

P6

STATELESSSCIENTIST SETS SIGHTS ON COVID VACCINE



P7

WORLD SHARES HOLD CLOSE TO ALL-TIME HIGHS



P12

BAYERN,MANCITY THROUGH TO LAST 16



OMAN

CONTRACT FOR WELLS IN MASIRAH BLOCK

MUSCAT: Upstream energy firm Masirah Oil Limited (MOL) has unveiled plans to drill a pair of development wells targeting the Yumna field in Block 50 — a move designed to ramp up output from the country’s first-ever producing field discovered off the Sultanate’s east coast. In a statement, MOL, which has a 100 per cent interest in the 17,000 sq km offshore concession in the Gulf of Masirah, said it has awarded a contract to UAE-based drilling rig operator Shelf Drilling to drill two development wells starting next month. This will be followed by the drilling of an exploration well in 2021, it noted. **SEE P7**

REGION

SUDAN’S EX-PM DIES FROM COVID-19

KHARTOUM: Leading Sudanese politician and former prime minister Sadiq al Mahdi died from a coronavirus infection three weeks after being hospitalised in the United Arab Emirates, according to family sources and a party statement on Thursday. Mahdi, 84, was Sudan’s last democratically elected prime minister and was overthrown in 1989 in the military coup that brought former president Omar al Bashir to power. The Umma Party was one of the largest opposition parties under Bashir, and Mahdi remained an influential figure even after Bashir was toppled. Last month, Al Mahdi’s family said he had tested positive for COVID-19. — **Reuters**

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INSIDE



UNGETSGREENLIGHTTOINSPECT, REPAIR DECAYING OIL TANKER | P3



TRUMPPARDONSFLYNN,WHO LIED TO FBI OVER RUSSIA | P5

Farmers prepare to plant as temperature drops

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef



Water Resources support the farmers with farming systems. They include production of crops such as dates and fruits, vegetables, fodder and field crops, as well as livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry.

These farmers in the villages are in an excited mood as Oman will have harvesting season between March to May. The climate needed for seedling is winter between October- November to end of April. It also requires water and in the north of Oman temperatures around 20-35 is good for these kinds of plants.

“Yes, we are in an excited mood as we are finally blessed with the arrival of the season to plant seeds of various fruits and vegetables,” Mohammed al Hadhrami, a farmer from Nizwa said.

They would water the crops as in north of Oman, daytime temperatures vary around 20-35 degree Celsius and is good for these kinds of plants. “We, of late, planted fenugreek seeds and the plants have started to show their faces to the sun.”

Tanuf and Nizwa area are known for, among other crops, ginger and coriander while Bahla is renowned for coriander, fenugreek, onion and garlic and other varieties.

Yes, we are in an excited mood as we are finally blessed with the arrival of the season to plant seeds of various fruits and vegetables

MOHAMMED AL HADHRAMI A farmer from Nizwa



The coronavirus pandemic is no excuse for not getting enough exercise, the WHO said, warning that even before the crisis many were getting too little physical activity. — AFP

Move more to stay active in pandemic era

GENEVA: All adults should do a minimum of 150 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week, even more vital for well-being and mental health in the COVID-19 era, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in its first guidance in a decade.

It recommended that children and adolescents have an average of one hour of daily physical exercise and limit time in front of electronic screens. And people of all ages must compensate for growing sedentary behaviour with physical activity to ward off disease and add years to their lives, the WHO said, launching its “Every Move Counts” campaign.

“Increasing physical activity not only helps prevent and manage heart disease, type-2 diabetes and cancer, it also reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, reduces cognitive decline including Alzheimer’s and improves memory,” Ruediger Krech, WHO director for health promotion, told a news briefing.

Yet one in four adults and a “staggering” four out of five adolescents do not get enough physical activity, which can include walking, gardening and cleaning, the WHO said. — **Reuters**

- WHO issues first physical activity guidelines since 2010
- Adults advised to do 150-300 minutes exercise per week
- Children should have 1 hour daily exercise
- Older adults urged to strengthen muscles, work on balance

Mass evacuations help minimise loss of lives in India cyclone

PUDUCHERRY: Accurate forecasting and the evacuation of several hundred thousand people helped avert any loss of life after a cyclone clobbered southeast India, authorities said on Thursday, as rescuers worked to restore power and clear fallen trees.

Nivar made landfall at 3:05 am near Puducherry, packing gusts of up to 130 kilometres per hour, uprooting trees and bringing torrential rain of up to 30 centimetres in a few hours in some

parts.

Thousands of emergency personnel were deployed in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry as authorities began restoring power that had been suspended to prevent damage to the electricity grid.

“People have given us full cooperation,” said O Panneerselvam, Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu state.

“It’s a solace that nothing untoward happened and the



Policemen walk along a deserted beach road during heavy rains in Puducherry. — AFP

weakening of the cyclone is good news,” he said, adding that 250,000 people were housed in shelters in the southern state as a precaution.

Rescue workers were using heavy machinery to remove hundreds of trees uprooted in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Initially classified as a “very severe cyclonic storm” as it swirled in the Bay of Bengal, Nivar weakened after landfall,” the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. — **AFP**



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Panoramic views and glorious past



WILAYAT OF SAMAYIL
in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is surrounded by towering mountain range of Al Hajar and many wadis.
Situating about 89 kms away from Muscat, the wilayat is distinguished for its flowing wadis and trees that lie along the banks of wadi Samayil.
Mountains surrounding the place are rich in natural wildlife and wild plants such as rare mushrooms and grasses which are basically used for healing.
The terrains are a destination for enthusiasts and thrill seeking climbers.
The wilayat has abundant palm

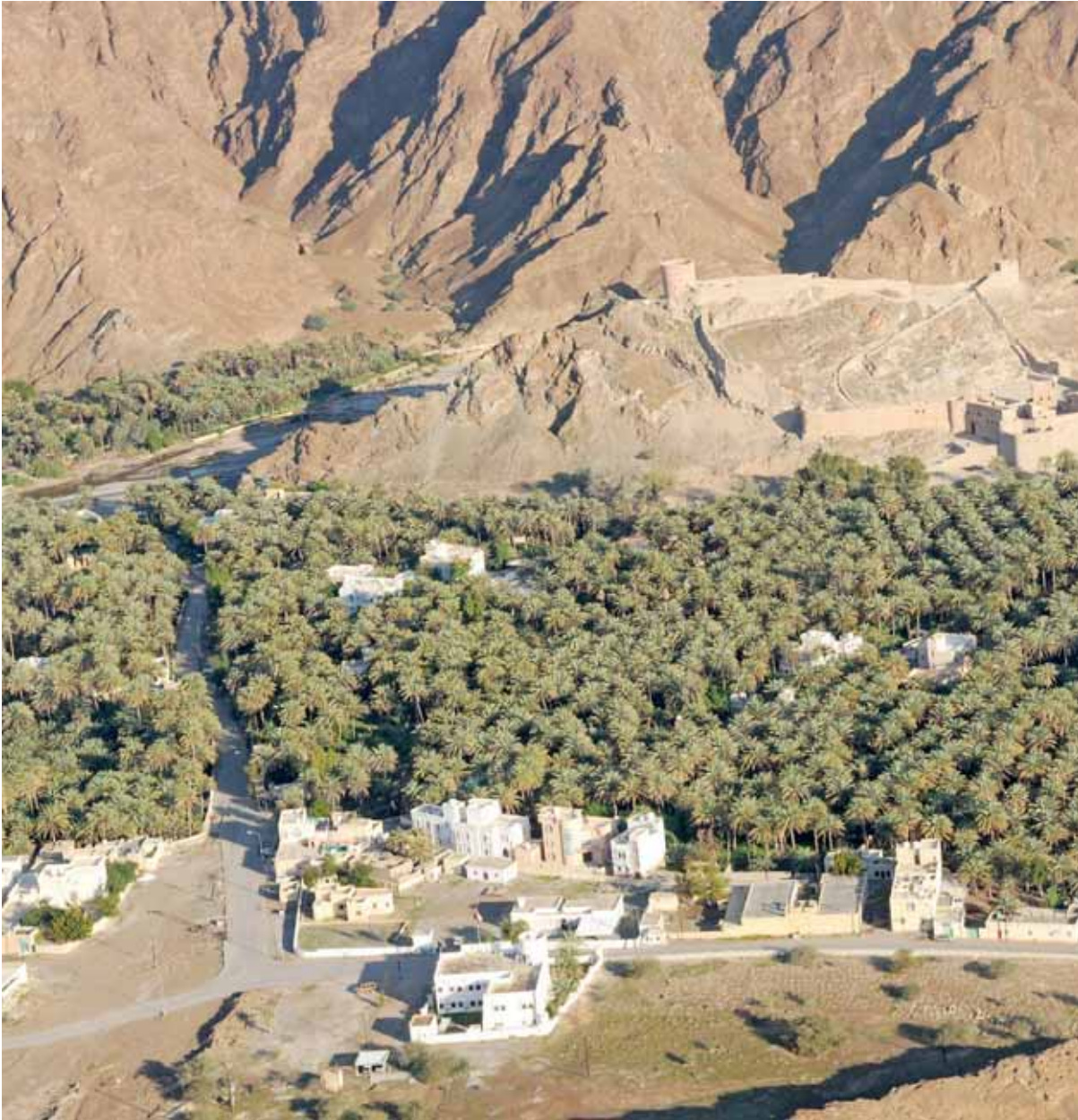
trees, especially Al Fardh. The wilayat borders Izki from south, Nakhl from west and Al Mudhaibi in the east.
Many poets and authors have written literary pieces on the picturesque scenes and attractive oasis of Samayil.
It is dotted with historically important sites, having played a big role in Oman's heritage.
Samayil, which dates back to the pre-Islamic era, has more than its fair share of stories to tell from its glorious past.
Located on a hill just next to the main road is the massive Samayil Hosn (the castle of Samayil) that has an impressive structure. The

castle with its towers overlooking the greenery of the place has been restored recently by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.
The fort was used to defend the town against internal and external invaders, and was also used as a prison for outlaws. The wilayat enfolds other historically reputed sites like Bait al Sarooj known anciently as Bait al Khoubar, Al Shah-baa, Hassas tower and Al Dawwarah tower in Al Madrah. Among the major villages in Samayil are Suroor, Nidab, Lizugh, Al Madrah, Al Khoubar and Hassas.
Those places encompass various attractions, particularly the date farms scattered all over the

area.
Mazin bin Ghadoobaa is the first Omani Muslim who came from Samayil. He built the first mosque in the Sultanate, which introduced people here to Islam during the era of Aabd and Jayfar, the sons of Al Juland, the king of Oman at that time.
This mosque was restored with the same architectural and engineering design. The Wilayat of Samayil includes a number of aflaj, the longest and biggest being Al Samdi falaj.
The area's inhabitants are engaged in many professions namely livestock breeding, silversmith, goldsmith and weaving.



