

China's Zhurong rover touches down on Red Planet

China's probe to Mars touched down on the Red Planet on Saturday to deploy its Zhurong rover, state media reported, a triumph for Beijing's bold space ambitions and a history-making feat for a nation on its first-ever Martian mission. The lander carrying Zhurong completed the treacherous descent through the Martian atmosphere using a parachute to navigate the "seven minutes of terror" as it is known, aiming for a vast northern lava plain known as the Utopia Planitia. **DETAILS ON P7**



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PSG STUMBLES
LEAVE LILLE
ON BRINK OF
LIGUE 1 TITLE



P14

'HISAN ARABI':
THE ARABIAN
HORSE, POETRY
IN MOTION



P20

INDIA'S GOAIR
PLANS IPO TO
RAISE \$491
MILLION



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO PARAGUAY PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Mario Abdo Benitez, President of the Republic of Paraguay, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and wishes to the President and the friendly people of Paraguay further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

TEHRAN

RAISI, LARIJANI BID FOR IRAN ELECTION

Two of Iran's political heavy-hitters, Ebrahim Raisi and Ali Larijani, launched on Saturday what may be the main battle for next month's presidential election. Iranians are due to elect a successor to President Hassan Rouhani, who is constitutionally barred from running for a third consecutive term, on June 18. First to throw down the gauntlet on Saturday was Larijani, a long-time parliament speaker and now adviser to the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, submitting his name at the interior ministry early on the final day of registration. Judiciary chief and one-time presidential hopeful Raisi announced his candidacy in a statement, before appearing at the ministry to sign up. **DETAILS ON P5**

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INSIDE



WARRING AFGHAN SIDES DISCUSS PEACE TALKS

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'EXTINCTION' WARNING TO UK'S LABOUR

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Scare over ICU patients, daily deaths

FIRST OMANI HEALTHCARE WORKER SUCCUMBS TO COVID-19

VINOD NAIR
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All eyes will be on whether the weeks of restrictions, including night lockdowns, did significantly impact the spread of infections in the country. With the mass vaccination drive still a few weeks away, there is concern over a large number of daily deaths recorded, while the new cases of infections have dropped substantially. Last Friday, the Ministry of Health reported the first death of an Omani health worker (a nurse) due to Covid-19.

“Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, officials, and all employees at ministry offered sincere condolences to the families of the deceased, Shannuna al Nu'maniyah”, a statement said.

The ministry added that earlier two

expatriate health workers died due to coronavirus.

On May 9, a 32-year-old nurse Ramya M Rajan, who worked at Rustaq Hospital, succumbed to Covid-19 after battling for weeks at a government hospital.

Last Tuesday, the ministry has announced 576 new cases of Covid-19 and 10 deaths. Figures were not released during the Eid holidays.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate now stand at 202,713, including 2,148 deaths. The recovery rate has improved to 92 per cent.

Another matter of concern is that there are still 255 patients in intensive care units.

There is no room for complacency as many people are getting infected with mild to serious symptoms, mostly from workplaces.



There is concern over a large number of daily deaths.

“Three to four colleagues in my office were initially tested positive, and now it has passed on to more employees, including me”, said a senior accountant of a construction company.

More care should be taken at workplaces, and most cases are

reported by employees with field jobs, including salesmen and others.

VACCINES

Meanwhile, experts have said that giving the first dose of vaccine, but delaying a second dose among people younger than 65, could lead to fewer people dying of the disease, but only if certain conditions are met, according to a study.

As the pandemic continues, there is a debate over whether to extend the gap between doses to give as many people as possible some protection or stick to the intervals designated in clinical trials.

The results suggest that a decrease in cumulative mortality, infections and hospital admissions can be achieved under specific conditions when the second vaccine dose is delayed.



A VILLAGE ON A GIGANTIC ROCK

Al Hashah village is one of the oldest villages in Wadi Bani Hani (Wilayat of Al Rustaq). This village reveals to its visitor the contours of creativity in construction and ancient architecture. Its houses were constructed on two parallel lines; east and west, separated by a long corridor extending from the big wooden gate until it reaches the high tower on the south part of the village. This village was built on a gigantic rock in the middle of the wadi. **DETAILS ON P3**

Oman a key partner in Opec+ decisions

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Sultanate is an important partner in the cooperation agreement signed between Opec and non-Opec members which have decided to cut oil production, said the Director-General of Marketing at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Ali bin Abdullah al Riyami said that it was decided that the Sultanate's share of the production cut would be 17 per cent (151,000 barrels per day) in April, 16 per cent (142,000 barrels per day) in May and 15 per cent (133,000 barrels per day) in June.

He said that Oman crude

oil is a basic reference for oil prices, especially in Asian markets, and most national oil companies in the region use Oman crude index as a primary factor for calculating crude oil pricing, such as Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain.

Al Riyami pointed out that there are several factors which distinguish Omani oil, but what distinguishes Omani crude oil from others in the region is the freedom to trade it in futures contracts through dedicated energy exchange, meaning there are no restrictions on export destinations, as well as the freedom to resell and trade it in the main or secondary markets.

Israel pounds Gaza City as US envoy arrives for talks

GAZA CITY: Israel pounded the Gaza Strip overnight killing 10 members of an extended family while rockets smashed into Israel on Saturday, amid violence in the West Bank and as a US envoy arrived for talks.

On the sixth day since military conflict escalated, the death toll rose as the two sides exchanged heavy barrages of fire.

US Secretary for Israel-Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr was due to meet Israeli leaders in Jerusalem on Sunday before heading to the occupied West Bank for talks with Palestinian officials.

He wants to encourage a “sustainable calm”, State Department deputy spokeswoman Jalina Porter said. Washington has been criticised for not doing more to end the intensifying violence, after it blocked a UN Security Council meeting scheduled for Friday.

Eleven Palestinians were killed in clashes in the occupied West Bank on Friday, and there were fears of worse violence as Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, the “catastrophe” of Israel's creation in 1948, which turned hundreds of thousands into refugees.

Despite intensifying diplomatic



efforts to ease five days of fighting between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza, Israel's fighter jets struck several sites in the coastal enclave overnight, while rockets again tore towards Israel.

On Saturday afternoon, a rocket fired by Palestinians in Gaza killed an Israeli when it hit his building in the central town of Ramat Gen, police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

An Israeli strike on a three-storey building in the Shati refugee camp killed 10 members of an extended family — two related mothers and their four children each. **SEE ALSO P6**



Be cautious even as night lockdown lifted

KABEER YOUSUF
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People have been urged to continue their precautions against the pandemic and help the state conquer the virus as the week-long night lockdown came to an end, according to the Supreme Committee on Covid-19.

“From Saturday, the ban on movement of individuals and vehicles will be over and shops and stores can function from 4am till 8pm provided the number of people inside shouldn’t be more than 50 per cent of the capacity as part of controlling the coronavirus,” the Supreme Committee notification said.

Accordingly, entry to complexes, shops, restaurants, and cafes will be allowed to 50 per cent capacity only during the period allowed to receive customers.

However, delivery and takeaway services and food stores are exempted from the prohibition.



Government offices can resume work with 50 per cent of staff who are required to attend the workplace in the state’s administrative apparatus and other public legal teams. Employees who do not attend the workplace perform the work assigned remotely. For private sector companies,

which are otherwise to open from Sunday, are allowed to implement business continuity plans by working remotely and with a reduced number of employees who are required to come to the workplace.

“Safety of the public is the responsibility of all the people, both citizens and residents, and all parties should continue to take necessary precautionary and preventive measures to prevent the spread of the disease and follow up on everyone’s commitment to them. One needs to abide by the rules and regulations implemented by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and Public Prosecution, which are responsible for implementing its decisions and cracking down on the violators,” the Supreme Committee urged.

It may be noted that Supreme Committee SC on Covid-19 had praised the role of ROP and Public Prosecution, who are responsible for implementing its decisions and tracking down on violators.

Expo 2020 urges participants to join vaccination drive

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Expo 2020 Dubai Steering Committee has urged all of Expo’s 200-plus participants to join vaccination drive, which will be offered free to all official participants and their staff.

From October 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, Expo 2020 Dubai will welcome visitors from every corner of the globe to join the making of a new world, as it brings together the planet in one place to reimagine tomorrow.

Manuel Salchli, chair of the Expo 2020 Steering Committee and Commissioner General for Switzerland at Expo 2020, said, “Health and safety is a pivotal part of the planning and operations for all World Expos and the ongoing global pandemic has put this more sharply into focus. It is especially important that all official participants should benefit from the UAE’s generous offer to vaccinate their delegations and it is the collective responsibility of all the countries to support this initiative to ensure an enjoyable and safe Expo for all participants.”

The Steering Committee met after the sixth and final International Participants Meeting (IPM), which took

place earlier this week. The IPM saw more than 370 senior representatives from 173 countries gather in Dubai to discuss final preparations ahead of the mega-event’s opening on 1 October, and experience first-hand the robust health and safety measures that have already been rolled out.

At the beginning of the year, Expo 2020 launched an extensive COVID-19 vaccination drive for all Expo 2020 employees and their households. More widely, the UAE has overseen one of the world’s fastest vaccination programmes, already administering more than 10 million doses since the programme began a few months ago.

Dr Amer Sharif, Head of Dubai’s Covid-19 Command and Control Centre (CCC), said: “Since the beginning of the pandemic, the UAE has followed a clear strategy in managing Covid-19. Dubai’s Covid-19 Command and Control Centre has, since its establishment, developed protocols, guidelines and precautionary measures that are science-based and data-driven. The guiding principle in managing the pandemic has always been to strike a balance between lives and livelihoods.”



Work on the Oman pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020 will be ready by June end, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion MoCIIP has said.

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Sultanate sends special medical assistance to India

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Government of Oman dispatched special medical assistance for India’s fight against Covid-19 on Wednesday aboard a Royal Air Force Oman(RAFO) plane.

“The Government of India expresses its deep gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarek and the government and people of Oman for their support to India during the difficult time of Covid-19 pandemic. India welcomes and deeply appreciates the essential medical supplies of ventilators, SPO2 monitors and medicines gifted by the Sultanate. This gesture is a testament to very close and longstanding strategic partnership between India and Oman,” said a press release issued by the Embassy of India in Muscat.



“India is also grateful to the Indian diaspora in Oman for their continuous support and for their contribution in the form of 30 Oxygen concentrators and 100 Oxygen cylinders, which were also airlifted aboard the RAFO plane.”

In line with our historical and close friendly ties, India is committed to further strengthening our bilateral relationship with Oman, not only in fighting this global pandemic together, but also in all areas of mutual interest, the release said.



AL HASHAH VILLAGE ON A ROCK!



TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Al Hashah village is one of the oldest villages in Wadi Bani Hani (Wilayah of Al Rustaq). The village reveals to its visitor the contours of creativity in construction and ancient architecture. Its houses were constructed on two parallel lines;

east and west, separated by a long corridor extending from the big wooden gate until it reaches the high tower on the south part of the village.

This village was built on a gigantic rock in the middle of the wadi. It used to be called the (Town of Al Ain). This was relative to a spring water emanating on the west side of the village.

Its unique and distinctive

shape and location in the centre of the wadi has led some to call it "The Ship". The village, with its archaeological buildings, appears to be lying on a rectangular deaf rock from north to south. Despite the run-off of the valleys, this village was not affected.

The north gate is the only gate to the village, the only entrance and exit, and at the main entrance there are two large and heavy wooden gates, which are stacked

with iron nails and distinctive inscriptions.

This fortification protected the village and its residents from any sudden raid.

The village includes single houses, rooms, weapons and food stores, a mosque, a water well and a tower located on the south side of the village. It relies on a natural ventilation system and features arches, clay columns, doors and wooden windows.

Today, this village is visited by thousands of tourists to see its features and monuments, which provides details of the of ancient Omani life. The village has witnessed historical, social, political and economic events at different periods, and the villagers continue to be interested in agriculture, livestock and honeybees. Many of them are pointed as professionals in pottery and traditional hand-

made industries. They also benefit from the vegetation in extracting dozens of medicinal herbs that are used in the treatment of some diseases.

This site still retains the symbols of the Omani architectural style. Locals are calling for the importance of restoring this village, as it is one of the archaeological realities that tourists from different countries flock to.

Healthy diet to stay fit in summer

JISHY SEBY

Mercury levels have started rising and summer is fast approaching. This is the time to search for soothing foods which keeps us cool. Since the pandemic is still on, we need to keep our body fit to keep away infections. Basically a summer diet consists of foods that is high in water content, provides ample nutrition and cools down your body while preventing you from dehydration. Break your meal in smaller meals and small snacks to let your body use the food properly to keep energised.

Diet during this time should be rich in natural and seasonal foods. It's easy to fill your meals with a variety of colourful fruits and vegetables during the summer months. Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and contain antioxidants and other phytonutrients that may slow aging, protect against various diseases and improve blood pressure, and keep your heart healthy. Avoid using dried fruits during summer as they are very low in water content.

Eating a healthy



Summer diet should be rich in natural and seasonal fruits and vegetables.

breakfast should remain part of your morning routine. Starting each day with a balanced, nutritious meal jump-starts your metabolism and gives you energy. It also holds off your hunger between meals, so you don't overeat later on.

Drink naturally cooling beverages like coconut water, lemon juice, buttermilk and sugarcane juice rather than aerated soft drinks, caffeine, and beverages as they contain sugar and other preservatives which act as diuretics (increase the flow of urine) and can cause loss of water from the body. A combination of lemon, ginger and honey is soothing and wards off cold and cough and soothes the throat.

Have a bowl of salads for lunch which includes veggies like bell peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, spinach etc to increase the water content in your body. Red bell peppers are rich in Vitamin C and Beta carotene which helps the

body to fight against infections. It's important to pay attention to the type of dressing and the quantity of dressing you use in your salads. A fresh dressing made from lemons and olive oil is going to be a lot healthier than a creamy, mayo dressing. Avoid heavy meals at one time as it can cause acidity and affect digestion. Rather, eat small meals to feel light and keep your system active.

Curd is excellent for summers as it increases friendly bacteria in the gut and improves digestion and boosts immunity. Track your protein and carbohydrate intake during summer.

Animal proteins like eggs and meat are not easy to digest and can pose a digestion problem during summer periods. However, you can include pulses and fishes, yogurt and fruits in your diet to gain proteins. Nuts are good option for snacks time; but avoid eating fried ones. Roasted or plain would be a

better option.

All the health benefits that you get from eating light summer food may be wasted if you fall sick because you've eaten food that is not fresh. During summer, food gets spoilt more quickly. So, make sure that you pay extra attention to the freshness of meats and sea foods. Bacteria in food multiply faster in hot, humid weather. We have to be very careful regarding the storage of foods during summer. Simple rule is to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Avoid storing foods in the room temperature for long time. Don't eat food that's been left out of the fridge for more than four hours — especially poultry, meat, seafood, cooked rice and cooked pasta.

Fast and junk foods to be avoided as these foods have heated thermal effect on the body and makes the body sluggish. Avoid chilled liquids as they constrict blood vessels and reduce heat loss via skin and has negative impact on heat. Since the scorching heat of summer increases with each degree rise in the mercury, by rooting ourselves to nature's provision of healthful food choices we can experience the bloom of our health and vitality.

Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep, practice meditation and involve in at least 45 minutes of exercise (not in scorching sun) daily. These steps along with a healthy and balanced diet also helps to keep the body fit and strong and to lead a healthy life.

(The writer is a Clinical Dietician at KIMS Oman Hospital)

CHANGING CONSUMER!

