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OMAN TO MEET QATAR ON JUNE 7

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Over 400,000 cyberattacks in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 417,021 cyberattacks were registered in 2020 in Oman compared to 483,794 in 2019, according to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

A report issued by the ministry stated, 'There were 1,461 incidents related to cyber attacks registered in 2020 by government institutions, vital sectors and also individuals, which were dealt with successfully. In 2019, there were 1,779 incidents in which cybersecurity was compromised.'

The number of notifications and warnings of security threat was 107 in 2020, compared to 109 in 2019. The Digital Evidence Laboratory dealt with 128 cases in 2020, compared to 162 in 2019. Digital analysis was performed on 671 devices, including



desktop computers, laptops, phones and external hard drives, in 2020, compared to 813 devices in 2019.

The report confirmed that 94 per cent of Omani households have Internet, 95 per cent have smart phones, and 96 per cent have computers. The report also indicated an increase in Internet use in 2020 when 95 per cent in individuals aged 18 and older used it, against 92 per cent in 2019.

The report indicated that 92 per cent individuals aged 18 and older used WhatsApp in 2020, compared to 89 per cent in 2019, followed by YouTube - 81 per cent in 2020 against 70 per cent in 2019. Fifty-six per cent used Facebook in 2020, compared to 49 per cent in 2019; 47 per cent for imo in 2020, 52 per cent in 2019; 44 per cent for Instagram in 2020, 39 per cent in 2019; and 25 per cent for Twitter in 2020, 23 per cent in 2019.

27-year-old nurse designs 2-minute ECG machine

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A device designed by a 27-year-old Omani has caught the attention of the scientific community for reducing the time needed to conduct heart examination on patients.

Ali Abdullah Humaid al Gharibi from the wilayat of Ibri, Dhahirah governorate, who works in Ibri Hospital's accident and emergency department as a general nurse, has made an electrocardiogram (ECG) machine that examines patients in two minutes, sometimes less. Regular ECG machines take up to five minutes to conduct the same examination.

"The need for this arose from a real life situation, which many of us encounter. In 2015, when I was working with a patient, he needed an urgent ECG."

Recalling the incident, he said, "It was a race against time. I was under pressure to do it as fast as I could because the patient was experiencing severe chest pain and in unstable condition."



The need for this arose from a real life situation, which many of us encounter. In 2015, when I was working with a patient, he needed an urgent ECG

ALI AL GHARIBI

Gharibi noted that in such circumstances, there could be several other factors developing simultaneously to further slow the procedure. "It prompted me to think how I can solve this

problem. The challenge piqued my curiosity and an idea evolved," Gharibi told *Muscat Daily*.

His device is a 12-lead ECG machine that presents a compre-

hensive picture of the heart and the electrical impulses passing through the muscle.

"Such a device would benefit all of humanity, not just Oman. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it helps save time and - more significantly - reduce exposure time for patients which eventually minimises risk of disease transmission."

Gharibi's biggest challenge in designing his ECG machine was availability of equipment. "The design itself was the first roadblock which was overcome following endless discussions with a specialist engineer. The design went through several stages of tweaking," he said, adding that he has no financial support in the project.

Gharibi is confident his ECG machine can expedite the procedure for clinicians and hopefully replace the traditional machines currently in use.

He is in the process of applying for a patent and registering the device with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Development.

Over 7,900 register for isolation in 321 centres

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 7,963 international travellers have registered for institutional isolation in 321 approved centres to date, according to Hamoud bin Mohammed al Mundhiri, spokesman of the Ministry of Social Development's Relief and Shelter Sector.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mundhiri said, "The 7,963 are registered in institutional quarantine centres in different governorates. The number may vary in coming days."

Mundhiri informed that teams from the Relief and Shelter Sector are working around the clock receiving returnees from abroad. "Travellers are screened in cooperation with the Ministry of Health to make sure they are free of any symptoms of COVID-19. The Relief and Shelter Sector is also cooperating with the Royal Oman Police to monitor people in institutional isolation centres."

He noted that the Relief and Shelter Sector has also recorded violations of isolation orders among international travellers.



"Some people go home. We are in contact with the ROP to take necessary action against violators."

According to Mundhiri, cases of isolated individuals testing positive for COVID-19 have also emerged. "The Relief and Shelter Sector has activated hotline numbers - 24994267, 24994266 and 24994265 - for enquiries about places of institutional isolation."

New institutional quarantine rules

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has announced new exceptions to institutional isolation directives.

A statement issued by the

CAA said that based on decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the impact of COVID-19, in reference to circulars issued on February 11 and 15, some passengers are exempted from presenting pre-confirmed hotel reservations before they are checked in at their airport of departure.

Those exempted include diplomats working at foreign missions accredited to the sultanate, their families, and diplomats visiting Oman; arriving passengers aged 18 and younger if travelling alone, and those aged 60 or older; and airlines crew, subject to the precautionary measures issued by MoH.

Continued on Page 02

Rules to be amended to support exhibitions, conferences sector: MoCIIP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support companies in the exhibitions and conferences sector, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) is working on amending the exhibition management regulations spelt out in Ministerial Decision

No 182/2017.

A statement issued by the ministry said, 'The new amendments will keep pace with the current economic condition in the sultanate. The amendments will provide facilities for companies that organise exhibitions and conferences and encourage them to expand, diversify and attract regional and international exhibi-

tions, conferences and events to the sultanate.'

Further, the statement said, 'The ministry will consider the views of stakeholders, including the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, exhibitions and conferences firms and the private sector in framing regulations before approval and

issuance.'

According to the ministry statement, the amendments will include new formats of exhibitions in line with the current economic and health situations. Among these are virtual exhibitions which are organised on electronic platforms using applications.

It will also simplify procedures

of permits for companies organising exhibitions and conferences and reduce the number of days to study applications after submission of all required documents.

'The ministry is keen to follow up on all the commercial activities in the sultanate and the impact of the current conditions that the sultanate is facing as a result of the COVID-19 pan-

demia,' the statement said.

'The ministry will continue to provide facilities for exhibitions and conferences organising companies to perform their activities.'

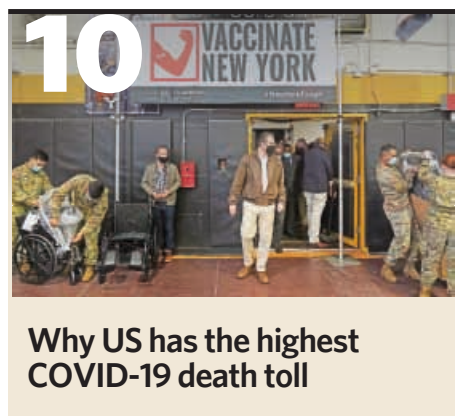
The Exhibitions and Conferences Committee of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry held its first meeting of 2021 on February 15 and demanded financial compensation

and exemptions in government fees, rents and tax, in addition to discounts from the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre when activities resume.

The committee suggested the exhibitions sector be included for support by the Oman Development Bank and Raffd Fund for loans to SMEs to help these companies organise events.



Bank Nizwa to finance new multispecialty hospital



Why US has the highest COVID-19 death toll



7 challenges for food industry in 2021



Zubair hopes for a good show at Oman Rally Championship



Bausher rally to stun Seeb; Ahli-Sidab down Sohar

Are contactless 'Tap & Go' bank cards safe?

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

As a catalyst for change, the event of the year 2020 accelerated an already shifting mindset towards conducting everyday activities in a contact less manner. This shift was not limited to social or personal lifestyle, but also the way one transacts and conducts purchases.

With innovation and digitalisation becoming a way of life, the banking sector witnessed significant acceptance and use of their various modes of digital payments, which included the quick adoption of mobile banking apps, ebanking, contactless 'Tap & Go' for those using debit and credit cards, and beyond considering the seamless experience and concerns regarding hygiene.

With the adoption of such technologies and increased customer awareness, security always remains the core focus of both - financial institutions and customer. So how secure are such modes of payments? And what can customers do to protect themselves from potential fraud?

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ewan Macleod, chief transformation officer at Sohar International, elaborated on the security concerns about contactless payments. "I think the pandemic has been instrumental in driving people away from cash, specifically for small ticket amounts. We have noted that the confidence

level of customers has risen during the pandemic to use contactless modes of payment for small amounts.

"We have records showing the slow and gradual increase of contactless transactions that are gaining momentum. There has been a dramatic change in such transactions in Oman due to the pandemic situation," Macleod said.

He said contactless card payments have quickly become the preferred way of transacting, given the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the issues related to security and data protection which have always existed when it comes to digital banking.

Today, the use of contactless payments has increased significantly and one of the reasons for its growing popularity is the ease and convenience it offers. While this way of transacting has opened up new avenues offering a faster and convenient way to pay, it also brings with certain challenges that cannot be overlooked but definitely overcome.

"Contactless card transactions are processed through the same secure networks used for all VISA, MasterCard and OmanNet transactions and that contactless technology currently limits the value of purchases, hence reducing the value of potential fraud. The number of frauds in such transactions are close to nil according to the banking sector's industry data on a global level which reflects the



The number of frauds in such transactions is close to nil according to industry data on a global level which reflects the high security and reliability such payments provide

EWAN MACLEOD

high security and reliability such modes of payments provide to customers," Macleod said.

"The contactless payment platform also limits the amount per transaction to RO40 in Oman. Any purchase of a higher value will require customers to enter their PIN hence adding a second layer of protection. This has been set as a regulatory standard globally to ensure that there are measures and caps

placed to mitigate against any significant risks."

Macleod said that it is important to know that contactless cards or 'Tap & Go' cards are embedded with multiple layers of security to protect the user, so the chances of becoming the victim of fraud are extremely unlikely. "Contactless cards can only work within a short range of a POS terminal, which further protects from potential theft or

case can be up to RO200 across five separate transactions," Macleod said.

"For security reasons, after the fifth consecutive contactless transaction, the bank will immediately ask for the pin. In all cases, as a responsible cardholder, it is of utmost importance the affected customer informs their bank as the first line of defence through official channels. From here on, the bank will block the card immediately and take further necessary measures to cancel the card and issue a new one."

Furthermore, Macleod said that banks continue to encourage contactless transactions instead of physical cash.

"This is important both from a security and hygiene perspectives. Regulatory bodies across the globe are encouraging the use of digitised ways of banking - contactless transacting being the most prominent one. But, what is necessary here is that every user needs to be a responsible customer. The bank can help minimise the impact of a card loss if it is informed in time. Following this, any transaction that takes place becomes the sole responsibility of the bank. For this purpose, individuals must ensure to have their respective bank's call centre number handy at all times."

Sohar International witnessed a 54 per cent increase in contactless transactions between the years 2020 and 2021 meet-

ing and exceeding market norms and trends. With direct and indirect investments into digital avenues through enhancing existing platforms, purchasing new ones, Sohar International is transforming and redefining banking living up to its promise of providing responsive banking services to help customers reach any goal.

Digital transformation is one of the cornerstones of development for global, regional and local banking sectors. The sultanate's banking landscape has kept pace with recent technological developments, implementing advanced methods to overcome challenges posed by conventional ways of banking. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of mobile banking services and digital wallets is being encouraged all over the world and Oman is no different in adopting such best practices and international quality standards for corporates and individuals alike.

Today, with significant expansions in banking and economic activities within the country, the Central Bank of Oman continues to play a pivotal role in pursuing fintech-led growth, regulating policies and practices, and enabling banks to align with global trends of embracing a prudent digital economy. Such advancements come with their own set of hurdles and challenges, cyber security and data protection being one of the key ones.

@shaddadm

RNO COMMANDER RECEIVES US NAVY OFFICIAL



Rear Admiral Saif Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received at the Maritime Security Center on Tuesday Vice Admiral Samuel Paparo, Commander of the US Naval Forces Central Command, and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the sultanate. The two sides discussed views on several matters related to the naval fields between the two friendly countries (ONA)

Oman participates in 8th Arab women conference

Muscat - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, took part on Tuesday in the eighth conference of the Arab Women Organization themed 'Arab Woman and Cultural Challenges'.

The opening ceremony of the conference was held under the patronage of President Michel Aoun of Lebanon.

The sultanate was represented in the conference by H E Laila Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

Held via video conferencing in Lebanon, the three-day conference addresses a range of topics pertaining to status of Arab women regarding heritage and modernity, confrontation and reconciliation, Arab women involved in literary and artistic production, the mechanisms of



socialisation and the economic role of women in sustainable development, and the elimination of poverty and marginalisation.

The conference will also discuss Arab women in relation to

citizenship, government policies and civil struggles, and the dissemination of a gender culture, as well as the contribution of women in strengthening society. ONA

Over 7,900 register for isolation in 321 centres

Continued from Page 01

Sick passengers with health conditions requiring special attention as per an authorised health form are exempted. Two companions accompanying a sick patient who is under 18 years or a woman patient will be exempted from institutional quarantine.

Holders of permits for private institutional isolation centres that are pre-approved by the Relief and Shelter Sector are also exempted from institutional quarantine.

For members of ship crews moored in territorial waters of the sultanate, companies are obliged to ensure that there is a

hotel reservation covering the duration of their stay in Oman based on the letter of a shipping agent.

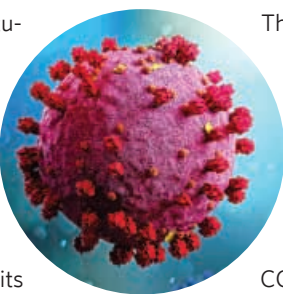
'All other requirements as stipulated in previous circulars remain valid,' the CAA stated.

297 new cases

The MoH registered 297 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, taking the total to 139,989.

The ministry confirmed two COVID-19 related deaths, taking the total to 1,557 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 131,143, and the recovery rate 94 per cent.

Thirty-five patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 182, including 64 in intensive care.



Bird, poultry product imports banned from seven countries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has decided to ban the import of live birds and poultry products from seven countries.

A statement issued by the ministry on Tuesday said, 'The import of poultry is banned from the Republic of Nigeria, Nepal, Wales in the United Kingdom, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Algeria, the states of Chhattisgarh and Gujarat in the Republic of India, and Astrakhan Oblast and Krasnodarkray regions in Russia. It is forbidden to import live birds and their products and derivatives until the cause of the ban is removed and a decision in this regard is issued.'

On February 5, the ministry had decided to ban the import of



live birds and poultry products from seven countries and two states of India due to the outbreak of avian flu. The countries include Kuwait, Iraq, Senegal, Hungary, Lithuania, Northern Ireland, Cambodia, and the states of Haryana and Maharashtra in India.

In a similar decision in January, the ministry had banned imports of poultry and their products from seven other coun-

tries which included Sweden, the Netherlands, France, Ireland, Ukraine, Scotland, and Tehran Province in Iran.

Since October last year, several European countries have been affected by cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), caused by H5 subtype viruses.

On February 5, the epidemiological situation in Europe was updated with several new cases of HPAI reported in wild birds and poultry in Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Slovenia, Poland, France, Croatia, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Finland, Sweden and Bulgaria, according to IZSve, the Italian health authority and research organisation for animal health and food safety.

Environment Authority chief urges companies in Sohar to plant wild trees

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, chairman of Environment Authority, visited Sohar Port and Freezone recently and called on companies in Sohar to plant more wild trees.

The visit aimed to review the environmental conditions in the area, discuss the challenges, and find appropriate solutions.

Dr Omari visited Sohar Port and Freezone and examined the environmental monitoring stations and their role in monitoring environmental pollutants.

He also visited Vale Oman Pelletizing Company and OQ company to review the efforts

made in environmental management and improvement plans.

He urged them to make more environmental efforts and use the best global environmental practices to reduce emissions at their sites.

He also urged companies to plant wild trees on their sites to support the national initiative to cultivate 10mn wild trees in order to achieve environmental balance and sustainability for future generations.

He visited the Harmul area in the wilayat of Liwa to review the proposed area for the expansion of Sohar Port. He also toured Khor Harmul to view the site for planting more mangroves.

