

P10

ZIYECH PUTS CHELSEA IN FA CUP FINAL



P16

SAUDI ARABIA'S CITY OF ROSES BLOOMS



P20

PANDEMIC DESTROYED FEWER US BUSINESSES THAN FEARED



MUSCAT

NEW DECISION ON LAND OWNERSHIP

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning issued a ministerial decision on possession of lands and properties by companies. The ministerial decision states that national companies and those that are wholly possessed by citizens of the GCC countries, are permitted to own, by means of buying, lands and properties necessary for practising licenced activities in accordance with the laws and regulations in force. As per the decision, the lands and properties possessed by means of purchase should be restricted to the residential, commercial, industrial and tourism purposes.

DETAILS ON P5

AMMAN

SYRIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON MAY 26

Syria will hold a presidential election on May 26 that is virtually certain to return President Bashar al Assad for a third term — an event that Washington and the opposition say is a farce designed to cement his rule. Assad's family and his Baath party have ruled Syria for five decades with the help of the security forces and the army. This year is the 10th anniversary of the crackdown on protesters which triggered a civil war that has left much of Syria in ruins. The multi-sided conflict killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions more.

DETAILS ON P6



Agreements signed to take Omani products global

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's commission signed a number of agreements with 18 public and private establishments for the execution of Luban Project for the promotion of Omani products worldwide, notably through Expo 2020.

The initiative is being undertaken in cooperation with Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Omani business platform (Tayseer).

Tayseer works in cooperation with Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and other government departments concerned to promote livelihood products of families, artisans, rural women, businesses of micro and small and medium enterprises, among other sectors, whose products are scheduled to be marketed at Dubai Expo 2020.

The Sultanate will participate in Dubai Expo 2020 alongside 190 countries under the motto "Communication Among Minds: Shaping the Future".

The Omani pavilion will showcase the country's civilisation and humanitarian achievements, as well aspirations for a promising future. It will reflect government and private establishments' keenness to promote the Sultanate.

DETAILS ON P17

COVID-19 CASES, DEATHS MAXIMUM FROM MUSCAT, DHOFAR

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 3,363 new cases of coronavirus (Covid-19) during the last three days, in addition to 57 new Covid-19-related death cases, amidst calls that hospitals are running short of beds.

According to the ministry, 96 people were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 823, including 261 in intensive care units (ICUs).

The total recovery cases reached 160,324, which is 89 per cent of the total cases reported.

The majority of the new cases reported are from Muscat (1,702), including 16 deaths, followed by Dhofar



The Ministry of Health is pressing ahead with the vaccination of target segments of society.

Around 96 people were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 823, including 261 in ICUs

(442 cases and 12 deaths) and North Al Batinah (309 cases and three deaths).

Within the capital, most cases were reported from Muscat, Seeb and Bausher areas. According to health officials, the hospitals are overwhelmed with Covid patients because of the third

wave.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said that masks should be used as part of a comprehensive strategy of measures to control the transmission of the virus and save lives, but using a mask alone is not sufficient to provide adequate level of protection against Covid-19.

Earlier, the government has said that 4,750,000 doses from Pfizer will be supplied to the Sultanate before the end of September, of which 1,350,000 will be supplied before the end of June and negotiations are under way to obtain 250,000 this month.

The Directorate-General of Health Services in Dhofar has said that there are 1,857 active cases in the governorate.

TURN TO P5



People gather at the scene of a railway accident in Toukh on Sunday. — AFP

Two Omanis safe as train derails in Egypt

CAIRO: The Sultanate's Embassy in Egypt confirmed the safety of two Omani nationals after a passenger train derailed north of the Egyptian capital, Cairo on Sunday.

The embassy expressed condolences to the families' victims wishing the injured speedy recovery.

A train accident north of Cairo on Sunday left 97 people injured, Egypt's Health Ministry said, in the latest rail calamity to hit the country.

The ministry said "97 citizens were injured in a train accident in Toukh", a small farming town in the fertile Nile Delta about 40 km outside the capital. No deaths were reported.

A security source said eight carriages came off the rails as the train headed north towards the city of Mansoura.

Over 55 ambulances were dispatched to treat the injured, the ministry said, and investigators have been sent to assess the accident's cause. The security source said the driver and other officials had been detained for questioning. — Agencies

Why is the Tropic of Cancer in Al Amerat?

AL AMERAT: In 2017, Oman Astronomical Society placed a signboard on the both sides of Al Atkia township road in the Wilayat of Al Amerat indicating the point where the Tropic of Cancer enters the Sultanate starting from Al Sifa and running through Al Amerat, Fanja, Wadi Al Maawil, Al Rustaq and Ibri.

Mohammed bin Nabhan al Battashi, member of Oman Astronomical Society, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that this site signifies the path of the Tropic



of Cancer from east to west. The Tropic of Cancer (northerly latitude) is an imaginary line where the sun is directly overhead on the day of the summer solstice which occurs in June each year.

are warmer than other places. However, the climate of a place is linked to several factors, including its height above sea level, humidity and wind movement in addition to proximity to water sources and forests.

He explained that the Tropic of Cancer was so named 2,000 years ago, as the sun was in the sun sign of Cancer at the time of summer solstice then and due to the oscillating movement of the earth, the sun will return to Cancer in around 24,000 years.

— ONA

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE SULTANATE, ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK

AND THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT UNVEIL A CROWDFUNDING PROJECT.



You have made a significant humanitarian contribution for which we thank you.

Al Sayyida Maani Al Busaidi



Success is a journey, not a destination, and with cooperation, we will reach the goal we seek

Hani Al Zubair



This initiative is bigger than us, as it encompasses the entire country, not just Alizz Islamic Bank.

Sulaiman Al Harthi

Muscat – Sultanate of Oman:
Alizz Islamic Bank and The Ministry of Social Development unveiled a crowdfunding website (www.crowdfunding.alizzislamic.com) to raise OMR 2 million to build the Center of Excellence for Children with Disabilities, as well as an additional initiative on the platform to collect OMR 40,000 to provide "Eidiya", to distribute to orphans. The website was launched at the Ministry of Social Development, in the presence of Al Sayyida, Maani Al-Busaidi, Director General of Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, Mr. Hani Al-Zubair, Vice Chairman of the board of Alizz Islamic Bank, and Mr. Sulaiman bin Hamad Al-Harthi, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, and a number of officials from both institutions, and Mrs. Rahma Al-Musharafi, Chairman of the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities

The crowdfunding website (www.crowdfunding.alizzislamic.com) aims to collect OMR 2 million from various segments of society and collect OMR 40,000 for orphans by using innovative digital technology. This will allow all groups and segments of society to participate and contribute in building "The Center of Excellence for Children with Disabilities" and help orphans.

The donation process is transparent and reveals the amount donated. When entering the website, donors can notice the movement of the electronic meter, the number of donors and the amount remaining to reach the desired sum. Alizz Islamic Bank has facilitated the process of donating from anywhere in the Sultanate or outside it.

Crowdfunding is the practice of funding a project by raising small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet and social media. With an aim of financing a project that serves the community, the money is collected through a specialized platform that guarantees everyone's participation in serving the nation and society. This act will also gain religious remuneration and reward for contributors. The act of donation establishes the role and responsibility of the Omani community, institutions and individuals, as a partner that provides services to Omani persons with disabilities. This plays an important role in the establishment of private rehabilitation institutions that contribute to the rehabilitation of these individuals alongside government institutions, as this solidarity leads to collaboration in building society, each according to his role. During the inauguration ceremony, an additional initiative was launched on the website (www.crowdfunding.alizzislamic.com) aiming to collect OMR 40,000 as 'Eidiya' for orphans. The sum will be distributed to orphans from the Child Care Center.

Alizz Islamic Bank and the Ministry of Social Development have opened an account for every orphan at the Child Care Center, and after completing the collection of the required sum, the amount will be distributed equally to each orphan. The orphans are under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development which provides them with the necessary needs and prepares them in terms of educational, social and cultural aspects to integrate them into society.

Alizz Islamic Bank believes in providing excellent humanitarian initiatives that offer the greatest benefit to society in appreciation of every child. It also aims to preserve them as the building block on which the future of society is built. The care for persons with disabilities and orphans in the Sultanate comes from the government's keenness, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, to ensure that this group, in all its categories, has access to all rights like other citizens in the Sultanate. Among these rights are the rehabilitation of these people in the various rehabilitation institutions that provide the services that persons with disabilities need to become people who are



We hope that the goal we seek will be fulfilled.

Rahma Al Musharafi



Everyone in this community has the right and ability to contribute to building the nation.

Murtadha Al Lawati



Giving back to this great nation is sure to generate wonderful results.

Zayed Al Hadidi



The four partners
Rahma Al Musharafi, Chairman of the Association for Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities, valued this inauguration, saying, with appreciation, "I take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to the four partners represented in the private and public sector, non-profit charitable institutions and the society on launching this initiative. We are convinced that Alizz Islamic Bank has adopted this project based on the belief in the Early Intervention Society's mission and its impact on various segments of society. It will also give an incentive to other sectors to initiate and contribute to promoting collective donation and community solidarity, and we hope that the quest we seek will be fulfilled."

Ongoing commitment
Murtadha Al Lawati, AGM Head of Marketing & Corporate Communications, Alizz Islamic Bank affirmed the continuous commitment to developing social work by supporting and empowering those in need, building effective mechanisms for social protection, enhancing family cohesion and social solidarity, activating community partnership, and raising the efficiency of resources to provide high-quality social services. Every individual in this society has the right and ability to contribute to building the nation in various ways, and therefore we are continuing to promote these initiatives. Our government has been keen since the beginning of the Blessed Renaissance to provide decent living for the people of the country and to achieve human dignity for them across social groups, and our role will extend to include bigger and wider initiatives."

easy to integrate into society to play their role side by side with the people of this country.

Active contribution
On a related note, Sayyida Maani Al Busaidi, Director General of the General Directorate for Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, appreciated the launch of this website, the first of its kind in the Sultanate, touching upon how the efforts of the bank work in parallel with achieving all means of expanding the developmental roles of the Ministry of Social Development.

"It is important at the outset to thank Alizz Islamic Bank for its active contribution. We are proud to launch the crowdfunding project on the website (www.crowdfunding.alizzislamic.com) to raise funds to build "The Center of Excellence for Children with Disabilities". God willing this project will see success in a short time. This initiative will be engraved as part of history and the name of Alizz Islamic Bank will ring throughout the annals of time. It is a great honour that the cooperation will bear results that are good and righteous." She concluded her speech saying: "We praise and applaud your humanitarian duty. We express our thanks and gratitude to you and everyone who has supported us. On behalf of the Ministry of Social Development we thank you all for your kind initiative and the Ministry as well as Alizz Islamic Bank will work side by side in the future to serve various groups served by the Ministry of Social Development."

Continuing humanitarian duties
On the other hand, Mr. Hani Al Zubair, Vice Chairman of the board of Alizz Islamic Bank, said: "This is not just a task between us that we have accomplished, but rather it is the opening chapter of a of the relationship between the Ministry of Social Development and Alizz Islamic Bank. This is the first step in the long journey ahead for more cooperation in the days to come. The launch of this website will enhance the fields of creativity to be inclusive in ensuring the service of various social strata and groups that fall under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Development.

We always strive to facilitate what are tough and overcome difficulties, by devising various methods and systems that lead to providing social care for the disabled, handicapped, orphans and others. We provide them with financial and in-kind assistance and rehabilitating those who can be rehabilitated. I urge you to continue carrying out humanitarian deeds, because as you know without cooperation, we will not be able to build continuous achievements, for success is a journey, not a destination. With constant cooperation we will move towards the goal we seek."

An initiative bigger than us
Sulaiman Al Harthi, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, affirmed that in all situations a distinction should be made between theory and practice, as theory enjoys freedom and possesses a wide time space, and it usually does come later than reality. Application requires immediate and direct action and this is what we are doing at the launch of this website. We all take part in doing a great service to this beloved nation and continuing to persevere in strengthening the relationship between Alizz Islamic Bank and the Ministry of Social Development in preserving the social fabric of this country and transforming all cooperation into a real tangible reality in various fields. The lesson is not in terms of nomenclature, but rather in the goals that we will all achieve, God willingly. We honour and cherish the Omani spirit in you. We say thank you and salute this high spirit and enthusiasm because we feel that this initiative is greater than us, as it includes the entire country and not just Alizz Islamic Bank.



Health workers wary of 'attendants' visit in hospitals

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

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Even as all possible curbs are in practice to reduce the spread of Covid-19 cases in Dhofar, a section of health workers are worried over the visit of 'attendants' in some hospitals in the governorate.

It has been noticed that some people are still in denial about the pandemic. They are fearlessly moving here and there, even visiting hospitals to see their relatives and friends who have Covid-19 symptoms.

"This is a dangerous practice not only for the community but for the frontline health workers who are working day and night to beat the pandemic. I have seen some attendants visiting wards and going out after meeting their relatives. Since they immediately do not have any severe symptoms, they go shopping in malls etc after visiting their relatives in hospitals, and unknowingly spread the virus," said a health worker on the condition of anonymity.

Since the pandemic has entered into a critical phase in the Sultanate, it can be beaten only with concerted efforts and with the cooperation of one and all. It is not possible to stop its spread unless all the loopholes are plugged. The authorities are coming out with hard yet praiseworthy measures to contain the disease. Still, there are



people, like some hospital visitors, who are silent spreaders of the virus, said Mohammed ba Omar, a government employee pursuing higher studies.

He called for cooperation from the general public and requested the authorities to regulate the visit of attendants, particularly in the Covid wards.

Endorsing the concern, another health worker said, such ignorant behaviour is seen only in small hospitals. In contrast, big hospitals are following the best practices as much as possible.

"But the question here is not being big or small. The new

variants can spread 70 per cent faster, so everyone should be mindful that even smallest of the loopholes can become big," she said.

It is good to love and support relatives in a tough time like this. Still, one should be mindful of the responsibilities of own safety and safety of others, she said.

Dhofar is undergoing an 11-hour daily lockdown as a stringent measure to check the spread of the virus. The 'people in denial' have to understand that though the germs cause the pandemic, they are responsible for spreading it due to their irresponsible behaviour.

Cooperation opportunities discussed with ITFC



MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met with Hani Salem, CEO of the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) through video conferencing on Sunday.

The meeting reviewed the 2nd phase of the Aid for Trade Initiative for the Arab States (AftIAS 2), scheduled to begin

in June 2021. The Aid for Trade Initiative for Arab States (AftIAS) is a multi-donor, multi-country and multi-agency programme, aimed to foster Arab trade through enhancing enterprise competitiveness and facilitating trade.

The meeting also discussed cooperation opportunities that the Sultanate can benefit from and means of developing commerce

with the ITFC.

The ITFC is related to the Islamic Development Bank Group, headquartered in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with 57 member states. It offers programmes on trade development and increasing exports.

The meeting saw participation of officials from the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economy. — ONA

CPA warns against undue price hike after VAT roll out

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

To make sure the Value Added Tax (VAT) is properly implemented in all commercial outlets, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has warned against undue price hikes on goods and services excluded from the purview of the tax.

Accordingly, teams from the CPA would conduct regular and random inspections of shops to ensure that the VAT is applied on goods that fall under the taxable merchandise category.

