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22°C/13°C

THE DRAMA OF A ROMA
GO TO PAGE 02 NATION



NEWS BRIEFS



GCC SUMMIT TO BEGIN IN ALULA ON TUESDAY
Muscat - The 41st GCC Summit will begin in the historic Saudi city of Alula on January 5.

Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), said, "The council is steadily moving towards the fifth decade of the blessed cooperation process with the grace of God and with the wisdom of the leaders of the GCC states."

He said that the session is being held in Alula despite the exceptional circumstances currently in the world. "It confirms the keenness of the leaders of the GCC states in preserving the cooperation council as a cohesive system capable of overcoming difficulties and challenges, and strengthening its complementary path in all fields."

Dr Hajraf had visited Oman on December 29 with an invitation for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to attend the summit.

COVID-19 takes 1,500 lives

No side effects of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine have been registered: MoH

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

The COVID-19 pandemic claimed the 1,500th patient's life in Oman last weekend even as the sultanate continued a vaccination drive for target groups. As many as 7,600 people in the sultanate had been vaccinated till Sunday with no side effects registered, other than expected symptoms.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday announced that the total number of deaths had reached 1,501 following two patients succumbing to the virus in the last three days. There were 537 new infections in this period, taking the total to 129,404.

As of Wednesday, a total of 77 COVID-19 patients were admitted in health institutions, including 31 in ICUs. 'There were 376 COVID-19 patients who recovered in the last three days, taking the total number of recoveries to 122,266,' an MoH statement said, adding that the rate of recovery is now 94.5 per cent.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said on Sunday that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine being administered in Oman is safe and effective. "We are very glad to



H E Dr Ahmed al Sa'eedi speaks with a young boy during the minister's visit to Bausher Specialised Polyclinic and Seeb Specialised Polyclinic to monitor the vaccination campaign on Sunday (Supplied photo)

see the citizens and residents taking the vaccine. Around 7,600 people have been vaccinated in Oman till today," he said, urging target groups to get vaccinated.

The sultanate started the national campaign for immunisation against COVID-19 for target groups last week. Experts and those who have been affected say the vaccine is safe and advise staying away from rumours.

"No side effects have been seen other than the expected symptoms from vaccines, such as headache, body ache, mild fever and skin rash in some cases. We call upon all to not pay attention to rumours," H E Sa'eedi said.

He said that vaccination campaigns in Oman are well-documented and the sultanate was described in 2016 as the first among 127 countries in adminis-

tering vaccines. "We use vaccines only after reviewing the studies and clinical trials, and registration of vaccines and medicines in the country of origin and its use," he said.

Reiterating the safety of the vaccine, recipient Majid al Suleimany, 72, said, "I took the Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19 at Bausher Specialised Polyclinic. I did not feel a thing. It was easy

and done quickly. I have got an appointment for the second dose in three weeks time. I experienced zero side effects. The injection was literally painless."

Suleimany informed that he stayed at the polyclinic 30 minutes after the injection for observation. "I hope this will allay people's fears about the vaccine. Just go for it. All the conspiracy theories about the vaccine make no sense. They give you a card certifying you have been vaccinated which you may need in future for traveling," he added.

Responding to a query on the jab being made a travel requirement, the MoH stated, 'It would depend on each country's policies and on the availability of the vaccine in quantities that allow it to be used as an additional requirement or as an alternative to PCR test and isolation.'

Dr Hanan bint Abdullah al Mahrooqi, head of Bausher Specialised Polyclinic, described the turnout for vaccination as 'great', and the process going on 'smoothly and safely'.

"The vaccination centres have been chosen carefully to facilitate the safe transportation of the vaccine. In Muscat, 1,458 people have been vaccinated," she said.

@shadadm

CPA monitors markets for price of reusable bags



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following claims that there aren't enough environment-friendly reusable bags available in the local market, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has assured that plenty of options are available at nominal prices. The authority added that it will monitor markets to ensure prices are not hiked.

In a statement, the CPA said, 'Alternative bags are available in markets and shops. These bags are made of paper, fabric or cotton. Bags made of organic materials are also available at nominal prices.'

The CPA said that these type of bags can be used multiple times, stressing that it will monitor markets to ensure the prices of the bags are not raised.

'The Consumer Protection Authority calls on all suppliers to abide by the laws and regulations to protect consumers,' it said.

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(Syed Fasiuddin)

THE DRAMA FOR A ROMA

The new grand tourer is as delightful to drive as it is to look at



2020 FERRARI ROMA TEST DRIVE

Khalid Zakwani
Muscat

The Roma is something special from Maranello - not your normal Ferrari if there ever was one! The Roma is unique for its ability to strike a sense of déjà vu with its classic lines while simultaneously revealing design elements of a modern coupe-like GT car for the new age.

Slim LED lights in the anterior façade of an elongated bonnet that houses a re-engineered V8, a torpedo like side profile and a rear end like no other Ferrari - with an integrated boot spoiler that also lodges the brake cluster - amplify the proportions of the GT.

Front splitters that enhance the angle of the bonnet, side skirts highlighting the love handles, slightly protruding rear diffusers for maximum aero efficiency, and unmissable exhaust tips all add to the drama of the Roma.

In this particular test drive vehicle, the pristine white surface complemented the sublime body sculpture, with hints of the menace lurking beneath.

As you open the frameless door, you'll be instantly impressed by what awaits you inside. The lavish layout is modern and made with the best materials available from Ferrari. The seats are comfortable; easily adjustable to offer the perfect driving position with clear visibility. And while the Roma is a 2+2 car, anyone standing taller than 4ft will struggle to be in the rear seat for long without complaining.

The infotainment system is new with

user-friendly, touch sensitive buttons. Admittedly, we did not test the sound system but that's because of the almost soothing sound of the exhaust. That was music to our ears.

The 16-inch instrument screen is clear and informative with all the right details at hand offering numerous display options to choose from. Controlling it through a haptic touchpad was new to us. It needed a bit of getting used to but is easily manageable. So too is the steering wheel which has no rocker switches but a little knob for the wipers. The gearbox paddles are very prominent and within touching distance of your fingers for ultra quick manipulation of the gears.

The award winning 3.9ltr twin turbo V8 has been re-engineered and tweaked for the Roma, offering all-round performance gains. Torque spread throughout the power band makes for a

joyous driver experience as it allows the Roma to drive effortlessly with gentle inputs to the throttle.

Ferrari removed the conventional silencer from the exhaust and added gas particulate filters, while adopting a new bypass system that helps regulate and control overall noise levels to give a very satisfying soundtrack.

The beauty of this engine is its mating with a special eight-speed dual clutch transaxle gearbox derived from the renowned hybrid SF90. A broad spread of ratios for the Roma and even broader spread of torque enhance the GT characters of this Ferrari.

Being a grand tourer, one expects a level of usability and everyday functionality from the Roma. It lived up to those expectations allowing us to be at ease with the car's character almost immediately. It took mere minutes to get used to the car's dimensions.

For the most of our limited test drive, we chose Comfort mode and the car offered just that - a comfortable experience. All road imperfections were cushioned; uneven roads are handled with little or no fuss.

Steering the Roma is made fun by accurate and precise angling. Long hauls couldn't possibly pose any issue - the Roma takes all driving conditions into its stride.

The Sport mode intensifies the steering's tightness and increases the engine's ability to stay in the right gear for longer periods. It's in this mode that the car is in its element - eager to show off its power and grip.

The Roma's brakes produce more than enough stopping power on demand. We figured the perfect bite to bring the car to a grinding halt in any circumstances. We punished the Roma on a secluded road, but it was only too eager to accelerate and brake without breaking into a sweat.

Going around corners even at high speed feels like a dream as the Roma never seems out of grip. This Ferrari has all the characteristics of a GT, and more. It even has a big boot - for luggage and some shopping, too. It's a very useable everyday GT with all the ingredients to woo new and current Ferrari owners alike.



SPECS

Max power	620hp @ 5,750-7,500rpm
Max torque	760Nm @ 3,000-5,750rpm
Max engine speed	7,500rpm
Kerb weight	1,570kg
0 to 100kmph	3.4 secs
Max speed	Over 320kmph



RO40mn Dibba fishing port development begins

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to develop the ports of the sultanate in keeping with diversification plans for the nation's income source, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has commenced work on developing the RO40mn Dibba Fishing Port in Musandam governorate.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official at the ministry said, "The executing company of the project started construction works on the development of the Dibba Fishing Port in mid-December. The project includes several facilities to serve a variety of sectors, including tourism and trade. The Royal Oman Police will also have service facilities at the port."

He informed that a 2,000m long breakwater and 10m deep



An artist's rendition of the port

quay will be constructed. Facilities for fishermen will include a 60m stationary berth for fishing boats, a 190m beach for boats and two 70m floating berths.

"This is in addition to the erection of a boat chute, a 5,000sqm area to serve a hotel, restaurants and tourism offices, a 570m mooring area, and floating an-

chors of a total length of 200m," the ministry official said.

He added that the project aims to enhance economic diversity by developing the fishing

fleet, stimulating economic activity, creating investment and job opportunities, and raising the contribution of the fisheries sector of GDP.

"The project also aims to enhance maritime transport and logistical support to Musandam, provide an attractive environment for fishermen and stimu-

late tourism in the governorate," said the official.

According to statistics made available by the ministry, Musandam has five ports - Khasab, Lima, Kamazar and Bakha, besides Dibba. The governorate contributes seven per cent of the sultanate's fish production.

Musandam has 3,447 fishermen, 2,025 fishing boats, 93 artisanal fishing vessels and 83 vehicles for transporting and marketing fish, and produces 37,599 tonnes of fish annually valued at RO82.7mn.

The sultanate's fish production increased by 4.8 per cent to 580,000 tonnes in 2019, compared to 553,000 tonnes in 2018.

The ministry has stated that production increased by 34 per cent during the first half of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

92,000 TONNES OF FISH LANDED IN OCT 2020



As per the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), 92,000 tonnes of fish were landed in the sultanate using traditional methods in October 2020, an increase of 40 per cent on the previous month. NCSI stated that the total value of fish landed was RO36.9mn (Supplied photo)

Mawaleh Central Market to open for customers from Jan 5

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has decided to reopen Mawaleh Central Market for Fruits and Vegetables for retail customers from January 5.

The municipality said the decision was taken as per the municipality procedures and health regulations decided by the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with COVID-19.

The municipality said the market will be open from 1pm to 6pm for consumers, and from 5am to 11am for wholesalers.

"The number of people allowed to enter the market in one



vehicle will not exceed two. Children below 12 are not allowed."

The municipality urged all market-goers to be cautious by

practising and encouraging social distancing, wearing face masks, and using disinfectants when visiting the market.

Electronic system launched for mosques

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) launched an electronic system for mosques on January 1. The ministry also stated that it hoped that in the next stage more mosques will be opened for worshippers.

H E Dr Mohammad bin Said al Maamari, MARA's Undersecretary, said that the electronic system for mosques is a qualitative leap in the services provided by the ministry.

He added, "The system provides 23 services such as obtaining permits to build or rebuild



mosques, upgrade and expand facilities, dig water wells, water and electricity connection, services for their maintenance and furnishing, managing mosques and their needs."

The electronic system also

provides an interactive map, which will enable the user to identify the nearest mosque, in addition to providing various statistics related to mosques and prayer rooms.

The ministry has worked on

counting and documenting the data of all mosques, as part of the objectives of the national project to inventorying mosques and endowment funds.

"The Supreme Committee, in agreement with the ministry, opened mosques which can accommodate more than 400 worshippers. We hope that the next stage will witness the opening of a larger number of mosques," said H E Maamari.

According to the figures of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, there were 5,584 mosques at the end of 2019. Dakhliyah had the most number of mosques with 3,137, followed by North Sharqiyah (2,092).

Omani students cautioned as Ireland stops issuing visas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani students in Ireland have been cautioned by sultanate's cultural attaché in London that the country has temporarily stopped issuing visas.

A statement issued online by Omani cultural attaché said, 'Dear Omani students studying in Ireland, according to the website of the Irish Council for International Students and as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, visas have been suspended temporarily, except for emergency cases or for family reunification. If the visa expires during this period, it will be automatically renewed until April 20, 2021; if your visa is valid, you can return to Ireland.'

The cultural attaché has advised students that they should get correct information from the official source, and keep in touch with their respective educational institutions.



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SHAME TO LITTERERS

Should Muscat Municipality name and shame litterers in its efforts to keep the city clean?



Barakath Ahmed
Engineer

Muscat Municipality is doing a marvellous job, given the current circumstances, to keep the city clean. We should appreciate the supporting staff for their fantabulous job in these times. Yes, the municipality should take strict action against litterers, in particular against those who dispose of face masks improperly. These can have a huge impact on spreading the virus.



Muna Basheer al Zadjali
Private sector employee

Littering is an extremely bad habit and is a major problem on beaches and parks. Litterbugs must be punished with fines. We can all do something to prevent littering and make our community safer, cleaner and more livable. Let us be role models for others, especially children and people who don't bother to keep their surroundings clean.



Govind Arjan
Corporate communications specialist

Naming and shaming seems excessive. Fines should suffice. Haven't we all seen how successful the compulsory wearing of masks in public has been? Fines for non-compliance was a strong deterrent. For repeat offenders, a few hours of compulsory community service in the very area they littered, which many states in USA impose, can be thought of.



A R Srinivasan
Consultant

I would suggest Muscat Municipality not only names and shames litterers but also substantially fines offenders. Oman, Paradise on Earth, deserves to be kept clean. The municipality should take all steps needed for this. People should understand the need to keep the country clean.



Arunkumar
Senior Manager

It's not really required to publish the names of litterers as it may violate human rights. Instead, a fine can be imposed so that the public will think twice before spitting or throwing garbage on road, beaches, tourist spots, etc.



K M Gurnani
Businessman

The Muscat Municipality should name and shame litterers in its efforts to keep the city clean. Though it looks very odd, but this will bring the number of such offenders to a minimum and create awareness about the need to keep our beautiful city clean.



Vipin Kumar Garg
Bank chief executive

Yes, definitely. Keeping the city neat and clean is the duty of every resident. When people defile the city, they should be punished which will set an example for others. Alternatively, an offender must clean the area they littered for two days or they must educate 100 people on the benefits of cleanliness.



Mohan Anandan
Banker

Thanks to the efforts of Muscat Municipality, the city has been ranked as one of the cleanest in the world. Habitual litterers tend to spoil the efforts of the municipality in keeping the city clean and tidy. Naming and shaming offenders would not only make them realise their mistake, but will also help in infusing in them some sense of civil morality.



Muthumari Pandian
Homemaker

Muscat Municipality has been taking all the necessary steps to keep the city clean and tidy. But keeping the city clean is a team effort. We, the people must work with the municipality for this. It's the responsibility of every resident. Cleanliness must start from home. A small thought will make a tremendous change.



NEXT ON YOUR SAY

After the ban on single-use plastic bags in Oman, is it now time to restrict the use of disposable cups, water bottles and cutlery?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by Muscat Daily. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om Log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue

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Over 47,000 SMEs registered at end of November 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) at the end of November 2020 stood at 47,820.

It was an increase of 13.4 per cent compared to the same period of 2019, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with a 13.6 per cent increase in SMEs registered till the end of November 2020, compared to November 2019, followed by North Batinah with 13.4 per cent, Dakhiyah with 12.5 per cent, Dhofar with 12.2 per cent, and the rest of the governorates with 48.3 per cent.

The Governorate of Muscat had 16,024 SMEs registered at the end of November 2020, followed by North Batinah with



(Photo for illustrative purpose)

7,536, Dakhiyah with 6,040, Dhofar with 3,979, South Batinah with 3,562, and North Sharqiyah with 3,214 SMEs registered. This was followed by South Sharqiyah with 2,827, Dhahirah with 2,786 SMEs, and Buraimi with 1,025 SMEs registered.

Al Wusta had 625 SMEs reg-

istered and Musandam had 184.

The total number of SMEs registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) at the end of October 2020 stood at 47,220, while the number of SMEs in September was 46,577,' NCSI stated.



(Supplied photo)

People called on to donate blood

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Department of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) has called on citizens and residents to donate blood.

In a statement, DBBS said, 'The Central Blood Bank in

Bausher is experiencing a sharp shortage in blood supply. We call on everyone to hasten to donate blood. Those interested can book an appointment to donate blood at Central Blood Bank in Bausher by calling 24591255 or sending a WhatsApp message to 94555648.'

REGIONAL WEATHER

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Doha	23	15
Kuwait City	22	12
Manama	23	16
Riyadh	21	10

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Ara Petroleum supports MoE's digital studio



(Supplied photo)

Muscat - In line with its strategy to support the development of the local communities it operates in, Ara Petroleum Oman Block 44 has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to sponsor a digital studio in Buraimi governorate.

As per a statement, Ara Petroleum Oman Block 44 is primarily a natural gas and condensate development in Oman wholly owned by Ara Petroleum. The company is committed to implement CSR strategies that are in line with in-country value. Being in the oil and gas business, the entity drives an earnest endeavour to extend tangible support to society.

