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F1 RIVALS AIM TO RACE HARD BUT FAIR

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LOOKING AT OTHER PRODUCTS FROM AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR ROSES

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ASEAN PLUS CHINA, JAPAN, S KOREA TO BOOST TIES

Eid Al Fitr holidays announced

MUSCAT: On the occasion of the blessed Eid Al Fitr, the Ministry of Labour decided that the holiday for Eid Al Fitr for employees of the departments of the state administrative apparatus and other legal entities and private sector's establishments will begin from Wednesday (29 Ramadhan 1442 AH), corresponding to May 12. The holiday ends as follows: In case the first day of the Eid falls on Thursday (May 13), the holiday will end on Saturday, 3 Shawwal 1442 AH, corresponding to May 15. Therefore, work shall resume on Sunday (May 16). **TURN TO P5**

Spread of new variant matter of concern

285 PATIENTS IN ICUS AS SULTANATE REPORTS 1,093 CASES

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Health on Monday reported 1,093 cases and 10 deaths, of which 585 cases and four deaths are from Muscat.

While the recovery rate has gone up to 90.4 per cent, 90 patients were still admitted in hospitals, bringing the total number of inpatients to 816, including 285 in intensive care units (ICUs).

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 196,900, including 2,053 deaths.

Meanwhile, the variant of the coronavirus found in India and



The possibility of arrival of new variant is a matter of concern.

the possibility of its arrival to the Sultanate is a matter of concern, said a senior consultant at Royal Hospital.

“There is a concern in the world about the new strain found in India for several reasons, including the speed of its spread, high infection rates and deaths. There is not much information about it currently. The world is awaiting reports, either from the Indian government or the World Health Organisation (WHO), to know the details of the new variants. Reports will also be issued from the countries that have recorded infections with the Indian strain.”

He said, “It is clear from the statistical readings that the Indian strain is fast spreading and has a great impact and the same seriousness as the previous strains, and it may be more. The epidemiological situation in India is very worrying. It is recording the largest number of infections in the world and daily deaths at present. All countries do not want the mutated strains to reach them.”

The senior consultant said that the Sultanate is not isolated from the world. It is certainly concerned as other countries about the new variants coming here as,

TURN TO P5

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INSIDE

26 KILLED IN BOAT COLLISION IN BANGLADESHI RIVER | P7

TURKEY HOPES LOCKDOWN RESCUES TOURISM SEASON | P9

\$826M LPG PROJECT BEGINS TRIAL OPERATION



Oman's first liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) extraction plant has commenced trial production at Salalah Free Zone in Dhofar Governorate. OQ LPG, a subsidiary OQ Gas Networks was set up with an investment of around \$826 million. The strategically important venture has been designed to further unlock the economic and commercial potential of the Sultanate's hydrocarbon resources. **DETAILS ON P17**

Assad to face two 'rivals' in polls

DAMASCUS: A Syrian former minister and a member of the opposition will face Bashar al Assad in this month's presidential election, the constitutional court said on Monday.

The body approved only three out of 51 applications to stand in the May 26 ballot, among them the

55-year-old president himself, widely expected to win a fourth mandate.

The court's president said in a press conference broadcast on state TV that Abdallah Salloum Abdallah, a state minister from 2016 to 2020, had been approved to run for president. **DETAILS ON P6**

Wild rabbits are facing extinction

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The wild rabbit, one of the most important species found on Masirah Island, is threatened with extinction, as they have become completely extinct in some areas.

Majid bin Hamad al Khanbashi, assistant director of the Nature Reserves Department, said that the wild rabbit on Masirah Island has adapted to the island's natural environment.



He said that what distinguishes the wild rabbit on the island is its short ears and small body size, noting that it is the smallest of

other wild rabbits found in Europe and Africa, and it may differ in its colour (between gray and brown) with white undersides.

He said that the wild rabbit is seen in the open sandy and gravel plains of the island and areas characterised by the presence of vegetation, pointing to its ability to get rid of its enemies thanks to its strong senses represented in its eyes, while the nose and ears are always active.

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SAYYID BADR RECEIVES US OFFICIALS



MUSCAT: Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy received on Sunday in Muscat US Senator Chris Murphy, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia and Counterterrorism, and Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen. During the meeting developments in Yemen and efforts exerted to end the war, that aimed at achieving peace and stability in the country through a comprehensive political process were reviewed. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali bin Issa al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs and Leslie M Tsou, US Ambassador to the Sultanate.

Resignation of health workers not allowed for now: MoH

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The resignation requests of health workers will be not received until further notice due to the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic and the increasing number of cases, the Minister of Health said in a circular.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said that the decision was made to maintain the efficiency of the health system to ensure the quality of health services, and to be able to contribute effectively to the state efforts to confront the



repercussions of this pandemic.

The circular said, "In view of the current conditions of the pandemic, and what the indicators show of the accelerating rise in the number of cases and based on Infectious Diseases Control Law promulgated by Royal Decree."

The law states "When disease emerges and threatens the health of public, the Minister of Health, or whoever delegates shall have exceptional powers to protect the country from the spread of the epidemic, it is decided to stop receiving the resignation requests

submitted by the occupants of medical and auxiliary medical posts from Omanis until further notice."

Most hospitals in Oman have battled the third wave by deploying more beds for Covid-19, opening new hospital wards, and having more beds in intensive care rooms.

Extra medicines, oxygen equipment, and ventilators have been also provided to cope with the pandemic.

Hospitals have also stopped non-essential operations and patient until the spread of the virus slows down.

Expo 2020 Dubai: Sultanate's pavilion 89 per cent ready



The pavilion is designed and built in a distinctive modern style inspired by one of the icons of nature in Oman, which is the frankincense tree. – ONA

MUSCAT: The General Commission for the Sultanate's Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai organised a field visit to the Expo site. The visit came in coordination with the concerned authorities in preparation for the Sultanate's participation in the international event. Expo 2020 is planned to commence on October 1, 2021 and will run until March 31, 2022.

The Omani delegation participating during the visit included Mohsin bin Khamis al Balushi, Commissioner General of the Sultanate at Expo 2020 Dubai, Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, Shaikh Salim bin Musallam al Kathiri, Head of the Sultanate's Commercial Office in

Dubai and officials from the public and private sectors institutions in the Sultanate. An invitation was extended to the Sultanate by the Expo's Organising Committee to participate in the international meeting of participants in Expo 2020 Dubai.

During the visit, the organising committee discussed the activities and programmes planned during the exhibition's period.

The pavilion is designed and built in a distinctive modern style inspired by one of the icons of nature in Oman, which is the frankincense tree. Its construction is divided to tell the story of the frankincense life cycle through its five zones relevant to the central theme and the three sub-themes of Expo 2020 Dubai. — ONA



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Ramadhan enters holiest phase

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Believers have been urged to pray for normalcy amid the Covid-19 pandemic, as the holy month of Ramadhan entered the final phase.

This is the second year in a row when the holy month has been confined in lockdown and is being celebrated within the four walls of a house with immediate family members.

For believers, the last ten days hold special importance because it is during one of these nights that is the 'Night of Power', or 'Qiyamul Lail' is bestowed with. It is the same night the holy Quran descended to the earth for humanity.

The holy Quran says about this night as a night better than a thousand nights, and believers are well aware of the power in the Night of Majesty.

Scriptures are quoting Aisha (RA) that when the last ten days of Ramadhan began, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would stay up at night, wake his family and tie his lower garment tight. He would strive hard in worship during the last ten nights of Ramadhan as he did not do at other times. Whoever spends the night of Laylat al-Qadr in prayer out of faith and in the hope of reward will be forgiven his previous sins. It simply indicates that believers need to,



Muslims perform the Umrah in the last ten days of Ramadhan, while maintaining social distancing due to pandemic, in the Grand Mosque, in the holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

during the next ten days, make the most in ibadah, good deeds, reciting Quran, dhikr, making dua, Qiyamul-lail, among others as the benefits are in multiple.

"As we draw close to the end of the holy month, believers should have a retrospect of what he or she has been offering, and it should reflect on their deeds, prayers, supplications, and dig deeper into the blessings of the holy month," Shaikh Ismail Menk, Mufti of Zimbabwe, said in an interview with the *Observer*.

People of Oman, both citizens and

expatriates, continue to share great positivity that they have been able to find in the face of negativity while trusting the authorities and doing all they could to make lives easier.

"Last ten days of the holy month is a time when believers immerse themselves in prayers, supplications and dua all the more but while doing so, they should strictly make sure that they follow the Covid-19 protocols aimed at safety of the society," said Mohammed Baqavi, an eminent scholar in Nizwa.

Mufti Menk to speak to Oman audience

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Shaikh Ismail Menk, aka, Mufti Menk, an acclaimed name among Islamic scholars and one of the most important Islamic scientists in Zimbabwe, will address the Oman audience on a virtual platform 22nd of Ramadhan, corresponding to May 5, as part of the annual Taaruf programme.

Organised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs represented by The Department of Islamic Information and Cultural Exchange (Iftaa Office) on 'Struggle and Healing in the Holy Quran', the scholar will deliver his discourse on 'The Quran — A Remedy for Soul — Mind and Body'.

Mufti Menk had visited Oman two years ago and gave a series of talks at different venues in Oman in 2019 as part of Taaruf. Al Istiqama TV is the media sponsor of the nearly 2 hours programme, starting at 7.30pm.

"At a time when everything is

closed, and people stay indoors in the fight against the pandemic, the speech of Mufti Menk will prove to be a guiding principle of Islam and the tenets of the religion. I believe it is something one should not let go of. I request all to attend the event", said

Hatim Abdissalam of Al Istiqama TV.

Shaikh Ismail Menk is one of the most important Islamic scientists in Zimbabwe. He has a significant role in introducing Islam in that country as well as beyond. Moreover, he has studied in

universities outside Zimbabwe. He is well-known for his moderation and prompt approach to matters about humanity.

Those who wish to join can do so by clicking <https://zoom.us/j/93325926203>

For more information, one can contact the Department of Islamic Information and Cultural Exchange at the Iftaa office on islamicicedept@mara.gov.om, or on Twitter: @islamicinfo_om

SQU marks annual day by felicitating researchers, academics

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Sunday celebrated its 21st annual day, which marks the visit of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to the university on May 2, 2000.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Chairperson of the SQU Council.

During the ceremony, Dr Amer Saif al Hinai, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies and Research, announced the names of research papers that won the 2021 Royal Scholarships.

The winners of the Best Research Group Prize 2021 was "Water Resources Assessment and Management in Arid and Desert Areas" Group, led by Dr Ali al Maktoumi, Director of Water Research Center.

Al Hinai said in a speech on the occasion that the SQU financed 97 projects in 2021. The Research Grants Deanship financed 29 projects while the grants of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (earlier The Research Council) contributed to financing 6 projects through the Programme of Grants for PhD Research Academics.

This is in addition to another 5 projects financed thorough the Graduates' Research Scholarships Programme, 6 projects financed through the University Students' Research Grants Programme and 16 more SQU projects that explored various aspects of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Al Hinai pointed out that the remarkable rate of research activity boosted the publication of the SQU's research papers in scholarly journals and conference presentations. In 2020, the number of journals listed in the SQU's affiliated Scopes Researchers stood at 1,287. These journals were quoted 3,179 times, said Al Hinai.

Last year, the SQU supported 67 researchers who participated in



SQU scaled up one step from 10th rank in the QS rating for the Arab region in 2019 to the 9th rank in 2021

conferences around the world — 53 of them took part in live events and 14 in virtual events.

The SQU's six scholarly journals published 15 editions throughout the year. The university's engineering research journal was promoted to the Q3 rating in the SC Imago Journal Rank.

In 2020, the Innovation and Technology Transfer Centre supported 7 invention-related research studies and 6 patents from Oman Patents Office. The SQU's scientific publication section granted 658 research papers and one patent to the SQU researchers.

In the meantime, the SQU's rating was upgraded in the QS global universities rating from the 450th position in 2019 to the 375th position in 2021. The SQU scaled up one step from 10th rank in the QS rating for the Arab region in 2019 to the 9th rank in 2021.

The ceremony saw the felicitation of a number of researchers, academics, new employees and winners of scientific prizes, in addition to a number of best performing students. — ONA

