

**TRAVEL ADVISORY FOR
OMANI CITIZENS TO INDIA**

Omani citizens have been asked to not travel to India unless absolutely necessary, the Sultanate's embassy in New Delhi has said. The warning came after a sharp spike in the number of COVID-19 cases in India. **>A2**



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**HM THE SULTAN CONGRATULATES
PRESIDENT OF ZIMBABWE**

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the Republic of Zimbabwe on his country's Independence Day anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and wishes to the president and his country's people. **—ONA**



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VAT COMES INTO EFFECT IN LINE WITH ECONOMIC GOALS

Value Added Tax is expected to provide a permanent and reliable revenue stream for the government

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Shopkeepers and business-owners in Oman are confident that the revenue earned from Value Added Tax (VAT) will be used towards expanding the economy and help the country achieve the goals of Vision 2040.

VAT came into effect in Oman on Friday, April 16, 2021. A flat tax of five per cent has been levied on a number of goods and services bought by customers. Despite its arrival, shops and restaurants reported brisk business over the weekend.

Dr Hesham Magd, the head of the Faculty of Business and Economics at the Modern College of Business and Science, said VAT would help contribute towards Oman's economic diversification through multiple means.

"Economic balance will be achieved as this will help industries expand and move towards production," he said. "This helps



make the goals and target of Vision 2040 more achievable. VAT will provide a permanent, reliable revenue stream for the government. Many of the GCC countries receive their primary source of income through the export of fossil fuels such as oil and gas, so this provides one of many possible alternative revenue streams."

"VAT will help supply the state treasury in meeting its deficit and debt obligations, diversify Oman's income away from oil, and strengthen the Sultanate's competitiveness levels and raise its sovereign ratings," he added.

He added that VAT would also help the government fund a number of programmes geared to-

wards social welfare, and is likely to affect people's spending habits, because they will think twice about where to spend money.

While expenditure on basic goods is expected to stay the same, Magd observed that there is likely to be a decline in the purchase of luxury goods, as people become more aware of VAT, and therefore start planning to spend better.

"We saw the usual number of customers at our store," said the owner of a supermarket in Muscat. "There was a little bit of confusion when it came to applying the tax to certain goods, and our staff had to double-check them, but VAT has only just come in, and I am sure most stores will get used

to it in the coming days."

"But we had a higher number of customers on Thursday, because many were coming to stock up on items before VAT began," he added. "We actually had to turn some away in the evening, because we're only operating at 50 per cent capacity, at the moment."

"The government is taking dedicated efforts towards growing the economy and providing more jobs to locals, so we hope the revenue earned from VAT also goes towards that," he explained.

At a restaurant in Al Khuwair on Saturday evening, orders were coming in thick and fast, particularly after the day's Ramadan fast had ended. **>A2**

CORONAVIRUS

New COVID-19 curbs in Dhofar welcomed

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Citizens and officials in Oman's southern Dhofar Governorate have praised the efforts taken by the government to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Owing to an increase in the number of coronavirus patients admitted to intensive care, a lock-

down between 6 pm and 5 am, starting from Saturday, April 17, 2021, has been instituted in the region.

"The number of hospitalised patients is increasing," said Dr Nasser bin Amer Al Awed, of the Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah. "The number of patients in intensive care is increasing." **>A2**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

'Carry enough water during desert trip'

1 People should not venture into the desert without carrying enough water, as underestimating the impact thirst could have on them could lead to disastrous consequences. **>A2**

WORLD

COVID toll past 3mn

2 The number of global deaths that can be traced back to COVID-19 has risen above 3 million, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally published on Saturday. **>A6**

MARKET

Bank Muscat profit

3 Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate, announced its preliminary unaudited results for the three months ended 31 March 2021. **>B1**



Prince Philip laid to rest at Windsor Castle funeral

A5

CONDOLENCES

The Management and the staff of Muscat Media Group offer their deepest condolences to our colleague **ANAND IYER** and members of the bereaved family on the sad demise of his Parents

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Oman-Syria ties are historic: Syrian envoy

The two countries have agreed to boost investments and trade between the two countries, said the Syrian envoy



OMAN VISION: The Sultanate is focused on the future through Oman Vision 2040, and hence Oman looks for partners who could contribute to the same through various efforts, said Dr. Bassam Al Khatib, Syrian ambassador accredited to the Sultanate. - ONA

MUSCAT: Dr. Bassam Al Khatib, Syrian ambassador accredited to the Sultanate, said that the relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic were established on deep-rooted historic ties, mutual respect, honesty, sincerity, non-interference in internal affairs of both the countries and the interest of people of both the countries.

Agency, he said that the Sultanate is focused on the future through Oman Vision 2040, and hence Oman looks for partners who could contribute to the same through various efforts.

He said that during his visit to the Sultanate, the two sides have agreed to boost investments and exchange of trade between the two countries. There are several professional and well-experienced employees and academics working at the various institu-

tions, colleges and universities and projects in the Sultanate, he added. The ambassador also spoke on the traditions, customs and preparations for the month of Ramadan in both Syria and Oman. - ONA

Ministry continues with COVID national vaccination drive

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health is pressing ahead with the vaccination of target segments of society against coronavirus (COVID-19) as part of the first stage of the National Campaign for Immunisation Against COVID-19 (First Stage).

The Ministry is conducting second dose vaccination using PfizerBioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca in Muscat Govern-

norate in four locations all days of the week, except Fridays and Saturdays. The first of the designated locations will be Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Buasher (to serve the two wilayats of A'Seeb and Buasher), the second Muttarah Majlis (for Muscat and Muttarah), the third Quriyat Polyclinic and the fourth Al Amerat Wali's Office. - ONA

VAT FROM A1 Economic expansion

"Our phones have been ringing incessantly since about 5pm, and we have had a good number of orders throughout the day," explained the restaurant owner. "We've had a good number of orders through the day as well: the arrival of the new tax does not seem to have impacted our business." He went on to say: "The objective of Oman's economic expansion

is to build a strong economy that will provide good standards of employment, and if VAT helps achieve that, then I am all for it. VAT is a very small sacrifice for all of us to make towards progress and development, particularly when there are more than 400 essential food supplies and a number of other services that are not going to be taxed."

HOSPITALISATION

FROM A1 People must take precautions

As of Saturday, there were 111 patients admitted to the hospital, as well as a further 54 in ICUs. "10 to 15 patients are on ventilators: they have a high likelihood of death," added Al Awad, speaking to Oman TV. "A number of patients died, and their places were taken by others who needed hospitalisation. This increase in cases is very worrying. To limit this escalation, people must commit to the precautionary measures. They need to think of their safety, and that of their families and society." Adding to this, Major Tariq bin Awad Al Shanfari of the Royal Oman Police, said the increase in infections is due to people violating the decisions of the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19, particularly during the time when businesses are sup-

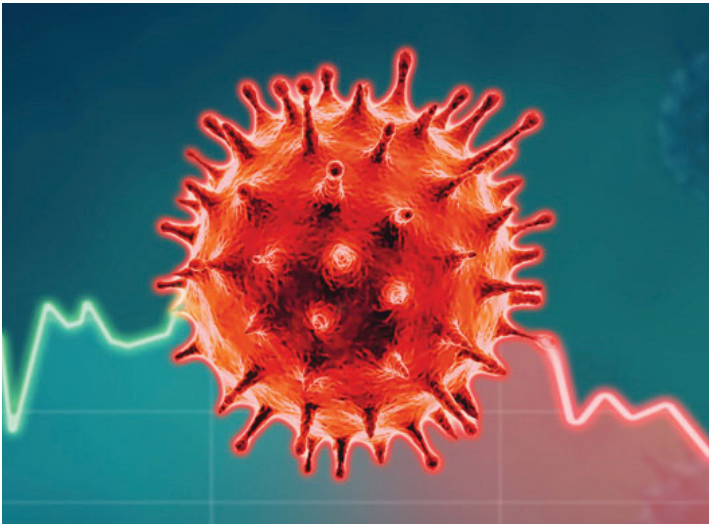
posed to be closed, and people are not permitted to move outdoors. "We hope the decision to extend the hours of the ban will have a positive effect on limiting the increases in infection rates," he said. Residents and citizens of the governorate have been advised to adhere to the precautionary measures and abide by the decisions of the Supreme Committee by staying at home and going out only when necessary. Those going outside must wear masks and stay away from crowded places while maintaining physical distancing. Alongside government-installed measures, Mwasalat have also announced the suspension of their bus services on Route 100, which connects Dhofar's capital Salalah to Muscat, until further notice.

