



Wear a mask... always!

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HUES OF HARMONY
GO TO **PAGE 12** FEATURES

EACH ONE, HELP ONE

A sizeable number of expat workers will be left at risk because they can't afford the vaccine

Muscat - With a large number of low-income and undocumented expatriates being left out of the National Immunisation Campaign against COVID-19, many socially concerned groups and individuals have come forward to support and sponsor free vaccines.

As per National Centre for Statistics and Information data, there were 1.389mn expatriates working in the private and household sector in Oman for May 2021.

Despite an ongoing vaccination drive for the 45+ age group that started on June 20, and 18 years and older being added to the target group starting today, a sizeable number of expatriate workers has been left out of the free National Immunisation Campaign.

Additionally, there are thousands of undocumented workers who are in desperate need of help. With low wages and staying in poor living conditions - some sharing a small room with eight-ten others - these individuals can't afford to pay for vaccines.

"A classmate who was working in Muscat absconded from his company following some differences. When he got infected with COVID-19, fearing arrest and expenses, he did not go to a hospital and died alone in his room," said Shaandar Bukhari, a resident eager to help those in need.

A few days ago, the injustice of the situation became even more evident when Bukhari learnt from an employee of a cleaning company that he was told to bear half of the vaccination cost. "This comes at a time



Mohammed Riaz, who runs a manual bakery in Muttrah, gets vaccinated for free on Saturday at Muscat Private Clinic, Al Khoud. His vaccination was facilitated by Shaandar Bukhari (Syed Fasiuddin/Muscat Daily)

when he's struggling to make ends meet owing to delayed salary, and so he decided not to spend money to vaccinate himself," Bukhari said.

Moved by the situation, Bukhari decided to support those in need by bearing the cost of vaccination. He has funds for six and so far registered four needy individuals for vaccination.

'We can make a difference'

On her Facebook page - What's Happening, Oman? - Jo James wrote, "Let's give everyone a chance to get vaccinated," with a link to a *Muscat Daily* article titled 'Low-income workers desperate for vaccines, rue the high cost', published on June 21.

"Like everybody else, we want everyone to get vaccinated regardless of their income and their residency status. But obviously, not everyone can afford it. Members of our Facebook page are supporting whoever is not in a position to pay," Jo told *Muscat Daily*.

Jo and members of the Facebook group had supported low-wage earners with food provisions during the first wave

Members of our Facebook page are supporting whoever is not in a position to pay

JO JAMES

Would you sponsor a person to get a vaccine if they can't afford it?

BOSKY DUTIA

Happy to contribute as I received mine free and am very grateful

CATHERINE BAKER
(ON FACEBOOK)

of the pandemic. "Thanks to that experience, we know our target group and area that needs support."

Last week, Jo registered six individuals for vaccination; she has funds for 30 more. "If we can support around 100 people, that would be great. The more the better."

However, Jo's appeal isn't limited to monetary support, "but showing solidarity with the have-nots, too. We have to do what we can and stand with the underprivileged. If everybody does what they can, then we can make a difference".

Another resident (named withheld on request) who is socially active said, "Before the pandemic, I used to distribute drinks and snacks among construction workers in summers. Last year during Eid, my colleagues and I pooled some funds and distributed food provisions among people who were hit financially due to lockdowns."

Following the article dated June 21, she called the *Muscat Daily* office expressing her intent to sponsor vaccines for needy people.

Continued on **Page 02**

Vaccination gains momentum amidst a spike in cases

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) will start vaccinating the 18+ category today, for which it has asked those eligible to register through Tarassud+ before arriving for their jab, as COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the sultanate.

Vaccination for the 45+ category at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, which started on June 20, will continue. Pregnant women have been added to the list of those eligible. "Pregnant women should be given priority for obvious reasons. Expectant mothers have been in intensive care units; they and their unborn in danger. We call on all pregnant women to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their families," H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said recently.

On Thursday, MoH reported 1,959 new cases of COVID-19 and 40 related deaths, taking the total number registered in Oman to 270,504 and death toll to 3,140.

In a glimmer of hope, however,



the number of recoveries is improving. An MoH statement said 2,127 individuals recovered on Thursday, taking the total number of recoveries to 236,988.

'As of Thursday, the total number of inpatients was 1,591, including 530 in intensive care.'

A home vaccination service has also been started for people with disabilities or mobility restrictions.

The immunisation campaign currently underway at government centres is limited to Omani citizens who can get vaccinated for free. While some expatriate residents are covered under a corporate scheme in collaboration with MoH through private

hospitals, others are opting to be vaccinated for a fee at their own expense.

H E Dr Sa'eedi has reiterated time and again that the sultanate only allowed the use of safe vaccines. More than 1.5mn doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been received so far, and 3.2mn more doses will arrive this month. "We aim to vaccinate all target groups with a dose of vaccine before the end of August," he said.

According to Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, director of the department of contagious diseases in MoH, all citizens in Musandam have been vaccinated. The governorate has registered the least number of infections.

ROP warns against gatherings

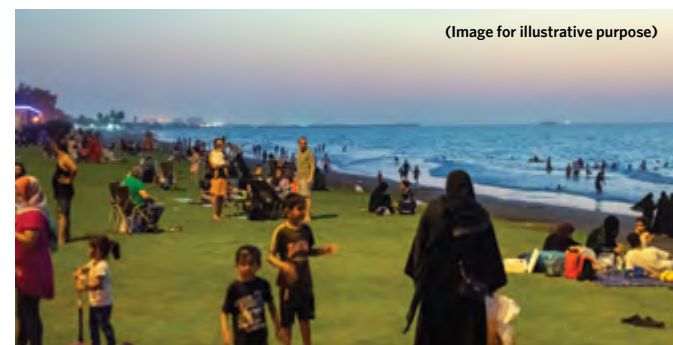
Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the rising number of COVID-19 cases in Oman, officials are calling on people to be more committed to the precautionary measures for the sake of their health, their families as well as the healthcare sector.

In the past couple of months, Oman has witnessed an alarming number of infections and deaths due to non-compliance with the guidelines of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the impact of COVID-19. The spike has been mostly attributed to illegal gatherings at private farms, beaches, weddings and funerals.

Royal Oman Police (ROP) has reiterated that offenders who violate the Supreme Committee's measures will be fined. 'All types of gathering are banned. Arrests and fines are still on for offenders.'

On Thursday, the Police Command in South Batinah Governorate arrested a group of



(Image for illustrative purpose)

citizens and residents for violating precautionary measures.

A statement issued by ROP said, 'One group was held in a gathering in a farm in the wilayat of Barka. Legal action has been taken against them.'

On June 24, another group of people in Buraimi governorate was arrested for violating the movement ban.

The Supreme Committee has banned all types of gatherings; those found hosting or organising such events will be handed a fine of RO1,500, while those taking part face a fine of RO100.

In an interview with Oman TV,

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health and member of the Supreme Committee, said, "Unfortunately, gatherings continue and the number of COVID-19 patients is increasing.

"The whole world is suffering because of the pandemic. I appeal to all to adhere to the precautionary measures to protect themselves and their families. If the community does not adhere to the precautionary measures, the number of cases will increase."

ROP urges people to report any gatherings on 1099.



03
Don't distort traditional Omani dresses: MoCIP

04
Adventurer releases book on rail trips across 30 countries

First Omani-Saudi road running through Rub al Khali to open soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The first ever road linking Oman with Saudi Arabia, that has been delayed for years now, will open soon, according to H E Salim Mohammed al Nuaimi, Undersecretary for Transport in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The road will not only cut down distance between the two countries by around 800km but also reduce travel time considerably. Currently, one has to go through the United Arab Emirates, first crossing the Omani-UAE border and then the UAE-Saudi one to reach the king-

dom.

In an interview with Oman TV, H E Nuaimi said, "The Oman-Saudi Arabia road will open soon. The road is considered almost complete, and now work is underway to establish the necessary facilities to provide services to its users, and we hope to open it soon."

H E Nuaimi described the road linking the two countries as 'vital', noting that the major part of the road runs through Saudi Arabia stretching over some of the toughest terrain in the world, including Rub al Khali, or Empty Quarter.

The road passes through Rub al Khali and the eastern province



(Supplied photo)

of Ihsa in Saudi Arabia. The section of the road in Oman is around 160km long, while around 580km of it is in Saudi

Arabia.

The Saudi section links the Khorais-Bathaa road to the Omani border, via Shayba and

Umm Zamoul. "The section of the road in Oman has been completed. We are now coordinating with the Saudi side, which has

completed its side of the road, to open it soon," said H E Nuaimi.

In an interview with ONA, H H Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Oman's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, said work on the road is in its final stages, and hoped that the border will be opened soon. "The concerned authorities in the two countries are making efforts in this regard."

The road offers scope for great commercial exchange between the two countries in several fields, including fisheries that is in much demand in the Saudi market, while Saudi Arabia provides the Omani market with large quantities of dairy products and petrochemicals.

Omran launches employment training for hospitality sector

Muscat: To prepare highly trained and skilled Omanis for the tourism and hospitality sector, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the executive arm of the sultanate for tourism development, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, launched a new training for employment programme called 'Midhyaf' on Thursday.

Midhyaf will act as the stepping stone for future Omani tourism and hospitality talent development and is the result of a capability building agreement signed between the ministry and Omran to establish this national training for employment project.

The programme will provide training to 148 Omani jobseekers from high schools, as well as diploma and Bachelor's degree holders, to prepare them for the labour market. Midhyaf consists of seven capacity-building vocational and professional courses -



(Supplied photo)

culinary, food & beverage, front office operations, hotel operations management, accounting and procurement, sales and marketing, and housekeeping.

The training will take place at Oman Tourism College (OTC), the training provider of the programme, followed by on-the-job training in several hospitality assets under Omran, including JW Marriott Muscat, W Muscat,

Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah, Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC, Crowne Plaza Duqm, Alila Jabal Akhdar, InterContinental Muscat and Barceló Mussanah Resort.

The methodology of the training programme that will be implemented by OTC is based on an integrated approach that aims to further hone the skills of the participants in three main areas: fundamentals, core factor and

Midhyaf reflects the ministry's active participation in implementing the objectives of Oman Vision 2040

SHARIFA BINT TAHIR AIDID

Launching the programme, Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, said, "Midhyaf will play a significant role in the National Tourism Strategy 2040 by creating a sustainable platform to support employment in the tourism industry and encourage Omani youth to work in this dynamic sector."

Commenting on the launch of Midhyaf, Sharifa bint Tahir Aidid from the Ministry of Labour, said, "This reflects the ministry's active participation in implementing the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, in addition to carrying out its plan for this year, targeting 9,000 jobs across the key focus areas which include training for employment, on-the-job training and entrepreneurship through continued cooperation with various sectors."

For registration and details, log on to <https://www.omran.om/midhyaf>

152.5% increase in applications for industry in Q1 2021

Muscat - The number of industrial applications submitted for new registrations or renewals through the electronic portal Invest Easy in the first quarter of 2021 was 4,981, up 152.5 per cent compared to the same period last year when it received 1,973 applications, according to Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

Ibtisam bint Mohammad al Alawiya, secretary of Industrial Register in MoCIIP, informed that the number of new industrial applications for investments costing less than RO5,000 submitted to the ministry in the first quarter of 2021 was 4,737 compared to 1,936 in the same period in 2020.

The number of industrial applications for investments in range of RO5,000 to RO50,000 was 41 compared to nine in 2020, while the number of applications with investments in the



RO51,000-RO100,000 range was 21 compared to five submitted last year.

Ibtisam added that the number of new industrial applications for investments in the RO100,000-RO500,000 category was 26 compared to 11 in 2020, while there were 21 applications for projects exceeding RO500,000 compared to 12 in 2020.

H E Ba'owain updates Shura about employment efforts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Mahad Said Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, made a visual presentation to Majlis A'Shura on Thursday on the ministry's efforts to hire citizens.

A statement issued by the council said, 'Members of the Council discussed the government's efforts to recruit jobseekers in the Ministry of Labour and



Members of the Council discussed the government's efforts to recruit jobseekers in the Ministry of Labour and viewed a presentation made by H E Ba'owain

viewed a presentation made by H E Ba'owain.'

The presentation included the ministry's plan for 2021 and organisational procedures to provide jobs to Omanis.

The presentation covered five main topics: Public-private sector partnership, the Ministry of Labour's plan for 2021, procedures to generate jobs for Omanis, efforts to implement employment initiatives (including

direct employment in fresh jobs, replacement of expatriate manpower and adjustments for laid off Omani labour) and employment initiatives.

The minister also responded to questions raised by council members about the labour market, employment opportunities, expat replacement plans and ways of resolving cases where Omanis' services were terminated.

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Each one, help one

Continued from Page 01

'I received mine free and am very grateful'

When Bosky Dutia, who runs the Facebook page 'Oman Restaurant Review', wrote, "Would you sponsor a person to get a vaccine if they can't afford it?" members messaged their support.

Catherine Baker commented, "Happy to contribute as I received mine free and am very grateful."

Another member Vamsi Krishna Kolachala wrote, "I am also happy to contribute. Please share details. I would like to contribute for one."

Bosky understands the government is doing what it can to immunise the population but doesn't know the challenges it faces in acquiring vaccines. "We should help the government in expediting the vaccination drive. If even one person helps another, this problem will be solved."

Within four days of her Facebook post, 24 individuals were vaccinated with help from members, while others pledged support. She has a list of 200 needy individuals which is growing



every passing day. "I will be able to vaccinate ten more people with the support I already have. I don't know what after that."

Having being affected closely by the pandemic after her parents and sister were infected, and losing her brother-in-law, an uncle and an aunt to the virus, Bosky just wants to help.

"It is a very personal thing. I want to help somehow and get over it, get through it. One doesn't need to help thousands of people. You just need to help one fellow human being."

(Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin)

new

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Doctors in the limelight amid pandemic

Our Correspondent
Muscat

India celebrated the National Doctors' Day on July 1 and medical fraternity in Oman too shared the same sentiments while acknowledging the contribution of medical practitioners in saving lives.

Commitment of doctors and other frontline healthcare workers is in the limelight this year too with COVID-19 pandemic still holding sway. From government and independent agencies to online platforms, accolades for medical practitioners poured in.

Prakash Verma, who recovered from COVID-19, remembered doctors and other healthcare personnel with gratitude.

He said he had his 70 year old mother admitted to a government hospital in Oman for the same reason.



There has been no better time than now when the role of each one of the doctors must be taken into account and sincerely appreciated

DR ASHIK SAINU



"Though this is a day for Indian doctors, I feel there should not be any boundaries. Health is a universal thing. My mother was treated by an Omani doctor and

nurses and I witnessed how he along with the team devoted so much time for my mother. They spent hours not only with her but also with me and my wife. Like

him there are many such doctors who have been working tirelessly during this trying times, and we must thank them."

Dr Ashik Sainu, medical direc-

tor of Aster al Raffah Hospital Ghubra, said, "This is the day where we acknowledge the contribution of each and every doctor. And there has been no better



Saving lives is not just a passion but it is our responsibility. We are doing our job and we will keep on doing it no matter what

DR BENNY PANAKKAL

time than this severe times now when the role of each one of the doctors must be taken into account and sincerely appreciated."

Dr Benny Panakkal, senior

consultant interventional cardiologist and group medical director at Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals, said, "All of us have choices in life but for us doctors always the priority has been profession often at the expense of family life! Last one and a half year was particularly challenging and tiring for all of us. We don't have time for ourselves and our families anymore. Our priorities have changed, and yes changed for good. Saving lives is not just a passion but it is our responsibility. We are doing our job and we will keep on doing it no matter what.

