

P11

SERENA OVERCOMES PATCHY START



P13

FRANCE UNVEILS BIG BUDGET AS VIRUS CASES WORSEN



P19

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN WESTERN, ARABIC CULTURES



OMAN

Crude prices at \$41.39 a barrel

MUSCAT: Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) said that Oman oil price for November delivery reached \$41.39. The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil declined 86 cents from the price of last Friday, which was \$42.25. The average price of Oman oil for October delivery has stabilised at \$44.32, thus 70 cents per barrel higher than September delivery. Brent crude slipped 37 cents to \$41.55 a barrel while US light crude was down 39 cents at \$39.86

ASIA

Pakistan supports Afghan peace talks

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Monday reaffirmed its “steadfast” support for the Afghan peace process during a visit by Afghanistan’s chief negotiator to Islamabad. “It is up to Afghan leadership to seize this opportunity”, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said following talks with Abdullah Abdullah, head of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation. Abdullah is in Pakistan to seek backing from a nation seen as crucial to securing peace in Afghanistan due to its influence on Taliban leaders.

INSIDE


INDIA'S CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS CROSS 6 MILLION

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AFTER A CABINET FIASCO, WHERE TO NOW FOR LEBANON?

P9

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 33°C
MIN: 28°C

SALALAH
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 24°C

NIZWA
MAX: 38°C
MIN: 25°C

SUNRISE 05.58 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

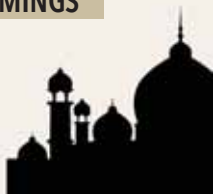
FAJR: 04:43

DHUHR: 12:02

ASR: 15:27

MAGHRIB: 18:01

ISHA: 19:11





DECISION ON REOPENING OF MOSQUES IN NOVEMBER

The decision to reopen mosques and places of worship will be taken on November 15, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Monday. In a statement, the ministry further said that it will take measures regarding the opening of mosques and places of worship following the guidelines and precautionary measures set by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 on September 22.

DETAILS ON P2

PARENTS CAN DECIDE ON SENDING KIDS TO SCHOOL

COVID-19 PROTOCOL ISSUED AHEAD OF SCHOOL REOPENING

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Parents have the right to decide whether to send their child to school or not, a top education ministry official said as Sultanate prepares to reopen schools on November 1.

Dr Abdullah Khamis al Busaidy, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Education, told Oman TV on Sunday night: “The ministry is able to find solutions to the current challenges, and it may be noted that the decisions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 are taken due to the exceptional circumstances that the Sultanate and the world is going through.”

NO ENTRY

Ventilated classrooms, isolation rooms in schools and no entry without masks are part of the



COVID-19 protocol issued by the Ministry of Education on Monday which cover students, parents, school administration, teachers, bus drivers, caregivers and visitors.

It lists measures in the event of

formed at the general directorates of education in the governorates will ensure the implementation of health protocol in schools, classify schools according to their student strength, and activate the hotline between the directorate’s supervisory committee and the main committee, schools and health institutions and the ministry. This is aimed at monitoring the detection of new cases and other developments in schools.

The administration of academic bodies is vested with the responsibilities of preparing the school premises to receive students, allocating a work team inside the schools that will direct students upon their arrival at the entrance and ensuring the availability of temperature measuring devices.

TURN TO P2

Diabetics face higher COVID-19 risk

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Health experts, including those in Oman, have repeatedly pointed out that some COVID-19 victims had a history of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which affected their chances of recovery.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) said that 6,430 new diabetes cases were recorded in the Sultanate in 2019. Of 6,430 new diabetes cases reported, 6,115 of them were Omanis and 315 expatriates.

According to NCSI, the majority of these cases were reported from North Al Batinah, while Musandam had the least number of new diabetes patients. According to the recent statistics of the Ministry of Health (MoH), three out of every 10,000 of the population are hospitalised due to high blood pressure and six per 10,000 due to diabetes.

The data also showed that about 25 per cent of all hospital deaths were due to heart disease and the circulatory system and that about 13 per cent were due to cancer-related diseases.

The report indicates a steady increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases, as the rate reached 44.2 per cent among outpatients and 39.8 per cent among inpatients.

According to the MoH annual report, out of 6,340 cases of NCDs reported in 2019, 54.3 per cent were women, 31 per cent in the age group 45-49, around 25 per cent in the age group 50-54. The total number of diabetes cases is 105,317.

World leaders commit to reverse nature loss by 2030

PARIS: Dozens of countries representing more than a quarter of global GDP on Monday released a fresh set of pledges for “urgent and immediate” action to halt nature loss and protect Earth’s crucial biodiversity.

Ahead of the UN Summit on Biodiversity this week, more than 60 heads of state and government promised to slash air pollution, eliminate ocean plastic and transition to more sustainable food systems by 2030.

The pledge comes just two weeks after the UN’s periodic review of

existing global conservation plans found that nations were set to miss all 20 targets they set themselves back in 2010 to halt nature loss.

The WWF’s biennial Living Planet Index, released separately this month, showed that wild populations of animals, birds, fish and plants had plummeted nearly 70 per cent since 1970.

“Two major reports published this month conclude we are utterly failing to protect the diversity of life on Earth”, said Johan Rockstrom, Director of the Potsdam Institute for

Climate Impact Research and co-chair of the international Earth Commission.

“We are failing to protect the resilience of our global commons. And we are failing to ensure a stable planet for future generations.”

The UN’s biodiversity panel IPBES last year warned that up to one million species faced extinction — many within decades — as human activity had “severely degraded” three-quarters of land on the planet.

— AFP


A duck swims in a pond during an autumn day in the town of Chekhov, some 70 km outside Moscow. — AFP



Decision on mosques, places of worship reopening by mid-Nov

KABEER YOUSUF
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The decision to reopen mosques and places of worship will be taken on November 15, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Monday.

In a statement, the ministry further said that it will take measures about the opening of

mosques, and places of worship following the guidelines and precautionary measures that the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 has set on September 22.

“We believe that opening of mosques and other prayer centres will trigger more cases and all the places of worship shall remain closed until further notice because

of the spike in COVID-19 cases especially the critical care cases,” a ministry official said.

“We will announce the opening of mosques only when the time is suitable for mass prayers,” the official further clarified.

The ministry explained that, due to the prevalence of impacts of the pandemic on public health, Sharia wisdom requires that

precautionary measures have to be taken to protect life, thanks to the Sharia’s ample space for judgment on performing prayers (without compromising health or life).

At the conclusion of its statement, the ministry prayed to the Almighty Allah to protect Oman and the rest of the world from the pandemic and to grant the patients quick recovery.

Parents can decide on sending kids to school

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry said parents should prepare a healthy meal for their children as per nutritional requirements. The school also should have a suitable mechanism for a break between classes.

For grades 1-4 students, the teacher should ensure that the students have their meals while maintaining physical distancing. For the students who don’t bring meals from home, the school canteen should prepare healthy, well-packed meals. Canteens should follow all precautionary measures.

For other students, they should remain in the classroom during the break in the presence of the teacher. Yet, they are allowed to go out in the schoolyard while maintaining physical distancing.

VISITORS
The ministry affirmed that the



school visitors must coordinate with the school administration for any visit. They have to follow all precautionary measures and adhere to wearing masks and maintain physical distancing. The visits should be as short as possible and documented online.

The ministry has asked the bus drivers to wear masks, organise proper boarding and dropping procedures, maintain physical distancing, clean seats and stands with alcohol-based disinfectants every morning before and after students board the bus.

Precautions during sports activities discussed



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth on Monday held a meeting chaired by Rashad bin Ahmed al Hinai, Under-Secretary of the Ministry for Sports and Youth, with the chairman of the Omani Olympic Committee (OOC) and heads of sports federations.

This meeting comes within the framework of the ministry’s endeavour to follow up on the programmes and plans that the Olympic Committee and sports federations are implementing in the next stage and to activate joint cooperation frameworks with them in a manner that serves the sports

and youth sectors.

The attendees discussed the importance of applying precautionary and preventive measures that have been taken by the Sultanate to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, especially with the resumption of different kinds of sports and youth activities.

The meeting discussed the reports received from the committee tasked with studying and following up plans of the Olympic Committee, federations and sports committees, which included many topics of interest to the sports sector in the Sultanate. — ONA

OCCI discusses impact of NOC removal



VINOD NAIR
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The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Sunday discussed the challenges faced by the private health institutions in the country.

The meeting decided to raise with concerned authorities the issue of not allowing pharmacies in the same building in which a private health institution is located. The pharmacy is expected to be at least 100 meters away from any health care institution.

It also discussed the recent changes to the Article 11 of the Foreigners’ Residence Law - under which expatriate employees in the Sultanate are not required to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from their existing employer to change jobs within Oman – and its impact on the private health sector.

The health committee of OCCI

held its third meeting for the current year, headed by Redha bin Jumaa al Saleh, chairman of OCCI, and the health committee.

A mini-committee was formed to coordinate with the Ministry of Health represented by the General Directorate of Private Health Institutions to make the necessary controls on the subject.

The meeting discussed the names of pharmacies and health institutions and their specialisations, and the extent to which the name matches the sector. The committee will also contribute to the study that will determine prices for health services through insurance companies.

Al Saleh urged the members to focus on the health insurance project which will be rolled out under the supervision of the Capital Market Authority (CMA) with the participation of the OCCI and other



Khasab to get exhibition and conference centre

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Musandam branch said that an exhibition and conference centre will be set up in Khasab.

The project will boost tourism and commercial activities in the governorate and of Musandam

and also place it on the global map of the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) industry, a statement said.

The green project, to be implemented next to the OCCI branch in Khasab, will be built using low impact materials and

construction methods. “The best international engineering practices have been taken into account in the design of the project, as well as it will be in line with the rules related to the COVID-19 pandemic or any future viruses.”

Small businesses find customers hard to come by



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

This is a challenge in front of small businesses to make a comeback even after the government decides to open activities in the respective sectors. Keeping them closed for long is not sustainable while opening them with full safety is a difficult task. Moreover, customers are not yet comfortable in going out and taking the services due to fear of COVID-19.

Despite keeping them open, it is difficult for many of the businesses to convince their customers, because the sense of fear of getting the virus is very much there.

Most of the small businesses have an issue with monthly rent. Even though they tried to sustain for a few initial COVID-19 months by paying late rent, it was difficult for them to pay when there was a total shutdown of the business. Most of them have a serious issue with this part of the finance and are not getting enough courage to reopen for fear of the

reminders of the landlords to pay the rent.

The other issues are recurring costs of keeping the businesses active. Electricity, water, telephone, cleaning, and giving subsistence allowance to their bare minimum staff — are certain expenditure heads, which look small but in the absence of zero or a little business, this also is big for them.

An employee of a music institute admitted to having been facing this issue. For his reasons, he did not want to disclose his identity but said the institute in which he has been working, is closed since March. "Luckily my wife has a job, I can sustain, but for the institute, the rent has been pending for several months, we got our landline telephone disconnected to save even that small amount."

He informed that the Supreme Committee has allowed the training institutes to operate, but music, art, and drawing being entirely hobby-based learning, no one wants to

Keeping them closed for long is not sustainable while opening them with full safety is a difficult task. Moreover, customers are not yet comfortable in going out and taking the services due to fear of COVID-19.

pursue this now to avoid getting the virus.

"Moreover, our audience mostly is school-going students. Their parents do not want to take any chance with their children. Such courses are hobby learning that helps in the personality development of the participants. A hobby can wait but not health. We are keeping our

fingers crossed, as we have not yet opened our activity for physical learning," he said.

The same is the situation with the owner of a newly opened restaurant in Salalah. Just 20 days after the opening of his business came the announcement for the closure of businesses to ensure physical distancing and check the spread of the virus.

"We opened this business before the beginning of the Khareef (monsoon) season with high hopes of getting good returns during the season. It was closed for several months. Even though it has opened, there is not much footfall. It is a testing time for us because we are bearing monthly expenses like rent, utility bills, and salary of employees," said Rashid, an employee of the restaurant.

He still has hope and doesn't want to give up. "I am hopeful that this will also pass like many other crises. This is the real test of patience for the small business community," he said.



Only business events in hotel banquet halls

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said that the banquet halls in hotels cannot be used for weddings, celebrations, or any kind of gatherings.

The hotel facilities can be used only for business meetings

by following the precautionary measures to ensure the safety of customers and staff.

The Supreme Committee on COVID-19 had given the approval to reopen meeting rooms in hotel establishments.

Sale of cosmetics slumps

KABEER YOUSUF
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As facemasks have become an essential part of everyday life thanks to the coronavirus, many customers prefer not to wear make-up leading to fall in the sale of cosmetics, say retailers.

In pandemic times, most women buy lash extensions or laminated eyebrows while others opt for kajal or maskara.

"Well, this pandemic has affected our business. A few customers are saying they don't need make-up because they're wearing masks, but still, most of them want to put make-up to their eyes," said Rabia Shaikh, who runs cosmetic counters in a leading shopping mall.

"There was a time some of our customers would buy some cosmetics if we succeeded in convincing them. But today, they would buy only what they need as they know rational buying," Nirosh Pandey, representative of another brand, said, adding, however, sale of nail polish is fast picking up.

Nevertheless, the sale of perfumes has not been affected much, say the vendors in the Muttrah Souq.

"Our sale of cosmetics has reduced drastically and materials for eye make-up are doing well. However, the demand for perfumes has not been affected much and the demand for both concentrate and alcohol-based perfumes is not affected much," Abdul Navas, who runs a couple of shops in the souq frequented by citizens, residents and tourists, said.

Oman's thriving cosmetics and personal care sector has seen a growth of nearly 12 per cent over the past few years and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has laid down steps to protect the users from counterfeit products.

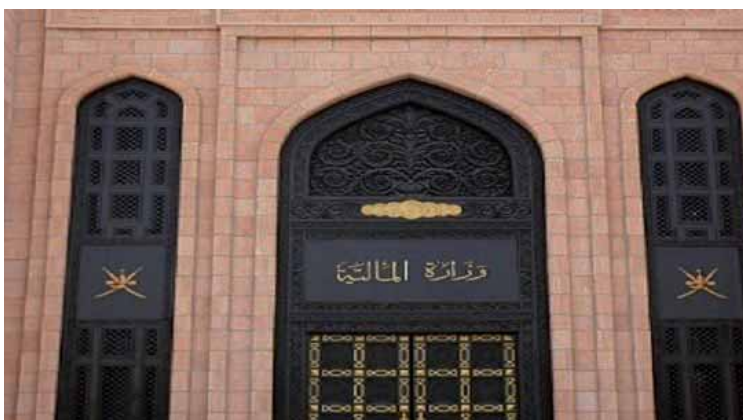
Accordingly, any cosmetic or personal care products offered, sold, manufactured, or distributed in the country must fulfill the Gulf Standard Specifications (GSS) by the Ministry in accordance with the Royal Decree 11/2017.

State institutions urged to finalise e-processing of salary transfer

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance on Monday exhorted units of the State's Administrative Apparatus to complete steps towards the finalisation of electronic transfer of salaries.

