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JAPAN NATIONAL DAY SPECIAL
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National Museum to open section on Sultan Qaboos

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Museum is currently setting up a special section dedicated to the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to showcase a comprehensive account of his life. According to Jamal al Moosawi, secretary general of the museum, the section is expected to open by end of 2021.

"This section commemorates the enigmatic personality of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos so that it remains alive in the conscience of Omanis and residents," said Moosawi.

He informed that the National Museum has been honoured by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik with the donation of a number of Royal holdings that have so far been inaccessible to the general public.

"The section will include the original copy of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' will addressed to the Royal Family Council. Currently, a stage and display box are being prepared. The next phase will involve installing the Royal pieces," Moosawi said.

With regard to other ongoing works at the museum, Moosawi said, "Renovations are underway to modernise certain sections, including the Currency Hall where distinct coins, some of which are from Royal holdings and others acquired by citizens from outside the sultanate, will be presented."

The Currency Hall will include a unique collection of golden Islamic dirhams that were minted in Oman in addition to coins cast



A special section dedicated to the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in the National Museum will include the original copy of his will (Supplied photo)

in Zanzibar. Commemorative coins of the Blessed Renaissance never displayed earlier will be exhibited for the first time.

"The museum will inaugurate a small section called Hermitage - a first in the Middle East. It will be a miniature exhibition that in-

cludes pieces related to the Islamic civilisation in Russia. It will be of one-year duration, subject to renewal," Moosawi said.

Additionally, in cooperation with Louvre Abu Dhabi, the National Museum will soon dedicate a section to a group of

holdings that belong to Omani civilisation. These items will be exhibited in Muscat for the very first time.

Work is also underway to create a corner to present the languages and dialects of Oman. "It will help showcase this impor-

tant aspect of the cultural dimension of the sultanate, documenting the oldest alphabet discovered in the Arabian Peninsula here in Oman, the roots of the Arabic language and its development over the years," Moosawi informed.

Alarm after 3 deaths reported; ICU cases increase

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday announced the death of three more people infected with COVID-19 taking the total number of those who succumbed to the virus to 1,555. There has also been an increase in the number of patients in the country requiring intensive care prompting authorities to call for caution.

Of Monday, as many as 59 patients were in ICUs. The total number of patients admitted in health institutions was 171. The MoH reported 330 new cases, on Monday, taking the total number of infections to 139,692, of which 130,848 have recovered.

Dr Zakaria al Balushi, consultant - infections and infectious diseases at The Royal Hospital, described the spike in infections as 'alarming'.

"If we compare figures from two weeks ago, the number of cases in the ICU at The Royal Hospital was three. Today, there are 11," he said in an interview on Monday.

"Apart from ICUs, the number of COVID-19 patients has increased from five to 12 in this period in the hospital. These numbers indicate that infections are on the rise, and caution must be taken. We should treat this as a warning for people to take appropriate action."

Dr Balushi informed that the cases in ICU are elderly and belong to the vaccine target groups. "This is a request for everyone in the category eligible for vaccination to get immunised to avoid any danger," he said. "Some patients in ICU were offered vacci-

Oman bans entry from ten countries

Muscat - Oman has suspended flights from ten countries for a period of 15 days. The decision will come into effect at midnight of February 25.

The Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic announced the decision to stop arrivals from Lebanon, Sudan, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania, Guinea, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia on Monday.

The ban includes people who have passed through these countries in the 14 days prior to their travel to Oman, as part of the efforts to protect people in the country from COVID-19. The decision excludes Omanis, diplomats and healthcare workers and their families.

nation but they refused."

Dr Asmaa al Rubhi, a doctor at Dhank Health Centre, said the first phase of immunisation with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was well received but in the last few days, there has been less acceptance for the second phase with the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

"We have been calling those in target groups to convince them to take the vaccine. We ask them not to pay heed to rumours," she said.

@shadadm



Italian envoy to DR Congo killed in attack

Rome, Italy - Italy's Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Luca Attanasio, was killed on Monday while travelling with a UN convoy in the east of the country, the foreign ministry said.

"It is with deep sadness that the Foreign Ministry confirms the death, today in Goma, of the Italian ambassador," the ministry said, adding that an Italian policeman also died.

Attanasio was 43 and had been representing Italy in Kinshasa since 2017. He joined the diplomatic service in 2003.

AFP

We look out to Oman for solutions: Danish envoy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

"Nothing goes wrong in Oman. Everything seems so pleasant," said Ole Emil Moesby, Riyadh-based Danish Ambassador to Oman, on visiting the Muscat Daily office during his short trip to the sultanate last week.

Serving as ambassador to five countries in the Middle East - Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, besides the sultanate - Moesby said this sense of calm and comfort comes from the fact that Oman enjoys friendly relations with every country and "hence has the ability to accommodate every country in dialogues" to iron out differences.

"Everybody knows that Oman has a tremendous role in the development of the region. You are friends with Saudi, you are friends with Iran... you are friends with just about everyone in the region. If there is one country which

doesn't have an enemy, it is Oman," the ambassador said.

"That gives you (Oman) the role to try to accommodate (different groups) in dialogue," Moesby said on his visit to Muscat to present his credentials to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik last week.

Iran and JCPoA

The envoy noted that the political changes in the region and elsewhere give "us an opportunity to think differently".

"Following the changes we have seen in recent days," Moesby said, "moving through these is like navigating a ship through uncharted waters."

"This demands ingenuity and networking that can make the ship move in the right direction. Oman has this maritime ability to give the ship a direction," Moesby said in the context of Iran and the possible revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) from which the



You are friends with just about everyone in the region. If there is one country which doesn't have an enemy, it is Oman

OLE EMIL MOESBY

US administration under President Donald Trump had moved out.

The Iran-US stalemate may yet linger with President Joe Biden demanding that the Islamic republic scale back its nuclear programme in line with JCPoA restrictions before American sanctions are lifted.

"If Iran is ever going to come out of the JCPoA, it will have to deal with issues differently," Moesby said, adding, "And this is the area where Oman has a

tremendous role to play in building up that confidence and also moving on with those new ways of looking at things.

"Oman understands the thinking of various parties and the way to move forward. You have the ability to talk to everyone. All are waiting for Oman to do something on this.

"Recently, we saw a change under which Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, (United Arab) Emirates and Bahrain began a new chapter of dialogue. We have also seen

developments following which some of the Arab countries are now setting up formal relationships with Israel."

COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a severe blow to the entire world, Moesby noted. "The situation was never constant. And it was not possible to understand what could be the course or the remedies.

"In Denmark, we were really frightened and felt devastated

seeing what was happening around the world. We immediately imposed very stringent restrictions, which can only be done with a strong political will," he said, adding that many other countries dealt with the situation differently.

Handling the healthcare sector and the economic impact of the pandemic posed a challenge but "we have a strong force of medical professionals competent enough to deal with the emerging situation".

Danish medical professionals knew how to deal with elderly patients and those in ICUs, while using the limited resources optimally, he said.

Taking note of the severe impact of the pandemic on economies around the world, he said, "Many of us were anxious when COVID-19 hit. Besides the pandemic, you (the region) had to also deal with the assault of reduction in oil prices."

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Pact signed to create job opportunities for Omanis in SEZs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) and the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) have signed a cooperation agreement to enhance integration between the higher education sector and special economic zones (SEZs) and free zones.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim bin Said al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Chairman of OPAZ.

H E Dr Rahma said, "The agreement aims to complete the ministry's efforts to link the labour market with the specialisations offered by the ministry."

Saleh bin Hamoud al Hasani



(Supplied photo)

from OPAZ said, "The authority will provide data on the companies located in the free zones and

empower the private sector and investing companies to provide some training opportunities and

create job opportunities for young Omanis. In addition the agreement will enable MoHERI

to establish a research centre in the Duqm Special Economic Zone."

OPAZ will provide training opportunities for undergraduate students and students of vocational colleges that suit their specialties, in cooperation with MoHERI which will provide research and consulting services

SALEH AL HASANI

He added, "The authority will also provide data on economic activities and companies operating in the special economic zones and free zones, needs for the labour market, challenges it

faces, its plans for growth, and the expected numbers for employment in coordination with the Ministry of Labour."

He added that the authority will provide training opportunities for undergraduate students and students of vocational colleges that suit their specialties, in cooperation with MoHERI which will provide research and consulting services to the authority.

The agreement invites the private sector to establish scientific complexes for higher education, and centres for scientific research, innovation and vocational training, and Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones to provide incentives and exemptions such as the right for land usufruct necessary for such projects in accordance with the regulations and procedures followed.

Air Arabia Egypt to launch Muscat-Cairo direct service



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Air Arabia Egypt, a low-cost carrier based in Egypt, has announced plans to launch direct service to Muscat from the Egyptian capital Cairo, flying twice a week starting from March 11.

These flights, all Airbus A320s, will operate on Mondays and Thursdays. Flight E5 753 will depart Cairo International Airport at 12.55pm and arrive at Muscat International Airport at 6.35pm. On return, Flight E5 754 will take off from Muscat at 7.25pm and land in Cairo at

10.05pm. Customers can now book direct flights on the Cairo-Muscat route through Air Arabia's website besides its call centre and travel agencies.

Air Arabia has stated that since the COVID-19 outbreak it has upgraded its customer journey to include all safety measures that are in line with the highest international standards.

Air Arabia's entire fleet is fitted with HEPA cabin air filters, which help provide a safer and healthier environment. Customers are always requested to comply with the conditions and requirements of the countries of departure and destination.

REGIONAL WEATHER			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
Abu Dhabi	28	19	Fajr	5.18am
Doha	25	17	Sunrise	6.34am
Kuwait City	21	13	Duhr	12.25pm
Manama	21	16	Asr	3.44pm
Riyadh	19	10	Maghrib	6.12pm
			Isha	7.22pm

CONDOLENCE MEETING

The Indian Social Club, Oman, is organizing a condolence meeting for Late Shri Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji on Wednesday, 24th February 2021 from 4.00pm to 5.00pm.

Indian Social Club Oman is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Condolence meeting for
SHRI KANAKSI KHIJJI
Wednesday Feb 24, 2021 04:00 PM

THOSE INTERESTED IN JOINING MAY DO SO WITH THE FOLLOWING LINK.

Meeting ID: 847 7211 2771
Passcode: 454543

If you are joining the meeting by telephone, you are requested to use the landscape mode.

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Fossil collector hands over rare cache to Natural History Museum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani fossil collector has found a variety of remnants of mysterious creatures from a bygone era dating back millions of years in the wilayat of Ibri.

Talal Matar Salem al Jahwari from the wilayat of Suwaiq found a treasure trove of fossils in Ibri and handed them over to the Natural History Museum of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Jahwari's love for collecting and studying fossils began early in life and was aided by his profession which involves working in remote areas.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Jahwari said, "I started collecting fossils in 1997 and my work in the oil and gas sector greatly helped me find many."

The fossils found by Jahwari in Ibri include nautilus (marine mollusc), fossilised snails, ammonite and fossilised tree trunks.

"In 2020, I found these fossils at the site of a company that is building dams in the wilayat of Ibri in Wadi al Salif. These are great samples for exhibition in museums and for future reference." Jahwari explained that the nautilus is a pelagic marine mollusc of the cephalopod family Nautilidae.

Among the fossils he found are ammonoids, a group of extinct marine molluscs in the subclass Ammonoidea of the class cephalopoda. "These molluscs, commonly referred to as ammonites, are more closely related to living coleoids, such as octopus, squid and cuttlefish."



I am eager to spread awareness of our geological heritage and want to preserve these natural wonders. I urge all who find such fossils to hand them over to the ministry

TALAL AL JAHWARI

Jahwari explained that the earliest ammonoids appeared during the Devonian period, and the last species vanished in the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event. The name 'am-

monite', from which the scientific term is derived, was inspired by the spiral shape of their fossilised shells resembling tightly coiled rams' horns.

"The fossilised tree trunks



found are of a pine species that is millions of years old as well," Jahwari said.

"I handed over the fossils to the Natural History Museum in order to document and preserve these and to display these. The museum is one of the most important historical museums in the sultanate, and through its exhibits it tells the story of many extinct creatures, and the natural diversity and geological heritage of Oman. The museum attracts a large number of visitors - citi-

zens, residents and foreign tourists."

Jahwari has collected numerous shells, oysters and other ancient geological pieces in the past. "I want to establish a travelling exhibition to exhibit some of these pieces. I am eager to spread awareness of our geological heritage among community members and want to preserve these natural wonders. I urge all who find such fossils to hand them over to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism."

Entry of foreign empty trucks to stop from Oct 19

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to support local transport companies, Oman will stop entry of empty foreign trucks through its borders from October.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced that the last day for empty trucks to enter Oman will be October 19.

A statement issued by the ministry said, 'Based on the Land Transport Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 10/2016, its ex-

ecutive regulation, the notice issued by the ministry on October 11, 2020, and considering the efforts exerted by the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology in using the national transport means and lessening the use of foreign ones, the ministry declares that the last day for the 'foreign land transport means' (trucks) to enter Oman's territories will be October 19, 2021.'

All foreign transport companies should be aware and adjust their businesses by contracting the national and local transporters, it added.

Illegal lobster, abalone catchers in Dhofar netted

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Some 43 pieces of lobster nets have been seized along with quantities of lobster and abalone in Dhofar governorate in a case of violation of the Marine Fishing Law.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources said, 'The Fisheries Control Team in Dhofar governorate seized 43 pieces of lobster nets, quantities of lobster and abalone that were caught outside the season, which is in violation of the Marine Fishing Law and the Protection of Live Aquatic Resources and its regulations.'

The ministry confirmed that some expatriate workers were arrested while catching lobsters and abalones in Al



Shuwaimiya area.

Ahmed Abboud, supervisor of Fisheries Control at the Directorate General of Fisheries in Dhofar, said, "The control teams are deployed along the coasts of the governorate to follow up on the implementation of the laws set by the ministry. They work day and night with continuous efforts in order to preserve these fish resources in cooperation with all government and civil agencies."



Environment Authority rescues bolted ibex

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An ibex that escaped from its owner while transportation has been found after a week of search and rescue operation conducted by the Environment Authority.

A statement issued by the Environment Authority, said, 'After efforts that lasted for a week of

search and investigation, the Environment Authority, in cooperation with some citizens from Quriyat, caught an imported ibex that escaped from its owner during its transport.'

