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Sayyid Theyazin announces setting up Youth Centre



Our Correspondent
Muscat

H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, announced the establishment of Youth Centre on Wednesday.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said that the minister issued a decision to this effect due

to the importance of the role of youth in nation-building. 'The centre will be an incubator for developing the capabilities of youth, discovering their talents and nurturing their creativity. The launch of the centre coincides with the country's celebrations of the 51st National Day, and is in line with the aspirations of the youth and the Oman Vision 2040.'

Announcing the centre, H H Sayyid Theyazin said, "Establishment of this centre is one of the initiatives of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth aimed at developing an integrated system of modern facilities in all governorates capable of embracing young people and developing their capabilities and discovering their talents."

In a statement, the Ministry of

Economy (MoE) said that the establishment of the Youth Centre is in implementation of the strategic programme Youth Sector Governance and Regulation and part of the Youth Sector Priority in the tenth Five-Year Plan. 'It aims to improve Vision 2040 indicators, in particular Youth Development Index.'

MoE's statement added that 'the objective of the Youth Sector

Governance and Regulation programme is to build an ecosystem of policies, legislation and strategies for the youth'.

The Youth Centre will also endeavour to achieve other strategic objectives such as promoting youth participation and contribution to national and international decision-making, and developing young professional leaders who can con-

tribute to nation-building.

'The centre will help create a conducive environment for innovation, entrepreneurship and startups that contribute to the national economy, explore potential sectors for youth employment in the future, and build a cultural and entertainment ecosystem for youth to enhance their quality of life,' MoE stated.

There will be no edition of **Muscat Daily** on November 28 and 29 on account of the National Day holiday

► NEWS BRIEFS

UNESCO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP FOR MINISTRIES

Paris - Oman participated in the 41st session of Unesco's general conference in Paris on Wednesday. At the meet, the Ministry of Information and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth were granted membership to intergovernmental councils and committees. Oman National Committee for Education, Culture and Sciences and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation are currently members of Unesco's Education Committee.



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Tourism sector eyes foreign travellers to bounce back

Muscat - With the opening of airports around the world and arrival of international tourists, the hospitality sector in Oman is looking forward to a promising winter season. The recovery, however, is dependent on an improvement in the COVID-19 situation in Europe from where the local hospitality industry is expecting visitors in sizeable numbers.

Towards the end of the 2020 winter season, the sector faced numerous challenges, including closure of airports and inter-city movement restrictions in the first phase of lockdowns in Oman.

Domestic tourists turned saviour

Jebel Shams Resort saw better business in the summer of 2020 than pre-pandemic times, its resort manager Said al Khatri claimed. "Closure of international travel and Salalah, during khareef, left few options for domestic tourists and, surprisingly, it worked in our favour."

Properties operating in deserts suspend operations between May and September, but owing to the pandemic last year, these were compelled to close in March. Luckily when they reopened for the winter season in October, they saw good business.

"We slashed our rates, keeping in mind the financial constraints resulting from the pandemic. It helped attract domestic tourists. However, we have noticed a drop in domestic tourists this winter season," said

V S Abhijit, resort manager of Thousand Nights Camp.

Shangri-La Muscat had to close its entire complex from April 2020 till July 2020. While it reopened Shangri-La Barr al Jissah on July 31 with limited food and beverage operations, Shangri-La Al Husn still remains closed. "We are planning to reopen the property in January 2022 with a series of new initiatives," said René D Egle, area general manager of Shangri-La Resorts Muscat.

According to Egle, last year was about activating survival mode, pushing boundaries and going out to the market with innovative and relevant ideas.

Vijay Handa, area GM for Omran's cluster of properties, attributes the group's survival to domestic tourism. "Now GCC countries are also open, so things are improving and the scenario is positive. We understand the spending capacity of domestic tourists due to the COVID-19 pandemic and we are still running special packages to attract local tourists."

Occupancy vs revenue

Handa informed that good occupancy does not always convert to good revenue, and international bookings are made at least a year in advance. In his estimation, returning to pre-pandemic rates will take time. "I am hoping that by 2023, the hospitality sector will be able to go back to pre-pandemic rates."

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SAYYID FAHD MEETS SYRIAN ADVISOR TO PRESIDENT ASSAD



Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Dr Bouthaina Shaaban, Political and Media Advisor to the President of the Syrian Arab Republic and Chairperson of the Wathiqat Wattan Organisation. Dr Bouthaina conveyed greetings of President Bashar al Assad to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The meeting touched on cooperation between Oman and Syria, with emphasis on the conservation of heritage and consolidation of intra-Arab relations. The two sides also reviewed regional and international developments (Supplied photo)

Oman affirms commitment to eliminate human trafficking at UN assembly

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has stated in the UN General Assembly that it will not falter in continuing its efforts to combat human trafficking despite the many challenges it faces.

H E Dr Mohamed bin Awad al Hassan, permanent representative of Oman in United Nations, said that "the phenomenon of human trafficking is incompatible with the lofty principles and values of the Sultanate of Oman," during a high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York on the appraisal of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

H E Dr Hassan added that despite the global hurdles posed by



The phenomenon of human trafficking is incompatible with the lofty principles and values of the Sultanate of Oman

H E DR MOHAMED AL HASSAN

the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Oman never wavered in combating human trafficking. "Here, I would like to point out that Oman's three-year National Plan for Combating Human Trafficking (2021-2023) is focused on a set of goals, among which are training frontline workers and raising social awareness."

H E Dr Hassan spoke of the successful 'Insan' initiative. "It was launched by the government of Oman, in cooperation with the private sector and civil society associations, and focused on educating workers in private sector institutions. It was credited with raising awareness and educating a wide sector of workers and employers about the phenomenon

(human trafficking), risks and ways to report such cases and to preserve the safety of society and protect human rights."

He said in addition to these efforts at the national level, "my government has joined many international and regional treaties and conventions on combating human trafficking."

At the conclusion of his speech, H E Dr Hassan affirmed that Oman renews its commitment to the United Nations plan to eliminate human trafficking.

Speaking at the meet, Abdulla Shahid, president of the UN General Assembly, said that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated factors - such as poverty, unemployment and gender-based violence - that fuel human trafficking.

IT'S TIME FOR SOME TO ENJOY THE LIMELIGHT

Let's celebrate their glory!

Sayyid Badr meets Oman's consuls to friendly countries

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, held a meeting on Wednesday with the honorary consuls of the sultanate in Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Turkey and Uganda.

The meeting discussed means of boosting cooperation between the sultanate and the countries represented by the consuls. The meeting also reviewed investment opportunities with those countries.

The meeting was attended by Khalid Hashil al Muselhi, head of the Minister's Office Department at the Foreign Ministry.

The meeting came within the framework of a visit programme being organised by the Foreign Ministry for the sultanate's consuls to the friendly countries.

The consuls thanked the Foreign Ministry's initiative of organ-



ising the visit programme, particularly conducting meetings with Omani government and private officials with the aim of familiarising them with the economic policies within the framework of Oman Vision 2040.

The consuls also visited Oman Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai during which they attended the Invest in Oman Forum. They also took part in the pavilion's celebration of the 51st National Day.

The consuls commended the

civilised heritage and future vision of the Sultanate of Oman showcased at the pavilion, especially in the fields of sustainability, environment and economic and tourism diversification.

ONA

Five agreements worth RO300,000 signed to help social initiatives

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development and Oman LNG signed five agreements worth RO300,000 on Wednesday. The agreements include financing a number of projects and initiatives that are instrumental in improving people's lives and addressing their needs.

The first agreement will see Oman LNG financing a 'Solar Energy' initiative, in which funding will be provided to supply solar panels to 32 Omani Women's Association buildings across the country.

Through this agreement, the company also aims to support a number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to supply and install these solar panels.

The second agreement involves supporting leadership and management training programmes for various Omani Women's Associations. Such programmes will provide training opportunities for 195 women in various fields, including leadership, innovation, financial management, and in media and technology fields.

The third agreement involves financing a 'We are with you' campaign, which targets diabetic children from low-income and social security families.

The fourth agreement encapsulates funding the purchase of modern equipment for Al Noor Association for the Blind in Dakhliyah governorate.

The equipment includes mod-



Oman LNG, through its Development Foundation, has placed great emphasis on supporting various social development programmes and initiatives

DR AMOR AL MATANI

ern audio and braille devices to facilitate a better learning environment for visually impaired students in higher education institutions and simplify the storage of information and conversion of files in braille.

The fifth agreement pertains to the establishment of a pilot project to support livestock breeders in South Sharqiyah governorate through the Omani Agricultural Association.

The project is predicted to provide the latest innovative agricultural procedures, and thus supports the country's vision of achieving self-sufficiency and reducing the increasing cost of fodder.

The project will produce green fodder with high nutritional value at low cost whilst maintaining sustainability.

Commenting on the agreements, Dr Amor al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation, said, "We are delighted to sign these agreements with the Ministry of Social Development. Since its inception, Oman LNG, through its Development Foundation, has placed great emphasis on supporting various social development programmes and initiatives for the benefit of the community.

"The agreements signed today confirm our consistent efforts to serve the community, and meet its expectations and aspirations."

Muscat Eat festival to kick off on Dec 2

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) announced that Oman's largest food festival, Muscat Eat will start on December 2.

The festival's fourth edition will include several events to be held from December 2 to 4 and December 9 to 11.

Saleh bin Ali al Khaifi, director of Promotion and Marketing Department, MHT, said that the ministry's support for the festival aims to strengthen the tourism



sector and make Oman one among the world's leading tourist destinations.

The festival, which will host a number of competitions and en-

tertainment events, is expected to attract audiences of all age groups, especially families and children to taste Omani and international cuisines in a fun-filled atmosphere, Khaifi said.

Visitors will have option of choosing food from a large number of carts offering different types of food.

Muscat Eat will be attended by 150 chefs and institutions. It will also have live cooking stations, tastings and cooking competitions.

Guests will be entertained with a number of musical performances.

"The audience will have an opportunity to test their culinary skills through the 'Cooking Challenge'," Khaifi said.

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'Commandos' to help turtle conservation

Muscat - Over 300 local youth are taking part in a programme to monitor turtles at Ras al Hadd Nature Reserve.

Called 'Turtle Commandos', the three-month programme was launched in October. On Wednesday, H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, Chairman of the Environment Authority, visited the reserve and interacted with the organisers and participants. He commended the wide participation of youth in the programme.

It will equip and encourage youth to volunteer for environment conservation projects, and educate the local community in-

side turtle reserves on best practices.

Ahlam bint Rashid al Muqbaliya, head of the media team of the programme, said it aims to protect, control and monitor turtles by implementing several activities including cleaning beaches.

Tourism sector eyes foreign travellers to bounce back

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Shangri-La's Egle too believes it will take time for the hotel industry to go back to pre-pandemic levels. "We are currently ramping up towards business recovery, so our room rates are not fully back yet to pre-pandemic levels."

Thousand Nights Camp has reverted to its pre-pandemic rates but response from domestic market is "a bit slow". "To attract the domestic market, we will place some offers soon but the overall response is picking up," Abhijit said.

Fourth wave of COVID-19 in Europe

Abhijit's immediate concern is the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic that has hit Europe. It has already resulted in some cancellations. "If the situation doesn't improve in Europe, it will be very bad for our sector," he said with his fingers crossed.

"We hope the rise in COVID-19 cases in Europe settles soon, as this is a risk that will impact the entire world, not only us. Since Oman is relying heavily on the European market, this surge might slow down our recovery pace. We are currently sold out for the festive period and January onwards looks promising," said Rene.

Handa describes the current condition as "very good and the overall scenario quite rosy but our only worry is the fourth wave of the pandemic hitting Europe".

Jebel Shams Resort's Khatri too is hopeful of good business from the European market and has already welcomed tourist from Germany, France and Netherlands.

(Text by Syed Fasiuddin)

Tender Announcement

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
13/2021/PEIE /HQ-13	Construction Of Pumping Station With Water Main Distribution Line From Awqad R/A To Raysut Industrial City 1 &2	9-12-2021	3-1-2022	Pipeline Network Construction and Drilling Wells	First and above	100

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only. No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening. Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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Qurayyat Development Company's R0385mn project unveiled



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Qurayyat Development Company unveiled the commercial identity of its Hayy al Sahel tourism project in the wilayat of Quriyat, Governorate of Muscat, on Wednesday. It will be built at an estimated cost of R0385mn, including R040mn allocated for the first phase of the project.

The unveiling ceremony was held under the patronage of Dr Yahya bin Suleiman bin Abdullah al Nadabi, Wali of Quriyat, in the presence of several officials from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Qurayyat Development Company and Al Madina Real Estate Company, the main developer of the project.

Nadabi stressed on the importance of the project in reviving tourism and the economy of Quriyat, and the fact that it is in line with the sultanate's economic diversification plans within

Hayy al Sahel will be developed in three phases and include three main components - tourism, residential and recreational facilities

Oman Vision 2040.

He added that Hayy al Sahel and its facilities will have positive economic and social outcomes, particularly for the people of the wilayat who will directly benefit from the project.

Sheikh Hilal bin Khalid al Mawali, chairman of the Board of Directors of Qurayyat Development Company, expressed his delight at the unveiling of the commercial identity of the project "as it is the first integrated

tourism project with comprehensive services and facilities in the wilayat of Quriyat".

On the occasion, Khamis bin Mubarak al Kiyumi, chairman of Al Madina Real Estate Company, said, "We are proud to be the main developer of Hayy al Sahel. The design of this pioneering project combines modernity and authentic Omani architecture. The project covers an area of 1.3mn sqm."

The project will be developed in three phases and include three main components - tourism, residential and recreational facilities. Its tourism facilities include three hotels (three-, four- and five-star rating) providing 750 rooms, in addition to a golf academy.

The residential complex will include more than 4,000 housing units, which will be available for freehold ownership by all nationalities.

Its recreational facilities will include a water park, a boulevard

walkway with shops, restaurants and cafes, cinemas and an integrated health club.

The project will also enhance the use of the fishing port and develop a floating berth to receive marine transport vessels, which will facilitate the movement of visitors and tourists between Muscat and all tourist ports.

The first phase includes infrastructure in the project for 400 housing units, constructing of a four-star hotel of 220 hotel units, including 100 chalets, as well as a residential neighbourhood on a boulevard spread over 53,000sqm with green houses and a walkway for bicycles.

The first phase also includes a park, a number of restaurants with a view of the project highlighting the heritage and identity of the wilayat, in addition to an equestrian and camel riding club and recreational and commercial facilities, which will be the major attraction of the project.



Muscat Quilt Guild raises R06,000 for OCA projects

Muscat - Members of Muscat Quilt Guild presented a cheque of R06,000 to Oman Cancer Association (OCA) at its headquarters on Tuesday. Every year, the group undertakes quilting projects to raise money for various causes and has been a supporter of OCA's cancer awareness programmes.

"Cancer awareness has come a long way from the past. It is no longer a taboo topic, and people everywhere support the cause. From helping the children in Dar al Hanan to setting up our mobile mammography unit for free breast cancer screening, Muscat Quilt Guild has always supported our association. Support from such organisations has been useful in spreading cancer aware-

Support from such organisations has been useful in spreading cancer awareness among the public

SHEIKH SOUD HAMED
SALIM AL RAWAHI

ness among the public," said Sheikh Soud Hamed Salim al Rawahi, vice-president of OCA.

Muna Fareed, a senior member of the guild, informed that the group conducts charity raffle draws annually, where some of the pieces - including a big quilt made every year - go to a few lucky winners. "This is done to

raise money for various causes, and also given to OCA," she said.

"Since the outbreak of COVID-19, our group has connected every month through Zoom to learn new techniques and designs. The pandemic has not stopped our work, and meeting through an online space has been just as fun and efficient as meeting in person," Muna added.

According to Batool Mohammed Hassan, a committee member of the guild, it started as a group of ladies who just wanted to pursue a shared hobby. "We have been quilting and donating to charities for the past nine years," she said, adding that it will continue to donate to OCA as long as their community is intact.

