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PROJECTS WORTH \$2.5 BN OPEN FOR INVESTMENT IN OMAN

P10

KOHLI, PERRY NAMED CRICKETERS OF THE DECADE

P19

'MINARI' COMPETES AT NEXT YEAR'S GOLDEN GLOBES

MUSCAT

BANKS STRONG TO SUPPORT ECONOMY

The Central Bank of Oman's Board of Governors held a meeting under the chairmanship of His Highness Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad bin Tarik al Said on Monday. The CBO Board of Governors reviewed economic, financial and fiscal developments currently witnessed by the Sultanate in particular and the world in general due to the COVID-19 pandemic during the last period of 2020. The board affirmed that the local banking sector is able to continue supporting the national economy. The board reviewed a report submitted by the executive administration on the prospects and challenges of the economy.

BRUSSELS

VACCINES IN ALL OF EUROPE BY SEPTEMBER

The distribution of an initial 200 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech across the European Union will be completed by September, a spokesman for the EU Commission said on Monday.

The protracted timetable, which was previously unknown, confirms that the bloc, with a population of 450 million, will need vaccines from other suppliers to speed up inoculations against the coronavirus. Most EU countries began inoculating healthcare workers and vulnerable people on Sunday. SEE P8

Immunisation against COVID-19 gets under way in governorates

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 28

A nationwide immunisation campaign against COVID-19 got underway in the governorates of the Sultanate on Monday.

In Al Dhahirah Governorate, the immunisation campaign began at Ibri Hospital.

Dr Salim bin Moosa al Abri, Director-General of Health Services was the first person to receive the vaccine in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Al Dhahirah Governorate has four vaccination centres at Ibri Hospital, Ibri Complex, Dhank Health Centre and Yan-qul Health Centre.

The Directorate-General of Health Services in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate began the immunisation campaign against COVID-19, under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah.

The Directorate-General of Health Services has set up seven vaccination centres at Nizwa

TARGET

The first stage will cover frontline workers, patients suffering chronic diseases and elderly patients

DOSAGE

It will be administered intramuscularly as a series of two doses (0.3 ml each) 3 weeks apart

STRATEGY

Vaccination strategy to cover 60 per cent of the population in several stages

Health Complex, Bahla Hospital, Samayil Health Complex, Izki Health Complex, Adam Hospital, Jabal Akhdar Hospital and Al Hamra Health Centre.

The vaccination campaign at Ibra Referral Hospital in North

Al Sharqiyah Governorate, under the auspices of Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor of North Al Sharqiyah Mohammed bin Khalifa al Abri, Director-General of Health Services was the first person to be given the

Pfizer COVID-19 jab. The governorate has 6 vaccination centres at Ibra Health Centre, Sinaw Hospital, Samad Al Shan Hospital, Bidiya Hospital, Dima W' at-tayeen Hospital and Wadi Bani Khalid Hospital.

Increment reduction for state employees

MUSCAT: To spare the lower-income groups from the effects that may result from some of the measures taken by the government in light of the financial and economic conditions, the Ministry of Finance issued a financial circular approving the disbursement of the annual periodic allowance (increment) for state employees for the year 2021.

Employees whose total salary is less than RO 900 will get 100 per cent increment while other employees who are drawing RO 900 or more will get 50 per cent of the increment. The decision applies to all government ministries, civil, military and security government units, public bodies and institutions, and government companies for the year 2021.

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■ SQU HONOURS TOP RESEARCHERS



Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday honoured its researchers who were featured in the 2 per cent most-cited researchers list in the world 2019. The honouring ceremony was held under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Dr Fahd Al Julanda al Said, SQU Vice-Chancellor. A list, published by researchers from the US-based Stanford University, containing the 2 per cent top researchers in the world in 2019, has the names of 43 researchers from the Sultanate, 23 of them are from SQU, including 5 Omanis. They are Prof Dr Yahya bin Mansour al Wahaibi (energy and chemical engineering), Prof Dr Sabah Ahmed al Suleiman (environmental sciences), Prof Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saadi (plant and biological sciences), Prof Dr Samir bin Hamad al Adawi (neurology), and Dr Mohammed bin Hamdan al Badi (energy). The list of Stanford University has largely depended on how often researchers from different countries of the world have cited their published research. This indicates the quality of scientific outputs from SQU and its use as references of research at the global level. Recent statistics indicate that the number of scientific publications from SQU has increased by 12.7 per cent during the last five years (2015-2019). – ONA

■ OMANI-BELARUS FRIENDSHIP GROUP MEETS

The Omani-Belarus Parliamentary Friendship Group held its first meeting for the second annual session of the seventh term, headed by Dr Said bin Mubarak al Muharrami, in the presence of the group members. The meeting began with the approval of the agenda, which included discussing the committee's work plan for the second annual session of the seventh term, reviewing the work system of friendship committees and their terms of reference, in addition to the report on bilateral relations between the Sultanate and Belarus. At the end of the meeting, the group reviewed a number of messages received, and the new work listed on its agenda, and appropriate decisions were taken in their regard. It is worth noting that the parliamentary friendship groups formed by the State Council in cooperation with Majlis Ash-Shura with a number of counterparts in other countries



play an important role in consolidating the relations of the Council of Oman with these councils, and enables the exchange of information and experiences between them in a way that strengthens the Sultanate's relations with these countries.

Domestic guests help hotels weather COVID-19 storm

VINOD NAIR
@VINOT_NAIR

Domestic guests seem to have aided the hotels in Oman to stay afloat despite restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Some citizens took advantage of the special promotional packages announced by various hotel groups as they were allowed to open for guests in September, said the property manager at Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Within Oman campaign launched by Omran helped some hotels weather the storm partially, but they were also hampered by the staff shortage who were asked to proceed on long vacation.

"Some of staff are yet to return due to visa restrictions after they urged to proceed on leave. We are not able to offer all facilities and amenities to our guests despite the permission to do so," said a resort manager.

There was only a 15.4 per cent drop in the number of domestic guests from 490, 986 at the end of November 2019 to 415, 230 this year.

With the easing of lockdown, the number of hotel guests increased gradually from 16, 475 in June 2020 to 81, 498 in November this year.

At the same time, the number of GCC citizens dropped by 80.4 per cent, other Arab nationals (67.3 per cent), Asian tourists by 67.5 per cent, and European nationals by 66.9 per cent.

Overall, the total number of hotel guests dropped 52.2 per cent from 1, 590, 387 at the end of November 2019 compared to 759, 421 during the same period this year. The occupancy rates



also dropped by 51 per cent.

The figures may change getting into the New Year as the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has allowed hotels and resorts to operate at full capacity in hotel rooms while adhering to the health safety requirements.

Hotels are also allowed to open and operate sports and recreational facilities of all kinds for visitors and guests, the operate ballrooms and conference halls at 50 per cent capacity.

The losses incurred by the tourism sector in Oman until September is estimated to be around \$1.3 billion, which led the government to take steps allowing citizens of 103 countries to enter the Sultanate without visa.

The Supreme Committee on COVID- 19 has decided to allow the issuance of tourist visas to enter the Sultanate.

Tourists will be allowed only to come through groups organised by hotels and tourism companies.

Sultanate, Hungary to boost cooperation



MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion today signed an agreement with Hungary. The agreement aims at promoting the economic and technical cooperation among the public and private sectors in both countries, as well as establishing long-term economic relations and finding a conducive investment climate between the two sides.

The agreement includes forming a joint committee between the two countries to foster diversification of economic cooperation in fields of industry, energy, transport, communications, scientific research, logistics services, tourism, agriculture, environment and health. Further, the agreement encourages the exchange and training of specialists, scientists, technicians and students, besides

enhancing cooperation among government institutions, business communities, commerce and industry chambers. The agreement was signed on behalf of the Sultanate by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry Under-Secretary, whilst it was signed from the Hungarian side by Dr Tibor Szatmari, Ambassador of Hungary to the Sultanate.



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■ SHURA SESSION BEGINS



Majlis Ash'shura held its session on Monday.

Official visits South Al Sharqiyah hospitals

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 28

Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Health for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs visited on Sunday a number of health institutions at South Al Sharqiyah Governorate to follow-up on the work progress in these institutions.

The visit included health institutions complex in the governorate that include Sur Health Polyclinic, Sur Specialised

Diabetic Center, Sur Health Center, ICU in the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital, as well as a number of health institutions in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

The under-secretary was briefed on the progress of work and met the administrators and health workers urging them to make every effort to provide the health services.

Furthermore, the MoH Under-Secretary visited a number of under-construction health projects in the governorate to view the work progress.

Immunisation against COVID-19 gets under way in governorates

From page 1

The national immunisation campaign began in Al Wusta Governorate under the auspices of Ma'adhad bin Mohammed al Yaqoubi, Governor of Al Wusta, on Monday.

A number of health workers and people with chronic diseases received their first dose of the vaccine.

The governorate set up four vaccination centres at Haima Hospital, Duqm Hospital, Al Jazir Hospital and Mahout Health Centre.

In Al Buraimi Governorate, the national vaccination campaign began on Monday at Al Buraimi Health Complex, under the auspices of Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi who was the first person to receive the vaccine.

Al Buraimi Governorate has two immunisation centres at Al Buraimi Health Complex and Mahdha Health Centre.

The Directorate-General of Health Services in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate started the immunisation campaign against the COVID-19 under the auspices of Shaikh Saqr bin Sultan al Shukaili, Wali of Sur, on Monday.

The health authorities in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate set vaccination centres at Sur Hospital, Sur Diabetics Centre, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan Hospital, Masirah Hospital, Jaalan Health Complex, Jaalan Dialysis Centre, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan Health Centre and Al Kamil Health Centre.

The national immunisation campaign



against COVID-19 began at the Sultan Qaboos Hospital, Salalah in Dhofar Governorate, on Monday.

970 doses of Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine were allotted to Dhofar Governorate

for the first phase of the national immunisation campaign.

Dhofar Governorate has three vaccination centres at the Sultan Qaboos Hospital, Salalah, Sadah Health Centre and Auqad Health Centre.



Vaccination in Al Dakhiliyah begins

AMAL AL RIYAMI

@AMAL92ALRIYAMI

The Ministry of Health launched a vaccination campaign against coronavirus in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

It was held under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, on Monday.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Dhawi, Director-General of Health



Services in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, gave a speech in which he highlighted the importance of starting the campaign, referring to the efforts made by the medical staff in dealing with the virus.

Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Toobi, Director of the Infectious Diseases Control and Control Department at the General Directorate of Health Services, gave a visual presentation on the vaccination plan, the target groups and places of vaccination in the governorate.

The target groups from the community are the elderly people aged 65 years and more who are diabetic, asthmatic and those who undergo dialysis for kidney failure.

The other target groups are staff who take care of COVID-19 patients and those who suffer from diabetes, chronic lung and kidney patients.

The hospital will contact the target groups by phone and approval to administer the vaccine. They will be given an appointment at the appropriate vaccination centre.

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Sultanate marks International Day of Persons with Disabilities

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), which falls on December 3.

Themed “ Building Back Better: toward a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 World,” the ceremony celebrating the IDPD was held under the patronage of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour at Sheraton Oman Hotel on Monday. The ceremony was attended by Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

Hamoud al Shabibi, Director General of Persons with Disabilities Affairs, delivered a speech saying, “The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected various as-



pects of people’s lives in general and persons with disabilities in particular as they are more vulnerable to being impacted by this virus due to many social and environmental barriers. They are also vulnerable because of the closure of social and rehabilitative services and the



failure provide them with information in an easily accessible way, besides the health conditions of severely and multi-disabled people who are also vulnerable to infection with the virus due to their weak immunity, and the difficulty facing some of them in terms of applying

the necessary physical distancing”. He said that the Sultanate has taken a set of preventive measures at the local level to limit the spread of the virus among persons with disabilities, such as suspending schooling and rehabilitation programmes in governmental, and private rehabilitation centres, and translating awareness programmes and the official statement issued in sign language. At the end of the ceremony, the Minister of Labour honoured some outstanding persons with disabilities at volunteering, sports, media, poetry, acting, managing a special project, in addition to honouring retired people working in the field of disability and companies supporting projects and programmes for persons with disabilities. — ONA



Average oil price falls 6.1% in November

MUSCAT: The Sultanate’s oil production, including condensates, stood at 318.62 million barrels until the end of November 2020, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The average oil price in November 2020 fell by 6.1 per cent compared to October 2020.

Of the total production, crude oil production fell by 8.9 per cent at 256.45 million barrels, while condensates production rose by 44.9 per cent to touch 62.17 million barrels.

The Sultanate recorded a daily average crude oil production of 951,100 barrels at the end of November 2020, against 971,000 barrels over the same period of 2019, the NCSI report added.

However, the average price of Oman Crude fell by 27.3 per cent to reach \$46.5 per barrel until the end of November 2020, from \$63.9 per barrel in the same period of 2019.

Oman exported 262,036,000 barrels of crude oil until the end of November 2020, against 281,776,300 barrels for the same period of 2019, falling by 7 per cent.

In terms of exports, China retained its position as the leading destination for Sultanate’s crude oil exports until November 2020, with the country importing 227,649,700 barrels of crude oil from Oman. This was followed by India (16,142,300 barrels), South Korea (4,996,200 barrels and Japan (2,605,400 million barrels).