"Prices of all commodities available in the market are closely monitored by the Consumer Protection Authority. Any violation of VAT guidelines will attract penal actions against the offending commercial outlets," a source from the CPA told the *Observer*.

"Any attempt to unjustifiably increase the prices of goods exempted from taxation would

amount to an offence and legal action would be taken accordingly," said the source and added the CPA would also monitor if the prices of taxable items increased as per VAT norms.

The VAT, which came in to practice on April 16, has exempted some around 488 essential food products, including fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, food grains, nuts, baby food, mineral water, and juices. Failing to register for VAT could lead to penalties.

"Commercial entities are not supposed to increase prices of non-taxable goods and not more than five per cent on taxable goods. This has been monitored by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion as well as the Consumer Protection Authority," said Davis Kallookkaran, Founding Managing Partner at Howarth Crowe, a leading audit firm.

Goods imported from other countries are exempted from VAT at the time of supply to the

country, while items of special needs individuals are also exempt from VAT.

Other major products and services excluded from VAT are education, including kindergarten, higher education and vocational training, healthcare, including surgery, lab and dentistry services, ambulance service, psychiatry, and physiotherapy.

Financial transactions such as loan, fund transfer, deposits, issuance of shares, bonds and other securities, insurance, and credit transactions concerning lease, ownership termination, and credit guarantee don't fall under the purview of VAT.

The sale of undeveloped land and resale or lease of residential real estate, vehicles used in emergency services, public transport, diplomats, and cargo operations, special tax exemptions for businesses in free zones, goods exported directly or indirectly, as well as exported, from Oman are not included in the taxable goods.

■ DISSEMINATION OF BEAUTY



Omani Women Association is implementing a project that aims at utilizing arts for serving the society, curbing visual pollution from the old quarters and disseminating beauty through artistic touches that are blends of originality and modernity. — ONA

'Prevention' strategy to promote public health

MUSCAT: As a precautionary step to promote public health to ensure a healthy and stable life, the health institutions in the Sultanate have recently implemented the health promotion strategy "prevention".

The "prevention" project aims to highlight the frequent health problems in the society by conducting research and surveys.

Dr Nawal bint Ali al Rashdi, Director of Education and Health Awareness Programmes at the Ministry of Health (MoH), pointed out that the health promotion concept is including all health aspects of the individual's life and his family and community. It also strengthens the community partnership between all sectors

to cooperate in solving all health problems.

Al Rashdi added that the target groups, participants covered by the study, identifying the tasks for each participant, development of indicators measuring interventions, as well as the specified period of time for intervention are being made by studying the indicators in the health institution and through opinion surveys of health workers and the conclusions that help to determine the health problem.

In addition, the Director of Education and Health Awareness Programmes clarified that writing the goals of the health workers who wish to achieve when solving



the problem whether in a short or long term comes after determining the health problem. Furthermore, Dr Nawal stressed that there will be a periodic follow-up to measure the work progress based on what has been achieved through the indicators and the success of the suggested interventions.

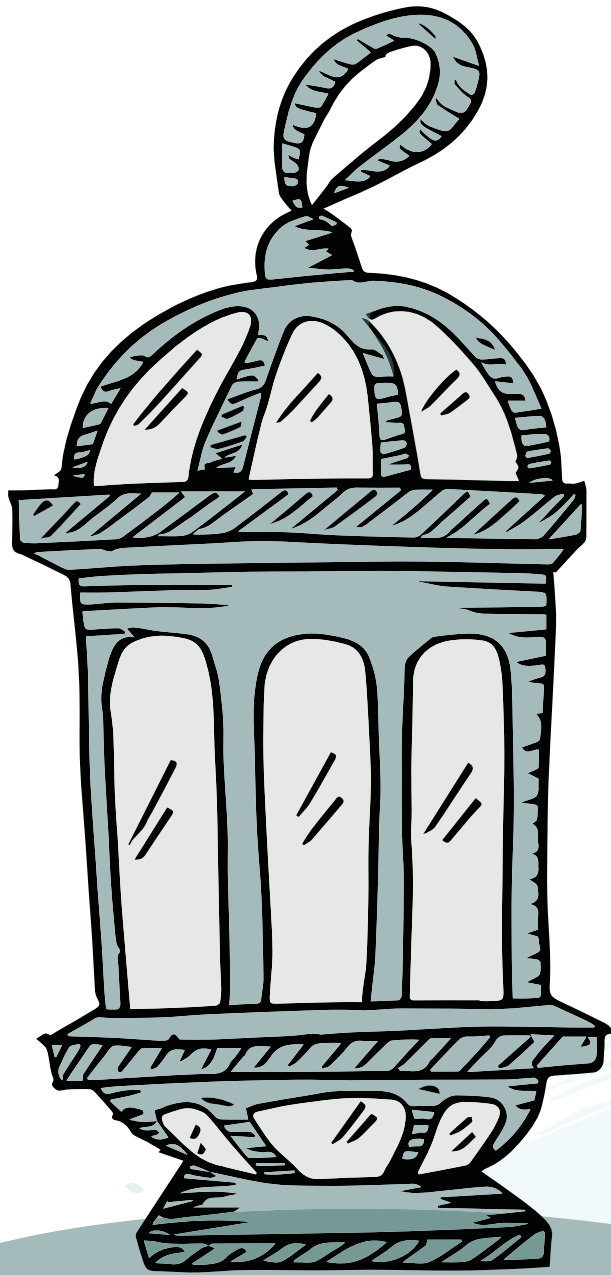
FREE HEART TREATMENT

In another development, expatriate workers employed in Oman can now receive free treatment for heart and cardiovascular diseases. The Minister of Labour has issued a decision 60/2021 amending some provisions of the executive regulations of the Civil Service Law. — ONA



Ramadhan

M U B A R A K



ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

Many feel lazy or restricted this year for not doing the good that they used to in Ramadhan due to the prevailing Covid-19 conditions in the whole world. But the people who do good should know that 'greater the challenge, greater the blessing. There are several innovative ways to help you do good. It is possible by ensuring your safety and the safety of those you help so that the good work does not stop and continues despite the obstacle that has come in the form of pandemic.

Think about daily workers from your surroundings who could be affected by coronavirus, try to help the elderly, even by shopping for them, so that they do not have to go out in these circumstances, ask about families whose bread earners have lost jobs, and try to meet their needs.

You can also think of pets in the streets, whose food supply has been affected after the movement of people has been reduced, and restaurants have closed their doors. Put some food and water in a suitable place to fill their hunger and quench their thirst.

On a broader scale, you can communicate with charitable societies in the country that help needy families.

THERE ARE SEVERAL INNOVATIVE WAYS TO HELP YOU DO GOOD. IT IS POSSIBLE BY ENSURING YOUR SAFETY AND THE SAFETY OF THOSE YOU HELP SO THAT THE GOOD WORK DOES NOT STOP AND CONTINUES DESPITE THE OBSTACLE THAT HAS COME IN THE FORM OF PANDEMIC

Alya Ali, a member of a charitable association, says, "In the implementation of the precautionary measures against the outbreak of Covid-19, we decided to pack and deliver iftar and suhoor food to the poor and needy right up to their homes or the places they live".

She added, "Feasts were organised annually in Ramadhan until coronavirus appeared. We decided to do something different as per the demand of the situation. Teams were formed. One team brings ready meals, while another distributes them to low-income families."

Some people take up volunteer activities during the month of goodness. Many young people volunteer to distribute charitable foodstuff bags and give zakat money to widows, divorced women and deserving families affected by the crisis.

"The reward increases during Ramadhan, so investing time in helping the needy and seeing smile on their faces is better than wasting it at home doing nothing", Ibrahim al Majini, who works as a volunteer, said.

Amina al Wahaibi, another volunteer, said: "Volunteering has taught me to love others, altruism, developing the spirit of cooperation and

teamwork among members of all segments of the society. In the beginning, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the feeling of fear, as I also did not want to get infected and infect my family members with the Covid-19 virus. That is why we are doing our work with full commitment to all preventive measures against the virus, like washing hands, wearing masks and sterilising bags."

Besides, some shopkeepers have set up 'charity corner' in their stores so that buyers can donate a portion of any stuff they buy in the store and put it in the designated corner. Thus the needy can take whatever they want from this corner for free.

LET THE GOOD DEEDS FLOW SMOOTHLY



MoH assesses staff safety from Covid-19

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 18

An assessment team to ensure staff safety from the Covid-19 pandemic has been formed by a ministerial decision to implement the precautionary measures in the workplace in the Ministry of Health (MoH).

The team under the chairmanship of Dr Qamra al Sariri, MoH Director General of Quality Assurance Centre, is visiting the MoH directorate generals to implement the measures and assess the requirements that should be followed in the workplace.

Recently, a number of tasks have been assigned to the team to visit the directorate generals in the governorates and hospitals to implement preventive measures and prepare a healthy work environment for the employees.

The team is performing the epidemiological investigations of Covid-19 incidences in the MoH headquarters and taking the necessary measures in the workplace.



Cases, deaths maximum from Muscat, Dhofar



FROM PAGE 1

"The number of inpatients in the Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah has reached 108 and the number of inpatients in intensive care units has

reached 51 so far, indicating the patients who receive artificial respiration has reached 13," the statement added.

Many steps have been taken, including provision of artificial

respirators.

Sources in the ministry and other related agencies have not ruled out the possibility of setting up a field hospital if the situation warrants.

Decision on land ownership by companies

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning issued a ministerial decision on the possession of lands and properties by companies.

The ministerial decision states that national companies and those that are wholly possessed by citizens of the GCC countries, are permitted to own, by means of buying, lands and properties necessary for practicing licensed activities in accordance with the laws and regulations in force.

The decision stipulates that companies should own lands and properties for practicing the activities listed in the commercial register. Besides, the lands or properties should be in proportion to the actual needs of the licensed activities.

As per the decision, the lands and properties possessed by means of purchase should be restricted to the residential, commercial, industrial and tourism purposes. The decision says that the companies should exploit more than 50 per cent of the total space of the land or property for practicing the licensed activities. — **ONA**

Practice some exercise after iftar

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Fasting undoubtedly is a practice that rejuvenates the mind and body. Including moderate exercises, post-iftar can add value to fasting during Ramadhan, particularly during the testing times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ramadhan is an excellent opportunity to stand up and start healthy habits and maintain them. Fitness experts advise continuing with some physical exercises as there is absolutely no reason to stop practicing them in Ramadhan unless there are known medical conditions.

"Exercise wisely. It is recommended to do moderate exercises during the holy month in all cases," says Hatim Abdulsalam, a religious scholar.

"But it should be at least an hour after meals so that the digestion is already done," he added.

"Walking, jogging and aerobics are some modes of mild exercises that one can try out after breaking fast and they should be done moderately," says Dr Mahmood al Rahbi, Head of Emergency Department at Al Nahda Hospital.

"We burn energy when we exercise during fasting. We rely on our body's sugar and fat. However, this cannot provide immediate and continuous energy to our body

during fasting and exercising. This may lead to fatigue and may have harmful effects on our heart," adds Dr Al Rahbi.

"Exercises may be done after breaking the fast and drinking plenty of fluids to hydrate well and a light meal. After exercise, one can have the main meal," says Dr Benny Panakkal, Medical Director of Badr al Samaa hospitals.

Athletes and fitness freaks have to adjust their exercise to suit fasting, and the focal point is moderation.

According to fitness experts, the moderation in exercises from a medical perspective is finding a balance between calories gained and consumed by controlling the intensity and timing of workouts.

MODERATE EXERCISES:

"While fasting, avoid getting into stress and consider indoor exercise at moderate temperature, as the temperature is high outside," says Rabyab Sidhique, Gold's Gym certified gym trainer.

"One should exercise wisely and be watchful of any new or unusual symptoms that appear during or after exercise. Do not hesitate to consult your doctor should you find any unusual symptom and know your chronic health problems such as diabetes or high blood pressure and exercise according to your doctor's advice," adds Rabyab.

Oman Air launches Iftar service and meal boxes



MUSCAT: Oman Air has reintroduced its signature Iftar service and meal boxes on select flights to facilitate guests' dietary needs during the holy month of Ramadhan.

This year's Iftar boxes contain slices of fresh seasonal fruits and fruit bites, an assortment of finger sandwiches, dates, and traditional maamoul, vegetables, hummus, mixed nuts, and traditional laban drink, and offer a convenient and healthy way for Muslim guests to break their fast.

Ramadhan is an important month of religious observation during which Oman Air is committed to showcasing its Middle Eastern hospitality to all guests. Muslim guests will be able to enjoy Ramadhan-themed feature programmes that will run alongside the airline's renowned in-flight entertainment. Full dining options will still be available for all non-Muslim guests during Ramadhan.

However, with health and safety an ongoing priority, all food, and beverages continue to be served in the form of bento-style boxes to reduce contact between guests and crew during meal service.

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation announced the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of Tenders
1/2021	Providing cleaning for services to the Ibri Vocational College	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Second, Third, Fourth	25 /= RO	08/05/2021	28/05/2021

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will start on Monday 19/04/2021 at 09:00 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of tender committee
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation

www.mohe.gov.om





MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 16/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for submission
1	RE-BB/06/2021	Rental a Site for Selling Snacks at Al-Mahj Walkway in AL- Amerat	25/- OMR	22/05/2021	23/05/2021	30/05/2021
2	RE-AB/07/2021	Investing & Operating The Entertainment Children's Games Center at Al-Seeb Public Park	150/- OMR	09/06/2021	10/06/2021	17/06/2021

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate in the biddings as per the following:

- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:
Bank Muscat | 0423010702710024
- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be sent to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted**.

Documents must be enclosed in a plain envelope sealed with red wax (without any company information). box's locations are As follows:

Bidding at The Serial	The Box's Location
1	Muscat Municipality Ruwi Building (Main Entrance), located on Capital Market Street
2	Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om).
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Syria to hold presidential vote on May 26

DAMASCUS: Syria will hold a presidential election on May 26 likely to keep in power President Bashar al Assad, in a country devastated by a decade of war.

