscat-based team's players and technical staff had completed from the mandatory COVID-19 test which was part of the medical protocol. The tests of the team members were completed at Badar al Samaa Medical Center. Now, the medical staff members of OFA is ensuring the implementation of the medical protocol and preventive measures. Before two days of stopping the sporting activities decision in the Sultanate, the top fixture of the 23rd week of Omantel League between League leaders Seeb and second-placed Dhofar ended in a 1-1 draw. With the result, Seeb had kept their lead at the top by five points (50 points) against Dhofar who have 45 points in the second place.

sport



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CLAIMS US OPEN TITLE AFTER THRILLING FIGHTBACK

NEW YORK: Austria's Dominic Thiem finally claimed his first Grand Slam title with a stunning comeback to beat Germany's Alexander Zverev 2-6 4-6 6-4 6-3 7-6(6) in a brutal and nerve-jangling US Open final on Sunday.

The 27-year-old world number three, beaten in his first three Grand Slam finals, started as favourite but appeared to have blown his golden chance as he fell two sets behind.

Thiem, who had dropped only one set en route the final, looked stifled by nerves early on but gradually broke the shackles to hit back from a break down to take the third.

Zverev faltered on serve at 3-4 in a high-quality fourth set allowing Thiem to take the contest to a decider.

A limping Thiem trailed 5-3 in a tense decider but Zverev could not close it out and the Austrian summoned some incredible baseline winners to take it into a tiebreak.

A gut-wrenching climax saw Thiem squander two match points



Alexander Zverev of Germany poses with the runner's up trophy after the US Open final against Dominic Thiem of Austria.

— USA Today Sports

from 6-4 with forehand errors but he would not be denied and set up a third match point with a passing shot before Zverev fired wide after four hours and two minutes.

"I wish there were two winners today, we both deserved it," Thiem, the second Austrian to win a Grand Slam title after Thomas Muster's 1995 French Open title, said on court after a tearful speech from his crestfallen 23-year-old opponent.

Thiem had lost the last two French Open finals to Rafael Nadal and this year's Australian Open final to Novak Djokovic.

This time he started as the favourite but needed to become the first player to win a Grand Slam title from two sets down since Gaston Gaudio at the 2004 French Open to end his wait.

Thiem is the first male player born in the 1990s to claim a Grand Slam and the first besides the big three of Nadal, Djokovic and Roger Federer to claim one of the majors since Stanislas Wawrinka won the 2016 US Open.

— Reuters

US Open 2020

ATP RANKING

3

GRAND SLAM TITLES

0

SINGLES WINS*

291

DEFEATS

153

TITLES

17

2020 W/L TRACK

16-5

PRIZE MONEY

\$US millions

27 m

AGED 27

1.85 m

Right-handed

AFP Photo: Andrej Isakovici

DOMINIC THIEM

AUSTRIA

PROFESIONAL SINCE 2011

Route to the title

Round One Jaume Munar 7-6(8-6), 6-3, ret.	Round Two Sumit Nagal 6-3, 6-3, 6-2	Round Three Marin Cilic 6-2, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3	Round Four F. Auger Aliassime 7-6(7-4), 6-1, 6-1
Quarter-final Alex de Minaur 6-1, 6-2, 6-4	Semi-final Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 7-6(9-7), 7-6(7-5)	Final Alexander Zverev 2-6, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 7-6(8-6)	

Source: ATP/US Open

*As of September 13

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BankDhofar

Hazardous waste handling facilities set up in North Batinah and Duqm

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 14

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company SAOC (be'ah), the sole agency overseeing the solid waste services sector in the Sultanate, says it is continuing to invest in the development of modern hazardous waste handling and treatment facilities, which are a prerequisite for the growth of a robust domestic industrial sector.

The wholly-government run agency has partnered with leading international solutions providers to help set up and operate modern complexes for hazardous industrial waste at two key locations in the country: one in North Al Batinah not far from Sohar Port and Free Zone, and the other in Duqm, where one of the region's largest industrial and economic hubs is currently under development.

According to be'ah, the bigger of the two facilities is at an advanced stage of development at Liwa in North Al Batinah. Conceived as an Integrated Hazardous Waste Handling and Treatment Facility, the sprawling complex will eventually include an incineration plant,



GROWING CAPABILITIES: 6,400 TONNES OF INDUSTRIAL WASTE TREATED AND DISPOSED OF LAST YEAR

physical and chemical treatment unit, solidification unit, and pre-treatment and storage units.

Importantly, the North Al Batinah facility will also feature three engineered landfills catering to different kinds of hazardous waste. The largest of these is a 500,000 sq

metre capacity yard designed to hold non-leaching wastes. Also envisaged are two other engineered landfills each of 400,000 sq metre capacity, one earmarked for moderately leaching wastes while the other is exclusively reserved for wastes with high leaching potential.

"This facility is designed to treat oil and chemical waste. The project's timeline has been envisaged in a way that the operations are rolled out in a phased manner," said be'ah in its newly published 2019 Annual Report.

In the far southeast of the country,

be'ah has brought into operation a hazardous waste landfill at Duqm, where a number of mega industrial and petrochemical projects are in various stages of planning and development.

"The waste handling facility is designed for both municipal and

industrial waste. The landfill can accept inorganic industrial waste with the highest values defined in the landfill acceptance criteria," according to be'ah. "The facility also includes a storage and handling area for industrial organic waste destined for incineration and industrial waste needing further treatment before landfill disposal."

Around 6,400 tonnes of industrial waste, including some quantities of hazardous waste, were collected from various waste generators during 2019, according to be'ah. It includes waste streams from Oil & Gas production processes, power and water production, and industrial and petrochemical activities.

"Industrial waste is categorised as hazardous if it causes or poses a threat to a person or the environment due to its physical, chemical or biological nature and mostly constitutes oil, chemical substances as well as compounds listed as hazardous by the government," the agency explained. Studies are also underway to evaluate the requirements of waste generators operating in the oilfield areas of the country, as well as in Dhofar Governorate, be'ah added.



Opec sees steeper oil demand drop as virus remains challenging

LONDON: World oil demand will fall more steeply in 2020 than previously forecast due to the coronavirus and recover more slowly than expected next year, Opec said on Monday, potentially making it harder for the group and its allies to support the market.