 الوطنية للتمويل National Finance Head Office: P.O. Box No. 1706, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 24470000 E-mail: info@nationalfinance.co.om Website: www.nationalfinance.co.om			
Directors' Report			
On behalf of the Board of Directors, we are pleased to present to you the financial results of the Company for the three month period ended March 31, 2021.			
Over the last year, we have continuously engaged with our customers and partners to overcome COVID-19 related challenges. Driven by a customer-centric strategy, we continued providing our services while ensuring that all necessary health and safety measures are in place for our employees, customers and partners. We continue to improve our technological capabilities to be aligned with the digital transformation happening across the world and provide solutions that deliver best in class customer experience. To support the economy and our customers, we provided payment deferrals to our eligible clients and an option to reschedule their finances.			
Your Company has a well-diversified geographical presence across Oman (19 branches), coupled with a broad product profile and we are well positioned to meet the financing requirements of both the Retail and SME segments. We anticipate slower credit offtake in the medium term with a need to balance credit risk with market growth. We will continue to focus on strengthening our efficiencies, customer experience, product offerings and quality of service delivery.			
Your Company continues to adopt a conservative approach to credit approvals keeping in view the overall macroeconomic scenario and perceived increase in credit risk. Within this policy, our approach has been to target customers who satisfy our credit risk appetite. We anticipate a cautious outlook to our credit offtake in the medium term, and overall, our reading is that the economic climate will continue to remain challenging.			
The Company's total regulatory capital of RO 106.4 million is the highest among FLCs and gives us a strong base on which to build our business. Your Company remains the largest finance and leasing Company in the Sultanate in terms of asset size, branch network, revenues and profit.			
The operating profit (profit before provision and tax) was at RO 3.4 million (RO 3.9 million in March 2020) while total earning assets was at RO 402.6 million (RO 402.3 million in December 2020). Profit after tax was RO 1.7 million as compared to RO 2.0 million in March 2020.			
The Company is in full compliance with the provisioning norms prescribed by the Central Bank of Oman and the International Financial Reporting Standards. We have added to our credit reserves through additional overlay over the IFRS9 requirement in order to be prepared for future challenges given the incremental risk in the portfolio due to COVID-19 pandemic.			
The Company remains committed to Omanisation and as of March 31, 2021, the number of Omani employees was 271 out of the total workforce of 305. The Omanisation percentage works out to 88.85%, which is higher than the given target of 80%. Your Company continues to remain committed to providing career growth and development of Omani nationals through ongoing training in line with their job requirement. We will continue to maintain momentum on employee engagement initiatives, development of future skills, managerial and leadership capabilities for their professional development.			
We also extend our sincere gratitude to the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Muscat Securities Market, our bankers, depositors, vehicle and equipment dealers, customers and shareholders for the support extended for the growth of the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, we also thank the management and staff for their dedication and hard work.			
Taya Jandal Ali Chairman			
Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests the company in either Arabic or English with 7 days of receipt of the request. The full set of financials are available in the website of Muscat Securities Market.			
UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME			
	Three months ended 31 March 2021 RO '000	Three months ended 31 March 2020 RO '000	
Income			
Income from financing activities	9,588	10,430	
Finance costs	(4,128)	(4,447)	
Net finance income	5,460	5,983	
Other operating income	662	672	
	6,122	6,655	
Expenses			
Operating expenses	(2,445)	(2,448)	
Depreciation	(190)	(152)	
Amortization	(71)	(64)	
Net impairment loss on lease receivables	(1,461)	(1,644)	
Bad debts written back	56	14	
Total expenses	(4,111)	(4,294)	
Profit before tax	2,011	2,361	
Income tax expense	(310)	(354)	
Profit after tax	1,701	2,007	
Other comprehensive income			
Items that will be classified to profit or loss			
Movement in revaluation reserve – net of tax	-	7	
Total comprehensive income	1,701	2,014	
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.002	0.003	
UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION			
	31 March 2021 RO '000	31 March 2020 RO '000	31 December 2020 RO '000
ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	3,284	20,968	5,407
Net investment in finance leases	348,644	389,319	348,954
Working capital and factoring receivables	53,997	47,097	53,390
Advances, prepayments and other receivables	2,830	3,859	2,452
Assets held for sale	1,500	1,500	1,500
Goodwill	5,950	5,950	5,950
Intangible assets	1,069	1,216	1,134
Property and equipment	7,072	6,342	7,095
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
Total assets	424,596	476,501	426,132
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Creditors and accruals	11,345	4,584	8,303
Tax liabilities	1,997	902	1,687
Bank borrowings	275,266	346,292	281,793
Fixed deposits	28,785	20,397	24,834
Deferred tax liabilities	190	294	190
End of service benefits	583	636	666
Total liabilities	318,166	373,105	317,473
EQUITY			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	54,123	54,123	54,123
Share premium	5,786	5,786	5,786
Revaluation reserve	1,040	776	1,040
Foreign currency reserve	4,321	4,321	4,321
Voluntary reserve	3,000	3,000	3,000
Cash flow hedge reserve	(260)	-	(298)
Legal reserve	8,501	7,699	8,501
Retained earnings	11,850	9,622	14,117
Total shareholders' equity attributable to the equity holders of the company	88,361	85,327	90,590
Perpetual bonds	18,069	18,069	18,069
Total equity	106,430	103,396	108,659
Total liabilities and equity	424,596	476,501	426,132
Net assets per share (RO)	0.163	0.158	0.167



WHAT'S

YOUR

RESOLUTION?



My Ramadhan resolution is to adopt two orphan children and sponsor their career. I have contacted an organisation that runs such a service and expressed my willingness.

I already have started this work and thank God for giving this thought, as I feel fulfilled and satisfied after signing the papers for them

who does not want to be identified, said, "My Ramadhan resolution is to adopt two orphan children and sponsor their career. I have contacted an organisation that runs such a service and expressed my willingness. I already have started this work and thank God for giving this thought, as I feel fulfilled and satisfied after signing the papers for them."

Many others resolve to eat less meat, take care of their health, give proper care to family, and keep ready for any voluntary service in this tough time.

For most of the respondents, Ramadhan is a source of inspiration to be better people and do as much as possible to better society.

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

[@patkaushal](#)

Ramadhan comes once a year but leaves so much impact on a person that he carries for years the good habits that he inculcates during this time.

For example, some bad habit like smoking, which for many people, is very difficult to quit, and carry it for several years. During one of the Ramadhan they resolve to quit, and they quit it easily. This happens with many people, and they thank the holy month of Ramadhan for this.

Ibrahim, who works in a private sector establishment, admits he was smoking for many

years and consumed some five to 10 packets of cigarettes every day. On the very first day of this year's Ramadhan, he decided to quit this bad habit and admits with pride that he did not even touch cigarette packets for straight 20 to 21 days.

"Since I decided to quit, I did not touch them even after breaking my fast in the evening. This is the beauty of the holy month of Ramadhan; if you want to quit some bad habit, it becomes easy to stick to your commitment," he said and added that he would quit smoking even after Ramadhan.

Ibrahim's friend Ahmed admitted he is very short-tempered, which he realises is terrible, but unable to

cope when anything against his plans happens. This Ramadhan he decided to become tolerant for everything and admits he is managing his tempers efficiently.

"I have taken a resolve to be cool and calm and would react only after proper thinking. And surprisingly, I am well managing my tempers. Earlier I used to get irritated easily, and I was not welcomed in a team. Friends would tease me to get my bad reaction and make fun of me. I thank my sister who advised me to take a resolve to become cool and calm, and thank God, it is happening," he admitted.

Some people resolve to do some good to society. A good Samaritan,





OHRC issues statement on Sierra Leone domestic workers

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 3

The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), under its jurisdictions and responsibilities, followed up the report published by the International Committee for Migration and London Guardian concerning the complaints of mistreatment of domestic workers who had travelled from the Republic of Sierra Leone to work in Oman, a statement released by the OHRC said.

The British Guardian published that domestic workers who came from the Republic of Sierra Leone to work in Oman in different jobs based on agreements between them, and recruitment agencies inside their countries that offered good salaries. In addition, some workers agreed with the same agencies to work in European countries, without informing them that they are going to Oman to work as domestic workers.

"Based on the communications received from 'Project 189' in London - an international organisation that supports the rights of migrant workers in the Middle East region, about what has been raised by domestic workers from Sierra Leone, the OHRC coordinated with authorities concerned in Oman to investigate the reality of the issue at hand. Authorities concerned clarified and affirmed that labour rights are guaranteed by Omani local laws and legislations including the rights of domestic

workers, which includes the assurance of obtaining the agreed monthly wage within a period not exceeding seven days from the end of each month or according to what the two parties agree upon as well as the signing of receiving it or whatsoever prove that, the provision of appropriate food and housing, and the provision of the necessary medical treatment by the

In some cases where domestic workers fall victims to human trafficking so that they are exploited in work that is conflict with their work contract or forced to carry out illegal work, they can inform the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking to take the necessary action to protect the affected worker and follow her rights in coordination

outside their country. As a result, some of them escaped from their employers after discovering the inaccuracy and honesty of what had been reported to them by the labour recruitment agencies in their countries."

On the other hand, the aforementioned workers had to report their complaints to the authorities concerned and follow them up in accordance with the laws and procedures in force, and they could also inform the competent authorities at the airport of refusing to travel to their countries if the recruitment office decided to deport them, on condition they prove that they did not obtain their rights or exposed to any abuse.

"OHRC assures that it monitors human rights violations through several means such as receiving complaints through the direct presence by the complainant at the commission's headquarter, or the submitting the complaint through several means including e-mail, website, and direct contact via phone, record the report via voice mail, or communicate through (WhatsApp) number, or via the social media accounts, thus OHRC coordinates with the competent authorities to work on settling cases and violations in accordance with the local laws in force," it said.

The OHRC as per its jurisdictions welcomes any observations or complaints on human rights issues in Oman, and work to investigate the reality and settle such cases.

Any expatriate worker may register his/ her complaint by going directly to authorities, or reporting to them via hotlines, text messages, WhatsApp, voice mail, e-mail, or through their websites on the Internet

employer for the duration of the contract," the statement said.

In case of any violations on labour rights, including domestic workers, which may be located in any country in the world, the worker may resort to legal means after the possibility of reporting the complaint through various bodies, including the Ministry of Labour, Royal Oman Police, Public Prosecution, the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking, and the Oman Human Rights Commission.

"Any expatriate worker may register his/ her complaint by going directly to such authorities, or reporting to them via hotlines, text messages, WhatsApp, voice mail, e-mail, or through their websites on the Internet," said the statement.

with the Ministry of Social Development, which provides shelter to victims of human trafficking (Dar Al-Wifaq) ensuring legal assistance, health and psychological care, and subsistence in the shelter, with the aim of mitigating the effects of any inhuman exploitation.

"Hence, it is clear to OHRC that the aforementioned workers referred to in the press report or through the aforementioned international organisation have been deceived by recruitment agencies in their countries, and this is what was published by the London Guardian. In addition, the domestic worker were circumvented and persuaded regarding the nature of the jobs offered, the monthly wage, and the place of residence, before they travel to any destination

Laid-off workers to get priority in loan deferment

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 3

The priority for loan deferment without interest for a year will be given to those who are laid off from work, said the CEO of Central Bank of Oman.

He said that priorities will be also given to whose wages and bonuses have been reduced from some government agencies and retirees as well. The age group for repayment has been extended to seventy years.

Tahir bin Salim al Amri said "A person may go to the bank and ask for a postponement or extension, and there will become some problems if the request is not accepted. We opened a section for complaints and the CBO is working to address the issue with banks and financing companies." He said the ceiling set by the Central Bank for interest on personal loans is six per cent and there are requests to reconsider this ceiling because many feel the cost of financing is high."



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Defence ENGINEERING SERVICES



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
02/2021	Civil Work - Haima	First and Above	20 th May 2021	06 th July 2021	150/-

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as soft copy (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

RE-TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Shared Services Company (NSS), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2021/1	Development of IR4.0 SMART ROADMAP	10 May 2021	31 May 2021	25/- *VAT not included

Terms and conditions:

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at NSS reception before 1:00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Monday, 31 May 2021.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website (www.nama.om).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Nama Shared Services, Bank Muscat: 0423-048027270-017 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 1:00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



Al Muzn Mall

R - Floor - Al Mawaleh North, Al Seeb
P.O Box C9740, Post Code 900, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 246
E-Mail: ibrahim.alhinaei@holding.nama.om

Eid al Fitr holidays announced

FROM PAGE 1

- In case the first day of the Eid falls on Friday (May 14), the holiday will end on Monday, 4 Shawwal 1442 AH, corresponding to May 17. Therefore, work shall resume on Tuesday (May 18).

The decision allows employers and employees to agree on work arrangements to compensate this holiday, if necessity arises.

The Ministry of Labour extended greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on this blessed occasion, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty, grant him good health, happiness and long life, and for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty for many years to come while the Omani people and our dear country enjoy further progress and welfare and all Muslims blessings and prosperity. — ONA

Spread of new variant matter of concern

FROM PAGE 1

especially with the presence of large Indian community and the fact that flights did not stop until a short time ago. "Theoretically, there is a possibility of the presence of the strain in the Sultanate, but no cases have been recorded till date."

The Indian variant has raised global concern after being reported in some 17 countries, including Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the United States, Singapore and Fiji.

The B.1.617 variant contains two key mutations to the outer spike portion of the virus, referred to as E484Q and L452R. Both are separately found in many other coronavirus variants, but this is the first time reported together. The WHO says more study is urgently needed. Laboratory-based studies of limited sample size suggested potential increased transmissibility, it concluded.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
10/2021	Providing of cleaning service for the building of the child care center in Al- Khoud	Excellent or First or Second	Sunday 23-5-2021 02:00 PM	Saturday 12-6-2021 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) , On Tuesday 4/5/2021.
- Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- The original (1%) bank warranty to be submitted at same day of submitting at tender box located in Directorate of Finance & Administration at MOSD HQ.
- For Inquiry , please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402222 or 24166670).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om

Syria approves Assad, 2 others to run in presidential election

DAMASCUS: A Syrian former minister and a member of the Damascus-tolerated opposition will face Bashar al Assad in this month's presidential election, the constitutional court said on Monday.

The Assad-appointed body approved only three out of 51 applications to stand in the May 26 ballot, among them the 55-year-old president himself, widely expected to win a fourth mandate.

The court's president said in a press conference broadcast on state TV that Abdallah Salloum Abdallah, a state minister from 2016 to 2020, had been approved to run for president.

The third candidate was named as Mahmoud Marei, a member of the so-called "tolerated opposition" long described by exiled opposition leaders as an extension of the regime.

All 48 other applications were ruled out for "failing to meet constitutional and legal requirements", the court president said without elaborating. They have until May 7 to appeal.

Applicants needed to garner support from at least 35 members of parliament, each of whom is only allowed to back one candidate.

Exiled opposition members are de facto ruled out by an electoral law that stipulates candidates must have lived in Syria continuously for at least the past decade.

The election will be the second since the start of a decade-long conflict that has killed over 388,000 people and forced more than half of Syria's pre-war



Head of the higher constitutional court, Jihad al Laham during a news conference in Damascus. — Reuters

population from their homes.

Damascus has invited lawmakers from allied countries such as Russia, Iran, China, Venezuela and Cuba to observe the electoral process.

In New York, Western members of the UN Security Council, led by the United States, France and Britain, on Wednesday rejected the outcome of the May 26 poll in advance, a position denounced by Russia as "unacceptable".

Assad, who has already been in power for 21 years, was elected by referendum in 2000 and 2007. For the first multi-candidate poll in 2014, only two candidates besides Assad, out of 24 applicants, were allowed to run.

All 48 other applications were ruled out for 'failing to meet constitutional and legal requirements', the court president said

Meanwhile, Assad issued a decree on Sunday authorising the release of prisoners, including those convicted for misdemeanours or complicity in acts of "terrorism", state media said.

The so-called general amnesty comes weeks before the May 26 presidential election, the second such polls since the start of the country's decade-long civil war.

Assad is widely expected to secure a fourth term.

SANA news agency published the decree but did not say how many prisoners would benefit.

The amnesty stipulates that pardons will be granted to prisoners convicted for crimes committed before May 2, 2021, including those convicted for misdemeanours as well as minors facing certain charges.

The decree includes crimes related to the terrorism act of 2012, including "conspiracy" to commit a "terrorist" act.