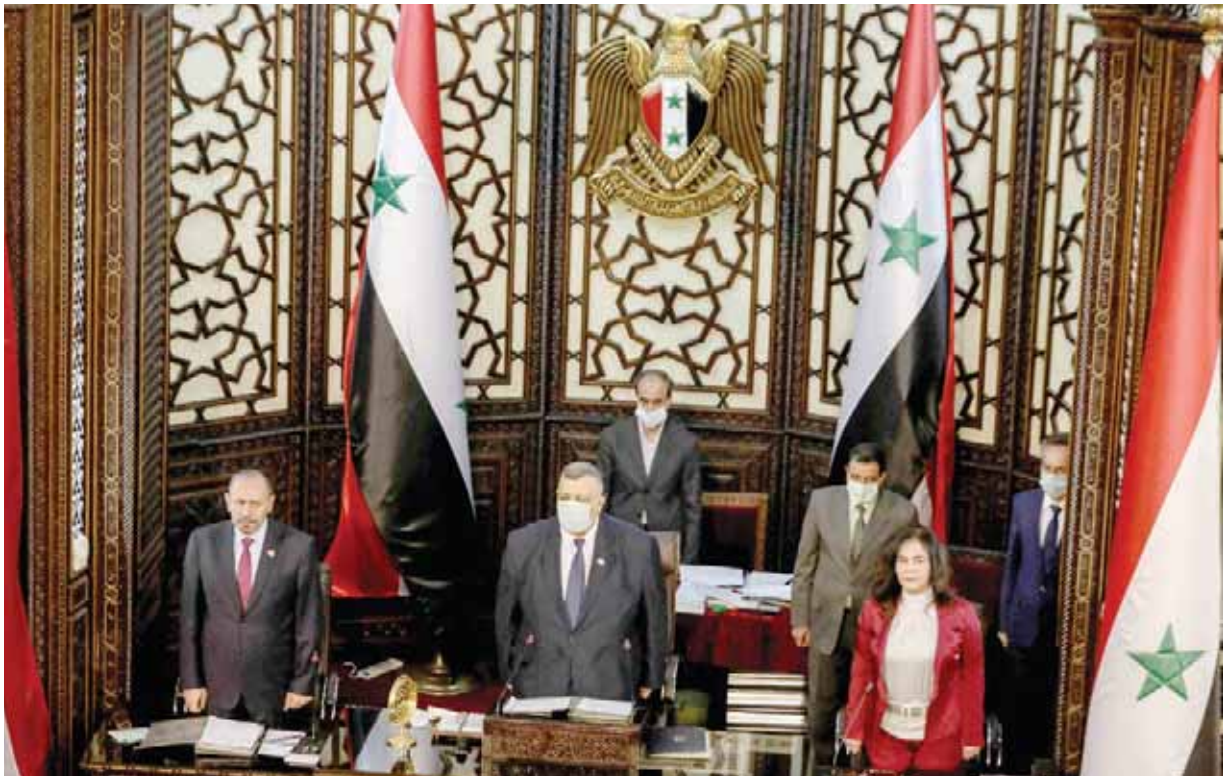
The vote will be the second since the conflict erupted in March 2011, with no political solution in sight to end a war that has killed at least 388,000 people and displaced half the population.

The election, announced on Sunday by speaker of parliament Hamouda Sabbagh, also comes as Syria is mired in a deep economic crisis.

Assad, who took power following the death of his father Hafez in 2000, has not yet officially announced that he will stand for re-election.

The now 55-year-old won a previous poll three years into the war, in 2014, with 88 per cent of the vote.

But large parts of Syria still escape government control and polling will not take place in those areas.



Hammouda al Sabbagh (C), head of the Syrian People's Assembly presides a parliamentary session in Damascus. — AFP

They include the northwestern province of Idlib, a major rebel bastion controlled by Hayat Tahrir al Sham which is led by members of Syria's former Al Qaeda affiliate.

The Idlib region, including nearby districts where other rebel groups are also present, is home to 2.9 million people, of whom two thirds have fled their homes in

other regions ravaged by violence.

Also unable to vote will be Syrians living in border regions controlled by Turkish troops and proxy militias, and others who

The poll comes amid a crushing economic crisis, compounded by the coronavirus pandemic

live in areas of the Kurdish-majority north where regime forces are not present.

Voting will only be allowed for Syrians living in government-controlled areas or those living abroad but registered with their country's embassies, according to Sabbagh.

Presidential hopefuls can submit their candidacies during a 10-day period starting on Monday, Sabbagh said.

They must have lived continuously in Syria for at least 10 years, meaning that opposition figures in exile are barred from standing.

Candidates must also have the backing of at least 35 members of the parliament, which is dominated by Assad's Baath party.

The poll comes amid a crushing economic crisis, compounded

ed by the coronavirus pandemic and a slew of Western sanctions, including from the United States, that have targeted key figures including Assad and his wife Asma.

Ahead of the vote, the foreign ministers of five Western powers — Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States — called for a boycott of the election, which they predicted would not be "fair or free" and would serve only to re-empower Assad.

In mid-March the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, urged the international community not to be fooled by the poll.

"These elections will neither be free nor fair. They will not legitimise the Assad regime," said Thomas-Greenfield in mid-March.

She told Security Council members the elections "do not meet the criteria laid out in Resolution 2254 — including that they be supervised by the UN or conducted pursuant to a new constitution". — AFP

Lebanese doctor's drive to curb Covid-19 with sniffer dogs

BEIRUT: Lebanese doctor Riad Sarkis says he can help curb Covid-19 globally. As he speaks inside Beirut airport, one of his secret weapons is wagging its tail next to him. Specifically trained sniffer dogs can detect Covid in a person in a few seconds, including in very early stages when a PCR test would yield a negative result.

"Man's best friend" doesn't even begin to describe how Dr Sarkis views dogs, which he argues can save more human lives than ever before by stopping the spread of the pandemic.

"The day we build a machine with an electronic nose that amplifies smells 10,000 times, then we can replace the dogs. For now, we need them," Sarkis says.

The effusive professor, who splits his time and work between France and Lebanon, has temporarily sidelined his passions for music and poetry to stay on a war footing against the pandemic that has brought the world to a standstill.

A digestive system surgery professor and oncologist, Sarkis had spent 12 years researching how dogs could help detect cancer and increase chances of early treatment. "When Covid



Lebanese doctor Riad Sarkis (C) supervises the training process of Covid-19 sniffer dogs at a facility in Lebanon's capital Beirut. — AFP

appeared, I thought why not try. And it worked," he recounts.

Research was conducted with France's Maisons-Alfort veterinary school, a leading institution founded in the 18th century, and various labs and universities.

The results were staggering: the hyper-sensitive snouts of trained sniffer dogs were almost infallible.

"PCR tests have a margin of error that can reach 30 per cent. With dogs, it's less than five per cent," he says. Each dog can process hundreds of samples every day, the only wages they need are



A police officer places a sweat sample for a sniffer dog to detect Covid-19 at Lebanon's Rafiq Hariri International Airport in Beirut. — AFP

biscuits or rubber toys and they deliver results on the spot.

The technique is not intended to replace PCR testing but has

been rolled out in a number of international airports such as Dubai, Helsinki and Sydney.

At a training facility provided by Bank Audi in Beirut, Rox and Sky, an Alsatian and a Malinois, are being trained by dog handler Carlo Selman.

"These dogs are a gift from God to combat Covid," he says, as Sky wiggles in excitement ahead of a new exercise.

Replicating the set-up at an airport terminal, a partition shields the dogs from the testing area, where passengers are ushered into booths. The underarm sweat sample is collected by the passengers, who are generally only too happy not to have a swab drilled into their nostrils.

The cotton pad is dropped in a glass container, which is in turn placed at the small end of cones that flare open on the other side of the partition.

Pacing down the row of cones on their handlers' leash, the dogs poke their muzzles in each one.

If a sample is positive, they stop and sit in front of it, waiting for their treat. Sniffer dogs with K9 unit experience in explosives or drugs detection can be trained in weeks. — AFP

Iran asks Interpol to arrest 'sabotage' suspect: media



View of the Natanz uranium enrichment facility 250 km south of Tehran. — Reuters

TEHRAN: Iran has asked Interpol to help arrest a suspect in a sabotage attack on its Natanz nuclear facility which it blames on Israel, a local newspaper reported on Sunday.

National television has published a photo and identified the man as 43-year-old Reza Karimi, saying the intelligence ministry had established his role in last week's "sabotage" at Natanz.

The broadcaster said the suspect had "fled the country before the incident" and that "legal procedures to arrest and return him to the country are currently under way".

Neither state TV nor other media provided further details on the suspect. The intelligence ministry has not issued an official statement.

The ultraconservative *Kayhan* daily reported in its Sunday edition that "intelligence and judicial authorities" are engaged in the process.

It added that "after his identity was established, necessary measures were taken through Interpol to arrest and return" the suspect.

Kayhan did not specify what form of Interpol assistance had been requested.

As of Sunday noon, Interpol's public "red notice" list online returned no results for Reza Karimi.

A Red Notice is a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender or similar legal action, according to Interpol's website.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Suspected militants attack two oil wells in Iraq

Suspected IS fighters attacked two oil wells in Iraq's northern province of Kirkuk, oil and security sources said. The state-owned North Oil Company in Kirkuk said that the two wells were targeted by explosive devices and that the "terrorist, subversive attack" resulted in no casualties or damage. The Oil Ministry meanwhile said the attack had not disrupted production.

Earlier on Saturday, the local police said at least one well in the Bai Hassan oil field in



Kirkuk had been detonated and pointed the finger at IS. Iraq is grappling with a deep economic crisis compounded by the fall in oil prices, the main source of the country's income, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. — dpa

TRIPOLI

Libya launches public vaccination drive

Libya has launched its coronavirus vaccination campaign for the general population in Tripoli, with the elderly and healthcare workers given priority in the conflict-hit North African nation.

Those over 70 would get the AstraZeneca jab while the Russian Sputnik V vaccine would be administered to medical personnel and those aged 50-60, the National Centre for Disease Control said.

NCDC head Badreddine al



Najjar said the vaccines would be distributed across

Libya "in the coming days", adding that China's Sinovac jab would also be available.

— AFP

TUNIS

Tunisia closes schools until April 30 due to virus

Tunisia announced the closure of all schools until April 30, as well as restrictions on movement, to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

A government spokeswoman said the situation was very serious, and that there would be a 7 pm curfew for cars. Intensive care units are near maximum capacity in most hospitals, officials said. With a population of around 11.5 million, Tunisia has recorded 9,639 deaths from almost 282,000 confirmed coronavirus infections.



Meanwhile, Tunisia plans to ease entry restrictions for tourists who travel to the country on package holidays, despite case numbers rising. — dpa

In brief

■ BANGKOK



THAILAND USES HOTELS FOR PATIENTS AS CASES SURGE

Thailand reported its fifth record daily tally of coronavirus cases last week, as authorities set up thousands of field hospitals to cope with an influx of patients and lined up hotels to provide extra beds for those without symptoms. All positive cases have to be admitted into care under Thai rules, and with 10,461 patients being treated the medical sector could be put under additional strain.

Authorities also announced the closure of bars, massage parlours and schools starting on Sunday for at least two weeks to curb the outbreak. — **Reuters**

■ DHAKA



5 KILLED AS POLICE FIRE AT PROTESTING B'DESHI WORKERS

At least five people were killed and dozens injured in Bangladesh after police opened fire on a crowd of workers protesting to demand unpaid wages and a pay rise at a Chinese-backed power plant, officials and police said. Police opened fire after about 2,000 of the protesters began hurling bricks and stones at officers at the construction site of the coal-fired plant in the southeastern city of Chittagong, local police official Azizul Islam said.

Four protesters died at the scene and another died in hospital, he said. "We're trying to control the situation", Islam said, adding that at least six police officers were among those injured. — **Reuters**

■ MELBOURNE



AUSTRALIA IN NO HURRY TO REOPEN BORDERS: PM

Australia is no hurry to reopen its international borders and risk the country's nearly coronavirus-free lifestyle, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said.

Australia closed its borders to all non-citizens and non-residents in March 2020 and has been permitting only limited international arrivals in recent months, mainly its citizens returning from abroad.

The border closure, together with snap lockdowns, swift contact tracking and high community compliance with health measures, have made Australia one of the world's most successful countries in curbing the pandemic, limiting coronavirus cases to under 29,500 infections and 910 deaths. — **Reuters**

'Run, Sara, Run': Is Duterte's daughter playing her father's game?

MANILA: The daughter of Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte says there's no chance she'll run for the presidency next year. Her father says the presidency is no job for a woman. But few are convinced by either of them as campaigns grow to back Sara Duterte-Carpio, 42, to succeed the autocratic and capricious president whose war on drugs killed thousands and whose embrace of China has convulsed historic ties with Washington.

"It is the clamour of the people

that will make her run", said Mar Masanguid, who led the movement behind the hugely popular 76-year-old Duterte's last minute presidential bid in 2016 and has now founded a group to back Sara Duterte.

Sara Duterte's image is as down-to-earth as that of her father in a country where tough plays well: She once punched a court official who challenged her; she rides big motorbikes; her children are nicknamed Sharkie, Stingray and Stonefish.

Opinion polls show her



A banner reading 'run, Sara', referring to support for Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte to run for president in a community in Manila. — **Reuters**

far ahead of other potential candidates for the 2022 election when Duterte must step down after one six-year term.

But Sara Duterte said she had thought carefully and decided not to try to extend the political dynasty to the presidency after succeeding her father as mayor of the southern city of Davao.

"I made a chart where I listed the whys and why nots before I decided that I am not going to run", she told Reuters, adding that she hadn't even told her father the reason. — **Reuters**

S Korea, US show differences over Fukushima plans

SEOUL: South Korea raised concerns over Japan's decision to release contaminated water from its crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea with visiting US climate envoy John Kerry, its foreign ministry said, but Kerry reaffirmed Washington's confidence in the plan's transparency.

Kerry arrived in Seoul on Saturday to discuss international efforts to tackle global warming on a trip that included a stop in China ahead of President Joe Biden's virtual summit with world leaders on climate change on April 22-23.

South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-Yong sought to rally support behind the country's protest against the Fukushima plan at a dinner meeting with Kerry, the ministry said. Under the plan, more than 1 million tonnes of water will be discharged from the plant wrecked by an earthquake and tsunami in 2011 into the nearby sea off Japan's east coast.

Seoul strongly rebuked the decision, with the foreign ministry summoning the Japanese ambassador and President Moon Jae-In ordering officials to explore petitioning an international court.

"Minister Chung conveyed our government and people's serious concerns about Japan's decision, and asked the US side to take interest and cooperate so that Japan will provide information in a more transparent and speedy



An aerial view of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant undergoing decommissioning work and tanks for storing treated water. — **AFP**

manner", the ministry said in a statement.

But Kerry, at a media roundtable on Sunday, said Tokyo had made the decision in a transparent manner and will continue following due procedures.

"The United States is confident that the Government of Japan is in very full consultations with the IAEA", he said, referring to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"The IAEA has set up a very rigorous process and I know that Japan has weighed all the

The United States is confident that the Government of Japan is in very full consultations with the IAEA

JOHN KERRY
US climate envoy

options and the effects and they've been very transparent about the decision and the process."

The former US secretary of state added that Washington would closely monitor Japan's implementation "like every country, to make certain there is no public health threat."

The South Korean foreign ministry said Chung and Kerry also agreed to work together to boost international cooperation to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, a goal pledged by South Korea, Europe and others. — **Reuters**

Pakistan, Indian FM's in crossover visits to UAE

DUBAI: The foreign ministers of India and Pakistan made crossover visits to the United Arab Emirates this weekend, after it was revealed the Gulf nation has been mediating between the neighbours.

"Good to be in the #UAE", Pakistan's Shah Mahmood Qureshi tweeted late on Saturday, after announcing a three-day trip which ends on Monday.

His Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar visited the emirate of Abu Dhabi on Sunday, a spokesman for New Delhi's ministry of external affairs tweeted. Pakistan's foreign ministry said there was no scheduled meeting between the two ministers.

But in February, Islamabad and New Delhi pledged to end all firing along the disputed frontier, after months of violence between the two countries.

Yousef al Otaiba, the UAE's envoy to Washington, confirmed last week that the Gulf nation had played a role "in bringing the Kashmir escalation down and created a ceasefire, hopefully".

"They might not, sort of, become best friends but at least we want to get it to a level where it's functional, where it's operational, where they are speaking to each other... that's our goal", he added, in an online talk with Stanford University's Hoover Institution. — **AFP**

Prince Philip's car becomes Lankan royal artefact

COLOMBO: An almost 90-year-old car that once belonged to Britain's late Prince Philip is now the centrepiece of a seaside museum in Sri Lanka.

