



MONDAY, 05 APRIL 2021
www.muscatdaily.com
Email: muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om
To subscribe, call toll free no: 80076000



37°C/28°C

SENSATIONAL SUNDAY FOR OMANI SAILORS
GO TO **PAGE 16 SPORTS**

Automatic licence service launched

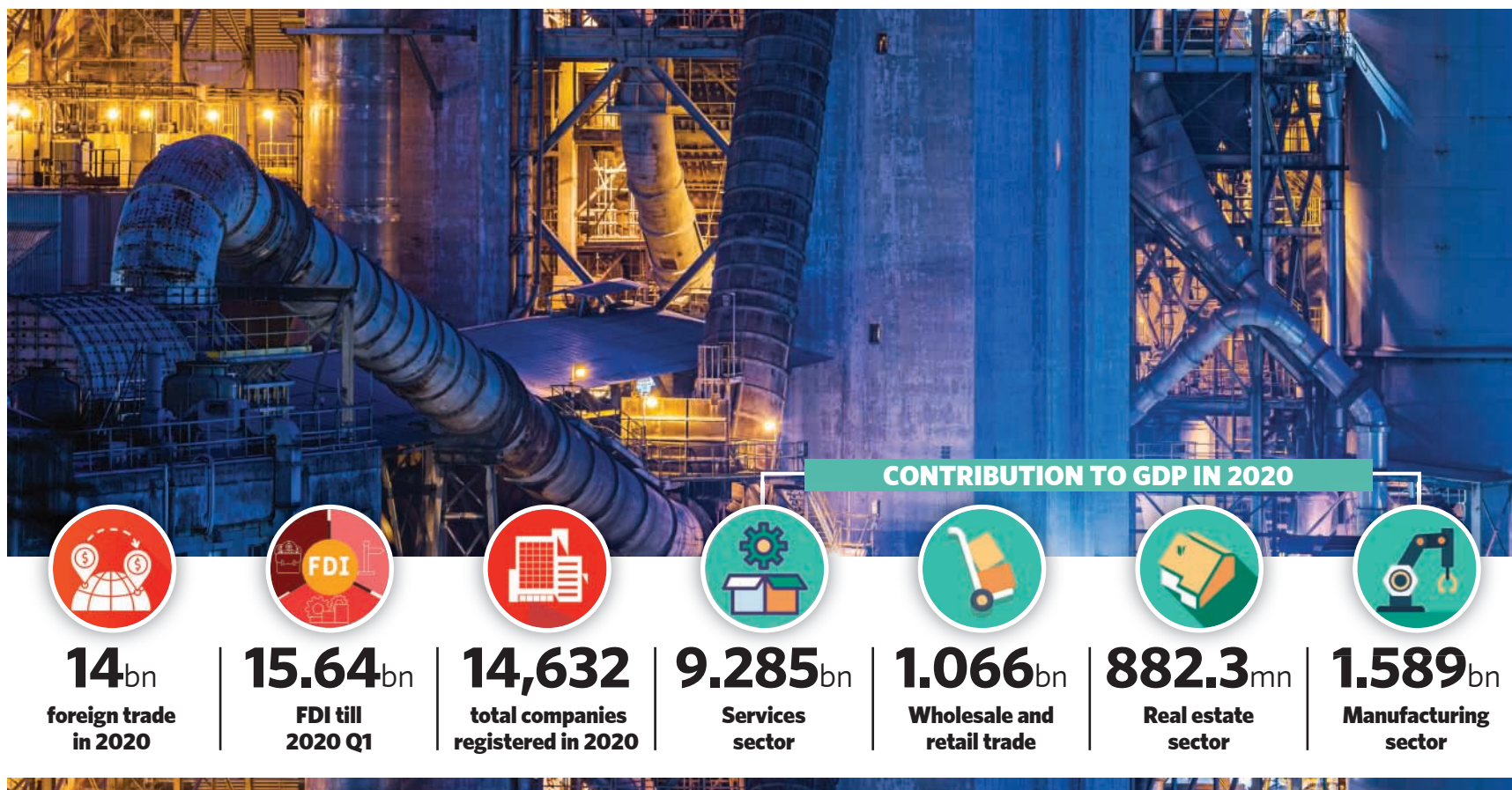
Approval of more than 1,500 economic activities will be through licences issued via Invest Easy portal

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to incentivise businesses and meet investment targets envisaged in the economic stimulus plan, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) launched an automatic licence approval service on Sunday.

At the launch, the ministry also announced that guidelines for granting long-term residency permits to foreign investors, which was announced as part of the economic stimulus plan, are currently being studied and expected to be announced within two months.

H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that the approval of more than 1,500 economic activities, constituting about 88



Figures in RO

per cent of the total economic activities conducted in the country, will be through automatic licences issued via the Invest Easy portal. "The portal issues one economic licence for an activity that includes all the approvals of the concerned authorities."

In his speech during the

launch ceremony, the minister said that the automatic licence approval service is in keeping with efforts to create a business environment conducive to growth and economic diversification. It will support and enable the private sector as a key partner in development and lead the Omani economy to competitive-

ness by enhancing the sultanate's international indicators on ease of conducting business in accordance with the guidelines of Oman Vision 2040.

The automatic licence approval service includes several sectors, including agriculture, livestock production, manufacturing, transportation and stor-

age, fishing, construction, vehicle repair, retail and wholesale, electrical supplies and water.

50 projects worth RO200mn

H E Yousef informed that 50 projects within the industrial sector worth a total value of RO200mn have been planned in

cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman and Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

"Value Added Tax, which will be applied starting April 16, is part of the Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan. There is coordination with the Ministry of Finance to expand the list of products

that are not covered by the tax. The total volume of foreign direct investment in the sultanate until the end of first quarter of 2020 amounted to about RO15bn," he said.

At the launch, H E Dr Said al Saqri, Minister of Economy, affirmed that facilitating procedures related to investments in the sultanate for businessmen and owners of SMEs is top priority. He noted that the launch of the automatic approval service will reduce the cost of investment and speed up transactions.

H E Dr Saqri described the service as a qualitative shift in the investment environment in the sultanate as it will be used for 88 per cent of the total permitted commercial activities. Besides stimulating investment, it will increase the volume of economic activity and help achieve economic diversification.

H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in MoCIIP, said the ministry has identified eight initiatives in the trade sector with the aim of improving it, including a draft national strategy for intellectual property, developing procedures for registering commercial activity, organising e-commerce and reclassifying companies.

Continued on Page 04

Oman supports Jordan under King Abdullah

Muscat - The sultanate has issued a statement on the recent developments in Jordan.

"Oman is following up the developments in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with great concern and reaffirms its full backing to the kingdom under the leadership of King Abdullah II bin al Hussein. The sultanate reiterates its solid support for all that might guarantee the security, sovereignty and stability of Jordan."

GCC backs Jordan king

Jordan's Gulf allies voiced support for King Abdullah II on Sunday, after several senior figures were detained and a half-brother of the monarch said he was under house arrest. In a video published by the BBC, former crown prince Hamzah bin Hussein said several of his friends had been arrested, his security detail removed and his communications cut, adding that the kingdom had become 'stymied in corruption, in nepotism, and in misrule'.

The UAE on Sunday voiced its 'full solidarity' with Jordan. In a statement on its WAM news agency, it said it backed 'any measures taken by King of Jordan, King Abdullah II... to preserve the security and stability of Jordan and defuse any attempt

'The sultanate reiterates its solid support for all that might guarantee the security, sovereignty and stability of Jordan'

that seeks to jeopardise either'.

Neighbouring Saudi Arabia swiftly reacted, also voicing its 'full support... for the decisions and measures taken by King Abdullah II and Crown Prince Hussein to safeguard security and stability'. Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain also voiced their support in similar terms. The GCC states are key backers of resource-poor Jordan, which depends heavily on external aid.

King Abdullah had appointed Hamzah crown prince in 1999 in line with Hussein's dying wishes, but in 2004 stripped him of the title and gave it to his own eldest son Hussein.

The Washington Post said the former crown prince was "placed under restriction" as part of a probe into an alleged plot to unseat the king.

Agencies

See also Page 09



05
Oman's public debt is in controllable limits, says MoF



10
Paris medics fear worst of COVID wave still to come

31 deaths, over 3,000 cases in 72 hours

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday reported 31 new COVID-19-related deaths over a three-day period, taking the total toll to 1,712. There were 3,139 new infections reported in this period, accounting for a total of 163,157 registered cases in the country. According to available data, there are 14,790 active COVID-19 cases in Oman.

The number of hospital ad-

missions is also increasing, with 590 patients in health institutions on Sunday, including 186 in intensive care. 'The number of recoveries has reached 146,677,' an MoH statement said.

On Saturday evening, another batch of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines arrived at Muscat International Airport. 'This batch arrived within the framework of the contract between Oman and the International Vaccine Federation. More than 139,000 people in Oman have been vaccinated with



the Pfizer-BioNtech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines till last month,' MoH stated.

'Oman has contracted the International Vaccine Federation to obtain 1mn doses that target ten per cent of the population,' the statement added.

Last week, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, announced that Oman has booked more than 2.5mn doses from one of the major companies that are set to arrive in August.

ROHM PRESENTS ONLINE CONCERT



Royal Opera House Muscat presented the first concert, performed by Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, of a new digital programme titled 'From Our Stage to Your Home' being held under a series called 'Paths through Classical Music' on its YouTube and Facebook channels (Supplied photo)

Zero tax for medicines, medical equipment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Saud bin Nasser al Shukaili, chairman of Tax Authority, announced Decision No 59/2021 on Sunday specifying the medicines and medical equipment that are zero-rated under Value Added Tax (VAT) which will be implemented from April 16.

Article 1 of the decision stipulates that medicines, herbal medicines, biological preparations, health and hygiene preparations, food for medicinal use, and medical equipment are subject to zero-rated VAT provided there is a permit issued by the Ministry of Health in accordance with the customs code.

Ninety-four food items are exempted from VAT including milk, meat, fish, fresh eggs, vegetables, fruits and bottled drinking water.

The decision was issued on March 31, 2021, and will be published in the Official Gazette and be effective from April 16, 2021.

Pioneering pet food development in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A growing number of Omanis are setting up their own businesses in keeping with a trend of entrepreneurship that is not only resulting in self-employment but also helping the labour market by employing others.

Muadh Humaid Salim al Subhi, 37, an engineer from the wilayat of Nakhal in South Batinah, didn't follow the norm of taking up a job in his field but decided to start a pet food company and be an entrepreneur instead. He claims Raseen is the only Omani company that produces pet food.

From conception of the idea to the establishment of a pet food unit in the wilayat of Barka, the Industrial Innovation Centre played a major role in supporting him and also upgrading his business skills. The centre also sent Subhi to Malaysia to learn and train in the practices of the pet food industry.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Subhi said, "The idea emerged in 2017 from my graduation project at Caledonian College of Engineering. The Industrial Innovation Centre has supported me



since. We explored different opportunities, starting from food supplements to medical products in the process."

The first batch of cat food was produced in 2019, while commercial production started in March 2020. The cat food prod-

uct, called Baseen, has the nutritional standards recommended by the Association of American Feed Control Officials; 87 per cent of protein derived from fish besides approved levels of vitamins and essential nutrients.

"Due to limitations resulting

from the pandemic and several other factors affecting marketing possibilities, we produce only 2kg packs now. The Industrial Innovation Centre has helped me explore global markets through a tracking system and compare pet food products in several mar-

kets to create a competitive edge over other products."

According to Subhi, Raseen pet foods now have a regular clientele and received positive feedback during the company's participation in the Seventh Omani Innovations Exhibition in



(Supplied photos)

2019, one of the largest events in the sultanate to showcase products and services of small and medium enterprises.

Subhi's immediate plan is to increase production to 30 tonnes a month and export. "I hope our product has a regular presence

on market shelves around the world."

He believes he must have a plan to run in parallel with the Oman Vision 2040 to help achieve not only his own dreams but also the aspirations of the country.

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES IRANIAN AMBASSADOR



H E Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, reviewed the relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran when he received H E Ali Najafi, Ambassador of Iran to the sultanate, at his office on Sunday. Discussions were held on several fields of joint cooperation and means of promoting these to serve the mutual interests of the two friendly countries. A range of matters of common concern were also discussed during the meeting (ONA)

Royal Hospital publishes book of scientific research

Muscat - The Royal Hospital on Sunday launched a book of abstracts of scientific research published over 20 years (2000-2020) under the auspices of H E Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, in the presence of the hospital's director general Dr Qasim al Salmi and several other staff members at its National Heart Centre Auditorium on Sunday.

A compilation of abstracts of its staff members' published scientific research, the book highlights their contribution in the medical field, besides emphasising the significance of scientific research in the field of health and medicine.

Dr Salmi pointed out that scientific research contribute to updating established treatment protocols, aiding in development of new drugs and technologies being introduced to health systems. According to him, carrying out scientific research regularly allows for the provision of safe and high-quality services.

He further outlined that the skills of analysing published scientific papers and conducting scientific research have become basic requirements, similar to the skills of diagnosis and treatment.

Headed by Dr Basim al Baharani, senior consultant oncologist



(Supplied photo)

in The Royal Hospital, its Scientific Research Committee supervised the compilation of the book which features 673 research projects, including 11 MSc and 13 PhD projects in the field of health and medicine.

Owing to the diversity of its departments and speciality health centres, in addition to leadership at the scientific level, The Royal Hospital is considered

one of the biggest and most important referral health institutions in the sultanate.

The Studies and Research Section of the Department of Training and Studies in the hospital has been developing and supporting research and publishing scientific research in peer-reviewed journals and periodicals at local and international levels for many years.

Wild tree planting project in Dhofar before khareef

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its ongoing commitment to plant 10mn trees in ten years, the Environment Authority (EA) will implement a project to plant wild trees in Dhofar governorate before the start of the khareef season.

The EA said, 'The Directorate of Environment in Dhofar governorate is currently coordinating



with a number of associations, volunteer teams, individuals and observers to collect a sufficient

quantity of seeds to launch the project in the specified time.'

The authority also said it recently planted a number of wild tree seedlings in Haima area in Al Wusta governorate.

The campaign aims to combat desertification by increasing vegetation cover, and to complete a project to plant 10mn wild trees.

In January 2020, the authority in cooperation with Petroleum

Development Oman launched the national initiative to plant 10mn wild tree saplings in the next ten years.

The initiative aims to plant saplings of species like Ghaf, Al Samar and Sidr, and set up nurseries for the same.

The EA said that it would form working groups to collect seeds in cooperation with local communities in order to facilitate the plantation of 10mn saplings.

Fried Series

Please Contact
+968 22060236/237

CAA invites investors to operate amphibious aircraft

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has invited investors wishing to establish and operate amphibious aircraft to submit their requests to it provided that a detailed proposal is attached to the request that includes an economic feasibility study, the company's business plan, and proof of financial ability.

Investors must complete application forms for a Class B operating licence for aircraft of 19 seats or less or with a maximum take-off weight of less than 10 tonnes.

The authority stated that 'in its capacity as the competent authority to regulate the civil aviation sector in the sultanate, and in its desire to promote tourism, it invites investors wishing to establish and operate amphibious aircraft to submit their requests to it'.

The forms can be obtained through the authority's website



- caa.gov.om - after paying application fee of RO300.

'After the initial acceptance of the application, the applicant is obligated to complete all re-

quirements for getting an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) according to a specific timetable,' CAA added.

It further said that initial ac-

ceptance of the application does not mean approval, and in the event that more than one application fulfils the stipulated requirements and procedures, the

authority will make a comparison and a licence will be issued for only two operators, which will be valid for seven years from the date of issuance.

Aquaculture project in Musandam to produce sea bream

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An aquaculture project launched in June last year in Musandam will soon help produce 50 tonnes of European sea bream fish, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stated.

In June 2020, the ministry and Blue Water, a subsidiary of Oman Aquaculture Development Company, in cooperation with the Royal Navy of Oman, launched the project for breeding and reproduction of fish in floating cages in Musandam governorate.

Fish seeds of European sea bream were placed in the cages in Musandam, which boasts a natural fish sanctuary and is considered an ideal location for cage aquaculture. The ministry is preparing to harvest about 50 tonnes of the sea bream in coming weeks, each with an average weight of 450g.

Meanwhile, the ministry has signed an agreement to produce sea cucumbers.

"On March 28, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water

Resources signed a cooperation agreement with the Industrial Innovation Centre to carry out a pilot study for the 'Cultivation of Omani Sea Cucumber' project at the Aquaculture Centre. The agreement aims to provide important data on hatching techniques and breeding methods for sea cucumbers," said an official at the ministry.

According to the Contractual Production in Agricultural & Fisheries Sectors Symposium, which was organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry recently, 18 aquaculture projects were approved in 2020. Of the 18 projects, seven have got approved commercial licences and 11 are under preliminary commercial licence phase with a total investment cost of RO987mn and an expected production of 435,397 tonnes.

The ministry said that the sultanate's production from aquaculture in 2019 accounted for 1,054 tonnes of fish and fish products, an increase of 133 per cent compared to 2018, and was worth RO2mn.

EA receives 361 pollution-related complaints in three years

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) received 361 complaints related to pollution in the past three years, with the maximum being lodged in 2019.

Of these 361 complaints, 96 were registered in 2018, 195 in 2019 and 70 in 2020, according to a statement issued by the authority.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Abdul Hakim bin Ahmed al Harthi, director of Pollution Control Centre in the EA, said, "The centre receives two types of reports - normal accidents and environmental violations.

"Some of them are related to oil spill, felling of trees, burning of wastes in farms, piling up of construction wastes and tyres near residential areas, emissions from quarrying sites and crushers, encroachment in wildlife areas, sewage discharge near residential areas, as well as discharge of oil residues by ships in Oman's marine environment."

Harthi said that the ministry 'monitors all types and sources



of environment pollution throughout the sultanate through available monitoring methods'.

"We take appropriate measures from time to time to prevent recurrence of any accident or violation and mitigate their effects on humans and the environment. We deal with these incidents in accordance with local and international laws under the supervision of our experts."

Talking about oil spill accidents, he said, "The Environment

Authority has a national emergency plan for combating oil pollution, which was issued in 1985 and updated in 1992 and 1995."

The plan includes developing specific guidelines to deal with any type of oil spill accident. Concerned government and private agencies participate in the operations to combat oil spill accidents. The national contingency plan for combating oil pollution also includes response measures to confront oil spill accidents in the event that they

occur at any location within the exclusive economic zone of the sultanate.

