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UAE TO OFFER CITIZENSHIP TO SELECT EXPATS

GO TO PAGE 09 WORLD

Oman jumps seven places in Corruption Perceptions Index

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has improved its ranking by seven places in the 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released last week by Transparency International.

'As a result of the efforts made to enhance governance and transparency, Oman has achieved a remarkable progress, ranking 49th globally in Corruption Perceptions Index 2020 issued by the Transparency International organisation. The report also focuses on the global health response to COVID-19,' stated the Ministry of Economy.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, the sultanate is placed third with a score of 54 after the United Arab Emirates and Qatar with scores of 71 and 63, respectively, while Libya (17), Yemen (15) and Syria (14) are among the worst performers.

The 2020 CPI reveals that persistent corruption in the world is undermining healthcare systems and contributing to democratic backsliding amid the

COVID-19 pandemic.

'Countries that perform well on the index invest more in healthcare, are better able to provide universal health coverage and are less likely to violate democratic norms and institutions or the rule of law,' it stated.

In MENA, the sultanate is placed 3rd with a score of 54 after the United Arab Emirates and Qatar with scores of 71 and 63, respectively

COVID-19

"COVID-19 is not just a health and economic crisis. It is a corruption crisis that we are currently failing to manage," Delia Ferreira Rubio, the chair of Transparency International, said.

"The past year has tested governments like no other in memory, and those with higher levels

of corruption have been less able to meet the challenge. But even those at the top of the CPI must urgently address their role in perpetuating corruption at home and abroad."

Corruption poses a critical threat to citizens' lives and livelihoods, especially when combined with a public health emergency. Clean public sectors correlate with greater investment in healthcare. Uruguay, for example, has the highest CPI score in Latin America (71), invests heavily in healthcare and has a robust epidemiological surveillance system, which has aided its response to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, like yellow fever and Zika, stated the report.

The 2020 edition of the CPI ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, drawing on 13 expert assessments and surveys of business executives. It uses a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Denmark and New Zealand top the index with 88 points.

ON A DIFFERENT WICKET



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, visited the Oman Cricket (OC) headquarters recently where he interacted with young aspiring cricketers. He also met the national men's, women's and U19 teams and the OC board members See also Page 16

Oman, Zanzibar sign deal for multi-terminal port

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and the government of Zanzibar have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a multi-terminal port at Unguja's Mangapwani suburb, in Zanzibar.

The pact envisages a huge

and modern port with various terminals for containerised and general cargo, fuel, fishing vessels, oil and natural gas, as well as a satellite city with all essential business facilities.

The signing was presided over by President Hussein Mwinyi who said in his speech that "the journey to build new Zanzibar has now begun".

He ordered an immediate feasibility study for the project, saying the government has no time to waste on rhetoric. "We have to speak less and do more. The government is determined to succeed in this grand project; it's the first development scheme under the Eighth Phase Government," President Mwinyi said.

He reaffirmed the govern-

ment's resolve to transform Zanzibar into the East and Central Africa's commercial and tourism hub through construction of essential infrastructure.

He commended the Oman Investment Authority for agreeing to work with the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar. Sheikh Mohammed al Touqi led the OIA delegation.

MHD-ITICS places renewed focus on growth & strategic expansion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Mohsin Haider Darwish (MHD) LLC, one of the largest and pioneering business houses in the sultanate which was founded by the late Mohsin Haider Darwish, has announced the creation of the new business cluster 'ITICS' to bring a renewed focus on growth of existing businesses, strategic diversification and expansion in the local and overseas markets.

The operations of MHD LLC were recently bifurcated into two clusters: (a) Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial & Consumer Solutions (ITICS), and (b) Automotive, Construction Equipment and Renewable Energy (ACERE). Each cluster is headed by its own chairperson.

Honourable Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, who has been consistently recognised and ranked as one of the most influential businesswomen in Oman and the Middle East, is the chairperson of ITICS. Honourable Lujaina is one of the flag-bearers of Omani women power and has been a trailblazer in uplifting, empowering and inspiring young Omani women entrepreneurs and corporate leaders alike.

The Harvard Business Council 2020 International Awards has recently conferred Honourable Lujaina with Harvard Business Council Leadership Medal and Diamond Executive's Award in recognition of the outstanding leadership shown by her in the past several years.

Areej Mohsin Darwish holds the position of chairperson of ACERE at MHD LLC.

"The purpose behind the creation of these two clusters is to bring greater focus on improving existing business verticals, as well as to place emphasis on strategic diversification and expansion," Honourable Lujaina



Honourable Lujaina Mohsin Darwish

said in an interview.

Kicking off the new year with the strength of MHD Group's legacy and a renewed focus on business growth and diversification, the newly formed ITICS concentrates on five business divisions of MHD LLC, with each division made up of multiple business units. The five divisions under ITICS are: Infrastructure & Building Systems, Technology &

Communications, Industrial Products, Office Products, and Consumer Division.

Headed and guided by chairperson Honourable Lujaina, the ITICS core management team has prepared a three-pronged business strategy: growing existing businesses, expanding into adjacencies and like domains, and diversifying into new business areas.

With the aim of doubling revenues within next four years, ITICS' diversification and expansion strategy focuses on both domestic and overseas markets, especially in the domains of technology and digital enterprise, through acquisitions and investments.

"My vision for MHD-ITICS is to guide this business cluster to become the dominant entity in

all the business domains it operates in, with the largest market share. Our focus is to expand further into regional and international markets, create large employment opportunities for the Omani workforce and become the employer of choice for them, and contribute to Oman's economic growth," Honourable Lujaina said.

The ITICS cluster of MHD LLC consists of a very large number of business verticals and it has presence in almost all key areas

with telecom operators, and provide telecom network passive infrastructure and services such as supply, installation and commissioning of telecom towers, shelters, power back-up, etc. The division also provides solutions through Telecom As A Service (TAAS) options, Internet of Things (IoT), etc.

The Industrial Products Division of ITICS consists of business units that bring to the market products and services for electrical projects, undertake supply

to its unique combination of multiple business activities and the large number of international brands it represents, ITICS touches the lives of almost every member of the society every day, by providing superior products and services for their homes, offices and other workplaces, leisure and recreational areas."

ITICS is also involved in distribution and retailing of major international brands of mobile devices - mobile phones, tabs, laptops, wearables like smart watches, etc. Its Consumer Division offers the discerning customers in Oman contemporary products for residential and light commercial airconditioning, other home appliances such as refrigerators, washing machines, cooking ranges, freezers, water dispensers, etc. as well as televisions and other consumer electronics.

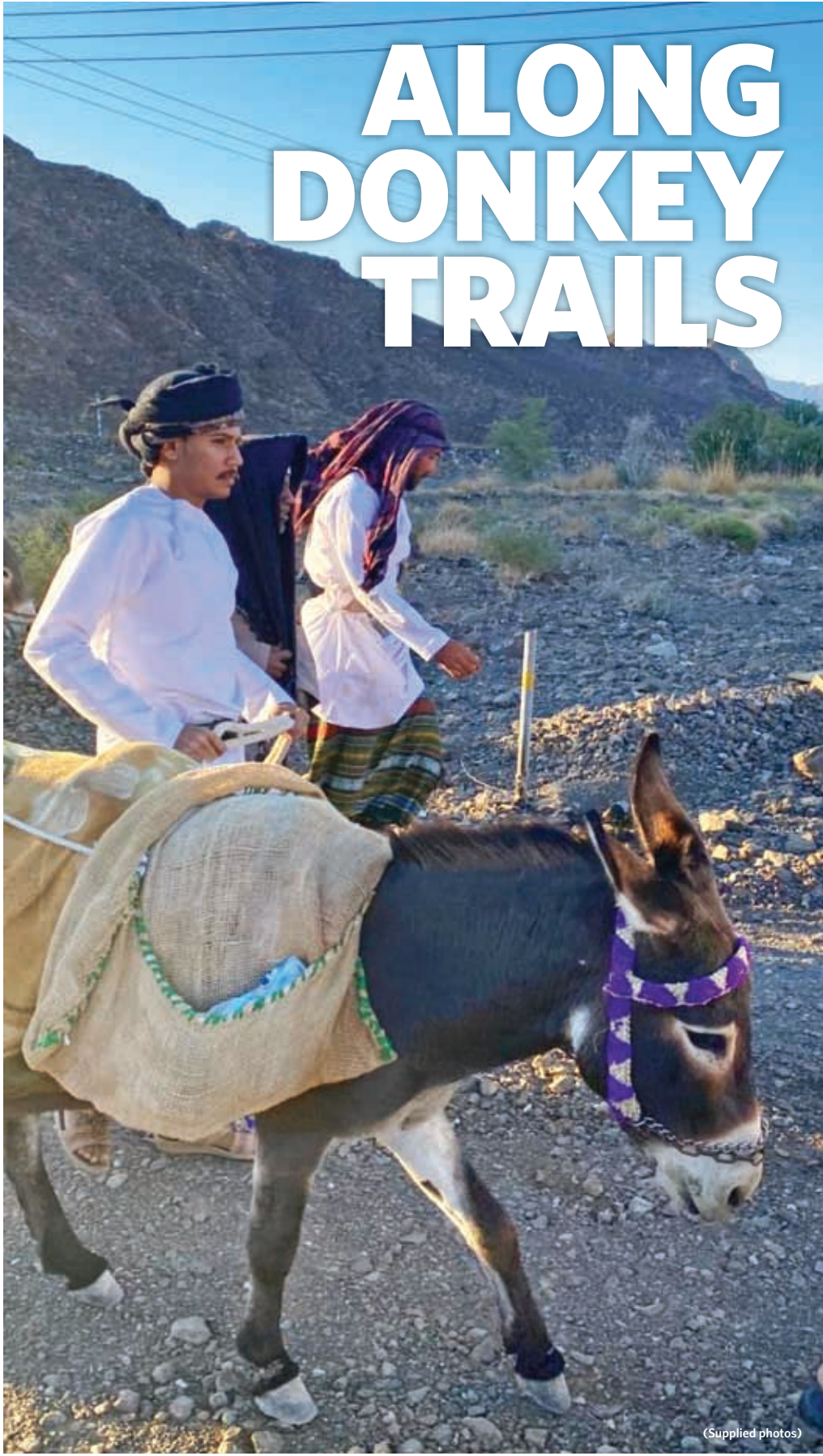
According to Honourable Lujaina, the reorganisation of MHD LLC into two clusters will allow ITICS to harness the synergies created by the integration of multiple business units and address market opportunities in an efficient and focused manner with greater agility. "This reorganisation will also allow the ITICS management to concentrate on growth, strengthen the business fundamentals of the cluster, and refresh organisational competencies to meet the challenges of the future."

With a large number of business verticals and its presence in almost all key areas of business in the sultanate, ITICS is uniquely positioned to take advantage of any opportunity that arises due to projects and investments announced by the government and the private sector. The management is now keenly focused on areas of new technology, telecommunications, home improvement, and infrastructure creation.

This reorganisation will also allow the ITICS' management to concentrate on growth, strengthen the business fundamentals of the cluster, and refresh organisational competencies to meet the challenges of the future

HONOURABLE LUJAINA MOHSIN DARWISH





A 65-km trip in North Sharqiyah revives traditional lifestyle and practices

Our Correspondent Muscat

Some 43 people recently took to their donkeys on a two-day 65km trip aimed at reviving the traditional lifestyle and practices of generations gone by as well as to promote domestic tourism in the sultanate.

"It was, in a way, tracing the footsteps of our grandparents while on a trail linking the wilayat of Al Qabel with Dima Wa al Taien in North Sharqiyah," said Salem al Balushi, head of the Generations Team, that organised the trip.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Balushi said, "Some 43 people from North Sharqiyah governorate participated in the trip between January 9 and 10. It took two days and 65km to complete the journey. On the first day, the participants set off from the wilayat of Al Qabel to Al Aqeedah village, a distance of 30km, and camped there. The next day's trip started from Al Aqeedah village to Dima Wa al Taien."

He added, "Our trips aim to rekindle the spirit of exploration mastered by our ancestors, spreading the culture of preserving the environment, promoting archaeological sites in Oman, and inculcating the culture of fitness among people."



It was, in a way, tracing the footsteps of our grandparents while on a trail linking the wilayat of Al Qabel with Dima Wa al Taien in North Sharqiyah

SALEM AL BALUSHI

He said the group's first trip was in December 2020 from the wilayat of Al Qabel to Bateen village.

"The group took one day, riding donkeys for 30km of

the journey."

On this traditional ride, each member of the team was assigned a special responsibility. The team was led by Salem al Balushi and Traq al Hajri was the assistant leader while planning and mapping was done by Fahr al Farsi.

"The team plans well before embarking on any trip. The site for the adventure trip is chosen after much deliberation and research. A team is also sent to study the place and the weather conditions in advance. We are also careful when choosing how many people can be taken for a particular trip," said Balushi.

"The trip included several activities such as fencing with sticks, reciting poems - Aazi,

which embodies the originality of the past with popular songs. Donkeys carried various supplies and goods while all the participants carried safety equipment, tents, water, beverages and canned food. Care was taken to ensure that all participants adhered to health measures, such as social distancing and wearing masks, to avoid the spread of COVID-19," said Balushi.

Participants of the journey recalled the struggles and sufferings of their ancestors who traversed different terrains, fighting adverse weather conditions in summer and winter. "We hope that COVID-19 ends, so we can continue to make more trips to promote archaeological sites and the natural splendour of Oman."



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Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Nonrefundable)	Tender Purchase deadline	Clarification deadline	Tender Submission Date
PDEN/2021/01/006	Construction of Commercial Building at Al Hazim Filling Station in Wilayat Al Rustaq / Al Batinah Governorate	50.000	07.02.2021	09.02.2021	14.02.2021

Bank Name & Account NumberBank Muscat (0319005687760012)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender document from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om. The tender may be collected on any working days between 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bids should be submitted in two separate sealed envelopes (Financial and Technical), addressed to the Chairman of Tender Committee, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelopes containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 02:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling **24610289/24610282/24610355**

Energy efficiency is central to social development, economic growth: H E Aufi



Our Correspondent Muscat

H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Undersecretary of Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said energy efficiency is centrally important to social development, economic growth and resilience, and clean energy transitions.

"Many countries have successfully implemented energy efficiency policies, resulting in a range of positive outcomes in terms of jobs and health. Oman is taking action with this important topic which is exemplified through multiple domains," H E Aufi said at the OQ's first energy efficiency conference, held recently.

Successful case studies of implementing energy efficiency measures in the oil and gas in-

dustry of Oman were also presented at the conference.

"Energy efficiency can enable a new market in Oman through the formation of local ESCOs (Energy Services Companies)," H E Aufi said.

The conference, providing an opportunity to engage with all the stakeholders from across the sultanate, discussed current global landscape and outlook of energy efficiency, its economic, social and environmental benefits, and related opportunities and challenges in both the industrial and buildings sectors of the country.

Dr Salim Huthaili, CEO of Alternative Energy, OQ, said, "Like many other parts of the developed world, the Middle East is also geared up to firmly emphasise on having government poli-

cies to implement energy efficiency ideas in their economic and fiscal planning. This is particularly with a focus on issues related to electrical demand as a 300 per cent increase in the electricity demand is expected in the Middle East by the year 2050."

The OQ Energy Efficiency Conference was organised by OQ which is a global integrated energy company of the sultanate with operations across 17 countries around the world.

OQ covers the entire value chain from exploration and production to marketing and distribution of end-user products.