(Contributed by Akshaya Pavanje)

Pact signed to train Omani jobseekers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Labour signed an agreement to train Omani jobseekers on Wednesday.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Labour said, "The co-operation agreement is for on-the-job training programmes for Omani jobseekers at the Ministry of Defence, in addition to specialised training at a number of institutes and colleges in the Oman and abroad."

5 more new COVID-19 cases: MoH

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced five new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday with no related deaths. This takes the total number of positive cases in Oman to 304,514.

"The total number of COVID-19-related deaths has reached 4,113," MoH stated.

It added that ten new cases have recovered, taking the total number of recoveries to 299,938, accounting for a recovery rate of 98.5 per cent.

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Candidate profile

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

Tender No.	No E- Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/21/065	2021/MM/QS-33	Supply & Fix of Containers For Vegetables and fruits In Wilayat A'Seeb (E- Tender)	Rial 25	16/12/2021	02/01/2022	Specialiset
PRE/21/095	2021/MM/QS-34	Supply of Granit walls for Mutrah Corniche (E- Tender)	Rial 25	04/12/2021	14/12/2021	Excellent
PRE/21/096	2021/MM/QS-35	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of web application and local balancer (E- Tender)	Rial 25	16/12/2021	02/01/2022	Excellent
PRE/21/098	2021/MM/QS-36	Construction of Sub-base layer for Internal Roads in Wilayat Muscat , Al Sifah (E- Tender)	Rial 25	16/12/2021	02/01/2022	First
PRE/21/099	2021/MM/QS-37	Supply & Fix of Containers For Café In Wilayat A'Seeb (E- Tender)	Rial 25	16/12/2021	02/01/2022	First

Tender Conditions :-

- 1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- 2- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- 3- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- 4- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- 5- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).



Asyad Express offers 15% discount on shipping fees

Muscat – Asyad Express, member of the Asyad Group, is offering a 15 per cent discount on Matjar's Black Friday purchases from the United States and free door-to-door delivery for online shoppers in Oman.

Customers using Matjar can prepay all their shipping fees and taxes in one simple on-line payment at the time of order. To enhance the overall customer experience, Matjar provides on-line tracking and dedicated customer support. All Matjar shipments are delivered from the US to Oman within seven to nine

business days, according to a press release.

Matjar is an express shipping service provided by Asyad Express to facilitate the e-commerce by providing virtual postal address in the US and other countries.

Customers can register with Matjar for free on-line, where they will receive a unique 'virtual' postal address in the US. This virtual address enables customers to shop online at all their favourite stores, enjoying discounts and promotions.

Oman's oil output increases in October, exports steady

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average oil production increased 1.3 per cent to 993,400 barrels per day (bpd) in October 2021 compared with 983,000 bpd recorded in the previous month, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oman's total oil production (including condensates) increased by 1.0 per cent to 293.22mn barrels during the January-October period of 2021, compared to 290.37mn barrels in the same period of 2020.

Of the total oil production, crude output decreased 3.6 per cent at 226.48mn barrels, while condensates production rose 20.2 per cent to 66.74mn barrels in the first ten months of this year against the corresponding period of 2020, the NCSI data showed.

As Oman continues to stick to its OPEC+ commitments on oil production, the sultanate sharply increased its condensates output earlier this year as condensate production is exempt from the obligations of the OPEC+ agreement. The OPEC+ agreement allowed non-OPEC oil producers



Crude exports were steady during the January – October period of 2021, as a decline in exports to China was offset by rise in shipments to India, South Korea and Japan

to exclude condensate output from their production quotas, which has enabled countries like Russia and Oman to sharply raise their condensate output.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the

first ten months of 2021 remained 34.2 per cent higher at US\$61.7 per barrel compared with US\$46 per barrels achieved during full year 2020.

Oman crude is currently trading near its highest price level in

the past three years. On Wednesday, Oman crude price at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange rose 3.9 per cent to US\$81.93 per barrel (for January 2022 delivery).

Exports to India surge

Oman's total oil exports recorded a marginal decrease of 0.5 per cent on year-on-year basis during the first ten months of 2021, mainly due to a drop in China-bound shipments. How-

ever, the decline in Oman's exports to China was offset by a sharp rise in shipments to India.

The sultanate's total oil exports decreased to 237.49mn barrels in the first ten months of 2021 in comparison with 238.72mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of last year, according to the NCSI data.

Oman's crude exports to China, the biggest destination for the sultanate's oil shipments, fell 5.6 per cent to 198.23mn barrels during the January-October period of 2021 compared to the same period a year ago.

On the other hand, Oman's oil exports to India, Japan and South Korea sharply rose during the first ten months of the year.

Oil exports to India more than doubled to 23.31mn barrels in the first ten months of 2021 from 11.34mn barrels in the same period a year ago, while shipments to Japan rose 30 per cent to 3.38mn barrels this year.

South Korea purchased 31 per cent more quantity of Oman crude during the January-October period at 6.54mn barrels against 4.99mn barrels in the same period of the previous year.

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MSX jumps 1.4% as stocks rebound

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday witnessed the year's biggest jump as financial sector stocks rebounded sharply. The MSX30 index rose 1.37 per cent to close at 4,106.62 points.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by more than 26 per cent to RO4.06mn and volumes surged 65 per cent to 28.1mn shares.

All sectoral indices recorded gains on Wednesday. Financial index jumped by nearly 2 per cent helped by a sharp rise in some banking and insurance stocks. Services index increased

0.23 per cent, while Industrial index inched up 0.08 per cent. The MSX Shariah index closed up by 0.65 per cent at 546.67 points.

Market breadth remained positive with 22 advancing stocks to eight decliners. Rest 20 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Oman United Insurance (7.1 per cent), Sohar International Bank (5.66 per cent), National Aluminium Products (5.26 per cent), Bank Nizwa (4.17 per cent) and Muscat Finance (3.64 per cent).

Top losers at the bourse were Majan Glass (-9.5 per cent), SMN Power Holding (-8.0 per cent), Al Madina Investment (-5.0 per cent), Oman REIT Fund (-4.44 per cent) and Oman Arab Bank (-3.01 per cent).

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India announces bill to ban cryptocurrencies

Mumbai, India - India's government will introduce a bill to ban private cryptocurrencies and create a framework for a central bank-backed digital money, parliament said in a shock announcement late Tuesday.

The proposed bill 'seeks to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India', the Lok Sabha said, and comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned last week that Bitcoin presents a risk to younger generations and could 'spoil our youth' if it ends up 'in the wrong hands'.

It is the latest such move by a major emerging economy, after China declared all cryptocurrency transactions illegal in September.

India's crypto market has boomed since the country's Supreme Court overturned a previous ban in April last year, growing more than 600 per cent over the past year according to research by Chainalysis.

Between 15mn and 100mn people in Asia's third-largest economy are estimated to own cryptocurrencies, with total holdings in the billions of dollars. Their investments will now face an uncertain future.

India's central bank announced in June that it is working to introduce its own digital currency by the end of the year, while warning it has 'serious concerns' about private cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Ethereum and others.

The bill, to come before the new legislative session, will allow for some exceptions to promote cryptocurrency technology, according to parliament's bulletin of upcoming business, but no



The wording has created a panic. The [crypto] industry will die in its natural way. Intellectual capital will move away, investors will face losses

KASHIF RAZA

further details about the proposed legislation were released.

The market price of Bitcoin appeared unaffected and was up 1.67 per cent in Tuesday's trade. But the phrasing of the proposed bill sent alarm bells ringing among local traders and enthusiasts.

"The wording has created a panic," Kashif Raza, founder of crypto-education platform Bitin-ning, said, adding that the industry expected the government to take a more favourable view after recent consultations with the industry.

"Obviously there will be a

shutter-down on the industry," he added. "The industry will die in its natural way. Intellectual capital will move away, investors will face losses."

Under scrutiny

Cryptocurrencies have been under scrutiny by Indian regulators since first entering the local market in 2013.

A surge in fraudulent crypto transactions following the Modi government's demonetisation of nearly all banknotes in 2016 led to the country's central bank banning crypto transactions in April 2018.

The Supreme Court lifted the ban two years later and investments have surged in the time since.

Indians have been bombarded in recent months with advertisements for CoinSwitchKuber, CoinDCX and other home-grown crypto exchanges across television channels, online streaming services and social media. These platforms spent more than ₹500mn (US\$6.7mn) on advertising spots during the recently concluded T20 cricket World Cup, research by TAM Sports showed, with viewers subjected to an average of 51 cryptocurrency advertisements per match.

Analysts say regulation would be central to addressing security risks, with crypto exchanges increasingly targeted by cyber criminals as virtual currency prices soar.

AFP

Samsung to build \$17bn microchip plant in Texas

San Francisco, US - Samsung said on Tuesday it will build a microchip factory in Texas, a US\$17bn investment that comes as semiconductor shortages are causing supply chain delays across many industries.

"Welcome to Texas, Samsung!" tweeted Texas' Republican governor Greg Abbott, who called the planned factory 'the largest foreign direct investment in Texas EVER'.

The new plant, which is supposed to be operational by the end of 2024, is expected to create more than 2,000 skilled jobs and 'lay the groundwork for another important chapter in our future', said Kinam Kim, CEO of the South Korean giant's electronics division.

The chips manufactured on the site will have applications in mobile technologies, 5G or even artificial intelligence, the group said. The plant will be built in the town of Taylor, near the capital Austin.

The news was welcomed by the administration of President Joe Biden, whose economics and



security advisors Brian Deese and Jake Sullivan said in a statement that the plant would go a long way to 'helping protect our supply chains, revitalising our manufacturing base, and creating good jobs right here at home'. Samsung, the world's biggest memory chipmaker, has aggressively stepped up its investment in its semiconductor business as the world battles shortages of chips that have hit everything from cars and home appliances to smartphones and gaming consoles.

Samsung joins its rivals TSMC from Taiwan and Intel of the US

in expanding chip manufacturing capacity in the United States, which sees the sector as an area of strategic competition with China. TSMC and Intel are building such plants in Arizona.

The two presidential advisors stressed that Tuesday's announcement was in large part the result of discussions between the heads of state of the two countries.

Samsung, which has been operating in the United States for 25 years, had filed documents for the project with Texas last January.

AFP

Oil majors 'pocketing the difference' as prices surge: Biden

Washington, US - Oil majors have raised petrol prices for the sake of their own profits, US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday as his administration looked for ways to lower prices at pumps nationwide at the beginning of the holiday travel season.

The White House has upped the pressure on oil markets amid a spike in energy prices that has driven overall US inflation to record levels.

Biden had earlier in the day announced the US would release crude from its national stockpile along with China, India, Japan, Korea and Britain in a bid to drive global prices lower, while again taking aim at oil majors he accused of unfairly raising prices.

"The price of petrol in the wholesale market has fallen by about 10 per cent in the last few years but the price at the pump hasn't budged a penny," he said.

"In other words, gas supply



US President Joe Biden

companies are paying less and making a lot more," he said, accusing companies of 'pocketing the difference' between wholesale and retail prices.

Last week, he urged the Federal Trade Commission to look into the causes of the nationwide spike in petrol, saying oil firms have increased prices at the pump even as their expenses decline and profits soar.

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Sultan Qaboos University announces their desire to sell used furniture and their in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view used furniture in auction stores and receive the bidding on Wednesday and Thursday 24-25/11/2021 from 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (200) Omani riyals in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the used furniture, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used furniture, and put the envelope in bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 30/11, 01/12 and 02/12/2021.
- The used furniture are sold in their current condition, and SQU is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold material if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale, and (10) Omani riyals will be imposed for each day after 05/12/2021.

Notes:

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through visa cards.
- Commitment to Precautionary measures and wearing a mask and only one person is allowed to enter auction's location with the buyer.
- Entering the auction stores through Gate No. (2).
- For more information, please contact 92907117 .



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Bank Muscat supports Sayyid Abbas Golf Tournament

Bank Muscat extended strong support to the prestigious Sayyid Abbas Golf Tournament, which was held recently at the Ghala Golf Club.

The event, which is held annually in memory of the club's former chairman, the late Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal, saw the participation of 120 of the top golfers in the country. Ziad al Zubair, guest of honor, along with Abdulnasir al Raisi, deputy general manager - Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, gave away prizes to the winners in different categories.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, deputy general manager - Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "We are delighted with the great success achieved

by the Sayyid Abbas Tournament, which is one of the most well-known sports tournaments in the country.

"It is my great pleasure to thank the organisers and the participants for the splendid results that have been achieved this year. Bank Muscat Private banking is delighted to continue its keen support to the tournament in line with its strategy of supporting initiatives, which contribute to Oman's development across all fields."

It must be noted that Bank Muscat Private's offerings are powered by its knowledgeable and well trained base of Relationship Managers (RMs), who take care of the financial and wealth

management needs of its exclusive clientele. Its services include conventional accounts, term deposits, currency exchange, domestic and international transfers, online banking and regular asset monitoring.

An exclusive VISA Platinum debit card, discretionary loans, luxury car finance, and competitive rates for deposits, loans and foreign exchange. The exclusive Private Banking Visa Infinite Credit Card facilitates unlimited access to 1,000+ airport lounges globally and a 1 per cent cash-back on all purchases made through the card. Access to a collection of 900 luxury hotels worldwide, airport dining offers at more than 200 restaurants

globally using the complimentary Dragon Pass and Meet and Greet service with 30 per cent discount at over 450 destinations, a global concierge service and multi-trip travel insurance for the cardholder and direct family members are some of the other benefits available.

Bank Muscat offers Private banking clients a complete suite of investment options in global asset classes through its wealth management platform and tie up with international counter parties. These include stocks, bonds, ETFs and mutual funds across global markets. Selective exposure to private equity funds, real estate funds and commodity ETFs; offshore banking and port-

folio management are also offered through reputed global counterparties. Clients also receive regular research reports and briefings covering investment ideas, global macroeconomic outlook and updates on key economic and geographic events impacting performance of various asset classes.

Bank Muscat Private's customer-centric strategy has been consistently lauded by the international financial community and the bank has won a number of awards for being the Best Private Bank in Oman in the recent past including from prestigious publications like Global Finance, EMEA Finance and PWM / The Banker.

Handicrafts House benefits from its Al Mouj presence



Through Al Mouj Muscat's support of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), hundreds of entrepreneurs are now located at Oman's premier lifestyle destination and benefitting from support which is helping them grow.

Handicrafts House (World of Handicrafts) is one Omani enterprise which has grown considerably since 2018 it began with a kiosk at Al Mouj Muscat. This year it moved to a unit inside the Al Mouj Muscat's Community Hub, a new facility serving 7,000 residents as well as the millions of people who visit every year.

The handicrafts business, which sources and sells traditional Omani items and is passionate about preserving and promoting the nation's heritage, in turn supports around 800 artisans who live in the Sultanate and craft items by hand.

World of Handicrafts was founded by Zuwaina Sultan al Rashdi in 2012 when she saw a gap in the market for well-designed and packaged traditional products for tourists as well as corporate markets. Now CEO of the company which has four

units and a packaging workshop, she was crowned winner of the Best Female Entrepreneur Award for 2015-2016 and is a well-respected voice within the Omani business community.

Zuwaina's vision for World of Handicrafts when it first started was to become a platform to showcase Omani products around the globe but she says it has become so much more. "We consider ourselves a development project and an independent crafters' forum rather than a business selling goods as we work closely with our designers to help them make best use of their skills. "From marketing and promotion and ensuring all items are of the highest quality and adhere to international standards, to advising them on how to explore new markets locally, regionally and internationally, we are here to help."

Al Mouj Muscat CEO Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani says, "I would like to congratulate Zuwaina and her team and of course all of the talented craftspeople for their hard work and for being so passionate."



Barceló Mussanah Resort joins Oman Sail to host Sailing Arabia

Barceló Hotel Group has entered into an exclusive partnership with Oman Sail to host the 11th edition of the coveted Sailing Arabia - The Tour (SATT) - the region's only long distance offshore sailing event from November 24 to December 5 at the group's iconic Barceló Mussanah Resort, the host venue for the teams, for the opening ceremony and first two races in Mussanah.

