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OMAN ALL SET FOR FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS
GO TO PAGE 16 SPORTS

Omanisation up 1.5% in private sector in March

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The total number of Omanis employed in the private sector increased by 1.5 per cent in March 2021, compared to the same period in 2020, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Citizens constituted 16.5 per cent of the total employees in the private sector in March 2020 and 18 per cent in March 2021.

NCSI's figures indicate that the number of jobseekers reached 2.80 per cent at the end of March 2021. Bachelor's degree holders formed the largest category of jobseekers comprising 10.50 per cent, followed by university diploma holders - nine per cent, and General Education Diploma

OMANIS FORMED 18% OF THE TOTAL EMPLOYEES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN MARCH 2021, UP 1.5% FROM LAST YEAR

holders and equivalent category - four per cent.

The figures show that there were 254,999 Omanis working in the private sector in March 2021, who were insured by the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), compared to 261,268 in the same period in 2020, accounting for a drop of 6,269.

NCSI data also reveals a reduction in the number of expatriate workers by 168,833 in one year. There were 1,152,920 expa-

triate workers in March 2021 compared to 1,321,753 in same period in 2020.

Bangladeshi nationalities accounted for the largest proportion of expatriate workers - 38 per cent - followed by Indians (34 per cent) and Pakistanis (13 per cent) in March 2021. The largest number of expatriate workers were employed in the construction sector - 27.30 per cent.

'A recruitment ban on expatriates in select professions was introduced a few years ago to regulate the Omani labour market and encourage more job opportunities for citizens. The private sector has been targeting training and upskilling of Omani youth for potential direct employment as well as the development of SMEs,' the NCSI stated.

IN THE SERVICE OF THE NATION



Implementing directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to speed up the process of employing jobseekers and in line with the Sultan's Armed Forces' keenness to provide opportunities to all to join military service, Royal Army of Oman commenced recruitment procedures of applicants on Monday

COVID-19 daily count crosses 1,000 mark after 28 days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 1,041 new cases of COVID-19 and 11 related deaths on Monday. The 1,000 mark was breached after almost a month. On May 3, the ministry reported 1,093 cases.

With Monday's figures, the total number of cases registered in the sultanate now stands at 217,224 and the death toll 2,345. The total number of recoveries is 199,960 which translates to a recovery rate of 92.1 per cent.

One hundred and four patients were admitted to hospitals across

Oxy's US\$2.5mn support for immunisation



Muscat - Occidental Oman has announced an agreement with MoH to fund the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines.

The company will support the ministry with a sponsorship of US\$2.5mn for the latter's COVID-19 immunisation efforts. 'The sponsorship aims to enhance vaccination levels in

the country against the coronavirus, particularly among high-risk individuals and the ministry's target groups,' a statement issued by Oxy said. 'This vaccine programme continues Occidental Oman's support for COVID-19-related initiatives in the year 2020 and in 2021.'

84% decrease in tobacco imports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Commemorating World No Tobacco Day, observed on May 31 every year, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) has stated that Oman witnessed a decrease of 84 per cent in import of tobacco and tobacco products in 2020 compared to 2019.

Statistics from NCSI shows that the number of wholesale and



retail establishments trading in tobacco and tobacco products was 236 in 2020.

According to H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Min-

ister of Health, in the belief that tobacco control is one of the best options in the fight against non-communicable diseases, Oman ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2005 through a Royal Decree.

Tobacco taxes are known to be the most effective and cost-effective tobacco control policies and it is important that countries use this tool in their fight against tobacco consumption, H E Dr Sa'eedi said recently.

1.5

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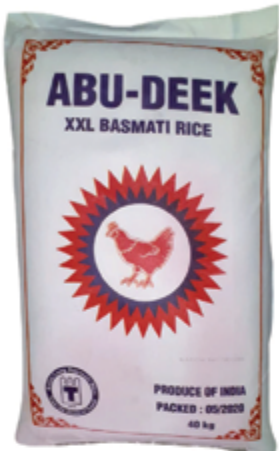
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عروض صيفية أكبر



زيت زيتون (الكورة) ٥٠٠ مل
Al koura olive oil 500ml

MyCLUB
points +5
SAVE 50%
1 RIAL 670
0 RIAL 835



أرز بسمقي (أبو ديك) ٤٠ كيلو
Abu deek basmati rice 40kg

MyCLUB
points +30
SAVE 30%
20 RIAL 500
14 RIAL 350



زيت دوار الشمس (بران) ٤ لتر
Pran sunflower oil 4L

MyCLUB
points +20
SAVE 34.39%
4 RIAL 100
2 RIAL 690



شوكولاتة (بست أوف مينيز) ٥٠٠ غرام
Best Of Minis chocolate 500g

MyCLUB
points +20
3 Pieces
SAVE 50%
8 RIAL 280
4 RIAL 140



عسل نحل (الشفاء) ٢٥٠ غرام
Al Shifa honey 250g

MyCLUB
points +10
3 Pieces
SAVE 35.19%
3 RIAL 240
2 RIAL 100



أرز بسمقي (بوابة الهند) ٢٠ كيلو
India Gate basmati rice 20kg

MyCLUB
points +30
SAVE 30.47%
19 RIAL 990
13 RIAL 900



كاتشاب الطماطم (هينز) ٥٧٠ غرام
Heinz tomato ketchup 570g

MyCLUB
points +10
2 Pieces
SAVE 45%
1 RIAL 800
0 RIAL 990



صوص كريم سيزر (هينز) ٤٠٠ مل
Heinz salad caesar cream 400ml

MyCLUB
points +10
2 Pieces
SAVE 37.50%
3 RIAL 200
2 RIAL 000



مياه للشرب (مسافي) ١,٥ لتر
Masafi drinking water 1.5L

12 Pieces
SAVE 50%
1 RIAL 740
0 RIAL 870



مارجرين (نوتراليت) ٢٥٠ غرام
Nutralite spread margarine 250g

SAVE 50%
0 RIAL 940
0 RIAL 470



بطاطس نصف مقلية (أمريكا) ٢,٥ كيلو
Americana potato fries 2.5kg

MyCLUB
points +5
SAVE 34.56%
1 RIAL 360
0 RIAL 890



شرائح زيتون (أكورسا) ٢٣٠ غرام
Acorsa slice green olives 230g

MyCLUB
points +10
2 Pieces
SAVE 31.51%
1 RIAL 460
1 RIAL 000



أفخاذ دجاج (ساديا) ٩٠٠ غرام
Sadia chicken thighs 900g

MyCLUB
points +5
2 Pieces
SAVE 40%
2 RIAL 900
1 RIAL 740



صدور دجاج (الإسلامي) ٢ كيلو
Al Islami chicken breast 2kg

MyCLUB
points +5
SAVE 27.77%
2 RIAL 755
1 RIAL 990



نفاقل الدجاج (أمريكا) ٣٤٠ غرام
Americana chicken franks 340g

4 Pieces
SAVE 50%
1 RIAL 500
0 RIAL 750



خضروات مشكلة (أمريكا) ٩٠٠ غرام
Americana mixed vegetables 900g

SAVE 47.06%
0 RIAL 850
0 RIAL 450



شوكولاتة (جالاكسي) ٦٥٠ غرام
Galaxy Jewels chocolate 650g

MyCLUB
points +15
SAVE 26.89%
4 RIAL 090
2 RIAL 990



بسكويت بالحليب (بريتانيا) ٩٠ غرام X ٨
Britannia milk bikis biscuits 90g x8

MyCLUB
points +10
2 Pieces
SAVE 42.41%
2 RIAL 240
1 RIAL 290



أفخاذ دجاج (الإسلامي) ٩٠٠ غرام
Allslami chicken drumstick 900g

MyCLUB
points +5
2 Pieces
SAVE 34.82%
3 RIAL 360
2 RIAL 190



دجاج كامل (ساديا) ٨٠٠ غرام
Sadia whole chicken 800g

MyCLUB
points +10
10 Pieces
SAVE 30.96%
9 RIAL 400
6 RIAL 490



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POWER موزع مياه (باور) Power water dispenser PB1169 SAVE 40.57% 41 RIAL 900 24 RIAL 900	Whirlpool 1.5 Ton مكيف الهواء سبليت (وايرلپول) Whirlpool split AC SPOW4184 159 RIAL 900	SAMSUNG 1.5 Ton مكيف الهواء سبليت (سامسونج) Samsung split AC AR18TRHQ 156 RIAL 900
impeX مروحة (إميكس) Impex table fan D1 SAVE 37.81% 7 RIAL 880 4 RIAL 900	NIKAI 110L براد (نيكاي) Nikai fridge NRF130SS1 SAVE 25.56% 52 RIAL 395 39 RIAL 900	SAMSUNG 450L براد (سامسونج) Samsung fridge RT5K5000 MyCLUB +500 points 139 RIAL 900
impeX مبرد هواء متحرك (باور) Power aircooler PAC1650R SAVE 37.15% 95 RIAL 450 59 RIAL 900	DAEWOO 108L فريزر أفقي (دايو) Daewoo chest freezer WCFW15WML SAVE 28.20% 69 RIAL 500 49 RIAL 900	NIKAI 138L فريزر أفقي (نيكاي) Nikai chest freezer NCF200N75 MyCLUB +500 points 69 RIAL 900
BOSCH 550W مثقاب بخاصية الطرق (بوش) Bosch rotary hammer drill MyCLUB +100 points SAVE 51.59% 61 RIAL 950 29 RIAL 990	Tefal 11 Pieces طقم طهي جرانيت متنوع Granite cooking set assorted MyCLUB +100 points SAVE 30.24% 42 RIAL 990 29 RIAL 990	Tefal 15 Pieces طقم طهي (تيفال) Tefal Prima cooking set MyCLUB +100 points SAVE 33.56% 45 RIAL 140 29 RIAL 990
HK 80 Pieces صندوق عدة (إتش كيه) HK tool set box MyCLUB +50 points SAVE 48.75% 13 RIAL 640 6 RIAL 990	blumen 7L إباء طهي بالبخار (بلومان) Blumen pressure cooker MyCLUB +100 points SAVE 33.34% 29 RIAL 990 19 RIAL 990	MILTON 3 Pieces وعاء لحفظ الطعام الساخن (ميلتون) Milton casserole set MyCLUB +50 points SAVE 37.55% 7 RIAL 990 4 RIAL 990
Lara 44 Pieces طقم طعام (لارا) متنوع Lara opal dinner set assorted MyCLUB +50 points SAVE 46.77% 16 RIAL 890 8 RIAL 990		



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MoCIIP announces 50 investment opportunities



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) announced 50 different investment opportunities in the industrial sector on Monday.

With this, it aims to attract investments worth RO200mn through the 'Invest in Oman' portal.

The areas for investment opportunities include the food products sector, mining, paper and plastic industries, petrochemicals, construction, metallic and non-metallic products, and the electrical equipment industry,' a ministry statement said.

At the announcement ceremony, H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the ministry, said, "Oman Vision 2040 is focused on economic diversification to support the economy. The launch of these investment opportunities is line with the objectives of the vision and the sultanate's industrial strategy. It is also the fruition of cooperation

The sector represents a tool for the development of other economic sectors. The contribution of industries was more than RO3bn in 2019

H E DR SALEH BIN MASAN

between the ministry and several partners, including Madayn, Petroleum Development Oman and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry."

According to H E Masan, the government is working on promoting the industrial sector as it is "a pillar of the national economy to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce imports. The sector represents a tool for the development of other economic sectors. The contribution of industries was more than RO3bn in 2019, or ten per cent of the GDP".

The value of non-oil merchandise exports increased to RO2.3bn in 2019, compared to

RO1.8bn in 2009, according to National Centre for Statistics and Information figures, H E Masan informed.

Also speaking at the launch, H E Aseela bint Salem al Sam-samiyah, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in MoCIIP, noted that these investment opportunities will add economic as well as social dimensions related to sustainable development plans in all the governorates, and positively affect the performance of the whole country and its development plans.

Redha Juma al Saleh, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said, "This investment initiative in the industrial sector aims to stimulate the market and create projects that contribute to creating job opportunities and employing Omani cadres.

"It is also an opportunity for business owners to diversify their projects and expand into industrial innovation on which the Fourth Industrial Revolution is based. Industry 4.0 is significant to Oman's strategic plans."

'Poor awareness of breast cancer symptoms delays visit to doctor'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A Sultan Qaboos University study has shown that poor awareness of breast cancer symptoms is a predominant reason for delayed presentation to a doctor.