Oman produced 354.3 million barrels of oil and exported 310.3 million barrels in 2019. Besides, the country’s daily oil production stood at 970,900 barrels last year. — ONA

Inma funds 142 projects worth RO 13m in 2020

HAMAD AL HASHMI
MUSCAT, DEC 28

Inma, SME Development Fund (SMEF) funded 142 small and medium enterprises during the current year at a total value of RO 13 million in various economic sectors.

The funding rate in the industrial sector amounted to 33 per cent, the services sector 22.76 per cent, the oil and gas sector 13.62 per cent, the transport and logistics sector 13.49 per cent, the tourism sector 7.37 per cent, the commercial sector 6.39 per cent and the infrastructure sector 3.37 per cent.

This includes working capital financing, project financing, bill discounts, asset financing in addition to Sharia compliant funding solutions for small and medium enterprises most importantly Murabaha sale.

The SMEF is among the leading financing entities that contributed to boosting the Sultanate’s economy through funding provided to projects spanning the sectors of infrastructure, oil and gas, transport and logistics, industry, commerce and services.

The SMEF provides funding to small and medium enterprises ranging between RO 50,000 and RO 500,000 with a payback period up to 8 years.

The Fund has financed a great number of successful national projects thereby boosting the national economy as well as raised entrepreneurship culture among the Omani youth by conducting training courses, seminars and conferences across the Sultanate.

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SELL SOLAR POWER, SLASH BILL

Surplus from solar panels on rooftops can be returned to the electricity grid and thereby reduce the burden of power tariff, which are set to go up following the lifting of subsidies

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@ZAINABALNASSERI

People are turning towards solar energy following the recent decision to lift subsidy on electricity that will come into effect from January. A study by the Authority for Public Services Regulation in 2008 revealed that solar density was found to be among the highest in the world and, therefore, there is significant scope for developing solar energy resources throughout Oman.

The Sultanate started pilot projects to help demonstrate the feasibility of technical and economic performance of technologies under local conditions, and facilitate the transfer of knowledge and know-how to relevant institutions in the country. However, it is really important for people to have a good background on solar systems, how they work, and how feasible they are.

Explaining about the types of solar energy systems that are suitable for homes, Salim al Balushi,

a mechanical engineer, said, "The off-grid systems are good as they are not connected to the electricity company's network. It works with batteries, so that it converts solar energy into electricity suitable for operating devices in the house. It stores the surplus energy produced during the day inside batteries so that the system continues to work during night hours".

Al Balushi said this system is expensive due to batteries which need to be replaced every 4 to 6 years. "The second possible solar energy system suitable for houses is the on-grid system that is linked to the electricity company's network. Once any electrical appliance in the house is running, the solar energy system will be the main source of energy. But if the household consumption exceeds the production capacity of the solar energy system, then the devices will begin to depend on the main power line of the house," he said.

If the household consumption is less, the system exports power to the electricity company's grid resulting



The off-grid systems are good as they are not connected to the electricity company's network. It works with batteries, so that it converts solar energy into electricity suitable for operating devices in the house. It stores the surplus energy produced during the day inside batteries so that the system continues to work during night hours

SALIM AL BALUSHI
Mechanical engineer

in gradual decrease in the electricity bill. The outgoing and incoming energy is measured by a new bi-directional meter that is installed by the electricity company. Al Balushi said the purchase tariff differs from its sale tariff. "In residential establishments, the new purchase tariff will start from 15 baisa, up to 30 baisa. According to the selling tariff in 2020 (to be renewed annually), the value of selling per kilowatt reaches 67 baisa and varies according to peak times and difference of months." He said the process of exporting energy to the electricity company comes in the form of a gradual decrease in the bill, which may reach zero or below zero. You will not be financially compensated for the sale, but it will be kept for you as a balance for the coming months.

There are conditions to get this second type of system. According to the Authority, the size of the solar energy system does not exceed 50 per cent of the power load of the house which is determined based on the number of electrical devices during the submission of the

connection request, and that the size of the system does not exceed 80 per cent of the monthly consumption.

Mohammed al Rashdi from Muscat electricity Distribution Company said "For small and medium homes in Oman, I recommend installing a solar power plant with a capacity of 10-15 kilowatts. You need a surface area of 60-80 square meters that produces approximately 16 megawatt hours per year. You must make sure that the roof is free of obstacles such as shade or air conditioning." The delivery of a solar energy system to homes requires approvals from electricity providers and from the municipal authorities. The price of the one kilowatt solar power plant starts from RO 360 to RO 460, depending on the quality of the solar panels used as well as the inverter. Al Rashdi added, "Installing solar energy should be accompanied by reducing consumption inside the house to ensure maximum benefit from the project. Also, periodic maintenance is required of all parts such as the panels and the inverter".

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS IN PRISON



An inmate, mask-clad due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, manning a commissary stall at Al Qanatir women's prison, at the tip of the Nile delta in Qalyoubiya province, about 30 km north of Egypt's capital. COVID-19 daily infections in the country of more than 100 million people have been climbing in recent weeks. Around mid-June, Egypt saw a peak of COVID-19 daily infections and fatalities before they started to gradually decline in the first week of July. — AFP

Senior Egyptian officials in Tripoli for talks on truce

TRIPOLI: Senior Egyptian security officials met with representatives of Libya's Government of National Accord, a first delegation in nearly six years from Cairo, considered a backer of a rival camp in the conflict-hit country.

Interior minister for the UN-recognised GNA, Fathi Bachagha, held "a high-level meeting" with the Egyptian delegation, which included the deputy intelligence services chief, his office said on Monday.

Imed Trabelsi, head of the Libyan general security body, also attended the meeting.

The talks covered "ways of strengthening security cooperation" and support for a ceasefire signed in October between rival Libyan sides under UN auspices, the ministry added.

Libya has been riven by violence since a 2011 Nato-



Military helicopters fly in Benghazi. Top Egyptian security officials visited Libyan capital, Tripoli, for first time in years to hold talks with GNA officials on ways to support ceasefire agreement. — Reuters

backed uprising that toppled and killed Muammar Gaddafi.

Two rival administrations have vied for control of the country for years, with the Tripoli-based GNA pitted against forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar.

The ceasefire the two sides struck in October has set the stage

work to "normalise diplomatic relations" between Tripoli and Cairo and to discuss "cooperation in various areas", said Mohammad Elgeblawi, spokesman for the GNA foreign ministry.

According to Elgeblawi, the delegation pledged to reopen the Egyptian consulate "as soon as possible" and to re-establish air links between the two capitals, which have been interrupted for several years.

The visit comes days after Haftar said in a speech that his forces would "prepare to drive out the occupier by faith, will and weapons," referring to foreign troops operating in support of the GNA.

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar was in Tripoli on Saturday and vowed that any attack by Haftar on Turkey's personnel in Libya would be met with force. — AFP

Lebanon secures 2m vaccine doses

BEIRUT: Lebanon has secured about 2 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, which will cover 20 per cent of the country's nationals, the health minister said on Monday.

Hamad Hassan said two weeks ago the country was about to sign a deal for supplies and that the first batch would arrive eight weeks later. "We have reserved about 2 million doses of the vaccine and that will be enough for 20 per cent of Lebanese living in the country," he said at the presidential palace on Monday.

Lebanon's hospitals are under



Christmas decoration in downtown Beirut. — Reuters

pressure as infections surge. Doctors warn ICU beds are filling up fast. The medical system has

also been battered by the country's financial crisis, which caused supply shortages, and August's port explosion, which damaged major Beirut hospitals.

The COVID-19 outbreak has killed nearly 1,400 people in Lebanon, which has an estimated population of 6 million including more than 1 million Syrian refugees.

Lebanon had also detected its first case of a new more transmissible variant of the coronavirus on a flight arriving from London, Hassan said last week. — Reuters

Iraq at risk of power shortages

BAGHDAD: Iran's state gas company said on Monday it had slashed supplies to neighbouring Iraq over arrears of more than \$6 billion, after the Iraqi electricity ministry said the cuts placed Baghdad and other cities at risk of serious power shortages.

"The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity owes more than \$5 billion in gas bills to the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), of which \$3 billion remains blocked and inaccessible in...TBI (Trade Bank of Iraq), and more than \$2 billion is overdue debt," NIGC



A man pulls a cart loaded with sacks along Rashid Street in Baghdad. — AFP

said. "In addition, the Iraqi side owes more than \$1 billion to the National Iranian Gas Company for contractual offenses under the agreement," said the NIGC statement. — Reuters

Sudan to deploy troops in South Darfur after tribal clashes

KHARTOUM: Sudan is to send troop reinforcements to the south of its Darfur region after 15 people were killed in tribal clashes, the official news agency SUNA said.

The governor of South Darfur state, Musa Mahdi, announced "the deployment of a large number of military forces in order to arrest those involved in the clashes and to collect the arms", it reported.

"The era of reconciliation conferences is over and the era of implementing the law has started," Mahdi said, referring to talks in recent months, as quoted by SUNA.

A local official, also cited by the agency, said a dispute between the Massalit and Fallata tribes in the Gereida area had led to armed clashes in which two members of the Fallata were killed.

The Fallata mounted reprisal attacks that left 13 dead and 34 wounded among the Massalit, SUNA said, without specifying when the violence broke out.

Gereida has been the frequent scene of deadly clashes between the rival tribes over the past two years, but this was the first since a reconciliation meeting held in October.



Sudan will deploy troops to South Darfur state after the killing of 15 people in tribal violence recently. — AFP

It comes less than a week after the United Nations Security Council agreed to end the UN and African Union's long-running peacekeeping mission in Darfur, UNAMID, when its mandate expires on December 31.

Conflict in the vast Darfur region of western Sudan has largely eased in recent years apart from confrontations, mostly over land and water resources, between nomadic tribes and farmers.

The withdrawal of UNAMID — deployed since 2007 and which had 16,000 peacekeepers at its peak — will begin January 1 and is

expected to be completed by June 30. The termination was requested by the Sudanese government and backed by China, Russia and African members of the Security Council.

Sudan's "transitional government is committed to providing security and stability for all citizens of the Darfur states," the foreign ministry has said.

"It will continue its efforts to address the roots of the problem and consolidate the foundations of tribal reconciliation and lay the foundations for transitional justice and the rule of law," it said. — AFP

RIYADH

Passenger flights suspension extended

Saudi Arabia has extended its suspension of commercial passenger flights by at least one week and possibly two amid concerns over a new variant of the coronavirus.

Saudi Arabia will however allow flights in "exceptional cases", an interior ministry official said according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

Foreigners will be allowed to depart the kingdom and cargo movement will be permitted, it added.



"Saudi Arabia decided to extend the aforementioned measures for another week to continue assessing the situation and to ensure safety of citizens and expatriates," said the SPA report. — AFP

TEL AVIV

Moroccan team in Israel to set up office

Moroccan officials are in Israel laying the groundwork for the opening of a liaison office in the Jewish state, a source familiar with the topic said on Monday.

The Moroccan "technical" team landed on Sunday, days after the North African kingdom and Israel signed a US-sponsored normalisation agreement in Rabat, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The team was expected to remain in the country for a few days and would be followed at a



later date by a larger delegation, the source added, without providing further details.

Morocco is the third Arab nation this year to normalise ties with the Jewish state. — AFP

DAMASCUS

Russia reinforces area in northern Syria

Russia said late on Sunday it had sent more military police to an area in northern Syria where fighters have clashed with Kurdish forces near a strategic highway patrolled by Russian and Turkish troops.

The deployment comes ahead of talks in Russia on Tuesday between Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu. They are expected to focus in part on Syria, where Turkey backs rebels opposed to President Bashar al



Assad, while Russia supports Assad's forces.

The Russian defence ministry said it had sent more military police to the area on Sunday. — Reuters

In brief

KABUL



MILITANTS ABDUCT 20 CIVILIANS IN GHAZNI

Taliban militants have abducted at least 20 civilians in Afghanistan's south-eastern province of Ghazni, local officials confirmed on Monday. The people, who were taken from the province's Qara Bagh district on Sunday, were transferred to an undisclosed location afterwards, provincial councillors Nasir Ahmad Faqiri and Esmatullah Jamrodwal said.

The area where the abduction took place is fully controlled by the Taliban, according to officials.

A Taliban spokesman said the group was trying to figure out the issue, without giving further details. — **dpa**

TOKYO



FORMER MINISTER DIES OF COVID AT AGE 53

A 53-year-old former Japanese minister has died of COVID-19, his party said on Monday, becoming the first incumbent lawmaker to succumb to the disease in a nation scrambling to shut its doors to foreign travellers.

Yuichiro Hata, who was transport minister in 2012 and is the son of former Prime Minister Tsutomu Hatawaho, died on Sunday, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan said.

Japan on Monday started banning non-resident foreign nationals from entering following the detection of a new, highly infectious coronavirus variant linked to a rapid rise in infections in Britain. — **Reuters**

BANGKOK



AUTHORITIES IMPOSE RESTRICTIONS ON ENTERTAINMENT

Thailand announced its first coronavirus death in nearly two months and tightened restrictions on entertainment businesses in its capital on Monday, in a bid to contain an outbreak that has reached more than half of the country's provinces.

Authorities confirmed 144 new infections on Monday as new clusters emerged stemming from its biggest outbreak yet, prompting a ban in Bangkok on betting businesses and midnight closures for its nightclubs and music venues until January 4.

