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ZVEREV KNOCKS NADAL OUT IN MADRID



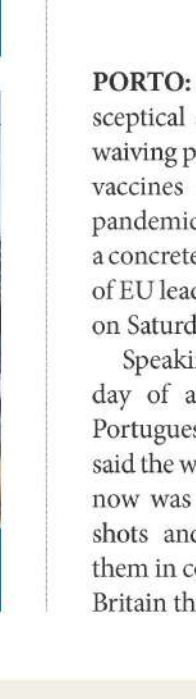
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HOW TO BALANCE TIME DURING RAMADHAN



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PLAN FOR GREEN HYDROGEN PROJECT IN OMAN



MUSCAT

GLOBAL OIL SUPPLY TO GROW IN 2021

Platts Analytics forecasts global oil supply growth of 3.2 million b/d in 2021 and 5.5 million b/d in 2022. “We see a bit stronger growth than a month ago on higher US and Iran outlook,” says Ash Singh, Manager Supply and Production Analytics, S&P Global Platts. On April 27, Opec+ decided to maintain its production plan from April 1 with the option to correct course in a month if demand recovery falters. Opec+ and Saudi’s gradual addition of supply over the summer when demand is expected to grow much faster will result in significant stock draws.

SEE P14

GLASGOW

SCOTTISH ELECTION ON KNIFE EDGE

The Scottish National Party (SNP), which has vowed to hold an independence referendum that could tear the United Kingdom apart should it be returned to power, will find out on Saturday if it has won a majority in Scotland’s parliament. The SNP says it will seek to hold a new vote on secession if a pro-independence majority is returned to the devolved 129-seat parliament. This would set up a clash with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who says he will refuse any such vote because Scots backed staying in the United Kingdom in 2014.

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LEBANON HEADS FOR BLACKOUT AS ELECTRICITY FUNDS DRY UP

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MYANMAR ARMY SAYS NO TO ASEAN ENVOY’S VISIT

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REVISED LOCKDOWN BEGINS

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The revised lockdown announced by the Supreme Committee on Covid-19 that directs some sectors to remain closed to control the virus spread came into effect at 4 am on Saturday.

The lockdown hours have been extended between 7 pm and 4 am from Saturday, May 8 until May 15, while all commercial activities banned from 4 am till 7 pm. Exemptions are food stores, healthcare centres, and gas stations.

“All are obliged to abide by the decisions of the Supreme Committee aimed at controlling

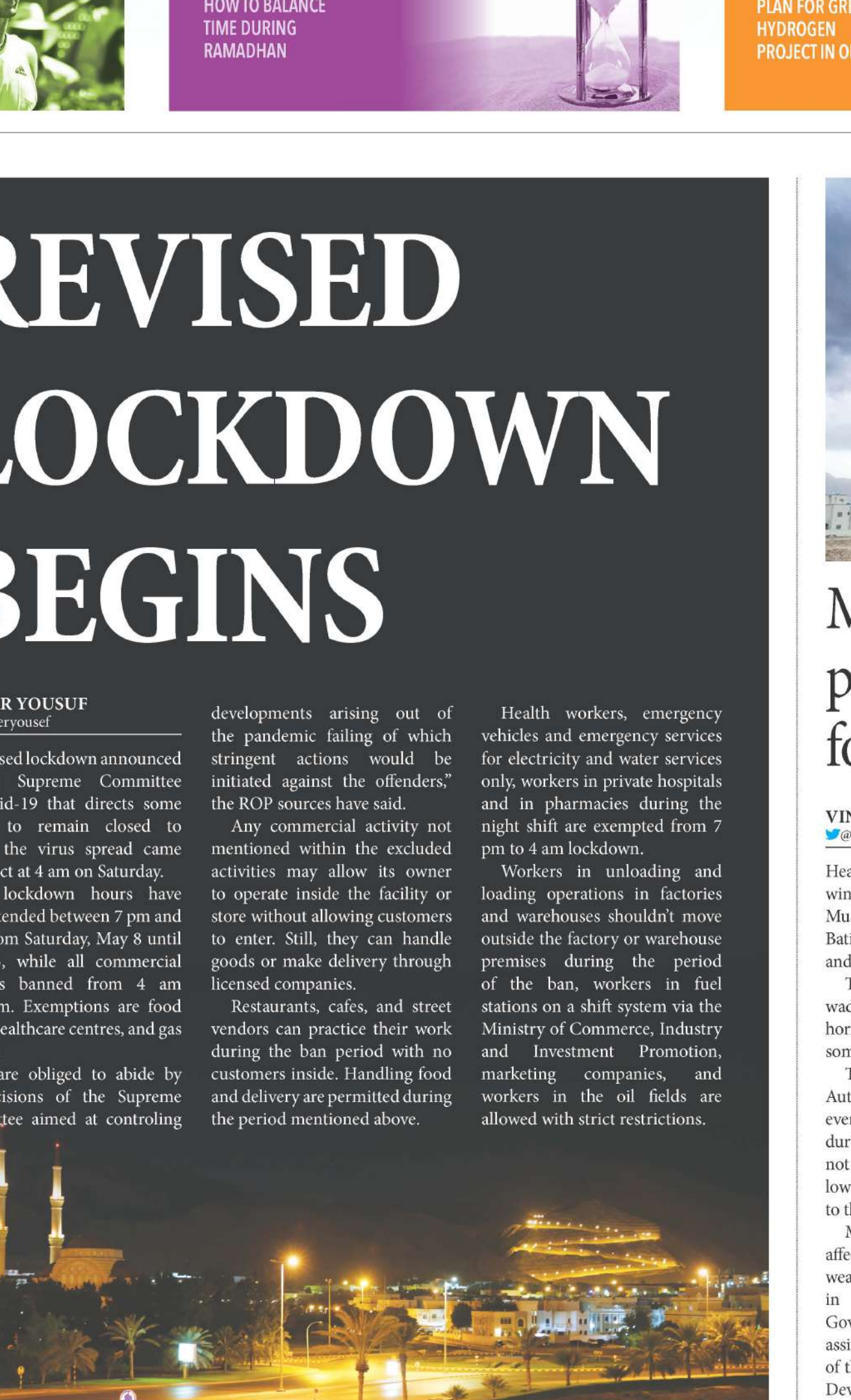
developments arising out of the pandemic failing of which stringent actions would be initiated against the offenders,” the ROP sources have said.

Any commercial activity not mentioned within the excluded activities may allow its owner to operate inside the facility or store without allowing customers to enter. Still, they can handle goods or make delivery through licensed companies.

Restaurants, cafes, and street vendors can practice their work during the ban period with no customers inside. Handling food and delivery are permitted during the period mentioned above.

Health workers, emergency vehicles and emergency services for electricity and water services only, workers in private hospitals and in pharmacies during the night shift are exempted from 7 pm to 4 am lockdown.

Workers in unloading and loading operations in factories and warehouses shouldn’t move outside the factory or warehouse premises during the period of the ban, workers in fuel stations on a shift system via the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, marketing companies, and workers in the oil fields are allowed with strict restrictions.



EU split on Covid-19 vaccine patent waiver

PORTO: The European Union is sceptical about the usefulness of waiving patent rights to Covid-19 vaccines as a way to fight the pandemic, but is ready to discuss a concrete proposal, the chairman of EU leaders Charles Michel said on Saturday.

Speaking before the second day of an EU summit in the Portuguese city of Porto, Michel said the way to fight the pandemic now was to quickly make more shots and lift export curbs on them in countries like the US and Britain that make vaccines but do

not sell them to others.

“In Europe we took the decision to make exports possible and we encourage all partners to facilitate the exports of doses,” Michel said after discussions with leaders of the 27-nation bloc.

India and South Africa called last year for the lifting of patent rights to vaccines as a way of boosting manufacturing and ensuring the world is supplied. Debate around the issue erupted anew when US President Joe Biden supported the idea.

— Reuters

SULTANATE SUPPORTS LEGITIMATE RIGHTS OF PALESTINIANS

The Sultanate on Saturday expressed condemnation over the storming of the courtyards of the Al Aqsa Mosque by Israeli forces. The Foreign Ministry in its statement issued online also rejected Israel’s plans to evict Palestinians from their homes, and affirmed its firm position in support of legitimate rights in the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.



Palestinians react as Israeli police fire stun grenades during clashes at the compound that houses Al Aqsa Mosque, amid tension over the eviction of several Palestinian families from homes. At least 163 Palestinians and six Israeli officers were reported wounded during the clashes, as the Palestinian Red Crescent said it had opened a field hospital because emergency rooms were full. — AFP



Met Dept warns people to brace for heavy rains

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

Heavy rains (25-50 mm) accompanied by active downward winds in the range of 30-45 knots have been predicted for Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and North al Batinah, South al Batinah, North al Sharqiyah, South al Sharqiyah, Buraimi, and Al Dhahirah, said Oman Meteorology.

There are chances of hail and floods due to flowing wadis with reduced horizontal visibility in some governorates.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) called on everyone to take caution during thunderstorms, not to cross valleys, avoid low places, and not to go to the sea.

Meanwhile, people affected by the recent weather conditions in North al Batinah Governorate will receive assistance from the offices of their walis in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD).

A statement issued by the ministry said: “Assessment of the number of houses affected, and general damages are under way and then assistance will be provided through repairing and maintaining the damaged buildings and renting buildings to the families whose houses were affected,” the ministry said.

People affected by the recent weather conditions in North al Batinah will receive assistance from the offices of their walis in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development

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TOTAL NATIONAL DAY PRIZES
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TOTAL PRIZES FOR LADIES
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Artificial Intelligence plays big role in combating Covid-19

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

Artificial intelligence (AI) has come handy for tracking, monitoring and combating Covid-19 pandemic, which has created havoc with raising tentacles and new variants in different parts of the world.

The solution, according to experts, rests in concerted and joint action based on research and analysis, because the virus mutants are posing new challenges to the scientists and doctors.

According IT experts, the tools and technologies being offered under AI are hugely beneficial in almost all aspects of

The solution, according to experts, rests in concerted and joint action based on research and analysis, because the virus mutants are posing new challenges to the scientists and doctors

the Covid-19 crisis response.

“When Covid-19 pandemic started spreading in February-March last year, people were clueless about its handling. The Artificial Intelligence came out with easy solutions to track, and

identify hotspots.

That was very useful in breaking the chain. To a large extent, it was possible to break the virus chain,” said IT expert John Varghese.

Since the virus posed new challenges with mutations and development of new strains, the IT experts came out with solutions accordingly.

“Now the technology is helpful in understanding, detecting, assisting and responding to the situations as and when needed,” he said.

It is helping a lot. The scientists are able to understand the virus and are processing research on possible drugs. The AI is useful also in detecting and diagnosing

the virus as also in predicting its evolution.

The IT expert called for concerted efforts taking advantage of Artificial Intelligence, data analysis, and knowledge sharing.

“It is beyond our capacity to develop one treatment, because by the time the doctors are working on one course, the virus is taking another course,” he said and added that the technologies used under artificial intelligence can play big role in combating Covid-19.

The policymakers, according to Varghese, should ensure that the systems under the AI are trustworthy and handled with the best practices.

Donors urged to donate blood and platelets

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

Eligible donors have been requested to visit the Central Blood Bank at Bausher to donate blood and platelets for an emergency. Just as the Eid holidays are around the corner, people engage more in prayers than before, resulting in shortage of blood units.

Oman needs about 100 blood donors daily to cover the patients’ needs during Ramadhan and donors from all the blood groups are required, but O positive, O negative and A positive are high in demand, according to Dr Zainab al Fana al Araiimi, Director of Blood Bank Services.

Speaking to the *Observer*, she said blood and platelet units would be collected from the donors strictly within the Covid-19 protocols.

“Of late, we receive at least 2 to 3 requests for platelets every day and we are finding a scarcity for platelets. Hence, we encourage people to come forward and give blood and platelets to save a life in danger,” a spokesperson from the Bausher Blood Bank said.

The situation would be even pressing as revised lockdown came into force from Saturday. However, those who are going to or coming from the Blood Bank

wouldn’t have any issue at the checkpoint.

All they have to show the Royal Oman Police (ROP) is any proof of blood donation.

“One wouldn’t be stopped or punished for travelling to or from the Blood Bank and they just have to show a proof that they are donors at the CBB.”

“Although accidents have come down during the lockdown and elective surgeries were postponed, blood is still needed to cover the requirements of hematology patients such as individuals with thalassemia, sickle cell disease and for oncology patients,” said Dr Zainab.

Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs sources have confirmed that a fasting person can donate blood and platelets and donation during the holy month is absolutely harmless any time of the day but due to restoration and other medical reasons and to keep the person safe.

Health experts suggest one to take part in the life-saving mission after breaking fast. However, non-Muslims can come and donate blood or platelets during the day.

Blood donation timing during Ramadhan is 8 am to 12.30 pm (daily except Friday and Saturday) and 7 pm to 11.30 pm (daily).