The delays in presentation are more likely in breast cancer cases in which the symptoms do not include a breast lump.

'Moreover, women experienced several emotional barriers to seeking medical help, and this led to many women being diagnosed at advanced stages. Despite national efforts to increase breast cancer awareness, further educational initiatives are needed,' according to the study titled 'Knowledge of symptoms, time of presentation and barriers to seeking medical help among Omani women diagnosed with breast cancer'.



Worldwide, breast cancer accounts for ten per cent of all cancers diagnosed annually and around 15 per cent of all cancer deaths. Oman follows a similar pattern with breast cancer being the most diagnosed cancer accounting for 12.8 per cent of all cancers and 21.2 per cent of cancers affecting women.

There is a high chance of cure if breast cancer is detected early and adequately treated; women

who begin treatment within three-five months of developing symptoms have significantly poor survival rates compared to those who seek medical help in less than three months.

The participants of the study were diagnosed and treated between November 2018 and April 2019 at the National Oncology Centre of The Royal Hospital and the Oncology Unit of Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

A total of 300 women with breast cancer participated in the study, of which 33.5 per cent were diagnosed in advanced stages (stage III or IV). Although most women (74.4 per cent) recognised breast/armpit lumps to be a symptom of breast cancer, less than half identified other symptoms, including breast/armpit pain (44 per cent), changes in the position of the nipple (36.2 per cent), redness (31.7 per cent), fatigue (26.3 per cent),

weight loss (23.4 per cent) and loss of appetite (20.8 per cent).

The study found that while most participants (91.6 per cent) were aware that breast cancer can be cured if detected early, only 66.4 per cent sought medical help within a month of developing symptoms and only 31 per cent decided to see a doctor within the first week of developing possible breast cancer symptoms. Initial responses to symptoms included informing husbands (40.2 per cent) or other family members (36.5 per cent).

Hurdles to seeking medical help included feeling scared (68.9 per cent) and worried about what the doctor might find (62.8 per cent). 'The younger age of presentation of women with breast cancer in Oman might be attributable to various factors, including genetic background, the adoption of more 'westernised' lifestyles.'

ROP's decision on visit visas hailed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police's decision to allow visit visas to be converted to work permits has been hailed by expatriates in the country.

Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shuraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, issued decision No 142/ 2021 to amend some provisions of the executive regulations of the Foreigners' Residence Law. The decision states that visitors entering Oman on visit visas can get them converted to work permits. The rule also applies to those with family joining visas and student visas, among



others, provided stipulated conditions are met.

According to the decision, competent authorities can convert the following visas stipulated in the Foreigners' Residence Law to a work visa or temporary work visa: a visit visa issued to resi-

dents of GCC countries, a visit visa issued to meet relatives and friends in the country, single-entry tourist visas (valid for up to ten days or a month), single- and multiple-entry business visas, express visas, investor visas, student visas, visas provided to sailors serving on board or passengers aboard cruise ships, and visas for owners of residential units and their family members.

Reacting to the decision, businessman Naser al Hosni said, "This will help revive the economy by giving new impetus to the educational and tourism sectors, and consequently increasing the national income. The decision will

make Oman an attractive environment for tourists and students."

Fathy Najm, a teacher in Muscat, described the decision as "very important" as it will provide resident families psychological stability and make the Omani market attractive for investments.

Curiously, Syed Husnain's visit visa was converted to a job visa in March. "I was anxious because my extended visit visa was about to expire. But authorities changed my visit visa to work visa, which was surprising as this was done even before the official announcement in this regard was made."

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Offer valid from 1st May 2021 to 15th August 2021. Total of 3 raffle draws will be held at Oasis Water Company, Asabiya. Draw Dates: 16th June 2021, 19th July 2021 and 16th August 2021. Winners will be intimated directly. Oasis Water Company employees are not eligible to participate in this promotion. Gifts shown are for illustrative purposes only. Actual may vary.

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Tech summit promotes knowledge collaboration

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Research and Education Network (Omren) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in collaboration with the global research and education community, organised a virtual summit titled 'Omren Technology Summit' on Monday.

The summit aimed to empower connectivity between research and education communities, promote knowledge collaboration locally and internationally, and enrich productivity of knowledge and innovation. The event featured avant-garde solutions, latest technologies, cutting-edge innovations, and cost-effective products and services.

The summit was held under the chairmanship of H E Dr Ali al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, with the attendance of H E Dr

Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

H E Dr Shidhani emphasised the importance of raising the standards of innovation and technology, especially as demonstrated in unexpected circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not only the objectives of the summit were in alignment with the top national priorities of Oman Vision 2040, the summit is also expected to foster more collaborations between organisations and countries in the research and education network.

The full-day event consisted of an expansive line-up of stellar speakers, case studies, panel discussions and diverse presentations by global and regional stakeholders, researchers, leading industry experts, policy makers, government officials and more from across the value chain, providing access to a wealth of industry-leading knowledge, among others.

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ACDA reports 21% drop in vehicle fire accidents in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman reported a drop of 21.19 per cent in the number of vehicle fire accidents in 2020 compared to 2019, while the decline is steeper (27.59 per cent) over 2018.

According to the Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (ACDA), there were 606 cases of vehicle fires in 2020 compared to 769 reported in 2019 from different parts of the sultanate. The number of cases were more in 2018, when 837 vehicles caught fire, and even greater - 894 - in 2017.

'Motorists should adopt simple measures to protect their vehicles from fire. These include periodic vehicle maintenance, pulling over if the engine is overheated and not parking or stopping near generators or flammable materials,' said ACDA.

The authority stated that



some of the other safety measures include turning off the engine and mobile phones when refuelling, ensuring fire extinguishers are intact, using only original spare parts, especially radiators and getting vehicles repaired only at licensed workshops.

'In case the vehicle catches

fire, stop immediately, evacuate passengers and try dousing the fire using an extinguisher. Disconnect the battery if possible to prevent further spread.'

'We urge vehicle owners to inspect vehicles at regular intervals and ensure the availability of a hand-held fire extinguisher,' ACDA added.

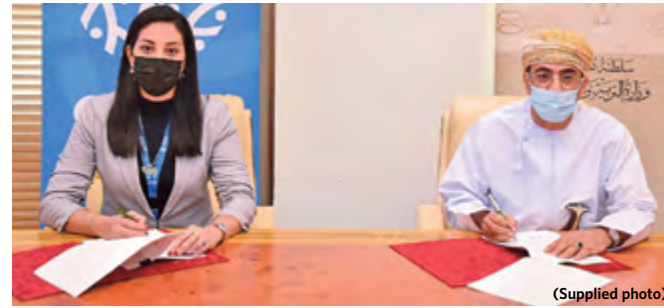
MoE, Al Jisr Foundation sign pact to focus on talented students

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education (MoE) signed a cooperation agreement with Al Jisr Foundation to implement a programme to provide enriching activities and extra care for talented students.

This agreement comes in line with the ministry's belief in the right of gifted students to comprehensive care, and an educational environment appropriate for their abilities and skills.

H E Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry for Education, signed the agreement with



Mira Khalid al Busaidi, board member of Al Jisr Foundation for Charitable Activities, in the presence of Dr Fathiya al Sadia, director general of the Directorate General of Special Education and Continuing Learning, at the ministry's main office.

H E Dr Ambosaidi said, "The signing of this agreement comes within the framework of the ministry's attention to the talented students, and Al Jisr Foundation's keenness to support this project. This agreement is concerned with providing enrich-

ment activities for talented students who should be attended to with great care and special attention to their ability to advance in various cultural, sports and economic fields."

"The ministry seeks to support this group by establishing a special department for the caring of talented students," H E Dr Ambosaidi added.

Dina al Khalili, general manager of Al Jisr Foundation, said, "The Omani society is at the core of our work, and through this partnership the foundation invests in thousands of teachers whose work affects the lives of talented students directly."

OETC launches e-system for submitting applications

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) recently launched an electronic system to receive requests for high voltage electrical connectivity.

It previously relied on a traditional system based on letters of demand and paper presentations

and following them up via an internally accredited electronic system only.

The new electronic system allows the beneficiary companies to submit connection requests at anytime and anywhere via the company's website, and it has been linked to an electronic payment gateway that allows the beneficiaries to complete the

payment of connection request fees in a safe and fast manner.

Also, the beneficiaries can track the status of the request through the system without the need to visit the company, which will contribute to facilitating procedures for customers, saving time and effort, as well as ensuring the provision of quality at its

best levels.

Requests for connection to the transmission network will be available on the OETC website (<https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx>).

Eng Saleh Nasser Majid al Rumhi, CEO of the OETC, said that the system has been available for use by beneficiaries since last month.

Tender Announcement

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C Invites Interested Companies To Participate In The Following Tender:

RFQ No.	Description	Last Date to Participate	Date of Submission	Grade	Price (R.O)	Sit Visit	Note
RFQ 60/2021	33/11KV PSS Civil Rehabilitation Works at Zone 3-Part A	10/06/2021	30/06/2021	Specialized	Free	20/06/2021 21/06/2021 22/06/2021 23/06/2021 at 8:00 Al Mawalleh Zone 3 Office with HSE PPE	To obtain the RFQ document, please contact us via e-mail sabra.jahdhami@medcoman.com

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	• Companies may obtain documents online.
Purchase timing	• Documents can be purchased at the official working time between 08:00 – 13:00 hours • To obtain the RFQ document, please contact us via e-mail sabra.jahdhami@medcoman.com
Enquiries	Any inquiry can be sent using clarification available in the tender documents, one week before bid submission date
Submission	• Should be submitted in a sealed and stamped envelope addressed to the MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CO. marked only with RFQ number and the subject
Bid Placement	The Completed Tender should be deposited in the Tender Box No. 4 in the ground floor of MEDC Head Office building at Airport Heights, before 10 a.m. on the assigned date of tender submission
Email/Tele No.	24588600 sabra.jahdhami@medcoman.com



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MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 23 /2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings :

Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for bidding docs.	Deadline for submission	Deadline for submission
RE-BB-07/2020	Constructing and Operating of Coffee Shop & Shop in the Plot Number (4510), Block (Phase 1) at Al-Maabilah	25/- OMR	20/06/2021	24/06/2021	29/06/2021
RE-BB-08/2020	Operating of the Shop located at Al-Bustan	25/- OMR	20/06/2021	24/06/2021	29/06/2021
RE-BB-01/2021	Provide Car Cleaning Service at Muscat Municipality (Head Office)	25/- OMR	20/06/2021	24/06/2021	29/06/2021

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate in the biddings as per the following:

1. Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat	0423010702710024
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2. A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.LPC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, company name, commercial registration number of the company, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number and email address approved by the company).
3. The bidding documents will be sent to the company via email.
4. **2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted.**

Documents must be enclosed in a plain envelope sealed with red wax (without any company information). In a box located in Muscat Municipality Rawi Building (Main Entrance), located on Capital Market Street

NOTES:

- 1- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- 2- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to send their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.LPC@mm.gov.om)
- 3- **10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- 4- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om



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MARKET WATCH	
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Pakistani Rs	399.46
Bangladeshi Taka	220.42
Philippine Peso	123.96
Sri Lankan Rs	514.35
*Rates as on May 31 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

German inflation hits highest mark in a decade

Germany's annual inflation rate jumped in May to its highest level in a decade, preliminary data showed Monday, driven by surging energy prices and one-off effects linked to the pandemic.

Consumer prices in Europe's top economy rose by 2.5 per cent year-on-year, the Destatis statistics agency said, as Germany mounts a recovery from the coronavirus outbreak.

The last time that rate was reached was September 2011.

Prices rose by 0.5 per cent compared with April.

German inflation has ticked up steadily since the start of the year, partly because of the introduction of a carbon tax and the end of a six-month sales tax cut aimed at mitigating the economic damage from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The May spike was mainly driven by a 10 per cent hike in energy prices year-on-year, Destatis said, up from nearly eight per cent in April, when inflation grew 2 per cent year-on-year. German food prices were up 1.5 per cent while the services sector marked a 2.2 per cent hike.

PDO's Yibal Khuff mega project hits key milestone



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) Yibal Khuff project, the most complex and second largest project in size in the company's history, has achieved a key milestone ahead of the commissioning, according to the engineering, procurement and construction management (EPCm) contractor Petrofac.

"Our team delivering the massive Yibal Khuff project for PDO has safely achieved an important milestone with the introduction of sweet hydrocarbons to the central processing facilities," Petrofac said in a project update statement on its website.

The Yibal Khuff project is technologically complex due to its mega high sour oil and gas content.