Harthi explained that there are three levels of oil spill accidents - the first one being minor oil spill accidents of less than 100 tonnes that can be contained locally using the resources of the National Pollution Control Plan.

"The second level includes oil spills of more than 200 tonnes, which cannot be contained by the capabilities available in the ports. It requires urgent external assistance that may come from the resources of the national emergency plan. The third level includes oil spills of more than 500 tonnes. Such spills are considered major accidents at the national level that exceeds the capabilities of the national emergency plan to combat oil pollution.

"The support and response team for environment pollution have been trained to deal with any incident. There is a 24x7 hotline (80071999) in addition to our website pollution.cen ter@meca.gov.om to receive any complaint."

Investment in clean and renewable energy on track: H E Dr Omari

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate confirmed that it has begun implementing its plans to invest in clean and renewable energy through a number of projects in the field of solar and wind energy, which scientific studies have proven to be effective in Oman.

This came in the speech of H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, chairman of Environment Authority, during the first GCC and MENA Regional Dialogue For Climate Action held on Sunday in Abu Dhabi. The dialogue saw participation of John Kerry, US presidential envoy for climate affairs, and came within the preparations for the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) to be held in November.

The dialogue covered a number of basic issues related to the efforts to reduce the repercussions of climate change, including enhancing renewable energy opportunities. It also focused on areas of strategic importance for the region, which include food and water security, desertifica-



H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari

tion, and environmental preservation.

H E Dr Omari stated in his speech that the sultanate seeks to exert more efforts in the field of diversifying sources of income and to look into benefiting from alternative energy generation and developing the necessary strategic plans to achieve this.

He added that Oman Vision 2040 includes clear goals for the implementation of that strategy, and the competent authorities in the sultanate are working to put those goals into action through a set of programmes and plans, in-

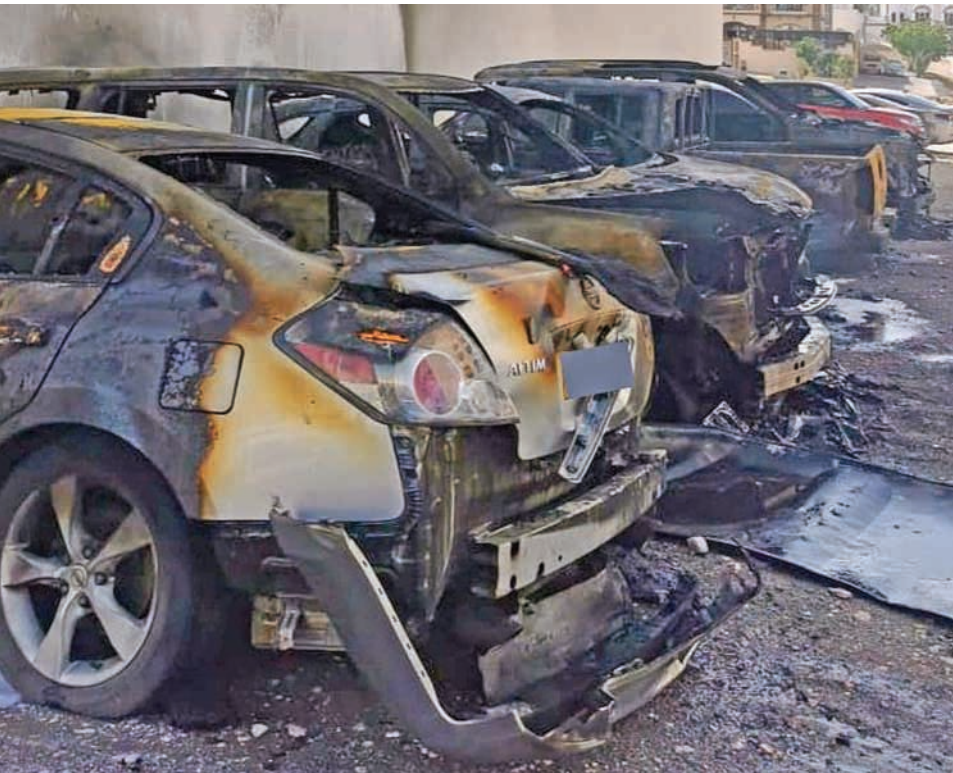
cluding investment in clean energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

He also stressed that this approach is consistent with the sultanate's report on the nationally determined contributions, which were delivered to the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015, in which the sultanate had guaranteed an ambitious goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by two per cent by 2030.

In conclusion, he said that Oman has established a special agency for investment that places among its priorities environment-friendly investments, and is ready to enter into regional and international investments and partnerships whenever the appropriate motivating factors and opportunities become available.

H E Dr Omari also participated during his visit to Abu Dhabi in a ministerial meeting between the GCC countries and the US envoy to discuss ways to achieve consensus among the GCC states in tracking investments in emerging markets.

VEHICLE FIRE IN BAUSER



The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulances announced that firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulances Department in Muscat governorate managed to extinguish a fire that broke out in a number of vehicles in the wilayat of Bauser without injuries (Supplied photo)

Working hours of slaughterhouses announced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has announced the working hours of Seeb and Amerat slaughterhouses. The municipality said it will implement a pre-reservation system for individuals to slaughter their livestock from Wednesday, April 7.

The companies and shops that want to slaughter their livestock can do so from 6pm to 7pm on Thursday, April 8 till the first day of Ramadan. Individuals wishing to obtain slaughtered livestock can go directly to the slaughterhouse for reservation and pick up the next day from 7.30am to 11am.

'From the second day of Ramadan, the slaughterhouses will receive companies from 6am till 8am, and individuals from 8am to 12.45 noon,' it stated.

Our WhatsApp number has changed

Get your latest news update on WhatsApp

91953774

Save this number to your contact list.
Send 'start' to receive news update



MUSCAT DAILY



Three hydroponic greenhouses to come up in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to achieve growth in agriculture and self-sufficiency, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has begun building three hydroponic greenhouses in Musandam governorate.

In hydroponic agriculture, farmers are able to grow crops in a controlled environment. This allows them to extend cropping into higher priced periods or grow crops that are not normally suited to a particular climate. A key aspect to this is being able to maintain a stable root zone temperature that promotes healthy growth and oxygen retention within the nutrient solution.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official said, "The ministry has started building three hydroponic greenhouses with cooling systems in the Lima area in the wilayat of Khasab in Musandam governorate. These greenhouses are part of the Integrated Farming Project in Lima. The project aims

to grow various vegetable crops such as cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and zucchini among others."

In another development, the official informed that the ministry is working with the Oman Food Investment Holding Co to establish an integrated project to plant coconut trees on the ministry's land in the Arzat area in the wilayat of Salalah.

The project includes planting 50,000 coconut trees, establishing an integrated unit for processing coconuts, and recreational tourism activities in the area surrounding the project.

Additionally, the ministry recently signed an agreement with the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Company to lease 100 acres and to invest in and implement a smart agriculture project in the wilayat of Al Kamil W'Al Wafi in South Sharqiyah.

"The RO6.5mn project aims to increase productivity of crops, extend production seasons, and raise the quality and safety of local production. The project

consists of greenhouses, shade houses, soilless farming techniques, open field cultivation techniques, mechanisation, modern irrigation networks, a wireless agricultural meteorological station, warehouses, production sorting and processing facilities, etc," the official said.

As per the official, the ministry is currently implementing model fields for plantation of lemon, mango and date palm trees in various governorates. The project targets setting up organised farms of minimum five acres and is aimed at boosting the produce of mango, lemon and date palm trees.

The ministry supports farmers by distributing quality seedlings of mango, lemon and date palm in coordination with authorities in various governorates. A total of 73,000 date palm seedlings were cultivated in 2020-21 on 120 acres of land and 26 farmers benefited in the first phase. These farms are expected to produce 370 tonnes of dates worth RO365,000.

SQU holds event within goals of Oman Vision 2040

Muscat - The 17th Business Week of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Sunday explored the potential of students and their aspirations in relation to the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The event saw the participation of H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. In a speech on the occasion, H E Yousef underscored the attention accorded by the government to Omani youth. He described this attention as "an investment in the future".

The minister pointed out that the government provided support to youth through education and training which, he said, constituted basic factors that enabled Omani youth to efficiently shoulder their responsibility in the nation building process.

Dr Al Mukhtar Saif al Abri, dean of the College of Economy and Political Sciences, said that the Business Week forms a bridge of communication between the university and society. Within this theme, the students are tasked with researching major economic and social issues and portraying them through the



The Business Week forms a bridge of communication between the university and society. Within this theme, the students are tasked with researching major economic and social issues and portraying them through the use of innovative tools

DR AL MUKHTAR SAIF AL ABRI

use of innovative tools.

Dr Abri explained that the 17th Business Week takes up Oman Vision 2040 from the perspective of students, who elaborate on their topics during discussion

sessions with officials, academics and experts. It aims to deepen students' understanding and social awareness about the roles of various segments of society within Oman Vision 2040.

The SQU Business Week offers an opportunity to exchange ideas and highlights the potential of youth in government and private establishments.
ONA

OTC signs partnership agreement with W Muscat

Muscat - Oman Tourism College (OTC) recently signed a partnership agreement with W Muscat, to provide its students with various specialised training opportunities within its facilities.

As per a statement, the agreement was signed by Dr Abdulkarim al Mughairi, dean of OTC, and Gerald Chevasson, general manager of W Muscat. The signing is in line with OTC's continuous endeavours to strengthen its network of relations with entities operating in the tourism sector, in order to provide practical training for its students and ensure their readiness to join the job market upon graduation.

Dr Mughairi said, "At OTC, we seek to establish partnerships with various tourism and hotel establishments to exchange experiences, share knowledge and develop the current academic curricula. This way we can stay updated with the current trends in the tourism and hospitality sectors and keep pace with the requirements of the job market."



(Supplied photo)

He added, "Moreover, entering into such partnerships will contribute towards diversification of the work environment that will prepare our students for training, as part of their graduation plan. Through these collaborations, we aim to provide the tourism sector with Omanis with the best competencies and skillsets, who will lead the progress and development of the tourism and hospitality industry in the sultanate."

"We're incredibly excited to be working with OTC to help bring to the market a pool of new well-trained Omani talents. Learning from international best practices, it is partnerships like these that will propel the country's hospitality offerings to a new level of service and experience," said Chevasson.

"Since opening doors in 2019, we have recognised our responsibility to share our knowledge and expertise in the industry."

Four expats held for drug trafficking

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In cooperation with the Directorate General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, South Batinah governorate Police Command has arrested four expatriates on charges of smuggling and trafficking drugs.

In a statement, ROP said, "The anti-drug unit in cooperation with Coast-guard arrested four expatriates on charges of smuggling narcotic substances with the intention of trafficking them and entering the country illegally. The officers recovered 35kg of crystal meth and 5kg of morphine from the accused."

Legal proceedings against them are underway, the police said.

Quriyat road closed for maintenance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has announced that the Quriyat main road will be closed for maintenance purposes.

The municipality said, 'Muscat Municipality, in cooperation with Royal Oman Police, has enforced a complete closure of the Quriyat main road, starting from Sunday, April 4 until Thursday, April 8 in order to carry out maintenance work for the damaged parts of the road.'

DOUBLE GOODNESS
GAIN HEALTH
WIN PRIZES

Fortified with **Zn** **Cu**
Zinc & Copper
Boost your immune system

SCRATCH REGISTER WIN

Every Immuno shrink pack comes with a scratch coupon inside. Register the hidden number at www.omanoasis.com/immuno and stand to win amazing prizes.

Promotion valid from 25th February 2021 to 24th May 2021. Raffle draws on 25th March, 26th April and 25th May 2021. Three draws in total. Winners will be intimated in 7 days from the draw date. Pictures shown are for illustrative purpose only. Actual may vary. Customers to retain purchase receipts and scratch coupons to claim the gift. Oasis Water Company employees are not eligible to participate in this promotion. Terms and conditions apply.

OASIS WATER COMPANY SAOC
PO Box 87, Rusayl 124, Sultanate of Oman.
www.omanoasis.com

CALL TOLL-FREE
800 71 222
or GSM: **9275 5522**

Scan QR Code to Register

CR.No: 1/38545/2 Permit No: P20931

UBGCCF Inception Date* 17-Nov-09 NAV Date APR 1, 2021 NAV (OMR) 1.100 Adjusted NAV** (OMR) 1.507 Cash Dividend paid since inception (OMR) 0.055 Unit Dividend paid since inception 30.5% YTD Performance 9.41 % Performance since inception 58.54%	
* First NAV was issued on 4th March 2010 ** Adjusted for cash and bonus dividends For more information please contact: Tel: 00968 24 949 031/030, Email: ubhargocfund@u-capital.net	

Automatic licence service launched

Continued from Page 01

"The industrial sector includes 13 initiatives to improve investment opportunities such as in-country value added in manufacturing industries, implementing a programme for the most advanced industries, modernising industrial law, and formulating a

framework for governance and industrial development management," said Dr Masan.

H E Asila Salim al Samsami, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in MoCIIP, indicated that there were 22 investment initiatives representing eight sectors at the end of December

2020 and that there is a marketing plan to attract foreign investment and expand exports through a campaign in several languages. "The Invest Easy portal has registered 62 investors, 72 service providers, 26 project owners and 35 projects so far," H E Asila said.

oman OASIS

sifr

OMAN'S ONLY SODIUM FREE DRINKING WATER

5 IN 5 GALLON BOTTLE

Sodium Free Drinking Water

The healthy choice

It is beneficial to limit sodium intake if you have blood pressure, diabetes, heart or kidney disease.

Call Toll-Free **800 71 222** or GSM **9275 5522**

f OmanOasis @ OmanOasisOfficial www.omanoasis.com

OASIS WATER COMPANY LLC P.O.Box: 87, PC: 124, Rusayl, Sultanate of Oman.

CR. No.: 1/38545/2

Oman's public debt is within controllable limits, says MoF

Our Correspondent
Muscat

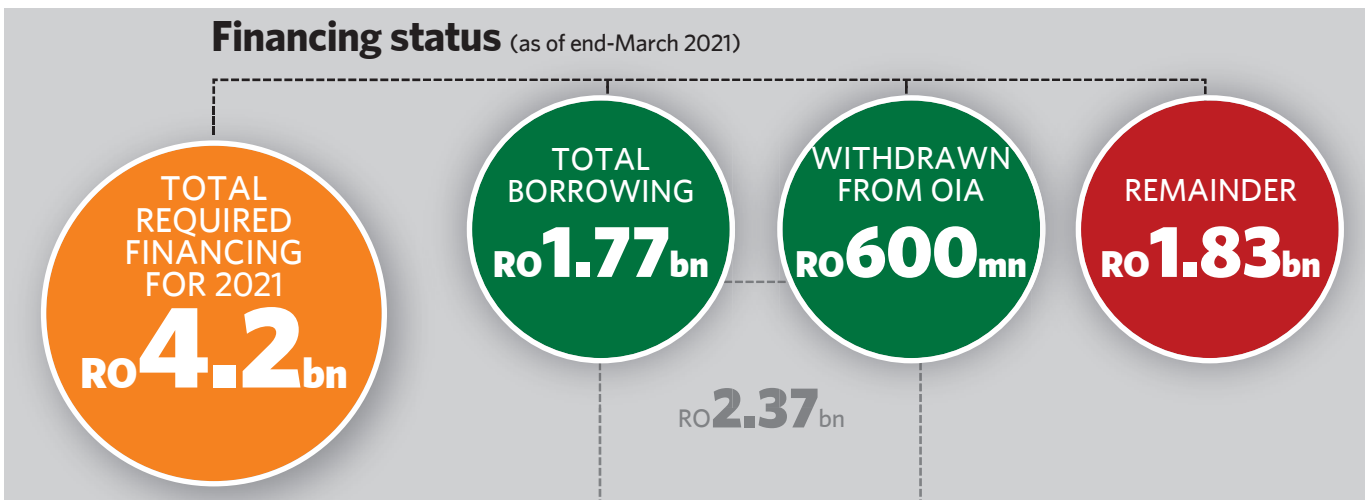
Oman's government has successfully raised more than half of its required financing needs of RO4.2bn for the year 2021 and the sultanate's public debt is within the controllable limits, according to the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

For the year 2021, Oman has set within its financing plan to cover a budget deficit of RO2.2bn and repay principal of a loan of RO2bn. Consequently, the total required financing for this year amounts to RO4.2bn, which was planned to be obtained through various financing instruments, in addition to an amount of RO600mn withdrawn from the Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

'As of the end-March 2021, total obtained financing amounted to RO2.37bn, of which RO1.77bn represents total loans, while an amount of RO600mn was received from OIA. This shows that Oman has successfully covered most of its financing needs [for 2021]. The remaining amount of RO1.83bn will be raised during the current year,' the Ministry of Finance said in its monthly bulletin Fiscal Performance which was released on Sunday.

The sultanate's 2021 budget, the Ministry of Finance said, has allocated RO1.2bn to public debt servicing, which will be paid in accordance with an approved payment schedule.

'By the end of February 2021, an amount of RO144mn paid for public debt servicing and an amount of RO563mn repaid for principal of some loans,' the ministry said.



Taking Oman's fiscal reform measures into account, S&P Global Ratings on Friday affirmed its 'B+/B' long and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings on Oman and maintained its stable outlook on the sultanate's ratings.

'We affirmed our ratings on Oman because we consider that the authorities have outlined a more solid path to reduce the historically high fiscal deficits, backed by stronger political will to implement the related reform measures. The Omani government has embarked on a 2021-2025 fiscal plan to improve public finances and has implemented several reforms since last year,' S&P noted in a statement issued on Friday.

Budget performance
Oman recorded 49.1 per cent year-on-year increase in the budget deficit in the first two months of this year, mainly due to lower oil prices during the January-February period of 2021.

Affected by lower oil revenue, the budget deficit widened to RO456.6mn in the first two months of 2021 against

RO306.1mn recorded in the corresponding period of 2020, the figures released by the Ministry of Finance showed.

By the end of February 2021, Oman's total public revenue amounted to RO1.092bn, a 21.6 per cent drop compared to RO1.393bn revenue recorded in the same period of 2020. 'This is

increased by 8.1 per cent to RO240.5mn during the first two months of 2021 compared to RO222.4mn in the corresponding period of 2020.