Thailand has recorded just 6,285 cases and 61 COVID-19 deaths. — **Reuters**

Philippines troops, ministers get COVID vaccine before approval

MANILA: Members of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's security team have received a Chinese-made coronavirus vaccine, officials said on Monday — the first people in the country to be officially immunised despite no regulatory approval.

The Philippines is in talks with several pharmaceutical firms, including Britain's AstraZeneca, US company Pfizer and China's Sinopharm, to secure 60 million doses for a vaccination drive starting as early as the second quarter of 2021.

No vaccine has been approved by the country's Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which is required before it can be rolled out across the country of 110 million people.

But the Presidential Security Group (PSG) — which is tasked with protecting Duterte — said some of its personnel have already been inoculated.

"The PSG administered COVID-19 vaccine to its personnel performing close-in security operations to the

President," unit chief Brigadier General Jesus Durante said in a statement, without specifying how many got the drug.

Asked if Duterte had been immunised, Durante said the president was still waiting "for the perfect or appropriate vaccine".

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the Sinopharm drug was given to the soldiers, confirming Duterte's comments at the weekend that "a select few" had been inoculated with the Chinese vaccine.

Roque did not explain how the drug was obtained or the number of doses received. The Chinese embassy in Manila did not respond to a request for comment.

Duterte has previously expressed confidence in vaccines made by China and Russia, even offering himself up for the very first jab of Moscow's controversial "Sputnik V".

Roque played down concerns about the safety of the Sinopharm drug, saying it was meant to send a message of hope to Filipinos.



File photo shows president Duterte reviewing military cadets of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Soldiers assigned to guard the president have been given a COVID-19 vaccine developed that is yet to be authorised, officials said on Monday. — **AFP**

"The news is that the vaccine is already here and if we cannot be given Western vaccines, our friend and neighbour China is willing to give us vaccines," Roque said.

"It's not prohibited under the law to get inoculated with an

unregistered (vaccine). What is illegal is the distribution and selling."

'NO GUARANTEE ON SAFETY'

More than 470,000 cases of coronavirus have been recorded in the Philippines and authorities

fear a post-Christmas surge in infections.

The FDA issued a statement on Monday warning against the use of unauthorised vaccines, noting there was "no guarantee on the safety, quality and efficacy" of a drug that has not undergone technical evaluation by the regulator.

So far, the Philippines has signed a deal with AstraZeneca for 2.6 million doses of its vaccine and hopes to secure another 30 million from the company using public and private funding.

Pfizer has applied for emergency use authorisation for its vaccine.

China has four vaccines, including Sinopharm, in the final stages of development and is well advanced with mass human testing in a number of countries.

But, unlike vaccines being developed by Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, little information has been published about the safety or efficacy of the Chinese drugs. — **AFP**

COLD WAVE HITS PAKISTAN



A man covering himself with a blanket sits next to a snowman in Landi Kotal in Pakistan as the cold wave swept across the country on Monday. — **AFP**

Sri Lanka welcomes its first tourists in nine months

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka welcomed its first foreign tourists in nine months on Monday even as a new deadlier strain of the coronavirus gripped the island.

A charter flight carrying 185 passengers from Ukraine landed at a little-used airport south of the capital, which has been stricken by a surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths.

In less than three months, the official number of coronavirus fatalities has risen from 13 to 191, while the number of infections has gone from 3,300 to more than 41,000.

Still, authorities hope the Ukrainian arrivals will be the first of thousands of foreigners to visit — easing pressure on the tourism-reliant economy that was shut down in March.

The visitors, who had to produce coronavirus-free certificates before departure, were



Ukraine passengers arrive at Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport in Mattala on Monday. — **AFP**

tested again on arrival at Rajapaksa International airport. They will be confined to their hotels for the duration of their holiday.

"This is a pilot project to test our systems," government spokesman Ramesh Pathirana said, adding that there would be a review after one month.

Sri Lanka's international

borders remain closed, with the exception of repatriation flights and charters approved by local health authorities.

But Sri Lanka is also scheduled to host a two-Test cricket tour by England next month.

The moves come despite authorities announcing a deadlier coronavirus strain. — **AFP**

Bangladesh ships more Rohingyas to island

COX BAZAR: Bangladesh on Monday started moving a second group of Rohingya refugees to a controversial flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal despite opposition from rights activists.

More than 1,600 of the minority from Myanmar were taken to Bhashan Char earlier this month, and Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen said just under 1,000 were in the latest batch heading for what he called a "beautiful resort".

Buses took the Rohingya from camps in Cox's Bazar, where nearly one million refugees are packed, to Chittagong port where they will be taken to the barren island.

"They are going voluntarily. They are very eager to go Bhashan Char because they have heard from their relatives, those

who have gone to Bhashan Char, that (it) is an excellent place," Momen said.

He claimed the island was "100 times better" than the camps, and that the refugees had "appealed" to be taken there.

"Bhashan Char is a beautiful resort. It is an excellent resort. And once anybody goes there, they will love it," the minister added. Two Rohingya men in the latest group said they were going to the island willingly.

Nur Kamal, a Rohingya from the giant Kutupalang refugee camp, said he was going to be with relatives already at Bhashan Char: "What is the point of staying here (in the camps) without them?"

Serajul Islam said he was going with five family members and was not being forced. — **AFP**

Indian farmers probed for disrupting telecom towers

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI: Authorities in Punjab are investigating whether protesting farmers were disrupting power supply to hundreds of telecom towers, a state official said on Monday, amid protests over new farm laws. "We have told the police to track all those involved in sabotaging the infrastructure," a senior official in the Punjab state government told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

A senior Punjab state police official said the power supply was disrupted to several telecom towers in the state, mainly ones owned by Jio, the telecommunications arm of Reliance Industries.

A source close to Jio said more than 1,400 of its 9,000 plus towers were affected as power supplies

and fibre to the towers were cut but could not confirm whether farmers were behind the damage.

Some bundles of Jio's fibre kept for laying were also burnt at one location, the source said, declining to be named as the matter is private. Jio did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

At least 1,600 towers were affected in total due to the power supply disruption and about 30 towers have been damaged, Tilak Raj Dua, director-general of the Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA), told Reuters. Dua said the association was trying to determine which companies were affected and had written to the police in Punjab asking for protection of the towers.

— **Reuters**

Pfizer to complete supply of COVID-19 vaccines to Europe by September

BRUSSELS: The distribution of an initial 200 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech across the European Union will be completed by September, a spokesman for the EU Commission said on Monday.

The protracted timetable, which was previously unknown, confirms that the bloc, with a population of 450 million, will need vaccines from other suppliers to speed up inoculations against the coronavirus.

Most EU countries began inoculating healthcare workers and vulnerable people on Sunday with the Pfizer vaccine, which is the only one so far authorised in the 27-nation bloc, and requires a two-dose regimen.

“Distribution of the full 200 million doses is scheduled to be completed by September 2021,” the spokesman told Reuters in an emailed statement.

A spokesman for Pfizer declined to comment on specific schedules or whether the timeline indicated by the Commission represented a delay in planned supplies, adding: “Our timelines are aspirational and can shift based on capacity and manufacturing timelines. These considerations will in turn



Nurses receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in Lombardy, Italy. – AFP

refine supply projections and delivery schedules”.

Talks are under way on delivery of a further 100 million doses which are optional under the contract sealed with the two companies, the EU spokesman said, confirming an earlier report from Reuters.

The timetable for the additional

doses is unclear.

Pfizer’s spokesman said the option for another 100 million doses had not been concluded.

The EU spokesman said most supply contracts agreed by the EU with COVID-19 vaccine makers foresee the majority of deliveries completed by the end of next year.

Belgium and Latvia on

Monday joined the growing list of EU countries who have begun vaccinating their populations with the vaccine produced by Pfizer and BioNTech.

In Belgium, a 101-year-old senior home resident was the first person in the Brussels region to receive the vaccine, followed by four fellow residents, the Belga

news agency reported.

Doctors and nurses were first in line in Latvia, with medical staff at the university hospital in Riga receiving it on Monday.

“The pandemic has taken a lot out of us this year. Hard to believe we can still launch a targeted counterattack in 2020!” doctor Janis Vetra wrote on Twitter after getting his jab. A shipment of nearly 10,000 vaccine doses arrived in Latvia on Saturday, to be administered at 10 hospital vaccine centres. The European Commission announced a joint vaccination launch for Sunday to Tuesday, and the vaccine was ordered for all 27 member states. Germany, Norway and Poland were among the first member states to kick off vaccinations.

Several countries, including Spain, were affected by a delay in shipping from Belgium due to logistical problems. “It seems to be a problem in controlling the temperature,” Spanish media cited Health Minister Salvador Illa as saying on Monday. The BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine must be cooled to minus 70 degrees for prolonged storage. It should now reach Spain by Tuesday.

— Reuters/dpa

Care workers given 5 times vaccine dose

BERLIN: Eight care home workers in Germany were accidentally injected with five doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, local authorities said on Monday — but are suffering no serious ill effects so far.

The seven women and one man, aged between 38 and 54, are employees of a retirement home in the town of Stralsund in northeastern Germany.

They are therefore in a priority group and among the first to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, which Germany began rolling out at the weekend.

But as they were being inoculated on Sunday, they were each injected with five doses at once, according to Stefan Kerth, the administrator of the district where the facility is located.

They were immediately informed of the error, Kerth said.

Four were admitted to hospital for observation with mild flu-like symptoms, while the others were sent home.

“I deeply regret this incident,” Kerth said, adding that the mistake was an isolated case and down to human error.

“I hope all those affected suffer no serious side effects,” he said.

— AFP

■ BRITAIN BLANKETED WITH SNOW



People walk through snow in Burford. Most of Britain was blanketed with snow on Monday as temperatures plunged to -3 degree Celsius in some parts of the country. – Reuters

Storm leaves thousands without power in France

PARIS: Thousands of households in France and the UK were left without electricity as storm Bella caused torrential rain and heavy winds in the region.

Brittany and Normandy in the north and west of France were the first regions to suffer power cuts, but “18,000 households were reconnected”, said power company Enedis.

Some 34,000 households in the east and centre of France were still without power as the storm made its way across the country.

The storm has disrupted air travel, with over a third of flights from France’s main airport of Charles de Gaulle in Paris suffering delays of an average of 50 minutes. However, airport operator ADP said “air traffic has now returned to normal.”

The winds and rains abated in some areas by the late afternoon, but heavy snow was forecast on higher ground in the south of the country.

Similar troubles across the



A big wave crashes on a pier in front of a house in Lesconil, western France, on Monday. – AFP

channel. The weather service Meteo France warned of strong gusts and high waves on the Atlantic coast, while the prefecture of the department of Manche on the English Channel urged caution due to the strong winds.

Gusts of up to 145 kilometres per hour were measured at the top of the Paris Eiffel Tower.

Earlier, the storm hit large parts of Britain with heavy rainfall and strong winds. More than 100 flood warnings remained in place across the country on Sunday. — dpa

ROME

Venice activates flood defence system

Authorities in Venice on Sunday activated the Italian city’s controversial flood defence system as sea levels rise.

Venice Mayor Luigi Brugnaro wrote on Twitter that floods of 130 centimetres above normal water levels are predicted for Monday morning.

In response, the city’s MOSE flood defence system will be activated, Brugnaro announced.

MOSE relies on a system of close to 80 yellow barriers at three tributaries to the city’s



main lagoon.

These are supposed to hold back the water and protect the city, along with its most famous sites, including St Mark’s Square.

MOSCOW

17 fishermen dead after trawler sinks

Seventeen fishermen were missing and feared dead on Monday after a Russian trawler capsized during a storm and sank in the freezing waters of the Barents Sea.

Officials said that two people had been rescued by a passing vessel, but hopes were quickly fading that more survivors could be found during a snowstorm over the Arctic waters.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday expressed “deep condolences” to the



families of the victims and offered “words of support” for the survivors.

“It is with sorrow that I learnt of the tragedy,” Putin said in a statement released by the Kremlin.

JOHANNESBURG

Coronavirus cases top 1-million mark

South Africa has become the first country on the African continent to surpass the 1-million mark for coronavirus cases. The country, which is in the middle of a second wave of infections, has recorded 1,004,413 coronavirus cases since March, the health ministry said late on Sunday.

A new variant of the virus thought to be more highly transmissible is spreading in South Africa. John Nkengasong, head of the pan-African health organisation Africa CDC, said



last week the variant in South Africa was being transmitted rapidly and is likely responsible for most of the second wave of the pandemic there.

Best gifts ever – time, health

Next week this day we will be in the year 2021. That also means we would be in the beginning of the third decade of the millennium.

This week, however, is a good time to reflect. Of course we are encouraged to think of resolutions but we also know how successful we are at keeping them. The trick would be to keep short term goals first so that more we achieve we are encouraged to continue with more.

Our welcoming of the year 2021 is probably going to be quite different because of what we have gone through this year. The eventful 2020 has taught us a great deal. So we should actually start off with gratitude at the very fact that we are coming out of it. We should pray for the people who had to leave us due to the pandemic. We ought to say a prayer in gratitude to the frontliners.

We need to express a special gratitude to people who have been there for us because these are the people whom we forget often. A lot of times it is because we think they are part of us.