DIGITAL MARKETING OFFERS SIMPLE SOLUTION TO BUYERS DURING PANDEMIC

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The current pandemic has hugely affected people's shopping behaviour. It has seen a paradigm shift for both buyers and sellers. While the buyers have become very picky, it has forced the sellers to look for an intelligent platform to reach directly to the customers and cater to their needs.

Digital marketing has emerged as a helpful tool for almost all businesses to showcase their products among their prospective buyers and convince them to buy their products.

"It is a convenient tool for both. If the businesses are looking for ways to reach their audiences, the buyers also are looking for the right platforms to understand products and place orders at a time when need of the hour is social distancing and avoid crowding", said Shahid Ahmed, a marketing executive in a private firm.

According to him, digital marketing has developed manifold in recent years. It has seen an all-time boom during the current pandemic.

Kethki Ambekar, a digital marketing expert, provided a detailed description of the marketing trend driven by digital marketing, be it through website, email campaigns, content marketing, social media posts, clickable ads, affiliate marketing, or search engine optimisation (SEO).

A couple of years back, before the rise and craze of Internet, marketers all around the globe invested hugely into traditional mediums of marketing that included ATL (above the line) and BTL (below the line) activities. This included advertising in

newspapers, magazines, billboards, television, direct mail etc.

"Digital Marketing, on the other hand, is a component of marketing that utilises the Internet and online-based technologies to connect with potential customers. It helps you reach out to the global audience, who can eventually be your target customers.

It is proven to be more cost-effective than traditional marketing in terms of audience reach. It also helps companies measure the cost-effectiveness with the help of the analytical tools available", she said.

Digital marketing has emerged as more beneficial and a crucial tool during the pandemic.

The statistics suggest its importance in the current time when consumers' frequent usage of the Internet and mobile devices has gone very high. According to Statista, there are 4.54 billion active Internet users

globally and 3.8 billion active social media users. With numbers that high, marketing online and through social media makes a lot of sense.

"With a lot of people working from home, including the kids doing online schooling, I believe the Internet is a space that businesses should not ignore. In the past year, people of all age groups have adapted to the use of Internet for various purposes that could be work, education, or even connecting with near and dear ones", Kethki Ambedkar said.

At a time when social and physical distancing is the mantra for staying safe, social media and e-commerce tools have only been a blessing. A lot of people are now ordering their groceries, food and other items online. It can be challenging with people not trusting the Internet. Still, with E-commerce companies offering a smooth customer interface, it surely can be very convenient, she said.

The benefits here, according to her, are: "Help understand customers' needs, it can be hyper-personalised, advanced analytics, and the most important is, it integrates with mobile Phones."

All businesses, small and big, can now easily reach out to their target audience thanks to the cost-effective social media tools. Facebook, Instagram, twitter, and Snapchat are some highly interactive platforms where companies can understand their customers' needs. They could easily measure the effectiveness of each forum and deploy the resources accordingly.

"E-commerce platforms have made paying utility bills, banking transactions, grocery and lifestyle shopping very convenient and easily trackable. Some digital tools go one step ahead and analyse your spending behaviour pattern, helping you make better financial decisions", she said.



In brief

UNITED NATIONS



UN YEMEN ENVOY NAMED HUMANITARIAN CHIEF

Martin Griffiths, the UN envoy struggling to end the bloody war in Yemen, was named to be the global body's humanitarian chief.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' appointment of Griffiths as under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs keeps the prominent post in the hands of a British diplomat, succeeding Mark Lowcock. Similarly, two other top positions, under-secretary-general for political affairs and under-secretary-general for peacekeeping, have stayed respectively with diplomats from the United States and France despite a 1992 General Assembly resolution that opposed the "monopoly" of the major powers in key jobs. — **AFP**

MOSUL



EID PRAYERS RETURN TO MOSUL MOSQUE

Worshippers knelt between piles of rubble while Eid al Fitr prayers took place in the city's oldest mosque for the first time since IS was driven out of the area in 2017. Groups of men listened to Quranic recitals in the building, which dates back to the Umayyad period in the 7th century and remains largely in ruins following heavy fighting in Mosul's Old City.

"The message is clear, the Al Masfi mosque is the Islamic epicentre and symbol of the area. It is not only Islamic, but also a symbol of the city," said Ahmed Najem, a local academic, after prayers. — **AFP**

TUNIS



17 EUROPE-BOUND MIGRANTS DROWN

At least 17 migrants drowned as a boat sank off Tunisia, the International Organization for Migration said, citing two survivors rescued near an oil platform. IOM said the boat had left on Tuesday from the port of Zwara in Libya.

Two women from Niger survived and were rescued by authorities off the Tunisian port of Sfax, IOM said, adding the pair were taken to hospital. According to the IOM, more than 500 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea from the shores of North Africa to Italy and Malta since the start of 2021.

So far this year, some 13,000 migrants have landed on Italy's shores — a sizeable increase from about 4,200 and 1,100, respectively, for the same periods in 2020 and 2019. — **AFP**

Raisi, Larijani bid for Iran presidential race



Iranian judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi arrives to submit his candidacy for Iran's presidential elections at the Interior Ministry in Tehran. — **AFP**

who are on this path (of presidency) cannot solve the country's main economic problem".

Larijani is a supporter of the 2015 nuclear deal, which offered Iran a relief from sanctions, in return to limitations on its nuclear activities.

The deal has been on life-support since former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew Washington from it in 2018, and reimposed punishing sanctions on Tehran.

Singling out the economy as Iran's main issue, Larijani accused anyone of "promising paradise in this complicated state" that the country is going through of "speaking falsely".

In his statement, Raisi said he came forward over intense "public demand," and aims to run "independently in order to bring about a change in the executive management of the country".

Larijani proved to be one of the key allies of Rouhani, who was elected on a platform of ending Iran's international isolation by reaching the nuclear agreement

He also vowed to wage "a relentless fight against poverty and corruption, humiliation and discrimination," the main slogans of his campaign four years ago. Raisi bears the title of Hojjat al Islam, which is a rank under Ayatollah in the hierarchy.

The two main coalitions already announced their support for Raisi.

Several prominent figures, such as parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, had reportedly said they would stay out of the race



Iran's former parliament speaker Ali Larijani delivers a speech after registering his candidacy for Iran's presidential elections in Tehran. — **AFP**

if Raisi ran.

Raisi was appointed by the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to take over the judiciary leadership in 2019 from Sadeh Amoli Larijani, brother to Ali Larijani. This is Larijani's second run for the presidency. He ran in 2005, which saw a surprise victory by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — who has also put his name in to run as well.

Seen today as a prominent establishment figure, Larijani was at the time in charge of Iran's nuclear negotiations with the West, a post he resigned from two years later over serious disagreements with Ahmadinejad. He then went on to be parliament speaker from 2008 to 2020.

Larijani proved to be one of the key allies of Rouhani, who was elected on a platform of ending Iran's international isolation by reaching the nuclear agreement in

2015. His candidacy comes as Iran and world powers are engaged in talks in Vienna, seeking to revive the deal.

"I hope the negotiations produce results (as) it can provide a breathing space for the country's economy," Larijani said.

He also called for "smart relations with the West, strong and constructive relations with the East, and brotherly relations with our neighbours".

The nuclear accord has been a constant target of criticism by Rouhani's opponents, and its fate is expected to one of the major stakes in the 2021 poll. Since registration to run in the election began on Tuesday, dozens of hopefuls have submitted bids to stand.

Their names will be vetted by the Guardian Council, who will publish a list of approved candidates by May 27, after which campaigning begins. — **AFP**

Egypt's road building drive eases jams but leaves some unhappy

CAIRO: At weekends, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi is often driven out to a road construction site in Cairo where he is pictured surveying stretches of recently poured asphalt and being briefed by workers.

The highways and bridges he inspects are the most visible part of a big infrastructure push meant to galvanise Egypt's economy after decades of rapid population growth and unplanned building.

Led by the government and the military, it includes several new cities and one million low-cost homes and has helped pull Egypt through the economic shock of the pandemic and remain in growth last year.

After overthrowing Egypt's first democratically elected

president in 2013 and pushing through painful fiscal reforms, Sisi is invested in the infrastructure drive's success.

But there is a cost. Some of those displaced by new roads are unhappy at losing their homes, others at seeing their neighbourhoods suddenly transformed. Analysts question how much difference the infrastructure boom can make while structural economic problems persist.

One area of intense activity is eastern Cairo, where new roads and bridges scythe through the urban sprawl towards a futuristic capital under construction in the desert and due to open this year.

In the Ezbet el Hagana neighbourhood, drilling machines and diggers are laying out an intersection that cuts through cheap,

informal housing, of which hundreds of units have been demolished to make way for the road.

When Sisi visited in February, he met ministers in front of unpainted brick housing blocks and discussed how half of Egypt's population of 100 million lived in similar conditions. Afterwards, Sisi announced it would be renamed "Hope City".

But residents of Ezbet el Hagana, many of whom moved from rural areas and built apartments and livelihoods, say they worry about the uncertainty.

Ali Abdelrehim, a 52-year-old father of four, said his house was not at immediate risk but others might suffer if authorities carry out the president's suggestion to widen the area's narrow streets. — **Reuters**



Lebanese journalists on a guided tour standing aboard the Turkish-owned MV Karadeniz Powership Fatmagul Sultan viewing the other powership Esra Sultan, both moored off the shore of the Lebanese town of Zouk Mosbeh, north of the capital Beirut. — **AFP File Photo**

Turkish power firm halts generation for Lebanese grid

BEIRUT: Lebanon lost as much as a quarter of its mains electricity supply last week when a Turkish firm halted power generation, the latest blow to the crisis-hit country already suffering long blackouts. Lebanon's ailing electricity sector is facing dire cash shortages, as the country grapples with its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

The caretaker energy minister has for months warned the country was heading to "total darkness" if no emergency funds were secured to keep the lights on.

Karpowership said it had been left with little choice but to cease production from its two power barges moored off Lebanon's coast after months of delayed payment and in the face of a prosecutor's threat to seize the vessels.

"We deeply regret shutting down" the barges in the coastal areas of Zouk and Jiyeh, the

Turkish company said in a statement.

"For 18 months, we have been exceedingly flexible with the state, continually supplying power without payment or a payment plan, because the country was already facing very hard times," it said.

But "no company can operate in an environment with such direct and undue risks".

A Karpowership source said the remaining fuel in the barges' power plants ran out at 0500 GMT and transmission to the Lebanese grid ceased. The source said the company was owed more than \$100 million by the Lebanese state but was equally concerned about the prosecutor's order.

In early May, a Lebanese prosecutor banned the barges from leaving the country over the alleged payment of illicit commissions, accusations that could lead to a \$25 million penalty, a Lebanese judicial source said at the time. — **AFP**



An aerial view of the construction site in the New Administrative Capital (NAC) east of Cairo. — **Reuters**



A Palestinian boy who fled his home due to Israeli air and artillery strikes sits on a mattress outside at a school hosting refugees in Gaza city as cross-border violence between the Israeli military and Palestinian activists continues in the Gaza Strip. – AFP



A protester holds the Palestinian flag during a demonstration in solidarity with the Palestinians called over the ongoing conflict with Israel, in Paris. – AFP



A tower housing AP, Al Jazeera offices collapses after Israeli missile strikes in Gaza city. – Reuters



Palestinian men salvage documents from the rubble of the Qlebo mosque at the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip after Israeli air strikes. – AFP

DEATH TOLL UP; VIOLENCE ROCKS GAZA AND WEST BANK

GAZA/JERUSALEM: Israeli planes renewed air strikes in Gaza early on Saturday and Hamas activists responded by firing rockets into Israel as their battle entered a fifth night and US and Arab diplomats sought an end to the violence.

Palestinian medics said at least 12 people were killed overnight in air strikes throughout Gaza. Health officials said a woman and her three children were among the dead after their house was hit in a refugee camp.

The Israeli military said it carried out strikes on a Hamas military intelligence facility and a number of rocket launching sites in northern Gaza.

The Palestinian religious affairs ministry said Israeli planes destroyed a mosque. A military spokesman said the army was checking the report.

Across the border, sirens sounded throughout much of southern Israel, sending residents running for shelter. In the cities of Beersheba and Ashdod buildings were struck by rockets. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

With no sign of an end to the fighting, casualties spread further afield, with Palestinians reporting on Friday 11 killed in the occupied West Bank amid clashes between protesters and Israeli security forces.

At least 132 people have been killed in Gaza since Monday, including 32 children and 21 women, and 950 others wounded, Palestinian medical officials said.

Among the eight dead in Israel were a soldier patrolling the Gaza border and six civilians, including two children, Israeli authorities said.

Ahead of a session of the UN Security Council on Sunday to discuss the situation, Biden administration envoy Hady Amr, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Israel and Palestinian Affairs, flew in on Friday.

The US Embassy in Israel said the aim was “to reinforce the need to work toward a sustainable calm.”

Israel launched day-long attacks on Friday to destroy what it said were several kilometres of



A tower housing AP, Al Jazeera offices collapses after Israeli missile strikes in Gaza city. – Reuters

tunnels, launch sites and weapons manufacturing warehouses used by the activists in an effort to halt the rocket attacks.

Across central and southern Israel, from small towns bordering Gaza to metropolitan Tel Aviv and southern Beersheba, people have adjusted to sirens wailing, radio and TV broadcast interruptions and the beeps of cellphones bearing red alerts that send them rushing for cover.

Cross-border hostilities between Israel and Palestinian activists in Gaza have been accompanied by violence in mixed communities of Jews and Arabs in Israel. Synagogues have been attacked and street fights have

broken out, prompting Israel’s president to warn of civil war.

Egypt was leading regional efforts to secure a ceasefire. Cairo was pushing for both sides to cease fire from midnight on Friday pending further negotiations, two Egyptian security sources said, with Egypt leaning on Hamas and others, including the US, trying to reach an agreement with Israel.

The foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan discussed efforts to end the Gaza confrontation and to prevent “provocations” in Jerusalem, Egypt’s foreign ministry said.

“The talks have taken a real and serious path on Friday,” a Palestinian official said. “The

mediators from Egypt, Qatar and the UN are stepping up their contacts with all sides in a bid to restore calm, but a deal hasn’t yet been reached.”

The UAE on Friday called for a ceasefire and negotiations while offering condolences to all victims of the fighting, citing the promise of September accords that made the UAE and Bahrain the first Arab states in a quarter century to establish formal ties with Israel.

The Israeli military said more than 2,000 rockets had been fired from Gaza into Israel since the start of the conflict, around half of them intercepted by missile defence systems and 350 fell into the Gaza Strip. — Reuters

Conflict turns into ‘horror movie’ for Gazan teens

GAZA CITY: Gazan teenager Mohammed Najib said on Friday that Israel’s bombardment of the coastal enclave and the barrages of rockets unleashed by Palestinian groups was like “watching a horror movie”.

Najib, 16, has had a frontline view of the battles raging since Monday from his family home in Rimal, a neighbourhood close to the centre of Gaza City.

Fireballs have lit up the night sky over the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip as Israel and Palestinian groups battle, with tower buildings levelled in massive Israeli air strikes.

One of the targets was the 14-storey Al Shuruq building, not far from Najib’s home. “It was horrifying” to see it collapse on Wednesday, Najib said.

“This crazy bombardment is

I used to like to stay up at night, but now I hate it. The last four days I hardly slept, I am terrified like never before

DIMA TALLAL, 17
from Gaza

like an electronic video game, it’s like watching a horror movie,” he said.

Najib said he was just “a child” during the last large-scale confrontation between Israel and Gaza’s armed groups in 2014.

“We used to hide under the staircase when there was bombardment but now... there is no place to hide.”

