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MOODY'S AFFIRMS RATINGS OF SEVEN OMANI BANKS
GO TO PAGE 04 BUSINESS

Govt to build 328 houses destroyed by cyclone Shaheen

Our Correspondent
Suwaiq

The Ministerial Committee in charge of assessing the impact of cyclone Shaheen has tasked the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) to facilitate construction of 328 houses which were completely damaged during the tropical condition.

The Ministerial Committee held its fourth meeting on Monday in Suwaiq to look into updates and efforts made to deal with the aftermath of the cyclone.

The meeting was chaired by H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and chairman of the committee. He informed that MHUP "has been tasked with designing layouts for the construction of 328 houses for citizens that were completely damaged".

Responding to reports of the impact of Shaheen on aflaj in the governorates of North and South Batinah, H E Habsi informed that 80 aflaj and five dams were damage and that a tender has been awarded to repair 24 aflaj and two dams.

"The remaining dams will be



Eighty aflaj and five dams were damage and a tender has been awarded to repair 24 aflaj and two dams

H E SULTAN
SALIM AL HABSII

repaired as soon as technical procedures are finalised," he said, adding that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has been entrusted the task of conducting a study for protection of dams built along the course of wadis.

H E Habsi affirmed that the Ministerial Committee and concerned authorities agreed to draw out temporary solutions for

citizens to access their homes in the cyclone-stricken areas till such time that internal road restoration work is complete.

A team comprising the Engineering Services Division of Sultan's Armed Forces, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, MAFWR and the municipalities of North Batinah and South Batinah presented a report about the repair of internal roads damaged by the cyclone to the committee.

Proposed recommendations in this respect will be submitted to the authorities concerned to avoid repetition of such damage to roads and culverts during adverse climatic conditions in the future.

At the meeting, the committee announced two decisions, the first being an exemption for citizens who lost documents in the cyclone-affected areas from any fees when they apply for alternative documents.

The second decision pertained to floating a tender for the maintenance of two protection dams and 24 aflaj damaged during Shaheen. MAFWR has been tasked with finalising the related procedures.



OMAN GO DOWN FIGHTING TO BANGLADESH

Bangladesh staved off a tough fight from hosts Oman to bounce back from their opening game defeat against Scotland. Bangladesh beat Oman by 26 runs in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup First Round Group B game at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Amerat on Tuesday. Oman take on Scotland in the final group game on Thursday

Poor quality fuel need authorities' attention

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following launch of a hashtag through which citizens are expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of fuel available at gas stations, many are calling for the government to look into

the matter.

Through the hashtag, thousands of citizens have complained about the quality of petrol. They demand publication of results of an investigation carried out by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) two months

ago on fuel quality in the country.

"We need a clear and frank answer from the concerned authorities about the poor quality of fuel. How can a citizen pay high prices - the highest in the Gulf when compared to income - for poor quality fuel?" tweeted Rashed al Saeedi.

Earlier in August, MoCIIP issued a statement on the matter of fuel quality raised in some governorates. 'The ministry is currently monitoring what is being circulated on social media platforms about the quality of fuel in some governorates.'

Continued on Page 03

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Oman, UAE discuss boosting investments, industrial sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A high-level Emirati delegation led by Dr Sultan Ahmed al Jaber, UAE's Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology, visited Oman on Tuesday and met H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and other high ranking government officials.

The visit explored ways of broadening cooperation between the two countries in both the government and private sectors, especially in promoting industrial cooperation, and enhancing investment opportunities in the industrial sector and in advanced technologies.

Jaber said the continued strength of the bilateral relations between the two countries is a source of encouragement and pride, adding that he is looking forward to further enhancing cooperation in the areas of industry and advanced technology.

He noted that the next steps will focus on creating investment opportunities and facilitating measures for investors.

"Thanks to the vision and directives of our wise leadership," Jaber said, and pointed out that "the UAE is moving rapidly to develop the industrial and ad-



The visit of the Emirati delegation to Oman reflects determination of both countries to exchange views on expanding private-sector partnerships and investment opportunities

H E QAIS MOHAMMED AL YOUSEF

vanced technology sectors, investing in research and development and integrating Fourth Industrial Revolution concepts to achieve the key goals of boosting the national economy and achieving sustainable develop-

ment."

On his part, H E Yousef underscored the importance of developing bilateral relations with the UAE, particularly in the industrial sector. He pointed out that the visit of the Emirati delegation to

the sultanate reflects determination of both countries to exchange views on expanding private-sector partnerships, investment opportunities and trade volumes between the UAE and Oman.

Meanwhile, a meeting was held on the sidelines of the Emirati delegation's visit between representatives from the business and industrial sectors of the two countries.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the

Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Madayn, and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

During the meeting, OIA made a presentation on the investment opportunities and its affiliated companies.

OPAZ also gave a presentation on the investment opportunities in Duqm, while Madayn highlighted the partnership between the private sector and the future development projects in its industrial estates.



Oman Pavilion at Expo 2020 marks women's achievements

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai organised a panel discussion on the occasion of Omani Women's Day on Sunday with the participation of a group of leading Omani women personalities representing various sectors.

According to a statement, the participants discussed inspiring stories of Omani women in the business environment and their contributions to achieving a sustainable and innovative economic future.

A commemorative postage stamp on Omani Women's Day was unveiled on the occasion, while the brand 'Talid' was launched in a store in the sultanate's pavilion under the patronage of Hon Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, Member of the State Council.

She said in a statement that the occasion showcased the role of Omani women in development and sustainability, in addition to what they have achieved in different fields.

Entrepreneur Kamel bin Ali al Awfiya said that a delegation of

businesswomen from Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry participated in a discussion held in the GCC pavilion. "Bilateral meetings held between Omani businesswomen and businesswomen of the Ajman Chamber of Commerce and Industry sought to start business partnerships," she said.

The participants discussed possibilities of having joint cooperation mechanisms in various sectors, the statement said, adding that the event provided a platform to businesswomen to share their ideas and experiences with their counterparts from different countries of the world.

Diana Abdul Majeed al Zadjali, director of the Visual Arts Department in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and supervisor of the Omani Fine Artists Exhibition in the sultanate's pavilion, said that the exhibition highlighted Omani women's creations of traditional costumes, ornaments and other works through expressive symbols. The exhibition also displayed prominently the cultural and artistic achievements of Oman, the statement said.

Business opportunities in Buraimi explored at OCCI meet

Buraimi - Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (OCCI) branch in Buraimi held a meeting with officials from the government and private sectors, and the economic team in charge

of preparing a study to identify the economic and investment opportunities in the Governorate of Buraimi on Monday.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Ashraf Mushref, chairman of

the OCCI Chair for Economic Studies at Sultan Qaboos University.

The meeting reviewed the main objectives of the study, which include identifying eco-

nomics and investment opportunities of the promising sectors in the Governorate of Buraimi, providing a sectoral study and evaluating the available opportunities.

The study also aims at identifying the necessary incentives and privileges to enhance the investment environment and attract local and foreign investors. ONA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Great sports coverage

I am a legal adviser working in the Sultanate of Oman for the last 11 years and have been a regular reader and subscriber of *Muscat Daily*.

I would like to inform you of my appreciation for the sports coverage of *Muscat Daily*, particularly the coverage in Monday's edition in relation to the T20 World Cup tournament being hosted in Oman.

The coverage of the tournament, both on the

first page and the last few pages, was precisely captured with pith and substance.

I hope *Muscat Daily* continues to cover and report sports events in Oman and across the world with the same level of detail and accuracy.

Wishing the *Muscat Daily* team all the best for the future.

Abhishek Kalla
Azaiba, Muscat

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S

One of the most refined elements of the Persian culture is the hand-knotted carpet, seldom known by the general public. Traces of this art take us thousand years back. Initially, carpets were designed and hand-knotted to fill smaller tents, which could easily be transported by nomads, adapted by tribes to fit their demands and then gradually for entire rooms for those living in cities. There were no furniture and people would sit on the ground with some cushions.

The popularity of the art of Persian hand-knotted carpets is detailed in the historical narratives of such great historians as Xenophon and Herodotus, and the oldest hand-woven carpet till now in Iran (called Pazirik) dated back to the reign of the Scythians in Iran, in the Achaemenid era. It is called by this name, because it was found in the frozen tomb of a Sakai ruler in the Pazirik valley in Siberia, 80km from outer Mongolia.

Persian carpet was born at the same time as the Aryan sedentism, spreading animal husbandry and agriculture, and gaining knowledge about the use of animal wool, such as goats, sheep and cotton bones, and, after a period of historical ups and downs, it is now one of the best and most sophisticated souvenirs and artistic treasures of the Orient.

What makes the difference between the oriental hand-knotted carpet (Iran, Caucasus, Turkmenistan, Turkey etc), and others is that the wool from the sheep is cut on a full moon, and only from the upper part of the body of a living sheep. The wool is dyed, using solely natural dyes used since time immemorial and include red from the madder root, blue from



ONE OF IRAN'S TREASURES

the indigo plant, green and brown from walnuts skins, olive leaves and acorn cups, and yellow from more than 20 plants, such as saffron and chamomile, turmeric etc. Black does not exist in natural products.

Their designs vary from city to city, mainly representing paradise, with symbolic gardens and pools and animals.

The quality of a carpet depends on the quality of the wool or silk, the number of knots, which can be counted on the back of a rug of 6.4cm length, which requires one to bend down. This is why it is often said that carpet weaving is the only art in front of which one has to kneel down. Sometimes the motifs are more important than the number of knots.

There are several types of carpets, runners, kilim etc. Persian kilim rugs are unique, tapestry-woven rugs or carpets that are produced by interweaving warps and weft strands tightly. This process pro-

duces a flat surface that does not have a pile. In the past, families would take their kilim, often with elongated dimensions to the public baths, where marble pedestals were used to sit upon covered by a kilim.

In 1978, I was in charge of the design of Teheran's Carpet Museum, which was inaugurated by the Shah of Iran and the display of so many masterpieces of carpet designs was incredible, representing thousands of years of development. The museum is still the most important exhibition location of Iran's carpet weaving art.

Small carpet weaving takes a year to two, and this art employs millions of people in Iran. It is not just a floor covering, but a world of culture. The designs often have a purposely made mistake, to prove that only God can reach perfection and not humans. But in most cases, those who weave carpets in tribes do not follow designs. They create designs from their memories. The aesthetics of villagers and those of the cities vary. Since in the past there were no vacuum cleaners, people would brush the carpet from inside towards the exit door of a room. Specialists, just by passing their hands on the carpet are capable of telling the location of doors leading to the room.

Each carpet is a story, representing years of culture and development of a country which has so much more and much deeper impact than what people can see today. It is old and rich and next time you see a carpet, watch it with attention and talk to this hidden culture, and you will be amazed by its depth. Persian hand-knotted carpet forces you to look down at what is under your feet and discover the beauty which is near you.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of *Muscat Daily* or Apex Press & Publishing



Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company
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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company(OWWSC) announces that it will implement improvement works in pumping stations and main water transmission lines in the wilayats of Nakhal and Wadi Al Ma'awil in the South Batinah Governorate and Dakhiliyah Governorate during the period from October 25 to 26, 2021 for a period of (48) hours.

The company apologises for any shortages that may occur in the water supply.

The company urges all valued subscribers to take the necessary measures and continue to rationalise water consumption.

For more information, please contact the call center (1442).

Expats' plight: A ride in the quagmire

Blue-collar expats trapped in rigmarole of loans, buying work visas and renewing visas

Muscat - The plight of some unskilled low-wage earning migrants from the Indian subcontinent, mostly employed for housekeeping by facility management companies, is heart-breaking.

These blue-collar workers come to Oman in the hope of a better life, but end up in debt instead.

N Islam paid close to RO1,000 for a job visa to come to Oman and work for a facilities management company. He gets paid RO100 a month and stays in company accommodation.

Married with two children - aged five and 12 - Islam takes care of his mother, too. From his salary of RO100, RO65 goes towards loan repayment for the job visa and RO30 to support his family back in Bangladesh. He manages his food and medical expenses by doing part-time jobs in his free time.

Paying to renew work visa

Islam considers himself fortunate that he doesn't have to pay to renew his work visa, unlike his colleague S Alam.

They work in the same super-



I paid RO200 in advance for a visa and RO10 for the NOC. The company said that my old sponsor had blocked my visa. It's been over nine months they have not returned my RO210

RAHEEM

market but on different company visas. Alam needs to pay for visa renewal and his resident card every two years. "My visa renewal is due in a couple of months and my company has

asked me to pay RO372 for it."

Alam took a loan from a relative for a visa to come to Oman. He gets paid RO100 and sends around RO70 home for his family and loan repayment.

"One of my relatives bought the visa from the foreman of the company I work for now," Alam informed. He has two daughters, aged seven and 14, and his mother's responsibilities also rest on his shoulders.

He is hopeful following the new labour regulation that allows workers to change jobs without employer no-objection certificate (NOC) at the end of the contract. "I am looking forward to finding a company that does not ask me to pay for visa renewal every two

years," Alam said.

A Abdul too bought a work visa in Bangladesh to work in Oman that cost him RO1,400 and his company used to charge him RO400 for visa renewal. However on his current visa, after working for the first five months for a company in Muscat, he was shifted to another location. "My employer said there was some issue with the contracted company and did not pay me for those five months saying it did not pay the agreed amount."

In a limbo

Abdul continued to work due to his financial commitments but matters worsened by the day. "They shifted me to another location where 20 people were living in one room. It was difficult to even sleep," he said.

He left the job and had returned home to Bangladesh when he got a job offer from a restaurant. His new employer negotiated with the earlier company, but unfortunately, this was during the COVID-19 travel re-

strictions. He was able to return to Oman only after eight months.

Raheem, too, spent close to RO1,500 on a visa. He didn't have to pay for its renewal, but when he returned from vacation at the end of his first two-year contract, he was sent to a work in a seafood processing company. Working long hours in the cold didn't suit him and he fell ill. Since there was no medical insurance, he requested his employer to shift him to another company due to his health, but they refused. "They confiscated my resident card, threw me out of my job and cut RO410 from my salary dues."

Raheem was promised a job by another company and asked to pay RO500 for the visa and RO30 for NOC from his ex-employer. "I paid RO200 in advance for the visa and RO10 for the NOC. After a couple of weeks of follow-up, the company said that my old sponsor had blocked my visa and that they cannot help. It's been more than nine months, and they have not returned my RO210 nor helped me to get out of the problem."

Islam has been in Oman for four years but still cannot dream of visiting his family back home or taking a holiday.

"I don't save anything currently. Once my loan is cleared, I can think about a holiday. I can't go home empty-handed."

For Alam, it's been six years since he saw his family last. "I may need a couple of more years before I can think about visiting home."