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

Invitation for submitting proposals to develop and operate Port of Khasab and Port of Shinas

MTCIT invites interested parties on a concessionary agreement to develop and operate Port of Khasab and Port of Shinas. The term of the concession period will be mutually agreed upon based on an investment basis. Both ports are involved in domestic and international trade, equipped with basic infrastructure and offices for concerned government agencies. Interested Parties may e-mail their interest and profile to the Directorate General of Ports, (MTCIT) at sami.baabbad@mtcit.gov.om no later than 20th of June 2021.

[www.mtcit.gov.om](#)

Winners of ‘best visual advertisement competition’ announced

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Winners of the ‘best visual advertisement competition’ for student companies have been announced. Under the auspices of the Zubair Corporation (Z-Corp), Injaz Oman had recently announced the competition, which was held as part of the ninth edition of the Injaz Oman’s Student Company Programme. In all, 40 students companies participated in this year’s contest.

The ‘best visual advertisement competition’ aimed to identify the best visual advertisement for services and products offerings of student companies participating in the programme. It also intended to encourage creativity and communication skills among young people and highlight their power of visual communication. The competition intended to broaden the skills of students at universities and colleges in the field of marketing the products and services that



they provide and stimulate their creative ideas by keeping pace with the modern world of advertising. The winners of the competition will receive a cash prize of RO 300 and a glass shield.

The videos submitted by the student companies was evaluated by a jury represented by a number of experts from video and production industry in Oman including Muhammad al Kharousi, a film director at Emaq, Muhammad al Jabri, a film director at Thawani Company, and Sultan al Qamshoui, a film director.

The criteria for evaluating the best advertisement included level of innovation and creativity. Interpretation, originality, clarity of the theme, quality of

artistic composition and overall writing based on the product advertised were the other measures used to assess the advertisements.

The videos, which were put up on Instagram account on May 2, were also voted by the viewers for a period of three days.

Commenting on the competition, Khaula bint Hamoud al Harthy, Executive Director of Injaz Oman, said: “At the outset, we thank the student companies for participating in the Student Company Programme and the competition. We received lots of extremely creative entries for the competition. We were pleased to see the great level of innovation and creativity shown by the participating students. The focus of this competition included script writing, advertising plot, production, photography, sound recording, lighting, directing, montage, colour and sound effects. We would like to thank the Zubair Corporation for their support for the competition.”

Met Dept warns people to brace for heavy rains



FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre said that a trough of low pressure (Al Ataya) is expected to affect the Sultanate from today

till Monday, May 10.

“Varying intensity rain occasionally thundershowers associated with fresh to very fast winds and hail over Musandam Governorate and Al Hajar Mountains and surroundings

extend to the coastal areas of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Muscat and South Al Sharqiyah and flash floods (wadis) are expected and chances of isolated rain over parts of Al Wusta Governorate. Chances

of blowing dust and flying of unstable objects due to wind,” the report said.

Whereas, sea state will be slightly moderate along most coastal areas with a maximum wave height of 1.5 metres.

Covid cases dropped due to tough measures: MoH



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The series of restrictions, including lockdowns and closure of commercial activities, seems to be helping in the slight flattening of the epidemiological curve.

Dr Saif al Abri, Director-General of Diseases Surveillance & Control, said in a statement that while the number of new cases has dropped, the daily deaths recorded and a high number of patients in Intensive Care Units (ICUs) are still a matter of concern.

As of Thursday, the total inpatients were 782, including 283 in intensive care units.

“The closure has contributed to a slowdown as the slowdown started on April 9, reached the peak on April 16, and continued to rise until April 21. The new infection rates started to drop from the month-end.”

The situation would have been

worse without the night lockdown, and it takes a minimum of two weeks for such measures to show their impact.

The lockdown in Dhofar had its impact as there has been a decline in positive cases and inpatients.

Currently, the percentage of positive cases from examinations is 13 per cent, compared to 11 per cent during the pandemic, which touched 41 per cent at one point in October 2020.

Al Abri said five per cent of the cases needed hospitalisation in health institutions as per the study prepared by the Ministry of Health.

He hoped that the number of ICU patients would drop to 15 cases per day at the end of July if the current trend continues. It will be 102 cases per day on average during the next two months.

The majority of cases among vaccinated people received mild symptoms and some hospital treatment, but one needed

The closure has contributed to a slowdown as the slowdown started on April 9, reached the peak on April 16, and continued to rise until April 21. The new infection rates started to drop from the month-end

DR SAIF AL ABRI

Director-General of Diseases Surveillance & Control

intensive care.

The ministerial team on immunisation against Covid-19 has said that more than 1 million doses of vaccines will be received in June, and the number of vaccinated people will reach

1.5 million by the end of June, including new target groups.

The committee said that the target groups include those over the age of 45, pilgrims, citizens of Musandam Governorate, frontline staff including health workers and employees in government institutions, Royal Oman Police, Sultan's Armed Forces, higher education institutions, educational staff, and Grade 12 students in schools, employees of vital sectors such as the oil and gas sector, ports, airports, and several private sector institutions.

The team explained that the deployment of vaccines will take place through the opening of vaccination centres in all governorates of the Sultanate, including the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, which is currently being prepared for this purpose, sports complexes in the Governorate of Muscat, and schools and sports complexes in other governorates.

SAI's Nazaha programme aims to nurture values

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8



Dr Hemyar al Mahrouqi

The State Audit Institution (SAI) has started producing the TV and radio programme Nazaha since 2017. This comes within the framework of SAI's efforts to raise the level of awareness and embed integrity values towards public money and public service, with the use of different media platforms. This year, Nazaha 5 comes with new content and idea and is broadcast daily on TV and radio channels as well as online platforms throughout Ramadhan.

The programme episodes aim to build positive trends and virtuous practices with public funds, promote ethical conduct on public service as well as embed a culture of uprightness and morality in the lives of individuals and society as a whole.

This is because of the significance of developing integrity in individuals to stay away from corruption and thus protect society from negative competition.

As for the idea of the programme and the diversity of its content, Dr Hemyar al Mahrouqi, Director of Media and Communication Department at SAI, stated that the fifth season of the programme is featured with presenting the most significant matters in relation to integrity values towards public

property and public service. Each subject matter was highlighted through montaging various video clips taken from the previous 4 seasons and introducing short acting scenes along with general legal content.

Al Mahrouqi added that in 30 episodes, the programme focuses on specific primary themes which are: integrity values and its practices, duties towards public fund and its inviolability, professional values as well as efficient use of resources.

The programme targets different individuals in society and promotes the principle of partnership and collective responsibility towards public money and institutional performance.

The programme was broadcast in different audio, visual and electronic platforms and at different timings throughout the day, which allowed everyone to watch the programme whenever convenient.

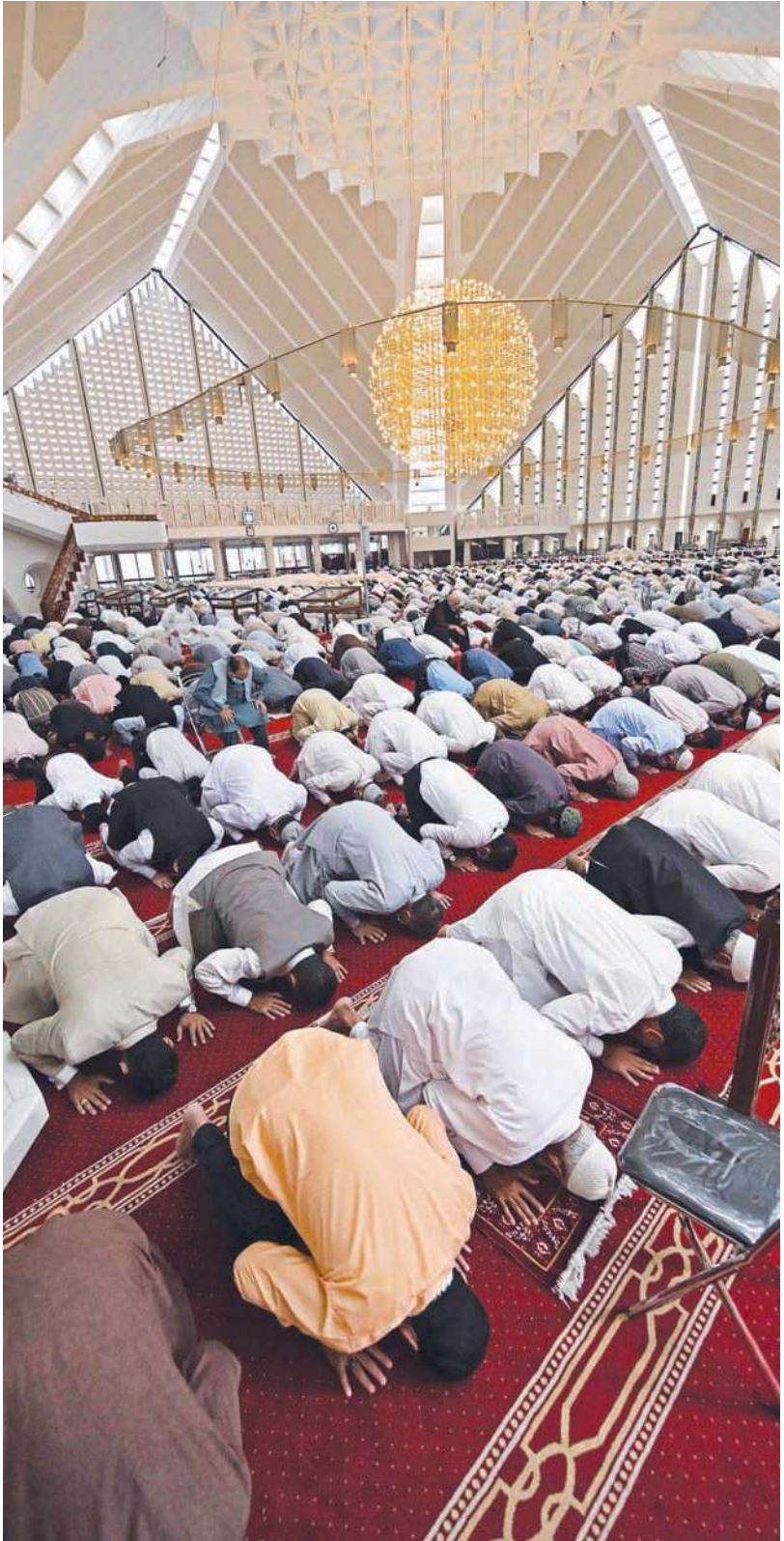


Ramadhan

M U B A R A K



KOSOVO: Devotees offer prayers on the last Friday of the holy month at a new mosque in the town of Pristina. – AFP



PAKISTAN: Devotees offer prayers on the last Friday of Ramadhan at the Grand Faisal Mosque ahead of the Eid-al-Fitr in Islamabad. – AFP



SENEGAL: Worshippers preform Faye Faat (The Compensatory Prayer) at the Mosque of Divinity in Dakar as Faye Faat falls on the last Friday of the month of Ramadhan. – AFP



JERUSALEM: A woman reads near the Dome of the Rock, in the compound known to Muslims as Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as Temple Mount, in Jerusalem's Old City. – Reuters



PALESTINE: A Palestinian family prepare traditional pastries to be sold in preparation for the upcoming Eid-al-Fitr holiday in the village of Susya in the southern area of Hebron. – AFP



MALAYSIA: A performer wearing a Mickey Mouse costume, dances at a Ramadhan Bazaar during a lockdown due to Covid-19 outbreak, in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday. – Reuters

US envoy in Sudan for talks on Nile dam, border tensions



US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman meets with Sudanese Foreign Minister Maryam al Sadeq al Mahdi in Khartoum. — AFP

KHARTOUM: The US envoy for the Horn of Africa arrived in Sudan on Friday for talks on Ethiopia's controversial Nile dam and rising tensions over a fertile border region, Sudanese state media reported.

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia have been locked in inconclusive talks over the filling and operation of the huge hydro-power dam since Addis Ababa broke ground on it in 2011.

Cairo views the dam as an existential threat to its water supply, while Khartoum fears its own dams would be harmed

The talks will tackle the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the border tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia

if Ethiopia fills the reservoir without a deal. Addis Ababa insists the barrage is indispensable for its development.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Mariam al Sadiq al Mahdi met US envoy Jeffrey Feltman at

the airport in Khartoum, according to a correspondent.

Feltman is expected to meet with head of state Abdel Fattah al Burhan, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and other senior Sudanese officials on his two-day visit, official news agency SUNA said.

"The talks will tackle the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the border tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia," it added.

Feltman's visit comes as part of a regional tour that also takes in Egypt, Eritrea and

Ethiopia, according to the US State Department.

Ethiopia, which announced last July it had completed its first-year filling target for the dam, has said it would proceed with the second stage regardless of whether an agreement is in place.

US and European Union observers have attended multiple rounds of negotiations between the three countries that have so far failed to produce a binding deal.