OMAN EMBASSY

Travel advisory for Omanis to India

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Omani citizens have been asked to not travel to India unless absolutely necessary, the Sultanate's embassy in New Delhi has said. The warning came after a sharp spike in the number of COVID cases reported in India. "The embassy advised all citizens to avoid travelling to the Republic of India during the current period unless absolutely necessary, due to the steady increase in the number of cases of COVID-19, which has exceeded 200,000 cases per day, and owing to the accompanying measures taken by the Indian government, including restriction of movement and prohibition of some activities." Meanwhile, ANI reported from New Delhi that amid the record surge in COVID-19 cases across the country, Prime Minister Nar-



endra Modi on Saturday held a meeting to review the coronavirus and vaccination situation. Top officers across various ministries participate in the meeting

that started at 8pm yesterday. The country is currently witnessing a second and more severe wave of the pandemic. According to the Ministry of

Health and Family Welfare, India recorded the highest-ever single-day spike of COVID-19 cases on Saturday with over 2,34 lakh new cases and more than 1,300 deaths in 24 hours, which was also the highest number of daily new cases reported in the world. India contributed 22.8 per cent of the total cases reported worldwide on April 12.

COVID-related deaths According to the Union Health Ministry, in the last 24 hours, 1,341 COVID-related deaths were reported in the country taking the death toll to 1,75,649. As many as 2,34,692 new COVID-19 cases have been reported in India in the same period. With this, the total number of cases has gone up to 1,45,26,609. The active number of cases stands at 16,79,740. With inputs from agency

MOHAMMED SALIM AL JAHWARI

Omani who crossed Sharqiyah Sands on foot says thirst is man's worst enemy

Times News Service

MUSCAT: People should not venture into the desert without carrying enough water, as underestimating the impact thirst could have on them could lead to disastrous consequences, according to Mohammed Salim Al Jahwari, who crossed the Sharqiyah Sands on foot. The Omani, who took six days to complete the 150km journey across the desert, faced pleasant weather on the first two days, but realised in the importance of being prepared for thirst on the third day, when the heat intensified. "The conditions on the first two days were cloudy: perfect to begin the crossing, but on the third day, the heat started to pick up during the afternoon, which means I had to change my plans, from a continuous 35km walk to one that was split into two sessions," he recalled. "Initially, I had to take a one hour break from 11am to noon, but on the third and fourth day, I was compelled to start earlier and stop from noon to three or four pm, after which I covered the rest of the distance. "On day four, the heat was at its peak, so I finished all of the two litres in my bag," he admitted. "The subsequent lack of water, and the fact that I was only walking with my socks on, made me feel the heat more and more." Although Mohammed was on foot, he travelled with three others who rode alongside him in a four-wheel drive to take care of his many needs, from preparing his food to organising his camp at night. Hamdoon Al Hashmi - who previously cycled across the Gulf Cooperation Council - was in charge of planning the route, while Shihab and Nooh Al Dahmani had to make sure their ride was able to safely navigate the deceptive dunes of the desert. They had their own lessons to learn from their time out there:



"I learned how to use a GPS and to navigate with it, and to understand my own location by studying the shadows around me - a most important tool in the wild," said Hamdoon. "It was also important to understand and react to changes in weather, which might differ be-

tween one hour and the next." Mohammed added: "During these tough times, it is important to just be patient and focus on the walk in front of you." To sustain them in the desert, the group had packed plenty of light food that can last a long



time without spoiling, such as an Omani bread locally called rakhal, dates, oats, rice, sweet potatoes, and lentils. Plenty of fruit, including bananas to prevent cramp and muscle soreness while walking, and oranges to provide electrolytes and keep them hydrated, were also



part of their supplies. "We packed plenty of water, because we knew that we would not be able to get help for a while, in case we'd gotten stuck," recalled Mohammed. "Our mission was to engage youth and show them their ability to reach their potential, and spread awareness about the terrain and geographical makeup of our country." Taking care of themselves aside, the quartet also needed to make sure their four-wheel drive was in tip-top shape throughout. The slightest slip could lead to them getting bogged down in the dunes, with extricating themselves a time-consuming and laborious effort. Because vehicles consume more fuel on sand, an extra jerry can of petrol had to be packed, while a

GPS link-up issued by a friend who provides such services meant they could be tracked, should things go wrong, particularly since phone reception out in the desert is often non-existent. They also took an extra car battery, traction mats, and power banks for their phones and other electronic equipment. "When we needed to go to the toilet, we'd go behind the dunes," admitted Mohammed. "We'd only get the opportunity to shower in places where there were wells from which the local Bedouin often draw water. Other times, we'd make do with wet wipe tissues." Despite all the challenges and difficulties experienced in the desert, the Omani admitted his journey was worth it, thanks in generous part to what was waiting for him at the end. "On the sixth day, I arrived home by about 10pm, and my father was waiting there for me," he recalled. "He father used to undertake such long-distance walks, and often tells me that walking helps lead a healthy lifestyle. "That day, we stayed up late at night, and he asked me a lot of deep questions about my experience," Mohammed said. "That really inspired me to always strive to do better and take on tougher challenges."



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PRAYER TIMINGS

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Dhuhr	12.11pm
Asr	3.39pm
Maghrib	6.34pm
Isha	7.47pm
Fajr (Tomorrow)	4.24am

Muscat

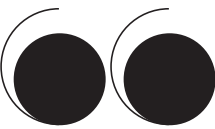


Ramadan

► **IFTAR TIMING**

6:34 pm

► **RAMADAN WORDS**



Oh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you many learn piety and righteousness” (Q 2:183)



► **HEALTH TIP**

Choose healthy cooking methods

Try baking instead of deep-frying them. Also enjoy your sugary Ramadan juices in moderation and aim for more servings of laban, homemade iced green tea, or plain water.

► **RECIPE OF THE DAY**



Pesto shrimp risotto

Recipe: Oneza Tabish

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves,minced
- 1 cup arborio rice
- 2 1/2 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for garnish
- 15 cooked large shrimp (shell removed)
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- Salt as per taste
- Pesto sauce (readymade)for serving

PREPARATION

- Preheat the oven to 200°C .
- In an oven proof casserole, heat the olive oil.
- Add garlic and rice and cook over moderate heat, stirring, until very fragrant for 2 minutes.
- Stir in the broth and bring to a boil. Cover and bake for about 20 minutes, until the rice is tender.
- Stir in the 1/2 cup of cheese, the shrimp, butter and lemon juice; season with salt.
- Serve drizzled with pesto and garnished with cheese.

► **GOOD DEED**

SHOWING
RANDOM ACTS
OF KINDNESS

Kindness often costs very little, yet its value is immense. During these challenging times, show some kind gestures to your friends, neighbours and strangers. It could be something as simple as ordering a takeaway iftar box from a local restaurant to support them during the current difficult times, sending a bouquet to a friend who is unwell, reaching out to the elderly couple in your neighbourhood and volunteering to buy their groceries this weekend... it can be anything. All we all need to do is to be kind. Remember, a small act of kindness can make a huge difference in someone’s life.





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UK’s Prince Philip laid to rest



END OF AN ERA: (Clockwise from top) Queen Elizabeth II watches as pallbearers carry Philip's coffin to the chapel; members of the Royal Family attend Prince Phillip's funeral; police officers patrol outside Windsor Castle on the day of Prince Philip's funeral; and, a 2003 photo of the Queen and Philip released by Buckingham Palace ahead of the funeral. -**ow**

Only 30 people, including his widow Queen Elizabeth, were allowed to attend due to concerns over the coronavirus pandemic

MOURNERS gathered to remember Prince Philip at a funeral on Saturday inside the Windsor Castle's St. George's Chapel.

Prince Phillip's coffin, draped in his personal standard and topped with a wreath of flowers, was carried by a group of royal guards into the quadrangle of Windsor Castle. Prince Charles and Prince Anne and other senior royals then led a procession behind his coffin, which was transported by a modified Land Rover hearse to St. George's Chapel.

Members of the royal family surrounded Philip's coffin at the chapel, with Britain observing a minute of national silence at 3:00 pm (14:00 GMT/UTC). The coffin was then brought inside the building for the service, as organ music played.

"We are here today in St. George's Chapel to commit into the hands of God the soul of his servant, Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh," the Dean of Windsor, David Conner said at the beginning of the service. Queen Elizabeth sat alone in the chapel during the ceremony.

Choral music from a four-member group of singers in the chapel then followed Conner's remarks, with the group performing various hymns during the service.

Later in the service, Phillip's coffin was lowered into the royal vault,



a burial chamber underneath the chapel, as bagpipe music played. The Archbishop of Canterbury then pronounced the blessing.

As the ceremony came to a close, the choral singers performed "God Save The Queen," the British National Anthem. Members of the Royal Family then departed from the chapel.

Instead of the initial plans for 800 mourners, just 30 people attended the ceremony, due to coronavirus restrictions. Those attending included the widowed queen, her four children and eight grandchildren.

"This service had to be hastily scaled back in order to remain in line with COVID restrictions here in the UK," said DW correspondent Charlotte Chelsom-Pill.

