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OMAN

HM condolences to Saudi King

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, on the demise of Prince Saud bin Fahd bin Mansour bin Jalawi. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest his soul in peace and grant the family of the deceased patience and solace.

WORLD

Ukraine crash toll climbs to 26

CHUGIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday praised the only survivor of a military plane crash as the death toll climbed to 26, after another cadet died and three more bodies were found. Zelensky went to the scene of the tragedy near the northeastern city of Kharkiv where an Antonov An-26 transport plane carrying 20 air force cadets and seven officers crashed during a training flight on Friday evening. **DETAILS ON P8**

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 36°C
MIN: 28°C

SALALAH
MAX: 29°C
MIN: 23°C

NIZWA
MAX: 39°C
MIN: 25°C

SUNRISE 05.57 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

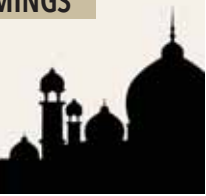
FAJR: 04:42

DHUHR: 12:03

ASR: 15:28

MAGHRIB: 18:03

ISHA: 19:14





LARGEST COIN TREASURE RESTORED

Oman's largest coin treasure, which was found inside a pot in September 1979, has been restored. It was found in the Sinaw area of Al Mudhaibi in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, a report said. The restoration process which lasted for a year by the conservation and preservation team at the National Museum included documentation of the details of each currency, including their dimensions (weight and radius), historical description, and photos of the coin before and after the restoration. – ONA

GATHERINGS CAUSE SPIKE IN SEVERE COVID-19 CASES

Recovery rate fell from 94 to 91 per cent while death rate stood at 1 per cent

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyvp](#)

While hinting at stringent measures again, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, blamed illegal gatherings for the rising number of COVID-19 cases in intensive care units (ICUs).

"There are groups which continue to hold parties in farms, rest houses and closed places, and they gather in beaches and public place", the minister said.

"There is clear disregard for social distancing and other rules in public places", the minister said, with a warning note, "perhaps we will have to resort to partial closure of some hotspot areas in the future".

At the weekend, a group was arrested by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate Police for gathering in a farm in violation of the Supreme Committee's decision.

In another case, Muscat Municipality raided a restaurant in Muttrah which was holding a night event, and legal measures were initiated against the restaurant management.

As per the Supreme Committee's decision, those found organising gatherings will face a fine of RO 1,500, while those who participate in gatherings will be fined RO 100.

TURN TO P2

Phase 3 of serological survey from today

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The third phase of the national serological survey will begin on Sunday, the Ministry of Health said. The survey will be conducted in four stages and it may be noted that each stage has its importance in highlighting the evolution of the pandemic in the Sultanate.

"While we emphasise the need for individuals to participate in the survey, no mandatory isolation or wearing

of tracking bracelets will be imposed on the participants," it said. The second phase of the National Serological Survey was launched on August 16.

The results of the first phase of the national serological survey conducted by the Ministry of Health found that six per cent of the population in the Sultanate was exposed to coronavirus. The infection was prevalent more among non-Omanis with 8.7 per cent testing positive and Omanis accounting for 3.9 per cent.

TURN TO P2

WORLD
TOURISM DAY

Sultanate to develop 14 projects

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

The Sultanate represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will celebrate on Sunday the World Tourism Day, which falls on September 27 every year.

Themed "Tourism and Rural Development", the WTD, this time, comes at a critical moment as countries around the world look to tourism to drive recovery. The 2020 edition also comes as governments look to the sector to drive recovery from the effects of the pandemic with the enhanced recognition of tourism as a way of empowerment, integrity and income generator in rural communities.

In a statement, Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said, "this time, the celebration of the event coincides with the restructuring of the tourism sector with the heritage sector, noting that tourism has become a key source to the economic and social growth of countries and communities that foster them through empowerment, skills development, infrastructure development and provision of employment opportunities".

"The Sultanate is taking part in celebrating the World Tourism Day with a focus on the implementation of a number of programmes and initiatives of the Omani tourism strategy, which includes the development of 14 tourist projects across various governorates of the Sultanate, taking into account the elements of sustainability, empowerment of local communities, and enhancing their roles in protecting their cultural heritage and customs from evanescence."

On his part, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said, "All around the world, tourism empowers rural communities, provides jobs and opportunities.

Radiation levels on Moon 2.6 times greater than ISS

WASHINGTON: As the US prepares to return humans to the Moon this decade, one of the biggest dangers future astronauts will face is space radiation that can cause lasting health effects, from cataracts to cancer and neurodegenerative diseases.

Though the Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s proved it was safe for people to spend a few days on the lunar surface, Nasa did not take daily radiation measurements that would help scientists quantify just how long crews could stay.

This question was resolved last Friday after a Chinese-German team published in the journal *Science Advances* the results of an experiment carried out by China's Chang'E 4 lander in 2019. "The radiation of the Moon is between two and three



The team found that the radiation exposure on the moon is about 2.6 times higher than the ISS crew's daily dose

times higher than what you have on the ISS (International Space Station)," co-author Robert Wimmer-Schweingruber, an astrophysicist at the University of Kiel said.

"So that limits your stay to approximately two months on the surface of the Moon," he added, once the radiation exposure from the roughly week-long journey there, and week back, is taken into account.

There are several sources of radiation exposure: galactic cosmic rays, sporadic solar particle events (for example from solar flares), and neutrons and gamma rays from interactions between space radiation and the lunar soil.

Radiation is measured using the unit sievert, which quantifies the amount absorbed by human tissues.

The team found that the radiation exposure on the Moon is 1,369 microsieverts per day — about 2.6 times higher than the International Space Station crew's daily dose.

The reason for this is that the ISS is still partly shielded by the Earth's protective magnetic bubble, called the magnetosphere, which deflects most radiation from space.

Earth's atmosphere provides additional protection for humans on the surface, but we are more exposed the higher up we go.

"The radiation levels we measured on the Moon are about 200 times higher than on the surface of the Earth and five to 10 times higher than on a flight from New York to Frankfurt," added Wimmer-Schweingruber.

— AFP



Sustainable practices part of Oman’s tradition

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Proper guidance and a certain degree of initiative may lead to an entirely different approach towards waste management in Oman, as a survey done by EcoMENA suggests, “the Omani society is ready to engage actively in initiatives to promote more responsible consumption habits and sustainable waste management.”

EcoMENA is a volunteer-driven initiative to create mass environmental awareness and to foster sustainability worldwide in general and MENA in particular.

Discussing the case of Oman towards waste management, Jamila J Hakam in a study mentioned that the Omani culture “has a strong tradition of conservative use, re-use, repurposing, and recycling. Many of the traditional practices of family and community living now thought to be ‘outdated’ are highly efficient and ecologically sound.”

The recent concept of three Rs (re-use, repurposing, and recycling) to conserve the environment, is inherent in Omani society. Just a small push may have far-reaching positive results.

To score her point of Omanis’



natural inclination towards heritage and culture, and its possible reflection on sustainable waste management Jamila mentioned, “Omani men, women and children have the example of their grandparents to guide them in reviving and re-establishing local, traditional, sustainable and environmentally-friendly practices of careful consumption and waste

management.”

The study took note of a full-scale survey of attitudes and awareness along the lines of the Sultan Qaboos University’s Geography Department’s investigation on climate change awareness and perceptions in residents of Muscat.

Conditions, according to the document, are ripe for the

implementation of a network of well-designed, integrated, and efficiently executed recycling programmes that are accessible to the Omani population where they live, work and go to school.

Back to basics, that apply old ways of shopping, storage, preparation, and disposal of food and other consumables can be hugely beneficial in sustainable development.

Omani men, women and children have the example of their grandparents to guide them in reviving and re-establishing local, traditional, sustainable and environmentally-friendly practices of careful consumption and waste management

JAMILA J HAKAM

“At the level of the household, families can avoid buying packaged pre-processed foods, use drinking water supply services which provide refillable containers/dispensers instead of buying bottled water, bring their reusable shopping bags and request that purchases from shops not be placed in plastic bags,” the study stated.

The Omani society is ready to engage actively in initiatives to promote sustainable waste management

As a mark of a fresh initiative, the “households could aim for ‘zero waste’ by applying the four Rs and participating in composting where possible. This is already being done in local rural areas, and it is a practice that is being restored in urban areas of developed countries in Europe, North America, and elsewhere.”

She suggested using consumer clout to change the practices of business and industry. “It is known that businesses that serve consumers are very sensitive to customer demands. With the food service and hospitality industry, individual consumers in Oman can effect change by demanding less wasteful and more sustainable practices and options from the industry (eg. compostable packaging, less packaging, appropriate portion sizes and eco-friendly food containers in restaurants, and filtered water instead of bottled water in restaurants and hotels).

Commenting on the burgeoning waste problem, she said, “the solution is local, but it has definite regional and potential global application.”

■ FROM PAGE 1

Gatherings blamed for spike in COVID-19 cases

Speaking during the 16th media briefing of the Supreme Committee, Dr Al Saeedi expressed concern over the record increase in the number of infected people in the ICUs.

“The return of employees and the opening of commercial activities is one of the factors causing the spread of the virus, but the main factor in the increase in the number of infected cases is due to lack of compliance with precautionary measures and social distancing”, he said.

He revealed that there were 190 patients admitted in intensive care units as on Thursday last.

The recovery rate, according to Dr Al Saeedi, has decreased from 94 to 91 per cent due to the increase in cases, while the death rate stood at 1 per cent in the Sultanate.

He called on all government and private agencies to adhere to the decisions and guidelines to limit the spread of the virus.

While expressing optimism that the first batch of the vaccine will reach Oman before the end of the year, he said, “distribution of the vaccines will start first with the medical and security personnel and then to the most vulnerable groups and those with chronic diseases”.

Phase 3 of COVID-19 survey from today

The survey is useful as it helps the government in estimating the proportion of the population that might have been exposed to the virus causing coronavirus disease, and developed immunity to it.

This is done by checking for antibodies against Sars-CoV-2 in blood samples. The cross-sectional survey includes all parts of the Sultanate, Omanis and expatriate volunteers whose blood samples are collected and tested as part of this exercise.

The survey will also benefit a lot in planning for the future in case vaccines are found in the coming six months. The Governorate of Muscat will have twice the number of samples because of the population density and other factors.

Among the governorates, Muscat and Al Wusta governorates had the highest prevalence of the disease at 9.2 per cent rate each.

Launched in July, the first phase of the study revealed that the number of infections in the Sultanate is estimated at 276,685 (those who have symptoms and those who did not show symptoms).

The Ministry of Health stressed the need for the sustained participation of citizens and expatriates in the survey is necessary to complete the survey process successfully.

Outdoor sports activities resume

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth issued a circular on Friday that allows the committees, clubs, and national teams to resume their outdoor activities.

The organisers must ensure the absence of an audience at the venue and follow the precautionary procedures issued by the Supreme Committee and international federations for each game.

The organisers should assign specialists working in sports complexes and clubs to ensure that all health requirements are met before the start of training and matches in coordination with the sports federations.

They should sterilise all sports facilities before resuming activities and publish the necessary instructions at the sports facilities and social media.

Direct physical contact should be avoided and periodic health checks must be conducted on players and members of the technical and administrative officials.



It requires technical and administrative officials and workers to wear masks inside the sports facility.

Players are required to use special sports equipment. Gatherings after the end of training should be avoided.

Residential plot allotment falls 40.8 per cent in August



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning allotted a total of 10,564 residential properties across the country at the end of August 2020, compared to 17,833 plots in the same period of 2019, which is a decrease of 40.8 per cent, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah was allotted 1,992 residential lands at the end of August 2020, which is the highest

among governorates. This was followed by Muscat with 1,632 properties, Al Dakhiliyah with 1,575, North Al Batinah with 1,192 and Al Dhahirah with 1,144 plots.

The governorates of Dhofar, South Al Sharqiyah, South Al Batinah, Al Wusta and Musandam were allotted 1093, 877, 549, 202 and 162 residential properties, respectively. Al Buraimi was allotted 146 plots, which is the lowest among governorates.

Meanwhile, the governorates of Dhofar, North Al Batinah and Al Dhahirah witnessed an increase in the number of lands allotted at the end of August 2020 compared to the same period of 2019, whereas allotment of properties in the rest of the governorates showed a marked decline during the period of study.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning had allotted a total of 28,099 residential plots in 2019. — ONA

Waiver for fines on work permit defaults

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Foreign workers who are leaving Oman for good have been exempted from fines related to their work permit.

The exemption, one among many sops given to the private sector, is valid till the end of this year in accordance with the decisions by the Supreme Committee combating the COVID-19 situation in the country.

“Private sector employers are exempted from paying fines accrued by their expat employees during their stay in the country, will be waived if they leave the country permanently”, the ministry said.

The ministry said that the private sector companies can terminate the services of their non-Omani workers, provided they pay all the amounts due to them, in addition to ensuring that they leave the country permanently.

A decision by the ministry also grants permission to renew the expired licences of companies with Omani nationals, as well as for small and medium enterprises registered with the Public Authority for Social Insurance.

In accordance with the earlier decision, “work permits for temporary or part-time employers can also be approved, with the costs calculated on the basis of the number of workers the company wishes to appoint.”

According to the ministry, companies have to pay only RO 201 for the renewal of employment visas of expat workers against the RO 301 applicable previously.

“The decision by the Supreme Committee will continue till the end of 2020”, the ministry added.

Intercity bus services begin today

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Mwasalat is all set to start intercity public transport services from Sunday following approval from the Supreme Committee dealing with the COVID-19 situation.

In an online statement, the state-owned operator said, "Based on the approval of the Supreme Committee, it has been decided to resume public transport services in the Sultanate according to the specified dates and requirements."

With airports in the nation resuming partial operations on October 1, having adopted the required safety protocols for travellers and workers, Oman Air started flights to Duqm on September 20, and is now working six flights every week to Al Wusta Governorate. Boat operators have additionally resumed their actions for some time now, with social distancing and sanitisation measures in place.

"Bus services between the cities will resume in the first stage, to be followed by a gradual return in the operation of the service within the cities," the operator said in the statement.

Mwasalat provides a number of services from the governorate of Muscat to different wilayats of the Sultanate (Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Al Buraimi, Ibbi, Duqm, Yanqul, Sur, Rustaq, Salalah, Marmul, Masirah, Khasab and Haima) and the Emirate of Dubai. We also operate from Salalah to a number of wilayats, it said.

The schedule and the rates have been posted on the twitter handle of Mwasalat



indicating that the services will be resumed on a daily basis.

Earlier, in a press release, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said, "Intercity public transport services will start operating on September 27, and public transport services within Muscat will operate from October 4."

The operation of transport services within Salalah will begin from October 18, and the date for operating public transport services in Suhar will be determined later by

Buses are to be sterilised earlier than and after every journey, and all passengers travelling on intercity buses can have their temperatures checked earlier than boarding. Masks should be worn by all onboard, and hand sanitisers should be made accessible to them

Mwasalat, it said.

As a part of resuming operations, plenty of steps to safeguard the well-being of passengers are to be taken.

Buses are to be sterilised earlier than and after every journey, and all passengers travelling on intercity buses can have their temperatures checked earlier than boarding. Masks should be worn by all onboard, and hand sanitisers should be made accessible to them. Passengers are required to follow social distance onboard by avoiding sitting next to each other onboard.

India to operate more repatriation flights from Oct 1

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

The government of India has added more flights to India from Oman under Vande Bharat Mission (VBM).