World oil demand will tumble by 9.46 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries said in a monthly report, more than the 9.06 million bpd decline expected a month ago.

Oil prices have collapsed as the coronavirus crisis has curtailed travel and economic activity. While some countries have eased lockdowns, allowing demand to recover, a rising number of new cases and higher oil output have weighed on prices. "Risks remain elevated and tilted to the downside, particularly related to the development of COVID-19 infection cases as well as possible cures," Opec said of the 2021 outlook.

"Increased usage of teleworking

and distance conferencing is estimated to limit transportation fuels from fully recovering to 2019 levels." That means demand will rebound more slowly than expected next year. Opec sees consumption rising in 2021 by 6.62 million bpd, 370,00 bpd less than expected last month. Oil stocks have built up due to the demand collapse.

Opec said inventories in developed nations fell by 4.5 million barrels in July but stood 260.6 million barrels above the five-year average, a yardstick that Opec before the pandemic saw as a desirable level. Crude was trading below \$40 a barrel on Monday after the report was released, below levels that many Opec members need to balance their budgets. Prices have fallen by almost 15 per cent so far this month.

To tackle the drop in demand, Opec and its allies, known as Opec+, agreed to a record supply cut of 9.7 million bpd that started on May 1, while the United States and other nations said they would pump less.

— Reuters

Banking credit to private sector in Oman climbs to RO 22.8 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 14

The total outstanding credit extended by other depository corporations (ODCs) — encompassing commercial banks and Islamic Windows — grew by 1.7 per cent to RO 26.2 billion at the end of July 2020, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Credit to the private sector rose by 1.1 per cent to RO 22.8 billion, the apex bank stated in its monthly review of banking and monetary developments for July 2020.

Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 46.4 per cent and 45 per cent respectively, while the financial corporations received 5.3 per cent and other sectors the remaining 3.4 per cent, the Central Bank said.

Total deposits held with ODCs reached RO 23.8 billion at the end of July 2020, increasing by 3.5 per cent from July 2019. Total private sector deposits increased by 10.4 per cent to RO 16.5 billion. When looking at sector-wise analysis of private sector deposits, the share of households was largest at 50.9 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 31.1 per cent,



STRONG GROWTH: Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.1 billion at the end of July 2020, recording a growth of 7.3 per cent over that a year ago

financial corporations at 15.6 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks indicates an annual growth of 0.6 per cent in total outstanding credit as on end-July 2020. Conventional banks' credit to the private

sector decreased marginally by 0.3 per cent to RO 18.9 billion. Conventional banks' overall investments in securities amounted to RO 3.9 billion.

Investment in Government development Bonds increased by 21.3 per cent over the year to RO 1.8 billion. Banks also invested RO 265.8 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO 1.1 billion at the end of July 2020.

Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased to RO 20.2 billion in July 2020, registering a growth of 3.2 per cent over the level a year ago. Government deposits with

conventional banks decreased by 15 per cent to RO 4.5 billion, while deposits of public enterprises increased by 2 per cent to RO 1.1 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 70.3 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 10.6 per cent to RO 14.2 billion. Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.1 billion at the end of July 2020, recording a growth of 7.3 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 4.8 per cent to RO 3.6 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows stood at RO 4.9 billion and constituted about 14 per cent of the banking system's assets as at end-July 2020.



An economic lifeline during the pandemic

The current pandemic has adversely impacted a number of sectors during the last six months stemming from the closure of institutions and companies and the shuttering of economic activities.

This impact has been particularly significant for the logistic sector, especially aviation services, which led some international airlines to announce successive losses and then bankruptcy. However, the maritime sector continued to play a constructive role with commercial vessels and containerised cargo moving to and from international seaports of different countries of the region.

This has helped to maintain commercial flow of goods between

countries and stabilised prices of basic commodities and goods.

With the recent decision to open airports in the region and beyond, everyone expects that the logistics sector will return to normality especially once land borders are fully operational as well, enabling the smooth flow of goods and people through land crossings, but also airports and seaports.

The logistics sector was among the most affected by the current pandemic, although the workforce was quick to heed the prescribed preventive precautions and keep safe from possible exposure to Coronavirus infections among people returning from abroad.

It is expected that institutions operating in the logistics sector, especially airports, will exercise the same precautions when commercial



HAIDER AL LAWATI

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The maritime sector continued to play a constructive role with commercial vessels and containerised cargo moving to and from international seaports of different countries of the region.

flights resume next month.

Oman and other countries in the region were affected by the closure of the logistics sector organisations, especially the land and air borders, while maritime ports played their full role in supporting foreign trade by receiving ships carrying imports

and exports, including medicines, food and other essential needs.

The Sultanate is located on the open seas, and through the smooth operation of its many ports in Muscat, Salalah, Suhar, Musandam, Shinas and Duqm, all the Omani governorates have managed to enjoy access to the essential goods, while also re-exporting part of these items to some neighbouring countries that need them.

With this free flow of merchandise, countries were able to face the difficult times they went through during this crisis.

Omani ports have been able to manage these operations efficiently by operating at their full capacities and working round the clock to handle ships with goods destined either for Oman or for re-export to the countries of the region and beyond.

This sector today proves its great ability to maintain a continuous flow of goods and basic commodities, while maritime relations with the world are being developed to support trade flows through global ports and local ports.

During the pandemic, the Sultanate was able to deal with more than 200 international organisations operating in the logistics sector, facilitating direct maritime trade links with 86 ports in more than 40 countries.

Oman and other countries in the region need to develop their infrastructure in these vital sectors, invest in the equipment required to operate mega projects in various fields, and attract more new investments in the maritime fields, roads and airports.

NBO joins Outward Bound Oman for ‘Strength in our Youth’ project

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman recently announced a three-year partnership with not-for-profit foundation Outward Bound Oman that will see 900 young people develop their personal skills in line with the expectations of Vision 2040.

Starting later this year, a series of challenging four-day Next Generation and Skills for Life courses will be delivered by Outward Bound Oman to young people throughout the Sultanate.

The courses are carefully designed to increase the employability of Omani youth through enhancing their self-awareness and resilience, developing their creative thinking and problem-solving skills, and their ability to work effectively with others.