"The public is being asked to stay away from Windsor Castle and all royal residences."

To deter crowds from gathering during the pandemic, the entire procession and funeral took place within the grounds of the castle, a 950-year-old royal residence about 20 miles (30 kilometres) west of London, and will be broad-

cast on television. However, people were still expected to turn out at Windsor, prompting barriers to be put up along the Long Walk to the castle gates, patrolled by uniformed and armed police.

Philip was remembered as a man of "courage, fortitude and faith" at the funeral, which saluted both his service in the Royal Navy and his support for Queen Elizabeth II.

Philip, who died on April 9 at the age of 99, will be buried in the Royal Vault at Windsor following the ceremony.

The prince, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh and described by royals as the "grandfather of the nation," died just weeks after being hospitalised for treatment of a heart condition.

Ahead of the funeral, Buckingham Palace released a photo of the queen and Philip, smiling together on blankets in the grass in the Scottish Highlands in 2003. The palace said the photo was a favourite of the queen.

Philip's death, which came after 73 years of marriage, has left a "huge void" in the queen's life, the



couple's second son, Prince Andrew, said last weekend.

Supporters of the royal family took to social media to express their condolences.

"Thanks for your loyalty to the

Queen, & keeping us all entertained over many years. Prince Philip, Duke Of Edinburgh," one user posted.

When Queen Elizabeth II dies, Philip's body will be transferred

to lie alongside her in the King George VI memorial chapel, which houses the remains of her father, George VI, her mother and the ashes of her younger sister, Princess Margaret. -**ow**



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Global coronavirus death toll passes 3mn

The virus that surfaced in late 2019 in central China and the ensuing pandemic has infected more than 100 million people

WASHINGTON: The number of global deaths that can be traced back to COVID-19 has risen above 3 million, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University published on Saturday.

The virus that surfaced in late 2019 in central China and the ensuing pandemic has infected more than 100 million people, leaving billions more under crippling lockdowns and ravaging the global economy.

How has the virus spread more recently?

Over 1 million people have died in the three months since mid-January when the death toll reached the last grim milestone.

It took eight months to reach 1 million dead and less than four months after that to reach the second million. The pandemic continues to ravage populations around the world as more virulent variants appear and spread quickly, with some increasing the virulence of the virus.

COVID-19 deaths have continued to rise despite monthslong vaccination campaigns.

However, richer countries have been slammed for hoarding vaccine doses, while countries with large populations such as India



GRIM MILESTONE: Over 1 million people have died in the three months since mid-January when the death toll reached the last grim milestone.

and Brazil struggle to bring down even deadlier surges in infection rates. While the count is based on figures supplied by government agencies around the world, the real toll is believed to be significantly higher because of poor testing and many inaccurately recorded deaths, especially during the first months of the outbreak.

How has the pandemic been felt around the world?

Global cases and deaths continue to rise, but not uniformly across the world.

Some countries such as the UK

and Portugal that had previously been hit by rampant surges have since managed to bring their case numbers down and even emerge from strict lockdowns.

Other countries have seen their earlier efforts decimated by newer, more contagious variants, such as the B117 strain first discovered in the UK. India — with a population of over 1.3 billion — reported a record-breaking 200,000 new daily infections on Thursday after having successfully brought an earlier wave under control.

Germany, which had been praised during the first few months

of the pandemic for its handling of the crisis, reported almost 30,000 new cases — among a population of just over 80 million — in one day on Thursday. Brazil has also been particularly badly hit by the pandemic.

The country has registered a total of 361,884 COVID-19 deaths with daily deaths reaching up to 4,000. The situation is likely down to a combination of the P1 strain — which appears to have a bigger effect on younger people — running rampant and the refusal by President Jair Bolsonaro's administration to enforce a strict lockdown.



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FIRST COMMERCIAL LANDER

SpaceX wins contract from NASA to develop lunar lander

CALIFORNIA: US space agency NASA said on Friday that it had selected SpaceX, entrepreneur Elon Musk's space transportation company, to develop the first commercial lander, which is set to put the first woman and person of color on the moon.

The US space agency plans to launch four astronauts on its Orion spacecraft, into the orbit of the moon. From thereon, two astronauts will be transferred to SpaceX's Starship, which will head to the moon. NASA said that SpaceX's Starship will include a cabin and two airlocks for moonwalks. The eventual plan is to reuse the launch and landing system for other space travel missions. "We won't stop at the moon," said Steve Jurczyk, the acting administrator of NASA. While NASA did not provide a launch date for the program, Kathy Lueders, the head of the space agency's human exploration office, indicated that the launch could happen later in the decade. "We'll do it when it's safe," said Lueders.

Musk: 'NASA rules!'
SpaceX won the nearly \$3-billion

contract over competitors like Blue Origin, owned by Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, and Dynetics, a defense contractor.

Musk, who is also the founder of electric car company Tesla, tweeted "NASA rules!" and "Everything to the moon!" after winning the contract.

The contract for the lunar lander is part of NASA's Artemis program, which aims to return astronauts to the moon by 2024 in preparation for the first human mission to Mars. SpaceX is currently testing its Starship rocket. In March, the company recorded the fourth failed test of the S11 prototype, which the company hopes will one day be able to fly crewed missions to the Moon, Mars and beyond. Musk has said that the first Starships would land on Mars "well before 2030."

SpaceX wants to combine the Starship spaceship with a Super Heavy rocket, creating a fully reusable system. This final version will stand 394 feet (120 meters) tall and will be able to bring 100 metric tons up and into Earth orbit; it has been described as the most powerful launch vehicle ever developed.

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Biden slams US gun violence ‘epidemic’ after Indiana shooting

Vice President Kamala Harris reacted to the shooting, saying there is “no question this violence must end”

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Friday reacted to a shooting in Indianapolis that killed eight people and left several wounded, calling gun violence an “epidemic” in the United States. He ordered all flags be flown half-staff, a symbol of mourning and respect for the victims.

“Last night and into the morning in Indianapolis, yet again families had to wait to hear word about the fate of their loved ones,” Biden said in a statement. “What a cruel wait and fate that has become too normal and happens every day somewhere in our nation.”

“Gun violence is an epidemic in America. But we should not accept it. We must act,” Biden continued. He cited recent actions by his administration to curb gun violence and called on Congress to enact “commonsense” policies such as universal background checks and a ban on “weapons of war.”

Earlier in the day, Vice President Kamala Harris reacted to the shooting, saying there is “no ques-



GUN VIOLENCE: The Indianapolis shooting is the latest in a series of gun massacres in the United States.

tion this violence must end.”

What do we know about the shooting?

The gunman who carried out the shooting at a FedEx Ground facility late Thursday killed himself after the massacre. Law enforcement officials have identified the assailant as a 19-year-old man but are still looking for a motive behind the shooting.

Police chief Randal Taylor said there are a “significant” number of Sikh employees at the FedEx facility. The suspect was also a former employee at the facility, according to a FedEx spokesperson.

The Sikh Coalition, which said “that at least four of those killed” were members of the Indianapo-

lis Sikh community, said that it hoped “that authorities will conduct a full investigation — including the possibility of bias as a factor.” Authorities have conducted a search of a home tied to the suspect and have seized evidence such as laptop computers and other electronic media. The FBI said it had previously questioned the suspect last year based on items found in his bedroom, after his mother called police to tell them he might commit “suicide by cop.”

The Indianapolis shooting is the latest in a series of gun massacres in the United States. Four people were killed in an office building in California last month, with 10 people having died in a shooting at a Boulder, Colorado

supermarket on March 22.

Why is gun control so controversial in the US?

Although Democrats such as Joe Biden promote some gun control measures to curb the violence, conservative Republicans are staunchly opposed to the idea, as they believe it infringes upon the constitutional right to bear arms.

In December 2012, former President Barack Obama called for an assault weapons ban after a shooting at an elementary school in Connecticut left 27 people dead, including 20 children. Yet, Obama’s gun control measures failed to win the 60 votes needed in the Senate in 2013, due to stiff opposition from Republicans. **AW**



US, Japan leaders present united front against China

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and Japan’s Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga presented a united front against China during Suga’s visit to Washington on Friday.

It was Biden’s first in-person summit with a foreign leader since taking office.

“We committed to working together to take on the challenges from China and on issues like the East China Sea, the South China Sea, as well as North Korea, to ensure a future of a free and open Indo-Pacific,” Biden told a press conference, listing areas that have become the focus of growing regional tension.

Suga made a break from past Japanese leaders by openly commenting on China, saying he and Biden held “serious talks on China’s influence over the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.”

“We oppose any attempt to change the status quo by force or coercion,” Japan’s prime minister added.

What else did Biden, Suga say on East Asia?

According to the Japanese prime minister, Suga and Biden reaffirmed “the importance of peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait.”

