



MONDAY, 16 AUGUST 2021
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AHMAD TO COMPETE IN ROAD TO LE MANS
GO TO **PAGE 08 SPORTS**

EDO raises \$2.5bn in debut financing deal

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Energy Development Oman (EDO) has successfully secured a US\$2.5bn debut financing transaction attracting an overwhelming market response at very competitive rates.

The funding will further support EDO in achieving its key objective of alleviating the government's Block 6 funding requirements. The company is also mandated to create growth; enhance efficiencies and governance in Oman's oil, gas and new energies sector; and unlock value through diversification and value chain integration.

The deal was oversubscribed by more than 100 per cent which is a testament to investors' confidence in EDO and Oman's



economy.

Haifa al Khaifi, interim CEO of EDO, said, "The creation of EDO and the progress made since its establishment constitute a historic achievement for Oman, and it will serve as a vehicle for accelerated development and value

creation. In particular, the successful execution of the syndicated deal is a major milestone for EDO and the country.

"The strong participation from local, regional and international banks is another sign of Oman's attractiveness for global investors

and paves the way for fruitful and sustainable collaboration with international partners."

EDO was established through Royal Decree No 128/2020 following which Block 6 Oil Concession was transferred (Royal Decree No 21/2021) and a new Block 6 Gas Concession was granted (Royal Decree No 43/2021). Since then, EDO has made substantial progress in its journey to become Oman's energy champion and support the sultanate's economic diversification.

With a vision 'to be a world-class partner for growth, driving a sustainable energy future', EDO takes inspiration from Oman Vision 2040 of transitioning to renewables, and leveraging and maximising the sultanate's world-class development opportunities.

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3.5km cable car planned in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to boost Dhofar's attraction as a tourist destination and increase visitors to over 4mn annually, International Teleferik Company is planning to set up a cable car in the Darbat area of the governorate.

International Teleferik Company is part of the Turkish Teleferik Holding which specialises in providing urban passenger transportation solutions, tourism applications and winter sports installations.

In an exclusive interview with Muscat Daily, Abd el Moez Geba, representative of International Teleferik Company in Oman, said, "Our company started operating in the sultanate in March 2020. We have studied how to set up cable cars in several areas in the sultanate, including Jebel Akhdar and Jebel Shams in the Governorate of Dakhliyah and one in Musandam."

The company found Darbat in Dhofar best suited for a world-class cable car that would make for an attractive tourism project.

Geba informed that his company has held two meetings with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to establish the first cable car in Dhofar. "We have prepared a feasibility study for



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism officials welcomed the project and we are waiting for the final approval

ABD EL MOEZ GEBA

the establishment of an integrated project called New Switzerland. It will include a cable car, an amusement park, aqua park and other facilities that cost more than €1bn. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism officials welcomed the project and we are waiting for the final approval to set up the first cable car in Darbat."

Officials of the company visited several areas in Dhofar for the project, including Jebel Attin, Mughsail, Ayn Jarziz and Ayn Hamra, before finalising Wadi Darbat for the cable car of 3.5m length.

Dibba Port to open for investors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The development of Dibba Port in Musandam is going to play an important role in attracting investments to the governorate as it will soon offer land and build-up areas for investors.

Ahmed bin Ali al Shehhi, head of the fishing port in the wilayat of Dibba, said, "The Dibba Port development project, coming up at a cost of around RO40mn, is part of the government's plan to diversify the economy and work to develop fishing ports in the sultanate to be attractive environment for investments. Area of the port following completion of the expansion in December



The Dibba Port development project, coming up at a cost of around RO40mn, is part of the government's plan to diversify the economy

AHMED AL SHEHHI



2023 will increase from 97,000sqm to 779,000sqm. The expansion will provide land plots that meet the needs of local and foreign investors," Shehhi said. "Buildings will also be offered for investment, including shops, restaurants and maintenance workshops," he said, stressing that expansion of the port will

constitute a qualitative leap for the projects implemented in Musandam and contribute to attracting tourists and investors.

According to Shehhi, the port facilitates the movement of cargo and passengers on a daily basis, especially for National Ferries Company (NFC) and cargo ships.

The port also played a significant

role during the COVID-19 pandemic through the movement of passengers and goods.

A total of 140 cargo and landing ships docked in the port in 2020, and NFC's express ferries operated three to five services per week.

"The port also had a role in supplying the coastal areas of Dibba and the wilayat of Khasab foodstuff and building materials via ships designated for this purpose," Shehhi said.

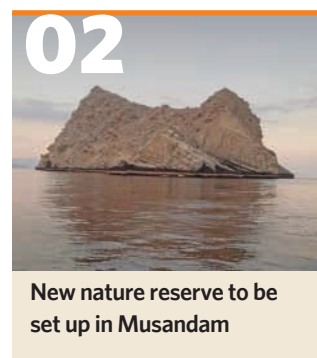
The number of fishing vessels licensed in Dibba Port at the end of 2020 was 47, while the number of fishing boats using its facilities was 972, and the amount of fish exported from it was 11,209 tonnes.

TALIBAN COMPLETES TAKEOVER OF AFGHANISTAN



The Afghan Taliban on Sunday completed a total takeover of the country after President Ashraf Ghani fled Kabul, effectively ceding power to the Taliban. The hardliners reached the capital to seal a nationwide military victory in just ten days and started mobilising fighters to fill the security vacuum in order to maintain law and order after the Afghan forces left their posts unattended. Almost all the embassies evacuated their staff during the day, even though the EU late on Sunday said that the Taliban's advance to Kabul had 'increased the urgency to provide protection' for its Afghan staff against possible reprisals, and Brussels was trying to ensure their safety (AFP)

See also **Page 15**



02
New nature reserve to be set up in Musandam



14
Haiti searches for survivors after quake kills 724

New nature reserve to be set up in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to preserve the natural environment, the Environment Authority is seeking to establish a nature reserve in Musandam.

Abdul Salam bin Hassan al Kumzari, director of the Environment Department in Musandam, said there is a proposal to convert Umm A'Tair Island into a nature reserve and name it 'Musandam National Park'.

The government is working to develop Musandam governorate by establishing projects to achieve comprehensive development and increase sustainable economic diversification. It has attached great importance to preserving the environmental systems in the sultanate in general and the Governorate of Musandam in particular.



(Supplied photos)



Umm A'Tair Island is a haven for various species of migratory birds. There is a proposal to turn it into a nature reserve because of its importance globally

ABDUL SALAM AL KUMZARI

"Umm A'Tair Island is a haven for various species of migratory birds visiting all year round. There is a proposal to turn it into a nature reserve because of its importance globally. The island is also called Umm al Baidh (the place of eggs) due to the huge number of birds that visit the island to lay eggs and for nesting," Kumzari said.

"Musandam's renowned natural features includes the creeks Najd, Shamm, Al Hablain and Ghab Ali. Besides diverse formations of coastal rocks, there are many islands scattered across the governorate, such as A'Tair and the famous Telegraph Island. Among its beaches, Qada, Mokhi, Bassa, Hyout and Hill are big draws for tourists. The diversity of terrain nurtures many wild plants and trees distinguished by their nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic properties."



(Supplied photo)

Indian Embassy marks country's 75th Independence Day

Muscat - The 75th Independence Day of India was celebrated in Oman with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervour on Sunday.

India is celebrating the momentous occasion as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'. The Amrit Mahotsav was inaugurated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in March 2021 and it will continue till August 15, 2023.

The embassy building was lit up in tricolour on the eve of Independence Day. A flag hoisting ceremony was organised in the embassy in the morning in hybrid format owing to COVID-19 restrictions. Embassy officials and staff attended the event physically in the embassy, and was telecast live enabling the Indian community to join the celebration virtually. Before the start of the main event, videos on Amrit Mahotsav, a global painting competition launched by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), an Odissi dance performance and patriotic song were played.

The event started with unfurling of the Indian flag by H E Muna Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the sultanate,

followed by singing of the National Anthem. The ambassador delivered a speech and read out excerpts from the address of the President of India.

He greeted the Indian community in Oman and thanked them for their contribution in supporting India's fight against COVID-19. The ambassador noted that 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' means celebration of elixir of energy of independence and inspiration from the warriors of freedom movement. He encouraged everyone to be a part of India's growth story and the journey towards self reliance and propagate India's message of peace and development.

Videos of patriotic songs and dance by students of Indian School Muscat and Indian Social Club were played after the speech by ambassador, adding to the sense of pride and enthusiasm in the celebration. A video of a message by Dr S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India, and glimpses of the celebration organised by ICCR were played at the end of the event.

30.18% rise in commercial registries in Q1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The number of commercial registries in various legal forms recorded in the Commercial Registry Secretariat of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in the first quarter of 2021 was 5,620. This was 30.18 per cent more compared to the 4,317 registries recorded in the same period in 2020, according to MoCIIP.

Figures released by the ministry indicate an increase in the number of commercial registries of individual merchant companies, limited liability companies (LLC), one-person companies, home businesses and street vendors, all in accordance with the legal forms of commercial registries. The increase in registries



(For illustrative purpose)

is attributed to several factors, including a tendency of investors to utilise self-service facilities and to take advantage of e-government services.

Elaborating further, the Statistics Department in MoCIIP informed that the recorded commercial registries include

3,006 registries of individual merchant companies recorded in the first quarter of 2021, compared to 2,257 registries recorded in the same period of 2020, while there were 1,099 registries of LLCs, compared to 919 LLCs in the first quarter of last year. This first quarter, there

were 955 registries of one-person companies, compared to 666 registries of this category in the same period last year. There were 359 home business registries in the first three months of 2021, compared to 249 recorded in the same period of last year.

The ministry's statistics also show that there were 80 registries of joint venture companies, compared to 90 in the same business category in 2020; 59 registries of limited partnership companies in 2021, compared to 96 in 2020; 57 registries of street vendors, compared to 26 in 2020; four registries of subsidiaries of international companies in 2021, compared to ten in 2020; and one registry of a closed joint stock company (SAOC) in the first quarter of 2021, compared to three in the same period of 2020.



Omani granted Arab volunteering passport

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani citizen has been granted a volunteering passport from the Arab Federation for Voluntary Activities for the first time.

Bakhit bin Salem al Omari said his work represents a religious and national duty and had earned him a lot of experience.

Omari contributed to the establishment of volunteer teams, in addition to presenting books titled *Psychological Happiness and Bullying* to families and educational bodies. He was honoured alongside prominent volunteer personalities of Dhofar by the Ministry of Social Development.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.20am
Sunrise	5.43am
Duhr	12.11pm
Asr	3.37pm
Maghrib	6.39pm
Isha	8.09pm

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MUSCAT DAILY

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Muscat Pharmacy: Ruwi
24702542, Salalah 23291635
Al Hashar Pharmacy: Ruwi
24783334

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Al Hayat International Hospital, Al Ghubra-
22004000, 94267068 / 97049520
94442000 (Emergency)
Al Raffah Hospital: Muscat -
24618900/1/2/3
Sohar - 26704639/49/50
Apollo Hospital Muscat,
Hamriya: 24787766,
24782666, 24787780
Abeer Hospital, Ruwi, Muscat
24770800, 90999335,
90999334 (Emergency)
Starcare Hospital: 24557200
Emergency number: 24558333
Dr Harub's Clinic:
24563217, 2456381,
99254940 (Emergency)
Emirates Medical Center:
24604540
KIMS Oman Hospital:
24760105
Lama Polyclinic: CBD
24799077, 24788881,
24788577, 24707566,
24799655, Al Khuwayr
24478817, 24478818,
Sohar 26751128

Pact signed to operate Nizwa water park

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To stimulate the tourism movement and provide places of entertainment, Liwan Investment and the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund signed an agreement to operate Nizwa water park.

The water park is a distinctive addition to the entertainment and tourism sector in the region and an essential complement to the Nizwa Square project, which includes Nizwa Grand Mall, a three-star hotel, a wedding hall, Nizwa Business Centre and Tanuf Residential Building.

Liwan Investment also announced the name - Wadina - for the water park project and launched its social media accounts on the occasion.

Nizwa Square is the first fully integrated trade hub, newly established in the city of Nizwa and



(An artist's rendition of the water park.)

is a mixed-use project developed by Amjaad Holding. The design of the project is a modern inter-

pretation of traditional Omani architecture along with its total built-up area of approximately

65,000sqm (including parking) and features a wide variety of shopping, hospitality, dining and

entertainment options, as well as direct connections to the water park, three-star hotel, event hall

The water park is a distinctive addition to the entertainment and tourism sector in the region; an essential complement to the Nizwa Square project, which includes Nizwa Grand Mall and a 3-star hotel

along with residential apartment and office building.

The project is first of its kind in Dakhliyah governorate that matches international standards and offers a variety of entertainment and business opportunities.

552 new COVID-19 cases, 19 deaths

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday reported 552 new COVID-19 cases and 19 deaths over the past three days taking the total number of cases registered in the sultanate to 300,194, including 3,993 deaths.

The number of inpatients has also been declining. 'Thirty-four patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 256 including 116 in intensive care units,' the MoH statement said.

The total number of recoveries has also increased taking the total to 288,389 while the recovery rate is 96.1 per cent.

Khareef demand: Oman Air boosts flight frequencies

Muscat - In response to exceptional khareef season demand for Salalah in Dhofar governorate, Oman Air has gradually increased weekly flight frequencies from an average of 18 weekly flights in July to a total of 41 weekly flights at the beginning of August.

Both Muscat-to-Salalah and Salalah-to-Muscat route reached a total of 41 weekly flights and 7,820 weekly seats each way, for a grand total of 82 weekly flights and 15,640 weekly seats, the airline announced.

'The extra flights reflect Salalah's popularity as a leading domestic destination during khareef (monsoon) season, a time of the year when the region is



bathed in an abundance of rain, lush greenery, and cool air.'

Adil al Zadjali, Oman Air country manager (Oman) said, "Salalah remains an extremely popular domestic destination

and our commitment at Oman Air is to provide travel flexibility for our valued guests with the convenience of extra flights when needed. Khareef season - and all the visual splendour it of-

fers - transforms Muscat to Salalah into one of our busiest routes. By progressively introducing 23 additional weekly flights in each direction, visitors to the region have been able to book their seats with full confidence. As domestic travel rebounds, our aim now is to develop a revised flight schedule that lets us maintain exceptional year-round frequencies to Salalah."

'In July this year, Oman Air scheduled its Boeing 787 Dreamliner with 3-class configuration on flights between Muscat and Salalah, featuring award-winning Economy and Business Class cabins and luxuriously appointed First Class Suites. Initially

planned to service the route until July 31, the airline will continue to operate the 3-class Dreamliner on select flights to Salalah, adding to an already optimised mix of aircraft type and offering a wider choice of on-board comfort,' added the statement.

'Our flights are departing on time. For flights operating during the lockdown period, passengers and those dropping them off or picking them up are allowed to travel to the airport. Please ensure that you always carry a printed copy of travel tickets along with all applicable travel documents and valid ID in the event that you are asked to present them to the relevant authorities,' the airline further stated.

ROP NEWS



110kg of drugs seized in South Sharqiyah

Muscat - The South Sharqiyah Police Command, in cooperation with the Coast Guard unit, arrested an infiltrator at sea while trying to

smuggle narcotics into the sultanate, said the Royal Oman Police. Over 110kg of different types of drugs were found in his possession.



Dhofar International Development And Investment Holding Company (SAOG)

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Unaudited Financial Results of Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding Company SAOG ("DIDIC") for the period ending 30 June 2021.

During the first six months of 2021, all the securities markets in the region, including Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) continued their recovery in their respective indices. MSX improved by 405 points and closed at 4063 points as on June 30, 2021 which is a 11% increase over the six months period. Most other indices in the GCC region witnessed a similar improvement for the period ranging from 3% to 34%. During this six months period, the Company's investments in equities recorded an increase of RO 1.945 million, on account of increase in prices of its key equity investments.

Group Consolidated Performance

During the six months period ending 30 June 2021, net profits were RO 3.61 million and the total comprehensive income attributable to our shareholders amounted to RO 0.85 million as compared to net profit of RO 45.41 million and total comprehensive profit of RO 42.78 million for the same period last year. The six months comparative period of last year included one-time deemed acquisition gain of subsidiaries and associates of RO 45.72

million. The Group ended the first half with total assets of RO 231.81 million, an increase of 3% while shareholders' equity of RO 92.93 million registered a drop of 3% from the first six months of 2020 where total assets amounted to RO 225.35 million and shareholders' equity attributable to our shareholders was RO 96.19 million.