Photo and text by Syed Fasiuddin

Omani farmer to cultivate 100 acres of fig in South Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has signed an agreement with farmer Ali Nasser Salem al Rasbi to plant 100 acres of Omani fig in the wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi in South Sharqiyah governorate.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Rasbi said, "The agreement is a good step to support Omani farmers. We will plant 100 acres of Omani figs in the next five years."

Elaborating on the agreement, Rasbi informed that 60,000 fig trees would be planted in this period, which will produce 40 tonnes to 45 tonnes of fig per month.

"The project aims to diversify the types of fruits in Oman, achieve self-sufficiency and generate enough produce for export, in addition to providing job opportunities. We expect production to start two years after implementation of the project."

Rasbi started farming in 2017 and currently his main goal is to diversify his income sources.

"My farm is spread over 40 acres on which we grow mangoes, lemon and orange, besides



Supplied photo

fig. In the first year, I planted 6,000 fig seedlings. Next season, I expanded by growing 5,000 more seedlings. My farm currently has an annual production of around 50 tonnes of fig.

"I have followed experts' recommendations regarding expansion and diversification of crops to boost food security which has become a key goal for the country as it targets self-sufficiency in

domestic crops."

In order to learn about various farming methods and increase crop production, Rasbi has visited several countries.

"I use modern agricultural techniques in my farm, including drip irrigation."

Referring to the agreement with the ministry, he said, "It will encourage Omani farmers to in-

It will encourage Omani farmers to increase their cultivation area to compensate for the losses they suffered due to pandemic

ALI NASSER AL RASBI

crease their cultivation area to compensate for the losses they suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I urge Omani youth to work in the agricultural sector to build a stable and sustainable future."

He also appealed to every Omani to plant a tree in their house or anywhere to increase the green coverage area in the sultanate.

Oman sees 24% increase in number of SMEs

Muscat - The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) till the end of August this year stood at 56,687, said the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data released by the NCSI noted a 24 per cent increase in registrations this year compared to 45,706 SMEs registered in August last year.

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list, marking an increase of 25.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2020

to reach 19,187 followed by the Governorate of North Batinah with a rise of 23.7 per cent to stand at 8,945. Dakhiliyah posted a rise of 20.1 per cent to reach 6,961, Dhofar 23.8 per cent (4,737) and South Batinah 28.1 per cent (4,341) among others. ONA



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

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Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Serial	Tender No.	Tender Description	Document fee	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Submission
1	49/2021/MM/PA-10 - Recall-1	Supply of Garbage Bags	25/- OMR	06/11/2021	23/11/2021	28/11/2021
2	59/2021/MM/PA-16	Maintenance of Fire Extinguishers, Fire Hoses, Sensors and Water Pumps.	25/- OMR	06/11/2021	23/11/2021	28/11/2021

Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.

Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through the link shown above accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The details of bond (amount & validity) must be as per tender's terms and conditions in the tendering Website starting from the date of bids submission. The original copy of the bond shall be submitted at **First floor at The Directorate General of Quantity Surveying & Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.**

Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.

Note:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Poor quality fuel need attention

Continued from Page 01

"The ministry took random samples of fuel from various petrol stations in different governorates and conducted octane test."

The ministry assured its 'continuous efforts to follow up on the observations and complaints received in this regard with the concerned companies'.

Naji bin Buraik, another Twit-

terati, said that citizens have the right to enquire about the quality of fuel and to appeal to the competent authorities in this regard, especially after fuel price has gone up. "High quality and unadulterated fuel is the consumer's right. We wish to hear answers, transparent and clear, from the responsible authorities that are supposed to protect consumers," he said.

Bader Ali al Shaibani, another citizen, observed that the problem wasn't in the quality of fuel, "but in the quality of follow-up, auditing and accountability", while Ibrahim al Jahdhamy described the silence on the matter as disturbing.

Following Oman's decision to peg its local fuel prices to international oil prices, petrol has become dearer in recent months.

REGIONAL WEATHER		
	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	35	24
Doha	36	26
Kuwait City	35	23
Manama	34	27
Riyadh	38	20
PRAYER TIMINGS		
Fajr	4.48am	
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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Ford to drive electric transformation at UK car plant

US auto giant Ford unveiled plans to convert a UK factory into its first component assembly site for electric vehicles in Europe.

Ford will invest £230mn in its Halewood plant on Merseyside in northwest England, the carmaker said.

Production will start in 2024 in a move expected to safeguard hundreds of jobs.

"This is an important step," said Stuart Rowley, president of Ford of Europe.

"It strengthens further our ability to deliver 100 per cent of Ford passenger vehicles in Europe being all-electric and two-thirds of our commercial vehicle sales being all-electric or plug-in hybrid by 2030."

"Today's announcement, backed by government funding, is a huge vote of confidence in Britain's economic future and our plans to ramp up electric vehicle production," added Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng.

Moody's affirms ratings of seven Omani banks, upgrades outlook

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Moody's Investors Service has affirmed the long-term local and foreign currency deposit ratings of seven Omani banks: Bank Muscat, HSBC Bank Oman, BankDhofar, National Bank of Oman (NBO), Sohar International Bank, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) and Bank Nizwa.

The global ratings agency has also changed its outlook to 'stable' from 'negative' on these ratings of all seven banks. At the same time, Moody's affirmed the baseline credit assessments (BCAs) and adjusted BCAs of the seven Omani banks.

In a statement, Moody's said these actions reflect its expectation of continued improvements in the operating environment where the Omani banks operate, as highlighted by the affirmation of the government of Oman's 'Ba3' issuer rating and change in the outlook.

Last week Moody's upgraded the outlook on the government of Oman's issuer rating to 'stable' from 'negative' and affirmed its long-term issuer and senior unsecured ratings at 'Ba3' for Oman.



The change in outlook to 'stable' from 'negative' on Omani banks' ratings reflects Moody's expectation of continued improvements in the operating environment

A secondary driver of these rating actions for Bank Muscat and HSBC Bank Oman, Moody's said, is the interlinkages between their creditworthiness and that of the sovereign, as the banks' standalone BCAs continue to be constrained at the level of the sovereign rating.

Moody's expects that the Omani government's willingness

banks' long-term deposit ratings reflects Moody's expectation of continued improvements in the operating environment where the banks exercise their business activities, and also mirrors the stable outlook on Oman's sovereign ratings.

Moody's affirmed Bank Muscat's long-term local and foreign currency deposit ratings at Ba3, its BCA and adjusted BCA at ba3. Bank Muscat's long-term deposit and senior unsecured debt ratings continue to be aligned with the rating of the Oman sovereign.

"The affirmation of Bank Muscat's long-term deposit ratings

reflects (i) the affirmation of Omani government's rating, and (ii) the interlinkages between the bank's and the sovereign's creditworthiness, as reflected in the affirmation of the bank's BCA at ba3,' Moody's said.

Moody's affirmed HSBC Bank Oman's long-term local and foreign currency deposit ratings at Ba2, its adjusted BCA at ba2 and its BCA at ba3. 'The bank's long-term deposit ratings continue to be one notch above the rating of the Oman sovereign, owing to the affiliate support from which HSBC Bank Oman benefits from HSBC Holdings, HSBC Bank Oman's ultimate parent.'

With regards to NBO's ratings, Moody's affirmed the bank's long-term foreign and local currency deposit ratings at Ba3, its BCA and adjusted BCA at ba3. 'The affirmation of the BCA at ba3 reflects Sohar International Bank's sound liquidity (31.6 per cent liquid banking assets/tangible banking assets) and gradually improving funding profile,' the ratings agency said.

On the other hand, Moody's affirmed Bank Nizwa's long-term foreign and local currency deposit ratings at Ba3, its BCA and adjusted BCA at b1.

'Bank Nizwa's long-term deposit ratings, at Ba3, still benefit from one-notch uplift from the bank's b1 BCA,' Moody's said.

Omani government's rating at Ba3.

For OAB, Moody's affirmed the bank's long-term foreign and local currency deposit ratings at Ba3, its BCA and adjusted BCA at ba3. The rating agency changed the outlook on the bank's long-term deposit ratings to stable from negative, which reflects Moody's expectation of continued improvements in the operating environment and mirrors the stable outlook on the Omani government's issuer ratings.

Moody's affirmed Sohar International Bank's long-term foreign and local currency deposit ratings at Ba3, its BCA and adjusted BCA at ba3. 'The affirmation of the BCA at ba3 reflects Sohar International Bank's sound liquidity (31.6 per cent liquid banking assets/tangible banking assets) and gradually improving funding profile,' the ratings agency said.

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'Bank Nizwa's long-term deposit ratings, at Ba3, still benefit from one-notch uplift from the bank's b1 BCA,' Moody's said.

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Jihad Azour

Mideast economy to grow by 4.1%: IMF

Dubai, UAE - The Middle East and North Africa is on track to economic recovery, but rising social unrest and unemployment are threatening to hinder 'progress', the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday.

The MENA region, which includes the Arab countries and Iran, saw its real GDP growth shrink by 3.1 per cent in 2020 due to lower oil prices and sweeping lockdowns to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

But with rapid vaccination campaigns, particularly in the Gulf nations, the IMF predicted that GDP growth would rise to 4.1 per cent this year, a slight upgrade of 0.1 per cent from the last projection in April.

"The region is going through recovery in 2021. Since the beginning of the year, we see progress in the economic performance," Jihad Azour, director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at the IMF, told AFP in an interview.

But 'this recovery is not the same in all countries. It is uncertain and uneven because of the divergence in vaccination... and geopolitical developments', Azour added.

The IMF said this month that while prospects for oil-exporting economies improved with higher oil prices, low-income and crisis-hit countries are witnessing 'fragile' recoveries. It warned of a rise in social unrest 'in 2021 that 'could pick up further due to repeated infection waves, dire economic conditions, high unemployment and food prices'.

Unemployment rates increased in MENA last year by 1.4 per cent to reach 11.6 per cent. This rise exceeds that seen during the global financial crisis and the 2014-15 oil price shock.

AFP

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Climate change a double blow for oil-rich Mideast

Paphos, Cyprus - The climate crisis threatens a double blow for the Middle East, experts say, by destroying its oil income as the world shifts to renewables and by raising temperatures to unliveable extremes.

Little has been done to address the challenge in a region long plagued by civil strife, war and refugee flows, even as global warming looks likely to accelerate these trends, a conference heard last week.

“Our region is classified as a global climate change hotspot,” Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades told the International Conference on Climate Change in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.

Home to half a billion people, the already sun-baked region has been designated as especially vulnerable by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the UN’s World Meteorological Organization.

Yet it is also home to several of the last countries that have not ratified the 2015 Paris Agreement - Iran, Iraq, Libya and Yemen - weeks before the UN’s COP26 climate conference.

When it comes to climate change and the Middle East, ‘there are terrible problems’, said



A firefighter battles the flame in a forest on the slopes of the Troodos mountain chain of Cyprus on July 3 (AFP)

Jeffrey Sachs, who heads the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

“First, this is the centre of world hydrocarbons, so a lot of the economies of this region depend on a fuel that is basically anachronistic, that we have to stop,” said Sachs of New York’s Columbia University.

“Second, obviously, this is a dry region getting drier, so everywhere one looks, there is water insecurity, water stress, dislocation of populations,” he said.

Sachs argued that “there

French foreign minister who oversaw the Paris Agreement, pointed out that in this year’s blistering summer, “We had catastrophic wildfires in Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Lebanon”.

“There were temperatures over 50°C in Kuwait, Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran. We have drought in Turkey, water stress in different countries, particularly Jordan.

“These tragic events are not from a disaster movie, they are real and present.”

Cyprus, the EU member closest to the Middle East, is leading an international push involving 240 scientists to develop a ten-year regional action plan, to be presented at a summit a year from now.

The two-day conference last week heard some of the initial findings - including that the greenhouse gas emissions from the region have overtaken those of the European Union.

Already extremely water-scarce, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been warming at twice the global average rate, at about 0.45°C per decade, since the 1980s, scientists say.

Deserts are expanding and

dust storms intensifying as the region’s rare mountain snow caps slowly diminish, impacting river systems that supply water to millions.

By the end of the century, on a business-as-usual emissions trajectory, temperatures could rise by 6°C - and by more during summertime in ‘super- or ultra-extreme heatwaves’ - said Dutch atmospheric chemist Jos Lelieveld.

‘Future conflicts’

“It’s not just about averages, but about the extremes. It will be quite devastating,” Lelieveld of Germany’s Max Planck Institute for Chemistry said.

Peak temperatures in cities, so-called ‘heat islands’ that are darker than surrounding deserts, could exceed 60°C, he said.

“In heat waves, people die, of heat strokes and heart attacks. It’s like with corona, the vulnerable people will be suffering - the elderly, younger people, pregnant women.”

Fabius, like other speakers, warned that as farmlands turn to dust and tensions rise over shrinking resources, climate change can be ‘the root of future conflicts and violence’.

AFP

China growth slows further in Q3

Beijing, China - China’s economic growth slowed more than expected in the third quarter, official data showed on Monday, as a crackdown on the property sector and a looming energy crisis began to bite.

After a swift coronavirus bounceback, recovery in the world’s second-biggest economy is losing steam, with gross domestic product expanding 4.9 per cent on-year, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), citing an ‘unstable and uneven’ domestic rebound.

The reading was just short of the 5 per cent tipped by analysts polled by AFP - and a sharp three per centage points off the April-June performance.

NBS spokesman Fu Linghui said, “Current international environment uncertainties are mounting and the domestic economic recovery is still unstable and uneven.”

The economy grew only 0.2 per cent from the previous three months, the weakest since a historic contraction in the first quarter last year.

“Growth was dragged down by a slowdown in real estate, amplified recently by spillover from Evergrande’s travails,” said Oxford Economics’ head of Asia economics Louis Kuijs.

The struggles of property giant China Evergrande - which is drowning in more than US\$300bn of debt - has battered sentiment among prospective buyers.

A government regulatory clampdown on the real estate sector - particularly the tightening of lending rules - has dealt a severe blow to a crucial driver of



Workers prepare to install a window panel at a construction site in Beijing on Tuesday (AFP)

Growth was dragged down by a slowdown in real estate, amplified recently by spillover from Evergrande’s travails

LOUIS KUIJS

economic growth, with a knock-on effect for other parts industries including construction.

Investors are now keeping a worried eye on developments in the Evergrande saga on concerns it could impact the wider economy.

However, China’s central bank at the weekend reassured that any financial sector fallout would be controllable, while governor Yi Gang told a seminar on Sunday that authorities were watching for problems like default risks ‘due to mismanagement and breakeck expansion’ at some firms.

In a sign of the ongoing weakness in the property market,

supply chain disruptions.

Analysts at Fidelity International said that while property fears were the ‘epicentre of the shock’, economic drag was being exacerbated by the power crunch, regional lockdowns and a ‘zero COVID’ strategy that hit the services sector and disposable income.

“The only surprise in China’s published GDP figures is that they have not come in lower,” said Paras Anand, Fidelity’s Asia-Pacific chief investment officer.