Tensions over the dam come amid souring relations between Sudan and Ethiopia over Al Fashaqa, a fertile border region where Ethiopian farmers have long cultivated fertile land claimed by Sudan.

Khartoum and Addis Ababa have been locked in a tense war of words over the region, trading accusations of violence and territorial violations in the area.

Meanwhile, Sudan has passed its second review under the International Monetary Fund's staff-monitored programme in a step towards debt relief, its finance minister said.

Clearing the second review paves the way for Sudan to be approved for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) process "which will hopefully result in a substantial debt relief for (Sudan) as well as new credit lines," Jibril Ibrahim said on Twitter. — Reuters



Tear gas billows amid clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian protesters at the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem. — AFP

EU urges authorities to 'de-escalate' tensions

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Saturday condemned violent clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al Aqsa mosque compound and urged authorities to quickly calm tensions.

"Violence and incitement are unacceptable and the perpetrators on all sides must be held accountable," a spokesman said in a statement.

"The European Union calls on the authorities to act urgently to de-escalate the current tensions in Jerusalem."

The statement added that "acts of incitement around the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif must be avoided and the status quo has to be respected", using another term for the key religious site.

It said "political, religious and community leaders on all sides should show restraint and responsibility and make every effort to calm down this volatile situation".

More than 160 people were wounded when Israeli riot police clashed with Palestinians at the Al Aqsa mosque compound late on Friday, capping a week of violence in the Holy City and the occupied West Bank.

Stones, bottles and fireworks were

hurled at officers who fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at the crowds at Islam's third-holiest site, also revered by Jews as the location of two biblical-era temples.

Police said officers had restored order because of the "rioting of thousands of worshippers" after evening prayers.

Tensions in Jerusalem have soared in recent weeks as Palestinians have protested against Israel's restrictions on access to parts of the Old City during Ramadhan, and after authorities ordered several Palestinian families to leave their homes to make way for Israeli settlers.

The EU statement condemned the evictions as "illegal" and blamed them for increasing tensions.

"The situation with regard to the evictions of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and other areas of East Jerusalem is also of serious concern," it said. "Such actions are illegal under international humanitarian law and only serve to fuel tensions on the ground."

Meanwhile, more than 200 people have been injured in heavy clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in Jerusalem. — dpa

Lebanon's lights may go off as cash for electricity runs out

BEIRUT: Lebanon's lights may go off this month because cash for electricity generation is running out, a lawmaker said on Thursday, as the country grapples with a deep economic crisis.

Lebanon's parliament had approved a \$200 million emergency loan to finance fuel imports for power generation in March, but a committee reviewing the loan has yet to approve it.

"We should not forget that starting May 15, gradual darkness will start," said Nazih Negm, a member of parliament, according to a government statement released after he met the caretaker finance and energy ministers.

The Lebanese have long learned to live with regular power cuts that run for at least three hours a day in the capital and much longer in other areas, because the state's power plants cannot meet demand. Many people rely on private generators.

But the financial crisis has exacerbated the heavily indebted nation's problems, as the government struggles to find enough foreign exchange to pay for fuel and other basic imports.

The loan, approved by



A view shows the Zahrani Power plant in Zahrani, Lebanon. — Reuters File Photo

lawmakers in March, is being reviewed by a constitutional committee, which is studying whether it is lawful. The government resigned after a massive blast in Beirut in August and is now acting in a caretaker capacity.

"We hope that the constitutional committee does not take a month to reach its decision because the situation can't wait," Negm said, according to the government statement.

Lebanon usually keeps enough fuel for about two months or so, as it is too costly

to hold strategic reserves for longer.

The economic meltdown, the biggest crisis since the end of Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, has fuelled unrest, locked depositors out of their accounts and hammered the currency, which has lost around 90 per cent of its value against the dollar.

Meanwhile, France's top diplomat wielded the threat of more sanctions in Beirut to prevent what he described as a "collective suicide" organised by members of Lebanon's ruling political class.

Lebanon's leaders had promised reform in the aftermath of a deadly explosion at Beirut port last year but, nine months on, they have yet to form a government.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, whose country has spearheaded international efforts to assist Lebanon's moribund economy, said there was no sign of a breakthrough.

"It is indeed urgent to find a way out of the political deadlock," he told reporters just before wrapping up a two-day visit to Beirut. — Reuters



Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Tender Announcement

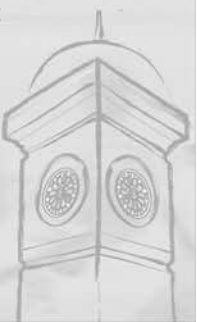
Sultan Qaboos University Hospital announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Subject	Non-Refundable Fee	Last Collection Date	Site Visit Date	Last Date of Submission
DND/T/285/2021	CATERING SERVICES CONTRACT IN SQUH	OMR. 90	23/05/2021	24/05/2021	28/06/2021

Tender Conditions:

- The companies who are registered in Tender Board shall collect the documents during office hours from 8.00 am to 1.00 pm from the Procurement Department/ Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- The site visit shall be at 09.00 am in the Nutrition & Dietetics Department building / Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- The Tenderers shall submit with the form of tender a certified cheque or tender bond from a locally registered bank in the sum of (1%) of the tender value and valid for 90 days from the date of tender submission and addressed to the chairman of tender committee, Sultan Qaboos University.
- The tender quotations shall be sealed and addressed to Procurement Director; Sultan Qaboos University Hospital. The tender number and the name of the tender shall be mentioned on the tender document. It is not accepted to indicate or mention the name of the company or its logo on the envelop.
- The quotations are subject to the Tender General Terms& Conditions for the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- Sultan Qaboos University Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.

Procurement Directorate
Sultan Qaboos University Hospital
AL Khoudh / Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24144688 / 24144633
Fax: 24413156
E-mail: hospitalprocure@squ.edu.om
www.squ.edu.om



Myanmar says no Asean envoy visit until stability restored

YANGON: Myanmar’s ruling military, which is facing nationwide protests against the coup that removed the elected government three months ago, said on Friday it would not agree to a visit by a Southeast Asian envoy until it could establish stability.

Leaders of countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) reached consensus on five points at a summit on the Myanmar crisis last month, which was attended by the architect of the February 1 coup, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

These included an end to violence, dialogue between the military and its opponents, allowing humanitarian help, and permitting a visit by a special Asean envoy.

“Right now, we are prioritising the security and stability of the country”, Major Kaung Htet San, a spokesman for the military council, told a televised briefing.

“Only after we achieve a certain level of security and stability, we will cooperate regarding that envoy.”

The junta would consider suggestions made at the summit if they were helpful to its visions for the country, he added.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the coup, which unleashed anger amongst a public unwilling to tolerate a return to military rule after five decades of economic mismanagement and underdevelopment.

Protests and marches have taken place on most days, the latest a big pro-democracy demonstration on Friday in the commercial capital Yangon, and smaller protests in



Protesters make the three-finger salute during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon. — AFP

at least 10 other places around the country.

At least 769 people have been killed and nearly 3,700 detained in the military’s crackdown on opponents, according to an advocacy group monitoring the crisis.

The junta says it is battling terrorists. On Friday, spokesman Kaung Htet San said more arrests of instigators of violence had been made than were publicly announced.

The April 24 Asean meeting in Jakarta was hailed as a success by those who attended, but analysts and activists remain sceptical that Myanmar’s generals will implement the five-point plan, which had no timeframe nor any mention of releasing political prisoners, including ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Protests and marches have taken place on most days, in Yangon, and smaller protests in at least 10 other places around the country

Kaung Htet San said Asean leaders had provided positive suggestions to Min Aung Hlaing, but whether or not they would be followed depended on the situation in Myanmar, and if their ideas were “helpful to our further visions”.

The prospect of stability anytime soon in Myanmar appears bleak, with a reigniting of conflict between the military and ethnic minority insurgents in the borderlands and minor bombings and explosions now taking place

regularly in its main cities.

The junta says it is fighting rogue elements of ethnic armies and all parties remain committed to a nationwide ceasefire. It has blamed the spate of urban bombings on supporters of Suu Kyi’s ousted government.

A recently formed National Unity Government, a coalition of anti-military groups, says the junta orchestrated the bombings as a pretext to crush its opponents.

Two local media outlets on Friday reported that fighters from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) attacked and killed 30 Myanmar troops as they tried to travel on a river, citing local people and a KIA source.

Kaung Htet San said violence and armed conflicts would be dealt with by the military “in a suitable way”. — Reuters

Maldives steps up hunt for suspects after bomb attack

MALE: Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed remained in intensive care on Saturday as security services stepped up the hunt for the attackers, who allegedly used a remote control bomb on the democracy pioneer and climate activist.

The 53-year-old, who remains the Indian Ocean country’s number two leader, is recovering from 16 hours of surgery to remove shrapnel from his lungs, liver, chest, abdomen and limbs after the attack on Thursday night.

In its first report on the attempted assassination, the Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF) said a homemade bomb was used.

“The improvised explosive device was triggered using a remote control”, an MNDF official told reporters in the capital Male.

Police say they have identified

four suspects seen close to the attack, but no arrests had been made.

The Maldives is expecting Australian Federal Police officers to join the investigation on Saturday in addition to two experts from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih thanked Nasheed’s medical team and said he prayed for his “quick recovery and return — stronger and steadier than ever”.

Nasheed is a democracy pioneer in the Maldives who ended decades of one-party rule in the archipelago and became its first democratically elected president in 2008.

He is also known internationally as a champion for battling climate change and rising sea levels that he says threaten to submerge the nation of 1,192 tiny coral islands. — AFP



Police secure a site after a suspected bomb blast injured former Maldives president and current parliament speaker Mohamed Nasheed in Male. — AFP

Chinese rocket to tumble back to Earth in re-entry

SHANGHAI: Remnants of China’s largest rocket launched last week are expected to plunge back through the atmosphere late on Saturday or early Sunday, a US federally funded space-focused research and development centre said.

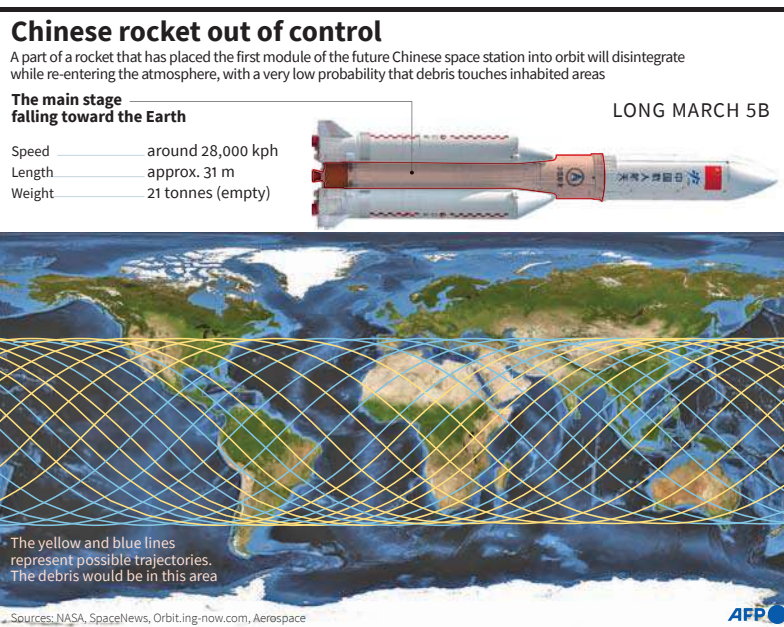
China’s foreign ministry said on Friday that most debris from the rocket will be burned up on re-entry and is highly unlikely to cause any harm, after the US military said that what it called an uncontrolled re-entry was being tracked by US Space Command.

In a tweet sent on Friday evening in the United States, the Aerospace Corporation said that the latest

prediction for the re-entry of the Long March 5B rocket body by its Center for Orbital Reentry and Debris Studies (CORDS) was for eight hours on either side of 0419 GMT on Sunday.

CORDS’ latest “informed prediction” of the rocket body’s re-entry location was given near the North Island of New Zealand, but it noted that re-entry was possible anywhere along paths covering large swathes of the globe.

The Long March 5B — comprising one core stage and four boosters — lifted off from China’s Hainan island on April 29 with the unmanned Tianhe module, which contains what will become living



quarters on a permanent Chinese space station.

The Long March 5 family of rockets have been integral to China’s near-term space ambitions — from the delivery of modules and crew of its planned space station to launches of exploratory probes to the moon and even Mars.

The Long March launched last week was the second deployment of the 5B variant since its maiden flight in May last year.

Harvard-based astrophysicist Jonathan McDowell previously said there is a chance that pieces of the rocket could come down over land, perhaps in a populated area, as in May 2020, when pieces

from the first Long March 5B rained down on the Ivory Coast, damaging several buildings, though no injuries were reported.

Debris from Chinese rocket launches is not uncommon within China. In late April, authorities in the city of Shiyan, Hubei province, issued a notice to people in the surrounding county to prepare for evacuation as parts were expected to land in the area.