Performance of Key Associates

Bank Dhofar, our banking associate, reported net profit of RO 17.056 million for the six months period ended 30 June 2021 as compared to RO 15.786 million for the same period in 2020, representing an increase of 13%. This increase in profits is mainly on account of increase in ner fees and commission income and savings in its operating costs.

The bank continues to build on a strong foundation for future growth, where the total assets of the bank were at RO 4.44 billion in June 2021 as compared to RO 4.11 billion at end of 30 June 2020, an increase of 8%. The Net Loans, Advances and Financing to customers stood at RO 2.85 billion as at 30 June 2021, showing a growth of 4.1% from RO 2.73 billion as at 30 June 2020. Total customer deposits also showed a growth of 8.1% increasing to RO 2.67 billion as of 30 June 2021 as compared to RO 2.47 billion for similar period for last year. Total shareholders' equity in the bank registered an increase of 1.8%, growing to RO 539.477 million from RO 530.138 million a year prior.

Dhofar Insurance, our insurance associate reported an increase of 15% of gross premium written to RO 29.72 million from RO 25.76 million a year earlier for the six months period. However, their net underwriting results showed a marginal decline of 3% from RO 4.50 million in the first six months of 2020 to RO 4.37 million a year later which alongwith an increase of 12% in operating expenses resulted in the net profit for the six months period dropped by 18% from RO 2.18 million to RO 1.78 million. The shareholders equity has increased by 9.5%, from RO 24.01 million as at 30 June 2020 to RO 26.29 million as at 30 June 2021.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the board of directors, I would like to extend our gratitude to the leadership of the CMA, CBO and MOCI for their continued support. I would also like to thank the management teams of DIDIC, our subsidiaries and associate companies for all their hard work and dedication. Finally, we wish our country continued safety and stability under the wise leadership and guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, may God protect him and prolong his life.

Khalid Bin Mustahail Ahmed Al Mashani
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2021

	Group 2021 RO	Group 2020 RO	Parent Company 2021 RO	Parent Company 2020 RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	7,391,037	3,210,901	6,675,300	2,924,591
Receivables and prepayments	844,303	1,094,327	2,216,097	1,334,344
Inventories	20,648	22,551	-	-
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	39,954,117	37,561,444	27,576,337	24,376,279
- Investment in equities	8,930,000	8,930,000	8,930,000	8,930,000
- Investment in term deposits	-	-	-	-
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	9,453,036	9,998,938	-	-
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	10,055,547	12,217,659
Investment in associates	159,564,391	158,732,975	159,564,391	158,732,975
Loan to subsidiary	247,212	247,212	4,950,000	4,950,000
Investment property	5,400,533	5,553,693	606,201	247,212
Property and equipment	231,805,278	225,352,041	220,821,085	214,394,477
Total assets				
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	25,872,000	25,872,000	25,872,000	25,872,000
Legal reserve	8,624,000	8,213,333	8,624,000	8,213,333
General reserve	7,070,404	7,070,404	7,070,404	7,070,404
Investment revaluation reserve	(7,491,431)	(2,629,226)	(7,491,431)	(2,629,226)
Retained earnings	58,856,579	57,662,032	58,856,579	57,662,032
Total equity due to shareholders of the Parent Company	92,931,552	96,188,543	92,931,552	96,188,543
LIABILITIES				
Other liabilities	12,595,761	3,263,014	12,465,953	3,114,833
Income tax payable	9,383	9,383	-	-
Loans and borrowings	101,455,075	101,114,846	90,610,075	90,314,846
Subordinated bonds	24,813,506	24,776,255	24,813,506	24,776,255
Total equity and liabilities	231,805,278	225,352,041	220,821,085	214,394,477
Net assets per share	0.359	0.372	0.359	0.372

UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

	Group 2021 RO	Group 2020 RO	Parent Company 2021 RO	Parent Company 2020 RO
INCOME				
Dividend income	1,495,482	1,540,033	1,206,063	1,357,453
Net revenue of a subsidiary	183,553	164,525	-	-
Realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	(251)	9,991	299	-
Unrealised gain/(loss) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	2,092,070	(1,962,731)	1,945,312	(1,763,678)
Interest income	357,984	401,068	490,236	477,714
Other income	95,643	88,468	91,845	68,435
Total income	4,224,481	241,354	3,733,755	139,924
EXPENSES				
Administrative and general expenses	(933,301)	(895,338)	(688,874)	(630,461)
Depreciation	(91,498)	(95,169)	(39,160)	(42,231)
Total expenses	(1,024,799)	(990,507)	(728,034)	(672,692)
Operating profit/(loss)	3,199,682	(749,153)	3,005,721	(532,768)
Finance costs	(5,010,501)	(4,706,102)	(4,678,973)	(4,375,448)
Amortization of deferred finance cost	(166,240)	(166,241)	(166,240)	(166,241)
Share of loss from subsidiaries	-	-	(137,568)	(547,039)
Deemed acquisition gain of subsidiaries	-	772,128	-	772,128
Share of profit from associates	5,591,735	5,315,805	5,591,735	5,315,805
Deemed acquisition gain of associates	-	44,945,654	-	44,945,654
Profit for the period before tax	3,614,675	45,412,091	3,614,675	45,412,091
Income tax	-	-	-	-
Profit for the period	3,614,675	45,412,091	3,614,675	45,412,091
Other comprehensive income / (loss)				
Items that will not be subsequently reclassified to profit or loss				
Changes in fair value of financial assets through other comprehensive income	(746,744)	(573,379)	-	-
Share of other comprehensive loss of subsidiaries	-	-	(746,744)	(573,379)
Share of other comprehensive loss of associates	(2,013,891)	(2,055,847)	(2,013,891)	(2,055,847)
Other comprehensive loss for the period	(2,760,635)	(2,629,226)	(2,760,635)	(2,629,226)
Total comprehensive profit for the period	854,040	42,782,865	854,040	42,782,865
Basic earnings per share	26 0.014	0.176	0.014	0.176

DESPERATE WAIT

Is it time for Oman to allow passengers who have received both doses of vaccine?

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Muna Basheer al Zadjali
Private sector employee

Fully vaccinated travellers are less likely to spread COVID-19, but there are risks involved with international travel and even vaccinated individuals may be infected with variants. There is no way of predicting how long the vaccine will be effective. Vaccination doesn't fully prevent people from passing on the virus.



Govind Arjan
Communications and media consultant

Vaccinated persons should be allowed back with stringent requirements like pre-departure test, quarantine on arrival, and subsequent PCR tests. Isolation should be mandatory for passengers travelling from hotspots. Families should be permitted to quarantine at home to avoid financial burden.



Khaleelullah Mohammed
Office manager

Undoubtedly, airline companies are the worst affected during the pandemic. Since the vaccination programme is progressing well, I strongly believe passengers who have received both doses should be allowed to enter Oman. It will enable airlines to get back on track and also help many companies who are struggling.



K M Gurnani
Businessman

We respect the government's efforts to contain COVID-19, but it's been a long time - neither residents have been allowed to come back nor any visas issued for visitors. Many students and families have been separated. Many businesses are suffering because of manpower issues arising from the travel ban.



Jaya Dwivedi
Housewife

I think that is the need of the hour. Many countries are allowing vaccinated travellers entry to recover their economies. Why not Oman? As expats, it will be a great decision for us to have our family members back.



Balaji Anandavelu
Accounting manager

Yes, Oman's decision allowing entry to fully vaccinated residents and visitors is much overdue. However, quarantine is needed only until the result of the PCR test on arrival is released and is negative. Those testing positive should have to complete quarantine as per MoH guidelines.



Rupal Panchal
Homemaker

Passengers who are fully vaccinated should be allowed to enter Oman with negative PCR test on arrival. This will help people resume work, provide boost to local businesses and unite families who have been waiting for long to meet their near and dear ones.



Reema Bhatia
Teacher

I agree with the fact that people who have taken both doses of vaccine are safe to travel. Currently, some people are using the third country route to return to Oman. They are spending huge amounts of money to rejoin work and return to their families. If direct flights resume, then the same amount will be spent here.



Jayatee Choudhury
Student

Vaccinated people ought to be allowed entry because the ban is hampering businesses and education of the children who are stuck elsewhere. Most families are cut-off from normal life. Entering via a third country is almost unaffordable and travel agents are taking advantage of the situation.



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YOUR SAY**

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Number of SMEs rise 23% in H1 2021

Muscat - The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) at the end of June 2021 stood at 54,726, compared to 44,448 in the same period of 2020, comprising a rise of 23.1 per cent.

According to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI), among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with 18,460 SMEs, registering an increase of 23.2 per cent, followed by North Batinah which went up by 23 per cent to reach 8,642,

Dakhliyah with a rise of 20.2 per cent to stand at 6,756, and Dhofar with an increase of 23 per cent to reach 4,586.

Other governorates also saw a rise in the number of SMEs. In the Governorate of South Batinah, the number went up by 27 per cent to reach 4,189, the Governorate of North Sharqiyah by 20 per cent to reach 3,619, South Sharqiyah by 29.2 per cent to reach 3,272, Dhahirah by 16.9 per cent to reach 3,083, Buraimi by 24.7 per cent to reach 1,165, Al Wusta by 45.1 per cent to reach 727 and Musandam by 34.3 per cent to reach 227.

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TENNIS ROUND-UP

Medvedev faces Opelka for title



Reilly Opelka of the United States hits a shot against Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece during their semifinal match in Toronto, Canada, on Saturday (AFP)

ATP TORONTO MASTERS

Toronto, Canada - Russian top seed Daniil Medvedev blunted the big serve of American John Isner 6-2, 6-2 on Saturday to set up an ATP Masters 1000 final with Reilly Opelka.

Medvedev dominated throughout in a 54-minute rout against Isner, who was held to a miserly four aces.

With the major part of his game mis-firing, the 36-year-old Isner was an easy target for Medvedev, the losing 2019 finalist to Spaniard Rafael Nadal.

Medvedev will play for his fourth trophy of the season after helping Russia to the ATP Cup in Australia and claiming the honours at Marseille and Mallorca.

He takes on another American two-metre-plus giant in Opelka, who broke new ground as he edged third-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 to reach the final at the Aviva Centre in Toronto.

Medvedev cannot fault his current form: "I'm really happy with the win. I had very few unforced errors (seven). I'm pleased with my game in this moment.

"I feel I'm playing better and



Daniil Medvedev in action against John Isner on Saturday (AFP)

better leading to the US Open."

Isner's game was off the boil and Medvedev took full advantage. "He was not serving like usual and I had to take my opportunities, try and break as much as I could," Medvedev said. "I stayed focused and managed to do that."

The Russian winner posted 20 winners to Isner's 20 unforced errors, breaking the American four times.

Medvedev will need to take

hours to notch his first victory over a top-five opponent.

"I've played great from the first round against a lot of adversity," said Opelka, who ousted Australian Nick Kyrgios in the first round.

"There are no easy draws at Masters 1000s, every match is a nightmare. But I've got a lot of confidence going and I've carried it through each match. I'm putting pressure on guys with my serve and they can feel it."

Tsitsipas held his own until late in the third set, when Opelka broke for a 4-3 lead. The American finished off the upset three games later with an overhead smash on his first match point.

"He prevailed, it just didn't go my way," Tsitsipas said. "But there is hope for next time, it's all right.

"I struggled with my serve, it was obvious. When you get no rhythm it's difficult. It silently ruins your game."

Tsitsipas, ranked third in the world behind Novak Djokovic and Medvedev, still leads the ATP with 45 match wins this season, with Djokovic trailing on 36.

AFP

Pliskova upsets top seed Sabalenka, to meet Giorgi in final

WTA MONTREAL MASTERS

Montreal, Canada - Wimbledon finalist Karolina Pliskova rolled into the final of the WTA hardcourt tournament in Montreal on Saturday with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over top seed Aryna Sabalenka.

The win was a repeat for the fourth-seeded Czech, who defeated her Belarus rival in three sets two months ago in their All England Club semifinal. Pliskova will fight for the Montreal title against Italy's Camila Giorgi, who needed a deciding set to see off Australian Open quarterfinalist Jessica Pegula 6-3, 3-6, 6-1.

Pliskova lost to Giorgi last month in the third round of the Tokyo Olympics.

"It's an amazing feeling to be in another final," Pliskova said. "I was super-solid today."

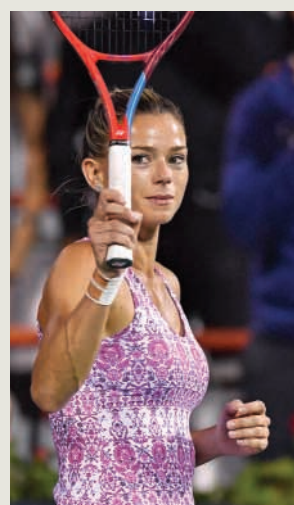
"I did what I needed to win. I used my brain and played smart. She was missing a bit too much, I'm quite happy with the performance."

Pliskova broke Sabalenka four times and saved two of the three break points she faced. Sabalenka, who flung her racquet in disgust in the second set, apologized for any unprofessional behaviour later on Instagram.

Pliskova fired ten aces for a total of 267 this season, putting her within touching distance of Sabalenka's tour-leading 270. The Czech won her 39th match of the season, top of the table on the WTA.



Karolina Pliskova celebrates her victory against Aryna Sabalenka



Camila Giorgi celebrates her victory against Jessica Pegula

But even though she has won 12 of her past 13 matches, she's seeking her first title of the season.

Giorgi has been on a roll in recent weeks, winning her 15th WTA match from 19 played as she moved into the first 1000-level final of her career.

"Reaching this final means a lot," Giorgi said. "I'm having a great week, all my matches have been tough."

"I knew I was playing very well," she said. "Even losing the first set, I never felt the match was in danger as I knew I was playing very well."

"The first set went very well. Losing the second... it can happen in tennis. In the third I came back even more focused."

"The final will be another great match, as usual I will just focus on my game."

AFP

Dream debut for Hendrikse as South Africa beat Argentina

RUGBY UNION

Gqeberha, South Africa - Jaden Hendrikse, called into the matchday 23 just hours before kick-off, came off the bench to score and earn South Africa a bonus-point 32-12 win over Argentina in the Rugby Championship on Saturday.

The scrum-half dived over in the corner to secure the third try in Gqeberha that left the Springboks level with New Zealand on five points at the top of the table after the first round.

Hendrikse woke on Saturday believing he would watch the match from the stand at Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium in the eastern Cape city formerly called Port Elizabeth.

But when a hip niggle ruled out Herschel Jantjies, Hendrikse took his place on the bench and came on seven minutes from time in place of Cobus Reinach.

After scoring two tries within 18 minutes of the kick-off through Reinach and winger Aphelele Fassi, the world champion Springboks were running out of time to claim a third and an extra point.

Then, replacements Marco van Staden, Morne Steyn and Hendrikse combined to give the 21-year-old scrum-half a fairytale start as a Springbok.

Van Staden charged for the line and when he was held up, the ball moved to Steyn, whose pass sent Hendrikse over to seal a clinical 20-point victory.

Scoring completed a remarkable turnaround for Hendrikse, who did not make the 46-man Springbok squad chosen in June for Tests against Georgia and the British and Irish Lions.

He was then sent off for elbowing Wales full-back Liam Williams when playing for his franchise, the Sharks, in a heavy loss to the Lions.

But after serving a three-match suspension, he caught the eye of Springboks head coach Jacques Nienaber and was called up last week as cover after first-choice scrum-half Faf de Klerk was injured.

It was a solid rather than spectacular victory for South Africa, who rested ten of the team that started a series-winning victory over the Lions in Cape Town last weekend.

AFP

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Late strikes push England ahead

Wood, Moeen rock India; Rahane and Pujara’s dogged century stand keeps visitors in the game



England’s Moeen Ali (second from right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of India’s Ravindra Jadeja on the fourth day of the second Test



India’s Ajinkya Rahane (L) and India’s Cheteshwar Pujara tap gloves during their century stand on Sunday (AFP)

ENGLAND VS INDIA
SECOND TEST: DAY FOUR
London, UK - England’s Mark Wood and Moeen Ali struck late on against India at Lord’s on Sunday to leave the second Test intriguingly poised heading into the last day. The tourists were 181 for six in their second innings, a lead of 154 runs, when bad light forced an early close.

The start of a fourth day of fluctuating fortunes had seen Wood remove the in-form KL Rahul and Rohit Sharma.

And the visitors were in even greater trouble at 55 for three

when Sam Curran captured the prize wicket of India captain Virat Kohli.

Cheteshwar Pujara (45) and Ajinkya Rahane (61), both of whom had previously struggled for runs this series, checked England’s progress albeit it took them 59 overs to add exactly 100 for the fourth wicket. But from 155 for three, India then lost three wickets for 20 runs.