Many poets and authors have written literary pieces on the picturesque scenes and attractive oasis of Samayil
It is dotted with historically important sites, having played a big role in Oman's heritage



UN gets green light to inspect, repair decaying oil tanker



The FSO Safer oil tanker off the Yemeni port of Ras Isa. — AFP File

DUBAI: Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters confirmed they have given the green light for a UN mission to inspect and repair a long-abandoned fuel tanker which threatens to rupture and cause a massive oil spill.

The UN has been trying to assess the "FSO Safer" for years, but the Ansar Allah — who control much of Yemen's north after a war that erupted in 2014 — have so far denied access.

"An urgent maintenance agreement and a comprehensive evaluation of the *Safer* tanker was signed with the United Nations in order to avoid an environmental catastrophe," senior commander Mohamed Ali al Huthi said in a tweet late Wednesday.

The UN said earlier this week that the operation could begin by late January or early February, depending on when it could obtain the necessary equipment.

The 45-year-old vessel, abandoned near the western port of Hodeida since 2015, has 1.1 million barrels of crude on board, and

The 45-year-old vessel has 1.1 million barrels of crude on board, and a rupture or explosion would have disastrous environmental and humanitarian consequences

a rupture or explosion would have disastrous environmental and humanitarian consequences.

Apart from corrosion to the ageing vessel, essential work to curb explosive gases in its storage tanks has been neglected.

Greenpeace welcomed the development but said it was "long overdue".

"Every day that the *Safer* is left unattended brings us another day closer to a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe that will further deepen the current tragedy in Yemen, and cause untold damage to the land, sea and air around the region," said spokesman Ahmed El Droubi.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab also urged quick action to "tackle the huge environmental threat it poses to Yemen

& the Red Sea."

"We need urgent progress now. The Ansar Allah must work with the UN to avoid a devastating oil spill," he said in a tweet.

The UN has said an oil spill could be "catastrophic", destroying Red Sea ecosystems, shutting down the fishing industry and closing Yemen's lifeline Hodeida port for six months.

Independent studies show it could affect countries as far away as Djibouti and Eritrea as well as Saudi Arabia and expose more than 8.4 million Yemenis — many already vulnerable due to famine after years of war — to heightened pollution.

An earlier agreement on access struck in July failed to materialise, but UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said this week that the new accord was more formal and repre-

sents "an important step forward in this critical work".

Ansar Allah-run media quoted a senior official as saying a message had been sent to the United Nations welcoming the experts who would conduct the "urgent evaluation and maintenance".

"The national side (Ansar Allah) are currently waiting for a letter from the United Nations to inform the date of the arrival of the team of experts, after they have been granted the necessary visas to enter Yemen, and to start implementing the work assigned to them alongside the national technical team," it said.

"We hope that the United Nations will accelerate the implementation of the steps according to the agreement, and send the team of experts to carry out their duties quickly."

In June, the Ansar Allah said they wanted guarantees that the value of the oil on board the *Safer* would be used to pay salaries of their employees. — AFP



Turkish soldiers patrol next to the entrance of the Sincan Penal Institution at the 4th Heavy Penal Court near Ankara. — AFP

Turkish court sentences 2016 coup leaders to life in jail

ANKARA: A Turkish court sentenced leaders of a 2016 attempted coup to life in jail on Thursday, convicting hundreds of army officers, pilots and civilians over a failed bid to topple President Tayyip Erdogan directed from an air base near the capital Ankara.

More than 250 people were killed in the July 15, 2016 coup attempt when rogue soldiers commandeered warplanes, helicopters and tanks to take control of institutions and overthrow Erdogan's government.

The trial of nearly 500 de-

fendants was the highest profile of dozens of court cases targeting thousands of people accused of involvement in the coup attempt, which Ankara blamed on supporters of the US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen. He has denied having any role. Based at the Akinci air base, the defendants were accused of directing the coup and bombing government buildings, including parliament, and attempting to kill Erdogan. Many of the military commanders involved have already been sentenced to life in jail. — Reuters

Blockade has cost Gaza \$16.7 bn, says UN report

GENEVA: Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip cost the Palestinian enclave's economy an estimated \$16.7 billion in just over a decade, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

The coastal enclave has been under an Israeli-enforced blockade since 2007, the year the Hamas took power.

In the 11 ensuing years, its economic situation deteriorated dramatically, the UN Conference on Trade and Development found in a new report.

Between 2007 and 2018, "the estimated cumulative



economic cost of the Israeli occupation in Gaza under the prolonged closure and severe economic and movement restrictions and military operations would amount to \$16.7 billion (constant 2015 US dollars)," it said. — AFP

Displaced Syria teen recreates lost family home with tent, garden

ATME, SYRIA: Among the olive trees in northwestern Syria, displaced teenager Wissam Diab plucks an oud outside his new home, a tent surrounded by luscious plants.

Inside, there are more tumbling indoor plants and a collection of tiny cacti, as well as dozens of books lined up on a cloth-covered table from authors such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Haruki Murakami and Egypt's celebrated Naguib Mahfouz, the only Arab to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

Syria's war forced the Diab family to flee their village of Kafr Zita in central Hama province, but when 19-year-old Wissam moved into a tent in northwestern Syria he decided to recreate his childhood home.

"It's been four years, and we haven't been able to find a house or go back home," said the young man with green eyes and



Displaced Syrian, Wissam Diab, plays the oud at his new home, a tent surrounded by luscious plants in the town of Atme in Syria's northwestern Idlib province. — AFP

shoulder-length brown hair.

"What I've done with the tent is me trying to settle down."

And settle down he did in his own tent in an olive grove in the area of Atme, in Idlib province near the Turkish border, while his parents and two sisters have a separate tent next door.

A patterned stone path leads

up to the front door and wooden sticks top the canvas roof.

All around, plants and flowering shrubs thrive in large plastic pots, or in neat rows in the soil of his front garden.

Indoors, he has hung a textile curtain along the tarpaulin wall, and made a small living room with a floor-level sofa.

An ornate red carpet pads out his tent underfoot.

"Our home was like this. We had a garden, we had a library, we had a lot of flowers," he said. It "was like this, but much, much better".

Syria's war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions since starting in 2011.

In Idlib, a major rebel bastion, around half of the three million inhabitants live in tents or shelters, many after losing their homes in other parts of the country now back under government control. — AFP

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In brief

■ SEOUL



SOUTH KOREA, CHINA
AGREE ON EARLY XI VISIT,
N KOREA TALKS

South Korea and China agreed on Thursday to prepare for a visit to South Korea by Chinese President Xi Jinping and to cooperate on stalled talks on North Korea's nuclear programme and on tackling the novel coronavirus. China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, arrived in the South Korean capital late on Wednesday, after a two-day visit to Japan, as Asian governments prepare for change under a new US administration. "Both sides agreed to actively communicate so that the COVID-19 situation stabilises and conditions are created for President Xi's visit", the South Korean foreign ministry said in a statement after Wang held talks with South Korea's Foreign Minister, Kang Kyung-Wha. — Reuters

■ PHNOM PENH



CAMBODIA BEGINS
MASS TRIAL OF 120
OPPOSITION FIGURES

A mass trial of more than 120 Cambodian opposition figures kicked off in Phnom Penh on Thursday, amid UN concerns the proceedings were politically motivated and violated due process. The case is linked to attempts by exiled opposition figurehead Sam Rainsy to return to Cambodia last year from France, where he has lived since 2015 to avoid jail for convictions that he says are bogus. Prime Minister Hun Sen is one of the world's longest serving leaders, maintaining a 35-year grip on power with methods that include jailing political opponents and activists. — AFP

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES, PRIVATE
FIRMS TO SIGN VACCINE
SUPPLY DEAL

The Philippines is set to sign a supply agreement for AstraZeneca's potential COVID-19 vaccine on Friday, the first such deal in a country aiming to further reopen its economy that has been ravaged by the pandemic. Carlito Galvez, a top coronavirus task force official, told a media briefing the deal would be for two million doses. However, Joey Concepcion, a government business adviser, told Reuters the private sector was aiming to procure more than that. The deal will augment government efforts to lock in supplies to inoculate around two-thirds of its 108 million population, and is another boost for AstraZeneca. — Reuters



Motorists make their way along a waterlogged road after heavy rains following Cyclone Nivar landfall, in Puducherry on Thursday. — AFP

Cyclone Nivar slams into southern
India causing five deaths

CHENNAI: A severe cyclone slammed into India's southern coast early on Thursday, killing at least five people and uprooting trees and power lines. Cyclone Nivar made landfall near the city of Puducherry, located near the southern state of Tamil Nadu, with winds of up to 130 km per hour, according to the India Meteorological Department. Heavy rains from the storm caused flooding in some streets of the city of Chennai, Tamil Nadu's largest city which is home to many large automobile manufacturers, according to a Reuters witness. The storm caused at least five deaths in and around Chennai from trees falling, drowning and electrocution, the *Times of India* reported.