And for the gentle souls who might be going through depression, may 2021 be the year for you to come out of the shell and explore the world. Let us not choose to stay behind in fear of



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AS WE MOVE FORWARD AND YOU BEGIN TO RECEIVE NEW CALENDARS AS GIFTS LET IT REMIND US OF THE FACT THAT TIME WAITS FOR NO ONE. TIME IS THE MOST IMPORTANT GIFT GRANTED TO US SINCE BIRTH

uncertainties, what could go wrong at the most is what we need to look into and remember that failure still brings in experience and the knowledge on what else does not work. Sure enough there might be financial struggle as the world will take its time to recover from the global shocks faced by the economies of the world.

But look at the positive side – how we have moved on with technology and the close link we have developed with family and friends. Through the test of time, we learnt that we can live with the basic necessities during the lock down so much so that even when the shops opened we managed to cope with having the basic essentials in order to avoid visiting shops often.

Remember the shock of seeing the first person I came across wearing a facial mask right at the beginning of COVID-19. We stopped bothering about our appearance while travelling on flights. Even if we were fit we had nightmares of being sick. We felt the helplessness when we heard someone succumbing to COVID-19. It taught us humility many times over. If we were the interfering type in the past this year taught us about social distancing and let alone visiting each other and there was a sense of guilt

while visiting family members. If we were into avoiding people, 2020 also helped us in realising the value of people especially the elders.

In general, 2020 might have taught us to expect the unexpected, but what we must not forget is that the New Year is indeed a new beginning in every way. So let us hold onto our dreams and have the confidence to dream more and achieve them.

Let us not forget to have hope and we must remember that we could also be hope for someone else at the time it is important to generate hope in others and not let them lose faith in themselves. The beauty of life is its ups and downs. At times it is nice to look back on our journey of life and what we have gone through and what we have achieved, but let us not get stuck in the past as there is so much more for us to achieve.

So as we move forward and you begin to receive new calendars as gifts let it remind us of the fact that time waits for no one. Time is the most important gift granted to us since birth. However, the essential gift is health and at no time shall we be off guard on safety.

So let us roll up our sleeves and get ready for the year 2021!

2020 EMISSIONS

An unexpectedly good year for the climate

PATRICK GALEY

For a few moments in late April of 2020, oil — normally the lifeblood of the world economy — became more expensive to store than to pay someone to take it away.

Crude oil's wildly fluctuating futures prices reflected the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, with record falls in greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel demand making 2020 an unexpectedly good year for the climate.

The United Nations and the Global Carbon Project both said this month that planet-warming carbon pollution was set to fall seven per cent this year, the largest single-year drop in history.

As pressure mounts on governments to match action to their promises to slash emissions, such a historic drop is welcome even if it only came about due to the pandemic.

It puts 2020 roughly in line with what the UN says is needed to keep the Paris climate deal goal of limiting warming to 1.5C° within reach.

But with distribution of several COVID-19 vaccines ramping up in 2021, enabling an anticipated global economic rebound, will 2020 be the start of an annual downward emissions trend, or just a momentary blip?

“I am afraid that if governments do not take major new policies we may well see that the decline we are experiencing in emissions this year will rebound,” Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency (IEA), said.

“If governments do not put clean energy policies in their economic recovery packages we will go back to where we were before the pandemic.”

Birol pointed to China, the world's largest polluter, which he said was an “important test run” for how other nations power their COVID-19 recovery.

“We all know China was the first country to have the coronavirus, the first where there was a lockdown and where the economy declined,” he said.

“But China is also the first country where the economy rebounded and as of today Chinese emissions are higher than levels before the crisis.”

The UN in its annual Emissions Gap report said last week that 2020's dip in emissions would have only a “negligible impact” on long-term warming without a profound shift towards green energy. It said emissions hit a record high in 2019 of 59.1 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent — a whopping 2.6 per cent higher than the year before. Yet the countries that pollute the most have prioritised sectors heavily reliant on fossil fuels in their stimulus packages.

In October, a study by manufacturer Wartsila and Energy Policy Tracker found that G20 nations had earmarked \$145 billion for clean energy solutions as part of their recovery funding.

This compared with \$216 billion that had been pledged for fossil energy, the analysis showed.

The UN said this month that production of oil, gas and coal needed to fall 6 per cent annually through 2030 to stay on a 1.5-C° course. Its Production Gap assessment showed however that countries plan to increase fossil fuel production 2 per cent per year this decade. This is despite record low costs for renewable energy technology such as solar and wind. — AFP

NO QUICK RETURN TO NORMAL

Trump will be gone, but 2020 will be never-ending for Joe Biden

SEBASTIAN SMITH

COVID and a traumatic presidential election left the US reeling in 2020, but even with Donald Trump gone and Joe Biden promising to heal the nation there will be no quick return to normal in 2021.

For many in the world's richest country, 2020 was the year that seemed never-ending — an infinite series of horror movie sequels shaking the economy, politics and society itself.

Biden, an old-school Washington politician who believes in traditional US diplomacy and what he refers to as “decency,” got elected on a promise to stop the chaos.

“It is time to turn the page,” he said earlier this month.

The shift in mood at the White House after Inauguration Day on January 20 will be remarkable.

Out goes the most attention-seeking president imaginable, and in comes a mild-mannered leader who says he seeks “to lower the temperature.”

But Trump clearly has no intention of giving up the limelight — or allowing the United States to forget the nationalist and populist passions that his administration worked so hard to stoke.

His extraordinary decision to deny that he lost the election, more than a month after it happened, is just part one in what he hopes will be yet another Trump-centred drama, possibly culminating with a new presidential run in 2024.

And Biden will have another, tougher foe breathing down his neck: COVID-19.

Even though vaccines are now



COVID and a traumatic presidential election left the US reeling in 2020, but even with Donald Trump gone and Joe Biden promising to heal the nation there will be no quick return to normal in 2021. — AFP

TRUMP CLEARLY HAS NO INTENTION OF GIVING UP THE LIMELIGHT — OR ALLOWING THE UNITED STATES TO FORGET THE NATIONALIST AND POPULIST PASSIONS THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION WORKED SO HARD TO STOKE

coming online, the virus is at its most deadly, killing thousands of Americans a day. It's forecast to get even worse before winter is over.

Trump has tried to take credit for the ultra-fast development of the vaccines — one of the few good news stories of 2020.

But it will largely fall to Biden next year to oversee the unprecedented logistical task of getting doses administered across 50 states.

And while Trump can blame the catastrophic disruption to the economy on the coronavirus, it will

be Biden who finds himself being remembered for what happens during the hoped-for recovery in 2021.

DEATH STAR

With Trump running for a second term, perhaps it was always inevitable that 2020 was going to be a wild year.

The rules-breaking Republican began his year with acquittal along party lines in a Senate impeachment trial. Emboldened, he then stormed out onto the reelection trail, holding rally after rally in front of large crowds. — AFP

sport

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LIST OF ICC AWARDS

Male cricketer of decade:
Virat Kohli (India)

Female cricketer of
decade: Ellyse Perry
(Australia)

Men's Test cricketer of
decade: Steve Smith
(Australia)

Men's ODI cricketer of
decade: Virat Kohli (India)

Women's ODI cricketer of
decade: Ellyse Perry
(Australia)

Men's T20I cricketer of
decade: Rashid Khan
(Afghanistan)

Women's T20I cricketer of
decade: Ellyse Perry
(Australia)

Men's Associate cricketer
of decade: Kyle Coetzer
(Scotland)

Women's Associate
cricketer of decade:
Kathryn Bryce (Scotland)

Spirit of Cricket Award of
decade: Mahendra Singh
Dhoni (India)



ICC NAMES KOHLI, PERRY AS CRICKETERS OF THE DECADE

“It’s just been an honour for me to be able to go out there and perform for my team, and it’s a great honour for me to win this award. My only intention was to make winning contributions for the team and I just strive to do that in every game

VIRAT KOHLI

Winner of ICC Male Cricketer and ODI Cricketer of the Decade Awards

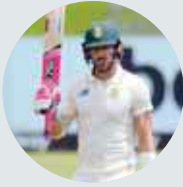
DUBAI: India captain Virat Kohli was named the ICC’s male cricketer of the decade on Monday as Australia all-rounder Ellyse Perry swept the top women’s awards. Kohli and Perry were the big winners in the International Cricket Council’s Awards of the Decade, while Australian batsman Steve Smith was crowned the best Test player. Kohli, who was also named ODI player of the decade, lifted the 2011 World Cup and the 2013 Champions Trophy with India,

before inspiring their first Test series victory on Australian soil two years ago. “It’s just been an honour for me to be able to go out there and perform for my team, and it’s a great honour for me to win this award,” Kohli said in a video message. “My only intention was to make winning contributions for the team and I just strive to do that in every game,” he added. India’s all-formats captain was the decade’s highest run-scorer with 20,396, hitting the most

fifties (66) and having the highest average (56.97) of players with more than 70 innings. He was also the only player with more than 10,000 one-day international runs, including 39 centuries and 48 fifties at an average of 61.83. Perry was named female cricketer of the decade as well as the top ODI and T20 player as she cleaned up in the women’s awards. Perry, who also played football for Australia at the 2011 World Cup, won four T20 world titles and the 2013 one-day World Cup,

scoring 4,349 runs and taking 213 wickets in the decade. “It has been tremendous to develop the women’s T20 game and take it forward,” Perry said. “Amazing to see where it’s come from when I was introduced to it.” Smith, who averaged 65.79 with 26 centuries and 28 fifties, won the Test award despite his role in the ball-tampering scandal at the 2018 Cape Town Test which saw him banned for a year. Meanwhile, Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan said he was “speechless” after being picked as

the men’s T20 player of the decade. “For someone from Afghanistan to get this award, it’s a special moment for me,” he said. Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni won the decade’s Spirit of Cricket award for sportingly calling back England batsman Ian Bell after a bizarre run-out in the 2011 Nottingham Test. And Scotland’s Kyle Coetzer and Kathryn Bryce were named the decade’s best male and female cricketers from associate, or non-Test playing, countries. — AFP



Du Plessis prospers as SA build lead

Former captain Faf du Plessis led South Africa to a dominant position as Sri Lanka suffered more injury blows on the third day of the first Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Monday. Du Plessis made a career-best 177 not out as South Africa reached 565 for six at tea, a first-innings lead of 169.



Federer out of Australian Open after knee surgery

Twenty-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer will miss the Australian Open for the first time in his career as he continues his recovery from two rounds of knee surgery, organisers said on Monday. Federer hasn't missed the Australian Open since his debut in 2000, winning the trophy six times.

Mavericks thrash Clippers

HORNETS HAND NETS FIRST LOSS OF NBA SEASON

LOS ANGELES: The Dallas Mavericks powered to an NBA-record 50-point halftime lead on the way to a 124-73 demolition of the short-handed Los Angeles Clippers on Sunday.

The Mavs, taking full advantage of the absence of injured Clippers star Kawhi Leonard, set the tone early.

Point guard Luka Doncic scored 18 of his 24 points in the first half and the halftime score of 77-27 gave Dallas the largest margin at the break ever in the NBA, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Josh Richardson added 21 points and Tim Hardaway Jr chipped in 18 for the Mavs, who had opened the season with two defeats.

"Everything was clicking on all cylinders," Hardaway said, adding that the Mavericks did not realise how big their halftime lead was until they were in the locker room.

Coach Rick Carlisle said the key for the Mavericks going forward would be to maintain the intensity they showed in the first half.

"Our guys established a standard for collective toughness and will that we need to find a way to maintain," he said.

In Charlotte, Gordon Hayward scored 28 points as the Hornets cooled off red-hot Brooklyn, handing the Nets their first defeat of the season 106-104.

Terry Rozier — Hayward's former teammate in Boston — added 19 points and PJ Washington chipped in 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Hornets, who held the Nets to 42.7 per cent shooting.

"Unbelievable win for us," said Hayward, who joined the Hornets from the Celtics in November. "Just proud of our effort, man, proud of our defence. We

finally got it together it seemed like on that end."

Kevin Durant led the Nets with 29 points and Kyrie Irving had 25 for Brooklyn, which had become the first club since the 2008-09 Lakers to win their first two games by 20 or more points.

It looked like the Nets might pull out a close one when they erased a 16-point fourth-quarter deficit, twice trimming the gap to two points with less than three minutes to play.

Durant missed a fadeaway jumper with 7.4 seconds left and Rozier made two free throws that sealed the win.

The Hornets were playing without centre Cody Zeller, who broke his left hand in their season opener.