The digital studio will help the education sector in Buraimi enhance the general and digital learning experience. We want to express our sincere gratitude to Ara Petroleum

MOE SPOKESPERSON

The 'Ara Digital Studio' to be constructed in Buraimi governorate will serve the educational sector by producing digital material.

The MoU signing ceremony was held under the aegis of H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Education. Moosa al Moosawi, DGM of Ara Petroleum Oman Block 44, and Dr Fathiya Alsaddi, director general

of the Directorate General of the Ministry of Education in Buraimi governorate signed the agreement.

A spokesperson for Ara Petroleum said, "Community engagement is one of the key pillars of corporate social responsibility. With the objective of contributing to the community where we are based in, we are taking on social activities such as the digital studio with emphasis on assist-

ing the community's educational activities. As a trusted and responsible member of the community, we take up distinctive social contribution activities. We understand the impact businesses have on the stakeholders, communities and the environment. Therefore, our commitment to being a responsible company and making a positive contribution to society is instilled in the way we conduct business."

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Education said, "The digital studio will help the education sector in Buraimi enhance the general and digital learning experience. We want to express our sincere gratitude to Ara Petroleum for creating a positive change in the society."

12,474 residential plots allotted till November 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning allotted a total of 12,474 residential properties across the country at the end of November 2020, compared to 25,220 plots in the same period of 2019, which is a decrease of 50.5 per cent, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The Governorate of North Sharqiyah was allotted 2,040 residential plots at the end of November 2020, which is the highest among all the governorates.

This was followed by South Sharqiyah with 1,768 plots, Dakhliyah with 1,726 plots, Muscat with 1,680 plots, Dhahirah with 1,425, and North Batinah with 1,398.



There were 1,158 plots allotted in Dhofar, 661 plots in South Batinah, 269 in Al Wusta, and 199 in Musandam.

Buraimi was allotted 150 plots, which is the lowest among all the governorates.

The governorates of Dhofar and Dhahirah witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number

of plots allotted at the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of 2019, whereas allotment land in the rest of the governorates showed a marked decline during the period of study.

The Ministry of Housing allotted a total of 28,099 residential plots in 2019.

HOTLINES

24-hour pharmacies

Scientific Pharmacy: Qurm
24566601, Ruwi 24702850

Muscat Pharmacy: Ruwi

24702542, Salalah 23291635

Al Hashar Pharmacy: Ruwi

24783334

Hospitals and Clinics

Al Hayat International

Hospital, Al Ghubra-
22004000/94267068

94442000 (Emergency)

Al Raffah Hospital: Muscat -
24618900/1/2/3

Sohar - 26704639/49/50

Apollo Hospital Muscat,
Hamriya: 24787766, 24782666,

Abeer Hospital, Ruwi, Muscat

24770800, 90999334

Starcare Hospital: 24557200

Emergency number: 24558333

Dr Harub's Clinic:

24563217, 99254940

Emirates Medical Center:

24604540

Muscat Municipality: 80077222

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (RO)
1	01/2021	Supply of Over Head Lines Identification Name Plates and Numbering Plates for some lines at MIS Network (TMM-C21-006)	18/01/2021	16/02/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	150/=
2	02/2021	Outsourcing Staff for Security Monitoring	18/01/2021	16/02/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	285/=
3	03/2021	Supply, Installation & commissioning of new electrical elevator at AL	18/01/2021	16/02/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate	88/=
4	04/2021	Supply New Current Transformer for upgrading CT ratio of 125 MVA transformer 3 & 4 33KV Incomers of Bus Bar C at Seeb Grid Station	18/01/2021	16/02/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	75/=
5	05/2021	Upgradation of testing kits and procurement of software for test reports	18/01/2021	16/02/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	63/=

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.
Buying the Tender:	The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender through the official working days of the hour from 8.00 am - 01.00 pm.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document.(Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The complete bid documents should be deposited in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 4230 Block No: 321 - GSM: 99105413, 93201558, 91777378, 92217856, 93515198
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com



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م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (رغ)
١	٢٠٢١/٠١	توريد لوحات تعريفية ولوائح الأرقام الخاصة بأبراج خطوط نقل الكهرباء في شبكة نقل الكهرباء الرئيسية	٢٠٢١/٠١/١٨	٢٠٢١/٠٢/١٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	١٥٠/=
٢	٢٠٢١/٠٢	توفير موظفين لغرفة التحكم الأمنية	٢٠٢١/٠١/١٨	٢٠٢١/٠٢/١٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	٢٨٥/=
٣	٢٠٢١/٠٣	توريد وتركيب مصعد كهربائي في محطة السلام بالمعبيلة	٢٠٢١/٠١/١٨	٢٠٢١/٠٢/١٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	٨٨/=
٤	٢٠٢١/٠٤	شراء محولات تيار لرفع كفاءة الأحمال لمحولات الطاقة ٣ و ٤ سعة (١٢٥ م ف ا) للوحدات الفواطع جهد ٣٣ ك ف محطة السيب	٢٠٢١/٠١/١٨	٢٠٢١/٠٢/١٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	٧٥/=
٥	٢٠٢١/٠٥	ترقية أنظمة أجهزة الفحص وشراء برنامج لإعداد التقارير	٢٠٢١/٠١/١٨	٢٠٢١/٠٢/١٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	٦٣/=

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة إرسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب.
طريقة الشراء	يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إلى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود . وذلك لتأكيد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك من خلال أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ١:٠٠ م
الرسوم	مقابل دفع التلعب المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد - الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	تقدم العروض في مظاريف مغلقة ومعنونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (٢١) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنونا بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء . - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر .
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات .
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم المسكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣ - هاتف - ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨, ٩٢٢١٧٨٥٦, ٩١٧٧٧٣٧٨, ٩٣٢٠١٥٥٨, ٩٩١٠٥٤١٣
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com

الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش . م . ع . م
ص . ب : ١٣٨٩ . الخوض . الرمز البريدي : ١٣٢ . سلطنة عمان
الهاتف : +٩٦٨٢٤٨٣٠٠٠ / الفاكس : +٩٦٨٢٣٠٩٠٤٦
الموقع الإلكتروني : www.omangrid.com



OAB provides tourism fee paying service

In cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) launched a new service through its digital channels. The new development will allow entities in the tourism industry to directly pay their fees to the ministry's account, easily and efficiently.

Commenting on the new service, Khalid Khalaf al Awfi, assistant general manager for Financial & Administrative Affairs, at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said, "The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism continuously seeks to facilitate and develop procedures for investors within the tourism and hotel establishments by digitising relevant processes, together with private sector institutions. Through our partnership with Oman Arab Bank, we will see the provision of a suitable technical solution that links the payment of tourism fees via the bank's digital platforms, which is also in line with national e-government strategy."

Abdullah Salim al Hajri, general director of Financial & Administrative Affairs, said, "We are confident entities in the



Sulaiman al Hinai

tourism industry will appreciate this new service, which enables timely fee payments, no delay and promotes ease and convenience. This will reflect positively on the sustainability of their businesses, especially in light of the current circumstances and the tremendous challenges facing the sector. The government, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is working in cooperation with all concerned parties to overcome these obstacles and enable the advancement of the sector, sustainably."



manager, head of Treasury, Investments & Government Relations Division at OAB said, "Oman Arab Bank is committed

to developing technology solutions that enhance customer experience, for both individual and corporate clients. Today, we cel-

ebate the launch of this new service, in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The new facility will

allow owners of tourism-based entities such as hotels, restaurants, etc, to pay their tourism fees through our digital plat-

forms, including the OAB Online App, our online banking services and ATMs across all governorates in the sultanate. They can simply visit the app, navigate to the icon for paying the fees and fill in the required information. Once completed, users will have to enter the amount of money due, which will then be transferred directly to the ministry's account."

Oman Arab Bank is considered one of the most advanced local banks in terms of digital services.

The bank's journey began several years ago, with huge investments in its digital infrastructure which is now capable of providing efficient services to all of the bank's customers.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate. Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 55 branches and representative offices with 160 ATMs spread across Oman. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services for personal banking, corporate banking and investment clients.



Meethaq launches Corporate Purchase Cards

In line with the bank's vision 'To serve you better, everyday', Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, has launched the first-ever Sharia'a-compliant Corporate Purchase Cards in Oman. Now, Meethaq Corporate Clients can enjoy a simple and secure way to make all their business to government payments with these exclusive corporate purchase cards.

Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in Oman, operating on the principles of Transparency, Trust and Partnership, thereby ensuring the comfort of remaining true to one's religious values.

The new card features includes a minimum limit of RO20 at card issuance. A corporate customer can avail up to five cards for free and there is no need to pay any annual or Ujrah fee. To enhance corporate security, no cash advance or withdrawal facility is available on these cards, which can be used only for making payment to government entities in Oman. Customers can load funds up to a maximum of RO1mn on a card.

Meethaq customers can apply for a card by visiting their nearest branch or by contacting their account-relationship manager. Corporates who apply for the card should provide details including Commercial Registration Number, Oman Chamber of Commerce membership document, the ID cards of the cardholder and authorised personnel along with a completed Application Form. Government entities who require the card should provide a letter stating the requirement duly signed by account authorised signatories and copies of ID cards of the cardholder and au-

thorised personnel along with a completed Application Form. The customer should provide written instructions to the branch to debit the account and credit funds on the card.

Featuring state-of-the-art technology, the new Corporate Purchase Card is designed to meet the evolving needs of corporate payments. Meethaq remains committed to partnering with all institutions and corporate clients for success, as the bank processes and technology are designed to drive future corporate transactions and digital banking requirements. The new Corporate Purchase Card will greatly enhance financial flexibility with greater user experience, superior payment controls and easy to access to MIS reports. The cards are equipped with self-service features to obtain user-friendly MIS reports to track corporate expenditure data.

Meethaq Islamic banking provides several value-added services and exclusive lifestyle privileges to its customers, complementing a world-class banking experience. As the pioneer of Islamic bank in the sultanate, Meethaq has adopted best practices in Islamic banking and finance worldwide to provide a robust model that benefits its customers. Every Meethaq product goes through Sharia'a compliance certification by the bank's Sharia'a Supervisory Board.

Meethaq Islamic Banking has been recognised as the Best Islamic Bank in Oman for the year 2019 by Islamic Finance News. For more details, visit <https://www.meethaq.om/en/meethaq-cards/Pages/Corporate-Purchase-Credit-Card.aspx> or call 24656666.

Ooredoo and data2cloud keep businesses running

Ensuring businesses stay running smoothly and are equipped with the latest technology, Ooredoo alongside its subsidiary, data2cloud's all-in-one cloud-based email solution is the one-stop-shop for all business. Ooredoo Mail is a locally hosted and fully integrated solution for companies of all sizes, featuring a mail server, web client, collaboration suite, and an office suite offering documents, spreadsheets and presentations tools, all secure and protracted by antivirus, anti-spam and more, along with full flexibility and scalability.

With its native support for Outlook and robust antispam and archiving capabilities, along with competitive pricing, Ooredoo Mail is the ideal choice for business looking to be digital.

Already trusted and used by some government organisations and large corporations in Oman, thanks to its cloud infrastructure, Ooredoo Mail offers a comprehensive and centralised account administration. Perfectly scalable to suit small



and medium enterprises (SMEs) too, it can be offered to as few as 5 users per account.

Sultan bin Ahmed al Wahabi, chief business & wholesale officer at Ooredoo said, "The pandemic rapidly changed the way businesses communicate within their businesses, and increased the use of emails to stay connected around the clock. With our locally hosted all-in-one email cloud solution, customers now have a fully integrated, and managed cloud-based email and collaboration suite designed to suit their spe-

cific needs. It's all part of Ooredoo's aim to be data experience leaders."

A subsidiary of Ooredoo, data2cloud offers all kinds of organisations, including government, local enterprises, and SMEs, with cutting-edge cloud computing services. A virtual 'office in the sky', data2cloud uses Ooredoo's reliable network and world-class infrastructure to give businesses the chance to further elevate their cloud operations with cost-effective solutions and flexible consumption-based payment plans, backed by world-class Service Level Agreements.

Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo) was founded and registered in the sultanate in December 2004.

Services were launched its service in March 2005, originally operating under the name Nawras. Ooredoo provides individuals and businesses with cutting-edge digital products and services, so that customers can enjoy the Internet.

Environment Society of Oman rounds off busy year

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is rounding off a busy year, which saw it continue to fulfil its mission to protect Oman's natural heritage and influence environmentally sustainable behaviour.

With the steadfast and generous help of its members, sponsors and supporters, ESO, which is the sultanate's only non-profit organisation focusing on environmental conservation, carried out a number of educational programmes, awareness campaigns and conservation projects.

During the year, it produced seven educational materials, including booklets, infographics and videos, distributed more than 700 frankincense tree seedlings together with the Dhofar communities, and distributed 4,600 reusable bags to communities in Muscat, Sur, Masirah, Al Wusta, Sadah and Thamreet. Bolstered by the Summer Sea Turtle Sustainability Grant from the Turtle Island



Restoration Network and SEE Turtles, a grant awarded to ESO thanks to an international public vote, ESO also removed almost 200 tonnes of abandoned fishing nets in Masirah.

Continuing to drive community engagement, ESO has ended the year with 356 individual members, 30 corporate members, as well as strengthening relationships with educators and fishermen across the country.

E-commerce reigns with shift in shopping

The e-commerce industry had quite an impact on the shopping experience of individuals, as the global pandemic forced closure of retail stores worldwide, compelling consumers to shift their shopping preferences online. However, regions across the globe have responded differently to this change thus showcasing contrasting results in e-commerce spending.

A report by Statista.com stated that in 2020 alone, retail e-commerce sales globally were expected to hit US\$3.9tn; Asia Pacific expected to be making US\$2.45tn in online sales. North America was projected to be second in line, likely to generate online retail sales of US\$749bn.

Mauro Romano, CEO and co-founder of ArabClicks, said, "The global pandemic probably worked in favour of online businesses. With several consumers not willing to compromise on their shopping preferences, this came across as an opportunity for businesses to upscale their



ventures and revamp their products and services to closely match the needs of their consumers. We are presently seeing so many businesses thriving online and I believe this trend is

here to stay."

In a report highlighting leading e-commerce retailers during the year, Statista.com listed WooCommerce as the leading e-commerce platform accumulat-

ing market shares of 28.24 per cent. This was followed by Squarespace online stores with shares of 17.69 per cent and Shopify making shares worth 10.98 per cent.

These online businesses have a strategic way of carrying out their activities that helps them conduct their business effectively and efficiently.

These platforms make use of the 'e-commerce software,' that helps manage online activities including handling inventory, changing the visibility of products, calculating taxes and complying to various orders of customers.

In 2018 alone this software application market encompassed a value around US\$5.1bn and is expected to reach approximately US\$6.3bn by 2023. With e-commerce industries doing exceptionally well e-commerce sales worldwide are expected to climb to a whopping US\$6.5tn by 2023.

Overtime, it has been ob-

served that consumers find it increasingly convenient to make their online purchases using their mobile phones, with approximately 64 per cent of the traffic coming through these devices.

South Korea and China having experienced the highest online penetration with approximately 83 per cent of shoppers making purchases online.

Some of the leading e-commerce industries today happen to be Chinese companies such as Taobao.com, Tmall and JD.com.

American e-retailer giant Amazon has also attracted customers due to its diverse offerings.

The digital revolution leading all nations has had its impact on the e-commerce industry as well.

With consumer behaviours rapidly changing, this platform can change to accommodate the needs of the consumers, thus continuing to be the preferred mode of making purchases.

Alizz Islamic Bank increases Bushra prizes to RO2mn



2020 was an exceptional year that saw many changes in the social and economic fabric of the country. The world as we know has changed in so many ways to accommodate the changes that were forced onto us by the pandemic. Consumer behaviour was one of the first and most visibly impacted area, the way we live, the way we shop and even the way we do day to day tasks has changed significantly. At Alizz Islamic Bank we take pride in insuring that we are always adapting to these changes and enhancing our services and products to match the expectations of our customers.

This year the Bushra Prize Savings Account programme was designed to match these changes in expectation and consumer behaviour. Bushra in 2021 is bigger and better, with an increase in the Bushra prizes from RO1.85mn to RO2mn and a significant jump in the number of winners to 3,692.



The pandemic was a world changing event and it has highlighted key sectors that play a vital role in the health and safety of our community; keeping this in mind the Bushra 2021 schemes includes special draws for our front line soldiers; Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education

and the defence force as well as the ROP, just a small token of appreciation for their relentless sacrifices. The special draws for this segment will take place every quarter with a prize of RO500 each for three winners per organisation.

We also kept in mind the

growing number of retirees that are also adjusting to these changes. Our 2021 Bushra Prize Savings Account includes quarterly prize draws of RO500 for 3 pensioners. Technology has played a key role in insuring continuity of business and life during the pandemic and the lockdowns. Keeping in line with this consumer behavioural shift this year the Bushra Prize Savings account also includes monthly prizes for accounts that are opened digitally via the banks mobile banking application; 17 lucky winners that have opened a Bushra account digitally via the Mobile banking application will be getting a prize of RO100 each every month.