"But it is time that we all joined hands and understood our responsibilities and help reduce the burden from the healthcare system by strictly following the protocols and guidelines put forward by the authorities to limit the spread of the pandemic. That will be something which you can give back to us."

Don't distort traditional Omani dresses: MoCIIP

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotions (MoCIIP) has called on the owners of shops selling and stitching men's and women's dresses not to distort traditional Omani dresses and costumes such as kummah, musar or turban, in any way 'contrary to the public interest'.

The ministry through a statement alerted that the traditional men's dress (dishdashah) and women's abayas must not be distorted "either by sewing or printing slogans and trademarks of foreign clubs or by making drawings contrary to the public interest, or by merging designs of musar and the Omani cap or other traditional dresses in any form that may distort these traditional Omani costumes".

The Directorate of Commercial Affairs and Electronic Commerce at the MoCIIP emphasised that the Omani dress is an important symbol of the traditional Omani heritage.

While the ministry had already warned all commercial institutions and companies in its previous announcements against any abuses that offend some traditional Omani clothes and costumes.



(File photo)

The MoCIIP pointed out that this notice was issued after it had been found that some commercial establishments were violating the Ministerial Decision in this regard

The MoCIIP pointed out that this notice was issued after it had been found that some commercial establishments were violating the ministerial decision (No. 270/2015), which banned the import of some products, while some of these establishments were found importing and selling items which are offensive to the Omani dress identity and cos-

tumes. Some establishments were also found selling products which had images and slogans considered offensive or against the common moral practices, costumes, and the public order of Oman.

The MoCIIP is continuing inspection drive in sewing shops in various governorates of the sultanate to stop this practice.

For the purpose, it has deployed a team of inspectors which work under directorates and departments in various governorates of the country.

It has urged all to abide by the rules and regulations as well as protect the Omani costumes in its original form and not to purchase or market products that are in violation of this decision.

In the context of the ministry's keenness to protect Omani dresses against distortion and to preserve the Omani identity, the MoCIIP has cooperated with the relevant authorities to issue an Omani standard specification for the Omani dishdashah.

ASA to get first five-bladed Airbus H145 helicopter in ME

Muscat - Al Sharqiya Aviation (ASA), the only commercial helicopter operator in the sultanate, announced on Thursday that it will shortly take delivery of its first Airbus H145D3 helicopter, leased from the Milestone Aviation Group Limited (Milestone).

Not only is this the first five-bladed Airbus H145 for the ASA, but it is also the first to be delivered to a customer in the Middle East, according to the company.

The addition of the new helicopter will support the ASA's fleet expansion and will enable the provision of reliable onshore and offshore passenger transport and emergency medical aviation services throughout Oman.

"The helicopter will complement the ASA's existing fleet and capabilities affirming group's leading market position in providing commercial helicopter services in Oman," a statement said.

Milestone is also providing the



(Supplied photo)

ASA with a number of training slots and a state-of-the-art disaster management kit to support them with the phasing-in of this new helicopter type into its fleet.

Tariq al Barwani, CEO of Al Sharqiya Aviation, said, "Al Sharqiya Aviation is thrilled to be the first operator of the five-bladed H145D3 variant in the Middle East. The H145D3 complements our fleet perfectly and fulfils a variety of mission profiles which match our overall business development objectives. We have been working closely with Mile-

stone on this project and we are grateful to have Milestone as our leasing partner in this transaction where a certainty of execution is critical to delivering for our customers."

Michael York, head of Emerging Markets at Milestone, said his team was proud to have been selected by the ASA as their leasing partner in this transaction. "The H145D3 is a new type for the ASA, which will provide them with a whole new level of helicopter capability and technology," he added.

Oman included in Arab civil aviation group's executive body

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman has won a membership of the Executive Council of the Arab Civil Aviation Organisation, said the Civil Aviation Authority.

In a statement, the Civil Aviation Authority said, 'Oman won the membership of the Executive Council of the Arab Civil Aviation Organisation for 2021-2022, during the elections held at the meeting of the organisation's General Assembly at its 26th session currently being held in Rabat in Morocco.'

PRAYER TIMINGS

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Sunrise	5.24am
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Asr	3.29pm
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Isha	8.27pm

VACANCIES

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Diabetes mellitus management guidelines launched

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre and Oman Diabetes Association, launched on Thursday via video conference the fourth edition of the National Diabetes Mellitus Clinical Management Guidelines under the auspices of H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health.

The minister praised the efforts of the joint teamwork in preparing the manual, and stressed on the importance of activating the manual's guidelines in the treatment of diabetes mellitus. Furthermore, H E Dr Sa'eedi pointed out that diabetes is a global health problem and there is need of enhanced disease prevention efforts and steps to deal with the risk factors in co-ordinating with all other related stockholders.

The manual, prepared under the supervision of Oman Diabetes Association, involves several concerned authorities namely, Ministry of Health (Royal, Khoula and Al Nahda hospitals, National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre, Directorate General of Medical Supplies, and Directorate General of Primary Healthcare), Oman Diabetes Association, Armed Forces Hospital

and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Dr Noor bint Bader al Busaidi, director of National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre and president of Oman Diabetes Association, pointed out that in view of the national requirement, 24 task force experts from participating institutes excelled in adapting the latest knowledge and scientific evidences to the needs and consensually agreed on the content presented in this edition of guidelines.

She added that the manual contains nine sections covering the entire spectrum of the clinical management of type 1 and type 2 diabetes mellitus, including the management of gestational diabetes, diabetes in pregnancy and diabetes during Ramadan.

Two sections in this edition are completely new, and cover obesity management in persons with diabetes and diabetes in the adolescents. These discuss thoroughly how physicians should manage diabetes in these special situations. The manual also encompasses the latest pharmacological therapies and clinical approaches to manage the condition. Around 14.5 per cent Omanis suffer from diabetes as per a 2017 survey.

Adventurer releases book on rail trips across 30 countries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Having visited 71 countries and authored ten books on his travels, Omani adventurer Khalid Said al Anqudi has published yet another literary work detailing railway journeys to 30 countries he undertook from 1997 to 2019.

Titled *Saket Safar*, the book captures the splendour of the mountains and nature in 30 countries including France, England, Egypt, Russia, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The book covers the countries' majestic mountains, customs, traditions and the adventures of the author that make it an interesting read.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Anqudi said, "I started writing this book during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, from January to May 2021. The book was launched in June this year. In each chapter, I give readers a peek into the 30 countries' natural treasures."

The 164-page book has six chapters and delves into train journeys within the cities he visited. In the first chapter, he talks about the metro train and its usefulness in navigating and seeing the scenic landscapes without the hardship of mountain climbing or hiking.

"While one chapter describes travelling by train between the countries of the Asian continent and camping in the mountains, another describes visits to the countries of the European continent."

He added, "To popularise travel and tourism, books pub-



(Supplied photos)



To popularise travel and tourism, books published in Oman need to reach different countries. Some of my books have been translated into German

KHALID SAID AL ANQUDI



lished in Oman need to reach different countries of the world. Some of my books have been translated into German. I am

now trying to have these translated into English and French."

Urging young people to read, and parents to encourage their

children to discover the joy of reading, he said, "Our youngsters need to widen their knowledge about the world."

The book explains the importance of railways in supporting tourism and the economy of any country in the world.

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MUSCAT DAILY



(Supplied photo)

CAA approves SalamAir's weekly flight to Sarajevo

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) approved the operation of SalamAir's weekly flight to Sarajevo Airport in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina on Thursday.

A statement issued by the authority said, "The CAA issued its approval to operate SalamAir's one flight per week to Sarajevo Airport, starting from July 12, 2021."

The authority added that this

came after it recently held talks in Sarajevo to organise air transport services with the Civil Aviation Authority of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, during which it was agreed on the importance of running a direct air route between the two countries. During the meeting, other operational and technical issues in the fields of civil aviation and air transport were discussed.

Meanwhile, SalamAir has announced the operation of a special flight to the Sudanese capital Khartoum on July 17.

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Oman posts RO890mn deficit in first five months of 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman recorded a drop in government revenues in the first five months of 2021 as the average oil price and production remained lower compared with the same period of last year.

The decline in oil and gas revenues resulted in a widened budget deficit for the first five months of this year.

The government's total revenues in the first five months of 2021 decreased by 18.9 per cent to RO3.551bn compared with RO4.376bn recorded in the same period of last year, according to the Ministry of Finance data. Net oil revenue - which accounted for around 52 per cent of the government's total revenues - remained 23 per cent lower in the first five months of 2021 at RO1.860bn compared with RO2.418bn in the corresponding period of 2020.

As a result of lower oil revenue, the sultanate's budget deficit widened to RO890.2mn in the first five months of 2021 against a deficit of RO198.4mn in the same period of last year.

"The decline in public revenue is a result of low oil price and lower oil production. Consequently, oil revenue declined by 23.06 per cent and gas revenue decreased by 7.08 per cent during January - May period compared with the same period in



Oil revenue remained 23 per cent lower in the first five months of 2021 at RO1.860bn compared with RO2.418bn in the corresponding period of last year

2020,' the Ministry of Finance said in its monthly bulletin.

The ministry said that current revenue increased 13.7 per cent to RO1.104bn in the first five months of this year compared with RO971.3bn recorded in the corresponding period of 2020.

Oman's total oil production decreased by 4.3 per cent to 143.96mn barrels during January - May period of 2021 from 150.47mn barrels in the same period of last year. Average oil

price during the first five months of 2021 remained lower at US\$54.8 per barrel compared with US\$56.5 in the corresponding period a year ago.

However, the price of Oman's crude oil in recent weeks recovered to its pre-pandemic levels, having hit the highest level in more than two years. Oman crude price at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange closed at US\$74.4 per barrel on Friday.

The current rising trend in oil

prices comes amid optimism for a vaccine-led global economic recovery and an effective coordination and commitment by major OPEC and non-OPEC producers to restrain supply of crude. With the support of higher oil prices, improvement in economic activity, and implementation of value-added tax, Oman is expected to record a significant growth in revenues in the coming months which should help the country narrow its overall budget deficit for 2021.

On the other hand, the ministry's data showed that Oman's gas revenue decreased to RO563.2mn in the first five months of this year compared with RO606.1mn in the same period a year ago.

Public spending

The sultanate's total public expenditure decreased by 2.92 per cent to RO4.441bn during January - May period of 2021 from RO4.574bn in the corresponding a year ago.

"The public spending continues to decline as fiscal consolidation continues. In light of Energy Development Oman (EDO) is still in the process of being established, the government continued to cover the expenses of oil and gas sectors, which amounted to RO663.6mn as of end-May 2021,' the Ministry of Finance said.

Nominal GDP down 2.5% in Q1

The sultanate's nominal gross domestic product, or GDP at current prices, decreased by 2.5 per cent to RO7.389bn in the first quarter of 2021 compared with RO7.580bn in the same period a year ago.

Hit by the lower oil production due to OPEC+ commitment, Oman's oil GDP dropped by 20.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2021, according to the statistics released by the Nation Center for Statistics and Information.

On the other hand, non-oil GDP grew by 5.7 per cent to RO5.728bn in the first quarter of this year against RO5.418bn recorded in the corresponding period of 2020.

Renaissance celebrates 25th anniversary of IPO

Muscat - Renaissance Services, Oman's first family-owned company to be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), recently marked the 25th anniversary of its initial public offering (IPO).

The company completed its IPO in 1996 and is part of the MSX30 Index at the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Commemorating the 25th anniversary of going public, Samir J Fancy, chairman of Renaissance Services presented a memento as a token of appreciation to the MSX for their support on this journey, according to a press release.

Speaking on the occasion, Fancy said, "This is a moment of pride for the board, management team and all the employees of Renaissance Services. Our success has been possible only with the invaluable support from all stakeholders. We have been privileged to earn the trust and confidence of shareholders, thanks to a robust process, disciplined approach, good corporate governance, transparent reporting and a collaborative culture. We celebrate this milestone together and look ahead to meeting the opportunities and challenges to come."

Receiving the memento, Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the MSX, said, "Congratulations to Renaissance on its strong performance over the last 25 years. We believe that such leading corporations reinforce the role of the securities market



in contributing to economic and social development. We are certain that Renaissance's approach to adopting best practices in financial management and building trusted relationships with shareholders will inspire other listed companies as we march into the next phase of national growth."

Over this 25-year period, Renaissance Services has grown exponentially expanding its service offerings and establishing leadership in integrated facilities management, large scale accommodation solutions, and environmental services. Today, the company has over 8,800 employees serving a wide range of clients across diverse industries from over 100 locations in Oman, and a growing presence in the UAE.

"We take pride in being an investor-friendly organisation creating value for all shareholders. Renaissance is well-placed to drive growth as we continue to invest in the future," Fancy added.

Global tax deal backed by 130 countries

Paris, France - A total of 130 countries have agreed a global tax reform ensuring that multinationals pay their fair share wherever they operate, the OECD said, but some EU states refused to sign up.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said in a statement that global companies, including US behemoths Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple would be taxed at a rate of at least 15 per cent once the deal is implemented.

The new tax regime will add some US\$150bn to government coffers globally once it comes into force, which the OECD said it hoped would be in 2023.

"The framework updates key elements of the century-old international tax system, which is no longer fit for purpose in a globalised and digitalised 21st century economy,' the OECD said. The formal agreement follows an endorsement by the G7 group of wealthy nations last month, and negotiations now move to a meeting of the G20 group of developed and emerging economies on July 9-10 in Venice, Italy.

US President Joe Biden said the latest deal "puts us in striking distance of full global agreement to halt the race to the bottom for corporate taxes."

Germany, another backer of the tax reform, hailed it as a 'colossal step towards tax justice', and France said it was 'the most important tax agreement in a century'.

British finance minister Rishi Sunak, whose country holds the G7 presidency, said "the fact that 130 countries across the world, including all of the G20, are now on board, marks a further step in our mission to reform global tax".

But EU low-tax countries Ireland and Hungary declined to



OECD chief Mathias Cormann speaks upon arrival of Antony Blinken (right) at OECD headquarters in Paris, on June 25 (AFP)

sign up to the agreement reached in the OECD framework, the organisation said, highlighting lingering divisions on global taxation. Both countries are part of a group of EU nations also including Luxembourg and Poland that have relied on low tax rates to attract multinationals and build their economies.

Ireland, the EU home to tech giants Facebook, Google and Apple, has a corporate tax rate of just 12.5 per cent.

Irish Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe has warned that the new rules could see Ireland lose 20 per cent of its corporate revenue. On Thursday, Donohoe said Ireland still 'broadly supports' the deal, but not the 15-per cent tax floor.

"There is much to finalise before a comprehensive agreement is reached", he said, adding that Ireland would "constructively engage" in further discussions.

Also expressing concerns is Switzerland - known for its banking secrecy laws - which said it would support the measures despite 'major reservations' and that it hoped the interests of 'small, innovative countries' be taken into account.

An agreement for the implementation of the plan is planned

for October. Nine of the 139 participants in the talks have so far not signed on to the agreement.

But China, whose position was being closely watched as it offers tax incentives to key sectors, endorsed the agreement.

"It is in everyone's interest that we reach a final agreement among all Inclusive Framework Members as scheduled later this year," said OECD Secretary General Mathias Cormann.

"This package does not eliminate tax competition, as it should not, but it does set multilaterally agreed limitations on it," Cormann said, adding that "it also accommodates the various interests across the negotiating table, including those of small economies and developing jurisdictions". Finance chiefs have characterised a minimum tax as necessary to stem competition between countries over who can offer multinationals the lowest rate.