Express quick Wood , who had figures of three for 40 in 14 overs, dismissed Pujara before off-spinner Moeen removed Rahane and the dangerous

Ravindra Jadeja. Pujara’s 206-ball vigil ended when a Wood delivery lept off a length and lobbed gently to Root at second slip to leave India 155 for four.

Rahane was then caught behind cutting off Moeen, who then bowled Jadeja with a superb delivery that turned and bounced to clip the top of the left-hander’s off stump.

Moeen, brought back in place of dropped batsman Dan Lawrence, had two for 52 in 20 overs.

Worryingly for England,

Wood also had a shoulder injury that would need to be assessed in the morning after diving headlong into an advertising board when saving a boundary.

Shortly before play ended, the umpires appeared to suggest the game could not proceed if England took the new ball in the gathering gloom, even though the floodlights were on.

England, however, did not want to risk conceding runs in those circumstances, with Rishabh Pant 14 not out and Ishant Sharma unbeaten on four.

Play resumed on Sunday with

England 27 runs ahead following captain Joe Root’s superb 180 not in his side’s first-innings 391.

Rahul and Rohit had provided the bulk of India’s first-innings 364 with 129 and 83 respectively. But Rahul fell for five on Sunday when, having left the ball so well this series, he edged a 150kph Wood delivery straight into wicket-keeper Jos Buttler’s gloves.

Rohit drew India level when he pulled a 146kph Wood ball for six. But trying to repeat the shot just three balls later, even though three fielders were out for the

hook, he was well caught low down by Moeen, running in from deep square leg, for 21. India were now effectively none for two.

Kohli, who had been in good touch, survived left-arm swing bowler Curran’s review for lbw on height.

But still on 20 and seemingly playing for inswinger, Kohli edged a Curran delivery angled across him and was caught behind off a thin nick to spark a joyful run in celebration from the bowler.

AFP

SCOREBOARD	
India 1 st Innings 364	
England 1 st Innings 391	
INDIA 2 nd INNINGS	
KL Rahul	c Buttler b Wood 5
Rohit Sharma	c Moeen b Wood 21
C Pujara	c Root b Wood 45
V Kohli	c Buttler b Curran 20
A Rahane	c Buttler b Moeen 61
R Pant	not out 14
R Jadeja	b Moeen 3
Ishant Sharma	not out 4
Extras:	(b 2, lb 5, nb 1) 8
TOTAL:	181 for six in 82 overs
Fall of wickets:	1-18, 2-27, 3-55, 4-155, 5-167, 6-175
Bowling:	J Anderson 18-6-23-0, O Robinson 10-6-20-0, M Wood 14-3-40-3, S Curran 15-3-30-1, Moeen Ali 20-1-52-2, J Root 5-0-9-0

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Gutsy Babar keeps Pakistan hopes alive

WEST INDIES VS PAKISTAN
FIRST TEST: DAY THREE
Kingston, Jamaica - Babar Azam’s unbeaten half-century kept his team’s hopes alive of setting a competitive target for the West Indies in the final innings of the contest with Pakistan reaching 160 for five in their second innings at the close of the rain-affected third day of the first Test at Sabina Park on Saturday.

Having trailed on first innings by 36 runs, the tourists will start day four ahead by 124 with Azam on 54 and Faheem Ashraf on 12, the pair having put on 39 so far for the sixth wicket.

Pakistan’s captain almost exactly replicated the caution and determination of his opposite number Kraigg Brathwaite of a day earlier. He limited his usually fluent strokeplay to the barest minimum in nearly four hours at the crease in which he faced 139 balls and hit seven fours.

Ashraf was equally watchful and had come to the middle following the demise of Mohammad Rizwan at 121 for five at the start of an extended final session



Pakistan’s Babar Azam in action against West Indies on Saturday

after a heavy mid-afternoon shower interrupted play.

Azam and Rizwan had put on 56 for the fifth wicket but when the wicketkeeper-batsman fell to Jason Holder for 30, Pakistan were in danger of capitulating before the close of play.

While those fears were averted, it looked a distinct possibility when they were reduced to 65 for four just after lunch as the West Indies opening bowlers

again made early inroads.

Yet as bleak as the situation appeared in early afternoon for the visitors on their Independence Day, Shaheen Shah Afridi had gotten them off to the perfect start in the morning by taking the last two West Indies first innings wickets to dismiss the home side for 253.

However that satisfaction was immediately tainted by Kemar Roach, who left the visitors in

more than a little discomfort with a wicket in each of his two spells before lunch.

Once again showing the value of his experience and accuracy, the Barbadian trapped Imran Butt leg-before without scoring.

After an increasingly promising 55-run stand between the other opener, Abid Ali, and former captain Azhar Ali, Roach produced a sharp off-cutter to Azhar which clipped the right-hander’s leg-stump as he shuffled too far across the crease.

Jayden Seales got his first wicket of the innings when Abid Ali’s edged cut high to the right of the tall allrounder at second slip.

There was even greater jubilation in the West Indies camp three balls later when first innings top-scorer Fawad Alam edged another Seales delivery to wicketkeeper Joshua da Silva before he had scored.

At that stage Pakistan had lost three wickets for nine runs either side of the lunch interval and were in desperate need of stability, which Babar together

SCOREBOARD	
Pakistan 1 st Innings 217	
WEST INDIES 1 st INNINGS	
K Brathwaite	run out 97
K Powell	c Butt b Abbas 0
N Bonner	lbw b Abbas 0
R Chase	c Rizwan b Hasan Ali 21
J Blackwood	c Abbas b Afridi 22
K Mayers	lbw b Afridi 0
J Holder	c Rizwan b Ashraf 58
J da Silva	lbw Afridi 21
K Roach	lbw b Abbas 13
J Warrican	b Afridi 1
J Seales	not out 0
Extras:	(b 3, lb 11, nb 6) 20
TOTAL:	253 all out in 89.4 overs
Fall of wickets:	1-1, 2-1, 3-51, 4-100, 5-100, 6-196, 7-221, 8-249, 9-252, 10-253
Bowling:	M Abbas 22-9-43-3, S Afridi 21.4-6-59-4, Y Shah 13-1-46-0, F Ashraf 14-6-37-1, Hasan Ali 19-4-54-1
PAKISTAN 2 nd INNINGS	
I Butt	lbw b Roach 0
Abid Ali	b Holder b Seales 34
Azhar Ali	b Roach 23
B Azam	not out 54
F Alam	c da Silva b Seales 0
M Rizwan	c da Silva b Holder 30
F Ashraf	not out 12
Extras:	(b 4, lb 2, nb 1) 7
TOTAL:	160 for five in 70 overs
Fall of wickets:	1-1, 2-56, 3-65, 4-65, 5-121
Bowling:	K Roach 15-7-15-2, J Seales 13-2-50-2, K Mayers 12-4-19-0, J Holder 14-5-27-1, J Warrican 7-2-28-0, R Chase 6-1-12-0, K Brathwaite 3-1-3-0

with Rizwan and then Ashraf provided.

AFP

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



A file photo, dated January 21, 2009, of Germany's Gerd Mueller

Legendary German striker Gerd Mueller dies at 75

Berlin, Germany - Legendary German striker Gerd Mueller died in the early hours of Sunday at the age of 75, his former club Bayern Munich has confirmed.

"Today, the world of FC Bayern stands still," the club wrote on its website.

During a glittering career, Mueller scored a record 365 goals for Bayern in the Bundesliga during the 1960s and 70s, as well as scoring 68 times for West Germany in 62 internationals.

"Today is a sad, black day for

FC Bayern and its fans," said Bayern president Herbert Hainer.

"Gerd Mueller was the greatest striker there has ever been - and a fine person, a personality in world football.

"Without Gerd Mueller, FC Bayern would not be the club we all love today.

"His name and the memory of him will live on forever."

For the last few years, Mueller had been suffering from dementia.

He leaves behind his wife

Uschi and a daughter.

Largely thanks to his goals, Mueller made history for both Bayern Munich and West Germany.

He scored an unbelievable 566 goals in 607 competitive games for FC Bayern.

"Without Gerd's goals, we'd still be in our old wooden hut on Saebener Strasse (the club training ground)," Franz Beckenbauer once said of his former Bayern and West Germany teammate.

Mueller was part of Bayern

teams which won four Bundesliga titles and dominated the former European Cup - now the Champions League - lifting the trophy three consecutive seasons from 1974-76.

Mueller's Bundesliga record of 40 goals scored in a single season stood from 1971-72 until current Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski scored for the 41st time in 2020/21 last May.

Bayern CEO Oliver Kahn described Mueller as 'one of the greatest legends in the history of FC Bayern'.

"His achievements are unmatched to this day and will forever be part of the great history of FC Bayern and all of German football," Kahn added.

With the West German national team, Mueller won the 1972 European championships and the World Cup on home soil in 1974, scoring the winning goal in the final in Munich against the Netherlands.

After his career, he stayed with the club for a long time as a coach for the youth teams.

AFP



Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean striker Son Heung-Min (second from left) celebrates with his teammates after scoring against Manchester City in London, on Sunday (AFP)

Kane-less Spurs stun City with Son strike

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Tottenham shrugged off the absence of Harry Kane to give Nuno Espirito Santo a dream start as manager as Son Heung-min's strike beat English Premier League (EPL) champions Manchester City 1-0 on Sunday.

Nuno left Kane out of his squad with the England captain closely linked with a move to City, who showed why they are in need of a natural goalscorer in a toothless display. City have already spent US\$138mn on Jack Grealish and are prepared to smash the Premier League transfer record once more to get

Kane by the end of the month.

The Spurs striker was reportedly in the stadium, but not on the pitch after returning back to pre-season training late in his bid to force a move away from his boyhood club.

Pep Guardiola's City penned in the home side for the opening ten minutes, but were left to rue not taking their chances as they slipped to a fourth defeat in four visits to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium without scoring.

Grealish could have won a penalty as he was tripped on the edge of the box by Oliver Skipp and Ilkay Gundogan's free-kick was deflected inches wide.

Fernandinho then headed wide with the goal gaping as Hugo Lloris flapped at a cross, while Joao Cancelo and Riyad Mahrez sliced good chances wide. However, buoyed by the return of a full house to their 62,000 capacity home, Spurs grew into the game and soon started causing City's makeshift defence problems.

Guardiola left out England internationals John Stones and Kyle Walker due to their lack of pre-season training and Tottenham targeted the pairing of Nathan Ake and Benjamin Mendy on the left of the City defence.

Son saw a deflected shot fly inches wide before the break in a prelude of what was to come in the winning goal. The South Korean has been a persistent thorn in City's side and scored his seventh goal against them on 55 minutes as he cut inside Ake and fired low into the bottom corner.

Guardiola finally turned to his star-studded bench to turn the game around with Kevin De Bruyne, Gabriel Jesus and Oleksandr Zinchenko introduced. De Bruyne brought some much-needed speed to City's approach in play and tested Lloris from range.

But even the Belgian could not raise the champions from their

slumber in the closing stages as their frustrations boiled over.

Grealish was booked for diving in on Lucas Moura in stoppage time to round off his miserable debut.

City have now lost their last three competitive games 1-0 after defeats in the Champions League final last season to Chelsea and Leicester in last weekend's Community Shield.

Earlier, West Ham twice came from behind to get their EPL season off to a flying start with a 4-2 win at Newcastle in front of over 50,000 fans at St James' Park on Sunday.

AFP



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema (L) vies with Alaves' Pere Pons on Saturday

Benzema brace as Real off to a flier

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - A brace from French veteran striker Karim Benzema got Real Madrid off to a flier in La Liga on Saturday, his double laying the foundation for a 4-1 victory at Alaves to leave Carlo Ancelotti celebrating the start of his second spell in charge with a victory.

After initially failing to click in a goalless first half, Real found their rhythm after the restart as the returning Gareth Bale found Eden Hazard who flicked on with his heel for Benzema to volley home on 48 minutes.

Nacho volleyed in from close range following a Luka Modric short corner on 56 minutes and Benzema made it 3-0 just after the hour. A Joselu penalty for the hosts was a minor blemish after Thibaut Courtois, making his 100th Liga appearance for Real, brought down John Guidetti. But Vinicius' goal applied extra gloss for Real's fourth in injury time.

In other action, Cadiz and Levante parted 1-1 as did Mallorca and Real Betis while the match between Osasuna and Espanyol ended in a goalless stalemate.

AFP

Haaland nets twice in Dortmund's victory

GERMAN LEAGUE

Berlin, Germany - Erling Braut Haaland weighed in with two goals and three assists as Borussia Dortmund threw down a marker on the first weekend of the Bundesliga season with a 5-2 thrashing of Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

The 21-year-old Haaland has now netted 62 goals in 61 games for Dortmund.

When Dortmund attacked early on, Haaland drew the defence and squared to Marco Reus, who scored his 100th Bundesliga goal on 23 minutes.

However, pressure by new Frankfurt signing Rafael Santos Borre saw Dortmund defender

Felix Passlack put the ball into his own net four minutes later.

Haaland helped restore the lead on 32 minutes. Just over two minutes later, Haaland broke free of the defence and drilled his shot past Trapp to make it 3-1.

New Norway signing Jens Petter Hauge scored Frankfurt's late second goal. However, there was only one Norwegian star in Dortmund as Haaland set up Giovanni Reyna to score the hosts' fourth goal on 58 minutes.

Haaland then had his second goal with 20 minutes left.

OTHER RESULTS:

Sunday: Mainz 1 RB Leipzig 0, Cologne 3 Hertha Berlin 1.

AFP

Binder gambles to win Austrian MotoGP in rain

AUSTRIAN MOTOGP

Spielberg bei Knittelfeld, Austria - South African Brad Binder won the Austrian MotoGP on Sunday after gambling not to change bikes when heavy rain began to fall in the closing laps. Unlike his rivals, Binder opted to stay out on slick tyres and held off the field to win his second ever MotoGP.

The Italian Francesco Bagnaia (Ducati Lenovo Team) swapped to his wet weather machine and passed six riders on the final lap to snatching second place.

Jorge Martin (Pramac Racing), who won last week's Styrian GP on the same track and started this race on pole, claimed a third podium of the season.

AFP

Messi gets rapturous reception as PSG prevail

FRENCH LEAGUE

Paris, France - Lionel Messi got a first proper taste of his new home on Saturday as he was presented to a full stadium of Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) fans before watching his teammates beat Strasbourg 4-2 in Ligue 1 with Kylian Mbappe playing a starring role.

Messi received a rapturous reception as he ran out onto the pitch along with PSG's other summer signings, with a 48,000-full house greeting the six-time *Ballon d'Or* winner despite the welcome ceremony taking place an hour before kick-off.

Messi joined fellow recruits Sergio Ramos, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Georginio Wijnaldum

and Achraf Hakimi on a stage set up on the turf at the Parc des Princes, and the flashy presentation ceremony threatened to overshadow the match itself.

The Argentine later watched from the stands alongside Neymar and Angel di Maria - the trio not yet considered match-fit having enjoyed an extended break after playing at the Copa America - as Mauricio Pochettino's team made it two wins from two Ligue 1 matches this season.

They led 3-0 at half-time thanks to goals by Mauro Icardi and Julian Draxler either side of a Ludovic Ajorque own goal, but Kevin Gameiro and Ajorque netted after the interval to bring the visitors back into the contest.

However Pablo Sarabia made sure of the win late on after Strasbourg had been reduced to ten men in the first match played before a full house at the Parc des Princes since before the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March last year.

Earlier Lille - who defied expectations to pip PSG to the title last season - suffered a humiliating 4-0 defeat at home to Nice, whose coach Christophe Galtier joined in the summer from the champions.

OTHER RESULTS:

Sunday: Angers 3 Lyon 0, Brest 1 Rennes 1, Clermont 2 Troyes 0, Nantes 2 Metz 0, Reims 3 Montpellier 3, Lens 2 Saint-Etienne 2.

AFP



L-R: PSG's Achraf Hakimi, Georginio Wijnaldum, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Sergio Ramos and Lionel Messi pose during a presentation ceremony at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Saturday (AFP)



A file photo of the Circuit de la Sarthe in Le Mans, France, where the Road to Le Mans support race and the 24 Hours of Le Mans is held

Ahmad to compete in Road to Le Mans

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A little over a week since Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy made a winning return on the tracks, the experienced racer is now set for another top-class challenge – Road to Le Mans – a support event for the main race, the annual 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Ahmad will be competing in one of the 11 GT3 cars along with 35 LMP3 entries at the Circuit de la Sarthe in Le Mans, France, ahead of the 89th edition of the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

The Road to Le Mans races will be held on August 19 and 21.