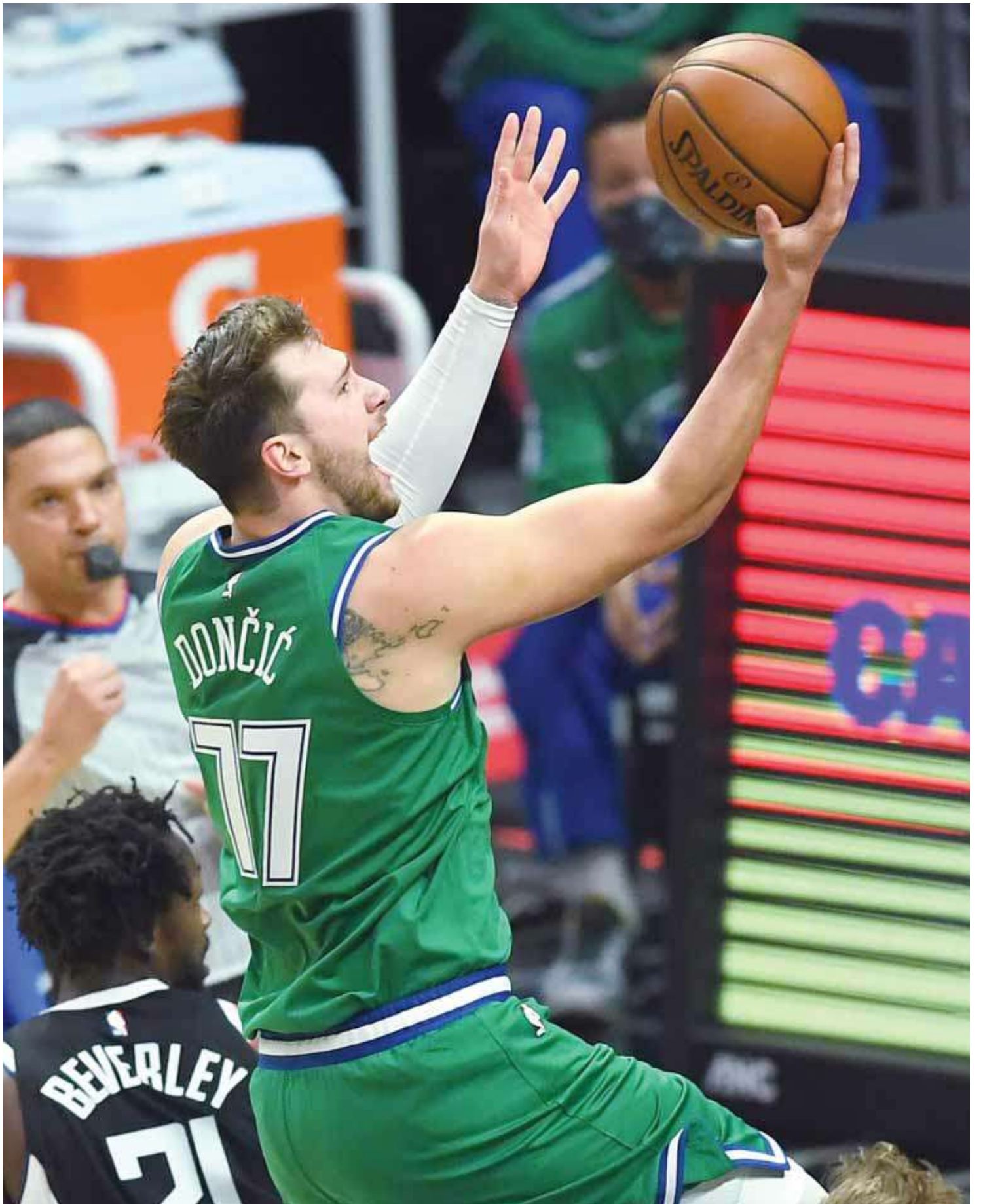
Brooklyn guard Spencer Dinwiddie departed in the third quarter with a right knee strain and did not return.

The reigning champion Los Angeles Lakers seemed not to feel the absence of Anthony Davis, nursing a calf contusion, in a 127-91 romp past the Minnesota Timberwolves — who were without star Karl-Anthony Towns a day after he dislocated his left wrist in a win over Utah.

Kyle Kuzma led the Lakers with 20 points. LeBron James added 18 with nine rebounds and five assists and sat out the fourth quarter with the game in hand.

'WHY CHANCE IT?'

The Cleveland Cavaliers, with 24 points, 14 rebounds, three assists and three steals from Andre Drummond, cruised to a 118-94 victory over a Philadelphia 76ers team missing big man Joel Embiid, who was a late scratch with a tight back. "We just thought, why chance it this early in the season," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said. "Nothing to be concerned about."



Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Doncic (77) drives past Los Angeles Clippers guard Patrick Beverley (21) for a basket in the first half at Staples Center. — USA Today Sports

The Golden State Warriors, who were again without Draymond Green — and may have lost centre Marquese Chriss for the season with a broken right leg and ankle injury suffered in practice — shook off the bad news to edge the Bulls in Chicago 129-128.

Stephen Curry delivered 36 points with five three-pointers.

His first long-range shot of the night made him just the third player, along with

Ray Allen and Reggie Miller, to make 2,500 three-pointers in their career.

But it was Damion Lee who drilled the game-winner from beyond the arc with 2.3 seconds remaining, taking over as the Bulls prevented Curry from getting his hands on an inbounds pass.

It was a blowout in New York, where the Knicks stunned Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks 130-110.

— AFP

NBA RESULTS

Indiana bt Boston **108-107**
Cleveland bt Philadelphia **118-94**
New York bt Milwaukee **130-110**
LA Lakers bt Minnesota **127-91**
Golden State bt Chicago **129-128**
Charlotte bt Brooklyn **106-104**
Orlando bt Washington **120-113**
Phoenix bt Sacramento **116-100**
New Orleans bt San Antonio **98-95**
Dallas bt LA Clippers **124-73**

Landmark, Danmark, BSI and Cricworld post wins

MUSCAT: Kuganeswaran Ramar's superb half-century helped Landmark Group to an emphatic 6-wicket victory against Ghantoot Group in an E Division game at Muscat Municipality ground 4 in Amerat on Friday.

Nahas Theparambil struck an elegant 57 in Ghantoot's total of 139 all out. Hemant Magar and Ajay Kumar bowled well, taking three and two wickets respectively.

Landmark raced to the target in just 13 overs, scoring 141 for 4 thanks to brilliant batting by Kuganeswaran (57) and Mohammed Thahir (45). Kamesh Maharaja took two wickets.

Unas steers Danmark to victory

In another E Division match at the same venue, Unas Ali's 72 off 39 and Doresh Devender's 4 for 29 were the highlights of Danmark's 4-wicket win over Mazoon Up.

Mazoon Up posted a robust 190 for 8 on the board thanks to main contributions from Bilawal Ali (56) and Mohammed



ACT Cricworld

Ali (31). Doresh was the pick of Mazoon bowler taking four wickets in his spell.

Danmark's successful chase ended in the final over as it reached 191 for 6 thanks to splendid batting by Unas and Lal Shankarlal (38). Fahad Mohamed claimed

3 for 42 and Muhammed Ali 2 for 28.

Rakshan bowls BSI to big win

Rakshan Achary's magnificent 5 for 16 powered BSI to a big 113-run victory against Mazoon Dairy Company in an

F Division match at OAC 3 ground in Seeb.

BSI batted well to score 194 for 6 in 20 overs, Usman Siddique (59) and Saud Haroon (49) being their main scorers. Ameer and Martin Yesupaul bagged two wickets each.

Mazoon Dairy slumped to 57 for 6 inside first 10 overs, folding up for a dismal 81 in 15.5 overs. Rakshan did the bulk of the damage with his five-wicket haul while Saud Haroon picked up two wickets.

Alif bats Cricworld to victory

Alif Hameed's sensational 16-ball 51 not out saw ACT Cricworld to a thumping 7-wicket victory against Muscat Young Stars in another F Division game at the same venue.

Young Stars managed to score a disappointing 107 for 6 which Cricworld overhauled in only 13.1 overs, scoring 112 for 3 thanks to Alif's brilliant knock in which he slammed 4 fours and 4 sixes.

BRIEF SCORES

E Division
Ghantoot Group 139 all out in 20 overs (Nahas Theparambil 57 – 7x4, Hemant Magar 3-21, Ajay Kumar 2-27) lost to Landmark Group 141 for 4 in 13 overs (Kuganeswaran Ramar 57 – 7x4, 2x6, Mohamed Thahir 45 – 9x4, Kamesh Maharaja 2-21) by 6 wickets.
Mazoon Up 190 for 8 in 20 overs (Bilawal Ali 56 – 8x4, Mohammed Ali 31 – 3x4, Doresh Devender 4-32) lost to Danmark CC 191 for 6 in 19.5 overs (Unas Ali 72 – 7x4, 1x6, Lal Shankarlal 38 – 4x4, 1x6, Fahad Mohamed 3-42, Muhammed Ali 2-28) by 4 wickets.

F Division
Muscat Young Stars 107 for 6 in 20 overs (Tejas Rajeev 33 – 3x4, Shashank Ram Mohan 30 – 3x4, Jebin James 2-18, Rajan Anup 2-20) lost to ACT Cricworld 112 for 3 in 13.1 overs (Alif Hameed 51 not out – 5x4, 4x6, Neil Paily 31 – 3x4) by 7 wickets.
BSI CT 194 for 6 in 20 overs (Usman Siddique 59 – 8x4, 1x6, Saud Haroon Khan 49 – 8x4, Fajes MP 34 – 4x4, Ameer 2-33, Martin Yesupaul 2-44) beat Mazoon Dairy Company 81 all out in 15.5 overs (Sakil Khan 15 – 2x4, Rakshan Acharya 5-16, Saud Haroon Khan 2-16) by 113 runs.

India rip through Australia to eye series-levelling win

MELBOURNE: A depleted Indian attack ripped through Australia's top order to leave the world's number one team with a slender two-run lead and in deep trouble on Monday after day three of the second Test.

At stumps in Melbourne, Australia were 133 for six with Cameron Green on 17 and Pat Cummins on 15 in their second innings as the visitors zeroed in on levelling the series after losing the first Test by eight wickets.

India are doing so with a weakened attack after Umesh Yadav pulled up in his fourth over with a calf problem, limping off the field.

It was a setback for India, who were already missing injured regulars Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma. But the remaining bowlers, led by Ravindra Jadeja (2-25) and Jasprit Bumrah (1-34), admirably picked up the slack.

"I think we played really well. I thought the bowlers came out really strong and bowled in all the right areas. It was good to see," said India captain Ajinkya Rahane.

"But this game is not over yet, we still have to get four more wickets."

India were all out for 326 in their first innings on the stroke of lunch, adding just 49 to their overnight 277 for five in reply to Australia's 195.

It gave them a 131-run lead, courtesy of Rahane's magnificent 112 and Jadeja's 57. Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon took three wickets each.

Australia needed some of their big names to stand tall in the run chase. Opener Matthew Wade did well with a fighting 40 off 137 balls before being trapped lbw by the spin of Jadeja.

But Steve Smith, Marnus Labuschagne and Joe Burns all failed.

Burns lasted just 10 balls, caught by Rishabh Pant off Yadav for four to follow his first-innings duck.

Even if David Warner fails to recover from a groin strain for the next Test in Sydney, it will be hard for selectors to again justify

“

I think we played really well. I thought the bowlers came out really strong and bowled in all the right areas. It was good to see. But this game is not over yet, we still have to get four more wickets

AJINKYA RAHANE
Indian captain

picking Burns, with Marcus Harris among those waiting in the wings.

Labuschagne fell for 28, caught by Rahane off a thick edge from Ravi Ashwin.

At the other end, the usually flamboyant Wade dug in but Smith again went cheaply, bowled by Bumrah for eight.

After Wade departed, Travis Head was the last recognised batsman but he became a victim of paceman Mohammed Siraj on debut, slashing a ball to Mayank Agarwal.

Captain Tim Paine fell to Jadeja for one, leaving Green and Cummins to knuckle down in a 34-run partnership and take the Test into a fourth day.

"Cummo is not an established batsmen, but he has done well for us at this ground in the past and we all know what Greenie is capable of if he can get in," said Wade.

"So it'd be really good for these two to get a nice partnership together, which we haven't done over this Test match."

He added that setting India a target of "anything over a 100 will be good".

RAHANE RUN-OUT

India started the day at a chilly Melbourne Cricket Ground in front of 24,995 socially-distanced fans with an 82-run advantage after taking charge on Sunday with a gutsy response to their embarrassing 36 all out in Adelaide.



India's Mohammed Siraj celebrates with Cheteshwar Pujara after taking the wicket of Travis Head of Australia during day three of the second Test at The MCG, Melbourne. — Reuters

SCOREBOARD

Australia first innings: 195
India first innings (O/n: 277/5)
M Agarwal lbw Starc0
S Gill c Paine b Cummins45
C Pujara c Paine c Cummins17
A Rahane (run out)112
H Vihari c Smith b Lyon21
R Pant c Paine b Starc29
R Jadeja c Cummins b Starc57
R Ashwin c Lyon b Hazlewood14
U Yadav c Smith b Lyon9
J Bumrah c Head b Lyon0
M Siraj (not out)0
Extras (B-12, LB-6, W-2, NB-2) ---- 22
Total (all out, 115.1 overs) ---- 326
Fall of wickets: 0-1, 2-61, 3-64, 4-116, 5-173, 6-294, 7-306, 8-325, 9-325.
Bowling: Starc 26-5-78-3, Cummins 27-9-80-2, Hazlewood 23-6-47-1, Lyon 27-1-4-72-3, Green 12-1-31-0.

Australia second innings
J Burns c Pant b Yadav4
M Wade b Jadeja40
M Labuschagne c Rahane b Ashwin28
S Smith b Bumrah8
T Head c Agarwal b Siraj17
C Green (not out)17
T Paine c Pant b Jadeja1
P Cummins (not out)15
Extras (NB-3) ---- 3
Total (For 6 wks, 66 overs) ---- 133
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-42, 3-71, 4-98, 5-98, 6-99.
Bowling: Bumrah 17-4-34-1, Yadav 3-3-0-5-1, Siraj 12-3-1-23-1, Ashwin 23-4-46-1, Jadeja 10-3-25-2.