For Biden, a global tax agreement will help maintain US competitiveness since he has proposed hiking domestic corporate taxes to pay for an infrastructure and jobs programme with a price tag of around US\$2tn.

AFP

OPEC+ members fail to resolve wrangling over production quotas

London, UK - The members of the OPEC+ alliance of oil producing countries failed to reach agreement on production quotas from August at a meeting on Friday, with the group saying talks had been adjourned until next week.

Friday's videoconference talks, which had themselves run over from Thursday, involved a meeting between the 13 members of OPEC proper led by Saudi Arabia, followed by a technical meeting and full discussion between the 23 members of OPEC+.

A statement late on Friday evening from OPEC said that the meeting had been adjourned and would reconvene on Monday at 1300 GMT (3PM local time at OPEC's Vienna headquarters).

The wider grouping includes Russia, the world's second-largest oil producer.

Earlier on Friday a Russian government spokesman had refrained from commenting when asked if the current impasse could produce a crisis like that seen in March 2020.



Back then, a falling out between Moscow and Riyadh sent US crude prices below zero for the first time in history.

The hitch in Thursday's discussions came 'due to the UAE raising a last-minute objection to the Russian-Saudi Arabia deal reached earlier in the day', according to analysts from Deutsche Bank.

"The UAE, which has raised its production capacity since 2018 when the individual baselines were set, insisted on having its baseline lifted by 0.6mn barrels per day (bpd) to 3.8mn bpd,

thereby allowing them a unilateral production increase within the current quota framework," according to Ole Hansen from Saxobank.

"Negotiations... will be difficult as OPEC+ knows that if the UAE is allowed to produce from a different base, other members may protest," said Louise Dickson from Rystad.

Complex market

The Bloomberg agency reported on Thursday that an agreement

had been floated which would involve raising production by 400,000 bpd each month from August onwards, reaching an extra 2mn bpd by the end of 2021. This would fit the broad strategy followed by OPEC+ since May: gradually increasing output which it had drastically cut in reaction to the collapse in demand at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

Since the beginning of the economic crisis, the group has held almost monthly meetings to coordinate their response.

Their strategy has succeeded in steering prices back upwards - they are now at levels not seen since October 2018.

The alliance has to navigate a complex market, characterised by an uptick in demand which may yet turn out to be fragile, as well as the possible complication of a return of more Iranian exports in the medium term.

In addition, current high prices are prompting grumbles from large crude consumers such as India.

AFP

DP World acquires leading US-based logistics provider

Dubai, UAE - Dubai's DP World has announced the acquisition of 100 per cent of Syncreon for an enterprise value of US\$1.2bn. This transaction is subject to customary completion conditions and is expected to close in second half of 2021.

Syncreon is a US-based global logistics provider that specialises in the design and operation of complex supply chains for the high growth automotive and technology industries. Syncreon has a global presence across 91

sites in 19 countries and services a large and diversified portfolio of customers made up of multinational companies.

Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, group chairman and CEO of DP World, said, "We are delighted to announce the acquisition of Syncreon, which adds significant strategic value to DP World given its strong logistics solutions capability, and will allow DP World to deliver end-to-end solutions to cargo owners."

WAM

Announcement

Termination of the license for postal and related services activity issued to United Travel Company LLC

(United Travels LLC) announces that its activity related to providing postal and related services has been terminated since the date of January 1, 2021, and the company has taken all required procedures to cancel the license, which was confirmed by Telecommunications Regulatory Authority Decision no .(73/2021)

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

Industrial, services stocks push MSX index higher

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange last week ended higher supported by all sectors, particularly industrial stocks.

The MSX30 Index gained 0.80 per cent for the week. All the sub-indices ended in green territory led by Industrial Index which rose 1.51 per cent. Services Index and Financial Index also closed up by 1.13 per cent and 0.94 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah Index increased 1.51 per cent during the week.

Local news

►The Ministry of Health has awarded Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC) a contract for operation and maintenance of equipment at Al Nahdha Hospital in Muscat. The contract value is RO823,230, for a period of three years commencing on October 1, 2021.

►A new collaboration between Sharakah and BankDhofar was established recently to support the SMEs in Oman. The collaboration is to facilitate a wider array of funding and supporting opportunities to small and medium enterprises in the sultanate. With a keen interest to help entrepreneurs, the joint support will also ensure better facilities for the start-ups and established businesses alike. Commenting on this initiative, Dinkar Kishor, deputy general manager at Sharakah said, "We are delighted to collaborate

with BankDhofar to play a significant role in the SME ecosystem in Oman and push it forward in alignment with Oman's Vision 2040.

►The Central Bank of Oman's (CBO) foreign assets dropped to RO6.62bn as at the end of April 2021, decreasing by 3.3 per cent on month-on-month basis but rising by 5.1 on year-on-year. The CBO's foreign assets include bullion, IMF reserves, placements abroad and foreign securities. Foreign assets were higher on month-on-month basis by 4 per cent. The share of securities in total foreign assets was 46.3 per cent while that of placements abroad was 51.9 per cent.

►Oman's fixed-line telephone subscribers were down 0.2 per cent year-to-date in May 2021 at 0.593mn compared to 0.594mn in December 2020. Total mobile subscribers were down 3.6 per cent year-to-date. Within the mobile segment, postpaid subscribers were higher by 11.2 per cent whereas prepaid subscribers were down by 6.5 per cent. Active mobile broadband subscribers were down 6.2 per cent at 5.05mn in May 2021 compared to 5.385mn in December 2020. Penetration levels were down marginally to 13.2 per cent, 134.4 per cent and 112.3 per cent for fixed-line, mobile and mobile broadband, respectively.

►Total number of vehicles registered in the sultanate totalled



at 1.539mn in May 2021, representing a small increase over the December 2020 registered vehicles at 1.557mn, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Private vehicles topped the list of vehicles registered at 1.218mn, followed by 0.232mn commercial vehicles and 29,169 taxis. The number of vehicles with temporary registration reached 10,545 compared to 15,351 vehicles in December 2020.

GCC markets

The Gulf countries are set to impose a 33 per cent anti-dumping tax on aluminium

products imported from China from July 22 after the GCC issued a final ruling in the case. The decision was made by the GCC's Bureau of Technical Secretariat of Anti Injurious Practices in International Trade. This follows a preliminary ruling made in December 2020, according to a June 24 report by China Trade Remedies Information under the Ministry of Commerce. The tax will be levied for a period of five years and is aimed at plates, sheets and strips of aluminium alloys of a thickness not exceeding 8mm but greater than 0.2mm, except those polished, coated and heat

treatable. The GCC had said earlier that China's aluminium products imported into the Gulf market resulted in 'material damage to the Gulf industry of similar products'.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on June 29 launched the National Strategy for Transport and Logistics Services. The strategy aims to enhance the kingdom's position as a global logistic hub that links the three continents. It also aims to improve the transport services and enhance integration of the logistics services system and modern means of transport to support the king-

dom's development.

The new strategy includes a package of large projects to achieve economic and social targets and adopt effective governance models to strengthen institutional work in the transport system. The strategy focuses on developing infrastructure, launching several platforms and logistic zones in Saudi Arabia, implementing advanced operating models and systems. It aims at strengthening effective partnerships between the government and the private sector to achieve four main goals: Transform Saudi Arabia into a logistics hub, enhance liveability across the country, enhance fiscal sustainability and improve public entities performance.

Global news

The US unemployment rate dropped to 5.8 per cent in May 2021, the lowest since March 2020 and below market expectations of 5.9 per cent, adding to signs that the job market consolidated its recovery as the economy further reopened.

Still, the US unemployment rate remained well above the 3.5 per cent recorded in February 2020, just before the virus tore through the economy. A steady decline in the number of daily coronavirus cases due to vaccinations has allowed authorities to lift restrictions on businesses, but employers have been complaining that they

cannot find enough workers to respond to growing demand. The number of unemployed people declined by 496,000 to 9.32mn, while employment rose by 444,000 to 151.62mn.

Recommendations

Globally, companies will announce their second half results, which will give the investors a broader look and guidance on the performance of the economy and what to expect for the second half of the year. However, there are still uncertainties on the fast spreading COVID-19 Delta variant, despite increasing vaccination worldwide.

Within the region, oil price continued its upward movement ahead of OPEC+ decision on supply for the second half of the year which will give us better idea as to where oil prices can go for the year. Most GCC stock markets ended the week higher reflecting to the oil price.

Locally in the MSX, the market remained buoyed by higher oil prices and better trading activity, which indicates more interest in the market.

The MSX also ended the June month higher than all GCC countries with large number of foreign fund inflows. Going into the earnings season, we expect range bound trades until companies announce their results. We recommend investors to look closely on banks and industrial stocks.

By special arrangement with U Capital

Biden hails 'historic' US economic recovery

Washington, US - President Joe Biden on Friday cheered the 'historic' US economic rebound from the COVID-19 crisis as the economy gained 850,000 new jobs in June, cementing the evidence of a broad recovery.

The uptick was better than expected and came after two months of disappointing results, buoyed by big increases in the hard-hit leisure and hospitality sector, the Labor Department said in its closely watched monthly report.

With the latest gains, the world's largest economy has added 3.3mn jobs in the first six months of the year.

"This is historic progress, pulling our economy out of the worst crisis in 100 years," Biden said at the White House.

The Democratic president credited the massive American Rescue Plan approved in March and the rapid acceleration of vaccinations as factors fueling the economic revival.

"Our economy is on the move and we have COVID-19 on the run," Biden said, though he acknowledged there is more work to do.

The unemployment rate last month ticked up to 5.9 per cent from 5.8 per cent in May, the data showed, and the jobless rate for Black workers rose a tenth of a point to 9.2 per cent. The data also showed the economy is still short 6.8mn jobs compared to February 2020.

Biden called for more 'critical investments' in infrastructure outlined in his American Jobs Plan, including roads and bridges but also childcare and higher education.

"It's going to help us create more good jobs, ease the burden



US President Joe Biden (AFP)

on working families, and strengthen our economy - strengthen it in the long run," the president said.

Worker shortage boosting wages

As the United States has brought the pandemic under control, Americans have been able to attend professional sports games, travel, and dine out and celebrate weddings in person.

The sector has hired at a rapid pace, adding 343,000 positions last month, the report said. However, it is still short 2.2mn jobs from the pre-pandemic level.

Education gained 230,000 positions at the state and local government level, while manufacturing gained 15,000. But construction lost jobs, and more workers saw their hours increased.

"While today's report was shy of the coveted 1mn mark, it paints a picture of a steadily recovering jobs market," said Lydia Boussour of Oxford Economics.

While she noted that many

companies continue to report difficulties finding people to fill open positions, she said the strong performance "is likely the start of a series of stellar reports that will underpin the strongest US economic performance since 1951 this year."

The labor shortage also is driving wages higher, with average hourly earnings rising by 10 cents to US\$30.40 in June, following larger increases in May and April, the report said.

Biden said that dynamic tips the balance of power in favour of workers and "gives them the power to demand to be treated with dignity and respect."

"More jobs, better wages. That's a good combination," he said.

Wall Street was ebullient about the 'Goldilocks' report and seemed to have tamed investors' fear that rising wages will spark uncontrolled inflation, with all three major indices posting new records ahead of the July 4 holiday weekend.

AFP

Saudi Arabia announces plan to launch second national airline

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler announced plans Wednesday to launch a second national airline, state media said, despite an already crowded aviation market struggling with the coronavirus pandemic.

The airline, part of a push to turn the kingdom into a logistics hub, would be in addition to state-owned Saudi Arabian Airlines, which has suffered losses for years.

"We aim... to increase international connectivity to 250 destinations, and alongside the launch of an additional new national carrier,



we aim to double air cargo capacity to more than 4.5mn tons," Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was quoted as saying by the official Saudi Press Agency. The crown prince did

not say when the new airline would be launched, in what is seen as a crowded aviation sector in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabian Airlines faces growing competition from other

Gulf carriers, including Dubai's Emirates Airline and the Doha-based Qatar Airways, which offer a wider network.

Under Prince Mohammed, the kingdom's de facto ruler, OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia is currently in the midst of a major push to boost investments to fund ambitious plans to diversify the oil-reliant economy.

The kingdom is considering building a new airport in the capital Riyadh - a base for a new airline - to cater to international tourists and business travellers, according to Bloomberg News.

AFP

Richard Branson plans trip to space

Washington, US - British billionaire Richard Branson one-upped his rival Jeff Bezos on Thursday, announcing that he too will travel to space - as many as nine days ahead of the Amazon founder.

Branson's company Virgin Galactic said in a statement that he would be a 'mission specialist' aboard the SpaceShipTwo Unity, which will go to space as early as July 11, 'pending weather and technical checks.'

If the schedule holds, Branson would make it to the cosmos before Bezos, who said he would travel to space aboard the New Shepard launch vehicle belonging to his company Blue Origin on July 20.

The two billionaires have founded rival companies to take tourists on short flights to sub-orbital space. Branson will evaluate the private astronaut experience and will undergo the same training, preparation and flight as Virgin Galactic's future astronauts.



Richard Branson (centre) plans to travel to space as early as July 11 aboard a Virgin Galactic spacecraft (AFP)

"The company will use his observations from his flight training and spaceflight experience to enhance the journey for all future astronaut customers," Virgin Galactic said.

The company plans to livestream the flight.

Virgin Galactic's spacecraft is not a classic rocket, but rather a

carrier airplane that reaches a high altitude and releases a smaller spacecraft, the VSS Unity, that fires its engines and reaches suborbital space, then glides back to earth.

"I truly believe that space belongs to all of us," Branson said.

"After more than 16 years of research, engineering, and test-

ing, Virgin Galactic stands at the vanguard of a new commercial space industry, which is set to open space to humankind."

After this flight, two more tests are expected before the start of regular commercial flights in 2022, according to Virgin Galactic.

AFP

More than RO250,000 awaits lucky winners in BankDhofar mid-year draw

BankDhofar continues to encourage customers to save and rewards them with valuable cash prizes for their savings. The coming Mid-Year Grand Prize Draws of the Savings Account Scheme 2021 will distribute more than RO250,000 for lucky winners. The Savings Account Scheme, which reiterates BankDhofar's keenness to spread the culture of saving among the community, provides chances for all family members to win valuable cash prizes.

On the coming draws, Dr Tariq Taha, chief retail banking officer at BankDhofar said, "We have seen good responses from our customers on this year's scheme, as we are providing more chances of winning for all family members. As we are near our mid-year prize draws, we encourage our customers to continue saving as they might be one of the winners who will take home the grand prizes."

The draws will see cash prizes



worth a total of RO50,000 (2 winners / RO25,000 for each winner), along with Al Riadah prize worth RO200,000 for one winner. The bank will also conduct the monthly draws.

With a total of RO2.304mn, the scheme is valid till December 2021.

As per the prize draw scheme, BankDhofar customers who save a minimum of RO100 in their accounts are eligible to enter the draws and get the chance to win in the Monthly Guaranteed Prizes for branches, worth total of RO708,000 (59 winners per

month/ RO1,000 for each winner), Monthly Prizes for Children, worth total of RO177,000 (59 winners per month/ RO250 for each winner) and Monthly Prizes for Youth, worth total of RO30,000 (5 winners per month/ RO500 for each winner).