Ahmad had recently made a winning return to the tracks after a gap of more than five months at the Snetterton 300 circuit when he along with Charlie Eastwood took part in the 2021 British GT Championships and won the round five and finished P4 in the next race.

Both Ahmad and Eastwood had entered fifth and sixth rounds of the British GT as guest



A file photo of Oman's Ahmad al Harthy (third from right) with the winner's trophy in 2017 at the Road to Le Mans

entry as this was their one-off participation in the series this season.

At the Road to Le Mans, which was first run in 2016, Ahmad will be joined by American Micheal Dinan for the two 55-minute races.

Ahmad, a 2017 Road to Le Mans double race winner, will race in his Aston Martin Vantage GT3 against five Ferrari 488

GT3, two Porsche 911 GT3R, two Audi R8 LMS and one Mercedes AMG GT3.

Ahmad's car will be prepared and engineered by the official Aston Martin Racing (AMR) team for the event, which also forms the fourth round of the Michelin Le Mans Cup.

At the 2017 Road to Le Mans, Ahmad and his then teammate, Tom Jackson, scorched to a

double victory in the Michelin Le Mans Cup in June. "I'm very excited to be heading to Le Mans," said Ahmad.

"The 24 Hours of Le Mans is, by far, the biggest racing event of the year worldwide. For us to be present at the Road to Le Mans, one of the biggest support events for the weekend, is something I'm very proud of.

"I'm delighted to be racing

The 24 Hours of Le Mans is, by far, the biggest racing event of the year worldwide

AHMAD AL HARTHY

alongside Michael Dinan with Aston Martin Racing for this event. I'm incredibly proud, as ever, to be representing Oman at such a prestigious event."

"We had amazing results at Le Mans in 2017 and it's always a great opportunity to be able to race there. It's going to be a long race meeting - we have a few testing sessions on Wednesday and two qualifying sessions on Thursday. We will have the first race on Thursday, followed by the race on Saturday."

All of the action will take place on the same 13.6km track on which the 24 Hours of Le Mans will also be held.



Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy

Neuville triumphs in Belgium rally



Thierry Neuville with the trophy after winning the Ypres Rally of Belgium

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Thierry Neuville wrapped up his 14th World Rally Championship (WRC) career win with victory in his 'home' Ypres Rally of Belgium on Sunday, followed closely by his Hyundai teammate Craig Breen of Ireland.

The Belgian, who claimed his win in the finale Spa-Francorchamps race circuit thereby closed the gap atop the world championship standings where seven-time world champion

Frenchman Sebastien Ogier has 162 points, with Neuville and Elfyn Evans also of Toyota level second on 124.

"What a fantastic feeling," Neuville said. "So happy to win at home," he added after clinching his first home rally win in front of major crowds.

Much of the race took place on the narrow tarmac roads of Flanders but huge unmasked home crowds applauded Neuville in the main stand of the

Spa circuit at the end as he spun his Hyundai around in noisy circles. There was shock shortly after the race, however, with news of the death of racetrack director Nathalie Maillet, who had not shown up for the finale.

On this eighth of 12 rallies in this year's calendar, Neuville led for most of the weekend, which took in around 300km of competition on narrow farm lanes as well as the Spa-Francorchamps circuit.

He finished a comfortable 30.7sec ahead of Breen following the finale at the racetrack where Hyundai had been desperate to keep their 1-2.

The boyish looking Kalle Rovanperä, 20, who won the last rally in Estonia, finished third after a fierce intra-team battle with fellow Toyota drivers Evans and Ogier. Welshman Evans took fourth with championship leader Ogier down in fifth.

The next rally is in Greece on September 9.

AFP

Bilal, the wrecker-in-chief

Oman Stallions edge Renaissance; wins for Majees, Muscat CT, AER



L-R: Bilal Khan, Mehran Khan and Prasad Sankata of Oman Stallions; Shoaib Khan, Ayaan Khan and Suraj Kumar of Muscat CT

LOCAL CRICKET

The opening weekend of the 2021-22 Oman Cricket's Premier Division (50-over) League witnessed exciting matches and victories for Oman Stallions, Majees CT, Muscat CT and AER.

On Saturday, Stallions' pacer Bilal Khan was the wrecker-in-chief as he tore through the Renaissance's batting line-up with a spell of six for 58 to guide his team to a one-wicket win at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground Two in Al Amerat.

Aqib Ilyas struck an elegant

95 while Pruthvikumar Machhi contributed 46 as Renaissance was bowled out for 244. Bilal was supported by Rafiullah, who claimed three for 56.

Chasing 245 to win, Stallions recovered after struggling at 33 for three at one stage, thanks to a 74-run fourth wicket partnership between Prasad Sankata (62) and Karan Sonavala (39). Later Mehran Khan's 54 put the team on course before Shakeel Ahmed held his nerves to steer his side to a last-over win with an unbeaten 28.

BRIEF SCORES:

Renaissance CT 244 in 50 overs (Aqib 95, Machhi 46; Bilal 6-58, Rafiullah 3-56) lost to Oman Stallions 248-9 in 49.2 overs (Sankata 62, Mehran 54; Aqib 3-39, Bilal Mohammed 3-57).

IAS (Ibn Abdul Samad Engineering & Contracting) 54 in 26.4 overs (Hammad Mirza 18; Nester Dhamba 9-2, Khawar Ali 2-10, Ahmad Fayyaz Butt 2-11) lost to Majees 56-2 in 6.1 overs (Chaminda Lakmal 30, Khurram Khan 22).

Yalla Shabab 200-9 in 50 overs (Mohammed Nadeem 58; Ayaan Khan 3-23, Rana Naeem 2-17) lost to Muscat CT 201-5 in 44.5 overs (Shoaib Khan 69, Suraj Kumar 46, Ayaan Khan 33; Sanuth Ebrahim 3-37).

Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) 115 in 49.1 overs (Mohammed Mohsin 34; Sajeed Ahmed 3-25, Danish Mohammed 2-13, Aamir Kaleem 2-16, Muzahir Raza 2-33) lost to AER 116-5 in 29 overs (Zeeshan Siddiqui 44, Aamir Kaleem 27).



MODI SETS \$1.3TN INFRA PLAN
India will soon launch a ₹100tn (US\$1.35tn) national infrastructure plan that will boost the country's economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Sunday as per the media reports

BUSINESS

MONDAY, AUGUST 16, 2021

MUSCAT DAILY 09



OMINVEST

Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies

Unaudited Financial Results For the Period Ended 30 June 2021

DIRECTORS' REPORT

For the Period Ended 30 June 2021

Dear Shareholders

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Unaudited Financial Results of OMINVEST Group for the period ended 30 June 2021. During the period, OMINVEST achieved steady results both at the Group and the Parent level, despite the difficult business and economic conditions caused by the continuation of COVID-19 pandemic. Below, I would like to present the financial performance of OMINVEST Group and our major portfolio companies for the first half of 2021:

Group Consolidated Performance

During the period ended 30 June 2021, total Group revenues decreased by 39% to RO 103.31m and the net profit attributable to OMINVEST's shareholders decreased by 25% to RO 18.03m from RO 24.11m, over the same period in 2020. The Group revenues declined during the period as Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB) was converted to an associate and the Group discontinued the consolidation of OAB's financials and commenced equity accounting for OAB's results in accordance with the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards from 1st July 2020. The Group's year-to-date profits edged lower as we did not have a large and profitable investment exit such as the sale of a sizeable stake in OAB in the previous year. In addition, our main insurance subsidiary, National Life & Insurance Company SAOG, reported lower profits due to a sharp rise in medical claims related to COVID-19 and claims in the motor business as life returned to partial normalcy after the end of severe lockdowns triggered by the pandemic during the previous year.

Parent Company Performance

During the period ended 30 June 2021, total revenues decreased by 17% to RO 32.66m and net profit decreased by 22% to RO 21.90m, over the same period in 2020. The reasons for decline in the revenues and profits of the Parent company are the same as highlighted above in Group performance. Parent company's total borrowings stand at RO 294m with a healthy leverage ratio of 0.92.

Performance of Key Subsidiaries & Associates:

Jabreen International Development Company SAOC (Jabreen), our subsidiary, is focused on making private equity investments in diverse sectors and expanding into new growth markets in Asia. Jabreen reported a net profit of RO 15.40m for the period ended 30 June 2021 compared to RO 14.63m for the same period in 2020, an increase of 5%. The increase in profit is primarily due to good performance by Bank Muscat SAOG and other portfolio companies. The increase was partially offset by an absence of a one-time gain of RO 3.7m recorded on change in investment classification of International

General Insurance Holding Ltd (Nasdaq listed company) during the first half of 2020. At 30 June 2021, Jabreen's total assets stood at RO 341m compared to RO 333m at 31 December 2020. We expect Jabreen to further enhance and diversify its investment income in the years ahead.

National Life & General Insurance Company SAOG (NLGIC), our subsidiary in the insurance sector, reported net profit of RO 4.85m for the period ended 30 June 2021 compared to RO 10.84m for the same period in 2020; a decrease of 55%. Decline in profitability was primarily attributable to a significant rise in medical claims and motor insurance claims, which on a combined basis rose by 20%. We expect the claims to stabilize and therefore future profits to rebound again on rising business volumes. The decrease was partially offset by an increase in investment income by 49%. NLGIC reported Gross Written Premium (GWP) of RO 85.4m, of which Oman contributed 52%, UAE 46%, and Kuwait 2%. We believe that NLGIC's growth prospects are strong, its recurring revenues from insurance business are stable and on a clear growth trend.

Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB), our associate in the banking sector, reported a profit of RO 10.49m for the period ended 30 June 2021 compared to RO 10.38m for the same period in 2020; an increase of 1%. OAB increased its loans and advances by 0.40% to RO 2.65bn compared to RO 2.64bn, as at 31 December 2020. Customers' deposits decreased by 1.71% to RO 2.71bn compared to RO 2.75bn, as at 31 December 2020. The Shareholders' funds were RO 367m compared to RO 359m, as at 31 December 2020. OAB successfully issued USD 250m Tier I capital securities during the period.

National Finance Company SAOG (NFC), our associate in the leasing sector, reported net profit of RO 3.63m for the period ended 30 June 2021 compared to RO 3.91m for the same period in 2020; a decline of 7%. NFC's revenues decreased by 3% to RO 21.5m in this period compared with RO 22.2m in corresponding period in 2020. NFC continues to adopt a conservative approach to credit approvals keeping in view the overall macroeconomic scenario and perceived increase in credit risk. NFC will continue to focus on strengthening its efficiencies, customer experience, product offerings and quality of service delivery. We expect NFC to further consolidate its position as the leading and best performing finance company in Oman.

Corporate Citizenship

OMINVEST signed an agreement with 'Oman In Focus' as the Main Partner for video productions that raise global awareness of Oman's natural beauty. The documentaries aim at promoting eco tourism and environment preservation in the Sultanate. A team of international and local experts and filmmakers will explore 12

landmark destinations to cover various aspects of Oman's wildlife and landscapes that make the country such a unique destination.

As part of the project, OMINVEST will work closely with the producers to facilitate knowledge exchange in the field of environment conservation and wildlife research between the international production team and local community members, including students and scholars. Through this project, OMINVEST is also supporting young Omani talents that have led and orchestrated this high-standard filmmaking effort.

Acknowledgements:

We are profoundly grateful to our beloved leader His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his great vision and initiatives as he continues to lead the Sultanate on the path of development, peace, and enduring prosperity.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, Central Bank of Oman, and Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for their continued support and guidance. I also take this opportunity to thank the management teams and employees at OMINVEST and across our Group companies for their dedication and hard work.

Khalid Muhammad AlZubair
Chairman

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED AND PARENT COMPANY STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 30 JUNE 2021				
	Consolidated		Parent Company	
	(Unaudited) 30-Jun-21 (RO'000)	(Audited) 31-Dec-20 (RO'000)	(Unaudited) 30-Jun-21 (RO'000)	(Audited) 31-Dec-20 (RO'000)
Assets				
Balances with banks and money at call	28,428	40,874	12,909	24,125
Deposits with banks	81,213	85,885	34,068	44,289
Premium and insurance balance receivable	59,795	43,156	-	-
Re-insurance share in insurance funds	19,412	16,175	-	-
Investment securities	138,363	142,903	7,021	5,328
Investment in associates	332,452	323,368	148,811	142,250
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	295,163	299,391
Due from subsidiaries	-	-	116,135	112,173
Other assets	32,773	14,400	1,394	1,140
Investment properties	9,469	11,139	2,100	2,100
Property and equipment	12,156	12,579	899	969
Intangible assets	21,160	21,795	-	-
Total assets	735,221	712,274	618,500	631,765
Equity and liabilities				
Equity				
Share capital	80,777	80,777	80,777	80,777
Share premium	43,838	43,838	43,838	43,838
Treasury shares	(58,580)	(58,580)	-	-
Legal reserve	19,859	19,859	19,859	19,859
Other non-distributable reserves	6,736	5,641	6,736	5,641
Cumulative changes in fair value reserve	(12,598)	(13,155)	(24,279)	(23,004)
Retained earnings	134,100	136,953	132,586	135,185
Equity attributable to equity holders of the Parent Company	214,132	215,333	259,517	262,296
Perpetual bonds	57,272	52,098	60,638	60,638
271,404	267,431	320,155	322,934	
Non-controlling interests	20,382	21,268	-	-
Total equity	291,786	288,699	320,155	322,934
Liabilities				
Due to banks	294,016	302,470	291,496	302,470
Insurance funds	106,169	74,713	-	-
Other liabilities	41,700	43,555	6,210	5,722
Taxation	1,550	2,837	639	639
Total liabilities	443,435	423,575	298,345	308,831
Total equity and liabilities	735,221	712,274	618,500	631,765
Net assets per share (Rial Omani)	0.320	0.322	0.321	0.325

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTH PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021				
	Consolidated (Unaudited)			
	6 months ended 30-Jun-21 (RO'000)	6 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-21 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)
Gross premium earned	69,797	72,534	34,052	35,254
Interest income	3,024	61,212	1,631	30,329
Investment income	10,160	13,020	4,102	7,183
Fee and commission income - net	3,660	10,858	1,483	6,606
Other operating income	1,605	2,112	1,219	(804)
Share of results from associates	15,060	9,824	7,950	5,132
Total revenue	103,306	169,560	50,437	83,700
Premium ceded to re-insurers	(12,056)	(14,330)	(6,515)	(6,787)
Net claims	(44,457)	(36,947)	(21,748)	(14,308)
Fee and commission expense	(6,436)	(6,437)	(2,508)	(2,817)
Interest expense	(7,644)	(28,938)	(3,875)	(14,654)
Operating expenses	(12,634)	(36,299)	(6,221)	(17,953)
COVID-19 contribution	-	(1,175)	-	-
Allowance for loan impairment, net of recoveries	-	(9,237)	-	(5,300)
Total expenses	(83,227)	(133,363)	(40,867)	(61,819)
Profit before tax	20,079	36,197	9,570	21,881
Income tax expense	(964)	(4,571)	(387)	(2,869)
Profit for the period	19,115	31,626	9,183	19,012
Profit for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	18,037	24,118	8,637	14,766
Non-controlling interests	1,078	7,508	546	4,246
19,115	31,626	9,183	19,012	
Basic earnings per share attributable to the equity holders of the Parent Company (RO)	0.024	0.032	0.010	0.018
Other comprehensive income / (expense):				
Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:				
Movement in cash flow hedge	255	(561)	(4)	(193)
Foreign currency translation reserve	(2)	(11)	(2)	(8)
Changes in fair value of debt instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income	(436)	(572)	27	1,424
Items not to be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:				
Changes in fair value of equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income and share of OCI from equity accounted investee- net of tax	1,407	(10,912)	4,175	(2,394)
Other comprehensive income / (expense) for the period	1,224	(12,056)	4,196	(1,171)
Total comprehensive income for the period	20,339	19,570	13,379	17,841
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	19,208	12,542	12,713	13,186
Non-controlling interests	1,131	7,028	666	4,655
20,339	19,570	13,379	17,841	

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONDENSED PARENT COMPANY STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTH PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021				
	Parent Company (Unaudited)			
	6 months ended 30-Jun-21 (RO'000)	6 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-21 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)
Interest income	3,922	3,106	2,007	1,460
Investment income	4,598	6,414	1,640	6,490
Other income	128	375	120	345
Share of results from subsidiaries	19,435	28,218	7,476	12,172
Share of results from associates	4,575	1,375	2,936	677
Total revenue	32,658	39,488	14,179	21,144
Interest expense	(7,588)	(7,201)	(3,820)	(3,840)
Operating expenses	(3,169)	(3,232)	(1,680)	(1,812)
COVID-19 contribution	-	(500)	-	-
Total expenses	(10,757)	(10,933)	(5,500)	(5,652)
Profit before tax	21,901	28,555	8,679	15,492
Income tax expense	-	(500)	-	(500)
Profit for the period	21,901	28,055	8,679	14,992
Basic earnings per share attributable to the equity holders of the Parent Company (RO)	0.024	0.030	0.008	0.014
Other comprehensive income / (expense):				
Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:				
Movement in cash flow hedge	255	(561)	(4)	(193)
Foreign currency translation reserve	(2)	(11)	(2)	(8)
Changes in fair value of debt instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income	(409)	(537)	25	1,336
Items not to be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:				
Changes in fair value of equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income and share of OCI from equity accounted investee- net of tax	(505)	(10,273)	3,246	(30)
Other comprehensive expense for the period	(661)	(11,382)	3,265	1,105
Total comprehensive expense for the period	21,240	16,673	11,944	16,097
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	21,240	16,673	11,944	16,097
21,240	16,673	11,944	16,097	

Note:
The unaudited interim consolidated financial statements of the Company would be made available to any Shareholder or interested Party on request in Arabic or in English within 7 days from the date of request.