At Alizz Islamic Bank we always work to insure that our products and services are structured to match the expectations and requirements of our customers, in the past few years the bank has received a number of requests and suggestions from customers on further enhancing

the Bushra proposition.

One of these requests was to have specific draws for Male customers alongside the Female Draws that the bank has been conducting for the last few years. Bushra 2021 include monthly draws for both Female and Males customers, providing equal opportunity to both genders, with 17 winners every month from each branch for each gender with a prize of RO500 per winner. The bank has also introduced a special draw for its Tharwa Customers in June and December where 3 lucky winners will get RO10,000 each.

This alongside daily draws of RO100 for 10 customers, weekly draws of RO500 for 10 customers and monthly draws of RO25,000 for 3 customers alongside 2 quarterly draws of RO50,000 for 3 winners insures that everyone has a chance to win. Winning a large sum of money can be a life changing event, and this year there will be 2 lucky winners that will experience this life changing journey with our Mega draws that will be conducting in June as part of our half yearly celebrations where one lucky winner will get a chance to win RO100,000 and the Grand draw of RO150,000 for one winner conducted at the end of the year.

The prize scheme also includes a number of special draws including Omani youth Day with RO500 going to 15 customers as well as a special draw celebrating the countries National Day where 51 lucky customers will win RO500 each. To be eligible for any of these draws customers need to open a Bushra Prize Savings account with Alizz Bank and maintain a balance of just RO100. The Bushra Prize Savings account is the first Sharia's Complaint Prize Savings account in the sultanate that is based on the principle of Mudharaba.



Oman Air welcomes passengers from 103 countries

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, will welcome guests from 103 countries who can travel to the country without a visa.

The Royal Oman Police recently announced the plan, which eases travel requirements for guests who spend up to 10 days in the sultanate. Guests are required to have a confirmed hotel reservation, health insurance, and a return ticket.

The new programme applies to citizens of countries throughout the world including European nations such as Germany, France, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and many more.

Citizens of Turkey, Japan, Brazil, Russia, China, Egypt, Jordan and a number of other countries around the world are also eligible.

Visitors to the sultanate can avail themselves of a number of options to experience Oman Air's award-winning service. The national carrier recently earned two 2020 World Travel Awards, for providing the world's best service to the Middle East and the world's best First Class experience. Oman Air also recently achieved the top tier 5-star status from APEX, an internationally recognised organisation which rates airlines based on

travellers' feedback.

Oman Air continues to maintain its comprehensive safety program throughout all elements of the travel journey to ensure that guests fly confidently. Masks are required when guests are on board the aircraft and in Oman's airports. Distancing is maintained while guests board and exit the aircraft, which are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of every day. Cabin crew all wear a full set of personal protective equipment, meal service has been modified to further ensure safety and a number of other steps have been taken to ensure that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times.

Guests who are planning to travel to Muscat should visit the Civil Aviation Authority website, caa.gov.om, to ensure they are prepared to comply with requirements to enter the sultanate.

Guests departing from Oman should also ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements and requirements during their flights, which are provided at omanair.com.

Guests travelling outside Oman should ensure that they are aware of official requirements to enter their destination country.

PUBG Mobile Star Challenge returns to Mideast region

The PUBG Mobile Star Challenge returned to the Middle East for the third time, bringing together some of the top esports teams from across the region, to compete in three days of PUBG Mobile action. The Moroccan team, Gunz Esports was able to seize the chicken dinner by landing the first place by 125 points in the PUBG Mobile Star Challenge Arabia. In second place and third place, Rico Infinity Team and Frag Machines mark their places respectively by 98 and 85 points.

The PUBG Mobile Star Challenge Arabia 2020 was a major community tournament, organised by PUBG Mobile, which celebrated and showcased some of the very best talent in the game in the region.

The PMSC Arabia also marked the second anniversary of the launch of the highly-popular Arabic language version of PUBG Mobile.

The 2020 edition of PMSC Arabia was an online, Middle East-only, invitational event, pitching teams of four players each into fast-paced head-to-head matches over three days.

Sixteen teams, drawn from countries around the region and including some of the top esports teams in the Middle East, had been invited and joined the tournament. Teams competed for a total prize fund of US\$100,000.

PMSC Arabia 2020 also included participation from the region's most exciting PUBG

PUBG MOBILE STAR CHALLENGE ARABIA 2020					
الترتيب					
الترتيب	اسم الفريق	مركز	الترتيب	اسم الفريق	مركز
1	56	FATE ESPORTS	9	125	GUNZ ESPORTS
2	50	SABON TEAM	10	98	RIKO INFINITY TEAM
3	41	THE FORCE	11	85	FRAG MACHINES
4	35	SNP TEAM	12	84	YALLA ESPORTS
5	34	THE SPARK ESPORT	13	80	HEADQUARTERS
6	31	SUBOR ESPORTS	14	67	IRABDI ELITE
7	27	BSNTEHAWABRIGHS	15	64	ARAB ESG
8	10	BANDIAN SQUAD	16	53	NASH ESPORTS

Mobile content creators and streamers, who joined in on the fun with pop-up shows and segments taking place alongside the tournament, including a very special guest star performance from Flipperachi.

The latest edition of the PMSC Arabia was a purely online competition, in line with health and safety recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This edition was built on the suc-

cess of previous PMSC editions, which were held in Dubai in 2018 and Riyadh in 2019 and demonstrates PUBG Mobile's ongoing commitment to the development of professional esports in the region.

The PUBG Mobile Star Challenge Arabia took place from December 24-26.

Matches were broadcasted on PUBG Mobile's social media channels.

Joint study led by AUS examines impact of sandstorms in UAE

A joint study led by American University of Sharjah (AUS) has found potential improvement in the UAE air quality in recent years.

Looking at the effect of meteorological parameters on air quality, the two-year study analyzed a number of factors at two sites near Abu Dhabi and Dubai international airports.

Major results showed a decline in smaller particulate matter in the UAE in 2017 in comparison to 2016. "This indicates major improvements to air quality in recent years because of government regulations, and recent cloud seeding and rain enhancement projects," said Dr Yehya el Sayed, professor in Biology, Chemistry and Environmental Sciences at AUS and co-lead on the research.

In a desert environment, dust can have a significant impact. "This research assesses environmental quality in the region, where exposure to dust is part of daily life. There is shortage in the data available about dust patterns and composition in the Gulf region. The long-term exposure to dust storms is expected to have an impact on our daily lives and operations, which is why we need to monitor their periodic patterns and characteristics," said Dr el Sayed.

"For example, dust storms result in reduced visibility that limits aviation and may cause



mechanical problems for cars and airplane engines. Further, dust particulates have the potential to impact public health since they can easily enter the respiratory system and affect the heart and lungs."

The study provides new data about the seasonal and temporal meteorological climate, and the information can help regulators adopt measures that can potentially alleviate the impact of dust and sandstorms on aviation and public health.

"Detailed assessment of dust contamination and metal concentration can potentially solve or eliminate possible mechanical problems in automobiles and air-

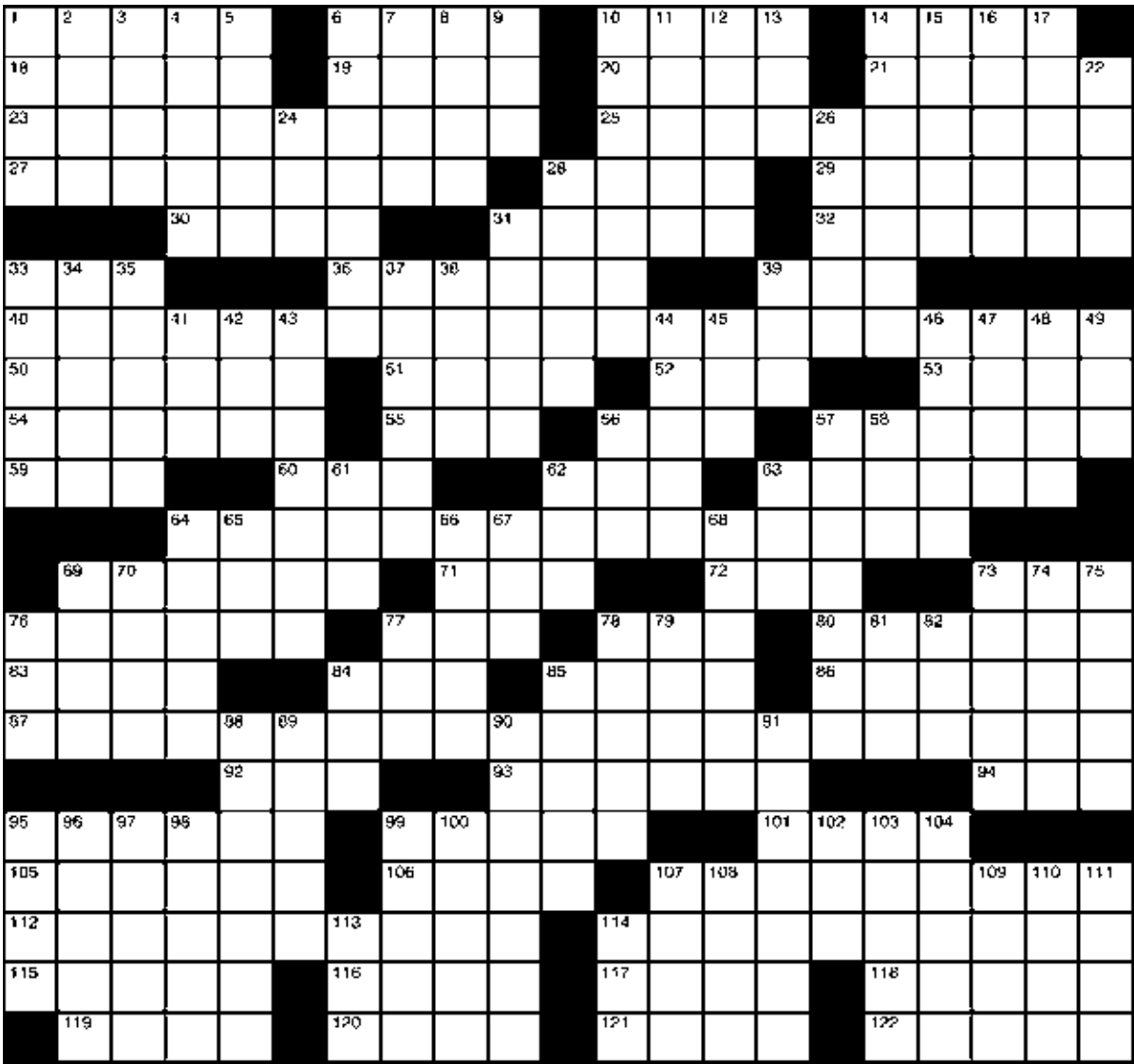
plane engines that are associated with dust. Dust storms may include desert sand, sea salt aerosol, soil erosion dust and fossil fuel combustion products. While most of the metals found are part of the sand composition, some of the heavy metals identified in low concentrations are most likely related to major industrial, heavy machinery and construction activities within the vicinity of the stations. The data can assist environmental agencies in their regulatory roles," explained Dr Sofian Kanan, professor in Biology, Chemistry and Environmental Sciences at AUS and co-lead on the research.

The researchers installed on-

line monitoring stations and dust collectors at each of the two research sites. The collected dust particulates were analysed, and the composition of the dust-borne heavy metals concentrations were measured at the AUS laboratories.

The study also looked at meteorological parameters, including wind speed and direction; air temperature; air pressure; air humidity; precipitation; haze and contents of the air. The findings of the study have been published in the prestigious *Environmental Pollution* journal. The study recommends continuous monitoring of meteorological parameters in the Gulf region.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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34 The others

35 Safety and garter followers

37 Fall blooms

38 Emulate the eagle

39 TLC dispensers

41 Tiny in Glasgow

42 March threat?

43 Candidate for election

44 Wheel spokes, e.g.: L.

45 Peer Gynt's mother

46 "Dallas" surname

47 River to the Rhine

48 Dressed

49 Blueprint add-on

56 Ecclesiastical robe

57 Botanical spikelet

58 Hole or head

61 Always, to a poet

62 "Where the Wild Things ____"

63 Barcelona bravo

64 Identification tag

65 One of Pindar's works

66 Japanese gateway

67 Beard on barley

68 Fasteners for some boots

69 Weblike membrane
- 70 Marsh wader

73 Leg joints

74 Onion-topped flat roll

75 Pieces of chalcedony

76 Min. unit

77 Biblical name

78 Double-reed woodwinds

79 Widespread

81 Mountain range of Morocco

82 Cuckoo of puzzledom

84 Not clearly seen

85 Ghostly pale

88 Eternal

89 Rabies, less commonly

90 Darken or obscure

91 Rumor

95 Made a hole in one

96 Measurement standards: var.

97 Point of view

98 CA-NV border lake

99 Point to be disputed

100 Sudden brief burst

102 New Guinea town

103 Comfortable shoes

104 Give the OK

107 Strike heavily

108 Egyptian skink

109 Emerald Isle

110 Manor bigwig

111 Small dagger

113 Short code signal

114 Abyssinian prince

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Be on the lookout for big news sweeping in on the career front. Mercury merges with change-demanding Pluto this afternoon, delivering powerful revelations or important conversations that update your current set of ambitions. The day ahead is bound to be highly productive on the job front in general, as the efficient Virgo moon finds herself in pleasant, supportive alignments.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Certain truths are making themselves known on the work front. Expressive Mercury sinks into a potent conjunction with regeneration-seeking Pluto this afternoon, likely ushering in important news or changes to your current course of action within your job. The productive Virgo moon helps you stay on track and apply your skills with ease to any task before you.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Important revelations are underway with the arrival of Monday's skies. Mercury slips down the rabbit hole with Pluto, bringing an intense inner awareness of your personal skills and resources. Any feelings of not being up to par are certain to float to the top of your thoughts today, so work to honestly acknowledge where your confidence needs shoring up.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Powerful mental breakthroughs await you with the arrival of Monday's skies. Mentally stimulated Mercury sinks down into the rabbit hole with Pluto, intensifying your thoughts and conversations across the board. This also prompts important changes around educational pursuits or travel plans. The Virgo moon helps you digest these new insights in a creative light.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Monday's skies are intense. Your ruling planet, Mercury, falls into an emotionally potent conjunction with Pluto. This union might be a little uncomfortable, but its ultimate aim is to help you break down any outmoded approaches standing in your way around sharing yourself. The moon's presence in your sign signals an important need to prioritise and protect yourself.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

This time of year is all about bringing an experience of renewal to your identity. Monday's skies work to move that process along, as Mercury merges with truth-seeking Pluto. This pairing stirs up some emotionally charged revelations or conversations in your environment—especially those concerning your individuality. So, listen closely rather than tune out the truth.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you wake up feeling intense, then you're right on track. Your ruling planet, Mercury, forms a powerful conjunction with emotionally-healing Pluto. These two coming together puts truth on the tip of your tongue and has you looking well beyond the surface for clues into your current relationship story. Try to lay low, as the Virgo moon suggests staying close to home is best.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

The universe has been putting your foundations to the test. That story is further emphasised today, as Mercury visits with radically honest Pluto. Powerful changes and communications are likely to occur on the home and family front with this union, so lean into keeping things honest and open. The insular Virgo moon suggests laying low is best to process this new information.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've trekked through some strange territory this last year. Monday's skies offer you the chance to dip back into some of the powerful subconscious terrain you've managed to connect to, as Mercury unites with Pluto. Important revelations or striking conversations aimed at breaking down old mental barriers are likely, so be gentle with yourself and confide in those closest to you.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your relationships are always intensified this time of year. Yet, Monday's skies ask you to dig a little bit deeper into the current narrative taking place in your heart, as Mercury merges with emotionally raw Pluto this afternoon. You can expect romantic conversations to take on a heavier tone than usual, so try your best to prioritise honest, vulnerable communication.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're no stranger to seeking the truth. Monday's skies offer the chance for a cosmic confessional, as Mercury merges with Pluto. Your communication is likely to be extra sharp, as mental storm clouds gather to help you acknowledge any unacknowledged feelings that need sharing. It's an ideal day to tell your story, through the written word or to another trusted soul.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The dreams you pine for are forever changing. Monday's skies work to keep you honest with the goals you wish to see through and bring to reality, as Mercury merges with radically honest Pluto. Social connections are likely to have an added intensity to them today, so be mindful of the communication breakthroughs that are possible within your community or group of friends.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The language spoken in Lakshadweep island is

a. Malayalam

b. Marathi

c. Tamil

d. Gujarati

2. The life history of human malaria parasite in Anopheles was first described by

a. Partrick Manson

b. Laveran

c. Ronald Ross

d. Richard Pfeiffer

3. The Indian Olympic Council was established in

a. 1936

b. 1988

c. 1924

d. 1900

Answers: 1: a 2: c 3: c

KIDS COLOURING

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

BOGGLER

S	R	U	S
E	R	E	B
N	O	V	I
R	E	I	Y

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JANUARY 03)

C	A	B	A	T	I	S		B	R	O	O	G	A	N		S	A	I	D	I	S	T
A	I	N	E	N	O																	
S	T	I	L	T	R	I	G	H														
E	N	T	A	I	L	E	D															
C	E	E																				
C	E	E																				
A	U	O	U	S	I	S	T															
S	T	A																				
M	O	L	T																			
R	A	I	N	E	D																	
O	T	H	E	R																		
G	O	D																				
A	U	O	U	S	I	S																
C	H	O	S	E																		
M	E	A	S	T																		
C	A	I	S	A	R																	
E	S	T	A	T	I	C																

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

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MANN GULANI
January 04

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Arsenal continue winning run

Manager Arteta sees brighter future for Gunners after three English Premier League wins in eight days



Arsenal's Alexandre Lacazette (second from right) scores against West Brom during the English Premier League match at The Hawthorns stadium in West Bromwich, UK, on Saturday (AFP)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
West Bromwich, UK - Mikel Arteta said the prospects for Arsenal's season are 'completely different' after thrashing West Brom 4-0 to complete three English Premier League (EPL) wins in eight days.