Barceló Hotel Group is a proud sponsor of one of the boats consisting of a diverse crew of Spanish and Omani sailors, representing the union of two enriched cultures. 23 sailors from across the world will participate in the 12-day sailing tour consisting of a four coastal raid and a four in-port racecourses across the Mussanah, Sur, Marina Bandar Al Rowdha and Al Mouj districts in Oman.

Dermot Birchall, general manager of Barceló Mussanah Resort says, "We are proud to be partnering with Oman Sail for this

year's sailing tour, and take pride in promoting the rekindling of the sultanate's maritime eminence as the premier international sailing destination in the region. The event will showcase the impressive wonders and cultural heritage of Oman and we as Barceló Hotel Group are honoured to be a part of such an exemplary display of comradeship, sailing sportsmanship and the breathtaking treasures of Oman."

Saleh al Jabri, project manager and acting head of Sailing Events & Commercial at Oman Sail, said, "Sailing Arabia - The Tour is one of the most beloved events in Oman's sailing calendar. For more than a decade we have welcomed some of the best teams to our waters to take on Omani sailors, share their diverse experience and learn from each other.

"This year's fleet is incredibly strong with both male and female sailors, competing together under a variety of flags. We're

delighted to host The Tour once again this year and look forward to ten days of great sailing as we showcase the beauty of Oman's coastline and world class facilities at each venue."

Highlighting the partnership between Barceló Hotel Group and Oman Sail, the sponsored boat will be led by a team comprising of a mixed Omani-Spanish crewmembers, including Marcos Fernandez, Iset Segura, Yasser al Rahbi and Ali al Balushi. These athletes alongside five other participating teams will sail across the sultanate that features crystal blue waters of the Omani coast and picturesque views of majestic mountain ranges of the naturally aesthetic country.

For this year SATT edition, Barceló Hotel Group and Oman Sail together have championed sustainable practices with a strong focus on environmental initiatives laden throughout the event.

Ooredoo's Data Centre wins again

A testament of its forward-thinking digital transformation, Ooredoo has been recognised by the Comex Excellence in Big Data & Analytics Awards for its pioneering Data Centre. Opened earlier this year, the 7,000sqm facility represents a major breakthrough for hosting and data processing in Oman, allowing Ooredoo to further develop its infrastructure, invest in technologies, and support the unique needs of its consumer and business customers.

The award was announced at the Crowne Plaza Muscat, during Oman's first big data and analytics meet, which highlighted companies' use of data science to transform their operations and customer experience.

As data experience leaders, Ooredoo continues to keep up with the evolving digital requirements of its customers, while



propelling Oman's standing as a digitally-advanced, knowledge-based, and diversified economy.

With the Data Centre as the

backbone of this strategy, it has already attracted international acclaim, including most recently being named 'Best Network

Readiness - Data Centre services Oman 2021' at the US-based World Economic Magazine Awards.

Tanweer supports women's forum in Duqm

In appreciation of the role of women and their contribution to community service and development and their participation in all projects to serve the country, the Rural Areas Electricity Company 'Tanweer' - a member of Nama Group- participated as a gold sponsor for the Women and Society Forum 2021 in Duqm, Al Wusta governorate.

Under the slogan 'Tanmiah Wa Atta'a' (Development and giving back), the forum was organised on the occasion of the Omani Women's Day by Dar Al Mubadara for Press, Publishing, Advertising and Distribution.

The event was held in official partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and the exclusive strategic partnership of Tawasil Foundation, under the



patronage of H H Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said.

The forum aimed to highlight the talents and competencies of members of society and productive families in the Al Wusta governorate. And to create tangible partnerships between all sectors

in the governorate.

In addition to launching annual initiatives concerned with women and contributing to improving family income, economic and living standards, and stimulating the role of governmental and private institutions in sup-

porting and encouraging programmes for women and productive families.

Tanweer is keen to support community initiatives that enhance the cultural, environmental, knowledge and economic aspects of its concession areas in the governorates of the sultanate and annually celebrate the Omani Women's Day and honour them in appreciation and gratitude for their efforts in serving the company's work system.

The forum coincides with the sultanate's Omani Women's Day celebrations, which falls on October 17 each year. The forum included discussion sessions on the role of women in Oman's Vision 2040, ways to empower women, and the legal aspects that enhance their contributions.

Ahli Islamic launches account opening service

In line with its strategic approach and digital transformation goals, Ahli Islamic has announced the launch of an exclusive new mobile service that is designed to ensure smooth and easy on-boarding of new customers.

With digitalisation gaining ground in the country, the newly introduced service reflects the bank's vision to be a vibrant and innovative banking institution in Oman and affirms its belief in innovation to attain excellence. It also demonstrates its primary objective of meeting customers' banking requirements round-the-clock.

Yousuf al Rawahi, DGM and head of Ahli Islamic, stated, "At Ahli Islamic, our core focus is on augmenting our successes with innovative solutions to meet the requirements of our customers and the society-at-large. Our

strategy is focused on achieving growth by offering distinctive and timely banking services and products, as well as keeping pace with the latest market trends and constantly evolving customer requirements. We are certain that our new feature will enhance the level of service we provide to our customers, as it allows them to open a saving account on the go, from anywhere in the world, thereby contributing to our continuous endeavour to speed up banking procedures."

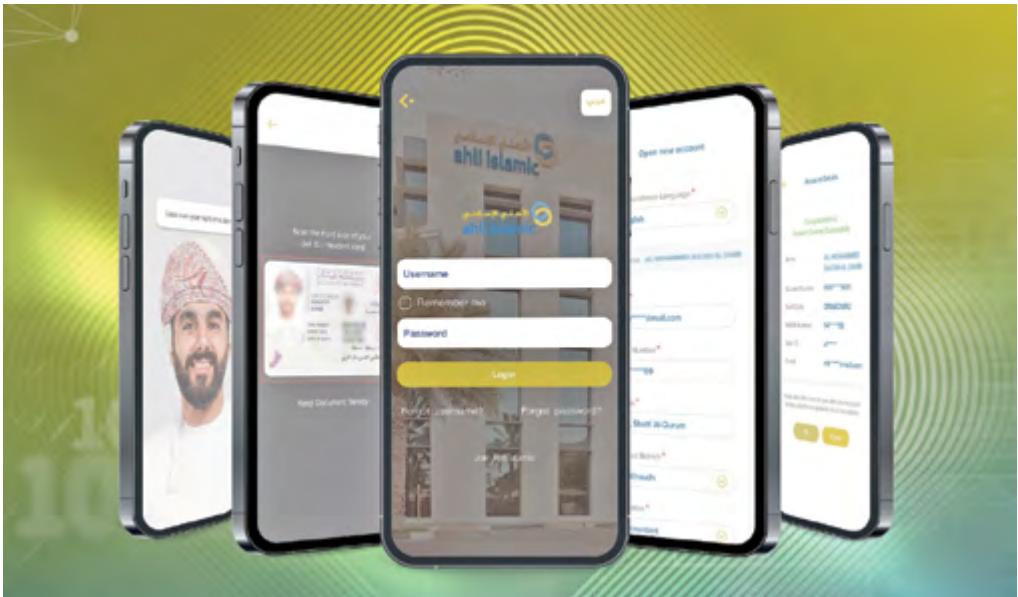
"The new service comes in the wake of a series of premium products that were introduced in the recent past to supplement the bank's efforts to add new members into the growing community of customers who seek services that are in tandem with the changing times and conform to the Islamic Sharia'a princi-

ples," he added.

Once Ahli Islamic mobile app is downloaded, individual citizens and residents will be able to open their savings account instantly with the bank and access a range of benefits and banking services in simple and easy steps.

"The newly launched service is one milestone to many the bank has achieved in its journey toward digital transformation. Our mission is to constantly study the market and convert opportunities into success stories that strengthen the bank's position in the banking sector and expand its customer base," said Hassan al Zaabi, head of E-Channels Retail at the bank.

To open a new savings account through the app, new customers will only have to register their personal details, through



scanning their ID card from the front and backside, as well as taking a selfie using the mobile phone to document the identity of the account holder for Oma-

nis. As for resident and foreign customers, the app requires verification of the resident ID card from both sides, and the passport. They are also required to

take a selfie by the mobile phone. Following the completion of the registration process, the account will be created and activated.

Ahli Islamic has announced

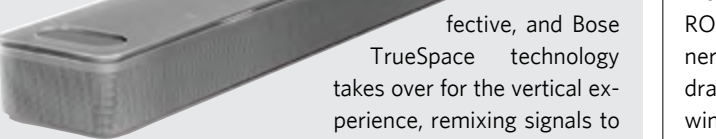
earlier this year the new upgrade of its Internet and mobile banking application. The app allows Ahli Islamic customers to access a diverse portfolio of banking products and services.

To name a few, customers are able to manage their accounts and cards more easily, along with the possible option of replacing and stopping the card either credit or debit, when required. The app also allows customers to obtain an instant electronic and printable account statement, make local and international transfers, as well as request for a chequebook. Additionally, users can conduct their banking transactions and pay utility bills in the new app. Ahli Islamic mobile app is supported by high standards of security and convenience, and it helps customers to save time and effort.

Bose introduces Smart Soundbar 900

Today Bose announces the new Smart Soundbar 900 — a Dolby Atmos speaker that provides unmatched immersion for music and movies.

With proprietary Bose spatial technologies, the 900 elevates Dolby Atmos content by



separating instruments, dialogue, and effects, and then places them in discrete parts of a room — far above, and to the far right and left. It also elevates content other than Dolby Atmos by providing a comparable experience no matter what you're listening to or watching.

Featuring HDMI eARC, the Soundbar 900 connects to a TV with just one cable, and packs all its technology in a gorgeous single enclosure. It features Wi-Fi and Bluetooth for the best of both worlds, Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa for voice control, a simple app for touch control, and is compatible with Spotify Connect, AirPlay 2, and all other Bose smart speakers for a premium audio multi-room system. The Soundbar 900 is an all-in-one powerhouse that replaces the Bose Smart Soundbar 700, is available for RO429 + VAT.

Oman International Electronics & Trading Co LLC is the sole distributor of Bose in Oman for the past 37 years. Soundbar 900 is available at Bose Store Qurm City Centre, Lulu Hypermarkets, Emax, Sharaf DG and Extra.

Dolby Atmos meets Bose spatial technologies

The Smart Soundbar 900 puts you in the centre of your music or movies in an entirely new way. By combining custom arrays, dipole transducers, and low-profile transducers with Bose spatial technologies, it produces a layer of realism no other speaker can duplicate.

While conventional Dolby Atmos soundbars create sound "overhead," the 900 does more.

Bose PhaseGuide technology adds other dimensions just as precisely, placing and "pinning" distinct sound to the right and left where there are no speakers. So the helicopter hovers above you — while the actors run past you, not across your screen. Or the singer is standing centre-left when per-

forming — and you hear them performing centre-left in your room. When there's no Dolby Atmos content, the horizontal spatial effects are just as ef-

fective, and Bose TrueSpace technology takes over for the vertical experience, remixing signals to add "height" without adding a ceiling speaker.

For programming or playlists, Bose QuietPort technology delivers exceptional bass performance and virtually no distortion at any volume.

And if furnishings or system placement interfere with audio quality, proprietary ADAPTiQ technology automatically fixes it, optimising performance for every space, every time.

Size and design

The Soundbar 900 is a mere 2.3" high, just over 4" deep, and 41" long. It features an oval-shaped design, wrap-around metal grille, tight seams, clean lines, and a polished, impact-resistant tempered glass top. It fits beautifully under televisions 50" or larger.

Simplicity, compatibility, controls

The Bose Smart Soundbar 900 delivers instant gratification across the board. Setup is straightforward with HDMI eARC and one cable that plugs into the TV. With Wi-Fi, accessing Spotify Connect and AirPlay 2 is easy; with Bluetooth, pairing to a phone or tablet takes seconds. Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa are built-in for voice control — and Alexa extends to taking and making calls, and enables the exclusive Bose Voice4Video feature that turns a TV on to the channel or input asked for — with just one command.

For true flexibility, the 900 works seamlessly and wirelessly with Bose bass modules and rear speakers for a more complete home theatre experience; Bose smart speakers for a multi-room or whole-home system; and the new QuietComfort 45 headphones for the ultimate private watch party.

The Bose Music app helps with pairing, personalisation, and updates.

NBO celebrates National Day giving out RO191,000

Continuing to celebrate special occasions with its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) held its latest Al Kanz Savings Scheme draw at its headquarters in Azaiba.

The event included its once-a-year National Day of the Renaissance draw, which gave RO1,000 each to 51 winners, in addition to the monthly Sadara draw, giving RO25,000 each to three winners; the Mazaya Exclusive draw, giving RO10,000 to four winners; and the Salary Transfer draw, giving RO500 each to 50



winners. With just one month left until the half-yearly Mega Draw, the bank is gearing up to hand over a total of RO500,000

as it rounds off another exciting year for its popular draw scheme.

Tariq Atiq, chief Retail and

Digital Banking officer at NBO, said, "Celebrating Oman's National Day with this special draw has become a wonderful tradition, as well as an extra way to reward our customers.

"It's also part of our efforts to support their financial journey and set them and their families up for the future. As we enter the last month of the year, we are looking forward to the Mega Draw and encourage our customers to keep saving."

Delighting customers across the country since 1995, the Al Kanz Savings Account scheme

continues to reward more customers every year, with prizes ranging from RO100 to RO250,000.

Customers are automatically eligible to win by maintaining an average minimum balance of RO100 in their Al Kanz Savings account. Every RO100 provides an extra chance in the draw, so the more money kept in the account, the more the chance of winning. Meanwhile, customers simply have to transfer their salary to NBO to be in for the chance of winning in the Salary Transfer draw.

OHI Oman Amateur Opens return for eleventh year

The Oman Golf Association and OHI are delighted to announce the welcome return of the OHI Oman Amateur Opens. One of Oman's premier golf championships, now in its 11th year, the event continues to drive tournament golf in the Sultanate. With the championship attracting top amateur golfers in Oman, including many of the Oman National Team, it is sure to be a well-contested event.

OHI Group have generously renewed their title sponsorship for a fifth year which sees the OHI Oman Amateur Open, OHI Ladies Open, OHI Juniors Open, OHI Oman Under 15s Open and OHI Under 12s Open played simultaneously on the 26th and 27th November 2021 at Ghala Golf Club in Muscat.



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

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

Eihab Al Saleh, CEO – OHI Group, the title sponsor of the event, said "We are immensely proud to sponsor Oman's leading Amateur golf Tournament for the 5th year. Golf in Oman is at a very exciting stage and OHI Group is committed to help grow the game in Oman and promoting junior golf for which there are separate categories. We had no hesitation to continue being the title sponsors. Golf is such a unique and accessible sport, with golfers aged from 7 to over 70 coming together to play the game." The OHI Oman Amateur Opens are unique as they not only offer the elite golfers an opportunity to compete but have created a platform for the juniors to excel and learn to compete from a young age."

Drive your ambition with Mitsubishi Xpander

Experience true Japanese hospitality with the versatile 7-seat Mitsubishi Xpander, now available from General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor of Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, as part of their ongoing National Day promotion. Under the promotion, you will enjoy a range of benefits when purchasing a brand-new Xpander, including cash gifts of up to RO3,047, free insurance, six years unlimited mileage warranty and roadside assistance, three years of free service, and an RO51 gift voucher on every purchase.

Commenting on the Xpander, Manoj Ranade, general manager of GAC, said, "With the Xpander's unsurpassed reliability and unprecedented comfort, the SUV continues to gain popularity across Oman; especially among those seeking style, functionality, and ruggedness in a practical family-focused vehicle. Now, with this new offer, we are able



to make this incredible SUV even more affordable and accessible to a larger number of fans across the country."

For the duration of the two-month promotion, which ends on January 13, 2022, customers purchasing the Xpander will receive cashback ranging from RO2,633 to RO3,047, depending on trim. In addition, it will also come with one-year free insurance, three years/51,000km free

service, an RO51 gift voucher, and a six-year unlimited mileage warranty and roadside assistance. As a bonus, every customer purchasing a vehicle will also be entered into a draw for a chance to win 51g of gold.

