



50
GLORIOUS YEARS

MUSCAT DAILY

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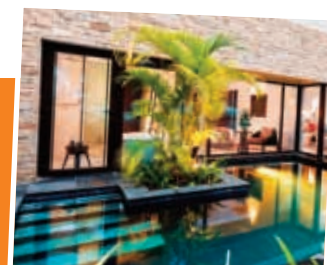
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FAMILY FRIENDLY STAYS IN THE LAP OF NATURE
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Field hospital to start in October

COVID-19 field hospital in old airport will have 312 beds, but the first phase will be initiated with a capacity of 100 beds



Supreme Committee members, including H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi and H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Obaid al Sa'eedi visited the field hospital on Monday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's first field hospital for COVID-19 patients will be operational by early October. On Monday, H E Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health (MoH), informed that the field hospital is currently receiving final touches before opening at the old airport.

The hospital will have 312 beds, but the first phase will be initiated with a capacity of 100 beds. A shelter centre will be attached to the field hospital with an area of 10,000sq m and a capacity of 384 beds.

"The field hospital will not receive patients directly, but only

those who need to be admitted and referred from other hospitals and health centres and requiring moderate care only," H E Dr Hosni said, adding that critical cases will be referred directly to the referral hospitals.

A medical team from the MoH consisting of 30 doctors, 115 nurses, seven lab technicians, seven assistant pharmacists and seven radiologists will run the field hospital. The hospital will cover patients from the governorates of Muscat, South and North Batinah, Dakhliyah, and North Sharqiyah. Other governorates will be covered if necessary in the future.

H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior and Chairman of the Supreme

A medical team from the MoH consisting of 30 doctors, 115 nurses, seven lab technicians, seven assistant pharmacists and seven radiologists will run the field hospital

Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, along with other committee members visited the site of the field hospital on Monday.

Eng Abdul Amir bin Abdul Hussain al Ajmi, executive director for External Affairs and Value Creation at Petroleum Development Oman, said that PDO praised the role of the Supreme Committee and it is

eager to collaborate with the committee in the interest of the public welfare.

"PDO, in collaboration with Carillion Alawi, has equipped the field hospital with beds, medical equipment and logistic support. PDO staff contributed a large amount through a campaign that lasted for three months," Eng Ajmi said.

The goal of establishing a field hospital is to relieve the pressure

on the sultanate's hospitals, resumption of essential services that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as maintain the health of health workers in hospitals.

The COVID-19 field hospital, spread over 6,100sq m, has admission beds for mild and moderate cases, a temporary care section, a pharmacy, a laboratory for COVID-19 diagnosis and a radiology section.

The establishment of the field hospital was the result of collaboration between a number of government and private sector entities, including MoH, Civil Aviation Authority, Oman Airports, PDO, Royal Court Affairs, Royal Oman Police and other authorities.

'Vaccine for 20% of population by 2020 end'



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman hopes to vaccinate at least 20 per cent of its population against COVID-19 before the end of 2020. Frontline workers, including health and security personnel, will be the first ones to be vaccinated.

The country has been in touch with vaccine manufacturers to ensure the first batch is here before the end of 2020, H E Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health, said during his visit to the COVID-19 field hospital being set up at the old airport.

"We knocked on all doors to get the vaccine. The sultanate joined the Global Alliance for Vaccines (GAVI) to obtain the vaccine, which will provide ten per cent of our population's needs. The sultanate will obtain

We knocked on all doors to get the vaccine. The sultanate joined the Global Alliance for Vaccines (GAVI) to obtain the vaccine

H E DR MOHAMMED AL HOSNI

ten per cent of its vaccine requirements from other private companies.

"We hope to cover at least 20 per cent of the population with vaccine before the end of 2020," H E Hosni said.

He added that there is no approved vaccine so far, but noted that current test results are promising.

► NEWS BRIEFS

UN CHIEF RUES LACK OF MULTILATERAL SOLUTIONS

New York, US - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday deplored the lack of multilateral solutions to global challenges as he opened a summit for the world body's 75th anniversary.

"No one wants a world government - but we must work together to improve world governance," Guterres said at the UN General Assembly rostrum ahead of virtual speeches by world leaders.

"In an interconnected world, we need a networked multilateralism, in which the UN family, international financial institutions, regional organisations, trading blocs and others work together more closely and effectively," Guterres said.

"We also need an inclusive multilateralism, drawing on civil society, cities, businesses, local authorities and young people."

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An increasing number of people are seeking help for psychological problems, the latest data from the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) reveal.

According to the ministry, 53 per cent of the calls it received over four months (March to June) were related to psychological problems. This was followed by marital issues (17 per cent), family problems (12 per cent), economic problems (nine per cent) and others (nine per cent).

The figures were tabulated from nine dedicated MoSD phone lines to provide psycho-

logical and social support to community members during the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an MoSD official said, "The ministry launched a service called 'Psychological Support' for all members of society - citizens and residents - in Arabic and English language with a focus on individuals in home and institutional quarantine."

The service aimed at counselling individuals, helping them recover from negative emotions and finding psychological and social compatibility with their families and society, the official informed.

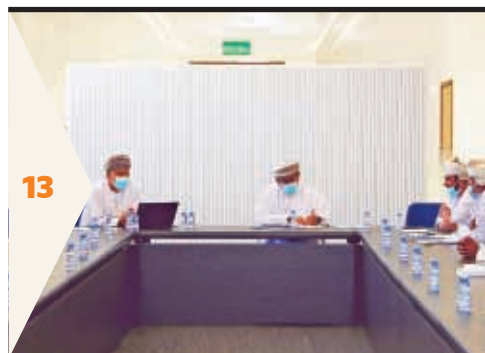
According to ministry statis-



12 Ronaldo helps Pirlo start with victory as Juve boss



13 Port of Salalah climbs 7 places to emerge 44th in global ranking



13 Local community firms to get shares of new projects in Duqm



16 Egypt discovers ancient sarcophagi at Saqqara necropolis

Over 53% calls on MoSD hotline for psychological problems



tics, the dedicated phone lines received thousands of calls - 91 per cent from Omanis and nine per cent from expatriates; 58 per cent were female and 42 per cent were male.

Revealing the age breakup of the callers, the MoSD official said 42 per cent were in the age group of 30-39 years and 35 per cent were aged 20 to 29 years. Callers aged 40 and older comprised 20 per cent of the total calls, while those under 20 years accounted for three per cent of the calls.

He confirmed that the most number of calls were from Muscat (55 per cent), followed by North Batinah (23 per cent),

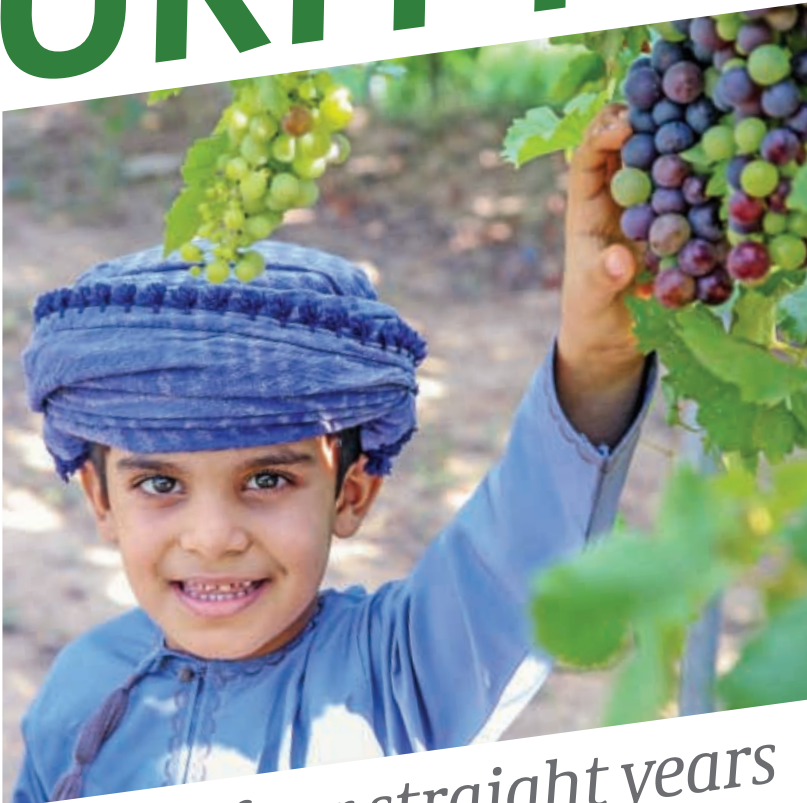
South Batinah and Dakhliyah (six per cent), Dhahirah (four per cent) and North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah governorates (three per cent).

"Psychological problems are negative emotions and feelings that can include tension, fear, anxiety, insomnia, inability to sleep, panic attacks, frustration, despair and boredom," the MoSD official said.

MoSD has appointed psychologists to provide counselling to those isolated in institutional quarantine centres. The dedicated lines include 24994200 and 24994201. For counselling in English, residents can call 24994208.



FARMING FOR FOOD SECURITY



Net acreage of Oman’s cultivation land continues to grow for four straight years

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Farming has been integral to Omani culture for generations but with modern irrigation and cultivation techniques in practice, there is growing acceptance of it being a viable business as well as an important sector contributing to the country’s food security. The total area of farmland has also slowly but steadily increased over the last few years.

The cultivated area in Oman increased by 1.1 per cent to 262,000 acres in 2019 compared to 2018, according to National Centre for Statistics and Information figures released recently.

The figures shows cultivated area was spread over 240,000 acres in 2017 and 259,000 acres in 2018.

Fodder crops accounted for the largest area of cultivated land, totalling 119,959 acres and accounting for a total production of 1,698,706 tonnes, followed by fruit crops grown on a total area of 77,510 acres producing 468,654 tonnes. Vegetables were grown on 55,121 acres yielding

825,260 tonnes, and field crop farms were spread over 10,265 acres producing 25,483 tonnes.

Of the fodder crops, the total area of alfalfa cultivation stood at 23,710 acres with a total production of 406,586 tonnes, while the total area of Rhodesgrass cultivation was 87,480 acres with production of 1,191,480 tonnes. The total area of sorghum cultivation was 4,222 acres and production was 49,823 tonnes, while the area planted

CULTIVATED AREA (ACRES)	
2015	217,000
2016	220,000
2017	240,000
2018	259,000
2019	262,000

with other forage crops reached 4,547 acres yielding 50,817 tonnes.

Among fruit crops, date palms accounted for 60,434 acres with a total production of 376,850 tonnes, while mangoes accounted for 3,623 acres producing 16,006 tonnes. The total cultivated area of bananas was 3,751 acres with a total production of 18,447 tonnes.

The total area of lemon cultivation was 3,366 acres producing 7,189 tonnes, while the total area of coconut cultivation was 1,517 acres with a total production of 6,709 tonnes. Papaya was cultivated in 699 acres, yielding 5,830 tonnes. Areas cultivated for other fruit crops reached 4,120 acres with a total production of 37,623 tonnes.

Among the vegetable crops, tomatoes accounted for the largest cultivated area - 6,091 acres - producing 201,293 tonnes, followed by watermelon grown on a total area of 4,161 acres yielding 56,616 tonnes. Cauliflower was cultivated on 3,345 acres to produce 28,315 tonnes.

Cantaloupes were cultivated on 2,875 acres to produce 33,818 tonnes, while pepper was grown on 2,557 acres yielding 65,331 tonnes.

The total area of okra cultivation was 1,935 acres and production was

16,843 tonnes, while eggplants were cultivated on 2,118 acres to produce 30,895 tonnes.

The total cultivation area of cabbage was 1,832 acres and production was 19,192 tonnes. Onion was cultivated on 1,324 acres and production was 9,163 tonnes. About 1,489 acres of land was cultivated with potatoes, with the production reaching 15,766 tonnes.

The total area of carrot cultivation was 1,385 acres and production was 18,303 tonnes, while the total area of zucchini cultivation was 1,171 acres with production of 10,656 tonnes.

Garlic was cultivated on an area of 449 acres yielding 2,501 tonnes. Radish was cultivated in 373 acres and production was 3,070 tonnes, while cucumbers were cultivated on an area of 326 acres with production of 73,983 tonnes.

Other vegetables were cultivated on an area of 23,697 acres and the production was 239,520 tonnes.

As for field crops, maize was cultivated on a total area of 2,469 acres with a total production of 8,916 tonnes, while the total cultivated areas with wheat was 2,235 acres producing 3,615 tonnes. The total cultivated areas of barley was 1,459 acres with a total production of 1,901 tonnes. Other field crops accounted for a total area of 4,102 acres and production of 10,051 tonnes.



CROP COVERAGE & PRODUCTION

Top 4 crops	Cultivated area (acres)	Production (tonnes)
Fodder	119,959	1,698,706
Fruits	77,510	468,654
Vegetables	55,121	825,260
Field crops	10,265	25,483

TOP 10 FRUIT & VEGETABLE CROPS

Fruit & vegetables	Area (acres)	Production (tonnes)
Date palm	60,434	376,850
Tomato	6,091	201,293
Watermelon	4,161	56,616
Banana	3,751	18,447
Mango	3,623	16,006
Lemon	3,366	7,189
Cauliflower	3,345	28,315
Cantaloupe	2,875	33,818
Pepper	2,557	65,331
Eggplant	2,118	30,895

FIELD CROPS

Top 4 field crops	Cultivated area (acres)	Production (tonnes)
Maize	2,469	8,916
Wheat	2,235	3,615
Barley	1,459	1,901
Other field crops	4,102	10,051



Expats who lost jobs sell water on streets

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

A group of expatriate workers, who lost their jobs and sources of income in the aftermath of the virus outbreak, have chosen to sell bottles of water at intersections and traffic signals.

Such activities are strictly prohibited in Oman. But these people, who are mostly from Bangladesh, say they don't have any other way to make both ends meet.

Shiraz, in his 30s, sporting a rough beard and a confused look, has been selling water for the last 25 days at the traffic signal between Holiday Inn Muscat and Muscat City Centre.

"I buy bottles of water in large quantities at low price. I stock them in our common freezer and then sell them at normal prices which is 100bz," Shiraz said.

"Both men and women buy water from me. Some kind people pay me 200bz or even 500bz."

Shiraz said he was selling water because he was no longer employed.

"The restaurants where I worked were closed for months



(Muscat Daily)

because of COVID-19. When they reopened recently, I was told there was no work for me. I tried hard to find some other work. Out of desperation, I chose to come to the road with these

bottles."

Shiraz's friend Alam said each of them can earn nearly RO10 by the end of the day, after 'working' from 7am to 7pm.

"The best time is at noon

when most people return home but it is tough for us as the sun is very strong at that time," he said.

Most of these men had been working with restaurants, small offices and construction sites.

But now they are struggling for survival.

Seeb resident Ahmed al Touqi who works as a public relations officer, often encounters such men on the roads.

"I genuinely feel bad for these people," he said.

"They lack work and they are desperate. I know this is perhaps not the right thing to do. We need to come up with a solution

The restaurants where I worked were closed for months because of COVID-19. When they reopened recently, I was told there was no work for me

SHIRAZ

at the earliest to help them."

However, there are many who do not approve of these activities.

A banker who spoke on the condition of anonymity said that such people at times cause disturbance and encroach on the privacy of motorists.

"They also put their own and other people's lives at risk by suddenly crossing the roads," he said.

The Ministry of Labour, represented by the Joint Inspection Team in Muscat governorate, arrested 43 expatriates in July for selling drinking water in public places and roads.

Labour Undersecretary calls for job creation for citizens



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Sheikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosani, Undersecretary for Labour in the Ministry of Labour, visited a number of establishments in Sur Industrial City, part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, and directed companies to create job opportunities for citizens.

H E Hosani also visited Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (Oman LNG) and Oman India Fertiliser

Company (OMIFCO). The visit aimed at replacing expats with Omanis and creating further job opportunities for citizens within the framework of partnership and cooperation with private sector establishments.

H E Hosani was briefed on work procedures, and the creation of an appropriate work environment that guarantees the stability of the national workforce.

H E Hosani also met with Eng Abdul Qadir bin Salim al Balushi,

director general of Sur Industrial City. They agreed to replace the expatriate workforce in higher and middle category jobs in future plans, organising the labour market and exchanging ideas and visions aimed at finding new and continuous job opportunities for the national workforce.

H E Hosani praised OMIFCO for its contribution in training Omani youth to work in various fields, including health and safety programmes.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.40am	Duhr	12.05pm	Maghrib	6.09pm
Sunrise	5.56am	Asr	3.30pm	Isha	7.19pm

INVITATION TO TENDER



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

Tender No. : 2020-ENG-SOW-0021

Tender Title : SAPP GRS Bypass Gas Piping

Scope : Design, Engineering, supply, Installation and commissioning for Bypass Gas Piping system at SA power plant as per SA scope of work.

Tender No. : 2020-ENG-SOW-0050

Tender Title : Supply of HVAC Chiller condensing coils in SAPP

Scope : Contractor must supply, Installation and commissioning for HVAC Chiller condensing coils and other related items at SA power plant as per Scope.