Financial Circular No 20/2020 on "Processing of electronic transfer of salaries" requires all ministries and government units to speed up the finalisation of procedures governing coordination with their respective banks of electronic transactions "to complete the mechanism of electronic processing of salary transfer".

In its circular, the ministry urged ministries and government units lagging behind in the project to fill up the application form for electronic banking services (with banks), specify the names of systems users and those authorised to disburse and deal with the designated bank account provided the particulars/accounts are revised and audited by the internal auditing unit at each ministry and government establishment.



THE MINISTRY CAUTIONED THAT THE CURRENT METHODS OF RECEIVING AND PROCESSING SALARIES WILL CEASE TO BE USED BY THE END OF DECEMBER 2020

The ministry cautioned that the current methods of receiving and processing salaries will cease to be used by the end of December 2020.

The procedures and measures come within the context of government efforts to implement electronic transformation and to protect information and data against any risks. They also reflect the Sultanate's commitment to establish security criteria and an approach to tighten control over internal auditing and risks arising from transfers pertaining to government expenditures.

— ONA

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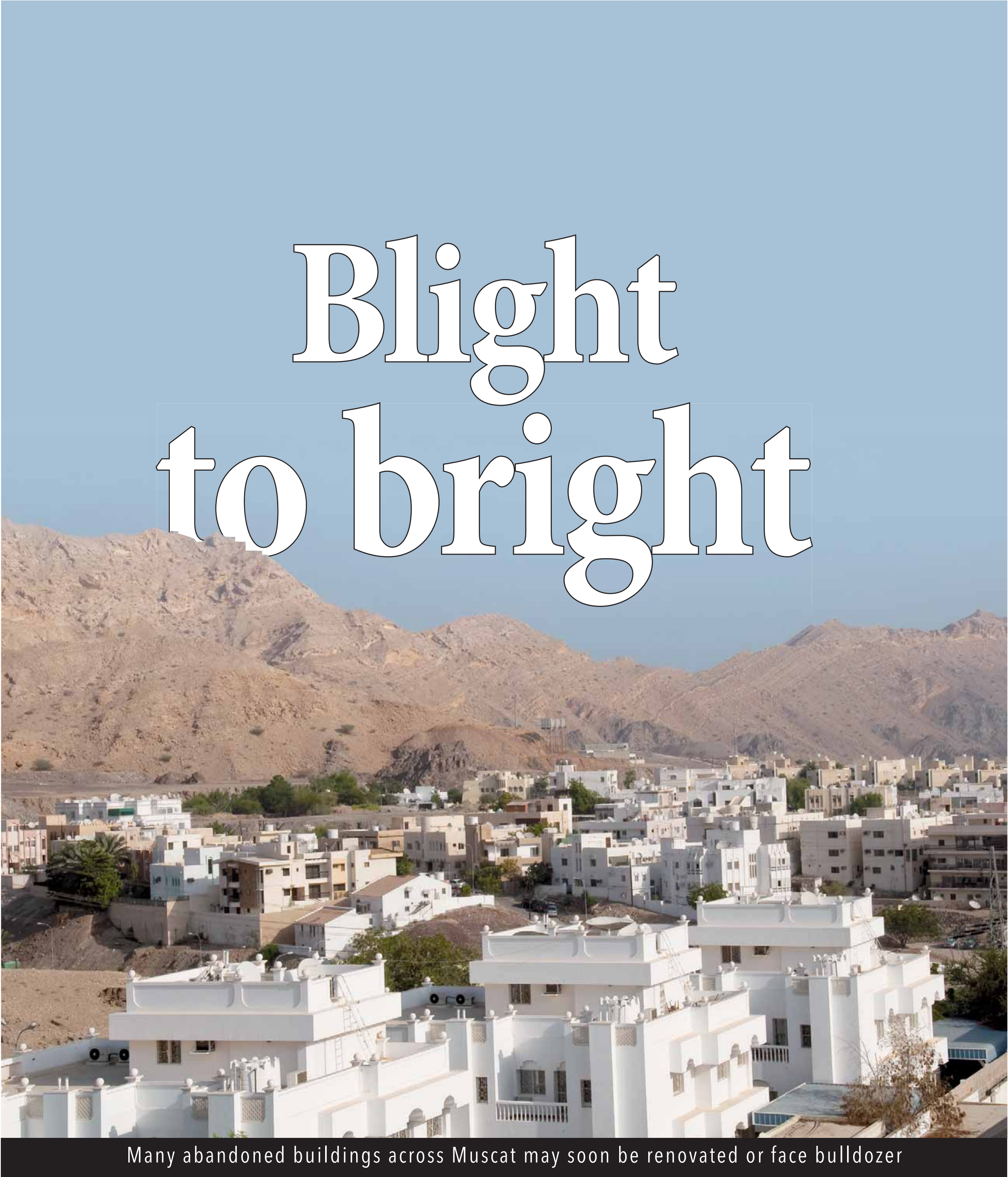
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Many abandoned buildings across Muscat may soon be renovated or face bulldozer

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Buildings that fell into disuse and decay are abundant in both urban and rural areas throughout the Sultanate.

While abandoned houses in Oman's villages are a major attraction to visitors and are the only way to have a glimpse of its historical past, many of them in the capital city of Muscat have deteriorated to the level that they have become not only an eyesore to the city but are also posing increased risk to people's health and safety.

Abandoned properties have long plagued many of the old residential neighbourhoods in the

capital and the reasons behind them are many and some of which are benign.

The government in cooperation with private builders has spent millions of rials for expanding existing towns or building new ones, partly because of changing economic structures and the trend of people moving to new settlements.

While citizens have moved to newly built residential areas because of modern facilities available in these clusters, most of the old buildings were rented out to expats.

As proper maintenance is not done on these buildings, many of them have been abandoned

“Officials will inspect old buildings and those not complying with safety regulations will have to face the consequences,”

MUNICIPALITY OFFICIAL

by the occupants leaving it to the responsibility of the civic authorities.

It is considered that the average life of an apartment is 50-60 years while of a house it is 40 years. Independent home ages much slower than an apartment building, where the amenities and common services are shared among the society residents. Their lifespan can be improved by carrying out regular maintenance.

Water pipelines, power cables and other allied services get degraded over time and worn out after a fixed period of time. Apart from this, window and door openings, poor construction quality, waterproofing, painting,

layouts of plumbing also result in ageing of a home before time.

Abandoned houses lead to many problems as they offer a safe haven for stray animals, insects and rodents, and unwanted harmful plants. Unpleasant odour from the accumulation of waste in abandoned homes can cause concerns or psychological discomfort to residents.

Indications from Muscat Municipality are that the department concerned is studying the current conditions of old buildings and will start issuing notices either for their demolitions or renovations.

“Officials will inspect old buildings and those not complying

with safety regulations will have to face the consequences,” a municipality official told the *Observer*.

The civic law stipulates that all old or unused buildings should be surrounded by a wall or a fence. The municipality has the right to warn owners to remove them and clean the sites completely or remove them through an administrative decision, with the costs recovered from the parties.

According to the official, abandoned buildings negatively affect the image of cities and their residential neighbourhoods.

In addition, he said they also pose risk of collapse endangering life and limb of people.



Macron says will keep pushing Lebanon initiative

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron admonished Lebanon's leaders on Sunday for serving their own interests ahead of their country and vowed to push ahead with efforts to prevent chaos, but appeared to have no backup plan should his initiative fail. Lebanon's prime minister-designate, Mustapha Adib, quit on Saturday after failing to line up a non-partisan cabinet, dealing a blow to a French plan aimed at rallying sectarian leaders to tackle the country's crisis.

"I am ashamed of Lebanon's political leaders," Macron told a news conference in Paris. "The leaders did not want, clearly and resolutely, to respect the commitments made to France and the international

community. They decided to betray this commitment."

For the first time, Macron also specifically questioned the role of the Hizbullah, saying that the group needed to lift its ambiguity on the political arena. Adib was picked on August 31 to form a cabinet after Macron's intervention secured a consensus on naming him in a country where power is shared out between Muslims and Christians.

Under the French roadmap, the new government would take steps to tackle corruption and implement reforms needed to trigger billions of dollars of international aid to fix an economy crushed by a huge debt.

But there was a deadlock over



a demand by Lebanon's two main groups, Amal and Hizbullah, that they name several ministers, including for finance, who will have a big role in drawing up economic rescue plans.

Macron, who also took a swipe

at leading politician Saad al Hariri, criticised both parties for blocking efforts to form a government by a mid-September deadline.

"Hizbullah can't be at the same time an army at war with Israel, an unrestrained militia against civilians in Syria and a respectable party in Lebanon," Macron said, adding that he saw no evidence Tehran was interfering in his initiative.

"Is it really a political party or does it proceed just in a logic dictated and its terrorist forces? I want us to see if in the next few weeks something is possible. I'm not naive," Macron said he would convene international partners within 20 days to assess where his efforts stood and hold an aid conference by

the end of October.

Describing the events of the last few days as a betrayal, he said political leaders had chosen "to deliver Lebanon to the game of foreign powers", destabilising the region further.

He warned them that they had 4-6 weeks to play ball. When asked whether sanctions were on the table, he said he would only consider them at a later stage in conjunction with other powers because he could not see their use for now. "This is a system of terror.

This system is no longer advancing and a few dozen people are bringing down a country and its people," Macron said. "The French initiative will persist. My commitment ... will not falter." — AFP

■ CAMEL RACE IN HERITAGE VILLAGE



Handlers drag camels equipped with robot jockeys ahead of a race at Dubai's Al Marmoom heritage village, UAE. — AFP

Jordan reopens trade gateway with Syria

AMMAN: Jordan on Sunday resumed its land border traffic with Syria, following a more than month-long closure, after applying new rules to prevent truck drivers spreading the novel coronavirus into the kingdom, officials and businessmen said.

They said authorities imposed back-to-back handling of goods to ensure Syrian, Lebanese truck drivers and others entering the kingdom maintain a social distance from Jordanian customs officials.

Officials said in mid-August they had to close the crossing, the main gateway for goods from Lebanon and

Syria to the Gulf, after dozens of infections among border officials linked to a spike in cases in neighbouring Syria.

Before the decade-old conflict in Syria, the Nasib Jaber crossing was also a transit route for hundreds of trucks a day transporting goods between Europe and Turkey and the Gulf in a multi-billion dollar annual trade.

The closure hit trade that had already shrunk because of the impact of COVID-19 and the Caesar Act - the toughest US sanctions yet that came into force in June and prohibited foreign companies trading with Damascus.

"We have had millions of dollars of losses as a result of the closure," said Mohammad al Daoud, the president of the Jordanian Truck Owners' Association that represents over 17,000 trucks.

The country's other land crossings with Saudi Arabia, Israel and the Palestinian territories have been only open for commercial goods since a lockdown in March to stem the pandemic.

Syrian authorities said 70 trailers carrying, mostly fresh produce, entered Jordan on Sunday, including transit cargo heading to Gulf mar-

kets and Iraq. While the crossing was closed, Syria's only normally operating frontier crossing had been with Lebanon, which itself has no other functioning land borders.

Lebanon was also hit hard by the closure. It relies on the crossing for overland connections to all other countries because its only other frontier is with Israel, with which it has no ties.

"This crossing is an economic lifeline for all our land exports," said Ibrahim al 'Tarshishi, the head of the Lebanese farmers' association.

— Reuters

Exiles return to rebuild post-Bashir Sudan

KHARTOUM: After 33 years in exile, El Sadig Mohamed gave up the easy life in Canada to return to help rebuild Sudan as it emerges from three decades of rule.

"After the revolution... I thought it's the right time to come back... despite the luxury people enjoy in the West," said Mohamed, who now heads the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company's health and environment department.

"It's my country and I have to do it."

The SMRC supervises exploration, production and taxation of Sudan's mining sector, notably its star asset, the gold mines.

Ousted president Omar al Bashir ruled the country with an iron fist for 30 years until his overthrow in April 2019 after months of youth-led street demonstrations.

"The Bashir regime, for 30 years, destroyed everything," said the 55-year-old civil engineer and ex-University of Calgary professor, who came home in November, six months after Bashir was toppled.

"I believe it is my duty to take part in... building a new Sudan."

Expert help is needed. Sudan's economy is in crisis, laid low by long

years of civil war under Bashir's rule, US sanctions and the 2011 secession of the oil-rich south.

SMRC's director-general, Mubarak Ardol, was in exile for eight years.

His home in Sudan's southern Nuba Mountains was attacked by government forces, and Ardol had led rebel forces against them.

He fled to Uganda in 2011. "I thought the regime would not last long. We worked with all our might to overthrow the regime," said 38-year-old Ardol.

"I felt certain I would return home very soon."

So when Bashir was forced out, Ardol returned from Kampala as quickly as he could.

"I came back immediately," he said. "I was the head of the first armed group which arrived in Khartoum on May 10, 2019."

He was appointed by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok -- a fellow returnee, who has made striking peace with the rebels who fought Bashir a priority.

Ardol aims to boost the revenues of SMRC, the African country's top moneymaker.

"We far exceeded our targets," he said. — AFP



Hundreds of Sudanese exiles have been streaming in from around the world since the ouster of president Bashir 2019 after months of youth-led street demonstrations, to help rebuild Sudan as it emerges from three decades of autocratic rule. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ALGIERS

Algeria protest movement activists jailed

An Algerian court on Sunday sentenced to three years in jail a member of the "Hirak" protest movement that forced longtime President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign last year, a rights group said.

The group, CNLD, lists prisoners of conscience in Algeria. It said earlier this month that 61 people were still behind bars for acts related to "Hirak".

It described the three-year sentence handed down to Brahim Laalami as "incredible and unacceptable".

Khaled Tazaghart, a former deputy and anti-regime activist, was also



sentenced to one year in a separate trial, the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADH) added. The Hirak movement emerged in February 2019 and led to the resignation of Bouteflika, whose plans to run for a fifth term sparked the protests.

RIYADH

Saudi to hold virtual G20 meet in Nov

The G20 leaders summit will be held virtually on November 21-22, Saudi Arabia said on Monday, as the COVID-19 pandemic thwarted Riyadh's hopes of hosting the gathering in the kingdom.

King Salman, who had surgery in July, will chair the November summit, a G20 Saudi secretariat statement said. Saudi leaders had hailed the kingdom's G20 presidency as proof of its leading role in the global economy, but the majority of the meetings have been held virtually due to the novel coronavirus.

The summit will focus on "protecting lives and restoring growth, by addressing vulnerabilities uncovered during the pandemic and by laying down foundations for a better future," the statement said.

The Group of 20 major economies have this year contributed over \$21 billion to support measures such as the production and distribution of vaccines to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

They have injected \$11 trillion to stem the economic impact of the pandemic and launched a debt suspension initiative for the world's poorest countries aimed at deferring some \$14 billion in debt payments due this year.