Biofuel startup wins first place in Arab contest

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani startup Fanar, which produces biofuel from used cooking oil and plant waste, has won first place as the best innovative team in the Arab world in a competition called 'Innovate for Good'. It was organised by Spread the Passion, a non-governmental organisation in Kuwait.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Wafa Nasser Mohammed al Sinaidi, a student at Sultan Qaboos University, and head of Marketing Department at Fanar said, "The company has ten members. We decided to take part in Spread the Passion's competition to showcase our environment-friendly biofuel. Around 15 teams took part in the competition from almost all the Arab countries. We qualified for the final stage and then the winners were announced according to the number of votes. We got 745 votes, and won the first prize as the best innovative team."

She said their project was titled 'Let's make the environment smile'.



"We focus on the field of renewable energy, as we produce biofuels from used cooking oil

and neglected local plants." She added, "We know that oil or the black gold is the economic



engine of the Gulf countries. But it is a non-renewable source of energy, not to mention about the

damage it causes to the land, sea and air. Taking into account all these factors, we decided to

launch 'Let's make the environment smile' programme."

The initiative stipulates that discarded seeds such as date seeds, bitter melon and used cooking oil be collected and recycled to produce biodiesel.

"And as our goal is to make the environment smile, we recycle all by-products in a way that

of these and organised our schedules in a way that we could win the competition."

She said the team likes to thank Injaz Oman for their support. "They helped us by providing a special supervisor for us to follow up on our work. We also thank our families who always supported us."

We know that oil or black gold is the economic engine of the Gulf. But it is a non-renewable source of energy, not to mention about the damage it causes to the land, sea and air

WAFAL AL SINAIDI

allows us to make economical products and rid the environment of its harm. In the process we also produce glycerin, which can be used to make soap," said Wafa.

Talking about the challenges, she said, "We faced many challenges as we are university students. We had pressure at work and to balance between competition and study was a tough task. But thank God, we overcame all

Of future, she said, "It is not only Oman that needs our project, but all countries. As the quantities of fossil fuels continue to decline and disappear, so there must be awareness on the importance of a renewable and alternative energy that may soon become extinct."

The team is currently working to obtain a patent for its product, she added.

Current school year is exceptional in every sense, says Dr Madiha

OMANI TEACHERS' DAY

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dr Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shibanayah, Minister of Education, said that the current school year is an exceptional one in every sense following the challenges it is experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the sultanate marks Omani Teachers' Day, which falls on February 24 every year, Dr Madiha underlined the impact of the pandemic on the education sector saying that "the educational process has not faced a difficult challenge as the one currently it is facing". Here she acknowledged the sacrifices that the teachers "have made in order to educate your students since the beginning of the pandemic".

"We are very proud of your remarkable role in educating students, about the importance of adhering to health procedures, your positive interaction with electronic educational platforms, and your great effort in producing educational content," Dr Madiha said. At the same time, the minister pointed out that the next stage requires teachers to continue the educational process with efficiency and competence.

"We need to preserve these gains, and build on them by multiplying efforts in improving educational practices and devising advanced methods to consolidate the principles of self-learning among students. We should work on instilling citizenship values in students, and providing them with accreditation skills on the psyche and scientific research," she said.

"All that shall lead to preparing a generation capable of interacting with renewed data, and making it enjoy the skills of the 21st century, in line with the objectives



We need to build on the gains by multiplying efforts in improving practices to consolidate the principles of self-learning among students

DR MADIHA AL SHAIBANIAH

of Oman Vision 2040, which made the development of the educational system and the improvement of its outcomes a fundamental basis for the comprehensive development of the country.

"The challenges facing the world after the spread of the COVID-19 has had a major impact in various areas of life: health, economy, society and other areas, and cast a shadow

directly on the education sector. It resulted in various countries finding innovative solutions and methods for providing educational services that ensure the safety of learners and those in charge of educational work. Providing quality and sustainable education is now relying heavily on technology and electronic distance education, through interactive educational platforms established for this purpose."

In light of the current exceptional circumstances, the minister said, "Education in the sultanate enjoys a great interest and diligent follow-up from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. The Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the spread of COVID-19 made the decision of applying the blended learning curriculum with a focus on distance education.

"Accordingly, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has laid the foundations and controls needed

to implement blended education, activate the e-learning as a central component of the educational process, and take precautionary measures to ensure the safety of teachers, students and the school environment," she said.

In the current academic year 2020/21, the total number of teachers in public schools reached 56,827 of whom 48,176 are Omanis. Majority of the teachers are female that make 72.96 per cent of the total.

The largest number of Omani teachers are concentrated in North Batinah governorate, with 10,103 of them engaged there. MoE is keen to enhance the knowledge of the Omani teachers and provide them with the necessary skills to face the challenges of the spread of COVID-19, which requires providing teachers with the knowledge and methods necessary to develop their level of performance in the field of distance education.

Dhofar Municipality sets up play areas, fitness facilities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to provide entertainment and recreational services to citizens and residents in Salalah, Dhofar Municipality has installed 35 outdoor fitness facilities and 155 children's games facilities.

As per a municipality official, the fitness facilities were set up in several areas including the Airport Walkway, Khor Al Dahariz Walkway, Sultan Qaboos Street, Al Rabat Walkway 1 and Al Rabat Walkway 2.

He said, "The municipality also put up 155 children's recreational games facilities in various



residential neighbourhoods in the wilayat of Salalah."

The Department of Gardens and Afforestation in the Dhofar Municipality is continuing to im-

plement a number of afforestation projects in Salalah to increase green areas and provide various recreational services to citizens and residents, he added.



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Time: 5 pm - 6pm (GMT +4)

Venue: Online via Zoom

Cost: Free

Register: oabc.org/events



Ten infiltrators arrested in North Batinah: ROP

Muscat - Ten infiltrators were arrested in North Batinah governorate on Tuesday, Royal Oman Police (ROP) said.

In a statement ROP said, 'The Coast Guard Police Command, in cooperation with the Royal Air

Force of Oman (RAFO), seized a smuggling boat carrying ten infiltrators close to the coast of North Batinah governorate.'

Legal measures have been taken against the arrested, the statement added.

UBGCCF Inception Date*		17-Nov-09
NAV Date		FEB 18, 2021
NAV (OMR)		1.090
Adjusted NAV** (OMR)		1.434
Cash Dividend paid since inception (OMR)		0.03
Unit Dividend paid since inception		28%
YTD Performance		3.38%
Performance since inception		49.79%
* First NAV was issued on 4th March 2010		
** Adjusted for cash and bonus dividends		
For more information please contact:		
Tel: 00968 24 949 031/030, Email: ubhargocfund@u-capital.net		

**DAMEN PARKER**

A Lean Coach with over 20 years of Lean experience in automotive, aerospace, FMCG, and most recently oil and gas in Oman. He is a specialist in process improvement and coaching others, developing critical thinking skills, and building capability to deliver the road map.

Lean: Doing more with less

To many it is about cost-cutting and headcount reduction; to the wise, it is about growth and opportunity

Over the last decade something big has been happening in Oman. It has been quietly growing in size and importance, in reputation and significance.

It travelled from Japan to the US and back again. It resides in every country around the world in one form or another. It is highly desirable, sought after by many a business and enterprise regardless of their service or industry.

The problem is that many still don't know exactly what it is.

To some it is a philosophy, to others a continuous improvement methodology. To the inexperienced it is often viewed as just a toolbox of problem-solving techniques.

For many it is associated with cost-cutting and headcount reduction. To the wise, it is about growth and opportunity.

So what exactly is 'it'?

A simple definition of it, it being Lean, is "do more with less", to find the least wasteful way of doing things. However, Lean is much more than this simple definition.

Lean is a way of thinking, a way of solving problems, a way of leading, and a way of planning and measuring the long-term success of an organisation, focused on improving quality, delivery, cost, and safety. In short, Lean creates sustainable business success through a change of cultural proportions.

Lean will be seen as many as a recent innovation but in reality, many aspects of Lean have been around for millennia and successfully applied through the ages. It can be argued that 2000 years ago the Roman Empire expanded with the rigorous application of standards in their military and by their engineers.

Lean has five principles. The starting point is to specify value from the customer perspective. Lean thinkers

insist on understanding exactly what drives customer value, including understanding what problem they are trying to solve. Great focus is placed on what the customer will pay for specific products, features, and service offerings. Once this is determined, the producer is responsible for determining how cost can be minimised and waste eliminated so that the product can be delivered profitably at the price the customer is willing to pay.

The next principle is identifying the value stream. This is the sequence of processes from procuring the raw material all the way through to delivery to the final customer, or from product concept to market launch. A value stream includes all the processes, steps, and materials necessary to place the product (or service) in the hands of the customer. Think economies of time rather than economies of scale and measure performance of the value stream end to end, not departmentally.

The third principle is flow. Make the value creating steps occur in tight sequence so the product or document will flow smoothly toward the customer.

The fourth principles in the Lean philosophy is pull. It is based on the assumption that one should only produce what is asked for by the customer and not over produce.

The final principle is the relentless pursuit of perfection. Lean thinkers implement systems and measurements that continuously seek opportunities to improve quality, speed up, and reduce the cost of each step of the value stream. When problems that impact quality arise, Lean thinkers don't apply sticky plasters, instead they seek and address root causes.

Over the last three decades Lean has evolved. While Lean may have its roots in manufacturing, if you don't think the principles apply to your industry then you are surely missing the

point. Beyond manufacturing, Lean management has become the desired standard management across various sectors including government, health-care, finance, logistics, retail, hospitality, IT, mining, and oil and gas.

In Oman today there is a growing nucleus of home-grown Lean talent as the coachee becomes the coach. Primarily residing in the oil and gas sector and further enhanced with the adoption of the principle of respect for people it is a fair conclusion to say that Lean has successfully landed in Oman.

The great thing about Lean is that it is not about buying the latest piece of kit or having state of the art facilities: It's about developing a different mental approach to work. It's therefore not expensive to get started and is suitable for businesses large and small.

To learn more about Lean and how it can help you grow into profitability visit theleancoach.com.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company Limited Oman Branch (CPP), as an EPC Contractor, invites companies to participate in the following tender:

Estimated Scope Description	Tender Documents Fee
Insatallation Of Electrical, Instrumentations Duct Bank, Estimated Quantity: 1. Duct Bank: Excavation, Disposal, Formation layer/Polythene, BackFilling, Pcc (16/20), Rcc (40/50), Formwork, Bituminous paint, Concrete Protection by applying self adhesive membrane, Protection boards of approved brands, UPVC Pipes	Free

Legal entities, domestic Omani and foreign companies who meet the following minimum qualification criteria are eligible to quote in Tender:

- Priority to Oman local companies, or local agent appointed by foreign companies,
- Capability to submit a performance bond of ten percent of total value.
- Complying with the CPP's project execution schedule.
- ISO 14001 and OHSAS18001 in valid period are mandatory.
- Having direct experience of similar jobs in the last five years.
- Agree to complete the further prequalification undertaken by CPP.

All interested bidders shall submit a written application letter printed on Bidder's letter head signed by the Bidder's authorized Person to rasmakazpro@cnpc.com.cn; cppomaned@cppmde.com over a period before **1st Mar, 2021** stating the following details: Full name of Bidder, phone number, e-mail address, contact person, tender name and tender title. Any application received after **1st Mar, 2021** shall not be entertained.

شركة صناعة مواد البناء (ش.م.ع.ع)

Construction Materials Industries (S.A.O.G)



P.O. Box: 1791, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 26752247/26752287, Fax: 26750867

Announcing the invitation to attend the annual ordinary general meeting

The Board of Directors **Construction Materials Industries SAOG** has the honor to invite the honorable shareholders to attend the annual ordinary general meeting of the company, which is scheduled to be held at exactly 3:00 pm on Monday 08/03/2021, via the electronic platform for the general assembly's held You can access it through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum is not completed for the assembly, a second annual ordinary general assembly will be held at exactly 3:00 pm on Sunday 14/03/2021 to discuss the following agenda: -

- 1- Study and approve the report of the Board of Directors on the company's activities and its financial position for the fiscal year ending 31/12/2020.
- 2- Study and approve the report on the organization and management of the company (Governance Report) for the fiscal year ending 31/12/2020.
- 3- Study the auditor's report and approve the balance sheet and profit and loss account for the fiscal year ending 31/12/2020.
- 4- Ratification of the allowance for attending the sessions of the Board of Directors and the subsidiary committees that were received by the members of the Board of Directors for the fiscal year ending 31/12/2020, and determining the amount of the allowance for the fiscal year that will end on 31/12/2021 (according to the annex).
- 5- Informing the assembly about the donations that were disbursed to support community services during the fiscal year ending on 31/12/2020 (according to the annex).
- 6- Study a proposal to allocate an amount of 5,000 Omani riyals to support community services during the fiscal year that will end on 31/12/2021 and approve it.
- 7 - Electing new board members for the company from both shareholders and non-shareholders, and everyone who wishes to nominate himself must fill out the form prepared for this purpose and deliver it to the company, at least five (5) days before the date of the assembly, no later than the end of working day Tuesday corresponding to 02 March 2021, and the candidate must fulfill the requirements for membership of the company's board of directors.
- 8- Approval of the standards for measuring the performance of the Board of Directors for the fiscal year ending on 31/12/2021 (according to the annex).
- 9- An independent body shall be appointed to measure the performance of the Board of Directors for the fiscal year ending on 31/12/2021 and determine its fees.
- 10- Appointing an auditor for the fiscal year that will end on 31/12/2021, and determining their fees. In accordance with the company's articles of association and the regulations for holding general assembly's using modern technology issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:
 - (A) The legal person has the exclusive right to authorize a natural person to attend the general assembly meeting and vote on his behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
 - (B) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins with a period not exceeding three days prior to the date of the assembly and until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting, and in the event that the shareholder's balance is changed by an increase or decrease, the voting process will be canceled, he must re-vote again. On the day of the assembly meeting.

If you have any inquiries, please contact Mr. Ahmed Odeh at 26752287.

Chairman Board of Directors

Independent Auditor

Legal Adviser

Sultanate takes part in Arab Space Cooperation Group meet

Muscat - Oman, represented by the National Space Programme Team (NSPT) at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, took part in the sixth meeting of the Arab Space Cooperation Group.

The sultanate was represented at the virtual meeting by Dr Saud Humaid al Shu'aibi, head of NSPT.

The meeting discussed many topics of concern to the joint Arab action, including the status of the Arab countries that have not signed the charter of joining the group. The meeting also reviewed the strategic trends and the existing projects of each country in this sector, in addition to aspects of cooperation among member states to promote the Arab space sector.

The Arab Space Cooperation Group was formed as an initiative by the UAE in 2019 and the sultanate joined it in 2020.

ONA

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	27	18
Doha	24	17
Kuwait City	21	12
Manama	21	17
Riyadh	21	12

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.18am
Sunrise	6.33am
Duhr	12.25pm
Asr	3.44pm
Maghrib	6.12pm
Isha	7.23pm

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Bank Nizwa to finance new private hospital

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Nizwa has signed an agreement to finance the construction of a new state-of-the-art multi-specialty private hospital in the sultanate.

Shifa Hospital is designed, owned and will be operated solely by Omani pioneers with core focus in surgical specialties. The hospital is envisaged to pro-

vide in-country value by filling the gap in the country's healthcare requirements and provide employment opportunities. Bank Nizwa, in a press statement, said that it is honoured to be associated in providing the necessary financing support to such a worthy sustainable development venture.

The financing agreement was signed by Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and Dr Salim al



Ghannami, CEO of Shifa Hospital at the bank's head office recently.

Kayed said, "Bank Nizwa has been leading the way in Islamic

banking in the sultanate and we believe in investing in projects that go beyond just promising financial returns. We want to en-

sure they also benefit the communities. Quality healthcare is an integral building block of a thriving economy. By supporting ventures that have the same goal as Oman's Vision 2040, we want to do our part to enhance the healthcare system in the country."

