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Oman's role in achieving peace and stability in Syria lauded

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A globally respected nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank has appreciated the role Oman has played towards achieving peace and stability in Syria.

'Oman leveraged its neutrality to push the various sides towards a diplomatic settlement in an attempt to bring an end to the bloodshed (in Syria),' wrote Giorgio Cafiero and Brett Sudetic in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the oldest international affairs think tank in the United States founded in 1910.

It added that the sultanate has maintained diplomatic relations with Middle Eastern countries amidst their periods of relative isolation. 'Since the Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said's ascendance to the throne in 1970, Muscat has never severed diplomatic relations with any country in the world. This is part of an Omani ethos and national character that emphasise the need to maintain healthy dialogue and diplomatic relations with all governments,' stated the report titled *Oman's Diplomatic Moves in Syria*.

'Such a foreign policy is reflective of the Omanis' neutrality and



Oman leveraged its neutrality to push the various sides towards a diplomatic settlement

pragmatism on the international stage, and an understanding that the sultanate can best advance

its own security interests without infringing on the sovereignty of other nations. Muscat's continuous relationship with Syria is a salient example,' it added.

Looking ahead, while most Western governments are not ready to directly engage the Syrian regime diplomatically, Oman could continue to establish itself as a go-between the actors for engagement between Syria and the West, it said. 'As a country that carries minimal

baggage in its foreign relations, Oman's growing influence in Syria could make the sultanate an increasingly important diplomatic actor in the process of reintegrating Damascus into the Arab world and international community.'

Since the Syrian crisis broke out nearly a decade ago, Oman has been the only Gulf Cooperation Council member to take virtually no diplomatic action against Damascus. 'Muscat's re-

fusal to join other countries in regime change efforts targeting Damascus was unsurprising given Oman's foreign policy traditions. Omani foreign policy post-1970 has aimed to avoid actions or rhetoric that can be construed as interference in another country's internal affairs.'

According to Omani diplomats in Washington, the sultanate's vision in solving the Syrian crisis stems from the need to stop the bloodshed and the armed conflict, and it spares no effort to contribute in this regard in all forums in order to achieve peace in Syria and put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people, the report said.

In the year 2020, Oman sought to maintain its approach to Syria and even expand relations with the country. 'In early October 2020, Walid Muallem, Syria's late foreign minister, received the credentials of Muscat's ambassador to Syria, Turki Mahmoud al Busaidi, making the sultanate the first GCC member to return its ambassador to Syria since 2011.

'In Muscat's view, this move helps boost Oman's ability to play a greater role as a diplomatic bridge and humanitarian actor in the war-ravaged country.'



103 nationalities allowed visa-free entry for 14 days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an effort to support the tourism sector in Oman, Royal Oman Police has announced that nationals of 103 countries will now be allowed to stay in Oman for 14 days. Earlier, the ROP had announced that travellers were exempted from entry visas for a period of ten days.

'In a stimulus to the tourism sector, it has been decided to extend the exemption period of the nationals of the 103 countries to 14 days as per specific regulations and conditions,' ROP said in a statement.

The specified controls and conditions include a prior confirmed hotel reservation, health insurance and a return ticket.

The move is part of Oman's focus on tapping tourists from new markets in Europe, including Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Andorra, Italy, Bulgaria, San Marino, Switzerland and Croatia. The countries included in the exemption are Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, Uruguay, Paraguay, Suriname, Argentina, Brazil and Chile from South America.

The other countries exempted are Japan, Thailand, South Africa, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Russia, China, Seychelles, USA, Brunei, Turkey, South Korea, New Zealand and Iran.

Nationals of 71 other countries and territories can apply for visas online provided they have validity of six months in their passport.

Innovation Building to boost research; to open mid-2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The centrepiece of the Muscat Innovation Complex, the Innovation Building will open mid-2021, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced on Tuesday. The project aims to activate a knowledge-based economy in the sultanate supported by scientific research, innovation and entrepreneurship as well as strengthen Oman's position as a scientifically advanced country in line with Vision 2040.

H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, informed that 95 per cent of the building is complete, while some procedures related to its operations are being currently finalised.

Spread over an area of 540,000sqm near Sultan Qaboos University in Al Khoudh, Muscat Innovation Complex will cover four fields of research - environment and water, renewable energy, biotechnology, and food security and health in accordance with the national strategy for scientific research.

The building includes business incubators for innovators on an area of 4,000sqm, a one-stop shop, a mini commercial complex



and theatre. In addition, it will have directorates and departments of scientific research and innovation.

The complex's research and development centre includes several plots of land designated for establishing research, development and training centres for local and international companies. The plots range from 8,000sqm to 10,000sqm.

H E Dr Haddabi confirmed that the complex will be a catalyst for research investment with its close proximity to Sultan Qaboos University, Rusayl Industrial Area, Oman Botanic Garden, Knowledge Oasis Muscat and other services such as Muscat International Airport.

According to H E Dr Haddabi, organisations have started communicating with the ministry to reserve space to establish their

research centres in the complex. The ministry is also working to attract organisations that develop businesses, such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada).

'The master plan for the current development consists of three phases and will focus on four research specialties related to Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies. Muscat Innovation Complex is based on three elements - the private sector, the academic and research sector, and the government sector,' he said.

The National Strategy for Scientific Research and Development 2040 has proposed allocating a certain percentage of the GDP for scientific research and development activities, starting with 0.5 per cent in 2021 and increasing gradually to reach two per cent by 2040.

BACK TO SCHOOL



Following the Supreme Committee's decision allowing the gradual return of school students under the blended education system from January 17, students of grades 1, 4, 5, 9 and 11 returned to classrooms. 'Our school adheres to hygienic procedures, such as measuring the temperature of students before entering, wearing mask and maintain social distance between students - not less than 2m in classrooms. The number of students in a class does not exceed 16,' said Sulaiman al Jabri, principal of Imam Jabir bin Zaid School in Wattayah (Picture and text by Syed Fasiuddin)

Six arrested for online banking fraud

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Six expats have been arrested on charges of online fraud after they duped people by obtaining their bank details, according to Royal

Oman Police.

In the guise of being bank employees, the accused sent text messages to their victims asking them to call back so that their bank cards could be activated.

'During the call, the suspects

obtained the bank data of the victims and withdrew money from their accounts,' the ROP stated.

The 'scammers' messages often said: 'Your ATM card has been blocked because you have not updated it. You won't be able

to use your ATM card. Please call our number.' Another message stated: 'Your ATM card has been blocked because you have not updated your Omani ID. If you want to keep using your ATM card, please call back.'



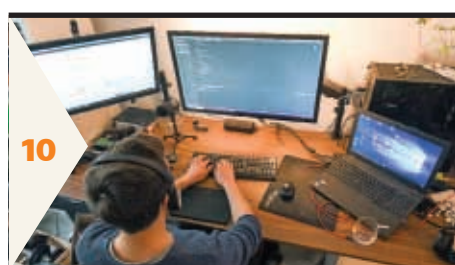
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Nature reserves to boost biodiversity

Over 350,000 people visited nature reserves in Oman in 2019, an increase of 15% over 2018

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nature reserves in Oman are a major tourist attraction, offering scenic nature, camping and diving to enjoy coral reefs and other underwater treasures.

As many as 359,225 people visited Oman's nature reserves in 2019, compared to 305,405 at the end of 2018, marking an increase of 15 per cent, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official at the Environment Authority, said, "The authority seeks to conduct scientific studies and provide tourism and entertainment facilities for guests inside nature reserves. We have 20 nature reserves through which we aim to preserve biological diversity and promote the sultanate in the world of ecotourism."

The official added that efforts are on to support eco-tourism in the sultanate's nature reserves in a sustainable manner.

The Implementation Support and Follow-up Unit (ISFU) at the Diwan of Royal Court, which is responsible for monitoring and following up on specific national projects - chief among these being Tanfeedh programme - has outlined eco-tourism as an important part of the sultanate's diversification plan. This plan aims to improve, preserve and capitalise on Oman's eco-tourism of-



(Supplied photos)

We have 20 nature reserves through which we aim to preserve biological diversity and promote the sultanate in the world of ecotourism

ENVIRONMENT AUTHORITY OFFICIAL

ferings. At the same time, it aims to ensure long-term sustainable growth of the tourism sector as it plays a vital role in boosting Oman's economy.

The plan includes three projects - Geo-Heritage Tourism Development, Operationalisation of Ras al Shajar Natural Reserve and Operationalisation of Qurm Nature Reserve - according to ISFU's Annual Report 2019.

Under the Geo-Heritage Tourism Development, the Al Huqf Geo Park in Al Wusta has been identified as one of the

promising developments that aims to leverage eco-tourism and geotourism assets in the governorate.

The proposed Al Huqf Geo Park will cover an area between the wilayats of Mahoot and Duqm, in Al Wusta governorate, and include the Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve, Duqm Rock Garden and the area surrounding the two wilayats of Mahoot and Duqm.

Operationalisation of Ras al Shajar Natural Park has been included in the plan for its rich bio-

diversity and close proximity to the capital. Located in the wilayat of Quriyat, Muscat governorate, its proximity to the capital makes it an attractive and feasible project, according to ISFU.

The Qurm Nature Reserve project aims to continue developing Oman's eco-tourism offerings by inviting more responsible investment and activity into the reserve without compromising its intrinsic ecological value.

The Tanfeedh programme also seeks to transform natural sites into tourist hotspots. The

programme laid out various requirements for private companies to invest in nature reserves and wildlife sanctuaries. One of the notable decisions made recently was the establishment of the Starlight Reserve in the Al Hajar al Gharbi in Jebel Shams.

The decision, apart from encouraging stargazing as a tourist activity, aims to curb light pollution due to the growing use of outdoor lights.

An important announcement was also made through a Royal Decree establishing the Rustaq

Wildlife Nature Reserve in the Governorate of South Batinah.

The reserve has more than 110 species of plants and trees, six different types of mammals and over a dozen species of birds. The establishment of these reserves reinforce the role of the Environment Authority and other competent government agencies in the protection of the environment.

The Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve is home to more than 11 species of wild animals, including Arabian oryx, Arabian gazelle,

Rhim gazelle, Nubian ibex, red fox, ostrich, brown eagle and wild rabbit. The Office for Conservation of the Environment recently launched a programme to release wild animals (Arabian antelopes) into the wild, setting them free in the Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve.

Following their release, the antelopes were traced through satellite and radio devices. The move came in the wake of a success story that began with a project for the settlement and breeding of the Arabian oryx in the 1970s.

Tender Notice

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tender for 2021:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
02/2021	Supply of laptops & tablets with accessories	1-Feb-2021	15-Feb-2021	62.5 OMR

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E-Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> The Tenderer should enclose scanned copy of bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value validity for (120) days from the deadline for the tender bids and addressed to Public Authority for Social Insurance. And original document of the same should be submitted later directly to the Administration Department - Purchase and General Services Section / Third Floor, PASI Head Office in Bawshar.

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
2. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : +968 24166670 , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any tender that may be received

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Copper mining cave discovered in Amerat



(Supplied photos)



Our Correspondent
Muscat

A group of adventure enthusiasts recently discovered a new cave in the Al Khatam mountain in the wilayat of Amerat, adding to Oman's list of subterranean treasures.

This particular cave has two narrow entrances and a copper mine. The cave was discovered by the newly formed Exploration Team consisting of six members. Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Badr al Jardani, leader of the team, said, "The cave has a number of chambers and corridors, and inhabited by bats."

He noted that there are paved paths around the cave



suggesting human activity - probably mining - was conducted in the area. The area includes furnaces for melting copper, smelters and pottery.

"Our group was established in March 2020 and we aim to explore caves spread across Oman and encourage caving as a sport. We are keen to explore archaeological and tourist sites, and promote domestic tourism," Jardani said.

Dr Mohammed al Kindi, a geologist who visited the cave in Amerat, said, "These caves are man-made. The amount of copper in the cave is not large now. Copper was formed in the cave due to the release of hot fluids - 100C to 200C - from a depth of 5km of the earth."

The presence of copper suggests there was widespread trade in the region for hundreds of years.

Over 1,300 Omanis return to work: Ministry of Labour

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Committee to Address the Status of the Discharged National Manpower enabled over 1,300 Omani citizens on Tuesday to return to their work after having meetings with their employers on their reemployment.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Labour, the committee met the managements of ten establishments spread across different sectors, and ensured that the 1,315 Omani workers could continue working at those establishments.

'The Committee to Address the Status of the Discharged National Manpower, represented by Muscat Work Team at the General Office of the Ministry of Labour, held its meetings with ten establishments from various sectors, most of which came from the oil and gas sector,' the ministry statement said.

Salem bin Said al Badi, director general of Labour Welfare and the head of the Work Team in Muscat governorate, said that the work team, in the presence of all its members representing the competent authorities, with the cooperation



(Supplied photo)

The committee is examining the financial reports of the companies to find out the conditions accurately and to find appropriate solutions

ABDUL RAHMAN AL YAHYA

tion of the representatives of the establishments, was able to attain an assurance from the establishments that the national workforce could continue working either through transfer to the establishments' different projects or other branches of their operations or by reducing their wages not below the minimum wage.

Badi confirmed that the Work Team formed by members com-

ing from all the relevant authorities deals with the requests submitted to it as quickly as possible.

Abdul Rahman bin Humaid al Yahya, CEO of the Oman Association for Oil Services, said that the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic can be seen in the continued decline in oil prices, and delay in the implementation of a large number of projects in the oil and gas sector, in addition to the continued

shrinking of business, especially in drilling and well maintenance.

"The committee is examining the financial reports of the companies to find out the conditions accurately and to find appropriate solutions to preserve the national workforce," Yahya said.

Khalid bin Khamis al Masrouri, director of Audit and Control Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said, "The committee works to solve the workers' problems by meeting with companies on an ongoing basis through the complaint submitted to the Ministry of Labour and coordinating with them and analysing the complaint."

Pact signed for innovation in Omani sarooj industry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Industrial Innovation Centre on Tuesday signed an agreement for the development of the Omani sarooj (lime) industry.

The agreement aims to boost one of the sultanate's ancient industries through innovation.

The agreement was signed by H E Eng Ibrahim bin Said bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Undersecretary for Heritage in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Mahrooqi, CEO, Industrial Innovation Centre, at the ministry.

Sarooj has been used mainly in the sultanate as a basic material for building aflaj, castles and forts. At present it is used mostly



(Supplied photo)

for restoration work.

The initiative will help in the production of sarooj material and raising its quality. The pact will facilitate joint awareness and training programmes between the ministry and the centre in the field of sarooj production and the exchange of experiences and knowledge.

In addition to providing per-

mits and site identification to test the Omani sarooj material used in the restoration processes at archaeological sites, the agreement also stipulates the formation of a team from both sides.

The centre, in cooperation with the ministry, will verify the benefits of Omani sarooj in the production of tiles and bricks as well.

Rescue of entangled Arabian Sea humpback whale under way in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A massive rescue effort was kick-started on Tuesday to save an entangled Arabian Sea humpback whale, stranded in the Port of Duqm. The stranding of the whale was reported to the Oman Stranding Network on Monday night.

'Specialists and volunteers from the Environment Authority, Five Oceans Environmental Services and Future Seas, supported by ESO and Port of Duqm, took the lead in what would be a complicated rescue effort,' Port of Duqm said in a statement.



A video grab of the whale

environment. 'Will post updates on the efforts to save this endangered whale,' the statement added on Tuesday evening.

Arabian humpback whales, inhabiting the Arabian Sea, are a small sub population of humpback whales, which are most genetically distinct humpback whales and are considered to be the most isolated whale population on Earth. A population estimation study suggests that they have remained separate from other humpback whale populations for perhaps 70,000 years, which is extremely unusual in a species famed for long distance migrations.

135 new COVID-19 cases reported

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday announced 135 new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), taking the total to 132,146 while the number of deaths reported was two.

The number of those who have recovered also increased by 185. 'The number of recoveries has increased to 124,398, while the number of deaths has reached 1,516,' an MoH statement said, adding the rate of recovery is now at 94.1 per cent.

CASES FROM JAN 12 TO JAN 19	
Jan 12	164
Jan 13	142
Jan 14	178
Jan 15 to 17	526
(Average 175)	
Jan 18	221
Jan 19	135

covery is now at 94.1 per cent.

As of Tuesday, a total of 79 patients were admitted in health

institutions while 21 patients were in the ICU.

