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SAFEGUARD GAINS OF DEVELOPMENT MARCH

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND MAJLIS ASH'SHURA OFFICE HOLD JOINT MEETING

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and other cabinet members on Tuesday received members of the Majlis Ash'shura Office, led by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

The meeting came within the framework of cooperation of institutions in implementation of the Basic Law of the State's provision requiring the State's institutions to continuously coordinate with each other, engage in fruitful dialogue and forge visions targeting the



HH Sayyid Fahd with Majlis Ash'shura Office members. PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

implementation of economic and social plans and programmes in tune with the best standards of

performance.

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd commended the

significant role of Majlis Ash'shura Office when coordinating with the government for the realisation of

citizens' aspirations.

During the meeting, emphasis was laid on the significance of

the current period which requires rallying efforts to safeguard the gains of the comprehensive development march that covers all parts of the Sultanate, as well as ways to address the challenges posed by coronavirus.

The meeting reviewed the challenges posed by coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic to all world economies.

The government places the Majlis Ash'shura on top of its priorities as a basic partner in the nation building process aimed to implement domestic development plans.

TURN TO P2

MUSCAT

466 FREED UNDER FAK-KURBAH

With the generous donations of individuals and institutions, 'Fak-Kurbah' Initiative, or Ending Loan Agony, in coordination with 34 courts in Oman, released 466 insolvent persons from prison. Fak-Kurbah initiative announced that the released 466 persons have been jailed for civil, commercial, legal or labour financial claims.

DETAILS ON P3

INSIDE

TALIBAN LAUNCHES HUGE AFGHAN OFFENSIVE

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NORTH KOREA AND US TREAD CAUTIOUS LINE

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STEPS TO RUN ONE MILLION DATE PALMS PROJECT

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced the start of preparatory steps to undertake the management of the 'One Million Date Palms Project'. The move reflects the government's keenness to improve performance and achieve fiscal sustainability in line with Oman Vision 2040 goals. The OIA, acting in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, works to maximise benefits from this project and generate a higher economic value from it, besides enhancing food security in the Sultanate, opening up vistas for partnership with the private sector and empowering farmers.

DETAILS ON P17

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Council of Ministers meet Shura members



SAFEGUARD GAINS OF DEVELOPMENT MARCH

FROM PAGE 1
This is realised through ministers' attending sessions of the Majlis and discussing their draft plans and their ministerial statements, as well as means of upgrading services rendered to citizens. The procedures include ministers' responding to Majlis Ash'shura's requests to host government officials to discuss with them the topics studied by the Majlis's committees.

The two sides discussed the Council of Ministers' approach to meetings in which governors' host members of Majlis Ash'shura, in turns, to update them about services and municipal affairs in their respective governorates. The Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura and members of the

Majlis Office commended the constructive cooperation between the government and the Majlis. They affirmed that the next stage will see more cooperation between the two parties. The joint meeting reviewed the agenda and topics, including measures to foster government-Majlis partnership, efforts exerted by the government

for the employment of Omani job-seekers and governance of government firms. It was agreed during the meeting to conduct social awareness programmes about the serves the citizens of the Sultanate are getting under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. — ONA
— PICTURES BY
MOHAMED AL RASHDI

INVITATION TO TENDER

**SOHAR ALUMINIUM**

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. :	21/013
Tender Title:	General Civil and Building Maintenance Services
Scope :	Contractor shall provide General Civil and Building Maintenance Services including all management, supervision, personal equipment etc.
Tender No. :	2021-ENG-SOW-0005
Tender Title:	Rodding Shop Power and Free Upgrade
Scope :	The Contractor shall design, fabricate, supply and install support structures for the Power and Free Conveying System in the Rodding Shop.
Tender No. :	2021-ENG-SOW-0016
Tender Title:	Supply of new Crusher with a Conveyor
Scope :	Contractor shall do design, supply, install and commissioning of new crusher with a conveyor.
Tender No. :	2021-ENG-SOW-0018
Tender Title:	Facility wide corrosion protection
Scope :	Contractor shall do protective painting on structures, piping and equipment facility wide for corrosion protection.

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

Rains to continue in some parts

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](https://twitter.com/lakshmioman)

Suhar received the most rain on Tuesday as the weather in most parts of Oman continued to be influenced by Al Hajar Mountains.

The cloud advection continued in most parts of the Sultanate with chances of convective clouds development with rain and occasionally thundershowers associated with fresh wind and downdraft. Hail also experienced over Al Hajar Mountains and the adjoining areas.

"By evening, the clouds are expected to move toward the coastal areas of Oman Sea," said the weather forecaster at the National Multihazard Early Warning Center of Civil Aviation Authority. She added that there is a possibility of rain in Muscat as well – the airport area, Seeb and Maabela, areas that are close to the sea.

The trough began from Musandam Governorate, moved to Batinah (Suhar), continuing toward Khabourah. It is forecast to move to Barka, Muscat and then



is expected to head to Sharqiyah.

"The charts are showing a downdraft in Sharqiyah, and downdrafts are associated with thundershowers," pointed out the weather forecaster.

The amount of rain is expected to reduce by Wednesday.

Along the coastal areas of the Oman Sea, winds will be northeasterly light to moderate during the day, becoming variable light at night. Over the rest of the Sultanate, winds will be southerly to southeasterly light to moderate, occasionally fresh. According to the weather forecast, sea condition is expected to be moderate along most of Oman coasts with a maximum wave height of 1.75 metres.

The Met Office has alerted precaution to be taken as there could be reduced visibility during thunderstorms, the chance of Hail and overflowing wadis, and a chance of blowing dust due to fresh wind. They also noted that the sea is expected to be rough during a thundershower.

OCA continues its role during the pandemic

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Oman Cancer Association (OCA) is continuing its activities even during the pandemic with all possible safeguards. To make it more dynamic, it has created a director's position.

For the first time in 21 years, Oman Cancer Association has created a director's position. The first person to be assigned the job is Faiqa bint Ali al Sinawiyah who assumed office on May 1.

She will report directly to the Board of Directors, assigned as per the elections held on March 31. She brings with her 28 years of experience at the Ministry of Health.

The responsibilities of the director will include supervision of the Association's flagship initiatives: The Mobile Mammography Unit (MMU) and Dar Al Hanan (DH), as well as tracking policy implementation across the sectors OCA engages in, in close coordination with the relevant government authorities, sponsors and partners, as well as management of all programmes and projects underway and forecast for the next five years.

Speaking to the *Observer* in the programme note, Al Sinawiyah explained her dream for the OCA and said, "I hope to see the OCA at the international level, serving cancer patients, and have proper funding. Now our fund comes mainly from fundraising



Faiqa bint Ali al Sinawiyah has assumed the role of Director of the Oman Cancer Association from May 1.

events, companies and vendors. I hope to see regular funds or have our budget to support our patients and projects."

One of our projects is Dar Al Hanan, a home away from home, where we host children from outside Muscat who come for treatment. It serves the residents staying in Oman as well. Our Mammogram units go around the country twice a year aimed at women above 40 years of age, and they receive reports within 48 hours. If everything is normal, we call them and congratulate them on telling them they are well. Still, if there are any doubts,

we request them to come to our centre for the ultrasound because it is here at the centre. If there is any problem, we arrange an appointment at the hospital. We have also held training for palliative care for 360 nurses from around the country."

Although the pandemic has restricted movements, the OCA has successfully conducted at least two awareness events online every month.

"Before Covid-19, we used to go to the universities, community and schools to educate people about cancer

and spread awareness on prevention. Since Covid-19, we are conducting awareness through social media," she said.

The pandemic has brought in operational changes in Dar Al Hanan.

"The manner of admission has seen a change. Like any other institution, we have taken precautions, and we have to go through policies announced by the Minister of Health. So we maintain social distancing, washing of hands and using sanitisers throughout the centre. We have been educating the mothers who come to Dar Al Hanan. The hospitals are not admitting people like they used to do before, so they are also not staying with us for a longer period as they used to do previously. The mammogram is also testing fewer people currently. In the past, we used to take a walk-in appointment, but now we are restricted to appointments and take all precautions," explained Faiqa, who has her Masters Degree in Nursing from Queen Margaret University, UK.

Faiqa has been affiliated with OCA since 2011 and was a member of the board for five years (2016-2021). Her training in active healthcare deliverance service has covered Oman, Jordan, Bahrain and the United Kingdom. She has extensive nursing, administration, and planning experience in several regions across the Sultanate, with the last position as the Director of the School and University Health for Oman at the Ministry of Health.

466 insolvent people freed with the help of Fak-Kurbah drive

MUSCAT: With the generous donations of individuals and institutions, "Fak-Kurbah" Initiative, or Ending Loan Agony, in coordination with 34 courts in Oman, released 466 insolvent people from prison.

Fak-Kurbah Initiative announced that the released 466 people have been jailed for civil, commercial, legal or labour financial claims.

The released cases included 78 residents and 388 Omani citizens, 39 of whom were females. The released cases so far covered 10 governorates namely Muscat (128), South Al Batinah (60), North Al Batinah (89), South Al Sharqiyah (22), North Al Sharqiyah (62), Al Dakhiliyah (37), Al Dhahirah (31), Al Buraimi (26), Musandam (8) and Al Wusta (3).

The initiative affirms keenness to contribute to helping the prisoners whose circumstances led them to prison while seeking to provide a decent life for their families. The initiative will continue its efforts to achieve its goals, with the help



The 8th edition of the initiative was launched on April 1 and will continue until May 31

of individuals and institutions under the slogan "Everyone deserves a second chance."

The 8th edition of the initiative was launched on April 1, 2021 and it will continue until May 31, 2021.

FROM PAGE 1

No arrivals from Egypt and Philippines

Ethiopia, the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as travellers from any other country if they visited the above-mentioned countries within 14 days from applying to enter the Sultanate.

To add incoming travellers from Egypt and the Philippines to the above-mentioned list of travel-ban countries, as well as travellers from any other country if they visited these two countries (Egypt, the Philippines) within 14 days from

applying to enter the Sultanate. The ban takes effect from 9 am on Friday (May 7), till further notice.

The decision exempts incoming travellers who are Omani citizens, diplomats, health workers and their families. These exempted segments will undergo the prescribed procedures upon arriving in the Sultanate.

May the Almighty Allah protect everyone against all harm."

— ONA

Stay informed... stay healthy

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

The pandemic has affected one and all. It is up to an individual's ability to handle the situation or surrender to it by accepting whatever information is coming to him as true information and finally suffering from an overload of information that is not useful. Rather it affects the mental wellbeing of a person.

Like last year the Internet is flooded with all kinds of information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. Some are useful, some are wasteful, and some fake. But all of them are affecting the human mind in some way or the other.

"The smartest thing around us is our smartphones, which has taken away our own smartness and started ruling us. Some people feel very uncomfortable when they are separated from their smartphone, even for a moment. They do not want to miss any big or small information about their family, friends and even distant relatives despite knowing the fact that they are not in a position to extend any help due to distance, situation, or many



other reasons," says a clinical psychologist.

Such people are overtaxing their brains due to the consumption of some 'bad news' that is happening around them, in their countries and or even with their family members and friends.

The psychologist cited WHO's definition of health, which suggests: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" and called for mental fitness to keep pace with physical fitness and social wellbeing.

"It is time to filter the

information and take whatever is useful to you. You cannot afford to consume whatever is coming in your way; start sympathising, fearing or even becoming extra alert under the influence of that information. Every government is coming out with necessary guideline to be safe from the virus, and even if you get infected. You can easily protect yourself by following those guidelines," said clinical psychologist Anwar Ibrahim.

He suggested not be on the lookout for news and info about the pandemic all the time. "Engage yourself either by doing something – cooking,

cleaning, reading or even pursuing hobbies like singing or painting. You can distract yourself from these negativities by watching movies, playing indoor games."

Yoga has emerged as a great help during this point in time when usual outdoor fitness and sporting activities are not possible. "By regular practice of certain Yoga postures, meditation and breathing exercises, you can keep fit and disconnect with the negativities that are doing the round due to the situation and some vested interests who love to exploit the situation for own benefits," said yoga teacher Rajesh Pardeshi.



IDP IELTS Oman 2021 test dates

May	June	July	August
Sat 08 ●●●	Sat 05 ●●●	Thu 01 ●●●	Sat 07 ●●●
Thu 20 ●●●	Sat 12 ●●●	Sat 10 ●●●	Thu 12 ●●●
Sat 22 ●●●	Thu 17 ●●●	Sat 17 ●●●	Sat 21 ●●●
Sat 29 ●●●	Sat 19 ●●●	Sat 24 ●●●	Sat 28 ●●●
September	October	November	December
Sat 04 ●●●	Sat 09 ●●●	Sat 06 ●●●	Thu 02 ●●●
Sat 11 ●●●	Thu 14 ●●●	Thu 11 ●●●	Sat 04 ●●●
Thu 16 ●●●	Sat 23 ●●●	Sat 20 ●●●	Sat 11 ●●●
Sat 25 ●●●	Sat 30 ●●●	Sat 27 ●●●	Sat 18 ●●●

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Ramadhan

M U B A R A K

Laylat-ul-Qadr

THE NIGHT
THAT
SHOWERS
DIVINE
BLESSINGS IN
ABUNDANCE



KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Almighty Allah has ordained human beings to seek a night that's powerful than 1,000 nights and that night in the holy month of Ramadhan is the one showers blessings in abundance.

Known as 'Laylat-ul-Qadr' which translates into the 'Powerful Night' falls on one of the odd nights and is the 'promised night' for the believers.

They keep themselves more into supplications, prayers and other deeds such as zakat and sadaqa (two forms of supporting fellow beings) and the like as the promised night falls on one of the last 10 days of the holy month which has entered into the most important and the last phase.

It is the same night that the Holy Quran was sent down to mankind. Unlike in the mosques pre-Corona period, houses are being converted into semi mosques for the whole family and stay indoors as part of 'itikaf' which means stay overnight inside the prayer room.

"Believers seek the 'night of power' or 'the promised night' also known as 'the night of greatest rewards' during the odd nights of the last ten days on the holy month", said Mufti Menk, who is due to speak to Oman audience today, May 5.

According to the Holy Quran, Allah Almighty has said that there is a night in the odd nights of the holy month which is more powerful than 1,000 nights and it is the night when the Holy Quran, the guiding book for the entire mankind, is sent down to the people.

