

P9
HAMILTON REELS
IN VERSTAPPEN
AGAIN

P13
KUSAMA'S DOTS, FLOWERS
BREATHE LIFE INTO
PANDEMIC NEW YORK

P16
ME ENERGY DEMAND TO
GROW BY 3.35 PER CENT
ANNUALLY TO 2035

HM and leaders exchange Eid al Fitr greetings

MUSCAT: On the advent of Eid al Fitr, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has exchanged cables of greetings with leaders of the sisterly Arab and friendly Islamic countries.

In his cables, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments along with his best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to them and the peoples of their countries.

His Majesty wished them further progress and prosperity, praying to the Almighty Allah to achieve all aspirations of progress and prosperity for their peoples under their leadership and for the return of this and similar occasions on them and all



HM, LEADERS EXCHANGE GREETINGS OVER PHONE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday exchanged Eid al Fitr greetings through phone calls with Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar, and King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of Bahrain.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to them, praying to the Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions on them and peoples of their countries at a time they have achieved progress and welfare. His Majesty also wished all Muslims plentiful bounties and blessings.

TURN TO P2

Muslims around the globe with blessings and bounties.

In their cables, the leaders expressed their sincere greetings along with their best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty, grant him good health, happiness and long life to achieve further progress and prosperity for his people under his wise leadership. They also prayed to the Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty, the Omani people and the Arab and Muslim nations with welfare and well-being.

TURN TO P2

Preparations under way for mass vaccination drive from June

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Preparations are under way at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), one of the main venues for the mass national vaccination campaign from June.

A team lead by Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary,

Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, and Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, visited the OCEC to oversee the preparations, including installation of the necessary equipment.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health (MoH) said that administering the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine will be postponed until June.

The available vaccines will be given to the high diploma students prior to their final examinations.

As of May 5, over 72,000 people have received the second dose of the vaccine.

TURN TO P3

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INSIDE

TALIBAN DECLARE EID HOLIDAY
CEASEFIRE AS VIOLENCE SOARS

P6

ITALY'S SALVINI STRUGGLES AS
RIGHTISTALLY GROWS STRONGER

P8

Alesco keen to follow Omani Renaissance model

TUNIS: Dr Mohamed Ould Amar, Director-General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alesco), said that the Arab organisation appreciates the model of Omani renaissance which, he said, brought about comprehensive development in all spheres of life, notably in the fields of education and technology, while at the same time safeguarding the heritage.

The Alesco is keen to tap the Omani model in its endeavours to enrich the march of joint Arab action, he added.

Ould Amar described the Sultanate as an active member of the Alesco which participates continuously in all of the organisation's conferences and educational, intellectual and scientific events.

The Alesco often approaches Oman's National Committee for Education, Culture and Sciences to benefit from its expertise in various spheres, said Ould Amar, adding that this National Committee is an active member of the Alesco's consultative committees.

TURN TO P2



Dr Mohamed Ould Amar

The Alesco is keen to tap the Omani model in its endeavours to enrich the march of joint Arab action

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HM and leaders exchange Eid al Fitr greetings

FROM PAGE 1
His Majesty the Sultan exchanged greetings on this occasion with King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of Bahrain, Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar, Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of Jordan, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, President Kais Saied of Tunisia, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria, President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan, President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo of Somalia, and President Dr Barham Ahmed Salih of Iraq.

His Majesty also exchanged greetings with President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, President Othman Ghazali of the Union of the Comoros, Dr Mohamed al Menfi, Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya, President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of Egypt, President Mohamed Ould Sheikh Ghazouani of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Field Marshal Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, President of Yemen, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam, Sultan Abdullah

His Majesty greets Qatar Emir, Bahrain King, Kuwait Emir over phone

FROM PAGE 1
In their turn, Shaikh Tamim and King Hamad expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan. They prayed to the Almighty Allah to grant His Majesty good health, happiness and long life, and for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty to achieve further aspirations of progress and prosperity for the Omani people. They also wished the Arab and Islamic nations abundant blessings and bounties.

Sultan Ahmad Shah, King of Malaysia, President Dr Ilham Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan, President Dr Mohammed Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan, and President Joko Widodo of of Indonesia.
His Majesty also exchanged greetings with President Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan, President Dr Hassan Rouhani of Iran, President Dr Arif Alvi of Pakistan, President Mohammad Abdul Hamid of Bangladesh, President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov of Turkmenistan, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, President Samia Hassan of United Republic of Tanzania, President Ali

His Majesty the Sultan also exchanged greetings over phone with Shaikh Nawaf al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait.
During the telephone conversation, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, long life and happiness to the Emir of Kuwait, and praying to Almighty Allah to return the occasion, while the friendly Kuwaiti people have achieved their aspirations for more progress and prosperity and the

Bongo Ondimba of the Gabonese Republic, President Adama Barrow of Gambia, President Macky Sall of Senegal, President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan, President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Republic of the Maldives, President Bazoum of the Republic of Niger, and President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria.
His Majesty the Sultan has also received similar cables of greetings on this blessed occasion from heirs apparent, heads of governments, senior officials in the Arab and Islamic worlds, their highnesses,

whole Muslim population more blessing and bounties.
The Emir of Kuwait expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan praying to Allah Almighty to perpetuate His bounties on His Majesty and grant him long life and happiness, praying for the turn of the auspicious occasion as the Omani people have achieved their aspirations for more progress and prosperity and the Arab and Islamic worlds more blessing and bounties.
— ONA

ministers, advisers, members of the State Council, members of Majlis Ashshura, under-secretaries, Omani ambassadors abroad, ambassadors of Arab and Islamic nations accredited to the Sultanate, shaikhs, dignitaries and citizens.
In their cables, the well-wishers expressed their heartfelt greetings along with best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to His Majesty the Sultan, praying to the Almighty Allah for the return of this blessed occasion on His Majesty for many years to come, Oman and its people with further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty.
— ONA

Monitoring low pressure over Arabian Sea: CAA



MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said that it is following indications of a possible low pressure in the coming days.
This is one of the tropical low-pressure situations this annual season and the CAA is following the developments as per the approved procedures.
Meanwhile, the Indian Meteorology Department on Monday said that a pressure area is likely to take shape over the

southeast parts of the sea and the adjoining Indian Ocean region around May 14.
“It is likely to become more marked over the subsequent 48 hours.
The likely formation of the low-pressure area is due to a cyclonic circulation extending up to 3.1 km above mean sea level which lies over the equatorial Indian Ocean and adjoining southern parts of the Arabian Sea,” the Indian Met said.

Alesco keen to follow Omani Renaissance model

FROM PAGE 1
Ould Amar commended the Sultanate’s remarkable contribution in formulating the “Arab Theatre Development Strategy” endorsed by Arab Culture Ministers in Riyadh in 2016. Quoting an example in this context, he said that Oman played a leading role in composing collective research on common Arab head gears and their implications. Ould Amar added that the Sultanate hosted a number of Alesco’s training

workshops on building capacities in the field of safeguarding cultural heritage.
Speaking about future plans of the Alesco, Ould Amar said that the Arab organisation seeks to intensify the use of technology in developing education, with emphasis on the 4IR (fourth industrial revolution), artificial intelligence techniques and methods of empowering children through the introduction of digitised innovative skills at an early age.
— ONA

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No citizen will lose right to acquire land

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The stability of families in Oman is a priority and the new regulations will reduce the waiting period for a family that does not own a home or land suitable for construction, said Dr Khalfan bin Said bin Mubarak al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.
“Giving Omani families the right to own property is one of the most important objectives of the new law,” he said.
In an interview on Sunday, he said that the last decree was issued in 1984, and living conditions and realities were then completely different.
He said that old housing applications will not be cancelled, and we will deal with the matter professionally.
“After Eid Al Fitr, the ministry will launch a programme to study



land requests and create a specific mechanism to determine the eligibility. Over the past 10 years, 334,000 plots were distributed in various governorates, and women received 78 per cent, but the urbanization rate did not exceed seven per cent.”
He said around 4,000 plots of land are now ready for distribution.
The minister clarified that the law does not link the Omani family to marriage, as every person who has never been

married has the right to submit an application. “No citizen will lose his or her right to acquire land, but it will bring them closer to obtaining land.”
He added that even citizens with housing loans have the right to obtain residential land.
“There are many requests for social housing, and the ministry has distributed 500 social housing at a value of RO 15 million, and we have the housing aid program with a budget of RO 20 million.”

OCEC readies for national vaccination programme



MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, and Maithaa bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah,

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, on Monday visited the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

The visit aimed to inspect the workflow and the preparedness for the national vaccination campaign against Covid-19. The visit was also aimed

to review the decision of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic regarding the use

of the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre as a vaccination centre in the Governorate of Muscat in June. The Minister of Health has

also said that schools, stadiums and other public places in Oman will be used as centres to distribute the Covid-19 vaccine to people.

Preparations under way for mass vaccination drive

FROM PAGE 1

MORE VACCINES

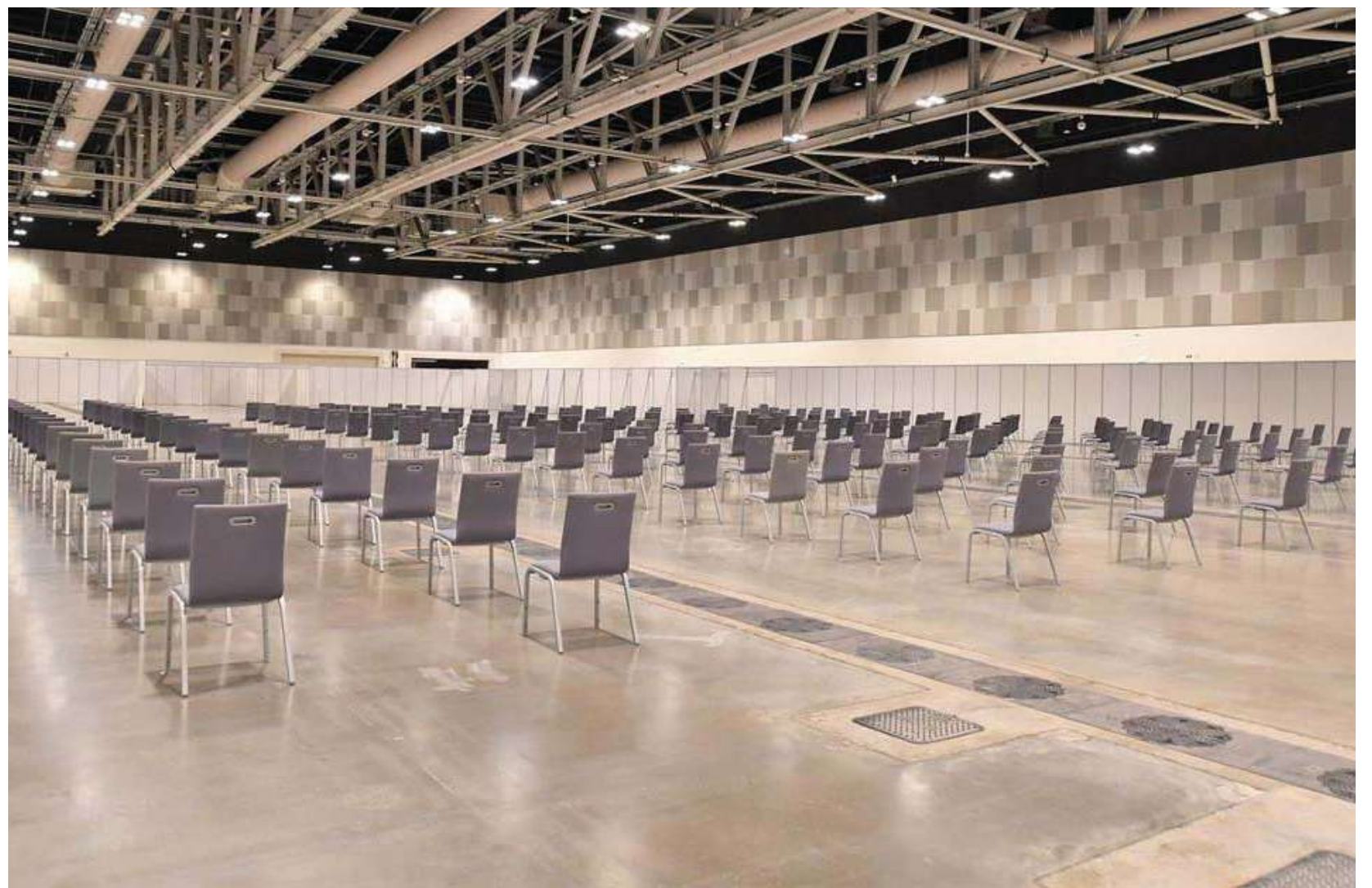
The ministerial committee on immunisation has said that more than one million doses of vaccines will be received in June, and the number of vaccinated people will reach 1.5 million by the end of June, including new target groups.