"Terrorism" is a term used by Damascus to encompass acts carried out by rebels and anti-regime activists. — AFP

Lebanon's central bank governor faces new graft allegations

PARIS: An anti-corruption group has submitted a legal complaint in France against Lebanon's central bank governor over foreign investments including property he owns worth millions of euros, two people involved in the filing said on Monday.

Sherpa, a non-governmental organisation that defends victims of economic crimes, said in a statement that it and a group of lawyers had filed the complaint on Friday over "suspicious" real estate purchases in France.

Central Bank Governor Riad Salemeleh said he had proved and shown documents on many occasions highlighting that the source of his wealth was acquired before taking up his post in 1993.

"I have also declared that my properties in France were acquired prior to being governor," he said.

Salameh's brother, son and an associate are also named in the legal complaint, said Laura Rousseau, head of the illicit financial flows programme at Sherpa.

"We are targeting the ill-gotten gains acquired in France and more specifically we are targeting the numerous investments overseas that make the suspicious origins of his (Salameh's) fortune in France," she said.

Lebanon's financial and political elite have long been under scrutiny over allegations of mismanagement, corruption and obstructing efforts to unlock international aid. It is the latest complaint filed on



Lebanon's Central Bank Governor Riad Salemeleh

suspected Lebanese corruption to authorities in Europe.

Salameh has dismissed previous corruption allegations against him as a smear campaign.

The 81-page complaint in France, seen by Reuters, outlines what it says are assets, companies and investment vehicles across Europe worth hundreds of millions of euros which it alleges Salameh, members of his family and his associates used over years to divert funds out of Lebanon.

France's National Financial Prosecutor, where the complaint was filed with the Collective Association of Victims of Fraudulent and Criminal Practices in Lebanon, was not immediately available for comment.

The complaint also lists almost 20 senior Lebanese politicians and suggests that bank owners and shareholders who could also be targeted in the future.

Lebanon faces a financial crisis in which banks have blocked most transfers abroad and cut access to deposits as dollars grew scarce. — Reuters

War and doubts slow Covid vaccination in Yemen city

TAIZ, Yemen: In Al Thawra hospital in the disputed Yemeni city of Taiz, a nurse with no face mask or protective gear inoculates the few people who have shown interest in the Covid-19 vaccine.

She picks an AstraZeneca vial from a cooler box, warms it with her hands and invokes the name of god before injecting the shot into a man's left arm.

Yemen has received 360,000 doses from the global Covax vaccine-sharing scheme, yet many Yemenis seem reluctant to get inoculated on religious grounds, due to distrust of the vaccine, or because of the dangers of war.

"We have received 70,000

There has been a dramatic spike in infections in Yemen this year, straining a health system already battered by war and economic collapse

doses in Taiz and we started the vaccination campaign on April 21," Rajeh al Maliki, head of Yemen's health ministry in Taiz.

"We can fairly say that there is very little interest... we have distributed around 500 shots since we started, it is less than we expected," Maliki said.



A man receives the AstraZeneca vaccine against the coronavirus disease at a medical centre in Taiz. — Reuters

There has been a dramatic spike in infections in Yemen this year, straining a health system already battered by war, economic collapse and a shortfall in aid funding.

The Ansar Allah movement, which controls most of northern Yemen and parts of Taiz, has been battling the government since 2014. Tens of thousands have been killed and millions rely on aid to survive.

Maliki and other doctors said many Yemenis, including medical staff, believe the vaccine would break their fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

Checkpoints and snipers in the

heavily militarised city make it impossible for many residents to reach hospitals, they said.

People living in Ansar Allah-controlled neighbourhoods have to travel around 50 km to avoid front lines and reach the main government-controlled hospital.

"I got infected by coronavirus, I took natural herbs and spices that our ancestors used. I was well again," said Ali Abdou, a 55-year-old Taiz resident. "We work very hard with our bodies and it gives us strong immunity, one of us dies only when his time has come. Those rare diseases only affect the rich and we are not among them," Abdou said. — AFP

TEHRAN

Iran denies US prisoner swap reports

Iran denied media reports suggesting a prisoner swap deal had been reached with the United States, in parallel with nuclear talks involving the two. "The reports from informed sources are not confirmed, as it was said in the past," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told a news conference.

His comments came after outlets including Iranian state television on Sunday quoted an "informed" source saying that Tehran and Washington would



swap prisoners. "Under pressure from the (US) Congress and the need for immediate results" in the nuclear file, "the Americans agreed to pay \$7 million and release four Iranians." — AFP

TRIPOLI

Europe-bound migrants returned to Libya

More than 600 migrants hoping to reach Europe from Libya have been stopped since Friday, the navy said, as the International Organization for Migration warned Libya was "not a safe port". Three groups of illegal migrants were intercepted at sea on Friday and Saturday by Libya's coastguard and units in charge of securing ports, the navy said in a statement, released overnight Saturday to Sunday.

It said the 638 people were mostly citizens from sub-Saharan



African nations trying to reach Europe, and they were brought to a naval base in the capital Tripoli ahead of handing them over to an anti-immigration squad run by the interior ministry. — AFP

ALGIERS

Algerian president seeks to calm social anger

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has urged his government to open "a dialogue" with social partners to appease mounting social anger.

Unemployment at 15 per cent, soaring prices and shortages of basic food items have all added to turmoil caused by a deep economic crisis due to the fall in oil revenues and political deadlock since the popular Hirak pro-democracy uprising two years ago.

During a cabinet meeting,



Tebboune ordered "a dialogue with different social partners to improve the socio-professional situation" of employees in the education and health sectors, a statement said. — AFP

In brief

■ BANGKOK



THAILAND REPORTS NEW RECORD OF 31 CORONAVIRUS DEATHS

Thailand reported a new daily record of 31 coronavirus deaths, the health ministry said, as the Southeast Asian country grapples with a third wave of infections.

After managing to largely control the virus for around a year through shutdowns and strict border controls, Thailand has faced a spike in cases since early April that is proving harder to control and putting pressure on parts of the medical system.

The ministry reported 2,041 new Covid-19 cases, taking the country's total number to 71,025 since the pandemic began last year. The total number of fatalities now stands at 276.

— Reuters

■ ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN TIGHTENS BORDERS AS COVID-19 CASES SOAR

Pakistan has closed land crossings with Iran and Afghanistan for travellers and slashed international flights as the government warned of a "critical" few weeks ahead in the battle against Covid-19. The border restrictions were announced Sunday as the country prepared to mark Eid al Fitr, which usually sees the mass movement of people between cities and villages as well as the return of migrant workers and overseas Pakistanis for celebrations. Pakistani officials have anxiously watched the coronavirus crisis unfolding in neighbouring India. — AFP

■ KATHMANDU



NEPAL SUSPENDS ALL FLIGHTS AMID COVID-19 SPIKE

Nepal has decided to suspend international and domestic flights amid a surge in Covid-19 cases, the country's communications minister said on Monday.

All domestic flights will be suspended from midnight Monday, while international flights will be halted from midnight on Wednesday, according to minister Parbat Gurung.

"The flights will remain suspended until May 14," Gurung said. Details have not yet been made public but the decision will not impact chartered and humanitarian flights, according to officials.

This decision comes at a time when the government is struggling to contain the spread of coronavirus cases. — dpa



A speedboat is seen ashore after it collided with a sand-laden bulk carrier and sank on Padma River in Madaripur, Bangladesh. — Reuters

26 killed in boat collision in Bangladeshi river

DHAKA: At least 26 people were killed when a speedboat packed with passengers collided with a vessel transporting sand on Monday in the latest maritime disaster to hit Bangladesh.

Police said the speedboat carrying about three dozen passengers from the town of Mawa rammed into the other vessel in the Padma river as it neared the main river station in the central rural town of Shibchar.

"We have so far recovered 26 bodies including a woman. We have also rescued five injured people including three children," police official Amir Hossain said.

Hossain said the bow of the passenger boat was destroyed when the speedboat smashed into the side of the transport vessel, sinking in the river in minutes.

"Police, the fire brigade and army rescue teams are on the spot, conducting search and rescue work," he said.

Witness Abdur Rahman said there was a loud noise when the boats collided and the vessels then overturned.

"When we rushed to the spot we found the speedboat torn into

two pieces. Hundreds of villagers immediately started conducting rescue work before they were joined by police and the fire brigade," he said.

Bangladesh is building the country's largest road and railway bridge near the accident spot and police said officers were immediately at the scene.

Construction work has slowed ferry transport on the river, prompting many to take the journey on less safe speedboats, which take only about 15 minutes to make the crossing in contrast to up to two hours on safer ferries.

The government administrator of Shibchar district said up to five people were believed to be missing. He said the driver of the speedboat would be investigated as he appeared to have hit the transport vessel, which was moored at the time.

"A probe has been ordered into the accident," he said.

Meanwhile, Ashikur Rahman, an on-duty police officer at the river port, said the motorboat was ferrying passengers across the river in absence of regular transportation services, which

are shut because of a nationwide lockdown imposed last month to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Television footage shows the front side of the damaged speedboat, salvaged by the rescuers, was reduced almost to half.

The district's chief administrator Rahima Khatun said an investigation was launched into the accident. A panel of investigators were asked to report back in three days.

Deaths from ferry accidents are common in Bangladesh, a country of many rivers. Experts blame poor safety measures and the lax implementation of regulations. Maritime accidents are common in Bangladesh, a delta nation crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers.

Experts blame poor maintenance, lax safety standards at shipyards and overcrowding for many of the accidents.

Vessels transporting sand sit low in the water and can be hard to see in choppy conditions, particularly when light is poor.

— AFP/dpa

Blinken presents new N Korea approach

LONDON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday opened the Group of Seven's first in-person talks in two years by presenting the new administration's fresh approach on North Korea, which has already denounced it.

With Covid raging in India but increasingly coming under control in the West, Britain welcomed foreign ministers of the club of wealthy democracies to London to discuss a post-pandemic agenda and prepare for a G7 summit in southwest England next month.

India, South Korea, South Africa and Asean bloc chair Brunei were invited as guests to the three days of talks, which will also address rising tensions with Russia and China as well as diplomacy to revive a nuclear accord with Iran.

Amid stringent anti-Covid measures including restrictions on movements, Blinken met separately at his hotel with the foreign ministers of Japan and South Korea days after President Joe

Blinken and Japanese FM 'shared their concerns about North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes'

Biden completed a review on North Korea policy.

"We are grateful to have this opportunity to have in-depth discussions with the US after the conclusion of your policy review," South Korean Chung Eui-yong said, as he welcomed the "very positive and open message" by Biden in his address to Congress last week.

The State Department said that Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi "shared their concerns about North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes" in their meeting.

They agreed to work together along with Japan's sometime rival South Korea "towards denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula," a statement said. — AFP



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks with South Korea's Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong during a bilateral meeting in London during the G7 foreign ministers meeting. — AFP

Myanmar rebels claim military helicopter downing

YANGON: A leading Myanmar ethnic rebel army said it had shot down a military helicopter on Monday, a day after a renewed junta crackdown on anti-coup protests left at least five civilians dead.

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) said it downed the helicopter gunship during fierce clashes near the town of Momauk in the country's far north.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and seized power on February 1.

Security forces have sought to quell near-daily pro-democracy protests with deadly force, while long-simmering conflicts with ethnic rebels have erupted into fierce fighting.

The KIA, which has waged a decades-long insurgency against the military in northern Kachin state, has been hit by airstrikes in



Protesters take part in a flash mob as part of demonstrations against the military coup on 'Global Myanmar Spring Revolution Day' in Yangon. — AFP

recent weeks.

"They used jet fighter and helicopter gunship since eight this morning to attack our troops. Our troops fired back and this was how the helicopter was shot down," said KIA spokesman Col Naw Bu, who refused to give details of the weaponry used to down the chopper.

AFP has tried to contact the Myanmar military to seek their account of events but has not had a response.

A number of Myanmar's myriad ethnic rebel groups have come out in support of the anti-coup protest movement, offering shelter and even training to activists who have fled the crackdown.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a local monitoring group, said that at least five civilians were killed in operations to break up protests on Sunday. — AFP

EU aims to open up to more foreign tourists despite Covid

BRUSSELS: The European Union's executive has recommended easing Covid-19 travel restrictions next month to let foreign travellers from more countries enter the EU, hoping to boost the stricken tourism industry this summer.

Under current restrictions, people from only seven countries, including Australia and Singapore, can enter the EU on holiday, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated against Covid-19 but subject to tests or quarantine.

New proposals outlined by the European Commission on Monday, but still requiring member states' approval, would allow in foreign citizens who have been fully vaccinated and those who arrive from countries with a "good epidemiological situation".

"Time to revive tourism industry and for cross-border friendships to rekindle — safely," Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wrote on Twitter.

People arriving from Britain, Russia and a number of other countries would meet the new criteria, according to data provided by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). US citizens would not currently do so.

"We want to have this done before the mass summer travel starts," an EU official said.

The 27 EU member states are due to start discussing the proposal on Tuesday and the official hoped it would be approved this month.



Federal police officers check air passengers arriving from Britain at Frankfurt Airport, as the spread of the coronavirus disease continues in Frankfurt, Germany. - Reuters File Photo

Travel restrictions because of Covid-19 have inflicted heavy losses on the tourism industry in the EU, which at times has struggled to agree on a common position as it responds to the pandemic.

If the new proposals are agreed upon, specific EU countries would be expected — but not legally obliged — to follow the new joint approach. Greece has already agreed to welcome vaccinated tourists from Israel.

The Commission recommended allowing people fully inoculated with EU-recognised vaccines to be able to enter from any country, and said other vaccines could be added if they are approved by the World Health Organization (WHO).



Time to revive tourism industry and for cross-border friendships to rekindle — safely

URSULA VON DER LEYEN
European Commission chief

The WHO has also approved those vaccines for use and is expected to decide on the use of two Chinese vaccines this week. Both agencies are considering approval for Russia's Sputnik V vaccine.

The Commission said reciprocity should be considered when deciding on its proposals to allow leisure travel from third countries.

To limit the risk of importing new coronavirus variants, the Commission also proposed a new "emergency brake" that would allow the swift introduction of travel restrictions from countries where the health situation deteriorates sharply.

— Reuters

Scottish independence leader eyes key victory

EDINBURGH: Scottish National Party (SNP) leader Nicola Sturgeon goes into elections Thursday hoping victory will set the nation on the road to independence, but will have to overcome infighting and opposition in London.