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>

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FOUR STAGES

FIRST PRELIM
01 October 2020

SECOND PRELIM
06 October 2020

MEGA PRELIM
08 October 2020

WEEKLY QUIZ
STARTING FROM
01 SEPTEMBER 2020
TO JOIN THE WEEKLY QUIZ
VISIT THE LINK
OR
SCAN THE QR CODE

LINK : <https://bit.ly/35SnTmL>

GRAND FINALE
ON
10 OCTOBER 2020

EVENT SPONSORS

WINNERS OF WEEK 3

First Position:
Name: **Aniruddh Sajit Menon**

Second Position:
Name: **Rithika Ravindren**

Guidelines

- The weekly quiz (**Every Tuesday**) is open to all the residents of Oman irrespective of their nationality.
- The link for accepting the answers will be active every Tuesday from 9 am till Wednesday midnight and will stop accepting responses after that.
- The quiz will have 2 winners per week namely the **FIRST** and the **SECOND**.
- In case of a tie or a greater number of participants with correct answers, the initial correct respondents will be declared as the winners (Timestamp of 9 am will be taken into account).
- The prizes for the winners will be announced during the Grand finale (10th October).

2nd ISQUIZ virtual event from Oct 1

Celebrity quiz master Vinay Mudaliar to host grand finale on October 10 streamed live on YouTube



**MEDIA SPONSOR
MUSCAT DAILY**

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The much-awaited second edition of ISQUIZ, the annual inter-school quiz organised by Indian Schools in Oman, was officially inaugurated by the host school - Indian School Salalah - on September 19.

The competition is held under the aegis of the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman.

ISQUIZ 2020 will be held in four stages. The first prelim will begin on October 1. All the stages - the first prelim, second prelim, mega prelims and grand finale - are to be conducted completely online.

The grand finale, to be held on October 10, will be hosted by Vinay Mudaliar, a celebrity quiz master and the founder of Mindcogs, a prominent quiz venture. The grand finale will be streamed live on YouTube for the public.

A record number of 8,158 entries from students across the Indian schools have been received, indicating the immense popularity of the event.

The inaugural ceremony held virtually was graced by various dignitaries including Dr Baby Sam Saamuel, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman; Dr Syed Ahsan Jamil, president, School Management Committee, Indian School

Salalah; P B Salim, managing director of Noor Gazal; Mark Rix, CEO of Apex Media; and quiz master Mudaliar.

A record number of 8,158 entries from students across the Indian schools in Oman have been received, indicating the immense popularity of the event

The event was attended by the members of the board, School Management Committees, principals, teachers and participating students.

Dr Saamuel stressed on the importance of competence, re-

silience and adaptability to change as the needed skills of the hour and highlighted that the quiz is an extension of this re-

Dr Jamil stated that everyone must improve their knowledge, as all are life-long learners irrespective of age. Using the word 'QUIZ' as an acronym of Question Your Inner Zeal, he highlighted what quizzing is all about.

Salim, managing director of Noor Gazal, the mega sponsor of the event, conveyed how delighted he was to be associated with ISQUIZ 2020. He asserted that experimentation and the human instinct to move ahead are the keys to success.

Rix noted in his felicitation that the *Muscat Daily* is proud to be involved in the endeavour as media partner and in playing an essential role in promoting the

biggest quiz in the country. He underlined the importance of developing reading as a serious habit. He also advised the students to maintain humility in victory and defeat. He pointed out how competition is healthy and helps to focus the mind.

The salient features of the quiz were presented to the viewers by Deepak Patankar, principal, Indian School Salalah.

Mudaliar noted that the 2020 edition of ISQUIZ is a truly 'Digital Avataar'. He declared that ISQUIZ 2020 would be visual-based with innovative rounds. He also exhorted the participants to 'research more' and 'observe more'.

Cutting mountains, excavation under roads need approval

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its efforts to safeguard the environment and preserve the urban character of Muscat governorate, Muscat Municipality has reiterated that cutting mountains and digging under roads are only permissible after obtaining a licence from the municipality in accordance with the provisions of regulations in force.

Muscat Municipality issued the regulation (212/2017) which relates to obtaining licences for mountain cutting and excavation work.

'The municipality reaffirms the importance of providing protection from falling rocks and landslides. The work has to be carried out by an approved contractor, under the supervision of an accredited consultant in accordance with the licence issued by the municipality.'

The municipality stated that it examines any application it receives with all the required documents, and decides upon it within a period of 30 days from the date of submission. The re-



quest should be considered rejected if the said period passes without a reply from the municipality.

The regulation prohibits cutting of mountains or doing excavation work under roads between sunset and sunrise, and from Friday until midday on Saturday. Such work can be done only after obtaining prior approval from the municipality, and providing a bank guarantee with a minimum of RO2,000 for a period of two years according to the type of cut and its length. In a letter of pledge, a road contractor registered with Muscat Mu-

nicipality needs to mention that the applicant will carry out repair works if asphalted roads are damaged.

The contractor is obliged to provide a certified bank guarantee of RO30,000 to the municipality for a period of two years in case of spiral digging under a main dual carriageway of two lanes; RO7,500 will be added for every extra lane.

A consultant is obliged to submit a request to the municipality to remedy the situation in the event of a collapse that damages buildings around the project within a maximum period of ten

days from the date of the collapse.

Since this type of excavation causes accumulation of debris, Muscat Municipality stated that a letter confirming the disposal of waste should be submitted when requesting the refund of the insurance amount. In another letter, the authority which supervised the project needs to mention that the project was implemented according to the necessary procedures.

The consultant and the contractor, depending on the circumstances, will be liable for any incident caused by the work implemented and for the damages caused to individuals, public and private property during the implementation of the project.

The regulation stated that anyone who violates the provisions of the regulation will be penalised with an administrative fine of RO2,500 in case the licence was not obtained. A fine of RO500 will be added if any other provisions are violated. If the violation is not corrected within ten days, the licence will be considered revoked.

EXCAVATOR FIRE EXTINGUISHED



The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulances (PACDA) announced that its firefighting teams in Muscat dealt with an incident of an excavator catching fire in the Rusayl Industrial Area in the wilayat of Seeb. No injuries were reported (Source: PACDA)

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Candidates must send their CV and other documents to raed.hassan@alanzoor.com & justine.anunciacion@alanzoor.com

576 new COVID-19 cases, 7 deaths reported

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday confirmed 576 new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), taking the total to 94,051. The number of deaths reported was seven. Recoveries too have increased, the ministry said.

'The number of recoveries has increased to 85,781 while the number of deaths has reached 853,' an MoH statement said. As of Monday, a total of 551 patients were admitted in health institutions

while 180 patients were in ICU.

MoH calls upon all to adhere to the isolation procedures by staying in an isolated room with an attached toilet and serving the isolated person from outside the room as instructed. It said that social distancing also helps curb the spread of the virus.

MoH advises all citizens and residents to continue washing hands with water and soap, avoid touching the face, nose, mouth, and eyes and follow healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

Topfruit

NO ADDED SUGAR

Passengers, drivers await return of public transport

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With coronavirus health restrictions still in place for public transport, both passengers and taxi drivers are awaiting days when services get into full swing. Bus services in the sultanate are not operating while taxis are going through a bad patch with many people having concerns about boarding them. Mahmmod al Riyami, a taxi driver in Ruwi, said his income is badly affected. "I operate from the Ruwi bus stand area and usually take people to and from Muttrah. In the last few months when the city was under lockdown with Muttrah being the most hit, we suffered. There was no business. Also we are not allowed to take more than three passengers now and so our income is drastically reduced."

For people without personal cars, transport has been a grave problem. Professionals like sales-



Before, I used to get in the bus around 8am and reach on time. But now I need to depend on cabs; they take time to fill and leave. Also I find them a bit risky

SADIQ KHAN

men who need to travel often find it tough to meet deadlines. The heat and the long wait for

the taxis is also another factor. They miss buses which are considered one of the best

means of local transport owing to the speed, comfort and fare. Sadiq Khan, a Pakistani national, said, "I am yet to get my licence and it is very tough for me to go to work in Ghala from Ruwi. Before, I used to get in the bus around 8am and reach on time. But now I need to depend on cabs; they take time to fill and leave. Also I find them a bit risky." He said his office has agreed

to provide him transport but he will have to leave early. The number of taxis and vans on the roads has seen a drastic drop in the past months. Salim P, an Indian expat, said, "One of the best things in Oman was that there was never a shortage of cabs at anytime of the day, but now one needs to wait for long time to get a cab mainly on main roads."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mwasalat bus service resumption need of the hour

As the Supreme Committee dealing with the COVID-19 situation has decided on the re-opening of Muscat International Airport on October 1, I would request concerned authorities also to give permission to start the operations of Mwasalat buses across the country, especially in Muscat. So many commuters depend on the public transport system as they can't afford the exorbitant charges levied by taxi drivers. Once the airport is operational, buses will be needed to ply from the city to airport and vice versa. As per reports, Mwasalat transported more than 9.2mn passengers in its bus service, and more than 240,000 passengers through its ferry service during 2019. Mwasalat is the safest mode of transport for commuters. However, due to the coronavirus there are certain guidelines to be followed by commuters. All buses must be sanitised at regular intervals and social distancing norms should be followed in all the routes. The return of Mwasalat buses will be a great relief to all blue-collar workers and some families too.

Hiten Dutia
Via email

MoE approves regulations for activities of schools

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shibaniyah, Minister of Education, issued a decision approving the regulations for operations of schools that will help the ministry to prepare implementation of the Supreme Committee decisions for the academic year 2020/21 for blended education. The ministry, which has been preparing plans to reopen schools in a manner that guarantees the safety of students and members of the teaching and administrative staff, is taking advantage of the best regional and international experiences. "The framework for the operations of schools will include the guide for teachers and students for using the electronic platform, the teaching plan for e-learning, the mechanisms of operating special education schools, and private schools," MoE said. It said that the blended education approach will include regular attendance of students in some classes and online education in other classes. On the days when students are not attending classes, they are obligated to attend e-learning according to their assigned schedules, which are prepared by the school administration according to the approved curriculum.



(Photo for illustrative purpose)

Smart City Ambassadors initiative wins at ITU Innovation Challenges

Muscat - Smart City Ambassadors, one of the initiatives of the Smart City Platform, has achieved a global achievement for the sultanate by winning in the 'Ecosystem Best Practice' category in the 2020 ITU Innovation Challenges competition. Laila al Hadhrami, a member of the executive team of the Smart City Platform, said that the platform team is currently working on documenting the initiative of the Smart City Ambassadors in scientific research in cooperation with the e-government office of the United Nations University in order to be adopted as a global practice in the field of digital transformation. The Smart City Platform is one of the initiatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in

The platform focuses on facilitating and enabling smart city innovations through funding research and conducting competitions

partnership with the Supreme Council for Planning (formerly), Muscat Municipality and the Information Technology Authority (formerly), with the founding partners being Omantel, Omran and Nama Holding. The objectives of the platform focus on facilitating and enabling smart city innovations through funding research and carrying

out innovation competitions as well as creating awareness on the importance of smart city solutions and best practices. The newly formed Smart City Ambassadors initiative aims to create knowledge societies in the governorates and wilayats of the sultanate. With the goal of spreading knowledge and awareness of different aspects of the smart city sector and its various solutions, the initiative attracted the registration of more than 700 ambassadors from various governorates. The Smart Cities Ambassadors also launched a professional community of practice, which aims to create a professional platform for smart city ambassadors in order to exchange knowledge, transfer expertise and work on various projects.

Two arrested for stealing from cars

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two people have been arrested on charges of stealing cash from vehicles in two different incidents. An official at Royal Oman Police (ROP) stated that South Sharqiyah Police Command arrested a man for stealing cash from a vehicle in Sur. "The accused stole the enve-



lope containing cash when the victim got off the vehicle. ROP arrested the accused from South Batinah.' In the second incident, the South Sharqiyah Police Command arrested another man for stealing money and a mobile phone from a vehicle after its driver had stopped and got off at a public place in Sur. ROP urges motorists not to leave cash and valuables inside their vehicles.

Indian School Board conducts webinar on assessment and evaluation

Muscat - The Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman in association with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), New Delhi, recently conducted a webinar on 'Assessments and Evaluation - Tracking Students' Progress during the Pandemic'. The resource persons for the virtual event were experts from CBSE, Dr Joseph Emmanuel, director (academics) and Dr Sanyam Bhardwaj, controller of examinations. As per a statement, various principals, vice principals, assistant vice principals and teachers of Indian schools in Oman at-

tended the insightful and interactive session. The event began with a welcome address by Vinoba M P, senior principal and education advisor to the Board of Directors of Indian Schools, who welcomed the CBSE dignitaries and spoke about the phenomenal measures taken by the board in upskilling the staff and providing quality remote learning to students during the pandemic period. In his inaugural message, Dr Baby Sam Saamuel, chairman of the Indian School Board, thanked CBSE for the support

extended to Indian Schools in Oman, especially during COVID-19, through various online sessions for the upskilling of faculty. "This webinar session will no doubt lead us ahead, as we now climb up the ladder in our virus response," Dr Saamuel added.

He also lauded the resilience and adaptability shown by teachers across Indian schools in Oman in mastering the skills required to initiate remote learning and said that it has been a constant and continual journey of learning for the staff and students.

The CBSE officials, Dr Emmanuel and Dr Bhardwaj were introduced to the forum by Papri Ghosh, principal, Indian School Ghubra, and Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan, principal, Indian School Muscat respectively. Dr Emmanuel, in his address, highlighted the salient aspects of the New Education Policy and the positive impact it will have on the educational front in the country. "It will be a transition from content-based learning to competency-based learning and preparing the young generation to take up the challenges of the

21st century without losing the elements of discipline, commitment and hard work that are quintessential of the Indian Education system." In his address to the forum, Dr Bhardwaj covered the whole gamut of assessments and evaluations with specific reference to the ways and means of tracking students' progress during the prevailing pandemic milieu. Dr Bhardwaj said that CBSE Board, India, was able to conduct the public examinations and declare the results even during the pandemic period. He thanked the heads of all CBSE-

affiliated schools across the world for the support received from them in this regard. In a Q&A session held as part of the webinar, the CBSE officials responded to the queries posed to them by the principals and the teachers. The Q&A session was moderated by Santhitha Verma, convener of Oman Chapter of CBSE Principals. The webinar was moderated by Alex C Joseph, assistant education advisor, and was concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by S I Shareef, principal, Indian School Muladha.

The resource persons for the virtual event were experts from CBSE, Dr Joseph Emmanuel, director (academics) and Dr Sanyam Bhardwaj, controller of examinations

Finance your home easily with Bank Muscat Baituna



In line with its commitment to national development and priorities, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, offers Baituna home finance that makes the dream of owning a home come true. The attractive features of Baituna home finance include competitive interest rates starting at 5.75 per cent and a tenure up to 25 years. The competitive interest rate is particularly attractive for people looking for the best home finance deals in the sultanate.

Customers can obtain easy and convenient credit approval across the sultanate at any of the dedicated Baituna Sales Centres at Qurum, Ma'abala, Nizwa, Salalah, Barka, Sur, Saham, Sohar, Ibbi, Buraimi and Ibra or at the bank's retail banking branches.

Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, DGM - Institutional Sales & Product Development, said, "The real estate sector is a major component of the national economy and Bank Muscat is



committed to supporting this crucial sector and strengthening its role in the development and growth of the Omani economy. Baituna facilitates purchase and construction of new homes as well as land for residential use. It also offers insurance coverage and fast processing of applications across the bank's extensive

network of branches and dedicated Sales Centres. The finance offers flexible payment options and requires only simple documentation. We encourage our customers to make their dream homes a reality with the convenience of Baituna home finance."

Baituna home finance is available for salaried government em-

ployees (Omani) with a minimum salary of RO250 and minimum service of three months for up to 25 years of home financing while employees of Tier 1 private sector companies (Omani) minimum salary of RO500 and a minimum of six months of service are eligible for home loans having a tenure of up to 25 years.

Loans of up to RO500,000 are available through Baituna subject to the applicant fulfilling the relevant criteria. Easy processing, competitive interest rates and special guidance during the application process are some of the key advantages of getting home financing done through Bank Muscat Baituna.

With Oman now also becoming an attractive real-estate investment destination for GCC and non-GCC nationals, Baituna offers some of the best home financing options in the sultanate for different customer segments.

For more details please visit www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/details.aspx#baituna.

MEDC carries on operational work

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), a member of Nama Group, successfully carried on its operational and administrative work despite the exceptional circumstances caused by COVID-19.

The company had increased its network capacity in the Muscat governorate by 122 mega-volt-ampere during the first half of 2020 reaching a total network capacity in Muscat to 6,704 mega-volt-ampere.

This expansion contributed in keeping up with the increased demand in the Muscat governorate serving a total of 6,324 subscribers.

Additionally, the company launched the operation of three primary substations, 37 of ground mounted type distribution stations and 11 of poll mounted type; the distribution cables used amounted to a total distance of 262km in the Muscat governorate.

It is worth noting that through the adoption of new technologies, MEDC managed to optimise its processes, reduce the turnaround time for such services as application submission, as well as better organise the distributing of work shifts and the follow through.

Moreover, MEDC has extended its coordination with local authorities such as online bridging between the company and Muscat Municipality to provide the needed information before the construction work starts.

Infiniti Oman follows safety precautions

To ensure safety of its customers and employees, Infiniti Oman is following a thorough safety precaution protocol at its service centre. The standard operating procedure it follows involves the execution of strict safety, sanitisation, and physical distancing rules.

Implemented in line with Oman's Supreme Committee advisories on COVID-19, Infiniti Oman's precaution protocol aims to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of its customers and employees as priority.

Among the important safety precautions and protocol being followed at the Infiniti Oman service centre include sanitisation of touch points and fumigation of facilities. While hand sanitisers are kept at customer receptions, thermal checks are

done before employees and customers enter the service centre. All staff keep a physical distance of two metres from customers.

Other safety measures include sanitisation of vehicle exterior touch points and protective covers on steering wheel, gear lever and seat. Staff always wear disposable gloves and face masks while handling and checking vehicles. All vehicles are sanitised before the start of work. The vehicle is washed, cabin is fumigated and touch points are sanitised before delivery.