Awarded in 2015, this mega project was Petrofac's second

When fully operational, the Yibal Khuff field will deliver 6.1mn standard cubic meters per day of associated gas and around 21,900 barrels per day of oil

EPCm contract with PDO. The integrated oil and sour gas facility is located approximately 350km south-west of Muscat.

Said Harrasi, PDO's Yibal Khuff project engineering and procurement manager, commented everyone involved in the project.

He said, "A great thanks to the entire Petrofac team who worked day and night to ensure the achievement of this milestone. Please also convey our gratitude and appreciation to all team members in Sharjah, Chennai and the Muscat offices."

Khalid Abdul Kadar, Petrofac's project director, said, "We

appreciate the extraordinary team efforts during this prolonged pandemic period. We continue towards achieving the next commissioning milestones safely and for a successful plant operation."

When the project is completed and plant becomes fully operational, the Yibal Khuff field will deliver 6.1mn standard cubic meters per day of associated gas and around 21,900 barrels per day of oil.

The development of the Yibal Khuff field will add to PDO's future oil production, whilst the associated gas will be used for power generation and enhanced

oil recovery (EOR) developments.

In 2015, Petrofac was awarded its second contract with PDO for the Yibal Khuff project at a value of around US\$900mn.

The UK-based Petrofac, a leading international service provider to the energy industry, has been working in Oman for more than three decades, helping its clients to unlock more value from their hydrocarbon resources.

Petrofac has a long-term framework agreement with PDO for the provision of EPCm support services for major oil and gas projects in the sultanate.

The projects undertaken through the framework agreement are supported by the company's Muscat office for technical delivery and to ensure it generates sustainable in-country value.



S&P Global affirms Bahrain's ratings; outlook negative

Our Correspondent
Muscat

S&P Global Ratings has revised its outlook on Bahrain to negative from stable. At the same time, the ratings agency has affirmed Bahrain's 'B+/B-' long- and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings.

In a statement, S&P said the negative outlook reflects the increasing risks to the government's ability to service external debt and maintain confidence in the exchange rate peg.

"This is because fiscal reform measures may prove insufficient to stabilize debt-to-GDP ratio and Bahrain's external and monetary positions remain weak due to continued pressure on foreign exchange reserves," the ratings agency said.

It said despite higher oil prices compared with 2020 and S&P's expectation that the economy will return to growth this year, risks to Bahrain's fiscal position persist.

"The government's budgetary reform efforts continued over 2020, albeit more slowly given

the necessary government focus on the health and wellbeing of the island's residents in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, risks from the strength of the economic recovery this year will likely cause further delays for non-oil revenue-raising measures," S&P said.

In addition, expenditure-reducing measures in the 2021-2022 budget are modest. The government plans to place the onus of fiscal consolidation on raising non-oil revenue rather than reducing expenditure, the ratings agency said.

According to S&P, relatively high oil prices should support the fiscal position this year, but deficits will nevertheless remain elevated, adding to already-high debt and debt-servicing burdens.

"We expect net debt-to-GDP ratio to average 120 per cent and interest-to-revenue to average 28 per cent over 2021-2024. We also assume the government's dependence on oil receipts (accounting for about 70 per cent of revenue) will continue over the forecast period to 2024," S&P added.

China factory activity nudges down in May

Beijing, China - Factory activity in China nudged down slightly in May on slower demand and higher raw material prices, while the services industry boomed over the Labour Day break, official data showed Monday.

The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), a key gauge of China's manufacturing activity, was 51.0 - slightly down from 51.1 in April but above the mark separating growth from contraction, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

But there are risks ahead, analysts warned, including shortages of parts - especially semiconductors - and rising commodity prices.

Although factory production has been rising steadily, with overall activity exceeding the

same periods in the past two years, demand growth has slowed, said NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe.

The new export order index fell, he said, "reflecting the decrease in foreign orders".

Capital Economics said in a recent note that there are 'few signs' of easing, with freight rates still going up.

Meanwhile, the purchasing prices of major raw materials remains high, said the NBS.

On top of that, a fresh wave of COVID-19 in Asian countries and the resurgence in China's Guangdong province will also hurt some small exporters in the region, said Betty Wang, senior China economist at ANZ Research.

AFP

India's GDP contracts by record 7.3% in 2020-21

Mumbai, India - India's economy contracted 7.3 per cent in 2020-21, official data showed Monday, its worst recession since independence as coronavirus lockdowns put millions out of work.

The GDP of Asia's third-largest economy grew by 1.6 per cent between January and March - the fourth fiscal quarter - after exiting its first 'technical recession' since 1947 following two successive quarters of contraction.

About 230mn Indians fell into poverty due to the pandemic last year, according to a study by Bangalore's Azim Premji University, which defined the poor as those living on less than 375 rupees (or US\$5) a day.

An easing of restrictions towards the end of 2020 helped propel a tentative recovery in activity, but this may prove short-



Labourers work at a construction site in Mumbai on Monday (AFP)

lived following an explosion in COVID-19 cases in April and May.

India's vicious second wave, which has killed 160,000 people in eight weeks, prompted further lockdowns and saw 7.3mn people lose their jobs in April alone, according to the Centre for Mon-

itoring the Indian Economy.

That means more pain in a country where 90 per cent of the workforce is in the informal sector with no social safety net, and where millions do not qualify for emergency government rations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has so far re-

frained from announcing any fresh major stimulus measures in response.

The government has faced growing criticism - including from Nobel prize-winning economists Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee - for focusing on loans to hard-hit businesses rather than direct cash handouts to vulnerable households.

In a recent report, British financial services firm Barclays pegged the economic cost of India's second wave at US\$74bn, or 2.4 per cent of GDP.

But helped by output having slumped so much last year, the headline figures for the current fiscal year will appear strong.

India's central bank is projecting annual growth of 10.5 per cent and the International Monetary Fund 12.5 per cent, the fastest among major economies.

"We expect 10 per cent GDP growth in fiscal year 2021-2022, with a slight downside bias," said Upasna Bhardwaj, senior economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank.

But she warned that analysts would "have to revisit this expectation much more often, given it depends on the pace of vaccinations and the pace of restrictions".

"While the situation this year is not as bad as the national lockdown last year, the economy is coming under a lot of stress due to localised restrictions, which we expect to continue into the rest of the year," she told AFP.

India has recorded 28mn coronavirus cases so far and distributed 213mn doses of the COVID-19 jab, with its massive vaccination programme facing delays and shortages.

AFP

OECD raises world GDP growth forecast to 5.8% but fears 'headwinds'

Paris, France - The OECD raised its 2021 global GDP growth forecast Monday, but warned that 'too many headwinds persist' as not enough Covid vaccines are reaching emerging economies and markets worry about inflation.

The world economy will expand by 5.8 per cent this year, the highest since 1973 and up from a previous estimate of 5.6 per cent, the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said in a report.

Most economies should return to their 2019, pre-pandemic levels next year, the OECD said.

This follows a massive global recession last year that was

caused by lockdowns and travel curbs imposed by the governments to slow the spread of COVID-19.

"It is with some relief that we can see the economic outlook brightening, but with some discomfort that it is doing so in a very uneven way," OECD chief Laurence Boone said in the report.

The recovery is uneven so far, with the United States and China returning to pre-pandemic levels and forecast to have much stronger growth than other major economies such as Japan and Germany.

While the US and South Korea are back to their pre-pandemic income levels, it could take an



OECD chief Laurence Boone

additional year for much of Europe and three to five years for Mexico and South Africa to catch up.

The 38-nation organisation,

whose members account for 60 per cent of global GDP, applauded the rapid reaction of governments to prop up the economy.

"Never in a crisis has policy support - be it health, with the record speed of vaccine development, monetary, fiscal or financial - been so swift and effective," Boone said. "Yet, too many headwinds persist," she warned.

Boone said it was very disturbing that not enough vaccines were reaching emerging and low-income economies.

"This is exposing these economies to a fundamental threat because they have less policy capacity to support activity than advanced economies," she said.

The warning comes as the emergence of more contagious coronavirus variants has raised

concerns around the world, with India battling a strain that has caused a surge in cases and deaths.

"As long as the vast majority of the global population is not vaccinated, all of us remain vulnerable to the emergence of new variants," Boone said.

New lockdowns would hurt confidence while companies, which are saddled with more debt than before the pandemic, could go bankrupt, Boone said.

"What is of most concern, in our view, is the risk that financial markets fail to look through temporary price increases and relative price adjustments, pushing market interest rates and volatility higher," Boone said. "Vigil-

ance is needed."

The OECD's outgoing secretary general, Angel Gurría, called for a multilateral approach to put an end to the pandemic.

"Effective vaccination programmes in many countries has meant today's economic outlook is more promising than at any time since the start of this devastating pandemic," he said.

"But for millions around the world getting a job still remains a distant prospect. We urgently need to step up the production and equitable distribution of vaccines," said Gurría, who will be succeeded by Australian Finance Minister Mathias Cormann on Tuesday after 15 years on the job.

AFP

Alizz Islamic launches Fintech solution for goods financing

Alizz Islamic Bank and IFIN (first Islamic Fintech of its kind) have partnered to launch the first instant 'Goods Financing' product in the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic finance world. This launch comes with the backdrop of Alizz Islamic Bank's constant pursuit to provide its clients with innovative financial solutions.

The bank has inaugurated this instant finance solution with Danube Home's Al Khuwayr branch as the first outlet to welcome Alizz Islamic Bank customers able to avail instant finance on their furniture right at the store. The service is being rolled out across the entire branch network of Danube Home over the course of next few weeks.

It is the first time in the sultanate when customers will be able to instantly take home their desired goods from the store having them financed for up to 120 months without the need of visiting any bank branch. The process of availing finance has been simplified into a simple 10-minute process at the store's checkout counter, where the customer will go through an on-line verification process and sign the finance contract following an immediate approval.



IFIN is the world's first Sharia'a-compliant, multi-institutional, multi-product, multi-channel Islamic FinTech solution facilitating instant Islamic financing at the retailer outlets.

This game-changing solution is geared to redefine the way Islamic financing is being done, making it secure, quick and easy for everyone.

The first product offered by

Alizz Islamic bank on IFIN is the Goods Murabaha, where the bank purchases the goods desired by the customer, from the authorised dealer and sells the same to the customer at an

agreed price that is paid in instalments.

The advantage is complete transparency as the customer knows the bank's profit margin and instalment plan at the time of signing the contract. This arrangement allows for immediate possession and ownership of the goods by the customer who never pays more than agreed amount.

Mohammed al Ghasani, AGM - acting chief consumer banking officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, said, "The launch of the IFIN instant financing solution comes as part of our plans to provide a wide range of carefully-designed solutions that meet all clients' needs. The way people bank has changed, convenience and speed are keys to the modern customer and thanks to the efforts of our team, we are extremely proud to be the first Islamic bank in the entire Islamic banking industry globally to launch this innovative solution."

Ghasani added, "Alizz Islamic Bank has always been at the forefront of digitalisation. As people increasingly rely on digital technology to bank, it is crucial that we, as an organisation, embrace digital strategies that meet our customers needs."

Bank Muscat offers home finance at competitive rate



Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has announced the availability of its Baituna home finance at competitive interest rates in line with its commitment to national development and priorities. Omani customers looking for the best home finance deals in the sultanate will find Baituna with its maximum tenor of 25 years a particularly attractive option.

Based on customer feedback, the bank is continuing to launch new innovative features and benefits for customers in its various financing options.

Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, deputy general manager - Institutional Sales & Product Development, said, "The real estate sector is a major component of the national economy and Bank Muscat is committed to supporting this crucial sector and strengthening its role in the development and growth of the Omani economy. Baituna facilitates purchase and construction of new homes as well as land for residential use. It also offers insurance coverage and fast processing of applications across the bank's extensive network of branches and dedicated Sales Centres.

"The finance offers flexible

payment options and requires only simple documentation. We encourage our customers to make their dream homes a reality with the convenience of Baituna home finance."

Baituna home finance is available for salaried government employees (Omani) with a minimum salary of RO250 and minimum service of three months for up to 25 years of home financing while employees of Tier 1 private sector companies (Omani) minimum salary of RO500 and a minimum of six months of service are eligible for home loans having a tenure of up to 25 years.

Loans of up to RO500,000 are available through Baituna subject to the applicant fulfilling the relevant criteria.