The authority calls on all owners of imported wild animals not to release them into the Omani environment and to take necessary precautions to prevent their escape.

We look out to Oman for solutions: Danish envoy

Continued from Page 01

Collaborations with Oman

"There's no crisis ever without having good effects... because it changes people's way of thinking; it changes our behaviour and the way we communicate," he said.

"With the culture and rules that we have developed during the pandemic... virtual meetings and other events, the world is going digital like never before.

"On Sunday, I met the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef and we discussed how we can develop trade partnerships between the two countries. I suggested we

have webinars for this."

"Had I asked Danish companies to come to Oman and explore partnership opportunities, there would have been few participants. But now with the changes following the pandemic, I am sure we'll have more participants in webinars from both sides. This may open up new areas of partnership and collaborations," he added.

Exchange of expertise

"In the last 40 years, we have added 1mn to our population, but trebled industrial production using half of the energy we needed in 1980.

"We are extremely strong in efficiently using energy and our

way of going about it is by shifting completely to renewable energy from any source," he said, asserting that this is an area where Oman and Denmark can join hands.

Denmark meets 60 per cent of its energy demands from renewable sources such as wind.

"We aim to meet 100 per cent of our energy needs from renewable sources by 2030," the envoy informed.

According to Moesby, areas of cooperation could include the health sector, food and agriculture, and water conservation.

Describing Omani architecture as 'famous', he said it too presents scope for cooperation between the two countries.

Omani students in Texas safe after snowstorm

Muscat - All Omani students in the US city of Texas affected by the snowstorm are safe and sound, said Oman's Embassy in Washington.

In a statement the embassy

said, 'All Omani students in the US city of Texas affected by the snowstorm are fine.'

The embassy said that the snowstorm hit the southwestern part of Texas, far from the

University of North Texas, located in northeast.

The embassy called on students to follow the instructions issued by the university and the US authorities.





Two nations shaped by waves

Statement by Toshinori Kobayashi, Ambassador of Japan to Oman, on the occasion of Emperor Naruhito's 61st birthday today

An old Japanese folk story tells of a fisherman who, after rescuing a sea turtle, is invited to ride it on a journey to a fantastical and timeless kingdom under the sea. My own journey across the ocean to the sultanate two years ago was far more conventional - nevertheless, I too found myself in a beautiful land of breathtaking nature, vibrant society, and enduring splendour, and I feel extraordinarily blessed to experience the Omani way of life. Oman too, of course, has its turtles aplenty; whenever I witness the majestic form of one off the coast of this country, I am possessed by a strange feeling that our two nations have been somehow linked by these beautiful creatures since eons.

I have often come to remark on and appreciate the unexpected similarity between the cultures of our two countries, though we may be separated by over 8,000km. A strong sense of communal custodianship, a society guided by principles of integrity and sincerity, a proud tradition of hospitality and generosity - these are the qualities which are shared between our peoples, and form the invisible threads which bind together our international friendship. So too does our shared maritime heritage; nations such as ours whose fates have been shaped by the waves recognise the vital importance of fostering cooperation with overseas nations.

The Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may his soul rest in peace, possessed great vision and under his wise guidance, Oman established a precious and greatly admired diplomatic stance of positive neutrality. Since his accession to the throne, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has affirmed and reinforced the uniquely Omani path of peaceful approach towards all nations. The great effort expended by the sultanate to contribute to the peace and stability of the region and the world is recognised and appreciated by Japan as a noble and worthy undertaking. Our shared 'DNA' as sea-faring nations brings with it a keen awareness of the gravity of maintaining maritime security and ensuring unimpeded economic activity in the oceans. These well-aligned priorities have convinced us that Oman is a valuable and assured partner for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific.'

Of course, our two nations already enjoy substantial long-standing relations.

From ancient radios long consigned to museums, to gleaming new vehicles displayed in dealerships, I am proud to see that Japanese products have long been viewed by the people



Oman and Japan have always been and will forever be connected by an ocean of opportunities

TOSHINORI KOBAYASHI
Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman

of Oman as emblematic of quality and reliability. Nowhere is this more evident than in the enthusiastic recital of Japanese brand names by friendly locals in even the remotest of the mountain villages to which I have ventured!

It is not only the enduring popularity and desirability of Japanese cars and electronics that have contributed to the daily lives of Omanis. Consortiums led by Japanese companies produce around 70 per cent of Oman's electricity, as well as more than 25 per cent of the drinkable water. It is with great happiness that I see the corporations of Japan supporting the livelihoods of Omanis in this way, and I expect that our technology will be able to aid Oman further in fields ranging from environmental protection to medical science. In turn, Oman's importance to Japan's energy stability, through the supply of crude oil and natural gas, cannot be understated.

In the face of unprecedented global challenges brought about by COVID-19, the government of Oman's decisive response has successfully tempered a tragic crisis. It is my sincere hope that once this difficult period is behind us, the ties between Japan and Oman will emerge stronger than ever before.

We celebrate the 61st birthday of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan on February 23, 2021. It is worth mentioning that His Majesty Emperor Naruhito, accompanied by Her Majesty the Empress, paid an official visit to Oman in 1994 when His Majesty was the Crown Prince. During their visit, they received the warm welcome and generous hospitality of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and the Omani people.

Inspired by the warm relationship between the Imperial Family of Japan and the Royal Family of the Sultanate of Oman, I hope to see our two nations further enhance our ties, and I would like to wish continued health, prosperity, and long life to both His Majesty Emperor Naruhito and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

From a favourite vantage point on the hilltop beside the town of Qalhat, azure skies overhead and the shining ocean filling the horizon, I cannot help feeling the weight of time and a bond which stretches through centuries. In the foreground lie the crumbling ruins of the ancient city, visited in the 13th Century CE by explorer Marco Polo who first brought word of Japan to the West. Behind it, across the bay, looms the LNG plant which today supplies the gas used in my hometown in Japan. And so, Oman and Japan have always been and will forever be connected by an ocean of opportunities.

Oman and Japan – united by timeless bonds

It gives me great pleasure to convey my heartfelt greetings, on behalf of all Members of the Board of the Oman Japan Friendship Association, to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan on the auspicious occasion of his 61st birthday.

This year, in Oman, we marked a significant occasion celebrating the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik taking over the reigns. We are confident that His Majesty's visionary leadership and guidance will steer Oman further ahead on its inspiring path of development, peace and stability. For this, we the people of Oman pledge our complete support to His Majesty's leadership. May the Almighty bless him with good health and long life.

Oman and Japan are two great nations, united by timeless bonds based on rich heritage and culture that go back hundreds of years. With time these remarkable ties have grown stronger, offering numerous opportunities to people of both the nations to learn about each other's absorbing culture and heritage, while also taking advantage of mutually beneficial economic relationships.

As a responsible association, focussed on taking these special bonds to even greater levels, the Oman Japan Friendship Association uses every opportunity to build enduring relationships and foster meaningful ties between people of both the nations. The association plans and initiates a number of activities in various areas, including fields as diverse as commerce, education, culture, arts, tourism and



Mohammed Saud Bahwan

sports. Like each year, this year too, the Oman Japan Friendship Association reaffirms its commitment to take these remarkable bonds to even greater levels.

Apart from building lasting relationships through deep-rooted culture, Oman and Japan have made impressive economic progress based on each other's strengths. Japan's expertise in machinery, iron, steel,

electronics, automotive and more continue to benefit Oman through imports from Japan. Similarly, as a major producer of oil and gas, aluminium and fishery products, Oman continues to cater to Japan's growing demand through exports. It is also encouraging to know that Japanese companies have made impressive investments in Oman through joint ventures in a number of projects includ-

ing the energy sector.

Since its inception, the Oman Japan Friendship Association, in close co-operation with the Embassy of Japan, has continued to improve relations between the people of the two nations by planning and initiating a number of cultural exchange programmes that showcase the diverse, rich and absorbing culture of both countries.

Unlike earlier, the last year unfolded a unique and challenging environment as a result of the global pandemic. Although the highest levels of care and concern were exercised to limit people-to-people contacts through special events offline, a few online events and programmes continued to play a role in strengthening the relationship between people of Oman and Japan.

It is very inspiring to witness the interest the people of Oman have in learning the Japanese language. To cater to this interest, each year the Oman Japan Friendship Association, in co-operation with the Embassy of Japan, conducts a three-month Japanese Language Course. These courses are held by native Japanese language teachers and are popular among Japanese language enthusiasts here in Oman.

Due to limitations like social distancing norms and adherence to health and safety guidelines, advised by competent authorities, the Embassy of Japan offered students interested in learning the Japanese language an opportunity to register and learn for free through the event 'Online Study in Japan Week 2020'

in December 2020.

In September 2020, the Embassy of Japan conducted the Japanese Illustration Online Competition for all residents in Oman. The competition was based on the theme of Japanese landscapes, nature, tradition and culture.

Earlier in February the same year, the Embassy of Japan inaugurated the Japanese stall at the 25th Muscat International Book Fair at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in co-operation with the Japan Foundation. The stall had books from Japan that covered a variety of genres and activities, including origami, Japanese calligraphy and more.

Every year, several such events and activities held by the Oman Japan Friendship Association showcase each nation's rich culture and heritage to the people of both the nations. In the days to come, the Oman Japan Friendship Association will continue to plan and initiate several such events and activities that will bring the people of Oman and Japan closer.

On this special occasion, on behalf of all the Board members of the Oman Japan Friendship Association, I convey sincere greetings to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito. May God Almighty grant him good health and long life. And may the beautiful bonds of friendship that bind Oman and Japan continue to grow even stronger.

Mohammed Saud Bahwan
Chairman of the Board of
Oman Japan Friendship Association

MARKET WATCH

MSM30	3,561.20
BSE Sensex	49,744.32

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	188.60
Pakistani Rs	413.21
Bangladeshi Taka	220.42
Philippine Peso	126.83
Sri Lankan Rs	503.25

*Rates as on February 22
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

German business confidence bucks shutdown impact

German business confidence improved in February, a key survey showed on Monday, as the robust industrial sector of Europe's top economy bears up despite the impact of coronavirus restrictions.

The Ifo institute's monthly confidence barometer, based on a survey of 9,000 companies, climbed to 92.4 points from 90.3 points in January, when the index slipped as tougher measures to fight the pandemic were introduced.

The manufacturing sector recorded its highest score since November 2018, surging to 16.1 points from 9.1 points last month.

Ukraine leader 'confident' IMF will unblock aid in 2021

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Monday he is 'confident' the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will unblock aid to his country this year, despite admitting to disagreements in talks with the lender.

The IMF last June approved a US\$5bn line of credit with an immediate payment of US\$2.1bn to help the ex-Soviet country fight the coronavirus pandemic.

"We are counting on this money," Zelensky said.

He added that Ukraine's relations with the IMF were 'normal', but added that he disagreed with some of the lender's demands.

'Duqm set to become a regional hub for fisheries and food industries'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With a number of proposed fisheries and food security projects in the Special Economic Zones at Duqm and the development of a large multipurpose fishing port, Duqm is all set to emerge as a regional hub for fisheries and food industries, according to a top official of Oman Food Investment Holding Co (OFIC), a state-owned enterprise mandated to promote Oman's food security through partnerships with government agencies, private operators and investors.

"We believe Duqm is well-positioned to become a food hub for the wider region. Fisheries and food industries will get a boost with the development of the multipurpose fishing port. Fisheries sector in Duqm has huge potential to target export markets where lot of value can be added," Eng Saleh al Shanfari,



Eng Saleh al Shanfari (Muscat Daily)

CEO of OFIC said in an interview with *Muscat Daily*.

In November last year, Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) awarded the tender for the development, management and operation of the

multipurpose fishing port and the related projects in Duqm to a strategic alliance of Omani and international companies led by Fisheries Development Oman (FDO).

Enabled by a huge special economic zone, developed infra-

structure and a modern port which attracts investors from around the world, Shanfari said, Duqm has huge potential for export-oriented food processing industries.

In the fisheries sector, OFIC is promoting a large fish canning

project in Duqm with an investment of more than US\$100mn. The project will include canning of tuna, sardine and other value-added products such as feed, fish oil etc.

"The fish canning project is a huge project and we believe it would be a model project for upcoming food projects in the Duqm area. This is an anchor project for the multipurpose fishing port in Duqm," Shanfari said. He added that the investment in the fish canning project, which is now part of FDO, will be a mix of investments from the private and state-owned entities.

Shanfari informed that the fish canning project is presently under the tendering stage and construction is likely to begin before the end of 2021 and would take roughly 24 months to be completed.

He said, "Duqm will be a very attractive place for fisheries and other food projects because it is

well positioned to become a hub for many food-related activities. When OFIC started building its strategy, one of our focus areas was to make the sultanate as a food hub to attract investors in this field from within Oman and from around the world. We are seeing investors are showing interest from around the world."

Having a competitive advantage due to its strategic location, modern ports and logistics infrastructure, Oman, Shanfari said, is in a much better position in the region to become a food industry hub.

"The quality and high standard of fish and food products produced in Oman can easily match with any internationally accepted standard. Lots of fisheries products are produced and manufactured and processed in the country. Omani fish products have reached to more than 80 countries and demand is consistently growing," Shanfari added.

Insurers' ratings to remain stable: S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

S&P Global Ratings on Monday said it expects its ratings on insurers in the GCC countries to remain broadly stable in 2021, mainly thanks to robust capital buffers and despite ongoing economic uncertainty relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the relatively large number of insurers in the region, some of which are small or posting losses, S&P expects to see further capital raising and consolidation, particularly in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where regulators may introduce higher capital requirements.

For Oman, S&P in a report said, the implementation of the



new compulsory health insurance scheme should boost gross written premiums in the sultanate in the coming years. However, the ratings agency forecasts a further modest decline in Oman's gross written premiums this year.

The report cites the main risk for GCC insurers as a potential return of volatility in capital mar-

kets, which could weaken credit conditions for insurers in 2021, particularly if central banks gradually lift forbearance measures later this year.

Among the opportunities for GCC insurers is a large uninsured population; higher awareness of insurance products and the need for protection among the population could increase the

demand for medical and critical illness policies covering COVID-19 and other pandemics, S&P said.

According to S&P, the real GDP in the GCC countries will likely recover to about 2 per cent in 2021 on average, after the sharp contraction in 2020.

"But we believe that key sectors, particularly real estate, hospitality, and retail, will remain under pressure this year. Ongoing high competition, a contraction in population of about 4 per cent across the GCC on average, and economic uncertainty will weigh on growth prospects and earnings, while elevated asset risk could lead to further volatility in the coming quarters," the ratings agency said.