Prior to last weekend, the

Gunners had gone eight league games without a win to find themselves battling at the bottom end of the table. But nine points from nine has propelled Arsenal back into contention for the European places as they climb to 11th and within three points of the top six.

"I'm so happy we were able to achieve the target that we had because the table looks completely different," said Arteta, who had found his job under threat just four months on from winning the FA Cup. "The energy we have around the place is much better and

wins bring a lot of confidence. You can see that today in the way the team played." West Brom are yet to win in four games since Sam Allardyce took charge and the former England manager needs to quickly instill the defensive discipline he has made his trade-

mark at previous clubs if his new team are to have any chance of survival. The Baggies have shocked Manchester City and Liverpool by claiming 1-1 draws on the road in recent weeks, but have now conceded 12 goals in Allardyce's first three home games.

"I think we need to work out a way to make sure we are not as sloppy as we are at conceding goals," said Allardyce, whose side remain second bottom, six points from safety. "That seems to be by defending deeper like we did at Man City and Liverpool. It seems like when we do try and open up then we leave opportunities for the opposition and we're not able to cope." Arteta's decision to finally put faith in his crop of talented youngsters has turned his side's season around. Bukayo Saka was again the shining light, while Kieran Tierney and Emile Smith Rowe also impressed. Arsenal's poor run was principally caused by a struggle to score goals, but they were a threat from the off despite the treacherous conditions on a snow covered surface. Sam Johnstone denied Hector Bellerin and Saka inside the first ten minutes, but he was

powerless to stop Tierney's stunning opener on 23 minutes. The Scotland international left Darnell Furlong trailing in his wake before cutting inside onto his weaker right foot and curling into the top corner. Arsenal's second was reminiscent of their flowing football at the height of the Arsene Wenger era as Saka fed Lacazette, whose brilliant pass played Smith Rowe in behind the West Brom defence and he squared for Saka to tap into an empty net. The one way traffic continued after the break and some comical West Brom defending led to the third as Semi Ajayi smashed a dangerous cross off his own post and the ball broke to Lacazette to apply a simple finish. Moments later another raid from Tierney down the left teed up Lacazette for another finish from point-blank range for his fourth goal in three games. AFP



Arsenal's manager Mikel Arteta (left) greet Dani Ceballos and Ainsley Maitland-Niles (right) after the win against West Brom on Saturday

Alvarado stops Kriel to retain IBF light flyweight crown



Felix Alvarado celebrates after defeating DeeJay Kriel during the IBF Light Flyweight title fight in Dallas, US, on Saturday (AFP)

Washington, US - Nicaragua's Felix Alvarado stopped South Africa's DeeJay Kriel after 99 seconds of the tenth round on Saturday to retain his International Boxing Federation (IBF) light flyweight title. Making his US debut in Dallas, Texas, Alvarado improved to 36-2 with his 31st stoppage inside the distance. Alvarado stretched his win streak to 18 fights since losing to Argentina's Juan Carlos Reveco by decision for a flyweight title in June 2014. Kriel, a former IBF strawweight world champion, fell to 16-2 with one drawn. The 25 year old from Johannesburg was knocked to the canvas in the second and fourth rounds. "I knew this would be a tough fight," Alvarado said. "I dropped him with a hook, and I didn't even expect for a punch like that to land. But rather than keep

looking for that punch, I kept pushing him to the ropes to wear him down." It marked the second time Alvarado, whose twin brother Rene fights at super featherweight, has defended the IBF crown he took from Filipino Randy Petalcorin in 2018. Alvarado, 31, defended for the first time in May 2019 by taking a 12-round decision from Japan's Reiya Konishi in Kobe in May 2019. Alvarado had not fought since then due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Next on Alvarado's wish list would be a rival world champion, whose ranks include a pair of Japanese unbeaten, WBA super champion Hiroto Kyoguchi and WBC champion Kenshiro Teraji. "I want any of the other world champions so I can show who is the best in the division," Alvarado said. AFP

Record 42 starters set for US PGA Tournament of Champions

Miami, US - Top-ranked Dustin Johnson, third-ranked defending champion Justin Thomas and US Open winner Bryson DeChambeau will lead a record 42 starters when the US PGA Tournament of Champions tees off Thursday. The traditional first tour event of a calendar year at Kapalua, Hawaii, opened its field to players who reached last season's Tour Championship as well as event winners after a season disrupted by a two-month COVID-19 layoff. PGA Player of the Year Johnson captured his second major title in November at the Masters after winning the Tour Championship in September. The 36 year old American also won the Hawaii champions event in 2013 and 2018. Thomas won the WGC St Jude Invitational as well as the Tournament of Champions last year while fifth-ranked US compatriot DeChambeau won in Detroit last



Dustin Johnson, world No 1 golfer

The traditional first tour event of a calendar year at Kapalua, Hawaii, opened its field to players who reached last season's Tour Championship as well as event winners

July before taking his first major crown at Winged Foot. Fourth-ranked Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland and Britain's tenth-ranked Tyrrell Hatton are skipping the Hawaii event after qualifying, while American Jim Herman, ranked 96th, announced

he will not play after contracting COVID-19. "Some lousy news to end the year - I've had CV19 for the last couple of days and therefore will not be playing Kapalua," Herman tweeted. AFP

Momota tests positive, Japan players to miss Thailand Open

Tokyo, Japan - Badminton world No 1 Kento Momota tested positive for coronavirus on Sunday, prompting the withdrawal of all Japan's players from this month's Thailand Open, Japan's Badminton Association said. "Momota has tested positive for the coronavirus, and the association has decided not to send any players, including Momota, to Thailand," an association official said. Momota was looking to make his international comeback in Bangkok after almost a year out

following a car crash that left him with serious injuries. National broadcaster NHK said the 26 year old tested positive at Narita airport ahead of the Japan team's departure for Thailand. An association official confirmed that none of the other 22 Japan players tested positive, but said the entire team would withdraw nonetheless. The shuttler made no immediate comment on his social media accounts about the diagnosis. Momota won the All-Japan championships last week in his

first competition since his accident last January, when the vehicle taking him to the airport after he won the Malaysia Masters crashed, killing the driver. Momota feared his career might be over after fracturing an eye socket in the accident, and admitted his "spirit was almost broken" after undergoing surgery. The rescheduled Thailand Open is one of three tournaments taking place in Thailand this month, following disruptions to the badminton world tour schedule last year.

Momota came from behind to beat world No 11 Kanta Tsuneyama in the final of last week's All-Japan championships in Tokyo, giving him his third straight national title. He is one of Japan's brightest hopes for a gold medal on home soil at the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Games this year. Momota's positive test comes as Japan battles a third wave of infections that has seen record numbers of cases in the capital and nationwide. On Saturday, the governor of Tokyo and three surrounding

regions asked the central government to declare a state of emergency in their areas over the rising number of cases. The spike in infections comes with just over six months to go until the rescheduled Olympics, with public opinion in Japan still favouring a further postponement or outright cancellation over holding the Games this summer. But Japan's government and organisers are insistent the event can go ahead and have drafted extensive coronavirus countermeasures. AFP



Kento Momota of Japan

Question mark over Gabba Test after reported Indian boycott threat

INDIA'S TOUR OF AUSTRALIA

Melbourne, Australia - The schedule for Australia's Test series against India has come under threat after reports on Sunday that the visitors are unhappy at the prospect of re-entering strict quarantine for the fourth Test in Brisbane, according to *ESPNcricinfo* quoting a *Reuters* report.

The third Test in the four-match series is slated to start in Sydney on Thursday after Cricket Australia decided not to move the match in the wake of an outbreak of COVID-19 cases

in the city's northern beaches.

On Monday, both squads will fly to New South Wales, which reported eight new locally transmitted cases of the virus and ramped up social distancing measures on Sunday.

Queensland state has closed its border with Greater Sydney and although agreement has been reached to allow the players to fly to Brisbane for the fourth Test on January 15, there is uncertainty as to what level of restrictions they would face after having been in Sydney.

Reports in the Australian media, citing sources within the

touring party, said India's players, many of whom have been in some form of quarantine or other for six months, would refuse to travel if they were going to be subjected to a hard lockdown. A spokesperson for the India team did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the reports.

India's players underwent 14 days of strict quarantine after their arrival in Australia, but have since enjoyed more freedom while preparing for and playing matches in Adelaide, Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. There

are still some restrictions, however, and five Indian players were placed in isolation on Saturday after a video surfaced showing them eating inside a Melbourne restaurant on New Year's Day.

The Australian and Indian cricket boards are investigating the alleged breach of bio-security protocols with precedent suggesting the players might be fined for their actions.

Sydney, which at one stage looked like losing the third Test to Melbourne, would be the most likely beneficiary if it was decided to move the fourth match from Brisbane.

Australian team member Matthew Wade said the Australian players had been told the protocols would be stricter in Brisbane but rejected the idea that there was now uncertainty over the schedule.

"There's a lot of talk out there but for us as a group and me position personally, we'll go Sydney and play the SCG and then we'll go the Brisbane and play the Gabba," he told reporters.

"Until the powers that be knock on the door and tell us that that's going to change, we just roll onto the next game..."

Cricinfo



A file photo of India coach Ravi Shastri (left) and Rohit Sharma



Ganguly 'stable' after undergoing angioplasty

Kolkata, India - Sourav Ganguly, the former India captain and current BCCI president, is 'stable' and 'completely conscious' after undergoing an angioplasty on Saturday. Ganguly had been hospitalised in Kolkata after complaining of chest pain, which doctors said was a heart attack.

Ganguly had felt some 'uneasiness' in the morning after doing some exercise, and was subsequently admitted to the nearby Woodlands Hospital where Dr Rupali Basu, the MD & CEO, confirmed that he underwent a primary angioplasty.

"Sourav Ganguly has undergone angioplasty. He is stable now. He will be monitored for 24 hours," Dr Aftab, one of the doctors treating Ganguly, told the media. "He is completely conscious. There are two blockages in his heart for which he will be treated. As of now he is stable, we will have a meeting on Monday and then we will decide what needs to be done further, priority is to let him settle down after heart attack. He is risk-free and he is talking as well."

Cricinfo

FIRST DAY HONOURS SHARED

Azhar, Rizwan mount Pakistan fightback against New Zealand despite Jamieson's five-for

NEW ZEALAND VS PAKISTAN SECOND TEST: DAY ONE

Christchurch, New Zealand - An innings of great concentration from Azhar Ali (93), and one full of enterprise from Mohammad Rizwan (61), the captain, formed the bedrock of a much-improved batting performance from Pakistan on the first day of the second Test against New Zealand on Sunday.

Yet, they were perhaps left wondering what may have been had their top order shown a bit more application.

That said, by scoring at close to 3.50 runs an over to make 297, Pakistan ensured they drove the game forward on a surface where the ball did enough right through the day to keep the fast



Pakistan's Azhar Ali plays a shot on day one of the second Test match against New Zealand



New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson celebrates a dismissal

SCOREBOARD		
PAKISTAN 1ST INNINGS		
S Masood	lbw b Southee	0
Abid Ali	c Southee b Jamieson	25
Azhar Ali	c Taylor b Henry	93
H Sohail	c Nicholls b Jamieson	1
F Alam	c Watling b Jamieson	2
M Rizwan	c Watling b Jamieson	61
F Ashraf	c Taylor b Jamieson	48
Z Gohar	c Jamieson b Southee	34
S Afridi	c Nicholls b Boult	4
M Abbas	not out	0
N Shah	c Latham b Boult	12
Extras:	(b 2, lb 9, w 6)	17
TOTAL: 297 in 83.5 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-66, 3-70, 4-83, 5-171, 6-227, 7-260, 8-282, 9-285, 10-297		
Bowling: T Southee 23-7-61-2, T Boult 20-5-3-82-2, K Jamieson 21-8-69-5, M Henry 17-2-68-1, D Mitchell 2-1-6-0		

bowlers interested. That questions were asked of them all day was largely thanks to Kyle Jamieson (5-69), who claimed his third five-for in Tests.

Azhar's knock was largely one of denial. Risks weren't his cup of tea, the emphasis firmly on crease occupation by playing close to the body and trying to wear the bowlers down.

That said, when runs were at a premium and Jamieson threatened to take the game away, Azhar also found a way to punish

the odd bad deliveries, his on-driving in particular right out of the top drawer.

His 82-run partnership with Rizwan after Pakistan lost three wickets in as many overs to Jamieson, who came in first change after the first hour's play, changed the complexion of Pakistan's innings.

At 83 for four, when collapse was written all over the innings, Rizwan ensured he was up and running to ease much of the pressure on Azhar.

The day started poorly for Pakistan with Shan Masood trapped lbw by a toe-crusher from Tim Southee in the third over of the morning.

Abid Ali was the next to go, but after he had dug in and fought his way through the first hour.

His leg-side strokeplay was competent, but the tendency to poke at deliveries outside off had him playing one too many into the cordon. It didn't help that Jamieson got it to shoot up

off a length and straighten.

Then, two deliveries into Jamieson's next over, Haris Sohail, over whom there seem to be question marks every time he bats, was caught in a moment of indecision.

The ball flew off his edge by the time he decided to withdraw the bat, with Henry Nicholls pouncing one at gully.

Jamieson further drove this home when Fawad Alam, centurion from the previous game, got a snorter of a bouncer

that had him fall over in trying to fend, only for the ball to sharply jab back in to lob off the glove to BJ Watling behind the stumps. Just like that, Pakistan had collapsed. But Rizwan had other ideas as he strode out confidently.

He counter-punched quite magnificently after a rain break, hitting Trent Boult for three successive boundaries to get the scoreboard moving.

It needed Jamieson's introduction once again after drinks to cut short the partnership. Getting one to lift off a length and nip back in, he had Rizwan playing the wrong line as he nicked behind.

This could have ended up being a double-strike for New Zealand had Ross Taylor not let off Faheem Ashraf at first slip on four. It would cost New Zealand 44 more as Ashraf followed his captain's template to counterattack with the lower order for company.

When Azhar was out in the final session for 93, it appeared as if Pakistan could fold quickly. But Ashraf and debutant Zafar Gohar laid down a template their top order could have done better to follow. Gohar made a solid 34 to add more heft before the lower order was dismantled without much of a fight.

Cricinfo

Nortje, Elgar put South Africa on top

SOUTH AFRICA VS SRI LANKA SECOND TEST: DAY ONE

Johannesburg, South Africa - Fast bowler Anrich Nortje took six wickets and opening batsman Dean Elgar batted confidently as South Africa took control on the first day of the second and final Test against Sri Lanka at the Wanderers Stadium on Sunday.

Nortje claimed career-best figures of six for 56 as Sri Lanka collapsed to 157 after winning the toss and choosing to bat first on the pace-friendly Wanderers pitch. Then the left-handed Elgar scored 92 not out as South Africa reached 148 for one at the close.

With Kusal Perera hitting an aggressive 60, Sri Lanka were on course to reach lunch with minimal damage on a pitch which usually offers assistance to the bowlers on the first morning.

But Perera was caught at gully off the medium-paced Wiaan Mulder 20 minutes from the interval, sparking a calamitous collapse from 71 for one to 84 for five before the break.

The left-handed Perera struck 11 boundaries, punishing anything loose against the fast bowlers but the medium-paced Mulder slowed his momentum with a maiden over. With the first ball of his next over, Mulder had Perera caught at gully. He followed up with the wickets of



South Africa's Anrich Nortje celebrates after dismissing a Sri Lankan batsman during the second Test on Sunday

Kusal Mendis and Lahiru Thirimanne in a spell of three wickets for one run in three overs.

The tall Nortje had debutant Minod Bhanuka caught at first slip off the last ball before lunch. Four wickets fell for 13 runs in four overs before the interval.

Nortje, who had made the first breakthrough of the match when he had Sri Lankan captain Dimuth Karunaratne caught be-

hind in the tenth over, claimed four more wickets after lunch.

Nine of the Sri Lankans were caught in the arc between wicketkeeper and gully before last man Ajitha Fernando was bowled by Nortje, backing away from a full ball after a series of short-pitched deliveries. Several of the batsmen contributed to their own downfall with loose strokes outside off stump.

Ajitha Fernando, making his debut, bowled impressively at the start of the South African innings, bustling in at a lively pace. He had Aiden Markram caught at second slip in an opening spell of one for 14 in seven overs.

