

■ PANDEMIC COULD PUSH 115M INTO EXTREME POVERTY

As many as 115 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty this year due to the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the World Bank warned on Wednesday. That is higher than the bank previously estimated, even as recently as August, when the worst case was put at 100 million. And the bank's new report estimates that by 2021, 150 million could be living below the extreme poverty threshold of less than \$1.90 a day. **DETAILS ON P5**



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NADAL PASSES SINNER TEST TO STORM INTO FRENCH OPEN SEMIFINALS



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TRUMP URGES CONGRESS TO PROVIDE \$25 BILLION BAILOUT FOR US AIRLINES



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THAI ARCHAEOLOGISTS HUNT ANCIENT ARTWORK



OMAN

Dialysis unit at Saham Hospital

SAHAM: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday signed an agreement to fund the establishment of a dialysis unit at Saham Hospital at a cost of RO 500,000 donated by a businessman from the Wilayat of Saham. Sultan bin Saif al Saadi, Director-General of Services in North Al Batinah Governorate explained that the project will contribute in improving the services provided to patients with kidney failure and ensure the continuity of these services. The dialysis unit will be established on a 778,8 sq metre land inside Saham Hospital. **SEE ALSO P3**

REGION

Lebanon to begin talks on new PM

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun will begin parliamentary consultations to name a new prime minister next week, his office said on Wednesday. It will mark the third attempt to name a new premier in less than a year following a series of resignations in the face of a deepening economic crisis and a port explosion that ravaged entire districts of the capital. Outgoing prime minister Hassan Diab quit in the wake of the colossal August 4 explosion at Beirut port that killed more than 190 people, and wounded at least 6,500. **DETAILS ON P6**

INSIDE



WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 34°C
MIN: 27°C

SALALAH
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 24°C

NIZWA
MAX: 39°C
MIN: 22°C

SUNRISE 06.01 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:46

DHUHR: 11:59

ASR: 15:21

MAGHRIB: 17:53

ISHA: 19:03



Panel to evaluate sports, youth and culture activities

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Wednesday issued a ministerial decision to form a committee to evaluate sports, youth and culture activities and programmes.

The decision comes in implementation of the Royal Decree No 87/2020 establishing the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and defining its specialisations and organisational structure. The committee will evaluate the activities and programmes undertaken by the departments under study prior to the



cancellation and merging of the Ministry of Sports Affairs, the Ministry of Arts Affairs and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture.

It will look into all that relates to cultural affairs, youth, culture and sports as stated in Annex (1) of the Royal Decree No 87/2020.

The decision reflects an approach to keep up with aspirations of youth and to explore futuristic aspects that pertain to developing generations that are capable of creativity and innovation in all areas. The aim is to contribute to the accomplishment of Oman Vision-2040.

The ministerial decision appoints Sayyid Said bin Sultan bin Yaarub al Busaidy, Cultural Affairs Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, as Chairman of the assessment committee — along with the following as members of the committee: Ahmed bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Hilal bin Saif al Siyabi, Khalifa bin Saif al Issa'ee, Hisham bin Jumaa al Sinani, Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Yahmadi, Awadh bin Mohammed al Luwaihi and Maryam bint Nassir al Kharboushiya (also as rapporteur of the committee).

— ONA

COVID-19 DEATHS IN OMAN TOUCH 1,000

IT IS COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY TO CURB THE VIRUS

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The Sultanate recorded another ‘undesirable’ milestone close on the heels of reporting over 100,000 confirmed cases this week.

On Wednesday, with the reporting of 10 more deaths the number of COVID-19 related deaths touched 1,000.

Oman has now become the second country in the GCC to report 1,000 deaths after Saudi Arabia, which leads the regional table with 4,923 victims.

Expressing concern over the issue, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, on Wednesday, said that any decision taken by the Supreme Committee is based on the prevailing situation as per the epidemiological situation, and is subject to review again by the Supreme Committee.

Controlling infections is not only the responsibility of the government, but that of each and every member of the population

DR AHMED AL SAEEDI
Minister of Health

He said that the decision on reopening of schools was taken by the Supreme Committee and it will decide if it needs to be reviewed.

The minister said the controlling the infection is not only the responsibility of the government, but that of each and

every member of the population as social gatherings continue to take place.

It may be noted that the first death in Oman was that of a 72-year-old citizen on March 31, followed by another citizen on April 4.

The third death was that of an expatriate from Muscat on April 10, while the fourth one was on April 12, a 37-year-old expatriate from the capital.

According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), a total of 734 Omanis succumbed to the virus, of which the age group of 70-79 saw maximum deaths, followed by the age group of 80+, 60-69, 50-59, 40-49, 30-39, 20 29 and under 20.

Among 256 expatriate deaths reported in Oman, the vulnerable group has been in the age group 40-49 followed by 50-59 and 60-69.

■ MIXING MODERNITY WITH TRADITION



Bushra al Araimi is one of the primary designers of traditional Omani dresses with modern touch. She started from scratch with only a needle and a thread, but this is only what it requires. After getting her technical diploma, Bushra took her dreams to Sur and became an international trainer and fashion designer.

DETAILS ON P19

US-French duo win Nobel Chemistry for gene editing tool

STOCKHOLM: Emmanuelle Charpentier of France and Jennifer Doudna of the US on Wednesday won the Nobel Chemistry Prize for the gene-editing technique known as the CRISPR-Cas9 DNA snipping “scissors”, the first time a Nobel science prize has gone to a women-only team.

Using the tool, “researchers can change the DNA of animals, plants and microorganisms with extremely high precision”, the Nobel jury said.

“This technology has had a

revolutionary impact on the life sciences, is contributing to new cancer therapies and may make the dream of curing inherited diseases come true.”

The technique has been tipped for a Nobel nod several times in the past, but speaking to reporters in Stockholm via telephone link Charpentier said the call was still a surprise. “Strangely enough I was told a number of times (it might happen) but when it happens you are very surprised and you feel that



Emmanuelle Charpentier

it's not real”, she said.

Charpentier, 51, and Doudna, 56, are just the sixth and seventh women to receive the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Speaking at a Berlin press conference later in the day, Charpentier said the fact that women were being honoured reflected a changing field with more female scientists.

“Science, fundamental science, becomes slowly, but hopefully surely, a world of female scientists

as leaders, and it reflects what is happening in our days”, she said.

While researching a common harmful bacteria, Charpentier discovered a previously unknown molecule — part of the bacteria's ancient immune system that disarms viruses by snipping off parts of their DNA. After publishing her research in 2011, Charpentier worked with Doudna to recreate the bacteria's genetic scissors, simplifying the tool so it was easier to use and apply to other genetic material. **SEE ALSO P5**



In brief

MUSCAT

DISCARDED CARS
REMOVED



Muscat Municipality removed a number of discarded cars from the Ghala Industrial Zone on Wednesday. A statement issued by Muscat Municipality said: “Muscat Municipality continues its efforts to transfer a number of discarded cars from the Ghala Industrial Zone, in coordination with Royal Oman Police. Vehicles may not be left in public places in a manner that leads to distorting the view or causing environmental and health damage.”

PHARMA WORKSHOP
BEGINS

The second online training workshop on pharmacoeconomics, organised by the Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Professional Development & Career Guidance Section in the Directorate General of Medical Supplies (DGMS) in collaboration with Merck Company began on Tuesday. A number of specialists in health economic management from the Sultanate and abroad along with the MoH pharmacists are participating in the workshop.



Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health inaugurates isolation ward at Sur Hospital on Wednesday. – ONA

Health minister opens COVID-19
isolation ward at Sur Hospital

SUR: A ceremony was held at Sur Referral Hospital on Wednesday to mark the opening of isolation ward for coronavirus patients.

The project was inaugurated by Health Minister Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi in the presence of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah.

Dr Khalid bin Said al Saadi, Director-General of Health Services in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah, said in a speech on the occasion that the 838 sq-metre facility has been funded by Oman LNG at cost of RO 761,000. He added the project's funding comes as a contribution to social cause and as a measure of support to the health sector in the Sultanate in its fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

Mohammed bin Juma al Mukhaini,



Director-General of Communications and Community Affairs at Oman LNG's, said that the project's launch reaffirms the company's main objective of contributing to the development of the country through setting up of suitable health care establishments to serve individuals and providing hospitals with the best

equipment and services.

The isolation ward consists of 12 special rooms fitted with hi-tech ventilation systems that spare time and effort of medical staff who would otherwise shift patients to different destinations for treatment, said Al Mukhaini.

— ONA

Omanisation in
medical jobs rises

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttvyp

Along with an increase in Omanisation across multiple medical jobs, there has also been a significant rise in the ratio between population and health workers in the Sultanate.

“During 2019, for every 10,000 population, there have been 21 doctors and 44 nurses in the country compared to nine doctors and 26 nurses in 1990”, reveals a report by the Ministry of Health (MoH).

Statistics show that over 40 per cent of WHO member states report to have less than 10 medical doctors per 10 000 population and over 26 per cent have less than three.

According to the Ministry's Annual Report 2019, while the nurse-doctor ratio stood at two to one, the medical officer-specialist ratio remained one to two in 2019.

“The rate of Omanisation in the Ministry of Health throughout the years has increased in medical and paramedical categories”, points out the report.

The manpower indicators in the report show that Omanisation in the health ministry reached a remarkable 72 per cent. In the private sector health establishments, it stood at 10 per cent.

While the public sector accounted for 68 per cent of the total health staff, the private sector comprised 27 per cent of the doctors, 75 per cent dentists

During 2019, for every 10,000 population, there have been 21 doctors and 44 nurses in the country compared to nine doctors and 26 nurses in 1990

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

and 68 per cent pharmacists.

In the Sultanate, the public health sector consists of MoH and non-MoH with the latter consisting of Medical Services of Diwan of Royal Court, Royal Oman Police, Sultan Qaboos University and Petroleum Development Oman.

Out of the 72 per cent of the Omani staff, 97 per cent account for health administrators, 100 per cent for medical orderlies and 99 per cent for administrative support staff comprising white-collar staff, skilled and unskilled labour.

Omanisation among doctors, dentists, pharmacists and nurses collectively has reached almost 59 per cent in 2019 compared to 57 per cent in 2018.

The nursing staff has seen a rise of 65 per cent in 2019 from 12 per cent in 1990.



Insurance mandatory
for visitors and citizens

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People who come to Oman must have health insurance for coronavirus treatment as well take PCR test, according to officials.

The arriving passengers must download the Ministry of Health's mobile application ‘Tarassud+’ and complete the registration upon arrival to make their documentation easier and faster. They have to pay RO 25 for the test must stay in quarantine for 14 days.

“Those residents who arrive in the Sultanate should primarily have two things,” a source from the emigration department has told the *Observer*. “The first one is a health insurance policy that covers the COVID-19 treatment for one month as well as a PCR test done at the special counter set at all the gateways,” he said quoting the recently issued ‘Coronavirus Travel Guide’.

“Children below the age of 15, and cabin crew members are exempted from the COVID-19 test and arrangements,” he said.

According to sources at the Capital Market Authority (CMA), the pandemic is covered under the health insurance.

As far as the Omani citizens who

are travelling abroad, a valid health insurance that covers all medical expenses including COVID-19 for at least one month is mandatory.

“As per the CMA instructions, the ceiling, age and prevalence of pre-existing medical conditions should be taken into consideration before issuing a travel insurance policy,” representative of a leading insurance company said.

Various travel agencies along with airlines are offering these services in association with insurance companies.

The Oman Air package covers expenses related to medical treatment or quarantine due to the coronavirus since October 1 when scheduled flights began to fly.

“We are offering 30 days medical protection against COVID-19 at a cost of RO 5 which covers all medical expenses associated with the pandemic,” a travel agency official said.

“All arriving residents should submit a declaration form to confirm that they do not have COVID-19 or its symptoms. Their temperature will be checked as soon as they enter the terminal building. Access will be granted if their temperature is below 38c and who doesn't meet these criteria will be sent to isolation.”

Online marketing project
to boost sales of fish

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources began to implement the fisheries online marketing project. The project, funded to the tune of RO 184,120 by the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund, started operations for a period of two years on July 19.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Balushi, Director of the Project and Manager of the Central Fish Market (Wholesale), said that the project follows the success stories of the ministry in setting up infrastructure for fish markets and unloading areas and developing marketing mechanisms and regulations in coordination with the departments concerned, as well as installing modern online marketing systems for the central market.

He said that the first phase has been accomplished with success, thanks to the cooperation of all parties in the chain of fish marketing.

Al Balushi added that the project goes in line with the forthcoming launch of Oman Vision 2040 and the goals set for upgrading the fisheries sector, which is one of the target segments anticipated to contribute considerably to the gross domestic product.

It envisions the introduction of new technologies for developing revenues and financial sustainability, besides enhancing the concept of governance and streamlining procedures.

The second phase of the project began to be implemented at fish markets in governorates, said Al Balushi, noting that such



a project will be a significant step forward in regulating the fisheries products in local markets and providing direct and indirect jobs, he added.

Al Balushi pointed out that certain marketplaces have been selected as venues for sale by auctioning in Suhar, Qurayat, Seeb and Masirah.

Work is underway to expand this business concept in light of needs, he said, adding that, accordingly, online trading systems might be installed and manpower trained.

Besides increasing sales, the project will enhance transparency, revenues and employment of Omanis. All fish markets will eventually be connected through a single database that will facilitate product updates.

Fish market officials have been provided with hand-held smart devices to register fisheries products data on a daily basis and send them to the main database of the ministry, he said.

Al Balushi explained that, besides increasing sales, the project will enhance transparency, revenues and employment of Omanis.

All fish markets will eventually be connected through a single database that will facilitate product updates, he added.

— ONA

In brief



■ SAHAM

HOSPITAL TO HAVE A DIALYSIS UNIT

The Ministry of Health on Wednesday signed an agreement to fund the establishment of a dialysis unit at Saham Hospital at a cost of RO 500,000 donated by a businessman from the Wilayat of Saham. Sultan bin Saif al Saadi, Director-General of Services in North Al Batinah Governorate, explained that the project will contribute to improving the services provided to patients with kidney failure and ensure the continuity of these services for. The dialysis unit will be established on a 778,8-sq metre land inside Saham Hospital. The new unit will have a main ward with 17 beds in addition to two isolation wards with one bed each. The unit will have a capacity to accommodate more than 50 patients a day in two sessions. — **ONA**

■ MUSCAT

TAX AUTHORITY TO HOST WEBINAR ON OCTOBER 15

The Tax Authority, in collaboration with Deloitte, will organise a webinar on Common Reporting Standard (CRS), on October 15.

The workshop is in light of the issuance of Oman Tax Authority's decision No 78/2020, in regards to Standards for Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information.

The objectives of the webinar is to clarify who are the persons liable to Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information, obligations per the decision, registration and reporting procedures, deadlines and how to use the Oman Tax Authority AEOI online Portal. The Tax Authority's decision on Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information was issued to put into effect the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters signed by the Sultanate with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in November 2019.

The convention aims to tackle tax evasion. — **ONA**

Sultanate and Philippines mark 40 years of strong friendship

JOMAR MENDOZA
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The Philippines celebrated on Tuesday its 40 years of strong diplomatic relations with the Sultanate of Oman which started on October 6, 1980.

Philippines' Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr said that Filipinos witnessed the rise of Oman with its significant development in four decades.