Now, he is even afraid to go



A Palestinian woman walks amidst the rubble following an Israeli strike on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

to the bathroom in case the bombardment starts. “I’m afraid of dying inside the bathroom,” he said.

Since Monday, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Gaza, pounded it with hundreds of mortar rounds and massed troops around the enclave ready for a possible ground offensive.

Palestinian groups have launched more than 2,000 rockets at Israeli cities and towns from Gaza.

At least 122 people have been killed in the densely-populated coastal enclave, and nine on the Israeli side.

Among those killed in Gaza were several Hamas leaders but the Palestinian group has remained defiant.

Najib’s fears are shared by young and old in Gaza.

“I used to like to stay up at night, but now I hate it,” because that is when Israeli air strikes pound Gaza and Palestinian activists fire rockets, said Dima Tallal, 17.

“The last four days I hardly slept, I am terrified like never before,” she added.

The escalation was triggered by a weekend of unrest at Jerusalem’s Al Aqsa mosque compound, which is sacred to both Muslims and Jews.

The unrest, in which riot police repeatedly clashed with Palestinians, was driven by anger over the looming evictions of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of east Jerusalem.

The violence has marred celebrations for Eid al Fitr which started on Thursday, marking the end of Ramadhan. — AFP

In brief

■ SEOUL



SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENT APPOINTS NEW PM

South Korea's former interior minister Kim Boo Kyum has officially been appointed as the country's new prime minister, receiving the certificate of appointment from President Moon Jae In in Seoul on Friday. Moon asked Kim to address the social fallout of the coronavirus pandemic and economic recovery, according to the presidential office.

A change of prime minister in the middle of a legislative term is not unusual in South Korea, a country in which the president wields the most power.

Kim succeeds former prime minister Chung Sye Kyun, who offered his resignation last month and is expected to run for president in the elections scheduled for March. — dpa

■ SYDNEY



FIRST AUSTRALIAN REPAT FLIGHT FROM INDIA LANDS

Australians returned from India on Saturday on the first government repatriation flight, as a ban on entry from the coronavirus-hit country expired. More than 70 people were stopped from boarding the repatriation flight in Delhi on Friday night because they either tested positive for coronavirus themselves or had close contacts who had, and around 80 people are thought to have boarded, news agency AAP reported.

The flight landed at an air force base in the northern city of Darwin, and passengers were transferred to a quarantine facility on the city's outskirts, according to AAP. — dpa

■ KATHMANDU



OUSTED NEPAL PREMIER OLI REAPPOINTED

Nepal's ousted prime minister has been reappointed after the political opposition failed to secure the majority of lawmakers' support.

KP Sharma Oli, 69, had lost a no-confidence vote on Monday following months of feuding within his ruling Nepal Communist Party and coalition partners. But after the president called on parties to propose a new candidate by Thursday evening, the opposition Nepali Congress found it was unable to cobble together a majority coalition. Oli, the leader of the biggest party in parliament, was reinstated. "Respected President Bidya Devi Bhandari has appointed KP Sharma Oli... as the prime minister," a statement from the president's office said. — AFP



Ruqia Bakhshi, one of the students who was injured in a car bomb blast outside a school receives treatment at a hospital in Kabul. — Reuters

Warring Afghan sides discuss peace talks

KABUL: Negotiators from the Afghan government and Taliban teams met on Friday to discuss speeding up stalled peace talks, officials from both sides said, as a deadly mosque blast shattered the calm of a holiday ceasefire in Afghanistan.

Despite unprecedented talks opening in September in Doha, the two warring sides have struggled to make headway, with violence escalating in Afghanistan as the United States pulls out the last of its troops.

"Today a meeting was held in Doha between the delegations of both negotiating sides", the Afghan government's peace team tweeted.

The parties "emphasised speeding up the peace talks in Doha", it added.

In a similar statement posted to Twitter, the Taliban said "both sides agreed to continue the talks after (Eid al Fitr)", which ends on Saturday.

A three-day ceasefire agreed by the warring sides came into force on Thursday to mark the Muslim holiday, after weeks of deadly violence.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the deadly blast which killed 12 people

But the calm was broken by a blast at a mosque on the outskirts of the Afghan capital, which killed 12 people including the imam leading Friday prayers.

No group has so far claimed the attack and the Taliban denied responsibility. A spokesman for the interior ministry said the explosives were placed in the mosque ahead of the prayers.

Afghans have been cautiously enjoying the rare respite from violence, only the fourth such truce in the two decades-long conflict.

Ceasefires in the past have largely held, in what is widely thought to be an exercise by the Taliban leadership to prove it has control over the myriad factions across the country that make up the hardline movement.

As violence has soared, including a wave of targeted killings on Afghanistan's educated

class, international efforts have been made to jump start the talks — including a one day conference in Moscow in March attended by representatives on both sides, as well as Russia, the United States, China and Pakistan.

Turkey was also scheduled to hold an Afghanistan conference in late April but it was postponed indefinitely because the Taliban declined to attend.

The United States, Russia and other mediators want to see some form of transitional government take power in Afghanistan involving the Taliban, but President Ashraf Ghani has insisted leaders can only be chosen at the ballot box.

Having made enormous gains on the battleground, the Taliban appear to have little to gain from either strategy.

Washington has vowed to end America's longest war but missed a deadline earlier this month to withdraw all of its troops, as agreed with the Taliban in return for security guarantees and a promise to launch talks with the Afghan government, who were cut out of the deal. — AFP

Taiwan tightens virus measures

TAIPEI: Taiwan on Saturday tightened measures to contain the coronavirus for two weeks after it reported 180 locally transmitted cases, a record daily high since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Health and Welfare Minister Chen Shih-chung, who heads the Central Epidemic Command Centre, told a news conference that, until May 28, all recreational facilities and sports centres should stay closed. All religious pilgrimage activities will also be banned, and all school campuses will not open to the public.

Meanwhile, tougher measures were imposed for two weeks on 7 million residents in the Taipei metropolitan area in northern Taiwan as a sharp rise of locally transmitted coronavirus cases was observed.

Residents in the area, which includes both the capital, Taipei City and New Taipei City, must wear masks at all times time outdoors, according to Chen.

To lower the risk of infection through close contact, in the Taipei metropolitan area, outdoor and indoor family and social gatherings with more than 10 and five participants, respectively, are banned, according to Chen. All libraries and venues for exhibitions, sports, games, concerts and mass gatherings

will have to stay closed.

Taiwan's Premier Su Tseng-chang said that medical resources and personal protective equipment are sufficient.

As of Saturday, Taiwan, with a population of 23.6 million, has only reported 1,475 cases of Covid-19, including 344 that were locally transmitted, and 12 deaths since the pandemic began.

According to Chen, the new Covid-19 patients reported on Saturday include 68 males and 112 females aged from under 5 years old to into their 80s. Among them, 89 patients live in Taipei City and 75 in New Taipei City.

Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je urged citizens to stay home as much as possible, saying the infection rate will become manageable in two weeks as most people in Taiwan are willing to wear masks and follow preventive instructions.

In the following two weeks, residents in the Taipei metropolitan area are still allowed to go to school, work and hospital. However, online schooling and remote working are strongly encouraged.

They are also required to provide their names before entering restaurants and supermarkets, for example, or attending essential gatherings such as weddings and funerals.

— dpa



Customers rush to shop after the government advised people to reduce leaving their homes and limit gatherings due to an increasing number of locally transmitted infections in Taipei. — Reuters

China lands spacecraft on Mars for first time

BEIJING: China has successfully landed a spacecraft on Mars for the first time, the Chinese space agency has announced.

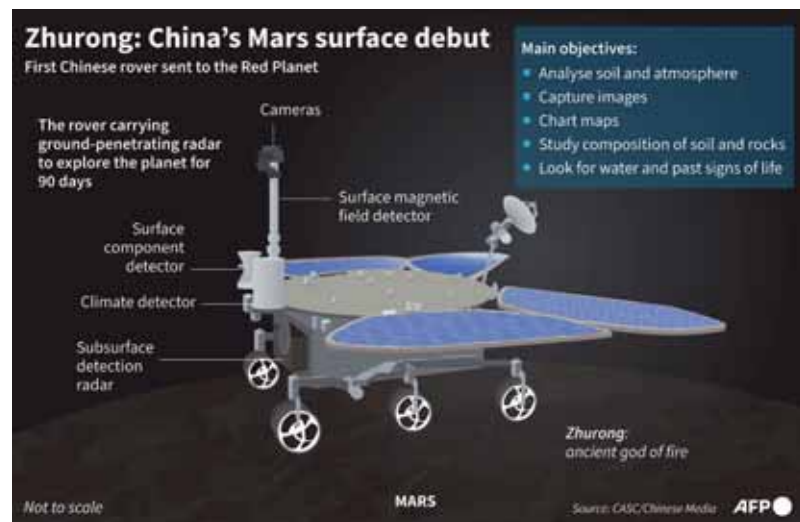
The landing module of the Tianwen-1 spacecraft touched down on the surface of the Red Planet on Saturday morning with the Zhurong rover on board.

Tianwen-1 took off from Earth on July 23 and reached the red planet's orbit in February.

The flight is one of the most difficult that China has ever undertaken. The landing is a huge challenge, as Mars has its own atmosphere, unlike the moon.

A parachute and brake thrusters helped slow down the Chinese probe; the vehicle initially hovered about 100 metres above the Martian surface to identify obstacles before finding a suitable landing site.

The manoeuvre was "extremely complicated", Chinese state media



cited Geng Yan, an official with the space programme, as saying. "Each step had only one chance. The actions were closely linked. If there had been only one mistake, the landing would have failed", Yan said.

President Xi Jinping congratulated the scientists involved.

If all goes to plan, the Zhurong rover, named for the Chinese god of fire, will investigate the Red Planet for at least three months.

The rovers weighs around 240 kilograms, has six wheels and four solar panels and can move on the surface of Mars at 200 metres per hour.

It carries scientific

The Zhurong rover, named for the Chinese God of Fire, will investigate the Red Planet for at least three months

instruments that will be used to gather information about the composition of the planet's surface and its geological structure and climate.

With its first Mars landing, new space power China wants to catch up with the United States, which has already sent several research devices to roam the planet.

The Soviet Union had a successful landing in the 1970s, but ultimately lost contact with their probe.

Beijing has steadily expanded its space programme over the past few years and has missions

planned for decades into the future.

After several successful flights to the moon, China began building its own space station at the end of April. The 22-tonne Tianhe, which is to form the core module of the space station, was brought up by a rocket at that time. It is expected to be completed around 2022.

In the coming weeks, two more space flights are to follow in close succession.

In May, the cargo spacecraft Tianzhou 2 could already dock with fuel and supplies. Three astronauts are also preparing to fly to Tianhe on board the Shenzhou 12, possibly in June.

The Chinese Mars mission is one of three flights to Mars that launched from Earth last summer. The other launches were by the US and the United Arab Emirates.

The US Perseverance rover landed in February. — dpa

■ CYCLONE HITS SOUTH INDIA



Police and rescue personnel evacuate a local resident through a flooded street in a coastal area after heavy rains under the influence of cyclone 'Tauktae' in Kochi. — AFP

Majority of Germans against benefits for fully vaccinated

BERLIN: A majority of Germans believe it would be wrong to lift coronavirus-related restrictions for people who are considered fully immune, according to a recent poll conducted by YouGov. The polling institute found that 32 per cent of people said no group should receive any benefits until everyone has had an opportunity to be vaccinated, and 21 per cent said fully vaccinated and recovered people should not be treated differently than the unvaccinated. In contrast, only 39 per cent of people think the restrictions

The data used is based on an online survey in which 2,049 people took part

should be lifted, while 8 per cent did not specify, according to YouGov. The data used is based on an online survey conducted between Monday and Wednesday in which 2,049 people took part. The results were weighted and are representative of Germany's adult population. Since last Sunday, Germany has lifted a number of restrictions for the fully vaccinated: They can

once again socialise without limits and no longer have to observe a night-time curfew. Travel is also easier for this group, as the quarantine obligation upon returning to Germany only applies if they are coming from an area where new coronavirus variants are present. They are also largely exempt from mandatory testing when entering the country. More than 30 million people have received at least one

vaccination so far, or 36.5 per cent of the population, according to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) disease control body. More than 9 million, or 10.9 per cent, have been able to receive both vaccinations. On Friday alone, 721,279 jobs were given, according to the RKI. An extraordinary vaccine campaign in southern Germany caused a big rush on Saturday, with about 850 people queuing for a jab as of 10 am, according to police. Those at the front had been waiting since at least 5 am (0300 GMT). — **dpa**

12 killed as tornadoes strike Chinese cities

SHANGHAI: Two tornadoes ripped through China's central city of Wuhan and a town in the eastern province of Jiangsu, killing 12 people and injuring hundreds while destroying homes and property, the official Xinhua news agency said on Saturday. Eight people were reported dead in Wuhan, in Hubei province, with 280 injured after Friday's tornado ripped through the district of Caidian at 8:39 pm, the agency said. The tornado toppled 27 houses and damaged 130 more, as well as two tower cranes and 8,000 sq metres of sheds at construction sites, it added. "I've grown up in Wuhan and I've never seen anything like it," one resident of the city posted on China's Weibo app. "There's been so much extreme weather recently." Another tornado struck the town of Shengze, in the Suzhou

area of tornado-prone Jiangsu province, killing four people and injuring 149, Xinhua said. Fire officials said the winds damaged electricity facilities and toppled several factory buildings, it added. Tornadoes often hit Jiangsu in the late spring and early summer. China's commercial hub of Shanghai, 100 km from Suzhou, was also hit by powerful thunderstorms, prompting weather officials to declare an alert. More heavy storms were expected in Shanghai and other parts of the Yangtze river delta region later on Saturday, the state weather forecaster said. China faces more extreme weather as a result of climate change, Jia Xiaolong, an official of the forecaster, told reporters late in April, adding that the risk of disasters such as heat waves and floods was expected to rise in coming years. — **Reuters**



Damaged vehicles and debris at a construction site after a tornado hit an economic zone in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province. — AFP

Pandemic to be 'far more deadly' this year, WHO warns

GENEVA: The World Health Organization issued a grim warning on Friday that the second year of Covid-19 was set to be "far more deadly", as Japan extended a state of emergency amid growing calls for the Olympics to be scrapped. "We're on track for the second year of this pandemic to be far more deadly than the first," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. The mood also darkened in Japan where the coronavirus state of emergency took in another three regions just 10 weeks before



the Olympics, while campaigners submitted a petition with more than 350,000 signatures calling for

Vaccination alone is not a guarantee against infection or against being able to transmit that infection to others
SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN
WHO's chief scientist
the Games to be cancelled. With Tokyo and other areas already under emergency orders



until the end of May, Hiroshima, Okayama and northern Hokkaido, which will host the

Olympic marathon, will now join them. In Europe, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that the arrival of the B.1.617.2 variant, one of those believed to be driving the Indian surge, could delay reopening of society and the economy. "This new variant could pose a serious disruption to our progress," Johnson said. Britain's health ministry has tracked the variant in northwest England and in London. Germany has already added the UK back onto its list of "risk areas" requiring extra checks — but

not necessarily quarantine — for incoming travellers. Elsewhere around the continent, tourist hotspots are opening up. Greece kickstarted its tourism season on Friday, hoping to reverse last year's miserable summer. "I hope to forget this damn Covid," said Jil Wirries, a 28-year-old student from Hanover, Germany, collecting luggage on the island of Crete. "Everything is terrible in Germany... people are depressed... I'm so happy to be here." France and Spain launched tourism campaigns this week too. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Model elephants paraded through London

A herd of life-size model elephants was paraded through central London to trumpet the idea that humans and wild animals can share space in this crowded world. The 125 elephants, brought to London by the conservation group Elephant Family, are the work of indigenous people who live alongside real beasts in southern India's Nilgiri Hills. The organisers hope to highlight the need for coexistence with wild animals after



lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic slowed down human activity and helped some threatened species to recover. It's a matter of mutual survival, said Ruth Ganesh, Elephant Family's principal trustee. — **AFP**

LISBON

Portugal to open to most European tourists

Portugal will open to tourists from nearly all European countries from Monday, the interior ministry said, following months of restrictions to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Travellers from EU countries with coronavirus rates below 500 cases per 100,000 residents during the last 14 days can make "all types of visits to Portugal, including even non-essential visits," the ministry said in a statement on Saturday. It said restrictions, limited to essential trips, would be



maintained for five EU countries — Cyprus, Croatia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Sweden. It stressed restrictions also remained on non-European countries including Brazil, India and South Africa. — **AFP**

ROME

Italy's Draghi appoints first female spy chief

Prime Minister Mario Draghi has appointed diplomat Elisabetta Belloni as the head of Italy's spy agency, the first woman to lead the Department of Information Security (DIS). Belloni, 62, has since 2016 been secretary general of the foreign ministry — the top job in the diplomatic service. Previously, she headed the ministry's crisis unit tasked with protecting Italian citizens abroad. She gained prominence after helping secure the release of



Italians kidnapped by fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan and leading operations to bring home Italian tourists hit by the 2004 Asian tsunami. — **Reuters**

After the deafening silence. What comes next?