On the spending side, by the end of February 2021, Oman's general budget saw a drop in public spending by 8.8 per cent to RO1.548bn compared to

stimulus plan aiming at accelerating economic recovery and enhancing economic activities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and continued low oil prices.

'In light of the current unfavourable conditions, the government seeks, through the plan, to mitigate the implications of the pandemic on the national economy, notably the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by providing an incentive package. Such a package limits government purchasing contracts worth less than RO10,000 to SMEs only. In addition, the government has made some decisions within the plan to reduce some fees and tax rates in order to encourage the private sector to invest more in the economic diversification sectors,' the ministry said.

The ministry further said that the recently launched National Program for Attracting Private Investments and Supporting Omani Exports in Foreign Markets will eventually support the national economy, create more jobs, and further diversify the sources of income.

Affected by lower oil revenue, Oman's budget deficit widened to RO456.6mn in the first two months of 2021 as compared to RO306.1mn recorded in the corresponding period of 2020

mainly due to a decline in net oil revenue, as a result of low oil price and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic,' the ministry said in its monthly bulletin.

Net oil revenue fell 35 per cent to RO603.4mn during the January-February period of 2021 from RO928.7mn in the same period of last year, while gas revenue decreased 2 per cent to RO235.3mn during the same period. Other current revenues

RO1.699bn in the same period of 2020. 'This [reduction in expenditure] is as a result of several factors, including a reduction in spending of various government units,' the Ministry of Finance said.

Economic stimulus

On measures that were announced to stimulate the sultanate's economy, the Ministry of Finance said the government has endorsed the economic

'VAT, excise tax to raise \$47bn for GCC states in 2021'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The value-added tax (VAT) and excise taxes are likely to provide around US\$47bn in tax revenues for the GCC region in 2021, according to a report published by PwC on Sunday.

A majority of the tax increases in the GCC region since 2017 have come from VAT, applied so far in three countries, and from so called 'sin tax' excise duties, applied everywhere but Kuwait, PwC said.

'Together, VAT and excise tax raised around US\$24bn, more than a quarter of the total tax revenues of the GCC in 2019. The tripling of VAT in Saudi Arabia in July 2020 and the launch of VAT in Oman in April 2021 should see the take double again to about US\$47bn in 2021, nearly half of all GCC taxation,' PwC said.

It added that the other major increase has come from Saudi Arabia's expat levies, phased in since 2017, which raised approximately US\$15bn in 2019 alone.

PwC on Sunday launched its latest Middle East Economy Watch, 'The GCC rethinks expats and tax as it looks beyond COVID-19'.

Although the GCC has generally been a no tax, or very low tax zone, the tax environment is now changing rapidly, spurred by the challenge of lower oil prices since 2015 and by a growing appreciation, particularly over the last year, that the clean energy transition requires a rethink of the region's model, PwC said.

'Boosting the tax take is a high priority, particularly for the countries with the least fiscal space and reserves, such as Oman, Bahrain and, to a lesser extent,



Saudi Arabia. However, there are risks that the increasing cost and complexity of taxes could weigh on local businesses, particularly during this difficult period of recovery from the pandemic,' PwC said in a press statement.

Mark Schofield, Middle East tax and legal services leader at PwC Middle East, said, "With careful design, tax policies can be used to encourage positive outcomes and can potentially provide a win for revenue generation, a win for cost of collection and, importantly, a win for competitiveness."

The PwC report said the labour reform developments in the GCC are indicative of a broader trend of rethinking the roles and rights of expatriates, who were long assumed to be temporary residents in a transitional phase of development. 'As the governments look ahead to transform the region and create new avenues of growth, opportunity and resilience, the value of talented and wealth-creating expats should not be ignored.'

Richard Boxshall, Middle East senior economist at PwC Middle East, said, "As the region looks to diversify, it is better appreciating the value of expats as entrepreneurs, investors, consumers and, increasingly, as taxpayers."

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	18/2021	Rectification works for 132 kV OHL at Dhofar network	19/04/2021	18/05/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	60/=
2	19/2021	Supply, Installation & Commissioning for online DGA monitoring system for 9 Power Transformers at JBB Hassan, Jahloot, Airport Height, Al Falaj and SUR2 Grid Stations	19/04/2021	18/05/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	150/=

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 ensure 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: 93515198, 92217856
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com



Oman Electricity Transmission Company s.a.o.c.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2428 3000 | Fax: +968 2230 9046
www.omangrid.com



إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (رغ)
1	٢٠٢١/١٨	صيانة الخطوط الهوائية جهد ١٣٢ كيلوفولت في شبكة ظفار	٢٠٢١/٠٤/١٩	٢٠٢١/٠٥/١٨	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول.	٦٠/=
٢	٢٠٢١/١٩	توريد وتركيب وتشغيل نظام مراقبة الغازات الدائمة في زيت المحولات (DGA) بشكل تلقائي لعدد ٩ محطات (جعلان بني بو حسن وجحوت ومرتفعات المطار والفليج وصور ٢٠)	٢٠٢١/٠٤/١٩	٢٠٢١/٠٥/١٨	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول.	١٥٠/=

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 الى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود . وذلك لتأكيد من صحة المستند قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك من خلال أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ١:٠٠ م .
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ 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 المظاريف. - 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 (١%) 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) بجنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات.
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم المسكة ١٥٣٠ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣٠ - هاتف - ٩٢٢١٧٨٥١, ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨
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 : +٩٦٨ ٢٤٢٨٣٠٠٠ / الفاكس : +٩٦٨ ٢٤٢٣٠٠٩٠٤
الموقع الإلكتروني : www.omangrid.com



COMMENTARY

Value-added tax: Group registration rules

The governments of many countries allow a taxable person to register as VAT tax groups. Under this mechanism, more than one company can get a common VAT registration as a VAT tax group under single common control. The VAT returns and VAT payments are carried out by the member who acts as a representative of this VAT group.

However, all the members of the group are jointly liable for the payments and returns. The group members can make any transaction or supply within the group and there is no need for VAT accounting for inter-group transactions.

Conditions to register as VAT group

Under the Oman VAT Law, two or more persons may register and may be treated subsequently as a

tax group, provided the following conditions are met:

- Each person has a place of residence in the sultanate.
- All group members are legal persons.
- Each person must be registered for tax as per the law.
- One person, whether a member of the group or not, has control over all other members of the tax group.
- None of the persons is a member of another tax group.
- None of the persons is a person registered with the authority operating in a special zone.

The VAT Executive Regulations says that if a person who has the right to directly or indirectly control other persons' activities or commercial matters, or owns more than 50 per cent of the voting rights of the legal person or more than 50 per cent of the capital of the legal person then control exists and such persons can register as a group.

Documents required for registration

The persons in the tax group must appoint one of them as a representative of the group.

- A registration application for the tax group must be submitted:
- A copy of the agreement concluded



TAYSIR AL RAWAHI

The writer is director-taxes at Crowe Oman

between the group members to appoint a tax representative, and an evidence of the representative's approval of the appointment.

- The tax identification number for each member of the group.

The Tax Authority shall approve the

application for tax group registration within a period not exceeding 30 days from the date of completing all the details and documents, otherwise the application will be considered rejected.

Implication of VAT after group registration

The tax group registration results in the following:

- The representative of the tax group shall be responsible for all tax obligations imposed on the tax group.
- Any activity that is carried out, any supply that is made, whether taxable or

otherwise, and any import of goods or services performed by a member of the tax group, and any supply of goods or services provided to a member of the tax group is considered to have been made by or for the benefit of a tax group representative.

- The output tax imposed by one of the members of the tax group or the input tax incurred by one of the members of the tax group is considered as if it was imposed or incurred by the tax group.
- All members of the tax group shall have joint responsibility among themselves for any tax and penalties.
- It may not be considered a supply and no tax is imposed on goods and services transactions between members of the tax group.

Notification for changes

The representative of the tax group is required to notify the Tax Authority of

any changes that occur to the details previously submitted to the tax group registration application within 30 days from the occurrence of those changes on the form prepared for such, like adding or removing members in the group, change in the group representation, any change in the control pattern, cancellation of the group or any other relevant change.

It is necessary that when a member leaves the tax group or upon the cancellation of the tax group, the person must apply for re-registration in the event that he is still required to register as per the law.

(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

MSM index falls 0.12%; volumes up

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) fell 0.12 per cent to close at 3,662.26 points on Sunday.

While turnover declined 31.75 per cent to RO1.6mn, volumes rose 45.62 per cent to 13.7mn shares.

While Industrial index rose 0.28 per cent, Financial and Services indices fell 0.66 per cent and 0.14 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah index closed up by 0.13 per cent at 535.72 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 13 companies closed up, while 11 companies closed down. The rest 24 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Galfar Engineering & Contracting (9.09 per cent), Sohar International Bank (4.65 per cent), Al Jazeera Services (2.34 per cent) and Muscat Fi-

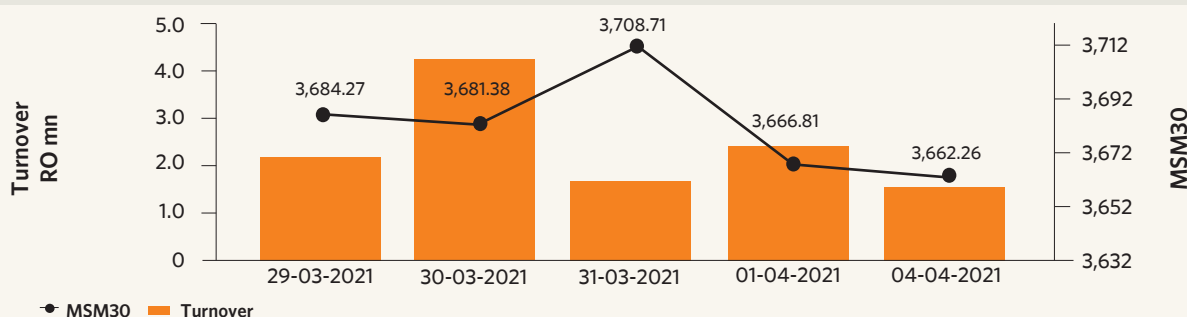


nance (2.33 per cent).

Top losers were Al Ahlia Insurance (-8.14 per cent), Oman United Insurance

(-7.81 per cent), HSBC Bank Oman (-5.0 per cent) and Vision Insurance (-3.75 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Dubai's Tristar Group launches IPO on DFM

Dubai, UAE - Tristar Transport, a leading global integrated liquid logistics solutions provider headquartered in Dubai, on Sunday launched its initial public offering (IPO) for qualified investors only on the Dubai Financial Market (DFM).

The offering comprises a base case of a minimum of 239.8mn ordinary shares, which represents a transaction size of 20 per cent of the total issued ordinary shares in the capital of Tristar, with a maximum of 287.76mn ordinary shares, which will represent a transaction size of up to 24 per cent.

A price range of AED2.20-AED2.70 per share has been announced, inferring a market capitalisation on listing of approximately AED2.64bn-AED3.24bn. Proceeds from the primary component will be approximately AED438mn-AED537mn and the secondary component will be approximately AED90mn-AED240mn, according to a press release.

The IPO is being made available to qualified investors only.



Eugene Mayne

The offer period starts from Sunday and will close on April 15, 2021 with expected listing of offer shares on the DFM expected to take place on April 22, 2021, subject to market conditions and obtaining relevant regulatory approvals in the UAE.

Eugene Mayne, CEO of Tristar Group, said, "I am delighted our share offer is now open, which provides investors the opportunity to share in Tristar's long-term growth aspirations. Our business has achieved considerable success over the last 23 years delivering revenues of US\$453.4mn, and Ebitda of US\$103.6mn for the year ended

December 31, 2020. Our main operating metrics for the first quarter of 2021 are trending positively, and so as we look ahead, we see significant opportunities to continue to drive steady and sustained growth as we expand our geographic reach and support services whilst continuing to innovate and shape the logistics industry."

Established in 1998 as a road transport service provider for the petroleum industry in the UAE, Tristar has evolved into a leading integrated energy logistics company serving a diversified customer base of 'blue-chip' investment grade companies. The group has operations in 21 countries and territories across three continents and has over 2,000 road transport assets and 35 maritime vessels, including the operation of 69 fuel farms and over 100 remote fuel sites, providing a wide spectrum of integrated service offerings.

In the year ended December 31, 2020, Tristar Group had a consolidated revenue of US\$453.4mn.



Siemens Energy signs long-term service deal with Saudi Aramco

Ankara, Turkey - Siemens Energy has signed its first long-term service agreement with Saudi state oil company Saudi Aramco, covering a range of turbines and generators at four major oil fields.

In a statement, Siemens Energy said the contract is expected to enable Aramco to improve reliability, efficiency, and availability of power supply, thereby safeguarding oil and gas production.

The 15-year contract will also enable Aramco to benefit from Siemens Energy's warranties and extended service support, in-

creasing the availability and reliability of the power supply for these assets. Siemens Energy will provide the necessary resources and materials in Saudi Arabia in case of emergencies.

"Siemens Energy is a strategic partner and a trusted service provider that can ensure reliable power supply at these major oil fields, helping improve operational excellence and continuously enhancing the performance of our strategic assets," said Mohammad al Shammari, vice president of Aramco's procurement and supply chain management.

The agreement with Aramco will also enable Siemens Energy to expand localisation plans through the development of high-tech industry and training of a skilled Saudi workforce.

"This long-term service agreement is expected to help achieve the highest efficiency, reliability and availability of Aramco's plant, with optimized parts management and with a core local team dedicated to the plants' needs," said Gianluigi Di Giovanni, Siemens Energy's head of power generation services Middle East and North Africa.

Anadolu Agency

Automakers report higher US sales, but chip shortage clouds outlook

New York, US - Carmakers reported higher first-quarter US sales amid rising consumer confidence, but a semiconductor shortage that has crimped production raises questions about supply in coming months.

Toyota led the pack with its double-digit, year-over-year US sales gain, but General Motors (GM), Ford and Fiat Chrysler also saw sales rise during a period that included passage of a giant US economic relief package that sent cash to most households and accelerating vaccinations.

"Consumer confidence and spending will continue to increase due to stimulus, rising vaccination rates and the progressive reopening of the economy," said GM chief economist Elaine Buckberg. "Auto demand should remain strong throughout the year."

But while demand is healthy, there are questions about the supply picture as all four companies have announced production cuts due to the global semiconductor shortage.

Just a week ago, FCA's parent company Stellantis announced it



A line worker works on the chassis of a full-size General Motors (GM) pickup truck at the Flint Assembly plant in Michigan, US (AFP)

was suspending production at five North American auto manufacturing plants due to the chip crunch.

Toyota scored a 21.6 per cent sales increase in the first three months of the year to 603,066.

That included a jump in sales of 'alternative powered vehicles' including hybrids and electric cars, which now comprise 24 per cent of total sales, Toyota said.

GM, the largest US automaker, posted a 4 per cent sales gain to 642,250.

The company pointed to

strong demand for larger vehicles such as full-size sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and pickup trucks.

Ford sales were up just 1 per cent to 521,334, as higher sales of trucks and SUVs more than offset a sharp drop in sedan sales.

Ford also highlighted higher electric vehicle sales following the rollout of its Mustang Mach-E SUV.

Meanwhile, FCA said sales rose 5 per cent to 469,651, propelled in part by gains in the Ram

and Jeep truck brands.

Analysts at Cox Automotive said activity picked up in March after winter storms slowed sales in February, and the arrival of stimulus checks from President Joe Biden's economic relief package also is boosting activity.

But Cox warned the semiconductor shortage looms as a threat to the auto sector.

"The production disruptions happening now will turn into even lower inventory in the months ahead," said Cox Automotive economist Charlie Chesbrough.

GM said inventory at the end of the quarter stood at 334,628, well below the level at the end of the fourth quarter and a drop of 50 per cent compared with the year-ago supply.

Due to the chip shortage, 'GM is building some vehicles without certain modules when necessary', the company said. 'They will be completed as soon as more semiconductors become available.'

The Detroit giant aims to recover lost production the second half of the year.

AFP

Muriya's Sifah Farms sells out Phase I, launches Phase II

Within weeks from the launch and remarkable successful selling out of Sifah Farms Phase I, Muriya, Oman's largest and most diversified real estate developer, has announced the launch of Phase II of the project. Presenting the ultimate outdoor privacy, and set in Jebel Sifah, Muscat's lowest density destination, the project offers a first-of-its kind opportunity of owning a farmhouse within close proximity to an established community.

Continuing on Jebel Sifah's development approach to open spaces, Sifah Farms offers two, three- and four-bedroom single storey farmhouses, each with a spacious garden, private pool, outdoor majlis and family BBQ area. Inspired by the traditional Mazra'a country homes found across Oman, the properties combine rustic charm that blends with the natural surroundings. With privileged access to Jebel Sifah's resort amenities, homeowners of Sifah Farms will experience the true meaning of healthy outdoor living.

Seif el Khouly, chief development officer of Muriya, said, "We continually strive to bring real estate offerings that represent



unique living opportunities and concepts to the Omani market.

"In 2020, Jebel Sifah witnessed a surge of interest among the domestic market with more and more people appreciating and valuing the concept of healthy outdoor living. No less than 85 per cent of Jebel Sifah's masterplan is dedicated to open spaces that harmonise with the surroundings. Having received such enthusiastic interest from buyers in a short period of time, we are confident that Sifah

Farms will delight homeowners with its individual style and all of the amenities they could expect from a world-class destination."

Set on generous grounds, ranging from 930sqm to 1,880sqm, Sifah Farms offers a world of amenities within the space of every farmhouse. Shimmering swimming pools and sweeping garden terraces give homeowners a private oasis of relaxation.

A secluded outdoor majlis area surrounds a fire pit, perfect

for spending balmy evenings under the stars, while a built-in BBQ and a brick oven provide ample ways to celebrate the joy of dining in fresh air. With lush landscaping, the gardens and large social seating areas are the perfect place to unwind with loved ones and enjoy the important moments in life. Meanwhile, the light-filled interiors bring the outside in, with large windows and fresh, clean lines.

Every space is thoughtfully designed and fitted to the high-

est specification, giving homeowners total luxury alongside the benefits of country living.

Alongside the farmhouses, the project offers several unique amenities including stables complete with a large, sandy paddock, a playground for children of all ages, organic garden plots, and a 5-side football pitch. It also has direct connectivity to hiking trails, a cycling path and golf course. Meanwhile, at their doorstep, homeowners are connected to modern day living at Jebel Sifah marina, a 9-hole golf course, the Sifawy Boutique Hotel, diverse restaurants and cafes as well as an abundance of water activities to enjoy.