In order to show our respect for the retirees in the society, we have also introduced for the first time ever, monthly Prizes for Amaan Retirees Banking Services' customers, worth total of RO300,000 (5 winners per month/ RO5,000 for each winner). BankDhofar will continue celebrating occasions with customers, the 2021 scheme includes Omani Woman's Day Prizes, worth total of RO10,000 (10 winners / RO1,000 for each winner), and National Day Prizes, worth total of RO59,000 (59 winners / RO1,000 for each winner).

In addition to the Grand Prizes; Mid-Year Grand Prizes,

worth total of RO50,000 (2 winners / RO25,000 for each winner), and Year-End Grand Prizes worth total of RO100,000 (2 winners / RO50,000 for each winner).

As for Al Riadah Priority Banking Services' customers, the scheme will include Monthly Prizes worth total of RO120,000 (1 winner per month/ RO10,000), Al Riadah Prestige Monthly Prizes worth total of RO300,000 (1 winner per month/ RO25,000), Mid-Year Grand Prize worth RO200,000 for one winner, and Year-End Grand Prizes worth RO200,000 for one winner.

To learn more, check-out BankDhofar pages on social media; Facebook (www.facebook.com/BankDhofar), Twitter (@BankDhofar), Instagram (www.instagram.com/BankDhofar), or visit the official website www.BankDhofar.com or contact the call centre 24/7 on (+968) 24791111 for inquiries.

OWWSC CEO visits South Batinah, Dakhliyah offices

In order to develop and maintain the services provided to the company's services beneficiaries in the sector of water and wastewater, Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, the CEO of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) - Member of Nama Group - visited the Customer Services Offices in the Governorate of South Batinah and Dakhliyah.

In the first governorate, the visit includes the wilayats of Rustaq, Barka and Mussanah while the second visit targeted the wilayats of Nizwa, Bahla, Samail and Jebel Akhdar in Dakhliyah governorate.

During the visit, Zakwani met the company's employees and listened to their suggestions and views that aim to improve the company's business, and the challenges it always faces in the services sector.

The discussions also covered the procedures that the new company is going to follow in the near future in order to facilitate the services provided.

The CEO expressed his sincere thanks to all employees for their keenness on the continuous improvement of the serv-



ices provided. In his speech to the employees, Zakwani said, "We are confident that the sector's cadres will translate challenges into achievements, and also to a work environment that is expected to be characterised by hard and systematic work, and with it many opportunities will develop the business system in the Company to reach its desired goals."

The CEO stressed the importance to keep up with the modern technologies to facilitate the beneficiary expectations and without the need to let them to personally attend to the

company's offices.

He also emphasised to fully adhere to the precautionary measures that are used to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, either in the customer services offices or in the other work sites.

"In any business, the human cadre is the main element of any success and in the OWWSC, we are proud of our distinguished employees who work continuously to make achievements through their tasks and continuous role in developing and improving the company's business and services."

British Council launches summer programme for kids and teens

The British Council has launched its popular Summer School programme that helps parents from across Oman give their children the tools to succeed in an evolving world. The courses spark children's imagination, so they can express themselves with confidence that goes beyond their English language skills.

Delivered online through the safe and secure British Council learning hub the Summer School programme is designed to enable participants to improve their core communication skills while discovering their own style and talents.

Helen Mehta, British Council country director for Oman said, "Our courses are intended to enrich children's education and help them grow. They are designed around fun stories, games and creative activities that will inspire your child and improve their language. Above all, they will give children the chance to use the English that they've been studying so hard to learn. A unique part of the courses this year is that every child will get



the opportunity to participate in our Global Young Learners' Art Competition."

The courses are for Primary children aged between 6 and 11 years and Secondary children aged between 12 and 17 years. This means they study in a class with children of a similar age and level.

With smaller class sizes children also get more attention and personal support from expert teachers, enabling them to get the maximum benefit and make good progress.

The courses offer flexible start dates with four live classes per week, 1.5 hours per day from El-

ementary to Upper Intermediate levels.

Course dates are as follows:
► Summer School B: July 4 - July 15
► Summer School C: July 25 - August 5
► Summer School D: August 9 - August 22

The classes are priced at:

► 2 weeks: RO82
► 4 weeks: RO159
► 6 weeks: RO236

To learn more about the Summer School programme, please visit: Summer School for kids (6-11 years): <https://www.british-council.org/en/english/children/kids-summer-school>
Summer School for teens (12-17 years): <https://www.british-council.org/en/english/children/teens-summer-school>

The British Council is the UK's cultural relations organisation, creating opportunities for people globally to connect and engage with each other through the arts, education, and the English language.

Zubair SEC receives big attendance for its fourth 'Know Your VAT' webinar

Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC), in partnership with the Omani International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), recently conducted its fourth VAT webinar titled, 'Key Aspects related to VAT Input Tax Credit in Oman'. This marks the completion of the second to last in a series of five Value Added Tax webinar sessions, titled 'Know Your VAT', executed by Moore.

Additionally, five animated videos, a digital downloadable booklet, and one-to-one consultations where required will be part of the initiative.

Ali Shaker - senior advisor at Zubair SEC said, "By dividing this initiative into five independent webinars, we are able to take something as complex as VAT and break it down into bite-sized pieces. In doing so, we help our attendees easily grasp even the most complicated elements of the law. As we are nearing the end of our series on VAT, we are now exploring some of the more complicated and complex aspects of this topic."



This fourth webinar, titled 'Key Aspects related to VAT Input Tax Credit in Oman', was conducted on June 23. It was focused on five main topics of discussion: a snapshot of VAT Input Tax Credit (ITC), prerequisites to claim ITC and restrictions, ITC under Reverse Charge Mechanism (RCM), the apportionment of ITC, and other key aspects of ITC. Over 60 Zubair SEC members as well as some large private-sector corporations

attended the webinar. Each expressed gratitude to the organisers as well as their desire to return for the final webinar.

"We are always encouraged to see such strong attendance at our VAT webinars. This shows that local entrepreneurs understand and are embracing the VAT concept," said Shaker.

"For anyone who missed this webinar, or any of our previous ones, they are readily available on the Zubair SEC website,

where you can also learn more about the 'Know Your VAT' initiative. In addition, we invite all interested parties to register for the final webinar by contacting Zubair SEC as soon as possible."

The final 'Know Your VAT' webinar will be focused on 'Key action steps to be undertaken, with a special focus on transition issues'. Those interested in participating can contact Zubair SEC via email: info@zubairsec.org, or telephone: 24737325

SAI takes part in ARABOSAI meeting on robust public health systems

The State Audit Institution (SAI) participated in the virtual meeting for SAI heads and relevant stakeholders addressing the strength and flexibility of public health systems.

The meeting, which was held on Thursday, July 1 from Oslo, was organised by the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI) in cooperation with the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI), with the presence of organisation members.

Oman's SAI delegation was chaired by Ahmed Salim al Rujeibi, deputy chairman of Audit on State Administrative Apparatus.

At the beginning of the meeting, Abdul Hakeem al Azraq, director general of IDI, gave the opening remarks welcoming SAI heads. In his speech, he assured the importance of the meeting that



aimed to find a common understanding on the flexibility of public health services and exchange of experiences and practices to work together and efficiently execute high quality audit tasks related to SDGs.

The meeting agenda in-

cluded a number of items including the review of the IDI training programme highlights on auditing the third sub goal of the SDGs covering four main themes which are; 1) the SDGs audit process and principles, 2) tools and technologies in audit-

ing SDGs and the roadmap of ecological system, data analysis and stakeholders analysis, 3) flexible health systems and finally 4) identifying the audit scope, audit related questions and audit standards.

Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G awarded best smartphone

Samsung Electronics announced that the Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G won the Best Smartphone category at the Global Mobile Awards (GLOMO Awards) during Mobile World Congress (MWC) 2021. The annual GLOMO Awards recognise the hardware, software and services that drive innovation across the mobile industry worldwide.

Best Smartphone

At the awards ceremony on June 30, the Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G was named 'Best Smartphone' of the past year. The smartphone, which features a professional grade camera system and bright Intelligent Display is the go-to choice for users who want to take gorgeous, detailed photos. It is also the first device of the S Series to support the S Pen, for advanced productivity from power users. With all these features packed into a sleek contour-cut design, the Samsung



Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G represents the very best of Samsung engineering.

The category judges said, "The best Android smartphone Samsung has ever made with a great range of features, stunning AMOLED display, best-in-class cameras and more - this phone delivers across the board and is a worthy winner of Best Smartphones in 2021."

Also shortlisted in this category was the Samsung Galaxy S20 FE, which brought fan-favorite features of the flagship Galaxy S20 to even more users, including the incredible AI-pow-

ered camera and beautiful Infinity-O 120Hz display.

"We are honoured to have been recognised in such a competitive category at this year's GLOMO awards. Samsung has a long, proud history of driving innovation, and we aim to deliver devices that meet the needs of our users now and in the future," said Stephanie Choi, senior vice president & Head of Marketing, Mobile Communications Business at Samsung Electronics.

For more information, please visit news.samsung.com/galaxy, www.samsungmobilepress.com, or www.samsung.com.

MG Motor Oman on expansion spree - opens showroom in Bidayah in Batinah

In line with its commitment to take its innovative products to the faraway cities and towns of Oman, MG Motor has opened its 10th showroom in the city of Bidayah in Batinah region. The showroom was inaugurated by Mohsin Hani al Bahrani – CEO, MHD ACERE in the presence of senior staff members.

Bahrani was elated on this milestone achievement. “We are extremely delighted as we open MG Motor Oman’s 10th showroom. Our choice of location reflects our commitment to reach to the remotest of car-lovers in the country,” he said.

“We can proudly say our latest range of exceptionally well-equipped and great value cars appeals to persons across age-groups and lifestyles. While the sleek and stylish MG 6 and the lively and exciting MG5 sedan is a favourite among women and youngsters, the power-packed performer MG ZS SUV is most-



suited for adventurers. The seven-seater MG RX8 is perfect for big families and the smart and highly capable MG HS and MG RX5 SUVs are ideal for office-goers.”

After the successful opening and running of its Ibra and Sur showrooms, MG Motor had very recently opened its state-of-the-art facility in the historic city of Nizwa. There is a showroom as well as a full-fledged Service Centre in Karsha Industrial Area to cater to the convenience of MG Motor customers.

Apart from having state-of-the-art showrooms in Muscat, Al Manuma, Sohar, Salalah, Sur, Ibra, Ibri, Nizwa and now in Bidayah, MG Motor Oman also has an e-commerce platform to help enhance its customers’ shopping experience from the comfort and safety of their homes. The platform <https://mg-om.com/buy-online/> allows customers to select vehicles from the available stock, to reserve vehicles, to conduct online payments and to schedule home delivery of cars. Additionally, customers can also book test drives and connect with MG Motor customer service team for any query or information.

MG is a British-born automotive brand established in 1924, known for its historic models, awards and achievements throughout the past 97 years. MG was founded by William Morris and Cecil Kimbers and has one of the oldest car club in the automotive industry. Best known for its two-seat open sports cars, MG also produced saloons and coupes. Since its acquisition of MG, SAIC Motor, as a Global Top 500 company, has opened a new chapter for this British icon.

MG is at the forefront of the introduction of innovative technologies and new energy vehicles for car buyers.



Hitachi ABB Power Grids to become Hitachi Energy

Hitachi ABB Power Grids announced that it will be evolving to become Hitachi Energy from October 2021. The decision to change name has board and shareholder consent and coincides with the business’ first-year anniversary since it started operations on July 1, 2020. Hitachi Ltd has an 80.1 per cent stake in the joint venture and ABB Ltd holds the balance.

Headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, the global technology and market leader brings a rich heritage of pioneering breakthroughs, which have helped to increase access to safe, secure, and reliable electricity for more than one century. These range from pioneering innovations such as long distance commercial HVDC1 technology, that enables countries to efficiently transmit large amounts of power with minimum losses over thousands of kilometers while reducing carbon footprint, to providing microgrids and energy storage solutions that combined with state-of-the-art intelligent control systems, ensure reliable distributed power availability.

The business has played a leading role enabling a stronger, smarter and greener global energy system. Today, combating climate change is of paramount importance and one of the most urgent challenges of our times. According to the IEA’s ‘Net Zero by 2050’ report, ‘the path to net zero emissions is narrow’ and staying on it requires increased investment in infrastructure, and specifically, an ‘immediate and massive deployment of all available clean and efficient energy technologies.’ By 2030, the world economy is expected to be some 40 per cent larger but consuming seven percent less energy to be on track for net zero in 2050. By this time ‘the energy sector will be dominated by renewables’ and ‘electricity will account for al-

most 50 per cent of the total global energy consumption’ – up from about 20 per cent today. An equitable and sustainable energy transition is at the center of this global challenge, where electricity will be the backbone of the entire energy system.

Hitachi ABB Power Grids places sustainability at the heart of its purpose: powering good for a sustainable energy future. The transition to the Hitachi Energy name reflects the rapidly evolving energy landscape and the opportunity to create economic, environmental and social value; and with Hitachi enabling the business to position its pioneering and digital technologies to serve existing and future customers, going beyond the grid – opening up a breadth of opportunities in areas like sustainable mobility, smart life, and data centers. By combining advanced digital solutions and services, such as Hitachi Lumada, with an energy platform that is built on unique domain expertise and experience, the business is serving customers and partners co-creating global solutions to solve the global challenge of an inclusive and equitable carbon-neutral future.

Toshiaki Higashihara, executive chairman and CEO of Hitachi, said, “With climate change and increasing natural disasters, there is a need to solve three social issues worldwide: environment, resilience, and security and safety.” He continued, “Hitachi ABB Power Grids provides a variety of solutions that solve these social issues, and by changing the company name to Hitachi Energy, we are further strengthening our commitment to the realisation of a sustainable society. Hitachi and Hitachi Energy will contribute to solve social issues and improve people’s QoL by realising social innovation in the energy field with customers and partners.”

Oman Insurance launches Straight Through Process

Oman Insurance Company, UAE’s largest insurance provider, launched a new Straight Through buying Process for its term life insurance policies. In line with its ‘customer first’ strategy, the company partnered with Mashreq Bank and Insurance-Market.ae by AFIA Insurance Brokerage Services to enable customers to protect themselves and their loved ones with a comprehensive plan within minutes.

The 100 per cent online process ensures instant policy approval for all standard non-medical cases and end to end digital process to ensure fast and seamless service to the customers.

Emmanuel Deschamps, EVP – head of Individual Life and Workplace Saving at Oman Insurance said, “We are happy to have a first-mover advantage as no one in the region currently offers an end to end digital process for life policies. This initiative along with our online term life and critical illness policies gives us a strong competitive advantage to offer great products along with exceptional experience and service to



our customers, from the comfort of their home or office. I would like to thank our preferred partners Mashreq Bank and Afia Insurance Brokers to be part of this initiative.”

The company has been leading the market with its digital and innovative solutions and this process should help it strengthen its life insurance business in the region. From quote generation to policy issuance, all steps can be completed online including submitting of supporting documents and payment for the plan through a secured gateway.

Hasheer Kottal, SVP – head of Insurance at Mashreq Bank commented, “The importance of life insurance cannot be understated, especially, given the unpredictable situation we have witnessed in the past 12 months or so as a result of the global pandemic.

“Life insurance not only provides financial cover for individuals and their families but also peace of mind during challenging or unforeseen conditions. Keeping in mind the evolving customer needs, we are delighted to partner with Oman insurance and offer customers the ability to buy life insurance through the digital medium providing a simple, fast and seamless experience.”

To know more, visit www.omaninsurance.ae

QNB continues to lead the list of ‘Top 1000 World Banks’

QNB Group, the largest financial institution in the Middle East and Africa, continues to lead the Middle East and Africa ranking on the ‘Top 1000 World Banks’ list, the largest and most important edition of the year in *The Banker* magazine.

