



MONDAY, 01 FEBRUARY 2021
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DHOFAR'S WINNING STREAK ENDS
GO TO **PAGE 15 SPORTS**

HM CONFERS AL NU'MAN ORDER ON OUTGOING SAUDI ENVOY



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred the Al Nu'man Order (First Class) on Eid Mohammed al Thaqafi, outgoing ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the sultanate, in appreciation of his efforts to strengthen relations between the two brotherly countries. The medal was handed over by Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received Thaqafi in his office on Sunday (ONA)

Four cases of new COVID-19 strain registered in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Four cases of infection with the new strain of COVID-19 have so far been reported in Oman, according to H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health.

About COVID-19 vaccines, he informed that the next batch of Pfizer shots will be delivered mid-February. "The ministry made great efforts in coordination with international organisations and succeeded in booking 1mn doses of COVID-19 vaccine, which will arrive gradually."

In an interview with Oman TV following the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines from India, H E Sa'eedi said, "We welcome the government of India's gesture to gift 100,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and commend the cooperation between the two

Land borders closed till Feb 8

Muscat - The Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has decided to keep the sultanate's land borders closed for one more week till 6pm of Monday, February 8. This comes as per recommendations of the specialised technical team which is following up on the spread of the new strain of virus causing COVID-19.

countries."

He lauded India's leading role in the global fight against COVID-19 and the support that India has extended to its friends and partners in their efforts.

The minister clarified that it is not possible for those who received the first dose of Pfizer vaccine to take the AstraZeneca vaccine as booster dose, and that the initial evidences show the new strain of the coronavirus responds to vaccines manufactured against COVID-19.

H E Sa'eedi emphasised that not all people can be vaccinated so "we must adhere to health measures such as social distancing and wearing mask".

598 new cases

The Ministry of Health has registered 598 new COVID-19 cases and two deaths in Oman in three days. In the same period, 282 recoveries were reported.

The total number of cases in the country has now touched 134,326, including 126,854 recoveries and 1,529 deaths.

See also [Page 02](#)

Oman Investment Authority transfers its assets to Omran

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced the restructuring of its tourism and real-estate investments in the sultanate by transferring them to the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), now a subsidiary of OIA. This includes moving projects and shares in

some companies to Omran, allowing the group to continue its focused role as the government's executive arm in developing the tourism sector and adding further momentum to its contribution to the economic diversification drive.

The restructuring saw the transfer of the integrated Yeti Sustainable Tourism City project, a 1.5mn sqm waterfront tourism

The move will allow Omran to continue its focused role in developing the tourism sector and adding further momentum to its contribution to the economic diversification drive

complex, and the five-star Alila Hinu Bay Hotel in Mirbat, Dhofar, with its 112 room, integrated leisure facilities and free-hold vil-

las. Additionally, the Naseem Hotel in Jebel Akhdar, Dakhliyah, with its chalets and adventure park, has also been transferred to

Omran's hospitality arm.

Moreover, OIA's shares in ASAAS Company, a joint-stock company for development and investment, were transferred to Omran Group in order to generate sustainable economic revenue. As part of this, the integrated multi-purpose and free-hold tourism complex Hay al Sharq will also be under Omran.

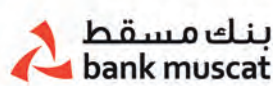
This step aims to channel

tourist and real-estate investments under one efficient management in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the Tenth Five-Year Plan. Tourism has been identified in the plan as a key sector to achieve economic diversification in the sultanate, promote growth, increase non-oil revenues, and attract direct foreign investments.

In addition, this initiative aligns

with the Rawabet programme that was launched by OIA last September to establish the general framework for the governance of state-owned enterprises. Additionally, the programme will establish a common ground for the policies and systems of these companies in line with the overall strategic policies of the authority.

Continued on [Page 02](#)



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India gifts 100,000 doses of vaccine

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Government of India's gift of 100,000 made-in-India AstraZeneca vaccines was handed over by Ambassador Munu Mahawar to Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Oman's Minister of Health, at a ceremony held in the Ministry of Health on Sunday.

Dr Sa'eedi welcomed India's gesture to gift 100,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

He clarified that the vaccine will provide protection for everyone, and that its effectiveness, safety and results are laboratory-confirmed. An interval of at least four weeks between the first and second doses is important when taking the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Mahawar highlighted the strong cooperation between the two countries in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. "India has always shouldered global responsibility at times of crisis and is a dependable and reliable friend of Oman," he said, and thanked His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Government of Oman for taking good care of Indian nationals during the pandemic.

Prior to the delivery of the vac-



India has always shouldered global responsibility at times of crisis and is a dependable and reliable friend of Oman

MUNU MAHAWAR

commitment that India's vaccine production and delivery capacity would be used to help all humanity in fighting this crisis. India has already supplied COVID-19 vaccines to a number of countries.

The delivery of vaccines is another landmark in the strong cooperation between the two countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the resilience of India-Oman strategic partnership, as close engagement and cooperation have continued in addressing the urgent matters related to the pandemic.

India looks forward to continuing its work closely with the leadership and the Government of Oman to further strengthen the strategic partnership.

Over 99,000 register for electricity subsidy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 99,262 people have registered for electricity subsidy under the National Subsidy System (NSS).

Under the electricity and water subsidy system, eligible Omanis, who hold a valid electricity account, get subsidy over the use of the services.

Those eligible for the subsidy include those whose family income is less than RO500 regardless of the number of family members; RO750 or less for a family of five or more members; RO1,000 or less for a family of seven or more members; and less than RO1,250 for a family of nine members or more.

But if the family income is more than RO1,250, the family is not covered by the support, regardless of the number of family members.

The NSS provides the eligible people with a protective cover against the increase in related regular expenditure streams such as fuel, electricity and water.

Regulations issued for Competition Protection, Monopoly Prevention Law

Muscat - In accordance with the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law issued by the Royal Decree No 67/2014, H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, has issued the Ministerial Decision No 18/2020 promulgating the executive regulations of the law.

The Article 1 of the decision stipulates that the provisions shall have effect in relation to the executive regulation of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law, while the Article 2 stipulates that any provision contradicting or conflicting with the provisions of the attached regulation is repealed. The Article 3 stipulates that the decision shall be published in the gazette and shall come into force

from the date following its publication. The Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law aims at regulating the freedom of practising any economic activity, stabilising the principles of the market rules and freedom of pricing in such a manner that the same shall not restrict the integral competition, prevent the same or be negatively affected thereby.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) clarified that the executive regulations of the law indicates that when determining the relevant market that is mentioned in the law, it shall determine two elements - the concerned products and the geographical scope of the studied case.

It pointed out that a number

of criteria stipulated in this executive regulation shall be taken into account when determining the above mentioned elements, while the relevant market varies from case to case, in accordance with the complaint or the studied case. MoCIIP emphasised that the dominance over the relevant market can take place in two cases, namely if the person's share exceeds 35 per cent during a certain period of time, and the capability of a person to have an effective impact on the prices of products, or on the volume of supply of the products to the relevant market, along with the lack of competition during a certain period of time.

MoCIIP also pointed out that the executive regulations of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law confirmed

that the monopoly concentration can take place when any form of the control to be imposed by any person or group of people directly or indirectly over the quantity or the price for any goods or service in such manner that the freedom of the competition is restricted or adversely affected, through determining the prices, imposing resale prices, implementing less than cost pricing, or implementing a predatory pricing method.

It also happens when dividing the relevant market into quotas, preventing the supplying of an alternative products to the relevant market, the absence, limitation, or weakening of competition, and the existence of economic links between the concerned products that enable the monopolists to operate independently without competition.

Continued from Page 01

These are also aligned with Oman Vision 2040 under the ultimate objective of economic diversification.

Hashil Obaid al Mahrouqi, chief executive officer of Omran, expressed his appreciation to Oman Investment Authority for taking this step. Mahrouqi asserted that such a measure would drive the growth of Omran as it enters a new stage of business growth, strengthen its leading role in supporting economic diversification in the sultanate as one of the strategic partners in Oman Vision 2040. He stressed that this step would allow the group to raise the bar to realise the national objective alongside partners in the tourism sector and other primary sectors.

"Omran plays a pivotal role in

developing major projects, stimulating investments, and establishing a full-fledged hospitality proposition, all inspired by the unique cultural and natural heritage of the sultanate," added Mahrouqi.

The operational framework of Omran is based on four key pillars: tourism, development, hospitality and development partnerships. Omran owns, manages and invests in many tourist assets across the sultanate amounting to 26 hotels and resorts with over 3,800 hotel rooms, ranging from luxury hotels and large-scale beach resorts to conference hotels and business hotels downtown, joint tourism as well as heritage and environmental destinations. Such assets include the Millennium Resort Mussanah, Alila Jabal Akhdar Resort, Atana Mu-

sandam Resort, Atana Khasab Hotel, Crowne Plaza Duqm, City Hotel Duqm, Crowne Plaza Madinat al Irfan, W Muscat Hotel, JW Marriott Muscat Hotel, Daba Beach Resort and other hospitality destinations in the sultanate in addition to Al Hoota Cave, Nizwa Fort, Harat al Bilad and Majlis al Jinn Cave. The development projects of Omran comprises Madinat al Irfan, which is considered the largest urban development project in the sultanate, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and InterContinental Muscat hotel renovation project.

It is worth noting that since the transfer of its ownership to Oman Investment Authority, Omran witnessed a series of developments, including the formulation of its new board that has already made key decisions.

62-year-old sets speed record scaling Mt Kilimanjaro



Our Correspondent
Muscat

A sexagenarian has proved that 60 is not the age to sit back and reminisce about the past but to lead by example.

Last weekend, Hamed Hamood Said al Harthi, 62, completed a speed ascent and descent of Mt Kilimanjaro, in the process creating a record of sorts at his age of accomplishing the feat in 15 hours and 20 minutes. Harthi's aim with the challenge was to create awareness on autism and support children with the complex developmental condition.

By scaling the 5,895m peak, Africa's tallest, he has inspired many mountaineers to take on the challenge. It was Harthi's seventh conquest of the mountain.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Harthi said, "On this trip, I began my first ascent on January 18 and reached the top of the mountain on January 26 as part of preparations for the 15-hour speed attempt.

"Then on January 29, I started at 5am and after ten



The climb was not easy as the weather was unpredictable. I walked and ran over 15 hours to reach the top and back. There was snow. It was cold, it rained and the rocks were slippery

HAMED HAMOOD SAID AL HARTHI

hours, I reached the summit. It took me five hours and 20 minutes to climb down. I believe that in my age category, it is a world record."

He raised Oman Autism Society's flag on the summit.

"Nothing is impossible when

you set your mind to achieve something. I also raised Oman's flag at the peak."

Determination was the key, Harthi said, explaining the challenges encountered on his way up. "The climb was not easy as the weather was unpredictable.

I walked and ran over 15 hours to reach the top and back. Additionally, there was snow. It was cold, it rained and the rocks were slippery. I got altitude sickness and vomited," he said recounting the experience.

His preparations for the sev-

enth conquest of the mountain involved rigorous training.

"But apart from physical training, a climber has to be prepared mentally for such expeditions. I trained on the Sa'al Stairs and other jebels in Oman for both physical and mental preparedness."

Besides Mt Kilimanjaro, Harthi has scaled Mt Batur in Indonesia, Mt Karisimbi and Mt Bisoke in Rwanda, Mount Meru in Tanzania - three times, mountains in Switzerland and Cerro Bonete in Argentina. "I have attempted Aconcagua, also in Argentina, twice but couldn't reach the summit," he informed.

While he hasn't chalked out plans for his next challenge, he is considering an ultra marathon.

"I ran the 137km Oman by UTMB in 2018, the 130km Oman by UTMB in 2019, the 130km Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina in 2019, and the 150km CM6 in Thailand in 2019. And I have qualified for the 2021 UTMB in Mont-Blanc, France. So my focus this year is mountain races," he said, adding that his love of mountains will continue.

179 child abuse cases registered in three months

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) on Sunday said that as many as 179 cases of child abuse were handled by the child protection committees across the sultanate in the second quarter of 2020, with the maximum cases being reported from Muscat.

Muscat registered 74 abuse cases, followed by North Batinah (43), South Batinah (20) and Buraimi (17), the ministry said,

adding that 14 cases were reported in Dakhliyah, two in Dhahirah and one in South Sharqiyah.

Of the 74 cases in Muscat governorate, 20 were of physical abuse, seven cases of mental abuse, eight cases of sexual abuse and 39 cases of negligence.

In North Batinah, out of 43 cases, four cases were of mental abuse, 13 of sexual abuse and 17 of negligence.

Of the total 179 cases, 88 were male victims, while the re-

maining 91 were female. The abused children were accommodated at Dar al Wefaq, a temporary protection house.

Additionally, 109 cases of abuse were registered through the ministry's Child Protection Line (1100) during the same period.

Of the total registered cases during the second quarter of 2020, 37 cases (22 male, 15 female) were registered in Muscat followed by North Batinah 25 (12 male, 13 female), South Batinah ten (three male, seven female)

Of the 74 cases in Muscat governorate - the highest number in the country - 20 were physical abuse, seven cases of mental abuse, eight cases of sexual abuse and 39 cases of negligence

and Dakhliyah ten cases.

Nine cases were reported in Buraimi governorate, followed by seven in South Sharqiyah, four in North Sharqiyah, four in Dhahirah and three cases in Dhofar.

"Some children need immedi-

ate social, psychological and medical treatment," a ministry official said, adding that there are cases which call for immediate intervention by child protection officials.

"In such cases, the abused

child is shifted to Dar al Wefaq in the Department of Family Protection. This house is dedicated for the protection and rehabilitation of abused children," the official said.

The ministry official said that the hotline service is operational 24x7. "It's a free line. We ensure full confidentiality of the complaint and the caller. Depending upon the complaint, it is forwarded to the relevant authorities," the official said.

The Department of Family Protection was established by

the MoSD through Ministerial Decision No 330/2012 for the overall welfare of children.

The Department of Family Protection "is responsible for developing family protection plans and strengthening efforts to serve the family better", the official said.

"The department ensures the provision of stability and family cohesion, and provides a safe environment away from negative behaviour, and receives complaints via hotline to protect children".

SULTANATE'S WHALE RESCUE EFFORT COMMENDED



The International Whaling Commission, the global body charged with the conservation of whales, has commended the sultanate's recent efforts in rescuing an Arabian humpback whale stuck in a net in the Port of Duqm. Arabian humpback whales are the most genetically distinct humpback whales and considered to be the most isolated whale population (Supplied photo)

MoL amends renewal fees, licences for expat worker recruitment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, issued Ministerial Decision No 12/2021 on Thursday to amend renewal fees and licences for recruitment of non-Omani workers. The decision also included fees for temporary licences for higher level professions: RO336 for a period of four months, RO502 for six months and RO752 for nine months.