Patron of Outward Bound Oman, Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, stated,



“As we learn to live with the COVID-19 pandemic, this partnership with NBO is perfectly timed to enable Outward Bound Oman to support the efforts of His Majesty’s government to help Oman recover and cautiously move forward.

Young people today will be active

and productive citizens in 2040, and it is vital we invest in them now to enable them to play their part in making the vision a reality.”

Abdullah al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of National Bank Oman, commented, “At NBO, a core part of our CSR programme focuses on youth and as such, we are always looking at ways that we can empower Oman’s young people.

Our collaboration with Outward Bound Oman is not only part of our commitment to nurturing tomorrow’s leaders, but shows them how we, as a bank, can help them on their journey.

By investing in such initiatives, by fostering a culture of talent, and by celebrating the amazing potential of the next generation, we hope to inspire others to do the same, thus securing a bright future for Oman.”



OTC offers special discounts for part-time students

MUSCAT: In line with its social responsibility commitment towards various segments of society, Oman Tourism College (OTC) announced that it is offering a special discount (20 per cent off of the total tuition fees) for part-time students from low-income families at the college and a 25 per cent discount for part-time students who are OTC Diploma graduates. The college also offers to reduce the fees of a student by 10 per cent if they register with a sibling and extends a 20 per cent discount to international students. These discounts are valid only for the academic year 2020-2021.

Commenting on this new offering, Dr Abdulkarim Sultan al Mughairi, Dean of OTC said, “At OTC, we believe in the importance of education and its pivotal role in the development of nations, as well as empowering individuals and societies to bring about a new future.

Therefore, we decided to reduce the tuition fees for part-time students to enable them to continue their studies, achieve their goals and aspirations and contribute towards building a better and brighter Oman. OTC offers several academic programmes, including BSc (Hons) and Diploma in four primary majors, namely Tourism and Hospitality Management, Tourism Marketing, Event Management and Business Enterprise. Pathway courses in Service Management or Innovation & Entrepreneurship are also available. Our state-of-the-art classrooms and labs are fully equipped with advanced tools and technologies to ensure a seamless learning experience.

Oil prices slip as demand concerns rise, Libya output looms



Pipelines are seen at the oil port of Brega, Libya, in this file photo. – Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices slipped slightly on Monday amid concerns about a stalled global economic recovery and worries over renewed Libyan supply, but were supported by an impending storm which has disrupted US oil production.

Brent crude was down 11 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$39.72 a barrel while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were down 12 cents, or 0.3 per cent, at \$37.21 a barrel by 1105 GMT.

Both contracts ended last week lower, falling for a second week in a row.

“(Coronavirus) infection rates are on the rise again, there are localised lockdowns introduced in a growing number of countries hindering regional economic growth and the number of unemployed is failing to fall significantly,” oil broker PVM’s Tamas Varga said.

“This leads to dismal oil

The Opec+, meets on September 17 to discuss compliance with deep cuts in production, although analysts don’t expect further reductions to be made.

demand growth.”

In Libya, commander Khalifa Haftar committed to ending a months-long blockade of oil facilities, a move that would add more supplies to the market, although it was unclear if oil fields and ports would begin operations.

“The announcement that the blockade of Libyan oil export terminals may be about to end will add to the woes of Opec+’s meeting this week,” said Jeffrey

Halley, senior market analyst at OANDA.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, a grouping known as Opec+, meets on September 17 to discuss compliance with deep cuts in production, although analysts don’t expect further reductions to be made.

However, Tropical Storm Sally gained in strength in the Gulf of Mexico west of Florida on Sunday and was poised to become a category 2 hurricane.

The storm is disrupting oil production for the second time in less than a month after hurricane Laura swept through the region.

Typically oil rises when production is shut down, but with the Coronavirus pandemic getting worse demand concerns are to the fore, while global supplies continue to rise. The United States is the world’s biggest oil consumer and producer. — Reuters

BUSINESS ALERT

Hyundai Motor unveils stylish enhancements for KONA

MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor Company recently unveiled its newly enhanced KONA subcompact SUV and introduced the exciting all-new KONA N Line variant.



Hyundai KONA — the 2019 North American Utility Vehicle of the Year—is back with a bold design update that retains the model’s winning personality. The B-SUV’s exterior design is upgraded with various enhancements that make it even more appealing to customers who lead active lifestyles.

At the same time, Hyundai is expanding its B-SUV lineup by launching the sporty all-new KONA N Line. This attractive entry point to Hyundai’s high-performance N brand is distinguished by signature fascia, body colour claddings and large rear spoiler as well as N Line specific design accents.

“Interestingly, there’s a happy vibe that I feel is common with many Kona drivers,” said SangYup Lee, Senior Vice-President, Head of Hyundai Global Design Center. “Our design inspiration stems from this positive spirit, and this is a dedication to all the adventurers out there who explore life with a smile.”

With the latest product enhancement, KONA will be available for the first time as an N Line version, combining fun to drive with a sporty appearance. The KONA N Line stands out through its motorsports-inspired front and rear end, body colour claddings, and diamond-cut wheel design. KONA N Line’s front is characterised by the dynamic features of the front bumper, harmoniously connected and unified with the body colour treatment of the wheel arch claddings.

Exclusive experiences on Lexus Hybrid range

LEXUS VEHICLES are designed and engineered with the finest features, technology and luxury. Making every experience in it, truly outstanding.



Owning a Lexus is much more than just owning a luxury vehicle. Lexus enthusiasts looking forward to owning their favourite Lexus Hybrid vehicle, can now visit any Lexus showroom for exclusive experiences.

In Oman Lexus has a range of vehicles that include sedans, coupes, Hybrid Electric and SUVs. Lexus Hybrid Electric Range includes ES300h, RX450h and LS500h.

ES300h: Designed to draw all attention and equipped with power to take you further on every journey, the ES300h is ideal to make the most of memorable experiences.

The ES300h combines two power sources consisting of a petrol engine and two electric motors, producing 176 hp and 22.5 kg-m of torque and 118 hp and 20.6 kg-m of torque, respectively, delivering a combined system output of 215 hp.