The Duke of Edinburgh, whose funeral was held on Saturday, was a car aficionado who bought the 1935 Standard Nine for £12 when he was based in Colombo with the British Navy in 1940.

"When he came back in the early 1950s, he came and saw the car", said Sanjeev Gardiner, who has kept the vehicle at his Galle Face Hotel in Colombo.

"When he saw the car he said, 'I hope the brakes work. They didn't work then.'"

According to Gardiner, the prince acknowledged that the

Standard was the first car he bought. He also became a patron of the Standard Motor Car club.

Gardiner's hotel, one of the oldest in the former British colony, has built a museum around the silver and black sedan, preserving it for the enjoyment of guests and tourists.

At the time he bought it, the prince reportedly failed to beat down the asking price for the second-hand car, though he did manage to get a payment plan of two equal instalments within a month.

According to museum records, he first drove the car from Colombo to a naval base in Trincomalee, 260 kilometres away.

The car, which has 93,040



Galle Face Hotel Chairman Sanjeev Gardiner and his son Seshan pose with the 1935 Standard Nine vintage car which is claimed to be owned and the first car of Prince Philip (not pictured) now acquired by the Gardiner family in Colombo. — **AFP**

kilometres on it, has been restored several times and can still be driven, Gardiner said, but the prohibitive insurance cost means

it is not taken out anymore.

The vehicle was bought by Gardiner's father Cyril in the early 1950s.

Gardiner said his father also loaned the royals the Cadillac used by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip during their first official Sri Lanka visit in 1954.

"That along with another used by the royal family are being restored at the moment", he said.

Prince Philip, who died at the age of 99 last week, was known to love cars and often choose to drive himself. But in 2019, he surrendered his driving licence at the age of 97 after a collision that flipped his car and injured two other people.

During the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral procession on Saturday, a bespoke Land Rover Defender that he helped design bore his coffin to the Windsor Castle. — **AFP**

Russia to retaliate against Czechs over diplomat expulsions

MOSCOW/PRAGUE: Russia said on Sunday Czech accusations that Russian spy services were behind an explosion in an ammunition depot were unfounded and absurd and it would retaliate for Prague's expulsion of 18 Russian embassy staff.

The Czech Republic said it had informed Nato and European Union allies about suspected Russian involvement in the blast, which killed two people, and the matter would be addressed at an EU foreign ministers' meeting on Monday.

The expulsions and allegations by the Czechs have triggered its biggest dispute with Russia since the 1989 end of Communist rule, when Prague was under Moscow's domination for decades.

The incident also poured more fuel on the worst Russian-Western tensions since the Cold War, stirred in part by Russia's military build-up on its Western borders and in Crimea, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014, after a surge in fighting between government and rebel forces in Ukraine's east.

The Czech Republic kicked out the Russian embassy staff on Saturday after saying investigations had linked Russian intelligence to the blast in the ammunition depot some 300 km east of the capital Prague.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said the Czech accusations were absurd as Prague had previously blamed the blast on the depot owners, and Moscow would hit back hard.

"We will take retaliatory



Police officers stand outside the Russian Embassy during a protest over Russian intelligence services alleged involvement in an ammunition depot explosion in Vrbitice area in Prague. — Reuters

measures that will force the authors of this provocation to fully understand their responsibility for destroying the foundation of normal ties between our countries," a ministry statement said.

"This hostile move was the continuation of a series of anti-Russian actions undertaken by the Czech Republic in recent years. It's hard not to see the American trace (here)," it said, accusing Prague of "striving to please the United States against the backdrop of recent US sanctions against Russia".

Czech Interior and acting Foreign Minister Jan Hamacek said on public television investigators believed the 2014 blast was meant to target an arms

Worst tensions between Moscow and West since Cold War

shipment due to leave the depot, and to occur after it was gone, likely to Bulgaria.

He said police had later identified two suspects as the same Russian military intelligence officers — Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov — wanted by Britain for the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter with the nerve agent Novichok in the English city of Salisbury in 2018.

Petrov and Boshirov are believed to be aliases used by the Skripals' attackers, who remain at large. The Kremlin denied

involvement in the incident.

Hamacek said Prague would ask Moscow for assistance in questioning them but did not expect it to cooperate.

The Czech investigative weekly Respekt reported on Saturday that the arms shipment was for a Bulgarian arms trader who was believed to be supplying Ukraine at a time when Russian-backed separatists were fighting Ukrainian government forces in the country's east.

Respekt and Czech public radio named a Bulgarian arms dealer who they said Russian agents had tried and failed to kill. News website Seznamzpravy.cz said the arms shipment may also have been destined for Syrian rebels.

— Reuters

Germany mourns Covid dead

BERLIN: Germany held a national memorial service on Sunday for its nearly 80,000 victims of the coronavirus pandemic, with the president urging the country to put aside deep divisions over Covid restrictions to share the pain of grieving families.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier joined an ecumenical service in the morning at Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, a memorial against war and destruction, before attending a ceremony later at the capital's Konzerthaus concert hall.

"Today, as a society, we want to remember those who died a lonely and often agonising death during this dark time," said Steinmeier.

"I have the impression that we as a society do not make ourselves aware that behind all the numbers there are human fates, people. Their suffering and their deaths have often remained invisible to the public," he said.

With pandemic curbs still

in force restricting the number of people who can attend, the ceremonies were being broadcast live on public television.

As debate raged in Germany over measures put in place by Merkel's government, including the limitation of social contact to halt contagion, Steinmeier said it was a "bitter truth" that such Covid restrictions had "also brought about suffering".

Besides the pain of losing a loved one, restrictions in place mean that relatives are often unable to even hold their family members' hands as they lay dying.

Others have been left grieving on their own, as funerals or memorials are curtailed.

"We have restricted our lives to save lives. That is a conflict where there can be no way out without contradiction," admitted Steinmeier.

But he also defended the actions, saying that "politicians must make difficult, sometimes tragic decisions to prevent an even greater catastrophe." — AFP



German Chancellor Angela Merkel holds a candle during a ceremony for Germany's victims of the coronavirus pandemic in Berlin. — AFP

Scientists find 3pc of land areas unblemished by humans

SINGAPORE: Very little of today's world resembles Planet Earth from 500 years ago. In fact, only about 3 per cent of land surfaces might be ecologically intact — still home to their full range of native species and unblemished by human activity, according to new research.

The finding — published on Thursday in the journal *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change* — is far lower than previous estimates based on satellite images, which suggested around 20 per cent to 40 per cent of land ecosystems were undamaged.

For the new study, however, scientists conducted an extensive

survey of forest cover and species losses to understand better what was happening beneath the world's tree canopies.

"I was particularly surprised to see how low it really is," said Andrew Plumptre, a conservation biologist at the University of Cambridge. "It shows how rare such intact places are. It's scary just how little the world looks like what it was just 500 years ago."

The term ecosystem describes the complex relationships within a natural area that, altogether, help to sustain a healthy and balanced diversity of life. Lose just one or two key species, and the whole system could fall apart.



Aerial view showing the Laranjal tribal camp along the Iriri river in Arara indigenous land, Para state, in the northern Brazilian Amazon rainforest. — AFP File Photo

Today's still-pristine habitats, containing the same species abundance as in the year 1500 AD, were mostly found in regions considered less hospitable for humans, including the Sahara Desert and chilly regions of Greenland and northern Canada.

Other intact habitats were in areas under extreme pressure from deforestation and development, including parts of the Amazon in Latin America.

The authors argue that these areas should be a priority for future conservation. Though currently, only 11 per cent of these areas are under protection, the study found. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Navalny's team calls for new protests in Russia

The team of jailed Russian dissident Alexei Navalny has called for fresh protests this week. According to the announcement, published on Sunday, people are to gather on Wednesday evening in various Russian cities.

"There are circumstances under which you have to act quickly, otherwise there will be irreparable damage," the call for protest read.

Navalny's health has reportedly deteriorated, with doctors warning of the risk of heart



failure. He has been on hunger strike for the last two weeks, in order to protest against the lack of medical attention. His doctor has demanded to see him, but has not been let to him. — dpa

PARIS

France pledges €1 billion for frost-hit farms

The French government has pledged 1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) of financial aid for farmers who were worst affected by this month's spring frosts and cold weather, the prime minister's office said. The measures include a mix of tax rebates, state-guaranteed loans and state-subsidised furlough programmes, it said, adding that local government officials provide emergency funds for farmers who can't make ends meet.

Growers who have suffered



the most significant losses will be eligible to an "agricultural disaster" scheme, under which they will be granted compensation equivalent to up to 40 per cent of lost crops.

STUTTGART

Coronavirus protesters defy ban in Stuttgart

The German city of Stuttgart was the focal point of the country's weekend protests against coronavirus regulations, with more than 700 citations issued, as police once again clashed with people who argue that the rules are too restricting.

"It is maddening and embarrassing that, during this time, when we should be exercising mutual concern and care for one another, hundreds of police are needed to maintain basic standards



of social-distancing and behaviour," said Thomas Strobl, the interior minister of Baden-Wuerttemberg, the south-western state of which Stuttgart is the capital. — dpa

Have a blessed Ramadhan!

Ramadhan has just kicked off its journey, spreading blessings all over the world throughout 29 to 30 days. Starting and completing of this month-long journey depends on moon sighting. Muslim communities all over the world are observing this month by fasting from the dawn until sunset everyday. Ramadhan comes once a year as a generous guest visiting every house of Muslims, showering them with blessings and graces of different kinds.

Ramadhan is one of the five key pillars of Islam, standing as a must-to-be-performed religious obligation by all Muslims. Truthfully, fasting was prescribed in this month and assigned to nations of other Prophets before being assigned to the nation of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). This has been affirmed by the Holy Quran verse when the Almighty Allah addressed people, “O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.”

Known as the month of fasting, mercy, forgiveness and kindness, people become more compassionate to each other during Ramadhan. In fact, this month is the holiest month in the Islamic Calendar and regarded a significant occasion for Muslims. Its importance and value as a month is marked by the revelation of Holy



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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RAMADHAN
COMES ONCE
A YEAR AS A
GENEROUS
GUEST VISITING
EVERY HOUSE
OF MUSLIMS,
SHOWERING
THEM WITH
BLESSINGS AND
GRACES OF
DIFFERENT KINDS

Quran, prescription of fasting and declare of the Night of Al Qadr, a night valuing better than one thousand months in terms of worth in praying to Allah on this night.

The Holy Quran affirmed it in the verse, “The month of Ramadhan in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever of you sights the month, he/she must observe fasts that month and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number of days which one did not observe fasts must be made up from other days”.

Stressing the importance of the Night of Al Qadr is having, the verse of Quran says: “Surely We revealed it (Quran) on the night of Al Qadr — And what do you know what Night of Al Qadr is — The night is better than a thousand of months — The angels and the spirit descend in it by the permission of their lord every command — It is peace till the break of morning”.

Moreover, Ramadhan is a time of learning and passing different lessons to Muslims during their fasting period since dawn to sunset. Fasting urges Muslims to recall various aspects of living practices and reminds them of all those poor people and needy families around. Basically, it mirrors the daily struggle of poor people,

striving to afford food and other life necessities for themselves and their families. Therefore, while fasting, Muslims become more thoughtful and sympathetic to their poor brothers and sisters. In return, good deeds are usually conducted in this month reflecting the spirit of giving and care. Donation of food and money to the needy families is essential indeed.

Generally, fasting is a spiritual practice that does not just consist of refraining from eating and drinking, but from every kind of selfish desires and wrong deeds too. Fasting is not only of the body, but of the spirit as well. Essentially, the purpose of fasting is to develop and strengthen ones power of self-control to resist wrong desires and bad habits. This definitely will help people attain nearness and closeness to Allah. Besides, fasting promotes charity and generosity, as people get more considerate with the suffering of others.

Certainly, Ramadhan as a month is a time of obtaining blessings from the Almighty Allah as well as time for giving and sharing. Fasting as a practice is a valuable experience towards achieving self-improvement. Likewise, it could be the start of maintaining good deeds and principles to be habitual in everyday life of people.

Have a blessed Ramadhan to one and all.

A CRUMBLING CAPITAL

Potholes, graffiti and broken streetlights

ROUBA EL HUSSEINI

Beirut’s roads are riddled with potholes, many walls are covered in anti-government graffiti and countless street lamps have long since gone dark. At night, car drivers creep cautiously past broken traffic lights and strain their eyes for missing manhole covers, stolen for the value of their metal.

Many parking metres have been disabled in protest over an alleged corruption scandal, while cars are parked randomly on sidewalks. Charred patches from burnt tyres are seared into the asphalt downtown, reminders of angry street protests of past years against the political leadership held responsible for the malaise.

To many, the dysfunctional capital has become emblematic of a country mired in its worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war after decades of mismanagement and corruption.

Much of Beirut’s infrastructure started falling apart long before last August’s massive portside explosion killed more than 200 people, levelled the waterfront and damaged countless buildings.

Amid the crisis, the Lebanese currency has collapsed and continues its downward slide at a sickening rate that in itself is deepening the problem.

As the currency has dived by more than 85 per cent on the black market, wary contractors are steering clear of any municipal repairs that are paid for in Lebanese pounds. When the Beirut city council called for tenders to fix lighting on streets and in tunnels, no one showed up at two meetings to assign bids

last month. “Not a single contractor wants to work with the municipality,” a Beirut city council official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. But if the city raised its offers, the official added, “there would be nothing left in the coffers”.

The few contractors taken on in recent months, the municipality official said, have been hired to repair buildings ravaged in the enormous portside explosion.

The buildings were divided into 15 groups depending on the degree of damage, but the city only found firms willing to work in the four worst-hit categories.

Just months after signing on, the companies are complaining because the pound has lost even more of its value on the informal exchange market. Meanwhile, civil society and non-government organisations have often stepped in to help with the badly-needed repairs.

On other projects, companies contracted by the city are unhappy too — among them the waste management firm Ramco, which signed on to be paid the equivalent of \$14 million per year, according to Beirut mayor Jamal Itani.

The sum is now worth less than \$2 million. “From time to time, (Ramco) threatens to suspend work until the fees are adjusted,” the anonymous official said. Many worry that this could lead to a repeat of Beirut’s 2015 infamous trash crisis, when a landfill closure led to festering rubbish piling up in the streets.

Public anger at the time sparked anti-government protests, years before unprecedented cross-sectarian demonstrations broke out in late 2019. — AFP

BROTHER’S SHADOW

Raul Castro leaves the political stage, his legacy yet to be written

SARAH MARSH

Raul Castro, who is retiring from high public office, for most of his life toiled in the shadow of his older brother, Fidel Castro. Yet he also played a key role in Cuba’s 1959 leftist revolution and the preservation of Cuban socialism.

While Fidel was the charismatic leader who rallied Cubans to defend the revolution and defy the United States, Raul, 89, built the military into a formidable fighting force that saw off enemies including a US-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

Later, after the fall of former benefactor the Soviet Union sent Cuba into an economic tailspin and left it politically isolated, he launched market-style reforms to its centralised economy and sought to normalise relations with Western powers.

But he leaves office amid an economic crisis that has caused shortages of even basic goods and is threatening the universal access to quality healthcare and education hailed by supporters of Cuban socialism as among the most important achievements of the revolution.