The decision confirmed that the fees for middle-level occupations for four months will be RO169, RO252 for six months, and RO377 for nine months.

Temporary licence fees for the technical and specialised professions for a period of four months will be RO101, RO151 for

RENEWAL FEES



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► **RO1,001** to recruit expats in mid positions with salary from **RO2,500 to RO3,999**

► **RO601** to recruit non-Omani in specialised and technical professions

► **RO361** for the profession of fisherman

► **RO141** for domestic workers and those with similar skills (up to three workers)

► **RO241** for domestic workers and those with similar skills (four or more such workers)

► **RO201** for farmers and breeders (up to three workers), and **RO301** for the fourth worker and more

six months and RO226 for nine months, the decision stated. The decision was issued on

January 28 and will be effective 90 days after its publication in the Official Gazette.



Fuel to cost more in February

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fuel prices in Oman will cost more in February, according to fuel distributing companies.

Prices for the month of February was announced on Sunday. M91 will cost 188bz per litre, while M95 will cost 202bz per litre. Diesel will be priced 209bz per litre.

The revised prices will come into effect on February 1. Fuel prices for the month of January were 180bz per litre for M91, 194bz per litre for M95 and 209bz per litre for diesel.

Postal stamp celebrates anniversary of cancer-stricken children's shelter

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Cancer Association's landmark project Dar al Hanan (Home away from home), which serves the needs of children with cancer who reside away from the capital, is celebrating its tenth anniversary.

To mark the occasion, a postal stamp (RO1) was launched by H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Obaid al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health. Yuthar al Rawahi, founder of Oman Cancer Association (OCA), said, "For the past ten years, Dar al Hanan has been the second home for children fighting cancer, who come from all other parts of Oman and stay with their families while taking treatment at The Royal Hospital."

She said it took a year to iron out difficulties and convince others and deal with the logistics.

"This is something unique for Dar al Hanan to be on the stamp."



Yuthar added that the next dream for Dar al Hanan is to have its own purpose built building. "That is my next wish. It has been 20 years since Oman Cancer Association has been functioning in rented buildings. A major share of funds is spent on rent."

The number of patients who have benefitted from Dar al Hanan is 538 since 2011, and the

number of relatives is 1,076. The number of residents per year stands at 17,280 and number of meals served is 51,849.

All nationalities have benefited from Dar al Hanan over the years. The stay, meals and even the laundry are taken care of throughout the duration of their treatment.

The total annual expenditure is RO425,000 and it is covered

by a number of direct and indirect donors.

On the occasion, Dr Wahid al Kharousi, chairman of OCA, said, "Cancer is one of the most expensive diseases to manage, especially if it is left unnoticed due to lack of awareness and late diagnosis. Cancers pose socio-economic and legal challenges and negatively impact a country's GDP."



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THE MORE THE MERRIER

With Oman getting its third telecommunications company soon, how do you think the telecom sector will improve?

Ali al Sheyadi
Teacher

With the third operator, there will be more competition and it will improve the communications sector in Oman. The new company will make special offers which will be good for the people of Oman.

Dr Priti S
Author

The pandemic-affected yet technologically advanced world is now highly dependent on high-speed networks and streaming services for almost all activities, and the entry of the third service provider should impact the situation positively through healthy competition.

Mir Waheed
Banker

The telecom sector will get a big boost. The third operator will prompt competition resulting in better and more affordable services.

Disha Naik
Student

With the third telecom company entering the market, I feel that digital technology will reach a wider audience and there is scope for competitive pricing, more coverage and even better speed. This may also help the country improve its Online Service Index.

Husam al Musallami
Banker

Such news is always great for the country. But for competitive edge, the new company must offer consumers more and better services than the existing ones. With the launch of the new company, we expect Internet charges to come down.

Hamoud Khalfan
Retired government employee

I am sure rates will now come down because the new company will have to attract customers and reducing rates will be the main factor. Also, I am sure it will launch new services.

Piya Pawani
Model

This is great news for Oman and I am very excited about it. I am sure it will bring some interesting services and offers and definitely be a key to boosting the economy too.

Nabeela Jamal
Private sector employee

The third telecom company entering the market means digital technology will reach a wider audience. There will be more coverage and even better services.

Fareed Hamoud
Bank employee

I am sure the third operator will launch new services and since it is an international company, it will definitely boost the economy.

?

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Do you think people have started taking COVID-19 lightly and have stopped following preventive measures?

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

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CBO issues framework for micro businesses to use e-payments

Muscat - The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued procedures for on-boarding Micro Business Entities (MBEs) for e-payment acquiring services by licensed banks and Payment Service Providers (PSPs).

The new policy for enabling e-payments for MBEs comes in line with CBO's vision to promote e-payments in the country and to achieve the goal of a cash-less society. Inclusion of these segments under the electronic

payment services will support the objective of the national e-commerce strategy that is being implemented by various government agencies and the private sector.

Omani nationals owning

The objective of this guideline

is to enable e-payments for legitimate businesses which are not required to obtain registration from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

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Refinery output falls in 2020 as COVID-19 hits fuel demand

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate's petroleum refineries recorded sharp declines in the production last year as the demand for fuels was badly hit due to the coronavirus pandemic and economic recession triggered by the virus outbreak.

The production of M91 grade petrol in Oman dropped by 28 per cent to 9.597mn barrels during the full year 2020, while the output of M95 grade petrol decreased by 7 per cent to 12.805mn barrels, the figures released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

The aviation fuel production plummeted by 51 per cent to 6.980mn barrels during the year ended December 31, 2020, while liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) production fell 10 per cent to 6.121mn barrels, the data showed.



The COVID-19 pandemic last year caused one of the biggest declines in fuel consumption in the history as the lockdowns and restrictions to curb the spread of

the virus kept fuel demand low. The closure of many economic activities, mainly during the second and third quarters of 2020, resulted in a dramatic reduction

in sales volume of petrol, diesel and aviation fuel in Oman.

The domestic sale of M91 grade petrol fell 26 per cent to 7.831mn barrels in 2020, while

sales of M95 grade petrol dropped 12 per cent to 11.535mn barrels during the year.

Diesel sales also declined by 13 per cent year-on-year to 13.3mn barrels. Sales of aviation fuel, due to travel restrictions and closure of airports for a long period in 2020, plummeted by 67 per cent to 1.683mn barrels during the January-December period of 2020 compared to 5.040mn barrels sold in 2019.

Export of M91 grade petrol plunged by 21 per cent to 3.088mn barrels in 2020 against 3.904mn barrels in the same period a year ago, while export sales of M95 rose by 77 per cent to 1.563mn barrels.

Oman's export of aviation fuel dropped 40 per cent to 5.340mn barrels during last year from 8.919mn barrels in 2019. The volume of LPG exports was 7 per cent lower in 2020 at 3.710mn barrels compared to the previous year.

Drydocks World to deliver calm buoys for Ras Markaz

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Drydocks World, the Dubai-based leading service provider to the marine, offshore, oil, gas and renewable energy sectors, has completed the production of two calm buoys for the sultanate's Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park Project for its clients Bluewater Energy Services, China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Co (Oman Branch) and Oman Tank Terminal Company.

Catenary anchor leg mooring calm buoys act as offshore floating hulls to transfer stabilised crude and refined hydrocarbon products while tethering even the largest crude carriers to on-shore terminals via up to 400 megatonnes hawser load.

These calm buoys will eventually be moored at a crude oil storage terminal off the coast of Oman with a maximum transfer capacity of each 2x8,000 cubic metre per hour, Drydocks World

said in a statement on Sunday.

Capt Rado Antolovic, CEO of Drydocks World, said, "Delivering another major project outcome for Bluewater Energy Services, China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Co (Oman Branch) and Oman Tank Terminal Company, is a testament to our continued partnership. I'm proud of the trust shown in the Drydocks World team to deliver for a key partner and look forward to collaborating again on future projects."

Oman Tank Terminal Company, a subsidiary of OQ, is building the Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park, which will be the Middle East's biggest oil storage facility, located about 80km from Duqm Refinery. The Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park marks an important component of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm where the crude-oil will be stored in giant tanks that are currently being built and will be connected to Duqm Refinery afterwards.

Oman LNG and Yokogawa sign agreement to upgrade distributed control system

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman LNG has signed an agreement with Yokogawa, a leading Japanese process control and instrumentation solutions provider, to upgrade the distributed control system (DCS) at Oman LNG's plant.

The agreement is in line with Oman LNG's robust efforts towards maintaining continuous development and efficiency. Such steps will ultimately buoy the company's unrelenting efforts to ensure safe and reliable production, Oman LNG said in a



LNG said.

The agreement was signed by Eng Mohammed al Naseeb, Oman LNG's chief operating officer, and Jean Raphael Brousseau, Yokogawa's country manager for Oman, at Oman LNG's head office in Muscat.

Naseeb said, "At Oman LNG, we strive to be the best at what we do. This agreement comes to replace the current hardware and adopt the latest technology, ensuring our efficiency in production. We are delighted to a partner with Yokogawa as they are a leading provider of Industrial Automation Test and Measurement Solutions."

He added, "As part of the project's deliverables, Oman LNG and Yokogawa have committed to involve Omani partners in the execution of such a project which would expose the local talents to such expertise in the field. This is aligned with our efforts towards enhancing in-country value, and our contribution towards the local economy."

Brousseau said, "Oman LNG's DCS system upgrade project will contribute towards increasing Yokogawa Oman Limited's in-country value in the sultanate."

press statement.

The current DCS has been in operation since Oman LNG's inception in 2000. This upgrade is essential to ensure uninterrupted production of liquefied natural gas.

The new DSC will be of high-industry standard as it provides advanced features involving cybersecurity, to protect the facilities from potential threats. The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2023, Oman

COMMENTARY

Simplified value-added tax registration

The value-added tax (VAT) registration begins today under the Executive Decision No 3/2021. As per the VAT law, any person who resides in the sultanate and carries out any commercial, industrial, professional or other activity in the country and has annual supplies that exceeds the mandatory threshold of RO38,500 will have to register for VAT. It is noteworthy that any person whether natural or legal, who carries such taxable activities will have to register, regardless of whether they possess a commercial registration number or not.

The executive decision has provided a staggered approach for the taxable person to register for VAT. This is to ease the process of registration and give sufficient time for businesses to prepare for VAT. It becomes very important for the entities to understand the methodology to calculate the value of taxable supplies and ascertain their registration timeline [as mentioned in the table].

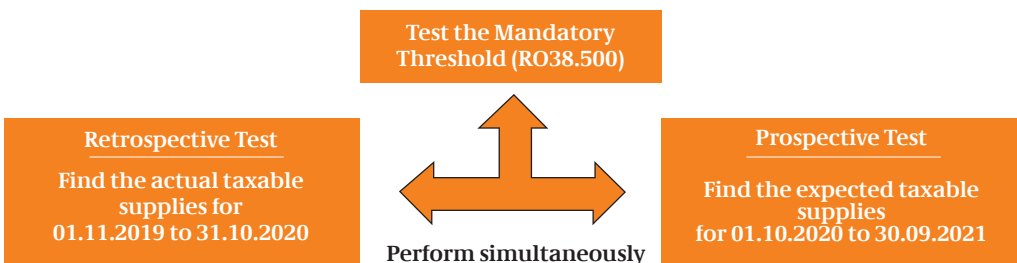
As per the VAT law, there are two approaches or tests to determine if the taxable person has exceeded the mandatory registration threshold and the approach has to be extended to ascertain the timeline for registrations as per the above executive decision.

Entities will have to carry out above two tests simultaneously.



TAYSIR AL RAWAHI

The writer is director, tax advisory services at Crowe Oman



Eligibility to register before the effective date of law

Category	Persons having annual taxable supplies in Oman (RO)	Persons having annual taxable supplies in Oman up-to (RO)	Mandatory registration timeline
A	1,000,000	No limit	February 1 to March 15, 2021
B	500,000	999,999	April 1 to May 31, 2021
C	250,000	499,999	July 1 to August 31, 2021
D	38,500	249,999	December 1 to February 28, 2022

Executive Decision No 3/2021

The retrospective test is to determine if the actual taxable supplies exceed the mandatory threshold or not for the given period. Simultaneously, entities need to check the prospective test to determine if the expected taxable supplies exceed the mandatory threshold or not for the given period. In either case, if the entity touches or exceeds the

mandatory threshold of RO38,500, it will have to register for VAT.

The next step is to determine under which category the total value of supplies fall and the same will guide the entity to register accordingly as per the Executive Decision No 3/2021 as mentioned in the table. For an instance, as per the retrospective

test, if the actual taxable supplies are less than RO1mn and as per the prospective test, the expected taxable supplies are more than RO1mn, the entity will have to mandatorily register within the registration timeline of February 1 to March 15, 2021.

Once the law is effective, the above two tests need to be performed on rolling monthly basis

to ascertain the mandatory threshold. It is important to note that the person will have to register immediately once the actual or expected value of supplies exceeds the mandatory threshold limit. There is another important clarification given by the Tax Authority that the person who wishes to voluntarily register for VAT may apply for registration with the Tax Authority at any time starting from February 1, 2021.

For the purpose of registration, the value of supplies shall include the following:

- (1) Value of taxable supplies - except supplies of capital assets.
- (2) Value of the goods and services supplied to the taxable person and subject to the reverse charge mechanism.
- (3) Value of intra-GCC supplies of goods and services.

It is advisable for entities, corporates and any person carrying out taxable economic activities, to start evaluating their taxable supplies to ascertain the threshold and timelines to register for VAT.

(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

Virus cost global tourism \$1.3tn in 2020, says UN

Madrid, Spain - The coronavirus crisis cost the global tourism sector US\$1.3tn in lost revenue in 2020 as the number of people travelling plunged, the UN said, calling it 'the worst year in tourism history'.

Revenue lost last year amounted to 'more than 11 times the loss recorded during the 2009 global economic crisis', the Madrid-based World Tourism Organization said in a statement, warning that between 100mn and 120mn direct tourism jobs were at risk.

International tourist arrivals fell by 1bn, or 74 per cent, in 2020 with Asia, the first region to feel the impact of COVID-19, seeing the steepest decline, it added.

"While much has been made in making safe international travel a possibility, we are aware that the crisis is far from over," WTO head Zurab Pololikashvili said in the statement.

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines is expected to 'slowly normalise travel' in 2021 but many countries are reintroducing travel restrictions such as quarantines, mandatory testing and border closures 'due to the evolving nature of the pandemic', the body said.

The Asia and Pacific region recorded an 84 per cent drop in arrivals.

It was followed by Africa and the Middle East with a 75 per cent drop, Europe with 70 per cent fewer visitors 'despite a small and short-lived revival in the summer' and the Americas where arrivals fell by 69 per cent.