The latest SUV to join the Mitsubishi family, the Xpander sports a futuristic look inspired by the Montero Sport. It features a chrome upper grille and incorporates auto LED headlamps as well

as LED positioning lamps, together with Mitsubishi Motors' Dynamic Shield signature look. The stylish fenders and strong character line flow into the rear quarter and L-shaped rear combination lamps, which then extend into the tailgate, completing the Xpander's strong sculpted look.

On the inside, the Xpander features a spacious cabin designed to reflect Japanese hospitality 'Omotenashi' and provides

comfort for all seven adult passengers thanks to supportive seating, convenient amenities, and high-quality materials.

Power is provided by a spirited and responsive 1.5-litre 16-valve Dual overhead camshaft engine with advanced MIVEC - Mitsubishi Innovative Valve timing Electronic Control system - making it easy for the Xpander to carry seven adults uphill with ease. Excellent ground clearance for its class provides confidence on rough or flooded roads, while the reinforced suspension, coupled with high-performance shock absorbers and a rigid and lightweight body, ensure stability and comfort. Safety performance is significantly enhanced thanks to Mitsubishi Motors' Reinforced Impact Safety Evolution body or RISE. The Xpander also enjoys a variety of active safety features including an Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Emergency Stop Signal System (ESS), Active Stability Control (ASC), etc.

Gaza anger mounts at ‘humiliation’ of Egypt trips

‘It’s killing me inside. The people of Gaza are treated really badly. It is as if we are all terrorists’

Rafah, Palestinian Territories - Gaza resident Mustafa al Sawaf posted a scathing criticism online of the ‘path of humiliation’ Palestinians endure when leaving the crowded enclave for Egypt, and of the companies that profit from it.

Within an hour, his phone rang. “Someone from Hamas called and told me to erase everything,” Sawaf said, referring to the Islamist group that runs the Israeli-blockaded coastal strip.

The caller said the border business was ‘a very sensitive subject for the Egyptians, and that my article was going to harm Palestinians’, said Sawaf, a political analyst.

He quickly took down the social media post - but it had already earned dozens of supportive comments, reflecting widespread frustration about Gaza’s main lifeline to the outside world.

The 380km road trip to Cairo passes through the sweltering deserts of the Sinai peninsula, where the Egyptian army fights the Islamic State group and operates checkpoints and night-time curfews. It also crosses the Suez Canal.

The common complaint in Gaza is that the journey, often made on stuffy buses, is made deliberately more arduous and uncertain so that travel operators can profit by offering hassle-free ‘VIP services’ to those who can afford them. “It’s a disaster for the Palestinians,” said one industry source, speaking on condition of anonymity, who estimated the business is worth up to US\$175,000 per day.

“On the Egyptian side, they are applying more and more pressure to make the return to Gaza difficult, trying to push people to pay for the VIP service the next time.”

Blockaded enclave

Gaza, an impoverished territory of some 2mn people, where Hamas fought its most recent war with Israel in May, is a difficult place to enter or leave.

Israel, which used to occupy Gaza, has maintained a strict land and sea blockade on the enclave since Hamas took it over in 2007.

The Jewish state argues this is necessary to protect itself from a group labelled a terrorist organisation by much of the West.

The Yasser Arafat International Airport was bombed by Israel at the start of the second Palestinian intifada, the uprising



Palestinians wait for their turns to cross into Egypt through the Rafah border crossing in the southern Gaza Strip, on November 15 (AFP)



A general view of the Rafah border crossing in the southern Gaza Strip (AFP)

of 2000 to 2005, and goats now graze on its defunct runway.

Israel also does not permit passenger ferries to dock at Gaza’s Mediterranean ports.

This leaves only two ways out of the territory: Tightly-controlled land crossings through Israel and Egypt.

The Erez crossing to Israel is restricted to Palestinians with permits to work or trade inside Israel, some serious medical cases, and some people with onward transit permits to Jordan.

That means that for most of Gaza’s people, the Rafah crossing to Egypt offers the best route out.

But it is notorious for being, all too often, a costly and bureau-

cratic nightmare.

‘VIP services’

Palestinians are forced to register their names on a waiting list weeks before they plan to travel, and still transit is not guaranteed.

To be assured of travel, Palestinians have in recent years resorted to paying hundreds or even thousands of dollars to private companies and middlemen offering the ‘VIP’ services.

This has bred frustration towards Egyptians perceived to be profiting from the trade.

There was a brief period in the Hamas era when transit through Rafah was easier.

In 2013, when Egypt was ruled by late president Mohammed

Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood member less hostile to Hamas, a record half a million Palestinians crossed through Rafah.

But numbers fell dramatically after Morsi’s ouster in July of that year. Under current President Abdel Fattah al Sisi, Egypt periodically opens and closes Rafah, a tactic allowing it to exercise leverage over Hamas.

380km in four days

Several Gazans who recently made the trip through Rafah spoke with AFP, on condition they not be named for fear of being blacklisted by Egypt for future travel. A man who asked to be called Ahmed said his return from Cairo earlier this year, a

road trip that should take about five hours, stretched over four days.

First, he hired a private taxi that left Cairo at 4am on a Wednesday with an agreement to drive him to Rafah for US\$130.

The journey was halted at the entrance to the Suez Canal zone, where the vehicle crossing was closed and packed with taxis.

He left his cab, shared the cost of another with five other passengers and slept in the car.

At the checkpoint, he said, “The Egyptians opened all my bags. They confiscated my cologne, opened my Facebook and WhatsApp profiles and looked at my photos.”

After three security checks he was travelling smoothly through the Sinai until he reached another checkpoint 50km from Rafah late Thursday afternoon, where the Egyptians announced the road’s closure.

He said he rented a ‘totally filthy’ room in the nearby town of al-Arish and stayed for two days until the road reopened.

Ahmed and his companions rushed to Rafah but missed that day’s hour-long window to cross. Devastated, he slept on the street and crossed the next day.

‘I was scared’

For countless Palestinians, the Rafah-Cairo round trip is complicated by security conditions in

the Sinai, an area where IS militants have clashed with Egyptian forces.

Fatima, also not her real name, said she broke out in a cold sweat while sleeping at a checkpoint last year while travelling with a group of women from Cairo to Gaza.

“I stretched out on a cardboard box and I made a blanket out of my abaya” robe, she told AFP. “I was scared, we were in the desert, there was no water, no toilet.”

“We could hear shelling in the distance. One of the women with us kept screaming: ‘I’m going to die, I’m going to die.’”

The next night at the Baluza checkpoint about 200km from Rafah she slept on a bus, then under a bus in al-Arish the next night. She said it was hot, and children also trying to sleep under the vehicle cried through the night.

When she had to relieve herself, she asked other women to stand around for privacy.

‘Killing me inside’

Ahmed said the compounding hardships of travel were devastating and humiliating for Palestinians.

“It’s killing me inside,” he said. “The people of Gaza are treated really badly. It is as if we are all terrorists, Hamas members, but Hamas is not Gaza.”

His frustration mounted when, after finally returning to Gaza, he met others who had made the same journey in just a day. The difference, said Ahmed, was that they paid the VIP fees.

“In the end, counting the taxis, the rotten hotel, I almost paid the same amount and it took me almost five days”, he lamented, accusing Egyptian security officials of creating conditions aimed at forcing Palestinians to resort to VIP service.

Gaza-based companies charge US\$1,000 to expedite the journey to Cairo, including registration, private taxis and other documentation. The return costs US\$600, making the entire trip more expensive than most Gazans can afford.

Palestinian officials have in recent months urged Egypt to make transit easier, including Gaza Chamber of Commerce president Walid al Hosari.

Hosari told AFP that Egypt has said it will increase the number of travellers allowed to pass through a new tunnel under the Suez Canal, making the journey easier.

AFP



A Palestinian man with children wait at the Rafah border crossing (AFP)

Yemen war casualties likely to touch 377,000 by year end: UN

Dubai, UAE - Yemen’s seven year old war will have claimed 377,000 lives by the end of the year, through both direct and indirect impacts, a UN agency estimated in a report published on Tuesday.

Nearly 60 per cent of deaths will have been caused by indirect impacts such as lack of safe water, hunger and disease, it said, suggesting that fighting will have directly killed over 150,000 people.

Most of those killed by the war’s indirect effects are ‘young children who are especially vulnerable to under- and malnutrition’, said the UN Development Programme (UNDP) report.

‘In 2021, a Yemeni child under the age of five dies every nine minutes because of the conflict.’

A Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen in early 2015 to shore up the government after Iran-backed Houthi fighters seized the capital Sanaa months before.

Fighting since then has had ‘catastrophic effects on the nation’s development’, said the report.

The UNDP has warned in the past that the war in Yemen, already the poorest country in the region, had thrown its development back by over two decades.

The Yemen war is often labelled the greatest humanitarian disaster in the world.

Projecting the impact of continued fighting into the future, the UNDP warned that 1.3mn people in total will have died by 2030.

‘A growing proportion of those deaths will occur... due to second-order impacts that the crisis is waging on livelihoods, food prices and the deterioration of basic services such as health and education.’

‘Downward spiral’

If the war stopped now, the UNDP report said, there would be ‘hope for a brighter future in Yemen’ which could achieve



A man inspects a damaged factory following a reported bombardment by the coalition forces in the Houthi-controlled Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, on Tuesday (AFP)

middle-income status by 2050. But it judged that, for now, ‘the situation continues to propel in a downward spiral’.

Escalating fighting, including tank battles and regular bombardment by both fighter jets

and drones, have in some areas destroyed even the most basic infrastructure.

In recent weeks fighting has escalated on several fronts, mostly near the strategic Marib city, the internationally-recog-

nised government’s last major stronghold in Yemen’s oil-rich north.

Thousands of rebels and pro-government fighters have been killed in the battle for the city.

The UN refugee agency, in

separate comments on Tuesday, said it was ‘gravely concerned about the safety and security of civilians in Yemen’s Marib governorate, including more than 1mn people who are estimated to be displaced’.

Some 40,000 people have been forced to flee in Marib since September, said UNHCR spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo in Geneva. “Health conditions such as acute watery diarrhoea, malaria and upper respiratory tract infections are common among the newly displaced,” she said.

‘Worst disaster’

“We’ve not witnessed this much desperation in Marib in the last two years as we have in the last two months,” said the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Yemen chief of mission, Christa Rottensteiner.

The governorate’s 137 displacement sites have seen a nearly ten-fold increase in new

arrivals since September, the IOM said in a statement Wednesday.

“We’re now seeing, at times, up to 40 people with no choice but to share one small tent,” said Rottensteiner.

The Houthis this month also seized a large area south of Hodeida, a Red Sea port where the warring sides agreed on a ceasefire in 2018, after loyalist forces withdrew.

UNDP administrator Achim Steiner said that “millions of Yemenis continue to suffer from the conflict, trapped in poverty and with little possibility for jobs and livelihoods”.

More than 80 per cent of the population of around 30mn require humanitarian assistance, the report said, while ‘the economy is close to collapse’.

“Yemen is the world’s worst and largest humanitarian and development disaster, and it is continuing to worsen.”

AFP

NASA launches spacecraft to deflect an asteroid off course

Washington, US - A NASA mission to deliberately smash a spacecraft into an asteroid - a test run should humanity ever need to stop a giant space rock from wiping out life on Earth - blasted off on Tuesday from California.

It may sound like science fiction, but the DART (Double Asteroid Redirection Test) is a real proof-of-concept experiment, the goal of which is to slightly alter the trajectory of the asteroid Dimorphos.

The SpaceX rocket carrying the mission spacecraft lifted off at 10:21pm Pacific Time on Tuesday (0621 GMT Wednesday) from Vandenberg Space Force Base.

'Asteroid Dimorphos: we're coming for you!' NASA tweeted after the launch, adding later the DART spacecraft had successfully separated from the rocket's second stage.

'We've received our first signals from #DARTMission, which will continue to roll out its solar arrays in the coming hours and prepare for its 10-month, one-way trip to the asteroid,' it added.

Dimorphos is a 'moonlet' around 160m (or two Statues of Liberty) wide, that circles a much larger asteroid called Didymos (2,500 feet in diameter). The pair orbit the Sun together.

Impact should take place in the fall of 2022, when the binary asteroid system is 11mn kilometres from Earth, almost the nearest point they ever get.

No current threat

"What we're trying to learn is how to deflect a threat," NASA's top scientist Thomas Zuburchen said of the US\$330mn project, the first of its kind.

To be clear, the asteroids in question pose no risk to our planet.



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launches with the Double Asteroid Redirection Test, or DART, spacecraft onboard, from Space Launch Complex 4E at Vandenberg Space Force Base in California on Tuesday (AFP)

But they belong to a class of bodies known as Near-Earth Objects (NEOs), which approach within 30mn miles.

NASA's Planetary Defense Coordination Office is most interested in those larger than 460

feet in size, which have the potential to level entire cities or regions with many times the energy of average nuclear bombs.

There are 10,000 known near-Earth asteroids 460 feet in

size or greater, but none has a significant chance to hit in the next 100 years.

One major caveat: Scientists think there are still 15,000 more such objects waiting to be discovered.

15,000 mph kick

Planetary scientists can create miniature impacts in labs and use the results to produce sophisticated models about how to divert an asteroid - but these are always inferior to real-world tests.

Scientists say the Didymos-Dimorphos system is an 'ideal natural laboratory', because Earth-based telescopes can be used to judge the time it takes the moonlet to orbit its big brother.

Since the current orbit period is known, the change will reveal the effect of the impact, scheduled to occur between September 26 and October 1, 2022.

What's more, since the asteroids' orbit never intersects our planet, they are thought safer to study.

The DART probe, a box the size of a large fridge with limousine-sized solar panels on either

side, will slam into Dimorphos at just over 15,000 miles an hour.

Andy Rivkin, DART investigation team lead, said the current orbital period is 11 hours and 55 minutes, and the kick will shave around 10 minutes off that time.

There is some uncertainty about how much energy will be transferred by the impact because the moonlet's internal composition and porosity are not known. The more debris that's generated, the more push will be imparted on Dimorphos.

"Every time we show up at an asteroid, we find stuff we don't expect," said Rivkin.

The DART spacecraft also contains sophisticated instruments for navigation and imaging, including the Italian Space Agency's Light Italian CubeSat for Imaging of Asteroids (LICIACube) to watch the crash and its after-effects.

AFP

Biden invites Taiwan to democracy summit alongside 110 countries

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden has invited Taiwan to a virtual summit on democracy alongside more than 100 countries - a move that sparked indignation from authoritarian China, which is not on the list.

Taiwan thanked Biden for the invitation and said the gathering would be a rare opportunity for the self-ruled democracy to burnish its credentials on the world stage.

"Through this summit, Taiwan can share its democratic success story," Presidential Office spokesman Xavier Chang told reporters.

China said it 'firmly opposed' the inclusion of an island it regards as 'an inalienable part of Chinese territory'. Beijing claims self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory to be re-taken one day, by force if necessary.

The global conference was a campaign pledge by the US President, who has placed the struggle between democracies and 'autocratic governments' at the heart of his foreign policy.

The 'Summit for Democracy' will take place online on December 9 and 10 ahead of an in-person meeting at its second edition next year.

The meeting was long advertised, but the guest list - published on Tuesday on the State Department's website - will be closely scrutinised.

Unsurprisingly, America's main rivals China and Russia are



US President Joe Biden speaks at the White House in Washington, DC on Tuesday (AFP)

not on it.

Diplomatic coup

The invitation is a major coup for Taipei at a time when Beijing is ramping up its campaign to keep Taiwan locked out of international bodies.

Only 15 countries officially recognise Taipei over Beijing although many nations maintain de facto diplomatic relations with the island.

The US does not recognise Taiwan as an independent country but it holds it up as a rare

model of progressive democracy in Asia and maintains it as a crucial regional ally. It opposes any change to Taiwan's status by force. China balks at any use of the word 'Taiwan' or diplomatic gestures that might lend a sense of international legitimacy to the island.

"I agree Taiwan more than qualifies - but it does seem to be [the] only democratic govt invited that the US govt does not officially recognise. So its inclusion is a big deal," tweeted Julian Ku, a Hofstra University law pro-

fessor whose specialties include China.

Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said it would be represented at the summit by its de facto US Ambassador Bi-khim Hsiao and Digital Minister Audrey Tang, who is one of the world's few openly transgender national politicians.

India, often called 'the world's biggest democracy', will be present despite increasing criticism from human rights defenders over democratic backsliding under Hindu nationalist Prime

Minister Narendra Modi.

So too will Pakistan, despite its checkered relationship with Washington.

Democracy in decline

Turkey, a NATO ally of the United States whose President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was dubbed an 'autocrat' by Biden, did not make the list.

The city-state of Singapore and Bangladesh - one of the world's most populous democracies - did not make the list either.

In the Middle East, only Israel and Iraq were invited. The traditional Arab allies of the US - Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates - are all absent.

Biden also invited Brazil, which is led by controversial far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

In Europe, Poland is represented, despite recurring tensions with Brussels over respect for the rule of law, but Hungary's far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orban is not.

On the African side, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Niger are invited.

"For this kick-off Summit... there's a case for getting a broad set of actors into the room: It provides for a better exchange of ideas than setting a perfect bar for qualification," Laleh Ispahani of the Open Society Foundations told AFP.

AFP



Hezbollah fighters march during a military parade in the city of Baalbek in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa valley on November 13 (AFP)

Australia lists Hezbollah as 'terrorist organisation'

Sydney, Australia - Australia on Wednesday listed all of Hezbollah as a 'terrorist organisation', extending a ban on armed factions to the entire movement, which wields considerable power over Lebanon.

Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews said that the Tehran-backed Shiite group 'continues to threaten terrorist attacks and provide support to terrorist organisations' and poses a 'real' and 'credible' threat to Australia. Hezbollah is part political party and part militia - the only group in Lebanon to have refused to disarm since the civil war ended in 1990.

The movement, which plays a pivotal role in Lebanese politics, has been accused of fuelling Syria's civil war by sending thousands of fighters across the border to prop up President Bashar Assad's regime.

In 2006, it fought a short yet devastating war against Israel.

Critics have accused the movement of killing former prime minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, and more recently of

blocking investigations into the cataclysmic 2020 Beirut port explosion.

Some countries have sought to distinguish between Hezbollah's political and militant factions, fearing a blanket ban could further destabilise Lebanon and hamper contacts with authorities.

Australia had such a policy since 2003, when it banned Hezbollah's so-called External Security Organisation - a part of the movement's military wing that is chiefly focused on shadowy overseas operations.

From now, membership of the entire organisation or providing funding for it will now be proscribed in Australia, which has a large Lebanese community.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett thanked his 'friend' and Australian counterpart Scott Morrison for the move.

"Hezbollah is an Iranian-backed terror organisation in Lebanon responsible for countless attacks in Israel & around the world," he tweeted.

AFP

Four killed in Israel missile strikes on Syria: War monitor

Beirut, Lebanon - Two civilians were among four people killed by Israeli strikes on Wednesday that targeted a part of Syria where fighters loyal to Lebanon's Hezbollah are based, a monitor said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based group that relies on sources on the ground, said the Israeli missiles struck an area near three villages in the west of Homs province.

The raid killed four people, including two civilians, said the war monitor, although it was unable to determine whether the other two deaths were civilians or soldiers.

The official Syrian news agency SANA, citing a military official, said two civilians had been killed and seven people

wounded in the strikes that were conducted at dawn.

'The [Israeli] aggression resulted in the death of two civilians and injured six soldiers and one civilian,' the military official was quoted as saying.

The strikes targeted positions in the central part of the country, it said, without giving further details on the location.

Syria's air defences 'repelled the aggression and shot down most of the missiles, SANA said, quoting the same source.

The Israeli military, which rarely acknowledges individual strikes on Syria, declined to comment on 'reports in the foreign media'.

Israel has said repeatedly it will not allow neighbouring Syria to become a launchpad for its arch foe Iran.

Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory, targeting government positions as well as allied Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters.

Similar strikes on November 3 hit positions held by the Syrian government and its pro-Iranian allies near Damascus, said the Observatory.

On October 30, five pro-Iranian fighters were killed in an Israeli strike that destroyed Hezbollah and Iranian weapons and ammunition near the Syrian capital, the monitor said.

An Israeli strike in mid-October killed nine pro-government fighters near the T4 airbase east of Palmyra in central Syria, according to the same source.

AFP

Iran executes man convicted of murder as minor

Tehran, Iran - Iran executed a man on Wednesday who was arrested for murder at the age of 17, the judiciary said, despite appeals to spare his life by rights groups including Amnesty International.

Arman Abdolali was executed at dawn in Rajai Shahr prison near Tehran, in line with the 'qesas' eye-for-an-eye style justice demanded by the victim's family, said the judiciary's Mizan Online website.

Amnesty International had appealed on October 11 for Iran to halt the execution of the 25 year old who was arrested in 2014 and later convicted of murdering his girlfriend, Ghazaleh Shakour.

The London-based rights group said he had been sentenced to death twice but that the execution was stopped both times following international outcries.



Arman Abdolali

It said Abdolali was first sentenced to death in December 2015 after 'a grossly unfair trial' by a court that 'relied on torture-tainted confessions' following Shakour's disappearance the year before.

It said Abdolali was sentenced to death again in 2020 in a retrial, where the court ruled the teenager was responsible in the absence of evidence to the contrary, Amnesty reported.

"This young man was not a

criminal," Hadi Sadeghi, a judicial official, was quoted as saying by Iranian media in October.

"Like the victim, he came from a respectable family. In prison, Arman continued his studies to obtain a master's degree in education," he said. "The two families knew each other and the victim and the accused intended to get married," Sadeghi added.

The body of Shakour, who was 19 at the time of her disappearance, was never found.

According to Mizan Online, the victim's mother had said she would forgive Abdolali if he revealed the location of her body.

UN human rights experts also appealed to Iran to halt the execution.

"International human rights law unequivocally forbids imposition of the death sentence on anyone under 18 years of age," said the Geneva-based UN Office of the High Commissioner

for Human Rights.

Iran executed at least 246 people last year, retaining its place as the most prolific user of capital punishment in the region and the second worldwide after China, according to Amnesty.

Iran has often faced international criticism for executing people convicted of crimes committed when they were minors, in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that has been ratified by the Islamic republic.

In July, a senior Iranian official told AFP that the Islamic republic was doing its best to bring down to zero the number of executions of child offenders.

"We are going to the zero point," said Majid Tafreshi of the state-run High Council for Human Rights, insisting that was the 'will of the system' of the country.

AFP

Europe urged to act urgently amid dire COVID-19 outlook

Stockholm, Sweden - The EU health agency on Wednesday appealed to member states to 'urgently' introduce measures to counter surging COVID-19 cases, a day after the WHO Europe warned that 700,000 more may die on the continent this winter.

With more than 2.5mn cases and almost 30,000 deaths reported in the past week, Europe is by far the region currently worst hit by the virus, according to AFP's tally.

The trend is increasing, especially in countries with the lowest vaccination rates.

Europe's return to the pandemic's epicentre has been blamed on sluggish vaccine uptake in some nations, the highly contagious Delta variant, colder weather moving people indoors again and the easing of restrictions.

In addition, evidence is growing that vaccine-induced protection against infection and mild disease is waning, prompting calls for booster shots.

Some countries in Europe have already reintroduced strict measures while others are poised to do so, sparking protests from people weary of having their lives restricted over the past year-and-a-half.

On Tuesday, the European branch of the World Health Organization warned that up to 700,000 more people could die from COVID-19 by March 2022 in Europe and Central Asia, in addition to the 1.5mn who have al-



This file photo shows a patient in an intensive care unit of a hospital, in Salzburg, Austria, on November 17 (AFP)

ready succumbed to the virus.

The WHO said it expected 'high or extreme stress' in intensive care units (ICUs) in 49 out of the 53 countries that comprise its European region this winter.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on Wednesday said its modelling predicted an equally grim outcome unless measures were taken 'urgently'.

'The potential burden of disease in the EU/EEA from the Delta variant will be very high in December and January unless public health measures are applied now in combination with continued efforts to increase vaccine uptake in the total popu-

lation,' it said in a statement.

Under 70 per cent of the overall population in the EU and the European Economic Area (Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland) have been fully vaccinated.

'This leaves a large vaccination gap that cannot be bridged rapidly and gives ample room for the virus to spread,' the ECDC said.

"We need to urgently focus on closing this immunity gap, offer booster doses to all adults, and reintroduce non-pharmaceutical measures," ECDC director Andrea Ammon said.

Booster shots

In the EU overall, 67.7 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated

but vaccination levels vary widely between countries. Only 24.2 per cent of Bulgarians are fully vaccinated compared to 86.7 per cent in Portugal.

Ammon recommended COVID-19 booster shots for all adults over the age of 18, 'with a priority for people above 40 years old'.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Wednesday echoed that call, tweeting that 'boosters should be available for adults, with priority for people over 40 and vulnerable people'.

Sweden, which has already offered boosters to those over the age of 65, meanwhile announced it would soon be making them

Europe's return to the pandemic's epicentre has been blamed on sluggish vaccine uptake in some nations, the highly contagious Delta variant, colder weather moving people indoors again and the easing of restrictions

available to those aged 18 to 64. It will start with those in the age group 50 to 64, Health Minister Lena Hallengren said.

Countries in central and eastern Europe are meanwhile those currently seeing the highest number of deaths, due to low vaccination rates.

In Russia, doctors on Wednesday invited celebrities and politicians with anti-vaccine views to visit COVID-19 red zones in hospitals and see for themselves the dramatic effects of the pandemic.

"We are all somewhat busy, you can probably guess with what," said the letter. Signatories included prominent Moscow doctor Denis Protsenko, who is in charge of the capital's main COVID-19 hospital.

AFP



Members of the local Muslim community lower the coffin of a stillborn baby of an Iraqi migrant, into the grave in Bohoniki on Tuesday (AFP)

Belarus, Poland violating human rights: Watchdog

Warsaw, Poland - Belarusian border guards may be guilty of torture against migrants on the country's border with Poland, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Wednesday, adding that both nations have committed 'serious human rights violations'.

The group said in a report that the two governments 'have an obligation to prevent further deaths by ensuring regular humanitarian access to the people stuck in the border area'.

HRW researchers said they had conducted in-depth interviews with 19 people, some of whom 'had been pushed back, sometimes violently, by Polish border guards'.

They said these pushbacks 'violate the right to asylum under EU law' and urged the EU to 'start showing solidarity with the victims at the border on both sides who are suffering and dying'.

In Belarus, they said that 'violence, inhuman and degrading treatment and coercion' by Belarusian border guards were

'commonplace'. HRW added that this treatment 'may in some cases constitute torture, in violation of Belarus' international legal obligations'.

The EU and US have accused Belarus of engineering the crisis in retaliation against EU sanctions on President Alexander Lukashenko, who has crushed the opposition and independent media during his nearly three decades in power.

Lukashenko has told the BBC that Belarusian border guards 'maybe' helped the migrants cross, but denied bringing them to Belarus and urged the EU to take them in.

Belarus estimates there are around 7,000 migrants in the country. 'While Belarus manufactured this situation without regard for human consequences, Poland shares responsibility for the acute suffering in the border area,' Lydia Gall, senior Europe and Central Asia researcher at HRW, said in a statement.

AFP

Israel, Morocco sign security deal

Rabat, Morocco - Israel and Morocco signed a security agreement on Wednesday making it easier for Rabat to acquire high-tech exports from Israel's defence industry, as the countries expand ties following their normalisation deal last year.

The memorandum of understanding signed in Rabat by visiting Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz and Morocco's minister in charge of defence administration, Abdellatif Loudiyi, was 'unprecedented' for the Jewish state, an Israeli official said.

Israel has several security accords with allied nations, but the Morocco deal marks the first-of-its-kind agreement with a majority Arab nation, the official said, asking not to be named.

Israel has full diplomatic relations with only four Arab countries: Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

The Morocco deal came as Gantz made the first visit by an Israeli defence minister to the



Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz (right) exchange documents with Moroccan Minister Abdellatif Loudiyi, in Rabat on Wednesday (AFP)

North African kingdom. Gantz said the deal 'will enable Israeli exports here (to Morocco)'.

Israel's Defence Ministry oversees all security exports, with the Jewish state offering state-of-art products ranging from attack drones to the Iron Dome missile defence system.

The Defence Ministry said the Morocco MoU will establish 'formal cooperation' on 'operational planning, purchases, research

development, and training'.

One Israeli product, the NSO's Pegasus spyware, has already made its way to Morocco, according to Amnesty International and Paris-based organisation Forbidden Stories. Rabat allegedly used it against French President Emmanuel Macron - a claim denied by Morocco which said it never bought the software and has filed lawsuits against French media and Amnesty.

An Israeli defence official stressed that 'relations with Morocco are not based on arms sales' alone. In Morocco, Israel was eyeing 'long-term bonds that are a cornerstone of Israeli security', the official said.

Gantz was due to meet Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita later on Wednesday.

Morocco and Israel previously set up low-level ties in 1993 but Rabat broke them off at the start of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, in 2000.

Rabat normalised ties with the Jewish state last December, shortly after similar announcements by the UAE and Bahrain. Sudan followed suit in January but has yet to build relations.

Those pacts brokered by former US president Donald Trump infuriated the Palestinians, who urged the Arab world to maintain its stand against recognising Israel until it agrees to a peace deal establishing a Palestinian state.

AFP

Sri Lanka government lifts ban on weedkiller linked to cancer cases

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka on Wednesday lifted its partial ban of a weedkiller subject to US lawsuits over claims it causes cancer, after abandoning a campaign to become the world's first completely organic farming nation.

On the weekend, authorities lifted a ban on pesticides and other farming goods, after food shortages saw the price of vegetables double and supermarkets began rationing rice.

Sri Lanka completely banned the use of glyphosate - classified as a 'probable carcinogen' by the World Health Organization (WHO) - in 2015.

Three years later it carved out a limited exemption for the tea industry, the country's main export earner.

A government bulletin circulated on Wednesday revoked all remaining restrictions on the weedkiller with immediate ef-



Glyphosate is classified as a 'probable carcinogen' by the WHO

fect. Agriculture minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage confirmed to reporters on Wednesday that all remaining bans on agricultural products had been abolished.

Glyphosate is the active ingredient in weedkiller Roundup and has been widely used around the globe since its introduction in 1974, both on food crops and outside of agriculture on public

lawns and in forestry.

German chemicals giant Bayer has been plagued by legal woes since it bought Roundup producer Monsanto in 2018, with a series of claims by cancer patients who say glyphosate caused them to fall ill.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa banned agricultural chemical imports in May.

AFP

Bangladesh resumes moving Rohingya refugees to flood-prone island

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh - Bangladesh has resumed moving Rohingya refugees to a remote and flood-prone island, authorities said on Wednesday, despite criticism from aid groups and claims some are being relocated against their will.

Nearly 20,000 members of the stateless minority, who fled neighbouring Myanmar in 2017 after a brutal military crackdown, have already been sent to Bhashan Char island.

Bangladesh eventually wants to rehouse 100,000 of its approximately 1mn Rohingya refugees to the island, moving them from cramped relief camps on the mainland.

But hundreds already sent there have since been arrested in

coastal towns after fleeing the island, and dozens died in August after a fishing boat carrying escapees capsized.

Another 2,000 Rohingya will nonetheless be transferred this week, the country's deputy refugee commissioner Moozzem Hossain told AFP, more than six months after the last group was sent there. "Navy ships will bring them to the island on Thursday," he added.

The UN refugee agency signed a deal with Bangladesh authorities to provide help and protection to refugees on the island last month.

Hossain said that all relocations were completely voluntary, but several refugees said they were being forced to move there.



A Red Cross expert speaking to members of the Rohingya community to create awareness about cyclones and COVID-19 pandemic at Bhashan Char island on Tuesday (AFP)

"We don't want to go to Bhashan Char," a Rohingya woman told AFP by phone, speaking on the condition of anonymity. She said a Rohingya community leader in the camps had added her name to a list of people seeking to relocate without her consent.