But Elgar batted fluently and had solid support from Rassie van der Dussen in an unbroken second wicket stand of 114 which took South Africa to within nine

SCOREBOARD		
SRI LANKA 1ST INNINGS		
D Karunaratne	c de Kock b Nortje	2
K Perera	c Markram b Mulder	60
L Thirimanne	c du Plessis b Mulder	17
K Mendis	c van der Dussen b Mulder	0
M Bhanuka	c van der Dussen b Nortje	5
N Dickwella	c de Kock b Nortje	7
D Shanaka	c de Kock b Nortje	4
W Hasaranga	c de Kock b Sipamla	29
D Chameera	c de Kock b Nortje	22
V Fernando	not out	2
A Fernando	b Nortje	4
Extras:	(lb 5)	5
TOTAL: 157 in 40.3 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-71, 3-71, 4-80, 5-84, 6-93, 7-110, 8-149, 9-151, 10-157		
Bowling: L Ngidi 10-3-44-0, A Nortje 14-3-1-56-6, L Sipamla 9-3-27-1, W Mulder 7-3-25-3		
SOUTH AFRICA 1ST INNINGS		
D Elgar	not out	92
A Markram	c Mendis b Fernando	5
R van der Dussen		
	not out	40
Extras:	(b 4, lb 4, w 3)	11
TOTAL: 148 for one in 37 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-34		
Bowling: V Fernando 10-0-40-0, A Fernando 10-2-30-1, D Chameera 7-0-34-0, D Shanaka 6-1-13-0, W Hasaranga 4-0-23-0		

runs of the Sri Lankan total.

Sri Lanka, hit hard by injuries, made four changes from the first Test at Centurion.

Batsmen Dhananjaya de Silva and Dinesh Chandimal and fast bowlers Kasun Rajitha and Lahiru Kumara were all ruled out of action. They were replaced by Thirimanne, Bhanuka, Dushmantha Chameera and Asitha Fernando. AFP



England's cricketers arrive at Mattala airport in Sri Lanka on Sunday (AFP)

England team arrives in Sri Lanka for Tests

Mattala, Sri Lanka - England's cricketers arrived in Sri Lanka on Sunday to resume a Test tour cancelled in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, in what officials hope will be a 'massive boost' for match-starved cricket fans. A British Airways charter flight carrying the players and support staff landed in Mattala, in the south of the Indian Ocean island, where they underwent antigen tests.

Joe Root's men had the small airport to themselves as Sri Lanka has closed its airspace to scheduled commercial airlines. Only a handful of repatriation flights and charters are allowed into Sri Lanka since May under strict health controls.

"We are very excited about the Galle Tests," Root told a small group of cameramen allowed into the terminal for their arrival. Airport staff in white

hazmat suits sprayed the hands and footwear of the visitors and their luggage before they were allowed into the terminal for coronavirus tests.

England cricket director, Ashley Giles, said the team looked forward to playing at the seaside Galle stadium adjoining a colonial-era fort. "To play in Galle will be very special - it is one of the iconic venues in world cricket," he said in a statement.

Sri Lanka Cricket said the team's hotel in the island's southern district of Hambantota will be off limits for locals as part of quarantine regulations. England abandoned their two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka in March on the second day of a practice match as the pandemic spread. They will play their two Tests starting on January 14 at the Galle stadium without any fans. AFP

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Leicester City's James Maddison (right) goes for a darts-themed celebration after scoring the opener against Newcastle United at St James' Park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, on Sunday (AFP)

Leicester up to third

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Newcastle, UK - Leicester climbed to third place in the English Premier League as goals from James Maddison and Youri Tielemans sealed a 2-1 win against Newcastle on Sunday. Brendan Rodgers' side struck twice in the second half at St James' Park. Andy Carroll reduced the deficit with his first goal for Newcastle in over ten years, but it was too late to rescue a point.

Leicester were good value for their first win in three league games as they extended their unbeaten run to four matches. The Foxes are one point behind leaders Liverpool, who face Southampton on Monday. After missing out on a top-four finish on the final day of last season, Leicester look well equipped to challenge for Champions League qualification and could even pose a threat to Liverpool's title defence. Having taken maximum

points from a visit to Newcastle for the fifth successive season, Leicester have now won seven of their nine away league games this term. They were hardly tested by Newcastle, who are without a win in six games in all competitions as the pressure mounts on Magpies boss Steve Bruce. Leicester thought they had taken an early lead when Jamie Vardy accelerated onto Maddison's precise pass, rounded Newcastle keeper Karl Darlow

and slotted into the empty net. Vardy's joy was short-lived however as an offside flag curtailed his celebrations. Unable to apply the knockout blow in the first half, Leicester finally took the lead in the 55th minute. Harvey Barnes led the break and his pass picked out Vardy, who cut inside before teeing up Maddison's fierce strike past Darlow. It was Vardy's 34th Premier League assist for Leicester, equalling the club record set by

Steve Guppy. Tielemans killed off Newcastle in the 72nd minute when the Belgium midfielder met Marc Albrighton's cross with a fine finish. Carroll, who started his career with Newcastle before spending eight years away after leaving in 2011, came off the bench to score in the 82nd minute. His thumping shot after Leicester failed to clear a free-kick was his first goal for his hometown club since December 2010. AFP



Atletico Madrid's Luis Suarez (third from left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Alaves in Vitoria, Spain, on Sunday (AFP)

Suarez slams late Atletico winner at ten-man Alaves

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Luis Suarez struck a 90th-minute winner for Atletico Madrid as they defeated ten-man Alaves 2-1 on Sunday to move back above Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. Marcos Llorente gave Atletico the lead at Mendizorroza shortly before half-time with a deflected strike from just outside the area. Diego Simeone's side appeared to have the game under control when Alaves defender Victor Laguardia was sent off on the hour following a VAR review for chopping down Thomas Lemar as the Frenchman ran towards goal. Florian Lejeune headed against the post for Alaves before a spectacular own goal on 84 minutes from Felipe threatened to cost Atletico two vital points, the Brazilian centre-back drilling beyond Jan Oblak as he attempted to hack clear an attempted cross. However, Suarez secured Atletico's fourth consecutive win in the final minute as the Uruguayan tapped in from close range after the ball was slotted across goal by substitute Joao Felix. Atletico climbed two points clear of Real Madrid and have two games in hand on the defending champions. On Saturday, Real Madrid recorded a 2-0 home victory over in-form Celta Vigo.

Lucas Vazquez headed in a cross from Marco Asensio at the far post in the sixth minute, barely a minute after Real centre back Nacho had cleared a shot by Celta striker Iago Aspas off the line. He returned the favour in the 53rd minute, laying a diagonal ball into the path of Asensio with the visiting defence in disarray. Asensio drove his shot into the roof of the net.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Lautaro hat-trick as Inter Milan go top Milan, Italy - Lautaro Martinez scored a hat-trick as Inter Milan kicked off 2021 in blistering form with a 6-2 win over lowly Crotone on Sunday to take top spot in Serie A. Inter claimed an eighth consecutive league win to move two points ahead of AC Milan who travel to midtable Benevento later on Sunday. Martinez and Romelu Lukaku proved decisive for the northerners, the strike duo being involved in five of Inter's goals.

OTHER RESULTS:

Sunday: Genoa 1 Lazio 1, Atalanta 5 Sassuolo 1, Roma 1 Sampdoria 0, Cagliari 1 Napoli 4, Spezia 0 Hellas Verona 1, Fiorentina 0 Bologna 0, Parma 0 Torino 3. AFP

Seeb, Al Nasr march into last-16

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Defending Omantel League winners Seeb sent a clear signal on Sunday that they are the team to beat in the new domestic season as they trounced Al Talee'a 5-0 to advance into the round-of-16 of the 2020-21 His Majesty's Cup Football Championship at the Seeb Sports Stadium. Playing the last match of the day that featured five games to complete the round-of-32, Seeb, a three-time winner of the coveted HM's Cup, was in roaring form as they hammered in four goals in the first half itself. Former Oman striker Abdulaziz al Miqbali and Amjad al Harthi scored a brace while Issam al Makhzoumi got the fifth in Seeb's convincing victory. Also advancing to the last-16 stage on Sunday were former champions Al Nasr and Sur. Five-time champions Al Nasr proved too strong for Bausher at home, coasting to a 2-0 win at the Saada Sports Complex in Salalah. Four-time winners Sur also sealed a spot in the next round after a penalty shootout, winning 4-3 against Bahla. The match ended 1-1 after the regulation and extra-time. In the other games on Sunday,



Seeb's Abdulaziz al Miqbali (C) and teammates celebrate their win on Sunday

Al Nahda knocked Ahli-Sidab out with a 2-1 win at the ROP Stadium and Majees got the better of Nizwa in a penalty shootout, winning 3-0, after the teams were locked in a 1-1 stalemate. Earlier on Saturday night, Sohar routed Al Khabourah 4-1 to secure a spot in the last-16. Following the conclusion of the round-of-32 on Sunday night, the 15 teams that advanced are Al Arouba, Saham, Ibri, Samail, Al Suwaiq, Al Mussanah, Oman, Al Rustaq, Sur, Al Nahda, Sohar,

Al Ittihad, Seeb, Al Nasr and Majees. Nine-time and defending champions Dhofar had received a bye to last-16. The round-of-16 will also be played on a single-round format and will be held on January 21-22. The first-leg of the double-leg quarterfinals will be played on February 5-6 while the return-leg will be held on February 15-16. The two-leg semifinals will be played on February 26-27 and March 8-9.

@ashokmuscat



Action from the HM's Cup match between Al Nahda and Ahli-Sidab



Sohar players celebrate their 4-1 win over Al Khabourah on Saturday night



Carlos Sainz and co-driver Lucas Cruz compete in Dakar Rally on Sunday

Sainz claims Dakar first stage

Bisha, Saudi Arabia - Defending champion Carlos Sainz won the first stage of the Dakar Rally on Sunday in Saudi Arabia with the kingdom hosting motorsport's most punishing event for the second year since its move from South America. The Spaniard, a three-time Dakar winner, covered the 277km special between Jeddah and Bisha in his Mini Buggy in 3hr 18min 56sec. Sainz, whose son Carlos drives for Ferrari in Formula One, finished 25sec ahead of French teammate Stephane Peterhansel after a gripping see-saw battle which record 13-time champion Peterhansel appeared to have won until Sainz stormed home to deny his celebrated rival. Czech Martin Prokop (Ford) completed the first day's car podium. While Sainz leads Peterhansel by eight seconds in the fledgling standings, for another luminary of the rally world the

2021 Dakar had barely begun before it was all but over. Nine-time world rally champion Sebastian Loeb trails by more than 24 minutes after a day to forget. In the motorbike category Australian Toby Price began his quest for a third crown in style, taking the first stage honours by more than half a minute from Argentine Kevin Benavides (Honda) and his KTM teammate, Matthias Walkner of Austria. But the opening day proved tough going for reigning champion Ricky Brabec, Honda's American rider who trailed in almost 20 minutes behind Price after losing his way in the early part of the 277km special. Monday's second stage sees competitors covering 685km, including a 457km special, between Bisha and Wadi Ad-Dawasir featuring the first taste of racing in dunes. AFP



MAHINDRA FOCUSES ON SUVs

Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd will focus on developing its core portfolio of SUVs and their electric version, the company said after it ended joint venture talks with Ford Motor Co

BUSINESS

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Sultanate's budget deficit swells to RO4.2bn in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As the COVID-19 pandemic and continued low oil prices triggered tremendous challenges for Oman's economy and public finance, the sultanate's budget deficit sharply increased to RO4.2bn for the full year 2020 as compared to RO2.5bn total deficit estimated in last year's budget.

The preliminary results of 2020 budget showed a sharp decline in Oman's total revenue that led to a higher deficit. As per the Ministry of Finance's statement issued on Saturday, the sultanate's total revenue in 2020 fell by 21 per cent to RO8.5bn as against the budgeted figure of RO10.7bn. Total public spending in 2020 declined by 4 per cent to nearly RO12.7bn as compared with RO13.2bn in the 2020 budget estimates.

'The 2020 budget faced dual challenges of lower oil prices and economic and financial implications triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 budget deficit is projected to reach nearly RO4.2bn, up by RO1.7bn than the estimated deficit of RO2.5bn in the 2020 budget. This is attributed to the implications of COVID-19 and sharp drop in oil prices,' the Ministry of Finance said



Total revenue in 2020 fell by 21% to RO8.5bn as against RO10.7bn estimated in the budget

in its statement.

Oman's 2020 general budget was based on an average oil price of US\$58 per barrel, but the actual average oil price during the year remained as low as US\$48 per barrel.

The country's oil revenues declined by RO1.1bn due to average oil price being significantly lower than the assumed price in the budget by US\$10 per barrel. Oman's oil revenues in 2020 decreased to RO5.5bn, nearly 21 lower than the estimated oil revenues in the budget.

Gas revenue also dropped by RO500mn as a result of a decline in natural gas price as well as lower sales.

According to the preliminary 2020 budget results, non-oil revenues declined by RO600mn compared with the budget estimate due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate the effects on the economic activity, the government waived several fees and taxes (such as tourism tax, municipality fees and tax, industrial areas rents, commercial register renewal fee,

shipping and handling fees and others), which helped fuel the decline in non-oil revenue.

Oman's budget deficit in 2021 is estimated at about RO2.2bn or 8 per cent of gross domestic production (GDP). A 73-per cent or RO1.6bn of this deficit will be financed through external and domestic borrowing, while the rest of the deficit (nearly RO600mn) will be covered by drawing on reserves.

With rising deficits in recent years, the sultanate's total public debt is projected to reach RO21.7bn by the end of 2021, and external borrowing represents 76 per cent of overall public debt, the Ministry of Finance said.



VAT to add RO300mn in revenue this year

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The implementation of a 5 per cent value-added tax (VAT) in Oman from April 2021 is expected to generate additional revenue of RO300mn for the sultanate this year, according to the budget statement released by the Ministry of Finance.

The value-added tax is an indirect tax on consumption so that the final consumers will ultimately bear the cost of VAT. The tax will be imposed on goods and services in Oman starting from April 2021, with exception of the education and health sectors and some basic commodities.

'The financial impact of measures and initiatives taken under the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (2020-2024) has been estimated at RO3.5bn in 2021, with

an increase in revenue by RO565mn resulting from VAT which is expected to generate RO300mn, government investments to yield up to RO195mn, excise tax of RO20mn, and taxes at RO50mn,' the Ministry of Finance's statement said.

The excise tax and VAT revenue are expected to stand at RO413mn in 2021, increased by threefold when compared with budgeted figure of RO100mn in 2020, the ministry's statement added.

The corporate income tax revenue is estimated at RO400mn in 2021, a decrease of 27 per cent as compared with 2020 budget. This decline is mainly due to consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement said.

According to the Royal Decree (121/2020), a six months

grace period has been granted for the taxpayer to register, and prepare their internal system to implement the VAT.

The Ministry of Finance said that the VAT rate of 5 per cent to be applied in Oman is among the lowest rates at the international level. Therefore, it is expected that the impact of VAT on the cost of living in Oman will be minimal.

'The VAT will have a positive impact on the economic and social development and the international competitiveness of Oman. The financial resources obtained from this tax will contribute to building a sustainable economy for future generations, and it will also contribute to improving public services and continuing the development of infrastructure in future,' the ministry's statement added.

Number of registered SMEs rise 13% in Nov

Muscat - The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Public Authority for SME Development (Riyada) at the end of November 2020 stood at 47,802, recording an increase of 13.4 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with 33 per cent of registered SMEs till the end of November 2020, fol-

lowed by North Batinah with 16 per cent, Dakhliyah with 13 per cent, Dhofar with 8 per cent, and the rest of governorates with 30 per cent share in the total.

As many as 16,024 SMEs are registered in the Governorate of Muscat at the end of November 2020, followed by North Batinah with 7,536, Dakhliyah with 6,040, Dhofar with 3,979 and South Batinah with 3,562.

ONA

Virus-ravaged oil market collapses by a fifth in 2020

London, UK - World oil prices slumped by more than a fifth this year as deadly coronavirus savaged the world's appetite for crude, despite a vaccine-driven upturn at the end of 2020.

Europe's benchmark contract North Sea crude stood at US\$51.13 per barrel in mid-afternoon deals on Thursday. That was a hefty 22.5 per cent lower than the same stage a year earlier.

The oil market had begun 2020 on the front foot, with

prices rising as simmering tensions in the crude-rich Middle East region threatened to disrupt valuable supplies.

Oil spiked in early January, with Brent soaring as high as US\$71.75 after US President Donald Trump ordered the drone assassination of Iran's top general Qasem Soleimani.

But prices were subsequently slammed by fallout from the escalating and deadly COVID-19 pandemic, with losses accelerating in March as nations imple-



mented lockdowns and shuttered businesses.

Tightening restrictions slammed the brakes on demand from oil-intensive sectors like

aviation, with planes grounded.

At the same time, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) faced a massive internal conflict.

Crude futures crashed on the back of a vicious price war between OPEC cartel kingpin Saudi Arabia and fellow producer Russia - which is a key member of the enlarged OPEC+ grouping.