“The Long March 5B re-entry is unusual because during launch, the first stage of the rocket reached orbital velocity instead of falling downrange as is common practice,” the Aerospace Corporation said in a blog post. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan receives first consignment of vaccine

Pakistan on Saturday received its first consignment of AstraZeneca’s coronavirus vaccine as the country of 220 million scrambles to secure more supplies amid a third wave of the pandemic. The first shipment of over 1.2 million doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has arrived in Islamabad, Rana Safdar, a senior Health Ministry official said.

Pakistan secured 17 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine through the World



Health Organization’s COVAX programme.

The first delivery was expected in March but got delayed due to an Indian ban on the export of the vaccine. — dpa

BANGKOK

Thailand aims for wider tourism reopening from Oct

Thailand plans to waive its mandatory quarantine for vaccinated visitors to its capital Bangkok and top tourist destinations from October, an official said, in a bid to revive a key industry battered by coronavirus travel curbs. The new measure means easier access to hotspots like Pattaya, Phang Nga, Koh Samui, Krabi and the capital Bangkok, deputy government spokeswoman Traisulee Traisoranakul said.

Thailand has since a year ago



tightened visa processes and required all visitors and returning residents to undergo 14 days of quarantine in government-approved facilities.

— Reuters

MANILA

Philippines tightens controls on inbound travellers

Travellers entering the Philippines will be required to undergo 14 days of quarantine, up from a week previously, as authorities try to contain more infectious coronavirus variants, the presidential spokesman. The new controls will apply regardless of whether a visitor has been vaccinated and the first 10 days of quarantine will be in a government-accredited facility and the remainder at home, Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said in a briefing.



Visitors will get a Covid-19 test on the seventh day after arrival, but will still be required to complete a 10-day stay in a facility even if they test negative, Roque said. — Reuters

In brief

NEW YORK



BIDEN SAYS IS CONFIDENT HE CAN MEET PUTIN SOON

US President Joe Biden said he expected to be able to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin soon and the White House said ongoing differences between the United States and Russia would not need to be resolved in advance of a summit.

Biden told reporters at the White House he wanted to meet Putin despite Russia's build-up of military forces near Ukraine.

"It does not impact my desire to have a one-on-one meeting and you'll notice he had more troops before. He's withdrawn troops," he said.

Asked about meeting Putin in June, he said: "I'm confident we'll be able to do it. We don't have any specific time or place."

BRUSSELS



BELGIANS BRAVE RAIN TO RETURN TO OUTDOOR TABLES

After almost seven months of a second national lockdown, a thirsty Belgium, heartland of European beer, returned gingerly to outside tables on Saturday. The wet weather was not promising as the first hardy souls began to gather to café terraces in Brussels, hoping to take a step towards a return to normal life.

Belgium was one of the hardest hit countries in the first wave of the epidemic last year, and locked down harder than some when the later surges hit. Now a national vaccination campaign has begun to make progress, infection numbers are down and the government has begun a phased return to business as usual. — AFP

WASHINGTON



WHITE HOUSE RELEASES FIRST VISITOR LOGS SINCE OBAMA

The White House released its first batch of records disclosing visits by official guests, returning to a practice set by the Obama administration but ditched by Donald Trump. The White House disclosed 400 visits during President Joe Biden's first 12 days in office. The White House typically sees hundreds of visitors each day, but the pandemic has slowed those visits dramatically, the records show.

"As vaccinations increase and the pandemic response continues to make progress, we look forward to welcoming many more visitors onto the White House campus and back into the People's House," the White House said. — Reuters

SNP on course for 4th term in office

GLASGOW: The Scottish National Party (SNP), which has vowed to hold an independence referendum that could tear the United Kingdom apart should it be returned to power, will find out on Saturday if it has won a majority in Scotland's parliament.

The SNP says it will seek to hold a new vote on secession if a pro-independence majority is returned to the devolved 129-seat parliament. This would set up a clash with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who says he will refuse any such vote because Scots backed staying in the United Kingdom in 2014.

Initial results showed the SNP on course for a fourth consecutive term in office having triumphed in 40 of 49 seats declared so far, including in three key battlegrounds.

But some areas saw an increase in support for opposition pro-union parties, indicating the final outcome would be very close. The final results will be announced later on Saturday.

The electoral system — which allocates some seats on a proportional representation basis which helps smaller parties — might see the SNP fail to win an outright majority, something First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, the party leader, acknowledged.

"I have never taken that (an outright majority) for granted and it has always been on a knife edge,"



Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon gives a TV interview at a counting centre, in Glasgow, Scotland. — Reuters

she said.

There is likely still to be a pro-independence majority even if the SNP fall short because of the Green Party, which also supports secession. But supporters of the union argue that without an SNP majority, there is no mandate for a referendum.

Scottish politics has been diverging from other parts of the United Kingdom for some time, but Scots remain divided over

Scottish National Party plans independence referendum if it wins majority as PM Johnson rules out another secession vote

holding another polarising vote on whether to end their country's 314-year union with England and Wales.

Britain's exit from the European Union — a move opposed by a majority of Scots — as well as a perception that Sturgeon's government has handled the Covid-19 crisis well and antipathy to Johnson's Conservative government in London, have all bolstered support for Scotland's independence movement.

Scots voted by 55-45 per cent in 2014 to remain part of the United Kingdom, and Johnson says that

was a "once in a generation" vote. Polls suggest the outcome of a second referendum would be too tight to call.

The British government says Johnson must approve any vote for it to be legal and he has made clear no such approval would be forthcoming.

"I think a referendum in the current context is irresponsible and reckless," he told the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper.

Sturgeon herself has ruled out holding any vote until after the Covid-19 pandemic, with the SNP indicating it would be held by the end of 2023. She argues there would be no moral or democratic justification for Johnson to refuse a referendum if the Scottish parliament passes a bill to hold a vote.

"The results are looking like what we expected, that with the Scottish Greens there will be a pro-independence majority in the Scottish parliament and we take that as a clear mandate from the Scottish people to hold another referendum," Lorna Slater, co-leader of the Scottish Greens, told the BBC.

"I think Boris Johnson doesn't want a referendum because he knows he's going to lose."

With Sturgeon ruling out holding an illegal or wildcat plebiscite, it is likely that the issue will ultimately be decided by Britain's top court. — AFP

Defects, damage suspected in Mexico metro disaster



A person places a candle down near the site of a train accident where an elevated metro line partially collapsed, during an event in honour of the victims in Mexico City. — AFP

MEXICO CITY: The collapse of a Mexico City metro overpass that left 26 people dead could have been caused by defects in the steel beams or damage to the joints, experts said.

The capital's mayor, Claudia Sheinbaum, said after Monday's accident, which also left 80 injured, that a beam holding up the section of elevated track had given way. Norwegian engineering company DNV has been asked to help prosecutors with the investigation into the disaster, which has prompted accusations of negligence and demands for justice from devastated relatives.

Sergio Alcocer, a researcher at the engineering faculty of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, said that the collapse "may be due to a defect in the steel" used to make the beams.

Like other experts, he based his initial suspicions on a police

Prosecutors have been asked with the investigation into the disaster, which has prompted accusations of negligence and demands for justice from devastated relatives

video showing the moment when an elevated part of metro line 12 collapsed, sending two carriages plunging towards the ground.

Juan Manuel Fuentes, technical director of Mexican structural engineering firm Quasar, said that "the deafening vibration" on some of the sections of the line also could have caused the overpass's joints to weaken.

According to a senior Mexico City official, Jesus Antonio Estevas, "it is clear that there was a

failure in the metal structures" of the section of elevated track that came crashing down.

Line 12, also known as the Golden Line, is 24.5 kilometres long and was built at a cost of around \$1.2 billion — 70 per cent more than originally planned.

It was inaugurated in 2012 by then-mayor Marcelo Ebrard — now foreign minister — who, along with Sheinbaum, is at the centre of the political furor unleashed by the tragedy.

In 2014, operations were suspended along 12 stations of the line for just over a year due to a deterioration in the track, rail fastenings and railroad ties, also known as sleepers.

The same year, the Mexico City authorities hired the French engineering company Systra to determine the causes and recommend measures to solve the issue. — AFP

Indian states impose stricter lockdowns

CHENNAI: India on Saturday reported its highest ever single-day Covid-19 death toll, as cases continued to rise and states imposed stricter lockdowns.

India's health ministry reported 4,187 fatalities over the past 24 hours, taking the overall death toll to just under 240,000. Cases rose by 401,078, increasing the total since the start of the pandemic to 21.9 million.

Medical experts say the real numbers of Covid-19 cases and fatalities are likely to be far higher than official tallies.

Tamil Nadu, known for its automobile manufacturing including BMW, Daimler, Hyundai, Ford, Nissan and Renault, said it would move from a partial to a full lockdown on Monday, stopping public transport and shutting state-run alcohol retailers.

Neighbouring Karnataka

state extended a total shutdown late on Friday. The state capital Bengaluru is a major tech hub, home to major offices of companies including Google, Amazon and Cisco.

India is yet to impose a national lockdown as it did during its first wave last year, but around half of all its states have imposed a total shutdown. The rest are under a partial shutdown.

Though it is the world's biggest vaccine maker, India is struggling to produce and distribute enough doses to stem the wave of Covid-19.

Although the country has administered over 167 million vaccine doses, its rate of inoculation has fallen sharply in recent days and only around 2 per cent of its 1.4 billion people have received the two doses needed to be fully immunised.

— Reuters



Health workers check equipment in a ward of a newly open Covid care facility at Balak Ram hospital in New Delhi. — AFP

The contradictions that torment contemporary pandemic societies

The Covid-19 pandemic is no longer about medicine, science, or health. It has now become a social phenomenon as several factors emerge through the political, economic, psychological and social disaster that it has morphed into.

Why is it no longer a medical, scientific, and health issue? Because several different vaccines have now been developed, been approved and are in circulation, with around 700 million people vaccinated, 8 billion yet to be treated. Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna, Janssen, Novavax, Sputnik, Cor-V, CoronaVac, QazVax, Covaxin and Convadecia, are those currently in use, variously, around the world. The pandemic has now evolved somewhat, and become globally, about getting populations treated, and here is where the socio-economic issues emerge, countering the global imperative of herd immunity as a defence against Covid-19.

The reality is that herd immunity, while being the only clear and coherent solution, faces political, economic and social barriers, that are currently perpetuating global misery. Too many politicians, and global leaders, have to date demonstrated a contemptable talent for procrastination and confusion in fighting the pandemic, appearing to prioritise political survival and economic stability over their society's needs. It is ironic that



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WE, REALISTICALLY, CANNOT DO MUCH ABOUT THE POLITICS AND THE ECONOMICS SURROUNDING THE PANDEMIC, BUT IF WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE IN THE FIGHT TOGETHER

the global societies with enormous wealth and significant military might, also have the most enormous poverty, and are proving more vulnerable to the pandemic.

The cynical among us have identified capital gains by the more affluent, with employer's practices and motives, even their capabilities, coming under the microscope. Who would have thought that organisations and institutions would be able to function effectively with their staff working from home? There is less traffic, less congestion, and significantly less pollution, but also, less control! Will management relinquish these dominance, power, and control psyches in a post-pandemic landscape?

It is, therefore, entirely understandable that those who are unable to provide sufficient protection and care for their dependents, who are bereaved, and who are unable to grieve, are further, exponentially 'poorer' because of lockdowns, closures, and redundancies, are showing signs of greater frustration. It is the disparity in mortality rates across gender, ethnicity, disability, and age, the social divisions existent in societies, that are rubbing salt in the wounds of the less affluent.

Our human solidarity in adversity in the manner of the British during the German blitz of WWII, or the extraordinary survival of the Uruguayan Flight 571 passengers, a

football team, in 1972, are social and relationship characteristics have been dramatically, forcefully, and rudely taken away, and the Internet, and virtual technologies are, wrote Michael Brennan, "ersatz, a poor substitute for the embodiment of touch and interaction that are the cornerstones of humanity." Societally, and individually, we are also losing faith in the future, our futures, and Covid will not help in our positive re-imagination of that future, will it?

We cannot allow this pandemic to become a debate, an "I want", or more importantly though ignorance and fear, an "I don't want!" Like these... "It will make me infertile." It has no effect on fertility. "The vaccine will give me Covid." Impossible, it is synthetic. "I don't need vaccination, I'm young and healthy." You are as vulnerable as anyone. "Sanitation and hygiene are enough." Certainly, they help, but vaccines protect. "Covid is not real!" So why are people dying? "It's a plot, with the Chinese/Americans/Elon Musk/Bill Gates and 5G, to turn us into zombies!" Well... flat earth thinking is alive and well.

We, realistically, cannot do much about the politics and the economics surrounding the pandemic, but if we can understand that we are in the fight together, though distanced, we can take assurance that we are very much, not alone.