Madayn organises lecture on digital shift

Muscat - The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by Madayn Industrial Academy, organised a virtual awareness lecture on 'Digital Transformation Management' as part of a series of programmes held to develop the skills and capabilities of human cadres in Madayn's various industrial cities.

Delivered by Dr Yaqoob al Bulushi, the programme highlighted several topics related to digital transformation including the challenges facing the process and ways to overcome them, methodology for implementation of digital transformation to meet the needs of the organisations,

and development of digital transformation strategy.

He said that organisations are formed in different periods to do different tasks, and as time passes, they expand with more hierarchical structure. Eventually, an organisation's requirements and duties evolve, and the current role may require new communication and coordination approaches among employees.

"This may demand advanced technologies, different thinking modes, problem-solving skills, new methods for developing the capabilities of the employees, and development of policies, enterprise architecture and strategic plans," Bulushi elaborated.

Bitcoin market hits \$1tn in value

London, UK - The total value of all bitcoin topped US\$1tn on Friday, capping a spectacular record-breaking week for the world's most popular cryptocurrency.

At about 1930 GMT, bitcoin zoomed to its latest all-time pinnacle at US\$55.155 after a string of corporate giants embraced the digital unit.

With more than 18.6mn bitcoins created since the digital currency was launched in 2009, the entire market is now worth US\$1.015tn, according to data provider Coinmarketcap.com.

"This is certainly big news for the industry and this would not have been possible without the involvement of smart money," said AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam.

"The reason that one trillion dollar market cap is significant because not many believed that bitcoin can achieve this. Now, we have a real number which is massive in size and we are going to get more investors joining this rally," he added.

Bitcoin has set a blistering record pace, blasting past US\$50,000 last Tuesday, after Tesla revealed it had invested US\$1.5bn in the unit.

Investors and Wall Street finance giants have been wooed by dizzying growth, the opportunity for profit and asset diversification, and a safe store of value to guard against inflation.

"The payment integration and store of value are the factors



which are driving the price higher and as long as this support remain in place, we are likely to have even bigger headlines," added Aslam.

The cryptocurrency also vaulted higher after both New York bank BNY Mellon and credit card titan MasterCard announced plans to support bitcoin.

A further boost came after investment fund giant BlackRock also confirmed a push into the booming sector.

And US software firm MicroStrategy announced plans to sell convertible bonds in order to buy more bitcoin.

The virtual unit has been on a meteoric rise since March last year, when it stood at US\$5,000, spurred by online payments giant PayPal saying it would allow account holders to use cryptocurrency.

Once regarded as the preserve of internet geeks and hobbyists, bitcoin has now soared by almost 90 per cent in value so far this year, despite mounting regulatory concerns and analyst

fears of a speculative bubble.

Elon Musk, the founder of electric carmaker Tesla, sought to defend his company's investment - and contrasted bitcoin with some traditional fiat currencies.

"When fiat currency has negative real interest, only a fool wouldn't look elsewhere," he tweeted in reference to his company's move into bitcoin.

CMC Markets analyst David Madden said bitcoin's 2021 rally was less 'aggressive' than the 2017 bubble that resulted in big slump the following year.

"The bitcoin rally continues but what is different this time when compared with late 2017, the upward moves are less than the aggressive, mad moves [that] were seen then," Madden told AFP.

"The fact we are seeing more measured moves could be a sign the market is maturing, which should help it attract more well-known names, like MasterCard and Bank of New York Mellon, to back the cryptocurrency." AFP

شركة ظفار لتوليد الكهرباء ش م ع ع
Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

PO Box: 1571, PC: 211,
Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.
www.dgcoman.com

Invitation to Annual General Meeting of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

The Board of Directors of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders of the company to the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") to be held at 3p.m. on Tuesday, 9 March 2021 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOG ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om).

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3p.m. on Tuesday, 16 March 2021 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through the MCD website (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss and consider the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the Auditor's report and the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2020 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year 31 December 2021 (Annexure 1).
- To notify the General Assembly with transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2020 (Annexure 2).
- To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2020 (Annexure 3).
- To consider and approve the allocation of a budget of RO 15,000 (Rials Omani fifteen thousand) to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2021.
- To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors' to determine and distribute interim cash dividends to the

Company's Shareholders (who are registered with the MCD as of the dates to be decided by the Board of Directors) in September 2021 and March 2022 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2020, provided that the aggregate amount shall not exceed 18 Baisas per share.

- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2021 and approve their fees.
- To elect a new Board of Directors:

Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company minimum five (5) days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5pm on Thursday, 4th of March 2021 shall not be accepted.

- To approve the Report of the Independent Consultant on the performance appraisal of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.

According to the Commercial Companies Law and the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means issued by CMA, we would like to call your attention to the following:

- only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD;
- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the date of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand canceled and must revoke on the date of the meeting.

Please log on to the e-portal at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.

For more information, please contact Mr. Salim Al Amri of Dhofar Generating Company on telephone No. 9884 9480.

Chairman

Auditor

Legal Advisor

MSM falls 0.13%; volumes surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) fell 0.13 per cent to close at 3,561.2 points on Monday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 61.51 per cent to RO2.58mn and volumes surged 102.03 per cent to 17.62mn shares.

All the sectoral indices closed in red territory. Financial index fell 0.22 per cent, Industrial index declined 0.19 per cent and Services index fell 0.73 per cent. The MSM Shariah index closed down by 0.59 per cent at 536.11 points.

Market breadth remained negative as five companies closed up, while 14 companies closed down. The rest 24 traded

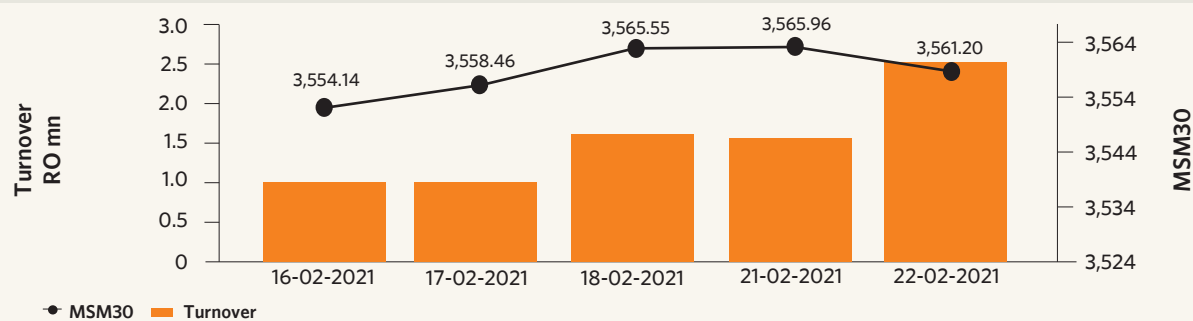


stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Sharqiyah Desalination (7.14 per cent), Bank Nizwa (1.02 per cent), Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles (0.64 per cent) and Omantel (0.52 per cent).

Top losers were Al Sharqia Investment (-8.11 per cent), Phoenix Power (-4.26 per cent), National Aluminium Products Company (-3.75 per cent) and Muscat Finance (-2.78 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Investcorp buys leading US data analytics firm

Manama, Bahrain - Investcorp, a leading global provider and manager of alternative investment products, on Monday announced that one of its affiliates has acquired a majority ownership position in KSM Consulting (KSMC), a leading consulting firm specialising in data analytics, technology and digital transformation, from Renovus Capital Partners, which will continue to maintain a minority stake in KSMC. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

Founded in 2008 and headquartered in Indianapolis, KSMC delivers smart, custom solutions to the most complex challenges of more than 700 private and public sector organisations.

This is done by leveraging deep expertise in data analytics, technology and digital transformation, according to a press release.

The firm draws on its experienced and highly skilled employee base of engineers, mathematicians, data analysts, and business professionals to craft innovative solutions, modernise business processes and drive performance improvements.



Tarek al Mahjoub

KSMC is led by CEO Mark Caswell and president John Roach, who will continue to lead the firm as it grows.

KSMC has delivered consistent double-digit growth by providing exceptional services that solve mission-critical challenges, like accelerating ideal-fit company mergers and acquisitions through consolidated data reporting and technology integration. In the past three years, KSMC has grown at a compound

annual growth rate (CAGR) in excess of 40 per cent, pro forma for acquisitions.

Investcorp's partnership with KSMC will focus on continuing the firm's organic growth, expanding geographically across the United States and broadening KSMC's service offerings into strategic adjacencies.

This will include seeking to complete strategic, value-creating add-on acquisitions, building upon KSMC's recent acquisitions of Colorado-based Tempus Nova, Ohio-based Advocate Solutions, and Indianapolis-based Connect Think.

Tarek al Mahjoub, head of UAE and Oman for Investcorp's Private Wealth, said, "The past year highlighted the importance of embracing technology for all organisations, regardless of size, sector or industry. We believe that in addition to the industry's attractive secular tailwinds, KSMC's people, values and culture set the firm apart in a highly fragmented market, and we are excited to be partnering with them."

Pace of global real estate investment recovery picks up

Dubai, UAE - Global real estate investment volumes declined by 28 per cent year-on-year from a record amount of capital markets activity in 2019. According to JLL's recently published Global Real Estate Perspective, full-year transaction volumes totalled US\$762bn in 2020. In EMEA, investment volumes reached US\$282bn, marking a 17 per cent decrease year-on-year.

Global investment volumes were buoyed by strong performance during the fourth quarter, which totalled US\$267bn, an increase of 65 per cent from the third quarter of 2020. Fourth quarter global investment activity continued the trend of decelerating quarterly declines throughout 2020 -21 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2020 compared to -41 per cent in the third quarter of 2020 and -50 per cent in the second quarter of 2020.

Established markets with sector diversity, transparency and scale fuelled the fourth quarter rebound. France, Germany and the US totalled an aggregate of US\$150bn, representing an increase of 81 per cent on the third quarter of 2020, during the final quarter. Gateway markets in Europe and Asia Pacific saw interest pick up in the quarter, where investor demand is improving for centrally-located, larger-ticket

assets - particularly core offices. "As 2020 progressed and the pandemic matured in markets, investors have learnt to better navigate the uncertainty. This confidence was reflected in higher levels of capital deployment in the latter part of the

As 2020 progressed and the pandemic matured in markets, investors have learnt to better navigate the uncertainty

SEAN COGHLAN



year," said Sean Coghlan, global director, capital markets research & strategy at JLL in a press release.

According to JLL, the improvement in activity was most evident in select segments of the markets.

Capital targeting income and operational stability: The logistics and multifamily sectors continue to exhibit strength globally, with rent collections holding steady and secular tailwinds intact. This dynamic is resulting in more resilient pricing, with win-

ning transaction bids hovering near expectations. The office sector experienced a moderate recovery in investor sentiment in the fourth quarter, with activity expanding in global gateway markets. Private capital has seized on the opportunity to acquire quality office product, representing a near all-time high of 29 per cent of acquisitions valued above US\$100mn since the onset of the pandemic. Institutional investors are returning to the market but remain cautious.

Core product seeing expanded liquidity: Desirable long-let, core product represented the largest share of closed transactions in 2020. Prime, high-quality assets have experienced relatively marginal price adjustments since COVID. Pricing for core logistics product continues to hit highs, and high-quality, core multifamily and office product also marked relatively modest, single-digit pricing adjustments since the onset of the pandemic.

"Despite the divergence in many parts of the market, optimism continues to improve on the heels of recovering liquidity, and the low cost of debt is supporting cap rate compression in sectors with growth and favourable demand outlooks. In 2021, we expect this to translate into a broadening of the capital markets recovery," said Coghlan.

Boeing grounds 777s after engine fire

Washington, US - Boeing confirmed on Monday that dozens of its 777 aircraft were grounded globally after the engine of a United Airlines plane caught fire and scattered debris over a suburb of Denver, Colorado.

It is a fresh blow for the beleaguered US aviation giant that was forced to ground another fleet of planes after a series of deadly crashes.

Boeing said on Monday that 128 of its 777 planes with Pratt & Whitney engines will stop flying after the fire on Saturday that forced the United Airlines plane to make an emergency landing.

"I have just had confirmation that all the 777s equipped with this engine have been grounded," a spokeswoman for the plane-maker told AFP in a text message.

Flight UA328 had been headed from Denver to Honolulu when it experienced engine failure shortly after departure.

A video shot from inside the plane - which had 231 passengers and ten crew on board - showed the right engine ablaze and wobbling on the wing of the Boeing 777-200.

Residents in the Denver suburb of Broomfield found large pieces of the plane scattered around their community.

Its front cowl, which landed in the front yard of a house, was entirely missing as the aircraft returned to Denver airport.



There were no injuries on the plane or on the ground, authorities said.

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had ordered extra inspections of some passenger jets after the incident.

Steve Dickson, the head of the regulator, said he had consulted with experts, signalling the planes would likely be removed from the air.

"I have directed them to issue an Emergency Airworthiness Directive that would require immediate or stepped-up inspections of Boeing 777 airplanes equipped with certain Pratt & Whitney PW4000 engines," he said in a statement.

Dickson added that a preliminary safety data review pointed to a need for additional checks of the jet engine's fan blades, which were unique to the engine model and only used on 777 planes.

Officials from the FAA met with Pratt & Whitney and Boeing representatives on Sunday

evening, he added.

The US National Transportation and Safety Board also said it is investigating the incident, while United Airlines, Asiana, Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways grounded their planes earlier.

Japan's Transport Ministry had earlier said it had ordered stricter inspections of the engine after a Japan Airlines 777 plane flying from Haneda to Naha experienced trouble with 'an engine in the same family' in December.

Asiana Airlines, South Korea's second-largest carrier, had also said it would not fly any of its seven currently operational 777s.

The engine failure is unwelcome news for Boeing following several high-profile accidents.

The manufacturer's 737 Max was grounded worldwide in March 2019 after 346 people died in two crashes - the 2019 Lion Air disaster in Indonesia and an Ethiopian Airlines crash the

following year. Investigators said a main cause of both crashes was a faulty flight handling system known as the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System.

Boeing was forced to revamp the system and implement new pilot training protocols.

This month the aircraft made its first commercial flight in Europe since the grounding, after the continent's air safety regulator EASA approved the return of the 737 Max.

The FAA and Britain's Civil Aviation Authority have also cleared the aircraft for flying again.