International tourism arrivals rose by 4 per cent in 2019 to 1.5bn, with France the world's most visited country, followed by

International tourist arrivals fell by 1bn, or 74 per cent, in 2020 with Asia, the first region to feel the impact of COVID-19, seeing the steepest decline

Spain and the United States.

The last time international tourist arrivals posted an annual decline was in 2009 when the global economic crisis led to a 4 per cent drop.

The WTO said most experts do not see a return to pre-pandemic levels of tourism activity before 2023.

Open-air and nature-based tourism will see growing demand when tourism restarts, with domestic tourism also expected to be more popular, the body said.

While international tourism has taken a hit from the outbreak of disease in the past, the coronavirus is unprecedented in its geographical spread.

By comparison, international tourism arrivals fell by just 0.4 per cent in 2003 after the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which killed 774 people worldwide.

The coronavirus has killed at least 2,176,000 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

The tourism industry accounts for about 10 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and jobs.

AFP

UBG GCF Inception Date*	
NAV Date	17-Nov-09
NAV (OMR)	JAN 28, 2021
Adjusted NAV** (OMR)	1.085
Cash Dividend paid since inception (OMR)	1.427
Unit Dividend paid since inception	0.03
YTD Performance	28%
Performance since inception	2.87%
	49.06%

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

For more information please contact:
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MSM rises 0.11% on improved activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose by 0.11 per cent to close at 3,653.22 points on Sunday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover rose by 3 per cent to RO1.71mn and volumes increased 30.43 per cent to 12.98mn shares.

While Financial index rose 0.62 per cent, Industrial and Services indices fell 0.76 per cent and 0.48 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah index closed up by 0.18 per cent at 531.33 points.

Market breadth remained negative as ten companies closed up, while 16 companies closed down. The rest 16 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were National Bank of Oman (7.2 per cent), Bank Nizwa (3.16 per cent), National Aluminium Products (2.41 per cent) and Oman & Emirates In-

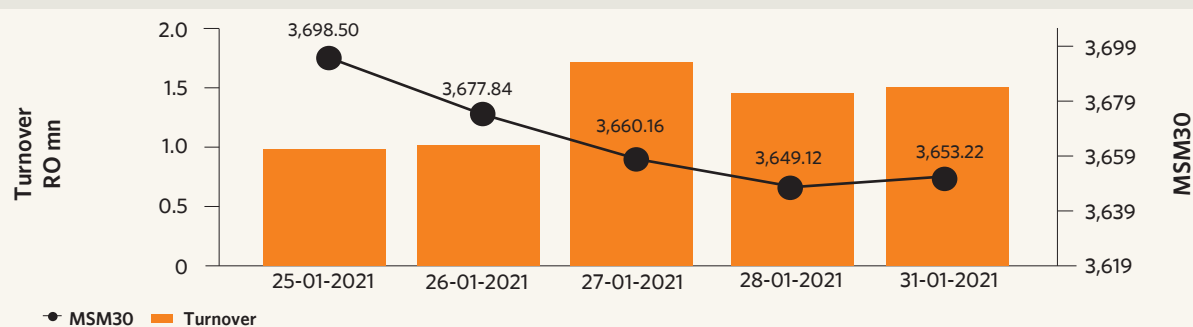


vestment Holding (2.38 per cent).

Top losers were Dhofar Generating Company (-9.09 per cent), Oman Arab

Bank (-9.09 per cent), United Finance (-6.67 per cent) and Ahli Bank (-4.96 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Pandemic caused worst year for US economy since 1946

Washington, US - The United States saw its sharpest contraction in growth since 1946 as the coronavirus pandemic hammered the economy last year, but while the country may be set for a recovery, it hasn't arrived yet.

The world's largest economy shrunk by 3.5 per cent in 2020, the Commerce Department reported after COVID-19 rearranged daily life and forced many businesses to shut down or change their operations while laying off workers in droves.

Those mass layoffs, which began in March as the pandemic intensified, continue to take a toll, with the Labor Department reporting nearly 1.3mn new claims for unemployment benefits filed last week.

The data underscores the job awaiting President Joe Biden, who took office just over a week ago promising to get the country back on track with a US\$1.9tn spending proposal that's an initial salvo against the twin economic and health crises.

"Today's data suggests a significant slowing of our economic recovery," director of the White House's National Economic Council Brian Deese said.

"Without swift action, we risk a continued economic crisis that will make it harder for Americans to return to work and get on back their feet. The cost of inaction is too high."

But by this point, analysts agree there's only so much the government can do to support the economy, which won't be back to normal until the raging virus is done away with or has at least been brought to manageable levels.

"Additional fiscal stimulus and broader vaccine diffusion should support an improved labour market in the spring, but claims are expected to remain high in the



A waitress takes customers' orders in the outdoor seating area of a restaurant in Los Angeles, US on Thursday (AFP)

near term as the pandemic continues to restrict activity, with new strains of the virus a concern," Nancy Vanden Houten of Oxford Economics said.

The pandemic caused an unheard-of whipsaw in the growth, with the economy contracting a record 31.4 per cent annualised in the second quarter of 2020 when the pandemic's restrictions were at their most severe, then shooting back up 33.4 per cent the next quarter as businesses reopened.

In the fourth quarter, GDP grew by an annual rate of 4 per cent, according to the Commerce Department's first estimate for the final three months of last year.

That wasn't enough to stop 2020 from seeing an overall contraction, which the government said was caused by a drop in spending as well as in 'exports, private inventory investment, nonresidential fixed investment, and state and local government'.

Net exports fell 13 per cent last year while personal consumption expenditures dropped 3.9 per cent.

The declines were partially offset by the strong housing market and federal government spending like the trillions of dollars in stimulus money Congress passed last year amid the pandemic.

"Against the risk of excessive winter pessimism, we believe in spring optimism," Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics said.

Even if Biden's stimulus bill is eventually watered down by cost-conscious lawmakers, that - combined with the effects of COVID-19 vaccine drives and a recovery in the employment market - could cause the economy to expand by 5.5 per cent in 2021, he said.

But if the job market is in for a recovery, the wait continues for now.

The Labor Department reported 847,000 new seasonally-adjusted filings for regular unemployment benefits, fewer than the week prior and still above the single worst week of the 2008-2010 global financial crisis, ten months after the mass layoffs began.

AFP

Governments must win vaccination race: IMF

Washington, US - Government debt burdens worldwide soared to a record in 2020, but policymakers must continue to provide support to buoy their economies and finance the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, the IMF said.

"Policymakers will have to strike a balance between providing more short-term support to ensure a solid recovery and keeping debt at a manageable level over the longer term," the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its latest Fiscal Monitor report.

Global fiscal support reached nearly US\$14tn last year, up by about US\$2.2tn since October 2020, the IMF found.



A health worker administers a vaccine for COVID-19 in Surabaya, Indonesia on Sunday (AFP)

That spending drove average public debt worldwide to an all-time high, hitting nearly 98 per cent of GDP, compared with less

than 84 per cent in 2019.

But since the economic downturn was slightly less terrible than the IMF had forecast, the

debt level, too, ended below the 101 per cent level projected in July. The IMF now sees world growth recovering this year with a 5.5 per cent GDP expansion, after contracting 3.5 per cent last year.

"In short, governments need to win the vaccination race, respond [with] flexibility to the changing economic conditions and set the stage for a greener, fairer and more durable recovery," the fund said.

But access to financing might tighten up, and the IMF stressed it will be 'vital' to develop 'credible multiyear frameworks for revenue and spending'.

AFP

Gold demand shrinks in 2020 on coronavirus fallout: WGC

London, UK - Gold demand shrank 14 per cent last year as the coronavirus pandemic sparked record falls in jewellery purchases and as strong investor interest sent prices to all-time highs, industry data showed.

Overall demand for the precious metal hit the lowest level since the global financial crisis in 2009, at 3,759.6 tonnes, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in its annual report.

At the same time, gold prices hit record highs above US\$2,000 an ounce, with the commodity benefitting from its status as a haven investment in times of economic uncertainty.

'Jewellery demand in 2020 dropped to its lowest annual level on record, decimated by the combination of the global pandemic - with its resultant market lockdowns - and record high gold prices at a time of economic slowdown,' the WGC said.

Demand for gold jewellery slumped 34 per cent to a record-low 1,411.6 tonnes from 2019.

'In a tumultuous year for the gold market, investment was one of the notable positives,' the report added.

Total annual gold investment hit a record 1,773.2 tonnes, 40 per cent higher than in 2019, thanks to the popularity of exchange-traded funds, which allow investment outside of fu-



tures market.

'Record inflows into gold ETFs clearly showed the strength of investor demand for gold worldwide at a time of heightened risk and uncertainty, ultra-low interest rates, fiscal expansion and economic slowdown,' the World Gold Council said.

By contrast, demand by central banks slumped 60 per cent to 272.9 tonnes.

That contrasted with a multi-decade high of 668 tonnes in 2019.

'The first half of... [2020] saw a continuation of the longstanding trend of net buying' by central

banks, the report said.

Demand slowed however in the second half, which coincided with a pick-up in sales as some central banks sought greater liquidity to help tackle economic fallout from the pandemic, it added.

'Gold's performance during the year boosted reserve portfolios, providing central banks with additional firepower when it was needed,' the WGC said.

'And some banks saw this as an opportune time to obtain liquidity to support their struggling economies.'

AFP

UK to apply to join Asia-Pacific free trade bloc, eyes 'enormous benefits'

London, UK - Britain will apply to join a massive 11-nation free-trade bloc of Asia-Pacific countries, it announced on Saturday, weeks after leaving the European single market with its departure from the EU.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss will formally request today for Britain to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a market representing half a billion people and roughly 13.5 per cent of the global economy.

The CPTPP application will come one year after Britain left the European Union following more than forty years of membership - and after five years of complex trade discussions.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the potential partnership would 'bring enormous economic benefits for the people of Britain'.

"Applying to be the first new country to join the CPTPP demonstrates our ambition to do business on the best terms with our friends and partners all over the world and be an enthusiastic champion of global free trade," he said.

Negotiations between the UK and the partnership - which represents 11 Pacific Rim nations including Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico and Vietnam - are



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (AFP)

expected to start this year, the trade department said.

But opposition Labour party shadow international trade secretary Emily Thornberry questioned the lack of transparency surrounding the pact.

After five years of debate over Brexit trade agreements, she said people would question the British government's decision 'to rush into joining another one on the other side of the world without any meaningful public consultation at all'.

"At present, Liz Truss cannot even guarantee whether we would have the right to veto China's proposed accession if we

join the bloc first," she said.

Truss said joining the CPTPP would offer 'enormous opportunities'.

She has touted joining as Britain made agreements with members such as Japan and Canada in the wake of Brexit, with British media reporting that CPTPP nations accounted for around eight percent of UK exports in 2019.

Truss said the deal will mean lower tariffs for car manufacturers and whisky producers, as well as 'delivering quality jobs and greater prosperity for people here at home'.

Karan Bilimoria, president of

the UK's largest business lobby group the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), said the move marked a 'new chapter for our independent trade policy'.

"Membership of the bloc has the potential to deliver new opportunities for UK business across different sectors," he said.

The CPTPP was launched in 2019 to remove trade barriers among the 11 nations representing nearly 500mn consumers in the Asia-Pacific region in a bid to counter China's growing economic influence.

The partnership is an updated version of a giant deal originally backed by former US president Barack Obama.

The United States pulled out of the agreement under Donald Trump's presidency - turning away from what he viewed as unfavourable multilateral deals - but 11 countries eventually agreed to sign the new version.

Following Britain's definitive departure from the European Union after a one year transition period out of the European single market at the end of 2020, the UK has sought to advance the brand of 'Global Britain' in 2021.

The UK holds the rotating presidency of the G7 in 2021 and takes over the presidency of the UN Security Council in February.

AFP

Sohar International's new branch starts operation



With a key focus on furthering customer experience, Sohar International has started its operation in its new flagship branch in the heart of Muscat at Shatti al Qurm.

Conveniently located next to the bank's headquarter at Waterfront, the new branch recently commenced operations and offers a full range of the bank's superior products and financial solutions for Retail, Corporate and Wealth Management clients with a 24-hour digital lobby.

The flagship branch has been designed and developed centered around customer needs and the ideal customer journey ensuring that the brand experi-

ence speaks loud from prior to entering the branch until exiting the branch.

The new premises is a true reflection of Sohar International and the brand purpose of helping people 'win' by delivering banking for their ever-changing world.

Khalil al Hedaifi, chief retail banking officer at Sohar International, said, "A culture of banking with technology that adds value and convenience to the customers' life, is how Sohar International envisages its winning proposition. Taking this forward in 2021, a customer-first approach underlined by digitalisation has become a core focus of the bank, and Sohar International

is leaving no stone unturned to cater responsive banking services for both branch operations as well as remote banking.

"The bank is increasing touch points with its expanding customer base across the sultanate, and the new branch at the prestigious location of Waterfront is a key milestone in this direction. A 24-hour digital lobby enabling and empowering customers to embrace technological banking at any time forms the fundamental of the new branch, and we aim to continue growing these services as we progress in our digitalisation journey.

"Our customers continue to inspire us to serve them in new

innovative ways and we are happy to make this a reality."

Operating from 8am to 2pm from Sunday till Thursday, the new branch with its robust infrastructure and distinct Sohar International identity, enjoys a spacious design covering a range of customer facilities, operated by qualified staff to deliver responsive services and complete portfolio of products.

The branch boasts of convenient accessibility from different directions in the area.

"We are committed to provide customers across the sultanate with a comprehensive suite of financial services coupled with innovation, convenience and customer service excellence. The new branch will be able to better service customers within the area, and we look forward to continuously open more branches as part of our network expansion plans," he added.

Like other Sohar International branches, the Waterfront branch will also offer customers a full-fledged ATM and CDM facility.

With the new branch added to its networks, the total number of Sohar International's branches in Oman has now reached 31, including 13 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 18 branches in other governorates.



OHI Leo Burnett facilitates Al Bashayer product launch

OHI Leo Burnett, Oman's leading advertising and communications agency which provides branding, advertising, public relations, and digital media services to clients across verticals, partnered with Al Bashayer Meat Company, Oman's first and the region's largest integrated red meat project, for the launch of their new retail brand 'Bushra' - fresh, halal and ready to cook cuts of beef, lamb and goat across Oman. The launch was held on January 18 at the OCEC Ballroom, while following strict COVID-19 precautionary protocols.

OHI Leo Burnett, the agency behind the brand's identity, packaging and communication, developed a comprehensive strategy for Al Bashayer and its

retail brands including Bushra.

The agency team collaborated with Al Bashayer's management to understand the brand purpose and its USP and worked on delivering a 360-degree communication approach for the launch. The campaign is being delivered across a mix of eight media channels with an emphasis on digital platforms along with the launch event.