Infiniti Oman ensures a sanitised service vehicle delivery to confirm complete safety.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, said, "We are steadfast regarding the safety of customers visiting us for service

and employees working with us. Our protocol and guidelines guarantee the utmost hygiene, sanitisation, and safety for all. Besides, our staff is trained to make the processes very secure, with highest focus on hygiene and safety."

SBA commitment

SBA is largely committed to supporting Infiniti Oman's growth in the sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of more than 40 showrooms, service centres and parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers.

NBO and Danube Home offer a chance to transform homes

Always finding exciting ways to reward its customers, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) popular credit card competition is back, offering customers the chance to win a home renovation worth RO2,000 with Danube Home.

Anyone shopping using an NBO credit card until September 30 will be eligible to enter the draw, which will be announced on the bank's social media channels.

Maha al Raisi, head of Card Business at NBO, said, "Aside from working hard to encourage cashless banking, particularly in light of COVID-19, it is our aim to find innovative ways to engage with our customers while adding value to their lives. Our latest competition is a great opportunity to take ad-



vantage of the experts for a fresh new interior. The best part is, cardholders are eligible to win just by doing their usual shopping."

NBO's suite of credit cards offer cashless convenience, tailor-made to meet the needs of

its customers. Providing excellent spending power and a smarter, safer alternative to cash, cardholders are able to access a host of unmatched benefits including movie tickets, dining and hotel discounts, free travel insurance, airport lounge

access and more.

Applications approved between September 1 and September 30 for new credit cards and all purchases of the required value during the same period will be eligible to enter the prize draw, which will take place on October 8. Cash withdrawals at ATMs will not be eligible for the draw. Winners will be published on social media and contacted by the bank with details about how to claim their prize.

More details about NBO's range of products and services are available in-branch at any of the 60 branches located across the sultanate, online at www.nbo.om or by contacting the NBO Call Centre on 80077077.

Ferrari Portofino M spells a voyage of rediscovery

The Ferrari Portofino M, the evolution of the Prancing Horse's 2+ GT spider, the Ferrari Portofino, has been unveiled. In a move unprecedented in the Maranello marque's 70 year plus history, the new car's premiere took place entirely online. The build-up to the unveiling included the sending out of a series of newsletters to clients over recent weeks at the end of which they were given access to a platform containing exclusive videos illustrating the concept behind the car, its restyling and main technical content.

Significantly, the Portofino M is the first Ferrari to be presented in the wake of the company's temporary closure due to the COVID-19 crisis, making it the symbol of a voyage of rediscovery. It is the (re)starting point for

Prancing Horse's pursuit of innovation whilst fully respecting its heritage, passion and constant search for perfection. All of these values are reflected in the new Portofino M with the 'M' in its moniker standing for 'Modificata', which in Ferrari nomenclature refers to cars that have undergone an evolution that has boosted their performance.

There is no shortage of technical innovation in this stunning new evolution of the Ferrari Portofino, the most notable being its redesigned powertrain, a brand-new eight-speed gearbox and a five-position Manettino that includes a Race mode, an absolute first for a Maranello GT spider.

As a consequence of these and many other new features, the Portofino M guarantees a

completely unprecedented combination of authentic GT performance, driving pleasure, agility and exceptional versatility in everyday driving contexts.

In terms of its powertrain, the Portofino M's 3855 cc engine, which belongs to the V8 turbo family voted "International Engine of the Year" on four consecutive occasions, has been optimised to unleash 620 cv at 7,500 rpm - 20 cv more than the Ferrari Portofino.

It also boasts a completely redesigned eight-speed gearbox that replaces the previous seven-speed version. This is, in fact, the first eight-speed to

be installed on an open-top Ferrari and is based on a dual-clutch oil bath architecture with a 20 per cent smaller clutch module and 35 per cent higher torque delivery.

From a vehicle dynamics perspective, the most significant innovation is most certainly the introduction of the five-position Manettino, an absolute first for a Prancing Horse GT spider.

The aim being, of course, to further enhance the Ferrari Portofino's already superb handling and traction through the addition of the Race mode. Supported by the Ferrari Dynamic Enhancer, said Race mode focuses mainly on maximising

driving pleasure and fun behind the wheel.

The significant technological evolution the model has undergone is visually underscored by the new design of the front of the car and the bumpers in particular, which are sportier and more aggressive. Both inside and out, there is a

sense of harmony of expression and intent in forms that are sometimes sharper and then softer and more flowing.

This latest design and engineering masterpiece from the Prancing Horse is the perfect evolution of the Ferrari Portofino. Sportier in character than its predecessor, it also delivers superior handling whilst not only maintaining but enhancing on-board comfort, courtesy of specific new optional features, such as ADAS, and ventilated and heated seats.

The Ferrari Portofino M thus retains its predecessor's twin soul.



MG Motor's ZS Turbo in Oman with exciting benefits

Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC (MHD), the official distributor of MG Motor, is offering their current and new customers an exciting deal on the all-spacious, stylish and premium MG ZS 1.3lt Turbo. With a unique and irresistible tech features, the MG ZS is designed to chase any adventure, and with an extraordinary performance, customers will be able to enjoy this rewarding deal on the MGZS starting from RO5,999 inclusive of registration, insurance, service package and six years manufacturer's warranty.

The MG ZS compact mid-size family SUV is the perfect option for buyers seeking a good-looking, well-equipped, well-built car at a sensible price. Inspired by iconic landmarks from its homeland, the MG ZS has many distinctive features customers can benefit from. Its London Eye inspired headlights and signature 'Star Rider' front grille grant the car a refined look that are certain to leave a lasting impression.

In addition to the above, the MG ZS has 17" alloy wheels, a maximum horsepower of 163hp, a 230Nm of torque, a 6-speed automatic gearbox, panoramic sunroof, one button start, keyless entry, a driver electric seat, red interior trim, power adjustable wing mirrors, manual air conditioning, rear camera, Apple CarPlay and many more features for customers to enjoy.



The first-generation MG ZS has played a major role in the success of the MG brand in the market. The model offers many contemporary enhancements that provide ultimate comfort

and exceptional room space for up to five adults. In addition to that, the driver and passengers will have up to 448lt boot space, a powerful air conditioning system, premium fabrics and a

panoramic view that will make the drive memorable.

Pleased to be announcing the availability of the ZS 1.3lt in the sultanate, Muhammad Faisal Nawaz, marketing manager, MG

Oman, elucidated, "Having premium finishes and bold proportions, the new MG ZS is a model that is sure to make a statement on the road. Spacious, and with a host of premium features, the

new ZS represents the ultimate in the compact mid-size family SUV segment; and is a remarkable evolution of one of MG's most successful cars to date. With an exciting new look, great

new technology and a quality new interior, the new MG ZS is sure to take the family SUV segment to the next level. We are confident that given the arrival of the model, existing MG customers will be excited to visit our showrooms and digital touchpoints to find out more; even new customers are sure to be attracted by this alluring new package."

It is noteworthy that MG's sanitisation drive initiative continues in all MG showrooms and service centres, adding stricter sanitization protocols for new vehicle deliveries (PDI) and all vehicles received by MG service centres, with the customer's safety remaining a number one priority.

MG Motor Oman has also introduced a brand-new e-commerce platform to help enhance its MG customers' purchase experience from the comfort and safety of their home.

The new platform <https://mg-om.com/buy-online/> allows customers to select vehicles and reserve vehicles from the available stock to conduct online payments and to schedule home delivery at their convenience. Additionally, customers can also book home test drives.

To arrange a test drive, or, if you require more details, please visit our MG Motor showroom, or call 71557334.

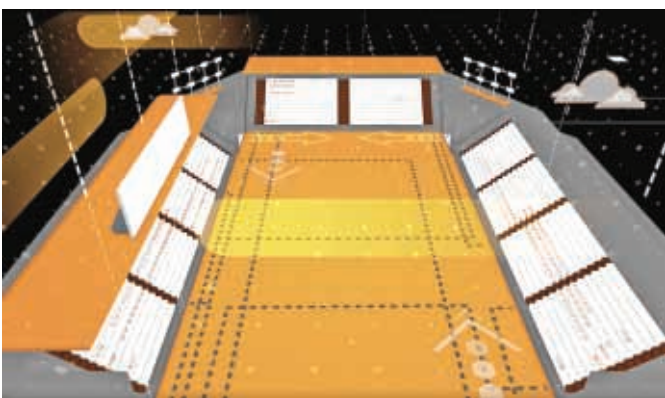
Alibaba Cloud digitalises sports events with AI solutions

During Apsara Conference 2020, the digital technology and intelligence backbone of Alibaba Group, unveiled a series of artificial intelligence (AI) powered solutions which are set to transform and digitalise the way sports entertainment was traditionally organised, broadcasted and consumed.

The solutions are designed to bring spectators closer to the events' centre stage for more

personalised and interactive engagement, while helping organisers and broadcasters operate more efficiently, effectively and securely. The applications of AI in sports have become increasingly common over the past few years. As an early adopter of technological trends, the UAE has welcomed innovative solutions to the sports industry.

Recently, the Dubai Sports Council held the Dubai Artificial



Intelligence in Sports (DAIS) Conference and Exhibition, where top decision-makers from the world of sports and leading names from the world of AI discussed the scope of AI's ability to enhance every facet of the global sports industry.

Event organisers are set to benefit considerably from Alibaba Cloud's Event Simulation Services (ESS). Running on cloud and powered by elastic compute,

ESS can help organisers plan the layout of indoor venues virtually, optimising the position of equipment and facilities, without having to move or commission a single piece of physical kit.

With the ability to create a digital twin, ESS negates the time, expense and risk of physical tests and run-throughs, providing a comprehensive digital examination of a venue for all key stakeholders. When it comes to

event broadcasting planning, ESS enables broadcasters to simulate and test different camera positions before installing camera tracks, thereby offering audiences the best point of view.

ESS provides organisers with a wealth of insights for post-event analysis for more effective future planning.

Alibaba Cloud is the official cloud services partner of the International Olympic Committee.

Bank Nizwa delivers convenience on the go



In line with its commitment towards digital transformation and innovation, Bank Nizwa has further enhanced user experience by adding features to its mobile banking application.

Aimed at providing a better customer experience, the bank has been leading the way in digitising Islamic banking, by en-

abling them to bank from the comfort of their homes. The recently revamped mobile app will now allow users to make bill payments for utilities such as electricity and water; pay fees for schools, universities, PASI and more.

"We are delighted to provide greater benefits to our cus-

tomers and include them in the age of digital banking in Oman. Our mobile application has been designed to make banking hassle-free with minimum personal interface during these times of physical distancing. The newly added features are a testament to our promise of modern banking, and are not

just simple to execute, but also safe and secure," said Arif al Zaabi, retail banking AGM at Bank Nizwa.

"The addition of bill payments for recurring expenses is a small step towards our commitment to product innovation, thereby making their life simpler," he added.

The bank had previously introduced Money Transfer Feature within and outside Oman which allows customers to make instant local as well as international transfers through a simple, fast, and secure channel to their loved ones.

Since its inception, Bank Nizwa has remained dedicated to making Sharia'a-compliant banking more accessible and efficient through innovative solutions. In addition to the mobile app, the bank maintains a 24/7 phone banking service, as well as ATMs, and CDDMs located in high-footfall locations.

Renna Mobile, Badr al Samaa provide special rates for healthcare

As part of its continuous efforts to aid the community, Renna Mobile has partnered with Oman's largest healthcare provider, Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals, to offer special benefits to its customers.

With this, Renna Mobile customers can avail healthcare services at any centre of Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals at special rates and stay healthy during these challenging times. The discount rates vary for different services as agreed between both partners. The details of different services and discounts are available at <http://www.rennamobile.com/bas-discount/>

All a Renna Mobile customer needs to do is dial *181*615# from his mobile. In reply the customer will receive an SMS. After receiving the SMS, the customer needs to show the SMS and civil ID at Badr al Samaa billing



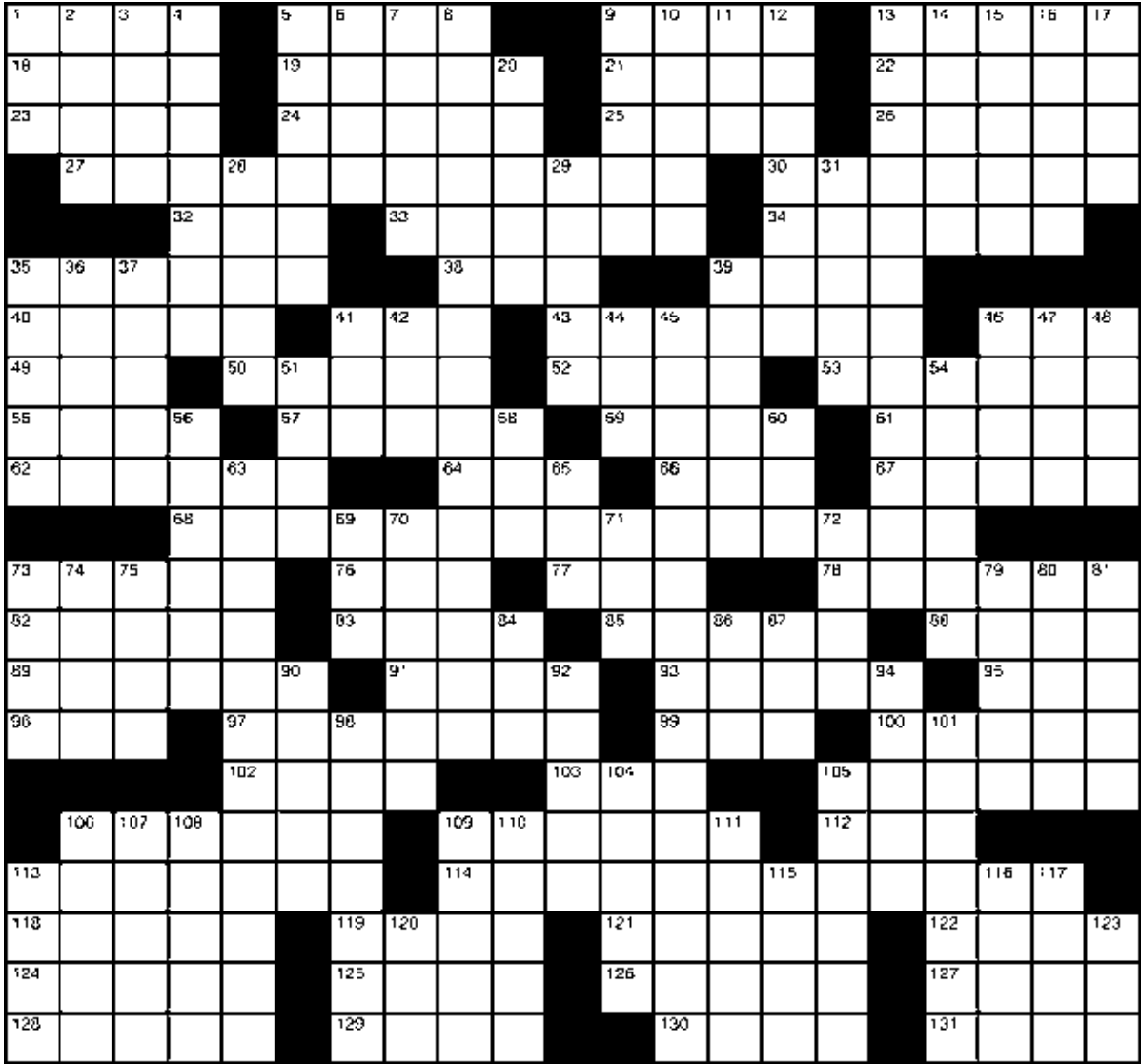
desk/customer care executive.

Raed Haddadin, CEO, Renna Mobile said, "We are excited to partner with Badr al Samaa, a prominent healthcare name in the region and sincerely appreciate their support for this initiative. In this testing time, it is extremely important that our customers get access to the best healthcare and no establishment other than Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals fits better."

In a joint statement the man-

aging directors of Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals, Abdul Lathief and Dr P A Mohammed said, "We are happy to offer our support to this special initiative by Renna Mobile. Being the largest healthcare provider in private sector, we understand our social responsibility and through this campaign, we not only make ourselves affordable to many but also raise awareness around the importance of preventive health check-ups."