OUT OF POWER IN WASHINGTON

Republicans pursue hard-right agenda across the country

JAMES OLIPHANT AND NATHAN LAYNE

Shut out of power in Washington, Republicans are using their dominance in state houses across the country to oppose Democratic President Joe Biden's agenda and appease the diehard supporters of his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump.

In Texas, Republican lawmakers are pushing for legislation that would allow citizens to carry a handgun without a permit or any training.

In Florida, Oklahoma and Iowa, Republican legislators passed bills granting immunity to drivers who hit protesters, part of a wave of Republican-led legislation aimed at cracking down on public protests of the kind that followed the police killing of George Floyd. Across the country, a bevy of states have passed bills preventing transgender athletes from playing high school sports.

And Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis on Thursday signed a sweeping new reform bill that limits mail-in voting and ballot drop boxes, making the state the latest to restrict voting access in the aftermath of Trump's false claims that he lost the November election due to widespread fraud.

These actions have made for a stark contrast with the first few months of the Biden administration, which has pursued a sweeping liberal agenda on civil rights, police reform, gun control and voting rights.

Although Democrats control the White House and both chambers of Congress, Republicans dominate the nation's state houses. After a dismal showing by Democrats on the state level in the 2020 elections, Republicans now control the legislatures of 30 states and also hold the governor's office in 23 of those states.

Republicans are using that power to serve as "counterweight to the Democratic trifecta" in Washington, said Dee Duncan, President of the Republican State Leadership Committee, an arm of the party that supports state legislative candidates.

But civil rights groups, Democrats and even some Republicans say the party is doubling down on a host of hot-button social and cultural issues to only appeal to the party's activist base.

"It's a toxic combination of grievance politics and the traditional culture wars", said David Jolly, a former Republican congressman from Florida who left the party over Trump.

So far this year, Republican state lawmakers have proposed or advanced more than 250 bills regarded by activists as being restrictive of LGBTQ rights, 361 bills with restrictive voting provisions, and passed 35 bills to relax gun regulations, according to advocacy groups tracking the legislation.

Meanwhile, the 83 anti-protest bills introduced so far in 2021 is more than double the number introduced in comparable periods of prior legislative sessions, according to Elly Page, a senior legal adviser at the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law.

The trend signifies that the Republican Party, after its surprising performance on the state level in November's election despite Trump's own loss, continues to believe that it must play to the former president's base in order to win, says Jacob Rubashkin, a nonpartisan elections analyst in Washington. — Reuters

LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

Online Samaritans rush to help India

LEELA JACINTO

The latest Covid-19 surge has driven desperate Indians to seek help on social media. As adults struggle to cope with medical shortages, India's wired youths are doing their bit to help — and getting lessons on resilience, initiative and the constructive power of the Internet.

Mahi Saraf was stuck at home under lockdown during India's devastating second Covid-19 surge when she saw the plea for help on her high school WhatsApp group. A teacher at her school in the New Delhi suburb of Gurgaon was gravely ill with Covid-19 and needed plasma as blood banks in the Indian capital had run out of stock. After a harrowing, unsuccessful hunt, the patient's harried family activated informal Samaritan networks in a desperate bid to secure the plasma.

The 16-year-old high school student and her classmates immediately got on the job. Within minutes, the children combed through shared spreadsheets, found contacts, verified and pursued leads, and updated Google docs in real time until a donor was a found.

"The teacher's family had tried and couldn't find a donor. When the kids got involved, it took us 30 minutes to find one", explained Saraf. "We kids all have social media accounts. The adults are so stressed, they're trying to get the money for treatment, they have so many responsibilities, we have to pitch in. It's easier when we have to do one task, we just get down to it."



People wait to get the Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine in a hospital in New Delhi. — AFP

SOCIAL MEDIA, ONCE SLAMMED IN INDIA WITH A CHRONIC FAKE NEWS PROBLEM, HAS TURNED INTO A GIANT HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM

Social media, once slammed in a country with a chronic fake news problem, has turned into a giant humanitarian platform in the world's second-most populous nation, with desperate people posting messages seeking hospital admissions, ICU beds, oxygen cylinders or concentrators, plasma donors and drugs.

Their calls are being answered by millions of online volunteers reposting and trying to help as best they can. The gap between demand and supply in a

country that largely relies on private healthcare has seen the entry of touts and profiteers, increasing the need — at a life-and-death pace — of cyber verification and authentication.

Enter the youth of India. Confronted with the sheer desperation of the adults, youths — with the intuitive online skills that their parents' generation sometimes lack — are pitching in. In the process, they're also getting lessons in resilience, confidence and initiative in a difficult world. — AFP



Germany's Alexander Zverev plays a return to Spain's Rafael Nadal in Madrid. – AFP

ZVEREV KNOCKS NADAL OUT IN MADRID

Defeat casts cloud over Spaniard's Roland Garros bid

MADRID: Rafael Nadal lost 6-4, 6-4 to Germany's Alexander Zverev in the Madrid Open quarterfinals on Friday, casting doubts over the Spaniard's form ahead of this month's French Open.

Nadal has now fallen early in two clay-court Masters tournaments ahead of the Grand Slam in Paris, after going out in the Monte Carlo quarterfinals last month before winning in Barcelona.

Even in Barcelona, however, he needed to save a championship point to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final.

World number two Nadal is hoping to clinch a 14th Roland Garros title and record-setting 21st major in the French capital.

"I had the match under control at the beginning and was playing well for six games, probably playing better than him", said Nadal.

"Then at 4-2 serving for 5-2, I had a disaster."

Nadal continued: "Of course, playing against one of the best players in the world, under these circumstances, with this speed of the court, it's very difficult. I tried



Spain's Rafael Nadal reacts during the match. – AFP

but it's true that the serve was difficult to control today."

Zverev has now beaten Nadal three times in a row but this was his first victory on clay against the five-time Madrid champion.

"It's definitely one of the biggest wins of my career so far, especially on clay against Rafa", Zverev said.

"It is the toughest thing to do in our sport. Beating him in his house, in Spain, is incredible but the tournament is not over yet."

Zverev's impressive straight-set win at the Caja Magica earns him a meeting with Dominic Thiem in the semis, in what will be a repeat of last year's US Open final, which was won by Thiem.

After losing to world number eight Andrey Rublev in Monaco, Nadal was convincingly beaten by Zverev and the spotlight will be on the 34-year-old now in Rome next week, his last tournament before heading to Paris.

It started well for Nadal when he broke Zverev to love to lead 4-2 in the first set, Zverev serving a double fault to give away the first advantage. But the world number five immediately hit back and then pulled away, four straight games

“
It is the toughest thing to do in our sport. Beating him in his house, in Spain, is incredible but the tournament is not over yet
ALEXANDER ZVEREV
German player

clinging him the set.

A whipping forehand down the line put Zverev up another break midway through the second and while Nadal resisted more pressure in the seventh game to hold, Zverev served out an impressive victory after an hour and 44 minutes.

Thiem had earlier come from a set down to beat John Isner 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 and reach the last four.

The 36-year-old Isner has never been at his most comfortable on clay but he caught Thiem cold by breaking early to claim the opening set.

But Thiem ripped a forehand pass to open up a break opportunity at 3-2 in the second, which the Austrian took when Isner hit the net with a volley.

Thiem was reading Isner's serve better by the time the match went to a decider but it was not until 4-4 that he struck again, when he chased down three Isner volleys to serve for victory. He closed out the win in just under two hours.

Norway's Casper Ruud reached the semifinals of a claycourt Masters event for the third successive time by defeating Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan 7-5, 6-1.

Ruud, who knocked out world number five and Monte Carlo Masters champion Stefanos Tsitsipas in the previous round, will face either Matteo Berrettini of Italy or Chile's Cristian Garin for a place in the final. — AFP

MADRID OPEN RESULTS Men (quarterfinals)
Alexander Zverev (GER x5) bt Rafael Nadal (ESP x1) 6-4, 6-4; Dominic Thiem (AUT x3) bt John Isner (USA) 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Casper Ruud (NOR) bt Alexander Bublik (KAZ) 7-5, 6-1; Matteo Berrettini (ITA x8) bt Cristian Garin (CHI x16) 5-7, 6-3, 6-0



Indian board yet to discuss IPL offer from English counties

NEW DELHI: The Indian cricket board will explore all options to try to complete this year's Indian Premier League (IPL) but is yet to discuss offers from English counties to host the remaining matches, a senior official said on Friday.

The eight-team league was postponed indefinitely on Tuesday after several personnel tested positive for Covid-19 following bubble breaches in two venues.

Warwickshire, Surrey and the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) have offered to host the IPL's remaining 31 matches in September, according to www.

espnricinfo.com.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan last month said he was keen to bring the lucrative league, which attracts international cricket's top players, to the city.

"We will explore all the options and see when it's feasible to play those matches and take a call at the right time," BCCI treasurer Arun Singh Dhumal said by telephone.

"Their offer has not been discussed yet. It's too early."

"Right now, our immediate plan is finalise the preparation for the Twenty20 World Cup in India later this year."

Dhumal said the interest to

stage IPL matches was indicative of its popularity abroad.

"IPL is huge, and everybody wants to host IPL matches. It has a massive fan following even outside India."

BCCI officials have acknowledged how difficult it could be to squeeze in the remaining IPL matches in an already crowded calendar.

The franchises believe it could be in September, just before the Twenty20 World Cup is scheduled to take place in a pandemic-ravaged India.

Royal Challengers Bangalore shared a team video on their Twitter feed on Friday in which

chairman Anand Kripalu told the players the BCCI had "indicated" the tournament would resume in September.

"We trust the BCCI will obviously gather as much information as they can when looking at that window around September and obviously keep us all informed," Bangalore's Director of Cricket Operation Mike Hesson said in that video.

"We'll be part of the decision-making process as well, just to make sure that when it's rescheduled, the players and everybody involved are in a safe environment."

— Reuters

Abid bats on but Pakistan lose three wickets

HARARE: Abid Ali continued his marathon innings for Pakistan but lost three batting partners on the second day of the second Test against Zimbabwe as they looked to wrap up the two-match series on Saturday.

Opening batsman Abid had scored 151 not out as Pakistan reached 353 for seven at lunch at Harare Sports Club.

Abid took 74 balls to add 33 runs to his overnight score of 118. He had faced a total of 320 deliveries in an innings which included 20 fours.

Zimbabwe's bowlers restricted the tourists to 85 runs in 28 overs during the morning, claiming the wickets of Sajid Khan, Mohammad Rizwan and Hasan Ali.

It could have been better for Zimbabwe, who missed out on an early strike when substitute fielder Wesley Madhevere failed to hold a straightforward chance at gully from nightwatchman Sajid off Blessing Muzarabani in the third over of the day.

Sajid was on one and went on



Blessing Muzarabani

to score 20 and helped Abid see off the threat of Muzarabani and Richard Ngarava with the second new ball, which was only ten overs old at the start of play.

Madhevere was fielding in place of Roy Kaia, who suffered bruising when he was struck on the left knee while fielding at short leg on Friday.

Pakistan won the first Test by an innings and 116 runs. — AFP

Brief scores at lunch: Pakistan 353-7 in 118 overs (Abid Ali 151 not out, Azhar Ali 126; B Muzarabani 3-53)

Real, Barca, Juventus defend Super League in face of Uefa 'threats'

ROME: Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus on Saturday defended the aborted Super League project after the nine other clubs were given a financial penalty by Uefa for their involvement.

The three clubs said they had received "unacceptable" threats from Uefa and Fifa since the project collapsed just two days after it was announced last month, when six Premier League clubs and three other teams pulled out.

In a joint statement, Real, Barcelona and Juventus said the Super League had been launched "with the aim of providing solutions to the current unsustainable situation in the football industry".

They argued that they and the nine clubs who withdrew under pressure from supporters' protests — Tottenham, Arsenal, Manchester City, Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool,



Atletico Madrid, Inter Milan and AC Milan — "shared the same concerns... that structural reforms are indispensable to ensure our sport stays appealing and survives in the long term".

Those nine clubs on Friday agreed to forego five per cent of their revenue from Uefa competitions for one season and between them make a 15-million-euro (\$18.25 million) donation to support grassroots and youth football in Europe.

They also committed to participating in Uefa competitions for which they qualify and agreed to pay fines

The nine clubs on Friday agreed to forego five per cent of their revenue from Uefa competitions for one season and between them make a 15-million-euro (\$18.25 million) donation to support grassroots and youth football in Europe

of 100 million euros if they ever seek to play in an "unauthorised" competition.

Real, Barcelona and Juventus said: "We regret to see that our friends and founding partners of the Super League project have now found themselves in such an inconsistent and contradictory position when signing a number of commitments to Uefa yesterday."

Uefa said it would take "appropriate action" against the three clubs who still support the Super League project.

The clubs responded that "the founding clubs have suffered, and continue to suffer, unacceptable third-party pressures (and) threats." — AFP

New Zealand's Seifert positive for coronavirus in India

WELLINGTON: New Zealand batsman Tim Seifert was forced to stay in India after testing positive for the coronavirus as his fellow Kiwi cricketers fled the Covid-19 crisis in India for the Maldives, officials said on Saturday.