Heavy rains from the
storm caused flooding
in some streets of the
city of Chennai, Tamil
Nadu's largest city

A spokesman for the chief minister's office declined to comment on the reported deaths. Local administration workers have been working to remove fallen trees and power lines, city corporation officials said on Twitter. People in Velachery, a low-lying suburb of Chennai, said the storm's impact was mitigated by steps taken by the government ahead of the storm,

compared to the hundreds of deaths during floods in 2015. "The situation was terrible here during the floods in 2015. This year, because of the precautions taken, the situation has not been that bad," said S Sakthivel, a shopkeeper in Velachery. More than a hundred cars were parked on the edge of a bridge in Velachery to keep them above the floodwaters, according to a witness. While rains are expected to subside in Tamil Nadu, heavy precipitation is expected in the Rayalaseema region of the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh on Thursday. The streets around the Lord Venkateshwara temple, one of the world's richest, in Tirumala, Andhra Pradesh, were flooded and officials were working

to drain the water, the *New Indian Express* newspaper reported. Tens of thousands of people were evacuated from low-lying areas of Tamil Nadu ahead of the storm's landfall, a state minister said on Wednesday. The Meteorological Department said Nivar's intensity had dropped to 85 to 95 kmph and is expected to weaken further. Meanwhile, the country recorded 44,489 new coronavirus infections, data from the health ministry showed on Thursday, the 19th straight day that single-day cases have stayed below the 50,000 mark. India's coronavirus tally now stands at 9.27 million, the second-highest in the world, after the United States. Deaths rose by 524, taking the total to 135,223. — Reuters



Farmers gather on a bridge as police block a road during a march to New Delhi to protest against the central government's recent agricultural reforms, on the outskirts of Ambala on Thursday. — AFP

Farmers clash with police
over farm reforms

NEW DELHI: Indian police fired tear gas and water cannon on Thursday in clashes with several thousand farmers marching to New Delhi to protest against recent agricultural reforms. The confrontation happened when police tried to stop the farmers, from the northern state of Punjab, crossing a bridge about 200 kilometres from Delhi. Armed with sticks and rocks, some of the farmers threw police barriers into the river below. The police opened fire with water cannon and tear gas, further enraging the protesters. After a two-hour stand-off, police eventually allowed the marchers to continue towards the capital.

The plight of farmers is a major political issue in India, with about 70 per cent of rural households depending primarily on agriculture. Issues such as drought and mounting debt have been blamed for the suicides of thousands of farmers in recent years. Legislation passed earlier this year means that farmers are now free to sell their produce to anyone at any price, instead of to state-controlled markets at fixed rates. Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed this as a "complete transformation of the agriculture sector" that would empower "tens of millions of farmers" and encourage much-needed investment and modernisation. — AFP

Pakistan shuts schools to curb
new coronavirus infections

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan shut its schools and postponed exams on Thursday to try to curb new coronavirus infections and a rise in the number of people in hospital with COVID-19. Students, including those at higher educational institutions as well as in private schools, are expected to continue classes through distance learning until December 24, when schools are scheduled to go on winter break until January 11. "All efforts will be made to make sure that education continues from home", Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood said on Monday, announcing the closure of schools, adding that "if the situation improves" schools would reopen on January 11. Pakistan reported 3,306 new cases on Wednesday, and 40 deaths from the pandemic, with 2,485 patients currently admitted in hospitals, according to officials. There have been 386,198 total cases in the country recorded so far, and 7,843 deaths. The decision to close schools, officials have said, was based on an increase in the rate of positive test results in the country. The rate of people testing positive in June was as high as 23 per cent, but dropped to a low of 1.7 per cent by September. It has since begun to in-



Students wear protective masks as they attend a class at school as the outbreak of COVID-19 continues, in Peshawar on November 23. — Reuters

crease again, reaching 7.41 per cent this week. More than 19 per cent of new cases were from educational institutions, where the rate of positive results had nearly doubled in one week to reach 3.3 per cent, officials said on Monday. The south Asian country has ruled out a wide ranging lockdown, opting to close down non-essential public gatherings in a bid to keep the economy afloat through the pandemic. "We do not know what this winter is going to be like, so there is a bit of worry right now because our cases are ris-

Malaysia's
PM survives
budget test



Prime Minister
Muhyiddin Yassin

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin won parliamentary approval for his government's 2021 budget on Thursday, avoiding a potential political crisis in the midst of all the other crises brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. Parliament passed the budget by a voice vote, leaving it unclear exactly how many of the 222 lawmakers supported the government's first budget since Muhyiddin emerged as the leader of a new coalition in March. The government tabled the country's largest-ever budget three weeks ago, in a bid to bring the economy out of its first recession in over a decade and to manage the health fallout from COVID-19. Following a spike in infections since September there has been a four-fold rise in the COVID-19 caseload to nearly 60,000. The budget vote was the first real test for Muhyiddin's wafer thin majority, as he had avoided earlier opposition attempts to hold a confidence vote. The ruling Perikatan Nasional coalition has been beset by infighting, and opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim has been impatient for a chance to test whether Muhyiddin still commanded support. — Reuters

Trump pardons Flynn, who lied to FBI over Russia

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has announced he had pardoned Michael Flynn, the former security adviser whose lies about his Russian contacts spurred the troubling investigation into Trump campaign collusion with Moscow.

The pardon, which was expected, came in the final weeks of Trump's presidency, two years of which was spent fighting the allegations that Trump had overseen and sought to cover up a dangerous scheme of cooperation with Russia. It was the first of several possible pardons that analysts think Trump could extend to political aides and allies before he steps down on January 20.

Those could include former 2016 campaign chairman Paul Manafort, also convicted in the Russia collusion investigation, Trump personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, former adviser Steve Bannon, and Roger Stone, whose prison sentence for lying and witness tampering the president already commuted.



In this file photo taken on December 18, 2018 former National Security Adviser General Michael Flynn leaves after the delay in his sentencing hearing at US District Court in Washington, DC. — AFP

The announcement helped Flynn avoid a potential prison sentence being weighed in a Washington federal court

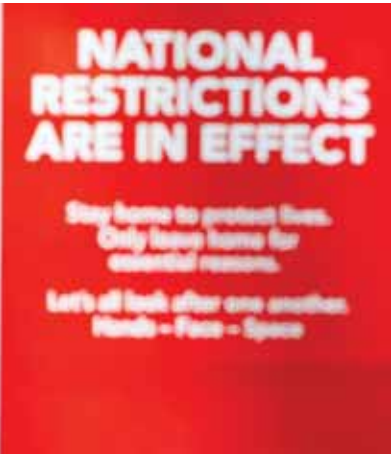
Coupled with Flynn having taken significant sums of money over the previous two years for appearances with Russian companies — including one in which he sat next to Russian President Vladimir Putin at a Moscow gala — US investigators were concerned that Trump's top national security aide may be vulnerable to compromise.

He was forced to resign as Trump's national security adviser in February 2017, less than four weeks into the administration.

Trump's efforts to defend and protect Flynn led to the naming of an independent counsel, Robert Mueller, whose investigation into both collusion and obstruction of justice clouded the first half of Trump's tenure in office.

In late 2017 Flynn reached a deal with investigators and pleaded guilty, twice, to lying to FBI agents, avoiding heftier charges tied to his allegedly illegal lobbying for Turkey.

But after Flynn's trial exposed some missteps by the FBI and investigators, Trump and his supporters said it was evidence that the entire Mueller probe was politically tainted, Trump labelling it a "witch hunt." — AFP



A man stands beneath a government information board amid the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in Manchester, Britain, on Thursday. — Reuters

A third of England face toughest COVID curbs, London spared for now

LONDON: More than 20 million people across large swathes of England will be forced to live under the toughest category of COVID-19 restrictions when a national lockdown ends on December 2, while London was placed in the "high alert" second-toughest tier.

Health Minister Matt Hancock on Thursday announced final details of a regional system set to take effect when blanket restrictions on England's 55 million population end after a month-long lockdown — dictating the terms of daily life for the country's citizens and businesses.

"Hope is on the horizon but we still have further to go so we must all dig deep. The end is in sight, we mustn't give up now," Hancock told parliament, alluding to growing prospects for a vaccine against the

coronavirus in the coming months.

Britain has Europe's highest official death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic and has been hit hard by a second wave. The government's response on lockdown rules, procurement and testing has been criticised as disjointed, expensive and slow. "We must follow these new rules and make sure that our actions today will save lives in future and help get our country through this," Hancock said.

Thursday's decision had been keenly awaited by businesses across the country whose ability to trade in the critical pre-Christmas period will be affected. Hospitality is one of the large sectors that will suffer the most in higher tiers. Hancock said cases were rising in parts of the capital and needed to be brought under control. — Reuters

INNOCENT MAN?

Thursday's announcement helped Flynn avoid a potential prison sentence being weighed in a Washington federal court.