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Two Gaza fishermen shot dead

Hundreds of mourners on Sunday buried two Gaza fisherman shot dead at sea, as the Palestinian fishing union blamed Egypt and demanded an investigation. Three brothers were fishing on Friday in the Mediterranean Sea off the Gaza Strip, a crowded sliver of land sandwiched between Egypt and Israel when their boat was hit by gunfire. Two died and their bodies were returned to Gaza by Egyptian forces, the union said, while the third brother was wounded and remains in Egypt.

Hamas also blamed the Egyptian army. There was no immediate



comment from Egyptian officials. As hundreds gathered Sunday in the central Gaza district of Deir al Balah to bury the men, their mother pleaded with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi to let her surviving son Yasser Zaazoua come home.

In brief

■ BRISBANE

THEME PARK FINED
FOR RIDE DEATHS

The owner of Australia's biggest theme park was fined Aus\$3.6 million (\$2.5 million) on Monday for safety failures leading to the deaths of four people on a popular water ride in 2016.

Two women and two men died when their rafts collided on the Thunder River Rapids ride at Dreamworld on the Gold Coast, leading prosecutors to file three charges against owner Ardent Leisure in June.

A Queensland court found the company had breached the state's workplace health and safety laws but stopped short of the maximum Aus\$4.5 million penalty.

Ardent Leisure said it accepted full responsibility and apologised "unreservedly" in a statement to the Australian Securities Exchange.

■ DHAKA

WORKERS PROTEST
FOR RETURN TO SAUDI

Several thousand Bangladeshi migrant workers employed in Saudi Arabia, who have been stranded in Bangladesh since the pandemic broke out, rallied in Dhaka on Wednesday, calling on the government to help them return to the kingdom to work.

The protesters called on the Bangladeshi government to allow them to travel to Saudi Arabia, fearing that otherwise, they could lose their jobs.

They are struggling to return partly because there are few flights between Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh at present. Saudi Arabian Airlines is the only carrier to have resumed passenger flights between Dhaka and Riyadh, with the first flight taking place on Wednesday. Many of the protesters staged a sit-in in front of the Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry building. They called on the government to ask the Saudi authorities to extend their visas and work permits, and increase the frequency of flights between the two countries.

■ KUALALUMPUR

661 ARRESTED FOR
RULE-BREAKING

In Malaysia 661 people were arrested on Sunday for breaking rules aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus, Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said on Monday. The offences included businesses not recording customer contact details for tracing purposes, breaches of mask-wearing and social distancing requirements and "activities in pubs and nightclubs," Ismail Sabri said during a press conference.

Most arrests, 577, were made for attending illicitly reopened clubs, the minister said. Since the end of Malaysia's seven-week coronavirus lockdown in May, there have been dozens of hundreds of daily arrests over breaches of the remaining measures. — **Agencies**

Japan govt warns on suicide
after death of actress

TOKYO: Japan's government on Monday urged people to seek help if they were struggling to cope, following the death at the weekend of a popular actress.

The death of "Miss Sherlock" star Yuko Takeuchi, 40, shocked the nation and follows other recent cases of Japanese celebrities taking their lives, with figures showing a recent rise in suicides.

Takeuchi was a household name in Japan and had given birth to her second child in January.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato did not mention a particular case, but noted some people were struggling to cope during the coronavirus crisis.



Japanese actress Yuko Takeuchi

"There has been an uptick in the number of suicide cases since July. We have to acknowledge the fact that so many people are ending their precious lives," said Kato, who was health minister until earlier this month. — **AFP**

■ PROTEST AGAINST FARM BILLS



Activists belonging to various farmers rights organisations stage an anti-government demonstration to protest against the recent passing of new farm bills in parliament in Bangalore. — **AFP**

S Korea calls for joint probe into
killing of official by North

SEOUL: South Korea on Monday expanded the search for a missing fisheries official killed by North Korean troops at sea last week, a day after North Korea accused the South of raising tension by intruding into its territorial waters.

South Korea's military has accused North Korean soldiers of killing the man, dousing his body in fuel and setting it on fire near the sea border, apparently in an effort to prevent the risk of a novel coronavirus outbreak.

Officials in Seoul are calling on North Korea to agree to a joint investigation into the incident, which prompted an apology from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who said the killing should not have happened. South Korea's President Moon Jae-in said on Monday that military hotlines with North Korea should be restored to prevent unexpected incidents.

North Korea severed the inter-Korean hotlines this year as relations soured. Moon called Kim's apology "unprecedented, very rare and special" and a sign that North Korea did not want relations to worsen. He added that communication must resume to prevent future problems.

As of Monday, the North had not responded to the call for a joint investigation.

On Sunday, its state media issued a statement complaining that South Korea's naval operations had entered its territorial waters in the area, off the west coast of the peninsula, threatening to raise tensions.



A woman walks past a TV broadcasting file footage for a news report on North Korea firing an unidentified projectile in Seoul. — **Reuters File Photo**

"We have never crossed the Northern Limit Line to the North's side, but there has been differences in how the two Koreas mark the waters," South Korea Coast Guard Lieutenant Lee Hong-chea said, referring to a disputed maritime demarcation that dates to the end of the 1950-1953 Korean War.

At least six aircraft and 45 vessels were participating in the search,

including 36 ships from the coast guard and navy, and nine boats from the fisheries ministry and private owners, Lee said. North Korea said on Sunday it was conducting its own search for the man's body, and said it was considering ways to hand it over to the South if found.

Meanwhile, South Korea's President Moon Jae-in said on Monday military hotlines with North

Korea should be restored to prevent unexpected incidents after North Korean troops shot dead a South Korean fisheries official who had gone missing.

Restoring hotlines would facilitate communications and future rescue operations, Moon told a meeting with senior secretaries, as both sides continue searching for the man's body. — **Agencies**

Pakistan
oppn leader
arrested after
protest vow

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani anti-corruption officials arrested the country's opposition leader on Monday, days after he vowed to help lead efforts to dislodge Prime Minister Imran Khan's government.

Shabbaz Sharif — who heads the opposition in National Assembly — was arrested in Lahore after the eastern city's high court rejected a bail plea in a money-laundering case. "We are not scared of these arrests," said Marriyum Aurangzeb, spokeswoman for Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N).

Sharif is the brother of three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who was ousted over corruption allegations in 2017 and is currently residing in Britain after being released from prison earlier this year for medical treatment.

Maryam Nawaz — the daughter of the ex-premier — also confirmed her uncle's arrest on Twitter.

"Sharif has been arrested only because he refused to play in the hands of those who wanted to use him against his brother. He preferred standing behind prison bars than to stand against his brother," she tweeted. Khan's administration has been pushing for Nawaz's return to the country to continue his prison sentence. The arrest comes as opposition parties have reignited efforts to remove Khan from office, vowing to launch a protest movement in the coming weeks. — **AFP**

India's coronavirus cases pass six million mark

NEW DELHI: India reported its six millionth coronavirus case on Monday as it surged closer to the United States as the most-infected nation, and authorities pressed ahead with reigniting the economy.

The vast nation is home to 1.3 billion people, some of humanity's most densely populated cities and a feeble healthcare system, and for several weeks it has reported around 90,000 new cases daily — the highest in the world.

Health ministry data showed a rise of 82,000 cases on Monday, taking the total to 6.1 million and closing the gap on the United States, which has recorded 7.1 million infections. India could leapfrog the US in the coming weeks.

India has a much lower death rate than other worst-hit nations with almost 100,000 fatalities so far — fewer



A medical worker collects a swab sample from a woman for COVID-19 coronavirus test in New Delhi. — **AFP**

than half the grisly toll of 205,000 recorded in the US, which has roughly a quarter of the population.

Brazil has meanwhile recorded 140,000 deaths.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called on people to keep wearing face coverings when they ventured outside of their homes.

"These rules are weapons in the war

against corona. They are potent tools to save the life of every citizen," Modi said during his monthly radio address on Sunday.

The virus initially hit major metropolises including financial hub Mumbai and capital New Delhi, but has since spread to regional and rural areas where healthcare systems are even more fragile and patchy.

"In several of the pockets where the transmission is active, the infection has gone into the community," former national health secretary Sujatha Rao said.

"It is difficult to control transmission in such situations and a dramatic turnaround can perhaps be possible only through a rigorous implementation of a lockdown and preventive measures like mask wearing."

The government is unlikely to

reimpose major restrictions after a lockdown in March battered the economy and wrecked the livelihoods of millions of people, particularly the poor.

Some schools have now reopened, and trains, metros, domestic flights, markets and restaurants have been allowed to operate with some restrictions. The Taj Mahal also opened again for tourists this month.

Anand Krishnan, a community medicine professor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi, said authorities should focus on treating people who contract the virus.

"The only thing that we can do is take care of people who are ill — identify them faster and treat them better. And follow the social-distancing norms," he said.

— **AFP**



A elderly woman sits on a bed in a building's basement used as a bomb shelter in Nagorno Karabakh's main city of Stepanakert. – AFP

21 reported killed in Armenian, Azeri battle

YEREVAN/BAKU: At least 21 people were killed on Monday in a second day of heavy clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh that reportedly involved air power, missiles and heavy armour.

The confrontation between the two former Soviet republics has rekindled concern over stability in the South Caucasus, a corridor for pipelines carrying oil and gas to world markets. Any move to all-out conflict could drag in major regional powers Russia and Turkey.

Moscow has a defence alliance with Armenia, while Ankara backs its ethnic Turkic kin in Azerbaijan. Majority Christian Armenia and mainly Muslim Azerbaijan have come to blows periodically in their decades-long conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway region that is inside Azerbaijan but run by ethnic Armenians.

Armenia's parliament condemned what it said was a "full-scale military attack" by Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh that was receiving Turkey's help, adding that Ankara's involvement could risk destabilising the region.

Azerbaijan denied its ally Turkey was taking part in the fighting. Azerbaijan declared a partial mili-

tary mobilisation, and its foreign minister said six Azeri civilians had been killed and 19 wounded. An Armenian defence ministry representative said 200 Armenians were wounded, Interfax reported.

Nagorno-Karabakh reported 15 more of its soldiers had been killed, after saying on Sunday that 16 of its servicemen had been killed and over 100 wounded when Azerbaijan attacked. Nagorno-Karabakh also said it had recovered some territory that it had lost control of on Sunday, and said Azerbaijan had been using heavy artillery to shell areas.

Azerbaijan's defence ministry said Armenian forces were shelling the Azeri town of Terter north of Nagorno-Karabakh. Interfax news agency quoted the press secretary of Azerbaijan's defence ministry, Anar Evyazov, as saying the Azeri military occupied several strategically important heights near the village of Talish in Karabakh.

"Missile, artillery and air strikes are being applied to the enemy's positions, which forces the enemy to surrender the held positions," he said, adding that several important strategic heights around Talish village had been taken.

— Reuters

Democrats attack Trump ahead of first debate with Biden

WASHINGTON/WILMINGTON: Democrats seized on a fresh line of attack on the eve of the first US presidential election debate, accusing President Donald Trump of gaming the system after a report showed he paid paltry amounts of federal tax in recent years.

Citing tax-return data, the *New York Times* reported on Sunday the self-proclaimed Republican billionaire paid only \$750 in federal income taxes in both 2016 and 2017, after years of reporting heavy losses from his businesses to offset hundreds of millions of dollars in income.

The report also said Trump paid no federal income tax in 10 of the previous 15 years through 2017, despite receiving \$427.4 million through 2018 from his reality television programme and other endorsement and licensing deals. "It's really no surprise," Democratic US Senator Dick Durbin said in an interview on Monday, noting that Trump had bucked a decades-old tradition of presidential nominees releasing their tax returns when seeking office.

"Now we know why: this so-called billionaire business empire is a house of cards. He is facing hundreds of millions of dollars of personal debt that will come due in just a short period of time and he's had a string of business failures that he's propped up" using his tax returns.

Democratic Representative Richard Neal, chairman of the US House of Representatives' powerful Ways and Means Committee, said the Times report underscored the importance of the committee's legal effort to seek Trump's tax returns, saying in a tweet on Sunday that Trump had "gamed the tax code to his advantage."

Trump has dismissed the report as "fake news." In a post on Twitter on Monday, he said he had paid "many millions of dollars in taxes" but was entitled to depreciation and tax credits and was "extremely under-leveraged" in terms of his debt and assets. White House spokeswoman Kayleigh

Biden v Trump: the first TV debate

Tuesday Sept 29, 9:00 pm local time

"It'll be mostly personal attacks and lies"

Says he's ready to "take the gloves off"

6 TOPICS (order unknown)

- > The Trump and Biden records
- > The Supreme Court
- > Covid-19
- > The economy
- > Race and violence
- > The integrity of the election

90 minutes no ad breaks
6 x 15 min segments

MODERATOR
Chris Wallace
(Anchor, Fox News Sunday)

Reportedly doing mock debates with stand-ins

Experienced debater

Prone to gaffes

PREPARATION

QUALITIES

Working on possible Biden attack lines with aides

Experienced TV performer

Vulnerable on fine details

Joe Biden Age: 77

Donald Trump Age: 74

Where to watch

- Major US TV networks
- US media websites
- YouTube

DEBATE SCHEDULE

Sep 29	1 st debate
Oct 15	2 nd debate
Oct 22	3 rd debate
Nov 3	Election

A RECORD AUDIENCE ?

Year	Audience (million)
1960	66.4
1980	80.6
2012	67.2
2016	84
2020	?

Kennedy-Nixon Carter-Reagan Obama-Romney Clinton-Trump Biden-Trump

Sources: Commission on Presidential Debates, media AFP Photo / Brendan Smialowski / Roberto Schmidt

AFP

McEnany described the report as a political hit job that was straight out of the Democratic playbook. "We've seen this play out before ... purported tax information dropping the eve of a debate. They tried this in 2016 - it didn't work," she told Fox Business Network.

Trump and Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden will square off in their first presidential debate in Cleveland on Tuesday, just five weeks before the November 3 general election.

Polls show the former vice president leading Trump nationally and in a number of key battleground states that are likely to determine who wins the White House. Democrats are trying to turn the tables on Trump, who ran successfully as an economic populist in 2016 and who is regarded by some observers as having an edge over his challenger on the issue of who would best manage the economy.

In recent days, Biden has

Polls show the former vice president leading Trump nationally and in key battleground states

characterised the race as a clash between Scranton, the working class Pennsylvania town where he spent part of his childhood, and Park Avenue.

Trump Tower, which serves as the headquarters for the Trump Organization, is located near that tony boulevard in Manhattan. Trump has painted his economic record in glowing terms, saying his policies were responsible for boosting growth and reducing US unemployment to near 50-year lows prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

His message, however, has been badly dented by the recession triggered by the pandemic, which has led to

the cratering of the economy and put millions of people out of work.

Democrats say Trump has mishandled the pandemic, which has killed more than 200,000 Americans, and embraced policies that have favored corporations and the rich. The re-emergence of his tax history as an election issue could reinforce that theme.

"This is going to upset some voters," John Anzalone, a pollster who works with Biden, said on Twitter on Monday, adding that the Democratic nominee "will make the rich and big corporations pay their fair share of taxes."