Seifert, who was playing for the Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League (IPL), failed his pre-departure tests and has been placed in quarantine.

Test players involved in the IPL — Kane Williamson, Mitchell Santner and Kyle Jamieson — had planned to stay in New Delhi before travelling to England for their upcoming Test series but have now decided to move to the Maldives.

The IPL, the world's richest Twenty20 cricket tournament, was suspended for safety reasons on Tuesday as infections in India surged.

One of two charter flights taking the remainder of New Zealand's IPL contingent

home has departed India and the other will leave later on Saturday.

Seifert is to be treated at the same Chennai hospital where former Australian player Michael Hussey has been staying since testing positive earlier in the week.

"It's really unfortunate for Tim and we'll do everything for him that we can from this end, and hopefully he will be able to test negative, and be cleared and approved for discharge as soon as he's well again," New Zealand Cricket boss David White said.

The Test players opted to leave India after learning their entry to England, initially expected to be next Tuesday, was likely to be delayed a further week.

Black Caps bowling spearhead Trent Boult is also among the 16 IPL players, officials and media returning to New Zealand and will spend time with his family before joining the Test squad in England. — AFP





Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton during practice in Spanish GP at Catalunya, Barcelona. – Reuters

HAMILTON

FASTEST IN SPANISH GP PRACTICE

* CHAMPION LEADS MERCEDES ONE-TWO * VERSTAPPEN SECOND IN MORNING

MADRID: Seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton was fastest in Spanish Grand Prix practice on Friday as the Mercedes driver prepared for a weekend that could bring him a record-stretching 100th Formula One pole position and boost his overall lead.

The Briton, who is eight points clear of Red Bull's Max Verstappen and has won the last four races at the Circuit de Catalunya, led a team one-two with Valtteri Bottas in the afternoon.

Verstappen had been second fastest in the morning but dropped to ninth, 0.615 off the pace, in the second hour-long session.

Bottas had led in the morning with a lap of one minute 18.504 seconds, 0.033 faster than Verstappen, but Hamilton put in a 1:18.170 effort on soft tyres after lunch when the conditions were warmer.

That was 0.139 quicker than Bottas's best effort.

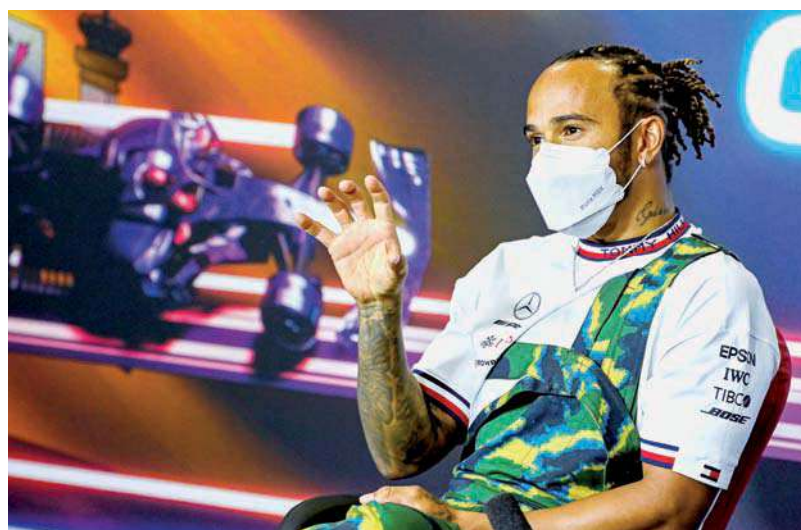
"It's been a good start to the weekend, the track is awesome and our balance is similar to what we had in the last race. It looks close but I think we've got good pace", said Hamilton, who won in Portugal last weekend.

Verstappen sounded happy also and said the car seemed competitive.

"How competitive we are going to be tomorrow is always going to be a question mark on a Friday but from our side we are quite happy", said the Dutch driver.

"Of course, you always want to improve and do better so we just have to make sure tomorrow that we are up there but I'm looking forward to it."

Red Bull team boss Christian Horner highlighted after the opening session that there was less than a tenth between his driver



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton during a press conference ahead of Spanish Grand Prix in Catalunya, Barcelona. – Reuters

and the fastest Mercedes.

"At a track like this that's been a stronghold for them for the last seven years or so, that's encouraging", Horner told Sky Sports television after first practice.

"Mercedes have been truly dominant here for the last few

years. I think if we can get close to them here that's a really encouraging sign."

GOOD BALANCE

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc ended the second session third fastest, with Alpine pairing Esteban Ocon

and Fernando Alonso continuing their improving form with fourth and fifth.

This weekend will be double world champion Alonso's first race at home in Spain since 2018, when he drove for McLaren.

"Overall, I am pleased with our two sessions and I think the car balance feels good, so it gives me confidence for tomorrow", he said.

Verstappen's Mexican teammate Sergio Perez was only ninth and 10th in the two sessions and said it had been a tricky day.

"I think our long-run pace is stronger but there's work to do", he added.

Sunday's race will be Verstappen's 100th for Red Bull, at the circuit where he became the sport's youngest ever winner on his team debut as an 18-year-old in 2016.

The Dutchman has fallen foul of track limits in recent races, having

times deleted for going too wide, but Horner doubted that would be a big issue this weekend.

"I certainly hope it won't, it's not that type of a circuit", he said, adding that there would be more discussion about the rules on Saturday.

The opening session was halted with 15 minutes remaining when Alfa Romeo reserve Robert Kubica, making his first Friday appearance of the season, went into the gravel at the revised turn 10.

HaaS's Nikita Mazepin also spun, a regular occurrence for the Russian rookie.

The virtual safety car was deployed in the afternoon when some bodywork came off Carlos Sainz's Ferrari and had to be retrieved.

In an indication of the tight competition, the top 14 drivers were separated by less than a second. — Reuters

OFA technical director focuses on training coaches

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Serbia's Slobodan Pavkovic, Technical Director at Oman Football Association (OFA), said that Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have affected the implementation of his strategy and initiatives for football development in Oman.

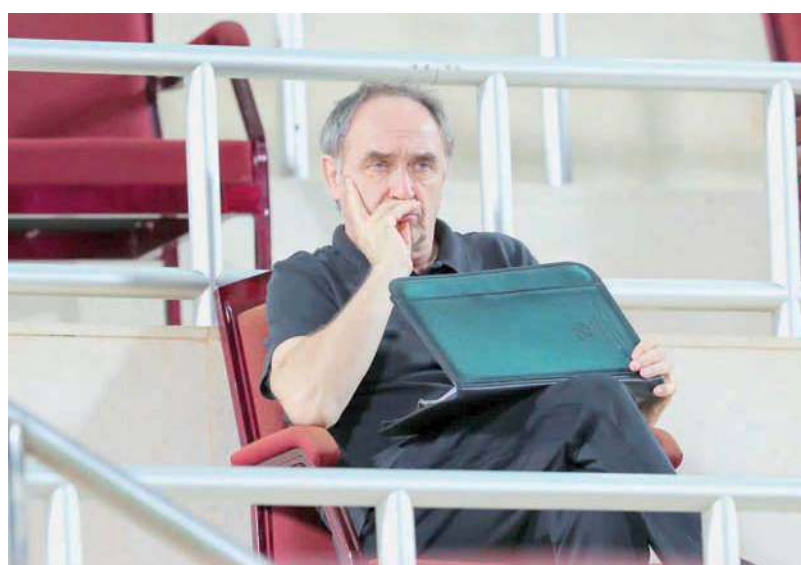
The experienced Serbian technical expert in football coaching had joined the OFA in February last year. "Since I had joined OFA, I have worked only 40 days without Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. All the set plans, initiatives and strategies for improvement of Oman's football could not be executed due to the global pandemic outbreak", he told *Oman Daily Observer* in an exclusive interview.

However, Pavkovic said that despite Covid challenges he had completed five key documents which were shared with the national coaches of under-15,

Covid challenges have affected the proper execution of technical programmes among the clubs

under-17 and under-19 teams. "I have prepared during the last few months five key documents including: Playing philosophy on how to play football, Coaching philosophy on how to coach and train, Code of conduct in coaching (how to behave), Code of conduct for players and Code of conduct for parent's players. Besides the above five mentioned documents, I have written two books on 'Coaching work' and '7 Vs 7'.

The first book gives instructions and guidelines for the youth teams coaches on how to deliver the right coaching for junior players,



Slobodan Pavkovic

while the second book is on the best ways and practices to improve your game", he said.

ONLINE PLATFORMS

Using advanced technology communication platforms during the lockdowns was one of the alternative solutions for the 65-year-old Serbian to convey the message and continue his work

with the national youth coaches.

"I have started since last 45 days 'Zoom' sessions with the national coaches on youth football coaching. Different topics were discussed during the last sessions including training process, playing philosophy, code of conduct for coaches, code of conduct for players, training of players in smaller group and finishing

techniques during the matches", he pointed out.

The former technical director in the Singapore Football Association agreed that delivering of the theoretical sessions to the domestic youth coaches is not enough to implement proper development of football in the country.

"I wish to have practical and field training sessions with the clubs' coaches. I have started in December last year a technical programme for the youth coaches in the domestic clubs. The workshop was supposed to cover all the 44 clubs in the Sultanate. Unfortunately, and due to the Covid challenges, we could manage to have only one session in Muscat Governorate", he clarified.

Pavkovic, who is well-known for football coaching on YouTube, affirmed that after resuming of sporting activities and things move to better situation, the technical programme and his visit to all the clubs will resume.

"I wish to resume my plan to

visit all the governorates to cover all the Sultanate's football clubs. This will assist us to have better analysis in country's footballing. I have got the opportunity to be with the national U-16 team in Bahrain camp last year. We have talented players who need continuous and proper training schedules", he said.

The Serbian football expert said the theoretical part of his job is completed with the national youth coaches. "All the football coaching documents and supported coaching books were already delivered and presented to the domestic coaches. Two more steps are pending and that can be briefed on implementation these coaching strategies and quarterly evaluation to the executed strategies by the youth coaches to ensure smooth learning process to the junior players. Evaluation steps can be implemented physically only with field visits which we hope to do after restart of the sporting activities", he ended.



ramadhan



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How to balance time during the final days of Ramadhan

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI
Instagram: @mazoun_alghailani



The last days of Ramadhan and the approaching Eid al Fitr turn many people's schedules into chaos. With iftar preparations, more time for holy month worship especially at nights and doing last-minute shopping and preparation for Eid throw a lot out of balance that there's almost no time left to just enjoy the moment. How is it to manage time in the last days of Ramadhan and how can one use these crucial days as an opportunity of improving our quality of life?

Badriya bint Said al Khaifi, a life and career certified coach by the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and owner of Badriya Coaching and Consulting Corporation, shared that to fix one's schedule and have proper time management, one should know first the meaning of time before organising it.

"Time is your feelings, thoughts, and behaviour at a certain moment in which you feel happy or dissatisfied. It is important to have an awareness about the importance of time and there should be a clear plan on how to divide the 24 hours and minutes. If one is aware, then one can benefit from this awareness," Badriya explained.

"The fact is, dividing time properly is a bit of a difficult task that needs commitment, flexibility, and awareness of your feelings, thoughts, and behaviour at the same time. If you have a clear picture of how you see your life in the next year or five years, the efforts you make during Ramadhan becomes less stressful and your actions also become more focused," she shared.

She pointed out that Ramadhan is a good time to practice habits of concentration, balance, planning and setting priorities.

"We can say that if you were able to organise your time in Ramadhan with all of the feelings, thoughts and behaviours, and you took these new habits with you for the rest of the year, then this is a remarkable achievement," she said.

"For example, it is important to take care of evaluating the most important 20 per cent of the different aspects of your life that needs follow up in which give you 80 per cent of the results, instead of focusing only on completing the tasks of your daily schedule, only to feel the momentary happiness," she added.

Badriya said that when Ramadhan is upon us, we should exploit its spiritual blessings by acquiring positive habits and getting rid of some habits that no longer suit us. It is also a great opportunity of repairing our relationship with ourselves. The organisation of time is

related to the extent of our positive feeling of what success means to us. Each person has his goals and aspects of his life that differ from the people around him.

"Defining your own goals contributes to making your time management and your self-motivation clearer. It is important to know the habits of commitment, setting priorities and setting personal boundaries. One should also learn and have the courage to

say no if the things you are doing is not in the matrix of your priorities. Thus you spend less than 40 per cent in the circle of pressing tasks, and 60 per cent in a circle that makes your day more productive, lively and satisfied," Al Khaifi said.

Some people are suffering from the lack of sufficient time to sleep in Ramadhan. Sleep is a basic biological need just as important as food, drink and breathing. In case of imbalance, it will affect a person's energy and achievement during the day. The concentration will decrease due to lack of sleep which in turn affects family and professional relationships. When one was unable to sleep properly, he does not perform as required, so he takes a bad impression on himself, which leads to a lack of informed decision-making and anger increases.