The online campaign generated in its first few days more than 393,000 impressions on Twitter alone, which built up the anticipation for the launch. The brand was showcased at the recently held MENA Transform Awards and received multiple awards for 'Best use of packaging' and 'Best implementation of

brand development project'.

Wyle Dura, director of Client Relations, OHI Leo Burnett said, "It was exciting for all of us at OHI Leo Burnett to work on the first Omani retail brand in the red meat sector. Al Bashayer is a renowned name in Oman and we are proud to have been able to launch their retail brand successfully in the market. For us, it was important to create a well-recognised identity which conveys the brand personality, purpose and promise. I can proudly say, we delivered on this and I congratulate the team for their continuous efforts in making this launch a success."

Bushra is being made available in all major departmental stores across Oman.

VISIT TO SAS NAQVI MUSEUM



P K Prakash, counsellor (cultural), Embassy of India, visited the SAS Naqvi Sports Olympics and Hockey Museum to attend the Republic Day of India hockey function on January 26. Prakash (right) was accompanied by his wife and daughter

Bank Muscat inaugurates two more Green Sports fields in South Sharqiyah

In line with the bank's commitment to community development and promoting Oman as a sporting nation, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, inaugurated two more new sports fields in South Sharqiyah as part of its flagship Green Sports programme.

The opening of the Shabab al Wafi Team's sports field in the wilayat of Al Kamil W'Al Wafi was held in the presence of Hamad bin Sultan al Hashimi, deputy chairman of the team. The opening of the Falaj al Mashayekh Sports Team's field was done in the presence of Rashid bin Nasser al Mashaikhi, honorary vice chairman of the team. Salim bin Rashid al Shidi, regional manager - South Sharqiyah, Bank Muscat, represented the bank and handed over the certificates of completion to both the teams at the respective events, which were organised in compliance with social distancing norms.

On the occasion, Shidi said that the bank's flagship Green Sports programme has been going from strength to strength over the years with bank helping



develop Green Sports fields for teams across different governorates in the sultanate.

He congratulated both the teams and asked members to make the best use of the new facilities so as to develop their skills and talents to the maximum possible.

The total number of teams, which have benefited from the programme until the end of last year has now reached 123, confirming the great success of the programme. There is no doubt that it has been greatly con-

tributing to further build Omani sporting talent. The programme is providing an excellent means to channelise the energy and talents of Omani youth in a productive way, besides helping local communities develop stronger bonds.

The scope of support under the Green Sports programme included installation of artificial turf or natural grass on sports fields, floodlighting and water-desalination systems. Bank Muscat continues to invest strongly in sustainability and corporate so-

cial responsibility programmes across the country. Its longest running CSR programme will continue to support and serve the community as it implements the bank's vision of "serving you better, every day".

The registration process for 2021 was done recently and saw excellent participation by many teams from different governorates. The applications are currently being evaluated and the announcement of the beneficiaries for 2021 will be made later this year.

Gulf Air operates first commercial flight from new Bahrain airport terminal

Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, on January 28 operated the very first commercial flight from the new Bahrain International Airport terminal which was GF2130 to Delhi on one of the newest Airbus A320neo aircraft at 2.35pm Bahrain time.

The first incoming flight to the new terminal was also a Gulf Air flight that arrived from Lahore on flight GF765 at 2.50pm local time on the airline's flagship aircraft the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner.

Moreover, bidding farewell to the old terminal, Gulf Air oper-



ated the last flight from the old premises which was GF504 to Dubai on Airbus A320neo at 10.55am local time.

With these operations Gulf Air started a new chapter in the Kingdom of Bahrain's aviation history.

The new terminal will support the strategic vision for Bahrain to strengthen its position as a hub and facilitate the movement of millions of passengers and Gulf Air takes pride to be a vital operator in the state-of-the-art terminal.

The new airport terminal will feature a dedicated check-in

area for both Falcon Gold and economy class passengers of Gulf Air as well as a brand new Falcon Gold lounge that is double in size and capacity compared to the previous one in the old airport.

Taking into consideration all of the updated health and safety measures, the new state-of-the-art lounge will reflect new concepts of modern premium lounges yet keeping with the legacy and rich history of the 70 year old Gulf Air brand.

A number of features will be maintained from the previous lounge as well as newly intro-

duced spaces such as a children's area, shower rooms, prayer space, a quiet area along with live cooking stations and new food and beverage concepts.

Operational around the clock and with a capacity of over 400 passengers at any given time, the new Falcon Gold lounge will be available to experience by the airline's Falcon Gold passengers as well as its Black, Gold and Silver Falconflyer members.

Gulf Air commenced operations in 1950, becoming one of the first commercial airlines established in the Middle East.

Jaguar Classic celebrates 70th anniversary of legendary C-type with Continuation cars

Jaguar Classic is celebrating the 70th anniversary of the legendary C-type sports racer by creating a strictly limited production run of new C-type Continuation cars, which will be hand built at Jaguar’s world-class Classic Works facility in Coventry.

The C-type Continuation programme will allow historic motor racing enthusiasts to purchase a new factory-built example of the ultimate 1953 disc-braked ‘works’ C-type direct from Jaguar for the first time.

The C-type, which was originally made between 1951-53, was famed for its exceptionally fluid shape by Jaguar Cars designer, aerodynamicist and artist Malcolm Sayer. The C-type won the gruelling Le Mans 24 Hours on its debut in 1951, scoring the first of Jaguar’s seven outright wins at the French endurance race.

From 1952, the C-type pioneered the adoption of innovative disc brake technology in motorsport, with a revolutionary



system developed by Jaguar and Dunlop scoring the first win for a disc-braked car with Stirling Moss at the Reims Grand Prix in France and contesting the 1000-mile Mille Miglia in Italy.

The C-type won the Le Mans

24 Hours again in 1953, another first for disc brakes, and also enjoyed success in the hands of private owners, which contributed to Jaguar finishing vice-champion in the inaugural World Sportscar Championship.

Dan Pink, director, Jaguar Classic, said, “Driven by some of the most-admired racing drivers in history, the C-type laid the foundations for Jaguar’s success in endurance racing and is synonymous with design and engi-

neering innovation. Seventy years on, Jaguar Classic is proud to be able to utilise the latest innovations in manufacturing technology – alongside traditional skills and unrivalled expertise – to reintroduce this legendary car

for a new generation of enthusiasts to enjoy.”

Of the 53 Jaguar C-types built in the 1950s, 43 were sold to private owners, but the production C-type specification was limited to drum-braked cars with twin SU carburettors and 200bhp, in the style of the 1951 works cars.

Eight new C-type Continuation cars will be built ahead of a racing-inspired celebration event for their owners in 2022. Each example will reflect the 1953 Le Mans-winning works team car specification, including 3.4lt straight-six engine with triple Weber 40DCO3 carburettors for 220bhp and disc brakes.

Building on the experience gained with previous Jaguar Classic Continuation programmes for Lightweight E-type, XKSS and D-type, Jaguar Classic engineers have consulted Jaguar’s archives and cross-referenced scan data taken from an original C-type in conjunction with the latest computer aided design technology to create

the most authentic new C-type possible.

Exclusive access to original engineering drawings and company records created by the original C-type development team – including Malcolm Sayer, competitions manager Lofty England, and engineers William Heynes, Bob Knight and Norman Lewis – ensure the authentic 1953 specifications are accurately maintained.

Taking that engineering CAD data a stage further, for the first time ever Jaguar Classic is also able to give customers the opportunity to visualise their C-type Continuation virtually using a specially designed online configurator. This new tool at classicvisualiser.jaguar.com allows users to compare colour and trim options from the 12 authentic exterior colours and eight interior colours available, and apply optional racing roundels, steering wheel badge and bonnet badging. To find out more about cars visit www.jaguar.com/classic

Al Ahlia wins ‘Oman Insurer of the Year’ award

Al Ahlia Insurance, one of the leading insurance companies in Oman, received the ‘Oman Insurer of the Year’ award at MENA IR Awards 2021 for the eighth time. Previously, the company won the title in 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The MENA IR Awards recognise and celebrate the groundbreaking achievements of insurers, reinsurers and brokers across the MENA region.

The awards are judged by an independent panel of industry experts who evaluate the comprehensive performance of the organisation over the past 12 months.

This year’s awards ceremony was held online on January 27 and was attended by well-known industry leaders and senior officials.

Sheikh Khalid al Khalili, chairman – Al Ahlia, said, “Al Ahlia is proud to be the insurer of choice in Oman and this award validates the support that Al Ahlia has earned with its clients and customers. As Oman Insurer of the Year, Al Ahlia proudly serves the nation. Al Ahlia is leveraging its position to create In-country Value through local SME entrepreneurship opportunities for Omani nationals. The company has been appointing a



number of Omani insurance agents that are SMEs which in turn is creating further jobs and sustainable value. I am certain that this award will further inspire the company and the staff to continue their excellent performance.”

Speaking on the achievement, Praveen Kumar, CEO, Al Ahlia Insurance, said, “2020 has been a challenging year in many ways. Winning the ‘Oman Insurer of the Year’ in such exceptional circumstances is a testimony to the resilience demonstrated by the entire team at Al Ahlia and the positive attitude we have maintained and inspired in all our stakeholder relationships.

“We dedicate this award to all those in the service industry who have worked selflessly in the fight against the pandemic in Oman.”

NBO makes banking easier with cardless cash service

Continuing to pioneer digital innovation in the sultanate, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has made banking easier than ever with its cardless cash service.

Customers can now withdraw funds from any NBO ATM, conveniently located across the sultanate, using only their mobile phones, by simply logging into the NBO mobile app and going to the cardless cash feature. They will then enter the required amount and the One Time Number Passcode which will be sent via SMS into the ATM screen. This is just one of the many ways



that NBO is supporting the sultanate’s digital transformation and meeting the evolving needs of its customers.

“As part of our leading posi-

tion in the market, we are constantly building on our portfolio of digital and customer-friendly solutions. Cardless withdrawals on ATMs join a long list of mobile

payment options that have already taken the banking industry by storm, catering to the growing demand for smartphone technologies and digital services. Integrating cash withdrawals into the cardless-payment ecosystem is a logical next step and because it’s safe and convenient, it comes in particularly handy when you’ve left your card at home,” said Abdul Karim al Hinai, chief transformation officer at NBO.

Keen to adopt the latest technologies and stay ahead of the curve, NBO is enhancing its digital channels to enable customers

to manage their money in a way that is tailored to their specific and changing needs.

Its easy-to-use digital banking services – online banking and the mobile app – are available around the clock, facilitating a range of everyday tasks to be completed, including opening accounts, paying utility and credit card bills, increasing/decreasing debit card limit, changing debit card PIN, locating branches and ATMs, applying for products such as the Easy Payment Plan, and making local and international money transfers.

Snuggle up this Valentine’s Day, enjoy OSN’s Love Story

Treating loved ones to a candlelit dinner, mouth-watering chocolates and red roses are just a few ways to say ‘I love you’ this Valentine’s Day. However, nothing quite beats celebrating the most romantic day of the year like snuggling up with a blanket in the comfort of your own home and binge-watching romantic movies.

And OSN is offering just that with its latest pop-up channel ‘Love Story’, launching from Monday, February 1 to Sunday, February 14 offering a selection of the greatest romantic movies ever made.

Whether you’re spending time with the leading person in your life, watching with friends or



streaming solo, get ready to be swept off your feet with over 35 romantic movies to choose from on OSN and as a collection on the OSN streaming app.

Beloved rom-com movies:
► Serendipity (2001)
► Pretty Woman (1990)
► When Harry Met Sally (1989)

► Four Weddings And A Funeral (1994)
► When in Rome (2010)
► How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days (2003)
► No Strings Attached (2011)
► Benny & Joon (1993)
► French Kiss (1995)
► Honeymoon in Vegas (1992)
► Hope Springs (2012)
► Along Came Polly (2004)
► Bridesmaids (2011)
► Knocked Out (2007)
► While You Were Sleeping (2017)
► Forgetting Sarah Marshall (2008)
► There’s Something About Mary (1998)
► Letters to Juliet (2010)
► Juliet, Naked (2018)

Hopeless Romantic Dramas:
► Titanic (1997)
► Allied (2016)
► The Last Song (2010)
► Mad Love (1995)
► Romeo and Juliet (2013)
► When a Man Loves a Woman (1994)
► Griffin & Phoenix (2006)
► The Sun Is Also a Star (2019)
► Queen & Slim (2019)
► The Photograph (2020)
► Emma (2020)
► Chocolat (2000)
► Up Close & Personal (1996)
► The Longest Ride (2015)
The loveable musical:
► Yesterday (2019)
Romantic sci-Fi:
► Clara (2018)

Smart Cricket comes to Abu Dhabi T10 riding on Delhi Bulls

Smart Cricket Global Limited, a United Kingdom-based sports technology start-up on Saturday announced its first-ever official technology partnership.

SmartCricket.com, the brand of Smart Cricket Global Limited, has teamed up with Delhi Bulls, Abu Dhabi T10’s premier franchise during the ongoing fourth Season of Abu Dhabi T10.

The partnership will see top international players like Dwayne Bravo, Sherfane Rutherford, Ravi Bopara, Adam Lyth, Mohammad Nabi and Evin Lewis play in the Abu Dhabi T10 with BatSense, SmartCricket.com’s bat sensor which has the power to provide a wide range of data for every shot played.

It promises to showcase data

about the bat speed, back lift angle, follow through angle, bat speed at impact and a host of other batting parameters of top international cricketers for millions to follow and emulate.

BatSense is driven by an Intel-powered chip that ensures data accuracy and high-performance data results. Apart from the device that captures the data, the product comes equipped with a sleeve to mount the device onto the bat, a key to lock the sensor into the sleeve and a USB charging cable to power the device.

The device has a supporting app, the SmartCricket.com app, that provides a plethora of features which enable players and coaches to train smarter.

The device which made its



first appearance at the ICC Champions Trophy 2017 held in the England and Wales, where it

was used by several superstars of the game, is now available for use of everyone. It can

now be purchased both online and offline.

“Cricket technology has so far

been largely focused only on broadcast,” said Atul Srivastava, founder of Smart Cricket Global Limited.

“There was very limited technology that could actually help players monitor and improve their game. We are bringing IOT-based technology with our bouquet of Smart equipment, starting with BatSense, to change the way cricket is played. Technology has a major role to play in improving the all-round quality of cricket and BatSense is going to revolutionise its use in cricket. Our goal is to democratise data and make it easily accessible to anyone who loves the game, whether he is a young aspiring cricketer or a professional cricketer. It will be a game changer in every sense.”

The experience and the feedback from all the players who have used BatSense in the Delhi Bulls squad has been exhilarating. “Sometimes you think you played a perfect shot and timed it perfectly. With BatSense you can know for sure. And that is amazing,” said Dwayne Bravo, captain of Delhi Bulls on his first experience of BatSense.