The 50-year-old has become the pre-eminent force in Scottish politics, earning a reputation for assured leadership since becoming first minister in the country's devolved government in 2014.

She has earned points among voters for her management of the coronavirus pandemic. Her clear communication style is cast by her supporters in contrast to mixed messages emanating from UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson during the health crisis.

But what should have been a smooth build-up to the elections has been overshadowed by months of mudslinging between Sturgeon and Alex Salmond, her former mentor and predecessor

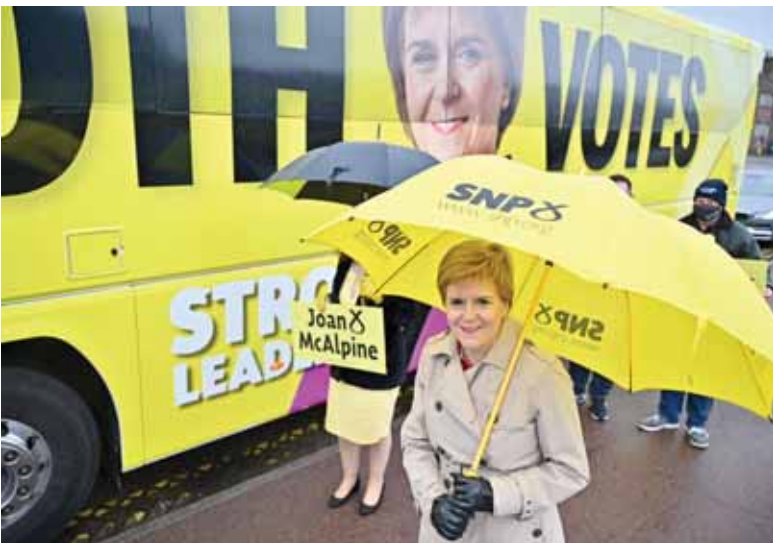
as first minister.

The spectacular falling out between the pair over the handling of sexual harassment claims against Salmond has seen Sturgeon facing questions over her judgement and her reputation for attention to detail.

Disagreements between the two political heavyweights reverberated into the election campaign and threatened to split the independence movement, with Salmond forming his own pro-independence party called Alba.

Sturgeon's SNP looks set to dominate at the ballot box, with one Ipsos MORI poll showing it on course to win 70 of the 129 seats in the Scottish Parliament.

But questions remain over whether Scots will back independence in a referendum after all the infighting, with a string of surveys showing waning popular support for breaking away from the UK. — AFP



Scotland's First Minister and leader of the Scottish National Party Nicola Sturgeon campaigns in Dumfriesshire, ahead of the upcoming Scottish Parliament election to be held on May 6. — AFP

Northern Ireland marks centenary as crises simmer

DUBLIN: Northern Ireland marked its centenary on Monday with coronavirus restrictions, simmering post-Brexit unrest and a leadership crisis marring the anniversary in the British-ruled province.

Northern Ireland — home to 1.9 million people — was created in 1921 as Ireland freed itself from British rule following a war for independence.

Commemoration events have been cancelled due to Covid-19 curbs and the weeks leading up to the anniversary have been marred by the worst rioting in the region for years.

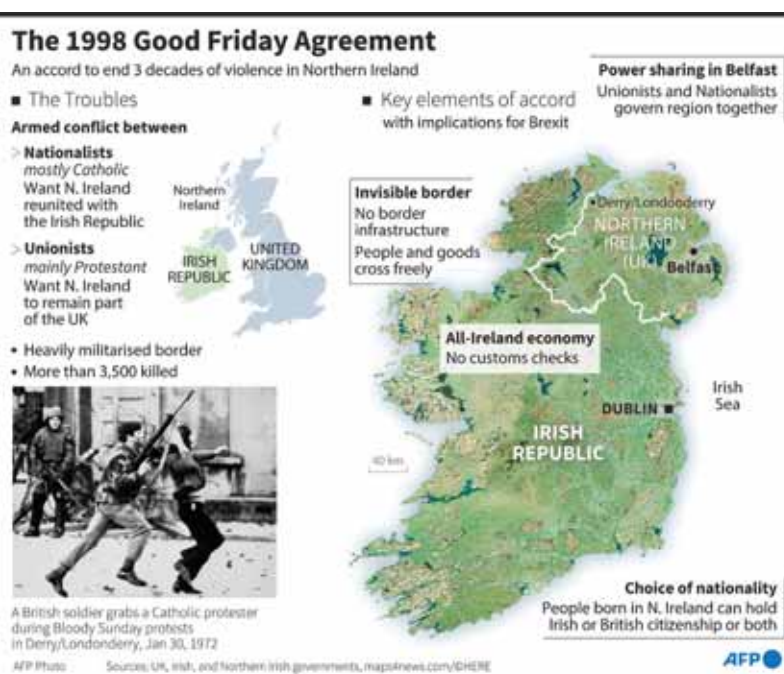
Meanwhile First Minister Arlene Foster on Wednesday

announced her resignation amidst a reported coup in her Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), where rancour is brewing over the consequences of Brexit.

Throughout its history, Northern Ireland has been bitterly contested between pro-UK unionists and pro-Ireland nationalists, who do not recognise its legitimacy and therefore do not celebrate the anniversary.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson nevertheless said that Monday is a "very significant national anniversary", marking "the formation of the United Kingdom as we know it today".

He said it was important that "we pause to reflect on the



complex history of the last 100 years".

It is "an important opportunity to come together to celebrate Northern Ireland", he added in a statement released on Twitter.

Recent unrest across the province emanated from the unionist community, where Johnson is held in low esteem for allowing a special post-Brexit "protocol" for Northern Ireland which many feel dislocates the region from its place in the UK.

At least 88 police officers were injured in a week of riots in April that spread to the nationalist community and saw riot police with water cannons deployed against youths throwing bricks

and petrol bombs.

Unionists fear the protocol would increase the likelihood of a united Ireland — a prospect which has been a historic source of bloodshed in Northern Ireland.

A three-decade-long sectarian conflict known as "The Troubles" saw 3,500 killed over the question of Northern Ireland's destiny.

A 1998 peace deal largely ended fighting but a hangover of bitter division remains.

On Sunday Britain's Queen Elizabeth II said "the peace process is rightly credited to a generation of leaders who had the vision and courage to put reconciliation before division." — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KINSHASA

Congo declares end of Ebola outbreak that killed 6

The Democratic Republic of Congo declared the end of an Ebola outbreak that infected 12 people in the eastern province of North Kivu and killed six of them.

The outbreak was contained using Merck's Ebola vaccine, which was given to more than 1,600 of the patients' contacts and contacts of contacts, the aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), said.

The cases were genetically linked to the 2018-20 Ebola



epidemic that killed more than 2,200 people, the second-highest toll recorded in the disease's history. — Reuters

WASHINGTON

Biden to promote mega plans in visit to Virginia

President Joe Biden travels to coastal Virginia to promote how his proposals to spend \$4 trillion for infrastructure and families will help the US education system.

Biden, joined by his wife, Jill Biden, a teacher, will visit an elementary school in Yorktown and deliver remarks at Tidewater Community College in Norfolk, Virginia.

The travel is part of Biden's "Getting America Back on Track" tour to promote his



\$2 trillion infrastructure plan and his \$1.8 trillion 'America Families Plan.'

— Reuters

GENEVA

WHO chief Tedros plans to seek re-election

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of the World Health Organization, plans to run for a second five-year term as the head of the agency, Stat News reported on Monday, citing a person familiar with the matter.

Ethiopia's Tedros, as he is widely known, in 2017 became the first African to head the Geneva-based United Nations agency and made universal health care coverage his priority. It is unclear at this point whether others will emerge to challenge



Tedros, the Stat report said. The WHO did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. — AFP

Blame it on Covid...

Feeling moody? Cannot pinpoint what is the cause? Blame it on Covid-19. Want to fly across nations like you did in 2018 and your suitcases have no more meaning — you know whom to blame.

It has become a reality — there is a defined time period now pre-Covid and post-Covid. Health insurance did not matter as much as it is now. Hospital bills are a stress on their own.

My friend who used to love Karak tea has just recovered from Covid-19 and has suddenly realised he does not fancy Karak tea anymore. His mother noted that he is quieter than he was before the Covid. He thinks maybe it is a lack of common topics that is causing the silence. Or could it be yet another impact of Covid?

Does Covid change our thinking? Of course one would be mentally and physically exhausted after an ordeal such as that.

Yet another recovered person said he never believed much in herbs and spices but he found their amazing healing qualities while he depended on them during his rendezvous with the virus. A friend who is still under treatment and is completely out of touch with news said he will travel to his home in India for further treatment when he is out of hospital this weekend. We are all living in different realities and isolation can create a whole new environment. Let us blame it on Covid, but at times maybe it is better to stay tuned out of the chaos the earth is



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

DOES COVID
CHANGE OUR
THINKING? OF
COURSE ONE
WOULD BE
MENTALLY AND
PHYSICALLY
EXHAUSTED
AFTER SUCH AN
ORDEAL

going through. With so many activities shut out and since the norm has become abnormal, it is about time we thought out of the box and became creative in bringing down the number of Covid-19 cases. Each one of us has a responsibility and for some reason we have stopped talking about flattening the curve and breaking the chain. So it seems most of us are tired and have begun to lose focus. We need motivation to revive the fight against the pandemic. We cannot pass on the blame to others. As children we knew it was the easiest solution but now it is not a mere blaming game as what is at stake is world's health.

It is tempting to go out to shop but we have to tell ourselves — do it only if you have to.

Yet another friend felt exhausted throughout the day, and even after her doctor friend kept insisting on her taking a PCR test, she brushed it aside saying her exhaustion is due to shifting house. Eventually when she did go for the test she turned out to be Covid-19 positive. She had no other symptoms. While she isolated herself to recovery, what we must learn from her story is that at times Covid arrives with no other announcements other than just a body ache and in many cases with no symptoms.

We must also overcome the tendency to remove the mask to speak. As one poster at a doctor's office depicted — the neck is an exposed part of the body and when a person draws it down to

speak and pulls it up to cover the face again the person has actually touched the neck with the inner part of the mask and taken it up to the nose and mouth.

Maybe we are tired of hearing advice and bored with the restrictions but the fact is it is all for our safety because when we are safe others are safe and when others are safe we are safe. It proves once again how we are all interconnected.

The social beings we have had been enjoying the isolation that social media provides and failing even to connect with the person who is sitting next to us; but now when there is a need to isolate ourselves we are at loss. Maybe nature has been teaching a lesson or two in 2020 and 2021. Maybe this experience will take us back to the basic values and to appreciate the beauty in simplicity.

Let us move from blaming and instead move towards practicing gratitude for what eventually works is the combination of practicing patience and gratitude. As we approach the Eid celebrations with new restrictions in place, let us be able to appreciate with gratitude and understand that we need to stand together to break the chain and flatten the curve.

So in case you want to blame Covid for the restricted celebration and enjoying the Eid holidays, change the mode of thinking and be happy that you are going to be proactive in bringing down the numbers. It is being socially responsible.

DEMOCRACY RISKS?

Madrid regional election puts PM on the defensive

CHRISTIAN CHAISE

Madrid votes on Tuesday in a closely watched regional election which surveys suggest will deliver a serious drubbing to Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialist Party.

In a country still divided over its 1936-39 civil war and the dictatorship of Francisco Franco that followed, echoes of the past have entered campaign rhetoric with parties labelling each other "reds" and "fascists".

The polarisation has drowned out debate over the Madrid regional government's handling of the pandemic and the policies of the conservative Popular Party (PP), which has governed Spain's richest region since 1995.

Polls suggest the PP will win by a wide margin although they will fall short of a majority in the Madrid regional assembly and will need the support of far-right party Vox to govern. Aside from the verbal insults, the campaign has been marked by death threat letters with bullets sent to top politicians, including the leader of far-left party Podemos, Pablo Iglesias.

Podemos is the junior partner in Sanchez's minority coalition government.

Isabel Diaz Ayuso, the outgoing leader of the Madrid regional administration who is a rising star in the PP, set the tone for the campaign in March when she called the early election, saying it would allow voters to choose between "Socialism or freedom". She has made Sanchez the focus of her attacks and has consistently pushed back against central government pressure to impose tighter virus restrictions and lockdowns, arguing that keeping the economy afloat and preserving social interaction is also important for health.

Antonio Barroso of Teneo consultants said a defeat of the left in Madrid "is unlikely to make a difference" in the national government's ruling coalition between the Socialists and Podemos, since it is not in Sanchez's interest to bring forward a general election.

"A decisive victory by Diaz Ayuso will probably give a boost to the PP on the national level level," he added.

It could also be seen as a vindication for her more hardline positions and "lead to internal quarrels" over the leadership of current PP head Pablo Casado, who has become more centrist in recent months, Barroso said.

Madrid has Spain's laxest virus restrictions and it has been the only major European capital to keep bars, restaurants and theatres open with few restrictions since a nationwide lockdown ended in mid-2020.

Final opinion polls give her PP party around 40 per cent support, almost double the result in the previous election in May 2019, and well ahead of the Socialists who have seen their backing drop to 20 per cent from just over 27 per cent in the last polls.

The pandemic has hit Madrid hard with the region accounting for nearly 20 per cent of Spain's over 78,000 Covid-19 deaths, prompting opposition criticism over Diaz Ayuso's handling of the health crisis. But Diaz Ayuso blames Sanchez, accusing him of having left management of the pandemic to Spain's regional governments. — AFP

HIGH STAKES

Prospects fading, Turkey hopes lockdown rescues tourism season

CANAN SEVGILI AND BERNA SULEYMANOGLU

Turkey's tourism sector faces another lost season after a rapid coronavirus rise wiped out many early foreign bookings and prompted Russia, its top source of visitors, to halt flights and warn against travel this summer.

In a last-ditch move to cut infections and save the season, President Tayyip Erdogan last week imposed a lockdown through mid-May in part, he said, so that European countries did not leave Turkey behind as they re-open beaches, restaurants and travel.

The foreign cash that tourists spend is critical to offset Turkey's heavy foreign debt, but revenues plunged 65 per cent last year when the pandemic first hit.

The tourism minister said that 30 million foreigners could arrive this year, twice as many as last, if the lockdown succeeds in lowering daily Covid-19 cases to below 5,000 from near 30,000 in recent days.