There will be flights from Muscat and Salalah to Delhi, Mumbai, Trivandrum, Bengaluru/ Mangalore, Chennai, Vijayawada, Kannur, Kochi, Kozhikode, Lucknow, and Tiruchirappalli from October 1 to 24.

As in the case of flights operated earlier under Vande Bharat Mission, passenger lists for all the above-mentioned flights will be finalised by the embassy. Passengers are requested to provide details and confirmation to travel on a particular flight on the online form floated by the embassy.

All eligible people will be contacted by Air India directly for booking of tickets.

The passengers, after registering on the online form, may also approach Air India offices in Ruwi and Wattaya (National Travels, General Sales Agent of Air India) directly to book tickets on a first come first serve basis. However, priority will be given to medical emergency cases, pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as other Indian nationals who are stranded in difficult situations.

The cost of tickets will have to be borne by the passengers themselves. All passengers are required to confirm acceptance of all conditions of travel, including quarantine requirements in India as well as health requirements in order to board the flight.

Al Musannah Health Centre marks Patient Safety Day

BADRIYA MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI
MUSANNAH, SEPT 26

Al Musannah Health Centre celebrated the world patient safety day in Wilayat Al Musannah recently. The theme of the day, which falls on September 17 every year, is 'health worker safety: a priority for patient safety.'

The event is marked as hospital staff across the world wage battle against COVID-19 risking their health and safety.

The event was filled with voluntary initiatives from several community bodies who praised the health workers and medical personnel of Al Musannah Health Centre. The health personnel distributed face masks and sanitisers for the patients who came for medical check-up at the Al Musannah Health Centre. The health personnel received gifts at the end of the event.



The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted unprecedented pressure on health systems worldwide. A knowledgeable and skilled

health workforce is critical for the provision of safe care to patients.

Therefore, strict adherence to safety standards to maintain the



safety of both the health cadres and patients is required. It is also a time to express our thanks and gratitude to medical and allied

medical cadres, administrative and technical personnel who are the first line of defence against the pandemic.

Tarassud app updated

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has released a new update for the Tarassud+ app for android and iPhones.

The update will allow the travellers who are coming to the Sultanate to register their personal information before arrival at Muscat International Airport.

The app will also allow the inbound passengers to use the medical scout to report their health condition on a daily basis. The app will show the person's condition through the icon to register cases.

Tarassud+ will be supported with international text messages to register the arrival passengers via their phone numbers in their countries.

The new update will also be supported with the optical character recognition (Ocr) feature through the ID card, passport and boarding pass.



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GOT COVID-19? DON'T PANIC

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As the number of COVID-19 patients in ICU increases, authorities have requested the public to practice all safety measures to combat the virus. As the economic activities have been opening up in a measured manner, the gatherings have increased.

Not every coronavirus infection case might turn out to be serious, as in the case of Nasser H and his mother; both had the symptoms of cold, fever and headache along with lack of smell and taste. "It lasted maybe a day or two then just disappeared," he says.

For others the experience might be more difficult, but the impact it has on mind could have been overlooked.

"More than the sickness of COVID-19 the patient finds it difficult to tackle the fear associated with it. They need the complete support of the family and friends. The patient has to be assured that they are not going to die because of COVID-19. They have to focus on keeping the mind positive, take as much as healthy food as possible, keep their mind active and yes afterwards there will be tiredness which lasts for a long time. If you do not take care of your health it is going to affect you in the long run," says Tina S who recovered from the ordeal of COVID-19.

Maintaining a positive mind is equally important to getting the right medication, says Dr Hamad al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Studies have shown the mind-body interaction. For example, feelings of loneliness can help to predict health status — perhaps because lonely people have more psychological stress or experience it more intensely and that stress in turn tamps down immunity.

Dr Al Sinawi explains further, "It is also no surprise that depression hurts immunity. It is also linked to other physical problems such as heart disease. At the same time, depression may both reflect a lack of social support and/or cause someone to withdraw from social ties. Both can be stressful and hurt the body's ability to fight infection."

While Tina was lucky to be with family, Mahesh U was at a field location when he began to sense some of the COVID-19 symptoms. Now totally recovered and in the comfort of his home and in the company of family, Mahesh recalls the coronavirus days.

"AS I had the symptoms our company doctor asked to visit the local clinic at the place I was staying. The test confirmed the diagnosis. The symptoms were high fever, headache, throat and body pain, cough as well as loss of smell and taste. As there is no specific medication for COVID-19 the doctor gave me panadol, cough syrup and antibiotics for my throat pain and pain killers for my body pain. But I suffered all these symptoms for three days and I felt better overall by the fourth day except for lack of smell and taste which lasted for 10 days," explained Mahesh.

He was eating a healthy diet which included fruits in addition to the intake of multivitamins as the doctor had advised him to take vitamin C.

He made sure he watched a lot

of movies that helped to pass time. After fourteen days he was perfectly all right and it was then he lost the fear.

"Now wherever I go I do not have the fear because I have experienced it. What I want to tell others is not to panic. Doctors will treat the symptoms," he advised.

Since the start of pandemic the whole focus is on the patients who get the coronavirus infection. It is not just the patients but the relatives also go through the trauma due to the uncertainty.

It comes as a shock to the patient when he gets to know that the test report is positive confirming the infection and also to the other family members," explained Dr Dilip Singhvi, Internal Medicine Specialist, who has been a frontline doctor during the pandemic period.

"Some patients have both symptoms of anxiety and depression especially as the patient has to isolate for the next 2 weeks and cannot meet any of his family members or wife or children. Apart from treating the patient for his physical illness which we as treating physicians do, we should also council the patients regarding their mental health, motivate them with positive thoughts and energy, treat them with empathy so that they can tide over next 2 or 3 weeks of the illness, also family has a big role to play here," he noted.

The doctor explained that families should be in constant touch with patients, especially wife, children or partners, other members like parents or sisters or brothers. Fortunately, the technology now has provided so many platforms by which one can interact face to face via audio or video means and can keep motivating with positive vibes, can help by doing some meditation, prayers, or play games, watch movies, music etc. This all helps in creating positive energy and takes him away from depressive thoughts.

Some patients have both symptoms of anxiety and depression especially as the patient has to isolate for the next 2 weeks and cannot meet any of his family members or wife or children. Apart from treating the patient for his physical illness which we as treating physicians do, we should also council the patients regarding their mental health, motivate them with positive thoughts and energy, treat them with empathy so that they can tide over next 2 or 3 weeks of the illness, also family has a big role to play here

DR DILIP SINGHVI



Music lovers pay homage to legendary singer

KABEER YOUSUF
@KABEERYOUSEF

Music lovers in the Sultanate paid homage to S P Balasubrahmanyam, the legendary playback singer, who was laid to rest in the Indian city of Chennai on Saturday.

"A huge loss in my family," described Chithra Narayan, an educationist, and a philanthropist.

"Music is the language of the heart. The legend SPB with his wealth of renderings had not only captured the hearts of millions but also made sure that his melodies would be ringing in the ears and minds of the people for eternity," she said.

"His life also teaches us to lead our lives for serving society and touch upon lives for SPB had always this noble thought in mind. I have too many memories of SPB from my childhood days," remembers Piya Pawani, a model and actor based in Muscat.

"My dad would sing his songs and they were the first ones that created an image of love in us. We grew up listening to his voice and the lyrics of the film 'Raja' is very close to my heart. If only songs could have life and soul, SPB's voice and style would have soothed many aching hearts," adds Piya.

A R Biju, Managing Director of Choice Investments, feels the singer bade adieu at the peak of his fame.

It is a great loss to music lovers. The world has lost a legend who has become an immortal with his songs. He lives in the hearts and minds of millions of people across India and beyond

DR V CHAMPAKAVALLI

"It is as if he had decided to call it quits when his voice was at the pinnacle of beauty". He remembers that there could never be such a down-to-earth singer.

"SPB was witty and loved to joke and treat everyone in his team alike. He enthralled his audience with his humour and humble attitude alike besides his soulful rendition," adds Biju who finds himself a singer first.

GREAT LOSS
"It is a great loss to music lovers. The world has lost a legend who has become an immortal with his songs. He lives in the hearts and minds of millions of people across India and beyond. Especially



Telugus will miss him a lot. He is the only one in the music world who has done more than 40,000 songs in 17 languages," says Dr V Champakavalli.

"I consider him a modern-day 'Annamayya'. He has left a mark on millions of music lovers. Not only as a great singer, (but) he has also proved to be a great human being. Today with his demise the music world has come to a standstill. None can replace him in near future," she added.

Speaking of SPB (as he is popularly known), Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF) president Ramdas Chandaka said: "It is difficult to digest the news of his death. Generations have grown up listening to his songs. Whether it is college-going youth, middle-aged and elderly... all relished his songs with the same flavour. He has cut the barriers of age and generations.

For someone to be around singing songs for 50 years is not a small achievement... and this credit goes to one and only SPB."

"Being born and brought up listening to the songs by SPB, his death is a shock to the generations from 60's till date. I consider his loss just to be physical... as his songs echo every moment of our lives and his songs are eternal. Besides singing he has proved to be a great actor, dubbing artist, an anchor and a producer. In one word he is a multi-faceted person," says Swetha Bhadri, a pharmacist.

"SPB was a down to earth person, supported his successors in the film industry with all his expertise," she added.

Anuradha and Jayakumar, a couple that loves SPB fondly recall how their childhood in a Tamil Nadu village was enriched by his mellifluous voice.

"We were mesmerised by his beautiful, youthful, and soothing voice. SPB was in his peak in the 80s and 90s, as his voice suited many top heroes like Rajinikanth, Kamal Hassan etc in multiple languages. His voice had almost ruled over Tamil cinema where he was looked upon as brother and son in many houses."

Saifudheen, a budding singer based in Salalah, takes inspiration from SPB as he grew to imitate him.

Drive-through PCT testing at Muscat Airport

MUSCAT: Oman Airports, in partnership with Chinese company BGI, is setting up Covid-19 testing facilities at Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport, Suhar Airport, and Duqm Airport to help passengers undergo a PCR test and boost early detection and containment of the virus.

Oman Airports stated that drive-through PCR testing facilities have been installed at Muscat International

Airport and Salalah Airport to facilitate sample collection.

Tests will have to be pre-booked via the Tarassud+ app with test findings to be communicated within 24 hours through the same app. The price set for the drive-through PCR tests is RO25. This also comes as part of the precautionary measures that Oman Airports started taking to adapt its operations to a post-coronavirus period, as international air travel is

set to open up again by early October with international and domestic flights resuming through the airports of the Sultanate.

According to the requirements set by the Ministry of Health and the Civil Aviation Authority, a mandatory PCR test at the expense of the traveler is required when entering the Sultanate.

PCR tests will have to be pre-booked on Tarassud+ mobile application.

New ISG topper in CBSE Class 10 board exam



MUSCAT: Nayaonika Vasishta is the new School Topper of Indian School Al Ghubra with an aggregate of 98.2 percent. The improvement in her scores in English and Social Science, upon re-evaluation, made her take the lead from the previous two toppers of the school who scored 97.6 percent.

The Management and Staff of ISG are proud of Nayaonika for her outstanding performance and wish her many more superlative achievements.

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



TENDER NOTICE

The National Museum hereby announces the following Tenders:

Tender No	Name/Description	Grade	Tender Document Cost	Deadline for collecting tender documents	Closing date for submission of tender documents
2/2020	Supply and implementation of Electronic Documents and Records Management System (EDRMS)	All registered companies at the Tender Board and certified by the National Records and Archives Authority.	25 OMR	1/10/2020	15/10/2020
3/2020	Supply and implementation of audio guide system for visitor services	All registered companies at the Tender Board	25 OMR	1/10/2020	15/10/2020

- The National Museum's Internal Tender Committee invites companies who have been registered at the Tender Board under for providing audio guidance system for visitor services at the National Museum.
- The Companies who are interested in participating in the above tender shall collect the tender documents during office hours from 08:00 am to 12:00 pm. From the National Museum, Administrative and Finance Department, 1st floor, al-Saiyda Street, historical Muscat, opposite Qasr al-Alam Palace.
- The payment of the tender documentation must be done by cheque prior to acquiring the document at above mentioned address.
- Bids shall be submitted in closed envelopes, sealed with red wax and addressed to: His Excellency the Chairman of Internal Tender Board Committee, the National Museum Sultanate of Oman. The Tender submission must be placed inside the Tender Case. The tender number and the name of the tender shall be mentioned on the tender document. It is not accepted to indicate the Bidder's identity, name and/or its logo on the envelope.
- The tenderers shall submit with the form of tender a certified cheque or tender bond in the sum of (1%) of the tender value valid (90) days, issued in the name of The Ministry of Finance by locally registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman.
- The Tender is subject to the Tender Law of the Sultanate of Oman.
- Bids received after due date will not be considered.
- Any enquiries and questions regarding the Tender please contact the number 22081575, or by email tender@nm.gov.om.
- Any enquiries must be raised before the deadline for the submission of tender documents.
- Any Tender Bond which does not meet the requirement of Tender Bond will not be considered. The Museum is not obliged to accept the lowest tender. Therefore, Preference will be given to companies with the highest proportion of Omani workers.

Note: The National Museum reserves the right to accept/reject any offer and cancel the Tender inquiry altogether.

الشركة المتحدة للطاقة (ش.م.ع.) UNITED POWER COMPANY (SAOG)



P.O. Box: 147, Jawharat A' Shatti, PC 134, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24400600, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.soharpower.com

Request for Quotations for Diesel Oil stored at Manah Power Plant

Manah Power Plant is situated approx. 30 kms from Nizwa, off the Nizwa – Adam road.

The Power Plant has 4 Diesel Oil storage tanks which currently store approx. 7.2 Million litres of Diesel Oil. Manah Power Plant is looking to sell off approximately 3.2 Million Litres of Diesel oil and wishes to invite interested parties to submit their best quotations for purchasing the stored Diesel Oil.

- Interested Bidders to note that all of the following shall be considered by them in their bids:**
 - The Plant has diesel oil unloading station to unload Diesel Oil from tankers into the tanks. Bidders could use these pumps to pump the oil from the tanks to the tankers. However, any and all modifications necessary to undertake such work shall be considered by the bidders. Such modifications shall be undertaken with strict adherence to Health & Safety (H&S), considering all precautions for undertaking hot work in the presence of inflammable substance like Diesel.
 - The Buyer will adhere to all H&S conditions of the work of the Plant Operator, including providing required insurance cover for safety of their staff and that of the Plant.
 - All power utilised for the unloading of the tanks into the tankers shall be chargeable at the CRT rate published by Mazoon Electricity Company. Such power shall be measured by the successful Party using standard meters.
 - The Diesel Oil has been procured in the year 1996. Tests undertaken in 2016 showed no significant deterioration to the quality; however the Seller does not provide any warranty as to the quality of the oil.
- The Seller of Diesel shall apply the following principles to qualify submitted Bids:**
 - Net price for purchase of oil in OMR / Litre.
 - Robustness of the unloading methodology from H&S standpoint.
 - It is recognised that Bidders may not have the facility to store such quantities of Oil; however, the lowest time for offtake of the entire 3.2 Million Litres of Diesel Oil shall be a factor in arriving at a decision.