Former US president Donald Trump unravelled a detente Castro reached with his predecessor Barack Obama and tightened the decades-old US trade embargo. The rollout of Internet has fuelled internal dissent.

Still, some thirty years after the end of the Cold War, Cuba remains one of the last Communist-run countries in the world. “Always preferring the supportive role to his brother and carrying out that role brilliantly, Raul eventually had to take on Fidel’s



Cuban President Raul Castro waves as he arrives to attend a speech from former US president Barack Obama at the Gran Teatro in Havana, Cuba, on March 22, 2016. — Reuters

RAUL CASTRO
LEAVES OFFICE
AMID AN ECONOMIC
CRISIS THAT HAS
CAUSED SHORTAGES
OF EVEN BASIC
GOODS

leadership himself at a time when the revolution showed every sign of faltering,” said Hal Klepak, a Canadian historian living in Havana who wrote a book on Raul’s military life.

“That it is still there, wounded and shaken but still there, in the face of massively powerful forces out to destroy it, is no small part a result of his leadership.”

Raul backed Fidel in his revolution against the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista since the beginning in 1953, when they led a failed assault on the Moncada military barracks. An

early admirer of communism, it was Raul and Ernesto “Che” Guevara, the Argentine-born doctor turned Marxist revolutionary, who persuaded Fidel to seek support from the Soviet Union.

But he was also quick to launch reforms to move Cuba away from a Soviet-style command economy after the fall of the Berlin Wall plunged the Caribbean island nation into economic crisis.

First he established thriving enterprises within the armed forces — which now control much of the economy. — Reuters

SPORT

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Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech scores against Manchester City. – Reuters

“I strongly believe that some clubs have this aura and this energy to be in finals, and Chelsea obviously has it

THOMAS TUCHEL
Chelsea coach

Ziyech puts Chelsea in FA Cup final

CITY'S HOPES OF HISTORIC QUADRUPLE TROPHY WIN END

ANDY JALIL

LONDON, APRIL 18

The only goal of the match scored by Hakim Ziyech, was enough to see the London side march into the FA Cup final for the fourth time in five years. It also ended Manchester City's hopes of a historic quadruple trophy win. They had four major trophies available to them at this stage of the season.

Chelsea coach, Thomas Tuchel, whose side have lost just two matches in 19 since he took charge at the end of January, said: "It was a very, very strong performance and I'm very happy for my team, very proud they performed at this level. We deserved the lead, we

deserved to win and could even have been a goal better."

He added: "I strongly believe that some clubs have this aura and this energy to be in finals, and Chelsea obviously has it. If you're at a club that's regularly in finals you feel it. I don't know if it sharpens the mentality or if it's the other way around. But you feel Chelsea are used to playing finals."

Chelsea began in quick passing style and could have taken the lead as early as the 6th minute when Ziyech put the ball in the net only to be ruled slightly off side. They had the better of the goalless first half, attacking at every opportunity and should have scored. Reece James' 20-yard shot went a little wide and then Ben



Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech celebrates scoring their first goal with Timo Werner.

– Reuters

Chilwell, who had time to control the ball, mis-hit a wonderful cross from James.

City lifted their game at the start of the second half but ten minutes into it, Chelsea took the lead with

a beautifully crafted goal. Mason Mount started the move inside his own half and found Timo Werner moving behind the City defence. The German received a perfect long pass and crossed to Ziyech who had sprinted through the middle. Ziyech found the pass slightly behind but did well to stretch the left leg and hook the ball in.

Chelsea remained in control and should have scored moments later when Ruben Dias misjudged a high ball which left Ziyech clear in front of goal but the Moroccan scuffed his shot and Steffen saved well with his legs. City applied further pressure towards the end, Raheem Sterling shot over the bar from close range and Rodrigo's

header was saved by Arrizabalaga in added time.

City coach, Pep Guardiola, said: "It was a tight game. We were not able to win. Congratulations Chelsea. Chelsea is a top side. With the number of new players that came to Chelsea this season, this can happen."

Guardiola defended the several team changes he made. "Who is saying we don't pay attention to this competition? We respect the FA Cup. We only had two days to recover after Wednesday and a very long three-hour train journey. We play to win every game and these players here deserved to play. What we have achieved is incredible. We haven't had a free midweek for an eternity."

Oman U-15 basketball team awaits approval for training

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The GCC basketball executive committee has confirmed the dates of the Under-15 GCC Basketball Championship which is scheduled to be held in Manama city, Bahrain from August 10 to 18. The decision was confirmed during a remotely-held meeting of the committee.

Asaad bin Mubarak al Hasani, Secretary-General of Oman Basketball Association (OBA), represented the Sultanate in the meeting. The committee announced that Dubai city will host the GCC senior basketball championship from June 18 to 26 after Kuwait and Qatar pulled out of hosting the event.

Mohammed al Qusaimi, head coach of Oman U-15 team, said the training programme of the team which started from January was affected by the decision of suspension of the sporting activities until further notice due to the current situation of Covid-19



Mohammed al Qusaimi

pandemic.

He added in his exclusive remarks to *Observer* that the OBA has sought approval from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth seeking an exceptional for the national team from this decision. "The letter was sent to the ministry and I hope to get a positive response very soon. Our aim is to resume the field training as soon as possible. The Under-15 GCC Basketball Championship is very crucial event as the tournament will act as Asian qualification for



the GCC zone to the U-15 Asian basketball championship. The first and second placed teams in the championship will seal their spots in the qualifier", he added.

Commenting on resuming the training sessions through advanced communication platforms, he responded: "It is always better to have the training on the field especially with players in under age of 15 years. Also, having an external camp is quite difficult and costly during this tough period. Therefore, we hope

to obtain the permission from the Ministry and Supreme Committee to resume the training and our warm-up session for the GCC assignment", he ended.

The technical preparation of the team has started since last January. Many short domestic camps were held at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex with attendance of large number of players. Coach Al Qusaimi had selected several promising players in the comprehensive training plan.

The experience national coach

is leading the technical staff of the U-15 team as replacement of Bosnia's Mladen Ostojic. Al Qusaimi is well-known name in the Sultanate as he led many local teams including Nizwa club for many accomplishments.

Earlier in January, 25 players were selected for the team and representing different clubs including Seeb, Al Ittifaq, Dhofar, Salalah, Qurayat, Ahli Sidab and Bausher.

OMAN PROBABLES:

Bashar bin Basheer, Qaiser

al Balushi, Sufayan Tawfeeq, Muhannad Faraj, Ayoob al Jabri, Mohammed al Wahaibi, Abdulrahman al Maamari, Al Qasim al Wahaibi, Ahmed al Saadi, Faisal al Abri, Turki al Balushi, Ahmed al Ghaithi, Suleiman al Barashdi, Al Mukhtar al Shukairi, Al Yazan al Salti, Al Ayham al Salti, Mohsin Fouad, Qusai al Amri, Faisal al Balushi, Yousuf al Barwani, Suleiman al Hasani, Al Hawari al Hashli, Suleiman al Hasani, Laith Khimji, Sultan al Ghafri and Ghssan al Salmi.



Quartararo wins Portuguese MotoGP, Marquez seventh

Fabio Quartararo won his second consecutive race when he took the Portuguese MotoGP at Portimao on Sunday, with six-time champion Marc Marquez seventh in his first race back after nine months out. "I feel full confidence," said French Yamaha rider Quartararo, who started last season strongly only to fade out of contention.



BCCI backs Olympic inclusion of cricket

Cricket's bid for Olympic inclusion has received backing from the Indian board BCCI which said it was now keen to help the game become part of the world's biggest sporting event. Cricket last featured in the 1900 Olympics in Paris and the ICC wanted the Twenty20 format to be included in the 2028 Games in Los Angeles.



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas with the trophy after winning the final against Russia's Andrey Rublev in the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series in Monaco. — AFP

Tsitsipas storms to first Masters 1000 title

MONACO: Stefanos Tsitsipas crushed Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-3 on Sunday in a one-sided final in the Monte Carlo Open for his first Masters 1000 title.

The Greek 22-year-old world No 5 took one hour and 11 minutes to beat the Russian, ranked eighth, for the best victory in his career, after his triumph in the year-end Masters in 2019.

"I'm overwhelmed with emotion," said Tsitsipas. "It's the best win of my life so far."

"It is the best thing winning my first Masters 1000 and it is even more special doing it here on home soil in Monte-Carlo and doing it on clay, which is my favourite surface."

"I knew that he was going to be a very difficult opponent to face. There were a lot of nerves coming into that match," he added, noting that he and Rublev were old foes

who "always want to bring the best out of each other."

The Greek's victory in their seventh meeting gave him a 4-3 advantage in their head-to-head meetings.

"I'm proud of the way I handled myself on the court," he added.

Tsitsipas now has six titles on the ATP Tour, including the year-end Masters in 2019 and four ATP 250 tournaments (Stockholm 2018, Marseille and Estoril 2019, Marseille 2020).

By the time the 23-year-old Rublev got going in the first set, the damage was done.

Tsitsipas calmly held his service games to win the first set in 32 minutes.

The second followed the same pattern as Tsitsipas broke serve in the third game. He broke again to end the match. — AFP

VERSTAPPEN WINS CHAOTIC GP AT IMOLA

IMOLA, Italy: Max Verstappen kept his cool to claim a chaotic rain-hit Emilia Romagna Grand Prix on Sunday as seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton recovered from a rare mistake to sneak in second.

Red Bull driver Verstappen muscled past pole sitter Hamilton on the first corner at Imola to set up his impressive first win of the season.

"I surprised myself. We worked really hard to make that better. In these tricky conditions we did a great job," Verstappen said.

Lando Norris in a McLaren took third for the Briton's second successive podium ahead of Charles Leclerc for Ferrari. The outcome of a compelling second leg of the Formula One season confirmed Verstappen's stature as a formidable obstacle to Hamilton's quest for an unprecedented eighth drivers' crown.

After winning the season-opener in Bahrain and putting in the fastest lap on Sunday Hamilton leads Verstappen by one point ahead of the Portuguese Grand Prix next time out.

A high-speed crash involving Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas and George Russell in a Williams forced the race to be suspended



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium with the trophy after the Emilia Romagna Formula One Grand Prix at the Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari race track in Imola, Italy. — AFP

as debris was cleared off the Imola circuit. The pair collided at over 300kmh on lap 34, both drivers shaken as their wrecked cars were lifted off the track.

The red flags appeared a lap after an uncharacteristic slip-up from Hamilton saw the Mercedes world champion hurtle off the

circuit into a gravel pit when placed second on a treacherous rain-hit track. Half an hour after the suspension, a rolling re-start saw Verstappen set off in front of Leclerc and Norris. Hamilton, his car repaired, had work to do from ninth.

As Verstappen calmly reeled

in his 11th career victory, but first in Italy, Hamilton weaved his way up to sit third, and then second after passing Norris with three laps remaining. "First time I've made a mistake in a long time, but I'm grateful I could bring the car home," said a relieved Hamilton.

— AFP

MAXWELL, DE VILLIERS STAR IN BANGALORE'S THIRD WIN

CHENNAI: Glenn Maxwell and AB de Villiers hit whirlwind half-centuries to set up a third successive win for Royal Challengers Bangalore as they thrashed Kolkata Knight Riders by 38 runs in the Indian Premier League on Sunday.

Maxwell (78) and De Villiers (76 not out) powered Bangalore to 204-4 and Virat Kohli's team then restricted Kolkata, led by Eoin Morgan, to 166-8 in Chennai.

Bangalore, who are searching for their maiden IPL title reclaimed top spot in the Twenty20 tournament. "Well, I said at the halfway mark we have 200 because of two genius innings back-to-back," said Kohli. "Maxi has taken to this team like duck to water. AB loves the team and they were the difference today. We're not getting ahead of ourselves and not getting over-excited."

Maxwell, who was bought by Bangalore for \$1.95m in February's auction, hit his second straight fifty to make his team recover from 9-2 including Kohli out for five in the second over.

The Australian batsman put on 86 for the third wicket with Devdutt Padikkal as he took the attack to the opposition bowlers.

He also stood strong with



de Villiers before falling to fast bowler Pat Cummins as he hit nine fours and three sixes in his 49-ball knock.

De Villiers, the South African veteran who has been with Bangalore since the 2012 season, hit the ball to all parts of the ground in his 34-ball blitz. He hit three fours and a six off the last over from Andre Russell as Bangalore finished with a flourish after Kohli elected to bat first.

"I did play well and had a lot of fun. Maxi made it easier," said man of the match De Villiers.

"It wasn't a 200-wicket, maybe 170 was about par today. The most

important thing is I'm enjoying myself and my cricket - my family is here."

Two-time IPL winners Kolkata were never in the chase as they lost wicket at regular intervals. Morgan hit 29 and Russell made 31 off 20 balls. New Zealand fast bowler Kyle Jamieson took three wickets while fellow quick Harshal Patel and spinner Yuzvendra Chahal claimed two each. — AFP

Brief scores: Royal Challengers Bangalore: 204-4 (Glenn Maxwell 78, AB de Villiers 76 not out; Varun Chakravarthy 2/39) beat Kolkata Knight Riders 166-8 (Andre Russell 31, Eoin Morgan 29; Kyle Jamieson 3-41) by 38 runs.

Mumbai Indians inflict third defeat to Hyderabad

CHENNAI: Champions Mumbai Indians inflicted a third straight defeat on David Warner's Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday to go to the top of the Indian Premier League.

Quinton de Kock hit 40 and Kieron Pollard a crucial unbeaten 35 as Mumbai made 150 for five off their 20 overs.

Australia star Warner and England's Jonny Bairstow hit early runs but Hyderabad were all out for 137 with spinner Rahul Chahar taking three for 19 and pace bowler Trent Boult three for 28.

Hyderabad are now bottom of the eight team league already facing a mountain if they want to qualify for the playoffs.

Mumbai, who lost their opening fixture to Royal Challengers Bangalore, must thank their powerful bowling and Pollard's big hitting for the win.

Pollard's two sixes in the final over finally proved the difference between the two sides after Mumbai to build on a strong start by South African de Kock and captain Rohit Sharma who made 32.

Bairstow hit 43 off 22 balls —



including one six which went through a fridge door in the Chennai stadium — and Warner 37 but Hyderabad's lower order again failed to build on their fine start.

The openers fell in chaotic circumstances, Bairstow stepping back on his stumps and Warner leaving the field fuming after being run out going for a single.

"The two of us were set but it proves that if you don't bat deep, you can't win," said Warner.

Chahar then accounted for Manish Pandey, Virat Singh and Abishek Sharma in the middle order to leave Hyderabad

scrambling for runs and fast running out of wickets.

They were all out 13 runs behind with two balls left.

"The way we came out and bowled was very important," said Sharma who acknowledged that he was expecting more from the batting.

"We ticked some boxes, we have more to tick," said the Mumbai captain. — AFP

Brief scores: Mumbai Indians 150/5 (Quinton de Kock 40, Kieron Pollard 35 not out; Vijay Shankar 2/19) beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 137 all out (Jonny Bairstow 43, David Warner 36; Rahul Chahar 3/19) by 13 runs.