Located a 40-minute drive from Muscat and a world away from the stress of everyday life, Jebel Sifah is nestled between the towering peaks of the Al Hajar Mountains and the tranquil crystal waters of the Arabian Sea. With a Harradine designed golf course, a modern marina with superyacht berthing, boutique hotel, restaurants and an incredible choice of freehold residential properties, Jebel Sifah offers all the elements of leading healthy and rewarding lives.



FalhaInvest to bring strong AI capabilities

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sought for women to actively participate in realising the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, on Omani Women's Day in October 2020, called upon Omani women to efficiently participate in the nation building process. Dr Amaal Rashid al Abrawi needed no further inspiration and motivation.

Dr Amaal Rashid al Abrawi

Dr Amaal has been a restless and energetic entrepreneur. In recent months, witnessing the aggressive rush for businesses from all sectors to participate in the digital industrial revolution, Dr Amaal has been strategising FalhaInvest's growth as an innovative and leading technology business in Oman, bringing best-of-class solutions to Oman. She is a firm believer in Oman's strong advantage in having well-educated and talented young professionals. She is convinced Oman has tremendous potential and ability to match up to the advancements of other GCC countries, She was determined to create an organisation that rightfully gains visibility and recognition as a respected, leading and reputed name from Oman.

Among Dr Amaal's priorities was to identify a reliable and visionary team of experienced professionals who could share her passion and vision to create a world-class organisation. After much deliberation and extensive search for suitable partners, Dr Amaal's FalhaInvest announced its intention to partner with Konsultera Solutions Private Limited.

Konsultera, founded by accomplished senior and top management veterans from globally renowned organisations in the risk, data, information, credit bureau, legal & compliance and technology businesses, is a fast-growing name in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data and Analytics solutions. Konsultera has grown at an annual rate of almost 70 per cent in the last five years and has clients that run smart and innovative digital enterprises in financial services, insurance, education, healthcare, legal and surveillance domains.

Sajeev Kutty, CEO - Konsultera

With entities in India and USA,

Konsultera has aggressive plans to grow in the EMEA markets. Sajeev Kutty, CEO of Konsultera said, "Our partnership with FalhaInvest is a strong expression of Konsultera's conviction of Oman's 2040 vision and Dr Amaal's determination to support Oman's leading and emerging enterprises in their digital transformation journey. Our team of data scientists and smart developers, guided by experienced leaders, are eagerly looking forward to deliver futuristic solutions and products to Oman in the years to come. We want to play an integral role in capacity building among bright Omani young IT aspirants and professionals."

Dr Amaal emphatically says, "While organisations rush to transition into mobile applications and digital platforms, critical attention to data, process automation and decisioning efficiencies is where many businesses struggle. Together, FalhaInvest and Konsultera, intends to address these challenges for existing digital initiatives in Oman. We will bring strong Artificial Intelligence capabilities to Oman.

"FinTech and HealthTech will be our immediate focus, followed by EdTech and InsurTech. Oman's banking and non-banking financial services entities have immense potential to bring efficiencies in customer onboarding, increasing personalised services, leveraging internal and external, structured and unstructured data to develop new products for retail and business lending, including for SME and micro businesses. The Central Bank of Oman has prioritised the development of Fintech and enhancement of innovation in the financial sector.

"I cannot thank enough Dr Salim al Wahaibi, my husband, friend, philosopher and guide for his incredible support and for the pillar of strength he has been. When he launched Sehatek, a telemedicine digital platform, with the blessings of the Oman Technology Fund, he started on his mission to make healthcare reach all in quick, affordable and efficient manner. As a co-founder of FalhaInvest, his wisdom and assured guidance will be invaluable. Our effort to create a quality-driven, competitive and reliable organisation crossed a significant milestone with our partnership with Konsultera."

Sohar International unveils investor relations portal

Continuing its efforts to enhance its digital presence, Sohar International announced the launch of a dedicated portal for investor relations as part of its corporate website. The new portal cements Sohar International's firm belief in establishing and retaining meaningful relations with its shareholders and investors whether locally, regionally, or internationally.

Ahmed al Musalmi, chief executive officer, Sohar International, said, "We are delighted to announce the launch of a dedicated portal in our corporate website as a step towards implementing the bank's digital transformation strategy. As we evolve to take on new challenges in 2021 and strive to be a partner of



choice for enabling winning journeys, digitalisation will underscore all our efforts and approaches across businesses.

"This portal comes in line with the same thought and will support in bridging communication with a critical target group, while also building relations with new ones enabling us to bring the

best of the world to Oman and present Oman to the world through Sohar International lens."

The portal aims at providing and distributing information about the bank and its financial performance to existing and potential shareholders and to the public at large, at regular periodic intervals. The bank is determined to add value to its proposition for existing investors and shareholders, and attract potential ones in the near future.

Sohar International has continuously endeavoured to strengthen its relationship with the existing investors, conduct itself in a way that enhances shareholder value and attracts more investors to be a part of its

business by keeping abreast with evolving needs and socio-economic dynamics. The launch of this dedicated portal comes in the framework of marking a great stride in the bank's digital evolution and its commitment to technological progress.

The bank complies with the procedures prescribed in the guidelines of the Capital Markets Authority with regard to channels of contact with shareholders for the objectives of maintaining investor relations. All the Reports of the Board of Directors with the Financial Results of the bank are available on the website of the bank, both in Arabic and English.

These reports provide corporate information, details of the Bank's performance and data

that is essential for investors.

Sohar International unveiled a range of advanced digital solutions and services in the last one year, in order to provide improved customer experiences within the banking sector in Oman, as banks across the globe are transitioning into the digital space.

With the purpose of enabling people to win and delivering on its brand principles of providing more value, more vision, and more velocity, Sohar International continues to deliver on its promise of providing responsive banking services to help customers reach any goal. The new Sohar International Investor Relations portal can be accessed at <https://soharinternational.com/investor-relations/>

Michelin Agilis 3 tyres launched in GCC

Michelin, the world's leading tyre company has announced the launch of Michelin Agilis 3 in the GCC for the commercial light truck tyre market, targeting conventional load customers involved in people and goods transportation. The newly launched tyre aims to capture the larger high-potential, light-load segment with exceptional solutions - in terms of safety, performance, and environment.

Marc Pasquet, president, Michelin Africa, India and Middle East Region, said, "When it comes to sustainability, Michelin is committed to a long-term strategy that applies to all of its products, from car to truck tyres. Our design choices seek to make more efficient use of raw materials and



resources, while at the same time ensuring outstanding performance throughout the working life of the tyres. As a result, their environmental impact is lower and they last longer, two key considerations for road and urban transport professionals who are looking to optimise their costs without compromising safety,

while at the same time reducing their environmental footprint. I am confident that this tyre range fulfils these aspirations of the light truck fleet owners in the country."

Rolling resistance of tyres accounts for at least 20 percent of a vehicle's energy consumption. On average, the tyres that make up the new Michelin Agilis 3 range weigh 1kg less than their corresponding predecessor, and the difference is as high as 1.7kg in the case of certain larger sizes. Fewer raw materials and natural resources are



consequently required for their manufacture and the amount of waste that needs to be recycled is reduced. According to the results of in-house tests carried out by Michelin, this Michelin Agilis 3 tyre curbs CO₂ emissions by 100kg on average over a distance of 20,000km.

That's equivalent to the CO₂ stored in approximately three trees, a fuel-consumption reduction of 0.12lt/100km and a sav-

ing of €100.

Certain performance-related qualities actually improve as tyres wear, such as their braking performance on dry roads and fuel consumption. Braking performance in wet conditions deteriorates with wear, however, but the Michelin Agilis 3 is designed to deliver high-level braking performance on wet roads all the way down to the tyre's TWI (tread wear indicator / 1.6mm). Indeed, in addition to being A-graded for braking performance in wet conditions when new (in-line with European labelling legislation), it continues to perform in this domain even when worn, with results that are superior to the safety threshold legislation required for new tyres.

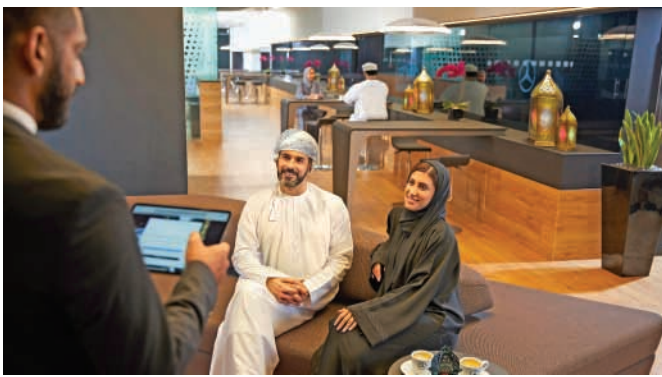
Mercedes-Benz Oman prioritises safety offering up to 60% off on brake pads

Ensuring cars are at their very best this Ramadan, Mercedes-Benz Oman has announced its latest offer on Brake Pads which includes up to 60 per cent off on changes.

The offer is available from April 11 until May 13 at the Authorised Service Centres in Muscat, Sohar and Salalah, where customers can put their car in the safe hands of Mer-

cedes-Benz certified technicians, who will also carry out an inspection of the vehicle braking system, including brake fluid condition and testing, in addition to a complimentary vehicle wash.

"At Mercedes-Benz, we want our customers to enjoy their cars to the fullest and that's why our commitment to after sales care is second-to-none," said Shaun



Michael, chief executive officer at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

He added, "Our Brake Pads campaign makes sure that vehicles stay in the best possible condition and because we use Mercedes-Benz Genuine Parts, it means our customers are not only getting the value they deserve, but are protecting their well-being."

Scientificallty proven to out-

perform all alternatives in the market, Mercedes-Benz genuine brake pads go up to 17,000km further than the second-best substitute, keeping drivers safer for longer.

Perfectly designed for Mercedes-Benz genuine brake discs, they ensure high braking power, short stopping distances, lower wear and tear when compared to non-genuine parts.

This is how Mercedes-Benz genuine brake components contribute to a safer driving experience.

The Mercedes-Benz Brake Pads campaign is available to owners of models registered after January 30, 2017.

Customers are requested to book an appointment early to avoid missing out on the offer by simply calling 80079777.

McLaren unveils hybrid supercar Artura in Oman

McLaren Automotive, the British creator of luxury, high-performance supercars, represented by Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC in Oman, has revealed the long-anticipated McLaren Artura, marking the beginning of both a new chapter for the pioneering luxury supercar company and a new era in supercar technology and performance in the market.

Underpinned by the McLaren philosophy of super-lightweight engineering, the Artura is a distillation of every attribute inherent in a McLaren, combined with faster throttle response, lower emissions and ability to run in pure EV mode, thanks to its ground-breaking electrified powertrain.

"We are proud and honoured to showcase the all-new McLaren Artura in Muscat, Oman. This revolutionary high-performance hybrid supercar marks a beginning of a new era for both McLaren Automotive and the wider supercar segment. Every drop of our engineering expertise gained across more than 50 years of racing has been poured into the Artura, to deliver a combination of breath-taking performance, driver engagement and dynamic excellence, which our brand is so renowned for. I am confident that this extraordinary



creation will appeal to both our existing and new customers in the Middle East region," said Brett Soso, managing director - Europe, Middle East & Africa, McLaren Automotive Ltd. The McLaren Artura is the first model built on the new McLaren Carbon Lightweight Architecture (MCLA), which sets

new standards for advanced and flexible chassis design and has been optimised for hybrid applications through bespoke battery compartment, domain-based ethernet electrical architecture, as well as electrical air-conditioning. The new platform complements a wealth of additional weight-reduction measures, re-

sulting in class-leading lightest dry weight of 1,395kg, and a DIN kerb weight of 1,489kg. At the heart of the Artura's all-new powertrain is a light-weight 2,993cc twin-turbocharged V6 petrol engine, paired to a bespoke eight-speed transmission and a compact e-motor, which provides the super-

car with instant torque and improved throttle response. The package generates a combined power output of 680PS (671 bhp) and 720S Nm of torque, which translates to a class-leading power-to-weight ratio of 488PS per tonne, as well as truly breath-taking performance figures. The Artura's top speed is

electronically limited to 330km/h with 0-100km/h reached in just 3.0 seconds and 0-200 km/h in 8.3 seconds. The Artura is designed with full Plug-in Hybrid (PHEV) capability and can be charged to an 80 per cent level in just 2.5 hours. The battery pack, comprising five lithium-ion modules, can also harvest power from the combustion engine during driving, depending on the driving mode selected. This solution provides the driver with a unique ability to enjoy the car in silent, pure EV mode with a range of up to 30km and a top speed of 130km/h.

The engineering artistry beneath the Artura's skin is complemented by its exterior design, which gives the car a 'shrink-wrapped' appearance and pushes the McLaren design language seen in recent models to a new level. The technical sculpture of the car has been conceived to optimise aerodynamic performance, as well as cooling, and is driven by the McLaren design principle of 'everything for a reason'.

Every McLaren cockpit is built around the driver, but the Artura brings a new level of meaning to that principle.

The driving experience is enhanced through a new Digital In-

strument Cluster mounted to the steering column, so it moves in conjunction with the steering wheel.

The Artura is also the first McLaren to offer Over-The-Air (OTA) updates, as well as Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), which include Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control with Stop/Go, Road-Sign Recognition, Lane-Departure Warning and High-Beam Assist.

Peace of mind on quality and durability were core considerations with the all-new Artura and it is no surprise that its development programme was the most rigorous ever in McLaren's history.

Available to order now from McLaren retailers, with first deliveries to customers commencing in Q3 of this year, the Artura is priced at AED954,000 for the standard specification, which includes a three-year service plan, Smartphone Integration Package and Practicality Pack as a no cost option. This pack includes Vehicle Lift, power-folding heated door mirrors with 'Dip in Reverse' functionality, four front and four rear parking sensors, rear-view camera, Homelink and soft-close doors.

For more information, visit McLaren showroom in Azaiba.

NBO announces new appointments

National Bank of Oman (NBO) held its Annual General Meeting this week. Conducted remotely, the meeting was attended by board members, senior management and shareholders, and included the declaration of RO422,000 to be allocated for community support services over the coming year, in addition to last year's financial results.

In 2020, NBO achieved a net profit of RO18.1mn, a satisfactory yield given the lower income and higher loan impairment charge, mainly arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the meeting, the bank also introduced three new board members, namely Dr Ghazi Nasser al Alawi, Said Hilal al Habsi, who were appointed in May 2020, and more recently, Nabil al Mahrouqi.

Member of the Board Audit Committee (BAC) and Board Risk and Compliance Committee (BRCC), Dr Alawi has five years' experience in the financial sector,



having served on a number of boards including one of the sultanate's major financial institutions, as well as for Oman Casting Aluminum, Dunes Oman, Muscat Horizons International and ABI Showtech Oman. He holds a PhD in Entrepreneurship from the University of Plymouth, UK.

Member of the Board Audit Committee (BAC), Habsi has extensive experience in finance and investments. An Investment Director at Oman Investment Authority (OIA), he has previously held senior positions at Oman Investment Fund (OIF), and the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund. He is also a Board member

of Salalah Mills SAOG, and Ubhar Capital SAOC. He holds a Masters of Business Administration, a Bachelors in Finance, and is a certified professional accountant.

Member of the Board Risk and Compliance Committee (BRCC), Mahrouqi is an experienced investment professional with a demonstrated history of working in the investment management industry. A qualified Financial Modeling and Valuation Analyst (FMVA), he works as the acting head of Local Asset Management at the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) and holds a BSc. in Finance from Sultan Qaboos University.

Rounding off a busy year, NBO has embraced the challenges emerging from the pandemic, enhancing its digital channels and launching a number of cutting-edge products and services that support its journey towards becoming a fully digitally enabled bank.

Ooredoo strikes gold for innovation

Ooredoo has scored big-time at the 2021 Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards, scooping up three awards for the Innovative Use of Technology in Customer Service - Telecommunications Industries; Innovation in Customer Service Management, Planning & Practice - Telecommunications Industries; and Innovation in Technology Management, Planning & Implementation - Telecommunications Industries.

It's one of a string of accolades the telecoms company has picked up in the last year, as it continues to develop market-leading technology and maximise its customer experience.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, "As data experience leaders in the sultanate, our aim has always been to provide our users with innovative technology, and never has this role been more important than during the pandemic, where we've had



to think on our feet even more and continue to come up with innovative ways to serve our customers remotely. These awards are a welcome testament to the massive progress we've made, and continue to make, in our infrastructure, our network and our customer service."

The Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards are the only business awards program to recognize innovation in the workplace in 17 nations in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world's pre-

mier business awards, conferring recognition for achievement in programs such as The International Business Awards for 19 years. More than 400 nominations from organisations across the Middle East and North Africa were considered this year in categories such as Award for Excellence in Innovation in Products & Services, Award for Innovative Management, and Award for Innovation in Corporate Websites, among many others.

Ooredoo was also honoured with several Gold Stevie Awards last year, including for Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year, Innovative Use of Technology in Customer Service, and Innovation in Technology Management, Planning & Implementation, sitting alongside a string of other awards and recognitions. Ooredoo continues to transform Oman's telecommunications landscape, by providing its customers with the latest technologies to enrich their digital lives.

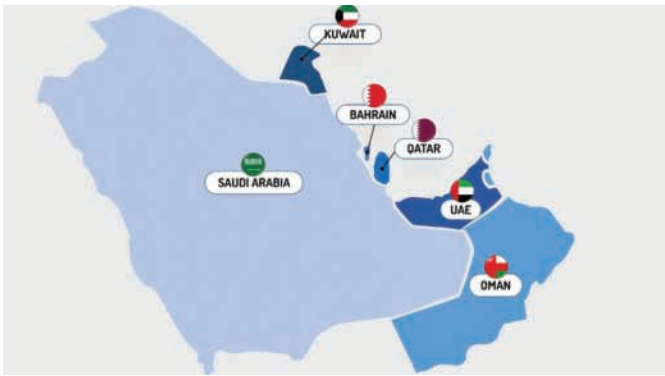
B2B regional speed networking for OABC members, AmChams affiliates

To foster new relationships among member companies throughout the network of US Chamber of Commerce affiliates in the GCC (AmChams), the Oman American Business Center will co-host its first-ever Virtual Speed Networking Event on April 5 via Zoom.