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JABREEN CAPITAL



Galfar returns to profit after years of losses

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Galfar Engineering & Contracting Company returned to profit in the first half of this year after six straight years of losses as the company's new turnaround plan, which was adopted earlier this year, shows signs of progress.

The sultanate's largest construction and contracting firm reported a net profit of RO2.62mn for the six months period ended June 30, 2021 compared to the net loss of RO11.04mn for the same period of 2020.

'This improved performance is on account of various initiatives taken by the company as part of its turnaround strategy especially restructuring and reorganisation and the implementation of stringent cost control measures,' Galfar said in its financial report submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday.

The positive bottomline results, as per the company, came despite a 6 per cent drop in revenues compared to the same period in 2020 as a result of reduced scope of works and cash flow constraints.

'As part of the turnaround strategy, the ongoing measures to control manpower and overhead expenses, and improve efficiencies in project execution have contributed to reducing overall cash outflow and improve the operating financial results in 2021,' Galfar said.

At the group level, Galfar's consolidated net profit came at RO1.36mn for the first half of 2021 against losses of RO11.11mn in the corresponding period of last year.

Galfar said its board and management continue to explore opportunities to reduce operating expenses, to maintain competitiveness and to improve the financial results.



'The company resources are optimised continuously to align with the financial situation and the company succeeded to reduce its overhead costs considerably. The board and management are determined to turnaround and improve the financial performance with continued focus to implement the company's turnaround strategy,' Galfar said.

Order book at RO364mn
During the first half of 2021, Galfar received new orders worth RO69mn and is optimistic to receive more contract orders before the year-end. The company continues to maintain significant order book of around RO364mn worth of jobs to be executed.

'As a flagship for Oman's contracting and engineering business, Galfar is looking forward firmly to build on its strength and to continue supporting the government endeavours for economic growth and pursuit of important development and infrastructure projects,' the company said.

Going forward, Galfar expects to maintain a solid project pipeline with a significant number of tenders under evaluation across a diverse array of sectors and clients.

'We reasonably expect to be successful in a number of those tenders which will ensure stability and sustainability of our strong market position,' the company said.

Moreover, Galfar said it has identified various diversification opportunities in construction technology (such as 3D printing), energy, minerals and other sectors that will provide long-term sustainability and growth opportunities for the company in the future.

According to Galfar's report, the parent company has certified overdue receivables of more than RO52mn as of date from the government and government-related projects. Majority of these certified overdue receivables are relating to long-completed transportation and waste-water network projects.

'The delay in receiving the overdue amounts has caused a significant strain on our cash flow, which resulted in suboptimal execution of certain projects and delay in completion of others. As a result, revenue was lower than planned and lower than the same period in 2020,' the company added.

Dubai Airports expects rebound in air traffic in second half of 2021

Dubai, UAE - Dubai Airports is projecting robust growth for Dubai International (DXB) in the second half of the year after the airport clocked 10.6mn passengers in the first six months of 2021 despite travel restrictions affecting its key source markets throughout the second quarter.

According to the latest figures issued by Airports Council International (ACI), DXB remains the world's busiest airport for international passengers after retaining the title for the seventh consecutive year for annual traffic in 2020. DXB holds a significant lead over other international airports and has nearly twice the passenger traffic of the next busiest global hub in the Middle East, said a Dubai Airports press release.

"In anticipation of the robust recovery of global air travel, we started the second half on a high note by reopening Terminal 1 and Concourse D - the home terminal for our 60 international carriers, after 15 months of



hibernation to accommodate the seasonal rush of travellers over the summer holidays. This was essential to facilitate the continued expansion of the route networks of our home base carriers Emirates and flydubai, whose joint network currently spanning 168 destinations continues to grow," said Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports.

He added, "We have already witnessed some of our busiest weekends of the year in July, and with major international events such as the Dubai Expo 2020 and Dubai Airshow 2021

lined up for the months ahead, the outlook for 2021 in terms of passenger numbers looks very promising."

Griffiths stated that the UK's recent decision to move the UAE to the 'Amber list' and the UAE's conditional lifting of travel restrictions for passengers arriving from four countries in the Indian subcontinent as well as Nigeria and Uganda are major developments that will significantly boost DXB's international traffic while enabling social and economic recovery.

KR Group and Asyad Drydock build Oman's first indigenous marine vessel

Muscat - The Khimji Ramdas (KR) Group, through its Marine Solutions business, has partnered with Asyad Drydock to build vessels in the modern shipbuilding and repairs facility in Duqm.

A full-fledged service company specialised in the design and construction of harbour-related infrastructures in addition to ship repair and maintenance, Khimji Ramdas Marine Solutions under the KR Infrastructure Cluster has grown rapidly since its inception in 2005. Undertaking its maiden project, the team has successfully built a 15m multi-cat vessel *Hulm Al Behar* which has become the first marine vessel to be built in Asyad Drydock, according to a press release.

"The delivery of the first local project is indeed a defining moment in our growing partnership. This is a monumental achievement for the KR Group Marine Solutions, together with Asyad Drydock, and this accomplishment will be the start of many



new opportunities. While we are still celebrating the launch of the first-ever modern ship built in Oman, *Hulm Al Behar*, our focus will continue to remain on the growth and expansion capabilities while contributing to the nation's economy. We have also commenced the building of our second vessel *MEFK Pearl*, a 24m high-speed aluminium crew boat, to facilitate anchorage support services in Port of Fujairah," said Hritik Khimji, director of the Khimji Ramdas Group.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping and Drydock, said, "We are proud of this achievement. Building the first modern ship with international standards, demonstrates the world-class services and operations provided by the drydock and it is a pivotal milestone for the logistics sector in Oman." He added that the completion of *Hulm Al Behar*, is a testament to Asyad Group's empowerment of national talent.

Ravi Kumar Dhulipala, chief operating officer, Khimji Ramdas - Infrastructure Cluster, said, "We are honoured to partner with Asyad Drydock for building ships and vessels in Oman for the very first time. The launch of the 15m multi-cat vessel in Oman's water in Duqm is the start of many more accolades for the teams. The vessel is the product of the untiring efforts of both our teams to deliver world-class vessels built at the Drydock facility, second to none in the world."

MSX rises 0.43%; volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 0.43 per cent to close at 4,019.42 points on Sunday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 20.76 per cent to RO2mn and volumes fell 20.13 per cent to 10.53mn shares.

While Industrial index fell 0.24 per cent, Financial and Services indices rose 0.53 per cent and 0.07 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed down by 0.42 per cent at 590.73 points.

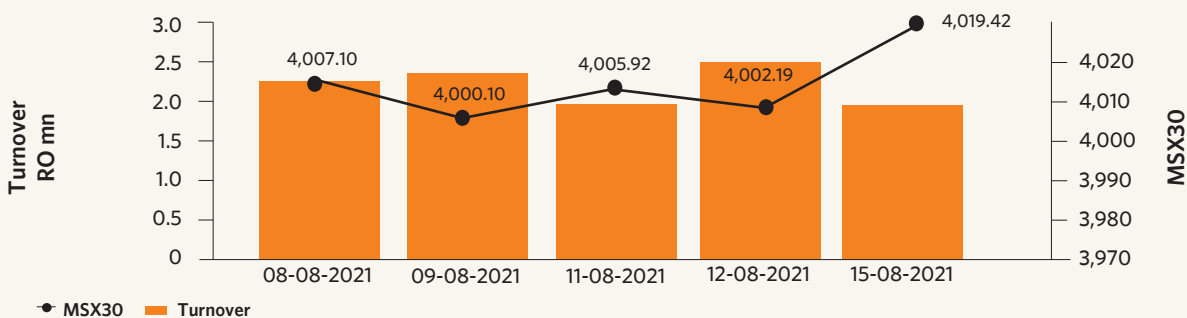
Market breadth remained neutral as 12 companies closed up, while 12 companies closed down. The rest 17 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were National Aluminium Products Company (5.41 per cent), Dhofar Generating Company (3.2 per cent), Oman & Emirates Investment Holding



(2.86 per cent) and BankDhofar (2.5 per cent). Top losers were SMN Power (-7.46 per cent), Al Jazeera Services (-3.38 per cent), Oman Flour Mills (-1.96 per cent) and Al Sharqia Investment (-1.94 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Lebanon army deploys at pumps as fuel subsidies come to an end

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's army seized fuel from petrol stations on Saturday to curb hoarding amid crippling shortages, as the central bank chief stood firm on his decision to scrap fuel subsidies.

Compounding the country's crisis, a top private hospital said it may have to close due to power outages caused by shortages of diesel, warning this could cause hundreds of deaths.

Lebanon's foreign currency reserves are fast depleting, forcing the central bank to scale down funding for imports in an effort to shore up the little money Lebanon has left.

On Wednesday central bank chief Riad Salameh said he would scrap fuel subsidies to ease pressure on fast-depleting foreign reserves.

His decision sparked panic, with huge queues forming outside bakeries and petrol stations as Lebanese struggled to stock up.

Salameh told a radio station on Saturday he would not back down. "I will not review the removal of subsidies on fuel unless the use of compulsory reserves is legalised," by a parliamentary vote, he said.

Fuel shortages have left many



A Lebanese soldier directs traffic at a petrol station in the capital Beirut on Saturday (AFP)

with just two hours of electricity a day, forcing the closure of businesses.

Warning of 'imminent disaster', the American University of Beirut Medical Centre said it would be forced to cease operations within 48 hours.

Without fuel, 'forty adult patients and fifteen children living on respirators will die immediately', it said in a statement.

Fuel importers blame the crisis on delays by the central bank in opening credit lines to fund imports. Salameh on Saturday accused importers and distributors of hoarding fuel to sell at higher prices on the black market, or across the border in Syria.

With the situation rapidly deteriorating, the army raided gas

stations on Saturday and seized fuel to distribute to desperate customers.

A statement said the military had confiscated more than 78,000 litres of petrol stored at two fuel stations as well as 57,000 litres of diesel fuel from a third one.

Internal Security Forces also said they had seized thousands of litres of petrol and diesel fuel stockpiled at one gas pump.

Pictures and video footage posted by the army on its social media pages showed soldiers working pumps at gas stations and filling up car tanks.

Video footage posted online showed motorists cheering as the army raided gas stations. AFP

NBO's Badeel Travel card is ultimate companion on vacation

With travel starting to return, there's no better time to pick up a Badeel Travel card. National Bank of Oman's (NBO) innovative prepaid card comes with a whole host of unique benefits, is super simple to use, and supports multiple international currencies.

Providing access to Schengen Approved Travel Medical Insurance, and a host of special offers and discounts through MasterCard, users can easily obtain, top-up and manage it from their phones or at conveniently placed kiosks. Available for customers



and non-customers, the Badeel Travel card is the ultimate companion.

Maha al Raisi, head of Products at NBO, said, "At NBO we are committed to empowering the people of Oman through convenient digitally led solutions and cutting-edge technology. We introduced our prepaid cards in 2018 and since then have not stopped thinking about how we can make them better and more useful.

"Whether travelling for work or leisure, the Badeel Travel card offers a safe, easy, and cashless

way to carry multiple foreign currencies in a single, re-loadable card, ensuring convenience and peace of mind."

Mastercard enabled and utilising 3D and Chip & Pin technologies, the Badeel Travel card lets users make purchases at millions of merchants worldwide while also being protected by state-of-the-art electronic security.

The only card in the market to offer nine currencies, customers can load the card with Omani rials, US dollars, euros, British pounds, UAE dirhams, Saudi riyals, Swiss francs, Thai bahts

and Indian rupees. What's more, with its own dedicated mobile app and self-service kiosks, customers can order, print out, renew and reload their cards at the touch of a button.

Available for anyone holding a valid resident ID, with or without having an account with NBO, the Badeel Travel card can be easily obtained through the NBO mobile app, Badeel Prepaid App, at any NBO branch, or at Badeel self-service kiosks located at Oman Oil's Ahlain Store on Ghala Expressway and NBO's head office in Azaiba.



Huawei partners with famous music star Yara

Huawei collaborated once more with the Lebanese star Yara through the Studio-quality open-fit ANC earphone with air-like comfort – the new Huawei FreeBuds 4.

These pair of beautifully designed earphones provide studio-quality sound, open-fit noise cancellation, air-like comfort, and they do not put any pressure on your ears while using them! Yara expressed her admiration of design, studio-quality sound and comfort of the new Huawei FreeBuds 4, and chooses them as her day to day companion for leisure, work and communication.

This is not the first-time that the iconic technology brand and Yara are joining hands to bring the to all fans a surprise track release. They worked together on a popular track release back in April that featured Huawei FreeBuds 4i.

Yara found success after winning the LBC music competition 'Kass el-Nojoum' in 1998 by performing 'Awedak'. Since 2004, she has released five hugely popular albums including 'Twassa Feyi' and 'La'ale' Khaleejiya'. And

her fan base has been growing ever since.

Huawei's newest earphones – the Huawei FreeBuds 4 come fitted with a fully upgraded 14.3mm driver unit with a wide frequency range of up to 40 kHz providing you with impressively deep bass, silky treble, clear vocal and rich details of every melody. They feature a dual-microphone noise cancellation technology to deliver upgraded noise cancellation performance and ensures that the microphones pick up the noise surrounding you with far greater accuracy.

The Huawei FreeBuds 4 is loaded with smart and personalised cool features like dual-device connectivity and smart personalised controls where you can effortlessly enable active noise cancellation, adjust the volume, answer calls, press play, and switch songs right from the earphone stems, with simple Swipe/Double tap/Long press touch controls! It is also compatible with all the smartphones in the market across all OS platforms.

Excellent response for Bank Muscat's 'Fuel and Win' e-payment promotion at Shell service stations

Bank Muscat's 'Fuel and Win' campaign at Shell service stations continues to achieve great success in promoting e-payments in Oman, thanks to the excellent response from the customers.

The bank is offering all its Premier Banking customers a chance to win prizes of RO20 each for using their debit cards to pay for transactions at Shell service stations across the sultanate. All that they have to do is to make a single payment of RO10 or more to enter into the draw.

Customers may note that the two-month long promotion will soon conclude on August 20 and a total of 180 lucky customers



will be rewarded for the entire campaign. Bank Muscat's promotion offers its Private Banking, Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers a golden chance to win rewards for making secure e-

payments instead of using cash. The bank has invited its customers to take advantage of this promotion period and get multiple chances to win prizes.

With e-payments now more popular than ever in the sul-

tanate, many customers prefer to use their bank cards rather than cash to make payments safely and securely at merchants and kiosks across the country.

Bank Muscat's 'Just Tap' contactless cards are particularly useful in secure payments during the current challenge of social distancing and enhanced hygiene measures. Cardholders can complete their low-value point-of-sale (PoS) transactions with a simple tap of the card at a 'Just Tap' enabled point-of-sale (PoS) terminal without the need to enter their personal identification number (PIN) for transactions up to RO 40.

Contactless payments take

only a few seconds and both the customer and the retail outlet benefit from faster checkout times and highly secure transactions, which are debited and credited respectively into their accounts. Bank customers receive alerts on their mobile phones for all transactions made using their debit or credit cards, thereby ensuring that transactions are highly secure and private.

Going ahead, e-payments are all set to become the default payment option across the sultanate thanks to its convenience and security and Bank Muscat cards with its numerous features are playing a major role in this digital transformation.