To check eligibility, please visit the loan calculator page at: <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx>

OTC opens admissions for new academic year, offers discounts

Oman Tourism College (OTC) announced the opening of the admissions for the new academic year (2021-22) for the various academic programmes that it offers. This also includes the General Foundation, Diploma and Bachelor (Honours) programmes.

Moreover, OTC is offering a special discount of 20 per cent off on the total tuition fees for part-time students from low-income families and a 25 per cent discount for part-time students who are OTC Diploma graduates. The college will reduce the fees of a student by 10 per cent if they register with a sibling and offers a 20 per cent discount to international students.

Dr Abdulkarim Sultan al Mughairi, dean of OTC, said, "As part of our social responsibility efforts, we decided to reduce the



tuition fees for our students. This way, we can support them in continuing their studies and enabling them to achieve their goals and dreams within the tourism sector.

"OTC offers a range of academic programmes, which are accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education and quality assured by the Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin).

"We provide BSc (Hons) and Diploma in four primary majors, namely, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Tourism Marketing, Event Management and Business Enterprise, alongside pathway courses." Omani students can call 24512383 or email admission@otc.edu.om. International students can call 24512303 or email international@otc.edu.om.

Oman-Switzerland Friendship Association board meets with Swiss ambassador

On Thursday, the Board Members of the Oman-Switzerland Friendship Association (OSFA) met with the Swiss Ambassador, H E Balz Abplanalp. For most of the recently elected board, this was their first introduction to the ambassador.

Hosted at The Zubair Corporation by OSFA chairman, Hani al Zubair, the meeting was arranged to give the ambassador the opportunity to share his vision of how OSFA and the embassy can support each other in the years to come.

In turn, it provided a useful insight for the OSFA Board to consider which areas to focus on during their tenure.

Speaking of the relationship, H E Abplanalp said, "The Swiss Embassy and OSFA are the two legs of contact between Oman and Switzerland and they must



walk together to make progress."

After a short presentation, the ambassador expressed his excitement to work with OSFA in the months and years to come. A sentiment echoed by

the OSFA Board Members who were grateful for the opportunity to exchange ideas and thoughts with the ambassador.

In thanking H E Abplanalp for his time, Zubair commented, "The aim is to broaden the base

of expertise available to OSFA; the more that can be done together with the embassy, the more successful each entity can be, for the good of economic and social development and advancement."

Nisan Sunny available at 0% interest as part of special scheme

Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) is offering a wide range of benefits for the patrons of Nissan Sunny as part of its on-going offer which is valid till June 3. Nissan Sunny, with its modern, expressive design, fresh interiors and confidence-inspiring performance is much loved by its owners.

Customers of Nissan Sunny are being offered attractive benefits including special interest rate, cash gift, free service, insurance and more.

A spokesperson for Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "With an attractive offer available, this is the ideal time to buy Nissan Sunny. Its great design, smart technological upgrades and best-in-class spacious interiors make it a perfect car for customers looking for a sophisticated driving experience. The car continues to be a popular choice amongst customers in the segment because of its outstanding design, intelligent

technology and remarkable performance."

Special interest rate

A special interest rate is available for Nissan Sunny and customers can get at 2.99 per cent for six years on the model. For all tenures beyond six years, normal interest rates will apply for the full tenure of the loan. This rate is applicable for individual purchase with private registration only and is subject to finance/credit approval. This benefit will be applicable for financing through select finance companies only. Customers purchasing in cash, LPO, credit will not be eligible for special interest rate benefit. Terms and conditions apply.

EMI

Customers of Nissan Sunny range can avail low monthly rate. The EMI rate for 20MY Sunny SL 1.5lt is RO104 and 20MY Sunny 1.6lt is RO105. These EMIs are calculated on the basis of 2.99 per cent rate of interest for six



years loan tenure.

Service package

Customers of Nissan Sunny 1.5lt and Nissan Sunny 1.6lt can enjoy free periodic maintenance service package for three years/ 60,000km. This offer is valid for 10,000km service intervals.

Assured cash gift

Under the Season special promotion, customers can avail assured cash gift on the Nissan Sunny 1.5lt and Nissan Sunny

1.6lt. The cash gift for Nissan Sunny 1.5lt ranges from RO1,200 to 1,400 and Nissan Sunny 1.6lt ranges from is RO1,400 to 1,500.

Free insurance

Customers of Nissan Sunny 1.5lt and Nissan Sunny 1.6lt can enjoy free insurance in Oman and UAE for first year for private registration.

Free registration

Customers can enjoy free registration on Nissan Sunny 1.5lt

and Nissan Sunny 1.6lt for the first year.

Nissan Sunny: Bold new look

The latest Sunny is an addition to the growing line-up of Nissan's renewed sedan models and features a bold new look, advanced powertrains and technology features. The new generation car builds on this solid foundation and reinforces Nissan's presence in the increasingly popular B-Sedan segment that is loaded

with technology and safety features not usually found in the segment.

The fully upgraded model comes with an expressive exterior featuring Nissan's V-motion grille and combines a spacious interior design with harmonious materials and colours to give a fresh and renewed feel to the car.

Premium design and styling

Design is also a key strategic advantage for the Sunny, as Nissan has reimagined the entry-level sedan with a design that leaves a lasting first impression and that owners can be proud to be seen in.

The new design features lower, wider and longer exterior dimensions while retaining Sunny's roomy interior space.

With its emotional design, large roominess and advanced Nissan Intelligent Mobility technology, Sunny brings a new level of style, excitement and refinement to entry-level buyers at a highly affordable price.

Top priority safety

Safety and technology remain a top priority at Nissan, and the Sunny features Nissan Intelligent Mobility technology that helps provide front, side and rear safety monitoring and intervention technologies to enhance awareness on the road.

This model also makes for an easier and more confident driving experience with seamless smartphone sync options and driver assist technology.

This is bolstered by mechanical innovations including an advanced engine design, upgraded Xtronic transmission and an electric power steering system - all of which comes at a highly affordable price, making it ideal for entry-level buyers. The all-new model comes in three trim-levels, models - S (MT or Xtronic), SV (Xtronic) and the sporty SL (Xtronic).

For test drive options call Nissan Toll free 80050011. For more details on Nissan vehicles visit their new website: www.nissanoman.com

You can experience fantastic benefits on family sedan Changan EADO till June 6

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE) has announced an attractive offer on Changan EADO as part of its exclusive Ramadan promotion for the benefit its customers. AGAE's 'Driving Forward This Ramadan' offers a surfeit of attractive benefits for customers of Changan EADO including assured cash gift, free service, free assured fuel card, manufacturer's warranty and low EMI. All customers purchasing Changan EADO till June 6 will be eligible to participate in the campaign scheme.

The C-segment refined family sedan Changan EADO continues to impress auto enthusiasts in Oman with its composed performance, tasteful interiors, uncompromising safety, smart technology and great fuel economy. The charismatic Changan EADO's inherent design language integrates style with function and practicality.

Assured cash gift
Under the special offer, customers of Changan EADO can avail assured cash gift of RO1,400.

Free service
Customers of Changan EADO can avail periodic maintenance



service of three years/55,000km.

Free assured fuel card
Customers of Changan EADO can avail free fuel card of RO100.

Warranty
Customers of Changan EADO can enjoy manufacturer's warranty for five years/150,000km whichever is earlier.

Easy instalments
Customers of Changan EADO Trend can avail an EMI starting

RO120. Easy monthly instalments are calculated based on 20 per cent down payment for six year loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals from banks and financial companies.

EADO, a C-segment sedan built to charm the families with its appealing exterior, luxurious and spacious interior, interactive dashboard, driver-assist features for utmost safety is more than just a saloon.

Under the hood is a 1.6lt engine which produces 126 hp and 168 Nm of torque mated with a 6

speed AT for one of the most comfortable rides. With a boot space of 500lt and 35 storage spaces inside the car, EADO is always ready to give you the comfort of your home anywhere you go.

A spokesperson for AGAE says, "We are pleased to offer EADO is stylish, energetic, and practical and has a perfect design that integrates fashion with function. The C-segment Sedan is equipped with Changan's new Blue Core powertrain that ensures efficiency and reliability.

Designed by Changan global R&D team, it is manufactured to meet and exceed international standards. Changan EADO is truly about extraordinary action dominating outcome."

Spacious interior
The Sedan has plush and spacious interior creates a comfortable space for both driver and the passengers. It also allows them to feel safe in the comprehensive protection offered with forward-thinking intelligent technology. Its Blue Core Powertrain

Technology based on the principles of power, clean and quiet provides owners a highly efficient and energy saving performance.

Host of features
Under the hood, it has a 1.6lt 4-cylinder engine, mated to a six-speed automatic transmission. Features in the EADO are top of the range includes Leather Seats, 17" Alloy wheels, LED Headlamps, Electrically foldable ORVMs, Power Driver seat. The Eado Limited equipped with advanced safety features like Forward Collision Warning, Adaptive Cruise Control, Front side airbags which are generally seen in luxury sedan variants.

The Standard safety features include like Electronic Parking Brake, Rear Parking sensors, Front dual airbags, ESP: ABS, Electronic brake force distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA) Traction control and Hill assist as well as 10" inch Infotainment Touch Screen, Mirror link, USB ports, Keyless Start , Keyless Entry and LED DRL's.

Noise reduction
The EADO has technologies employed for vibration and noise reduction: PVB sound insulation, 10 per cent thicker glass, barrier

material, and damping film which result in uniform 68.5 dB level internal noise at Express highways.

EADO Specifications:
Changan EADO's vehicle specifications includes length x width x height of 4710 mm x 1820 mm c 1505 mm, a 1.6lt GDi Blue Core engine, output of 116 HP, maximum torque of 168 Nm, wheelbase of 2700 mm, and a fuel tank capacity of 53lt.

The Premium Automotive Brand Changan recently launched by Bahwan International Group in Oman has received overwhelming response among the customers. Changan Automobile boasts of a comprehensive portfolio of range of products including Sedan, Crossovers and SUVs like Changan Alsvin - Entry Level sedan, EADO- Family Sedan, CS35 Plus Crossover, CS75 4WD Crossover, CS85 Coupe & CS95 7 seater 4WD.

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE), which is part of Bahwan International Group, recently announced a partnership with leading international automotive group Changan Automobile Co. Ltd to bring its range of passenger vehicles to Oman including Changan EADO.



Sultan al Wahaibi, chief business & wholesale officer

Ooredoo's app offers innovative solutions

Helping businesses thrive, Ooredoo's B2B App offers a wide range of functions to keep them connected and in control, on the go. With constant upgrades and enhancements, the award-winning digital app is designed to make business people's lives easier, providing them with a central online point for real time monitoring, management and administrative tasks, handled quickly and efficiently, at the touch of a button.

Free to all Ooredoo business customers with 24/7 access, the app provides two secured log-in access levels. Employees are able to view their own accounts, pay personal bills, top-up credit and add roaming services. Meanwhile, administrators have access to a vast range of options, including management of bundles and add-ons, the ability to bar/unbar telecom lines and more. With extra speeds, increased data, and a whole host of other benefits, Ooredoo's range of B2B services are helping businesses 'Be Digital', while making their lives easier, no matter the circumstances.

The app can be downloaded for free at [Ooredoo.om/BizApp](https://ooredoo.om/BizApp).

Lulu concludes Dream Drive 2021, hands over car keys to eight winners

With the successful conclusion of its annual Dream Drive mega promotion, Lulu Oman handed over the keys of Nissan Patrol 4WDs to eight lucky winners. The seventh and eighth draws marked the end of this year's mega promotion, which was spread over two months from March 21 until May 19 coinciding with Ramadan and Eid.

Officials representing Lulu Group handed over the keys to the eight winners who drove home brand new Nissan Patrol 4WDs. The eight winners were Mohammed Shareef, Muzna al Balushi, Jasem Ghaedi, Manoor al Riyami, Abdul Hakeem Juma Abdullah al Junabi, Mohammed Hamed, Khalid al Hathmi and Arun Sinha.

Apart from the grand prize, many others won an array of gift products from Ikon. The registration and draws were digital and the winners of all the draws were selected through the eRaffle Winner Management System under the supervision of the officials from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.



merce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Ananth A V, regional director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman, India & Sri Lanka, remarked, "We are truly excited to conclude this year's Dream Drive promotion on a very happy note. We would

like to congratulate all the winners of this promotion and thank everyone who supported the campaign so far. It is indeed a joy to be part of our customers' proud moments. This promotion is an opportunity to reward our valuable customers and add

more excitement to their overall shopping experience during Ramadan. Like all the previous years, Dream Drive promotion had created lots of enthusiasm and interest among customers and has attracted new shoppers too."