"Staying awake all night is not recommended. If one cannot sleep for the full 8 hours, one should divide the sleep intermittently. Getting 8 hours of sleep a day is something that the body needs. Since there is also a lockdown now, it should aid in being able to sleep early," Al Khaifi shared.

"Also the lockdown period is a perfect opportunity to look at your habits by writing them down. Try to pay attention to your behaviours, thoughts and feelings before making them your habit. Also take this opportunity to learn a new skill of setting a personal boundary, improving your health and defining family and community priorities," she said. "Time can be annoying when you think of it individually as it passes by. But on the positive side of it, if you are aware of each passing moment, you can live in the moment. Ramadhan is the perfect time to reflect and understand that time moves no matter how much you want to freeze it. We move along with time whether we like it or not and to fully utilise it, we should move along with it with flexibility. Remember always. Life is a miracle so live it fully," she shared.

"Time is your feelings, thoughts, and behaviour at a certain moment in which you feel happy or dissatisfied. It is important to have an awareness about the importance of time and there should be a clear plan on how to divide the 24 hours and minutes."

Badriya Said al Khaifi
Life and Career Certified Coach

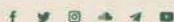


QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in row. They will not speak, unless it be one permitted by the Most Merciful, and he will say what is right.

Al Naba'

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FATWA QUESTION & ANSWER



HIS EMINENCE
SHAIKH AHMED BIN
HAMAD AL KHALILI
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN

QUESTION
A person didn't fast during Ramadhan for almost 10 years without any reason, what should he do?

ANSWER
He must compensate for those missed 10 years and make amends by fasting for two consecutive months or by feeding 60 people.

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HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Ubayy ibn Ka'b, may Allah be pleased with him, reported the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said:

"Do not curse the wind. If you see what you dislike thereof, then say: 'O Allah, we ask You for the good of this wind, the good of what it contains, and the good of what it is ordered to do. We seek refuge with You from the evil of this wind, the evil of what it contains, and the evil of what it is ordered to do'."

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CHANGING WORLD



Fire-juggling at home? Lockdown easing a relief for Hungarian circus artists

AFTER MONTHS of practising aerial acrobatics suspended from the ceiling in her tiny apartment in Budapest with only her cats for an audience, Hungarian circus artist Eszter Kovacs is relishing the prospect of performing in front of people again.

With Covid-19 restrictions beginning to ease in Hungary, where 40 per cent of the population are now vaccinated, outdoor shows in parks and at cafe terraces are now possible and hopes are rising for a vibrant summer of festivals and concerts.

Kovacs, whose skills also include fire-juggling, maintained her fitness during lockdown through a daily regime of yoga, long walks and acrobatic exercises using two flexible hoops hanging from the ceiling of her 24-square-metre living space.

For the fire-juggling, which would not have been safe to attempt in such a confined space, Kovacs made use of the narrow courtyard of her apartment block.

"We simply had no choice. For us this is not work, this is passion," she said.

Kovacs belongs to an innovative performing arts troupe called Taurin Circus. The group have their first performance of the season in front of paying spectators scheduled for June 13 at a festival. In the meantime, they have planned a series of informal outdoor performances where audiences can donate money if they wish.

The first show, a masked street theatre act performed on stilts with another arts group, took place over the weekend at Budapest's City Park. Despite the cold, windy conditions, a sizeable crowd gathered to watch, visibly enjoying live entertainment after a long hiatus.

This marked a welcome change after months during which interaction with audiences was online only. For Kovacs, that took the form of a regular fortune telling show on Facebook in which her black cat would pick tarot cards.

Fellow group member Kata Ott-Balogh, a pole acrobat, also had to adapt to the peculiar circumstances of lockdown. She installed two vertical poles in the middle of her living room, which also serves as an office.

Also in the troupe is Balazs Gyertyan, who gave up his job at a marketing agency in 2016 to become a professional magician, only for his new career to be brought to a forced halt by the pandemic.

He used lockdown time to work on new acts with his blue-eyed dog Lupin, who performs card tricks. He has also learned new skills in video and photography while running a popular online magic show that helped him get by financially.

"This past year was not about abundance ... but it was good to see that it is possible to live a lower-cost life ... and I don't need to fall into despair if there is a problem."

A sample of the group's work can be viewed at <https://www.taurincirkusz.com/>. — **Reuters**

RAMADHAN EDITION COOK LIKE A CHEF

A SPECIAL SNACK FOR YOUR IFTAR THIS RAMADHAN

Crispy Fried Prawn Croissant with Tonkatsu and Tartar



There's good food in the desert and one only has to visit the kitchen of Desert Nights Camp in Al Wasil in Sharqiyah to know this. In today's Cook Like a Chef, Chef Ruchira Silva is sharing this tasty snack — one that you can binge on during iftar.

RECIPE

Makes 4 portions

INGREDIENTS:
8 nos Croissant
50gms Red cabbage
50gms White cabbage

For the Crispy Fried Prawn
8nos Large prawn (cleaned with tail)
1 1/2 tsp Salt
1 tbsp Lemon juice
1 1/2 tsp Pepper powder
50 gms Corn flour
2 nos Eggs
100 gms Panko crumb
Oil for frying

FOR THE TARTAR SAUCE
2 nos Chopped white egg (boiled)
2 tbsp Chopped onion
1 tbsp Chopped gherkin
3 tbsp Mayonnaise
1 tsp Lemon juice
1/2 tsp Salt
1/2 tsp Pepper powder

FOR THE TONKATSU SAUCE
1 tbsp Tomato ketchup
1 1/2 tsp Worcestershire sauce
1 1/2 tsp Oyster sauce
1 1/4 tsp Sugar
For the garnish
2 tbsp Spring onion

METHOD:

FOR THE CRISPY FRIED PRAWN
Season the prawn with lemon, pepper, salt and keep for 10 to 15 min.
Coat the prawn in cornflour and remove excess flour.
Beat the eggs and make a batter
Dip the prawn in egg batter, coat in panko crumb and keep aside.
Heat the oil up to 175°C and fry the prawns for 2-3 minutes until golden brown.
Drain the excess oil and keep it aside.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF RUCHIRA SILVA is currently the Executive Chef of the multi-awarded Desert Nights Camp in Al Wasil in Rimal Al Sharqiya.

With an advanced school level at the Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, Chef Ruchira gained his experience by working with some of the 5-star hotels in his home country. His career would take him from some of the best hotels and restaurants in Sri Lanka to the beautiful island of Maldives and finally in the shores of Oman.

Working his way from commi, to sous chef to finally as an executive chef, Chef Ruchira's is as diverse as a chef can get. He likes preparing different cuisines in his kitchen and is adept with Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Mediterranean, Western, Middle Eastern, Indian and Sri Lankan dishes.

FOR THE TARTAR SAUCE

Mix all the ingredients in bowl and keep a side.

FOR THE TONKATSU SAUCE

Mix all the ingredients together in bowl and keep a side.

FOR ASSEMBLING THE CROISSANT SANDWICH

Take croissant, cut the middle through halfway and open wide.
Mix the cabbage and fill it into the croissant.
Layer the 02 fried prawns on top of the cabbage.
Top the prawns with tartar sauce.
Dress with tonkatsu sauce and serve.

ANIMAL PLANET

Pandas a respite from pandemic for Madrid care home residents



ELDERLY RESIDENTS from a nursing home outside Madrid relished the fresh air and freedom of a guided tour around the city's zoo on Wednesday, delighting in particular at the sight of Bing-Xing the giant panda.

Around 50 residents and staff from the Casaverde home, all of them vaccinated, were whisked through the zoo's leafy trails on a miniature train and introduced to some of the park's most charismatic inhabitants, in their first organised excursion since the Covid-19 pandemic struck last spring.

"It's great to leave, to get out of the monotony of the nursing home, especially as we have been confined to it for so long," said Manuel Roman, one of the residents.

Mariano Valdera, 80, was thrilled to see a wide range of animals, from pandas and elephants to birds.

"Here I feel just like I used to years ago in my village, in the middle of nature, listening to the birds, which I haven't heard for such a long time," he said.

Nearly 43,000 elderly people in Spanish nursing homes died of Covid-19 or a suspected infection during the first wave of the pandemic.

After such a devastating loss, authorities prioritised the vaccination of people who work and live in care homes, achieving nearly total coverage by the end of February.

Cristina Bravo, director of the Casaverde home, stressed the importance of being able to return to some semblance of normality: "Today was a very exciting day, they were really looking forward to going outside again... Today we have forgotten about the pain." — **Reuters**

Int’l JV plans green hydrogen project in Oman

ZERO-CARBON:
Partnership of Fusion Fuel Green of Ireland and CCC Group to invest in clean energy venture to help refining and petrochemical firms achieve their decarbonisation goals

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Oman is among three countries in the Middle East selected by Irish clean energy specialist Fusion Fuel Green PLC for the establishment of green hydrogen demonstrator plants designed to support local refining and petrochemical firms reduce their carbon footprint.

A collaboration agreement has been signed to this effect with Consolidated Contractors Group SAL (CCC), a globally diversified company specialising in engineering and construction.

The pact, signed in Dublin over the weekend, commits the two sides to cooperating on the development of projects centring on the production of green hydrogen for potential clients in the refining and petrochemicals industries. Demo plants are also planned in Kuwait and Qatar.



Green hydrogen — billed as the ‘fuel of the future’ — is produced through the electrolysis of water using electricity generated from renewable energy resources — a process that is entirely free from carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas primarily responsible for global warming and climate change.

Announcing the pact with CCC, Joao Wahnnon, Head of Business Development at Fusion Fuel, said: “We are delighted to be partnering with the CCC to open this new market. The Middle

East represents a big opportunity and a very promising region for us, given the high levels of solar exposure, strong appetite for green hydrogen projects and strategic geographic position between Europe and Asia. We are excited to bring Fusion Fuel’s revolutionary technology to the Middle East.”

Dublin-headquartered Fusion Fuel is credited with developing its own proprietary electrolyser design, dubbed HEVO, that enables the production of hydrogen using renewable energy

at highly competitive costs. The company specialises in supplying electrolyser technology to customers interested in building their own green hydrogen capacity. It also plans to develop and operate its own portfolio of hydrogen assets with a view to supplying green hydrogen to clients on long-term supply agreements.

CCC Group, through its local subsidiary CCC Oman, has a longstanding presence in the Sultanate dating back to the country’s first renaissance

The Middle East represents a big opportunity and a very promising region for us, given the high levels of solar exposure, strong appetite for green hydrogen projects and strategic geographic position between Europe and Asia

JOAO WAHNON
Head of Business Development,
Fusion Fuel Green

companies will generate new opportunities in the development of green energies.”

Significantly, the latest venture adds to a string of green hydrogen projects — demonstrator and full-fledged commercial-scale — planned for implementation at key locations around the Sultanate.

The Alternative Energy unit of OQ, the integrated energy group of Oman, is joining hands with DEMA Concessions, the Belgian-based global solutions provider for the maritime infrastructure and offshore energy industries, in the implementation of a world-scale green hydrogen project at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm.

The so-called HYPOR Duqm Green Hydrogen Project envisages an electrolyser capacity of 250-500 MW in the first phase.

Also at Duqm SEZ, the partnership of the Oman Company for the Development of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Tatweer) and India’s biggest solar developer ACME Solar Holdings Ltd plans to invest \$2.5 billion to manufacture green ammonia and green hydrogen. An MoU signed by the two sides envisions the establishment of a large-scale facility to produce 2,200 mt of green ammonia.

A number of pilots and industrial-scale ventures are also planned at Sohar Freezone and in the oilfield areas of the Sultanate.

High testing costs could stall air travel recovery: IATA

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) called on governments to ensure that high costs for Covid-19 testing don’t put travel out of reach for individuals and families. To facilitate an efficient restart of international travel, Covid-19 testing must be affordable as well as timely, widely available and effective, it said.

An IATA sampling of costs for PCR tests (the test most frequently required by governments) in 16 countries showed wide variations by markets and within markets. Findings include:

Of the markets surveyed, only France complied with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation for the state to bear the cost of testing for travellers.

Of the 15 markets where there is a cost for PCR testing to the individual: The average minimum cost for testing was \$90, while the average maximum cost for testing was \$208.

Even taking the average of the low-end costs, adding PCR testing to average airfares would dramatically increase the cost of flying for individuals. Pre-crisis, the average one-way airline ticket, including taxes and charges, cost \$200 (2019 data).

\$90 PCR test raises the cost by 45pc to \$290. Add another test on arrival and the one-way cost would leap by 90 per cent to \$380. Assuming that two tests are needed in each direction, the average cost for an individual return-trip could balloon from \$400 to \$760.