FC Barcelona's Lionel Messi celebrates winning the Copa del Rey trophy after beating Athletic Bilbao in the final at Seville, Spain. — Reuters

“
It’s very special
to be captain of
this team where
I have spent my
whole life and very
special to be able
to lift this cup
LIONEL MESSI

ARGENTINE HITS BRACE AS BARCA BEAT ATHLETIC TO WIN COPA DEL REY

MAGNIFICENT MESSI

MADRID: Lionel Messi scored twice, including a stunning solo goal, as Barcelona blew away Athletic Bilbao to win the Copa del Rey on Saturday, consigning their opponents to a second final defeat in two weeks. The cup was won and lost in a whirlwind 12 minutes in Seville, which saw Barca score four times to clinch an emphatic 4-0 victory, with Messi at his devastating best. It remains to be seen if his seventh Copa del Rey triumph is the last trophy Messi lifts in Barcelona colours but if this was to be a final flourish, the

33-year-old crafted a fitting farewell. “It’s very special to be captain of this team where I have spent my whole life and very special to be able to lift this cup,” Messi said. His first goal, and Barca’s third, started with the Argentinian in his own half before a charging run down the right and a surge forward into the penalty area gave him the chance for a simple finish. With the club’s new president Joan Laporta in the crowd, Ronald Koeman’s first title as Barcelona coach should also

significantly boost his chances of remaining in charge beyond the summer. “To win a title is important for me,” Koeman admitted afterwards. Yet Laporta was noticeably evasive when asked about Koeman’s future. “He is doing well,” he said. Koeman took over a team at rock bottom, humiliated by an historic loss to Bayern Munich and wounded by the attempts of Messi to leave the club for free. But this 31st Copa del Rey success for the club is a testament to progress made and Koeman will hope it not only

helps convince Messi to stay but gives Barca momentum now in a neck-and-neck title race in La Liga. “Despite the changes at the club and the young players, at Barca you have to always fight for trophies,” Koeman said. “We have the first one and now we are going to fight to the last game in La Liga.” Gerard Pique said it felt like the club had been “reset”.
‘TURNED IT AROUND’
“Sometimes you fall down and you have to get up,” Pique said. “It has been a difficult

year but the team has turned it around.” Messi was sent off when Athletic Bilbao beat Barcelona, also at the La Cartuja, in January to win the Spanish Super Cup but they never looked like pulling off a repeat. After Athletic lost to their Basque rivals Real Sociedad in last year’s postponed final only two weeks ago, lifting themselves for another showpiece in the same stadium and against a tougher opponent was always going to be a big ask. “In both finals we played well below the level that we’re

capable of,” said Athletic coach Marcelino Garcia Toral. It became a collapse, with goals scored in the 60th, 63rd, 68th and 72nd minutes to leave Athletic’s hopes in tatters. First, Messi slipped in Dest down the right and his cross was diverted in by Griezmann before the second came from the opposite flank, Jordi Alba curled in a cross for De Jong to nod in. The third was a spectacular from Messi, who started the move in his own half, leaping over one challenge and dodging another. — AFP

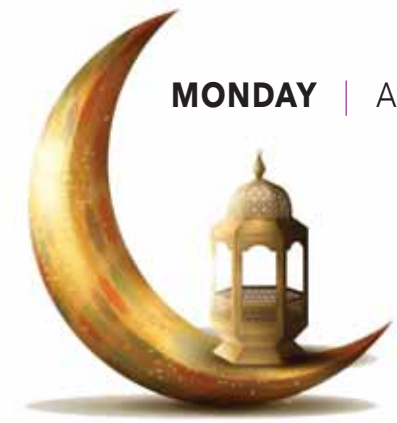
Nervy Milan return to winning ways against Genoa

MILAN: AC Milan secured a first home Serie A win for over two months with a nervy 2-1 victory over Genoa on Sunday to boost their hopes of a top-four finish. Without suspended top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Milan took the lead in spectacular fashion through Ante Rebic in the 13th minute, but Mattia Destro’s 37th-minute header against his former club levelled things up. Milan struggled to break down the visitors after the break, but got a stroke of luck when Gianluca Scamacca put through his own net in the 68th minute to edge the hosts back in front. Genoa threw everything at Milan in search of the equaliser, but Stefano Pioli’s men dug in to move on to 66 points from 31 games, eight behind leaders Inter Milan, who play Napoli later on Sunday. Genoa stayed 14th. Pioli has insisted that Milan’s aim this season was not a



AC Milan's Mario Mandzukic (C) and team-mates celebrate after Genoa scored an own-goal during the Serie A match at the San Siro stadium in Milan. — AFP

Scudetto challenge, but securing Champions League football next term, for the first time since 2014. But while they have the best away record by far in Serie A this season, Milan had won just six of 15 home league matches prior to Genoa’s visit. Hopes of a first home success since beating Crotone on February 7 were raised when Rebic arrowed a fine strike into the net, the Croatian scoring for the second successive match. Destro’s header, his third goal against Milan this season, unsettled the hosts, who could have easily have conceded again before Scamacca’s unfortunate intervention — the ball going in off his back. Two last-ditch clearances denied Genoa a late equaliser, as Milan equalled their Serie A points tally from last campaign with seven games still to be played. — Reuters



ramadhan

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Keep your eyes on the blessings coming your way this Ramadhan

BY NUZHAT ABDULRASHEED

For my husband and me, 2019 was the first time we celebrated Ramadhan together since we got married. Marking a milestone, we made it special and memorable. We both shopped together for everything necessary to make Indian, Arabic and Chinese dishes.

A special time in Oman, we also decided to hold a big iftar party inviting his Omani partner to share a meal with us. They were doing business together running this restaurant called "Gemello" in Al Khoudh.

It was a memorable celebration filled with shared joy. That year, we wished for more success and for things to become even better. Little did we know, a gift was coming our way.

It was at that Ramadhan that we discovered that I was pregnant — our first baby. We were so excited and happy. It was a real gift that any couple would be ecstatic to celebrate.

But excitement faded a little because of morning sickness, nausea and vomiting that came along with the pregnancy. I was unable to fast but I still did read Quran, did dhikr and prayed my Salah.

I was so needy then that we decided it was better for me to be near him while his working. My moods and needs were so unpredictable that at that time, it was good to come up with a compromise. I also started going to the restaurant with him during his working hours. I used to help him in punching orders and supervising everything. I wanted to also cook but my stomach and sense of smell cannot tolerate them for some reason. My husband Abdul Rasheed was very supportive in this journey. He used to do all household chores for me and I can't thank Allah enough for pairing me with such a husband with a nice soul.

Even back then, we used to order food online for my cravings. From burgers to chips and pani puri, it was an eclectic yearning for something delicious. And some point, we come to realise that starting a family

can be challenging and having a baby adds to that challenge. I eventually have to go back home to India so that my close family members will be able to attend to my needs better.

This year is the second Ramadhan we are celebrating in Oman. Unlike in the past, our munchkin is finally a little bigger and is very curious about the world.

But just like a lot of people, we face the same kind of challenges. Businesses are down and the incessant lockdown is not helping. It's easy to understand what needs to be done but it doesn't mean that the decisions don't cause everyone pain.

Travel has also become a challenge. While we usually just take flying for granted in the past to meet families, today, it was much recommended to stay distant.

Kids born during Corona times are facing their own sets of issues. How can you explain to a one or two-year-old that they have to wear a mask and wash their hands for their protection? Even young adults have trouble adapting — the school becoming an additional burden rather than something to be truly enjoyed.

Thankfully, little by little, our small one has learned to live with the necessity of wearing a mask. I'm proud of the little progress that my kid does everyday. It just saddens me sometimes that this kid of young mind is starting to accept the new reality but a lot of adults still can't wrap their heads around the concept of wearing a mask and sanitising as often as they can.

Ramadhan is indeed a blessed month. It breaks my heart not to be able to pray Taraweeh like we used to. But in the deepest recesses of my wanting heart, I know that Allah will bless us. Ramadhan is the perfect opportunity to tell him what we need and it's also the perfect opportunity to be a good neighbour. All of us go through our separate pains but the fact that we were given a chance to celebrate Ramadhan means we must take advantage of this holy month and work for the bountiful blessing Allah has promised to his devoted children.

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

On that day, you will see the sinners bound together in chains, their garments made of tar, and the Fire covering their faces,

IBRAHIM 49-50

5 RAMADHAN
SUNDAY, APRIL 18

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FATWA QUESTION & ANSWER



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

QUESTION

Someone overslept at some of Ramadhan nights and missed Al Isha prayer. He woke up after the sunrise but found himself junub, what should he do?

ANSWER

He should perform ghusul (washing) from janabah. Then, he should pray Al Isha and Al fajr prayers even after the sunrise. Probably, it is OK if he doesn't make up that day as it happened unintentionally.

5 RAMADHAN
SUNDAY, APRIL 18

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HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

ABU HURAIRAH NARRATED THAT :

THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH SAID:

"Whoever does not leave false speech, and acting according to it, then Allah is not in any need of him leaving his food and his drink."

5 RAMADHAN
SUNDAY, APRIL 18

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The importance of staying hydrated during Ramadhan

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The days are long while fasting for Ramadhan during summer making it exceptionally important to avoid dehydration.

Shabib al Kalbani, a clinical nutritionist at the Ministry of Health says that an adult comprises 70 per cent water and this depends on how much fat a person is carrying in his/her body.

"For example, an obese person has less water by percentage, about 60 per cent and is at risk of dehydration, especially in the tropical climate. This also indicates that they are carrying more fat above the organs and between the organs. When there is fat around the waist and between the organs one is at risk of cardiovascular diseases and chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension, which suggests that they should go for weight management in a healthy manner", said Al Kalbani.

Why hydration is currently so important is because we are fasting approximately 12 hours or even a bit more than that. This requires replenishing of fluids and electrolytes", Al Kalbani explained.

So what are the ways the fluids can be replaced?

"Replacing fluids does not only mean just drinking water, but also sufficient consumption of fruits and vegetables. This helps one to simultaneously replenish electrolytes lost due to fasting, sweating, physiological and metabolic processes", he replied.

"When it comes to coffee, tea and other beverages, we must note that they are to be taken in moderation as they carry some form of diuretic effect", pointed out the clinical nutritionist.

Salt is the other element that needs to be controlled, "It is advisable to limit the amount of salt used in the preparation of iftar meal. If possible use other flavours as salt can have an osmotic effect. Salt can cause fluid retention and can also deplete fluids."

How can we stay hydrated while exercising in Ramadhan?

"If you are an athlete and practises for more than one hour indoors or outdoors make sure you replenish yourself after the fasting hours with fluids or energy drinks that contain six to eight per cent of electrolytes", - Shabib al Kalbani, Clinical Nutritionist.

Here are two natural options according to Shabib al Kalbani: "Coconut water is also a healthy choice as well as lemon juice, but the one that is homemade and it should not be too sweet."

FOURTH PART OF A SERIES

Getting To Know Islam

An in-depth look into the faith of billions

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Do you know Allah?

The 99 most beautiful attributes of Allah

In Arabic, "Allah" is the proper name of the one and only one God worth worship. The name Allah embraces all His beautiful names. He has ninety-nine other most beautiful names that are referred to as Allah's unique attributes that are not shared by any other being. A human being needs to have unshakable faith in Him and profound knowledge of His attributes, for unless a person has a faith in Allah and knowledge of His attributes, may not render obedience to Him. The knowledge of Allah's attributes enables a person to cultivate the noblest human qualities and to fashion his or her life in virtue and devoutness. If a person does not recognize Allah as the Creator, the Ruler and Sustainer of this universe and Who has no partner to share with Him the Divine power and authority, that person may fall prey to false gods. But if a person recognizes Allah and knows His divine attributes, there is not the least possibility of falling prey to this illusion.

For example, if we know that Allah is Omnipresent and Omns and He sees, hears and knows everything that we do in public or private or even our unexpressed thoughts, then how can we afford to indulge in disobedience to Allah? The one who is aware of these attributes will feel under divine will and scrutiny all the time, therefore, will behave in the most appropriate way. But the one who is not aware of these attributes may be misled into Allah's disobedience out of ignorance. So is the case with all other attributes. Furthermore, the qualities and attributes which a person must possess can be cultivated and developed out of profound knowledge of Allah's attributes. It is the knowledge of Allah's attributes that purifies a person's mind and soul, beliefs, morals and actions. "To Allah alone belong all the fairest and most perfect Names, so call on Him by those Names, and leave alone those who deviate from the right way to His attributes and violate their sanctity." (Quran 7:180)

Timeline of Development in Muslim Civilisation

ca 654 Islam has spread to all of North Africa

ca 691 Construction of the Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem beings.

Do you know the QURAN?



Language of the Quran

The Quran was revealed in Arabic. Pre-Islamic Arabic was a spoken language with an oral literature of elaborate poetry and prose.

Writing had not yet fully developed and memorisation was the most common means of preserving the literature. Arabs in Muhammad's day had political freedom, the precondition for linguistic integrity. The Roman Byzantium had dismissed the Arabian Peninsula as the barren desert, and the Persian Sassanid dismissed the Arabs as barbarians not worth conquering. Arabian Peninsula became the most isolated piece of populated land in the world - virginal container for God's last revelation. At the time of the Quran's revelation, the Arabs were experts in the art of recited poetry. They believed that oratory was a means to access and political influence in the tribe. It is not surprising that the Quran was revealed in the most eloquent, articulate and elaborate style the Arabic language has ever known. The Quran has without doubt provided a level of linguistic excellence unparalleled to that of Arabic poetry and beyond human capacity to reproduce (Quran 2:23). The Quran has been admired for its restraint and grace of style, its eloquence and refinement. Its pleasant prose and dignified style are instantly recognized as ingredient of its sublime charm. The Quran describes its own status: God has revealed "the most beautiful message in the form of a book internally consistent and reiterative." (Quran 39:23).



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ramadhan

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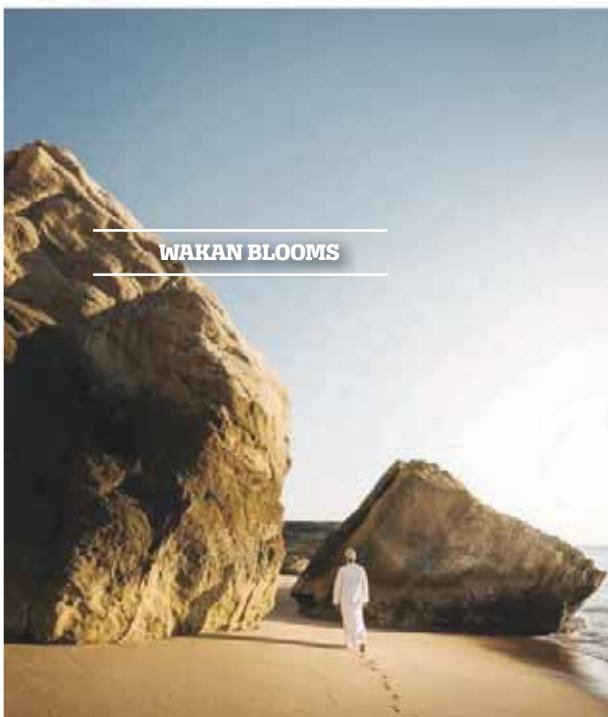
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CHANGING WORLD

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Livin' on a prayer: Champion Pakistan Quran reader in full voice

Islamabad: To master the art of Quran recitation, 21-year-old Hassan Ali Kasi had to follow a strict regime of yoga, hours of rehearsing vocal scales — and a total ban on biryani.