Within hours of the Times report, Biden's campaign released a video listing the thousands of dollars in income tax typically paid by an elementary school teacher, firefighter, construction manager and registered nurse, before contrasting Trump's reported \$750 bill in 2017.

— Reuters

Pompeo urges Greece, Turkey to resolve Mediterranean row

ATHENS: The United States welcomed on Monday Greece's willingness to look for a solution to a territorial dispute with Turkey, after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo held talks with Greek officials.

Rival claims to potentially resource-rich territory under the Mediterranean should be resolved "peacefully in accordance with international law", said Pompeo and Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias in a joint statement after holding talks in Thessaloniki.

The two Nato members have spent weeks at loggerheads after Ankara sent exploration vessels into disputed waters, roping in other European powers and raising concern about a wider escalation.

Turkey has also angered Greece by repeatedly casting doubt on postwar treaties setting out the status quo in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean.

But last week Athens and Ankara said they were ready to start talks.

"Let's meet, let's talk and let's seek a mutually acceptable solution. Let's give diplomacy a chance," Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Friday to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in an address to the virtual UN General Assembly.

Pompeo, on a two-day visit to Greece, said in the joint statement that the US "welcomed Greece's confirmed readiness to engage with other countries in the region to achieve maritime delimitation agreements".



US Secretary of State Pompeo and North Macedonia, Deputy Prime Minister for Economy Fatmir Bytyqi before a meeting with the Federation of Northern Greek Industries in the northern city of Thessaloniki in the northern city of Thessaloniki. – AFP

"The strength of our bilateral relationship is at an all-time high," Pompeo tweeted earlier on Monday.

He will fly to the Greek island of Crete on Tuesday and tour the Nato naval base of Souda Bay.

Mitsotakis — who is hosting Pompeo at his family home on Crete — wants closer military ties with the US. The secretary of state last October signed a defence agreement allowing US forces a broader use of Greek military facilities.

On Monday, both sides said they intended to "further enhance their strategic defence and security partnership" in talks in Washington next year.

A key element of the October

deal was the northern Greek port of Alexandroupolis, a Balkans and Black Sea gateway of strategic value to the US navy and Nato.

The US has been granted priority status to the port after paying roughly \$2.3 million to remove a sunken dredging barge that had blocked part of the harbour since 2010.

At the time, Greek officials said the Pentagon was expected to invest over \$14 million on the Greek airbase of Larissa and around six million euros at Marathi, part of the Souda base.

The visit to Thessaloniki is also intended as a sign to the Balkans on American willingness to invest in the region, the State Department said.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

MINSK

Nobel prize-winning author leaves Belarus

Nobel prize-winning author Svetlana Alexievich, the last member of a galvanized opposition movement's leadership to have remained free in Belarus, has left the country for Germany, on Monday.

The 72-year-old, who won the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature, was said to have left Belarus on a flight operated by Belarusian airline Belavia en route to Berlin over concern for her safety. Her spokesperson, Tatyana Tyurina, attested to the prominent Belarusian independent news site Tut.by that Alexievich had travelled abroad for



personal matters unrelated to the opposition movement and intended to soon return to Belarus.

"She has planned meetings, a book fair in Sweden, and in Sicily she will be given an award," Tyurina was quoted as saying.

MADRID

Catalan separatist leader suspended from office

The Catalan separatist leader Quim Torra is to be suspended from office for disobedience, Spain's supreme court ruled on Monday.

The supreme court unanimously confirmed a ruling by the Catalan regional court from last year that Torra had appealed, which mandates that the 57-year-old cannot hold public office for 18 months.

Torra is also to pay a fine of \$35,000 dollars and has to transfer his position as regional prime minister to his deputy, Pere Aragonès.

Media reports estimated that this would happen in the next week.

Aragones is then expected to call new elections for early 2021. Torra had refused to take down symbols and posters of the Catalan independence movement from his office and other public buildings before the parliamentary elections last year, defying instructions by the electoral commission.

Some of the posters demanded the release of jailed separatists, calling them "political prisoners."

VILNIUS

Belarus oppn leader calls for Macron to mediate

Opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya on Monday urged France's president to mediate in the political crisis in Belarus and called for EU sanctions against businesses that support President Alexander Lukashenko's government.

Speaking ahead of her meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday, Tikhonovskaya said that he could be "one of the mediators" and could involve his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in a dialogue between government and opposition.

"The protests are not going



to stop," she said in an interview in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius where she fled after running against Lukashenko in an election on August 9.

Surviving and overcoming 2020

It is a period of ambiguity and confusion. Questions such as should we pay rent for commercial entities during the lockdown period, and what is the best way to get new tenants as well as the best way to make a profit seem to be thoughts for the day.

There seems to be no experts or coaches to give classes on how to survive 2020. It is not enough to cope, but we need to thrive by striving but how is it possible when 2020 looks like nothing as the years before.

It is not about recession; it is not just about having disagreements between nations, but rather dealing with uncertainties due to a virus and now struggling to ensure there is a vaccine for all, which is the current challenge. If in the past it was the wealth that divided a society between haves and the have-nots now it is the potential vaccines that are dividing nations. Not to forget the weak economies trying to stand up and families trying to make the ends meet with organisations figuring out how to stay away from drowning. “Should we try to make a move?” wonder some and that is when a statement from a friend echoed, “When the wind is blowing hard as they say keep low until it moves on.” People might want to take steps hastily or would want to give up, but we must buy time. Yet again, people with experience point out that there



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are times when decisions should be taken at the right time, if not the list of problems will just continue to add on.

People also point out that the world has seen similar calamities in the past too and nations survived them.

The impact of COVID-19 has also been the loss of so many people. Families are still mourning their loved ones, while still struggling to face the fear of the unknown. The other side of the coin has the other group which is beaming with confidence and is fed up with living in a restricted manner, and they are ready to go out and make their life happening once again. This seems to be another invisible divide between the societies. However the adventurous ones at times forget that they are going back to home where there could be someone who is vulnerable.

Experts have been pointing out that it is important to know the path of the transmission — whether it is from an infected person they have come in contact with or community transmission. But could one live in fear forever? Maybe not, if we take all precautions and patiently wait until the vaccines arrive. In the midst of all this is the struggle to survive. One of the industries that employ the highest number of people is the hospitality sector but it is the area which has had the biggest dent.

More than ever before people are looking out for jobs.

The worry has also been whether the virus has been evolving and if there is any change in mode of transmission. While some say the best thing to do is not to touch any surface, others say it is the distance maintained between people that matters.

One of the India's leading singers who passed away this weekend after going through COVID-19, S P Balasubramanyam, who has also performed in Oman on many occasions, had earlier said this is the result of our actions. In several interviews he had explained how much he loved life.

Man who had thought he was superior to all other living beings on earth is now at the whims and fancies of an invisible virus. While man tries to make the moon hospitable for human beings, living on earth is turning out to be a challenge with the unpredictability of a virus. Man is supposed to be a social being, yet today that very feature is a threat.

Man has always been building defence but nothing that could shield him so far from a virus that continues to travel across the globe. While there is a race for a vaccine among nations and companies if all mankind cannot benefit it — then the theory of survival of the fittest would not be a fair statement. Instead it would have to be ‘Survival of the ones who could afford.’

PANDEMIC’S NET

Fish sellers struggle to stay afloat in India

ANURADHA NAGARAJ

In 35 years of selling the village catch, Jennet Cleetus said business has never been so bad for her and other women who make ends meet by hawking seafood along the palm-fringed coast of Kerala in southern India.

India — one of the countries worst-hit by COVID-19 — has eased most lockdown restrictions and sought to reopen its battered economy, but some curbs on informal vendors remain and many customers are too scared to go out shopping.

“First, our men couldn't go fishing. When they did go and brought fish in, we couldn't go and buy it. Now if we buy it, we can't sell it outside our villages,” said Cleetus, 60, from her home in Valiya Veli in Thiruvananthapuram district. Additional pandemic requirements are adding to their woes, she added. “The government wants us to get an antigen test, produce the certificate and get permission from the police before we can enter the markets. The test is expensive but we have to do it now or we may die of hunger.”

Cleetus is among the tens of thousands of women fish vendors living along India's 7,500-km coastline who are battling to regain livelihoods hit by wary buyers, online sales and persistent curbs on movement and access to markets.

An estimated 25 million people make a living from fishing and related activities in India, government data states. Women make up nearly half of the workforce, taking a lead in the procuring, processing and marketing of fish, said S Velvizhi, who heads the Fish for All research and training centre at Poompuhar in Tamil Nadu state.


The government wants us to get an antigen test before we can enter the markets. The test is expensive but we have to do it now or we may die of hunger
JENNET CLEETUS
Fish seller

Traditionally, women known as headloaders sell fish door-to-door, carrying sardines, shrimps and other local fish in bamboo baskets or aluminum vessels. Others sit on pavements or operate out of fish markets.

“Many of them are single women and most of them use their income for the everyday running of their households”, said Velvizhi. “The pandemic has increased the debt burden on these women and pushed their families to the brink of poverty.”

In the middle of the lockdown, the Indian government announced broad plans to modernise the nation's fishing industry. “One of the thrust areas of the new plan is to empower women in fisheries”, Shankar Laxman, joint commissioner in Ministry of Fisheries, said.

“We are aware that the pandemic has hit women fishworkers badly. The new scheme will benefit them. We are not encouraging roadside vendors anymore and will support them to set-up modern kiosks with freezers and display cabinets to sell hygienically.” Lakshmi Kowada, president of the Traditional Fish Workers' Union in Andhra Pradesh state, said he was not impressed by the government blueprint.

“Today's ground reality is that women are not able to enter apartment blocks or housing colonies to sell fish,” said Kowada, who has been in the business for 20 years, demanding immediate financial assistance for the fish sellers. Wearing a mask and carrying extra water to wash hands frequently, Maharani Selvamani went out to sell fish at a street corner in Mayiladuthurai in Tamil Nadu a few weeks back. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

FRENCH INITIATIVE

After a cabinet fiasco, where to now for crisis-hit Lebanon?

ALICE HACKMAN

With Lebanon already mired in multiple crises, where does the failure to form a government despite intense international pressure leave the country?

Lebanon is grappling with its worst economic crunch in decades, and still reeling from a colossal blast at the capital's port on August 4 that killed more than 190 people, injured thousands, and ravaged large parts of Beirut.

France earlier this month extracted a promise from political forces that they would help prime minister-designate Mustapha Adib draw up a cabinet within a fortnight, but on Saturday he threw in the towel.

Is there a new deadline? French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday gave Lebanese leaders another “four to six weeks” to form a crisis government of independents as a prerequisite to much-needed financial aid.

“It now is up to Lebanese leaders to seize this last chance”, he said.

President Michel Aoun, who on Monday said he still stood by the French initiative, must now consult parliamentary blocs on the choice of a new premier-designate, before that candidate can even start trying to form a cabinet.

This is often a drawn-out process in Lebanon, where a complex power-sharing system seeks to maintain a fragile balance between its various political and religious sides.



▶ Lebanon's prime minister-designate Mustapha Adib speaks at the presidential palace in Baabda, Lebanon, on Saturday.

– Reuters

LEBANON IS
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In practice, main political forces usually agree on a new prime minister even before the president names him. And similarly, they back a cabinet line-up even before the premier-designate announces it.

“This will take quite a bit of time”, said Maha Yahya, Director of the Carnegie Middle East Centre.

This was bad news for a debt-

ridden country desperately in need of restarting stalled talks with the International Monetary Fund towards saving its crumbling economy.

“Meanwhile we're left with a caretaker government that really cannot take any decisions... and certainly cannot negotiate with the IMF on an economic recovery plan,”, she said. — AFP



Barcelona's Spanish forward Ansu Fati (2L) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Villarreal CF at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona. — AFP

Koeman makes debut with big win

BARCELONA: Barcelona beat Villarreal 4-0 in a sensational debut for new coach Ronald Koeman on Sunday night in La Liga.

Ansu Fati opened the scoring on 15 minutes from Jordi Alba's assist and doubled the lead three minutes later when Philippe Coutinho was allowed to stroll through midfield and play him in.

Villarreal were asleep in the first 45 minutes and a trip on Fati enabled Lionel Messi to score from the penalty spot on minute 35. With their last attack of the first half, Messi looked to find Sergio Busquets and Pau Torres turned the ball past Sergio Asenjo to make it 4-0 at the break. There were no further goals in the second half but Koeman was able to give debuts to Francisco Trincao, Pedri, and Miralem Pjanic on what was a very satisfactory first start as coach.

Koeman said after the game: "Ansu has a big future at this club. I had a word with him when he came off because he needs to be consistent and he didn't perform at his best in the last pre-season match."

"But he was at his best tonight. I am delighted with the performances, especially the movement in the first half."

SUAREZ ON TARGET

Earlier, former Barcelona forward Luis Suarez scored twice on his Atletico Madrid debut as Diego Simeone's side beat Granada 6-1.

Suarez was named among the substitutes and looked on as Diego Costa put Atletico into the lead on nine minutes. Angel Correa doubled the advantage two minutes into the second half and the impressive Joao Felix made it three on 65 minutes.

On 68 minutes, Suarez came on and it took him just four minutes to set up fellow sub Marcos Llorente with his first touch of the ball.

Five minutes from time Llorente returned the favour with Suarez heading in his cross for his first Atletico goal and the team's fifth.

And two minutes into injury time he hit the post and scored from the rebound to make it 6-1 after Jorge Molina's consolation for Granada.

Atletico coach Simeone tried to


Ansu has a big future at this club

RONALD KOEMAN
Barcelona coach

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS ON SUNDAY

Eibar 1 (Kike 48) Athletic Bilbao 2 (Lopez 40, 87)

Osasuna 1 (Torres 38) Levante 3 (Melero Manzanares 41, Roger 77, Morales 81)

Atletico Madrid 6 (Costa 9, Correa 47, Felix 65, Llorente 72, Suarez 85, 90+3) Granada 1 (Jorge Molina 87)

Cadiz 1 (Salvador Sanchez Ponce 48) Sevilla 3 (L. de Jong 65, Munir 90, Rakitic 90+4)

Valladolid 1 (Guardiola Navarro 66-pen) Celta Vigo 1 (Aspas 44)

Barcelona 4 (Fati 15, 19, Messi 35-pen, Torres 45-og) Villarreal 0

ON SATURDAY

Alaves 0 Getafe 0

Elche 0 Real Sociedad 3 (Portu 55, Januzaj 77-pen, Lopez 90+4)

Real Betis 2 (Mandi 35, Carvalho 37) Real Madrid 3 (Valverde 14, Emerson Aparecido 48-o.g., Ramos 82-pen)

Valencia 1 (Wass 38) SD Huesca 1 (Siovas 63)

dampen the euphoria that was bound to surface after such a big win.

"We don't want to get things out of proportion," he said.

"Suarez does what we know he can do. But rather than focus on his two goals I am happy with the way he found space and his assist."