So. The obligations of Ramadhan are behind you, and you have celebrated your renewal of faith through the Eid observance, hopefully, well and in a good frame of mind... what comes next?

Can you get beyond the never-ending, always changing restrictions, and the social implications of Covid-19? If you can, you are strong beyond description, a paragon of virtue, the quintessence of patience, the epitome of understanding, and the archetypal example of the modest, moderate, progressive individual we should all aspire to be... of any nationality, faith, colour, or gender. Anne Frank suggested in her poignant diary that we should, when we are afraid, lonely, or unhappy, to “go outside, find somewhere quite alone, with the heavens, nature, and God.” But it’s not so easy, is it?

Or do you still feel the weight of the pandemic on your shoulders every day when you wake up? Is the pandemic affecting your health, your ability to do your job effectively, your relationships with others, your financial status, or your ability to plan effectively for the future, particularly for yourself, and your loved ones? Don’t worry, you are certainly not alone, as after a year of lurching from one lockdown situation to another, one set of restrictions to another, in what appears to be a ‘hamster



Ray Petersen
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CAN YOU GET BEYOND THE NEVER-ENDING, ALWAYS CHANGING RESTRICTIONS, AND THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19?

wheel’ existence, a ‘lab rat’ culture, a thoroughly depressing set of social circumstances, featureless and futureless.

I may even be, unwittingly responsible for some of those depressing signs of our current existence, as for most of the last 59 weeks I have focused on offering advice and guidance to you, seeking to change attitudes to the pandemic. I have been encouraging you to practice social distancing, and to not only exercise an awareness of the dangers of Covid-19 to you, your families, and friends, but to your extended families, your communities, and your society.

However, I am done with it now! I am done with trying to save you from yourselves because the only conclusion I can draw from this current impasse between the way I see this pandemic, and the way you see it, is a gulf too wide, a bridge too far... an unreachable star. If you cannot recognise Einstein’s opinion that “doing the same thing all the time, and expecting a different result,” is the ultimate definition of... well, foolishness... then you cannot be helped.

There is a small upside, in that some are responding so effectively, and with such compassion and energy. Morgan Harper Nichols wrote, “Going through things you never thought you would have to, takes you to places you never

thought you could go to.” Of course, I am referring of the health workers around the world who place themselves at risk every day of the week. They deserve much more than our thanks, but at least through International Nurses Day, on May 12, we could offer some recognition of that profession’s commitment, albeit only words.

Arundhati Roy, 1976 Booker Prize-winner, wrote that historically, pandemics have forced us to break with the past and imagine our world in new ways, saying, “This one is no different, it is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.” She is advocating that my world, our world, your world, will never be the same again... and she may well be right!

I am disappointed how this society has responded to the challenges of the pandemic, that even now, far too many of you are denying it, rejecting the pandemic to suit your own agendas.

Any response to community issues, from the bottom to the top, requires responses that are common to all, without exceptions.

Too many community leaders have either not spoken, or not been heard, and as chosen, appointed, or elected leaders, have not therefore, fulfilled the expectations of those who look to you for inspiration. So, what comes next?

AS COVID EBBS

Tourists make their comeback to US capital

DELPHINE TOUITOU

With the park in front of the White House reopening last week, selfie-snapping tourists have suddenly reappeared.

Washington DC, home to some of the toughest anti-Covid regulations in the country, is now reopening, highlighting the United States’s steady transition back to normality. Boasting imposing landmarks such as the US Capitol and the Supreme Court, Washington began reopening the doors of its museums on Friday, including the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the National Portrait Gallery, which will soon host a painting of former president Donald Trump.

By next Friday, six museums run by the famed Smithsonian Institution, and the National Zoo, will once again welcome visitors as vaccination rates climb and infections continue to plunge. The question now is how to attract more tourists and spur an economic rebound after a year of pandemic restrictions that left the US federal capital city, normally a hub for conferences and meetings of international institutions, stricken.

“For the moment, I have very few customers,” said Ngre Phung, whose mobile souvenir shop is parked near the African American museum.

So far, DC residents, who are packing the

This is our first trip in just over a year. We were waiting to be fully vaccinated and for the city to get a little busier. But these leisure travellers are not the ones who typically fill hotel rooms

GHANIA AND ABDEL
Tourists

terraces of restaurants, haven’t rushed downtown to peruse Phung’s selection of caps, T-shirts and other trinkets. Instead the shopkeeper relies heavily on visitors to nearby museums.

“It’s very key with the museums opening,” said Anne Purcell, director of hospitality market analytics for the northeast region at CoStar Group.

Between the

555-foot Washington Monument obelisk and a memorial to World War II, Read Scott Martin sat on his pedicab, patiently waiting for customers to emerge from the crowd.

At the moment he gives about three or four tours a day, but that can double on weekends.

“The last few weeks, it was improving,” he said, especially since the city’s Cherry Blossom Festival in the spring. His optimism is boosted by increasing arrivals of tourists from Asia and Latin America.

One of them is 17-year-old Valeria, who came from Peru for a week-long visit, posing for photos in front of the White House with her little sister and parents.

“We wanted to come before the Covid but we have to cancel our trip,” she said.

However, the overwhelming majority of visitors are from other US states coming to see family, or tourists stopping by on their way to New York. Ghania and Abdel, who live in Los Angeles, were in Washington to visit their daughter Shiraz, 26, who just graduated from Georgetown University.

“This is our first trip in just over a year,” the couple originally from Algeria said in French. “We were waiting to be fully vaccinated and for the city to get a little busier.”

But these leisure travellers are not the ones who typically fill hotel rooms.

Hotel occupancy in Washington, DC on Saturday, May 1 was only 43.4 per cent, slipping to 42.4 per cent the following Saturday, according to STR, which provides data and analysis for the industry. — **AFP**

PERPETUAL IRRELEVANCE?

‘Extinction’ warning to UK’s Labour as Europe’s centre-left struggles

JITENDRA JOSHI

Britain’s Labour Party is licking its wounds after another electoral drubbing, and can look to the decaying remains of once-great movements in Europe for a sign of potential worse to come.

Across the continent, insiders and analysts say, social democratic parties are struggling for relevance: riven by infighting, lacking a coherent message, hobbled by weak leadership. The coronavirus pandemic has only accentuated a trend years in the making, since at least the 2008 financial crisis, and cultural fault lines have emerged to shape debates such as Brexit in Britain or republican values against “radicals” in France.

“Political parties have no divine right to exist and progressive parties of the centre and centre-left are facing marginalisation, even extinction, across the Western world,” former Labour prime minister Tony Blair wrote in the *New Statesman* magazine.

Democrat Joe Biden’s election to the White House is scant comfort to the European left, he stressed.

Beyond the pandemic, Blair wrote, a political realignment is still at play in the United States, culture wars remain a potent rallying cry for the right, and the Republicans could yet coalesce behind a more disciplined leader than Donald Trump.

“In short, leave to one side Joe Biden, and around today’s Western world



Britain’s Labour Party leader Keir Starmer speaks during the debate on the Queen’s Speech at the House of Commons in London, Britain, on May 11. — **Reuters**

ACROSS THE CONTINENT, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES ARE STRUGGLING FOR RELEVANCE... RIVEN BY INFIGHTING, LACKING A COHERENT MESSAGE, HOBbled BY WEAK LEADERSHIP

there are only flickers of a progressive agenda with deep majority support,” he said, appealing for a new centre-left politics in an era of rapid technological change.

Grandeess such as Blair are right to be worried, argued Sophie Porschlegel of the European Policy Centre in Brussels, after Labour saw Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Conservatives make deep inroads into its traditional heartlands last week. Across Britain, France and Germany, the old industrialised working class is no more and the centre ground has shifted, she said.

“There is a stronger identification

with parties that reflect cultural lines,” Porschlegel said.

“I think that’s a negative development, but it is one that cannot be undone, and that’s why social democracy has such an issue at the moment, because they need to define themselves along this new conflict line — and they don’t want to.

“There’s definitely a lack of leadership and a lack of ideas,” she said, commenting that Germany’s Social Democratic Party (SPD) was finally crafting new policy proposals ahead of September elections, but that it was “too late”. — **AFP**

sport

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PARIS: Lille stand tantalisingly close to a first Ligue 1 title in a decade, but Kylian Mbappe is convinced that Paris Saint-Germain will only have themselves to blame if they fail to retain their crown.

PSG have won the French title in seven of the last eight seasons and were fully expected to do so again this year given the huge financial advantage the Qatar-owned club enjoys.

Despite possessing the two most expensive signings in football history in Mbappe and Neymar, Mauricio Pochettino's team find themselves second, three points behind Lille with two games remaining.

PSG's 1-1 draw at Rennes last weekend followed a 3-0 victory for Lille at Lens, and left the northern club requiring four points from their last two outings to be sure of becoming champions for the first time since 2011.

It would be a remarkable success story for Lille, but also a damning indictment of PSG's failings in a campaign in which they have lost eight times already, as many as in the last two seasons combined and the most they have suffered in a single season since 2010-11.

"If we don't win the league it will have been us who failed to win it rather than them who won it", Mbappe told Eurosport after PSG beat Montpellier on penalties in midweek to reach the French Cup final.

After his comments caused a backlash, Mbappe took to social media to explain himself.

"Lille would make for great champions if they are crowned but with eight defeats, if we lose the title we will be fully responsible", Mbappe wrote alongside the hashtag #Respect.

Lille, who took four points out of a possible six against Paris this season, could even win the league with a game to spare this Sunday.

In the seemingly unlikely event that PSG fail to

beat mid-table Reims, Christophe Galtier's Lille will be champions by bettering the capital side's result when they host Saint-Etienne.

PSG fans will of course disagree, but a Lille success would certainly be a shot in the arm for the French game four years after Monaco — with a young Mbappe in their ranks — took the title away from Paris.

Pochettino's team could still end the season without a major trophy, and could even miss out on a top-three finish and Champions League qualification with both Monaco and Lyon just behind them.

However, they could also still finish with a domestic double following their Champions League semi-final loss to Manchester City. As well as trying to reel in Lille they play Monaco in the French Cup final next Wednesday. — AFP

FIXTURES ON SUNDAY (ALL 1900 GMT) Bordeaux v Lens, Dijon v Nantes, Lille v Saint-Etienne, Lorient v Metz, Marseille v Angers, Monaco v Rennes, Montpellier v Brest, Nice v Strasbourg, Nimes v Lyon, Paris Saint-Germain v Reims

PSG STUMBLES LEAVE LILLE ON BRINK OF LIGUE 1 TITLE

KEY STATS

4 LILLE NEED FOUR MORE POINTS TO BE CERTAIN OF WINNING THEIR FOURTH FRENCH LEAGUE TITLE.

3 POCHETTINO HAS LOST THREE OF HIS NINE HOME LIGUE 1 GAMES IN CHARGE OF PSG. THAT IS AS MANY DEFEATS AS THOMAS TUCHEL HAD IN 42 HOME MATCHES AND AS MANY AS THE PREVIOUS TWO COACHES – UNAI EMERY AND LAURENT BLANC – HAD IN 95 HOME LEAGUE GAMES COMBINED.

17 IF LYON AVOID DEFEAT IN NIMES THEY WILL EQUAL THE FRENCH TOP-FLIGHT RECORD OF 17 AWAY LEAGUE GAMES WITHOUT LOSING IN A SINGLE SEASON, MATCHING THEIR OWN ACHIEVEMENT FROM 2005/06 AND THAT OF SAINT-ETIENNE IN 1980/81.

FRENCH LIGUE 1 TABLE AHEAD OF THE PENULTIMATE ROUND OF MATCHES THIS SEASON ON SUNDAY (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Lille	36	23	10	3	62	22	79
Paris SG	36	24	4	8	80	28	76
Monaco	36	23	5	8	74	41	74
Lyon	36	21	10	5	74	38	73
Marseille	36	15	11	10	50	44	56
Lens	36	15	11	10	55	51	56
Rennes	36	15	10	11	49	38	55
Montpellier	36	13	11	12	58	61	50
Nice	36	14	7	15	47	49	49
Metz	36	12	10	14	42	45	46
Saint-Etienne	36	12	9	15	42	53	45
Angers	36	12	8	16	37	53	44
Reims	36	9	15	12	41	44	42
Brest	36	11	7	18	50	64	40
Bordeaux	36	11	6	19	37	55	39
Strasbourg	36	10	8	18	46	57	38
Lorient	36	10	8	18	47	66	38
Nantes	36	8	13	15	42	53	37
Nimes	36	9	8	19	38	64	35
Dijon	36	3	9	24	24	69	18

NOTE

Top three qualify for Champions League; fourth and fifth go into Europa League; sixth-placed team into Europa Conference League
Bottom two relegated; third from bottom into play-off against team from Ligue 2

PLAYER TO WATCH

The veteran Turkish striker has been the driving force behind Lille's title charge. His tally of 15 goals this season is the second highest for a player aged 35 or older in any of Europe's five leading leagues behind Cristiano Ronaldo (27).

Yilmaz, signed for free from Besiktas, is one of five nominees for France's player of the year, voted by his fellow professionals. He has stiff competition in Neymar, Memphis Depay, Wissam Ben Yedder and, above all, Mbappe. Despite that Yilmaz would surely deserve the award if Lille do take the title.

BURAK YILMAZ



MCKEOWN SWIMS SECOND FASTEST 100M BACKSTROKE EVER

SYDNEY: Australian teenager Kaylee McKeown fired a warning shot on Saturday ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, swimming the second fastest women's 100 metre backstroke ever to narrowly miss American rival Regan Smith's world record.

The 19-year-old, who is shaping as a serious contender for multiple Olympic medals, hit the wall in 57.63 seconds at the Sydney Open, just outside Smith's all-time mark of 57.57, set at the 2019 world

championships.

It followed her victory in the 200m backstroke on Friday in the fourth quickest time in history.

"I wasn't expecting to come out and do that swim this morning and I've got no complaints about it. I'm pretty happy," she said after setting a new Australian and Commonwealth record.