Russia refused Saudi Arabia's request to cut their collective output to counter the virus-fuelled slump in crude demand.

In response, top global exporter Saudi slashed its prices and raised output to preserve market share in the face of Russian opposition.

On April 20, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude collapsed to minus US\$40.32 per barrel - meaning producers paid buyers to take the oil off their hands.

Brent spiralled as low as US\$15.98, plumbing depths not seen for more than twenty years. AFP

Bank Nizwa signs financing deal for construction of AOU campus

Muscat - Bank Nizwa recently signed an agreement with Arab Open University (AOU) to finance the construction of their new campus in Oman. The signing ceremony was held at the Bank Nizwa head office in Muscat. With education being a primary focus of the Oman's Vision 2040, Bank Nizwa understands the importance of having a professionally skilled workforce to drive the economy and thereby attain prosperity, the bank said in a press release.

The agreement was signed by Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and Dr Moosa al Kindi, director of Arab Open University, Oman branch.

"One of the key drivers of success in a country is defined by the quality of education provided to its youth who are the future of the country. By supporting such ventures that are dedicated to the advancement of skills of our youth, we will continuously have local talents that will be professionally geared to take on new



initiatives and contribute to the national economy," Bank Nizwa CEO Kayed said.

He added, "Education is one of the key sectors that the Oman's Vision 2040 focuses on and Bank Nizwa is committed to being a vital contributor to the nation's growing economy through strategic partnerships like these."

To build the campus, Bank Nizwa has signed a financing deal and the university has re-

ceived a land allocation from the Ministry of Housing in South Mabela with a total area covering 37,850sqm. The new Arab Open University falls under the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) which is a regional organisation established in 1980 by the initiative of His Royal Highness the late Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz and the support of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The first phase of the Arab

Open University was launched in October 2002 and the it started in Oman in February 2008. With 15 branches and centres in nine Arab countries, it aims to reach all Arab countries.

Established as a non-conventional academic institution, the Arab Open University has been reaccredited by the Open University Validation Service of the Open University in the United Kingdom for a period of five years (2017-2022) for the fourth time. The AOU has signed a series of memoranda with a number of international universities to offer academic programmes required in the labour market.

On completion of the project, the university will help students enhance their skill set, increase knowledge and attain internationally acclaimed degrees, therefore, giving the country local talents in various sectors who possess the necessary expertise to take on leadership roles.

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COMMENTARY

Value-added tax on imports of goods and services

In VAT regime, import of goods will have a different treatment from import of services.

When goods enter the Sultanate of Oman from outside the GCC, whether by land, air or sea, in order to be considered as imported under the value-added tax law, they must be cleared by the registered importer through customs authorities and not placed under the duty suspension regime.

Whereas, for import of services, reverse charge mechanism (RCM) will apply wherein the VAT liability shifts from supplier to the customer residing in Oman.

The import of goods need not be only a sale-purchase transaction. Even if a company transports goods from the head office to its branch in Oman, it will

be considered as an import from VAT viewpoint. All goods imported into Oman are subject to VAT, unless they are specifically exempted.

The taxable value of imported goods is determined by the customs value specified in accordance with the Common Customs Act plus taxes, duties and other expenses related to the import process, transportation, packaging, storage, stocking and insurance charges.

In cases where goods are temporarily exported outside the Sultanate of Oman for repair, completion of manufacturing, or other similar services, and then re-imported, VAT will be due, on the value added to the goods during export.

For an example, when equipment or

apparatus is temporarily exported from the sultanate to China for repair or supplement manufacturing. Once it is repaired or finished manufacturing, it is re-imported into Oman. The value of

offer discounts after importing the goods.

The discount will not affect the value of the goods or the VAT obligation unless the customs value of the goods is

the importer finds that the VAT on imported goods is incorrect, let's say, due to an error in classification or value. In such cases, the importer must inform the General Administration of Customs before paying VAT on imports.

Sometimes, the importer may need to make an adjustment to the customs declaration even after the goods are cleared. If there are any modification leading to additional customs duties or VAT due, the amendment will prevail. Further, if any modification leads to overpayments of customs duties or VAT, the General Administration of Customs will amend the customs duties and VAT due.

It is very important for the importers to verify all relevant documents at the

time of clearing customs formalities. As a general rule, the importer must pay VAT due on the goods at the point of import to the General Administration of Customs, before releasing the goods. Most likely the Bayan systems will be linked with the VAT systems and the VAT will be paid along-with the customs duties. Any errors or mistakes leading to excess/short payment of VAT may lead to complications for the importer.

(Reader questions can be directed to davis.kallukaran@apexmedia.co.om)

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



TAYSIR AL RAWAHI

The writer is director, tax advisory services at Crowe Oman

VAT on imports will be on the value added to the equipment or apparatus while it is in China, according to the customs law.

It is very common for the supplier to

adjusted due to this discount. If there are no adjustments to the customs value, there will be no change in the obligation of VAT to the importer.

There could be a situation, where

MSM rises 0.56%, volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose 0.56 per cent to close at 3,679.34 points on Sunday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 55.8 per cent to RO724,538 and volumes fell 24.15 per cent to 7.32mn shares.

Financial index rose 0.42 per cent, Industrial index climbed 0.72 per cent and Services index rose 0.66 per cent. The MSM Shariah Index closed down by 0.2 per cent at 523.55 points.

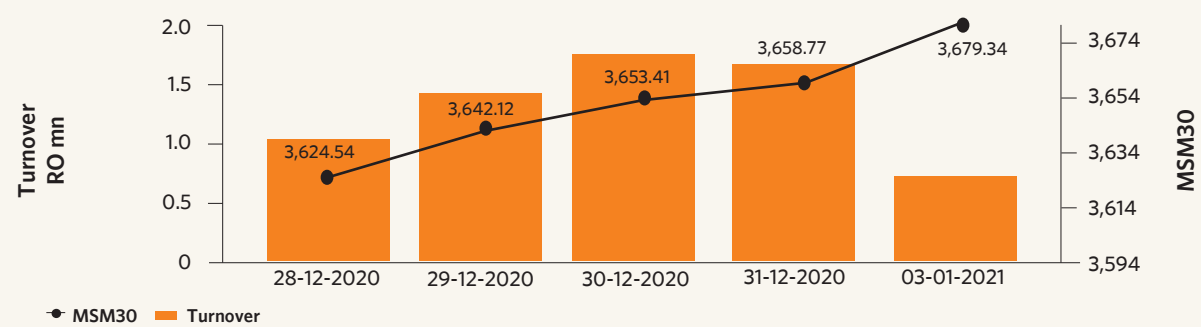
Market breadth remained positive as 15 companies closed up, while only one company closed down. The rest nine traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Galfar Engineering & Contracting (9.76 per cent), Al Anwar Holding (4.92 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel



Products (4.38 per cent) and Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles (4.26 per cent). The only loser was Oman Flour Mills (-5.41 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Egypt signs \$1bn oil, gas exploration deals



Tarek al Molla, Egypt's Minister of Petroleum

CAIRO - Egypt's Minister of Petroleum recently said nine US\$1bn worth new oil and gas exploration agreements were signed with local and international companies.

The exploration will cover regions in the east and west of the Mediterranean Sea and regional waters of the Red Sea with six large companies for drilling 17 wells, Tarek al Molla said in a statement.

"Egypt seeks luring new international investments in gas and oil exploration, and concluding

The exploration will cover regions in the east and west of the Mediterranean Sea and regional waters of the Red Sea for drilling 17 wells

deals with big companies as a priority," he said.

He noted that developing many items of the oil deals has

contributed a lot to boosting the competitiveness of Egypt as an attractive destination for investments amid stable economic conditions and reform.

The nine deals are part of 12-new-agreements that have been targeted since March 2020 with a minimum investment estimated at US\$1.4bn for drilling 23 wells, nine of them offshore the Mediterranean and three in the Red Sea, Molla added.

Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Total are among the signatories. WAM

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'2020: Most challenging year of aviation history'

Istanbul, Turkey - The year 2020 has been the most challenging year of the aviation history, the CEO of Turkey's flag carrier Turkish Airlines said.

"2020 will be an unforgettable era for a long time to come due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is already considered the biggest global crisis since World War II," Ilker Ayçi said in a statement.

In 2021, the aviation industry, which felt the negative effects deeply, will try to return the pre-2020 figures, he noted.

Ayçi said Turkish Airlines was in close contact with international authorities during the pandemic period, and the carrier adapted quickly to the digital



Ilker Ayçi

transformation by implementing various measures to protect people.

The global COVID-19 pandemic, which appeared initially in China in December 2019, has spread all around the world and affected deeply economic activities, especially tourism, aviation and manufacturing.

Anadolu Agency



Aldar Properties sells Abu Dhabi Golf Complex

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Aldar Properties has agreed to sell the Abu Dhabi Golf Club Complex, including the Westin Hotel and the Abu Dhabi Golf Course, to a financial investor for AED180mn.

The sale, which has a transaction value representing a 13 per cent increase on the entry price, is in line with Aldar's asset management strategy to actively pursue profitable investment exits and redeploy capital into growth opportunities.

The complex, which also includes land for development of 46,543 sqm gross floor area of residential property, was acquired by Aldar as part of a wider transaction with Abu Dhabi's Tourism Development Investment Company (TDIC) in 2018.

Jassem Saleh Busaibe, chief investment officer of Aldar Properties, said, "We are very pleased to have successfully conducted the sale of this luxury hospitality complex, a testament to our team's ability to create value through active management, despite challenges to the hospitality and tourism industry from COVID-19. We will continue to pursue opportunities for significant growth and further diversification of the Aldar Properties portfolio."

This is the latest in a series of transactions by Aldar. The company agreed earlier in December to divest its district cooling assets on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island. WAM

UBGCF Inception Date*		17-Nov-09
NAV Date		Dec 31, 2020
NAV (OMR)		1.055
Adjusted NAV** (OMR)		1.389
Cash Dividend paid since inception (OMR)		0.03
Unit Dividend paid since inception		28%
YTD Performance		4.02%
Performance since inception		44.90%

* First NAV was issued on 4th March 2010
** Adjusted for cash and bonus dividends

For more information please contact:
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Bitcoin rallies above \$30,000 for first time as demand soars

Paris, France - Bitcoin, the leading virtual currency, saw its price pass US\$30,000 on Saturday for the first time in just its latest record high.

The first decentralised cryptocurrency surpassed US\$30,823.30 at 1313 GMT, according to data compiled by the Bloomberg news agency, having broken US\$20,000 on December 16.

Analyst Timo Emden noted that 'the appetite for risk', which is reflected in buying of bitcoin, 'remains unshakeable'.

"More historic highs could follow," the Germany-based analyst added.

Just 12 years old, bitcoin has seen a meteoric rise since March, when it stood at US\$5,000, spurred by online payments giant PayPal saying it would enable account holders to use cryptocurrency.

After PayPal's announcement in October, analysts at investment banking giant JPMorgan Chase compared the cryptocurrency to gold.

'Bitcoin could compete more intensely with gold as an 'alternative' currency over the coming years given that millennials will become over time a more important component of investors' universe,' they said.

A number of central banks have meanwhile responded to the rise of cryptocurrencies and



Just 12 years old, bitcoin has seen a meteoric rise since March, when it stood at US\$5,000

the dwindling global use of cash by announcing plans for bank-backed digital units.

Several central banks including those of China and Sweden -

but also the US Federal Reserve - are also testing digital applications in response to Facebook's recent moves to produce its own digital unit, Libra.

Unregulated by any central bank, bitcoin emerged as an attractive option for investors with an appetite for the exotic - although criminals have also picked up on its under-the-radar appeal.

Debate has meanwhile raged over the status of the digital asset, launched in late 2008, as

to whether it should be seen as a form of money, an asset or a commodity.

After the unit surpassed US\$1,000 for the first time in 2013, it increasingly began to attract the attention of financial institutions and has experienced wild price swings.

AFP



Japan-UK post Brexit trade deal takes effect

Tokyo, Japan - A post-Brexit trade deal between Japan and the United Kingdom came into force on Friday, ensuring business continuity and strengthening the bilateral relationship as London seeks to join the larger Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement (FTA), Kyodo News reported.

The two countries signed the FTA in October as the existing Japan-European Union trade pact ceased to cover the United Kingdom on Thursday, the end of the transition period following the country's exit from the European Union in January 2020.

The lack of an agreement could have resulted in impositions of higher tariffs by both countries on bilateral trade.

The deal largely duplicates the Japan-EU FTA, including gradual elimination of British tariffs on Japanese cars by 2026 and im-

mediate removal of its duties on most Japanese agricultural goods such as beef and tea.

Under the pact, Japan did not set new preferential treatment for British agricultural imports, although the issue was a major sticking point in their four months of negotiations through October.

Rules on e-commerce and financial services set in the Japan-Britain deal have become more ambitious than in the Japan-EU pact, including a prohibition on governments requesting businesses to disclose algorithms used in artificial intelligence technology and encryption data.

London said the deal with Tokyo, the UK's first trade pact with a major economy after its departure from the EU, is a major stepping stone in its aspiration to join the TPP.

SPA

Chinese banks set aside nearly \$1tn for bad loan provision

Beijing, China - Banking institutions in China have put aside 6.5tn yuan (about US\$996.2bn) of bad loan provisions to fend off risks, according to the country's top banking regulator.

In the first nine months of 2020, some 1.5tn yuan have been added to provisions for credit losses, an increase of 206.8bn yuan year on year, data from the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC) showed.

The CBIRC said it has urged

banks to strengthen loan provision to prepare enough ammunition to settle bad loans in wake of the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic.

The provision coverage ratio of Chinese commercial banks, the ratio of provisioning to gross non-performing assets which indicates the extent of funds a bank has kept aside to cover loan losses, stood at 179.9 per cent at the end of September.

Xinhua

NYSE delists Chinese telecommunications companies

New York, US - The New York stock exchange (NYSE) has begun the process of delisting three Chinese telecoms companies as it seeks to comply with an order by the Trump administration barring investment in firms with ties to the Chinese military.

It comes as relations between the world's two biggest economies spiral downwards over sore points ranging from trade and the coronavirus to Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Trading in China Mobile Communications, China Telecommunications Corp and China Unicom (Hong Kong) Limited will end within the next week, subject to transactions being set-



tled, the exchange said in a statement on Friday.

In November President Donald Trump signed an executive order banning Americans from investing in Chinese companies deemed to be supplying or sup-

porting Beijing's military and security apparatus, earning a sharp rebuke from China.

The order listed 31 companies it said China was using for the 'increasing exploitation' of US investment capital to fund military

and intelligence services, including the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction.

It was one of a series of executive orders and regulatory actions that have targeted China's economic and military expansion in recent months.

Trump's order prohibits US companies and individuals from owning shares in any of the 31 companies, which also include video surveillance firm Hikvision and China Railway Construction Corp.

National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said at the time that the order would prevent Americans from unknowingly

providing passive capital to Chinese companies - listed on exchanges around the world - that support the improvement of Beijing's army and spy agencies.

Under his 'America First' banner, Trump has portrayed China as the greatest threat to the United States and global democracy, pursued a trade war with it, harangued Chinese tech firms, and laid all the blame for the coronavirus pandemic at Beijing's door.

Other index providers including MSCI Inc, S&P Dow Jones Indices and Nasdaq have deleted various Chinese firms from their listings.

AFP

Germany rings in 2021 with CO2 tax, coal phase-out

Frankfurt, Germany - Germany is aiming for a green start to 2021 by shutting down a coal-fired power plant and slapping a CO2 price on transport, but critics say the efforts aren't enough to combat climate change.

The measures are the result of hard-fought compromises thrashed out by Chancellor Angela Merkel's right-left coalition government, and are key to Germany's transition away from polluting fossil fuels towards renewable energy.

From January 1, 2021 the government will charge €25 per tonne of carbon dioxide emissions released by the transport and heating sectors.

The pricetag was raised from the government's initially proposed €10 per tonne - a number widely slammed as too low by Germany's Green party, environmentalists and scientists.

The price will increase to €55 by 2025, and will be decided at auction from 2026.

Germans will feel the difference at the pump with diesel and petrol set to become more expensive, while heating buildings will also cost more.

The government expects to



raise €56.2bn from companies buying the new carbon certificates or 'pollution rights' over the next four years.

Also on Friday, the 300MW Niederaussem D unit power plant near Cologne, running on lignite (brown coal), became the first to close down as part of Germany's phaseout of coal by

2038.

Energy giant RWE, which has operated the plant since it was built in 1968, said decommissioning the facility - as required by Germany's 2020 coal exit law - was 'a difficult step' that would lead to some 300 job losses.

Under the same legislation,

several power plants fuelled by black or hard coal are going offline from January, taking a combined capacity of 4.7GW off the market.

Exceptions

But the flagship initiatives have drawn criticism.

The €25 carbon price will not

'make the necessary contribution' to helping Germany meet its commitments under the 2015 Paris climate pact, said Christiane Averbeck, director of the environmental group Climate Alliance Germany.

Germany aims to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent from 1990 levels by

2030, and derive 65 per cent of its electricity from renewables by then.

Averbeck said the carbon tax however allowed for too many exceptions for 'entire branches of industry' and was pegged too low to really change behaviours.