The 737 Max was a big hit with airlines, becoming Boeing's fastest-selling aircraft until its grounding, which has now been lifted.

After the COVID-19 crisis decimated demand, airlines cancelled hundreds of orders for the plane.

AFP

COMMENTARY

Opt for digital solutions to comply easily with VAT

With the introduction of value-added tax (VAT) in Oman from April, businesses in the country will have to adapt to newer, faster techniques to comply with VAT regulations.

Adopting robust digital solutions will be a good start as compared to manual solutions. The digital business management solutions not only simplify operations, but also facilitate users to comfortably manage and grow their business without needing to know the finer nuances of accounting or technology. The key goal is to keep the user experience at core, offering speed, simplicity and flexibility at all times.

Maintain records easily

A move to a business management

software will help businesses to not only organise data, but also ensure that the financial records are easy to retrieve, anywhere anytime.

Along with the operational benefits, the simplicity and reliability offered by these solutions elevate the threat of losing books and information due to mismanagement, making it easy to comply and file VAT on time.

Access information conveniently

In a business, interdependence is the key. Departments are interlinked together, with each department helping the other out. This interdependence means that all departments must have access to the critical information of the business, anywhere, anytime. It is

therefore imperative that the data is readily available during filing returns, which can be easily facilitated through an effective business management



VIKAS PANCHAL

The writer is the business head at Tally Solutions in the Middle East

software.

Save time suitably

It takes time to create and gather information, when done manually. The associated costs also increases in such a

situation. A business management software gives businesses the comfort of creating and maintaining data sheets instantly, as most of them are simple

and easy to operate. Businesses can take advantage of increased efficiency and productivity to comply with VAT regulations with digital solutions and focus on other essential aspects of the company.

Preserve data safely

Even though a business might have a comprehensive manual system to maintain records, threats to accidents or robberies is always there, which can negatively impact the data. With business management software, it is possible to secure the data safely.

Experience reliability and scalability

It is quite normal to make mistakes in manual calculation. However, one small mistake in the financial calculation can be devastating for the business. But automation in this process brings perfection in work as there is no chance of making such mistake. In addition to reliability, business management software is also fast becoming a

favourite among companies and entrepreneurs because of its simple nature.

For a small business that is in its growth stage, opting for a digital solution will help them grow and scale operations systematically. So if you businesses are looking to boost productivity, keep data up to date and maintain minimal costs, switching to a business management software can be a convenient solution to ensure right compliance with the soon-to-be-introduced VAT.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Media Publication

Bank Muscat gives away RO400,000 in first draw of Al Mazyona scheme for 2021

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, in line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and commitment to partnership in promoting a strong savings culture in Oman conducted the first draw of the 2021 scheme for Al Mazyona at the bank's head office recently in the presence of H E Dr Hamood bin Ali bin Humaid al Marshoudi, Wali of Bidbid.

As many as 31 winners walked away with RO400,000 in high-value prizes in the draw. The winners included 10 Asalah customers who won RO25,000 each while 20 Al Jawhar customers walked away with prizes worth RO5,000 each. One lucky winner won the monthly mega prize of RO50,000 in the draw.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, deputy general manager - Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "The bank is pleased to conduct the first draw of the 2021 scheme and I congratulate all the lucky winners for their excellent savings habit, which has resulted in them winning these high-value



prizes. Bank Muscat is well known as an innovator in the financial services sector in Oman and the Al Mazyona scheme has been playing a very impor-

tant role in creating a good savings habit amongst people in the sultanate.

"The bank will continue to launch new innovative products

and services in response to the needs of our valued customers."

It is noteworthy that a large number of high-value prizes worth over RO5.6mn have been

exclusively reserved for Asalah and Al Jawhar customers in this year's scheme.

In particular, customers maintaining a minimum balance

of RO30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts will be automatically entered into the prize draw for two mega prizes of RO250,000 each in the special

Mid-year draw as well as the End of Year draw.

High savings Asalah Priority Banking customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO30,000 are eligible for 10 monthly prizes of RO25,000 each, 10 Mid-year and 10 End of Year prizes of RO50,000.

Al Jawhar customers who maintain a minimum balance of RO10,000 are eligible to win one of the 20 prizes of RO5,000 each in the monthly draws as well as 10 Mid-year and 10 End of Year prizes of RO20,000 each.

Al Jawhar customers with a salary of more than RO1,000 will also get a chance to win a fixed salary prize of RO500 every month for a year, with 10 winners being chosen every month.

With a record 7,470 prizes totaling over RO11mn to be given away during the year, the country's biggest prize draw scheme was launched earlier in January and seeks to promote a strong savings culture in Oman among all members of society.

Madayn takes part in Gulfood 2021 in Dubai

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn began its participation in one of the world's largest annual food and beverage trade shows - Gulfood 2021, which kicked off on Sunday at Dubai World Trade Centre in the United Arab Emirates. The five-day event is witnessing the participation of 2,500 companies representing the food and beverage industry from various countries worldwide.

Hamood bin Abdullah al Balushi, director of Omani Products Department at Madayn, commented that Madayn is participating in Gulfood for the ninth consecutive year given the significance of being present at such a global platform to promote Omani products and explore new markets for these products.

"Gulfood presents an ideal opportunity for the Omani food industries to feature their high



quality products to visitors from different countries. Madayn aims through the exhibition to disseminate awareness on the objectives of 'Made in Oman' campaign outside the sultanate, identify new markets and business opportunities, and attract new consumers regionally and internationally," Balushi

pointed out.

Various Omani companies and factories are taking part in Gulfood 2021 under Madayn's umbrella, which include Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives, Oman Foodstuff Factory, Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives, Al Joudah Food Tech Lab, Dhofar Poultry Company,

Pragati Glass, and Industrial Innovation Centre.

Through Gulfood 2021, the Omani companies aim at enhancing the presence of their products in various markets, and get familiarised with the latest products, trends and technologies in the food and beverage industry. The participating companies also look forward to explore new business deals to expand their businesses overseas.

Gulfood 2021 is being held while adhering to all rules and regulations in coordination with Dubai Health Authority and Dubai Municipality to ensure the health and safety of the visitors and participants. According to the organisers, the event is being delivered with strict standards of health and safety precautionary measures including social distancing, contactless transactions and hygiene protocols at all times.

NBO's Mazaya account offers more benefits and rewards

Committed to offering a superior banking experience, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has added a range of dedicated products and unmatched rewards to its popular Mazaya account.

Tailored to its customers' incomes and banking needs, the improved privilege account comes with a host of attractive benefits including its very own Entertainer and Nuqati programmes, which provide exclusive offers at thousands of merchants and access to airport lounges worldwide, as well as 2,000 bonus Nuqati points when opening an account.

Wessam al Asfoor, head of Premier Banking at NBO, said, "The experience of our customers is of paramount importance to us, as we continue to offer them more convenient and seamless solutions. De-



signed for select customers, Mazaya is the preferred choice for those wishing to make their busy lives easier. We want to encourage these customers to make the most of their money, whilst planning ahead."

With a dedicated relationship manager, priority experience at all NBO branches, and priority service in the call centre, Mazaya customers can

enjoy a prompt, efficient, and personalised service that suits their lifestyles. More perks include special rates on loans and deposits, as well as global investment products, in addition to, a free Credit Card and an exclusive Platinum Debit Card with increased withdrawal and POS limits.

Omanis and expats can avail the benefits of Mazaya, simply by maintaining a deposit of RO15,000 or having a minimum monthly salary of RO1,000. Keen to offer innovative products and services that suit its customers' evolving needs, NBO's accounts are supported by its award-winning mobile app, which is available around the clock.

For more information call 24770098, go to nbo.om, or visit one of NBO's branches, located across the sultanate.

Omani halwa now available at Sheraton Oman Hotel

Sheraton Oman Hotel, the iconic landmark of the sultanate, has introduced Omani halwa as part of its offerings as a takeaway, the country's most favourite sweet treat. Yes, Omani halwa, a symbol of hospitality is now being served during Omani Sabla Night which is held every Friday at the Courtyard gardens, the hotel's outdoor venue.

This Omani halwa made in-house and is available for sale in exquisitely designed package at the Tea Library. Starting from RO5, the halwa is available in two types of exclusive packaging, ideal to gift to friends, families and also for formal occasions.

Samir Messaoudi, general manager, Sheraton Oman, said, "We are delighted to introduce the Omani halwa to our culinary offerings. Keeping in line with our themed night that is focused on local cuisine and culture, Omani halwa speaks of tradition. This national dessert symbolises the legendary



Omani hospitality and is close to people's heart. Employing traditional methods and techniques, Omani chefs stir up this sweet delicacy in a 'Mirjin', which is a large copper pot used for halwa making. All traditional ingredients are locally sourced."

Sheraton halwa is a part of the Omani Sabla Night which

takes gastronomes on a journey of flavours, ingredients and colours into the sultanate's traditional kitchens.

At the time of conceptualisation, as a team, we did sample tastings for small social circles to ensure authenticity.

For prior and customised orders, contact Tea Library, Lobby Level, Sheraton Oman Hotel.

Al Bustan Palace named among top hotels

Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel has been named among the World's Top 500 by Travel+Leisure for 2021 for the second consecutive time.

Every year, the largest travel media brand in the United States, with an audience of 8.1mn, asks its readers to share their thoughts on destinations, city hotels, resorts, and more in its World's Best Awards survey.

Each prestigious edition of the resulting roster of properties, which is divided into eight geographic regions, serves as a trusted resource for millions of enthusiastic travelers around the world.

The inclusion of Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel on this year's list is the latest in a string of international awards the hotel has garnered, as it continues to maintain its reputation as one of the world's most luxurious resorts, and an ultimate destination for prestigious events and leisure alike.

Nabil Abdul Wahab al Zadjali, general manager of Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, said, "In the past year, the travel industry has confronted the



greatest challenge it has perhaps ever faced. Yet, we have risen to meet the moment, adapting our service and rethinking hospitality in ways that keep our guests safe and happy. Awards like this are a welcome testament that even through challenging times, we continue to set benchmarks for the industry and are able to present our guests with unforgettable

experiences and uncompromising hospitality."

Last year, Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel was also named in the Top 5 Resorts in North Africa and Middle East by Travel+Leisure and was also recognized with six awards from the prestigious World Travel Awards 2020, including World's Leading Palace Hotel, Oman's Leading Beach Resort

and Oman's Best MICE Hotel.

From award-winning restaurants, to world-class facilities and unparalleled surroundings, guests are offered the perfect setting for creating unforgettable memories in unbridled luxury. Whether staying for day or for a week, for work or for leisure, every moment is accounted for and no detail is overlooked.

Z-Corp with Al Wafa Centre in Sohar launches art contest

To encourage children with disabilities and special needs, The Zubair Corporation (Z-Corp) recently launched an art contest 'I am talented'. The art contest is being organised by the 'collaboration team' of Z-Corp in association with Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children. The 'collaboration team' comprises of a group of employees of Z-Corp who participate in community initiatives which are planned and executed by them.

The aim is to develop the artistic gifts, creative ideas and talent of the disabled and special needs children. The contest provides an exciting opportunity for children with disabilities and special needs from around North and South Batinah governorates to display their talent. The aim of the contest is to encourage children with disabilities and special needs to participate and showcase their skill.

Entries will be evaluated based on creativity and the inspiration behind the artwork by a panel of judges. The photos will be sent via WhatsApp to the jury consisting of artists Muhammad al Shukaili, Ahmed al Balushi, Samsa al Esayi and Maryam al Balushi. Z-Corp will be represented by Faisal al Mandhari, director of social communication at Z-Corp.

The art contest is being organised as part of Z-Corp's corporate social responsibility to



builds its programmes around factors such as employee engagement, community involvement and corporate giving. The objective of organising such events is to touch and improve upon the lives of the communities they live in. The Zubair Corporation handed over several sets of crayons and art paper which will be distributed at eight centres of Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children in North and South Batinah governorates. Each centre will pick best

paintings, out of which ten will be selected for the final contest. Faisal al Mandhari said, "This art contest is an important project that our team has announced. These children have their own exclusive vision and understanding of the world that surrounds them and we hope that through this art contest they find new ways to create and depict their ideas. "Studies have shown that while art is important for all children, it's vital for children with special needs and disabilities.

Art activities strengthen self-confidence, social skills and verbal capabilities. "We believe that embracing these special children's work and honouring their creations will give them a sense of pride and accomplishment, and enhance feelings of self-worth. We will be recognising the talent of these children in North and South Batinah governorates and most importantly integrating them into society." The winners of the contest will be announced at a later

stage. A member of the 'collaboration team' said, "We feel a complete sense of satisfaction in organising events that make a difference in the lives of these gifted children. We want to take up similar projects that enrich the life's of the people in the community we live." The Zubair Corporation's strategy to bring focus to its continued and evolving socially relevant work as a responsible corporate house with intent to make a positive difference in the society.

Occidental Oman provides over 300 tablets

As part of its social responsibility to local communities, Occidental Oman recently provided tablets for low income students in Hamra al Doroa, Dhahirah governorate, and students in Al Wusta governorate, where company concession areas are also located.

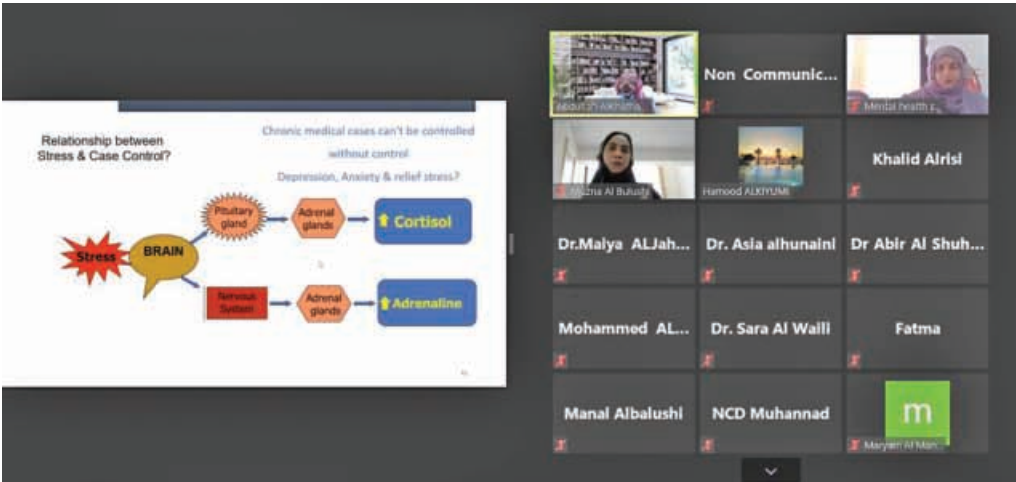
Held in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the project aims to support students in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Some 306 tablets were distributed to students from low-income families – 25 in Hamra al Doroa, 281 in Al Wusta – in order for the students to successfully integrate in schools operating through online distanced learning.