“Policy actions have been swift and have led to a collapse in global investor sentiment,” he said, though adding tightening measures have likely peaked for now.

Kuijs believed that although electricity shortages and production cuts will be controlled in the fourth quarter, ‘the pending real estate downturn will continue to weigh substantially on growth’.

AFP

Facebook eyes 10,000 European Union jobs to build ‘metaverse’

Paris, France - Facebook on Monday announced plans to hire 10,000 people in the European Union to build the ‘metaverse’, a virtual reality version of the Internet that the tech giant sees as the future.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has been a leading voice in Silicon Valley hype around the idea of the metaverse, which would blur the lines between the physical world and the digital one.

The technology might, for example, allow someone to don virtual reality glasses that make it feel as if they’re face-to-face with a friend - when in fact they are thousands of miles apart and connected via the Internet.

“The metaverse has the potential to help unlock access to new creative, social, and economic opportunities. And Europeans will be shaping it right from the start,” Facebook said.

The European Union hires, spread over the next five years, will include ‘highly specialised



engineers’, but the company otherwise gave few details of its plans for the new metaverse team.

“The EU has a number of advantages that make it a great place for tech companies to invest - a large consumer market, first class universities and, crucially, top quality talent,” the blog post said.

Zuckerberg predicted in July that Facebook will transition from ‘primarily being a social media company to being a metaverse company’ over the next five years.

In August Facebook unveiled Horizon Workrooms, a feature where co-workers wearing VR headsets can hold meetings in a virtual room where they all appear as cartoonish 3D versions of themselves.

‘No one company will own and operate the metaverse. Like the Internet, its key feature will be its openness and interoperability,’ Facebook said.

AFP

Toyota to invest \$3.4bn into US battery production

Tokyo, Japan - The world’s biggest carmaker Toyota unveiled plans to invest US\$3.4bn into automotive batteries in the US and build a factory in the country for their production.

The ten-year investment is part of a project announced last month by the Japanese firm to pour 1.5tn yen (US\$13.1bn) into the development and supply of batteries for electric vehicles as it pushes to make its production carbon-neutral.

“Toyota’s commitment to electrification is about achieving long-term sustainability for the environment, American jobs and consumers,” said Ted Ogawa, chief executive officer at Toyota Motor North America.

The company did not specify further details such as a site and production capacity but said it would establish a new company for the US project.

In June, Toyota said it aimed to make its production carbon-neutral by 2035, replacing the previous target date of 2050.

AFP



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Celebrate this Diwali with Vedha from Kalyan Jewellers

An ode to heritage and craftsmanship through statement gold jewellery accentuated with precious stones

Muscat, 19th October, 2021: Gearing up for the auspicious occasion of Diwali, Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most-trusted and leading jewellery brands, has launched the stunning Vedha collection - a line of handcrafted, heritage gold jewellery accentuated with opulent precious and semi-precious stones. These delicately crafted jewellery pieces exude an essence of old-world charm, with a tinge of new-age style, to create a design aesthetic that is sure to stay in vogue.

Vedha is perfect for the woman of today, who even when in charge of her own agency, proudly embraces traditions, preserves her cultural heritage

and invests in luxurious future heirlooms. The collection combines heritage designs with contemporary-cut precious stones like rubies, emeralds, sapphires, uncut diamonds and more. With over a 100 unique designs spread across long haars, necklaces, bangles, earrings and rings, Vedha from Kalyan Jewellers will bring home prosperity, positivity and happiness, this festive season.

Talking about the launch of the Vedha Collection, Mr. Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director - Kalyan Jewellers said, "We are extremely delighted to present our customers with the Vedha Collection, which is another unique brand that we are adding to our range of jewellery offerings. The timeless designs from the Vedha Collection

beautifully translate India's tryst with colours through shimmering gemstones, and designs that draw inspiration from enduring jewellery traditions of our land. With this collection, we aim to offer our customers a unique way to wear and celebrate India's rich craftsmanship legacy, and we could not think of a better occasion than Diwali, the festival of lights and new beginnings, to launch Vedha."

In a bid to make this festive season shine brighter for customers across Oman, Kalyan Jewellers has announced its Diwali offers, which includes up to 25% cashback on making charges of gold jewellery and up to 20% cashback offer is available on diamond, precious stone and uncut diamond jewellery. These offers are valid until Nov

30th, 2021, across all showrooms in UAE.

Customers can also avail gold rate protection by paying 10% advance on their intended purchase value.

The all-new Vedha will complement Kalyan Jewellers' existing collections, which include Muhurat, the bridal jewellery line curated from across India along with popular house brands such as Tejasvi (Polki jewellery), Mudhra (handcrafted antique jewellery), Nimah (Temple jewellery) and Rang (precious stones jewellery). The company's product designs also include a varied range of diamond jewellery as part of Glo (dancing diamonds), Ziah (Solitaire like diamond jewellery), Anokhi (uncut diamonds), Apoorva (diamonds for special occasions), Antara



Croctober set to deliver fan engagement

Croctober, a month-long, fan-fueled celebration of Crocs and its iconic Classics Collection, is back for 2021 with new digital and in-store activations that recognize and celebrate the brand's global tapestry of fans, in a bold, colourful and authentically Crocs way.

All Croctober long, Crocs fans will have more digital-first opportunities to engage with the brand than ever before, including a first-ever global partnership with Bitmoji. Through this activation, fans from all over the world will have the opportunity to showcase their personal style with a new digital collection of Crocs shoes and Jib-



bitz charms available for their Bitmoji avatars. The collection will feature a

range of Crocs shoes for users to choose from, including the brand's iconic Classic Clog in 11 colorways, plus the Classic Bleach Dye Clog, Classic Printed Camo Clog and more. Users can even select between three options of Crocs shoes accessorised with some of the brand's most popular Jibbitz charms in a nod to the global personalisation mega trend. This unique feature will be available to fans beginning on October 13.

More fan-first, one-of-a-kind moments, including Crocs Trivia on social media and in select Crocs retail stores, will also take place all throughout the month.

Countdown to Bank Muscat Al Mazyona draw begins

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has begun the countdown to the special Al Mazyona draw being held on the occasion of the 51st National Day celebrations in November.

The bank has announced that customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO1,000 in their Al Mazyona savings account will automatically be eligible to participate in the draw, which will see 51 lucky winners get RO2,000 each, with a total of RO102,000 being given away in the draw.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, deputy general manager - Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said, "We are delighted to invite all our Al Mazyona customers to take part in the upcoming National Day draw by saving more and getting more chances to win prizes. Bank Muscat always participates in all national



Abdullah Tamman al Maashani

events in order to bring joy and happiness to its customers and we call upon all our customers to continue their savings habit to get more opportunities to win exciting financial prizes."

It must also be noted that the special draw for National Day will be preceded in October by special draws on the occasion of the Omani Women's Day and the Omani Youth Day. The 2021 Al Mazyona Scheme will culminate with the special End-of-Year draw, which will reward customers with high value prizes worth over RO1.5mn.



ISG student wins IS Quiz 2021

Pavithra, a student of Class 9 of Indian School Ghubra won the first place in the Senior Category of IS Quiz 2021. This mega event comprising various rounds was organised by Indian School Muscat under the aegis of the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman. The Quiz was conducted by the renowned quizmaster Vinay Mudaliar.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, presented the certificate and trophy to the winners. Educational advisor Vinoba M

P, assistant educational advisor. Alex C. Joseph, were also present on the occasion.

More than 6300 students from 21 Indian schools actively participated in the various categories of IS Quiz. Several rounds based on topics such as World History and Culture, Art forms, Environment, Sports, Literature, Famous Personalities, etc, presented in innovative ways, made the quiz interesting and challenging for all the participants. The quizmaster praised Pavithra for her clear lead without any negative scores.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

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- 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; cppomanecd@cppmde.com over a period before **26th OCT, 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 **26th OCT, 2021**, shall not be entertained.

The ITB documents will be issued via email by CPP later. The bidders shall bear all cost arising from or incidental to the preparation, clarification, finalization and delivery of their bid proposal.

CPP is not obliged to accept the bid with least prices or any other bids. CPP reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids, at any time prior to award of contract, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders or; any obligations to inform the affected bidder or bidders of the ground for the CPP's action.

OOMCO focuses on retail customers

As part of the annual celebration held to advance, strengthen, and promote customer services, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) celebrates 'Customer Care Week' from October 17-21.

Each year, the company participates in a week-long celebration, honouring its community and providing customers with authentic and enriching experiences. The celebration was observed through a number of activities including an interactive social media competition, various customer care activities and the distribution of assorted gifts to customers at its service stations throughout Oman, including the Governate of Ad Dakhila, Asharqiya and Dhofar.

This celebration marks OOMCO's on-going efforts to improve its customers' overall experience. As a leader in the fuel marketing sector in the sultanate, it has dedicated itself to being the most customer-centric fuel marketer in the region and delivering a unique, and innovative, retail experience.

The mega service stations, being rolled out at flagship OOMCO fuel stations across the



Khamis al Shuhaibi

country, have been designed to include coffee shops, car care centers, convenience stores, shopping complexes with global brands, separate gyms for men and women, children's play areas, pharmacies, nurseries, ATMs, and business centers for students. But more than that, they offer a hub for community-based activities, and a stop to look forward to, on every journey.

"The fuel retail industry isn't one where customer service would spring to mind; traditionally it was a necessary, but mundane, part of owning a car. But there is so much more potential," said Khamis Nasser al Shuaibi, general manager of Shared Services at OOMCO.



2022 INFINITI Q50 presents with new smart features

The 2022 Infiniti Q50 sedan adds newfound smarts next year to its strong exterior style and tailored interior, including a Sport Black Edition grade specific to the Middle East market. Every Infiniti Q50 now includes wireless Apple CarPlay compatibility for 2022.

The 2022 Infiniti Q50 sedan continues its award-winning formula by combining a lean, athletic stance with a crafted, connected, and comfortable interior. The sedan is available in four well-equipped grades: Luxe, Sensory, Sport Black Edition and Red Sport.

Dual, high-definition displays feature smartphone compatibility software and Infiniti InTouch Services. Sound travels through an available Bose Performance Series 16-speaker audio system with Bose Centerpoint simulated surround that delivers a rich, balanced, and nuanced sound throughout the cabin.

Every 2022 Infiniti Q50 sedan is powered by a dynamic 3ltr twin-turbo V-6 paired to an advanced 7-speed automatic transmission with manual shift mode and Downshift Rev Matching, combining excellent drivability with efficiency.



Sports campaign helps in cyclone relief

More than 350 citizens and residents, including 55 women, participated in the “Sport brings us together” campaign, which was organized by Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) last Friday to help those affected by the recent climatic conditions that affected Oman (Cyclone Shaheen) in North Al Batinah and to contribute to the removal of waste from neighborhoods and streets resulted.

The volunteers participated in each of the wilayats of Suwaiq and Al Khaboura, where the campaign started at 7:00 am heading to North Al Batinah, with the participation of OOC board members represented by Sheikh Saif bin Hilal Al Hosani, Taha bin Suleiman Al Koshary, Khaled bin

Ali Al Adi, Saada Bint Salem Al Ismailia, and Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Jabri, and a number of NFs boards members, in addition to members of the sports committees and sub-committees, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Youth, sports clubs and athletes.

Volunteers have helped and supported in the affected wilayats in cleaning beaches and homes, removing waste from roads, helping the parties involved in the rest of the work, in addition to providing a range of games and artistic and educational competitions for children. The campaign also presented a number of initiatives during its presence, including providing two trucks loaded with drinking water, and distributing breakfast,

lunch and dinner to a number of affected people.

Taha Al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, said: “We are pleased to have a large group of athletes of all categories in this national campaign with the rest of the governmental and private institutions to support those affected by the cyclone in the North Al Batinah wilayats, and to support them and stand with them in this ordeal, and to complement the efforts made by our rational government, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.”

Muhammad Al-Yahmadi, Director General of Sports Affairs at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said: “Sports provide moral, voluntary and social les-

sons and messages. It embodies the noble and moral values that societies carry out such as ethics, volunteerism, solidarity and interdependence, and carries with it messages for young people and youth that sports are not only physical, artistic or competitive goals, but are higher and stronger than that.”

As for the professional runner Barakat Al-Harthy, who was one of the participants in the campaign, he expressed his happiness at his presence alongside the rest of the athletes in the campaign and said: “It is a great honor for us to be present in this national epic, and it is our duty as athletes to stand with the rest of society, as they are the basis of our success in our journey.”

Imdaad Al Batinah helps in cyclone clean-up

Imdaad Al Batinah, a leading waste management services provider in Oman, is playing a major part in ongoing clean-up operations in the aftermath of Cyclone Shaheen in the sultanate. The company has mobilised personnel and equipment in support of efforts to assist communities affected by the storm, which caused extensive damage to homes and infrastructure across the country's Batinah region, a press release said.

Imdaad Al Batinah, which provides municipal waste collection for the government of



Oman, is based within one of the most badly affected areas. Despite the challenges posed by the storm at its facilities and labor accommodation in the

city of Khabourah, the company was quick to lend support to local relief and clean-up efforts in the aftermath of the extreme weather event.



Bank Nizwa bags Domestic Foreign Exchange Bank award

Bank Nizwa has yet again proven its expertise by winning the Oman Domestic Foreign Exchange Bank of the Year award at the prestigious Asian Banking & Finance (ABF) Wholesale and Retail Banking Awards 2021.

As the first dedicated Islamic bank in the sultanate, Bank Nizwa has successfully pioneered Sharia compliant banking in the country in all aspect of its products and services.

Expressing pride at the global accolade, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa, said, “We are delighted to receive this coveted

recognition which underlines our global standards in providing Shari’a compliant products and services that are described meticulously and are delivered to exceed expectations. Our unfaltering approach is to continue providing the people of Oman a unique banking experience that combines Islamic banking with today’s dynamic financial requirements. The ABF Award honours this commitment and is an endorsement of the bank’s innovative propositions that caters to diverse banking requirements.”

“The utilisation of FX Waad is

multifold, given its market competitiveness and ease of usage, in addition to the assertion of Islamic principles. Over the past two years, the Bank has witnessed steady growth in its customer-base as more people seek an alternative solution to conventional banking.”, he added.

Bank Nizwa’s Treasury department caters to Retail, HNIs and Wholesale banking clients. As a specialised function, the department has played a significant role in supporting the government’s diversification plan as well as Oman’s 2040 vision.

Kempinski Hotel Muscat wins leading conference hotel award

Kempinski Hotel Muscat received an award for Oman’s Leading Conference Hotel during the 28th edition of the World Travel Awards 2021.

For meetings, weddings, or celebrations, the venue facilities at Kempinski Hotel Muscat are unparalleled in the city. Kempinski Hotel Muscat offers a range of options for small to large groups. Our conference rooms range in capacity from 16-48 people, a press release said.