Seven affiliates of the US Chamber of Commerce in the GCC will invite their member companies to participate in the event, which will facilitate fast-moving brief networking sessions for business owners and executives.

Attendees will be placed into rooms with a few other individuals, for 4 minutes at a time. In this way, each attendee will meet dozens of other professionals in the GCC and be given many chances to share their own business with others.

AmChams in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait represent over 1,000 member companies and millions of dollars of US investment in the region.



They are the go-to organisations in each country for anything US trade-related.

The event will also double as the official launch of an exclusive LinkedIn group: 'Members of AmChams in the GCC'. This group will serve as a professional development and networking group where current AmCham members may post articles, questions, opportunities, promotions, job postings, and discussion topics.

For some business leaders, even very successful ones, LinkedIn can be seen as exciting, but daunting; a necessary tool,

an important platform, but also new and possibly challenging to understand how to capitalise upon. For this reason, to take full advantage of the new regional group, AmCham members are invited to receive a free one-on-one consulting session with Oman's LinkedIn expert Mohammed al Tamami after the session.

"LinkedIn as a social media tool that focuses on the professional community, is no different from email," says Tamami.

"The learning curve is how to capitalise on the platform and leverage it for your purpose."

The Residences at St Regis Al Mouj Muscat appoints OSIR as sales agency

The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat has announced the appointment of Oman Sotheby's International Realty (OSIR) as its exclusive sales agency for its branded luxury apartments resting on the shores of Oman.

Recently launched by Alfardan Group, OSIR falls under the umbrella of leading high-end property international brokerage firms around the globe, Sotheby's International Realty. The OSIR office is located on the 2nd floor at Finaa Alfardan and will be headed by Faisal al Shanfari as the country manager.

Boasting an exclusive and robust portfolio of luxury real estate properties across the world's most premium addresses and locations, the realty will manage the portfolio for The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat marking a key milestone towards the launch of the exclusive property.

Omar Hussain Alfardan, president and chief executive officer of Alfardan Group, stated, "Mark-



ing our latest foray into the real estate market, Alfardan Group is delighted to take on The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat with Oman Sotheby's International Realty. The international realtor brings world-class services and extensive agency experience that leads globally with a proven track record in luxury real estate to connect local and international investors with the rich Omani real estate market. Backed by a network of experts, the brokerage firm opens up The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat to a global clientele of luxury connoisseurs

seeking an exceptional home, exclusive privileges, and unparalleled luxury living."

The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat feature 170 luxury abodes spanning an array of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments, as an ideal real estate investment opportunity in Oman. The project will entitle its residents to a freehold title deed upon purchase.

A beachfront address running along an incredible 360m long coastline enters its occupants into a world of new experiences at The St Regis branded residences that have arrived for the

first time in Oman. Under the signature brand, residents have access to The St Regis signature lifestyle and first-class amenities ranging from private butler service, 24-hour concierge and à la carte services at distinct hotel apartments.

The project will be the destination for a number of speciality restaurants along the coast. All facilities are specifically curated to match the needs of its residents, boasting an unmatched lifestyle and exceptional privileges. Residents will have exclusive access to a modern health club, deluxe wellness centre & spa, spacious swimming pools, and a kid's club alongside a high-end meeting room, a grand ballroom, and a well-appointed business centre. Residents will also be entitled to special rates at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat as well as access to the Marriott Bonvoy loyalty programme.

More information is available at info@omansothebysrealty.com or +968 9571 4640.

Jordan Prince under ‘house arrest’

Amman, Jordan - Jordan's official media warned on Sunday that security and stability are 'red line' issues after a half-brother of King Abdullah II said he was put under house arrest and others were detained amid reports of a coup plot.

Jordan's former crown prince Hamzah bin Hussein (41), who lost his title in 2004, said he had been confined to his home, speaking in a video message which the BBC said ON Saturday it had obtained from his lawyer.

Hamzah lashed out at Jordan's 'ruling system' and said several of his friends had been arrested, his security detail removed and his internet and phone lines cut.

He denied being part of 'any conspiracy or nefarious organisation', but said the country had 'become stymied in corruption, in nepotism, and in misrule' and that nobody was allowed to criticise the authorities.

The official newspaper *Al-Rai* warned on Sunday that Jordan's 'security and stability' were a 'red line that must not be crossed or even approached'.

Official news agency Petra said an unspecified number of suspects had been arrested, among them former close aides to the royal family Bassem Awadallah, chief of the royal court in 2007-2008, and Sherif Hassan bin Zaid.

The pair were detained for 'security reasons', Petra said, quoting a security source.

Hamzah's mother, Queen Noor, tweeted on Sunday that



A general view of a street in the capital Amman on Sunday, a day after several senior figures were detained and a half-brother of King Abdullah II said he was put under house arrest (AFP)

she was 'praying that truth and justice will prevail for all the innocent victims of this wicked slander'. "God bless and keep them safe."

US closely watching

Hamzah is the eldest son of late King Hussein and American-born Queen Noor. He has had

good relations officially with Abdullah, his half-brother, and is a popular figure close to tribal leaders.

Abdullah had appointed Hamzah crown prince in 1999 in line with Hussein's dying wishes, but in 2004 stripped him of the title and gave it to his own eldest son Hussein.

A Jordanian analyst who did not want to be named for security reasons said Hamzah had recently 'stepped up his criticism of what he described as corruption within the government in front of his circle of friends'.

According to the same source, 'there is certainly resentment on his part, because he has

never digested losing his title of crown prince'.

The army denied on Saturday that Prince Hamzah, who holds no official position, had been detained.

"What has been published about the arrest of Prince Hamzah is not true," said Joint Chiefs of Staff head Major Gen-

eral Yousef Huneiti. But the prince had been 'asked to stop some activities that could be used to shake the stability and security of Jordan', he said.

The *Washington Post* said the former crown prince was 'placed under restriction' as part of a probe into an alleged plot to unseat the King.

'The move followed the discovery of what palace officials described as a complex and far-reaching plot,' it said, quoting a senior Middle East intelligence official.

The alleged scheme 'included at least one other Jordanian royal as well as tribal leaders and members of the country's security establishment', *The Washington Post* added.

But *Al-Rai* in a front page editorial on Sunday denied such reports.

'Some people are trying to create the illusion of an attempted coup in Jordan, and trying to implicate Prince Hamzah in their sick fantasies,' it said.

'All that happened was that some of the prince's actions were used to target Jordan's security and stability.'

US State Department spokesman Ned Price said Washington was 'closely following' the events in its close regional ally.

"King Abdullah is a key partner of the United States, and he has our full support," he said.

Saturday's security sweep comes as Jordan prepares to mark 100 years since the new kingdom then named Transjordan was established alongside Palestine under British mandate.

It declared independence in 1946. Despite having little oil wealth and severely lacking water, the kingdom has managed to survive repeated wars in the region which have sent waves of refugees across its borders.

AFP



The aftermath of a flash flood, which killed at least 23 people only in the village of Lamanele on East Flores in Indonesia on Sunday (AFP)

Indonesia flash floods kill 44, toll expected to rise

Jakarta, Indonesia - At least 44 people were killed after flash floods and landslides swept an island in Indonesia's easternmost province Sunday morning, rescue officials said, adding they expected the toll to rise.

"There are 44 people dead with nine injured [in East Flores regency]," and 'many (...) are still under the mud', National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesperson Raditya Jati said.

Hours before people woke to celebrate Easter Sunday, torrential rain unleashed flash floods in the Catholic-majority Flores Island.

Mud inundated homes, while bridges and roads in the eastern end of the island were destroyed.

Rescuers are struggling to reach the remote and worst-hit area in East Flores regency because of rains and strong waves.

The death toll rose from 23 earlier announced by authorities.

The number of injured is also expected to increase as the agency is still receiving reports from locals, Jati said.

"We are still documenting the total number of people injured," the spokesperson said, adding that extreme weather is expected to continue in the coming week.

Separately on Sunday, major floods also killed two people in Bima city in the neighbouring province of West Nusa Tenggara, according to the disaster agency.

Dams in four subdistricts also overflowed, submerging nearly 10,000 houses in Bima following a nine-hour downpour, said Jati.

Fatal landslides and flash floods are common across the Indonesian archipelago during the rainy season.

AFP

Philippine Minister accuses China of plans to occupy more South China Sea ‘features’

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines Defence Minister on Sunday accused Beijing of planning to occupy more 'features' in the disputed South China Sea, in an escalating war of words over Chinese vessels in the waters.

China claims almost the entirety of the resource-rich sea and has asserted its stance by building up small shoals and reefs into military bases with airstrips and port facilities.

Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei all have rival claims to the waters, which incorporate strategically crucial shipping lanes and could harbour oil and gas deposits.

A fleet of more than 200 Chinese ships that sparked a diplomatic row last month after parking at Whitsun Reef off the Philippines is now scattered across the contested Spratly Islands.



This handout photo from the National Task Force-West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) shows Chinese vessels anchored at Whitsun Reef, some 320km west of Palawan Island in the South China Sea on March 27 (AFP)

Manila has called on Beijing to withdraw the 'maritime militia' vessels from the area, saying their presence is unlawful.

China has refused, insisting they are fishing boats and are allowed to operate there.

But Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the vessels were there for other reasons.

"The continued presence of Chinese maritime militias in the area reveals their intent to further occupy features in the West

Philippine Sea," he said.

Lorenzana pointed to China's seizure of the Philippine-claimed Scarborough Shoal and Mischief Reef as previous examples of them 'brazenly violating' his country's sovereignty.

On Saturday, the outspoken Lorenzana rejected China's claims that the boats parked at Whitsun Reef - and where dozens remained last week - had been seeking shelter from bad weather. "I am no fool. The weather has been good so far, so they have no other reason to stay there," he said.

"Get out of there," he said.

The Chinese Embassy in Manila called Lorenzana's statement 'perplexing' and urged authorities to avoid 'unprofessional remarks which may further fan irrational emotions'.

Beijing often invokes the so-called nine-dash line to justify its apparent historic rights over most of the South China Sea, and it has ignored a 2016 international tribunal decision that declared this assertion as without basis.

AFP

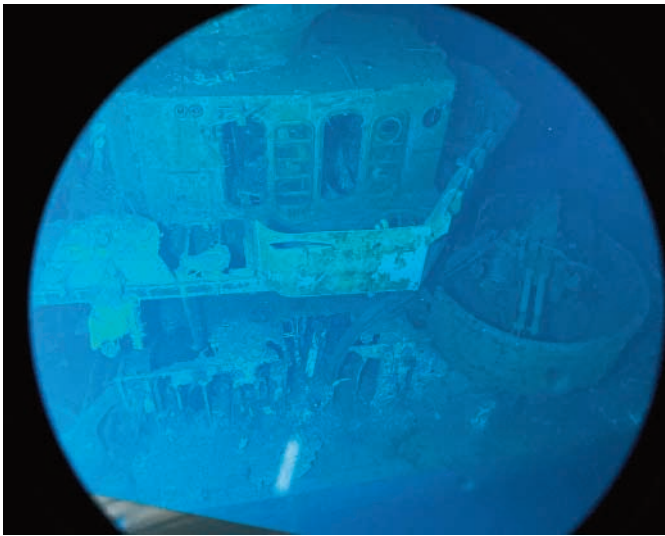
Deepest wreck dive reaches WWII ship off Philippines

Manila, Philippines - A US navy destroyer sunk during World War II and lying nearly 6,500 metres below sea level off the Philippines has been reached in the world's deepest shipwreck dive, an American exploration team said.

A crewed submersible filmed, photographed and surveyed the wreckage of the *USS Johnston* off Samar Island during two eight-hour dives completed late last month, Texas-based undersea technology company Caladan Oceanic said.

The 115m long ship was sunk on October 25, 1944 during the Battle of Leyte Gulf as US forces fought to liberate the Philippines - then a US colony - from Japanese occupation.

Its location in the Philippine Sea was discovered in 2019 by



The main wreckage of the *USS Johnston*, the US Navy Fletcher-class destroyer that sank during the Battle of Samar in World War II (AFP)

another expedition group, but most of the wreckage was beyond the reach of their remotely-operated vehicle.

'Just completed the deepest wreck dive in history, to find the main wreckage of the destroyer *USS Johnston*,' tweeted Caladan

Just completed the deepest wreck dive in history, to find the main wreckage of the destroyer USS Johnston. We located the front 2/3 of the ship, upright and intact, at a depth of 6456 meters. Three of us surveyed the vessel

VICTOR VESCOVO

Oceanic founder Victor Vescovo, who piloted the submersible.

'We located the front 2/3 of the ship, upright and intact, at a

depth of 6456 meters. Three of us across two dives surveyed the vessel and gave respects to her brave crew'.

Only 141 of the ship's 327 crew survived, according to US Navy records.

The Caladan Oceanic-backed expedition found the bow, bridge and mid-section intact with the hull number '557' still visible. Two full five-inch gun turrets, twin torpedo racks and multiple gun mounts remain in place, it said.

Team navigator and historian Parks Stephenson said the wreck bore the damage inflicted during the intense surface battle 76 years ago. "It took fire from the largest warship ever constructed - the Imperial Japanese Navy battleship *Yamato*, and ferociously fought back," said Stephenson.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Paris medics fear worst of COVID wave still to come

Paris, France - In the COVID-19 intensive care unit of the Antony Private Hospital south of Paris, no bed stays free for long and medics wonder when their workload will finally peak.

As one recovered elderly patient is being wheeled out of the ward, smiling weakly, boss Jean-Pierre Deyme is on the phone arranging the next arrival and calling out instructions to staff.

Louisa Pinto, a nurse of nearly 20 years' experience, gestures to the vacated room where a cleaner is already at work, scrubbing down the mattress for the next arrival.

"The bed won't even have time to cool down," she says as the patient monitoring system beeps constantly in the background.

For now, everything is stable in the 20-odd beds around her where COVID-19 victims lie inanimate, in a silent battle with the virus.

Paris is going through a third wave of the pandemic which risks putting even more strain on saturated hospitals than the first wave in March and April last year.

"With what's coming in April, it's going to be very complicated," says Pinto, a mother of three who hasn't had a holiday since last summer and like other staff will be cancelling a planned break this month.

Even with a new round of restrictions coming into force this week, Health Minister Olivier Veran predicts that infections in France will peak only in mid-April, while hospital admissions will continue climbing until the end of the month.

Alarming forecasts leaked to the French media from the Paris public hospital authority AP-HP last week showed anywhere from 2,800-4,400 people in intensive care in the Paris region by the end of April even with a strict lockdown.

In the first wave, the number peaked at 2,700.



A nurse tends to a COVID-19 patient at an intensive care unit of the Antony Private Hospital, in Antony - a southern Paris suburb on Friday (AFP)

The difficulty is not so much beds or material, it's a question of finding medical and paramedical staff to be able to take in patients

DENIS CHANDESIRIS

Staff shortages

The director of the Antony hospital, Denis Chandesris, said intensive care capacity has already been increased by drastically reducing all surgery except for critical cancer, cardiological and emergency cases. Hospitals everywhere in the region have taken similar measures, re-deploying beds and creating new wards, but they are reaching their limits.

"The difficulty is not so much beds or material, it's a question of finding medical and paramedical staff to be able to take in patients," Chandesris explained.

Last Sunday, a group of emergency care directors in Paris warned in an open letter that the situation was so bad

that medics would soon have to start 'triage' - selecting patients for care based on their chances of survival.

This prospect horrifies staff - and President Emmanuel Macron has always promised to shield hospitals and avoid the sort of scenes witnessed in Italy last March when patients piled up in corridors.

In a televised speech to the nation on Wednesday night, he promised to increase intensive care capacity nationwide from 7,665 beds currently to 10,000 - a jump of 30 per cent.

"I want to thank medical students, retired people, the army health service and medical reserve volunteers. All of them will be mobilised in a larger way," he announced.

Opposition politicians and some experts reacted with scepticism while an Ifop poll for the *Journal du Dimanche* weekly found only 35 per cent of French people had confidence in their government 'to deal effectively with the coronavirus'.

Pinto, the nurse, underlined how working in intensive care is 'very technical', requiring specialised training and knowledge.

New restrictions

Macron is banking on a limited lockdown over the next month turning the rising tide of cases which have roughly doubled to 40,000 a day compared with their level a month ago.

The sharp acceleration is down to the spread of the more contagious so-called British variant which has become dominant in France. New measures include nation-wide travel restrictions, which limit people to 10km from their homes, and the closure of schools and non-essential shops.

Only a significant increase in the vaccination campaign -

which started sluggishly but is now picking up pace - fills any of the medics at Antony Private Hospital with any hope.

After months of lacking doses, the government is promising a major rollout this month and an increase in the rate of jabbing.

Samir Taik, a taxi driver from Paris, walked out of the Antony hospital last week as the 1,000th COVID-19 patient to have benefited from oxygen therapy in the COVID-19 intensive care unit.

The 43 year old, who enjoys boxing and sport, is still short of breath and reeling from the trauma of seeing his health deteriorate so fast.

He says he knows three or four people with a similar profile to him who have been hospitalised recently. "Young people need to know that we're not talking about 80 year olds, it's people who are 30, 40, 45 year olds and have no health problems. The British variant is not like the old one," he told AFP.

AFP



Doctors carry a box of traditional Easter cakes as they tour the COVID ward of the GVM Maria Pia Hospital in Turin, Italy (AFP)

Millions mark Easter under lockdowns

Rome, Italy - Millions of Christians around the world celebrated a second Easter under coronavirus restrictions on Sunday, as nations tried to control worrying COVID-19 surges.

Despite vaccine rollouts gathering pace in many countries, dramatic spikes in cases have forced the reimposition of deeply unpopular restrictions from Canada to Europe and South America.

Pope Francis was due to celebrate Easter morning mass with Italy under a strict lockdown over the weekend.

Ahead of his Easter Sunday mass, he delivered a message of hope and renewal.

"It is always possible to begin anew, because there is a new life that God can awaken in us in spite of all our failures," Francis said during Easter Vigil Mass on Saturday. "From the rubble of our hearts, God can create a work of art; from the ruined remnants of our humanity, God can prepare a new history."

Tighter curbs have come into effect in Belgium as well as in France, where authorities are scrambling to deal with a serious spike in cases that has overwhelmed hospitals in Paris.

Across the Atlantic, Canada crossed the threshold of one million coronavirus cases as it battled a new wave of infections, forcing several provinces to tighten

restrictions ahead of the Easter weekend.

And celebrations have been dampened in South America too, where Brazil is in the grip of a devastating outbreak likely fuelled by a more contagious variant.