This initiative continues Occidental Oman's collaboration with the Ministry of Education over the past years, as the company has sponsored yearly ceremonies to honour high achieving school students in Occidental Oman's concession areas, as well as the 2019 project to install safety devices

on school buses serving government schools across Muscat governorate, and the company's English Training Program in concession areas.

"Occidental Oman is keen to support the advancement of local communities within our concession areas, particularly in support of school students, as it highlights the company's long-term focus on education as a central pillar for investment and development in Oman," said Stephen Kelly, president and general manager of Occidental Oman. "We are hopeful that the tablets provide vital e-learning channels for the students moving forward."

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



Workshop discusses integrating mental health into PHC settings

A two-day virtual workshop on 5-Steps Patients' Interview for Providing Mental Health Care approach at the primary health care (PHC) centres commenced on Monday. Organised by the Mental Health Section of the Ministry of Health's (MoH) Directorate General of Primary Health Care, the workshop aims at activating the integration of mental healthcare services into the primary healthcare centres, as well as enhancing the competence of the medical staff to diagnose early

and treat the common mental disorders. Around 90 family medicine doctors, general practitioners, psychologists, heads of mental health, and mental health focal points at governorates participate in the workshop moderated by the international expert Dr Abdullah al Khathami, consultant family and director of Initiative Primary Mental Health Care Program in Saudi Arabia. The workshop introduces a new concept that focuses on enhancing competency to better

diagnose the most common mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression, and the appropriate referrals to people experiencing a mental health crisis to specialised health facilities through implementing the five steps approach. The workshop is part of the training programmes provided by the Ministry of Health to qualify medical professionals in the field of mental health and thus upgrading the provided health care services in the sultanate.

Cyberbullying is parents' main concern

Being a parent was never easy as it involves constantly worrying about the child. However, it became even more challenging in modern times when various digital threats came to the stage. Such dangers as cyberbullying emerged with their ability to provoke stress, depression and social isolation. However, all can be prevented by maintaining prompt communication with a child and giving them a right stance regarding the Internet. According to 'Responsible Digital Parenting' survey, 56 per cent of Emirati parents claim that cyberbullying is a top concern when it comes to worries about their children. It is no surprise as this Internet phenomenon have already caused such problems as decrease in social activity and social isolation (40 per cent), decreased self-esteem (39 per cent), negative impact on child's performance at school (36 per cent), ongoing stress (31 per cent) and depression (31 per cent). Additionally, 32 per cent of children in the UAE have actually come across cyberbullying, be that being bullies themselves, seeing cases among their friends



or being bullied. This impressive number should have made parents think about the ways to prevent the proliferation of this phenomenon, however, not all the parents are aware of this. Particularly, 32 per cent of parents haven't discussed the ethics of the Internet with their child, while a quarter of them have not discussed safety rules on the Net. "There has always existed a certain threat landscape for parents, however, now it includes digital ones which can often be invisible as not every child tells their family about ongoing cyberbullying, for instance. According to our survey, 20 per cent think something threatens their child

on the Internet while 19 per cent find it hard to say if there are potential dangers, thus not communicating enough on the topic. It is quite disturbing statistics," commented Andrey Sidenko, head of Child Safety at Kaspersky Network. In this context, it is crucial to take special measures in order to safeguard your child's Internet presence. Kaspersky strongly recommends to: ►Be more involved in your kids' online life. Befriend them on social media platforms, communicate to learn more about modern trends and tendencies in social media. Chat with your child regularly to discuss their

online experiences. Create a communication strategy in which they understand they can reach out whenever they have any worries. ►Notice the changes in your child's behaviour, observe if they become more isolated or do not perform at school. In order to monitor this keep connecting with the school where they study. ►Install a reliable security solution such as Kaspersky Safe Kids to look after your child's digital life successfully and in a more productive way. Kaspersky is a global cybersecurity company founded in 1997. Kaspersky's deep threat intelligence and security expertise is constantly transforming into innovative security solutions and services to protect businesses, critical infrastructure, governments and consumers around the globe. The company's comprehensive security portfolio includes leading endpoint protection and a number of specialised security solutions and services to fight sophisticated and evolving digital threats.

Maserati employees share first images of Grecale SUV prototype

A prototype of the new Grecale SUV has been photographed outside the historic Maserati plant on Viale Ciro Menotti in Modena. The employees were the first to diffuse these images on the social networks. Innovative by nature, Maserati decided to share the photos of the new model exclusively with the Maserati Family. The prototype cars are currently undergoing a period of intensive road, circuit and off-road tests, in various conditions of use, to acquire vital data for the preparation of the new SUV's final setup. The Grecale will be built at Cassino (Italy), where an invest-

ment of about €800mn is planned. The Maserati Grecale will receive its World Premiere before the end of 2021. Maserati produces a complete range of unique cars with an amazing personality, immediately recognisable anywhere. With their style, technology and innately exclusive character, they delight the most discerning, demanding tastes and have always been a global automotive industry benchmark. A tradition of successful cars, each of them redefining what makes an Italian sports car in terms of design, performance, comfort, elegance and safety, currently available on



more than seventy markets internationally. Ambassadors of this heritage are the Quattroporte flagship, the Ghibli sports sedan, now also available in hybrid version, the Trident Brand's first electrified car, and the Levante, the first made by Maserati SUV, all models denoted by use of the choicest materials and technical solutions of superlative excellence. A complete range, including V6 and V8 petrol, 4 cylinder hybrid and V6 diesel powerplants, with rear-wheel and four-wheel drive. The range's prestige was recently even further enhanced by the introduction of the new Trofeo Collection, compris-

ing Ghibli, Quattroporte and Levante, equipped with the powerful 580 hp V8 engine. The top-of-the-range is the new MC20 supercar, powered by the ground-breaking Nettuno V6 engine, incorporating F1-derived technologies now made available in the power unit of a standard production car for the first time. Today, the Maserati range is produced at three plants: Ghibli and Quattroporte are built at Grugliasco (Turin) at the Avvocato Giovanni Agnelli Plant (AGAP), and Levante at the Mirafiori Plant in Turin. The new MC20 supercar is produced in Modena, at the historic Viale Ciro Menotti plant.

IAEA chief's visit significant: Iran

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Monday hailed as a 'significant achievement' the outcome of a visit by the head of the UN nuclear watchdog and a temporary agreement they reached on site inspections.

That deal effectively bought time as the United States, European powers and Tehran try to salvage the 2015 nuclear agreement that has been on the brink of collapse since Donald Trump withdrew from it.

Tehran now demands that Washington scrap punishing sanctions Trump reimposed in 2018, while Washington demands that Iran first return to all its nuclear commitments.

In the standoff, Iran's conservative-dominated parliament has demanded that Iran from Tuesday limit some inspections by the

A temporary solution had been reached with Tehran that enables the IAEA to retain a necessary degree of monitoring and verification work

RAFAEL GROSSI



Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi takes his face protection mask off prior to addressing the media on return from Iran, at Vienna International Airport in Austria on Sunday (AFP)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi held last-ditch talks in Tehran on Sunday where the two sides hammered out a temporary technical deal.

They confirmed that Iran will continue to allow access to UN inspectors to its nuclear sites -

but will for three months bar inspections of other, non-nuclear sites.

Grossi said afterwards that a 'temporary solution' had been reached with Tehran that enables the IAEA to retain 'a necessary degree of monitoring and verification work'.

Iran's Foreign Ministry

spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday the talks had 'resulted in a very significant diplomatic achievement and a very significant technical achievement'.

Khatibzadeh stressed that the outcome was 'within the framework of the parliament's binding law'.

Iran will temporarily suspend so-called 'voluntary transparency measures' - notably inspections of non-nuclear sites, including military sites suspected of nuclear-related activity.

Tehran will for 'three months record and keep the information of some activities and monitoring equipment' at such sites, Iran's

Atomic Energy Organization said.

This means that cameras will keep running at those sites, 'but no footage will be given to the IAEA', Khatibzadeh said.

If the US sanctions are not lifted within three months, the footage will be deleted, Iran's atomic body has said.

AFP

US top general urges Iran to maintain restraint

Muscat, Oman - Iran must refrain from any provocation as Washington steps up efforts to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran, the head of US forces in the Middle East told AFP.

"I would think this would be a good time for everybody to behave soberly and cautiously, and see what happens," General Kenneth McKenzie said in an interview on Sunday during a visit to Oman, from where he flew close to neighbouring Iran in a helicopter.

"I do believe we will be prepared for any eventuality, however."

US President Joe Biden's administration, European powers and Iran have boosted attempts to revive a 2015 deal that has been on the brink of collapse since Donald Trump withdrew from it three years later.

On Sunday after talks in Tehran, UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi announced a 'temporary solution' to allow Iranian facility inspections to continue.

The four-star general, head of the US Army Central Command (Centcom) which covers the region urged Iran not to undertake any 'nefarious activities' in a bid to re-

build trust. "I think they would want to be recognised as a responsible member of the family of nations and a stable member in the region," McKenzie said.

The US accuses Iran of destabilising the region through financial and military support for Shiite militant groups, especially in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.

Washington also accuses Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards of disrupting maritime traffic in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a choke-point through which a fifth of world oil output passes.

The Strait of Hormuz was the focus of the US general's visit to Oman, officially intended to make contact with the country's new chief of staff, Rear Admiral Abdallah ben Khamis al Raissi.

On Saturday, he visited Oman's rugged peninsula at the naval base at Khassab, which controls maritime traffic in the strait from its side, flying over the sea towards the Iranian island of Qeshm.

"We were about 28 miles (45km) across the channel and we were looking at Qeshm island," he said. "It was a hazy day, couldn't see it," he added with a grin.

AFP



This file photo shows watchtowers on a high-security facility near what is believed to be a re-education camp where mostly Muslim minorities are detained, on the outskirts of Hotan, in China's Xinjiang region (AFP)

Xinjiang a 'shining example' of human rights progress, claims Chinese minister

Beijing, China - China's treatment of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet was a 'shining example' of the country's human rights progress, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Monday as other countries mulled actions over its repression of Uighurs.

Rights groups believe at least one million Uighurs and other mostly-Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in camps in the northwest Xinjiang region, where China is also accused of forcibly sterilising women and imposing a regime of forced labour.

After initially denying the camps existed, Beijing later defended them as vocational training centres aimed at reducing the appeal of extremism.

"Places inhabited by ethnic minorities, such as Xinjiang and

Tibet, have stood out as shining examples of China's human rights progress," Wang said at a forum on US-China relations in Beijing.

Wang made his speech as politicians in countries including the United States condemn China's incarceration of minorities in Xinjiang and hours before he was scheduled to address the UN's annual Human Rights Council session.

The Foreign Minister will address the UN body when he speaks via videolink later on Monday.

Wang will 'share China's philosophy, practice and experience in protecting human rights' in his speech to the council, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

But the US State Department has said China's actions in Xin-

jiang amount to genocide, while Canada is weighing a similar declaration.

Rights groups and activists say Tibetans have also suffered harsh restrictions on their religion and culture under Chinese rule - including the demolition of monasteries - which culminated in several self-immolation protests by Tibetans in recent years.

Reporters are banned from independent reporting in Tibet, where Beijing insists it has brought development to a previously backward region.

Wang on Monday said China was 'always committed' to protecting human rights and cited the growth of per capita GDP and life expectancy in the regions as evidence that rights were being safeguarded.

AFP

Iraqi dies of wounds sustained in Arbil rocket attack: Ministry

Baghdad, Iraq - An Iraqi civilian wounded in a rocket attack targeting the Arbil airport in northern Iraq last week has died, authorities in the Kurdistan region said on Monday, raising the toll to two dead.

On February 15, more than a dozen rockets were aimed at a military complex inside the Arbil airport that hosts foreign troops deployed as part of a US-led coalition helping Iraq fight extremists since 2014.

But many of the rockets struck all over the city's northwest, including in residential districts, where they wounded five civilians.

One of them died on Monday, said the spokesman for the autonomous Kurdistan region's health ministry, Bajjar Mousa.

"One of the wounded getting treatment at the hospital has died. We could not save his life despite several days of trying," Mousa told AFP.

The second death was a foreign civilian contractor working



This image grab shows damage following a rocket attack a week back targeting a military complex inside the Arbil airport that hosts foreign troops deployed as part of a US-led coalition (AFP)

with the US-led coalition, the alliance's spokesman said.

The spokesman could not confirm the fatality's nationality but told AFP he was not American. Nine others working at the military base were wounded.

The attack was the first in

nearly two months targeting Western military or diplomatic installations in Iraq, after dozens of similar incidents last year that were blamed on pro-Iranian Shiite factions.

A shadowy group calling itself Awliyaa al-Dam (Guardians of

Blood) claimed the attack and in a follow-up statement vowed to keep targeting US forces in Iraq.

The violence was condemned by the United Nations, which called it 'reckless', as well as a host of countries.

AFP

Gunmen kill four women aid workers in Pakistans North Waziristan district

Peshawar, Pakistan - Four women aid workers were gunned down on Monday in a restive part of northwestern Pakistan, police said, as a fresh wave of extremist violence rattles the Afghan borderlands.

The aid workers were ambushed by two gunmen as they were driving through a village in North Waziristan district, according to local police chief Shafiullah Gandapur, who said

just one passenger survived the assault. "No one has claimed responsibility for the attack so far but it was surely an act of terrorism," he told AFP.

Gandapur said the aid workers were affiliated with a programme run by a local institute to develop household skills for women.

The incident and death toll was confirmed by Rasul Khan, another local police official.

The so-called tribal areas along the Afghan border remain notorious for the availability of cheap guns, drugs and smuggled goods. The region was once home to a wide array of extremist groups and was a focal point in the global war on terror.

Attacks have decreased in recent years following a series of military offensives against home-grown and foreign militants.

In 2014, the army launched a

massive operation to wipe out militant bases in North Waziristan aimed at ending a near decade-long insurgency that cost thousands of lives.