"With thoughtful partnerships that drive not just economic returns but also play an active role in rendering its services to soci-

ety, we are proud to say that our varied portfolio reflects some of the most noteworthy Islamic financing agreements in the sultanate," Kayed added.

Dr Ghannami said, "The construction of the new private hospital will support the national socio-economic sector and uplift the healthcare system which resonates with our beliefs and principles. This will be achieved through the provision of modern

and high standard medical services available at the facility."

To be built on more than 10,000sqm land, Shifa hospital will start operating with a 100 bedded multispecialty in the first phase. It will contain nine state-of-the-art care facilities mainly focusing on surgical specialties. Shifa Hospital specialising in sports medicine is also seen as a promising option for athletes in the sultanate.

CBO issues RO35mn worth treasury bills



Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of government treasury bills (issue number 153) was held at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week. The total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO35mn, for a maturity period of 182 days (from today until August 15, 2021).

The average accepted price reached RO99.604 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.575.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.79504 per cent and 0.79820 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the

treasury bills discounting facility with the CBO is 1 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

Renaissance Services secures ISO 27001 certification by SGS

Muscat - Renaissance Services, Oman's leading services solutions company, has secured the ISO/IES 27001:2013 certification for its robust and state-of-the-art Information Security Management System.



Vishal Goenka

After successfully implementing all the stringent requirements, Renaissance has been officially certified with this accreditation by SGS, the world's leading inspection, verification, testing, and certification firm, the company said in a press release.

Renaissance is the first company in the IFM (integrated facilities management) industry in Oman to gain this accreditation, which demonstrates that the company has identified the risks, assessed the implications, and put in place systemised controls to secure information.

Vishal Goenka, group chief financial officer and deputy CEO of Renaissance Services, said, "This achievement marks yet another milestone in our journey and commitment to adopt global standards in all aspects of our business. Information security and maintaining a robust risk management framework is pivotal to our approach and underlines the trust we maintain with our customers and vendors. With accelerated digital transformation demands in the industry, our customers and business partners can rest assured of the highest levels of excellence in the way we manage their data and information."

Meeting the standards for this certification requires organisations to demonstrate an overall enhancement of their information security systems, following proven diligent processes and maintaining high standards. "We have taken a proactive approach to invest and continually upgrade our digital infrastructure. This is a proud moment for Renaissance and we are confident that this will also inspire the industry," Goenka added.

Renaissance constantly evaluates and adopts technologies in its operations that enable the company to provide a better experience for its clients, while optimising costs and resources. The company already holds ISO certifications for quality management, environment management, food safety, and occupational health and safety. The company is also a certified HACCP food safety process compliant besides holding HSE compliance certification from OPAL and Highfields Body for Compliance (HABC).

A'Sharqiya Investments Holding Co. (SAOG)				
P.O. Box 47 PC 118 Al Harthy Complex Sultanate of Oman				
Tel: +968 24566160 / Fax: +968 24566162 / Email: admin@asharqiya.com				
Chairman's Report				
Dear Shareholders, It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Annual General Meeting of your company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to present before you the Annual Report for the year 2020 along with the audited consolidated financial statements of A'Sharqiya Investment Holding Co. (SAOG) and its subsidiary, Qalhat Real Estate Investments & Services LLC (QREIS). Investment Environment 2020 The World Economy was witness to a shock in 1H 2020 with severe contraction in economic activity imposed by the pandemic induced lockdowns across countries, with the Service Sector more severely affected relative to other sectors. The 2H 2020 saw economic activity partially bouncing back due to partial release of lockdown restrictions and also aided by the swift monetary measures implemented by central banks and fiscal support provided by respective governments, though this varied across countries depending on the cushion available to central banks to absorb currency losses and the governments to relax fiscal deficit targets- leading to the recovery being uneven. The financial markets after witnessing a rapid decline in the 1Q 2020, rapidly increased in the remaining of the year driven by ample liquidity thanks to the very low interest rate environment. The GCC markets too witnessed a similar trend but the rebound was less profound than the developed markets. The Oil Prices witnessed massive volatility for the most part of 1H 2020, but increased post the agreement on production cuts among the major producing nations and the rebound in economic activity led to further increase towards the later part of the year. The economic environment has had significant negative impact on the operations of certain key holdings due to the lockdowns in the markets where they operate. But we believe these companies are strong enough to withstand the current scenario and recover with continuing ease in lockdown restrictions and also the vaccine availability adding to the positive hopes for a turnaround later this year. The investment strategy of your company is to generate long-term shareholders wealth by identifying investment opportunities that generate attractive sustainable long-term returns. Such a strategy entails a vision that looks beyond the short-term volatilities in the market. The Company also allocates a portion of its capital to investment opportunities that look attractive in the medium-term. Selection of these opportunities is dictated by market conditions and other macroeconomic factors impacting the investment environment. This opportunistic allocation is a strategy to minimize the negative impact of volatilities in the market on our key holdings. The portfolio holdings are continuously reviewed to ensure the operational performance and progress of key milestones by the portfolio companies are on track with our long-term goals for the portfolio. Performance for the year In line with the investment environment, your company is constantly monitoring and continues to take significant efforts to stay focused on adding value to its investee companies with a long term perspective and to take advantage of attractive new investment opportunities. For the full year ended December 31, 2020, your company generated an Operating Income of RO 1,165,014 as compared to RO 1,175,630 during the previous year 2019, reflecting a decrease of 13.5%. The profit after tax arising from the company's operations during this period was RO 528,784 as compared to RO 504,036 during the previous year 2019, reflecting an increase of 4.9%. The increase in the fair value of the company's investment portfolio under the "available for sale" investments was RO 758,312 for the year 2020 as compared to a decrease of RO 94,628 for the year 2019. The total comprehensive income for the year 2020 is RO 1,302,910 as compared to an income of RO 316,358 in 2019. The total assets of the company is RO 16,811,670 at the end of the year as compared to RO 15,927,077 at the end of 2019. The company's Shareholder Funds increased by 7.5% to RO 12,937,539 at the end of 2020 compared to RO 12,035,289 at the end of 2019. The book value of the company's equity share was 144 Baizas on December 31, 2020, compared to 134 Baizas per share as on December 31, 2019. Outlook for 2021 The global GDP is estimated to have declined by 3.5% in 2020 and is projected to grow 5.5% in 2021 as per the IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO) Update in January 2021. The IMF forecasts Oman's GDP to have declined 10.0% in 2020 and further decline 0.5% in 2021. The Sultanate's budget for 2021 estimates total revenues at OMR 8.64 billion, an increase of 2% compared to actual revenues in 2020. Oil and gas revenues comprise 63% of revenues at an oil price assumption of USD 45 per barrel which is below the actual realized oil price of USD 48 per barrel in 2020. The overall public spending is estimated at RO 10.88 billion leading to a fiscal deficit target of RO 2.24 billion- development expenditure is estimated at RO 900 million. The 2021 budget deficit is expected to be covered by external and domestic borrowing c.73%, while the balance c.27% will be covered by drawing on the reserves. The Sultanate of Oman's budget for 2021 aims at fiscal sustainability, lower public debt, economic diversification and higher economic growth. The forecasted deficit is the lowest since 2015. The budget is based on guaranteeing the sustainability of basic social services such as health, housing, education, & social security, and to ensure spending is maintained at 40% for these services. The FY 2021 Oman budget represents the first year of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025). It takes into account Oman Vision 2040 priorities and fiscal framework and objectives to achieve fiscal sustainability, and reduce the ratio of the size of public debt to GDP. The 2021 Budget framework aims at achieving a set of objectives and priorities, notably fiscal sustainability, a diversified economy, stimulate economic activity in partnership with the private sector and supporting the role of small and medium enterprises. These initiatives are expected to bode well for the economy in the long-term and for the companies operating in the private sector. The management continues to focus on identifying opportunities that will enhance shareholder's wealth. The outlook for our investee companies will continue to remain challenging and aligned to the speed of the recovery from the pandemic. We are confident about the recovery with improved availability of vaccines later in the year allowing for gradual return to pre-pandemic level of economic activity. The Company will continue to add value to its investee companies in the local market with a long-term view, the Company is also focusing on opportunities in other markets in its constant effort to achieve effective diversification of the portfolio. Corporate Governance I am pleased to confirm that the company is fully committed to the Capital Market Authority's Code of Corporate Governance for Public Listed Companies. The Board of Directors has established a fully empowered Audit Committee which is effectively performing its role in accordance with the aforementioned Code. A report on Corporate Governance and a Management Discussion and Analysis forms part of the Annual Report. The Corporate Governance Report has been audited by the statutory auditor whose report also include in the Annual Report. Acknowledgment On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his able leadership of the country during such an unprecedented crisis. We also express our sincere thanks and admiration for the timely and effective measures adopted to address the impact of the pandemic through loan/ interest deferments particularly for SMEs and a number of relief initiatives to relax statutory and regulatory compliance for businesses. I also thank the shareholders for their continued support and for the confidence reposed on the company. My appreciation also goes to the company's management and staff for their contributions and commitment to the company.				
Separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 December 2020				
	Parent Company		Group	
	2020 RO	2019 RO	2020 RO	2019 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets:				
Furniture and equipment	9,680	12,678	9,877	12,963
Capital work in progress	-	-	46,730	-
Lease receivables	-	-	5,594,315	6,062,062
Financial assets at fair value through other				
comprehensive income	9,238,100	8,381,366	9,238,100	8,381,366
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	58,439	-	58,439	-
Investment in a subsidiary	250,000	250,000	-	-
Deferred tax assets	54,467	38,652	54,467	38,652
Total non-current assets	9,610,686	8,682,696	15,001,928	14,495,043
Current assets:				
Current portion of lease receivables	-	-	467,747	378,748
Prepayments and other receivables	23,825	12,692	485,911	81,271
Cash and bank balances	407,980	553,387	856,085	972,015
Total current assets	431,805	566,079	1,809,743	1,432,034
Total assets	10,042,491	9,248,775	16,811,671	15,927,077
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity:				
Share capital	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000
Legal reserve	1,403,679	1,388,930	1,487,013	1,472,264
Fair value reserve	(307,846)	(1,114,030)	(307,846)	(1,114,030)
(Accumulated losses)/retained earnings	(912,179)	(612,199)	2,758,373	2,677,055
Total equity	9,183,654	8,662,701	12,937,540	12,035,289
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Finance lease payable	-	-	3,566,170	3,580,455
Staff terminal benefits	101,982	106,104	127,291	126,456
Total non-current liabilities:	101,982	106,104	3,693,461	3,706,911
Current liabilities:				
Current portion of finance lease payable	-	-	14,285	2,182
Trade and other payables	42,890	61,312	82,590	102,249
Income tax payable	16,507	6,358	83,795	80,446
Amount due to a subsidiary	697,458	412,300	-	-
Total current liabilities	756,855	479,970	180,670	184,877
Total liabilities	858,837	586,074	3,874,131	3,891,788
Total equity and liabilities	10,042,491	9,248,775	16,811,671	15,927,077
Net assets per share	0.102	0.096	0.144	0.134
Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive incomefor the year ended 31 December 2020				
	Parent Company		Group	
	Year ended 31 December 2020 RO	Year ended 31 December 2019 RO	Year ended 31 December 2020 RO	Year ended 31 December 2019 RO
Income:				
Dividend income	446,215	420,360	446,215	420,360
Finance income on lease receivable	-	-	644,885	694,168
Realised gain on disposal of investments carried at fair value through profit or loss	12,640	-	12,640	-
Other income	64,770	69,910	61,275	61,102
	523,625	490,270	1,165,015	1,175,630
Expenses:				
Staff costs	(221,602)	(280,260)	(222,632)	(280,680)
Finance cost on lease payable	-	-	(187,797)	(187,413)
Other finance costs	(2,454)	(1,912)	(2,454)	(1,912)
General and administrative expenses	(137,806)	(121,729)	(141,695)	(125,249)
Depreciation	(4,128)	(2,164)	(4,216)	(2,252)
Profit before tax	157,635	84,205	606,221	578,124
Tax expense	(10,149)	-	(77,437)	(74,088)
Profit for the year	147,486	84,205	528,784	504,036
Other comprehensive income for the year				
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss				
Remeasurement gain/(loss) on investments carried at FVOCI	758,312	(94,628)	758,312	(94,628)
Provision for impairment of investment	-	(86,009)	-	(86,009)
Deferred tax on FVOCI investments	15,815	(7,041)	15,815	(7,041)
Other comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	774,127	(187,678)	774,127	(187,678)
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	921,613	(103,473)	1,302,911	316,358
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.002	0.001	0.006	0.006
Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.				
Mohammed Ali Mohammed Al Fannah Chairman February 21, 2021				

MSM rises 0.38% on improved activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose 0.38 per cent to close at 3,574.59 points on Tuesday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 55.34 per cent to RO4.01mn and volumes rose 69.7 per cent to 29.9mn shares.

While Industrial index fell 0.11 per cent, Financial and Services indices rose 0.21 per cent and 0.41 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah index closed up by 1.1 per cent at 542 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 12 companies closed up, while eight companies closed down. The rest 21 traded

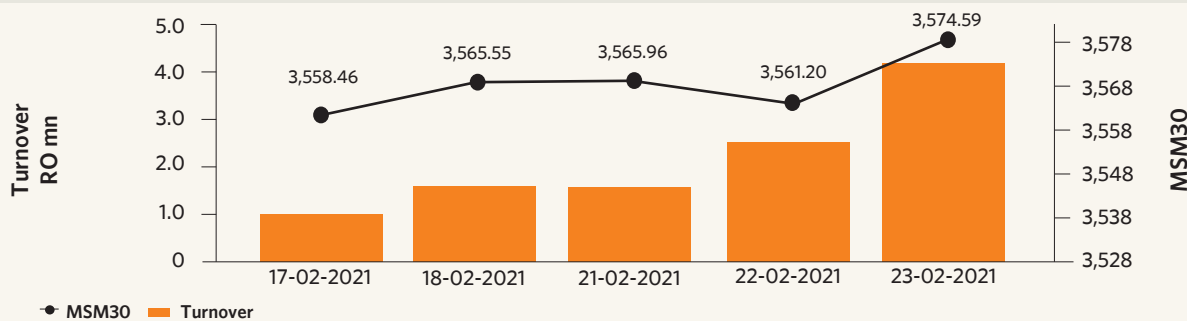


stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Al Madina Takaful (9.41 per cent), Musandam Power (3.27 per cent), Ooredoo (2.5 per cent) and Phoenix Power (2.22 per cent).

Top losers were Oman & Emirates Investment (-5.0 per cent), National Gas (-4.32 per cent), Sembcorp Salalah (-3.3 per cent) and Al Sharqiya Investment (-2.94 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Qatar Petroleum enters into LNG supply deal with Bangladesh

Doha, Qatar - Qatar Petroleum entered into a long term sale and purchase agreement (SPA) with Vitol for the supply of 1.25mn tonnes per annum (MTPA) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Vitol's final customers in Bangladesh.

Under the agreement, LNG deliveries will commence later this year, further demonstrating Qatar's continued commitment to meeting the growing needs of its customers for reliable LNG supplies, according to a press statement posted on the Qatar Petroleum website.

Saad Sherida al Kaabi, the Minister of State for Energy Affairs, the president and CEO of Qatar Petroleum, welcomed the signing of the agreement and said, "We are pleased to sign this SPA with Vitol, and we look forward to commencing deliveries under the SPA to further contribute to meeting Bangladesh's energy requirements."



Kaabi concluded his remarks by saying, "This SPA also highlights our strong ability to meet the requirements of our partners and customers. We are proud to continue to be the supplier of choice for our customers and partners around the globe."

Earlier this month, Qatar Petroleum announced its decision to build the first phase of the North Field East (NFE) project, in what the company said was the world's largest LNG project ever

in terms of capacity.