The worrying situation in the continent forced Peru to go into an Easter lockdown, Bolivia to seal its frontier with Brazil, and Chile to close all borders.

Bollywood star tests positive

In the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, vaccinations are proceeding at a fast pace, with authorities giving at least one shot to 60 per cent of its population of less than a million.

Neighbouring India is battling a new surge, expanding its vaccination programme on Thursday to the 45-60 age group. The country is aiming to inoculate 300mn people by the end of July.

Experts have warned that infections in India are increasing at a faster pace compared with last year.

Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar on Sunday became the latest Indian celebrity to test positive, following cricket superstar Sachin Tendulkar last month.

Next-door Bangladesh will implement a lockdown from Monday as it grapples with a sharp rise in infections.

AFP

Truck driver makes tearful apology over Taiwan rail crash

Taipei, Taiwan - A railway maintenance worker whose truck rolled onto the tracks and sparked Taiwan's worst train disaster in recent decades made a tearful apology on Sunday, saying he would cooperate with investigators.

At least 50 people were killed and more than 200 were injured in Friday's crash, which sent a packed eight-car train hurtling into the sides of a narrow tunnel near the eastern coastal city of Hualien.

Investigators say the Taroko Express hit a truck on the line moments before it entered the tunnel.

The vehicle slipped down a steep embankment and prosecutors are working on whether the driver either failed to secure the parking brake, or the brake suffered a mechanical failure.

On Sunday, the driver Lee Yi-hsiang read out an emotional statement to a bank of media cameras.

"I am deeply remorseful and want to express my most sincere apologies," he said, his voice cracking with emotion.

"I will cooperate with the in-



Relatives of the victims who died on the derailed train, pray at the accident site on the mountains of Hualien in Taiwan on Saturday (AFP)

vestigation by police and prosecutors to take the responsibility I should take," he added.

Lee (49) was part of a team who regularly inspected Taiwan's mountainous eastern train line for landslides and other risks.

He was questioned over the weekend by prosecutors and released on bail by a court pending further enquiries.

As questions mounted over how packed the train was and why there were not fences on that section of the track, transport minister Lin Chia-lung offered his resignation on Sunday.

But it was not accepted by the government who said he should remain in place until the results of the investigation are known.

Survivors reported that the train driver was honking his horn shortly before the crash but did not - or was unable to - slow down before striking the truck.

The *United Daily News* newspaper ran a report based on initial analysis from footage of the train recorder that showed the truck was on the line before the train went into the tunnel and no slowdown before impact.

AFP

Maoist rebels kill 22 Indian security forces in deadliest ambush: Police

Bijapur, India - Twenty-two Indian police and paramilitary forces were killed and 30 others wounded in a gun battle with Maoist rebels in a central Indian state, police said on Sunday, in the deadliest ambush of its kind in four years.

Some 2,000 security personnel were on the hunt for a Maoist rebel leader in Bijapur district in Chhattisgarh state on Saturday when they were ambushed, a police officer told AFP.

"So far it is confirmed that 22 security personnel were killed," Chhattisgarh police's Additional Director General Ashok Juneja said of the almost three-hour battle in the Maoist rebel stronghold. "The search operation is still underway and the exact figure will be known... late Sunday evening."

The injured personnel were admitted to two government-run hospitals in Bijapur and Chhattisgarh's capital city Raipur.

More than a dozen others remained missing, he said, adding that an unknown number of Maoists were also killed in the encounter.

Juneja said the rebels looted



Medical workers bring an injured soldier on a stretcher in a hospital in Bijapur following a gunbattle with Maoist rebels, which left 22 security personnel killed and 30 others injured (AFP)

weapons, ammunition, uniforms and shoes from the security forces who were killed.

The death toll could rise further, another senior police officer in Bijapur district told AFP.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that the 'sacrifices of the brave martyrs will never be forgotten', while Home Minister Amit Shah wrote on Twitter that India would 'continue our fight against these enemies of peace & progress'.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel wrote on Facebook on Sunday that Shah had assured him of 'all the necessary help' from the national government against the militants.

The toll was the worst for Indian security forces battling the far-left guerillas since 2017, when 25 police commandos were killed in an attack.

Seventeen police from a commando patrol were killed in an attack by more than 300 armed

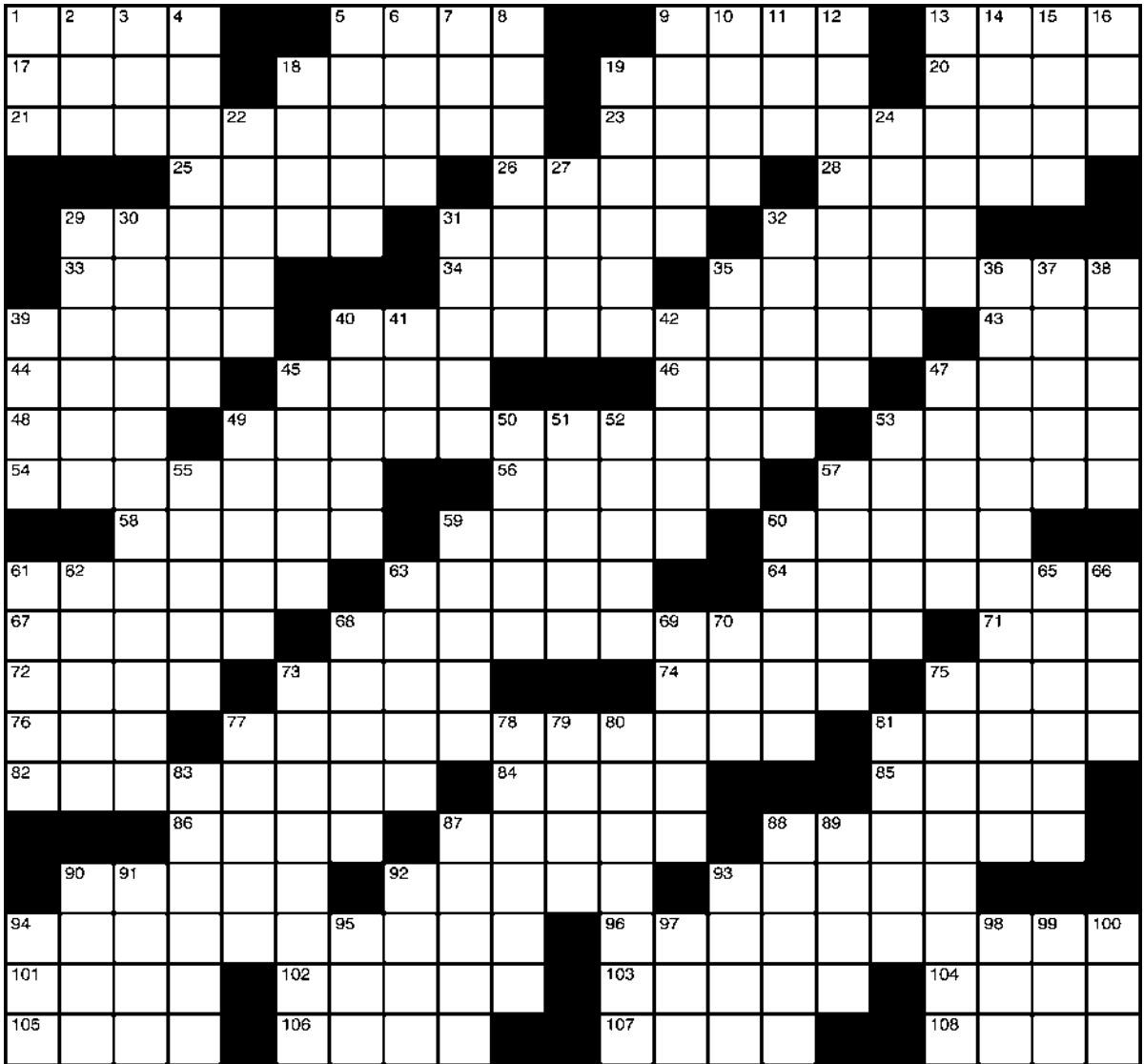
rebels in Chhattisgarh in March last year.

Sixteen commandos were also killed in the western state of Maharashtra in the lead-up to India's election in 2019, in a bomb attack that was blamed on the Maoists.

The militants - who say they are fighting for rural people and the poor - have battled government forces across eastern India since the 1960s.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



©2020 Tribune Content Agency, LLC All rights reserved

ACROSS

- 1 Level
5 First father
9 “___ iron”
13 Shucks!
17 Takes ___ view of:
frowns on
18 Small antelope
19 Philippine island
20 Cruising
21 In a rage
23 Peter Cottontail’s
pace
25 Provide
26 Drizzles
28 Eucharist plate
29 Concurs
31 Furnaces
32 “Le Roi d’Ys”
composer
33 Cut short
34 Give aid
35 With calmness
39 Plot
40 Plays a sidewalk
game
43 Forest female
44 Energy company
45 Lobster’s feeler
46 Toward the mouth
47 Noah’s numbers
48 Printing measures
49 Memorable

- Tinseltown
tattletale
53 Stop
54 Place in a new
setting
56 Irregularly edged
57 Art categories
58 News items
59 Sore
60 Tired of it all
61 Projects
63 Bric- ___
64 Namesakes of
Christie
67 Sin
68 Wheat bin
71 Cinnabar, for one
72 Arrow poison
73 Hold on!
74 Link situations
75 Dashboard calcs.
76 2-nation pen.
77 Restaurant
busybody
81 Edible fungi
82 Puts in office, old
style
84 Silkworm
85 Maple genus
86 Astronaut Sally
87 “Inferno” poet
88 Frolics
90 Type of fertilizer
92 Swine breed

- 93 New Zealand
native
94 Freight train units
96 ___ jump
101 At the summit of
102 Choice cut
103 French females
104 Family history
105 Summer shades
106 Wise one
107 Backtalk
108 Sutured
DOWN
1 Fan sound
2 Stir
3 Kind of code
4 Crowned heads
5 Hundred-eyed
monster
6 Thin coin
7 Arabian garment
8 Leaf veins
9 Great care
10 Diamond arbiters,
for short
11 Atlas feature
12 At the ready
13 Wright brothers
Ohio home
14 Arthur of the
courts
15 Night light
16 Space

- 18 Wave, in Dieppe
19 Japanese religion
22 Clumsy
24 Hoffmann
compositions
27 Novelist Waugh
29 Single-seeded fruit
30 Lawn jumpers
31 Greek letter
32 Operetta master
35 Rocky debris
36 American realist
painter: 1882–
1967
37 Relaxed
38 Affirmatives
39 “Moonstruck” star
40 The nether world
41 Dated
42 Stowe character
45 Annoying ones
47 Doctrine
49 Oil, in Orleans
50 Matisse
51 Church instrument
52 Veranda
53 Chest lining
55 Fast
57 Tokens of defiance
59 Diminish
60 Practical joker
61 “___ Ike”
62 Massenet opera

- 63 Seed coverings
65 Weapon suppliers
66 Conf.
68 Clark of Butler
role
69 Wine pitchers
70 Flaky dessert
73 Salad and hotel
75 Sales slips
77 19th cent. French
philosopher/historian
78 William Randolph
79 Yes ___?
80 Sinkers and
sliders
81 Romantic isle
83 Famed Austrian
singers
87 Painter-engraver
Albrecht
88 Law matters
89 NASA approvals
90 “I’ve ___ secret”
91 Knowledgeable
92 Glass artist
Chihuly
93 MN city
94 Porkpie
95 Co., in France
97 Palm leaf
98 Common verb
99 Fresh
100 Vixen’s home

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

There are going to be a lot of different emotions swarming around inside your heart, which could cause you so much confusion. But the problem isn’t your feelings; it’s your attitude. Instead of feeling so many feelings, move them up to your brain and start thinking them through. Take each emotion one at a time. Once you do, you’ll be able to find the cause and the cure.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You could get some honest feedback that is a little too honest for your ego. The hard truth could hit you pretty hard. But before you run off to lick your wounds, take a moment to realise how valuable this feedback is to you. It holds all the clues about what you need to do to make things better in your life or in your job, so be grateful for it, and get to making those revisions you need to make.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your days of feeling moody and slow are coming to an end! There is a huge rush of energy flooding into your body and brain, making today a wonderful day to prove your capabilities. If you’re going to be getting a lot of attention today, you’re sure to shine. Your quick thinking and witty quips will keep people engaged and thrilled to be in the presence of such greatness!



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You’ve been focused on your latest goal with such intensity that you’re in danger of overthinking things! Take a step back today and just let things simmer for a while. Put your energy into cultivating and strengthening your personal relationships. Make more social engagements. There is no clock to watch, so there’s no need to hurry. This is a day much better suited to laughter.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Give credit where credit is due. You have to communicate to other people how impressed you are with their behaviour or accomplishments. When you do, you set up a reciprocal relationship. This person will be the first to cheer you on when your time in the spotlight arrives. Giving to others feels good, but it’s also a great way to ensure that others give back to you.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There could be a lot of erratic energy buzzing around your circle of friends, but you can’t let it get in the way of your plans! Unless one of your friends asks you for help, don’t get involved. They know you care, and they know that you’ll be there if they need you. But they also want you to be happy and not change your life just because theirs is going through some upheaval.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

A recent health concern could turn out to be nothing, but that doesn’t mean you should go back to living your life the same way you always lived it. It’s important to focus on preventive measures. Getting more active is easier. Just start playing more of the sports you enjoy. Getting your emotional health in check is important. Once you start sharing your affection, your happiness can grow.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Whatever you do shouldn’t be all about money. Make sure you have the right motivation. It can be easy to assume that as long as you’re doing something that will make you richer it’s the right thing to do. This isn’t true, especially today. Do things because they’re the right thing to do, not because they’re profitable. If you only think about financial gain, you’ll ultimately be selling yourself short.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your positive attitude has always helped you in life. But right now it can enable you to satisfy your growing need to be socially useful. Being able to take things as they come and adapt to any kind of group situation you’re unaccustomed to, shows other people how to do the same. People look to you for clues. You should always try to set a good example for others.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today is a good day to initiate anything that you’ve been contemplating. The stars are shining favourably on new initiatives. And once all of the key elements are in place, you should start to feel the momentum take over, and you can reduce the amount of energy you put into this project. All you need to do is give things a big shove in the right direction and they’ll move right along!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You have an extra strong appreciation of beauty and could fall into its magnetic field a bit too easily. This is fine if your day is open and you’re looking for something fascinating to keep you occupied. But if you have a full plate, you’d better stay focused on what you’re doing. You relax and get lost in a pretty picture, great music, beautiful hiking trail, or the eyes of your sweetheart.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You should only start something new if you’ve got all the evidence you need to feel confident about it. Don’t get involved with stuff you’re unsure of, no matter how tantalising or exciting it might seem. Taking risks right now isn’t advised. Load up on the skepticism and apply it liberally to any ‘great’ new opportunity that comes your way.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

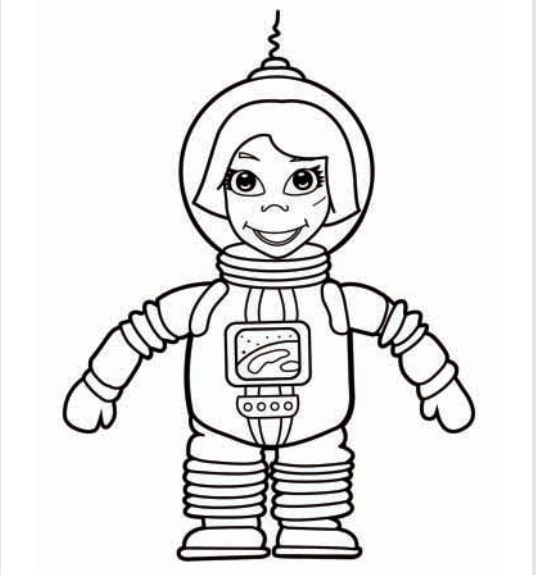
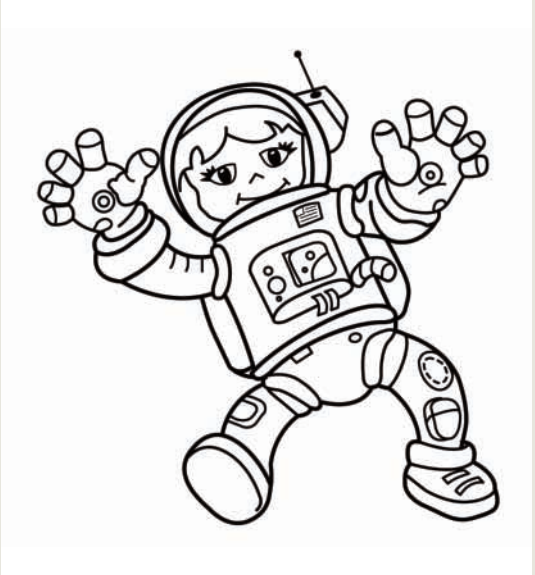
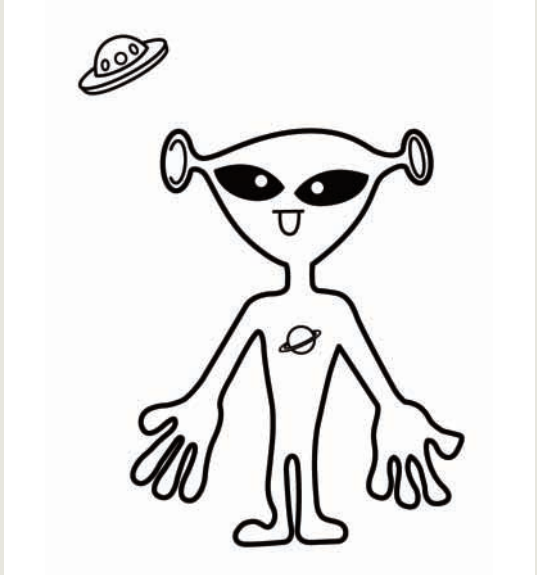
1. When, where was athletics introduced in the Olympics?
a. 1896 at Athens
b. 1900 at Paris
c. 1992 at Barcelona
d. 1995 at Athens

2. What was the purpose of establishing NATO?
a. To maintain and develop individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack
b. To defend economic and trade interests of the developing nations of the world
c. To provide collective defence and economic cooperation in South-east Asia
d. None of the above

3. What is the role of WTO (World Trade Organisation)?
a. To settle trade disputes between nations
b. To widen the principal of free trade to sectors such as services and agriculture
c. both (a) and (b)
d. None of the above

Answers: 1: a, 2: a, 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

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

BOGGLER

L	O	O	G
A	N	T	L
V	A	D	T
S	D	S	A

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (APRIL 04)

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

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



MEXICO TOURISTS HAVE WHALE OF A TIME AS PANDEMIC EASES

Guillermo Arias
Mulegé, Mexico

A giant barnacle-encrusted gray whale nuzzles her calf next to a small boat of excited tourists in the waters off the Baja California peninsula in northwestern Mexico.