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

sectors, ports, airports, and private sector institutions.

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

The committee pointed to the formation of mobile teams to immunise all workers in government institutions and to provide Covid-19 vaccines to the private sector through clinics in large companies and in private health institutions licensed to administer the vaccine.



High PCR test costs could stall travel recovery

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

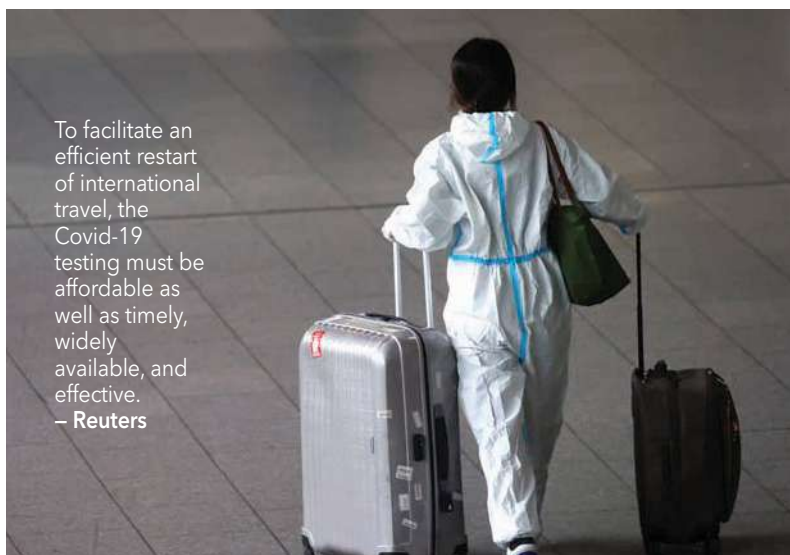
The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has called on governments to ensure that high costs for Covid-19 testing should not be a travel hindrance for individuals and families. To facilitate an efficient restart of international travel, the Covid-19 testing must be affordable as well as timely, widely available, and effective.

It may be noted that a PCR test costs around RO 25 and above in Oman and some private clinics charge up to RO 40, depending on the urgency to get results. Currently, all passengers to Oman aged 15 years and below are required to undergo PCR tests.

Outbound passengers from Oman are also required to do PCR tests two-three days before their departure.

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

Of the markets surveyed, only France complied with the World Health Organisation (WHO)



To facilitate an efficient restart of international travel, the Covid-19 testing must be affordable as well as timely, widely available, and effective.
— Reuters

recommendation for the state to bear the cost of testing for travellers.

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

Even taking the average of the low-end costs, adding PCR testing to average airfares would dramatically increase the cost of flying for individuals. Pre-crisis, the average one-way airline ticket, including taxes and charges, cost \$200 (2019 data). A \$90 PCR test raises the cost by 45 per cent to

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

The impact of the costs of Covid-19 testing on family travel would be even more severe. Based on average ticket prices (\$200) and average low-end PCR testing (\$90) twice each way, a journey for four that would have cost \$1,600 pre-COVID, could nearly double to \$3,040—with \$1440 being testing costs.

“As travel restrictions are lifted

in domestic markets, we see strong demand. The same can be expected in international markets. But that could be perilously compromised by testing costs — particularly PCR testing. Raising the cost of any product will significantly stifle demand. The impact will be greatest for short-haul trips (up to 1,100 km), with average fares of \$105, the tests will cost more than the flight. That's not what you want to propose to travellers as we emerge from this crisis. Testing costs must be better managed. That's critical if governments want to save tourism and transport jobs; avoid limiting travel freedoms to the wealthy,” said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director-General.

The World Health Organisation's International Health Regulations stipulate that states should not charge for testing or vaccination required for travel or the issuance of certificates. The WHO Covid Emergency Committee recently reiterated this position, calling on governments to reduce the financial burden on international travellers of complying with testing requirements and any other public health measures implemented by countries.

554 offenders released through Fak Khorba

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

A total of 554 people held guilty for minor financial offences from 34 courts of the Sultanate were released through an annual charitable programme, according to the Oman Lawyers Association.

Till last week, 466 people who were found guilty of small financial offences, were released through the concentrated work of the Association on Fak Korba programme, supported by several good Samaritans who pooled in money for their release.

On Thursday, 88 people held guilty of the financial offences of dishonour of cheques were released as part of the 8th edition of the initiative, which was launched on April 1, 2021, and will run until May 31, 2021. The total acquittal will reach 554.

“Omanis always demonstrate their solidarity with the suffering people and those who are punished for unintentional mistakes and we generously help those in need,” Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, Chairman

of Oman Lawyers Association.

These 554 prisoners were jailed for civil, commercial, legal or labour, financial claims through 34 courts in the governorates of the Sultanate.

The released cases so far covered ten governorates namely Muscat (132), Dhofar (23), South Al Sharqiyah (31), North Al Sharqiyah (67), Al Wusta (5), North Al Batinah (134), South Al Batinah (60), Al Dakhiliyah (37), Al Dhahirah (31), Al Buraimi (26), and Musandam (8).

As much as 20 per cent of the released were residents, while 80 per cent constituted Omani citizens, 40 per cent females and 60 per cent men.

“The Fak Korba initiative is an indication of the state's willingness to help those prisoners whose circumstances lead them to prison while seeking to provide a decent life for their families. We will continue our efforts to achieve the goals, with the help of individuals and institutions because we believe that everyone deserves a second chance,” adds Dr Mohammed al Zadjali.



THE NIGHT OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE



A boy takes part in evening prayers called 'Taraweeh' on Laylat-ul-Qadr or Night of Decree. – Reuters

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

There is a night in the holy month of Ramadhan, the 9th month in Hijri year and this night, which is one of the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadhan, is a night that is more powerful than 1,000 months when the distance between the Creator and His People will be zilch.

Believers engage themselves in more prayers, supplications and in reciting the holy Quran, doing charity work and giving Zakath.

But, what are the exceptional features of this particular night? Scholars say it is the night when the Decree on every

human being is scripted, and there should be constant efforts to earn his contentment by doing good things.

One of the blessings that are given by Allah Almighty to His servants is the Laylat-ul-Qadr, the blessed night, also known as the 'Night of Decree' or the 'Night of Power'.

The night is so unique and significant that Allah s.w.t. dedicated an entire chapter of the Qur'an to it.

Almighty Allah says in Surah Al-Qadr:

"Indeed, We sent the Quran down during the Night of Decree. And what can make you know what is the Night of Decree? The Night of Decree is better

than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter. Peace it is until the emergence of dawn."

(Surah Al-Qadr, 97:1-5)
"Ramadhan is a month that is filled with immeasurable blessings, a month of purification of the hearts, minds and souls and a month when spirituality thrives and flourishes," says Hatim Abdissalam, religious scholar and one who runs Al Istiqama TV.

So, as we seek the Night of Decree in the last few days of Ramadhan, it's thought-provoking to learn what makes Laylat-ul-Qadr exceptional.

1. The date of the Night of Decree is

Unknown and falls within the final ten nights of Ramadhan, and as believed by many on the odd nights. The Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. said,

"Search for Laylat-ul-Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten nights of Ramadan." (Sahih Al-Bukhari)

2. The Holy Qur'an was revealed on this night and that is the biggest virtue associated with Laylat-ul-Qadr. Allah has bestowed the Quran upon humankind as a gift and as a source of guidance. Besides mentioning in the first verse of Surah Al-Qadr, Allah s.w.t. says in Surah Ad-Dukhan:

3. The 1,000 times higher reward is another fact that makes the night of

Laylat-ul-Qadr exceptional. If we realise the value of it, every act of righteous deeds and worship completed on this single night are rewarded a minimum of at least 83 years of worship, which is equivalent to an entire lifetime.

4. The quick acceptance of supplications makes it even sweeter. As is said in the Surathul Qadr, the earth on that night will be flooded and occupied with so many angels that it becomes congested and pressured. And because it is filled with celestial beings of light and blessings, the earth is voided of every evil and calamity and becomes exposed to spiritual pressure. Sins are forgiven and supplications are accepted.

Hundreds hurt in Jerusalem clashes



A Palestinian argues with Israeli security forces in Jerusalem's Old City ahead of a planned march to commemorate Israel's takeover of Jerusalem. – AFP

JERUSALEM: More than 300 people were wounded Monday in renewed clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police in Jerusalem, Palestinian medics said, as an Israeli celebration of its 1967 takeover of the holy city threatened to further inflame tensions.

Palestinians hurled rocks at Israeli officers in riot gear who fired rubber bullets, stun grenades and tear gas on the esplanade of the revered Al Aqsa mosque, a correspondent at the scene said, following a night of sporadic clashes.

Loud booms and angry screams echoed from the ancient stone walls of the compound, revered by both Jews and Muslims, where tear gas filled the air and the ground was littered with rocks, stun grenade fragments and other debris.

The violence was the latest in days of the worst such disturbances in Jerusalem since 2017, fuelled by a long-running bid by Jewish settlers to take over nearby Palestinian homes in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

Despite mounting international condemnation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he supported the Israeli police force's "just struggle" amid the Jerusalem clashes.

"We insist on guaranteeing the (religious) rights of all, and this from time to time requires the stability and steadfastness that the Israeli police and our security forces are currently displaying," he said.

Police said Jewish "prayers continue as usual" at the Wailing Wall, which adjoins the esplanade, adding that "we will not let extremists threaten the safety of the public".

The UN Security Council was to meet at Tunisia's request later on Monday on the unrest that has escalated since the last Friday prayers of Ramadhan.

A key court hearing scheduled for Monday on Sheikh Jarrah, the flashpoint east Jerusalem neighbourhood at the centre of the property dispute, has meanwhile been postponed.

There were fears of further violence ahead of a planned march Monday by Israelis to commemorate the takeover of Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War, an anniversary known as "Jerusalem Day" in the Jewish state. Israeli police had, as of Sunday, approved the march, which was re-scheduled to start around 5 pm.

The Palestinian Red Crescent put the toll at 305 injured, including more than 200 who were hospitalised, five of them in critical condition.

Three people lost one eye each, said surgeon Firas Abu Akari at east Jerusalem's Maqassed hospital.

Near the Old City, a car carrying Israelis was pelted with stones, lost control and rammed into Palestinians, according to police and footage from a journalist on the scene.