"When the Philippines established diplomatic relations with Oman, overseas Filipinos in Oman were few and the Philippine non-resident ambassador was based in Riyadh. Since then, relations have rapidly expanded, reflected in large part by Oman's rapid growth and modernisation. Today, the Sultanate hosts almost 50,000 Filipinos exemplifying the Filipino brand of honesty, hard work, dedication and making themselves helpful wherever they are welcome."

The Philippines established its embassy in Muscat in 1992 having served with seven ambassadors since then, with the latest Ambassador Imelda M Panolong.

Locsin said, "The Philippines and Oman have diplomatic missions in their respective capitals — a sign of our very close friendship. In fact, Munther al Mantheri, the current Omani Ambassador to the Philippines, is the acting dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Manila having started his tour of duty in 2013."



The services agreement between the two countries has enabled Oman Air to operate a daily flight between Manila and Muscat enabling more people-to-people exchanges, trade and commerce. In 2019, both countries traded \$85 million of goods and 4,500 Omanis visited the Philippines. Also last year, the Philippines resumed imports of Omani Export Blend crude.

The secretary also thanked the Omani government's effort during the COVID-19 pandemic. He said, "Oman's timely intervention enabled the safe return of overseas Filipinos to their families in the pandemic. We deeply appreciate these acts of generosity and humanity which marked true friendship in a time of need. When I visited Muscat, I dropped in on two Philippine Navy

ships of the Philippine Naval Task Force Contingent on standby to give support if the repatriation of Filipinos became necessary. I'm grateful that the Sultanate allowed them to dock and for quite a long time."

Early this year, Philippine Navy ships *BRP Davao del Sur*, a landing platform dock vessel, and *BRP Ramon Alcaraz*, an offshore patrol vessels were docked at Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat to process the overseas Filipino workers' repatriation papers, attend to their medical needs and take them home.

It also served as a temporary accommodation to distressed OFWs in the Middle East.

Locsin expressed his gratitude to Oman and looks forward to continue forming strong relations

I am pleased and honoured to express my sincerest appreciation to the Omani government and the people of Oman for the 40 years of friendship as we recall the past, cultivate the present and look forward to the future of Philippines-Oman relations.

TEODORO LOCSIN JR

Philippines' Foreign Affairs Secretary

between the two countries. "I am pleased and honoured to express my sincerest appreciation to the Omani government and the people of Oman for the 40 years of friendship as we recall the past, cultivate the present and look forward to the future of Philippines-Oman relations.

"Under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Foreign Minister, Sayyid Badr al Busaidy, the coming years will surely usher in more cooperation between our countries and further deepen our friendship."

Regain essence of kindness to ease stress of coronavirus

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The Whispers of Serenity under the umbrella of Not Alone campaign is organising a Webinar on Saturday titled 'Be Kind' open to the public on World Mental Health Day, which falls on October 10.

Although the topic is 'Kindness', there are going to be different approaches for adults and children,

according to the organisers. As part of the event, there will also be workshops with the objective of being interactive.

"We want to invite the world to Oman at the same time to remind everyone once again to be kind to one another. Sometimes as human beings we tend to be self-centered and we need to be reminded," said HH Sayyida Basma al Said, founder of Whispers of Serenity and Not

Alone Campaign.

"We have taken up to the big day of a campaign happening on social media where you share your idea of being kind. It is exciting because we even have filters. There is a surprise for the winner that will be announced on the day of the webinar," she said.

"Being kind is not just a feeling or talk but an action and we want everyone to be involved," said Sahar Salmanian, psychologist and speaker.

Every day at 6 pm a task is posted on social media related to being kind. Once the task is done, one can post it whether it is audio, picture or video with the tag #BeKind and explain how it feels.

"People tend to have lost the essence of being kind to each other; maybe it is the pandemic that is why we thought it is important to bring it up this year. We have lined up many distinguished speakers from Oman

and abroad. One of our speakers is HH Shaikha Intisar al Sabah who will be talking about positivity. We also have doctors from Egypt and Bahrain, as well as successful initiatives from across the world.

Initially we were talking about mental health, but I think the most important factor is being kind as that would be a big boost to mental health.

The objective is to talk about the

importance of kindness in our lives and society and ways to incorporate it into our daily lives during these times.

The agenda of the webinar will include 10 main speakers and five mental health campaigns. Participants will be divided into groups according to the age groups for the workshops.

More information can be obtained on bekind.whispers-of-serenity.com.

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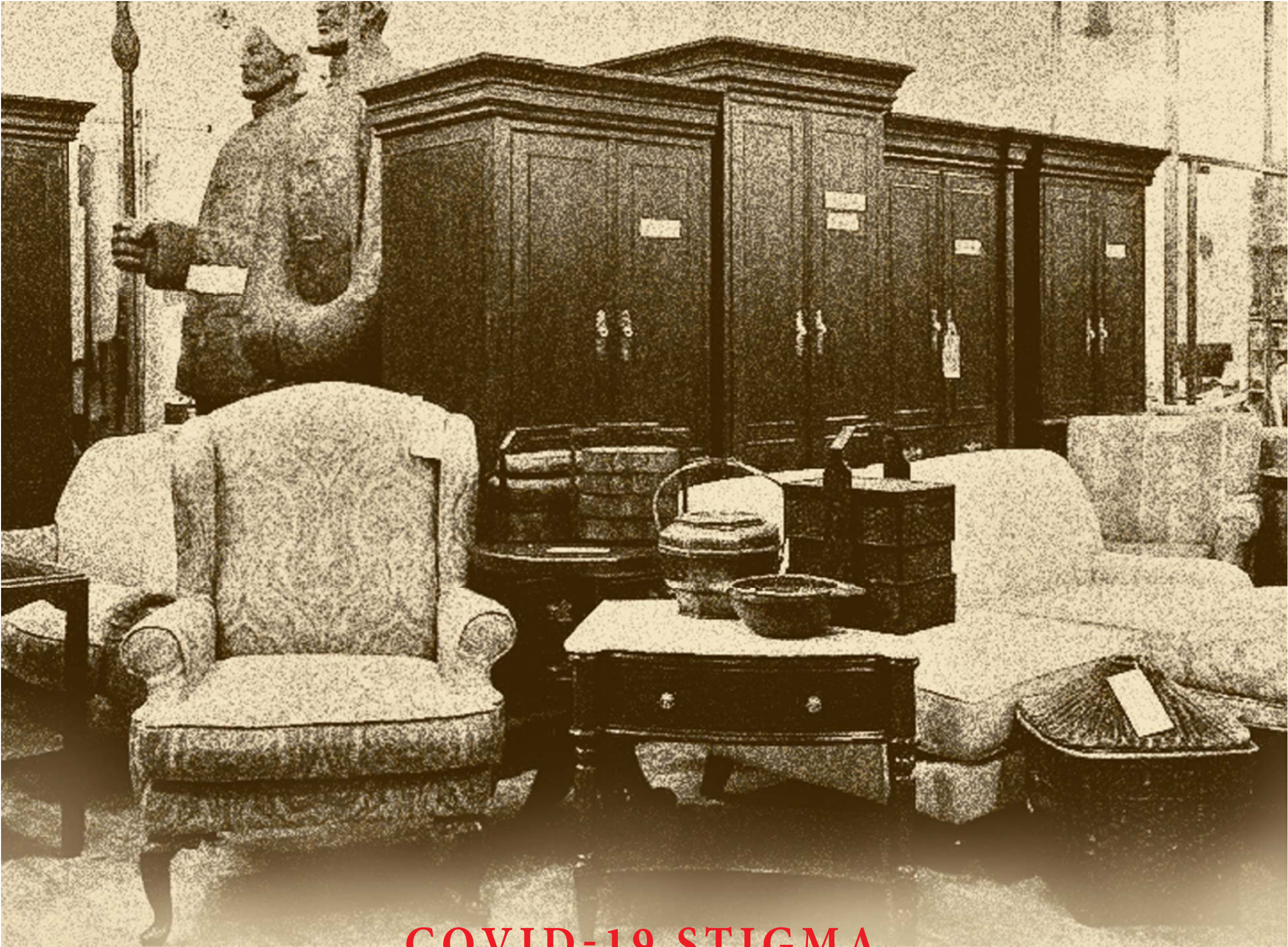
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#Living_with_COVID19



COVID-19 STIGMA

WEIGHS ON USED GOODS DEALERS

Many fear buying second-hand products will get them infected. The market is facing oversupply as many expats leave the country

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The fear of contracting COVID-19 is weighing on the used goods sector where many vendors think whether to continue or shut shop. The glut of used goods in the market as many expats leave the country is also taking the sheen off the business.

“My business, and the business of many whom I know in the similar sector, have gone down by at least 70 per cent as people are afraid to buy used furniture which they believe is instrumental in spreading coronavirus,” Radhakrishnan who has been running a used furniture shop in Muttrah told the

Observer.

Althaf Hussein, an expatriate who sells used household appliances like air conditioners, fridges and washing machines in Hamriya too is reduced to displaying his products outside the shop in the morning and taking them back by evening.

“These are goods that I bought several months ago and till now, I’m not able to sell them off.”

A scroll over the major used goods online platforms too indicate that goods are either lying there for many weeks or are sold for a song. Panic selling signposts such as ‘expat leaving,’ ‘goods as fresh as new,’ ‘urgent sale’ are not helping many to dispose of their used

goods, be it furniture or household appliances.

“I’m a regular visitor of 2 major sites that facilitate sale of used goods and I can see a large volume of goods continuously promoted either by reducing prices or by advertising in other groups”, Saeed Yousuf said.

“I was able to help one of my friends who was leaving on urgent grounds or dispose of his used goods including beds, ACs and a scar,” says Meeraj Kizhuthani Mahesh, a resident of Muscat.

But experts comment that there is no evidence that coronavirus can be transmitted through used (or new) furniture and the belief otherwise is

unfounded, according to Dr Mahmoud al Rahbi of Al Nahdha Hospital.

“There is a low or no risk that the virus can be transmitted from products or packaging to people. There have been no reported cases of the virus being transmitted from imported goods from some country.”

“Simply touching a contaminated surface will not make you sick. The problem starts when you use unwashed hands to eat or scratch your nose or rub your eyes,” says Dr Viresh Chopra.

“This is a respiratory virus and it mainly attacks the respiratory system. So, it needs to have contact with a mucus membrane, such as your nose, mouth or eyes.”

Pandemic could push 115m people into extreme poverty

WASHINGTON: As many as 115 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty this year due to the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the World Bank warned on Wednesday.

That is higher than the bank previously estimated, even as recently as August, when the worst case was put at 100 million. And the bank's new report estimates that by 2021, 150 million could be living below the extreme poverty threshold of less than \$1.90 a day.

"The pandemic and global recession may cause over 1.4 per cent of the world's population to fall into extreme poverty", World Bank President David Malpass said in a statement.

If the pandemic had not struck, the global extreme poverty rate was expected to fall to 7.9 per cent, but now could climb as high as 9.4 per cent, the bank said in its flagship report.

World Bank economists say the dire estimates for new victims of poverty this year, which range from 88 million to 115 million, depend



Commuters wearing face masks walk at Sretensky Bulvar metro station in Moscow amid the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic. — AFP

on the outlook for the global economy, which the Washington-based crisis lender estimates range from a contraction of five per cent to eight per cent in the worst case scenario.

That would erode decades of progress in reducing extreme poverty, and the authors warn create "poverty hotspots" in areas that face a double-hit from economic crisis

and conflict.

The research also finds a rising share of those living in extreme poverty are in urban areas, which threatens to overwhelm existing support programmes that are designed for rural populations.

Instead of achieving the goal of eradicating poverty by 2030, the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic with the pressures of

conflict and climate change will put the goal "beyond reach without swift, significant and substantial policy action", the World Bank said, warning that the global poverty rate could be about seven per cent in the next decade.

"In order to reverse this serious setback to development progress and poverty reduction, countries will need to prepare for a different economy post-Covid, by allowing capital, labour, skills, and innovation to move into new businesses and sectors", Malpass said.

The bank said the policy response must be commensurate with the severity of the crisis, including modernising education and online learning and deploying new technology to expand the reach of social protection programmes.

Looking at a broader definition of poverty, the report found that close to a quarter of the world's population lives below the \$3.20 line and more than 40 per cent — almost 3.3 billion people — live below the \$5.50 line. — AFP



French researcher in Microbiology, Genetics and Biochemistry Emmanuelle Charpentier (L) and US professor of Chemistry and of Molecular and Cell Biology, Jennifer Doudna at the San Francisco park in Oviedo. — AFP File Photo

Timid steps for women in Nobel man's world

PARIS: The Nobel prizes remain very much a man's world, especially in science, but with three female laureates already named this year, women are slowly making their mark.

Since the first Nobel prizes were given out in 1901, 57 women have been rewarded, representing only 6.1 per cent of the 931 laureates (excluding institutions) overall, according to an AFP database.

However the number of women laureates has been steadily increasing over the decades, with 11.1 per cent in the 2010s and 9.2 per cent in the 2000s, against 5.4 per cent in the 1900s and 2.6 per cent in the 1910s.

There were, however, none in the 1950s. The latest additions to the Nobel club are France's Emmanuelle Charpentier and the United States' Jennifer Doudna, who were awarded the chemistry prize on Wednesday, a day after American Andrea Ghez shared the physics prize.

The record of five female laureates is within reach this year, as the awards for literature, peace and economics have yet to be announced.

The three women have pulled off quite a feat in getting their prizes in two of the most male-dominated disciplines.

Women make up only 1.9 per cent of physics laureates, or four out of 216, while they won seven out of 186 chemistry prizes.

The medicine and economics prizes are also heavily male dominated, with respectively 5.4 per cent (12 out of 222) and 2.4 per cent (two out of 84) women laureates.

The Nobel peace prize (15.9 per cent, or 17 out of 107), not taking into account those awarded to institutions, and literature (12.9 per cent, 15 out of 116) are slightly more women friendly.

This year is only the second time after 2009 that three women have won scientific prizes.

Even though Ghez was awarded her physics prize with two men, Charpentier and Doudna have won an all-woman chemistry prize.

It is only the third time that this has happened in this discipline, after French-Polish scientist Marie Curie and Britain's Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin won it alone in 1911 and 1964 respectively.

As a Frenchwoman, Charpentier follows in the footsteps of Curie and her daughter Irene Joliot-Curie, who won the prize in 1935 in a tandem with her husband Frederic Joliot.

Marie Curie was the first woman laureate in 1903 in physics, and is to date the only one to have won two Nobels (1903 in physics and 1911 in chemistry).

Like the prizes themselves, the Nobel committees awarding them are also man dominated, with women holding less than a quarter of the places.

There are, for example, only two women among the seven members of the committee which selects the literature laureate, one out of seven for physics and four out of 18 for medicine.

— AFP

■ COVID-SAFETY MEASURES ACROSS UK VARSITIES



Third-year students on the Special Effects Model Making for Film and Television course wear face coverings to help mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19, during class at the University of Bolton, in Bolton, northern England. The University of Bolton has introduced numerous Covid-safety measures across its campus including: Airport-style temperature scanners, socially distanced seating, perspex screens and visors for lecturers, a bicycle loan scheme for students, one-way routes throughout campus buildings and additional online resources for student learning. Hundreds of thousands of students have begun a new academic year at universities across the UK. — AFP

UK PM says lockdown approach correct

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson insisted on Wednesday that his government's approach to controlling the spread of COVID-19 was still the right one, despite rising infection rates.