Andy Flower, Delhi Bulls head coach, said, “Talent is inborn but performance can be changed dramatically with technology. The art of fine batting can now be taught with the precision of science and BatSense is the way for the unlocking of that talent.”

The SmartCricket.com app is available to download for free on the App Store and Play Store.

Police clampdown on Russia protests

Moscow, Russia - Police detained hundreds of people across Russia and blocked off the centre of Moscow on Sunday in a massive clampdown on protests demanding the release of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

From Vladivostok in the Far East to Saint Petersburg on the Baltic Sea, thousands of police in riot gear were deployed to prevent a second weekend of mass demonstrations over the arrest of President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent.

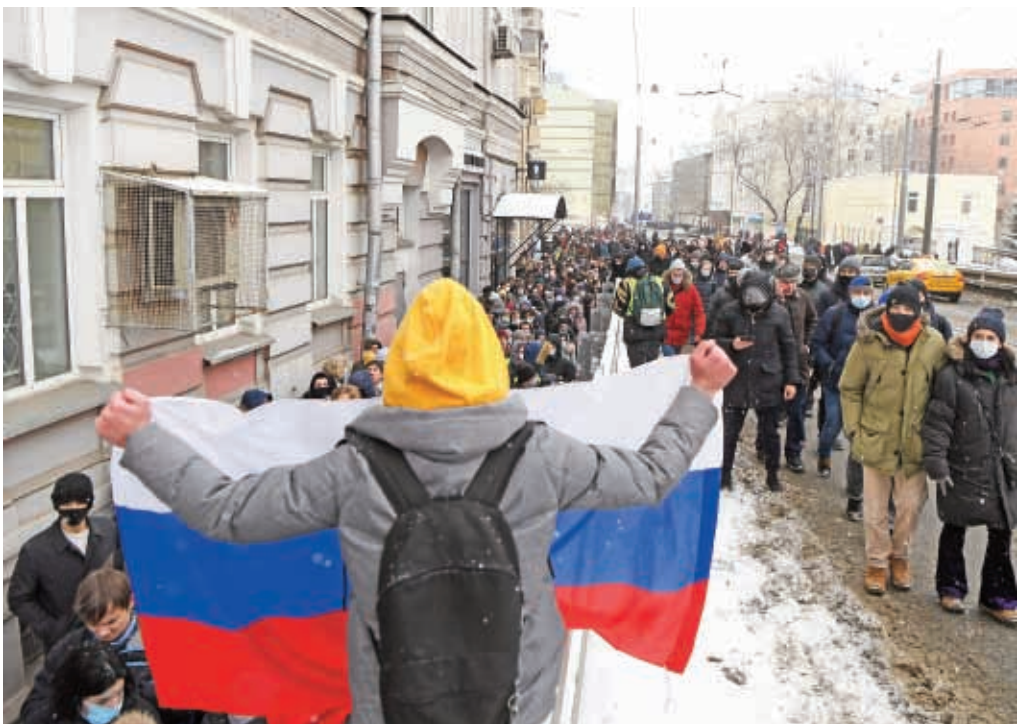
Navalny was detained at a Moscow airport in mid-January after flying back to Russia from Germany where he was recovering from an August poisoning he blames on the Kremlin.

The 44 year old anti-corruption campaigner is being held in a Moscow detention centre and facing years of potential jail time in several different criminal cases, despite calls from Western governments for his release. In moves not seen in years in Moscow, police locked down the centre of the capital on Sunday, with hundreds lining the streets, central Metro stations closed and the movements of pedestrians restricted.

Protesters who had hoped to gather outside the headquarters of the FSB security service were instead scattered to various parts of the city as organisers made last-minute changes in locations. Dozens of protesters were detained and forced into police vans, eyewitnesses said. It was unclear amid the chaos how many people were protesting.



Riot police personnel run to disperse supporters of Alexei Navalny, in Moscow on Sunday (AFP)



People take part in a rally in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Moscow on Sunday (AFP)

'People are outraged'

Independent monitor OVD-Info said more than 1,500 people had so far been detained across the country, including more than 300 in Moscow. It reported more than 4,000 detentions during last weekend's protests. Hundreds were marching through the city centre chanting 'Freedom!' and 'Putin is a thief!' as they headed towards the Matrosskaya Tishina prison where Navalny was being held.

Police followed the protesters, breaking up the crowds and playing pre-recorded messages on loudspeakers warning that the gathering was illegal because of coronavirus restrictions.

"The people in power don't

want to listen to anything or to anybody," said a 34 year old protester at the Moscow rally.

In the second city of Saint Petersburg police closed off the main thoroughfare Nevsky Prospekt, closed Metro stations and police cars were parked all across the centre, an AFP journalist reported.

"The whole centre is cordoned off," said Natalya Grigoryeva, who came to the Saint Petersburg rally with her daughter. "And who is this all against, against their own people?"

Earlier protesters had rallied in cities including the Pacific port of Vladivostok, where several dozen gathered in a central square despite police closing it off ahead of

Sunday's protest in Novosibirsk was potentially bigger than the week before. People are still outraged by what is happening

HELGA PIROGOVA

the rally. Several thousand were also reported to have protested in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk despite temperatures dropping to -20°C.

Local politician and Navalny ally Helga Pirogova told AFP that Sunday's protest in Novosibirsk was potentially bigger than the week before. "People are still outraged by what is happening," the 32 year old said.

The US Embassy in Moscow condemned the arrests and blocking of the city centre in Moscow, saying in a tweet: 'Russia must respect international human rights commitments.'

Russian authorities issued several warnings against participating in the unauthorised rallies and threatened criminal charges against protesters.

Navalny is due in court in sev-

eral cases next week, including on February 2 on charges of violating the terms of a 2014 suspended sentence.

His wife Yulia posted on Instagram on Sunday, urging supporters to make their voices heard.

'If we remain silent, then tomorrow they will come for any one of us,' she wrote.

Allies in custody

This week several Navalny associates, including lawyer Lyubov Sobol and his brother Oleg, were placed under house arrest until late March pending charges for violating coronavirus restrictions by calling people to join protests.

Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh was detained late on

Saturday also over violating virus measures, the same day she was due to walk free after a nine-day jail term for violating protest laws.

In a continued effort to clamp down on online platforms used to coordinate the rallies, Russia's media watchdog on Sunday ordered social networks to block posts with 'false' information about the protests, including those 'over-estimating' numbers of participants.

Navalny's team released a video report alleging Putin had been gifted a US\$1.35bn property on the Black Sea coast.

The Kremlin has denied that the Russian president owns the opulent complex.

AFP

Palestine killed for attempt to attack

Jerusalem - The Israeli army said it killed a Palestinian who carried out an attempted knife attack on Sunday in the Gush Etzion area of the occupied West Bank.

'A knife attack was reported at the Gush Etzion junction, south of Bethlehem,' the army said in a statement. 'The attacker was neutralised.'

The attacker 'is dead', the army told AFP, confirming that the military had killed the assailant.

The military later said the incident took place at a bus station, where soldiers were providing security to Israelis, with the suspect 'running' at the forces while brandishing a stick with three knives fastened to it. No military personnel were wounded in the attack.

Gush Etzion is a cluster of two dozen Israeli settlements and outposts near Bethlehem.

There is frequent friction at the nearby junction, which has been the site of numerous so-called lone wolf Palestinian attacks.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War.

There are currently about 475,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank living in communities considered illegal by most of the international community, alongside some 2.8mn Palestinians.

All Jewish settlements in the West Bank are regarded as illegal by most of the international community.

AFP

Daniel Pearl's family to challenge Pakistan top court's order to acquit mastermind

Islamabad, Pakistan - The family of American journalist Daniel Pearl will challenge an order by Pakistan's top court to release a British-born militant acquitted of masterminding his kidnapping and brutal murder in 2002.

The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the acquittal of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and three other men last year, triggering outrage from the United States.

Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal* when he was abducted and beheaded by extremists in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about religious extremist militants.

'The Pearl family intends to file a review petition against the illegal and unjust majority decision,' parents Ruth and Judea Pearl said in a statement that was tweeted by the murdered journalist's friend and former *Wall Street Journal* colleague Asra Nomani.

They join both the federal government and Sindh provincial government - of which the city of



A police vehicle (left) enters the central prison where British-born militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh (right) is serving his prison sentence, in Karachi on Saturday (AFP)

Karachi is the capital - in launching a plea for the latest verdict to be reviewed.

Lawyers for Pearl's family have argued that Sheikh played a crucial role in organising the abduction and detention of the journalist before ordering his captors to kill him.

Defence lawyers, however, say he was a scapegoat and sentenced on insufficient evidence.

'It is beyond belief that Ahmad Omar Sheikh - who after 18 years of lies, had finally admitted in a handwritten letter to the court his role in the kidnapping for ransom of Daniel Pearl - has

been given a clean slate and let loose once again upon the world to continue his international terrorist activities,' Pearl's family said in the statement.

The four men - who have been detained under the emergency orders of Sindh government since their acquittal last year -



still have multiple court challenges linked to their case.

Sheikh, a British-born extremist who once studied at the London School of Economics and had been involved in previous kidnappings of foreigners, was arrested days after Pearl's abduction.

He was later sentenced to death.

US President Joe Biden's administration was 'outraged by the Pakistani Supreme Court's decision', White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters last week.

AFP

Mexico identifies four of 19 bodies found burned near US border

Ciudad Victoria, Mexico - Mexico has identified at least four of the 19 bodies found shot and burnt near the US border, prosecutors said on Saturday.

Two Guatemalans - believed to be migrants - and two Mexicans were identified by their DNA after authorities discovered the bodies on January 22, the prosecutor's office in the northern state of Tamaulipas said in a statement.

It said members of the Interior Ministry's national search commission had been added to the investigation for 'greater trans-

parency', in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry and the Guatemalan Embassy in Mexico.

"It was determined that 16 correspond to the male sex, one to the female sex, and two are pending clarification [due to the severity of the burning]," the prosecutors said.

A team of forensics experts, dentists, geneticists and criminology specialists has been formed to identify the victims.

Residents of the Guatemalan town of Comitancillo suspect at least a dozen of the victims are their relatives, according to au-



This file photo shows Marco Pablo, the father of Guatemalan migrant Anderson (16) - believed to be among the 19 people killed in Mexico, at his home in Nueva Esperanza village in Guatemala on January 28 (AFP)

thorities in the Central American country. Authorities in Tamaulipas, who worked with the neighbouring state of Nuevo Leon, established that 113 bullets were fired into a vehicle where the bodies were found.

Tamaulipas, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, is the shortest route to the United States from Guatemala, but it is dangerous because of the presence of gangs that kidnap, extort, and murder migrants.

The region is regularly the scene of clashes between the North West cartel, which con-

trols part of Nuevo Leon, and the Gulf cartel, which has been present in Tamaulipas for decades.

Mexico is experiencing a wave of violence linked to organized crime, especially drug cartels that vie for control of the routes to the US.

The rate of violence has grown steadily in the country since the end of 2006, when the government handed the anti-narcotics file to the army. More than 300,000 murders have taken place since that date, according to official figures.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

WHO experts probe ground-zero China market as nations tighten virus curbs

Wuhan, China - WHO experts on Sunday visited the market in central China linked to the first known COVID-19 cluster, seeking clues about the beginning of the pandemic as a number of nations further tightened restrictions to stop the coronavirus.

France on Sunday closed its borders to non-European countries except for essential travel, a day after Germany imposed a ban on most travellers from nations hit by new, more contagious coronavirus variants.

And authorities in Australia imposed a snap five-day lockdown in Perth after the detection of a single case in the city of roughly 2mn people.

The emergence of the new variants has further complicated the fight against the coronavirus, which first emerged in late 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan before unleashing death and economic devastation around the world.

A World Health Organization team visited the Huanan food market in Wuhan on Sunday as part of its fieldwork in a politically sensitive mission to investigate the origins of the pandemic.

Their visit is being tightly controlled, and the WHO has already downplayed expectations of finding the source of the virus, which is known to have infected more than 102mn people so far with over 2.2mn deaths.

The experts did not take any questions from journalists as they visited the market.

In recent days, Chinese authorities have relentlessly pushed a positive narrative of heroism and decisive, swift action against the virus.

But it has faced criticism at home and abroad for how it handled the initial Wuhan outbreak and its lack of transparency.



Members of the WHO team arrive at the closed Huanan Seafood wholesale market, in Wuhan on Sunday (AFP)

More restrictions

With mass vaccination programmes still in their infancy and struggling with supply, unpopular restrictions on business, movement and travel remain among the few options available to governments in their fight against the virus.

On Sunday, France closed its borders to all non-EU travellers except those on essential trips, and closed big shopping centres, except those selling food; whilst Portuguese citizens will not be able to travel abroad except in 'special cases' for two weeks.

The day before, Germany barred most travellers from countries battling the new virus variants that are believed to be more contagious. The decision impacts people from Britain, Ireland, Portugal, Brazil, South Africa, Lesotho and Eswatini.

A World Health Organization team visited the Huanan food market in Wuhan on Sunday as part of its fieldwork in a politically sensitive mission to investigate the origins of the pandemic

Even nations that have largely brought their outbreaks under control are wary of a resurgence. The lockdown in Perth, Australia, was ordered after a security guard at a quarantine hotel tested positive.

"Our model is to deal with it very, very quickly and harshly," said Western Australia premier Mark McGowan.

Canada said arriving passengers would have to quarantine in hotels at their own expense, with airlines suspending flights to southern destinations.

And in the United States, the

hardest-hit nation in the world, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a sweeping order requiring people to wear masks on virtually every form of public transportation.

Despite the number of infections and deaths remaining high, the outbreak in the United States appears to be easing, with new cases and hospitalisations down two weeks in a row.

Experts say that is down to better adherence to mask wearing and social distancing, as well as the end of the holiday season.

But another factor identified

by some experts is that - at least in some areas of the country - the virus has already burned through much of the population and is running out of targets.

The recently launched vaccination drives in many countries are stumbling because of supply shortages, which have also sparked a bitter diplomatic row between the EU and Britain.

Both are tussling over the AstraZeneca-Oxford shots, with the firm saying there are not enough to go around because of production issues. Germany has threatened legal action against companies that do not deliver the doses they promised.

In less privileged parts of the world that have yet to launch vaccinations at that scale, people are struggling to find resources to save lives of their loved ones.

AFP

S Africa orders 20mn Pfizer vaccines: Report



A man meditates during a protest against the government's ban on people's entry to the beach, in Cape Town on Saturday (AFP)

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa has secured 20mn doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine, the Health Minister told a newspaper.

Africa's worst virus-hit country has yet to begin vaccinating its population against COVID-19, stirring criticism over slow procurement and lack of strategy.

A first shipment of AstraZeneca/Oxford jabs produced in India is due to arrive on Monday, with injections expected to start two weeks later.

Health Minister Zweli Mkhize told *The Sunday Times* that 20mn additional vaccines had been ordered from US drugmaker Pfizer.

