

P10

TOTTENHAM CUT CORD WITH MISERABLE MOURINHO SPELL



P15

EGYPTIAN ARCHITECTS WIN MOSUL MOSQUE COMPETITION



P17

PACT INKED FOR OPERATION OF NEW BUNKERING TERMINAL



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO TURKMENISTAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow of the Republic of Turkmenistan, on the death of his father. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to President Berdimuhamedow and his family. — ONA

NEW DELHI

LOCKDOWN IN DELHI AS COVID CASES SOAR

India's capital New Delhi will impose a week-long lockdown from Monday night, officials said, as the megacity struggles to contain a huge surge in Covid-19 cases with hospitals running out of beds and oxygen supplies low. The nation of 1.3 billion people reported a record-high of 273,810 infections on Monday — the fifth-consecutive day of more than 200,000 cases — to take the total to 15.06 million. In Delhi — the worst-hit city in India — 25,500 fresh cases were reported on Sunday, with almost one-third of those tested returning positive coronavirus results. "Delhi's health system is at a tipping point. The Covid-19 situation is pretty critical," Delhi Chief Minister said in a TV address. SEE P7



INSIDE



Health services are in place to fight Covid-19

HM DIRECTIVE TO STUDY NEED FOR DHOFAR FIELD HOSPITAL

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH @patkaushal

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has directed to study the extent of the need to establish a field hospital in Dhofar Governorate, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, confirmed during his visit to the governorate on Monday.

The minister took stock of the situation in Dhofar Governorate, and confirmed there are enough beds to accommodate Covid-19 patients in the hospitals.

The minister held series of meetings with the health officials and local authorities and assured them of all possible assistance following the increase in new cases of the Covid-19 variants.

He said the current needs of the hospitals are being monitored and supplied with necessary medical equipment



Dr Al Saeedi speaking to the media in Salalah on Monday.

and personnel.

Commenting on the availability of ventilators, the minister said, "There is no shortage of ventilators and enough of them are available, whether it is in Dhofar Governorate or any other governorate."

He also assured that testing kits are sufficiently available. "There is one type distributed to all the governorates. It was directed that priority should be given to Dhofar Governorate due to the geographical distance from the capital," the minister added.

TURN TO P2

Majlis Ash'shura to host agriculture minister

STAFF REPORTER MUSCAT, APRIL 19

The Majlis Ash'shura will host Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, to present the ministry's statement, on Sunday (April 25).

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. He added that Majlis Ash'shura will hold three consecutive meetings — the 9th, 10th and 11th regular sessions and that the 9th session will be allocated to discussing the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources' statement.

Shaikh Al Nadabi said that the first part of the statement will deal with the issue of food and water security in terms of the contribution of the agriculture and fisheries sectors to the economic diversification strategy as well as realising self-sufficiency, the investment map for achieving food and water security, the ministry's research efforts and its role in realising self-sufficiency and food safety

The statement will deal with the issue of food and water security in terms of the contribution of the agriculture and fisheries sectors to the economic diversification

AHMED AL NADABI Secretary-General of Majlis

and the ministry's vision to control the prices of basic food commodities.

The second will focus on the safety of agricultural, fisheries and animal products in addition to the monitoring of food products. The third part discusses the most prominent developmental projects in the fields of agriculture, fisheries and water resources of the five-year plan and the challenges...

TURN TO P2

Ingenuity makes history with successful flight on Red Planet

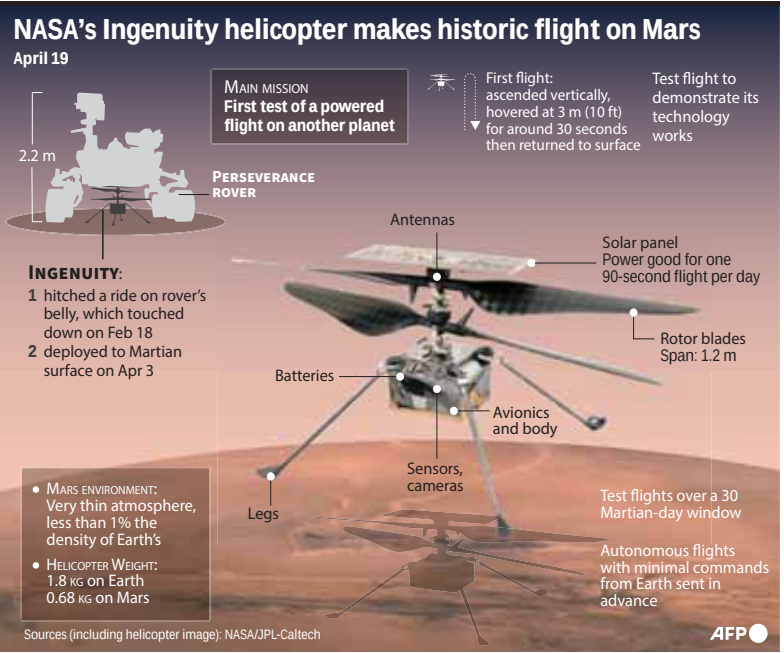
WASHINGTON: Nasa successfully flew its tiny helicopter Ingenuity on Mars early on Monday, the first powered flight on another planet and a feat a top engineer called "our Wright brothers' moment."

At 3:34 am Eastern Time (0734 GMT), the 1.8 kilogramme rotorcraft lifted off, hovered 10 feet above the Martian surface, then came back to rest after 39.1 seconds. Data and images from the autonomous flight were transmitted 278 million km back to Earth where they were received by Nasa's array of ground antennas and processed more than three hours later.

Engineers were tensely watching their screens at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, where the mission had been designed and planned for the past six years.

They broke into applause as one of them read off a checklist of tasks Ingenuity had achieved and concluded: "Ingenuity has performed its first flight — the first flight of a powered aircraft on another planet."

Ingenuity quickly sent back a



black-and-white image from its downward pointing navigation camera, showing its bug-like shadow cast on the surface. Then came a choppy colour video from the Perseverance rover showing Ingenuity on the ground, in flight, and then once again at rest.

More images and a smoothed-out video are expected to follow.

"We've been talking so long about our Wright brothers' moment on Mars, and here it is,"



Gradual transition to eco-friendly bags

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnasseri

The Environment Authority (EA) has issued a decision (No 61/2021) to form a support team for a gradual transition to the use of eco-friendly bags in the Sultanate.

TURN TO P2



Health services in place to tackle Dhofar Covid situation: Minister

HIS MAJESTY'S DIRECTIVE TO STUDY THE EXTENT OF THE NEED TO ESTABLISH A FIELD HOSPITAL ENOUGH BEDS TO ACCOMMODATE COVID-19 PATIENTS, NO SHORTAGE OF VENTILATORS TESTING SOLUTIONS ARE SUFFICIENTLY AVAILABLE, PRIORITY TO DHOFAR DUE TO DISTANCE



FROM PAGE 1
Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health has reported 1,399 new cases on Monday, bringing the total number of cases to 181,430. With 12 new deaths, the total death toll in the Sultanate has reached 1,890.

During the past 24 hours, 107 people were hospitalised, bringing the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 818, including 265 in intensive care units (ICUs). The total recovery cases reached 161,670, which is 89 per cent of the total cases reported.

Majlis Ash'shura to host agriculture minister

FROM PAGE 1
facing the ministry in executing the developmental projects of the five-years' plans, he said.

The fourth one deals with the evaluation of the agricultural sector and identifies the ministry's role in encouraging the suppliers of pesticides and fertilisers to import green substances for providing safe pathogen-free food products. It also focuses on the use of the progressive irrigation methods to reduce water consumption and the ways for improving the marketing of agricultural products.

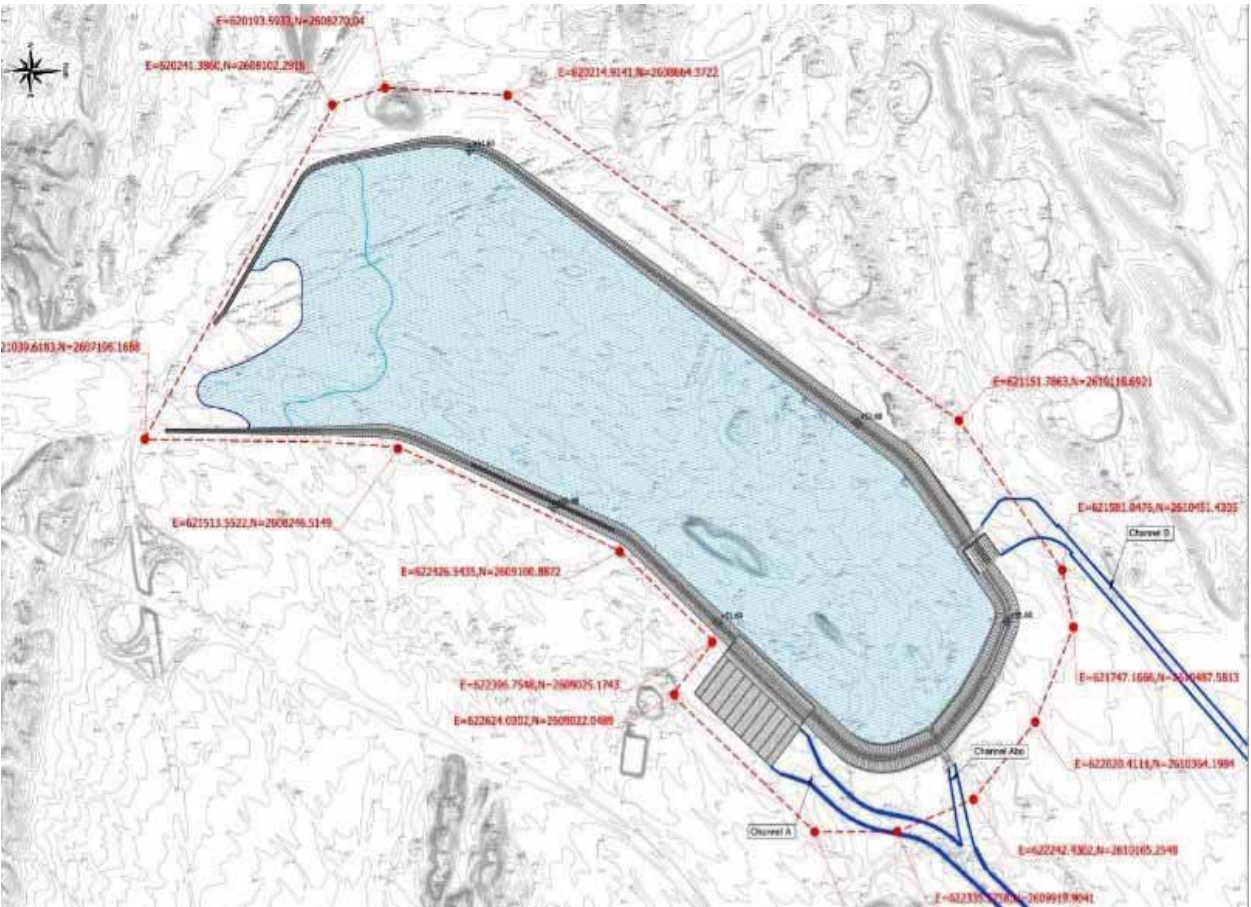
The remaining four parts of ministry's statement discuss aspects related to the water resources, the ministry's plans to conserve and sustain water resources, developing aflaj, dams and ground wells and the strategic alternatives followed by the ministry to address the problem of water deficit, Shaikh Al Naddabi said.

During its 10th and 11th sessions, the Majlis Ash'shura will discuss the proposed amendments of the law on pasture and livestock management and the Advocacy Law and the proposal for introducing an article in the traffic law that allows for permanent cancellation or temporary suspension of vehicle registration, he said.

During the sessions Majlis Ash'shura will discuss the vision of the Economic and Financial Committee related to delaying instalments on the personal, consumption and housing loans for citizens, and the Education and Scientific Research Committee's report on enhancing educational services in the remote and border areas as well as the Economic and Financial Committee's report on allocating a bigger percentage of banking credit to the industrial and productive sectors, Shaikh Al Naddabi said.



Al Jifnain protection dam construction in full swing



MUSCAT: The construction work of the flood protection dam project in Al Jifnain in the Wilayat of Seeb is in full swing. The project which began in February is aimed at intercepting and storing flood water converging from Wadi Al Jifnain and reducing the amount of water loss in the sea. It involves

construction of an earth-rock dam with a height of 5.18 metres and length of 6,500 metres. It will have 2 concrete spillways and 2 concrete towers in addition to several floodgates to control the release of stored water. The dam will be fitted with a set of monitoring devices for measuring ground water level,

leakage in the body of the dam. With a storage capacity of 11.4 million cubic metres, the dam will be one of the biggest dams in the flood protection system in Wadi Al Jifnain which comprises 3 dams. It will account for 50 per cent of the total storage capacity of the flood protection system. — ONA

Condolences to Egypt

MUSCAT: In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate expressed condolences and sympathy to the government and people of the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt on the victims of the train crash in Toukh city north of the Egyptian capital, Cairo, wishing the injured speedy recovery. — ONA

MoH highlights primary healthcare practices amid Covid-19

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Directorate General of Primary Health Care (DGPHC), recently organised a virtual workshop on 'Primary healthcare (PHC) practices amid the Covid-19 pandemic.'

The workshop was held in conjunction with World Health Day, which was observed under the theme 'Building a fairer, healthier world', so that anyone can access the health services.

The workshop aimed to develop the appropriate mechanisms for follow-up and assessment to circulate them to all health institutions in both the government and private sectors.

Dr Jean Jabbour, Representative of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Office in the Sultanate, said the PHC is the central pillar of the health system. It is the key entrance point to health coverage. He stressed that the Sultanate has worked within the last five decades to spread health services across the Sultanate.

Simultaneously, the Sultanate focused on supporting the PHC components by supporting the national health programmes such



as the Expanded Programme of Immunisation, and maternity and child care and health education programme. The WHO Representative to the Sultanate added that the Covid-19 affected the health system in the Sultanate significantly for what it caused in the suspension of some of the main PHC services such as immunisation, communicable diseases, mother and child health, the early detection of chronic diseases and others.

Gradual transition to eco-friendly bags

FROM PAGE 1

The team will assess the current situation of plastic waste management in the Sultanate, and develop a clear vision regarding its management under an integrated and sustainable system in coordination with the relevant authorities.

It will direct factories and suppliers to the alternatives approved by the Authority. The other options may be in the form of bags made of cloth and paper. The move is also to support manufacturers to open production lines for eco-friendly bags in the Sultanate.

The team will support the implementation in compliance with norms to ensure the ban on the circulation of all plastic and non-environment-friendly shopping bags in the local markets.

The resolution on banning single-use plastic shopping bags came into force from January 1, 2021. As per Article 1 of Resolution 23/2020 issued on March 15 last year, it is prohibited for companies and institutions to use single-use plastic shopping bags which are used and disposed of after single use.

Article 2 imposes an administrative fine of not less than RO 100, and no more than RO 2,000 for anyone who violates the provisions of this decision. The penalties will be doubled in case of repeated violations, without prejudice to any severe punishment stipulated by the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law.