OQ is leveraging existing OQ assets around the world to generate a diversified revenue stream of over US\$400mn EBITDA from alternative energy by 2030.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.30am	Duhr	12.25pm	Maghrib	5.58pm
Sunrise	6.48am	Asr	3.35pm	Isha	7.10pm

Seventeen elderly get foster families in Oman



Children need to understand the importance of caring for parents during old age, Jokha al Farsi said (Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Seventeen elderly men in the sultanate have got foster families to look after their needs and care for them. The elderly found their new lease of life with the help of Ihsaan Association.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Jokha Mohammed Khamis al Farsi, head and the founder of Ihsaan Association, said, "In 2018, we started the initiative and till now we have been successful in providing foster families for 17 elderly persons from all parts of Oman. However, most of them are in Muscat governorate."

The aim of the association is to strengthen the bonds between members of the society and within families, Jokha said.

"Children need to understand the importance of caring for parents and assisting them during old age."

Being with a family in old age is more comfortable, she added.

"We provide alternative families for older people who have no children or relatives to care for. These foster families provide them all that they need from lodging, food to healthcare. We also cooperate with the Ministry of Social Development to help these families by paying for a helper and increasing the social security allowance for the elderly."

Talking about the other services provided by the association, Jokha said, "We provide medical aid for the elderly at low prices, including prosthetic limbs for individuals with limited income. We will continue with our awareness campaign to cover all the wilayats.

"Our association also provides free ambulance services to help the elderly and disabled reach hospitals for routine

check-ups and other healthcare needs."

"We have provided 2,000 elderly persons access to hospitals in Oman so far," she added.

"We have trained some members of families to drive ambulances to transport their sick parents to hospitals."

The association has four ambulances.

"We give names to every ambulance, such as *Kafah* or *Struggle*, *Atta* or *Giving*, *Hiba* or *Gift*, and *Amal* or *Hope* to spread reassurance among members of society," she said.

The association launched another initiative this year to transfer the dead from their homes to hospital centres and then to cemeteries to relieve their families.

"We hope to get financial support from private companies in our efforts to transport the elderly to hospitals," Jokha said.

Revenues of 3 to 5-star hotels fell by 62.9%, guests by 52.5% in 2020

Our Correspondent

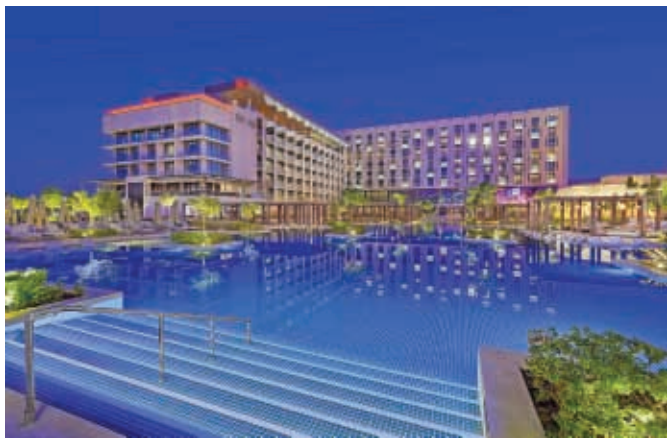
Muscat

The revenues of 3 to 5-star hotels in Oman fell by 62.9 per cent and number of guests saw a decline of 52.5 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019.

According to the preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on the main indicators of 3 to 5-star hotels, the occupancy rate was only 26.4 per cent in 2020.

"The fall in revenues of 3 to 5-star hotels until the end of December 2020 was 62.9 per cent, reaching RO85.77mn, compared to 229.53mn at the end of December 2019," NCSI stated.

The total number of guests until the end of December 2020 reached 842,491 guests, a fall of



52.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2019, during which the number of guests was 1,774,258.

The statistics showed that the Omani customers constituted the largest number of hotel guests in 2020 (479,336), followed by Europeans (176,743),

Asians (72,513), Gulf nationals (37,357) and Arabs from other Arab countries other than the Gulf (23,943).

There were 20,668 guests from the Americas, 6,345 from Oceania, 4,243 from Africa, and 21,343 guests from other nationalities.

GCC health ministers discuss emergency preparedness, response

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH), took part in the extraordinary meeting of the GCC Health Ministers, which was held on Thursday to review the development of the GCC general framework of the public health plan for emergency preparedness and response, MoH said.

In addition, the meeting touched upon the Early Health Warning System Guidelines that were adopted by the GCC Supreme Council at the 41st Session of the GCC Supreme Council (Sultan Qaboos & Sheikh Sabah Summit) held at Al Ula

city in Saudi Arabia this month, in order to prepare early health warning systems in the GCC countries.

The extraordinary meeting reviewed the contents of the closing statement of the GCC Supreme Council, particularly the decisions taken regarding the development of the GCC general framework of the public health plan for emergency preparedness and response.

The GCC Supreme Council has approved the general framework of the plan and assigned the concerned authorities in the GCC countries to implement this plan by cooperating and coordinating with the health ministries, it said.

The sultanate's delegation in the meeting, held via video conferencing, was headed by H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health.

The meeting aimed at accelerating the implementation and follow-up of the decisions of the Sultan Qaboos & Sheikh Sabah Summit, highlighted the decision of the GCC Supreme Council on establishing the Gulf Centre for Disease Prevention & Control, which will be under the umbrella of the GCC Health Council.

Al Ula Declaration underlined strengthening the role of this centre and enable it rapidly in order to coordinate the joint Gulf action to confront the COVID-19 pandemic and other epidemics.

Al Kawthar Islamic Shariah Compliant Fund		
"Value added exposure to GCC Markets"		
BOARD OF DIRECTOR REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31ST, 2020.		
Dear Unitholders, On behalf of the board, I am pleased to present the results of Al Kawthar Shariah Compliant Fund for the year ended December 31st, 2020. The fund posted a gain of 5.5%, while the benchmark GCC Shariah Capped Index computed by S&P increased 2.5%, resulting in an outperformance of 3.0%. The fund value at the end of the period was RO. 5.58mn and the Net Asset Value per unit stood at RO 1.034. The fund has given an annualized 3-year return of 6.1%, which is much ahead of the benchmark in challenging period.		
Fund Performance		
Period	2020	2019
Al Kawthar Fund	5.49%	7.62%
Benchmark	2.48%	4.11%
Out Performance	3.01%	3.52%
Last 3 Years Annualized	6.10%	4.13%
1.97%		
2020 took markets by surprise with the speed at which the pandemic escalated and the magnitude of the lockdowns. The sizeable government stimulus aided the equity markets as easy liquidity helped them close the year with gains. Also, the recovery was led by vaccine hope and further positives from unlocking. GCC markets continued to witness volatility as crude oil prices dropped and demand remained unstable, coupled with the impact of the pandemic. However, for the year 2020- Saudi and Qatar managed to report a 3.6% and 0.1% gain. Kuwait was the top loser, high valuations and poor sentiments with the loss of Emir led to selling pressure which could not be curtailed with MSCI inclusion flows. Dubai's market fell considerably in 2020 but soon managed to pull back during the last 6 months, limiting the damage to 9.9%.		
Oman market reported an 8.1% decline as it followed a downward trend despite a marginal recovery towards the end of 2020. Oman has been through a smooth transition of power and has begun implementing enabling measures to encourage the economy and market. Bahrain ended the year with a 7.5% decline while Abu Dhabi displayed a flatish performance.		
Brief Summary of Accounts		
Particulars	12 Months 31 DEC 2020 RO	12 Months 31 DEC 2019 RO
Revenues	430,385	541,324
Total Comprehensive Income	279,963	389,308
Net Asset Value	5,581,639	5,496,115
Fund Capital	5,399,527	5,608,853
NAV per unit	1.034	0.980
Outlook Oil production control and rebound in GDP forecasts are expected to translate into positive figures for the GCC as demand for oil & gas is anticipated to recover following the commencement of travel, tourism and general movement. The recent reconciliation between Qatar and Saudi presents a bright future and possible investment co-operation. The region is hosting the EXPO and FIFA and both remains of significant interest, even as certain geo-political issues continue to linger over the region. Going forward, we expect corporate performance to improve and with suitable liquidity GCC markets can continue to give positive returns. Biden and his new policies to have an impact on markets. We believe that our disciplined approach and diversification in fundamentally strong shariah compliant stocks in select sector themes help in procuring superior long-term returns.		
On behalf of the members of the Board of Directors, I would like to acknowledge and thank our valued unit holders for their continued support. We pay our tributes to His Majesty, Haitham Bin Tariq, for his inspiring leadership and vision that will continue to lead us further on the path to greater prosperity.		
Rawan Ahmed Al Said Chairperson		
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020		
	31 December 2020 RO	31 December 2019 RO
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	5,558,036	5,320,662
Receivables from brokers	10,047	42,298
Bank balances	75,596	258,196
Total assets	5,643,679	5,621,156
UNIT HOLDERS' FUNDS		
Fund capital	5,399,527	5,608,853
Accumulated profits/(losses)	182,112	(112,738)
Total Unit Holders' funds	5,581,639	5,496,115
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Accruals and other payables	62,040	125,041
Total Unit Holders' funds and liabilities	5,643,679	5,621,156
Net asset value per unit	1.034	0.980
STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020		
	Year ended 31 Dec 2020 RO	Year ended 31 Dec 2019 RO
INCOME		
Dividends income on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	136,826	200,024
Realised gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	48,676	188,781
Unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	245,879	150,514
Foreign exchange (loss)/gains on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	(996)	2,005
Total income	430,385	541,324
EXPENSES		
Management, custodian and fund administration fees	(102,380)	(104,473)
General and administration expense	(48,042)	(47,543)
Total expenses	(150,422)	(152,016)
Profit for the year	279,963	389,308
Profit per unit	0.052	0.069

تثمير TATHMEER صندوق تنمية المتنوع للأسهم الخليجية TANMIA GCC Diversified Fund		
BOARD OF DIRECTOR REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2020.		
Dear Unitholders, On behalf of the board, I am pleased to present the results for the year ended 31st December 2020 of TANMIA GCC Diversified Equity Fund (TATHMEER). Despite a very challenging year, the Fund continued its superior performance trend and ended the year with a gain of 2.56%. The fund adopted the widely recognized S&P GCC Composite as its benchmark. The benchmark posted a negative return of 1.72%, thus the fund has managed to outperform the same by 4.28%. The Fund value is at USD 22.83mn and the Net Asset Value per unit stood at USD 1.066.		
Performance		
Period	TANMIA GCC Fund Returns	
Full Year 2020	2.56%	
Full Year 2019	11.87%	
Full Year 2018	12.25%	
Last 3 Years annualized	8.80%	
2020, the year saw Global spread of pandemic, which led to a global standstill for travel. Lock down and work from home became the new trend. Fundamental damage to corporate businesses was largely protected by the easing of liquidity through stimulus packages. Liquidity thus helped most Global equity markets post double digit gains during 2020 despite the significant setback to economic growth and investments from the lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The development of vaccines for Covid-19 further boosted markets towards the end of the year. Most of the regional markets recorded negative performance during the year due to the impact of lockdown on corporate performances and the decline in crude oil prices. However, Saudi and Qatar markets reported a gain of 3.6% and 0.1% respectively on the back of gradual gains post the sharp decline in 1Q2020. Kuwait reported the biggest decline as investors looked profits after years of gains that was led by the announcement of the MSCI EM inclusion. Dubai market declined sharply in 2020, however, it recovered from the lows of 2020 and closed the year on 9.9% loss. The declining trend in Oman Market continued during 2020 as it declined 8.1% despite seeing marginal recovery towards the end of the year. Bahrain Market closed the year on decline of 7.5%. Abu Dhabi market closed on flatish in 2020, recovering from Mar-2020 lows by closing the year marginally down at 0.6%.		
Brief Summary of Accounts		
Particulars	For the 12 Months ended 31 December 2020 (US\$)	For the 12 Months ended 31 December 2019 (US\$)
Revenue for the period	923,763	3,489,820
Total Comprehensive income/ (loss) for the period	444,112	2,937,137
Net Asset Value	22,827,473	25,226,090
Fund Capital	21,420,644	22,863,485
Net Asset Value per unit	1.07	1.10
The likely stability in the oil prices in the current range and estimated improvement in regional GDP is positive for the markets in the near term. Fundamentally, we expect better corporate performance in 2021 over 2020. Moreover, the expected re-opening of travel and tourism is likely to result in further economic recovery. New US President Biden and his policies with regards to China, Iran and Oil to be watched carefully as it may have a major impact on the market direction. Finally, improving diplomatic relations within GCC can be read as sentimentally positive. We remain positive on a long-term horizon as both GDP and corporate profits rise on a year over year basis. Liquidity and global news flows would also continue to make its impact in our investment strategy.		
On behalf of the members of the Board of Directors, I would like to acknowledge and thank our valued unit holders for their continued support. We pay our tributes to His Majesty, Haitham Bin Tariq, for his inspiring leadership and vision that will continue to lead us further on the path to greater prosperity.		
Rawan Ahmed Al Said Chairperson		
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020		
	2020 US\$	2019 US\$
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	21,294,781	24,706,917
Receivables from brokers	491,976	765,880
Bank balances	1,276,114	627,146
Total assets	23,062,871	26,099,943
UNIT HOLDERS' FUNDS		
Fund capital	21,420,644	22,863,485
Accumulated profit	1,406,829	2,362,605
Total Unit Holders' funds	22,827,473	25,226,090
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Accruals and other payables	235,398	873,853
Total liabilities	235,398	873,853
Total Unit Holders' funds and liabilities	23,062,871	26,099,943
Net asset value per unit	1.07	1.10
STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020		
	2020 US\$	2019 US\$
INCOME		
Dividends income on quoted financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	622,915	1,027,905
Realised gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	(322,216)	1,197,807
Unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	671,586	1,259,450
Foreign exchange gain/ (loss)	(51,680)	1,324
Finance and other income	3,158	3,334
Total income	923,763	3,489,820
EXPENSES		
Management and custodian fees	(365,867)	(446,109)
General and administration expenses	(113,784)	(106,574)
Total expenses	(479,651)	(552,683)
Profit for the year	444,112	2,937,137
Profit per unit	0.021	0.128

Oman to take part in 6th Gulf Cancer Awareness week

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Along with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries Oman will take part in the activities of the 6th Gulf Cancer Awareness Week that will take place in the first week of February.

The GCC countries have adopted the first week of February as the Gulf Cancer Awareness week in line with the celebration of the World Cancer Day which falls on February 4.

Dr Taha al Lawati, board member, Oman Cancer Association (OCA), said cancer is the second leading cause of death globally. "Usually, the incidence rate in developed countries is much higher than in developing countries," he said.

"In addition, several studies indicate the possibility of having 27.5mn new cases of cancer by 2040, an increase of 61.7 per

The activities of the Gulf Cancer Awareness Week will be launched on Monday

DR TAHA AL LAWATI

cent from 2018 if the current trends continue."

The Gulf Cancer Awareness Week aims to raise health awareness about risk factors leading to cancer, to encourage the community to adopt a healthy life style including diet and physical activity as well as to encourage saving the environment, public health, professional health and the importance of early detection of cancer for better prognosis.

The seven-day event will have

activities including health awareness lectures, walkathons and entertainment events in various governorates of the sultanate - all to be held online.

Dr Lawati added, "The activities of the Gulf Cancer Awareness Week will be launched on the first day which is Monday with the slogan 40/40 which was chosen based on the scientific evidence that indicates that 40 per cent of the cancer diseases can be prevented by following healthy lifestyle, adopting correct dietary habits, practising regular physical activity and maintaining an ideal body weight. Forty types of cancer can be cured if detected early and managed with the appropriate treatment plan in a timely manner."