Prophet Muhammad (May Peace Be Upon Him) has said to his followers to "Look for Laylat-ul-Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadhan." (Bukhari)

Hazrat Aisha Radiallah Anha stated that as much Rasool Allah PBUH tried (Ibadat) in the last Ashra (ten days) of Ramadhan, did not try in any of the Ashra." (Muslim)

Hazrat Aisha Radiallah Anha had asked Allah's Messenger 'If I find Laylat-ul-Qadr then what should I do? To this, Allah's prophet (PBUH) said, recite this Dua. "ALLAHHUMMA INNAKA A'FUWUN TOHIBBUL AFWAFAAFU ANNI" (Tirmidhi).

"Individually, each one should pray 'Qiyamul Lail' which denotes long, standing supplications which is a part of the last ten days of the holy month and get even closer to Almighty Allah", adds Mufti Menk.

CAA revenues drop by 65 per cent in 2020

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has said its revenues for the year 2020 declined by 65 per cent due to the exceptional circumstances and disruptions of air traffic for an extended period worldwide.

The revenues from air navigation fees decreased by 54 per cent and airport fees by 75 per cent as the passenger traffic decreased.

Revenues from franchise fees dropped by 86 per cent. The air traffic at Muscat International Airport declined 80.1 per cent and passenger traffic by 81.1 per cent at the end of February this year, compared with the same period in 2020.

The decline in passenger traffic at Salalah airport was 90.9 per cent even though domestic air travel has been largely uninterrupted since the last quarter of 2020.

According to IATA, passenger traffic remained weak in February since new Covid-19 cases elevated globally and governments maintained travel restrictions. Industrywide revenue passenger-kilometres (RPKs) were 74.7 per cent below pre-crisis levels in February 2019, compared to January's level, which was 72.2 per cent down.

A top IATA official said that the PCR tests are expensive and said it is time to decide whether they are necessary.

Any demand for PCR tests that can cost



A top IATA official said the PCR tests are expensive and it is time to decide whether they are necessary

more than the short flights themselves threatens the recovery. "We are seeing evidence of profiteering by people who have jumped on the testing bandwagon," Willie Walsh, the IATA director-general, said. "The cost of testing should be significantly lower than it is. I think we've got to challenge whether PCR testing is necessary," he said at a webinar of the World Aviation Festival attended by *the Observer*.

It may be noted that PCR costs around

RO 25 and above in Oman and some private clinics charge up to RO 40, depending on the urgency to get results. Currently, all passengers to Oman aged 15 years and below are required to undergo PCR tests.

As PCR tests will make travel too expensive for many, airlines call for allowing travellers to use antigen tests, which are much cheaper and give results more quickly.

"We can't have a situation where only the wealthy are able to travel. That would be a shame and a disgrace, and everyone in the industry should be pushing back," Walsh said.

He said that lateral flow and rapid antigen tests are just as effective in the context, where there are other measures in place to help manage risk.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Shared Services Company LLC (NSS) invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2021/7	Providing IT Outsource Services for Three Years	17 May 2021	13 June 2021	100/- *VAT not included

Terms and conditions:

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tender name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at NSS reception before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Sunday 13 June 2021.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website (www.nama.om).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Nama Shared Services, Bank Muscat: 0423-048027270-017 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 1.00pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.


نماء للخدمات المشتركة
Nama Shared Services

Al Muzn Mall

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National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

Investment Manager Report

For the 3M- 2021 ending 31st of March 2021

The first quarter of 2021 was at the opposite end of last year's first quarter as regional and global markets continued to rally surfing on a wave of continued optimism. While increasing government bond yields did cause a certain level of worry, the impressive bounce in economic activity has withheld skeptics at bay. Valuations across most risk asset classes continued to grow, as investors seek exposure to secular growth and try to hedge against the possibility of inflation. While valuations remain elevated on a trailing earnings view, earnings are being revised upwards and slowly justifying current valuations.

Monetary policy remains a focal point as all this recovery wouldn't be possible without the ample amount of liquidity provided by central banks across the globe. Fiscal policies are also playing an increasing role as social inclusiveness and aggressive environmental targets need serious financial backing in order to be achieved. While debt levels are elevated by historical standards, the combination of elevated debt levels and increasing government yields highlights the necessity of continual monetary support in order to avoid a liquidity squeeze.

On the commodity front, Brent enjoyed another remarkable quarter, rallying 23% to close the quarter at USD 64 a barrel. While crude consumption ticked up during the quarter, it's mostly OPEC's disciplined production curtailment that contributed to crude's strong price performance.

During the first quarter, the Fund gained 4.56%, a performance that trails the benchmark's quarterly return of 12.51%. Financials and materials were among the best performing sectors, on the back of strong mortgage growth in Saudi Arabia and a tight pricing environment for petrochemicals globally. Saudi Arabia was the best performing GCC country, posting a 14.02% return, followed by UAE 13.18%, Kuwait 4.14%, Oman 1.36%, Qatar -0.33% and Bahrain -2.13%.

2021, will be a year of recovery and change. While change may be uncomfortable to some; it brings its fair share of opportunity. While the economic upswing relieves businesses who have suffered in the past; we plan on continuing to adopt a cautious approach while taking advantage of a mutating environment to deliver results to our unit holders.

UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

AS AT 31 MARCH 2021

	31 March 2021	31 March 2020	31 December 2020
	RO	RO	RO
Assets			
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	7,932,671	6,143,346	8,158,406
Cash and cash equivalents	2,016,414	1,916,099	1,347,752
Dividend receivable	13,514	18,326	-
Interest receivable	-	12,019	5,802
Total assets	9,962,599	8,089,790	9,511,960
Liabilities			
Amount due to brokers	101,313	217,325	-
Amount due to related parties	27,410	27,087	26,759
Dividend payable	-	385,137	-
Accruals and other payables	6,506	10,884	10,000
Total liabilities	135,229	640,433	36,759
Total net assets attributable to the unitholders	9,827,370	7,449,357	9,475,201
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders	9,962,599	8,089,790	9,511,960
Net asset per unit attributable to the unitholders	0.766	0.580	0.732

UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

	31 March 2021	31 March 2020	31 December 2020
	RO	RO	RO
	3 Months	3 Months	12 Months
INCOME			
Dividend income	82,932	77,528	151,503
Interest income	5,778	2,264	25,140
Foreign exchange gain	10,062	-	5,165
Other income	-	-	7,537
Total income	98,772	79,792	189,345
Net realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	128,720	(1,354,303)	(928,099)
Net unrealised gain/(loss) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	255,910	(851,191)	727,029
Net investment income/(loss)	483,402	(2,125,702)	(11,725)
EXPENSES			
Brokerage commission expenses (transaction cost)	12,853	28,503	55,760
Management fees	26,136	25,813	96,960
Administration fee	3,699	3,759	15,061
Custodian fees	2,367	2,393	9,626
Fund Management Body's fee	7,000	7,000	35,000
General and administration	2,171	3,049	10,088
Foreign exchange loss	-	11,652	-
Total expenses	54,226	82,169	222,495
Profit/(loss) and total comprehensive income/(loss) and increase/(decrease) in net assets attributable to the unitholders for the period/year	429,176	(2,207,871)	(234,220)
Profit/(loss) per unit	0.033	(0.172)	(0.018)

Investment Manager & Administrator

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box 751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778864, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om



SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-50/2021	Supply of Chemicals and Laboratory Items for Directorate General of Pharmaceutical Affairs and Drug Control	06/ May /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/June/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-52/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Disposable Sterile Intravenous Set) for The Royal Hospital	13/ May /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 09/June/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-53/2021	Supply of Surgical and Consumable Items (Covid-19)	06/ May /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 12/June/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 55.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-54/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Ophthalmic)	13/ May /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 09/June/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-55/2021	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment (Covid-19) for Central Public Health Laboratories in Muscat Governorate	06/ May /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 12/June/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-56/2021	Supply of Laboratory Items	13/ May /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 09/June/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-57/2021	Supply of Ambulances for Various Health Establishments	13/ May /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 09/June/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

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

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24166670

Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

LIVING IN FEAR



A Palestinian girl watches from the balcony of her house as Israeli soldiers conduct a security operation in the village of Aqraba, east of Nablus in the occupied-West Bank, on Monday. Suspected gunmen carried out a drive-by shooting at a nearby junction the previous, leaving three Israeli civilians wounded, one of them in critical condition, with a manhunt underway. – AFP

Thousands of families hit by Yemen floods



A collapsed building flash floods in the city Tarim in Yemen's central province of Hadramawt on Monday. – AFP

DUBAI: The United Nations said on Tuesday that thousands of families across war-torn Yemen have been hit by torrential rains and deadly floods since mid-April that destroyed homes and shelters. “Initial reports indicate some 3,730 families (22,380 people) have been affected by the rains and flooding, the majority of whom are internally displaced people,” the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said.

“Intensified rainfall over the past few days is causing damage to infrastructure, destroying homes and shelter and causing deaths and injuries.”

On Monday, the government said four people were killed in flash floods in the historic city of Tarim in the central province of Hadramawt, and the UN cited reports of three deaths elsewhere in Yemen.

AFP footage showed city streets in Tarim flooded and its famed mud-brick buildings in

ruins, with cars and motorcycles buried under mud and debris.

OCHA said flooding also caused extensive damage in the provinces of Aden, Abyan, Daleh, Lahj, Hadramawt, Marib and Taz.

Dozens of people are killed every year across Yemen in flash floods. Fierce storms have added to the woes of the conflict-ridden country.

The UN says Yemen is suffering the world’s worst humanitarian crisis as a years-long war rumbles on, with over four million people displaced and two-thirds of its 30-million population dependent on aid.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed and millions pushed to the brink of famine in the conflict between the government — supported by a Saudi-led military coalition — and Iran-backed Huthi rebels that is now in its seventh year.

— AFP

Netanyahu faces midnight deadline to form govt

TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced a midnight deadline on Tuesday to form a government, a daunting task that would likely require convincing the Jewish far right to cooperate with an Islamic party.

Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, was given a 28-day window to forge a majority coalition following a March 23 general election, Israel’s fourth inconclusive vote in less than two years.

The prime minister’s right-wing Likud party won the most seats in the vote, but as results came in on election day, it became clear that he would again struggle to secure a majority in the 120-seat parliament.

Over the past month, Israeli media have been rife with speculation about possible deals that could see Netanyahu extend his record 12 consecutive years in power.

But hours before his negotiating window was due to expire at 2100 GMT, the core obstacles facing the 71-year-old premier remained largely unchanged since the morning after the vote.

A coalition will require coming to terms with his estranged former protege Naftali Bennett, leader of the hawkish Yamina party.

It will also require persuading the far-right Religious Zionism alliance to tacitly cooperate with



A partial view of the Israeli parliament building (the Knesset). – AFP

the Islamic conservative Raam party.

Religious Zionism has vowed not to sit in such a coalition.

Orit Strok, a lawmaker from the party who lives in a settlement in Hebron in the occupied West Bank, told army radio that sitting with Raam would “bring a Trojan horse into the government of

Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, was given a 28-day window to forge a majority coalition following a March 23 general election, Israel’s fourth inconclusive vote in less than two years

Israel” and mean “the end of Zionism.”

Netanyahu said on Thursday that he had offered Bennett to serve as premier ahead of him if that would help maintain the right’s hold on power. Bennett immediately replied that he never asked Netanyahu for the opportunity to be prime minister. “I tasked him to form a government, which, unfortunately, he cannot do,” Bennett said.

Political scientist Gayil Talshir of Hebrew University said a Netanyahu-Bennett arrangement was doomed because it would require support from Likud defector Gideon Saar, whose New Hope party won six seats.

Saar has maintained that he is committed to ousting Netanyahu.

“Bennett did not say no to (Netanyahu’s) offer, he just said it’s not realistic,” Talshir said. — AFP

Cementing Egypt security ties, France seals large warplane deal

PARIS: France said on Tuesday it will begin delivering 30 Dassault warplanes to Egypt from 2024 in a 4 billion euro (\$4.8 billion) deal, as it strengthens ties with a partner it considers vital in fighting militants.

In December, President Emmanuel Macron drew criticism from rights groups when he said he would not make the sale of weapons to Egypt conditional on human rights because he did not want to weaken Cairo’s ability to counter militancy in the region.

Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly said the deal, confirmed on Tuesday, illustrated the “strategic nature of the partnership” between the countries and would secure 7,000



Marine Rafale fighter jets before taking off on the deck of the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle on the Mediterranean Sea, as part of the Operation Arromanches III. – AFP file photo

jobs in France over three years.

“Our two countries are resolutely committed to the fight against terrorism and work for stability,” she said.

Egypt’s military has expanded its domestic status and influence under Abdel Fattah el Sisi, a former army chief who has been president since 2014, waging

operations against militants in the Sinai Peninsula.

Benedicte Jeannerod, Human Rights Watch Director for France, said Sisi’s government was presiding over the worst repression in Egypt in decades. “By signing a mega-arms contract ... France is only encouraging this,” she said late on Monday.

The deal also covers contracts for missile provider MBDA and equipment provider Safran Electronics & Defence worth another 200 million euros.

France concluded more than 7.5 billion euros in arms deals with Egypt between 2010-2019, including 24 of the same warplane, the Rafale, in 2015 in what was its first export sale. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Iraq health minister resigns over hospital fire

Iraq’s Health Minister Hassan al-Tamimi resigned on Tuesday over a fire from an exploding oxygen tank at a Baghdad Covid-19 hospital last month that killed more than 80 people, the government said in a statement.

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s cabinet also ordered the dismissal of the director of the Ibn Khatib hospital and other senior hospital officials. The entire hospital had been converted to treat Covid-19 patients.

The April 24 blaze highlighted



the neglect of a healthcare system that was once one of the best in the Middle East, but has been wrecked by conflict, international sanctions, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. — Reuters

TEHRAN

Iran police probe Swiss diplomat’s death after ‘fall’

Iranian police have announced an investigation into the death of a Swiss diplomat whose body a rescue official said was found on Tuesday morning at the foot of a tower block.

“Specialised police units are in the process of examining” the circumstances around the death of a “52-year-old Swiss citizen employed by the Swiss embassy in Tehran,” the national police said in a brief online statement.