The decision was made according to the Law on Environmental Protection and Pollution Control issued by Royal Decree 114/2001, and Royal Decree 18/2008, defining the terms of reference of the then Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs and adapting its organisational structure.

Ramadhan donations should be channelled through OCO



KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

All donations and charitable contributions should be channelled through the official portal of the Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO), which oversees all local and international fund-raising and Zakat contributions.

Any financial support or all sorts of charity during the holy month of Ramadhan should be made online through the OCO's website (www.donate.om).

Supports to various causes, like Zakat, Covid-19 aid, iftar, charities for Ramadhan provisions, Zakat al fitr, Eid clothing, orphan care, support to families, a donation to any masjid, medical, social welfare, student support, international relief, Syria

and Yemen aid and environment support, etc. can be made through this portal.

"The site, Donations Portal for Charitable Organisations, (www.donate.om) provides an option for donating in a more secure, transparent, easy to use, and convenient way. We urge all people and companies to extend a helping hand to those less fortunate in our community," Ahmed al Hattali, in charge of OCO, told the Observer.

The site, the only official donation channel, serves as many as 46 charitable organisations, including Dar al Atta'a, Oman Association for Disabled, Environment Society, The Association of the Welfare of the Handicapped, Al Noor Association for the Blind, The International Islamic Charitable Trust, Awqaf, the

Association of Early Intervention for Children with Special Needs, National Cancer Association, Oman Hereditary Blood Disorder Association, Al Rahma Charity, House of Funds and Zakah, Omani Association for Elderly Friends, Oman Diabetes Association, Omani Bahjah Orphan Society and Oman Charity Organisation, to name a few.

One has to access the portal first then choose the donation recipient.

The bilingual portal is accessible for Omani citizens and residents who have an account in Omani banks to donate with a single click from anywhere without visiting any charitable organisation. Alternatively, people can donate via mobile app, easily downloadable from the online portal, Android's Play Store, or App Store.

Mauritanian ambassador expresses gratitude for Sultanate's support



MUSCAT: Mohammed Vall, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania to the Sultanate, has hailed the support extended to his country by Oman under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), the Ambassador commended the two countries' political cooperation that, he said, stems from harmony and continuous coordination on different issues.

He explained that the last example of this coordination was the visit to Oman by Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad, Envoy of the President of Mauritania, who conveyed a message from the President to His Majesty the Sultan.

The Ambassador described Oman Vision 2040 as a leading experience in the Arab world and that the vision will shuttle the Sultanate into the orbit of advanced nations with high rankings in economic development indicators. He hoped that Mauritania would benefit from the Sultanate's experience in this field.

The Ambassador pointed out that economic cooperation between the two countries will scale new heights and meet the aspirations of their peoples, adding that the two countries possess political will to do so.

The Ambassador invited Omani investors to engage in business in Mauritania, noting that his country boasts a wealth of marine resources (2 million tonnes per annum), in addition to business opportunities in the fields of agriculture and tourism. — ONA

Right diet to sustain you through the fast

JISHY SEBY

Health is the key to happiness, and what we consume directly affects our health. The month of Ramadhan is a great opportunity to focus on bringing back a balanced and healthy lifestyle in our life. Ramadhan fasting has spiritual, physical, psychological and social benefits. Fasting during Ramadhan can be good for one's health and personal development.

Good hydration, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein foods like fish, lean meat, nuts and low fat foods should be the main source of energy for those fasting.

Metabolic function slows down during fasting. Body and dietary fat is utilised during this period. The body has regulatory mechanisms that activate during fasting. A diet that has less than a normal amount of food but is sufficiently balanced will keep a person healthy and active during the month of Ramadan. The diet should be simple and not differ too much from one's normal everyday diet. It should contain foods from all the major food groups (cereals, pulses, meat and fish, dairy and fats).

Over eating or feasting should be avoided during all the meals during Ramadhan especially during iftar.

The body's immediate need at the time of iftar is to get easily



available energy source in the form of glucose particularly for brain and nerves. So it is always good to break the fast in the traditional way with dates and fruits. Dates provide the energy in the form of sugar. Fruits help to maintain water and mineral balance in the body.

It can be followed by soups and cereals. Make sure your soup includes generous amounts of vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, peas, green beans, squash, and carrots. These add vitamins and minerals to your soup as well as fibres which are essential for a healthy digestive system. Oily, spicy and deep fried foods can be avoided and it prevents acidity and bloating which are the most common complaints during fasting.

Dinner can be with more complex carbohydrates, vegetables, yoghurt or laban, fish and chicken and with

reduced red meat and refined foods. Fruits can be taken as a snack after dinner but not immediately and it keeps bloating away. Fibre rich foods like fruits and vegetables helps to prevent constipation during Ramadhan.

Be creative with your salad. The more varied and colourful vegetables you include in your salad, the more assorted are the nutrients and antioxidants you get. These help protect your body cells and promote good health especially during this holy month.

Drink sufficient water between the iftar and suhoor to avoid dehydration during the fasting time. Make sure to drink at least 1.8 litres during the non-fasting hours and to include more fruits and fresh vegetables in the diet so that the body gets enough water during the fasting period.

Avoid caffeinated drinks

The body's immediate need at the time of iftar is to get easily available energy source in the form of glucose particularly for brain and nerves. So it is always good to break the fast in the traditional way with dates and fruits

like tea, coffee and cola. These drinks to be reduced one week prior to fasting. This helps to reduce headache during fasting.

After dinner it is always good to engage in light exercise like stretching or walking which aids in digestion.

Slow digesting foods with fibre like wheat, oats, unsalted nuts etc should be consumed for suhoor. They help to stabilise the blood sugars for a long time. Refined carbohydrates like sugar rich and white flour based foods should be avoided. This meal should never be missed since this provides sufficient energy needed for the day time.

Smoking should be avoided during fasting. Brushing the teeth before sleep and after suhoor and sufficient sleep is also good to maintain a healthy body during Ramadhan. (The writer is a clinical dietician at Kims Oman Hospital)



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 21-013	Supply of Fenders	RO 25/-
2	SIPC 21-080	Maintenance Work of Street Lighting System and Administration Building Equipment At Port & SFZ Area	RO 250/-
3	SIPC 21-096	Catering Management Services	RO 250/-

Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Tuesday 20/04/2021 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 06/05/2021. Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXX
Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted	

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:

A request for the electronic tender documents

Scanned bank transfer

The firm's commercial registration documents

All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:

sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3:

Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents

The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, marked "Technical and Commercial" addressed to:

SOHAR Port and Freezone

Bid Opening Committee

Tender Reference No: 2021/

Tender Title:

SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons

All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents

For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:

sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com
soharportandfreezone.com

It all starts here

+968 2685 2700 | soharportandfreezone.com



MISSING

RAMADHAN NIGHTS



VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

At the onset of summer, the holy month of Ramadhan had all the ingredients this year for long nights of social gatherings, especially outdoors.

But worldwide, especially in countries known for vibrant celebrations, the pandemic has changed the way people observe the holy month as many are forced to stay home due to restrictions.

In the Sultanate, the government has reportedly indicated a complete lockdown if the third wave of the pandemic must be brought under control and lives are saved.

Some of the restaurants that survived the prolonged lockdown

last year were hoping to make up for the lost business, but that hope has faded away much before the start of the holy month.

Generally, Muslims fast from dusk until dawn and focus on pure religious activities, reading the Quran, and charity. "While growing up, Ramadhan has always been about the night, Quran and poetry recitals, charity, social gatherings, not just about food. Preparing food at home or restaurants continue even now. Still, there is no just religious and social fervor," said Saleh, a 25-year-old electrical engineer.

He added, "Last year, we even avoid spending time with my grandparents as they are old. Ramadhan nights have always been

While growing up, Ramadhan has always been about the night, Quran and poetry recitals, charity, social gatherings, not just about food. Preparing food at home or restaurants continue even now. Still, there is no just religious and social fervor

about getting to know about stories and the past lifestyle from her. As she got vaccinated recently, we made a point to spend the full holy month of fasting together."

"It is the period we get to know the good side of all friends and relatives. Gatherings are always about religion and concern for those less privileged. Gossips are limited, and children and women at home also exhibit creative sides via cooking, painting, singing, and handmade works," said Maryam, a mother of three. She just misses those busy and long Ramadhan nights.

With outdoor shopping and dining facing restrictions in the Sultanate, the past year saw the emergence of several home-based

businesses, that hope to make a mark this year as people are trying to minimise contact with the outside world.

While some basic Ramadhan routines, sharing food and gifts cannot be stopped, many localised businesses have taken shape to take orders on the phone and deliver home.

Several restaurant owners told the Observer while it is online deliveries that keep them going. Still, it is never the same as Ramadhan buffets and Iftar gatherings at restaurants.

With Ramadhan expected to be in early April next year amidst a milder climate, the prayers are just for that it is not engulfed by the virus again.

Russia says expulsion of diplomats ‘provocative’

MOSCOW: The Kremlin on Monday denounced the “provocative and unfriendly” expulsion of 18 Russian diplomats from the Czech Republic who were accused by authorities in Prague of spying.

“We categorically do not agree with these conclusions,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, describing the Czech move as “provocative and unfriendly”.

Czech authorities on Saturday said they would expel the diplomats identified by local intelligence as secret agents of Russian security services who are suspected of involvement in a 2014 blast that killed two people.

Russia responded on Sunday by announcing 20 employees of the Czech Embassy in Moscow “persona non grata” and saying they had to leave the country before the end of Monday.

The expulsions were announced after the Czech Ambassador in Moscow, Vitezslav Pivonka, had been summoned by the Russian foreign ministry.

Also on Monday, the ministry’s spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the “hastily fabricated” accusations were aimed at distracting from “accumulated problems in EU countries and in the West in general”.



Czech diplomats and their family members leave the grounds of the country’s embassy in Moscow. — AFP

“Without a doubt, it is the United States that is behind this,” she said in a televised appearance.

She added that in response both the Czech and the US embassies in Moscow will no longer be allowed to employ Russian citizens.

Meanwhile, acting Czech Foreign Minister Jan Hamacek said he had asked fellow European Union foreign ministers for “an expression of solidarity” at a video

conference on Monday.

“I expect that also on the basis of this..., we will learn about more expressions of support and it will be up to member states if they add some concrete decisions.”

The central European country ordered the Russian diplomats out on Saturday, saying it suspected Russian intelligence was involved in explosions at an ammunition depot in October and December

2014.

“The reaction (by Russia) is stronger than we had expected, it is more diplomats than the number of intelligence officers we expelled,” Hamacek told a televised news conference.

“I will meet the prime minister and discuss whether and when it will be needed to take some further steps from the Czech side.”

The Czech government has said

it has reasonable suspicion that two Russian intelligence agents accused of a nerve agent poisoning in Britain in 2018 were behind the ammunition depot blasts four years before that killed two people.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry criticised Prague’s decision not to disclose all details of the investigation to Moscow, describing the affair as a blow to bilateral relations.

Without a doubt, it is the United States that is behind this

MARIA ZAKHAROVA
Ministry spokeswoman

“This is proof that this whole story is a fabricated, dirty, disgusting fake,” RIA news agency cited Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova as saying.

The row is the biggest between Prague and Moscow since the end of decades of Soviet domination of central and eastern European countries in 1989.

The Kremlin, commenting on the allegations that Russian intelligence was involved in the explosions and on the subsequent diplomatic expulsions, called the Czech Republic’s actions “provocative and unfriendly”.

The Czech Foreign Ministry said the Russian Embassy in Prague had 129 diplomats and other personnel, and two regional consulates — about twice the size of the Czech Embassy in Moscow, which the Russian countermeasure left severely hit. — Reuters

One dead as powerful typhoon brushes past the Philippines



Cargo trucks bound for the Visayas and Mindanao islands line up along a highway in Daraga town, south of Manila after authorities stopped the ferry service between Luzon and Samar islands due to Typhoon Surigae as it moves over the eastern seaboard of the country. — AFP

MANILA: At least one person was killed as a powerful typhoon skirted the Philippines on Monday, dumping heavy rain that flooded dozens of villages and forced tens of thousands to leave their homes.

Typhoon Surigae packed sustained wind speeds of 195 kilometres an hour at its centre, about 500 kilometres off the Philippines, and was not expected to make landfall in the disaster-prone archipelago, according to the government weather service.

But strong winds and heavy rain reached the central region of the Eastern Visayas, where about 66 villages were flooded, the regional civil defence office said.

A 79-year-old man was killed after an uprooted coconut tree fell on him, the

office said, adding that another man was missing after failing to return from rough seas.

More than 68,000 people living in the affected region had been evacuated from their homes as a precaution. Many of them were staying in emergency shelters, raising concerns about the spread of the coronavirus.

“(Despite the damage), we are still blessed that it didn’t (make) landfall in the area. Just imagine what would happen then with its strong winds and heavy rains,” civil defence officer Malou Dela Calzada said.

The typhoon was moving slowly in a northwesterly direction off the main island of Luzon and was expected to veer away from the country in the coming days.

The Philippines is hit

by an average of 20 storms and typhoons every year, a dangerous and disruptive part of life in the country.

Many of the storms are deadly, and they typically wipe out harvests, homes and infrastructure, keeping millions of people perennially poor. The country’s deadliest typhoon on record was Super Typhoon Haiyan, which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013.

Meanwhile, the first super Typhoon of 2021 foreshadows a busy storm season for the region in the year ahead, experts say.

“Early indications are that the 2021 Typhoon season will be at least average in activity, and possibly above average,” US meteorologist Jeff Masters wrote in a post on Yale Climate Connections’

website, which reports daily on climate conditions.

Atmospheric scientists say data shows that storms, called Typhoons, cyclones or hurricanes in different parts of the world, are getting stronger because of global warming.

“The fuel for these storms is warm oceans,” said Anne-Claire Fontan, a scientific officer at the World Meteorological Organization based in Geneva.

“The global trend is that they are getting stronger, and a higher percentage of total storms will be stronger.”

A warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, allowing gale force winds to dump more rain. In particular, water temperature in the western Pacific Ocean is higher than the global average, making it fertile ground for mega storms like Surigae. — Reuters

Syrian opposition leader Michel dies of Covid-19

BEIRUT: Prominent exiled opposition figure Michel Kilo died of Covid-19 on Monday in Paris after a lifetime of peaceful struggle against Baath party rule in Syria, colleagues said.

Kilo, who turned 80 last year, was a key player in efforts to form a credible non-violent alternative to President Bashar al Assad’s regime during the early stages of the conflict that erupted a decade ago.

“A great loss. Michel Kilo departed today after he was infected with Covid-19,” senior opposition figure Nasr Hariiri wrote in a statement.

“Michel was an intellectual and patriotic powerhouse and his dream was to see a free and democratic Syria. God willing, the Syrian people will carry on this dream and see it through,” he said.

Kilo, who was also a writer, was born in 1940 to a Christian family in Syria’s Mediterranean town of Latakia, a bastion of the Assad family’s Alawite minority. He had opposed the ruling Baath party since it came to power in



Syrian activist and opposition figure Michel Kilo. — AFP

1963.