The annual arrival of the migratory mammals, coinciding with a drop in coronavirus infections, has provided a much needed boost to the region's battered tourism industry.

For visitors, close encounters with one of the largest animals on the planet are a welcome respite from a pandemic that has killed more than 200,000 people in Mexico - the world's third highest toll.

"It's the best day of my life," said Wilbert, a Mexican tourist who travelled from the southern state of Oaxaca to a coastal wildlife sanctuary in Baja California.

"I had dreamed of whales before so I was really keen to come."

Each year, gray whales travel about 9,000km from their summer feeding grounds off Alaska to mate and give birth in the warmer waters off northwestern Mexico.

Similar in size to a humpback whale but recognisable from their mottled grey colour-



We kept the jobs and we hope to come out of it, if not with a profit, **then at least being able to pay off some debt**

LUIS ENRIQUE ACHOY



ing, they span up to around 15m and weigh as much as 30-40 tonnes.

'Pay off some debt'

Mexico is one of the few major tourist destinations not to have closed its borders during the pandemic or demanded a negative COVID-19 test result from visitors on arrival.

As a result, it was the third-most visited country in the world in 2020.

But it has still been a disastrous time for the tourism industry and whale-watching tour operators were among those hit by a suspension of non-essential activities for part of last year.

Thanks to a decrease in coronavirus infections, the government allowed the boats to go out 30 per cent full at the start of this January-April season, which was later increased to 50 per cent.

"We kept the jobs and we hope to come out of it, if not with a profit, then at least being able to pay off some debt," Luis Enrique Achoy, of whale watching company Malarimo Eco-Tours, told AFP.

He said that it had been a good season with around 1,500 to 1,700 whales spotted in the El Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve.

'Little by little'

Fisherman and tour guide Naman Dominguez was one of those affected by the pandemic re-

strictions.

"Right now, there's a maximum of six or seven people per boat due to social distancing," he said.

"But everything's getting better little by little. As the level of infections has been low, tourism has been increasing."

The gray whale's survival was once at risk after commercial whalers found them wintering along the Baja California peninsula in the mid-19th century.

But the population in the eastern North Pacific has since rebounded strongly and the gray whale is today ranked 'least concern' on the list of threatened species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The eastern North Pacific is home to the only definitely surviving breeding population, with an estimated size of up to around 27,000 gray whales, according to the IUCN.

And one of the best places to see them is in the lagoons off Baja California where they congregate in winter away from predators like killer whales, offering an unforgettable experience for visitors.

"We could touch them and see the mother with her calf. The two of them were playing for a good while with us," said Mexican tourist Claudia Gaitan.

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Expat lady with 12 years of experience, excellent communication skill, D/L seeks job in admin/hospitality. Contact 78346082

Indian Male, 24, B.E. Computer Science, Masters in GIS from U.K, seeking placement in GIS field. Having Oman Driving Licence. Contact 99738614

IT Manager with 15+ years of ex-

perience. Currently working with a reputed institution in Muscat for last 7 years. MCSA, CCNA, ITIL certified. Seeks suitable placement as IT Manager/System Admin. Contact 92514687 Email: hi.binu@gmail.com

TO ADVERTISE IN
MUSCAT DAILY
CLASSIFIEDS
CALL 99104346
OR E-MAIL
dailyclassifieds@
apexmedia.co.om

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals
at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684

Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease



SPECIAL
SUBSCRIPTION
OFFER

R024
1 YEAR
(Actual price: R052)

R015
6 MONTHS



Toll free no: 80076000
E-mail: customercare@apexmedia.co.om

an apex media | منشور PUBLICATION | القبة للإعلام

www.apexmedia.co.om

EDUCATION FURNITURE

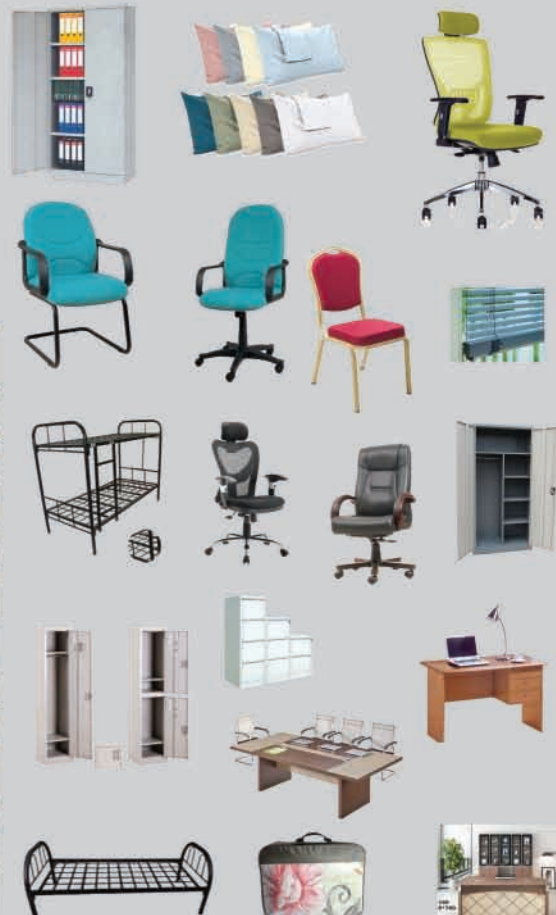


uniQue
CITY TRADING

OUTDOOR SHADES



LABOUR CAMP FURNITURE



Contact: 9611 5353 / 9611 5252 Email: mybusinessoman@gmail.com

PANDEMIC FUELS TRAVEL BOOM IN

VIRTUAL REALITY

By Rob Lever

Jem Jenkins Jones was stuck at home in Wales for much of the past year amid pandemic lockdowns but managed to fulfill a promise to her ten year old daughter to see the northern lights from Iceland and South Africa's game reserves - in virtual reality (VR).

"She was amazed," she said, calling the VR travel experiences 'a lifesaver for us'.

Strict lockdowns and travel limitations during the pandemic have sparked fresh interest in immersive virtual travel experiences, which have become more accessible and affordable with new apps and VR hardware.

Even those confined to their homes can take a virtual jaunt to Machu Picchu, the rainforests of Borneo or a road trip across the United States in a convertible.

Data on VR travel usage is limited but developers have seen surging interest since the pandemic hit.

"It has been skyrocketing," said Cezara Windrem, creator of the Alcove VR platform at AARP Innovation Labs. "We're getting more adoption every month."

Alcove enables users to visit exotic locales such as Australia's coral reef or the island of Malta, while adding a 'shared' experience which enables people to interact and even 'lead' a family member without the technical skills to navigate in a VR headset.

"We've heard from a lot of people who discovered Alcove and decided to buy a headset for their elderly family members," Windrem said.

This allows for shared travel even during

a lockdown and other kinds of experiences such as 'playing chess with someone on the other side of the planet'.

Travel substitute, complement

With the tourism industry largely obliterated by the coronavirus outbreak, virtual reality has emerged as both a substitute for real-world travel and a complement to help people plan their next trip.

App developers have created a range of travel experiences: touring the pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal, the savannahs of

Kenya or the Antarctic from a kayak. These come from commercial operators or organisations such as National Geographic or World Wildlife Fund.

Users can opt for hardware from Facebook's Oculus, Sony's PlayStation or the inexpensive Google Cardboard, among others. Some gear costs as little as US\$300 and many apps are free.

"I have travelled every week since the pandemic, from the comfort of my home," said Rafael Cortes, a San Antonio computer professional who uses Alcove and YouTube VR.

"I've been to London, the glass bridge in China, Angel Falls in Venezuela, the ancient city of Petra in Jordan, a helicopter tour of New York."

Amy Erdt lives in Portland, Oregon, but with VR, 'like to walk around my sister's

town in Wallingford, England, occasionally because I can't be there'.

Erdt, who administers a Facebook group of VR users, said there are 'some great travel experiences' in virtual reality, which can be remarkably realistic.

"I once sat at VR poker table at 1 am with a guy in Australia who was eating KFC (chicken), she said. "I could hear his KFC crunch. It was a trip."

Gaming and beyond

Virtual reality's most popular applications are in gaming and fantasy worlds, but travel is seen as a new growth vector.

"During the pandemic when everyone is socially isolated it may seem strange to isolate yourself further to transport yourself somewhere else but it does allow us to experience things we can't experience today," said Avi Greengart, analyst with the consultancy Techspontential.

Greengart said VR travel has some advantages but can't be compared with the real thing.

"With VR travel you're not getting the food unique to the area, you're missing a lot of the sensory experiences and serendipitous meetings with locals," he said.

On the other hand, 'you can browse a museum and have it all to yourself', which may be impossible in the physical world.

A report by research firm GlobalData shows that virtual and augmented reality had already been gaining momentum from travel operators and tourism boards before the pandemic to enable people to get a taste of a destination before going there.

GlobalData analyst Ralph Hollister said the pandemic may be giving the sector a lift that will endure even after the pandemic.

"Spending considerably more time indoors with an abundance of spare time, combined with an urge to travel, has meant that aspiring travellers have been turning to VR to fill a void that travel restrictions have left," Hollister said.

Hollister said he sees VR becoming an important part of the process of travelers viewing and selecting a travel destination.

"The widespread adoption of VR for this kind of purpose could be the next step for this technology and help it permanently move away from its 'gimmick' label," he said.

AFP



CYPRUS TO SWING DOORS OPEN TO MAIN TOURIST MARKETS

Cyprus is to open up to 16 countries previously not on its coronavirus safe list, welcoming tourists from its largest markets Britain, Russia and Israel, the Health Ministry announced on Monday.

From April 1, they will not need special permission or to quarantine.

Cyprus has introduced a colour-coded system for COVID-19 risk-assessed countries.

From 1 April, Cyprus is opening

its doors to 16 countries including the UK, Russia, Israel, the UAE, Ukraine, Lebanon, Egypt, Belarus, Serbia, the US and Qatar.

Travellers from these countries will be allowed entry if they carry a negative coronavirus test, no older than 72 hours, and take another test upon arrival.

From May 1, Cyprus will allow in COVID-19 vaccinated British tourists without any restrictions.

All tourists will still have to com-



ply with health protocols such as mandatory mask-wearing and social distancing.

Britain is the island's largest tourism market, accounting for a third of nearly four million arrivals in 2019, while nearby Israel is its third-biggest source.

The eastern Mediterranean island's key tourism industry has been devastated by the pandemic and travel curbs, with arrivals slumping by more than 80 per cent

last year. Russia, the second-largest tourist source, has been off its safe travel list since the pandemic reached its shores in March 2020.

Tourism makes up around 15 per cent of Cypriot GDP, with earnings plunging 85 per cent in 2020.

The island has implemented two national lockdowns but had a milder outbreak than many other European Union countries. Cyprus has recorded about 250 coronavirus deaths and 45,000 infections.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Real Sociedad's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the 2020 Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) final against Athletic Bilbao in Seville on Saturday night (AFP)

Sociedad end 34-year wait for Copa del Rey

Madrid, Spain - Mikel Oyarzabal scored the penalty that won Real Sociedad the delayed 2020 Copa del Rey on Saturday before dedicating their victory to the fans unable to attend an historic final against Basque rivals Athletic Bilbao.

Oyarzabal, La Real's captain who joined their youth academy aged 14, proved the difference in a 1-0 win in Seville, where the biggest ever game between these two famous clubs was played in an empty stadium.

"It's an incredible day," said a tearful Oyarzabal afterwards.

"You remember everybody, all the people who would have loved to be here, people who have left us. This is for everyone, my family, my friends. It means everything."

Oyarzabal's strike secures Real Sociedad their first Copa del Rey triumph in 34 years while at the same denying a 24th success for Athletic Bilbao, who must now try to recover in time for a second attempt in two weeks' time.

Athletic have also reached the final of this season's competition, which will be played on the same



Sociedad's Mikel Oyarzabal (R) vies with Bilbao's Alex Berenguer on Saturday

pitch at La Cartuja on April 17, with Barcelona and Lionel Messi their opponents next time around.

"I'm not disappointed, I'm sad," said coach Marcelino Garcia Toral. "The players are gutted but they have to bounce back."

For Real Sociedad, this was a one-off chance and they took it, edging a final that was tight, tense and without clear openings, but one in which the better team lifted the trophy at the finish.

Eighteen of the 22 players that

started were Basque, with many of them beginning in the academies of the club's they now represent, including Oyarzabal, who was born in Gipuzkoa and joined Real Sociedad's 'Zubieta' as a teenager.

The final had been put off as long as possible in the hope fans might be able to attend, but instead it was staged almost 1,000km south in Seville, where around 350 guests and journalists were allowed in, but the stands were otherwise left empty.

Trouble in Bilbao

Excitement spilled over in Bilbao, where police had attended to disturbances earlier in the evening. Large crowds of Athletic fans gathered near the team's San Mames stadium, with some throwing bottles and flares, while many ignored rules regarding social distancing.

"Some madmen causing problems before the final," wrote Bilbao mayor Juan Mari Aburto. "You do not represent the values of our Athletic or our city. Please, a little sanity and let us enjoy ourselves."

There was little about La Cartuja that felt like home for these two teams, except perhaps the weather, given the first 20 minutes was played in torrential rain.

Neither side really settled in a frantic first half, full of rushed passes and nervy touches, but Real Sociedad were the more dominant in possession, even if Athletic went closest to scoring.

Raul Garcia flashed wide early on from an acute angle before Inigo Martinez fired off a shot from distance, with La Real goalkeeper Alex Remiro doing

well to tip the ball over.

The second half was more concentrated as both teams tightened up and two penalty decisions in quick succession put Athletic on the back foot.

Inigo was at the centre of both, first blocking an Oyarzabal cross with his arm, only for VAR to spare the defender, with referee Javier Estrada deciding he was just outside the box.

But there was no disputing the second, as Inigo this time prevented Portu from finishing off a superb ball through by Mikel Merino, the only consolation that his initial red card was reduced to a yellow.

Oyarzabal exhaled and struck the penalty sweetly into the corner.

There were eight minutes added on for injury time but Athletic never looked like finding an equaliser. They will try again in two weeks.

OTHER RESULTS

SPANISH LEAGUE:
Saturday: Granada 0 Villarreal 3, Osasuna 0 Getafe 0.
Sunday: Alaves 1 Celta Vigo 3.
AFP

Spurs held; Saints boost survival bid

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Tottenham's bid for a top-four finish in the English Premier League suffered a setback as Joe Willock's late strike rescued a 2-2 draw for lowly Newcastle, while Southampton took a huge step towards survival with a 3-2 victory over fellow strugglers Burnley on Sunday.

Jose Mourinho's side were just five minutes away from moving into fourth place when Willock equalised at St James' Park. Joelinton had put Newcastle ahead, but Harry Kane struck twice in four minutes before the break. Tottenham now sit in fifth place, two points behind fourth-placed Chelsea with eight games left.

Newcastle's early pressure was rewarded, with an helping hand from Tottenham's Japhet Tanganga, in the 28th minute.

Tanganga gifted possession to Matt Ritchie with a wayward pass and the Tottenham defender's teammates were slow to react as Sean Longstaff found the unmarked Joelinton, who slotted home from close range.

The much-maligned striker's first goal since November proved a false dawn as Newcastle were ahead for just 90 seconds before Kane punished the hosts' woeful defending. Four minutes later, Kane bagged his 29th club goal of the season in ruthless style as he raced onto Tanguy Ndombele's inch-perfect pass and fired into the far corner.

Kane's 162nd Premier League goal took him level with Jermain Defoe in eighth place in the competition's all-time leading scorers chart.

Saints alive

At St Mary's, Southampton moved ten points clear of the relegation zone after a dramatic fightback. Chris Wood's 12th-minute penalty put Burnley ahead after Kyle Walker-Peters' challenge on Erik Pieters. Matej Vydra doubled the visitors' lead with a finish in the 28th minute.

But Ralph Hasenhuttl's side hit back as Stuart Armstrong and Danny Ings scored before half-time. Saints midfielder Nathan Redmond bagged the 66th-minute winner.

City 17 points clear

Earlier on Saturday Manchester City moved closer to the Premier League title as the runaway leaders won 2-0 at Leicester.

Liverpool took full advantage of Chelsea's shock collapse to close within two points of the top four with a 3-0 win at Arsenal.

City are 17 points clear of second-placed Manchester United after a remarkable 15th successive away win in all competitions.

Goals from Benjamin Mendy and Gabriel Jesus killed off third-placed Leicester in the second half at the King Power.

"It is a big step to winning the Premier League," Guardiola said.

Jurgen Klopp's Reds looked more like their old selves and got their reward thanks to three goals in 18 second-half minutes. Substitute Diogo Jota powered home Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross to break the deadlock before Mohamed Salah prodded the ball between the legs of Bernd Leno. Jota rounded off the scoring with his sixth goal in four games for club and country.

AFP



Newcastle's Joe Willock (C) scores their second goal against Tottenham Hotspur at St James' Park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, on Sunday (AFP)



Celtic's James Forrest (left) in action against Falkirk on Saturday

Celtic cruise into Scottish Cup last-16

Glasgow, UK - Celtic ignored mounting speculation over the vacant managerial post at Parkhead to begin their defence of the Scottish Cup with a 3-0 win over League One Falkirk on Saturday. The Glasgow giants have reportedly been in talks with former Bournemouth boss Eddie Howe. In the meantime, interim boss John Kennedy is in charge till the end of the season. The Hoops had to wait until the 56th minute to take the lead through a deflected drive from

James Forrest, who was making his first start in six months.

Ryan Christie doubled Celtic's lead two minutes later and substitute Mohamed Elyounoussi added a third in the 79th minute to put a sheen on the scoreline.

There was a lack of cup upsets in the other third round ties as top-flight Aberdeen, St Johnstone, Motherwell, Dundee United and Kilmarnock all overcame lower league opposition to reach the fourth round.