Mojtaba Khaledi, spokesman



for the national rescue service, said that the body was found in the morning after the diplomat “fell from a (residential) tower in Kamranieh,” a northern district of Tehran. —AFP

AMMAN

Jordan partially reopens two border posts

Jordan reopened on Monday two border posts closed nine months ago due to the coronavirus pandemic — one with Saudi Arabia, the other with Syria — the interior ministry said.

But there are strict limits on the numbers allowed in each day and travellers are required to be in possession of a negative PCR test, before taking an additional test upon arrival in Jordan. Two hundred people per day will be allowed in from Saudi Arabia through the Al-Omari post, and



150 people from Syria through the Jaber crossing, the interior ministry said. Jordanian authorities had closed the two posts in August, after staff became infected with coronavirus. — AFP

In brief

■ YANGON



JAPANESE SCRIBE CHARGED IN FOR SPREADING FALSE NEWS

A Japanese journalist detained in Myanmar last month has been charged with spreading false news, an official at the Japanese Embassy in Yangon said on Tuesday, amid a crackdown on media since the military seized power three months ago.

Yuki Kitazumi, who had been picked up from his home by troops and taken into custody on April 19, is the first foreign journalist to be charged since the military ousted the elected government of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Kitazumi, who was being held at Insein Prison in Yangon, has been charged under section 505A of the penal code. — **Reuters**

■ KATHMANDU



NEPAL APPEALS FOR COVID-19 VACCINES AS CASES RISE

Nepal urgently needs at least 1.6 million AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine doses to administer second shots as the Himalayan country is recording a surge in new coronavirus cases.

"People who have already got the first dose will be in difficulty if they don't receive their second dose within the stipulated time", said Samir Adhikari, a senior official of the Ministry of Health and Population in capital Kathmandu.

On Monday, Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli urged foreign donors to supply vaccines and critical care medicines to prevent a collapse of the small country's creaky health infrastructure. — **Reuters**

■ SYDNEY



AUSTRALIAN PM HEARS EMOTIONAL PLEA FOR ASYLUM-SEEKERS

A woman approached Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison in tears on Tuesday after he held a news conference in Queensland, as she made an emotional plea for him to help her family in Cameroon and asylum-seekers from Africa.

The incident was caught on camera after Morrison had just finished a news conference in the city of Rockhampton, where he fielded questions about his travel ban on Australian citizens returning from Covid-ravaged India.

Morrison listened to the woman and told her that government officials would help her. — **Reuters**

Taliban launches huge attack after deadline for US pull-out

LASHKAR GAH: Afghan security forces fought back a huge Taliban offensive in southern Helmand province in the last 24 hours, officials and residents said on Tuesday, as militants launched assaults around the country following a missed US deadline to withdraw troops.

Although the United States did not meet the May 1 withdrawal deadline agreed in talks with the Taliban last year, its pull-out has begun, with President Joe Biden announcing all troops will out by September 11. Critics of the decision to withdraw say the militants will try to sweep back into power.

"There was a thunderstorm of heavy weapons and blasts in the city and the sound of small arms was like someone was making popcorn," Mulah Jan, a resident of a suburb of provincial capital Lashkar Gah, told Reuters.

"I took all my family members to the corner of the room, hearing the heavy blasts and bursts of gunfire as if it was happening behind our walls," he said. Families that could afford to leave had fled, but he had been unable to go, waiting with his family in fear before the Taliban were pushed back.

Attullah Afghan, the head of Helmand's provincial council, said the Taliban had launched their huge offensive on Monday



Handover ceremony at Camp Anthonic, from US Army, to Afghan Defence Forces in Helmand province, Afghanistan on Sunday. — **Reuters**

from multiple directions, attacking checkpoints around the outskirts of Lashkar Gah, taking over some of them.

Afghan security forces had launched air strikes and deployed elite commando forces to the area. The insurgents had

been pushed back but fighting was continuing on Tuesday and hundreds of families had been displaced, he added.

RESONANCE

A Taliban surge in Helmand would have particular resonance, as the opium-growing desert province was where US and British forces suffered the bulk of their losses during the 20-year war.

As part of the pullout, US forces handed over a base in Helmand to Afghan troops two days ago.

The Afghan defence ministry said that in addition to Helmand, security forces have been responding to attacks by the Taliban in at least six other provinces, including southeastern Ghazni and southern Kandahar in the past 24 hours.

The defence ministry said just over 100 Taliban fighters had been killed in Helmand. It did not provide details on casualties among Afghan security forces.

The Taliban did not immediately respond to request for comment.

The May 1 deadline for US troops to pull out was agreed last year under former President Donald Trump. The Taliban rejected Biden's announcement that troops would stay on past it but withdraw over the next four-and-a-half months. — **Reuters**

Chinese Navy to help Indonesia salvage sunken submarine

JAKARTA: Chinese navy ships have arrived off Bali to help haul up a submarine that sank last month killing 53 crew, the Indonesian Navy said on Tuesday as it geared up for a deep-sea salvage operation.

The help arrived after other foreign ships from Australia, Singapore and Malaysia left the archipelago, having assisted Indonesian authorities in finding the stricken vessel.

The *KRI Nanggala 402* — one of five submarines in Indonesia's fleet — disappeared last month while it was scheduled to take part in live torpedo training exercises.

An underwater rescue vehicle supplied by neighbouring Singapore gave visual confirmation that the German-built sub was lying on the sea floor more than 800 metres deep, broken in three parts, confirming there was no hope of finding survivors.

Two Chinese salvage ships were on standby in waters off Bali, while a third was expected to arrive later on Tuesday, the Indonesian Navy said, adding that Chinese Navy officials in Bali were helping to examine data collected on the submarine. All three salvage ships can dive up to 4,500 metres deep. Indonesia's Navy said Beijing's ambassador to the country had offered the help to Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto. — **AFP**

Thailand starts vaccination drive in Bangkok district

BANGKOK: Thailand launched a campaign on Tuesday to vaccinate 50,000 people living in a crowded river-side district of the capital Bangkok, as the country tries to contain a third wave of coronavirus infections.

Authorities aim to vaccinate about 70pc of people in Khlong Toei, an area that is home to about 80,000 people, after more than 300 residents became infected in the latest outbreak that started in early April.

The inoculation drive will last about two weeks and health workers also intend to test up to 1,000 people per day, said Asawin Kwanmuang, Governor of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

Thailand, which for the most part brought the virus under control for around a year, has recently faced a spike in cases including the highly transmissible B.1.1.7 variant that has accounted for over half of its

total cases and deaths.

A third of the new cases since April have been from Bangkok, prompting health authorities to focus on the capital and three surrounding provinces, with the rest of Thailand's 77 provinces already largely under control. "The provinces are able to control the outbreak and new cases are decreasing, leaving only Bangkok and three surrounding provinces that are still seeing a slow uptick in infections", Opas Karnkawinpong, Director-General of the Disease Control Department, told a news conference.

Besides Khlong Toei, authorities will also ramp up testing in seven other crowded Bangkok communities to contain developing clusters.

A new cluster was identified in a factory in Samut Prakan province, on the outskirts of Bangkok, where 160 were infected. — **Reuters**



A woman from Klong Toey community receives Covid-19 vaccine in Bangkok, on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

Desperate for oxygen, Indian hospitals go to court

NEW DELHI: A court in India's capital New Delhi has become the last hope for many hospitals struggling to get oxygen for Covid-19 patients as supplies run dangerously short while government officials bicker over who is responsible.

A two-judge bench of the Delhi High Court has been holding almost daily video conferences to hear petitions from hospitals invoking India's constitutional right to protection of life. Local and federal officials are attending.

The court's intervention has saved lives, lawyers say.

On Sunday, with just 30 minutes of oxygen left for 42 virus patients at Sitaram Bhartia Hospital, and new supplies nowhere in sight, hospital authorities approached the Delhi court as a "last resort" for help, lawyer Shyel Trehan said.

The judges ordered the Delhi state government to immediately arrange supplies.

"Oxygen cylinders arrived soon after the hearing, and a tank arrived a few hours later", Trehan said.

The shortage of medical oxygen has plagued the city of 20 million people for about two weeks, with unprecedented scenes of patients dying on hospital beds, in ambulances and in carparks outside, gasping for air.

Delhi is recording about 20,000 new Covid-19 cases a day. As the health system buckles, the city says it needs 976 tonnes of medical oxygen daily, but gets less



People wait to refill their medical oxygen cylinders for Covid-19 patients under home quarantine at a private refill centre in New Delhi on Tuesday. — **AFP**

India halted its most popular sports tournament on Tuesday as the number of coronavirus infections climbed past 20 million, a dismal milestone crossed only by the US

than 490 tonnes, allocated by the federal government.

CRICKET LEAGUE HALTED

India halted its most popular sports tournament on Tuesday and the country's opposition chief called for a nationwide lockdown as the number of coronavirus infections climbed past 20 million, a dismal milestone

crossed only by the United States.

Cricket officials suspended the money-spinning Indian Premier League (IPL), after the country added 10 million cases in just over four months, versus the more than 10 months taken for the first 10 million.

"These are difficult times, especially in India, and while we have tried to bring in some positivity and cheer, it is imperative that the tournament is now suspended and everyone goes back to their families and loved ones in these trying times", the IPL said in a statement.

With 3.45 million active cases, India recorded 357,229 new infections over the last 24 hours, while deaths rose 3,449 for a toll of 222,408, health ministry data showed. Experts say actual numbers could be five to 10 times higher, however. — **Reuters**

23 dead, dozens hurt as elevated metro collapses in Mexico

MEXICO CITY: An elevated metro line collapsed in the Mexican capital on Monday, leaving at least 23 people dead and dozens injured as a train came plunging down, authorities said.

Carriages were seen hanging from the overpass in a tangle of twisted cables with the ends pointing towards the ground in a V-shape.

“Unfortunately there are 23 deceased,” including minors, Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum told reporters at the scene in the south of the capital.

Around 65 others received hospital treatment following the dramatic accident, one of the worst to strike the Mexico City metro since it was inaugurated in 1969.

Anxious relatives gathered at the site awaiting news of those believed to have been aboard the train.

Efrain Juarez said that his son was in the wreckage.

“My daughter-in-law called us. She was with him and she told us the structure fell down over them,” he said.

Another man who did not give



Cranes work at a site where an overpass for a metro partially collapsed with train cars on it at Olivos station in Mexico City, Mexico on Tuesday. — Reuters

his name said that his brother was among those trapped.

“He came with his wife and they managed to get her out, but he was crushed there and we don’t know anything,” he said.

‘STRUCTURE WAS SHAKING’

Dozens of emergency workers were seen trying to rescue victims from the carriages.

The work had to be suspended because of fears the wreckage was too unstable, but it later resumed with the help of a crane.

A car was trapped under the rubble, but a person inside managed to get out alive, she said.

The police, who brought rescue dogs, urged onlookers to move back in case of falling debris.

“Suddenly I saw that the

structure was shaking,” an unidentified witness told the Mexican television network Televisa.

“When the dust cleared we ran... to see if we could help. There were no screams. I don’t know if they were in shock,” she added.

Medics were seen taking the injured away on stretchers.

—AFP

Biden to allow up to 62,500 refugees into US after flak

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden announced on Monday, after coming under fierce criticism, that he was raising the maximum number of refugees allowed into the United States this year to 62,500 — up from the 15,000 caps imposed by his predecessor Donald Trump.

The change follows backlash from allies over Biden’s earlier decision to keep the Trump-era limits — a politically costly moment of confusion that stood out in a White House notable for its iron discipline in its first three months.

“This erases the historically low number set by the previous administration of 15,000, which did not reflect America’s values as a nation that welcomes and supports refugees,” Biden said in a statement.

“The new admissions cap will also reinforce efforts that are already underway to expand the United States’ capacity to admit refugees so that we can reach the goal of 125,000 refugee admissions that I intend to set for the coming fiscal year.”

The programme is only for refugees selected by US security and intelligence agencies from United Nations camps around the world.



President Joe Biden delivers remarks during a visit at Tidewater Community College in Norfolk, Virginia, on Monday. — Reuters

The course correction was quickly welcomed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which is controlled by Biden’s Democratic party.

“I welcome the Biden administration’s announcement that it will increase the number of refugees allowed to be resettled in the United States. This is an important step in continuing our proud, bipartisan tradition of providing refugees protection through resettlement,” the committee chairman, Senator Bob Menendez, tweeted.

The American Civil Liberties Union, a powerful advocacy group, also voiced approval, saying that the country’s “reputation” was at stake. — AFP

UN condemns Colombia using ‘excessive’ force

GENEVA: The UN rights office condemned on Tuesday the “excessive use of force” by security officers in Colombia, after numerous deaths during days of protests against proposed tax reform.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights voiced “profound shock” at a further incident overnight in the city of Cali, saying police “opened fire” on demonstrators, reportedly killing and injuring a number of people.

Spokeswoman Marta Hurtado told reporters in Geneva that the situation remained volatile.

“What we can say clearly is that we have received reports, and we have witnesses, is (of) excessive use of force by security officers, shooting, live ammunition being used, beatings of demonstrators and as well detentions,” she said.

Protesters in Colombia called Monday for a new mass rally after 19 people died.

— AFP

Bill and Melinda Gates to divorce, but charitable foundation to remain intact

SEATTLE: Billionaire benefactors Bill and Melinda Gates, co-founders of one of the world’s largest private charitable foundations, filed for divorce on Monday after 27 years of marriage but pledged to continue their philanthropic work together.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has become one of the most powerful and influential forces in global public health, spending more than \$50 billion over the past two decades to bring a business approach to combating poverty and disease.

The Gates have backed widely praised programmes in malaria and polio eradication, child nutrition and vaccines. The foundation last year committed some \$1.75 billion to Covid-19 relief.

In a joint petition for dissolution of marriage, the couple asserted their legal union was “irretrievably broken,” but said they had reached an agreement on how to divide their



Bill and Melinda Gates attend the Presidential Medals of Freedom ceremonies in the East Room of the White House in Washington, on November 22, 2016. — Reuters

marital assets. No details of that accord were disclosed in the filing in King County Superior Court in Seattle.

Bill Gates, 65, who co-founded Microsoft Corp, and his spouse, Melinda French Gates, 56, met after she joined the software giant as a product manager, and

they dated for a few years before marrying in January 1994 in Hawaii.

“After a great deal of thought and a lot of work on our relationship, we have made the decision to end our marriage,” the two said in a joint statement posted on each of their individual

Twitter accounts.