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 Fraud

5 Kingpin

9 Des. manual

13 Urgency

18 Hindu melody pattern

19 Supports

21 Novel's main character

22 ___ ease: jittery

23 Dance ___

24 Headpiece for the prom?

25 On ___: equal

26 Furry marsupial

27 Instigate recall

30 Electra's brother

32 Gold in Granada

33 Clerical scarfs

34 Type of bug?

35 Defensive tree barrier

38 Heel

39 Insipid

40 Billiards stroke

41 Sturdy wood

43 Needle-shaped

46 Jet malady

49 Scrap

50 Croatian tourist spot

52 Greenish blue
- 53 Dismay

55 Booty

57 Wood strips

59 Bell sound

61 Textile fiber

62 Provoke

64 Dawn goddess

66 Atlas rd.

67 Incensed

68 Accept an offer eagerly

73 Surprise win

76 Russian govt. unit

77 Alouetta's friend

78 Trojan hero

82 Signified

83 Porgy

85 Appropriate

88 ___ -a-whirl

89 Compartments

91 Elevator name

93 Thrusting weapons

95 Ram's mate

96 Fort ___

97 Descriptive cognomen

99 Mehitabel, for one

100 ___ the hole

102 Rattles

103 ___ loss

105 Beautifies

106 Spurious

109 Repulsive
- 112 Greek letter

113 Message bearers

114 Relax requirements

118 Work a slide fastener

119 Bearing

121 Swimmer Nyad

122 Sleep like ___

124 Take care of

125 Mine access

126 Wise lawgiver

127 Room, in Spain

128 Ruhr city

129 Signifies assent

130 Cozy place

131 "SNL's" Samberg
- DOWN**

1 Madrid Mrs.

2 Pilgrimage to Mecca

3 Exchange premium

4 Insect larvae

5 Anticlimax

6 Drama award

7 Wrinkles

8 Exaggerate

9 Portion

10 Diarist Samuel

11 Notable time

12 Flower petals

13 Raise the ante

14 East Flanders

city

15 List of candidates

16 Former German coin

17 Greek letters

20 Pacific island group

28 Essays

29 ___ the hills

31 Steer catcher

35 Soap plant

36 Sacha ___

Cohen

37 Noted merchant

39 Inhalation

41 ___ carte

42 Pose

44 Upper limit

45 Act prudently

46 Tibetan monk

47 Descended

48 Jane Lynch TV series

51 ___ bargain

54 Primary relative

56 Flair

58 Barfly

60 Grazing area

63 Have a head start

65 ___ Na Na

69 Ltr. addition

70 Broad neckties

71 Rhea's relative
- 72 Scruff

73 Shield boss

74 Type of review

75 Chalcedony

79 Sea duck

80 Bitter crystal

81 British guns

84 Key lime product

86 ___ tree: stumped

87 Soak flax

90 Designer Kate

92 Wood coloring

94 Hindu holy man

98 ___ Triathlon

101 ___ cucumber

104 Producer Mike and others

105 Unmitigated

106 Stamp sheets

107 Shapes' partner

108 Cream of the crop

109 El ____: Sudan city

110 Impressions

111 Fracking rock

113 Ruminant

115 Son of Seth

116 Spirit

117 Auctioneer's word

120 Altar response

123 Author Talese

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

The past few weeks have witnessed you honing your craft and committing to new lifestyle changes. Now that you've found ways to realign body and mind, new terrain calls out to be explored. Partnership now takes on the utmost importance.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've spent enough time behind closed doors, Leo! The past few weeks have seen you focusing on your finances and keeping your nose to the grindstone with work. If you've been craving movement, look no further than today's skies.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You've been on your career game in a big way. After putting in the long hours and devoting yourself to getting ahead, you're feeling the need to reconnect with your people. The sun moves forward into Libra, propelling you forward into a new focus.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's been imperative that you let yourself enjoy life's pleasures over the past month. Romance, creativity, and a desire for play have refreshed your sense of spirit. As the sun moves forward into Libra, it promotes a focus on organising your workflow.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Do you have a good idea of who you'd like to become? After a few weeks of hard focus on your identity, you're ready to take your self-expansion to the next level. The sun moves forward into Libra, activating your need to organise your finances.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Nothing can hold you back. The past few weeks have been working to expand your perceptions and update your belief systems on life. Now, with that new awareness underfoot, you're ready to embark on the most important career month.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's a fact of life that Geminis are always on the go. Yet, the past few weeks have asked you to stay put and reevaluate the roots beneath your feet. Today, the sun moves forward into peace-loving Libra, helping lift you out of the doldrums.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Tensions are likely to rear their head on the home front. Plans to renovate, move, or redesign your living space can face some blockages, as Mars locks into a stifling square to Saturn. Another area of tension likely to feel the heat is your close relationships.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're finally coming out of the dark today, Aquarius! Intimacy issues and relationship dramas around shared finances seemed to permeate your world over the past few weeks, but you've managed to learn a lot about connection in that time.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Cancerians possess a deep reverence for their home life. The last month has seen you busier, running from neighbourhood to neighbourhood with not enough time to enjoy your humble abode. Focus your energy on reconnecting to your roots.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The past few weeks have seen you reaching your social limit! Your involvement in community and with friend groups has been rewarding—and has helped you get a better idea of your long-term goals. Today's skies herald an energetic shift.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Relationships have been your primary point of focus. You've learned a lot about your own expectations and projections in love. Now, it's time to go one step deeper. The sun moves forward into Libra, propelling a need to explore intimacy issues.

Answers: 1. a 2. c 3. c

KIDS COLOURING

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

7						5		3
9	2				8	7		
	8		6	5				
		2		3	5			
3	4						1	5
			8	2		9		
				8	3		6	
		1	2				9	7
6		4						2

BOGGLER

P	T	H	D
C	O	E	A
T	O	M	R
Y	N	A	O

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

2	9	8	6	7	1	4	3	9
7	6	3	4	9	2	1	5	8
1	9	4	3	8	9	6	7	2
4	3	6	1	2	8	7	9	5
5	1	2	9	6	7	8	4	3
8	7	9	5	3	4	2	6	1
6	2	1	7	4	9	5	8	3
9	4	7	8	1	3	5	2	6
3	8	5	2	4	6	9	1	7

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (SEPTEMBER 21)

WORD BUILDER

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

MEDICAL SUPPLY SERVICES for Home, Hospital, Clinic, School, College, Ministry, Club, Company/Factory



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DeChambeau storms to first major victory

GOLF: US OPEN

New York, US - Bryson DeChambeau captured his first major golf title on Sunday, firing a three-under-par 67 to win the 120th US Open and humble a relentless Winged Foot layout.

The 27 year old American, who bulked up during the coronavirus lockdown in a bid to add power to his game, eagled the par-five ninth from just inside 40 feet and rolled to a six-stroke victory over 21 year old countryman Matthew Wolff.

"Oh my gosh. I can't believe it," said DeChambeau, renowned for his scientific approach to the sport. "It has been a lot of hard work."

DeChambeau hit only 23 fairways for the week but finished 72 holes on six-under par 274 thanks to Sunday's only sub-par round at the formidable Mamaroneck, New York, layout.

DeChambeau became the first player since 1955 to win with the only sub-par score in the final round, and just the fourth ever to do it, completing a dominating performance.

Typical deep US Open rough could not stop DeChambeau, whose exercise and protein shakes delivered powerful drives while his calculations and precise readings produced solid shotmaking on a layout that crushed rivals.

"I just kept thinking throughout the back nine, 'We have to keep focused. I have to execute every shot the best I can.' And that's what I did," he said.

DeChambeau's 325 yards off the tee was a driving distance record by a US Open champion, defying convention by attacking without fear, taking swing speed length to outweigh drawbacks of finding the rough. "I worked my whole life for this," he said.

"I wasn't that afraid of going off line. I gained the confidence I needed for the week."

The scientist found a major-winning formula. On Saturday night, he was the last player to leave Winged Foot, working into the dark with his driver.



"Sure enough it paid off," he said. "I'm in shock right now. It's amazing."

South African Louis Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open winner, was a distant third on 282, one stroke ahead of American Harris English after both fired 73 Sunday.

Wolff led last-duo partner DeChambeau by two strokes when the day began but, in his US Open debut, failed to become the youngest US Open winner since Bobby Jones in 1923 and youngest major winner since Tiger Woods at the 1997 Masters.

DeChambeau, who spent a three-month coronavirus pandemic layoff building his physique, uses same-length

clubs and a chart book for judging putts, bringing some slow-play complaints but also six prior PGA Tour victories.

Ninth-ranked DeChambeau won in July at Detroit and shared fourth at last month's PGA, his best major finish until Sunday.

The coronavirus pandemic postponed the US Open from June and led to a spectator ban, although some fans cheered from beyond boundary fences.

Wolff led DeChambeau by two strokes at the start but made bogey at the par-three third. DeChambeau joined him on four-under with a birdie at the fourth, blasting from rough to 13 feet and sinking the putt.

Wolff missed a downhill ten-foot par putt at the fifth while

DeChambeau hit a seven-footer for par and took the lead alone for good, even after they both made bogeys at the eighth.

DeChambeau curled in an epic 40-foot eagle putt at the 556-yard par-five ninth, but Wolff knocked in a ten-footer to match him and stay one back.

Wolff began the back nine with a bogey, missing a ten-foot par putt, and DeChambeau rolled in an 18-foot birdie putt at the 11th to seize a three-stroke lead.

Wolff took a bogey at 14 and a double bogey at 16 while DeChambeau closed with seven pars, the last on 18 from seven feet to seal victory.

"Going through my body was just chills," DeChambeau said.

'Just a tough day'

Xander Schauffele shot 74 and settled for fifth on 284, one stroke ahead of two fellow Americans, top-ranked Dustin Johnson and Will Zalatoris.

"Tough golf course," Johnson said.

"I gave myself enough chances, but I just didn't putt well enough."

Third-ranked American Justin Thomas finished on 286 to share eighth in a pack with fourth-ranked Rory McIlroy, who closed with a 75.

"It was really difficult. Wind was up again," McIlroy said. "Looks like everyone found it pretty tough out there. Just a tough day."

AFF

Rivals debate the winning formula

GOLF: US OPEN

New York, US - Whether Bryson DeChambeau's US Open victory will revolutionise golf or just give a few people a new edge, it had other players talking after Sunday's final round at Winged Foot.

Ignoring fears of deep rough in favour of pure distance, DeChambeau won his first major title by six strokes, jumping from ninth to fifth in world rankings.

"Revolutionise? Maybe he's just exposing our game," American Xander Schauffele said. "If he keeps hitting it further and further, I don't see why he wouldn't be able to win many more US Opens."

DeChambeau's scientific approach has proven a winning formula: drive long, wedge from the rough, sink your putts.

"I don't really know what to say because that's just the complete opposite of what you think a US Open champion does," said four-time major winner Rory McIlroy.

"He has found a way to do it. Whether that's good or bad for the game, I don't know, but it's just not the way I saw this tournament being played."

"It's kind of hard to really wrap my head around it."

Schauffele said: "He's sort of trending in the new direction of golf. Everyone talked about hitting fairways. It's not about hitting fairways. It's about hitting on the correct side of the hole and hitting it far so you can kind of hit a wedge instead of a

six-iron out of the rough.

"The only way to make a golf course really hard is to firm up the greens and grow the rough... You'd rather be the guy in the rough with a lob wedge than with an eight-iron."

Then there are those who settle for the old-fashioned fairways, like two-time major winner Zach Johnson. "If he's not hitting fairways, the short game has been very good and this place is not easy around the greens," Johnson said.

"Is it the proper way? I don't know, but it's a way to play. And it's not wrong at all. It's just very different but also very effective."

With new club and ball technology to stress distance and big muscles to propel them, DeChambeau has 'taken advantage of where the game is at the minute', McIlroy said. "Whether that's good or bad, it's just the way it is."

McIlroy, hoping to complete a career Grand Slam at the Masters in November, says DeChambeau's strategy could pay off at Augusta National.

"I don't shudder, but if he can do it around here, and I'm thinking of Augusta and thinking of the way you sort of play there, yeah," McIlroy said.

"The game has moved on a lot in the last 14 years since the US Open has been played here, and you're seeing what the game has become, what he's doing out there."

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DeChambeau plays his shot from the 18th tee on the final day

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Tennis world No 1 Barty claims club golf honours in Australia

Sydney, Australia - Multi-talented Ashleigh Barty has conquered tennis, been a professional cricketer and has now added another string to her sporting bow by winning a golf tournament.

The world No 1 Australian would ordinarily be in Europe preparing to defend her French Open crown on the Roland Garros clay.

But she pulled out over coronavirus fears, having also missed the US Open, and instead of swinging a racquet picked up her golf clubs.

The 24 year old, whose father once represented Australia as an amateur golfer, proved she has what it takes on a course designed by Greg Norman, claiming the Brookwater Golf Club women's title near Brisbane with a commanding seven and five triumph in the matchplay final.

'Champions', she wrote on Instagram on Monday accompanying a picture of herself holding a trophy alongside men's winner Louis Dobbelaar. "Is there anything you can't do?," asked one social media user, while another



Ashleigh Barty on the Brookwater Golf Club course

equally in awe wrote: "Wait...what? Tennis - Cricket - Tennis - Golf? @ashbarty - you beauty!"

Barty, who played cricket for Brisbane Heat in the Women's Big Bash League in 2015-16, has been working on her golf game

during her COVID-19 enforced absence from tennis.

Local media said she had slashed her handicap from ten to four while playing rounds with fellow Grand Slam winner Pat Rafter and her boyfriend Garry Kissick, who is a PGA trainee professional at Brookwater.

Barty previously caught the eye of 15-time major winner Tiger Woods before the Presidents Cup in Melbourne last year, with Woods saying she had a 'great swing'.

"She's got all the tools if she wants to pursue it. If she put her mind to it, I'm sure she could," men's champion Dobbelaar told the *Australian Associated Press*.

"I've seen quite a lot of golfers come from different sports and she's the one that stands out the most - by far actually. Her ball-striking's really good. She just gets that naturally from tennis, the hand-eye stuff."

She has also been unable to train with her Melbourne-based coach because of the state border closures imposed in Australia to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Agencies



IPL 2020



QUOTE OF THE DAY
It really hurts to not close off the game from the situation we were in, feels terrible.

Mayank Agarwal
Punjab batsman after his knock of 89 went in vain on Sunday



TODAY'S MATCH

SHARJAH, 6PM



RAJASTHAN ROYALS



CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
RCB	1	1	0	0	2	+0.500
CSK	1	1	0	0	2	+0.486
DC	1	1	0	0	2	+0.000
KXIP	1	0	1	0	0	+0.000
MI	1	0	1	0	0	-0.486
SRH	1	0	1	0	0	-0.500
KKR	0	0	0	0	0	0
RR	0	0	0	0	0	0

P: Played, W: Won, L: Lost,
NR: No Result, PTS: Points,
NRR: Net Run-Rate

CSK: Chennai Super Kings
RCB: Royal Challengers Bangalore
DC: Delhi Capitals
KKR: Kolkata Knight Riders
KXIP: Kings XI Punjab
MI: Mumbai Indians
RR: Rajasthan Royals
SRH: Sunrisers Hyderabad

SCOREBOARD

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

D Padikkal	b Shankar	56 (42)
A Finch	lbw b A Sharma	29 (27)
V Kohli	c Khan b Natarajan	14 (13)
AB de Villiers	run out	51 (100)
S Dube	run out	7 (13)
J Philippe	not out	1 (2)
Extras	(lb 1, nb 2, w 2)	5
TOTAL: 163 for five		
Fall of wickets: 1-90, 2-90, 3-123, 4-162, 5-163		
Bowling: B Kumar 4-0-25-0, S Sharma 4-0-36-0, T Natarajan 4-0-34-1, M Marsh 0-4-0-6-0, V Shankar 1-2-0-14-1, R Khan 4-0-31-0, A Sharma 2-0-16-1		

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

D Warner	run out	6 (10)
J Bairstow	b Chahal	61 (43)
M Pandey	c Saini b Chahal	34 (33)
P Garg	b Dube	12 (13)
V Shankar	b Chahal	0 (1)
A Sharma	run out	7 (4)
R Khan	b Saini	6 (5)
B Kumar	b Saini	0 (2)
S Sharma	c Kohli b Steyn	9 (6)
M Marsh	c Kohli b Dube	0 (1)
T Natarajan	not out	3 (4)
Extras	(b 5, lb 2, w 8)	15
TOTAL: 153 all out in 19.4 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-89, 3-121, 4-121, 5-129, 6-135, 7-141, 8-142, 9-143, 10-153		
Bowling: D Steyn 3-4-0-33-1, U Yadav 4-0-48-0, N Saini 4-0-25-2, W Sundar 1-0-7-0, Y Chahal 4-0-18-3, S Dube 3-0-15-2		



Devdutt Padikkal
56
42 BALLS

PADIKKAL, CHAHAL STAR IN BANGALORE VICTORY

Dubai, UAE - Sunrisers Hyderabad's inexperienced middle order hurt them big time as they collapsed spectacularly from 121 for two in a chase of just 164, giving Royal Challengers Bangalore a winning start to their campaign on Monday.

The knowledge of such a flaky batting order will leave a big question mark against the dismissal of Jonny Bairstow (61), trying to hit a six in the last over of Yuzvendra Chahal (3-18), the only bowler he hadn't got on top off. They needed just 43 off 29 at that point. A panic-stricken collapse followed: it involved a ramp into the helmet onto the stumps, a mid-pitch collision between the two batsmen, a Navdeep Saini coup de grace and Hyderabad lost eight for 32 in 27 balls.

Royal Challengers needed all that after they had wasted a quick start themselves to end up with what a below-par total

against a stronger batting unit.

Devdutt Padikkal got a fifty on IPL debut too. He left the first ball alone, gave himself four balls of quiet, and then got stuck into Sandeep Sharma. He made good use of lack of pace in the Sunrisers attack and the pace restrictions to race away to 34 off 22 in the first five overs, taking Bangalore to 48 for no loss in those overs.

The slowdown, part I

At the other end, Aaron Finch struggled to get going against the predominant inswing in the first few overs. Despite two free hits, he got ten off ten. Towards the end of the powerplay, Padikkal joined in on the slowdown.

To start off with, Sandeep bowled a quality sixth over, conceding just five. The four and a six off Rashid Khan's second over were the only boundaries they could hit after those free hits in

the fifth over. When Padikkal tried, he offered two chances in the deep, both of which were dropped. Eventually he fell to the returning Vijay Shankar immediately followed by a plumb lbw for Aaron Finch to the left-arm spin of Abhishek Sharma. Last 37 balls: 42 runs, two wickets. Bangalore 90 for two after 11.1 overs.