MoH calls upon all to adhere to the isolation procedures by staying in an isolated room with an attached toilet and serving the isolated person from outside the room as instructed. It said that social distancing also helps curb the spread of the virus. MoH advises all citizens and residents to keep on washing hands with water and soap, avoiding touching the face, nose, mouth, and eyes and following healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.32am
Sunrise	6.51am
Duhr	12.23pm
Asr	3.29pm
Maghrib	5.50pm
Isha	7.04pm



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Advertisement No. (3 /2021)

specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/21/004	(2021/MM/QS/56)	Removal and Relaying of Road Markings at Filling Stations Accesses Along Muscat Expressway (E - Tender)	Rial 25	04/02/2021	11/02/2021	First

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box for E-Tendering in the Ground floor at Muscat Municipality Building, Ruwi, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date For Collection Of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-8/2021	Provision of Operation and Maintenance of Equipment at Al Nahdha Hospital in Muscat Governorate	28/January/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 24/February/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board in the Excellent Grade	R.O 155,000 Per set
MOH/HQ-9/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Endoscopy) for The Royal Hospital	28/January/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 17/February/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set
MOH/HQ-10/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Covid -19)	27/January/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 03/February/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set
MOH/HQ-11/2021	Supply of Laboratory Items	04/February/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 24/February/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

[\(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>\)](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)
 Any Clarification, you may contact via
 Telephone: 24166670
 Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

National Research Award winners announced



National Research Award winners pose with H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said (centre) and other dignitaries (Supplied photo)

Muscat - The seventh Annual Research Forum organised by the Research and Innovation Sector of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation took place on Monday at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat, under the patronage of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

At the event, which was held in the presence of H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim bin Said al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and a number of ministers, researchers and academics, the 12 winners for the National Research Award (NRA) were announced.

H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation in the

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, highlighted the main objectives and achievements of the sector and stressed on the importance of maintaining the harmony between the research and innovation sector, the National Strategy for Research and Development 2040, the National Innovation Strategy and Oman Vision 2040 in terms of vision, goals and strategic directions.

As part of the forum's activities, the Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre launched its new identity and brand name 'Mawarid'.

The National Research Award winners were selected in the best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (senior specialist or higher in the medical field) category and the best published

research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder) category.

Under the PhD category, Prof Constantinos Chryssou from Muscat University won in the Education and Human Resources

category for his project 'Transportation Service Redundancy from a Spatio-Temporal Perspective' and Dr Ashraf Saleem from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) for his project 'Cooperative Cruise Controller for Homodyne and Heterogeneous Vehicle Platoon System'.

In the Environmental and Biological Resources field, the award went to 'Enhanced power generation and desalination rate in a novel quadruple microbial desalination cell with a single desalination chamber' by Dr Tahereh Jafary (SQU, International Maritime College Oman), while in the Health and Social Service field, the award went to 'Clonal copy-number mosaicism in autoreactive T lymphocytes in diabetic NOD mice' by Dr Maha al Riyami (SQU).

As for the Energy and Industry field, Dr Chaham Alalouch from SQU took the award for his project 'Energy saving potential for residential buildings in hot climates: The case of Oman'.

Under the Young Researcher's category, Hanan al Burashdi from the Ministry of Education took the award for her project 'The effectiveness of using the Course Lab program in improving the academic achievement and the attitudes toward science among 10th grade students in Oman' in the Education and Human Resources field.

In the Information Systems and Communication Technologies field, the award went to 'AMACoT: A Marketplace Architecture for Trading Cloud of Things Resources' by Ahmed al Rawahi from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences Nizwa.

Two teams won in the Environmental and Biological Resources field: 'Fungal Diversity in Tomato Rhizosphere Soil under Conventional and Desert Farming Systems' by Elham Kazerooni from SQU and 'Detecting Dubas bug infestations using high resolution multispectral satellite data in Oman' by Dr Rashid al Shidi from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

For the Health and Social

Service field, the award went to 'MOVEDiabetes: A cluster randomised controlled trial to increase physical activity in adults with type 2 diabetes in primary health care in Oman' by Dr Thamra al Ghafri from the Ministry of Health, while 'Investigating the technical feasibility of various energy carriers for alternative and sustainable overseas energy transport scenarios' by Mohammed al Breiki from Hamad bin Khalifa University took the award in the Energy and Industry field.

The award for the Cultural, Basic, and Social Sciences field was withheld this year for both the PhD and Young Researcher's categories.

The National Research Award in 2020 saw 218 research applications.

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Mobile app offers benefits for members of AmCham Oman

Muscat - The Oman American Business Center (OABC or AmCham Oman) has released a new mobile application for its 160 member companies, giving executives and professionals in Oman a chance to access discounts and promotions in the palms of their hands.

"Our commitment to sustainability was a big part of moving away from plastic membership cards," said Rebecca Olson, executive director of the OABC.

"But in 2021, it's also about ease of use and safety - why ask busy executives to carry and remember a physical card to pass around when there are easier ways to connect them with membership benefits?"

In a statement, OABC said as Oman's largest and most active business networking group, and the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman, it hosted 36 events in the past year. And the new application allows each company to highlight their own business via special offers and VIP benefits,

only for fellow members.

Ali Daud, chairman of the OABC, praised the support and participation of OABC's own member companies in the development of the new application.

"As a 17 year organisation serving the Oman business community, we are proud to be on the cutting edge in providing relevant benefits to members. It's great to see dozens of businesses actively taking advantage of this network by sharing member-to-member benefits with one another

Z-Corp distributes masks, sanitisers for elderly

Muscat - As part of its commitment to contribute towards meaningful causes in the community, The Zubair Corporation (Z-Corp)'s 'collaboration team' recently visited the Social Welfare Home at Al Rustaq and distributed masks and sanitisers for senior citizens.

The collaboration team comprises of a group of employees of Z-Corp and its subsidiaries who participate in community initiatives which are planned and conducted by them.

The team stressed on the importance of using face masks and how they play a very vital role in personal hygiene and protection from germs and other deadly infections.

Faisal al Manthri, communication manager and a member of the collaboration team said, "The elderly citizens are at a greater risk against COVID-19, and those with pre-existing problems are all the more vulnerable. Masks prevent people from getting and spreading the virus. Therefore, senior citizens should wear a mask especially in public places.

Our collaboration team distributed masks at the Social Welfare Home in Rustaq to create awareness among people about the importance of wearing masks and use of hand sanitiser to check the spread of the virus."

Mutafa al Rujabi, chairperson of the Welfare Home in Rustaq, said, "Government authorities in Oman have directed the use of face masks in all public places. The World Health Organization advises wearing masks and use of sanitiser as the best way to avoid infection. We thank the collaboration team for distributing masks for senior citizens in Rustaq."

Within the framework of strengthening community partnership, Z-Corp's collaboration team recently distributed masks and sanitisers in all schools in the Musandam governorate.

To emphasise the importance of wearing masks and maintaining hygiene in public, the team also distributed masks and sanitisers in all schools in the Buraimi governorate.

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*Rates as on January 19
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Europe 2020 auto sales post record fall as virus hits

New car sales in Europe last year suffered a record fall of nearly 24 per cent due to the coronavirus pandemic, the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) said on Tuesday.

'The EU passenger car market contracted by 23.7 percent to 9.9mn vehicles as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic,' the ACEA said in a statement.

'Containment measures - including full scale lockdowns and other restrictions throughout the year - had an unprecedented impact on car sales across the European Union,' it said.

The ACEA said that among the biggest auto markets, Spain recorded the sharpest fall at 32.3 per cent for the year, with Italy down 27.9 per cent and France 25.5 per cent.

Germany, the bloc's strongest economy, dropped 19.1 per cent.

Al Bashayer Meat launches its commercial operations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Bashayer Meat Company, Oman's first and the region's largest integrated red meat project, has announced the launch of commercial operations and distribution of its products in the local market.

Al Bashayer Meat Company, which is promoted by Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), on Monday launched its first retail brand in the local markets under the name 'Bushra'. The launch ceremony took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, under the patronage of H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and in the presence of H E Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, head of Oman Investment Authority.

Eng Tariq bin Ali al Amri, chairman of Oman Food Investment Holding Company said, "The launch of Al Bashayer Meat Company's retail brand 'Bushra', and the announcement of the distribution of the company's products in the local markets narrate yet another success story for OFIC, which is currently implementing a number of important projects in food security. During a short period of time,



Al Bashayer Meat Company, which is considered region's largest integrated red meat project, expects to produce about 13,000 tonnes of red meat products in the first year of its commercial operations

OFIC was able to implement a number of projects in various governorates of the sultanate, that aims to raise self-sufficiency, create job opportunities for citizens and boost exports."

Eng Saleh bin Muhammad al Shanfari, CEO of Oman Food In-

vestment Holding Company said, "The launch marks the start of the company's commercial operations and the start of distributing its products in various commercial centres and stores throughout the sultanate. Al Bashayer Meat Company is con-

sidered as one of the largest companies specialising in red meat in the region in terms of area and capacity, which reaches 1.3mn heads of livestock."

Shanfari pointed out that OFIC, affiliated to Oman Investment Authority, aims to lead strategic investments in the food sector, by investing solely or with strategic partners in various food projects within and outside Oman to contribute to achieving food sufficiency and security.

Al Bashayer Meat Company will be committed to providing live livestock, and fresh and var-

ied red meat products that meet the various segments and needs of consumers. The company is expected to produce about 13,000 tonnes of red meat products in the first year.

Dr Ghalib al Saidi, CEO of Al Bashayer Meat Company said, "We are happy to launch our first-ever retail brand in Oman today. Our goal has always been to promote food security and self-sufficiency in our country and today's launch brings us one step closer to our final consumers. We are also very excited to welcome Ali Al Habsi into the Al Bashayer Meat Company family. Ali is a very passionate young man who is loved by all in Oman and he is the perfect representation of our brand and our company."

Al Bashayer Meat Company's farm is located in Wilayat of Thumrait. The integrated facility, which includes modern and disease-free farms, feedlots, a state-of-the-art abattoir and processing plant, follows exacting standards of Sharia's compliance, safety, sanitation, hygiene and quality control to ensure purity and taste. Additionally, the livestock at Al Bashayer is only fed with natural feed so as to provide the highest quality meat with local flavour, to its consumers.

Work begins at Khazaen dry port

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The construction work for the proposed dry port project at the Khazaen Economic City has started, Khazaen announced on Tuesday.

The dry port is one of the major projects in the Khazaen Economic City which will play an important role in facilitating container and cargo handling operations in Oman's first integrated economic city, Khazaen said in a tweet.

As per Khazaen, the dry port project will become a link between Oman's maritime ports, airports and land ports.

The logistics facilities at Khazaen Economic City will be directly connected to its state-of-the-art dry port which will speed up the flow of cargo between ships, major land transportation networks, and end-users.

In November 2019, Khazaen had signed the investment deal with a number of leading local logistics firms to operate and manage the proposed dry port in the economic city in South Batinah.

The dry port is an inland intermodal terminal connected by road or rail to a seaport, generally operating as a center for the transshipment of cargo to inland destinations.

Shell launches 25MW solar plant in Sohar



(L-R): H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Walid Hadi and Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone, mark the launch of Sohar Solar Qabas with a plaque unveiling (supplied image)

Sohar - Oman Shell on Tuesday launched its 25MW Qabas solar plant at Sohar Port and Freezone. The new solar plant will help the port and freezone in Sohar to become more sustainable and demonstrate the commercial benefits of solar power for industrial purposes.

Owned by Shell, Sohar Solar Qabas is the company's first utility scale, photovoltaic (PV) solar project in the Middle East and in Oman, a press release said.

The plant is located on a 50-hectare site within Sohar Freezone and consists of over 88,000 solar modules. The re-

newable electricity output from Sohar Solar Qabas is supplied to a large ferrochrome production facility, displacing the equivalent gas-fired power generation taken from the grid and avoiding more than 25,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually.

Oman Shell has future ambi-

tions to facilitate solar energy development within the sultanate.

Walid Hadi, Oman Shell's vice president and country chairman, said, "This is an incredible project and the first of its kind for Shell in the Middle East and in Oman, while being in line with our ambition to become a net-zero emission energy business by 2050 or sooner. I thank the Omani government, particularly the Sohar Port and Freezone, for their collaboration and support on a project with potential for long-lasting economic value for the sultanate."

H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) commented, "I would like to congratulate Oman Shell and Sohar Freezone for inaugurating this solar project in Sohar."

The facility is an important milestone and it aligns with Oman Vision 2040. It is the first step for OPAZ's plan for solar projects equating to 1 gigawatt in Sohar. This will help free up natural gas for other industrial use."



Ominvest's net profit rises 5% to RO33.7mn for 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), one of the oldest and the largest investment companies in the sultanate, has reported a 5 per cent growth in its group net profit for the year ended December 31, 2020.

At the group level, net profit attributable to the shareholders of Ominvest rose by 5 per cent to RO33.7mn, whereas net profit at the parent company level rose by 6 per cent to RO38.1mn in 2020, compared to the previous year.

The company announced its initial unaudited financial results for 2020 on Tuesday. The results are subject to statutory audit, review by the audit and control committee, and approval of the board of directors of Ominvest.

In a press statement, Abdulaziz al Balushi, group CEO of Ominvest, attributed the company's resilient performance to its major subsidiaries, associate companies and certain strategic transactions completed during an otherwise extremely challenging year. He added that Ominvest's portfolio companies

nimbly adjusted to new operating routines necessitated by the onset of COVID-19 and continued to serve their customers efficiently.

"Ominvest ended the year 2020 with a strong financial position. Particularly, the company built a substantially large liquidity cushion enabling it to withstand difficult economic conditions and take advantage of emerging investment opportunities," Balushi said.

During the last year, Ominvest's banking subsidiary Oman Arab Bank (OAB) successfully merged with Alizz Islamic Bank; completed its listing on the Muscat Securities Market and became a SAOG company. Preceding the merger transaction, Ominvest also sold an 11.76 per cent stake in OAB to Arab Bank plc, resulting in Ominvest's shareholding in OAB declining from 51 per cent (before the merger) to 31.64 per cent in the combined entity (after the merger).

After the sale of the stake, OAB's classification in Ominvest's financials was changed from a subsidiary to an associate with effect from June 30, 2020.

Therefore, in line with IFRS requirements, from the date of the reclassification to an associate, Ominvest stopped consolidating OAB's financials and implemented the equity method of accounting. In addition, the sale of its partial equity stake in OAB will result in a lower share of income with effect from the date of reclassification.

While lauding Omani government's new policy initiatives and reforms to restore the sultanate's economic strength over the next few years, Balushi cautioned that 2021 will be another difficult year for the local and regional businesses as protracted weakness in oil price is leading to rising sovereign debt levels, budget deficits and tight liquidity conditions in the banking sector. Therefore, firms need to become much more creative and efficient to survive through these difficult times and emerge stronger.

Balushi highlighted that being cognisant of such macro challenges, Ominvest is prudently managing its assets and liabilities, aiming to further diversify and grow to maximise shareholder value while keeping potential risks well anchored.

IEA trims 2021 oil demand forecast

Paris, France - The International Energy Agency (IEA) trimmed its 2021 global oil demand forecast on Tuesday as fresh coronavirus lockdowns cloud the outlook but said mass vaccination programmes should help bolster a second half rebound.

'Global oil demand is expected to recover by 5.5mn barrels per day (bpd) to 96.6mn bpd in 2021, following an unprecedented collapse of 8.8mn bpd in 2020,' the IEA said in its latest monthly report.

'For now, a resurgence in COVID-19 cases is slowing the rebound but a widespread vaccination effort and an acceleration in economic activity is expected to spur stronger growth in the second half of the



year,' it said.

'This recovery mainly reflects the impact of fiscal and monetary support packages as well as the effectiveness of steps to resolve the pandemic,' it added.

The IEA said it now expected demand in the first quarter of this year to be 0.6mn bpd less than previously forecast, with the full-year outcome revised down by

0.3mn bpd.

On the supply side, the IEA said that after 'falling by a record 6.6mn bpd in 2020, world oil supply is set to rise by over 1mn bpd this year'.

'There may be scope for higher growth given our expectations for further improvement in demand,' the IEA added.

It said that its forecasts assume that in the second half this year, OPEC+ - that is OPEC members plus non-cartel producers, principally Russia - will continue to rein in output, withholding 5.8mn bpd of oil from the market in line with their April 2020 agreement.

The IEA noted that OPEC+ has recently adopted a more flexible stance and will be meet-

ing regularly to assess output levels.