"His arrival is going to generate a level of competition for places that will only be good for the team."

Costa could find his place under threat. The Brazilian-born Spain international said: "I have let the club decide my future. I don't want to be a dead-weight for them."

Elsewhere, Sevilla beat Cadiz 3-1 and there was another former Barcelona player on the scoresheet as Ivan Rakitic got the third in the impressive away win. — **dpa**

LEICESTER STUN CITY WITH GOAL SPREE



Leicester City's Jamie Vardy celebrates scoring their third goal against Manchester City to complete his hat-trick with teammates in Manchester. — Reuters

ANDY JALIL
LONDON

After being dominated for all but the last ten minutes of the first half, Leicester came back strongly to take control. Jamie Vardy inspired the team to inflict an overwhelming 5-2 defeat on Manchester City and completed his second hat-trick against Pep Guardiola's side. In 685 previous matches as a manager, Guardiola had not seen five goals conceded by his teams.

He said: "It's tough but we have to accept it. We didn't create much and started to think we weren't playing well. We put pressure on ourselves to score the second but we have to be calmer. We were anxious, we got nervous when not creating chances. We told them at half-time that they were playing good, try to be patient. Then to concede the second and third it became more difficult."

Guardiola went on to say: "They defended deep. We don't have players to attack in the box. It's difficult when a team plays deep and doesn't run. We need to be more patient, not chase the second and third goals. It's not easy to accept it. Maybe we should let them get out more and punish them on the counter."

Leicester restricted City to just two chances in the first half, one of which gave them the lead. It came from a corner which was not cleared well and Mahrez

sent a powerful shot into the top left corner. Seven minutes before the break the visitors equalised when Vardy took a pass from Harvey Barnes, got the better of Kyle Walker and was brought down. He made no mistake with the first of his two penalties.

Leicester's second and third

goals came two minutes apart. In the 54th minute, Tim Castagne after receiving a beautiful pass from Yiouri Tielemans, crossed from the right, the ball went past Mendy and Nathan Aka and Vardy nipped in to flick into the net. He then went on to complete his hat-trick from the resulting penalty when Eric Garcia fouled him. It got worse for City in the 77th minute when substitute James Maddison cut in from the left to hit a looping angled shot from 25 yards.

From an embarrassing score-line of 4-1, Nathan Ake pulled one back for City. His header from a corner five minutes from time brought him his first goal for his club. But Leicester weren't finished yet. They were awarded a third penalty when Mendy fouled Maddison with just two minutes remaining. Vardy had left the field a couple of minutes earlier and so it was Tielemans who took the spot-kick, his powerful drive gave no chance to Ederson.

Asked if it was the best performance since taking over as Leicester manager, Brendan Rodgers said: "It's the best result for sure. We showed a great mentality. We didn't panic. We knew we could push on in the second half."

He explained his game plan a little: "We set the team up to play a little differently. We're normally high pressing but we wanted to deny them space deeper. You won't have seen too many of my teams play like that. You have to work like hell against City. We were such a threat offensively."

IN 685 PREVIOUS MATCHES AS A MANAGER, GUARDIOLA HAD NOT SEEN FIVE GOALS CONCEDED BY HIS TEAMS

MILAN

Totti visits girl awakened from coma by his voice

Roma legend Francesco Totti on Monday visited a teenage girl in hospital who emerged from a nine-month coma after hearing a recording of the former Italian football star's voice.

Ilenia Matilli, a 19-year-old footballer with Lazio's women's team but a great fan of city rivals Roma, was left in a coma last December by a car accident in which her friend was killed.

Former World Cup winner Totti had recorded a video message a few months ago, urging: "Ilenia don't give up, you'll do it, we are all with you."

Matilli finally emerged from the coma and as promised Totti, 43,



on Monday visited her in Rome's Gemelli hospital where she is undergoing rehabilitation.

"She smiled at me, hugged me and started crying," Totti said. — **AFP**

ROME

Juve 'work in progress' after Roma draw

Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo was disappointed by his side's performance in Sunday's 2-2 Serie A draw at AS Roma but explained that his side was still a "work in progress".

The Italian champions failed to impress in the capital and had a Cristiano Ronaldo double to thank as they came from behind twice, the second time while down to 10 men after Adrien Rabiot was shown a second yellow card. "It was a step backwards, but as a team, we are a work in progress," Pirlo said. "We haven't had the chance to try much out in pre-season because there were practically



no friendly matches."

Pirlo said new signings like striker Alvaro Morata and midfielder Arthur Melo are yet to be fully integrated. — **Reuters**

DOHA

Persepolis oust Al Sadd with late goal

Issa Alekasir scored with a brilliant late header on Sunday to put Iran's Persepolis into the quarterfinals of the Asian Champions League with a 1-0 victory over Qatar's Al Sadd.

Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr also advanced with a similar margin with Moroccan Abderrazak Hamdallah on target in the 75th minute against domestic rivals Al Taawoun in the late match.

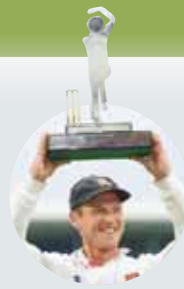
On Sunday, the early match was decided when Alekasir leapt in front of the defence and powered the ball into the net in the 88th minute after Omid Alishah had executed a perfect corner at the new brand Education City Stadium, one of the venues for the 2022 Fifa World Cup.



The result left the normally calm and collected Xavi furious as he felt Al Sadd could have earned a penalty had VAR been in use in the tournament. — **AFP**

BANGLADESH CALLS OFF SRI LANKA SERIES

Bangladesh on Monday called off the forthcoming Test series in Sri Lanka because of coronavirus restrictions imposed by the hosts they say make preparing impossible. The Bangladesh Cricket Board took the decision after Lanka refused to ease quarantine rules, which included players being confined to their rooms for 14 days.



ESSEX WIN BOB WILLIS TROPHY AFTER DRAW

Essex won the Bob Willis Trophy after a five-day draw against Somerset ended in their favour thanks to their superior first-inning run total at Lord's. Somerset declared early on the final day on 272-7 to leave Essex a target of 237 while giving themselves 80 overs to claim all 10 wickets. Essex finished on 179-6 to end the match in a draw.

THIEM ACES CILIC TEST AT ROLAND GARROS

SERENA OVERCOMES PATCHY START

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (FIRST ROUND):

Hugo Gaston (FRA) bt Maxime Janvier (FRA) 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, 6-3; Yoshihito Nishioka (JPN) bt Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x19) 7-5, 6-3, 6-3; Tommy Paul (USA) bt James Duckworth (AUS) 6-2, 6-3, 6-2; Jack Sock (USA) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 6-4, 6-4, 6-3; Dominic Thiem (AUT x3) bt Marin Cilic (CRO) 6-4, 6-3, 6-3; Pierre-Hugues Herbert (FRA) bt Michael Mmoh (USA) 6-3, 6-2, 6-3; Mikhail Kukushkin (KAZ) bt Fabio Fognini (ITA x14) 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (7/1), 6-0; Pedro Martinez (ESP) bt Aleksandar Vukic (AUS) 7-5, 6-4, 6-0

WOMEN (FIRST ROUND):

Bernarda Pera (USA) bt Cici Bellis (USA) 7-6 (7/3), 6-1; Amanda Anisimova (USA x25) bt Tamara Korpatsch (GER) 6-2, 6-0; Iga Swiatek (POL) bt Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x15) 6-1, 6-2; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS) bt Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS x28) 6-1, 2-6, 6-1; Katerina Siniakova (CZE) bt Lauren Davis (USA) 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Sara Errani (ITA) bt Monica Puig (PUR) 6-2, 6-1; Kiki Bertens (NED x5) bt Katarina Zavatska (UKR) 2-6, 6-2, 6-0; Elina Svitolina (UKR x3) bt Varvara Gracheva (RUS) 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Renata Zarazua (MEX) bt Elsa Jacquemot (FRA) 6-1, 6-2; Tsvetana Pironkova (BUL) bt Andrea Petkovic (GER) 6-3, 6-3; Serena Williams (USA x6) bt Kristie Ahn (USA) 7-6 (7/2), 6-0; Christina McHale (USA) bt Karolina Muchova (CZE x22) 6-2, 6-4; Petra Kvitova (CZE x7) bt Oceane Dodin (FRA) 6-3, 7-5; Jasmine Paolini (ITA) bt Aliona Bolsova (ESP) 6-4, 6-3

PARIS: Serena Williams made a slow but successful start on Monday to her latest pursuit of a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at Roland Garros while US Open winner Dominic Thiem navigated a testing first-round tie against former major champion Marin Cilic.

The American star is chasing an elusive 24th Grand Slam title to match Margaret Court's all-time mark, but clay is her least favoured surface.

An error-prone beginning from Williams left world number 102 Kristie Ahn serving for the first set before the three-time Roland Garros champion prevailed 7-6 (7/2), 6-0.

Williams, playing at the French Open for the 18th time, dropped serve twice as Ahn moved 5-4 ahead in the opener in a rematch of their first-round encounter at Flushing Meadows.

But the sixth seed forced a tie-break that she sealed with an ace after a 74-minute slog before charging to an ultimately comfortable victory.

"She played very well in the first set, it wasn't easy for me and she hit a lot of winners," said Williams. "It was important for me to stay focused."

Williams, seeded sixth here, has not gone beyond the last 16 in

Paris since her defeat to Garbine Muguruza in the 2016 final. Her last major came at the 2017 Australian Open while pregnant.

Meanwhile Thiem, the runner-up to Rafael Nadal in Paris the past two years, defeated 2014 US Open champion Cilic 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in their second meeting at a major this month.

"My level was good. I was very happy with the way I played from the beginning to the end basically," said Thiem.

Having captured his maiden Slam in New York, Thiem is trying to become the only man in the Open era to win his first two majors at successive tournaments.

A steady display from Thiem saw the Austrian break Cilic six times under the roof of Court Philippe Chatrier on another gloomy day at Roland Garros, pushed back from its customary May-June slot due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I really love this tournament, it's by far my best Grand Slam tournament so far," said Thiem, who plays American qualifier Jack Sock in the second round.

"I'm from Austria so I know how it is to play in these cold conditions. I love it when it's not too fast. I felt well from the first moment I came here."



Austria's Dominic Thiem eyes the ball as he returns it to Croatia's Marin Cilic. — AFP

TOUGH CONDITIONS

Nadal, on a mission to match Roger Federer's record of 20 major titles, arrives at the French Open short of preparation and unhappy with the tournament's choice of new balls.

"The conditions here are probably the most difficult conditions for me ever at Roland Garros for so many different facts," said Nadal, who won the first of his 12 French Open titles in 2005.

"The ball is completely different. It is super slow, heavy. It's also very cold, slow conditions."

Nadal has been beaten just twice in 95 matches at the tournament but now must adjust to the unusual autumnal chill in Paris.

The heavier atmosphere could negate some of Nadal's lethal topspin as he heads into the event without a clay title under his belt for the first time. However a first-time meeting with Egor Gerasimov, the world number 83 from Belarus, is unlikely to trouble him.

The competition began on

Sunday amid steady drizzle in temperatures struggling to reach 10 degrees (50F).

Play on Monday was initially delayed by more persistent rain. Twice Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova defeated Oceane Dodin 6-3, 7-5 in the only match to start on time under the new roof on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Dutch fifth seed Kiki Bertens recovered from a poor start once conditions improved to overhaul 112th-ranked Ukrainian Katarina Zavatska 2-6, 6-2, 6-0.

Third seed Elina Svitolina scrapped past Varvara Gracheva of Russia 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 while last year's runner-up Marketa Vondrousova was bundled out 6-1, 6-2 by 2018 junior champion Iga Swiatek. — AFP



Serena Williams of the US serves the ball to Kristie Ahn of the US. — AFP

Tewatia blitz powers Royals to record IPL chase

DUBAI: India's Rahul Tewatia smashed five sixes in one over as Rajasthan Royals completed the Indian Premier League's highest-ever run chase against Kings XI Punjab on Sunday.

Tewatia, a leg-spin bowler and left-hand batsman, hit the ball over the fence seven times as he made 53 off 31 balls as Steve Smith's Royals, set 224 to win, reached 226 with four wickets and three balls to spare in Sharjah.

Smith hit a quickfire 50 and Sanju Samson top-scored with 85 before Tewatia took the Royals to within one run of Kings XI's 223 for two.

"I was not hitting the ball well initially, I saw in the dug-out, everybody was curious as they know that I can hit the ball long," said Tewatia, who was promoted to number four but struggled at first, scoring eight from 19 balls before he cut loose.

"It was a matter of one six.

SCOREBOARD

KINGS XI PUNJAB

L Rahul c S Gopal b A Rajpoot69
M Agarwal c Sanju b T Curran 106
Glenn Maxwell not out13
Nicholas Pooran not out25
Extras (1b 0lb 1nb Open 8w)10
Total (20 overs) 223-2
Fall of wickets: 1-183, 2-194
Bowling: Jaydev Unadkat 3-0-30-0, Ankit Rajpoot 4-0-39-1, Jofra Archer 4-0-46-0, Shreyas Gopal 4-0-44-0, Rahul Tewatia 1-0-19-0, Tom Curran 4-0-44-1

RAJASTHAN ROYALS

J Buttler c S Khan b S Cottrell4
S Smith c M Shami b J Neesham 50
S Samson c L Rahul b M Shami 85
Tewatia c M Agarwal b Shami ...53
R Uthappa c N Pooran b M Shami 9
Jofra Archer not out13
T Parag b M Ashwin0
R Curran not out4
Extras (1b 1lb 0nb Open 6w)8
Total (19.3 overs) 226-6
Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-100, 3-161, 4-203, 5-222, 6-222
Bowling: Sheldon Cottrell 3-0-52-1, Mohammed Shami 4-0-53-3, Ravi Bishnoi 4-0-34-0, Jimmy Neesham 4-0-40-1, Murugan Ashwin 1-3-0-16-1, Glenn Maxwell 3-0-29-0

After that, I got going. I hit five in an over and it was amazing."

Tewatia, who has played seven first-class matches, hit West Indies quick Sheldon Cottrell for five sixes — four in a row — in the 18th over to turn the tables at the Sharjah cricket ground, which has short boundaries.

Tewatia finally fell to paceman Mohammed Shami on the last ball of the 19th over but Jofra Archer, unbeaten on 13, and Tom Curran, who hit the winning boundary, saw the Royals home. The previous best chase of 215 was also by the Royals, against the Deccan Chargers in 2008.

Tewatia's innings eclipsed Kings XI opener Mayank Agarwal's maiden IPL century in a 183-run opening partnership with skipper KL Rahul, who made 69. — AFP



Rahul Tewatia of Rajasthan Royals plays a shot against Kings XI Punjab at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium. — BCCI



Sultanate of Oman MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND YOUTH TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
12/2020	ELECTROMECHANICAL and TELECOMMUNICATIONS CONTRACTING and MAINTENANCE	MAINTENANCE & OPERATION OF ELECTRO-MECHANICAL SERVICES, CIVIL, CLEANING AND PEST CONTROL SERVICES TO SULTAN QABOOS SPORTS COMPLEX AT BAUSHER FROM 1/1/2021 TO 31/12/ 2022	200/-	EXCELLENT

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 08/10/2020.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 9:00am 09/11/2020.