He was jailed in Syria from 1980 to 1983 under Hafez al Assad, and then again from 2006 to 2009 under Bashar.

In September 2000, he was one of around 100 intellectuals who called for reforms including public freedoms, political pluralism, and the lifting of the state of emergency in what became known as the Damascus Spring.

He also belonged to a group of prominent Syrian opposition figures who in 2005 signed the “Damascus Declaration” calling for democratic reform in the Arab nation. — AFP

MOORE STEPHENS LLC NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT COMPANY LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1388)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Urban Development Company LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1078161, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company’s Members on 21 January 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company’s business at the following address:

Office No.41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013;
Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company’s creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within six months from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company’s rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Urban Development Company LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)

Russia says Iran nuclear talks enter ‘drafting stage’

VIENNA: A Russian diplomat taking part in talks to save the landmark Iran nuclear deal said Monday that the negotiations had entered “the drafting stage” though solutions to some of the issues were “still far away”.

The 2015 agreement to curb Iran’s nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief has been left hanging by a thread since the US withdrew from the pact in 2018 and re-imposed sanctions, prompting Tehran to in turn step up its nuclear activities.

Diplomats from the parties to the deal — Iran, Britain, China, France, Germany and China — have been meeting in Vienna since early this month to find a way to get the pact back on track with US participation under the new Joe Biden administration.

“Summing up the results of two weeks of deliberations on JCPOA restoration we can note with satisfaction that the negotiations entered the drafting stage,” Russian ambassador to Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov wrote on Twitter, referring to the acronym of the deal’s formal name.

“Practical solutions are still far away, but we have moved from general words to agreeing on specific steps towards the goal,” he added.

The EU, Russia and Iran all hailed progress at the talks Saturday following an attack on the Natanz nuclear facility, which Iran blamed on arch-foe Israel.

On Friday, Tehran also announced that it was producing uranium enriched to 60 per cent



Abbas Araghchi (C), political deputy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, leaves the ‘Grand Hotel Wien’ after the closed-door nuclear talks in Vienna where diplomats of the EU, China, Russia and Iran held their talks. — AFP

purity, taking the country closer to the 90-per-cent level required for use in a nuclear weapon and far above the threshold allowed by the deal.

Iran has said it will reverse steps taken so far if the US lifts sanctions imposed under the administration of former President Donald Trump.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told Fox News on Sunday that the US wanted to be sure of Iran’s compliance.

“The United States is not going to lift sanctions unless we have clarity and confidence that Iran will fully return to compliance with its obligations under the deal that it will put a lid on its nuclear programme,” he said.

Iran delegation head Abbas

We have moved from general words to agreeing on specific steps towards the goal

MIKHAIL ULYANOV
Russian ambassador to Vienna

Araghchi said Saturday that “a new agreement is taking shape” but warned that it won’t be easy.

“We think that negotiations have reached a stage that the parties can start working on a joint text. The writing of the text can start, at least in the fields with a consensus,” he said.

“There are still serious disagreements that must be reduced during future negotiations,” he added.

TALKS IN BAGHDAD: Saudi Arabia and Iran have held talks in Baghdad in recent weeks, an Iraqi government official and a Western diplomat said.

The talks between senior officials, facilitated by Iraq’s Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi, aim to restore relations five years after Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran severed diplomatic ties.

The initiative also comes as US President Joe Biden is seeking to revive Iran’s nuclear deal with world powers which was abandoned by Donald Trump, and to ease regional tensions. — AFP

11 dead, 98 injured in Egypt train derailment

CAIRO: A passenger train on Sunday derailed near Cairo, killing 11 people, the Egyptian Health Ministry said, in what is the latest in a series of rail mishaps in the country.

Some 98 others were injured in the accident which took place in the city of Qalyubia north of the Egyptian capital, the ministry added in a statement.

Fourteen of the injured later left hospitals after they were treated for minor injuries, a Health Ministry spokesman said.

Four carriages of the train, which was heading from Cairo to the Nile Delta province of Mansoura, derailed, the state railway authority said.

An investigation is underway to determine the cause of the accident, it added in a brief statement.

Online footage showed several carriages turned over

as sirens of ambulances can be heard in the background.

The train driver and assistant as well as eight other rail officials were arrested in connection to the derailment, the privately-owned newspaper *Al Shorouk* reported. Egypt has seen several railway tragedies in recent years.

Earlier this week, 15 people were injured after another train derailed in the northern province of Minya al Qamh.

On March 26, two passenger trains collided in southern Egypt, killing at least 19 people.

In February 2019, an unmanned locomotive rammmed into a platform at Cairo’s train station, causing a fire that claimed 31 lives. Egypt’s worst rail disaster took place in 2002, when a passenger train caught fire, killing more than 360 people. — dpa



A telescopic railway crane lifts an overturned passenger carriage at the scene of a railway accident in the city of Toukh in Egypt’s central Nile Delta province of Qalyubiya. — AFP

Rangers battle encroachment in Sudan’s biggest park

DINDER, Sudan: Tucked away by the Ethiopian border, Sudan’s Dinder National Park boasts the country’s most diverse wildlife, but rangers face a daily battle to protect it as human encroachment mounts. Spread over more than 10,000 square kilometres, 400 kilometres southeast of Khartoum, the park is Sudan’s biggest and abuts Ethiopia’s Alataash National Park.

Sandwiched between the vast grasslands of the Sahel and the forests of the Ethiopian highlands, the park boasts a variety of habitats that have made it a haven for wildlife. Freshwater lakes dot the park’s woodlands and savannah,

Rangers patrol the rugged terrain in search of violators, who can face hefty fines or 6-months in prison depending on the offence

making it an important flyway for migratory birds as well.

“It enjoys the richest wildlife in Sudan,” said Albadri Alhassan, head of the park’s development organisation. “But the growing human violations threaten to diminish the wilderness.”

When the park was first



Cranes fly over pelicans feeding in the water at sunset at the ‘Ain Al Shams’ a seasonal lake within the Dinder National Park, about 400 kms southeast of Khartoum. — AFP

declared a protected reserve under Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1935, the area was sparsely inhabited. But in recent decades, the population has soared in the villages that dot the park and its surrounding buffer zone, creating huge pressure for new land to grow crops.

And as cattle herders’ traditional grazing lands have been ploughed up, they, in turn, have increasingly encroached on the park in search of pasture.

“Such behaviours are posing an immense threat to the reserve,” said the head of Dinder’s wildlife research station, Omar Mohamed.

Among the hardest-hit species has been the giraffe, which has

disappeared from the park in the face of habitat loss and other environmental factors, Mohamed said.

Villagers say they do their best to follow park restrictions but add that they desperately need more land to feed themselves.

“We use traditional agriculture and we prevent our animals from grazing outside our village,” said farmer Abubakr Ibrahim from Mai Carato, a village on the west bank of the Rahad river, which flows through the reserve.

He complains that some regulations are “very hard and impractical” to follow in the growing villages. — AFP

TUNIS

Tunisian president draws security powers

Tunisian President Kais Saied said that his powers as commander of the armed forces also cover the internal security forces, not only the army, in the latest escalation of his dispute with the prime minister.

Saied’s comments threaten to draw the sensitive Interior Ministry into the political arena and potentially divide the security establishment as Tunisia’s young democracy grapples with a coronavirus-induced slump as well as militants. Tunisia’s 2014



constitution has until now been widely interpreted as putting the internal security forces and the Interior Ministry under the control of the prime minister.

Saied is a professor of constitutional law. — Reuters

JAFFA

Four Palestinians injured in clashes

Four Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli police in annexed east Jerusalem, the Palestinian Red Crescent said, after officers cordoned off a popular gathering spot for Ramadhan crowds. Separately in the historically Arab Jaffa district of Tel Aviv, residents assaulted a rabbi seeking to acquire land for housing for Jewish seminary students in a predominantly Arab neighbourhood, prompting clashes with police.

Police said they made three



arrests after the Jerusalem clashes, during which they used tear gas and water cannon to disperse a large crowd gathered outside one of the gates to the walled Old City, a video posted on Twitter showed. — AFP

TELAVIV

Israel, Greece sign record defence deal

Israel and Greece have signed their biggest-ever defence procurement deal, which Israel said would strengthen political and economic ties between the countries and the two countries’ air forces launched a joint exercise. The agreement includes a \$1.65 billion contract for the establishment and operation of a training centre for the Hellenic Air Force by Israeli defence contractor Elbit Systems over a 22-year period, Israel’s defence ministry said.



The training centre will be modelled on Israel’s own flight academy and will be equipped with 10 M-346 training aircraft produced by Italian company Leonardo, the ministry said.

— Reuters

In brief

BANGKOK



THAI COVID INFECTIONS EASE AFTER DAYS OF RECORD HIGHS

Thailand reported 1,390 new coronavirus cases, slowing slightly after a run of record daily highs, amid a new wave of infections that has seen a third of the country's cases recorded this month alone. The new infections were down by a fifth from Sunday's record 1,767 cases, which the coronavirus taskforce said was due to measures to control the spread and requests for people to avoid travel and gatherings.

"Measures we have introduced for next two weeks will reduce cases, travel and risky activities," Apisamai Srirangsan, a spokeswoman for the taskforce said. Three new deaths were reported, taking total fatalities to 104. — Reuters

JAKARTA



INDONESIA'S MERAPI SPEWS FIERY LAVA IN NEW ACTIVITY

Mount Merapi on Indonesia's Java island erupted, spewing fiery lava 16 times, the country's volcanology agency said. The lava travelled up to 1,500 metres on the south-west slope of the volcano from midnight to 6 am, the state Antara news agency said, citing data from the National Geological Agency. There were no reports of casualties and the volcano's alert level remained at the second highest.

Merapi, the country's most active volcano, has erupted regularly since November last year. In its last deadly round of eruptions in 2010, more than 340 people were killed and 60,000 others were displaced.

ISLAMABAD



PAKISTANI FIGHTERS FREE POLICE HOSTAGES AFTER PROTESTS

A group in Pakistan seeking the expulsion of the French ambassador have released 11 police officers they took hostage during protests, a top official said. Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) released the hostages after negotiations with the government overnight, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said.

Hundreds of TLP activists, armed with petrol bombs and batons, remained holed up inside a mosque compound that serves as headquarters for the group in the city of Lahore.

The TLP has been holding violent protests since late last year supporting the French ambassador's expulsion in response to the publication in France of a cartoon. — dpa

Week-long lockdown in New Delhi as virus cases soar



People make their way along a street in the old quarters of New Delhi. — AFP

“Delhi's health system is at a tipping point. The Covid-19 situation is pretty critical”

ARVIND KEJRIWAL

Delhi Chief Minister

The national government has said it will address state pleas for more oxygen and drugs.

In the last seven days, India has recorded more than 1.4 million cases — an increase of 64 per cent on the previous week, according to data compiled.

Experts blame complacency about the virus, with the massive spike coming after daily cases fell below 9,000 in early February.

There is also growing concern that virus variants, including a “double mutant”, are fuelling infections.

“The guard was let down too early... people went back to pre-pandemic behaviour and no one cautioned them,” virologist T Jacob John said. — AFP

UK premier Johnson cancels trip to India

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday cancelled a planned trip to India, scheduled to take place next week, due to the current coronavirus situation in India, Johnson's office said.

Johnson had already postponed the trip once from January, when Covid-19 infections were high in Britain. Infections in India are currently surging as the country endures a second wave of the virus. “In the light of the current coronavirus situation, Prime Minister Boris Johnson will not be able to travel to India next week,” a joint statement from the British and Indian government, released by Johnson's office, said.

“Instead, Prime Ministers

Modi and Johnson will speak later this month to agree and launch their ambitious plans for the future partnership between the UK and India.”

Relations with India are seen as a key component of both Britain's post-Brexit ambitions to reinvigorate trade with countries outside the European Union, and a diplomatic push to gain more influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Britain has invited India to attend the G7 summit it is hosting in June.

British health officials said on Sunday they were investigating a Covid-19 variant originating in India, but as yet they did not have enough evidence to classify it as a variant of concern.

— Reuters



Japanese journalist Yuki Kitazumi. — Reuters

Japanese journalist detained in Myanmar

YANGON: Myanmar authorities detained a Japanese journalist in Yangon on Sunday evening, Japan's government said on Monday, adding that it was trying to seek his release.

BBC Burmese quoted a witness as saying freelance journalist Yuki Kitazumi was picked up from his home and taken into custody by troops on Sunday night. He was asked to raise both hands and was taken away in a car, it said.

Japan's government spokesman described the journalist as a man in his forties, without naming him.

“We are seeking, from Myanmar, his quick release, and we are trying to secure the safety of Japanese nationals,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told a news conference, adding that the government was seeking details on the circumstances surrounding the journalist's detention.

A spokesman for the junta did not respond to calls asking for comment.

Kitazumi runs a media production company, Yangon Media Professionals, and used to be a journalist with the *Nikkei* business daily, according to his Facebook page and interviews with online media.

He was arrested previously in February while covering protests against the February 1 coup but was released soon afterwards. — Reuters

Celebrations after Australian-NZ travel bubble opens

QUEENSTOWN: Families reunited in emotional scenes on Monday as Australia and New Zealand launched a quarantine-free travel bubble that opened the border almost 400 days after its pandemic-enforced closure.

There were group hugs and enthusiastic welcomes at airport terminals on both sides of the Tasman Sea as the long-awaited bubble sparked joy and relief. Lorraine Wratt, a New Zealander stranded by the pandemic while visiting family in Australia, said that travelling again was “wonderful”.

“We came to Australia on December 11 to spend Christmas with our children... planning to go back in February, it's been a bit of a nightmare,” she said.

On a grass embankment at the foot of Wellington Airport's runway, the words “Welcome Whanau” (family) were spelled out in giant letters and Maori dancers Maori dancers performed a traditional greeting in the terminal.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the joyful scenes were like something from a movie. “Love Actually... I imagine it's pretty close to that,” she said, referencing the 2003 British romantic



A mother embraces her daughter upon her arrival from New Zealand at Sydney International Airport as Australia and New Zealand opened a trans-Tasman quarantine-free travel bubble. — AFP

Passengers can fly between Australia, New Zealand without undergoing mandatory quarantine on arrival

comedy.

Ardern said she shared the elation, and was preparing to welcome some of her own loved ones back home. The bubble, which followed months of negotiations between the largely coronavirus-free neighbours, was hailed as a major milestone in restarting a global travel industry that has been crippled by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The arrangement means that for the first time since Covid-19 closed borders worldwide, passengers can fly between Australia and New Zealand without undergoing mandatory quarantine on arrival. “We hope more travel bubbles will be established across the region when it is safe to do so as part of overall efforts to restart international air travel,” International Air Transport Association Asia-Pacific vice-president Conrad Clifford said. — AFP

Germany’s Greens make first bid for chancellery

BERLIN: The co-leader of Germany’s Greens, Annalena Baerbock, said on Monday she would run to become chancellor in September’s elections, the first time the left-leaning party has sought the top job in its 40-year history.

Baerbock, a former champion trampolinist who has seen support for her party rise over the past year, said she would offer a “new start” and focus on investing in education, digital and green technologies.