This year the Gulf Cancer Awareness Week comes amid a new global challenge with the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic.

H E Sa'eedi highlights NCD action at launch of WHO report

Muscat - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health, took part in the World Health Organization's virtual launching of the WHO Unhealthy Lifestyle Diseases Report on January 28.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, and First Deputy of WHO-Executive Board, represented the sultanate in the event.

The health minister gave a keynote address where he affirmed that non-communicable diseases remain a common burden to the international community, and one that will require organised efforts beyond the health sector.

H E Dr Sa'eedi stated that hosting the Global Meeting to accelerate progress on SDG Target 3.4 on Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health in Oman in December 2019 had placed NCDs and mental health in the spotlight, which helped build a better understanding of the important role of non-health sectors in controlling the threat they represent. He added that the meeting offered a capacity-building opportunity for Oman's NCD and mental health professionals.

H E Dr Sa'eedi pointed out that since the meeting in December 2019, Oman has taken several actions to mitigate such diseases by introducing taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages, the Omani standard for bread (stating the upper limit of salt in bread), and enhanced the integration of managing the most common mental illnesses in primary healthcare.

He said that COVID-19 pandemic brought with it numerous challenges, especially concerning the vulnerability of persons living



with NCDs, as many health systems recognised this quickly at the onset of the pandemic and ensured prioritisation of NCDs and mental health in their COVID-19 response.

In Oman, as in many countries, the situation imposed by the pandemic led to innovation. Measures were introduced at all levels of care based on the use of technology in raising awareness and providing services. He elaborated that examples and evidence-based best practices are many, ranging from counselling through hotline services and telemedicine clinics; and to the use of technology in scheduling appointments to collect medications and share vital measurements.

He emphasised the country's commitment to addressing the burden of NCDs in the face of all and any challenges, affirming their continuous strive to strengthen NCD data and moni-

toring processes which would pave the way for successful implementation towards the SDG targets that have been set.

The event marked the formal launching of the Lifestyle Diseases Report. Notably, the Global Report is one of the major outputs of the Global Meeting, highlighting the key messages and recommendations and providing the reference to the WHO resources on how to advance the NCD agenda at global, regional and national levels.

The event aimed at taking stock of the progress towards achieving SDG target 3.4 since the Global Meeting in Oman, as well as providing a platform for major announcements of projects, initiatives, technical packages and tools, which WHO and partners can offer to help countries implement the whole spectrum of NCD and mental health interventions from promotion and prevention, to treatment, re-

habilitation and palliation.

Moreover, it provided a platform for updates and information exchange on WHO's work in the areas covered in the report, taking into account the major developments in the NCD field related to the ongoing pandemic. It further aimed at disseminating the report and other WHO resources to a wide range of stakeholders, including high-level policymakers, NCD managers, United Nations organisations, and non-state actors.

The meeting highlighted the follow-up activities, collaborations, partnerships, and accelerated action in countries as a result of the Global Meeting as well as outlined the way forward.

The sultanate is one of the pioneering countries in adopting the initiative to integrate chronic disease services within the primary healthcare system and has also worked to reduce the spread of these diseases in society.

Tourism, sports ministries appeal for cancellation of events, activities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth have asked their respective stakeholders to abide by the Supreme Committee decision to stop

holding events as a COVID-19 precautionary measure.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Thursday issued a statement requesting all hotel establishments to halt hosting social events, international events, activities and conferences. It also said internal activi-

ties and exhibitions of all kinds need to be stopped.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth also issued a statement requesting to stop holding of sporting activities. However, league and sports federations' events can go ahead in accordance with health protocols.

Do not disclose any banking or personal information to any source: Central Bank



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has urged the public against disclosure of any banking or personal information to any source or entity.

'CBO would also like to state that all licensed banks or exchange companies operating in the sultanate do not request the disclosure of any banking infor-

mation such as the password, card number or account number, by calling or contacting through various social media platforms or by sending text messages requesting direct access via links,' CBO said in a statement.

'Thus, whoever is exposed to such messages or communications must inform the authorities represented by the Royal Oman Police or the banks operating in the sultanate. Be aware of fraud.'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The future of transportation

760 mph. San Francisco to Los Angeles in just 45 minutes. All under a dollar shy of \$20 per ticket!

As world leaders attended the fifth anniversary of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement in December 2020, we are yet again left to wonder whether there's a practical and viable solution to the current climate crisis we're facing today.

Whilst economic giants such as China and India are set to achieve record high emissions by 2030 it's time we tackled the problem head on. With the biggest offender being the transportation sector, contributing to over 28 per cent of the world's current greenhouse gas emissions, it's in dire need of an update.

First introduced back in 2012 by Elon Musk, the hyperloop was endorsed as the fastest way to travel from point A to B. Reaching speeds of over 760mph, the hyperloop system is structured around one simple idea - Eliminating drag. Air resistance and friction account for over 40 per cent of energy loss in cars contributing to over 4.6 metric tonnes in CO₂. With passengers being transported in pods through pneumatic steel tubes, this system uses maglev technology and electric propulsion to completely eradicate the two factors that hinder conventional forms of transportation.

In theory, the low pressure vacuum sealed tubes creates a low resistance environment,

whilst a series of magnets repel the pod of the rail and propel it forward at considerable speeds. Although still in its infancy, this system holds some considerable advantages over contemporary transportation schemes. By virtue of operating in a tube, the pods are completely sheltered from the weather and can operate in most climate conditions.

Furthermore, due to the low resistance environment, very little energy is required to propel the pods along the tubes, making the system energy efficient. As a result, these systems could be powered by renewable technologies such as solar, in which panels could be attached to the outer surface of the tubes, thus offering a considerably cleaner alternative to air travel.

While the concept of hyperloop may seem improbable, several companies have made great strides in its development. Notably, Virgin Hyperloop One, who conducted their very first passenger trial (on November 9), reaching speeds of over 100mph on their 500m test track.

Whilst this may seem far from the numbers promised, with the current rate of technological development the hyperloop is set to completely radicalise the transportation industry and could very well be an integral part of our everyday lives in the near future.

Mohamed Suleiman
Student, Class 12

Sterling and Wilson commissions 25MW solar project in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sterling and Wilson Solar Limited (SWSL), one of the largest solar EPC solutions providers in the world, has successfully commissioned its second project in Oman.

The 25MW solar project in Sohar was awarded to SWSL by global energy company Shell, the Mumbai-based solar engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contractor said in a filing to the Bombay Stock Exchange.

SWSL said it commissioned this project on time with more than 300,000 safe manhours during the pandemic by following all the necessary safety protocols and measures set by the local authorities.

Bikesh Ogra, director and global chief executive of Sterling and Wilson Solar Limited, said, "It gives us immense pride to commission our second project in Oman during these difficult times. We feel honoured to have the opportunity to support Shell and contribute to Oman's journey of a clean and sustainable future."

He added, "Oman is experiencing a rapid rise in domestic energy demand as more urbanised populations are consuming greater amounts of power. The country wants to ex-



The project, located on a 50-hectare site within Sohar Freezone, will save 25,000 tonnes of carbon emissions annually, thus reducing the dependency of natural gas resources

pand its electricity generation capacities through renewable independent power projects and aims to derive 30 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2030."

The project, located on a 50-hectare site within Sohar Freezone, will save 25,000 tonnes of carbon emissions annually, thus reducing the dependency of nat-

ural gas resources and unlocking large scale solar opportunities for the sultanate.

Last year, SWSL became the first Indian company to commission a solar photovoltaic (PV) project in Oman. The Amin Solar Project, with an installed capacity of 125MWp, is Oman's first renewables-based independent power project.

Sterling and Wilson Solar Limited has been executing projects globally and has to its credit more than 10.6GWp of solar power projects (commissioned and under various stages of construction) in various geographies. This portfolio includes a 1,177MWp Solar PV plant in Abu Dhabi - the world's largest single-site solar plant.

SWSL also manages a portfolio of 8GWp of operations and maintenance projects globally. Sterling and Wilson Solar Limited, a Shapoorji Pallonji Group company, is a global pure-play, end-to-end solar EPC solutions provider.

Bank Muscat, AXA join hands to offer insurance to SMEs

Muscat - Bank Muscat has announced the availability of high-quality and class-leading bancassurance plans through its tie-up with AXA Insurance, a global leader in insurance.

The newly-launched plans will in particular benefit entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in facing unexpected risks to their business activities and projects.

In a press release, Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, DGM - institutional sales and product de-

velopment at Bank Muscat, said "Bank Muscat is very happy to continue its cooperation and strong partnership with AXA Insurance to provide a range of insurance products that meet the needs of a large segment of the bank's customers. The new products will enhance customer satisfaction and provide insurance plans and solutions to support our customers' business and projects, thereby supporting the national economy too."

Jonathan Jane, senior partner-

ships director and general manager of Oman and Bahrain at AXA Gulf, said, "We are pleased to partner with Bank Muscat to offer new and innovative insurance products for the SME sector, which is an important part of Oman's economy and has the potential for improving economic diversification and creating employment. Our customers will be able to enjoy full peace of mind knowing that they have planned ahead to ensure unforeseen risks to their business and projects."

The Chedi Muscat appoints Guss as general manager

Muscat - The Chedi Muscat recently announced the appointment of its new general manager, Thomas Guss from January 2021.

With an inspiring vision of quintessential modern hospitality, Guss comes from a family of hoteliers and brings a wealth of authentic luxury experience from his work in the industry across Europe and the Middle East, a press release said.

Guss is an accomplished hospitality professional with over 30 years' experience in the luxury hospitality industry. He completed his master's in hospitality administration and management from French Military School Baden-Baden in 1988.

Guss started his career as a chef and in 1990 he moved into a management training programme that set his first footing for managing luxury hotels



Thomas Guss

across the world. He efficiently worked his way through various roles in the industry from being the director of food and beverage to the director of sales and marketing, allowing him to gain an all-rounded hospitality experience. At the age of 32, he took his first position as general manager. Since then he has transformed numerous properties into leading luxury hotels.

Guss is a strong leader who

prides himself in growing and nurturing talent. This approach remains at the heart of the hospitality business and it is with this dedication and leadership that he will lead the team at The Chedi Muscat.

Guss' vision is to turn challenges into opportunities. His mission is to position The Chedi Muscat as a leading luxury lifestyle hotel in the GCC.

Guss said, "The Chedi Muscat is an iconic hotel in the GCC, winning a range of awards in our industry year after year. I look forward to welcoming guests to this elegant sanctuary that makes them feel at home from the moment they arrive. I am very excited to bring my experience and market knowledge on board. This, combined with the reputation of The Chedi Muscat, will bring new horizons for myself and the team to aspire for."

DARVESH GROUP CLARIFIES ITS STAND ON THE RECENT MEDIA REPORTS

We have noted the publication of a news article currently in circulation on the net. Benchmark News, triggering the MSM and the local media to report on matters concerning our Group. This article contains a number of inaccuracies and misleading statements amongst which being the amount of the Group's exposure to financial institutions and the amount stated to be due to suppliers and others, having been vastly exaggerated.

We have met with the MSM representatives and provided them with clarifications with regard to the Group's current financial exposure to Omani banks.

Details contained in the report are false, baseless and with malicious intent made by disgruntled employees whose services have been terminated by the Group for non-performance or acts against the Group while in service, against whom a prosecution has been

ongoing in the UAE. We are taking all necessary action to bring these culprits to justice with the help of the concerned authorities.

We believe that the defamatory content of the news article to be a malicious attempt by the ex-employees of the Group to discredit the Group and its owners.

We remain fully committed to the discharge of our obligations towards all our creditors. We further take this opportu-

nity to thank our partners, suppliers and well-wishers for the trust placed in our organization over the past 40 years.

Not only has our Group been adding value to the community and business in general in Oman, but we continue to highly value our social responsibility from which we will continue to remain undeterred. With the current situation in hand, our ongoing restructuring underway, and there being an expected turnaround in the

global and local market conditions in one to two years, Darvesh Group in Oman is extremely hopeful and confident that it will continue its operations as done so for the last 40 years in Oman.

The Group has been employing at its peak in excess of 800 employees of which a significant number are Omani nationals. Not only are these employees our well-wishers but also part of our family and an asset of the Group.



MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

Financial, services stocks drag MSM down

The benchmark MSM30 Index ended the week down by 2.63 per cent. The Financial index declined 3.97 per cent and the Services index declined 1.53 per cent, while the Industrial index posted a gain of 0.79 per cent on week-on-week basis. The MSM Shariah index decreased by 0.31 per cent.

Local news

►Raysut Cement announced during the week that Raysea Navigation SA, a 100 per cent owned subsidiary of Raysut Cement Company, owns a vessel named *Raysut 1*, and that the board of directors has approved the management proposal to dispose this 40 year old vessel. The management asked to proceed with the disposal process as per International Maritime practices.

►Sohar Port and Free zone signed an agreement with Eagle Ceramics FZC for the establishment of a ceramic tiles manufacturing unit at Sohar Free zone. CEO of Sohar Free zone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port signed the pact with Partner at Eagle Ceramics FZC LLC. The new facility will be established on a 20,000 sqm site within the free zone with a capital investment of US\$1.2mn. The finished products from the facility will be exported to markets in the GCC.

►Moody's Investors Service last week assigned a Ba3 rating to the proposed senior unsecured notes to be issued by

Oryx Funding Limited, a special purpose vehicle established in the Cayman Islands (Aa3 stable) by Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC, Ba3 negative). The outlook is negative. The proceeds from these notes will be used to refinance OETC's existing RO100mn shareholder loan, for capital spending and general corporate purposes. OETC's liquidity will improve as a result of the proposed issuance, to a more adequate level.

►The total number of vehicles registered in the sultanate totaled 1.557mn in 2020, representing a 0.6 per cent rise over the corresponding figure for 2019, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Private vehicles topped the list of vehicles registered at 1,221,302, followed by 239,639 commercial vehicles and 29,931 taxis. The number of vehicles with temporary registration reached 15,351, an increase of 27 per cent over 2019. Meanwhile, there was a drop in the number of rental, government (does not include military vehicles) and motorbikes registered by 5.3 per cent, 2.3 per cent and 3.1 per cent, respectively.

GCC markets

With the announcement of Kuwait's budget, now all countries in the GCC have announced their budget projections for this year. Overall, GCC have budgeted to earn revenue of US\$351bn on budgeted oil



(Muscat Daily)

price ranging between US\$40-45/bbl, which is lower than last year's budgeted revenue of US\$357bn. On the expenditure side, GCC expects to spend US\$445bn, 3 per cent lower when compared to the budgeted numbers of 2020. Overall, the deficit is projected at US\$94bn for 2021 compared to budgeted deficit of US\$103.5bn for 2020.

Kuwait announced its 2021-22 budget earlier last week. Spending in 2021/2022 is estimated at KD23bn (US\$75.9bn), 6.9 per cent higher than the current year. Revenue is seen at KD10.9bn (US\$36bn), compared with KD7.5bn (US\$ 24.8bn) in the current budget.

Oil income is expected to be KD9.13bn (US\$30bn), or 83 per cent of income. Non-oil revenue is seen at KD1.8bn (US\$5.94bn). Calculations are based on oil at US\$45 a barrel, up from the current US\$30, and a daily production rate of 2.4mn barrels per day; Kuwait would need crude to average US\$90 to balance the budget. Wages and subsidies account for 71.6 per cent of budget; capital expenditure is 15 per cent of total spending.