The comment comes amid Beijing’s increased military pressure on the self-ruled island that is claimed as a province by the government of mainland China. Just days before the summit, China sent 25 aircraft, including fighters and nuclear-capable bombers, near Taiwan.

Suga made repeated references to the “severe security environment” in East Asia.

Also discussed at the talks was China’s tightening grip on Hong Kong and its crackdown on Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang.

China’s response to criticism from abroad has been increasingly belligerent. Ahead of Suga’s visit to the US, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned his Japanese

counterpart that Tokyo should “not get involved in the so-called confrontation between major countries,” according to a Chinese government statement.

What do they say about technology?

Biden said the United States and Japan will invest together in areas such as 5G, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

China could see this as another blow. It has seen its technology companies face increasing restrictions in the US. Huawei, the world’s leading producer of ultra-fast 5G network technology, has been targeted with US sanctions.

The previous Trump administration, which introduced the sanctions, claims Huawei is a back door for Chinese intelligence services to conduct espionage operations via critical infrastructure.

“Japan and the United States are both deeply invested in innovation and looking to the future,” Biden said. “That includes making sure we invest in and protect technologies that will maintain and sharpen our competitive edge.”

What will happen to Tokyo Olympics?

Sporting events also made the agenda between the two leaders.

Suga said he told Biden “about my determination to realize the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games this summer as a symbol of global unity,” and that Biden offered his support.

The games, postponed by a year, are set to be the first to go ahead amid a global pandemic. Japan is grappling with rising coronavirus infections with fewer than 100 days until the planned start.

During the press conference, Biden commented to Suga on the success of Japanese golfer Hideki Matsuyama in the Master’s Tournament. The 29-year-old is the first Japanese player to win at Augusta National. **AW**

UK researchers plan to ‘deliberately infect’ coronavirus survivors

LONDON: Researchers in the United Kingdom said on Friday they will launch a year-long study to deliberately infect people who have recovered from COVID-19 to study whether people become infected a second time and to see if there are particular immune responses that protect them.

According to CNN, the so-called challenge trial will be con-

ducted under carefully controlled conditions, with treatments on-hand in case one of the volunteers becomes ill, the team at the University of Oxford said. “Challenge studies tell us things that other studies cannot because, unlike natural infection, they are tightly controlled. When we re-infect these participants, we will know exactly how their immune system

has reacted to the first COVID-19 infection, exactly when the second infection occurs, and exactly how much virus they got,” Dr Helen McShane, a vaccine specialist at the University of Oxford who is leading the trial, said in a statement. CNN reported that the first phase of the study, starting this month, will find the lowest dose of virus that can infect half of the

coronavirus survivors without causing symptoms. Then all 64 volunteers will be infected with that dose. Their immune responses will be studied.

Any volunteers who develop symptoms will be treated with Regeneron’s monoclonal antibody treatment and quarantined until they are at no risk of infecting others. **ANI**

Britain approves extradition of billionaire jeweller Nirav Modi to India

LONDON: The UK Home Office has approved the extradition of Indian billionaire jeweler Nirav Modi, a spokesman for the immigration department said on Friday.

“On 25 February the District Judge gave judgment in the extradition case of Nirav Modi. The extradition order was signed on April 15,” said the spokesman.

The legal team representing jeweler Modi said that they were in the process of “challenging” the order in the UK high court. India’s External Affairs ministry did not immediately respond, according to a news agency.

Modi had lost his bid to not be extradited to India in a UK district court in February. At the time, the judge disputed the tycoon’s claims that his business was legitimate.

“I find no genuine transactions and believe there is a process of dishonesty. Many of these are a matter for trial in India. I am satisfied again that there is evidence he could be convicted. Prima facie there is a case of money laundering,” the judge said.

The court had rejected Modi’s argument that he would not be fairly treated in India. Modi had also argued that he had a family history of suicide and depression

and his mental health had worsened during the pandemic.

Why is India after Nirav Modi?

The son of a diamond merchant, Modi built an international empire and opened luxury jewelry stores in several major cities around the world. He also catered to a host of celebrity clients, including actresses Naomi Watts, Kate Winslet and Priyanka Chopra-Jonas. Nirav Modi shares the last name with India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, but the two men are not related.

He was arrested in the UK in 2019 at the behest of Indian authorities, who want him to face trial over a \$1.8-billion (€1.59-billion) loan fraud at state-run Punjab National Bank (PNB).

Indian authorities allege that companies owned by Modi defrauded PNB — India’s second-largest public lender — by using forged documents to raise credit to buy and import jewels.

Modi, one of the main suspects in the case, fled India in early 2018 before the scandal came to light. He denies wrongdoing and says the charges against him are politically motivated. **AW**



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Nawaz, Zaman shine as Pakistan defeat South Africa by three wickets

Nawaz finished the game with a six as Pakistan clinched the final T20I with just a ball to spare



CENTURION: Faheem Ashraf and Hasan Ali picked three wickets each before Fakhar Zaman's fifty and Mohammad Nawaz's late cameo helped Pakistan register a thrilling win over South Africa in the fourth and final T20I on Friday.

Nawaz finished the game with a six as Pakistan clinched the final T20I with just a ball to spare, and took the series 3-1. Faheem Ashraf and Fakhar lead the way for the tourists, the former claiming three wickets and the latter recording a blistering half-century, before a slight wobble and the victory being sealed.

Pakistan won the toss and asked South Africa to bat. The

home side again made a promising start by reaching 109 for two thanks to Rassie van der Dussen's dashing 52 (36 balls, 5 fours, 2 sixes). However, they then collapsed to 144 all out in 19.3 overs with Faheem grabbing three for 17.

Fakhar was then outstanding in the reply and plundered 60 off 34 balls (5 fours, 4 sixes) to help his side reach 92 for one at one stage. The home side did fight back

through Sisanda Magala (2/33), Tabraiz Shamsi (1/21), and Andile Phehlukwayo (1/11) but Mohammad Nawaz's unbeaten 25 sealed victory with delivery to spare.

That concluded another disappointing showing by the South Africans as Pakistan completed the double - they also won the ODI leg of the tour.

They were on top for most of this game too as Aiden Markram fell

early for 11. But Janneman Malan (33) and Van der Dussen put on 57 for the second wicket before Heinrich Klaasen (9) helped take the score to 109 in the 13th over.

But they imploded badly from there, losing eight for 35 to be dismissed with three balls of the innings to spare. In addition to Faheem, Hasan Ali collected three for 40.

The reply was ominous from the visitors when Fakhar and Barabar Azam (24) got going following the rare early loss of Mohammad Rizwan for a duck, Bjorn Fortuin (1/26) striking in his first match of the series.

Pakistan were closing in on 100 in the 10th over when Lizaad Williams (2/39) finally broke the stand, sparking a collapse that saw five wickets fall for 23.

That opened the door slightly for the home side and they kept the pressure on bravely to take it to the last over, before a Nawaz six sealed victory for his side.

Brief Scores: 144/10 (Rassie van der Dussen 52, Janneman Malan 33; Faheem Ashraf 3-17); Pakistan 149/7 (Fakhar Zaman 60, Mohammad Nawaz 25; Sisanda Magala 2-33) **ANI**

Mourinho hits back at Pogba over comments



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur boss Jose Mourinho has hit back at claims made by Paul Pogba, saying "he couldn't care less" about what the Manchester United midfielder had to say about him.

Pogba had earlier said that he sees Ole Gunnar Solskjaer as a different manager because he does not go against the players. The French international also spoke about his flawed relationship with Mourinho, who was earlier in charge of Manchester United. "I would like to say that I couldn't care less with what he says. I couldn't care less. Not interested at all," Mourinho told Sky Sports after Tottenham's drawn match against Everton.

Earlier, Pogba had openly talked about the different coaching styles of Mourinho and Solskjaer, saying the current United manager will never go against his players.

"What I have now with Ole is different, he wouldn't go against the players. He wouldn't go against the players. Maybe Ole wouldn't pick them, but it's not like he puts them on the side like they don't exist anymore. That's the difference between Mourinho and Ole," Pogba had told Sky Sports.

"Once I had a great relationship with Mourinho, everybody saw that, and the next day you don't know what happened. That's the strange thing I had with Mourinho and I cannot explain to you because even I don't know," he added. Tottenham played out a 2-2 draw against Everton on Friday. Spurs did not manage to win even after a brace from star striker Harry Kane. With the draw, Tottenham remain seventh in the Premier League. On the other hand, United sit second ahead of this weekend's match against Burnley. **ANI**

MEETING

BCCI discusses venues for the upcoming T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) held its seventh Apex Council meeting virtually on Friday and the members discussed the way forward for the upcoming T20 World Cup with an eye on the coronavirus situation in the country.

Speaking to ANI, sources in the

know of developments in the meeting said that the nine venues selected for the T20 World Cup have been asked to continue preparing for the showpiece event and a call can only be taken closer to the tournament.