Oil prices have risen in recent weeks on hopes the global economy will get back on track later this year.

The IEA said these higher prices could 'provide an incentive to increase production by the US shale industry, which saw the biggest fall in output last year'.

However, shale producers appear set to stick with promises to keep output largely flat so as not to jeopardise prices.

'If they stick to those plans, OPEC+ may start to reclaim the market share it has steadily lost to the US and others since 2016,' the IEA concluded.

AFP

MSM jumps as volumes increase

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose by 0.99 per cent to close at 3,679.68 points on Tuesday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 53.01 per cent to RO2.91mn and volumes surged 86.39 per cent to 14.56mn shares.

The gains in the main index were supported by all the subindices. Financial index rose 0.33 per cent, Industrial index climbed 1.83 per cent and Services index rose 0.88 per cent. The MSM Shariah index closed up by 1.04 per cent to close at 529.46 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 22 companies closed up, while 7 companies closed down. The rest 14 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Dhofar Cattle Feed (7.78 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel (7.39 per

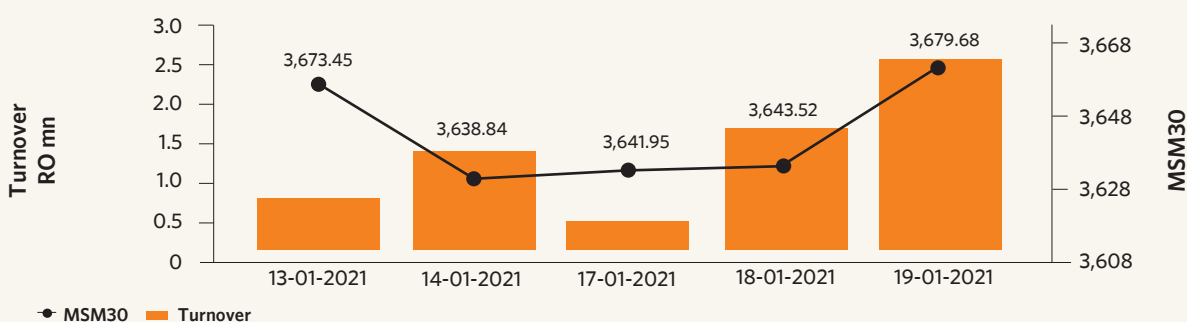


cent), Galfar Engineering & Contracting (6.52 per cent) and Ooredoo (5.7 per cent).

Top losers were Oman National Engi-

neering & Investment (-4.95 per cent), Vision Insurance (-3.41 per cent), Muscat Finance (-2.27 per cent) and Al Suwadi Power (-1.92 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



COVID-19, economic impact are world's top threats: WEF



A woman waits at a bus stop with a billboard showing a government message to observe the coronavirus restrictions in St Helen's, northwest England on Monday (AFP)

Paris, France - Business and government leaders currently see the loss of life from COVID-19 and related economic effects as the world's greatest short-term threats, the World Economic Forum (WEF) said on Tuesday.

The group which organises an annual get together of leading industrial and political voices at the Swiss Alpine resort of Davos carries out a survey of its members beforehand to determine what they consider as the greatest global threats.

Unsurprisingly, this year the COVID-19 pandemic is at the top of the list for short-term threats, though climate change remains among the top long-term concerns.

'The immediate human and economic cost of COVID-19 is severe,' said the WEF's Global Risks Report (GRPS) 2021.

'It threatens to scale back years of progress on reducing

poverty and inequality and to further weaken social cohesion and global cooperation,' it added.

Most of those who replied to the GRPS identified 'infectious diseases' and 'livelihood crises' as the top short-term threats worldwide.

The risk of 'social cohesion erosion' due to the pandemic and joblessness was deemed another critical short-term threat.

The report noted that young adults are experiencing their second major global crisis in a decade, having lived through the disruption of the financial crisis and the economic inequality it aggravated.

'This generation faces serious challenges to their education, economic prospects and mental health,' the report said, warning of 'an age of lost opportunity' as well as social unrest and political fragmentation.

WEF's leaders also noted that

its Global Risks Report has been warning of the threat of a pandemic since 2006, which it said highlighted the need find more effective ways to identify and communicate risk to decision-makers.

The World Economic Forum itself has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting its usual January summit in Davos to May in Singapore.

Nevertheless, next week the WEF will be holding a virtual Davos: A week of events dedicated to helping leaders choose innovative and bold solutions to stem the pandemic and drive a robust recovery over the next year.

The report is based on a survey of 841 people who are part of WEF's stakeholder communities including business, academia, government and NGOs.

They were questioned in September and October.

AFP

EU to approve 737 Max flights next week

Paris, France - The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) plans to authorise the Boeing 737 Max to fly again next week, 22 months after the plane was grounded following two fatal crashes.

"For us, the Max will be able to fly again starting next week," after publication of a directive clearing the jet, EASA director Patrick Ky said in a video conference.

"We have reached the point where our four main demands have been fulfilled," Ky said during the conference, organised by the German association of aviation journalists.



The Max was grounded in March 2019 after two crashes that together killed 346 people - the 2018 Lion Air disaster in Indonesia and an Ethiopian

Airlines crash the following year.

Investigators said a main cause of both crashes was a faulty flight handling system

known as the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System.

Meant to keep the plane from stalling as it ascends, the automated system instead forced the nose of the plane downward.

The findings plunged Boeing into crisis, with more than 650 orders for the 737 Max cancelled since last year.

The US Federal Aviation Administration ordered Boeing to revamp the jet and implement new pilot training protocols, before finally approving the plane for a return to service in November.

AFP

UAE uses solar power in aluminium production

Dubai, UAE - Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) and Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA) announced that the UAE has become the first country in the world to produce aluminium using the power of the sun.

Under an agreement signed on Monday, DEWA will supply EGA's smelter with solar power from the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park.

The milestone supports the vision of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, to make Dubai the most sustainable city in the world and become a global leader in the development and application of scientific and technological advances in the energy sector.

DEWA will supply EGA's smelter with 560,000 megawatt hours of solar power annually from the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park, sufficient to make 40,000 tonnes of aluminium in the first year with the potential for significant expansion. EGA will supply solar aluminium to global customers under the new product name CelestiAL.

EGA's sourcing of solar power from Dubai's electricity grid will be tracked and traced through the use of the International Renewable Energy Certification System, ensuring that the energy used to produce EGA's CelestiAL solar aluminium has been sourced from the sun.

WAM

Hit by virus, eurozone sees ghost of debt crisis

Brussels, Belgium - European governments fear the COVID-19 pandemic will punish the most fragile economies the hardest, widening gaps between EU member states and reviving memories of the eurozone debt crisis.

Much has changed in the European economy since the crisis a decade ago, but recent data shows that the countries that suffered the most back then are still the most vulnerable today.

Eurozone finance ministers, meeting by videoconference, discussed their worries Monday, with soaring public debt and stagnant wage growth topping their lists of concerns.

Greece, Spain and Italy all share towering debt levels but, to make matters worse, they are also service-based economies highly dependent on tourism that has ground to a halt because of the pandemic.

"The crisis is deepening existing imbalances, which had been gradually receding before COVID-19," the EU's economic affairs commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said after the talks.

Too much debt?

But the sun-kissed destinations on the Mediterranean are not the only countries under the gun. France and Belgium are also



A shopper leaves a H&M ready-to-wear store in Athens, Greece on Monday (AFP)

about to see debt levels soar to levels not seen in peacetime.

Frustrating to many of these countries is the relative success of the bloc's economic main player, Germany, which has avoided the worst of the pandemic crisis thanks to a steady flow of exports to China.

Complaints about the divergence between richer countries and the hard-hit poorer ones has been a recurring refrain during the pandemic that in Europe began with scenes of tragedy in Italy, where citizens bitterly complained of a lack of solidarity from their European partners.

That grievance only grew as

death rates rose and lockdowns spread in Spain and other countries, leading to the historic decision last July for the EU governments to jointly pump €750bn into the economy.

The injection of cash, which will go to European priorities such as facing the climate emergency or developing new technologies, is not expected to be felt until later in the year.

In the meantime, debt-spending runs rampant in Europe.

According to the EU's forecasts from November, France's public deficit will reach 10.5 per cent of the GDP for the end of 2020 and hit 12.2 per cent in

Spain - compared with 6 per cent in Germany.

In more typical times, these levels of overspending would sent financial markets into a panic, threatening the solvency of the countries and the future of the euro single currency.

This time however, the European Central Bank (ECB) has put the markets at ease by buying up much of the public debt, essentially snuffing out the problem for the foreseeable future.

Thanks to this intervention, a country as deeply indebted at Italy has ten-year borrowing rates at just 0.65 per cent while others even have negative rates,

meaning lenders pay for the privilege of lending the money.

Some economists believe that the ECB's intervention - and the steady expansion of vaccinations helping to reopen the economy - will be enough to get Europe back on track.

Whatever the length of the recovery, few want to see a return to balanced budget orthodoxy imposed by Germany and other northern partners in the debt-crisis years.

"We had two crises in ten years, that are normally once in a century," said Joao Leao, the Finance Minister for Portugal, which currently hold the EU's rotating presidency.

Even though it is a sensitive issue, 'we have to think about our rules', he added referring to the bloc's limits on debt and deficits that are firmly defended by Germany and others.

For now, those rules have been suspended as EU countries are left to spend freely and keep their economies out of depression.

'Let's hope our policymakers keep their cool - and the pedal to the metal - until the economies are properly back on their feet,' wrote Erik Nielsen, chief economist at Unicredit in a note to clients.

AFP

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Refer your friends and win prizes with Bank Muscat's Al Jawhar

In line with the bank's vision 'To serve you better, everyday', and commitment to offering the best services in Oman to benefit its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has called upon its Privilege Banking customers to make the best use of the ongoing Al Jawhar referral scheme.

The promotional scheme gives Al Jawhar customers a chance to earn up to RO5,000 by referring their friends and family members to join the Privilege Banking services. The scheme is at present seeing an excellent response.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, deputy general manager - Premier Banking, said, "In line with its prolific role as an innovator, Bank Muscat is very happy to launch this new scheme with guaranteed rewards. All existing Al Jawhar customers will earn an incentive of RO50 for every successful referral, up to a maximum of 100 referrals. New referrals who successfully open an Al Jawhar account before the last date of the scheme will also win RO50 each.



This makes the scheme a win-win proposition for both existing customers as well as their family and friends when they join the largest banking family in the country."

Designed to elevate Privilege Banking to unparalleled heights, Al Jawhar opens a world of opportunities with a number of services and facilities that makes the banking experience truly rewarding for its exclusive clientele. Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers are eligible for exclusive 2-for-1 deals on food, entertainment and shopping that are available through the 'Visa Of-



fers MENA' app on their smart-phones.

They also have access to a higher ATM withdrawal limit of RO800, the chance to win a fixed salary prize of RO500 every month for a year as well as other exclusive and high value Al Mazyona prizes that are especially reserved for them in the new 2021 Al Mazyona scheme.

Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers who maintain a minimum balance of RO10,000 in their accounts are eligible to win one of the 20 monthly prizes of RO5,000 each. They are also eligible to be in the special draws

for 10 prizes of RO20,000 each during the Mid-year and End of Year draws. In all, 340 high-value prizes worth over RO2.1mn are exclusively reserved for Al Jawhar customers during the year.

Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Cardholders offers access to 25 premium lounges around the world in addition to lounges at Muscat and Salalah airport. Cardholders are eligible for a complimentary Dragon Pass and a 'Meet and Greet' service with 15 per cent discount at over 450 global destinations..

The Al Jawhar Visa Platinum

Credit Card allows customers to enjoy the best in class complimentary travel insurance which include includes travel accident insurance as well as insurance for lost baggage and money, cancellation, travel delay, delayed baggage, personal liability, legal expenses and loss of passport and access to free medical and legal referral services worldwide.

The cardholders also enjoy 1 per cent cash back on all local and international spends. Designed around unique lifestyle and banking requirements, Al Jawhar is a first-of-its-kind privilege banking service in Oman.

Whispers of Serenity, Tamoghna work together on art, yoga

Distinguished artist Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna established non-governmental organisation (NGO), Tamoghna, and Oman's well known mental-health clinic, Whispers of Serenity have joined hands to work together on art, yoga for the benefit of mental well-being.

With Whispers of Serenity clinic employing a holistic approach to mental well-being, yoga and art remains a natural and readily available approaches to maintaining wellness and treating mental health issues which the NGO Tamoghna advocates. A one-of-a-kind facility Whispers of Serenity clinic offers traditional counselling therapies, hypnotherapy, while it also promotes alternative new age treatments such as yoga, art and music therapy.

While Tamoghna's major mission is to contribute to the social and economic emancipation of rural women in India, it promotes yoga and art which founder Dr Kavitha is a great campaigner. For the last many years, Dr Kavitha has been working relentlessly to promote yoga,



art and culture and has authored a yoga book *Tamoghna*. Dr Kavitha's expertise in yoga, community work, Tanjore art, Sanskrit language dissemination, writing and dedication as an educator has won her several accolades in Oman and India.

Dr Kavitha said, "We are privileged to collaborate with Whispers of Serenity which has been committed to improving mental well-being by empowering and providing appropriate physical, psychological and social therapies to those in need. We are happy to lend our expertise in the field of yoga and art to the facility's multitude of services."

Omantel App's popularity reflects in 1mn users

Omantel, the leading telecom services provider in the sultanate, has entered the year 2021 buoyed on a great achievement that underscores the company's growing popularity as the preferred integrated telecom services provider among customers in the sultanate. The user-friendly Omantel App has clocked 1mn users and continues making it easier to avail the company's array of services, for an increasing number of users. The milestone has been achieved within one year from the revamped app launch on January 9, 2020. The app has continued to benefit Omantel's subscribers as well as non-subscribers.

From around 368,000 registered users in the beginning of 2020, Omantel saw the number grow to 1mn users, with a monthly average acquisition of new customers by 200 per cent. The in-app monetisation for the company has increased by 90 per cent since December 19.

Dr Jihad al Ansari, senior manager, Digital Operations at Omantel, said, "It gives me immense pride to highlight this achievement. The 1mn mark is not just a reason to celebrate, but also the time to set higher goals.



I am confident that Omantel will achieve more milestones in customer service by channeling technology and moulding it into a user-friendly avatar for our subscribers as well as non-subscribers so that they derive maximum benefit from the telecom and digital revolutions.

"Omantel is working to further expand the service offerings on the app. Users can look forward to more flexibility, cost savings and easy operation. The app has

benefited everyone - from our individual to corporate customers. Their growing trust has been reflected in this 1mn mark. We are poised to go higher."

With an improved user experience, intuitive design and Artificial Intelligence for superior customer engagement, support and experience, the Omantel App has opened the pathways to simplified registration, instant access to services like top-ups, bill payments, etc.

Ahlibank picks SunTec for indirect taxation solution

SunTec, the world's #1 relationship-based pricing and billing company and the provider of #1 GST and VAT compliance solution for banks and financial services in GCC and India, has partnered with Ahlibank, Oman, to provide its GCC VAT compliance solution. SunTec's VAT compliance solution to help Ahlibank automate end-to-end VAT compliance process, manage regulatory changes, and seamlessly integrate it with the existing IT ecosystem.

Approximately 3bn transactions per annum are processed through SunTec's GCC VAT/GST compliance solution across its client base.

VAT is likely to be introduced in Oman in early 2021 and Ahlibank has taken the proactive step of adopting a VAT compliance solution to ensure operational efficiency, enhance



revenue, and augment customer experience.

The win is a landmark one for SunTec as it marks the 50th customer for its indirect taxation solution. SunTec has garnered 24 customers in India and this is the 26th customer in the Middle East to acquire the solution.

Said Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO at Ahlibank, said, "It is extremely crucial for us to be ready for VAT compliance. We are very happy



to partner with SunTec to deploy GCC VAT compliance solution. With SunTec we will have a single solution in place covering all aspects of VAT compliance and we will be future-proofed given that any future regulatory changes will be handled by the solution with ease."

SunTec's GCC VAT compliance solution based on the Xelerate platform will enable the bank to smoothly comply with GCC

VAT regulations and manage potential regulatory changes with ease. The single end-to-end solution helps automate the entire VAT compliance process including centralised rule-based tax determination, input tax recovery, tax invoice, reconciliation, corrections, adjustments, statements, and regulatory reporting.