Once stopped, the vehicle was attacked by around a dozen people who continued to hurl projectiles at the passengers before an Israeli policeman dispersed the crowd by firing into the air. The Israeli police reported nine injuries in their ranks.

The United States expressed "serious concerns" about the situation.

In a White House statement, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan "encouraged the Israeli government to pursue appropriate measures to ensure calm during

The violence was the latest in days of the worst such disturbances in Jerusalem since

2017

Jerusalem Day commemorations".

The Israeli role in the hostilities — especially Friday's clashes at Al Aqsa, has met widespread criticism. All six Arab nations that have diplomatic ties with Israel — Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — have condemned the Jewish state.

In Jordan, the custodian of Jerusalem's holy Islamic and Christian sites, King Abdullah II condemned "Israeli violations and escalatory practices at the blessed Al Aqsa mosque".

Indonesia urged "the UN Security Council to take measures on the repeated violations carried out by Israel".

The Middle East quartet of envoys from the EU, Russia, the US and the UN — and Pope Francis — have all called for calm.

Much of the recent violence stems from a long-running legal effort by Jewish settler groups to evict several Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah.

A lower court ruling this year backing the settlers' decades-old claim to the plots infuriated Palestinians. — AFP



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Chairman's Report For the three months period ended 31 March 2021

Dear Shareholders,

After Compliments,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the unaudited result of parent and group for the three months period ended March 31, 2021.

The summarized operating result for the above period is as under:

Details	Parent			Consolidated		
	31-03-21 RO'000	31-03-20 RO'000	Variance % YOY	31-03-21 RO'000	31-03-20 RO'000	Variance % YOY
Sales	2,135	1,809	0.18	3,981	4,029	(0.01)
Cost of sales	(1,175)	(936)	(0.26)	(2,904)	(2,618)	(0.11)
Gross profit	960	873	0.10	1,077	1,411	(0.24)
Selling and distribution expenses	(252)	(209)	(0.21)	(442)	(390)	(0.13)
General and administrative expenses	(303)	(242)	(0.25)	(475)	(442)	(0.07)
Operating profit	405	422	(0.04)	160	579	(0.72)
Finance charges	(16)	(19)	0.16	(638)	(800)	(0.20)
Other income	71	94	(0.24)	14	123	(0.89)
Share of loss of Joint Venture	-	-	-	(105)	(3)	34.00
Profit before taxation	460	497	(0.07)	(569)	(101)	4.63
Taxation	(55)	(75)	0.27	(55)	(75)	0.27
Profit for the period	405	422	(0.04)	(624)	(176)	2.55
Profit attributable to parent co. shareholders				(152)	103	(2.48)
Share of profit/(loss) attributable to minority shareholders				(472)	(279)	0.69

1. Performance Overview of Parent Company

The company consistently maintained the capacity utilization of the plant at high level and the company achieved the over 99.51% capacity utilization during first 3 months of 2021 (2020-103.47%).

- The higher capacity utilization enabled to optimize the selling price to key customers wherever possible and this is likely to lead higher customer retention and improved billing in the coming years especially after commencement of commercial operations of our brown field expansion.
- During first three months of 2021, the higher sales volume to a greater extent compensated the lower selling price as compared to the similar period of 2020 which resulted in marginally lower net profit during first three months of 2021.
- The overall sales volume increased during first three months of 2021 by 12% owing to improved demand mainly for Caustic lye, Hydrochloric Acid and Calcium Chloride.
- Selling prices were marginally declined during first three months of 2021 for all the products due to the fluctuation in global caustic price and Oil prices.
- Operating profit was lower due to one time impact on director remuneration paid for the year 2020 as per revised CMA guidelines.

Taking into the account the competitive environment, continued COVID-19 pandemic and falling international price of our product, the profitability of the parent company to be considered satisfactory.

2. Performance overview of Subsidiaries

2.1 Union Chlorine LLC (UAE)

For the first three months of 2021, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 136K. After interest, depreciation, and Joint venture share of loss of RO 495K the net loss was RO 359K. The parent company's share of loss including its 100% subsidiary (OIDC) is RO 215K. Revenue was lower due to lower international price of caustic flakes. (US\$ 349 in Q1-2021 from US\$ 409.00 in Q1-2020 a decline of 15%)

Amount RO ('000)			
Particulars	Q1 2021	Q1 2020	
Revenue	1,333	1,509	
EBITDA	136	449	
Loss after Tax	-359	-157	

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 March 2021

	Parent		Consolidated	
	31/03/2021 RO'000	31/12/2020 RO'000	31/03/2021 RO'000	31/12/2020 RO'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Goodwill	-	-	74	74
Property, plant and equipment	14,190	12,208	76,982	75,452
Investment in subsidiaries	12,809	12,809	-	-
Subordinated Loan	767	767	-	-
Investment in Joint Venture	-	-	2,815	2,921
Right of use assets	787	643	2,489	2,274
Total non-current assets	28,553	26,427	82,360	80,721
Current assets				
Inventories and consumables	755	910	2,228	2,515
Trade and other receivables	2,978	3,018	5,709	5,514
Cash and bank balances	2,937	2,553	3,281	3,657
Total current assets	6,670	6,481	11,218	11,686
Total assets	35,223	32,908	93,578	92,407
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	6,810	6,810	6,810	6,810
Statutory reserve	2,848	2,848	2,848	2,848
General reserve	800	800	800	800
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	(154)	(170)
Retained earnings	16,294	16,741	11,093	12,097
Equity attributable to the Parent Company's shareholders	26,752	27,199	21,397	22,385
Capital contribution from Non-controlling interest	-	-	6,355	6,355
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(386)	75
Total equity	26,752	27,199	27,366	28,815
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	2,836	1,433	47,366	43,929
Liability on land lease non current	783	630	2,468	2,207
End of service benefits	149	141	266	254
Retentions due to contractors	-	-	-	-
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	258	183
Deferred tax liability	635	641	635	641
Total non-current liabilities	4,403	2,845	48,140	47,214
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	3,383	2,217	9,068	6,392
Liability on land lease current	54	58	105	100
Retentions due to contractors	-	-	-	1,494
Current portion – Term Loan	226	245	4,659	5,821
Short term borrowings	-	-	982	2,127
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	-	100
Provision for income tax	405	344	405	344
Total current liabilities	4,068	2,864	18,072	16,378
Total liabilities	8,471	5,709	66,212	63,592
Total equity and liabilities	35,223	32,908	93,578	92,407
Net asset per share	0.393	0.399	0.314	0.329

Management is taking all measures to enhance sales to end-users as well increase value added products. Continuous improvement in the cost of production due to the adopted cost cutting measures taken by the management and the continuous reduction of electricity tariff among all.

However, the continued lower selling prices of the products linked to the global prices of caustic lye and caustic flakes (which were low) on account of overall market conditions and COVID-19 Pandemic impacted our ability to meet the targeted revenue.

The company is mainly focusing on long term supplies to the government, major oil and gas producer and private companies. Recently a major contract was awarded by one of the Oil and gas producer in UAE.

2.2 Gulf Chlorine LLC (Qatar)

For the first three months of 2021, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 71K. After interest, depreciation, and Joint venture share of loss of RO 741K the net loss was RO 670K. The parent company's share of loss is RO 342K.

Amount RO ('000)		
Particulars	Q1 2021	Q1 2020
Revenue	633	871
EBITDA	71	212
Loss after Tax	-670	-440

With the projected commissioning of the Calcium Chloride Plant by Q2 2021 by the joint venture "United Chemicals", will help us enhance the plant capacity utilization and improve performance.

The Company is about to enter a non-breakable sole supply contract with major MNC in oil & Gas sector for supply of our products for 18 months starting from May 2021. Also, the company has further strengthened its long-term agreements and position with the major players in Qatar and targeting more governmental bodies and leading entities in the market for a sustainable products supply. Furthermore, we are striving to further widen its export market in the region. The management has signed a new contract for supply of 3,000MT of HCL per month to Saudi, execution of which will start once the land border with Saudi opens.

2.3 Oman Industrial Development Company SAOC

Oman Industrial Development Company is fully owned by Oman Chlorine and the company holds an 11.1% economic interest in Union Chloride LLC – Abu Dhabi. posted loss of RO 1399K- for the first three months Q1 2021 (RO. 840/- for 2020).

3. Outlook

a. Parent:

The parent company awarded the contract for the brownfield expansion of the existing Chloro Alkali plant from 45 TPD to 75 TPD and for new Calcium Chloride plant with the capacity of 85 TPD.

The required project finance has been provided by a leading Islamic bank based on long-term loan of 65% and the balance 35% is equity contribution from internal accruals. The commercial production of the project is scheduled to commence during Q2 2021.

The above expansion will lead to cost optimization and enable the parent company to cater local demand and compete effectively with imports in the local market and enable to offer better price to export customers.

b. Subsidiaries

Union Chlorine LLC

Management is taking all measures to enhance sales to end users as well increase value added products. The company has won major order for supply of one product from a major oil and gas producer for a period of five years and under discussion to enter medium to long term contracts with several end users for supply of various products. The management is optimistic that this major contract along with foreseen increase in caustic flakes will increase the profitability.

Gulf Chlorine WLL

With the projected commissioning of the Calcium Chloride Plant by Q2 2021 by United Chemicals (a Joint Venture) this is subject to the existing travel restrictions due to the pandemic getting lifted during the upcoming quarter. Gulf Chlorine will be able to run the existing plant at higher capacity which will enable the company to post improved operating performance. Discussion going on with other customers in the region for new acid supply agreements. This step is taken to introduce our products to the market and will enable us to establish our footprint in global market.

Oman Industrial Development Co. SAOC (OIDC)

The improved operating performance of Union Chlorine LLC will result in improved operating performance of OIDC.

The above measures will enhance the future cash flows of the company and its subsidiaries and will improve the financial leverage of the group.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Management, we wish to express our loyalty and thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik May God protect Him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its People.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Government Authorities for their support and encouragement in particular the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, the Capital Market Authority as well as all the employees of the company and management for their sincere efforts, leading to the continued success of the company.

Sulaiman Bin Mohammed Bin Hamad Al Yahyai
Chairman of Board of Directors

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the 3 months period ended 31 March 2021

	Parent		Consolidated	
	31/03/2021 RO'000	31/03/2020 RO'000	31/03/2021 RO'000	31/03/2020 RO'000
Revenue	2,135	1,809	3,981	4,029
Cost of sales	(1,175)	(936)	(2,904)	(2,618)
Gross profit	960	873	1,077	1,411
Selling and distribution expenses	(252)	(209)	(442)	(390)
General and administrative expenses	(303)	(242)	(475)	(442)
Operating profit	405	422	160	579
Finance charges	(16)	(19)	(638)	(800)
Other income	71	94	14	123
Share of loss of Joint Venture	-	-	(105)	(3)
Profit before taxation	460	497	(569)	(101)
Current tax	(61)	(86)	(61)	(86)
Deferred tax	6	11	6	11
Profit for the period	405	422	(624)	(176)
Other comprehensive income:				
Items that are or may be reclassified to profit or loss:				
Currency translation difference of foreign subsidiaries	-	-	-	-
Net changes in cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	26	15
Total comprehensive income	405	422	(598)	(161)
Results attributable to:				
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	(152)	103
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(472)	(279)
Total comprehensive income attributable to:	405	422	(624)	(176)
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	(137)	112
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(461)	(273)
Earnings per share on profit attributable to the Parent Company shareholders – Basic and diluted	0.0059	0.0062	(0.0022)	0.0015

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of a written request.