"It was so close to the world record but I have to have something to chase and Regan is still the No 1 girl at the moment."



Australia's Kaylee McKeown

She revealed that Smith texted her after her 200m performance.

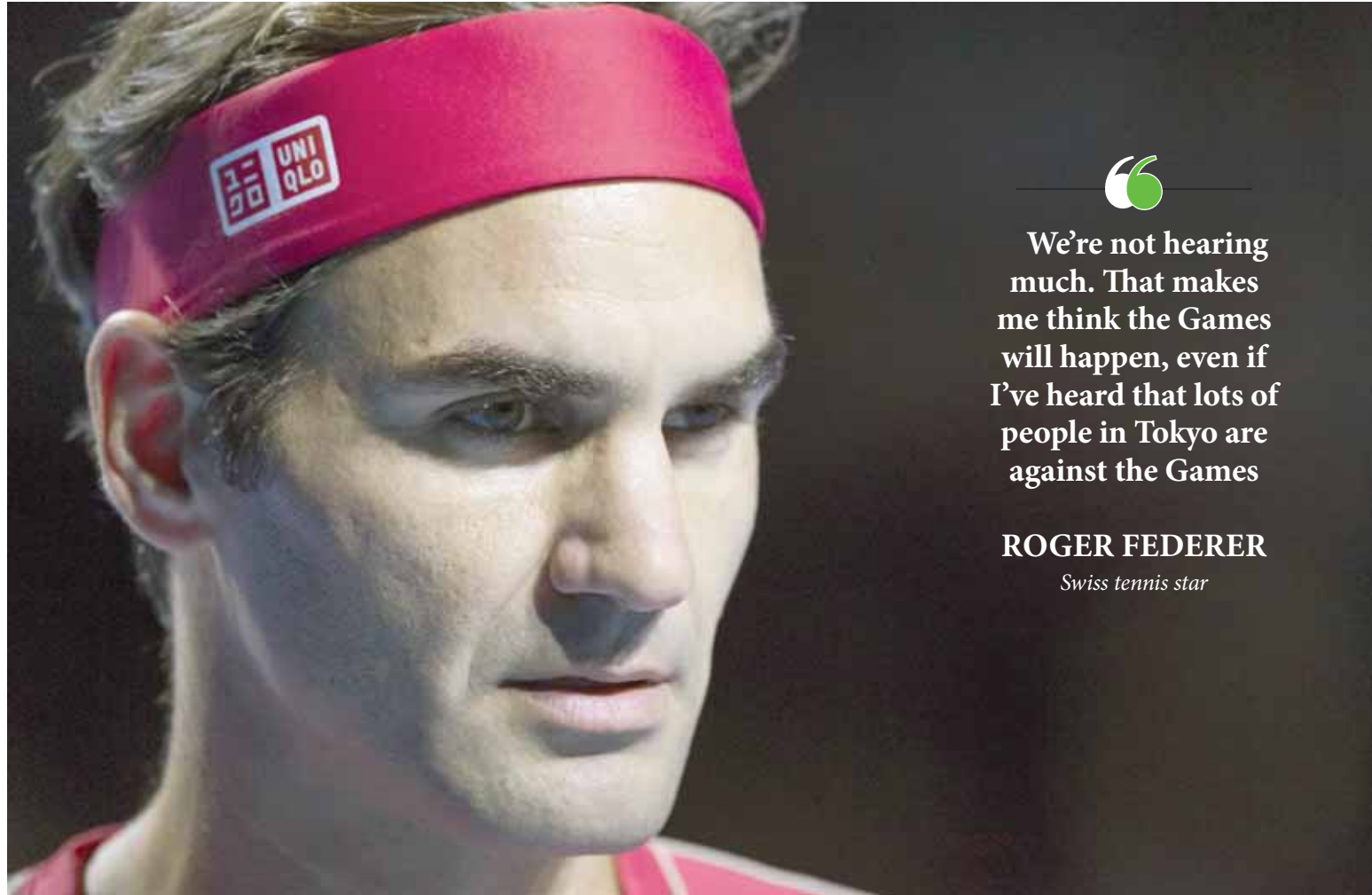
"It's nice to hear from competitors from all over the world, nice to know they're watching and they've got your back as well," she said.

"Regan is an outstanding swimmer and she's a lovely person. "It's a pretty outstanding world record to be chasing and to come up and edge a bit closer is exciting."

Australia's Olympic trials are

in Adelaide next month, where records could fall. McKeown is also set to contest the 200m individual medley in Tokyo.

Emma McKeon is also targeting a clutch of gold medals in Japan, swimming away from the field to win the 100m butterfly on Saturday in 56.81 then backing up to clinch the 50m freestyle in 24.58. It followed her victory in the 100m freestyle on Friday in the year's fastest time and sixth quickest of all-time. — AFP



We're not hearing much. That makes me think the Games will happen, even if I've heard that lots of people in Tokyo are against the Games

ROGER FEDERER

Swiss tennis star

Competitors need decision on Olympics, says Federer

GENEVA: Roger Federer said on Friday that athletes need a firm decision on whether the Tokyo Olympics are going ahead, with the tennis star saying he was in two minds over the Games.

An Olympics singles gold medal is the only major honour missing from the Swiss great's collection — but the 39-year-old said he would understand if the Games were called off.

The pandemic-postponed 2020 Olympics are due to open on July 23.

"It's difficult," Federer told Switzerland's Leman Bleu television.

"We're not hearing much. That makes me think the Games will happen, even if I've heard that lots of people in Tokyo are against the Games."

Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency on Friday, just 10 weeks before the Olympics, as campaigners submitted a petition with more than 350,000 signatures calling for the Games to be scrapped.

With Tokyo and other areas already under emergency orders until the end of May, three more regions — including northern Hokkaido, which will host the Olympic marathon — now join them.

The widening emergency, aimed at combatting a fourth wave putting Japan's medical system under strain, comes with public opinion firmly opposed to holding the Games, fearing further infections.

"Honestly I don't know what to think," said Federer.

"I would love to play in the Olympics, win a medal for Switzerland, that would make me so proud.

"But if that doesn't happen due to the situation, I would be the first to understand.

"But I think what the athletes need is a decision: is it happening or isn't it?

"At the moment, we have the impression that it will. We know it's a fluid situation. And also you can also decide as an athlete

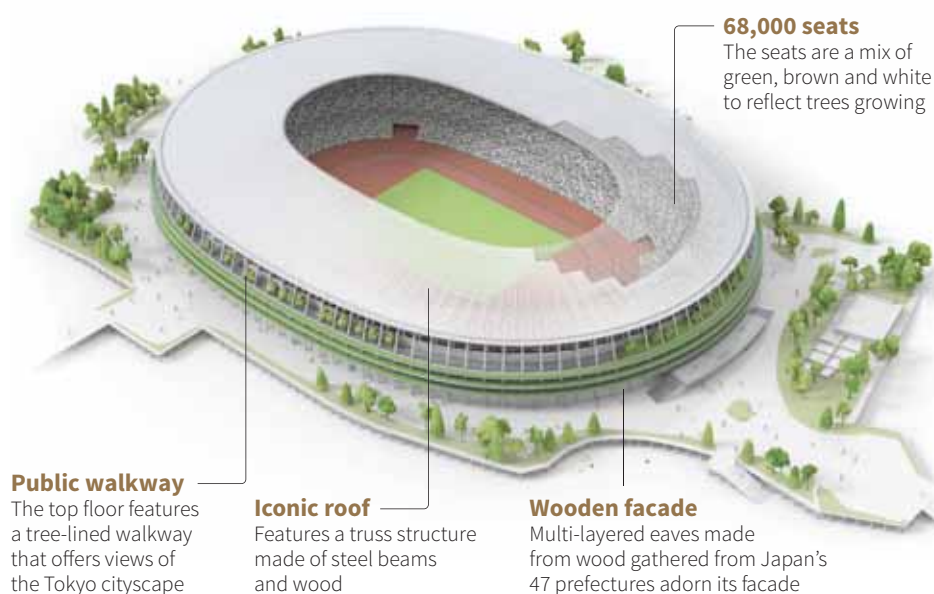
Olympic stadium

NEW NATIONAL STADIUM

Completed at a cost of more than \$1.4 billion, the stadium will host the athletics and soccer events during the games in addition to the opening and closing ceremonies.

Construction started in December 2016, about 14 months later than planned, after the original design was scrapped because of a public outcry over spiraling costs.

The centerpiece stadium is designed by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma who is known for blending traditional Japanese style with modern elements.



68,000 seats
The seats are a mix of green, brown and white to reflect trees growing

Public walkway

The top floor features a tree-lined walkway that offers views of the Tokyo cityscape

Iconic roof

Features a truss structure made of steel beams and wood

Wooden facade

Multi-layered eaves made from wood gathered from Japan's 47 prefectures adorn its facade

Sources: Tokyo2020; Reuters

Staff, 3D illustration by Jeong Suh, 05/05/2021

REUTERS

if you want to go. If you feel there's a lot of resistance, maybe it's better not to go. I don't know."

FEDERER VACCINATED

Federer is playing in the Geneva Open tournament next week, his second event since coming back from more than a year off with knee problems.

Beijing 2008 Olympic singles champion

Rafael Nadal admitted on Tuesday that he had not yet decided whether he would

participate in Tokyo, giving himself more time to decide according to "circumstances".

On Monday, Serena Williams said she was undecided about going to the Olympics, while Japanese stars Naomi Osaka and Kei Nishikori have both raised concerns about whether Tokyo should be hosting the Games at all.

Federer said he has been immunised with the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine.

"I'm glad that I could do it, with all the travelling I do," he told Leman Bleu. — AFP

Quartararo shrugs off surgery to take French MotoGP pole position

LE MANS, France: Home favourite Fabio Quartararo made light of the tricky changeable conditions and his recent surgery to claim pole for the French MotoGP in Saturday qualifying at Le Mans.

With intermittent rain making life difficult at the Bugatti circuit Quartararo topped the time sheets from his Yamaha team-mate Maverick Vinales with Ducati's Jack Miller completing the front row.

Quartararo's pole grab comes just 11 days after undergoing 'arm pump' surgery following problems with his right forearm, which saw him slip to a 13th place finish last time out at Jerez.

"It's fantastic," beamed the 22-year-old.

"I'm pleased to be on pole for the second successive time here."

The Frenchman had started the Spanish MotoGP last time out at the top of the standings. He surged into an early lead and seemed set for his third win in four races this season. But muscle problems left him with no strength in his right forearm to finish down the pack and in tears.

He is placed two points off the top of the standings which are led by Francesco Bagnaia (Ducati).

Both Bagnaia and the reigning world champion Joan Mir failed to make it out of Q1 and into Q2 and the battle for pole, leaving the pair well down the grid for Sunday's race.

Franco Morbidelli on Yamaha's satellite SRT bike is on the second row after posting the fourth quickest time in Q2 alongside the other home chance Johann Zarco and six-time world champion Marc Marquez.

Marquez, back this season after multiple operations on the arm he broke in the opening race of last year, led for much of qualifying before his time was bettered in the closing flying lap. — AFP



Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP French rider Fabio Quartararo reacts after taking the pole position of the Q2 qualifying session with a timing of 1'32.600 ahead the French Moto GP Grand Prix in Le Mans, northwestern France.— AFP



Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP's French rider Fabio Quartararo rides during the third free practice session of the French Moto GP Grand Prix in Le Mans. — AFP

ROME: World number one Novak Djokovic survived a three-set battle with Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas over two days in their rain-delayed quarterfinals to advance to the Italian Open semifinals on Saturday.

The defending champion won through 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 after 3hr 16min on court in the clash which had been suspended from Friday because of rain in the Italian capital.

The Serb, a five-time Rome winner, had been trailing 6-4, 2-1 when the game was halted overnight.

Djokovic twice recovered from a break down in the final set to seal a berth in the final four for the eighth straight year on his second match point.

The 33-year-old next meets Italian Lorenzo Sonego who shocked Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 in 2hr 33min.

"It felt like we played two matches, actually we did, one yesterday where he was a better player," said Djokovic.

"He started also better today I managed somehow to hold my nerve, breaking serve at important moments.

"Without a doubt, until the last shot I didn't know whether



Serbia's Novak Djokovic (R) taps hands with Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas after winning the Italian Open quarterfinal at Foro Italico in Rome, Italy. — AFP

I was going to win but I believed that I could.

"I am just really, really glad to overcome this challenge. It was probably the toughest match of the year for me so far."

Monte Carlo winner Tsitsipas had moved to a 4-2 lead in the second set on their return to court on Saturday, but Djokovic made a crucial break for 4-4, the Serb saving break points in the following game

for 5-4 and breaking in the 12th game for 7-5 to level at one set all.

Both hit 15 winners in a balanced second set but Tsitsipas paid for four more unforced errors than his rival who used his forehand to break through with winners along the line.

Tsitsipas twice led by a break in the deciding set and served for the match at 5-4, but winner

Djokovic rallied to take a 6-5 lead.

Tsitsipas served to force a final-set tie-break, but the 18-time Grand Slam winner again proved too strong for the Greek who has won none of their three meetings on clay.

Djokovic, 33, stretched his winning record over Tsitsipas, 22, to 5-2.

The Serb's next opponent, 33rd-ranked Sonego, won their

only previous meeting in the quarterfinals on hard court in Vienna last year.

SWIATEK IN LAST FOUR

In women's section, Poland's Iga Swiatek ousted fifth seed Elina Svitolina to advance to the semifinals.

The reigning French Open champion won 6-2, 7-5 in 1hr 36min against the Ukrainian in the match which had been pushed back from Friday because of rain in Rome.

Swiatek, the 15th seed, will play American teenager Coco Gauff later for a place in Sunday's final.

Gauff, 17, advanced on Friday to her first clay-court semifinal after world number one Ashleigh Barty retired injured while leading their last eight clash 6-4, 2-1.

The Australian suffered from a recurring right arm issue and chose against taking any risks before the French Open, which she won in 2019, starting on May 30. — AFP

ITALIAN OPEN RESULTS

MEN (QUARTERFINALS):
Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) 4-6, 7-5, 7-5; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA) bt Andrey Rublev (RUS x7) 3-6, 6-4, 6-3; Reilly Opelka (USA) bt Federico Delbonis (ARG) 7-5, 7-6 (7/2); Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Alexander Zverev (GER x6) 6-3, 6-4
WOMEN (QUARTERFINALS):
Iga Swiatek (POL x15) bt Elina Svitolina (UKR x5) 6-2, 7-5; Coco Gauff (USA) bt Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) 4-6, 1-2 - retired; Karolina Pliskova (CZE x9) bt Jelena Ostapenko (LAT) 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/1); Petra Martic (CRO) bt Jessica Pegula (USA) 7-5, 6-4

DJOKOVIC
SURVIVES
TSITSIPAS
SCARE

SWIATEK OUSTS SVITOLINA TO
ADVANCE TO ITALIAN OPEN SEMIS

Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates a point against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas. — AFP

Oman beach soccer team concludes Morocco camp

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Oman's beach soccer national team players concluded recently the overseas camp in Morocco under supervision of the experienced long-time coach Talib Hilal.

The six-day external preparatory camp, which began on May 10, featured two vital friendly games against Morocco beach soccer team. The Sultanate's team had suffered a 5-2 loss in the first preparatory game while they registered a 3-1 win in the second friendly game. Abdullah al Souti scored two goals and Khalid al Orami netted the opening goal.

Despite a short camp in Morocco, the former Asian champions obtained many technical purposes and gained



the match experience after long absence since last December. The technical staff of the team headed by Hilal, tested different faces during both the matches.