RX450h: The Lexus RX450h is a gas-electric hybrid version of the RX350 crossover sport-utility vehicle. The hybrid powertrain employs two motor-generators.

One is an engine-driven generator that operates as an engine starter and can charge the battery pack or power other electric motors as needed. Total output of this pairing is 308 horsepower

LS500h: Equipped with several world-firsts and Lexus’ first performance, design, and safety features, the LS500h is equipped with the new Lexus Multi Stage Hybrid System. This provides enhanced responsiveness and linear acceleration, particularly when accelerating from a full stop.

The powertrain features a 3.5-litre V6 Dual VVT-i V6 gasoline engine and two electric motors, together delivering maximum system power of 354 hp. The LS500h is fitted with a compact, lightweight, lithium-ion hybrid battery.

TikTok rejects Microsoft offer, Oracle sole remaining bidder



A man holding a phone walks past a sign with the TikTok logo at the International Artificial Products Expo in Hangzhou, in this file photo. — Reuters

NEW YORK: American tech giant Microsoft said its offer to buy TikTok was rejected, leaving Oracle as the sole remaining bidder ahead of the imminent deadline for the Chinese-owned video app to sell or shut down its US operations.

TikTok is at the centre of a diplomatic storm between Washington and Beijing, and President Donald Trump has set Americans a deadline to stop doing business with its Chinese parent company ByteDance — effectively compelling a sale of the app to a US company.

But two Chinese state media outlets — CGTN and China News Service — said on Monday that ByteDance will not sell TikTok to Oracle either, citing unnamed sources.

TikTok is at the centre of a diplomatic storm between Washington and Beijing, and President Donald Trump has set Americans a deadline to stop doing business with its Chinese parent company ByteDance

The Oracle bid would need approval from the White House and Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, a source told the Journal, with both parties under the belief it would meet US data security concerns.

Microsoft had indicated at the beginning of August that it was interested in acquiring TikTok's US operations, but announced on Sunday that bid had been rejected. "ByteDance let us know today

they would not be selling TikTok's US operations to Microsoft," it said in a statement.

"We are confident our proposal would have been good for TikTok's users, while protecting national security interests."

In early August, Trump issued an executive order stating that if a purchase agreement was not reached by September 20, the platform would have to close in the United States. — AFP

SOFTBANK QUILTS

Nvidia to buy chip designer Arm for \$40 billion



The logo of Nvidia is seen in this illustration photo. — Reuters

SAN FRANCISCO: Nvidia Corp will buy UK-based chip designer Arm from Japan's SoftBank Group Corp for as much as \$40 billion, the companies said on Monday, in a deal set to reshape the global semiconductor landscape.

The sale puts a vital supplier to Apple Inc and others across the industry under the control of a single player and faces likely pushback from regulators and rivals to Nvidia, the biggest US chip company by market capitalisation.

Within hours of the announcement, critics questioned how Arm would maintain its open approach under US ownership and at a time of friction with China.

For Softbank, the sale marks an early exit from Arm, just four years after the technology group's \$32 billion acquisition. Chief Executive Masayoshi Son has lionised the potential of Arm but is slashing his stakes in major assets to raise cash.

The move comes as SoftBank executives, frustrated at the group's share performance, have held early stage talks about taking the Japanese technology group private, a source said. Those talks could gain momentum following the Arm sale. SoftBank's shares soared 10 per cent in Tokyo.

Nvidia will pay SoftBank \$21.5 billion in shares and \$12 billion in cash, including \$2 billion on signing. The deal will see SoftBank and its \$100 billion Vision Fund, which has a 25 per cent stake in Arm, take a stake in Nvidia of between 6.7 per cent and 8.1 per cent.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said the deal, which will boost his firm in data centre chips, was "pro competition". It marked "the first time in history the industry could see something that is genuinely alternative" to Intel Corp's domination of the sector, he said.

Taiwan-born Huang emphasised he will retain Arm's neutral licensing model and expand it by licensing out Nvidia intellectual property for the first time. — Reuters

French GDP slump less than feared

PARIS: The French economy will contract by 8.7 per cent this year owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the central bank estimated on Monday, less than originally forecast due to consumer spending.

The Bank of France had previously expected a 10.3 per cent slump as companies reel from the impact of coronavirus restrictions that have prompted hundreds of thousands of layoffs.

However "the second-quarter shock was less significant than expected," the bank said, adding that "the rebound suggested by business surveys in recent months has been stronger."

As a result, the French economy could return to its pre-crisis levels by early 2022, instead of later that year as the bank had expected.

The new forecast is in line with the 9.0 per cent drop expected by statistics office Insee, which produces official economic data, though for now the government has not changed its outlook for an 11 per cent decline.

Third-quarter growth is expected to jump by 16 per cent from the second quarter, when gross domestic product (GDP) plunged by 13.8 per cent amid a two-month nationwide lockdown.

The increase reflects household spending that held up better than expected, as well as resilience in the automobile, construction and even restaurant and hotel sectors — foreign travel restrictions meant many French took vacations closer to home this summer.



A city view shows the skyline of the French capital as the Eiffel Tower and roof tops are seen in Paris. — AFP

But unemployment is expected to keep climbing, despite the government's financing of salaries for employees who have been laid

off or forced to reduce their hours.

Unemployment, set to reach 9.5 per cent by the end of this year, could rise to 11.1 per cent in 2021,

the Bank of France said.

"We are entering a phase where economic activity is going to keep improving, but we are not at all

near the rhythm we have seen these past months," the bank's director general Olivier Garnier told a press conference. —AFP

Amazon to hire 100,000 more workers in its latest job spree

WASHINGTON: Amazon.com Inc on Monday said it is recruiting 100,000 more workers — the fourth hiring spree it has announced for the United States this year — to keep pace with e-commerce demand that jumped during the pandemic.

The world's biggest online retailer said the positions are for full and part-time work in its home country and Canada, and these will include roles at 100 new warehouse and operations sites it is opening this month.

The Seattle-based company employed 876,800 people as of June 30, excluding contractors and temporary personnel.

The news reflects Amazon's constant need for labour to pick, pack and ship products to shoppers' doorsteps, with a 40 per cent revenue rise last quarter and the biggest profit in the retailer's 26-year-history.