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Afghan Taliban declare ceasefire for Eid holidays

KABUL: The Taliban on Monday declared a three-day ceasefire for this week's Eid al Fitr holiday, following a sharp spike in violence as Washington goes about withdrawing its remaining troops from Afghanistan. Violence has soared since May 1 — the deadline missed by the United States to withdraw the last of its troops — and while the Taliban have avoided engaging American forces, attacks against government and civilian targets have not stopped.

In the latest, the interior ministry said on Monday that at least 11 people were killed by a bomb that struck a bus overnight in southeastern Zabul province.

That followed Saturday's carnage outside a school in the capital Kabul when a series of bombs killed at least 50 people and wounded over 100 — most of them young girls. Early on Monday, the Taliban instructed fighters "to halt all offensive operations against the enemy countrywide from the first till the third day of Eid".

The Taliban declared similar ceasefires last year to mark Islamic holidays. The government usually reciprocates, but Afghan peace council chief Abdullah Abdullah said on Monday what the country needs is a permanent ceasefire.

"We believe the best solution to get out of the country's crisis is expediting peace talks, declaration of lasting ceasefire and ending the fighting forever," he said in a statement.



A man pushes an injured boy at a hospital in Kandahar as he receives medical treatment after being hurt by a roadside bomb that struck a bus overnight killing at least 11 people. — AFP

On Saturday, a series of bombs detonated outside a girls' school in Dasht-e-Barchi, a suburb of the capital largely populated by the Hazara community which is often targeted by fighters. It was the deadliest attack in more than a year and came as residents were shopping ahead of the Eid holiday. On Sunday, on a desolate hilltop cemetery, bodies in small wooden coffins were lowered into graves, one by one, by mourners still in shock.

"I rushed to the scene and found myself in the middle of bodies, their hands and heads cut off and bones smashed," said Mohammad Taqi, whose two daughters were students at the

Afghan peace council chief says what the country needs is a permanent ceasefire

school but escaped the attack. "All of them were girls. Their bodies piled on top of each other."

Kabul resident Rashed Hashimi said the Taliban should stop fighting as US forces were leaving. "The Taliban were saying they were fighting the foreigners, but now the foreigners are leaving," he said. "So, why are they fighting Afghans?"

Political analyst Fawad Kochi said the ceasefire was a way for



Girls attend their class at a school in Herat. — AFP

the Taliban leadership to give its forces a brief respite from fighting that has intensified since the US troop withdrawal formally commenced on May 1.

"The government will try all possible channels to extend the ceasefire but the Taliban will go back to the battlefield right after Eid," he said. "The Taliban know that a prolonged ceasefire will split them and kill their momentum. They will never want that."

The Taliban insist they have not carried out attacks in Kabul since February last year when they signed the deal with Washington that paved the way for peace talks and withdrawal of the remaining US troops. — AFP

India reports decline in new Covid-19 cases

NEW DELHI: India saw a significant drop in daily coronavirus infections on Monday, with 366,161 reported — after logging more than 400,000 cases for four straight days — but this would have likely been due to relatively lower testing at the weekend, experts said.

Covid-19 claimed 3,754 lives in the past 24 hours, according to the country's Health Ministry. This was also a decline, after 4,000 deaths a day for two consecutive days. The overall death toll now stands at 246,116.

The new infections brought the overall caseload to more than 22.6 million, it said. Official data showed that 1,474,606 samples were tested on Sunday, almost 400,000 samples fewer than the 1,865,428 and 1,808,344 samples tested on previous days.

After sparking a healthcare crisis in India's main urban centres of New Delhi and Mumbai, the surge in infections in rural regions and cities like information technology

hub Bengaluru, posed a fresh challenge for authorities.

Hospitals reported shortages of beds and medical oxygen as patients flooded the facilities.

Medical experts say mass vaccination is the only solution to India's Covid-19 crisis, but the inoculation drive that began in January has faltered.

Nearly 180 million doses have been administered so far. The pace has slowed down, despite the vaccine drive being extended to all adults above 18 years since May 1.

In recent days, many states in India have declared lockdowns, as opposition leaders urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to announce nationwide curbs.

India, the second-most infected country after the United States, which has a caseload of 32.7 million, is in the grip of a second wave that began mid-February.

The pandemic has claimed nearly 3.3 million lives worldwide since it first emerged in late 2019.

— dpa



Navy personnel unload Liquid Medical Oxygen tanks supplied by French company Air Liquide as part of France's assistance efforts towards coronavirus relief to India at the naval dockyard in Mumbai. — AFP

Australia's New South Wales reports zero Covid-19 cases

SYDNEY: Australia's New South Wales (NSW) state reported zero Covid-19 cases for a fourth straight day on Monday, but concerns about new infections remained as the missing link in a case that has reinstated restrictions continued to elude officials.

Australia's most populous state on Sunday extended social distancing curbs in Sydney by a week after authorities could not find a transmission path between an infected overseas traveller and a resident in his 50s who tested positive last week.

"There has been a lot of work to identify how the transmission event occurred. Unfortunately, we haven't found that missing link," NSW state Chief Health Officer



Staff members prepare vaccines at a New South Wales coronavirus disease mass vaccination hub as it opens at Sydney Olympic Park in Sydney. — Reuters

Australia has fared much better than many other developed countries but its countrywide immunisation drive has hit roadblocks

Kerry Chant told reporters in Sydney.

Chant said the man may have contracted the virus through brief contact with a currently unidentified person who was infectious.

"So, because of that, we are still concerned that there may be chains of transmission in the community that are yet unrecognised," she

said. More than 5.3 million people living in and around Sydney, Australia's biggest metropolitan area, have been ordered to wear masks on public transport and at indoor venues, while house gatherings are limited to 20 guests until May 17.

NSW on Monday opened a mass vaccination hub in Sydney aiming to administer up to 30,000 vaccines every week to ramp up a national vaccination programme that is behind schedule.

With just over 29,900 Covid-19 cases and 910 deaths, Australia has fared much better than many other developed countries but its countrywide immunisation drive has hit roadblocks. — Reuters

SEOUL

S Korea says 'time to take action' on North

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said he sees his final year in office as the last chance to achieve a lasting peace with North Korea, and said it was time to take action amid stalled talks over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes. Moon's comments, in a speech marking the fourth year of his presidency, come ahead of his first summit with US President Joe Biden in Washington on May 21.

The South Korean president is expected to push the United



States to seek engagement with North Korea, though Biden has shown little interest in making North Korea a top priority. — Reuters

SHANGHAI

Escaped big cat sparks fear in China

One leopard remained at large in eastern China after escaping from a safari park with two of its fellow big cats, prompting fierce public criticism of the wildlife attraction over the safety lapse and for brutally hunting down the escapees with packs of dogs. Residents of the city of Hangzhou first reported seeing leopard sightings in local tea plantations late last week, but the Hangzhou Safari Park only acknowledged the outbreak after the news went viral.



The park has said the cats were not fully grown and that it delayed making a public statement to avoid causing panic, but it faces accusations that keeping mum recklessly endangered residents. — AFP

BANGKOK

Vietnamese woman is Laos' first Covid-19 fatality

A Vietnamese woman died from Covid-19 in Laos, according to state-run media, marking the first death from the disease in the impoverished communist country. Reclusive, landlocked Laos had appeared to escape the brunt of the pandemic in 2020, but a community outbreak uncovered last month has sent the number of cases soaring — from 49 in early April to 1,302 in less than a month.

Authorities confirmed that a 53-year-old Vietnamese woman



had died from Covid-19, according to state-run news outlet Vientiane Times — the first fatality from the disease recorded in the country. — AFP

In brief

■ NEW YORK

**MELINDA GATES
MET WITH DIVORCE
LAWYERS IN 2019**

Melinda Gates had begun meeting with divorce lawyers by at least 2019, *The Wall Street Journal* reported, citing sources and documents.

The couple announced their split last week after 27 years, saying in a statement together that the decision came after “a great deal of thought and a lot of work on our relationship.”

Melinda Gates, 56, had been in contact with lawyers from different firms dating back to 2019, according to the new report. Unnamed people who spoke with *The Wall Street Journal* contended that Bill Gates’ work with the late Jeffrey Epstein, a multimillionaire and convicted sex offender, was an issue between the technology tycoon, 65, and his wife. — **dpa**

■ MOGADISHU

**BOMBING BY SOMALIA'S
AL SHABAAB GROUP
KILLS 6**

A bomber killed six police officers in front of a district police station in the Somali capital Mogadishu late on Sunday, police said, in an attack claimed by the Al Shabaab group. “Six police officers including the commander of the Waberi (district) police were confirmed dead and six others were injured in the blast,” Somali police spokesman Major Sadiq Aden Ali Doodishe told a news conference.

Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the assault but said they had killed five police personnel. — **Reuters**

■ ROME

**MIGRANTS REACH
MEDITERRANEAN
ISLAND OF LAMPEDUSA**

More than 2,000 migrants have reached Lampedusa by boat within the past 24 hours, the ANSA news agency, sparking concerns in Rome.

The number of migrants boarding crowded vessels for the treacherous journey to the small island between North Africa and Sicily has sharply risen in recent days.

During the previous 24 hours, 2,128 people landed on the Italian island, including 635 overnight. Patrol boats picked up several hundred people travelling in small boats and brought them ashore, while others managed to reach the coast. — **dpa**

London Mayor launches tourism campaign

LONDON: London Mayor Sadiq Khan launched a campaign on Monday to bring tourists back to the British capital, ahead of a planned easing of government coronavirus restrictions across England.

The £6 million (\$8.4 million) campaign by Khan’s office with the capital’s tourism and transport bodies will look to drive domestic tourism to hospitality, culture, nightlife and retail venues in the city.

The plans are designed to boost the sectors, which have been badly hit by months of closures and lockdown curbs during the pandemic.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected on Monday to confirm the next stage of his government’s road map out of lockdown from next week, including a return to indoors mixing, and the reopening of cinemas and theatres.

Khan, who on Saturday was re-elected for a second term as mayor, called the initiative “the biggest domestic tourism campaign London has ever seen”.

“This is about getting the message out to Londoners and people across the country that our capital stands ready to entertain, inspire and enthrall once again,”



Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and wife Saadiya Ahmed arrive for his signing in ceremony after being re-elected as a mayor, at the Shakespeare’s Globe in London. — **Reuters**

he said. The “Let’s Do London” campaign will look to target day-trippers and overnight visitors to the capital from across the UK, given ongoing restrictions on international travel.

Analysis by Britain’s tourism sector has shown consumer spending in central London by overseas tourists was £7.4 billion lower throughout 2020.

Domestic tourists will have

The £6 million campaign by Khan’s office with the capital’s tourism and transport bodies will look to drive domestic tourism

spent £3.5 billion less, it added.

“Our new campaign is bringing together many of the capital’s

leading organisations and venues to offer an unparalleled experience for anyone visiting the capital throughout the year,” Khan said at the city’s riverside Globe Theatre.

The year of events will begin with the unveiling of public art installations by influential British artist David Hockney and London designer Yinka Ilori.

Road crossings and streets in the West End theatre district —

will also be transformed as part of an initiative involving Royal Academy artists.

London’s V&A museum will showcase an exhibition on Lewis Carroll’s children’s book “Alice in Wonderland” while Shakespeare’s Globe will stage a series of “Midnight Matinees”.

In June, the British capital plans to see the return of sporting events including the Wimbledon tennis championships. London will also host eight games in the Euro 2020 football tournament, including semi-finals and the final.

Meanwhile, Britain’s parliamentary standards watchdog confirmed on Monday it is investigating Prime Minister Boris Johnson over how he paid for a luxury Caribbean holiday, the latest of multiple probes into his conduct.

