

# ObserverWeekend



INSIDESTORIES 

Duqm Refinery commissioning

DUQM: Duqm Refinery, whose construction is advancing at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm on Oman's southeast coast, is slated for commissioning as early as late next year or early 2022, Argus Media, a leading news portal on global energy and commodity markets, announced on Friday, citing the Sultanate's Minister of Energy and Minerals. Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy was quoted in the interview as stating that the estimated \$7 billion greenfield refinery is expected to process its first crude before the end of 2021 or in early 2022 — well ahead of the timeline initially envisaged for the delivery of the strategically vital national project.

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Lanka tows tanker away from coast

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka began towing a fully loaded supertanker that had caught fire off its east coast after it began drifting towards land, a spokesman for the navy of the Indian Ocean nation said on Friday. The fire was still raging on the *New Diamond* tanker carrying about 2 million barrels of oil, said the spokesman, Captain Indika de Silva. There were 23 crew on board, one of whom is presumed dead. The rest have been taken off the ship by the Sri Lankan navy, with one injured crew member flown to the capital Colombo for treatment.

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Varsities act against erring students

PORTLAND: Police shot and killed an anti-fascist activist on Thursday as they moved in to arrest him for the alleged fatal shooting of a right-wing activist in Portland, Oregon, last weekend, officials said. Michael Reinhoehl, 48, was wanted on a charge of murder when members of a fugitive task force shot him dead in Olympia, Washington after he left an apartment and got in a car, according to police. "The suspect produced a firearm, threatening the lives of law enforcement officers", a US Marshals Service spokesman said.

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Former Italian PM in hospital

MILAN: Italy's flamboyant former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has been hospitalised, his aides said on Friday, days after the media tycoon became the latest high-profile figure to contract the coronavirus. Berlusconi, 83, was taken to San Raffaele Hospital in Milan on Thursday night after suffering "certain symptoms", his entourage said in a statement. But it said the move was just "a precaution" and there was "no cause for concern".

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# A GUIDE FOR GUIDES

## AN OMANI INSPIRING AND MOTIVATING FELLOW WOMEN TO BECOME TRAVEL PROFESSIONALS

KABEER YOUSUF

If the epitome of three words, travel, love and passion can be summed up, the result will be Wisal al Rashdi, an ambitious Omani travel guide who keeps motivating people to love travelling and guiding others.

Simply put, she became a guide because she loves travelling and exploring other cultures. A determinant hardworking, outgoing, social and very flexible Omani youth.

"I want people who come to Oman to have great experiences in my country and to love and appreciate its beautiful scenery, people and culture," says Wisal, a certified general guide in Oman.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, there are 27 female tour guides in the country specialised in various languages and the ministry has licensed 14 Omani females just last year.

"I want to tell my fellow women out there who complain about mundane office chores to transform your passion into your profession so that you'll never get fed up of work", Wisal, who works at the British Council during the week and guides visitors in Oman on weekends.

With the aim to inspire and motivate local women, she has started her webpage a few months ago as an online initiative, which is supported by the "women in tourism movement" at Oman College of Tourism. "This is to encourage more people to join the tourism industry as guides but to specifically encourage women. I ran a series of talks online on Zoom to make an attempt towards this", says Wisal.

Wisal says that we don't have enough female guides in the industry and we need to see more women in the field of guiding whether it is general guiding like me or adventure guiding.

All the females I featured never told their stories before, so it was new for people to see females talk about their personal journeys in tourism online. I also covered two topics that were discussed for the first time like. "A Guide for Guides which was a talk aimed at giving Guides tips on guiding and explaining to them how to become a certified guide", she adds.

She opines that by openly featuring their stories and discussing topics of different interests will inspire them to join.

TRAVEL



FOR ELEONORA, THE SULTANATE IS A 'GEM OF THE MIDDLE EAST'. ITS NATURAL BEAUTY KEEPS CALLING HER BACK, TO DISCOVER MORE OF THE HIDDEN WADIS, SWIM IN CLEAR WATER BEACHES AND CAMPING IN THE HIGH MOUNTAINS.

SEE P2

Widespread COVID-19 vaccination not expected until mid-2021: WHO

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said it did not expect widespread immunisation against the novel coronavirus until mid-2021, despite growing expectations in the US and beyond that a vaccine could be released within weeks.

Across the world, governments are hoping to announce a vaccine as soon as possible and roll out treatments for COVID-19, which has killed nearly 870,000 people and infected well over 26 million. The UN health agency welcomed the fact that a "considerable number" of vaccine candidates had entered final stage Phase III trials, which typically involve tens of thousands of people.

"We know of at least six to nine that have got quite a long way with the research already", WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told reporters in Geneva.



However, she stressed, "in terms of realistic timelines, we are really not expecting to see widespread vaccination until the middle of next year".

Under normal procedures, test administrators must wait for months or years to verify that vaccine candidates are safe and efficacious.

But as the pandemic continues to take a devastating toll, there has been massive pressure to roll out a vaccine quickly.

It was revealed this week that Washington has urged US states to get ready for a potential coronavirus vaccine rollout by November 1, sparking concerns President Donald Trump's administration is rushing to begin distributing a vaccine before the November 3 elections.

The US Food and Drug Administration has also raised the possibility that a vaccine might be given emergency authorisation before the end of trials.

The FDA has faced allegations from the medical community, which it has denied, that it is bowing to political pressure from Trump, who is trailing Democratic challenger Joe Biden in the polls.

NO CUTTING CORNERS

The worry is that, for emergency use approval, the bar for ruling a vaccine safe and effective is lower than that for normal full approvals.

Several company executives stressed on Thursday the importance of sticking to high testing norms, vowing not to cut corners on safety and efficacy standards, even as they race to bring coronavirus vaccines and treatments to market. — AFP



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| <b>Senior Citizen Prize</b><br>August<br><b>1,000 OMR</b><br>For 1 winner (per branch) | <b>Youth Prize</b><br>August<br><b>500 OMR</b><br>For 1 winner (per branch) | <b>Expat Prize</b><br>September<br><b>1,000 OMR</b><br>For 1 winner (per branch) | <b>Ladies Prize</b><br>October<br><b>1,000 OMR</b><br>For 1 winner (per branch) | <b>Kids Prize</b><br>October<br><b>100 OMR</b><br>For 5 winners (per branch) |
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# A place of peace & calm

LIJU CHERIAN  
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

*Muscat,  
You are a dream,  
You look brand new,  
As if the paint is still fresh,  
As if the grass grew  
green for the first time  
Oman, I love you  
Muscat, you are art.  
The white hallways of the  
Sultan's palace  
lift up your heart,  
lift up your mind.*

A Khalil Gibran favourite, this poem by Eleonora Kokorina, a frequent traveller to the Sultanate, as she keeps coming back for the peace the country offers.

She grew up in The Netherlands and lives in Apeldoorn town, travelling around the world through her job as a KLM flight attendant.

A passionate travel blogger, she has so far visited 55 countries in six continents having travelled 22 per cent of the globe so far.

She first landed in the Sultanate in 2017 and did not even know what a wadi was. Today, after 10 visits, Wadi Shab is no familiar spot to her like it was during its first introduction.

"I didn't know what Oman looked like at all so when I experienced it, I was blown away by its natural beauty," she recalls.

"I brought my friends and family on a visit to Oman. Wadi Al Arbeieen seems to be my favourite spot for its breathtaking waterfalls good enough for a picnic. I also loved the hot water Nakhl springs which provide relaxation. There are so many beautiful spots, and it is difficult to choose one," explains Eleonora.

The best part of her visit was with Tatjana, her mom, sleeping in Al Houb, an abandoned mountain village in Jabal Al Akhdhar. "Though this may sound scary but on the contrary, she felt like a sanctuary of peace. The village lies hidden in a mountain valley, only to be seen from the highest top of 3,000 metres in Jabal Shams," she mentions.

"I always come back for the feeling of peace and serenity during each holiday. Oman for me is the gem of the Middle East. Its natural beauty keeps calling me back, to discover more of the hidden wadis, swim in clear water beaches and camping in the high mountains. Most people do not know about Oman as a holiday



destination yet, and many times you find yourself alone in these places of nature," she admits.

Her work as a flight attendant in KLM enables her to travel extensively. She had visited the Sultanate four times as part of her profession. Earlier, she stayed in Muscat between 72 and 48 hours. She however prefers the

longer lay-over than the 24-hour stay.

"Through travel we learn what books cannot teach. I have always been interested in different cultures, philosophies and habits. Travel opens up our minds, vision of life when we connect with the world and this is my favourite aspect about travel. In school, I would dream about working

in foreign countries and I choose to study tourism management, which became my gateway to the world," she says. To pursue her dreams, she created a website to share her best tips and tricks about travel and personal development.

"It is an easy way to share my experiences with my colleagues,

fellow travellers and my friends. A platform for me to use my creativity and share my experiences. I recently uploaded a blog about spending one night in an abandoned village in the mountains"

Her family was also completely blown away by Oman's charm and natural beauty.

"I ADMIRE THAT MODERN CIVILISATION EXISTS IN BIGGER CITIES BUT TRADITIONAL LIFE HAS REMAINED IN INTERIOR VILLAGES, AMONG FARMS AND EVEN IN REMOTE PLACES THERE IS ELECTRICITY AND CLEAN WATER. I AM ASTONISHED BY THE INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREN RECEIVING EDUCATION EVEN HIGH UP IN THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGES."

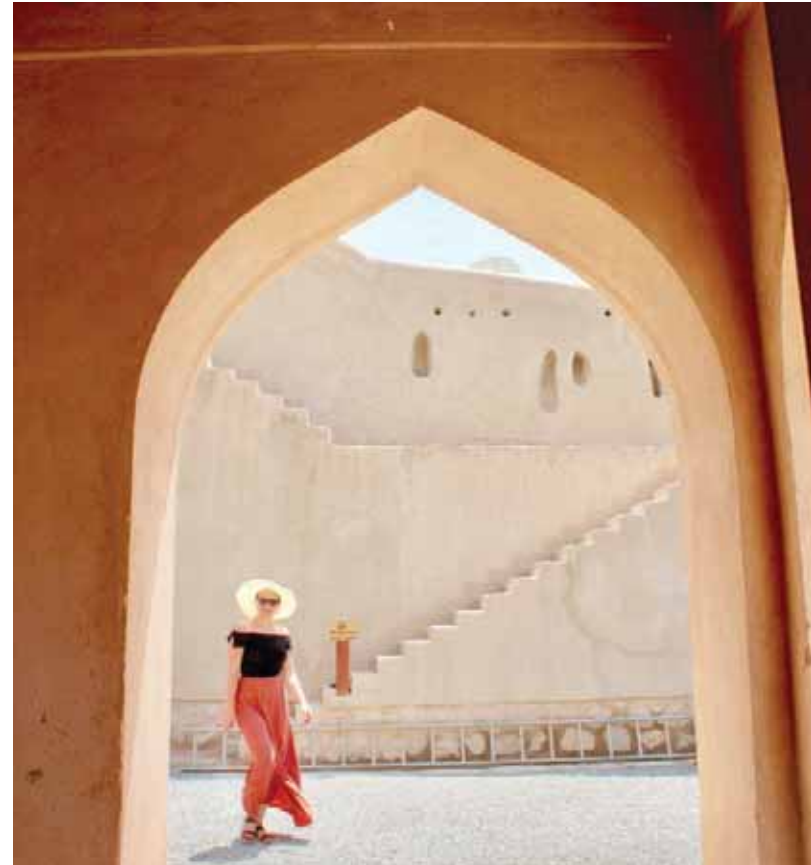
Tatjana who accompanied Eleonora during her recent trip admires the beautiful mountains, painted in different colours, the emerald clean waters of the wadi and the tall palm trees that carry sweet dates in abundance.