"The nine venues have been informed and it was again discussed that preparations should continue

for the showpiece event with an eye on the COVID-19 situation and a call will only be taken closer to the event. It is too early to imagine what can or will happen in October-November with regards to the coronavirus situation. But preparations shall be on," the source said.

Asked about the visa of players

participating in the T20 World Cup, the source said: "Yes, all participants will get visas."

Asked about India's participation in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the source said there were positive discussions on the matter and it is about taking one step at a time.

The fate of the next domestic

season was also discussed and while the board is looking at starting off in September, but again, it was decided that a 'wait and watch' policy will be followed as the second wave of COVID-19 has shown that priority is the health and safety of players and every stakeholder involved.

"There were discussions on

the domestic calendar as well as the BCCI is very serious about it and we are looking at September to kickstart the season with the Mushtaq Ali and then the 50-over and days format, but then have to see how things pan out. You cannot guess the future in these circumstances," the source said. **ANI**

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OPEN BANKING SYSTEM

A study of 2,000 global consumers released by Mambu, the market-leading banking and financial services platform, revealed that a significant misunderstanding of open banking is hampering its adoption.

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



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Bank Muscat posts net profit of OMR47.15mn

Operating expenses for the three months period ended 31 March 2021 was OMR47.11mn as compared to OMR50.60mn for the same period in 2020



PRELIMINARY UNAUDITED RESULTS: The full results for the three months ended 31 March 2021 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the bank at its meeting scheduled later during April 2021.

Times News Times

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate, announced its preliminary unaudited results for the three months ended 31 March 2021.

The bank posted a net profit of OMR47.15 million for the period compared to OMR33.25 million reported during the same period in 2020, an increase of 41.8 per cent, mainly due to lower impairment charges.

The key highlights of the results for the period are as follows:

Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at

OMR 83.74 million for the three months period ended 31 March 2021 compared to OMR81.23 million for the same period in 2020, an increase of 3.1 per cent.

Non-interest income was OMR37.68 million for the three months period ended 31 March 2021 as compared to OMR34.39 million for the same period in 2020, an increase of 9.6 per cent.

Operating expenses for the three months period ended 31 March 2021 was OMR47.11 million as compared to OMR50.60 million for the same period in 2020, a decrease of 6.9 per cent.

Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the three months period in 2021 was OMR18.08 million as against OMR25.73 million for the same period in 2020.

The decrease is mainly attributed to the precautionary and collective provisions created by the bank during Q1-2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the historic decline seen in global crude oil prices. The bank remains vigilant of the continuing stress in the macro-economic and business conditions and its potential impacts.

Net loans and advances includ-

ing Islamic financing receivables increased by 2.2 per cent to OMR 9,278 million as against OMR 9,076 million as of 31 March 2020.

Customer deposits including Islamic customer deposits increased by 2.1 per cent to OMR8,446 million as against OMR8,269 million as of 31 March 2020.

The full results for the three months ended 31 March 2021 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the bank at its meeting scheduled later during April 2021.

ONLINE PORTAL



Over 85,000 transactions completed through Invest Easy portal in 2020

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The number of transactions completed through the online portal 'Invest Easy' from the beginning of January till December 2020 reached 85,665, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (Mo-CIIP), said.

Elaborating on the transaction the ministry said of these 17,266 were new transactions, 64,424 were updated transactions and (4,015) were cancelled transactions. The ministry said that it has urged directs investors to conduct their transactions by using the electronic self-services provided through the online portal, 'Invest Easy'.

It contributes to the speedy completion of transactions, the achievement of clarity in the procedures and the possibility of updating all company data electronically in addition to saving time and effort and limiting hidden trade operations.

In addition, the electronic por-

tal contributes to making the Sultanate a suitable environment for carrying out various commercial and investment business.

The ministry affirmed that investment today, in many different economic fields, has become a catalyst in the Sultanate in light of the existence of a stimulating investment environment, given the Sultanate's assets that contribute to carrying out many different mega economic projects in various governorates.

It should be noted that the digital transformation team at the ministry supervising the online portal 'Invest Easy', seeks to link all government agencies' licenses concerned with commercial registration to be through a single-window after re-engineering and simplification for the investor.

The team also works to introduce some improvements in services. The electronic portal provided through the portal to be in the framework of speed and quality for the business community.

EFFECTIVE SYSTEM

Effective IP and patent system to help attract investments



“

Ministry through IP in general and patents in particular seeks to popularise knowledge and encourage registration of new technologies, products or industrial methods

Khalid bin Hammoud Al Hinai

Head, Patents and Industrial Designs Department - Intellectual Property Department

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The existence of an effective intellectual property (IP) and patent system enhances the attraction of investments in accordance with Oman 2040 Vision, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) said.

This effective system will help to achieve the objectives related to the performance and provision of high-quality government services and the ministry's vision of creating a competitive business environment. This IP and patent system will promote growth and economic diversification and will also help the private sector to attract investments. This will also help in contributing a possible tool for companies and projects based on new technologies and methods that are transformed into assets that can be used commercially and industrially.

"In light of the intense global

competition between companies to provide products and services that meet the needs of the markets, it is imperative for these companies to keep abreast of developments and rapid changes in the economic environment by adopting new strategies by exploiting opportunities presented by technological advances," Khalid bin Hammoud Al Hinai, Head of the Patents and Industrial Designs Department at the Intellectual Property Department at the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion, said.

"Therefore, creativity and innovation are essential elements for excellence in the products and services provided by companies to improve quality, raise efficiency and reduce costs. This will enable companies to meet the changing needs of consumers and expand into new markets," he added.

Engineer Al Hinai said that inventions, experiences, knowledge,

trademarks and goodwill gained by companies as intangible assets are economic resources that contribute to raising their market value.

This will greatly affect their commercial business and over time will help to attract customers and gain their trust and loyalty in providing quality products and competitive prices.

Therefore, companies and investors seek to protect new technologies in their products and services to prevent infringement by competitors, he said.

Engineer Al Hinai said that the ministry through IP in general and patents in particular seeks to popularise knowledge and encourage registration of new technologies, products or industrial methods that improve quality, increase efficiency or reduce costs in multiple areas.

The number of patent applications rose in 2020 to 532 applications compared to 2019, he said.

STOCK MARKET

Asian shares mixed as vaccine wait tempers Wall St optimism

TOKYO: Asian shares were mixed on Friday as jubilation over positive US economic data and a Wall Street record high was tempered by caution in the region, where the coronavirus vaccine rollout has lagged.

The contrast in the speed of the vaccine rollout has been striking between the US and Asia. Nearly half of American adults have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine, and about 30 per cent of adults in the US have been fully vaccinated, according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Japan, where inoculations for the public have barely started, has seen a resurgence of infections in recent weeks. The country's western metropolis of Osaka reported over 1,200 new infections Thursday, it is highest since the pandemic began.

A top ruling party official suggested the possibility of cancelling the Tokyo Olympics, set to start in July if infections continue to surge.

Prakash Sakpal and Nicholas Mapa, senior economists for ING, said the markets are watching the meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and President Joe Biden, set for the weekend, data from China, including GDP and retail sales, as well as for further news on the pandemic. "Asian markets will likely track gains overnight with optimism driven by positive US data highlighted by retail sales. Investors now turn their focus to a string of China data reports," they said in a report.

The investors welcomed a suite of encouraging economic reports showing how hungry Americans are to spend again, how fewer



CONTRAST: The contrast in the speed of the vaccine rollout has been striking between the US and Asia. - **BNA**

workers are losing their jobs and how much fatter corporate profits are getting.

Expectations are very high on Wall Street that the economy — and thus corporate profits — are in the midst of exploding out of the cavern created by the pandemic, thanks to COVID-19 vaccinations and massive support from the US government and Federal Reserve. New data on retail sales and jobless claims Thursday helped bolster the view that the economic recovery is accelerating.

US retail sales jumped by 9.8 per cent in March from February, blowing past economists' forecasts for 5.5 per cent growth. Much of the surge was due to \$1,400 payments from the US government's latest economic rescue effort hitting households' bank accounts. Economists said

it shows how primed people are to spend as the economy reopens and conditions brighten. That's huge for an economy that's made up mostly of consumer spending.

Adding to the optimism, more big US companies reported even healthier profits for the first three months of 2021 than analysts had forecast. Expectations are already high for this earnings reporting season, which unofficially got underway on Wednesday and could result in the strongest growth in more than a decade.

In energy trading, benchmark US crude fell 19 cents to \$63.27 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, slipped 19 cents to \$66.75 a barrel.

In currency trading, the US dollar inched up to 108.91 Japanese yen from 108.77 yen. The euro cost \$1.1956, down from \$1.19. - **BNA**

MARKET

MAMBU

Research reveals global consumers are hesitant to use open banking

ABU DHABI: A study of 2,000 global consumers released by Mambu, the market-leading banking and financial services platform, revealed that a significant misunderstanding of open banking is hampering its adoption.