But Australia quickly made inroads.

Rahane, captain in place of Virat Kohli who has returned home for the birth of his first child, rode his luck on day two, when he was dropped on 73 and 104.

But after adding eight to his overnight 104, brilliant awareness from Labuschagne saw him run out.

Jadeja, back in the team after missing the first Test injured, dabbed Nathan Lyon to point and set off for a single as he looked to bring up his 50.

Rahane responded but wasn't quick enough with Paine whipping off the bails after Labuschagne's throw.

It ended a 121-run partnership and one of the 32-year-old's most important innings, having come to the crease with India in trouble at 64 for three.

Jadeja brought up his 15th Test half-century before misjudging a Starc bouncer, then Lyon and Josh Hazlewood mopped up the tail. — AFP

New Zealand dominate Pakistan despite Wagner injury



New Zealand paceman Tim Southee (right) and team-mates appeal for the wicket of Pakistan's Azhar Ali on day three of the first Test in Mount Maunganui. — AFP

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, NEW ZEALAND: Not even a broken toe could stop New Zealand's pace attack dominating day three of the first Test against Pakistan on Monday, but their efforts to quickly wrap up the innings were slowed by Mohammad Rizwan and Faheem Ashraf's late century stand on Monday.

As intermittent showers and an unseasonal hail storm disrupted proceedings at Mount Maunganui, the Black Caps' pace foursome took five for 50 in the first two sessions before Pakistan rallied to be all out for 239 at stumps, still 192 in arrears.

Rizwan and Ashraf provided a face-saving partnership for Pakistan with 107 for the seventh wicket before Rizwan was run out for 71 by Mitchell Santner's smart underarm throw from square leg.

Ashraf soldiered on to a career-best 91 before he was the last wicket to fall.

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand first innings: 431
Pakistan first innings (O/n: 30/1):
S Masood c Watling b Jamieson10
A Ali b Jamieson25
M Abbas c Taylor b Boult5
A Ali c Watling b Southee5
H Sohail c Nicholls b Southee3
F Alam c Watling b Wagner9
M Rizwan (run out)71
F Ashraf c Watling b Jamieson91
Y Shah b Boult4
S Afridi c Latham b Wagner6
N Shah (not out)0
Extras (B-3, LB-4, W-2, NB-1) ---- 10
Total (all out, 102.2 overs) ---- 239
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-39, 3-43, 4-51, 5-52, 6-80, 7-187, 8-196, 9-235.
Bowling: Southee 26-7-69-2, Boult 26-4-71-2, Jamieson 23-2-13-35-3, Wagner 21-5-50-2, Santner 6-2-7-0.

Kyle Jamieson returned the best figures for New Zealand with three for 35, while Neil Wagner ignored the pain from a broken toe to charge in for 21 overs to take two for 50.

He hobbled off at stumps describing it as one of the toughest days of his career and revealed he

needed pain killers to keep going.

"After the first rain break I just went 'dammit I can't bear the pain' and I got a jab and that took the pain away a little bit... but it started wearing off pretty quickly," said Wagner, who broke a toe on his right foot when batting on day two.

"Injuries happen and it's unlucky but I can still do things and run and it's not going to stop me. It's sore and it's bloody uncomfortable but its just one of those things you've got to deal with and I still felt that I didn't want to let my team-mates down."

MUST WIN SITUATION

New Zealand need to win both Tests against Pakistan to be in with a chance to make the World Test Championship final in June, and Pakistan batting coach Younis Khan said that would put added pressure on the Black Caps going into their second innings on Tuesday. — AFP

business

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Projects worth \$2.5 bn open for investment in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

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Around 33 projects and initiatives, involving investments totalling in excess of \$2.5 billion, are currently available for local and international investment across the Sultanate.

A list of these ventures, spanning the healthcare, agriculture and fisheries, food security, mining, manufacturing and logistics sectors, was unveiled by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP) during a recent online seminar targeted at prospective international investors.

Hospitals and related healthcare ventures account for a third of the projects in the portfolio.

Overseeing these projects is the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Unit of the Ministry of Finance.

Currently in planning are general hospitals each worth \$72.80 million at Bahla and Samayil, as well as a string of similar general hospitals named

FDI INFLOWS:
Portfolio of 33 ventures available for local and international investment across healthcare, agriculture and fisheries, food, mining and logistics sectors

Al Namaa (\$73m),

Al Falah (\$72.8m), Al Najat (\$72.8m) and Rashad (\$70.2m). More modest-scale hospitals are also planned at Dhalkout (\$39m), Al Mazyounah (\$33.8m), and Bukha (\$18.2m), while a one-of-a-kind National Rehabilitation Centre is also on the cards at a cost of \$52 million.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), which regulates all four of the country's biggest free zone developments, is overseeing a string of mining-related



investments.

The largest of these is a soda ash production plant at a cost of \$145.64 million.

Also available for investment are smaller-scale ventures, currently in the conceptual stage, that include a clinker manufacturing facility (\$20.72m), quick lime production plant (\$14.3m), and a ground calcium carbonate factory valued at \$7.25 million.

At Barka, just north of Muscat, the promoters of Khazaen

Economic City – the Sultanate's first integrated manufacturing and logistics hub – has invited international firms to consider a range of investment opportunities.

The list includes a Central Market for Fruits & Vegetables (\$54.60 million), Central Automotive Market, warehouses for operation and management, and a stopover for trucks.

Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), the government's food investment

and development arm, is soliciting investments in four key ventures – part of a large portfolio of projects designed to secure the Sultanate's access to essential food commodities and related goods.

Currently open for investment are a Food Logistics Company (\$19.3m), Food & Vegetables Marketing Platform (\$4.43m), Food Techno Park (\$10m) and Animal Vaccine Project (\$30m).

Oman's solid waste management flagship, be'ah, is promoting an array of projects for local and foreign investment as part of its drive to sustain a circular economy centring on the solid waste sector.

The biggest of these is a Waste-to-Energy Independent Power Project (IPP) utilising municipal waste for power generation – a venture estimated to cost \$700 million.

Together with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), be'ah has plans to support the development of another Waste to Energy project for the production

of thermal energy.

Additionally, the state-backed entity is looking at a \$23.5 million worth biogas plant at the Barka landfill for the production of electricity, thermal energy and compost.

A similar facility is also envisaged for implementation at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) at a cost of around RO 21.5 million. Also available for investment are initiatives linked to biofuel production from Used Cooking Oil (UCO) – worth \$7.8million – and recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment (\$3m).

Marafi, Asyad Group member and state-owned port operator, is welcoming funding support for the upgrade of Lima Port in Musandam Governorate, entailing an investment of \$23 million.

Wrapping up the portfolio of ventures for investment is a mixed-use development offered by the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) valued at \$113 million.

Duterte signs \$93.7 billion national budget

MANILA: Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte signed on Monday a 4.5 trillion pesos (\$93.7 billion) budget for next year, the country's largest yet, to bankroll economic recovery and fund the purchase of millions of doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

The approval of the national budget, a tenth greater than that of 2020, seeks to return what was formerly one of Asia's fastest expanding economies back to growth and help contain coronavirus infections.

The budget enables the country to heal, rebuild and resume the economy's upward trajectory, Duterte said after its signing. "This coming year, we intend to recover as one nation," he said.

The education sector and public works secured 752 billion pesos and 696 billion pesos respectively, accounting for nearly a third of the budget.

Budget for the health ministry was at 210 billion pesos while the defence receives 206 billion pesos.

The budget includes 72.5 billion pesos to buy, store and distribute COVID-19 vaccines, in line with Duterte's pledge to inoculate the entire 108 million population starting in May 2021.

With about 470,000 infections and more than 9,000 deaths, the Philippines has the second-highest COVID-19 cases and casualties in Southeast Asia, next to Indonesia.

Around a thousand new cases are still reported daily, despite varying levels of restrictions in the capital since mid-March. — Reuters

CMA sets up dedicated anti-money laundering unit

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 28

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has added to its administration structure a new department dedicated to combating money laundering and terror financing – a move designed to create a safer investment climate for institutions operating in the capital market and insurance sectors of the Sultanate. The new outfit will also complement other government departments and units focused on fighting money laundering and terror financing, the Authority said in a statement.

The establishment of this department is in line with the Authority's continuous efforts to build national capabilities in dealing with the phenomenon of money laundering and terror financing. The CMA had previously issued regulations for combating money laundering and financing terrorism (30/2016) for companies operating in the securities, companies, brokers and insurance agency fields.

Mohammed bin Said al Abri, Vice-President of Capital Market Sector, said the new unit has been equipped to provide all necessary assistance to institutions and their clients operating in the capital market and insurance spaces.

"The establishment of this department is included in the preparation procedures to work on executing the national 'Oman Vision 2040' based on achieving the main national priorities to develop the national economic system by achieving the financial sustainability, create a conducive regulatory and legislative



environment that attracts investment, enhance institutional performance, and align with the authority's strategic objectives," he said.

As part of its remit, the new department will review and develop legislation and measures to strengthen the fight against money laundering and terror financing. It will also enhance the effort to promote awareness of these phenomena, and build a culture of precaution and prevention in institutions operating in this arena.

With the establishment of a dedicated unit within the Authority, Oman will be further recognised internationally for its commitment to combating money laundering and terror financing, he said. The department will assist capital market institutions, companies, brokers and insurance agents and their clients in the Sultanate in keeping themselves safe from money laundering and terror financing risks.

"This will enhance the level of trust that international organisations, investors and

clients have in Oman's regulations and systems, which are based on international best practices," he said.

Various tasks were assigned to this department like field and office examination and auditing.

The department also identifies which of the capital market institutions, companies, brokers and insurance agents are more exposed to money laundering and financing terrorism crime risks and working on raising its efficiency through putting adequate follow-up mechanisms and treatment programmes.

The department will study the capital market institutions, companies, brokers and insurance agents' conditions that are having problems in complying with combating money laundering and financing terrorism requirements, following the execution of condition compromising plans, analysing the financial statements and reports and other reports received from these institutions to ensure the compliance level with the legislations and instructions related to money laundering and terror financing.

Oil rises after Trump signs aid bill



LONDON: Oil rose to hit \$52 a barrel on Monday as US President Donald Trump's signing of a coronavirus aid package and the start of a European vaccination campaign outweighed concern about weak near-term demand.

After Trump backed down from a threat to block the package, Democrats on Monday will try to push through expanded \$2,000 relief payments. Europe, meanwhile, launched a mass vaccination drive on Sunday.

Brent crude was up 45 cents, or 0.9 per cent, at \$51.74 a barrel at 1200 GMT, after trading as high as \$52.02 and reversing an earlier decline. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude added 44 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to \$48.67.

"The signing of the US stimulus bill, with the possibility of an increased size, should put a floor under oil prices in a shortened week," said Jeffrey Halley, an analyst at broker OANDA.

Oil has recovered from historic lows hit this year

as the emerging pandemic hammered demand. Brent reached \$52.48 on Dec. 18, its highest since March.

But, the emergence of a new variant of the virus has led to movement restrictions being reimposed, hitting near-term demand and weighing on prices.

Oil remains vulnerable to any further setbacks in efforts to control the virus, said Stephen Innes, chief global market strategist at Axi, in a note.

Also coming into focus will be a January 4 meeting of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, a group known as Opec+.

The group is tapering record oil output cuts made this year to support the market.

Opec+ is set to boost output by 500,000 barrels per day in January. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Monday the deal could be adjusted if the market recovers more quickly than expected. — Reuters

Oman Air, Qatar Airways strengthen strategic cooperation

ENHANCED CONNECTIVITY:
Expansion of code-share agreement is the first step in further strengthening commercial cooperation between the two Gulf airlines

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 28:

Oman Air has announced an expanded code-share cooperation with Qatar Airways that will boost connectivity and provide more flexible travel options for both airline's customers.

The expanded code-share agreement is the first step in further strengthening strategic cooperation between the two airlines that first began in 2000. Sales of the additional destinations will commence in 2021.

Oman Air Chief Executive Officer Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, said: "We are delighted to expand our commercial cooperation with Qatar Airways, which will streamline flying for leisure travellers from around the world to enjoy Oman's culture, scenic beauty and hospitality, and facilitate travel for those who



visit the Sultanate of Oman for abundant, fast-growing business opportunities across a diverse range of sectors. The expansion of our code-share agreement is just the first step, and we look forward to working with Qatar Airways to further strengthen our strategic partnership to enhance the business and leisure travel experience for our customers in Oman and throughout the world."

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Akbar al Baker, said: "We are pleased to further expand our code-share cooperation with Oman Air, one of the leading airlines in the Gulf region. Now more than ever, it is important to strengthen strategic partnerships

across the industry to optimise our operations and provide seamless connectivity to hundreds of destinations across the globe for our passengers.

Since 2000, both airlines have seen the benefits that commercial cooperation has brought, providing our passengers with unrivalled service and more flexibility to travel when they want. I look forward to further strengthening our commercial cooperation with Oman Air to provide even more benefits to our customers."

The code-share expansion will significantly increase the number of destinations available to Oman Air guests to 65 additional points

on the Qatar Airways' network across Africa, the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, India, and the Middle East. Qatar Airways passengers will also benefit from additional connectivity, with the ability to book travel on six new destinations across Africa and Asia in Oman Air's network.