"I admire that modern civilisation exists in bigger cities but traditional life has remained in interior villages, among farms and even in remote places there is electricity and clean water. I am astonished by the infrastructural development and children receiving education even high up in the mountain villages. It was heartwarming to notice the transport vans drive the children back to their homes after school," she says.

"I like books that provide me with wisdom or spirituality mainly on religion and philosophy. Those that illuminate an understanding and insight into oneself."

Sochi-born Eleonora feels the Sultanate is an oasis for peace and yearns to live in this country later. During her free time she enjoys following ballet classes, writing poetry or reading self-development books and meeting friends and family.

Their trip was organised by Majid al Mrshoudi from Escapade along with his adventurous guides Mazin al Abri, Mohammed al Mamari and Mohanna al Khatri.



DR YOUSUF ALI  
AL MULLA

## WHEN YOUR SENSES ARE STOLEN!

It is known that humans are somewhat unaware or indifferent to their sense of smell. For instance, if I ask you if the sense of smell is better or slightly worse than it was yesterday. You are unlikely to notice any difference as our sense of smell fits in with the phrase we all know — Not noticing how important it is until you lose it!

Of course during coronavirus pandemic, many questions have been circulated and asked as people have concerns about their loss of taste and sense of smell. Perhaps a number of patients who were infected with COVID-19 have experienced these symptoms and are still asking whether these senses will return to normal and when?

The loss of taste and sense of smell are among the most common symptoms of COVID-19, which are at least 20 times more likely to predict a positive test for coronavirus than symptoms like fever and cough.

The weak sense of smell or losing it (anosmia) is an invisible obstacle and it is psychologically difficult for people to live with, which is the price that people pay after surviving the coronavirus, where some people may face a long term inability to smell or even losing the sense itself and sadly this represents 10 per cent of the cases.

Studies are still going on about coronavirus and how it adheres to cells via a specific enzyme, as an entry point in the human body, making the cells that contain this enzyme the most vulnerable. Not to mention that, the people who recover more quickly from the coronavirus, here the virus may have affected only the cells lining their noses, while people who recovered more slowly, the virus may have affected the nerves related with the sense of smell, hence these neurons take a longer time to repair and regenerate.

In spite of what has been mentioned and many ongoing research, I am optimistic with the latest study that confirmed, that the permanent loss of smell does not always appear, because the sensory neurons responsible for detecting the scent and sending it to the brain are not exposed to the coronavirus and instead the cells that provide support for neurons are infiltrated by the virus and led to a temporary loss of smell or anosmia.

It is really hard to know who will regain their sense of smell and who will not. The only thing I can say is that if the patient starts for instance, during the period following his improvement from coronavirus in the same year noticing some betterment, this will be a good and promising sign.

Certainly, I do not think that anyone can appreciate the suffering of these patients, because the loss of smell here means changing the relationships of the survivors of coronavirus with the people, the food and the environment around them, which definitely will complicate the path of their recovery and may reach the stage of depression and isolation. So, if you could imagine with me how some people might lose interest in preparing food, as they had a weak smell or lost it permanently or that mother who could not smell her infant scent or not discover the danger when it occurs like a gas leak or a fire at home.

There are certain diseases that may lead to loss of smell (anosmia), from simple cold and allergy that cause weak or temporary loss of smell, to serious conditions that affect the brain or nerves which ends up with a permanent loss of smell.

The temporary loss of smell after coronavirus infection and its illness, may not need specific treatment with the improvement of the sense. But when such weakness or loss of the sense persists beyond two weeks, it may be reasonable to consider treatment. Here it is good to be aware that the effectiveness of the treatments currently for patients with loss of smell caused by coronavirus are unknown to date.

Undoubtedly, starting training for the sense of smell may be appropriate, as it does not have side effects and not expensive. It is repeated with a number of smells such as lemon, rose or clove for a period of at least three months, besides other additional treatment that are recommended by a specialist in such cases, knowing that such defect in the sense of smell may indirectly cause problems with the taste as they are related.

Training the sense of smell is a marathon rather than a race in trying to improve it. People who practice smell training have better results than those who do nothing and of course it is not guaranteed to restore the sense. However, temporary or permanent loss of smell due to coronavirus appears as a strange phenomenon, but it may be devastating for some people who continue to have such loss, ending sometimes with a serious psychological result. So, do not pay the price for ignoring health instructions and fall prey to the coronavirus and its health complications.

Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla, MD, Ministry of Health, is a medical innovator and educator. For any queries regarding the content of the column he can be contacted at: dryusufalmulla@gmail.com

# What is the best way to share out a future COVID-19 vaccine?



Wealthy countries have already pre-ordered billions of vaccine doses for themselves and the mechanism set up by the WHO for a more equitable distribution, known as Covax. — Reuters

IVAN COURONNE

An international group of ethicists on Thursday criticised the World Health Organization's goal of distributing coronavirus vaccines to treat 20 per cent of each country's population, proposing instead what they said was a more equitable system of distribution.

In an article published in the journal *Science*, US professor Ezekiel Emanuel and more than a dozen experts from Britain, Canada, Australia, Norway and Singapore suggested giving priority to countries where outbreaks are the most serious.

The first task is "minimising the number of premature deaths," Emanuel, chair of the Department of Medical Ethics and Health Policy at the University of Pennsylvania, said.

The group likewise refutes the idea that allocations of the vaccine should be in line with the number

of medical workers or elderly people in a country, something that would automatically favour developed countries.

"Who has a lot of healthcare workers and who has a lot of elderly over 65? Rich countries," said Emanuel, who was an architect of president Barack Obama's healthcare reforms.

The experts' system, which they call a "Fair Priority Model," starts by calculating the number of years of life that will be added in a given country by the delivery of a million vaccine doses, for example.

Peru, where Covid-19 mortality rates are currently very high, and the United States, where the virus continues to kill a thousand people every day, would most likely be on the priority list.

"But take New Zealand, giving them a million doses, you're probably not going to save but one or two people literally. So they would be low

on the priority list," he said.

### HEALTH WORKERS NOT A PRIORITY?

The group rejects the argument that its policies would reward bad management such as that in the United States, which leads the world in the number of virus deaths and cases.

"You shouldn't penalise Americans because Donald Trump can't seem to manage this pandemic," said Emanuel.

Against COVID-19 "you don't say everyone gets the same," he said.

"The country with the worst situation, they have to be treated first," he added, comparing the situation to an emergency room where a heart attack victim is treated before the patient with sore throat.

After calculating the years of life that might be saved, the experts propose taking into consideration minimising the economic and social impact of the virus, such as

unemployment, poverty and school closures.

In their plan, priority populations are not necessarily health workers, but those put at risk by their housing situation, jobs or age.

"A lot of healthcare workers are no longer getting infected because they know how to use the masks and the gowns and the gloves," he said. "And so they may not need to be top of the list in terms of priority. You have to look at the empirical data." He added that immunising the elderly "may not work if they may not respond well to a vaccine." Will the academic debate on how to share out a future vaccine gain traction with world leaders? Wealthy countries have already pre-ordered billions of vaccine doses for themselves and the mechanism set up by the WHO for a more equitable distribution, known as Covax, has not yet raised the funds needed to provide for the 92 poor countries that have signed up. — AFP

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# Mythical creatures of ancient Arabia

A famous verse that comes from ancient times says: “The impossible is defined in three: Al-Ghool, Al-Aanqa’a and the loyal friend”.

Of course, the only known creature in this verse is the loyal friend. But what about the other two? Al-Ghool in many Arab countries is another name for the snake (just like Ras Al-Ghool organisation in Batman movie that Bane and Bruce Wayne were part which means: Head of the snake).

But in ancient Arabia Al-Ghool (singular) or Al-Gheelan (plural) were believed to be jinn (spirits) that were shape-shifters with one defect: whatever shape they took, their legs would remain that of a donkey and that’s how people recognised them.

Many ancient Arab poets took pride in fighting and killing them, most famously the poet Ta’abbata Shar’ran (a nickname that means he who carried evil under his arm). Legend has it that the poet found

a ram in the desert and carried it all the way to his place to discover that it wasn’t a ram after all but a Ghool and that’s how he got the nickname.

In another version he was carrying a bag of truffles for his mother to find out at home that they’d turned into slithering snakes. Another famous knight poet Aa’ntara ibn Shadad claimed that a Ghool that appeared to him had black face, blue eyes and sickle-like claws. Some believed that it could be killed by a sword if stabbed once, but if stabbed twice it could live more than a thousand years.

Other beliefs include that it could lure travellers by fake camp fires in the middle of the desert and kill them by revealing their frightful looks. As for Al-Aanqa’a, it was a big colourful bird with a white ring around its neck. It lived on top of a mountain and one day when its chicks got hungry, it flew down into a nearby village and snatched a human child. On another occasion,

MANY ANCIENT ARAB POETS TOOK PRIDE IN FIGHTING AND KILLING MYTHICAL CREATURES, MOST FAMOUSLY THE POET TA’ABBATA SHAR’RAN (A NICKNAME THAT MEANS HE WHO CARRIED EVIL UNDER HIS ARM)

the prey was a slave girl. That’s when it got its nickname: Aanqa’a mughrib as it flew towards the sunset.

The villagers were displeased and went complaining to their prophet who prayed for them and Al-Aanqa’a got burned down by an instant thunderbolt. Old Arabs used the proverb: “something was flown away by Aanqa’a mughrib” to indicate hopelessness.

Another mythical creature was bird called Al-Ham (plural) or Al-Hama (singular). It was believed to be a human soul that hung around its owner’s grave giving frightful cries.

Al-Ham were also found in abandoned places and war zones. It grew to the size of an owl and was the dead person’s eyes in the living world, reporting back everything that happens to his relatives after his departure.

A famous Hama was that of Hatim Al-Ta’i, the most generous man of ancient Arabia. It’s said that a group of travellers passed

his grave and asked him to be fed before camping nearby and sleeping hungry. In the middle of the night, one of them woke up to find Hatim with a sword, slaughtering his own camel. The travellers feasted before continuing their journey. On their way, they met a man with a camel in hand asking for the owner of the slaughtered camel by name.

He handed him the camel and identified himself as Uday ibn Hatim Al-Ta’i. His dad had appeared to him reproaching for not carrying out his nobleness legacy and ordered him to compensate the man with a new camel instead of the slaughtered one. Another mythical bird is Al-Rukh that Ancient Arabs believed to be huge enough to carry elephants and was mentioned by Marco Polo.

*Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: The World According to Bahja. rashabooks@yahoo.com*



RASHA AL RAISI

# Reduce your food waste

THERE ARE PLENTY OF IDEAS TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE AT THE LAST CONSUMER STAGE WHICH PRACTICALLY HAPPENS AT OUR HOMES. MEAL PLANNING, SHARING ANY SURPLUS OF FOOD WE KNOW WE WON’T BE ABLE TO EAT OR SIMPLY DONATING IS JUST A FEW FROM THE LIST

MAŁGORZATA PIECHOWICZ-PIETRUSZKA

It is incredible how well 2020 has managed to expose so many of our human shortcomings on practically every possible dimension. And it is not even over yet.

One of them is food security and nations’ dependency on global markets and food supplies. Many of us, brought up in fairly prosperous times, have finally realised that food cannot be taken for granted. Suddenly, food security has become a topic discussed not only at a governmental level but at a family table.

Isn’t it alarming that we waste one third of food produced globally? That means 1.3 billion tonnes of food ending up in landfill, which is literally over a half a kilo per world inhabitant every single day, while millions of people worldwide suffer from hunger and even more millions are undernourished.

What a terrible paradox! In countries with higher industrialisation and income food loss and waste increase to 40 or shocking 50 per cent at the consumption stage.

As these estimates are pre-COVID it is feared that they will be pushed even higher due to the necessary time that food companies need for their portfolio to adjust to the changes in demand and supply. It is all very disturbing, to say the least.

Obviously food waste happens at every stage across the chain, from farmers to retailers and eventually consumers. So is there anything we can do as ordinary people to change the current situation?

There are plenty of good and proven ideas to reduce food waste at the last consumer stage which practically happens at our homes. Meal planning, sharing any surplus of food we know we won’t be able to eat or simply donating is just a few from the list.

However, I personally believe that educating ourselves may bring the biggest, most profound and long lasting effects. And we should start with

children. Teaching them that food doesn’t simply happen by magic but requires a lot of effort and is time and energy consuming should be the first step. And because children learn best by example, why not showing them the local farms, fields and apiaries? While shopping for fruit and vegetables they should be able to differentiate between the local and imported produce.

Then, we may encourage them to try and grow their own plants, either in pots or, if we are lucky enough, in our own garden. Children love such kinds of activities. They instantly connect with nature and learn its cycles and laws. They are naturally curious and very observant.

I have noticed myself that when my kids planted their first tomato seeds and realised how long the process takes to have the actual fruit in their hand a new level of respect and awe of nature opened up for them. More importantly, it is very hard to lightheartedly discard something that you grew yourself. Try baking your own bread and then throwing even a tiny piece to a bin, no matter how stale it is. You just don’t do it. And that is the whole point.

I am convinced that teaching children the rudimentary skills of food growing and cooking is a must in our uncertain times. Actually it should always be a priority, no matter how good or bad the times are. Obviously it will not significantly affect global food security but perhaps it is the best way to instil respect towards food and nature in our childrens’ hearts and minds. As for adults, it may forever teach us to appreciate how precious and valuable food is and that we will be held accountable for the state of our planet and humanity that we will pass on to future generations.





A woman looks on from a rooftop as rescue workers dig through the rubble of a badly damaged building in Lebanon's capital Beirut, after scanners detected a pulse, on Friday. — AFP

# 'Pulse' sparks hunt for survivors one month after Beirut blast

**BEIRUT:** Rescuers resumed a search on Friday for possible survivors under rubble in Beirut, buoyed by faint hopes of a miracle a month after a monster blast ripped through the city's port.

The cataclysmic August 4 explosion killed 191 people, making it Lebanon's deadliest peacetime disaster. One month on, seven people are still missing.

Hopes emerged on Thursday that one of them could be found alive after a specialist sensor device detected a heart beat under the debris of a collapsed building.

"I was not aware I needed a miracle that much. Please God, give Beirut this miracle it deserves," said Selim Mourad, a 32-year-old filmmaker.

Chilean and Lebanese rescuers on Friday lifted chunks of rubble from the site between the hard-hit districts of Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhail, an AFP photographer said.

"We have excavated rubble but we haven't reached a conclusion yet," said George Abou Moussa of Lebanon's civil defence.

The pulse had slowed significantly on Friday compared to a previous recording, said rescue co-

**Hopes emerged on Thursday that one of the victims could be found alive after a specialist sensor device detected a heart beat under the debris of a collapsed building**

ordinator Nicholas Saade. "After removing the big chunks we scanned again for heartbeats or respiration, it showed low beat/respiration" levels of seven per minute, he said.

"The reading before was about 16 to 18," French civil engineer Emmanuel Durand, who is assisting the rescue effort, said 3D mapping scans of the building had so far shown no signs of life.

"What we have seen so far is, unfortunately, no trace of any victim or body. We have been conducting two scans on two different rooms," he said.

## CHILEAN 'HEROES'

The area being excavated was among the hardest hit by the blast that was so powerful. It was heard in Cyprus, some 240 kilometres away.

The explosion piled on new misery for Lebanese already reeling from the coronavirus pandemic and the country's worst economic crisis in decades. A sniffer dog deployed by Chilean rescuers on Wednesday night had responded to a scent from the site, Beirut governor Marwan Abboud said.

After detecting a pulse on Thursday, Lebanese rescuers teamed up with the Chileans to find survivors.

They moved on Friday in the "direction of the signal", trying to find a tunnel or entry point giving access to a "survivor or corpse", Saade said.

Lebanon lacks the tools and expertise to handle advanced search and rescue operations which are now being supported by international experts.

The Chileans arrived recently with a sniffer dog, as well as specialist sensors that can detect heart beats and breathing.

They have been praised as heroes by many Lebanese who have compared their expertise with the lacklustre performance of what they see as an absent state.

"Shows you how low we are on the priority ladder of these insects ruling us," said one on Twitter.

## HEARTLESS OFFICIALS

Lebanese authorities came under more fire from an anxious public after Thursday's search and rescue operation was paused for two hours.

The army said on Friday the efforts had been halted because chunks of the building's wall could fall on rescuers.

Work was resumed at 2230 GMT after military engineers with the help of two cranes "managed to secure the building", it said.

The stoppage sparked an outcry online.

"There is a heart beating in Mar Mikhail, and there are heartless officials who decided to stop the rescue operation," activist Zahia Awad tweeted. As well as killing more than 190 people, the explosion injured at least 6,500 and left 300,000 homeless. — AFP

# Sri Lanka tows supertanker away from coast after fire

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka began towing a fully loaded supertanker that had caught fire off its east coast after it began drifting towards land, a spokesman for the navy of the Indian Ocean nation said on Friday.

The fire was still raging on the *New Diamond* tanker carrying about 2 million barrels of oil, said the spokesman, Captain Indika de Silva. There were 23 crew on board, one of whom is presumed dead. The rest have been taken off the ship by the Sri Lankan navy, with one injured crew member flown to the capital Colombo for treatment.

There were no signs of an oil leak from the vessel, de Silva added. Ships from the Russian

"The missing Filipino sailor is presumed dead. He was badly injured when a boiler exploded," de Silva said, citing crew who were rescued. "There were 5 Greek and 18 Philippine nationals among the crew. One of them was injured and he was airlifted out of the ship and the rest were accounted for."

While there are no signs of a leak, Sri Lanka's meteorology department has already modelled the impact of 70,000 tonnes of crude oil - a quarter of the ship's cargo - spilling into the ocean.

The simulation, a worst case scenario according to authorities, found that such a spill would not immediately threaten the country's east coast.



Indian coast guard ship (R) battling to extinguish the fire from the Panamanian-registered crude oil tanker New Diamond, some 60 km off Sri Lanka's eastern coast. — AFP

navy and the Indian coastguard have been assisting in the fire-fighting. The fire that broke out in the engine room of the *New Diamond* on Thursday morning had spread to the bridge of the ship, chartered by Indian Oil Corp (IOC) (IOC.NS), though it has yet to reach the cargo area, the Sri Lankan navy said.

Initially, the ship was stranded 38 km east of the Sri Lankan town of Thirukovil, but drifted within 25 km of the coast after being abandoned. Authorities were now towing it eastward, away from the coast, de Silva said.

Thirukovil is a town in Sri Lanka's Ampara district that was badly battered by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Arugam Bay, a world-renowned surfing spot, is nearby.

But Dharshani Lahandapura, chair of Sri Lanka's federal Marine Environment Protection Authority, said that any spill from the ship would be catastrophic for marine life.

"It will be a huge environmental and economic disaster if this happens," she said.

The 1989 oil spill from the Exxon Valdez, considered one of the worst human-caused environmental disasters, spewed about 37,000 tonnes of crude into waters off Alaska.

The *New Diamond* had sailed from the port of Mina Al Ahmadi in Kuwait, loaded with Kuwait Export Crude, Refinitiv Eikon tracking data showed. It was heading for the Indian port of Paradip, where state-run IOC has a 300,000 barrel-per-day refinery. — Reuters

# Sudan signs peace with holdout rebel group

**KHARTOUM:** Sudan and a key rebel group that had refused to join other opposition forces in a previous peace deal have signed their own agreement, officials on both sides said on Friday.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and rebel chief Abdelaziz al Hilu signed the peace deal in neighbouring Ethiopia, Sudan's official news agency SUNA said, which posted pictures of the two men smiling and shaking hands.

The deal is significant because Hilu, a veteran guerilla fighter who leads a faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), had been one of two rebel leaders who had rejected an earlier peace deal with Khartoum.

While Khartoum and Hilu agreed to a "cessation of hostilities", the deal allows rebels to keep hold of their guns for "self-protection" until Sudan's constitution is changed to separate religion and government.

"For Sudan to become a democratic country where the rights of all citizens are enshrined, the con-

stitution should be based on the principle of 'separation of religion and state', in the absence of which the right to self-determination must be respected," said a copy of the deal, confirmed to AFP by rebel spokesman Jack Mahmoud.

The agreement, signed late on Thursday in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, follows a deal signed on Monday in South Sudan's capital Juba with leaders of a coalition of rebel forces, the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF).

The SRF brings together rebels from the war-ravaged western Darfur region, as well as the southern states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, where Hilu's SPLM-N is based.

Hilu's stronghold in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan has a significant Christian community among its mainly non-Arab population and he has long championed a secular state to replace the Islamist regime of military strongman Omar al Bashir which was overthrown in April last year. — AFP

## LURING TOURISTS



An employee carries umbrellas amongst mythical sculptures made of white sand imitating ice in the "Frost Magical Ice of Siam" park outside Pattaya, Thailand. A Thai disc jockey sentenced last week to two years in prison has tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said on Thursday, ending the kingdom's 100-day run without a local transmission. — AFP



## Russia presses Germany for more details on Navalny

**MOSCOW:** The Kremlin said on Friday that it wanted dialogue with Germany over the case of opposition politician Alexei Navalny and that Russian doctors who treated him initially were much more transparent than the German doctors treating him now.