The first warm-up match did not go well for the national team due to long break from training sessions and official matches. However, the Sultanate's beach



soccer team players bounced back strongly in the second match as they beat the hosts 3-1 to confirm that the technical preparatory plan is moving in right direction.

The abroad camp, which was an invitation from Morocco Football Federation, was part of preparation for the top assignment at Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup

Russia 2021 that will be held from August 19 to 29. The following step in the team's preparatory plan is to travel to Dubai in June to have the second overseas camp.

The preparatory plan will feature many training sessions besides friendly matches against tough international teams to shape the players for the global beach soccer event.

The Sultanate's beach soccer team had participated in Beach Soccer World Cup in Ravenna city in Italy in 2011 and in Portugal in 2015. The third participation of the team was at the Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay in December 2019. The Oman team had registered a crucial win against Nigeria. The national team had suffered two losses against Portugal and Brazil.

features



A special gift for kids with cancer

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI
Instagram: @mazoun_alghailani

They face the pain with smiles and battle the disease with patience and determination; their courage a source of inspiration for others. Children with cancer are often overlooked by society. Even before the pandemic, they are in constant need of care and psychological support and the outbreak has magnified the problems that they face.

Understanding the challenges that these children face, the Oman Cancer Association (OCA) South Al Sharqiyah had launched an activity that would bring smiles to these children.

The branch surprised the children with Eid al Fitr gifts.

"Presenting gifts to children with cancer on the occasion of Eid al Fitr is the way of OCA South Al Sharqiyah

branch to bring joy and happiness to these children and their families. Through these gifts, it is the goal of the group to help them to at least, forget their disease for a little while," shared Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Farsi, president of OCA South Al Sharqiyah branch.

"The gifts were sent to children at the Oman Cancer Associations' Dar al Hanan, a home for children with cancer where they are housed while receiving their chemotherapy treatment at the Royal Hospital," Al Farsi said.

He added that different batch of gifts will also be sent directly to the homes of children with cancer in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

"We wanted them to enjoy these gifts. We also make sure that the gifts they receive will help enhance their abilities to move inside the house and contribute to their overall immunity. In addition to the gifts, we also send nominal amount to serve as their

"eidiya." Our goal is to shower them with these gifts and make them happy," he added.

Al Farsi said that for cancer patients to receive gifts has an impact on their psychological needs thereby helping them strengthen their immunity.

"Gift plays important role in enhancing the child's immunity against cancer. Some scientific studies have proven that continuously making the child happy contributes to their speedy recovery. The gift is a symbolic element to help them heal. Also, by giving them gifts that they can play with, we also allow them to interact with other children giving them the psychological support they need," Al Farsi expounded.

Among the association's programmes is online meeting with children and their families to congratulate them on Eid, talk with them and find out their requirements.

The number of children who bene-

fited from the initiative totals 30 — 16 children are in Dar Al-Hanan, and the rest of children are distributed in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

"Today I am very excited and happy for the gift, Eid Mubarak to you," Aseel al Musharfi, a cancer patient said.

"Thanks to the association for the Eid gift and the efforts made to make my daughter and all cancer children happy, and grateful for the efforts of providing the healthcare needed," Aseels' mother said.

The association provides various services to cancer patients, and this includes providing them with necessary medical equipment, facilitating the appointments for cancer patients in hospitals of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate and raising funds to support the association's activities.

While the association faces a lot of challenges due to the pandemic, the leadership and members and volunteers are committed to delivering the required services expected from them.

Adhering to the strict regulations set by the Supreme Committee, OCA South Al Sharqiyah transformed an old residence to serve as their headquarters to deliver visual communication to members. The association was officially recognised by the Ministry of Social Development in 2010 by April 23, 2021, they moved to the new building to enhance the services they deliver to their causes.

Dr Mohammed said that currently, there are three employees in the new building and a new board of directors elected on March 25 consisting of seven members for a period of two years. The association will strive to continue achieving the general goals of the association, which is promoting health awareness among members of the society about cancer prevention.

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



IRAQ'S HERITAGE BATTERED BY DESERT SUN, RAIN AND STATE APATHY

One of the world's oldest churches is crumbling deep in Iraq's desert, another victim of years of conflict, government negligence and climate change in a country with a rich heritage... **Story on P16**

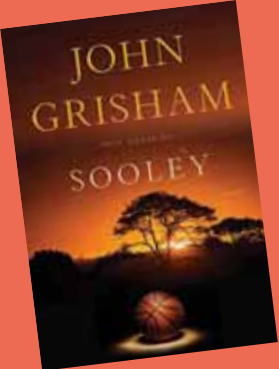
HERITAGE



DAMASCUS FAMILY PRESERVES SUFI WHIRLING TRADITION

Three-year-old Anas al-Kharrat gracefully raises one hand to the sky as his long white robe twirls around his tiny spinning body... **Story on P15**

READ



SOOLEY
BY JOHN GRISHAM

Samuel Sooleymon receives a basketball scholarship to North Carolina Central and determines to bring his family over from a civil war-ravaged South Sudan.

TRAVEL TALES



DISCOVER THE MAGICAL CANTON OF VAUD BY ROAD

Travellers can choose to self-drive or hire chauffeur driven cars and explore some of the most beautiful destinations in Switzerland including Lausanne and Montreux Riviera... **Story on P15**

LOCAL SCENE



'HISAN ARABI:' THE ARABIAN HORSE, POETRY IN MOTION

The bloodline of the Arabian horse is perpetuated through most refined breeds of equine athletes to be found around the world today, with their muscular conformation, uniquely shaped, almost arrogant head carriage, deep chest, and remarkable intelligence and sensitivity.... **Story on P14**



‘Hisan Arabi’: The Arabian Horse, Poetry in Motion

STORY BY RAY PETERSEN
PHOTOS BY ALEX PETERSEN

The bloodline of the Arabian horse is perpetuated through most refined breeds of equine athletes to be found around the world today, with their muscular conformation, uniquely shaped, almost arrogant head carriage, deep chest, remarkable intelligence and sensitivity.

Their cultural links to the Sultanate were embraced by the late Sultan Qaboos, and are reflected in the magnificent Royal Cavalry, home to hundreds of horses, horsemen and horsewomen, for whom their daily duties are a labour of love. Horses, thrive on routine, with unchanging stables, bedding, feed, water buckets and exercise times important to their peace of mind, however, they have also been proven scientifically (Hausberger, 2007), to respond with exceptional positivity to spontaneous, genuine and diversity of affection, much as humans do. Renowned Arabian breeder, artist and author, Gladys Brown Edwards, wrote in ‘The Arabian, War Horse to Show Horse’, of their “romanticism, mysticism and near-divinity across centuries”, and their rapport with those devoted to the horse’s well-being.

The Arab lends itself to pomp and ceremony with its inimitably cheeky dishdasha head, accentuating its incredibly intelligent eyes, its inevitable high head carriage, its high stepping gait, especially when it knows it is being watched. The

Arab’s distinctive muscular development suggests athleticism, its solid bone structure strength, its deep chest hints strongly at a massive heart and lungs so endurance is yet another quality of this versatile breed.

The Royal Cavalry of Oman, though being a largely ceremonial unit among today’s tanks and rockets’ militia, invokes the same sense of history, culture and tradition, as the United Kingdom’s Household Cavalry Lifeguards; the Italian Lancieri di Montebello; the Russian Cossacks, the United States First Cavalry; the French Dragons of the Republican Guard and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the ‘mounties.’

It is believed the first Arabians were bred throughout the 7th Century, then, through the 13th to 15th centuries such notables as the Ottoman Empire’s Suleiman the Magnificent, Mehmed the Conqueror, Egypt’s El Naseri and Muhammad Ali Pasha, ruled through their Arabian horse cavalries. The global spread of the Arabians in later centuries includes such notable breeders as Russia’s National Stud, Poland’s Slawuta Stud, Babolna Stud in Hungary, Weil Stud in Germany, Spain’s Yeguada Militar, the Darley and Godolphin Studs in England and Kellogg Farms in the United States.

Oman’s Royal Cavalry has enjoyed racing success recently with Azwan winning the Clarendon Stakes at Newbury, while Nafees has been the main flagbearer for the Royal Cavalry with stunning wins in the Qatar Derby, The UAE President’s Cup, The United Kingdom Arabian Stakes and the prestigious 2018 Shadwell

International. The Royal Cavalry has also been prominent in Endurance Racing across Europe with Saleh Bin Salim Al Balushi and Raffal, after taking out the Jullianges Endurance event in France, in May of this year, also in showing, tent-pegging and any number of other equestrian disciplines.

We are most likely to encounter the Royal Cavalry, and regional equine groups at ceremonial or public events however, such as the Muscat Festival, where the horses, their riders and grooms, men and women can demonstrate their skills for all to see, and whether it is simply riding at full gallop, standing on the horse’s back at a gallop, riding facing backwards, hanging off one side of, or even under the horse, or whatever, the complete trust and affinity between man and horse is clearly evident.

The Arabian horse... is like a cheeky schoolmate you can share both good times and bad, and always be friends with, but no school friend could fly on unseen wings, with, as the Arabic proverb says, “the winds of heaven between his ears.” He has a strong heart, a will to win, is poetry in motion, and offers all this and more, for so little in return. A friendly word, a gentle caress, just something to show you care.

The Royal Cavalry’s Grey colt Awzan wins the prestigious Group Three Clarendon Stakes at Newbury (UK) in 2019.

Nafees has been the flagbearer for the Royal Cavalry with stunning wins in the Qatar Derby, The UAE President’s Cup, The United Kingdom Arabian Stakes and the prestigious Shadwell International, under top French jockey Olivier Peslier.





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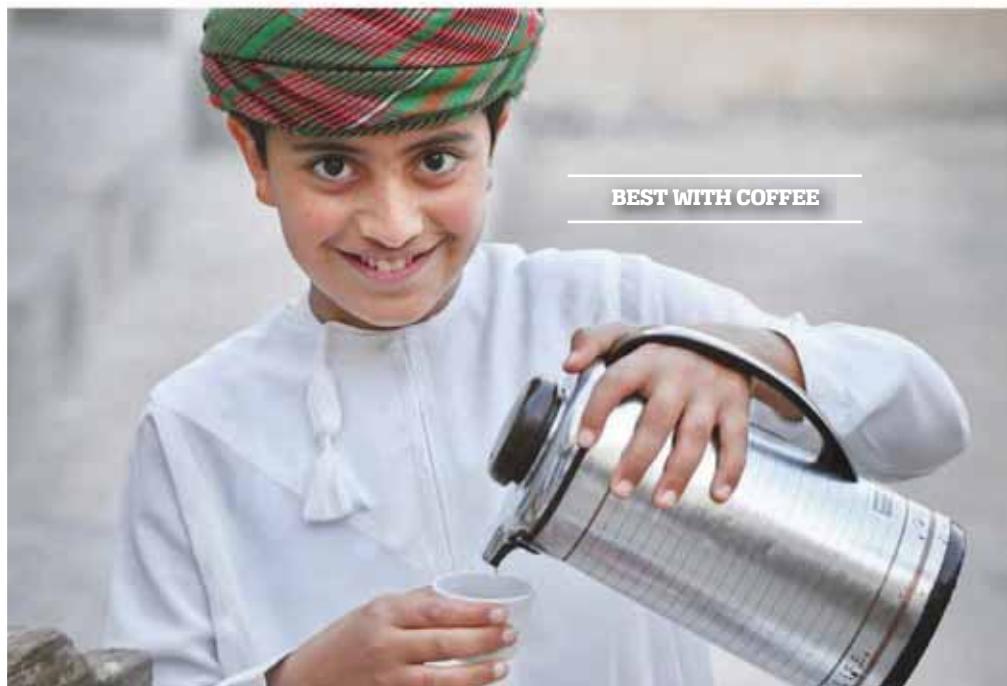
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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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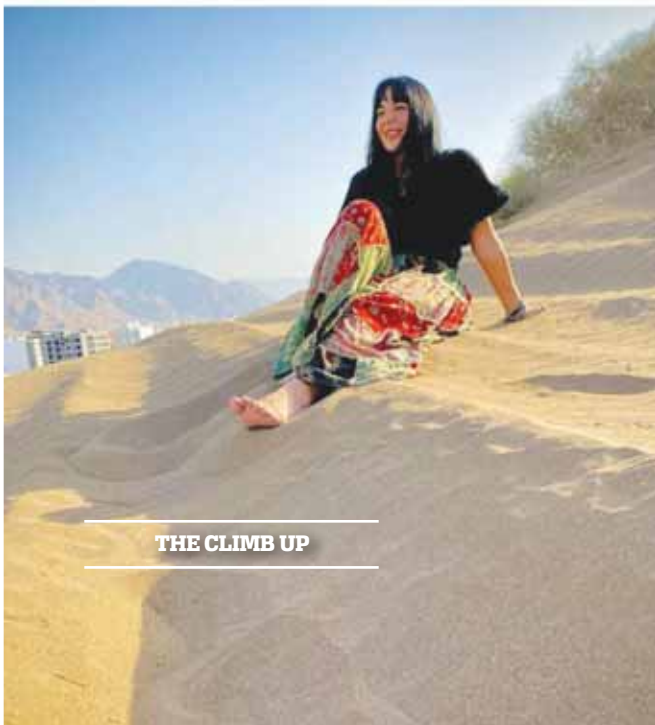
سبيقي



BEST WITH COFFEE



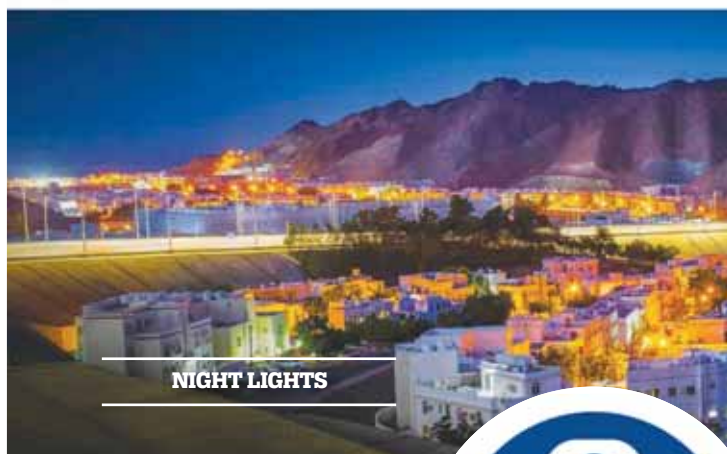
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THE CLIMB UP



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NIGHT LIGHTS

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HERITAGE



Twirl and spin: Damascus family preserves Sufi whirling tradition

Three-year-old Anas al Kharrat gracefully raises one hand to the sky as his long white robe twirls around his tiny spinning body.

His dancing skills run in the family — his dervish dancer father Muayad is whirling next to him, in front of a spellbound audience.

"Anas learnt to whirl before he learnt to talk," his father said, speaking inside a Damascus restaurant. "He is the youngest dervish dancer in Syria".

Whirling — a sort of moving meditation through which Sufis seek to commune with the divine — sees performers twirl to the hypnotic rhythm of prayer, until they reach a trance-like state.

Popular in Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey, the dance emerged alongside Sufism — a spiritually focused approach to Islam, founded by followers of 13th-century Persian mystic and poet Jalal al Din Rumi.

The Kharrat family is one of the most reputed in Damascus, and boasts 20 dervish dancers who often perform during the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan.

Muayad started twirling as a child, taught first by his grandfather, then his uncle and finally his father.

At 28, he now owns a fragrance shop in a popular Damascus market, but his real passion lies in Sufi spiritual practise.

"Sufism in general is a means to worship and exaltation," he said. "Whirling is just one way of reaching God."