Indian School Muscat launches new initiative ISM Bridge

ISM Bridge, an endeavour of Indian School Muscat (ISM), seeks to empower students to become their own bosses and learn new skills. It is the new initiative to equip students with the skills they need to make a good difference in themselves and the world. ISM Bridge (Business Research, Incubation, and Innovation Development Growth Entrepreneurship) aims to feed students' new ideas, equip them with abilities to develop entrepreneurial skills in young people, promote creativity and self-confidence, encourage creative start-ups and elevate the role of entrepreneurship in society and the economy.

The school has made huge strides in bridging the ISM vision with Oman Vision 2040.

On August 8, chief guest Mohammed al Rasbi, managing director, Techween & OTF



Accelerator programme and entrepreneur, virtually unveiled ISM Bridge Logo on Zoom platform. He was ecstatic to reveal the new logo, which was created by Tetala Satya Narayana Reddy of 12 F.

The logo was designed exclusively to represent the ISM Bridge vision - Inspiration, Innovation and Incubation of ideas which are represented by the three high-rising I-s in the logo.

Students, teachers and management are metaphorically represented as working together to achieve new heights of achievement. The exquisite bridge symbolises the core fulcrum of Indian School Muscat, which aspires to bring the students' ideas to life.

Guest of honour Dr Biswajit Saha, director of Skill Education and Training at CBSE, virtually launched ISM Bridge website and delivered a keynote address.

PSM STUDENTS CELEBRATE INDEPENDENCE DAY OF PAKISTAN



August 14, 1947 marked a great day in the history of the Indian subcontinent when Pakistan came into being. On this very day the white and green flag sways in hands, and eyes filled with tears of joy represent the happiness and importance of independence. The students of Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) celebrated the 75th Independence Day of their beloved country with great zeal and fervour. They decorated their homes with Pakistani flags, green and white lights and balloons. They expressed their passion and excitement online by wearing various traditional dresses, singing the national songs, making videos and paintings. Indeed this day flashbacks the sacrifices of the ancestors who laid down their lives for the establishment of Pakistan



Ferrari continues its strong momentum across all regions

Ferrari N V announced its consolidated preliminary results for the second quarter and six months ended June 30, 2021.

Chairman and acting CEO John Elkann said, "This excellent second quarter confirms the strength of Ferrari and of its unique business model. With each Ferrari we unveil we are setting new benchmarks for innovation, beauty and distinctiveness which is the only true luxury. As we move towards our 75th anniversary next year, our opportunities have never been wider and greater."

Shipments totaled 2,685 units in the second quarter of 2021, up 1,296 units or 93.3 per cent versus the prior year quarter, which was heavily impacted by the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic,

including production and delivery suspension during the initial part.

Sales of 8-cylinder models (V8) were up 111.2 per cent and 12 cylinder models (V12) were up 37.6 per cent. The deliveries of the quarter were driven by the F8 family and the 812 GTS together with the SF90 Stradale and the Ferrari Roma, which reached global distribution. The Ferrari Monza SP1 and SP2 continued to be delivered in line with planning. The first deliveries of the new Ferrari Portofino M commenced in the quarter.

All geographic regions positively contributed in the quarter. EMEA(4) was up 89.4 per cent, Americas(4) increased 70.3 per cent, Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan posted a



strong 564.0 per cent performance, boosted by the arrival of new models and accentuated by an easy comparison versus prior year(5), and Rest of APAC(4) surged by 92.4 per cent.

On June 9 Ferrari announced the appointment of Benedetto Vigna as its chief executive officer. Vigna will join Ferrari on Sep-

tember 1 from STMicroelectronics ("ST"), where he was president of its Analog, MEMS (Micro-electromechanical Systems) and Sensors Group, ST's largest and most profitable operating business in 2020. He was also a member of the ST Group's Executive Committee.

In his role as CEO Vigna's pri-

ority will be to ensure that Ferrari continues to build on its leadership position as the creator of the world's most beautiful and technically advanced cars. His unique knowledge gained over 26 years working at the heart of the semiconductor industry that is rapidly transforming the automotive sector, will accelerate Ferrari's

ability to pioneer the application of next generation technologies.

On June 13 Ferrari launched its first luxury collection, designed by Rocco Iannone, with a fashion show that happened amidst the assembly lines of the factory in Maranello. The following day the first of our new flagship stores was inaugurated in Maranello, which enhances a modern shopping experience and embodies the company's values of innovation, style and performance. Directly adjacent to the factory and the store, the new Cavallino Restaurant also opened, after its transformation into a modern Modenese trattoria now under the direction of Massimo Bottura.

On June 24 Ferrari unveiled the 296 GTB, the first V6 hybrid

and the latest evolution of Maranello's mid-rear-engined two-seater berlinetta, during an online event broadcasted on Ferrari's social media and web channels. The 296 GTB redefines the whole concept of fun behind the wheel, guaranteeing pure emotions not just when pushing the car to its limits, but also in day-to-day driving situations.

The car's name, which combines its total displacement (2,992 l) and number of cylinders was chosen, with the addition of the GTB (Gran Turismo Berlinetta) acronym in finest Ferrari tradition, to underscore this new engine's epoch-changing importance to Maranello. It is not simply the living, beating heart of the 296 GTB, but it also ushers in a new V6 era.

Changan CS85 luxurious crossover on low EMI

Changan CS85 Coupe is a sporty coupe designed SUV which reflects one's personality. Redefining the definition of smoothness, CS85 coupe SUV is outfitted with turbocharged direct injection engine that produces 233 HP and a maximal torque of 360 Nm, partied with an 8-speed automatic transmission, while accelerating from zero to 100km/h in just 7.5 seconds and four driving modes.

Changan CS85 Coupe with elegant looks and characteristic dexterity is now available at EMI starting from RO205 for six years through Bank Muscat auto loan division (includes five per cent Value Added Tax).

A premium coupe SUV, the model stands out from its counterparts through its lustrous appearance, focus on high quality and application of latest technology in the vehicle's many features.

A spokesperson for Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE) said, "Changan CS85, the luxurious crossover coupe combines the

dynamic handling of an SUV with the sporty aesthetics of a coupe to give owners the best of both worlds.



HD Camera, blind area monitoring, forward collision warning, adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning.

Interior
The overall interior style of Changan's CS85 coupe is dynamic, elegant, and luxurious. The interior decoration of the car applies double real stitching lines. It has sport seats in leather, 8-way and 4-way electrically adjustable driver and co-driver seat, seat heating and ventilation, lumbar support, seat courtesy function, 64 colour ambient lighting, illuminated door sills, parking simulation display, drive select mode (sports, economy, snow) and rear AC vents.

Sensors with Screen & IC Display, Adaptive Cruise Control, Lane Departure Warning, 360° HD Camera, Forward Collision Warning, Automatic Emergency Braking, Blind Area Monitoring, Lane Change Assist, Reverse Lateral Warning and TPMs.

Infotainment
A host of infotainment attributes includes 10.25" LCD Instrument Cluster, 12.3" Infotainment Touch Screen, navigation, Bluetooth, Front & rear USB, Mirror Link, Radio, 8 Speakers, Multi Screen Interaction and Memory Card Slot

Comfort
Cruise Control, Keyless Entry, Electric Tailgate Opening, Vehicle Control (Forward and Reverse) with Remote Control, One Touch Up-Down Movement for all four windows are some of significant features of the vehicle.

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE), which is part of Bahwan International Group, brings Changan passenger vehicles to Oman.

style and fashion and will be the new constant in your life once you own this sporty coupe. Blue Core Powertrain Technology based on the principles of power, clean and quiet provides highly efficient and energy saving performance."

With all the vehicles' key parts originating from the world's leading suppliers, the CS85 Coupe offers top grade enjoyment from every angle - visual, tactile, audi-

tory and safety - coming together to create the perfect driving experience.

Sporty style
With its wide body and muscular shoulders accentuated by horizontal contours that sweep through the sides, the CS85 makes a sporty style statement.

The slick exterior styling is matched by a luxurious interior

crafted using high-quality materials and supported by high-tech features.

Innovative technology
Equipped with innovative driving technologies, the CS85 keeps owners at ease with everything under control when on the road. It has features including 360°

Exterior
19" Alloy Wheels, LED Headlamps with LED DRLs, Auto Headlamps, Follow me Home Function, Matrix Fog Lamps, Roof Rails, Quad Exhaust Pipes in Chrome, Panoramic Sunroof, Electrically Adjustable, Folding ORVMs with Heating and Memory.

Knowledge Gate International School celebrates outstanding academic success

At Knowledge Gate International School the aim is to continuously improve and grow. Since 2019 and the change in leadership, there has been great progress and 2020-2021 academic results are a true reflection of the outstanding education and supportive environment that the school has become known for.

Knowledge Gate International School students have demonstrated amazing resilience, tenacity and diligence despite another challenging year. These are skills that will serve them well as they venture into the adult world.

Knowledge Gate International School teachers and parents are extremely proud of the students who have been inspired to unlock their absolute potential delivering the best IGCSE and A Level results to date.

International A Level Results



2021
►17% A* Grades
►43% of students achieving A or A* 70% of students achieving A* to B
IGCSE Results
►This year the students were awarded outstanding results with:

►44% of all grades obtained being A and A* grades (9-7) and
►25% of all grades being A* (9-8). A record 17% of Knowledge Gate International School students achieved A and A* (9-7) grades in all their subjects.

Liz Stanley, executive principal

said, "I am so honoured to celebrate these fantastic results with our students. The fact that these students have weathered the challenges of the past year and have emerged with such an outstanding set of grades is testament to the top quality teaching they have received, the

highly aspirational culture, first class pastoral care, their sheer enthusiasm for learning and the support that they have received from their parents. The students have faced every challenge and change head on, and have not only survived them, but have conquered them."

Al Baleed Food Festival to be held in December

A fantastic line-up of leading international chefs will gather at Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara from December 4-9 for the inaugural Al Baleed Food Festival. The menu will feature local organic Salalah produce along with fish and seafood from our rich coastal shores in a journey that will touch all the senses.

During this extraordinary celebration of food, a range of events will take place to engage even the most discerning diners. Anantara invites you to join in the most exciting culinary gala ever seen in Salalah.

Meet international chefs including Dutch seafood specialist Edwin Vinke, Chef Bobby Chinn of MBC's Top Chef Middle East, French Michelin-star Chef Fanny Rey, and Lebanese fine-dining specialist Chef Joe Barza, in col-

laboration with 'CHEFS' by Lise Timmer', who will all be hosting events and demonstrating their expertise.

From creating signature dishes from local ingredients to sharing their recipes for street food from across the globe, guests are sure to be delighted and entertained.

There will be a focus on locally caught seafood, street food as well as Arabic and Asian nights, offering a variety of regional cuisines to tempt the taste buds.

The last evening will be a finale featuring all four chefs cooking up a storm in one fantastic closing event.

These events are sure to sell out fast, so book now to reserve your exclusive experience at Al Baleed Food Festival 2021.



Modern Oman Bakery opens latest branch in Al Khuwayr

Modern Oman Bakery, the nation's popular home-grown bakery that has been serving happy customers since 1982, announced the official opening of its new branch in Al Khuwayr.

This launch celebrates the 17th branch of Modern Oman Bakery and welcomes you with renewed fresh look. Located in one of the

busiest spots of Al Khuwayr, Modern Oman Bakery is opening their very first Coffee Bar with in-house baristas. Having found overwhelming support in desserts, the new store concept introduces an all new coffee selection to complement the delicious bakery products available in the store.

Made with some of the finest ingredients in town, this renowned bakery continues to spread joy through their cakes and snacks throughout the years. To further celebrate the expansion, Modern Oman Bakery will be inviting guests for a freshly brewed cup and a handcrafted Mamlouls.

ISWK students come up with stellar performance in Class 12 CBSE exams

The jubilant students of Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) have delivered another stellar performance in Class 12 CBSE Examination of 2021, marking yet another year of excellent academic and personal achievements at the school.

Despite the challenges faced by the students due to the pandemic, all of the 285 students (159 in Science and 126 in Commerce stream), came out triumphant. Once again, the students of ISWK exhibited their grit and determination to set an all-time record for the school. The following students have distinguished themselves by securing the first three positions in the Science and Commerce Streams respectively:

Asfaq Jalal Mohamed Abbas Nisha topped the list of successful candidates among Science students. He scored the highest marks in English, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics (99 per cent); Computer Science (98 per cent). Asfaq Jalal and Sayanti Maiti shared the top position in Physics (99 per cent). In Chemistry, the toppers are Asfaq Jalal, Vaisnav R Nair, Gianna Lewis and Kaarthik Menon with 99 per cent.

Marena Saji topped in Biol-



Asfaq Jalal Mohamed Abbas



Marena Saji



Abhijit Prasad Nair



Sayanti Maiti



Vidushi Jagnani



Sashank Rajaram

ogy with 98 per cent. Atharv Shete and Nandhana Rajesh are the joint toppers in Engineering Graphics with 98 per cent.

In Commerce stream, Vidushi Jagnani topped in Accountancy with 99 per cent. Sashank Rajaram topped in Economics with 98 per cent. Hasti Sampat, Austin Denny, Manasvi Hiran, Sahana Raghuraman and Sreedevi T Babu are the proud subject toppers in Business Studies with 98 per cent. Misba Fatima, Vanshika Shah, Sreedevi T Babu and Vianca Vaz topped in Entrepreneurship with 94 per cent.

Kaarthik Menon distinguished with 99 per cent marks in Informatics Practices.

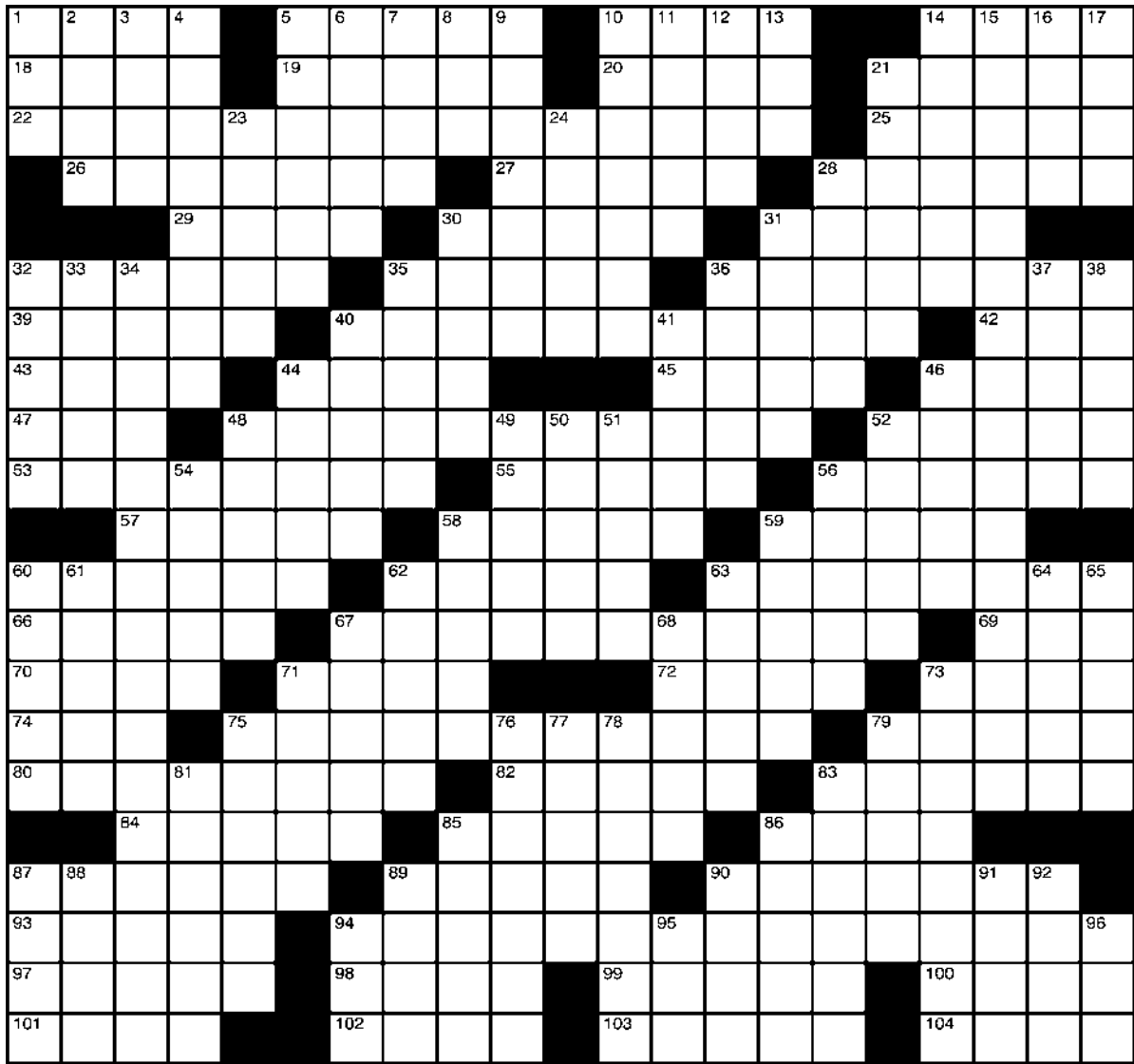
Asfaq Jalal, Gayathri Rajesh and Sayanti Maiti are the subject toppers in English with 99 per cent.