The Censuswide survey, commissioned by Mambu, found that more than half (52 per cent) of consumers have never heard of open banking and 61 per cent have never used it, in spite of 80 per cent of respondents using one or more mobile finance apps.

“The research reveals the majority of customers don’t understand what open banking is, how it works and what it means for them,” said Elliott Limb, Mambu’s Chief Customer Officer. “But it also reveals they do care about receiving better financial services that support their lifestyles – smart banking. If banks address this need and lack of understanding, it will help banks build customer loyalty and provide genuinely innovative, differentiating revenue-generating services.”

The big disconnect

Open banking has witnessed an increase in adoption globally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the research indicates a marked change in attitude and priorities as a result of the crisis. According to our survey, 52 per cent said they wanted more control over their finances. At the same time, 40 per cent said the pandemic had changed their attitudes to privacy and 24 per cent to data sharing. Another boost came from the 41% who said they have had more time for research.

I have needed to take more control of my finances (52 per cent)

I have had the time to do my research and understand it better (41 per cent)

My attitude to privacy has changed since the pandemic (40 per cent)

I’m less worried about sharing data (24 per cent)

I have had more time to set it up (40 per cent)



“The research reveals the majority of customers don’t understand what open banking is, how it works and what it means for them

Elliott Limb
Mambu’s Chief Customer Officer

However, existing concerns remain with 48 per cent of consumers claiming they are ‘scared’ to use open banking and 53 per cent still believing that open banking is a dangerous use of data sharing. Looking at this further, almost half of the respondents claim that their banks did provide reassurance on the safety of open banking or provide information on what the numerous benefits are, with another 24 per cent stating that, while it was explained, it could have been done in a better way.

“Banks must accept that open banking is still a not fully comprehended phenomenon so this is the starting point,” said Dmitrii Barbasura, CEO and Co-Founder, Salt Edge, a Mambu partner. “We believe they need to invest time and effort in educating customers about the new possibilities they get access to, and also inform them about their rights and the high safety level covered by open banking.”

Change the record

Demonstrating the opportunity for open banking, the survey re-

vealed that 57 per cent said they would be more likely to use it if their bank had more successfully implemented and promoted it.

When exploring further what consumers want from open banking, the survey shows that nearly half of respondents want instant digital money transfers; more than a third want aggregated bank balances at a glance; third want tips on better money management and a quarter want money-saving suggestions for their bills.

Instantly transfer money between different accounts (48 per cent)

See different account balances together at a glance (38 per cent)

Help boost my savings automatically calculating spending patterns and moving spare money into savings or investments (36 per cent)

Receive helpful hints about better money management (34 per cent)

Receive one overall monthly bank statement (34 per cent)

Allow access to banking data to receive automatic suggestions about money saving on bills and insurance (26 per cent).

March US home construction jumps to fastest pace since 2006



REPORT: According to the report, applications for building permits, a good sign of future activity, increased by 2.7 per cent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.77 million units. - BNA

Builders began construction of new homes and apartments at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.74 million units in March, the Commerce Department reported

WASHINGTON: US housing construction rebounded strongly in March to the fastest pace since 2006 as home builders recovered from an unusually frigid February that shut down projects.

Builders began construction on new homes and apartments at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.74 million units in March, the Commerce Department reported Friday, a 19.4 per cent increase over

February when housing construction fell by 11.3 per cent. It was the fastest pace for home building since a level of 1.8 million in June 2006 during the last housing boom, The Associated Press reported.

Severe storms raked several regions of the country in February, setting construction back.

According to the report, applications for building permits, a good sign of future activity, increased by 2.7 per cent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.77 million units.

Economists expect housing construction to remain strong this year given the record low level of homes for sale. A new report from mortgage giant Freddie Mac concluded that the housing market is 3.8 million single-family homes short of what’s needed to meet demand – a 52 per cent increase from a significant housing shortage in 2018.

“We expect the pace of housing starts to moderate slightly over the balance of 2021 but still look for starts to increase more than 6 per cent this year,” Nancy Vanden Houten, lead economist at Oxford Economics, said in a research note.

Housing was one of the star performers last year in an economy struggling with a global pandemic. Housing construction rose

6.9 per cent to 1.38 million units for the year.

Builders are currently grappling with lumber prices, which have tripled in the past year, and supply chain shortages for such things as appliances while home buyers are facing higher housing prices because of the low inventories. However, builder confidence remains strong. The latest National Association of Home Builders/Wells Fargo survey saw an increase in its confidence index to 83 in April, up from 82 in March. Any reading above 50 shows builders are optimistic about the future.

The Commerce report Friday showed that construction of single-family homes was started at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.24 million units in March, up 15.3 per cent from February. Construction in the smaller and often more volatile apartment sector jumped 30 per cent to an annual rate of 477,000 units.

By region of the country, construction was up in all parts of the country except the West which saw a 12.6 per cent decline. Construction activity surged 122.8 per cent in the Midwest and posted gains of 64 per cent in the Northeast and 13.5 per cent in the South. -BNA



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CONSTRUCTION ARM

L&T wins significant contracts

DUBAI: The construction arm of L&T has secured orders from prestigious clients for its various businesses.

The power transmission & distribution business has won orders to design and construct two 132/11kV Substations in Dubai, UAE.

The scope of these turnkey orders involves the supply of advanced equipment including gas insulated switchgear. While enhancing the capacity of the network to cater to the demand growth of the domestic, commercial, and industrial sectors, these substations will also ensure the highest standards of reliability, availability, and efficiency of power supply. Additional orders have been received for ongoing projects in India.

The factories business of buildings & factories has secured another order from a leading cement manufacturer to construct a 3.5 MTPA brown-field cement plant in Nimbera, Rajasthan. The scope includes civil, mechanical and equipment erection works.

The railways strategic business unit that resides within the transportation infrastructure business has won an order from the Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE).

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Indian male, 29yrs, BE Mechanical, 6+ yrs. UAE experienced QA QC in Oil and Gas with valid D/L on visit in Oman. Looking for suitable opportunities in QA QC / project/ process. Contact 92057664 e-mail: hafisashraf14@gmail.com

Civil Engineer, 10 years in Muscat, Client Meeting, AutoCAD, Quotation, Tender, High-rise Com/Res, Villas Maintenance. Having D/L and NOC. Contact 97431611

Indian Male, Diploma in Computer Engineering, 3 years' experience Worked as a System administrator & Support Engineer looking for a suitable job. Presently on visit. Contact 94243856/93894634 rashadmuhammed20@gmail.com

Site Engineer (DCE), 9 yrs experience in building construction (execution of site works, BBS, BOQ preparation) Oman D/L. Local transfer/NOC available. Contact 94334402. Email nishath.ind91@gmail.com

Indian male 23 yrs, B.Tech (EEE) is looking for suitable job, presently on visit. Contact 95055966

24, Mechanical Engineer, currently in Oman Looking to work as back-office Sales/Purchase coordinator in any field. Contact 79121923 / 78043052

B.E Civil engineer Male, with 2 years of professional experience in municipal house construction project. Equipped with a valid D/L. Fluent in English & Arabic. Contact 96749821 Email mhassan9610@gmail.com

Civil engineer with 9 years exp in Oman. Contact 97646908

Indian female M.Tech in Electrical power system having 4+ yrs of experience in Oman seeking suitable placement. Contact 79733520, 94306164

MEP Mechanical engineer with 2 year exp. Contact 79027224

Sr. quantity surveyor - Civil / contracts with 14+ years of experience in commercial and residential projects in Oman, holder of D/L & NOC available. Seeking for suitable position. Contact no. 93249891

Construction engineer with 10 yrs experience in Oman consulting offices 7 experience in government project. Contact 96965100

Planning engineer, Indian more than 20 yrs experience in Oil & gas, pipeline building & MEP projects scheduling using primavera P6 seeks suitable job. NOC available. Contact 92651105
Email reji-mathai@hotmail.com

Project engineer, B.tech-civil, India, 12yrs Oman experience in all kinds operation of civil & MEP and interior fit-out field with valued Visa and D/L, 95206259, looking placement

Electrical engineer 9 years experience in primary substations, OHL, and underground cables. With a valid D/L. Contact 98223842

Indian Male B.E Civil 6Y experience currently available in Oman. Ready for Immediate join Looking for Any job. Contact 91406778

Senior Civil Engineer with 12 years Exp in government and private construction projects. looking for a suitable position. Contact 95962450. Email: solanki.ahmed@gmail.com

B.E Mechanical engineer, 25 yrs with 2.5 yrs of experience in MEP execution & estimation is seeking suitable placement. Contact 94846765. Email akshaygopinath@gmail.com