Germany, where Navalny is in hospital, has said he was poisoned with a Soviet-style Novichok nerve agent and wants the perpetrators held to account. Russia has until now not opened a criminal investigation and said there is no evidence yet of a crime.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow wanted to find out from Germany what exact substance caused Navalny to fall ill in Siberia last month.

“According to the version of our doctors it wasn’t a poisoning,” Peskov said. “The German specialists managed to establish some kind of poisonous substance. We’re counting on a dialogue with our German colleagues.”

He added: “Investigative actions are being carried out by our specialists, and if there is confirmation of the presence of poisonous substances in the biological material of the patient (Navalny), then of course legal consequences will follow. We

ask everyone to rely on the facts.”

Navalny is the most popular and prominent opponent of President Vladimir Putin, and the German announcement this week that he was poisoned by a nerve agent has raised the possibility of further Western sanctions against Moscow.

Separately, a Russian court said on Friday it had rejected a complaint filed by allies of Navalny accusing a top law enforcement body of inaction over what they said was his attempted murder.

One of Navalny’s allies accused the Investigative Committee, which handles probes into major crimes, of inaction following a statement they filed to it on August 20 demanding a criminal investigation be opened into Navalny’s attempted murder.

The court said the Investigative Committee had passed on the statement by Navalny’s supporters to one of its regional branches in Siberia and asked for it to be reviewed.

Kira Yarmysh, Navalny’s spokeswoman, said the court had said their statement had been treated as a “citizen’s appeal”, a legal nuance she said meant it could take up to 30 days for it be looked at.

“Anything so they don’t have to start an investigation,” she wrote on Twitter. — **Reuters**

# Suspect in Portland shooting killed by police during arrest

**PORTLAND:** Police shot and killed an anti-fascist activist on Thursday as they moved in to arrest him for the alleged fatal shooting of a right-wing activist in Portland, Oregon, last weekend, officials said.

Michael Reinhoehl, 48, was wanted on a charge of murder when members of a fugitive task force shot him dead in Olympia, Washington after he left an apartment building and got in a car, according to police.

“The suspect produced a firearm, threatening the lives of law enforcement officers,” a US Marshals Service spokesman said in a statement.

Thurston County Sheriff’s Office is responsible for investigating the incident.

“The information that we have at this time is that the suspect was armed,” said Lt Ray Brady of the Sheriff’s Office.

“There were shots that were fired into the vehicle and the subject fled from the vehicle, at which time there were additional shots that were fired,” he said, adding that the exact circumstances had yet to be confirmed.

Portland Police earlier on Thursday issued a warrant for Reinhoehl’s arrest and asked the US Marshals to locate him.

“They lit his ass up,” bystander Jashon Spencer said in an online video. “It sounded like fireworks it was that many shots.”

Reinhoehl, who had provided security for Black Lives Matter protests in Portland, was allegedly involved in the shooting of Aaron Danielson on Saturday night, the US Marshal’s Service said.

Danielson, 39, was among a caravan of supporters of President Donald Trump who rode in pick-up trucks into downtown Portland and clashed with protesters demonstrating against racial injustice and police brutality.



Investigators are seen at Tanglewilde Terrace, where law enforcement officers shot a man reported to be Michael Forest Reinhoehl, in Lacey, Washington on Thursday. — **Reuters**

Portland has seen escalating clashes between right- and left-wing groups in recent weeks following nearly 100 days of protests since George Floyd, a Black man, died in Minneapolis on May 25 after a white police officer knelt on his neck.

Several people involved in overnight protests in Portland were arrested after they threw projectiles at officials, the police said in a statement on Friday.

Police said they did not use any crowd control munitions or tear gas to control the crowd.

**NO CHOICE**

Reinhoehl died only hours after Vice News broadcast a video in which he appeared to admit he shot Danielson and said he acted in self-defence.

“I had no choice. I mean, I, I had a choice. I could have sat there and watched them kill a friend of mine of colour. But I wasn’t going to do that,” he said in the video, adding he feared he would be stabbed.

Reinhoehl was previously cited for carrying a loaded gun at a July 5 Portland protest, resising arrest and interfering with police, according to *The Oregonian* newspaper. The allegations were subsequently dropped, the newspaper reported.

In social media posts Reinhoehl described himself as a professional snowboarder, a US Army veteran and “100% ANTIFA.”

Antifa is a largely unstructured, far-left movement whose followers broadly aim to confront those they view as authoritarian or racist.

Reinhoehl said he was prepared to fight to change the “course of humanity.”

“It will be a war and like all wars there will be casualties,” he said in a June 16 Instagram post.

In July, the Trump administration deployed federal forces to Portland to crack down on the protests.

Trump signed a memo on Wednesday that threatened to cut federal funding to “lawless” cities, including Portland. On Thursday he had demanded that police arrest Reinhoehl.

“Why aren’t the Portland Police ARRESTING the cold blooded killer of Aaron “Jay” Danielson. Do your job, and do it fast. Everybody knows who this thug is. No wonder Portland is going to hell!,” he tweeted. — **Reuters**

## Italy’s ex-PM Berlusconi hospitalised after contracting coronavirus

**MILAN:** Italy’s flamboyant former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has been hospitalised, his aides said on Friday, days after the media tycoon became the latest high-profile figure to contract the coronavirus.

Berlusconi, 83, was taken to San Raffaele hospital in Milan on Thursday night after suffering “certain symptoms”, his entourage said in a statement.

But it said the move was just “a precaution” and there was “no cause for concern”.

The billionaire tested positive for coronavirus earlier this week after returning from a holiday at his luxury villa on Sardinia’s jet-set Emerald Coast.

The AGI news agency said Berlusconi was hospitalised in a room that he often occupies when staying at the facility. AGI said this indicates that his condition is not serious, or he would be in intensive care.

Italian news reports said the ageing politician showed signs of the onset of pneumonia. His entourage said an official statement on his health would be made after 1400 GMT, and urged against the spread of “alarmist or inaccurate” information.

Licia Ronzulli, a senator with Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party, said the former prime minister “spent the night in hospital to check on his condition... but he is fine.”



Silvio Berlusconi speaks during a rally. — **AFP file photo**

Berlusconi announced on Wednesday that he had tested positive for the novel coronavirus and was in quarantine at home.

Two of his children — daughter Barbara, 36, and son Luigi, 31 — have also contracted the virus, as has his companion Marta Fascina.

Berlusconi, who once owned AC Milan, had insisted on Wednesday that he would continue his political activities.

“I will be present in the electoral campaign with interviews on televisions and in newspapers,” he said during a video-conference of Forza Italia’s women’s movement.

He recognised “the limitations imposed on my activities by testing positive for the coronavirus... but I will continue the battle.”

**JET-SET PLAYGROUND**

Regional elections are due to take place in two weeks as well as a referendum on reducing the number of Italian parliamentarians.

Well-wishes from both the right and left streamed in after reports he had contracted the disease — most likely while holidaying in Sardinia.

A first test proved negative, but he was tested again after some people he met on the Italian island

— including Italian businessman and former Formula One racing team Benetton managing director Flavio Briatore — tested positive, according to Italian news reports.

**FLAMBOYANT**

Berlusconi, famed for his steamy dinner parties, grabbed headlines again in March after he reportedly split from his longtime girlfriend Francesca Pascale to date Fascina, some 53 years his junior.

At the time, the dating antics of the man at the centre of the famous “bunga-bunga” soirees brought Italians a welcome distraction as the coronavirus pandemic tightened its grip on the country.

The twice-divorced media magnate reportedly ditched Pascale for Fascina, an MP from his party.

In June, he announced in local media he aimed for a return to Italian football’s top table for the first time since selling AC Milan after his new club Monza was promoted to Italy’s Serie B.

Berlusconi is the latest among a line of celebrities who have contracted the coronavirus since it was first discovered in Wuhan City, in China in December last year.

The list also includes Paris Saint-Germain football players Neymar, Angel Di Maria and Leandro Paredes who reportedly tested positive earlier this week. — **AFP**

### ‘REBELLION’ FOR CLIMATE



An activist takes part in a demonstration against the HS2 hi-speed rail line, as part of protests by the Extinction Rebellion climate change group in central London on Friday on the fourth day of a new series of ‘mass rebellions’. — **AFP**

# COVID rules: Varsities act against erring students

ELYSSA CHERNEY

C

ollege students, beware: You could temporarily lose your spot on campus — or worse, get expelled — for partying with your peers this fall. It happened at Purdue University in Indiana, where 36 students received “summary suspensions” earlier this month for attending an off-campus gathering that lacked face masks and social-distancing, just hours after a warning from administrators. The Ohio State University issued about 225 interim suspensions for off-campus parties and gatherings between August 19 and 23, spokesperson Benjamin Johnson said.

More than half of the suspensions were lifted after students showed they did not attend, host or participate in unsafe activities, Johnson said. And on the east coast, Pennsylvania State University suspended a fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha, and its student leaders for staging an event with 70 people on

August 22, while Syracuse University in New York took action after a large group of freshmen met up in a campus quad.

As colleges across the country allow students to return for fall classes, many are ramping up enforcement of new rules to curtail the spread of COVID-19. The stakes are high: Universities that can’t contain the virus on campus have paused in-person classes or reverted to remote learning entirely, sending students home for the rest of the semester. In recent weeks, some colleges have said they will check social media to monitor student behavior, review security footage when students mingle in large groups and, most severely, kick students out of classes for violating school policy.

At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the state’s largest college, disciplinary cases are pending as well, according to spokesperson Robin

Kaler. As of Monday, two students were issued interim suspensions, one faced disciplinary action and a fraternity — Pi Kappa Phi — was placed on interim suspension, Kaler said. The suspended students were accused of hosting a large apartment party on Friday and violating a quarantine order on Saturday, Kaler said.

The fraternity was also accused of hosting a large party this weekend. The student facing discipline allegedly posted a social media video showing how to override the school’s COVID-19 tracking application, Kaler said.

In Indiana, the University of Notre Dame, which confronted a surge in infections attributed to off-campus parties, is also cracking down on irresponsible behaviour, but assured students the information would not be used against them if it was volunteered during contact-tracing.

“We will continue to adhere to this

policy because we want students to be forthright with us so that we can discover the source of the infections in order to keep the community safe,” said the Reverend John Jenkins, the school’s president, during a recent video address. But if Notre Dame learns about “serious” violations from other sources, they will be referred to the university conduct review process, Jenkins said.

Also in the Hoosier state, Indiana University’s board of trustees passed a policy August 5 underscoring that students who fail or refuse to comply with health and safety directives related to COVID-19 can be suspended or expelled. That policy will be applied to a recent gathering of about 100 people off campus in Bloomington. A video of the event circulated on Twitter, but has since been removed from public viewing.

IU spokesperson Chuck Carney

said the school began contacting involved students last week and planned to issue suspensions, though he did not know how many students were affected. The off-campus party violated local prohibitions on gatherings of more than 50 people, he said. The city has since reduced the limit to 15. With many Illinois colleges beginning classes in the last two weeks, few local examples have yet to emerge. But many of the policies are consistent with what’s transpired at other campuses.