But travel agents, associations and hotels said they fear this year will be little better than last after the virus wave briefly ranked Turkey second globally in new cases just as the season kicked off, before it dropped back to fourth. Some Turkish and Russian agents see a difficult few months until August, when they say the Mediterranean and Aegean hot spots and historic sites in Istanbul and elsewhere could fill up again. Much will depend on last-minute bookings, they said.



Tourists enjoy a sunny day outside the Ayasofya-i Kebir Camii or Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in Istanbul. — Reuters

THE FOREIGN CASH
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"The lockdown decision will probably not be able to save the season" because it was taken too late, said Cem Polatoglu, general manager at Istanbul-based Andiamo Tour.

Even if the lockdown cuts daily coronavirus cases to below 5,000 by the end of May, as the government hopes, he said it takes time for countries to remove travel warnings "which means probably losing July too".

Coronavirus cases topped 60,000 last month, leaving Turkey's top five tourist sources — Russia, Germany,

Britain, Bulgaria and Iran — with travel warnings in place.

Ankara said Moscow's decision to halt most flights until June 1 blocked 500,000 tourists, compared to a total of 2.1 million Russians who came last year and some 6 million before the pandemic.

The flight ban could be extended. Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said last week Russian operators should not sell tours even after June 1 until authorities decide.

— Reuters

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HAMILTON AND VERSTAPPEN HAVE
GONE WHEEL-TO-WHEEL IN ALL
THREE RACES THIS SEASON

F1 RIVALS AIM TO RACE HARD BUT FAIR

LONDON: Formula One title rivals Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen have gone wheel-to-wheel in all three races this season but both expect the racing to stay firm but fair as the pressure rises.

Hamilton's victory in Portugal on Sunday stretched the Mercedes driver's championship lead over Red Bull's Dutch youngster to eight points.

In a sport where fine margins and small mistakes can have big outcomes, and with a record 23 races scheduled this year, the seven-time world champion saw plenty of battles to come.

"We're going to be sick of each other at the end I would imagine, or sick of racing, because there are so many races," joked Hamilton.

The rivalry could boil over with so much at stake, 36-year-old Hamilton chasing records while 23-year-old Verstappen seeks a first crown, but the tone on Sunday remained one of mutual respect.

"I always have full trust in Lewis that we always give each other enough space," said Verstappen, who has won one race and finished second twice.

"I just second that," said



I always have
full trust in
Lewis that we
always give
each other
enough space

MAX
VERSTAPPEN
Red Bull driver

Hamilton. "I think it is naturally down to respect and I think both (of us are) very, very hard but fair and I think that's what makes great racing and great racing drivers."

TOO WIDE

The gap at the top would have been just seven points but for Verstappen having a fastest lap, and bonus point, deleted for going too wide.

Hamilton, superlative on Sunday, has also erred — skidding off in race two at Imola before fighting back from ninth

to second. He won against the odds in the Bahrain season-opener after Verstappen, on pole, ran wide while overtaking him.

Verstappen won at Imola, muscling past Hamilton on the opening lap, and might have taken pole in Portugal from Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas but again went just too far off and had a fastest time deleted.

Both made mistakes on Sunday that allowed the other

Portuguese Grand Prix			May 2	
Portimao circuit				
1	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	1h34:31.421	25	
		Mercedes		
2	Max Verstappen (NED)	at 29.148 sec	18	
		Red Bull		
3	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	at 33.530	16	
		Mercedes		
4	Sergio Perez (MEX)	at 39.735	12	
		Red Bull		
5	Lando Norris (GBR)	at 51.369	10	
		McLaren		
Source: Formula1.com			AFP	

Driver standings

Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	69
Verstappen (NED)	61
Norris (GBR)	37
Bottas (FIN)	32
Leclerc (MON)	28

Team standings

Mercedes	101
Red Bull	83
McLaren	53
Ferrari	42

to overtake. "This championship will come down to all the marginals and it's still at an early stage," said Red Bull boss Christian Horner.

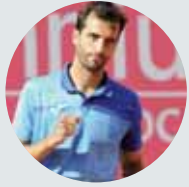
"Max is driving the wheels off the car and it's super, super tight between us. We're race three, we're eight points behind in the drivers' (standings), it's nothing. This championship is going to be a marathon rather than a sprint."

Despite Red Bull starting

the season with an apparent performance advantage, Mercedes lead both championships and are getting back to the sort of form their fans have come to expect.

"I think we had a good car, the first time we were really able to compete for pole," said team boss Toto Wolff.

"I wouldn't have believed it because I rely on probabilities and maths," he said. — Reuters



Ramos Vinolas claims third career title at Estoril

Albert Ramos Vinolas claimed his third title by beating Cameron Norrie in the Estoril final on Sunday with the vanquished Briton describing the Spaniard as "a big brother". Ramos Vinolas, ranked 46 in the world, triumphed 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3). For the 33-year-old, it was a first title since Gstaad in 2019.



Sri Lanka's Thisara quits international cricket

Former Sri Lanka skipper Thisara Perera announced his retirement from international cricket on Monday, ahead of a white-ball tournament against Bangladesh. The 32-year-old all-rounder — who captained his country in the limited-over formats — said he was stepping down to clear the way for youngsters.

Jayawickrama dream debut seal Sri Lanka series win

LEFT-ARM SPINNER TAKES 11 WICKETS IN 209-RUN ROUT OF BANGLADESH

PALLEKELE, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka spinner Praveen Jayawickrama enjoyed a dream debut as he claimed 11 wickets to seal a 209-run victory over Bangladesh in the second Test at Pallekele on Monday.

Chasing a daunting 437 to win, Bangladesh were dismissed for 227 in the first session of the final day after resuming at 177-5 as Sri Lanka wrapped up the match, and the series 1-0, after 90 minutes of play.

The 22-year-old left-armer Jayawickrama was named player of the match after claiming 11-178 on his first Test appearance as he added five second-innings wickets to his six in the first.

Jayawickrama said it was a dream come true just to get a place in the Test team. "It was a childhood dream to play for Sri Lanka one day," Jayawickrama said. "To get 11 wickets in the game is simply unbelievable."

He thanked senior players for their encouragement.

"They just told me not bother when the batsmen go after the bowling, just to be patient and do the basics right," he said. "I am glad that it all worked today."

Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne, who was named player of the two-match series for scoring



Sri Lanka's Praveen Jayawickrama (3L) and teammate celebrates with the stumps after victory in the second and final Test against Bangladesh at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy. — AFP

428 runs in three innings, said Jayawickrama and off-spinner Ramesh Mendis worked well as a team. "Ramesh also gave him (Jayawickrama) a lot of help from the other end, in terms of building pressure," Karunaratne said. "That bowling partnership was good, and they had an understanding because they also play for the same club."

SPIN DUO

Off-spinner Ramesh Mendis dismissed four batsmen as all 10 Bangladesh second-innings wickets were taken by slow bowlers.

Jayawickrama struck in the third over on Monday, taking his ninth wicket of the match when he trapped Liton Das lbw with a ball that went straight on and

setting a Sri Lankan record for a Test debutant, surpassing Akila Dananjaya's 8-44 against the same opposition in Dhaka in 2018.

Mendis was replaced after a 15-over spell during which he took two wickets and the bowling change worked immediately as part-time spinner Dhananjaya de Silva struck with his second delivery.

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka 1st innings	493-7 dec
Bangladesh 1st innings	251
Sri Lanka 2nd innings	194-9 dec
Bangladesh 2nd innings	
T Iqbal c Dickwella b Mendis	24
S Hassan c Lakmal b Jayawickrama	34
N Shanto b Jayawickrama	26
M Haque b Mendis	32
M Rahim c de Silva b Mendis	40
L Das lbw Jayawickrama	17
M Hasan c Nissanka b Jayawickrama	39
T Islam c Dickwella b de Silva	2
T Ahmed c Karunaratne b Mendis	7
S Islam not out	0
A Jayed lbw Jayawickrama	0
Extras (b3, lb2, nb1)	6
Total (10 wks, 71 overs)	227
Fall of wickets: 1-31, 2-73, 3-104, 4-134, 5-171, 6-183, 7-206, 8-227, 9-227	
Bowling: Lakmal 4-2-14-0, Mendis 28-2-103-4, Jayawickrama 32-10-86-5, de Silva 7-1-19-1	

Tajjul Islam, on two, attempted a late cut, but only managed to edge it to wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella. Mendis returned to have Taskin Ahmed's wicket.

Jayawickrama then mopped up the tail.

Bangladesh skipper Mominul Haque said despite the series defeat, he was pleased with the team's batting in the first Test.

"There are certainly a lot of positives," the Bangladesh skipper said. "Losing the series doesn't mean I lost everything. There will of course be criticism but we did well as a batting group in the first Test." — AFP



Pankaj Khimji



Paul Sheridan



Alkesh Joshi



Younis Sakhi Mahmood Al Balushi

MUSCAT: Top cricket administrator Pankaj Khimji has now become the new Chairman of Oman Cricket (OC) after the post fell vacant due to the demise of its founding chairman Kanak Khimji in February.

Known as voice of Oman at International Cricket Council and top cricket platforms, Pankaj was recently appointed Vice-President of Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

He has been instrumental in Oman's growing stature as a rising force in international cricket apart from leading the national cricket team on international tours as Chef de Mission.

As Oman Cricket's representative in the highest echelons of international cricket, his efforts have resulted in unprecedented events and activities taking place in the Sultanate. The country has now become an established cricket centre with a host of international events and tournaments to its credit.

In another development, Younis Sakhi Mahmood al Balushi, Alkesh Joshi and Paul Sheridan have been inducted into Oman Cricket's Board of Directors. Their new role will continue till the next OC Board elections. The trio was serving Oman Cricket as Advisors to the Board till date.

Delhi move top after beating Punjab

AHMEDABAD: Delhi Capitals (DC) moved to the top of the points table after beating Punjab Kings (PBKS) by 7 wickets in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2021 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

Shikhar Dhawan scored a terrific 69 not out as DC chased down the target with 2 overs to spare after the bowlers restricted PBKS to a total of 166.

Chasing a target of 167, DC openers — Prithvi Shaw and Shikhar Dhawan — got off to an impressive start, scoring 24 in the first two overs. Shaw creamed two fours and found an edge that travelled all the way for a six against Mohammad Shami.

Dhawan added two fours with two brilliant cricketing shots in the fourth over. Shaw welcomed Ravi Bishnoi to the crease with a lofted shot that went all the way for a maximum. Seventeen runs came off the final over of the powerplay after Shaw smacked two fours and a six off Jordan and DC were 63/0 after 6 overs.

Harpreet Brar broke the dangerous partnership and castled Shaw on the first ball after the powerplay. Dhawan and Steve Smith knocked the ball



around in the middle-overs and developed a steady partnership.

DC were 87/1 at the end of 10 overs with both Dhawan and Smith settled at the crease. Riley Meredith was back into the attack and found success after Smith flicked it straight to Dawid Malan at deep mid-wicket in the 13th over. However, Dhawan continued playing his shots as he smacked a six off Bishnoi and reached his half-century. — **IPL**

BRIEF SCORES: Delhi Capitals: 167/3 (Shikhar Dhawan 69 n.o., Prithvi Shaw 39; Chris Jordan 1/21) beat Punjab Kings 166/6 (Mayank Agarwal 99 n.o., Dawid Malan 26; Kagiso Rabada 3/36) by 7 wickets.

IPL STROKES PRANAV MEHTA

IPL should generally love any form of controversies and it's amidst one now. With the building uncertainty, the TRP ratings would increase, cause the audience's anxiety to know more would increase.

With Covid-19 striking IPL furiously and with a lot of people from the bio secure bubble are being tested positive, the question remains as, how secure are these bio secure bubbles and are all the protocols being followed?

A few days back, Adam Zampa had left stern accusations on the IPL management while leaving IPL. Although, his comments were seen at that point of time, as with him being frustrated and irritated with the bio secure bubble and lack of opportunities to play with the Royal Challengers Bangalore.

The KKR vs RCB match yesterday, was cancelled due to Varun Chakavathy and Sandeep Warrier being tested positive from the KKR camp. Bowling coach L Balaji and a member of the service staff has also been tested positive from the CSK camp. Previously, Deepak chahar and Ruturaj Gaikwad were tested



positive in the CSK Camp.

Something is definitely wrong and the rules need to be made more stricter, if IPL is looking to complete this year's tournament. Already, India is struggling with a terrible outbreak of Covid-19 and with the medical facilities failing due to shortage of medical supplies and facilities. At such times, if everyone follows the bio secure bubble protocols strictly, then it will be a big sigh of relief to the world population, who considers IPL has a major stress buster.

SRH NEED TO LIFT GAME AGAINST MI

One would definitely not want to be in the camp of Sunrisers Hyderabad currently. They have lost 6 games out of

7 and the team environment is just not how it needs to be. Last game, Kane Williamson took over the captaincy duties from David Warner. Later, Warner was dropped by Williamson for the last game against Rajasthan Royals.

The generally very active and energetic Warner, was seen doing the substitute duties.

On the other hand, MI have jumped to the fourth spot with 4 wins from 7 games. MI has a brilliant team composition with almost all it's players having the experience of international cricket for their countries. This makes a big difference.

MI have a very long batting line-up and with pollard striking last game, the MI camp will take a big sigh of relief. The next in line is an expected knock from Hardik Pandya.

WHAT'S THE ACTUAL ISSUE WITH SRH?

The actual problem with SRH is Vijay Shankar playing in the middle. He takes a while to get in and then recovers to only get it to just around run a ball. This completely breaks the momentum.

Players like Abdul Samad, who are great prospects need to have more game time at higher positions rather

MESSI NETS TWICE IN BARCA TURNAROUND

COMEBACK WIN OVER VALENCIA
KEEPS HOPES FOR LA LIGA TITLE



VALENCIA, Spain: Lionel Messi scored a 50th free-kick goal for Barcelona as he led his side to a quick-fire comeback to win 3-2 at Valencia on Sunday and keep the pressure on La Liga title rivals Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid.

With coach Ronald Koeman serving a touchline ban, Barca fell behind in the 50th minute when Valencia defender Gabriel Paulista headed home from a corner after keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen had stumbled in his attempt to come for the ball.

The Catalans, who had blown the chance to go top of the league with a shock 2-1 defeat at home by Granada on Thursday, where Koeman was sent off, reacted well to going behind and soon won a penalty thanks to a handball from Valencia's Toni Lato.