"If I go to Bhashan Char, I will not be able to go back to Myanmar. I will not go," she added.

One Rohingya community leader, who also asked to remain anonymous, said Bangladeshi authorities had told him and his peers to each provide lists of at least five families to be relocated.

Bhashan Char is 60km from the Bangladesh mainland and lies at the heart of the Meghna

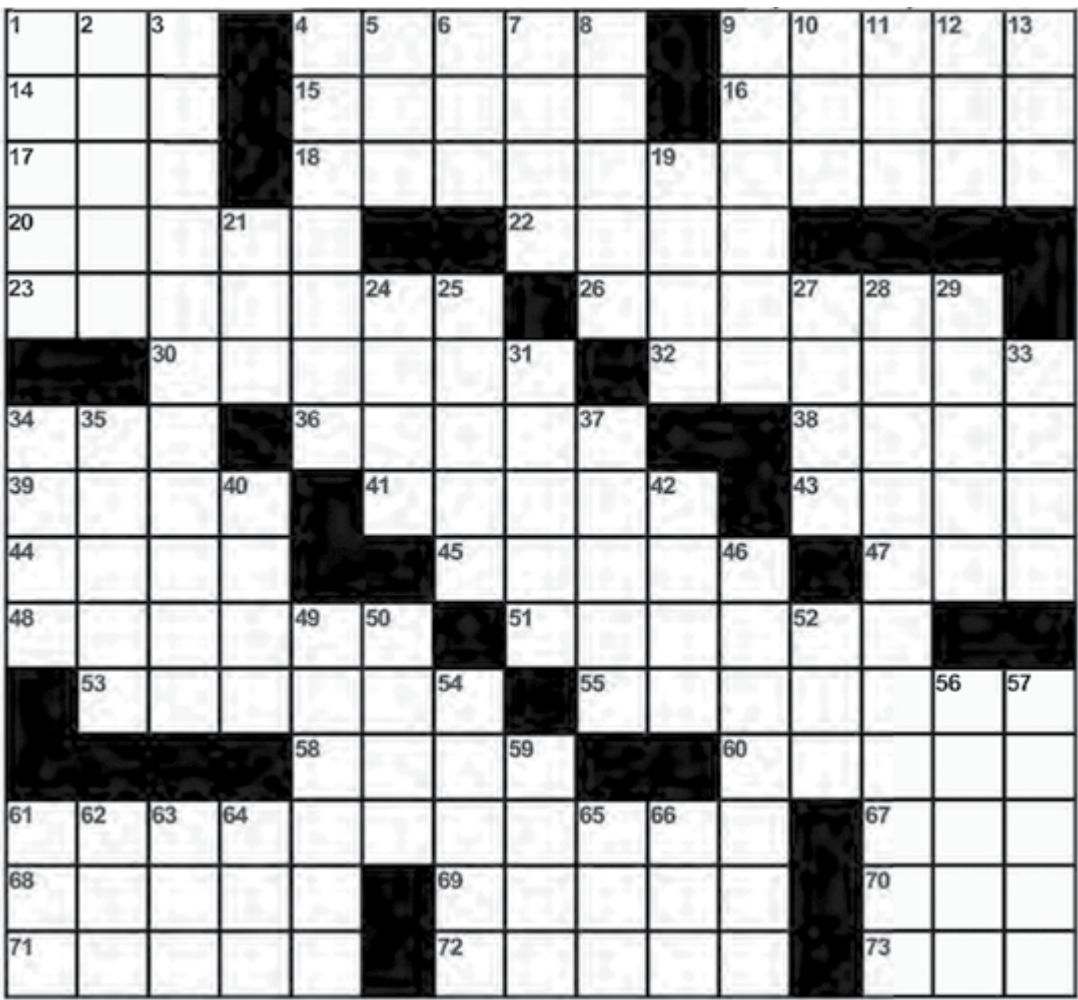
estuary, an area prone to powerful cyclones that have killed around 1mn people in the last 50 years.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged Bangladesh to halt further relocations until it could guarantee freedom of movement for the refugees. The watchdog said on Tuesday that Rohingya leaders were being coerced into persuading camp residents to move to Bhashan Char, including by confiscating their identity documents.

"Bangladesh's October agreement with the UN doesn't provide a free ticket to forcibly relocate Rohingya refugees," said Bill Frelick, HRW's refugee and migrant rights director.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) Bird known for thiev-
ery,
briefly
4) Soft-palate attach-
ment
9) Not appropriate or
suitable
14) Roth plan
15) Banking expert?
16) Workplace for some
clowns
17) Nothing at all
18) Preparing for
Thanksgiving
dinner?
20) Like an improperly
hung
picture
22) Gin-flavoring fruit
23) Female inheritor
26) Professor's job secu-
rity
30) Nervous_ (worri-
some
person)
32) Plays a guitar
34) Clothing attachment
36) Yoga position
38) Agitation
39) Bonneville Flats lo-
cale
41) Wearing a hidden
microphone
Moving right along

43) Poker payment
44) Investment firm T. _
Price
45) Spectacular stars
47) "Vandal" suffix
48) Damaged
51) River through Wales
and
England
53) Bobcats' relatives
55) Backs out
58) Bit of this and a bit
of that
60) Campaign man-
ager?
61) Declining to draw
67) Become mature
68) Middle Eastern rice
dish(Var.)
69) Wear away
70) Ball prop
71) Barks sharply
72) Uses an acetylene
torch
73) Botch something up
DOWN
1) Washington the blues
legend
2) Questions do it
3) Rudely implying "for-
get it"
4) Abrupt increase
5) Seven on a grandfa-
ther clock
6) Consultants' center?

7) A great deal
8) See 20-Across
9) Like some requests
10) Silent assent
11) Hue and cry
12) Sermon seating
13) Tare factor
19) "Nay" and "uh-uh"
21) Before, poetically
24) Like a snail's pace
25) Play a set with the
band
27)_ Major ("Big Bear"
constellation)
28) Eiden, to Obama
29) Gives off
31) Common Market
money
33) Part of a plant
34) Artificial grass
35) Coral island
37) Dissolve, as ties
40) Felled, as a small
tree
42) Mr. Letterman
46) Government upper
houses
49) Book of Moses
50) Place for cold cuts
52) U.S. flag color
54) Muscular "swine"
anagram
56) Like beavers, it's
said
57) Look with a curled

lip
59) Grimm villain
61) Undercover infiltra-
tor
62) Bit of men's formal-
wear

63) What a monopolist
wants
64) Brief lie-down
65) D.C. dealmaker
66) Do simple math

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Give a fire some air and you can really feel the heat. Right now, you and someone new are sparking off each other all over, especially when you add your flirtatious rambling into the mix. Make sure that it's someone you're really interested in. There's nothing worse than building up a roaring fire only to have to quickly hose it down with an extinguisher.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Are you stuck in the mire of dealing with career needs and other necessary but taxing responsibilities? Your energy has a major change of plans in store for you. Social activities rank high, so make sure everything you do is part of a group. That doesn't mean that your task list gets thrown out the window, though. It's more like you and your friends run errands together and your chores turn into games.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
Boredom is not on your schedule right now, thank heavens. Curiosity and competitiveness are taking up too much room to allow anything else! Take advantage of this buzzing energy to get lots of things moving. It isn't the time for you to sit down and see things through from start to finish. Instead, you need to just begin projects you've been trying to get off the ground for some time now.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The market condition when goods and services are not freely available and thus the prices are relatively high is called
- a. rights issue
 - b. sinking fund
 - c. seller's market
 - d. recession

2. The language spoken in Sikkim are
- a. Nepali, Hindi, Lepcha, Bhutani
 - b. Marathi
 - c. Bengali, Tripuri
 - d. Manipuri

3. The Heads of Government of the countries which are members of the Commonwealth meet
- a. once a year
 - b. biennially
 - c. at intervals of three years
 - d. as and when necessary

Answers: 1. c 2. a 3. b



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Are you eating because you need sustenance or chowing down for other, maybe more emotional reasons? As one of the more sensual people out there, you can sometimes respond to stress through your body, and overindulging in food is an easy way to do just that. Just make sure you really need those calories and aren't simply trying to feed your anxieties. Find a way to nourish your body and your soul in the right way.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Keep your head and don't be distracted by any silly notions or guesswork. Unanswered questions sometimes spark your creativity, but right now you're better off sticking to the basics and taking care of any details that come up. You find that once you're in the groove the time flies by as you take care of all those loose ends that escaped your attention earlier.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Immunise yourself against a dangerous case of flakiness that's making the rounds by ensuring that your communication style is direct and to the point. Others may have a hard time expressing their feelings, which results in lots of time wasting, but you don't have to let it affect your work. It might help to rehearse what you want to say ahead of time and cut out anything extraneous that could confuse your flightier peers.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You're the idea person now, and it's a good thing too, because you've got more than you know what to do with! Delegate all the stupid details (and the follow-up) to others for now. Your job is to just keep coming up with new schemes for people to play with. Your imagination is so strong that it might almost be too much to keep up with. If so, save some of your hot ideas for later.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Though you're normally the apex of sociability and grace, right now you rise to even greater heights of social genius with barely any provocation. Indulge your curiosity about different people, places, and things. You're delighted to discover new interests and a wide-ranging circle of new people who might turn into lifelong connections.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Sparks fly in the best possible way when you and the right person get clicking. All partnerships (from romantic to business and beyond) really get moving thanks to today's energy, and communication has never been as easy or as fun as it is now. Make the most of this energy and discuss all the topics that seemed too touchy just a few days ago. They're easy as pie to address now.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
From answering ancient messages to replying to old invitations, you're the master of tying up loose ends now. And it's not just communication matters either. Anything lying around collecting dust should definitely get some of your attention as well. It's also time to play catch-up with an old friend or family member, especially if they've been sending you signals for a while now.

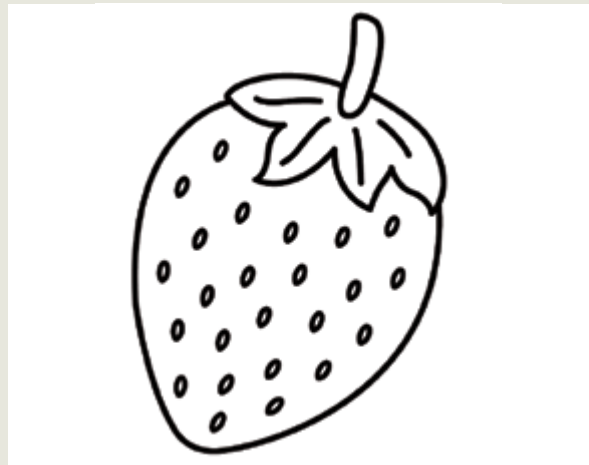
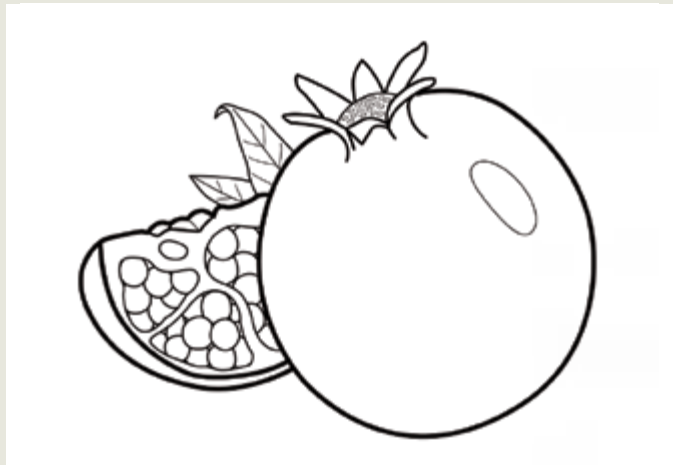
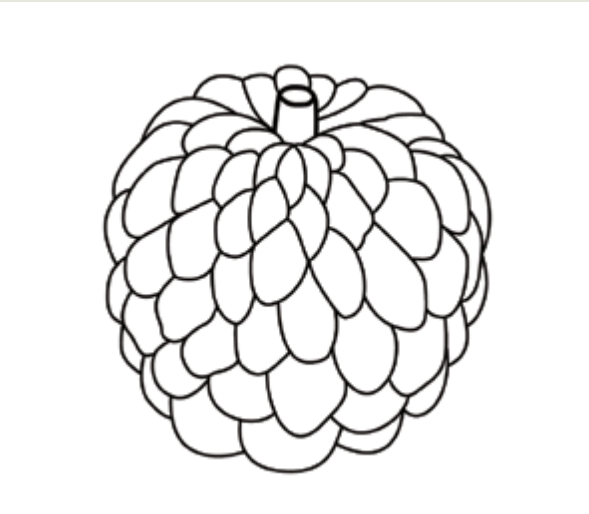
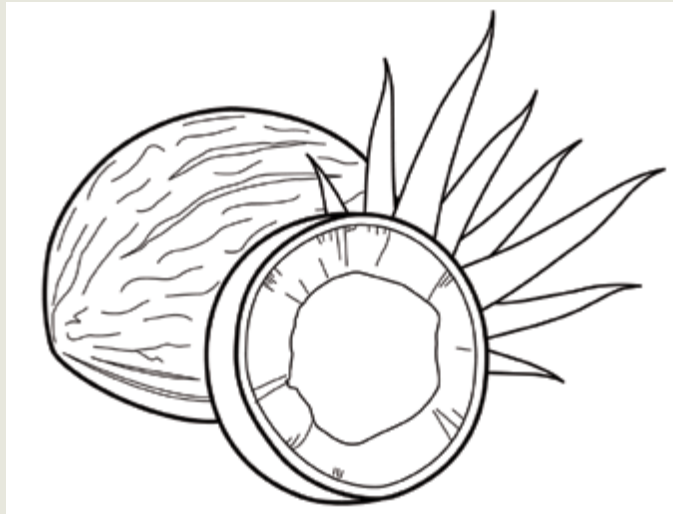


SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Even your best-laid plans need to be double-checked, confirmed, and then triple-checked before you're sure that everything should work out right. Your energy demands caution in all business and financial matters, so make sure everything is in order before you sign on the dotted line, or any other kind of line for that matter. It might take a serious effort, but your peace of mind is worth it.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
If you felt that certain elements of life were carved in stone, today is the day to shake things up in a big way. Your personal energy is pushing you to stick with generalities rather than try to nail anything down. Embrace change and you might encounter some sweet surprises, even when the things you thought you knew for certain start to change before your very eyes.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

Y	I	I	R
B	E	D	S
U	I	R	S
A	G	A	A

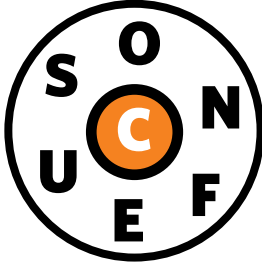
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

HOLIDAY ESCAPE



FOUR HOURS TO FUN

With National Day holidays here, the weekend has become a four-day long affair – the perfect time for a quick getaway. If you have seen enough of Oman and seek a different experience, consider short flights from Muscat to various destinations, within four hours away. Here are some ideal destinations worth visiting during the extended weekend break:



Dubai, UAE

Flight time: 1 hour

With a good number of flights daily, Dubai is a city for luxury shopping, ultramodern architecture and a lively nightlife scene. Burj Khalifa, an 830m-tall tower, dominates the skyscraper-filled skyline. At its foot lies Dubai Fountain, with jets and lights choreographed to music. On an artificial island just offshore is Atlantis, The Palm, a resort with water and marine-animal parks. And for those interested in shopping, Dubai has much more to offer with Expo 2020 currently on.



Doha, Qatar

Flight time: 1½ hours

If you are a football fan, you can make the best of the national day holidays and go to Qatar – now in the lime-light because of the next football World Cup tournament. Qatar is all decked up to receive visitors from around the world, hence this is the good time to go check on the preparations. The shining jewel of Qatar, Doha is a multicultural city, home to most of the country's population as well as expatriate communities. Shopping abounds in the city's numerous malls, while a wide corniche impresses visitors.