Qatar, the world's largest LNG supplier, aims to expand its LNG production from the North Field, which is the world's single largest non-associated offshore natural gas field.

The project will also raise the country's LNG production capacity from 77mn tonnes annually to 110mn tonnes. In addition to LNG, the project will produce condensate, LPG, ethane, sulphur and helium.

Ex-Saudi oil minister Yamani dies at 90

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Former Saudi oil minister Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, a key player behind the 1973 oil embargo, died on Tuesday aged 90 after a long career that laid the foundations of the kingdom's energy sector.

Yamani, dubbed by local papers as the 'godfather of black gold', died in London, said state-owned El-Ekhabriya television, without giving the cause.

It said he will be buried in the holy city of Mecca, in western Saudi Arabia, where he was born.

In 1973, he was a key player in OPEC's decision to raise oil prices in protest at Israel's occupation of Arab land seized in 1967, sparking a world economic crisis.

Two years later, he was among oil ministers kidnapped by pro-Palestinian militants led by the infamous Carlos the Jackal at an OPEC meeting in Vienna.

Yamani, who served as oil minister from 1962 until 1986, was the first Saudi representative in the Organization of



Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani

the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

He was dismissed in 1986 for undisclosed reasons, apparently over disagreement with the king at the time on oil output quotas.

He played a pivotal role in the nationalisation of Saudi Arabia's oil industry, led today by energy giant Aramco.

"He masterminded the negotiations through which Saudi Arabia purchased Aramco from its American owners - a key move which assured no loss in revenue or disruption in the flow of oil," Ellen R Wald, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center, tweeted on Tuesday.

AFP

HSBC ramps up Asia pivot as coronavirus pandemic hammers profits by 30% in 2020

Hong Kong, China - HSBC on Tuesday vowed to accelerate its Asia pivot despite spiralling tensions between China and the West after it reported a 30 per cent plunge in profits for 2020 caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Reported profit after tax came in at US\$6.1bn, which the bank blamed primarily on higher-than-expected credit losses and other bad debts.

The results came as HSBC published a new strategy laying out plans to redouble its attempt to seize more of the Asian market - the region of the world where Europe's largest lender makes the vast majority of its profits.

The strategy will see the London-headquartered bank plough some US\$6bn into shoring up operations across Asia, with a particular focus on targeting wealth management in the increasingly affluent region.

The bank made specific mention of markets in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, as well as China and Hong Kong, and also the Middle East.

"We plan to focus on and invest in the areas in which we are



strongest," CEO Noel Quinn said in a statement.

The global economic slowdown caused by the virus has hit financial giants hard but HSBC has a further headache - its politically precarious position as a major business conduit between China and the West.

HSBC makes 90 per cent of its profit in Asia, with China and Hong Kong the major drivers of growth.

As a result, it has found itself more vulnerable than most to the increasingly frayed relationship between China and western powers - especially after Beijing imposed a draconian security law on Hong Kong last year and

cracked down on democracy supporters.

HSBC vocally endorsed the security law, a move that led to criticism from lawmakers in Britain and the United States.

It has frozen the bank accounts of some Hong Kong democracy activists with Quinn summoned to testify before British lawmakers earlier this month.

'Challenging' environment

At the same time HSBC has found itself called out by Chinese state media for providing information that helped lead to the arrest in Canada of a top Huawei

executive.

HSBC says it has to obey the laws in each jurisdiction it operates in.

But the dual crises neatly encapsulated the delicate position that a bank so reliant on China has now found itself in.

"The geopolitical environment remains challenging - in particular for a global bank like HSBC - and we continue to be mindful of the potential impact that it could have on our strategy," chairman Malcolm Tucker said in a statement attached to Tuesday's results.

Despite those complications, HSBC looks set to go all in on Hong Kong.

According to Bloomberg and the *Financial Times*, the bank is planning to move three of its top executives from London to Hong Kong in the coming months.

The trio collectively head up wealth and personal banking, global banking and markets and global commercial banking.

Bloomberg said the move would mean businesses responsible for some 95 per cent of net revenue will soon be run out of Hong Kong.

Other major banks have

started moving some senior executives away from Hong Kong to rivals cities like Singapore and Tokyo.

The latest strategy comes just 12 months after HSBC announced a worldwide overhaul to slash 35,000 jobs by 2022, primarily in its less profitable European and American divisions.

The job cuts represent some 15 per cent of the bank's global workforce.

HSBC has spent a year in vain looking to sell its French retail arm and the *Financial Times* on Tuesday reported it was also planning to end its consumer banking business in the US.

The bank said on Tuesday that adjusted pretax profit was halved in the fourth quarter to US\$2.2bn, though that was better than the US\$1.8bn forecast thanks to the lender keeping costs down as part of a major restructuring it has already embarked on.

It also said it would start paying a dividend, of US\$0.15, after British officials lifted a ban on payments put in place last year to maintain balance sheets at the height of the pandemic panic.

AFP

Apple tops smartphone market

Washington, US - Strong sales of iPhone 12 models lifted Apple to the top of the global smartphone market in the fourth quarter, a survey showed.

The report by market tracker Gartner showed Apple sold some 79.9mn iPhones in the final three months of the year - a 15 per cent surge from a year earlier - to leapfrog Samsung in sales in a global smartphone market which shrank by some 5.4 per cent.

The California giant captured 20.8 per cent of the market to take the top spot for the first time since the fourth quarter of 2016, according to Gartner.

Samsung saw an 11.8 per cent dip in sales to 62.1mn units in the period, giving the South Korean company 16.2 per cent of the global market.

The overall market was hurt by global consumer caution, with the declines limited by the introduction of new 5G



handsets, Gartner analysts said.

"The sales of more 5G smartphones and lower-to-mid-tier smartphones minimised the market decline in the fourth quarter of 2020," said Anshul Gupta, senior research director at Gartner.

"Even as consumers remained cautious in their spending and held off on some discretionary purchases, 5G smartphones and pro-camera features encouraged

some end users to purchase new smartphones or upgrade their current smartphones in the quarter."

China-based Xiaomi and Oppo held the third and fourth places with 11.3 per cent and 8.9 per cent, respectively.

Huawei, the Chinese firm hammered by sanctions limiting its access to US technology, fell to fifth place with 8.9 per cent, according to the survey.

AFP

Japan-UAE bilateral trade reaches \$22bn

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The United Arab Emirates is a long-time partner that has supported Japanese economy and society, and economic relations remain robust with US\$22.4bn bilateral trade in 2020, a top Japanese official told Emirates News Agency (WAM).

"As one of the most significant crude oil suppliers to Japan, the UAE is a very important partner that has supported our economy and society for a long time," Ejima Kiyoshi, Japanese State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), said in an email interview from Tokyo.

Of the US\$22.4bn bilateral trade in 2020, exports from Japan to the UAE were pegged at US\$5.7bn and imports from the UAE to Japan were worth US\$16.7bn, he revealed.

Japan is Abu Dhabi National Oil Company's (Adnoc) largest international importer of oil and gas products with approximately



Ejima Kiyoshi

25 per cent of its crude oil imported from the UAE.

However, Kiyoshi clarified that the relationship between Japan and the UAE is not limited to the energy sector.

"More than 340 Japanese companies have their largest bases in the Middle East in the UAE, and have promoted economic cooperation in a wide range of areas," he noted.

Apart from the energy sector, the UAE and Japan have cooperated in a wide range of fields, including medical care, education,

industry and women's empowerment, the minister said.

As this year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the UAE, and next year will be the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Japan, "I sincerely hope that the friendly and cooperative relations between the UAE and Japan will be further developed in various fields," Kiyoshi said.

"The government of Japan will also do its utmost to strengthen economic ties between the two countries," he added.

Talking about the coronavirus pandemic, he said, "The crisis of COVID-19 with its enormous impact all over the world has drastically changed our lives and reminded us that energy is the foundation of all economic activities, including the use of digital technologies."

"At the same time, we need to accelerate our efforts toward decarbonisation as the issue of cli-

mate change is a common crisis facing all of humanity."

He emphasised that it is important to create a 'virtuous circle of the economy and the environment' where proactive measures against global warming will lead to changes in the industrial structure and economy and lead to significant economic growth. "The key to this virtuous cycle is breakthrough innovation," he affirmed.

At the end of last year, Japan formulated its Green Growth Strategy, which includes supporting policy measures to promote social deployment in 14 promising industries, including hydrogen, automobiles and storage batteries, and carbon recycling.

From now on, Japan will mobilise all policies, including a two-trillion yen fund, tax incentives and deregulation, to put this strategy into practice, he said.

WAM

Ooredoo has built up a solid reputation as one of Oman's top places to work, demonstrated through its unique and dynamic working culture and a strong focus on professional and personal development.

Prioritising the protection of staff, as well as bolstering their network in order to continue serving customers, companies and government during the pandemic, Ooredoo was among the first organisations in the sul-

A portrait of a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a white thobe and a colorful, patterned ghutra. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.[illegible]

"Sohar seeks to strengthen its social efforts, in line with a sustainable strategy that aims to yield significant results in the long run. Therefore, our focus areas are divided into several sectors that cover society, education, health, entrepreneurship and the environment."

A man wearing a white thobe and a ghutra is seated at a desk, working on a computer. The desk is dark and modern, with a large monitor and a keyboard. In the background, there is a reception area with a woman in a black abaya and headscarf standing behind a counter. The office has a contemporary design with dark wood paneling and a large window.

ment solutions across various asset classes are currently offered to the bank's clients. A robust execution platform administered by experienced and dedicated RMs ensures that clients have an exceptional experience. Also, the bank regularly engages with clients, giving insights through research-based sectoral analysis highlighting investment and business opportunities.

Private Banking clients receive

mobile blood bank at the company's headquarters, however, due to the current circumstances and in compliance with precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the campaign has been held at the Blood Bank headquarters in Bauscher," she added.



fitted with three temperature controlled compartments for Frozen, Chilled and Ambient requirements.

Ananth A V, regional director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman and India, said, "The launch of the on-line delivery demonstrates Lulu's continuous quest for innovation and commitment to serve its customers in the most efficient manner. The online sales is a response to the changes in customer behaviour with a website and app that features a unique

assortment of the brands and values that Lulu is known for. We are excited for customers to experience the brand in this new way.”

Shabeer K A, regional director of Lulu Oman, remarked, “We are working very hard to keep in pace with the growing demands of our online customers and to enhance their buying experience. With the constantly evolving trends that the shoppers want, just as they do for stores, the Lulu online portals deliver new products periodically, so that the shoppers can discover new deals on the brands they love.”

Shoppers can shop on the go by accessing the Lulu Shopping App to enjoy a more convenient shopping experience either by logging in to luluhypermarket.com or downloading the app on IOS Appstore or Google play.

China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company Limited
Oman Branch (CPP), as an EPC Contractor, invites
companies to participate in the following tender:

Estimated Scope Description	Tender Documents Fee
Insatallation Of Dyke Wall In Oil Recovery Area, Estimated Quantity: 1. Dyke Wall: Excavation, Disposal, Formation layer/Polythene, BackFilling, Pcc (16/20), Rcc (40/50), Formwork, Bituminous paint, Epoxy coating, Concrete Protection by applying self adhesive membrane, Protection boards of approved brands, 40x10 mild steel welded with I70x50x8, insert Plate 200x200x12 with angl welded L60x60x12, Water Stopper Bar, Hydrocarbon coating, Isolation Joint with sealent, Steel Structure , Piping inserts	Free

- Priority to Oman local companies, or local agent appointed by foreign companies,
- Capability to submit a performance bond of ten percent of total value.
- Complying with the CPP's project execution schedule.
- ISO 14001 and OHSAS18001 in valid period are mandatory.
- Having direct experience of similar jobs in the last five years.
- Agree to complete the further prequalification undertaken by CPP.

All interested bidders shall submit a written application letter printed on Bidder's letter head signed by the Bidder's authorized Person to **rasmakazpro@cnpc.com.cn; cppomaned@cppmde.com** over a period before **1st Mar, 2021** stating the following details: Full name of Bidder, phone number, e-mail address, contact person, tender name and tender title. Any application received after **1st Mar, 2021** shall not be entertained.

Changan CS85 Coupe offers a dynamic, elegant and luxurious driving experience



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. Packed with a 2.0lt turbocharged engine which produces 233 horses and 360 Nm of torque, an 8 speed AT Changan CS85 Coupe redefines the definition of smoothness.

Positioned as a premium coupe SUV, the model stands out from its counterparts by its sleek appearance, focus on the high quality and application of latest technology in the vehicle's many features.

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE), which is part of Bahwan International Group, recently announced a partnership with leading international automotive

group Changan Automobile Co Ltd to bring its range of passenger vehicles to Oman including Changan CS95.

A spokesperson for AGAE said, "Changan CS85 Coupe is a sporty coupe designed SUV which reflects one's personality. Style and fashion 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 components originating from the world's leading suppliers, the CS85 Coupe delivers top grade enjoyment from every angle - visual, tactile, auditory and safety - coming together to create the perfect driving experience.



Sleek design

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

Exquisite luxury

The slick exterior styling is matched by a luxurious interior crafted using high-quality materials and supported by high-tech features.

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

Exterior

19" Alloy Wheels, LED Head-

lamps 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

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.

Safety

Its safety features include ESP (ABS +TCS) + EBD, Hill Hold Assist, Electronic Parking Brake Hill Descent Control, Front, Side & Curtain Airbags, Front & Rear 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 with Remote Control, One Touch Up-Down Movement for all four windows are some of significant features of the vehicle.

Specifications

Engine: 2.0lt Turbo GDI, Power: 224 hp 224, Torque: 360 Nm 360, Transmission: 8 Speed AT

OABC hosts key session for executives

In line with its mission to update, inform, and connect Oman's business community, the Oman American Business Center (OABC) hosted 'Workforce Planning: Key Trends in Immigration, Travel, and Labor Policies', with speakers from Fragomen, CMS Oman, and Qatar Airways on February 22, for OABC members and special guests.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly created significant obstacles for companies in Oman, especially regarding workforce requirements," says Rebecca Olson, executive director of the OABC.



Ajay Jacob

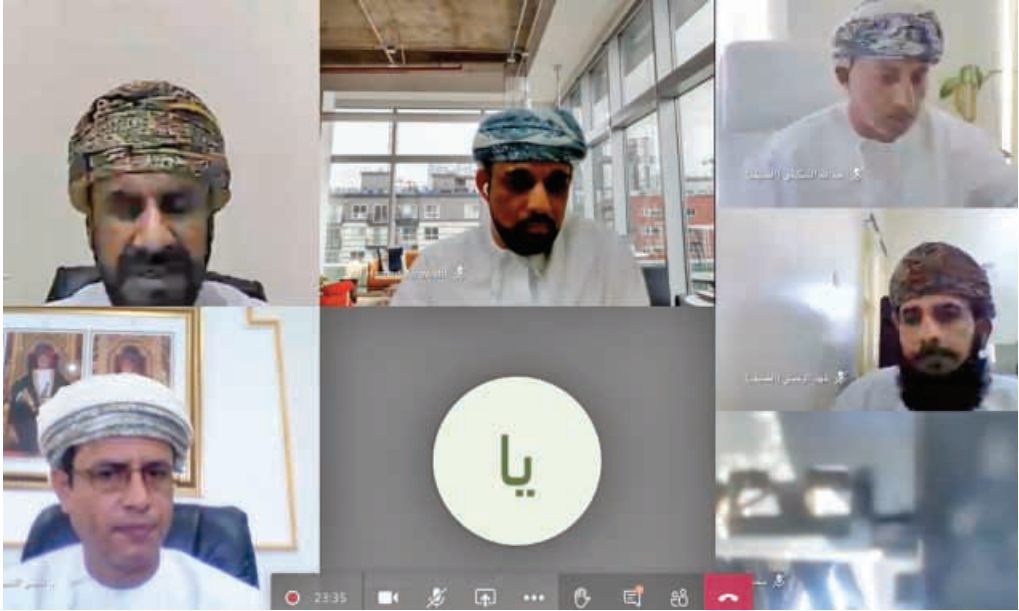


Ben Ewing

session examined current immigration and labour policies, and discussed what workforce planning and mobilisation look like for companies now and in the near future.