Interested Bidders are requested to submit their queries at the following email address (info@upcmanah.com) no later than three (3) Business Days after issuance of this advertisement. Responses to the individual Bidders shall be made within five (5) Business Days thereafter. Bids shall be submitted within five (5) Business Days thereafter (and in no event later than 15th October 2020) in sealed envelope addressed to the **Chairman, Audit Committee at the office of United Power Company SAOG, 1st floor Jawharat A'Shatti Complex, Qurm, Muscat**. Bids shall explicitly state compliance to the points raised in 1 above and provide details on unloading of oil from the tanks.

The Seller reserves the right to reject any of the Bids received and to choose amongst any of the qualified Parties, without assigning any reasons for the same.



Lebanon PM designate bows out after failing to form cabinet

BEIRUT: Lebanon's premier-designate stepped down on Saturday, saying he had been unable to form a reform-minded government to lift the country out of its worst economic crisis in decades.

Lebanon's last government resigned in the aftermath of a colossal blast at Beirut's port on August 4 that killed more than 190 people, wounded thousands and ravaged swathes of the capital.

Since his nomination on August 31, Mustapha Adib has been under pressure to form a new cabinet as soon as possible to carry out the necessary reforms to unlock billions of dollars in foreign aid.

"I excuse myself from continuing the task of forming the government," Adib said in a televised speech.

"I apologise to the Lebanese people... for my inability to realise its aspirations for a reformist team," he said. Government formation can drag on for months in multi-confessional Lebanon, where a power-sharing agreement seeks to maintain a fragile balance between all sides.

This effectively means that all main political parties must agree on major decisions, including the makeup of any future cabinet even before it is submitted for parliamentary approval.

Adib's efforts to come up with a new line-up have been effectively blocked by the two main parties representing Lebanon's large Shiite community — Amal and Hizbullah.

The two parties have refused to budge on their demand to keep the finance ministry under their control.

Adib, a little-known 48-year-old former ambassador, was named just hours before French President Emmanuel Macron made his second visit to the country since the August 4 blast, pressing for the speedy



Lebanon's President Michel Aoun meets with Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib at the presidential palace in Baabda, Lebanon. — Reuters

formation of a reformist government.

Macron said he had secured commitments from all of Lebanon's political parties to help Adib achieve that within a fortnight, but the deadline came and went.

The premier-designate said it had become clear he no longer had support from all political forces.

"As the efforts to form a government reached their final phase, it became apparent to me that this consensus... was no longer there and that forming one according to the criteria I had determined was bound to fail," he said.

Even before last month's blast, Lebanon was already mired in its worst economic crunch since the 1975-1990 civil war, as it grappled with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In March, Lebanon for the first time defaulted on its sovereign debt,

I apologise to the Lebanese people... for my inability to realise its aspirations for a reformist team,

MUSTAPHA ADIB
Prime Minister-designate

before launching talks with the International Monetary Fund towards unlocking billions of dollars in aid that then ground to a halt.

The Lebanese pound has plummeted in value, inflation has soared, and poverty rates have doubled to more than half the population.

Adib has become the third prime minister, or prime minister-designate, to step down in less than a year.

Former premier Saad Hariri — who himself quit last autumn, during massive protests — was among several former premiers who on Saturday lamented the deadlock that led to Adib's resignation.

"You will bite your fingers in regret... over wasting an exceptional opportunity that will be difficult to repeat to stop the economic collapse and put the country on the path of demanded reform," Hariri said.

UN envoy to Lebanon Jan Kubis reacted on Twitter: "Such a degree of irresponsibility, when the fate of Lebanon and its people is at stake!"

"Politicians, have you really scuppered this unique chance created by France?" — AFP

Sudan rejects linking removal from US terror list

KHARTOUM: Sudan does not want to link its removal from a US terrorism list that is hindering access to foreign funding for the country's economy with a normalisation of relations with Israel, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said on Saturday.

Sources said this week that US officials indicated in talks with a Sudanese delegation they wanted Khartoum to follow the UAE and Bahrain and open ties with Israel.

Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism dates back to its toppled ruler Omar al Bashir, and makes it difficult for its new transitional government to access urgently needed debt relief and foreign financing.

Hamdok said Sudan had told US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a visit last month it was necessary to separate the removal from the US list from the normalisation of relations with Israel.

"This topic (ties to Israel) needs a deep discussion of the society," he told a conference in Khartoum to discuss economic reforms. Sudan's

surging inflation and plummeting currency have been the biggest challenges to Hamdok's transitional administration, which rules with the military since Bashir's ouster.

Sudan was put on the US list in 1993 because the United States believed Bashir's regime was supporting fighter groups. But many in Sudan consider this is undeserved since Bashir was removed last year and Sudan has long cooperated with the United States on counter-terrorism.

The White House and State Department have declined to comment when asked about the status of negotiations. Burhan and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a surprise meeting in Uganda earlier this year. Yet opening ties is sensitive, as Sudan was a staunch foe of Israel under Bashir.

Meanwhile, a Sudanese court has sentenced six artists to two months in jail for "creating a public nuisance", a lawyer said, bringing the total number convicted in the case to 11.

— Agencies



Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Sovereign Council chief General Abdel Fattah al Burhan attend the opening session of the First National Economic Conference in Khartoum. — AFP

■ POLICE PATROL TO CONTROL COVID



Members of Istanbul Police Department Mounted Unit patrol against people not wearing protective face masks at Taksim Square as the spread of the coronavirus disease continues in Istanbul. — Reuters

Tunisia reports highest single-day corona cases

TUNIS: Tunisia on Saturday confirmed 1,087 new cases of the coronavirus, the North African country's highest single-day caseload since March.

The latest reported cases have taken Tunisia's total virus caseload to 14,392. Eleven new deaths due to Covid-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus, were also recorded, the Health Ministry said on Saturday, bringing the country's total to 191.

The Tunisian government, grappling with economic woes, has ruled out reimposing a total lockdown to contain the spread of the virus. However, some health officials have warned that the infection situation could worsen next month if health precautions are not strictly observed.

Police have started campaigns to ensure people wear protective face masks in public places. Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, who took office earlier this month, said on Saturday a partial lockdown could be imposed in "hot infection areas" to curb the spread of the virus. "Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, the government has sought to strike a balance between economic and health requirements," he added, according to Tunisia's state news agency TAP.

Tunisia has struggled with civil unrest as well as economic hardships, which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. The economy is expected to shrink by up to 7 per cent.



A Tunisia student outside a primary school in the Ariane region near the capital Tunis. — AFP File Photo

Meanwhile, Tunisia's tourism sector has collapsed, officials warned on Saturday, with earnings plunging 60 per cent and swathes of hotels at risk of closing permanently.

The sector, a major employer that accounts for 14 per cent of the North African nation's GDP, has been hit hard by restrictions imposed to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. "There has been a drop in

tourism activities of 60 per cent, and we could reach 70 percent by the end of 2020," Tourism Minister Habib Ammar told reporters.

Tunisia's income from tourism this year has totalled just \$563 million, officials statistics showed.

Total bed nights — the number of nights visitors stayed in hotels — dropped by 79.5 per cent.

— Agencies

UNITED NATIONS

Abbas seeks UN Mideast conference in 2021

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas appealed on Friday to the United Nations for an international conference on the Middle East in 2021, hoping for a new start after US elections and the milestone of Gulf Arabs' recognition of Israel.

In an address to the General Assembly, Abbas asked Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to convene the meeting on the Palestinian issue "early next year" and bring in "all relevant parties."

"The conference should have full authority to launch a genuine



peace process based on international law," Abbas told the virtual General Assembly in a recorded address.

ANKARA

Turkey issues 82 arrest warrants

Turkish prosecutors on Friday issued arrest warrants for 82 people, including a mayor and several former lawmakers from the pro-Kurdish HDP party, who are accused of involvement in 2014 protests that left 37 dead.

The Ankara chief public prosecutor's office said 20 people had already been detained in connection with the unrest, which spread to Turkey after IS fighters fought to capture the mainly Kurdish northern Syrian border town of Kobane.

The detained included six former lawmakers from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), as well as current and former party executives.

Ankara suspects the HDP of being a political front for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency against the state since 1984.

The HDP blames Turkish police for provoking the violence, which spread from southeastern border regions near Syria to Ankara.

TEHRAN

Jailed rights lawyer ends hunger strike

Jailed Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has stopped a hunger strike she began more than 45 days ago due to health concerns, her husband said on Saturday.

Sotoudeh, 57, announced she was going on hunger strike last month to demand the release of political prisoners and focus attention on their plight due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week, Sotoudeh's husband said she was hospitalised for five days before being returned to her prison cell. On Saturday, he said she had



ended the hunger strike. "We spoke briefly this morning. She decided to end the hunger strike in order not to worsen her heart problems," Reza Khandan said.

In brief

SYDNEY

DISPOSAL OF 350
DEAD WHALES BEGIN

Australian wildlife officials began disposing of hundreds of dead pilot whales on Saturday after concluding there was no longer any hope of rescuing any more.

In Australia's biggest whale beaching, 470 whales were first spotted on a wide sandbank during an aerial reconnaissance of rugged Macquarie Harbour in Tasmania state on Monday.

After days of difficult and dangerous rescue attempts, Australia said they rescued 108 whales, with the rest now believed to have died. Rob Buck, Incident Controller and Parks and Wildlife Service manager, said 15 whales have already been disposed of at sea, but the operations to dispose of the remaining near 350 mammals was expected to take several days at least.

NEW YORK

JAPAN'S NEW PM READY
TO MEET WITH KIM

Japan's new Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga stated before the UN General Assembly that he wants to meet with North Korea's ruler Kim Jong Un and that Japan seeks to normalise relations between the countries.

"I am ready to meet with Kim Jong Un without conditions," Suga said via pre-recorded video message during the UN general debate on Friday in New York.

"Establishing a constructive relationship between Japan and North Korea will not only serve the interests of both sides but will also greatly contribute to regional peace and stability," Suga said.

The Prime Minister also stressed that his country is working on organising the 2021 Olympic Games, which he said will be "safe and secure" and "proof that humanity has defeated the pandemic. The 71-year-old Suga succeeded Shinzo Abe as Japanese Prime Minister nearly two weeks ago. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the 75th general debate of the UN General Assembly this year will largely be conducted online until Tuesday.

SOUTH KOREA FOR JOINT PROBE WITH
NORTH ON SHOOTING KOREAN OFFICIAL

SEOUL: South Korea urged North Korea on Saturday to further investigate the fatal shooting of a South Korean fisheries official and suggested it could be an unprecedented joint probe by the two sides, as public and political outrage over the killing grew.

The move came as a rare apology from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un appears to have failed to soothe criticism over the Moon government's handling over the accident.

After a National Security Council meeting last evening, South Korea's presidential office said it would call for a joint probe into the case with the North if needed, saying there were discrepancies in accounts of the accident from the two sides.

South Korea's military said on Thursday that the North's soldiers killed the man, doused his body in fuel and set it on fire near the sea border.

But the North Korean government said in a message on Friday that its soldiers shot the "illegal intruder" and denied burning his body.

The two Koreas have not conducted joint probes into previous accidents, including the death of the South Korean tourist who was shot at the North's mountain resort of Kungang in 2008 and the North's bombing of the Yeonpyeong Island which killed four South Koreans in 2010.



The South Korean Mugunghwa 10 fisheries patrol vessel is seen anchored off the western border island of Yeonpyeong. — AFP

The two Koreas have been technically at war since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce. "A chance of a joint probe is low. How on earth can we investigate the North Korean military?," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North

Korean Studies in Seoul.

The North has tightened border controls due to the COVID-19 outbreak, which further complicates the prospect of the joint investigation, he said. "Given Kim quickly offered a rare apology, there is a possibility of

an exchange of written questions and answers between two Koreas," he said.

In the message, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was quoted as offering an apology for disappointing his counterpart Moon Jae-in and the South Korean people.

Moon govt faces
backlash over handling
of civilian killing

The main opposition People Power Party said on Saturday Kim's apology was not genuine, calling on the Moon government to send the case to the International Criminal Court and the US Security Council.

The Moon administration faces an intense political backlash over how it responded to the incident, which coincided with a renewed push by the president for engagement with Pyongyang. Critics questioned why the military did not attempt to save him despite allegedly spotting him six hours before he was shot dead.

"Peace is important in inter-Korean relations, but the most important thing is the lives of our people. Our people were shot by North Korea and why there is no such movement as 'Korean lives matter' in South Korea?," said Thae Yong Ho, a former North Korean deputy ambassador to London who defected to the South, and became a lawmaker.

"I am depressed. Why are we weak in front of North Korea," he said at a meeting of a parliamentary task force to investigate the case. — Reuters

■ GAIETY MARKS BALI FESTIVAL



People carry offerings to pray during the religious festival of Kuningan, the last day of the Galungan celebrations believed to be the ascendant day of ancestral holy spirits returning to heaven, at Sakenan temple at Serangan island near Denpasar on the Indonesian resort island of Bali. — AFP

Coal miner's
daughter tops in
Afghan varsity exam

KABUL: The daughter of an Afghan coal miner has come top in the country's university entrance exam and set her sights on becoming a doctor.

Shamsia Alizada, 18, came first out of more than 170,000 students, the education ministry said, prompting congratulations from former president Hamid Karzai and foreign envoys including the US Charge D'affaires.

The celebration came at a particularly sensitive time in Afghanistan as the government holds peace talks with the Taliban group which barred girls from schools when it ruled between 1997 and 2001.

But Alizada said she would not let politics get in the way of her studies. "I have some fears about the Taliban's comeback... but I don't want to lose my hope, because my dreams are bigger than my fear." — Reuters



I have some fears
about the Taliban's
comeback... but I
don't want to lose
my hope, because
my dreams are
bigger than my fear

SHAMSIA
ALIZADA

Top Bollywood actresses questioned in drug probe



Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone arrives to attend questioning by Narcotics Control Bureau officials in Mumbai. — AFP

NEW DELHI: Three popular Bollywood actresses were questioned on Saturday in a drug probe that has sent shockwaves through India's film industry, already hurt by COVID-19 lockdowns.

Officials from the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) have been investigating alleged drug use in Bollywood for the last month in connection with the death of Sushant Singh Rajput, a popular actor who was found dead at his residence in June. The investigation aims at finding whether there is a nexus between the film industry and the drug trade, a law enforcement official said.

Actresses Deepika Padukone, Shraddha Kapoor and Sara Ali Khan were seen on television walking into the NCB offices in Mumbai questioning.

The investigation aims at finding whether there is a nexus between the film industry and the drug trade

Padukone, Khan and Kapoor were not immediately available for comment. Officials at NCB's Mumbai offices did not respond to Reuters requests for comments.

The NCB questioned several other well-known people connected to the industry this week in Mumbai, including producers, talent managers and a fashion designer.

The \$2.59 billion Indian film industry, of which Mumbai-based Bollywood

forms a major part, has been struggling with a lean year, as theatres remain shut due to the pandemic.

Mumbai police initially reported Rajput's death as accidental and local media called it a suicide, but the federal police agency is now investigating whether there was foul play.

On September 8 the NCB arrested Rajput's girlfriend, actress Rhea Chakraborty, accusing her of being "active in a drug syndicate connected with drug supplies", according to her bail order.

Chakraborty, who remains in jail in Mumbai, has denied wrongdoing. Her lawyer, Satish Maneshinde, called the arrest "a travesty of justice".

— Reuters

Trump mocks Biden for ‘staying in again’

NEWPORT NEWS, US: With just 39 days until the US election, President Donald Trump ramped up his campaigning with back-to-back events in battleground states — a frenetic pace in contrast with the more sedate approach of Democratic rival Joe Biden.