The slowdown, part II

The double strike brought together two of Royal Challengers' best: Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers. The two batted together for 28 balls for just 33 runs and just two boundary attempts. Twelve of these 28 balls were bowled by Rashid. When they took on the left-arm seam of T Natarajan, Kohli holed out to a slower ball to leave Bangalore 123 for three after 15.5 overs.

De Villiers went on to show his class as he converted his start of 14 off 13 into an eventual

30-ball 51. Along the way he hit his 200th six in the IPL, and took his overall T20 sixes tally to 399. The last four overs got them 39.

Bairstow in form

Even after running David Warner out in a freakish manner via a deflection off the bowler Umesh Yadav's hand, Bairstow looked in sparkling form.

He tucked into some Yadav freebies to keep Sunrisers ahead of the asking rate despite a run-a-ball effort from Manish Pandey at the other end. Pandey kept trying to hit, which brought about his dismissal off the bowling of Chahal. However, Bairstow made up for it with another Yadav over in which he was dropped - his second life - and took 14 runs.

Chahal triggers panic

You would have thought Bairstow wouldn't take a risk off Chahal's last over, especially

with their allrounder Mitchell Marsh injured and unlikely to bat. He had not gone for a boundary yet, and the asking rate was under control. He played the first ball watchfully, but then went for a slog and missed altogether. The flood gates then opened. A perfect wrong'un followed to send back Vijay Shankar first up. India's U19 captain Priyam Garg then chose Shivam Dube to play a ramp off and was bowled. Abhishek and Rashid made

bright starts to their knocks with early boundaries to calm some nerves down, but then got involved in a horrible mid-pitch collision. This resulted in the run-out of Abhishek, and a possible concussion for Rashid.

Saini brought Sunrisers back with five wides in his last over, bringing the equation down to 24 off 17, but his pace was too much for Bhuvneshwar Kumar and a shaken Rashid. That was all over. Cricinfo



Yuzvendra Chahal (second from right) celebrates after a dismissal

Punjab lodge appeal over 'short run'

Dubai, UAE - Kings XI Punjab have lodged an appeal with match referee Javagal Srinath over what they believe was an erroneous line call in the 19th over of their match against the Delhi Capitals on Sunday night. The 'short run' call cost them the game, their CEO Satish Menon said on Monday.

Umpire Nitin Menon's call for one-run short against Chris Jordan in the penultimate over of their chase, Satish Menon believes, could 'cost them a playoff spot'.

However, there is no provision for overturning an on-field decision after a match.

Satish Menon said that technological intervention could have given them the extra run and possibly a victory. "We have appealed to the match referee," he told PTI.

"While a human error can happen and we understand that, there is no room for human errors like these in a world-class tournament like the IPL. This one could cost us a playoff berth. A



Punjab's Chris Jordan completes a run, which was called short by umpire Nitin Menon (photo right) on Sunday



loss of a game is a loss of a game. It is unfair. I hope the rules are reviewed so that there is no margin for human error."

The Punjab CEO also told ESPNcricinfo there shouldn't be any errors because of the presence of technology: "Even if you give the benefit of doubt to human error, in a Twenty20 match, a crunch match, there

should be nothing called an error. Because you have got technology today for everything."

However, as per the playing conditions of both the ICC and the IPL, the umpire can use the assistance of third umpire only in cases of a possible dismissal or an unclear boundary decision.

So there was no way under the rules that the on-field umpire

could have sought the third umpire's inputs. The third umpire can't get into the game without being asked for by the on-field umpires or a player using a DRS review.

The only exception to this is the no-ball calls, which he used to keep an eye on in cases of dismissals before he was mandated to check every deliv-

ery for overstepping. The incident on Sunday occurred when Mayank Agarwal tapped the ball towards mid-on to comfortably complete two runs.

TV replays confirmed Jordan turned for a second run only after dragging his bat inside the crease for the first run. Yet Menon, stationed at square leg, deemed it to be a run short.

Eventually, Jordan was caught at square leg off the final delivery with Kings XI needing one run for win, thereby forcing the game into a Super Over.

As social media erupted over the short-run decision, former India opener Virender Sehwag tweeted: "I don't agree with the man of the match choice. The umpire who gave this short run should have been man of the match."

Cricketer-turned-commentator Aakash Chopra posted: "One short that wasn't. Technology must take over in these cases... What if #KXIP don't make it to the final four by 2 points?"

Cricinfo



FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Ronaldo helps Pirlo start with victory as Juve boss



Juventus' coach Andrea Pirlo (right) congratulates Cristiano Ronaldo after his team beat Sampdoria 3-0 to kick-start their title defence in the Italian League in Turin on Sunday

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Andrea Pirlo got his coaching career off to a winning start as Juventus launched their bid for a tenth consecutive Italian League title with a 3-0 win over Sampdoria on Sunday.

Swedish debutant Dejan Kulusevski opened the scoring after 13 minutes in Turin with Leonardo Bonucci adding a second on 78 minutes and Cristiano Ronaldo a late third.

The match was played in front of 1,000 spectators as Serie A stadiums reopened on Sunday to a limited number of fans after a seven-month coronavirus lockdown. Pirlo could not have hoped for a better start to his coaching career having taken

over from Maurizio Sarri this summer.

The win against Sampdoria, coached by veteran Claudio Ranieri, came just days after the former Italy and Juventus star received his coaching diploma.

"It will take time to put together the mode of play, but I will not copy and paste," warned the 41 year old.

"I will take inspiration from teams that have impressed - there was little time, the lads returned from the national teams, we only worked together for a week.

"Today and already with (the friendly against) Novara we have seen something, it will take time. We lack players but we're trying

It will take time to put together the mode of play, but I will not copy and paste. I will take inspiration from teams that have impressed

ANDREA PIRO,
JUVENTUS COACH

to do the best with what we have."

Juventus handed debuts to new signing Weston McKennie and Kulusevski, who joined from Atalanta in January before immediately returning to Parma on loan.

Kulusevski curled in the first goal in a move started by Ronaldo, who hit the bar minutes later. But it was not until the last

quarter of an hour that the champions finally killed off the game they dominated, with Aaron Ramsey missing a chance for a fourth late.

Osimhen inspires Napoli against Parma

Victor Osimhen proved decisive on his Serie A debut inspiring Napoli to a 2-0 win against Parma as they target a return to

Champions League football having finished seventh last season.

After a barren first hour in Emilia Romagna, Osimhen came off the bench to provide an electric shock for Gennaro Gattuso's side.

Dries Mertens and Lorenzo Insigne scored both goals after his arrival which were set up by Mexican Hirving Lozano.

Genoa kicked off their campaign with a 4-0 win at home against promoted Crotone with Sassuolo and Cagliari settling for a 1-1 draw.

Other results: French League:

Sunday: Marseille 1 Lille 1.

German League: Sunday: Wolfsburg 0 Bayer Leverkusen 0.

AFP



Brendan Rodgers

'Revitalised Leicester ready to attack the season again'

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Brendan Rodgers said Leicester were 'ready to attack the season again' after two wins from their opening two English Premier League matches eased the pain of a disappointing end to last season. The former champions are top of the table on goal difference after beating Burnley 4-2 on Sunday.

It was the 100th victory for Rodgers in the EPL in his 210th game - Alex Ferguson, Kenny Dalglish and Kevin Keegan are the only British managers to have reached the landmark in fewer matches.

Leicester lost out on a Champions League spot on the final day of the last campaign after a poor run when football resumed following the coronavirus shutdown.

"It (starting well), was always going to be important because there can be a hangover, if you don't address it," said Rodgers.

"But we spoke about it in our short pre-season period and felt ready to move on.

"The players have good motivation, they've scored seven goals in two games and it shows we're ready to attack the season again."

Sunday was the first time Leicester had ended the day at the top of the table since they won the title in 2015-16, but the Northern Irishman said it was far early to describe them as potential challengers. "It's only two games. After ten games you start to get an idea of where the league is at," said Rodgers.

"We're not even thinking about that (a sustained challenge). We're looking to develop the team and the experiences of last season, both in the league and the cup, will really enrich us. Whatever way it finished last season we still had a fantastic season to finish where we did (fifth)."

AFP

QUICK RUN



Croatian star Rakitic calls time on international career

Croatia midfielder Ivan

Rakitic has called time on his international career with the 2018 World Cup runners-up, he said on Monday. The former Barcelona player, 32, was an integral part of the Croatia side who reached the World Cup final in Russia before losing 2-4 to France. Rakitic, who made 106 appearances and scored 15 goals for his country, discussed the decision with national captain Luka Modric, coach Zlatko Dalic and Croatian Football Association president Davor Suker. "Saying goodbye to the Croatian national team is the most difficult decision in my career, but I felt that this was the moment when I had to break away and make that decision," said Rakitic in a social media post from the national side. "I enjoyed every game I played for my homeland, and unforgettable moments from the World Cup will remain among my favourites."

City's Gundogan tests positive for coronavirus

Manchester City midfielder Ilkay Gundogan has tested positive for coronavirus, the English Premier League (EPL) club announced on Monday, hours ahead of their first match of the new campaign. The Germany international is now in self-isolation as the club prepare to play Wolves at Molineux. "Ilkay is now observing a ten-day period of self-isolation in accordance with Premier League and UK government protocol on quarantine," said a City statement. "Everyone at the club wishes Ilkay a speedy recovery." Gundogan is the third City player to return a positive test this month, following Aymeric Laporte and Riyad Mahrez.

F1 can welcome up to 20,000 at Nurburgring

Germany's Nurburgring can welcome up to 20,000 fans next month when it hosts Formula One, organisers said on Monday, after local authorities gave it the go-ahead alongside stringent health measures. Spectators have been conspicuously absent from motorsport's top competition this year due to restrictions to combat the coronavirus pandemic, but races later in the calendar have started to open up. The previous event at Tuscany's Mugello circuit held around 2,000 fans, and the organisers of this weekend's Russian Grand Prix in Sochi are hoping for an audience of 30,000. The maximum number of spectators allowed will also be just 20 per cent of the 100,000 top capacity of the circuit. The race on October 11 marks the return of the Nurburgring to F1 after an absence of seven years, when Germany's four-time winner Sebastian Vettel won in 2013.

AFP

Real Madrid toil in goalless opening draw at Sociedad

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid began the defence of their Spanish League title with a tepid 0-0 draw at Real Sociedad on Sunday as Martin Odegaard made his first league start for the reigning champions against his former club.

Madrid are heading into the La Liga season after making no new signings this summer, with president Florentino Perez admitting the club has to be cautious amid the

coronavirus pandemic.

Odegaard is the closest thing to a new arrival, the attacking midfielder returning early from his two-year loan with Real Sociedad, after he shone for them last season.

Norwegian Odegaard, whose only other league appearance for Madrid came in May 2015, lasted 69 minutes before he was replaced by Casemiro.

"We didn't get the win. I'm not happy about that, but I'm

pleased to play with Real Madrid," Odegaard told Movistar.

"It's always a bit difficult at the start but it's easier for me with all these incredible players I have around me."

Sergio Ramos, three goals shy of a century for Madrid, watched an acrobatic effort blocked in a quiet first half before Karim Benzema dragged wide of the post after rounding the goalkeeper.

Alexander Isak spurned the

best chance when Thibaut Courtois spread his body well to block from the young Swedish striker.

Teenager Ander Barrenetxea side-footed just past the post early in the second half for the hosts while Alex Remiro made comfortable stops from Dani Carvajal and Benzema.

David Silva made his La Liga return after a decade with Manchester City as he took the place of Isak for the final 25 minutes.

"It's two points lost but we struggled to make chances, particularly in the second half. We had two or three in the first half," said Zidane.

Granada lead the table with maximum points after two rounds following Sunday's 2-1 victory over Alaves.

Real Betis trail on goal difference after beating Real Valladolid 2-0 with a penalty from Nabil Fekir and a William Carvalho goal.

AFP

Halep lifts Italian Open after Pliskova retires

Rome, Italy - Top seed Simona Halep won her first Italian Open title on Monday after defending champion Karolina Pliskova retired while trailing 0-6, 1-2 in the final.

World No 2 Halep, 28, was competing in her third Rome WTA final, having finished runner-up in 2017 and 2018 on the clay at the Foro Italico.

"Finally after two finals I could win this title," the Romanian said.

"I love this tournament and I'm really happy to have this beautiful trophy in my hand.

"In 2013 here I started to go in the top in world tennis. I really enjoyed and I really was happy on court that I could play the semifinals back then. Since then I have started to play really well."

Pliskova, the second seed, was playing with her left thigh bandaged, and required treatment on her lower back and upper leg after the first set which Halep swept in just 20 minutes.

The Czech lost her opening service game in the second set, but broke back immediately for 1-1 to claim her first game after

half an hour. But she called time in the third game, heading towards Halep to signify the end of the match after 32 minutes.

Wimbledon champion Halep's 22nd career title comes just a week before the start of the French Open which she won in 2018. Halep extended her winning streak this season to 14 consecutive victories.

She won the Dubai title in February, before the coronavirus lockdown, coming back to claim victory in Prague last month having skipped the US Open.

Earlier on Sunday, former world No 1 Pliskova eased past fellow Czech Marketa Vondrousova 6-2, 6-4 in the semifinals.

In the men's final, world No 1 Novak Djokovic will bid for a record 36th Masters title later on Monday against Argentine Diego Schwartzman.

Schwartzman had booked his ticket to the final with a 6-4, 5-7, 7-6 (7-4) win over Canadian Denis Shapovalov in the semifinals on Sunday.

AFP



Simona Halep poses with her trophy at Foro Italico in Rome on Sunday



NIKOLA FOUNDER RESIGNS

Trevor Milton, the founder and executive chairman of zero-emission truck maker Nikola has resigned after allegations of fraud which sparked a stock tumble and a regulatory investigation

BUSINESS

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MARKET WATCH

MSM30	3,626.27
BSE Sensex	38,034.14

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	191.43
Pakistani Rs	433.03
Bangladeshi Taka	220.79
Philippine Peso	126.05
Sri Lankan Rs	482.67

*Rates as on September 21
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Lufthansa to cut more jobs as losses mount

Lufthansa said on Monday it will slash more jobs on top of 22,000 previously announced cuts and put more planes out of service with current losses running at some €500mn a month.

With demand set to be lower than expected through winter as the coronavirus pandemic continues to severely curtail travel, the airline said it now plans to reduce its fleet by 150 planes by 2025.

Lufthansa had previously estimated it would have to scrap 100 aircraft in response to the unprecedented crisis in the aviation sector.

The group did not give a figure for further job cuts, but said it would engage in talks with labour representatives to 'limit the number of necessary redundancies'.

Managers will also be hit, with one in five management positions to go in the first quarter of 2021.

Microsoft buys gaming firm ZeniMax Media for \$7.5bn

Software giant Microsoft on Monday announced it would acquire ZeniMax Media for US\$7.5bn, marking a major expansion into video gaming that will give it ownership of several best-selling franchises.

ZeniMax is the parent company of Bethesda Softworks, publisher of the Fallout and Elder Scrolls franchises, and Bethesda brings an impressive portfolio of games, technology, talent, as well as a track record of blockbuster commercial success,' Microsoft said in a statement.

The company will pay for the acquisition in cash with the deal expected to close by the second half of fiscal year 2021.

The deal comes as Microsoft prepares to release its Xbox Series X in mid-November.

S Korea's exports rise 3.6% this month

South Korea's exports rose during the first 20 days of this month mainly due to more working days, customs office data showed on Monday.

Outbound shipments reached US\$29.6bn in the September 1-20 period, up 3.6 per cent from the same period of last year, according to Korea Customs Service.

It was attributed to more business days. The number of working days was 15.5 in the cited period, up two days from a year earlier.

The daily average exports reduced 9.8 per cent amid the lingering economic fallout from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Shipments of telecommunication devices such as smartphones declined 9.1 per cent in the 20-day period, with exports of oil products dropping 45.6 per cent.

Port of Salalah climbs 7 places to emerge 44th in global ranking

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Port of Salalah, the transshipment hub in the Middle East region, climbed seven spots from its previous ranking to emerge 44th this year in the prestigious list of top 100 container ports in the world.

The ranking of the top 100 container ports was recently announced by Lloyd's List, a global leader in shipping news and intelligence, which analyses the annual container throughput figures of the world's elite port facilities. Port of Salalah last year ranked at the 51st position among the top 100 ports.

Lloyd's List in its report noted that Port of Salalah bounced back stronger than ever after the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Mekunu two years ago.

'The container terminal capacity was restored to pre-cyclone levels by the end of last June. By December, Salalah clocked up its all-time record month for box throughput,' Lloyd's List said.

The 2020 evaluation of the



port is based on last year's performance. Port of Salalah handled 4.1mn TEU containers in 2019, recording a growth of 21.4 per cent compared to 3.38mn TEUs in the previous year.

Lloyd's List said that Port of Salalah, which serves as the re-

gional hub for the 2M alliance of Maersk and MSC, has made up for the devastating impact of 2018's Cyclone Mekunu.

The report noted that a number of investment projects have recently been completed or are underway at Salalah, including

the completion of a central service corridor, infrastructure and jetty rehabilitation work, additional flood protection, new fenders at berths 30 and 31, and new plants and handling facilities for LPG and ammonia.

During the first half of 2020,

Port of Salalah's container terminal volumes grew by 13 per cent to 2.2mn TEUs compared to 1.94mn TEUs in the corresponding period of 2019, according to the latest financial report of Salalah Port Services Company.

Each year Lloyd's List analyses

the dynamics shaping the fortunes of the world's top 100 ports. It said the container throughput growth at top 100 ports was typically fragmented last year. The combined container throughput figures of the top 100 ports grew by 2.5 per cent in 2019 as volumes continued to soften amid a weakening global economic environment.