Colombo, Sri Lanka

Flight time: 4 hours

If you like history, then Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, has a long history as a port on ancient east-west trade routes with heritage being reflected in its architecture. It is a city with a great mixture of modern life and architecture, and old colonial buildings. Colombo actually served as a seaport town as far back as the 5th century as it has the perfect location for trade between Asia and Europe. It has since had Arab, Portuguese, and Dutch settlers, so it has been quite international for many decades. Direct flights to Colombo make it convenient.



Cairo, Egypt

Flight time: 4 hours

With direct flights that take only four hours, Cairo is the place to be this long weekend. It is set on the Nile River and nearby there is Giza, which is the site of the iconic pyramids which are the main attraction in Cairo that tells a story of the last remaining wonder of the ancient world – for nearly 4000 years. Also, make sure to visit the Egyptian Museum, which has one of the world's most important collections of ancient artifacts. Also, Museum of Islamic Art, on the edge of Islamic Cairo, holds one of the world's finest collections of Islamic art.



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Flight time: 4 hours

Sometimes referred to as the capital of Africa, Addis Ababa is a buzzing hub of economic, social and political activity and home to such notable offices as the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The things to do in Ethiopia will absolutely astound you and one of the most fascinating things about the country is that it is a very ancient culture. Their language, Amharic, is one of the oldest written languages in the world. And Ethiopia, the city known as the 2nd Jerusalem, has African safaris, and a real world Camelot.



Shiraz, Iran

Flight time: 2 hours

Shiraz is a city in south-central Iran, known for its literary history and many gardens. It is known as a city of lovers is a land full of worth seeing things. It is believed that Shiraz is the most beautiful tourist city of Iran with many historical and natural attractions that you will become interested in them. People of Shiraz are really warm-hearted. Traveling to Shiraz can be one of your most memorable trips. Though passengers need to travel via Dubai, it is worth exploring Shiraz.



Tbilisi, Georgia

Flight time: 3 hours

Charming is a word that often pops up when describing Georgia's capital. It is a place that can be called a foodie destination, and the best way to discover it is by booking yourself on one of the many food tours on offer. Apart from that, Tbilisi's old town reflects a long, complicated history, with periods under Persian and Russian rule. Its diverse architecture encompasses Eastern Orthodox churches, ornate art nouveau buildings and Soviet Modernist structures.



Amman, Jordan

Flight time: 4 hours

Jordan might be best known for its ancient city of Petra, but you'll find plenty to keep you entertained in the thriving capital. Rainbow Street is a popular hang-out, with lots of great cafes, restaurants and shops. And for those in love with history, they can check out the striking Roman Theatre, which dates back to the second century.



Male, Maldives

Flight time: 4 hours

Maldives is a small country in South Asia, located in the Indian Ocean. One of the world's smallest national capital, Male is known for its ancient mosque and colourful buildings. With its beauty and progressiveness being talked about, the island today has grown into one of the most visited places in the Maldives. It is a casual town best for wandering without pre-planned itineraries. Male has heritage buildings on one hand and trees and water with welcoming shades on the other.

HOME LAB TO SAVE LAD



Xu Wei pouring liquid nitrogen at his home laboratory in Kunming, China

A Chinese dad makes his own medicine in a make-shift home laboratory to treat his 'dying' son



Xu Wei playing with his son Xu Haoyang, who was diagnosed with Menkes syndrome

Two-year-old Haoyang, in all likelihood, has just months to live - but the only medicine that can help his rare genetic condition is not found anywhere in China and closed borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic mean he cannot travel for treatment. His desperate father, Xu Wei, has instead created a home laboratory to himself prepare a remedy for the lad.

"I didn't really have time to think about whether to do it or not. It had to be done," the 30-year-old told AFP from his DIY lab in a high-rise apartment building in southwestern Kunming.

Haoyang has Menkes Syndrome, a genetic disorder that impacts how copper - which is crucial for brain and nervous system development - is processed in the body. Sufferers rarely survive beyond the age of three.

Xu, who has only high school education and ran a small online business before his

I didn't really have time to think about whether to do it or not. It had to be done. My friends and family were against it. They said it was impossible.

XU WEI

son became ill, is, however, determined to give him a fighting chance.

"Even though he cannot move or speak, he has a soul and feels emotions," he said, holding Haoyang in his lap to give him honey mixed in water.

After being told the disease was incurable and the only medication that could help ease

symptoms was not available in China, he began researching and teaching himself pharmaceuticals.

"My friends and family were against it. They said it was impossible", he says.

Most online documents on Menkes Syndrome were in English, but undeterred Xu used translation software to understand them, before setting up a home lab in his father's gym.

On discovering copper histadine could help, he set up the equipment to create it himself, mixing copper chloride dihydrate with histidine, sodium hydroxide and water.

Blocked by COVID-19

Xu now gives Haoyang a daily dose of home-

made medicine, which gives the child some of the copper his body is missing. The amateur chemist claims that a few of the blood tests returned to normal two weeks after beginning the treatment.

The toddler can't talk, but he gives a smile of recognition when his father runs a gentle hand over his head. His wife, who didn't want to give her name, cares for their five-year-old daughter in another part of the city.

Menkes Syndrome is more prevalent in boys than girls, and it is estimated one in 100,000 babies are born with the disease globally according to organisation Rare Diseases.

There is little information or data available but Xu said pharmaceutical companies have

shown little interest as the treatment "does not have commercial value and its user group is small."

Under normal circumstances, he would have travelled abroad to bring back treatments for Haoyang from specialist centres overseas, but China has largely closed its borders since the start of the pandemic. So, Xu felt he had no choice but to make it himself.

"At first, I thought it was a joke," said Haoyang's grandfather Xu Jianhong. "(I thought) it was an impossible mission for him."

However, six weeks after throwing himself into the project, Xu produced his first vial of copper histidine. To test it, he first experimented with rabbits and then injected the treatment into his own body.

"The rabbits were fine, I was fine, so then I tried it on my son," he said. Reassured, he then started gradually increasing the dosage. But the medicine is not a cure.

Professor Annick Toutain, specialist of rare diseases at the Tours University Hospital in France, said the copper treatment "is only efficient against certain genetic anomalies and if it is administered very early on, in the first three weeks of life." She said that after that the treatment will alleviate symptoms, "without leading to recovery." And Xu has accepted that it can "only slow down the disease".

Gene therapy

His work has led to interest from Vector-Builder, an international biotech company, which is now launching gene therapy research with Xu into Menkes syndrome.

The company's chief scientist Bruce Lahn described it as "a rare disease among rare diseases" and said they were inspired after learning about Xu's family.

Xu has even been contacted by other parents whose children have been diagnosed with Menkes, asking him to make treatment for their relatives too - something he has refused. "I can only be responsible for my child," he told AFP, while health authorities have said they will not intervene as long as he only makes the treatment for home use.

Huang Yu of the Medical Genetics Department at Peking University told AFP that, as a doctor, he was "ashamed" to hear of Xu's case. He said he hoped that "as a developing country, we can improve our medical system to better help such families." AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

JOB VACANCIES

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Please send cv to: get@omzest.com

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ACCA / CA / CMA / CPA / Graduate / Diploma any of this qualification with at least 5 years of experience. Candidate should have the capability to manage payable Accounting keeping in mind minimum working capital and constraints in Liquidity. Independently managing Payable Function and Cash Flow, Petty Cash Management, Timely managing Supplier Payments and other Inter Company Payments and all other payments, Timely Booking of Invoices, GRN Costing and booking of Bank Payments, etc., Timely Reconciliation of Suppliers as well as Banks. Month End Closing Activities of Payable Accounting to ensure timely submission of MIS. Ready to take more responsibilities during Budget, Month End Activities and Audits to meet time line. Candidate should be able to oversee and bring about the functioning of Accounts, Finance and Store activities of a large size trading organisation to ensure company needs are met and interests safeguarded.

Please send your CV to: job.opportunity1947@gmail.com



BIRTHDAY WISHES
SUMAIYYA FATHIMA
25th November

Many Many Happy Returns Of The Day
Best wishes from Father, Mother And Brother

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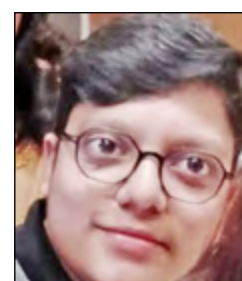
WEDDING ANNIVERSARY



SHAJI AND SUSAN
27th November

Dear Dada and Mama,
Here is a bunch of our wishes to say 'love you always'. God bless you.
Happy anniversary!
Sharon, Sherin & Sherill

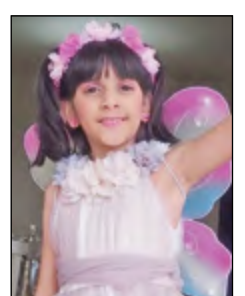
BIRTHDAY WISHES



ABDUL FATHAH (ACHU)
29th November

May this year's birthday be the start of life Live beautifully, richly and happily.
With love
Umma, Wafa, Vappi

BIRTHDAY WISHES



AYERA SAGAR
25th November

Your birthday is the perfect time to celebrate how truly phenomenal you are. You are classy, beautiful, and intelligent. Happy birthday to our little princess! Lots of love from Mama, Papa and Aarav

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Mr. Saleh Al Balushi: +968-98037464



Sunday 21 November to Thursday 3 December 2021 (8:00 AM to 5:00 PM)



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The items can be inspected at our premises with prior appointment

Sri Lanka four wickets away from big win over West Indies



Sri Lanka's Ramesh Mendis (second from right) celebrates with teammates after dismissing West Indies' Kyle Mayers on the fourth day of the first Test match, in Galle on Wednesday (AFP)

Galle, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka need just four wickets to win the first Test against West Indies in Galle after setting the all-but-impossible target of 348 on Wednesday's penultimate day of play.

West Indies had made just 52 before bad light forced an early end after the hosts' spin trio made quick work of the top order.

The sensational collapse saw

the tourists lose four wickets in 15 balls for just four runs.

Ramesh Mendis was the pick of the bowlers finishing with four for 17. The off-spinner had the makings of a hat-trick as he trapped Kyle Mayers leg before.

Jason Holder was expecting the ball to turn into him on the next delivery but a straight path smashed his off-stump.

Joshua da Silva walked in to face the hat-trick ball but it was

wayward from Mendis, who bowled down the leg-side.

Lasith Embuldeniya accounted for Jermaine Blackwood and Roston Chase.

There was little hope for West Indies at 18 for six and all signs were that the game was going to end on the fourth day.

Then Nkrumah Bonner (18) and da Silva (15) batted for just over 45 minutes to hang in before the umpires called bad light.

"Everyone is disappointed in the dressing room," Bonner told reporters.

"But then, it's up to me and Josh to get the job done.

"We have about 640 balls to bat. We want to play each ball on merit and respect the bowlers... It's a simple plan: bat as much as possible tomorrow."

West Indies' lowest total against Sri Lanka is 93 all out in Barbados in 2018.

Sri Lanka declared their second innings on 191 for four after a 123-run stand by Angelo Mathews and Dimuth Karunaratne in just 150 deliveries.

Skipper Karunaratne, who had posted 147 in the first innings, narrowly missed twin centuries with 83, including nine fours.

He finally stumbled after attempting to cut Rahkeem Corn-

wall, a top edge knocking the ball off the wicketkeeper's gloves and into the hands of first slip.

Karunaratne has been prolific this year with over 850 runs now at an average of 77. He is the world's third-highest run getter in Test cricket for 2021, behind England's Joe Root and India's Rohit Sharma.

"I have little doubt that by the time he's done, he will be amongst the top three run scorers for Sri Lanka," Mathews said of his teammate after play ended.

The West Indies were 230 all out in the first innings, with nine wickets falling to Sri Lanka's spinners. Left-armers Praveen Jayawickrama was the pick of the bowlers with four scalps to his name.

The fourth day's play was delayed by one hour due to rain. A total of 52 overs were lost on day three due to rain.

AFP

SCOREBOARD		
Sri Lanka 1st innings 386		
West Indies 1st innings 230		
Sri Lanka 2nd innings 191d		
WEST INDIES 2 ND INNINGS		
K Brathwaite	lbw b Mendis	0
J Blackwood	c Mathews b Embuldeniya	9
N Bonner	not out	18
Shai Hope	b Mendis	3
Roston Chase	b Embuldeniya	1
K Mayers	lbw b Mendis	2
Jason Holder	b Mendis	0
Joshua da Silva	not out	15
Extras:	(b 4)	4
TOTAL: (6 wickets, overs 25.3) 52		
Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-11, 3-14, 4-15, 5-18, 6-18		
Bowling: L Embuldeniya 10-3-18-2, R Mendis 11-1-17-4, P Jayawickrama 4-2-8-0, D de Silva 0.3-0-5-0.		



Kane Williamson (AFP)

'Can't take India lightly in home conditions'

Kanpur, India - New Zealand will not start as favourites despite facing an Indian team missing several key players, skipper Kane Williamson said on Wednesday, as the world's two top-ranked teams geared up for a spin battle in their first Test.

Hosts India have rested skipper Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami while opener K L Rahul was ruled out of the two-Test series on Tuesday after a leg injury.

New Zealand are the number one Test side and reigning World Test champions but are still wary of the hosts, who have often proved formidable in home conditions.

"I don't think we are favourites," Williamson said on the eve of the first Test in Kanpur.

"One of the key strengths of Indian cricket is its depth. India has great knowledge of their own conditions, we know the challenge is a big one."

Williamson led his side to an eight-wicket win against India at the World Test Championship (WTC) final in Southampton in June, which the hosts will be looking to avenge.

New Zealand have packed their squad with five spinners and are considering playing as many as three of them in the match.

"As we have seen in this part of the world, the spin component has been very large and it has played a big role in changing the complexion of the game," said Williamson.

"I am sure throughout the whole series, the spin component will be a factor and it will be no different in Kanpur. It will be all about assessing the conditions as quickly as possible."

India's stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane said his side would miss the first-choice players but their replacements were willing to stand up and be counted. "It's an opportunity for youngsters to back themselves and play with freedom," he said.

Rahane brushed aside concerns over his own patchy form, saying he was just one game away from hitting a big score. "What I am concerned about is how I can contribute to the team. You cannot score a hundred each time you come out to bat."

Rahane scored a Test century in December but failed to impress in the following home and away series against England.

In the WTC final, he made 49 and 15.

AFP

England bowler Stuart Broad eager for Cooley 'insight' ahead of Ashes

London, UK - Stuart Broad is looking forward to gaining some inside knowledge on Australia after England appointed Troy Cooley as a consultant pace bowling coach ahead of the upcoming Ashes series.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Wednesday that Cooley, a 55-year-old Australian, will aid the tourists' quicks in Brisbane under the direction of elite pace bowling coach Jon Lewis.

He will then assist the seamers in England's second-string Lions squad when they face Australia A in a four-day match that starts on December 9.

Cooley was England's bowling coach during their 2005 Ashes series success and subsequently took up a similar role with Australia.

"(Cooley) arrived when we got out of quarantine (on) Saturday, but he's with us for a decent period of time," Broad told cricket.com.au. "Really looking forward to picking his brain on



Troy Cooley

Australian conditions, and Australian players, to be honest."

Broad (524 Test wickets) and longstanding new-ball partner James Anderson (632) are not only England's two all-time leading Test wicket-takers, they are the only members of the current squad to have enjoyed Ashes series success in Australia, following their involvement in a 3-1 triumph in 2010/11.

England, however, have since lost nine of their last 10 Tests in Australia, with just one draw.

But the 35-year-old Broad hopes Cooley can help redress



Stuart Broad

the balance.

"He's been in their setup for a long period of time, through development and at the top level," the Nottinghamshire seamer said.

"He can give us great insight into Australian batters' mentality. What they're looking to do, where they're looking to score, where they don't like the ball, how (we should) be around them - whether you talk to them, whether you ignore them, whether you sledge them...can you annoy them enough to make a mistake.

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العید الوطني العماني 51

Man Utd candidate Rodgers keeps focus on Europa League

Paris, France - Leicester City boss Brendan Rodgers will put aside speculation linking him with the vacancy at Manchester United to focus on beating Legia Warsaw on Thursday to ensure the Foxes keep their hopes of automatic qualification to the Europa League knockout stage alive.