It also appeared to bring to a close the last case arising from special counsel Robert Mueller's sprawling 2017-2019 investigation of the Trump campaign, which saw six campaign associates plead guilty or be convicted at trial.

"It is my Great Honour to announce that General Michael T Flynn has been

granted a Full Pardon," Trump tweeted. He wished the retired army lieutenant general a "truly fantastic Thanksgiving!" holiday.

In a broader statement, the White House said the pardon brings "an end to the relentless, partisan pursuit of an innocent man."

The statement said the investigation into Flynn was part of "a coordinated attempt to subvert the election of 2016" and to "undermine (Trump's) administration at every turn."

SECRET CALLS WITH RUSSIANS

Flynn was initially targeted in an FBI counterintelligence investigation over secret phone calls with the Russian ambassador to the United States in December 2016, after Trump's election victory but before he took office.

In one key phone call Flynn sought to undermine the impact of sanctions and expulsions announced by then-president Barack Obama against Moscow for its interference in the 2016 election.

Ethiopian prime minister orders 'final' offensive

ADDIS ABABA: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Thursday ordered Ethiopia's army to launch a "final" offensive against Tigray's dissident leaders in their regional capital Mekele, saying the deadline for their surrender had expired.

Abiy, the winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, late on Sunday gave the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) 72 hours to lay down their arms.

The ultimatum was rejected by the leaders of the region, whose forces have been fighting federal troops in the country's north for three weeks. Violence has claimed hundreds of lives and displaced more than 40,000. Ethiopia's army — which in recent days said it was advancing on Mekele with tanks — had been directed "to conclude the third and final phase" against the TPLF, Abiy said.

"In this final phase, great care will be given to protect innocent civilians from harm. All efforts will be made to ensure that



A member of the Amhara Special Forces looks on as he holds his rifle at the 5th Battalion of the Northern Command of the Ethiopian Army in Dansha, on Wednesday. — AFP

the city of Mekele, which was built through the hard work of our people, will not be severely damaged," Abiy promised.

He said "thousands" of TPLF militia and special forces had surrendered to federal forces before the deadline lapsed. It was not immediately clear how close the army was to the city. — AFP

Americans defy pandemic and leaders

LOS ANGELES: Americans defied pleas from state and local officials to stay home for the Thanksgiving holiday in the face of the surging coronavirus pandemic, triggering fresh warnings from health officials with the release of vaccines still weeks away.

US President-elect Joe Biden joined in the calls for safety, urging people to forgo big family gatherings, wear protective masks and maintain social distancing. "I know we can and we will beat this virus," Biden said in a speech delivered in a near-empty Wilmington, Delaware, theater to a handful of staffers and reporters wearing masks and sitting inside socially distanced circles on the floor.

Biden did not wear a mask. "Life is going to return to normal. I promise you. This will happen. This will not last forever," said Biden, a 78-year-old Democrat. Deaths from COVID-19 surpassed 2,000 in a single day for the first time since May on Tuesday and hospitalisations reached a record of more than 89,000 on Wednesday as the country recorded 2.3 million new



Passengers check-in for a Southwest Airlines flight at Los Angeles International Airport ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday, on Wednesday. — AFP

infections in the past two weeks.

Spiraling infections typically result in a rising death toll weeks later. Coronavirus deaths reached 2,157 on Tuesday — one person every 40 seconds — with another 170,000 people infected, as millions of Americans travelled for Thanksgiving. Nearly 1

million passengers a day have been screened at airport security checkpoints for the past week, with Sunday's total of 1.047 million being the highest number since the early days of the pandemic in mid-March. "It's tough. It's a big holiday in the US, Thanksgiving. But with the situation

that we're in right now, it just seems like the safe play is to not come to the airport, to not travel," Los Angeles International Airport spokesman Charles Pannunzio said. "But if you are travelling, we're going to do our best to make the journey safer for you." — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Merkel defends extended coronavirus shutdown

Germany is facing a bleak winter after federal and regional governments agreed to extend business closures and tighten coronavirus restrictions, but Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted on Thursday that the move was necessary to defend the health system.

"We are not powerless," Merkel said in a statement to the Bundestag parliament, as she tried to drum up acceptance for the measures. But she conceded that the country, which has so far failed to reverse a stubborn second wave of infections, has difficult months ahead. "Winter will be difficult, but it will end,"



Merkel said, calling in particular for discipline and solidarity over the festive season.

Merkel held a seven-hour-long video conference on Wednesday with the nation's 16 state premiers, whose backing she needs to enact measures in response to the pandemic. — dpa

MOSCOW

Putin opens COVID-19 drug plant as cases soar

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday inaugurated a pharmaceutical plant in Siberia that will manufacture drugs to treat COVID-19 as the country reported record high numbers of new coronavirus infections and deaths. Russia has experienced a surge in infections since September, but authorities have resisted imposing lockdowns, relying instead on targeted measures in certain regions.

Speaking at the inauguration via video link, Putin said the plant would produce COVID-19 drugs, as well as medicine used to treat tuberculosis, diabetes, hepatitis and other diseases.



"People need these drugs," he said.

"They need them literally every day," Russia reported a record high of 25,487 new coronavirus infections on Thursday and 524 deaths in the last 24 hours, the highest numbers it has reported since the start of the pandemic. — Reuters

NEW YORK

Trump losing Twitter followers after poll loss

What's the sound of a lame duck tweeting? Weeks after losing the election, President Donald Trump is now losing Twitter followers by the day, according to *Newsweek*. More than 46,000 of the president's former disciples have reportedly stopped receiving his tweets since Sunday. The president still has nearly 89 million followers, but lost 10,000 readers by Wednesday noon.

Newsweek observed that Trump's Twitter following dropped by 12,476 followers on Tuesday and by almost 6,000 more on Monday. On Sunday, he lost 19,164 followers. According to that report, it's possible that Twitter's crack-down on bots — accounts not run by



humans — is bringing down Trump's still massive numbers.

Trump's drop in readership coincides with a movement called "UnfollowThePres," which encourages the public to ask Twitter to flag tweets from the president that aim to spread misinformation. — dpa

A different ‘super spreader’: FB struggles with election disinfo

JULIE JAMMOT

The US presidential election is finished: Votes cast, the transition — though delayed — begun.

But on Facebook, the fight against election misinformation continues, thanks to “super spreaders” — accounts that disseminate rumours and fabrications, falsely spreading the idea that the 2020 election was beset by organised, extensive fraud by the Democratic Party.

The US nonprofit Avaaz has identified 25 pages in particular, including those of Donald Trump Jr and Eric Trump — the president’s sons — White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany and combative conservative commentators Dan Bongino, Lou Dobbs and Rush Limbaugh, along with pro-Trump organisations such as Turning Point USA.

These are sowing doubt about the President-elect Joe Biden’s White House win earlier this month — taking their lead from the building’s current resident, who has also taken to social media to tweet that he will not “concede” and to outline his so-far unfounded claims that the election was “stolen.”

Unproven allegations of fraud from these accounts have been “liked,” commented on and shared more than

UNPROVEN
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ON AND SHARED
MORE THAN
77 MILLION TIMES
SINCE NOV 3

77 million times since November 3, according to a study from Avaaz.

And that doesn’t take into account the Facebook accounts of the “super-spreader” in chief, Donald Trump himself, nor that of his former adviser Steve Bannon, which was recently removed by the network.

The social media giant has increased efforts to stop the spread of disinformation.

It restricted and in some cases banned the publication of some political ads, highlighted reliable sources of information and tackled foreign manipulation campaigns.

GOING VIRAL

Thanks to those measures and others, Facebook was able to avoid a repeat of the 2016 presidential campaign, when organised disinformation campaigns permeated the network ahead of Trump’s election.

But these efforts were not enough to stop run-of-the-mill rumour circulation.

“The superspreaders in this list, with the helping hand of Facebook’s algorithm, are central to creating this flood of falsehoods that are now defining the political debate for millions across the country”, explained Fadi Quran, Avaaz Campaign Director.

Private Facebook groups have also contributed to the far-reaching spread

of misinformation, according to Avaaz.

Such groups — often made up of Trump supporters or those who also believe his allegation of a “stolen” vote — have exploded in the aftermath of the election, Avaaz reported, and they can be difficult to monitor and manage.

Facebook on November 5 suspended a group called #StopTheSteal, which had attracted some 350,000 members in 48 hours.

“The false rumours about election fraud continue as they being passed through these networks. So it’s less big accounts... it is more the millions of people who continue to push this narrative to one another”, said Claire Wardle, US Director of the First Draft NGO.

AFP works with Facebook’s fact-checking programme in almost 30 countries and nine languages. Around 60 media work worldwide on the programme. Content rated “false” by fact-checkers is downgraded in news feeds so fewer people will see it.

If someone tries to share a post found to be misleading or false, Facebook presents them with the fact-checked article.

But Facebook has been widely criticised for its reluctance to take a more rigid stance, including by some employees, according to the US publication *The Information*. — **AFP**

PANDEMIC BLUES

Have job, but no hours: Some employed not working at all

JULIE GORDON

Canadian service workers are faring even worse during the pandemic than previously thought with hundreds of thousands of those who still have jobs not actually putting in any hours at all, and a grim holiday season could add to the pain. Canada has so far clawed back nearly 80 per cent of the jobs lost to the COVID-19 crisis, official data shows.

But a deeper analysis reveals that the ranks of the under-employed — people who are working less than half their usual hours, or none at all — have swelled to well above February levels.