But militant groups are still able to carry out sporadic, isolated assaults. A recent surge in attacks targeting security forces along the Afghan border has sparked fears that extremist groups may be regrouping.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

UK's PM eyes end to lockdown as one-third of adults get jabs

London, UK - Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to start unwinding England's third and potentially final coronavirus lockdown, as a quickening UK-wide inoculation drive relieves pressure on overstretched hospitals.

In a statement to parliament on Monday, Johnson is set to confirm the reopening of all English schools on March 8 in the first big step towards restoring normal life, nearly a year after he imposed the first stay-at-home order.

The Conservative prime minister, who was accused of acting too late and relaxing curbs too early last year, says he will lay out a 'cautious but irreversible' plan to ensure no more lockdowns.

"Today I'll be setting out a roadmap to bring us out of lockdown cautiously," he said in a Downing Street release, ahead of his House of Commons appearance and a televised news conference later. "Our priority has always been getting children back into school which we know is crucial for their education as well as their mental and physical well-being, and we will also be prioritising ways for people to reunite with loved ones safely," Johnson said.

Britain is one of the countries hardest-hit by the COVID-



A doctor administers an AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine dose to a patient at a vaccination centre in Sheffield, northern England, on Saturday (AFP)

19 pandemic, with more than 120,000 deaths.

It was the first nation to begin a mass vaccination campaign, in December, but surging case numbers forced a return to lockdown and shuttered schools in early January after an easing of curbs over Christmas.

More than 17mn people have now received at least a first vaccine dose - one-third of the adult UK population.

Case numbers falling

Over the weekend, the government said it would seek to offer a dose to everyone aged over 50 by mid-April, and to every other adult by the end of July, accelerating the latter timetable from September previously.

Case numbers are falling again and early evidence suggests the vaccinations are reducing serious illness, after some intensive-care units were overrun last month and queues

of ambulances formed outside hospitals, unable to transfer their patients.

Johnson said the planned relaxations would be uniform across England, after regionalised tiers were put in place last year, but stressed that further progress would hinge on factors such as any new COVID variants.

That, and proof that the National Health Service is not facing any more 'unsustainable

pressure', offer Johnson some flexibility against pressure from Conservative backbenchers who are pressing for a cast-iron timeline to normality by the summer.

Vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi confirmed on Monday that pupils would go back to schools en masse on March 8 rather than in a staggered return, insisting widespread testing would make it safe.

AFP



A health worker takes a nasal swab from a passenger for RT-PCR tests at a railway terminus, in Mumbai on Monday (AFP)

Mumbai imposes fresh restrictions

New Delhi, India - India's financial capital Mumbai imposed fresh coronavirus restrictions on Monday as a rise in cases in the worst-affected region sparked fears of a new wave, while the country's vast inoculation drive fell behind schedule.

All religious, social and political gatherings are banned in the city and the surrounding western state of Maharashtra, home to 110mn people, after infections spiked to levels last seen in October. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said he was 'worried about the severity of a second wave if it hits the state', which has recorded nearly 52,000 deaths since the pandemic began.

"The simple mantra is wear a mask, follow discipline

and avoid lockdown. We will review the situation again in the next eight days and decide on a lockdown," Thackeray said on Sunday.

India's tough nationwide lockdown imposed in March has largely been relaxed, with even its famously lavish weddings and cricket crowds returning, albeit with numbers capped.

Daily new cases peaked at more than 97,000 in September but have been falling sharply, coming in at under 9,000 a day earlier this month. But the past two weeks have seen an uptick, with around 14,000 new infections on Monday, the biggest rise coming in Maharashtra, taking India's total past 11mn since the pandemic began with 156,000 deaths.

'Vaccine giant told to prioritise India'

New Delhi, India - The world's biggest vaccine maker, India's Serum Institute, has urged other countries to be 'patient' about it supplying anti-coronavirus shots, saying it has been instructed to prioritise its home market.

"Dear countries & governments, as you await #COVID-SHIELD supplies, I humbly request you to please be patient," Serum chief Adar Poonawalla tweeted on Sunday.

@SerumInstIndia has been directed to prioritise the huge needs of India and along with that balance the needs of the rest of the world. We are trying our best."

Serum, from its sprawling facility in Pune in western India, is producing hundreds of millions of doses of the As-

traZeneca vaccine.

Many countries around the world, particularly poorer nations, are relying heavily on the company for supplies of the vaccine, and it has already shipped millions of doses abroad.

The Serum Institute also plans to supply 200mn doses to Covax, a World Health Organization-backed effort to procure and distribute inoculations to poor countries.

Poonawalla did not say who had told the firm to prioritise India, or whether the instructions were new.

India's aim of inoculating 300mn people by July is falling well behind schedule with just over 11mn shots worked out so far.

AFP

German pupils back to schools despite rising cases

Berlin, Germany - Hundreds of thousands of German pupils returned to schools and kindergartens for the first time in two months on Monday, despite fears of a third coronavirus wave fuelled by the British variant.

Schools and daycare centres reopened in ten German regions, including the capital Berlin and the most populous state North-Rhine Westphalia.

Most schools are limiting the return to pupils attending primary classes one to three. Class sizes have also been halved, alongside other precautions such as mask-wearing and airing out rooms, but critics have questioned whether the timing is right for the reopenings.

In discussions with party colleagues on Monday, Chancellor



Second-grade pupils attend class at the Petri primary school, in Dortmund on Monday (AFP)

Angela Merkel reportedly mooted plans for a step-by-step relaxation of measures in areas such as social contact, schools and restaurants and culture.

Merkel argued that relaxation measures should be strongly tied to testing, according to participants in the meeting.

Yet experts are warning that

Germany could be at the start of a third coronavirus wave, as case numbers have begun to rise again in recent days.

On Monday, the nationwide

seven-day incidence rate returned to 61 cases per 100,000 people after sinking to almost 50 in the past weeks.

"We're seeing that the numbers are climbing again. That's annoying, and it brings back some uncertainty," Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Sunday, urging 'caution'. Spahn had last week said that the more infectious UK variant of the coronavirus is spreading rapidly in Germany, where it accounts for more than one in five cases.

Yet Families Minister Franziska Giffey on Monday defended the decision to allow schools to reopen. "Taking the first steps to open things up is the right thing to do for children and their wellbeing," Giffey said.

AFP

Halt repression: UN chief to junta

Geneva, Switzerland - UN chief Antonio Guterres on Monday condemned the 'brutal force' used by those behind Myanmar's coup and urged the military to immediately halt the repression and release prisoners.

In his annual address to the UN Human Rights Council, Guterres mentioned only one country by name: Myanmar.

"Today, I call on the Myanmar military to stop the repression immediately," he said, in a pre-recorded video message at the opening of the council's 46th session.

"Release the prisoners. End the violence. Respect human rights, and the will of the people expressed in recent elections," he said, insisting that 'coups have no place in our modern world'.

Myanmar's authorities have gradually ratcheted up their tactics against a massive and largely peaceful civil disobedience campaign demanding the return of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Saturday marked the deadliest day since the February 1 coup, with two people killed after security forces fired on a rally in Mandalay and a third man shot dead in Yangon.

And the junta warned protesters against inciting people 'to a confrontation path where they will suffer the loss of life'.

Guterres had already condemned Saturday's 'deadly violence', insisting in a tweet on Sunday that 'the use of lethal force, intimidation and harassment against peaceful demonstrators is unacceptable'.

AFP

EU warns Myanmar, mulls sanctions on Russia over crackdown on Navalny

Brussels, Belgium - The EU on Monday warned Myanmar's military rulers it 'stands ready' to impose sanctions over their coup, as foreign ministers meeting in Brussels also considered targeting those behind Russia's crackdown on Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

The top diplomats from the 27-nation bloc faced a full agenda for talks that will also include a wide-ranging videoconference with new US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Shortly into the meeting, the ministers issued a statement on Myanmar, saying 'the EU stands ready to adopt restrictive measures targeting those directly responsible for the military coup and their economic interests'.

They called for 'a de-escalation of the current crisis' triggered by the February 1 coup by



Armed police personnel advance towards protesters, in Myanmar's largest city Yangon on Monday (AFP)

Myanmar's military and demanded the overthrown civilian government be restored.

Targeted sanctions

While they took a last-chance stance on Myanmar, there were expectations they would pull the

trigger on sanctions against Russian officials over imprisoned opposition leader Navalny and repression of his supporters.

Any such move would come two weeks after EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell was caught in a diplomatic ambush in Moscow

that enraged member states.

Capitals are eyeing using the EU's new human rights sanctions regime for the first time to hit individuals responsible for the Russian clampdown with asset freezes and visa bans, diplomats said.

Borrell called for a 'united and determined' response from the bloc as he arrived for the meeting.

"It's clear that Russia is on a confrontational course with the European Union," he said.

Diplomats said they expect a political agreement to be reached on punishing officials - with the list of names to be worked out in the coming days.

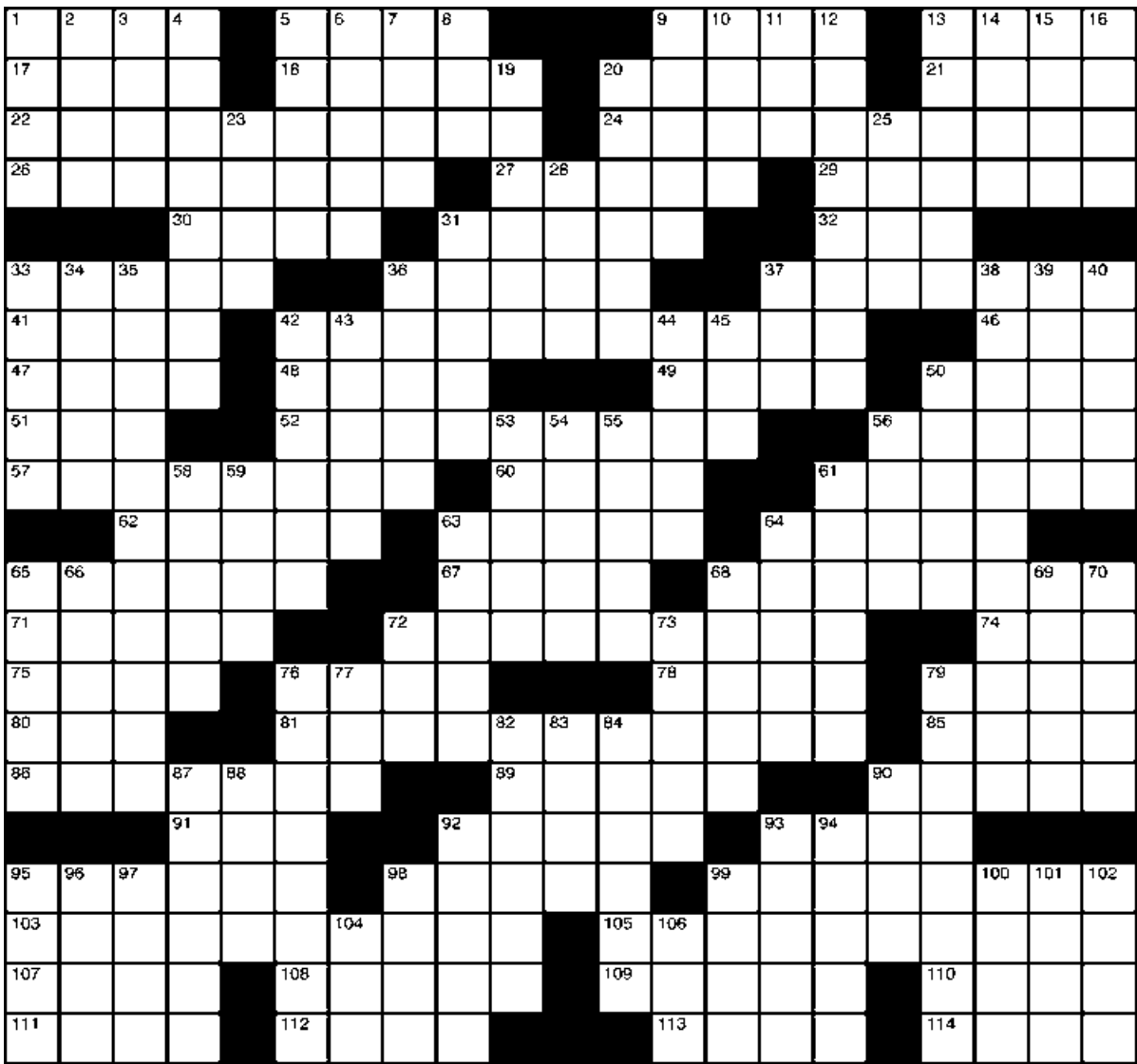
"There is a very large majority supporting the adoption of new sanctions," Romania's Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu said.

Two of Navalny's closest associates called for the targeting of Putin's closest allies at a meeting with eight EU foreign ministers in Brussels Sunday.