QNB was ranked first in Qatar and the region with Total Assets rising 9 per cent to US\$282bn from December 2019, which placed it on the 79th position in the global ranking.

This evaluation comes by analysing each bank’s strengths and weaknesses through eight categories: growth, profitability, operational efficiency, asset quality, return on risk, liquidity, soundness, and leverage. The performance category weightings are all equal and are prepared to analyse every bank in comparison with other Banks.

Last year, the group marked a milestone achievement when became the first banking institution in the region to achieve total assets of one trillion Qatari Riyal



(USD282bn), which emphasised the group’s continuous efforts and vision to become a leading bank in the MEASEA region.

QNB Group’s presence through its subsidiaries and associate companies extends to more than 31 countries across three continents providing a comprehensive range of advanced products and services.

The total number of employees is 27,000 serving 20mn customers operating through 1,000 locations, with an ATM network of more than 4,400 machines.

AlShawamikh receives groundbreaking hoists

An inaugural accomplishment by a local company, AlShawamikh Oil Services SAOC (Al-Shawamikh), a leading Super Local Community Contractor (SLCC), has received two high-tech automated hoists, the first of their kind in the sultanate. These hoists are committed for service within Petroleum Development Oman’s (PDO) assigned concession areas of Bahla and Adam in North Oman.

The arrival of these hoists is made possible through a strategic alliance with Highwood Global, a leading Canadian manufacturer of trusted oil services equipment.

The equipment were air-freighted aboard an Antonov-124, one of the largest cargo planes in the world, which recently landed at Muscat International Airport – a rare occurrence in the sultanate. These hoists will contribute to enhancing the quality of oil extraction services and elevating the skills of Omani technicians and engineers in the oil and gas sector. Weighing more than 120 tonnes in total,



the hoists were designed and manufactured to the highest international standards and assembled in record-time, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For AlShawamikh, the successful delivery of the hoists from Canada to the sultanate, within half the time it usually takes to manufacture and ship such equipment, represents a major milestone in its history.

Complex technical machines of this kind typically takes about a year to design, fabricate and

deliver. Adding to the remarkable feat was the company’s deployment of a giant Antonov-124 cargo plane to ship these hoists instead of via the normal ocean route.

Its partner in this commendable initiative, Highwood Global, will be laying the groundwork for a national project centralised on the establishment of a factory specialising in assembling, servicing and maintaining hoists in the sultanate.

The project will enable the transfer of specialist technology

and know-how to the sultanate – a goal enshrined in Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to enhance economic diversification notably through the advancement of the industrial sector, and supporting In-Country Value (ICV) development linked to oil and gas projects.

Dr Afrah al Hadhrami, CEO of AlShawamikh said, “The strategic partnership between Al-Shawamikh and Highwood has won praise from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and among other institutions and companies

Iraq sizzles as blackouts hit

Sizzling temperatures have been compounded by high levels of humidity

Baghdad, Iraq - When the mercury soared to 52 degrees Celsius this week in Iraq, Ali Karrar placed his baby for a couple of minutes in the fridge.

But when the power went off on Thursday night across oil-rich Iraq, people were left at a loss as to how to escape the torrid heat.

Those with the means hooked up fridges, air conditioning units and fans to private generators - but not Karrar, who lives in the town of Al-Hillah, as well as others across the impoverished and rural south.

Four southern provinces have been without electricity since Tuesday, including Basra - home to Iraq's main port.

Sizzling temperatures have been compounded by high levels of humidity.

"The children sleep right on the floor to try and stay cool, but us, the adults, haven't slept a wink these past nights," Meshaal Hashem, a Basra docker and father of three, told AFP.

In the city of Diwaniyah, Rahi Abdelhusein buys bags of ice to cool down his children, saying it helps hydrate them.

Shops have placed hoses and makeshift showers outdoors to attract customers to stop.

Blame game

Anger has mounted among Iraq's 40mn population, with corrupt politicians at the centre of a blame game for its poor services and dilapidated infrastructure.

'The electricity ministry is blaming the oil ministry which is blaming the finance ministry, and the finance ministry says the culprit is Iran, but Iran says it's the



Amid power outages and soaring temperatures, an Iraqi man buys ice blocks from a factory outlet in Sadr City, in the east of the capital Baghdad, on Friday (AFP)

The electricity ministry is blaming the oil ministry which is blaming the finance ministry, and the finance ministry says the culprit is Iran, but Iran says it's the Iraqi govt

SAJAD JIYAD

Iraqi government's fault, and the government lays the blame on the people who accuse politicians of shortcomings,' Iraqi political analyst Sajad Jiyad tweeted.

'The politicians just shrug and say, 'We've got to live with it'.'

Boiling temperatures and

power outages often go hand in hand during the summer months in Iraq, but there are other factors behind the latest crisis.

Iraq - the second largest producer in the OPEC oil cartel - buys gas and power from neighbouring Iran to supply about a third of its power sector, dilapi-

dated by decades of conflict and poor maintenance.

But Iran decided on Tuesday to cut supplies to its neighbour, saying the Iraqi electricity ministry owes it more than US\$6bn in arrears.

Iraq says it is unable to pay because of US sanctions on money transfers to Iran, a deep financial crisis compounded by lower oil prices, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government in Baghdad also says few consumers are paying their utility bills, with many stealing electricity by hooking up lines illegally to

power mains.

Minister quits

Endemic corruption was a key driver of protests that shook Iraq from October 2019 to June 2020.

Iraq is ranked 21st from last bottom on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, with tens of billions of dollars missing from state coffers.

The latest power outages have sparked protests and clashes with police in the southern provinces of Missan and Wasit, leaving 12 people wounded, seven of them policemen.

The electricity ministry says the blackouts, which started in the south before spreading to the rest of the country, were caused by unexplained attacks on power lines.

"Someone is trying to destabilise the country and sow chaos," ministry spokesman Ahmad Moussa said on television, without giving further details. As for electricity minister Majed Hantoosh, he resigned on Monday, a day before Tehran announced its cutback in supplies.

It was the 18th year in succession that Iraq's minister of electricity has failed to survive the summer season.

In June, a senior official said Iraq wants to build eight nuclear power reactors by 2030.

According to experts, Iraq should instead renovate its infrastructure, because between 30 and 50 per cent of power capacity is lost due to outdated circuits.

AFP



Taliban fighters put down their weapons as they surrendered to join the Afghanistan government during a ceremony in Herat on 24, 2021 (AFP)

Afghan fighting rages as US forces see exit by August

Kabul, Afghanistan - Hundreds of Taliban fighters were killed in fierce battles with government forces across several provinces of Afghanistan, officials said on Saturday, as Washington announced it would finish withdrawing its troops from the country by the end of August.

Washington's announcement came after all US and NATO troops vacated their main Bagram Air Base, from where the coalition forces led operations for two decades against the Taliban and their Al Qaeda allies.

Over the past 24 hours, more than 300 Taliban fighters were killed in fighting with government forces, the Ministry of Defence said on Saturday.

Scores were killed in airstrikes, including a pre-dawn assault on Saturday, in the southern province of Helmand, where the insurgents and government troops have regularly clashed.

There have been fears that Afghan forces would struggle without the air support that the United States has provided.

"In recent days, the Afghan air force has intensified its air strikes against the Taliban hideouts and the insurgents have suffered casualties," Attaullah Afghan, a member of Helmand provincial council, told AFP.

The Taliban rejected the government's claims.

Both sides often exaggerate each other's casualties.

But since May 1 when the US military began its final withdrawal of about 2,500 troops, the two warring sides have clashed fiercely across the rugged countryside as peace talks between them have faltered. As a result, the Taliban have seized dozens

of districts in blistering assaults targeting government forces.

Insurgents encircle several major cities

The insurgents have encircled almost all major cities across the country, and on Saturday claimed seizing seven more districts in the northeastern province of Badakhshan.

Top US envoy to Kabul, Ross Wilson, lashed out at the insurgents. 'The Taliban is using violent propaganda and hate speech to intimidate, threaten & attack Afghans on social media,' Wilson said on Twitter on Saturday.

'Violence and terror cannot create peace.'

The Pentagon pressed on with its withdrawal to end America's longest war.

On Friday, all US and NATO troops left Bagram Air Base, signalling that the military involvement for coalition forces was finally nearing its end.

Over the years, the mini-city north of Kabul has been visited by hundreds of thousands of US and NATO service members and contractors.

It has great military and symbolic significance.

"For many Afghans, Bagram is remembered as the hub for more than one foreign intervention, as it was the main air base for the Soviets throughout their occupation of the country as well," said Andrew Watkins, an Afghanistan expert at the International Crisis Group.

The exit of foreign troops from Bagram has fuelled concerns the country might slide into new civil war, as in the 1990s after the Soviets left.

AFP

Regime shelling kills 8 civilians in NW Syria: Monitor

Ibblin, Syria - Six children were among eight civilians killed by regime artillery fire on Saturday in Syria's last major rebel stronghold of Idlib in the country's northwest, a war monitor said.

The shelling on Saturday morning also wounded 16 others in several locations of the Jabal al Zawiyah area in the south of the stronghold, the

Syria Observatory for Human Rights said.

It killed five members of the same family - a man, his wife and their three children - in the village of Ibblin, two children in Balyun village, and another child in Balshun village, it said.

In Ibblin, an AFP photographer saw the bodies of the family arrive at a health dispensary, wrapped in woollen and cotton

blankets.

Nurses and others prepared the bodies for burial, cleaning the bloodied corpse of a young boy before swaddling it in white fabric, he said.

The Idlib health directorate reported that the dead man in Ibblin worked for its local branch, and likewise reported the death of his wife and three of their children.

Saturday's death toll is one of the highest since an international ceasefire came into force in March 2020 to protect the extremist-dominated bastion from a regime offensive.

But violations of the truce, brokered by regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey, are relatively frequent, as government forces maintain pressure on the rebel enclave.

In past weeks, Russian warplanes have pounded the southern Idlib region in tandem with artillery shelling by regime forces, according to the monitor.

The war in Syria has killed nearly 500,000 people since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful demonstrations.

AFP

Freed American journalist remembers horrors of Myanmar junta jail

Fairfax, US - Journalist Nathan Maung turned to meditation when he was jailed for reporting on Myanmar's bloody coup, but even back home in sleepy Virginia, he can't forget those left behind, including a colleague still at the mercy of their jailers.

In March, as the junta moved to crush mass pro-democracy protests on Myanmar's streets, about 45 soldiers arrived at Maung's office in the commercial capital Yangon, he told AFP in an interview.

As the squad battered their way through the gate and a locked door, Maung was frantically sending messages to friends telling them he was about to be arrested, he said.

When the soldiers finally broke through and stormed in with their guns up, "I said, 'Please, don't shoot us'."

Myanmar has been rocked by a huge uprising since the February putsch that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi and her government.

The junta has responded with force - shooting protesters, arresting suspected dissidents, rounding up journalists and shutting down news outlets.

Maung and his colleague

Hanthar Nyein watched the squad take 'everything from our office' - cash, jewelry, and even shoes - before they were brought to an interrogation centre in northern Yangon.

There, he said, he was held 'for four days' - during three of which he was denied food, and for two, water.

"I kept practicing Vipassana meditation to be mindful," said Maung, who is a Myanmar-born US citizen. And with the first sip of water came hope.

"After I drank my first water, I thought I could live," he said. "I wouldn't be killed."

Crackdown on dissent

More than 880 people have been killed and almost 6,500 arrested in the crackdown according to a local monitoring group, although the State Administration Council - as the junta calls itself - disputes these figures.

Another group, Reporting ASEAN, says 89 journalists have been detained since the coup.

In March, one journalist livestreamed his own arrest on his employer's official Facebook page, with the chaotic footage showing loud bangs outside his



US citizen Nathan Maung poses for a photo during an interview, in Fairfax, Virginia on Friday (AFP)

apartment building.

Kamayut Media, which Maung founded, faced similar charges under a colonial-era law that criminalises encouraging dissent against the military.

As well as brute force, the military has re-tooled a colonial-era law to make spreading 'fake news' a crime as it tightens its grip on dissent.

'Cigarette burns'

Maung soon found out how brutal the consequences of being brought in could be.

"They hit my eardrums with their bare hands several times, they beat my face and shoulders," he said.

"(They) kicked... my sides." His phone had been broken by the time he got to the centre, and was of no use to his interrogators looking for contacts of dissidents and other journalists.

But Hanthar Nyein's was still working, and they needed his password.

"They put his legs on the ice block for hours, burnt his skin with a cigarette," Maung said.

He refused to tell them until they threatened to rape him, Maung said, and when they

found photos of him with Suu Kyi and other political figures, he was beaten again.

The junta's information team says all investigations and interrogations are being carried out according to the law.

'I left him behind'

Maung believes US diplomacy was one of the factors in all charges against him being dropped, and his release in June.

It is a freedom not yet afforded to fellow US citizen and journalist Danny Fenster, who has been held since May 24, the only foreign reporter remaining in junta custody.

In Fredericksburg, Virginia, Maung said he is committed to continuing his work and a 'free Burma' - using a previous name for Myanmar - and to work to free other imprisoned journalists, such as his colleague Hanthar.

Until then, he has demons to live with. "I contacted our lawyers when I arrived in the States, and I was told that he was crying in the court when I left him behind," he said.

"It broke my heart... I do not enjoy my freedom at all."

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

World battles Delta variant; 697 die in Russia

Moscow, Russia - Russia reported its fifth record for daily COVID-19 deaths in a row on Saturday, as countries around the world rush to contain the rapid spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

The variant has propelled a resurgence of the virus which has already killed nearly four million people, forcing numerous nations to reimpose restrictions well over a year after the pandemic first swept the world.

Russia has reported 697 deaths on Saturday - setting a new record for the fifth straight day. Second city Saint Petersburg hosted a Euro 2020 quarter-final between Spain and Switzerland on Friday night, with concern raised after hundreds of cases were detected among spectators attending games across the continent.

Russia had hoped its vaccination campaign would tamp down a new wave, but it has met with widespread scepticism and a sluggish rollout, with only 16

per cent of Russia's 146mn people having been jabbed.

Hundreds of people were waiting at vaccination points across Moscow on Friday.

"I've been queueing for about two hours already," 21 year old student Svetlana Stepereva said in northeast Moscow. "I want to get a jab and feel safe."

This week President Vladimir Putin urged Russians to 'listen to experts' rather than rumours about the virus and vaccines.

No new lockdown

Russia, the fifth worst-hit country in the world in terms of total cases, has refused to impose a full lockdown since the first wave of the pandemic last year.

The surge in infections prompted President Putin to once again urge Russians to get vaccinated in an annual televised phone-in session with the nation.

The Kremlin stressed on Friday that a new lockdown was off the table.



People wait in a line for COVID-19 jabs at a vaccination centre in Sokolniki Park, in Moscow on Friday (AFP)

"Nobody wants any lockdowns, and yes, it is not up for debate," said Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov. "It is not being discussed."

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin has said the Delta

variant now accounts for 90 per cent of new cases in the city.

Sobyanin has ordered offices to send home a third of their workforces, except employees who had been vaccinated, and said 60 per cent of people work-

ing in the service industry must be fully inoculated by mid-August.

Saint Petersburg, Russia's second city, on Friday recorded 101 deaths, just shy of its record from earlier in the week of 119.

Nobody wants any lockdowns, and yes, it is not up for debate. It is not being discussed

DMITRY PESKOV

The Delta variant, first identified in India and now present in at least 85 countries, has driven outbreaks in places that had previously been able to mostly avoid the pandemic's ravages.