“We no longer believe we can grow together as a couple in the next phase of our lives. We ask for space and privacy for our family as we begin to navigate this new life,” they said.

The divorce petition, which states that the couple have no minor children, comes after the youngest of their three offspring recently turned 18.

Launched in 2000, the nonprofit Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation ranks as the largest private philanthropic foundation in the United States and one of the world’s biggest, with net assets of \$43.3 billion at the end of 2019, according to the latest full-year financials shown on its website.

From 1994 through 2018, the couple gifted more than \$36 billion to the Seattle-based foundation, the website said.

Last year, investor Warren Buffett reported donating more than \$2 billion of stock from his Berkshire Hathaway Inc to

the Gates Foundation as part of previously announced plans to give away his entire fortune before his death.

‘NO CHANGES TO THEIR ROLES’

In their divorce petition, the couple asks the court “to dissolve our marriage” and to divide their communal property, business interests and liabilities “as set forth in our separation contract,” though that accord was not made public.

Bill Gates is ranked No 4 on the Forbes list of the world’s wealthiest individuals, with an estimated \$124 billion fortune.

In a separate statement, the Gates Foundation said the couple would remain as co-chairs and trustees of the organisation.

“They will continue to work together to shape and approve foundation strategies, advocate for the foundation’s issues, and set the organisation’s overall direction,” the foundation’s statement said. — Reuters

MADRID

Covid-influenced crunch poll in Spanish capital

Voters formed long queues at polling stations in Madrid on Tuesday to maintain social distancing in a regional election centred around unorthodox Covid-19 policies that could shake Spain’s political landscape.

The unusual mid-week vote in Spain’s wealthiest region is poised to return Isabel Diaz Ayuso, from the conservative Popular Party (PP), to power as a regional leader, according to opinion polls.

Ayuso, 42, has won the sup-



port of many Madrid residents by defying Spain’s left-wing government and refusing to close down bars and restaurants to curb the coronavirus pandemic.

— Reuters

VIENNA

Austria says it will only buy Sputnik V vaccine

Austria will only buy Russia’s Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine if the European Medicines Agency approves it, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz’s office said on Tuesday, further clarifying its position on the planned purchase.

Facing public frustration at a slow vaccine roll-out, Kurz said on March 31 Austria would probably order a million Sputnik V doses within a week, but completion of that order still has yet to be announced.

It would be the first by a west-



ern European country. Hungary and Slovakia are the only European Union countries to have bought Sputnik V, and only Hungary has used it so far.

— Reuters

JOHANNESBURG

ANC reaffirms ‘step aside’ rule for members

A top committee of South Africa’s governing African National Congress (ANC) has reaffirmed that all members charged with corruption or other serious crimes must vacate their posts within 30 days or face suspension, the party said on Tuesday.

The ANC added in a statement that the National Working Committee had instructed that letters be written to affected members “implementing this decision, and outlining the terms and conditions regulating their partici-



pation and conduct during the suspension”. The “step aside” rule is an important test of President Cyril Ramaphosa’s control over the ANC and his commitment to tackling graft. — Reuters

A ‘watchful’ eye for better work...

The government is trying to be active in management of its works. It is focusing on productivity and making its services swift by doing away with all bottlenecks which create hurdles.

Keeping in view all these efforts, it seems imperative to have a “watching eye”. This is the most advisable way to ensure that the work is done effectively, smoothly and speedily in each ministry and organisations. This apparatus will also evaluate employees’ commitment to give service to people in a timely manner and gauge how they are welcomed in government offices. This will help in finding out areas of weakness and lacunae required to be cured. But the team which will be given the task to have a covert eye should have full knowledge and understanding to be able to accurately assess the situation and find out the weaknesses.

For example, it should be able to find out if there is any delay in services given to the people. It does not mean that the employee only should face the blame. There may be a delay because of a smaller number of staff compared with the work load. In such cases the management and not the employee should be held responsible. Sometime, for the delay in services, lack of capabilities of an employee or his nature can be the reason. In that case the onus falls on the employee himself. Therefore, the accountability should be fair for all.

Without this, a talk about any



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THIS WILL
EVALUATE
EMPLOYEES’
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TO GIVE SERVICE
TO PEOPLE IN A
TIMELY MANNER
AND GAUGE
HOW THEY ARE
WELCOMED IN
GOVERNMENT
OFFICES

administrative improvement is nothing put throwing dust in the eyes. The reality is stark. There are lot of complications. This should be dealt with without delay. The idea of a watchful eye can help in dealing with such situations and the process of improvement. This will give clear picture to the officials about the performance of an employee, and his adapting to any changes taking place in the work as well as his his ability to keep pace with the developments.

It is a reality that the actual hurdle in any improvement in the work is the employee himself. If their response will be weak to such efforts, they would never be able to give proper service to the people. For this, there should be certain rules to monitor the speed of accomplishment of work and number of tasks completed without any mistake and their comparison with their other colleagues.

This requires government organisations to establish the weak points with proof, then refer such cases for investigation or take administrative action or transfer him as punishment. Only a watchful eye can help in the process and make all these details available.

There are many companies and banks use such means to evaluate their employees and monitor how they are dealing with their customers. They send undercover agents to the bank or the company and ask for certain services which can help

them evaluate the performance. This is how, sometime, even restaurants assess how their customers are being dealt and what is the performance of their employees in the process, from welcoming at the entrance to serving the food.

Such services can help in keeping a guard on the quality of services given by the ministries to the people, particularly those who have lots of customers and services. It is particularly important to ascertain the satisfaction level of the beneficiaries and returns of their investment.

Such a method can also help the government organisations to assess employees and promote those who are doing extraordinary work to compensate their performance and encourage them. This will also motivate others to try to be equally good or even better in the work and get gradual promotions.

Everywhere such methods are being used to improve the quality of services and work. Such measures are not alien. At some places electronic means of evaluation are also used to gauge the level of services in various offices as a solution. This is because seniors, manually, cannot keep an eye on the work of each member of his team. A mechanism like this can do this job fairly.

If such means are developed in government organisations, it will relieve people from ordeals which they face sometime in certain offices.

DISRUPTIVE DRIVE

Looming election win masks disquiet over economy

DAVE GRAHAM

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s clashes with business elites have helped him to the cusp of mid-term election triumph, but also undermined investment and economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Now, a contrasting, friendlier message to business is emerging from officials and candidates from the ruling National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) looking towards the rest of his term, eager to show they can deliver jobs and growth.

“I will give priority to investment wherever it comes from,” said Alfonso Durazo, Lopez Obrador’s former security minister, who is pitching a raft of projects to revitalise the northern state of Sonora if elected governor for MORENA in the June 6 vote.

Mexicans have so far backed Lopez Obrador on his disruptive drive to renegotiate or cancel billions of dollars in contracts that he argues were the product of entrenched corruption between big business and politicians conspiring to bilk taxpayers.

Opinion polls suggest MORENA and its allies will dominate the national, state and municipal elections, winning the bulk of 15 governorships up for grabs, and could get close to a two-thirds majority in the lower house of Congress.

But that support partly reflects discontent with older parties, and officials, lawmakers and voters say MORENA must improve its economic

record to stay on top in the long term.

There’s not enough work in Mexico. What we have to fight for is jobs, so we don’t need to migrate to the United States

JULIAN FERNANDEZ
A Mexican worker

MORENA gubernatorial candidates for states including Baja California and Sinaloa in the north and Tlaxcala in the centre, as well as mayoral hopefuls in and around Mexico’s second city Guadalajara, have all made overtures to investors.

And Finance Minister Arturo Herrera has been particularly insistent on the need to promote investment.

Gabriela Cuevas, a MORENA federal congresswoman, said the party had always made clear it would shake up the system, but now needed to explain how the new rules would work for business.

So far it had pursued “more of a strategy of deconstruction, rather than constructing a new economic policy,” she said. In Sonora, while voters are broadly supportive of MORENA, many also cite concerns about the economy, alongside gang violence and a soaring pandemic death toll.

“There’s not enough work in Mexico. What we have to fight for is jobs, so we don’t need to migrate to the United States,” said Julian Fernandez, a 51-year-old worker in Sonora’s capital Hermosillo, who voted for Lopez Obrador as president but is now leaning towards Durazo’s main gubernatorial rival.

Lopez Obrador took office in December 2018 promising to reduce crime and increase economic growth. Instead, the next two years saw more homicides than ever before, and Mexico’s economy was shrinking even before the pandemic hit.

— Reuters

DIPLOMATIC DANCE

North Korea and US tread cautious line on nuclear standoff

JOSH SMITH

While North Korea’s barrage of complaints about US President Joe Biden’s policies over the weekend might appear to be ratcheting up tensions, some signs suggest Pyongyang hasn’t ruled out diplomacy with the new team in Washington.

Few observers expect talks to resume soon — both countries are more focused on issues including the coronavirus pandemic and its fallout — and there are no easy ways to resolve their thorniest differences.

But some analysts say that despite its bluster, North Korea doesn’t appear to have shut the door entirely on the Biden administration just yet.

“There are signs that Washington and Pyongyang are in the early, cautious stages of a diplomatic dance,” the US-based 38 North programme, which monitors North Korea, said in a report on Monday.

On Sunday, North Korea released a series of official statements slamming Biden’s policies and rhetoric so far as more of the same Cold War-style hostilities embraced by previous American presidents, and dismissed talk of diplomacy as an attempt to cover up those threatening policies.

The statements came after the White House on Friday said officials had concluded a policy review in which complete denuclearisation of North Korea remained the goal. It said it would explore diplomacy to that



President Joe Biden looks through binoculars to see North Korea from Observation Post Ouellette in Panmunjom on December 7, 2013. — Reuters

SOME ANALYSTS
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JUST YET

end but not seek a grand bargain with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

While North Korea mentioned the review, it did not specifically respond to the few details that have been released, a sign some analysts interpreted as evidence that Pyongyang is withholding judgement for now.

The North Korean statements came from lower-level foreign ministry officials, did not call out or insult Biden by name, and the threats of “worse crisis” were still conditional on US actions, 38 North noted.

“It would not be a surprise if both sides use this initial period to probe and posture a bit,” the report said.

Republican Donald Trump held three summit meetings with Kim in an attempt to persuade the North Korean leader to surrender his nuclear arsenal, but achieved no major breakthrough.

Talks have been stalled since 2019, with North Korea saying it has no interest in negotiations if the United States doesn’t drop hostile policies, including tough economic sanctions.

— Reuters

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sport



TIME RUNNING OUT FOR WASTEFUL WERNER TO PROVE HIS WORTH

LONDON: Chelsea welcome Real Madrid to Stamford Bridge on Wednesday still with much to do to reach the Champions League final after failing to land the killer blow when the 13-time European champions were on the ropes in last week's first leg.

A 1-1 draw in the Spanish capital still gives the Blues the upper hand thanks to their away goal, but Thomas Tuchel's men could have had a much more convincing advantage but for a tale of two strikers.

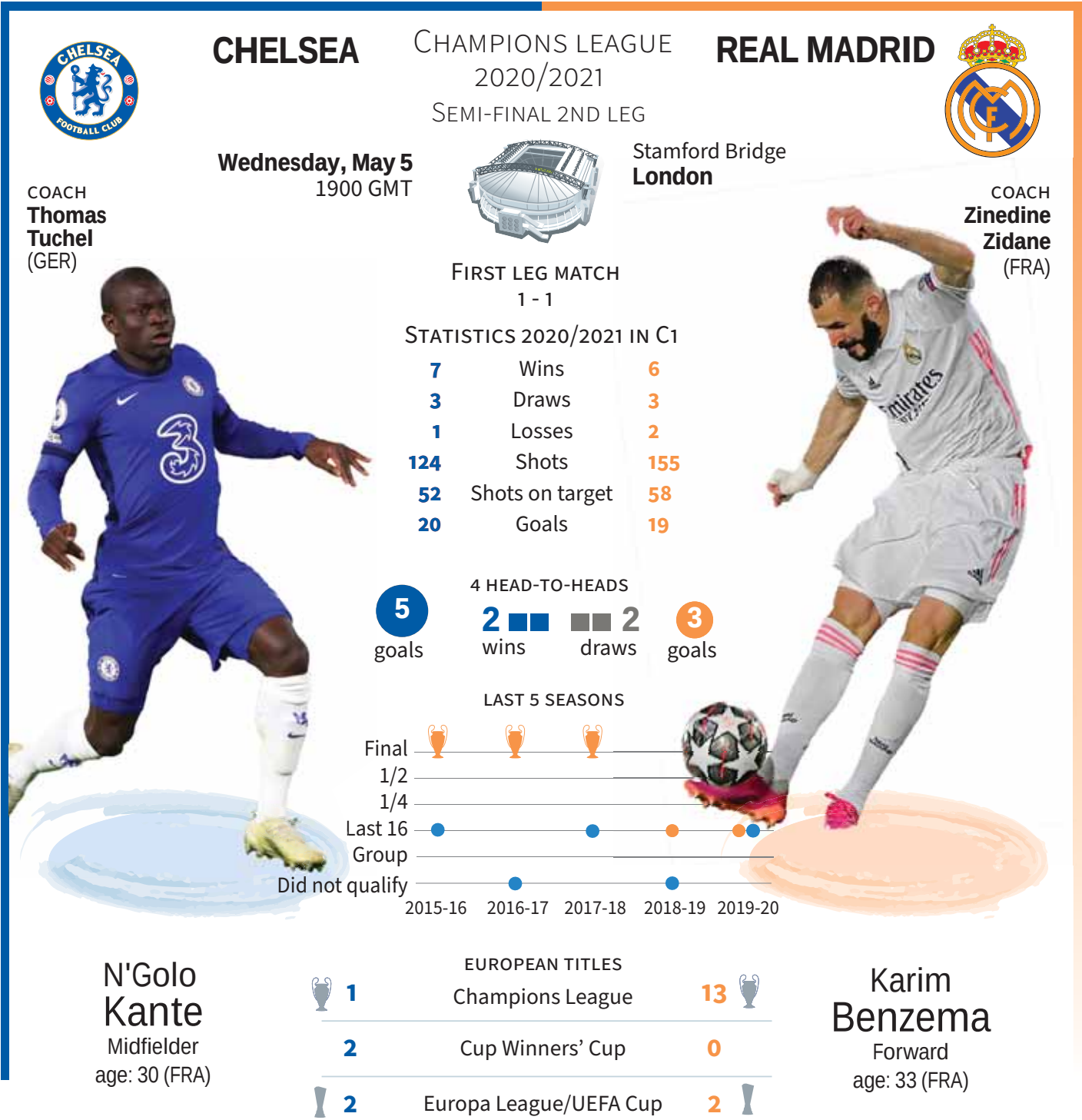
In a story of his first season at Chelsea, Timo Werner missed a glorious chance to put his side in front early as the outstretched leg of Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois denied his old club.