World Travel Awards (WTA) is the most prestigious awards programme in the global tourism industry. WTA was established in 1993 to acknowledge, reward and celebrate excellence across all sectors of the tourism industry and is recognised globally as the ultimate hallmark of quality, with winners setting the benchmark to which all others aspire.



2022 Renault Koleos - engineered for attention

Renault’s first SUV the Koleos remains a favourite among customers and those looking for something different, which speaks volumes about the innovativeness that the car was built on.

Well-defined edges make the overall profile of the 2022 Koleos appear solid and athletic and is one of the most prominent features in this new version. A great combination of power and refinement, the Koleos makes its presence felt with large shoulders and muscular side panels that are further enhanced by a robust frontend; broad, smart-looking tires; and a distinctly large wheelbase.

A spokesperson for Renault

Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, “The 2022 car is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort. With its athletic profile, robust front end, roomy seats, taut lines underscored with chrome, Renault Koleos allows owners to take their journey with confidence. Featuring a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies Renault Koleos fully embodies the values of the top of the Renault line-up.”

The all-mode 4x4-i transmission results in a car that promises

owners all the power and comfort they would require on the road. The engine can be switched between two- and four-wheel driving giving drivers the liberty and flexibility to choose their own experience.

The car is engineered to mirror the comfort of being home, with spacious leg space, ventilated memory seats, a breathable cabin. With a choice of colours for the seats, owners can choose what defines them the best — for a roomier feeling, one can opt for lighter shades, while darker ones can be picked for more assertive looks. The 2022 Koleos also comes with all-new black titanium trims that replace its predecessor’s wooden trims.



Ooredoo supports cyclone relief

In keeping with its ongoing commitment to the community it serves, Ooredoo’s CSR programme, ‘Goodwill’ got into action to help those who were most affected by tropical cyclone Shaheen.

During and after the storm, over 70 volunteers from the Ooredoo family came together to first donate essential food and cleaning supplies to residents in Al Suwaiq, Saham, Al Khabora and Al Musanah, followed by

supporting on-ground efforts to clean up roads and homes in the areas affected.

At the same time, technical teams were deployed across Muscat and Al Batinah governorates to restore sites affected by the storm and ensure the network was operating with minimal disruption. In addition, ensuring families stayed connected with their loved ones, the telecom company offered unlimited WhatsApp data for

three days in the areas that were affected.

Ooredoo tied up with Oman’s Charitable Organisation and Dar Al Atta, to raise funds to support those in need, while also donating electronic devices, such as laptops, school bags and necessary household items. All profits made through the recent iPhone 13 launch will be donated to families in Al Batinah region who were affected by the cyclone.

Raed Mohammed Dawood,

director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, “At Ooredoo, we continuously stand by the people in Oman, and more so as we recover from the damages caused by the cyclone, that left many without homes, food and even water. As an integral part of the Omani community, we wholeheartedly launched a number of initiatives, as we believe together, we can rebuild the communities once again.”

Lebanon elite unite against blast probe

Beirut, Lebanon - They may often squabble but Lebanon's political parties seem united in rejecting an investigation into Beirut's massive port explosion that they fear could threaten their survival, analysts say.

The explosion of a huge stockpile of poorly stored fertiliser on the dockside on August 4, 2020 killed more than 210 people, wounded thousands and ravaged half the capital.

In the aftermath of mass protests in late 2019 demanding the ouster of the traditional ruling class, many said the disaster was just the latest example of official incompetence and corruption.

But months into a domestic investigation, no one has been held accountable.

Politicians have repeatedly obstructed the work of judge Tarek Bitar by refusing to show up for questioning, filing legal complaints against him or calling for his dismissal, which last week sparked deadly violence in the heart of Beirut.

Analyst Lina Khatib said hopes were fading of holding those responsible for the port blast accountable.

"The ruling class in Lebanon is in agreement about wanting the port probe to be abandoned and they will use all available means to derail it," said Khatib, director of the Middle East and North Africa programme at the Chatham House thinktank.



Protesters gather in front of the 'Revolution fist', symbol of Lebanon's October 2019 uprising, during a rally in the capital Beirut on Sunday (AFP)

The country's powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah has spearheaded a campaign to remove Bitar, accusing him of political bias.

The debate over his future, which comes after the previous investigator was removed in February, has already triggered the postponement of one Cabinet meeting despite the urgency of addressing Lebanon's acute eco-

nomics crisis.

'Battle for the rule of law'

Nadim Houry, executive director at the Arab Reform Initiative, said that the whole ruling class felt under threat in what he described as 'an essential battle in Lebanon for rule of law'.

'A section of society has decided that they want to go all the

way and ask for truth', but they face 'a political class that is willing to use threats, use violence, use even launching into another civil war to prevent that quest for truth from leading to a result', he said.

It emerged after the port blast that officials had known that hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate had for years been left to linger in a warehouse near

residential neighbourhoods.

Families of the victims see in Bitar the only hope for justice in a country where impunity has long been the norm.

After the 1975 to 1990 civil war, Lebanon issued a broad amnesty that benefited the country's warlords, allowing many of them to become political leaders.

"Regardless of what Bitar

finds, it's the idea itself that any of them can somehow be held accountable that they are resisting," Houry said.

Any success in the blast probe would set a precedent and unravel a 'impunity regime' under which each party agrees not to pursue the other for its crimes, as long as it is not targeted itself.

Tensions came to a boil last week after a rally against Bitar

tion, analysts say they ultimately wish to protect their own interests.

"Lebanon's ruling class may be political opponents but they are united in profiteering from the system... and they therefore oppose any steps to reform it or to instil accountability within it," Khatib said.

A spokesman for the families of blast victims quit on Saturday,

The ruling class in Lebanon is in agreement about wanting the port probe to be abandoned and they will use all available means to derail it

LINA KHATIB

organised by Hezbollah and its Shiite ally Amal descended into violence that killed seven of their supporters. The sound of gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades trapped residents indoors for hours, reviving memories of the civil war.

Hezbollah accused snipers of the Lebanese Forces, a Christian party, of causing the bloodshed, but the latter has denied this.

The army, meanwhile, is investigating a video circulated on social media that appears to show a soldier shooting at protesters.

While political parties have publicly supported an investiga-

after many feared he had been intimidated into toeing the Hezbollah line and calling for Bitar to step down.

Ibrahim Hoteit, who lost his brother in the explosion, lives in a Shiite-majority neighbourhood.

The following day, many refrained from taking part in a protest to mark the second anniversary of the now-defunct 2019 protest movement, fearing further violence.

"Ultimately, the ruling class want to push the Lebanese to conclude that the price of accountability is too high," Khatib said.

AFP



Turkish philanthropist Osman Kavala (AFP)

Turkey summons envoys over call for activist's release

Ankara, Turkey - Turkey on Tuesday summoned the envoys of ten countries, including Germany and the United States, after they called for the release of a civil society leader whose jailing has upset Ankara's relations with the West.

Parisian-born philanthropist and activist Osman Kavala (64) has been in jail without a conviction since 2017, becoming a symbol of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's growing intolerance of dissent.

The Turkish activist faces a string of charges linked to 2013 anti-government protests and a failed military putsch in 2016. Kavala denies the accusations.

In a statement on Monday, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the US called for a 'just and speedy resolution to his case'.

'The continuing delays in his trial... cast a shadow over respect for democracy, the rule of law and transparency in the Turkish judiciary system,' they said.

The embassies called on Turkey to follow the rulings of the Council of Europe, a human rights body it joined in 1950.

The Council of Europe has warned that it would launch dis-

ciplinary proceedings against Turkey 'in the event that [Kavala] is not released before' the human rights body's next meeting on November 30-December 2.

Kavala's next court hearing is set for November 26.

The ambassadors and charge d'affaires arrived at the Foreign Ministry in Ankara on Tuesday morning, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The diplomats were notified their statement 'overstepped boundaries' and 'attempted to politicise the legal process and pressure the judiciary', the ministry said.

'They were told that the focus on only Turkey-related court cases, especially Kavala's, insisting on keeping it on the agenda, was an insincere approach filled with double standards.'

Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu hit out at the embassies' statement late Monday.

"It is not acceptable for ambassadors to make a recommendation or suggestion to the judiciary for an ongoing case," Soyulu said on Twitter.

"Your recommendation and suggestion throws a shadow over your understanding of law and democracy."

AFP

Tunisia ex-president poses as Saied's critic-in-chief

Tunis, Tunisia - Paris-based former Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki has emerged as a vocal critic of incumbent Kais Saied's power grab, but analysts say he may lack the popularity to lead the opposition.

Saied on July 25 sacked the government, suspended the legislature and seized control of the judiciary, later moving to rule by decree in the North African nation.

Marzouki has used appearances on pan-Arab news channel Al-Jazeera to call his opponent a 'dictator', accusing him of carrying out a coup.

His hard line marks him out from the country's main political parties. Even Islamist-influenced Ennahdha, seen as a key target of Saied's moves, has called for 'peaceful resistance' and dialogue.

The 76 year old Marzouki, who has a reputation as a champion of democracy, was a prominent critic of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and became Tunisia's first president after the autocrat's fall in a 2011 revolution.

But he was later criticised for



Former Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki (right) has emerged as a vocal critic of incumbent Kais Saied (left)



Marzouki's ambition is to be the most prominent voice in the opposition

SLAHEDDINE JOURCHI

his alliance with Ennahdha, and his poor showing in a 2019 presidential election left his career in tatters. Saied won the poll in a landslide.

Today, unlike Ennahdha and other political parties, 'he has nothing to lose', said analyst Slaheddine Jourchi.

"Marzouki's ambition is to be the most prominent voice in the opposition," Jourchi said. "The current situation allows him to make a return to political life."

'Nascent dictatorship'

Marzouki and Saied have exchanged increasingly sharp barbs in recent days.

The former president urged France not to support Saied's

'coup against the revolution' and to 'respect Tunisia's national sovereignty'.

Saied in turn accused Marzouki of 'plotting against the state', ordered his diplomatic passport withdrawn and urged the Justice Ministry to investigate him.

Marzouki swiftly responded by saying he was 'not concerned by any decision issued by these illegitimate authorities'.

In a Facebook post, he slammed 'a nascent dictatorship in which the dictator is confused with the nation, recalling the Ben

Ali regime, under which opposing the dictator was considered treason'.

He also accused Saied of importing the 'Egyptian model' of President Abdel Fattah al Sisi, who took power in 2013 after leading the military's ouster of Islamist Mohamed Morsi.

Marzouki and Saied are both academics. The former studied medicine and has a broad knowledge of human rights issues, while the latter has a background in constitutional law.

AFP

Libyan town clings to memory of Moammar Gadhafi

Bani Walid, Libya - A huge portrait of Moammar Gadhafi marks the entrance of Bani Walid: Ten chaotic years since the Libyan dictator's death, residents of the desert town still hanker for his rule.

"Moammar Gadhafi is a symbol," said resident Mohamed Dairi, in his fifties. "We will always support him."

Unfinished concrete buildings litter the town of some 100,000 people on the edge of the Sahara desert, many of them scarred by bullets and mortar rounds fired during over a decade of conflict.

Rebels killed Gadhafi in his hometown of Sirte on October 20, 2011, months into the



A billboard praising slain leader Moammar Gadhafi topped with a Gadhafi-era flag is seen in the city of Bani Walid on Thursday (AFP)

NATO-backed rebellion that ended his four-decade rule.

Residents of Bani Walid, a stronghold of the Warfala tribe

- the country's biggest and a key pillar of Gadhafi's rule - had backed him to the bitter end.

Many fighters from the town

were killed, with more dying in further battles when rival fighter groups attacked.

Today, dusty wind whips through the town centre, where a decommissioned tank overlooks a dried-up fountain and a board bearing pictures of 'martyrs' hangs above a pile of mortar shells.

"Moammar will stay in our hearts forever," one resident told AFP.

"Before 2011, Libyans were the masters of their destiny. Since then we've seen ten years of injustice, bombing, killing and kidnapping," said Mohammad Abi Hamra, who wore a wristwatch bearing Gadhafi's face.

The 10th anniversary of Gad-

hafi's death comes as the country prepares for December elections, part of a United Nations-led peace process that some hope will help start a new, more peaceful chapter in Libya's history.

"The reason this town is so attached to the former regime is that the 2011 revolution brought nothing but wars, catastrophe, division of the country and violations of its sovereignty," said engineer Fethi al Ahmar.

"We still cling to the past because back then we had security, which is the main thing that's missing in Libya today," Ahmar added.

AFP

US envoy who brokered Afghan exit quits

Zalmay Khalilzad was the US ambassador to Kabul and then Baghdad and the UN

Washington, US - Zalmay Khalilzad, the veteran US envoy whose months of patient hotel-ballroom diplomacy helped end the US war in Afghanistan but failed to prevent a Taliban takeover, resigned on Monday.

In a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Khalilzad defended his record but acknowledged that he came up short and said he wanted to step aside during the 'new phase of our Afghanistan policy'.

'The political arrangement between the Afghan government and the Taliban did not go forward as envisaged,' he wrote.

'The reasons for this are too complex and I will share my thoughts in the coming day and weeks.'

Born in Afghanistan, the dapper 70 year old academic turned US diplomat took senior positions as part of the inner circle of former president George W Bush, becoming the US ambassador to Kabul and then Baghdad and the United Nations.

As former president Donald Trump itched to end America's longest war in Afghanistan, he brought back Khalilzad, who led exhaustive talks with the Taliban - without including the US-backed government in Kabul.

Those talks led to a February 2020 agreement in which US troops would leave the following



A file photo of US diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad

The political arrangement between the Afghan govt and the Taliban did not go forward as envisaged. The reasons are too complex

ZALMAY KHALILZAD

year. But peace negotiations between the Taliban and the leadership in Kabul failed to gain traction, and the government that the United States built over 20 years crumbled within days as US troops left.

Rare US figure

Steeped in Afghanistan's language and customs, Khalilzad was a rare US diplomat able to develop a cordial rapport with Taliban leaders whose regime was toppled by the United States after the September 11, 2001 attacks over its welcome to Al Qaeda.

Khalilzad, despite his Republi-

can affiliation, was kept in place when Democratic President Joe Biden defeated Trump and decided to go ahead with the withdrawal.

Khalilzad soon became a lightning rod for criticism, with even his superiors in the Biden administration - while voicing respect for him personally - faulting the diplomacy behind the 2020 agreement.

Blinken said that Khalilzad's deputy, Thomas West, would take over as the special envoy.

West is a longtime aide to Biden, serving on his staff when he was vice president. West has worked for years on South Asia

policy including on the US-India civilian nuclear deal.

Shortly before Khalilzad's resignation became public, the State Department said the United States would not be able to attend a new session called Tuesday by Russia that also includes China and Pakistan, historically the Taliban's primary backer.