His dedication is paying off, and he was recently named champion of an international online qari competition hosted by Afghanistan, where he was up against men from 25 other countries.

He was tutored in the Quran by his father, and his recitation skills quickly earned him recognition at national level where he won numerous awards before making it onto the international stage.

'THE VOICE IS A GIFT FROM GOD'

Many qaris emerge after being taught at religious



Revered in Pakistan, qaris are professional reciters of the Quran, called upon to lead prayers at mosques and also to teach the Muslim holy book to students.

They are in particularly high demand during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting currently being observed around the world.

"It was a job of the prophets," Ali Kasi said in the capital, Islamabad.

"One of the very first elements of preaching was recitation. It is as old as Islam."

Qaris require perfect Arabic pronunciation, a difficult feat in Pakistan where Urdu is the national language.

A finesse of rhythm and intonation produces the slow, melodic sound similar to the distinctive adhan, or call to prayer, delivered through loudspeakers from the top of mosques five times a day.

Recitations during competitions can last for 15 minutes, so Ali Kasi practises yoga to help with breath control, and vocal exercises to strengthen his voice.

"A qari should be able to recite for a minimum of 50 seconds without taking a breath," said Ali Kasi, an Islamic Studies student at a university in the capital.

"The throat is very sensitive, a qari should avoid cold water and fatty food as it produces too much mucus, which causes abrasion when you touch high notes," he cautioned.

schools known as madrassas, where young boys are taught to memorise the Quran — often with little understanding of the Arabic language and also at the expense of other subjects.

Education activists say the colossal effort that can often take years to master fails to prepare students for the workforce. But for millions of boys in impoverished and deeply conservative Pakistan, it is the only schooling available, providing free shelter, clothes and food.

Very few madrassas are open to girls. Boys who complete their studies can go on to become teachers or lead prayers at mosques around the world — even if they earn little money from it.

"One has to be meticulously hardworking," said Abdul Qudus, from the Wafaq-ul-Madaris al-Arabia, the country's largest group of madrassas.

"The voice is a gift from God, but one has to polish it."

He said hundreds of prayer leaders in the Middle East are madrassa graduates, while others are now teaching the Quran online to Pakistanis living overseas in Europe or America.

Ali Kasi, who spends hours practising verses ahead of competitions, said quality teachers were the key to his winning voice.

"When you follow a good qari, you can spread your voice across the world," he said. — **AFP**

ART

Argentine artist channels 'hand of God' with Maradona portraits



BUENOS AIRES: Maxi Bagnasco says he knows Diego Maradona's features by heart after painting portraits of the soccer star almost daily since the Argentine World Cup winner died last November.

The artist, who creates lifelike paintings with spray paint on huge canvases, decided to make Maradona his niche after the outpouring of grief over the footballer's death.

"I am not afraid of being pigeonholed, I believe that what everyone sees from me is the hand of God," Bagnasco said with a smile, a reference to Maradona's famous goal against England at the 1986 World Cup, which Argentina went on to win.

"I think Maradona will accompany me in other projects that I do."

Bagnasco, 39, has been using his phone to copy photographs of Maradona, who has cult-like status in Argentina, where he was nicknamed 'D10S,' a play on the Spanish word for 'God' that incorporates the number '10' shirt he wore as a player.

In a trendy food court in Buenos Aires, Bagnasco showed off some twenty

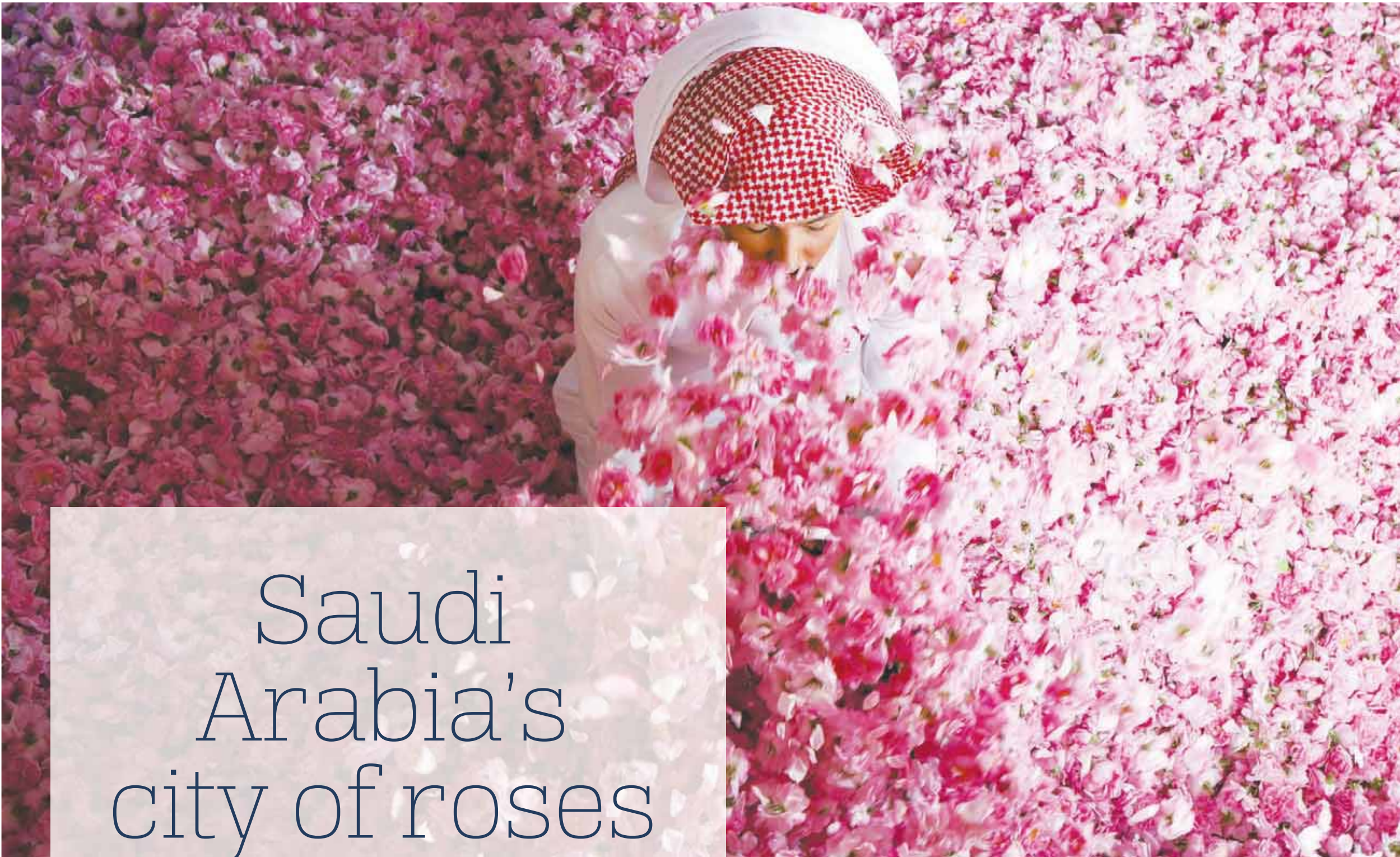
paintings of Maradona, including a large rendering of a famous pose of the silky striker in his blue-and-white Argentina jersey, which he was finishing off with a brush.

A black-and-white painting showed a young Maradona with long hair over his face. In another, the player holds aloft the World Cup. Another reflected Maradona's wilder side, showing him puffing on a cigar in front of a huge Argentina flag.

Bagnasco, who said he knew he wanted to be an artist at age nine when he won a contest copying a Vincent van Gogh painting, is now looking to auction off the works. He said there had been strong demand and social media interest in his art, which had led to a number of commissions.

"He was the best of all time. The Argentine best known in the world, with a unique life, a life no-one else will have," said Bagnasco.

"That's why I say that what is happening to me today, that they are asking me to paint him all over the world, is not going to happen with anyone else, only with Diego." — **Reuters**



Saudi Arabia's city of roses blooms in Ramadhan

Every spring, roses bloom in the western Saudi city of Taif, turning pockets of the kingdom's vast desert landscape a vivid and fragrant pink.

In April, they are harvested for the essential oil used to cleanse the outer walls of the sacred Kaaba, the cubic structure in the holy city of Mecca towards which Muslims around the world pray. This year, the harvest falls during the holy fasting month of Ramadhan, which observant Muslims devote to prayer and reflection.

Workers at the Bin Salman farm tend rose bushes and pick tens of thousands of flowers each day to produce rose water and oil, also prized components in the cosmetic and culinary industries.

The perfumed oil has become popular among the millions of Muslims who visit the kingdom every year for

pilgrimages.

Patterns of plants and flowers have long been part of Islamic art.

Known as the city of roses, with approximately 300 million blooms every year, Taif has more than 800 flower farms, many of which have opened their doors to visitors.

Known as the city of roses, with approximately 300 million blooms every year, Taif has more than 800 flower farms, many of which have opened their doors to visitors

While workers pick flowers in the fields, others labour in sheds, filling and weighing baskets by hand.

The flowers are then boiled and distilled.

"We start boiling the roses on high heat until they are almost evaporated, and this takes around 30 to 35 minutes", Khalaf al Tuweiri, who owns the Bin Salman farm, told AFP.

"After that we lower the heat for around 15 to 30 minutes until the distilling process starts, which lasts for eight hours."

Once the oil floats to the top of the glass jars, the extraction process begins.

The oil is then extracted with a large syringe to fill different-sized vials, the smallest going for 400 Saudi riyals (\$106). — **AFP**





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MINISTRY OF HOUSING, URBAN PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION

Muscat University names new Vice-Chancellor

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The Board of Directors of Muscat University has announced the appointment of Professor Khamis bin Hamad al Yahyai as Vice-Chancellor of the University.

Dr Jumaa bin Ali al Jumaa, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, commented: “I am very proud of the appointment of Prof Khamis al Yahyai at this important stage of the university’s development. Although the university has witnessed impressive growth since its inception in 2016, one of the university’s aims is to utilise Omani leadership expertise and competencies as well as developing the future leaders of the Sultanate. Prof Khamis has accomplished remarkable achievements at Sultan Qaboos University.”

Khalil bin Abdullah al Khonji, Chairman of the Muscat University Board of Directors, stated: “We are very pleased with the appointment of Prof Khamis al Yahyai and greatly look forward to his leadership. Professor Al Yahyai is a leading expert in the economic and political sciences and has a proven record of scientific and administrative achievements, community service and the leadership of successful academic institutions.

We believe his expertise and experience regarding the needs of the Sultanate and achieving the Oman 2040



Vision will be instrumental in further growing the University through offering a high-quality education for its students and pioneering research.”

Prof Khamis commented: “I thank the Board of Directors and Trustees for giving me the opportunity to lead this promising institution. Muscat University is one of the Higher Education Institutions working with industry to ensure its programmes and research are relevant to the needs of the Sultanate and to the wider region.

The University has already achieved so much despite its recent formation building on the original feasibility study carried out by Oxford University, UK. To achieve both the Oman 2040 vision and Muscat University’s own vision, we will create an exemplary educational experience through offering a suite of high-quality industry-informed programmes.”

Prof Khamis previously held the position of Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University.

Landmark pact to take Omani frankincense products global



KEY GOAL: 18 public and private sector organisations join hands to support strategic initiative

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Eighteen Omani public and private sector organisations have come together to join hands with the Sultanate’s authorities in promoting and marketing frankincense products to the global market. An agreement to this effect was signed by the Commissioner-General of the Sultanate of Oman at Expo 2020 in Dubai, together with the Authority for SME Development (Riyada), Oman Chamber of Commerce and

Industry (OCCI) and the Oman Trading Platform (Taiseer).

The project will be spearheaded by the Taiseer platform with the support of the Commissioner-General, Oman Investment Authority, and other stakeholder agencies of the Omani government. The goal is to prep a range of frankincense based Omani products to be showcased as the Expo 2020 in Dubai.

Mohsen bin Khamis al Balushi, Adviser at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, who is also Commissioner-General of the Sultanate, said: “The project is part of ongoing efforts aimed at maximising the economic gains from the Sultanate’s participation in Expo 2020, the most important of which is the tourist flow to the Sultanate, and

the visibility of the Sultanate as an investment destination.”

The initiative will open up new markets for scores of Omani families and crafts-persons, as well as rural communities, who can now have their merchandise displayed and marketed at the Oman Pavilion of Expo 2020 Dubai.

As the first such expo to be held in the Middle East and North Africa region, the event will provide a valuable platform for Omani craft products, as well as enhance tourism inflows as well.

Taiseer’s role, said the Commissioner-General, is to use its expertise to enhance the marketability and appeal of Omani frankincense products to global audiences expected to turn up at the expo. They will add to the competitiveness of the

Omani products and ensure their sustainability.

Nasser bin Suleiman al Harthy, Vice-President of Oman’s Investment Agency for Operations, said the Authority has will ensure that its subsidiaries play a robust role in supporting SMEs succeed in marketing their products overseas.

This is in line with the OIA’s goal to support sustainable development of the national economy by ensuring the strong growth of the SME sector.

Nada Bassam, representing the Taiseer platform, said the agency has since organised numerous visits and workshop directly with artisans, crafts persons and SME outfits with the aim of suitably mobilising them to make the most of the upcoming expos.

(With inputs from ONA)

Majan forecasts uptick in power demand after historic dip

REVERSING TREND: Pandemic-induced lockdowns and other economic impacts contributed to a 1.6 per cent decline in peak load demand for the first time in over 15 years

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Wholly government-owned Majan Electricity Company (MJEC), member of Nama Group, registered an unprecedented 1.6 per cent decline in peak load demand in its jurisdiction last year, reversing over 15 years of steady demand growth ranging from 1.2 to 12 per cent annually.

The dip, coinciding with a prolonged spell of pandemic-induced lockdowns and other economic-related impacts, is however unlikely to forestall a strong uptick in electricity demand growth forecast around Sohar Port and Freezone and other parts of North Al Batinah Governorate.

With a supply license covering around 50,744 sq kilometres of north-western



Oman, MJEC’s sprawling remit includes Al Dhahirah Governorate, Al Buraimi Governorate and North Al Batinah Governorate. Of these areas, North Al Batinah — with its port, free zone and industrial city, among other load centres — is expected to drive new power demand growth as well as sizable network expansion, the company said.

According to MJEC’s newly published 3-year Capability Statement, spanning the 2021 – 2023 timeframe, peak demand declined 1.6 per cent to 1334.0 megawatts (MW) in 2020 — for the first time since the company was established in 2005. It attributed the slump to the countrywide lockdown imposed by authorities primarily on commercial and industrial

The dip, coinciding with a prolonged spell of pandemic-induced lockdowns and other economic-related impacts, is however unlikely to forestall a strong uptick in electricity demand growth forecast around Sohar Port and Freezone and other parts of North Al Batinah Governorate

activities right up to mid-August 2020.

“Although Al Dhahirah Governorate faced a slight growth increase (3.7 per cent), a major decrease occurred in Al Buraimi (-9.2 per cent) and North Al Batinah (-1.6 per cent) governorates. Clearly, Al Batinah North and Al Buraimi Governorates were affected by the closing of commercial and industrial activities, which led to load decreasing comparing to the 2019 peak load. The majority of load in Al Dhahirah Governorate is residential load.