Saudi Arabia launched US\$5.5bn in a dual-tranche bond sale on Tuesday with tenors of 12 and 40 years, a document showed, as it seeks to plug a large fiscal deficit. The

world's top oil exporter has taken a severe blow from the pandemic, which, along with an oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia last year, sent oil prices tumbling. The kingdom sold the 12-year bonds at 130 basis points (bps) over 10-year US Treasuries and the 40-year notes at 3.45 per cent, the document from one of the banks on the deal showed. It tightened the 12-year tranche by 35 bps and the 40-year by 30 bps from initial price guidance.

Global news

US Federal Reserve officials left their benchmark interest rate unchanged near zero as they

flagged a moderating US recovery and reiterated a pledge to use all available tools to support the economy during the coronavirus pandemic. The committee unanimously voted to keep the federal funds target rate in a range of zero to 0.25 per cent, where it's been since March. The central bank's policy-making body also repeated it would maintain its bond-buying programme at the current pace of US\$120bn of purchases per month until 'substantial further progress' towards its employment and inflation goals has been made. It made no changes to the composition of purchases.

Some Fed officials have suggested in recent weeks that tapering of the bond-buying programme could begin as soon as late 2021, though Fed chair Jerome Powell said on January 14 that 'now is not the time to be talking about exit'.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has become more upbeat about the global economy, as coronavirus vaccinations are administered across the world. It is, however, worried about the risk new COVID variants pose to the post-pandemic recovery, according to its latest World Economic Outlook, published during the week.

Amid exceptional uncertainty, the global economy is projected to grow 5.5 per cent in 2021 and 4.2 per cent in 2022. The 2021 forecast is revised up 0.3 percentage point

relative to the previous forecast, reflecting expectations of a vaccine-powered strengthening of activity later in the year and additional policy support in a few large economies.

Recommendation

Global markets corrected last week after witnessing a non-stop rally from November. Short interest covers in many stocks and subsequent sell off to cover them also led to overall drop in equities.

We believe, global markets to take a breather as renewed lockdowns in some countries and vaccine roll out issues are set to create issues in the short term.

Regionally, markets continued to be led by the results season. So far we have only seen banking sector results mostly which have been under pressure. Lower results have led to lower dividend announcements as well.

Oman market also witnessed dividend announcements from mostly banking sector so far. Companies which announced lower or no dividend were under severe pressure from the investors.

We believe in next 2-3 weeks; we will see more such announcements which will lead the market.

Companies have also started publishing detailed financial statements which will also aid investors about the future plans and outlook of the companies.

By special arrangement with U Capital

US Fed's Powell warns economic outlook still 'highly uncertain'

Washington, US - The fate of the US economy depends on the course of the pandemic and the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, but the outlook is nonetheless 'highly uncertain', US Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell said.

"A resurgence in recent months of COVID-19 cases, hospitalisations and deaths is causing great hardship for millions of Americans and weighing on economic activity and job creation," the central bank chief said.

He said government spending programmes have helped support the economy, but the United States needs to recover at least nine million jobs to reach the goal of full employment.

"Overall economic activity remains below its level before the pandemic, and the path ahead remains highly uncertain," Powell told reporters.

He spoke after the central bank's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) held its first meeting of 2021 and pledged to keep borrowing rates low until employment has recovered.

It was the first meeting under the presidency of Joe Biden, who took office last week and said defeating the COVID-19 pandemic and pushing through a US\$1.9tn economic rescue plan are his top priorities.

"Support from fiscal policy will help households and businesses weather the downturn as well as limit lasting damage to the economy that could impede the recovery," the central bank chief said.



US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell (AFP)

Powell also said he was 'absolutely sure' he would be able to work well with newly-installed US Treasury secretary Janet Yellen, who was his predecessor as Fed chair and will lead the charge in pushing Biden's stimulus plan through Congress.

After the coronavirus pandemic derailed the world's largest economy, unemployment surged from a near record low of 3.4 per cent to nearly 15 per cent, before ending last year at 6.7 per cent.

However, Powell said the pandemic drove huge numbers of people out of the workforce, which means 'the real unemployment rate is close to 10 per cent'.

Vaccine hope, hiccups

As the economy grapples with the world's worst coronavirus outbreak, optimism about vaccines has raised hopes that activity can return to normal soon.

But there also have been some setbacks in vaccine distribution and supply, and the FOMC said the course of the recovery will depend 'significantly' on the virus and those treatments.

Powell, who said he has received the first of two shots for his COVID-19 vaccine, cautioned that it will be 'a struggle' to get enough people injected to achieve herd immunity.

After the United States, like other countries, saw a resurgence of infections late last year, the FOMC noted that the recovery had 'moderated in recent months, with weakness concentrated in the sectors most adversely affected by the pandemic'.

The FOMC again pledged to keep the benchmark lending rate low until the economy achieves 'full employment', in keeping with the Fed's new policy stance. AFP

Toyota becomes top-selling automaker

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's Toyota reclaimed the title of world's top-selling automaker in 2020, according to data released by the firm recently, pushing Volkswagen (VW) into second place for the first time in five years.

Toyota said it had sold 9.53mn vehicles around the world last year, overtaking the 9.3mn sales made by VW.

Toyota took the lead despite a decline in global sales of more than 10 per cent as the auto industry suffered the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

'Despite the COVID-19 pandemic... Toyota was able to continue corporate activities through



comprehensive implementation of various infection prevention measures, and by working together with partners including suppliers and dealers,' it said in a statement.

That was still better than the more than 15 per cent drop in sales VW announced earlier this



month.

Toyota said it had benefited from a jump in sales in China, which were up over 10 per cent year-on-year, and a better-than-expected performance globally in the October-December quarter.

The last time Toyota held the

top spot was in 2015, with VW edging it out in the following years.

'Toyota's recent strategy of pursuing quality over quantity has... satisfied consumers', especially in North America and China, Koichi Sugimoto, an auto analyst at Mitsubishi UFJ Morgan Stanley Securities, told AFP.

'Improved ties with the Chinese government, partly thanks to China's interest in Toyota's green tech as well as brand-building in the Chinese market by Japanese carmakers in general, also contributed' to sales growth, Sugimoto said.

AFP

Boeing reports \$11.9bn annual loss



A Boeing 777X aircraft takes off on its inaugural flight from Paine Field at Everett, Washington State, US on January 25, 2020 (AFP)

coupled with the 737 Max grounding, challenged our results."

In light of radically worsened market conditions, Boeing has taken a hacksaw to costs, announcing job cuts of some 30,000 employees over two years.

The company also completed a US\$25bn bond offering to provide liquidity to ride out the downturn.

Boeing executives empha-

sized that they expect a long-term recovery in travel demand, but reiterated that it will take about three years for activity to return to pre-pandemic levels.

They cautioned that profit margins will be under pressure until demand returns and the company is able to ramp up plane production.

"I'm quite optimistic," Calhoun said in a conference call with analysts.

"There's nothing about the market right now that has me switched off on that, but we are talking about 2023. It's going to take that long for us to sort of work our way out of the COVID world."

Beyond the challenge caused by the 777X delay, the fourth quarter included a number of other one-time hits: Payments to the US Justice Department to settle criminal charges over the 737 Max crashes; the altered production schedule for the same aircraft; production issues on the KC-46 US military tanker; and the drag from anaemic demand for Boeing's global services business.

Each of these items amounted to a hit of between US\$275mn and US\$744mn.

Revenues in the quarter fell 14.6 per cent to US\$15.3bn.

As far as the 777X, Boeing has now pushed back the timeframe at least three times.

AFP

Oman Arab Bank announces winners of December Hasaad draw



Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced the names of the 131 winners of its monthly Hasaad Savings Scheme for December 2020 on January 26, at its Elite centre.

This included 94 winners of the monthly branch draws of RO1,000 each, ten winners of

the Children's Account draw (RO100 each), twenty winners of the Youth Account draw (RO100 each), five winners of RO500 of the bank's Salary Transfer draw, one winner of RO50,000 of the Elite draw from Al Qurm branch and one winner of RO25,000 from Big Prize

draw for the last quarter from Bahla branch. 2020 has seen the highest number of winners for OAB's Hasaad Savings Scheme, totalling over 1,796 winners over the year.

Rashad al Shaikh, acting head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "As the year comes to

a close, so does our Hasaad Scheme for 2020. We are proud to note the success of this programme due to a large number of winners across the wide pool of draws. As we welcome the new year, which will bring with it the launch of the new Hasaad Scheme and even more exciting prizes, we hope that all our customers will continue to maintain their savings culture, to build a more stable financial future for themselves and their future generations."

He added, "On behalf of OAB, I extend my warmest congratulations to the winners of the final draw, as well as everyone that has won during the year. I encourage all our customers to keep on saving, even more so as we launch our Hasaad Scheme for 2021, to increase their chances of winning. We wish everyone the best of luck."

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate.

Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 54 branches and representative offices with 160 ATMs spread across Oman. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services for personal banking, corporate banking and investment clients.

Make most of long winter nights with Ooredoo data plan



Raed Dawood, director - branding

Long winter nights call for extra data, and Ooredoo's Shahry data-only plans offer just that.

For only RO12 a month, customers can get a massive 100GB of data to use between 11pm and 11am, plus 12GB to use between 11am and 11pm. Available until February 9, as a data add-on for Shahry Omanuna and Endless plans, or as a base plan for data-

only packages, it's the perfect way to chat, browse and play all night long, with plenty for the daytime too.

Ooredoo's postpaid Shahry data-only plans offer amazing value and choice to suit all kinds of budgets and needs. With a range of prices and up to unlimited data, customers can buy exactly what they need each month and all without a contract. Coupled with the Shahry Omanuna and Endless plans, which offer a range of unique benefits, there's no better time to enjoy the internet without worrying about running out of data or experiencing bill shock.

Customers can subscribe to the plan through the Ooredoo Oman App or the eShop, or for more information, visit www.ooredoo.om.



Madayn Academy holds training on polls analysis

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, represented by Madayn Industrial Academy, organised a training programme on 'Opinion Polls and Survey Analysis'.

Moderated by Yahya bin Khamis al Hussaini, the programme highlighted several topics related to design methodology of surveys and polls, samples of the study, data collection, data processing, data analysis, and writing the final report.

The programme aimed at familiarising the participants with the concepts and processes related to conducting effective survey research.

Madayn Industrial Academy was established in 2019 to offer training opportunities for the national cadres to enhance administrative, financial and technical skills, raise their productivity, provide value adding services to the investors in the industrial cities, and provide new job opportunities.



CCED paving community approach for energy sector

The sultanate's oil and gas industry has long been a cornerstone of economic progress, supporting the country's growing energy needs and facilitating the pursuit of sustainable progress in the country. The main players often take center stage but behind the scenes, quietly building a legacy of giving back, lies CC Energy Development, an independent upstream oil and gas exploration and production company operating one of the largest concession areas in Oman. After producing their 100 millionth barrel in July 2020, the value-driven company is emerging as a serious player in the industry and one with both feet in the development pool.

Thinking globally, acting locally

After beginning operations in the sultanate in 2007, CCED have spent the 13 years since making strides in both their own sustainable development and that of Oman's. Propelled by a motto to 'think global, act local,' the energy company set itself on a path of corporate responsibility to develop the communities within which they operate.

With almost two thirds of their initiatives directly benefiting their concession areas in the wilayats of Mahout and Adam, CCED have taken guidance from their local communities in building their CSR strategy. In 2019, the company financially supported the establishment of Mahout Fish Market, creating a shaded and hygienic venue for local fishermen and shoppers to conduct commerce. Similarly, CCED developed the local fruit and vegetable market in the wilayat of Adam, which is under construction and will soon be further developing the market to support livestock trade. Both initiatives stemmed from communication with local groups that determined the needs for improving local lifestyles.

The company has also previously supported the maintenance of falaj systems in Adam necessary to support farmers and families in the area.

Wellness for the future

Well aware that the health and wellbeing of people are key factors in achieving progress, CCED have taken a holistic approach to their community development and spend significant energy on supporting and facilitating local and national wellbeing projects. They have previously financed 3D printing machines and distal radius plates to aid in major trauma treatment for Khoula Hospital, and built a running track in Adam to encourage local fitness.

One of the company's most notable sponsorships to date is a long-running partnership with the Oman Cancer Association (OCA) (Dakhliyah branch). Extending financial support to the association's annual programme, the OCA sponsorship provides life-saving breast cancer awareness and prevention information to women across the sultanate and is particularly beneficial in rural areas where CCED operate and where health awareness is low. The annual OCA programme also extends training and upskilling services to volunteer nurses in Oman and provides necessary medical equipment to patients.

Throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the company has stepped-up their commitment to wellbeing, not only for their employees but also in support of the government's efforts to fight coronavirus. A generous donation to the Ministry of Health's relief fund sits alongside sponsorship of a Convalescent Plasma study at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital that aims to determine the efficacy of convalescent plasma in the treatment of high-risk COVID-19 patients.

The prioritisation of community wellbeing has served them well during the challenges of the pandemic, and CCED have reported tangible benefits from implementing flexible working conditions and thoughtful leadership in these unprecedented times. Managing director, Walter Simpson, has recently made it clear that public health learnings will be implemented in to future operational planning while working-from-home facilities will be extended to employees beyond the pandemic should it better serve their lifestyles and mental wellbeing.

At a time when economic restraints are reducing profits and testing the most robust of companies, CCED is certainly proving their character and staying true to their corporate values. In line with its long history of supporting our local communities, CCED contributed over US\$300,000 to the Job Security Fund, established by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which aims to support the local workforce.

Sustainable environments

Strong supporters of the government's In-Country Value (ICV) programme, CCED maintains a high Omanisation rating while consistently seeking to facilitate knowledge-sharing within the industry. The company also works directly with SMEs by providing guidance and assistance in bid preparation and strategic planning, helping them improve their competitive advantage.

Noting a responsibility to share the economic and social benefits of their operations, Simpson has previously reiterated the company's commitment to national development, acknowledging that community-based activities are directly or indirectly channeled back to the company, further fueling the CSR strategy to offer more to the people of Oman.

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles introduces 'Service Mobile'

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group in Oman, has introduced Service Mobile, a mobile auto repair service, which is the first in region to offer customers a complete home vehicle service and light repairs.

In a world where you can get just about anything done from the comfort of your home, AJIA is making sure car repair is not overlooked in the digital transformation.

With the launch of this unique platform, customers can now say goodbye to trips to the dealership, and hello to stress-free auto repairs and servicing.

The platform's incredible convenience is unparalleled, allowing customers to schedule servicing and repairs on a flexible schedule, either at home, work,

or on the go, as long as a flat safe area of land is available.

Amid the global pandemic, this service guarantees valued customers can stay safe whilst ensuring they can check every errand off their to-do list.

Expert technicians will utilise fully equipped mobile workshops to complete home vehicle service and light repairs, and for full technical support, they can dial in remotely to BMW.

Using this new service, AJIA will also set up remote clinics out of Muscat to fully support all BMW owners across town.

Salim Sabbagh, acting chief executive officer of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles said, "Digital innovation and convenience continues to reign king amongst our customer's ever-changing demands. With



this in mind, we could not think of a better time than now to reveal this one-of-a-kind service in Oman which ultimately aims to improve and increase the accessibility of our services and the satisfaction of our customers."

He added, "We understand time is important, therefore there's no need to drive across town, then wait for your car to be fixed. Instead, you can now stay on top of your busy schedule without any interruptions with Service Mobile.

"We hope that this system can give our customers peace of mind as they began their journey into 2021."

For more information on Service Mobile, please call 96178383, 96179393, or toll-free on 800 50008.