Senior Civil Engineer (RE) with over 10 years of experience on major projects (Residential, Commercial & Industrial). # 78270396

B.E in Mechanical Engineering with 2 yrs of experience in fire fighting & MEP. Currently working as estimation & design engineer is looking for a suitable placement. Contact 94417169

Indian B.Tech Electrical engineer with 11 yrs experience in construction field. Have DCRP licence, looking for job as an Electrical Engineer/ MEP engineer. NOC available. Contact 99873092 Email ranjithbr17@gmail.com

Indian B.tech Electrical male engineer having 14 yrs experience in construction, looking for suitable placement as Estimation Engineer/ MEP engineer/MEP Qs. NOC available. Contact 92121940 Email abyee@gmail.com

Planning Engineer, Indian BE (Mechanical), 20 yrs experience in using primavera (P6) with NOC, D/L. Contact 79822993

Civil engineer diploma with BBA, NEBOSH IGC, valid Oman D/L, 9 yrs experience building construction, network tower erection, gas pipe line project. Contact 00971501140652, 95305786

PURCHASE/PROCUREMENT

Inventory, Accounting, Purchase & Sales: Indian male 31, having 8 years experience in MNC with F&B, Customer relations and various other skills. NOC available. Contact: 96219904, Email: khanshah98@gmail.com

Indian male procurement, purchase officer having Bachelor degree in Mechanical engineering, 5 yrs experience in UAE in Electrical & Construction company & having UAE D/L. Looking for suitable job. Contact 98227904 Email nrangra@rediffmail.com

Indian male, 10+ yrs experience in the field of purchase, store, asset coordinator. Valid D/L. Immediately available for joining. Contact 71596360. Email praveenskurup82@gmail.com

Indian male, experience of 12 Years in Oman as a Purchasing officer and store manager, D/L NOC available looking for suitable job. # 97099785, maniugcc@gmail.com

Procurement, purchase officer having master degree searching for job. 07 yrs exp in oman in a well known construction & maintenance group of companies. NOC available. Contact 92587919, 99423614. Email jahanzeb_athar@yahoo.com

Indian, purchase assistant, store keeper 9 years working experience in oman. Valid Oman D/L (light) Looking for suitable job. Contact 98615731 Email: sanalk73@gmail.com

Indian male, 16 yrs experience in a multinational freight forwarding & logistic co, worked under the capacity of Senior operation executive/senior accountant (Ocen freight, air freight, land transport, warehouse operations & finance & accounting). NOC available. Contact 93587605

TOUR / TRAVEL

Seeking job in Travel & Tourism, 12 years experience, Graduate (B.Sc) IATA Certified professional presently available in Oman. Contact 968 92477622, 79842322 Email: tahaspm@gmail.com

Indian male 29, exp: 03yr-09 months as ticketing reservation executive seeks job. NOC available. Contact 97322323/94478168. e-mail: anwarijail51@gmail.com

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Contact 92514687 Email: hi.binu@gmail.com

JOB WANTED

SALES / MARKETING

Inventory, Sales & Accounting, Indian male 31, having 8 years experience in MNC with F&B, Customer relations and various other skills. NOC available. Contact: 96219904, Email: khanshah98@gmail.com

14 yrs of Sales experience in FMCG, valid D/L. Looking for Supervisory / Management position. Contact 71554818. Email: mohammedsultan1977@gmail.com

MBA marketing having 12 years of experience in sales of various B2B products. Experience in making and implementing marketing plans. Capable to market any good product. Call 91690869

Marketing Professional with 5 years experience seeking job in the fields of Content Management, Marketing and Branding. Please call or Whatsapp 91998204 or vidyaramofficial@gmail.com

Indian Male 32, 5+ yrs Exp in Oman, Property Asst Manager, In Real Estate, VLD D/L, Looking for suitable opening. Contact 92686168

BM, with 26 yrs fmcg exp, handling large distribution looking for better prospects. Contact 90925520

Having 14 yrs experience in Sales & Marketing field. Having valid Dubai D/L, looking for a suitable position. Contact 94720995

Indian Male, having over 20 years experience in sales support and Arabic English translation in Automotive industry seeks suitable placement. Contact 968 99776201. Email ajmal.aleem@gmail.com

Indian male (30) MBA with oman Experience (FMCG and other) in Sales and Marketing valid Omani D/L on Visit. Contact +968 7975 5795

MBA with Engineering (Indian female) working in a reputable company in Oman, with 3 years of experience in Content writing, Digital marketing, Vendor & Budgeting. management, Contact 98945207

Indian male with 10 years GCC experience in Luxury Watches & Jewellery currently in Oman with valid driving license looking for a job in Sales/Marketing. Contact: 91901852

34yrs Indian, MBA marketing, B.Com, 9 yrs experience (2 yrs GCC-Dubai) seeking Sales, admin, accounting job. Contact 78167383

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FEATURES

CORONAVIRUS
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The coronavirus crisis
has significantly increased
the speed of digitisation
worldwide.
It has lowered the cost
of artificial intelligence (AI)
and augmented reality
(AR) while triggering
innovation.

In the near future, digitisation will be supporting energy transition worldwide, allowing, among other things, fast electrification of growing economies, especially on the African continent. Companies’ and governments’ qualms about artificial intelligence had slowed down the roll-out of advanced applications in the energy sector. Then came the pandemic, the ultimate digital catalyst. Within a year, tools created by researchers over more than a decade are now hitting markets. This will change energy systems forever.

Anticipating failures

“I am working on a machine learning project with Spanish utility Iberdrola Scottishpower Renewables. We are trying to use the data that is recorded on the wind turbines to predict failures,” Kalyan Veeramachaneni, principal research scientist in the Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, told DW.

“In other words, we want to predict how much time we have before a particular component needs

to be replaced.”

Turbine failures can decrease wind farms’ output, potentially leading to permanent infrastructure damage. “Knowing when these failures will happen in advance allows for timely repairs,” Veeramachaneni said, adding that the project recently covered a wind farm with 140 turbines. “Soon, we are trying to roll out the technology for multiple farms.”

Forecasting demand and supply

Even more important is the ability of machine learning, a branch of artificial intelligence, to predict intermittent renewable energy. The very nature of wind and solar has always made them somewhat unpredictable sources, raising concerns about energy systems’ stability.

DeepMind, a British artificial intelligence subsidiary of Alphabet founded in 2010, worked with Google to forecast wind farms power output in the United States. The British research laboratory said in February 2019 that “our early results suggest that we can use machine learning to make wind power sufficiently more predictable.” The project now sits with Google.

Several companies are currently working on similar forecasting projects. AI is also used by energy companies to improve customer management and retention.

Knowledge transfer

Artificial intelligence is not the only disruptive digital tool in the energy world. Augmented reality (AR) is booming too.

Smart assistance, for example, is an industrial AR platform designed to streamline maintenance, remote support and training processes in various sectors. Operators are connected to the system via smart glasses through which they can visualise information. The platform is available as a stream in real-time as well as offline. In the first case, operators can receive guidance from experts; in the second case, the operator can identify the solutions via AI.

“The global AR market value amounts to \$30.7 billion (€25.8 billion) and, according to Statista, will reach almost \$200 billion by 2024,” says Mauro Rubin, CEO of the Milan-based AR development firm JoinPad.

The rise of these technologies will cut down intervention times

and decrease travel expenses. “This will make knowledge transfer easier, especially in growing economies,” explains Rubin, adding that JoinPad worked on various projects in Asia and Africa.

Africa in focus

Damilola Ogunbiyi, CEO and special representative of the UN secretary-general for Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL), agrees on the importance of digitisation in growing economies.

“Digitalisation can support more efficient, inclusive and sustainable energy systems. This is especially important for countries across Africa where 565 million people live without access to electricity,” Ogunbiyi, who is also co-chair of UN-Energy, told DW.

SEforALL is an international organisation backing the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7, which calls for universal access to sustainable energy by 2030.

According to Ogunbiyi, a former managing director of the Nigerian Rural Electrification Agency, “this new digital era will help us identify where people living without energy are and connect them with the

best solutions at the lowest cost.”

Leapfrogging outdated systems

Ewald Hesse, CEO of Berlin-based Grid Singularity, says several countries in Africa would leapfrog the development phase of European energy systems, similar to what happened to landline phones.

“In developing countries, there is no stringent regulation in the energy sector, and we don’t need to convince the government of allowing a new approach to energy production and consumption. It would be run purely economically,” Hesse told DW, adding that the company’s first trials were on the African continent.

Grid Singularity is an open-source energy technology startup using blockchain technology to facilitate market participation and decentralisation. It wants to connect groups of energy buyers and grid operators.

The point is that not all citizens can afford PV installations. Still, local communities would benefit from one PV system in the surrounding area, which, combined with sensors to measure energy consumption, would

create a localised market.