Kathryn Stone, the current Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, is looking into the controversial trip to the privately owned island of Mustique over Christmas 2019 by the UK leader and his fiancée Carrie Symonds.

Johnson, who was buoyed by successful local election results in England last week, has long been dogged by questions about the holiday. — **AFP**

South Africa warns of ‘vaccine apartheid’

JOHANNESBURG: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Monday that if wealthy nations hogged Covid-19 shots while millions in poor countries died waiting for them it would amount to “vaccine apartheid”.

South Africa and India have been pushing for a waiver on some intellectual property (IP) rights for vaccines and medicines at the World Trade Organization.

US President Joe Biden backed the proposal last week, though it may still take months to reach a deal.

Ramaphosa called on South Africans to support the waiver in a weekly newsletter, saying vaccines should be “a global public good”.

“It is about affirming our commitment to the advancement of equality and human rights, not just in our own country but around the world,” he wrote.

“A situation in which the populations of advanced, rich countries are safely inoculated while millions in poorer countries die in the queue would be tantamount to vaccine apartheid.”

Sub-Saharan Africa has administered the fewest vaccines



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa

relative to its population of any region, with roughly 8 doses per 1,000 people versus 150 doses per 1,000 people globally, according to the World Health Organization.

Ramaphosa recalled that twenty years ago South Africa faced off against “big pharma” over efforts to import and manufacture affordable generic antiretroviral medicines to treat people with HIV/Aids.

“Years later, the world is in the grip of another deadly pandemic in the form of Covid-19. And once again, South Africa is waging a struggle that puts global solidarity to the test,” he said. — **Reuters**

Germany’s hard-left party presents top candidates for September polls

BERLIN: With less than five months to go before Germany chooses a new parliament and chancellor, the hard-left Die Linke party has presented its top candidates for the election campaign. Janine Wissler and Dietmar Bartsch, the co-leader of the party and the co-leader of its parliamentary faction respectively, will be the party’s flagbearers in the lead up to the September 26 polls.

Die Linke won 9.2 per cent of the vote in the last Bundestag elections in 2017 and is currently polling at between 6 and 8 per cent. Key policies include reducing poverty, taxing the rich and disarmament.

So while it has no realistic chance of forming a government itself, it could form part of a future coalition government.

The two politicians span a wide generation gap, with Wissler —



Germany’s co-leader of Die Linke party Janine Wissler and a party member Dietmar Bartsch pose following a media event to announce party’s candidates for the federal elections in Berlin. — **Reuters**

regarded as being on the left wing of the party — a relative newcomer at 39; experienced party strategist Bartsch is 63 years old.

“Our goal is to hit double figures this election year,” Bartsch said on Monday. The surge of

the Green party and the poor showing of centre-right has led to speculation that the Greens could lead a coalition with left-wing parties after the September elections, and that this coalition could include Die Linke. — **dpa**

French court rejects claim in Agent Orange lawsuit

EVRY, France: A French court on Monday dismissed a case by an elderly French-Vietnamese woman against several agrochemical companies, including Monsanto and Dow Chemical, over the use by the US military of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

The court in the Paris suburb of Evry ruled that it did not have the jurisdiction to judge a case involving the wartime actions of the US government, according to the ruling seen by AFP.

Tran To Nga, who was born in 1942 in what was then French Indochina, accused the chemicals firms of causing grievous harm to her and others by selling Agent Orange to the US government, which used the toxic chemical to devastating effect in the war.

The 79-year-old complainant,

Campaign groups estimate that 4m people in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were exposed to the 76m litres of Agent Orange

who covered the 1955-1975 war as a reporter, also accused the companies of causing damage to the environment.

Dismissing the case, the court backed the companies’ contention that they were acting “on the orders” of the US government, which was engaged in a “sovereign act”.

Campaign groups estimate that four million people in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were exposed



Tran To Nga, a French woman of Vietnamese origin, began the legal battle in 2014

to the 76 million litres of Agent Orange sprayed by US forces to destroy ground cover and food sources in its battle with communist North Vietnamese troops between 1962 and 1971.

Vietnam blames it for creating severe birth defects in 150,000 children. So far, only military veterans — from the United States, Australia and Korea — have won compensation for the after-effects

of the highly toxic chemical.

German chemicals giant Bayer, which now owns Monsanto, and the other companies accused argued they could not be held responsible for the use that the American military made of their product.

Tran’s lawyers argued that the companies should have refused to supply the US military with the chemical.

Agent Orange destroyed plants, polluted the soil and poisoned animals, and caused cancer and malformations in humans as well as attacking people’s immune systems, campaign groups say.

Tran To Nga suffers from type 2 diabetes and an extremely rare insulin allergy, which she argued were symptomatic of exposure to Agent Orange. — **AFP**

Be the cause to break the chain...

Don't talk to strangers is what parents used to teach their little ones in the past, but now in the midst of the pandemic it is, "Don't go near strangers."

After taking a walk it was pleasant to sit on a little grass mount thanks to Muscat Municipality's beautified dedicated pathways for walking. It was perfect to do a bit of breathing exercises and was comforting to watch the mynahs walk with such confidence pecking on the grass least bothered about who is walking around or exercising.

Just then a young family came with three young children who probably have not started schooling yet. The parents tried to engage them by playing with a ball. The little girl looked on while one child enthusiastically kicked back the ball, his brother looked straight at the mount and walked towards me. The parents called him back but he was in no mood to return as he wanted to check out the stranger on the mount. The parents made noises but the child kept coming forward and I froze but managed to nod a 'hi' from behind the mask to his knowing smile. The parents pulled him away. Then again I thought it was enough of relaxation and got up to walk away and as I stood up and turned to the right there he was again on the little mount with me with the same understanding smile with twinkling eyes. The father tried to grab him away. And I thought to myself, "What should children make of all this?"



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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WE NEED TO
MAINTAIN
THE SOCIAL
DISTANCE, BUT
THE YOUNG
ONES STILL HAVE
THE HUMAN
QUALITIES
INTACT AND
BEING SOCIAL IS
A BASIC HUMAN
INSTINCT

Not once did the parents of the friendly child give an eye contact to the stranger on the mount. The impact of the pandemic is much more than we realise. The fear has the power to remove all the social skills. We might be going through a complete evolution of social skills. And what children are experiencing currently and being taught can have lasting impressions. This is one of the reasons why schools have been so important in the upbringing of the children especially when practically there is no more the goodness of joint family system.

We cannot blame anyone as that is how the nature of the pandemic has been. We need to maintain the social distance but the real young ones still have the human qualities intact and being social is a basic human instinct. But it would be important to observe closely on our changes in behaviour.

We however still seemed to forget all the new protocol when we are shopping in supermarkets. If they are smaller places then one has to be cautious while opening the door. It is funny to note that it might be you who opened the door but people from the other side might be the first one to walk through. This is the case if the door is manual — could it be to avoid touching the door? That is when you have to remind them and request, "Please wait."

While we have our dramas, the situation is different in the hospitals. The front liners — the health workers

and especially the ICU doctors and nurses who are treating the patients suffering from Covid-19 are going through their own trauma. The stress from worrying about their patients is one aspect and the other is when they are back at home when their own safety looms over their head. Yet the next day they get ready to do their best to treat the patients.

And what about the patients suffering from Covid-19 and recovering? We talk about the number of cases but not really thinking about what they are going through. A few people who are on the recovery have been in touch thanks to phones. Emotions seemed to be the major factor but also energy. Two people whom I know who are in different countries talked about food. One who cannot consume the food and the other who has lost his appetite makes us realise the importance of food intake which we take for granted. The patients who are in the hospital or in isolation at home — are they hungry? There have been families where both the husband and wife were sick and it was thanks to social workers who took it upon themselves to provide them food. There are children who lost both parents and others came forward to adopt them.

It all brings down to the question — are we as world citizens doing enough? There is one thing for sure — be a cause to break the chain by maintaining distance, avoiding gathering, wearing masks and washing hands frequently.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Millions of Kenyan tea workers seen at risk

NITA BHALLA

Climate change is set to ravage tea production in Kenya, the biggest global supplier of black tea, threatening the livelihoods of millions of plantation workers, a report by British charity Christian Aid warned on Monday. The report looked at how shifting temperatures and rainfall patterns in tea-growing regions in Kenya, India, Sri Lanka and China could affect the quality and yield of the world's most popular beverage.

Tea is one of Kenya's top foreign currency earners, along with tourism and remittances, employing about three million people.

But the East African country — which produces almost half the tea consumed in Britain — is likely to see the areas with optimal and medium tea-growing conditions shrink by about 25 per cent and 40 per cent respectively by 2050, the report said.

Climatic changes will also make it increasingly difficult for tea growers to move into new, previously uncultivated regions, it said, adding that the decline in output was already being felt on the ground.

"The conditions here used to be good and we had a great tea harvest. When the climate changed, the production of tea in my farm dropped," said Richard Koskei, 72, a tea farmer from Kericho in Kenya's western highlands. "We have nothing else to rely on here. People in my community will consider running away from tea farming, with jobs lost, and consumers of tea might see the price rise."

RICHARD KOSKEI
A tea farmer

According to a UN survey of 700 growers in all seven of Kenya's tea regions, farmers observed changes in rainfall patterns, distribution, and reduced yields tied to climate change.

More than 40 per cent of respondents said they had noticed changes in rainy and dry seasons, which led to shifts in the planting season, while 35 per cent cited drought.

Kenya is highly vulnerable to climate change, with projections suggesting its average annual temperature will rise by up to 2.5 degrees Celsius between 2000 and 2050, said Christian Aid's report.

Rainfall will become more intense and less predictable. Even the slightest increase in droughts will present major challenges for food security and water availability, especially in Kenya's arid and semi-arid area in the north and east, it added.

"Africans make up 17 per cent of the world's population but we generate just 4 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions that have caused the climate crisis," said Karimi Kinoti, head of Christian Aid's Africa Division, in a statement.

"And yet it is we who are suffering the brunt of the impacts of climate change. Our tea industry is vital to our economy... and now it is under threat from climate change."

Ahead of crucial UN climate talks in Glasgow in November, campaigners are calling for countries to cut carbon emissions, cancel the debts of developing countries such as Kenya, and mobilise climate finance to help countries adapt.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

CHANGING TRENDS

Italy's League leader Salvini struggles as rightist ally grows stronger

ANGELO AMANTE AND
CRISPIAN BALMER

League leader Matteo Salvini is in danger of losing his crown as the undisputed head of Italy's centre-right bloc, a prospect that could destabilise or eventually even upend Prime Minister Mario Draghi's government of national unity.

Under Salvini's frenetic command, the League emerged as Italy's most popular party three years ago and looked likely to dominate the political landscape for the foreseeable future. However, a series of missteps has eroded its advantage and current polling trends suggest the League will be overtaken in the coming months by its ally, the far-right Brothers of Italy party led by Giorgia Meloni.

Italy's three-party conservative bloc, which includes former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia! (Go Italy!), has always said that whoever wins most votes in the case of electoral victory can decide who should be prime minister.

This means Meloni might find herself in pole position to lead the country after a parliamentary election due anytime between early 2022 and mid-2023 — a possibility that might alarm Brussels, given her steely nationalist credentials. Her relentless rise is also rattling the League.

While the League and Forza Italia joined Draghi's broad national unity government in February, the Brothers of Italy refused. The three parties have



Leader of Italy's far-right League party Matteo Salvini speaks to the media in Rome, Italy, on January 28. — Reuters

UNDER SALVINI'S
FRENETIC
COMMAND, THE
LEAGUE EMERGED
AS ITALY'S MOST
POPULAR PARTY
THREE YEARS AGO

nonetheless maintained their alliance as Italy's election law favours such groupings, but Meloni now stands out as de facto leader of the opposition.