"These vaccines are secured and awaiting manufacturers to submit final agreements with details of delivery dates and exact amounts," said Mkhize.

The Health Ministry did not respond to several AFP requests for comment.

The new Pfizer order will complement 12mn vaccine doses from the WHO-backed Covax facility, 9mn Johnson & Johnson shots and 1.5mn AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccines - pushing the total supply secured so far to over 40mn.

South Africa aims to vaccinate 67 per cent of the population, or 40mn people, by the end of the year.

Some vaccines will be provided by Covax and the African Union, while others will be directly purchased from suppliers.

"We are reasonably comfortable that what we have paid for, signed for and are negotiating for will cover the numbers that we are looking to vaccinate," Mkhize assured.

AFP



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (centre) addresses the media upon his arrival for the budget session at the parliament, in New Delhi on Friday (AFP)

India's Modi vows to pursue reforms after deadly protest

New Delhi, India - India will push on with sweeping agriculture reforms, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday, as he criticised last week's deadly riot in the capital following a long-running protest campaign by farmers.

Thousands flooded New Delhi on Tuesday, driving tractors from border camps where they have been holding sit-ins since November 26; but the rally turned into a rampage which left one person dead and hundreds of police injured.

Modi called the farmers' assault on a historic fort an 'insult'

to the national flag.

His government have insisted that the agriculture sector needs to be modernised, but farmers fear the deregulation laws will place them at the mercy of big corporations that already dominate other industries.

In his first public comments on Tuesday's events, Modi stressed that the government remained 'committed to modernising agriculture'.

"The efforts of the government shall also continue in the future," the Indian leader said in his regular monthly radio address on Sunday.

"On January 26, seeing the insult of our tricolour, the country was very sad," he added.

The demonstrators swarmed the 400 year old World Heritage-listed Red Fort on Tuesday, raising religious and farm union flags, though they did not remove the national flag from the top of the monument.

Mandeep Punia, who writes for the English-language *Caravan* magazine, was detained on Saturday at Singhu, one of the main protest sites.

He was photographed being taken to court on Sunday.

AFP

Britain opens visa scheme for millions of Hong Kongers

Hong Kong, China - A new visa scheme offering millions of Hong Kongers a pathway to British citizenship went live on Sunday as the city's former colonial master opens its doors to those wanting to escape China's crackdown on dissent.

Anyone with a British National (Overseas) (BNO) passport and their dependents can now apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the United Kingdom. After five years, they can apply for citizenship.

The immigration scheme is a response to Beijing's decision last year to impose a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong to snuff out the huge and often violent democracy protests.

Britain has accused China of tearing up its promise ahead of Hong Kong's 1997 handover that the financial hub would maintain key liberties and autonomy for 50 years, and has argued it has a moral duty to protect its former subjects.

"We have honoured our profound ties of history and friendship with the people of Hong Kong, and we have stood up for freedom and autonomy," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said of the scheme this week.

The website for visa applications went online at 5.00pm in



This file photo shows residents queuing up outside the Immigration Department building to register their status before the midnight deadline for the right to apply for a British National (Overseas) passport or 'BNO', in the Wanchai district in Hong Kong on March 31, 1996 (AFP)

Hong Kong. China has reacted with fury to the visa offer, announcing that it would no longer recognise the passports as a legitimate travel or ID document.

The move was largely symbolic as Hong Kongers tend to use their own passports or ID cards to leave the city.

for violating its promise not to

give BNO passport holders right of residence. 'This is a flagrant offence of China's sovereignty, and we firmly oppose it,' it said.

The office claimed the UK was beautifying its colonial history and called this 'a shameful logic of bandits, seriously hurting the feelings of the Chinese'.

In a commentary on Sunday, China's state-run Xinhua news agency accused Britain of having a 'colonial mentality'.

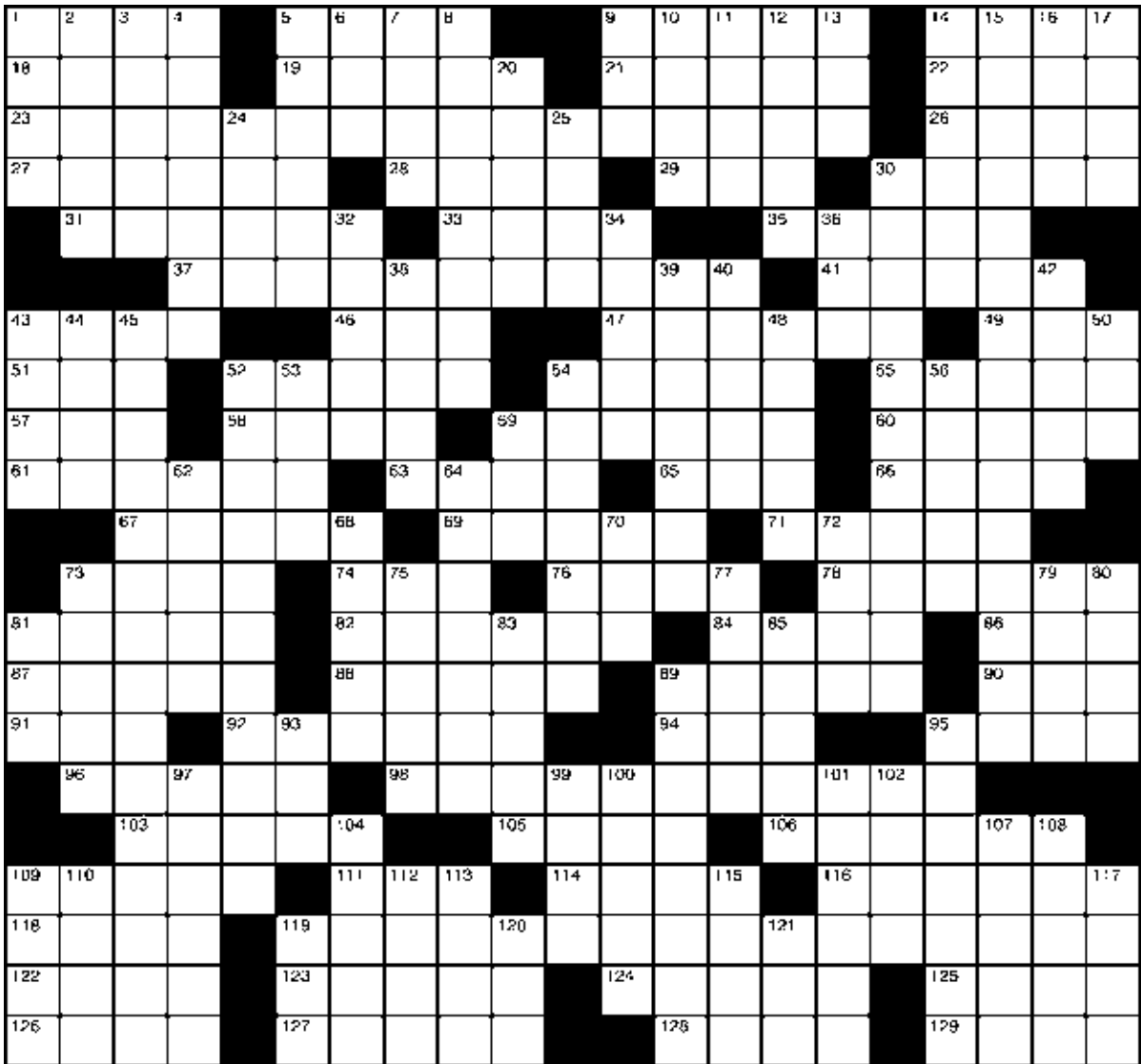
It is not clear how many Hong Kongers will take up the offer - especially as the coronavirus restricts international flights and mires much of the world, including Britain, in a painful economic malaise.

But the visa offer is available to a huge number of people - about 70 per cent of Hong Kong's 7.5mn population.

Applications for 'BNO' passports have skyrocketed more than 300 per cent since the national security law was imposed last July, with 733,000 registered holders as of mid-January. Britain predicts up to 154,000 Hong Kongers could arrive over the next year and as many as 322,000 over five years, bringing an estimated 'net benefit' of up to £2.9bn.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- 121 Fodder

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

February kicks off with a new change of pace. Venus moves forward into Aquarius, bringing her powers of magnetism to your social network, community, and friend groups from now until February 25. Relationship matters preoccupy the day in a pleasant, if not slightly serious way, as the Libra moon smoothly aligns with commitment-concerned Saturn and sweet Venus.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You understand what it takes to make love grand. Now, the universe is working to show you what it takes to make love functional. Today's skies witness Venus' forward movement into your opposite sign of calm Aquarius. Venus' stay here, running now through February 25, offers you the chance to sweeten bonds, deepen commitments, and bring the right people into your sphere.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your mind has been something like a beehive. All the activity and buzzing has been stimulating, but it may leave you feeling mentally drained. Today's skies see the forward movement of Venus into Aquarius, helping soften and sweeten this atmosphere. This transition gives you a silver tongue, boosting your charisma in any circumstances requiring your voice.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You're cosmically guided by the goddess of love, Venus. Today's skies see Venus on the move, as she pushes forward into cool, calm, and collected Aquarius this morning. This transition is a positive one for you, as it puts you at peak visibility in your career from now through February 25. Now is the time to apply, launch, and promote yourself in the public eye!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You've got all your eggs in one basket. That's just how you roll! Commit to the project and see it through to the best of your ability. Venus prances into logic-first Aquarius, attracting positive circumstances to your work/life balance and health, from now through February 25. This makes for an ideal time for applying to new jobs and for deepening bonds with co-workers.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

This time of year often finds you in a deep review of your resources. It's time to take stock of the things you're good at and the talents you wish to improve on. Make something happen with them. Today's skies see Venus move forward into cool, calm, and collected Aquarius. Venus' stay here attracts beneficial circumstances around money, skills, and abilities.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The darker days are behind you. Venus emerges from her trek through heavy Capricorn, moving forward into Aquarius—where she'll remain until February 25. This transition attracts positive circumstances around travel and education. It also offers bright new opportunities for self-expansion. The day itself is light, as the Libra moon calls for playful activity as opposed to productivity.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your ruling planet is on the move. That means a much needed change of pace is in store for you! It's time to leave the past behind, as Venus moves forward out of dreary Capricorn and dances into Aquarius today. Venus' stay in the sign of the Water-Bearer turns up the heat in your romantic life and amplifies your ability for creative output, from now through February 25.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're ready to give life everything you've got. This first day of the month brings a welcome change of pace, as Venus slides into your sign, bringing her benefits to your doorstep. Venus' stay, running now through February 25, makes you hard to miss in the eyes of other people. It's the best time of year to reinvent your style, update your wardrobe, or put yourself out there when dating.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The universe is shining a light on the darker spaces within you. While this isn't exactly comfortable, it makes it easier to identify what parts of your life are hungry for renewal. Today's skies witness Venus' forward movement into Aquarius, where she'll stay until February 25. This offers the opportunity to bravely face commitment issues and other long-standing relationship fears.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your emotions are hidden—churning just below the surface. That narrative is feeling especially true these days, as the cosmos have been aiming their energy at the foundations beneath your feet. Today's skies send in assistance, as Venus moves into Aquarius. Venus' stay will help sweeten family bonds and attract positive circumstances to any home related matters from now.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Life is asking you to look at the habits you're ready to give up. You've outgrown so much in recent years, and yet, so much clutter has amassed in your psychic closets. Relationship-focused Venus moves forward into fresh-solution-seeking Aquarius. Venus' stay will help assist you in acknowledging and releasing old relationship patterns that just aren't cutting it anymore.

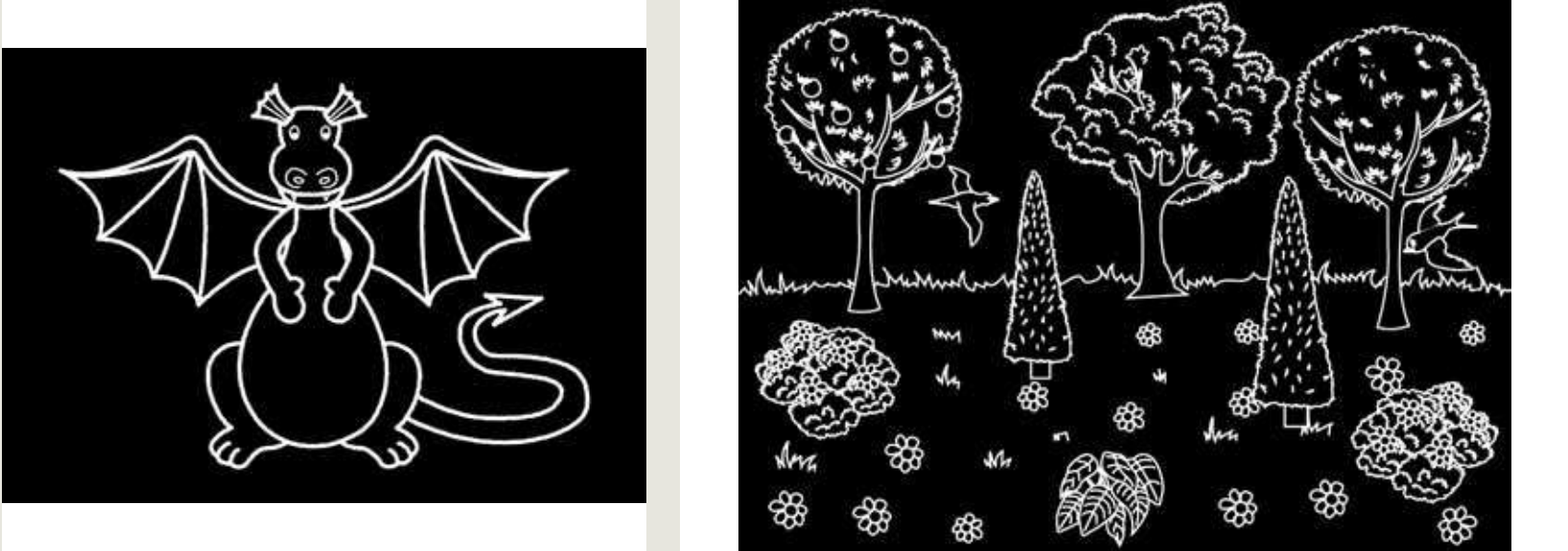


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. The significance of the lotus symbol is
 - a. culture and civilisation
 - b. peace
 - c. justice
 - d. sign of mourning, in protest
- 2. The number of judges in European Court of Human Rights are
 - a. 5
 - b. 11
 - c. 47
 - d. 15
- 3. The Roman governor and principal assassin in the murder of Julius Caesar was
 - a. Marcus Junius Brutus
 - b. Marco Polo
 - c. Leon Trotsky
 - d. Karl Markx

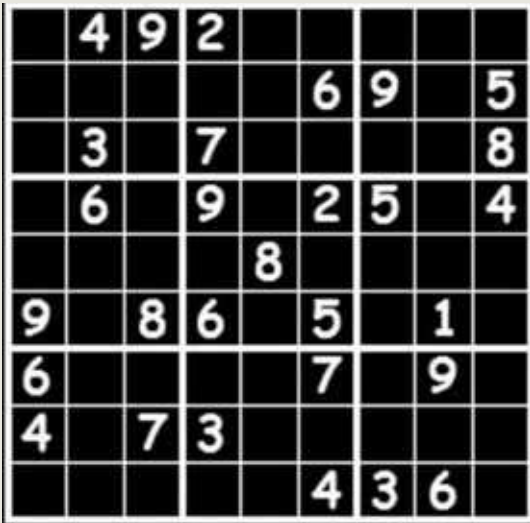
Answers: 1: a 2: c 3: a

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



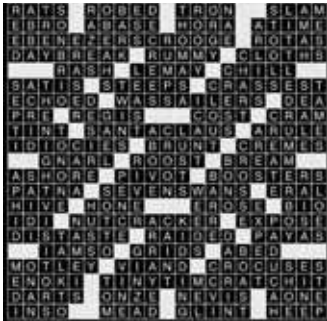
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JANUARY 31)



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



WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021

TRAVEL trends

Travelling abroad will no more look the same this year onwards, no matter how good or enjoyable and experience you have had in past years. From delays and hold-ups to quarantines and health checks, one can expect anything to throw a spanner in your plans and bring forth surprises that might take off the steam from all your intended revelry.