Known for mileage, versatility and comfort, Renault Duster on low EMI

Renault brand's celebrated model the aspirational SUV Duster, which is embodied by strength, functionality, and safety, continues to resonate completely with proud customers in Oman. Renault Duster, which boasts of brand-new exterior styling, distinctly assertive look, and fuel efficiency, is now available for a starting EMI of RO77.

Consisting of a powerful engine, an attractive modern design, a comfortable and spacious cabin, Renault Duster is available as 1.6lt 2WD and 2.0lt 4WD or the Urban and Sports variants. Reflecting Renault's inherent characteristics of strength and SUV capability the Duster's variants feature a powerful engine, an attractive modern design, a comfortable and spacious cabin, in addition to strength, functionality and safety to meet the aspirations of buyers.

Mohammed al Hashmi from Ibra who is a long time Renault Duster owner says, "With its proven strength to handle all challenges, the Renault Duster equipped with multiple outstanding features and technology enhancements, continues to set new benchmarks in Oman. Renault Duster 2WD and 4WD's impressive exteriors, elegant interiors and advanced equipment reiterate the maker's commitment for setting new standards in the SUV segment."

Dubbing it an innovative product, Faisal al Zedjali from Nizwa, owner of Renault Duster Sports variant, says, "I admire the car for



its unique exterior styling, distinctly assertive look and fuel efficiency. Renault Duster adds more splendour and elegance with its distinctive features. The sports utility vehicle offers a refreshing take on 4WD driving experience, equipped with the same off-road capability and affordability to beat the best in the market."

Abdullah Bhacker from Sohar who owns a 1.6lt 2WD Renault Duster from Muscat likes the car for its superior SUV capabilities and enhanced features. "I am a very proud of owner of this brand which offers excellent mileage."

Swapan Narayan from Salalah who owns Renault Duster's 4WD says, "The Duster is an impressive all-terrain vehicle. I have

been a long-time fan of Renault Duster and will vouch for the vehicle's performance and mileage."

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "Setting new standards in the SUV segment, the popular Renault Duster continues to be a best-seller in Oman. Featuring a host of impressive features, Renault Duster has won the admiration of customers for being a perfect package in terms of looks, performance, strength, functionality and safety. Its sleek style and innovative design, and its impressive interiors complement the striking exteriors, makes it a style statement inside out."

2WD and 4WD

The SUV is characterised by powerful engines, 1.6lt 2WD and 2.0lt 4WD for off-road enthusiasts. It also has an advanced automatic transmission with outstanding performance and significant fuel economy and carbon dioxide emissions to keep pace with the current trends and needs.

Renault Duster has an individually self-assured look and features a brand-new exterior styling with a more full-bodied look and boosted by a wide chrome-finish grill which extends to the headlights at the car's front corners. With a front skid plate and Renault's signature C-shaped lighting with LED day-

time running lights, Renault Duster further reinforces the SUV's personality as a sturdy, yet a smart city vehicle.

One of Renault's celebrated models characterised by strength, functionality and safety, the new Renault Duster adds more splendour and elegance with its distinctive features. The sports utility vehicle offers a refreshing take on 4WD driving experience.

'Urban' and 'Sports' editions

Renault Duster's 'Urban' and 'Sports' editions are loaded with superior SUV capabilities and enhanced features have been designed to make a statement.

Equipped with multiple outstanding features and technology enhancements, it is certain to set new benchmarks in Oman. The additional features of Renault Duster's 'Urban' edition, which is a 4 x 2 model include a door sill, boot sill, 16" alloy wheels and side steps. Renault Duster's 4 x 4 model 'Sports' edition boasts of wing extension, door moulding, side bar and 16" alloy wheels along with feature of three modes selection.

All-terrain

Step into the all-terrain world of Duster and discover attractive design, enhanced grille and lighting signature. The SUV's exterior has been given a more robust look thanks to the addition of a wide chrome-finish grille which extends to the head lights positioned at the car's front corners.

A front skid plate reinforces the Duster's adventurer credentials and ensures that the vehicle never loses its smart looks. Finished with Renault's signature C-shaped lighting with LED daytime running lights the Duster is a modern SUV with a rugged personality.

All-new Duster means a new front end as well as modern and powerful lines. It features robust and all-terrain styling with high ground clearance, chrome grille surround and Hill Descent Control. Every road is open to you from now on.

For more information, visit <https://www.renault.com.om/> or call Toll Free number on 80050011.

Indian School Seeb hosts ICAI Awards

Indian School Seeb hosted the third edition of ICAI Awards organised by the Muscat Chapter of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, to felicitate AISSCE 2020 Commerce Toppers from among all Indian Schools in Oman on January 20.

Dr Baby Sam Saamuel, chairman, Board of Directors, was the chief guest and CA Ramananda Prabhu, co-founder and executive director of Middle East Chartered Accountants, (Dr) CA Debashis Mitra, chairman, Board of Studies (Academic) were the guests of honour.

Dr Saamuel, in his inaugural address, stated that all are destined to grow emotionally, academically, spiritually in their dreams and ambitions and a daily growth and change will take a person to the pinnacle of success.

CA V Pattabhi Ram, author and motivational speaker presented the keynote address. CA Prabhdeep Singh Baweja, regional director (Middle East and Africa) and CA Vandana D Nagpal, director, Board of Studies, dealt on the different facets of pursuing CA as a career. CA V Pattabhi Ram spoke on 'Chartered Accountants Leading the Charge' whereas CA Prabhdeep Singh Baweja threw light on the opportunities in the Middle East for CA aspirants.

The five outstanding achievers procuring the first, second and third positions in the AISSCE 2020 Commerce Stream from among all Indian schools in Oman were felicitated by the Muscat Chapter ICAI.

How to tap 5G potential with Ericsson's 5G RAN Slicing

Why is 5G RAN slicing key to delivering on the promise of 5G? As a vital part of end-to-end network slicing technology, RAN slicing will help unlock the potential of a wide range of use cases for various industries, enterprise and enhanced mobile broadband segment. In our latest paper, we discuss what is Ericsson RAN slicing and how it can help realize the full potential of 5G.

From smartphones to smart factories, the promise of 5G is an open innovation platform that enables business and society to take the leap towards a smarter, safer and more sustainable future. 5G network slicing gives service providers the ability to serve a multitude of use cases with lightning-fast connectivity and enhanced performance.



Service providers around the world are moving towards 5G network slicing, where slices of virtual networks are allocated to the meet connectivity demands of different use cases. Network slicing facilitates service differentiation and secures the necessary capacity and performance during high load to fulfill service-level agreements (SLA).

A case in point is online gaming.

An Ericsson ConsumerLab survey of 7,000 consumers found that 90 percent of those who play video games at least weekly were negatively affected by lag when playing, with at least 1 in 3 sometimes quitting as a result.

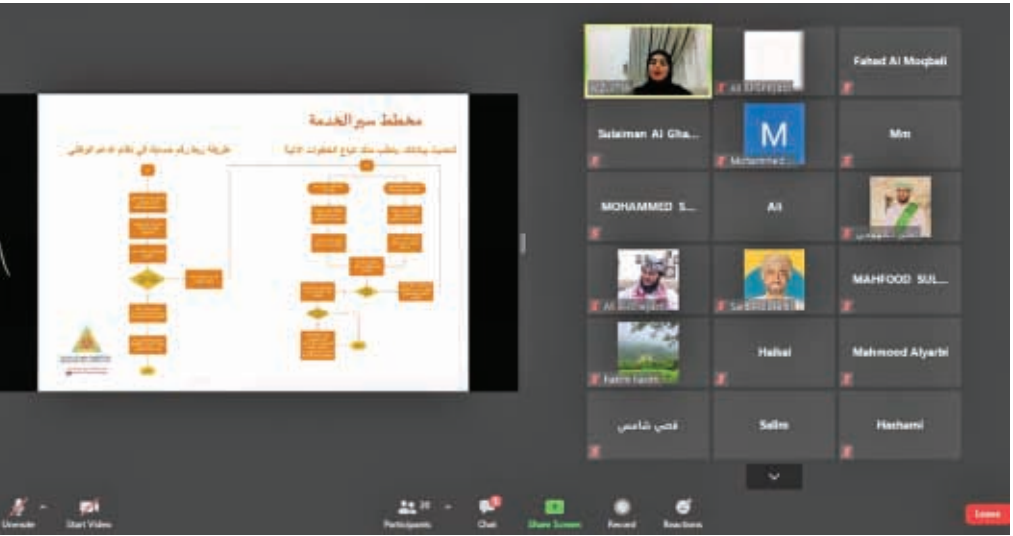
Ericsson RAN slicing solution enables service providers to offer differentiated handling of new services with respective quality of service and radio resource management for SLA fulfillment. What's more, our solution is scalable and flexible enough to support a growing number of slicing use cases with faster time to market. Take a look at our latest paper, in which we discuss the importance of RAN slicing in delivering on the promise of 5G.

Ajay Gautam, strategic product manager, 5G RAN

Mazoon Electricity organises online workshop from Nizwa on new tariff

To spread information on the newly announced electricity tariff, Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, organised an online workshop at Nizwa Sports Club in Nizwa. The objective of the workshops was to disseminate information, educate customers and provide important and accurate facts about the reformed electricity tariff.

The workshop covered the new electricity subsidy reformed policy and timeframe, types of target tariff, tariffs for residential groups, available channels for customers to update data, national support system and examples of changes in electricity bills for customers according to the new tariff.



The workshops are part of a wide awareness programme planned by Mazoon Electricity to enlighten about the new tariffs

using different channels and targeting different stakeholders. Mazoon Electricity continues to encourage customers to update

their data on Mazoon Electricity website or any of Sanad services centers, and they can also call contact centre on 80077771.

OHI Oman Amateur Open golf returns for the eleventh year

OHI Oman Amateur Opens are a premier golf championship, and now in its 11th year continues to drive tournament golf in the sultanate. With the championship attracting top amateur golfers in Oman, including many of the Oman national team, it is sure to be a well-contested event as the top gross score over 36 holes will earn an invitation to rub shoulders with the European Tour's top professionals as well as participation in the Oman Open promoted by the Oman Golf Association, which will be held in March.

OHI Group has generously renewed their title sponsorship for a fifth year which sees the OHI Oman Amateur Open, OHI Ladies Open, OHI Juniors Open, OHI Oman Under 15s Open and OHI Under 12s Open played on



February 5 and 6 at Ghala Golf Club in Muscat.

Having taken a one-year hiatus in 2020 due to the restrictions on hosting events during the pandemic, Oman Golf Association and OHI Group are confident that the 2021 edition will be well received, with every precaution being taken to ensure the safety of the competitors, and organising staff.

Speaking on this announcement, Mundhir al Barwani - chairman of Oman Golf Association, said, "After a very difficult last year of no tournaments and events due to COVID-19, we are delighted to continue with OHI as our partners and title sponsors of the Amateur Opens. We truly appreciate their continued support and belief in the future of golf even

during these challenging times."

Eihab al Saleh, CEO - OHI Group, the title sponsor of the event, said, "We are immensely proud to sponsor Oman's leading Amateur golf Tournament for the fifth year. Golf in Oman is at a very exciting stage and OHI Group is committed to help grow the game in Oman and promoting junior golf for which there are separate categories. We had no hesitation to continue being the title sponsors. Golf is such a unique and accessible sport, with golfers aged from 7 to over 70 coming together to play the game."

The OHI Oman Amateur Opens are unique as they not only offer the elite golfers an opportunity to compete but have created a platform for the juniors to excel and learn.

US first lady to help reunite migrant kids with parents

Washington, US - US first lady Jill Biden will participate in efforts by her husband's administration to reunite families split apart by former president Donald Trump's hardline immigration policies, the White House said on Friday.

In line with his campaign promises, President Joe Biden plans to announce on Tuesday 'his launch of a task force on reunifying families and children. Something that he is personally committed to, his wife Dr [Jill] Biden is personally committed to and

President Joe Biden plans to announce a task force on reunifying families and children. Something that he is personally committed to, his wife Dr [Jill] Biden is personally committed to

JEN PSAKI

invested in', said White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki.

The task force will be under the command of Alejandro Mayorkas, who is due to be confirmed by the Senate as head of the Department for Homeland Security on Monday, she added.

Jill Biden (69) has a doctorate in education and plans to keep teaching at a university close to



this file photo shows a Guatemalan migrant with his son crossing the Rio Grande natural border - between Ciudad Juarez in Mexico and El Paso in the US state of Texas, US - in search of political asylum in the US on Tuesday (AFP)

Washington while her husband serves as president.

In December, she visited a migrant camp in Mexico, close to the border with Texas.

"We are a welcoming nation, but that's not the message that we're sending at the border," she said at the time.

Her tone was in marked contrast with her predecessor Melania Trump, who in 2018 visited children who had been locked up by her husband's policy of 'zero tolerance' at the border and who wore a jacket with the logo, 'I really don't care, do u?'

Trump's government separated hundreds of migrant families, with very young children being taken away from their parents, some of whom were then

deported.

The plight of the children, taken from their parents and locked in detention centers, provoked such an outcry, even from some in the ranks of Trump's own Republican party, that he was forced to backpedal. A judge later ordered that the families be reunited.

Authorities identified more

than 2,700 children who needed to be reunited with their parents.

But the parents of 611 children have yet to be located, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The ACLU has is calling on the US government to allow them to legally return to the United States.

AFP



The UN had on Friday urged Iran to halt the execution as it rebuked the Islamic republic for a spate of recent hangings

Iran hangs ethnic Baluch, despite UN pleas

Tehran, Iran - Iran hanged a man for murder, abduction and 'terrorist' links on Saturday, the judiciary's website said, despite international calls for the execution of the ethnic Baluch to be halted.

Javid Dehghan Khald was put to death early in the morning in the restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, Mizan Online reported.

It comes a day after the United Nations had appealed to Iran not to go ahead with the execution of the 31 year old.

Mizan said Dehghan was arrested in June 2015 and later convicted of being 'one of the leaders' of a 'terrorist' group linked to the extremist Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice). Also known as Mohammad Omar, he had been found guilty of carrying out 'armed action against the state', the website said.

Dehghan was found to have been involved in the killing of two Revolutionary Guards' members in 2015, as well as leading a raid

aiming to abduct five border guards, one of whom was killed, it added.

The UN had on Friday urged Iran to halt the execution as it rebuked the Islamic republic for a spate of recent hangings, including of members of minority groups.

'We urge the authorities to halt the imminent execution of Javid Dehghan, to review his and other death penalty cases in line with human rights law,' the Geneva-based Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights wrote on Twitter. 'We strongly condemn the series of executions - at least 28 - since mid-December, including of people from minority groups,' it added.

London-based rights group Amnesty International has alleged Dehghan's trial was 'grossly unfair' with the court relying on 'torture-tainted confessions' and ignoring abuses during the investigation.

AFP

UAE opens citizenship for experts, talented

Dubai, UAE - The UAE announced on Saturday it is opening a path to citizenship for select foreigners, in a rare move for the Gulf where the status and its welfare benefits are jealously guarded.

Dubai ruler and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum said 'investors, specialised talents and professionals including scientists, doctors, engineers, artists, authors and their families' would be eligible for naturalisation under the new amendment.

"The UAE Cabinet, local emiri courts and executive councils will nominate those eligible for the citizenship under clear criteria set for each category," Sheikh Mohammed said.

"The law allows receivers of the UAE passport to keep their existing citizenship."

The UAE government said the amendment to the citizenship law 'aims at appreciating the talents and competencies present in the UAE and attracting more bright minds to the Emirati community'.

Citizens make up a small minority of the population of the UAE, which has a huge migrant labour force, largely from south Asia, some of whom are second or third generation residents.