In one of the more forceful approaches, Northwestern University is effectively enlisting nearby residents to help monitor off-campus behaviour. During a community town hall last week, interim dean of students Mona Dugo asked neighbors in Evanston, Illinois, to use an online form to report social gatherings that don’t follow health precautions. — dpa



In this file photo taken on September 16, 2019 a young woman holds a placard reading ‘Our hero, our liberator’ as villagers queue to view the coffin of Robert Mugabe lying in state at Murombedzi Growth Point, about 107 km northwest of Harare. – AFP

## Bitter anniversary a year after Mugabe died

FANUEL JONGWE

D

espondent and waiting in a long queue for daily food handouts from a well-wisher, Milka Mandimutsa gets nostalgic about Zimbabwe’s autocratic and longtime ex-leader Robert Mugabe, who died a year ago.

Had Mugabe been still ruling Zimbabwe, “I don’t think it (life) would be like this,” said the woman, in her late 20s, waiting to receive a portion of cooked beans and white maize meal in the working-class town of Chitungwiza, 30 kilometres south-east of Harare.

“He was far much better,” said the unemployed Mandimutsa, who was born after Mugabe was already a decade in power. Another woman in the queue echoed her sentiments.

“Ever since the new president took power, I have not seen anything positive,” said Diana Nhemachena, also in her 20s, bemoaning the high cost of living in the country where official inflation is more than 800 per cent.

Mugabe died on September 6 last year, aged 95 in a Singapore hospital, two years after he was forced to resign in 2017, and after 37 years in power.

Zimbabweans thronged the streets celebrating his ouster.

His successor Emmerson Mnangagwa came in with promises to fight corruption, revive the moribund economy and reduce poverty.

‘NGWENA’ MEANS CROCODILE

But many Zimbabweans say they are worse off than they were under Mugabe despite his creating an authoritarian regime which savagely repressed opponents.

Mugabe died on September 6 last year, aged 95 in a Singapore hospital, two years after he was forced to resign in 2017, and after 37 years in power

He is also remembered for implementing controversial land reforms 20 years ago that resulted in economic collapse.

But far from being the expected messiah, Mugabe’s former deputy Mnangagwa has also become known for brutally crushing his opponents.

A month ago, he threatened to “flush” out bad “apples”, two weeks after an opposition politician and a journalist were arrested on charges of incitement to commit public violence.

Politician Jacob Ngarivhume’s crime was calling for non-violent protests on July 31 against state corruption and journalist Hopewell Chin’ono tweeted in support of the planned demonstrations.

They were released on bail on Wednesday after 45 days in detention.

Other critics, including an opposition lawmaker, are still being held.

In January last year, soldiers shot dead 17 people following protests sparked by the doubling of fuel prices.

“Much as he (Mnangagwa) says he ...is soft as wool, (people who knew him well called him ‘ngwena’ which means

crocodile,” said Harare-based political analyst Cyprian Ndawana.

“If you look at the traits of the crocodile, it’s dangerous from the front, it’s dangerous from the back. It’s dangerous in water and on the ground,” Ndawana said adding that many people are struggling more now than they were under Mugabe.

“The citizenry is roundly impoverished, reduced to a lifestyle of ferreting for basic sustenance”.

“It is now a headache to be alive. Life is a grind. It is now a mammoth task for households to score the minimum goal of putting food on the table,” he said.

‘KILLING THE ECONOMY’

Zimbabwe’s economy improved during a power-sharing government between Mugabe and the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change, but since the deal crumbled, the economy has been on a downturn for over a decade.

This week the government unexpectedly announced plans to give some land back to white farmers.

The announcement created confusion and forced the government to re-issue statements clarifying the plans.

It later emerged that only 37 of more than 4,000 farmers who were evicted would be eligible for the restitution of title to their land. They are a special group of foreign farmers who enjoyed protection under an international investment deal.

For Harare-based independent economist Gift Mugano, while “Mugabe was not good ... the current government has gone further than Mugabe.” — AFP

## Indian school paints village walls for outdoor pandemic classes

O

ut on a street in an Indian village, half a dozen children gather around their teacher who points a stick at the diagrams on a wall, one of many murals in the neighbourhood being used to help poor students keep up with their education during the coronavirus pandemic.

With schools shut since March in a virus lockdown, teachers in Nilam Nagar, western India, became concerned that some youngsters would fall behind because their families cannot afford an internet subscription for online classes.

So they came up with a workaround — children like playing on the streets, so they would take their lessons outside.

“Since most of the families lack resources to educate their kids digitally, we had to come up with an innovative method to keep children invested in education,” Ram Gaikwad, a teacher at Asha Marathi Vidyalaya school, said ahead of Teachers’ Day in India on Saturday.

The outdoor classrooms for a total of 1,700 students aged between six and 16 have been a hit.

Every day, small groups gather at the painted walls in alternate lanes in the village of more than 30,000 people, sitting or standing as they take notes.

Their teachers walk through the village each weekday morning, stopping to explain the lesson or answer any questions.

The murals cover a vast range of subjects — from writing to trigonometry — in English and the local Marathi language.

On one sun-faded wall, illustrations of objects starting with the letter “s” — including a scooter, spade and swing — are painted in black below the words “look, listen and say”.

“When my mother sends me to buy milk, I walk through the village and look at the lessons on the walls,” 13-year-old Yashwant Anjalakar said. The son of two factory workers — who hopes to work for the elite Indian Administrative Service one day — said the walls are the only option for students like him who lack access to the internet.

“I miss my school and my friends a lot. Sitting at home is boring and these walls are a great way of revising and studying... I want to keep studying even during this pandemic.”

So far, 250 walls in the village have been painted by a local artist, and the school hopes to commission another 200.

Parents have chipped in to help with the project’s cost, which has reached 150,000 rupees (\$2,050) so far, said the school’s principal Tasleem Pathan. — AFP

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German industrial orders rebound decelerates



Employees of German car manufacturer Porsche work chassis at the Porsche factory in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Germany. – Reuters

**FRANKFURT:** Germany's industrial rebound slowed in July, as the economic recovery from the shock of the coronavirus pandemic started to plateau, according to official statistics released on Friday.

Industrial orders increased 2.8 per cent month-on month, driven by Germany's all-important car industry, after much stronger rises in May and June, statistics agency Destatis said. The index showed that industrial activity was 7.3 per cent below the same month in 2019, and 8.2 per cent below February 2020, before the impact of measures to combat the spread the pandemic.

The figures were "a slight disappointment," according to Jens-Oliver Niklasch, analyst at German public bank LBBW.

"The easily attainable fruits have been harvested," Niklasch said, referring to the immediate economic pickup after Germany began gradually easing its lockdown from mid-April. "Now the economic race to catch up will lose momentum. We will not see the pre-crisis levels quite as quickly as one or the other had hoped recently," he said.

July's orders were led higher by the automotive industry, with new orders rising by 8.5 per cent, and the battery manufacturing sector.

Both are benefiting from purchase incentives for electric vehicles, but other branches of the economy are lagging behind, Oxford Economics analyst Oliver Rakau said.

However, car industry statistics released on Thursday showed that demand for new cars slowed in August as consumers held back on new purchases. Finance Minister Peter Altmaier said this week that the economy is in the midst of a V-shaped rebound, but the threat of any further spikes in coronavirus infections haunts any recovery.

Germany recently reported its highest case numbers since April, and is starting to tighten restrictions again.

Chancellor Angela Merkel last week said coping with the outbreak will become more challenging in the coming months as Germany heads into colder weather in autumn and winter. — AFP

Duqm Refinery set for 2021-end commissioning

FAST-TRACK EXECUTION: OMAN'S THIRD REFINERY TO BE OPERATIONAL WELL AHEAD OF SCHEDULE



CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, SEP 4

Duqm Refinery, whose construction is advancing at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm on Oman's southeast coast, is slated for commissioning as early as late next year or early 2022, Argus Media, a leading news portal on global energy and commodity markets, announced on Friday, citing the Sultanate's Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy was quoted in the interview as stating that the estimated \$7 billion greenfield refinery is expected to process its first crude before the end of 2021 or in early 2022 — well ahead of the timeline initially envisaged for the delivery of the strategically vital national project.

When fully operational, the refinery — an anchor project of the

SEZ — has the potential to catalyse a wave of new investment in support services, ancillary infrastructure and an array of civilian amenities. Together with the construction of the much-larger petrochemicals scheme envisaged downstream of the refinery, the integrated scheme is expected to make a robust contribution to Oman's long-term economic and GDP growth.

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company (DRPIC), a joint venture of OQ — the wholly Omani government owned integrated energy group, and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), is developing the refinery and petrochemicals complex with a combined investment estimated in excess of \$15 billion. The 230,000 barrels per day (bpd) capacity refinery will process various types of crudes into diesel, jet fuel, naphtha

and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

As of end-July 2020, construction work on the refinery was well past the 65 per cent mark with an army of workers, employed by a bevy of contractors and subcontractors, currently deployed at site. Also making headway is the construction of an Oil Berth at the Port of Duqm as well as the first phase of a world-scale Crude Oil Storage Park at Ras Markaz just south of the SEZ.

According to the Argus report, storage capacity of around 6 million barrels capacity is being developed at Ras Markaz to meet the needs of Duqm Refinery. Feedstock for the refinery, comprising a mix of 65 per cent Kuwaiti crude and 35 per cent Omani crude, will be stored at Ras Markaz and piped to the refinery via an 80-km crude pipeline, also due to be commissioned around mid-2021.

The park's capacity will be

gradually ramped up based on the requirements of international and regional customers eager to take advantage of Duqm's strategic location far outside the relatively volatile Arabian Gulf to store their crudes.

Underscoring the strategic nature of this signature development to the Sultanate's economic growth, the timeline for the implementation of the downstream petrochemicals complex is being accelerated as well. Construction work on the complex, currently the subject of a Front End Engineering Design (FEED) by UK's Wood Group, is expected to start by 2022, with the integrated plant set to be operational in 2026, the report added. Last week, DRPIC named 12 international licensors as winners of technology licence packages for various units of the giant petrochemicals scheme.

Japan Q2 GDP slump may be worse than expected

**TOKYO:** Japan's economy likely shrank more than previously estimated in the second quarter as capital expenditure took a hit from the coronavirus pandemic, a Reuters poll showed, highlighting the challenge policymakers face in averting a deeper recession.

Separate data is expected to show household spending was hit by a bigger annual drop in July than in June, a sign the COVID-19 pandemic is keeping consumers cautious about shopping.

The slew of data due out next week underscores the daunting task the new prime minister, to be elected in a ruling party leadership race later this month, faces in seeking to contain the pandemic while avoiding restrictions on business activity.

"Unless a fundamental solution to the pandemic is found, we'll likely face a trade-off between steps



A man chooses goods underneath banners notifying the rise in the national sales tax at a store in Tokyo. – Reuters

to prevent the spread of the virus and efforts to revive the economy,"

said Shunsuke Kobayashi, chief economist at Mizuho Securities.

"The focus will be on an extra budget likely to be compiled

Japan's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to have shrank an annualised 28.6 per cent in April-June, more than a preliminary reading of a record 27.8 per cent contraction

during the autumn Diet session. But the impact on growth will be short-lived as long as we face the trade-off," he said.