Shayan Sultan, director - Middle East and North Africa at Fragomen, Ajay Jacob, regional manager GCC at Qatar Airways, and Ben Ewing, partner at CMS Oman, each presented in turn, leaving time for Q&A.

OABC is best known for hosting high-level professional networking events and informational sessions for professionals across the sultanate.



Zubair SEC takes part in MoE's entrepreneurship forum

On the invitation of General Directorate of Education, Dakhiliyah governorate, Department of Vocational Guidance, Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC) participated in the entrepreneurs' forum held to promote entrepreneurship among students.

The forum titled 'Promising future prospects' was organised by the Ministry of Education (MoE), Dakhiliyah, as part of its strategy to equip young people with the ideals to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams.

The forum brought together a panel of expert entrepreneurs, subject specialists, students, and parents and offered key insights on entrepreneurial challenges and models of success.

Ali Shaker, advisor, Business Development and Strategic Partnerships, Zubair SEC, who made an introductory presentation spoke about the centre's accomplishments and the importance of instilling a culture of entrepreneurship among students aimed towards the common good of creating a better society both economically and socially.

The presentation included some cases of businesses that started as an idea but today is considered a successful business.

Students were encouraged not to give up but take their entrepreneurial ideas forward with

confidence just like the successful examples presented.

Shaker said, "Promoting entrepreneurship among students is an important step towards developing the human capital necessary for the future. Building a society that encourages youth entrepreneurship is the responsibility of every society."

"Zubair SEC believes in the importance of influential groups participating in cultivating and developing entrepreneurship, so that the desired results can be reached with their cooperation and support. The centre is always keen to be present and participate in such events which receives the attention of youth. Youth have to be empowered with the necessary skills and motivation to spark entrepreneurial innovation and economic growth."

He added, "Zubair SEC likes to participate in such platforms as it allows young people to think innovatively and analytically, identify business opportunities, take initiative, endure through failure, communicate cogently, and develop an entrepreneurial mindset. Through this forum participants got acquainted with success stories of entrepreneurs in Oman."

Hamad bin Salem Al Kindi, head of the vocational guidance section at the General Directorate of Education in Dakhiliyah

governorate, said, "Encouraging students to become entrepreneurs has a lot of advantages in terms of paving way for the innovation, self-development and growth of the country too."

"Understanding the need to creating and nurturing entrepreneurship among young people, we have taken up this strategic initiative aimed at imparting entrepreneurial knowledge. We thank Zubair SEC for their participation and encouragement to students."

With an intention to inspire and encourage, Zubair SEC has been sharing success stories and promoting entrepreneurial accomplishments of its members on various platforms.

Zubair SEC, a social responsibility initiative of Z-Corp, continues building solid business grounds and facilitating business development opportunities for all its members.

Through Zubair SEC, its members have been getting better access to knowledge, innovation and understanding of the market.

To achieve its goal, Zubair SEC built a comprehensive support ecosystem that includes providing business development assistance, organising workshops, specialist advisory support, networking opportunities, serviced office space and partnerships.

Himachal Wing calendar presented to envoy

Himachal Wing Committee of the Indian Social Club (ISC) representatives have presented the wing calendar 2021 to the Indian Ambassador H E Munu Mahawar and to embassy officials on behalf of Himachali Community in Oman in the premises of Indian Embassy at Al Khuwayr, Muscat.

During the meeting, Himachal Wing convener Shri Sanjeev Sharma also presented the Himachali Cap, a proud symbol of state culture to the ambassador and Shri P K Prakash, cultural



counsellor. In discussions, the ambassador was updated about the issues and effects due to COVID-19 on the society.

General upkeep updates of the community were provided in the sultanate by the treasurer Shri Gaurav Sood.

The calendar provides glimpse on past events hosted by the wing and a collection on the scenic views of the state in an opportunity to showcase the beauty of Himachal.

Copies of the calendar were presented to the office bearers of Indian Social Club Oman and convenors of all 29 linguistic wings of the club. Around 400 calendars were distributed among the wing members, Himachali business community and distinguished society back in Indian Himalayan state.

OSN to exclusively air Framing Britney Spears

OSN, the region's leading entertainment hub, announced that it will be airing the highly anticipated and controversial documentary *The Weekly: Special Edition, Framing Britney Spears*. The 74-minute production will be available exclusively to OSN subscribers on the OSN streaming app.

The documentary film has been creating waves both online and offline, trending on social media and sparking commentary from celebrity fans and the fan-driven #FreeBritney movement.

Directed by Samantha Stark and produced by Jason Stallman,



Sam Dolnick, and Stephanie Priess, the film revolves around the career of American superstar Britney Spears, her rise to fame, transformation into an iconic fig-

ure within the American culture, and the conservatorship that she has been living under since 2008, overseen by her father Jamie Spears.

Iran starts limiting UN inspections

Tehran, Iran - Iran confirmed it had begun implementing new restrictions on inspections by the UN nuclear watchdog on Tuesday after the United States failed to lift economic sanctions by a week-end deadline.

Interim arrangements agreed in talks in Tehran on Sunday mean that the International Atomic Energy Agency will not be 'flying blind' while 'political discussions' on restoring a 2015 deal between Tehran and major powers go ahead, its director Rafael Grossi has said.

But while praising Grossi's 11th-hour diplomacy, Washington called on Tehran to 'fully meet its verification and other nuclear non-proliferation com-

If the [US] sanctions are not fully lifted in the next three months, the data [on our nuclear programme] will be destroyed for good

THE ATOMIC ENERGY ORGANIZATION OF IRAN

mitments' under the deal while talks are under way. The changes to the IAEA's



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif speaks during a press conference, in the capital Tehran on Tuesday (AFP)

equipment that the IAEA installed at Iran's nuclear sites to verify its compliance will now be withheld by Tehran until President Joe Biden has lifted the crippling sanctions imposed by Trump.

So-called 'voluntary transparency measures', including snap inspections of sites not under regular monitoring - are also suspended. Zarif said the changes would have no major immediate impact on the work of the IAEA inspectors.

"The crux of this deal is that the data recorded on our nuclear programme ... will be stored and not handed over to the IAEA," Iran's top diplomat said.

The data 'had never been supplied to the IAEA in real time but had been handed over on a daily or weekly basis', he said.

If talks on a US return to the nuclear deal drag on, that will change, however.

The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has said that under the new law, if there is still no lifting of US sanctions after three months, it will start erasing the recordings. If the sanctions are not 'fully lifted in the next three months', the data will be 'destroyed for good', it said.

Biden has signalled readiness to revive the nuclear deal but insists Iran first return to all its nuclear commitments. AFP

monitoring and inspection regime, which were ordered by Iran's conservative-dominated

parliament last year, are the latest in a series of retaliatory measures Iran has adopted in re-

sponse to then US president Donald Trump's 2018 withdrawal from the agreement.

"The implementation of the law began this morning," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif

told the official IRNA news agency. Recordings from monitoring

'Spy for Egypt' on trial in Berlin

Berlin, Germany - A German man went on trial Tuesday for allegedly spying for Egypt while he was working in Chancellor Angela Merkel's press office.

Egypt-born Amin K is accused of exploiting his privileged position in the office to pass on information to Egypt's General Intelligence Service (GIS) between 2010 and 2019.

Originally scheduled to start in January, the trial was postponed due to the pandemic, and a verdict is now expected in March.

The 66 year old had worked since 1999 for the visitor service of the federal press office, which among other things is responsible for communicating Merkel's activities.

According to the charge sheet, the suspect made observations about media coverage of Egypt-related domestic and foreign policy issues in Germany, and also helped in a failed attempt to recruit another spy.

He is also suspected of handing over the names of five Syrian-born colleagues at the press office.

Contact with his handlers was 'largely conspiratorial' and took place via phone call and instant messaging service, the charge sheet said. The suspect allegedly hoped to win preferential treatment from the Egyptian authorities with his espionage, and succeeded in securing help with his mother's claim to her pension payments.

The case came to light with the publication of a German intelligence service report in 2019. AFP



Disha Ravi (centre) after being granted bail, in New Delhi on Tuesday (AFP)

Indian activist linked to Thunberg gets bail

New Delhi, India - An Indian climate change activist was granted bail on Tuesday ten days after being arrested for allegedly creating a 'toolkit' to help the country's farmer protests that was tweeted by Greta Thunberg.

The arrest of 22 year old Disha Ravi on charges of sedition - which can carry a sentence of life imprisonment - sparked fierce criticism from activists and India's opposition politicians.

Police alleged that Ravi was a 'key conspirator' in the formation of the toolkit, which was shared by Swedish climate activist

Thunberg on social media.

The toolkit offers basic advice on joining the protest on the ground and spells out how to show support on social media.

Officers said the aim appeared to be to 'create disharmony among various social, religious and cultural groups and encourage disaffection and ill-will' against the Indian government.

Police also said Ravi and two others had been in contact with a Canada-based organisation that allegedly supported separatists from India's Sikh minority. AFP

Myanmar generals under pressure after G7 condemnation, sanctions

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar's military leaders came under renewed pressure Tuesday as the world's wealthiest nations condemned the junta for responding to anti-coup demonstrators 'with violence', a rebuke coming on the heels of tightened sanctions from Washington and Brussels.

Authorities have gradually ratcheted up their use of force against a massive and largely peaceful civil disobedience campaign demanding the return of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Three anti-coup protesters have been killed in demonstrations so far, while a man patrolling his Yangon neighbourhood against night arrests was also shot dead on the weekend.

"Use of live ammunition against unarmed people is unacceptable," the foreign ministers of the G7 group of rich democracies - comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan,



A convoy of cars makes its way during the funeral for protester Thet Naing Win, who died from a gunshot wound while taking part in a demonstration last week, in Mandalay on Tuesday (AFP)

Britain, the United States together with the EU - said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Anyone responding to peaceful protests with violence must be held to account," they said, calling for Myanmar security forces to 'exercise utmost restraint and respect human rights and international law'.

The sharp condemnation comes after the overnight blacklisting of another two members of the regime by the United States - air force chief Maung Maung Kyaw and fellow junta member Moe Myint Tun - after Washington announced targeted sanctions against other top generals earlier this month.

"We will not hesitate to take further action against those who perpetrate violence and suppress the will of the people," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Hours earlier, the European Union also approved sanctions targeting Myanmar's military and their economic interests. AFP

Victims' families sue Saudi Arabia over naval base attack

Washington, US - Families of three men killed in 2019 at a Florida naval base by a Saudi airman sued Saudi Arabia on Monday, saying its government knew of the shooter's radicalisation and association with Al Qaeda.

Three members of the US military were shot dead and 13 others were wounded in the attack on December 6, 2019, at training facilities for foreign military at the Naval Air Station Pensacola.

US justice authorities said the shooter, Royal Saudi Air Force flight student Mohammed Alshamrani, had plotted the attack for years, expressing extremist ideology and contacting Al Qaeda operatives via an encrypted cell phone. Alshamrani, who was also killed in the incident, was in touch with Al Qaeda the night before his attack, according to the FBI.

In the civil lawsuit filed in fed-



Three members of the US military were shot dead and 13 others were wounded in an attack by Royal Saudi Air Force flight student Mohammed Alshamrani (inset), at training facilities for foreign military at the Naval Air Station Pensacola in the US on December 6, 2019 (AFP)

eral court in Pensacola, the families of the dead and wounded alleged that his colleagues and the

Saudi government were all aware of his extremist turn and anti-American views.

Those views 'were publicly associated with a Twitter account bearing his name' even be-

fore he joined the air force.

His social media accounts were also followed and com-

mented upon by government officials and air force colleagues.

'Throughout Alshamrani's service with the Royal Saudi Air Force, Alshamrani regularly posted radical fundamental ideology on his social medial accounts, including anti-American and anti-Jewish ideology, and encouraged others to post radical Islamic sentiments,' the suit said.

It also argues that, as one of a small group of students sent to study in the United States, he would have to be thoroughly screened by Saudi security, which can monitor the phones and other communications of people seen as security risks.

And it alleged that fellow members of his group of students, and an unnamed senior air force official who oversaw them were aware of his plans. AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Why US has the highest death toll



New York Governor Andrew Cuomo arrives at a vaccination centre in the Brooklyn borough of New York, on Monday (AFP)

New York, US - The United States crossed the grim milestone of 500,000 deaths from COVID-19 on Monday, a year since announcing its first known death from the virus on February 29, 2020 in the Seattle area.

Why does the world's leading power have the highest death toll and what lessons are American health specialists learning from the past year?

Here, infectious disease experts Joseph Masci and Michele Halpern provide answers to some of the key questions.

Masci (70) is one of the leaders of Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, which was at the heart of New York's epidemic.

Halpern is a specialist at the Montefiore hospital group in New Rochelle, a New York suburb where the epidemic arrived in force in February 2020.

Why has the US been hit so hard?

Prior to this pandemic, the United States observed coronaviruses 'from a distance', explained Masci.

"There was SARS in Canada but very little or none in this country. There was no MERS here at all," he said.

"There was a lot of preparation made for Ebola coming to the United States, and it never

really did. Suddenly this (coronavirus) was a problem where the United States was the epicenter."

Masci said it was difficult to compare the United States with other countries.

"I think smaller countries that had structured health care services had a good chance of bringing things into play quickly."

"In a country like ours, with 50 independent states, and a huge landmass, with largely a

deal with those obstacles that were put up," he said.

Masci and Halpern rue that mask-wearing was politicised.

"It's purely a healthcare issue," said Masci, adding that it is going to be difficult for the federal government to 'reframe' that message.

Halpern insists that people should not see mask-wearing as 'infringing' on their freedom.

"There are other things we do routinely that you could say

"Now... instead of 12 hot ICU beds, you have to have 150. Where do you get them? Who do you staff on with? So now we've learnt this lesson."

Masci said the group of public hospitals of which Elmhurst is a part found strategies to distribute the burden among NYC's 11 public hospitals by transferring patients very quickly.

"We've turned from one hospital with 500 beds, to 11 hospitals with about 5,000 beds. It's worked very nicely."

More generally, Halpern says the pandemic has made everyone realise that 'hospitals need resources'.

"You have to invest in research, but you also have to invest in hospitals, in nursing homes. They have to have enough staff, they have to have the equipment that they need and the personnel has to be happy," she added.

The epidemic has also sharply exposed inequalities, not just in health care but also in housing, with Black and Latino communities dying in disproportionately high numbers.

"We have to look at housing, and how it can be better suited to handling future epidemics. There are others coming," said Masci.

Will we be wearing masks in December?

Vaccines are rolling out but health experts are cautious due to uncertainties surrounding the British and South African variants of the virus.

Masci says that if the variant strains don't turn into a huge problem and once we've reached the point where 70-80 percent of the population is vaccinated then 'there's a good chance' we won't wear masks anymore.

"(But) suppose these variant strains do take hold, become more of a problem, are vaccine resistant, and we're all closing schools and putting masks and locking down again in a few months, (then) it's a lot harder to say by December, 'We'll be out of the woods'."

Halpern says it's reassuring that the second wave was largely controlled, in New York at least.

"I have hopes that the vaccines will be effective and will temper future waves. But it's hard to be sure whether our vaccines will be effective in the longer term, or on new variants. I don't think anyone knows that. So we have to be prepared that we're in this for a while," she said.

AFP



Motorists ride past India's Serum Institute in Pune (AFP)

Serum despatches first Covax vaccines

New Delhi, India - India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, despatched on Tuesday its first batch of vaccine shots for the Covax global inoculation programme.