Over 100 take part in Zubair SEC's second 'Know Your VAT' webinar

Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC), in partnership with the Omani International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), recently completed its second VAT-focused webinar for SMEs in Oman. Titled 'Basic Concepts of Value Added Tax (VAT) in Oman', this is the second in a series of five webinars as part of their 'Know Your VAT' initiative executed by Moore. In addition to the five webinars, the initiative will also include five short animated videos, a digital downloadable booklet, and one-to-one sessions where required.

Commenting on the 'Know Your VAT' initiative, Adel al Hubaishi - executive manager at Zubair SEC said, "The Value-Added Tax (VAT) law, which was implemented in the sultanate on April 16, applies to any



company whose taxable turnover exceeds RO38,500. This includes the majority of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the country; many of which are not familiar with all the steps and procedures required to be fully VAT compliant. These

series of webinars have been designed specifically to address these concepts and help them be fully prepared."

Hubaishi added, "At Zubair SEC, we are very pleased with the number of participants and the level of the engagement between the SMEs and speakers.

The questions raised shows that our members value the importance of the topic and are eager to understand and properly setup their businesses for the implementation of VAT.

"We would like to thank Om-

invest for their continued support in this initiative and we look forward to hosting the next webinar soon. We would like to invite all interested SMEs to register and benefit from this program by contacting Zubair SEC at the earliest."

This second webinar, titled 'Basic Concepts of Value Added Tax (VAT) in Oman', was conducted on May 26. It was effectively an extension of the first and covered two core topics - VAT exemptions versus zero-rating and tax implications on key business transactions. The latter of the two topics covered the sale of goods, reverse charge mechanism, exports, sales return, damages, discounts, bad debts, and more.

The webinar was attended by over 100 Zubair SEC members as well as some large private

sector corporations.

Each of them expressed their appreciation to the organisers, as well as expressed their desire to return for the remaining three webinars.

"VAT as a concept is significantly more complex at a corporate level than it may initially seem to the general public. It is vital that businesses, especially SMEs, are given a clearer understanding of each of the concepts and intricacies of its implementation. That being said, it was very encouraging to see the enthusiasm of each the attendees to learn about VAT and its proper implementation. This just goes to show their commitment to change and their willingness to adapt; a great sign for the future of SMEs in the country," added Gajendra Maheshwari, head of VAT Services at Moore.



Oman Air, Qatar Airways fly ahead

Oman Air and Qatar Airways have taken the next step in further strengthening strategic cooperation, expanding their codeshare partnership to cover more than 80 destinations on Qatar Airways' network. The expansion of the agreement will provide more convenient and seamless travel options for both airlines' passengers.

This expansion follows shortly after the two airlines announced an agreement to significantly strengthen strategic cooperation between the two airlines in December 2020.

Oman Air chief executive officer Abdulaziz al Raisi, said, "Oman Air's expanding partnership with Qatar Airways underscores the commitment of both airlines to provide their guests with more flights, more choice of destinations, and greater flexibility throughout their travels with us. For Oman Air and many airlines around the world, the key to post-pandemic recovery lies in strategic collaborations with industry partners and in identifying

innovative route expansion opportunities as we navigate a constantly changing environment. Our longstanding cooperation with Qatar Airways reflects a highly valued relationship and we look forward to growing our networks together."

Qatar Airways group chief executive, Akbar al Baker said, "We are delighted to further expand our partnership with Oman Air after announcing our plans in December 2020 to further strengthen strategic cooperation. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we have remained committed to forging and expanding our global network of partners."

Obstacles remain in bid to end Netanyahu era: Israel's Lapid

Jerusalem - Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid on Monday said many obstacles remain before a diverse coalition can be built to oust veteran Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu but voiced hope it will achieve the 'greater goal'.

Lapid, a secular centrist, has been locked in talks with the right-wing nationalist Naftali Bennett on the terms of a 'change alliance' that also hinges on an array of other parties ahead of a Wednesday midnight deadline.

Former TV anchor Lapid's chances of success rose when tech millionaire Bennett, despite their ideological differences, said on Sunday he would join a 'national unity government' in which the two men would take turns to serve as premier.

Israel's latest political turmoil comes more than two months after Israel's fourth inconclusive election in less than two years and could topple the rightwing leader known as Bibi who has ruled for a total of 15 years.

The intense political bargaining follows Israel's bloody 11-day military conflict with Hamas in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza that ended with a May 21 ceasefire. A viable anti-Netanyahu coalition would still need the support of other parties and lawmakers to gain a majority of 61 seats in the 120-member Knesset, Israel's legislature.

But while Lapid warned of re-



Israel's opposition leader Yair Lapid addresses the press at the Knesset (parliament), in Jerusalem on Monday (AFP)

maintaining hurdles, he also sought to strike a cautiously upbeat note.

"We'll have to overcome them together," he told members of his Yesh Atid (There is a Future) party. "That's our first test - to see if we can find smart compromises in the coming days to achieve the greater goal."

'Last stand'

Netanyahu, in power for the past 12 years following an earlier three-year term, has been fighting for his political life, warning on Sunday of 'a leftwing government dangerous to the state of Israel'.

The 71 year old is Israel's longest serving Prime Minister,

and the first to face criminal charges while in office - on fraud, bribery and breach of trust charges, which he denies.

The combative premier lashed out at Bennett, accusing him of 'the scam of the century' for running on a rightwing platform but then joining a prospective government that includes liberal parties.

Lapid (57) is seeking to cobble together a diverse alliance which would include Bennett, a supporter of Jewish settlements in the Israel-occupied West Bank, as well as Arab-Israeli lawmakers.

In order to build such an anti-Netanyahu bloc, he must sign in-

dividual agreements with seven parties, whose members would then vote in parliament to confirm the coalition.

Among them are the centrist Blue and White party of Defence Minister Benny Gantz and the hawkish New Hope party of Netanyahu's former ally Gideon Saar.

Avigdor Lieberman's pro-settlement Yisrael Beiteinu party as well as the historically powerful centre-left Labour party and the dovish Meretz party would also join.

Netanyahu's conservative Likud party won 30 seats in the last election on March 23, the best result of any party, but far

short of a majority. In a last-ditch bid on Sunday, Netanyahu offered a three-way power sharing deal to his rivals Bennett and Saar - but Saar refused.

Bennett accused Netanyahu of seeking to take down the political right and 'the whole country with him on his personal last stand'.

'Far from easy'

Lapid's party, with 17 seats of its own, had mustered a total of 51 votes of support from left, centre and rightwing parties before Bennett joined him. Bennett's Yamina ('Rightward') bloc has seven seats, but one lawmaker swore he would not cooperate with the anti-Netanyahu camp.

To win the backing of four more lawmakers, needed to achieve the required 61 seats, Lapid is counting on parties representing Arab citizens of Israel, which have not yet announced their intentions.

They would have to support a coalition including Bennett, even though he has previously directed the Yesha Council which represents Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank.

"The left is making far from easy compromises here," Bennett acknowledged on Sunday.

According to Israeli media, the coalition agreement would allow Bennett to head the government for the first two years, to be followed by Lapid.

AFP



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (centre) with his Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias (right), in Athens on Monday (AFP)

Turkey, Greece smooth relations after Ankara spat

Athens, Greece - Greece and Turkey on Monday smoothed over their most recent diplomatic spat by setting up a June meeting between their respective leaders, officials said.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis will meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during a NATO summit in Brussels on June 14, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said after holding talks with his Turkish counterpart in Athens.

The talks in Athens between Dendias and Mevlut Cavusoglu were designed to 'attempt a procedure of preliminary understanding' and 'gradually normalise' relations, Dendias said. A 'limited list' of economic partnerships had also been agreed, Dendias said.

Cavusoglu said Turkey wanted to pursue talks with Greece 'without prerequisites and without terms', according to the official translation.

The ministers did not take any questions from reporters.

Some Greek analysts say Erdogan favours talks with Greece

ahead of a scheduled meeting at the NATO summit with US President Joe Biden, who appears less accommodating toward Ankara than his predecessor Donald Trump.

"At this point in time, Turkey is seeking a rapprochement - but on its own terms," said Kostas Lavdas, professor of European politics at Athens' Panteion university. "Turkey has a positive stance because it needs to," Lavdas said, pointing to an upcoming EU summit expected to discuss Turkish relations in late June.

Greek-Turkish relations last year went through several flare-ups over migration, regional energy exploration, a Turkish-Libya agreement disputed by Athens and Erdogan's persistent questioning of postwar treaties with Greece.

On Sunday, Cavusoglu's description of the Muslim minority living in northeastern Greece as 'Turkish' while on a private visit to the area prompted an angry response from the Greek Foreign Ministry.

AFP

Saudi talks ongoing in 'good atmosphere': Iranian official

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Monday that the Islamic republic is continuing talks with regional rival Saudi Arabia in a 'good atmosphere', in the hope of reaching a 'common understanding'.

Media reports last month revealed that Iranian and Saudi officials met in Baghdad in April, their first high-level meeting since Riyadh cut diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016.

"Talks are still continuing in a good atmosphere," ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said at a press conference.

"We hope these talks can achieve a common understanding between Iran and Saudi Arabia," he added.

Ties between the two countries were cut in 2016 after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions following



Saeed Khatibzadeh (AFP)

the kingdom's execution of a revered Shiite cleric.

The talks in Baghdad, facilitated by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi, remained secret until the *Financial Times* reported that a first meeting was held on April 9.

Khatibzadeh confirmed the talks on May 10, saying their purpose was 'both bilateral and re-

gional', but stressed it was 'too soon' to disclose any details.

"De-escalation and (establishing) ties between two great Islamic countries in the Persian Gulf region is to the benefit of both nations," he said at the time.

Iran in late April welcomed a 'change of tone' from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman towards it after he called for a 'good and special relationship' with Tehran.

The regional rivals have backed opposite sides of several regional conflicts, from Syria to Yemen, where a Saudi-led military coalition is fighting the Huthi rebels.

Iran backs the Huthis, who are battling the coalition that intervened in Yemen's war in support of an internationally recognised government in 2015.

AFP

Ryanair jet makes emergency landing in Berlin

Warsaw, Poland - Polish police said on Monday they were investigating a fake bomb threat that forced a Ryanair passenger plane travelling from Dublin to Krakow to make an emergency landing in Berlin.

"We were notified by the Krakow airport that an airport employee received a phone call saying an explosive device had been planted on the plane," said regional police spokesman, Sebastian Glen.

"German police checked and there was no device, no bomb threat at all. So we know this was a false alarm," he told AFP.

"The perpetrator has not been detained, but we are doing everything possible to establish their identity," Glen added, saying the person faces eight years in prison.

With 160 people on board, the flight arrived at the Berlin-Brandenburg airport shortly after



An airplane of Irish airline Ryanair approaches the BER airport near Berlin Schoenefeld on Monday (AFP)

8.00pm on Sunday.

The passengers were later transferred onto another plane which took off early on Monday morning.

German police said that officers had completed their security checks 'without any danger being detected'.

The flight was emptied with

the baggage also searched, German media reported.

"The Ryanair plane that made an emergency landed reported an air emergency and was therefore immediately given a landing permit at BER," airport spokesman Jan-Peter Haack told *Bild*.

The incident comes a week

after a Ryanair flight was forced to divert to Belarus, with a passenger - a dissident journalist - arrested on arrival.

And in July last year, another Ryanair plane from Dublin to Krakow was forced to make an emergency landing in London after a false bomb threat.

AFP

Hong Kong's 'Grandma Wong' arrested for solo Tiananmen protest

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong police have arrested an elderly democracy activist as she made a solo demonstration over China's deadly Tiananmen crackdown in a vivid illustration of the zero protest tolerance now wielded by authorities in the financial hub.

Alexandra Wong (65) was detained on Sunday on suspicion of taking part in an unlawful assembly as she walked towards Beijing's Liaison Office in Hong Kong. Wong - known locally as 'Grandma Wong' - was a regular fixture of the huge democracy protests that swept Hong Kong in 2019.

She could often be seen waving a Union Jack flag, a symbol of her dissatisfaction with Beijing's rule since the city was

handed to China by former colonial power Britain in 1997.

Protest is now all but outlawed in Hong Kong.

Authorities have used both the threat of the coronavirus and security concerns to ban demonstrations. A vigil planned for this Friday - the 32nd anniversary of Beijing's 1989 crackdown on democracy protests in Tiananmen Square - has been denied permission for the second year in a row.