This has bolstered her image as a principled politician unwilling to compromise her conservative ideals.

"From the point of view of consensus in the short term, we knew this would cost us. Success in the medium term depends on how much we can solve people's problems," said Edoardo Rixi, a senior League lawmaker in the lower house of parliament.

Looking to counter Meloni, Salvini is battling to maintain a distinctive voice within the government — a stance that is putting him at odds with his disparate coalition partners and could yet hinder Draghi's efforts to introduce swift, wide-ranging reform.

"Salvini is trying to walk a tightrope and it is very complicated," said Massimiliano Panarari, a strategy and communications consultant who teaches at Mercatorum University.

— Reuters

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sport



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton crosses the finish line at the Spanish GP race at the Circuit de Catalunya. – AFP

HAMILTON REELS IN VERSTAPPEN AGAIN

DEJA VU FOR RED BULL AS BRITON GOES 14 POINTS CLEAR AT TOP



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton (R) celebrates on the podium next to Red Bull's Max Verstappen after the Spanish F1 GP race at the Circuit de Catalunya. – AFP

BARCELONA: Max Verstappen's Red Bull race engineer realised immediately what was going on when Lewis Hamilton, running a close second to the Dutch driver, suddenly pitted for fresh tyres 23 laps from the end of Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix.

"It's like Hungary all over again," he said.

In 2019, Verstappen led for 67 of 70 laps at the Hungaroring but not the ones that mattered most after Mercedes took a tyre gamble and

brought Hamilton in for a winning early second pitstop.

On Sunday, Verstappen seized the lead at the start but ultimately lost out when the champions pulled off the same gambit.

When Hamilton re-emerged on track at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya, the seven times world champion asked his race engineer Peter Bonnington how far behind he was.

"Currently 22 seconds," came the answer. "We've done it before."

Hamilton, now 14 points clear of his rival at the top after four close races, said he had been "really conflicted" about the strategy and could have ignored the call but put his trust in the team.

"It was a long way to come back from some 20 odd seconds back but it was a good gamble, a really great strategy from the team," he said.

Verstappen said there was very little he could have done to change the outcome.

"I knew that as soon as they pitted that second time, he would come back at me a bit like Hungary"

MAX VERSTAPPEN
Red Bull driver

"I knew that as soon as they pitted that second time he would come back at me a bit like Hungary," he said.

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff complimented the team's strategists back at the factory in England for crunching the numbers and running the computer simulations.

"They said, 'In our planner if you were to stop now, we would end up catching him one lap to the end and it would have a tyre

differential of 1.4 seconds and we believe that it is enough,' said the Austrian.

"In the end, we trust them and we trust the data.

"This is really where the strategy team comes into play, saying the probability's higher that we overtake him at the end of the race than now on a tyre that is only five laps younger," added Wolff.

The only miscalculation was that it took Hamilton fewer laps than expected. — Reuters

Spanish Grand Prix

Barcelona-Catalunya circuit

May 9

1	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	1h11m11.111s	
		Mercedes	
2	Max Verstappen (NED)	at 11m11.111s	
		Red Bull	
3	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	at 11m11.111s	
		Mercedes	
4	Charles Leclerc (MON)	at 11m11.111s	
		Ferrari	
5	Sergio Perez (MEX)	at 11m11.111s	
		Red Bull	

Driver standings

Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	94
Verstappen (NED)	80
Bottas (FIN)	47
Norris (GBR)	41
Leclerc (MON)	40

Team standings

Mercedes	141
Red Bull	112
McLaren	65
Ferrari	60

Source: Formula1.com

In brief

■ LONDON



UEFA POISED TO SWITCH CL FINAL TO WEMBLEY

Uefa is set to switch the Champions League final to Wembley if certain assurances can be met. The UK government's decision to place Turkey on the high-risk 'red list' for international travel on Friday threw plans to stage the all-English May 29 showpiece in Istanbul into disarray. Officials from European football's governing body are understood to be meeting virtually with civil servants from Britain's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on Monday with a decision expected within the next 24 hours.

■ MANCHESTER



UNITED WIN, WEST HAM RELEGATED

Manchester United extended rivals Manchester City's wait for the Premier League title for at least another two days as they came from a goal down to beat Aston Villa 3-1 on Sunday. At the bottom, West Bromwich Albion's hopes of avoiding relegation were ended as they went down 3-1 at Arsenal while West Ham United's top-four hopes were dealt a blow. Had United lost to Villa, City's celebrations would have begun. It will be the same scenario when United face Leicester City on Tuesday and then Liverpool on Thursday. Should United win those two games, the gap will be cut to four points and while only a collapse of astonishing proportions would deny City the title, it could induce some nerves when Guardiola's side face Newcastle United on Friday.

■ MILAN



MILAN KNOCK JUVE OUT OF TOP FOUR

AC Milan pushed Juventus out of the Serie A top four with a 3-0 win in Turin on Sunday which increases their hopes of Champions League football for the first time since 2014. Brahim Diaz put Milan ahead just before the break with Anton Rebic and Fikayo Tomori adding two more in the second half after Franck Kessie had missed a penalty. Milan move up to third, equal on 72 points with second-placed Atalanta, with Napoli a further two points behind in fourth and the final Champions League berth. Juventus are now fifth, one point behind the top four with three games left to play, including next weekend's clash with newly-crowned champions Inter Milan.

Olympic chief's Japan visit postponed

TOKYO: International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach has been forced to postpone a visit to Japan, organisers said on Monday, after a coronavirus state of emergency was extended less than three months before the Tokyo Games.

Bach's trip was scheduled for May 17-18 but organisers "decided to postpone it based on various situations including the (government's) extension of a virus state of emergency".

It is just the latest coronavirus disruption for the postponed 2020 Games, which have seen several test events cancelled, postponed or moved.

An athletics test event involving more than 400 competitors took place behind closed doors at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium on Sunday.

The Japanese government and Olympic officials insist the virus-postponed Games can go ahead safely this summer, although polls show most Japanese people support cancellation or another delay.

In a statement, the Tokyo 2020 organising committee said it hoped the visit could go ahead "as soon as possible" and would continue to assess the coronavirus situation. Japanese media said organisers planned to reschedule Bach's visit for June.

Japan's state of emergency, which is less strict than blanket lockdowns in other countries, was last week extended to the end of May in the hardest hit regions, including Tokyo.

Seiko Hashimoto, president of the Tokyo 2020 Games, said on Friday it would be "very difficult" to arrange the visit given the state of emergency.

Japan's Covid-19 outbreak remains much smaller than in many countries, with around 10,800 deaths.

But its vaccine rollout is moving slowly and some areas have seen record cases as more infectious variants drive fresh waves of contagion.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga was forced on the defensive on Monday, insisting in parliament he has "never put the Olympics first"



Ryoichi Akamatsu of Japan competes the men's high jump during a test event for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics at the National Stadium in Tokyo on Sunday. — AFP



IOC president Thomas Bach (on screen) and Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee president Seiko Hashimoto waving to each other during a meeting on April 28. — AFP



Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike (R) chatting to IOC president Thomas Bach in Tokyo on November 16, 2020. — AFP



Athletes compete in the men's 3000m steeple-chase during a test event for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics at the National Stadium in Tokyo on Sunday. — AFP

An athletics test event involving more than 400 competitors took place behind closed doors at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium on Sunday

and that his priority remains "the lives and health of the Japanese people".

TORCH RELAY HIT

IOC vice-president John Coates said on Saturday that nothing could stop the Tokyo Olympics from going ahead, despite ongoing risks from Covid-19.

More than 10,000 athletes from 200 countries and regions are set to travel to Tokyo for the Games, with a decision on how many domestic fans — if any — can attend set for June. A poll published on Monday by Japan's *Yomiuri Shimbun* daily found 59 per cent of respondents want to cancel the postponed 2020 Games, which will open on July 23. The poll did not offer the option of a further postponement.

A separate survey by the TBS broadcaster found 37 per cent back cancellation, while 28 per cent want the Games delayed again.

And an online petition urging the Games to be cancelled has gathered more than 315,000 signatures since Wednesday.

But Games organisers insist the mega-event can be held safely with strict virus rules.

US drugs giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech on Thursday announced a deal with the IOC to provide vaccines to athletes and their delegations.

Japan's own vaccine programme is progressing cautiously, however, with around one per cent of the population having received two shots so far.

An increasing number of sections of the Olympic torch relay have been scaled back and moved off-road to prevent people from gathering to watch.

Japanese media reported on Monday that two more regions will scrap the public relay — Hyogo prefecture, which is under the state of emergency, and Okayama, also seeing a surge in virus cases.

— AFP

Babar looks to West Indies after Zimbabwe success

HARARE: Pakistan captain Babar Azam lauded his players after they completed a successful southern Africa tour with a second straight innings victory over Zimbabwe on Monday — then looked ahead to his team's planned tour of the West Indies in July.

It took Pakistan five overs to take the remaining Zimbabwe wicket to seal a win by an innings and 147 runs on the fourth day of the second Test at Harare Sports Club and take the series 2-0. Shaheen Shah Afridi had Luke Jongwe caught behind for 37 to complete a five-wicket haul. He took five for 52.

Zimbabwe, who resumed at 220 for nine, were all out for 231.

Speaking at the post-match presentation, Babar said his players had shown character and he was particularly pleased with the performance of the batsmen, especially man-of-the-match Abid Ali, who scored 215 not out in Pakistan's only innings.

"The partnership between Abid and Azhar Ali was crucial," he said. Azhar scored 126 in a second-wicket stand of 236.



Shaheen Shah Afridi celebrates with team-mates after beating Zimbabwe.

"The confidence of our batsmen will be high and we have an important series in the West Indies coming up," said Babar.

Pakistan are due to play three Tests and three Twenty20 internationals in the Caribbean.

Zimbabwe captain Brendan Taylor said he was disappointed with his team's batting in both Tests but praised the Pakistan bowlers.

"They're always at you. They're a world-class attack and they made it very difficult for us," he said.

Fast bowler Hasan Ali was named man of the series. He had match figures of nine for 89 in the first Test at the same venue and took a career-best five for 27 in the first innings of the second Test.

"I would like to have seen more positives," said Taylor. "To finish

both games in three days or just after three days is off the mark.

"We've got a lot of things to address, particularly with the batting, maybe the mental side of that. A little more discipline. The wicket played well enough to take it five days." But Taylor said there had been some promising signs in a side depleted by injuries to four leading batsmen. "I can't fault the guys'

SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN, FIRST INNINGS: 510-8 DECL	
ZIMBABWE, FIRST INNINGS: 132	
ZIMBABWE SECOND INNINGS	
K Kasuza b Nauman Ali	22
T Musakanda c M Rizwan b S Afridi	8
R Chakabva c B Azam b N Ali	80
B Taylor c M Rizwan b S Afridi	49
M Shumba c I Butt b N Ali	16
L Jongwe c M Rizwan b S Afridi	37
D Tiripano lbw Nauman Ali	0
R Kaia c Sajid Khan b N Ali	0
T Chisoro b Shaheen Afridi	8
R Ngarava b Shaheen Afridi	0
B Muzarabani not out	4
Extras (b1, lb5, nb1)	7
Total (68 overs)	231
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-63, 3-142, 4-170, 5-188, 6-196, 7-196, 8-205, 9-205	
Bowling: Shaheen Shah Afridi 20-5-52-5, Tabish Khan 11-3-46-0, Hasan Ali 10-7-9-0, Sajid Khan 6-1-32-0, Nauman Ali 21-3-86-5	

efforts. They are a young side, full of enthusiasm, wanting to learn and to get better day by day."