Indonesia imposed a partial lockdown on Saturday, a day after reporting more than 25,000 cases and 539 deaths, both new daily records.

Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Myanmar ordered 2mn people in the second city of Mandalay to stay at home Friday as the coup-hit country struggles to contain coronavirus cases.

Fiji, which went an entire year

without recording any community coronavirus cases until Delta arrived in April, recorded its biggest-ever infection increase on Saturday.

Authorities reported two deaths and warned of more to come as the virus threatens to overwhelm the South Pacific nation's health system.

Africa has also been largely spared the worst of the pandemic, but infection numbers have increased in the continent for six weeks running, driven by the Delta variant.

Deaths rose by 15 per cent across 38 African countries to nearly 3,000 in the same period.

"The speed and scale of Africa's third wave is like nothing we've seen before," Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization's regional director for Africa, said this week.

South Africa, the continent's worst-hit country, posted a new record of 24,000 cases on Friday.

AFP

Iran fears 'fifth wave' linked to Delta variant

Tehran, Iran - President Hassan Rouhani expressed fears on Saturday that Iran will be hit by a new wave of COVID-19 due to an outbreak of the Delta variant in the Middle East's hardest-hit country.

"It is feared that we are on the way to a fifth wave throughout the country," Rouhani told a meeting of Iran's anti-virus taskforce, warning the public to be careful as 'the Delta variant' had entered the country from the south and southeast.

COVID-19 has killed more than 84,000 people out of over 3.2mn infections in Iran, according to official figures that authorities admit do not account for all cases.

The Islamic republic confirmed three cases of the Delta variant on May 5 in the central province of Qom.

Iran's Health Ministry has classified as 'red' - the highest category on Iran's coronavirus risk scale - the capital Tehran and nine other cities in Tehran province. The southern and southeastern provinces of Fars, Hormozgan, Kerman and Sistan-Baluchistan are also now classified as 'red'.



Iran's President Hassan Rouhani (second from left) at the weekly coronavirus taskforce meeting, in the capital Tehran on Saturday (AFP)

In red zones, all shops must stay shuttered except for those considered essential, including grocery stores and pharmacies.

Border controls

Authorities in Sistan-Baluchistan province said on Wednesday that they had closed travel across the border with Pakistan until further notice, although goods transport by road would be permitted.

On Saturday, Alireza Raisi, the spokesman for the anti-virus taskforce, called for 'strict controls of the country's borders', especially those on the eastern side of Iran.

Strangled by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money to foreign firms, Iran says it is struggling to import vaccines for its population of 83mn. Just over 4.4mn people have received a first dose of anti-COVID vaccine in Iran, while only 1.7mn have received the necessary two jabs, the Health Ministry says.

"God willing, the situation will improve in terms of vaccinations from next week," said Rouhani.

The authorities in Iran have approved emergency use of two locally produced vaccines.

AFP

Tougher curbs as cases surge in Indonesia

Jakarta, Indonesia - Thousands of troops and police hit the streets of Indonesia's Java island and Bali on Saturday to enforce new virus curbs as the Southeast Asian nation battles an unprecedented wave of COVID-19 infections.

The country's overwhelmed healthcare system teetered on the brink of collapse as jammed hospitals turned away patients, forcing desperate families to hunt for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home.

Hundreds of checkpoints were set up as mosques, parks, shopping malls and restaurants were shuttered across the capital Jakarta and hard-hit Java.

Over 50,000 police and troops were deployed to enforce restrictions in areas home to more than 100mn people.

The rules also applied to Bali where police patrolled shuttered beachside eateries after the holiday island shelved plans to reopen to foreign tourists.

The world's fourth most populous nation has seen its daily caseload more than quadruple in less than a month with a new record Saturday of 27,913 cases logged in the past 24 hours and 493 official deaths - less than Friday's record 539 fatalities.



Police officers patrol on a beach to enforce new measures on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on Saturday (AFP)

Indonesia's tally to date stands at 2.25mn cases and 60,027 deaths - making it one of Asia's worst-hit nations.

But that figure is widely believed to be a severe undercount due to low testing and poor tracing measures.

"The stricter restrictions came too late," said Jakarta resident Maya Puspita Sari.

"Before, people who got COVID-19 were strangers, but now it's also the people closest to me who are infected."

"The virus is getting so much closer and it's terrifying."

The highly infectious Delta variant of the virus was driving

the recent surge, the health ministry said.

The streets of Jakarta were largely deserted on Saturday but staying at home wasn't an option for many who live hand to mouth in a country of nearly 270mn.

'Little people'

"The measures need to be tougher, but please think about the little people like me," said 35 year old Paijo as he struggled to find buyers for the instant coffee packages hanging from his bicycle.

"Of course I'm afraid... but this is my only livelihood and I'm

supporting my wife and two kids," Paijo said.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo, better known as Jokowi, had long resisted the strict lockdowns seen in other virus-wracked nations, saying they could tank Southeast Asia's biggest economy.

But this week the government ordered all non-essential employees to work from home, while classes would only be held online.

The new measures are set to last until July 20 in the hopes of bringing daily infections below 10,000.

AFP

More than 2,000 flee as Philippine volcano spews gas

Manila, Philippines - More than 2,000 people have fled from a volcano eruption that has filled the air near the Philippine capital with toxic gas, officials said on Saturday.

Taal volcano, which sits in a picturesque lake, has been belching sulphur dioxide for several days, creating a thick haze over Manila and several surrounding provinces, and prompting health warnings.

At least 2,400 people have left their homes since the government called for evacuations of hamlets on the lake's shores, provincial disaster official Joselito Castro told AFP.

"We expect more residents to evacuate over the coming days," he said, adding that they were seeking refuge either in schools closed by the coronavirus pandemic or in the

homes of relatives.

Taal lies just 50km south of Manila and for much of the past week has discharged volcanic smog that has blotted out the sun in the capital.

Civil defence officials have warned that upwards of 317,000 people could be vulnerable to toxic gas emissions from the volcano under the current eruption's worst-case scenario.

Taal is one of the most active volcanoes in a nation hit periodically by eruptions and earthquakes due to its location on the Pacific 'Ring of Fire' - a zone of intense seismic activity.

The last eruption there in January 2020 shot ash 15km high and spewed red-hot lava, crushing scores of homes, killing livestock and sending over 135,000 people into shelters.

AFP

Two bodies found after Japan landslide sweeps away homes

Tokyo, Japan - Two bodies were found after a huge landslide at a resort town in central Japan swept away homes on Saturday following days of heavy rain, with around 20 people still missing, officials said.

Television footage showed a torrent of mud obliterating buildings as it crashed down a hillside in Atami, southwest of Tokyo, sending people fleeing as it buried part of a road.

"I heard a horrible sound and saw a mudslide flowing downwards as rescue workers were urging people to evacuate. So I ran to higher ground," the head of a temple near the disaster told public broadcaster NHK.

"When I returned, houses and cars that were in front of the temple were gone."

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said emergency services and the military had launched rescue and evacuation missions, warning that more downpours were forecast. "There is a possibility of heavy rain due to the rain front, so we still need to be alert



Debris at the site of a landslide following days of heavy rain, in Atami in Shizuoka Prefecture on Saturday (AFP)

at the maximum level," he said at an emergency disaster meeting.

Atami saw rainfall of 313mm in just 48 hours to Saturday - higher than the average monthly total for July of 242.5mm, according to NHK.

Two people were 'found in a state of cardio and respiratory arrest', the regional governor said, an expression often used in

Japan before confirming death.

"Because of the heavy rain, the ground loosened and the mudslide occurred... it picked up speed and swept away houses together with people," Shizuoka Governor Heita Kawakatsu told reporters.

He said 'around 20' people were still missing after being swept away by the landslide.

Rainy season

The disaster began at around 10.30am at a river near the city, which is around 90km from Tokyo and is famous as a hot spring resort.

A video posted on TikTok from the scene showed a huge slurry of mud and debris sliding slowly down a steep road and nearly engulfing a white car,

which drove away before a faster and more violent torrent arrived.

In other clips on social media, the landslide was seen toppling electricity poles, with large areas left inundated by several waves of earth.

Much of Japan is currently in its annual rainy season, which lasts several weeks and often causes floods and landslides, prompting local authorities to issue evacuation orders.

Scientists say climate change is intensifying the phenomenon because a warmer atmosphere holds more water, resulting in more intense rainfall.

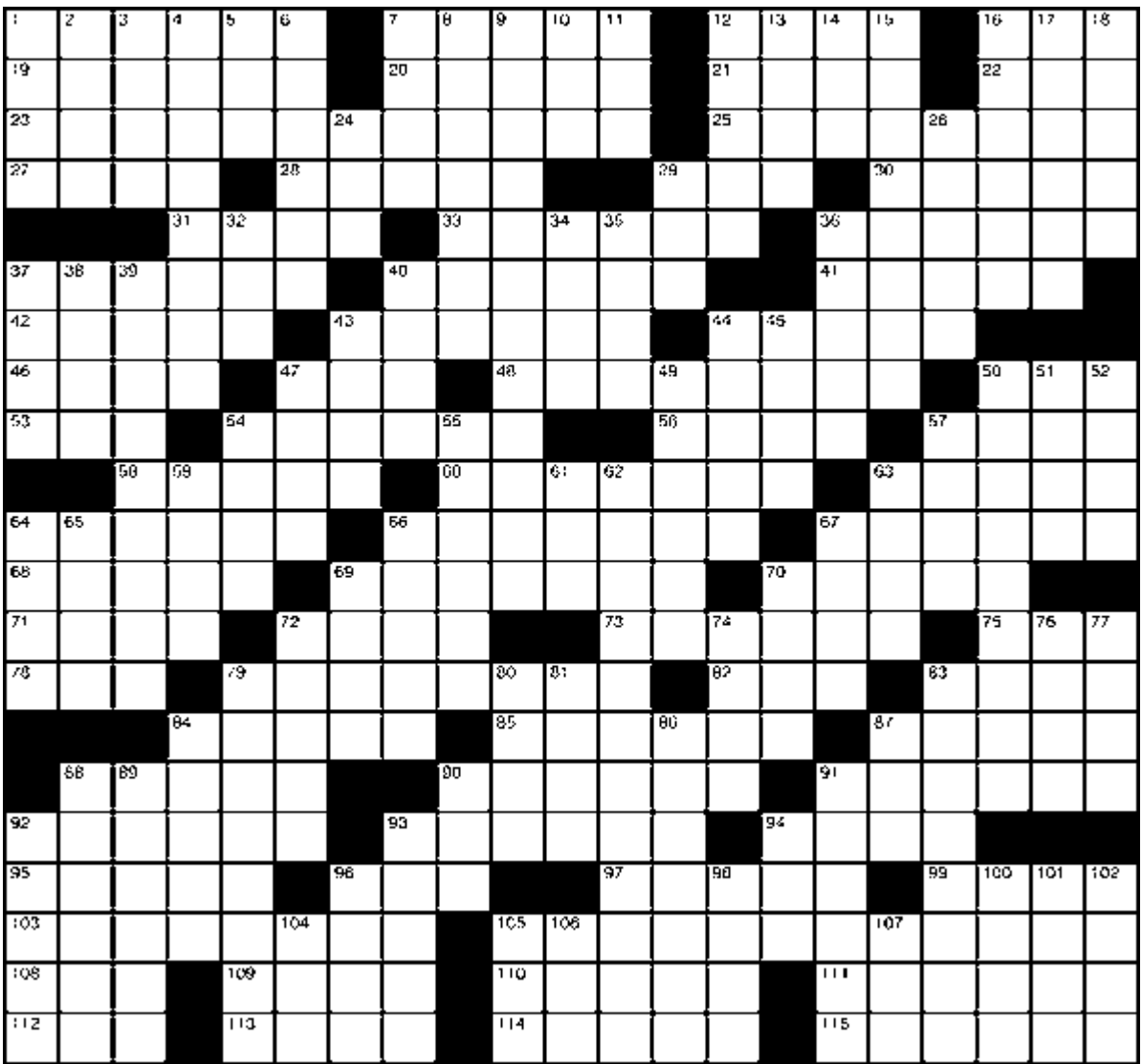
More than 200 people died as devastating floods inundated western Japan in 2018.

The highest evacuation alert, which urges people 'to secure safety urgently', has been issued to Atami city which has more than 20,000 households, according to NHK.

Residents in many other cities in Shizuoka have also been ordered to evacuate.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Where the sirocco blows
7 Mea ____
12 Salt's salute
16 Latin I word
19 Unshut
20 Big Mac topper
21 Unique
22 Pool length
23 Ante up
25 Five in a row, in Vegas
27 Wheel support
28 Choose
29 Gatos or Altos start
30 Purloined
31 Feudal bomdman
33 Polypropylene, e.g.
36 Looked at fixedly
37 Mathematical transformation
40 Institute in Philly
41 Certain runner
42 Fits of pique
43 Invalidate
44 Mattress name
46 Foot part
47 Stately tree
48 In a shrewd way
50 Short farewell
53 Building build-on
54 Trolley sounds
56 Invalid
57 Jughead
58 AWOL from school
60 Lime trees

- 63 Dig find
64 Bikini, and its kind
66 Least robust
67 Gummy
68 "I ____ Write a Book"
69 River at Mount Vernon
70 Press agent, sl.
71 Bonheur of art
72 Dispense charitably
73 More forbidding
75 Rocky's right?
78 ____ out a living
79 Unit of radiation
82 Role for George Burns
83 Supernatural force
84 Largest asteroid
85 Wise saying or sayer
87 Treaties
88 Behaved like a bee
90 By and large
91 Cold sufferer's need
92 Not thickly spread
93 Nun of note
94 Wish-bringer's prop
95 Kind of column
96 Deface
97 Employer
99 Down with, at the Bastille

- 103 Mixed bag, in Vegas
105 Five gems, in Vegas
108 Brewed beverage
109 Ticklish toy
110 Bancroft and Archer
111 Muse of astronomy
112 Med. country
113 Memorandum
114 Film hero's foe
115 Time to feel flush
DOWN
1 Davenport
2 Pinnacle
3 Cad
4 Fine grained volcanic rock
5 Soak flax, e.g.
6 Stick by
7 Soft drink
8 Horned horse of fable
9 Small betting parlor
10 Where antes go
11 Whichever
12 Firebug's felony
13 Porkpies, e.g.
14 Bobby of hockey
15 With exuberance
16 Contender in 2000
17 Composer Gustav
18 Made a choice
24 North Pole helper
26 Where the Po

- flows
29 Diamond ____
32 USNA grad
34 Crosses (out)
35 Sensed
36 Fry or potatoes lead-in
37 Church section
38 Trick
39 A pair and a trio, in Vegas
40 "____ Yankees"
43 Court surface
44 Feat of daring
45 Sniggler's prey
47 Deer relations
49 World org. for ed. and culture
50 Twenty-one, in Vegas
51 Cooper's sergeant
52 Whirlpool
54 Word with war or wave
55 Body sculptors' targets
57 Smart
59 Spicy stew
61 Game played with counters
62 Wild Bill Hickok's last cards
63 Lead, usually
64 Area measure
65 Confiscated
66 Counts votes
67 Husky's haul

- 69 North or South?
70 Cleaving tool
72 Funeral lament
74 Unsightly
76 Against
77 Dastardly
79 Admirable people: Yiddish
80 Laugh loudly
81 Lake where Perry met the enemy
83 "On the road to ____": Kipling
84 Madame of radium fame
86 Demanded
87 A Darling friend
88 Winners' take
89 Leather maker
90 La Mediterranee
91 In need
92 Moses' Mount
93 Sierra Nevada feature
94 Skin blemish
96 Bus. VIPs
98 Happy hue
100 League: Ger.
101 Minor site?
102 Open carriage: var.
104 UN org.
105 Small amount
106 ____ pinch: if needed
107 Friar from Firenze

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Fasten your seatbelt and put your tray-table in the upright position -- because whatever you had penciled into your planner will be entirely different from what actually happens. That's not to say you'll be distraught over the difference. In fact, since you're a fire sign, you'll probably love it. Besides, the end result of this unexpected event will be an unexpected blessing.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Speaking of connections, expect one to develop fast and furiously -- but don't get too comfortable. You're due to meet someone under unusual circumstances who'll make a major impact in your life, even though they may not be around for very long. Your best bet is to enjoy this person for as long as they're in the neighbourhood, and learn the lesson they're here to teach you.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You've just about had it with being so darned serious. Sure, you had work to do, but it's done. Now it's time to play -- and you've been saving all your energy for this precise moment. Your only mission is this: To refuse to let go of the steering wheel until you're sure whoever wants to drive knows what they're doing. At that point, you can relax and have some fun.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You thought you were 'just friends,' and you've been conducting yourself accordingly. While you've been worried about discretion, caution and not jumping the gun, however, your 'friend' has been thinking about how to lure you closer. If either of you happens to be unavailable at the moment, however, be very, very careful, even if you're sure you're 'just flirting.'