Authorities have cited the coronavirus, although Hong Kong is currently celebrating no local transmission cases of unknown origin for the last month.

Activists had also sought permission for a small Tiananmen-themed march on Sunday to the Liaison Office, which rep-



Alexandra Wong, an activist known as Grandma Wong, holds a British Union Jack flag, as nine pro-democracy activists await their sentencing, outside the District Court in Hong Kong on Friday (AFP)

resents the central government in the city, but it was also denied permission.

Wong turned up anyway that afternoon holding a sign that read '32, June 4, Tiananmen's lament' and a yellow umbrella - the latter a symbol of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

The South China Morning Post said the pensioner started chanting slogans in a park before heading towards the Liaison Office by herself, while being followed and filmed by police.

She was stopped twice.

"I'm only by myself, just an old lady here. Why stop me?" *The South China Morning Post* quoted Wong as telling officers.

Soon afterwards she was arrested.

Police confirmed a 65 year old woman surnamed Wong had been arrested for 'knowingly participating in an unauthorised assembly and attempting to incite others to join an unauthorised assembly'.

Hong Kong's democracy movement has been crushed by a broad crackdown on dissent over the last year, including the imposition of a sweeping security law that criminalises much dissent.

In the middle of the 2019 protests Wong disappeared for more than a year.

She resurfaced saying she had been detained by mainland authorities during a trip to Shenzhen, a neighbouring city where she lived at the time.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

France declares jabs for all adults in race against variants

Paris, France - France on Monday opened up COVID-19 vaccines to all adults, a week before Germany, as Europe races to avoid another wave of infections caused by new virus variants.

Until now, French authorities gave priority to people over 50, people in 'priority professions' or younger adults with underlying health problems.

So far, 25.4mn people have received a first shot of a vaccine, representing about 38 per cent of the population and nearly one in two adults. Nearly 12mn have received the two shots required for full protection.

As the French savour a degree of freedom following the reopening of cafes, restaurants and museums two weeks ago, initially high levels of vaccine scepticism have begun to subside.

A Cevipof poll conducted in early May showed that 65 per cent of adults planned to get vaccinated, up from 48 per cent in February.

"I am fully convinced that we are going to see a lot of people getting vaccinated," Professor Alain Fischer, the immunologist who heads the government's vaccination advisory board, said on Monday, adding that immunisation was the key to 'getting back an increasingly normal life'.



French Prime Minister Jean Castex (centre), flanked by Health Minister Olivier Veran (left) and Saint-Maur-des-Fossés mayor Sylvain Berrios, visits a vaccination centre, in Saint-Maur-des-Fossés on Monday (AFP)

With 28mn adults eligible for a first shot, but only around half a million appointments available each day, many people have opted to travel outside their neighbourhood or even their region to secure highly coveted Pfizer or Moderna shots.

Vaccinations with the AstraZeneca and Janssen jabs are only open to those aged 55, after cases of potentially deadly blood clots in a very small number of younger people vaccinated.

The government is hoping that the 76.7mn vaccines which it is expecting to receive in June will help it meet demand.

Quiet summer?

After an initially slow start to its vaccination drive in January, when it was one of Europe's laggards, France is aiming to close the gap with Britain, Germany and other neighbours.

Britain, which has led the vaccine race in Europe, has given

nearly 35mn people a first shot of vaccine. Over 16mn have received a second shot.

Germany, which like France was slow to get off the mark, has also powered up its immunisation drive in recent weeks.

Over 49mn people in Europe's most populous country have received a first shot, representing around 42 per cent of the population.

That figure is expected to rapidly increase when vaccines

are made available to all Germans aged 16 and over from June 7.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has also plans to offer coronavirus jabs to children over the age of 12 but stressed they will not be compulsory.

In France, a third month-long lockdown in April is credited with taming a severe third wave of infections. The number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care in hospital fell to under 3,000 at the weekend, the lowest level since January.

The situation emboldened the government to reopen sidewalk cafes and restaurants after seven months on May 19, along with museums, cinemas, theatres and non-essential shops.

The next stage of the loosening of restrictions falls on June 9, when cafes and restaurants will be allowed serve clients indoors and a nationwide 9.00pm curfew is pushed back to 11.00pm.

"If the fall-off continues between now and June 9... we will have a quiet summer," Arnaud Fontanet, an epidemiologist at the Institut Pasteur in Paris told the *Journal du Dimanche* weekly.

So far the virus has claimed 109,431 lives in France. AFP



A woman receives a nucleic acid test for COVID-19 in Guangzhou in China's southern Guangdong province on Sunday (AFP)

China imposes travel limits in most populous province

Beijing, China - Chinese authorities imposed fresh travel limits, cancelled flights and tested thousands of residents in Guangdong Monday after the new variant of the coronavirus was reported in the country's most populous province.

Travellers leaving Guangzhou - the capital of the southern province home to 100mn people - must show negative COVID-19 test results from the past 72 hours, starting from 10.00pm on Monday, the city said in an announcement late on Sunday.

Guangzhou, an industrial hub of nearly 15mn people north of Hong Kong, reported 18 new local cases of the coronavirus on Monday, causing alarm in a country that has largely brought domestic transmission under control.

Guangzhou authorities have ordered residents of entire districts to be tested for the virus, while the nearby cities of Foshan and Shenzhen, which borders Hong Kong, have also launched mass testing after local cases were detected in the past week.

Hundreds of flights out of

Guangzhou's Baiyun International Airport have been cancelled as of Monday afternoon, according to aviation monitor VariFlight.

The patients in the current Guangzhou outbreak were 'all infected with the fast-spreading variant discovered in India', city health official Chen Bin said at a press conference on Sunday.

A neighbourhood in Guangzhou's central Liwan district was locked down on Saturday, with markets and schools shut and residents ordered to stay indoors.

High school students across the city, except for those in their final year of school, have also been ordered to stay home and take lessons online.

Life in China has returned almost to normal since mid-2020, with authorities responding to sporadic outbreaks with aggressive testing and localised quarantines.

Travellers entering China from abroad must endure lengthy hotel quarantines, with major cities tightening quarantine rules in recent weeks over fears of overseas variants. AFP

Singapore to start vaccinating schoolchildren

Singapore - Singapore will start vaccinating schoolchildren against the coronavirus soon, the Prime Minister said on Monday, after officials warned that new strains were affecting youngsters more.

The city-state recently tightened curbs following a slight uptick in cases, after months of reporting barely any local transmissions.

This included closing schools amid signs that new variants,

such as the one first detected in India, were affecting children in greater numbers.

In a televised speech, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced school students aged 12 and over will be the next group to be inoculated.

Health regulators approved the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds this month. It was previously only allowed for those aged 16 and above.

"In this latest outbreak, we



This file photo shows a senior staff nurse receiving vaccine as Singapore began its vaccination exercise on December 30 last year (AFP)

have seen more cases of children getting infected, in schools and tuition centres," Lee said.

"The children were not seriously ill, but parents are naturally worried. Therefore, we will take advantage of the June holidays to vaccinate students."

The city's more than 400,000 students can start booking vaccinations from Tuesday, with the first slots available on Thursday, officials said.

AFP

Thousands of Rohingya protest against conditions in Bangladesh

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Several thousand Rohingya staged 'unruly' protests on Monday against living conditions on a cyclone-prone island off Bangladesh where they were moved from vast camps on the mainland, police said.

Since December, Bangladesh has shifted 18,000 out of a planned 100,000 refugees to the low-lying silt island of Bhashan Char from the Cox's Bazar region, where around 850,000 people live in squalid and cramped conditions. Most of them had fled a brutal military offensive in neighbouring Myanmar in 2017 that UN investigators concluded was executed with 'genocidal intent'.

Monday's protest involved up to 4,000 people, police said, and coincided with an inspection visit by officials from the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR).

"The Rohingya who are there became unruly the moment the UNHCR representatives landed (on the island) by helicopter today," local police chief Alamgir Hossain told AFP. "They broke the glass on warehouses by throwing rocks. They came at the police ... Their demand is they don't want to live here."

One Rohingya man confirmed to AFP that bricks were thrown



This file photo shows Rohingya refugees standing in a queue on the island of Bhashan Char on December 4 last year (AFP)

and that police prevented them from entering a building where the UNHCR officials were present. An international rights activist said police used batons to disperse the protesters. Quoting Rohingya sources, he said several protesters were injured.

Police, however, rejected the claim. A police spokesman said Rohingya protesters attacked officers, injuring several of them. They also damaged cars on the island, he said.

After the first transfer on December 4 to the island in the Bay of Bengal, several Rohingya told AFP they were beaten and intimid-

ated into agreeing to be relocated. Their claims have been echoed by rights groups.

The Bangladesh government insists relocation is voluntary, that the island is safe and that its facilities are far better than those in the camps.

Police said at least 49 Rohingya including women and children have been arrested in recent weeks after fleeing the island and trying to return to Cox's Bazar.

But Rohingya leaders say that scores, if not hundreds, of Rohingya have escaped and have since returned to Cox's Bazar. AFP

China allows couples to have 3 children as birthrate falls after 4 decades of planning

Beijing, China - China will allow couples to have three children after a census showed its population is rapidly ageing, state media said on Monday, further unwinding four decades of strict family planning controls in the world's most populous nation.

In 2016 China relaxed its 'one-child policy' - one of the world's strictest family planning regulations - allowing couples to have two children as concerns mounted over an ageing workforce and economic stagnation.

But annual births have continued to plummet to a record low of 12mn in 2020, Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics said this month, as the cost of living rises and women increasingly make their own family planning choices.

China's fertility rate stands at 1.3 - below the level needed to maintain a stable population, the figures revealed.

The slump threatens a demographic crisis which has alarmed President Xi Jinping's ruling Communist Party, risking a shortage of young workers to drive an economy experts say will have to support hundreds of millions of elderly by 2050.

A Monday meeting of the party's powerful Politburo led by Xi announced a further loosening



Children play at a kindergarten in Yantai in China's eastern Shandong province on Monday (AFP)

of the state's control over the size of families.

"To actively respond to the ageing population... a couple can have three children," state media Xinhua reported.

The Politburo meeting promised 'accompanying support measures' including improving maternity leave, universal childcare and lowering the costs of education, but without giving firm commitments.

Rich kids only?

The announcement was met with widespread ridicule on Chinese social media platform Weibo, tapping into a deep unease with long working hours, skyrocketing house prices and

the rising burden to provide for ageing relatives that frames modern life.

'For Chinese millennials one couple must support four grandparents as well as three kids? Can the country give a hero's award to each of them?' read one comment that gained over 3,000 likes.

Others said the policy could only be taken up by those with money.

'The poor don't dare have kids, in two more generations there will only be rich people left,' another user commented.

A poll on Weibo shared by Xinhua asking readers their reaction to the news later appeared to have been deleted after over

25,000 responded that they would not consider having three children.

China's gender balance has been skewed by decades of the one-child policy, and a traditional social preference for boys which prompted a generation of sex-selective abortions and abandoned baby girls.