Analysts said the chance of an outright win for the ecologist party was still a long shot — though the Greens have become a formidable force that has profited from voters’ fatigue with Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives.

Baerbock’s group still trails the conservatives by around five points in the polls, despite signs of divisions in the conservative camp that has ruled Germany for 16 years.

Baerbock, 40, sought to allay fears about her relative lack of experience. “Democracy lives off change. Yes, I was never a chancellor and never a minister,” she told a news conference. “I stand for renewal. Other stand for the status-quo.”

“We would like to lead this government — but since politics is not a wish-fulfillment exercise, it will be up to the voters to decide who will come out of this election with how much strength,” she added.

Baerbock was nominated for the chancellorship by her party and



Co-leader of Germany’s Green party Annalena Baerbock during a digital announcement event on the party’s federal election campaign and the announcement of candidacy for chancellor in Berlin. — AFP

formally presented on Monday by co-leader Robert Habeck — an orderly process that stood in contrast to public divisions among the conservatives.

Armin Laschet, chairman of the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Markus Soeder of their CSU Bavarian sister party, remained at loggerheads on Monday over which of them should lead their increasingly strained alliance.

“While Laschet and Soeder are still fighting in the arena and the potential damage to the party could be great, the Greens have delivered a masterpiece of political professionalism,” ING

Baerbock says she would offer a ‘new start’ and focus on investing in education, digital and green technologies

economist Carsten Brzeski said. The Greens, who were born in 1980 out of the ecologist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, govern the southwestern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, a former conservative stronghold. A Forsa poll last week put support for the Greens on 23

per cent, behind 27 per cent for Merkel’s alliance.

To lead a coalition government, the Greens could team up with the left-leaning Social Democrats (SPD), which the Forsa poll showed to have 15 per cent support, and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP), at 9 per cent. Another three-way tie-up could be with the SPD and the far-left Linke.

In a more likely scenario, given the current numbers, the Greens could also join government as junior partner to Merkel’s conservatives.

— Reuters

Cuba’s appoints President Diaz-Canel as leader

HAVANA: Cuba’s ruling Communist Party elected President Miguel Diaz-Canel (pictured) to succeed Raul Castro as party first secretary, the most powerful position in the country, on the final day of its congress on Monday. The succession marks the end of six decades of rule by brothers Fidel and Raul Castro, who led Cuba’s leftist 1959 revolution, in a transition to a younger generation that worked its way up the party ranks rather than forging itself through guerilla warfare.

Diaz-Canel, 60, who already succeeded Castro as president in 2018, had been widely expected to be nominated first party secretary too. He has emphasized continuity since becoming president and is not expected to move Cuba away from a one-party socialist system.

“Diaz-Canel is not the fruit of improvisation but of the thoughtful selection of a young revolutionary who has all that is required to be promoted to higher positions,” Castro said in a speech opening the congress on Friday, his military fatigues contrasting with his protege’s civil garb.

Hundreds of party delegates gathered for the party’s most important meeting, that takes place every five years to review policy and elect new leadership, in Havana.

Castro said at the last party congress in 2016 it would be the last presided over by the so-called historic generation of those who fought in the Sierra Maestra to overthrow the US-backed government of dictator Fulgencio Batista.

The new policy setting



Political Bureau will not include Jose Ramon Machado Ventura and Ramiro Valdes, two other famous proponents of that generation. The party has not yet announced who will replaced Machado Ventura, a communist ideologue, as deputy party leader. (Reporting by Sarah Marsh and Nelson Acosta; editing by Grant McCool)

Two other revolution-era figures will also stand down: Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, 90, the party’s number two, and Commander Ramiro Valdes, 88.

But even as younger Cubans rise to power, no major changes in policy are immediately expected.

Most pressing on the congress’s agenda is the economy, which plummeted by 11 per cent in 2020 -- the worst decline since 1993 -- due in no small part to recent strengthening of the US embargo and the coronavirus pandemic.

Castro, however, committed the country to “respectful” talks with the US administration of Joe Biden. Ties with the United States had worsened under Biden’s predecessor, Donald Trump. — AFP

Russia moves ailing Navalny to prison hospital

MOSCOW: Russia’s penitentiary service on Monday said it was transferring ailing Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny to prison hospital, as the EU warned it would hold Moscow “responsible” for the state of his health.

The United States on Sunday threatened Russia with “consequences” if President Vladimir Putin’s major domestic opponent — who launched a hunger strike three weeks ago — dies in jail, with Navalny’s private doctors warning at the weekend he could pass away at “any minute”.

Russia’s prison authorities, which have barred Navalny’s own medical team from visiting him,

Fears over Navalny’s fate have added more fuel to soaring tensions between Moscow and the West

said its doctors had decided to move him to a medical facility on the premises of another penal colony outside Moscow.

But the authorities insisted the anti-corruption campaigner’s condition was “satisfactory”, and said he was taking vitamin supplements as part of medical treatment.

Fears over Navalny’s fate



An exterior view shows the IK-3 penal colony, which houses a hospital where jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was reportedly transferred, in Vladimir. — Reuters

have added more fuel to soaring tensions between Moscow and the West over a build-up of Russian troops along the border with Ukraine and a spiralling diplomatic row with EU member state the Czech Republic.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc held the Russian authorities “responsible for the health situation of Mr Navalny” as foreign ministers from its 27 nations held virtual talks.

Borrell called Navalny’s condition “very worrisome” and repeated demands that Moscow allows his chosen team of doctors to inspect him.

Lithuania’s Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis pushed further, saying the bloc should prepare “a humanitarian mission” to fly him out of Russia for treatment.

“If the international community does not respond, the regime’s opposition leader will be sent silently to his death,” Landsbergis said.

The Kremlin dismissed the outcry from foreign leaders over Navalny’s condition.

“The health of convicts in the Russia Federation cannot and should not be a topic concerning them,” said Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ATHENS

Greece lifts quarantine for vaccinated travellers

Greece said on Monday that travellers from the EU and five other countries who are fully vaccinated or have a recent negative Covid test will no longer have to quarantine on arrival. Visitors from the EU, Britain, the United States, Israel, Serbia and the UAE will not be subjected to a week-long quarantine, the civil aviation authority said in a statement.

Travellers must present proof they are fully vaccinated or a negative Covid test from the



previous 72 hours, it said. The quarantine will be lifted from Monday but other restrictions “for domestic or international flights will be in effect until April 26”, the aviation authority said. — AFP

N'DJAMENA

Over 300 rebels, 5 soldiers killed in Chad

The Chadian army said it had killed 300 rebels in the north of the country at the weekend, adding that it had lost five of its soldiers.

A heavily armed rebel group had launched a raid from its rear base in Libya on April 11, the same day as Chad’s presidential election that is expected to see the incumbent Idriss Deby Itno returned to power.

The raid by the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) has since resulted in “more than 300



rebels neutralised” and claimed the lives of five government troops, army spokesman General Azem Bermandoa Agouna said. Bermandoa said 36 soldiers had been wounded in fighting. — AFP

CAPE TOWN

Cape Town fire guts library, moves closer to city

A fire in Cape Town has ravaged part of a university library housing a unique collection of African archives, its director said, as the blaze advanced on Monday towards the city centre. The fire, which broke out in the foothills of the landmark Table Mountain before spreading to the University of Cape Town (UCT), forced hundreds of students to flee on foot.

The African studies section of the 1930s building and its parquet-floored reading room



were “completely gutted”. “Some of our valuable collections have been lost,” she wrote, adding that fire shutters had protected other parts of the building. — AFP

Being responsible and hopeful...

Tell me, how many times you have been looking through your shopping bills since April 16, 2021. We have been trying to figure out and understand how VAT works and feel an ouch when goods cost more than before.

Would products become costlier than before?

The years 2020 and 2021 have been all about changes. We went through these emotions when we went through oil prices but then we got used to it. And this too we will get used to it.

But with VAT there were doubts at different levels such as if the importer, trader and retailer are all paying at various points would it not eventually increase the cost of the product which could fall on the customer. We will soon have an in-depth discussion on the *Observer* programme Note It on Social media.

The Tax Authority however has given an explanation too but we still continue to collect our supermarket bills but wait until we begin to shop for electronic goods and maybe an automobile. On social media, we have been comparing notes. Let us excitedly enjoy the VAT experience. It is for the betterment of the nation.

On 'Note it this week' our guest is Dr Ahmed Shahrabani, Locum's Nest Co-Founder and CEO, who is also the Forbes 30 under 30 Science & Healthcare Europe Honouree.

It is more than one year since



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

THE YEARS 2020
AND 2021 HAVE
BEEN ALL ABOUT
CHANGES. WE
WENT THROUGH
THESE EMOTIONS
WHEN WE WENT
THROUGH OIL
PRICES BUT THEN
WE GOT USED
TO IT

Covid-19 began its impact and the demand for doctors brought the APP Locum's Nest into existence. Dr Ahmed Shahrabani speaks about the changing phases of Covid-19 cases, therapies, vaccines and how Locum's Nest came about.

He also alerted on the importance of vaccination but not to look down on our basic protection system – masks, social distance and frequent washing of hands. And guess what, an annual booster jab could be a norm.

Well if that is the future, the current scenario needs our full focus and that is to protect ourselves and the people around us. The number of deaths due to Covid-19 continues to increase with 12 cases recorded in 24 hours and announced on Monday afternoon.

What is most important is to not to expose others if anyone is experiencing Covid-19 symptoms or for that matter, we must not forget in some cases the individuals are asymptomatic.

Life must go on and work must continue especially for the doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers. It is even more painful when we hear any of them suffering from Covid-19; because while we talk about social distancing, the healthcare professionals do not have a choice but to pay attention to the patients whether they are Covid-19 positive or with any other common ailments.

Temporarily there is a feeling that all

other ailments seem to be insignificant. But people are suffering from those ailments too but fear stops them from approaching medical help.

While the challenges of Covid-19 continue, the dilemma is whether to travel or not. It is recommended not to travel unless there is an urgent need, but expatriates seem to have developed the urge to see family back home.

For now, it might be best to stay put and settle for communication technology and apps, according to the experts.

Health experts want to come out of denial and realise, "it just does not happen to others it can happen to anyone."

What we have to remember is there are ways to overcome the virus with the right medical assistance and many have recovered from home itself. More than anything else what is important is rest.

Somehow that is a term that is often forgotten. Maybe it is the moral of the story. Covid-19 has been reminding us to take a break from the rush of life, from running around the clock non-stop, not taking time to relish the food, to stretch or breathe.

We had even forgotten that exhaling follows inhaling, the past must be pushed over to live in the present and hope for a bright future.

So let us be responsible and get into the mode of reviving and bring back hope in Ramadhan.

OPEN TO TOURISTS

Greece anxious to move on from crisis season

KAROLINA TAGARIS

Greece began opening to tourists on Monday with few bookings but hopes for a better season to help make up for a 2020 devastated by the coronavirus pandemic.

On Rhodes island, where most visitors are from abroad, hoteliers are scrubbing, polishing and painting in anticipation of a make-or-break year. "We're preparing the hotel in order to start as soon as the government gives us the green light," said George Tselios, general manager of Sun Beach Hotel, whose customers are from Scandinavia, Germany, Austria and Britain. Greece will formally open on May 14 but starting from Monday, tourists from the European Union, the United States, Britain, Serbia, Israel and the United Arab Emirates will not quarantine if they are vaccinated or test negative for Covid-19.

Tourism, which generates a fifth of Greece's GDP and one in five jobs, is vital for an economy that had climbed out of a decade-long slump only to slip back into recession last year as Covid-19 struck.

In a normal year, Rhodes would have already laid out the umbrellas for a season that runs from March through October. In mid-April, it

resembled a ghost city.

“We’ve done everything within our power to have a better season. We’ll be absolutely ready by mid-May

GEORGE HATZIMARKOS
Governor of Aegean islands

Shuttered luxury resorts towered over a long, sandy, empty coastline. Beach towns normally bursting with crowds of British tourists were silent, with boarded up shops and tavernas.

Many have been closed

since 2020, when just 7.4 million people visited Greece, fewer than any year in its decade-long economic crisis and down from a record 31.3 million in 2019. From hotels to restaurants and daily cruise boats, the many businesses surviving on state aid cannot afford another lost summer. "Most of them feel the country cannot survive another crisis," Rhodes's deputy mayor for tourism, Konstantinos Taraslias, said. Nearly 600,000 tourists visited Rhodes last year, down from 2.3 million in 2019. Just over half its 650 hotels opened, the hoteliers' association said.

Greece says it is better placed this summer thanks to widespread testing, quarantine hotels and plans to vaccinate islanders and tourism workers. "We've done everything within our power to have a better season," said George Hatzimarkos, governor of Greece's most popular region, the south Aegean islands, which besides Rhodes includes Mykonos and Santorini. "We'll be absolutely ready," by mid-May, Hatzimarkos said.

But bookings are few and most for August to October, said the president of Rhodes' hoteliers, Manolis Markopoulos, forecasting a year of last-minute reservations. "We can understand it because guests really want to be sure that they will fly," he said. "But that does not mean that we will not get bookings later."

While Greece fared better than much of Europe in containing the first wave of the pandemic, a continuous rise in infections has forced it to impose several lockdowns to protect its strained health service.

Tourists will be subject to lockdown restrictions, which include night-time curfews. Restaurants have been closed since November. Giannis Chalikias, who manages nine businesses on Rhodes, said only one is open and struggling to meet the obligations of the remaining eight. — Reuters

PAINFUL COMPROMISES

US announcement of pullout from Afghanistan hit chances of peace

HAMID SHALIZI AND
JIBRAN AHMAD

US President Joe Biden's announced pullout of troops from Afghanistan by September 11 has jeopardised Washington's push for peace with Taliban and increased the chances of an upsurge in violence, sources say.

Biden announced the withdrawal, pushed back from a May 1 deadline agreed with the Taliban, without buy-in from the insurgents, sources involved in the discussions said.

The decision was signalled just hours after Turkey announced dates for a crucial peace summit on April 24, which the Taliban had also not yet agreed on. The Taliban then announced they were shunning the summit while troops remained, throwing the process into disarray.

"Biden's announcement decreases any leverage the international community has left over them, and helps the Taliban justify refusing to attend," said Ashley Jackson of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

One official whose country is involved in the peace process said the Taliban's negotiating position had become much stronger and chances of progress were slim.

"What do the Taliban get out of the Turkey summit? They need something tangible," he said. "It's difficult to bring them to a negotiation table where they know they will have to make painful compromises."

Tribal elders and Taliban members



In this file photo US Marines board a C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft headed to Kandahar on October 27, 2014. – AFP

THE DECISION
WAS SIGNALLED
JUST HOURS
AFTER TURKEY
ANNOUNCED DATES
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in Afghanistan's Taliban-controlled areas described jubilation at the US announcement. "Of course we won and America lost the long... war," said Quraishi, a Taliban commander in eastern Logar province. "There is no bigger happiness than hearing that the invaders are packing their bags."