The global vaccine procurement and equitable distribution effort aims to secure vaccines for at least the most vulnerable 20 per cent in every country.

Covax, led by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the GAVI alliance, has struck agreements with manufacturers for two billion

doses in 2021 and has the option for another billion.

This includes 1.1bn doses from the Serum Institute, which is producing the AstraZeneca and Novavax vaccines.

WHO Southeast Asia tweeted photos of the first shipments being loaded onto a truck at Serum's manufacturing facility in Pune in western India.

Serum has already supplied the Indian government with millions of doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine as well as other poorer nations.

Afghanistan begins vaccination drive

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghanistan on Tuesday launched a COVID-19 vaccination campaign aimed at inoculating hundreds of thousands.

Doctors, security personnel, and journalists were among the first volunteers to receive doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, donated earlier this month by India.

"Today, I congratulate the people of Afghanistan for the launch of the first stage of COVID-19 vaccine [drive] with 500,000 doses of vaccines. This is a big opportunity for the people of Afghanistan," said Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as the first jabs were administered.

"We don't expect any miracles, but let's help this campaign to be implemented justly," the country's acting health minister Waheed Majroh added.

Afghanistan is believed to have been hit hard by the pandemic last year, but limited testing and a ramshackle healthcare sector have hampered its ability to track the virus.

Officially the country has recorded just 55,600 confirmed cases and about 2,430 deaths.

But a survey published by the country's health ministry last August estimated that up to 10mn people might have been infected with the virus.

AFP

Hong Kong to disqualify 'disloyal' politicians

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong announced plans on Tuesday to ramp up the ideological vetting of politicians and officials, with anyone seen to be disloyal to China or a national security threat barred from office.

The draft law will be sent next month to the city's legislature, a body now devoid of opposition after a number of figures were disqualified because their political views were deemed a security threat.

Officials have detailed a 'negative list' of offences that could see their colleagues removed from office, including acts that endanger national security, advocating for independence or refusing to accept China's sovereignty over Hong Kong. The city's Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Erick Tsang confirmed that criticism of the Chinese Communist Party could also be a disqualifying factor.

AFP

Nine women arrested over Philippine bomb plots: Army

Manila, Philippines - Nine women suspected of plotting to blow up military targets in the restive southern Philippines have been arrested, the army said on Tuesday.

Security forces detained the women and seized bomb-making equipment during raids on Friday of several homes Jolo island, a stronghold of the Islamic

State-linked Abu Sayyaf group.

Most of the women were the daughters or widows of slain Abu Sayyaf fighters and included several 'potential suicide bombers', Maj Gen William Gonzales said.

"This is how desperate the remaining terrorists are, willing to sacrifice their families just to get back at government forces."

AFP

India's endangered lion prides conquer disease

Gir National Park, India - Three years after a deadly virus struck India's endangered Asiatic lions in their last remaining natural habitat, conservationists are hunting for new homes to help booming prides roam free.

The majestic big cats, slightly smaller than their African cousins and with a fold of skin along their bellies, were once found widely across southwest Asia.

Hunting and human encroachment saw the population plunge to just 20 by 1913, and the lions are now found only in a wildlife sanctuary in India's western Gujarat state.

Following years of concerted government efforts, the lion population in Gir National Park has swelled to nearly 700, according to an official census last year.

But just three years ago, the conservation success looked to be in danger when several lions started to die in one part of the 1,400sqkm forest.

The canine distemper virus - a highly infectious disease - was detected among dozens of the royal beasts, killing at least 11 of them.



This file photo shows Asiatic lions at the Gir National Park and Sanctuary at Sasan Gir, about 330km from Ahmedabad, the largest city in the western Indian state of Gujarat, on January 5 this year (AFP)

"We picked all the lions from the area and isolated them," Dushyant Vasavada, the park's chief conservator of forests, said.

Authorities imported special vaccines from overseas and each animal was given three doses each, followed by a booster shot.

Cattle and dogs living near the park were also inoculated as suspected carriers of the virus.

"We vaccinated the lions in captivity and successfully con-

trolled the disease and no new outbreak has been observed," Vasavada said, adding that park rangers were still closely monitoring their health.

'Very thrilling experience'

Lions are a source of pride for India, particularly in Gujarat's Saurashtra region, where man and beast coexist.

A cattle-rearing tribe lives

among the animals in the sanctuary, and it is not uncommon to see a pride of lions crossing a highway in the region as motorists wait and watch.

The king of the jungle is also a major tourist attraction, along with leopards, panthers and other big cats found in the sanctuary.

Around 550,000 people visit the park each year, riding in open-top jeeps as they try to spot the predators prowling among pale

yellow deciduous trees.

"It is a very thrilling experience to see the lions from close in the wild," said forest guide Dinsh Sadiya.

But the 2018 virus outbreak was a reminder that the steady growth in the animal's population cannot be taken for granted.

The lions have low genetic diversity due to their small population size, making them more vulnerable to epidemics.

A 1993 outbreak of canine distemper virus in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park killed a third of its 3,000 lions.

Wildlife biologist Ravi Chellam said that outbreak underscored the need to move a few prides to other sites nearby.

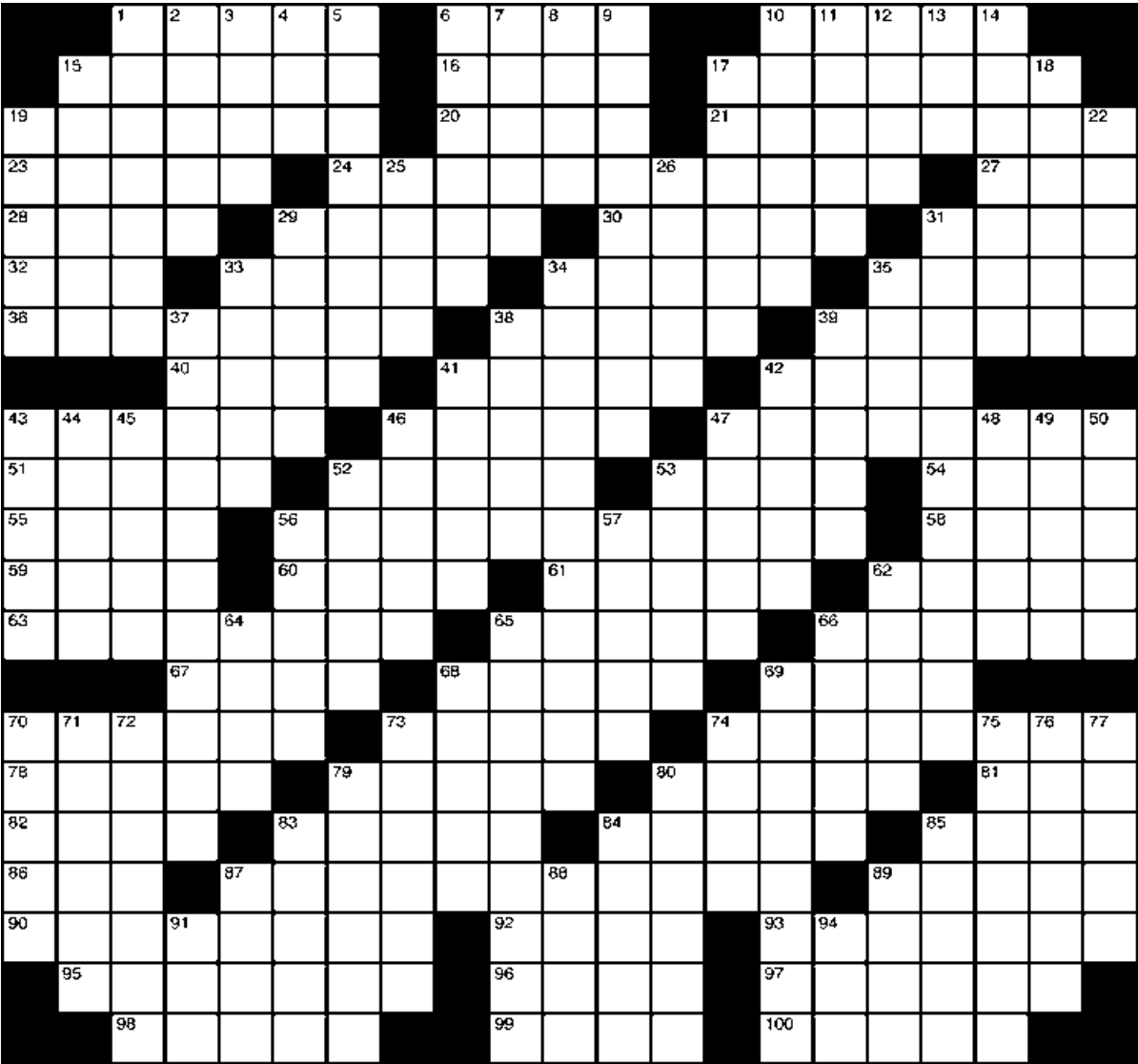
"Translocation is a risk mitigation strategy akin to us getting health or life insurance," he said.

"If something happens to the population in Gir, there is always going to be an additional free-ranging population of wild lions available."

Chellam said the sanctuary was now too small for its steadily growing lion population.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Pursue
- 6 Dub
- 10 Went to the polls
- 15 Hut
- 16 L x W
- 17 Sloped
- 19 IL national
- forrest
- 20 Wild hog
- 21 Yet to be published
- 23 Meet the day
- 24 “ ___ of 1933”: musical movie
- 27 “Norma ___”
- 28 Mediterranean north wind
- 29 Thick soup
- 30 Calyx part
- 31 Sea swooper
- 32 Barely making ends meet
- 33 Property claims
- 34 ___ Pyle
- 35 Paradigm
- 36 Acknowledgement
- 38 Nat and Natalie
- 39 Certain
- fishermen
- 40 Birds: L.

- 41 Goes out of business
- 42 Shakespeare
- 43 Tea cakes
- 46 Herds
- 47 Conjointly
- 51 Turkish title
- 52 Over do
- 53 Restaurateur
- Toots
- 54 Abyss
- 55 Singer Coolidge
- 56 California
- 58 Actor Tamblын
- 59 Far East country
- 60 Pistols
- 61 Like a riverbed, often
- 62 Deserve
- 63 Bonanza
- 65 Canada ___
- 66 Charters
- 67 TV Ranger
- 68 Rises high
- 69 Good as ___
- 70 Throws about
- 73 ___ d'Aosta: Italy
- 74 Achievement award
- 78 Equals
- 79 Assembles

- 80 Tocsins
- 81 ___ Jima
- 82 Cul-de-sacs: dead ___
- 83 Doggie problem
- 84 Hangs
- 85 Non-union worker
- 86 Tiny
- 87 Showy flower
- 89 40’s actor Jack
- 90 Acquire without effort
- 92 Smell ___
- 93 Opens, in a way
- 95 Iron worker
- 96 Strong wind
- 97 Nets
- 98 Jewish feast
- 99 City trees
- 100 Watered the garden
- DOWN**
- 1 Carriages
- 2 Ship part
- 3 1702-14 English queen
- 4 Sault, ___ Marie
- 5 Old TV quiz show
- 6 Supports
- 7 Eat away
- 8 Study

- 9 Showy flowers
- 10 Thin surface layer
- 11 ___ barrel: in trouble
- 12 Spreads hay
- 13 Samuel’s mentor
- 14 Thrust away
- 15 Predatory bird
- 17 Taps players
- 18 Atlantic City worker
- 19 Sword
- 22 Valleys
- 25 Caen’s river
- 26 Arcade and video
- 29 Hankers
- 31 Buttercups
- 33 I ___ Mystery
- 34 CA NHL team
- 35 Only
- 37 Gold miners
- 38 Formal farewell
- 39 Tidal waves
- 41 Wards off
- 42 Prize
- 43 Brad
- 44 Town on the Mississippi
- 45 Of the number 8
- 46 Diacritical mark
- 47 English freeman

- 48 Time spans
- 49 Famous cow
- 50 Supports
- 52 First Kentuckian?
- 53 Facing a glacier
- 56 Smiles
- 57 Metric unit
- 62 Pinochle term
- 64 Trims the lawn
- 65 Millennium
- 66 Droops
- 68 Looey’s aide
- 69 1849 Rush
- 70 Jets
- 71 Golden rules
- 72 Saves
- 73 Merchant
- 74 Hoofers Kelly
- 75 ___ pink
- 76 Bides
- 77 Beachwear
- 79 Rope
- 80 Davis and Midler
- 83 ___ Carlo
- 84 Hymn
- 85 Rhône feeder
- 87 Coat with gold
- 88 Russian Sea
- 89 Japanese sashes
- 91 ___ Wee Reese
- 94 Modernist

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your creative energy is fully engaged with some new project, so make sure that you’re pushing it as far as it can go. Things may start to look really good for you by day’s end. Read between the lines of a new salon or spa’s song-and-dance. It all sounds great, but what does it really mean? Take the pamphlet and the business card and go home and contemplate it on your own time.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You need to make the most of your newfound celebrity. It may not last forever! At least one person is starstruck in your presence, and you can get them to do almost anything for you. Are you eating to feed yourself or eating because sometimes it’s easier to do that than deal with your emotions? Everybody does it, but it’s a hard habit to break. Try to be more conscious.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You need to figure out a way to deal with a situation that’s in dire need of an upgrade. The good news is that your amazing energy can help you find sneaky ways to get what you need. You’ve got luck to spare right now, so enter all the sweepstakes, free giveaways and magazine-sponsored makeovers you can find. Chances are that something great will come your way.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It’s too easy for you to fill up with hot air, so do what you can to chill out and let others take the lead. You’re sure to find that your people are willing to cut you some slack for the downtime. Celebrate a special occasion in style. When you’re with loved ones, it can be tempting to go casual, but a little formality is a good thing. Dress up, use the best china and no eating while watching TV!



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Can you pare back your schedule? If not, things could get a bit ridiculous and you may feel rushed. If you can defer some meetings or projects, you should feel better. One of the joys of being a regular customer is that you can tap your beauty professionals for advice even when you’re not in the salon. If you have a question about a product, call up one of your pit crew.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You’ve got more problems than usual at work or in your job search. One way or another, you can overcome these obstacles, but you may have to get really creative. Even if the weather is dull, your skin doesn’t have to be. Book an exfoliating treatment at a spa, or buy a jar of a good salt scrub and do it yourself in your bathroom. You’ll feel like a new person!