There are 391,300 Canadians employed but working zero hours because of the pandemic, data provided to Reuters shows, and another 42,100 working less than half their usual hours. The vast majority of these workers are in the hard-hit service sector.

“You take a look at a restaurant or a barber: They’re operating, but they’re nowhere near capacity”, said Royce Mendes, senior economist at CIBC Capital Markets.

“So there is a significant amount of unused labour.” Under-employment, like unemployment, spiked across Canada in the spring as businesses were shuttered to curb the spread of COVID-19.

But while employment has improved, under-employment remains more than 50 per cent above pre-pandemic levels, highlighting the unevenness of the recovery and laying bare an underlying weakness that will make recovering from the next slump harder.

“There’s a whole category of workers who don’t indicate they have actually been laid off, but they might not have a business that is open to show up at”, said Brendon Bernard, an economist with online job-search company Indeed Canada.

There are always some people in the labour force who are employed but have no hours, such as substitute teachers and casual workers. The large increase in the pandemic likely reflects workers whose workplace is temporarily closed or restricted, along with those who are not working due to child care issues or health concerns, economists say.

Many of these workers are being kept on payrolls by Canada’s emergency wage subsidy, which allows businesses to retain staff even if they have no hours for them to work.

“If the business can hang on and the wage subsidy helps them do that, (the wage subsidy) makes some sense”, said Benjamin Reitzes, Canadian Rates & Macro Strategist at BMO. The subsidy pays furloughed workers and also a portion of the salary for active employees at hard-hit businesses.

Two-thirds of claims went to service-sector employers in the most recent period. But critics say the payments can disincentivise employers from bringing back furloughed workers and some companies may never return to normal, with those sidelined employees eventually joining the ranks of the long-term unemployed.

“Those who really pay for this (policy) are the employees”, said Amir Barnea, an associate professor of finance at HEC Montreal.

— **Reuters**

You take a look at a restaurant or a barber: They’re operating, but they’re nowhere near capacity

ROYCE MENDES
Senior Economist at CIBC Capital Markets

THE STORY OF SUCCESS

From Syria to Covid frontline, stateless scientist sets sights on vaccine

EMMA BATHA

Ask scientist Nowras Rahhal about his cutting-edge work on a COVID-19 vaccine and he is eager to explain the complexities, but ask him where he comes from and he struggles for words.

Rahhal, who moved to Germany two years ago from Syria’s war-shattered capital Damascus, is stateless — meaning no country recognises him as a citizen.

“When you are stateless, the simple question ‘Where are you from?’ becomes very loaded”, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“Most people are happy to say where they belong, but I don’t know what to answer. I’d love to have a place to call home.”

Rahhal, 27, has just finished working with a team at one of the Max Planck institutes on developing a system allowing a COVID-19 vaccine to be applied to the skin, rather than injected into muscle.

He said the technique — targeting specialist immune cells in the skin that can trigger an immune reaction in the body — would require a far smaller dose per person, a big advantage when inoculating large populations.

Before arriving in Germany, Rahhal spent years studying to the sound of bombings and artillery fire, using his phone torch to read when the



Scientist Nowras Rahhal (left) and Professor Christoph Rademacher (right) are seen with their vaccine research group at the Max Planck Institute of Colloids and Interfaces in Potsdam, Germany. — **Reuters**

NOWRAS RAHHAL
HAS JUST FINISHED
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TO BE APPLIED
TO THE SKIN

electricity cut out at his Damascus home.

But Rahhal’s academic achievements are remarkable for another reason — stateless people often struggle to access education.

Rahhal’s grandfather was among tens of thousands of Palestinians who fled the Mediterranean city of Haifa during conflict in 1948.

Today there are half a million Palestinians in Syria, but they are not allowed to naturalise even though

most were born in the country.

Although Rahhal’s mother is Syrian, laws in many Arab countries ban women passing their nationality to their children, so Rahhal, his two brothers and sister were born stateless like their father.

There are an estimated 10 million stateless people in the world with large populations in Myanmar, Ivory Coast, Thailand and Dominican Republic. Deprived of basic rights, they often live on the margins of society. — **Reuters**

HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
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Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100,
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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

Contract awarded for drilling of three wells in Oman’s Masirah block

PROMISING POTENTIAL:
Drilling of two development wells to start next month, followed by an exploration well in 2021

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Upstream energy firm Masirah Oil Limited (MOL) has unveiled plans to drill a pair of development wells targeting the Yumna field in Block 50 — a move designed to ramp up output from the country’s first-ever producing field discovered off the Sultanate’s east coast.

In a statement, MOL, which has a 100 per cent interest in the 17,000 sq km offshore concession in the Gulf of Masirah, said it has awarded a contract to UAE-based drilling rig operator Shelf Drilling to drill two development wells starting next month. This will be followed by the drilling of an exploration well in 2021, it noted.

The announcement underscores optimism in the Block’s hydrocarbon potential notwithstanding the relatively depressed state of the global energy market, weighed down by a protracted economic downturn and the coronavirus pandemic.

It also comes on the heels of the Omani government’s decision to approve the Field Development Plan



for the Yumna field, as well as to award the all-important Declaration of Commerciality (DOC), paving the way for Masirah Oil Ltd to fully develop the field while continuing to explore the rest of Block 50.

At the time of the Declaration of Commerciality by the Ministry of

Energy and Minerals on July 12, 2020, the Yumna-1 well had been producing around 8,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil aggregating in excess of 1 million barrels. Stored temporarily on board an Aframax tanker, these volumes have been sold in multiple shipments on international markets.

A recent uptick in international oil prices has augured for the growth of crude production from the Yumna field, according to a top executive of Rex International Holding, which holds a majority stake in Masirah Oil Limited.

“With the permanent

Yumna 1 production facilities in production and sale of the Masirah crude since April 2020, our next short-term focus would be to drill two development wells to boost production. The average oil price per barrel between July and September 2020 has been \$43, which is 46 per cent higher than the average oil price per barrel between April and June 2020,” said Dan Broström, Executive Chairman of Rex, a Singapore-based technology-driven oil firm.

“Following the development wells, an exploration well, the location of which is to be selected from 14 previously identified prospects near the Yumna Field, is slated to be drilled in 2021. A discovery in this exploration well will enable us to put together further development plans and potentially convert more prospective resources near the Yumna Field into additional reserves,” he further noted.

According to Rex International, an independent Qualified Person’s Report (QPR) undertaken by Aker Geo and Pareto Asia in February 2012, had estimated the sum of best estimate gross unrisks prospective resources in the entire Block 50 to be over 4 billion barrels.

Masirah Oil Limited is majority owned by Rex Oman Ltd (86.37 per cent) with minority stakes also held by Petroci, the National Oil Company of the Ivory Coast, and Schroder & Co Banque SA.

Sri Lanka stands pat on rates, to set lending targets

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s central bank kept its key interest rates unchanged on Thursday, but said it would introduce lending targets for certain sectors “in the near future”, as it stressed upon the need for lower lending rates to boost economic growth.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) said its accommodative monetary policy stance would continue and that it will introduce a limit on the maximum interest rate that can be charged on mortgage-backed housing loans for salaried workers. The bank maintained the standing deposit facility rate and the standing lending facility rate at 4.50 per cent and 5.50 per cent, respectively. The statutory reserve ratio was also left unchanged at 2 per cent.

CBSL said the second wave of COVID-19 infections globally have adversely affected the momentum of domestic economic recovery that was seen in the third quarter of 2020, but the impact of containment measures is not expected to be massive. — Reuters

China hits 26 per cent of target for US energy imports

BEIJING: China has accelerated imports of crude oil, propane and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States since July, but total energy product purchases through October remain far short of targets for 2020 set out in the Phase 1 trade deal with Washington.

Over the first 10 months of 2020, China’s purchases of US crude oil, LNG, propane, butane and other energy products totalled \$6.61 billion, about 26 per cent of the \$25.3 billion target, according to Reuters calculations based on Chinese customs data.

While the gap to the target is unlikely to be bridged by year-end, US and Chinese trade officials reaffirmed their commitment to the deal in August, and China’s imports of US energy products have increased sharply the second half of the year.

The \$6.61 billion accrued through October marks a five-fold jump from the \$1.29 billion amassed by end-June.

Imports of propane, a key component of liquefied petroleum

gas (LPG) used as fuel for cars, heating and to produce petrochemicals, grew at the fastest pace of all major energy products since July.

Robust demand for chemicals from China’s revitalised manufacturing sector, along with new processing units at independent refiners Zhejiang Petroleum & Chemical and Zhejiang Huahong have fuelled the import drive.

LNG demand is also expected to be firm through winter as Beijing continues to replace coal with gas and as the country liberalises its pipeline network.

Refinitiv trade flows data show China may receive a record 1.26 million cubics metres of US LNG in November.

China’s crude oil imports from the US hit a record 12.5 million tonnes through October, worth \$3.88 billion, but the pace of US purchases is expected to slow through the remainder of 2020 as top suppliers Saudi Arabia and Russia target increased flows to the top oil importer. — Reuters



A VLCC oil tanker is seen at a crude oil terminal in Ningbo Zhoushan port, Zhejiang province, China. — Reuters

World shares hold close to all-time highs

LONDON: European shares were mixed on Thursday and world shares held near all-time highs after a strong Asian session in which market euphoria around COVID-19 vaccines, Joe Biden’s US presidential election win and hopes for further stimulus outweighed worsening US data.

World shares are having their best month on record this November, boosted by a slew of positive vaccine announcements and hopes that Biden’s administration will deliver more economic stimulus and political stability.