Both airlines will also explore a number of joint commercial and operational initiatives to further optimise their partnership. The code-share flights for the additional destinations will be displayed in the reservation systems once all the necessary approvals are obtained from the concerned Civil Aviation Authorities.

NBC signs agreement to support Omani skincare, fashion platform



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 28

The National Business Centre (NBC), which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), signed an incubation agreement with Keatha Platform — an online platform that displays local and international beauty, skincare, perfume and fashion products.

Managed by Omani cadres, the platform features products of emerging Omani companies with same concept of products that are displayed by Keatha.

Rahma al Habsi, owner of Keatha, stated that the project aims at creating a healthy lifestyle for the users of the featured products and

showcasing the trends in the skincare and fashion industry.

Keatha also plans to hold training courses and live sessions with professionals from the industry in future.

NBC is an initiative launched by Madayn at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) to offer promising Omani entrepreneurs a platform to develop their business ideas and advance them into growing ventures.

The centre offers a premier platform for Omani entrepreneurs by providing business development support and guidance, training and mentoring, access to markets and industry experts, and state-of-the-art and fully equipped office space, meeting rooms and presentation facilities.

Oman Aviation Group, Oman Post and ASYAD Express pact underscores rapid transformation

MUSCAT: Rashid al Aghbari, Executive Director of Airport Cities at Oman Aviation Group, and Nasser al Sharji, Acting CEO of Oman Post and ASYAD Express, part of ASYAD Group, announced that Oman Post has moved both its postal and ASYAD Express operations to Muscat International Airport as part of a strategic agreement between both companies.

The move highlights the rapid transformation of several key sectors of Oman's economy, including the logistics sector, to improve capabilities, modernise infrastructure, and leverage emerging technologies to align with Oman Vision 2040 objectives for advancing national priorities and facilitating economic



diversification.

According to Rashid: "A key component of the National Aviation Strategy 2030 is attracting local and global companies to establish their operations in the former airport terminal

redevelopment zone, part of the future Muscat Airport City. We are delighted to welcome Oman Post, the country's leading postal and logistics services company, to their modern new facility. The company not only connects people and

businesses across the Sultanate, but also connects Oman to the rest of the world, and is known for its excellence, innovation, and customer-first approach. The move will allow Oman Post and Asyad Express to achieve greater business integration and growth to the benefit of Oman."

Nasser stated, "The agreement with Oman Aviation Group to move the operations of both postal and ASYAD Express to Muscat International Airport marks a new chapter in our journey and allows us to explore airside operations in view of strengthening our logistics capabilities. We continue to move forward with a view to unlocking new opportunities and business growth for us, our partners and customers.

PRESS RELEASE

BANK MUSCAT WINS 2 ELITE AWARDS FROM JP MORGAN

Bank Muscat has once again been recognised by JP Morgan for its best in class Straight-through Processing (STP) rates for its US Dollar Clearing operations.

A global leader in financial services offering solutions to the world's most important corporations, governments and institutions, JP Morgan has been giving these awards since 1997 to acknowledge consistent high-quality performance of client fund transfer operations.

It is a matter of great pride that the awards won by Bank Muscat recognise the ultimate level of performance by client banks. The MT 103 Elite Quality Recognition Award won by the bank is only given to clients who achieve STP of 99 per cent or more with a minimum debit volume of 10,000 MT 103



transactions. The MT 202 Elite Quality Recognition Award won by the bank is only given to clients who achieve STP of 99.7 per cent or more with a minimum debit volume of 8,000 MT 202 transactions.

Recipients of these awards have to demonstrate superior transaction processing leading to higher efficiencies, faster payments, cost reductions and honouring of commitments to operational excellence to their customers.

Sharakah and HSBC renew joint collaboration

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 28

The Fund for Development of Youth Projects, SAOC (Sharakah) and HSBC Bank Oman have announced the launch of the second edition of their Istdama Programme for SMEs.

The renewal of the programme comes as a result of the successful completion of the first edition that was held last year and was funded by HSBC Bank Oman as part of its corporate sustainability agenda aiming to contribute to enhancing the role of SME's in the economy.

Istdama programme is managed and implemented by Sharakah in partnership with

Destination Sustainability, a personalised consultancy firm in Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility. It brings together international best practices and global research and innovation with deep local expertise and regional cultural awareness in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability Systems and Impact Measurement.

Sharakah has signed a cooperation agreement with Destination Sustainability for assessing the sustainability aspects of the business.

The agreement was signed by Dinkar Kishor, Deputy General Manager at Sharakah, and



Shaima al Lawati, Founder and General Manager of Destination Sustainability.

The programme aims to take the selected SMEs through an intensive evaluation of their business performance and sustainability practices including

identifying areas of improvement, which will be executed over a period of six months.

The selected SMEs will undergo a holistic evaluation with a focus on sustainability practices.

The aim is to support SMEs to operate professionally and apply the best sustainability practices. It is worth mentioning that the applications received will be filtered and the participant will be selected by panel consisting of representative from Sharakah, HSBC Bank Oman and Destination Sustainability.

On the occasion, Shaima al Lawati, Founder and General Manager of Destination Sustainability, commented saying:

"We are pleased to collaborate with HSBC Bank Oman and Sharakah for the second time to participate in implementing the Istdama programme. Through our role in this programme, we seek to evaluate the commercial projects of the participating SMEs to gain a deeper understanding of the SMEs business status and positioning in regards to the sustainability aspects that include human rights, labour practices, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, and community involvement and development.

We then shall propose areas of development as we believe in the role of these small and medium

enterprises in contributing to sustainable environmental, social and economic development of Oman and their effects through socially responsible behaviour."

Nabiha al Mandhari, Marketing Specialist at Sharakah further commented: "We encourage SMEs to utilize the opportunity to be part of the programme for the sustainability of their businesses, registration is now open to all existing SMEs from all around Oman. Interested SME can register from <http://hsbc.sharakah.om>. All interested candidates should fill the form with accuracy and authenticity information about the business before January 3, 2021."



In brief

■ FRANKFURT

**BMW AIMS FOR 20% OF ITS VEHICLES TO BE ELECTRIC BY 2023**

German luxury carmaker BMW is planning to step up its production of electric vehicles, Chief Executive Oliver Zipse told German daily *Augsburger Allgemeine*.

"We are significantly increasing the number of electric vehicles. Between 2021 and 2023, we will build a quarter of a million more electric cars than originally planned", Zipse told the newspaper. BMW wants roughly every fifth car it sells to be powered by an electric engine by 2023, Zipse said, compared to about 8 per cent this year.

The manager reiterated his call to speed up the expansion of charging infrastructure.

— Reuters

■ BERLIN

**SAP PLEDGES TO SPEND MORE ON SOCIAL, DIVERSE BUSINESSES**

SAP will try to allocate 5 per cent of its procurement spending to social enterprises and diverse businesses by 2025 to encourage greater social and environmental responsibility.

The German software group, which has 440,000 clients, appealed to other companies to join it in supporting small businesses owned and run by women or minorities.

SAP's procurement initiative follows its launch in June of a product to help firms track greenhouse gas emissions in supply chains, backing a view that being transparent about their carbon footprint will be good for business. — Reuters

■ BEIJING

**CHINA PUSHES ANT GROUP OVERHAUL IN LATEST CRACKDOWN**

China's central bank disclosed it had asked the country's payments giant Ant Group Co Ltd to shake up its lending and other consumer finance operations, the latest blow to its billionaire founder and controlling shareholder Jack Ma.

The announcement came more than a month after Chinese regulators abruptly suspended Ant's blockbuster \$37 billion initial public offering in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Chinese regulators and Communist Party officials have set about reining in Ma's sprawling financial empire after he publicly criticised the country's regulatory system in October for stifling innovation.

— Reuters

Asian markets mixed as Trump signs COVID relief bill

TOKYO: Asian markets were mixed on Monday as US President Donald Trump signed a massive coronavirus relief bill, with a boost in positive sentiment dampened by concern over a new strain of COVID-19.

Under pressure from all sides, Trump approved the stimulus package worth \$900 billion late Sunday in the United States, having delayed doing so for nearly a week.

"An otherwise quiet day in Asia has sparked to life," Jeffrey Halley, Senior Market Analyst at OANDA, said after the signing.

"The headline should provide a welcome boost to sentiment in Asia, which was likely to waver today as Chinese authorities over the weekend told Ant Financial to go back to its core payments business," he added.

Before signing the bill, Trump tweeted that he had "good news" to come — sending markets swinging higher even before the measures were approved.

Equities and oil prices have taken a hit recently as virus cases surged across the planet and a new more transmissible strain was reported in Britain, forcing governments to impose tight restrictions and lockdowns to



A businesswoman looks at a stock exchange market display screen board in downtown Tokyo financial district.

contain the disease over the festive period.

Tokyo closed 0.7 per cent higher on Monday, with Jakarta, Mumbai and Bangkok also in positive territory. Shanghai, Seoul and Singapore were flat, while Hong Kong and the Philippines slid downwards.

Sydney and Wellington were closed for a holiday.

Analysts in Tokyo said

Analysts in Tokyo said investors remained cautious after Japan reported its first cases of the new strain and closed its borders to all non-resident foreign arrivals until late January

investors remained cautious after Japan reported its first cases of the new strain and closed its borders to all non-resident foreign arrivals until late January.

The emergency US package is part of a larger spending bill that, with Trump's signature, will avoid a government shutdown on Tuesday.

The president's turnaround came after a day marked by calls

from across the political spectrum for action to avert a financial and social disaster in the world's largest economy, especially among the most vulnerable.

"For Americans that have been endlessly checking their mailboxes for a stimulus check, this is the best holiday present anyone could ask for," said Axi strategist Stephen Innes.

"The stimulus balloon will allow the markets to navigate better the number of new air pockets... due to the virus's latest variant," he added.

But with various lockdown measures in place worldwide due to the new strain, "vaccine rollout remains the key to unlocking the ultimate rally door," Innes warned.

The approval and roll-out of vaccines have boosted hopes that 2021 could bring a respite from the pandemic, which has killed more than 1.7 million people since emerging in China late last year.

But jitters remain over the new strain that emerged in Britain and reached several other European countries such as France and Sweden, as well as Japan, which on Friday said five people — all of whom had come from Britain — were confirmed infected with the new variant. — AFP

Thai protest demands help for shrimp sellers

BANGKOK: Thai protesters demonstrated on Saturday to demand more action to help seafood sellers hit by a COVID-19 outbreak as the government urged people to eat more shellfish.

Thailand's worst outbreak of the new coronavirus was reported just over a week ago, with more than 1,500 infections now linked to a shrimp market outside Bangkok.

Most of those infected have been migrant workers from Myanmar. Seafood sellers say business has fallen in a country whose economy had already been badly hit by a collapse in tourism. "We want the government to create confidence in shrimp consumption," said Piyarat Chongthep, among the scores of protesters at Government House, some of whom briefly scuffled with police. — Reuters



A vendor puts a fish into a bag at a roadside market in southern Thailand's Narathiwat province. — AFP

Gig economy workers say they can no longer survive

PARIS: Whether in Paris, Kuala Lumpur or California, gig economy workers fear they can no longer survive on meagre earnings from jobs that leave them increasingly vulnerable.

The term "gig" stretches back a century to jazz musicians who used it to refer to a one-off show but now the "gig economy" involves millions of people in all sorts of jobs, from Uber drivers to Deliveroo delivery teams.

Wissem Inal does more than 700 kilometres a week on his scooter, delivering up to 10 takeout meals in the Paris suburbs every evening.

"At the moment, with the lockdown I end up with 500 euros (\$600) a month net," said the 32-year-old who has driven for Deliveroo since 2017 but also takes jobs for Uber Eats and Stuart.

Inal has trouble seeing the "good side" of his job at



Grab delivery rider Amal Fahmi putting orders inside a thermal bag before delivering them to customers in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

the moment and criticises calculations by Deliveroo's algorithm that decide how much to offer him for jobs.

"A delivery that's worth six euros at noon is worth just three euros in the evening. You can't earn a living with this job, unless you're willing to live like a slave."

He recently joined an association of gig delivery drivers that seeks to improve working conditions.

"We should be able to defend

ourselves," he maintains.

When Erica Mighetto began driving with Lyft three years ago, "I just loved it," she said.

Her grown son had left the house and she thought it would be a great move until she found a job in bookkeeping or property management.

"I really enjoyed, you know, choosing my own hours," she said. "I thought life was good."

Mighetto lived in Sacramento but would drive more than an hour to the San Francisco area on weekends because there was more work in the richer towns.

She slept in her car or shelled out \$25 for a room.

Mighetto was pulling in \$60-\$80 an hour before expenses in 2017 but a series of rate cuts caused that to fall to \$20 at the beginning of the year and to less than \$10 in March. She finds the algorithms opaque and pernicious. — AFP

Alibaba's \$10 bn buyback plan fails to halt stock slide



The Alibaba Group logo is seen during the company's 11.11 Singles' Day global shopping festival at its headquarters in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. — Reuters file photo

BEIJING/HONG KONG: Alibaba shares slumped 9% to their lowest since June on Monday, as the firm's upsized \$10 billion buyback programme failed to ease concerns about a regulatory crackdown on co-founder Jack Ma's e-commerce and financial empire.