AFP

UAE says will cooperate with UN, US on Libya conflict

United Nations - The United Arab Emirates, accused this week by the United States of military intervention in Libya's protracted civil war, issued a statement on Friday stating its readiness to work 'closely' with the new US administration for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

'There is an urgent need for renewed diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict in Libya,' Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE Ambassador to the UN, said in a letter.

'The UAE stands ready to work closely with all Security Council members, including the new US administration, to achieve a peaceful settlement for the Libyan people,' she said.

The country welcomed the Security Council's 'call for all foreign forces to withdraw from Libya. Foreign intervention in the conflict must end now', Nusseibeh added.

The day before, during a virtual meeting of the Security Council on Libya, the United States called on 'all external parties, to include Russia, Turkey and



This file photo shows mourners moving ahead carrying placards with photos of the victims who were found in mass graves, during a prayer ceremony in the Martyrs' Square of Libya's capital Tripoli on January 22 (AFP)

the UAE, to respect Libyan sovereignty and immediately cease all military intervention in Libya'.

Together with Egypt and Russia, the UAE is one of the main backers of Khalifa Haftar, the

strongman in the east of Libya who is fighting the UN-supported Government of National

Accord (GNA) in Tripoli.

'The UAE firmly believes that diplomatic and political solutions

The UAE stands ready to work closely with all Security Council members, including the new US administration, to achieve a peaceful settlement for the Libyan people

LANA NUSSEIBEH

are the sole path to end the Libyan conflict', Nusseibeh said.

'The first priority is to preserve and reinforce the ceasefire agreement' agreed to in October, she said.

'This will enable and encourage a political process and a Libyan-led transition that fulfills the aspirations of the Libyan people for stability, peace, and prosperity,' she added.

AFP

US Capitol police officer who died after riot to lie in honour

Washington, US - The US Capitol police officer who died after being injured in the January 6 attack by pro-Trump rioters will lie in honor at the building's Rotunda, lawmakers said Friday, a mark of respect rarely bestowed.

Brian Sicknick was reportedly struck in the head with a fire extinguisher while struggling with the rioters who swarmed through the halls of Congress.

The 42 year old member of the force that protects the ground of the Congress returned to his division office where he collapsed and was taken to the hospital, according



This file photo shows flowers and a US flag placed on a fence in memory of slain Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick, a week after a pro-Donald Trump mob broke into the Capitol, in Washington, DC on January 14 (AFP)

to the Capitol Police.

He died the next day, they said, bringing the death toll from the violent attack to five.

'The US Congress is united in grief, gratitude and solemn appreciation for the service and sacrifice of Officer Brian Sicknick,' said Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in a statement Friday.

Sicknick's actions 'during the violent insurrection against our Capitol helped save lives, defend the temple of our democracy and ensure that the Congress was not diverted from our duty to the

Constitution'.

'On behalf of the House of Representatives and the Senate, it is our great privilege to pay tribute to Officer Sicknick with this lying-in-honour ceremony,' the statement continued.

Only four other people have laid in honour in the Rotunda previously, according to the House archives website: The Reverend Billy Graham, civil rights icon Rosa Parks, and two other Capitol police officers, Jacob Chestnut and John Gibson, killed during a shooting rampage at the building in 1998.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

EU backs off jab threat to UK; WHO warns against inequality



A freight lorry driver from Dungannon in Northern Ireland, is being examined at a COVID-19 testing centre for hauliers bound for France via Dublin Port, at the Dublin Airport in the capital city of Ireland on Friday (AFP)

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union on Friday backtracked on a threat to restrict exports of coronavirus shots to Northern Ireland in its growing row with Britain, as the WHO warned against 'vaccine nationalism'.

Outbreaks are raging around the globe with COVID-19 deaths nearing 2.2mn, and while wealthy countries fight over limited vaccine supplies, there are fears the less privileged will not get access for a long time.

British-Swedish firm AstraZeneca has said it can only deliver a fraction of its vaccine doses promised to the EU and

The EU threatened to restrict vaccine exports to Northern Ireland by overriding part of the Brexit deal with Britain but backed down after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson voiced 'grave concerns'

Britain because of production problems, but both sides are demanding their pledges are met.

The EU threatened to restrict vaccine exports to Northern Ireland by overriding part of the Brexit deal with Britain that allowed the free flow of goods over the Irish border, but backed down after British Prime Minister

Boris Johnson voiced 'grave concerns'.

The European Commission will 'ensure that the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol is unaffected', the EU commissioner said in a statement late on Friday.

That came after the EU released a redacted version of its contract with AstraZeneca,

while announcing a mechanism that could allow it to deny the export of vaccines made on European soil.

The AstraZeneca vaccine on Friday became the third to get EU approval after Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, but it came under the shadow of the bitter diplomatic row.

'I expect the company (AstraZeneca) to deliver the 400 million doses as agreed,' tweeted European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, as she announced the authorisation.

The supply issue is a huge blow to Europe's already stumbling vaccine rollout.

'Vaccine nationalism'

The EU-Britain tussle has highlighted the impact of shortages on ambitious mass vaccination programmes, even on wealthy nations, and fears are growing that the developed world is hogging doses, leaving poorer nations behind.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned on Friday against 'vaccine nationalism', saying there was a 'real danger that the very tools that could help to end the pandemic - vaccines - may exacerbate' global inequality.

Parts of Africa and Asia have only just started securing and rolling out vaccinations.

The global scramble for shots comes as more troubling data emerges on new variants of the coronavirus, which is known to have infected more than 101mn people worldwide.

Variants first detected in Britain, Brazil and South Africa are believed to be more contagious.

Scientists are concerned that the South African variant may elude some vaccines, a potential stumbling block in the global effort to defeat COVID-19 through mass inoculation.

New data on Thursday and Friday showed average effectiveness of 89 and 66 per cent for shots from Novavax and Johnson & Johnson.

But while Novavax's jab was highly effective against the British variant, both were less effective against the South African strain.

Pfizer and Moderna have said their vaccines are effective against the variants.

WHO experts continued their closely watched scientific mission on Saturday in Wuhan, China, where the coronavirus first emerged in late 2019, hoping to uncover more clues about the origins of the pandemic.

They visited Jinyintan hospital, which received the first patients officially diagnosed with COVID-19.

AFP



People wait in line in front of the Beaugrenelle shopping mall, a day before the closing of large shopping centres, in Paris on Saturday (AFP)

France to close borders to non-EU countries

Paris, France - French Prime Minister Jean Castex on Friday said the country would close its borders to non-European Union countries for all except essential travel, while stepping back from an anticipated third lockdown.

The travel ban will come into force from Sunday to try to limit the spread of new variant cases of coronavirus from abroad.

Castex, speaking after a meeting of the country's defence council, said he was not announcing a fresh national lockdown for now, adding that 'the next few days will be decisive' in terms of any possible new restrictions.

President Emmanuel Macron added, "Lockdown is a legitimate question... (but) we all know the heavy impact that has on all fronts."

In an attempt to stem the number of new infections, Castex said big shopping centres -

excluding those selling food - would be closed from Sunday and enforcement of the current 6.00pm curfew would be stepped up.

"More police and gendarmes will be mobilised to check non-compliance with the curfew, the organisation of clandestine parties and the illegal opening of restaurants." He said only essential travel would be allowed to and from non-EU countries and all arrivals in France from inside the bloc except cross-border workers would be required to show a negative PCR test.

The requirement was previously imposed for air and sea travellers but would now also apply to those travelling by land too. With schools and shops still open but restaurants and bars closed, France has fewer restrictions than some European neighbours.

AFP

Canada to impose hotel quarantine on travellers

Ottawa, Canada - Travellers to Canada will have to quarantine in hotels at their own expense and airlines are suspending flights to southern destinations, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Friday, further tightening virus restrictions.

New arrivals will have to pay to quarantine in hotels for up to three days under strict supervision, he told a news conference.

Ottawa is also stepping up COVID-19 testing while Canadian airlines have agreed to cancel flights to destinations such as Mexico and the Caribbean until the end of April.

"Now is just not the time to be flying," Trudeau said.

The extra measures come as

public health officials are increasingly concerned about the spread of more transmissible COVID-19 variants, as well as an uptick in Canadians taking foreign vacations this winter.

For weeks, Trudeau has been urging Canadians to cancel any upcoming travel plans, warning that a crackdown was coming.

"By putting in place these tough measures now, we can look forward to a better time when we can all plan those vacations," he said on Friday.

Starting next week, all incoming flights to Canada will be directed to land at one of only four airports - in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

AFP

Eight Afghan security personnel killed in Taliban attack on base

Jalalabad, Afghanistan - A suicide bomber drove a vehicle loaded with explosives into a base for Afghan defence forces in the country's east on Saturday, killing at least eight security personnel in an attack claimed by the Taliban.

The pre-dawn assault took place in the restive province of Nangarhar where the Taliban have claimed several deadly assaults targeting government forces.

It came two days after the Pentagon said the Taliban were not living up to promises made in a deal signed with Washington last year, including reducing violence and cutting ties with Al Qaeda.

The eight were killed when the bomber hit the base with a Humvee, the office of Nangarhar's governor said in a statement.

The deputy head of Nangarhar provincial council, Ajmal Omar, confirmed the attack but put the number of dead soldiers at 15 with five wounded.



This file photo shows Hazara armed militia for the Resistance for Justice Movement, in their base before going out to patrol against Taliban insurgents at Hisa-e-Awali Behsud district of Maidan Wardak Province (AFP)

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said his group had carried out the attack.

The governor's office said security forces had seized another vehicle loaded with explosives near the city of Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar.

Nangarhar province has seen several recent deadly attacks carried out by the Islamic State.

Separately, two roadside

bombs exploded in Kabul on Saturday but there were no casualties, police said.

Violence has surged across Afghanistan even as the Taliban and government engage in peace talks that began in September. The discussions have so far failed to make any major breakthrough.

The new Biden administration in the United States has accused the Taliban of not reducing vio-

lence despite signing a deal with Washington last year that stipulated the group do so.

That agreement required the Taliban halt attacks on US forces, sharply decrease violence and advance peace talks with the government in Kabul. In return, the US would steadily reduce its troop levels in the country, and remove all forces by May 2021.

AFP

Myanmar army plays down coup rhetoric as fears swirl

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar's military on Saturday vowed to abide by the country's constitution, in an apparent backtracking after its commander-in-chief spurred fears of a coup when he suggested the charter could be repealed.

The army has for weeks alleged widespread irregularities in November's election, won in a landslide by Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD).

Tensions were ramped up Tuesday when a military spokesman refused to rule out the possibility of a coup.

A day later, army chief Gen Min Aung Hlaing - arguably the most powerful person in Myanmar - said revoking the 2008 junta-scripted constitution could be 'necessary' under certain circumstances.

His comments - translated into English and published in the army-run Myawaddy newspaper - sent shockwaves through the nascent democracy, which is only a decade out of the grips of



Military supporters wave national flags during a rally to demand an inquiry into the Union Election Commission, in Yangon on Friday (AFP)

a 49 year military junta.

On Saturday the army released a statement claiming its commander-in-chief had been misunderstood, though the statement did not directly address fears of an imminent coup.

"Some organisations and media defined the speech of the Commander-in-Chief as they liked... without respecting the full text of the speech," said an English translation of the statement.

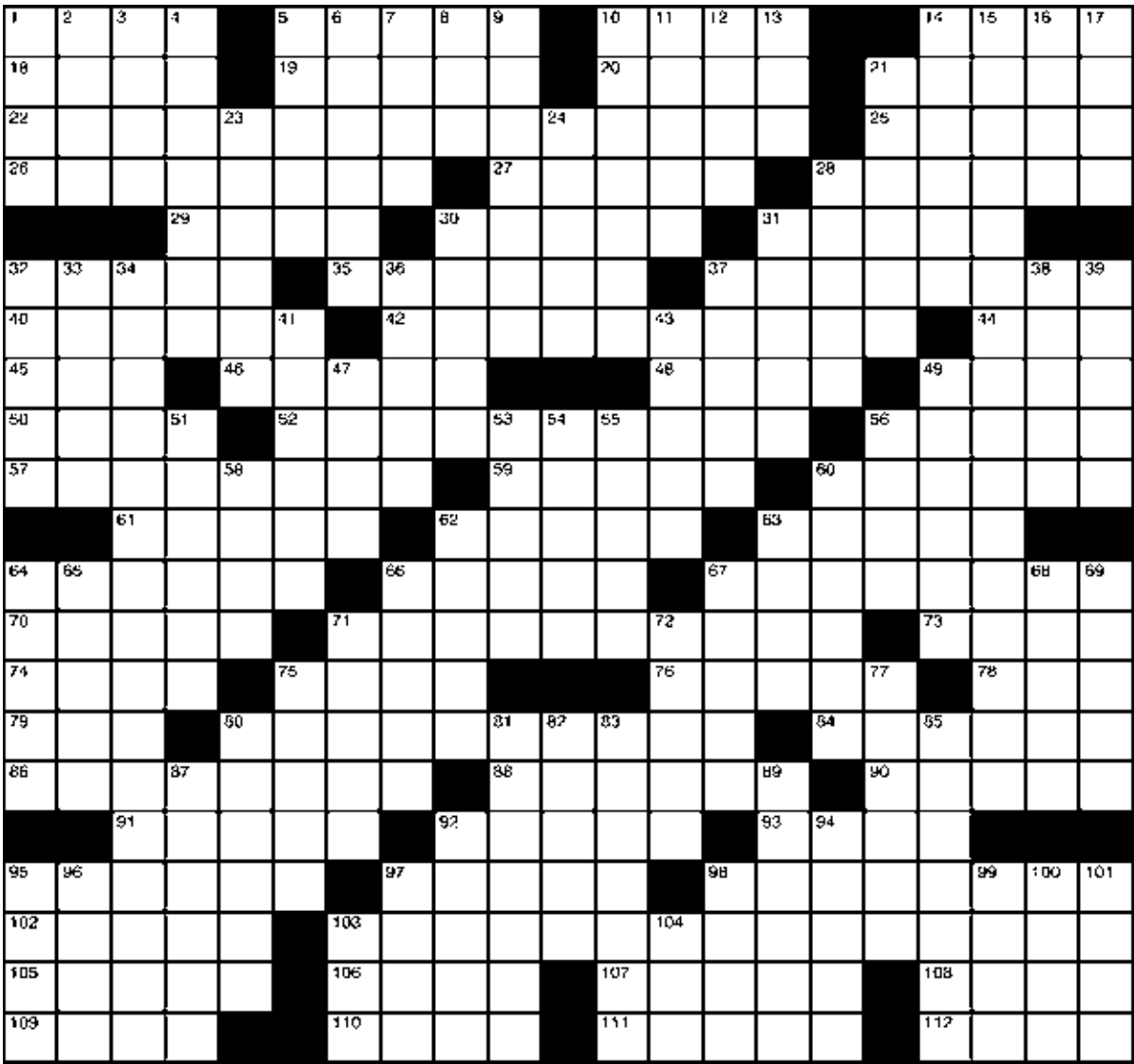
"The Tatmadaw is abiding by

the constitution... (and) will perform its tasks within the frame of enacted law while safeguarding it," it added, referring to the army by its official Burmese name.