The MSCI world equity index, which tracks shares in 49 countries, hit an all-time high on Wednesday and held close to this level on Thursday, up 0.2 per cent on the day at 0821 GMT, as markets shrugged off the latest rise in US jobless claims.

Europe’s STOXX 600, which is also having its best month ever, up 14.5 per cent in November, was flat on the day, while London’s FTSE 100 was down 0.4 per cent.

Markets also took a boost from minutes from the US Federal Reserve’s November 4-5 meeting, which showed that officials discussed how the central bank’s asset purchases could be adjusted to provide additional support to the economy.

The minutes said policymakers may give new guidance about its bond-buying “fairly soon”.

“Downward pressure on the US dollar has been reinforced by the release of the latest FOMC minutes which signalled that the Fed is likely to strengthen their QE programme at the next FOMC meeting on December 16,” wrote MUFG strategist Lee Hardman in a note to clients.

“A strong commitment to maintain QE stimulus would provide further reassurance that the punch bowl is unlikely to be taken away as soon as



A man walks past the New York Stock Exchange at Wall Street in New York City. — AFP

next year,” he said.

The US dollar slipped around 0.1 per cent and was at 91.922 versus a basket of currencies at 0828 GMT, having touched its lowest in nearly three months in early London trading.

It also lost out versus the safe-haven Japanese yen, down 0.2 per cent on the day at 104.3 at 0832 GMT.

US markets are closed for Thanksgiving on Thursday. Biden urged Americans to avoid big family gatherings and to wear protective masks and maintain social distancing as COVID-19 cases soar.

“While the release of vaccine results is promising, we do not know yet when this pandemic will be completely over and that is what investors will continue to struggle with,” analysts at the FXTM brokerage told clients.

“Wednesday’s economic data showed that US jobless claims

World shares are having their best month on record this November, boosted by a slew of positive vaccine announcements and hopes that Biden’s administration will deliver more economic stimulus and political stability.

increased for a second consecutive week suggesting more pain ahead as business restrictions and partial lockdowns continue to hurt employment,” they added.

In Europe, a survey showed that German consumer morale fell

further heading into December, as a partial lockdown in Europe’s largest economy hit households’ income and willingness to spend money.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel told parliament that lockdown measures will be in place until at least the end of December and possibly longer. The euro was up 0.1 per cent against the dollar, at \$1.1926 at 0831 GMT. Euro-sterling was up 0.2 per cent at 89.225.

Markets participants are closely watching trade talks between Britain and the European Union, with little more than a month until the status-quo transition period ends on December 31. Ireland’s prime minister said on Wednesday that a “good result” was still possible, but Ursula von der Leyen, head of the European Commission, said that the bloc was ready for the possibility of a no-deal exit. — Reuters



UK’s Sunak says public finances are on ‘unsustainable’ path

LONDON: British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said on Thursday that record public borrowing is not forecast to fall fast enough to be sustainable, the closest he has come to acknowledging that taxes will need to rise once the coronavirus pandemic is over.

“(There are) record peacetime highs in borrowing and debt, and the forecasts that were set out yesterday show us on a path where that continues to be at a very elevated level, so that’s not a sustainable position”, Sunak told the BBC.

Sunak declined to commit specifically to tax rises, saying any decision would need to wait for his annual budget statement due early next year. Previously he has said that hard choices would need to be made on the public finances after the pandemic, which has killed more than 55,000 people in Britain and led to the biggest collapse in economic activity in more than 300 years.

“Once we get through this and we have more certainty about the economic outlook, we’ll need to look at how we can make sure we have a strong set of public finances”, he added on Thursday.

Bank of England Governor



Once we get through this and we have more certainty about the economic outlook, we’ll need to look at how we can make sure we have a strong set of public finances

RISHI SUNAK
British Finance Minister

Andrew Bailey, speaking to a BBC local radio station, said Sunak was taking the right approach by spreading the financial cost of the pandemic over many years.

Britain’s Office for Budget Responsibility forecast on Wednesday that the budget deficit would hit its highest since World War Two at 19.0 per cent of gross

domestic product this year, before falling to 7.4 per cent in 2021/22 and then bottoming out at around 4 per cent of GDP — above pre-pandemic levels. Britain’s government would need to find £29 billion — just over 1 per cent of GDP — to balance day-to-day spending with tax revenues by the end of the forecast period, it said.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies think-tank said the new plans also implied cuts to some public services other than healthcare which could prove hard to implement, after spending in these areas fell by a fifth in real terms during the 2010s.

“This may not quite be a return to austerity, but for some public services it may not feel much different”, IFS Director Paul Johnson said. The OBR said the headline measure of public debt would begin to fall as a share of GDP from 2024/25, but a lower, underlying measure of debt — which excludes temporary lending by the Bank of England — is forecast to keep rising.

Record-low interest rates made the high level of debt affordable, and spending on debt interest is due to fall to a record low share of public spending, despite the surge in borrowing, the OBR forecast. But Britain was becoming more vulnerable to any unexpected rise in global interest rates, the forecasting body warned.

“If those change significantly over time and move up, that would cost us more money and that’s something that would obviously be difficult”, Sunak told radio station LBC. — **Reuters**



Visitors pose for a picture at Shanghai Disney Resort in Shanghai, China. — Reuters

Disney increases planned layoffs to 32,000

WASHINGTON: Walt Disney Co said it would lay off about 32,000 workers, primarily at its theme parks, an increase from the 28,000 it announced in September, as the company struggles with limited customers due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The layoffs will be in the first half of 2021, the company said in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

A spokesman for Disney confirmed that the latest figures include the 28,000 layoffs announced earlier.

Earlier this month, Disney said it was furloughing additional workers from its theme park

in Southern California due to uncertainty over when the state would allow parks to reopen.

Disney’s theme parks in Florida and those outside the United States reopened earlier this year without seeing new major coronavirus outbreaks but with strict social distancing, testing and mask use.

Disneyland Paris was forced to close again late last month when France imposed a new lockdown to fight a second wave of the coronavirus cases.

The company’s theme parks in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo remain open. — **Reuters**

EasyJet says domestic bookings rise as England lockdown ends



An Easyjet plane is seen at Luton Airport in Britain. — Reuters

LONDON: British airline EasyJet said domestic bookings for December had risen significantly this week compared to last week after news that some COVID-19 restrictions in its home market would be eased.

England’s current lockdown bans most international travel, but when it ends on December 2 people will be free to go abroad. Over Christmas, COVID-19 restrictions across the UK will be relaxed to allow families to mix for five days.

The prospects for travel were also boosted after a rule change in England earlier this week which means from mid-December, arrivals in the UK can shorten their quarantine to five days from 14 if they test negative for coronavirus.

EasyJet said bookings for flights from London and Bristol to Belfast and London to Edinburgh had risen, and it had seen a 200 per cent increase in searches for both flights and holidays to beach destinations for next year.

“We know underlying demand is there, which we see every time travel restrictions are lifted”, EasyJet Chief Executive Johan Lundgren said in a statement on Thursday.

“We continue to closely review our flying programme to ensure we are aligning our schedule with customer demand.” The pandemic has battered EasyJet’s finances, forcing it to axe 4,500 staff, sell planes and take on new debt, and Lundgren has said a recovery depends upon travel restrictions being removed. — **Reuters**

Iran economy could rebound to 4.4% growth in 2021

DUBAI: Iran’s economy could grow 4.4 per cent next year if US President-elect Joe Biden lifts sanctions that have contributed to a deep three-year recession, although the COVID-19 crisis could limit foreign investment, the Institute of International Finance (IIF) said.

Biden’s victory in the November 3 US election has raised chances

that the United States could rejoin a deal Iran reached with world powers in 2015, under which sanctions were lifted in return for curbs on Iran’s nuclear programme.

This is unlikely to happen overnight, however, and the prospects remain uncertain as the adversaries would both want additional commitments.

Iran’s rial currency has lost about 50 per cent of its value against the US dollar in 2020, reflecting economic damage from sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic, although it strengthened in late October in anticipation Biden would unseat US President Donald Trump.

Iran has the highest COVID-19 death toll in the Middle East.

Trump abandoned the nuclear deal in 2018, and Tehran responded by scaling down its compliance.

The IIF, a trade body for the global financial industry, said that if United States lifted most of the economic sanctions on Iran by the end of 2021, the economy could expand 4.4% next year after an expected 6.1% contraction in 2020. — **Reuters**

Japan’s export credit agency to lend \$2 bn to Nissan for US sales financing

TOKYO: Japan’s state-owned export credit agency has agreed to give Nissan Motor Co up to \$2 billion as part of a credit agreement to help it finance car sales in the United States.

The money is part of a \$4.1 billion credit agreement for Nissan Motor Acceptance Corporation, a unit of Nissan North America, Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) said in a press release.

The money should help the Japanese company sell cars in the world’s second-biggest automarket after China by allowing it to provide customers with loans that they can repay in monthly instalments, the export credit agency added in the statement.

The United States “is an important market for Japanese automobile manufacturers. Sales finance has become an important tool in business strategy”, JBIC said.

“This case provides financial support for Nissan’s overseas business development”, it added.

JBIC has provided loans for



Workers are seen on the production line at Nissan’s car plant in Sunderland, Britain. — Reuters

overseas sales financing to other automakers, including a \$78 million October agreement with Honda Motor Co in Brazil, and one in September for Toyota Motor Corp in South Africa. JBIC did not disclose the amount for that deal.

The latest agreement with Nissan is more than three times as much as a \$582 million loan extended by JBIC in July to help it finance car sales in Mexico.

A JBIC spokesman said the government export credit agency applied the same lending standards as private banks.