Japan's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to have shrank an annualised 28.6 per cent in April-June, more than a preliminary reading of a record 27.8 per cent

contraction, according to the poll on 19 economists.

The main culprit behind the revision is an expected 3.1 per cent drop in capital expenditure, a bigger fall than a preliminary 1.5 per cent decline, the poll showed.

The Cabinet Office will announce the revised GDP data at 8:50 am on September 8 Japan time.

Household spending in July likely fell 3.7 per cent from a year earlier, more than a 1.2 per cent drop in June, hit by bad weather and social distancing policies to contain the pandemic.

Core machinery orders, a leading gauge of capital expenditure, likely rebounded, rising 1.9 per cent in July after a 7.6-per cent decline in June, offering some hope of a pick-up in corporate spending appetite, the poll showed.

## Hong Kong financial firms step up compliance hiring

**HONG KONG:** Financial firms in Hong Kong are scrambling to fortify their compliance operations following US sanctions and China's new national security law, even as the sector pushes to cut costs amid the coronavirus pandemic.

This underscores the growing challenges for firms operating in the Asian financial hub, which was roiled last year by often-violent pro-democracy, anti-China protests and is now in the crosshairs of mounting Sino-US tensions.

International asset managers and Asian banks have stepped up compliance hiring, while some are training existing staff and buying new technology to offset a talent crunch as candidates are unwilling to relocate amid the health crisis and the uncertainty in Hong Kong, bankers, lawyers and headhunters said.

Demand for compliance staff has risen by as much as a third from a few months earlier, two headhunters said.

"In the past three months we've had demand from top-tier asset managers looking for regulatory compliance lawyers because they need experts in place when the US and China keep slapping sanctions on each other," said Olga Yung, regional director at recruiter Michael Page Hong Kong.

Because sanctions are a "niche area," companies are hiring lawyers with some sanctions expertise and supplementing with external law firms, she said.

The United States has imposed sanctions on Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam and 10 other officials for what it says is their role in curtailing political freedoms in the territory.

The sanctions came after Beijing imposed in late June a sweeping security law on Hong Kong, targeting seditious and subversive activities.

A senior banker at an Asian lender in Hong Kong said he gave his compliance team a list of individuals and businesses linked to the sanctioned officials and "the immediate response was to either close all those accounts or hire five more sanction-specialists to do a proper audit".

The banker, declining to be named because the information was private, said they decided to hire two experts and organise sanctions training for the rest of the team, despite a company-wide attempt to limit spending.

— Reuters



A Star Ferry boat crosses Victoria Harbour in front of a skyline of buildings during sunset, in Hong Kong. — Reuters

## US job growth seen slowing, unemployment rate falls below 10%

**WASHINGTON:** US job growth likely slowed further in August as financial assistance from the government ran out, threatening the economy's recovery from the COVID-19 recession.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday would come as companies from transportation to manufacturing industries announce layoffs or furloughs. It could add pressure on the White House and Congress to restart stalled negotiations for another fiscal package, and will likely become political ammunition for both Democrats and Republicans with just two months to go until the presidential election.

Programmes to help businesses pay wages have either lapsed or are on the verge of ending. A \$600 weekly unemployment supplement expired in July. Economists credited government largesse for the sharp rebound in economic activity after it nearly ground to a halt following the shuttering of businesses in mid-March to control the spread of the coronavirus.

"The pandemic has really torn our economic and social fabric," said Sung Won Sohn, a finance and economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "The ending of the fiscal stimulus has not helped the situation."

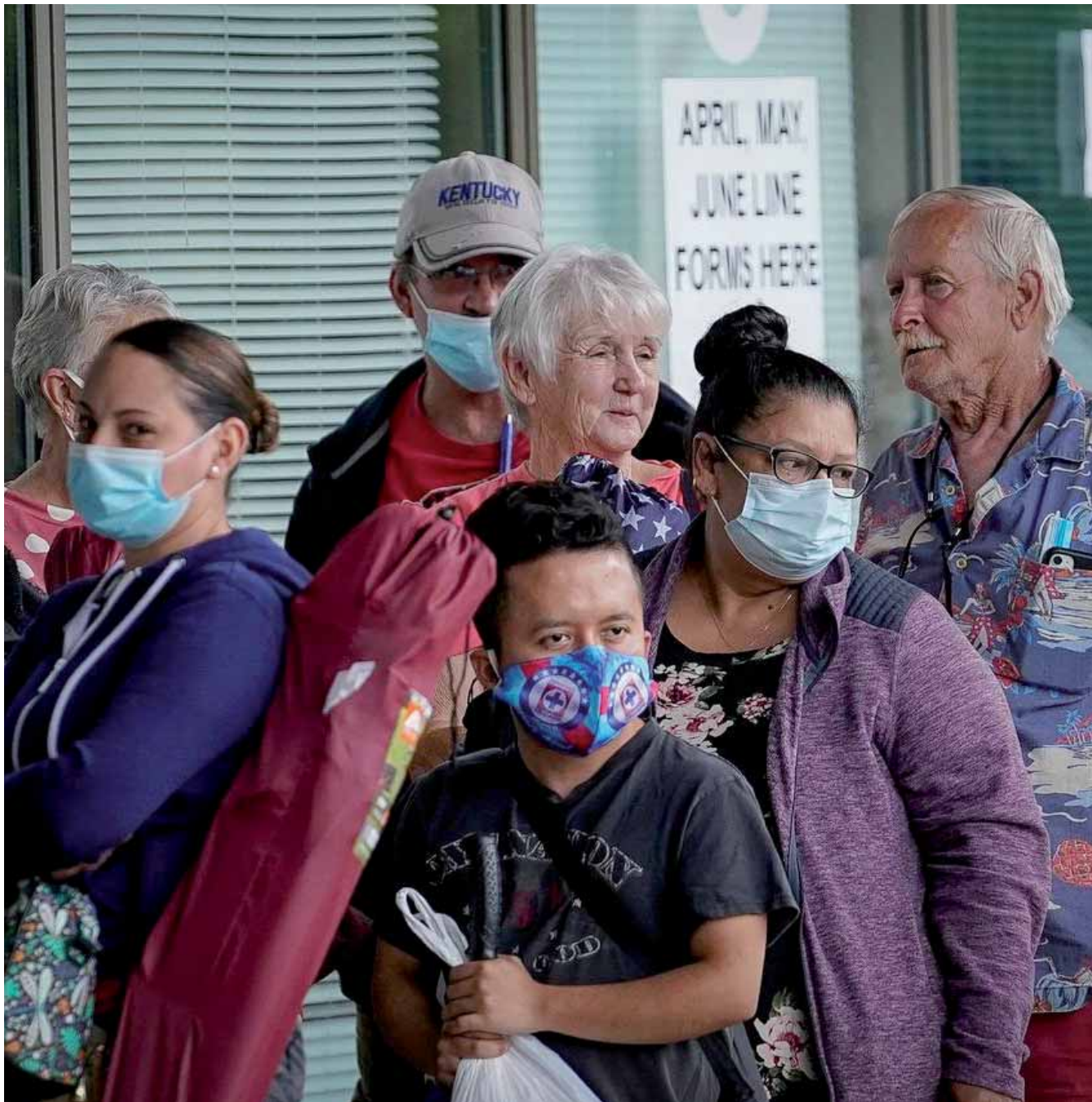
According to a survey of economists nonfarm payrolls likely rose by 1.4 million jobs last month, with some of the anticipated gains coming from hiring for the 2020 Census. Employment increased 1.763 million in July and its growth peaked at 4.791 million in June.

Friday's report is one of just two monthly labor market scorecards left on the calendar before the November 3 presidential election.

President Donald Trump, who is trailing in polls behind former vice-president Joe Biden, the Democratic Party nominee, is likely to tout the continued job gains as a sign that the economy is improving after suffering its biggest shock in at least 73 years in the second quarter.

But employment would still be about 11.5 million below its pre-pandemic level. Most of the job gains have been workers being recalled from furloughs or temporary layoffs. Though new COVID-19 infections have subsided after a broad resurgence through the summer, many hot spots remain.

United Airlines said on Wednesday it was preparing to furlough 16,370 workers on October 1. American Airlines has announced its workforce would shrink by 40,000, including 19,000 involuntary cuts. Ford Motor Co said it was targeting 1,400 US salaried jobs for elimination by year end. Mass transit rail



People line up outside a Kentucky Career Center hoping to find assistance with their unemployment claim in Frankfort, Kentucky.

— Reuters

operators are also eyeing furloughs.

A report this week from the Federal Reserve based on information collected from the US central bank's contacts on or before August 24 showed an increase in employment. The Fed, however, noted that "some districts also reported slowing job growth and increased hiring volatility, particularly in service industries, with rising instances of furloughed workers being laid off permanently as demand remained soft."

"Restaurants and other businesses in the services industry are not going to continue calling workers back when demand is not there," said Ryan Sweet, a senior economist at Moody's Analytics in Westchester, Pennsylvania. "We need the stimulus like weeks ago."

The unemployment rate is forecast to have dropped to 9.8 per cent in August from 10.2 per cent in July, according to the Reuters survey. That would leave it just under the 10 per cent peak shortly

**Programmes to help businesses pay wages have either lapsed or are on the verge of ending. A \$600 weekly unemployment supplement expired in July**

after the end of the 2007-09 Great Recession.

But the measurement of the jobless rate has been biased downward by people misclassifying themselves as being "employed but absent from work." At least 29.2 million were receiving unemployment benefits in mid-August.

Lydia Boussour, a senior economist

with Oxford Economics in New York, estimated that payroll gains in line with expectations would leave one out of two laid-off workers still unemployed, with an increased risk of a prolonged high unemployment spell.

"The fact that the employment is settling into a trend of slow, grinding improvement is a worrisome sign for the broader recovery," said Boussour. "The combination of slow employment progress and poor health conditions along with the absence of fiscal aid risk jeopardising the consumer spending rebound in the coming months."

Slowing job growth will likely have a limited impact on gross domestic product in the third quarter, which economists estimate could rebound at an annualised rate of as high as 30 per cent after sinking at a historic 31.7 per cent pace in the April-June quarter. But it will hurt fourth quarter GDP, with consumer spending taking a hit. — Reuters

## Chinese firm to run Laos electric grid amid default warnings

**VIENTIANE:** The poor, small Southeast Asian country of Laos is set to cede majority control of its electric grid to a Chinese company, as it struggles to stave off a potential debt default, people with direct knowledge of the agreement said.

The deal comes at a time when critics accuse Beijing of "debt trap diplomacy" to gain strategic advantage in countries struggling to repay loans taken out under President Xi Jinping's global "Belt and Road" infrastructure initiative.

China is Laos's biggest creditor, and the deal will bind the landlocked, mountainous country of seven million people closer to its giant neighbour.

The power grid shareholding deal was signed on Tuesday between state-owned Electricite du Laos (EdL) and China Southern Power Grid Co, according to Chinese state news agency Xinhua, which did not give details of the new ownership.