AFP

Lukaku pulls Inter eight points clear as Juve held

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Romelu Lukaku fired Inter Milan eight points clear at the top of Serie A on Saturday with the only goal in a 1-0 win at Bologna as title rivals Juventus and AC Milan were both held.

"Winning is a big step forward for us," said coach Antonio Conte after second-placed Milan's challenge faltered in a 1-1 draw with ten-man Sampdoria while champions Juventus were held 2-2 at city rivals Torino.

Conte's side stretched their winning run to nine league games as they chase a first 'Scudetto' since 2010, having finished runners-up last season.

"Last year we nearly got there. The closer we get to the finish line, every victory becomes more important," added the former Juventus and Chelsea manager.

Lukaku got his head to an Alessandro Bastoni cross after half an hour and bundled the ball over the line for his 20th league goal this season after Bologna's young goalkeeper Federico



Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku (left) shoots past a Bologna player to score during their match on Saturday (AFP)

Ravaglia had pushed out the initial strike. Lautaro Martinez missed a chance for a second five minutes after the break when he rattled the post.

Inter next play Sassuolo on Wednesday, a match postponed from before the international

break because of a COVID-19 outbreak in the Milan club.

In Turin, Cristiano Ronaldo struck in the 79th minute but couldn't stop Juve dropping further points in their bid for a tenth consecutive league title. Andrea Pirlo's side slip to fourth,

12 points behind Inter, and four points back from Milan, with a game in hand. Ronaldo missed two chances before the Serie A top scorer finally got his 24th league goal this season following a VAR review when he nodded home Chiellini's cross.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Bayern eye title after Leipzig victory

Berlin, Germany - RB Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann all but conceded the Bundesliga title on Saturday after his side were beaten 1-0 by leaders Bayern Munich thanks to a first-half goal from Leon Goretzka, who smashed the ball into the top corner shortly before the break.

Bayern opened up a seven-point lead at the top of the table over second-place Leipzig with just seven games to go. Leipzig will now need a near miracle if they are to stop Bayern winning a 30th Bundesliga title in May, yet match-winner Goretzka remained cautious. "There are still 21 points on offer this season, so this was a big step towards the title, but not a decisive one," he said.

OTHER RESULTS

Saturday: Augsburg 2 Hoffenheim 1, Borussia Moenchengladbach 2 Freiburg 1.
Sunday: Stuttgart 1 Werder Bremen 0.
AFP

Leukaemia survivor Ikee defies odds with Olympic berth

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese swimmer Rikako Ikee said she 'didn't know what had just happened' after qualifying for the Tokyo Olympics medley relay on Sunday, just two years after being diagnosed with leukaemia.

Ikee, who only resumed training in March last year after being hospitalised for around ten months, won the 100m butterfly race at Japan's Olympic trials in Tokyo in a time of 57.77 seconds. That was not enough to earn her an individual spot at the coronavirus-delayed Tokyo Games, but it did make her eligible for Japan's relay

team, capping an incredible comeback for the 20 year old.

"I was really happy but also really surprised," said Ikee, who was in floods of tears as she addressed the crowd after the race. "I didn't know what had just happened. It was a feeling I had never experienced before."

Ikee had downplayed her chances of appearing at the Tokyo Games after resuming racing in August last year, claiming she was focused on Paris in 2024 instead.

But she reached her goal ahead of schedule, admitting after the race that she 'thought it would be much later that I

would be able to start winning'.

"I felt I was swimming pretty well in my first qualifying race yesterday, but then in the semi-finals I had the tiredness of swimming in a second race," she said.

"I could hardly move in the second half of the semifinal. Today was just a one-off, so I wasn't so worried about that."

Ikee missed a place in the Olympic 100m butterfly competition after failing to meet the 57.10s qualifying time.

But she will have other chances to clinch an individual spot this week at the Japanese trials, and is set to appear in the



50m and 100m freestyle. "I didn't think I had a chance in the butterfly at all," she said. "I thought if I was to get in, it might

be the 100m freestyle relay. I thought if it wasn't to be, it wasn't to be. I thought if I did get in, it would be good experience to

take to the next Olympics."

Ikee was named MVP of the 2018 Asian Games after claiming six golds and two silvers.

She won the 50m butterfly at the Tokyo Open in February to claim her first victory since she started her comeback.

"I thought it would be a while before I was able to compete in the 100m butterfly, but I was looking at it like, even if I did lose this year, I wouldn't lose next year," said Ikee, who finished 0.41 seconds ahead of Suzuka Hasegawa.

Elsewhere at the Japanese trials, Waka Kobori and Miyu

Namba both clinched a spot in the Olympic women's 400m freestyle competition after meeting the qualifying standard of 4:07.10. Kobori won the race in 4:06.34, ahead of Namba in 4:06.36.

Nineteen-year-old phenom Shoma Sato won the men's 100m breaststroke in a time of 59.30, but failed to meet the qualifying time of 59.21. His time made him eligible for a spot on Japan's medley relay team.

Sato recorded a 200m breaststroke time of 2:06.78 earlier this year - the fourth-fastest in history.

AFP



Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman plays a shot during his knock of 193 against South Africa in Johannesburg on Sunday (AFP)

Zaman's stunning 193 goes in vain

SOUTH AFRICA VS PAKISTAN SECOND ODI

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa survived an astonishing onslaught from Fakhar Zaman to secure a series-leveling 17-run win against Pakistan in Johannesburg on Sunday.

Zaman's 155-ball 193 was heroic, a one-man show in the truest sense of the word because no other Pakistani managed more than 31 in a chase of 342. It is the highest score in a chase in ODI cricket history, and the second highest ever in a losing cause. Zaman also surpassed Herchelle Gibbs' 175 to record the highest individual score at this venue.

After several stutters, South Africa did manage to get over the line, thanks to a commanding batting performance spearheaded by the top order. Captain Temba Bavuma top-scored with 92, while Quinton de Kock, Rassie van der Dussen and David Miller each brought up half-centuries, allowing South Africa to post 341 in the face of a listless bowling effort from the visitors.

Pakistan were never really in the chase right until the final 15 overs; once Zaman brought up his first ODI hundred in two years, he would run riot.

Despite finishing with the highest score by a Pakistani in ODI cricket in South Africa, it always looked like an unassailable task, and in truth, proved so by some distance in the end.

Pakistan have never chased a total of this magnitude in ODI cricket, and a daunting challenge became even tougher when opener Imam-ul-Haq fell in the second over.

For a brief while, Pakistan looked to have course-corrected with a 63-run partnership that exuded easy elegance from the bats of both Azam and Zaman. But Pakistan's bane on Friday, Anrich Nortje, exploiting a vulnerability against the short ball that brought about the seismic wicket of Azam in his first over. Two balls later, he would dismiss Mohammad Rizwan.

It was an uncharacteristic innings through the middle from Zaman, as he reined in his belligerent instincts while the middle order crumbled around him. Danish Aziz was no match for Nortje's short lengths, while Shadab Khan and Asif Ali had little to contribute. Around that time, Zaman decided to go hell for leather once more, bringing up a 70-ball half-century with a colossal six over square leg.

That point on, the shackles were off, and even as wickets fell and the asking rate rose, runs off Zaman's bat came freely as he brought up his hundred, and farmed the strike while plundering South Africa's bowlers, particularly the spinner Tabraiz Shamsi. Zaman singled him out and at one point struck five sixes in six balls off the spinner.

The central problem at this point for Pakistan was there were three No 11s at the other end, with Shaheen Afridi, and then Haris Rauf, unable to turn the strike over. Zaman was forced to take on ever increasing responsibility, turning down singles in a contest where every run was priceless. Thirteen runs off the 48th over brought the equation down to 38 off 12, and individual records were tumbling.

By now, Zaman had overtaken Gibbs' 175 in that famous chase of 434, 15 years ago, posting the highest individual score at the Wanderers. In the present, a disciplined penultimate over from Andile Phehlukwayo only allowed seven. A direct hit from long off from the first ball of the final over finally put an end to Zaman's resistance, and South Africa were home and dry at last.

Earlier, Aiden Markram set

the tone with a 34-ball 39. Bavuma and the irrepressible Rassie van der Dussen then made key contributions before David Miller 27-ball 50 led the hosts to formidable 341.

Cricinfo

SCOREBOARD		
SOUTH AFRICA		
Q de Kock	b Rauf	80
A Markram	c Ali b Ashraf	39
T Bavuma	c Azam b Rauf	92
R van der Dussen	c Ashraf b Hasnain	60
D Miller	not out	50
H Klaasen	c Rauf b S Afridi	11
A Phehlukwayo	c Ashraf b Rauf	3
K Rabada	not out	1
Extras:	(lb 1, nb 1, w 3)	5
TOTAL:	341 for six in 50 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-55, 2-169, 3-270, 4-306, 5-317, 6-322		
Bowling: S Afridi 10-1-75-1, M Hasnain 10-0-74-1, F Ashraf 9-0-62-1, H Rauf 10-0-54-3, S Khan 9-0-64-0, D Aziz 2-0-11-0		
PAKISTAN		
Imam-ul-Haq	c Markram b Ngidi	5
F Zaman	run out	193
B Azam	c Bavuma b Nortje	31
M Rizwan	c Klaasen b Nortje	0
D Aziz	c de Kock b Nortje	9
S Khan	lbw b Shamsi	13
A Ali	c Markram b Phehlukwayo	19
F Ashraf	c de Kock b Phehlukwayo	11
S Afridi	c & b Rabada	5
H Rauf	not out	1
M Hasnain	not out	12
Extras:	(b 1, lb 8, nb 1, w 15)	25
TOTAL:	324 for nine in 50 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-70, 3-71, 4-85, 5-120, 6-186, 7-205, 8-273, 9-312		
Bowling: K Rabada 10-2-43-1, L Ngidi 9-0-66-1, A Phehlukwayo 10-0-67-2, A Nortje 10-1-63-3, T Shamsi 7-0-60-1, A Markram 4-0-16-0		

Martin takes shock Doha pole

Doha, Qatar - Spanish rookie Jorge Martin, riding for Ducati-Pramac, claimed a shock pole position for the Doha MotoGP on Saturday in just his second appearance in the sport's elite class but wrote off his chances of winning Sunday's race.

Martin is joined on the front row by teammate Johann Zarco of France and Spain's Maverick Vinales, the Yamaha rider who won the season opener at the same Losail track last weekend.

"My last lap was on the limit," said the 23 year old.

"Every day I improve... I've been here with the team for one month and I already feel at home.

He added: "It's incredible. I didn't expect to be on pole, rather fourth or fifth.

"Tomorrow will be a new day to learn. It will not be my day to win. A top six place will be incredible."

The paddock lined up to congratulate Martin who high-fived his team as he rode past, setting the stage for an unpredictable second race of the season on Sunday night.

As a Moto 3 stalwart, and champion in 2018, Martin was on pole 19 times in 2017 and 2018.



Ducati-Praman rider Jorge Martin in action during the qualifying session in Qatar on Saturday (AFP)

"I'm pretty happy. Below 1 minute 53 was a pretty good target for the first row," said second-placed Zarco.

"When I saw that Martin was on pole I was pretty surprised and also happy. It's going too perfectly for us at Pramac."

'Very difficult'

Third-placed Vinales said, "The front row is very difficult, for tomorrow I have nothing planned. I'll go out and try to make a fast

race, we will see".

Australia's Jack Miller, on a factory Ducati, was fifth ahead of Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha and Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia who had been on pole last week.

Italy's Franco Morbidelli, of Yamaha-SRT, who struggled in 18th place at the Qatar MotoGP last Sunday, was tenth in qualifying on Saturday.

There was disappointment for seven-time MotoGP champion Valentino Rossi as the 42 year

old Italian qualified in 21st place on the other Yamaha-SRT, the second slowest time on the grid.

Six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez is still out with a fractured arm after falling last summer.

The renewed season is taking place amid strict coronavirus prevention measures that have included a bio bubble for participants and the offer of vaccines to anyone in the paddock.

AFP

BEST

AIR CONDITIONERS

BEST COOLING

BEST ENERGY EFFICIENCY!

ROTARY SERIES - BSTS18CNE2 | BSTS24CNE2

RECIPROCATING SERIES
BSTS18GPE2 | BSTS24GPE2 | BSTS30GPE2

R-410A
REFRIGERANT

4 way swing
Better Air Flow

6 in 1 Filter
Healthy Air

Low Noise
Peaceful Sleep

Gold Fin
Anti Rust

HEAVY DUTY
COMPRESSOR

Genetco
GENERAL ELECTRIC & TRADING CO. LLC

50
YEARS OF SUCCESS

MUSCAT
97693496, 96742452
Available at
Major Hypermarkets & Electronics Retailers

SALALAH
79011363

C.R. No. 1009680

SENSATIONAL SUNDAY

Oman's Hadi and Kindi bounce back from overnight's tenth to top spot in 49er class

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2021 MUSSANAH OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

It was a sensational Sunday for Oman's top-ranked pair of Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi in the 49er class at the 2021 Mussanah Open Championship, an Olympic qualifier for Asia and Africa, at the Millennium Resort Mussanah.

A remarkable comeback by the sultanate's Olympic hopefuls saw the duo erase the disappointment of the opening day as they rose to the top of the rankings on day two in their class after the conclusion of three more races on Sunday, six in total, in good conditions with wind between 15-16 knots throughout the day.

Hadi and Kindi were nearly unstoppable in the three races held on Sunday as they won two and came a close second in the other race to catapult themselves from overnight's tenth spot to the top.

Sunday's performance by Hadi and Kindi raised fresh hopes of Oman sports fraternity as they look forward to their continued excellence over the next four days as they chase history - a maiden Olympic berth for Oman sailors.

It was a display of indomitable spirit and grit from Hadi and Kindi as they bounced back in style. On the opening day, Hadi and Kindi had finished 11th, sixth and eighth respectively in the three races but the duo remained positive.

Despite the hiccups on Saturday, the pair started the new day with a stunner as they



Oman's 49er team of Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi in action during the second day of the Mussanah Open Championship at the Millennium Resort Mussanah, on Sunday

won the opening race after overcoming the challenge from Thailand's Don Whitcraft and Dylan Whitcraft.

However, in the next race, Hong Kong's Akira Sakai and Russel Williams Aylsworth, who were 11th in the opener edged past Hadi and Kindi for a win while Whitcraft duo came third.

In the day's final race, Hadi and Kindi bounced back to clinch the top honours to claim the lead

Our goal is to remain competitive until the last second of the last race on the final day

MUSAB AL HADI

ahead of third day's action.

With one race discarded from the six held so far, Hadi and Kindi have a nett score of 18 from a total of 29 points after two days of racing.

Hashim al Rashdi, Oman 49ers' team coach, said, "Today was a very good day after a difficult opening day. The performance by Hadi and Kindi puts them back in contention. But these are still early days."

Speaking after a successful day on his home waters Hadi, the team helmsman, said, "Our goal is to remain competitive until the last second of the last race on the last day. It will be test of mental strength and tough for all teams



Sailors competing in the Laser Standard Class in Mussanah on Sunday

right to the end. With a lot of racing still to take place, we must stay calm and safe, on and off the water."

Overnight pair of Hong Wei and Chai Xiang from China is close second with a nett score of 20. Wei and Xiang had a fifth, 12th and eighth to their credit on Sunday but their day one display

kept them ahead of the Indian duo of KC Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar. The Indian team is third, also with nett 20, as they recorded fourth, fifth and a third rank on day two. South Africa's Benjamin Daniel and Alex Burger are fourth with nett 24.

Oman's other pair in fray, Ahmed al Hasani and Abdul

Rahman al Mashari, had another disappointing day as they finished sixth, eighth and 11th to be placed overall 12th (nett 43) among the 14 teams.

Though there is a long way to go before the Olympic qualifiers are spotted on Thursday, the way Hadi and Kindi fought back on Sunday has renewed Oman's hopes for maiden Olympic sailing qualification.

Windsurfers disappoint

Meanwhile, Oman's trio of windsurfers, who were late entrants to the competition, Abdulmajeed al Hadrami, Faisal al Qutaiti and Al Mukhtar al Mujaini, had another disappointing day as they finished in the bottom rung among the 13 participants after three more races on Sunday.

Thailand's Natthapong Phonopparat continued to lead with a nett score of five while The Philippines' Yancy Kaibigan

moved to second spot from overnight third with a nett score of 11 and another Filipino sailor, Geylord Coveta is third with nett 15. Hadrami is overall 11th with nett 37 and is followed by Qutaiti (39 nett) and Mujaini (48 nett).

In the women's competition, Charizanne Napa of the Philippines maintained her excellent form from day one to stay top of the rankings ahead of Amanda Ng Ling Kai from Singapore and Ishwariya Ganesh of India.

The Mussanah Open Championship is also serving as an Olympic qualifier for Laser, Laser Radial and 49erFX classes for men and women.

The 49er FX class saw China's Ye Jin and Chen Shasha remain in first position with the team of Molly Highfield and Sandy Wing Chi Choi from Hong Kong second and the Thai pair of Kamonchanok Klahan and Nichapa Waiwai at third spot.

The Laser Standard class has seen four different round winners so far as Singapore's Ryan Lo Jun Han leads Keerati Bualong of Thailand and India's Vishnu Saravanan after Sunday's races.

Laser Radial class has been dominated by the Indian sailors, who occupy three of the top four spots. Nethra Kumaran leads Dutch sailor Emma Savelon with Indian teammates Ramya Saravanan and Harshita Tomar in third and fourth respectively.

Tomasz Januszewski, chief national coach of Indian sailing contingent, said, "Our team is improving day by day, and I am very proud of the sailors. We have prepared well for this event; individually, as a team, and some members were sailing with a larger fleet in Mumbai before coming to Oman.

"We have spent the time between events preparing as best we can and we are showing a good sailing performance so far. We have definitely improved since last year and I am confident that we have not finished showing our ability on the water."

A total of 102 sailors from 17 countries are participating in different classes in a bid to secure their place at Tokyo Games as the Mussanah Open Championship is the final qualification event.

The regatta was allocated Olympic qualification status by World Sailing to substitute for postponed events throughout 2020 and allow sailors the opportunity to confirm their spot in a safe and competitive environment.

While the top two finishers each in the two Laser classes - Laser Standard (men) and Laser Radial (women) - will qualify for the Olympic Games, the other four classes will send only the respective overall winners.

So far, 312 athletes from 59 nations have qualified for the Olympic Games sailing events, which are scheduled to be held in Enoshima Yacht Harbour from July 25-August 4.

@ashokmuscat