In view of the current pandemic, sudden alteration in flight schedules, the prospect of procuring and presenting health 'passports', and the trend of planning last-minute getaways instead of well-thought-over plans are here to stay. Travel experts say, it might take at least two years for things to get back on track - a new track with new guidelines and expectations. In any case, the exercise of vaccinations all over the world has definitely brought in new hope. Here's what to expect in coming days:

Airline change fees

Many airlines, including American, Delta, United and Alaska Airlines, looking to get more passengers on planes in 2020, stopped charging customers exorbitant fees (typically \$200) just to change or cancel domestic flights. They recently extended that policy to include international flights (with some exceptions). Airline change fee may soon be gone for good among all airlines to get more people on flights, says tour operators.

Travel flexibility

Before committing to a trip, travelers will want assurance that they can easily cancel their cruise, hotel or tour without penalty. Providers are responding and Celebrity Cruises, for example, is now allowing customers to cancel their cruise up to 48 hours before departure

and rebook through May 2022. Some tour operators are allowing customers to change departure date up to three weeks before the tour for no fee.

Last-minute getaways

This is another response to the unpredictability caused by COVID-19. Even those of us used to planning our big vacations months in advance may now wait to do so until close to departure. According to a recent trends report from the vacation rental site www.hometogo.com, the average time before check-in between when the pandemic began and the end of September was 50 days.

COVID-free documents

Proof of a negative test (and may be vaccination) may become necessary for flying. A growing number of airlines and airports are partnering with destinations to develop travel corridors, where people flying between select destinations who show proof of a negative test can avoid quarantine mandates. At some point, say experts, the travel corridors may become less about testing and more about proving you were vaccinated.

Digital 'health passports'

It's unclear whether it will become standard for destinations and travel providers like airlines and tour companies to require COVID vaccination for entry, but one tool for doing so could be health apps that can reliably confirm negative COVID-19 test results and proof of COVID-19 vaccination. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is developing one, the IATA Travel Pass, that will allow travelers to store verified test or vaccination results on their mobile devices.



In view of the current pandemic, sudden alteration in flight schedules, the prospect of procuring and presenting health 'passports', and the trend of planning last-minute getaways instead of well-thought-over plans are here to stay

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وفقاً لأحكام المادة 150 من قانون الشركات التجارية تعلن شركة مأكولات مسقط الفاخرة (ش.م.م) المقيدة بالسجل التجاري رقم 1381159 بأنها بصدد تخفيض رأس المال 150.000.000 إلى 30.000.000 ريال عماني . وكل من له اعتراض على ذلك عليه أن يتقدم بأسباب اعتراضه لأمانة السجل التجاري بوزارة التجارة والصناعة خلال 30 يوماً من تاريخه .

BIRTHDAY WISHES

SUMI NAZEER
February 01

'No one will ever love you as much as you'
Happy Birthday
Dear Umma
With love.. Wafa, Achu, Vappy

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TIPS FOR DUNE BASHING

A DATE WITH THE SANDS

Hubert Vaz

Oman's young adventurer, Hamdoon Sultan, who has been travelling to different countries in the Middle East on his bicycle, as well as taking up daredevil adventures all by himself, recently chose to learn a new skill – dune bashing – to equip himself with nerves of steel and defy his own abilities.

“There are numerous sites on the internet which tell you how to get ready and prepare your vehicle for dune bashing but there are none that give you tips on how best to do it – you've got to get out there and figure it out for yourself,” says Hamdoon who recently took up a dune bashing trip in the Empty Quarter in Sharqiyah. “Experience is the best teacher and unless you try dune bashing for yourself, no amount of theory or tips can actually teach you what to do, and when,” he added.

Hamdoon, who decided to stay in Oman because of the travel restrictions in other countries, said, “Due to the limitations in travel, I found it a great time to explore Oman and its hidden treasures. I was happy to join Yusuf al Balochi, a professional trainer

for dune bashing in the Empty Quarter, for a great experience. I learnt that some adventures require a leader, to follow orders and take decisions. This was unlike my previous adventures when I headed out without a leader or sans professional help.”

Dune Bashing is a form of off-roading done on sand dunes, usually in huge 4X4 vehicles that are built for such activity. Not every 4X4 is suitable for dune bashing which involves driving at varying speeds over sand dunes and manoeuvring the car in such a way as to maintain balance while going up the dune and coming down.

A highly thrilling and adrenaline-pumping activity, which calls for perseverance, endurance, as well as high safety precautions, the SUV's that are used for this adventure sport, are usually fitted with protective gear, like roll cages, and the tyre pressure is significantly reduced to allow for maximum traction against the moving sand.

Prep your vehicle

The first thing you need to do for a dune bashing trip is procure a worthy vehicle. You need a 4X4 SUV with higher ground clear-



“Experience is the best teacher and unless you try dune bashing for yourself, no amount of theory or tips can actually teach you what to do, and when”

HAMDOON SULTAN

ance and one needs to check the vehicle manual to confirm that it is suitable for this activity before embarking on it.

The next step is to ensure that it is well serviced and the fuel tank is full. One must also carry an extra fuel can and store it safely in the vehicle, besides spare tyres and tools. One must also download a compass app on one's phone which gives latitudes and longitudes to get the right coordinates for your location, in case you need emergency services to find you in case of any eventuality.

Prepping the tyres comes to the fore once there. Depending on the vehicle, the recommended pressure rating lies between 30 and 40 PSI for regular road surfaces. But if you go into the dunes with this, the tyres exhibit a tendency of get stuck in the sands than manoeuvring the dunes. The trick is to give them greater control by deflating the tyres to a certain pressure depending on the terrain. You can do this by using a simple air deflator. Typically, you should drop pressure down to 20 or 15 PSI, or even less, if needed.

What to wear

Dress comfortably because inevitably the sand gets into everything. A hat or a scarf to cover your hair, and long pants and a light shirt or t-shirt is fine. You may also wear

sneakers and socks but sandals are just as fine. Those wearing contact lenses, must wear shades as tiny grains of sand can very easily get into your eyes and cause much discomfort.

Wearing shades is a good idea because small grains of sand get into your eyes very easily when you are outside the vehicle. And, with no running water nearby, eye-drops alone won't be helpful.

Teamwork is key

Hamdoon says that teamwork is the key to success on such an adventure which involves many challenges that one cannot handle single-handedly. However, by coordinating and cooperating with team mates no dune is unsurpassable. “On this trip, I was among many others, many of whom were there for the first time, like me. Teamwork, however, made work light for all. For instance, when one person got stuck in the sand, those before and after his vehicle jumped in to help him get out. Also, in the evenings, the leaders often sit down to discuss mistakes and make suggestions on how to tide over them,” he said.



What to eat before dune bashing

When taking up a dune bashing trip or a desert safari which includes a dune bashing stint remember what's in your stomach does matter. Most tour operators give out guidelines but rarely talk about what one must eat or drink before dune bashing.

Desert Safaris are similar to roller coaster rides and if you take it up soon after a good breakfast or lunch, you surely know what to expect to spoil your experience. Dune bashing involves riding up tall dunes and then rushing downwards on the other side, sharp

and quick turns and quick manoeuvres that often leave your head spinning. So, it is bound to make you feel a bit sick, but it can get ugly if you throw up in the middle as your stomach is bound to get churned.

You know how your body behaves, so you

are the best judge to decide what you should eat before going on such an adventure. However, don't have a real feast before a desert safari, neither should you try to ride on an empty stomach. Eat at least an hour before your trip to allow time for your digestion.

Avoid hot (spicy) and fatty foods - eat healthy foods like fruits and vegetables but don't overeat. For drinks, water is the best bet as it will prevent dehydration. Avoid hot beverages or fizzy drinks that might cause your stomach to rumble during the ride.



QUICK TIPS

- Use a 4X4 SUV suitable for dune bashing
- Vehicles with high ground clearance are best
- Use radio communication between vehicles
- Always carry extra fuel, water, and tools
- Suitably deflating tyres is a must on sand
- Maintain a good distance between vehicles
- Carry a winch for towing when stuck
- Carry an air compressor and puncture fixing kits
- Always follow instructions of the team leader



RALLY RECORD-BREAKER

- Qatar’s Nasser Saleh al Attiyah betters his own record with 15th victory in the Qatar International Rally
- Oman’s Zakariya al Auferi claims podium finish in MERC 2 category, Zakariya al Amri ends overall tenth

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

QATAR INTERNATIONAL RALLY FIA MERC: ROUND ONE

Nasser Saleh al Attiyah’s dominance on the wheels is becoming part of the regional rally circuit folklore and on Sunday, the Qatari driver once again stamped his authority in style.

Attiyah clinched his 15th title in the Qatar International Rally, the first round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) at Losail, Qatar, along with his French co-driver Matthieu Baumel in their Autotek Motorsport Volkswagen Polo GTi R5.

It was a record-breaking title win for Attiyah who bettered his own mark of 14 title victories. He also broke his record of total number of wins in the MERC, winning for the 77th time in the 218-event history of the series.

Attiyah’s winning margin was of 1min 48.4sec over his Qatari compatriot Abdulaziz al Kuwari and his Irish co-driver James Fulton in their Tok Sport Škoda Fabia R5. Completing an all-Qatari podium was Khalid al Suwaidi with a third-place finish with his navigator Hugo Magalhães.

Three Omani drivers had entered the fray including last season’s MERC overall runner-up Abdullah al Rawahi. The other two were Zakariya al Auferi and Zakariya al Amri.

While Rawahi’s car broke down on the second day on Saturday to force him out of the R5 category, Auferi and Amri, who had entered the MERC 2 category, finished eighth and tenth overall in the rally. Rawahi was expected to start on the final day with a time penalty but on Sunday morning confirmed before the restart that the car’s exhaust sensor issues were not fixed forcing him to retire.



Nasser Saleh al Attiyah during the final day of the Qatar International Rally on Sunday



Zakariya al Auferi competes during the Qatar International Rally on Sunday

However, bringing some cheer to the Oman camp were Auferi and his co-driver Ammar al Balushi in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX as they claimed a podium finish with a third-place in the MERC 2 class.

Defending class winner Meshari al Thefiri of Kuwait retained the title with his co-driver Nasser al Kuwari of Qatar with a time of 2hrs 17min10.9sec. Qatar’s Rashad al Mohammadi

and his navigator Yousef Juma of Jordan finished second with a time of 2hrs 22min31.3sec.

Auferi and Balushi timed 2hrs 33min51.9sec to round off the MERC 2 podium.

Speaking after the podium finish Auferi said, “I suffered tyre puncture on the last day and was also hit with a time penalty for taking a wrong route. Later in the final stage, I couldn’t go all out as my brakes failed due to a me-

chanical issue. Had I not encountered these problems, I would have finished second. But, I am happy with the result.”

Zakariya al Amri and his co-driver Mohammed al Mazroui in their Subaru Impreza managed to complete the rally with a tenth-place finish overall and fifth in the MERC 2 category. The Omani driver clocked 3hrs 01min00.2sec to come ahead of the last driver to complete the



Zakariya al Amri drives on the final day of the Qatar International Rally

I suffered a tyre puncture on the last day and was also hit with a time penalty for taking a wrong route. Later in the final stage, I couldn’t go all out as my brakes failed

ZAKARIYA AL AUFERI



Omani drivers with OAA official Suleiman al Rawahi (second from left)

rally - Henry Kahy of Lebanon.

Amri said that ‘there was considerable improvement in his performance on the final day’. “I lost my advantage after I was hit by penalty on Saturday. In fact, during the last stage today, I was faster than Thefiri, who eventually won the MERC 2 category.”

Good job: Attiyah

“Today we did a really good job,” said Attiyah after the win. “It was

great to have some high level competition this year.”

Any hope of seeing Attiyah and visiting WRC star Meeke battling for stage wins on the final day fizzled out when the Ulsterman was unable to restart after the team discovered engine damage on his SRT Škoda Fabia R5 that was sustained on stage five. A total of 11 of the original 17 starters completed the rally.

@ashokmuscat

Antonsen and Tai lift titles

BADMINTON WORLD TOUR FINALS

Bangkok, Thailand - Top-ranked Tai Tzu-ying won a dramatic cliffhanger in women’s badminton World Tour Final in Bangkok, Thailand, on Sunday, blocking reigning Olympic champion Carolina Marin’s bid for a hat-trick of titles in three weeks.

The all-Danish men’s singles final was equally nail biting as Anders Antonsen denied Viktor Axelsen a third tournament win in three weeks.

Marin beat the Taiwanese 26 year old two weeks in a row during the previous Thailand Open tournament finals. The Spaniard had a shaky start Sunday as Tai exploited holes in her defence early, but Marin mounted a successful comeback in the later stages winning the opener 21-14.



Anders Antonsen

In the second game Tai dominated early and dictated a commanding pace, eventually triumphing 21-8. The decider was filled with fast and furious rallies - but two late spectacular drop shots were critical in sealing Tai’s victory 21-19.

Axelsen, ranked fourth, could-



Tai Tzu-ying

n’t control his nerves - losing the first game 16-21. He managed to regroup to win the second game 21-5. But in the decider Antonsen had all the right answers, triumphing 21-17 to claim the game and the hour-long match against an increasingly ruffled Axelsen.