'HUMILITY'

Muayad said he can twirl dozens of times per minute "without moving an inch away from the axis".

In war-racked Syria, whirling offers relief from the woes of a conflict that has been exacerbated by a dire economic crisis and the coronavirus pandemic, he said.

"Whenever I feel distressed... I confine myself to my room, and turn and turn until I feel at peace."

In the living room of their Damascus home, Muayad pulled a long white robe over Anas's head before helping him with a matching jacket and a tall burgundy felt cap.

Around them stood relatives in matching outfits and similar "sikke" caps, which can be brown or black and are designed to emulate the stick shape of the first letter of the word God in Arabic ("Allah").

They then descend a long staircase towards a courtyard, to practice whirling to the rhythm of prayer with Muayad's brother Mahmoud.

The 34-year-old is teaching the children how to hold their arms while twirling.

"By raising our arms we are begging for mercy from God and sending a prayer to the heavens," Mahmoud said, gesturing toward

the sky.

"Placing our hands against our chest is a sign of submissiveness and humility before God."

RAMADHAN SPECIAL

Before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Mahmoud performed in several European countries, and even toured the United States.

"We spent more time outside Syria than inside," he said.

Travel restrictions imposed on Syrians due to the conflict brought the family's performances abroad to a halt, forcing them to keep up the tradition by performing at local events.

"We have performed in restaurants and weddings," Mahmoud said.

Evening performances during Ramadhan "are one of our last hopes" to make a living, he added.

The holy month is a busy time of year for whirling dervishes, who perform for audiences sipping coffee or smoking shisha in cafes and restaurants after a day of fasting.

Almost every popular spot in the capital offers some form of dervish performance to attract customers.

"We eagerly await the month of Ramadhan to share this ritual with people," said Mahmoud.

"Whirling is for every time and place, but it is even more spiritual during Ramadhan". — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

DISCOVER THE MAGICAL CANTON OF VAUD BY ROAD

Mountainous region's lakes offer breathtaking scenery to nature lovers



THE CANTON OF Vaud, in the Lake Geneva region, is the perfect place to enjoy a road trip. With its breathtaking scenery of winding roads through the mountain valleys, it offers a natural escape from city life, for a romantic break or a family adventure alike. Travellers can choose to self-drive or hire chauffeur driven cars and explore some of the most beautiful

prefer the warmer climes.

The region hosts some of the country's finest hotels where luxury meets heritage, such as the world-renowned awarded restaurant Hôtel de Ville de Crissier and the Lausanne Palace, which both pay homage to the region's rich high-level gastronomy and culture.



destinations in Switzerland including Lausanne and Montreux Riviera.

The region's captivating lakes are a stunning backdrop to the offerings around the region, which include some of the world's finest Michelin restaurants and wellness retreats.

In addition to the natural panorama, there is much to do in the region, from walking holidays to exploring the region's history and culture, with the backdrop of some of the Alps' most dramatic peaks. The popular destinations Lausanne and Montreux Riviera are both less than an hour drive from the Alps and the stunning countryside of Jura.

With world-class infrastructure, a road-trip around the region is smooth sailing, allowing visitors to taste the wide variety of offerings from the Lavaux vineyard terraces now listed as a UNESCO world heritage site, to the unforgettable Lake Geneva and the region's highest point, Glacier 3000.

Offering year-round snow, active travel lovers can take to their skis, while the water sports, cycling and an array of thrill-seeking activities await those who

ABOUT THE CANTON OF VAUD, SWITZERLAND

Located in the southwestern part of Switzerland in its French-speaking region between Lake Geneva and Lake Neuchâtel, the Canton of Vaud is a dream vacation destination. The region is served by Geneva international airport, which is a short 40-minute train ride away from Lausanne. The region boasts a strong infrastructure including luxurious and affordable accommodation and well connected transportation system. The Canton of Vaud features beautiful towns such as Lausanne, the Olympic Capital and Montreux Riviera, all steeped in centuries of history and culture. The region has influenced and inspired many artists over the years from Lord Byron and Audrey Hepburn to Charlie Chaplin and Freddie Mercury. Canton de Vaud is best known for its art of living, local and internationally renowned events, outdoor sports activities, world class gastronomy, traditions and culture.

For more news about the canton of Vaud, visit the <https://www.region-du-lemman.ch/en/Z5192/media-corner>



Iraq's heritage battered by desert sun, rain and state apathy

One of the world's oldest churches is crumbling deep in Iraq's desert, another victim of years of conflict, government negligence and climate change in a country with a rich heritage.

After Pope Francis made a historic visit to Iraq in March, many Iraqis hoped that busloads of tourists would flock to Al Aqiser church southwest of the capital Baghdad.

But in a country that has been battered by consecutive conflicts and economic crises, the church — like Iraq's numerous Christian, Islamic and Mesopotamian relics — has been left to weather away.

All that remains of Al Aqiser, which has stood in Ain Tamr for more than 1,500 years, are crumbling brick and red earthen walls.

Archaeologist Zahd Muhammad blamed this on "climate conditions, the fact that under Saddam Hussein the area was transformed into a military firing range and the lack of regular conservation".

Ain Tamr Mayor Raed Fadhel said upkeep is a question of budget.

"Such maintenance requires an enormous amount of money, but we only get meagre funds" from the federal government, he said.

Some 60 kilometres (38 miles) further east, Shiite shrines in Karbala attract millions of pilgrims each year.

But these potential visitors fail to stop by Iraq's numerous ancient churches, its Mesopotamian cities and the fabled "ziggurat" pyramid-like structures of Babylon, a Unesco World Heritage site, residents and officials say.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Abdullah al Jlihawi, who lives in Diwaniya province bordering Karbala, told AFP he believes that "foreigners care more about our heritage than we do".

"Until the 1980s, an American university led excavations here, there were plenty of job opportunities", he said.

"Our parents and grandparents worked on those sites, but all that stopped in the 1990s" with the international embargo against Saddam's regime.

Diwaniya's Governor, Zuhair al Shaalan, boasts of the province's more than 2,000 historic sites and sees in each a potential economic windfall.

But almost 20 years since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam's dictatorship, promising democracy and prosperity, Iraqis are still waiting to for an economic upturn.

Diwaniya is home to Nippur, the ancient Sumerian city and jewel of Iraq's glorious Mesopotamian past with its temples, libraries and palaces.

Seven thousand years ago Nippur, now in southern Iraq, was one of the main religious centres of the Akkadians and later the Babylonians.

Much of that site was looted after Saddam's fall from power by armed bandits and many others destroyed by militants who seized swathes of Iraq in 2014 until their defeat three

years later.

"Investing in these sites would create jobs in our province, which is poor and has few investment opportunities", Shaalan said.

But there is another problem beyond renovation and preservation, Jlihawi said. If they came, "where would the tourists go?" he asked.

"There's nothing for them — the roads haven't been paved since the 1980s, the electricity poles are from the 1970s", in a country with chronic shortages of electricity and water.

Energy-rich Iraq suffered due to a decline in world oil prices and has been struggling with rising prices, high unemployment and poverty, which doubled last year to 40 per cent amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

RETURNED TO DUST

Historical sites in the central province of Kirkuk are also in a sad state of disrepair and "neither authorities nor private organisations are doing anything for heritage", said resident Muhammad Taha.

He pointed to the 3,000-year-old citadel and the "qishla", an Ottoman-era garrison, where chunks of mosaics have crumbled while sections of wall threaten to crash down.

Like Nippur, the citadel's deterioration could mean it might not be promoted from Unesco's Tentative List of heritage sites to the coveted World Heritage List.

Local authorities said frequent heavy rains that batter the mountainous region are to blame.

Iraq is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, according to the United Nations.

Galloping desertification in a country where desert already covers 50 per cent of the territory is threatening human and animal life, and has sounded death knells for Mesopotamian sites as well as recent constructions.

Abdullah al Jlihawi from Diwaniya recalled that between the 1960s and the 1980s archaeological ruins "were protected by the green belt".

But trees that had blocked the wind were burned, blasted apart by shelling during successive Iraqi wars or felled to make way for new towns.

Scorching summer temperatures above 50 degrees (122 Fahrenheit), dust storms and heavy winter rains have also dealt blows to Iraqi heritage.

And many fear that sites built with bricks made thousands of years ago by Mesopotamian labourers will one day soon turn back into dust. — AFP





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Looming tropical cyclone season spurs calls for National Disaster Fund

KEY GOAL: The proposed Catastrophe Insurance & Reinsurance Pool should be a joint undertaking of the private insurance sector and government, aimed at helping victims recover from natural and man-made disasters

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Calls for the institution of a National Catastrophe Insurance Fund to help mitigate the impacts of natural and man-made disasters have gained traction following the extensive damage to residential homes, farmland and small businesses caused by recent thunderstorms in various parts of the Sultanate. These appeals have also gained weight as the annual tropical cyclone season looms, bringing with it the threat of economic disruption, human loss, and property and infrastructure damage.

Leading these calls, this time around, is a senior official of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), who has long advocated for robust insurance legislation to ensure effective coverage across key aspects of socioeconomic life in the Sultanate.

Murtadha bin Mohammed Jawad Ibrahim al Jamalani, Chairman — OCCI's Finance



The people of Oman — citizens and residents alike — have a human right to be protected against natural catastrophes to the extent possible. But in safeguarding this right, the state can either shoulder this responsibility independently or share the burden with the private insurance and reinsurance sector

MURTADHA BIN MOHAMMED JAWAD IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI

Chairman — OCCI's Finance and Insurance Committee



and Insurance Committee, said a National Disaster Fund (doubling as a Catastrophe Insurance & Reinsurance Pool for insured and uninsured catastrophic losses) is the need of the hour given the plethora of natural and man-made risks that Oman is potentially exposed to.

"As is the case anywhere in the world, the people of Oman — citizens and residents alike — have a human right to be protected against natural catastrophes to the extent possible. But in safeguarding this right, the state can either shoulder this

responsibility independently or share the burden with the private insurance and reinsurance sector," he explained.

A week of torrential rains in parts of North Al Batinah, among other areas around the country, damaged homes, felled fruit trees and ruined vegetable crops earlier this month.

Pleas for compensation circulating on social media were backed up by calls for a more permanent insurance-based mechanism, such as a Catastrophe Insurance & Reinsurance Pool shared jointly by the private

insurance sector and government, to help victims recover from such calamities.

An Insurance & Reinsurance Catastrophe Pool was first mooted in 2007 in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Gonu that pummelled large swathes of the Sultanate, causing significant loss of life and extensive infrastructure and property damage.

Extreme weather events in the form of tropical storms, flash floods and tidal surges have since become an almost annual recurrence in the Sultanate, spurring calls for such a national support mechanism.

In the aftermath of Gonu, the insurance industry agreed to incorporate coverage against storms, tempests and floods (STF) when insuring property, vehicles and other private assets against weather-related perils.

That initiative was spearheaded by Murtadha in response to threats by international reinsurance companies not to underwrite local insurance companies unless measures were adopted to improve Storm, Tempest & Flood (STF) related risk mitigation.

"In the wake of those developments, we formed the Omani Insurance Assurance and also laid the groundwork for the establishment of Oman's first reinsurance company (Oman Reinsurance Company SAOC) — a move aimed at limiting and minimising the cash outflow of premiums abroad to the international reinsurers," the official said.

TURN TO PAGE 18

Emphasis on capacity building to achieve goals of Manufacturing Strategy 2040



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) emphasised that the Governance, Management and Development programme for the industrial sector, aims at creating the right administrative, legal, organisational, technical and contractual conditions to help the ministry successfully implement the Sultanate's Manufacturing Strategy 2040.

The programme also aims at enhancing the methodology for framing new laws and regulations, developing new processes and affixing responsibilities, as well as supporting the ability of the government to implement the manufacturing strategy.

In order to achieve the objectives of the manufacturing strategy, many laws governing the industrial sector have been modernised to keep pace with current trends. New regulations have also been formulated.

In the context, Eng Salim bin Suleiman al Hatami, Director of the Directorate General of Planning and Industrial Studies at the ministry, said: "The past few years have witnessed major changes in the Sultanate's economic environment, while the new legal framework will reflect efforts to upgrade the ministry's ability to play the role of a strategic promoter for industrial diversification."

He added: "Based on the outputs of the Governance, Management, and Development programme, a National Industry Development Committee was formed to support Omani products, enhance the implementation of the Manufacturing Strategy 2040, and tackle manufacturing challenges.

The committee is chaired by the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion with representatives from relevant government entities as well as the private sector, chiefly from manufacturing and value-adding industries.

Raysut Cement expands marketing reach

BURGEONING PRESENCE: Zanzibar, Comoros and Madagascar added to Omani cement producer's geographical coverage

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

New marketing arms set up by Raysut Cement Company (RCC), the Sultanate's biggest cement-manufacturer, have expanded the geographical reach of the group beyond the Middle East into parts of East Africa and the Indian Ocean, the publicly traded company announced last week.

RCC Trading DMCC has added Zanzibar, Comoros and Madagascar to its footprint in East Africa, while Raysut Maldives Cement Pvt Ltd has added the



new market of Maldives to the group's geographical coverage. These new markets supplement the existing markets of Oman, Yemen and East Africa covered by the parent company; northern Oman and by Sohar Cement Factory; and the UAE and Oman

by Pioneer Cement.

The announcement comes as the Raysut Cement Group, as a whole, reported a 1.45 per cent uptick in cement sold during the first quarter of this year, which rose to 1.113 million tonnes, up from 1.096 million

tonnes for the corresponding quarter of 2020. The Group also sold 0.184 million tonnes of clinker in Q1 2021, against 0.266 million tonnes in the last year. A further 0.150 million tonnes of clinker was consumed by newly acquired subsidiary Sohar Cement Factory LLC. Additional sales from the latter contributed to the Group's stable sales of cement in Q1, it noted.

"This is a significant achievement considering major businesses in the region are only operating at 20 per cent to 30 per cent," said Ahmed bin Yousuf bin Alawi al Ibrahim, Chairman of the Board of Directors, in the Group's report for the quarter.

During the period, the Group earned revenues of RO 26.896 million against RO 25.612 million in the Q1 last year, an increase by 5.01 per cent. Profit before Tax stood at RO 0.106

million as against loss of RO 4.237 million in Q1 2020. The Group's operating profit for the period totalled RO 0.832 million in the current year against a loss of RO 2.596 million in first quarter of last year. Profit after Tax for the Group was RO 0.102 million against a loss of RO 4.009 million during Q1 2020.

Meanwhile, Raysut Maldives Cement Pvt Ltd (formerly Lafarge Maldives Cement Pvt Ltd), a new acquired subsidiary company in Maldives where Raysut Cement has a 75 per cent shareholding, achieved cement sales of 0.015 million MT for Q1 2021.

Plans for a new Cement Grinding Unit in Duqm with a production capacity of 750,000 tonnes of cement per annum are also on track, according to the company. The estimated project cost is about \$30 million.

When is a good time to sell a business?

More and more readers of *Oman Daily Observer* continue to write me asking for guidance regarding their business. I am certainly honoured for being seen as a sort of a mentor figure by many new friends, and at the same time I am truly thankful for the platform that this newspaper is offering.

Doing business is not easy and I was pleased to be a mentor to the SME under Riyada during my time in Oman.

The Government of Oman is doing a spectacular job at supporting new entrepreneurs. As such, it is not a mystery why so many new businessmen and businesswomen in Oman are reaching out to me.

Today I would like to address the ideal “endgame” of a small and medium enterprise. Theoretically, a company is

meant to produce an endless profit, so talking about an ideal final goal might be counter intuitive for some readers.