Nissan, Japan’s third-largest automaker, is focusing on key markets as it pulls back from the rapid expansion led by ousted chairman Carlos Ghosn.

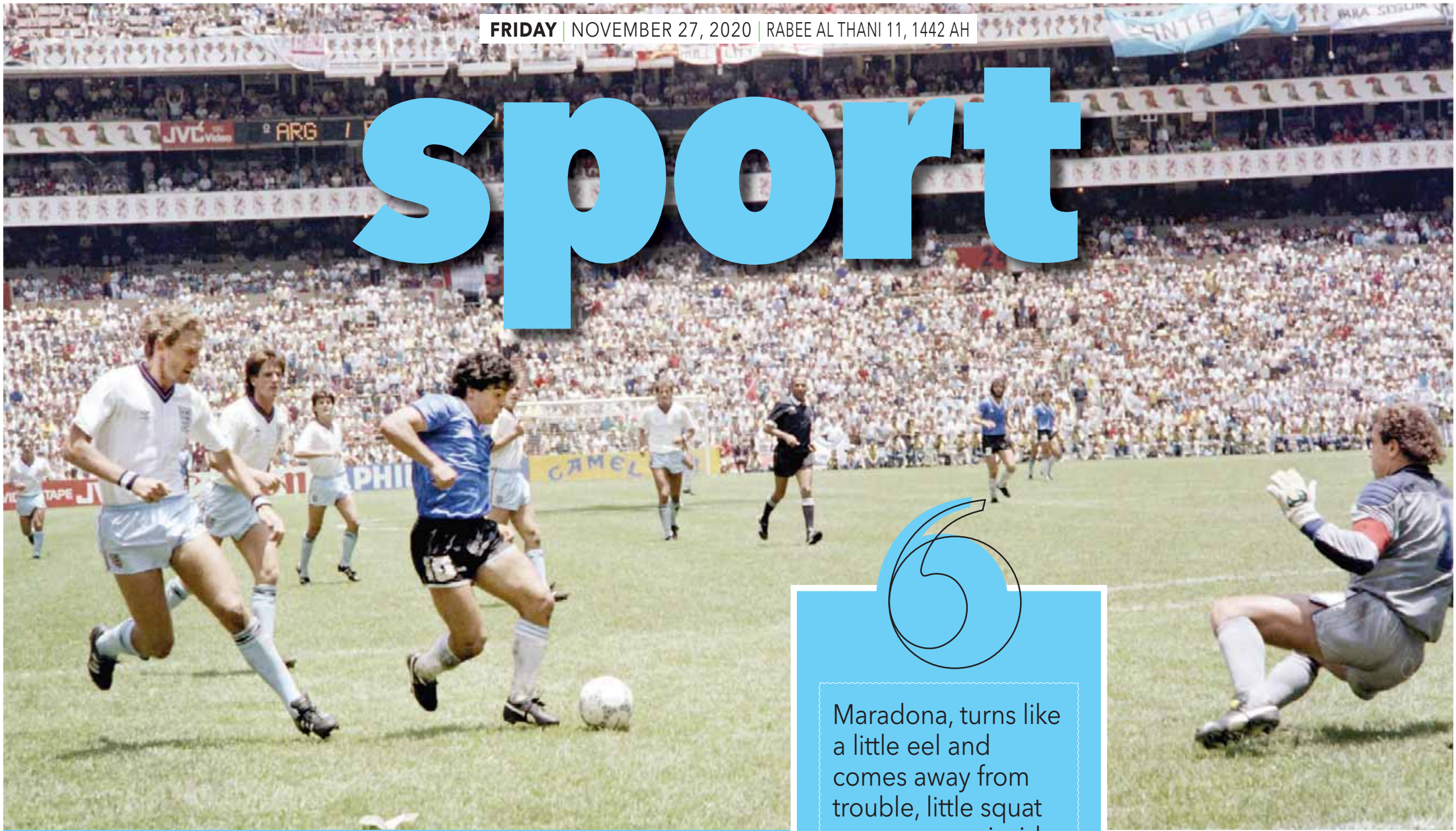
It is looking to raise market share with new models in the United States, China and Japan as they rebound from a demand

slump triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have financing from a variety of different ways and JBIC is one of them”, a Nissan spokeswoman said.

This month, Nissan cut its operating loss forecast for the year to March 2021 by 28 per cent, albeit still to a record of about 340 billion yen (\$3.2 billion), helped by a rebound in demand, particularly in China. — **Reuters**

sport



GOAL OF THE 20TH CENTURY



A man and his child pay tribute next to a mural depicting Argentine football legend Diego Maradona at La Boca neighbourhood, in Buenos Aires. – AFP

Maradona, turns like a little eel and comes away from trouble, little squat man... comes inside Butcher and leaves him for dead, outside Fenwick and leaves him for dead, and puts the ball away... and that is why Maradona is the greatest player in the world.

BRYON BUTLER'S
BBC RADIO
COMMENTARY ON
MARADONA'S
SECOND GOAL
AGAINST ENGLAND
IN THE 1986
WORLD CUP
QUARTERFINAL



Fans of Diego Maradona gather outside Argentinos Junior's Diego Armando Maradona Stadium in La Paternal neighbourhood, Buenos Aires. – AFP



A man pays his respect to Maradona at the main entrance of the San Paolo Stadium in Naples. – AFP

COMET FROM THE SKY

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ

T

he clichéd comparison between madness and genius is an age old one but one has witnessed the personification of that in full display through the years in arguably the greatest footballer of all time.

Diego Armando Maradona. None epitomised the contradiction between genius and madness more than the irrepressible Maradona, who lived up to the tag of a troubled genius throughout his illustrious and colourful career.

Coming from the poverty-stricken shanty of Villa Fiorito in the Buenos Aires suburbs, Maradona was a child prodigy bomb waiting to explode on the world stage. As he entertained and mesmerised his friends, fellow players and youth coaches in his boyhood years, international recognition beckoned.

Making his full international debut for Argentina at the age of 16 on February 27, 1977 against Hungary, Maradona began a

career that would produce some of the greatest performances in the history of world football.

MEXICO 1986, MARADONA'S FINEST HOUR

After a mediocre 1982 World Cup in Spain, Maradona would arrive for Mexico 86 primed and prepared to unleash his true potential.

Talk about the 1986 World Cup and everyone and anyone would write reams about Argentina's historic 2-1 quarterfinal win against England.

Despite the contentious first goal infamously known as the 'Hand of God', the second is Maradona's madness in all its pomp and glory.

The Argentine superstar dribbled past five English players (Peter Beardsley, Steve Hodge, Peter Reid, Terry Butcher and Terry Fenwick) after collecting the ball in his own half.

Swivelling initially before moving the ball upfield and dodging his way past Reid, Butcher and Fenwick, Maradona slots the

NOVEMBER 25,
2020 WILL GO
DOWN IN HISTORY
AS THE DAY
WHEN FOOTBALL
LOST ITS MOST
ROMANTIC
SERVANT.
THE ONE WHO
ENAMoured HIS
SUPPORTERS AND
COUNTRYMEN
AS EFFORTLESSLY
AS HE AGONISED
AND TOYED WITH
HIS OPPONENTS

ball in past a shell-shocked England goalkeeper Peter Shilton. Those few magical seconds made an ever-lasting imprint on

the hearts and minds of millions of football fans around the world ever since.

An entire generation of football fans would vouch that this was probably the greatest goal they had ever seen in a World Cup game.

It was widely acknowledged and the final recognition came when it was voted the 'Goal of the Century' in an online BBC poll in 2002.

Two more goals followed against Belgium in the semifinal after which West Germany were put to the sword.

In the final, Maradona delivered the final pass to Jorge Burruchaga who netted the winner in the 3-2 victory to gift Argentina its second World Cup victory after 1978.

The 1986 World Cup in Mexico was the finest hour of Maradona's career and he was at the peak of his powers demolishing opponents at will.

During the event, Maradona attempted a tournament-best 90 dribbles, was fouled a record 53 times and assisted or scored in 10 of the 14 goals that Argentina scored in the tournament.

TRYST WITH DRUGS

For all his footballing exploits, the drugs phase really took a toll on Maradona's health and it started to affect his performance on the field as well.

It is believed Maradona started his cocaine addiction in 1983 in Barcelona.

The Argentine star had to undergo medical treatments for his health issues like hepatitis and alcohol abuse up until 2007.

In January 2019, he underwent a surgery after a hernia caused internal bleeding in his stomach.

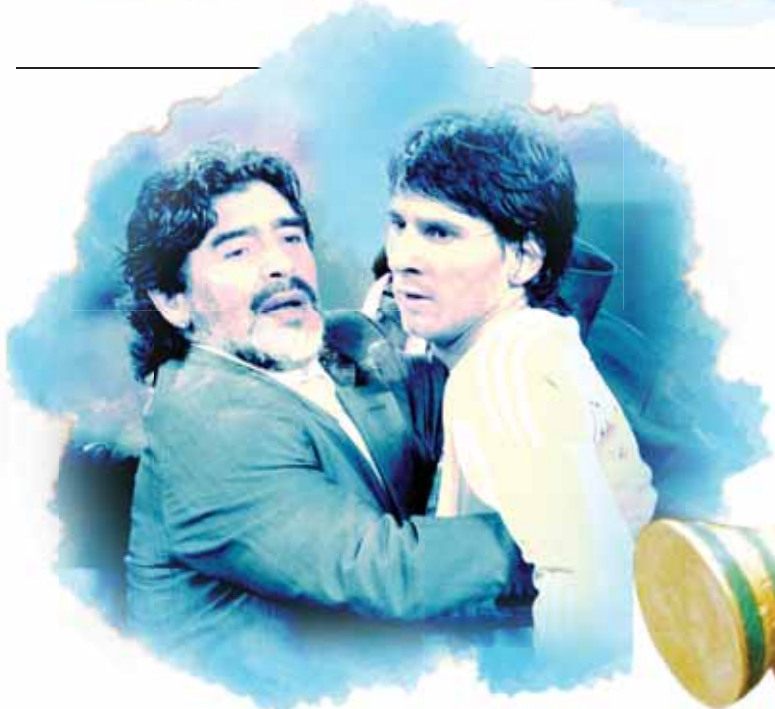
It is probably a tribute to Maradona's legend that he achieved what he did despite the off-field troubles that plagued him.