Amit Dua, president - Client Facing Groups, SunTec, said, "We are delighted to partner with Ahlibank, Oman in what marks a historic win, in their journey to ensure VAT compliance. We understand that the VAT landscape is evolving within the GCC, and therefore, our solution offers agility to respond to these changing regulatory requirements. With the Xelerate platform and GCC VAT compliance solution, Ahlibank can digitise the entire VAT compliance process and comply with least

number of changes to their existing technology infrastructure."

"VAT is a crucial step that the GCC countries have taken to implement tax regimes. It is imperative for banks and financial institutions to have a robust and scalable solution to accommodate their specific needs. Ahlibank joins the list of more than 20 banks who have adopted our GCC VAT Compliance solution," added Dua.

SunTec GCC VAT compliance solution is architected to meet the unique needs of banks and financial services firms and can easily integrate with existing IT systems. The solution is designed to process all taxable transactions across business lines and applications, reduce cost of compliance, mitigate potential risk of compliance violations, penalties, and reputational risk.

'Taiwan can help in global fight against cybercrime'

Since emerging in late 2019, COVID-19 has evolved into a global pandemic. According to World Health Organization statistics, as of September 30, 2020, there were more than 33.2mn confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 1mn related deaths worldwide. Having experienced and fought the SARS epidemic in 2003, Taiwan made advance preparations in the face of COVID-19, conducting early onboard screening of inbound travellers, taking stock of antipandemic supply inventories, and forming a national mask production team. The government's swift response and the Taiwanese people's cooperation helped effectively contain the spread of the disease.

The international community has been putting its resources into fighting COVID-19 in the physical world, yet the cyberworld has also been under attack, and faces major challenges. The Cyber Attack Trends: 2020 Mid-Year Report published in August 2020 by Check Point Software Technologies Ltd, a well-known IT security company, pointed out that COVID-19 related phishing and malware attacks increased dramatically from below 5,000 per week in February to over 200,000 in late April.

At the same time as COVID-19 has seriously affected people's lives and safety, cybercrime is undermining national security, business operations, and the security of personal information and property, causing significant damage and losses. Taiwan's success in containing COVID-19 has won worldwide acclaim. Faced with cyberthreats and related challenges, Taiwan has actively promoted policies built around the concept that information security is national security. It has bolstered efforts to train IT security specialists and develop the IT security industry and innovative technologies.

Cross-border cooperation

Nations around the globe are fighting the widely condemned dissemination of child pornography, infringements on intellectual property rights, and the theft of trade secrets. Business email fraud and ransomware have also generated heavy financial losses among enterprises, while cryptocurrencies have become an avenue for criminal transactions and money laundering. Since anyone with online access can connect to any Internet-enabled device in the world, crime syndicates are exploiting the anonymity and freedom this provides to conceal their identities and engage in illegal activities.

The Taiwanese police force has a special unit for investigating technology crimes comprising professional cybercrime investigators. It has also established a digital forensics laboratory meeting ISO 17025 requirements. Cybercrime knows no borders, so Taiwan hopes to work with the rest of the world in jointly fighting the problem.

Intelligence sharing

In August 2020, the US Department of Homeland Security,

Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Department of Defense released the Malware Analysis Report, identifying a state-sponsored hacking organisation that has recently been using a 2008 malware variant known as TAIDOR to launch attacks. Numerous Taiwanese government agencies and businesses have previously been subject to such attacks.

In a 2012 report on this malware, Trend Micro Inc. observed that all of the victims were from Taiwan, and that the majority were government organisations. Every month, Taiwan's public sector experiences an extremely high number of cyberattacks from beyond Taiwan's borders—between 20 and 40mn instances. Being the priority target of state-sponsored attacks, Taiwan has been able to track their sources and methods and the malware used. By sharing intelligence, Taiwan could help other countries avert potential threats and facilitate the establishment of a joint security mechanism to counter state cyberthreat actors.

Taiwan can help

In July 2016, an unprecedented hacking infringement occurred in Taiwan when NT\$83.27mn was illegally withdrawn from First Commercial Bank ATMs. Within a week, the police had recovered NT\$77.48mn of the stolen funds and arrested three members of a hacking syndicate—Andrejs Peregudovs, a Latvian; Mihail Colibaba, a Romanian; and Niklae Penkov, a Moldovan—that had until then remained untouched by the law. The incident drew international attention.

In September that same year, a similar ATM heist occurred in Romania. A suspect Babii was believed to be involved in both cases, leading investigators to conclude that the thefts had been committed by the same syndicate. At the invitation of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), Taiwan's Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB) visited its office three times to exchange intelligence and evidence. Subsequently, the two entities established Operation TAIEX. Under this plan, the CIB provided key evidence retrieved from suspects' mobile phones to Europol, which sieved through the evidence and identified the suspected mastermind, known as Denys, who was then based in Spain. This led to his arrest by Europol and the Spanish police, putting an end to the hacking syndicate.

The fight against cybercrime requires international cooperation, and Taiwan must work together with other countries. Taiwan can help these other countries, and is willing to share its experiences so as to make cyberspace safer and realise a truly borderless Internet. By voicing your backing for Taiwan in international forums, you can play a critical role in advancing Taiwan's objective of taking part in international organisations in a pragmatic and meaningful manner.

(Huang Ming-chao, commissioner, CIB, Taiwan)

Changan CS75 delivers on dynamism, comfort and safety

The Premium Automotive Brand Changan recently launched by Bahwan International Group in Oman has received overwhelming response among the customers.

Changan Automobile boasts of a comprehensive portfolio of range of products including sedan, crossovers and SUVs like EADO- Family Sedan, CS35 PLUS Crossover, CS75 4WD Crossover, CS85 Coupe & CS95 7 Seater 4WD.

Changan CS75 SUV excites with stylish looks, distinctive agility and all terrain capability delivers a greatly satisfying driving experience to the astute consumer. The 4WD SUV Changan CS75 is a perfect combination of dynamism and intelligence for professionals, families or avid travellers who want to explore new places every day.

Its intelligent all-wheel drive system helps conquer different terrains since the Changan CS75 4WD comes with a 1.8lt turbocharged engine which produces 170 hp and 245 nm of torque and is mated with a 6 speed AT. It delivers an excellent fuel economy of 12.2km per litre as per GSO rating.

A spokesperson for AGAE says, “Changan CS75 makes everyone explore new territories with its exceptional on-road performance and all-terrain capabilities. Along with the off-road prowess, CS75 is also instilled with everyday practicality, form and function to be prepared for all kinds of weekend adventure.”

He added, “Its features includes Push Start Button, 10” Infotainment Touch Screen, Navigation, 360°View Camera, Blind Spot Detection, Side Assist, Side Airbags, Leather Seats, Cruise control, Panoramic sunroof, Electronic parking brake and rear vehicle approaching alarm, etc.”

By seamlessly integrating luxurious interior with thoughtful technologies, Changan CS75 creates a level of ride comfort,



even on rough roads. with range of innovative driving technologies, the Changan CS75 gives the driver the confidence to control the vehicle in challenging situations. Its Blue Core Powertrain Technology, based on the principles of power, clean and quiet, provides owners a highly efficient and energy saving performance.

Exterior

Among its exterior features are

19-inch alloy wheels, LED headlights with auto headlamps, panoramic sunroof, roof rails, LED taillights, twin exhaust pipes, electrically adjustable, folding ORVMS with heating, puddle lamps.

Interior

Its interior boasts of Leather seats, Navigation, Multi-function steering wheel, Cruise control, Bluetooth, Keyless entry with Push button start and 10” Info-

tainment Touch Screen.

Safety

Its safety and security features front, side and curtain airbags, ESP (ABS+TCS) + EBD, hill hold and hill descent control, auto hold function, front and rear parking sensors, 360° view camera, electronic parking brake.

Technical Specifications

Changan CS75’s technical spec-

ification includes engine of 1.8lt Turbo Power – a torque of 245Nm, transmission of 6 Speed AT, drive type 4WD. Dimensions include length x width x height of 4650 x 1850 x 1705 mm, wheelbase of 2700 mm and fuel tank of 58lt.

About AGAE

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment, which is part of Bahwan International Group, has set up a spacious and state-of-the-art showroom in Qurm and service centre in Ghala, Muscat.

AGAE has already tied up for Periodic Maintenance Services in many cities including Salalah, Sohar, Sur, Nizwa, Ibra and Barka, etc.

Changan Oman offers 5 years or 150,000km manufacturer warranty on all passenger vehicles in Oman.

For more information, call Changan Oman Toll free number 80050800, WhatsApp on 94641010 or visit our showroom in Qurm.

Also you can visit and register at www.Changanoman.com to book test drives and call back.



Viewpoints engages wide audience

Continuing its efforts to make significant local impact on topics of national interest, Sohar International hosted its 5th virtual Viewpoints session in its 10th edition, recently.

Chaired by Mohammed Mahfoudh al Ardhi, chairman of the Board of Directors at Sohar International, the interactive forum witnessed an enticing conversation as it left the audience with learnings to reflect on and solutions to implement. The session’s guest speaker, Dr. Robbert Dijkgraaf, director and Leon Levy Professor at Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (New Jersey), USA – one of the world’s foremost centers for curiosity-driven basic research, left the viewers with interesting facts

and global learnings on ‘The Future of Science & Technology’.

Hundreds of audience, including students, academicians, entrepreneurs and working professionals attended the virtual session on Zoom and Sohar International’s YouTube channel. Dr Dijkgraaf shared from his rich experience the need for futuristic concepts, their global adaptability and the technological way forward in various industries.

Ardhi said, “Sohar International truly believes in the value of knowledge sharing and the opportunities and ideas it opens up for aspiring entrepreneurs, and for today’s youth. With that belief, Viewpoints augments the bank’s confidence in creating value for the people of Oman.”

OPPO introduces new technology for privacy protection

Global technology brand, OPPO, has innovated first-of-its-kind privacy protection technology to make the smartphone user experience more safety and convenience, in an increasingly converged environment.

Debuted in Oman on the latest OPPO Reno4 smartphone, the technology supports the OPPO’s R&D mission to make mobile phones smarter and enrich the user experience with innovative technologies.

With some of the highest smartphone penetrated markets in the world – Oman at 124 per cent (source: Datareportal) – mobile phones in MENA are currently the most important social interaction tools. However, they are increasingly vulnerable to threats against information privacy. Strangers could easily catch a glimpse of an official email or private content if a message pops up on a phone that is also being used in a social gathering or to take a photograph.

Tarek Zaki, senior product manager, OPPO MEA, said, “We are seeing an increasing demand from consumers for privacy features as well as lifestyle features in smartphones. With consistent penetration of Internet and infor-



mation technology into our lifestyles, staying always connected has made privacy protection one of the trickiest problems for smartphone users. With the new AI-enhanced smart sensor, OPPO is offering consumers smartphones that could realise the integrated functions of N-in-one such as AI assistant, privacy security and touchless gesture operation.”

The OPPO R&D team identified a next-generation solution using Artificial Intelligence that is available only on OPPO Reno4 smartphone. Offering groundbreaking camera capabilities and trendy design, OPPO Reno4 is equipped the new AI-enhanced smart sensor that provides four unique and advanced features.

The Reno4 is available across Oman, priced at RO154.9.

Occidental Oman lends its support to Ibri camel race

As part of its larger initiative to support camel racing in the sultanate, Occidental Oman sponsored the Ibri Camel Race in Dhahirah governorate, which is the third of four races organised by the Oman Camel Racing Federation, and sponsored by Occidental Oman.

The event was attended by federation and Occidental Oman representatives. 200 camels competed to win on the race-tracks. After 8 rounds, 4 winners



were declared. Occidental Oman awarded each of the winners with a pickup truck, in accordance with the sponsorship agreement previously signed between Occidental Oman and the Oman Camel Racing Federation.

Occidental Oman will also award 8 winners of the main following sponsored race with pickup trucks. Future sponsored race include the Sohar Camel Race. Occidental Oman has supported 21 camel races during the

last six years, as the initiative engages with a sport historically tied to the culture of local communities.

This sponsorship comes within the framework of Occidental Oman’s long-term commitment to strengthen its social ties with the communities located in its concession areas and the wider Omani population, and it enhances the strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders.

W Muscat among top five boutique hotels in Oman

Cementing its position as one of the hospitality industry’s best and brightest, W Muscat has been named among the top 5 Best Luxury Boutique Hotels in Oman at the Luxury Lifestyle Awards.

Since opening in 2019, W Muscat has showcased its unique brand of luxury to guests in the sultanate, from its super stylish rooms to a Whenever/Wherever attitude that caters to every whim and quirk. Highlighting the signature W brand passion points – Music, Fuel, Design and Fashion – and a penchant for the unexpected, the hotel is home to a number of the city’s trendiest venues, including the achingly chic Chinese restaurant, Ba Ban, and the dazzling



rooftop paradise, Siddharta Lounge by Buddha-Bar, all designed with glamour in mind.

“We are thrilled to have been named in this prestigious global award, which is a welcome recognition of our efforts to redefine luxury hospitality for the modern traveller. We’ve been open for under two years but in that time, we have introduced dozens of new and exciting happenings, and are constantly finding ways to shake things up. Combining our signature W energy with the amazing surroundings and rich culture of Oman, we are transforming the sultanate’s hospitality industry with the kind of personalised and authentic experiences that we believe true luxury should stand

for,” said Gerald Chevasson, general manager of W Muscat.

Built in collaboration with Omran, the country’s largest hotel investment company, W Muscat has brought the world-famous W brand to Oman.

A true disruptor in its aesthetic, the hotel is an eye-catching ode to the brand’s passions, offering a playful take on the sultanate’s natural beauty and rich heritage. With 279 sleek rooms and suites and array of show-stopping dining venues, the beachfront hotel continues to find new ways to thrill its guests.

For more information W Muscat, visit www.wmuscat.com or get social with W Muscat on Instagram @wmuscat.

Mideast mothers pin hope in Biden

Damascus, Syria - Syrian mother Dahouk Idriss says she can't wait for US President-elect Joe Biden to be inaugurated on Wednesday, so she can finally visit her son for the first time in four years.

Biden has pledged that, on his first day in office, he would reverse a ban ordered by Donald Trump on travel to the United States for citizens of many mostly-Muslim countries.

"I'm counting the days until I get my next visa," Idriss told AFP, sitting in her comfortable Damascus living room, surrounded by pictures of her far-flung children and late husband.

The retired chemistry teacher in her sixties said she visited her 36 year old son twice after he started studying in Washington DC the year Syria's war broke out in 2011, once in 2015 and the last time in late 2016.

But after Trump took over the White House in 2017, he banned access to the United States to all travellers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, igniting international outrage and leading to domestic court rulings against it.

Iraq and Sudan were dropped from the list, but in 2018 the Supreme Court upheld a later version of the ban for Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen - as well as North Korea and Venezuela.

Idriss slammed the ban as 'outrageous'.

"Thousands of mothers like me around the world only have one wish, which is to see their children again," she said.

That should be possible for many under Biden - at least once



Dahouk Idriss at her house in the Syrian capital Damascus. The Syrian mother says she cannot wait for Joe Biden to be inaugurated on Wednesday, so she can finally visit her son for the first time in four years (AFP)

the separate international travel restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic ease.

That may take some time, however, with Biden's team declaring on Monday that 'with the pandemic worsening, and more contagious variants emerging around the world, this is not the time to be lifting restrictions on international travel'.

'Scared I'll die alone'

To travel anywhere from Syria has become increasingly difficult since the war broke out as many countries severed ties with Damascus.

Obtaining a visa often requires a trip to an embassy in a neighbouring country, which has been made even more difficult by COVID-19 restrictions.

But Idriss, who has also struggled to visit her daughter in the United Arab Emirates, says she will jump through as many hoops as necessary to see her son again.

"I will travel to any country to submit my documents as soon as they start accepting applications," she said.

In another part of Damascus, 79 year old Lamees Jadeed said she too hoped Biden would keep his promise.

"It's been more than four years since I last saw my daughter," she said. "I'm scared I'll die alone without seeing her."

"I'm probably more impatient for Biden to become president than he is himself."

Her daughter, 38 year old Nawwar, travelled to the United States on a scholarship in late

The person [Trump] who ordered this [visa ban] is not a normal person and has had zero regard for the human consequences of his decisions.

IRANIAN MIDWIFE MAHNAZ

2015. She has since applied for asylum and therefore cannot leave the country.

Jadeed says she travelled once to Lebanon in 2018 to request a visa at the US Embassy there, but was rejected.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, other parents too are waiting with bated breath.