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

It was Pakistan's fourth successive series win on a seven-week southern Africa tour. They beat South Africa 2-1 in one-day internationals and 3-1 in Twenty20 internationals before defeating Zimbabwe 2-1 in a T20 series. — AFP

Coach Talib announces players for Morocco camp

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Oman beach soccer head coach Talib Hilal has announced the squad for the upcoming overseas camp in Morocco which will take place from May 10 to 16.

The external camp is part of the team's preparation for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup Russia 2021 that will be held from August 19 to 29.

The announced squad for the external camp featured many faces who had experience at the previous editions of Fifa Beach Soccer World including: Yahya al Orami, Mundher al Orami, Jalal al Sinani, Khalid al Orami and Eid al Farsi besides other players: Mashal al Orami, Abdullah al Souti, Nouh al Zadjali, Amjad al Hamdani, Younis al Oaisi, Ahmed al Mashrafi, Shareef al Balushi, Hamood al Touqi, Rashid al Badi, Said al Farsi and Salim al Orami.

Two friendly matches are confirmed for the team against



Talib Hilal

Morocco and will take place on May 15 and 16. The next camp will be in Dubai during June and will feature some friendly games.

It will be the fourth participation for the Talib Hilal's men at the world's high-profile beach soccer tournament in Russia next summer. The third appearance for the Sultanate's beach soccer team had registered the best show as the team delivered solid performance in the global showpiece event at Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay in December 2019.



The Sultanate team had recorded a crucial win against Nigeria while they had suffered two losses against Portugal and Brazil. This edition, Oman are expected to perform better with the experienced players in the squad.

The Asian Football body, Asian Football Confederation (AFC) announced on April 21, that the top eight teams in the last three editions of the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup will represent the AFC in the Beach Soccer World Cup



Russia including Japan, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

On the other hand, world football body Fifa announced that the domestic referee, Turki al Salhi, who have international umpiring badge, will officiate

the matches during the Russian edition of Beach Soccer World Cup. Al Salhi is one of the top umpires in beach soccer with experience of officiating in many Asian, European and international tournaments and championships.

GERMAN RECOVERS FROM ONE SET DOWN TO BEAT BERRETTINI

Zverev
claims
second
Madrid
title



Germany's Alexander Zverev holds up the winner's trophy after beating Italy's Matteo Berrettini in Madrid. – AFP

MADRID: Alexander Zverev recovered from a set down to defeat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (8/10), 6-4, 6-3 and win the Madrid Open for a second time on Sunday as he clinched a fourth Masters 1000 title.

The German fifth seed recorded his third consecutive top-10 victory this week, having eliminated five-time Madrid champion Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem to reach the final.

Zverev, last year's US Open runner-up, added to his 2018 Madrid triumph as he denied Berrettini successive titles following the Italian's win in Belgrade last month.

"It is great (to win this title), especially after losing my last three finals I played at Masters 1000 events," Zverev said.

"This is definitely special and I just want to enjoy this one."

Zverev was full of praise for his Italian rival.

"Matteo was an extremely difficult opponent, because I had not faced anyone who serves at 235 km/h, who dominates the ball like him.

"Against Rafa (Nadal) and Dominic (Thiem), the matches were different, although they are obviously excellent clay players, perhaps the two best at the moment.

"Against Matteo, it was extremely difficult to just put the ball back in the court."

Zverev is targeting a second Rome title at the Foro Italico next week.

He captured his first Masters there in 2017 before also winning



It is great (to win this title), especially after losing my last three finals I played at Masters 1000 events

ALEXANDER ZVEREV
World No 5

in Montreal later that year.

"Rome is also an event I like and enjoy, so I hope I can perform in the same way as I did here and we will see how it goes there. I feel awesome," said Zverev.

After Rome, the German star



Italy's Matteo Berrettini. – AFP

will target a maiden Grand Slam title at Roland Garros. However, he has yet to get beyond the quarterfinals in Paris.

"To play well at Roland Garros, you have to play well during the season on clay. In that sense, it's

(Sunday's win) important to me," said Zverev.

Berrettini, making his Madrid main draw debut this week, was attempting to become this year's third first-time Masters champion after Hubert Hurkacz (Miami) and Stefanos Tsitsipas (Monte Carlo).

'GREAT FIGHT'

"I think we had a great fight. It's tough, this sport is crazy. It's a really good moment of my career but at the same time it's not that great because I lost," said Berrettini.

World number 10 Berrettini landed the first blow as he broke Zverev to move 4-3 ahead in the opening set at the Caja Magica, only to drop his service the very next game.

The Italian raced into a 5-0 lead in the tie-break but Zverev

clawed it back to 5-4 before two set points slipped beyond the grasp of Berrettini.

Zverev failed to take a set point of his own at 7-6 and then saved a third, but a double fault at 8-8 handed Berrettini another opportunity that this time he did not let go to waste.

It was the first set lost by Zverev, whose last clay-court title had come in Geneva in 2019.

Zverev secured the only break of the second set in game nine, when Berrettini double faulted, to send the match into a decider.

The German then broke to move 3-2 ahead in the final set and closed out victory after two hours and 40 minutes with another break, earning his second title of the season after taking home the Acapulco crown in March. — AFP



ramadhan

Involving children in the rituals of Ramadhan

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI
Instagram: @mazoun_alghailani

Making children understand the meaning of the traditions of the holy month of Ramadhan will enhance their appreciation for these time-honoured traditions.

Since all of us are mostly confined at home due to the lockdown, we have an amazing opportunity to spend meaningful time with them and opens an opportunity to parents and guardians to sit them down, play or share some practises. By creating fun activities, we are also creating beautiful memories for these children and are also emphasising the importance of the holy month and the celebrations we do in between.

Buthaina bint Nooh al Zadjalayah, media and communications expert, child rights and early childhood development and education specialist currently working at Learn & Inspire by Dr Taghreed bint Turki al Said, shared top three advices for parents and guardians of children should consider.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS



ACTIVE LISTENING

"It is important to listen to your child with your mind, heart and body language. Active listening is crucial to breaking down communication barriers and gives room for growth of the child's communication skills. This is a skill, an art and a discipline which must be constantly practiced, and remember that such a process does not happen overnight. However with time, you will be amazed by what you discover within yourself and the child," Buthaina al Zadjalayah said.

CHILD-REARING AND NURTURING

"Through such occasions, this is an opportunity to further bond with children and encourage all areas of their holistic development. It is a challenge given the current circumstances, but it is also rewarding to truly discover a child's personality traits and characteristics," Buthaina said.

CULTIVATING SKILLS AND TALENTS

"This is a period to get creative and reveal hidden talents. Give children the freedom to create anything and discover their surroundings in a safe space. This approach will certainly help your child cultivate a positive approach to life by helping others and seeing the beauty in everyday things," Buthaina added.

Al Yamama bint Said al Saeedi, early childhood specialist and educator and educational activities developer, also working at Learn & Inspire by Dr Taghreed bint Turki al Said, pointed out that the importance of children's participation in activities lies in developing thinking skills, creativity, exercising the small muscles, and motor coordination between the eye and the hand.

"Leaving sufficient space for the child when he applies the activities to be creative as he wants. The activity should not be implemented in the way that we have previously drawn, but rather we must allow him to apply it in his own way. Giving the child area to rely on himself and do most of the work without anyone's help, and that parents do not expect the child to carry out the activity in an ideal way," Al Yamama al Saeedi said.

RAMADHAN ACTIVITIES

THEATRICAL ACTING ACTIVITY

In this activity, the children are allowed to listen to a story and are asked to turn what they've heard into a play.

"This activity refines the child's personality by enhancing his or her ability to act and simulate. It helps them gain self-confidence and expand their thinking range. The companions and followers can serve as their role models where children can take useful lessons from them," Al Yamama al Saeedi said.

"This activity helps develop the cooperative thinking among his peers and family. When he performs a play, he is considered part of a team that must work in harmony for the play to succeed, and in the case of older children they can write the script to develop their writing skill," she shared.

MAKING DECORATIONS FOR THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN

"The children are involved in making Ramadhan decorations using papers, colours,



scissors, strings, etc, and leave them a space for creativity, this activity develops the child's ability to creativity and gives him a sense of pride and achievement when hanging decorations that he made on the wall of the house. It also develops his skill in using the tools available around him, and develops some of his skills such as controlling the hand and coordinating the movement of the hand with the eye," Al Yamama al Saeedi said.

MOON SIGHTING BINOCULARS ACTIVITY

It teaches children about astronomy, moon sighting and its relation to the Islamic calendar months. As well as encouraging the child's interest in science, history and religion. "The skills a child gains from this activity is that the child will work on their fine motor skills in creating the binoculars and encourage language development with the use of correct terminology for the activity. In addition, the child will gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the process of moon sighting and its importance to determine the start and the end of each Islamic calendar month," Buthaina al Zadjalayah said.

"This activity can be done through arts and crafts creation of binoculars using paper rolls, colour paint and Ramadhan-themed cutouts to learn about moon sighting and the importance of the Islamic calendar especially during Ramadhan," she added.



QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

When there comes God's victory, and conquest. And you see the people entering God's religion in multitudes. Then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness. He is the Acceptor of Repentance.

An-Nasr

FATWA QUESTION & ANSWER



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

QUESTION
An elderly sick, who is very poor, couldn't fast in the past two years and he is not able to feed others to compensate his lost fasting days during Ramadhan. What should he do?

ANSWER
If he cannot feed people because of certain inability, Allah will forgive him. "Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear". (Surat al Baqarah/verse 286)

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Anas and Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with both of them, reported that the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "None of you will attain perfect faith until I am more beloved to him than his child, his parent, and all people".



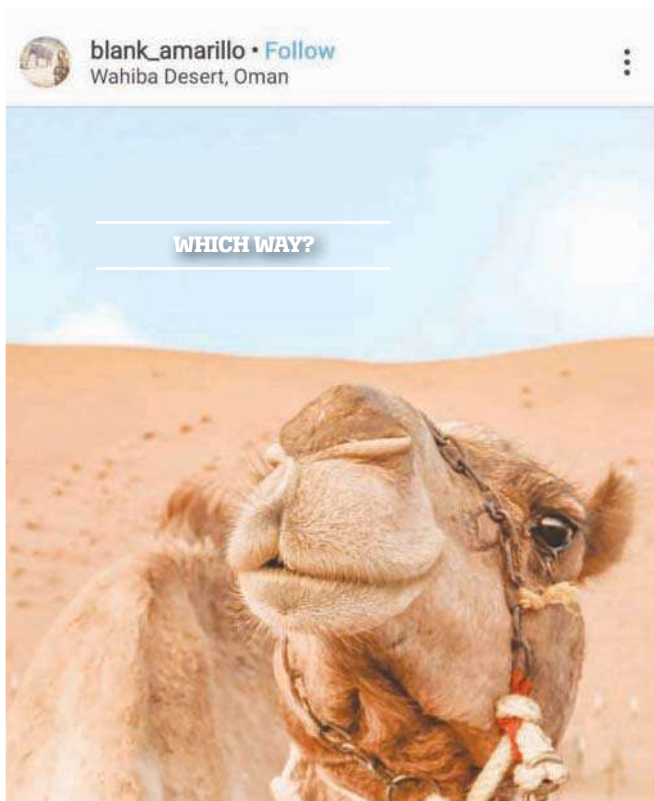
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ramadhan

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13

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ART



Kusama's dots, flowers breathe life into pandemic New York

DOTS ARE EVERYWHERE — on buildings, trees, water and more — as Japanese avant-garde artist Yayoi Kusama brings her signature motif to the New York Botanical Garden.