Messi saw his spot-kick saved by former team-mate Jasper Cillessen but Valencia failed to clear the danger and the Argentine followed up to score on the second rebound in the 57th minute.

Antoine Griezmann gave Barca the lead six minutes later,



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (L) scores his second goal during the Spanish League match against Valencia. – AFP

also netting on the rebound after Cillessen could only parry a header from Frenkie de Jong.

Messi looked to have clinched the points in the 69th when he fired a set-piece in off the post to score his 28th league goal of the season and bring up a half century of freekick strikes.

Valencia got back into contention out of nowhere when

midfielder Carlos Soler scored with an unstoppable strike from long range in the 83rd.

Barca are third on 74 points with four games remaining, level with second-placed Real Madrid and two behind leaders Atletico Madrid after both sides won on Saturday.

Fourth-placed Sevilla, on 70, host Athletic Bilbao on Monday.

PIQUE: NO EASY GAMES LEFT

"We know that we won't have any easy games until the end of the season but we got the job done after the unexpected defeat to Granada. We competed today and are going to keep competing," said Barca defender Gerard Pique.

"Today we showed we're still

in the fight, that was what we wanted to do at the start of the season and it's to our credit that we're still in it."

Valencia were left 14th in the standings and are still not completely out of the relegation battle, sitting six points above the dropzone.

Javi Gracia's side had held Barca to a 2-2 draw at the Camp Nou in December and they kept the Catalans on their toes for the final few minutes after Soler's pile-driver, having a couple of half chances to equalise.

But Barca clung on for the win to ensure they head into next Saturday's crunch game at home to Atletico knowing they will unseat the leaders at the top with a victory. Real then host Sevilla on Sunday to complete a huge weekend in the title race.

"We're still alive," added assistant coach Alfred Schreuder, who is taking charge of the team during Koeman's touchline ban, which will also make him miss the game with Atletico.

"We're not looking at the other teams, we're only interested in ourselves and we believe our players can go on and win the league." — Reuters

SPANISH LA LIGA TABLE AFTER SUNDAY'S MATCHES (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Atletico Madrid	34	23	7	4	61	22	76
Real Madrid	34	22	8	4	58	24	74
Barcelona	34	23	5	6	80	33	74
Sevilla	33	22	4	7	49	26	70
Real Sociedad	34	14	11	9	51	35	53
Villarreal	34	13	13	8	51	38	52
Real Betis	34	14	9	11	43	46	51
Granada	34	13	6	15	43	55	45
Celta Vigo	34	11	11	12	46	51	44
Athletic Bilbao	33	10	12	11	43	36	42
Osasuna	34	10	10	14	31	41	40
Cadiz	34	10	10	14	29	49	40
Levante	34	9	11	14	38	48	38
Valencia	34	8	12	14	43	51	36
Getafe	34	8	10	16	26	40	34
Alaves	34	7	10	17	28	52	31
Valladolid	34	5	16	13	32	46	31
SD Huesca	34	6	12	16	32	50	30
Elche	34	6	12	16	29	50	30
Eibar	34	5	11	18	26	46	26

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS

On Sunday

Valladolid 1 (Weissman 68) Real Betis 1 (Ruibal Garcia 49)

Villarreal 1 (Pino 79) Getafe 0

Granada 0 Cadiz 1 (Sobrinho 39)

Valencia 2 (Gabriel Paulista 49, Soler 83) Barcelona 3 (Messi 58, 69, Griezmann 63)

On Saturday

Eibar 3 (Kike 3, 50, 59) Alaves 0

Elche 0 Atletico Madrid 1 (Llorente 23)

SD Huesca 1 (Ramirez 87) Real Sociedad 0

Real Madrid 2 (Militao 76, Casemiro 80) Osasuna 0

Olympic team to hold camp in Bahrain from May 20

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The Oman Olympic (U-23) football team will resume training in May and June as they will have an overseas camp in Bahrain.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) announced on twitter official account that the Olympic team will meet Bahrain team in friendly matches on June 5 and 8 as a part of the external warm-up camp from May 20 to June 9 in Manama city.

The camp is part of the team's preparation for the Asian Olympic

Qualifiers that will take place in October. The finals of the AFC Asian (U-23) will be held in September 2022 in Uzbekistan during September 6 to 25.

The last appearance of the Oman U-23 team was in March as the team had an internal camp at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex under supervision of the Croatian coach Dario Basic and his assistant Mohammed bin Khamis al Orami. The team had depended on the local friendly matches during that domestic camp and could not have any international preparatory matches due to the



Olympic team will meet Bahrain team in friendly matches on June 5 and 8 as a part of the camp from May 20 to June 9 in Manama city

Covid-19 situation.

The twelve days camp in last March was the fourth camp under the Croatian coach, who took in charge for Olympic team since early 2020. The first two warm-up camps were in the first quarter of 2020 and the team had stopped

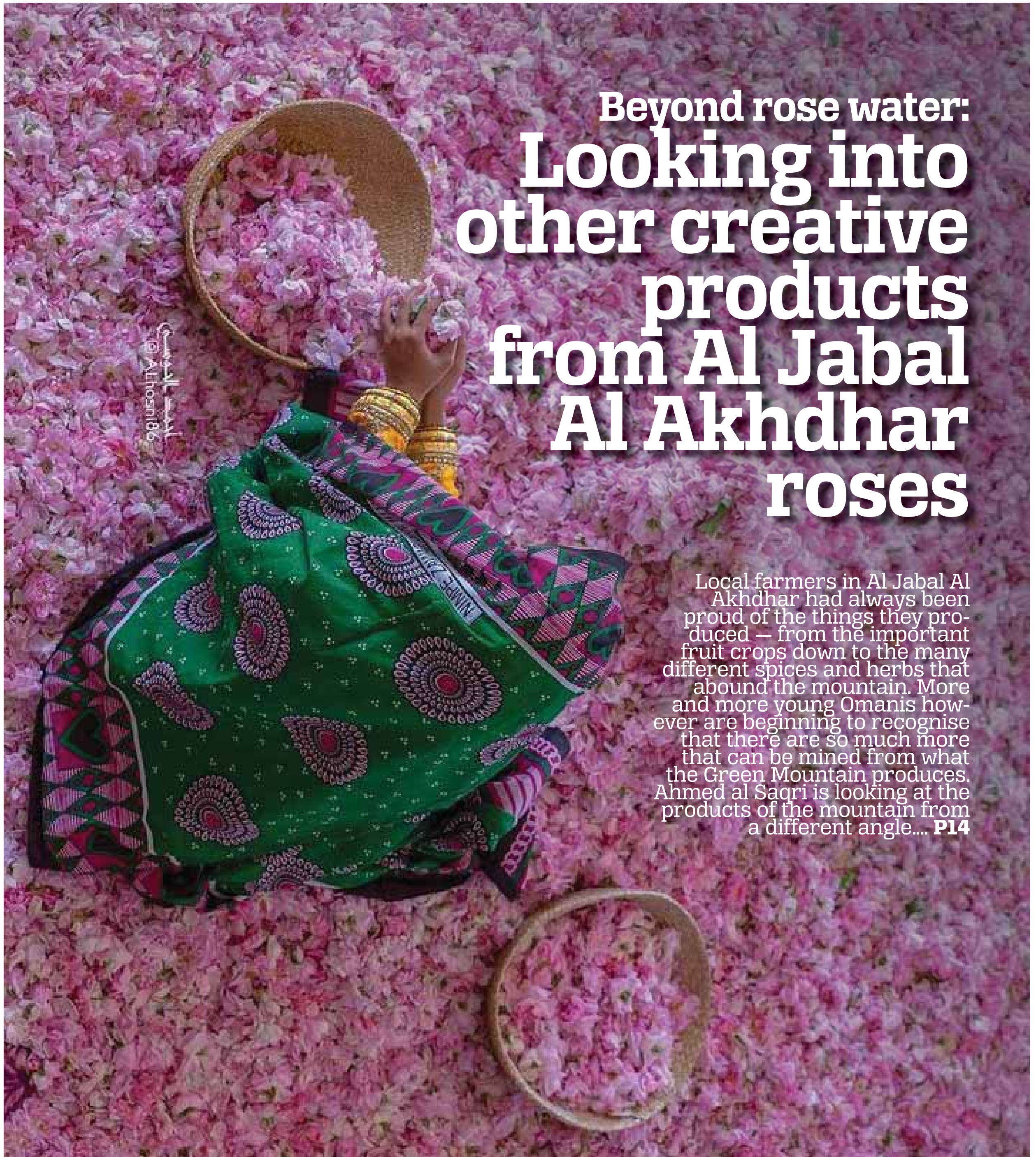
training due to the pandemic. The squad restarted training in last November with an internal camp.

Oman Olympic team's other assignment is to take part in the Islamic Solidarity Games in Turkey in next September. Also, participation at the GCC Games in Kuwait and the dates will be announced later.

OMAN PROBABLES: Essam al Makhzoomi, Faisal al Harthy, Arshad al Alawi, Yahya al Hudaifi, Awadh al Shari, Hussain al Shari, Najeeb al Shujaibi, Jasim al Noubi, Fahad Bait Obaidan, Essa al Naabi, Saud al Habsi, Al Baraa al Maawali, Islam al Hinai, Fahad al Hajri, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Yusuf al Malki, Abdullah al Balushi, Hani al Nuaimi, Musaab al Maamari, Yusuf al Shiyadi, Mohammed al Buraiki, Marwan al Abdulsalam, Hani al Qartoubi and Qasim Mubarek.



ramadhan



Beyond rose water: Looking into other creative products from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar roses

Local farmers in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar had always been proud of the things they produced — from the important fruit crops down to the many different spices and herbs that abound the mountain. More and more young Omanis however are beginning to recognise that there are so much more that can be mined from what the Green Mountain produces. Ahmed al Sagri is looking at the products of the mountain from a different angle.... **P14**

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

We have warned you of a near punishment — the Day when a person will observe what his hands have produced, and the faithless will say, "O, I wish I were dust".

Al Naba'

FATWA QUESTION & ANSWER



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

QUESTION

A traveller gets sick while on his way, the doctor advised him to stop his Ramadhan fasting as it may affect his health? What is he supposed to do?

ANSWER

Better to break. However, he should make up for the missed days.

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger as saying:

If anyone forgets that he is fasting and eats or drinks he should complete his fast, for it is only Allah Who has fed him and given him drink.



Photos by: Ahmed Alhosni.
Instagram: alhosni86.
Twitter: AhmedAlhosni10

Beyond rose water: Looking into other creative products from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar roses

Text by Baraah Al Mujaini
Photos by Ahmed Al Hosni

Local farmers in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar had always been proud of the things they produced – from the important fruit crops down to the many different spices and herbs that abound the mountain. More and more young Omanis however are beginning to recognise that there are so much more that can be mined from what the Green Mountain produces. Ahmed al Saqri is looking at the products of the mountain from a different angle.

Located around 3,000 metres above sea level, with its distinct atmosphere and towering mountains, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of Oman's place where one can experience nature at its finest with people living a very simple life. The residents here rely on the natural resources gifted to them by the land, and with fresh air filled with the scents of flowers, they've continued to thrive living healthy-independent lives.

The flower harvest season in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar begins in late March, peaks in April and ends in May. This season come with its unique rituals.

The vast areas of land look as if they are covered by an infinite green carpet, filled with pink/reddish flowers. This season is considered an essential season, especially for Jabal residents, as the collecting of flowers and extracting the various types of its products from them is one of their sources of income.

Many products are extracted from the flowers, but the most common product is the rose water. As of late, extracting oil from the flower has given life to new products revolutionising the flower industry of the Green Mountain and Oman in general.

But how is rose oil generated?

What has been the opinion of people about it? And how difficult it is to focus into this new endeavour?

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Saqri, founder and owner of Al Jabal Roses, gave out some very revealing answers regarding their effort to establish Al Jabal Al Akhdhar as more than just rose water.

Growing up in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and has been a witnessed to its people's customs and traditions, Al Saqri decided to launch his own business by utilising the flora of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

While the raw ingredients are there, they had not been properly utilised giving Al Saqri an idea to develop on it further.

"Our concern is the quality of the product, we opted to use modern agricultural technologies, tools, and instruments that guarantee the best results of clean and pure production. By using moden machineries and tools, we were able to extract and produce prodcuts at lesser amount of time with lesser effort," Al Saqri shared.

People in Oman are familiar with the how rose water is extracted but oil extraction is a new concept that has just began to trend.

Al Saqri shared that he has prepare for a long time for the launching of his business and has already considered expanding the scope of the products produced in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

As al Saqri shared, he wanted to innovate and diversity the products produce in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. Being one of the first Omanis who have gone to rose oil extraction, he wanted to do more for other products too. Rose oil is considered to be among the best scents globally and many countries compete to produce it. Because of this competition, it has become an expensive product in demand in the perfume and aromatics industries. Producing natural, new, and rare product, specifically by complicated procedure, poses a considerable risk for two reasons. First, the possibility of not reaching

the expected revenue, and second, the loss of a great deal of flowers.

But it was a risk Al Saqri willingly faced. Because of elevated effort, he was able to raise his brand to a higher level with many of his customers expressing their satisfaction for the product.

The process of extracting the oil is complex, yet delicate at the same time, it requires certain circumstances and infinite patience. Asked what was the most difficult problem they faced, Al Saqri said: "The most critical obstacle we faced so far is the difficulty of rocky lands reclamation and cultivation, and we have eventually solved it by using many processes." With marketing, Al Saqri has also gotten into social media to reach more people not only in Oman but also other countries too. He also endeavours to create a buzz either through TV interviews or newspaper coverages calling this collaborative effort with media and social media "the secret beyond our brand's success."

Al Saqri looks into the future and sees the "Al Jabal Roses" brand expanding beyond Oman towards the whole of the Guld region, and ultimately, internationally.

"We intend to acquire vast areas of lands, besides importing new kinds of flowers," Al Saqri said, "this trade will directly boost and enhance the income of the economic, agricultural, and touristic sectors in Oman."

If you have not visited Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (the Green Mountain) yet and would like to visit Al-Saqri farm to learn how the different products from roses are produced, you can contact Al Saqri via their Instagram account: [Aljabal_roses](#).