The Green Budget Germany (FOES) thinktank said that to avoid companies moving production abroad to dodge the carbon pricing, the government would have done better to incentivise climate-friendly investments instead.

The ADAC motoring association has calculated that petrol and diesel will now cost seven and eight cents more per litre respectively.

To ease the pain, the government will lower the so-called EEG surcharge Germans pay to fund the shift towards green energy. The lost income will be offset by the revenues generated from the CO2 pricing.

Payouts

Despite a green reputation abroad, Germany remains heavily reliant on dirty coal, partly because of Merkel's decision to abandon nuclear energy

after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

In the third quarter of 2020, just over half of the electricity produced in Europe's top economy came from non-renewables, with coal alone accounting for 26 per cent.

Climate activists, including the youth-led Fridays for Future movement, have urged the government to speed up Germany's coal exit, saying the current timetable of closing all coal-fired plants by 2038 is not ambitious enough.

To their fury, the government has given special permission for North Rhine-Westphalia's huge open-cast Garzweiler coal mine to keep expanding over the coming years in order to fuel nearby power stations, causing the destruction of several villages in the process.

Environmentalists have also rallied against the planned multi-billion-euro payouts set to flow to energy companies in compensation for the plant shut-downs, alongside €40bn in government aid for regions that depend on mining and energy jobs.

AFP

Mourners raise anti-US slogans on anniversary of commanders' killings

Baghdad, Iraq - Thousands of Iraqi mourners on Sunday condemned the 'American occupiers', one year after a US drone strike killed Iran's revered commander Qasem Soleimani and his Iraqi lieutenant Abu Mahdi al Muhandis.

The anniversary of their deaths in Baghdad - which brought arch enemies the United States and Iran to the brink of war - was also marked in Iran and by supporters in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere.

The lead-up to the commemorations of the Shiite Muslim commanders has again heightened regional tensions in the weeks before US President Donald Trump, who ordered the killings, leaves the White House.

In Iraq, the powerful pro-Iranian Hashed al Shaabi paramilitary network which Muhandis commanded has led the sombre and angry vigils for him and General Soleimani, who headed the foreign operations of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Thousands of black-clad mourners on Saturday night converged at the spot near Baghdad's international airport where the US hit the two vehicles and killed Soleimani, Muhandis and eight other men.



People carry placards with the photos of the late Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi al Muhandis and Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani (right) at Baghdad Airport - the site of their killing - in Baghdad on Saturday; in the right, an Iraqi holds a placard bearing the photos of the slain officials, at al-Muhandis' gravesite in the Wadi al Salam cemetery in the holy city of Najaf, on Sunday (AFP)



By candlelight, they honoured their 'martyrs' and condemned the Americans at the site where nearby walls are still pockmarked by shrapnel.

"We tell America and the enemies of Islam that they can inflict the greatest sacrifices on us, but we will continue to resist despite the bloodshed," said Hashed supporter Batul Najjar.

The Hashed - factions of which Washington has blamed for rocket strikes against its em-

bassy and troops in Iraq - has increasingly challenged Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi, whom it accuses of having helped plot the drone strikes.

This has brought to the boil once more tensions in the war-battered and politically fragile country which the United States

invaded in 2003, and which is struggling with economic crisis amid low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.

Ahead of mass gatherings on Sunday at Baghdad's central Tahrir Square, Ahmed Assadi, one of the leaders of Hashed's parliamentary bloc, vowed: "Abu

Mahdi al Muhandis, we will go out by the millions to brandish your portrait on Tahrir."

Giant posters of Soleimani and Muhandis were hung up above the iconic square, which in late 2019 became the centre of large anti-government protests, from an abandoned building known as the Turkish restaurant.

Amid the tensions, Iraqis, and many in the wider region, are nervously watching for any signs of escalation before Trump leaves the White House on January 20.

Trump confronted decades-old foe Iran by withdrawing in 2018 from its nuclear deal with world powers and launching a 'maximum pressure' campaign to further economically punish and isolate the country.

Trump recently tweeted that the US was hearing the 'chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq', and warned that 'if one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over'.

In recent days, US B-52 bombers have flown across the region for the second time in less than a month but, in what some

read as a sign of deescalation, Washington has also reportedly ordered its Nimitz aircraft carrier to leave the Gulf.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards chief Hossein Salami vowed on Saturday to respond to any 'action the enemy takes', as he visited a strategic Gulf island.

"We would respond with a reciprocal, decisive and strong blow to whatever action the enemy would take against us," Salami warned.

Iran and the United States - bitter foes since the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution and the US Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran - have twice come to the brink of war since June 2019, most recently after Soleimani's killing.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif accused Trump of aiming to fabricate a 'pretext for war', after the President blamed Tehran for a December 20 rocket strike on the US Embassy in Baghdad. In Iraq, 'Israeli agent-provocateurs are plotting attacks against Americans (to put) Trump in a bind with a fake casus belli', he said. AFP

Talks with Taliban resume in Doha as Afghanistan continues to bleed

Kabul, Afghanistan - A string of assassinations has sowed fear and chaos across Afghanistan as a fresh round of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban begin in Qatar on Tuesday.

Months of deliberations between the two sides have yielded little so far, but both parties made something of a breakthrough last year when they finally agreed at least on what to discuss in the next round.

Afghan government negotiators will push for a permanent ceasefire and to protect the existing system of governance, in place since the ouster of the Taliban in 2001 by a US-led invasion in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

"The talks are going to be very complicated and time-consuming," Ghulam Farooq Majroh, a government negotiator said. "But we are hopeful to arrive at a result as soon as possible as people are tired of this bloody war."

The Taliban did not offer any comment.



This file photo shows members of the Taliban delegation at the signing of a deal with the US, in the Qatari capital Doha on February 29 this year (AFP)

The first direct talks between the warring sides opened in September after months of delays, but quickly became bogged down by disputes on the basic framework of discussions and religious interpretations. A concerted diplomatic efforts of the US finally led to a consensus.

The negotiations follow a landmark troop withdrawal deal signed in February by the Taliban and Washington, which saw the US pledge to pull out all foreign forces from Afghanistan by May 2021.

Violence increases

The talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban have been marred by an increase in violence from the start, but a new trend is a wave of high-profile targeted killings of officials, activists, and journalists.

The deputy governor for Kabul province, five journalists, and a prominent election activist have been among those assassinated in Kabul and other cities since November.

Officials blame the Taliban for the mayhem, although the Is-

lamic State group has claimed some of the assaults.

"The Taliban aim to divide the people and trigger criticism and frustration against the government's security institutions with these assassinations," Javid Faisal, an advisor to the National Security Council, said. "But the killings are uniting people."

Nishank Motwani, deputy director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit think tank, said the Taliban would not formally claim responsibility for the political assassinations, but nevertheless wanted to demonstrate 'to its cadre that the Taliban are who they are and have not changed'.

The Taliban carried out more than 18,000 attacks across the country in 2020, Afghanistan's spy chief Ahmad Zia Siraj told lawmakers this week.

The first nine months of last year saw 2,177 civilians killed and 3,822 wounded, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

AFP

2 French soldiers killed in Mali

Paris, France - Two French soldiers died when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device in northeastern Mali on Saturday, just days after three others were killed in a similar fashion.

Their deaths brought to 50 the number of French soldiers killed in the West African nation since France first intervened in 2013 to help drive back extremist forces, according to army staff.

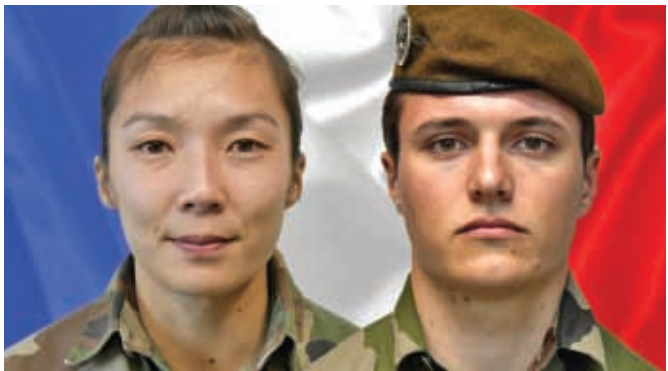
President Emmanuel Macron 'learnt with great sadness' of the deaths of sergeant Yvonne Huynh and corporal Loic Risser in the Menaka region, his office said.

Huynh, aged 33 and the mother of a young child, was the first woman soldier killed since the French operation began in the Sahel region.

Risser was 24. Both were members of a regiment specialising in intelligence work.

'Their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device during an intelligence mission,' the French presidency said of Saturday's incident.

Another soldier was wounded in the blast but the injuries were not life-threatening, it added.



Slain officials Sergeant Yvonne Huynh (left) and Corporal Loic Risser (AFP)

'Battle against terrorism'

France's Barkhane force numbers 5,100 troops spread across the arid Sahel and has been fighting extremist groups alongside soldiers from Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, who together make up the G5 Sahel group.

But lack of equipment, funds and training, together with problems in deployment and coordination on the ground have left the operation struggling for credibility and still dependent on France, the force's major political backer.

Macron affirmed France's determination to pursue 'the battle

against terrorism' after the latest attacks which come as Paris considers reducing the size of the forces in West Africa and negotiating with some local groups other than Al Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State.

The Al Qaeda-linked Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM) claimed responsibility for Monday's attack that killed three French soldiers in the centre of the poor Sahel state.

Those deaths were also due to an army vehicle hitting an explosive device. The group cited a string of reasons for the attack including the continuing French military presence in the region. AFP

3 executed in Iran for 'terrorist' acts, murder

Tehran, Iran - Iran's judiciary hanged two men on Sunday for 'terrorist acts' and another for murder and armed robbery, the body's official Mizan Online news agency said.

The three were executed early on Sunday morning in the southeastern Sistan-Baluchistan province.

Two were named as Hassan Dehvari and Elias Qalandarzehi, arrested in April 2014 after being found with 'a large amount of explosives' and weapons.

They were convicted of the abduction, bombing, murder of security forces and civilians, and of working with the extremist group Jaish al-Adl ('Army of Justice'), Mizan said.

When arrested, Dehvari and Qalandarzehi were in possession of documents from

Jaish al-Adl on 'how to make bombs' as well as 'takfiri fatwas', terms used by Iranian authorities to refer to decrees issued by Sunni extremists.

Jaish al-Adl has carried out several high-profile bombings and abductions in Iran in recent years.

In February 2019, 27 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards were killed in a suicide attack claimed by the group.

Jaish al-Adl was formed in 2012 as a successor to extremist group Jundallah, which waged a deadly insurgency for a decade before it was severely weakened by the capture and execution of its leader Abdolmalek Rigi in 2010.

The third man executed was named as Omid Mahmoudzahi. AFP

EU denounces conditions for migrants in Bosnia

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina - The living conditions of hundreds of homeless migrants in Bosnia, bordering the European Union, are 'completely unacceptable', EU envoy Johann Sattler said on Saturday.

The migrants have been left homeless in freezing and rainy conditions since their camp near the northwestern town of Bihac burned down last month.

"The situation is completely unacceptable," said Sattler, the EU's Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"Lives and basic human rights of many hundreds of people are seriously jeopardised," he added after a meeting with Bosnia's Security Minister Selmo Cikotic.

Fire engulfed the Lipa migrant centre in northwestern Bosnia on December 23. There were no casualties from the blaze but much of the infrastructure of the site was destroyed.

The incident deepened the crisis over where to house thou-



Migrants prepare to leave the camp 'Lipa' operated by International Organisation for Migrations (IOM) mission, after it was destroyed by a fire near the northwestern Bosnian town of Bihac, on December 29 (AFP)

sands of migrants, as Bosnian authorities failed to find new accommodation for the newly homeless.

Police believes the blaze on December 23 was started deliberately by migrants living there to protest the withdrawal of the UN's International Organisation

for Migration (IOM), which had been running the camp.

The IOM had left complaining that the accommodation was not fit to house people during the cold winter months.

Opened in April, the Lipa camp had never been hooked up with electricity or running water.

Sattler met Bosnian minister Cikotic on Saturday along with the German, Italian and Austrian ambassadors, according to a statement released by the EU delegation in Sarajevo.

The aim of the meeting was 'to discuss urgent solutions for the extremely concerning migration

situation', the statement said.

Bosnia lies on the so-called Balkans route used since 2018 by tens of thousands of migrants heading towards Western Europe as they flee war and poverty in the Middle East, Asia and in Africa.

The country currently hosts some 8,500 migrants.

The European Commission, which finances the running of several migrant camps in Bosnia, has called for another centre in Bihac to be reopened, but local and regional officials oppose the idea.

That migrant centre, in an abandoned factory, was closed in October under pressure from local residents.

In the very decentralised country, the federal government has also suggested the centre, which could house 2,000 people, be reopened. However it is not in a position to order local authorities to do so. AFP

Gulf crisis resolution hangs in balance

Doha, Qatar - The Gulf crisis, which has pitted regional players against Qatar, could be moving closer to resolution as the key countries prepare to meet in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Riyadh led a coalition of countries in the Gulf and beyond in 2017 to cut ties with Doha, over charges it was too close to Tehran and backed radical groups. Qatar denies the claims.

Washington has intensified pressure on the nations imposing what Qatar calls a 'blockade' to resolve the crisis, insisting Gulf unity is necessary to isolate US rival Iran as the curtain falls on Donald Trump's presidency.

The row will top the agenda at Tuesday's meeting of leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council in the northwestern Saudi city of Al-Ula.

While Gulf sources say an agreement on further talks and limited confidence building measures is ready, not all of the boycotting countries have yet signed up.

The GCC is a bloc that includes boycotting countries Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, neutral Kuwait and Oman, and Qatar.

After severing ties in June 2017, the Saudi-led alliance subsequently forced out Qatari expatriate residents, closed their airspace to Qatari aircraft and sealed their borders and ports, separating some mixed-nationality families.

The boycott countries later issued a list of 13 demands for Doha, including the closure of pan-Arab satellite television



This file photo shows the Gulf leaders attending the Gulf Cooperation Council Summit at Bayan Palace in Kuwait City on December 5, 2017 (AFP)

channel Al Jazeera, undertakings on terror financing, and the shutting of a Turkish military base in Qatar.

Doha has not publicly bowed to any of the demands.

Resolution in sight?

The White House has ramped up its rhetoric against Tehran, having walked out of an international deal to rein in Iran's nuclear programme in 2018.

US national security advisor Robert O'Brien said in November that allowing Qatari planes to fly

over Saudi Arabia via an 'air bridge' was a priority for the Trump administration.

In return, analysts have suggested Qatar could agree to tone down the coverage of Saudi Arabia by its media, including the Al Jazeera broadcaster.

"They will announce the interim deal with the emir most likely in attendance," said King's College London assistant professor Andreas Krieg.

"Bahrain has still not signed but all of the other blockading states have."

The country has repeatedly clashed with Qatar over the enforcement of maritime boundaries, with several incidents in recent months which have seen the Qatari coastguard intercept Bahraini vessels.

It then flew four of its fighter jets over Qatar's territorial waters on December 9, Doha alleged in a letter to the United Nations Security Council.

In its own letter to the UN, Manama denied it breached Qatari airspace, during what it described as a routine exercise in

While the UAE and Saudi feel pressure to fall in line of US pressure, they can use Bahrain as a disruptor to continuously show their discontent with Qatar.

ANDREAS KRIEG

Saudi and Bahraini airspace.

Bahrain is acting as 'a proxy,' said Krieg. "While the UAE and Saudi feel pressure to fall in line of US pressure, they can use Bahrain as a disruptor to continuously show their discontent with Qatar."

Experts had warned that the UAE could be the spoiler for any regional reconciliation attempt, having heaped criticism on Qatar and its leadership since the spat erupted.



King Harald V of Norway flanked by Queen Sonja (left) and Crown Prince Haakon takes stock of the crisis after the landslide, in a control room in Ask on Sunday (AFP)

Fifth body found in Norway mudslide, five still missing

Oslo, Norway - Rescue workers have uncovered a fifth body four days after a landslide buried homes near Norway's capital, police said on Sunday, as the search goes on for five people still missing.

The tragedy occurred in the early hours of Wednesday when houses were destroyed and shifted hundreds of metres under a torrent of mud at the village of Ask, 25km northeast of Oslo.

'Just before six am a deceased person was found,' Sunday's police statement said.

The discovery of a fourth body had been made on Saturday after three were recovered the day before at the bleak, snow-covered scene at Ask, in Gjerdrum municipality.

Police on Saturday identified the body of the first person found on Friday as 31 year old Eirik Grønolen.

The identities of the four other dead have not been released.

But police on Friday published a list of the names of all the eight adults, a two-year-old and a 13-year-old child who went missing on Wednesday.

Ten people were also injured in the landslide, including one seriously who was transferred to Oslo for treatment.

About a thousand people have been evacuated out of a local

The discovery of a fourth body had been made on Saturday after three were recovered the day before at the snow-covered scene at Ask, in Gjerdrum municipality

population of 5,000, because of fears for the safety of their homes as the land continues to move.

"We are at a hotel," one of the evacuees, Olav Gjerdingen, said. "It is a completely surreal and terrible situation."