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24166670 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om



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sport

SPORTS MEDICINE EXPERT
ADVISES PRE-PARTICIPATION
MEDICAL SCREENING FOR
ALL ATHLETES

ENSURE FITNESS BEFORE RETURN TO ACTION

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT

At a time when Oman is returning to sports action under strict vigil against COVID-19 pandemic, a veteran sports medicine expert with 40-year experience in the field advises pre-participation medical screening for all athletes.

Apart from the COVID-19 tests and medical protocols, the sportspersons are advised to take a thorough medical screening before returning to sports activities, Dr Mahmoud Shehabullah, (pictured) Senior Sports Medicine Physician at the Ministry of Sports Affairs, said.

“Start PPE (Pre-participation medical screening) beginning of the year or season whoever wants to participate in sports or physical activities. This is important to avoid injuries and ensure fitness while returning to sports action,” Shehabullah, who had attended eight Olympics with Oman contingent as medical officer, told *Oman Observer*.
Pre-participation medical

screening is one of the mainstays of sports medicine.

“The medical screening will definitely reveal if the athlete is fit to join sports. It will also give insight into the treatment of his/her problem and the steps to be taken next.”

“PPE reveals many hidden medical issues and biomechanical deficits which can be treated or corrected to join sports.”

In Oman, football is the most popular sport but most of the players are ignorant about stretching or warming up.

“One cannot step suddenly onto playing field without a minimum warm-up. Such move will make the player prone to injury very fast,” the Bangladeshi physician said.

Dr Mahmoud says that consequences of wrong training with wrong equipment in a wrong surface with no warming up and stretching will be very costly for athletes.

“Most athletes, both professionals and amateurs had undergone a deep stress as they were unable to do



outdoor sports activities during the lockdown period. So the key is to maintain a good balance mentally and physically when they return to sports activities.”

Shehabullah, who has monitored the Oman sports injuries closely for nearly four decades, feels there is an urgent need to educate even the professionals about the chances of injuries while playing.

In the step for the future, he proposes that all educational institutions should include basics of prevention of injuries and protection in the curriculum.

“The basics of warming up and stretching should be included in the education syllabus.”

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY

There are lots of talents in the country but lacking proper training and temperament. One must blend the recipe of 3TTTs – talent, training and temperament – for grooming future stars, he opined.

Sports psychology is playing very important part in the performance of an athlete.

“Unfortunately this discipline is yet to act fully which is a major discipline in sports medicine,” he said.

The sports medicine expert says there is no shortcut treatment for injuries like tear of ligaments, tendons, muscles, shoulder injury, groin as well as ankle injuries. “No need to rush to join sports with

incomplete rehabilitation.”

“The player can return to sports only when he is pain free with flexibility and full range of motion with the clearance from physician or physio.”

Shehabullah also warns against getting advise from unqualified or fake physios.

He cautions against using injectables/supplements available in the market which may be detrimental for the health. For poor performance without injury players should consult recognised sports psychologist, he added.

“Say no to drugs and play true,” he signed off.

As a hobby, Dr Mahmoud has a rare collection of Olympic pins of different countries — which numbers more than 6,000 — gathered from 8 Summer Olympic Games (1988 Seoul to 2016 Rio Brazil).

He had also attended three World Cup hockey events, six Asian Games and three Arab Games in his event-filled sports medical career.

TIPS FOR RETURNING SPORTSPERSONS

Ensure
overall basic
fitness

Warm up
before and
after at least
12 mins

Ergometer
cycling/
treadmill
specially
for cardio

Strengthening
exercises of
the lower &
upper body

Sports drills
under
qualified
physio/trainer

Proprioception/
plyometrics

Proper
hydration

Weight
control

Proper
diet/
nutrition

Rest/
sleep
to care

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
MARKET

3,621.41



CRUDE
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude	\$ 41.39
Brent Crude	\$ 41.55
Light Crude	\$ 39.86





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Oman registers 12.4pc decline in H1 revenues

The disparity is primarily attributable to the downtrend in international oil prices witnessed over the course of this year, combined with an output cut agreed by Oman in line with its commitment to the Opec+ grouping to help shore up global oil prices

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Government revenues slumped 12.4 per cent to RO 4.830 billion during the first six months of 2020, resulting in a deficit of RO 827 million for the period, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) revealed in its latest monthly bulletin.

Contributing to the decline were lower oil and gas export revenues, as well as significant shortfalls in customs duties and corporate income tax, according to the report.

Net oil revenue fell 16.3 per cent to RO 2.572 billion during the six months to June 30, 2020, down from RO 3.074 billion during the same period of 2019.

The disparity is primarily attributable to the downtrend in international oil prices witnessed over the course of this year, combined with an output cut agreed by Oman in line with



its commitment to the Opec+ grouping to help shore up global oil prices.

LNG export revenues too fell 21.2 per cent to RO 740 million this year, down from RO 934 million last year.

Citing Ministry of Finance data, the bulletin also noted a steep 33 per cent drop in corporate income tax, which tumbled to RO 351 million this year, down from RO 524 million during the first half of 2019.

An assortment of 'Other Revenues' registered a 26.4 per cent uptick to RO 1.066 billion, up

from RO 843 million last year.

In line with a series of belt-tightening measures adopted by the government to help rein in the country's burgeoning fiscal deficit, total public expenditure too declined 8.9 per cent to RO 5.656 billion as of end-June 2020 versus, RO 6.174 billion for the corresponding period of 2019.

This includes a 25.6 per cent reduction in Investment Expenditure which fell to RO 817 million this year, down from RO 1.098 billion last year.

Interest on loans surged 47 per cent to RO 410 million this year,

up from RO 279 million during the first half of 2019.

The deficit accrued over the first half was financed largely through a combination of withdrawals from reserves (RO 500 million) and local loans (RO 270 million).

Keeping pace with these declining trends, the contribution of various economic sectors to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) also fell proportionately during the first half of this year, the NCSI report said.

The share of the Oil & Gas sector at current prices slumped 20 per cent to RO 4.085 billion

this year, down from RO 5.103 billion for the first half of 2019. Non-oil activities too registered a 10 per cent decline to RO 8.701 billion this year, versus RO 9.660 billion last year.

With the sole exception of the Agriculture & Fisheries sector, almost every other economic sector witnessed a decline in its contribution to the GDP — a reflection of the substantive impact that the economic downturn, combined with the coronavirus pandemic, has had on the domestic economy.

The Hotels & Restaurants

Non-oil activities
registered a
10
per cent decline in
their GDP contribution
during the first half of
this year

sector, which was among the worst hit, saw its share plummet 34.3 per cent to RO 104.5 million during the January-June 2020 period, down from RO 159 million last year.

The Services sector — one of the key pillars of the non-oil economy — shrank 10.6 per cent to RO 6.094 billion this year compared to RO 6.817 billion last year. Real estate services too fell 23 per cent to RO 515 million, from RO 669 million in 2019.

Other sectors that contracted in terms of their contribution to the GDP (at current prices) were: Industry RO 2.217 billion (-11.3 per cent), Manufacturing RO 1.098 billion (-9.5 per cent), Financial Intermediation RO 993 million (-5.6 per cent), Transport, Storage & Communication RO 700 million (-13.5 per cent), and Construction RO 768 million (-16.8 per cent). The sole bright spot was Agriculture, Fisheries which climbed 13.2 per cent to RO 390 million.



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

France unveils big budget as virus cases worsen

PARIS: France launched a free-spending budget plan on Monday, saying a fresh spike in new COVID-19 cases justified its unprecedented loosening of the purse strings.

After \$537 billion of emergency spending this year to save the economy from the virus fallout, the government built its 2021 budget plan around a 100 billion "recovery plan", first announced this month and partly funded by EU money.

The budget came after France's health services on Saturday reported 14,412 new virus cases over the previous 24 hours — only slightly lower than the record 16,000 registered on Thursday and Friday.

The fresh spike threatens to

overwhelm hospitals, health officials warned, while the government imposed fresh curbs to limit the spread of the virus, including on restaurants, bars and sports facilities.

"There is no reason to give up the idea of a recovery just because the health difficulties have re-emerged", Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told a news conference.

The spending boost is to help the French economy to rebound strongly next year, by eight percent according to the budget, after crashing by an expected 10 percent this year, Le Maire said.

"We are implementing this recovery fund so it can be used up quickly and have the greatest possible impact on growth", he said.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Oman's Tax Authority has issued Ministerial Decision 79/2020 setting out Country-by-Country Reporting (CbCR) obligations for multinational entity groups (MNE groups) headquartered or operating in the Sultanate.

The new measures, which are effective for financial years commencing on or after January 1, 2020, follow Oman's accession to the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Inclusive Framework (BEPS IF) on October 20, 2017. In the interim period, Oman's authorities have taken significant steps to implement the BEPS minimum standards to "cement its position as an attractive regional and global hub for foreign direct investment", said multinational professional services firm Deloitte.

In an advisory to customers, Deloitte explained that the Oman CbCR rules will apply to MNE groups that have consolidated revenues of at least RO 300 million (approx. \$780 million)



in the financial year immediately preceding the reporting period, based on the consolidated financial statements of that preceding year. It is necessary that the ultimate parent entity (UPE) of the MNE group is resident in Oman or an Omani resident constituent entity (CE) of the MNE group (with its UPE outside Oman) is nominated as the Surrogate Parent Entity (SPE).

"The CbC report must be submitted within 12 months of the end of the reporting period.

Accordingly, for the financial years commencing on January 1, 2020, the CbC report must be submitted by December 31, 2021. For Constituent Entities in Oman, notifications to the Sultanate of the Oman Tax Authority shall therefore be due by the last day of the reporting period (by December 31, 2020)", Deloitte further noted.

The content and format of the CbC report, according to the advisory is in line with the CbCR guidance of the Organization

In the interim period, Oman's authorities have taken significant steps to implement the BEPS minimum standards to "cement its position as an attractive regional and global hub for foreign direct investment

DELOITTE

for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). "It includes aggregate information related to the amount of revenue, profit (loss) before income tax, income tax paid, income tax accrued, stated capital, accumulated earnings, number of employees and tangible assets other than cash or cash equivalents with regard to each jurisdiction in which the MNE group operates".

Competition intensifies for Oman Humanitarian Desalination Challenge

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

The Oman Humanitarian Desalination Challenge is a global water prize offering a \$700,000 cash reward to the winner. First announced in March 2018, the Challenge seeks delivery of a low-cost, stand-alone, hand-held desalination device, suitable for short-term use and rapid deployment during humanitarian crises.

The aim of the Challenge is to stimulate innovation in small-scale desalination and to contribute to solutions to freshwater scarcity, key areas of focus for organisers MEDRC and The Research Council of Oman (TRC).

“MEDRC has always had a close working relationship with the TRC and it was during one of my many conversations with the then Secretary General, Dr Hilal al Hinai that the concept for a water research prize such as this was conceived. At the time we were discussing the potential for existing desalination technologies to become miniaturized in terms of cost, scale and environmental impact. The Oman Humanitarian Desalination Challenge is a direct result of that conversation and is an attempt to focus the transformative potential of desalination technologies on wider humanitarian and development needs,” said Ciarán Ó Cuinn, MEDRC centre

director.

A key function of the Challenge is the low barrier to entry, being open to anyone regardless of professional background or expertise. Despite the pandemic, the Oman Humanitarian Desalination Challenge drew global interest this year, with 47 teams from 20 different countries applying, spanning a range of backgrounds including water research centres, private companies and start-ups, alongside individual innovators and problem solvers.

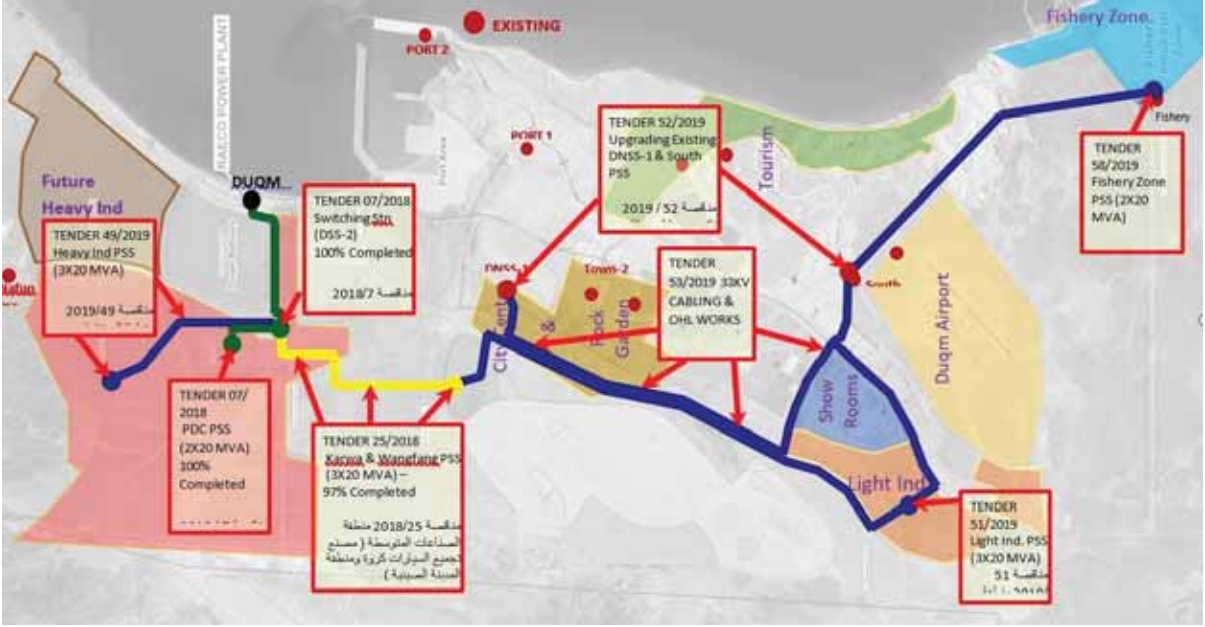
Designed to continue each year until 2022 or until a winner is declared, this year’s call for applications opened in February as the first impacts of the COVID-19 virus registered across the world.

In recognition of the mass disruption caused by the pandemic, MEDRC extended the closing date for applications from March 26 to May 11, 2020.

From the pool of 47 applicants, and following a preliminary review round, 34 teams progressed to qualify as authorised competitors.

These teams now have until October 4, 2020, to submit a video and written narrative, detailing how their innovation meets each of the 7 prize criteria. MEDRC will conduct a review of each submission to determine a shortlist. Shortlisted finalists are required to submit their working devices for testing and final judging.