After Trump ended US opposition to speaking to the Taliban, Khalilzad engineered the release from a Pakistani jail of the group's co-founder Mullah Baradar, seen as a figure who could deliver on promises, and spent months with the largely rural rebels in a luxury hotel in the Qatari capital Doha. But pictures of him smiling with the Taliban earned him heated criticism in Kabul where some in the now-fallen government as well as newly Western-oriented elite berated him and accused him of selling out Afghanistan.

AFP

House-to-house polio vaccination set to resume in November

Kabul, Afghanistan - The World Health Organization (WHO) together with the Unicef has welcomed the decision of the Taliban leadership to allow the resumption of house-to-house polio vaccination across Afghanistan.

In a press communiqué, the WHO said the vaccination campaign, which is set to begin on November 8, will be the first in over three years to reach all children in Afghanistan, including more than 3.3mn children in some parts of the country who have previously remained inaccessible to vaccination campaigns.

'A second nationwide polio vaccination campaign has also been agreed and will be synchronised with Pakistan's own polio campaign planned in December,' it said.

'This is an extremely important step in the right direction,' said Dapeng Luo, WHO Representative in Afghanistan.

'We know that multiple doses of oral polio vaccine offer the best protection, so we are pleased to see that there is another campaign planned before the end of this year. Sustained access to all children is essential to end polio for good. This must remain a top priority,' he said.

With only one case of wild poliovirus reported so far in 2021, Afghanistan has an extraordinary opportunity to eradicate



The vaccination campaign, which is set to begin on November 8, will be the first in over three years to reach all children in Afghanistan

polio. Restarting polio vaccination now is crucial for preventing any significant resurgence of polio within the country and mitigating the risk of cross-border and international transmission.

'This decision will allow us to make a giant stride in the efforts to eradicate polio,' said Hervé Ludovic De Lys, Unicef Representative in Afghanistan.

'To eliminate polio completely, every child in every household across Afghanistan must be vaccinated, and with our partners, this is what we are setting out to do,' he said.

A supplementary dose of vitamin A will also be provided to children aged 6 to 59 months during the upcoming campaign.

The polio programme has started preparations to rapidly

implement the nationwide vaccination campaign, which is a result of ongoing high-level dialogue between the UN and the Taliban leadership to swiftly and urgently meet the health needs of the people in Afghanistan.

'This is not only a win for Afghanistan but also a win for the region as it opens a real path to achieve wild poliovirus eradication,' said Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

'The urgency with which the Taliban leadership wants the polio campaign to proceed demonstrates a joint commitment to maintain the health system and restart essential immunizations to avert further outbreaks of preventable diseases,' he said.



A man celebrates with relatives after being released from Insein Prison in Yangon on Tuesday (AFP)

Myanmar protesters reunited with families

Yangon, Myanmar - Newly released anti-coup protesters in Myanmar were reunited with their families outside a Yangon prison Tuesday in tearful scenes on the second day of a junta amnesty as international pressure mounts on the regime.

The Southeast Asian country has been in chaos since a coup in February, with more than 1,100 civilians killed in a bloody crackdown on dissent and more than 8,000 arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

On Monday, the military said it would free more than 5,000 people to mark the three-day Buddhist Thadingyut festival, sending anxious families rushing to prisons, joyful at the prospect of reunions after months apart.

'I've missed you so much,' a mother wept over her newly released son, as he cradled his young child.

'I'm so proud of you.'

She was among hundreds who had gathered again on Tuesday morning outside the colonial-era Insein prison in Yangon, some carrying flowers and placards bearing the names of their relatives.

Buses pulled out, with former detainees inside giving the thumbs up gesture through the windows to the cheering crowd, some of whom flashed the three-fingered salute - a sign adopted by the democracy movement.

Than Toe Aung Was - imprisoned for around six months - was greeted by his jubilant sister outside.

'I would not say why I was arrested,' he said, urging people to 'move forward for the future'.

'I'm happy for my release. But I will have to try for those who are not released,' he added, flashing the crowd a three-fingered salute.

Meanwhile, Nwet Nwet San said he was hoping his son, a sol-

dier who had run away from the army, would be freed.

'He's been in prison for eight months,' he told AFP, adding that although he had heard it was mostly protesters being released, others would be set free too.

'That's why I'm waiting.'

The amnesty was 'a tactical response to a pretty hostile domestic and international environment', Richard Horsey of the International Crisis Group said.

'These kinds of cynical moves may have worked 20 years ago... but it will do nothing to improve the standing of this regime.'

Myanmar authorities released more than 2,000 anti-coup protesters from prisons across the country in June, including journalists critical of the military government.

Those still in custody include the American journalist Danny Fenster, who has been held since being arrested on May 24.

AFP

Indian boat sinks after collision with Sri Lanka's navy vessel

Colombo, Sri Lanka - An Indian fishing trawler has sunk after allegedly ramming a Sri Lankan navy vessel that was driving out poachers from the island nation's prawn-rich waters, officials said on Tuesday.

The two countries are separated by the narrow Palk Strait known for its jumbo prawns, with Sri Lankan fishermen long accusing their Indian neighbours of poaching in their territory.

The incident took place late on Monday, with rescuers still searching on Tuesday for one of the trawler's missing crew members, the navy said in a statement. Two other fishermen from the boat were rescued, it said.

'The search and rescue operation is being augmented by a team of navy divers, fast attack craft and inshore patrol craft,' the navy added.

On Sunday Sri Lankan fishermen took to the sea in a protest that called on authorities to block Indian fishing boats from their waters and end bottom trawling.

Sri Lankan fishermen say every week, several Indian vessels enter their waters to fish.

An Indian fisherman was allegedly killed by Sri Lankan forces in March 2017.

AFP

Russia 'obstacle' to peace, says US Pentagon chief on Kiev trip

Kiev, Ukraine - US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday called on Moscow to stop prolonging the war in eastern Ukraine, his second stop in Black Sea countries he said were threatened by Russian expansionism.

'We again call on Russia to end its occupation of Crimea and to stop perpetuating the war in eastern Ukraine, to end its destabilising activities in the Black Sea and along Ukraine's borders,' he said in a meeting with Ukraine Defence Minister Andriy Taran.

'Russia started this war and Russia is the obstacle to a peaceful resolution,' he added.

Austin was in Kiev for discussions on advancing the two countries' defence cooperation, building on the Strategic Defence Framework announced in Washington at the beginning of September. His meetings with Taran and President Volodymyr Zelensky for the second time in less than two months were important for building cooperation among Black Sea countries, he said, including Georgia and Romania, to confront increased Russian activity in the Black Sea.

Responding to European concerns that the US is now focusing most of its security attention on China and the Indo-Pacific region, Austin stressed: 'This region remains critical to us.'

'I like the minister,' he added.

'That's why I came back to see him so soon.'

Ukraine has 'no doubts'

Taran said Ukraine remained confident in the United States despite the US abandonment of Afghanistan after a 20-year war against the Taliban. 'We have no



US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Ukrainian Defence Minister Andriy Taran (left) at a welcoming ceremony, in Kiev on Tuesday (AFP)

doubt in support from our strategic partner,' he said.

'The United States understands the importance of Ukraine's struggle for its independence, for deterring Russian aggression.'

But Taran's restatement of Ukraine's desire to graduate from a strategic partner in NATO to full member was not answered by the Pentagon defence chief.

Washington continues to fall in line with Germany and France, who see admitting Ukraine to the Atlantic alliance as a high risk

given Moscow's adamant opposition to it.

Austin visited Georgia on Monday, and is due in Romania Wednesday, with the same message of solidarity and offers of continuing defence support in the face of challenges from Russia.

As well as providing weapons such as anti-tank missiles to Ukraine's fight against Russia-allied rebels in the east, the Pentagon has provided a number of patrol boats to Ukraine's Black Sea navy.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US to allow vaccine booster mix and match

Washington, US - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is preparing to allow 'mix and match' coronavirus vaccine boosting, in which people get a different additional shot to the dose they initially received, US media reported.

Citing sources familiar with the situation, *The New York Times* said the FDA might make the announcement on Wednesday when it is also expected to authorise boosters for the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

A preliminary study released in the United States last week showed that people who have received the J&J vaccine may benefit from a booster dose of a different, messenger-RNA vaccine such as Pfizer or Moderna.

But multiple reports quoted people familiar with the discussions as saying one shot may not be recommended over



Colin Powell died from complications from COVID-19 on Monday

The national flag is seen at half mast atop the White House following the death of Former Secretary of State Colin Powell on Monday (AFP)

another, and the FDA could say using the same vaccine is preferable when possible.

"People should generally get the same vaccine as their initial series," a federal official told *The Washington Post*.

Proponents of mixing and matching point to its benefits in terms of simplifying vaccine rollout, and ensuring those who need boosters can get them regardless of which jab they initially had.

"From a public health perspective, there's a clear need in some situations for individuals to receive a different vaccine," Amanda Cohn, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention official, told *The New York Times*.

In July the World Health Organization's (WHO) chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said mixing and matching vaccines was 'a bit of a data-free, evidence-free zone'.

The US study on boosters, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, has several limitations.

The number of participants was small, and the immune response could evolve beyond the 15 days observed during the study.

In the US, over-65s, adults with high-risk medical conditions, and those in jobs where they are frequently exposed to the virus are eligible to receive booster shots.

The WHO's vaccine advisors recommended last week that people with weakened immune systems should be offered an additional dose of all WHO-approved COVID-19 vaccines.

But the WHO wants a moratorium on booster doses for the general population until the end of the year to prioritise first doses in the dozens of nations starved of vaccines.

AFP

New Zealand cases hit record despite vaccination push

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand recorded its highest number of daily coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic on Tuesday as a Delta-variant outbreak that dashed the nation's 'COVID Zero' hopes showed no signs of easing.

Health authorities announced 94 new virus cases, exceeding the previous daily record of 89 set in April last year during the first wave of COVID-19 infections.

While case numbers remain low by most international standards, they have been steadily growing since the highly transmissible Delta variant was first found in New Zealand in mid-August.

The outbreak, centred on Auckland, has forced Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to drop her core policy goal of eliminating the virus in favour of ramping up vaccination efforts.



This file photo shows motorists queuing up for COVID-19 tests when Auckland was under a three day lockdown in February this year (AFP)

The centre-left leader is set to unveil a new strategy on Friday that will allow for greater freedoms once vaccination targets have been reached.

Around two-thirds of the eligible population have now been fully inoculated.

"We know that vaccinations are already making a significant difference to the outbreak in Auckland, but so too are people following the rules," she said.

Before the arrival of Delta,

New Zealand won widespread praise for its hardline approach, which involved strict lockdowns, rigorous contact tracing and tight border restrictions.

The measures paid off, with just 28 deaths in a population of 5mn and domestic life near normal for long periods.

But Ardern has conceded Delta was a 'game-changer', spreading at a rate too fast for contract-tracers to keep up.

AFP

Singapore further eases rules for fully vaccinated travellers

Singapore - Singapore on Tuesday began quarantine-free entry for fully vaccinated passengers from eight countries, part of a plan to ease restrictions as the business hub gears up to live with the coronavirus.

The latest easing expanded a programme that began with vaccinated air travel lanes with Germany and Brunei last month, and is now open to passengers from the United States, Canada, Britain, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

Singapore Airlines said flights from Amsterdam, London, Los Angeles and New York were scheduled to arrive on Tuesday under the programme.

'We have seen very strong demand for our Vaccinated Travel Lane flights,' the national airline told AFP.

'This is across all cabin classes, as well as various travel segments including leisure, families, and business travel.'

Passengers arriving as part of this scheme - which will include South Korea from November 15 - will not have to quarantine if they have been fully vaccinated and test negative for the virus before they depart and when they arrive.

To enable families to travel, Singapore has allowed entry to unvaccinated children aged 12 years and under if they are accompanied by someone flying under the scheme.

Raj Samuel, a restaurant manager in the almost deserted tourist district, said he was 'optimistic' about the potential for more business.



A passenger arrives under the Vaccinated Travel Lane at Changi Airport in Singapore on Tuesday (AFP)

We have seen very strong demand for our Vaccinated Travel Lane flights. This is across all cabin classes, as well as various travel segments including leisure, families and business travel

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

"I think it's an excellent move by the country to help open up the economy...especially for the food and beverage sector," the 36 year old said, adding he was "looking forward to having more guests."

Kylie Jens, a 29 year old lawyer from New Zealand living in Singapore, said she is planning to go to Britain for Christmas under the scheme.

"Singapore is just such a

small island, it's nice to have a chance to get away and know that that's possible pretty soon," she said.

The city-state initially fought the COVID-19 pandemic by shutting borders, imposing lockdowns of varying intensity and aggressive contact tracing. But with more than 80 per cent of the population fully vaccinated, authorities are keen to revive the economy.

"Singapore cannot stay locked down and closed off indefinitely," Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said earlier this month when he announced a raft of measures under the 'Living with COVID-19' strategy.

The city-state is home to the regional offices of thousands of multi-national corporations, which rely on Singapore's status as a business and aviation hub for their operations.

Vaccinated travel is a 'very significant step forward in re-establishing Singapore's role as one of the Asia-Pacific's leading international hubs for finance, regional headquartering and commercial aviation', said Rajiv Biswas, Asia Pacific chief economist at IHS Markit.

AFP

Pfizer seeks approval for jab for children

Montreal, Canada - Pfizer-BioNTech submitted an authorisation request to Health Canada on Monday for the use of its COVID-19 vaccine in children aged 5-11, the firms and the Canadian government said.

'This is the first submission Health Canada has received for the use of a COVID-19 vaccine in this younger age group,' it said in a statement.

The authorisation request is based on data from trials conducted on 2,268 children in this



age group for whom the dosage was lowered to 10 micrograms per injection - three times less than the standard dose - which the company says is 'the preferred dose' for 5-11 year olds.

This same Pfizer-BioNTech

vaccine is approved in Canada for ages 12 and up.

Health Canada said that it will only authorise the use of the vaccine if the independent and thorough scientific review of all data submitted confirms that the benefits outweigh the risks with this group.

The Canadian ministry also indicated that other manufacturers also were testing their vaccines on children of different age groups.

AFP

N Korea fires suspected submarine-launched ballistic missile: Seoul



A man watches a television report showing a broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, in Seoul, South Korea on Tuesday (AFP)

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired a suspected submarine-launched ballistic missile into the sea on Tuesday, the South's military said, the nuclear-armed country's latest advance in weapons technology and one that could give it a second-strike capability.

The test came with both Koreas building up their weapons capabilities in what could become an arms race on the peninsula, and with the Washington-Pyongyang dialogue at a standstill.

The 'short-range ballistic missile suspected to be an SLBM' was fired from Sinpo into the sea east of the peninsula,

Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff

said in a statement.

Sinpo is a major naval shipyard with satellite photographs previously showing submarines at the facility, and the statement added, 'South Korean and US intelligence are closely analysing for additional detail.'

The key question will be whether it was fired from a working submarine, or an underwater platform or barge.