In the Libyan capital Tripoli, Mariam and Abdelhadi Reda, both in their late seventies, said they could not wait to see their



Painter Jagot Singh Rubal gives the final touches to a painting depicting US President-elect Joe Biden (right) and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris ahead of their inauguration, in India's Amritsar city on Tuesday (AFP)

there to study on a scholarship from the Libyan government when they were younger.

"I miss the States," Mariam said in Tripoli. "We have very good memories and old friends from our college years that we see every time we go back."

Birth of first grandchild

In Iran, retired midwife Mahnaz (62) recounted how she was not allowed in 2018 to be by her daughter Neda's bedside when she gave birth to her first child in Los Angeles.

"It was my first grandchild. I had been waiting to live this moment with my daughter. How I had dreamt of it, and made plans," she said.

With no US embassy in

Tehran after the two countries severed diplomatic ties in 1979, she travelled to neighbouring Armenia, hoping to be able to obtain an exemption from the ban.

"I even provided a letter written by an American psychologist saying my daughter needed emotional support," she said.

But despite the promises of an understanding embassy employee, her demand was rejected.

She did not meet her grandson Kian until nine months later when her daughter returned to Tehran to visit.

"This ban has ripped so many families apart," Mahnaz said.

"The person who ordered this is not a normal person and has had zero regard for the human consequences of his decisions."

AFP



This photo provided by the Iranian Army office on Tuesday shows Iran's airborne infantry or paratroopers taking part in a military drill in the coastal region of Makran in southeastern Iran (AFP)

EU warns Iran nuclear deal at 'critical juncture'

Brussels, Belgium - EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has warned the Iran nuclear deal is at a 'critical juncture', as Tehran's moves to breach it threaten efforts to get the US back on board.

'We have seen very concerning developments on the nuclear side as well as new rounds of US sanctions,' Borrell wrote to EU foreign ministers in a letter.

'That risks undermining diplomatic efforts, including ours, to facilitate a US return to the JCPOA and to bring back Iran to the full implementation of its JCPOA commitments,' said the letter sent ahead of a meeting of the top diplomats on Monday.

The JCPOA, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, is the instrument agreed to implement the 2015 accord.

The EU and other signatories to the pact are pushing to get US President-elect Joe Biden to return to the agreement after scrambling to keep it alive following Donald Trump's withdrawal over two years ago.

But they face a struggle to get Iran and the US back on the same page after Trump reimposed harsh sanctions and Tehran responded by breaching limits set by the deal.

The Iranian government has signalled a readiness to engage with Biden, who takes office on January 20 and has himself expressed willingness to return to diplomacy with Tehran.

But supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has insisted the US must start out by lifting its sanctions on Tehran.

That could be a tough sell as Iran has set about pushing back against the constraints in the deal that sought to curb its nuclear programme in return for relief from the punitive measures.

Signatories Britain, France and Germany on Saturday called on Iran to halt plans to produce uranium metal, after Tehran told the UN's nuclear watchdog it was advancing research on the issue.

That move came after Iran announced earlier in January that it

had started the process of enriching uranium to 20 per cent.

That represents its biggest break yet from its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal struck with world powers.

Qatar calls for Gulf talks with Iran

Qatar has called for Gulf Arab countries to hold talks with Iran, its Foreign Minister said on Tuesday, after Doha reconciled with its neighbours following a rift.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, who has previously called for dialogue with Iran, told Bloomberg TV he was 'hopeful that this would happen and we still believe this should happen'.

"This is also a desire that's shared by other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries," he said.

It comes weeks after Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE re-established ties with Qatar after breaking them off in June 2017.

AFP

Tunisia seeks to stem night-time street riots after 4 days of violence

Tunis, Tunisia - Tunisia braced for further protests on Tuesday after hundreds were arrested in four nights of street clashes between riot police and disaffected youths in cities across the North African country.

President Kais Saied urged young Tunisians to refrain from further violence even as social media posts called for new rallies.

"Do not attack or insult anyone and do not damage private property or state institutions," he said on Monday, warning that 'chaos' does not allow progress.

Rioting broke out on Friday evening, and more than 600 people had been arrested by Monday over the disturbances in which young people have hurled rocks and Molotov cocktails at police who have fired teargas at them.

Much of the unrest has hit working class neighbourhoods,



Protesters stand amidst fumes as they block a street during clashes with security forces in the Ettadhamen city suburb on the northwestern outskirts of Tunisia's capital Tunis on Monday (AFP)

where anger is boiling over soaring unemployment and a political class accused of having failed to deliver good governance a decade on from the 2011 revolution.

The tourism-reliant economy shrank by nine percent last year, consumer prices have spiralled and one third of young people are unemployed.

Tunisia often sees protests in

January, a month of several key anniversaries including longtime dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's fall from power on January 14, 2011.

AFP

Sudan troops in Darfur after clashes kill 155

Khartoum, Sudan - A heavy Sudanese troop presence helped restore calm on Tuesday in the Darfur region, local sources said, after three days of inter-ethnic violence claimed at least 155 lives and displaced tens of thousands.

The transitional government in the capital Khartoum has deployed military units to the remote region where the recent end of a joint United Nation and African Union peacekeeping mission raised fears of more bloodshed.

Violence erupted on Saturday between Arab nomads and members of the non-Arab Masalit ethnic group in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, killing at least 100 people and wound-



This file photo shows a convoy of Sudanese security forces deploy in El Geneina, the capital of the West Darfur state, on April 2, 2016 (AFP)

ing more than 130, said the state governor, Mohamed Abdalla al Douma.

The clashes led around 50,000 people to flee areas in and around a camp for internally displaced people (IDP) who

were driven from their homes in previous conflicts, said the aid group Save the Children.

Authorities in West Darfur have imposed a statewide curfew as troops arrived there from Khartoum and other states to re-

store order.

"There have been no clashes since Sunday, but there were incidents of looting, especially of houses and farms of people living at the Kerindig IDP camp," Douma told AFP.

"The situation is calm in the state as security forces have spread in and around the city of El Geneina and Kerindig."

Douma said houses were burned and farm produce stolen in villages near El Geneina but added that "we sent security to surround these villages and they are now secure".

Separate clashes broke out on Monday in South Darfur leaving at least 55 people killed and 37 wounded.

AFP

EU to vaccinate 70% adults by June

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union is aiming to inoculate 70 per cent of its adult population against the coronavirus by June, European Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas told a media conference on Tuesday.

That aim, agreed in a meeting of all EU commissioners, comes as most member states are struggling to achieve liftoff with their vaccination programmes.

The bloc started jabs three weeks ago and has so far approved two vaccines - from BioNTech/Pfizer and from Moderna - with others soon expected to follow.

But its pace of vaccination trails behind countries such as the US, Britain, Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

Health commissioner Stella Kyriakides said that the EU's joint-buying strategy meant there were already enough doses to vaccinate 80 per cent of the EU's population of 450mn.

She admitted, though, that 'vaccinations need to speed up'.

Schinas said, "We also propose that by summer, this year, member states should have vaccinated a minimum of 70 per cent of the adult population."

He said that meant before June 1, when the European summer begins.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement that meeting the goal of 70 per cent within the next four months could be "a turning point in our fight against this virus".

Vaccine 'bottleneck'

Questioned earlier in the European Parliament about the slowness of the rollout, Kyriakides said the current bottleneck was due to 'the worldwide shortage of production capacity', rather



A computer scientist works in his home office in Dortmund, western Germany, on Tuesday amid expectation that German Chancellor Angela Merkel and leaders of the country's 16 states are expected to extend and tighten a partial lockdown beyond January (AFP)

than a shortage of vaccines already ordered by the EU. She also noted that, if all the vaccines the EU has secured in advance are authorised, the bloc would have over 2bn doses on hand.

The excess doses would be provided to lower-income countries outside the EU through a joint WHO facility called COVAX, she said.

"Very soon, we will be able to announce our donations of vaccines to the rest of the world," she said at the media conference.

MEPs were scathing about confidentiality clauses demanded by vaccine-makers in their contracts with the EU that kept the prices, liability terms and contingencies for late deliveries secret, preventing parliamentary oversight.

Kyriakides said she heard that concern 'loud and clear' but said the Commission was bound by the clauses.

She also responded to criticisms about Germany's Health Ministry, saying it had obtained

options for extra vaccine doses bilaterally with some of the companies.

"It is not legally possible for them to negotiate bilateral contracts with the companies in the EU portfolio," she said. "And I have reminded member states of these rights and obligations."

Chancellor Angela Merkel and leaders of Germany's 16 states are expected to extend and tighten a partial lockdown beyond January, as fears grow over virus variant strains.

Vaccine 'certificates'

Kyriakides said the Commission was in 'active discussion' with European governments about the possibility of 'vaccination certificates' that would be recognised across the bloc.

That was one of several vaccine-related issues to be discussed at a summit of EU leaders on Thursday, she said. But she added that it was 'premature' to think about such certificates being used for anything else.

AFP

'Pandemic lays bare WHO's powerlessness'

Geneva, Switzerland - The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how underfunded and powerless the World Health Organization (WHO) is to carry out the tasks the world expects of it, an independent expert panel said on Tuesday.

The heads of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response presented a report to the WHO's executive board which said that the UN health body could have acted faster and more decisively at the start of the pandemic to avert catastrophe.

But they stressed that the delays and failures could largely be attributed to the weak position of the UN agency, and said more funding and reforms were desperately needed.

"The world is more reliant on an effective WHO than ever before," said former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who co-chairs the panel with former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark.

But, she told reporters, the same countries that have turned to the WHO for leadership during the crisis 'have kept it underpowered and under-resourced to do the job expected of it'.

COVID-19 was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019 before seeping beyond China's borders



WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (AFP)

to wreak global havoc, costing more than two million lives and eviscerating economies.

The WHO has faced claims it moved too slowly to declare an international crisis, to acknowledge the virus was spreading through the air, and to recommend face masks.

It has also faced criticism for not pressing China harder to provide accurate information on the initial cases and for allowing more than a year to pass before an international team of experts could enter China to help search for the origins of the virus.

But while the panel report also suggested the WHO should have acted quicker at the start, Johnson Sirleaf stressed that 'the bottom line is the WHO has no powers to enforce anything or investigate... within a country'.

AFP

Truck kills 15 on Indian roadside

Ahmedabad, India - An out-of-control dumper truck crushed fifteen people to death as they slept by the roadside early on Tuesday in western India, authorities said.

The dead included a baby girl, eight women and six men, said police official Usha Rada in the Surat district of Gujarat state. Six others were injured.

The truck collided with a tractor carrying sugarcane just after midnight at a crossroads.

"The dumper driver... lost control of the vehicle and went off the road, crushing labourers sleeping on the roadside," deputy police superintendent C M Jadeja said.

Police said that the drivers of both the dumper truck and the tractor have been arrested.

In 2019 more than 150,000 people died in almost half a million accidents in a country of 1.3bn people, according to the government.

On Monday, Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari inaugurated Road Safety Month, saying that the government aimed to halve road deaths and accidents by 2025.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is from Gujarat, announced that the government would give ₹200,000 (US\$2,735 approx) to the families of each of the victims of the 'tragic' accident.

"The loss of lives due to a truck accident in Surat is tragic. My thoughts are with the bereaved families. Praying that the injured recover at the earliest: PM", Modi's office tweeted.

Agencies

Fire destroys UNICEF schools in Rohingya camps

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh - Four UNICEF schools for Rohingya children in refugee camps in Bangladesh have been destroyed in a fire, officials said on Tuesday, with the UN children's agency calling it arson.

It was unclear who might attack the schools, which were empty at the time, but the security situation in the camps housing around a million people has worsened in recent months.

Last week a blaze thought to have been started by a gas stove burned down hundreds of bamboo shacks in one of the camps, leaving thousands of the refugees originally from Myanmar homeless.

Razwan Hayat, Bangladesh's refugee commissioner, told AFP

that he believed the latest fire wasn't started deliberately and said that the schools were made of flimsy flammable materials.

"We are investigating. But we think it is an accident. These centres are not permanent structures," he said.

However, UNICEF said on Twitter the incident was arson and that it was 'working with partners to assess the damages of the attack and speed up the process of rebuilding these learning Centres'.

UNICEF runs about 2,500 learning centres in the 34 refugee camps in Bangladesh's southeastern border district of Cox's Bazar. Some 240,000 Rohingya children studied in them before the pandemic.



A UNICEF learning centre in flames after an arson attack, at a Rohingya camp in Bangladesh (AFP)

They have been closed for months because of measures to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus but are expected to open again from next month, aid workers say.

The Rohingya are largely conservative with many opposing the education of girls.

Those living in the camps include around 750,000 Rohingya who fled a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 that the UN has likened to ethnic cleansing.

There is little prospect of them returning to Myanmar, leading to tensions with the local population and prompting many to attempt treacherous sea journeys to Malaysia and Indonesia.

AFP

Imprisoned Chinese rights lawyer in poor health: Wife

Beijing, China - A Chinese lawyer nominated for a top human rights award is in poor health after years in prison, his wife Xu Yan told AFP on Tuesday.

Yu Wensheng was detained in Beijing in January 2018 in front of his young son just hours after he wrote an open letter calling for constitutional reforms, including multi-candidate elections.

He was tried in secret and sentenced to four years in prison last June for 'inciting subversion of state power'.

"His physical state is very poor. His right hand is deformed and trembles so much that he cannot write," Xu said.

Yu was nominated on Monday for the Martin Ennals Award, which organisers hope will shine a light on abuses in authoritarian states.



Xu Yan, the wife of Yu Wensheng, seeking the support of the Global Lawyers Forum for his release

Xu said her husband's nomination 'not only supports and honours (him), but is also an encouragement and affirmation to other human rights lawyers

and defenders'.

China has seen a dramatic crackdown on civil liberties and freedoms since President Xi Jinping took power in 2012, with

hundreds of human rights lawyers and activists detained in recent years.

Yu was known for taking on a number of high-profile rights

cases, including the defence of fellow lawyer Wang Quanzhang, who was among more than 300 legal professionals and activists arrested in a July 2015 crackdown.

He also became well known for suing the Beijing government for the city's chronic air pollution.

Yu's defence lawyer Lu Siwei had his legal licence revoked by authorities last week after handling several sensitive human rights cases.

Lu had planned to file another appeal against Yu's sentence, Xu said, after his first appeal was rejected earlier this month.

Last week, she was allowed to have a 25-minute video call with her husband, who is being held in a detention centre in the eastern province of Jiangsu.

It was their first such meeting

in three years, she said.

Four of Yu's teeth were missing and he was unable to chew food properly, Xu said, and that there was no heating in the detention centre. "These are very basic human needs that are not fulfilled," she said, adding that Yu occasionally glanced in another direction before replying.