“Whatever comes out in the energy field in developing countries will be by far smarter and more practical than what we have in Germany,” said Hesse, adding that several companies contributed to unlocking potential markets and significant investments in developing countries.

Village Data Analytics is one of them. Through satellite pictures, it estimates energy demand in villages. “What’s left to solve is the political and geopolitical issue,” Hesse said.

Apart from issues related to privacy and employment, energy consumption is another question mark hanging over digitisation.

According to Johannes Sedlmeir, researcher at Munich-based Fraunhofer FIT, “there have been concerns that training complex AI models consumes a lot of energy, but the savings generated from optimizing processes can outweigh consumption.” Similarly, while a lot has been said about energy consumption of blockchain technology, “industry projects typically use blockchains with negligible energy consumption,” he said. -**ww**



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ROUND-UP

MHD ACERE launches ‘Auto Expert’

Auto Expert offers quality services at cost-effective prices keeping in mind the needs of an individual as well as fleet customers and their vehicles

MUSCAT: Well-known Omani business conglomerate - Mohsin Haider Darwish's (MHD) ACERE cluster is pleased to announce that it has forayed into a new line of business with 'Auto Expert', an advanced diagnostic training and development centre, which has been launched to become a one-stop-shop for scheduled maintenance, service and repairs of all kinds of vehicles.

Located in Azaiba next to Super Plaza, Auto Expert offers quality services at cost-effective prices keeping in mind the needs of an individual as well as fleet customers and their vehicles. The facility caters to the accessorisation, detailing, polishing, window tinting, smart repairs, accident repairs, and paint jobs for all kinds of vehicle brands.

Speaking on the sidelines of the launch of the facility, Mohsin



Hani Al Bahrani, CEO of Mohsin Haider Darwish's ACERE division commented, "With the transportation infrastructure needing an overhaul; and with new car sales going up each year, we realise that

there is quite a demand for quality repairs. Today's vehicle requires sophisticated diagnostic equipment and trained technicians to maintain and repair them. The investment in equipment for this

type of technology and team presents a great opportunity for us to aggressively market to customers who want affordable and convenient car care and repairs, through Auto Expert."

Services offered

Some of the services offered at Auto Expert include Scheduled Maintenance Service: Engine oil and filter replacement, Standard Checkpoint service, Auto-Air condition Service: AC performance test, check system pressure, check condenser and radiator cooling fan operation, inspect all AC components for wear, leaks and proper operation, evacuate and recharge system; Complete Cooling System Service: Check all hoses, belts; pressure test system, check heater, defroster and cooling fan operation, flush and recycle antifreeze, correct coolant mixture to a 50/50

mixture, check for leaks.

The facility also provides - Engine Diagnostic Service: Fuel pressure test, code retrieval and vacuum testing; Brake System (Front & Rear): Remove and replace pads or shoes, resurface rotors or drums; inspect brake line and components and test parking brake; Engine Tune-Up: Replace plugs, fuel filter, minor adjustment and scope test if needed; Transmission Flush: Hook up flush machine adding flushing cleaner to transmission, completely flush all transmission components, replace all transmission fluid, add transmission conditioner, check for leaks, inspect the cable and all linkages; and Motor Value Added Services: Clean and de-carbon fuel injector, fuel rail, upper intake and intake valves and carbon in a combustion chamber, engine oil flushing, power steering flushing etc.

TOYOTA

Go beyond on every journey in Land Cruiser

MUSCAT: The powerful, capable and tough Land Cruiser has been the favourite 4WD SUV for enthusiasts the world over. From routine drives to off-road experiences, the Land Cruiser has always stood tall to offer exceptional experiences. Even earning it the status of the 'Pride of the Land.'

Hailed as a timeless icon, the Toyota Land Cruiser has a loyalty unmatched by any other SUV. The product of over 60 years of global adventure, it is a sophisticated blend of off-road prowess, on-road comfort and unparalleled refinement. And it remains Totally Unchallenged.

Proudly carrying forward its undisputed legacy of phenomenal all-terrain performance and reliability, the Land Cruiser indeed, is one of the most technically advanced four-wheel drive vehicles ever produced and is equipped with a series of advanced dynamic



and handling features.

The Land Cruiser's driving control features extend to the Active Traction Control (ATRC), which ensures excellent Vehicle Handling functionality. Further enhancing its versatility is the Hill Assist Control (HAC), which prevents vehicle rollback when stopping and then starting again on a steep incline or

slippery surface. The Crawl Control System helps maintain a low uniform vehicle speed by automatically controlling the engine output and brake hydraulic pressure to reduce driver burden when in off-road conditions.

At the heart of the indomitable 4WD Land Cruiser's capability is a 4.6-litre engine. A smooth and quiet

drive results from the Land Cruiser's advanced 6-speed Transmission.

Elevating the Land Cruiser's In-vehicle Entertainment to a completely new level is the 10-inch Navigation System with Multi Bluetooth connection & SIM card slot for Wi-Fi Hotspot, 6 Speakers and Rear Seat Entertainment System, Power backdoor (upper door only), New design front bumper spoiler with chrome garnish, Leather seats, Remote engine starter and Front sequential indicator.

The Land Cruiser VX is equipped with a 5.7L, V8 engine, New design front bumper spoiler with chrome garnish, 20" Alloy Wheels, Chrome + Gloss black Radiator Grille, Premium Leather Seats, 9" Navigation System with 14 JBL Speakers, Qi-Enabled Wireless Charger, Multi-terrain monitor with 4 cameras and active height control.

EXPANSION

Lulu Exchange opens 36th branch in Oman

MUSCAT: In a boost to the payment needs of people living in Oman's much sought-after Al Hail - Seeb region, Lulu Exchange - the Sultanate's leading payments provider, has opened its newest branch in the area at the centrally located Markaz Al Bahja Mall.

Offering superior, affordable and world-class cross-border remittances and currency exchange services, the new branch marks the company's 36th in the Sultanate of Oman and is the 234th global branch of Lulu Financial Group worldwide. The branch was inaugurated by Sheikh Mohammed Hamed Ali Al Ghazali, Director,



Lulu Exchange, in the presence of Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director of Lulu Financial Group and several other senior management staff, in a grand virtual opening ceremony.

Adeeb Ahamed congratulated the team for expanding the company's network to deliver reliable, seamless and accessible financial services to the country's people.

"We are happy to bring our services to Al Hail, which is home to several industries and expats. The region is considered one of the best places to live & work in Oman, and our new branch at Al Bahja Mall re-affirms our commitment to the country and its economy. The branch is located at an accessible location and will strive to provide consumers with a world-class payments experience, in line with our vision to innovate value and inspire experiences," Ahamed added.

Lulu Exchange, which is a part of the Lulu Financial Group, is among the leading and most trustworthy financial service providers in Oman.

TESTIMONIAL

Loyal customer shares his experience with JAC T8 pick up



MUSCAT: The partnership of JAC motors and Towell Auto Centre in 2008 has led to a realm of reliable and luxurious JAC commercial vehicles in Oman. Just recently Towell Auto Centre has added an exciting range of JAC passenger and light commercial vehicles to their line-up.

Dynamic range

Among JAC's dynamic range of vehicles is the power-packed, high octane T8 pick-up. Having the slogan of "Get more done for an unbelievable price", the JAC T8 Pick-up 2.0L Turbo surely lives up to its reputation. It is available in 2WD or 4WD and Classic or Luxury

configurations, enabling a powerful, fun-filled performance for off-road enthusiasts and an excellent business transport solution for those living and working in the Sultanate's cities and rural areas.

Consumers vouch on JAC T8's affordability and fantastic specifications such as Cruise Control, Bluetooth, 360-degree camera, Central Locking, Active Steering and ABS (Anti-lock Brake System) among others. In the T8, owners get the legendary reliability of JAC's commercial range coupled with its built to last looks. My recently had the pleasure of hearing from a happy and satisfied T8 customer.

Majid Hamed Al Hasani got his JAC T8 Pickup from TAC almost 3 months back. He uses it for his stable requirements that are for carrying horse feed, water and transporting horses. His JAC T8 is also used during competitions specifically for carrying the horse trailer.

Comfortable

When asked how his experience has been with the vehicle, he said, "I am extremely satisfied with my JAC T8. It has excellent performance and is extremely powerful, very smooth and comfortable. My daily usage is rough and I work with tight schedules, the T8 perfectly accommodates the same. I

am very content and satisfied with the after-sales service of Towell Auto Centre who are very punctual and organised. One of T8's most unique attributes is that it is economical and consumes very little fuel. My personal and professional life both have been elevated courtesy of my JAC T8. To add to all this elegant design is super impressive. It is a multipurpose product and can be used for my office needs, family, farm and leisure."

Keen to have a look at JAC's vehicles? Towell Auto Centre would be thrilled to have you experience their latest JAC range at one of their authorised dealerships located across the country.

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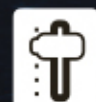


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