AFP

Pakistan drop Hafeez and Zaman for S Africa T20Is

Lahore, Pakistan - In-form batsman Mohammad Hafeez and struggling opener Fakhar Zaman are absentees from the Pakistan squad named by selectors Sunday for the Twenty20 international series against South Africa next month.

The 40 year old Hafeez is in the form of his life, scoring 502 runs in his last 12 Twenty20 internationals at an average of 100.40 with a strike rate of 153.

But chief selector Mohammad Waseem said the senior batsman was not available for the series. “There are no questions over Hafeez’s performance, but he has not given his availability on February 3 when the squad will go in a bio-secure environment,” said



Mohammad Hafeez

Waseem while announcing the squad. Hafeez is currently featuring in the T10 league in Abu Dhabi, UAE, which finishes on February 6.

Pakistan and South Africa will play three T20Is - all in Lahore - on February 11, 13 and 14.

Babar Azam will lead the

squad, which also sees comebacks for pacer Hasan Ali, allrounder Aamer Yamin and batsman Asif Ali.

Uncapped leg-spinner Zahid Mahmood, allrounder Amad Butt and batsman Danish Aziz are also part of the 20-man squad, while pacer Wahab Riaz is left out.

Squad: Babar Azam (captain), Haider Ali, Khushdil Shah, Hussain Talat, Danish Aziz, Asif Ali, Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz, Zafar Gohar, Faheem Ashraf, Aamer Yamin, Amad Butt, Mohammad Rizwan, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hussain, Hasan Ali, Usman Qadir, Zahid Mahmood.

AFP

Muscat’s Prajapati hits century; Ilyas’ allround display in Alpha’s win

LOCAL CRICKET

Kashyap Kumar Prajapati hammered an unbeaten 106 and his fellow opener Jatinder Singh scored an unbeaten 65 to power Muscat CT to a ten-wicket win over Renaissance CT in an Oman Cricket Premier Division (50-over-a-side) game at Al Amerat on Saturday.

Earlier on Friday, in another Premier Division match, Aqib Ilyas struck 66 and then claimed four for 16 to lead Arm Alpha to

a massive victory over AER.

BRIEF SCORES

Premier Division: Renaissance CT 174 in 48.5 overs (Shubo Pal 55; Aamir Kaleem 2-9, Shoaib Khan 2-28, Wasim Ali 2-38) lost to Muscat CT 175 for no loss in 26.4 overs (Prajapati 106, Jatinder 65).

Premier Division: Arm Alpha 223-9 (Ilyas 66, Ahmad Fayyaz 40; Amanpreet Singh 3-35,



Kashyap Prajapati



Jatinder Singh



Aqib Ilyas



Chirag Mandaviya



Usman Haider



Darwish Ellickal



Parthiban Mohan

Ghazanfar Iqbal 2-29) beat AER 119 all out in 33.5 overs (Kuttiraja Karuthapandian 40, Asim Kamal 31; Ilyas 4-16, Bilal Khan 3-18).

A Division (50-over-a-side): Awtad International 258-5 (Mohammed Waqas 70, Nidhin Mohan 59, Joel Biju 46) lost to

Basta CT 259-8 (Chirag Mandaviya 101, Usman Haider 58; Parameswaran Shankar 3-50, Mohammed Waqas 2-35).

B Division (30-over-a-side): Orient Travels/Gitacs 264-7 (Adil Khan 111, Rafique 43; Zubair Ali 5-48) beat

OCT Ruwi 173 all out in 28.1 overs (Ali 38, Shuaib Ismail 32; Rahman Umar 5-41, Adil Khan 2-6).

B Division: Bank Muscat 229-5 (Abbas al Balushi 54, Zeeshan Tufail 42, Mohsin Nazir 41; Parthiban Mohan 2-35) lost to Zubair CT 231-9 in 28.4 overs (Chandana Jagath 39, Darwish Ellickal 38, Mohan 23; Nazir 2-32, Tufail 2-36, Ashish Gupta 2-43).

NIZWA HOLD DHOFAR, SEEB ROUT MUSCAT

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2020 21 OMANTEL LEAGUE

Dhofar's seven-match winning streak in the 2020-21 Omantel League season was halted on Sunday when the Salalah giants were held to a 1-1 draw by promoted Nizwa at the Nizwa Sports Complex.

The 11-time winners and defending His Majesty's Cup champions were on a roll since the start of the new season and had won all their previous rounds ahead of Sunday's clash against last season's First Division League winners.

Hosts Nizwa rallied from a goal down to equalise in the 61st minute and share the spoils with the Rasheed Jaber-coached side.

Yaseen Sheikh had put the visiting Dhofar side ahead in the 46th minute with a long chip over the rival goalkeeper.

For Nizwa, it was only their second draw and they continue to stay among the bottom-four teams with five points.

Despite the draw, Dhofar remain at the second spot with 16 points after eight rounds.

Along with defending champions Seeb, Dhofar are the only team not to lose any match so far in the current campaign.

Earlier on Saturday, holders Seeb rode on the twin strikes of their forwards, Abdulaziz al Miqbali and Salah al Yahyaei, to record a dominating 4-0 victory over Muscat.

It was the sixth victory on the trot for the reigning champions and they lead the standings after eight rounds with 22 points.

Dhofar are followed by Al Mussanah at third spot with 14 points following their 1-1 draw on Saturday against Al Ittihad at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

It may be mentioned that Dhofar, Al Nahda and Saham clubs have been docked six points each at the start of the season after being slapped with sanctions by the Oman Football Association (OFA).

In another match on Sunday, Bahla upset four-time champions Al Suwaiq 2-1 at the Rustaq Sports Complex to move to sixth place in the standings



Seeb's Abdulaziz al Miqbali celebrates after scoring against Muscat during their Omantel League game on Saturday



Action from the Omantel League match between Bahla and Suwaiq on Sunday

with 11 points. Suwaiq, despite the defeat remain at fourth place with 13 points.

And in a late evening match, Saham emerged a 1-0 winner over Oman at the Sohar Sports Complex.

Earlier on Saturday, Al Rustaq drew goalless with Al Nasr at home and Al Nahda registered a 1-0 win over hosts Sohar at the Sohar Sports Complex.

Omantel League standings (after eight rounds): 1 Seeb (22 points), 2 Dhofar (16, -6), 3 Al Mussanah (14), 4 Al Suwaiq (13), 5 Al Nasr (12), 6 Bahla (11), 7 Al Rustaq (11), 8 Oman (10), 9 Al Ittihad (8), 10 Sohar (7), 11 Nizwa (5), 12 Al Nahda (3, -6), 13 Muscat (3, 14 Saham (-6).

@ashokmuscat

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Chelsea's Marcos Alonso (left) celebrates with Christian Pulisic after scoring against Burnley on Sunday (AFP)

Chelsea record first win of Tuchel era

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Chelsea notched their first win of the Thomas Tuchel era on Sunday as Leicester squandered a chance to leapfrog Manchester United into second place in the English Premier League.

Defenders Cesar Azpilicueta and Marcos Alonso produced stunning finishes as Chelsea beat toothless Burnley 2-0 at Stamford Bridge.

Leicester, looking to close to within two points of leaders Manchester City, took the lead against Leeds but Patrick Bamford played a part in all three goals as Marcelo Bielsa's men stormed back to win 3-1.

Former Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) boss Tuchel was brought in to replace Frank Lampard last week with a brief to haul stuttering Chelsea back into the race for Champions League spots. He oversaw a frustrating goalless draw against Wolves at Stamford Bridge in midweek but two moments of magic from Azpilicueta and forgotten man Alonso mean the German has four points from six.

The result lifted Chelsea to seventh, just four points behind fourth-placed Liverpool before they kicked off.

Earlier on Saturday, Manchester City opened up a three-point lead at the top with a game in hand to come as Pep Guardiola's men beat Sheffield United 1-0, while Manchester

United played out a goalless draw at Arsenal on Saturday. Gabriel Jesus scored the only goal inside the first ten minutes at the Etihad.

OTHER RESULTS

Saturday: Southampton 0 Aston Villa 1, West Brom 2 Fulham 2, Crystal Palace 1 Wolverhampton Wanderers 0.

ITALIAN LEAGUE Lukaku double in Inter victory

Milan, Italy - Romelu Lukaku scored a second-half double as Inter Milan kept the pressure on Serie A leaders AC Milan with a 4-0 win over Benevento on Saturday. Antonio Conte's Inter sit two points behind their city rivals, who beat Bologna 2-1 earlier on Saturday. Champions Juventus moved into third, seven points off top spot with a game in hand, after a 2-0 win over Sampdoria.

OTHER RESULTS

Sunday: Spezia 0 Udinese 1, Cagliari 1 Sassuolo 1, Crotone 0 Genoa 3, Atalanta 1 Lazio 3.

SPANISH LEAGUE Atletico go ten points clear

Madrid, Spain - Luis Suarez sent Atletico Madrid ten points clear at the top of La Liga on Sunday by scoring a sensational free-kick and then a penalty in a pulsating 4-2 win over Cadiz. Atletico's

lead at the top of the table could get even worse for the chasing pack, given Diego Simeone's side still have a game in hand.

Real Madrid remain closest despite their 1-2 loss to Levante on Saturday while Barcelona are 13 points back, although they could reduce the gap when they play Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

OTHER RESULTS

Sunday: Getafe 0 Alaves 0; **Saturday:** Eibar 0 Sevilla 2, Valencia 1 Elche 0, Villarreal 1 Real Sociedad 1.

FRENCH LEAGUE

Sunday: Nice 0 Saint-Etienne 1, Angers 3 Nimes 1, Brest 2 Metz 4, Lorient 3 Paris Saint-Germain 2, Strasbourg 0 Reims 1, Lille 1 Dijon 0; **Saturday:** Montpellier 1 Lens 2, Marseille vs Rennes (match postponed).

GERMAN LEAGUE

Sunday: Cologne 3 Arminia Bielefeld 1; **Saturday:** Bayern Munich 4 Hoffenheim 1, Borussia Dortmund 3 Augsburg 1, Eintracht Frankfurt 3 Hertha Berlin 1, Union Berlin 1 Borussia Moenchengladbach 1, Werder Bremen 1 Schalke 1, RB Leipzig 1 Bayer Leverkusen 0.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Saturday: Dundee United 0 Hibernian 2, Kilmarnock 2 St Johnstone 3, Livingston 0 Aberdeen 0, Celtic 1 St Mirren 2. AFP

Humanity and social media at its worst, says Rashford

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Marcus Rashford says online racist abuse shows 'humanity at its worst' after he became the latest English Premier League star to be targeted. The Manchester United forward was attacked after his side's goalless draw against Arsenal at the Emirates on Saturday.

"Humanity and social media at its worst," Rashford tweeted. "Yes I'm a black man and I live every day proud that I am."

"No one, or no one comment, is going to make me feel any different. So sorry if you were looking for a strong reaction, you're just simply not going to get it here."

The 23 year old, a high-profile campaigner against child food poverty, said he would not share the details of the abuse as many of his followers were children.

"I'm not sharing screenshots," he said. It would be irresponsible to do so and as you can imagine there's nothing original in them. I have beautiful children of all colours following me and they don't need to read it."

AFP

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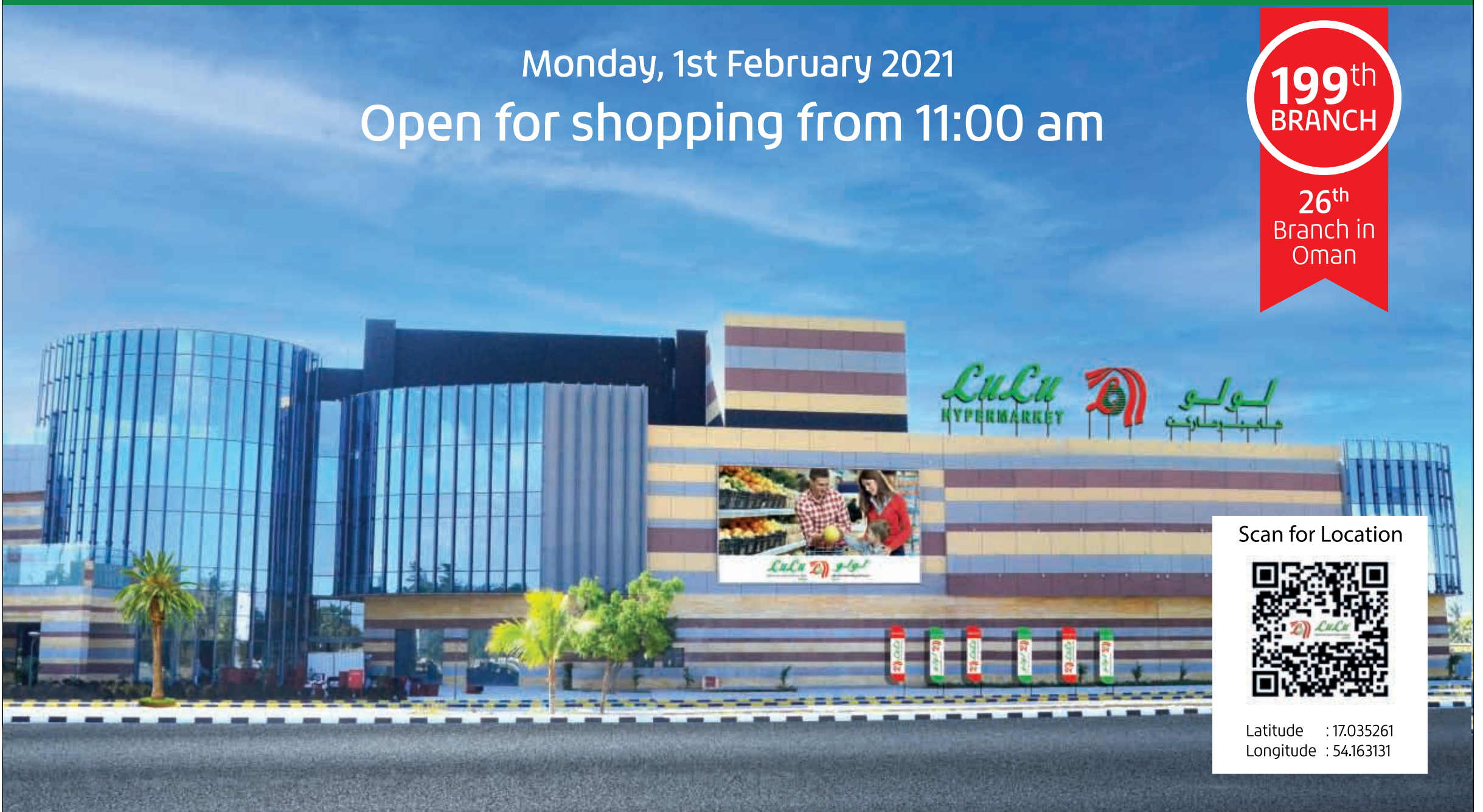
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