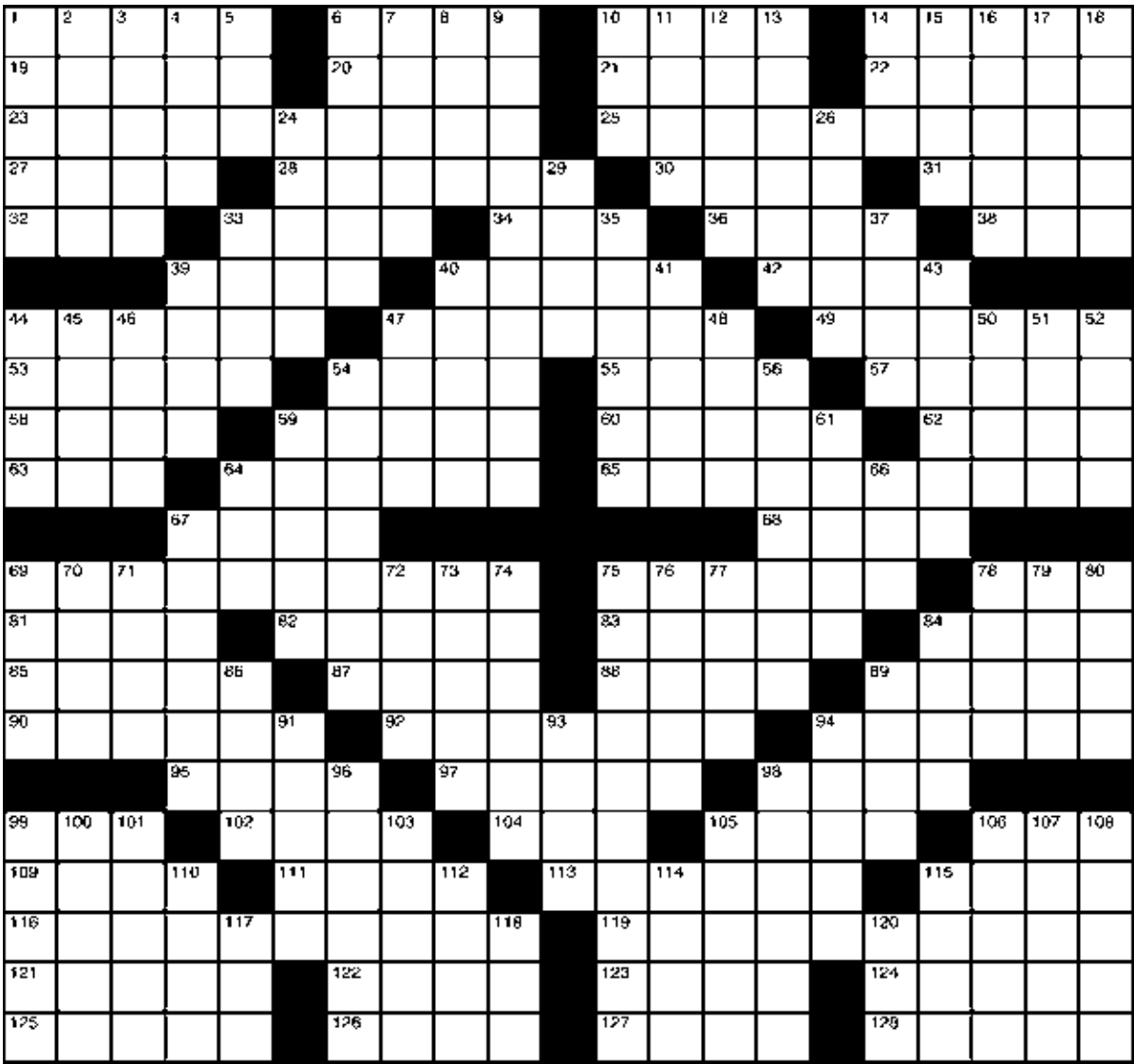
Xu suggested that was because there were police in the room, outside her view.

"There are probably a lot of things he cannot say right now, we will only know the full extent of what he experienced after he is released," she said.

The Martin Ennals Award is decided by ten leading rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 A Michelangelo work
6 Pack down
10 Biblical wise men
14 Much above normal weight
19 Pointed shaft
20 Culture medium
21 Solar disk
22 Formed into bundles
23 E. Africa lake
25 Plotting in secret
27 French summers
28 Bowling lanes
30 Needy
31 ___ Lisa
32 Thing, in law
33 Central Amer. leguminous tree
34 Airport info
36 First Arabic letter
38 Sailor, informally
39 Roman god of love
40 A support
42 ___ Jannings, actor
44 Bury
47 Executes by hanging
49 Light refractors
53 Large showy flower
54 Tolerable
55 Recording ribbon
57 Wise legislator in

Ancient Gr.

- 58 Scottish Gaelic or Irish
59 Forbidden
60 Habituate
62 Proboscis
63 Goddess of dawn: Gr.
64 Connect again
65 Vermillion
67 German philosopher
Emmanuel
68 Deity image
69 Hair fillers
75 Trimmed, as shrubs
78 Rub-a-dub-dub place
81 Simple
82 Uncanny
83 Stair part
84 Father
85 Senseless
87 Orient staple food crop
88 Poems
89 Sacha ___ Cohen
90 Sots
92 Signified
94 Criminals
95 Tears
97 Grants or permits
98 Overlook
99 Male gym objective
102 Require
104 Aves. counterpart
105 Hair colorists goal

106 Deface

- 109 Carpal: prefix
111 War god: Gr.
113 Futile
115 San Francisco Bay's ___ Alto
116 Predilection
119 Comes between
121 Dancing TV host
122 A nonreactive gas
123 Poetic contraction
124 A tidal flood
125 Brings up
126 Italian princely villa
127 Jewels
128 Waste allowances, once
DOWN
1 Father: L.
2 Angry
3 Sea eagles
4 Clothes
5 Milkfish, in Hawaii
6 Swift songbird
7 Nimble
8 Manufacture
9 Devotional tome
10 Prefix to Scotch names
11 Upon
12 Italian port city
13 Part of a shoe
14 Japanese sash
15 Yeast on malt liquors
16 Novelist Evans pen name

17 Dried cassia

- leaflets
18 ___ Allan Poe
24 Man of great wealth
26 To dress up
29 Pierce with a dagger
33 Television award
35 Vinegar's acid
37 Some conifers
39 First-class
40 Bovine ruminant?
41 Babylonian hero
43 One of the Barrymores
44 Fencing sword
45 Roman emperor AD 54-68
46 Fling
47 Desert in Asia
48 To goad
50 Narrow aperture
51 Greatest amount
52 Dirk
54 More briny
56 Certain weasels
59 Taut
61 Large sea duck
64 Operated
66 Drowse
67 More acute
69 Issue forth
70 Strange: comb. form
71 "The Parent ___"
72 Toward the mouth
73 "Model" judge Barber

74 Large fishing nets

- 75 Remonstrating
76 Carnival features
77 Employed
78 Edible rootstock
79 A top
80 Proscribes
84 Chums
86 Ireland
89 To outdo
91 Lance
93 A preposition
94 More delicate
96 Calm
98 Stingy ones
99 Isar tributary
100 Late TV comedian
Milton ___
101 Stone pillar
103 Sand hills
105 ___ pole
106 Skin disease
107 Wide awake
108 Valentine's flowers
110 The southwest wind
112 Robert Burns, for one
114 Arrow poison
115 Bosc or Anjou
117 Printer's measures
118 Compass direction: abbr.
120 Spot's doc

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You are not to be trifled with under Wednesday's skies! Your ruling planet, Mars, locks into a fiery conjunction with freedom-craving Uranus this afternoon. This pairing is likely to evoke a powerful independent streak, an unusually strong need for space, and potentially a fiery temper. Be especially mindful of your body today and try to refrain from taking any rash actions!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Things on Earth are heating up beneath Wednesday's cosmic landscape. You're likely to be feeling those flames creep up around your career path, as irritable Mars forms a conjunction with Uranus. This pairing brings a strong desire for change and the energy to back it up towards your current set of ambitions—but beware of unnecessarily burning bridges with people.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Things are likely to be heating up on the job front. Mars spends the day in a fiery conjunction with change-bringer Uranus, prompting the potential for unexpected happenings on the work front. You, more than anyone, need an active outlet for this potent energy, so try your best to find room for movement and exercise to cope with any new changes in plan.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Wednesday's cosmic landscape is shaping up to be a bit unruly. Aggressive Mars forms a conjunction with change-demanding Uranus in your sign this afternoon, prompting a strong need to break the mould wherever things have gotten stagnant in your life. Look to stories around individuality, identity, and health to see where this break-free energy is aching to be acknowledged.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Every once in a while, a day comes along that requires you to surrender control. Wednesday is one of those days! Mars forms a potent conjunction with explosive Uranus, potentially prompting unseen plan changes concerning your big-picture life view. Try to roll with the changes at hand, rather than desperately clinging to the plan you had laid down.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Tensions thoroughly lace themselves throughout Wednesday's skies. Brace yourself! Mars forms an explosive conjunction with Uranus, prompting irritability, tempers, and a strong need for independence. Creative projects are likely to receive a fresh burst of insight. But it might be hard to stay focused on the task at hand due to other frustrations on the romantic front.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Mental breakthroughs weave themselves throughout skies. Irritable Mars forms a powerful conjunction with truth-seeking Uranus. This pairing is likely to prompt powerful stories concerning buried anger, blocked drives, and the authenticity of your actions. It's an ideal day for a therapy session or long-form free write, as your subconscious is bound to be breaking new ground.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Breakthroughs are bound to be washing up on the shores of your intimate relationships. Mars forms an intense conjunction with radical Uranus, prompting shake-ups and irritable moods around romantic endeavours. This frustrated energy isn't a random punishment, it's pushing you to break through to new levels of authenticity and honesty in your methods of deeper relating.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You usually approach any kind of conflict with a cool and calm sense of composure. Today's skies will call upon your ability to do just that, as irascible Mars merges with electric Uranus today. This pairing is likely to create some hot-headed moods and disruptions to navigate around the home and family front, so do your best to gently handle whatever comes up for you.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Change is the name of the game under Wednesday's skies. Mars forms an explosive union with Uranus today, prompting a strong need to shake things up around both your social network and long-term goals. Look for opportunities to be as true and honest with yourself as possible about who belongs in your close-knit circle and what ambitions are worth pursuing.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Give yourself ample room to breathe! Your ruling planet, Mars, forms a fierce conjunction with Uranus. This union can create fiery tempers and unexpected outbursts—especially on the relationship front. You're likely to feel an especially strong independent streak as well. Be mindful of how you move about, as you're likely to act a little more erratic than usual.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Be mindful of your tongue! Words are likely to be coming out a mile a minute, and not all of them are worth sharing with others. Mars forms an explosive conjunction with Uranus today, prompting you to self-express in some potentially unusual and aggressive ways. Channel your excessive mental energy into a positive outlet, rather than biting someone's head off!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The number of already named bones in the human skeleton is

- a. 200
b. 206
c. 212
d. 218

2. The purpose of United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) is

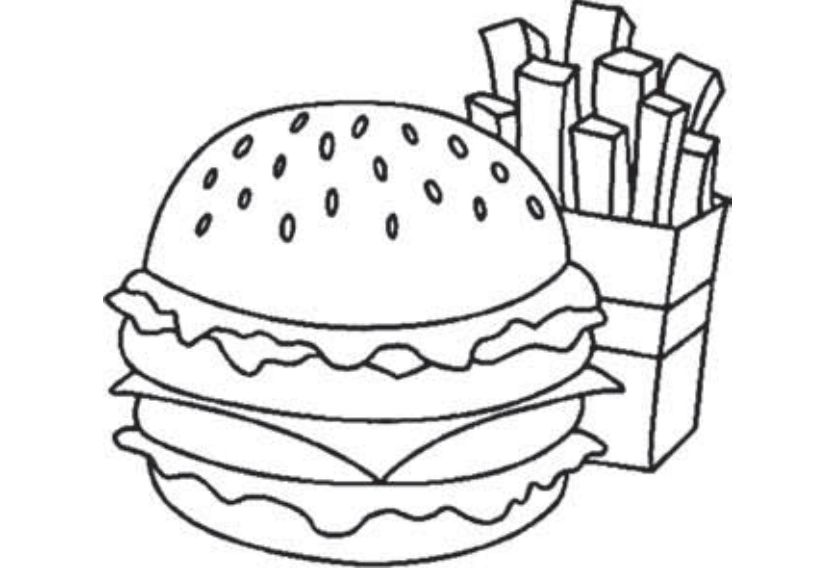
- a. studying population dynamics
b. collecting population data
c. evolving population policies, family planning and related programmes
d. All of the above

3. The official working languages recognised by the UNO are

- a. Chinese and English
b. French and Russian
c. Spanish and Arabic
d. All of the above

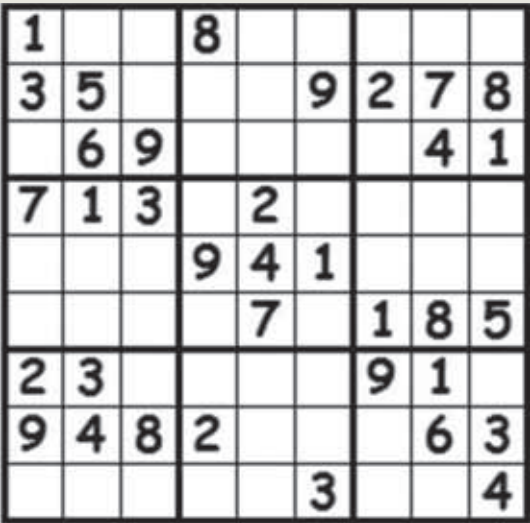
Answers: 1: b 2: d 3: d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



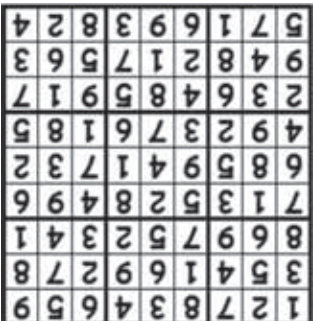
BOGGLER



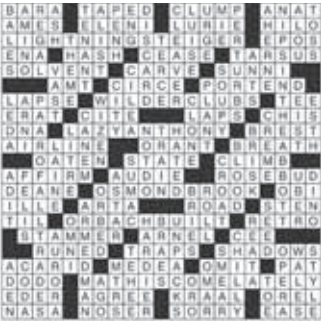
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JANUARY 19)



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



MYSTERY BOX CONTEST AT NHI

DISHING OUT DREAMS

Hubert Vaz

There was a wave of excitement in the kitchen of the National Hospitality Institute at Wadi Kabir, on Monday morning, as chefs belonging to various hotels in Oman, got to experience the thrill as well as anxiety associated with a 'Mystery Box' contest - something that has been extremely popular on Masterchef shows on television over the years.

The participants, divided in five teams of three chefs each, had to uncover 'mystery box' ingredients and churn out a three-course meal that was subsequently served out to the judges as well as diners in the adjacent students' restaurant to gain points that defined their prowess in the kitchen within a limited time frame. And, armed with the knowledge and experience from their respective outlets, as well as their own creative bent, most of the participants, came forth with a unique flair that was well received by the organisers as well as provided excellent insights to students of NHI.

This was the first competition held at the institute since the pandemic had kept students within their own homes for many months during lockdowns and restrictions in movement in the city which had been prevalent for the better part of 2020. While many kept abreast of learning via online classes, some of them also participated in virtual cooking lessons delivered by their tutors at the institute from time to time.

The 'Mystery Box' challenge was set up between participants from hotels and other hospitality branches such as the military and the Diwan of Royal Court. The objective of the competition was to create a competitive spirit amongst the chefs in Oman and to help grow interest, particularly amongst the Omani community in the job of a chef, Robert MacLean, principal of NHI said.

The Chef's competition at Gulf Chef School is a quarterly competition organised by NHI and teams have the opportunity to showcase their skills by turning regular food ingredients into premium menu items.

Each team consisted of two chefs and one

waiter. The teams were given mystery baskets which had a selection of protein and vegetables. The challenge before each team was to create a three-course menu and hand in the menu to the organisers by a set time. They were then given three hours to prepare the meal.

The twist in the competition was that each team had to produce four plates for each course - Two of these plates were served to real customers in NHI's Classroom Restaurant. This made the competition harder as they had to produce food that was worthy to be served to unsuspecting diners.

Two professional judges from the Oman Chefs Guild - the key sponsors of the contest - later declared their verdict after all five teams came forth with outstanding dishes for all three courses, much to the delight of the judges and the diners.

The winner of the competition was the team from Sheraton Oman hotel comprising Anil Sunar and Zahir Fadhil al Hajri (both chefs from the hot and cold kitchens respectively) and Mina Abdulmajid Labib from F&B service. They created a stunning ginger fish broth with



Photos: Syed Fasiuddin



In a mystery basket challenge, you do not know what will be given to you - so no planning works. However, we were able to play around with ideas on the spot and execute them well by dividing tasks

MINA ABDULMAJID LABIB

handcrafted steam dumplings and carrot noodles to start with, stuffed chicken roulade with creamy spinach, onion puree, confit potato and roast peppers for main course, and millie-fuille of caramelised apples for dessert.

Royal Army Officers Mess stood second while the third position went to Intercontinental Muscat.

Mina Abdulmajid Labib, from the winning team disclosed that good coordination and

cooperation were the hallmarks of their team which helped them bag the prize. "In a mystery basket challenge you do not know what will be given to you - so no planning works. However, we were able to play around with ideas on the spot and execute them well by dividing the tasks. Three hours were good enough for this challenge which was organised in a very professional manner," he said.