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15

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

COOK LIKE A CHEF RAMADHAN EDITION

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om

Hotel-quality chicken mandi for iftar dinner



A chicken mandi, if properly made, is one of the best dishes one can enjoy in the Middle East. What more can you ask for really? Nice delicious chicken on a big tray of rice garnished with lots of spices and herbs — it's a real explosion of flavours in your mouth.

If you have not locked down yet your own

PREPARATION

Marinate the chicken with all the spices and ginger garlic paste and keep it in the chiller for 4 hours.

Wash and soak the rice for half an hour. While soaking the rice, heat the ghee in a pot. Once the ghee gets hot, add all the spices then add the chopped onion, garlic, ginger and sauté until the onion gets golden brown in colour.

Add all powder spices to the pot and stir for a minute and a half, then add water.

Once the water boils, add washed rice then cook for 10 minutes, once the water is at the same level as the rice, turn the fire

ABOUT THE CHEF

Starting his journey as Commis II in Amman — Jordan, Chef Mahmoud has come a long way by sharpening his skills under experts Executive Chefs at Marriott International. To explore his culinary dreams, he worked in Amman and Dubai for over a year before joining JW Marriott Muscat as Chef De Partie, specialising in Arabic cuisine as the opening culinary team for the hotel.

He believes every dish should have soulfulness as that is when the ingredient's flavours truly shine and awe the guests. Between helping

recipe for a good chicken mandi, our friends at JW Marriott Muscat is sharing this restaurant-quality dish made by their Chef de Partie who specialises in Arabic Cuisines. We hope you enjoy preparing this for your iftar dinner or better yet, you can master this dish while you are stashed away in your homes during the Eid holiday.

to low heat.

Cover the pot tightly with aluminium foil, cook for another 17 minutes then turn off the heat. Keep the rice in the pot for 20 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 185 degree Celsius and cook marinated chicken for 19 minutes.

For a smokier flavour: Fire up the charcoal and keep it in a deep container then put the cooked chicken and cooked rice in the strainer and place it on top of the charcoal container then cover for 20 minutes.

his mom in the kitchen as a child, while cooking for family over weekends and growing up under the shadow of his uncle who taught him the skills of knife, he found his passion for cooking.

The turning point in his career was choosing his speciality, which was during the early time of his career while working for Marriott Dead Sea — Amman, it is there he was taught the essence of working with spices and the intricate delicacies the Arabic cuisine's hold, while he worked in the main kitchen preparing an array of Arabic dishes for weddings and events.

INGREDIENTS



250 gm Basmati Rice
200 gm Chicken Cube
50 gm Onion Chop
50 gm Tomato Small Cube
45 gm Ginger-Garlic Paste
2 gm Arabic Spice Powder
2 gm Red Chili Powder
1 gm Turmeric Powder
2 gm Coriander Powder
60 gm Olive Oil
50 gm Yoghurt
60 gm Ghee
Salt to taste
3 gm Cashew
20 gr Dry Lemon
5 gm Coriander Leaves Chop
5 gm Mint Leaves Chop
2 gm Whole Cloves
5 gm Whole Cardamom
5 gm Whole Cinnamon
5 gm Bay Leaf
0.05 gm Saffron
75 gr Charcoal
20 gr Green Chili Chop



CHEF MAHMOUD
JAMIL NAJJAR
Chef De Partie
JW Marriott Muscat
Specialty Arabic Cuisine

TRAVEL TALES

Italy unveils new hi-tech floor design for Colosseum area



THE ANCIENT Roman Colosseum is once again going to have a floor thanks to a new, hi-tech project announced by the culture ministry on Sunday.

"It is an extraordinary project," said Culture Minister Dario Franceschini, detailing the plans to create a flexible floor to give tourists a clearer idea of how the arena would have looked when gladiators fought to the death there.

"You will be able to walk on it and go to the centre of the Colosseum, seeing it in the same way as visitors used to up to the end of the 19th century," Franceschini said.

The last floor was removed by archaeologists to get a better glimpse of the labyrinth of rooms and corridors that lay below the arena. It was never fully replaced.

An Italian engineering firm, Milan

Ingegneria, won the 18.5 million euro (\$22.2 million) contract to design the new flooring and has committed to complete the project by 2023.

The wooden platform will be made up of hundreds of slats that can be rotated to bring natural light into the underground chambers that once used to house the gladiators and animals before their deadly combat.

The Colosseum is Italy's most popular tourist attraction, drawing some 7.6 million visitors in 2019, before the coronavirus struck.

Built 2,000 years ago, the stone arena was the biggest amphitheatre in the Roman empire. It used to have up to 70,000 seats and hosted gladiator fights, executions and animal hunts. It could also be filled with water to re-enact sea battles. — **Reuters**



‘No more sacred places’: Heritage sites under siege in Tigray conflict

Hajj Siraj Mohammed has spent five decades managing the famed al-Nejashi Mosque in northern Ethiopia's Tigray region, welcoming worshippers even during periods of conflict and famine.

But when war broke out last year in Tigray, he witnessed something he once thought impossible: The mosque itself, part of one of the oldest Muslim settlements in Africa, had become a target.

In late November Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers marched on the town of Negash, where the mosque is located, heading south towards the regional capital Mekele.

Cowering in a washroom, Siraj listened in horror as shells crashed into the mosque's dome and meeting hall, leaving the compound strewn with dust and rubble.

"Not only us, but Muslims all over the world are shocked that this happened," the frail 78-year-old told AFP.

It is now six months since fighting kicked off in Tigray, and the world is broadly aware of the massacres, gang rapes and other forms of human suffering it has wrought.

However as the war grinds on with no end in sight, experts are also sounding the alarm about the fate of the region's revered places of worship, including monasteries and rock-hewn churches.

"I sometimes feel bad to talk about heritage because the stories we hear about what's happening to the people are much worse," said Alula Tesfay Asfha, a Tigray native and scholar of cultural heritage and urban planning at the Japan's University of Tsukuba.

"But collectively, as part of public history, heritage is very important."

FULL DAMAGE UNKNOWN

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray last November to topple the once-dominant regional ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

His government blames the TPLF for starting the war by attacking army camps, and has accused it of putting both civilians and heritage sites at risk.

In January state media asserted that pro-TPLF fighters had dug trenches near the al-Nejashi Mosque, drawing it into active conflict.

But when AFP reached the site in early March, residents said pro-TPLF fighters had fled the area long before pro-government soldiers arrived.

They also said Eritrean soldiers had looted the mosque compound.

There are fears that other heritage sites in Tigray have suffered similar -- or even worse -- damage.

Both Alula and Wolbert Smidt, a Tigray-focused ethnohistorian at the University of Jena in Germany, said they had received reports of gunfire and shelling at the sixth-century monastery of Debre Damo, north of the Tigray city of Adigrat.

More than 20 scholars voiced concern for the monastery in a January open letter calling for "the salvation of the cultural heritage of Tigray."

"It is beyond any doubt that the conflict is causing heavy damage... but since most communication lines remain cut off and the information coming from the region is minimal, it is difficult to assess the real scope of the losses," the letter said.

SHATTERED NORMS

Elsewhere in Tigray, religious sites have been turned into gruesome crime scenes.

In the town of Dengolat, hundreds of residents hid in a centuries-old Orthodox church as Eritrean soldiers allegedly gunned down more than 160 civilians in late November, survivors told AFP.

At around the same time, Eritrean soldiers massacred hundreds of civilians in the ancient Tigray city of Axum, a Unesco World Heritage site, including Orthodox Christians gathering for a major festival, according to Human Rights Watch.

This kind of violence shatters a long-held norm in Ethiopia, where even in war-time churches are viewed as "a sort of parallel world" in which "protection is absolute," Smidt said.

"But now the message seems to be, as traditional believers often understand it according to my reports: We are not attacking leaders, we are attacking the society. There are no more sacred places, no more places of refuge, no options to avoid the war."

Abiy, the winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, says the military objective in Tigray is simply to detain and disarm TPLF leaders.

Eritrea has denied involvement in atrocities.

'ANOTHER LAYER OF HISTORY'

Other sites reportedly caught up in fighting are less prominent, but scholars still see their destruction as significant.

An attack on the Ligat Kirkos church, near the border with Eritrea, was likely part of an attempt by Eritrean soldiers to eradicate Tigrayan developments in territory the two countries have long contested, Alula said.

If confirmed, the scale of the damage to heritage sites would be unprecedented, said historian and Ethiopia expert Eloi Ficquet.

Proper recovery will require not just repairing physical sites, but also somehow mending ties between the state and the population, he said.

"If reconstruction is only material, a reconstruction only aimed at tourists, it would be disrespectful of the very nature of this heritage," he said.

Alula, the Tigray academic in Japan, says he draws some hope from the notion that heritage sites, and the power they possess, can never be fully eliminated.

"Even if you destroy them, you are just adding another layer of history on top of them," he said.

"Future generations will be able to tell the story of what happened during this time, and maybe they can learn from these problems in a way that leads to peace."

He added: "At this point, though, it's very hard." — AFP

Elsewhere in Tigray, religious sites have been turned into gruesome crime scenes. In the town of Dengolat, hundreds of residents hid in a centuries-old Orthodox church as Eritrean soldiers allegedly gunned down more than 160 civilians in late November



business

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Mideast set to become market leader in renewable and clean energy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Renewable & Clean Energy will debut as the theme for Middle East Energy's inaugural virtual focus week on May 17, 2021, as research from Informa Markets revealed 83 GW of renewable and clean energy capacity, mainly solar and wind power, is planned across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region within the next 20 years, and more than AED 55 billion of solar power projects are expected to become operational by 2026.

The figures were highlighted as the Middle East is set to become a market leader in renewable and clean energy due to well-designed auctions, favourable financing conditions, and declining technology costs, all contributing to bringing renewables into the mainstream.

Claudia Konieczna, Exhibition Director, Middle East Energy, said: "We expect renewable and clean energy to account for 34 per cent of total power sector investments across the MENA region in the next five years."

\$826 million LPG project begins trial operation in Salalah

VALUE CREATION:
Strategically vital plant produces 304 kilotons per year of LPG products, consisting of 155 kilotons of propane, 111 kilotons of butane and 38 kilotons of condensate.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Oman's first liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) extraction plant has commenced trial production at Salalah Free Zone in Dhofar Governorate.

OQ LPG, a subsidiary OQ Gas Networks (part of OQ Group – the Sultanate's integrated global energy group) was set up with an investment of around \$826 million. The strategically important venture has been designed to further unlock the economic and commercial potential of the Sultanate's hydrocarbon resources.

The centrepiece of the project is an extraction and fractionation plant designed to process up to 8.8 million standard cubic metres/day of natural gas.

While the rich gas elements, comprising a mix of propane, butane and condensates, are



The centrepiece of the project is an extraction and fractionation plant designed to process up to 8.8 million standard cubic metres/day of natural gas

stripped from natural gas to produce LPG, the 'lean gas' is pumped back into the grid.

Total output of LPG is estimated at about 304 kilotons per year, consisting of 155 kilotons per year of propane, 111 kilotons of butane and 38 kilotons of condensate. Also as part of the project, LPG and condensate storage facilities

have been developed on a roughly 9-hectare site at the adjoining Port of Salalah.

From this dedicated export jetty, LPG can be shipped to markets primarily in the Indian sub-continent.

OQ LPG (formerly known as Salalah LPG) has been described as a strategic investment for

OQ as it supports the long term objectives of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman in terms of revenue generation, economic development and job creation through monetisation of the propane and butane elements of available rich gas.

OQ LPG will generate significant financial benefit for the government of Oman and OQ, and its local community and will further enhance the existing and future downstream industries in Dhofar Governorate.

(With inputs from ONA)

Khazaen signs pact with new investor



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Khazaen Economic City has recently announced the signing of a new investment agreement with an Iraqi investor to build a new industrial facility in Khazaen.

The agreement was signed with Al Zayzafon Investment Company to build a diapers and napkins factory with an estimated investment value of RO 2 million.

The agreement was signed by Eng Salim bin Suleiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City and Haidar Dhiaa Talib, CEO of Al Zayzafon Company.

Commenting on the agreement, Al Thuhli said, "The signing reflects the steady growth and trust that Khazaen is gaining from local and international companies to set up their facilities at Khazaen. We are truly delighted to welcome this new investment to Khazaen, and we are committed to providing the best customer service needed to commence this project in the city."

"Oman in general and Khazaen, in particular, provide an ideal choice for us as investors due to several factors and advantages it offers, as we aim to build a modern industrial facility to produce baby diaper and sanitary napkins to meet the requirements of the local market and partly to export to international markets, taking the unique advantage of the city's strategic location and its direct links to various major ports and airports in Oman through Khazaen Dry Port," said Dr Haidar Dhia Taleb, an Iraqi investor and CEO of Al Zayzafon Investment Company.

\$250m Duqm project on hold: Oman Cement

Sultanate's oldest cement manufacturer seeks assurance of fuel supply to progress new Duqm project, capacity expansion in Muscat

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Majority government-owned 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 (tons per day) of clinker has currently been put on hold pending confirmation of the availability of fuel and its strategic



decision to expand the capacity of the existing plant at Muscat," said Dr Abdullah Abbas Ahmed, Chairman of the Board of Directors, in the company's Board of Directors' report for the quarter ended March 31, 2021.

Last year, the MSX-listed company unveiled plans for the modernisation and expansion of its 3.6 million tons per annum (tpa) capacity plant at Misfah.

To this end, the company had commissioned a consultant to study and recommend measures to address production bottlenecks in the existing plant.

To promote use of alternative energy, the company had carried out a feasibility study for utilising waste tyres as an alternate fuel, and the project consultant and the EPC contractor have also been appointed and the project work is expected to commence soon

"The recommendations are under implementation and the company has floated tenders for appointment of an EPC contractor. Evaluation of offers received from EPC contractors is completed. (However), as the company has engaged a consultant to carry out pre-feasibility study for new cement plant within OCC, this project has been kept under hold," said the Chairman.

Also kept in abeyance is a decision to install a waste heat recovery unit within its existing power plant to help achieve a higher level of energy efficiency in

operations.

This initiative "has been put on hold pending further confirmation of gas availability for the company's Capacity Expansion Plan", the Chairman stated. Nevertheless, a proposal to use waste tyres as an alternative source of fuel for cement production is going ahead, according to Dr Abdullah Abbas.