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Prepare yourself for fireworks of the most romantic kind. The heavens have arranged for more passion and romance, and your sign is due for the best of it. You might even want to do it up big tonight, just to let that certain someone know how special they are. This doesn't necessarily mean you have to rent a limo or take off for a four-star restaurant.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Expect to raise some eyebrows at work today -- and a few more tonight, too. You're in a very rare mood, so rare that your friends are willing to bet they've never seen you like this. Rather than exercising caution, playing it safe or avoiding confrontation, you're ready to rock. If it's reckless, you're in. If it's slightly scary, you're in, too.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

A loved one who's always been less than predictable -- to say the least -- will suddenly call to let you know that they're at it again. Of course, you just love hearing from them, especially because you're never sure what they'll be up to, and what kinds of wonderful, exciting stories they'll have to tell. Ready to hit the road and make some news yourself? See if they're game for a travel partner.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your sweetheart seems to have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed -- as do your neighbours. And your best friend. And the grocery clerk. Whoops. Doesn't this mean that it might actually be you who has the problem? Well, don't worry. It's nothing that dinner and drinks can't cure. Just be sure you're with someone who really knows how to enjoy a relaxing night out.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The issues of love and money will be quite startling to you today. In fact, they'll probably be somehow related. A dear one may decide it's time for you two to go into business together -- or at least to check out the possibility. Well, be sure you do your homework before you sign anything, and have a trusted professional help out with the arrangements.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you need to get away, but you can't arrange to do it right this second, you'd better at least find somewhere to go for a day or so. You're feeling pretty darned rebellious now, and not at all willing to sit still and let someone think they're in control of your life. Just don't take off without letting that someone know where you are. They may be irritating, but they love you and they'll worry.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You've never been big on surprises, especially if they weren't planned and executed by you. Today, however, you'll need to adapt to some extremely startling situations -- and you'll do just fine with them. In fact, at the end of the day, you may be even more surprised by just how much fun it was to let go and give the universe the wheel. Giving up control can be like a vacation.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Prepare yourself for a flood -- a flood of emotions, that is. You're quite ready to talk about that certain issue that's had you baffled for a while now -- but are your dear ones ready to hear it? Better warn them before you get going, because getting you to stop will be next to impossible. Fasten your seatbelt. It could be a bumpy ride. But it certainly won't be a boring one.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Who wrote the famous book - 'We the people'?

- a. T N Kaul
b. J R D. Tata
c. Khushwant Singh
d. Nani Palkhivala

2. Who is the author of the book 'Nineteen Eighty Four'?

- a. Thomas Hardy
b. Emile Zola
c. George Orwell
d. Walter Scott

3. Which of the following is not written by Munshi Premchand?

- a. Gaban
b. Godan
c. Guide
d. Manasorovar

Answers: 1.d 2.c 3.c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



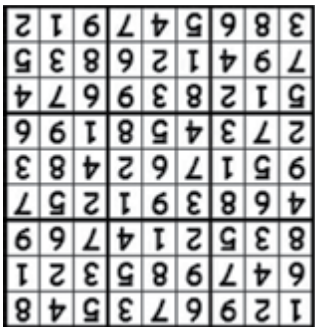
BOGGLER



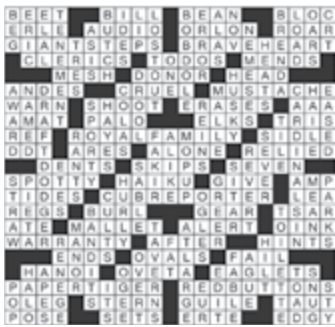
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JULY 01)



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



VIRTUAL EXHIBITION

Photo Finish - Saud al Hunaini

SCAN ME
TO VISIT
EXHIBITION

Villagers - Anwar Sonya



A Walk in the Woods - Dr Dipty Shrivastava



True Friends - Prakashan Puthur



Butterfly Effect - Sushmita Gupta



Nature - Showbi Nowshad

HUES OF Harmony

Hubert Vaz

Rangrez, the group of Indian artists in Oman supported by the Indian Social Club, has come forth with its sixth episode of virtual exhibitions, titled *Hues of Harmony*, which opened online on June 26. Curated by Soubam Priyananda, a key member of Rangrez, who has also been painstakingly designing all presentations of the group's shows, the exhibition features 45 paintings by 37 artists, including four talented Omani artists this time.

"I have always liked the idea of togetherness and co-existence in harmony. The best manifestation of this notion is nature and being a lover of it, the theme of the exhibition came organically to my mind. My attempt has been to bring out the beauty of togetherness in nature and to reinforce its importance," Priyananda says, asserting, "As issues concerning nature have recently come into sharper focus, this art exhibition interrogates the limits of human knowledge, understanding, and acts."

Reproduced here are the works of some of the participating artists. (Scan the QR code given above to see all the works on display in this exhibition.)

Abdullah al Hunaini**Vantage Perch**

My realistic and abstract compositions are in a detailed classical style. Most of my work features the country's natural beauty, traditions, culture and life of its people.



Vantage Perch - Abdullah al Hunaini



This is Where I Belong - Pragya Bhatnagar



Oneness with Nature - Khursheed Raja



Attraction - Parul Razdan Bradoo



The show is also a call for empathy and solidarity towards the sufferings of nature

SOUBAM PRIYANANDA

Showbi Nowshad**Nature**

This is an abstract painting of a flower garden, inspired by the various colours in nature, done with acrylic paints. I've tried to show the little details which we often

don't notice in our surroundings.

Pragya Bhatnagar**This is Where I Belong**

'This is where I belong' connects us (humans) to nature. We are a part of it, this is where we have come from and this is where we will merge into. The concept is inspired from a Bryan Adams song - 'Let nothing come between this (nature) and me...when we're all together, there's nothing to fear.'

Parul Razdan Bradoo**Attraction**

Life and nature are great teachers. Many mysterious ideas deeply embedded within get unfolded as time passes. Hues, forms and figures get revealed while creating paintings. In this painting, the attractiveness of a flower lures a bird to dance around.

Khursheed Raja**Oneness with Nature**

Through my surreal painting, *Oneness*

with *Nature*, I have tried to express the beauty, peace and harmony found in nature. Art can be a beacon of hope, lighting the way and compelling us to protect and conserve Mother Nature!

Dr Dipty Shrivastava**A Walk in the Woods**

My painting portrays a person in complete sync with nature. He is walking on a hilly road in the woods towards distant mountains. Tranquility, harmony and self-discovery can only be achieved when one is literally adrift in nature in its full glory.

Sushmita Gupta**Butterfly Effect**

The ecosystem and the environment are delicately balanced on a tipping see-saw of excesses of human greed. The '*Butterfly Effect*' is the sensitive dependence of initial conditions in which a small change in one state can result in large differences in a later state. My art is an amalgamated representation of both.

Brazil's Lucas Paqueta (L) celebrates with Neymar (C) and Richarlison after scoring against Chile on Friday (AFP)

Brazil edge Chile to set up semifinal with Peru

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Lucas Paqueta's second-half strike was enough for defending champions Brazil to hold off determined Chile 1-0 on Friday and book a Copa America semifinal showdown with Peru. Second-half substitute Paqueta made an instant impact, finding a gap in Chile's defence and firing into the back of the net in the 47th minute to put Brazil up 1-0.

Less than two minutes later, however, Brazil were reduced to ten men when Gabriel Jesus' reckless high kick caught Eugenio Mena in the face and drew a straight red card. Chile couldn't capitalise on the man advantage. Eduardo Vargas thought he'd grabbed the equaliser in the 62nd with a close-range shot, but VAR confirmed the offside call was

correct. In the 69th minute, Mena's cross from the left found Ben Brereton, whose looping header had Brazilian goalkeeper Ederson wrong-footed but caromed off the crossbar.

Ederson came up with another big save in the 78th minute as Chile battled desperately for an equaliser. Carlos Palacios went for broke five minutes into injury time with an attempt from the top of the box that sailed over the crossbar.

Brazil's best first-half chance came after 20 minutes, when Neymar found Roberto Firmino at Claudio Bravo's far post, but the Liverpool striker couldn't convert. Ederson was soon called

on and dived right to save a shot from Vargas after the Chilean striker shook off Thiago Silva.

Jesus, played in by Neymar, nearly fired Brazil ahead shortly before halftime but Chilean keeper Claudio Bravo tipped his shot over the bar.

With the victory, Brazil set up a re-match of the 2019 final in which they beat Peru 3-1.

Peru punched their semifinal ticket earlier on Friday, beating Paraguay 4-3 on penalties after playing to a 3-3 draw in regular time in Goiania.

Miguel Trauco scored the decisive penalty for Peru in a shoot-out that echoed the drama of the match with two shots over the crossbar and three saves.

Peruvian keeper Pedro Gallese set the stage for Trauco with his diving save of Alberto Espinola's attempt.

Paraguay captain Gustavo Gomez had opened the scoring in the 11th minute, but Gianluca Lapadula scored in the 21st and 40th minutes to give Peru the lead.

Paraguay's prospects looked bleak when Gomez was sent off moments before halftime, but Junior Alonso pulled them level in the 54th minute. Yoshimar Yotun's 80th-minute strike put Peru up 3-2, but after Andre Carrillo was sent off in the 84th minute to reduce the Peruvians to ten men Gabriel Avalos grabbed a last-minute equaliser to force the shoot-out.

AFP

Oman drawn in 'tough' group along with Japan, Australia, Saudi Arabia

Our Correspondent
Muscat

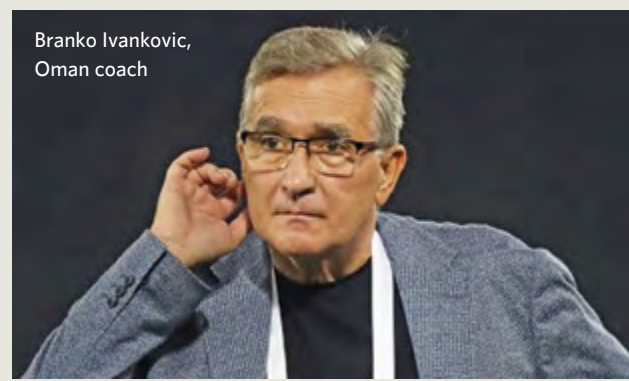
Oman face a tough and challenging path to book a spot in the FIFA World Cup in Qatar after the Red Warriors were drawn in Group B of the final round of the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to Qatar 2022 World Cup along with heavyweights Japan, Australia and Saudi Arabia. China and Vietnam complete the group of six.

Group A comprises Iran, South Korea, UAE, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The official draw was conducted at the Asian Football Confederation headquarters in Kuala Lumpur on a virtual platform on Thursday.

Oman begin their campaign with an away game to Japan on September 2 followed by a home game against Saudi Arabia on September 7. The Red Warriors then travel to Australia for their game on October 7 before hosting Vietnam on October 12.

Oman are back on road with a trip to China for their match on November 11 before hosting Japan on November 16.

Oman visit their Gulf rivals Saudi Arabia on January 27, 2022 before playing host to Australia on February 1. They make their last road trip to Vietnam for the match on March 24 before concluding their campaign with a home game against China on March 29.



Branko Ivankovic,
Oman coach

GROUP A

Iran, South Korea, UAE, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon

GROUP B

Japan, Australia, Saudi Arabia, China, Oman, Vietnam

itive team and then everything is possible."

The winner and runner-up in each group will earn an automatic spot at Qatar. The third place teams in each group will meet in an Asian playoff to determine which team advances to an intercontinental playoff for the one of the last places at the World Cup.

Japan are seeking a seventh consecutive appearance at the FIFA World Cup finals with Australia and Saudi Arabia both having made the finals five times previously and China once. Oman and Vietnam have never qualified for the global showpiece.

Japan, Australia and Saudi Arabia were also pitted together in the group stage of the Russia 2018 qualifiers. Back then, Japan and Saudi Arabia advanced automatically, which left Australia to come through a playoff against Syria and then Honduras before sealing their place at the global finals.

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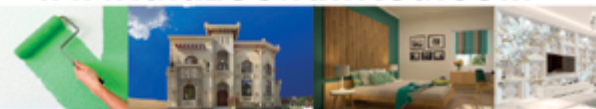
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EURO2020

TUESDAY'S
SEMIFINAL



SPAIN VS ITALY
Wembley, London
(11pm, Oman time)

Italy aim to honour injured Spinazzola with title glory

Azzurri register thrilling quarterfinal win over world No 1 Belgium to set up semifinal against Spain

Munich, Germany - Lorenzo Insigne says Italy are gunning for Euro 2020 glory in honour of left-back Leonardo Spinazzola, who is out of a tournament he has lit up after injuring his Achilles tendon in the Azzurri's thrilling quarterfinal win over Belgium, world's top-ranked team.

Spinazzola, 28, was stretchered off after 79 minutes and is expected to be sidelined for several months.

"It's a great loss for us. We are now trying to go very far - for him. He was so important for this team," said Insigne, who scored the stunning second goal in Friday's 2-1 win in Munich. "We'll try to do everything we can to make it to the final for him," he added ahead of Tuesday's semifinal against Spain, a repeat of Euro 2021 final, at Wembley.

A video of the Italian team wildly cheering Spinazzola on the plane ride out of Munich went viral on social media. "We're very sorry for 'Spina', he didn't deserve that," said Italy coach Roberto Mancini.

"He has played brilliantly, one of the best players at the Euro. It's such a shame, we wish him all the best."

Italy deserved the win in Bavaria as Nicolo Barella gave them the lead in the 31st minute with a fine solo goal, jinking between two defenders and hammering a shot into the far corner past Thibaut Courtois before Insigne added the second with a superb curling strike from outside the area.

Belgium grabbed a lifeline when Romelu Lukaku converted a penalty just before half-time after Jeremy Doku was shoved over in the box by

Giovanni Di Lorenzo, but the Red Devils could not break the disciplined Italian defence after the break.

The Belgians had their moments in the second half, with Lukaku denied by some desperate last-ditch defending. Doku fired over after a mazy run as the world's top-ranked side piled on the pressure, but Italy held on to reach the semis for the sixth time.