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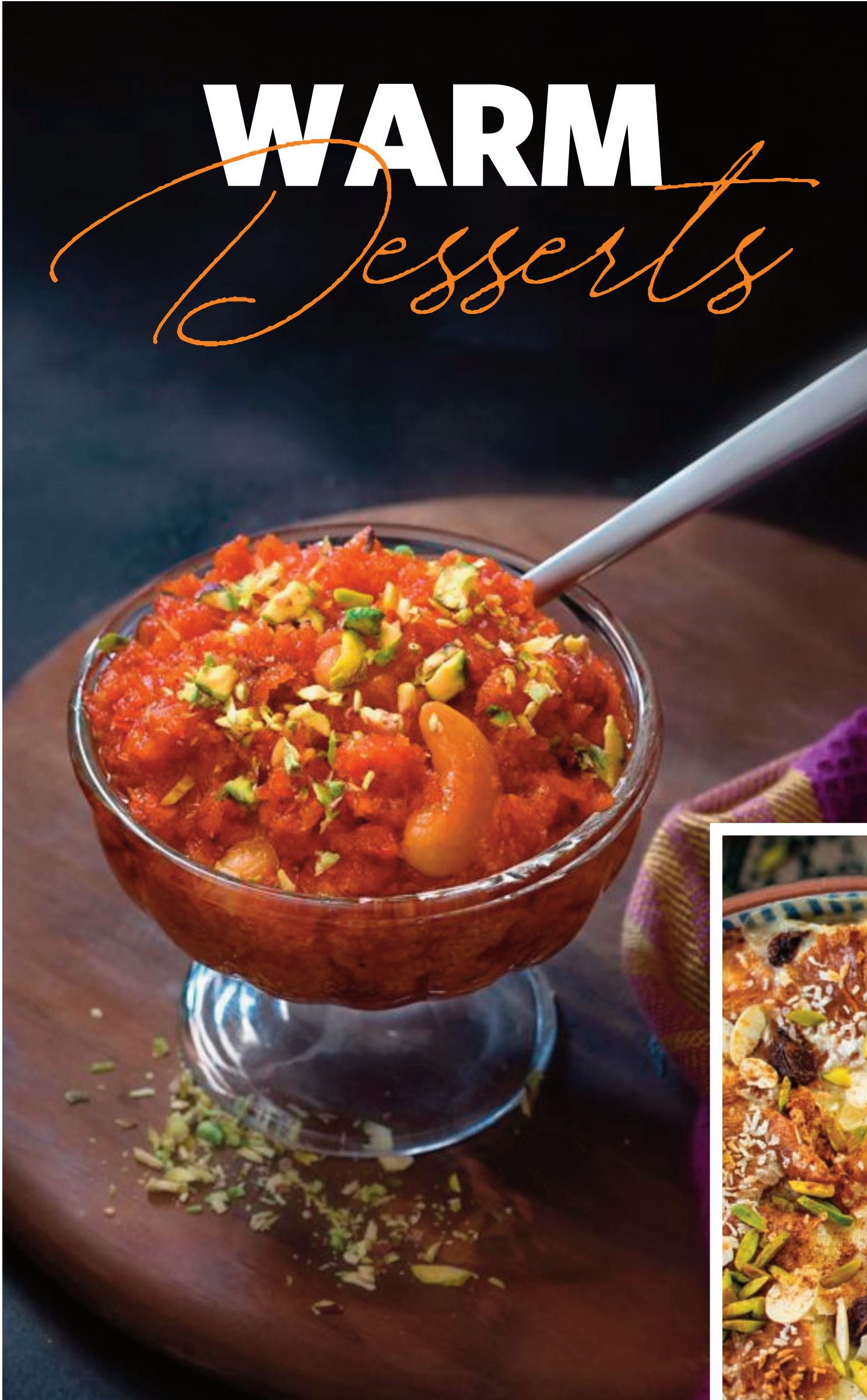
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WINTER RECIPES

With the mercury dipping significantly these days, ice-cold desserts might be off the table for most people in Oman. However, these can be replaced with warm desserts that are otherwise considered too heavy after a sumptuous meal. The fact is, in winter, after a satisfying meal, one might still have room for a nice warm dessert which need not be had right at the dinner table. You can settle with your bowl of joy after dinner while watching television or with a favourite book for company. The following desserts are ideal for wintry weather as well as celebratory occasions all year round:

Carrot halwa

- Ingredients**
- 400g carrots - grated
 - 3tbsp ghee
 - ½ cup milk
 - ½ cup sugar
 - ½tsp ground cardamom
 - 2tbsp – chopped nuts (almonds, cashew, pistachios)

Method

Heat the ghee in a wok and add the grated carrot. Mix and let it cook well on medium flame for about 5-6 minutes. Add the sugar and cook for 2 minutes. Then add the milk and cardamom powder and simmer for 5-6 minutes until all the liquid evaporates. Fry the chopped nuts for 15-20 seconds in 1tsp ghee and garnish the halwa while serving in bowls.

Tip: If you find some liquid left while the grated carrot has cooked well, just sprinkle 1tbsp of milk powder, mix, and cook for a minute. This will give the effect of adding khoya (dehydrated, thickened milk).



Sizzling brownies

- Ingredients**
- 180g butter
 - 100g dark chocolate
 - 1 cup sugar
 - 3 eggs
 - 1tsp dark cocoa powder
 - ½tsp salt
 - 100g flour
 - Chocolate sauce, vanilla ice-cream – for serving

Method

Melt butter and chocolate over a double boiler until no lumps remain. Add the sugar, mix it well, and remove from the double boiler. Next, add in 3 eggs but one at a time and stir well after each addition. Then add the dry ingredients - cocoa powder, salt, and flour. Mix everything until a smooth batter is formed. Pour it onto a prepared square tin and bake in a preheated oven for 30-40 minutes at 180° C. Allow the brownie slab to cool completely before slicing.

Once the brownie slab is cooled, slice it into large cubes. Heat up a small cast iron pan for about 3-4 minutes, until hot. Take it off the flame. Place the brownie slice onto the pan. Top it with a scoop of ice-cream and drizzle chocolate sauce all around to get the sizzling effect.



Umm Ali

- Ingredients**
- 4 large croissants, toasted to be crispy and flaky
 - 1tsp cinnamon powder
 - 500 ml milk
 - 1/3 cup sugar
 - 1 cup heavy whipping cream
 - 1tbsp sugar
 - 2 cups mixed chopped nuts (walnuts/almonds/pistachios/raisins/cashews/hazelnuts)
 - 1tbsp grated coconut
 - 1tsp vanilla extract

Method

Preheat oven 180° C. Simmer the milk on medium heat. Add cinnamon powder and sugar. Stir continuously till milk comes to a boiling point. Keep aside to cool, and when cooled, add the vanilla essence.

Now, whip the heavy cream with 1tbsp sugar till you get soft peaks. In a baking dish, roughly break 2 croissants into bite size chunks and cover the entire base to every corner. Sprinkle the shredded coconut and 1/2 cup of mixed nuts on the layer of croissants. Cover the nuts and coconut with bits of the other 2 croissants broken. Sprinkle another half cup of mixed nuts. Pour the cooled milk on the croissants to soak evenly. The croissants might seem to be swimming in milk. Spread the whipped cream evenly on the top. Cover the whipped cream with leftover nuts. Bake in the preheated oven for 20 minutes at 180° C. Broil for 3-5 minutes to toast the top layer.

Ibrahimovic scores as Milan pull clear of Inter on top

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice on his first start in two months as AC Milan beat Cagliari 2-0 on Monday to pull ahead of city rivals Inter on top of the Serie A table.

Ibrahimovic, 39, got the first from the penalty spot after seven minutes, adding a second just after the break in Sardinia.

Milan, targeting their first league title since 2011 when Ibrahimovic last played in the team, pull three points ahead of Inter who beat champions Juventus 2-0 in the San Siro on Sunday. "This victory is a sign above all to ourselves more than Inter," said coach Stefano Pioli.

"We all want to bring Milan back to the top. The team will do everything from here to the end.

"Now we have an important game against Atalanta (Saturday), we focus on that, then in March and April we will see where we are."

Ibrahimovic proved he has returned to his best after injury, with the club set to sign former Juventus and Bayern Munich forward Mario Mandzukic to help their title push. "Ibra will take care of keeping him (Mandzukic) at bay," joked Pioli.

The Swede brought his tally to

12 goals in eight games with five doubles, including a brace on November 22 against Napoli, when he picked up the thigh injury which sidelined him.

Milan shook of the absences of defender Theo Hernandez and midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu who tested positive for coronavirus. The visitors quickly took control of the game after Cagliari defender Charalampos Lykogiannis fouled Ibrahimovic.

Ibrahimovic decided to take the penalty ahead of regular spot kicker Franck Kessie after the Swede had missed twice from the spot twice before his injury.

Cagliari goalkeeper Alessio Cragno cleared a long-range Davide Calabria effort after 24 minutes with the Italy defender hitting the post ten minutes later.

Back after the break Ibrahimovic connected with Calabria's long-range effort finishing off with the goal confirmed after a VAR review.

Milan held their advantage despite playing the final quarter of an hour a man down after Alexis Saelemaekers was sent off for two bookings, ten minutes after coming off the bench.

Cagliari is just above the relegation zone in 17th position.

AFP



AC Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic celebrates after scoring against Cagliari



Arsenal's striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang celebrates after scoring against Newcastle during their English Premier League match on Monday (AFP)

Aubameyang at the double for Arsenal

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang returned to scoring form with a double as Arsenal's rise up the English Premier League (EPL) table continued with a comfortable 3-0 win over Newcastle on Monday.

The Gunners were facing an unlikely battle for survival less than a month ago, but 13 points from a possible 15 have lifted Mikel Arteta's men into tenth and within seven points of the top four.

Despite Aubameyang doubling his tally of league goals from open play this season, it was again Arsenal's dynamic young duo of Emile Smith Rowe and Bukayo Saka who caught the eye as the later slotted home the hosts' second goal in between the captain's brace. "When we are winning they put a smile on my face," said Arteta of Smith Rowe and Saka's impact.

"I know what they are capable

of doing. They are developing really well, that's merit to them, to their teammates and everyone who is involved to help them develop and protect them. The performances they are putting in are extraordinary."

Newcastle do remain firmly in a relegation fight after a ninth consecutive game without a win despite Steve Bruce making eight changes. Bruce said 'the gloves were off' after a scathing analysis of his side's display in becoming the only team to lose to Sheffield United in the EPL this season last week.

However, there was no change from the Magpies, who showed little ambition in failing to force Bernd Leno into a single save of note.

Newcastle still enjoy a seven-point cushion above the relegation zone, but those behind them are in better form with still over half the season to play.

"We're having a difficult

moment, that little bit of confidence has ebbed away," said Bruce, who pointed to Arsenal's first two goals as example of why he has not played in a more expansive style this season.

"That's why we've been deep in the past to avoid situations like that. Unfortunately we're throwing bodies forward trying to score a goal and one pass and we're caught."

Aubameyang's struggles in front of goal have played a major part in Arsenal's difficult start to Arteta's first full season in charge.

Another night to forget seemed in store for the Gabon international when he hit the post with the goal gaping after Karl Darlow had diverted Saka's low effort into his path at the back post midway through the first-half.

But Aubameyang made no mistake with a more difficult chance early in the second-half

after Newcastle were caught short from their own corner.

Thomas Partey got his first assist since arriving from Atletico Madrid in October as he set Aubameyang free in behind and, despite being forced onto his weaker left foot, he fired high beyond Darlow to open the floodgates.

The emergence of Smith Rowe has helped turned Arsenal's fortunes around in recent weeks since Arteta began to put his faith in the 20 year old ahead of expensive recruits Willian and Nicolas Pepe.

Smith Rowe's inviting cut-back was swept home from just inside the area by Saka for his third goal in five league games.

Aubameyang then had an even easier task to slot home just his fifth league goal of the season into an empty net after Cedric Soares just managed to keep the ball in play with a low cross.

AFP

Wenger lauds 'genius' of Fenerbahce-bound Ozil

London, UK - Arsene Wenger has hailed the 'genius' of Mesut Ozil after the Arsenal outcast confirmed he was leaving the English Premier League (EPL) club to join Turkish giants Fenerbahce.

The former Arsenal boss signed the German playmaker in 2013 but the relationship has turned sour under current manager Mikel Arteta.

The 32 year old, who is the club's highest earner, on a reported weekly salary of US\$475,000, has not played since March 2020.

But Wenger said the former Germany international, who won the World Cup in 2014, was a rare talent.

"Mesut is like if you imagine an orchestra in music," the Frenchman told beIN Sports Turkey. "He's a guy who plays the ball at the right time.



A file photo of Arsene Wenger (right) and Mesut Ozil

"The timing of his pass is exceptional, but the creativity of his pass is as well. In every situation he confronts, he gives the right answer and that is genius."

Ozil has claimed he is in good physical condition despite his lengthy period on the sidelines but Wenger said his former player would take a few games to

build up his 'competitive fitness'. "If his basic fitness in training is good, it will only take him three or four games to be at his best," said Wenger.

"The quality that he has is... vision in depth. He sees quickly, he decides quickly and he realises quickly what he sees. That is a quality you don't find too often in our game."

Wenger said Ozil would strengthen Fenerbahce's bid to win the Turkish league for the first time since 2013-14.

"I'm sure that he's frustrated at not having played," he said. "His hunger must be absolutely (enormous) to play football again.

"Mesut is a guy who needs a warm environment and I believe he will find that more than anywhere else in Turkey."

Ozil, who is of Turkish origin, was a key member of Germany's 2014 World Cup-winning side but after what he labelled 'racist' attacks following the holders' first-round exit at the 2018 tournament, he ended his international career.

Fenerbahce, one of Istanbul's three big clubs, are currently second in the Turkish Super Lig behind Besiktas

AFP

QUICK RUN

Messi banned for two matches

Lionel Messi was banned for two matches on Tuesday following his first ever sending off for Barcelona. The Argentine forward was shown a red card at the end of Sunday's 2-3 extra-time defeat to Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Super Cup final after lashing out at Asier Villalibre. Messi had twice been sent off playing for Argentina, including at the 2019 Copa America, but never in 16 years and 753 matches with Barcelona's first team. The six time *Ballon d'Or* winner's ban was announced by the Spanish Football Federation with Barca later revealing their intention to appeal the sanction on their star player.

Torino appoint Nicola as coach

Davide Nicola, who spent a season as a player for Torino, was named by the Italian Club on Tuesday as the successor to Marco Giampolo who was sacked as coach on Monday. Torino are struggling third from bottom of the league with just two wins this season and none at home. Nicola's first game is against Benevento on Friday.

Kusal Mendis axed from Test squad

Sri Lanka on Tuesday dropped out-of-form Kusal Mendis from an upcoming second Test against England while injured skipper Dimuth Karunaratne was replaced by stand-in Dinesh Chandimal. The cricket board said Mendis and Karunaratne were among a total of five players left out of the squad for the second Test against England starting on Friday.