Johnson's strategy over the summer, when new nationwide infections were in the low hundreds per day, was to try to shut down localised outbreaks while reopening the wider economy.

Since then, new cases have risen sharply, with more than 14,000 reported on Wednesday and data beginning to show a slow rise in the number of virus patients admitted to hospital.

"The local and regional approach combined with the national measures remains correct", Johnson told parliament when asked why infections continued to rise in areas where local lockdown measures have been put in place.

Scotland, where the devolved



Prime Minister Boris Johnson government sets its own public health policy, announced stricter restrictions on Wednesday, ordering all pubs in Glasgow and Edinburgh to close for 16 days from Friday.

Labour Party opposition leader Keir Starmer said Johnson's strategy was not working and presented analysis which showed infection rates had risen in 19 out of 20 areas in England that are subject to

additional lockdown measures.

Johnson said the data was "no surprise" and supported his approach because it showed that the strictest measures were in place where there were the most cases.

The analysis showed that in Wigan, northwest England, the infection rate, measured as the number of confirmed cases per 100,000 population, had risen by 3,653 per cent since a local lockdown was first imposed on July 30, increasing to 225 from 6.

Increases in the other areas were between 13 per cent and 2,241 per cent, Labour's data showed. Britain's COVID-19 testing system — already under fire over reporting errors — also faced more disruption after Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche said problems at a new warehouse had delayed the dispatch of some products.

Meanwhile, sufferers of "Long COVID" symptoms in England will

receive specialist care, the National Health Service said on Wednesday, with clinics set up to treat symptoms from breathlessness to brain fog.

Evidence is mounting that thousands of people may suffer weeks or months of long-term side effects, even if they did not have a severe case of COVID-19 initially.

NHS England said that some estimates indicated 10 per cent of COVID patients may still be experiencing symptoms more than three weeks after infection, with around 60,000 suffering from Long Covid symptoms after more than three months. "It is now clear that Long Covid can have a major impact on the lives of a significant minority of patients weeks or months after they have contracted the virus," said NHS Chief Executive Simon Stevens. "We must respond sensitively and effectively to these new patient needs." — Reuters



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement for the Supply of Computer Requirements Tender No. (143/2020)

You are invited to submit a tender for the above in accordance with the tender specifications.

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specification from the date of this advertisement until 21/10/2020 from the following address:

Operational Committee of the Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre

Knowledge Oasis, Building No4 (KOM4) First Floor.

Note: The Tender Specification Fees is 100 OMR.

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted in a sealed envelope by an Omani National from your company addressed to the head of Purchase Committee in the tender box located at:

Operational Committee of the Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center

Knowledge Oasis Building No. 4 (KOM4), First Floor.

No later than 29/10/2020.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact on Tel: 22584133 or 22584132, or via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



Lebanon to begin talks to name new premier

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun will begin parliamentary consultations to name a new prime minister next week, his office said on Wednesday.

It will mark the third attempt to name a new premier in less than a year following a series of resignations in the face of a deepening economic crisis and a port explosion that ravaged entire districts of the capital.

Outgoing prime minister Hassan Diab quit in the wake of the colossal August 4 explosion at Beirut port that killed more than 190 people, and wounded at least 6,500.

His designated successor Mustapha Adib stepped down last month after he failed to forge a consensus around a new government line-up.

“President Aoun has set Thursday, October 15 as the date for holding parliamentary consultations to assign a figure to form a new government,” his office said on Twitter.

Since the Beirut port blast, Western governments have stepped up pressure on Lebanese leaders to put in place a government ready to implement sweeping reforms and unlock much-needed aid.

On a visit to Beirut at the beginning of last month, French President Emmanuel Macron said he had secured promises from Lebanon’s factions to install a reform-minded administration within a fortnight.

When Adib finally abandoned his efforts to get faction leaders to deliver, Macron accused them of looking to their own selfish interests rather than those of the country.

The date set by Aoun for the start of parliamentary consultations comes just two days before Lebanon marks the first anniversary of a nationwide protest movement demanding sweeping political reform.

Its rallies lost momentum earlier this year as the coronavirus pandemic



People gather to release white balloons near the seaport of Beirut to commemorate the second month after the August 4 massive explosion that ravaged entire neighbourhoods of Beirut leaving scores of residents homeless. — AFP

hit, but public anger has soared since the port blast, which was caused by the ignition of a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate fertiliser that had been left uninspected for years.

A confessional power-sharing system, which has been in place ever since the end of Lebanon’s 1975-90 civil war, has created an entrenched, often hereditary, political elite that the protest movement holds responsible for the country’s woes.

Meanwhile, France will hold a humanitarian aid conference for Lebanon in November, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said on Wednesday.

The conference was initially planned for the end of October. Le Drian also told the French National Assembly that the Lebanon international contact group would meet in the coming days to reiterate the need for the formation of a government. — AFP

■ ACTIVISTS HELP OLIVE FARMERS



Palestinian solidarity activists assist olive farmers from the village of Hawara on fields near Israeli settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — AFP

Cash shortage adds to weary Eastern Libyans’ woes

BENGHAZI: When Jamal al Fallah tried to withdraw money from his bank in Benghazi, he was told no cash was available, the result of financial problems in eastern Libya aggravating a cash shortage that has hit the whole country.

With debts of tens of billions of dollars, and local banks suffering, according to the parallel central bank set up by authorities in Benghazi, eastern Libya faces a looming crisis.

Waiting outside Wahda bank with a few other people, Fallah said he had only turned up because it had recently said there would be money available. “When we go to the bank they say there’s no liquidity,” said Fallah, adding that he manages to pay his daily bills by borrowing cash from the owner of a supermarket. He did not receive any cash until a week later - his first receipt of his salary in months - and



Employees work inside the Business Centre Wahda Bank in Benghazi. — Reuters

within an hour had paid most of it to his landlord, he said later by phone.

Once one of the richest countries in Africa thanks to oil exports, Libya has crumbled since its 2011 uprising,

divided between rival governments in east and west, including institutions such as the central bank. As the war between the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord

(GNA) in the west and Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) in the east has intensified in recent years, the economic problems have also grown.

The tough living conditions — including power cuts and fuel shortages — have prompted protests in both western and eastern Libya in recent weeks, adding to the political pressures faced by both sides in the conflict.

A blockade of oil exports by the LNA since January was lifted last month and revenue is gradually starting to flow back into the country, but it cost Libya more than \$10 billion in lost income. Oil receipts are paid into the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya, which then pays salaries of most state employees across front lines including in areas held by the LNA. — Reuters

After Sudan’s peace deal, the hard task begins of gathering the guns

KHARTOUM: Sudan is celebrating a landmark agreement to end decades of war, but the first step to turn promises on paper into peace is also one of the most explosive — disarmament.

Collecting weapons in a country left awash with guns after years of conflict in which hundreds of thousands died is one of most delicate parts of the October 3 peace agreement.

“Gathering the weapons is a very difficult business,” said Gibril Ibrahim, commander of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), one of the rebel signatories to the historic deal. “It involves a collective effort. People will not hand over their weapons until they judge that the government can ensure their safety.”

Ibrahim’s JEM fighters battled Khartoum’s government in the western region of Darfur, where fighting since 2003 left around 300,000 people dead.

“If we have a democratic government

that listens to the voice of the people, people will conclude that they no longer need to carry arms to protect themselves,” Ibrahim said.

The historic deal signed by the government and an alliance of rebel groups, the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), was hailed by the international community as a milestone.

The rebels included groups from Darfur, as well as the southern states of the Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan.

According to one rebel leader, it involves some 35,000 rebel fighters. Peace was made possible after mass protests ousted President Omar al Bashir from power in April 2019, and the transitional government has made ending the conflicts a priority.

Bashir has already been convicted of corruption and is currently on trial in the capital Khartoum for the 1989 coup that brought him to power.



Members of the Sudanese army stand as weapons that were collected from Sudanese citizens are destroyed in the Hajar al Asal base, the Nile River State, 200 kilometres north of the capital Khartoum. — AFP

The government has also agreed that Bashir will face trial for his role in Darfur. But after so long at war, many are wary of giving up their guns.

“Trust is key to disarmament,” said Jonas Horner of Brussels-based think tank the International Crisis Group (ICG).

“The military-linked so closely with abuses during the Bashir government — simply has not had the time nor shown the will to address violence in the way that many rural Sudanese would need to see in order to put down their weapons.”

Warning of a “trust gap” between the ex-rebels and Khartoum, Horner said he feared some will keep a cache of weapons hidden as insurance.

Two holdout rebel groups — including some 15,000 fighters, according to one estimate — refused to take part in the October 3 deal.

One, the Darfur-based Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) faction led by Abdelwahid Nour, is believed to maintain considerable support.

Another, a faction of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) based in South Kordofan and led by Abdelaziz al Hilu, has signed a separate ceasefire. That deal allows the rebels to keep

‘People will not hand over their weapons until they judge that the government can ensure their safety’

hold of their guns for “self-protection” until Sudan’s constitution is changed to separate religion and government. Even before the deal was signed, Sudan’s army launched a mass disarmament campaign, blowing up thousands of firearms collected from civilians in a huge explosion in the desert.

The Small Arms Survey, a Geneva-based research organisation, calculates there were 2.76 million illegally-held weapons in Sudan in 2017, or 6.6 guns for every 100 people. Rebels will be slowly incorporated into joint units with government security forces. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Iran registers record daily death toll

Iran on Wednesday registered a new record number of daily deaths in the coronavirus pandemic, with 239 fatalities in the past 24 hours, Iranian state TV said.

More than 4,000 new infections were recorded in the same period, Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Lari said, bringing Iran’s total caseload to 483,844, with 27,658 related deaths. A curfew has been in place in several large cities since Sunday in a bid to control the spiking infection rate. In place initially, for a week, the restrictions are likely to be extended.



The situation in the capital Tehran with its 13 million inhabitants is particularly bad. Health experts are sounding the alarm and are particularly concerned about bottlenecks in patient medical care. — dpa

CAIRO

Egypt releases detained journalist

Egypt’s prosecutor-general has ordered the release of a journalist days after she was arrested in the country’s south, amid outcry from international press freedom advocates.

“The prosecutor-general has ordered the release of the defendant Basma Mostafa after she was questioned on the charges laid against her,” the prosecution said in a statement overnight Monday into Tuesday, adding that the investigation would continue. Prosecutors had accused her of

“using her personal social media account to publish and promote false news”, the statement said. Mostafa, a freelance journalist, had been brought before prosecutors on Sunday. She was arrested the day before while attempting to report on the alleged police killing of a man in the wake of small-scale demonstrations last month near the southern city of Luxor, according to Al Manassa news website, where she is a regular contributor.

ISTANBUL

Journalist declared fugitive, assets seized

An Istanbul court declared Can Dundar - a journalist who fled to Germany in 2016 to escape legal charges - a fugitive on Wednesday, seizing all his assets in Turkey, according to a court document seen by dpa. The court had given Dundar 15 days to return to Turkey from Germany.

The deadline expired on Wednesday. Dundar is now considered a fugitive and his four properties in the cities of Istanbul, Ankara and Mugla, along with bank accounts in Turkey were transferred to the regulator



The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF), the court said. Dundar, the former editor-in-chief of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, faces several charges in Turkey, including supporting a terrorist organisation.

In brief

■ KUALA LUMPUR

MALAYSIA PM TESTS
NEGATIVE FOR COVID-19,
SAYS PM'S OFFICE

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin has tested negative for the novel coronavirus, his office said on Wednesday, after a minister who attended a high-level meeting chaired by the premier on Saturday contracted the virus.

Muhyiddin, along with 13 ministers and deputy ministers, started home quarantine after it was discovered that religious affairs minister Zulkifli Al Bakri had COVID-19.

"The prime minister is currently in good health. However, he will continue self-quarantine until the end of the 14-day period set by the ministry of health," the prime minister's office said.

■ SEOUL

MAN CAUGHT AFTER
BUSTING OUT OF
KOREAN QUARANTINE

An Indonesian seaman who bust out of a South Korean coronavirus quarantine facility by digging a hole under a wall a day before he was due to complete a mandatory two weeks in isolation was caught by police on Wednesday, local media reported.

The man made his escape on Sunday night from the make-shift facility attached to a hotel in Seoul on Sunday night, but his disappearance was not discovered until the next morning. Police arrested him in the city of Cheongju, 112 kilometres south of the capital.

■ MUMBAI

ACTRESS WINS BAIL
IN EX-BOYFRIEND
SUICIDE CASE

Bollywood actress Rhea Chakraborty won bail on Wednesday, nearly a month after being arrested for allegedly buying drugs for her ex-boyfriend actor Sushant Singh Rajput, whose suicide sparked a media storm in India.

Rajput, 34, was found dead in June in his Mumbai apartment, triggering a national frenzy with television news channels speculating that Chakraborty drove him to kill himself with cannabis and black magic.

A star with many hits to his name, Rajput's suicide initially triggered a debate over mental health in India's multi-billion-dollar movie industry.

Thousands protest
against new jobs
law in Indonesia

JAKARTA: Indonesian police detained nearly 400 protesters on Wednesday, some armed with molotov cocktails and sharp weapons, on a second day of heated demonstrations over a controversial new jobs law in Southeast Asia's largest economy.

Demonstrations took place in at least 12 places on Wednesday, with police detaining 183 people outside parliament in Palembang in South Sumatra, and holding more than 200 protesters for questioning in the capital Jakarta, a day after tear gas and water cannon were used to disperse crowds in multiple cities.

The protesters are demanding the government revokes an "omnibus" jobs creation law that has outraged unions, who say it lopsidedly favours businesses and will hurt workers and the environment.

Footage from the Javanese city of Semarang showed angry protesters tearing down the fence of the local parliament complex, while in Jakarta and Bandung, students threw stones and burned tyres.

The sweeping legislation has been championed by President Joko Widodo as key to boosting an economy hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic by cutting red tape and attracting foreign investment.

But academics from prominent universities expressed disappointment on Wednesday over a law they said was problematic and would likely lead to a judicial review.

Susi Dwi Harijanti of Bandung's



A riot police officer fires tear gas following a protest against the government's labour reforms in a 'jobs creation' bill outside Regional People's Representative Assembly building in Semarang, Central Java Province. — Reuters

Many of their fears were based on false information. "I can assure you wages will not be cut"

AIRLANGGA HARTARTO

Top economic minister

Padjajaran University said the law's swift passage "shocked everybody" because parliament was usually "slow in making regulations, including the ones that are clearly needed by the people".

Indonesia's largest organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), also weighed in, with its leader KH Said Aqil Siroj saying it would benefit only capitalists, investors and conglomerates and would "trample" on ordinary people.

Top economic minister Airlangga Hartarto on Wednesday sought to calm protesters and said many of their fears were based on false information. "I can assure you wages will not be cut," he told a virtual news conference.

Other ministers have defended controversial provisions, including a land bank, saying the government would not take away farmers' lands and the law would not weaken environmental protection. — Reuters

■ ANNIVERSARY MOOD FOR KOREAN WORKER'S PARTY



A visitor looks at a sculpture of a Korean People's Army soldier at an exhibition of 'national art treasures' celebrating the 75th founding anniversary of the Worker's Party of Korea at the Okryu Exhibition Hall in Pyongyang. — AFP

Japan, India, US, Australia
discuss Indo-Pacific

'The four nations share fundamental values of democracy, rule of law and free economy,' says Japanese foreign minister



Indian foreign minister S Jaishankar follows his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi upon arrival at the Iikura Guest House in Tokyo. — AFP

TOKYO: The top diplomats from Japan, India, Australia and the United States agreed on Tuesday to enhance their cooperation, with an eye on the COVID-19 pandemic and China's growing assertiveness.