The last time the country saw its constitution revoked was in 1988, when the military reinstated a junta after a popular uprising. The general's comments on the constitution drew alarm from more than a dozen foreign missions and the United Nations.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

The final day of January presents a strange mix of sleepy and stimulated. The moon glides through Virgo, but her rendezvous with Neptune can leave you feeling less than inspired to tackle everything on your to-do-list. Elsewhere, the self-concerned sun locks into a heated square with your ruling planet, go-getter Mars. This aspect can create momentary stress over finances.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Sunday's skies offer up a peculiar set of energies to explore. Your ruling planet, the sun, spends the day in an uncomfortable connection with Mars, provoking tensions in your career path and relationships. Elsewhere, the productive Virgo moon seeks to push your talents into action, but is met with a sleepy visit from non-reality Neptune, suggesting its best to lay low instead.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

The last day of the month goes out with a bang. The sun forms a tense square with Mars, giving your communication added sharpness and letting tempers run high. Be mindful of how you express yourself! Stresses are also likely to crop up around work or health problems too. The Virgo moon calls your attention to the divide between your personal and public life.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

January was undoubtedly one of the hardest months of the year. Naturally, it goes out with one final irritation to tend to. The sun spends the afternoon in a sharp connection with Mars, starting little fires around concerns of your individuality and profession. Elsewhere, the docile Virgo moon's opposition to Neptune suggests a loose grip on reality; creative release can offer relief.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

This past month has been quite the intro to the new year! January has one more day of tensions to navigate. The moon glides through your sign, reminding you stay present with your body and needs, but her link to Neptune can blur the lines between you and others. Meanwhile, the sun locks eyes with aggressive Mars, creating stresses to handle on the job front.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

January is wrapping up with one final day of tensions to tackle. The sun locks into a fiery square with irritable Mars. This pairing creates heightened frustrations and tensions, especially around matters of the heart and financial concerns. Fortunately, the gentle Virgo moon's opposition with dreamy Neptune helps to briefly anesthetise things on a mental level.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

"Out of sight, out of mind" is the way to be under Sunday's skies. The moon roams through Virgo all afternoon, summoning your attention towards your roots and familial network. Luna's afternoon opposition with Neptune can draw hallucinations around your current career path. Elsewhere, mental tensions are likely to be on the rise, as the egoic sun and forceful Mars duke it out.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

January can't leave quietly. The last day of the month is fraught with frustrations to handle, as the sun squares off to Mars. This pairing can light up sparks (and not in a good way) around your creative process and romantic relationships. Tempers run high. The reflective Virgo moon's dance with dreamy Neptune helps to soften the atmosphere, so long as you keep a low profile.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Sunday's skies are turning up the heat. The final day of the month goes out with a bang, as the identity-focused sun creates an irritable aspect to cantankerous Mars. This uncomfortable pairing is likely to stress any of the ongoing stories that have been occurring between home, family, and your need for individuality. Closeness with a trusted confidant can help you get through.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's been a hard enough month as it is. January offers one final day of tension to navigate, while also offering a dose of softness to mitigate too. The moon drifts through Virgo and spends the morning in a disorienting opposition with Neptune, creating blurred lines and a desire for escape. Elsewhere, the sun and feisty Mars duke it out. This fans social flames.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Things are heating up under Sunday's skies. Your ruling planet, Mars, receives an uncomfortable visit from the dominating sun - creating a friction-sparking aspect that stresses your family and partnerships. Seek out ways to expand your extra energy, lest you respond like a volcano. The Virgo moon suggests that friends and community offer much in the way of relief today.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Mental stresses permeate the day ahead. The sun and Mars duke it out, creating tensions to be navigated around your communication style. Truths about your identity and untapped elements of your self-expression may be making their way into the light, however uncomfortable. The Virgo moon's soothing link with Neptune can help you bliss out with a close friend.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The range of missile Agni is approximately
a. 150 km
b. 1200-2000 km
c. 500 m to 9 km
d. 4 km
2. The process of revival of learning that swept across Europe in 15th and 16th centuries is called
a. feudalism
b. crusade
c. renaissance
d. communism
3. The red blood cells are in the
a. heart
b. liver
c. lymph nodes
d. bone marrow

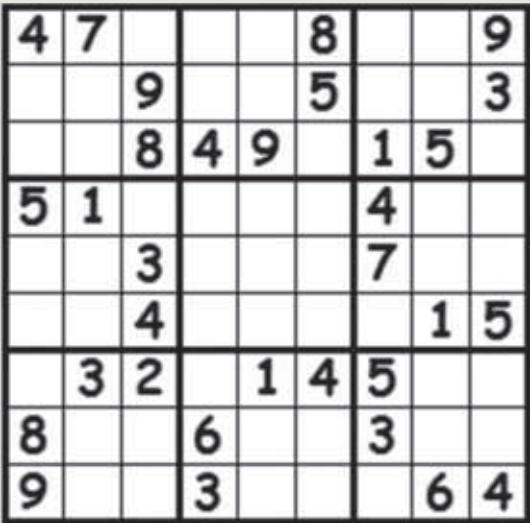
Answers: 1: b 2: c 3: d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JANUARY 28)



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



Hidden jewel

An Art Nouveau gem unmasked in COVID-19 hit Brussels

An emblematic Art Nouveau mansion designed by Belgian architect Victor Horta has opened its doors to the public in Brussels (Belgium), revealing a long hidden jewel of the city's Belle Epoque glory. (Art Nouveau is an ornamental style of art that flourished in the late 19th and early 20th century throughout Europe and the United States, mostly for architecture, interior design as well as for jewellery and glass design.)

"It is perhaps even more important in the time of COVID-19 to be able to spend a relaxing moment in the midst of this complete beauty," said Pascal Smet, heritage minister for the Brussels Region. Smet acted as a guide for a handful of journalists around the Hotel Solvay, a three-storey mansion with a majestic staircase where natural light shines through a multi-coloured stained glass window.

The mansion was built between 1895 and 1903 on the once glitzy Avenue Louise for the son of Belgian industrialist Ernest Solvay, and its architecture is impressively preserved. Horta paid attention in his work to the whole interior, from the design of the building's exposed structure, to the living room furniture, right down to the door handles.

"It gives the feeling of the perfect building, everything has been thought out, down to the



Art Nouveau along the stairway

smallest detail," said Smet, gazing at a decor of yellow, orange and beige, where the armchairs match the woodwork.

UNESCO included the Hotel Solvay on its World Heritage List in the early 2000s. According to the UN agency, it is "the most ambitious and spectacular work by Horta to have come down from the Art Nouveau period."

At the end of the 19th century, Art Nouveau had revolutionised architecture with its aesthetic of curves applied to glass and steel, materials that were new at the time.

The private mansion went on to have an eventful history after the death of its first owner in 1930. Damaged by a German bomb during World War II -- the main stained glass window had to be rebuilt -- it was saved from a wrecking ball at the end of the 1950s, when

a couple, running a fashion house, decided to make it their workshop.

Saved from demolition

At the time, real-estate developers had free rein in Brussels and the Avenue Louise was engulfed by large office buildings. Even the most awe-inspiring Art Nouveau edifices were threatened by developers, according to the current owner, Alexandre Wittamer, grandson of the fashion house couple.

"It's hard to imagine, but in the 1950s and 1960s in Brussels, everything was allowed, and it happened that Art Nouveau buildings were demolished, whether they were by Horta or other architects," said the 43-year-old finance executive, who now organises visits with the help of his wife.

For the time being, the architectural gem will only be accessible on Thursdays and Saturdays, provided that a time slot has been reserved in advance online. That rule applies to all Belgian museums, which have remained open despite the pandemic unlike in Paris or London.

Since the 1980s, after the end of the fashion business, the mansion had been used for private events and was only visited on rare occasions and city heritage days. (AFP)



The mansion was built between 1895 and 1903 for the son of Belgian industrialist Ernest Solvay



The Hotel Solvay, an Art Nouveau gem in Brussels, is now open for public visits

Gold mine for art lovers

From internationally renowned fairs, such as BRAFA and Art Brussels, to alternative fairs such as the Accessible Art Fair, Brussels is the place to be to keep your finger on the pulse of current trends and creations.

Throughout the year there are countless exhibitions and other events organised that offer shots of creativity. Not to mention the countless museums, art galleries and contemporary art hotspots that make Brussels a gold mine for art lovers. Current art events in Brussels include:

BRAFA Art Fair (Jan 27 -31)
The BRAFA Art Fair in Brussels has been

one of the world's most prestigious art and antiques fairs since 1956.

PhotoBrussels Festival (Jan 21- Mar 27)
PhotoBrussels Festival is an annual event dedicated to art photography around a meaningful theme. This 5th edition is dedicated to 2020 and its peculiarities.

BILY (Brussels I Love You) Contemporary Art Walk (Feb 6 -13)
BILY is a contemporary art walk that takes you to discover the trendy neighbourhoods of Ixelles and Saint-Gilles from an

artistic viewpoint.

Brussels Design Market (Mar 6-7)
The Brussels Design Market is one of Europe's most coveted vintage markets wherein visitors from Europe arrive to unearth furniture, ceramics, etc.

Affordable Art fair (Mar 18-21)
The Affordable Art Fair is an opportunity to browse for hundreds of inspired and original works to suit all budgets. It is frequented by curious visitors and aficionados.

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



GAUTAM KRISHNA
January 30
Dear Gautam, wishing you a day filled with happiness and year filled with Joy. Happy Birthday. God bless you! With love: Rajesh, Bindu & Vaisnav

BIRTHDAY WISHES



GAURI K JAYAN
January 31
Happy Birthday to our little girl! I wish you to love life and never stop dreaming! May beauty and happiness surround you today and always! From Parents & other Family Members

Send your request for Birthday/Anniversary wishes to wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)



Living with Art

ART ALL AROUND

‘Vibrancy’ unlocks Rebeca Nigrinis’ art during the lockdown in 2020

Hubert Vaz

Rebeca Nigrinis, a Colombian artist in Oman, who is wellknown for her vibrant representation of things all around her that catch her fancy, is currently showcasing her solo exhibition, titled *Vibrancy*, at the Art & Soul Gallery at Water Front mall in Shatti al Qurm.

Inaugurated under the auspices of Hon. Lujaina M Darwish, member of the State Council, on January 25, the exhibition will be on till February 8. Rebeca brings magic to life with every brushstroke while all the beauty around her has served to inspire her creativity. Her paintings are a perfect mixture of latino vibrancy from her background and the delicate beauty of the Middle East where she has spent a major part of her life

Rebeca’s work has been exhibited across the Middle East - in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman in several group shows and art events as well as in solo exhibitions. *Vibrancy* is Rebeca’s third solo art show and most of the pieces were created during the 2020 lockdown, a time where art became a sort of daily therapy for her, she says.

Asked what *Vibrancy* sought to convey, Rebeca told Muscat Daily, “I wanted to name this exhibition with a word that

describes the emotions that people feel when they see my work. I realised that, very often, people tell me that my art is extremely colourful and vibrant. So ‘*Vibrancy*’ is about what my art transmits to the world - it is about happiness and good energy.”

The new collection is very colourful like all her previous work, but in this, she has introduced shades of gold to most of the pieces. Many pieces were brightened up with gold leaves and varnished to perfection. “*Vibrancy*’s main inspiration was Oman and women from the world, influenced by my Latin American roots,” she asserts.

The collection includes artwork on canvas and on wooden panels, and also hand painted original Omani clay pots which have been a great hit. A majority of the pieces where created during last year’s lockdown and only a couple of them were done prior to that. Also, some pieces were finalised this month and have a signature of 2021.

“The message is basically happiness, hope and good energy. I like to create pieces that bring good vibes to spaces and to whoever sees them.

I think we all went through a very difficult year and a good and happy piece of art, sometimes is exactly what we need to brighten up our lives,” Rebeca says, adding,

“I think, artists are very lucky people because our work is actually our daily therapy. I can’t imagine how that time would’ve been for me without art!”

About the compulsion to stay indoors during the lockdown, Rebeca said, “As an artist I’ve been practising quarantine for a long time already because I actually enjoy staying inside my studio painting for long periods. So, for me, it was actually a normal thing to do. From the pandemic, I learnt that even if we have plans, the future is not in our own hands, and we need to be able to adapt to all changes in life.”

She also pointed out that having her family around, her faith, trying to stay positive, and the time inside her studio helped her relax during the tough months which the entire world was going through.

Asked how art has affected her lifestyle over the years, Rebeca admits, “I think, I was born as an artist, so I always have lived as one. Over the years, I learnt to be more relaxed and enjoy small things in life, and art has helped me with that.

“As artists, we are very sensible people, and through art we are able to express our emotions and opinions without words. In that way, art has helped me to communicate better with the world.”



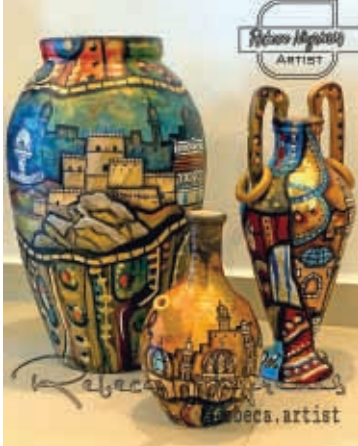
Muscat Golden Sky

This was inspired by the beautiful Muscat sunsets. I included some of the most iconic Muscat landmarks, like the palace, Muttrah Souq, the iconic incense burner at Riyam, forts and mosques. I worked with acrylic and gold leaves for the sky to represent the shiny Muscat sky in a very elegant and unique artwork.



Friendship

Medium: acrylic on wooden board. This piece was created during the times when the pandemic hit relationships hard and I wasn’t able to socialise with friends anymore. I believe, women need each other and this painting represents the friendship between women in the Middle East.



Clay Pots

I believe art is not only for walls. I like the concept of functional and decorative art. I believe, Omani clay pots are a beautiful part of Omani heritage and traditions. So, for this exhibition, I decided to decorate them in a very vibrant and colourful way.

Magical Village

Medium: Acrylic on canvas. Sometimes, I like to imagine I’m a miniature figure and I’m able to walk inside my paintings. This art was inspired by beautiful Arabian villages, full of details and beautiful doors.



Sun City

Medium: acrylics on canvas. Inspired by Oman’s warm summers. I used a sepia palette and local architecture in a semi abstract composition.



Newcastle United's striker Callum Wilson celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during the English Premier League match against Everton at Goodison Park in Liverpool, UK, on Saturday. Newcastle United won 2-0 (AFP)

Wilson strikes twice in Newcastle victory

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool, UK - Callum Wilson eased the pressure on Newcastle manager Steve Bruce as his late double sealed a vital 2-0 win against Everton on Saturday.

Bruce has been under fire from Newcastle fans after a wretched run plunged his team into the English Premier League relegation battle.

But Wilson netted twice in the last 17 minutes at Goodison Park to give Newcastle their first victory in 12 matches in all competitions.

Having ended a dismal streak of five successive defeats, New-

castle are now nine points above the bottom three.

Their first win in ten league matches gives Bruce some breathing space, but he still has only minimal margin for error given the ever-present gloomy mood on Tyneside.

Everton remain seventh after a first defeat in three league games.

Carlo Ancelotti kept faith with Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford despite the England international's latest costly mistake in the midweek draw against Leicester.

Pickford produced the best

save of the game to divert Wilson's flicked header onto the crossbar as the visitors began to generate some momentum before half-time.

Everton's Yerry Mina twice headed over as James Rodriguez's delivery caused problems.

Wilson should have done better when he swept Ryan Fraser's pass just past the far post from a counter-attack not long after the restart.

The substitution which Newcastle hoped would change things up came in the 66th minute when Allan Saint-Max-

imin replaced Fraser.

And they made the breakthrough in the 73rd minute when Wilson lost his marker at a Jonjo Shelvey corner and looped a header across Pickford and inside the far upright.

Wilson was then denied by the post after rounding Pickford, but the former Bournemouth striker made no mistake when Newcastle countered quickly in stoppage-time.