The 74-year-old president’s gruelling 12-hour, three-state schedule culminated with a nighttime rally in Newport News, Virginia. By that time US media was reporting that he was set to nominate Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, who if confirmed would cement a solid conservative majority on the country’s highest court.

“We are going to be announcing somebody great,” he told the crowd without mentioning a name.

Trump — who trails Biden in national polling and is narrowly behind in several swing states seen as crucial to his path to re-election — is under pressure to make the most of the remaining weeks before the November 3 election.

During his whirlwind day, the president mocked his rival for a lower-energy campaign, saying Biden was “staying in again today.”

“This guy never goes out. It’s terrible huh?” he told a black economic empowerment event in Atlanta, where few people wore masks and social distancing was non-existent.

“If I lose to a man who doesn’t campaign... I don’t know,” he told the



Judge Amy Coney Barrett

Trump, who trails Biden in national polling in several swing states is under pressure to make the most of the remaining weeks before the Nov 3 election

laughing crowd.

Biden travelled from his home in Delaware to Washington on Friday to attend a ceremony at the US Capitol as late Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg lay in state there.

But there was no in-person campaigning on the former vice

president’s schedule.

In a bid to fire up his base over the weekend, the president on Saturday will announce his pick to replace the liberal icon Ginsburg, who died last week at 87.

Trump began the day in Florida with a roundtable with Latino voters, a crucial constituency in the swing state.

Biden has “been very bad to Hispanics,” the president said at the event which took place at his golf club in Doral, near Miami.

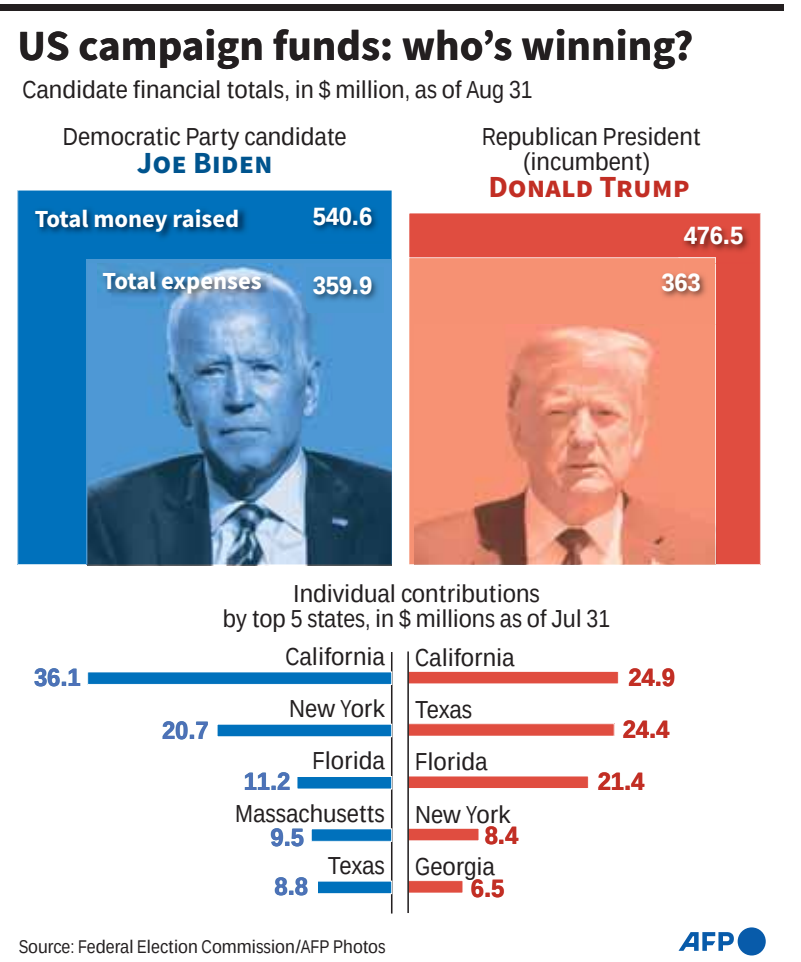
“I’m a wall between the American dream and chaos.”

Trump next flew to neighbouring Georgia, which has voted Republican in the last six elections but is now rated a toss-up, where he insisted that as president he did “even more than I promised” for African Americans.

“I did more for the black community in 47 months... than Joe Biden did in 47 years,” he said, repeatedly swiping at Biden’s legislative record in co-sponsoring 1990s tough-on-crime legislation that many experts say resulted in high incarceration rates for black Americans.

Trump said he was unveiling a “platinum plan” that aims to increase capital to African Americans, create three million new jobs for the black community and implement “the highest standards of policing.”

Trump then returned to Washington to gather with supporters and flew to a Make America Great



Again nighttime rally in Newport News, Virginia. The state’s Democratic governor meanwhile announced that he and his wife have tested positive for COVID-19.

“As I’ve been reminding Virginians throughout this crisis, COVID-19 is very real and very contagious,”

Governor Ralph Northam said in a statement.

Trump appears to dismiss coronavirus concerns at his events, where he appears maskless and crowds are often packed together — a scenario his own government experts have warned against.

Women lead latest round of Belarus protests



MINSK: Hundreds of women shouting “shame” gathered for a renewed weekend of protests by people who say Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stole August’s election so he could have a sixth term in office.

As the crowds gathered for the now-regular protest marches in Minsk, police transporters were already taking up their places on the streets. There were reports of new detentions, adding to the hundreds already carried out during weeks of unrest in the former Soviet republic.

Human rights group Viasna said 10 people had been taken into custody, including journalists.

Video footage showed women being carried by their hands and feet

to buses.

Others were taken from in front of shopping centres. Protests have rocked Belarus regularly since the August 9 elections, which Lukashenko says he won with more than 80 per cent of the vote, a claim denied by multiple Western powers and the protesters.

They argue that the true winner is Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who was forced to flee to Lithuania after the vote.

The mood has only darkened since Lukashenko staged an unannounced inauguration ceremony this week, a move that seems to have angered the protesters. Demonstrators said this weekends protests would be a “festive general rehearsal for a proper inauguration by the people.

Ukraine crash survivor dies as toll climbs

CHUGUIV, Ukraine: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday praised the only survivor of a military plane crash as the death toll climbed to 26 after another cadet died and three more bodies were found.

Zelensky went to the scene of the tragedy near the eastern city of Kharkiv where an Antonov An-26 transport plane carrying 20 cadets and seven officers crashed during a training flight on Friday evening.

“Ukraine has lost 26 worthy sons,” Zelensky said on Facebook, referring to the cadets and officers of the Kharkiv National Air Force University. “It is difficult to find words to express the pain of this loss,” he said, declaring Saturday a day of mourning.

The plane burst into flames on landing around two kilometres (more than one mile) from the Chuguiv military airbase.

On Saturday, the death toll rose after three more bodies were found under the charred remains of the plane and one of the two survivors died in hospital from extensive burns.

Zelensky visited the only remaining survivor in a military hospital in Kharkiv, posting a picture of the 20-year-old cadet lying in bed with a bandaged head and right arm.

He said the cadet, Vyacheslav Zolochovsky, “came to his senses near the wreckage of the An-26.”

“The plane was destroyed, there was fire, darkness and bodies all around.



People lay flowers in front of Kharkiv National Air Force University in tribute to the cadets and the seven officers who died in a transport aircraft crash at Chuhuiv military air base southeast of Kharkiv. — AFP

One of the guys was burning,” he said on Facebook, adding that Zolochovsky rushed to try and save him.

The second cadet died in hospital, the Ukrainian president said as he praised Zolochovsky for his “heroism.”

“Ukraine is proud of you!” he said.

Doctors said that Zolochovsky suffered a concussion but his life was not in danger. Most cadets on board were believed to be between the ages of 19 and 22. Zelensky said the cause of

the crash should be quickly established and called for an “objective” investigation. Ukraine’s SBU security service said the plane was performing a training flight but the cadets were not involved in piloting it.

The security service, citing preliminary information, said the pilot reported an engine failure and seven minutes later the plane hit the ground.

Defence Minister Andriy Taran said “the plane likely caught the

ground with its wing” and then burst into flames.

Citing preliminary information, the defence minister said that one of the sensors in the left engine had failed. He said the final conclusion would be made after authorities analyse the plane’s black boxes.

“Everything went according to plan: the plane was performing a training flight for cadets,” he was quoted as saying by the defence ministry. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

UNITED KINGDOM

Hundreds join London anti-lockdown protest

LONDON: Hundreds of anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protesters rallied in central London on Saturday, despite police warnings that they could be breaching Britain’s coronavirus social distancing rules.

Among the main speakers was eccentric conspiracy theorist David Icke, who took the stage in Trafalgar Square to loud applause and chants of “Freedom! Freedom!” at the “We do not consent” rally. Protesters held up placards with messages including “No to mandatory vaccines” and “COVID-1984,” a reference to George Orwell’s dystopian novel, “1984.”

London’s Metropolitan Police later cleared the square, sparking some clashes with protesters, after saying officers had warned the crowd repeatedly that they breached Britain’s COVID-19 law, which allows protests subject to social distancing rules.

“We have come here today to put on a public display of individual and collective self-respect... for self-respect always triggers the power of no,” Icke, a former professional footballer, told the crowd. “We will not hand control of our lives and our children’s lives to [people like] the UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock,” he said.



POLAND

Poland’s ruling nationalists cement coalition deal

WARSAW: Poland’s ruling nationalists signed a new coalition agreement on Saturday, ending weeks of in-fighting in the three-party alliance over how it will govern over the next three years.

The leaders of the Law and Justice (PiS) party and the smaller conservative United Poland and Accord groups signed the deal at PiS headquarters in Warsaw on Saturday but gave no details on how the coalition will work in practice. “I am absolutely sure that these years will be beneficial for Poland.

This agreement guarantees that” Jarosław Kaczyński, the head of PiS and Poland’s de facto leader, told a news

conference that was also attended by the leaders of his two smaller allies and by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

Following short statements, the leaders signed the agreement and left. The three parties already form the government. But the coalition had been split by internal fights over issues, animal rights and relations with the European Union. PiS leaders had threatened a minority government and early elections.

The coalition led by PiS has won a series of elections since 2015, but the party has been under pressure because of economic difficulties exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Getting learners back in classrooms

Never has the global education sector faced challenges of the magnitude it does today! Even in times of war, conflict and natural disaster school has been one of the key priorities, as societies for centuries have understood that schools draw society’s young people together, giving them a shared sense of security, and a distraction from whatever is going out outside the school gates. COVID-19 has done what nothing before has, and separated society’s pastoral and educational gatekeepers from their learners, with consequences that may be felt for a lifetime.

Teaching originally held that if I told you something, you then knew the same thing, and would not forget it. In fact, that is why large sections of those early societies remained uneducated. The mid-19th century saw compulsory education established in America and Europe, creating global models, when schools as we know them today, came into being. What changed however, was the pedagogy, the theory, methods and practice behind teaching, with the psychologies of teaching and learning progressively more important.

In the mid-20th century John Dewey, an American philosopher and education reformer changed the way schools should function with democracy and social reform, within the classroom. Dewey claimed that



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COVID-19 HAS
DONE WHAT
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TO EDUCATION
SECTOR

instead of preparing learners for society, schools cultivated passivity. He saw the need for reflection, critique and participation in a ‘whole child’ learning experience as the way forward. Almost all contemporary good practices are based on Dewey’s research and writings, and teachers have embraced the ‘politics’ of the classroom especially in implementing communicative language learning methodologies, where learners work in groups, using language to complete tasks, learning with and from each other by using their individual skills and knowledge for the progression of the group.

Teachers have studied, trained, taught and undertaken professional development to implement their pedagogy, fine tuned them to fit their own personalities and attributes, and become effective educators. Learners too have embraced being able to work with others, to share their knowledge and skills, and to utilise the teacher in a discretionary manner, appreciating their autonomy. They learn much in those groups from each other, and that is the beauty of communicative learning. When that is complemented over the years by research, writing, argumentative and analytical skills, we have learners who need little more than academic guidance and direction to achieve even higher order knowledge and understanding.

The problem is, that at all levels of the educational journey, those same

teachers and learners have, overnight, been expected to learn and embrace new and different technologies and pedagogy, to teach and learn online, using an Internet system that was clearly not built for the tens of thousands of teachers and learners who now need it. Factor in that many thousands of young people who thought they were tech savvy because they knew their phones back to front were IT geniuses and may now be frustrated Zoom students because “nothing is working.”

Here, as anywhere, it is nobody’s ‘fault.’ It is simply the hand we are dealt. Online learning requires academic skills, knowledge, understanding, technological awareness, access and engagement. Very few, teaching or learning, are that complete package. So, the priority must be getting the learners back into the classrooms as soon as possible, whatever it takes. Teachers need to be in classrooms where they have genuine interaction with their learners. Where they can know and understand what is going on inside their heads from their achievements, behaviour and body language, where the three-dimensional learner poses the challenge, rather than the technology that, with all its frustrations, currently divides them.

The education sector never had any other option in response to the pandemic, but now, with COVID-19 looking set to stay, we must review all our options.

SURVIVAL ANALYSIS

Both US presidential candidates may be ‘super-agers’

JAMES RAINEY

The presidential candidates and their supporters will likely keep belittling the other guy as a doddering old man, but a group of geriatric experts say in a new paper that both President Trump and challenger Joe Biden appear to have the physical and cognitive tools to make it through four years in the White House.

In fact, the two candidates’ relative good health and other advantages — parental longevity, access to top-notch healthcare and abstinence from smoking and drinking — suggest both men are likely to become long-living “super-agers,” who thrive well into their 80s, or beyond, according to a draft report written by three medical doctors and four researchers with expertise in public health, survival analysis and statistics.

Three of the authors of the paper — Stuart Jay Olshansky, a public health professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago; Dr Bradley Willcox, Director of research in the Department of Geriatric Medicine at the University of

Hawaii’s medical school; and UCLA Professor Hiram Beltran-Sanchez, an authority on the demographics of aging — wrote previously about how presidents tend to outlive average Americans.

While the candidates are unusually healthy for their age, Biden is projected to live

It is our conclusion that chronological age is not a relevant factor for either candidate running for President of the US

AUTHORS OF STUDY

longer because of his routine fitness regimen, compared with Trump’s relatively sedentary lifestyle and obesity, according to the paper. The journal bills itself as “an indispensable tool for professionals who are dedicated to older adults living as fully as possible regardless of age.”

Using actuarial analysis and publicly available data on the health of the two men, the authors project Biden has a 95-per cent chance of surviving a four-year term, while Trump has a 90-per cent chance of completing a second term.

“It is our conclusion that chronological age is not a relevant factor for either candidate running for President of the United States,” the authors wrote. “Both candidates face a lower than average risk of experiencing significant health or cognitive functioning challenges during the next four years.”

The paper’s projections were based on medical reports issued by the two politicians, public details about their personal habits and statistical models that predict longevity. There is no public record of either Trump, 74, or Biden, 77, completing a comprehensive cognitive exam. Because no such exam has been reported, the researchers concluded that their personal physicians have no concern about their mental capabilities.

“We don’t know, for certain, if anything was held back or not, so we have to operate under the assumption that their physicians are releasing accurate information,” said Olshansky, the study’s lead author. Dr Nir Barzilai, Director of the Institute for Aging Research at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, said Biden and Trump had performed at an “exceptionally high level” cognitively, for men of their age, during their public appearances in the last year. — **dpa**

RADICAL INTERVENTION

Italy avoids Europe’s dramatic virus uptick, but for how long?