'Given how this year has unfolded at the hands of the coronavirus crisis, 2019 can be marked as the calm before the storm. Top 100 volume growth softened on the previous year, a trend in line with the projections for more moderate growth from here on as the container port sector gains maturity,' the report said.

As per Lloyd's List, the strong performances were recorded in both the Middle East and the Mediterranean, where average growth among the region's ports grew by 6.3 per cent and 6.6 per cent, respectively. Volume growth in Northern Europe, North America and Central and South America was slim, at best.

Local community firms to get shares of new projects in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Company for Development of Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Tatweer) and Iskan Oman Investment Company have announced their plan to allocate capital shares of their new projects in Duqm for the local community companies.

Eng Yahya bin Khamis al Zadjali, in-charge of managing operations of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), held a meeting with a number of local companies and representatives



of Tatweer and Iskan Oman Investment Company, according to a press statement issued by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

During the meeting, several projects were discussed and one

of those was the accommodation project for employees who are working in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Accordingly, about 20 per cent of the big projects' capital, which are providing housing solutions in

Duqm, will be allocated for the local community companies.

This comes to promote the provision of long-term usufruct for 90 years as a gesture to encourage Omani youth to work and live in Duqm.

Oman's oil sector to grow 14% annually

Muscat - The sultanate's oil and gas industry is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 14 per cent during the period from 2020 to 2027, according to a new report prepared by the CMFE Insights Research Foundation.

The report added that the Asia-Pacific market is expected to see the fastest growth in terms of oil and gas imports from Oman during the forecast period, Oman News Agency reported.

As per the report, the demand for Oman's oil output will increase during the forecast



period as new innovative solutions and startups emerge in this sector.
ONA

Airbus aims for hydrogen powered plane by 2035

Paris, France - Airbus is aiming to put the world's first hydrogen-powered commercial plane into service by 2035, the European aircraft maker's CEO said in remarks published on Monday.

Hydrogen is a clean fuel, emitting only steam, but whether it is green depends on the carbon footprint of the fuels used to produce it.

France and other European countries are investing billions of euros in the development of green hydrogen, with the highly polluting transport industry a prime area for its intended use.

'It is our ambition to become the first aircraft maker to enter such a plane into service in 2035,' Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury told *Le Parisien* newspaper.

The development of decarbonised hydrogen fuel is a 'priority axis of development' for Airbus, he said.

The manufacturer has already been using hydrogen technology to power its satellites and the Ariane rocket.



A handout computer-generated image released by Airbus shows a prototype of zero-emission hydrogen-powered aircraft (AFP)

Developing an aircraft that uses carbon-free fuel would not require 'any major technological breakthrough', Faury said.

The production technology would, however, still need around five years to reach maturity, and suppliers and industrial sites would need another two to be ready, he said.

'We could therefore implement the programme around 2028,' he said.

Aviation generates up to 3 per

cent of the world's emissions of CO₂, the main driver of climate change. Hydrogen use would require some major design changes for aircraft, as the fuel requires about four times the storage space of kerosene for the same energy content.

The French government has earmarked €1.5bn for the development of carbon-free aircraft as part of a support plan for the aviation sector.

AFP

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MSM30 rises 0.2%, volumes surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose 0.2 per cent to close at 3,626.27 points on Monday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 211.13 per cent to RO2.62mn and volumes surged 195.95 per cent to 10.28mn shares.

While Financial index rose 0.18 per cent, Industrial and Services indices fell 0.06 percent and 0.52 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah Index closed down by 0.02 per cent at 517.52 points.

Market breadth remained negative as ten companies closed up, while 11 companies closed down. The rest 21 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Al Jazeera Steel Products (3.03 per cent), Sohar Interna-

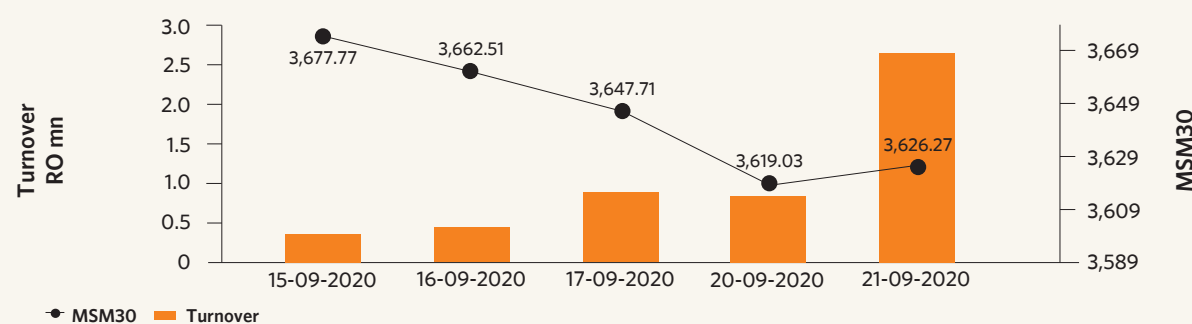


tional Bank (2.08 per cent), National Bank of Oman (1.84 per cent) and Al Anwar Holding (1.47 per cent).

Top losers were Renaissance Services

(-2.44 per cent), Muscat Finance (-2.0 per cent), Galfar Engineering & Contracting (-1.96 per cent), Phoenix Power (-1.82 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Tatweer and Eni sign study agreement for Bahraini oil block

Manama, Bahrain - As part of its mission to explore and develop the oil and gas fields of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Tatweer Petroleum signed a joint study agreement with Italian company Eni to conduct a joint study on offshore Block 2 located in the territorial waters of Bahrain with an area of 2,230 sq km.

The purpose of the agreement is to evaluate the hydrocarbon potential of Block 2 through an integrated interpretation and assessment of the geological and geophysical data relevant to the area.

Al Ansari, general manager - exploration and development at Tatweer, appreciated the support and guidance of Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al Khalifa, Minister of Oil, in this vital sector.

He also praised the fruitful and continuous cooperation with Eni in the development of Bahrain's oil and gas sector since the signing of the exploration and production sharing



agreement for offshore Block 1 in May 2019.

In addition, Eni also had signed a memorandum of understanding with respect to renewable energy and the supply of LNG and exploration in May 2020.

Ansari reaffirmed that the agreements have strengthened Bahrain's cooperation with Eni and ensured the exchange of information and expertise in common areas related to the development programs in the oil

and gas and energy sectors.

Ansari noted that the joint study agreement with Eni is a major positive step towards exploring the kingdom's natural resources. "The new agreement will enable Tatweer Petroleum to benefit from Eni's extensive expertise in this field, in line with the efforts that the kingdom is making to implement a number of vital projects aimed at exploiting prospective resources."

BNA

Iran to apply modern technology for recovery of oil fields : Minister

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said on Monday that Iran will apply modern technology for the recovery of oil and gas fields.

Universities and industry need each other, said Zangeneh in the ceremony to sign 13 new agreements with universities for the recovery of more oil and gas fields.

Zangeneh said that universities are like the heart of the oil industry.



Bijan Zangeneh

He said that having well-educated human resources is very significant, adding this task started in 1998.

Several people have studied abroad with scholarships and returned to Iran to teach in universities, he said.

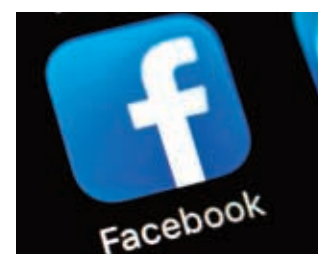
Earlier this month, Oil Minister Zangeneh said that Iranian gas export has doubled over the past seven years period.

IRNA

Facebook releases small business report

San Francisco, US - Facebook recently released its third edition of Global State of Small Business Report, a research collaboration with the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that provides monthly updates on how small businesses are operating amid the pandemic.

From surveying an additional 25,000 small businesses across more than 50 countries and regions in July, the report found that while small businesses continued to reopen, many still re-



ported lower sales and sustained reductions in employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial challenges overtook lockdown orders as the primary reason for the closure of surveyed small businesses.

Many small businesses saw the benefits of shifting to e-commerce, the report said.

Businesses that reported making over 25 per cent of their sales online were more likely to report higher sales than this time last year, and less likely to have reduced their number of employees as a result of the pandemic, compared to businesses that made less than 25 per cent of their sales online. A total of 48 per cent of consumers surveyed reported an increase in online spending since the outbreak of

COVID-19, and 40 per cent of respondents said they increased their use of social media and on-line messaging for product and business recommendations.

Of those surveyed who started shopping at new businesses since COVID-19, 73 per cent said that at least one of those new businesses was a small business, while 31 per cent of respondents said they plan to increase their spending with small, local businesses when the pandemic is over.

Xinhua

‘Emerging markets recovering but risks abound’

Ankara, Turkey - Trade across emerging markets (EM) is starting to recover since last month and the outlook is further supported by improving business surveys and an accommodative monetary stance, according to a recent report by the Institute of International Finance (IIF).

The IIF data indicates the decline in global growth has reached an end and economic activity is set for a significant rebound over the coming months.

According to the financial body's growth tracker, a 5.3 per cent improvement witnessed in August was the first sign of resurgence since the COVID-19 shock earlier this year.

While EM credit should benefit from improved growth supported by easy monetary policies, risks still abound, the report said.

"The dynamics of US real rates and emerging-market activity numbers will be key for EM's financial variables outlook," it said, while identifying fiscal deterioration as well as subdued potential growth and



productivity in EM remain as significant longer-term concerns.

"We do not expect the pace of expansion in recent months to continue, as the boost from reopening fades, labour market

dislocations constrain consumer spending, and firms retrench on capex [capital expenditure]," the report said.

With the virus outbreak not yet contained, social distancing behaviour and ongoing restric-

tions will drag on activity, it added.

The IIF said emerging markets are experiencing difficulties in handling the pandemic due to their very limited public resources and healthcare capacity,

Emerging markets are experiencing difficulties in handling the COVID-19 pandemic due to their very limited public resources and financial turbulence

combined with financial turbulence.

"Our tracker shows distinctive dynamics across regions. EM Asia and EM Europe and Africa regions saw their trackers in positive territory," the report said.

While the Latin America tracker also shows improving figures, it remains in contraction, it added.

The shape of the recovery, the IIF concluded, will be dependent on the capacity of the EM complex to introduce efficient policies to catalyse a lasting recovery.

Anadolu Agency

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China becomes EU's top trading partner: Eurostat



A general view of a container terminal at the Port of Antwerp in Belgium

Brussels, Belgium - In the first seven months of 2020, China became the top trading partner of the European Union (EU), a position previously held by the United States, said Eurostat.

EU's imports from China increased by 4.9 per cent in the January-July period, compared

to the same period last year, whereas its imports from the US dropped by 11.7 per cent.

The bloc's exports to China recorded a slight drop of 1.8 per cent, while those to the US fell by 9.9 per cent, according to the EU's statistical office.

China and US were followed by the United Kingdom, Switzerland,

land, and Russia on EU's main trading partner list in the first seven months.

In accordance with the world's changing epidemiological situation during the first seven months, the EU's international trade started to fall in January, and regained momentum after May, when confinement

measures were gradually eased.

In July, EU exports out of the bloc stood at €168.5bn, down by 11.3 per cent compared to July 2019, and its imports from the rest of the world reached €142.6bn, down by 16 per cent year-on-year, according to Eurostat estimates.

Xinhua

Donald Trump vows to block any TikTok deal allowing Chinese control

Washington, US - US President Donald Trump on Monday threw into doubt a deal to re-structure ownership of the popular video app TikTok, vowing to block any deal that allows its Chinese parent firm to retain any control.

The comments raised fresh concerns over a weekend deal that appeared to avert a US-ordered ban of TikTok, which the Trump administration has called a national security risk.

The deal would make Silicon Valley giant Oracle the data partner for TikTok with retail giant Walmart also taking a stake in a new entity to be called TikTok Global.

But details of the plan remained unclear, amid differing accounts on the American and Chinese shares of the new company, and who would be in control of the data and algorithms.

Trump on Monday told Fox News that TikTok's Chinese parent firm ByteDance 'will have nothing to do with it and if they do, then we just won't make the deal'.

He added Oracle and Walmart 'are going to have total control over it. They're going to own the controlling interest... If we



find they don't have total control, then we're not going to approve the deal'.

ByteDance, under pressure in China not to give in to US demands, said it would hold an 80 per cent stake in TikTok Global after a public share offering.

The Chinese firm said the current plan 'does not involve the transfer of any algorithms and technologies' and that reports to the contrary were 'rumours'.

A separate statement from Oracle offered a different view of the transaction.

"Upon creation of TikTok Global, Oracle/Walmart will make their investment and the TikTok Global shares will be

distributed to their owners, Americans will be the majority and ByteDance will have no ownership in TikTok Global," Oracle vice president Ken Glueck said.

TikTok - which became a global phenomenon with its brand of short, addictive phone videos - has come under fire in recent months as tensions escalate between China and the west.

Trump has increasingly put national security and his aggressive stance toward China at the center of his campaign, claiming without providing evidence that TikTok is collecting user data for Beijing.

AFF



HSBC shares hit 25 years low on report of 'unreliable list'

Hong Kong, China - Shares in banking giant HSBC plunged to a 25-year low on Monday on fears it could be added to a Chinese list of firms deemed a threat to national security and following news it had been accused of allowing fraudulent activity to go unpunished.

The troubled lender tanked 5.33 per cent to close at HK\$29.30 - a level not seen since mid-1995 - as investors fret over its ability to continue doing business in China and Hong Kong, which make up a crucial portion of its growth.

The sell-off came after the *Global Times*, a state-run English tabloid in China, reported the bank could be one of the first firms to be named on Beijing's 'unreliable entity list' as part of a tit-for-tat stand-off with several western countries.

The report pointed to HSBC's participation in Washington's investigation of Huawei and the arrest of its chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou in Canada.

Among penalties that can be meted out are restrictions on trade, investment and visas.

"If the company is listed as an unreliable company by China, which looks certain since it's a *Global Times* article, the bank will be facing lots of difficulties to do business in China," Banny Lam, at CEB International Investment Corp, told Bloomberg News.

"They may have trouble expanding the mainland business,

The Global Times reported HSBC could be one of the first firms to be named on the 'unreliable entity list' of Beijing

after investing so much there over the past few years."

HSBC was also among a group of banks said to have allowed fraudsters to transfer millions of dollars around the world even after it had learned of the scam. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) cited leaked official US documents that said the bank 'kept profiting from powerful and dangerous players' in the past two decades.

HSBC told the investigation team that it has always met its legal duties on reporting suspicious activities. In a statement, it said the ICIJ report was 'historical and predates the conclusion of our Deferred Prosecution Agreement (DPA) in 2017'.

It added that it had been overhauling its ability to combat financial crime across more than 60 jurisdictions since 2012 and Britain's Justice Department determined the bank met all its obligations under the DPA.

AFF

Britain overhauls privatised rail sector

London, UK - Britain launched on Monday a radical overhaul of its coronavirus-plagued privatised rail sector that will see franchises replaced with concessions subject to tougher scrutiny and greater state involvement.

Train services will no longer be managed by franchises, which handed their management to private operator companies, and these will be replaced by concession-style agreements.

'Ministers today ended rail franchising after 24 years as the first step in bringing Britain's fragmented network back together. The new system will create a simpler, more effective structure and will take shape over the coming months,' the Department for Transport (DfT) said in a statement.

While Britain's rail tracks remain in state hands, the trains are run by mostly private companies enjoying large government subsidies.

No longer working

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government decided in March to take on rail franchise holders' revenue and cost risks as the COVID-19 pandemic decimated demand. The move was part of emergency measures that cost £3.5bn according to media reports.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps declared on Monday that the current privatised rail model was not working in the current climate, as many commuters and travellers stay at home.

"The model of privatisation



adopted 25 years ago has seen significant rises in passenger numbers, but this pandemic has proven that it is no longer working," Shapps said.

The new system will keep the best elements of the private sector but add better direction and accountability, he added.

"Our new deal for rail demands more for passengers. It will simplify people's journeys, ending the uncertainty and confusion about whether you are using the right ticket or the right train company," said Shapps.

The Department for Trans-

port said it would maintain the current 'significant' levels of state support under the new Emergency Recovery Management Agreements (ERMAs), but aimed to achieve savings in the long run.

"Until passenger numbers return, significant taxpayer support will still be needed, including under the transitional contracts announced today. But the reforms will enable substantial medium and longer-term savings for taxpayers," the DfT noted.

Rail operators will still be paid management fees for running services under the ERMA system

- but these will be lower than under emergency measures that were implemented in March.

Keith Williams, a former British Airways boss commissioned by the government to carry out a 'root and branch' review of the rail sector, welcomed the new strategy.

"These new agreements represent the end of the complicated franchising system, demand more from the expertise and skills of the private sector, and ensure passengers return to a more punctual and co-ordinated railway," he said.

However, trade unions

slammed the move, which is the first major sector-wide overhaul since the Conservatives privatised British Rail back in the mid-1990s.

"This announcement should now force the government's hand and lead them to face up to what has been staring them in the face for the best part of three decades - that public ownership is the only model that works and can steer us through a crisis such as COVID-19," said Rail, Maritime and Transport union general secretary Mick Cash.

AFF

EU gives post-Brexit reprieve to London clearing houses

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union (EU) on Monday adopted a crucial emergency measure to safeguard the stability of financial markets after the Brexit transition period ends on December 31.

The decision came as negotiations on future relations between EU and UK have descended into acrimony, with

the increasing likelihood of a chaotic, 'no-deal' scenario.