But European diplomats say only those directly implicated in the clampdown can be targeted because the list needs to withstand any court challenge.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

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65 Impetuous

- 66 Evangelist McPherson
68 Wernher von ___
69 Main trunk
70 Parisian pates
72 Communications inits.
73 Plant firmly
76 Adele and Fred
77 Serbian city
79 Exiled
82 Long or Ellis, e.g.
83 Carol
84 Hellas, in English
87 Pine Tree State native
88 ___ dixit
90 Shake it or break it
92 Call Me ___, Bob Hope film
93 Rouen’s river
94 Everything, to Catullus
95 Some are liberal
96 Before thing or fire
97 Snick’s partner
98 NYSE position
99 Captain Hook’s companion
100 Ripped
101 Biographer Ludwig
102 Rod’s mate
104 Wheat in Provence
106 Like Methusaleh

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your parents play a role in the day’s activities, even if they’re distant memories now. You’re still one result of their lives, and your connection to your heritage is as strong as it’s ever been. You don’t want to be doing any gambling at all. Why leave your future to fate? How others handle their money is their business, but when it comes to your own paycheque, don’t take any risks.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your charm and warmth are perfect for quieter activities. You might find it easier than usual to engage people who are ordinarily kind of difficult to manage. Make the most of it! Your assigned tasks might be fluctuating, but your final goal is set in stone. You should keep a vision of it before you at all times. You’re at the office for one reason and one reason only.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

It’s time to show how flexible you can be, so make sure that you’re dealing with the world as it really is, not how you wish it could be. Things are sure to get better as soon as your attitude adjusts. Being complex works for you. You have just the right amount of fun. You’re not exhausted and you’re not bored. That leaves you with plenty of energy for the tasks at hand.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You feel happier than you have in a while, no matter what’s going on in your life. Some part of you is smiling, so focus on that and the rest should take care of itself. Encourage others to do the same! Work issues drown out all of your personal problems. Throwing yourself into life at work is the most productive way to make the most of things, so keep busy. If there’s a lull, go over fine details.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You’ve got friends who know just how to help, as long as you can reach them in time. Keep a line available for making sure you can get in touch with those who are closest to you. You should waste more time over the weekend so you won’t be so tempted to do it at the office. You’ll have to count on others to hold your feet to the fire. And by the way, they will.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your newest ideas are your best ones today, so even if you’ve got a few old favourites kicking around, try to focus on whatever came out of your brain most recently. If you get a bit stir crazy by the end of weekends, you’ll be pleased with the general tone at work now. There’s plenty going on. With all the movement, you can’t help but enjoy the feel of the workplace.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Now is a great time to focus on crafting, home brewing, or other fun activities that can also save you some money. Even if you feel flush, it’s better to sock away the excess than fritter it on unnecessary purchases. You have too much work staring you in the face to waste time yakking. But some colleagues have stories too interesting to ignore. You’ll have to listen before cutting to the chase.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

This is not the time to stick your neck out. Far from it! Someone may be looking to make an example of you, and that’s not good for anyone. Just relax and wait for your time to come soon. Looks are everything when the boss is watching. Well, almost everything. Why act bored? Keep busy and you’ll kill two birds with one stone. If there’s not a lot going on, generate your own work.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

This isn’t a day of thrills and excitement, but how many of those can you take? You need to make sure that you’re sticking to your routines as much as possible. Clear out some old tasks. Dare to dream. Your career is driven by what you want. The stars suggest behind-the-scenes assistance regarding hidden opportunities. Stay tuned!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your energy level is nearing a record high today, so make sure that you’re making the best of it! You could also just focus on one big plan, if that’s where you’re at. Don’t expect work to feel like a night at the ball. It might not be a sizzling affair, but at least you don’t have to worry about getting home in a pumpkin. You’ll have a good day if you can manage to look on the bright side.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You’re most likely the one off in a corner, deep in conversation with another like mind. Your intense personal energy is perfect for amazing conversations and creating connections. Rehearse a few lines, because you’ll have to start talking before you even have a chance to think. Prepare yourself for a steady bombardment of e-mails, telephone calls, and conversations.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Creative energy is filling every crevice of your being! Make some art, dance in the living room, act out improve scenes at work, or do whatever comes naturally. You may have to dig to find it, but that golden nugget of wisdom is there for the taking. One of the things you enjoy most about your job is the opportunity to learn and this moment presents a new chance that you should go for.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The velocity of light was first measured by
a. Einstein
b. Newton
c. Romer
d. Galileo
2. The third highest nation award given for distinguished service in any field in India is
a. Padma Vibhushan
b. Padma Bhushan
c. Padma Shri
d. Bharat Ratna
3. Triple antigen provides immunity to children against all of the following disease, except
a. diphtheria
b. polio
c. tetanus
d. whooping cough

Answers: 1: c 2: b 3: b

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

BOGGLER

G	S	E	Y
L	E	O	K
N	H	E	O
N	O	L	R

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

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (FEBRUARY 22)

SITELIE	ACTIV	TUTTI
ARMED	BRAIN	DEACTING
TOOTH	SHAND	ARRISTED
ALLIE	ETERNIS	TRITO
ROLE	TWAVIST	REIN
TRIGGS	PHIT	RAINS
ESSIS	EDEN	TRIP
ASTIS	SOIT	MOPED
SICOTIE	DEASH	HITS
TAHOE	RUNS	ODEA
TOTOT	OKKA	SMEW
TIME	ELER	CHIEF
TEER	TODOL	HARS
ACRE	ALID	BOOSE
PERKOE	ELME	OTUS
BONES	CHIN	ROS
ORIS	TOOP	UNCENT
ATE	NOIS	GOING
SERRATES	TOOOO	OOATIR
MEAPERS	STIANN	UNDER
DEER	ESTIE	REARDS

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



HAIRCARE



Benefits of coconut oil

Immense damage can be caused to hair by daily grooming practices like washing, brushing, and styling which also leave hair looking frizzy, broken and dry. However, regular use of coconut oil can reverse this damage and ensure healthy growth, say haircare experts.

Hair is composed of three key components - the medulla (a soft, central part of the hair shaft), the cortex (the thickest layer of your hair which contains lots of fibrous proteins and the colour pigment) and the cuticle (the tough, protective outer layer). Washing, styling and colouring your hair can damage the cuticle, rendering it unable to protect the central parts of the hair shaft.

Studies show that coconut oil is often said to be the best oil to use on your hair to reduce protein loss and keep it looking healthy. Researchers found that coconut oil prevented protein loss better than other oils when applied either before or after the hair is washed. In fact, studies also showed that coconut oil reduced protein loss in hair that was undamaged, bleached, chemically treated and UV exposed.

Coconut oil is predominantly made up of a medium-chain fatty acid called lauric acid which gives it a long, straight structure that is more easily absorbed deep into the hair shaft.

Damage when wet

There are a few ways to apply oil to your hair to help protect it from damage.

First, applying oil to your hair before it's washed can help reduce the amount of damage it sustains during washing and while it's wet. Hair is said to be most vulnerable to damage when it's wet. This is because of subtle, structural changes that occur when it absorbs water.

When you wet your hair, the thick, central cortex soaks up the water and swells, causing a structural change in the cuticle. The hair cuticle is actually made up of flat, overlapping scales that are attached towards the root end of your hair and point towards the tip. When the cortex of your hair absorbs water and swells up, these scales are pushed outward so

Other benefits of coconut oil

Lice prevention: One small study found that when combined with anise in a spray, coconut oil was 40% more effective at treating head lice.

Sun protection: UV filters can help protect your hair from sun damage. Some studies have found coconut oil to have a sun protection factor of 8, so putting it on your hair could be useful.

Dandruff treatment: While no studies have examined coconut oil specifically, it has antimicrobial properties that could be useful for treating dandruff.

Hair loss prevention: Excessive grooming can damage the hair shaft, which in extreme circumstances can cause hair loss. Coconut oil can help keep your hair manageable and in good condition.

they stick up. This makes wet hair much easier to damage, especially when brushing or styling.

Applying oil to your hair before you wash it can reduce the amount of water absorbed by the hair shaft and the degree to which the cuticle scales stick out. This makes it less prone to damage while it is wet.

Second, coating your hair in oil after you wash it helps make it softer and smoother. This reduces the amount of friction caused by styling, making your hair less likely to snag and break.



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BIRTHDAY WISHES



KAUSHAL PANDYA
February 23

Happy Birthday Kaushal,
May God Bless you.
Thanks for came into our
family and make us proud.
With love Bhagwatiba,
Sanat, Vishal, Yashica,
Tapan, Bhumica, Anand,
Prahar and Garvit.

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DRESSING DECREE

HOW TO WEAR A TIE

When you grab hold of a tie to complete your work attire each morning, let it not be a habit, devoid of style or creativity. Your tie should be just like the cherry on top of a slice of cake.

While many men love to believe that everything goes well with everything when choosing a tie to match their outfit, nothing can be more far from the truth. You just cannot wear 'a tie' with any shirt or with any outfit. The tie you wear must justify its presence against its backdrop - which is not only your shirt but also the occasion as well as your frame of mind.

They say, the wrong tie in the wrong place, at the wrong time, can be as embarrassing as wearing a denim jacket to the boardroom. So, it can be helpful to know some basic rules when it comes to wearing ties for different occasions and to suit varied formal attire.

Ask the stylists and they will tell you, that bold colours do not go well with bold colours, and prints do not go well with prints, with regard to combinations of neck ties and shirts. While some prefer to label their poor taste as going 'out of the box' or making 'a new style statement', the truth is, they are quite ignorant about the rules of the game.

For instance, even body type dictates the length and width of the tie to be worn, forget the shade or the print. So a lean guy would look awkward in a broad tie and a thin tie would be lost on a broad, well-built physique.

Also, not all textures or fabrics are suitable for ties worn to the office, neither can one been seen wearing a sombre formal tie for a casual event where the dress code of 'smart casuals' does make room for some play with ties and scarves.

Wearing a tie can be quite a daunting task for beginners seeking to put on a new style. However, if you follow some basic rules, you can avoid erring on the wrong side and, in the bargain, learn something about your own style quotient - what you can carry best. But remember, when your shirt or blazer screams for attention, let your tie take a bow in simplicity. And if your shirt/blazer is simple, let your tie become the 'hero' of your attire!

Expression

A tie is an accessory that needs to be adapted to suit every occasion. It is also a strong piece that allows you to express your own personality. Depending on your mood of the day and the event, you can wear a rather classic tie or a simple one. To choose the tie that will perfectly complement your outfit, you can play on the material, colour, or shape of the tie knot.

Fabrics

In terms of materials, synthetic fabrics are to be avoided altogether because synthetic fabrics age badly and may have a quite shiny appearance that is not very elegant. A tie with a beautiful material can be in silk, wool or cotton. Wool is an interesting material that stands out from traditional silk ties while the cotton knit brings a modern-retro side, especially in peppy styles.

Colours

The colour of the tie is chiefly meant to contrast or complement the colour of the shirt worn with it. This helps one to be creative as well as assertive in selecting the most apt tie. A navy blue tie would sit well over a white or sky blue shirt. At the same time, a navy blue tie with a silver streak would also unleash an element of style when worn with a navy blue shirt. One has to learn how to contrast or complement the shirt.

Patterns

When it comes to prints and patterns, there is one simple rule - plain shirt, printed tie; printed shirt, plain tie. It would, hence, look ridiculous to wear a printed tie over a printed shirt as both prints would clash and cancel each other. However, prints can complement each other, if there is some relation between the print on the shirt and the print on the tie. You never wear a tie with floral prints over a shirt with a floral print. But, you could indeed wear a tie with a leafy print over a shirt with a floral print - though this would go well for a less serious occasion or outing.

Different colours, prints and fabrics of ties are suitable for different occasions and should not be mixed up. But, in case of a black tie event, the right necktie to wear is none. Put on a bow tie instead.

Five tying styles



Four In Hand Knot

Popularity: **Common**
Difficulty: **Easy**
Size: **Small**



Half Windsor Knot

Popularity: **Common**
Difficulty: **Easy/Medium**
Size: **Medium**



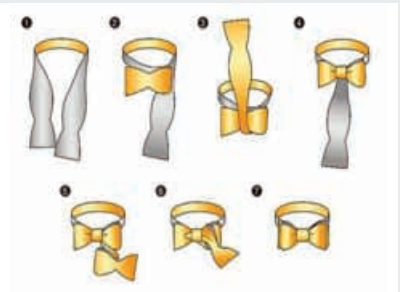
Full Windsor Knot

Popularity: **Common**
Difficulty: **Easy/Medium**
Size: **Large**



Nicky Knot

Popularity: **Uncommon**
Difficulty: **Easy**
Size: **Medium**



Bow Tie Knot

Popularity: **Common**
Difficulty: **Easy/Medium**
Size: **Medium**

Conway's unbeaten 99 sets up big win for NZ

NEW ZEALAND VS AUSTRALIA FIRST T20I

Christchurch, New Zealand - New Zealand utterly humiliated Australia's BBL XI in the opening T20I on the tenth anniversary of the Christchurch earthquake, hammering the tourists by 53 runs at Hagley Oval on Monday, the biggest ever margin of victory for them over their rivals across the Tasman in the T20 format of the international game.

Devon Conway was calmness and poise personified to maintain his outstanding start to representing New Zealand, compiling an unbeaten 99 to lift his side to 184 for five after the Australians had made the swifter start to claim three wickets inside the first four overs.

Chasing at least 20 runs more than they should have been, Aaron Finch's team were never a chance after being left completely bereft by the swinging new ball in the hands of Tim Southee and Trent Boult.

Together, they reduced the Australians to 19 for four, leaving the wrist spinner Ish Sodhi with a mop-up operation that handed him his best figures in T20Is.

Sams, Richardson nail the powerplay

Fewer than 24 hours after emerging from two weeks of quarantine with limited training, the Australia pace attack might have been expected to start uncertainly and then build into their work. Instead, Daniel Sams and Jhye Richardson - in his first T20I since early 2019 - produced strong opening spells to put the hosts in early trouble.

With Adam Zampa handed the second over of the innings to keep New Zealand from getting consistent pace on the ball, Sams coaxed Martin Guptill into slicing behind point in the opening over of the series.

When Richardson angled and swung a yorker right into the base of Tim Seifert's off stump, and then Kane Williamson was pouched behind the stumps when trying to pull a ball from Sam that was tight to his body,



New Zealand's Devon Conway celebrates his half century against Australia in Christchurch on Monday (AFP)

the tourists appeared to have put together the sort of powerplay that would decide the contest.

Conway gem holds hosts together

Out of a tally of 34 for three from the opening six overs, Conway had already looked a class apart in fashioning 16 from 12 balls with a boundary and a six.

In terms of shot production, selection and concentration he was more than a match for an attack that was at the top end of BBL standard, and with help from Glenn Phillips, Jimmy Neesham

and Mitchell Santner, Conway built stands worth 74 (50 balls), 47 (27) and finally 44 from 19 balls at the death. New Zealand's final 13 overs tallied 146, a superb recovery that Conway had helmed as though already a seasoned international performer. He resembled, among others, a latter-day Mike Hussey.

Southee, Boult swing through Australia

For a touring top order thinking mostly in terms of big hitting, the sight of Southee and Boult curling the ball around corners

was about as foreign to their mindsets and techniques as Pete Sampras at Roland Garros.

It was not entirely surprising, if no less galling for Australia's planners, to see the touring top order fold with alarming speed. Finch, still out of sorts, sliced his first ball to gully; debutant Josh Philippe miscued a pull shot; Matthew Wade showed scant respect to Boult's away swing with predictable consequences, and Glenn Maxwell's flat feet left him virtually guaranteed to edge Southee into a well-stocked New Zealand slips cordon.

Mitchell Marsh and Marcus Stoinis tried to remember how best to leave the ball outside off stump, but at 19 for four, the remainder of the innings was more or less academic.