GILDAS LE ROUX

The first Western country to be struck by the devastating coronavirus pandemic, Italy is today an outlier in Europe with limited new cases compared with neighbours.

The question is why, and will it last.

While France reported a record 16,096 new COVID-19 infections last Thursday and Spain over 10,000, Italy’s number has for weeks remained below 2,000.

It has carried out fewer tests — some 120,000 per day, versus France’s 180,000 — but not enough to explain the sharp difference in new infections.

Experts largely point to the success of a severe and lengthy lockdown, combined with a collective trauma.

Horrific memories of coffins stacked up as cemeteries in the north overflowed and intensive-care beds ran out appear to have ensured Italians stick diligently to the rules, many even wearing masks in situations where it is not obligatory.

“The epidemic hit Italy earlier... and it immediately put in place a very tough containment plan,” Professor Massimo Andreoni, an infectious disease expert at Rome’s Tor Vergata hospital, said.

The lockdown enforced in early March was not lifted until May, and that much more gradually than elsewhere, he said.

Massimo Galli, infectious diseases chief at Milan’s Sacco hospital, agreed, telling Saturday’s *Corriere della Sera* daily “that radical intervention, a longer and stricter lockdown, produced a sort



► People wear face masks after the southern Italian region of Campania made it mandatory to wear protective face coverings outdoors. — Reuters

THE LOCKDOWN
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of protection effect”.

The World Health Organization held Italy up as an example last week, praising its “clear government advice, strong public support to reduce transmission” and information-sharing.

That despite British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s suggestion that infections were higher in his country than in Italy or Germany because the

British were “freedom-loving”.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella shot back that Italians also loved freedom but “we also behave responsibly”. Masks are mandatory in all crowded public spaces between 6 pm-6 am local time — a precaution welcomed by tourists such as Swedish Louis Tietjens, who said he felt “very safe here in Italy” as he visited Rome’s Trevi Fountain. — **AFP**



Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum (0) scores a basket against the Miami Heat during the second half in game five of the Eastern Conference Finals of the 2020 NBA Playoffs. — USA Today Sports

Celtics rally to beat Heat, stay alive in NBA playoffs

MIAMI: The Boston Celtics roared back in the second half, beating the Miami Heat 121-108 on Friday to stay alive in the NBA playoffs.

Jayson Tatum scored 31 points and pulled down 10 rebounds and Jaylen Brown added 28 points as six Celtics players scored in double figures and Boston cut the deficit in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference finals to three games to two.

Goran Dragic led the Heat with 23 points and Duncan Robinson added 20 for Miami, who are trying to reach the NBA finals for the first time since 2014.

With their season hanging in the balance, the Celtics exploded for 41 points in the third quarter to turn the tide in a game dominated early by Miami.

Under solid pressure from the Heat defence, the Celtics made just one of their first 12 shots and connected on just five of 20 from the field in the first quarter.

Boston trailed by as many as 12 in the opening period, which ended with the Heat leading 26-18.

Miami again built the lead to 12 in the second period and finished the

first half with a 58-51 lead.

But Boston were beginning to see some shots fall, and as they turned up the intensity on both ends of the floor after the interval Miami had no answer.

Marcus Smart's three-pointer tied it up at 60-60 and Boston took the lead for the first time in the contest, 62-60, on Brown's layup off a feed from Kemba Walker.

They wouldn't trail again.

Walker's three-pointer with 4:26 left in the third gave Boston a 10-point lead and the Celtics took a nine-point

edge into the final frame, when they continued to pour it on.

The Celtics will try to build on their momentum against a Heat team determined to put them away in game six on Sunday.

The winners of the series take on either the Los Angeles Lakers or Denver Nuggets for the NBA title in the quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

The Lakers lead the Nuggets three games to one in the Western Conference finals.

— AFP

Messi sad but still motivated after Suarez departure



BARCELONA: Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman said he understood why Lionel Messi was upset about the departure of his long-time strike partner and friend Luis Suarez to Atletico Madrid but did not believe it would affect him on the pitch.

Messi blasted Barca on Friday for forcing Suarez out after six years of service in which he scored 198 goals, the Argentinean's latest attack on the club's hierarchy after he tried to force a move of his own last month.

"It's normal that he is sad after his friend has left the club, they spent many years side by side. But the important thing is he's training and playing," Koeman told a news conference before Barca's season opener at home to Villarreal on Sunday.

"He has been an example to everyone. He is upset but he has shown a lot of enthusiasm since he returned and he's going to show that on the pitch."

Koeman called Suarez within his first week of taking the Barca job to tell him he was surplus to requirements and he admitted taking a joint decision with president Josep Maria Bartomeu to move the Uruguayan on.

"It seems like I'm the bad guy in all of this but I am not, I showed him respect," added the Dutchman, who is one of Barca's best ever players and who delivered their first European Cup with a goal in the 1992 final against Sampdoria.

"I told him that perhaps he wouldn't play many minutes but that if he stayed I would still count on him. It wasn't just my decision, it was also the club's. "There are lots of young players who have a chance to get into the team and this is part of football. Luis and I still respect each other. He has left and I wish him a lot of luck." — Reuters



Barcelona's Lionel Messi in action with Elche's Omekunle Femi. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Klopp backs idea of EPL sides helping EFL teams

Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp said Premier League teams should look to help England's lower division clubs that have taken huge financial hits amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The English Football League (EFL) oversees the three tiers below the Premier League — the Championship, League One and League Two — and clubs in these divisions largely rely on matchday revenue to operate.

The British government this week postponed plans to allow a limited number of fans back into stadiums from October after a second wave of COVID-19 infections and the move is expected to have a massive impact.

"In general people in a better position should help people in a less good position, 100%," Klopp told a news conference ahead of Monday's league clash against Arsenal.

— Reuters



RIO DE JANEIRO

City's injured Jesus ruled out of Brazil qualifiers

Brazil forward Gabriel Jesus will be sidelined for next month's World Cup qualifiers after being injured in Manchester City's Premier League match at Wolverhampton Wanderers, the Brazilian football federation (CBF) said on Friday.

The CBF said in a statement that Jesus would be replaced by Hertha Berlin's Matheus Cunha for the matches against Bolivia and Peru. Jesus will be out for at least three weeks, missing City's matches at home to Leicester City in the Premier League on Sunday plus Wednesday's League Cup fourth round tie at Burnley and the league game at Leeds United on October 3.

"The English club have contacted the Brazil team doctor Rodrigo Lasmas to inform us of the injury to Gabriel Jesus, which was detected after the match against Wolverhampton," it said. — Reuters



DUBAI

'Chennai in muddle with misfiring spinners'

Chennai Super Kings have struggled to get their lineup right and the team's misfiring spinners have added to their woes after two successive Indian Premier League losses, team coach Stephen Fleming said.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's team went down to Delhi Capitals in Dubai on Friday after managing just 131 for seven while chasing a target of 176. Fleming said spin bowlers Piyush Chawla and Ravindra Jadeja had been unable to exploit slow pitches after winning the season opener against Mumbai.

"It's an area of concern because it is such a strength for CSK," Fleming told reporters in a virtual chat. "The style of play that we have developed over the last 12 years is heavily based on spin," he added.

Chawla claimed two and gave away 33 runs from his four overs against Delhi while Jadeja went wicketless. — AFP





MURRAY FORCED TO WAIT FOR HIP CHECKUP

LONDON: Andy Murray said a delay in receiving his COVID-19 test result on his return to Britain made him wait to seek treatment for a pelvic issue. — **Reuters**

VERDASCO QUESTIONS PROTOCOLS

Paris: Spain's Fernando Verdasco questioned the French Open's COVID-19 testing protocols on Friday after having to withdraw from the tournament due to a positive result. — **Reuters**



DJOKOVIC BRACED FOR UNHAPPY NADAL AND DEMONS

PARIS: Djokovic will renew his love-hate relationship with Roland Garros in the knowledge that it is himself who could pose the threat to winning a second Paris title and 18th Grand Slam crown. — **AFP**



SERENA ROOTING FOR F1 CHAMPION HAMILTON AS BOTH EYE RECORDS



NEW YORK: Tennis great Serena Williams expects Lewis Hamilton to overtake Michael Schumacher as Formula One's most successful driver of all time as both she and the Briton chase their own sporting records.

Williams has her sights on a record-equalling 24th Grand

Slam title at the French Open while six-times world champion Hamilton has his first chance to match Schumacher's record 91 wins at this weekend's Russian Grand Prix.

"He is for me the greatest driver that our generation has seen. I'm confident that he will

break the record of Michael Schumacher, who was also a fabulous driver," Williams told reporters on Saturday. The pair are long-standing friends and mutual supporters, and both Serena and her sister Venus have attended Grands Prix in the past. As far back as 2016

Hamilton spoke of how he was "mesmerised" by Serena's achievements as an athlete and inspired by her as a human being. Both grew up with little money and no family background in their sports but with determined fathers pushing them on.

"Lewis and I are super close.

I've known him for years. I love that guy. He's a really good friend of mine. The guy is such a champion, has such a champion's mindset," said Williams on the eve of the Roland Garros tournament.

"I look at what he does training, physically, his job, it's really no words for it, to be honest.

"Lewis is so intense. If you know anything, even if you're a fan, you know he lives his life on his sleeve. He's very emotional. He says what he says," continued the American.

"That's just who he is. He doesn't care who you are. "That's one thing I've grown to really appreciate about him, as well!" — **Reuters**

Lampard says Mendy will have to wait for Chelsea debut

LONDON: Frank Lampard has revealed Chelsea's new goalkeeper Edouard Mendy is not ready to make his debut in Saturday's Premier League clash at West Bromwich Albion.

Mendy joined Chelsea from French club Rennes on a five-year contract this week, strengthening Lampard's goalkeeping options following Kepa Arrizabalaga's dismal form.

Kepa is the world's most expensive keeper but has rarely lived up to his £72 million (\$91 million) price tag since arriving from Athletic Bilbao in 2018.

The Spaniard's costly mistakes are likely to see him replaced by Senegal international Mendy and he could even leave Chelsea in a loan deal before the transfer window closes in October.

But Lampard believes it is asking too much to give Mendy his first taste of English football following a hectic week in which he has hardly trained.

That leaves the door open for Kepa, who was at fault for goals in Chelsea's first two Premier League games against Brighton and Liverpool, to be handed one last chance to save his job.

Lampard, who could also select Argentine veteran Willy Caballero against West Brom, told reporters on Friday: "Mendy to start tomorrow is not going to happen. He's had a long week where he hasn't trained.

"He flew in yesterday, it just feels too tight of a turnaround to put him in contention to start the game."

Mendy's £22 million move could well spell the end of Kepa's reign as Chelsea's number one.

Lampard is yet to hold a face-to-face meeting with the 25-year-old about his future, but will discuss his plans with Kepa and Caballero in the coming days.

"I have a very open line of communication with both of them," he said. "The goalkeepers have their own small union at the training ground because of the way they work together.

"There is good competition there now and that is how we move forward."

'WINNING MENTALITY'

After spending around £220 million to revamp his squad, Lampard has seen several of his players linked with moves away from Stamford Bridge.

Jorginho is reportedly a target for Arsenal, while Antonio Rudiger is said to be interesting Paris Saint-Germain.

Lampard said there were no plans to offload anyone at present, adding: "Everyone will be a case-by-case situation. At the moment players remain ours."

Lampard will take Chelsea to the Hawthorns without Christian Pulisic and Hakim Ziyech, who are both



Edouard Mendy during training. — **Reuters**

expected back in a week or two after injuries.

But he will be able to give Premier League debuts to close-season signings Thiago Silva and Ben Chilwell after the pair featured in

Wednesday's League Cup win against Barnsley.

After Chelsea's defensive struggles last season, Lampard needs a big impact from Brazil centre-back Silva and England left-back Chilwell.

"I've been very impressed with Thiago and Ben on and off the pitch," he said. "They have both added to the dressing room. Thiago, albeit not speaking the language great, his winning mentality is something that

comes across in gestures and actions rather than talking at the moment.

"With Ben in terms of character and how quickly he has settled in the dressing room, those have been really big positives for me." — **AFP**

SPORT



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HALEP HEADS INTO 'WEIRD' FRENCH OPEN AS CLEAR FAVOURITE

Karolina Pliskova.

The fourth-ranked Czech retired from the final with a thigh injury after dropping the first set to Halep, who extended her winning run to 14 matches after capturing a second consecutive title coming out of lockdown.

"I'm honoured to hear that I am the favourite, people thinking that I'm the favourite. But I don't look in that direction," said Halep, who plays Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo in round one.

"It's not extra pressure. I'm used to this kind of pressure because I've been No 1 seeded in the past. I've been in this position."

"To play Roland Garros in September, end of September, it's a little bit weird," she added. "But it's nice that we have the chance to play at this tournament."

No woman has successfully defended the French Open title since Justine Henin won three times in a row between 2005 and 2007, a trend set to continue with Barty pulling out over the coronavirus fears that also prompted her to skip the US Open.

GLOOMY CONDITIONS AWAIT

A sore hamstring has sidelined three-time Grand Slam champion Osaka, while Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 US Open winner, will miss the tournament as well. The Canadian hasn't played since hurting her knee last October at the WTA Finals.

Despite the notable absentees, the field here is stronger than the US Open where six of the world's top 10 players skipped the event, with the return of Halep, Elina Svitolina and Kiki Bertens. Belinda Bencic was a late scratch with an arm injury.

"As I said always, many girls from the top 10, top 15 have a chance to win a Grand Slam," said Halep.

"Roland Garros is very open, because it's clay court but it's a little bit faster, so also the big hitters can win it easy."

The Romanian holds a 20-2 record this season and is unbeaten since January — her only losses came to Aryna Sabalenka in Adelaide and Muguruza in the Australian Open semifinals.

— AFP

PARIS: Former champion Simona Halep arrives at the rescheduled French Open as the player to beat in a women's draw missing title holder Ashleigh Barty and recent US Open winner Naomi Osaka, two of the world's top three.

Serena Williams can never be discounted as she launches another bid for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam singles crown, but Roland Garros is the American's least successful major despite her wins in 2002, 2013 and 2015.

Garbine Muguruza, who defeated Williams in the 2016 final, is another contender while fellow former world number one Victoria Azarenka is hoping to take the momentum from her run to the US Open final into the clay swing.

Last year's runner-up Marketa Vondrousova will again target a deep run in Paris having rediscovered some form at last week's Italian Open, where she made the semifinals before losing to compatriot

OOC Planning and Following-up Committee reviews the upcoming international events

MUSCAT: OOC Planning and Following-up Committee held its 3rd meeting this year headed by Mohsen bin Hamad al Masrouri.

Many important files were taken up which were postponed, including sports tournaments postponed because of COVID-19, and reprogramming and scheduling of strategic goals set in light of the amendments made to the dates, and within the framework of the existing coordination between OOC, federations and sports committees to ensure the continued preparation of our

national teams in preparation for participating in regional, continental and international tournaments during the next year.

In this context, the committee reviewed the importance of participating in these sessions in an appropriate manner after knowing what is available for our teams in terms of qualifying competitions within the plans and objectives set by the sports federations and committees and the desire that they conveyed to the committee according to the dates and modified dates after the courses



that are supposed to be held in the current year for the next year.