It is rolling out automation at its newest buildings at the same time, said Alicia Boler Davis, Amazon's vice president of global customer fulfilment.

"We will continue to deploy technology where appropriate, starting from a safety perspective" and "where we can improve our overall operation," Boler Davis said in an interview.

She did not have comment on whether automation means fewer jobs per warehouse but said Amazon uses its systems for collaboration with people.

"We don't look at it as an 'either/or,'"

Boler Davis, recently appointed to Amazon's senior leadership team, said the company is still evaluating seasonal employment needs for the winter holiday, apart from the 100,000 positions it is filling.

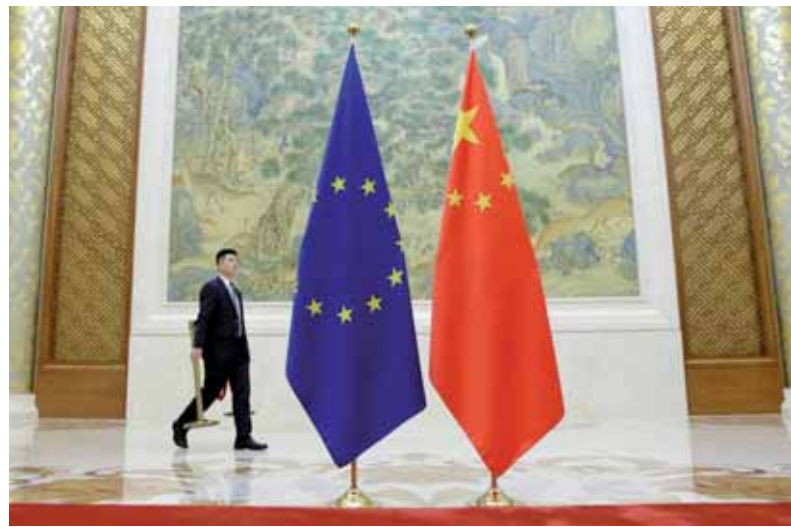
— Reuters

BRUSSELS: The European Union and China signed a deal on Monday to protect each other's exported food and drinks items from feta cheese to Pixian bean paste ahead of challenging discussions on trade, climate change and human rights at an online summit.

The two sides will respect the names of 100 European regional food designations and 100 Chinese equivalents, meaning for example that China will only allow "champagne" to be used on sparkling wine from the French region of that name.

China was the third-largest destination for EU agricultural and food products in 2019, worth 14.5 billion euros (\$17.2 billion). The new deal is a trade coup for Europe as US, Australian or New Zealand producers will no longer be able to use the protected names on their exports to China, although there is a transition period for certain cheeses.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, with the EU's chief executive and



A staff member prepares for the EU-China High-level Economic Dialogue at Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, in this file photo. — Reuters

chairman, will hold talks from 1200 GMT on more taxing topics in a summit that was to have been held in the German city of Leipzig.

"Time for real action to address imbalances and to show global leadership," European Council President Charles Michel, who chairs EU summits, said on Twitter

before the meeting.

European attitudes have hardened towards Beijing because of the novel coronavirus, which many scientists believe originated in China, and because of a new security law on Hong Kong that the West says curtails basic rights.

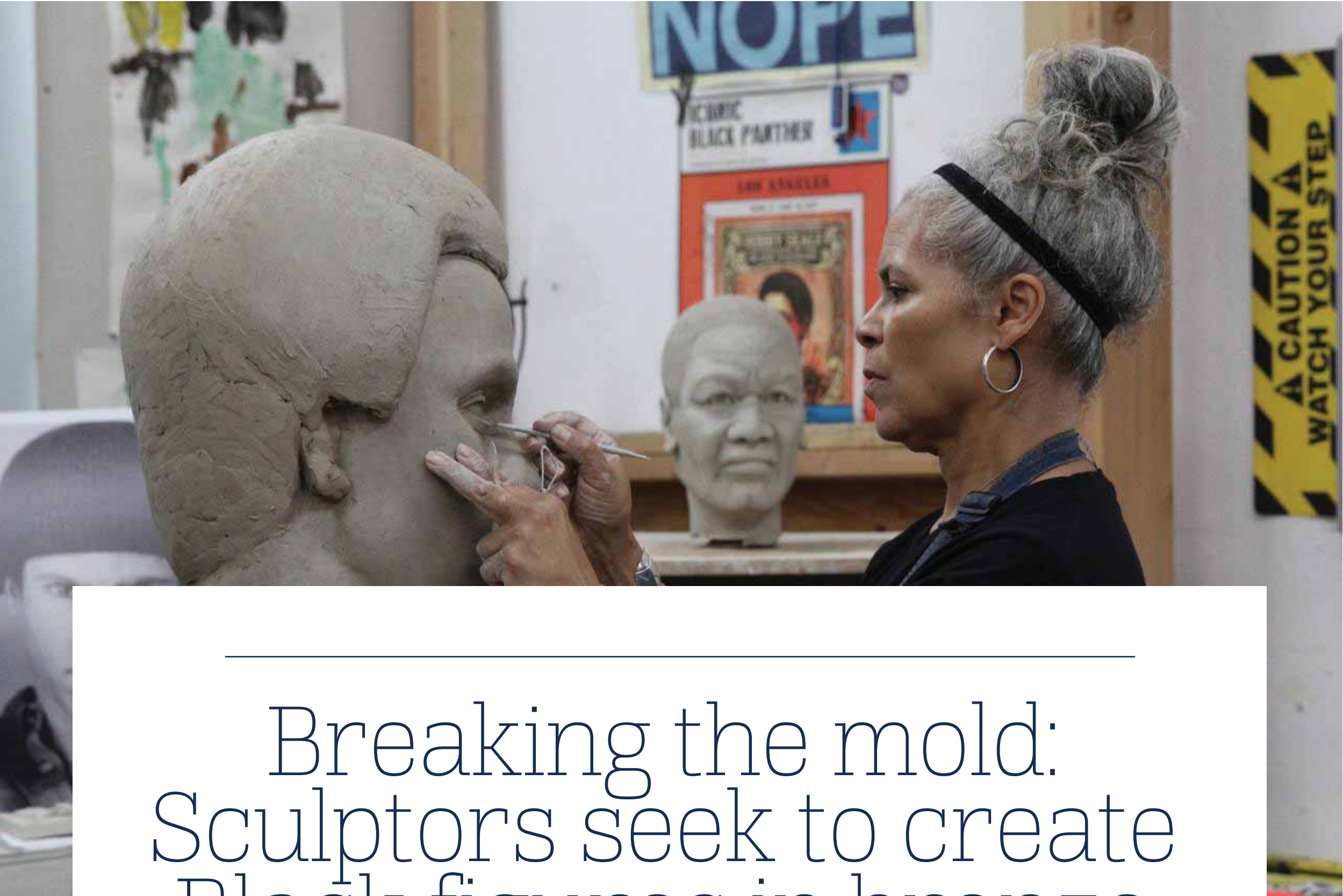
The EU wants stronger

EU, China sign food protection deal

China was the third-largest destination for EU agricultural and food products in 2019, worth \$17.2 billion