The plan is to preserve the stability of the market to derivatives, a complex but vital financial instrument that allows traders to insure themselves against sudden interest or currency exchange rate swings.

The EU derivatives market is almost exclusively centred on

London and was notionally valued in 2018 at €660tn - nearly 300 times the size of Britain's entire economy.

In the EU's plan, institutions where these transactions are finalised would have a licence to keep working with EU traders for another 18 months after December 31.

It will allow European firms

until mid-2022 to handle the key service, currently executed by the London Stock Exchange and other clearing houses.

"Clearing houses ... play a systemic role in our financial system," Valdis Dombrovskis, an EU Commission executive vice president, said in a statement.

"We are adopting this decision to protect our financial sta-

bility, which is one of our key priorities," he added.

The next formal round of negotiations on the future relations agreement will take place in Brussels next week.

The talks were undermined by Britain's wish to go back in part on its divorce agreement, signed in January.

AFF

Greek PM to visit affected areas after the medicane



A heavily damaged health centre after the floods caused by the Mediterranean hurricane (medicane) Ianos hit the central Greek town of Mouzaki on Sunday (AFP)

Athens, Greece - Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis will visit areas hit by a rare hurricane-like storm that left at least three dead, officials said on Monday as reconstruction efforts began.

"The Prime Minister will visit Karditsa on Tuesday," the government's deputy spokeswoman Aristotelia Peloni told state TV ERT, referring to the central Greek city that saw thousands of homes submerged by flooding.

Mediterranean cyclone Ianos, known as a 'medicane', has so far left three dead and one person missing.

Hundreds of people had to be rescued from flooded buildings as heavy rain and high winds wrecked homes, shops and warehouses in regions north of the capital Athens.

"Five thousand homes are flooded and a third of the city has no electricity," Karditsa mayor Vassilis Tsiakos told ERT.

It will take at least five days to

get the city back to its feet, Tsiakos said.

Ianos forced flights and ferries to be cancelled on Friday as it barrelled across Greece's Ionian Sea islands.

The city of Karditsa, about 300km north of Athens, was badly hit overnight Friday, with mudslides, falling trees and power cuts. The local agriculture economy was also badly hit, local officials said.

Mitsotakis expressed his con-

dolences over the deaths and promised that all affected regions would receive support from the state.

Medicanes are a rare phenomenon only categorised by experts over the past four decades, according to Kostas Lagouvardos, director of research at the Athens Observatory.

"Mediterranean cyclones or hurricanes have tropical characteristics like those in the Atlantic, but they often have a smaller volume and are less intense," he told AFP over the weekend.

Lagouvardos says six medicanes have hit Greece since 1982, four of them since 2016.

Ianos was among the strongest medicanes recorded since the start of observations in 1969, he wrote in an article on Sunday.

The last storm on this scale hit Greece two years ago, killing two people on the island of Evia.

AFP

to all political forces to 'work towards the success of the French initiative immediately and without delay' to help rescue the country.

"The Lebanese people's woes... require the cooperation of all sides to facilitate forming a crisis government [of independents]," he said.

A dib's efforts to form a government have been effectively blocked by the two main Shiite groups in Lebanon's usual power-sharing arrangement - Amal and Hezbollah.

Observers have said their insistence to keep the finance ministry is linked to recent US sanctions against a former minister from Amal, as well as Hezbollah-linked businesses.

The August 4 explosion of hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate at the Beirut port killed more than 190 people, wounded thousands, and ravaged large parts of the capital.

AFP



Lebanon's President Michel Aoun (left) with Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib at the presidential palace, in Baabda on September 17 (AFP)

Lebanon PM urges parties to help form new Cabinet

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib on Monday urged competing political forces to step up and help him form a desperately needed independent government to save the crisis-hit country.

A dib is under pressure to form a fresh Cabinet line-up as soon as possible so the new government can launch a raft of reforms required to unlock billions of dollars in foreign aid.

Lebanon was mired in its worst economic crisis in decades and battling the novel coronavirus pandemic, even before one of the world's biggest non-nuclear explosions at the Beirut port last month.

'Any further delay will exacerbate and deepen the crisis,' Adib said in a statement.

A dib's remarks came after a French-imposed deadline to form the Cabinet passed last week.

The PM-designate appealed

Bulgarian court jails duo for life over 2012 Israeli bus bombing

Sofia, Bulgaria - A Bulgarian court on Monday sentenced two men to life in prison over a deadly 2012 bus bomb attack on Israeli tourists at the country's Burgas airport.

The attack in July 2012 killed five Israelis including a pregnant woman, their Bulgarian bus driver and the Franco-Lebanese who carried the explosive, and left over 35 people injured.

It was the deadliest against Israelis abroad since 2004.

Bulgarian and Israeli authorities blamed the bombing on the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah, playing a part in a subsequent European Union decision to blacklist Hezbollah's military wing as a 'terrorist' organisation.

Judge Adelina Ivanova sentenced the two men - who fled Bulgaria and were tried in absentia - to 'life in jail without parole',



Judges of Bulgaria's specialised criminal court arrive to present the verdict, in Sofia on Monday (AFP)

finding them guilty of terrorism and manslaughter.

The two were identified as Lebanese-Australian Meliad Farah (31) at the time of the attack, and Lebanese-Canadian Hassan El Hajj Hassan (24) and were charged in mid-2016 as the

bomber's accomplices.

A DNA analysis identified the bomber as 23 year old Franco-Lebanese national Mohamad Hassan el Hussein.

Airport CCTV footage showed him wandering inside the airport's arrivals hall with a backpack on his back shortly before the explosion that tore through a bus outside the terminal that was headed to Sunny Beach, a popular summer destination on the Black Sea.

According to witness accounts, he tried to put his backpack inside the luggage compartment of the bus full of Israelis when it exploded. The tourists who were killed were all in their twenties, except for a pregnant 42 year old woman.

Prosecutors were unable to determine if the explosive was triggered by the bomber or re-

Briton, Australian killed clearing WWII bomb in Solomons

Honiara, Solomon Islands - Two bomb disposal experts from Britain and Australia died in the Solomon Islands when World War II ordnance they were helping to clear exploded, officials said on Monday.

Police said the pair - who worked for the charity Norwegian People's Aid - were storing munitions without permission in a residential area of the capital Honiara when the blast occurred on Sunday afternoon.

Norwegian People's Aid named the pair as Briton Stephen 'Luke' Atkinson and Australian Trent Lee, who were helping collate a database of unexploded ordnance in the Solomons, which was a major Pacific battleground in WWII.

Police inspector Clifford Tunuki said the explosion took place at the charity's office and it appeared unauthorised work



Forensic officers inspect the site where two bomb disposal experts from Britain and Australia were killed, in Honiara on Monday (AFP)

was being carried out on unexploded ordnance (UXO) in a residential area. "We do not know what exactly happened that led to the bomb blast but preliminary investigations indicate they had several items of UXO at the residence and they may have been conducting some UXO work," he said.

Tunuki said police were unaware the munitions were being stored in the area and, had they known, would have insisted they be taken to a proper bomb disposal facility. He said they had now been removed and assured residents the surrounding suburb was now safe.

AFP

Egypt discovers ancient sarcophagi at Saqqara necropolis

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt's Antiquities Ministry announced on Sunday the discovery of 14 sarcophagi in the Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo that had lain buried for 2,500 years.

The coffins were found two days ago during an archaeological dig at the burial spot where another 13 wooden sarcophagi had been discovered last week, the ministry said in a statement.

The vast Saqqara necropolis is located around 16km south of the famed Giza pyramids. It is part of the ancient city of Memphis, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and hosts the colossal step Pyramid of Djoser.



A handout picture released by the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities on Sunday shows one of fourteen 2,500 year old coffins discovered in a burial shaft in the desert necropolis of Saqqara, south of the capital Cairo (AFP)

Photographs of the well-preserved wooden coffins show ornate and intricate paintings, with maroon and blue lines, as well as hieroglyphic pictorials.

The ministry said more excavations had been planned, with the expectation that another trove of wooden coffins would be found at the site.

In a video distributed this month announcing the discoveries, Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled al Anani said the recent finds at Saqqara were 'just the beginning'.

Egypt has sought to promote archaeological discoveries across the country in a bid to re-

vive tourism, which took a hit from restrictions on travel due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In July, authorities reopened the Giza pyramids and other archaeological sites to the public after a three-month closure and waived tourist visa fees to lure holidaymakers.

Egypt is also planning to unveil its centrepiece project of the Grand Egyptian Museum in the coming months. The tourism sector, battered by years of political turmoil and terror attacks, had recovered to draw record visitors, around 13.6mn last year, when the COVID-19 crisis struck.

AFP

Belarus opposition leader meets EU

Svetlana Tikhanovskaya urges EU foreign ministers to sanction Lukashenko but the bloc has yet to act

Brussels, Belgium - Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya on Monday urged the EU to show courage and step up its support for her movement, as the bloc's internal squabbles about sanctions rolled on.

The former Soviet republic has been convulsed by unprecedented demonstrations against President Alexander Lukashenko since he was returned to power in a disputed August 9 election and launched a brutal crackdown.

Tikhanovskaya met EU foreign ministers in Brussels and urged them to sanction Lukashenko but, despite repeated statements condemning the veteran strongman and warning of measures, after 44 days the bloc has yet to act.

"Sanctions are very important in our fight, because sanctions is part of pressure that will force the so-called authorities to start dialogue with us," she told reporters.

"I think leaders have reasons not to push for these sanctions but at this meeting I asked just to be more brave in their decisions."

Cyprus, which has good relations with Lukashenko's key supporter Russia, has blocked EU agreement on measures against Belarus, insisting that sanctions against Turkey over a maritime



Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya holds a photograph as she addresses members of the EU parliament, in Brussels on Monday (AFP)

gas drilling dispute must be agreed at the same time.

Nicosia's position has support from some EU countries but the patience of others is wearing thin, with Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics lashing out on Twitter.

"It is regrettable that today we

could not decide on sanctions on violations of human rights there due to 'a hostage taking' by a member state. Sends a wrong signal to Belarusians, our societies and the whole world," he wrote.

Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides defended

his country's stance, insisting the EU must have a coherent response to violations of sovereignty and human rights.

"Our reaction to any kind of violation of our core basic values and principles, cannot be a la carte. It needs to be consistent," he said.

'Sanction Lukashenko'

After the meeting, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters the ministers had been 'really impressed by the courage and perseverance of the Belarusian people, especially Belarusian women who show a real sense of

leadership'. He said the EU would support an inclusive national dialogue in Belarus and reiterated that Brussels does not recognise Lukashenko as the legitimate president.

The EU and other Western powers have rejected the result of the election, saying the poll

with diplomats hoping they will find a way to agree both sets of sanctions.

"We must also address the question of whether Mr Lukashenko, who is the main responsible, should not also be sanctioned by the European Union," Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said.

The strongman, who has ruled Belarus for more than a quarter of a century, has responded to the protests with a security clampdown and turned to his longstanding ally Russia for help.

Tikhanovskaya, who fled to Lithuania for her own safety after the election, backed sanctions on Lukashenko himself, saying 'of course I think it is necessary'.

And she urged the EU to make a formal call for new elections - something it has so far held off from, despite rejecting the August 9 poll as illegitimate.

In the latest protests against Lukashenko, tens of thousands defied a heavy security presence to march in the streets of Minsk on Sunday, with authorities saying they detained more than 440 people. The EU ministers are also considering what finance could be given to civil society in Belarus, after Poland called for a billion-euro stabilisation fund to help the country.

AFP

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S TIKHANOVSKAYA

was not free and fair, and Brussels has drawn up a list of around 40 members of Lukashenko's regime to hit with asset freezes and travel bans.

But with ministers still deadlocked, the matter will be taken up by EU leaders at a summit in Brussels on Thursday and Friday,

Alarm for Macron as his party's deputy steps down

Paris, France - The number two official in French President Emmanuel Macron's ruling party on Monday stepped down, declaring the movement needed an 'electric shock' after a string of electoral routs.

The health of Macron's Republic on the Move (LREM) party, created for his successful 2017 presidential campaign, is a growing headache for the president as he prepares to seek reelection in 2022.

The party's number two Pierre Person, who will remain a member, told the *Le Monde* daily that he was stepping down from his executive post to 'give the party a new breath'.

He said he wanted to create an 'electric shock' as 'cosmetic changes are not going to be enough', with the party still stuck



A file photo of Pierre Person (AFP)

in its logic that dated from the 2017 presidential election campaign.

The resignation of Person (31), a former leader of a LREM youth wing who came from the Socialist Party, comes after the party suffered a series of reverses at the ballot box.

Person was also reported to have tense relations with the

number one party official Stanislas Guerini.

Local elections earlier this year were a disaster for the LREM, with the party failing to take control of a single major city hall.

More bad news came in six by-elections for vacant parliament seats at the weekend where no LREM candidate has made it to the second round.

Person said in the interview that the LREM 'needs to have its own reason to exist' rather than just 'copy and pasting the message of the government'.

Some two dozen MPs earlier this year defected from the LREM to other formations, formally robbing the party of its overall majority, although the make-up of the National Assembly lower house means it can still pass legislation.

AFP

Beijing says support for Taiwan independence 'doomed to fail'

Beijing, China - China ramped up its rhetoric over Taiwan on Monday, describing any support for its independence as 'doomed to fail', and threatened retaliation against US diplomatic visits to the island.

Taiwan has been ruled separately from China since the end of a civil war in 1949, but Beijing considers the island part of its territory awaiting reunification.

The island is a flashpoint with Washington, which promises military support to the elected government and has sent two envoys to Taipei in as many months.

At a press briefing on Monday, the Foreign Ministry said that the envoys' visits were a 'political provocation' and threatened retaliation.



Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen (centre) with Keith Krach (left), US Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment, at the President residency, in Taipei on September 18 (AFP)

"China will take appropriate countermeasures, including targeting relevant individuals," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin, without elaborating.

He warned that the US actions will 'further damage the co-

operation' between the US and China.

Wang added that any support for Taiwan's independence is a 'dead end... doomed to fail'.

Washington switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1979. Beijing rejects any recogni-

tion of Taiwan and has mounted a decades-long policy of marginalising the democratic island.

Washington's increased outreach to Taiwan under President Donald Trump is among a catalogue of sore points with Beijing as the countries clash over issues including trade, security and the coronavirus pandemic.

The US Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment, Keith Krach wrapped up a trip to Taiwan at the weekend, following on the heels of a trip by US health chief Alex Azar in August.

Last Friday, Taiwan scrambled fighter jets as the Chinese military conducted exercises near the Taiwan Strait during Krach's visit.

AFP

Hundreds of whales stranded in remote southern Australia

Sydney, Australia - At least twenty-five whales have died and scientists are trying to rescue 250 more that are stranded in a remote bay on the Australian island of Tasmania, officials said on Monday.

Tasmania's environment department said the whales had become stuck on a sandbar in Macquarie Harbour, on the island's rugged and sparsely populated west coast.

Nic Deka, who is managing the incident response, said two large pods were stranded on sandbars a few hundred metres apart inside the harbour.

"They are in water but it's very difficult to see how many of those whales are deceased or what condition they're in," he told reporters in the nearby town of Strahan. They are believed to be pilot whales but the environment department is yet to confirm the species.



This undated handout photo shows a humpback whale in the East Alligator River in the Kakadu National Park in Australia (AFP)

Police officials on site and marine experts are assessing the situation ahead of plans to launch a rescue mission early on Tuesday

morning. "In terms of the tides, when we start making an effort tomorrow it will be with an outgoing tide, so that'll be in our

favour, but obviously tides go up and come down so we'll be aiming to make the most of the windows that we have," Deka said.

Mass whale strandings occur relatively often in Tasmania, but the large numbers involved present a daunting rescue prospect.

Authorities may call on a network of local volunteers to assist but have cordoned off the area to the general public.

The latest stranding comes as a humpback whale that was stuck in a tropical river in Australia's north finally returned to the ocean after more than two weeks. Public broadcaster ABC reported the creature, which spent 17 days in the crocodile-infested waters of Kakadu National Park, has been spotted in open seas off Darwin.

Scientists had been weighing options for guiding the humpback to safety.

AFP

Ten dead, 25 trapped in India building collapse

Bhiwandi, India - Ten people were killed and up to 25 are feared trapped after a three-storey residential building collapsed before dawn on Monday in western India, officials said.

The accident in the city of Bhiwandi, which neighbours India's financial capital Mumbai, happened around 3.40am, according to local authorities.

Emergency workers from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) pulled 19 people from the rubble - including two boys aged four and seven - to loud cheers from residents.

"Total number of deaths is ten... Rescue operations are ongoing," NDRF commandant Ithape Pandit told AFP.

NDRF director general Satya Narayan Pradhan tweeted that specialist teams and sniffer dogs were trying to rescue another '20-25 feared trapped'.

An official at the Thane city authority, which oversees Bhi-



Rescue workers search for survivors in the rubble of a collapsed building, in Bhiwandi, near Mumbai, on Monday (AFP)

wandi, told AFP that more than 40 emergency workers were helping search for survivors.

Images broadcast on the NDRF's official Twitter feed showed emergency workers

combing through concrete and brick rubble with electrical wires hanging over their heads.

The cause of the accident was not immediately clear.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US deaths near 200,000 as fresh lockdown cripples Madrid

Madrid, Spain - A million people in and around the Spanish capital on Monday were under new 'stay-at-home' orders to contain another coronavirus surge, as the US death toll neared 200,000.

But unlike other nations that are tightening curbs to battle outbreaks, India pressed ahead with its measures to kickstart its battered economy, reopening the Taj Mahal and some schools on Monday.