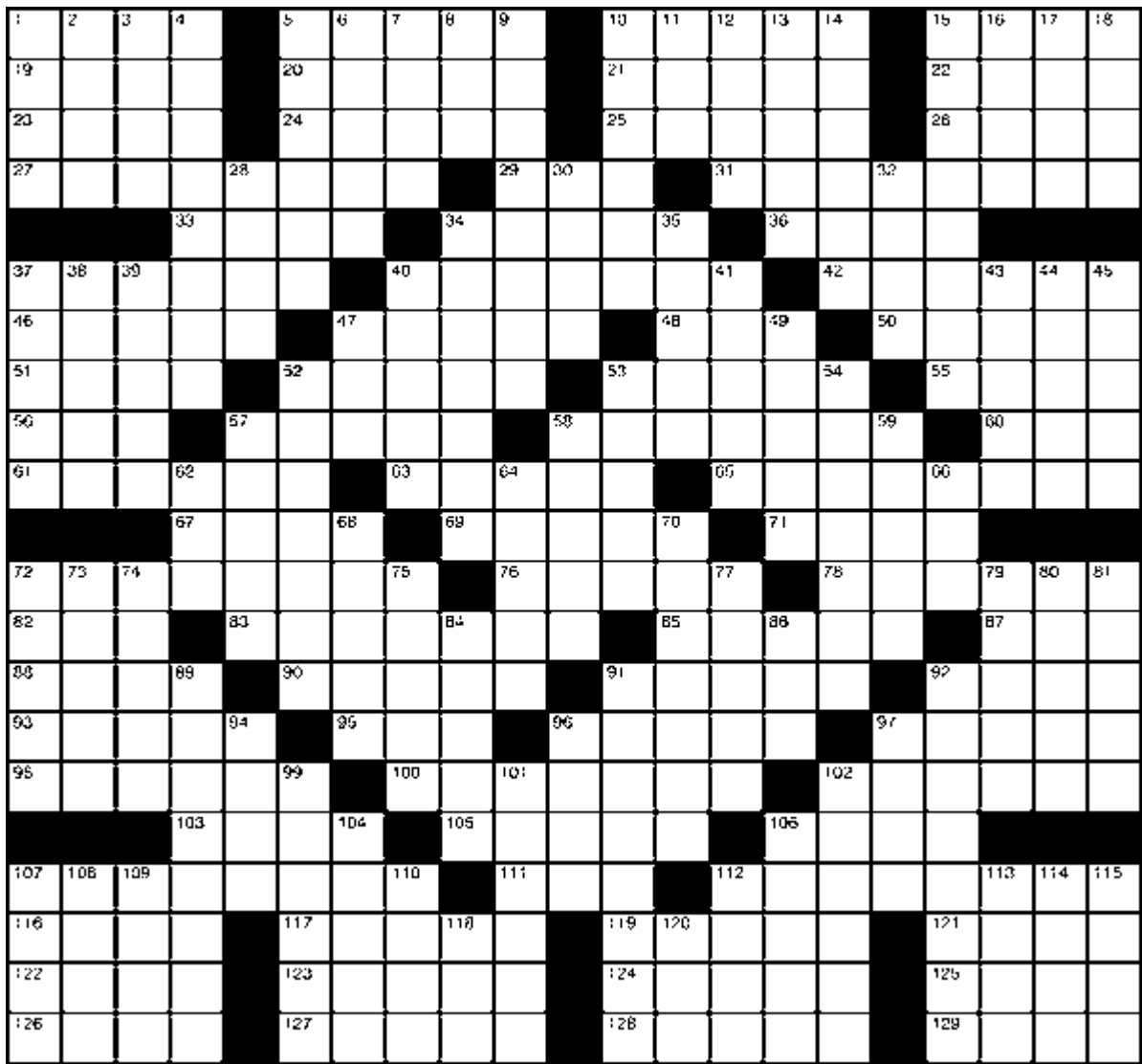
And for a younger generation of women with changing priorities amid the unrelenting pressures of urban life in China, there remains a widespread aversion to having children.

"I don't want to have even a single child," a 27 year old single woman from Zhejiang province who gave her name only as Wendy told AFP. "Nobody around me wants to have kids."

Most experts agree that the policy alone will not reverse China's declining fertility, though it sends a symbolic message after decades of the one-child limit that was often brutally enforced by forced abortions and sterilisations.

"Most families have a preference for few children now - akin to the rest of Northeast Asia," said Lauren Johnston, a China economics and demography researcher at SOAS University of London. AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Thick slice
5 ___ House
10 Screw pine
15 Part of the hand
19 Queen of heaven
20 Weird
21 Biblical name
22 Medicinal plant
23 Indigo dye
24 Senseless
25 Famous jockey
26 Electric catfish
27 Wild ducks
29 Caress
31 Pleasant period
33 Musical work
34 Aits
36 Ovid's 152
37 To greet
40 Buildings housing horses
42 Valuable possessions
46 Lena ___
47 Chiplike piece
48 A duct
50 Proofreader's mark
51 War god
52 Thin fabric
53 Vends
55 A defense
alliance: abbr.
56 Cistern

- 57 Famous physicist
58 Diversity
60 High hill
61 Sour ale
63 Notoriety
65 Religious rite
67 Shirley MacLaine role, ___ La Douce
69 Soft drinks
71 Super food
72 The tunny
76 Leonardo's birthplace
78 Small twigs
82 Pikelike fish
83 Hires
85 Accumulate
87 Born
88 A-tiptoe
90 Roman garments
91 Barter
92 Old
93 Mythical king
95 ___ Aviv
96 Agricultural lands
97 Famous Glenn
98 Blood deficiency condition
100 Vilifies
102 Actor Christian
103 Senate employee
105 Rescued
106 Mast
107 A shroud

- 111 French article
112 Aquatic athletes
116 Filament
117 "___ Jackie"
119 Measuring instrument
121 Mental concept
122 Being
123 Unexpected pleasure
124 Musical study
125 Half: prefix
126 Noxious plant
127 Oozes
128 Protuberances
129 Walked
DOWN
1 Pretense
2 Russian river
3 Seed covering
4 Inflated toys
5 Capital of Lebanon
6 Affords
7 Periods of time
8 French river
9 Souvenir
10 Artist's chalk
11 Macaw
12 Actress Shelly
13 A French wine
14 Interstice
15 Zealous advocate
16 Turkish regiment
17 Rich soil
18 Ancient Persian

- 28 Church part
30 German river
32 Compact ___
34 Type style
35 Cut
37 Love, in Hebrew
38 Shade of red
39 Greek island
40 Ooze
41 ___ law
43 Muse of poetry
44 River in Montana
45 Bedtime staple?
47 In favor of
49 Smooth and glossy
52 A New England state
53 Lucifer
54 Street: Ger.
57 A mockery
58 Quo ___
59 Barks shrilly
62 Actress ___ Scala
64 Holds in deep affection
66 Mal de ___
68 Cant
70 Marked by wounds
72 Old-world lizard
73 Classical language
74 Groom's companion

- 75 Enthusiastic
77 Mohammedan nobles
79 Cast metal mass
80 Anserine birds
81 Jewish home service
84 Storms at sea
86 Paid notices
89 Indulged to excess
91 Certain jurors
92 Scaremonger
94 Thailand
96 ___-o'clock scholar
97 Bivalve mollusk
99 Deputies
101 Male servants
102 Steeples
104 Habitate
106 Native of Stockholm
107 Masticate
108 Comfort
109 Ascend
110 Woody plant
112 Boss
113 European river
114 San ___
115 Uttered
118 Weaken gradually
120 WWII theater

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You have been making a strong, positive impression on some powerful people, and today you should start to be treated a lot better because of it. Someone is ready to give you a tougher challenge, and you are ready to take it on, especially if it involves travel or exploring new cultures. Channel any nervousness into positive energy and keep on doing what you're doing.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Clear out your schedule and set aside your expectations. This is going to be a fickle kind of day, and you need to be as flexible as possible. It's a day to toss out the rule book and just let things go along their merry way. You won't be disappointed. But if you struggle against the tide of the day and stubbornly try to stick to what you had planned, you'll experience a lot of frustration.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Get out in the world early today. Set your alarm 20 minutes early and give yourself some time to walk around the block, stop for breakfast, or just read the news while you nurse a cup of coffee. If you've been feeling moody and slow, this more gentle introduction to the day can help you unlock some of that energy that you need to stay motivated till evening.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Are you paying more attention to your enemies than to your friends? There is a certain level of jealousy around you, and it could develop into resentment if you don't get back in touch with one or two friends who are still waiting to hear from you. If you don't have enough time to really catch up with them, at least shoot them a message arranging some social time with them.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

All your plans should go perfectly. And if any obstacles do appear, they'll be the kind that fizzle out on their own soon enough. So the only way you could fall into a bad mood today is if you let your mind wander to problems that you can't fix. Dwell on things beyond your control and you could start feeling blue. Keep your mind on all the good news in your life right now.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Pretending someone is what they aren't is a dangerous game. You can't be idealistic about what someone is really about. Take off your blinders today and see that person for who they truly are. What other people have been saying hasn't been to your liking, but it may be true. Look at the entire person, see all of their imperfections. You might even like them.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

There is absolutely nothing wrong with adding some fun to a business situation. As long as you stay professional, why is it wrong to smile and laugh? You can't take everything so seriously all the time. It's just not healthy! Today, try out a few silly jokes. Not only will you make everyone relax a little bit, but you will encourage other people to add their personality to the conversation.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You've been pulling hard in a tug-of-war with someone, but today it might be wise for you to just let go of the rope and send the other person flying. By switching up the balance of things, you are sure to end up on top. If all you want to do is win, there are other ways to get that victory than to exhaust yourself over and over again with someone who will never give an inch.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Making connections with other cool people is going to be your full-time job today, but since when did you mind being social anyway? Keeping busy will keep you happy, so get out there and get social. Get online. Check blogs or social networking sites and spend some time touching base with folks you haven't talked to in a while. Send some funny e-mails and see what happens.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's not selfish to want to be by yourself. It's actually quite healthy! If being a social butterfly is simply not high on your priority list, don't be ashamed of it. Stream one of your favorite movies and get comfy on the couch tonight. Order in some food and just relax. Social-hound friends may not understand this inward phase you're going through, but they'll accept it.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's all about endurance today, and you'll be able to do anything for any length of time, including sitting through that boring meeting without falling asleep, handling that dreadful blind date with effortless charm, and waiting in a long line without grumbling one bit. You have some serious strength of patience deep down inside of you, and it will come to your rescue today.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Are you starting to feel like a doormat in one of your relationships, like they're walking all over you and you're not getting half of the credit you deserve? Today, get off the ground and get out of this person's life for a while. Show them that they need you a lot more than you need them. They will be back asking for your help soon. You need to demand equal footing.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The first Indian to receive Noble Prize in Literature was

- a. Mother Teresa
b. C V Raman
c. Rabindranath Tagore
d. Sarojini Naidu

2. Pulitzer prize is awarded for outstanding work in the field of

- a. Science and Technology
b. Environmental Studies
c. Literature and Journalism
d. International Understanding

3. Saraswathi Samman is given annually for outstanding contribution to

- a. classical music
b. education
c. literature
d. fine arts

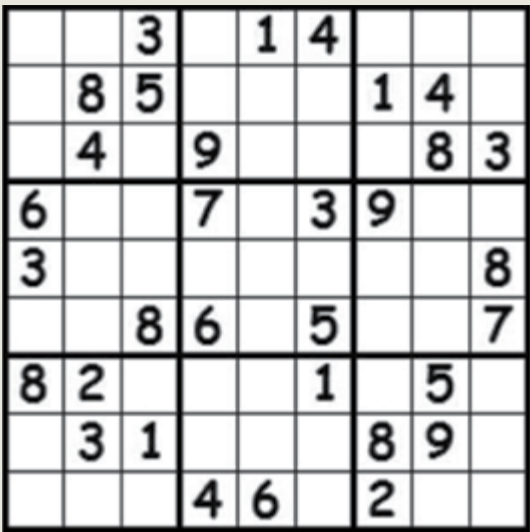
Answers: 1. c 2. c 3. c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



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 (MAY 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



SUMMERWEAR

LET YOUR
OUTFITS
breathe

Summer, somehow, is synonymous with cotton when it comes to attire. If keeping cool and working cool is the need of the hour, then one needs to turn to cotton for the much needed respite from the heat and humidity. The best part of it is, one never gets fed up with cotton outfits.

To stay in step with popular fashion trends this summer, cotton, linen, viscose, and silk are the key fabrics to focus on for refreshing your wardrobe. The best fabric to opt for, when the mercury shoots up, should be breathable and comfortable. And what better choice can there be, than cool cottons!

Cotton has been cultivated for over 7000 years making it one of the world's oldest natural fibres that is still one of the most widely used fibre. Cotton is used not just for clothing during summer but also for table-drapes, curtains, upholstery and many other uses. And, when it comes to sustainability, compared to synthetic fibres, cotton rules supreme as it is not just cool and absorbent but also durable.

3

THREE KEY
REASONS TO WEAR
COTTONS DURING
SUMMER

Breathability and moisture control

In hot and sweaty seasons, as the body perspires, cotton fibres absorb the moisture and release it on the fabric, so it evaporates. This makes cotton breathable. It also allows for better air circulation while drawing heat away from the skin and keeping the body cool and dry.

Cotton also helps you to remain comfortable as you exercise, keeping moisture from building up between your skin and clothing.

Cotton clothes provide thermal insulation and greater comfort as the cotton fabric traps air between the fibres and allow more air to pass between the skin and fabric.

Skin comfort

Cotton fibres (especially organic) are one of the only natural fibres that cause almost no allergic reactions and don't irritate human skin. Cotton's hypoallergenic nature and moisture-wicking properties don't aggravate dry skin or cause allergic reactions, even in people prone to skin problem. On the other hand, synthetic fibres can worsen dry skin by trapping sweat and robbing the skin of its natural essential oils.