"It is more critical now than ever that we collaborate to protect our people and partnerships from the Chinese Communist Party's exploitation and corruption and coercion," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told a meeting in Tokyo.

"We see it in the South and East China seas, in Mekong, the Himalayas, Taiwan Strait — these are just a few examples," he added.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne and Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar also participated in the talks. "The four nations share fundamental values of democracy, rule of law and free economy," Motegi said.

"Committed to upholding the rules-based international order, underpinned by the rule of law,

transparency, freedom of navigation, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes," Jaishankar tweeted.

The four countries' top diplomats, a group they call the Quad, held the second ministerial-level multi-party conference as China has stepped up its territorial claims in the South and East China seas.

Earlier in the day, Payne and Pompeo had their third meeting this year, Payne said. "We spoke about our ongoing cooperation to promote peace, stability and prosperity in our region," she wrote on Twitter. "Great to meet again with Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne today in Tokyo to discuss Quad cooperation."

The US-Australia-India-Japan relationship is integral to ensuring an open and transparent Indo-Pacific," Pompeo tweeted.

Pompeo also held talks with Motegi, exchanging views concerning the situations in North Korea and the South and East China seas, Japan's Foreign Ministry said.

The two agreed that the United States and Japan would coordinate closely to deal with North Korean missile and nuclear weapons development, according to the ministry.

In his first visit to Japan since Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga took office in mid-September, Pompeo met with the new Japanese leader. — dpa

India issues guidelines for festivals as virus count grows

NEW DELHI: India logged 72,049 new coronavirus infections on Wednesday, taking its tally past 6.75 million cases, as the government issued guidelines for the country's upcoming religious festival season.

At least 986 deaths linked to the virus were reported in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of fatalities to 104,555, the Health Ministry said in its daily update.

The Health Ministry also detailed preventive measures to contain the virus during the Hindu festival season beginning in mid-October, prohibiting any events inside designated containment zones.

The ministry issued guidelines on large gatherings, including site plans that ensure adequate space for events, markings to maintain distance as well as bans on touching idols and holy books.

Based on the ministry's guidelines, local agencies have to enforce thermal screenings at venues and ensure people wear face masks. Vulnerable populations, such as seniors, were urged to observe the festivals at home.

The final arrangements for the festivals rest with the individual regional governments. While some states like West Bengal have given ago-ahead, others like Gujarat have prohibited festive events altogether, and some are yet to spell out their policy. Authorities and doctors have warned that two events had the potential to spread the virus: the festival season, which sees large congregations and markets; as well as elections in the state of Bihar, which has some 72 million voters.

The holidays Dussehra and Durga Puja are due later in October. Diwali, the festival of lights, will be celebrated in November. Meanwhile, India is also preparing to re-open cinemas, multiplexes and entertainment parks with limited capacity from October 15 as part of the latest phase of removing lockdown restrictions. India's daily new infections, while still being the highest in the world, have recently shown a downward trend, after hitting a high of nearly 98,000 cases on September 17.

The situation in several Indian



People wearing protective masks wait in line to board a bus amidst the spread of the coronavirus in Mumbai. — Reuters

states however remains a matter of concern with high infections and deaths. The number of active virus cases has remained below 1 million for the past two weeks, as India posted a recovery rate of 85 per cent, the highest in the world.

India also has one of the lowest fatality rates at 1.55 per cent, almost half the global figure. India is the second-most infected country worldwide, with 6,757,131 cases, only behind the United States, which has a total of 7,501,769 cases, according

to the US-based Johns Hopkins University.

Globally, the coronavirus has infected more than 35.8 million and killed 1,049,854 people, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

— Agencies



Trump itching to recharge election campaign

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump, under coronavirus quarantine in the White House and restricted from travelling, is grasping for ways to put a spark back in his struggling re-election bid and mount a comeback with four weeks left until Election Day.

Trump has been looking for options on how to get his message out and cut into Democrat Joe Biden's lead in battleground states where the November 3 election will be decided, advisers said.

They said they had been discussing Trump delivering a national address, while a speech to senior voters is being contemplated for Thursday.

Vice President Mike Pence's debate with Democratic vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris in Salt Lake City will take centre stage of the campaign on Wednesday.

Complications abound. Trump aides say he is impatient to get back on the campaign trail and insistent on debating Biden on October 15 in Miami, but Biden said on Tuesday he will not participate if Trump is not virus-free.

The White House's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, said on Wednesday that Trump was eager to get back to work in the Oval Office. He has been working from a makeshift space in his residence in the White House since returning on Monday from three days



President Donald Trump pulls off his face mask as he poses atop the Truman Balcony of the White House after returning from being hospitalised at Walter Reed Medical Centre. — Reuters File photo

in hospital. "He wanted to go to the Oval yesterday. If he decides to go the Oval we've got safety protocols there," Meadows told reporters, adding there would be adequate personal protective equipment and ventilation.

He described Trump, who has received treatment with a steroid that is normally used in the most severe cases, as being "in very good health."

Any political boost Trump could get from a fresh injection of stimulus money into Americans' pockets appears to be out of reach after he abruptly ended negotiations with Democrats on Tuesday, with both sides far apart on how much

money to devote to a deal.

Both Biden and the top Democrat in the US Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, accused Trump of abandoning needy Americans. Republican Senator Susan Collins, facing a tough re-election bid in her home state of Maine, called Trump's move a "huge mistake." "The president turned his back on you," Biden said in a Twitter post.

With layoffs in key industries mounting by the day and threatening the fragile recovery, Trump late on Tuesday urged Congress to quickly pass \$25 billion in funding for passenger airlines, \$135 billion for small businesses and provide \$1,200 stimulus checks for Americans.

Trump aides say he is impatient to get back on the campaign trail and insistent on debating Biden on Oct 15 in Miami

"I am ready to sign right now," Trump wrote in a tweet. Meadows said he was not optimistic that a deal could be reached and that the Trump administration backed a more piecemeal approach. "We're still willing to be engaged, but I'm not optimistic for a comprehensive deal. — Reuters

Born October 20, 1964 in Oakland, California

Daughter of Jamaican and Indian immigrants

California's first black female attorney general (elected 2010)

US senator for California (2016), first person of South Asian heritage and the 2nd black female senator in US history

Democratic presidential campaign dogged by her failure to enact bold criminal justice reforms as attorney general. Dropped out of the race in Dec 2019

Seen as more progressive than Biden, personifies diversity

Could become America's first female and first black VP if elected

KAMALA HARRIS

Age: 55

US Democratic Party vice presidential candidate

AFP Photo: Logan Cyrus

Born June 7, 1959 in Columbus, Indiana

Devout evangelical, Democrat as a teen but enters Republican politics in 1990s, hosts radio and TV talks shows

Elected to Congress in 2000, fails bid to lead Republicans in House of Representatives

Serves as governor of Indiana from 2013-2016

Elected US vice president in 2016 as Trump's running mate

Opposes abortion and gay marriage. Supports widespread gun access and has voiced skepticism about climate change

Major duties as VP include coordinator for the White House's coronavirus response but main task often appears to be Trump's compliment-giver in chief

Mike PENCE

Age: 61

US Republican Party vice presidential candidate (incumbent)

AFP Photo: Mandel Ngan

Prime Minister for a day: Teenager fills Finland's top job

HELSINKI: Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin faced a quieter day than usual on Wednesday after handing power to a 16-year-old as part of a campaign to promote girls' rights.

Aava Murto, from Vaasky in southern Finland, said she was having an "exciting day" as she faced media on the steps of parliament after meeting with the chancellor of justice.

Murto added that she had "learnt some new things about legislation."

In the afternoon, the student who actively campaigns on climate and

human rights issues was to speak with MPs and the minister for development and foreign trade.

Her message to decision-makers has been that girls "need to realise more how important they are, and how they are just as good at technology as boys," she said.

"I think young people could teach adults to be more innovative and think more about the future," she added.

The swap is part of a global "Girls Takeover" campaign by children's rights charity Plan International, which aims to raise awareness of girls'



16-year-old girl Aava Murto speaks to the press in Helsinki, Finland. — AFP

digital skills and opportunities in technological industries and highlight the problem of online harassment against women.

Although Finland scores highly in international gender equality comparisons, women are still heavily under-represented in technology firms and boardrooms, while the country's share of females starting technology-related studies is the lowest in the OECD.

The global campaign coincides with the UN's International Day of the Girl Child on Sunday, and will also allow girls to take on the jobs of

ministers in Kenya, Peru, Sudan and Vietnam.

Elsewhere, senior jobs at Microsoft, Samsung, Facebook and Twitter will go to teenage girls in countries including El Salvador, Guatemala, the Netherlands and the Philippines.

Finnish premier Marin, 34, became the world's youngest head of government when she took office in December, leading a coalition of five centre-left parties who were all led by women. Marin did not have Wednesday completely free however, as she took part in budget negotiations in the morning. — AFP

MOSCOW

Russia plays down Belarus oppn figure's role

Russia played down the role of Belarus opposition figure Svetlana Tikhonovskaya on Wednesday, saying President Vladimir Putin had no plans to meet her.

Tikhonovskaya, a 38-year-old political novice, claimed victory over strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko in a presidential election in August but she was forced to flee to Lithuania as massive protests broke out over the disputed vote.

She has met French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, but Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov



said on Wednesday the Russian leader had no plans to follow suit.

"No contacts are being planned," Peskov told reporters. "Madame Tikhonovskaya is not in Belarus. One can hardly say that she is somehow involved in Belarus's life. — AFP

BERLIN

Germany's military service gets first female president

Germany's Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) will be run by a woman for the first time in its history, after lawyer Martina Rosenberg was revealed as the agency's new president on Wednesday.

Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer informed the German parliament's defence committee of the appointment, participants at the meeting said.

Rosenberg, who until now has served as a specialist attorney for the German armed forces, dealing with disciplinary

proceedings against soldiers, will replace Christof Gramm as MAD president.

The personnel shake-up comes after Kramp-Karrenbauer vowed to get tough on right-wing extremism in the Bundeswehr military, following a number of scandals, including the disbandment of an entire company of the army's elite Special Commando Forces (KSK). Gramm was relieved of his duties from October.

Kramp-Karrenbauer had praised him for his previous reform efforts. — dpa

GENEVA

UN refugee chief tests positive for COVID-19

The UN refugee chief said Wednesday that he had tested positive for COVID-19 after leading the first day of the agency's main annual meeting in person. Filippo Grandi, who kicked off UNHCR's week-long Executive Committee meeting in Geneva on Monday, told participants via video-link that he would need to continue following the event from home.

"I am engaging with UNHCR's Executive Committee from home as I have to isolate after testing positive to #COVID19," he said in a tweet.

"I only have mild symptoms and hope to recover soon," he said,



stressing with the help of emojis the importance of "washing hands", "keeping distances" and "wearing masks".

Grandi had addressed delegates from the podium in the UN Assembly Hall in Geneva on the first day of the event. — AFP

HURRICANE LASHES MEXICO'S CARIBBEAN COAST



Winds lash palm trees after the passage of Hurricane Delta, in Cancun, Quintana Roo state, Mexico. Hurricane Delta slammed into Mexico's Caribbean coast early Wednesday, toppling trees, ripping down power lines and lashing a string of major beach resorts with winds of up to 175 kilometres per hour. — AFP

Vote annulment fails to lift pressure on Kyrgyzstan leader

BISHKEK: Kyrgyzstan's pro-Moscow President Sooronbay Jeenbekov faced new pressure Wednesday after the annulment of the results of disputed elections failed to calm the latest bout of political unrest in the ex-Soviet state.

Jeenbekov has accused opposition forces of trying to seize power after protests against a parliamentary vote erupted into violence that left one dead and hundreds injured.

The results of the vote — which showed parties close to Jeenbekov dominating parliament but which the opposition says was rigged — were cancelled on Tuesday by electoral authorities.

But the unrest has continued and there are now fears of a power struggle after a new prime minister, Sadyr Japarov, was installed a day after being freed from jail.

The crisis is the latest political turbulence to hit the nation of 6.5 million people that shares a border



People rally to demand the impeachment of Kyrgyz President Sooronbay Jeenbekov at Bishkek's Ala-Too square. — AFP

with China. It is widely considered the most democratic state in ex-Soviet Central Asia, but has nonetheless been dogged by years of political volatility.

"We are hoping that things will resolve peacefully," Russian President Vladimir Putin told state television, adding that Russia hopes "normal

democratic processes will resume ... as soon as possible."

Throughout the night, volunteer brigades took to the streets to defend businesses and public places from other groups that roamed through the capital, an AFP correspondent said. — AFP

Opening up of opportunities for Omani lawyers...

The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs has recently taken far reaching decisions. It has decided that only Omani advocates lawyers will appear and plead in the courts of the Sultanate of Oman. This highly commendable decision will practically empower Omanis in many areas of work in the country. This decision puts major responsibilities on the shoulders of other government organisations to support the efforts for Omanisation. It is the responsibility of the ministry to deal with the shortage of Omani lawyers who can appear and plead in the Supreme Court. As one of the solutions, the ministry can shorten or completely waive the required years of experience for appearing in courts to qualify to plead in the Supreme Court.

The step to give the opportunity to the national cadre is an example worth to be followed by other organisations as well. They can actively play their role in the achievement of our aspirations. This should be done without any delay. There lies a major responsibility to help in this effort as it is vital for the country at this moment. National cadre should be given opportunity in the areas of their specialisation both in the public and private sectors. Perhaps, this was the idea behind the



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THE MINISTRY CAN SHORTEN THE REQUIRED YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TO QUALIFY TO PLEAD IN THE SUPREME COURT

Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs in allowing only Omani lawyers to plead in the courts of the country.

Everyone knows that the legal profession is important for fulfilling all requirements of justice everywhere. The decision taken by the ministry is a bold one. It took several years to reach to this level, and it would also take some more time when enough national cadre will be available for this. But where there is a will there is a way. The decision itself will open more horizons in the legal system, and lead to more effective solutions in getting rid of the shortage of Omani lawyers.

There is no doubt that the decision has pleased all Omani lawyers because now they will be seen appearing in large numbers and pleading cases to ensure justice. These are the basic principles of state institutions which the citizens get their due share in the work. To fill any vacuum, we hope that ministry will come out with solutions such as reducing the years of experience required for appearing in Supreme Court as lawyers. It takes more than 14 years of experience, hard work and getting sufficient knowledge and expertise to be able to plead in the Supreme Court.

According to 2019 statistics, there are just 1,935 Omani lawyers registered in various courts in the country. The

number of Omani lawyers registered to practice in the Supreme Court stands at 172. There are only 313 registered lawyers in the appeal courts. This data reveals that the number of advocates registered for pleading in the Supreme Court is much less than the number required. To fill this vacuum, immediate solutions should be found. One of them can be reducing or waiving the years of experience required for appearing in the Supreme Court.

There is another side of the picture. After this decision, clients will start refraining from contacting legal services offices for cases in the courts of first instance. This may lead to closure of some of such offices. This issue can also be looked into as we have to deal with the shortage of Omani lawyers in courts by the end of this year.

The decision which was taken by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs has generated confidence and hope. It has set an example for many other authorities also. However, it should look into these important issues to find real solutions so that the Omani lawyers climb the steps to reach to the Supreme Court gradually, effectively, faster and also in large numbers before they reach their age of retirement. These are the ambitions and aspirations of many Omani lawyers. They want to achieve their dreams.