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You’ve got an opinion on any given topic, and your mental energy keeps you from making people feel funny about their own ideas. It’s a good time to discuss big plans and rethink old ideas. Cutting back on washing your hair is good for your follicles and the environment. Besides, hair often looks better the second or third day. Find a good dry shampoo or switch your part when you need a change.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You need to be explicit about your hopes and dreams or how will anyone know how to help you? It’s a good time for you to make special requests and call in favours. Go through the pockets of all your coats. Chances are you’ll find an old lip gloss, your spare keys and the number of that potentially influential job contact you’ve been fretting about for ages. Next: your purses.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You need to mix it up, as much as you’d rather push forward or even retreat. Sometimes a struggle is your best solution, and today’s opportunity is perfect for your needs. You are not what you decide to buy. Put down the credit cards, avoid online shopping and stay away from the mall. It’s a good day to put up your feet, read a good book and have a long talk with a friend.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You are feeling impulsive, and why not? It’s one of those days when you can get away with almost anything as long as you’re pleasant about it. Others forgive and forget. Small things often make the biggest difference when it comes to how you look and feel. Park farther away so you walk an extra ten minutes to work. Use two per cent milk in your coffee instead of half-and-half.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your boss may cause problems, but you should try to just let their ill manners slide off your back. You can easily comply with their weirdness! Stick to one aspect of style instead of trying to do everything at once. For example, let your hair be fetchingly messy and focus on giving yourself that perfect, effortless glow with some blush and lip gloss instead.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You need to pull back a bit. It’s too easy for you to be somewhat overbearing, and your people respond poorly to that. Just offer enough input to make sure your voice is heard. In fashion, rules are made to be broken -- but here’s one style rule you should never, ever break: When wearing new shoes, no matter how initially comfortable they were, always bring band-aids with you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Trans World Airlines is an International Airline of
a. United Kingdom
b. United States of America
c. Russia
d. Scandinavia

2. The third crusade was led by
a. Richard I of England
b. Fredrick Barbarossa of Germany
c. Philip II of France
d. All of the above

3. Walt Disney was
a. the President of America during World War I
b. the creator of cartoon films starring popular cartoon characters Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck
c. the British physician known for his discovery of Addison’s disease
d. None of the above

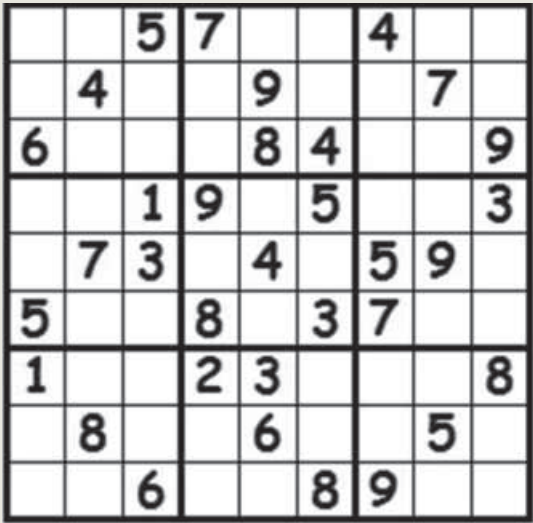
Answers: 1: b 2: d 3: b

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 (FEBRUARY 23)



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



7 CHALLENGES FOR FOOD INDUSTRY IN 2021

The year 2020 had been particularly tough for the food industry. The need for coping with increased demand along with restrictions on manufacturing and regulation processes made life very difficult for those in the supply chain. **Into 2021, there are a few inevitable challenges and trends that the food industry will continue to face this year.** Here's a food forecast, provided by *New Food* magazine, that includes seven challenges:

1 Upholding safety standards
The world has been living with Coronavirus through most of 2020, and, unfortunately, the pandemic shows little sign of abating, especially in the early months of 2021. Ensuring that safety standards are upheld in the industry is crucial to maintaining the high level of trust that consumers have in food manufacturers presently. This includes making sure that both the food on our plates is safe to eat and that the people who made it are looked after too.
Food manufacturing is one of those sectors where it is not possible to work from home – you can't package meat over Microsoft Teams, after all. Keeping workers safe and restoring confidence in the workforce will be crucial throughout 2021.

2 Keeping sustainability on the front burner
With the vaccine now available, it looks as though the COVID-19 crisis will come to an end at some point during 2021. However, the climate crisis is not going anywhere. While sustainability issues within the food industry have somewhat understandably taken a back seat, it's crucial that they are brought back to the fore soon. In particular, progress made on eliminating single use plastics from the industry has taken a few steps backwards.
Reusable cups, so heralded in the fight against plastic waste, coronavirus-plastic-pollution-environment" were banned from coffee shops back in March. But plastic wrapping has crept back, driven by consumer worries over virus contamination. Similarly, 2021 could also be the year when the massive issue of food waste gets more prominence.

3 Dealing with constant shutdowns
Restaurants have perhaps had to adapt the most during 2020, with many forced to transform from a bustling dining room into a takeaway overnight. This has raised particular concerns when it comes to providing sufficient allergen information

to customers. Quite simply, there is not that safety net of physical interaction to double check that a certain dish does not contain nuts, for example.
The FSA has told businesses offering a takeaway service that they must provide allergen information when taking an order. This can be done in print online, or orally over the phone. Also, businesses will have to continue to ensure that their customers get the necessary allergen information to keep them safe, no matter whether they are sat at a restaurant table or in front of their television.

4 Food fraud
Aside from the fairly obvious supply and logistics issues the pandemic has presented, the conditions brewed by COVID-19 gave (and still is giving) ample opportunity for food criminals. A surge in demand coupled with economic downturn for some meant the priority was getting food on shelves and tables as cheaply as possible, opening the door for disingenuous operators to move in. The desire for cheap food isn't going anywhere, especially as we look to be just getting started when it comes to the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While this desire remains, food crime will continue. It is up to the industry to devise methods to combat a problem which threatens to derail trust in certain products.

5 Plant-based diet marches on
The last few years have seen a marked increase in the amount of people opting for at least a partial plant-based diet, and this rise is showing little sign of slowing down. Mike Wystrach, Founder and CEO of Freshly (a prepared meals provider) sees a slight shift in terms of whether consumers opt to go fully plant-based in their diet or not. He said, "2020 showed us that consumers are interested in trying and buying more plant-based foods, as sales of foods like plant-based proteins and milks topped US\$3.3bn over the past year.
"In 2021, I expect that consumers will continue to place more of an emphasis on maintaining a 'plant-

forward' diet, instead of following a strict plant-based one. We will see more people opt for the age-old option of following plant-based eating principles, versus going completely vegetarian or vegan to fuel active lifestyles, support weight loss, or achieve other health and fitness related ambitions at home."
6 Artisan merchandise to develop
As lockdowns spill over into 2021, many people have started turning to artisan meals. With little or nothing to do, besides eat and store, artisan producers might see 2021 as their massive year, as shoppers search to fill the restaurant-shaped gap of their life.
Whereas shopper demand for craft and artisanal meals has steadily elevated over the previous years, an accelerated progress is expected into 2021 as shoppers search to brighten up their pandemic pantries with genuine elements and hand-crafted meals. Although some individuals might not really feel snug consuming in any kind of restaurant setting, they'll nonetheless need to recreate these genuine meals experiences at their dwelling. There is a chance for manufacturers to extend manufacturing on this sector to fulfill altering shopper tastes and preferences.

7 Digital acceleration – more to come
This pandemic era has taught us many things and amidst all the negatives there have been positive change and a newfound appreciation for some things (such as our food sector) too. It has also accelerated certain trends which were undoubtedly coming to the fore...albeit much slower. As the globe continues to gripple with the challenges of COVID-19, the digital era has never been more appreciated or needed.
Over the past year, restaurant operators, grocery retailers, and third-party platforms have all expanded or introduced their digital capacity for delivery. The consumer, too, has been in step with this trend.

CLASSIFIEDS

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Looking for a driver Job in Muscat, has got 9 years experience. Contact 78344297

Indian, Male, Masters Degree In Accounting, 15+ Years of Experi-

ence In Oman, Uae & India As Finance / Accounts Manager / Chief Accountant. Looking For A Job. Contact: 79007124 / 78039524. Email: Sheikcok@yahoo.Com

SITUATION VACANT

Young, Experienced, Indian Tailor With Good Knowledge of Ladies Tailoring Required Immediately For a Boutique In Muscat. Should be Hardworking, Proactive and with Pleasant Manners. Contact 95759535

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LOCKDOWN RECIPES

DRIED FISH

Delicacies

Dried fish, they say, is meant for a rainy day. They come in handy when you need to quickly stray away from a vegetarian diet yet have no time to replenish your refrigerator with proteins. Also, during a lockdown or when you don't want to step outdoors, store up some dried fish and enjoy unique, dried fish dishes, full of zing!

Dried Shrimp Chutney

- Ingredients**
- 1 cup medium dried shrimp, ½ cup grated coconut
 - 1tsp minced ginger, 5-6 dried red chillies, 2tsp minced garlic
 - 1 lemon sized ball of tamarind, salt - to taste

Method

Pinch out the heads of the dried shrimps and toast them on a hot plate until you get a nice roasted shrimp aroma. Remove them when crisp but not burnt. On the same hot plate, dry roast the red chillies for 1-2 minutes and remove. Then roast the coconut, ginger and garlic for 1-2 minutes and remove. Now, coarsely grind all ingredients with salt to taste (½tsp). The ground mixture should not be a fine paste, though it will bind together because of the tamarind. A few drops of water can be added to move the mixture while grinding. A few bits of shrimp in the ground mixture are fine. Serve as a side dish with rice and dal.



Dried Shark Fry

- Ingredients**

 - 200g dried shark chunks
 - 2tsp red chilli powder
 - 1tsp turmeric powder
 - 1tsp ginger-garlic paste
 - ½tsp salt, 2tsp vinegar
 - 2tbsp oil
- Method**

Soak the shark pieces in water for 30 minutes to get rid of excess salt and to soften the chunks. Mix the spices with salt, vinegar and ginger-garlic paste to form a smooth paste. Marinate the shark chunks with this paste and set aside for 30 minutes to one hour. Then, heat oil in a pan and fry the shark chunks on medium flame until they get evenly browned on all sides. Serve with onion rings as a snack or with a meal.



Dried Sardines Fry

- Ingredients**
- 8-10 dried sardines or any slim dried fish, 1tsp red chilli powder
 - 1tsp turmeric powder, Juice of half a lemon
 - 1 onion – sliced, 2 sprigs of curry leaves
 - 2tbsp oil, salt – to taste

Method

Soak the dried fish in water for 20 minutes. Clean and remove the excess salt and dirt from the insides. Season with chilli powder, turmeric powder, salt, lemon juice. Now, heat oil and add in the fish. Fry it for 5 minutes on both sides until golden brown. Remove them to a plate. In the remaining oil, add in onions, curry leaves and saute for a minute. Add 1tbsp lemon juice and mix well. Spoon this over the fried fish and serve hot with rice.

NOTE:
This recipe is ideal for dried mackerel but can be prepared with any available dried fish



Dried Fish Curry

- Ingredients**

 - 2-3 small dried mackerels or dried flat fish, 1 onion - sliced
 - 1 cup chopped tomatoes
 - 2tsp tamarind paste/pulp
 - 2tsp ginger-garlic paste
 - 1tsp red chilli powder
 - ½tsp turmeric powder
 - 1tsp coriander powder
 - ½tsp cumin powder
- 2 green chillies

1 sprig curry leaves

2tbsp oil, salt – to taste
- Method**

Wash the dried fish well to remove excess salt and cut to pieces. Heat oil in a non-stick sauce pan and fry the fish pieces till they turn golden brown. Set aside. In the same hot oil, add the curry

leaves and onion and fry for a minute. Then add the ginger garlic paste, tomatoes, spice powders, tamarind paste, and mix well. Cover and cook on low flame for 4-5 minutes until oil begins to separate. Then add half cup water and simmer for 3-4 minutes. Finally, add the fried fish and turn off the flame. Serve with steamed rice.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Ronaldo's double headers keep Juve in title hunt

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Turin, Italy - Cristiano Ronaldo kept Juventus within sight of the Serie A summit on Monday with a headed brace which helped the champions to a 3-0 win over bottom club Crotone.

Portugal forward Ronaldo struck twice late in the first half to break the resistance of lowly Crotone and keep Juve eight points behind league leaders Inter Milan.

Weston McKennie made sure of the points midway through the second half, lashing home when the ball broke to him after a corner.

Only Robert Lewandowski and Lionel Messi have scored more goals in Europe's top five leagues than Cristiano Ronaldo's 70 since his move to Juventus.

Ronaldo is now Serie A's top scorer this season, with 18 - overtaking Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku. Andear Pirlo's side climb to third with the win thanks also to Roma, who are a point back in fourth, only managing a goalless draw at Benevento on Sunday night.

They are also four points behind second-placed AC Milan who have lost three of their last five league matches, including Sunday's 3-0 derby thumping at the hands of Inter.

Juve, chasing their tenth straight league title, have a game in hand on both Milan clubs and play Inter in the penultimate round of league games in Turin.

Crotone meanwhile remain rooted to the bottom of the division thanks to their fifth defeat on the bounce.



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo scores his second goal with a header against Crotone at the Juventus stadium in Turin on Monday (AFP)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Palace stun Brighton

Brighton, UK - Crystal Palace manager Roy Hodgson defended his side's style after snatching a 2-1 derby win at Brighton on Monday thanks to Christian Benteke's stunning 95th-minute volley.

The Eagles had just two touches in the Brighton box, but scored with both whereas the Seagulls saw 25 shots and nearly 75 per cent possession count for little.

"We get so hung up on statis-

tics these days. The game is decided by goals. Goals are a question of how well you take your chances and defend theirs," said Hodgson.

"Until there are prizes for corners and touches in the box, it's very important we keep in mind that results are borne out by goals you score and goals you don't concede. I get no satisfaction when we lose and we have more corners or touches in their box."

Brighton are still looking over their shoulders at the bottom

three after a night that summed up so much of the season for Graham Potter's men.

"That's the nature of the league, how punishing it is, we have done a lot but clearly not enough," said Potter.

Palace were without the talismanic presence of Wilfried Zaha due to injury, but Jean-Philippe Mateta made an impact on just his second start since joining on loan from Mainz.

Jordan Ayew's cross from the right allowed the Frenchman to back-heel home on the turn and

claim his first Palace goal on 28 minutes.

When the hosts did equalise ten minutes into the second period it was thanks to right wing-back Joel Veltman's first goal for the club.

Pascal Gross' low shot was blocked by Palace defender Tyrick Mitchell as he battled inside the box with substitute Danny Welbeck and fell kindly for the Dutch defender to sweep home left-footed.

Palace then clung on for a point until completely against the

Dortmund fined for mask-free players party

Berlin, Germany - Borussia Dortmund on Monday accepted a fine of US\$91,260 after their players broke the German league's hygiene rules with an impromptu victory celebration on the team bus after last weekend's derby win against Schalke.

The German Football League (DFL) issued the fine after footage emerged of Dortmund players celebrating Saturday on the team bus without masks and without observing social distancing rules.

The club quickly accepted the fine having issued an apology on Sunday as Germany has been in lockdown since November amid the coronavirus pandemic.

run of play they snatched all three deep into stoppage time.

Andros Townsend's cross beyond the far post did not seem to pose any danger until Benteke connected flush on the volley to send the ball into the far corner.

Victory takes Palace ten points clear of the relegation zone, while Brighton remain just four clear of in-form Fulham.

OTHER RESULTS

SPANISH LEAGUE:

Monday: Osasuna 0 Sevilla 2.
AFP

QUICK RUN

Semplici named Cagliari coach

Cagliari named Leonardo Semplici as their new coach on Monday after sacking Eusebio Di Francesco in a bid to drag the Serie A club out of a miserable 16-match winless run. Cagliari said that Semplici, 53, had signed a deal until the end of next season. Semplici will be tasked with saving the Sardinian team from relegation as they sit in the drop zone after picking up just five points since early November. Semplici spent five years in charge of SPAL before being sacked last February. Former Roma boss Di Francesco had his contract extended last month by Cagliari until 2023 despite the team's struggles that have left them five points from safety.

Sampaoli quits Atletico Mineiro

Jorge Sampaoli quit Brazilian club Atletico Mineiro on Monday in a letter released by his adviser, amid speculation that he is set to become the new Marseille coach. "I have come to the end. This Thursday will be the last match," former Argentina coach Sampaoli wrote in the five-paragraph missive bringing an end to his one-year relationship with the team from Belo Horizonte. The 60 year old had coached the team during the coronavirus outbreak, with matches played in empty stadiums. Press reports have suggested the former Argentina and Chile coach could be appointed by Marseille to replace Andre Villas-Boas, suspended following comments made about the signing of a player he said he had not wanted. Sampaoli had led Atletico to 25 victories in 44 games played.

Halep pulls out of Qatar Open

World No 3 Simona Halep has pulled out of next week's Qatar Open, organisers of the WTA event announced on Tuesday. The Romanian's withdrawal follows her Australian Open quarterfinal loss to Serena Williams. "Unfortunately I've decided to withdraw, I can't wait to be back in Doha next year," organisers quoted her as saying on Instagram. She gave no reason for her absence from the March 1-6 tournament in the Qatari capital of Doha. With Halep missing the top seeds in Qatar are world No 1 Ashleigh Barty, and Sofia Kenin, fourth in the world and winner of the Australian Open in 2020. Halep, the 2018 French Open champion and 2019 Wimbledon winner's seven-year streak in the top-ten is the longest active run among women. AFP

Zubair hopes for a good show at Oman Rally Championship

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Abdullah al Zubair is hoping for a podium finish at the forthcoming Oman Rally Championship (ORC), which kicks off with the first round on Friday.