commitments on climate change from China, the world's top polluter. The two regional powers are also struggling to seal an investment agreement by the end of the year, to give European companies greater access to the Chinese market and to prevent the EU increasing trade defences.

"We hope the European Union will carefully reconsider characterising China as a systemic rival," China's diplomatic mission to the bloc said on Twitter, referring to the EU position that Beijing is becoming a rival as much as a partner. "Confrontation and rivalry will not make the world a better place to live in," the Chinese mission said. —Reuters



Breaking the mold: Sculptors seek to create Black figures in bronze

NEW YORK: The toppling of Confederate statues during nationwide protests against racial injustice brought renewed attention to the importance of US public monuments, very few of which were made by Black sculptors.

Empty plinths have stirred debate over who and what should replace the toppled statues. Black sculptors and historians hope the aftermath will give communities around the country a chance to honour often-forgotten African-American trailblazers.

"Space is power. When a Black body in bronze is placed publicly, that story is magnified because of the powerful space," said sculptor Dana King of Oakland, California.

"It allows children to look up into the faces of these sculptures and say, 'Who are you? And why are you standing before me?'" said King, who is set to unveil in September her public sculpture of William Lanson, a formerly enslaved Black man who worked to extend New Haven's Long Wharf, making the Connecticut port competitive with nearby New York.

Of the more than 5,000 public outdoor sculptures registered in the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Art Inventories Catalog, less than a quarter of the roughly 700 works in the "Ethnic-African American" category were made by Black sculptors.

Similarly, fewer than half of the 75 US works included in "Contemporary Monuments to the Slave Past," a website run by University of Maryland Professor Renee Ater, were created by Black sculptors.

"Part of the reason I went into figurative sculpture was to create works of art that represented people who look like me and look like a lot of New Yorkers who I see but I didn't see represented," said sculptor Branly Cadet.

Black sculptors bring a perspective that a white artist cannot, added Cadet, whose public statues highlight figures including New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who fought for pay equity, and star athlete Jackie



Robinson, who broke Major League Baseball's colour barrier.

"Statues and monuments reflect who and what we value as a nation," University of Pittsburgh historian Keisha Blain said. "Building a racism-free society requires making an active choice."

PUSHING PAST BARRIERS

Winning public art commissions is a lengthy, competitive and often controversial process decided by elected officials and influenced by powerbrokers ranging from real estate developers to political clubs.

It took more than a decade of delays and debates for Savannah, Georgia, whose population is 50 percent Black, to unveil in 2002 its first statue acknowledging its history as a major slave port.

Disputes raged over the memorial's graphic inscription about slave ship horrors, as well as about the selected sculptor - a white professor from the prestigious Savannah College of Art

Some, including sculptor King, say it would be far more meaningful to let the resounding absence of statues in the wake of the protests catch the public's attention

and Design. Cadet's insight into African-American history helped him win a commission for a memorial outside Philadelphia's City Hall honouring Octavius Catto, unveiled in 2017 as the

first public monument to an African-American individual in a city where the population is more than 40 percent Black.

Catto had an array of accomplishments, but Cadet was struck by Catto's push to de-segregate horse-drawn trolley cars and to ratify the 15th Amendment to let Black men vote.

"As an African American, I thought it was critical to highlight those two aspects of his existence," said Cadet, 54.

The killing of George Floyd, a Black man who died in Minneapolis in May after a white police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, has added momentum to a years-long movement to remove Confederate monuments and other US public statues that critics say promote white supremacy and racial violence.

Nationwide, nearly 800 Confederate monuments stand at county courthouses, town squares, state capitols and other public spaces, including 34 memorials dedicated after 2000, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Since June 2015, when white supremacist and Confederate flag enthusiast Dylan Roof gunned down a Bible study group at a Black church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine people, 48 Confederate monuments have been removed, some under public protest, the Law Center said.

Pittsburgh's Blain says that while removing symbols of oppression is vital, memorializing Black lives in public is an important first step in the struggle to build a racism-free society, which ultimately requires concrete changes to laws and public policy.

Some, including sculptor King, say it would be far more meaningful to let the resounding absence of statues in the wake of the protests catch the public's attention.

"All that space should be left alone for a while," said King.

"We should sit with the raw sense of discomfort from the space left over from those torn down monuments, and the energy they left behind." — Reuters



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ENTERTAINMENT

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Warner Bros won't share 'Tenet' box office data, angering rival studios



LOS ANGELES: People who closely follow box office earnings have noticed a surprising lack of transparency surrounding ticket sales for "Tenet," the \$200 million-budgeted sci-fi epic from director Christopher Nolan that released last weekend in US theatres.

Since "Tenet" premiered, Warner Bros., the studio behind the film, has parcelled out carefully selected bread-crumbs of data to reporters and rival studios. Traditionally, studios share box office information on a daily basis. That's not the case with "Tenet."

Though it started playing in theatres on Thursday, Sept. 3, Warner Bros. waited until Sunday, September 6 to officially announce opening weekend grosses. "Tenet" earned \$20 million over the long weekend, a middling result for a film of its size.

Industry observers presumed that Warner Bros. wanted initial box office receipts for "Tenet" to look as robust as possible — and waiting until Sunday for the full weekend figure would make earnings sound stronger than they might if the studio had dribbled out daily numbers.