In recent weeks, Washington raced to get agreement on a ceasefire and an interim government, and to get the Taliban onboard with a deadline extension, officials said. Biden's decision on the extension and the Taliban's reaction has sparked

more frantic behind-the-scenes negotiations.

The sources said Washington was urging Qatar and Pakistan, which have long-standing ties within the Taliban, to pressure the militants to come back to the table. Taliban sources described intense pressure from Pakistan.

"When our leadership refused to go (to Turkey), then Pakistani authorities asked us to send Mullah Yaqoob. When he refused, they proposed Sirajuddin Haqqani but he too is unwilling," one source said, referring to the Taliban's military chief. — Reuters

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TOTTENHAM CUT CORD WITH MISERABLE MOURINHO SPELL

MOURINHO LEAVES WITH SPURS SEVENTH IN PREMIER LEAGUE, FIVE POINTS ADRIFT OF THE TOP FOUR

LONDON: Tottenham brought Jose Mourinho's unhappy spell as a manager to an abrupt end on Monday just days before they attempt to end a 13-year wait to win a trophy in the League Cup final.

Mourinho was handed the daunting task of replacing Mauricio Pochettino, who had led Tottenham to the club's first-ever Champions League final just months prior to his sacking in November 2019.

Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy backed Mourinho's stellar record of winning multiple trophies at Porto, Chelsea, Inter Milan, Real Madrid and Manchester United.

However, Levy has sensationally cut his losses ahead of Sunday's League Cup final against Manchester City in the hope that Mourinho's departure will lift the gloom that has descended upon a talented squad of players.

Mourinho leaves with Tottenham seventh in the Premier League, five points adrift of the top four.

A shock Europa League exit to Dinamo Zagreb last month means a top-four finish is Spurs' only route back into next season's Champions League.

As evidenced by Tottenham signing up as one of 12 clubs to a breakaway European Super League on Sunday,

they now see themselves as part of the continent's elite and can ill afford the economic consequences of missing out on Champions League revenue.

A state-of-the-art new stadium at a cost of £1 billion (\$1.4 billion) was meant to herald a new era of success for Spurs. Instead, less than a year into their new home, the coronavirus pandemic has forced games behind closed doors and denied Tottenham extra revenue from hosting other sports and entertainment events.

'SAME COACH, DIFFERENT PLAYERS'

Yet, such was the scale of decline under the Portuguese in recent months, Levy has paid out to cut short a lucrative contract that still had over two years left to run.

Most of the Mourinho era was played without fans in the stands, as Levy acknowledged in a statement recognising his tenure as "some of our most challenging times as a club".

Yet, that may have prolonged rather than shortened his stay.

Mourinho was not a favourite of the Spurs support even prior to his arrival, having won three Premier League titles in two spells at London rivals Chelsea.

His overly defensive, counter-



Jose Mourinho

- Coach
- Portuguese
- Aged 58

Clubs and titles			
Tottenham (ENG)			
Nov 2019 - April 2021			
Man. United (ENG)			
2016-18			
Chelsea (ENG)			
2013-15			
Real Madrid (ESP)			
2010-13			
Inter Milan (ITA)			
2008-10			
Chelsea (ENG)			
2004-07			
Porto (POR)			
2002-04			
Uniao Leiria (POR)			
2001-02			
Benfica (POR)			
2000-01			

Photo AFP/Daniel Leal-Olivas © AFP

attacking style of play was not an easy fit with Tottenham's history of having great entertainers such as Glenn Hoddle, Paul Gascoigne and David Ginola.

"He was never the right man for the job. I'm happy that he's gone," said Tottenham fan David Buckley outside the club's stadium on Monday.

There were flashes of the charismatic Mourinho of old, particularly in a behind-the-scenes Amazon documentary during his first season in charge.

Spurs finished that campaign in sixth, having climbed up the table from 14th when he was appointed.

There were further signs of progress as a fast start to this season took Tottenham top of the table in December, sparking hope of challenging for a first league title in 60

years. However, just seven wins in 21 league games over the past five months saw them slip down the table.

In response, Mourinho publicly criticised his players rather than taking responsibility.

Tottenham have lost 20 points from winning positions in the league alone this season, with many pundits pointing the finger at Mourinho's desire to protect leads rather than seeking more goals.

Yet, when asked why his side let so many leads slip compared to his more ruthless Chelsea, Madrid and Inter teams, Mourinho replied: "same coach, different players."

Only the free-scoring form of England captain Harry Kane and Son Heung-min has kept Spurs' season alive as Mourinho failed to get the best out of a host of other attacking players.

Dele Alli has made just two Premier League starts all season, while Gareth Bale has struggled to find a regular place in the team on his return to the club on-loan from Real Madrid.

At the other end of the field, Mourinho constantly chopped and changed his defence without ever finding a winning formula.

As a result, he ended up as the one in the firing line. — AFP



Muralitharan undergoes angioplasty

Muttiah Muralitharan has undergone a scheduled angioplasty at a hospital in Chennai and has responded well to the procedure, a spokesman for the former Sri Lanka spinner's IPL side Sunrisers Hyderabad said on Monday. The 49-year-old is part of Hyderabad's coaching staff for the tournament.



Sri Lanka's Lokuhettige banned 8 years for corruption

World cricket's governing body ICC on Monday banned former Sri Lanka fast bowler Dilhara Lokuhettige for eight years for corruption. The 40-year-old had played nine one-day internationals and two Twenty20 internationals for Sri Lanka between 2005 and 2013.

De Villiers awaits Boucher talks on South Africa return



CHENNAI, India: AB de Villiers on Sunday said it would be "fantastic" to return to playing for South Africa ahead of the Twenty20 World Cup as he awaits a discussion with national coach Mark Boucher.

The veteran batsman, who retired from international cricket in 2018, smashed a match-winning unbeaten 76 as the Royal Challengers Bangalore thrashed Kolkata Knight Riders by 38 runs in the Indian Premier League.

De Villiers, 37, has been keen to feature again for the Proteas and believes a call on his form and fitness would be discussed towards the business end of the Twenty20 tournament.

"We have been talking about it. Already last year he asked me if I would be interested and I said 'absolutely'," De Villiers said after being named man of the match in Bangalore's third successive win this season.

"Coming into the IPL we will look at where we are with regards to my form, my fitness. If I can slot in there, it will be fantastic for all these things to fall into place.

"I am waiting for Boucher towards the end of IPL and then we will plan accordingly."

De Villiers has been in talks with former captain Graeme Smith, South Africa's director of cricket, and Boucher to make a comeback to the T20 side.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to played in India between October and November.

South Africa recently lost a one-day (2-1) and T20 series (3-1) to Pakistan at home.

De Villiers has been in prolific form for Bangalore, led by Virat Kohli, who are searching for their first IPL title.

He smashed nine fours and three sixes in his 34-ball blitz and put on a quickfire fifty-plus partnership with Australia's Glenn Maxwell, who made 78, in Bangalore's 204-4.

"I have never been an ego player who will go out there and say I am Mr.360, I am going to play all the shots in the book," said De Villiers.

"I rather want to play the situation to the best of my ability. I think I did that well and always do it well."

De Villiers has played 114 Tests, 228 ODIs and 78 T20 internationals for South Africa, scoring more than 20,000 runs across the three formats.

— AFP

Dhawan fireworks propel Delhi

CAPITALS OVERHAUL 196 SET BY PUNJAB KINGS

MUMBAI: Delhi Capitals (DC) bounced back with a victory after beating the Punjab Kings (PBKS) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2021 at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday.

Shikhar Dhawan's magnificent 92 (49 balls) at the top helped DC edge out PBKS as they chased down the target of 196 in a run-fest at Wankhede.

In the chase, the DC openers got off to the desired start, with Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw taking on the new ball and adding 21 runs in the first two overs.

Shaw took charge of the attack as he lofted Mohammad Shami for a six over long-on in the second over. The DC openers then hit a couple of fours off Jalaj Saxena, who came in to bowl the third over.

DC were going at over 10 runs per over at the start and Shaw went after the length deliveries of Jhye Richardson as he flicked the pacer towards the leg side for four and then lofted him over long-off for maximum.

It was then time for Dhawan to exhibit his range of shots after hitting Shami for three fours in an over. PBKS got rid of the dangerous Shaw and the short ball did the trick for Arshdeep Singh as the right-hander edged one to Gayle at square-leg.

Steve Smith joined Dhawan in the middle as the two worked around the ball and played out a couple of quiet overs, with Deepak Hooda and Saxena bowling from each ends.

Dhawan then broke the shackles and hit two consecutive fours off Hooda before notching up a half-century. In the 10th



over, he launched a maximum off Richardson as DC moved to 99/1 at the halfway stage of the chase.

Riley Meredith's short ball did the trick for PBKS, as he dismissed Steve Smith for 9.

Dhawan carried his rhythm and accelerated by smashing Shami over long-on for a six and then creamed three fours in a row off Meredith in the 14th over, helping DC score 18 runs in that over.

Rishabh Pant joined the party and smashed his first six of the game before Richardson brought an end to Dhawan's fine knock of 92 after the DC batsman played a premeditated shot to a delivery that crashed into the stumps.

DC got close to the target but the job was yet to be done as they required 36 off the final four overs.

Shami bowled a long 17th over

that included a front-foot no ball followed by a delivery that was above waist height.

Stoinis made full use of the free hits, hitting two fours and a six to bring up 20 off the over. However, Richardson scalped his second wicket in form of the DC skipper, who miscued the shot that went straight to Hooda at long-on, who took a juggling catch.

Lalit Yadav, who walked out to bat after Pant's fall, supported Stonis with 2 boundaries after the latter finished the run-chase in style with a boundary and DC chased the total of 195.

FLYING START

Earlier, PBKS, who were put in to bat first, were off to a flying start after Mayank Agarwal and KL Rahul took on the debutant Lukman Meriwala in the second

over and scored 20 off the left-arm pacer, smashing three boundaries and a six, courtesy a free hit that pushed the PBKS openers to accelerate early on.

Mayank then creamed two consecutive boundaries off Chris Woakes and backed his shots with solid timing. The 50-run stand was up for the opening wicket and the Mayank-Rahul duo was striking the boundaries in plenty on a belter of a wicket, scoring at nearly ten runs per over at the end of the powerplay.

Mayank brought his fifty with a four with an edge over the keeper's head off Avesh Khan. — IPL

BRIEF SCORES

Delhi Capitals (Shikhar Dhawan 92, Prithvi Shaw 32; Jhye Richardson 2/41) beat Punjab Kings 195/4 (Mayank Agarwal 69, KL Rahul 61; Lukman Meriwala 1/32) by 6 wickets

ISC's 'Mr Sports' Usman bids adieu to Oman

MUSCAT: Any sports activities organised at the Indian Social Club Oman (ISC) meant one name — Imtiaz Usman.

Imtiazbhai, as he is popularly known as, has been involved with the ISC for more than four decades as a board member and an office-bearer.

After spending 42 years in Oman, Imtiaz bids adieu to his second home and returns to his native place, Belgaum in the southern Indian state of Karnataka.

Acknowledging his yeoman services to ISC sports and the club, Dr Sathish Nambiar, Chairman of the Indian Social Club, Oman, and the board recently felicitated him with the ISC Indian of the Year 2021.

It was a deserving honour for the man, who has served ISC since 1980 and retired from the Embassy of Germany in Oman.



The ISC felicitates Imtiaz Usman (centre) with the Indian of the Year award.

Lauding Usman's services to the ISC, Dr Nambiar said, "A huge vacuum will be left behind by him. He has left big shoes to be filled and it will be a challenge

for anyone who takes over his responsibilities at the club.

"He is been one of the pillars of the club for the last four decades, managing successfully the sports

activities at the club amid all challenges."

Dr Nambiar added, "Imtiazbhai's passion was unparalleled. The way he

conducted coaching programmes in various sports annually, organised open tournaments and in-house tournaments was a major contributing factor in developing the skills and abilities of children in various disciplines of sports."

Usman arrived in Oman in 1978 and after spending his first two years in Salalah, he moved to Muscat and became an active member of the erstwhile Indian Cultural Association, which later on became the Indian Social Club.

He joined the ISC board in 1985 and took over as the general secretary. A year later, he sought to take over the sports activities, which remains a everlasting love for him.

Usman worked with passion and has been largely credited were integrating the ISC members with the local Omanis sportsmen.

Usman was credited to promoting tennis, table tennis,

badminton and karate among not just ISC kids but also among Omani children, earning the nickname 'Mr ISC Sports'.

Usman's success in organising the ISC Open table tennis and junior tennis tournaments could be gauged by the fact that the events evoked large participation from multiple nationalities and over the years the events have gained massive popularity.

Usman also donned the role of a sports scribe, at times reporting for tennis events including Davis Cup matches involving Oman.

Usman was also known to have played a vital role in organising coaching clinics that have helped young children to hone their skills and excel at national events.

In recognition of years of selfless service, ISC honoured Usman with the coveted Indian of the Year award 2021 at a farewell ceremony recently.



Uefa blasts ‘disgraceful’ Super League plan

MANCHESTER, England: European soccer’s governing body Uefa on Monday said clubs and players joining the proposed breakaway Super League could be banned from all of its competitions and the World Cup as it condemned a “disgraceful and self-serving proposal”.

The US investment bank JP Morgan is financing the new league, which includes clubs such as Real Madrid and Manchester United and is a rival to Uefa’s established Champions League competition.

Addressing an emergency meeting the day after 12 of Europe’s top clubs announced the breakaway, Uefa president Aleksander Ceferin launched a scathing attack on the plan, which has been widely condemned across the game and beyond.

“We’re still assessing with our legal team but we will take

12
CLUBS
ANNOUNCE
SUPER LEAGUE

EUROPE BODY
THREATENS TO
BAN CLUBS

all the sanctions that we can and we will inform you as soon we can,” he said. “My opinion is that as soon as possible they have to be banned from all our competitions and the players from all our competitions.”

The meeting was initially scheduled to confirm plans

Europe’s breakaway Super League
12 of football’s most powerful clubs announce controversial new scheme, April 19

Liverpool (ENG)	Manchester United (ENG)	Arsenal (ENG)
Chelsea (ENG)	Manchester City (ENG)	Tottenham (ENG)
Real Madrid (ESP)	Barcelona (ESP)	Juventus (ITA)
Atletico Madrid (ESP)	Inter Milan (ITA)	AC Milan (ITA)

The plan

- ▶ Three more founding clubs to be announced
- ▶ 15 initial members to be guaranteed qualification every season
- ▶ 5 places up for grabs in a qualifying system each year
- ▶ 3.5 billion euro investment available to the founding clubs
- ▶ Start “as soon as practicable”

AFP

for an expanded Uefa Champions League but has been overshadowed by the breakaway Super League.

“Uefa and the football world stand united against the disgraceful and self-serving proposal we have seen in the last 24 hours for a select few clubs in Europe motivated by greed. We are all united against this nonsense of a project,” Ceferin said.

JP Morgan is providing a 3.5 billion euro (\$4.21 billion) grant to the founding clubs to spend on infrastructure and recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The bitter battle for control of the game and its multi-billion dollar revenues entered a new phase with a letter sent by the 12 clubs to Uefa on Monday in which they said they would take legal steps in unnamed courts to protect their interests as they set

up the league.