NIGHTMARE

Two decades after US invasion, Afghans fear Taliban return

MUSHTAQ MOJADDIDI

Almost two decades after the United States launched air strikes against Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime and started what would become America's longest-ever war, the hardline group are in a stronger position than ever.

The invasion that followed those October 7, 2001 strikes quickly toppled the militants, who had harboured Al Qaeda, the group behind the September 11 attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people in America just weeks earlier.

Now, 19 years since the collapse of their brutal regime, the Taliban are pushing for a return to power, having signed a landmark troop withdrawal deal with Washington in February and currently holding peace talks with the Afghan government.

Fearful that the Taliban have changed little since the darkest days of their regime — when they killed women accused of adultery, attacked minority religious groups and barred girls from going to school — many Afghans worry about a new era of Taliban influence.

“I remember the Taliban regime like a nightmare. We are scared for our future and my daughter's future”, said Kabul resident Katayoun Ahmadi, a 26-year-old mother.

She recalled seeing severed hands and fingers on Kabul's streets following amputations for petty crimes under the Taliban's strict interpretation of law.

The 2001 invasion heralded some enduring improvements for young Afghans — particularly girls — and ushered in a constitution guaranteeing certain freedoms including the right to an education. But so far in peace talks in Doha, which started last month, the Taliban have said little about issues such as women's rights or freedom of expression.

Ahmadi's husband Farzad Farnood, 35, a researcher for the Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies, said a rise in Taliban violence since a deal was signed between the group and Washington shows the militants have not changed.

“Is this creating hope for Afghans? No, it is not”, he said.

As a teenager, he witnessed the Taliban stoning a woman to death and public executions and floggings in Kabul's football stadium. His family had to hide their black-and-white television's antenna in a tree when the Taliban banned music and entertainment.

“All the achievements we have made in the last 18 years did not exist in the Taliban era”, he said.

In a statement released on Tuesday, the Taliban claimed the US “rejected” their appeals for diplomacy in 2001, instead launching a “brutal invasion”.

“America, its allies and coalitions would have... been spared from infamy and war crimes along with great human and material losses”, they said, adding they welcomed an opportunity to usher in a “sovereign government”.

Zia-ul-Rahman, a former insurgent who battled foreign troops and Afghan government forces for four years, said the Taliban were pushing for “the establishment of a rigid system”, even though the country's constitution already gives primacy to the religion. — AFP

GOING DARK

California's rolling blackouts caused by climate change

SAMMY ROTH

California suffered its first rolling blackouts in nearly 20 years because energy planners didn't take climate change into account and didn't line up the right power sources to keep the lights on after sundown, according to a damning self-evaluation released on Tuesday by three state agencies.

The rotating power outages didn't last long and affected only a small fraction of the state's 40 million people. Just under half a million homes and businesses lost power for as little as 15 minutes and as long as 2.5 hours on August 14, with another 321,000 utility customers going dark for anywhere from eight to 90 minutes the following evening.

But officials should have been prepared for the climate-driven extreme heat that caused electricity demand to soar and briefly left the nation's largest state without sufficient power supplies, the state's Energy Commission, Independent System Operator and Public Utilities Commission acknowledged in a preliminary “root causeanalysis” demanded by Governor Gavin Newsom.

The immediate cause of the power shortages was the heat storm, which saw California experience four of its five hottest August days in the last 35 years, the analysis found.

Temperature records were shattered across the American West,



California's grid operator called twice for emergency outages over the weekend due to inadequate power supplies. — Reuters

STATE AGENCIES FAILED TO ADEQUATELY PLAN FOR THAT TYPE OF HEAT EVENT DESPITE KNOWING HOW THE WORLD IS HEATING UP

limiting the Golden State's ability to makeup for its energy deficit by importing electrons from other states.

State agencies failed to adequately plan for that type of heat event despite knowing how quickly the world is heating up, the report concluded. They also failed to direct electricity providers to buy sufficient power supplies to cover the evening hours when solar panels go offline.

And they created complex energy

market mechanisms that masked the inadequacies. “The combination of these factors was an extraordinary event. But it is our responsibility and intent to plan for such events, which are becoming increasingly common in a world rapidly being impacted by climate change”, wrote Independent System Operator President Elliot Mainzer, Public Utilities Commission President Marybel Batjer and Energy Commission Chair David Hochschild. — dpa

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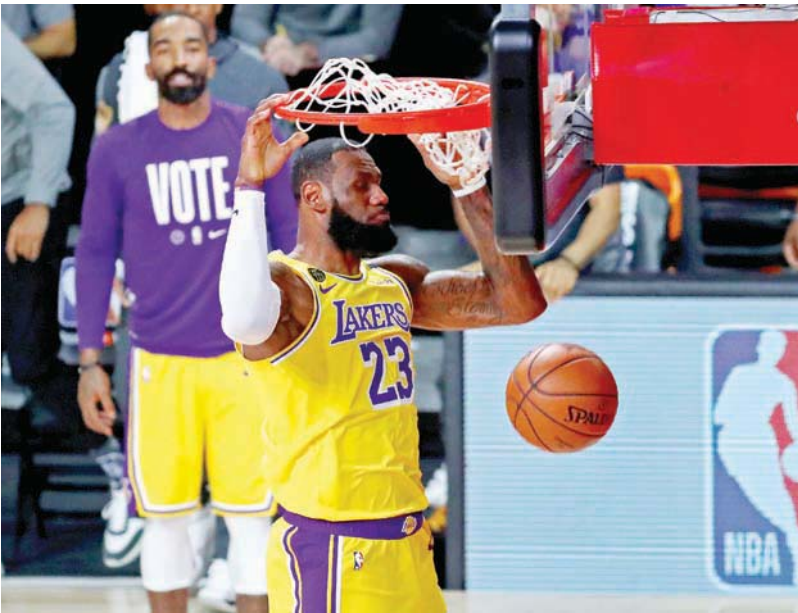
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Los Angeles Lakers’ Anthony Davis (3) is fouled by Miami Heat guard Andre Iguodala (28) during the third quarter in game 4 of the 2020 NBA Finals. – USA Today Sports

James, Davis put Lakers on brink as Miami downed

ORLANDO: LeBron James scored 28 points as the Los Angeles Lakers moved to within one win of a 17th NBA championship on Tuesday with a 102-96 victory over the Miami Heat. Humbled by Miami in game three on Sunday, James and the Lakers came roaring back in a hard-fought defensive battle that was finely balanced until Los Angeles pulled away in the closing minutes. The win leaves the Lakers 3-1 up in the best-of-seven series, meaning they can clinch the championship with victory in game five in Orlando on Friday. “It felt like both teams were desperate, understanding the situation they had put themselves in,” James said afterwards. “Trying to get every extra possession, execute offensively, not to make mistakes defensively, that’s what it was all about.” James started slowly but clicked in the second half to lead the scoring while providing eight assists and hauling down 12 rebounds. Anthony Davis meanwhile finished with 22 points, while Kentavious Caldwell-Pope chipped in with a vital 15 point contribution. Caldwell-Pope’s tally included a three-pointer and a layup in the closing stages that put the Lakers seven points ahead with two minutes remaining. Davis then drained only his second three-pointer of the night with 39.5 seconds left on the clock to give the Lakers a 100-91 lead and effectively



Los Angeles Lakers’ LeBron James (23) dunks the ball during the first quarter against the Miami Heat in game 4 of the 2020 NBA Finals. – USA Today Sports

seal the contest. Butler, the 40-point hero of Miami’s win on Sunday, was restricted to 22 points, frustrated throughout by a commanding defensive display from Davis. “He challenges me every night, I challenge him every night,” James said of Davis. “We have to do things to help our team win, defensively, and offensively, and he did that tonight — he was spectacular.” **‘MOMENTS OF TRUTH’** Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said

the game had been decided in key moments in the closing stages. “There were some moments of truth there at the end, and probably the bottom line is they won those moments of truth,” Spoelstra said. “It came down to making plays. They just made more plays and more shots to seal it.” An attritional contest saw defences on top throughout, with Miami containing the threat of James and Davis for long periods. James, in particular, struggled to generate his usual rhythm throughout the first half, giving up five turnovers

and scoring just eight points. The Lakers looked to have built a head of steam towards the end of the first quarter, edging into a 27-22 lead after a Kyle Kuzma three-pointer and a driving layup from Alex Caruso. But Miami responded swiftly at the start of the second quarter, transforming a five-point deficit into a 33-29 lead after Jae Crowder’s three-pointer. Butler meanwhile had started smoothly, going five-from-five in the first quarter to move into double figures. Despite Miami’s defensive efforts, the Lakers were still able to carve open a series of good looks, only for off-target shooting to let them down. Nevertheless, the Lakers had inched into a two-point lead at half-time at 49-47. In the third quarter, James’ shooting from distance improved, his first three-pointer of the night coming with a 29-foot effort to put the Lakers ahead at 55-54. A Danny Green bucket was followed by a driving layup from James and the Lakers had suddenly moved into a 59-54 lead. James made another long-range three shortly afterwards to put the Lakers 62-57 up with 6:44 left in the third. Davis’s first three-pointer of the game from 28 feet put the Lakers seven points clear with two minutes left in the third.

— AFP

Messi to put Barca drama behind him as Argentina seek fast start

BUENOS AIRES: Superstar footballer Lionel Messi will take a break from his Barcelona soap opera as he bids to fire Argentina to the World Cup in Qatar and what will probably be his last chance to try to win the coveted trophy. The 33-year-old, a record six-time winner of the Ballon d’Or, has won everything in the club game with Barcelona several times over but his international trophy cabinet looks bare in comparison. “The only goal I have now is to win the World Cup with the national team,” he has said. The closest he has come so far was as losing finalist against Germany in 2014. Thursday’s clash with Ecuador gives him the chance to start building towards one last tilt at that goal. He will be 35 by the time the Qatar World Cup ends, and will turn 39 during the following global showpiece in North America.

In the meantime, he has a pair of qualifiers — Argentina also travel to Bolivia next Tuesday — to distract him from his club travails. Messi tried to force his exit from the Catalan giants in the close season but Barca held firm and a 700 million euro release clause ensured he remained, albeit disgruntled. Playing Ecuador in his homeland may provide a welcome respite but it is also fraught with potential difficulty. Four years ago at the start of qualifying for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Ecuador stunned Argentina 2-0 at River Plate’s iconic Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires.

It took a hat-trick by an inspired Messi in Argentina’s final qualifier — away to Ecuador — to send the twice world champions to Russia. Thursday’s match will be in another iconic stadium: Boca Juniors’ Bombonera. But it will be a surreal experience in an empty ground that would normally be bouncing with stands packed full of some of the most fervent and passionate fans in the world. COVID-19 has put paid to any hopes of a paying public. ‘Memory’ players This is a much-changed Argentina from that which disappointed at the last World Cup. Young coach Lionel Scaloni embarked on an ambitious regeneration of the squad following the abject exit from Russia under the tutelage of Jorge Sampaoli. However, alongside Scaloni’s ‘new guard’ remain several old hats, like Messi.

“We can say that there are seven or eight “memory” players that are the foundation,” said Scaloni, pointing out that with “only one day of preparation” they would need the experienced heads to help the team hit the ground running. He will be without the injured Manchester City forward Sergio Aguero, though, while Scaloni has left out Paris Saint-Germain winger Angel Di Maria. “Messi needs two players ahead of him that he can assist, and sit deep, not at the tip. That’s how we got results at the Brazil 2019 Copa America,” added Scaloni in reference to Argentina’s third-place finish.

— AFP



Barcelona’s Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring a goal. – Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MELBOURNE

Late cricketer Jones farewelled in last lap of MCG

Former Australia batsman Dean Jones has been farewelled in a poignant final lap of an empty Melbourne Cricket Ground following his sudden death last month. The casket of Jones, who collapsed and died aged 59, was draped in an Australia flag and carried in a white hearse adorned with flowers spelling “324”, his Test cap number and his highest first-class score, achieved at the MCG. “Rocket Man” by Elton John — a friend of Jones — echoed through the 100,000-capacity arena as the hearse, followed by only 10 mourners due to anti-coronavirus rules, proceeded around the field on Saturday. — AFP



DUBAI

Skipper Smith fined for IPL slow over-rate

Australia’s Steve Smith has become the third Indian Premier League captain to be fined for a slow over-rate, adding insult to injury after his Rajasthan Royals team were hammered by reigning champions Mumbai Indians. The Royals allowed Mumbai to post 194 for four and lost by 57 runs after being bowled out for 136 — despite England’s Jos Buttler hitting 70 — in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday. The win put Mumbai top of the IPL table. Smith followed Virat Kohli and Shreyas Iyer in having to pay \$1,600 for the slow over-rate under the IPL code of conduct.



LONDON

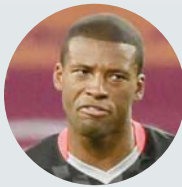
Stokes says ill father backed his decision to return

England all-rounder Ben Stokes has said he had his family’s blessing to return to action in the Indian Premier League with the Rajasthan Royals after taking compassionate leave to visit his father, who is ill with brain cancer. Stokes travelled from his father’s home in New Zealand to Dubai on Saturday and is currently in quarantine ahead of meeting up with his new team to continue their campaign in the IPL, which began in September and ends in November. “Sitting in a hotel room in quarantine once again after leaving New Zealand is not how I thought I would be arriving at the IPL, but here I am”. — Reuters



BELGIUM WAIT FOR WORD ON MERTENS

BRUSSELS: Belgium are still waiting on whether Dries Mertens will be allowed to leave Italy and join up with his national team-mates for three internationals over the next week, including a trip to Wembley at the weekend. — Reuters



‘NOTHING CONCRETE IN BARCELONA TALK’

LONDON: Liverpool midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum has played down reports linking him with a move to Barcelona. The 29-year-old was reported to be one of Ronald Koeman’s primary targets in the close season but Wijnaldum said there was “nothing concrete”. “I don’t think it was that serious,” he said. — Reuters

OMAN U-16 TEAM TO COMMENCE SECOND DOMESTIC CAMP ON OCTOBER 10



ADILAL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCTOBER 7

Oman national U-16 football team will commence their second preparatory domestic camp on October 10 until 24 in Muscat. The internal camp is part of the comprehensive gearing up for the team prior to taking part at the AFC U-16 Championship which will begin in Bahrain in early 2021.

In the previous month and during the first camp after resumption of the sporting

activities, the head coach of national U-16 football team, Hilal al Oufi, had stand on the physical and fitness situation of the players and noted down the strong and weakness points on the technical status for each player.

The previous camp did not feature any preparatory matches due to the restrictions on travel. However, with the gradual reopening of the airports, it is expected that the national teams panel may soon announce the friendlies after receiving the

confirmation from the teams as some of GCC teams requested for friendly matches.

AFC U-16 Championship was supposed to begin on November 25 and conclude on December 13. However, in September the AFC had reviewed the schedules of the AFC U-16 and AFC U-19 Championships until early 2021 taking into consideration the need to prioritise the welfare of young players, as well as the travel and health challenges.

Oman will play against Tajikistan, Yemen

and the United Arab Emirates teams in Group B at the AFC U-16 Championship. The top two teams in the group will advance to the quarterfinal. The top four teams in the AFC U-16 finals will represent Asia at the Fifa U-17 World Cup in 2021 in Peru.