Three people with knowledge of the matter said it would give majority control of the new Electricite du Laos

**CHINA IS LAOS'S BIGGEST CREDITOR, AND THE DEAL WILL BIND THE LANDLOCKED, MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY OF SEVEN MILLION PEOPLE CLOSER TO ITS GIANT NEIGHBOUR**

Transmission Company Limited (EDLT) to the Chinese company.

Power exports are central to Laos's development plans.

"It will give the Laos state grid better bargaining power with regional countries and start to make a profit," said one of the people with direct knowledge of the discussions.

China's embassy in Laos said on its website that Laos would operate the transmission assets. It did not give shareholding details but said "Laos can also gradually repurchase shares during the operation."

Neither EdL nor China Southern



A farmer works in a paddy field under the power lines near Nam Theun 2 dam in Khammouane province in Laos. — Reuters

responded to Reuters requests for comment on the deal. The Laos and Chinese governments did not respond to requests for comment either.

Reporting from the Laos capital Vientiane, Xinhua quoted Laos Energy and Mines Minister

Khammany Inthirath as calling it a key project which would benefit from the Chinese company's "advantages in experience, technology and human resources."

The new company will operate under Laos government regulation, Xinhua reported, but

would take advantage of China Southern's "financial strength and mature experiences in power grid construction, operation and management."

The state-run *Vientiane Times* said after the deal that EDLT would in future invest about \$2 billion

in the local grid and international connections.

Laos has spent heavily on hydroelectric schemes, many financed by China, with the aim of becoming "The Battery of Southeast Asia". But those projects, along with a new Chinese high speed railway, are at the centre of a debt crunch.

The World Bank estimated in June that debt levels would reach up to 68 per cent of GDP in 2020, from 59 per cent last year. Rating agency Moody's warned last month of "a material probability of default in the near term."

While Laos has recorded only 22 coronavirus cases and no deaths, the epidemic has hit tourism and overseas remittances hard.

Laos debt service obligations in 2020 are around \$1.2 billion with loans from commercial banks and Thai bonds maturing in September and October, Moody's said, but foreign reserves were just \$864 million in June, according to the central bank.

— Reuters



Toronto Raptors' Kyle Lowry (7) shoots against Boston Celtics' Daniel Theis (27) and Jayson Tatum (0) at The Field House.  
— USA Today Sports

# ANUNOBY'S BUZZER-BEATER LIFTS RAPTORS

**MIAMI:** OG Anunoby drained a buzzer-beating three-pointer as the Toronto Raptors resuscitated their NBA title defence on Thursday with a 104-103 victory over the Boston Celtics.

Kyle Lowry, tasked with inbound the ball with half a second on the clock and the Raptors down 103-101, lofted a perfect arcing pass over Boston's towering Tacko Fall to Anunoby on the opposite sideline.

Anunoby set his feet and fired, and the Raptors narrowed the deficit in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semifinal series to 2-1.

"I expected to make it. I don't shoot trying to miss... I wasn't surprised," said Anunoby, who was mobbed by his team-mates.

The Raptors avoided an 0-3 hole — from which no NBA team has come back to win a post-season series.

"The pass was nothing. OG made the shot", said Lowry, who led the Raptors with 31 points, six rebounds and eight assists. "All the credit goes to the shot, man. That's a tough shot. Give OG that credit."

Fred VanVleet scored 17 of his 25 points in the second half and Pascal Siakam scored 14 of his 16 after the interval and Anunoby contributed 12 points for the Raptors, who battled back from a 57-47 halftime deficit.

"We scrapped and clawed and fought," said Lowry. "We never quit."

In a fourth quarter that saw seven lead changes — neither

team leading by more than four points — Boston looked set to take a stranglehold on the series when center Daniel Theis, fed by Kemba Walker's savvy pass through traffic, slammed home a dunk for a 103-101 lead with 0.5 seconds on the clock.

During the ensuing timeout, Boston brought in Fall, who tops out at 2.26m, to defend the inbounds play, but he couldn't hold back the 2019 champions.

"Much credit to those guys. That was a hell of a shot", said Boston's Walker, who led the Celtics with 29 points.

Jaylen Brown added 19 with 12 rebounds and Jayson Tatum chipped in 15, but Boston have a series on their hands now.

Game four is on Saturday.

"One game at a time", Lowry said of the Raptors' mindset as they look to level the series in the NBA's COVID-19 quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida. "Great emotional moment right there (but) that's over. Now we have to focus on the next game."

In the late game, Kawhi Leonard had 29 points as the Los Angeles Clippers got off to a roaring start in their Western Conference semifinal by crushing the Denver Nuggets 120-97.

Leonard shot 12-of-16 from the floor and made all four of his free throws while Paul George had 19 points and Marcus Morris finished with 18 for the second seeded Clippers who lead the series 1-0.

Leonard wasted no time putting his stamp on the Nuggets series just as he did in a 4-2 first-round win over the Dallas Mavericks.

## LEONARD SHINES

Coming into Thursday's game, Leonard was averaging 32.8 points and 10.2 rebounds a game.

Los Angeles outscored Denver 38-20 in the second quarter. Leonard scored 19 first-half points.

He didn't have to press the issue against the Nuggets because the Clippers led 69-51 at the half and then dominated the third quarter to lead 91-67 heading into the fourth. Los Angeles held Denver to 25 percent shooting in the second quarter.

The Clippers managed to contain Denver star Jamal Murray,

who finished with just 12 points and six assists after averaging 31.6 points and scored 50 points twice in the previous series against Utah.

Nikola Jokic had 15 points, Paul Millsap finished with 13 points and nine rebounds for Denver who were coming off a grueling seven-game series victory over the Jazz.

Clippers guard Patrick Beverley returned to the line-up after missing the last five games with an injured calf. Beverley had eight points and six rebounds in 12 minutes. — **AFP**

**NBA Play-off results**  
Semi-finals (all series best-of-seven)  
Eastern Conference  
Toronto bt Boston 104-103 (Boston lead 2-1)  
Western Conference  
LA Clippers bt Denver 120-97 (Clippers lead 1-0)

## Medical protocol vital in resumption of sporting activities

**ADIL AL BALUSHI**  
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

Resumption of the sporting activities was one of the main items discussed during the remotely-held press conference of Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, on Thursday.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health and Member of the Supreme Committee, affirmed that the restarting of any sporting, commercial and cultural activities are subject to post detailed study on possibility of resuming that activity. "There were several requests from some national teams which have overseas participations and accordingly the Supreme Committee recently allowed them to resume the sporting activities in consideration of taking of all the precautionary measures that will prevent spreading of the virus", the minister said.

Al Saeedi added that the health sector has recommended opening



the sports venues as it is necessary tool for the human body to have a healthy life. "Physical inactivity and lack of sporting exercises are easy

ways to get diseases", he explained.

The Minister of Health clarified that the resumption of sporting activities will be followed up by

the head of the Health Minister's office with the sports bodies on their readiness to re-start the sporting events. "It is necessary

from each sporting entity to have a medical protocol and precautionary measures to ensure the safety of everyone at the sporting venues and

prevent spreading the virus". Many of the sports bodies had prepared the medical protocol and set the preventive measures which are in full adherence to the Ministry of Health guidelines as well as to the regulations of the international sports bodies.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) and Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) were among the earlier sporting organisations which started the awareness sessions with the players, coaches and referees on the medical protocol. It is expected that all the rest of sports associations and committees will finalise and implement the precautionary measures very soon.

Oman's national U-16 team players were tested for the COVID-19 recently as well as the Dhofar players. This action was part of the medical protocol. The other preventive measures will include implementation of the social distancing and wearing of the mask and personal hygienic measures.



Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health





Felix Auger-Aliassime



Serena Williams and Margarita Gasparyan

# FELIX DOMINATES MURRAY

\* SERENA ADVANCES TO LAST 32

\* MUGURUZA CRASHES OUT

\* THIEM EASES PAST NAGAL

**NEW YORK:** Serena Williams continued her hunt for a record seventh US Open title with a straight-set win on Thursday as Andy Murray crashed out in the second round at Flushing Meadows.

Williams, the tournament's third seed, dispatched unseeded Russian Margarita Gasparyan 6-2, 6-4 under the roof of a near-empty Arthur Ashe Stadium on a wet New York evening.

The 38-year-old closed out the first set with ease before a slight wobble in the second when she was broken twice by Gasparyan, before progressing into the third round.

"I'm just happy to get through it and try to focus on the next round," said Williams, who will take on 2017 champion Sloane Stephens in the last 32.

In the men's draw, Andy Murray, slumped to a 6-2, 6-3, 6-4 defeat against a dominant Felix Auger-Aliassime.

The 15th seed Canadian smashed 24 aces and 52 winners in a one-sided affair that saw Murray muster just two and nine respectively.

"I just felt like everything was coming in, my toss, my rhythm. Everything was going well through the whole match," said Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Williams is seeking a record-equalling 24th singles Grand Slam title at a subdued, spectator-free Billie Jean King US National Tennis Center in New York.

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

Williams' American compatriot Sofia Kenin, the number two seed, continued her impressive form this year with a straightforward 6-4, 6-3 victory over Canadian Leylah Fernandez to progress into the third round.

The reigning Australian Open champion Kenin is yet to drop a set at Flushing Meadows as she bids for her second Grand Slam title of the year, and of her career.

"I feel like I found a groove. I'm really focused on every shot," said the Moscow-born player who will

| US OPEN RESULTS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Men (second round)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| Matteo Berrettini (ITA x6) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6); Andrey Rublev (RUS x10) bt Gregoire Barrere (FRA) 6-2, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4); Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x14) 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-4, 6-1; Frances Tiafoe (USA) bt John Millman (AUS) 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 1-6, 6-3, 6-3; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x3) bt Christopher O'Connell (AUS) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4; Roberto Bautista (ESP x8) bt Miomir Kecmanovic (SRB) 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Vasek Pospisil (CAN) bt Milos Raonic (CAN x25) 6-7 (1/7), 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3; Alex De Minaur (AUS x21) bt Richard Gasquet (FRA) 6-4, 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 7-5; Karen Khachanov (RUS x11) bt Andrey Kuznetsov (RUS) 6-3, 6-4, 6-1; Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x15) bt Andy Murray (GBR) 6-2, 6-3, 6-4; Marin Cilic (CRO x31) bt Norbert Gombos (SVK) 6-3, 1-6, 7-6 (7/2), 7-5; Dominic Thiem (AUT x2) bt Sumit Nagal (IND) 6-3, 6-3, 6-2 |  |
| <b>Women (second round)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |
| Madison Keys (USA x7) bt Aliona Bolsova (ESP) 6-2, 6-1; Alize Cornet (FRA) bt Ysaline Bonaventure (BEL) 7-6 (7/4), 6-3; Donna Vekic (CRO x18) bt Patricia Tig (ROU) 6-2, 6-1; Tsvetana Pironkova (BUL) bt Garbine Muguruza (ESP x10) 7-5, 6-3; Maria Sakkari (GRE x15) bt Bernarda Pera (USA) 2-6, 6-3, 6-2; Amanda Anisimova (USA x22) bt Katrina Scott (USA) 4-6, 6-4, 6-1; Sloane Stephens (USA x26) bt Olga Govortsova (BLR) 6-2, 6-2; Serena Williams (USA x3) bt Margarita Gasparyan (RUS) 6-2, 6-4; Victoria Azarenka (BLR) bt Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x5) 6-1, 6-3; Karolina Muchova (CZE x20) bt Anna Kalinskaya (RUS) 6-3, 7-6 (7/4); Sorana Cirstea (ROM) bt Johanna Konta (GBR x9) 2-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Ons Jabeur (TUN x27) bt Kaia Kanepi (EST) 7-6 (10/8), 6-0; Sofia Kenin (USA x2) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN) 6-4, 6-3                                                                |  |

take on 27th seed Ons Jabeur of Tunisia in the next round.