"To promote the use of alternative energy, the company had carried out a feasibility study for utilising waste tyres as an alternate fuel, and the project consultant and the EPC contractor have also been appointed and the project work is expected to commence soon," he stated.

Oman Cement posted revenues of RO 11.424 million for the first quarter of 2021, which was 16.29 per cent lower than earnings or RO 13.647 million for the corresponding quarter of 2020. Profit after tax declined 33.26 per cent to RO 0.753 million for the quarter, down from RO 1.128 million for Q1 2020. The government's 51 per cent stake in Oman Cement, the country's first cement manufacturer, is held by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate.

Own a Lincoln with exclusive benefits



MUSCAT: Lincoln enthusiasts looking forward to owning luxurious Lincoln vehicles can benefit with no additional payment (Since 5 per cent VAT on net selling price will be borne by Lincoln Oman), cash gift from RO 5,500 to RO 9,000, service — 5 years / 100,000 kms, and registration (1 year). Conditions apply.

For details visit a Lincoln showroom. In Oman, the Lincoln range includes the family-size Lincoln Navigator, the Lincoln Aviator and the Lincoln Corsair.

The Navigator, combines modern luxury with advanced technology — elevating family travel to first class.

The Aviator is packed with advanced technologies that let the

luxury SUV rise up to greet you, and scan the road ahead to glide through an uneven pavement.

The Corsair embraces elements of both the full-size Lincoln Navigator and three-row Lincoln Aviator while building on these cues with even more flair.

Customers wishing to own their dream Lincoln are encouraged to visit their nearest Lincoln showroom. In Oman, Lincoln vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC. Please log on to www.lincolnoman.com, or www.facebook.com/lincolnoman or www.instagram.com/lincoln_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

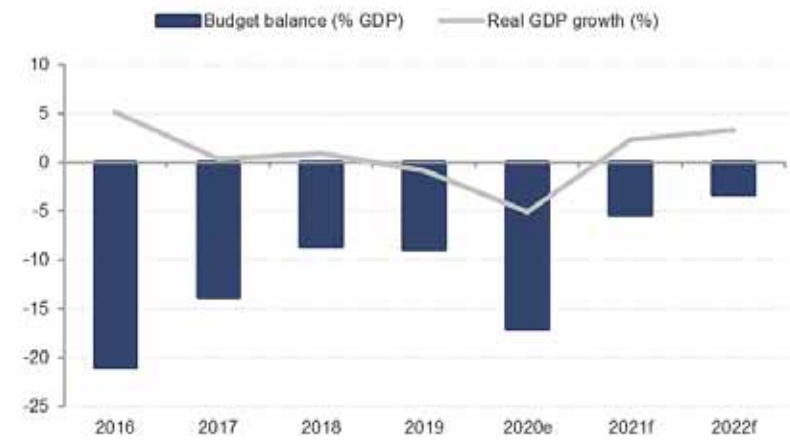
VAT, higher oil price to help Oman's budget deficit narrow in 2021

KHATIJA HAQUE

Oman introduced a 5 per cent VAT on most goods and services from April 16 2021, more than three years later than the UAE and Saudi Arabia and more than two years later than Bahrain, although they are ahead of Qatar and Kuwait which have yet to introduce the tax.

The number of food-related exempt items was raised from 93 to 488. Also exempt are financial services, medical care and equipment, education, and real estate transactions, rents, local and international transport services, and crude oil, its derivatives and natural gas.

The authorities estimate that the VAT will raise RO 400m (\$1bn) per year. This, together with higher oil prices than we expected at the start of the year should see revenue exceed RO 10.4bn in 2021, higher than the budgeted RO 8.6bn. However, we expect spending to exceed



the budget as well, and we have pencilled in RO 12bn in total expenditure. We thus estimate a budget deficit of RO 1.6bn or -5.4 per cent of GDP, a significant improvement on last year's -17.1 per cent per cent deficit.

Bloomberg data shows a further RO 1.6bn in debt falling due this year, bringing Oman's total annual financing requirement to RO 3.2bn (\$8.3bn). Oman sold \$3.25bn in international bonds in January, leaving around \$5bn still to be financed. This will likely be through a mix of domestic

borrowing and drawdown of reserves.

Oman's budget balance and GDP growth Oman's oil production increased by just under 1 per cent in Q1 2021 compared with average output last year, compared with a sharp contraction in oil output from other GCC exporters. While Oman is not an Opec member, it voluntarily complies with Opec+ decisions.

However Oman's oil condensate production is not covered by the Opec+ agreement

and this has seen strong growth over the last year. With Opec+ signalling a gradual unwinding of production cuts from May, we expect Oman's oil production to continue to recover from last year's cuts.

We have pencilled in 2 per cent growth in the hydrocarbons sector this year, making Oman the only GCC country where we expect oil production to boost headline GDP. The IMF estimates Oman's non-oil sectors contracted -10 per cent in 2020, against our forecast of -7.0 per cent.

Rising coronavirus cases in Q1 21 and a slow rollout of vaccines relative to some other GCC countries has led to tighter restrictions on movement and activity being re-imposed through mid-May. We remain comfortable with our 2.5 per cent non-oil sector growth forecast for 2021, bringing our headline GDP estimate for this year to 2.4 per cent. *[Khatija Haque is Head of Research & Chief Economist at Emirates NBD Research]*

Make your dream of owning a Infiniti QX80 come true this season



MUSCAT: Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles is offering a plethora of rewards for customers buying the full-size luxury SUV Infiniti QX80. Customers who purchase Infiniti QX80 during the Ramadhan promotion are eligible for assured cash gift, free registration, free window film and ceramic paint protection coat, free periodic vehicle service package and free AAA Assistance Card. The special offer is valid till June 6, 2021.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "Infiniti QX80 vows to present drivers with even more style and luxury. This is a good time to buy the QX80 which features a range of available drive-assist technologies. Blind Spot Intervention (BSI), Lane Departure Prevention (LDP), Distance Control Assist (DCA), and an updated Intelligent Cruise Control system are all included, while Android Auto and Apple CarPlay continue to bring enhanced connectivity across the QX80 range."

Foton announces Ramadhan offer on commercial vehicles range

MUSCAT: Gulf Great Sands LLC, the exclusive importer of Foton vehicles in Oman, has announced a 'Season To Begin A New Journey' offer on all Foton range of vehicles as part of its exclusive Ramadhan promotion.

Foton's Ramadhan offer 'Season To Begin A New Journey', which will go on till June 6, 2021, offers free service, assured fuel card, manufacturer's warranty and low monthly instalment.

The Ramadhan offer is available on models including Foton Aumark S Light Truck (3.8L Turbo Engine, 140hp); Foton Tunland Pickup 2.4L Double Cab, 134hp, 2WD; Foton View CS2 Mini Bus 2.7L Engine, 147hp and Foton Auman Medium Duty Truck 6.7L Engine, 245 hp.

Partnering with Foton Motor Group, one of the world's largest manufacturer of commercial vehicles, Gulf Great Sands LLC (GGS) had launched a full range



of commercial vehicles in Oman.

Through this exclusive distribution partnership, Gulf Great Sands LLC has commenced the supply of a range of Foton's commercial vehicles in Oman which includes Heavy Duty Trucks, Medium Duty Trucks, Light Duty Trucks, Pickups, Mini buses, Panel vans, and SUVs.

A GGS LLC spokesperson said, "The 'Season To Begin A New Journey' extends a host of incentives for Foton customers

this Ramadhan. We are certain our customers will benefit immensely out of it. All Foton vehicles boast highest levels of quality and design, due to its partnership with leading names like Daimler, Cummins and others. Foton invests heavily in research, development and state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities. This ensures all Foton vehicles are created with current as well as emerging technologies. This is a great time to buy Foton vehicles."

Renault Oman's Ramadhan promotions receive great response

MUSCAT: The exclusive Ramadhan promotion announced by Renault Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles has received a great response. Renault Oman's unique Ramadhan offer boasts of a host of benefits for patrons purchasing their top selling models as well as their latest models.



The winners of Renault Oman's test drive promotion, in which all prospective customers who test drive any of the Renault vehicles are eligible to enter a raffle draw, have been announced. And the winner is going to receive one UV Steriliser and wireless charger soon. Social media users who participate in the Ramadhan promotional campaign will also be eligible for attractive prizes. The Renault Ramadhan promotion which has already begun will go on till June 6, 2021.

A spokesperson for SBA said, "We are extremely pleased with the response we have received to the campaign so far. We are pleased to pass on the benefits to our customers who want to buy the innovative and fuel-efficient Renault vehicles."

Omantel launches Al Noor Waqf in partnership with leading foundation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Omantel has announced the establishment of Al Noor Waqf, in association with the Imam Jabir bin Zaid Waqf (Endowment) Foundation. Omantel is the first corporate entity to have been chosen by the Foundation for this initiative, under which it will support the Foundation in extending its messages.

Omantel, using its 2021 Ramadhan Campaign, will bolster the Foundation's efforts in raising awareness about Waqf and promoting community participation.

Al Noor Waqf will form an integral part of charity in Omani society through



which people can donate towards a cause, social projects or sponsor a person. Funds received as donations will be invested to reap returns, which will be re-invested to build the endowment so that it continues to benefit successive generations.

Commenting on the objectives of this initiative, Laila bint Muhammad al Wahaibi, Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility at Omantel said, "The most important objectives of this initiative are to raise social awareness about charity and Waqf, strengthen the Foundation's connection with society in general and with Waqf institutions, to enable people contribute towards projects of the Foundation through charity, and to encourage the community

to show solidarity in providing access to education and other assistance for financially weaker families.

Eng Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, CEO, Imam Jabir bin Zaid Waqf Foundation, said, "This cooperation with Omantel is part of our efforts to come together with institutions and corporates to promote the culture of endowment.

The Al Noor Waqf initiative aims to encourage community members to participate and donate an endowment (waqf) share to those they love, be it family members or friends. The Foundation will invest these funds and disburses their proceeds to serve education and people faced humanitarian conditions."

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INDIAN, male, Master Degree in Accounting, 15+ years of experience in Oman, UAE & India as Finance / Accounts Manager / Chief Accountant. Looking for a job and have noc on visit. Contact: 79007124 / 78039524. email: kadercok@outlook.com

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

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ROMINOV CORP.
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NOTICE is hereby given that in accordance under Section 286(b) of the International Business Companies Act 2016:

- ROMINOV CORP.** is in dissolution;
- The date of commencement of dissolution is 21st day of April 2021.
- The Liquidator of the Company is Mr. Serge Jean-Luc Rouillon of Suite 14, First Floor Kinsgate House, PO Box 1075, Victoria, Mahe, Seychelles.

Dated 23rd day of April 2021
Mr. Serge Jean-Luc Rouillon Liquidator

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Oil prices slip as pandemic takes toll on India's fuel sales



A driver reads a newspaper as he sits on a spare tire attached to a parked oil tanker at a truck terminal in Mumbai. — Reuters

SINGAPORE: Oil prices fell on Monday as a catastrophic second wave of a coronavirus epidemic in India cut short a recovery in oil demand there, offsetting optimism about a strong rebound in consumption in developed countries and China in the second half of the year.

Brent crude futures for July fell 48 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$66.28 a barrel by 0620 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate for June was at \$63.11 a barrel, down 47 cents, or 0.7 per cent.

State-level restrictions aimed at stemming infections in India have led to a drop in fuel sales

in the world's third-largest consumer in April, preliminary data shows.

"Overall fuel demand is down by about 7 per cent from pre-Covid level of April 2019," A K Singh, head of marketing at refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp said, adding that India's demand was close to pre-Covid levels in March.

India's Covid-19 total cases are nudging close to 20 million and analysts are expecting a sharper slump in the country's demand for transportation fuels in May due to more restrictions.

— Reuters

Global Islamic finance forecast to grow as main markets recover

DUBAI: The \$2.2 trillion global Islamic finance industry is expected to grow 10 per cent to 12 per cent over 2021-2022 due to increased Islamic bond issuance and a modest economic recovery in the main Islamic finance markets, S&P Global Ratings said.

The industry continued to grow last year despite the Covid-19 pandemic, although at a lower pace than in 2019, with global Islamic assets expanding by 10.6 per cent in 2020 against a growth of 17.3 per cent the previous year.

Islamic finance, which bans interest payments and pure monetary speculation, has been on the rise for many years across markets in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, but it remains a fragmented industry with an uneven implementation of its rules.

"Over the next 12 months, we could see progress on a unified global legal and regulatory framework for Islamic finance ... we believe that such a framework could help resolve the lack of standardisation and



(Image for illustration only)

harmonisation that the Islamic finance industry has faced for decades," S&P said on Monday.

The industry is expected to receive some support in the coming two years in Saudi Arabia, where mortgages and corporate lending are expected to rise as the country pushes ahead with plans to diversify the economy.

Investments in Qatar for the 2022 soccer World Cup and the Expo event in Dubai later this year are also expected to support growth.

The rating agency forecast global issuance of Islamic bonds, or sukuk, to reach \$140-155 billion this year, up from roughly \$140 billion in 2020, thanks to abundant liquidity

and sustained financing needs among corporates and governments.

S&P also highlighted that the full impact of the coronavirus crisis has yet to materialise and more requests for sukuk restructurings and maturity extensions, as well as higher default rates, are expected this year. — Reuters

Asean plus China, Japan, S Korea vow to boost financial ties

TOKYO: Finance ministers and central bank governors from Asean, China, Japan and South Korea on Monday vowed to strengthen regional financial cooperation while providing continued support for countries hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a joint statement issued after a virtual meeting on the sidelines

of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) annual meetings, the ministers pledged to achieve inclusive recovery, preserve long-term fiscal sustainability and maintain financial stability.

Responses to the coronavirus crisis, universal health coverage, climate change, high-quality infrastructure and debt



transparency and sustainability in emerging Asia will top the agenda at the ADB gatherings, said Japan's finance minister, Taro Aso (pictured).

"We expect a rebound in 2021 as the recovery gathers momentum and vaccine rollouts allow a gradual opening up of our economies," a statement read.

"The recovery appears uneven across and within countries, and subject to possible elevated risks including the spread of new variants and different paces of vaccination."

China, Japan and South Korea said they would explore "new initiatives" to strengthen the regional financial safety net

at the virtual meeting with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean).

The finance chiefs vowed to use all policy tools to ensure a sustainable economic recovery and to gradually normalise expansionary policy while mitigating risks of a fiscal cliff.

— Reuters



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