Four students - Elsheeba Paul, Krishna Venugopal, Vianca Vaz and Shruti Shenoy topped in Psychology with 96 per cent.

The subject topper in Physical Education is Rohan Lobo with 78 per cent.

The School Management, principal and staff congratulated all the students, parents and the teachers on achieving commendable results.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 Aleutian WWII base
5 Chic
10 ___ Lap: famed Australian horse
14 SA wood sorrels
18 Fields of Rippling Rhythm
19 Pentateuch scroll
20 “Boola Boola” college
21 Cook a steak
22 RED (3)
25 Narrow moon valley
26 Place for 44 Down
27 Menu in Montauban
28 ___ over: capsize
29 Heidi’s stamping ground
30 Shaping machine
31 Goddess of the hunt
32 Zoologist Dian
35 “Too ___ loved you!”: St. Augustine
36 Surpass
39 Fall flower
40 RED (2)
42 “___ clear day . . .”
43 Heyerdahl
44 Time untold
45 Animal fat
46 Make ___ for it: flee
47 Former atomic org.
- 48 WHITE (2)
52 Bob Cratchit’s job
53 Yeats’s “The ___ of Innisfree”
55 Quibblers split them
56 Exchange tennis shots
57 Prepared for printing
58 Erstwhile Hearst rebel
59 CA NV lake
60 “Messiah” composer
62 Vice ___
63 Not up to snuff
66 Does a lawn job
67 BLUE (2)
69 Betake oneself
70 Wearing shoes
71 Actor Brad
72 Soil sweetener
73 Cavil
74 Sun. talk
75 RED (2)
79 Crete’s capital
80 Set sail
82 Tidal flood
83 Debutante’s dip
84 Wickerwork willow
85 Vestibule
86 Fertilizer clay
87 Dasher’s partner
89 Fragment
90 Port ___: Papuan capital
93 Old Norse poems
94 “THREE CHEERS
- FOR THE ___!”
97 “___ You Glad You’re You?”
98 “A Death In The Family” author
99 French toast word
100 Lang syne
101 Fearless Dillon or Damon
102 Upon my ___!
103 Trollop
104 ___ Scott decision

DOWN

1 Cleo’s bosom companion?
2 Ellington’s “Take ___ Train”
3 Retained
4 Conciliator
5 Like a zebra’s coat
6 Specks
7 Ancient name for the Saone river
8 Seance sound
9 “___-Nine Tails”
10 Like a costly victory
11 Waste-maker?
12 On the sheltered side
13 “The Crying Game” actor
Stephen
14 Countries of Asia
15 WHITE (2)
16 Concorde wing: Fr.
17 Citizen Kane’s “Rosebud”
21 Beat one’s ___
- 23 “Oklahoma!” aunt
24 Hollywood western
28 Used a check improperly
30 End, as a subscription
31 French composer Marcel
32 Deadly
33 Tessie or Milo
34 BLUE (2)
35 Knight’s weapon
36 Head to head exams
37 Harden
38 Hanky ___
40 “The Little Engine That ___”
41 Winglike
44 Artist’s stand
46 Permit
48 Bill, of “Oliver Twist”
49 Midwest terminal
50 Dustin, in “Midnight Cowboy”
51 Shankar’s music-maker
52 Silver salmon school
54 Concluded
56 Sibelius’s “___ Triste”
58 Popular pasta sauce
59 Mets, Nets, Jets, etc.
60 “Steppenwolf ”

author
61 Hunt’s “Abou Ben ___”
62 Cast a ballot
63 Wedding sine qua non
64 Buenos ___
65 Settle a loan
67 Forty ___
68 Denzel
Washington film: 1989
71 Cheapskate
73 Caverns of NM
75 Most ironic
76 Subscribed again
77 Observe
78 Like a fairy tale heavy
79 Healed
81 Upward climb
83 Art, of “The Honeymooners”
85 Large sea duck
86 Castle ditches
87 Perfume measure
88 Ambiance
89 “___ My Heart” golden oldie
90 ___ wear department, for one
91 Become hazy
92 Seasonal tide?
94 Uncooked
95 St. Anthony’s cross
96 Hall-of-Famer Roush

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Your perfectionism can be a mixed blessing in your life. Often, it enables you to excel. You beat out the competition and win the best reward. But sometimes, like today, it can slow you down, isolate you from other people, and keep you from seeing the bigger picture. Try not to get too lost in the details of this day -- what people are wearing, how things are spelled, don't matter at all.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Your life could use a little bit more structure to it -- flying by the seat of your pants might be exciting, but it usually causes quite a bit of chaos with your friends and wastes quite a bit of everyone's time. So take some time to get things more organised. A smart thing would be to review your budget -- and if you don't have a budget, then today you need to make one.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Someone you work with or see every day is going through some heavy issues in their personal life and it's start to affect their demeanour. Their dramas are causing them to get distracted, which is understandable, but it's also creating more stress for you. It's time to gently ask them if there's something you should know -- don't offer to help, but offer to listen.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
It's time to stop putting off that conversation you've been dreading. If you feel like sharing your thoughts about someone with someone, then do it honestly. The critical things you have to say are just as valuable as the positive ones (if not more so). Just remember to be tactful and use your diplomacy skills to deliver your message without hurting anyone's feelings.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You're especially skilled at seeing the subtext of what people are really saying right now, which will help you sense when the tension is running high between two people -- and that's your cue to get the heck out of there! Step away and be by yourself. The last thing you need to be is a bit player in someone else's major drama. So give these people their space.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Today you will start to move into a more inward time, where reflecting on your life will feel valuable and even a little bit fun. You should be more deliberate about figuring out where you want to go, what you want to do, and who you want to do it with. But you will still have time to get things done. You'll have enough time to look inward, as well as outward.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Whether or not you realise it, your actions affect the world around you. The patterns of your behaviour cause ripples around you, and influence how other people behave, when you are with people who can be very, very easily influenced. Take this responsibility seriously and don't do anything that could set a bad example for others. This shouldn't be very difficult for a good person like you.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Sometimes, following the rules is not the best way to get by. It's not that you should go around breaking the rules on purpose today, but you shouldn't be afraid to work outside the norm. Make your own guidelines. As long as you're not hurting someone else, you can do what you think is right -- even if those in charge don't agree. Be willing to explain your actions.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You have done a good job of surrounding yourself with people who are more grounded than you are, and this will help you immensely when you are faced with challenges. Turn to these people and let them take the lead in reacting. You are too likely to be fanciful and try solutions that just might be too unrealistic. These people have the kind of focus you could really benefit from.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
You have a vested interest in someone else's decision -- if they go one way, you'll have sunny skies and a lot of hope. But if they go another way, things could get really cloudy for you really fast. Instead of getting nervous about what side they will come down on, though, you will be able to stay cool and calm about it. After all, you know that you can't control what someone else does.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
If you're trying to keep a few secrets, you'd better lock yourself up and throw away the key! There is no way that you will be able to resist the urge to spill your guts now. Sure, you could try to speak in code in order to confuse would-be eavesdroppers, but this is a risky move -- after all, how are you going to know that the person you're talking to knows what the code is?

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Achieving effective communication could be a problem for you today -- the people you'll be dealing with are not patient enough to listen with any great concentration, and they aren't smart enough to hide their distraction. There will be some serious misunderstandings that create delays and confusion -- but you can get everyone calm and back on track again.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. The major ingredient of leather is**
- a. collagen
 - b. carbohydrate
 - c. polymer
 - d. nucleic acid
- 2. What are the soaps?**
- a. Salts of silicates
 - b. Mixture of glycerol and alcohols
 - c. Sodium or potassium salts of heavier fatty acids
 - d. Esters of heavy fatty acids
- 3. In vulcanisation, natural rubber is heated with**
- a. Carbon
 - b. Silicon
 - c. Sulphur
 - d. Phosphorous

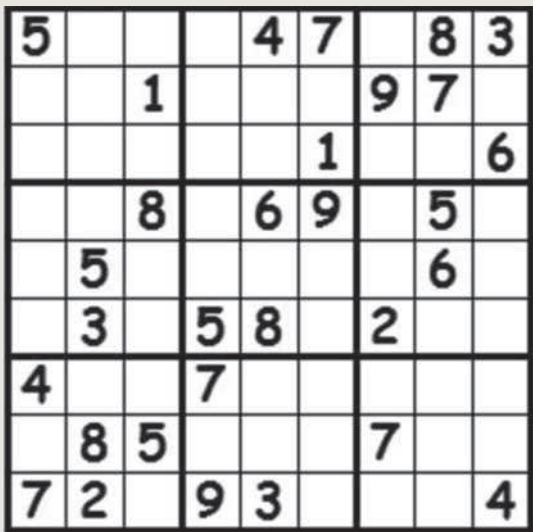
Answers: 1.a 2.c 3.c

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



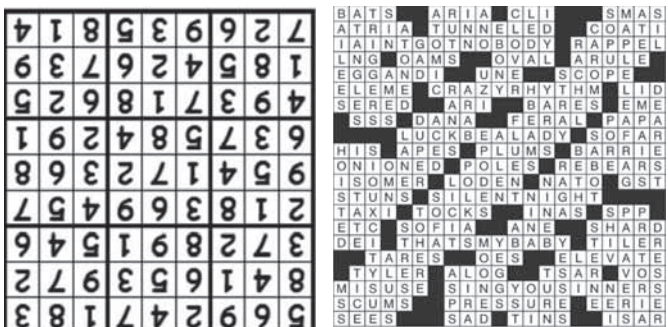
BOGGLER



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



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (AUGUST 15)



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



Lebanon fuel tank blast kills 28, injures 80

Hospitals in Akkar had to turn away many of the injured as it was ill-equipped to treat severe burns

Beirut, Lebanon - At least 28 people were killed and nearly 80 others injured when a fuel tank exploded in northern Lebanon on Sunday, authorities and medics said, scalding a crowd that was clamouring for gasoline in the crisis-hit country.

The night-time tragedy overwhelmed medical facilities and heaped new misery on a nation already beset by an economic crisis and severe fuel shortages that have crippled hospitals and caused long power cuts.

It revived bitter memories of an enormous explosion at Beirut port in August last year that killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital.

An advisor to the health ministry said the death toll from the blast in Al-Tleil village, in the remote northern region of Akkar, had climbed to 28, while the Lebanese Red Cross earlier put the number of wounded at 79.

The military said a fuel tank that 'had been confiscated by the army to distribute to citizens' exploded just before 2:00am, leaving soldiers also among the wounded.

The army began raiding gas stations on Saturday to curb hoarding by suppliers after the central bank chief announced last week he would scrap fuel subsidies.

The official National News Agency (NNA) said the blast followed scuffles between 'residents that gathered around the



Smoke billows from the reported home of the lot owner, where the exploded fuel tank was placed, in the village of Tlel on Sunday (AFP)

container to fill up gasoline' overnight.

Hospitals in Akkar, one of Lebanon's poorest regions near the border with Syria, and in the northern port city of Tripoli said they had to turn away many of the injured because they were ill-equipped to treat severe burns.

"The corpses are so charred that we can't identify them," said

Yassine Metlej, an employee at a Akkar hospital where seven bodies and dozens of injured were brought.

'Lost their faces'

"Some have lost their faces, others their arms," Metlej told AFP.

The head of Lebanon's High Relief Council (HRC), Mohammad Kheir, said authorities were

'in contact with Turkey and Egypt to transfer the most serious cases abroad', according to NNA.

"This is a real catastrophe, like the Beirut explosion," he said.

Unable to seek treatment in Akkar, Ismail al Sheikh (23), who sustained burns to his arms and legs, was driven by his sister Marwa to the Geitawi hospital in

Beirut.

"At night, we were informed that the army was distributing gasoline... so people flocked to fill it in plastic containers... straight from the tank," Marwa told AFP.

"Most of the people who were there said that someone had thrown a lighter on the floor [causing a fire that sparked the explosion]," she added.

A fuel tank that had been confiscated by the army to distribute to citizens exploded just before 2:00am, leaving soldiers also among the wounded

THE MILITARY

Other eyewitnesses claimed that shots were fired before the blast. Grief and anger filled the corridors outside the emergency rooms.

"What am I going to tell my sister?!" said a man in military uniform whose brother-in-law has been reported missing and brother hospitalised.

Lebanon, hit by a financial crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet's worst since the 1850s, has been grappling with soaring poverty, a plummeting currency and dire fuel shortages.

Central bank governor Salameh said last Wednesday the lender cannot afford to fund fuel subsidies due to dwindling foreign reserves, and accused importers of hoarding fuel to sell it at higher prices on the black market or in Syria.

Fuel shortages have left many with just two hours of electricity a day, while several hospitals have warned they may have to close due to power outages.

The American University of Beirut Medical Centre, the country's top private hospital, said it would close by Monday morning if it doesn't secure diesel to power generators, risking hundreds of lives.

Search for missing

President Michel Aoun called for an investigation into the blast and ordered an emergency meeting of Lebanon's defence council later on Sunday, his office said. At the blast scene, soldiers and rescuers swept the area to search for missing people, as relatives gathered in anguish, state media said,

The Akkar explosion comes less than two weeks after Lebanon marked the first anniversary of the Beirut port blast.

Despite the economic crisis, political wrangling has delayed the formation of a new government after the last Cabinet resigned in the wake of the port blast.

International donors have pledged hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid, but the funds remain contingent on a new government being formed to spearhead reforms, and on talks restarting with the International Monetary Fund.

AFP



A protester waves the Thai national flag during a protest against Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, in Bangkok on Sunday (AFP)

Thousands join convoy protests against Thai PM

Bangkok, Thailand - Thousands of protesters in cars and on bikes massed in Bangkok's central shopping district on Sunday, one of several mobile rallies across Thailand demanding Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha resign over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

The kingdom is grappling with its worst outbreak so far, registering record numbers of daily infections each week as hospitals struggle to cope.

In total, it has reported more than 907,000 cases and 7,551 deaths from COVID-19.

A sluggish vaccine roll-out - coupled with financial woes from weeks-long restrictions on businesses - has fanned anger at Prayut's administration.

Sparked by concerns about public gatherings spreading the virus, protesters have in recent weeks turned to organising massive car convoys at major intersections - thus clogging up Bangkok's already traffic-choked streets.

Thousands turned up in their cars and motorbikes Sunday in at least three rallies across the Thai capital - with the largest near Bangkok's gleaming shopping malls, empty in recent weeks.

"The time is up for Prayut. The government has shown clearly they will not take responsibility

for any loss," shouted Nattawut Saikuar, a politician long associated with former premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

Protesters - who were joined by saffron-robed monks - flashed the three-finger salute of resistance.

More so-called 'car mobs' were also planned in the beach city of Pattaya just two hours from Bangkok, as well as in the northern cultural hub of Chiang Mai. The anti-government movement first gained momentum last July.

At its peak, it drew tens of thousands to street rallies, demanding the resignation of Prayut - a former army chief who came to power via a 2014 coup.

But attendances have waned this year, as the public stayed away due to COVID-19 fears.

Sunday's protests come after a week of clashes between demonstrators and police, who have increasingly used rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas to quell the rallies.

At least three protesters were injured Friday, but authorities have defended their use of force as appropriate.

"We only use it (force) when it is necessary," National Police chief Suwat Jangyodsuk told a Sunday press conference.

AFP

Swathes of Libya without water after sabotage threats

Tripoli, Libya - Libyan authorities have shut water supplies to swathes of the country after gunmen demanding the release of a jailed Gadhafi-era official threatened to sabotage the water network.

Supplies to western and southwestern Libya were interrupted overnight Saturday to

Sunday, the Great Man-Made River water authority said.

It took the decision to cut the supply after gunmen on Thursday stormed several water distribution centres demanding the release of Abdullah al Senussi.

A brother-in-law of longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi, Senussi was sentenced to death

in 2015 over his alleged role in attempting to suppress the 2011 uprising that culminated in Gadhafi's ouster and killing.

On Thursday, gunmen gave authorities 72 hours to release Senussi from detention in the capital Tripoli, the water authority said.

If their demands were not met

they planned on attacking the network which brings water from underground wells in the Sahara to Tripoli.