The studio, however, was concerned that reporters and

Box office reports are one of the most public-facing activities that studios undergo. A hit opening weekend allows them to trumpet the good news in advertisements and through internal communications

rivals would misinterpret or unfairly analyse the results — leading to headlines that may incorrectly label "Tenet's" debut as a flop. Warner Bros. urged journalists to provide context by noting that ticket sales would automatically be lower than normal given the fact that theatres in major markets like New York and Los Angeles aren't open and cinemas that have reopened have done so at reduced capacity. With those caveats in mind, Warner Bros. was never banking on a splashy opening weekend and instead hoped "Tenet" would play in theatres

for months without much in the way of competition.

Box office reports are one of the most public-facing activities that studios undergo. A hit opening weekend allows them to trumpet the good news in advertisements and through internal communications. But there's a downside to those bragging rights. It also forces studios to own their mistakes — a miss is a miss, after all. With streaming rivals such as Netflix and Amazon keeping a tight grip on the number of times films are watched and refusing to reveal box office data about their films, more traditional studios have grown frustrated. Some studio executives have even publicly carped about the need to report grosses, suggesting they'd rather forgo the process all together.

Though it is unusual for a major studio like Warner Bros. to shield grosses for perhaps the buzziest movie of the year, other Hollywood players had given the company a pass for opening weekend because "Tenet" was the first significant movie to debut since coronavirus struck. Rival studios are closely watching the Nolan film as a test to see if people would go to the movies during the pandemic. The results, in effect, would help

Hollywood decide whether or not to continue releasing big-budgeted tentpoles in the middle of a global health crisis.

Numerous insiders at rival studios emphasised that they want Warner Bros. and "Tenet" to succeed, citing the aphorism that rising tides lift all boats. But given the importance of the movie theatre business, Hollywood executives at other studios have privately complained about the lack of transparency.

In normal times, executives that are involved in distributing films get access to grosses by the hour. Studios work with the research company Rentrak and its parent corporation Comscore to report daily numbers and publish box office charts each weekend that are widely distributed across the entertainment industry. Studios pay a lot of money to get down-to-the-minute updates, with the agreement that rivals have access to info from other distributors.

According to individuals familiar with the situation, Rentrak had to get permission from major studio heads before concealing daily numbers for "Tenet." Though executives were initially reluctant, they ultimately agreed for the first weekend as a courtesy, believing that Warner Bros. was taking a bold bet in testing the waters and needed their support.

But as "Tenet" continues into its second weekend in theatres, there has still been a dearth of information regarding box office data. The studio has yet to report daily figures, and is expected to wait until this Sunday to divulge ticket sales. Warner Bros. and Comscore declined to comment on this report.

However, studio sources argue they aren't obligated to share numbers with anyone else and stress that there's no precedent for releasing a movie in a pandemic. Comparing "Tenet" to any other movie, one source said, is "apples and kumquats." By distributing numbers in the traditional fashion, anyone on the outside could jump to conclusions and categorise "Tenet" has a financial disaster. They argue that there's no difference between reporting numbers on Friday afternoon or Sunday morning.— **Reuters/Variety.com**

FASHION

Burberry to livestream Spring/Summer 2021 fashion show on Twitch



BURBERRY said on Monday it would livestream its Spring/Summer 2021 fashion show this week in partnership with live video-streaming service Twitch, becoming the first luxury brand to do so.

The show will be completely remote, with no guests attend-

ing in person, the company said in a statement.

Fashion houses around the world have been experimenting with different formats as they seek to maintain the glamour and excitement of their catwalk shows in an era of face masks and social distancing. — **Reuters**

Top model Bar Refaeli sentenced in tax evasion case



ISRAELI supermodel Bar Refaeli was sentenced on Sunday to nine months' community service and her mother was ordered jailed for 16 months for tax evasion on earnings from her international career.

The former Sports Illustrated swimsuit cover model, now a popular TV personality in Israel, had pleaded guilty to tax offences under a plea bargain that also included her mother and agent, Tzipi Refaeli.

Israel tax authorities accused the two of evading paying taxes on income of about \$7.2 million.

Security for their court appearance on Sunday was tight, with barricades in the lobby

marking a path to an elevator that took the pair to the courtroom.

"We love you Bar," one woman shouted as the model and her mother, both wearing coronavirus masks, walked past cameras and reporters, without making any comment.

Defence attorneys had argued that Bar Refaeli, a papparazzi favourite during a romantic relationship with Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio, did not have to declare to Israeli tax authorities worldwide income between 2009 and 2012.

Refaeli, now 35 and a mother of three and married to an Israeli businessman, had contended she was living overseas at the time and exempt from any Israeli tax bills. — **Reuters**



Oman, an architectural beauty

STORY BY LIJU CHERIAN
PHOTOS BY ŞAFAK YAVUZLAR

Turkish professional shutterbug is amazed at what the Sultanate has to offer in terms of architecture photography.

An interior architect and environmental designer, Şafak Yavuzlar recalls that the Sultanate is one of the few countries that makes one feel at home. "Whether you have lived in Oman for years or days, the friendly nature of the citizens, the magical atmosphere and generous culture makes you feel like you belong originally to the place," reveals Safak.

Having worked in Oman for three years as an architect allowed him to be a part of one of its biggest projects — the new Muscat International Airport.

"I focused on architecture, landscape and aerial photography. Whenever I find time, I escaped to vast landscapes, ancient cities, lost civilisations, canyons and valleys. 'Straight out of the camera' is a concept which I am not familiar with. I try to fill the gap between what human eye sees and what camera can see," he explains.

Safak was part of various roles during the implementation of many iconic architectural structures in Turkey, his home country, and abroad.

"The issue that makes me love Oman like my home is its architectural gorgeousness, ancient forts, stunning mountains, enchanting beaches, scent of frankincense and its natural beauty."

In most of Safak's photographs, the architectural beauty stands out.

He says the unique Omani culture and heritage is also reflected in its spectacular architecture. This is clearly seen in its wonderful forts and castles, its great mosques, and even in the simplicity of its houses. From the Arabic calligraphy engraved on walls, to the unique Islamic and Arabic decorations, Omani architecture is one of a kind.

This propelled him to travel the length and breadth of the Sultanate and take pictures of which he has an impressive and vast collection.