That miss even provoked criticism from the wife of Werner's teammate Thiago Silva.

"Every team I go to there is a striker who keeps missing goals", Isabelle da Silva posted in a since deleted Instagram message.

At the other end, after Christian Pulisic had put Chelsea in front, Karim Benzema needed barely a half-chance to blast Real back on level terms for his 28th goal of the season and become the joint fourth highest goalscorer in Champions League history.

Those are the sorts of numbers Chelsea expected when they paid £47 million (\$65 million) for Werner last June at a time when other clubs, including Madrid, were scrambling to find the money just to pay their players as the coronavirus pandemic halted football across



Sources: UEFA, AFP Photos



Europe. Backed by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, Chelsea were the club least deterred by the pandemic as they splashed out a total of £220 million in the transfer market last summer.

That expense has been rewarded by a return to the last four of the Champions League for the first time in seven years.

Yet, none of the attacking trio of new signings, Werner, Kai Havertz and Hakim Ziyech have consistently shown their best form.

Havertz and Ziyech started the first leg on the bench, but Tuchel has remained loyal to Werner since taking charge in January despite his lack of goals. The German international has scored just three times in his last 38 games for club and country, one of which came against fourth-tier Morecambe in the FA Cup. Tammy Abraham has been linked with a move away from west London due to his limited opportunities under Tuchel, while 34-year-old Olivier Giroud is out of the contract at the end of the season.

'No panic'

The need for a prolific goalscorer to back up the significant defensive improvement since Tuchel replaced Frank Lampard has even sparked rumours Abramovich could be forced to spend big again.

Chelsea are among a number of clubs interested in Borussia Dortmund's Erling Haaland.

But Tuchel remains confident that Werner can prove to be the consistent finisher the club need.

— AFP



New Zealand overtake England as ODI No 1

New Zealand have overhauled world champions England as the number one side in the one-day international (ODI) rankings, the ICC said on Monday. England, who have dropped to fourth in the 50-over format, have retained the top spot in the Twenty20 rankings. Australia sit second followed by India.



Roma coach Fonseca to leave at end of season

Paulo Fonseca will leave his job as Roma coach at the end of the season, the Serie A club confirmed on Tuesday. According to reports former Juventus, Napoli and Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri is favourite to take over the three-time Italian champions who last won Serie A in 2001 and are trophyless since 2008.

BCCI TO 'ARRANGE' INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS' SAFE PASSAGE

INDIA'S IPL SUSPENDED OVER PANDEMIC

NEW DELHI: The Indian Premier League, the world's richest Twenty20 cricket tournament, was suspended on Tuesday and its players sent home as India battles a massive surge in coronavirus cases.

The move, which follows growing controversy over the competition, comes a day after two players — Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier — tested positive, forcing a match to be postponed.

The Chennai Super Kings added in a statement on Tuesday that its bowling coach L Balaji and a member of the side's travel support staff tested positive after undergoing tests in India's capital New Delhi on Sunday.

"The Indian Premier League Governing Council and Board of Control for Cricket in India in an emergency meeting has unanimously decided to postpone (the) IPL 2021 season, with immediate effect," a statement from organisers said.

"The BCCI does not want to compromise on the safety of the players, support staff and the other participants involved in organising the IPL," it added.

India, which has reported more than 20 million infections so far, with just over 222,000 deaths, is also due to host the Twenty20

World Cup in October and November.

The high-paying IPL, which was taking place in biosecure "bubble" conditions, attracts many of the world's top cricketers, including players from Australia, England and South Africa.

'DIFFICULT TIMES'
BCCI Vice-President Rajiv Shukla said the governing body would "make the arrangements" for the IPL's international players to leave India.

"About the foreign players, as we have said, we will try and ensure all of them get to their homes," he said.

Cricket Australia said in a statement that it was in touch with the BCCI to "ensure the safe accommodation and repatriation of Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators back home".

The governing body added that it was not seeking exemptions from the Australian government's move to ban travellers from India from entering the country until at least May 15.

Cricket South Africa said it was in touch with franchises for the "expedited travel of all South African players and support staff" back home, where they will undergo home quarantine.

— AFP

Game-changing IPL plays safe

IPL STROKES

PRANAV MEHTA

This column from its start has been diagnosing the problems and strengths of various teams and their players in IPL. But now since, IPL has been suspended temporarily, let's try and understand what right and wrong was IPL on its own doing and should have been organised amidst this pandemic.

Let's talk some numbers, as per Wikipedia, 2015 IPL contributed 11.5 billion rupees to the GDP of the Indian economy. So for other years, we estimated somewhere around those lines, which is massive money for just 60 days of madness.

The richest cricket board in the world has a total income estimated at around Rs 3,730 crores, out of which approximately Rs 2,500 crores comes from IPL.

There was a time when cricket was a sport and played to enjoy, but in the current world and after the entry of IPL, cricket is a profession and many people take it as a career option. IPL may provide entertainment to the people of India, but for many, it's a matter of their bread and butter. We could easily include, players, groundsmen, curators, scorers and umpires at prime. IPL also helps boast other related markets. When such a massive mega event

is helpful, it will obviously provide job and business opportunities to plenty of people. Business sectors such as food, hotels or resorts, restaurants, travel and tourism, events, freelancers, media, etc also benefit from the IPL.

How was IPL structured this year?

So basically, one person was kept in complete isolation for a certain time and made sure that he doesn't have Covid through multiple tests. Once they are sure, then these secured people were only allowed to interact and be with the safe people only. They were allowed to be in very restricted places, rather than only in those places where they were required to be. Even though they are cut out from the world, still they would undergo consistent tests to make sure that they are safe. Also, no person was allowed to go out of this bubble and he/she did, then they had to again undergo self-isolation.

So what went wrong?

When you are dealing with a very large number of people, it is always possible that one small mistake could have a very big price to be pay. Although, still it's not clear whose mistake it is, the biosecure bubble is no safer and the tournament committee realises it.

The social media outbreak and personal reviews!

For the past few days, social media's one of the most trending



topic has been, should IPL have been conducted this near amidst this pandemic or not? So we decided to take a few public reviews on this topic.

Jatan Sethia, Sr Finance Manager, MHD LLC mentioned, The continuation of IPL (like state elections) has been a distraction on the pandemic issue and hence I believe that IPL should be cancelled, and all its franchises should do more for the public in these tough times.

Sharad Krishnamoorthy, Group GM Finance, Towell Group mentioned, Considering that the bio bubble is no longer 100 per cent secure and Covid positive cases are emerging, it is best to suspend the tournament until the bio bubble is secure again. If this is not achievable, this edition of IPL should be rescheduled to a later date or cancelled.

Manikandan Rajagopal, Executive Secretary to Chairman, Al Naba Holding LLC mentioned, IPL gives a ray of hope for others. This virus is going to last at least for another year or 2, There is no point in sitting at home and waiting for it to go. We should learn to fight against it.

Varadharajan S, a local cricket enthusiast mentioned, Players are participating in the IPL by making a lot of sacrifices. Yes, money is there, but being in a bubble for 60 days is not easy. We must respect that aspect as well.

Hemin Desai, former Oman national cricket team player mentioned, If by putting in some more effort, if the IPL can be continued, then that's the best option. IPL not only provides job opportunity to many but it's also a platform for youngsters to showcase the talent.

Saleh al Khusaibi remembered for laying foundation to OOC

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 4

The late Saleh bin Khalifa al Khusaibi, former advisor for private organisations, Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports Affairs, will be best remembered for his contributions to sports in the Sultanate.

Saleh al Khusaibi, 67, the first Secretary-General of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), passed away after a surgery on April 28.

Al Khusaibi was instrumental in laying the foundation of the premier sporting body of the Sultanate, the Oman Olympic Committee, in 1983.

The enthusiastic administrator served the OOC from 1983 to 1994 joining as its first Secretary-General. Saleh was also the Chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) and later appointed as an advisor at the OVA.

SAS Naqvi, who had worked along with Al Khusaibi as the first technical advisor at the OOC recalled him as a great friend and determined administrator who worked towards developing the Oman sports.

"He had great knowledge about



sports and wanted to develop the sporting activities in the Sultanate through the Oman Olympic Committee. I had the honour of working along with him when he was the first Secretary-General of the OCC and me as the first technical advisor at the Olympic body of Oman."

"His contribution was especially noteworthy in setting up the premier sports body of Oman Olympic Committee in the Sultanate during its initial years."

"He was a great team leader and worked hard to lift the status of Oman sports. I have also lost a great friend in his demise," the veteran hockey personality added.



West Ham United's Michail Antonio celebrates scoring their second goal. – Reuters

Antonio double sees West Ham go fifth in EPL

BURNLEY, England: Striker Michail Antonio scored twice on his return from injury to fire West Ham United to a 2-1 win at Burnley on Monday which lifted them up to fifth place in the Premier League and kept alive their hopes of Champions League football next season.

The home side took the lead in the 19th minute when Chris Wood was brought down in the box by Tomas Soucek, and the New Zealand international picked himself up to drill the resulting penalty low to keeper Lukasz Fabianski's right.

The lead was short-lived as Antonio, who was returning from a hamstring injury suffered in early April, split a pair of defenders to score with a bullet header in the 21st minute.

With West Ham pouring forward, Antonio added what proved to be the winner eight minutes later with a deft finish from a brilliant inswinging ball into the box from Mohamed Said Benrahma.

The victory lifted the Hammers to fifth place with 58 points from 34 games, three behind London rivals Chelsea in the race for the final Champions League spot. "Everybody wants to play in the Champions League. I have been here a few years and there have been so many seasons we were fighting to stay in the league and now we have the opportunity for top four," a delighted Antonio told Sky Sports. — Reuters

PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON MONDAY:

West Brom 1 (Diagne 62) Wolves 1 (Fabio Silva 45+2)
Burnley 1 (Wood 19-pen) West Ham 2 (Antonio 21, 29)
On Sunday
Newcastle 0 Arsenal 2 (Elneny 6, Aubameyang 66)
Manchester United v Liverpool - match postponed
Tottenham 4 (Bale 36, 61, 69, Son 77) Sheffield United 0

Barty ousts Swiatek in Madrid

KVITOVA EDGES KUDERMETOVA TO SET UP BARTY QUARTER



Australia's Ashleigh Barty celebrates winning a point against Poland's Iga Swiatek. – AFP



Czech Republic's Petra Kvitová celebrates after beating Russia's Veronika Kudermetova in Madrid Open. – Reuters

MADRID: World number one Ashleigh Barty edged the battle of the French Open champions on Monday as she beat Poland's Iga Swiatek to reach the Madrid Open quarterfinals.

Barty triumphed at Roland Garros in 2019 before Swiatek sprung another surprise by clinching her own first major title in Paris a year later.

Both players will be among the favourites at the French Open next month but Barty's credentials gained an extra boost in Madrid, where she defeated Swiatek 7-5, 6-4.

"I really enjoyed myself out there tonight, I enjoyed the challenge," said Barty.

"Iga's game is exceptional. It's really, really impressive. I loved testing myself and trying to figure out the puzzle tonight and the challenges that she created for me."

The Australian will now face three-time Madrid champion Petra Kvitová for a place in the semis, after Kvitová beat Russia's Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 4-6, 6-4.

Swiatek's loss brings an end to her nine-match unbeaten run on red clay while Barty extends her own winning streak to 14 matches on the surface.

It was far from straightforward, with Barty having to come from 3-0 behind in the first set and recover from 0-40 down at 3-2 in the second, before sealing victory in an hour and 41 minutes.

KVITOVA PUSHED HARD

Kvitová, who won the tournament in 2011, 2015 and 2018, was also pushed hard by Kudermetova, who is one of the form players on the tour, having won her first WTA title in Charleston last month.

But Kvitová used all her experience and some excellent serving to stay in contention for a record-extending fourth Madrid title.

"Definitely it was a tough one," said Kvitová afterwards. "It was about serving a lot. It was just the one break in each set. I'm really glad I managed most of it mentally. Veronika was really on fire. Since she won Charleston, she really plays great. She will be a big champion. "The whole match I was not relaxed, but calm I would say. That's how I managed to bring the win."

Eighth seed Belinda Bencic is also through after Ons Jabeur retired with a thigh injury when trailing 7-6 (7/2) 4-3.

MADRID OPEN RESULTS

WOMEN (THIRD ROUND):

Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Iga Swiatek (POL x14) 7-5, 6-4; Petra Kvitová (CZE x9) bt Veronika Kudermetova (RUS) 6-3, 4-6, 6-4; Belinda Bencic (SUI x8) bt Ons Jabeur (TUN) 7-6 (7/2), 4-3 abandon; Paula Badosa (ESP) bt Anastasija Sevastova (LAT) 6-7 (0/7), 7-6 (7/3), 6-0

MEN (FIRST ROUND):

Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) bt Adrian Mannarino (FRA) 6-4, 6-0; Daniel Evans (GBR) bt Jeremy Chardy (FRA) 7-6 (8/6), 6-7 (7/9), 6-2; Marcos Giron (USA) bt Pablo Andujar (ESP) 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/4), 7-5; Lloyd Harris (RSA) bt Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x13) 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5); John Isner (USA) bt Miomir Kecmanovic (SRB) 6-4, 7-6 (8/6); Aslan Karatsev (RUS) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 7-5, 6-4; Fabio Fognini (ITA) bt Carlos Taberner (ESP) 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 6-3; Dominik Koepfer (GER) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 6-4, 6-4

In the men's draw, Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov fell in the first round after losing in three sets to South African Lloyd Harris.

Harris, who beat world number four Dominic Thiem and Denis Shapovalov en route to the final in Dubai in March, pulled off another upset by ousting Dimitrov 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5).

The world number 54 held off a late fightback from 13th seed Dimitrov, who saved three match points in the final set before breaking back to force a tie-break.

"It was a big up and down match, I had a set and a break, then I was a break up in the third too," said Harris. "I got a little bit nervous at the end but I'm happy to close it out"

In his first appearance at the Madrid tournament, Harris will now face Australia's 22-year-old Alex de Minaur in round two.