Azzurri fans are now dreaming of seeing four-time World Cup winners Italy claim the Euro Championship for the first time since 1968, with Spain standing in their way in the last-four. "Now we continue to dream, but with our feet on the ground," said defender Leonardo Bonucci.

"We started the European Championship with a dream in the drawer, let's leave it there.

"We have a match against Spain, a national team that didn't look like going all the way, but got back up. It will be a great match."

Confidence is high in the camp with Italy extending their national-

record unbeaten run to 32 games.

While Insigne was man-of-the-match, goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma twice denied Lukaku with superb saves at the Allianz Arena. "This is my first important competition and the goal is to go as far as possible in this shirt," said the 22 year old Donnarumma.

"Let's hope we can make everyone's dream come true. We are an extraordinary group who are not giving up."

Donnarumma's performance even impressed Belgium goalkeeping icon Jean-Marie Pfaff. "Italy also had an outstanding goalkeeper - Donnarumma made sure of the win with two or three saves," the 67 year old Pfaff said.

"Italy deserved it, they showed from the start that they wanted to win and took the initiative."

'Extraordinary' Italy

Mancini hailed Italy's 'extraordinary' performance against Belgium as the Italians extended their national record unbeaten streak to 32 games.

"We fully deserved this victory. My players were extraordinary," Italy coach Mancini told broadcaster RAI.

"We suffered in the last ten minutes because we were really tired. Maybe we could have even scored more goals."

Italy are hoping to be crowned European champions for the first time in 53 years, but Mancini tempered the growing expectations.

"Our road is still long, we still have two games to go," he said.

"Let's enjoy this victory, we'll see. Congratulations to the guys who have been very good."

"Spain are next but the more you go forward the most difficult it becomes."

AFP

Italy's Lorenzo Insigne celebrates after scoring against Belgium during their quarterfinal match at the Allianz Arena in Munich, Germany, on Friday (AFP)

Belgium 'gave everything' in defeat, insists De Bruyne

Munich, Germany - Kevin De Bruyne insisted that injury-hit Belgium 'gave everything' in their 1-2 Euro 2020 quarterfinal defeat by Italy as the world's top-ranked team bowed out on Friday.

Belgium were without injured captain Eden Hazard, but De Bruyne created two great second-half chances which Lukaku and Thorgan Hazard came agonisingly close to converting.

"We're disappointed, but we have to be realistic - we knew it would be difficult because many factors worked against us," De Bruyne told broadcaster RTBF.

The Manchester City star pointed to Eden Hazard's ham-

string injury, Timothy Castagne's eye injury in the opening game and the fact Axel Witsel had only just recovered from injury before the tournament.

"We had too many problems to be at 100 per cent, personally, I wasn't 100 per cent," admitted De Bruyne, who overcame an ankle problem to play.

"I thank the medical staff who did an incredible job so that I could play despite a torn ligament. It was a miracle that I played. I fought hard, we all fought until the end."

"In the first half, Italy were better, but we had chances to make it 2-2. Some people will be disappointed and will criticise



Belgium's Kevin De Bruyne reacts during the quarterfinal match on Friday

us but I think the fans saw that we gave everything."

"Getting eliminated is always a disappointment. Too bad I couldn't do more."

De Bruyne said the Red Devils will 'try again' at the 2022 World Cup, but goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois admitted the quarterfinal defeat 'hits hard'.

"We had two opportunities, but their keeper made a good save and I think we gave the first goal away a bit too easily," he said after Barella beat two defenders to break the

deadlock. "It really could have gone either way, but Italy deserved to win here."

Defeat means more Euro quarterfinal heart-break for Belgium, who exited at the same stage in 2016 after defeat by Wales.

"It's sad and disappointing, these players don't deserve to go out," said Belgium coach Roberto Martinez.

"I can't fault my team, they were magnificent."

AFP

QUARTERFINAL

ITALY VS BELGIUM





EURO2020

WEDNESDAY'S SEMIFINAL
DENMARK VS WINNER OF ENGLAND/UKRAINE GAME
Wembley, London
(11pm, Oman time)

DESERVING DANES



Denmark's Thomas Delaney (C) celebrates after scoring against the Czech Republic during the quarterfinal in Baku on Saturday

First-half goals from Thomas Delaney and Kasper Dolberg help Denmark overcome a spirited challenge from the Czech Republic to continue their fairytale run

Baku, Azerbaijan - Denmark's fairytale run at Euro 2020 will continue into the semifinals after they beat the Czech Republic 2-1 in Baku on Saturday to move into a last-four meeting with England or Ukraine at Wembley.

First-half goals from Thomas Delaney and Kasper Dolberg were enough to see Kasper Hjulmand's men through despite a second-half rally from the Czechs inspired by Patrik Schick's fifth goal of the tournament.

The Danes have now scored ten goals in winning their last three matches after starting the tournament with two defeats, the first amid shocking circumstances when Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest on the pitch.

Three weeks on, they are dreaming of a repeat of 1992 when Denmark won the European Championship despite not even qualifying.

Then Yugoslavia's expulsion due to an outbreak of war gave them a second chance and they are playing like a side inspired by the emotion of Eriksen's collapse and recovery.

The Inter Milan midfielder was able to leave hospital after less than a week with a defibrillator fitted in his chest, but on the field Denmark have survived the loss of their star man for the past decade.

After playing all three group games in Copenhagen and in

front of thousands of travelling Danish fans in Amsterdam in a



Kasper Hjulmand, Denmark boss



4-0 thrashing of Wales last weekend, only a small pocket of supporters could make the 4,000km trip to Azerbaijan.

Those that did make it were celebrating within five minutes as Delaney was left completely unmarked to head home Jens Stryger Larsen's corner.

Tomas Vaclik then had to deny Mikkel Damsgaard to prevent the Danes doubling their lead in a blistering start.

But the Czechs then came into the game and twice Kasper Schmeichel was forced into saves by Tomas Holes. Hjulmand's Denmark were

always a threat on the break, though, and Vaclik had to stand up to parry another powerful drive by Damsgaard.

Vaclik was powerless three minutes before half-time when Joakim Maehle added another assist to his fine tournament with a teasing cross with the outside of his right foot that Dolberg smashed home from close range.

Czech boss Jaroslav Silhavy made two substitutions at the break and the introduction of Jakub Jankto and Michael Krmencik made an instant impact.

Krmencik stung the palms of Schmeichel before the Leicester goalkeeper was forced to turn Antonin Barak's shot behind.

But Denmark did not heed their warning as Schick latched onto Vladimir Coufal's cross to join Cristiano Ronaldo as the tournament's top goalscorer.

The Czechs' momentum soon fizzled out with both sides visibly jaded by their long journey east and the searing heat.

Vaclik kept his side in the game with a string of saves to twice deny substitute Yussuf Poulsen and then Maehle when one-on-one.

However, with Schick forced off by a muscle strain, Silhavy's men lacked the goal threat to trouble Denmark through six minutes of stoppage time.

AFP

Petkovic proud of Swiss 'heroes' despite defeat

Saint Petersburg, Russia - Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic hailed his players as 'heroes' on Friday after they fell just short of reaching a first major tournament semifinal with defeat by Spain on penalties at Euro 2020.

The Swiss, playing in their first major quarterfinal since 1954, saw Remo Freuler sent off in the 77th minute for a tackle on Gerard Moreno, but hung on to force spot-kicks after a 1-1 draw in Saint Petersburg, only to lose 1-3.

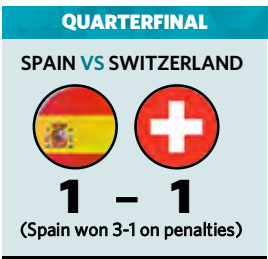
"My players are the heroes of the night," said Petkovic, whose side had beaten world champions France on penalties in a last-16 tie. We would have deserved to go through.

"I have mixed feelings. A lot of pride, because we gave everything and we leave here with our heads held high. On the other hand, we were so close to the semifinal, and that doesn't happen every year."

Swiss goalkeeper Yann



Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic (L) applauds his players



Sommer was unfortunate to be on the losing side after making eight saves in extra-time and keeping out a penalty in the shoot-out.

But his opposite number Unai Simon saved twice,

with both teams also missing the target once. "Yann (Sommer) - he's a hero," added Petkovic. "He didn't have that bit of luck in the penalty shoot-out."

Simon made two saves in the shoot-out to help keep Spain's bid for a record fourth European crown alive. "Football was just there. We are deserved winners," said Simon, who made an embarrassing error in the 5-3 last-16 win over Croatia. "Just like we had to

erase the memory of that mistake in the last match, it's time to quickly forget this triumph because we face a tough rival in the next match."

Spain forged ahead early on when Denis Zakaria put through his own net as Jordi Alba's shot was deflected, but Switzerland were the better side for long periods and Xherdan Shaqiri, standing in for the suspended Granit Xhaka as captain, equalised in the 68th minute.

Borussia Moenchengladbach stopper Sommer then made a string of fine saves in extra-time, but his one in the shoot-out from Rodri was not enough, despite Sergio Busquets also hitting the post, as Switzerland missed three of their four penalties.

Athletic Bilbao's Simon saved from Fabian Schaer and Manuel Akanji, while Ruben Vargas blazed over as Spain snuck through, with Mikel Oyarzabal converting the winning spot-kick.

AFP

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Team UAE Emirates' Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia wears the leader yellow jersey celebrates on podium on Saturday (AFP)

Champion Pogacar seizes lead as Tour enters Alps

TOUR DE FRANCE

Le Grand-Bornand, France - Defending champion Tadej Pogacar soared into the Tour de France overall lead on Saturday on an Alpine stage won by Belgian Dylan Teuns as British outfit Ineos' hopes were again battered.

This was a second stage win on the 2021 Tour for Team UAE's Slovenian leader Pogacar who took another three minutes out of his most credible rival Ineos' Ecuadorian Richard Carapaz. Overnight leader Mathieu van der Poel went into a trademark 'all or nothing at all' meltdown and looks set drop out of the Tour as promised and jet off to Tokyo to contest the mountain bike gold.

Pogacar was again head and shoulders above the rest of the field.

With 13 stages remaining, he leads the Tour by 1min 48sec from Wout Van Aert, who is Jumbo's main hope after Primoz Roglic's misadventures with a fall and subsequent decline in form.

The 22 year old Pogacar will wear the yellow jersey for only the second time on Sunday. He took control of the 2020 Tour on the penultimate day, but rather than bide his time on this raucous edition, he has seized control early.

The 150km run that culminated with the ascent and descent of a classic Tour climb the Colombier was the first of eight mountain stages. There were large weekend crowds in the Upper Savoy region known for Evian water, melted-cheese dishes and the Chamonix ski resort.

AFP

FEDERER GLIDES INTO LAST-16

London, UK - Roger Federer moved into the fourth round of a Grand Slam tournament for the 69th time on Saturday, overcoming a raucous home crowd and the last British man in the draw Cameron Norrie in an entertaining 6-4, 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 win at Wimbledon.

Federer kept his dream alive of a record-extending ninth singles title after reaching the Wimbledon last-16 for the 18th time in his career.

Federer said this Wimbledon held special significance for him. "I have loved every minute and I hope there is a little bit more left in me as this one is special for it is the last slam before I hit the big 40," said Federer, the third oldest man to reach the last-16 in the Open era.

"It's a nice stat to hear. It proves to me when I wake up in the morning that has happened," added Federer, who will turn 40 in five weeks' time. "It's a pleasure still playing right now. At this point it's all a bonus and I will see how far I can go here."

The other two players to reach the round of 16 at Wimbledon in the Open Era are Pancho Gonzales (41) in 1969 and Ken Rosewall (40) in 1975.

Norrie follows two-time champion Andy Murray and British No 1 Dan Evans in exiting in the third round.

Federer's half of the draw looks more treacherous than defending champion Novak Djokovic's with two of the younger generation Daniil Medvedev and Germany's Alexander Zverev potentially



Roger Federer returns against Cameron Norrie during their third-round match at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, UK, on Saturday (AFP)

lurking further down the line. Federer will face Italy's Lorenzo Sonego on Monday for a place in the quarterfinals.

'It's disgraceful'

Second seed Medvedev faces 2017 Wimbledon finalist Marin Cilic seeking to join Zverev in the fourth round. Zverev ended big-serving Taylor Fritz's impressive campaign - 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) - given he exited the French Open in a wheelchair due to a knee injury.

The match of the day on the

men's side was a damp squib as fiery Aussie entertainer Nick Kyrgios retired with an abdominal injury tied at one set all with stylish Canadian 16th seed Felix Auger-Aliassime. The maverick that is Kyrgios did not have the best of starts as he had left his shoes in the locker room.

Meanwhile American Coco Gauff and 2018 champion Angelique Kerber of Germany

advanced. Gauff and Kerber will meet in the last-16 after the American teenager breezed past Slovenian Kaja Juvan while the

German had a tough three-setter against Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus.

Gauff is not the only teenager making her mark at Wimbledon this year. Britain's Canada-born 18 year old Emma Raducanu, who moved with her Romanian father and Chinese mother to

England aged two, produced a brilliant display to beat the experienced Sorana Cirstea of Romania 6-3, 7-5.

She next faces Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic who accused her opponent Jelena Ostapenko of 'lying' when she took a medical time-out at 0-4 down in the final set of their third round clash on Saturday. "I think it's disgraceful behaviour from someone that is a Slam champion," said the Australian who completed a three-set win.

AFP

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Verstappen on pole in Austria

FORMULE ONE

AUSTRIAN GRAND PRIX

Spielberg, Austria - Red Bull's world championship leader Max Verstappen will start on pole for the Austrian Grand Prix after edging out Lando Norris for McLaren in qualifying on Saturday.

Verstappen's third pole in a row puts him in a strong position to stretch his 18 point lead over Lewis Hamilton in Sunday's ninth race of the Formula one season.

"Hopefully we can finish it off tomorrow," said the 23 year old, who was cheered on by a sea of Dutch fans at the first Grand Prix



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen reacts after winning the qualifying session at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg on Saturday

Hamilton extends contract with Mercedes

London, UK - Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton has extended his contract with Mercedes until 2023, the team announced on Saturday. Hamilton, 36, has won six of his seven F1 titles with the outfit since joining them in 2013.

Together they have domi-

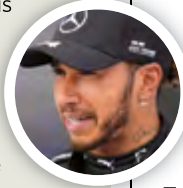
nated the sport for the past seven years. Mercedes have won the constructors' championship every season since 2014 with Hamilton winning six of the last seven drivers' titles.

Hamilton will reportedly earn US\$55mn a year under the new deal. "It is hard to believe it's

been nearly nine years working with this incredible team and I'm excited we're going to continue our partnership for two more years," Hamilton said in a statement. "We've accomplished so much together but we still have a lot to achieve, both on and off the track."

As the only black driver on the F1 grid, the Briton is a prominent advocate against racism and took the knee wearing a Black Lives Matter T-shirt before each race last season.

AFP



England paceman Robinson free to resume career

London, UK - Ollie Robinson is free to play for England again after receiving an eight-game ban - five of them deferred - for offensive tweets he posted several years ago, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Saturday.

The 27 year old pace bowler will be available for England's forthcoming matches including the five-Test series with India as a disciplinary panel deemed him to have already served the three-game ban. He was also fined US\$4,400. The seamer was suspended from England duty pending an investigation after historic racist and sexist posts made between 2012 and 2014 re-emerged during his Test debut in the first Test against New Zealand in June.

AFP

Every day, all day!