The breakaway has been heavily criticised by soccer authorities, fan organisations and politicians across Europe who say it entrenches the wealth and power of a small elite of clubs.

The breakaway clubs will be guaranteed annual places in the competition - in contrast to the current Uefa Champions League, which requires teams to qualify via their domestic leagues.

While having guaranteed spots in the league goes against long-standing tradition in European football, the clubs argue the Super League will create a more sustainable financial model.

“The formation of the Super League comes at a time when the global pandemic has accelerated the instability in the existing European football economic model,” the clubs said in their founding statement. — **Reuters**

Aussie Sharma topples Jabeur for first WTA title

MIAMI: Australian Astra Sharma, ranked 165th in the world, rallied to beat 27th-ranked Ons Jabeur 2-6, 7-5, 6-1 on Sunday to win her first WTA title at Charleston, South Carolina.

Sharma, who beat a top-30 player for the first time in three attempts, broke Tunisian top seed Jabeur three times in the third set to give herself a chance to serve out the match, which she

did in style with a love game.

The Singapore-born Australian, who reached the 2019 Australian Open mixed doubles final with compatriot John-Patrick Smith, became the sixth first-time singles winner on the WTA tour this year.

Sharma, who has been ranked as high as 85th in the world, is projected to rise to 120th on the strength of the victory in her second career singles final.

Jabeur, who has climbed to a career-high ranking since becoming the first Arab woman to reach a Grand Slam quarter-final at the 2020 Australian Open, used her wide array of weapons to dominate the first set, mixing deep groundstrokes with lobs and angled passing shots to build a 5-1 lead and pocketing the set without facing a breakpoint.

But Sharma gained the first

break of the second set for a 3-1 lead. Jabeur immediately broke back and they went with serve to the 12th game in which Jabeur led 40-15 before the Aussie four straight points to take the set - sealing it when she raced forward to reach a drop shot and scooped the ball back past Jabeur.

After they traded breaks early in the third, Sharma won the final four games to triumph.

— **AFP**





ramadhan

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Make fasting in Ramadhan comfortable for people with diabetes

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

It is a known fact that there are risks associated with diabetes and fasting. According to experts, however, there are strategies for effective prevention.

Sumaira Fatima, Clinical dietitian and diabetes educator at IMC Sugar Apollo, said the management of people with diabetes who fast during Ramadhan is crucial to achieve and maintain good glycemic control pre and post Ramadhan.

What are the most common risks diabetic patients face while fasting?

"The most common risks associated are hypoglycemia, hyperglycemia, dehydration, electrolyte imbalance and renal (kidney) dysfunction," explained Sumaira.

What are the areas diabetic people need to keep in mind?

The sacred month is back amid Covid-19 with partial lockdown and peaking summers. Fasting in Oman from pre-dawn to sunset will be 14 hours. Pre-health check-up and medications, right diet and nutrition, food timings, required carbohydrate intake, hydration, physical activity and rest have a significant role among diabetic people who wish to fast.

One of the most important things is to go through a check-up with your diabetologist/physician to know fitness and glycemic control. The medication and dosage are changed during Ramadhan because of long days of fasting.

These are Sumaira's recommendations: Include whole grains of your choice in suhoor to have a comfortable long day. Do not eat suhoor meal post-Taraweeh. The right way is to eat at early dawn before fajr prayers.

A whole cereal and good protein like whole-grain bread, oats, bulgur, plain muesli with either egg, low-fat cheese, low-fat milk, yoghurt and nuts will be nourishing.

Add crushed flax seeds, slices of avocado and chia seeds to delay the glucose absorption.

Avocado on toast and egg makes a simple one.

Do not skip Suhoor — meal of blessing.

These are the recommendations for individuals who are diabetic while breaking the fast:

Break your fast with dates, which is sunnah but limit to 3 or less. A light meal consisting of dates, mixing fruits with a bowl of whole-grain porridge or beans can complete the meal.

Keep the Iftar meal simple and small as it is the immediate meal after long days fast. Avoid frying, and opt for healthy cooking options using an air fryer, grill microwave, steam cooking.

Add up healthy choices like whole grain chicken or lean meat porridge, cooked or baked beans, lentils soup, simply cooked harees, quinoa with fish and vegetables, brown rice, mixed vegetables and lean meat stew which not only helps in good glycemic control but provides dense nutrition.

Avoid taking too many simple carbohydrate foods at one meal like juices, white flour savouries, desserts, potatoes, foods made of corn starch and rice starch which causes hyperglycemia spike in blood sugar later.

Include dairy products like milk, laban, yoghurt during post-Taraweeh hours where many people tend to feel hungrier. Avoid excessive eating post-Taraweeh.

Hydrate yourself with more water, lemon, mint water to avoid headaches and one must stay away from fruit juices with added sugars, energy drinks and carbonated drinks as it impacts sugars causing hyperglycemia.

Checking sugar level with a glucometer at home and taking insulin injection does not break the fast.

Stay aware of hypoglycemia (low sugar) points out Sumaira by checking glucose level at various times of the day, especially if you are using insulin injection. Be consistent with the medicine dosage advised by the doctor.

"If you experience hypoglycemia less than (4.5 mmol/L) correct it with fast-acting sugars like dates or juice or honey," she advised.

Proper rest during the night and physical activity are essential for better glycemic control in Ramadhan. People with diabetes have a higher risk of getting infections with weakened immune systems. Together we need to act responsibly and follow the current Covid guidelines ensuring that social distancing is observed avoiding family gatherings, overcrowding of supermarkets and public places to help save lives and protect the health of everyone living around us.

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

OH YOU WHO BELIEVE! FASTING IS PRESCRIBED FOR YOU, AS IT WAS PRESCRIBED FOR THOSE BEFORE YOU, THAT YOU MAY BECOME RIGHTEOUS

AL BAQARAH

6 RAMADHAN
MONDAY, APRIL 19

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FATWA QUESTION & ANSWER



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

QUESTION
Someone was making reparation for missed days of fasting but he broke it for a reason; another one was fasting during Ramadhan but he broke it due to illness. After getting well, he fed people in need to make up for the lost days. Is it OK?

ANSWER
The first one should make up his missed days of fast later, while the latter must make up his missed days if he is able to do so.

6 RAMADHAN
MONDAY, APRIL 19

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HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

UMAR BIN AL-KHATTAB NARRATED THAT:

THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH SAID:

"WHEN THE NIGHT ADVANCES AND THE DAY RETREATS, AND THE SUN IS HIDDEN, THEN THE FAST IS TO BE BROKEN."

6 RAMADHAN
MONDAY, APRIL 19

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Try this Nepali food for Iftar

BY KABEER YOUSUF

An array of restaurants, mostly in Kathmandu, where a small community of Newar Muslim in the Northernmost part of Thamel live is a place known for its Iftar varieties. The dozens of houses of Newar Muslims, as well as the restaurants, get vibrant at Iftar times. Food usually served for Iftar in a Nepali home over the years has assimilated into the mainstream Nepali food tradition adding to an even more diverse food selection. For the Muslim Nepalis, during Iftar, delicacies include naan and butter chicken curry, naan roti with butter chicken masala curry, buff (beef is pronounced buff) shami kebab, buff shami kebab, chickpeas flour and spices, and served with coriander chutney, mutton biryani, lachcha made of warm milk, nuts/raisins and sugar. Sheermal roti, saffron-flavoured sheermal roti, traditional flatbread, jalebi, and rumali roti. Sharing the most sought after Iftar delicacy of Nepal:

Recipe:

BUTTER CHICKEN (MURGH MAKHANI)

Similar to Chicken Tikka Masala, Butter Chicken is one of the most popular curries at any Nepalese and Indian household around the world. Aromatic golden chicken pieces in an incredible creamy curry sauce, this Butter Chicken recipe is one of the best you will try! You will love how easy it is to make it in the comfort of your own home. A milder curry when compared to other Nepalese curries makes Butter Chicken a favourite among families with little ones. You can certainly add as much or as little chilli as you wish. In other words, YOU are in total control of how spicy you make it. The juicy and tender, flavour-infused chicken starts with an easy yoghurt marinade made from scratch: plain yoghurt, fresh garlic and ginger, and easy to find spices. You can use boneless, skinless chicken thighs or breasts. Dark meat is preferred. First, mix your yoghurt marinade. Marinate chicken for 20 minutes, or overnight if time allows. (The longer it marinates, the more tender your chicken will be.) Sear chicken in a skillet or pan. Keep those charred bits on the pan to make your sauce. Browned bits = flavour. If you have too many burnt pieces stuck to the pan, you can discard some of them if you

wish. Finally, make your curry sauce in the same skillet. Easy to find spices, for example: Garam masala, Turmeric, Cumin, Red Chili Powder and Salt, are all you need to make a great sauce. It's all about that sauce when it comes to authentic butter chicken. You'll be surprised to find that you only need an onion, a can of crushed tomatoes, garlic and ginger, and some added spices to continue those beautiful flavours in the sauce. The trick to making a great sauce is to let the tomatoes cook off for at least 10-15 minutes until they are almost dry on your pan. Additionally, you can add in a couple of tablespoons of water if it dries too early. After that, blend until smooth and add in your cream (heavy whipping cream or thickened cream). You can use evaporated milk or half and a half for a lower calorie option. If you want a richer sauce, feel free to add a couple of tablespoons of butter (or ghee) right at the end, letting it melt through the sauce, before serving. It's served best with rice or naan. Enjoy the heavenly delicacy i.e Butter Chicken.

NAN:

- 3 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
 - 2 Tbls. melted butter
 - 1/2 cup warm milk
 - 1/2 cup warm water or as needed
 - 1 cup yogurt
 - 1 Tbs yeast
 - 1 Tbs baking powder
 - 1 Tbs sugar
 - 1 tsp salt
- For Stuffing:
- 1 lb ground lamb (chicken can also be used)
 - 1 cup finely chopped scallion
 - 1 tsp. garlic, minced
 - 1 tsp. ginger, minced
 - 2 Tbls. chopped cilantro
 - 1 tsp. turmeric
 - 1 Tbls. curry powder
 - Salt and Pepper
- 2 Tbs cooking oil

To prepare lamb stuffing, in a saut



pan heat two tablespoons of oil. Add turmeric, garlic, ginger and curry powder; fry for a minute or so. Add ground lamb and saut until cooked. Add chopped scallion and cilantro; mix well. Take off heat and allow cooling. In a small bowl, combine warm milk, water, sugar and yeast. Allow the yeast to reconstitute for about 30 minutes. In a large bowl, combine the flour, melted butter, baking powder and salt. Make a well in the centre and add milk-water mixture and yoghurt, mixing it with the flour until a soft dough is formed. Dust kneading board with flour; place the dough on the board and knead for ten minutes or so. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest for two hours. The dough will have expanded by two folds. Knead the dough again for another five minutes and allow resting for another half an hour. Divide the dough into three-inch balls. Roll out the dough ball into a six-inch circle. Place two tablespoons of lamb stuffing at the centre of the nan. Fold all edges over towards the centre and pinch to enclose. Sprinkle some dusting flour on the kneading board and gently roll out the stuffed nan into a six-inch circle. Continue with other dough balls. Cover with plastic wrap. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F. Place nans on a lightly buttered baking tray. Lightly brush the top of nans with melted butter. Bake in the oven for 10-12 minutes until the nans have risen and the surface has turned slightly brown. Do not over bake nans. Note that nans can also be baked in a hot tandoor which is commonly used in Nepal. Serve hot with vegetable or meat preparations

FIFTH PART OF A SERIES

Getting To Know Islam

An in-depth look into the faith of billions

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Do you know Muhammad (pbuh)?

What was the impact of Prophet Muhammad's call?

Many were convinced by him, from amongst the elite of society and from amongst the poor and the slaves whereas those in positions of power responded with anger, intense hatred and slanders. Muhammad and his followers endured violence and torture from the people of Mecca, but they did not retaliate or raise arms. They responded to the aggression by stepping up their non-violent challenge of ideas in society. After 13 years of persistence in Mecca, a group of people from another town called Medina invited Muhammad to live with them, accepting him as their leader, and pledging to defend him and his message. This marked a shift from persecution by those in Mecca towards the Muslims, to a declaration of war by them on him and his newly founded state. After many battles over many years, the Prophet's state, centred in the city of Medina, triumphed – and he entered Mecca victorious, but demonstrating his incredibly magnanimous nature, forgave almost all his former enemies. He then set about carrying his message to the neighbouring regions. Implementing the ruling of the Quran, he forbade anyone from being forced to convert to Islam. Belief, he said, had to be a free choice without compulsion. But where he saw oppression, or where people were not allowed that free choice, he used his army to end oppression, establish justice and allow people to choose if they wished to become Muslim, or not.

Timeline of Development in Muslim Civilisation

ca 750

Abbasids overthrow the Umayyads and 762 build a new capital Baghdad. Spain is ruled by an Umayyad descendant

ca 780

Mathematician Al-Khwarizmi is born. His book Algebr wal Muqabala developed modern Algebra.



FAQS Women in Islam

How does Islam view female children?

The Quran forbade pre-Islamic Arab custom of female infanticide and considered it a crime like any other murder. "And when the female (infant) buried alive – is questioned, for what crime she was killed." [Quran 81:8-9]. Islam criticises the attitudes of such parents who reject their female children, the Quran states: "When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of a bad news he has had! Shall he retain her on (sufferance) and contempt, or bury her in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on?" [Quran 16:58-59]. Far from saving the girl's life so that she may later suffer injustice and inequality, Islam requires kind and just treatment for her. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said, "Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favour his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise." In another report, "Whosoever supports two daughters till they mature, he and I will come in the Day of Judgment as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together)." (Sahih Bukhari & Sahih Muslim)



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CHANGING WORLD



Ruins, ghosts and cats: Rome's 'Area Sacra' to welcome visitors

Rome: History buffs will be able to roam the ruins of Rome's "Area Sacra", perhaps catching a glimpse of Julius Caesar's ghost, after the site becomes an open-air museum next year.

Work to adapt the Largo Argentina archaeological site for tourists begins next month, with upgrades to allow entry into the vast

sunken square containing the ruins of four Roman temples, Rome Mayor Virginia Raggi announced on Wednesday.

Today, the expanse of excavations in the historic site can only be gazed upon from street level.

"With this work, we'll begin entering into the area and... walk among the vestiges of our history," she said at a

press conference.

Julius Caesar is believed to have been stabbed in the Curia Pompei, a Senate building, part of whose limestone foundation is still visible.

But visitors are more likely to spot an apparition of the four-legged kind — namely, a cat.

The ruins are the domain of a colony of hundreds of rescued cats, fed, sterilised and cared for by a private non-profit shelter, who scamper through the site, lounging atop truncated marble pillars or posing for tourist photos — altogether unimpressed by the historical significance of their vast litterbox.

The temples, which date to between the third and second centuries B.C., include a circular monument to the goddess of Fortune, whose colossal marble head now sits in Rome's Centrale Montemartini museum.