Zubair is one of the many local stars who have confirmed their participation in the opening round, a welcome return for motor sports in the sultanate after three international events in February and March were postponed.

Zubair will return to rallying after a gap of one year with his last participation at the Jordan National Rally in February 2020, where he achieved a runner-up finish in Group N behind another Omani driver Abdullah al Rawahi.

This is the first time that Zubair will compete in the Oman Rally Championship.

An experienced driver, Zubair has competed in the past in FIA



A file photo of Abdullah al Zubair in action during a rally



Abdullah al Zubair

World CrossCountry and Baja rallies across the world. He also participated in the

Oman International Rally last year, which was the opening round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship.

At the Friday's rally, Zubair will be behind a Subaru Impreza (N14) with his navigator Taha Soomar.

Zubair said, "I thought a lot

before deciding to take part in Oman Rally Championship. I am looking forward to a good show and hope to be on the podium."

The opening round will have drivers compete in six special stages over a total distance of 279.78km. Organised by the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) the rally will begin and conclude at Lulu Hypermarket - Al Bandar in Seeb.



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Root, Kohli fear pink ball twilight collapse



England seamer James Anderson with the pink ball during a training session



A file photo of Indian pacers Jasprit Bumrah (left) and Ishant Sharma

INDIA VS ENGLAND

THIRD TEST: DAY-NIGHT

Ahmedabad, India - England captain Joe Root and India skipper Virat Kohli have both warned of the challenges of playing during the twilight zone in day-night Tests - when batting collapses can happen - ahead of their third Test clash starting on Wednesday.

The match will be the first time that India and England - level at 1-1 in the four-match series - face each other in a day-night encounter.

"It's much more challenging to play with the pink ball regardless of what pitch you are playing on," Kohli said on the eve of the match in the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

"And especially in the evening, if, as a batting team, you are starting your innings under lights, then that one-and-a-half hour is challenging," Kohli told reporters.

"When it starts to get dark, especially during that twilight period, it gets very tricky. Light changes, it's difficult to sight the ball and under lights is like playing the first session in the

morning in a normal Test match. The ball tends to swing a lot."

Both teams have had painful experiences of pink-ball cricket. India were bowled out for 36 by Australia in Adelaide in December and New Zealand skittled England in Auckland for 58 in 2018.

"Both are bizarre experiences for two quality sides," Kohli said. "Barring that 45 minutes of bad cricket (in Adelaide) we dominated the Test match. We are very confident in how we play the pink ball."

'Roll with it'

Root agreed that batsmen need to be careful - and not just in the evening when the lights come on the ball can start swinging.

"I think there's been a trend in all the pink-ball Test matches of collapses on occasion," Root told a separate news conference.

"It seems to be a trend and it's something as a batting group you need to make sure you stop," he said.

"It's sometimes been right at the start of the game, you know the morning session, late on in day four, that this strange sort of

passages of play has happened."

He added: "When you get that opportunity and you're on the right side of it, you're in the field with a ball in hand, you really get and roll with it. You take every opportunity and chance and you make that really count in your favour."

"Similarly with a bat in hand, you've just got to really make sure those (first) 20 balls, you're fighting with everything you've got to get yourself in, get accustomed to the wicket, the conditions and make sure you build that partnership which is so vital."

The Ahmedabad stadium has a capacity of 110,000 people and authorities have allowed 55,000 tickets to go on sale each day.

Each side has had a convincing win in the first two Tests. England won the first by 227 runs, while India claimed the second by 317 runs.

Both need a win to keep alive their hopes of reaching the World Test Championship (WTC) final.

England know this could be the series-defining Test and their opportunity to do what India did

in Australia. On the other hand, India's chances of earning a World Test Championship final spot are a little bit in jeopardy. If they lose this Test (or the next), they will be out of the race.

Kohli said, "You can't play for those kinds of reasons. We are not looking to win one and draw one. We are looking to win both."

"For us, these are two games of cricket, and the only thing we are focused on. What it does afterwards is a conversation for later. That is a reality not present right now. In the present moment, we are preparing for tomorrow, ready for the grind for five days, wanting to win a Test match for India and then move on to the next one."

"One day at a time is something we have followed for years now. There is no point running far ahead into the future where you have no idea what's going to happen. We are going to focus on what we can do as individuals in the present moment and let other people think of scenarios and what if and what if not."

One thing in India's favour is that they will field their strongest bowling attack of the series so

far. After a break of one Test, Jasprit Bumrah is back in the squad and will lead the pace attack alongside Ishant Sharma, with R Ashwin and Axar Patel manning the spin department.

Then they have the option of playing one of Kuldeep Yadav, Umesh Yadav and Mohammed Siraj as the fifth bowler, or, possibly, even Hardik Pandya.

For England, Jonny Bairstow's availability will somewhat reduce the burden on Joe Root, while a returning James Anderson will buoy them further.

Teams (likely): India: Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (capt), Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant (wk), R Ashwin, Axar Patel, Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah.

England: Dom Sibley, Zak Crawley, Jonny Bairstow, Joe Root (capt), Ben Stokes, Ollie Pope, Ben Foakes (wk), Dom Bess/Chris Woakes, Jofra Archer, Jack Leach, James Anderson.

Match begins at 1pm, Oman time.

Agencies

SLC accuses 'Vaas of holding the game to ransom'

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Just days after being appointed as Sri Lanka's fast bowling coach, Chaminda Vaas has resigned from the post with immediate effect, with Sri Lankan Cricket (SLC) accusing the former fast bowler of holding 'the game at ransom'.

The move comes a day out from the national team's departure for their tour of the West Indies, and has left SLC scrambling for a replacement.

ESPNcricinfo understands that SLC will take a decision on Vaas' replacement as a matter of urgency, with the selection likely to be from one of the coaches currently working at the high performance centre.

According to an SLC media release, Vaas' resignation had come about as a result of a dispute over remuneration, with SLC administrators also believed to be unhappy with the timing of his demands. "In such circumstances, it is extremely disheartening that a legend such as Chaminda Vaas has resorted to holding the administration, the cricketers, and indeed the game at ransom, by handing in his resignation at the eleventh hour, citing the administration's refusal



Chaminda Vaas

to accede to an unjustifiable demand for an increased USD remuneration, in spite of being a contracted employee of Sri Lanka Cricket."

Vaas has since tweeted that he had 'made a humble request to SLC and they turned it down'.

Vaas' resignation is the latest in a string of disruptions ahead of the West Indies tour. Meanwhile a delay in processing his transit visa to the US has meant that Sri Lanka's new T20I captain Dasun Shanaka was unable to leave for the Caribbean with the remainder of the squad on Monday. Shanaka was named Sri Lanka's T20I captain on Monday.

Cricinfo

Tharanga retires from international cricket

Colombo - Sri Lankan batsman Upul Tharanga has announced his retirement from international cricket at the age of 36. Having made his debut in August 2005, Tharanga last turned out for Sri Lanka in an ODI in South Africa in March 2019. He played his final T20I in March the previous year and his last Test in August 2017.

His ODI record is among the best in Sri Lanka's history. His 15 one-day hundreds are the fifth-most by a Sri Lankan batsman. Tharanga finishes his career having played 31 Tests, 235 ODIs and 26 T20Is. His 1,754 Test runs came at an average of 31.89 and included three centuries and eight



Upul Tharanga

fifties. It was in limited overs cricket though that Tharanga came into his own, scoring 6951 runs at 33.74 in ODIs, inclusive of 15 centuries and 37 fifties. While he had shown flourishes in the domestic T20 circuit, that form never really carried into his T20I career, in which he averaged 16.28.

Cricinfo

Gayle could return to WI T20I squad

Bridgetown, Barbados - Chris Gayle is expected to return to West Indies' T20I squad for the first time in two years, when the side takes on the visiting Sri Lankans at the start of March.

West Indies will announce a squad later this week but Gayle has interrupted a stint with the Quetta Gladiators in the PSL to return to the Caribbean, having been given indications that he will feature in the three-match T20I series against Sri Lanka.

As with the other members, Gayle will undergo a fitness assessment before the final squad is named. If he does play, it will be the first time he has represented West Indies in any format since August 2019, when he played an ODI against India; it will be exactly two years to the day since he last played a T20I, against England in March 2019.

Gayle is scheduled to return to Pakistan for the remainder of the PSL after the last T20I, on March 7 - an arrangement that had been agreed upon after the draft but before the season began. In fact, the PSL had announced just before the season that Faf du Plessis would be a partial replacement for Gayle just before



Chris Gayle

the season began.

But this recall, under the captaincy of Kieron Pollard, marks a significant milestone in Gayle's career, as well as for West Indies, coming as it does in a year in which they will be preparing to defend their T20 world title.

That tournament is due to take place in India in October-November, West Indies having won the last edition of the tournament also in India, in 2016.

At 41, Gayle's future - international and otherwise - has been the subject of on-off discussion since the 2019 World Cup. This was Gayle's first cricket in Pakistan since touring with West Indies in 2006-07.

Cricinfo

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Bausher rally to stun Seeb; Ahli-Sidab, Majees triumph

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2020 HIS MAJESTY'S CUP HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP

Bausher coach Saleh al Farsi's belief in his international players from India paid off in their Group B opening match of the second round of the 50th His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship 2020 as they stunned former champions Seeb 4-2 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC) on Tuesday.

In the second match of the day, previous edition's runner-up Ahli-Sidab registered their second successive win as they outplayed Sohar 3-0 in a Group A match to put one foot in the semifinals and in the last match of the evening, Majees drubbed Nizwa 8-1 for their first win in the same group.

The first match of the evening witnessed a remarkable turnaround from Bausher, who were stunned by the experienced Seeb with a goal in the very first minute of the match.

Seeb's national team player Fahad al Lawati's quick run found the rival team caught napping as he put the team ahead with a stinging shot.

And five minutes later, Seeb seemed to have taken control of the match with their second goal as they were awarded a penalty stroke. Pakistan World Cupper Mubashar Ali, who is considered one of the best dragflickers, converted the stroke to end the first quarter with a 2-0 lead.



Bausher's Sukhjeet Singh (right) tries to tackle a Seeb's Taha al Balushi during their Group B match of the 50th His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship at the SQSC on Tuesday



Bausher coach Saleh al Farsi

However, Bausher, which have a mix of young and experienced players fought back hard to score a memorable win.

The experience of three Indian players - Pradeep Mor, the only Olympian in the current tournament, and former Indian defender Gaganpreet Singh and Sukhjeet Singh 'Kaka', came in handy as the trio played a big role in the victory.

Gaganpreet, who has been

Pradeep [Mor] had a fantastic game and his experience has helped my young Omani players a lot. He is truly a leader and it is good to see my team gel well with the Indian trio

SALEH AL FARSI, BAUSHER COACH

specifically roped in for his dragflicking prowess, didn't disappoint with his ability as he sounded the boards off a penalty

corner in the 20th minute to begin the team's remarkable fightback.

The goal spurred the Bausher players and they were level in the

next minute as Sukhjeet found the target. Two goals in two minutes shocked the 11-time champions and Seeb could never recover from the blitz.

After the interval, Gaganpreet was again to the fore as he blasted in a powerful dragflick to put his team head in the 34th minute and Sukhjeet matched his countrymate's scoring skills with a field goal four minutes later to make it 4-2. Bausher defence then withstood the onslaught of Seeb attacks to emerge as worthy winners.

In the opening round of the tournament, Bausher had won both their games against Seeb. However, Seeb, coached by Khalid al Raisi, were without their foreign players who arrived recently. Besides Mubashar, Seeb also have Indian junior World Cup player Abharan Sudev and Pakistani international Muhammad Ateeq in their ranks.

Speaking after the win on Tuesday, Farsi, a former UAE national team coach, said, "We took the confidence from our wins in the first round. We knew that Seeb have been bolstered by

the coming in of top-class players from India and Pakistan but we too have experienced trio from India. I have faith in the potential of them. Gaganpreet proved his dragflicking skills and Sukhjeet showcased his talent as a young striker.

"Pradeep [Mor] had a fantastic game and his experience has helped my young Omani players a lot. He is truly a leader and it is good to see my team gel well with the Indian trio."

Farsi, who has coached Sohar and Quriyat clubs in the past, added, "The win is a morale-boost ahead of our match against defending champions Al Nasr tomorrow. We are ready to give them a good fight and I know my boys are capable of causing an upset. We will take each game as it comes."

Saidi's brace in Ahli-Sidab's victory

Later on Tuesday evening, Ahli-Sidab's Salah al Saidi stole the limelight from the foreign players as he struck a brace in his team's 3-0 win over Sohar.

It was the second successive

victory for India's C R Kumar-coached team and with only a game against Majees remaining, the 11-time winners are certain of their berth in the last-four stage.

Saidi hammered in two goals in a span of a minute to put Ahli-Sidab in command soon after the start of the second quarter.

Former Indian international, Affan Yousuf, who had a brace in the opening match against Nizwa on Monday, completed the rout with a penalty corner conversion seconds before the final hooter.

In the final match of the evening, Majees toyed with Nizwa, recording a 8-1 victory.

Following completion of two rounds of Group A, Ahli-Sidab lead the table with six points while Sohar and Majees have three points each. Ahli-Sidab's match against Majees on Thursday could decide the winner of Group A.

WEDNESDAY'S FIXTURES:

Group B: Bausher vs Al Nasr, 6pm; Dhofar vs Seeb, 8pm.

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Action from the match between Ahli-Sidab and Sohar on Tuesday



Majees and Nizwa players in action during their Group A game on Tuesday

Oman's World Cup qualifier against Qatar on June 7



A file photo of Oman and Qatar players at the start of their Group E joint FIFA World Cup and Asian Cup qualifying match at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah, Qatar, on October 15, 2019. Photo right: A file photo of Oman's coach Branko Ivankovic during a training

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2022 FIFA WORLD CUP AND 2023 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Croatian Branko Ivankovic will face his biggest test as Oman coach since he took over the team in January last year when the Red Warriors take on Asian champions Qatar in a Group E

game of the joint FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 qualifier on June 7.

The joint qualifiers, which have been rescheduled due to coronavirus pandemic and travel restrictions, will now be held in June. Though the dates of the three remaining fixtures of Oman were released by the Oman

Football Association (OFA) on Tuesday, the venue of the three matches is yet to be confirmed with Qatar in all likelihood to be the host of all the remaining Group E games as part of a secure bio-bubble single venue.

Following Qatar's match on June 7, Oman will meet Afghanistan on June 11 and then conclude their campaign with

their match against Bangladesh on June 15. A final decision on the venue is expected next month. With the matches now scheduled in scorching June, Qatar is the only country which is well equipped to host the matches as they boast of air-cool stadiums, which are ready to host the World Cup.

Qatar lead the group

standings with 16 points from six games while Oman is second with 12 but with a game in hand.

Afghanistan with four points from five matches are third in the group while India have three and Bangladesh have one point from five matches each.

Oman's last Asian Qualifiers ties were against India in 2019, with the Red Warriors securing

back-to-back triumphs against the Blue Tigers, recording a 2-1 win in September, before beating them again 1-0 in November.

With Qatar having already qualified for the Finals as hosts, Oman will fancy their chances of advancing to the third round of the qualifiers. Oman had lost their away game against hosts Qatar 1-2 at Al Janoub Stadium,

Al Wakrah, on October 15, 2019, the only defeat they have suffered in the second round.

On Monday, the OFA had announced that the national team will hold a camp from March 11-26 in Dubai, UAE. During the camp, Oman will play friendlies against Jordan (March 20) and India (March 25).

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