Klaasen to lead SA in T20Is vs Pakistan

Cricket South Africa (CSA) announced on Tuesday batsman and wicketkeeper Heinrich Klaasen will captain the side in next month's three-match Twenty20 international series in Pakistan. The 18-man squad includes only four of the 21 players currently in Pakistan for two Test matches. The bulk of the Test squad will return to South Africa after the Tests end on February 8 in order to undergo a COVID-19 quarantine period and to prepare for a planned home series against Australia. The three matches will all be played in Lahore, on February 11, 13 and 14. **Squad:** Heinrich Klaasen (captain), Nandre Burger, Okuhle Cele, Junior Dala, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, George Linde, Janneman Malan, David Miller, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Ryan Rickleton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Lutho Sipamla, Jon-Jon Smuts, Jacques Snyman, Glenton Stuurman, Pite van Biljon. AFP

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Australian player Storm Sanders (centre) returns to her hotel via a secure walkway after a training session in Melbourne on Tuesday (AFP)

Two more players test positive for COVID-19

Kyrgios slams ‘tool’ Djokovic as Australian Open tensions run high

Melbourne, Australia - Two more Australian Open tennis players have tested positive for the coronavirus, health officials said on Tuesday, in a new blow for the tournament which is facing a backlash from a wary public. It comes after a player was believed to have tested positive on Sunday, amid growing controversy over the event. The unnamed players were among three new cases - a woman in her 20s and two men in their 30s - taking the tournament's cluster to seven, Victoria state's health authority said. More than 1,000 players and staff are in quarantine after arriving last week in Australia, which is largely coronavirus-free. Three of the 17 charter flights had positive cases on board. The delayed Grand Slam has proved an enormous undertaking and is provoking disquiet among Australians, especially in host city Melbourne which emerged

from a four-month lockdown in October. Player complaints about quarantine have raised hackles further and Australia's Nick Kyrgios led criticism of world No 1 Novak Djokovic for requesting improved conditions. "Djokovic is a tool," tweeted Kyrgios, the world No 47. World No 13 Roberto Bautista Agut also told a TV station that quarantine was like prison 'with wifi', calling the arrangements a 'complete disaster'. However, tournament organisers insisted most players accepted their isolation without complaint. "Actually embarrassed to be a tennis player these days," tweeted Australia's Arina Rodionova, while two-time Australian Open winner Viktoriya Azarenka asked her fellow competitors for 'cooperation, understanding and empathy for the local community'. At least 72 players have been

barred from leaving their rooms for two weeks after cases were detected on their charter flights. The others can train for up to five hours a day under strictly controlled conditions. A series of warm-up events will be held after the quarantine period, before the Australian Open



starts on February 8. Djokovic, the reigning Australian Open champion, is among a select group of stars - including Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka and Rafael Nadal - flown into Adelaide to enjoy better facilities such as hotel rooms with balconies, unlike the majority

quarantining in Melbourne. The 17-time Grand Slam champion sent a letter to Tennis Australia that reportedly called for players to be moved into private homes with tennis courts and get better meals, among other requests. Australian media portrayed the letter as petulant and selfish, while showing images of Djokovic not wearing a mask in a players' minibus, which would be required in most taxis and ride-shares in Australia. 'Ridiculous scenes' However, Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley defended Djokovic, saying his letter merely contained 'suggestions and ideas', not demands. Tiley said Australia's strict quarantine rules were initially a 'shock' to some players but most had told him during a conference call that they accepted the restrictions and wanted to apologise for the comments of a

disgruntled few. "The majority of the players have been absolutely fantastic and this is a playing group that's a little bit upset with what some others have said because it holds them in a bad light in the community," Tiley said. He also ruled out cutting the maximum duration of men's matches from five sets to three to help players whose preparation had been compromised by quarantine lockdown. "We haven't entertained those comments or that position," he said. Meanwhile Kyrgios also took aim at fellow Australian player Bernard Tomic's girlfriend, Vanessa Sierra, after she complained in an online video about cold food and having to wash her own hair in quarantine. "I don't mind Bernie but his Mrs obviously has no perspective, ridiculous scenes," Kyrgios tweeted. AFP

India's Sindhu cruises into second round

THAILAND OPEN
BADMINTON

Bangkok, Thailand - India's P V Sindhu cruised into the second round of the Thailand Open on Tuesday to erase the memory of her surprise first round exit a week earlier. The Rio Olympics silver medallist, was sheer class as she pummelled Thailand's world No 12 Busanan Ongbamrunphan 21-17, 21-13 in 42 minutes in Bangkok. "It was a good game and I'm very, very happy. This win was very important for me in this tournament because at last week's tournament, I went out in the first round," said sixth seed Sindhu. "So this win today was important, because even though in the first game it was tight, I didn't want to make it easy." Sindhu fell to Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt in a shock a week ago in the first of back-to-back Thailand Opens. Former world No 1 Saina Nehwal suffered a first round loss to Thai fifth ranked Ratchanok Intanon after fizzling out in the second set 21-17, 21-8. The result is a blow to the Indian player, who is yet to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. "I've played Nehwal before

and lost a few times and so I've learnt from those experiences. Nehwal is one of the players I try to copy, she's fast," Intanon said. Top seed Tai Tzu-ying from Taiwan bounced back from her final defeat to Spain's Carolina Marin in the first tournament on Sunday, to beat Thailand's Supanida Katethong 21-16, 21-11. In the men's singles, Malaysian tenth seed Lee Zii Jia faced an unexpected defeat against India's Sameer Verma in a marathon 74 minute thriller. Verma, ranked 31st in the world, hung on to claim the decider 18-21 27-25 21-19. Former world No 1 Kidambi Srikanth polished off Thailand's 25th ranked Sitthikom Thammasin 21-11, 21-11. The Indian, now ranked 14th, was forced to pull out of last week's tournament with a calf muscle strain. Thailand is hosting three consecutive badminton events culminating in the World Tour Finals from January 27. The players have been facing off in a bio-secure bubble minus spectators, although the first tournament was overshadowed by three positive cases. AFP



A file photo of India's P V Sindhu in action

Israelis raced in Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia

Jerusalem - Israeli drivers participated in the latest Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia, a country with which the Jewish state has no formal diplomatic ties but hopes to normalise relations, their manager said on Monday. The FN Speed Team took part in the 7,000km race in the Saudi desert with two drivers who hold both Belgian and Israeli nationalities, the team's manager Omer Pearl said. "We are proud to have made history by participating in this race," said Pearl, whose team finished second to last in the lightweight vehicles category. He confirmed that certain members of the team, which is sponsored by the Israeli geneology firm MyHeritage, had entered Saudi Arabia using Israeli passports. "We waited for weeks... for the authorisation to enter the country with our Israeli passports to participate in this rally and we are glad we did not give up," he added. According to Israeli media, Israeli drivers also took part in the race with the American team CRV. The 42nd edition of the rally was held in Saudi Arabia for the second year in a row. AFP

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Indian players celebrate their Test and series win over Australia at the end of the fourth Test at The Gabba in Brisbane on Tuesday (AFP)

INDIA CONQUER FORTRESS GABBA

Gill 91, Pant 89*, Pujara 56 hand Australia their first defeat in Brisbane in 32 years

**AUSTRALIA VS INDIA
FOURTH TEST: DAY FIVE**
Brisbane, Australia - Maverick turned mature and only three overs of the final Test of a superlative Test series were left when India produced a win for the ages at the Gabba on Tuesday. Punctuating the end was Rishabh Pant, newly minted superstar, who could barely hold it together at the presentation when he called this one of the best things to ever happen to him.

In cricketing terms, that thing was an expertly paced unbeaten 89 that helped shatter a 32-year streak of Australia not losing at this ground and sealed for India a 2-1 series win with three wickets in hand. Pant's dashing best came during the last hour of play, after a series of partnerships had taken India to within 63 runs of victory at which point they lost

Mayank Agarwal. The burden of either pushing for a win or shutting the gates fell on Pant and debutant Washington Sundar.

To put it in terms that would be lost on their older teammates, the two left-handers woke up and chose violence. The final push began with Sundar taking on Pat Cummins (4-55), who had become the singular threat to India's ambitions as the rest of the bowling tired out. Sundar got his first boundary against Cummins, a neat check-punch past mid-off, that signalled a change in tempo for India. Cummins' plan to counter that was to tuck Sundar up at his chest, only to be hooked for six. When the next ball flew over the cordon off the outside edge, all bets were off.

What that meant was Pant, having resisted going across the line for more than an hour following a stumping survival, was ready to open up the leg side against Nathan Lyon. It would come apart in the 94th over as Pant walked across his stumps to ramp him fine. A boisterous sweep to the deep midwicket fence came next ball, a crack in the pitch turned Lyon's off-break

into a gigantic leg-break that was too much for Tim Paine, and that 15-run over took India within 24 runs of victory with six overs left.

Sundar reverse-swept Lyon onto his own stumps, and hope sprung when first-innings batting hero Shardul Thakur miscued a slog to midwicket.

But chaos is how Pant makes a living. In the last over of the innings, he fell on his backside for a pulled boundary, survived a slice to sweeper cover as he looked to finish with a six, and managed to cross over when Thakur's slog was still in the air.

Josh Hazlewood had two balls at him, and an injured Navdeep Saini at the other end. He fired a full one down the leg side that Pant looked to sweep, one-handed, and missed. Pant was indignant at not being awarded a wide for it but was composed enough next ball to reach out and pat a tired attempted yorker past the bowler for the win.

At the start, with no demons and no lateral movement despite an overcast morning, Shubman Gill pushed into his forward stride often and with assurance as he single-handedly kept the

score moving after Rohit Sharma had been nicked off early.

For Cheteshwar Pujara at the other end, the brief seemed to be to simply do what he does and be strong in defence. It was a day full of stingers for Pujara, who was hit on the helmet thrice during the course of the day. That was apart from a blow to the thumb that had him floored for over five minutes, and several bruises in the mid-riff and upper body as he endured to eight off 94 at one point.

In contrast, Gill welcomed the short bowling, particularly from Mitchell Starc, whom he banished from the attack for the best part of 25 overs with a hooked six, a slash over gully and a pull through midwicket off consecutive deliveries in the 46th over. On the last ball of that over, which went for 20, even Pujara piled on the fast bowler with a boundary.

That period of counter-punching ended with Gill losing his shape, however, and edging Lyon to slip as he tried to drive big through the off side. There were still 52 overs left and just under 200 runs to get for India when he fell. Captain Ajinkya Rahane

came out slashing and scything as India persisted with their two-pronged strategy of batting for time on one end and runs on the other. That 22-ball 24 from Rahane ended when he edged Cummins behind.

Pant joined Pujara and put on 61 before the latter was trapped by Cummins as soon as the second new ball was taken. Pant rarely took the minimal baits Australia had set for him and ensured a historic win in the end.

Cricinfo

SCOREBOARD		
Australia 1st Innings: 369		
India 1st Innings: 336		
Australia 2nd Innings: 294		
INDIA 2 ND INNINGS		
Rohit Sharma	c Paine b Cummins	7
S Gill	c Smith b Lyon	91
C Pujara	lbw b Cummins	56
A Rahane	c Paine b Cummins	24
R Pant	not out	89
M Agarwal	c Wade b Cummins	9
W Sundar	b Lyon	22
S Thakur	c Lyon b Hazlewood	2
N Saini	not out	0
Extras	(b 18, lb 8, nb 3)	29
TOTAL:	329 for seven in 97 overs	
Full of wickets: 1-18, 2-132, 3-167, 4-228, 5-265, 6-318, 7-325		
Bowling: M Starc: 16-0-75-0, J Hazlewood 22-5-74-1, P Cummins 24-10-55-4, C Green 3-1-10-0, N Lyon 31-7-85-2, M Labuschagne 1-0-4-0		



One of the biggest things in my life right now: Pant

Brisbane, Australia - Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant and Ravi Shastri reactions after the win:

Rishabh Pant
"I think this is one of the biggest things in my life right now. I am happy that all the support staff from the team and all the fans over here supported me a lot even though I wasn't playing in the starting matches but it has been a dream series I can say that."

Ravi Shastri, India head coach
"This team has tremendous character and self-belief. Even

after being bowled out for 36, the team had the belief that they could come back. Virat [Kohli] also left the team, but he will always be with us. That's because this team wasn't built during this series. This team has been built over the past five or six years."

Ajinkya Rahane
"It really means a lot to us. I don't know how to describe this victory, but I am really proud of all the boys. We showed character, attitude...especially after the Adelaide Test. We decided we will fight very hard." Cricinfo

Kohli, Hardik, Ishant return to Test squad

INDIA VS ENGLAND
Mumbai, India - Less than a week after the sudden passing away of his father, Hardik Pandya received some good news as he has been included in India's 18-man squad for the first two Tests of home series against England. Also returning to the squad were captain Virat Kohli and pacer Ishant Sharma.

Squad: **Openers:** Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal; **middle-order:** Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (captain), Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant, Wriddhiman Saha, Hardik Pandya, KL Rahul (subject to fitness after first Test); **fast bowlers:** Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur; **spinners:** R Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel. **Standbys:** KS Bharat (wk), Abhimanya Easwaran, Shahbaz Nadeem, Rahul Chahar; **net bowlers:** Ankit Rajpoot, Avesh Khan, Sandeep Warrier, K Gowtham, Saurabh Kumar.

Paine admits failures

Brisbane, Australia - Australia's captain Tim Paine has no intention of resigning, even after giving a frank and unflattering assessment of how his team found themselves beaten by an injury-ravaged India side in the battle for the Border Gavaskar Trophy, capped with the first victory by a visiting team at the Gabba since 1988.

At 36, Paine said he was looking ahead to the forthcoming tour of South Africa and a bid to qualify for the final of the World Test Championship (WTC), but would not guarantee his tenure beyond that to next summer's home Ashes series.

Paine said India had in truth won the majority of the key moments across all four Tests, cancelled out only by one crazy hour in Adelaide where they had been razed for 36. "I thought every time India needed to do that or needed a wicket, someone managed to do it for them. I think they won the key moments."

"I just said then to JL [coach Justin Langer], we turned up in



Australia's captain Tim Paine

Sydney on day five and the Gabba on day five in as good a position as you would want to be in I reckon, and couldn't get the job done, so there's some things that we should've and could've done better, but at the same time I thought India, their batting group were amazing on both those day fives."

Looking ahead, Paine was adamant he had not thought about giving up the captaincy or his place in the side. "No, not at the moment to be honest," Paine said.

Cricinfo



'The depth of Indian cricket is scary'

Twitter was abuzz with congratulations from across the world for an Indian side that broke Australia's 32-year unbeaten streak at the Gabba and made it back-to-back Test series victories Down Under.



AB de Villiers (@ABdeVilliers17)

What a Test match! The depth of Indian Cricket is scary. @RishabhPant17, sweet number 17. Well played young man. #testcricket at its very best



Virat Kohli (@imVkohli)

WHAT A WIN!!! Yessssss. To everyone who doubted us after Adelaide, stand up and take notice. Exemplary performance but the grit and determination was the standout for us the whole way. Well done to all the boys and the management. Enjoy this historic feat lads. Cheers @BCCI pic.twitter.com/CgWElgOOO1



Tom Moody (@TomMoodyCricket)

India thoroughly deserved to win this series, against all odds they stood tall. Australia has some serious thinking to do, had the advantage of home series, fitness and the toss across the series! #AUSvsIND



VVS Laxman (@VVS_Laxman281)

@ajinkyarahane88 led the side brilliantly, giving a lot of confidence to youngsters and Pujara exhibited his steely resolve once again. Can't forget the young bowling unit. Fantastic team effort #AUSvsIND



Sachin Tendulkar (@sachin_rt)

...EVERY SESSION WE DISCOVERED A NEW HERO. Every time we got hit, we stayed put & stood taller. We pushed boundaries of belief to play fearless but not careless cricket. Injuries & uncertainties were countered with poise & confidence. One of the greatest series wins! Congrats India.



Anil Kumble (@anilkumble1074)

Many congratulations Team India for the fabulous show of character and skill. A wonderful test series with the perfect result. Hopefully the end of discussion of 4 day tests for a while. #INDvsAUS



Sundar Pichai (@sundarpichai)

One of the greatest test series wins ever. Congrats India and well played Australia, what a series #INDvsAUS



Harry Kane (@HKane)

Unbelievable test series win by @BCCI! Every test match was exciting to watch! #IndiavsAustralia



Mahela Jayawardena (@MahelaJay)

This is why test cricket is the best challenge for a cricketer.. well done @BCCI.. what a game. Brilliant series to watch. Cricket was a winner today



Michael Vaughan (@MichaelVaughan)

Wow.. That has to go down as one of the greatest if not the greatest Test victory of all time!! Egg on my face over here in the UK.. but I love to see character & skill.. India have it in abundance.. btw @RealShubmanGill & @RishabhPant17 are future superstars! #AUSvsIND



Bishan Bedi (@BishanBedi)

This will take a while to sink in..by far the Greatest come back in the history of Indn Crkt.. @ajinkyarahane88 deserves kudos & lot more.. fr keeping remarkable cool.& calculated manoeuvres on the field..@ajinkyarahane88 reminds o #TigerPataudi at his best!!



Ian Bishop (@irbishi)

Remarkable. Injuries galore, absent players, & beating Australia at their fortress at the Gabba. This has been the most remarkable test series victory I've watched in my experience. India's depth of talent, heart and character must forever lift an entire nation. Congratulations.



Shane Warne (@ShaneWarne)

Congrats to the Indian cricket team @BCCI That's one of the best series wins I can ever remember on Aust soil & to do it after being bowled out for 36, plus a depleted squad-shows tremendous character, resilience, courage & belief. Just fantastic @RaviShastriOfc @ajinkyarahane88



Sunil Chhetri (@chetrisunil11)

A victory to celebrate. A series to inspire. Take a bow Team India, for an incredible show of character - session after session. One of those performances that we'll often run back to, when the chips are down. #AUSvsIND #TeamIndia



Stuart Broad (@StuartBroad8)

Test cricket's heart is beating strongly! That was an extraordinary win @BCCI & a fantastic series to watch. Aussies not lost at The Gabba since 1988. Wow

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