A sharp sell-off over two sessions has knocked almost \$116 billion off the tech giant's Hong Kong-listed shares. The downward spiral intensified when Chinese regulators announced on Thursday the launch of an antitrust investigation into Alibaba and said they would summon its Ant Group affiliate to meet.

Alibaba's US shares sank more than 15 per cent during the day.

"The antitrust investigation into Alibaba has yet to specify the penalties, which is worrying investors a lot," said Zhang Zihua, a chief investment officer of Beijing Yunyi Asset, adding a probe outcome could "greatly change" the company

valuations. Putting investors more on edge was news over the weekend that China's central bank had asked Ant to shake up its lending and other consumer finance operations.

These developments are part of a crackdown on monopolistic behaviour in China's booming Internet space in general, but Ma's business empire in particular after he publicly criticised the regulatory system for stifling innovation.

Last month, Chinese regulators abruptly suspended Ant's blockbuster \$37 billion initial public offering in Shanghai and Hong Kong, which was on track to be the world's largest, just two days before its planned debut.

"The new regulations are hurting big Internet platforms, so you see Tencent and other tech companies are also seeing their share prices going down," said Li Chengdong, a Beijing-based tech analyst.

"Alibaba now is the target of the regulators so the reaction is stronger." — Reuters

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Catch if you can

Yousuf Mohammed al Shanfari, Managing Director of Around the Ocean, also admits Salalah's strength in marine wealth. He calls for a pro-active approach to promote Salalah as an important marine entertainment destination... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

LIFESTYLE



SEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY WHO ADORES ELON MUSK IS SENSATION ON UGANDAN AVIATION SCENE

A 7-year-old Ugandan boy has become a sensation in his country with his precocious display of aircraft knowledge and budding flying skills...

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MOVIES



'MINARI' COMPETES AT NEXT YEAR'S GOLDEN GLOBES

Asian-American film-makers on Wednesday expressed dismay that South Korean drama "Minari" will compete for honours at next year's Golden Globes in the foreign language category, rather than the more high-profile best drama field...

Story on Page 19

READ



JOKES FOR THE GUNMEN

BY MAZEN MAAROUF

The stories in Jokes for the Gunmen are set around civil war and family crisis, told in the jittery, manic and surreal style of someone trying to joke with a gunman while fearing for one's life.

HERITAGE



THREE RESEARCH STUDIES TO HIGHLIGHT THE OMANI CULTURAL HERITAGE

The 'Linguistic Heritage' project have funded three research studies, as listed below...

Story on Page 20

CELEBRATE



FRANCE'S FAVOURITE TOUGH GUY BRASSEUR DIES AT 84

Claude Brasseur, one of France's most beloved character actors – who died on Tuesday aged 84 – lived as colourful a life off-screen as on it as a daredevil parachutist, Olympic bobsledder and Paris-Dakar rally champion.



CATCH IF YOU CAN

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Having different shades warm and cold currents, Dhofar Governorate is home to different fish species. It surprises section of visitors when they find huge difference in sea temperature from one place to another, and while digging for reasons they find presence of so many marine species spread all over.

Dhofar's coastal cities have huge deposit of marine heritage. Marine experts call for pro-active approach to make marine tourism more popular among the tourists, who visit Salalah mainly for authentic Arab experience.

The cities of Salalah and Sadah hold special importance among the marine activity lovers because of variety they store. "While Salalah water is normally warm like most of the places in Dhofar, seawater in Sadah gives an entirely different feeling of cool and chill. A visitor looks for searching for a nearby boat after a dive into the sea due to unexpected chill that he gets," said a tourist from Germany who loves fishing.

Yousuf Mohammed al Shanfari, Managing Director



of Around the Ocean, also admits Salalah's strength in marine wealth. He calls for a pro-active approach to promote Salalah as an important marine entertainment destination.

Due to his drive to do something different for this sector in Salalah, Yousuf al Shanfari's marine activity enterprise is treated as one of the success stories for many others to

emulate.

For him Salalah is one of the best locations for recreational fishing in the Sultanate. "This is fishing for pleasure as also for competition and adds quickly to suggest that this area is entirely different from commercial fishing."

Yousuf started dolphin watching service with one boat in 2011 from Raysut Fishing Port with the help of

some friends. He did not have any proper office to engage with his clients, but his service for Salalah was so unique that it picked up with word of mouth and people started contacting him.

He gives full credit to hard work and clarity of vision while choosing his career and becoming successful. "I suggest entrepreneurs to come out with their own plans

and not a copy paste of any other plan thinking 'that plan is successful with him and it will be successful with me also'. Too many projects of same nature have limited scope of becoming successful simply because there are many competitors for the same cake."

He never gets tired while fishing because he has been fishing from his childhood

and he has special attraction for sea and sea related activities. From no office in 2011, Yousuf has two offices at prime locations — one at Al Baleed Resort Salalah and another at Hawana Salalah.

Yousuf keeps on motivating young entrepreneurs and takes active part in events that demands promotion of Salalah tourism as an icon of successful entrepreneur.



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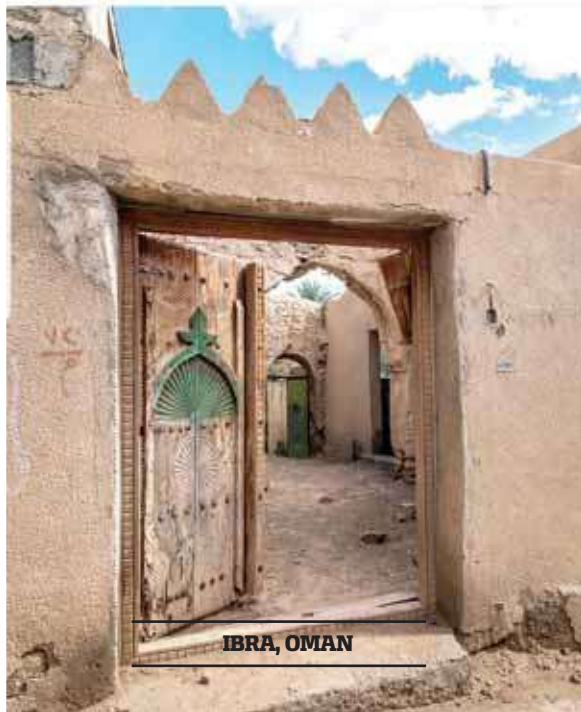
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LIFESTYLE

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Seven-year-old boy who adores Elon Musk is sensation on Ugandan aviation scene

A 7-year-old Ugandan boy has become a sensation in his country with his precocious display of aircraft knowledge and budding flying skills.

Graham Shema has been interviewed on local television and his name is prefixed in newspapers and on social media with "Captain". Germany's ambassador and the country's transport minister have invited him for meetings.

A lover of math and science, the student has flown as a trainee three times on a Cessna 172.

He says he wants to be a pilot and an astronaut, and someday travel to Mars. "My role model is Elon Musk," said the boy, a pilot's white shirt and black slacks hug-

ging his small frame.

"I like Elon Musk because I want to learn with him about space, to go with him in space and also to get a handshake."

Musk founded SpaceX and the private rocket company recently launched two Americans into orbit and hopes to one day send humans to Mars.

One recent morning at Uganda's Entebbe International Airport, his instructor asked him to explain how the engines worked on a Bombardier CRJ900 plane parked on the tarmac.

His voice struggling to rise above the roar of a plane's running engines, Shema rattled off the answer: "The inlet tubes

suck in the air and inject it into the compressor, the compressor squeezes it with the fans, after squeezing it with the fans, it becomes hot," Shema said, playfully gesturing and proceeding to detail how an engine creates thrust.

Shema's curiosity for the flight was piqued by a freak incident.

When he was 3 years old, a police helicopter flew so low to the ground that it blew off the roof of his grandmother's house on the outskirts of the Ugandan capital Kampala while he was playing outside.

"It triggered something in his mind," said his mother, travel agent Shamim Mwanaisha, 29. Her son began peppering her with

endless questions about how planes work, she said.

Last year, she contacted a local aviation academy and Shema began lessons at home on aircraft parts and aviation vocabulary. After five months of coursework, Mwanaisha paid for practical flying lessons for her son.

"I felt like a bird flying up," Shema said of his first flight. He had never flown on a plane before.

He flew three times as co-pilot between January and March before the pandemic stopped his practice.

He has since been focusing on aviation theory, and immersing himself in videos about aviation and space exploration on his virtual reality viewer. — Reuters

MOVIES

'Minari' competes at next year's Golden Globes



Asian-American filmmakers on Wednesday expressed dismay that South Korean drama "Minari" will compete for honours at next year's Golden Globes in the foreign-language category, rather than the more high-profile best drama field.

"Minari," the story of a Korean family that moves to Arkansas to start a farm in the 1980s, won the top prize at the Sundance film festival earlier this year and is expected to be a strong contender in the 2021 awards season. Its cast and director are all Asian-Americans and the dialogue is predominantly Korean but under longstanding rules drawn up by the organisers of the Golden Globes, contenders for its best drama award must feature at least 50% English dialogue.

"It's a story about an immigrant family, in America, pursuing the American dream. We really need to change these antiquated rules that characterise American as only English-speaking," tweeted Lulu Wang, the Chinese-American director of "The Farewell." Former "Hawaii Five-0" actor Daniel Dae Kim

said on Twitter the rule felt like "the film equivalent of being told to go back to your country when that country is actually America." Jacob Oller, who covers movies at Paste Magazine, was among some who called the rules racist.

Nominations for the Golden Globes will be announced in February. The Oscars have different rules, allowing South Korean drama satire "Parasite" to become the first foreign-language film to win the coveted Academy Award for best picture in February. "Parasite" was excluded from the best drama race at the Golden Globes in January but won in the foreign language field.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, whose members from publications around the world choose the Golden Globe nominees and winners, declined comment on Wednesday and the cast and director of "Minari" could not be reached for comment. Hollywood has made efforts to increase diversity behind and in front of the camera and at award shows since 2016 when all 20 Oscar-nominated actors were white for the second straight year.

— Reuters



Three research studies to highlight the Omani cultural heritage

The 'Linguistic Heritage' project is considered as one of the important projects in the Omani Cultural Heritage Strategic Research Program of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth. The linguistic phenomenon in Oman, with its richness and diversity, is an essential part of the culture and heritage of the country, as seen in its proverbs, poems, coined expressions and other ancient linguistic materials to name a few.

The programme aims to record, preserve and classify as much of the oral linguistic material as possible by scientific methods, as well as collecting archaeological linguistic writings on gravestones, rock walls and ancient inscriptions, and working to show the links between the components of the Omani linguistic heritage.

The 'Linguistic Heritage' project has funded three research studies, as listed below:

1 Inventorying and documenting inscriptions, drawings and archaeological writings on rock walls, tombstones and building walls in Wilayat Al Amarat

Dr Saif bin Yousef al Aghbari, head of the research project team, stated that the idea of the project started by searching for the beginnings of writing in the Omani civilisation, which began with rock drawings, then evolved into inscriptions and symbols, then into the current Arabic writing, and counting these discoveries, collecting and documenting them in accordance to the scientific classifications used in such studies.

Dr Saif al Aghbari maintained that the project is expected to achieve a set of results, such as providing the geographic and astronomical identification of sites that include archaeological drawings on rock walls in Wilayat Al Amarat as well as providing their descriptive data and documenting them. The descriptive and photographic



documentation will facilitate its availability and reference by researchers and those interested in this field.

2 Documentary research of the Kumzari language spoken vernacularly in the Sultanate of Oman

For this project, Dr Dola al Gady, head of the research project team, explained that this project is considered the first study that takes a scientific approach to archive and documenting the Kumzari language by a specialised team consisting of academic researchers specialising in linguistic studies, in addition to involving

individuals from the same language community and speakers of both Kumzari and Arabic languages. The project idea is to document the Kumzari language spoken in the Sultanate of Oman in the form of an electronic archive that includes various refereed language materials (text, audio and visual) in order to make them available to the community, specialists and researchers for research purposes and to learn about this language and the culture behind it.

The research will reflect the richness of Omani culture and enhance scientific diversity in the fields of Omani language and literature. It will also encourage specialists to

document and publish stories and various forms of oral literature and children's stories, which will ensure the continuity of these languages for future generations and the preservation of the cultural and literary diversity in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Dola al Gady added that this research project will produce a specific dictionary that includes at least four thousand terms written in both English and Arabic. The vocabulary will be classified according to topics related to the geographical nature, life and cultural aspects of Kumzari speakers. This work will also complement and catalyse the efforts of some members of the local

community who have worked to collect and transcribe the vocabulary, sounds and developments of the language over the past few years.

3 Agricultural terms in the dialect of the people of Rustaq: A lexical study

As for the final project, Dr Zahir bin Marhoon al Dawoodi, head of the research project team, stated that the project traces agricultural expressions and studies them as a lexical study in the dialect of the people of Rustaq due to the city's interest in agriculture, its diversity of agricultural crops, and its diversity of agricultural and animal imports since ancient times. He elaborated that the civilisational, urban and technological developments of recent times have contributed to the disappearance of traditional terms and idioms in agriculture. The project, therefore, seeks to trace these expressions and to frame them in a specific dictionary that deals with agricultural expressions in all their aspects in order to preserve them from being lost.