Search and rescue teams have been using sniffer dogs, helicopters and drones in a bid to find survivors.

The search teams were also digging channels in the ground to evacuate casualties.

The authorities have banned all aircraft from the disaster area until 3.00pm on Monday as they conduct aerial searches.

The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) said the disaster was a 'quick clay slide' of approximately 300m by 800m.

AFP

Gunmen kill 11 miners of Hazara community in Pakistan: Officials

Quetta, Pakistan - Gunmen in southwestern Pakistan have killed at least 11 workers at a remote coal mine, officials said on Sunday.

The victims of the attack in Baluchistan province were from the minority Shiite Hazara community.

"Dead bodies of the 11 miners have been taken to a local hospital," Khalid Durrani, a government official in the area, said.

Ethnic Hazara make up most of the Shiite population in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan - the country's largest and poorest region, rife with ethnic, sectarian and separatist insurgencies.

They are often targeted by Sunni militants, who consider them heretics, though it was unclear why the attackers targeted the coal mine specifically.

The attack, before dawn on Sunday, took place in the far-flung and mountainous Machh area - 60km southeast of Quetta



Shiite Hazara people protest after the killing of 11 workers of their community, in Quetta on Sunday (AFP)

- while the miners slept, Durrani said.

A security official told AFP the attackers first separated the miners, tied their hands and feet, took them out into the hills and later killed them.

Both Durrani and the security official said the victims belonged to the Hazara community.

Durrani said the mine was deep in the mountains.

Abid Salim, a top government official in the area, told AFP 'they tied their hands and feet and bru-

tally slaughtered them with some sharp instrument'.

Some of the victims were beheaded, he added.

The assailants fled after the attack. Both officials said police and members of the local paramilitary force were on the scene, where a search operation had been launched to trace the attackers.

Dozens of local people and family members briefly blocked a main road in the area, demanding protection.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a tweet, Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned 'the killing of 11 innocent coal miners in Machh' as a 'cowardly inhumane act of terrorism'.

Liaquat Shahwani, a spokesman for the provincial government, confirmed the incident and told private TV channel Geo that it was an act of terrorism.

AFP

Scotland must wait a generation for new vote: Johnson

London, UK - Another Scottish independence referendum should not take place for a generation, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Sunday, as Scotland's leader renewed calls for a fresh vote in the wake of Brexit.

"Referendums in my experience, direct experience, in this country are not particularly jolly events," the Prime Minister told BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

"They don't have a notably unifying force in the national mood, they should be only once in a generation."

Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom in 2014.



This file photo shows a pro-independence supporter at a rally calling for Scottish independence, in Glasgow on November 2, 2019 (AFP)

Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon at the time called it a once-in-a-generation vote, but now argues that Britain's departure from the European Union, which a majority

of Scots opposed, has changed the game.

Recent polls have shown consistent support for independence, boosted by rows between London and the devolved governments over the handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

'For too long, successive UK governments have taken Scotland in the wrong direction, culminating in Brexit. It's no wonder so many people in Scotland have had enough,' she wrote on her party's website on Saturday.

'We didn't want to leave and we hope to join you again soon as an equal partner,' she added,

in a message to the EU.

Johnson has ruled out holding another vote, but Sturgeon will likely claim a mandate and heap pressure on the prime minister should her party perform well in upcoming local elections.

When asked why it was fair to hold a referendum on EU membership but not another on Scottish independence, Johnson told Marr, "The difference is we had a (European) referendum in 1975 and we then had another one in 2016."

"That seems to be about the right sort of gap."

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

India approves 2 COVID-19 vaccines

Govt has held nationwide drills in the country of 1.3bn people ahead of the mass vaccination drive

New Delhi, India - India on Sunday authorised the emergency use of two coronavirus vaccines developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University and by local pharmaceutical firm Bharat Biotech, the country's drug regulator said, paving the way for one of the world's biggest inoculation drives.

"The... vaccines of Serum Institute (AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine) and Bharat Biotech are being approved for restricted use in emergency situations," the Drugs Controller General of India, V G Somani, said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that the fast-track approvals were 'a decisive turning point to strengthen a spirited fight' that 'accelerates the road to a healthier and COVID-free nation'.

India is the world's second most infected nation with more than 10.3mn cases and almost 150,000 deaths, although its rate of infection has come down significantly from a mid-September peak of more than 90,000 cases daily.

The government has already held nationwide drills in the country of 1.3bn people ahead of the mass vaccination drive and some 96,000 health workers have been trained to administer the shots.

The World Health Organization welcomed the news.

"The use of vaccine(s) in prioritised populations, along with



Indian health officials (left) check details during a dry run for the vaccine delivery at a primary health centre, in Kolkata on Saturday; while another (right) prepares a shot during the drill in Chennai on the same day (AFP)



continued implementation of other public health measures and community participation will be important in reducing the impact of COVID-19," WHO regional director Poonam Khetrpal Singh said in a statement.

The approvals came amid fears in India, as in other countries, about the safety of the shots.

Scepticism

A recent survey of 18,000 people across India found that 69 per cent were in no rush to get vaccinated.

"I was excited initially about the vaccine but not any more because I don't trust it. I am not going to be inoculated," 58 year old banker Vijaya Das told AFP on Sunday, echoing fears com-

mon across the country.

"No vaccine is 100 per cent effective so what is the guarantee that I won't get the coronavirus after I take the vaccine," added 48 year old sales manager Suman Saurabh.

Anand Krishnan, a community medicine professor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, said au-

thorities needed to publicly release more data about the vaccine trials. "They have to share the results of the trial and let scientists come to their own conclusion and that way, the vaccine hesitancy would be much less," Krishnan told AFP.

Both vaccines are to be administered in two doses and can be transported and stored at

normal refrigeration temperatures.

The Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest manufacturer of vaccines, has said it is making between 50 and 60 million doses a month of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine.

Serum Institute chief executive Adar Poonawalla tweeted following the approvals that the

vaccine would be 'ready to roll-out in the coming weeks'.

Bharat Biotech has yet to complete its Phase III trials, but Drugs Controller General Somani said that the drug regulator would 'never approve anything if there is the slightest safety concern'. "The vaccines are 100 per cent safe," he said. AFP

UK Prime Minister 'reconciled' to the prospect of tougher rules

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Sunday he was 'reconciled' to the prospect of tougher restrictions to combat spiralling coronavirus cases, as a row flared over whether schools should reopen.

"It may be that we need to do things in the next few weeks that will be tougher in many parts of the country," Johnson told the BBC's *The Andrew Marr Show*. "I'm fully, fully reconciled to that."

Britain recorded 57,725 new cases on Saturday, its highest total of the entire pandemic.

Health officials are concerned that the surging numbers could overwhelm hospitals during their busiest time of the year.

Johnson told parents of young children that they should 'absolutely' send them to schools reopening after Christmas, despite the closure of some establishments in the worst-affected areas.

"I understand people's frustrations, I understand people's



Ambulance staff shift a patient from an ambulance to The Royal London Hospital in London, on Saturday (AFP)

anxieties but there is no doubt in my mind that schools are safe and that education is a priority."

"We've really fought very hard throughout this pandemic across the country to keep schools open," he added.

But National Association of Head Teachers leader Paul Whiteman called on the gov-

ernment to delay the reopening of schools after the Christmas break 'so that we can agree the right mitigations... to make them COVID-secure'.

"We agree with everybody that school is the best place for children, we just want to do that well, we want to make it a sustainable return," he told BBC

Breakfast television.

Johnson said that public health experts had highlighted the long term damage of children being kept out of school.

"There are many factors you have to take into account, particularly deprivation in left-behind communities," he said.

AFP

Israel plans to vaccinate 2mn by end of January

Jerusalem - Israel said on Sunday two million people will have received a two-dose COVID-19 vaccination by the end of January, a pace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasts is the world's fastest.

Starting on December 19, when Netanyahu got his first jab, Israel launched an aggressive push to administer the vaccine made by US-German pharmaceutical Pfizer-BioNTech.

Health Ministry Director General Hezi Levy said that because of the enthusiastic take-up, Israel would be easing the speed of vaccination to eke out stocks. The vaccine must be given in two separate jabs, administered three weeks apart.

"We are slowing the pace of vaccinations of the first dose, so that we can keep reserved stock for a second dose for all those who got a first shot," Levy said.

But he added that around a fifth of Israel's people, starting with health workers and those over 60, would have had both shots by the end of this month.

"By the end of January, we shall have inoculated two mil-



A medic prepares a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at a centre in Tel Aviv (AFP)

lion residents, most of them elderly," he said.

As of Friday, 1mn people had received their first injection.

"We are breaking all the records," Netanyahu said on Friday, during a visit to the city of Umm Al-Fahm, where the millionth jab was reported administered. "We are ahead of the entire world," the PM said.

The Health Ministry on Sunday said that 435,866 people had so far tested positive for the virus since the first confirmed case was reported in February.

AFP

Saudi opens borders, starts flight operations

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia on Sunday announced the reopening of borders and the resumption of international flights after a two-week suspension aimed to stem the spread of a new COVID-19 strain.

The government ordered the lifting of 'precautionary measures related to the spread of a new variant of coronavirus', the Ministry of the Interior said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

Saudi Arabia has recorded more than 363,000 cases, including over 6,200 deaths - the highest among the Gulf Arab states - but has also reported a high recovery rate.

Riyadh suspended international flights and access through land crossings and ports on December 21.

Other Gulf countries, Oman and Kuwait, who had taken similar measures, have also lifted them in recent days.

But travellers returning from Britain, South Africa or 'any country where the new variant of the coronavirus is spreading' are subject to more restrictions, the statement added.

Foreigners coming from those countries must spend 14 days in another country before entering Saudi Arabia, and show a negative test.

AFP

Egypt approves Chinese jab; to receive AstraZeneca/Oxford

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt has approved the use of a COVID-19 vaccine developed by Chinese pharma giant Sinopharm with its rollout to start later in January, the Health Minister said.

"The Egyptian pharmaceutical authority approved on Saturday the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine," Hala Zayed said late on Saturday, on the local MBC Masr channel.

The first batch of the vaccine was delivered in December, with further doses expected this month.

"The second shipment of this vaccine is due to arrive in the second or third week of January, and as soon as it arrives, we will start vaccinations," the Minister said.

Each batch of the vaccine consists of 50,000 doses, and the ministry has announced that the first group to receive it will be medical workers.

Zayed said Egypt plans to purchase 40mn doses of the Sinopharm jab.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country with around

100mn inhabitants, has recorded more than 140,000 cases of the COVID-19 disease, including 7,800 deaths.

After a brief lull, the number of infections rose dramatically in late 2020, from around 100 new cases confirmed per day in October, to some 1,400 daily cases currently.

Sinopharm announced on Wednesday that one of its vaccines, to be distributed in China, was 79 per cent effective.

The jabs efficacy is lower than that of vaccines developed



A mask-clad doll of Santa Claus hangs outside a jeweller's shop in the Shubra district of Egypt's capital Cairo on Friday (AFP)

by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna - both over 90 per cent effective.

A jab developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University has proved 70 per cent effective with one dose, and 100 per cent effective with two.

Egypt will also receive the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine in the third or fourth week of January, said Zayed, adding that a contract 'was being finalised'. Negotiations with Pfizer 'are underway' as well, she added.

AFP

SIX CAN'T-MISS FLORIDA BEACH VACATIONS FOR YEAR-ROUND TRAVEL

SUN, SURF
AND SAND

If you're gearing up for a fall getaway or looking to use some of your remaining vacation days this year, Florida (the southeastern state in the US) has plenty of family-friendly, affordable options for you to consider. These six Florida destinations should be at the top of your list, since they're known for their amazing scenery, exhilarating atmosphere and excellent accommodations all year long.



Pensacola Beach
The westernmost city in the Florida Panhandle, Pensacola offers mild temperatures year-round. The sugar-white beaches and turquoise waters that greet visitors in 'the City of Five Flags' are fabulously pristine, and the local restaurant scene will tantalize your taste buds. History buffs will love exploring downtown Pensacola - historic sites like Fort Pickens or the Naval Air Station Pensacola are well worth checking out.
Consider staying at kid-friendly beachfront hotels with multiple pools and stunning views of the Gulf of Mexico.



Panama City Beach
Florida's Emerald Coast starts at Pensacola and stretches east along the Gulf to Panama City Beach, a destination that's a treasure trove of family fun. Spend the day splashing in the water and building sandcastles along the shore. Or rent a Jet Ski for a shot of adrenaline. Or head out on a boat for some serious fishing. Then relax on one of the piers as you soak in the sunset. Don't leave the area without checking out Shell Island, a 7-mile-long, undeveloped barrier island perfect for shell collecting and spotting coastal creatures in their natural habitat.



Amelia Island
On Florida's Atlantic coast, head to Amelia Island, part of the Southeast's Sea Islands chain of barrier islands. With postcard-worthy beaches and impressively tall sand dunes, Amelia Island is a dream escape for people of all ages. Besides basking along the beach, visitors can hit the links for some golf, visit the Palace Station Bar and have a chat with the bartender - or even the mayor, enjoy the fine dining options in town, and explore some American history at the Civil War-era Fort Clinch State Park.



Sarasota
An hour's drive south of Tampa is Sarasota, with its own bounty of cultural offerings and lovely, sandy beaches that have earned their own renown. While here, you'll want to make time to absorb the natural beauty of the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.
For an upgraded experience, stay at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Sarasota, an all-suite hotel within walking distance of downtown's lively Main Street corridor.



Cocoa Beach
On the other side of the state is Florida's Space Coast, which includes scenic Cocoa Beach, also known as the East Coast surfing capital of the US. Cocoa Beach has no shortage of activities, from Ron Jon Surf Shop to the Brevard Zoo. Adventure lovers can jam-pack their days with endeavors or beach bums can sit back and relax in the sand.
Beachside Hotel & Suites - a newly renovated boutique hotel - is the place to stay on Cocoa Beach. Its relaxed, retro vibe instantly puts you into vacation mode. Amenities include free beach toys, a lazy river and a poolside bar.



Fort Walton Beach
Back on the Florida Panhandle, Fort Walton Beach is a small town with big charm. The glittering waters and soft sand make this area idyllic, and there's plenty more in store beyond the shore. When you visit, drop by the Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, where you can see dolphins, penguins and alligators. When considering where to stay, check out the Hilton Garden Inn Fort Walton Beach, nestled oceanside.



JEBEL SHAMS

JUST CHILL

This year, the winter has got a bit colder than usual, and there is a nip in the air every morning; evenings too are quite chilly. But, while most people have pulled out their jackets and sweaters to enjoy the cool climes and organise outdoor barbecue parties, a few are going a bit further and camping at the highest point in Oman – Jebel Shams – where sub-zero temperatures are the order of the day.

According to weather forecasts, Jebel Shams has been experiencing temperatures ranging between 7° C to -5° C over the past week and similar temperatures are expected to continue at least for a week ahead. Hence, if you want to experience a bit of 'snow' in

Oman, this highest peak in Oman and across the Arabian Gulf is your destination to chill.

There has been mild snowfall in Jebel Shams every winter, over the past few years, and this year is no exception. And while many love to call it 'snow', there are others who dismiss it as just a sheet of frost that covers the peak and the shrubs there every morning. It is also common to find vehicles parked in the open covered with a thick layer of white frost every morning until the sun rises to play spoilsport.

Also known as the Mountain of the Sun, Jebel Shams is located in the Western Hajar mountain range, roughly 240km from Muscat. The mountain is one of the most popular

destinations for tourists in the region, best known for breathtaking views of Wadi Ghul and Al Nakhr Canyon, often referred to as the Grand Canyon of Arabia.

Over 3000m above sea level, the temperature in Jebel Shams is pleasant all year round and drops to single digits in the peak of winter (December-January). In summer, too, the temperature is below 20° C, making it a favourite camping spot all year round. The most popular location to camp is right by the edge of the canyon, a short drive after the paved road stops immediately following Jabal Shams Resort. But there are only a few suitable camping spots which could all be taken on holidays/weekends by early birds.



Layers of frost cover most portions of the summit during sub-zero temperatures

The summits

The highest point of the mountain is the North Summit, which is occupied by a military base and is a restricted area. The Ministry of Tourism has specified the North Summit to be around 3,009m high. The South Summit, which is publicly accessible for trekking via the W4 Trail, marked by the Oman Ministry of Tourism, has an elevation of 2,997m

Treks and walks

There are many organised treks to the summits with accompanying guides all year round. Though challenging, these are quite rewarding experiences for those looking to reach the peak on foot, covering around 8.5km to the

top. It is, however, recommended for those in good health and with some hiking experience. The W4 Trail is a steep climb up the plateau all the way to the 'summit, beginning from the Sama Heights Resort from the main road towards a graded road to a wadi with an open space suitable for parking.

There are also five-hour long balcony walks, also

known as 'donkey treks', which date back to 300 years, providing breathtaking views of Wadi Ghul and Al Nakhr Canyon. The most famous and easiest walk is the Rim Walk to the abandoned village of As Sab.

If you do not like trekking, the drive to the top, where one can camp or stay in a resort, is tedious but not quite challenging, as such.





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