A proven submarine-based missile capability would take the North's arsenal to a new level, allowing deployment far beyond the Korean peninsula and a second-strike capability in the event of an attack on its military bases.

Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo all condemned the launch,

with all three describing it as a ballistic missile.

Under sanctions

North Korea is banned from developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles under UN Security Council resolutions, and is subject to multiple sets of sanctions as a result.

Pyongyang is known to be developing an SLBM and has carried out two previous underwater launches in 2016 and 2019, although the Pentagon and analysts say those were likely to have been from a submerged platform with the system in its early stages.

"The Kim [Jong Un] regime is developing submarine-launched

ballistic missiles because it wants a more survivable nuclear deterrent able to blackmail its neighbours and the United States," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"North Korea's SLBM is probably far from being operationally deployed with a nuclear warhead," he said, "but Kim cannot politically afford appearing to fall behind in a regional arms race."

The missile travelled around 590km at a maximum altitude of about 60km, an informed source told AFP.

For its part South Korea last month tested its first SLBM, putting it among the elite group of nations that have demonstrated

proven technology, and also unveiled a supersonic cruise missile.

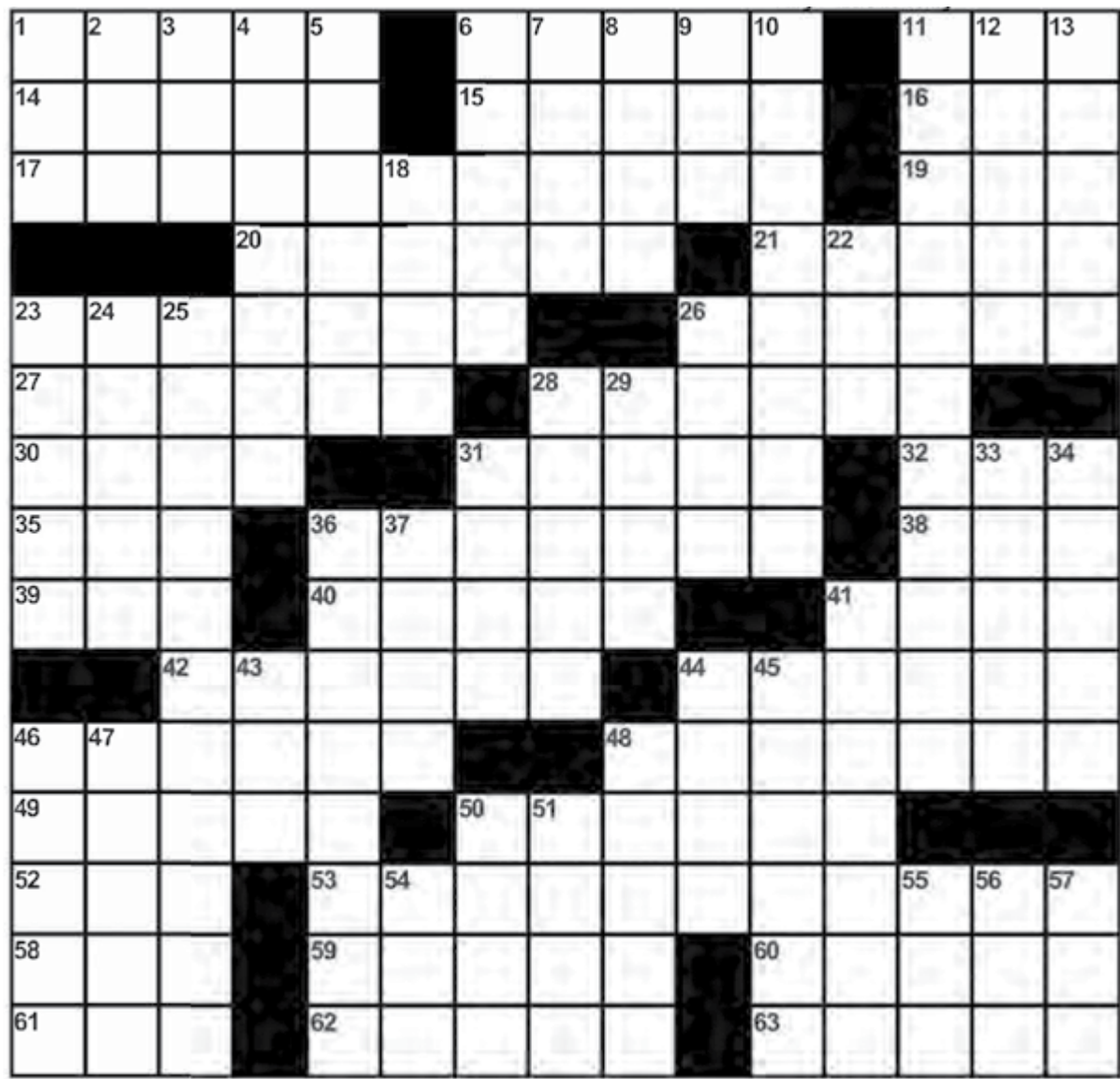
Tuesday's launch comes after North Korea recently tested a long-range cruise missile, a train-launched weapon and what it said was a hypersonic warhead, sparking global concern.

South Korea's National Security Council convened an emergency meeting over Tuesday's launch, expressing 'deep regret' and urging Pyongyang to return to dialogue.

US Indo-Pacific Command said, 'The United States condemns these actions and calls on the DPRK to refrain from any further destabilising acts'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Religious leader's maxims

6) Like the frontrunner

11) It checks the water

14) Pizzeria necessities

15) Beatniks beat it

16) Verse of glorification

17) Does a certain pet-owner's chore

19) Type of instinct

20) Twelve-strong panel

21) Postpone for later action

23) Waiter's charge

26) Is appropriate for

27) Footwarmer for a wee foot

28) Saggy, brimless toppers

30) Early birds?

31) Dropped hints about

32) EL_ (Charlton Heston role)

35) Western agreement?

36) Optical solution

A FRIEND INDEED

38) Put into play

39) Place for yacht-

ing

40) They spin in the wind

41) Extreme bitterness

42) More beloved

44) Emulated a hummingbird

46) Sum part

48) Ones skilled in laws

49) One having a ball?

50) Male part of a flower

52) "What _ bid?"

53) It's better to let it lie

58) Heat provider for all

59) They may be induced

60) Beloved English princess

61) Unit of work or energy

62) Napoleon's fate

63) South American range

DOWN

1) Deep, as a voice

2) Eggs in a lab

3) Hair salon application

4) Some printers

5) Allay fears

6) More than dislike

7) Groundbreaking one?

8) Puts a stop to

9) Long_ (the distant past)

10) Some canines

11) Bone-shaped snacks

12) Motion picture rating word

13) Dispenses, as justice (with "out")

18) Rainforest unit

22) Place for ruders

23) Follows commands

24) Elephant gone amok

25) Swimming, in a way

26) Some lingerie items

28) Leafy nook

29) Pilots' approximations, briefly

31) Hackman of Hollywood

33) Speck of land in the ocean

34) They contain property lines?

36) Disappear gradually

37) It has three feet

41) Earn, as money

43) Moray, e.g.

44) Moore of movies

45) Business meeting outline

46) Humiliate

47) Raise objections

48) Moment of forgetfulness

50) Prefix meaning "half"

51) Blueish hue

54) Bagel shop order

55) Mom's man

56) What two heads are better than

57) Type of station

NOTE PAD

STUD INCUS AGES
ARGO ROUGE TERI
LEAVE AT THE ALTAR
AMNESTIES PAR
MOD SEC ROSILY
IRAQ LEAVES DIE
USA WESTMOST
EXIT STAGE LEFT
PREDATOR TEN
AIR LANED SASS
SCORER ERG LAC
XAS TRAINABLE
GO INTO SECLUSION
ANNE CANOE KNOT
LOGE TREND SONS

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Comfortable? Good. Because you'll be interviewing potential partners for the next few days, and you'll need to give that tender task your full attention. Yes, it's a tough job. But heaven knows if anyone is up for tough jobs, it's you. Now settle down, pull out your yellow legal pad and your special pen, and get to work. Only so many hours are in a day.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've done everything you possibly could to avoid having this conversation, but you're not on the planet alone. So while you won't relish having to say certain things, you can at least stop blaming yourself. Remember, you're only half responsible. It definitely takes two to tango, and today's dance is no exception. So say what you have to say, then move on with your life.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

As optimistic as you ordinarily are, there's one particular person who can bring you down, make you doubt yourself and others and set you to wondering if it's really at all worth the effort you've invested. Your mission, right now, is to avoid that person for at least the next 48 hours. It's not that you'll never see them again. But you need all the positive energy you can muster.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

This could be tricky the whole day, that is. The good news is you're entirely familiar with the concept of doing battle, so if someone tries to put one over on you, no matter who they happen to be, you absolutely won't stand for it. That goes double for anyone who thinks higher of their own authority than they really should. It might be time to take them down a peg or two.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Don't take any guff from someone who thinks they have you over a barrel because they know your secrets and how badly you want to protect them. You happen to know something just as potentially volatile about your tormentor. Not that you'd really ever choose to say anything about it. But do make it clear you know what they're up to and you're not going to play their game.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It might not be fun, and it probably won't go down in your mental scrapbook as the best on record, but once you've made it through this day, you'll feel really good about yourself as if you've accomplished something. So when it seems as if the universe is throwing everything but the kitchen sink between you and where you need to be, don't give up.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Most of the planet doesn't deal well with change. Fortunately, you just love it. You're a living example of how great the ebb and flow of the universe can be. Keep those facts in mind when you're dealing with others who aren't open to last-minute modifications in their carefully planned schedules. They may not be kindred spirits, but they're fellow humans. Convince them to loosen up.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Bet you're feeling a bit tired right about now, hmm? Especially if you were out and about last night, playing with your friends. Well, grab yourself a power nap, because last-minute changes in your plans for the evening could mean you'll be up late once again. And if you can't fit in a nap? Oh, well. As the saying goes, "You can sleep when you're dead."

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've put everything you possibly could into making this thing work, but relationships can certainly develop minds of their own. Basically you've been taking one step forward and two back. If you're not ready to end it, don't worry. It doesn't matter whether it's a friendship, a romance or a business, this partnership will wait until all conditions are absolutely right.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to navigate a very delicate situation: Tending to your family duties and satisfying your urge to climb the career ladder. Well, if anyone can do it, you can. Tenacity, after all, is your specialty, even so, staying diligent may be trickier than usual. Not to worry: If you work your magic the way you always have, you'll pull it off.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's an instant replay of yesterday, complete with every last stumbling block, barrier and impediment you could possibly have imagined as well as a couple you hadn't. You being you, however, these challenges will only sweeten the pot. You'll gladly jump through every hoop, navigate every obstacle on the course and do whatever it takes to get where you want to be.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

They can certainly try to put one over on you, but it's not going to work. You've come up with a brand-new approach to life -- and you're eager to try it out. So when someone comes to you for your opinion, you'll be happy to share it. Just try to be gentle. Today's buffet of astrological energies could leave you looking a bit more stern than you really are.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Mother Teresa received the Magsaysay Award in 1962 in the area of

a. Community leadership

b. public service

c. journalism and literature

d. international understanding

2. Of the various non-conventional energy sources that are being tapped, which has the largest potential?

a. Water power

b. Wind power

c. Solar power

d. Biomass power

3. Microphone is used to convert

a. sound waves into electrical energy

b. sound waves into light rays

c. electrical energy into sound waves

d. sound waves into magnetic currents

Answers: 1.d 2.c 3.a

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

U	I	S	O
D	E	D	E
T	L	N	S
W	K	O	S

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

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

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

When you walk into Forchetta Cafe, in Shatti al Qurm, you enter with raised brows; but when you leave, you would’ve cultivated a smile that’s almost Italian, after wiping the cheese dripping from the corner of your lips

Taste of ITALY



Hubert Vaz

The most difficult part about enjoying Italian food is the fact that you cannot possibly savour a variety at one go and totally enjoy your meal. This means you need to try out various dishes on different occasions, and keep coming back for more as Italian food has a tendency to grow on you.

And if you thought Italian food is just about pastas and pizzas, you can now take your blinkers off. From a range of salads and risottos to lasagnes and gnocchis, and a host of lip-smacking desserts to die for, you can savour dishes from an exhaustive menu, prepared by chefs skilled in genuine Italian cuisine, at Forchetta Cafe. Located on the ground floor of the same building as Shatti Cinema at Shatti al Qurm, this restaurant gives you a glimpse of Italy through its food.

The small flight of



stairs that lead you to the main door, presents the feel of entering a

pub while the ambience within is warm and beckoning, promising a feast for the senses. The comfortable seating arrangements, the mocktail bar at one end and the courteous staff all make your apprehensions disappear in a few seconds until its time to place your order and wait for the culinary magic to unfurl into your lap.

Butterfly effect

Staff at the restaurant reveal that all Italian preparations are made by sourcing best local ingredients (which includes vegetables, meat, poultry and seafood and spices) while certain cheeses and sauces are imported to keep the culinary experience hundred per cent authentic.

They also reveal the key mantra sounded out to them by their CEO Amer Abdullah al Siyabi who calls it the ‘butterfly effect’ - if you give out a good vibe, it always returns with a good vibe; if you give out a bad vibe, it returns with a bad vibe. And so, the team within the kitchen and behind the scenes all

Genuine experience

“I want all my customers to get a genuine experience of Italian food. When they come here, it is our job to ensure that they are totally comfortable and satisfied, and leave with a smile,” says Siyabi who heads the operations of the establishment belonging to the Mazin al Julandani group.

Hailing from a village in Ibra, Siyabi discloses that he was never exposed to any international cuisine, except for a type of ‘Super Supreme Pizza’ which an American teacher during his high school days often treated his students to. So much in love with pizzas after that, he kept frequenting different pizza outlets in the US during his university studies, and though he works as a skilled engineer in oil exploration in Oman, he chose to realise his dream of setting up an Italian food outlet - something that had been on the back burner of his mind for years.

Forchetta opened around 2016 and has been enjoying a mixed clientele ever since. The menu is changed frequently with new dishes being churned out in the kitchen every now and then, while a few live performances are also held within the cafe, from

focus on giving a good vibe to their patrons.

I want all my customers to get a genuine experience of Italian food. When they come here, it is our job to ensure that they are totally comfortable and satisfied, and leave with a smile

AMER ABDULLAH AL SIYABI

time to time, to keep diners entertained. Just two days ago, the restaurant saw a full house turnout which came to enjoy a spirited performance by a local stand-up comedian.

Siyabi, who had chased his quest for a dream pizza while in the US, as well as in different outlets in Oman, admits that he found most of them to be quite greasy - leaving behind a not-so-good feeling after a meal. Hence, the pizzas at Forchetta are customised keeping this factor in mind, and many patrons who said they weren’t fond of pizzas, have now taken a liking for pizzas after trying them out at this restaurant, he said.