Tanweer connects key Duqm projects to power supply



In all, RO 22.6 million worth of investments are being made by Tanweer in new transformer stations and electrical networks for heavy and light industries, as well as fisheries and exhibition clusters in the SEZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

A primary substation that will provide electricity to a number of key industrial investments at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm has been completed and is currently under pre-

commissioning.

The 3 x 20 MVA primary substation is one of several investments being undertaken by the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), member of Nama Group, in developing electricity supply infrastructure necessary to support industries coming up in the SEZ.

In all, RO 22.6 million worth of investments is being made by Tanweer in new transformer stations and electrical networks for heavy and light industries, as well as fisheries and exhibition clusters in the SEZ.

Tanweer is also upgrading the power station in South Duqm and Duqm North Switching Substation (1). In addition, it is currently supervising the construction of a HV distribution network with a total route length of 67 km spread across the SEZ areas. “These projects contribute significantly to the

development of Duqm’s electrical infrastructure to meet current and future electricity demand at Al Duqm,” said Tanweer.

Tanweer had also recently completed the construction of a Primary Substation for Duqm Port Industrial Lands, Duqm North Switching Station 2 and is currently in the final commissioning tests stage to complete the primary substation in the Light and Medium Industries Area, which will feed the Karwa Bus Assembly project, and Oman Wanfang Chinese Industrial Zone.

In earlier years, Tanweer had substations feeding the ship repair yard, Port of Duqm Government and Commercial Quays, Duqm Town Commercial and Residential areas, Duqm South, Duqm Airport, Tourism Zone, and labour complex of Renaissance Village. The distribution networks covered more than 1,000 km.



Redefining the GCC’s economic future

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

The long-term outlook for MENA based investors looks surprisingly positive due to digital acceleration and other signals of growth in non-oil sectors due to the global pandemic, according to Aberdeen Standard Investments (ASI).

COVID-19 continues to ravage economies around the world. The most recent forecast from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts a very gloomy end to 2020 for the GCC with GDP expected to shrink by 7.6 per cent for the year, notably worse than the 2.7 per cent contraction predicted in April.2

However, ASI believes the strength and wealth of governments in the region, plus the push to expedite diversity across economies, point towards a far healthier long-term outlook, with some early signs starting to appear.

Edris Alrafi, Head of Middle East & Africa for Aberdeen Standard Investments (ASI), said: “2020 will be remembered by most as the worst year in recent history for many reasons and the economic devastation should not be downplayed with the remainder of the year expected to be extremely difficult.



“However, for investors, it is important to look further ahead, which is where we will see the positive effects of more digitally enhanced and diversified economies coming into play. This is certainly the case in the GCC where there are signs the pandemic has accelerated the economic diversity from oil to non-oil sectors.

“This is a very positive signal for investors as they look to focus on longer-term growth opportunities, rather than be stifled by immediate challenges such as austerity measures via the swift and substantial government spending cuts.”

The IMF shares some of this optimism, projecting growth of 2.5 per cent in 2021, spurred to some extent by the fact that most equity markets in the GCC have

rebounded amid easing lockdown restrictions and rising oil prices.

An election-free agenda coupled with relatively low levels of government indebtedness – 39 per cent in Kuwait, 15 per cent in Saudi Arabia and 13 per cent in Abu Dhabi – are further advantages for the GCC as the region is looking to leverage new opportunities.

A report from global research giant Frost & Sullivan highlights ‘megatrends’ that are expected to shape a more diversified GCC economic future. It claims the Internet is expected to account for 5 per cent of GDP by 2030, up from 4.1 per cent in 2018, with all six states expected to launch 5G mobile services by the end of 2020.

Other notable insights from the report include: 250 fintech

This is a very positive signal for investors as they look to focus on longer term growth opportunities, rather than be stifled by immediate challenges such as austerity measures via the swift and substantial government spending cuts

EDRIS ALRAFI
Head of Middle East & Africa, ASI

start-ups are operating across the GCC, with regional activities projected to expand by 50 per cent over the next five years; and the cumulative installed generation capacity for renewable energy across the GCC is expected to reach 72,300 MW by 2030.

Advances in technology across 5G networks and artificial intelligence, among others, are also expected to help drive digital transformation across all sectors.

A recent global study by Mastercard shows a surge in online payments in line with the

rush to e-commerce, with 54 per cent of respondents in the UAE saying they believe the preference of e-commerce over in-store shopping is a trend that is here to stay.

Edris continued: “The dial has been cranked up on digitisation across all sectors and we are already seeing new consumer behaviours fuelled by the pandemic.

“Regional governments embracing new business models and committing to fostering private enterprise in sectors slated for growth will help accelerate this further as will the continued investment in higher-quality infrastructure, renewable energy and digital systems. This should result in strong performances in future-focused sectors such as technology, telecoms and healthcare.

“With several trends breeding diversity in the economic make-up and mind-set within the GCC, there is increasing scope for the right conditions to future-proof growth in the next five to ten years. This could provide us with strong long-term markets helping us to recover from the devastation of 2020.”

ASI is a global asset manager overseeing \$670 billion of assets worldwide.

BRIEF BITES

MUSCAT



ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK TO HOLD SPECIAL BUSHRA PRIZE SAVINGS ACCOUNT DRAW FOR THE 50TH NATIONAL DAY

As part of its efforts to reward its loyal customers, Alizz Islamic Bank will be holding a special Bushra Prize Savings account draw for the 50th National day on November 18, 2020. There will be 50 winners of RO 1,000 each as hiba from the shareholders’ funds in this special 50th National Day draw.

Alizz Islamic Bank’s Bushra Prize Savings Account is Oman’s first Shari’a-compliant prize savings account and reflects the bank’s commitment in pioneering innovative Sharia-compliant products and services that cater to customers’ needs.

In addition, Bushra Prize Savings account customers also enter the daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and annual draws that are conducted by Alizz Islamic Bank.

MUSCAT

ALFA: NLG’S LEARNING PLATFORM



As part of its professional development for employees and Company’s digital approach, National Life and General Insurance (NLG) has travelled a great distance in self-learning for Company staff through its online platform ALFA (Active Learning For All). All employees are assigned online courses designed and compiled by NLG’s Learning & Development team with the objective to help them upskill in different genres.

These online courses are designed to serve different fields and sharpening various skills, for example, leadership development, stress management, selling skills, customers service, e-mail etiquette, in addition to some other technical & professional courses. NLG had also launched a pilot project for the upcoming talent development titled as Fast Track Career Development.

Oil prices slip as surge in virus cases clouds demand recovery



Pump jacks operate in an oil field in Midland, Texas. – Reuters

SINGAPORE: Oil prices dipped on Monday as rising coronavirus cases upset hopes for a smooth recovery in fuel demand, with the main crude benchmarks on track for their first monthly falls in multiple months after slipping last week.

Brent crude fell 37 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to \$41.55 a barrel after dropping 2.9 per cent last week. US West Texas Intermediate was at \$39.86 a barrel, down 39 cents or 1 per cent, following a 2.1 per cent decline last week.

Brent is on track to fall for the first month in six while WTI is headed for its first monthly loss since April as the reimposition of mobility curbs in some countries clouds the outlook on fuel demand recovery.

“New COVID-19 case numbers are accelerating in major US states, renewing fears of mobility restrictions challenging the ongoing oil demand recovery in the last quarter,” ANZ analysts said.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Monday that the global oil market has been stable for the past few months and the demand-supply balance restored, but warned of the risks of a second wave of

Brent fell 37 cents, or 0.9 per cent to

\$41.55

a barrel after dropping 2.9 per cent last week

COVID-19 cases.

More crude is also being exported from Opec producers Iran and Libya despite efforts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies to limit output.

Last week, US energy firms also added oil and natural gas rigs for a second week in a row, according to Baker Hughes.

Still, Opec Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo said on Sunday that commercial oil inventories in OECD countries are expected to stand only slightly above the five-year average in the first quarter of 2021, before falling below that level for the rest of the year.

The one factor that may offer some support to the market is the prospect of strike action, ING analysts said. — Reuters

US judge blocks Trump ban on TikTok new downloads

TikTok said it was pleased with the injunction and added it would maintain its “ongoing dialogue with the government to turn our proposal, which the president gave his preliminary approval to last week, into an agreement.”

WASHINGTON: A US judge has temporarily blocked a Trump administration order that was set to bar Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc’s Google from offering Chinese-owned short video-sharing app TikTok for download at 11:59 pm on Sunday.

US District Judge Carl Nichols in Washington issued the preliminary injunction in a brief order late on Sunday. He declined “at this time” to block restrictions set to take effect on November 12 on technical and business arrangements which are crucial for the app to function properly.

Nichols’ detailed written opinion is expected to be released as soon as Monday. The Commerce Department said in a statement it “will comply with the injunction and has taken immediate steps to do so.”

The statement, which defended the TikTok order and Trump’s executive order demanding owner ByteDance divest its TikTok US operations, did not specify whether the government would appeal.



A 3-D printed figures are seen in front of displayed Tik Tok logo in this picture illustration. – Reuters

The injunction comes at a time when negotiations are under way to hammer out terms of a preliminary deal for Walmart Inc and Oracle Corp to take stakes in a new company, TikTok Global, that would oversee US operations. Trump has said he had given the deal his “blessing.”

But key terms of the deal — including who will have majority ownership — are in dispute. ByteDance has also said any deal will need to be approved by China and Beijing has revised its list of technologies subject to export bans, in a way that gives it a say over any TikTok deal.

TikTok said it was pleased with the injunction and added it would maintain its “ongoing dialogue with the government to turn our proposal, which the president gave his preliminary

approval to last week, into an agreement.”

John E Hall, a lawyer for TikTok, argued earlier on Sunday that the ban was “unprecedented” and “irrational”.

“How does it make sense to impose this app store ban tonight when there are negotiations under way that might make it unnecessary?” Hall asked during a 90-minute hearing. “This is just punitive. This is just a blunt way to whack the company. ... There is simply no urgency here.”

Representatives for Chinese state media welcomed the ruling.

“I think it is in line with morality, justice and common sense,” Hu Xijin, the editor in chief of the *Global Times* newspaper said on Twitter on Monday.

Chinese state media have said they see no reason for China

to approve the deal, describing it as based on “bullying and extortion”.

Trump’s administration contends that TikTok poses national security concerns as personal data collected on 100 million Americans who use the app could be obtained by China’s government. Any deal will also still need to be reviewed by the US government’s Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS).

The Justice Department said a preliminary injunction would be “interfering with a formal national security judgment of the president; altering the landscape with respect to ongoing CFIUS negotiations; and continuing to allow sensitive and valuable user information to flow to ByteDance with respect to all new users.” — Reuters

IPO LAUNCH

Siemens Energy spinoff raises 16 billion euros in market debut

FRANKFURT: German industrial giant Siemens on Monday spun off its energy unit, raising just under 16 billion euros, in one of the largest stock market debuts in Europe this year.

Shares in Siemens Energy traded at 22.01 euros (\$23.27) at open before sliding back to 19.91 euros at 0713 GMT, lagging expectations.

Analysts had predicted the new company’s market cap to reach between 17 billion and 24 billion euros. In March, Siemens said the energy unit had equity of about 17.3 billion euros.



A bell is pictured during the initial public offering (IPO) of Siemens Energy at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange in Frankfurt, Germany. – Reuters

As an independent company, we now have the entrepreneurial flexibility we need to help shape the global transformation of the energy markets in a sustainable and economically successful manner

CHRISTIAN BRUCH
Siemens Energy CEO

“As an independent company, we now have the entrepreneurial flexibility we need to help shape the global transformation of the energy markets in a sustainable and economically successful manner,” said Siemens Energy’s chief executive Christian Bruch

Despite the coronavirus pandemic upending business plans worldwide, Siemens pressed ahead with the spinoff first announced in May 2019.

Siemens Energy, with its oil and gas, turbines, power transmission and related services businesses, joins medical devices arm Healthineers and lightbulb

unit Osram on the stock market, which debuted in 2018 and 2013 respectively, as Siemens slims down to become more agile.

Siemens chief executive Joe Kaeser in 2017 said he wanted the company to become a “fleet of ships” rather than an awkward tanker, as it seeks to chart a course through a more challenging time for industrial companies.

Other sprawling German firms such as Thyssenkrupp, Bayer and Continental have similarly spun off units to face a fast-changing trade climate, digitalisation, and cheaper metal imports from China. — AFP

BRIEF BITES

SANTIAGO

CHILE LAUNCHES \$2 BILLION PLAN TO BRING BACK JOBS LOST DURING PANDEMIC



Chilean President Sebastian Pinera (pictured) announced on Sunday the launch of \$2 billion in subsidies aimed at creating new jobs or recovering those lost during months of lockdown aimed at stemming the coronavirus pandemic in the globe’s top copper producer.

Pinera said the government would pay private businesses up to 50 per cent, or as much as \$317 of the salaries of any newly hired employee for the next six months. A programme will cover up to \$200 of the salaries of employees who return to work after a furlough period during the coronavirus crisis. <

PARIS

ARCELORMITTAL SHARES SOAR ON US DEAL



Shares in steel giant ArcelorMittal soared more than seven per cent on the Paris stock exchange on Monday after the firm said it would merge its US operations with producer Cleveland-Cliffs for \$1.4 billion.

ArcelorMittal, hit by a second-quarter slump in steel demand owing to coronavirus lockdowns, added 7.04 per cent to 11.04 euros in early trading although it remains down 29.4 per cent on the year as a whole.

The firm, headquartered in Luxembourg, said in a statement that Cleveland-Cliffs would acquire 100 per cent of ArcelorMittal USA for a combination of one third cash and two thirds stock. < AFP

BEIJING

CHINESE INVESTORS FLOCK TO NEWLY-LAUNCHED FUNDS TARGETING ANT IPO



Chinese investors are pouring into newly-launched mutual funds targeting Ant Group’s upcoming initial public offering, underscoring strong demand for technology shares at a time when Chinese tech firms are facing increasing US scrutiny.