The U-16 team’s squad for the internal camp consists of following probables including: Salim al Abdali, Jawad al Ezzi, Hamza al Eisari, Abdulrahman al Jabri, Nebras al Busaidi (Seeb), Loqman Khamis, Murshid al Hamhami, Abdul Aziz al

Ruzaiqi, Ammar al Saadi, Mishari al Hasani, Muhannad al Saadi (Suwaiq), Fahd al Mukhaini, Mamoun al Oraiimi, Al Munthir al Hasani (Al Oruba), Turki Abdullah, Khalaad Yazeed, Mohamed AbdulHakeem, AbdulMajid al Balushi, Ali al Balushi (Al Ettihad), Ayham al Raqqadi, Abdulaleem al Rawahi (Fanja), Maytham al Mukhaini (Jalaan), Mansoor al Amri (Al Khaboura), Mohammed al Muqbal (Suhar), Al Motasim al Sameen (Dhofar) and Khalid al Hashemi (Al Nahda).

Pint-sized Schwartzman growing in stature at Roland Garros

PARIS: Diego Schwartzman is one of the shortest tennis players on the men’s tour, but like the famous footballer he was named after the Argentine has made a point not to be defined by his size.

Affectionately known as “El Peque” (“shorty”), Schwartzman is a mere 5ft 7in (1.70m) and the smallest player in the world’s top 50, but he is scaling new heights at the French Open.

The 28-year-old reached the last four of a major for the first time on Tuesday, defeating US Open champion and close friend Dominic Thiem in a five-hour epic.

“I’m still in the tournament and I really want to keep winning,” said Schwartzman, having won his first Grand Slam quarterfinal after three previous failures.

“This win is very important for me. In the second and third sets, I was going a little crazy and I was screaming at myself because I had so many chances.”

Schwartzman accepts he will never be blessed with the serve of towering giants John Isner or Ivo

Karlovic, but is quick to put his shortcomings into perspective.

His Polish maternal great-grandfather escaped a train heading for a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust when a coupling broke apart, leaving a section of the train behind as the other carried on to its destination.

After fleeing, he brought his family to Argentina by boat, arriving speaking Yiddish but no Spanish. His father’s ancestors took a similar route as they emigrated from Russia.

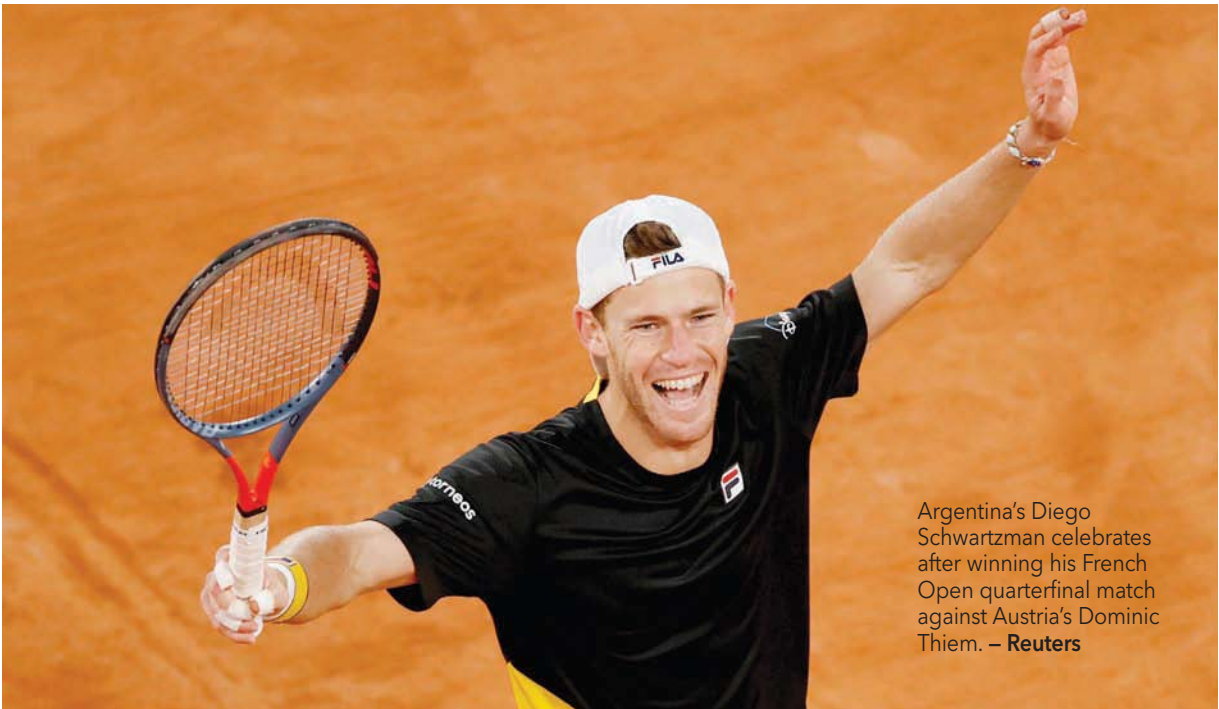
“I don’t know 100% of the history,” said Schwartzman. “(But) they escaped from the war. That is the story, the big story.”

“That’s how the Schwartzman and the Dykes family, surname of my mum, started in Argentina.”

BOOM AND BUST

His parents suffered travails of their own around the time he was born, as a once thriving family business reliant on imported goods was badly hit by economic reforms.

Schwartzman, named after 1986 World Cup hero Diego Maradona,



Argentina’s Diego Schwartzman celebrates after winning his French Open quarterfinal match against Austria’s Dominic Thiem. — Reuters

played football as a child and is fan of Buenos Aires giants Boca Juniors but chose to prioritise tennis.

He and his mother sold rubber bracelets left over from their clothing and jewellery company with the names and logos of popular

football teams to help pay for travel expenses, competing to see who could sell the most.

Trips to Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador for regional events often left a teenage Schwartzman, travelling alone, in tears on the

plane but ultimately strengthened his resolve.

He was far from a touted youngster, his only junior Grand Slam appearance in qualifying at the 2010 US Open ended in the first round and left him riddled with

self-doubt. But Schwartzman has steadily built himself into a quiet contender through years of graft and determination, quashing any reservations about his ability to compete with the best.

He lists his favourite surface as clay, and favourite tournament as Roland Garros, but faces the tallest of orders against a man who has made the French Open his own, his idol Rafael Nadal.

“Rafa is the legend here, is the owner of this place almost,” Schwartzman said of his semifinal showdown with 12-time champion Nadal.

While the odds will be stacked against him, Schwartzman knows Nadal is not entirely invincible having beaten the Spaniard last month when he made the final of the Italian Open in Rome.

“If I see the history, I’m 10-1 down. I’m not sure if I’m going to have a lot of confidence. But, yeah, I know this week that I can beat him. That’s the important thing.”

Sport

BIG HITS

- The big-hitting Sinner had the first break point, in the fifth game, but the Italian made an unforced error.
- Nadal went into the contest having won 48 of his 50 service games but he was in trouble again at 5-5 when Sinner set up two break points.
- He staved off the first with a forehand winner, and the second when Sinner's return of an ill-timed drop shot by the Spaniard flew long.
- From deuce, Sinner created another break chance, which was converted when Nadal's forehand went wide.
- Nadal had his first break points in the following game and he converted the third with a stunning forehand winner down the line.
- The Spaniard was more consistent in the tiebreak as he moved one set up. Sinner, who was three when Nadal first lifted the Coupe des Mousquetaires, took time out to have his right abductor muscle massaged.
- He then came back on court with all guns blazing, breaking for 3-1. Nadal broke back immediately as Sinner showed his first signs of frustration and the Spaniard broke again in the ninth game before wrapping the set on serve, having significantly raised his game.

PARIS: Claycourt master Rafael Nadal passed his first real test of this year's French Open with a 7-6(7-4) 6-4 6-1 victory against Italian rising star Jannik Sinner as his quest for a record-breaking 13th title gathered momentum on Tuesday.

The Spaniard, also looking to match Roger Federer's record of 20 Grand Slam men's singles titles, was stretched by the 19-year-old Sinner as he set up a clash with Argentine Diego Schwartzman, who beat him in the Italian Open quarterfinals last month.

The 34-year-old Nadal's 97 previous victories at Roland Garros made the difference in key moments with the Spaniard rallying from a break down in the first two sets.

Sinner, the first French Open debutant to reach the last eight since Nadal in 2005, confirmed his immense potential but lacked just a bit of composure when it mattered.

"Sinner is a very, very young talent with a lot of power, great shots. For two sets it was tough, especially in the second set I was lucky to be back," said Nadal after a match played in cold conditions that ended at 0126 local time, the latest finish at a French Open.

"The conditions were a little bit difficult, he was hitting every ball very hard and with this cold, my speed is not there. It was hard for me to put him out of position.

"Now I have two, well almost one and a half days off to rest and practice." South Tyrolian Sinner hit powerful groundstrokes, putting Nadal on the backfoot in many rallies on court Philippe Chatrier, only for the Mallorcan to unlock his own massive forehand to turn the tide.

— Reuters

NADAL

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Oman’s top banks see 34.2 per cent decline in H1 profits: Report

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 7

A majority of Oman’s banks are feeling the impact of tightening operating conditions, according to a report by multinational professional services firm KPMG.

The report, titled ‘GCC listed banks results: Six months ended on June 30, 2020’, covers financial institutions across countries including Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

It shares information on trends in the GCC on credit loss provisions reported by banks and a summary of significant regulatory support provided in each GCC country.

Oman’s banks saw a decline in credit flow, revenue compression and significant increase in non-performing loans, the report stated.

The average profits of banks in Oman for H1’20 declined by 34.2 per cent compared to H1’19, primarily on account of increase in expected credit losses by 120.9 per cent compared to H1’19 on loans and advances to customers.

The exception to the trend was Bank Nizwa, Oman’s leading Islamic bank, which registered a 37 per cent growth in its net profits for first half of the year, which rose to \$15.3 million, compared to \$11.2 million for the same period last year.

“The effect of COVID-19 and the consequent lockdowns by governments has impacted



several sectors globally. The banking industry is no exception. Oman’s economy and the banking sector have taken a hit due to the slowdown in the economy and the decline of oil prices”, KPMG said in a statement on the report.

Across the GCC, governments and central banks announced various economic support measures. Central Bank Oman, in its first stimulus package, reduced interest rates and urged banks to consider reducing the existing fees related to various banking services and avoid introducing any new fees for the duration of 2020.

Ravikanth Petluri, Partner and Head of Financial Services at KPMG in Oman, commented: “Our analysis shows that Oman’s banks are facing headwinds from the drop in global interest rates in response to COVID-19 and a low oil price environment. This impact, coupled with a negative view on the economic indicators in 2020, is clearly reflected in the H1’20 results analysed by KPMG for Oman’s banks. Barring one exception, a majority of Oman’s top banks have continued to build their loss allowances during the first two quarters of 2020.”

KEY MILESTONE: The launch of Oman’s national credit bureau (Mala’a) exemplifies efforts by the Central Bank, as well as the Omani government, to strengthen financial inclusion: Tahir al Amri, CBO Executive President

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

The Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a) — the country’s first National Databank — will formally come online on November 18, 2020, coinciding with the Sultanate’s 50th National Day.

Its operationalisation will help address the financial sector’s longstanding need for timely access to credit and financial data, which is indispensable for enhanced decision-making and credit assessment.

An announcement to this effect was made by the Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), under whose auspices the national databank centre operates, at a forum held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel on Tuesday.

Addressing the 5th New Age Banking Summit 2020, organised by UMS Events, Tahir Salim al Amri said the launch of Oman’s national credit bureau exemplified efforts by the apex bank, as well as the Omani government, to strengthen financial inclusion. “The establishment of our National



Mala'a

Databank Centre (Mala’a) — the national credit registry in December 2019 — will empower access to credit, financial inclusion and SME development”, said CBO’s Executive President.

“An integral part of financial inclusion is to provide timely access to affordable credit, which is challenging for small businesses and SMEs”, he noted.

Mala’a, an independent agency constituted by Royal Decree 38/2019, is located on the Central Bank’s

premises in Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM).

The national databank centre serves clients in all economic sectors, including financial institutions, insurers, retailers, telecommunication operators and small to medium-sized companies, among others.

Significantly, the national credit bureau will be modern in its design and service offerings, said Al Amri.

“Mala’a will be operating with world class technologies, scalable data modelling engines and credit bureau platforms. It will initially provide credit risk scores for consumers and corporates.

Going forward, Mala’a will be expanding its scope to provide other services such as mobile lending platforms, instant decisioning

modules, data analysis and other fintech innovations.”

The Centre was inaugurated last December under the brand ‘Mala’a with the mandate to facilitate access to accurate, timely and reliable information through the agency’s secured digital channels.

Mala’a, which means ‘creditworthiness’ (financial solvency in Arabic), aims to re-invent the business model of credit bureau by covering multiple sectors and integrating public registries and financial data as well.

The agency will empower corporates and consumers to have control over their data through a number of self-service channels such as the mobile app and online platform available in both Arabic and English.

TELECOM SERVICES

5G networks affected by external radio interference: TRA

JOMAR MENDOZA
[@JmObserver](https://twitter.com/JmObserver)

External radio interference is to blame for the poor performance of some 5G-based telecom stations operated by mobile service providers Omantel and Ooredoo, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) announced here yesterday.

In a statement, the Authority said the performance of some 5G stations along the coast of North and South Al Batinah, as well as Musandam Governorate, was impacted by the phenomenon.

“Following coordination with

neighbouring countries, it appeared that their 5G networks are also experiencing similar interference at this time. Hence, TRA held a series of meetings with several parties in the region, as well as manufacturers to find appropriate solutions to step these interferences”, it stated.

The Authority expressed regret for the challenges faced by the operators which, it noted, was “out of their control”. It however pledged to work with all of the relevant parties to tackle the issue at the earliest.

Oman’s 5G network was formally launched last December with leading operators Omantel and Ooredoo



High-speed wireless services are seen as key to aiding Oman’s socioeconomic development and are listed as an important enabler in achieving the country’s Vision 2040 goals and powering the country’s digital transformation

pledging to construct as many as 4,400 stations over a five-year timeframe as part of a phased roll-out of the 5G network in the Sultanate.

High-speed wireless services are seen as key to aiding Oman’s

socioeconomic development and are listed as an important enabler in achieving the country’s Vision 2040 goals and powering the country’s digital transformation.

5G telecom technology will cater to the demands of the 4th Industrial Revolution and facilitate the provision of unprecedented services in such sectors as education, healthcare, transportation and entertainment. It will also support the roll-out of smart cities and e-government services, Internet of Things (IoT), remote monitoring of industrial systems, campus area network (CAN), and so on, say experts.

BRIEF BITES INSIDE

CEO SURVEY

GCC CEOs BROADLY SATISFIED WITH PANDEMIC RESPONSE: SURVEY



A new COVID-19 CEO Survey carried out by OBG assesses the thoughts of GCC-based executives on the economic impact of the coronavirus, their reaction to how the pandemic is being handled by their respective governments and their expectations for recovery.

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WATER

HAYA WATER IMPLEMENTS E-LEARNING PROGRAMME



Haya Water launched a new e-learning programme (LMS) in cooperation with Nomu Institute, aiming to develop the employees’ skills and capabilities particularly during the pandemic period.