The name

Forchetta (pronounced ‘for-ket-a’) is the Italian word for ‘fork’ and it was used in the name as well as an icon in the restaurant to symbolise Italian food which is mostly consumed using a fork. The name also reminds him of his many experiences with Italian

food in the US and he wants diners in Oman to establish a similar relationship in their own minds after enjoying Italian food at this restaurant.

He also disclosed that the seating in the restaurant has been kept quite comfortable as he wants diners to relax and slowly enjoy their food, not eat and rush out as in many other restaurants. Regular feedback is also taken from patrons in a bid to improve and enhance the experience, he said, also disclosing that he plans to introduce a few new dishes that are purely Italian but with an Omani twist.

Having dined in other Italian restaurants in Oman, Siyabi emphasises that he has consciously attempted to keep the pricing of dishes reasonably affordable, while not compromising on quality. “My food is priced at around 50 per cent below what you see in other outlets but the quality is 100 per cent pure Italian. You need to dine here just once to know the difference...and then, you’ll keep coming back,” he assured.



Photos: Syed Fasiluddin

TENNIS ROUND-UP

Ons Jabeur: The Arab trailblazer

Tunisian becomes the first Arab tennis player (man or woman) to reach the top-ten in the world

Paris, France - Tunisia's Ons Jabeur became the first Arab tennis player (man or woman) to break into the world's top-ten on Monday, while Indian Wells champion Paula Badosa gained 14 places in the WTA rankings.

Jabeur, a Wimbledon quarterfinalist earlier this year, was beaten by Spain's Badosa in the Indian Wells semifinals on Friday. Before the tournament, 14th place was the highest achieved by Arab players, a record which was jointly held by Jabeur and former Moroccan star Younes El Aynaoui.

The 23-year-old Badosa, who beat Victoria Azarenka in Saturday's final in California, started the year as the world No 70 but has now climbed to 13th.

Jabeur already was a trailblazer in her own right when she became the first Arab woman to win a WTA Tour title and advance to the quarterfinals in a Grand Slam event.

Jabeur secured her top-ten place on Thursday when she defeated Estonia's Anett Kontaveit 7-5, 6-3, to reach the semifinals at the Indian Wells event.

It was Jabeur's 48th match win in 2021, the most by any WTA player this season. "When I spoke at the end of last season, I said I wanted to be in the top-ten," Jabeur, seeded 12th at Indian Wells, said after her place in the semifinals. "People doubted us as a team, but we proved them wrong... We have been working so, so hard. Being in the top-ten, it means a lot, but we're not going to stop here. We're going to go further, hopefully, and now focus on this tournament."

Jabeur's first career title came this year at the Viking Classic Birmingham. In 2020 at the Australian Open, she became the first Arab woman to reach a Grand Slam quarterfinal. She also reached the quarterfinals at Wimbledon this year.

Badosa the champ

Paula Badosa demonstrated her mental toughness to become the WTA Indian Wells champion in her desert debut on Sunday with a hard-fought, three-set victory over two-time champion Victoria Azarenka. The Spaniard, who had not lost a set since her first



Paula Badosa of Spain with the WTA Indian Wells trophy on Saturday

WTA TOP TEN

- 1 Ashleigh Barty (9,077 pts)
- 2 Aryna Sabalenka (7,115)
- 3 Karolina Pliskova (5,320)
- 4 Barbora Krejčíková (4,748)
- 5 Garbine Muguruza (4,425)
- 6 Elina Svitolina (4,096)
- 7 Maria Sakkari (4,005)
- 8 Ons Jabeur (3,500)
- 9 Belinda Bencic (3,365)
- 10 Naomi Osaka (3,326)

match of the tournament, needed three hours and four minutes to out-muscle Azarenka 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-6 (7/2).

"Every morning I wake up and my dream is to win a tournament like this," Badosa said. "I have to keep working hard and always believe. The key is to enjoy the journey."

Badosa won her only previous WTA final earlier this season in Belgrade but she did it via a retirement over Ana Konjuh. This one was sweeter because Badosa got to close out the championship point on the court, hammering a forehand winner to the open side that Azarenka could only watch sail in.

AFP

Britain's Norrie claims title

INDIAN WELLS TENNIS

Indian Wells, US - Cameron Norrie's breakthrough season reached a high point in the California desert on Sunday with a 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 win over Nikoloz Basilashvili to become the first Briton to win the ATP Indian Wells title.

Norrie rallied from a set down to earn his career best 47th win of the season and is the first player from Great Britain to lift the trophy, achieving what former finalists Andy Murray, Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski failed to do.

This is Norrie's second title in his sixth ATP final of the season after winning his maiden crown earlier this year in Los Cabos. The victory will also propel him into the top 20 in the world for the first time in his career, and move him past Daniel Evans to become the new British No 1.

"I am so happy, this is my



Cameron Norrie

biggest title," said Norrie, who clinched the crown when Basilashvili belted a forehand long on the first match point.

Norrie hit just one ace had two double faults but won 77% of his first serve points and played better in the crucial moments than Basilashvili.

"It has been an incredible week. I was expecting it to be a longer match and he made a couple of errors at the end,"

said Norrie. Murray was the most recent British finalist in 2009 when he lost to Spaniard Rafael Nadal. Henman made the final twice, in 2002 and 2004.

Norrie was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, grew up in New Zealand before becoming the top collegiate player in the US at Texas Christian University. He has represented Great Britain for the past eight years.

The 29-year-old Basilashvili was going for his third title of the season. Unfortunately, the Georgian did not bring his A game against Norrie unlike the quarterfinals where he upset second seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece.

Basilashvili said he had some health issues Sunday which sapped his energy in the final set, but declined to go into detail.

AFP

Young Oman players taste mixed success at Davis Cup tournament



Issa al Suleimani in action during his match on Tuesday



Oman's Ali al Busaidi

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

DAVIS CUP ASIA/OCEANIA GROUP IV

Oman's young tennis squad tasted mixed success in the ongoing Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Group IV 2021 tournament that are being played at the Bahrain Tennis Federation courts at Isa Town in Bahrain.

Oman began their campaign on a winning note with a 2-1 win over Mongolia on Monday but then lost 0-3 to a strong Iraq

team on Tuesday morning.

They now take on Turkmenistan in their final pool match on Wednesday.

The sultanate team, without their star player Mohammed al Nabhani who backed out of the event for personal reasons, comprises two 16-year-olds in Ali al Busaidi and Isa al Suleimani while another teen, 17-year old Marwan al Khanjari, completes the squad. Former Oman Davis Cupper Suleiman al Rawahi is the non-playing captain.

On Tuesday, Iraq cruised past

Oman 3-0. Adil Mustafa al Saedi beat Isa 6-2, 6-3 while Mohammed Abuzed Saber blanked Ali 6-0, 6-0. In the doubles, Mohammed al Shammari-Abdullah Ali Hatem drubbed Oman's Marwan and Isa 6-2, 6-0.

Earlier on Monday, against Mongolia, Isa beat Mongolia's Khatansuikh Batbayar 6-1, 6-2 before Ali made it 2-0 for Oman with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Oyunbold Baatar. However, Mongolia's duo of Baatar and Batbayar defeated Marwan and Isa 6-0,

6-3 for a consolation victory.

A total of 12 teams are participating in the Group IV event.

Pool A comprises Saudi Arabia, UAE, hosts Bahrain and Guam while Pool C is made up of Cambodia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Yemen.

The Saudis currently lead Pool A with clean sweep in both the ties against Guam and Bahrain respectively while Cambodia are on top in Pool C with victories in both their ties against Yemen (3-0) and Kyrgyzstan (2-1).

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Lukaku is mentally tired, says Chelsea boss Tuchel

GROUP H

CHELSEA VS MALMO

London, UK - Romelu Lukaku is mentally tired after being 'overplayed', Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel said on Tuesday, as the club's record signing seeks to end his frustrating goal drought.

The Belgium forward rejoined Chelsea from Inter Milan in August for a fee of around US\$134 mn, seven years after his first spell at Stamford Bridge ended.

The 28-year-old impressed in the early weeks of the season but his form has dipped and he has not scored for Chelsea since mid-September.

Tuchel, speaking ahead of Wednesday's Champions League match against Swedish side Malmo, said his players were still adjusting to having Lukaku in the team. "This will increase every day because we are in the process of adapting to each other," he said. "In the moment, in my opinion, I feel Romelu is a bit overplayed."

"I think he played too many competitions over the summer, too many competitions with the national team. Now he plays the



Chelsea's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku during a training session on Monday

Nations League (Belgium finished fourth at the finals earlier this month)."

"It means a lot for him to play for his country so he takes it really seriously," he added.

"If that does not work well he always puts it on his shoulders, he thinks about it, he reflects about it and I feel he is a bit mentally tired, not like hugely that we have a concern."

Player workload

Tuchel said other players in his squad also had a tough schedule for club and country, including England's Mason Mount and Jorginho, who won Euro 2020 with Italy. "They struggle," he said. "They have a lot of weight to carry for their countries. They take it and they love it and they are competitors and if you like it or not if you play 1,000

matches a year it can feel heavy."

Chelsea, the defending European champions, are second in Group H of the Champions League after two games following defeat to Juventus last month. They remain top of the Premier League after eight matches but Tuchel admitted their form had dipped, with one major reason being a surfeit of games for top players.

WEDNESDAY'S FIXTURES

(All matches kick-off at 11pm, Oman time, unless stated)

GROUP E

Barcelona vs Dynamo Kiev (8.45pm, Oman time)
Benfica vs Bayern Munich

GROUP F

Manchester United vs Atalanta
Young Boys vs Villarreal

GROUP G

Red Bull Salzburg vs VfL Wolfsburg (8.45pm, Oman time)
Lille vs Sevilla

GROUP H

Chelsea vs Malmö
Zenit St Petersburg vs Juventus



Barca's coach Ronald Koeman addresses a press meet on Tuesday

Barca must beat Dynamo Kiev to keep hopes alive: Koeman

GROUP E

BARCELONA VS DYNAMO KIEV

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona will have to beat Dynamo Kiev to have any chance of reaching the knock-out stage of the Champions League, coach Ronald Koeman said on Tuesday.

After losing 0-3 to both Bayern Munich and Benfica, Barca sit bottom of Group E with two games against Kiev up next, the first at Camp Nou on Wednesday.

Barcelona last went out in the Champions League group stage 21 years ago.

"Tomorrow we are playing for our future in this Champions League," said Koeman. "After losing two games, we have to win to have a chance of going through. There is no other option."

Koeman must decide whether to play Ansu Fati from the start against Kiev, with a Clasico against Real Madrid to come on Sunday.

Fati has lifted the mood at the club since returning from

11 months out through injury.

He scored on his first game back against Levante last month and struck another goal in a 3-1 win over Valencia on Sunday. There have been concerns the 18-year-old could leave when his contract expires at the end of the season.

Tomorrow we are playing for our future in this Champions League

RONALD KOEMAN, BARCA COACH

son but Koeman said an agreement is now close.

"The only thing I know is they are close to renewing Ansu Fati's contract," said Koeman. "This is very important news. We are talking about a young, high-quality player who has to shape the future of this club."

AFP

Hernandez to play for Bayern at Benfica

GROUP E

BENFICA VS BAYERN MUNICH

Munich, Germany - World Cup winner Lucas Hernandez is set to play for Bayern Munich at Benfica in the Champions League on Wednesday, just two days after appearing before a Madrid court for violating a restraining order in 2017.

"I would talk to him if I noticed anything unusual, but that is not the case," Bayern head coach Julian Nagelsmann said in a press conference on Tuesday.

"He is true professional, has trained well and will certainly play a very good game tomorrow. He can separate the two things well."

Earlier, Hernandez looked



Bayern Munich's Lucas Hernandez attends a training session on Tuesday

relaxed as the Bayern squad trained in Munich, a day after his round-trip to Spain.

The 25-year-old, who won the 2018 World Cup with France, appeared in a Madrid court on

Monday - a day earlier than planned - with a six-months prison sentence hanging over him.

FC Bayern have confirmed the court date was brought forward

so Hernandez could travel with the team to Lisbon on Tuesday.

Hernandez was arrested four years ago for violating a court order banning him from contacting his partner after a violent altercation between the pair.

He now has until October 28 to enter prison 'voluntarily', but has lodged an appeal which could keep him out of jail.

The legal matter dates back to February 2017 when Hernandez, then playing for Atletico Madrid, and his partner, Amelia Lorente, were both convicted of domestic violence.

They were ordered not to see each other for six months.

However, four months later Hernandez was arrested at a

Madrid airport in the company of his partner, whose own restraining order had not yet been formally served. They were returning to Spain after getting married in the United States and have since had a son.

The centre-back is expected to play against Benfica with Bayern chasing a third straight win in Europe to keep them top of their Champions League group.

Nagelsmann revealed Germany midfielder Leon Goretzka is out with a cold with Marcel Sabitzer set to deputise.

Canada's Alphonso Davies is out with a leg knock and his place in defence is set to go to Josip Stanisic.

AFP

Greece hands over Olympic flame to Beijing 2022 hosts

Athens, Greece - Greece on Tuesday handed over the Olympic flame to organisers of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games, a day after the lighting ceremony was disrupted by activists calling for the event to be postponed.

Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC) chief Spyros Kapralos gave the Olympic torch to the vice-president of Beijing 2022 and vice-president of the Chinese Olympic Committee (COC) Yu Zaiping at the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens, where the ancient Games were revived in 1896.

"The Olympic flame will travel to the Great Wall and across other parts of China, bringing with it the light of peace and friendship," Yu said.

He said China vowed to deliver 'a streamlined, safe and splendid Games'.

Actresses dressed as ancient Greek priestesses had earlier lit a cauldron with the

Olympic flame, after China's Turin 2006 and Vancouver 2010 freestyle ski silver medalist Li Nina ran a lap with the torch in the second-century AD stadium. The ceremony was held without spectators, with mainly officials and media in attendance.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has said the flame will go on display to the public in Beijing before setting off on an exhibition tour.

Earlier on Tuesday, activists against the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics urged the IOC to postpone the event, arguing that China was perpetrating 'genocide' against Uyghurs and Tibetans. "This is sports-washing. There are no legitimate reasons to host the Games during a genocide," Zumretay Arkin, advocacy manager of the World Uyghur Congress, told a news conference in the Greek capital.

AFP



Arsenal's Alexandre Lacazette celebrates after scoring against Palace

Lacazette equaliser spoils Vieira's Arsenal return

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Patrick Vieira nearly enjoyed a dream return to Arsenal but Alexandre Lacazette's 96th minute equaliser salvaged a 2-2 draw for the Gunners against Crystal Palace on Monday. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's seventh-minute strike gave the hosts the perfect start.

But a five-game unbeaten that had lifted the mood around the Emirates looked set to be punctured as Christian Benteke and Odsonne Edouard struck in the second-half to give the Eagles a deserved lead. Vieira's men failed to hold out, though, as

with seconds to spare Lacazette scrambled home from a corner.