The restrictions in Madrid will last for two weeks starting on Monday, affecting people living mainly in densely populated,

We will still be able to go to work, and go into other areas that are not under lockdown, where we might be able to raise the infections

BETHANIA PEREZ

low-income neighbourhoods who will be allowed only to travel for essential reasons such as work, medical care or taking children to school.

On Sunday, people took to the streets in some of the affected districts in protest against the new measures.

They sported placards reading 'No to a class-based lockdown' or 'They're destroying our district and now they're locking



A woman wearing a face mask walks past a mark pointing to the compulsory requirement to cover mouth and nose, at the main railway station in Berlin on Monday (AFP)

us up'. "We think that they are laughing at us a little bit," said nurse Bethania Perez, as hundreds protested against the measure.

"We will still be able to go to work, and go into other areas that are not under lockdown, where we might be able to raise the infections and also still be vulnerable to infections in our own area."

Authorities in Spain - among

the worst-hit nations in the world - have insisted the step is necessary because virus cases in those districts were much higher than the national average.

Global coronavirus infections are rapidly approaching 31mn, with more than 958,000 deaths.

N Zealand towards eliminating COVID
Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern moved most of New Zealand to

its lowest virus alert setting on Monday, saying the country was edging towards eliminating COVID-19.

The Pacific nation has recorded just 25 deaths in a population of five million and has been widely praised for its virus response.

In poorer, crisis-hit parts of the world, the pandemic has piled on even more suffering.

In Iraq tens of thousands of

Muslims participated in the annual mourning ceremonies of Ashura despite the government urging citizens to not attend large gatherings.

US hardest-hit

The United States remains the hardest-hit nation in the world, with more than 6.8mn cases and deaths approaching 200,000.

The pandemic has unleashed vast destruction on the world's

biggest economy, with millions left jobless, and President Donald Trump facing intense criticism of his handling of the virus.

Trump has expressed confidence that a vaccine would be ready by October - a claim contradicted by his administration's top health expert.

In the absence of a prophylactic, all public gatherings carry a serious transmission risk.

AFP

No mass gathering in Canada province

Toronto, Canada - The Quebec government on Sunday announced new restrictions on gatherings in order to prevent a second wave of COVID-19 infections.

The number of people allowed in 'rented halls, places of worship, festive events weddings' will drop from 250 to 50 from Monday, said Health Minister Christian Dubé.

In three of the regions in the province - including the cities of Montreal and Quebec City, which have increased to an 'orange' alert level - such gatherings are limited to 25 people, Dubé told a press conference.

The restrictions do not apply to theaters or cinemas, where social distancing is easier to implement, he added.

"The contagion has increased in three socio-sanitary regions," Dubé told reporters.

"The number of cases is increasing and our ability to take care of the sick is decreasing."

"We ask that you keep contact to a minimum and avoid visiting each other... Avoid family dinners, dinners with friends and parties," Dubé said.

Canada has seen an increase in the number of coronavirus cases over recent weeks. Quebec and neighbouring Ontario, the hardest-hit provinces, have clamped down on large gatherings and private parties.

AFP



Tourists take photos at the Taj Mahal, after the authorities reopened the mausoleum, in Agra on Monday (AFP)

Taj Mahal reopens even as cases soar

Agra, India - India's famed Taj Mahal and some schools reopened on Monday as authorities pressed ahead with kickstarting the nation's coronavirus-battered economy despite soaring infection numbers.

India, home to 1.3bn people and some of the world's most crowded cities, has recorded more than 5.4mn COVID-19 cases, second only to the United States which it could overtake soon.

But after a strict lockdown in March that devastated the livelihoods of tens of millions of people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is reluctant to copy some other nations and tighten the screw on activity again.

Instead in recent months his government has eased more and more restrictions including

on many train routes, domestic flights, markets, restaurants - and now, visiting the Taj Mahal.

"So many people lost their job during the lockdown. People have suffered a lot and it is time the country opens up fully," said bank official Ayub Sheikh (35) visiting the Taj with his wife and baby daughter.

"We are not afraid of the virus. If it has to infect us, it will," Sheikh told AFP. "Not many people are dying now. I don't think it is going to go away soon. We have to get used to it now."

The jaw-dropping white-marble mausoleum in Agra in south of New Delhi is India's most popular tourist site. It usually draws 7mn visitors a year, but has been closed since March. Officials said strict social distancing rules were in

place and visitors were not allowed to touch the marble. The famous bench where visitors sit for a photo - most memorably Princess Diana in 1992 - has been specially laminated so that it can be regularly sanitised without damage.

Early on Monday a couple of hundred of visitors were inside. Security personnel were reminding everyone to wear masks once photos have been clicked. Daily visitor numbers have been capped at 5,000 - a quarter the normal rate.

"Coronavirus is there in every country," Spanish visitor Ainhoa Parra told AFP.

"We are taking all the safety measures that we can. We have to be careful but if we have to get infected we will."

AFP

'Devastating' impact on displaced people

Oslo, Norway - The coronavirus pandemic is having a 'devastating' impact on people displaced and affected by conflict, tipping many into hunger and homelessness, a new study by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) showed on Monday.

The report, titled *Downward Spiral*, is based on assessments and survey in 14 countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Somalia and Yemen.

According to NRC, nearly three quarters the 1,400 people surveyed said they had seen a clear deterioration in their conditions since the outbreak.

For instance, 70 per cent 'had to cut the number of meals for their household', 77 per cent



The new NRC report is based on assessments and survey in 14 countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Somalia and Yemen

had lost a job or income from work, and 73 per cent said they were less likely to send their children to school due to 'economic hardship'. 'The world's most vulnerable communities are in a dangerous downward

spiral,' Jan Egeland, NRC secretary general, said in a statement. 'Already forced from their homes by violence, often with limited rights to work or access to government services, the economic impact of the pan-

demic is pushing them to catastrophe,' he continued.

Even before the pandemic, the UN was concerned about worsening hunger in the world.

According to an annual report published in July, nearly one in nine people were chronically undernourished in 2019, and things were expected to deteriorate in 2020 due to COVID-19.

The NRC survey was conducted among 1,413 displaced and conflict-affected people in 14 countries: Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Uganda and Venezuela and additional research in Somalia, DR Congo, Lebanon, Jordan, Burkina Faso and Yemen.

AFP

China's pandemic-themed TV drama faces online backlash

Beijing, China - A Chinese primetime TV drama about the coronavirus pandemic has been slammed by social media users, who accused it of sexism for downplaying the role of women in battling the deadly outbreak at ground-zero.

China has largely brought the virus under control since it first emerged late last year, though Beijing has rushed to reshape the official narrative following criticism that it mishandled its initial response and punished whistleblowers.

But the new show, *Heroes in Harm's Way* - first aired by state broadcaster CCTV on Thursday - has triggered a fierce online



The new TV drama downplays the role of women in fighting the virus

backlash for its depiction of women in the virus battle.

One controversial scene set in the virus ground-zero city of Wuhan showed female bus drivers being reluctant to volun-

teer for a delivery team due to family commitments - while their male colleagues did not hesitate.

Users on the Twitter-like platform Weibo re-posted state

media news reports praising real-life female bus drivers and volunteers, and argued women had been vital in transporting supplies and medical staff around the locked-down city.

'Women have made such a huge contribution to (fight) the epidemic... The pandemic is still not over, but they rushed to smear (women),' read one comment with over 15,000 likes.

'This TV series really ignores female bus drivers' contributions to fighting the epidemic. The implicit gender discrimination in these kinds of film and TV works should be redressed,' wrote another user.

AFP

FAMILY FRIENDLY STAYS



Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara



Kempinski Hotel Muscat



Al Bustan Palace

From pirate tents to volleyball courts and hiking trails, these hotels make the most of Oman’s natural landscape

Conde Nast Traveller, in its September 2020 issue, has listed the seven best family-friendly hotels and resorts of Oman. From pirate tents and a trampoline centre to volleyball courts and hiking trails, these hotels make the most of Oman’s natural landscape and extend the country’s gentle hospitality to guests of every age, it states. The top seven include:

AL BALEED RESORT SALALAH BY ANANTARA

A villa resort in Salalah, set between the sea and a freshwater lagoon on Dhofar’s south coast, this beachfront oasis is an example of architecture and décor inspired by the area’s coastal fortresses. In addition to the premier and deluxe rooms, there are 96 villas, including 88 private pool villas that are perfect for families. Younger guests will love the kids’ and teens’ clubs, children’s pool and gaming room, and the whole family can enjoy the infinity pool, private beach, water sports and tennis, volleyball, petanque and beach football facilities. While the kids are kicking a ball around, indulge in a signature treatment at the Anantara Spa, which features Salalah’s first hammam and razul treatment rooms. salalah.anantara.com

AL BUSTAN PALACE, A RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL

Set in lush gardens and nestled between the Al Hajar Mountains and the Sea of Oman, the 250-room Al Bustan Palace reflects authentic Omani culture and hospitality. The hotel’s 1km private beach is the country’s longest and five outdoor pools include a 50m-long infinity pool. The Ritz Kids programme educates and entertains with face painting, beach-themed crafts and tie-dye painting. The fun continues in the guest rooms, where little ones can have their own pirate or princess themed tent, which comes with personalised activity books, decorations, toys and balloons. Parents will be pleased to see nutritious and varied items on the bespoke kids’ menu, available at all the restaurants. ritzcarlton.com

ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR RESORT

Set 2,000m above sea level on the rim of a canyon in the Saiq Plateau – making it the highest five-star resort in the Middle East – Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar’s location lends itself to adventures. From mountain biking and visits to local villages to watching the night sky from the resort’s stargaz-

ing platform, the unique setting will excite even the least excitable teen. In addition to a shaded children’s pool, donkey rides and a cinema under the stars, the Asfour Kids Club offers crafts, nature walks, games and a playground, while older kids hang out at the Jabal Teens Club with Xbox games, a billiards table and an internet café. A cookery school, climbing wall, painting and photography classes and a range of sporting activities including archery and hot yoga keep the whole family occupied – with stories to share at mealtimes. jabal-akhdar.anantara.com

GRAND HYATT MUSCAT

In the heart of the Shatti al Qurm district, with direct access to a pristine, palm-fringed public beach, Grand Hyatt Muscat is well-placed for exploring the palaces, mosques and souqs of the capital. That is, if you can tear yourself away from this fun resort, where activities run the gamut from floodlit tennis to SUP Yoga, and where little ones can play in a river or the toddler splash pool. The hotel has 280 rooms and suites overlooking the Gulf of Oman and the Al Hajar mountains, including two- and three-bedroom Crown Suites with four-poster beds and jetted spa marble tubs for adults

(a babysitting service is available). hyatt.com

KEMPINKSI HOTEL MUSCAT

Set over 6km of beautiful coastline, this luxury beachfront resort is brilliant option for family-friendly adventure. Junior VIP guests can check-in to Dippy’s Clubhouse, offering a wealth of activities and entertainment for children aged 12 and under. As well as a main play area where supervised games and activities take place, there’s a multimedia room and reading room indoors, and outdoor play area and children’s pool for some alfresco fun. A weekly junior cooking class allows little ones to embrace their culinary streak. kempinski.com

SHANGRI-LA BARR AL JISSAH RESORT & SPA

The resort, split between two hotels, is home to Oman’s first dedicated family hotel, Al Waha. Its 262 guest rooms include interconnecting family rooms, with a DVD player and Playstation in the twin room. Cool Zone Kids Club offers games and activities from 9am to 10pm and the Adventure Zone, an expansive supervised soft play area with ball pits and drop slides, is adjacent to Springbox, the country’s first

trampoline centre. There’s also a dedicated children’s pool, a lazy river and the aquatic play area, Splashpad. It’s worth noting that some areas of the hotel are adults-only, including CHI spa, where mum and dad can unwind knowing that the kids are having the time of their lives. shangri-la.com

SIX SENSES ZIGHY BAY

For privacy-seekers, Six Senses Zighy Bay on the northern Musandam Peninsula offers 82 natural stone one- and two-bed pool villas set amid palm trees, away from prying eyes. Family movies on the beach at Cinema Paradiso are accompanied by five flavours of popcorn and 40 varieties of ice cream, while Arabic cooking classes for adults are complemented by cookie- and cake-making for little ones. For kids aged four to 10, Chaica’s Club offers regionally themed activities like sandcastle-building, treasure hunts and local cultural lessons, while the Al Feeteen teens’ club helps them burn off that sugar high with hiking and biking, wadi swimming, moonlight kayaking and even teaches photography skills. All of which means you have more time to yourself to try paragliding, go snorkelling or diving, or unwind at the Six Senses Spa. sixsenses.com

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PERFECT SUMMER CAMPING

After spending the past few months cooped up, the urge to get out and explore the great outdoors safely is stronger than ever. But, the pandemic has left many wary of travel by air, rail, bus, and other means of mass transportation. Instead, travelers are packing up their families and taking to the road.

A little fresh air and vitamin D may be just what the doctor ordered for those needing a reprieve from the stress of the past few months. And, following these simple tips will put you on the path toward the perfect summer camping trip.

For those needing a vacation that is relaxing, rejuvenating and, most of all, reachable on four wheels, a summer camping trip just might be the best option. Follow these tips to get the most out of your camping trip.

Selecting your campsite
From roughing it in the backwoods to

glamping in a fully-furnished yurt, there are many campsite options to choose from when planning. First, you'll want to decide what type of experience you are hoping to enjoy.

Are you pulling a camper trailer or a tent? Do you want to drive up, stake out your tent and be relaxing next to the campfire within an hour? Do you want to grab your pack and hike out to the backcountry where there are no maintained roads or trails? Once you've decided, do your research to find the campsite that meets your needs by visiting websites.

Prepping your vehicle
Before you hit the road, you'll want to take care of some basic vehicle maintenance to help avoid running into issues during your trip. One thing many of us tend to overlook before a trip are tyres. It's important to take the time to inspect your tyres to ensure you and your passengers are riding down the road safely. This starts with checking the

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air pressure to ensuring each tyre is at the factory recommended inflation. Lso, you can use the 'penny test' to make sure you have a safe amount of tread remaining.

Anything below 2/32 of an inch is considered worn and should be replaced.

If you're planning to take more camping trips this summer, you'll want to consider upgrading your vehicle with proper tyres that will perform on any terrain.

Next, pop the hood and check your oil. Is your car or truck due for an oil change? Will your road trip to the campground put you over the recommended miles between oil changes? If you answered yes to either of these questions, be sure to get your oil changed prior to your vacation.

While you're at it, you should also check your air filter and battery. Make sure both are clean, free of dirt and operating as intended. If not, these items should be cleaned or replaced.

Packing your gear
Now that you know where you're going and how you're going to get there, it's time to pack your gear for the perfect outdoor getaway. A few essential items you'll need, in

addition to your preferred shelter, are cooking utensils, footwear, insect repellent and a first aid kit.

Just because you're camping doesn't mean you won't eat well. With the proper meal prep and kitchen tools, you will be enjoying your favourite camp meals in the great outdoors. A must-have at any camp is a cast iron pan for cooking everything, from eggs and sausages to steaks and potatoes. You'll also want to invest in quality reusable eating utensils - forks, knives, spoons, cups - to ensure you can enjoy the fruits of your cooking labour while reducing waste.

If you plan to take a leisurely hike, you'll want to make sure you have adequate footwear that provides the comfort and support you need to traverse rugged terrain. Since you'll be spending a lot of time on your feet, it's important to invest in quality shoes or you'll be stuck at the campsite nursing blisters and unnecessary aches. (BPT)

Travel mistakes to avoid



Blindly trusting guidebooks

Allow yourself to explore and use your own initiative rather than blindly follow a guidebook or brochures that are intended to assist tourists. There is a unique joy in discovering things during travel than being aware of everything you would eventually unravel in advance. Besides, guide books and brochures are often outdated and carry information that would have changed over time to suit their own needs.



Overshooting your budget

It is good to go on a spending spree, if you have the means for it and if finance is not a constraint. But, if your trip has been budgeted, one must stick to it to avoid getting into tight situations. One must make allowance for small emergencies and curb the urge to overspend when not required. Frugal spending in tourist destinations includes avoidance of lavish dinners and purchase of costly mementos.



Minimum layover time between flights

You don't want to end up missing connecting flights or road/rail links, so don't cut it too fine. Keep enough of layover time between connecting flights or onward journeys to avoid the need to alter plans at the last minute. In a bid to avoid waiting time in between, make sure not to keep your deadlines so tight that unavoidable incidental delays, like flight delays or road snarls, jeopardise your schedule.



Not buying insurance

Travel insurance is usually not much considering the expense for any trip. It is common, these days, to face delays, lose or damage baggage, as well as encounter unexpected situations like sudden illness. Here's where travel insurance takes the burden off you. It is an assurance worth paying for so that you are not left stranded in a strange land with no means to return home. Also, if you do buy insurance, always read the fineprint.



Ignoring time zones

It is important to factor in the time zone of your destination while making advance bookings for flights/road-rail connections or hotel stays. Consider your arrival time as per the time at the destination before booking onward travel or hotel stays. Most hotels allow check-in around 12 noon. If you arrive too early, you might have to ensure an early check-in while booking or if you arrive later in the day, you end up paying for the whole day.



Keeping all resources in one spot

Never place all important resources - cash/bank cards, tickets/vouchers, passports/travel documents, driving licence/ID cards - in one single pouch or bag. If this gets lost/misplaced, you will be high and dry. It's a good idea to pack important things in different bags or keep them in custody of different travel partners. Also keep hard copies of important documents, like passports/ flight tickets, etc.