However, if we look at the equation from the point of view of an entrepreneur, there is not only one possible scenario.

In fact, the idea of an endless profit works perfectly fine in the mind of most people, but given the uncertainties that the economy have periodically got us accustomed to, the alternative scenario could be a buy-out to sell the company.

Let us imagine that a business is rendering RO 100,000 in profits every year. This amount over 5 years could sum up to half a million. But there is just one giant question mark. Would this be a constant?

The answer is — of course — no. The market could expand or collapse. The 100 thousand rial this year might as well be 300 thousand next year or 50... or



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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THE GOVERNMENT OF OMAN IS DOING A SPECTACULAR JOB AT SUPPORTING NEW ENTREPRENEURS. AS SUCH, IT IS NOT A MYSTERY WHY SO MANY NEW BUSINESSMEN AND BUSINESSWOMEN IN OMAN ARE REACHING OUT TO ME

zero. Think for example of cruise ships and airlines a month before Covid-19. All projections were cancelled.

Similarly, a small and medium enterprise need to constantly re-assess values over market in order to remain aligned with reality.

Back to the buy-out concept. If we stick to the narrative of RO 100,000 a year for 5 years, would you accept to sell the company all together for 500 thousand rial today?

This a question of risk and expectations. Some of the readers, having a solid business that is blooming and growing might answer with a decisive no.

Others, with a struggling enterprise facing market uncertainty might answer with a conclusive yes.

There is not a right or wrong answer, but it all depends — in my opinion — on the answer to

one single dilemma: what would you do with the buy-out money. If the seller has been running the company for decades, a buy-out is a perfect opportunity to retire, especially when the children show no interest in continuing the business.

On the other hand, if the company is relatively new and the entrepreneur is at the beginning of a long career, the buy-out money could be a great capital to start a new venture. It is hard to imagine a third option other than selling one's business out of pressure.

For example, an entrepreneur with an aggravating health issue, or a dispute in the family, or simply stress. In all these cases, selling the business could be the best option. The worst one? Of course, closing the business without a buyer.

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

Japan's exports seen posting largest monthly gain since 2010



New cars await export at a port in Yokohama, near Tokyo. — Reuters

TOKYO: Japan's exports likely grew more than 30 per cent year-on-year in April, the most in more than a decade, a poll showed, but the base effect was a major factor after last year's steep decline due to the initial impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The world's third-largest economy has recovered largely due to solid overseas demand that has boosted output and exports, even as a resurgence of coronavirus infections are dampening consumption.

Next week's key data include machinery orders and consumer and wholesale prices, as well as first-quarter gross domestic product figures that will be released on Tuesday.

Exports likely surged 30.9 per cent in April from a year earlier, which would mark the sharpest monthly rise since May 2010, the poll of 18 economists showed.

Imports were forecast to have grown 8.8 per cent in April from a year earlier, which would result in a trade surplus of 140.0 billion yen (\$1.28 billion).

“Tightness in supply and demand of semiconductors seems to have a minor impact on exports so far,” said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

“Export values increased greatly, by 32.2 per cent, in early and mid-April, in part in reaction to a sharp downturn in the same month last year.”

A slump in global trade due to supply chain disruptions from coronavirus lockdowns around the world delivered a heavy blow to Japan's trade-reliant economy in April last year. — Reuters

World Metrology Day to focus on efficacy of measuring devices in healthcare

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), is set to celebrate the World Metrology Day 2021 on the theme, ‘Measurement for Health’ on May 20.

The theme of this year's celebrations was chosen to create awareness of the important role that metrology play in health.

Commenting on this event, Eng Majid bin Nasser al Senawi (pictured), Head of the Metrological Control Department in the Directorate-General for Standards and Metrology, said the annual event commemorates the signing of the Metre Convention on May 20, 1875, which had set the framework for the modern science of measurement.

The convention has also contributed to streamlining



measurement standards globally, and the abolition of many units of measurement that were used randomly across the world.

He added that, the Sultanate joined the Metre Convention in accordance with the Royal Decree 17/2013, which promulgated the Measurement and Calibration Law stipulating that the unit of

measurement in the Sultanate shall be in accordance with the metric system.

Eng Al Senawi pointed out that the slogan ‘Measurement for Health’ aims at enhancing the awareness of the important role that measurement plays for health, and thus in the well-being of the individual and society,



Measurement for Health’ aims at enhancing the awareness of the important role that measurement plays for health, and thus in the well-being of the individual and society

while the medical measuring devices which are used to diagnose patients for measuring temperature, blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar level and

weight, as well as radiology and other medical measuring devices used in hospitals and health centres. These must be verified for accuracy and functionality to help guarantee proper diagnose.

In coordination with the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion aims to upgrade the metrology infrastructure in the Sultanate and endorse new measurement techniques so as to assure the reliability and credibility of measurements.

To this end, it has continued to examine and test weighing and measuring devices such as medical measuring devices, water and electricity meters, fuel pumps, pre-packaged products, commercial and jewellers scales and other devices which concern the health and safety of the consumers.

Looming tropical cyclone season spurs calls for National Disaster Fund

FROM PAGE 17

But efforts to establish a National Catastrophe Insurance Pool have so far remained elusive, despite pledges by the authorities, notably the Capital Market Authority (CMA), to make it happen.

“We understand the intentions are there, but the mechanisms underpinning the proposed catastrophe or disaster fund are somewhat challenging to formulate,” Al Jamalani reckoned. “After all, compensation claims stemming from a natural disaster can potentially overwhelm the government. Likewise, the private insurance sector, as a relatively modest-sized industry, will be unable to cope as well.”

Despite the increasing frequency of adverse weather events in the Sultanate, insurance coverage of private residential

holdings in coastal or flood-prone areas remains dismal, according to the official. With the exception of commercial organisations, there are barely any takers for insurance among owners of homes, farms and small holdings located in risk-prone areas. Victims typically depend on government assistance or grants from local charities to recover from damage inflicted upon them by adverse weather events.

Nevertheless, any disaster recovery fund, Al Jamalani points out, should be a joint undertaking between the government and the private insurance industry. “Looking at models employed successfully by some countries, the government can consider rolling out an insurance scheme that piggybacks on the electricity billing system in the country. The premium amounts to a small proportion of the monthly bill



payable by that establishment. As virtually every type of property — whether private, government, commercial, agricultural or industrial — has a power connection, it will be abundantly feasible to provide coverage to every establishment in the country. Insurance firms, for their part, can help with the management and

operation of this scheme on behalf of the government.”

Other business models can also be considered in consultation with the government, he noted. One such option is to map the entire length and breadth of the country into flood zones, each with a colour-code designating the degree of flood risk. This

colour-coded mapping decides the quantum of premium payable for properties located therein, he said.

Regardless of the choice of business model, it should be underpinned by five key objectives, Al Jamalani noted. It should aim to: (i) provide protection and compensation in the event of loss or damage to public property or injury or death at an affordable premium; (ii) improve the infrastructure of the country from the Risk Management point of view by working with the concerned authorities; (iii) enhance insurance contribution in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP); (iv) minimise cash outflow and bring foreign currency into the country; and (v) create employment for nationals.

As a first step in the delivery of the initiative, a working group with representatives from key

stakeholder organisations needs to be set up. It should include officials from OCCI, Capital Market Authority, Ministry of Finance, Central Bank of Oman, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Ministry of Social Development, in addition to domain experts, he said.

Also adding to the urgency of this initiative are a number of factors, including global warming, limited fiscal resources, enhancement of non-oil revenue, and the need to protect strategic infrastructure assets. Besides, practices related to government property insurance and reinsurance need to be reviewed. At the same time, the insurance industry will need to reorient its market outlook and tweak its Corporate Social Responsibility strategy to align with these goals, Al Jamalani added.

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Tunisia’s economy shrank 3 per cent in Q1

TUNIS: Tunisia’s gross domestic product shrank 3 per cent in the first quarter of 2021 from a year ago, the State Statistics Institute said, showing the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the country’s tourism industry.

Tourism accounts for about 8 per cent of Tunisia’s GDP and is a major source of foreign currency.

Tunisia, which has seen its debt burden rise and economy shrink by 8.8 per cent last year in real terms, has started talks with the International Monetary Fund to seek a financial assistance package.

The State Statistics Institute said that unemployment rates are at 17.8 per cent, amid an unprecedented economic crisis in the country, which led to a record fiscal deficit of more than 11 per cent in 2020.

— Reuters

US retail sales flat, inflation fears on the rise

WASHINGTON: The United States economic recovery showed signs of hitting some turbulence as shoppers curbed their spending last month and manufacturing slowed due to supply bottlenecks.

After a rush of shopping in March, US retail sales were flat in April, and while auto sales rose, vehicle production fell amid a global semiconductor supply crunch, according to government data released on Friday.

Meanwhile, a private survey showed consumer confidence fell due to concerns about rising prices as the reopening of the world’s largest economy drives speculation of a sustained rise in inflation.

Officials in President Joe Biden’s administration have tried to downplay the fears of a slowing recovery, but acknowledged there could be some bumpy months ahead.

“This was an unprecedented economic downturn... where we completely powered down the economy,” said Cecilia Rouse, chair of Biden’s Council of Economic Advisers.

“Given the extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic, it will remain difficult for analysts to accurately forecast economic data until we have more fully recovered,” she told reporters.



A man wearing a respirator mask searches for an item in a Safeway grocery store in Tucson, Arizona. – Reuters

The University of Michigan consumer sentiment index fell more than six points to 82.8 in May, amid increasing concerns about inflation.

But the survey showed “consumer spending will still advance despite higher prices due to pent-up demand and record saving balances.”

Fears the world’s largest economy will see an inflationary spike have been gaining traction,

fueled by recent data showing prices surging as the economy reopens following the Covid-19 shutdowns, including a 4.2-per cent year-on-year jump in the consumer price index for April reported earlier this week.

Economists say the spikes reflect a rebound from the price collapses one year ago as the pandemic began, and also are pushed by supply bottlenecks as industries struggle to return to

normal.

But the Federal Reserve’s repeated assurances that the issues are transitory have not eased the concerns.

Rouse said some price gains are due to unusual and temporary factors, like rental companies buying up cars to replenish their fleets.

“There’s going to be some choppiness” as the economy recovers, she said, but the issues

should not lead to inflation beyond the Fed’s control.

The volume of retail sales last month held steady at just under \$620 billion, as declines in clothing, sporting goods, furniture, gasoline and even the roaring ecommerce market were offset by gains in cars, electronics, food and healthcare, the commerce Department said.

The cooling off came after a 10.7-per cent jump in March compared to February, but total retail sales in April were more than 51 per cent higher than the same month last year, when the Covid-19 pandemic first forced the near-shutdown of the world’s largest economy.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics called the April pause “a modest post-stimulus hangover after the March binge.”

The National Retail Federation (NRF) stressed that while consumers tapped the brakes last month, sales remain strong and household finances are healthy.

“Consumers are demonstrating that when they feel safe, they are both willing and able to spend and are driving the economy forward,” NRF President Matthew Shay said in a statement.

He predicted “the economic recovery will likely continue to gain steam as we head into the summer months.” — AFP

India’s GoAir plans IPO to raise \$491 million

NEW DELHI: Indian budget carrier Go Airlines Ltd has filed for an initial public offering aiming to raise 36 billion rupees (\$491 million), a move that comes as airlines try to bolster finances to cope with the latest disruptions caused by the pandemic.

A second wave of Covid-19 infections in India is taking a heavy toll on domestic airlines, which were taking initial steps back towards normality after a nationwide lockdown hampered their operations in 2020.

The company, which is in the process of rebranding itself as “Go First”, plans to use the money raised from the IPO to repay loans, which total more than 20 billion rupees, and clear other dues, it said in a filing.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on our business... the duration and spread of the pandemic or



The logo of GoAir airline is pictured on an A320neo aircraft at an airport in Colomiers, France. – Reuters

another pandemic could result in additional adverse impact on our business,” Go Airlines said in the filing.

The airline has a current fleet of 55 Airbus narrow body planes and is due to take delivery of 98 more starting this year.

The airline’s founder and majority owner is the Wadia group, which runs textiles company Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Co Ltd and biscuit maker Britannia Industries. — Reuters

Less than 3 per cent of US small businesses could face tax hikes under Biden plan

WASHINGTON: Less than 3 per cent of the roughly 30 million small-business owners in the United States could face tax increases under President Joe Biden’s jobs and infrastructure plan, according to a new analysis by the White House on Friday.

The White House has been seeking to leverage the support and political popularity of small-business owners in its fight to raise the corporate tax rate from 21 per cent to 28 per cent on large corporations such as Walmart Inc and Amazon.com Inc.

The move has faced stiff opposition from large national trade groups like the US Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable.

The proposed increase in the corporate tax rate to 28 per cent would not affect any small



A woman checks her phone in front of a shop that is closing following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in the Manhattan, New York. – Reuters

business that file taxes as a “passthrough entity” such as a limited liability corporation, said a senior administration official. Nearly all small businesses fall in that category, the official said.

The proposed increase in the top income tax bracket by

2.6 percentage points for single earners who earn over \$452,700 annually and married couples above \$509,300 per year — “would affect less than 3 per cent of passthrough business owners,” the official said.

Most small businesses are

passthrough businesses like limited-liability organisations and S-corporations that do not pay a corporate tax. Instead, the owners report business income and pay the tax on their personal tax returns.

“There has been a false line of attack circulating that the president’s tax plan represents some kind of significant wide-ranging tax increases on small business owners and that’s just simply untrue,” the official said.

Biden’s tax plan attempts to “level the playing field” between small businesses and large multinational corporations, by ensuring that big corporations cannot escape or eliminate the taxes they owe by offshoring jobs and profits in the United States, and pay a lower tax rate than small businesses, the White House has said. — Reuters

Massive replenishment begins to ease US fuel shortages

WASHINGTON: Motorists in southeast US states on Saturday continued to hunt for fuel as a massive replenishment effort took hold, helping ease shortages from a cyberattack that cut supplies from Florida to New Jersey.

The six-day Colonial Pipeline shutdown was the most disruptive cyberattack on record. Widespread panic buying continued days after the pipeline network restarted, leaving filling stations across the US Southeast out of gas.

More than 14,000 gas stations

surveyed by fuel tracking app GasBuddy were experiencing outages, down from a peak of 16,200 early on Friday. The nationwide average for a gallon of regular unleaded was \$3.04, from \$2.95 a week ago, according to AAA.

An effort that involved ships under emergency waivers moving fuel from US Gulf Coast refiners to the northeast and 18-wheel tanker trucks ferrying gasoline from Alabama to Virginia helped to stem the losses.

In Washington, DC, Dennis Li



Two out of service fuel nozzles are covered in plastic on a gas pump at a gas station in Waynesville, North Carolina. – Reuters

was stuck on Friday at a Sunoco gas station that was out of fuel. He had tried to find gas at four stations during the day, with no luck.

“I’m running on empty to the point where I don’t want to drive anymore,” said Li, who is from Annapolis, Maryland.

Nicholas Swann had driven from his home in Washington to Bethesda to get gasoline, where the wait was 15 minutes.

“We were originally going to drive out to the beach this weekend but we don’t know if we

will, because I can’t make it there and back on one tank of gas,” Swann said.

The hacking group blamed for the attack, DarkSide, said it had hacked four other companies including a Toshiba subsidiary in Germany.

Colonial Pipeline has not determined how the initial breach occurred, a spokeswoman said this week. The 5,500-mile pipeline carries 100 million gallons of gasoline, diesel and jet fuel per day from Texas refineries to East Coast markets. — Reuters