**PIRONKOVA RETURNS**

In early men's matches, second seed Dominic Thiem celebrated his 27th birthday with an easy straight-sets win against India's Sumit Nagal.

The Austrian triumphed 6-3, 6-3, 6-2 against Nagal, who became the first Indian man since 2013 to reach the second round of a Grand Slam.

Thiem will play 2014 US Open champion Marin Cilic for a place in the fourth round after the Croatian advanced in four sets against Slovakia's Norbert Gombos.

"He's one of the big champions of the last decade, Thiem said of Cilic.

"It's not a guy I want to face in the third round."

Third seed and beaten finalist last year Daniil Medvedev made light work of Australia's 116th-ranked Christopher O'Connell, easing into round three 6-3, 6-2, 6-4.

Elsewhere, sixth seed Italian Matteo Berrettini brushed aside France's Ugo Humbert 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (8-6) while Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut progressed against Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic.

In the women's competition on Thursday, Tsvetana Pironkova, returning after a lengthy time away from the game following the birth of her son, advanced at the expense of Garbine Muguruza.

The unseeded Bulgarian knocked out the 10th Spaniard 7-5, 6-3 in 1hr 21 min.

"Coming from three year of absence on the tour, you always have your doubts. Right now my results actually make me really happy because it shows that I did the right things preparing for this comeback," said Pironkova.

Seventh seed Madison Keys of the USA also progressed, making light work of Spain's Aliona Bolsova 6-2, 6-1, while Stephens easily overcame Belarusian Olga Govortsova 6-2, 6-2. British ninth seed Jo Konta became another high-ranking woman to be sent packing, losing in three sets to Romania's Sorana Cirstea after going a set ahead. — AFP



Team Astana's Alexey Lutsenko celebrates as he crosses the finish line of the 6th stage. — AFP

## Yates keeps Tour lead as Lutsenko wins sixth stage

**MONT AIGOUAL, France:** Alexey Lutsenko of Astana won stage six of the Tour de France on Thursday completing a long breakaway over two mountains in the magnificent Cevennes National Park.

Briton Adam Yates held on to the overall leader's yellow jersey despite a dramatic late bid by Frenchman Julian Alaphilippe to snatch it back with a trademark kick to the finish that clawed back a few seconds.

"It went really well, with an escape with big riders we needed to control, but a good day for us," Yates said.

Alaphilippe lost the yellow jersey to Yates on Wednesday when a care-less late water-bottle pick-up cost him a 20 seconds time penalty, with the Mitchelton Scott rider admitting he wouldn't have wanted to take the lead in that manner but would defend it with everything he had.

"Tomorrow should be easy," said Yates when asked about Friday's flat stage, where he will likely keep the lead.

There were no other attempted attacks from among the favourites on the mountain stage. The race, which culminates in Paris on September 20, still a long way to go.

"The final ascent is a shallow climb, where you'd waste a lot of en-

| TOUR DE FRANCE 2020   |                                                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Stage 6</b> 191 km |                                                   |
| Thursday Sept 3       |                                                   |
| 1                     | <b>A. Lutsenko</b> (KAZ/Astana) 4h32:34           |
| 2                     | J. Herrada (ESP/Cofidis) at 0:55                  |
| 3                     | G. Van Avermaet (BEL/CCC Team) at 2:15            |
| 4                     | N. Powless (USA/EF Pro Cycling) at 2:17           |
| 5                     | J. Alaphilippe (FRA/Deceuninck) at 2:52           |
| <b>GENERAL</b>        |                                                   |
| 1                     | <b>A. Yates</b> (GBR/Mitchelton) 27h03:57         |
| 2                     | P. Roglic (SVK/Jumbo-Visma) at 0:03               |
| 3                     | T. Pogacar (SVK/UAE Emirates) at 0:07             |
| 4                     | G. Martin (FRA/Cofidis) at 0:09                   |
| 5                     | E. Bernal (COL/Ineos) at 0:13                     |
| <b>POINTS</b>         |                                                   |
| 1                     | <b>S. Bennett</b> (IRL/Deceuninck) 129 pts        |
| <b>MOUNTAIN</b>       |                                                   |
| 1                     | <b>B. Cosnefroy</b> (FRA/AG2r La Mondiale) 23 pts |
| Source: ASO           |                                                   |

ergy to gain just a few seconds if you tried anything," explained Yates, who rides for Mitchelton Scott of Australia.

Adam's twin brother Simon Yates won three stages on the 2019 Tour de France.

"When you grow up as a kid everyone wants to wear the Tour de France yellow," said Yates, who grew up in Bury, Lancashire.

I came here to win stages, so once we get to the high mountains I'll try (and win a Tour de France stage like his brother).

Yates said British team Ineos, which has dominated the Tour in recent years, had a fight on their hands on this tricky Tour.

"Ineos have a real battle going with Jumbo, they are both strong, both well organised so we'll see how that goes."

**SHOW OF INDIVIDUAL POWER**

Lutsenko, started the day trailing Yates by more than five minutes as the peloton left the Ardeche region.

He tagged along with an escape group including Olympic champion Greg Van Avermaet on his golden bike, who finished third 55 sec down with Spaniard Jesus Herrada in second.

"That was the most beautiful win

of my career," said the Kazakh national champion, who has also won a Vuelta stage.

"It was important for my team Astana too."

Lutsenko did not falter on the final climb.

"Near the end I knew Herrada couldn't catch me," he said.

Alaphilippe was the focus of attention at the start line as he and the 170 other riders embarked on the 191-km route through dozens of pretty villages perched along the gorges.

This was the first stage where the traditional party mood could be detected on the roadside and fans had gathered on the penultimate climb where there was dancing and singing hours before the passage of the peloton and most of the signs were in support of the emotional Thibaut Pinot, France's favourite 'boy next door'.

Notoriously moody, Pinot stopped to chat with the press on Thursday, which was interpreted as a good sign by the French media pack.

"I'm feeling better and better," said Pinot, who fell hard on day one in the rain at Nice. Stage seven takes the peloton back through the plains with a 168-km run to Lavaur, where British sprinter Mark Cavendish won back in 2011. — AFP



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# sport

## GAYA STRIKES LATE AS SPAIN DENY GERMANY

**PARIS:** Jose Luis Gaya's late goal gave Spain a 1-1 draw away in Germany on Thursday as the start of the Uefa Nations League marked the return of international football in Europe following a hiatus of 10 months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Valencia defender Gaya was on hand to score from close range in the sixth minute of added time in Stuttgart after Rodrigo Moreno had nodded down a Ferran Torres cross, in a dramatic ending to the League A, Group Four encounter.

Earlier, new Chelsea striker Timo Werner had given Germany the lead just after half-time in an entertaining contest between two of the last three World Cup winners.

It was Luis Enrique's first game of his second spell as Spain coach, despite being re-appointed in November 2019 just after their last game in Euro 2020 qualifying.

"This team is full of faith and hunger. We didn't deserve to lose and we kept fighting to the end," said Spain captain Sergio Ramos, who earned his 171st cap.

These two teams will hope to feature prominently in the European Championship, which was postponed by a year because of the pandemic and will now go ahead — all going to plan — in June and July next year.

In the meantime, this second edition of the Nations League will be crammed into the next three months, with the four group winners in League A advancing to the finals later in 2021.

**FATI DEBUT**

For now, all games are being played behind closed doors, just like the recent Champions League and Europa League 'Final Eight' tournaments in Lisbon and in Germany.

The stands in Stuttgart were therefore empty as Barcelona winger Ansu Fati came on for the second half to make his Spain debut.

Fati, who was born in Guinea-Bissau, does not turn 18 until October. At 17 years and 308 days, he is the second-youngest player ever to represent Spain, behind Angel Zubietta, who was a few weeks younger when he played against Czechoslovakia in 1936.

**IRELAND GRAB LATE DRAW**

Elsewhere on Thursday in the same group, Manchester City's Oleksandr Zinchenko scored a fine goal to give Ukraine a 2-1 win over Switzerland in Lviv.

Andriy Yarmolenko of West Ham United had put Ukraine ahead with a backheel effort, before Haris Seferovic equalised.

In League B, Artem Dzyuba netted a brace as Russia beat Serbia 3-1 in Moscow, while in the same Group 3, Hungary were surprise 1-0 winners away in Turkey.

In Group 4, out-of-favour Real Madrid star Gareth Bale started for Wales but was taken off at half-time in their 1-0 victory over Finland in Helsinki. Kieffer Moore scored the winner 10 minutes from time.

"Gareth Bale has had no football at all," Wales coach Ryan Giggs told Sky Sports. "It was a real juggling act, picking the team. Gareth has had the least football out of everyone and I thought, ahead of Sunday, it would be best to take him off."

On Sunday Wales host Bulgaria, who were held to a 1-1 draw by the Republic of Ireland in Sofia.

Bozhidar Kraev put Bulgaria ahead only for recent Celtic loan signing Shane Duffy to head in a stoppage-time equaliser for Ireland in their first game under new manager Stephen Kenny. The Nations League action continues every night until Tuesday, with Friday highlights including Italy hosting Bosnia and Herzegovina in Florence.

The Netherlands, who lost to Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in the inaugural Nations League final last year, entertain Poland in Amsterdam in their first game since coach Ronald Koeman quit to take the Barcelona job. — **AFP**

**UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE RESULTS ON THURSDAY:**

League A - Group 4

**At Stuttgart:** Germany 1 (Werner 51) Spain 1 (Gaya 90+6)

**At Lviv:** Ukraine 2 (Yarmolenko 14, Zinchenko 68) Switzerland 1 (Seferovic 41)

League B - Group 3

**At Sivas:** Turkey 0 Hungary 1 (Szoboszlai 80)

**At Moscow:** Russia 3 (Dzyuba 48-pen, 81, Karavaev 69) Serbia 1 (A. Mitrovic 78)

Group 4

**At Sofia:** Bulgaria 1 (Kraev 56) Rep. of Ireland 1 (Duffy 90+3)

**At Helsinki:** Finland 0 Wales 1 (Moore 80)

League C - Group 3

**At Parma, Italy:** Moldova 1 (Nicolaiescu 20) Kosovo 1 (Kololli 71)

At Ljubljana: Slovenia 0 Greece 0

League D - Group 1

**At Riga:** Latvia 0 Andorra 0

**At Torshavn:** Faroe Islands 3 (K. Olsen 25, A. Olsen 87, Hendriksson 90) Malta 2 (Degabriele 37, Agius 73)