Most notably the 32nd Olympic Games (Tokyo 2021), the Asian Beach Games (Sanya-China), the third GCC games (Kuwait), in addition to the fifth Islamic Solidarity Games (Turkey), and Indoor Asian Games (Thailand), and finally the Asian Youth Games (China). The committee raised the appropriate recommendations to OOC Board of Directors to confirm participation in the aforementioned sports tournaments in accordance with the technical standards and principles established and approved for external participation, as well as to study and analyse the technical levels of the players to implement the plans precisely as a result of the exceptional circumstances, and the work done for preparation.

Additionally, the conditions available to compensate for this partial interruption of the training of our national teams within the framework of a joint work programme and close cooperation with the sports federations and committees and their technical bodies.

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Oman to study potential for hydrogen-based economy

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY: EJAAD to study feasibility of powering the growth of a new economic engine around hydrogen

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

An ambitious bid by Oman's authorities to usher in a multi-billion dollar hydrogen-based economy in the Sultanate received a major boost over the weekend with the formal launch of a feasibility study paving the way for the growth of a new industry around this green fuel.

EJAAD, the Sultanate's premier platform for energy innovation, has taken upon itself the task of preparing the groundwork for a feasibility study aimed at unlocking the potential for hydrogen as a new economic engine for the country.



Announcing the move in a tweet, EJAAD said: "Under the leadership of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufer, (pictured) the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, EJAAD has officially kicked off the work on the hydrogen feasibility study for the Sultanate."

The announcement came during a virtual forum attended by key officials representing as many 72 local and international organisations and stakeholders — an event "deemed as an important step towards Oman's hydrogen economy", EJAAD noted.

Environmentally friendly hydrogen is billed as the ideal alternative to fossil fuels currently singled out as the principal contributor to greenhouse gas emissions driving global warming and climate change.

By harnessing renewable energy resources, chiefly solar and wind, hydrogen can be produced for local use, supply, storage and export, with the gas serving as an energy carrier in its own right in transportation and e-mobility applications, or used as feedstock in Oil & Gas, industrial and chemical processes.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, which is spearheading the development of a Hydrogen Economy in the Sultanate, has mandated EJAAD to oversee this effort. EJAAD was jointly established by the ministry along with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and The Research Council to serve as a collaborative platform where industry, academia and government can interact and engage in energy-related research and innovation activities.

A workshop organised by EJAAD earlier this year brought together many of these stakeholders in a landmark effort to help establish the "fundamental building blocks" underpinning the growth of a full-fledged hydrogen-based



economy in the Sultanate. Over the course of the year, a number of private and public sector organisations have unveiled major plans to invest in small and large-scale hydrogen-based projects in the Sultanate.

In January, German specialist Hydrogen Rise AG announced a partnership with Oman Educational Services LLC, a local company that owns the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech), to establish a local Omani firm focusing on the development and commercialisation of hydrogen.

According to Hydrogen Rise, Oman's future hydrogen industry has the potential to spawn the growth of a wider ecosystem that supports investments in industrial and petrochemical projects producing green hydrogen, green ammonia and synthetic fuel, among other decarbonised commodities. The Sultanate, it says, has the potential to export \$20 billion worth of hydrogen annually by the year 2050.

On its heels came the announcement by DEME Concessions, a subsidiary of Belgian-based conglomerate DEME Group, that it will partner with Omani investors to support the development of a "world-leading" green hydrogen plant in Duqm. With a proposed electrolyser capacity estimated between 250 and 500 megawatts (MW), the project will rank among the largest of its kind in the Middle East.

Environmentally friendly hydrogen is billed as the ideal alternative to fossil fuels currently singled out as the principal contributor to greenhouse gas emissions driving global warming and climate change.

Measures helped keep markets well-supplied during lockdown

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has adopted a number of measures to ensure that pandemic countermeasures do not hamper business continuity, as well as to facilitate the smooth flow of inbound and outbound goods. The measures were taken in cooperation with various local and regional entities and institutions.

Dr Ahmed bin Salem al Shamakhi, Director of the Department of Compliance, underlined the role of the Directorate General of Standards and Specifications in verifying that the products and goods introduced into the domestic market comply with the applicable standards, specs and laws. Tests are conducted on all such goods, while those that fall short of the prescribed specs do not enter the market in the interest of consumer safety.



Exports and imports of consumer goods are facilitated in coordination with the customs authorities of the Royal Oman Police, Center for Food Safety and Quality of the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources, and the Standardization Authority of the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

To enable the smooth flow of goods between various governorates of the country, the ministry had introduced electronic methodologies enabling the tracking of consumer products based on a unique electronic stamp and serial number. Thus, all paperwork concerning the distribution of consumer goods was handled electronically, thereby doing away with the need for company officials to physically visit the ministry during this period, except in a few rare cases, he said. Requests were certificates of validity, health and re-export governing food products were issued electronically through the Bayan system of the ROP Customs since April 2020. This service has since been transferred to the Food Safety and Quality Center of the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources with effect from August 1, 2020. — **ONA**

Major expansion of Nizwa Industrial City on anvil

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, visited Nizwa Industrial City, which forms part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'yn). She was joined by Dr Muna bint Salim al Jardaniyah, Under-Secretary for Vocational Training, Dr Bakhait bin Ahmed al Mahri, Under-Secretary for Higher Education, Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary for Research and Innovation, and Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Mada'yn.

The series of visits to Mada'yn's various industrial cities aim at



exploring cooperation opportunities in scientific research, innovation, and technical and vocational training in the industrial cities.

During the visit, Eng Saleh bin Salman al Abri, Director-General of Nizwa Industrial City informed that the total investment volume of Nizwa Industrial City has exceeded RO 369 million during the first half of 2020, marking a growth rate of

1.13 per cent compared to the same period in 2019.

The number of workforce in the industrial city has reached 6,100 and the total area of the industrial city has surpassed 3 million sqm.

The number of projects in Nizwa has reached 150 by the end of the first half of the current year, of which 128 are operating, 10 are under construction and 12 projects have been allotted with space.

Al Abri elaborated that Mada'yn is currently working on implementing several projects at Nizwa Industrial City, which include expansion of phases 3 and 4 on an area of one million sqm, and implementing a second entrance to the industrial city.

An invitation to attend the Chamber's Regular General Association meeting

Based on article (19) of the Chamber's regulations, issued by Royal Decree (45/2017) regarding the necessity of calling the association to a regular meeting at least once a year. The Chamber's Board of Directors Chairman is pleased to invite the association members who have paid the membership annual fee to attend the Regular Association meeting that will be held at 5:00 pm on Sunday, 18 October 2020 at the Chamber's headquarters in Ruwi, to discuss the following agenda:

1. Discuss and approve the Chamber's business annual report and the auditor's report for the financial year ending 31 December 2019.
2. Considering the proposals of the general association members, submitted to the council at least (15) fifteen days before its meeting.
3. Appointment of an auditor.

According to the Chamber's system, the registered member at the general association meeting shall represent in his own name as the owner or the authorized partner individually, or the authorized director individually, according to the commercial registry data, each member has one vote, it is not permissible for an agent or a representative to attend or vote in the association meeting, the Chamber's membership certificate shall be valid.

Important note:

1. We would like to inform the members that the second meeting of the association in the event that the quorum is not achieved for the first meeting will be on Wednesday, 21 October 2020 at 5:00 pm in the Chamber's building in Ruwi.
2. The Chamber's annual report on its activities and the auditor's report for the ended financial year are available at the Chamber's headquarters and branches.
3. The deadline for receiving member's suggestions is 2:30 pm on Wednesday, 30 September 2020.
4. Please register to attend the meeting via the Chamber's website www.chamberoman.om

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Job market status after COVID-19

One of the many shifts that occurred during the pandemic has affected the job market in a — somehow — predictable way. In this column, I will focus on some of the jobs that have been affected by the lockdown measures of the past few months.

For the benefit of the reader I have loosely classified the impact on jobs into the following categories:

- Jobs that must be done in person
- Jobs that are normally done in person, but could be done remotely
- Jobs that are usually done in person, but could be automated
- Jobs that were already performed remotely before the

pandemic

Jobs that must be done in person

Examples of these jobs are for instance cleaners, barbers, therapists, makeup artists, waiters etc. These jobs can be overall considered almost safe to the crisis.

However, because of some disruption to the regular operating hours — such as for spas and fitness centres — or due to enhanced safe distancing measures — for example in the case of hair salons — these professionals might have lost a few months of income, but in the long run, they can be positive that demand will return.

Another example is in logistics such as food delivery. Riders and drivers saw a boom in demand and worked around the clock to cope with the spiking amount of



Stefano Virgilli
stefano@virgilli.com

DESPITE THE FACT THAT FREELANCING IS NOT CONSIDERED A “SAFE JOB”, THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC MIGHT HAVE NOT BEEN AS HARSH ON FREELANCERS WHEN COMPARED TO FULL TIMERS

incoming orders.

Still, under this category, it is interesting to mention farming and agriculture. Food production never stops, hence these jobs have become even more essential during the pandemic and represent perhaps the safest possible jobs to hold during a crisis.

Jobs that are normally done in person, but could be done remotely

These jobs consist mostly of office positions. Salespeople and admins have been physically going to work every day before the pandemic. But then all of a sudden they were required to work from home.

Although statistics about the productivity of working from home are at times contradictory and somehow debatable, it is probably fair to imagine that salespeople

that are no longer allowed to visit their clients - locally or globally - might have been impacted in terms of performance and in some cases resorted to accepting salary cuts.

Jobs that are normally done in person, but could be done by a machine

An example is the security guard. When the lockdowns were eased around the world, new tasks were required from them. Many security guards had to learn how to measure temperature and keep detailed records. Quickly these processes have been digitized and automated.

Temperature scanning is now performed through cameras without operators and check-in records are done directly from the visitor's mobile phone. Especially in countries relying heavily on foreign

labour for jobs such as security guards, many have been sent back to their country and they are now struggling to find employment back home, where the need for security guards might not be as widespread.

Jobs that were already available remotely before the pandemic

Think of freelance graphic designers, web developers, influencers, online trainers etc. What has really changed for them? Nothing much except that maybe they have started working for clients with a tighter budget.

Despite the fact that freelancing is not considered a “safe job”, the effects of the pandemic might have not been as harsh on freelancers when compared to full-timers.

[The author is a member of the International Press Association]

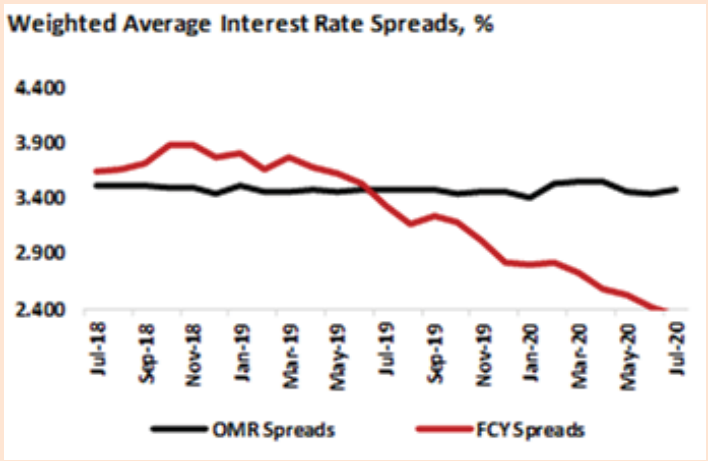


MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

MSM ends in red led by decline in all sub-indices and net foreign outflows

MSM 30 ended the week down by 0.57 per cent. All sub-indices ended lower w-o-w. Financial Index was down 0.84 per cent while Industrial and Services Index were lower by 0.40 per cent and 0.78 per cent, respectively. The traded value during the week was higher on w-o-w basis by 46 per cent.

Alizz Islamic Bank announced the successful completion of the merger process with Oman Arab Bank's (OAB) Islamic banking window. Alizz Islamic Bank said it has successfully completed all the processes related to the integration of Al Yusr Islamic Banking within Alizz Islamic Bank.



This merger, which is the first merger in the past eight years in Oman's banking sector, has led to the formation of a larger Islamic banking entity that can effectively compete in the market and meet the various financial services needs of the customers

This includes the integration and transferring of customers, services, employees, assets, and liabilities from the Al Yusr Islamic Banking window to Alizz Islamic Bank's operating system.

This merger, which is the first merger in the past eight years in Oman's banking sector, has led to the formation of a larger Islamic banking entity that can effectively compete in the market and meet the various financial services needs of the customers. The merger has received the unanimous support and endorsement from the boards of directors and Shariaa supervisory bodies of both banks.

The board of directors of United Power Company proposed to convert the company to an LLC with capital RO 150,000 owned by the preference shareholders. The purpose is to fast track capital repayment to shareholders.

Beginning October 1, sweetened drinks will cost more in Oman as the government is all set to introduce a 50 per cent excise tax on these products. The decision issued by the Tax Authority on June 18 last included a list of products include juices, fruit drinks, energy or sports drinks, canned coffee and tea products. “Beverages containing added sugar or sweeteners that are ready-to-drink, concentrates, gels, powders, extracts, or any form that can be converted into sugar-sweetened beverage,

will be subject to a 50 per cent excise tax from October 1, 2020”, says the decision issued by the Authority.

Fitch Ratings has assigned OQ SAOC (OQ) a Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) of ‘BB-’ with Negative Outlook. OQ's rating is equalized with that of the company's ultimate sole shareholder, the government of Oman (BB-/Negative) and reflects Fitch's view of strong links between OQ and the state.

The Central Bank of Oman has directed commercial banks, as well as finance and leasing companies (FLCs), operating in the Sultanate to begin carefully implementing the provisions of the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on the Exchange of Financial Information – an international convention that seeks to, among other things, combat offshore tax evasion. A recent circular signed by CBO Executive President has called on all banking and financial institutions to comply with the requirements of the Common Reporting Standard (CRS), which forms the centrepiece of the agreement. In line with its commitments, the Sultanate has mandated all financial institutions to ascertain the tax residency status of all account holders, whether belonging to individuals, legal entities or controlling persons.

CBO data reveals that the

weighted average Oman Rial interest rate spread (calculated as lending rate minus deposit rate) was flat on year-on-year basis (YoY), at 3.472 per cent during the month of July 2020, as both the deposit rate and lending rate grew at the same pace of 1.5bps.

On a month-on-month (MoM) basis, the spread expanded by 4.2bps as lending rate expansion outpaced deposit rate expansion. It must be noted that the weighted average deposit rate on RO deposits at 1.969 per cent is still below the peak of 2.089 per cent (since March 2010) witnessed in Jan 2020.

The weighted average FCY spread softened by 8.8bps on month-on-month (MoM) basis during Jul 2020 to 2.335 per cent. The FCY spread is lower by 98.8bps when compared to that recorded in Jul'19. The weighted average interest rate on private sector RO time deposits expanded by 1.0bps MoM and 18.2bps YoY, creeping up to 4.074 per cent. Weighted average interest rate on all private sector deposits (RO) was 1.459 per cent (+3.4bps MoM and +1.2bps YoY).

As per the CBO, about 44.1 per cent of the total deposits (in RO) of conventional banks are at zero interest rate. The largest chunk of total credit of conventional banks (in RO, at about 58.3 per cent) lies in the 5 per cent-7 per cent interest rate bracket.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Agreement signed to support research and innovation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation signed a cooperation programme with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) to boost cooperation between the Ministry and Madayn in various fields that serve education, scientific research and innovation.

The agreement, part of efforts to foster a robust partnership and integration between various bodies, was signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, Chief Executive Officer of Madayn.