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AVIATION

TRUMP URGES CONGRESS TO PROVIDE \$25 BILLION BAILOUT FOR US AIRLINES



US President Donald Trump said Congress should quickly extend \$25 billion in new payroll assistance to US passenger airlines furloughing thousands of workers as air travel remains down sharply amid the coronavirus pandemic.

< Page 15

GCC CEOs broadly satisfied with pandemic response

The vast majority (90 per cent) of business leaders said they had implemented remote working and meeting protocols as a result of the coronavirus

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 7

A new COVID-19 CEO Survey carried out by the global research and advisory company Oxford Business Group (OBG) assesses the thoughts of GCC-based executives on the economic impact of the coronavirus, their reaction to how the pandemic is being handled by their respective governments and their expectations for recovery.

Titled “Crisis management: How are CEOs responding to the pandemic?”, the survey covers several topical issues and trends, from the role of technology in containing COVID-19 and the increased focus on localisation to the influence that lower oil prices could have on new growth.

Alongside the findings, the survey includes an in-depth analysis of the answers and the broader economic climate in which they were obtained by Billy FitzHerbert, OBG’s Regional Editor for the Middle East.

In this latest survey, the majority (61 per cent) of executives surveyed told OBG that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their government’s economic response to the



pandemic, a finding that reflects the swift and effective action taken across the region which led to some of the lowest case fatality rates in the world.

Significantly, the vast majority (90 per cent) of business leaders said they had implemented remote working and meeting protocols as a result of the coronavirus, in a sign that broad-based efforts to bolster digital infrastructure and digital literacy in recent years have paid off.

Half of those surveyed told OBG that they believe the pandemic will significantly or very significantly change communication and interaction with their clients and customers. The pandemic has wreaked havoc

on supply chains worldwide, causing delays for businesses operating across the economic sectors, including those in the Gulf.

More than four-fifths (83 per cent) of respondents told OBG that COVID-19 had disrupted their supply chains.

In an indication that some decision-makers are keen to avoid further supply issues, almost one-third (31 per cent) of those surveyed said they were likely or very likely to relocate their supply chains more locally.

Lower oil prices inevitably remain a cause of concern among business leaders in a region that has felt the weight of falling demand for energy worldwide.

More than two-thirds (67 per cent) of CEOs interviewed by OBG said they believe oil prices will significantly or very significantly impact recovery in their sector.

However, a higher proportion (73 per cent) expected their company to be operating above 60 per cent capacity by September 2020 – a finding in line with the mood of cautious optimism evident across the region, according to FitzHerbert.

“Moving forward, business and consumer sentiment is going to be an important factor as authorities look to get economies moving again, fuelled by consumer and business spending,” he noted.

Haya Water implements e-learning programme



MUSCAT: Haya Water launched a new e-learning programme (LMS) in cooperation with Nomu Institute, aiming to develop the employees’ skills and capabilities particularly during the pandemic period. The programme includes a package of specialised programmes in the technical, leadership and administrative fields as well as programmes in health and safety, project management and information technology.

About the new programme, Saleh bin Abdullah al Khamyasi, Human Resources General Manager at Haya Water, said the company pays great attention towards developing its cadres.

This concept stems from Haya Water’s belief that its employees are its pillars and the main engine to lead the development mainly in terms of achieving the Company’s vision and mission.

“The active employees of the system exceeded 64 per cent from March to August of the current year.

The number of fully-completed training courses reached 2340, and the number of fully and partially completed training courses reached 4950 training courses in the same period. Besides, the trainer would be granted an accredited certificate from the Nomu Institute after passing the course exam,” he said.

Zahir al Maani, IT Operations Manager, affirmed that the electronic training system (LMS) is a very excellent system and is a distinct initiative by the concerned department in the Company.

“Personally, I have found the programme is useful. Through it, I can invest my free time either at home or the office. In addition, the courses’ themes that are available in this programme are comprehensive and cover different topics in various fields. For myself, I have benefited greatly particularly in the field of Information Technology.”

Sohar International’s CEO named CEO of the Year

MUSCAT: In recognition of his exceptional leadership in taking Sohar International to greater heights and setting new benchmarks in banking & finance excellence, Ahmed al Musallami

(pictured), Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International won the top honour at the Oman Banking & Finance Awards 2020 receiving the ‘CEO of the Year – Banking’ Award. This award



comes as a true testament to the resilient growth strategy that has been set in full gear with an exemplary leadership style enabling the bank to reach new heights and continue to redefine banking.

The award was presented to Ahmed al Musallami, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International at the prestigious Oman Banking & Finance

Awards (powered by OER) by the Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker, HE Tahir al Amri, Executive President, Central Bank of Oman, in a ceremony held at Hotel Sheraton Oman .

Mohammed Mahfoudh Al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors at Sohar International on the bank’s CEO’s recognition, he said, “Sohar International continues to be steered by a team of

leaders that are highly capable with extensive knowledge and come from different backgrounds.

With a pool of extremely talented and skilled individuals, harnessing such powers truly requires a leader that can inspire and drive change to build a culture of innovation in the bank, which is today apparent in Sohar International’s benchmark services that define modern banking and financial excellence.

BRIEF BITES

MUSCAT



BANK MUSCAT PREMIER BANKING CARDS OFFERS EXCLUSIVE PRIVILEGES

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, in line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’ and commitment to a secure and convenient electronic payment option for customers, has created an experience of convenience and exclusive privileges for its Premier Banking cardholders. With the reopening of international travel in October, Bank Muscat cards will prove to be a perfect companion for travellers. The exclusive Premier Banking cards meet customer expectations at all levels offering niche benefits and unparalleled privileges. Abdulnasir al Raisi (pictured), DGM – Premier Banking, said: “Bank Muscat Premier Banking offers customer service excellence with its world-class products and services.”

MUSCAT

DHOFAR INSURANCE RECEIVES AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INSURANCE



Chairman of Dhofar Insurance Majid Sultan al Toky received an award for “Excellence in Insurance” from HE Tahir Salim Al Amri, CEO of Central Bank of Oman at the Oman Banking & Finance Awards 2020 powered by OER. The award was received for Innovative insurance products, expeditious claims settlement – reinforced during ‘Mekunu’ and the recent floods in Salalah, and continued to serve customers during the lockdown with a 24/7 call centre. Dhofar Insurance has the largest network across all wilayat in Sultanate of Oman with 42 branches and 24/7 call centre. The Company has registered a consistent growth in both gross Premium and profitability despite tough economic conditions.

MUSCAT

OAB ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF ITS AUGUST HASAAD SAVINGS DRAW

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced the names of the 131 winners of its monthly Hasaad Savings Scheme for August. This included 94 winners of the monthly branch draws of RO 1,000 each, ten winners of the Children’s Account draw (RO 100 each), twenty winners of the Youth Account draw (RO 100 each), five winners of RO 500 of the Bank’s Salary Transfer draw and two winners of RO 10,000 of the Elite draw from the Muscat branch.



Commenting on the results of the draw, Rashad al Shaikh, Acting Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, “As we near the last quarter of the year, I am proud to note that we continue to see an increased number of savings from our customers.”

MUSCAT



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Toyota is offering enthusiasts one of the finest opportunities ever to own their dream Toyota. With even more exclusive benefits on select models. The models include Camry HEV LE (2019YM) available with cash gift RO 3000, 1-year comprehensive insurance and service 3 yrs/30,000 kms. RAV4 LE (2020 YM/ 2019 Plate) available with cash gift RO 3000, 1-year comprehensive insurance and service 4 yrs/40,000 kms and special interest rates. Fortuner 2020 YM 2.7 Classic GLX and 4.0 Luxury NAVI and 4.0 LTD SPL available with cash gift RO 2400, 1-year comprehensive insurance and service 3 yrs / 30,000 kms and the Rush 2020 YM (Premium and Exclusive) available with cash gift RO 1700, 1-year comprehensive insurance and service 3 yrs/30,000 kms.

MUSCAT

ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK TO HOLD SPECIAL BUSHRA PRIZE SAVINGS ACCOUNT DRAW TO MARK OMANI YOUTH 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 Youth customers between the ages of 18 to 25 on Omani Youth Day on Oct 26, 2020. There will be 12 winners of RO 500 each as hiba from the shareholders’ funds in this special Omani Youth 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 to pioneering innovative Sharia-compliant products and services that cater to customers’ needs.

DUBAI



ROCHE WEBINAR HIGHLIGHTS THE URGENCY OF ADOPTING PERSONALISED HEALTH CARE SOLUTIONS

Roche hosted a virtual plenary session titled “Building Resilient Health Systems in the Middle East”. The session, moderated by Rima Maktabi, Al Arabiya News Channel Bureau Chief - London and Former CNN host – Inside the Middle East, featured a panel of prominent business and public health experts. The session discussed the pandemic’s impact on health care in the Middle East, and the measures needed to pave the way for the future of health care in the region. This session is part of the global FutureProofing Healthcare initiative, supported by Roche, which examines the fundamental drivers of sustainable health care systems.

EGYPT’S NET FOREIGN RESERVES AT \$38.425 BILLION

Egypt’s net foreign reserves rose slightly to \$38.425 billion at the end of September from \$38.366 billion at end of August, the central bank said on Wednesday. Foreign reserves had dropped since March from a high of more than \$45 billion amid the economic fallout from the coronavirus outbreak. > Reuters



HYUNDAI DELIVERS 50 TRUCKS TO SWITZERLAND

South Korean carmaker Hyundai presented the first seven hydrogen-powered trucks to customers in Switzerland, out of 50 such vehicles scheduled this year to bring zero-emission commercial vehicles to European roads. For long haul, proponents say hydrogen-powered trucks have an advantage over electric rivals. > Reuters



Islamic banks play key role in project finance

Although Islamic banking is a relatively recent addition to the financial systems of a number of Arab and Islamic countries, it is making a significant contribution to the economies of these countries through its financing of viable investment projects. The Islamic banking industry started in Oman several years ago compared to the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where Islamic banking was launched at the beginning of the 1970s. Barely a decade has passed since the establishment of the first Islamic banks in Oman after 2011. As Oman prepares to begin the implementation of its new economic vision



Haider al Lawati
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AS OMAN PREPARES TO BEGIN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS NEW ECONOMIC VISION, THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC FINANCING WILL BE SIGNIFICANT.

(Oman Vision 2040) early next year, the role of Islamic financing will be significant. In an example of the contribution of Islamic finance, Bank Nizwa — which is one of the main Islamic banks in Oman — recently signed a strategic financing agreement with Nakheel Oman Development Company to fund establishment of an industrial complex for dates and related industries in Nizwa. This initiative will contribute to strengthening food security, as well as implement best practices in the field of food processing. Bank officials believe that the partnership in such vital projects comes within the framework of the foundations and values upon which the Islamic bank has been established in this industry.

This means that the efforts are not limited to financing people in personal projects, but also in funding investment projects that are economically feasible for the country. Such ventures will contribute to the production and marketing of Omani products, and enable young people to obtain job opportunities in their local communities, thereby mitigating migration from rural areas into the capital region. Khalid al Khalili, Chairman of the Bank’s Board of Directors, said that the institution’s works by supporting such vital projects not only generate high returns, but also contribute to economic and social development. This particular project will also achieve the strategic goals of the One Million

Date Palms Project, and contribute to the preservation of natural resources, supporting sustainable development in the agricultural sector and achieving food security – goals that are enshrined in the Vision 2040 strategy. Amid the economic slump triggered by the decline in global oil prices since mid-2014, coupled with impacts caused by the pandemic, many organisations and companies have suffered while employment opportunities have shrunk. But Islamic banks, among other institutions, have the opportunity to create real partnerships with public and private sector organisations to support economic diversification, open up new sources of national income, and boost exports by commercialising local resources.

In brief

■ BRUSSELS

POST-BREXIT TRADE TALKS RESUME IN LONDON

Negotiations between the EU and Britain on their post-Brexit relationship resume in London on Wednesday in the hope of reaching an agreement by the end of October, European sources said. The talks are due to last until Friday when a meeting is scheduled between chief negotiators Michel Barnier and David Frost. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Prime Minister Boris Johnson agreed on Saturday to speed up talks in an attempt to reach a deal while negotiations are stalled and time is running out. The Europeans want to reach an agreement by the end of October, but there has been little narrowing of differences on the three thorniest issues: fishing rights, public aid and the governance of the agreement since talks began in March. London has set an even earlier deadline of October 15, the date of an EU summit in Brussels. With a path to compromise urgently needed, Barnier this week reached out to the bloc’s fishery ministers, notably the French and Dutch. A failure to reach an agreement on the future relationship would have potentially disastrous consequences for economies already affected by the pandemic. — AFP

Trump urges Congress to provide \$25 billion bailout for US airlines

Airlines for America, the trade group representing major US airlines, noted “thousands of airline workers across the country have already lost their jobs – and more furloughs are expected in the coming weeks.”

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Congress should quickly extend \$25 billion in new payroll assistance to US passenger airlines furloughing thousands of workers as air travel remains down sharply amid the coronavirus pandemic. Trump’s new demand came hours after he announced his administration would abandon talks with congressional Democrats over proposals to spend at least \$1.6 trillion in additional coronavirus relief funds, a move that appeared to scuttle a new \$25 billion bailout for US passenger airlines to keep tens of thousands of workers on the job for another six months. But Trump later issued a call on Twitter, urging Congress to “IMMEDIATELY Approve 25 Billion Dollars for Airline Payroll Support.... I will sign now!” he wrote, saying Congress could tap unused funds from prior coronavirus relief to fund airlines and a separate programme for



An aerial photo shows aircraft at Boeing facilities at the Grant County Airport in Moses Lake, Washington. – Reuters

small business. American Airlines and United Airlines last week began laying off 32,000 workers, but had said they would reverse course if lawmakers reach a deal on a new government program to fund payroll costs. A prior \$25 billion airline payroll support programme of mostly cash grants approved by Congress in March expired on September 30. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi last Friday expressed support for a standalone bill to keep airline

workers on the job if a broader package could not be reached. Congress is expected to return to session on October 19 and lawmakers may make a new attempt to pass a standalone measure to provide the \$25 billion sought by airlines but the prospects are uncertain, even though the airline relief enjoys strong support in both the House and Senate. One remaining issue is how Congress would pay for the new funding, a senior congressional

aide said. American Airlines closed about 4.5 per cent lower after Trump’s tweet on ending talks, while shares of United Airlines closed 3.6 per cent lower. Southwest Airlines stock fell 2.4 per cent and Delta Air Lines shares closed 2.9 per cent lower. Airlines for America, the trade group representing major US airlines, noted “thousands of airline workers across the country have already lost their jobs — and more furloughs are expected in the coming weeks.” But the group added “there is a glimmer of hope that our leaders in Washington will act and save these jobs before it’s too late.” The US Travel Association said “with millions of Americans suffering, it is woefully shortsighted to end relief negotiations” and added that “without immediate aid, 50 per cent of all travel-supported jobs will be lost by December — an additional loss of 1.3 million jobs.” US airlines are collectively burning about \$5 billion of cash a month as passenger traffic has stalled at around 30 per cent of 2019 levels. After tapping capital markets, they say they have enough liquidity to last them at least 12 months at that rate. Between voluntary and involuntary furloughs, major US airlines’ workforce will shrink by at least 25 per cent in October. Industry experts expect a slight improvement in domestic demand over the winter holidays from current levels, but it will remain far below last year’s volumes. Meanwhile, higher-margin business and international travel remain severely depressed. Chief executives acknowledge that pre-pandemic air travel demand is unlikely to return for years, and still unknown is how the pandemic, which has forced drastic changes in habits, will impact travel behaviour. — Reuters