"It was so close but we have been saying that a little bit too often," said Vieira, whose side have drawn five of their eight league games this season. "I am really disappointed because the way the team came back in the second half, they deserved to win the game."

OTHER RESULTS

SPANISH LEAGUE

Alaves 0 Real Betis 1, Espanyol 2 Cadiz 0.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Venezia 1 Fiorentina 0.

AFP

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

If you ever doubt Davey [David Warner], it's an absolute no-no. He's a superstar of all three formats

Glenn Maxwell
Australian allrounder, on anyone writing off his teammate David Warner, at the T20 World Cup



ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021

Two in two for Scotland

PNG lose but not before putting up a spirited fightback in a Group B match

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The stunning opening day victory of Scotland against Bangladesh gave a momentum to Kyle Coetzer's side as they took to the field in the afternoon heat at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground against Papua New Guinea (PNG) on Tuesday.

And the Scots' winning rhythm continued as they struck the right chords for a 17-run win in their second match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup First Round Group B match. The second win in a row certainly puts them in a good position to advance to the Super 12s.

The heroes of Scotland's win were Richie Berrington, who hammered a 49-ball half-century (70), and right-arm pacer Josh Davey, who picked four for 18. The victory, however, was achieved after Scotland withstood a late and spirited fightback from Norman Vanua, who raised the hopes of his side with a 37-ball 47.

Along with Kiplin Doriga (18), the pair added 53 off just 29 balls, after PNG was reduced to just 35 for five, in their chase of a



Scotland players celebrate after their win over PNG in the T20 World Cup First Round Group B match at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Tuesday

target of 166. The defeat leaves PNG's hopes to advance in tatters as they take on Bangladesh in their final game on Thursday afternoon.

Brilliant Berrington

Earlier, Berrington's knock was the fulcrum around which Scotland's managed to put on 165 for nine after electing to bat first.

Berrington put on a vital 92 runs with Matt Cross (45) for the third wicket, amid a flurry of wickets at the start and the death.

Davey shines

PNG's chase was disappointing as they lost five wickets in the powerplay. Opener Tony Ura chopped on in the second over, giving Davey the first of his four wickets. Having hit Brad Wheal for a four on the first ball of the over, Lega Siaka attempted again, only to edge to the wicketkeeper Cross.

Alasdair Evans, playing his first game of this World Cup in place of Safyaan Sharif, was welcomed with couple of fours by PNG skipper Assad Vala. However, Vala's eagerness to

continue the onslaught proved suicidal as he could only top edge to Wheal at mid-on. Charles Amini was run-out by Michael Leask and three balls later, Simon Atai was caught brilliantly by Berrington off Davey.

Coming in at No 7, Vanua hit Chris Greaves for back-to-back boundaries and also hit a couple of sixes off Wheal the very next over to leave PNG requiring 62 off 30 balls. However, Doriga was stumped off Mark Watt in the 17th over, and Vanua was dismissed in the next by Davey to extinguish PNG's hopes.

Chad Soper and Kabua Morea took the game to the final over, but PNG was all out in 19.3 overs.

Crucial partnership

Scotland, too, found themselves in some early trouble as they were down to 37 for two in the powerplay. Openers George Munsey and Kyle Coetzer hit a couple of fours off both new-ball bowlers. However, Assad Vala's bowling changes got the desired result. Morea, the left-arm pacer, had Coetzer castled. And in the next over, Munsey, was caught in the deep off Soper.

TODAY'S MATCHES

FIRST ROUND: GROUP A



NAMIBIA VS NETHERLANDS

Abu Dhabi (UAE), 2pm



IRELAND VS SRI LANKA

Abu Dhabi, 6pm

SCOREBOARD		
SCOTLAND		
G Munsey	c Siaka b Soper	15 (10)
K Coetzer	b Morea	6 (6)
M Cross	c Amini b Atai	45 (36)
R Berrington	c Amini b Soper	70 (49)
C MacLeod	c Morea b Soper	10 (11)
M Leask	run out	9 (4)
C Greaves	c Siaka b Morea	2 (3)
M Watt	b Morea	0 (1)
J Davey	c Siaka b Morea	0 (1)
A Evans	not out	0 (1)
Extras	(lb 4, nb 1, w 3)	8
TOTAL	165 for nine in 20 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-26, 3-118, 4-151, 5-153, 6-158, 7-165, 8-165, 9-165		
Bowling: N Pokana 4-0-37-0, C Amini 4-0-41-0, K Morea 4-0-31-4, C Soper 4-0-24-3, L Siaka 1-0-8-0, S Atai 3-0-20-1		
PAPUA NEW GUINEA		
T Ura	b Davey	2 (3)
L Siaka	c Cross b Wheal	9 (11)
A Vala	c Wheal b Evans	18 (11)
C Amini	run out	1 (3)
S Bau	c Wheal b Greaves	24 (23)
S Atai	c Berrington b Davey	2 (3)
N Vanua	c Cross b Davey	47 (37)
K Doriga	st Cross b Watt	18 (11)
C Soper	c Cross b Davey	16 (11)
N Pokana	run out	1 (1)
K Morea	not out	6 (1)
Extras	(lb 2, w 2)	4
TOTAL:	148 in 19.3 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-20, 3-30, 4-33, 5-35, 6-67, 7-120, 8-128, 9-135, 10-148		
Bowling: B Wheal 4-0-41-1, J Davey 3.3-0-18-4, A Evans 3-0-22-1, M Watt 4-0-23-1, M Leask 2-0-11-0, C Greaves 3-0-31-1		

Flurry of wickets

He finally fell in the penultimate over as going for a pull was caught in the deep by Amini, while covering considerable ground. He was one of six wickets to fall in the last two overs.

Morea finished with four wickets, while Soper had three.

Scotland play Oman in their final group game on Thursday.

@ashokmuscat

Berrington, Cross played outstandingly well, says Scotland skipper Coetzer

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Scotland skipper Kyle Coetzer was delighted with the way his team played as they recorded their second successive win in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup First Round Group B match that took them closer to a place in the Super 12.

Speaking after the win over PNG, Coetzer said, "You need to try and find one or two partnerships in a T20 to really give yourself a chance to post a decent score. Richie Berrington and Matt Cross played outstandingly well today."

He added, "Richie was obviously the man of the match and he has been doing that consistently for us over the last month or so."

Coetzer said, "We know PNG with their attack can really squeeze second half if they've got a score on the board. So we



Scotland's Richie Berrington plays a shot against Papua New Guinea on Tuesday (AFP)

tried to put a score on the board and put them under pressure. PNG put us in the pressure in second half. The way Norman

[Vanua] came out and struck the ball, it's so very dangerous." Coetzer's counterpart Assad Vala said, "Getting exposure,

playing more games and testing ourselves against quality opposition would be good. If we can get more exposure we

Scotland are a really good bowling team and they put us under pressure

ASSAD VALA
PNG CAPTAIN

might be able to express ourselves better. Scotland are a really good bowling team and they put us under pressure and we crumbled. The lower order brought us back into it."

Berrington who was named the Player of the Match said, "We got just over par on that wicket. At first, we didn't have a target in mind, and just wanted to get used to the wicket. Thankfully we managed to get that big partnership which was quite key in the end."

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QUOTE OF THE DAY
As we have seen in the IPL, spinners have brought back their team in the game; I feel that will be same in the World Cup as well
Rashid Khan
Afghanistan's strike bowler, ahead of the start of his team's T20 World Cup campaign



ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021

Oman lose match but win hearts



Bangladesh's Shakib al Hasan (L) celebrates after dismissing an Oman batter during their match at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Tuesday

Experienced Bangladesh bounce back from their opening game defeat to edge past the hosts in a well-fought match

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The crowd had started queuing up hours before the start of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup match between the hosts Oman and Bangladesh at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground.

There were expatriates from Bangladesh who had turned up in thousands to cheer their national team and there were also a sizeable group of fans backing Oman. There was an air of expectation from the hosts after their opening day win against PNG while for Bangladesh, it was a do-or-die match as a defeat would ended their hopes.

Under pressure to perform, the Bangla Tigers rose to the occasion and won the match by 26 runs but not before surviving some tense moments from a spirited Oman side.

There were times when Oman had the upper hand but

the wealth of experience their rivals were loaded finally turned the scales in their favour.

Oman lost against a much-higher ranked T20I and a Test side but definitely won the hearts of all for their fightback.

For Bangladesh, the experienced and popular stars, Shakib al Hasan and Mustafizur Rahman, along with Mohammad Naim, shone to keep them alive with their first points.

Earlier in the day, Scotland registered their second successive win to stay top of Group B but with Bangladesh and Oman also having a win each, Thursday's final round games are set to provide all thrill and excitement as the three have chances to advance to Super 12 stage.

For Oman, having restricted Bangladesh to 153, the chase was on course till the in-form opener Jatinder Singh was at the crease.

However, his exit in the 13th over for a 33-ball 40, which in-

cluded four fours and a six, was the turning point. Bangladesh then roared back to shut out the game in the remaining overs.

Earlier, Naim's 50-ball 64 laid the foundation for Bangladesh to set up a big total.

However, Oman bowlers restricted them from 101 for two in the 14th over to 153 all out.

Shakib made a useful contribution of 42 off 29, while fast bowlers - Bilal Khan and Fayyaz Butt - grabbed three wickets each.

For the victors, Mahedi Hasan bowled a tight spell (1-14), before Mustafizur Rahman, erratic in his first spell, finished with four for 36.

Oman reached 57 for two in the seventh over and looked on course before Mahedi bowled two overs for six runs and claimed skipper Maqsood's wicket.

But with Jatinder at the crease hopes were high for the hosts to

chase down the target.

But his dismissal, as he tried to go for a sweep shot led to a catch to Liton Das at deep square leg off Shakib, derailed the hosts' chase. Jatinder had earlier survived a dropped catch on ten, but when he got out, Oman's chance to grab a historic win faded.

Oman could hit just one four and a six after his dismissal.

Rahman's woes

Mustafizur Rahman trapped Aqib Ilyas with his first ball of the match, but thereafter had a forgettable 15 minutes.

He conceded five wides in the first over and in the next over, he dropped Kashyap Prajapati at short third man. And if that was not enough, Mahmudullah dropped Jatinder off Rahman.

When Bangladesh began their innings, their woes of powerplays continued. They scored only 29 runs.

SCOREBOARD	
BANGLADESH	
M Naim	c Ayaan Khan 64 (50)
L Das	lbw b Bilal Khan 6 (7)
Mahedi Hasan	c & b Butt 0 (4)
Shakib al Hasan	run out 42 (29)
Nurul Hasan	c Goud b Maqsood 3 (4)
Afif Hossain	b Kaleemullah 1 (5)
Mahmudullah	b Bilal Khan 17 (10)
M Rahim	c Khushi b Butt 6 (4)
M Saifuddin	c Jatinder b Butt 0 (1)
T Ahmed	not out 1 (3)
M Rahman	c Maqsood b Bilal 2 (3)
Extras	(b 2, lb 5, w 4) 11
TOTAL	153 in 20 overs
Fall of wickets:	1-11, 2-21, 3-101, 4-112, 5-120, 6-122, 7-138, 8-138, 9-151, 10-153
Bowling:	Bilal Khan 4-0-18-3, Kaleemullah 4-0-30-2, F Butt 4-0-30-3, M Nadeem 4-0-35-0, A Ilyas 2-0-16-0, Z Maqsood 2-0-17-1
OMAN	
A Ilyas	lbw b Rahman 6 (6)
Jatinder Singh	c Das b Shakib 40 (33)
K Prajapati	c Nurul Hasan 21 (18)
Z Maqsood	c Rahim b Mahedi 12 (16)
Ayaan Khan	c Mahmudullah b Shakib 9 (33)
S Goud	c Rahim b Saifuddin 4 (8)
N Khushi	c Mahmudullah b Shakib 4 (6)
Kaleemullah	c Nurul b Rahman 5 (5)
M Nadeem	not out 14 (12)
F Butt	c Rahim b Rahman 0 (2)
Bilal Khan	not out 0 (1)
Extras:	(lb 2, w 10) 12
TOTAL:	127 for nine in 20 overs
Fall of wickets:	1-13, 2-47, 3-81, 4-90, 5-101, 6-105, 7-105, 8-112, 9-112
Bowling:	T Ahmed 4-0-31-0, M Rahman 4-0-36-4, M Saifuddin 4-0-16-1, Shakib al Hasan 4-0-28-3, Mahedi Hasan 4-0-14-1

T20 WORLD CUP					
FIRST ROUND GROUP A					
TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR
SL	1	1	0	2	2.607
IRE	1	1	0	2	1.755
NL	1	0	1	0	-1.755
NAM	1	0	1	0	-2.607
FIRST ROUND GROUP B					
TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR
SCOT	2	2	0	4	0.575
OMAN	2	1	1	2	0.613
BAN	2	1	1	2	0.500
PNG	2	0	2	0	-1.867

Group A: SL: Sri Lanka, IRE: Ireland, NL: Netherlands, NAM: Namibia
Group B: SCOT: Scotland, Oman, BAN: Bangladesh, PNG: Papua New Guinea



Oman players celebrate after picking a Bangladesh wicket

It was a chaseable target: Maqsood

Our Correspondent
Muscat

At times, some defeats are like a bitter pill to swallow. For Oman, the target of 154 set by Bangladesh was something that was achievable as hosts' skipper Zeeshan Maqsood said after the hard-fought match.

"It was quite a chaseable target. The way our opening stand went and we batted in the middle. But the last five-six overs didn't go so well as we lost a lot of wickets," Maqsood said.

He added, "All credit goes to the Bangladesh bowlers. We were in the game for 15-16 overs as we needed 50-odd runs in 36 balls. It's not a big margin."

The skipper denied that his team was under pressure while playing in front of home crowds. "There is no pressure, rather it's a boost. We would like to say sorry to the people. We couldn't make them happy, but it's cricket, it's a sport so we'll come back and fight back and make them happy. We have to see where we went wrong, come back and crack that. It's just another game."

'Oman played really good cricket'

Player of the match Shakib al Hasan said, "Obviously it (loss to Scotland) hurt the whole team because we were not expecting it. Oman played really good cricket but we held our nerve. Experience played a role. Oman were in the game for 15 overs, so credit to them. They are playing with a lot of heart, I wish them best of luck for their future games."

The star allrounder added, "I think this win will settle our nerves. We have another game which we have to win and we have to see what happens in the game between Oman and Scotland."

Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah said, "We'll take this win, but I think there are a lot of areas we need to improve. I hope everyone is happy. Thanks to the crowd that came in, they expect us to win. Delivering a win for them, for the country is the most important thing."

"Shakib and Naim batted brilliantly, they had a good partnerships and that took us to 150-plus. But we should have done better with the new ball, bowled a lot of wides."

He added, "We need to see those areas and correct them. I think our death bowling was going well."



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