The cooperation programme aims at developing joint plans to link the outputs of higher education institutions with the investing companies in the industrial cities of Madayn. This shall strengthen integration between the current and future development plans of the industrial cities and the fields of higher education, scientific research and innovation.

The cooperation programme will also play a role in developing the curricula of higher education institutions regarding the various specialisations that are linked with the industrial needs of the sector and the companies in the industrial cities. As per the agreement, Madayn will provide training opportunities at the industrial cities for the undergraduates, and vocational colleges' students.



The cooperation programme also aspires to enhance the exchange of consultations and expertise to support the development of scientific research and innovation in the industrial fields, and adopt the results and outputs of innovative and viable research and project ideas and transform them into investment projects and opportunities according to mechanisms agreed upon by the related parties.

Additionally, the programme will encourage the investing companies in the industrial cities to offer scholarships for higher education studies, in order to meet the employment requirements in the companies, sectors and industrial cities that fall under the umbrella of Madayn. Moreover, an electronic interactive platform will be formed with the participation of the relevant parties to exchange data and information related to the implementation of this programme.

BUSINESS ALERT

MUSCAT

AHLI BANK OPENS NEW BRANCH IN GHUBRA



In line with its vision to offer the best in banking services, Ahli Bank has opened a new branch in Ghubra to cater to the needs of the customers in and around the Wilayat of Basher.

The new branch has state of the art infrastructure, well-trained team of banking professionals to address the needs of the customers and a spacious waiting area. Customers in Ghubra and surrounding areas will have access to the Bank's wide portfolio of services and products and can enjoy the services of the Bank and interact with the customer service team for all their banking requirements.

Commenting on the opening of the Ghubra branch, Muneer al Balushi, AGM – Head of Retail Distribution, said, “We are keen to provide our customers with access to products and services through our strategic locations. The Ghubra branch will play a pivotal role in addressing the banking needs of our customers.”

The opening of the Ghubra branch comes within the framework of Ahli Bank's commitment to strengthen its branch network to bring banking services closer to its customers across the Sultanate. It is aimed at providing the highest levels of convenience and enhanced banking facilities to clients.

MUSCAT

FUEL EFFICIENT NISSAN KICKS NOW AVAILABLE AT AFFORDABLE EMI

Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has announced a special low EMI on the compact crossover. Customers of Nissan Kicks can now avail an exceptionally low EMI rate of RO 114 (terms and conditions apply). EMIs are calculated based on 3.2 per cent rate of Interest, 20 per cent down payment, six-year loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals.

Nissan Kicks has been impressing with its excellent mileage, unique styling, roominess, personal technology, smart functionality, and advanced safety features. The spectacular Nissan Kicks combines emotion and practicality by blending familiar Nissan design signatures with striking modern themes. The crossover demands attention for its dynamic styling and nimble performance and the Nissan Intelligent Mobility feature ensures seamless connectivity and advanced driver assistance features.

Nissan Kicks continues to be popular since its introduction due to its stylish design and “Excellent” Rated GSO Fuel efficiency of 17.8Km/litre. Nissan Kicks' Dual Tone further augmented the style quotient of the innovative, stylish, and functional crossover.



RETURN TO SERVICE

FAA chief to join Boeing 737 test flight



WASHINGTON: Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) administrator Steve Dickson and his deputy Dan Elwell will travel to Seattle next week to assess new training plans for the Boeing 737 MAX jet ahead of certification, the FAA said.

Following training on a flight simulator, Dickson is tentatively scheduled to pilot a Boeing 737 MAX on Wednesday, “fulfilling his promise to fly the aircraft before the FAA approves its return to service,” the regulator said in a communicate to Congressional oversight committees in Washington.

Dickson, who is a trained pilot, worked for the US Air Force and for Delta Airlines before joining the FAA. The 737 MAX series of planes was grounded last year following the death of 346 people in two accidents, one in Indonesia in October 2018 and another in Ethiopia in March 2019.

Aircraft manufacturer Boeing recently completed certification flight tests for the 737 MAX. But more steps are required before the twin-engined jet is declared airworthy again and data gathered during flight testing is being evaluated.

Other international supervisory authorities such as the European EASA will also have a say in the matter before the 737 Max can fly again internationally. Earlier this week, the FAA, Transport Canada Civil Aviation (TCCA), the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the National Civil Aviation Agency of Brazil concluded their assessment of Boeing's new training regimen for the revamped jet. The FAA also still has to open a planned 45-day public comment period. — **dpa**

Beijing autoshow: China's back, EVs booming, outlook uncertain

BEIJING: China's auto market has rebounded smartly from the COVID-19 crash in recent months, executives said on Saturday, as a rare in-person trade show was dominated by talk of recovery in the world's biggest car market.

While conditions have improved vastly from lockdowns that froze economic activity in the country where the pandemic erupted, the Beijing autoshow is a far cry from the usual ebullience as fewer attend, new models are scant and prospects remain uncertain.

Doubts remain over the durability of the recovery, but the focus for now is on bright spots such as strong demand for mid-sized to large luxury vehicles and a flood of interest — and investment — in electric vehicles.

“The recovery in the Chinese market has been very remarkable, and our key segments have returned to the previous year's level if not slightly better,” Nissan Motor Co CEO Makoto Uchida told a news conference via a video link from Japan.

“I expect this rebound to continue, but we need to watch for signs of trouble,” said Uchida, who announced Japan's second-biggest carmaker would launch a number of new vehicles in China over the next five years as it struggles to return to profit.

China's auto sales rose 11.6 per cent in August from a year earlier, the fifth straight monthly rise after plunging during the lockdown.

When almost all residents were told to stay home in February, sales collapsed by a record 79 per cent to their lowest since 2005.

Executives at Germany's BMW and Guangzhou-based GAC 601238.SS, which has partnerships with Toyota Motor Corp and Honda Motor Co, forecast full-year sales



People leave the Beijing International Automotive Exhibition, or Auto China show, in Beijing, China. — **Reuters**

growth in China, while Chongqing Changan Automobile predicted the same for its local joint venture with Ford Motor. Great Wall Motor Co, China's top pickup truck maker, aims to boost overseas sales this year, helping to ease an overall drop caused by COVID-19.

Germany's Audi AG is in talks with long-term partner China FAW Group Corp about creating a second joint venture to build electric cars on its PPE platform in China, Germany's Automobilwoche reported.

China's typically busy car-buying season, “Golden September, Silver October”, is off to a good start, according to preliminary data, with

Beijing would consider sanctions on entities whose activities ‘harm China's national sovereignty, security and development interests’ or violate ‘internationally accepted economic and trade rules’

passenger car sales up 12 per cent in the first 20 days of September.

The rebound means this year's sales will fall less than 10 per cent, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers estimates, better than its May forecast of a 15 per cent to 25 per cent decline.

Much of the upturn is driven by sales of larger passenger cars by makers such as Daimler AG and BMW, boosted by new models,

automakers' discounts and a broader recovery in the world's second-largest economy.

Premium vehicles accounted for a record 15 per cent of the Chinese market in August, up from around 10 per cent for all of last year, the China Passenger Car Association said.

Electric vehicles are also providing buzz to the Beijing show, as a boom in Tesla TSLA.O shares

has propelled interest in China.

EV startups such as Nio, Xpeng, Li Auto and WM Motor have together raised more than \$8 billion this year.

But the recent improvement reflects Chinese carmakers making earlier model launches as they could not wait for the usual hype from the delayed autoshow before going to market. That suggests a more limited upside to the current sales rise.

“This year's auto sales are very different from previous years,” said LMC Automotive senior analyst Alan Kang. “Many cars were sold during summer because customers delayed purchases after the lockdown.” — **Reuters**

IMF raises Colombia's credit line

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund announced it had raised by \$6.5 billion a credit line offered to Colombia to about \$17.2 billion to help the country cope with the economic effects of COVID-19.

“The augmentation was approved in light of Colombia's continued qualification with very strong institutional policy frameworks, track record of economic performance and policy implementation, and against a

backdrop of higher external risks and a larger than expected adverse impact from COVID-19 pandemic,” the Washington-based crisis lender said in a statement.

Colombia has had a Flexible Credit Line (FCL) since May 2009, and the IMF board has renewed it every two years, providing the country with money that could be deployed to head off a crisis.

The latest renewal was for \$10.8 billion, but deputy IMF Managing

Director Antoinette Sayeh said Colombia's downturn was deeper than expected and the country is set for its worst recession on record.

“The augmentation of access under the current FCL arrangement will help manage heightened external risks, protect ongoing efforts to effectively respond to the pandemic, continue to integrate migrants from Venezuela, foster inclusive growth and reduce external vulnerabilities,” she said. — **AFP**

3,500 US firms sue over Trump-imposed Chinese tariffs



A US dollar banknote featuring American founding father Benjamin Franklin and a China's yuan banknote featuring late Chinese chairman Mao Zedong are seen among US and Chinese flags in this illustration picture. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON: About 3,500 US companies, including Tesla Inc, Ford Motor, Target Corp, Walgreen Co and Home Depot have sued the Trump administration in the last two weeks over the imposition of tariffs on more than \$300 billion in Chinese-made goods.

The suits named US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and the Customs and Border Protection agency and challenge what they call the unlawful escalation of the US trade war with China through the imposition of a third and fourth round of tariffs.

The legal challenges from a wide variety of companies argue the Trump administration failed

to impose tariffs within a required 12-month period and did not comply with administrative procedures.

The companies challenge the administration's “unbounded and unlimited trade war impacting billions of dollars in goods imported from the People's Republic of China by importers in the United States” according to a suit filed by auto parts manufacturer Dana Corp.

The suits challenge tariffs in two separate groups known as List 3 and List 4A.” List 3 includes 25 per cent tariffs on about \$200 billion in imports, while List 4A included 7.5 per cent tariffs on \$120 billion in goods. — **Reuters**

American Airlines secures \$5.5bn loan

WASHINGTON: American Airlines said it has secured a \$5.5-billion government loan and could tap up to \$2 billion more in October depending on how the US Treasury allocates extra funds under a \$25-billion loan package for airlines.

Airlines have until September 30 to decide whether to take the US Treasury loans, which were authorised under the CARES Act coronavirus relief bill passed by Congress in March.

American Airlines was originally allocated \$4.75 billion, but carriers including Delta Air Lines and Southwest Airlines have already said they do not intend to take their share of the package, opening the door for the funds to be used by other airlines.

Fort Worth, Texas-based American said it has already drawn



An American Airlines Airbus A321-200 plane takes off from Los Angeles International Airport in Los Angeles, California, in this file photo. — **Reuters**

down \$550 million of the Treasury loan, which is backed by its loyalty programme.

The loans also require airlines to issue warrants and

carry restrictions on executive compensation and buybacks.

Among other carriers, United Airline said this week it will tap the Treasury loans, but it was not clear

whether the airline would only seek its \$4.5 billion share or more.

US airlines received a separate \$25 billion in March under the CARES Act primarily in the form of grants to keep employees on payroll through the end of this month and avoid furloughs while the industry battles a deep downturn from the coronavirus pandemic.

The have also tapped capital markets to bolster liquidity, but with passenger traffic still down about 70 per cent from pre-pandemic levels, the industry is urging Washington to extend another \$25 billion in payroll support through March, 2021.

American said it has also closed a \$1.2-billion debt offering with Goldman Sachs, backed by some intellectual property and airport slots. — **Reuters**

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STAY HOME, STAY SAFE, SAVE LIVES



Revealed: the darkness behind the beauty of Britain's great houses

Feted for their fine architecture and often used as lavish backdrops for period movies, Britain's great estates came under the spotlight on Tuesday for a darker reason: their links to colonialism and slavery.

The National Trust, which runs some 300 heritage buildings, said about a third of them had past owners who had profited from slavery, opposed its abolition, been involved in colonial expansion or administration or promoted imperialism.

"These histories are sometimes very painful and difficult to consider," it said in a report. "They make us question our assumptions about the past, and yet they can also deepen and enrich our understanding."

The National Trust is a household name in Britain and promotes the properties it manages in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as family days out.

But like other British institutions from Lloyd's of London to Oxford University, the trust was jolted by this year's wave of anti-racism protests into a reckoning with the past that has led to statues being toppled and legacies debated.

The trust said its 115-page report, which was not exhaustive, would be used to ensure that links to colonialism and slavery were properly explained at relevant places.

rulers, and cited the Bengal Famine of 1943, during which critics say Churchill denied food supplies to India.

Churchill biographer Andrew Roberts was among

to former slaves, but 20 million pounds, or about 40 per cent of the government's annual expenditure at the time, was set aside for former slave owners. The loan needed to fund the compensation was only fully repaid in 2015.

The imposing Basildon Park mansion, featured in the 2005 film adaptation of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" starring Keira Knightley and Matthew MacFayden, was also on the list.

It was purchased in 1771 by Francis Sykes, one of the so-called "nabobs", British merchants who made huge fortunes on the Indian subcontinent in ways that would now be considered exploitative.

The list also included Bateman's, home of writer Rudyard Kipling from 1902 until his death in 1936. Kipling, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907, is known for enduring works of fiction such as "The Jungle Book".

But he was also an influential apologist for imperialism, as epitomised by his poem "The White Man's Burden" which suggested white people had a moral duty to civilise countries inhabited by people of other ethnicities.

— Reuters

The National Trust, which runs some 300 heritage buildings, said about a third of them had past owners who had profited from slavery, opposed its abolition, been involved in colonial expansion or administration or promoted imperialism

But the report was met with an instant online backlash because among a list of 93 properties listed was Chartwell, Winston Churchill's home from 1922 until his death in 1965.

Churchill has long been revered as a British national hero for his leadership during World War Two, but his legacy in other areas has come under increasingly critical scrutiny.

The report noted that he had voted against a 1935 India Bill aimed at giving Indians greater autonomy from their colonial

numerous people who went on social media to accuse the National Trust of "wokery".

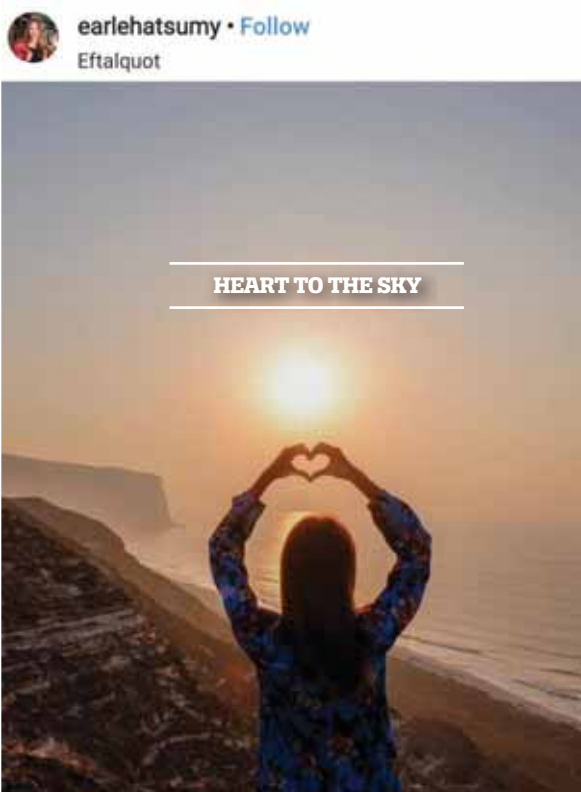
"WHITE MAN'S BURDEN"

Another notable item on the list was Glastonbury Tor, a hill topped by a 15th-century tower, close to the site of the famous music festival. It was one of 29 properties that had benefitted from a government scheme that compensated slave owners when slavery was abolished in 1833, the report said.