Two-time quarterfinalist John Isner battled past Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic 6-4 7-6 (8/6) while 11th seed Shapovalov defeated another Serbian, Dusan Lajovic, 6-1, 6-3. — AFP

OBC launches virtual sessions on badminton

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 4

The Oman Badminton Committee (OBC) organised various awareness sessions on badminton through virtual communication channels. Three different sessions were organised remotely during holy month of Ramadhan as part of boosting the sports awareness to different categories.

AirBadminton programme, physiology impact of badminton on personal health, umpiring virtual course and hosting of sporting events were the main topics for the online courses.

The last session on tourism events (badminton sports as an example) will be conducted on May 11. The remote sessions were been delivered by certified



trainers from international and regional federation. Jafar Ibrahim, Development Director at Badminton World Federation (BWF) delivered a session on (AirBadminton) which was launched by BWF as a new outdoor game and a new outdoor

shuttlecock, the AirShuttle, in 2019. According to BWF, AirBadminton designed to create opportunities for people of all ages and ability to play badminton on hard, grass and sand surfaces in parks, gardens, streets, playgrounds, and beaches around the world.



Jafar Ibrahim began his online sessions with an introduction on badminton and its playing system. Then, he stated that in 1992, badminton was one of the approved sports in Barcelona Olympic games in 1992. Later, he explained on including badminton

training for schooling as sports courses with a detailed learning process and practical sessions.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth restructured the board directors of OBC as it is chaired by Dr Badriya al Hadabi with membership

of Mohammed bin Khalifa al Mazroui, Ishaq al Hasani, Ruqaya al Omairi and Khalifa al Majrafi as secretary-general.

OBC had received the approval of membership at the Badminton World Federation (BWF) in July last year. The committee which was set up in early 2019 aimed to boost the sport among the domestic clubs and juniors.

Since its formation, OBC had conducted a series of events in the previous and current year including the championships for students in schools and the clubs besides some elementary courses for the referees as an encouragement to have more Omani umpires. OBC's plans were impacted by Covid-19 pandemic as many of open championships and events were postponed and cancelled.



ramadhan



Omani Ramadhan rituals expressed through Warli art

Ramadhan rituals for Omanis are a sacred matter. However, because of the pandemic, many of these rituals had been stopped to avoid the further spread of Covid-19. To reminisce her fun memories of the holy month, Omani artist Marwa al Hinai painted these rituals by using the popular Indian art of Warli... **P14**

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

The righteous will be amidst shades and fountains. And fruits as they desire. "Eat and drink pleasantly for what you used to do." This is how We reward the doers of good.

Al Mursalat

FATWA QUESTION & ANSWER



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

QUESTION

A person converted to Islam in the middle of a Ramadhan day. What should he do to compensate for the missed fasting hours?

ANSWER

He should stop any actions that will break his fast from the day he announced his conversion to Islam. He should try to compensate for the hours he did not fast.

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Narrated AbuHurayrah:
The Prophet said:

When any of you hears the summons to prayer while he has a vessel in his hand, he should not lay it down till he fulfils his need.



Omani Ramadhan rituals expressed through Warli art

By Ruqaya al Kindi

The blessed month of Ramadhan is awaited by both young and old not only in Oman but all over the world because of its value and the spirituality that it carries.

Ramadhan rituals for Omanis are a sacred matter. Having inherited many of these practices from their ancestors, they are keen on keeping them alive. These rituals can be seen not only in how the Omanis behave but how they conduct themselves.

Omani artist Marwa Al Hinai celebrated the holy month of Ramadhan the same as everyone else – not being able to do the things their family have done as a ritual in the past. With Covid19 changing nearly every possible way the holy month is celebrated, she focused her energy on documenting her fond memories of Ramadhan by painting and this time, employing the popular Indian art 'Warli'.

One of those she documented is the moon sighting that puts the holy month of Ramadhan into motion.

People in ancient times relied on primitive methods to explore this month. "Ramadhan kicks off by seeing the crescent moon. In the past, this is through people who have clear eyes and can see the moon from the sky. Once the moon is spotted, the people were informed through the loud noise that the firing of the cannon makes. Once people hear this fired cannon, everyone knows that the next day is the beginning of the month of Ramadhan," Marwa said.

Such practice is nearly extinct today. With technological development, "this month is explored by a specialised committee and people know about seeing Ramadhan's crescent through mainstream media," she pointed out.

Visiting relatives is also one of the customs and traditions done by Omanis during the month of Ramadhan.

"The family members are keen to gather for the Iftar (the meal in which the fasting person breaks his fast and is at sunset). Some people may travel long distances to attend Iftar

parties organised in Ramadhan. They know that these moments are special and they can have a fun time with their relatives," she shared.

Fasting people in the Sultanate used to break the fast with dates (an indication of the Omani's connection to the date palm), water and milk mainly, despite everything that is made at home, including meals and pastries.

Before Iftar, she pointed out, the mothers send their children to the neighbours with some food of Iftar, which include a range of popular dishes.

"It is a distinctive habit that Omani society has preserved since ancient times and embodies the concepts of tolerance, familiarity, love and good neighbourliness," she explained.

"At the same time, dishes of food like dates, milk and Logaimat (popular food) are sent to mosques near their homes. That's for passers-by and poor people to eat them for Iftar. This comes in line with the deeds of righteousness and benevolence, which are frequently done and paid attention to during the holy month of Ramadhan as a kind of worshipping," she added.

Provide Iftar meals for the needy are become active because it has a great reward as it is an act of worships in Ramadhan. From the Islamic perspective, the Messenger of Allah said that "Whoever provides the food for a fasting person to break his fast with, then for his is the same reward as his (the fasting person's), without anything being diminished from the reward of the fasting person."

Therefore, "If you go north the Sultanate or south, you find tents for this purpose along the streets. Whereas, along the public roads in the Sultanate, the passer-by can stop his car and choose one of the tents and eat Iftar," she pointed out.

She added that there are popular habits linked to give the Iftar which is distributing Iftar meals, randomly, for people on the streets whomsoever walking or driving.

Charitable works as well are active

and everyone is eager to do good in this blessed month because they are seeking the pleasure of God and the great reward. "Muslims collaborating together to help the needy and that is to convey messages of familiarity and empathy. Volunteer teams and charitable societies are active during Ramadhan and they provide food, clothes, money and necessary needs for the needy," she explained.

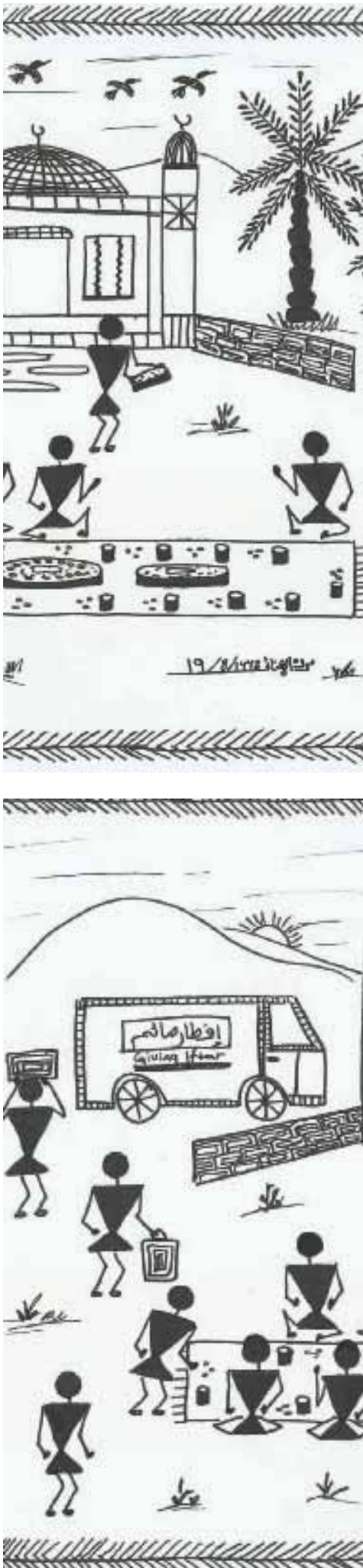
Among Ramadhan customs that ceased to exist among the Omani society is the lack of the Iftar cannon, which is considered to have a great influence on those who are fasting in the past. The Maghrib call to prayer has become the official and popular time for the end of a day of the month and the start of a night full of Ramadhan activities and religious worship.

"Iftar cannon is a traditional habit in some Islamic countries at Ramadhan and the story says that this habit started from Egypt. It just a sound used to announce to residents about the time of Iftar before Maghreb's prayer at the time of sunset. This operation happening under the supervision of the army," she mentioned.

Just as the phenomenon of the iftar cannon has become extinct, the "Almousaharati" no longer exist except on a very, very small scale. "It is a name given for the person who wandering on the streets after midnight (around 3:00 AM) while beating a drum and calling sleeper to wake up, have Sohor (food before fasting) and pray," she said.

Usually, as she added, the Musaharati accompanied by kids who enjoy helping him in carrying the lantern or beating drums. The popular words of Musaharati calling means "Awake, oh faster and praise Allah. Welcome to you Ramadhan, the month of forgiveness."

Some believe that the reason for the extinction of this habit is due to modern life with all its technologies that no longer calls for the existence of the Al Mousaharati now, as alarm clock do the task instead of him. (Part 1 of 2)





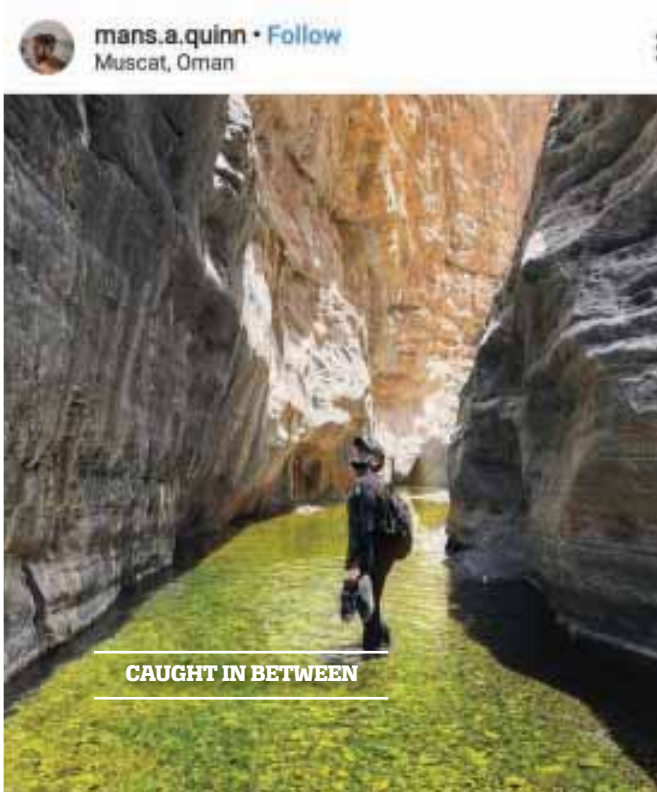
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ramadhan

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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

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ENTERTAINMENT



'Black Panther' and 'Captain Marvel' sequels reveal official titles

NEW YORK: Avengers movies, assemble! Marvel Studios on Monday unveiled the official titles for the upcoming "Black Panther" and Captain Marvel" sequels in a video highlighting the superhero franchise's list of upcoming movies. "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" is scheduled to arrive in theatres July 8, 2022, while "The Marvels" is slated for November 11, 2022.

The Marvel movies scheduled for this year include "Black Widow" on July 9, "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" on September 3, "Eternals" on November 5 and "Spider-Man: No Way Home" on December 17.

Monday's three-minute video included footage from "Eternals," which is directed by Oscar winner Chloe Zhao and stars Gemma Chan, Angelina Jolie, Kumail Nanjiani and more. The upcoming lineup also features "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" on March 25, 2022, "Thor: Love and Thunder" on May 6, 2022, "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" on February 17, 2023 and "Guardians of the Galaxy: Vol. 3" on May 5, 2023.

The new "Black Panther" will mark the second instalment to that movie series. The original "Black Panther" film starred Chadwick Boseman as the title hero and grossed more than 1.3 billion dollars following its release in 2018. Actress Lupita Nyong'o said last month on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" that she believes the "Black Panther" sequel "very much honours" Boseman, who died last year following a private battle with colon cancer.

The new "Captain Marvel" will be the second instalment in that series, which stars Brie Larson as the central hero. — **tca/dpa**

Conan O'Brien to put his eponymous late night show to bed on June 24



LATE-NIGHT TALK show host Conan O'Brien will host his long-running nightly TBS "Conan" talk-show for the last time on June 24, WarnerMedia said on Monday, ahead of his shift to a new show on HBO Max.

The final weeks of the TBS show will feature a line-up of special guests, culminating in an extended hour-long finale recapping his 11-year run.

"The plan is to re-emerge on HBO Max sometime in the near future with I think what will be my fourth iteration of a programme," O'Brien said at the start of "Conan" on Monday.

WarnerMedia said O'Brien's HBO Max show would move away from a traditional talk show format.

Known for his clever comedy, often self-deprecating and awkward, O'Brien is the current longest serving nightly late-night talk show host in the United States, having started his career in 1993 when NBC tapped him to take over from David Letterman as host of the Late Night franchise. He has won four Emmy Awards and six Writers Guild Awards. — **Reuters**

DISCOVERY

Swedish orienteering enthusiast finds Bronze Age treasure trove



STOCKHOLM: A Swedish orienteering enthusiast working on a map earlier in April stumbled across a stash of some 50 Bronze Age relics dating back over 2,500 years, authorities said on Thursday.

Mainly consisting of ancient jewellery, the find outside the small town of Alingsås in western Sweden represents one of "the most spectacular and largest cache finds" from the Bronze Age ever in the Nordic country, the County Administrative Board



pher who made the discovery when he was out updating a map, at first thought it was just junk.

"It looked like metal garbage. Is that a lamp lying here, I thought at first," Karlsson told the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper.

He told the paper he then hunched over and saw a spiral and a necklace.

"But it all looked so new. I thought they were fake," he continued.

He reported the find to local authorities who sent out a team of archaeologists to examine the site.

"Most of the finds are made up of bronze items that can be associated with a woman of high status from the Bronze Age," Johan Ling, professor of archaeology at the University of Gothenburg, said in the statement.