A statement from the Great Man-Made River authority said it was preferable to cut the water supply than see it damaged in any potential attack.

Senussi was extradited in

September 2012 by Mauritania, where he fled after Gadhafi's fall.

He was the subject of an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for suspected war crimes during the 2011 uprising.

In 2013 the court gave Libyan authorities the green light to put him on trial.

AFP

Haiti searches for survivors after quake kills 724

Port-au-Prince, Haiti - Rescue workers were scrambling to find survivors after a powerful 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, killing at least 724 and toppling buildings in the disaster-plagued Caribbean nation still recovering from a devastating 2010 quake.

The epicenter of the tremor, which rattled homes and sent terrified locals fleeing for safety on Saturday morning, was about 160km by road west of the center of the densely populated capital Port-au-Prince.

Churches, businesses, schools and homes crumbled in the quake that trapped hundreds of victims under rubble and left at least 1,800 people injured, the country's civil protection agency said.

Rescuers raced against the clock to find survivors, with the agency tweeting that efforts by 'both professional rescuers and members of the public have led to many people being pulled from the rubble', adding that already overburdened hospitals continued to receive injured.

Hours after the quake, the agency announced the death toll had jumped to 724, ticking upwards throughout the day from a first report of 29 fatalities.

The quake was felt in much of the Caribbean, emanating from the epicenter at Haiti's southwestern peninsula.

The civil protection agency said at least 160 people were killed in the country's South department alone.



People search in the rubbles of what used to be the Manguier Hotel, in Les Cayes on Saturday (AFP)

"Lots of homes are destroyed, people are dead and some are at the hospital," 21 year old Christella Saint Hilaire, who lives near the epicenter, told AFP.

Hospitals in the regions hardest hit by the quake were already struggling to provide emergency care and at least three were full, according to Jerry Chandler, head of the civil protection agency.

State of emergency

Haiti's Health Ministry quickly dispatched personnel and medicine to the southwestern peninsula, but their arrival could be hampered by the insecurity that has for months plagued the poorest country in the Americas.

The United States and other nations swiftly pledged support, with President Joe Biden approv-

ing 'immediate' aid efforts and Haiti's neighbour the Dominican Republic shipping 10,000 food rations and medical equipment.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said he was 'following the latest unfolding tragedy in Haiti'.

"The UN is working to support rescue and relief efforts," he tweeted.

A medical brigade of 253 Cuban doctors deployed in Haiti was traveling to treat the injured and adapt a Port-au-Prince hospital until now used for COVID patients, their head said on Cuban television.

In Ecuador, the Quito Fire Department said it was preparing to send a team of 34 personnel specialized in urban search and rescue.

Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Peru

and Venezuela also offered help while Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Haitians 'can count on the support of Spain to come through this terrible event'.

Tennis star Naomi Osaka, whose father is Haitian, said she was going to donate her prize money from an upcoming tournament to help quake victims.

'Really hurts to see all the devastation that's going on in Haiti, and I feel like we really can't catch a break,' Osaka tweeted.

Images on social media showed people frantically trying to pull victims from the ruins of caved-in buildings, while screaming bystanders sought safety in the streets outside their homes.

"Houses and their surrounding walls have collapsed. The roof of the cathedral has fallen

down," resident Job Joseph told AFP from the city of Jeremie on Haiti's western end.

Heavy damage was reported in the center of the city, home to around 200,000 people and composed primarily of single-story buildings. The damage in the city of Les Cayes appeared to be significant, including the collapse of a multi-story hotel.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who surveyed the damage via helicopter, declared a state of emergency for one month while calling on the nation to 'show solidarity' and not panic.

Rescue efforts could be hampered by Tropical Storm Grace, which is expected to bring heavy rainfall and possible flash floods to Haiti from late on Monday, according to the US National Weather Service.

'People are terrified'

A brief tsunami alert after the quake sent parents 'fleeing the city with their children in arms', Jeremie resident Tamas Jean Pierre said.

"People are terrified."

A 7.0-magnitude quake in January 2010 left much of Port-au-Prince and nearby cities in ruins, killing more than 200,000.

More than 1.5mn Haitians were made homeless in the disaster which also destroyed 60 percent of Haiti's healthcare system, leaving island authorities and the international humanitarian community with a colossal challenge.

AFP

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

Afghan President Ghani flees country as Taliban reach Kabul

Kabul, Afghanistan - President Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan on Sunday, a top official said, effectively ceding power to the Taliban as they reached the capital Kabul to seal a nationwide military victory in just ten days.

"The former Afghan President has left the nation, leaving the people to this situation," Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the peace process, said in a video on his Facebook page.

"God hold him accountable, and the people will have their judgement."

He gave no indication where Ghani was going, but leading Afghan media group Tolo news suggested he was heading to Tajikistan.

Ghani's departure from office was one of the key demands of the Taliban in months of peace talks with the government, but he had stubbornly clung to power.

In just over a week, the Taliban have carried out a lightning sweep of the country, with troops incapable of holding onto territory without US military support.

The insurgents said they want a 'peaceful transfer' within the next few days, two decades after US-led forces toppled it in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The group ordered its fighters



A US military helicopter flies above the US Embassy in Kabul on Sunday (AFP)

earlier Sunday not to enter the capital, saying the remnants of the government's forces were responsible for security.

But later, a spokesman tweeted that Taliban forces should enter areas deserted by Afghan forces in order to maintain law and order.

'God forbid the common thieves and robbers in Kabul do not mix, the abusers do not harm the people, the Islamic Emirate ordered its forces to enter the areas of Kabul from which the enemy went,' a statement by the Taliban said.

'There is a risk of theft and robbery.'

There are fears of a security vacuum in the capital as thousands of police and other armed services members have abandoned their posts, uniforms, and even weapons.

The United States began moving its citizens and Afghan staff to Kabul airport, with the help of thousands of troops deployed to the capital to assist with the evacuation.

However, Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday dismissed comparisons with the

chaotic American departure from Saigon in 1975.

"The fact of the matter is this: We went to Afghanistan 20 years ago with one mission in mind," he said. "That was to deal with the people that attacked us on 9/11. That mission has been successful."

Evacuations

The scale and speed of the insurgents' advance have shocked Afghans and the US-led alliance that poured billions into the country over the past two decades.

President Joe Biden ordered the deployment of an additional 1,000 US troops to help secure the emergency evacuation from Kabul of embassy employees and thousands of Afghans who worked for American forces and now fear Taliban reprisals.

That was on top of the 3,000 American soldiers deployed in recent days, and 1,000 left in-country after Biden announced in May that the final withdrawal of the US military presence in Afghanistan would be completed by September 11.

That decision has come under increased scrutiny given the collapse of the Afghan armed forces, but he insisted on Saturday there was no choice.

"I was the fourth president to preside over an American troop presence in Afghanistan - two Republicans, two Democrats. I would not, and will not, pass this war onto a fifth," Biden said.

Ghani's government was left completely isolated on Sunday after the insurgents overran the anti-Taliban northern stronghold of Mazar-i-Sharif and the eastern city of Jalalabad.

Like with most of the other captured cities, the seizure of power came after government forces surrendered or retreated.

AFP



Taliban fighters sit over a vehicle in Laghman province on Sunday (AFP)

Who's who in the leadership

As the hardline Islamic group appears to be on the brink of regaining power, here is a run-down of what little is known about its leadership.

Haibatullah Akhundzada

Haibatullah Akhundzada was appointed leader of the Taliban in a swift power transition after a US drone strike killed his predecessor, Mullah Mansour Akhtar, in 2016.

Before ascending the movement's ranks, Akhundzada was a low-profile religious figure. He is widely believed to have been selected to serve more as a spiritual figurehead than a military commander.

After being appointed leader, Akhundzada secured a pledge of loyalty from Al Qaeda chief Ayman al Zawahiri, who showered the religious scholar with praise - calling him 'the emir of the faithful'. This which helped seal his radical credentials with the group's long-time allies.

Mullah Baradar, the founder

Abdul Ghani Baradar was raised in Kandahar - the birthplace of the Taliban movement.

Like most Afghans, Baradar's life was forever altered by the Soviet invasion of the country in the late 1970s, transforming him into an insurgent.

He was believed to have fought side-by-side with the one-eyed cleric Mullah Omar.

The two would go on to found the Taliban movement in the early 1990s amid the chaos and corruption of the civil war

that erupted after the Soviet withdrawal.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, Haqqani Network

The son of the famed commander from the anti-Soviet war, Jalaluddin Haqqani.

Sirajuddin doubles as both the deputy leader of the Taliban movement while also heading the powerful Haqqani network.

The Haqqani Network is a US-designated terror group that has long been viewed as one of the most dangerous factions fighting Afghan and US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan during the past two decades.

The group is infamous for its use of suicide bombers and is believed to have orchestrated some of the most high-profile attacks in Kabul over the years.

Mullah Yaqoob, the scion

The son of the Taliban's founder Mullah Omar, Mullah Yaqoob heads the group's powerful military commission, which oversees a vast network of field commanders charged with executing the insurgency's strategic operations in the war.

His lineage and ties to his father - who enjoyed a cult-like status as the Taliban's leader - serves as a potent symbol and makes him a unifying figure over a sprawling movement.

However speculation remains rife about Yaqoob's exact role within the movement, with some analysts arguing that his appointment to the role in 2020 was merely cosmetic.

AFP

UK PM seeks to recall parliament over crisis: Media

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will seek to recall parliament next week from its summer break over the developing crisis in Afghanistan, domestic media reported on Sunday.

MPs are likely to be called back for urgent debate on what Britain, which lost 457 troops in the two-decade long war, should do next, Downing Street sources

told Sky News and the Press Association.

Taliban fighters were on the outskirts of Kabul on Sunday and on the brink of a complete military takeover of Afghanistan, leading to British politicians to call for a last-ditch intervention.

Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood, chairman of the Commons Defence Committee, urged Johnson to 'think again'

about stepping in. "We have an ever-shrinking window of opportunity to recognise where this country is going as a failed state," he told Times Radio.

"Just because the Americans won't, does not mean to say that we should be tied to the thinking, the political judgement - particularly when it is so wrong - of our closest security ally.

"We could prevent this, oth-

erwise history will judge us very, very harshly in not stepping in," he warned.

Ellwood said the government could deploy the Royal Navy's HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group to provide air support. He called the crisis 'the biggest single policy disaster since Suez'.

Johnson vowed on Friday that Britain will not 'turn our backs'

on Afghanistan, even as he confirmed the imminent withdrawal of most embassy staff in the face of a rapid Taliban onslaught.

However, he said that those calling for an intervention 'have got to be realistic about the power of the UK or any power to impose a military solution - a combat solution - in Afghanistan'.

AFP

Afghan soldiers seek Taliban amnesty after fall of Herat

Herat, Afghanistan - Thousands of Afghan soldiers thronged the governor's office in the western city of Herat looking for the Taliban - not to battle them but to seek amnesty.

Afghanistan's third-biggest city fell without a fight on Thursday as government forces retreated and Herat's famous warlord Ismail Khan was detained by the insurgents.

With fears of violent reprisals growing as the Taliban get closer to a full takeover of the country, Afghan soldiers in Herat - nearly all of them in civilian clothes - gathered on Saturday to try and get a letter of amnesty.



A Taliban fighter stands guard on a street in Herat on Saturday (AFP)

Inside the office that once housed the Herat governor, Taliban members sat on couches - some cradling American military rifles - as they jotted down names and reviewed lists spread on a glass-top coffee table.

On stationery with the Taliban letterhead, one wrote amnesty notes - some long-term, some valid for just a few days.

One Afghan soldier at the compound told AFP that his unit was surrounded by the Taliban before the fall of the city.

Now he just wanted security. "I have come here to get an amnesty letter to go out of the city," said Ahmed Shahidi.

"Until I find a place where I can stay safe in the future."

Taliban member Najeebullah Karokhi said around 3,000 people were given amnesty.

"Those who are from other provinces will be provided a three-day temporary amnesty letter so they can get to their home provinces, where they need to get another long-term amnesty letter from our officials," he said.

In the shaded part of a courtyard on the compound, hundreds sat patiently as a man holding amnesty slips shouted names one by one for them to be collected.

The banal bureaucratic process belied the shocking

speed and efficiency of the Taliban's victories across Afghanistan.

Just weeks ago, a defiant and angry Ismail Khan - who ruled Herat as his fiefdom - had vowed to defend the city with his militia, and called on government forces to show more backbone.

But the city's defences seemingly evaporated overnight as troops retreated to a base outside the city and Khan was captured by the Taliban.

The warlord's spokesman said he had been allowed to return to his residence following talks with the Taliban, but it was unclear exactly what deal had

been cut between the two.

"We had to leave the city in order to prevent further destruction," a senior government security source from Herat told AFP.

The fear of Taliban revenge is not unfounded: The insurgents have imposed brutal punishments on opponents, and anyone who violated their harsh brand of Islamic law when they were in power from 1996 to 2001. They have recently been accused of committing war crimes, including massacres of civilians and soldiers outside combat.

The insurgents deny committing such atrocities.

AFP



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SLOVENIA'S LABYRINTHS



This photograph shows stalagmites, stalactites and other cave formations in a part of the Postojna Cave in Postojna. AFP

UNDERGROUND

Grottoes

The grass flickered gently above a crack in the limestone and Ludvik Husu instinctively knew he had found what he was searching for: a new cave in Slovenia's dramatic Karst region.

The seasoned cave enthusiast, with more than 50 years' experience, told AFP that "the conditions were perfect... all the signs pointed to something beneath" as he felt the air current push up from below.

The 63-year-old had come across a new, 60m deep limestone cave, a discovery that made the headlines this summer in a country that prides itself in its 14,000 underground grottoes.

The tiny Alpine nation is unusually rich in caves, which are a major tourist attraction. One even houses an entire castle and another was used by the European Space Agency to help train astronauts.

Slovenia's underground caves resemble those in Oman, especially in Dhofar region, some of which have springs and are safe havens for people during the vagaries of the weather. The 5km long Al Hoota Cave in Oman, embellished with stalactites and stalagmites, is the only cave in Oman developed for tourism, though many others have attracted adventure tourists from around the world.

Biological treasure trove

Perhaps best known is the Postojna cave system, the longest in Europe, unearthed by another amateur enthusiast two centuries ago.

When local lamplighter Luka Cec decided to explore a hidden crack while scouting out the Postojna area for a visit by Austrian Emperor Franz, he is reputed to have said that he had stumbled on 'A new world... a paradise!'

The Postojna system extends for 24km and has offered up valuable finds for biologists.

Stanislav Glazar, a Postojna cave guide and speleology enthusiast, told AFP that more than 150 species have been discovered in the

system. Among them is the Proteus anguinus or 'little dragon', an ancient aquatic salamander that can live up to 100 years and was previously considered living proof that dragons had once existed.

A cave-dwelling beetle - the slender neck beetle or Leptodirus hochenwartii - was also found here, reputedly by Cec.

Glazar sid Postojna is one of the richest caves in the world in limestone formations, with a dense concentration of stalactites, columns, pillars.



You enter a cave out of curiosity, there is no fear. Those who feel fear should stay home.

LUDVIK HUSU

The cave, situated some 50km south of the capital Ljubljana, was also home to the world's first cave tourist train, which began transporting visitors in 1872.

No fear

Elsewhere in the Karst region, the cave systems are of historical, cultural and even extraterrestrial interest. The dramatic, medieval Predjama castle was built in a cave mouth to make access difficult and to provide an escape route through a shaft in the rock face.

The Vilenica cave, which Slovenes have



This photograph shows the Reka River flowing through the Skocjan Caves near the town of Divaca. AFP

been exploring since 1633, is known for the annual eponymous literary prize awarded in its interior. And the UNESCO-listed Skocjan system was where the European Space Agency sent some astronauts to prepare for life in space.

"Astronauts know that the Karst world is exceptional, in a similar way to the environment in space: you don't know what to expect at your next step," said Skocjan Caves supervisor Tomaz Zorman.

But for Husu, it's the hunt which proves most rewarding. The ideal time for cave searching is the winter when the air above ground is cooler than that in the caves, he says.

Once he knows there is something beneath, he digs around the crack to widen it and alerts fellow cavers to help gain access. He then uses ropes and a lamp to descend into what are vertical entrances in most caves, known as 'chimneys'.

But doesn't he feel any trepidation at entering such unexplored depths?

"You enter a cave out of curiosity, there is no fear! Those who feel fear should stay home," he said.

AFP

Slovenia's underground caves resemble those in Oman, especially in Dhofar region, some of which have springs and are safe havens for people during the vagaries of the weather



This photograph shows a path in a part of the Skocjan Caves near the town of Divaca. AFP

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