The 48-year-old Northern Irishman has been linked with the United role after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was sacked last Sunday.

It comes, though, at a time when Rodgers is encountering his rockiest patch since he took over in 2019.

The Foxes have for the past two campaigns been right in the mix challenging for a Champions League spot.

However, this term they are 12th in the Premier League table, eight points off a Champions League spot with almost a third of the season gone.

An illustration of how much their form has dropped off was the easy manner in which the team they defeated in May's FA Cup final Chelsea beat them 3-0 last Saturday.

Rodgers needs a quick pick me up against the Polish side who beat them 1-0 in Warsaw in their earlier group stage meeting.

Leicester are third in the group, two points off leaders Napoli and one adrift of Thursday's opponents.

Victory over Legia would keep them in the hunt with one match to play to top the group and progress to the knockout stages.

The runners-up would be consigned to a play-off which also features the eight third-placed Champions League group teams.

Napoli are away to bottom side Spartak Moscow who need to win to stay in the race themselves on Wednesday.



Leicester City's manager Brendan Rodgers shouts instructions to his players at the King Power Stadium, in Leicester on November 20 (AFP)

A win for Rodgers's side could set up a winner takes all trip to Napoli in their final match.

Leicester winger Ademola Lookman - on loan from Bundesliga outfit RB Leipzig - is predicting a tough encounter with Legia.

"Whenever you're playing in Europe, you're coming up against a good team," he told the Leicester website.

"Unfortunately, we lost to them over there, but we will be looking to use that experience to

win our game here.

"In that game over there, they were very intense, they fought a lot and they made it difficult for us. We couldn't get a victory out of the game, but hopefully this game will enable us to force ourselves on them, take the fight to them and show our true qualities."

'All Bravado'

Celtic, where Rodgers re-established his managerial credentials after a sour end to his term at

Liverpool, are battling to book their ticket into the next stage.

Celtic can still qualify automatically and could take a huge step in doing that if they beat table-topping Bayer Leverkusen in Germany.

Victory would leave them one point off Leverkusen and with a final home game against Real Betis.

"I feel we are in a good place to have a go at them," said Celtic's Australian manager Ange Postecoglou.

"Can we take the game to them and come away with a result? Otherwise it's all bravado without any substance.

"The reason we play as we do is because that is the kind of team we want to be.

"If we fall short we fall short. We get back up and go again."

Jose Mourinho's 'Special One' status has taken a battering in recent years and his spell with AS Roma is showing few signs of it being revived.

Way off the pace for the Serie A title, they are also second in their third-tier Europa Conference League group a point behind Norwegian outfit Bodo/Glimt.

Mourinho's side realistically need to beat third placed Zarya Luhansk in Rome if they are to entertain hopes of finishing top as Bodo/Glimt host bottom side CSKA Sofia.

Tottenham the latest club where Mourinho failed to deliver are also second in their Europa Conference group but should have little trouble in beating pointless NS Mura.

That should set up Antonio Conte's team with a winner takes all clash against table-toppers Rennes in London on December 9.

AFP

Karim Benzema gets one-year suspended term

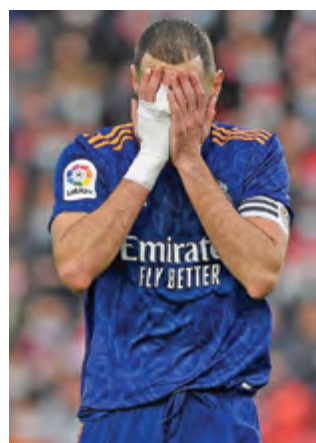
Versailles, France - A French court on Wednesday gave Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail his former France teammate Mathieu Valbuena.

The sentence, which included a €75,000 (US\$84,000 approx) fine, was tougher than that sought by prosecutors against the star player over the 2015 extortion attempt, which led Benzema to be cast out of the France team for five-and-a-half years.

Benzema (33) was not in court in the Paris suburb of Versailles for the verdict, which comes hours before Real Madrid take on Sheriff Tiraspol in a Champions League game in Moldova.

He was not accused of being behind the extortion attempt but rather of conspiring with the suspected blackmailers by putting pressure on Valbuena to pay them off.

The court ruled that he had 'implicated himself personally, through subterfuge and lies, to



Karim Benzema

convince his team-mate to submit to the blackmail'.

It added that he had shown 'no kindness towards Valbuena', as he had claimed, 'just the opposite' and had even appeared to take pleasure in his fellow player's demise. His defence team immediately announced plans for an appeal.

Speaking to reporters at the courthouse, one of his lawyers, Sylvain Cormier, said he was 'stunned' by the sentence which

he called 'very severe, unfair and unfounded'.

A second lawyer, Antoine Vey, said that Benzema, who did not attend his trial, would 'come and explain himself' when the case went to an appeal.

The prosecution had called for Benzema to be given a 10-month suspended sentence.

Benzema was one of five people tried over the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to blackmail Valbuena with an explicit video stolen from his phone.

He claims he was only trying to help Valbuena when he approached him at the French team's training centre in October 2015 and told him he could help him find someone to 'manage' the issue of the video.

But prosecutors said his remarks in a phone conversation to a childhood friend also convicted over the extortion attempt - Benzema told his alleged accomplice 'he's not taking us seriously' - proved his part in the plot.

AFP

Bayern Munich fans pressurise club to end Qatari deal in 2023

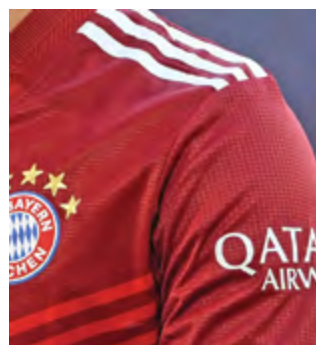
Berlin, Germany - A group of Bayern Munich fans are putting pressure on the club to end their controversial Qatari sponsorship deal amid claims of human rights abuses.

Bayern signed a five-year sponsorship deal with state-owned Qatar Airways in 2018 which the German media claim is worth around €20mn per year to the Bundesliga leaders.

The airline's logo is on the sleeve of Bayern's famous red shirts.

However a group of fans wants club president Herbert Hainer and CEO Oliver Kahn to cut ties when the Qatari deal expires in 2023.

"We'll wash anything clean for money," was the slogan on a banner which appeared during a



recent Bayern home game alongside a cartoon of Hainer and Kahn feeding money into a washing machine.

In the run-up to the club's annual general meeting on Thursday, disgruntled fans have tried to impose a motion demanding the non-renewal of the deal.

Attempts to get an interim injunction were rejected by a Mu-

nich regional court, but the group say their fight goes on.

"We want to obtain preventive measures to avoid a renewal of the contract," said Michael Ott, a spokesman for the group of fans.

"Qatar is guilty of massive human rights violations and there are heavy suspicions of corruption in sport.

"Now we go into the next round."

The protestors point to human rights groups, who accuse Qatar of exploiting foreign workers, particularly in the construction of stadiums for the next World Cup, which kicks off in November 2022.

Officials in Qatar reject the claims.

AFP

Haraguchi eager to break Union duck

Berlin, Germany - Dubbed 'Duracell bunny' for his seemingly tireless energy, Genki Haraguchi is a shoe-in for Union Berlin this season, but the Japan midfielder is desperate to break his duck for the Bundesliga club.

"I want to score," the 30-year-old attacking midfielder said having yet to hit the net in 19 games since his off-season transfer from second-tier Hanover.

Haraguchi's silky passing has helped Union's strikers Max Kruse and Taiwo Awoniyi bag 16 goals between them this season, but he wants to get on the score-sheet. "I want to make the difference in games. I am generally happy with my form this season, but I want to score goals."

It seems to be just a matter of time. The Japan veteran showed his finishing prowess at Hanover last season by having a hand in 16 goals - scoring nine and creating seven more - which earned him a free transfer to Union.

"He's one of the winners of the season so far," Union's CEO Oliver Ruhnert told Kicker.

"He's a bit like the Duracell bunny - he always gives his all."

Haraguchi came close to scoring against former club Hertha Berlin in Saturday's 2-0 derby win which saw Union climb to fifth in Germany's top flight.

AFP

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Sailing Arabia-The Tour 2021 begins in Mussanah



Participants during the practice races before the main event that started at the Barceló Mussanah Resort

Muscat - The 11th edition of Sailing Arabia - The Tour, Oman's premier offshore race, returned on Wednesday at the Barceló Mussanah Resort with teams representing Oman and Europe racing at four venues along the sultanate's coastline.

Organised by Oman Sail, Sailing Arabia - The Tour has become a favourite for Omani sailors to gain vital experience and teams from colder climates to test themselves in warm conditions as the season comes to a close.

The event - that is a combination of coastal raids and in-port

races - has the route starting at the Barceló Mussanah Resort and then heading south to Sur before returning north to Marina Bandar al Rowdha and then to Muscat for the final leg.

'Each team poses a different challenge and the teams will have to contend with shifting sea breezes and a mix of short sprints and longer races to become the 2021 champion', Oman Sail said in a press release.

This year's fleet features six teams representing five countries.

The crews of Oman Investment Authority and Oman Sail

will proudly fly the Omani flag, while a mixed all-Omani crew sailing on board DB Schenker will race under the German flag on behalf of the Tour's official logistics partner.

The mixed Omani-Spanish crew of Barceló Mussanah Resort, host venue for the opening ceremony and first two races, will represent a joint team representing Oman and Spain, an all-Italian crew from Nastro Rosa will represent Italy and a mixed crew representing Team France will race under the French flag.

'For more than a decade we have welcomed some of the best

teams to our waters to take on Omani sailors, share their diverse experience and learn from each other,' Saleh al Jabri, project manager and acting head of Sailing Events & Commercial at Oman Sail, was quoted as saying.

'This year's fleet is incredibly strong with both male and female sailors, competing together under a variety of flags,' he added, while expressing delight at being able 'to host The Tour once again this year and look forward to ten days of great sailing as we showcase the beauty of Oman's coastline and world class facilities at each venue'.

The opening ceremony took place at Barceló Mussanah Resort on Tuesday with the first coastal raid and in-port race at the same venue on Wednesday.

The second leg of the event will take place in Sur, a city synonymous with boatbuilding and sailing, on November 27, while the third will be held on December 1 at Marina Bandar al Rowdha, before the final races to be held at Al Mouj Muscat on December 3 with the prize-giving and closing ceremonies on December 5.

Dermot Birchall, general manager of Barceló Mussanah Resort

said, "We are proud to be partnering with Oman Sail for this year's sailing tour, and take pride in promoting the rekindling of the Sultanate's maritime eminence as the premier international sailing destination in the region."

He is of the opinion that the event "will showcase the impressive wonders and cultural heritage of Oman" and that "we at Barceló Hotel Group are honoured to be a part of such an exemplary display of comradery, sailing sportsmanship and the breathtaking treasures of Oman."

Since its first edition in 2011,

Sailing Arabia - The Tour has grown in stature to become the region's annual premier offshore race and a favourite winter destination for sailors around the globe.

The 2018 event marked another milestone, with the introduction of DIAM24 as the official class, offering the race crews an exceptional experience.

Given the current situation under the COVID-19 pandemic, Oman Sail said that the event would be conducted in full adherence to the government's latest safety protocols.



Preparations in full swing for athletics race walking

Muscat - There are just 100 days to go for the World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships Muscat 22. To ensure preparations are in place, the organising committee recently hosted a delegation from the World Athletics to finalise all technical and logistical elements.

To mark the milestone in the countdown, the Local Organising Committee - involving the Oman Athletics Association, Oman Sail and Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre - has unveiled an exclusive brand identity for the event featuring Muscat's iconic landmarks.

According to a press statement, the iconic landmarks included in the brand creation are Al Alam Palace, the Riyam Park monument and Al Sahwa Clock Tower above a traditional Omani tile pattern motif.

All these landmarks were set within the frame of the World Athletics symbol used for all World Athletics Series events, the organising committee said.

"Plans for the event are progressing rapidly," said Salim al Amri, president of the Oman Athletics Association.

"We have held work sessions together to narrow down the details and deliver a highly-professional, well-coordinated event



Salim al Amri

for athletes, coaches and international media."

Acknowledging it as "a unique opportunity for Oman to enhance athletics within the country and establish ourselves as a viable host nation for future events", Amri said, "We are determined to make sure the 2022 Race Walking Team Championships live long in the memory."

Racing will centre around the pristine landscaped gardens of the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre in the heart of Muscat from March 1 to March 6 next year.

The venue offers a variety of elevations to challenge the racers and a viewing platform will be set up within the Spectators Village to offer a perfect vantage point for the live audience.

Eng Said al Shanfari, CEO of Oman Convention & Exhibition

Centre (OCEC), said, "We are incredibly proud to host the 2022 Race Walking Team Championships."

The OCEC, he said, "has designed a challenging and inspiring course which will test the competitors while showcasing the beauty of our location to the live audience".

To take such a leading role in Oman's sporting evolution, "is a responsibility we are delighted to have, and hopefully this will be the first of many World Athletics events to visit our nation", he added.

The week of racing in Muscat will be a celebration of athletics with a 1km and 2km Kids' Run and Park Run Festival events on the either sides of the main competition with a health and fitness exhibition on site to inspire local athletes and visitors to become more active.

Participating squads for the World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships Muscat 22 will be chosen by national athletics federations. The championships will feature a men and women 20km race, U20 men and women 10km races and Masters categories, scheduled for March 4, 2022 (Friday). There will be a 35km combined race the following day.

HANKOOK 24H DUBAI

Will fight for a podium finish at 24H Dubai: Al Faisal al Zubair

Oman's talented racer to launch 2022 season with participation in the endurance race for Mercedes' HRT team

Muscat - He loves to take up fresh challenges. Following a satisfying season in 2021 that saw Oman's talented endurance racer Al Faisal al Zubair climb up the overall podium in the International GT Open Series for Lechner Racing team in a Porsche GT3 R in Barcelona, Spain, last month, the Muscat-based racer is all set for a new competition early next year.

On Tuesday, Faisal announced that he has signed up for Haupt Racing Team (HRT) to launch his 2022 season by competing in the Hankook 24H Dubai, which will be held at the Dubai Autodrome on January 14-15.

HRT, who has an excellent track record at the Dubai 24H, will field two teams at the 2022 edition just like last year. Faisal will be part of the four-driver line-up in a Mercedes-AMG GT3 #777 car along with Dutch Indy Dontje, German Luca Stolz and Austrian Martin Konrad.

The other car #4 will comprise owner and 2020 champion Hubert Haupt, Khaled al Qubaisi, Manuel Metzger and Raffaele Marciello.

Lights go green on January 14 and an excited Faisal is looking



forward to his 24H appearance. The Omani racer had competed last year at the same event but rains had forced the abandonment of the event just after seven hours of the 24-hour race.

Faisal said, "I am very excited to compete in the 2022 Dubai 24H race with Haupt Racing Team, which has got many winners on their rolls and have done very well in endurance races across the world."

"The HRT team had won the title last year in a rain-curtailed event and has also done well in the past editions. We have a strong drivers' line-up in Stolz, Dontje and Konrad. I also have a new car team for the Dubai 24H but I am confident that we can fight for a podium finish."

He added, "This will be my first proper 24H. So it will be a new challenge but after my sea-



Al Faisal al Zubair

son in 2021 with Porsche GT3 R, I am much more confident. My experience in the International GT Open will definitely help me when I take on the wheels of Mercedes in Dubai."

Last year, Faisal had teamed up with Maximilian Gotz, Maximilian Buhk and Christopher

Bruck with HTP Winward Motorsport at the Dubai 24H.

The 23 year old Faisal announced himself as a rising star on the regional circuit in 2018, when he won the Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East title and then extended his dominance by claiming the overall title for the second time in a row in 2019.

Last year the motorsports calendar was hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic but the Omani proved his credentials as a competitive and skilful endurance racer this season with an overall third in the 2021 International GT Open despite missing one round due to illness.

Out of the 12 races he competed in 2021, he won four and took eight podium finishes underlying his potential at the top level.



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