"They have been used to adorn different body parts, such as necklaces, bracelets and ankle bracelets, but there were also large needles and eyelets used to decorate and hold up different pieces of clothing, probably made of wool," Ling added. — **AFP**

GASTRONOMY

Bugging out: EU approves beetle larvae as food



MORE INSECTS are on their way to dinner plates in Europe under an agreement between EU countries to label them "innovative food" that is safe to eat, the European Commission said on Tuesday.

The endorsement means the 27-nation bloc is close to adopting an EU law allowing residents and visitors to tuck into a dish featuring dried yellow mealworm, the larva of the mealworm beetle, *Tenebrio molitor*.

"The use of insects as an alternate source of protein is not new and insects are regularly eaten in many parts of the world," the commission noted, announcing the decision.

It added that yellow mealworm must be labelled clearly as such when used in a food product, not least to alert people who might be allergic.

The insect can be used to make burgers, protein shakes and biscuits.

The commission said there are currently 11 other applications for insects to become "novel food" in the EU and they will be considered by the European Food Safety Authority.

The decision on yellow mealworms is expected to be formally adopted in coming weeks, the commission said.

While it noted that this is the first time an insect was being authorised as food in the EU, the commission did say that insects had previously been available for consumption in some member states.

But that was before a 2018 update to the EU regulation on novel foods that requires whole insects to be subject to approval.

Researchers have for years observed the high protein value of yellow mealworms, which contain required fat and amino acids. The larva can grow quickly in a variety of substances including brewer's yeast, wheat bran, corn starch and potato flour.

They have already long been found in food markets in Southeast Asian countries. — **AFP**



Stable genius: Serbia's unlikely saviour of horses

Pasha was once a mighty stallion who starred in movies, modelled for magazines and won carriage races. Now, the 24-year-old is spending his dotage in Serbia's only sanctuary for horses.

The former champ — a lightly dappled greyish white Lipizzan — struggles to walk these days but still keeps up with his nine stable-mates at the Staro Brdo shelter in central Serbia.

The sight of malnourished horses, harnessed and whipped while dragging carts, is common in Serbia — something that Zeljko Ilicic felt he had seen enough of.

"At one point, I decided to do something about that, even if it means rescuing only a single horse", he told AFP. "Better one than none."

Despite suffering from an allergy to horse hair, the 40-year-old, who makes bows and arrows for a living and runs children's nature workshops, officially registered the asylum in 2015.

Since then, his sanctuary near the town of Lapovo, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of the capital Belgrade, has rescued about 70 animals.

NEITHER WORKHORSE NOR PET

Ilicic says irresponsible owners are his main concern.

They do not necessarily abuse the animals physically, but keep them inactive inside barns or shackled outside on short leashes.

"Horses in Serbia are in a difficult situation — they are no longer 'work machines' that owners tend to because they survive off them, nor are they pets that rich families ride and take care of like they do in the West", he said.

Ilicic estimates that, "at least half" of the horses in Serbia are not kept in decent conditions.

In Belgrade alone, he guesses that some 150 horses live through daily abuse.

And later in their lives, the animals are most often sold to slaughterhouses.

"Most horse owners swear that they love them... but when something happens financially in their family, selling the horse for 200-300 euros is the easiest solution", Ilicic said.

And sometimes the financial interests can be even bigger.

Last year, some 19 tortured and exhausted horses arrived after being seized by police investigating an international animal smuggling ring.

The sanctuary managed to find a suitable home for most of them.

'SANCTUARY IS MY LIFE'

Although many of the animals are quickly adopted, looking after them is still an expensive pastime.

Ilicic relies on donations — whether from wealthy individuals, benevolent artists or even enterprising children selling lemonade — and the enthusiasm of his volunteers.

"I came here in 2016. Little by little, I started spending more and more time here, and ended up moving in", says 33-year-old Violeta Jovic.

"So now, the sanctuary is my life."

Along with the horses, the sanctuary has hosted abandoned donkeys, stray dogs, cats, a litter of piglets and even a water buffalo.

"We are a horse sanctuary, but believe that someone who loves animals can't simply love one animal and completely disregard another", Ilicic said.

"We never turned our backs to a single animal." — **AFP**





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JSRS certification must for VAT zero-rating on oilfield supplies



CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Registration under the Joint Supplier Registration System (JSRS) – a single-window vendor certification portal introduced by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals – is mandatory for businesses seeking to apply the zero-rating provision for Value Added Tax (VAT) on oil and gas-related goods and services, legal experts have affirmed.

The explanation came in a recent advisory issued by well-known professional services firm Deloitte to clients. Clarifying the certification requirements for zero-rating Oil and Gas related supplies, the firm cited a letter dated April 13, 2021, from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, confirming that registration under the JSRS system will be acceptable to the Tax Authority in lieu of certifications from the Ministry itself as stipulated under Executive Regulations for VAT. The recent regulations issued by the Tax Authority specify that the supply of goods and services related to oil, oil derivatives and natural gas, shall be zero-rated, provided the firms in question are licensed by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Strategic plan to ramp up value creation from Million Date Palms Project

MONETISATION PLAN: Oman Investment Authority set to assume management of landmark date palm venture

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 4

In a strategic decision, the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman – has said it is gearing up to assume responsibility for the operations and management of the Million Dates Palms Plantation Project with a view to harnessing its commercial potential to enhance economic diversification, support job creation, drive SME development in line with Oman's Vision 2040.

The move, which is backed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, is designed to maximise the benefits from this project by optimising value creation, contributing to enhancing Oman's food security, creating partnership opportunities with the private sector, and enabling Omanis farmers to play a key role in its development.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Head of the OIA, said responsibility for managing the Million Date Palms Project will be entrusted to its wholly-owned subsidiary, Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), which has the requisite expertise, integrated resources and qualified staff to manage world-class assets and facilities of



The move is designed to maximise the benefits from this project by optimising value creation, contributing to enhancing Oman's food security, creating partnership opportunities with the private sector, and enabling Omanis farmers to play a key role in its development



Abdulsalam al Murshidi



Dr Saud al Habsi



Tariq al Amri

various types of food industries and at different stages of the supply chain.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the Authority's takeover of the management of the Million Date Palms Project would lead to a qualitative improvement in agricultural practices in the Sultanate, given especially the comprehensive and integrated expertise of the Oman Food

Investment Holding Company.

Further, with farmers and private sector companies now being brought on board in improving date palm cultivation, there is greater assurance that the underlying objectives behind the Million Date Palms Project will be achieved. One such objective, he noted, is enhancing food security, which the ministry is keen to strengthen.

The Ministry's will also support the endeavour through the

provision of high-value and high-yield date palm species to replace non-commercial perennial palm, thus ensuring better economic returns for farmers engaged in this project.

Tariq bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Oman Food Investment Holding Company, said its task is to review the performance of the existing date palm plantations with a view to converting them into independent profit centres before they are handed over to the private

sector for effective management and commercialization.

OFIC will also purchase the date produced by the farmers participating in the initiative and ensure the sustainability of the project across various stages of production.

The Million Date Palms Project launched with the aim of achieving socioeconomic returns on date palm cultivation through the application of the latest scientific developments in agricultural processes, commercialization of dates through modern processing and innovative value-adding techniques and enhancement of the competitiveness of Omani dates in foreign markets.

Initiated in 2017, hundreds of thousands of date palms have been planted in 11 sprawling farms distributed across the Sultanate. Output is projected at around 50,000 tons of dates per annum in the first phase of operations, rising to 85,000 tons by 2034.

(With inputs from ONA)

MENA energy investments to exceed \$805 bn in five years

ROBUST POTENTIAL: Renewables claim a significant share of almost 40% the estimated \$250 bn in power sector investments

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 4

The Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation (APICORP), a multilateral development financial institution, estimates in its MENA Energy Investment Outlook 2021-2025, that overall planned and committed investments in the MENA region will exceed \$805 bn over the next five years (2021-2025) – a \$13 bn increase from the \$792 bn estimates in last year's five-year outlook.

The report attributes this modest rise to four factors: A



strong confidence in the rebound of global GDP, rising energy demand, the comeback of Libyan projects – which alone accounts for around \$10 bn in planned projects – and the accelerated pace of renewables in the region.

Percurrent estimates, MENA will add 3GW of installed solar power capacity in 2021 alone –

double that of 2020 – and 20GW over the next five years.

The region's economic forecasts suggest that commodity prices and exports will drive the rebound expected for most MENA countries in 2021. However, economies remain under fiscal strains due to unprecedented high debt levels and decline in oil

Energy industries are entering a period of relative stability in terms of investments as most MENA countries return to GDP growth in 2021 and the energy transition showing no signs of slowing down

DR AHMED ALI ATTIGA
CEO, APICORP

prices, tourism/Hajj revenues, and personal remittances.

Dr Ahmed Ali Attiga, Chief Executive Officer of APICORP,

said: "APICORP's MENA Energy Investment Outlook 2021-2025 indicates that energy industries are entering a period of relative stability in terms of investments as most MENA countries return to GDP growth in 2021 and the energy transition showing no signs of slowing down. We anticipate a slow but steady recovery of the energy sector from the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, supported by continued investment from the public sector and an upswing in demand."

Committed gas investments in MENA for the period 2021-2025 are expected to total \$75 bn – \$9.5 bn less than the previous outlook. The decline is attributed to the completion of several megaprojects in 2020 and countries being more cautious about new project commitments in an era of gas overcapacity.

Planned investments meanwhile held relatively steady at

\$133 bn for 2021-2025, signalling the region's appetite for resuming its natural gas capacity build-up – particularly the ambitious unconventional gas developments in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, and Algeria – once macro conditions improve.

As a whole, the MENA region expects to add an estimated 3GW of solar power in 2021 – doubling its total from 2020 – and almost 20GW by 2025. Wind and other sources such as hydropower are also coming into their own as countries step up their energy diversification plans.

Power investments in MENA for 2021-25 remain largely unaffected compared to APICORP's 2020-24 outlook. Notably, the sector's total investment amount of \$250 bn is the highest of all energy sectors – with an estimated \$93 bn and \$157 bn in committed and planned projects, respectively, over the next five years.

Canada and Britain in enhanced trade agreement

An improved trade deal has come into place between the UK and Canada after the two nations ratified a post-Brexit agreement. Speaking at a Conservative Friends of Australia event on Zoom, Trade Minister, Liz Truss, said the UK was working “very closely” with “like-minded partners” to tackle issues such as China as part of ongoing trade discussions.

“We’re currently also negotiating with New Zealand and I’ve had a call with the US trade representative about further discussions about the US trade deal, so we are working with all of those partners on enhanced trade deals,” she said.

The agreement with Ottawa will “help both countries build back better from the pandemic by supporting high-quality jobs

in industries such as automotive and food and drink”, the Department for International Trade said in a statement. Trade between the UK and Canada is worth around £22.4bn each year, according to the latest official estimates.

The ratified trade deal is expected to save an estimated £42m tariff burden on UK exports to Canada including through eventual zero tariffs on cars, beef, fish, chocolate bars and soft drinks.

Meanwhile, British consumers will continue to benefit from zero tariffs on Canadian maple syrup, biscuits and salmon. Britain has rolled over post-Brexit trade deals with 63 countries that it previously traded with under EU agreements.

The UK signed an independent deal with Japan on 22 October last year, marking its first trade



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TRADE MINISTER, LIZ TRUSS, SAID THE UK WAS WORKING “VERY CLOSELY” WITH “LIKE-MINDED PARTNERS” TO TACKLE ISSUES SUCH AS CHINA AS PART OF ONGOING TRADE DISCUSSIONS

agreement that diverted from an existing EU deal.

Truss added that the UK was also working to strike a “deep trading relationship” with Australia. A trade deal would give the UK the green light to join the CPTPP (Comprehensive and progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership).

She said that Britain is drawing up plans to create a “single trading area in digital and data, greater financial services (and) investment”.

Meanwhile there has been substantial improvement in the manufacturing sector with output hitting its highest level in nearly two years in the three months to March, in the clearest sign that a revival could be on the cards for the sector.

The CBI’s monthly order book balance rose to -5 in March, the highest reading since April

2019. The rise smashed the expectations of analysts, who had predicted a more modest increase.

Output increased in eight out of CBI’s 17 sub-sectors, with growth in the electronic engineering and plastic products sub-sectors partially offset by declines in paper, media and aerospace. Firms also said that a combination of higher freight prices and raw material shortages would see prices rise at a higher pace over the next quarter.

Anna Leach, the CBI’s deputy chief economist, said that the improvement in manufacturing outlook was “great to see”.

Despite the more positive tone, Tom Crotty, group director at Ineos and chair of the CBI Manufacturing Council, said: “There can be no doubt that this progress is fragile and the sector continues to operate in a

challenging landscape.

“Container shortages and higher freight costs are causing issues with supply chains and many firms are also encountering unanticipated difficulties with the new post-Brexit trading arrangements.”

He added: “It’s therefore important the government continues to support the sector through the coming critical weeks and months ahead.”

The EY Item Club said that the survey added weight to the argument that the latest lockdown had done less damage to the economy than first feared. It’s now predicting a fall of 1.5pc of GDP, rather than prior estimates of a 4.0pc fall.

In addition, it added that it was likely to raise its current 2021 GDP growth forecast of 5.0 per cent. *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*



Alizz Islamic signs pact to provide home financing solutions

MUSCAT: Within the framework of its commitment to provide home purchase finance options to various segments of the society, Alizz Islamic Bank recently signed a cooperation agreement with Zain Property Development.

As part of the agreement Alizz Islamic Bank will offer home financing solutions for those wishing to buy homes in the residential complexes that are being developed by Zain Property Development.

The agreement was signed by Jamil bin Abdul Qader al Zadjali, AGM, Head of Retail Business, Alizz Islamic Bank and Mesh’al bin Mohammed al Raisi, Managing Director, Zain Property Development at a signing ceremony that was held at the headquarters

of Alizz Islamic Bank in the Central Business District in Ruwi.

Alizz Islamic Bank will provide financing facilities, flexible payment options and fast and smooth procedures for customers of Zain Property Development projects including Al Muna Gardens, Zain Al Athaiba, as well as Zain Al Khuwair.

The company has developed these complexes using pioneering engineering methods.

The contemporary projects include a number of residential units, starting from one, two and three bedrooms and offices and shops. They are also closely located to all major commercial and shopping centres.