Firing a low shot past Pickford, Wilson turned away in celebration as Bruce punched the air on the touchline.

AFP

Marin sets up summit clash with Pornpawee

BADMINTON

WORLD TOUR FINALS

Bangkok, Thailand - Reigning Olympic champion Carolina Marin was unstoppable on Saturday, clinching a spot in badminton's World Tour Finals after quickly dispatching Thai player Pornpawee Chochuwong in a 21-13, 21-13 game.

The delayed 2020 season finale, which began on Wednesday, is the third tournament behind closed doors in three weeks in Bangkok, as badminton resumes after months of coronavirus cancellations.

The Spaniard - winner of back-to-back titles for the past fortnight - is gunning for a hat-trick of victories in tomorrow's finals.

Her opponent, 13th-ranked Pornpawee, has performed better than expected in the World Tour.

She beat her personal idol, Thai star Ratchanok Intanon, and top-ranked Tai Tzu-ying during the round-robin stage earlier this week.

But the 23 year old was no

match against the more experienced Marin, who praised Pornpawee's play but admitted that three straight weeks of badminton was wearing on her.

"Three tournaments in a row is tough," said the fifth-seeded player.

"But I am looking forward to tomorrow... I'm really happy to play and give my best tomorrow

during the 37-minute game.

"I think my physical condition has dropped - I feel heavy and made mistakes, so I couldn't match Tai Tzu-ying's speed," said An of the 21-18, 21-12 game.

As for Tai's final meeting with Marin, she said she wanted to just 'focus now and be patient' for Sunday's finals.

Missing from the tournament

Three tournaments in a row is tough. I am looking forward to tomorrow... I'm really happy to play and give my best tomorrow and enjoy one more game

CAROLINA MARIN

and enjoy one more game."

Marin will once again be facing off against top-ranked Tai Tzu-ying, who she had beaten two weeks in a row during the previous tournaments' finals.

The Taiwanese player earlier in the day trounced South Korean teen prodigy An Se-young, who admitted to feeling lethargic

are players from China and Japan - 2019's World Tour Finals champs - because of coronavirus problems. Despite the strict biosecurity arrangements in Bangkok, four people inside the tournament 'bubble' have tested positive, including two players who were forced to withdraw. AFP



Spain's Carolina Marin in action against Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong on Saturday

England's Casey leads MacIntyre in Dubai

DUBAI DESERT CLASSIC

Dubai, UAE - England's Paul Casey conjured up a birdie-eagle finish to seize control of the Dubai Desert Classic after Saturday's third round.

His bogey free 64 put him top of the leaderboard going into the final day, one shot clear of Scotland's Robert MacIntyre.

South African Brandon Stone was one shot further back at 13 under in third, three shots clear of Sergio Garcia, who won in Dubai in 2017, and Casey's fellow Englishman Laurie Canter.

Casey, who had begun the day three shy of the lead, is targeting a 15th European Tour win on Sunday at an event he described as 'iconic'.



Paul Casey

"I can see the very impressive list of winners, those photos of them behind the 18th green," he said after matching the lowest round of the week.

"It's cool - iconic trophy, iconic event. Dubai has given so much

to golf, especially the European Tour, so (to win) would be very, very cool but there's a long way to go yet."

At 43 years of age, Casey is only too aware he is by no means among the youngest on the

golf course these days.

"We always say, if you stay the same level you're going to go backwards in this game and every year it gets better and better and better, every year the young guys come up longer and stronger and they put it better.

"There's no question that I'm lucky that my physical attributes have allowed me to maybe give me another five years."

Casey made five birdies in his first ten holes before his sizzling finish to sit ahead of MacIntyre.

Halfway leader Thomas Detry slipped down to a three-way tie for seventh with Justin Rose and Justin Harding after adding a 74 to his pair of 67s.

AFP

Up to 30,000 a day allowed into Australian Open

Melbourne, Australia - Daily crowds of between 25,000 and 30,000 will be allowed to watch the Australian Open, organisers said Saturday in a big boost to the season's opening Grand Slam. Aggressive restrictions on incoming travel have helped keep the coronavirus largely at bay in Australia, making it one of the few places in the world where fans can still attend sports events in significant numbers.

Victoria state's Sports Minister Martin Pakula said it equated to some 390,000

spectators across the two-week spectacle - around half the attendance of last year.

The event's Covid-safe plan allows a daily crowd of 30,000 for the first eight days of the Slam, then 25,000 from the start of the quarterfinals.

"That means on Rod Laver Arena, as we get to the end of the tournament, we'll have an incredible atmosphere, not that different to the atmosphere we've seen in all the Opens in years past," he said.

"It will not be the same as the last few years, but it will be the most significant international event with crowds that the world has seen for many, many months."

Victoria has now gone 24 days without any new locally acquired cases of the virus and all players who arrived in Australia had to undergo a mandatory 14 days of quarantine.

Eight positive cases were detected from the more than 1,000 players, coaches and

officials who flew in on 17 charter flights.

Players are gradually emerging from their lockdown with the first of six ATP and WTA tournaments due to begin at Melbourne Park on Sunday ahead of the Australian Open starting on February 8.

Tournament chief Craig Tiley said it had been a huge logistical exercise. "We hope to have set the stage and the example for the rest of the world about the possibility of being able to do this," he said.

AFP



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Disappointment for Rawahi, Attiyah edges clear in Qatar



Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi in action prior to his retirement on the second day of the Qatar International Rally in Losail, Qatar, on Saturday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

2021 QATAR INTERNATIONAL RALLY

Last season's championship runner-up Abdullah al Rawahi of Oman had to endure disappointment on the second day of the 2021 Qatar International Rally, the first leg of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship, in Losail, Qatar, on Saturday.

Driving a Ford Fiesta and competing in the R5 class, the Omani driver's car suffered a broken steering arm to force him into retirement, failing even to complete the special stage on Saturday.

Rawahi is a young talent on the MERC scene and graduated from MERC 2 to drive a fully-fledged R5 car last year. The Omani is working with his Oman Rally Team and Jordanian navigator Ata al Hmoud with technical advice from 14-time Rally of Lebanon winner Roger Feghali. Rawahi finished as runner-up to Nasser Saleh al Attiyah in last year's MERC.



Oman's Zakariya al Aufi in action on Saturday

On Saturday, defending regional champion Nasser Saleh al Attiyah took full advantage of late problems for Ulsterman Kris Meeke to hammer home his advantage after a fascinating four gravel special stages.

The two rivals shared a pair of stage wins apiece through the northern deserts and were separated by 10.3 seconds before the last action of the day. Meeke and English navigator Sebastian Marshall damaged the underside of their Škoda Fabia R5 after a heavy landing over a jump and

were forced to stop after the stage.

The actual time loss was only 46.9 seconds, but the radiator had failed after the impact and damaged the intercooler. Rather than risk damaging the engine more seriously, Meeke stopped the day comfortably clear of third-placed Khalid al Suwaidi and his navigator Hugo Magalhães.

Nasser Khalifa al Atya also benefited from Meeke's issues and climbed to fourth overall with Kuwait's Meshari al Thefiri



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al Attiyah competes in the Qatar International Rally

Baumel to guide their Autotek Volkswagen Golf GTi R5 to the night halt with a 1min 40.6sec advantage over Abdulaziz al Kuwari and new Irish co-driver James Fulton in their Škoda Fabia R5. Kuwari, the 2012 Qatar International Rally winner, finished the day comfortably clear of third-placed Khalid al Suwaidi and his navigator Hugo Magalhães.

Nasser Khalifa al Atya also benefited from Meeke's issues and climbed to fourth overall with Kuwait's Meshari al Thefiri

driving impressively into fifth place and a comfortable lead in MERC 2. Sheikh Suhaim al Thani belied his lack of rallying experience to post an impressive debut drive to sixth in the Motorsport Italia-run Škoda.

Oman's Zakariya al Aufi was seventh and second in MERC 2 and Saudi Arabia's Salef al Saif led the FIA T4 section in his Can-Am with eighth.

The third Omani driver in fray, Zakariya al Amri was excluded for taking a short cut on one of the stages.



Shakib al Hasan during a nets session on Saturday

Shakib returns to Bangladesh's Test squad

BANGLADESH VS WEST INDIES

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Shakib al Hasan has been named in Bangladesh's 18-man Test squad for the two-match series against West Indies.

Shakib had suffered a groin injury during the third ODI on January 25, and walked off the field without completing his fifth over.

He returned to training on Saturday after a scan last week revealed no major damage.

Shakib had already made a successful return to international cricket following his one-year ban, completing a player-of-the-series performance against West Indies in the ODIs.

This will be his first Test since the one-off Test against Afghanistan in September 2019.

Apart from Shakib, the national selectors have added Shadman Islam to the squad that was chosen for Bangladesh's last Test match, the one-off game against Zimbabwe last February.

Among the uncapped players are Yasir Ali, the middle-order batsman who was picked against Zimbabwe last year for the first time, and pace bowler Hasan Mahmud who recently made his ODI debut against West Indies.

Yasir averages 51.33 in 51 first-class matches, and has scored eight centuries. Mahmud has taken 37 wickets in 14 first-class matches thus far.

The first Test begins on February 3 at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, while the second Test is from February 11 in Dhaka.

Bangladesh squad: Mominul Haque (capt), Tamim Iqbal, Shakib al Hasan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Mithun, Liton Das, Yasir Ali, Saif Hassan, Mustafizur Rahman, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Shadman Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Abu Jayed, Ebadat Hossain, Hasan Mahmud.

Cricinfo

Lokuhettige found guilty of corruption

Dubai, UAE - Former Sri Lanka allrounder Dilhara Lokuhettige has been found guilty of three offences under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code.

Lokuhettige had been slapped with three corruption charges - by the ICC's own Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) - in April 2019, five months after the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) had also charged him.

Concerns over Lokuhettige had initially been raised by an *Al Jazeera* documentary on cricket corruption in Sri Lanka. In that piece, both Lokuhettige was seen to be in the room when another former Sri Lanka cricketer was talking to an alleged fixer, as well as an *Al Jazeera* journalist posing as a prospective bettor.

Lokuhettige was provisionally suspended by the ICC in November when the ECB laid its charges. The November allegations relate to the 2017 T10 tournament, to which Sri Lanka had sent a team. Lokuhettige played 11 white-ball internationals for Sri Lanka, picking up eight wickets to go with 101 runs with the bat. His last competitive game was in February 2016.

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Oman Open postponed due to COVID-19

The event was scheduled to be held at Al Mouj Golf from March 4-7

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The prestigious Oman Open golf tournament, scheduled to be held at the Al Mouj Golf, from March 4-7, has been postponed due to the ongoing threat of COVID-19.

The European Tour, the organisers of the US\$1.75mn event, announced the postponement on Friday night after consultations with the Oman Golf Association (OGA).

Last week, Oman's Supreme Committee incharge of dealing with COVID-19 had declared suspension of all public events.

With the postponement of Oman Open, the European Tour has lost its first event on the 2021 schedule to the coronavirus pandemic.

In his remarks to *Muscat Daily* on Saturday, Mundhir al Barwani, OGA chairman said, "It was a very difficult decision to be made but following the



A file photo of Sami Valimaki celebrating after winning the Oman Open title at the Al Mouj Golf last year

Supreme Committee's decisions, we had no choice than to postpone the tournament, which was to be held in the first week of March.

"There were lot of uncertainties involved and we were left with only a month to deliver a world-class event. We are not sure of the timeframe of the restrictions and under such circumstances the best option was to postpone the event.

"We are in talks with the European Tour and other stakeholders and the option to have it by the end of the year is on the table. We will be in touch with all parties concerned on the possibility of rescheduling it, but there are no definitive plans at this stage to see if we can host it later in the year."

Earlier on Friday, a European Tour statement read, "The Oman Open, scheduled to take place from March 4-7 at Al Mouj Golf in Muscat, has been postponed due to the ongoing threat of COVID-19."

The fledgling Oman Open was added to the European Tour calendar only three years ago.

The event in Muscat was due to be the first-leg of a second Middle East Swing, but it has been reduced to just the Qatar



Mundhir al Barwani, OGA chief

Masters in Doha on March 11-14.

Last year, Finland's Sami Valimaki beat Brandon Stone of South Africa in a playoff for the Oman Open title, shortly before worldwide sport ground to a halt as the coronavirus pandemic took hold. A number of tournaments were subsequently cancelled, including the 149th Open Championship at Royal St George's, where the event is now due to take place in July.

Since coming out of lockdown in July, tournaments have been taking place in bio-secure bubbles including the ongoing Omega Dubai Desert Classic.

@ashokmuscat



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said (left) being introduced to the national women's cricket team

H H Sayyid Theyazin visits OCA, meets national cricket teams

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Cricket (OC) fraternity was delighted after the recent visit of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, to the Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) at Al Amerat.

During his maiden visit to the OC facilities on Wednesday, H H Sayyid Theyazin met with the national men's, women's and U19 teams.

H H Sayyid Theyazin was impressed by the world-class facilities at the OCA and also interacted with young cricketers training under expert coaches.

H H Sayyid Theyazin was taken around the indoor and outdoor facilities including net practice arena and gymnasium, which is equipped with state-of-the-art equipments.

Senior board member Pankaj Khimji briefed H H Sayyid Theyazin on OC's journey over the past four decades and the recent achievements of the national



The OCA youngsters with H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said

men's team. The Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth congratulated OC board members after being informed of the laurels achieved by the national teams.

Oman's rankings have soared in recent times with the national team placed 14th in ICC ODI Team Rankings among 20 nations and 18th in T20Is among 85 countries.

OC recently was also given the go-ahead by the ICC to host Test matches after the main ground at Al Amerat was approved as a Test venue.

During his visit, H H Sayyid

Theyazin was introduced to the national men's and women's teams by Duleep Mendis, OC chief development officer and head coach, and Vaishali Jesrani, captain of women's team.

H H Sayyid Theyazin was later presented a commemorative cricket bat by OC board of directors.

Present on the occasion were H H Sayyid Qais al Said, OC vice-chairman, H E Rashad al Hinai, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and other board members.



The national cricket team players and OC officials with H H Sayyid Theyazin at the OCA premises



H H Sayyid Theyazin with the U19 national team players and OC officials





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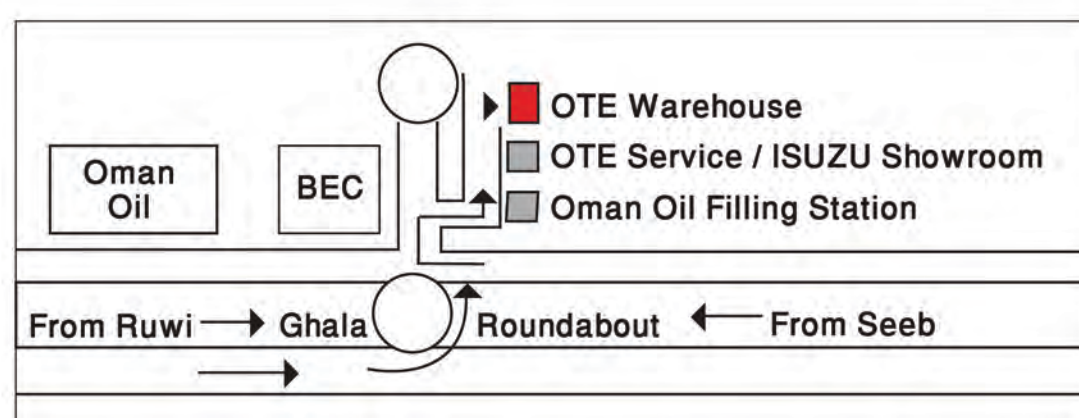
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