They were uncovered as recently as 1926 in an urban planning project when demolished medieval houses revealed ancient Roman ruins underneath.

TOURISTS WELCOME

Julius Caesar was assassinated on March 15, 44 BC, by senators who feared he wanted to become king of Rome.

While at the Curia Pompei, where the Senate was gath-

ered, a group fell upon him, stabbing him 23 times.

Among them was his friend Brutus, leading the dying man to utter, according to Shakespeare's immortal line, "Et tu, Brute!"

The work at the "Area Sacra", which is expected to take a year, will include elevated walkways, illuminated at night, footpaths, an elevator and a covered exhibition area along one side of the site.

The project is being financed by jeweller Bulgari, owned by France's luxury conglomerate LVMH, which donated about one million euros (\$1.2 million). Bulgari was a previous sponsor on the restoration of Rome's Spanish Steps and an intricate mosaic floor within the Baths of Caracalla.

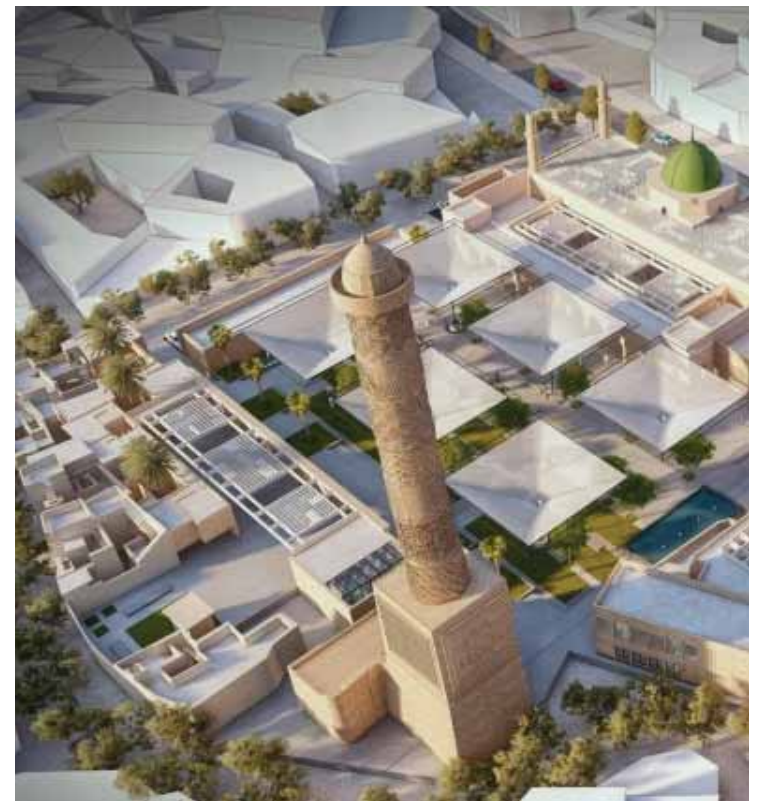
Excavations and preparatory work for the project continued despite the coronavirus restrictions of the past year, but the expected opening of the site in 2022 will hopefully coincide with a new wave of post-pandemic tourism, said Raggi.

"We are preparing for the arrival of new tourists when Covid is over," she said.

But what about the cats?

The city said the new site would not affect the area "where the historic feline colony of Largo Argentina is housed." — **AFP**

Egyptian architects win Mosul mosque competition



EIGHT EGYPTIAN architects have won an international competition for the reconstruction of the historic Al-Nouri Mosque complex in Mosul, Iraq, selection organiser Unesco said Thursday.

The complex was severely damaged by conflict in 2017, and the

be a landmark in the process of advancing the war-torn city's reconciliation and social cohesion," said Unesco Director-General Audrey Azoulay.

The reconstruction work, to start in the late autumn, aims to rebuild Al-Nouri's historic prayer hall and integrate the com-



rebuilding of the mosque is part of the organisation's project for the rehabilitation of the ancient city.

The mosque, built in the 12th century and famous for its leaning minaret, suffered badly in fighting between the Islamic State group and the US and Iraqi forces, known as the Battle for Mosul, with IS accused of blowing up the site before it was captured by government forces.

Selected from among 123 entries, the winning design is called "Courtyards Dialogue".

The reconstruction "will

plex, the largest public space in the Old City of Mosul, into its urban surrounding through open public spaces.

Unesco launched the competition in November 2020 in coordination with the Iraqi ministry of culture, the Iraqi Sunni Endowment and with support from the United Arab Emirates.

It is part of Unesco's "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative for the rehabilitation of the city and its cultural life, and the strengthening of its educational system. — **AFP**



Deserted Cape Verde hankers for its tourists

Tarrafal, Cape Verde: Way back in B.C. — Before Covid — Domingos Pereira made a living as a tourist guide, showing visitors the many natural wonders of Cape Verde.

Today, the 26-year-old is in limbo, like tens of thousands of others on the Atlantic archipelago, whose economy depends hugely on the vacation industry.

"I've been going fishing every day for the past year," said Pereira, a T-shirt on his head to protect him from the fierce sun.

"And the fish is just for eating. Don't bother trying to sell it. There are no tourists."

Cape Verde is a group of tropical Atlantic islands with a population of some 550,000 about 600 kilometres (375 miles) from Senegal.

Life in the archipelago is famously slow-moving. But once the coronavirus pandemic started to bite, tourists stopped coming and things seemed to come virtually to a stop.

In 2019, the islands welcomed 800,000 holidaymakers, most of them from Europe, said Eugenio Inocencio, president of the Tourism Association for Santiago, the main island where the capital Praia is located.

Now, Santiago's main resort, Tarrafal, is all but drained of life.

Its hotels are shuttered and its workers laid off.

The streets are deserted save for a knot of local people sitting at a corner in the shade. The only things catching the sun on its palm-fringed white-sand beach are colourful fishing boats.

In the main square, a dreadlocked trader of postcards and trinkets said

he had lost 80 per cent of his income thanks to Covid.

Silvio Antonio Lopes Borges, a 32-year-old former tourist guide said he can no longer afford his two-year-old son's playgroup.

"We play together — at least he's happy," he said. "And it's free."

"Before, I was able to put aside savings. Now I don't have enough to live on," he said.

ECONOMIC HIT

The pandemic has had, relatively speaking, only a limited medical effect on Cape Verde — the country has recorded 19,780 cases, of which 188 have been fatal.

Economically, though, the emergency has had catastrophic consequences.

Tourists, drawn to Cape Verde's gentle hospitality, year-round warmth and turquoise seas, account for a full quarter of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

After growth of 4.5 per cent in 2018 and 5.7 per cent in 2019, the former Portuguese colony suffered a record slump last year — a retraction of 14.8 per cent.

"We thought that tourism would be bouncing back at the start of the year, but Europe has had a fourth wave of the virus, which means that the number of tourists coming to Cape Verde is rock-bottom," said Inocencio.

How to rebound from this disaster is one of the main issues in Sunday's legislative elections, for which the outcome could be close.

Prime Minister Ulisses Correia e Silva's Movement for Democracy (MpD) is pitched against the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV), a socialist party led by



Janira Hopffer Almada that dominated politics for decades until suffering an election defeat in 2016.

RELIANCE ON EUROPE

Maya Duarte is manager of the Pensao Por Do Sol, a brand new hotel with a view of the Monte Graciosa, a volcanic peak that plunges into the ocean.

The hotel's opening day should have been in December, when the year-end tourist season kicks into gear. It was then delayed until February and postponed again, and has now only just taken place.

"We're worried," said Duarte, who is just 25.

"We're afraid that if we stay open, we won't have any income and be unable to pay the staff."

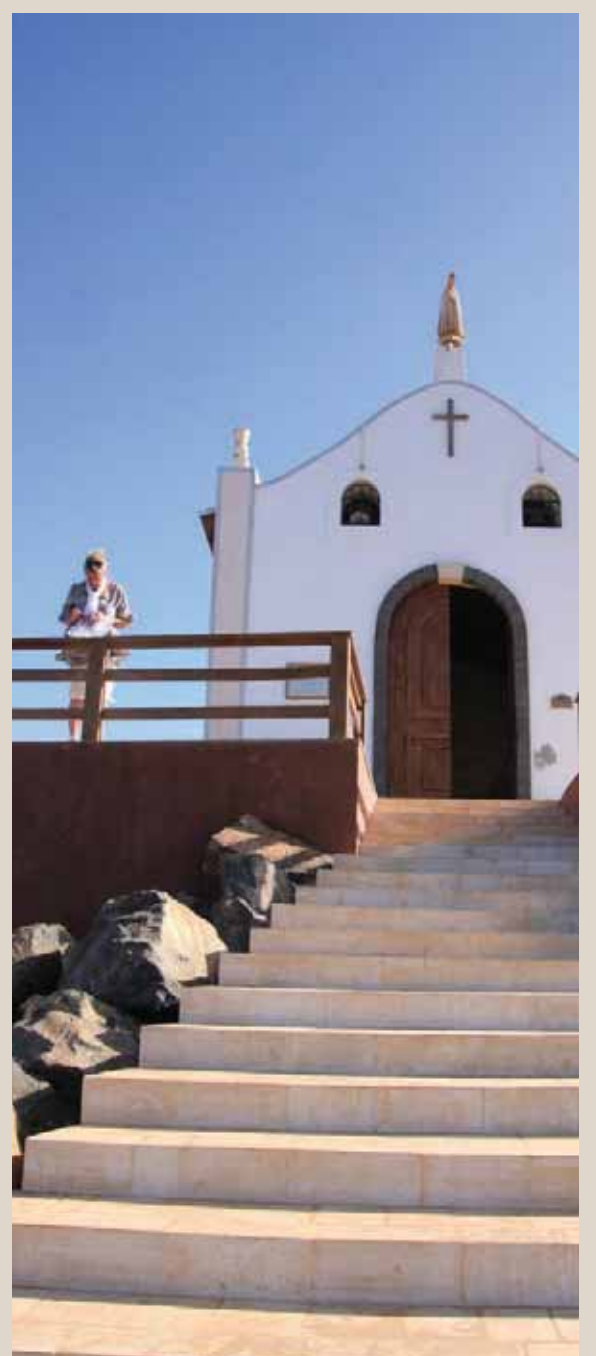
The solution, she said, was to ease dependence on vacationers from Europe.

"We can't expect just Europeans to come here — we have to invest locally."

Lacking freshwater and arable land, Cape Verde has to import 90 per cent of what it consumes, buying mainly from Spain, Portugal and Italy, according to the National Statistics Institute.

The crushing impact of the pandemic has brought home to many how dependent Cape Verde is on distant Europe, said economist Jose Agnelo Sanches.

"The future lies with diversifying the economy" and trading more with Africa, he said. "And we have to develop strengths in other sectors, such as agriculture and fishing." — AFP



business

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Oman Housing Bank approves RO 11 million in loans



MUSCAT: Oman Housing Bank said that 253 loans having a lump sum value of about RO 11 million were subsidized by the government in the first quarter of 2021.

Adnan Haider Darwish, CEO of Oman Housing Bank, said that the bank will accelerate the pace of approval of subsidized housing loans over the next few months.

This reflects the bank's commitment to develop the housing sector in the Sultanate in line with preset plans, said Adnan Haider Darwish.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), he added that, according to the 2021 scheduled plan, the bank will, by the end of 2021, finalize all loan applications filed as of April 2018.

The bank's management focuses on realizing the visions of the government, led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, aimed at providing decent housing for Omani citizens, Adnan explained.

— ONA

Pact inked for operation of new Duqm Port bunkering terminal

New infrastructure: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) and Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO) inked agreement regarding operations' OOMCO bunker facility

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

OQ owned Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO) and Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) signed an agreement regarding the operations and maintenance for OOMCO's bunker terminal facility in the Port of Duqm. The agreement was signed on Sunday at OQ's head office in Muscat by Ard Van Hoof, CEO, OTTCO, and Hussain Jama Bait Ishaq, Acting CEO, OOMCO.

The agreement represents the strong effort of the two companies to offer a cost-effective proposition to their customers both for the storage of liquid products and marine fuel delivery in the port, as well as the contribution to the competitiveness of Duqm as a regional port.

OOMCO, which OQ has a 49 per cent shareholding, is currently pre-commissioning a greenfield bunker terminal at the Port of Duqm.

This full-fledged terminal will consist of 30,000 m3 storage capacity and is capable of storing



The agreement represents the strong effort of the two companies to offer a cost-effective proposition to their customers both for the storage of liquid products and marine fuel delivery in the port, as well as the contribution to the competitiveness of Duqm as a regional port

and handling both heavy fuel oils as well as lighter distillate products such as marine gas oil.

Through the agreement, OTTCO will provide operation and maintenance storage and marine services, making this development a next step in strengthening OTTCO's strategy of owning and operating a widespread independent terminal network across Oman.

Ard Van Hoof, CEO OTTCO, said: "We are delighted to formalise this collaboration with OOMCO. Due to OTTCO's presence in the Port of Duqm, we are able, through the optimisation of operational resources and capabilities, to offer a cost-effective storage proposition to its customers in combination with a high level of quality of services".

Hussain bin Jama Bait Ishaq, OOMCO Acting CEO said "Supporting OTTCO's presence

at the Port of Duqm falls in line with our long-term strategy to transform Oman's fuel industry. The Port of Duqm has become a preferred trade and shipping destination, which has helped us in providing our services to broaden our global footprint."

OTTCO, part of OQ group of companies, is Oman's independent tank storage company. It was set up in 2014 with the objective to develop Oman's Crude Oil Hub in Ras Markaz, 70 km south of Duqm, with a potential total storage capacity of up to 200 million barrels.

The first phase of the development, with a designed capacity of 25 million barrels, is partly used to accommodate for the crude oil supply to OQ8 refinery in Duqm.

'Bitcoin' not bitcoin? UK considers new digital currency

LONDON: British finance minister Rishi Sunak told the Bank of England on Monday to look at the case for a new "Bitcoin", or central bank-backed digital currency, aimed at tackling some of the challenges posed by cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin.

A BoE-backed digital version of sterling would potentially allow businesses and consumers to hold accounts directly with the bank and to sidestep others when making payments, upending the lenders' role in the financial system.

"We're launching a new task force between the Treasury and the Bank of England to coordinate exploratory work on a potential central bank digital currency (CBDC)," Sunak told a financial industry conference.

Soon after, Sunak tweeted the single word "Bitcoin" in reply to the finance ministry's announcement of the task force.

Other central banks are also looking at whether to set up digital versions of their own currencies, essentially widening access to central bank funds which only commercial banks can use at present. This could speed up domestic and foreign payments and reduce financial stability risks.

China is a front-runner to launch a CBDC. — Reuters

OQ backs use of drone technology in agricultural sector

PROMISING POTENTIAL: Cooperation agreement covers Agricultural Drone Technology and Expertise Exchange

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

OQ, the global integrated group of the Sultanate, is supporting an initiative that seeks to harness the potential of drone technology in developing Oman's increasingly important agricultural sector. A Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) to this effect has been signed by the wholly government-owned energy group with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR).

It is part of a slate of initiatives and programmes supported by OQ in line with its corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments.