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Chery lures young consumers with value-added packages this Ramadhan

MUSCAT: The fun-to-drive Chery has sparked new excitement this Ramadhan with the unveiling of a spectacular package of offers on its Tiggo 7 and Tiggo 2 models now on display at the showrooms of OTE, the exclusive distributor of the brand in Oman.

Targeted at the young generation, Tiggo 7 and Tiggo 2 match up on looks, performance,



functionality and budget. The versatile SUVs come in a range of attractive colours and sporty looks, their appeal enhanced by the brand’s signature technology-

on-the-go and safety features.

Now bundled with cash gifts, service and insurance benefits and manufacturer’s warranty, both models make for irresistible offers.

Both models, along with other fine offerings from the Chery stable, are on display at dedicated showrooms — six in all — operated by OTE at various locations around the country.

NBO develops leadership skills in public sector



MUSCAT: Developing successful leadership beyond the banking industry, National Bank of Oman (NBO) organised a series of virtual workshops for senior government employees in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

Held through the bank’s Academy of Excellence, the series of workshops aimed to coach participants on the fundamentals of effective leadership in the digital age. The initiative’s inauguration, held virtually, was attended by Dr Yahya al Maawali, the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah and Hassan Shaban, NBO’s Chief Government Banking Officer. The workshops are in line with a growing string of partnerships the bank has established in its efforts to strengthen ties with the government and promote national capabilities.

“As the Sultanate’s national bank, we believe our role surpasses the provision of financial services. We are proud of our long-standing relationship with the government which is line with our alignment with the Oman Vision 2040. Through our many shared initiatives we seek to build bridges between the private and public sectors, add to the future-readiness of the workforce, while supporting the overall socio-economic development of the country,” said Hassan Shaban.

Muscat Finance supports online education for students

MUSCAT: In keeping with its long-standing tradition of supporting charitable causes, Muscat Finance – the Sultanate’s first non-banking finance company (NBFC) – provided support for the purchase of tablets for students from low-income families. The initiative was launched by the Parents’ Council in the Wilayat of Muttrah.

The financial contribution was made to purchase devices, and was



presented by the management of Muscat Finance SAOG, to Sayyid Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Wali of Muttrah.

The contribution builds on an energetic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme that characterises Muscat Finance’s commitment to the upliftment of communities in which it operates. Beneficiaries of past gestures by the reputable non-banking finance company

have included recognised charities and aid organisations, social organisations, sports centres and educational institutions.

Commenting on its most recent gesture, Faisal al Yousuf, Chairman, said, “In view of the adverse conditions unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic around the world in general, and the Sultanate in particular, online and integrated education has become a necessity for schoolchildren.”

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FARM land in Rumais, 7,500 sqm near German University (Rent per Metre). 99328880.

SIT. VACANT

WANTED Travel Accountant with minimum 5 years work experience, preferably with experience in e-travel accounting. Contact: bunnil1958@gmail.com

AN excellent grade construction company in Oman is searching for Purchase Manager with minimum 10 years experience in purchasing. Candidates matching the above criteria can forward their resumes to info@dawood.om

A POULTRY salesperson is required. For further details, call Majid Mosa on 25540330, 92264513

URGENTLY required assistant HR & Admin manager (only Omani national), oil & gas experience must. Contact: hrrecruit2828@gmail.com

ACC AVAILABLE

SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non- cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact 99657906

ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company ALASAS AL JDYD AL MMYZ (LLC), which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1269277, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 250,000.000 to 52,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

RENT A CAR SERVICES

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SPECIAL Rates on New Cars & 4 WDs RENTING & LEASING

Tours and Airport Transfer
Tel: 24582663 GSM: 95859497, Fax: 24582664, abcrent@omantel.net.om

Buttercup Rent A Car AMAZING OFFERS

○ Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.

○ Rent for one month and get 5 days free.

All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts. ☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

FOR SALE/RENT

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact: 94272979, 96252664.

NEW 3 storey villas for sale/rents Wadi Kabir/Al Khuwair), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir). 96596348.

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers**. Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

1. AC maintenance and servicing. 2. Fridge, washing machine and dish washer repairing. 3. Painting and cleaning services. 4. Electrical, plumbing and carpentry work 97014234, 99447257, 24290686.

ORIENT Trading llc, Shampooing, sofa, carpet, floor polishing. Old house repairing. 99834373.

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

ROMINOV CORP.
(IBC N° 59999)
(In Voluntary Dissolution)

NOTICE is hereby given that in accordance under Section 286(b) of the International Business Companies Act 2016:

- ROMINOV CORP. is in dissolution;
- The date of commencement of dissolution is 21st day of April 2021.
- The Liquidator of the Company is Mr. Serge Jean-Luc Rouillon of Suite 14, First Floor Kinsgate House, PO Box 1075, Victoria, Mahe, Seychelles.

Dated 23rd day of April 2021
Mr. Serge Jean-Luc Rouillon Liquidator

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT BY BRIDEGROOM/BRIDE FOR MARRIAGE AT EMBASSY OF INDIA, MUSCAT

I Ranadhir Dasgupta (holder of Indian Passport No. **V7759767**) S/o **gouranga Bijoy Dasgupta** having permanent residence in **Villaudayan Pally, P.O-Prithiba, P.S-Habra, Dist-24 PGS (N), West Bengal, India** (complete postal address in India) and presently residing at **Jaalan, Bani Bu Ali**, Post Box No **045**, Postal Code **416**, Sultanate of Oman (Complete postal address in Sultanate of Oman), intend to marry **Tama Karmakar** (Holder of Indian Passport bearing No **R4892035, D/O-Nepal Chandra Karmakar** having permanent residence in **Vill+PS-Purbasthali, PO-Palaspuli Purba Bardhaman, Pin-713513** (complete permanent address) at Embassy of India, Muscat. I swear that I am marrying him/her at my own free will and not under any duress and intimidation. Any objection towards this marriage may please be communicated to Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, P. O. Box No. 1727, Postal Code No. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman within 30 (thirty) days of publication of this newspaper advertisement.

UK manufacturing sector enjoys strongest growth for 27 years



Technicians work in a car on the production line in Chichester, Britain. – Reuters

LONDON: Britain's manufacturing sector hit growth speeds not seen in nearly 27 years as the post-Covid recovery gathered pace, according to new data.

The closely-followed IHS Markit/CIPS Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)hit a score of 60.9 in April — anything above 50 is seen as a sector in growth — beating 58.9 in March.

Respondents to the monthly survey said they have seen output growth due to the loosening of lockdown restrictions, improved demand and rising backlogs of work. It means manufacturing in Britain has growth for 11 months in a row.

Consumer goods

manufacturers performed strongest as retailers, pubs, restaurants and the leisure sector increased orders following the reopening of parts of the economy.

Improved global conditions also contributed, with international orders growing too, although this was weak in comparison with domestic business.

Larger manufacturers benefited most from international orders compared to smaller sized firms, suggesting the complexities around post-Brexit ordering are being resolved at the biggest businesses.

The outlook for the sector remained positive with two-thirds of respondents believing

output will be higher in a year's time. Only 4 per cent believe the sector will contract, leaving overall confidence at a seven-year high.

But there were signs that inflation is also on the rise, with average selling prices rising at the fastest pace since records started in November 1999, the survey found.

Supply chain delays and input shortages contributed — and some said demand outstripping supply also contributed to higher prices being charged. Rob Dobson, director at IHS Markit, which compiles the survey, said: "Further loosening of Covid-19 restrictions at home and abroad led to another marked growth spurt at UK factories."

— Reuters

Oil rises on US, Europe demand growth optimism



A man fills a car with petrol at a gas station in Beijing. – Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices rose on Tuesday after more US states eased lockdowns and the European Union sought to attract travellers, helping to offset concerns over fuel demand in India as Covid-19 cases soar.

Brent crude futures were 65 cents, or 0.96 per cent, higher at \$68.21 a barrel at 0822 GMT, after climbing 1.2 per cent on Monday. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures also ticked up 62 cents, or 0.1 per cent, to \$65.11 a barrel, after gaining 1.4 per cent on Monday.

Prices are being supported by the prospect of a pick-up in fuel demand in the United States and Europe, as New York State, New Jersey and Connecticut were set to ease pandemic curbs and the European Union planned to open up to more foreign visitors who have been vaccinated, analysts said.

— Reuters

Saudi Aramco Q1 profits jump 30% on oil market recovery

RIYADH: Energy giant Saudi Aramco on Tuesday posted a 30 per cent jump in first-quarter profits, in a sign of recovery from last year's oil market crash fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic.

Aramco said its net profit rose to \$21.7 billion in the first three months of the year, compared to \$16.7 billion in the same quarter of 2020, owing to a stronger oil market and higher refining and chemicals margins. The bumper results follow strong profits posted last month by major oil firms — including France's Total, Britain's BP and Anglo-Dutch group Shell — as a recovery in crude prices fuelled their rebound from the pandemic. "The momentum provided by the global economic recovery has strengthened energy markets," Aramco CEO Amin Nasser said.

Aramco's operational flexibility, financial agility and the resilience of our employees have contributed to a strong first-quarter performance.

The strong earnings provide relief to Aramco which has revealed consecutive falls in profits since it began disclosing earnings in 2019. The company's low earnings piled pressure on government finances as Riyadh faces a ballooning budget deficit and pursues multi-billion dollar projects to diversify its oil-reliant economy.

— Reuters



An employee rides a bicycle next to oil tanks at Saudi Aramco oil facility in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia. – Reuters

Oman Vision 2040 on fast track



DAVIS KALLUKARAN

Vision 2040 is going to be yet another turning point in the History of the Sultanate. Within a few months of taking the helm, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has embarked upon a total change in the economy and its administration. Apart from a major reshuffle of the cabinet, changes were brought about in the administrative apparatus of the government.

A number of authorities have been merged to bring about more efficiency and economy in functioning by restructuring and establishing new reporting lines.

Moreover, to streamline the investment and revenue stream of the government, Oman Investment Authority was established bringing in 65 major government companies under its fold. In a total restructuring of the Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Economy were set up.

To augment the revenue stream, Oman tax Authority was established. The Value Added Tax (VAT) system which has been introduced is expected to add RO 400 million to the revenue which by itself should wipe out the budget deficit in three-four years' time.

To attract foreign investors and accelerate the economic diversification process through fast track, all the free zones and special economic zones were brought under Oman Public Authority for Free Zone. To develop and foster the investment culture and further attract foreign investors, the Muscat Stock Exchange Company has been formed. Manufacturing, Tourism, Transport & Logistics, Mining, and Agriculture & Fisheries have been identified as the five core industries to spearhead the acceleration of the economy.

In response to these prudent measures announced and action taken, the World Bank, International Monetary fund, IIF and other rating agencies have already given a bright outlook to the Oman economy.

Medium Term Fiscal Plan 2020-24

The government has announced the Medium Term Fiscal Plan 2020-24 with the aim to achieve the above objectives on a fast track. The Fiscal balance plan includes initiatives across five pillars.

- Pillar I — Supporting economic growth through E transformation initiatives and stimulating Real Estate Market
- Pillar II — Revitalising and diversifying government investment returns by the stronger tax administration, implementation of value-added tax and taxation of high earning Individuals
- Pillar III — Rationalising and improving efficiency in government spending
- Pillar IV — Establishing and strengthening the social protection Plan



- Pillar V — Raising the efficiency of public financial management.

Financial framework of the tenth development plan 2021-2025:

The plan emphasises on 1. Strengthening the social protection system to protect low-income earners by maintaining the level of spending on basic services such as education, health, housing and social security and welfare.

2. Providing financial and investment incentives to the governorates of the Sultanate, to enable each governorate to exploit their respective constituents so as to achieve sustainable development, activate trade and generate employment opportunities for citizens.

3. Motivating economic diversification and development of economic sectors by creating means of additional financing for certain productive projects and raising the level of partnership between the public and private sectors

4. Ensuring the transfer of the proceeds of the sale of twenty thousand barrels per day of oil during the Plan years to use it to pay part of the loan instalments.

5. Improving the credit rating of the Sultanate to enhance investor confidence through control on deficit rates and public debt.

It is logical to conclude that such a rapid visualisation and conceptualization of achieving the noble objectives, requires the deployment of a tremendous amount of human resources, financial management, self-governance and monitoring by the regulators enabled by total digital transformation.

This has been addressed in the financial framework of the development plan. The plan emphasises on Strengthening of sustainable human development and safeguarding human capital by developing the school and university education system to raise the level of education and to enhance the competitiveness of graduates in the local and global markets.

Opportunities for professional Omani accountants

Oman may require tens of thousands of finance professionals to steer the economy to achieve the objectives of Vision 2040.

The country can develop highly qualified Omani accountants who can compete with the Accountants from any developed countries. To achieve this Oman should have an Institute to administer the examinations compatible with the rules and regulations of the country.

The laws and regulations in each country are structured based on the geographical terrain, demographic composition, available natural resources, business environment, customs and culture prevailing there. Let us draw up a curriculum that is required to be learned by accountants and auditors either practising or working in the business environment in Oman.

Institute of Chartered Accountants of Oman (ICAO)

It has been a long-felt need to have a national qualification for professional Accountants and Auditors in the Sultanate of Oman. Accounting and auditing Institutions the world over play a key role in the development of human capital.

These institutions are responsible for administering, training and conducting examinations for students, and further, organise continuing professional education (CPE) for its members.

The primary bodies in each country are affiliated with the International Federation of Accountants. Auditing institutions greatly contribute to professional development by maintaining high accounting, auditing and ethical standards for the regulation of the profession. They contribute to national development by enabling entities to fulfil their duties by being accountable and transparent to the public.

The practice of auditing is the cornerstone to good governance and ensures that unbiased accounts are available to the public to know whether resources are managed responsibly.

Auditing ensures integrity and instil confidence among citizens and stakeholders. The auditors also support the governance responsibilities of oversight, insight and foresight. They are the custodians of the national wealth and they are the conscience keepers of the economy.

Let us develop such an institution that will uphold and inculcate the core ethical values – 'Institute of Chartered Accountants of Oman'. Let us inspire and encourage the accounting graduates to join professional accounting programs.

The Institute, if established, will be the first of its kind in the whole GCC.

(The author is the Founding Chairman of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Muscat Chapter and former President of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) Oman Chapter. Email: davis.kallukaran@crowe.om)