German ministries agree on stricter rules after Wirecard debacle

BERLIN: German ministries have agreed on stricter regulations for financial markets and private companies, following a scandal involving the now-insolvent Wirecard company and its dubious accounting practices. An action plan foresees greater oversight powers for German financial regulator Bafin to combat balance-sheet fraud more effectively. The government body is to be granted the right to audit all capital market-oriented companies. Currently, it can only carry out special audits of financial institutions — as was the case with the WirecardBank AG subsidiary. The state is also to keep a closer eye on companies with complex international structures, like Wirecard, and auditors at capital-market companies are to change every 10 years under the tougher rules. — dpa

Spain to create more than 800,000 jobs in 3 years

MADRID: Spain plans to create over 800,000 new jobs in the next three years with aid it will receive from an EU rescue plan to help the virus-battered economy, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Wednesday. The country will use the 140 billion euros (\$165 billion) in aid from the European Union between 2021 and 2026 to boost its economy, which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, he said, unveiling the government rescue plan. This plan should be considered “a road map for the modernisation of our country in

“This plan should be considered “a road map for the modernisation of our country in the next six years” which aims to “transform the hard blow of the pandemic into an enormous opportunity”

PEDRO SANCHEZ
Prime Minister



the next six years” which aims to “transform the hard blow of the pandemic into an enormous opportunity,” Sanchez said. Spain will use a first block of 72 billion euros between 2021 and 2023 to finance “projects which can be executed in three years and which favour the modernisation

and the creation of jobs,” he added. Nearly a third of the all the money received from the EU will go towards the economy’s digital transformation while over 37 per cent will be used to transition to greener energy sources in alignment with targets set by the European Commission. The pandemic has pulverised Spain’s tourism-dependent economy, with the government warning that GDP would fall by 11.2 per cent this year, down from a previous prediction for a 9.2 per cent decline. — AFP

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Classifieds

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OMAN DAILY

Observer

Classified Section

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Rban Alz Fran LITTYWR LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1281033**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **250,000.000** to **25,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof



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Thai archaeologists hunt ancient artwork

An antelope, a lonely figure, a family linking arms — Kanniga Premjai shines her flashlight across a cave to reveal long-hidden paintings, a stunning discovery for Thailand's scrappy team of archaeologists.

For months, Kanniga and her small team have combed Sam Roi Yot National Park, about four hours southwest of Bangkok, following a ranger wielding a machete as he slashes a path through thorny vegetation.

They had searched about 40 caves — with no luck — before they stumbled on a cavern located a steep climb through rocky cliff terrain.

"I screamed when we found the paintings", she said, pointing out clusters of rust-coloured figures that look like they are holding hands.

The dark walls initially shrouded the etchings, but careful examination and the use of a mobile application — which helps researchers enhance rock art — exposed the drawings.

"They are pre-historic and they're about 2-3,000 years old", Kanniga says.

Thailand has unearthed ancient temples and cities, such as the ruins in the historic former capital of Ayutthaya and northern Chiang Mai — which attract domestic and foreign tourists.

But the search for cave drawings is more challenging for Thailand's understaffed Department of Fine Arts, often because of the arduous trekking required.

"A lot of their primary work is just preserving what is already found... and that already takes up a lot of time", says Noel Hidalgo Tan, an expert with Southeast Asia's regional centre for archaeology and fine arts.

"There's a lot of places in Thailand that are still unexplored."

LOST FOR CENTURIES

Locals often venture into the caves to collect guano — or bat



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feces used as fertiliser — but might not notice the wall art, which is why Kanniga's mission is "to search every cave and cliff in the park".

"We don't know what we'll stumble upon", the 40-year-old archaeologist says, as she ducks into the cave's inner chambers.

While they are not Thailand's oldest — that title belongs to markings believed to be between 5-11,000 years old found in the north — the "Clay Cave" supports Kanniga's hypothesis that the Sam Roi Yot area was once

home for pre-historic people.

Cave exploration is Kanniga's passion, but this year is the first in her nearly two-decade career that she is able to devote time and resources to it.

She is one of three archaeologists overseeing six provinces in the Ratchaburi Fine Arts Department and previously spent time assessing historical sites to determine age and provenance.

"Foreign archaeologists usually specialise in one thing, but in Thailand we need to do a bit of everything", she says.

The discovery of paintings in 2016 by authorities doing a cursory sweep of Sam Roi Yot's perimeter prompted Kanniga to push for further research in the park's unmapped grounds.

Today, the national park is popular with domestic tourists visiting nearby beaches and avid birdwatchers observing the wetlands.

'FINDING TREASURE'

The evidence suggests that hunter-gatherers lived in the area some 3,000 years ago, says Tan, a senior specialist on cave and rock art in the region.

"They would be moving camp-to-camp, so they would have a camp up in the mountains", he says, adding that the shoreline of the Gulf of Thailand would have been further inland.

Despite the area's potential, sustained exploration by the kingdom's overstretched archaeologists is likely difficult because "caves can't be easily turned into tourism sites" like historic temples, Tan says.

"As a way to preserve them and protect them, you need to generate revenue but it is not as monetisable."

But Kanniga remains undeterred by the challenges, pushing on with two researchers to search for hidden finds in the park's unexplored caves.

"It's quite exciting, but it's a little scary especially when we're climbing", Chananchaita Kitcho said.

The 23-year-old is grateful they have been successful in their exploration, especially since the difficult climbs can at times feel futile.

"First we get lost. Then we find the cave", she jokes.

Kanniga says she still gets goosebumps when she spies scrawls in the tell-tale ochre pigments.

She says: "When you find the paintings, it's like you're finding a treasure. The charm of archaeology is you never get bored." — **AFP**

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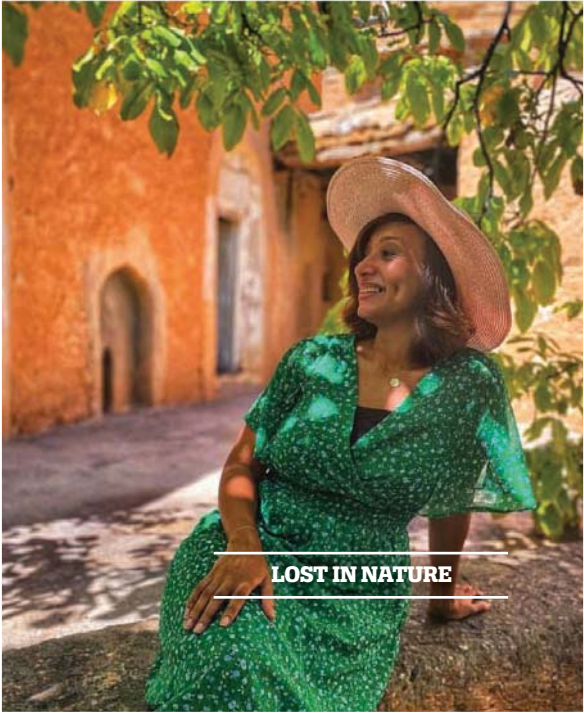


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CONSERVATION Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om

Baby boom at Taipei Zoo lightens pandemic blues



Taiwan's largest zoo has celebrated a flurry of births in recent months—including pandas and pangolins — in a welcome boost during a visitor slump due to the coronavirus. Human footfall to Taipei Zoo may have dropped this year but officials have been kept on their toes with an animal baby boom that has just kept coming. Formosan serows, Eurasian otters, jackass penguins, koalas, marmosets and black-capped squirrel monkeys have all added to their ranks since the beginning of 2020. "We are very lucky this year with successful breedings from many international cooperation projects with our partner zoos and aquariums in Europe and Southeast Asia," Taipei Zoo spokesman Eric Tsao said. Tsao said visitor arrivals are down 20-30 per cent because of the virus — even though Taiwan has emerged largely unscathed from the pandemic thanks to a

response that has won global recognition. The birth that has garnered the most excitement is Yuan Bao, the second female cub born to giant panda Yuan Yuan. Yuan Yuan and her partner Tuan Tuan have been star attractions at the zoo since their arrival from China in 2008 as a symbol of what were then warm relations between the two sides. Three-month-old Yuan Bao — "round baby" in Mandarin — has grown into a robust cub currently weighing five kilogrammes, up from 186 grammes at birth. The zoo has posted regular pictures of Yuan Bao on its social media platform and the public will likely be able to catch a glimpse of her in person by the end of the year. Beijing usually only loans its critically endangered pandas and any progeny must be sent to China. But in a rare departure from that protocol, Taiwan was allowed to keep the cubs as their parents were a gift, according to Taipei officials. Earlier this month another

Human footfall to Taipei Zoo may have dropped this year but officials have been kept on their toes with an animal baby boom that has just kept coming

of the zoo's most popular animals added to the growing nursery. Mofen — a Malayan tapir who featured in director Ang Lee's Oscar-winning film "Life of Pi" — gave birth short-

ly after a Czech delegation visited Taiwan. The timing was fortuitous as Mofen's mate came from Prague Zoo. Taipei and Prague have grown closer in recent years, much to the annoyance of Beijing, which claims Taiwan and tries to keep the democratic island internationally isolated. Taipei is preparing to send two pangolins to Prague Zoo — including a male born in April — as part of an exchange agreement between the two sister cities. Tsao said he hoped the spate of new arrivals will help raise conservation awareness among the public. "The role of a zoo has evolved from collecting exotic animals in the last century to carrying the responsibility to help prevent the extinction of endangered animals," he said. "The zoo has to play an important part to maintain a safe population for the endangered species under its care... in the hope that one day they can return to their natural habitats."—AFP

HOSPITALITY



Nabil al Zadjali named new general manager of Al Bustan Palace

MUSCAT: With over three decades of experience across the public and private sectors, Nabil al Zadjali was appointed as the new General Manager of Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Nabil succeeds Katrin Herz, who had held the role for five years. Moving from his previous post as Deputy General Manager, Nabil is bringing his diverse experience from his various leadership roles to his new position, and is anticipated to drive the next chapter of the hotel's rich history. "During Katrin's tenure, she has driven remarkable growth for the hotel and it is with great anticipation that I endeavour to build on the precedence she has set," said Al Zadjali. "I look forward to leading the team and taking this opportunity to cultivate the resort in ways that will match its exquisite setting, while engaging the passionate spirits of our Ladies and Gentlemen to continue providing authentic experiences. Building on our proud history, we hope to continue on our positive momentum, inviting guests to make memories with us time and again." Having joined the hotel in 2005 as Executive Assistant Manager, Nabil is credited for his supporting role in a number of projects, including a major 18-month renovation that saw the hotel completely redefine its guest experience. With over three decades of experience across the public and private sectors, he has held a number of leadership roles and offers a solid track record in achieving business growth, high-quality results, and strong financial performance. Nabil has participated in several committees within the tourism industry, and was among the team who formed the Oman Tourism Strategy 2030. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the American University in Cairo and a Diploma in Marketing Management from Boston College, US.

FASHION

Drive, skate, vote: Vuitton closes Paris Fashion Week with slogans

PARIS: French luxury label Louis Vuitton on Tuesday showed off its latest collection on the last day of Paris Fashion Week, featuring slogans splashed onto tops and dresses in pop colours - and which included a sweater stating "Vote". The look was the first one to cross the runway - housed inside a spectacular Art Deco building in Paris - and was fol-

lowed by others like "Skate" or "Bounce", on outfits with a skater-vibe. The brand, owned by luxury goods conglomerate LVMH, provided no specific context for the slogans, though the show comes weeks before the US presidential election. Vuitton's womenswear designer Nicolas Ghesquiere said in show notes that the collection was focused on the increasingly fluid boundaries between genders, with some oversized T-shirt styles for instance which could be masculine or feminine. "On some styles, prints are made up of words that are like positive injunctions," Ghesquiere added. "I wanted to transliterate an energetic, vigorous, daring collection." Vuitton held the socially distanced show - one of only a handful of physical catwalk events in Paris this season due to the coronavirus pandemic - inside La Samaritaine, a recently renovated 150-year-old department store owned by LVMH. — Reuters



FASHION

Designing traditional dresses with a touch of modernity

BY MAI AL ABRIA

Zealously believing that every stitch matters, Bushra al Araimiyah is one of the primary creators of the Omani traditional dresses with modern touches. She started from scratch with only a needle and a thread but this is only what it requires.

"Even the biggest names in fashion design had to start somewhere, and often it was at the bottom. It was their commitment to developing their creative and business skills, persistence in the face of rejection, and their unwavering passion for design, that allowed them to break out and succeed," she said.

After getting her technical diploma, Bushra took her dreams to Sur and became an international trainer and fashion designer. Her ten years of experience helped her to launch her fashion brand "Araimia Touch" and her business blossomed over the years with her products selling throughout the Sultanate.

Inspired by the Omani nature

and the country's different terrains, her collections are all telling stories of the Omani culture.

"I tend to use the most traditional fabric I find in the market.

Inspired by the Omani nature and the country's different terrains, Bushra al Araimiyah's collections are all telling stories of the Omani culture

The kind that our ancestors used to have in the past. Amazingly, it is all coming back to life again. The old fashion is now favoured by girls but they love it with modern touches," she explained.

"Even the forts and castles can inspire me when designing a garment. I believe that the designer

has to be well educated about other cultures and even governorates in the same country. I design different styles, not only the ones of Sur. I have customers from different parts of the Sultanate," she shared.

"We grow our creative talents through experience: whether it's learning from a veteran designer about how things came to be or finding our own sources. I have been always fascinated by the Emirati designer Muna al Mansooriyah who uses traditional touched in her collections. But no great designer exists without inspiration," she said.

She also shared, "I participated at many fashion shows like the one in Bait Al Zubair in 2018, Al Mouj Fashion show in the occasion of the 48th National Day, and one in Al Araimi Boulevard in 2019."

Today, Bushra is known for her trademark upscale children gowns, a range of accessories, and ladies traditional party dresses. The advice she gives to aspiring designers is "Don't be afraid to take time to learn. It's good to work for other people."



features

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Designing traditional dresses with a touch of modernity

Bushra al Araimi has long since established herself as one of the creators of traditional dresses with modern touches. Inspired by the country's beautiful history, architecture, nature and geography, she continues to create garments that showcase more of her culture but put little twists to make them relevant to the fashionistas of today... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

DISCOVERY

THAI ARCHAEOLOGISTS HUNT ANCIENT ARTWORK

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CONSERVATION

BABY BOOM AT TAIPEI ZOO LIGHTENS PANDEMIC BLUES

Taiwan's largest zoo has celebrated a flurry of births in recent months – including pandas and pangolins – in a welcome boost during a visitor slump due to the coronavirus... Story on **Page 18**

READ

THE HATE U GIVE

BY ANGIE THOMAS

A 16-year-old girl sees a police officer kill her friend.

FASHION

DRIVE, SKATE, VOTE: VUITTON CLOSES PARIS FASHION WEEK WITH SLOGANS

French luxury label Louis Vuitton on Tuesday showed off its latest collection on the last day of Paris Fashion Week, featuring slogans splashed onto tops and dresses in pop colours – and which included a sweater stating "Vote"... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE

INTERNATIONAL PODIATRY DAY

When was the last time you last thought about your feet? We use them almost everyday that it has become easy to neglect how important they are. The International Podiatry Day is celebrated to raise awareness about foot health. To celebrate today, why don't you take your feet to a nice spa.