With the lockdown, people were forced to stay at home, which lead

to increasing residential power consumption,” MJEC explained.

Notwithstanding the downturn, power demand is forecast to grow over the next three years to 1500.1 MW by 2023 in the base scenario, up from 1334.0 in 2020.

In the high scenario, demand is forecast to jump to 1592.7 MW, according to the report. Some of this growth will come from new industrial and manufacturing projects under development at Sohar Port and Freezone, focusing on mineral processing, alloy wheel manufacturing, textile, tile and paper manufacturing.

Elsewhere within North Al Batinah Governorate, a further uptick in demand is anticipated from a number of civil, infrastructure, housing, residential, commercial, retail, industrial and manufacturing projects in various stages of implementation.

The list includes new facilities for healthcare, water distribution infrastructure, Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Defence, building materials plants, and other ventures. Industrial and commercial investments in Al Buraimi are also expected to contribute to some demand growth over the 2021-2023 timeframe, the company added.

DCO to support regional digital economy

High impact: Digital Cooperation Organization welcomes Oman as founding member and launches several initiatives

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO), based in Riyadh, announced the joining of Oman and Nigeria, as founding members, joining Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

Combined, the seven countries are an economic bloc of \$1.2 trillion in GDP. The population base of the seven nations is close to 480 million, 80 per cent of

whom are under 35 years of age.

Last week, DCO convened its first ministerial meeting, chaired by the Saudi Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Abdullah bin Amer al Swaha and was attended by ministers of the DCO countries.

The meeting also featured ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao; the president of world economic forum Borge Brende; the Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf Dr Nayef Falah M al Hajraf and representatives from other UN programmes.



Combined, the seven countries are an economic bloc of \$1.2 trillion in GDP. The population base of the seven nations is close to 480 million, 80 per cent of whom are under 35 years of age.

During the meeting, an agreement was reached to launch five high impact initiatives. These initiatives aim at establishing a centre to highlight the importance of cooperation in relation to flow of data across borders, empowerment of women in the digital labour market, in addition to serving entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to grow and achieve a

digital future.

The meeting discussed ways to promote cooperation in all areas driven by innovation and acceleration of growth of digital economy. They also discussed the organisation's governance, organisational structure and future plans.

The DCO established in November 2020 as a partnership to pursue common values and goals in the digital economy, between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan, and Jordan, that will promote shared digital aspirations among member nations for economic diversification and increasing social prosperity through the growth opportunities available across the digital economy, and public sector digital transformation.

Bank Muscat extends support to Fak Kurba

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to partnership in sustainable development and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider, has once again extended its support to the Fak Kurba initiative launched by the Oman Lawyers Association for the fourth consecutive year.



This year, the bank's support will help secure the release of 250 citizens who have been jailed for failing to clear financial obligations. None of these cases relates to payments involving banks or financing firms. It is noteworthy that the announcement of the bank's participation in this year's Fak Kurba initiative came through a media meeting that was organised last Thursday at Muscat FM Radio.

On this occasion, Dr Muhammad bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, the supervisor of Fak Kurba, said that Bank Muscat is continuing to support the initiative to secure the release of insolvent people for the fourth year in a row. He noted that the bank is one of the most important institutions that has been keenly supporting the initiative. This year the bank's contribution will help secure the release of 250 debtors, adding to the 576 citizens it helped in the previous three years.

Dr Muhammad al Zadjali thanked Bank Muscat for its generous and continuous support of the Fak Kurba initiative. He stressed that the support provided by institutions like Bank Muscat and other like-minded individuals and entrepreneurs are the main engine on which this noble initiative is based. Donations from all those who are able, whether small or large, go a long way in taking this initiative forward to remove the distress of some members of our community.

Kia Cerato taxi runs 999,999 kms

MUSCAT: A Kia Cerato taxi owner Asaad Saleem Ali al Batashi, was extremely elated on touching the 999,999 kilometre mark on the odometer. On reaching this extraordinary milestone he was felicitated by Reliable International Automotive, the distributors for Kia in Oman.

Speaking at the occasion, a spokesperson from Reliable International Automotive said, "This is a remarkable feat. Something that goes on to highlight the capability of Kia vehicles. While also proving that there's a lot more to Kia vehicles than their attractive design language, advanced technology, assuring safety and more."

Asaad Saleem Ali al Batashi, an employee at MoH in hemodialysis unit in Bausher is a loyal Kia customer. Sharing his experience with the Kia Cerato taxi he said, "I have been a long-time admirer of Kia. My Kia Cerato is a 2012 YM vehicle. It has been with me on varied journeys through different climatic conditions. Even after touching 999,999 kilometres, the Cerato still feels so energetic and powerful. And I am happy that I never compromised on its upkeep. I always chose Kia



service as they are the experts. And whenever there was a spare part requirement, I only opted for Kia Genuine Spare parts. And I'm really happy with the result. If I have to opt for a new vehicle as a taxi, I will definitely choose a Kia."

Asaad recently noticed that he was going to clock 1 million kms on his odometer, so he immediately informed us and visited our service centre the next day to get his odometer changed and start anew. This testimonial is a proof that Kia has come a long way in terms of its quality and dependability.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way. No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the 'Good Partnership award', 'Family Like Care' Service award, and 'Kia Distributor of Distinction' award.

NBO credit card customers can win 6thStreet voucher with every purchase



MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) is offering customers the chance to win one of 20 online shopping vouchers worth RO 100 from 6thStreet, one of the region's premier online retail portals and home to top fashion brands including Calvin Klein, Lacoste, Levi's and Tommy Hilfiger.

This Ramadhan, simply become a new customer or use any existing NBO Credit Card online between April 12 and May 12, 2021 and receive free entry to the prize draw. For each spend of RO 40 or above at 6th Street or RO 20 at supermarkets or grocery stores, customers will receive entries to the prize draw.

Each week there will be five prize draws, one for each type of Credit Card offered by NBO, and five lucky winners will receive an eVoucher valid on 6thStreet website worth RO 100.

Maha al Raisi (pictured), Head of Retail Product Division at NBO, said, "This is a great opportunity for NBO customers to enjoy extra value this Ramadhan and win an exciting prize each time they shop online at 6thStreet. NBO's range of Credit and Debit cards have been designed with customer needs in mind and offer convenience and flexibility in their daily transactions as well as frequently adding extra value by offering a wide range of exclusive value-added lifestyle benefits."

To apply online for a NBO Credit Card please visit www.nbo.om or call NBO's Contact Centre or whatsapp on 24770000 where a specialist customer adviser will available to assist.

Commodity rally resumes to trigger multiple breakouts

OLE S HANSEN

The commodity sector is showing renewed strength, and following a six-week period of consolidation, the Bloomberg Commodity index was on track for its best week in four months.

While individual news and developments supported all three sectors, the overall performance was also being supported by a surprise drop in US Treasury yields accompanied by a weaker dollar.

Several key commodities, including crude oil, copper and gold broke higher, thereby potentially signalling renewed momentum attracting fresh buying from speculators.

While the global number of new daily Covid-19 cases look set to hit record levels, the market has taken comfort from strong

economic data from the world's two biggest economies.

Crude oil was heading for its best week since early March and in the process both WTI and Brent crude oil broke out of their consolidation ranges.

Strong economic data from the US and China, the world's biggest consumers, was enhanced by positive demand outlooks from Opec and the International Energy Agency. Despite short-term Covid-19 related challenges, both increased their outlook for 2021 demand based on an expected strong pickup into the second half.

Production restraints from the Opec+ group of producers, has supported a rapid reduction in the massive overhang in global oil inventories that built up last year.

Together with vaccination campaigns gathering pace, these developments have raised the prospect for increased mobility



and increased fuel demand into the second half.

The potential risks that may scupper fresh attempts to drive prices higher are the prospect for rising US production and the resumption in the Iranian nuclear negotiations driving a further increase in oil sales on top of what has already been registered since

Biden won the US Presidential election.

In addition, several nations, including India, are grappling with sharp rises in Covid-19 cases which could see the number of new global cases hit a new record soon.

Having broken out of the month-long consolidation range,

Brent will now be looking to build on this with the price potentially settling into a new range between \$65 and \$70 but probably not much higher until the current virus surge is brought under control, as the risk of spreading would challenge the elevated expectations for 2H demand growth.

Crude oil, copper and gold traders will be watching the weekly closes following multiple breakouts of recent ranges. Crude oil trades up more than 6 per cent on the week with the now levels of support being \$65.50 in Brent and \$62.25 in WTI.

Copper meanwhile has broken its recent consolidation range to trade above \$4.14/lb and gold has recovered to break above \$1,765/oz which is now support. Gold, the most interest rates and dollar sensitive commodity, rallied to challenge and eventually break resistance at \$1,765/oz a key level

that we have been highlighting in our latest updates.

While rates and the dollar sets the overall direction, it is clear the loss of momentum in recent months was a major reasons why money managers at the beginning of March had cut bullish futures bets by 85 per cent from the peak last February.

During the past month, however, buyers started to return and the recent rejection below \$1,680 helped trigger a 53 per cent increase in the net long to 7.7 million ounces during the week to April 6.

A sustained break higher would significantly improve the technical outlook and potentially kickstart renewed momentum and with that demand from investors in both futures and exchange-traded funds.

[The writer is the Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank]



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Pandemic destroyed fewer US businesses than feared

WASHINGTON: Fewer than 200,000 businesses in the United States may have failed during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, a lighter toll than initially feared and one that may have had relatively little impact on unemployment, according to Federal Reserve research.

The figure contrasts with the early forecasts that the pandemic would leave America's "Main Street" desolate as well as with polls that continue to show large percentages of US small business owners are worried about their survival.

Perhaps 600,000 businesses, most of them small firms, fail in any given year, and US central bank researchers estimated that from March 2020 through February of this year the figure has been perhaps a quarter to a third higher.

That included 100,000 "excess" failures among firms engaged in close-contact services such as barber shops and nail salons, a sector described by the Fed research group as the sector hardest hit by the economic fallout from the pandemic.

While potentially devastating for the owners and employees of those firms, "relative to popular discussion ... our results may represent an optimistic update to views about pandemic-related business failure," the authors



A woman walks past a shop that is closing following the outbreak of the Covid-19 in Manhattan, New York City. — Reuters

wrote.

Offsetting the hit to those services-oriented businesses, they noted, carry-out restaurants, grocery stores and outdoor recreation companies seemed to suffer fewer failures than usual, with the net result being a smaller-than-anticipated blow to the overall economy.

"Many industries have likely seen lower-than-usual exit rates, and exiting businesses do not appear to represent a large

share of US employment," the researchers wrote.

The study was the latest to sound a positive note on an economic recovery that has proceeded faster than expected, with top Fed officials confident that much of the potential permanent damage had been avoided. Earlier research had anticipated widespread business failures due to the pandemic, with 400,000 or more small firms going dark.

Census and other surveys continue to reflect stress among some firms that continue to operate, and the Fed researchers acknowledged that more failures could occur if, for example, banks, landlords and creditors become less flexible with their business tenants as conditions return to normal.

Nor does the study account for the millions of still-lost jobs at surviving firms that cut staff or reduced operations, or for

Offsetting the hit to those services-oriented businesses, carry-out restaurants, grocery stores and outdoor recreation companies seemed to suffer fewer failures than usual, with the net result being a smaller-than-anticipated blow to the overall economy

the disproportionate losses felt among racial or ethnic groups over-represented in the most devastated industries.

But it does start to put some scope around one of the potential economic scars from the pandemic, and suggests that small businesses appear to have been both more resilient than anticipated, and were propped up effectively by loans from the Paycheck Protection Program and other federal aid.

The Fed and the US government began flooding the economy with credit and outright grants for businesses and households last spring, so much so that personal incomes actually rose even as unemployment spiked to historical levels.

The funding included \$755 billion in forgivable PPP loans spread across more than 9.5

million firms. Although the roughly 30 million US small businesses are diverse, the vast bulk involve sole practitioners who have no employees, with the remainder employing only a handful. So the failures of these businesses, even in large numbers, don't register deeply in terms of overall employment.

Official government statistics on business failures typically lag the actual demise of those firms by a year or more. The Labour Department's Bureau of Labour Statistics and the Commerce Department's Census Bureau have not yet released any formal estimates on the pandemic's final toll on companies and their workers.

To augment the scarce data, the Fed researchers coupled available government information with high-frequency, alternative measures such as cellphone location data mapped onto retail locations, records from payrolls processor ADP, and other sources.

They found that while the early fears of a large Covid-19 hit may have been warranted given the numbers of businesses that shut down in the spring of 2020, by the end of August there was "no evidence of excessive, ongoing business inactivity; in fact shutdown was well below normal by late 2020." — Reuters

EU countries to miss deadline for recovery plans



BRUSSELS: Some European Union governments will miss the April 30 deadline to submit their recovery plans to the European Commission, its Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis (pictured) said, but they are still likely to submit the plans within a few weeks afterwards.

The delay in the submission of some of the national plans, which spell out how each government wants to spend its share of the EU's 750 billion euro joint borrowing scheme, will not delay the scheme as a whole, Dombrovskis said.

"Some Member States are nearly there and submitting their plans by the end of April is achievable. For others, it looks more difficult. Finalisation will require somewhat more work for a couple of more weeks," Dombrovskis said.

The 27 national plans are blueprints for spending grants and loans that each EU country will get from the unprecedented joint borrowing by the European Commission to rebuild economies greener and more digital after the Covid-19 pandemic.

To get the money, each country has to earmark 37 per cent of the funds to reduce CO2 emissions and 20 per cent to make the economy better prepared for the digital age through investment and reforms that will get piecemeal financing from the EU until 2026. — Reuters

Spot prices rise as China replenishes inventories

GLOBAL LNG

BEIJING: Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) rose this week as China, Japan and South Korea sought supply in an early move to stock up for winter, industry sources said.

The average LNG price for June delivery into Northeast Asia was estimated at about \$7.60 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), traders said. Last week, cargoes for May delivery were about \$7.30 per mmBtu.

"Companies are stocking up earlier for the next winter, after all the supply disruptions from the past months," a London-based trader said. A colder than average winter in the northern hemisphere and a ship congestion at the Suez canal, the fastest route between Asia and Europe, have boosted prices since December.

Japan Petroleum Exploration Co Ltd was seeking a cargo for delivery between May 22 and June 13 to the Soma terminal. Distributor ENN Energy

Holdings Ltd bought at least 12 cargoes for delivery between July and February in China, traders said.

Pavilion Energy said it had imported Singapore's first carbon-neutral LNG cargo. Europe is also storing up gas as a cold spell sustained heating demand and slowed stock replenishment, which are below historical levels for this time of the year, traders said.

The amount of gas flowing to US LNG export plants averaged 11.0 bcf/d so far in April. The volume would top March's monthly record of 10.8 bcf/d, as low internal prices compensate for the cost of liquefying and transporting the super-chilled fuel to Asia, traders said.

Analysts, however, said they do not expect LNG feedgas to break March's record in April because flows were expected to decline this month due to planned work on a couple of facilities and the pipelines serving them, including Cheniere Energy Inc's LNG. — Reuters



Workers inspect a pipeline at a natural gas facility run by Sinopec in southwest China's Sichuan province. — Reuters

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