Sodhi finishes the tourists off

Sodhi entered the attack, after Marsh and Stoinis had made some semblance of a recovery via some loose stuff from Kyle Jamieson.

Gaining plenty of bounce and just enough turn with subtle variation, Sodhi was gifted his first wicket when Stoinis shovelled a short ball straight back to him. But the remainder of his spell was much too beguiling for an Australia lower order facing a required rate well above 11 per over and straining for the boundary: figures of four for 28 were a new international best, punctuated too by 13 dot balls. The final overs were those desultory passages of a contest long since decided in favour of New Zealand.

SCOREBOARD			
NEW ZEALAND			
M Guptill	c Agar b Sams	0	(3)
T Seifert	b J Richardson	1	(5)
K Williamson	c Wade b Sams	12	(33)
D Conway	not out	99	(59)
G Phillips	c Marsh b Stoinis	30	(20)
J Neesham	c Wade b J Richardson	26	(15)
M Santner	not out	7	(5)
Extras	(b 2, lb 3, w 4)	9	
TOTAL	184 for five in 20 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-11, 3-19, 4-93, 5-140			
Bowling: D Sams 4-0-40-2, A Zampa 3-0-20-0, J Richardson 4-0-31-2, K Richardson 4-0-42-0, A Agar 2-0-20-0, M Stoinis 2-0-17-1, G Maxwell 1-0-9-0			
AUSTRALIA			
M Wade	c Williamson b Boult	12	(32)
A Finch	c Conway b Southee	1	(2)
J Philippe	c Conway b Boult	2	(3)
M Marsh	c Santner b Jamieson	45	(33)
G Maxwell	c Neesham b Southee	1	(5)
M Stoinis	c & b Sodhi	8	(11)
A Agar	c Jamieson b Sodhi	23	(33)
D Sams	c Jamieson b Sodhi	1	(3)
J Richardson	st Seifert b Santner	11	(3)
K Richardson	c Neesham b Sodhi	5	(5)
A Zampa	not out	13	(8)
Extras	(lb 1, nb 1, w 7)	9	
TOTAL:	131 in 17.3 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-8, 3-16, 4-19, 5-56, 6-98, 7-99, 8-99, 9-108, 10-131			
Bowling: T Southee 3-0-10-2, T Boult 3-0-22-2, K Jamieson 3-0-32-1, J Neesham 1-0-9-0, I Sodhi 4-0-28-4, M Santner 3-3-0-29-1			



A file photo of New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson

Skipping England Tests not ideal, says Williamson

Christchurch, New Zealand - New Zealand captain Kane Williamson has admitted that potentially missing the Test matches against England in early June due to complete the IPL is not his preferred option but that it's another case of the ideal scenario rarely playing out in the current climate.

It has yet to be confirmed whether there will be a direct clash between the knockout stage of the IPL and the two-match series that will be played at Lord's and Edgbaston between June 2 and 14. The England series will be just before the World Test Championship final, beginning on June 18, which New Zealand are guaranteed to be at.

However, it is expected that the IPL will stretch into early June and New Zealand Cricket (NZC) CEO David White has said that a 'pragmatic' approach will be taken.

NZC has long allowed their contracted players free rein to appear in the IPL and to date it has never meant any of them missing a Test match, although on the 2015 tour of England players arrived just a few days before the opening game.

But even if the dates aren't a direct clash it may not be as simple as quickly flying in from India depending on any COVID-19 quarantine protocols that are required.

"It's certainly not the preferred thing," Williamson said of the potential clash. "I know when plans were put in place that wasn't the idea then, but as we've seen, you can make plans in this day in age and very rarely do they go to plan."

"For us it's being able to adapt as quickly as possible, we still have to wait and see when dates are finalised to truly know what is happening before any decision is made but the ideal scenario is to be available and around for all that cricket. We'll just have to wait and see."

Other first-choice Test players Trent Boult (Mumbai Indians) and Kyle Jamieson (Royal Challengers Bangalore) also have IPL deals as does quick bowler Lockie Ferguson (Kolkata Knight Riders) who could push for a place.

Williamson and Boult have recently spoken about expecting to be on the road for up to ten months this year. Once the home season is completed they will head straight to the IPL before moving onto England (Williamson also has a deal in the Hundred) then New Zealand have tours of Bangladesh and Pakistan lined up ahead of the T20 World Cup in India.

Whenever a player returns to New Zealand they will be required to go through two weeks managed isolation under the government's COVID-19 protocols.

The two-Test series against England has been a late addition to the calendar and the matches are not part of the World Test Championship.

Depending on which franchises make the IPL knockouts there could be a number of players missing the Tests with the ECB having also said they will allow their players to play the whole tournament unless they have not been in the XI.

Cricinfo

Kumara tests positive, to miss Windies tour

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka quick Lahiru Kumara has tested positive for COVID-19, which rules him out of the tour of the West Indies in March, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) confirmed on Monday. Suranga Lakmal is in the frame to be his replacement in the travelling party.

"Following PCR Tests carried out on the squad nominated to take part in the 'white ball' segment of the tour of West Indies, Lahiru Kumara has tested positive for COVID-19," an SLC media statement said.

Earlier this month, both head coach Mickey Arthur and top-order batsman Lahiru Thirimanne had tested positive for the coronavirus, while seamers Binura Fernando and Chamika Karunaratne were removed from the training group following positive tests last month.

While no other player tested positive in the latest round of testing, it might be a matter of concern that all members of the squad, including Kumara, had



Lahiru Kumara

participated in a practice game the day before the latest tests were conducted.

The series, which will begin with the first T20I on March 4, has had to be rescheduled once - it was originally slated to start on February 20 - and Sri Lanka's limited-overs squad is due to fly out on February 23. But several players, who have to serve COVID-19 quarantines and/or are returning from injury, will link up with the rest of the squad at a later date, likely to be before the Test series that starts on March 17.

Cricinfo



Tom Moody of Australia set to become SLC director of cricket

Tom Moody lined up for Sri Lanka role

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Tom Moody has been lined up on what is understood to be a three-year contract to become Sri Lanka Cricket's director of cricket, a newly-created role that will oversee almost every facet of the game in the country.

The appointment will seek to utilise Moody's experience working within cricketing structures in Australia, England and India to keep Sri Lankan cricket up-to-date with the latest technological advancements and best practices in the sport.

"I think it will be important for him to come as an independent person with a different view, someone who has been involved in cricket in Australia and understands their structure, who has been involved in the IPL and

those structures, a person who has been involved in county cricket with Worcestershire and understands their structure, and also being involved with the Caribbean Premier League," Aravinda de Silva told *ESPNCricinfo*.

De Silva heads up a sports ministry-appointed technical advisory committee overseeing the development of cricket in Sri Lanka. Alongside him in the committee are former cricketers Roshan Mahanama, Muttiah Muralitharan and Kumar Sangakkara. Among their first moves has been the recommendation of Australian Moody, who enjoyed a successful spell as head coach of the Sri Lanka team from 2005-2007, most notably helping the side to the 2007 World Cup final.

Cricinfo

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OVA FIRST DIVISION LEAGUE FINAL

Al Salam have been a dominant force in domestic volleyball in recent times and the club stamped their authority on Monday when they successfully defended their title in the 2020-21 Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) First Division League at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC).

In what was a repeat of last year's final between Al Salam and Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Al Salam, once again, repeated a similar script as they managed to stave off a stiff challenge from their rivals to win the crown for the fifth time. Last year, Al Salam won the final 3-2 and this time also, Al Salam won 3-2 (25-23, 22-25, 25-17, 23-25, 15-11).

Al Salam had won three titles in a row, starting in 2016 before Seeb halted their streak with a title in 2019. Earlier on Monday, Seeb had the consolation of retaining their third-place finish with a 3-0 (25-14, 25-19, 25-21) victory over Sohar.

A total of seven teams battled for the top division honours. Besides the top-four teams, the other clubs in fray were Masirah, Ahli-Sidab and Bahla.

Later, H E Rashad al Hina'i, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, presented the trophy to Salam captain Ibrahim al Muzaini in the presence of OVA president Sheikh Badar al Rawas, Ali al Balushi, Salam Club chief, and other senior officials from the ministry and clubs. The chief guest also presented medals to players of the top-three teams.

Al Salam's Falah al Jarradi was named the season's Most Valuable Player (MVP).

Oman Club clinch second division title

On Sunday, Oman Club claimed the top honours in the OVA Second Division League with a clinical 3-0 (25-20, 25-23, 25-18) win over Al Suwaiq in the summit clash at the SQSC.

Saham finished third with a



Victorious Al Salam players with their support staff and club officials celebrate after retaining the top-division volleyball league crown at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday



Action from the final match of the OVA First Division League between Al Salam and Al Kamil W'al Wafi on Monday

3-0 (25-12, 25-21, 25-20) win over Salalah earlier on Sunday.

A total of 13 teams took part in the competition with clubs divided into four groups. The top four teams from each group

advanced to the semifinals.

In the last-four stage, Suwaiq got the better of Salalah 3-0 while Oman defeated Saham 3-0 to set up the title clash.

Fareed al Zadjali, Oman

Basketball Association (OBA) chairman, was the chief guest and handed over the trophy and individual awards in the presence of Sheikh Badar al Rawas.

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Oman to play Jordan and India in friendlies during Dubai camp

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following the recent joint decision by FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to postpone the majority of the upcoming Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023, Oman's games have been also affected due to the travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Monday, following discussions with the national team coach, Branko Ivankovic, the Oman Football Association (OFA) announced dates for a domestic and an overseas camps for the national team next month.

While the team will come together for a domestic camp in Muscat from March 8-11, the overseas camp in Dubai, UAE, will be from March 11-26.

During the Dubai camp, Oman will meet Jordan in the first of the two international friendlies on March 20 and then play India on March 25 before returning home.

Oman was scheduled to play against Afghanistan in an away game on March 30 before taking on Group E table-toppers Qatar at home on June 7 and concluding their campaign with an away game in Dhaka against hosts Bangladesh on June 15.

Oman and India are in the same group of the World Cup qualifiers and have played both their home and away games with Oman winning both the away game in Guwahati, India, (2-1) on September 5, 2019 and at home (1-0) in Muscat on November 19, 2019.

Al Suwaiq, Dhofar in goalless draw; Al Nasr upset Seeb



Dhofar and Suwaiq players vie for the ball during their Omantel League game at Rustaq Sports Complex on Monday

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2020-21 OMANTEL LEAGUE

With their crucial 2020-21 HM's Cup semifinal first-leg match scheduled for Friday, the coaches of Omantel League defending champions Seeb and His Majesty's Cup holders Dhofar seemed to have avoided going all out in the tenth round of the top-flight league, which was played on Sunday and Monday.

While Seeb, coached by Portuguese Bruno Pereira, suffered their second defeat of the

season against former champions Al Nasr, losing 1-2 at the Seeb Sports Stadium on Sunday, Rasheed Jaber-coached Dhofar missed a chance to come level with table-toppers Seeb when they were held to a goalless draw by Al Suwaiq at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex on Monday.

Following the completion of tenth round, Seeb stay on top spot with 22 points while Dhofar remain second with 20 points.

On Sunday, Zahr al Aghbari gave an early lead for Seeb with a strike in the sixth minute but Al Nasr, which dominated the

match from then on, got the equaliser through their African import Mousa Kabiro in the 18th minute. The teams went into the break with the scores tied at 1-1 but soon after the resumption, Marwan Talal found the winner in the 56th minute.

The win helped the Salalah giants to move to fourth place with 18 points, two behind Al Mussanah, who won 2-0 against Al Rustaq at the Rustaq Sports Complex on Sunday.

Al Suwaiq, who are under their new coach, Hakeem Shaker of Iraq, could have won the

LEAGUE STANDINGS AFTER TEN ROUNDS

1 Seeb (22 points), 2 Dhofar (20, -6), 3 Mussanah (20), 4 Al Nasr (18), 5 Suwaiq (17), 6 Bahla (15), 7 Rustaq (14), 8 Al Ittihad (12), 9 Oman (11), 10 Sohar (8), 11 Nizwa (7), 12 Al Nahda (6, -6), 13 Muscat (3), 14 Saham (0, -6).

match but for their strikers fluffing easy chances. The draw meant Suwaiq stay at fifth place with 17 points.

Suwaiq are also in HM's Cup semifinals and will take on Al Ittihad, who were the only club among the four semifinalists, to have won the match in the tenth round as they beat Saham 2-1 at the Sohar Sports Complex on Sunday.

In another game on Sunday, hosts Nizwa were held by Sohar 2-2.

Sixth-placed Bahla and ninth-placed Oman played out a goalless draw in late kickoff on Monday. Earlier in the evening, Al Nahda was a facile 3-1 winner against Muscat at the Seeb Sports Complex.

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Action from the match between Ahli-Sidab and Nizwa at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday

Yousuf shines as Ahli-Sidab rout Nizwa; Al Nasr triumph

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2020 HM'S CUP HOCKEY SECOND ROUND

The second round of the 50th His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship 2020 began in style with last year's runner-up Ahli-Sidab sending clear signals to rivals of them being a contender as they trounced Nizwa 4-0 in a Group A match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday.

In a late game, defending champion Al Nasr edged past Dhofar 1-0 in a Group B clash with Indian international Arman Qureshi scoring the winner in 50th minute. Earlier, in the second

match of Group A, Sohar beat Majees 4-2. Ahmed al Shibli and Mohammed Ali were on target twice each while Mohammed Adel and Hossam Mahmood scored for Majees.

The second round will see the top-eight teams battle for the coveted trophy. With all the clubs roping in international players from India, Pakistan and Egypt, some exciting games are expected over the next four days to determine the semifinalists.

Under former Indian junior team and Indian women's team coach C R Kumar, Ahli-Sidab have three Indian stars - Affan Yousuf, Jasjit Singh Kular and Sayyad Niyaz Rahim - in their

ranks and it was Yousuf who was the star of their team's win.

Yousuf opened the scoring in the 11th minute with a field goal.

Ahli-Sidab then found Nizwa defence hard to crack as the teams failed to score any more till the end of the second quarter. However, soon at the start of the third quarter, Yousuf once again scored (47th minute) and ten minutes later Aseel Ammar al Maini made it 3-0. Hammad al Fazari made it 4-0 with two minutes left for the hooter.

Tuesday's fixtures: Group B: Seeb vs Bausher, 4.30pm; **Group A:** Sohar vs Ahli-Sidab, 6.30pm; Majees vs Nizwa, 8.30pm.

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