Born in 1970 in Kütahya, Turkey, his photographic journey started with a ZENIT 7 camera which his dad Erdogan found at the entrance of primary school. Time flew so fast that while he was thinking and trying to understand how the world can fit in this small box!

While attending Bilkent University, Ankara, with interior architecture as major, he chose 'photography' as an elective. There was no looking back from here as his way of seeing from different angles started to draw attention of people.

"It is true my architectural education, knowledge of light and lighting, experience gained in these mega projects over the years, the miter, plumb, scales habit and experience is very supportive on the visuals I created," he explains.

Safak says that when your job is to photograph an architectural structure, it is a great advantage to realise it as an architect.

"It is a great advantage in my work to enter the subject to be photographed, analyse the relationship between space, occupancy, light and darkness, determine the mass ratios and effects, see the angles that will create an impressive perspective with professional knowledge and experience, and take photos in the light of this information."

He explains the features that make a photograph a 'piece of art.' The primary fac-

Safak was part of various roles during the implementation of many iconic architectural structures in Turkey, his home country, and abroad.

tor that makes architectural photography interesting and challenging; shooting in an environment dominated by variables outside one's control and many factors appear as variables that one needs to adapt.

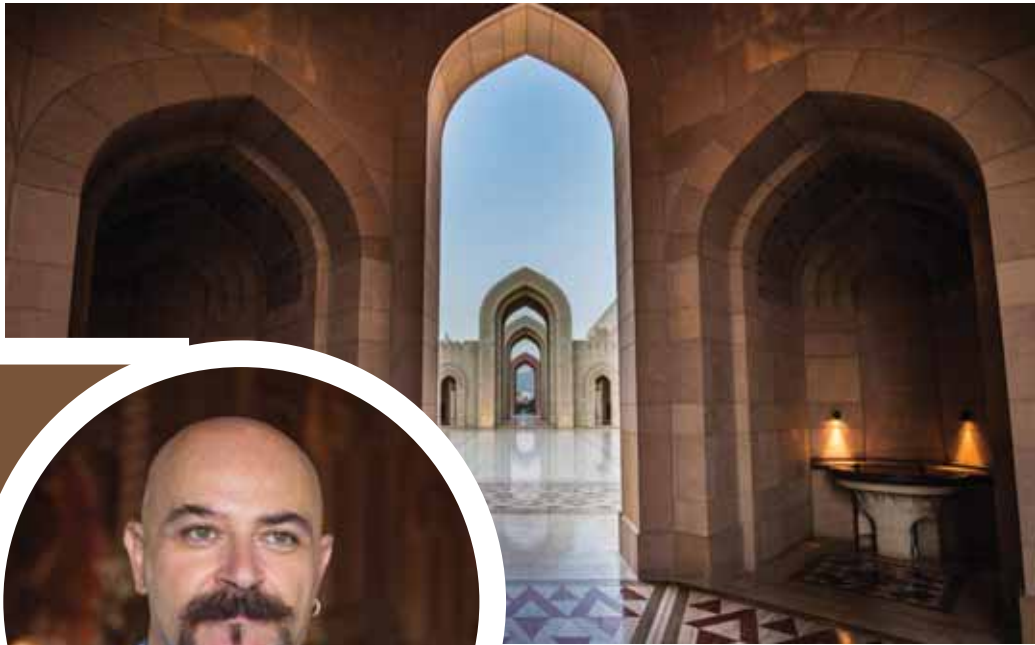
Many of his photographs reflect his feelings, excitement and imagination. "In the feedback I received from my exhibitions, I observe that these items are largely transferred to the audience. This makes me happy to see that my work has entered the art class," he mentions.

As one who is prompt in using developing technology in his works, Safak mentions that some of the equipment used when creating the photographs needs an update in 2-3 years, some in 5-6 years or even longer.

"This already forces you to follow technology, beyond that I have a serious tendency to use emerging technologies. New and developing software applications like Planit Pro, Ephemeris, together with new hardware, adds values to workflow, allowing to create more effective photos."

Finally, Safak says he feels a sense of happiness and excitement, similar to feelings while solving a riddle or wandering the streets of a city left behind by an ancient civilisation while taking architectural photographs.

"In every step I take, in every corner I turn, in every new place I enter, I see the space with the eyes of the designer, who designed the structure. I put myself in the place of people who will use that space and will spend time there, and this kind of perspective is reflected in my photographs," he concludes.



features

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Oman, an architectural beauty

Story by Liju Cherian
Photos by Şafak Yavuzlar

Renowned professional shutterbug Safak says that Sultanate's unique culture and heritage is reflected in its spectacular architecture. He feels a sense of happiness and excitement alike solving a riddle or wandering the streets of a city left behind by an ancient civilisation while clicking architectural photographs... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

ART



BREAKING THE MOLD: SCULPTORS SEEK TO CREATE BLACK FIGURES IN BRONZE

The toppling of Confederate statues during nationwide protests against racial injustice brought renewed attention to the importance of US public monuments, very few of which were made by Black sculptors... Story on **Page 17**

ENTERTAINMENT



WARNER BROS WON'T SHARE 'TENET' BOX OFFICE DATA, ANGERING RIVAL STUDIOS

People who closely follow box office earnings have noticed a surprising lack of transparency surrounding ticket sales for "Tenet," the \$200 million-budgeted sci-fi epic from director Christopher Nolan... Story on **Page 18**

READ



TRANSCENDENT KINGDOM

BY YAA GYASI

A PhD candidate in neuroscience looks to the hard sciences and her childhood faith to potentially help her grieving Ghanaian immigrant family.

FASHION



BURBERRY TO LIVESTREAM SPRING/SUMMER 2021 FASHION SHOW ON TWITCH

Burberry said on Monday it would livestream its Spring/Summer 2021 fashion show this week in partnership with live video-streaming service Twitch, becoming the first luxury brand to do so... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE



HOUSEKEEPERS WEEK

The week of September 13 to 19 is dedicated to housekeepers to show appreciation for their hard work and dedication to their craft. To celebrate this week, start by saying thank you to a coworker who cleans your office. If you can afford it, treat some of them to a dinner to show kindness to this integral part of any workforce.