Global oil supply to grow in 2021 and 2022

KEY TRENDS: Demand in 2021 has been revised down in India, Western Europe and Latin American due to more restrictions stemmed from more waves of Covid-19 but progress in vaccination offers hope

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Platts Analytics forecasts global oil supply growth of 3.2 million b/d in 2021 and 5.5 million b/d in 2022. “We see a bit stronger growth than a month ago on higher US and Iran outlook,” says Ash Singh, Manager Supply and Production Analytics, S&P Global Platts.

On April 27, Opec+ decided to maintain its production plan from April 1 with the option to correct course in a month if demand recovery falters. Opec+ and Saudi’s gradual addition of supply over the summer when demand is expected to grow much faster will result in significant stock draws.

“Saudi and Opec+ caution are supportive of the market but is also stimulating US activity higher. This has led us to revise US supply higher by 125,000 b/d in 2021 and 150,000 b/d in 2022. We now expect entry to exit growth of 350,000 b/d in 2021 and 1 million b/d in 2022,” Singh noted.

“Progress on Iran nuclear deal negotiations suggests a faster deal timeline. Framework agreement could come by late



May with sanction waivers. Full sanctions relief by Q4 2021”, he said.

OUTLOOK FOR GLOBAL OIL DEMAND

Globally, newly confirmed coronavirus cases increased by 824,800/day in the last seven days, a record pace. The sharp deterioration during April was essentially all due to India.

Data on coronavirus fatalities showed that hospitals in emerging economies are in dire situations; in developed economies, deaths are down sharply, suggesting that the worst may be over on the medical front.

In Israel and the UK, following aggressive vaccination campaigns, the spread of the disease has become contained. In the US and Chile (that are among leaders regarding vaccination), a clear relationship between vaccination efforts and

Oil supply growth is expected to lag demand growth with ongoing Opec restraint (on April 27, Opec+ decided to maintain its production plan from April 1). That will require stock draws to cover which are expected to be substantial from May through August

the number of new cases has not yet been firmly established. Mobility around retail shops and offices, which correlates with economic output, has improved in the UK, proving that vaccination efforts, are in part, key to the economic turnaround as restrictions are eased.

Mobility in the US has not yet begun to rise appreciably. Mobility in India has weakened substantially in recent periods, showing that the ongoing medical crisis is resulting in major economic difficulties.

Demand in 2021 has been

revised down in India, Western Europe and Latin American due to more restrictions stemmed from more waves of Covid-19 but progress in vaccination offers hope.

Platts Analytics forecasts 2021 global oil demand growth at 5.5 million b/d vs. 5.8 million b/d last month. We expect sequential on month global oil demand to grow by 1.7 million b/d in May, 3.1 million b/d in June, followed by 1.9 million b/d and 1.6 million b/d, in both July and August. Cumulatively, global oil demand is expected increase May-to-

August by 8.2 million b/d.

Platts Analytics has upgraded the 2022-on-year global oil demand growth to 4.4 million b/d vs. 3.5 million b/d, last month. Upward revisions are mainly for the US, Europe and China.

Relative to 2019 levels, demand will remain down 3.58 million b/d, or 3.5 per cent. Broadly, global demand will have recovered to pre-pandemic levels in 2022, though the notable exception for impairment will continue to be kero/jet, according to Kang Wu, Head of Global Macro and Demand, S&P Global Platts.

OIL PRICES

Firmer fundamentals are expected beginning in May with sequential demand increases, according to Richard Joswick, Global Head of Oil Pricing, Operations and Trade Flow Analytics, S&P.

Oil supply growth is expected to lag demand growth with ongoing Opec restraint (on April 27, Opec+ decided to maintain its production plan from April 1). That will require stock draws to cover which are expected to be substantial from May through August, he said.

However, the demand outlook is a bit softer now than a month ago (renewed Covid flare-ups/ lockdowns in several countries) and supply growth for Iran and the US is higher.

Together, that is leading to a somewhat less robust stock draw outlook, he noted, adding: “Platts has tempered its price forecasts accordingly but still expects the next drive for higher prices will likely lead the fundamentals with peaks around mid-year over \$70/b.”

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The art of successful start-up fundraising

Happy news for Nelson. You might remember him from my latest column. In just a week he managed to attract an investor to his project Sihalat, the application that will provide a marketplace for service providers.

Nelson personally wrote me a couple of days ago, sharing that the suggestions which I have provided made a positive impression on the investors and led to a successful fundraising. I am indeed glad that my 2 cents of knowledge turned into a fortune for Nelson.

Today I want to expand more on why my recommendations to Nelson about Sihalat made the

project more appealing to the investor.

As you might remember, my first concern was about the outsourcing of the code. Let us be practical.

A tech start-up is in general terms a brand new company with an idea and no income. Unlike a traditional business, startups do not open shop and start serving clients on day one.

On the contrary, start-ups set up an office and start programming a solution for a perceived problem (in Silicon Valley referred to as a medicine) or an app to make something easier and/or faster (in Silicon Valley known as a vitamin).

So, whether the start-up is about code a tech “medicine” or a tech “vitamin” the point is



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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A TECH START-UP IS IN GENERAL TERMS A BRAND NEW COMPANY WITH AN IDEA AND NO INCOME. UNLIKE A TRADITIONAL BUSINESS, START-UPS DO NOT OPEN SHOP AND START SERVING CLIENTS ON DAY ONE

the same: Nothing is ready to be sold.

That is why is crucial to rely on investor's money to pay for the initial development. The bet of the investor is on the the tech team being able to deliver a tech solution which will be adopted by millions of users.

As such, we could say that the code being developed is the number one asset that the startup owns.

That is why, in my opinion, outsourcing the programming part of a start-up is not particularly appealing to investors, as the asset that they are investing on, does not belong to them, but it is leased to another company. Nelson was very receptive on this topic and started looking for an Omani

developer able to migrate back home the code, as well as putting together a tech team in Oman.

The second concern I had, and this has not been fully addressed as far as I know, is the ability to make the payment seamless. As consumers we are used to speed.

A Kissmetrics report shared that people visiting a website has 40 per cent chances to abort the navigation if the page does not load within 3 seconds. If Amazon was 1 second slower overall, the company would lose \$1.6 bn a year.

Obviously performance is one of the key metrics in technology. So it would be unfortunate if an app failed to deliver the last mile of service, if the transaction execution was not equally

smooth. This brings to a whole separate topic on to how fintech is evolving and allowing for a progressively more seamless digital payment experience.

In summary, if the banking infrastructure does provide light speed service, I would probably advice to work with escrow systems, where funds are held away from the traditional banking systems, and the transactions are entered into a ledger based on their offline value, before being balanced with the real money.

For now let us congratulate the Omani entrepreneur that sponsored Nelson and Sihalat to succeed.

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

MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

MSX30 Index ends higher supported by sub-indices

The MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 1.30 per cent. All sub-indices ended higher. Industrial sector ended up by 3.13 per cent, service sector and financial sector ended up by 1.29 per cent and 1.02 per cent respectively. MSX Shariah Index close higher by 1.28 per cent.

Oman Cement Company has announced that it has paused plans for the development of a major cement project at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm pending confirmation of fuel supply for the estimated \$250 million venture.

The announcement also comes amid moves being weighed by Oman Cement to expand the capacity of its flagship plant at Misfah near Muscat. The company's decision to set up a new cement plant at Duqm with a capacity of 5,000 TPD (tonnes per day) of clinker has currently been put on hold pending confirmation of availability of fuel and its strategic decision to expand capacity of the existing plant at Muscat, said Chairman of the Board of Directors, in the company's Board of Directors' report for 1Q21.

Al Anwar Ceramics announced that following the shareholders approval in the EGM, the Company's registered issued share capital has been reduced from RO 29.62 million to RO 22.0 million. The amount RO 7.62 million (RO 0.0257/share) will be distributed. The cut-off date for capital reduction is May 19, 2021.

Al Anwar Investments has announced that Al Ruwad International School, in which Al Anwar Taleem (100 per cent subsidiary of

Oman Net Foreign Flows (USD mn)

Month	Flow (USD mn)
Jan 20	-16.2
Feb	-13.1
Mar	-22.3
Apr	-10.2
May	-8.6
Jun	-15.9
Jul	-16.0
Aug	6.7
Sep	-5.5
Oct	-5.5
Nov	-16.0
Dec	-0.5
Jan 21	1.9
Feb	-0.0
Mar	-2.5
Apr	-4.4

Source: MSM

Al Anwar Investments) holds 43.5 per cent equity stake, has been authorised by IB (International Baccalaureate) world school for the middle year programme (MYP).

This step will help Al Ruwad International School to provide world class education in the Sultanate.

Oman's Ministry of Finance says it has been able to disburse payments to private sector vendors, contractors, and other service providers within five working days on average upon receipt of the payment voucher via its newly installed e-payment system.

Since it came online, payments totalling RO 411.6 million were disbursed through the e-payment system as of April 29, 2021, the ministry said. We believe government has taken a commendable initiative which will reduce the receivable issues of the companies in the private sector.

Payments of RO 411.6 million will increase the liquidity in the market which will be beneficial to the companies and the overall market.

Oman recorded net foreign outflows of \$4.4 billion in April compared to net foreign outflows of \$2.5 billion in March 2021. Year to date 2021, the

outflows recorded by Oman amounted to \$5.0 billion. Market recorded net inflows amounting to \$1.9 million in January 2021 while in February the foreign flows were almost at breakeven level.

Oman recorded a deficit of RO 751.4 million in 1Q21 compared to a deficit of RO 26.3 million in 1Q20.

Higher deficit was largely because of lower revenue which was fueled by lower oil prices. Average oil price recorded in 1Q21 was \$50/bbl. compared to \$65.5/bbl. in 1Q20.

Overall revenue was recorded at RO 1.81 billion, down by 30.5 per cent as compared with the same period of 2020. Net oil revenue declined by 34.2 per cent. It is worth noting that the decline in capital revenue and repayments during the first quarter of 2021, as compared to the same period of 2020, is due to the privatisation of Oman Electricity Transmission Company that generated a yield of RO 365.4 million, recorded in March 2020.

Expenditure decreased by 2.73 per cent compared to the same period of 2020 as a result of several factors, including a reduction in spending of various government units.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Ford's season of generosity: Escort with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Owning a car has never been this easy with the Ford Escort. Own an Escort without additional payment (Since 5 per cent VAT on net selling price will be borne by Ford Oman) and exclusive Ramadhan benefits like cash gift RO 2,000 and service 5 years/100,000 kms and registration.

The Ford Escort is a stylish and modern car featuring Ford's Design DNA, blending comfort, performance and looks together in perfect ergonomic harmony.

The five-bar upper grille sits proudly between the headlamps, extending outboard to merge into the fenders, harmonising with the full width lower grille. The halogen signature headlamp design offers exceptional lighting performance, and includes levelling.

At the rear, the signature LED tail lamp design extends into the deck lid, giving the car a sense of absolute refinement. Twin integrated reverse lamps and separation of the fog lamps into the rear fascia give the rear design a sense of symmetry and balance.

The multi-piece rear fascia along with available 15-inch alloy wheels and a shark fin antenna further

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The Ford Escort is a stylish and modern car featuring Ford's Design DNA, blending comfort, performance and looks together in perfect ergonomic harmony

reinforces the upmarket nature of the car.

Inside, the Escort introduces an Urban Grey and Domino black two-tone colour scheme that gives the interior a fresh and contemporary feel. The Escort is designed with comfort in mind, with a spacious and well-appointed interior.

The steering wheel and cleverly designed dash-mounted touchscreen have been designed to give Passengers are afforded generous leg, shoulder and headroom — allowing them to stretch out and get comfortable

even on long journeys. The Escort's cavernous boot swallows luggage for weekends away.

The Escort is fitted with a 120 horsepower, 150Nm 1.5-litre auto start/stop engine that is light, strong and delivers impressive fuel efficiency. At 19.3 km/l, the Escort is one of the most efficient cars in its segment on combined cycle — making it a perfect vehicle for those who need to make every drop of fuel count. The engine is paired to a six-speed automatic transmission which powers the front wheels.

Jumeirah Group names General Manager for first Muscat resort

MUSCAT: Jumeirah Group, a global luxury hospitality group and a member of Dubai Holding, has announced a key appointment for its resort in Muscat. Luke James (pictured) will head the operations of Jumeirah Muscat Bay as its General Manager.

The first Jumeirah hotel to open in the Sultanate, Luke will oversee its 206 spacious suites, villas and rooms, state-of-the-art Talise spa, dive centre and numerous dining, meeting and event venues, set against incredible views of the Sea of Oman and mountains beyond.

Following his promotion, Luke says: "I am excited to establish this resort as a market leader in the region and, as with my previous hotel and resort openings, connecting with the

Muscat community closely to ensure they too are proud of this beautiful property, our first in the Sultanate."

Luke draws on past successes, with the openings of numerous hotels and resorts across multiple brands, most recently with the launch of Zabeel House by Jumeirah, The Greens, the popular urban nexus in the heart of Dubai. He will take the reins of the pre-opening team in Oman, ensuring seamless operations and build-up of anticipation for the launch of the exclusive resort.