November 25, 2020 will go down in history as the day when football lost its most romantic servant.

The one who enamoured his supporters and countrymen as effortlessly as he agonised and toyed with his opponents.

Maradona is an emotion that will live on eternally.





MARADONA AT
1986 WC

90
DRIBBLES

10
GOALS/ASSISTS

53
FOULED



Reaction to
Maradona’s demise



ARGENTINA AND
BARCELONA CAPTAIN
LIONEL MESSI, ON
INSTAGRAM

A very sad day for all Argentinians and for football. He has left us but he isn’t going anywhere because Diego is eternal. I’ll remember the lovely moments I experienced with him and I send my condolences to his family and friends. Rest in peace.



ITALIAN SOCCER CLUB NAPOLI, WHERE MARADONA PLAYED FROM 1984-1991

Everyone is waiting for our words but what words could we possibly use for a pain such as this that we are going through? Now is the moment for tears. Then there will be the moment for words. “We are in mourning. We feel like a boxer who has been knocked out. We are in shock. A devastating blow for both city and club. Always in our hearts. Ciao Diego.

ATLETICO MADRID COACH DIEGO SIMEONE

When I was growing up Diego was the guide on how to play football. This painful moments hurts us all, because Maradona is football, he is Argentina, he had that rebellious character which defined him everywhere he went. “He really looked after me when we were both at Sevilla and I was very young. Diego may have gone but his spirit will remain on every football pitch.



FORMER ARGENTINA
PLAYER OSVALDO ARDILES

He’ll be remembered as a genius in football. You can see the extraordinary amount of interest he generates. People like Ronaldo or Messi, they couldn’t even dream of having this kind of admiration.



FORMER ENGLAND
STRIKER GARY LINEKER

By some distance the best player of my generation and arguably the greatest of all time. After a blessed but troubled life, hopefully he’ll finally find some comfort in the hands of God. #RipDiego



FIFA PRESIDENT
GIANNI INFANTINO

Today is an unbelievably sad day. Our Diego left us. Our hearts – of all of us who loved him for how he was, and for what he represented – have stopped beating for a moment. Our silence, our tears, our pain is the only thing we are feeling deep inside us at this time.



BRAZIL FOOTBALL
GREAT PELE

Sad news to lose a friend like that. May God give enough strength to his family. For sure, one day we will kick a ball together in heaven.



PORTUGAL AND JUVENTUS
FORWARD CRISTIANO RONALDO

Today I say goodbye to a friend and the world says goodbye to an eternal genius. One of the best of our times. An unparalleled magician. He leaves too early but leaves a legacy without limits and a void that will never be filled. Rest in peace. You will never be forgotten.

LIVERPOOL COACH
JUERGEN KLOPP

I’m 53 years old, my entire life, he was a part of it. Diego was a sensational guy. Maradona had some struggles. I will miss both.



MANCHESTER CITY COACH PEP GUARDIOLA

There was a banner in Argentina that said: ‘No matter what you have done with your life Diego, what matters is what you have done for our lives.’ “He gave a lot of joy and he made football better. What he did for Napoli and for Argentina in 1986 was something unbelievable. On the pitch he was unique. A once in a generation.





DIEGO MARADONA

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11

Diego Maradona

Career of the Argentine football legend



Oct 30 1960
Born at Lanus



Oct 20 1976
Debuts in Argentine first division with Argentinos Juniors



Feb 27 1977
First cap with Argentina, scoring first goal in his 9th match (1979)

Sept 7 1979
World Junior Champion in Japan

June 30 1984

Transfers to Napoli



Sept 4 1982

First match with Barcelona. Wins Copa del Rey in 1983



June 13 1982

1st World Cup match
June 18: two first goals during a World Cup



Feb 22 1981

First match with Boca Juniors



June 22 1986

Scores two famous goals including the "Hand of God", in the (2-1) win against England in the World Cup



June 29, 1986

World Champion



May 10, 1987

Wins Italian championship with Napoli, the first title for the club in 60 years. Wins the UEFA Cup in 1989



Sept 1992

Transfers from Napoli to Sevilla

April 8 1991

Suspended for 15 months for doping

March 17 1991

Tests positive for cocaine during a match between Napoli and Bari

July 8 1990

In Italy, loses World Cup final against Germany (1-0)



1993

Plays 5 matches with Argentine club Newell's Old Boys

June 1994

Tests positive for ephedrine, left out of Argentine team during World Cup



Aug 1994

Suspended for 15 months for doping

Oct 1997

Announces the end of his playing career

Aug 1996

Travels to Switz. for drug rehabilitation



2001 - 2004

Several disintoxication treatments in Cuba



April 2004

Heart attack, nearly dies

Oct 1995

Returns as player to Boca Juniors

Jan 1995

Coach of Racing Club, leaves in May of the same year



March 2005

Weighing 121 kg, undergoes gastric bypass surgery, loses 50 kg



Aug 2005

Becomes television host of his own show "tonight at 10"

Aug 2011 to July 2012

Directs Al Wasl club in the Arab Emirates



Nov 2008

Becomes coach of Argentine national team

July 2017

Coach of Al-Fujairah, 2nd division Emirates club

Sept 2018

Coaches Dorados de Sinaloa, 2nd division Mexican club

Sept 2019

Coach of Gimnasia La Plata

Nov 3 2020

Brain surgery to remove a blood clot, 4 days after his 60th birthday

Nov 25 2020

Dies of heart attack in Buenos Aires



L I V E R P O O L G O D O W N T O A T A L A N T A A T A N F I E D

BAYERN, MAN CITY THROUGH TO LAST 16



PARIS: Robert Lewandowski set Bayern Munich on the way to a 3-1 Champions League win over Salzburg on Wednesday as the holders joined Manchester City in qualifying for the last 16 with two group games to spare, while Liverpool went down to defeat and Marseille are now the owners of an unwanted record. On a night when clubs marked news of the death of Diego Maradona by holding a minute's silence in memory of the Argentine before all Champions League games, Bayern eased to a record-extending 15th straight win in the competition.

Lewandowski scored the opener just before half-time at an empty Allianz Arena, his 14th goal of the season and also his 71st altogether in the Champions League, leaving him level with Real Madrid great Raul in third place on the all-time list behind Cristiano Ronaldo (131) and Lionel Messi (118). Kingsley Coman scored Bayern's second and then crossed for Leroy Sane to head

in their third, before Mergim Berisha pulled a goal back for the Austrian champions. Marc Roca was sent off for Bayern, but they have a maximum 12 points and are guaranteed to advance as Group A winners, while Atletico Madrid sit second but continue to toil in Europe this season after being held 0-0 at home by Lokomotiv Moscow. Pep Guardiola's City earlier secured progress as Phil Foden swept in from a Raheem Sterling back-heel to secure a 1-0 win away to Olympiakos in Greece, their fourth win out of four in Group C. City had 21 attempts on goal and their bluntness in attack is a source of concern, even if their European progress provides a tonic to their mediocre Premier League form. "It will come, we would love to do more, but one day it will come and will break everything", said Guardiola, whose side now just need a point from their final two matches to top the group.

UNLUCKY 13 FOR MARSEILLE
Second-place Porto are on the brink of joining them in qualifying after a 2-0 win at Marseille, which was the French side's 13th consecutive defeat in the competition stretching over three campaigns going back to 2011-12. The Nigerian Zaidu Sanusi gave Porto the lead six minutes before half-time and Sergio Oliveira scored a second-half penalty after on-loan Liverpool midfielder Marko Grujic had been sent off for the Portuguese side. Marseille, who had defender Leonardo Balerdi sent off, cannot now qualify for the last 16. — AFP

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS	
On Wednesday:	
Group A	
At Madrid	
Atletico Madrid (ESP) 0 Lokomotiv Moscow (RUS) 0	
At Munich, Germany	
Bayern Munich (GER) 3 (Lewandowski 42, Coman 52, Sane 68) Salzburg (AUT) 1 (Berisha 73)	
Group B	
At Milan, Italy	
Inter Milan (ITA) 0 Real Madrid (ESP) 2 (Hazard 7-pen, Hakimi 59-og)	
At Moenchengladbach, Germany	
Borussia Moenchengladbach (GER)	

4 (Stindl 17-pen, Elvedi 34, Embolo 45+1, Wendt 77) Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 0
Group C
At Marseille, France
Marseille (FRA) 0 Porto (POR) 2 (Sanusi 39, Oliveira 72-pen)
At Piraeus, Greece
Olympiakos (GRE) 0 Manchester City (ENG) 1 (Foden 36)
Group D
At Amsterdam
Ajax (NED) 3 (Gravenberch 47, Mazraoui 49, Neres 66) Midtjylland (DEN) 1 (Mabil 80-pen)
At Liverpool, England
Liverpool (ENG) 0 Atalanta (ITA) 2 (Ilicic 60, Gosens 64)