Commenting on its support for the 'Agricultural Drone Technology and Expertise Exchange Project', the energy group said: "OQ is dedicated to not only offer solutions and products for sustainable utilisation of natural resources for the benefits of humanity but to also play its part in

supporting its partners in this quest. An MOU was signed with the MoAFWR to support the strategic projects and studies the Ministry aims to carry out.

In the agricultural sector, drones have so far been deployed to, among other things, fight the deadly Dubas bug that afflicts date palm trees, as well as desert

locust swarms that infested part of the Sultanate last year.

The unmanned devices also play a role in the pollination of date palms. OQ's newly published 'Social Investment Report 2020' lists a variety of projects and initiatives that the company has supported as part of its CSR commitments

With the Fourth Industrial Revolution upon us, the centre aims to promote innovation and engagement in sciences and to foster learning, problem solving, risk taking and great ideas!

OQ

for the year.

In partnership with Sohar Port and Freezone and five of the latter's tenants, OQ funded the establishment of a regional molecular PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) laboratory in North Al Batinah Governorate on behalf of the Ministry of Health. The initiative was hailed

for its timeliness.

Further, with a view to engendering a scientific temperament among children and the youth, OQ is investing in the establishment of a pair of Science & Innovation Centres in Ibri and Al Buraimi.

"The centres are state of the art facilities with an ambition to act as hubs for the creative and daring minds. With the Fourth Industrial Revolution upon us, the centre aims to promote innovation and engagement in sciences and to foster learning, problem-solving, risk-taking and great ideas! It will offer several learning facilities such as a planetarium, innovation and multipurpose halls, a theatre, a public library and more," the report said.

Included in the sizable portfolio of social investment projects backed by OQ are initiatives in support of healthcare, education, environment, tourism, and R&D.

PPP drives national development and supports growth in Mideast

SUCCESS STORIES:
Arthur D Little report outlines how partnering with private sector will bridge investment gap, nurture collaboration, and bolster performance for governments

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are an essential tool to accommodate and advance Middle Eastern infrastructure requirements. When planned, designed, and implemented prudently, they can contribute to national development and support growth across all socio-economic sectors, benefitting public and private sector players.

Arthur D Little expounds this viewpoint in their latest report entitled, 'Successful Public-Private Partnerships: How countries should set up an effective ecosystem for public-private partnerships'. The document is rich in insights outlining how specific requirements should be considered throughout the planning, structuring, and implementation phases of such projects.

There are also key directions for how the private sector can spur innovation, exploring sector and country level initiatives as they are articulated across four main ecosystem levers – governance, strategy, transaction process, and implementation/monitoring.

The consultancy highlights the growing gap between infrastructure spending and needs, despite the critical nature of infrastructure regarding economic and social development.

In order to mitigate this void and cope with spending



limitations, governments are advised to involve the private sector where possible, which can bring additional financial support, increased efficiencies and optimal delivery of projects in tandem with the public sector, creating long-term value for money and positive outcomes for all.

"PPPs can conveniently unlock substantial financial and non-financial resources to foster the procurement of infrastructure. We acknowledge that adoption has been limited due to high complexity, high costs, the need for an enabling environment, and availability of bankable projects, but see longer term opportunities to deliver successful partnership projects in the future," said Carlo Stella, Partner at Arthur D Little, Middle East.

"Our work in the Middle East region and around the world has shown us that countries often struggle to implement PPPs. Encouragingly, we are starting to see signs of a turnaround with regional success stories providing tangible case studies to build confidence in this approach with

all stakeholders involved."

At the national level, the challenges are as follows: Striking the right balance between empowering sectors and maintaining quality; Ensuring the project pipeline is suitable and strong; Ensuring the projects in structured in the right manner, protecting both public and private sectors; and Optimising implementation to maximise success of PPPs.

Overcoming such challenges is crucial to optimise PPP ecosystems at a country level. A deliberate streamlining of approval authorities and the creation of PPP catalysers are both firm foundations for success. Moreover, sector ministries need to be empowered and responsible for implementing these projects whilst managing related contracts for the full project duration.

In terms of building a sustainable project pipeline, sectors must articulate a private-sector participation plan, conduct a comprehensive needs assessment analysis, and select PPP projects that matter most in

terms of eligibility and suitability.

"Governments need to carefully construct processes and mechanisms in order to select and nurture their partners. This is the optimum way for all entities to infuse efficiency and performance as projects grow," said Sally Menassa, Principal at Arthur D. Little, Middle East.

"We know it is crucial that all personnel involved in such projects have clearly defined roles and are empowered to deliver success. If these basics are in place we have a strong foundation to deliver successful PPP-driven initiatives."

The findings also show how governments should perform option analysis, conduct soft market sounding for pathfinder projects, ensure they protect all interests, and capture success beyond any given project's financial closure. Regarding the latter, governments are encouraged to plan strategically and actively monitor their PPP portfolio to safeguard against poor private sector performance and turbulent economic conditions.

Go further with style, comfort & capability in the Ford Explorer

MUSCAT: Ford's powerful and stylish Explorer ticks all the boxes when it comes to space, comfort, design, technology and safety. The Explorer is an ideal SUV to make the most of on every journey.

The Explorer has more power and space than ever and smart new technologies to help tackle life's adventures. Improved off-road capability comes courtesy of intelligent four-wheel drive and an available new Terrain Management System that features seven easy-to-engage drive modes. Standard features include a power liftgate, 8-inch digital touch screen with SYNC 3, and a comprehensive package of driver assist and safety technologies.

The Explorer is equipped with a revised 2.3-litre turbocharged EcoBoost engine that produces 300 horsepower and 420Nm of torque. The engine is matched to an all-new 10-speed transmission and Intelligent All-Wheel-Drive system.

Building upon Ford's push to bring more driver-assist technology to market, the all-new Explorer is packed with the very latest innovations from Ford. Every Explorer comes standard with Ford Co-Pilot360, a suite of driver-assist

technologies including Pre-Collision Assist with Automatic Emergency Braking, which includes Pedestrian Detection, Forward Collision Warning and Dynamic Brake Support; Blind Spot Information System with Cross-Traffic Alert; Lane-Keeping System; Rearview camera with built-in lens cleaner and Auto headlamps with auto high-beams.

Other available Ford Co-Pilot360 Assist+ technologies include Evasive Steering Assist, which provides steering support to help avoid a collision; and Post-Impact Braking provides braking after a collision to lessen injury and damage caused by a secondary crash event.

Explorer also is available with Ford's all-new Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control which automatically slows the vehicle down when traffic ahead slows. It also helps keep the vehicle centred in its lane.

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Infiniti Oman extends greetings for the Holy Month of Ramadhan



MUSCAT: Infiniti Oman has extended its warm wishes to its customers and members of the community on the special occasion of Ramadhan.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, said, "May this Holy Month of Ramadhan be a month full of blessings for all of you. We wish you and your family peace, harmony, happiness, good health and prosperity. We hope this Holy Month bring with it abundance of benevolence, harmony and kindness. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to our customers for their brand loyalty over the years."

He added, "We also urge upon everyone to observe the month following the Covid-19 protocols to enable this occasion to augur health and happiness."

Ominvest signs pact to support Omani innovators and SMEs at Expo 2020

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) signed a strategic partnership agreement with the General Commission of the Sultanate at Expo 2020 to support Omani innovators and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within the framework of Al Luban Initiative.

The agreement was signed by Mohsin bin Khamis al Balushi, Commissioner-General of the Sultanate at Expo 2020; Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of Ominvest; Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Qais bin Rashid al Toobi, Vice-President for SMEs Development at the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development in Nadab and Nada Bassam, General Manager of Oman Trading Platform (Taiseer).

In addition to supporting SMEs present their products through the Oman Pavilion, Ominvest will



work closely with the organisers on a special initiative to help identify and showcase innovative Omani products through various platforms and opportunities inside and outside the Oman Pavilion at Expo 2020.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of Ominvest said, "the Omani government is making laudable effort to present Oman in the best way possible at this important

international congregation of cultures, innovations, talents, and world heritage that will last for six months. We are pleased to be collaborating closely with the Oman Pavilion in effort to promote Oman and attract business attention to ambitious and talented Omani SMEs and innovative products and services."

He added, "As part of its corporate citizenship, Ominvest has been supporting SMEs for

years through various reputable partners in Oman. We strongly believe that SMEs are pivotal to the sustainable economic and social development of the country and that now more than ever, they need every support possible.

In line with Ominvest's purpose — Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies — our Strategic Partnership at Expo 2020 aims at showcasing some of the brilliant local innovations and encouraging Omani innovators to work harder and raise their ambition; to think global while knowing that they are well supported and promoted to reach new heights."

Expo 2020 will be held from October 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022 and the Oman Pavilion will be located at the Mobility District. The Pavilion design is inspired by the Omani frankincense tree (Luban) and the internal space is divided into five zones that take visitors on a journey to discover Oman and its beauty.

Great offers from Alizz Islamic Bank during Ramadhan



MUSCAT: To welcome the advent of the Blessed Month of Ramadhan this year, Alizz Islamic Bank has announced a number of special offers for its customers including discounts, cash back and easy finance options to buy homes, automobiles and goods at competitive profit rates.

The offers come as part of Alizz Islamic Bank's effort to enhance and diversify the services it provides to its valuable customers and to help them get easy finance options for products they desire to buy.

In brief

■ TOKYO

**JAPANESE INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION FALL LESS THAN ESTIMATED**

Japan's industrial production declined less than estimated in February, final data from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry showed on Monday.

Industrial production decreased a seasonally adjusted 1.3 per cent month-on-month in February. In the initial estimate, industrial production fell 2.1 per cent.

Shipment declined 1.3 per cent monthly in February. According to the initial estimate, shipment fell 1.5 per cent.

Inventories fell 0.7 per cent in February, versus a 1.0 per cent decline in the initial estimate.

The inventory ratio grew 1.0 per cent in February, as estimated. — **dpa**

■ BEIJING

**TENCENT PLEDGES \$7.7 BN TO SUPPORT CHINA POVERTY**

Chinese tech giant Tencent on Monday pledged to invest 50 billion yuan (\$7.68 billion) in environmental and social initiatives, a move that comes as China's Internet heavyweights come under intense scrutiny from antitrust regulators.

Tencent, China's biggest social media and video games company, said its investment would fund initiatives in areas including basic science, education innovation, rural revitalisation, carbon neutrality, food, energy, and water provision, assistance with public emergencies, technology for senior citizens and public welfare. — **Reuters**

■ BRUSSELS

**EURO ZONE CONSTRUCTION OUTPUT DECREASES IN FEBRUARY**

Euro zone's construction output declined in February after rising in the previous month, data from Eurostat showed.

The construction output fell 2.1 per cent month-on-month in February, after a 0.8 per cent rise in January. In December, construction output decreased 1.4 per cent.

Production in building construction decreased 1.9 per cent monthly in February and output in civil engineering fell 3.4 per cent.

On a year-on-year basis, the construction output fell 5.8 per cent in February, following a 2.6 per cent decline in the prior month. In the EU27, construction output decreased 1.6 per cent monthly, and fell 5.4 per cent from a year ago. — **dpa**

Dutch bank ABN Amro to settle \$575 million criminal probe



Employees enter the ABN Amro Bank headquarters in Amsterdam. — **AFP**

chief executive Vogelzang was now a suspect in the case, Dutch media reports added. Prosecutors said three individuals in total were under investigation, without naming them.

"I am very surprised by the Dutch authorities," Vogelzang said in a statement. "I left ABN Amro more than four years ago and am comfortable with the fact that I managed my management responsibilities with integrity and dedication," he said in a statement, issued on Danske Bank's website.

"My status as a suspect does not imply that I will be

charged," Vogelzang added. For its part, the Dutch public prosecution service said that by making the payment, "ABN Amro has taken accountability for the commission of criminal offences."

The bank "seriously failed to comply" with a Dutch law aimed at stopping money laundering and preventing funds from being used for terrorism, prosecutors said. "Various clients who engage in criminal activities have been able to abuse ABN Amro's accounts and services for a long time," prosecutors said in a statement.

"ABN Amro should have seen that certain flows of money that

went through the bank accounts... may have originated from a crime." "The bank has not taken sufficient action against this," they added.

Investors appeared relieved at Monday's announcement taking the legal risks to the bank off the table, as ABN Amro's share price rose by almost 2.0 per cent in early morning trading in Amsterdam. The ABN Amro probe came in the wake of a massive 775-million-euro (\$928 million) fine dished out to top Dutch bank ING in 2018 over money laundering after it failed to ensure its accounts were not misused.

That scandal saw ING axe its chief financial officer Koos Timmermans after a two-year probe by Dutch authorities that found many white-collar crime suspects held accounts at the bank.

The case threatened to seriously damage ING's reputation and triggered calls for its directors to resign. The Dutch state is still a majority stakeholder in ABN Amro after bailing the bank out following the 2008 crisis.

ABN Amro returned to Amsterdam's stock exchange in 2015 in what was described as "one of the biggest IPOs by a European lender since the financial crisis".

— **AFP**

Microsoft to invest \$1 bn in Malaysia to set up data centres

KUALA LUMPUR: Microsoft Corporation will invest \$1 billion over the next five years in Malaysia as part of a new partnership programme with government agencies and local companies, the prime minister said on Monday.

The announcement on what would be the US tech giant's biggest investment in Malaysia comes after the country in February gave conditional approvals for Microsoft, Google, Amazon and state telecoms firm Telekom Malaysia to build and manage hyper-scale data centres and provide cloud services.

It also comes after the country saw FDI plunge by 68 per cent last year, the biggest decline in Southeast Asia.

— **Reuters**



Oil prices slip as rising infections spark demand concerns

WASHINGTON: Oil prices were lower on Monday as rising coronavirus infections in India and other countries prompted concerns that stronger measures to contain the pandemic will hit economic activity, along with demand for commodities such as crude.

Brent crude was down 17 cents, or 0.3 per cent, at \$66.60 a barrel by 0643 GMT, after rising 6 per cent last week.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) US oil was down 10 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$63.03 a barrel, having gained 6.4 per cent last week.

"The progress of vaccination drives in the developed markets can be seen in road traffic levels, but resurging case numbers have reversed the recovery in the emerging countries," such as India and Brazil, ANZ Research said in a report on Monday.

India reported a record rise in

coronavirus infections of 273,810 on Monday, increasing overall cases to just over 15 million, making the country the second-worst affected after the United States, which has reported more than 31 million infections. India's deaths from Covid-19 rose by a record 1,619 to nearly 180,000.

In Japan, which has had far fewer Covid-19 cases than other top economies, companies there will be the fourth round of infections, with many bracing for a further blow to business, a Reuters monthly poll showed.

Japan's oil imports in March fell 17 per cent from a year earlier to 2.5 million barrels a day, official data showed on Monday.

In the United States, energy companies added oil and natural gas rigs for a fifth consecutive week for the first time since February as higher oil prices this year encouraged drillers to return to the well pad. — **Reuters**



Crude oil storage tanks are seen in an aerial photograph at the Cushing oil hub in Cushing, Oklahoma. — **Reuters**

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