No compensation was paid



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



COOK LIKE A CHEF

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Chocolate Crunch Bar



CHOCOLATE GALORE

Asado at the Sheraton Oman has won several distinguished awards through the leadership of its current executive chef, Adil Shaikh. As the restaurant adapts to the new normal, they are bringing back some of the favourites that have put them on the map as one of the go-to destinations for memorable dining. Currently offering Gaucho Night every Thursday where they showcase some of the best barbecues inspired by the American cowboys, they are also relaunching Seafood Wednesday providing even better diversity in Oman's culinary scene. To give you a taste of what they offer, Chef Adil is sharing four of their beloved dishes — something to surprise your family with when you have the time to cook them something extra-special.

PREPARATION METHOD

Preheat oven to 170°C, grease three 6 round baking pans and dust with cocoa powder. Line bottoms with parchment.
Place all dry ingredients into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Stir gently to combine.
In a medium bowl whisk, all of the wet ingredients.
Add wet ingredients to dry and mix on medium for 2-3 mins. The batter will be very thin and runny.
Pour evenly into prepared pans. Use a kitchen scale for splitting the batter evenly amongst pans.
Bake the cakes for 30-35 minutes.
Cool 10 minutes in the pans then turn out onto a wire rack to cool completely.
In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, mix all of the ingredients on low speed until it starts to come together.
Beat on high speed for 4-5 minutes until frosting is fluffy, be sure to scrape down the bowl, to get everything incorporated.
Garnish with assorted berries.



ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF ADIL SHAIKH

Executive Chef
Sheraton Hotel, Muscat

Adil Shaikh is currently the Executive Chef of Sheraton Oman Hotel located in Muscat. He has been associated with the hotel since its re-opening in 2016.
With an enriching career of over 15 years, he has successfully launched award-winning restaurants as an integral game changer in hospitality operations. Having won several prestigious recognitions and awards including Battle of the Chef Dubai and participated at several distinguished culinary platforms in the Middle East, he draws immense inspiration from the ever-evolving culinary world. His illustrious career spans across the Middle East & Asia in renowned Luxury, Business & Leisure Hotels & Resorts.
An avid foodie Adil is a strong advocate of 'Go Local.' He is committed to showcasing the flavours and tastes of lesser-known local ingredients, farm-fresh produce and regional cuisines. An astute, hands-on chef, Adil curates bespoke dining experiences that delves deep into authentic flavours, traditions and intricate nuances of each cuisine.
Off duty, you will spot him being an absolute foodie and exploring local cuisines of various cultures. On other days, he uses his kitchen as an interactive platform to celebrate the love for great food and memorable dining experiences that stand the test of time with his guests and loyal clientele.



INGREDIENTS:



CAKE

- 1 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup processed cocoa powder sifted
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 3/4 cup buttermilk room temperature
- 3/4 cup warm water
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla

FROSTING

- 4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1/8 tsp salt
- 1/4 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 tsps vanilla extract
- 1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder

FASHION

Prada returns to minimalist roots for first joint collection



MILAN: Miuccia Prada went back to her trademark minimalist style for her first collection with Belgian designer Raf Simons, who joined the Italian fashion group as co-creative director in February.
The pair's Spring/Summer 2021 women's show was streamed live on Thursday for Milan's fashion week, where most collections are being presented digitally and without audiences due to coronavirus social distancing rules.
"It's a really strange situation," Prada said in a video after the show, where she and Simons answered questions from people around the world.
"But we have the occasion to really show the clothes, we can't see the real people, the public, but at least we hope you can enjoy and see the clothes better."
Models wore mostly black and white or pastel-coloured vests, trousers and long skirts in simple, monochrome designs which Prada said were inspired by the idea of uniforms. Many clothes had round-shaped holes cut out of the fabric.
"Clothes are pared-back, refined, focused, without superfluous decoration: shell tops, straight pants, overcoats in industrial rayon," the brand said in a statement.
Simons, 52, said he had never expected to be, one day, co-designing a collection with Miuccia Prada, but that he was "extremely

happy" with the result.
"Maybe it's harder as you have more dialogue, and that can also impact on the timing, but all in all I find it easier," he said when asked what it was like to jointly create a collection.
"Decision-making for me is strengthened when I know that Miuccia likes very much what I also like very much. Even if I am convinced, my decision is strengthened when I know that she too is convinced."
After becoming one of Italy's best-known fashion houses, Prada has struggled in recent years.
A restructuring drive began to pay off in 2018 when sales returned to growth for the first time in four years thanks to a new strategy aimed at rejuvenating the label by renovating shops, launching new products and boosting online sales.
But the Hong Kong-listed group has, like luxury rivals, been hit hard by the pandemic, which forced high-end houses to temporarily shut shops and idle manufacturing sites.
Simons' appointment, announced in February, marked the first time the Italian fashion house has hired an outsider to work with its head designer. He was most recently creative director at Calvin Klein and before that at Christian Dior and Jil Sander.
Miuccia Prada, 71, said at the time the move was not intended to pave the way for a possible succession as the group's top designer. — **Reuters**



The abandoned village in Wajma is your ideal outdoor adventure escape

STORY BY YERU EBUEEN
PHOTOS FROM MAZIN AL ABRI

The last of the original inhabitants moved out early this year making the ancient village of Wajma totally abandoned.

The farms though continue to operate with the owners entrusting their gardens and crops to Bangladeshi and Pakistani hired helps. Elevated at 2,000 metres above sea level, the road to the top is circuitous, unpaved and rocky that a driving mistake can prove to be catastrophic. But it is a scenic drive reminding you a lot of the beautiful rocky roads of Jabal Shams. Some vantage points offer an astounding view of the villages below.

I learned of Wajma from the daily posts of Mazin al Abri (@mazin_alabri on Instagram) – the last of the inhabitants who moved to the nearby flatland. His daily posts are captivating offering a 10-second snippet of what this gem of Rustaq has to offer.

On some days, he will be out in the wild and eating fruits freshly plucked from the trees. On other days, he is carefully transferring honey to a bottle from homes of wild bees he found in some old trees. But daily, he will showcase the gentle waterfall found at the far corner of the village, the emerald cistern where water is collected from the falaj becoming an inviting pool ideal for cliff diving and swimming. It is a life so different yet so relatable and it is the kind of adventure you will want to do in Oman.

When we visited the place in February this year, it was just as how I envisioned it. It was a charming little village and typical of the many mountain villages in Oman survives in farming. There are date palms all over and the terraced gardens were planted with onions and garlic. It is a hard life without any school or medical facilities. Thankfully though there were water and light.

The houses, surprisingly, are restored. They are not crumbling like other abandoned villages. We will learn later that some of the inhabitants actually visit on weekends, stay there for a day or two before going back to the city. They come for a visit but will not return to live their permanently.

If you are a tourist, there are plenty of things to see in Wajma. These attractions offer clues as to how the residents lived and thrived.

At the far corner of the village, just

like in Mazin's daily posts, beyond the cistern where the water is collected, pots are still hanging by the rocks collecting the trickle of water coming from the mountain wall. It is cold and crystal-clear and whatever overflows go to the falaj which also ends up watering the farms.

There are also different hiking trails offering an even better view of the canyon in this side of the Al Hajar Mountain range, and yes, the view is just as impressive.

The stone and mud houses are all empty. At its peak, it was home to more than 300 people. Houses were built on cliffs that from below, you wonder how it would have felt living perched in what seemed to be a precarious condition.

Walking through the village and climbing one of the rooftops, you would come to understand why a town flourished here despite its remoteness. The ancient settlement's location is perfect as the mountains protect the village from strong winds while the other side offers a fantastic view of their farms and the adjacent mountains.

Sunsets and sunrises here are incomparable, and for people who love being with nature, it is a perfect place to find peace and quiet as well as exceptional outdoor adventures.

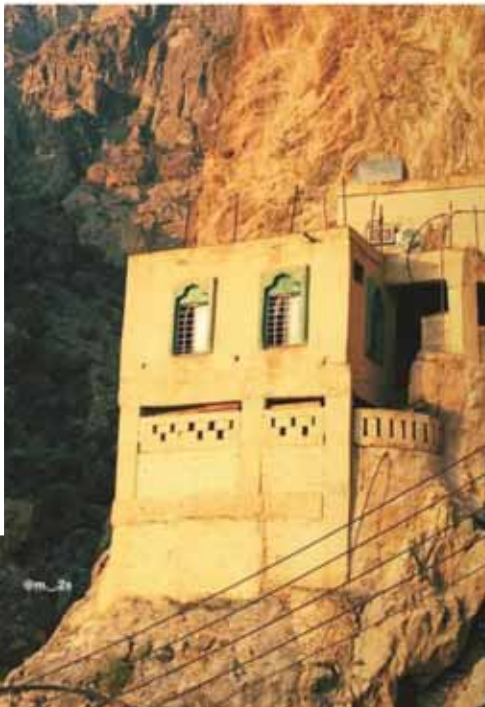
When I first wrote about Wajma, I compared it to Macchu Picchu. Many points make me think so – the iconic mountain, the ancient settlement, the terraced gardens, it seems like the inhabitants copied from each other's books.

Our discovery of Wajma has offered an amazing alternative to places to escape to when in Oman. With the proper renovation and further development, perhaps, a coffee shop and a restaurant that offers traditional Omani food even a bed and breakfast with a traditional Omani feel, Wajma will become one of Rustaq's major attractions.

Friends of Mazin had been encouraging him to do so – build something, create an attraction, let people live the life he led. Right now, he seemed adamant. But in time, he will also realize that his place has so much to offer and once he finally makes the jump and make it a reality and build something up in Wajma, I will be one of the firsts to stay there or eat in his restaurant. And I will definitely come back too.

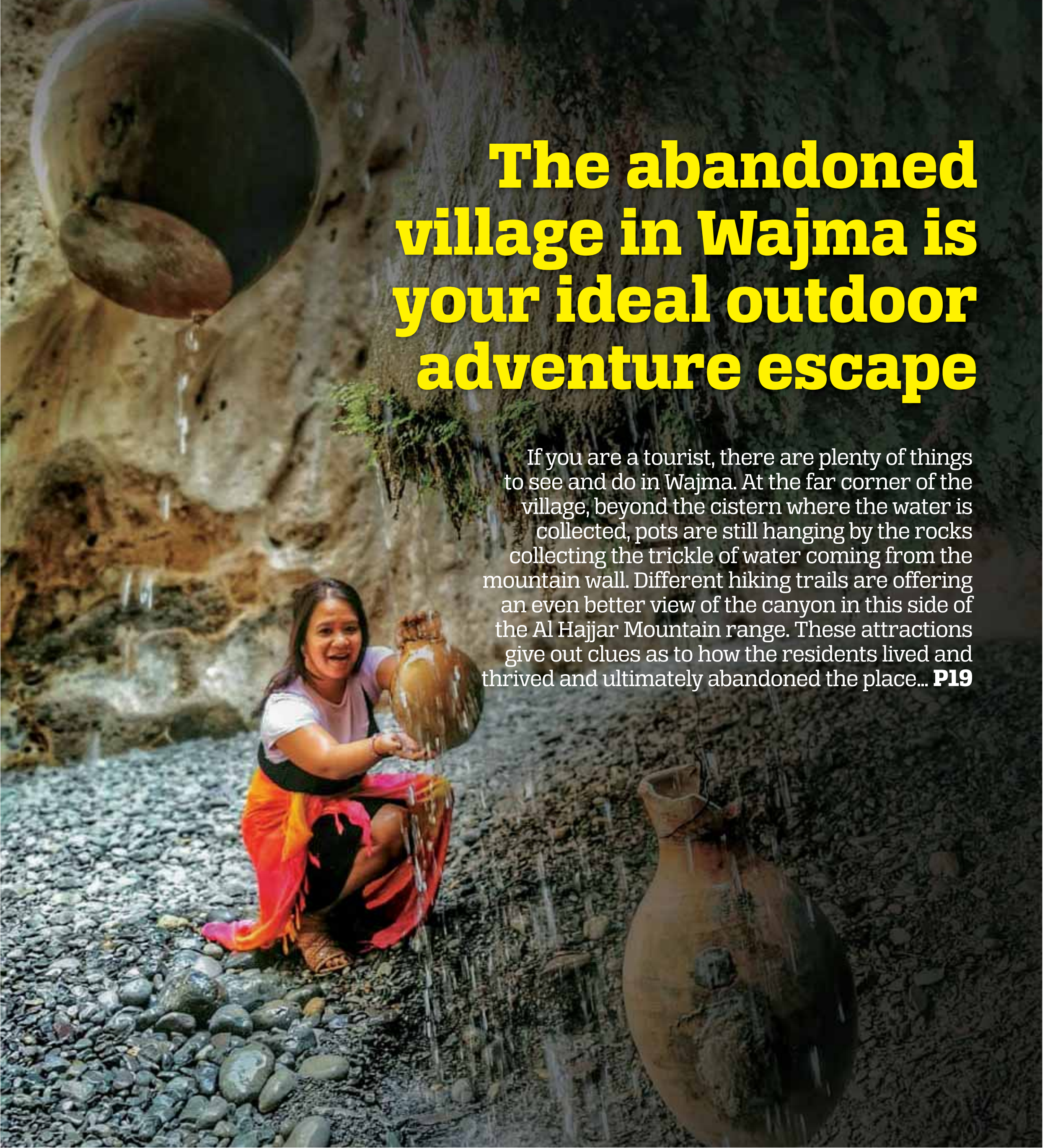


If you are a tourist, there are plenty of things to see in Wajma. These attractions offer clues as to how the residents lived and thrived.



features

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The abandoned village in Wajma is your ideal outdoor adventure escape

If you are a tourist, there are plenty of things to see and do in Wajma. At the far corner of the village, beyond the cistern where the water is collected, pots are still hanging by the rocks collecting the trickle of water coming from the mountain wall. Different hiking trails are offering an even better view of the canyon in this side of the Al Hajjar Mountain range. These attractions give out clues as to how the residents lived and thrived and ultimately abandoned the place... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

CULTURE



REVEALED: THE DARKNESS BEHIND THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN'S GREAT HOUSES

Feted for their fine architecture and often used as lavish backdrops for period movies, Britain's great estates came under the spotlight on Tuesday for a darker reason: their links to colonialism or slavery... Story on **Page 17**

WHAT TO EAT



CHOCOLATE CRUNCH BAR

After a series of delicious savoury food, Sheraton Executive Chef Adil Shaikh is taking the dessert route in today's Cook Like a Chef. This Chocolate Crunch Bar is too yummy not to try... Story on **Page 18**

READ



EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME

BY JENNA BUSH HAGER
Essays by the former first daughter and granddaughter celebrating the lives of her grandparents.

FASHION



PRADA RETURNS TO MINIMALIST ROOTS FOR FIRST JOINT COLLECTION

Miuccia Prada went back to her trademark minimalist style for her first collection with Belgian designer Raf Simons, who joined the Italian fashion group as co-creative director in February... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE



TOURISM DAY

Travel is a great way to learn. When you go out into the world, you become more sensitive to culture and tradition. The purpose of Tourism Day is to help broaden your mind. While it's hard to travel out of Oman during this time of the pandemic, do some local tours to a nearby historical place. Learn about the customs and traditions and check what makes it similar to yours.