Alibaba Group’s fintech arm Ant Group aims to raise about \$35 billion in

a dual listing in Hong Kong and Shanghai’s STAR Market, expected in October, in what could become the world’s largest initial public offering. < Reuters



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Classifieds

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Classified Section

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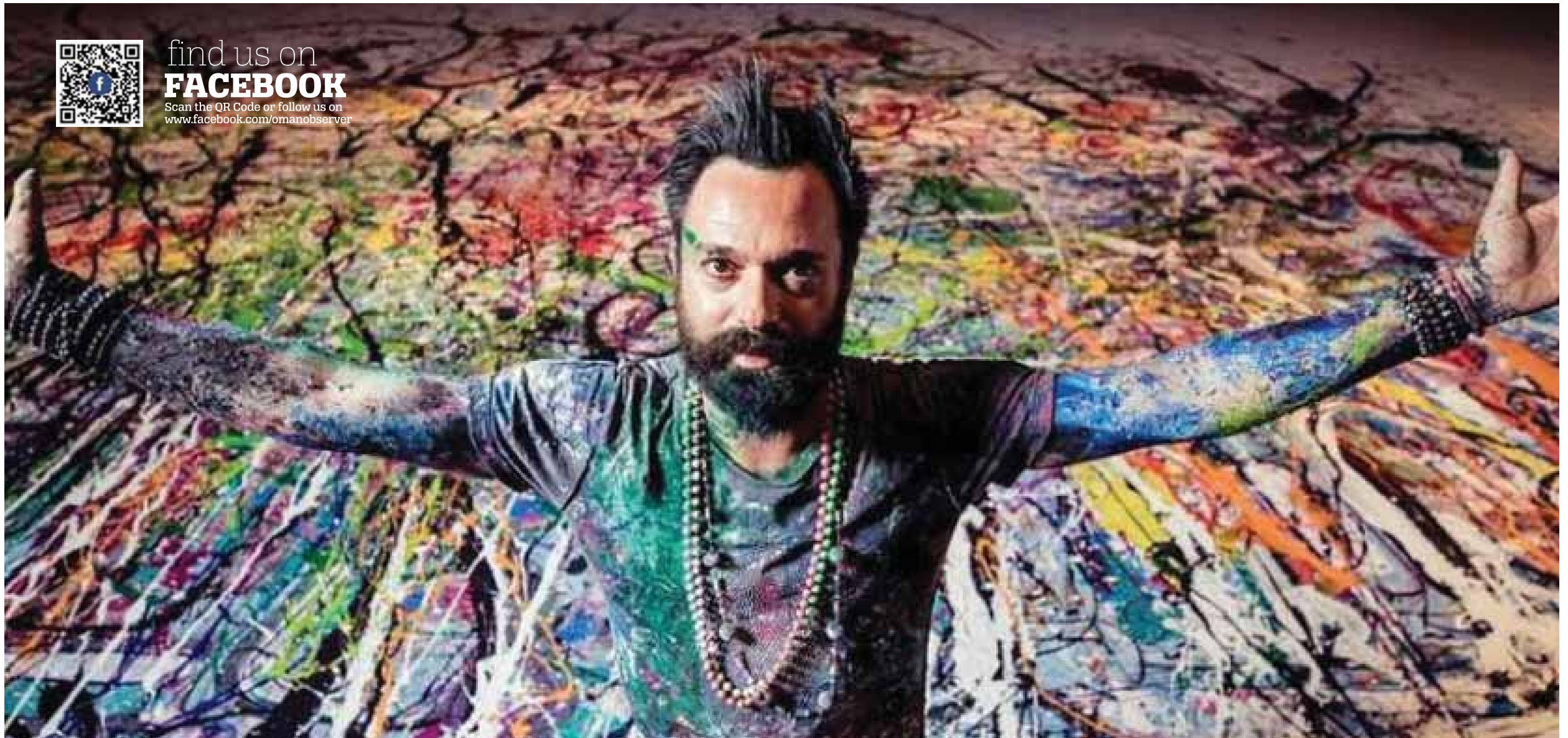
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UK artist aims to unite with 'humanity-inspired' work

British artist Sacha Jafri paces bare-foot back and forth across his giant canvas stretched across the ballroom floor of a luxury Dubai hotel, listening to a young girl singing.

She performed on Friday on the almost-completed canvas measuring just under 2,000 square metres (20,000 sq feet), before it is broken down next week into 60 framed works.

His goal is to set a new *Guinness World Record* for the largest art canvas and raise \$30 million to fund health and education initiatives for children in impoverished parts of the world.

The 44-year-old contemporary artist says he hopes to double that amount when parts of his "Journey of Humanity" work go up for auction in February 2021.

"They will own a piece of the largest painting ever created, but more than that they'll own a piece of history and, ultimately, humanity," Jafri, in paint-splattered jeans and shirt, told AFP.

For seven months and at a pace of 18-20 hours a day, Jafri has been working on his latest creation with almost 300 layers of paint, using 1,400 gallons (more than 5,000 litres) and about 1,000 brushes.

"It's been a big journey", he said.

"It depicts the soul of the Earth, nature, humanity itself, the love and nurture of the mother, the guidance and protection of the father as they guide their child through life and enable them to feel safe,



loved and brave, so they can grow their wings, make their dreams come true and take them into the solar system", Jafri said.

The artist said coronavirus has focused his efforts towards connecting people to counter its impact on children.

Children from 140 countries submitted paintings online to be included in Jafri's creation with its eight "portals".

"I paste those into the circular portals... I want to take us to a better world through the hearts, minds and souls of our children", said Jafri.

The children's paintings

His goal is to set a new *Guinness World Record* for the largest art canvas and raise \$30 million to fund health and education initiatives for children in impoverished parts of the world

depicted their own journeys, with many drawing a spikey ball representing the disease.

"Imagine what... people can do if we actually stopped all the nonsense and realised one world, one soul, one planet", said Jafri, who has four more days to complete the work.

For the day's last show on the canvas, girls and boys performed an acrobatic, interpretive dance to John Lennon's "Imagine", with Jafri on the sidelines giving encouragement.

"Completely intertwine with what's in front of you. Become one", he appealed. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

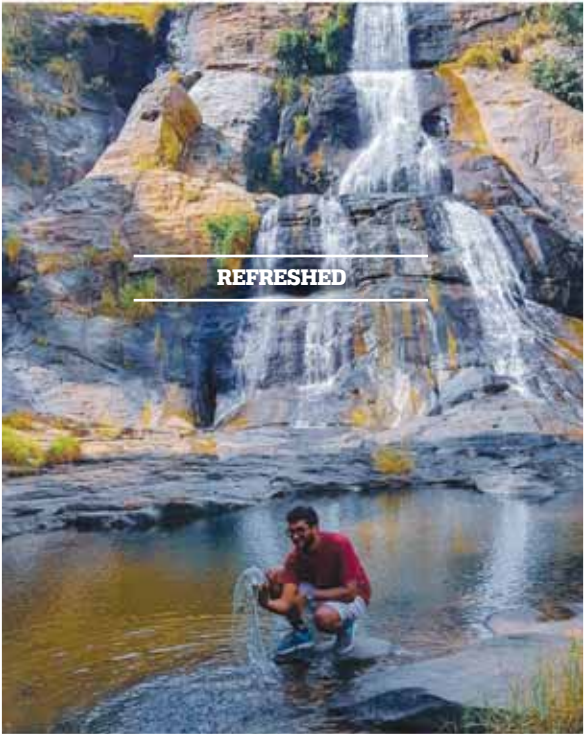


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DISCOVERY

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Remains of Jurassic sea predator found in Chile's Atacama desert



Scientists have unearthed the remains of Jurassic sea predators resembling killer whales in the world's driest desert in Chile. Pliosaurs were reptiles from about 160 million years ago with a more powerful bite than Tyrannosaurus rex, according to University of Chile researchers. The fossils are the second oldest record of this species in the Southern Hemisphere. Chile's vast Atacama desert, once largely submerged beneath the Pacific Ocean, is now a moonscape of sand and stone with parts



untouched by rain for years. Pliosaurs reined the region, with their large skull, elongated face, short neck, menacing teeth on a hydrody-

namic body and fin-like limbs. Scientists found jaw, tooth and limb fragments of the creatures "ecologically similar" to killer

whales at two sites in the Loa river basin near the mining city of Calama. The find helps scientists fill gaps in evolution, said Rodrigo Otero, a University of Chile palaeontologist who led the research. The complete fossil, under excavation since 2017, is likely to measure six to seven meters (19.7 to 23 feet). The skull is around a meter (3.3 feet) long, with teeth each around eight to 10 centimetres (3.1 to 3.9 inches) long, Otero said. The study was published in the Journal of South American Earth Sciences in early September. — Reuters

FASHION



Valentino picks Milan over Paris for rare live fashion show

MILAN: Italian fashion group Valentino ditched the glitzy setting of central Paris for a foundry on the outskirts of Milan to present its latest collection, a rare live catwalk in the time of COVID-19 with a restricted group of mask-wearing guests. The show brought down the curtain on Milan fashion week, which has hosted a mix of physical and virtual catwalks for its first edition since coronavirus restrictions made the heady mix of glamour, celebrity and hype at such events more complicated. Valentino had never presented a women's collection in Milan, and its last menswear show in Italy's fashion capital was in 2007. "In normal times we'd be in Place Vendome in Paris, but now here we are all wearing face masks," the brand's designer Pierpaolo Piccioli told reporters after the show. "When, in late August, we decided to go ahead with the catwalk, it seemed appropriate to support Italy at such a difficult time and give our backing to the Italian fashion system." Piccioli picked non-professional models for the show, which combined men's and women's designs for Spring/

Summer 2021, casting 66 youths in the streets of Milan, Paris and London in a nod to diversity. Some 200 guests attended, or about one-fifth of the usual audience for Valentino's ready-to-wear shows. To live music by British singer Labrinth, they strutted the runway in a series of black and white short dresses, brightly coloured, ruffled chiffon robes, silk overcoats with flower prints, as well as lace and crochet daywear. There were also jeans as part of a collaboration project with Levi's to revive the classic 517 boot cut model made popular in the late 1960s. The first country to be hit hard by the virus in Europe, Italy enforced one of the strictest and longest lockdowns from early March. Now new infections are just under 2,000 a day, steadily rising again, but below levels seen in France, Spain and Britain. Its fashion and textile industry, which with a turnover of 95 billion euros (\$98 billion) and 600,000 workers is the second most important nationwide, is reeling from a plunge in sales. According to business lobby Confindustria, exports of women's fashion fell by 24% in the six months to June. — Reuters



■ PERFORMANCE ART

Building bridges between Western, Arabic cultures

BY LIJU CHERIAN

An Italian art couple with exemplary theatrical background and a passion for travelling are making it big in Oman. They have a special love for the Arab world and its traditions, having cultivated their own ways to donate joy to others through dancing and playing with culture.

Dr Luca Moretti and Lucia Oliva, the loving art couple who have made Opera and theatre meet contemporary art in Oman through many events.

Both help connect theatre and Renaissance art all over the Arabian Gulf. Through their theatrical career they have exported Italian classical traditions.

Due credit must go to the couple who proudly brought such invaluable painting of Renaissance Italian Masters like Tiziano, Tintoretto and others to the Gulf.

Ludica Antiqua, an event company, which they created performed on many occasions in the Middle East and the Gulf since 2001.

The company helps cooperate with theatres and groups around the world and focuses on creating bridges among different cultures.

The first event was the opening of Lucia's solo exhibition at Bait Al Zubair Museum in 2017, when they built a special dance choreography



and performed the music of La Traviata in traditional clothes.

The Muscat Design Festival in 2018 saw them as protagonists, when they brought their artistic spirit to involve students of the Scientific College of Design in a peculiar art workshop that ended with a funny group musical game on the notes of a super famous opera aria.

They organised original 'Opera style' shows last November at Bait Al Zubair Museum, with a 'unique musical fairytale scene', including waltzes, polkas and other dances of the 19th century. Their historical costume themed choreography and dancing which they created and performed was highly appreciated. The period costume events are always story or legends inspired and themed which many times took inspiration from 'One Thousand and One Nights'.

On other occasions, they created plots starting from real episodes and stories which

were themed on imaginary fantastic journey through times and places, aiming to build bridges between Western and Arabic cultures.

The reaction of the audience was so enthusiastic that many projects planned earlier this year had to be put off due to COVID-19.

They had scheduled period dance classes workshops at Bait Al Zubair, shows at the exhibition centre on the occasion of congresses and events. Now, all events have been rescheduled for next year.

Lucia, a renowned international fine artist, is also a professor of criminal law who used to teach at University of Genoa (UniGe). She graduated with 'magna cum laude' as the best student of her course.

At the age of 18 she won an important drawing contest, prevailing on many renowned and professional cartoonists, and the following year she was commissioned to create her winning character of the contest in a 3D huge solid shape

to be brought on parade during Carnival celebrations and then to publish a book for children. At University she met her 'Prince Charming' and future husband Luca Moretti, brilliant lawyer at the beginning of his career. He too had a passion for dancing, history and creating social events. During holiday in Venice in 2001 at Carnival season and dreaming to dance at candlelit in a noble mansion like in fairy tales, they found themselves invited by chance to one of those exclusive parties at Palazzo delle Prigioni, one of the most beautiful stately homes in San Marco Square. "The atmosphere was so romantic that you could not understand whether that was fairytale or reality," recollects Luca.

The launching of Ludica Antiqua involved many other professional artists from musicians, opera singers, actors and dancers and not only charming grand balls in Venice were a usual appointment but Italy, Europe

and the entire world became their stage.

Their first performance in the Gulf was at the inauguration of Mercato Shopping Mall in Dubai. Later, shows in Qatar, Jordan and Bahrain saw their company protagonist of many prestigious events.

The climax was the yearly Italian Festivals of Culture in Bahrain which included a series of themed events, such as the Italian Grand ball, historical lectures and dance workshops. Stories about their art life on the environmentally friendly island of Alicudi north of Sicily (Unesco heritage), was chosen by them and other international artists to experiment a sustainable lifestyle.

Here Luca has her art studio where many other artists from different countries chose to live and work. They include maestro Francesco Gardella (Orchestra conductor), Tiziana Ducati (Soprano), Pippo Veneziano (Tenor), Davide Piaggio (Tenor), Carlo Truzzi (Shadow artist), Giovanni Anchisi Magicus (Magician) and others.

The couple have duplicated Alicudi Island here in Qantab village where they have been resident since September last and named their home as 'LuLu' from their first names.

"As far as all the ordinary and normal season is concerned, nothing has been scheduled due to COVID-19, not only for them but for all theatre companies and we hope Corona will soon be defeated," they conclude.

features

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Building bridges between Western, Arabic cultures

Italian art couple Dr Luca Moretti and Lucia Oliva love Arab and world theatre helping create bridges among different cultures. Hard hit by the pandemic, they are keeping fingers crossed and have planned many Opera and theatre events in Oman for 2021... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

ART



UK ARTIST AIMS TO UNITE WITH ‘HUMANITY-INSPIRED’ WORK

British artist Sacha Jafri paces barefoot back and forth across his giant canvas stretched across the ballroom floor of a luxury Dubai hotel, listening to a young girl singing... Story on **Page 17**

DISCOVERY



REMAINS OF JURASSIC SEA PREDATOR FOUND IN CHILE’S ATACAMA DESERT

Scientists have unearthed the remains of Jurassic sea predators resembling killer whales in the world’s driest desert in Chile... Story on **Page 18**

READ



ONE OF US IS LYING

BY KAREN M. MCMANUS

One of Us Is Lying is the story of what happens when five strangers walk into detention and only four walk out alive. Everyone is a suspect, and everyone has something to hide.

FASHION



VALENTINO PICKS MILAN OVER PARIS FOR RARE LIVE FASHION SHOW

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CELEBRATE



WORLD HEART DAY

The world’s leading cause of death according to the World Heart Federation is heart disease and stroke with millions falling prey to the disease annually. Heart Day is part of an international campaign to create awareness about the disease and prevent stroke. Celebrate today by eating healthy, getting some exercise and if you smoke, quitting it.