Spectacular steel floral installations painted in vibrant hues of yellow and pink, and green and blue and covered with polka dots engulf garden visitors. Giant pumpkins, flowers, an abstract octopus and whimsical shapes carry names such as I Want to Fly to the Universe.

"I don't think anybody can look at a polka dot and not feel joy," said Karen Daubmann, vice-president for exhibitions and audience engagement at the garden in the Bronx.

"Kusama has quite a following of people who love her art and want to be immersed in it."

The rain could not keep patrons away as the "KUSAMA: Cosmic Nature" exhibition opened on Wednesday after a year's delay due to the pandemic.

"We've seen people coming here... not only celebrating the garden and celebrating the art and the artist, but celebrating being together with their friends again and experiencing something inspirational, something bigger, something joyful," Daubmann said.

In the summer, visitors can enter Kusama's Infinity Mirrored Room-Illusion Inside the Heart at the garden.

Kusama, 92, left Japan at 27 for New York, where she made a name for herself by painting motifs inspired by hallucinations of flashing lights, dots and flowers she has seen since childhood.

Kusama has said that New York gave her neuroses. Around 1977, a few years after returning to Japan, she voluntarily checked into a mental hospital where she still lives. She is driven to her nearby studio each morning. "KUSAMA: Cosmic Nature" runs through October 31. — Reuters



RAMADHAN EDITION COOK LIKE A CHEF

SOMETHING SWEET PERFECT FOR YOUR IFTAR DESSERT

Sweet Cheese and Dates Samosa



Some people will argue with this but desserts are a must after every iftar meal. Can you ever imagine not having dessert? So can we.

In today's Cook Like a Chef, Chef Ruchira Silva of Desert Nights Camp is sharing this simple recipe of a sweet samosa, something different you definitely must try during iftar.

4 portions - 12 samosa

INGREDIENTS:



12 nos Samosa leaves
150 gms Cream cheese
60 gms Dates (deseeded, chopped)
25 gms Icing sugar
25 gms Mix nuts chopped
15 gms Sesame seed
1 tsp Cardamom powder
1 nos Egg yolk
50 ml Date syrup
50 gms Sugar
30 gms Cinnamon powder
Oil for deep frying

METHOD:

To make samosa filling, in a bowl mix cream cheese, dates, icing sugar, nuts, sesame and cardamom into a paste. Take samosa sheet one by one and add the mixture to corner of the sheet. (Cover the samosa sheet with damp cloth to avoid drying)
Brush egg yolk in the edge of samosa sheet, fold it into triangle shape and sealed edge.
Heat the oil for deep frying (temp: 175°C)
In bowl mix sugar and cinnamon powder and keep side
When the oil heated fry the samosa until it turns golden brown. (Maintain the heat of the oil, if temperature high, it will burst and filling will come out)



ABOUT THE CHEF

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

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

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

After frying keep for drain the excess oil for few seconds.
Add all fried samosa into sugar and cinnamon mixture and make coating.
Remove the excess coating and arrange into platter.
Served hot with date syrup.
Specially can serve this samosa at Iftar as a snack and also as a dessert.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

French stunt school's 'badass' women snapped up by film industry



VALERIANE MICHELINI trained as a dancer before opting to tap into the growing demand for stuntwomen and a career of jumping out of helicopters, leaping from buildings and brawling.

Michelini is one of a growing number of women passing through the Campus Univers Cascade (CUC), which bills itself as the world's biggest stunt school, and looking to break into European cinema and Hollywood as a stunt double.

"I'm used to thriving in a graceful and feminine world," the 29-year-old said between rounds of simulated fights. "And now, I'm in quite the opposite."

Nearly a third of the school's current intake are women.

Demand for female superheroes in the film industry is growing and with the growth of online streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney Plus, 24-year-old Marine Dolle believes she'll be a precious commodity on the job market.

"It's choreographed, it's calculated, it's technical," Dolle said of the challenges of safely executing dangerous stunts.

Sometimes, the school's women students don't even finish the course before they are snapped up by studios on either side of the Atlantic.

Keeping the talent in France is proving difficult, said the school's parkour trainer Malik Diouf.

"There's really a small pool of stuntwomen," Diouf said. "As soon as they have the slightest skills, they leave directly to work with the Americans, the English or the rest of the world."

It was once commonplace for studios to use stuntmen in wigs instead of female doubles, a practice known as wigging.

In a landmark lawsuit in 2018, US stuntwoman Deven MacNair sued a production company and Hollywood's acting union over dressing up a male double rather than hiring a woman.

Attitudes were evolving, said CUC director Lucas Dolfus.

"We don't need wigs anymore," he said. "The women are badass in any case." — Reuters

DME Oman front-month

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11-Feb-2020	68.00
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18-Jun-2020	40.00
24-Aug-2020	42.00
23-Oct-2020	38.00
24-Dec-2020	48.00
1-Mar-2021	62.00
3-May-2021	65.00

(Picture for illustration only)



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender Number	Description	Release Request for Bids	Last date for Specifications Purchase	Last date of Bid Submission	Tender Fee OMR
04/2021	INTEGRATED PAYMENT SOLUTION FOR CAPITAL MARKET AUTHORITY DHAMANI HEALTH INSURANCE PLATFORM	11 May 2021	1 June 2021 , 03:00 PM	10 June 2021 , 03:00 PM	25 /- OMR Non refundable

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Commodities remain the hot property of 2021

OLE S HANSEN

The “everything rally” in commodities continues to gather steam with the Bloomberg Commodity Spot index rising for the fifth straight week to reach its highest level since 2011.

Spurred on by multiple factors from a vaccine-led rebound in global growth, transportation bottlenecks crimping supplies, weather concerns in key growing regions along with rising inflation concerns and a speculative frenzy triggering increased investment demand.

All the major commodities traded higher this past week led by iron ore, lumber, Arabica coffee and corn. Metals of all colours rallied as well with copper reaching a record high while gold, supported by silver, managed to break above \$1,800. The energy sector came bottom with crude oil, rightfully so, struggling to break higher with virus outbreaks in Asia creating a very uneven demand recovery.

On a macroeconomic level,



both the dollar and US Treasury yields provided further support with the Greenback trading softer and nominal yields holding steady. The latter receiving a great deal of attention with rising inflation focus sending 10-year breakeven yields to an eight-year high and real yields back down towards minus 1 per cent.

One of the biggest concerns

related to the current surge in global commodity prices is the impact rising food costs have on those populations and economies that can least afford it.

The UN FAO's Global Food Price index, which tracks a basket of 95 food quotations from around the world, surged higher in April to record an annual rise of more than 30 per cent.

Food inflation has not risen this fast since 2011 — when higher food prices helped trigger the Arab Spring — with all sectors rising led by a 100 per cent jump in edible oils, sugar 58 per cent and cereals at 26 per cent.

Brent and WTI crude oil both lagged the momentum seen across metals and agriculture,

and despite increased calls for +70 dollar Brent, the market has sensibly adopted a wait-and-see approach.

Before drifting lower, Brent got tantalising close to \$70/b, a level it briefly breached two months ago before suffering a 15 per cent correction. The market, already supported by investment demand, has also increasingly been focused on reopening's in Europe and the US driving a strong recovery in fuel demand.

Oil bulls, however, may have to remain patient given ongoing production increases from Opec+, the prospect for a renewed Iran nuclear deal leading to increased production, and not least the current risk to demand in parts of virus-hit Asia. Since late March, Brent crude oil has traded within a four dollar wide uptrend, currently between \$66.50 and \$70.50.

Precious metals: Having failed on a handful occasions during the past couple of weeks, gold finally managed to mount an attack strong enough to take it above \$1,800.

While lower US real yields

and a softer dollar provided the fundamental tailwind the yellow metal needed support from in-demand silver, one of the best performing commodities this week.

During the past month, the continued rally across industrial metals have supported silver relatively more than gold. This can be seen through the gold-silver ratio which has been declining since late March.

Silver is currently trading within a rising channel and after hitting the upper end at \$27.55 it may need to spend some time consolidating before mounting a fresh upside attempt towards the 2021 high at \$30.

In order for gold to continue higher, it first needs to establish support above \$1,795 before chasing after long-term trend following short positions. The next level of upside interest is \$1,851, the 200-day moving average and 61.8 per cent retracement of the January to March sell-off.

[Ole Hansen is the Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank]

French economy back to pre-Covid levels by H1 2022



PARIS: The French economy will return to its pre-Covid 19 levels of economic activity by the first half of 2022, said French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire (pictured) on Monday, who also reaffirmed his target of 5 per cent economic growth for France in 2021.

“Economic growth is back in the first quarter... I think we will have a strong growth in 2021,” Le Maire told France Info radio.

He ruled out a second economic stimulus plan on top of France's current 100 billion euros (\$122 billion) economic stimulus plan.

Le Maire, added, however that it was fair to raise the issue of longer-term investment plans for France. — Reuters

US and top fuel supplier work to secure pipelines stricken by cyberattack

WASHINGTON: The US government and the top US fuel pipeline operator on Monday worked to secure the network that transports nearly half of the East Coast's supplies as a shutdown to halt a ransomware cyberattack entered a fourth day. The attack on Colonial Pipeline last week, one of the most disruptive digital ransom schemes ever reported, has sent shockwaves across the industry. The resulting shutdown has disrupted fuel supply across the eastern United States, triggered isolated sales restrictions at retail pumps and pushed benchmark gasoline prices to a three-year high.

US lawmakers urged stronger protections for critical US energy infrastructure, and the White House has made restarting the fuel network a top priority and organised a federal task force to assess the impact and avoid more

severe disruptions.

The southeastern United States would likely be the first to see price increases at retail pumps, and demand has already picked up as drivers fill their tanks. The southeast is the most dependent on the line and has fewer alternatives than states further north, and has seen prices spike during previous shutdowns.

“My biggest concern, as far as the consumer goes, is that you end up with a run on the gasoline supplies at the gas station, further exacerbating what is happening at the terminals,” said Andrew Lipow, president of consultants Lipow Oil Associates LLC.

While the US government investigation into the attack is in its early stages, a former US official and three industry sources said the hackers are suspected to be a cybercriminal group called DarkSide. — Reuters

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 10

Middle East Energy will spotlight the increasing demand for energy, which is set to grow by 3.35 per cent per annum for the next 15 years in the region, as the Middle East and North Africa' (MENA) population is estimated to grow by 20 per cent to reach 581 million in 2030 and a further 24 per cent by 2050 to hit 724 million, according to statista.

In light of the increasing demand and the apparent need for increased connectedness and interoperation in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a strong economic case for deepening and extending regional cooperation in the energy supply.

The four-week online networking conference series that starts next week on 17 May, is set to facilitate the convergence of the global and regional energy ecosystem and connect energy



professionals from far-reaching corners of the globe to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of the interconnectivity of the energy system.

Claudia Konieczna, Exhibition Director, Middle East Energy, said: “In key regions such as the Middle East, where energy resources are imbalanced, increased integration of energy systems will increase broader market integration and drive sustainable development.”

A recent example of the increased integration of energy supply is the acceleration of the move to create a Pan-Arab

Electricity Market in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Aiming to revolutionise the electricity sector in the Middle East by increasing electricity trading from 2 per cent to 40 per cent by 2035, the integrated market also offers significant opportunities for renewables and private investment in the regional electricity supply.

Middle East Energy begins on 17 May with the Renewable & Clean Energy sector week, which will provide a platform to explore the strengthening momentum of the global transition to renewable energy.

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