Cotton is also the best choice for those who suffer from asthma or allergies, as well as those with sensitive skin as the fibres provide least irritation.

Fungal breeding

Many people develop skin rashes and fungi during the hot summer weather due to exposure to heat. This is because heat and moisture is what leads to the development of fungi. This especially applies to underwear. Wearing Cotton innerwear reduces the chance of itching, infection and foul odour. Since cotton outfits breathe, they successfully absorb moisture and keep the skin dry.

On the other hand, synthetic materials do not breathe, which means they retain heat, leading to accumulation of bacteria and subsequent infections.

Benefits of organic cotton

Organic cotton textile is breathable. It's engineered to keep you dry. Organic fabrics provide ventilation that prevents fungi to grow as compared to synthetic fabrics that encourage yeast growth causing infections.

Since the organic cotton fabric is all-natural. Just like a towel, it absorbs the moisture and liquid leaving your skin dry and clean. You feel restored and eased without fearing the sweat stains during hot summer days.

Organic cotton has the ability to save you from the heat during summer and cold in the winter season. It's a weatherproof fabric. It traps air between its fibres to keep you cool as well as protected. It also helps maintain body temperatures during extreme weather.

Organic cotton is produced naturally and is chemical-free hence it

is hypoallergenic. It won't irritate your skin or cause any rashes or allergies, unlike synthetic fabrics that may cause allergic reactions when in contact with the skin.

Organic cotton is very strong, it has impressive tensile strength and it retains its shape after the stretch. This property makes organic cotton durable and less likely to be ripped or torn. It is also machine washable with hot water.



Kokrak holds off Spieth to clinch Colonial crown

US PGA TOUR CHARLES SCHWAB CHALLENGE

Washington, US - Jason Kokrak held off home-region hero Jordan Spieth down the final holes on Sunday to win the US PGA Tour Charles Schwab Challenge by two strokes.

The 36 year old American fired a level par 70 in Sunday's final round to finish 72 holes on 14-under 266 at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas.

Kokrak stumbled with bogeys at the par-four 15th and par-three 16th but closed with back-to-back pars to deny Spieth, who had ended a four-year win drought last month at the Texas Open.

"They were definitely rooting for the guy next to me," Kokrak said of Spieth, who hails from nearby Dallas.

"We had a little ebb and flow. Grinded it out. Kept patient. Didn't finish the way I wanted to but got the win."

Kokrak, who claimed his first US PGA title last October at the CJ Cup at Shadow Creek, became the season's third multiple winner after reigning US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau and 2009 British Open winner Stewart Cink.

Spieth, a three-time major winner who won at Colonial in 2016, had cheers but stumbled to a final-round 73 on a course where only silence greeted players last year.

The event was the first played in 2020 after a three-month COVID-19 hiatus and spectators were not allowed.

England's Ian Poulter birdied three of the last four holes to



American Jason Kokrak lifts the trophy after winning the US PGA Tour Charles Schwab Challenge at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, US, on Sunday

We had a little ebb and flow. Grinded it out. Kept patient. Didn't finish the way I wanted to but got the win

JASON KOKRAK

share third on 270 with Colombian Sebastian Munoz and Americans Charley Hoffman and Patton Kizzire. American Troy Merritt was eighth on 273.

Kokrak carried a two-stroke lead over Spieth to the par-three 16th, where the leader found a bunker and missed an 11-foot putt to make bogey, trimming his edge over Spieth to a lone stroke.

At 17, Spieth saved par with a putt from just inside six feet while Kokrak did the same from just beyond seven feet to keep Kokrak ahead by one at the 18th tee.

Spieth wound up in the right rough while Kokrak found the edge of the fairway.

Spieth blasted out with a pitching wedge but the ball rolled

off the green and into a water hazard and Kokrak sealed victory by putting his approach safely onto the green 50 feet from the cup. Spieth made bogey and Kokrak two-putted for the victory.

The day began with Spieth holding a one-stroke lead over Kokrak and both struggled early. Kokrak began with a bogey and made another at the fourth while Spieth reeled off three bogeys in a row starting at the second, leaving them level on the fifth tee.

Kokrak birdied the fifth from just outside 23 feet, then birdied the sixth from just inside ten feet

and answered a bogey at the seventh, after needing two to escape a greenside bunker, with a birdie from six feet at the par-three eighth.

Spieth, meanwhile, dropped his approaches inches from the cup at the sixth and eighth for tap-in birdies and made the turn level with Kokrak for the lead.

Kokrak sank a 13-foot birdie putt at the par-five 11th and rolled in a 17-footer for birdie at a two-stroke edge at the par-three 13th. When both made bogey at the 15th Kokrak's edge remained two strokes.

AFP



L-R: Mattias Ekstrom, Emil Bergkvist, Lucas Cruz, Carlos Sainz, Stephane Peterhansel, Edouard Boulanger at the unveiling of the team on Monday

Audi to field 'dream team' at Dakar Rally

2022 DAKAR RALLY

Paris, France - Audi announced Monday that it has hired two of the Dakar Rally's most successful drivers Stephane Peterhansel and Carlos Sainz for when it makes its debut on the race with a hybrid car.

"It is no exaggeration to speak of a 'dream team'," said Julius Seebach, managing director of Audi Sport, in a statement.

Audi will enter three hybrid cars on which the power will be provided by electric powertrains although the battery will be augmented by a combustion engine. Swede Mattias Ekstrom will complete the trio.

The 55 year old Frenchman Peterhansel has won the race 14 times on bikes or in cars, including this year, while 59 year old Spaniard Sainz has won three times, most recently in 2020, and also won two World Rally titles.

"Stephane is the most successful Dakar driver of all

time in the history of the Dakar.

Carlos is a multiple Dakar winner and World Rally champion," said Seebach. With Mattias (Ekstrom), we already celebrated many Audi successes in the past. He is one of the world's most versatile drivers. In addition to a lot of speed, they are all adding an extreme amount of expertise and motivation to our team. The same goes for their co-drivers, who play an increasingly important role in the Dakar Rally."

Both Peterhansel and Sainz drove for Mini last season.

"We want to be the first team to win the Dakar Rally with an electric powertrain," said Peterhansel.

Emil Bergkvist will be the co-driver of Ekstrom while Edouard Boulanger will be the navigator of Peterhansel and Lucas Cruz will join Carlos Sainz as his co-driver.

The 2022 edition of the Dakar will take place in Saudi Arabia from January 2-14.

AFP

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

REAL NO LONGER HAD FAITH IN ME: ZIDANE

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Zinedine Zidane resigned as Real Madrid coach because he felt the Spanish club no longer had any confidence in him, he wrote in an open letter on Monday.

"I'm leaving because I feel the club no longer has the faith in me I need, and doesn't offer me the support to build something in the medium or long term," the Frenchman wrote in the letter published in the sports daily AS.

"I am a born winner and I was here to win trophies, but beyond this there are human beings, emotions, life and I have the feeling that these things have not been valued, that it has not been understood that this is also how the dynamic of a great club is maintained," he said.

"But everything I built on a daily basis, what I brought to the relationship with the players...has been forgotten."

"I'm leaving, but I'm not jumping ship and I'm not tired of coaching," he added.

Real had a disappointing season, finishing second in La Liga behind neighbours Atletico Madrid and losing to eventual winners Chelsea in the Champions League semifinals.

It was the first time that the 13-time European champions had failed to win a trophy in 11 seasons.

It is the second time that Zidane has resigned as Real Madrid coach.

The 1998 World Cup winner



first took the helm in January 2016 and guided Real an unprecedented hat-trick of Champions League titles as well as a La Liga title in 2017, before abruptly quitting on May 31, 2018. Less than a year later he returned after Julen Lopetegui and Santiago Solari were sacked in quick succession.

‘Hurt me’

In his letter, Zidane said he left

the club in 2018 because it needed 'a different voice to keep itself at the very top' but this time 'things are different'.

"I want what we have achieved together to be respected.

"I would have liked in recent months my relationship with the club and with the president (Florentino Perez) to have been a little different from that of other coaches," Zidane said.

"I wasn't asking for privileges, of course not, but a little more memory," added Zidane.

"It hurt me a great deal when I would read in the press, after a loss, that they were going to fire me if I did not win the next match.

"It hurt me and the entire team because these messages which were intentionally leaked to the media created negative interferences with the squad,

they created doubts and misunderstandings."

Zidane's contract with Real was set to expire in 2022 but he had repeatedly refused to confirm he would still be at the club next season.

‘Always be grateful’

He has a history of making surprise announcements: as a player, he initially announced his retirement from international

football in 2004 before coming back for the 2006 World Cup, after which he retired for good following his red card for headbutting Italy's Marco Materazzi as France lost the final.

"Spending 20 years in Madrid has been the most beautiful thing that has ever happened to me in life and I know that I owe it exclusively to Florentino Perez who bet on me in 2001," Zidane said in the letter.

"I say it from the heart, I will always be grateful to the 'presi' for it. Always," he added.

Zidane also had a message to Real fans, saying he wanted them to know that "we gave 100 per cent".

Zidane's resignation roiled an already turbulent coaching picture at the continent's elite clubs.

One of Zidane's former clubs, Juventus, has replaced Andrea Pirlo with Massimiliano Allegri. Antonio Conte, a former teammate of Zidane's at Juventus, quit Inter Milan after leading them to the Serie A title.

Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich have replaced Hansi Flick with Julian Nagelsmann.

There is doubt about the future of Ronald Koeman who became coach at Barcelona last August, while Mauricio Pochettino, who took over at Paris Saint-Germain in January, is reportedly being courted by former employer Tottenham Hotspur and has also been linked with Madrid.

AFP

World Cup qualifiers moved to Dubai from China

Shanghai, China - Several World Cup football qualifiers scheduled to be played in China were moved to Dubai on Monday over coronavirus infections in the Syria and Maldives teams, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) said.

Seven Group A fixtures involving China, Syria, Maldives, the Philippines and Guam are affected, playing further havoc with the already heavily disrupted Qatar 2022 World Cup qualifiers. "In view of the recent epidemic infections in the Maldives and Syrian national football teams... they must be strictly quarantined upon entry and cannot participate in the games as scheduled," a CFA statement said.

"According to recommendations from the AFC (Asian Football Confederation), the Chinese FA agreed that the remaining qualifying matches... will not be held in Suzhou and will be transferred to Dubai and held there," it added. The games were supposed to take place over the next fortnight in a secure 'bubble' in the Chinese city of Suzhou.

According to China's Titan Sports, the Maldives and Syria are in Dubai and were denied permission to depart for China.

Maldives striker Ali Ashfaq tweeted that he had tested positive and won't be playing in the qualifiers. China were scheduled to face the Maldives on Thursday, while Syria and the Maldives were set to play on June 7. China are second in the group behind Syria and are fighting to keep their World Cup hopes alive. The games double as qualifiers for the 2023 Asian Cup in China.

AFP



Copa America 2021 to be held in Brazil

Asuncion, Paraguay - South America's largest football tournament, the Copa America, was moved on Monday to Brazil after a COVID-19 surge in Argentina and social unrest in Colombia saw the co-hosts stripped of the right to host the event.

With two weeks to kickoff, South America's CONMEBOL football federation tweeted that "The CONMEBOL Copa America 2021 will be played in Brazil!" and the June 13-July 10 dates were maintained.

CONMEBOL is expected to announce the venues and dates of matches in the coming hours.

Brazil hosted the last Copa America, in 2019.

Originally scheduled for last year, the Copa was postponed by 12 months due to the coronavirus epidemic.

New host Brazil is one of the countries in the world worst affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, with the second-highest death toll of over 460,000 so far and more than 16.5mn cases.

It was to have been the first



A file photo of the Copa America trophy

time in its history that the tournament would be co-hosted by two countries, Argentina and Colombia.

But ten days ago, CONMEBOL stripped Colombia of its duties amid street protests that were met with a heavy-handed police response that drew international

condemnation. More than a month into the unrest, dozens of people have died.

On Sunday, CONMEBOL also stripped Argentina of hosting rights in the context of a record coronavirus surge, with more than 77,000 deaths in the pandemic to date and nearly 3.8mn infections.

"CONMEBOL informs that in view of the current circumstances it has decided to suspend the organisation of the Copa America in Argentina," the governing body tweeted.

An Argentine poll published on Friday found that most respondents were against holding the tournament as the country experiences its worst

event. Argentina had presented its 'strict protocol' to CONMEBOL to host the tournament in its entirety, which involved preparing additional stadiums.

On May 20 CONMEBOL rejected a plea by Colombia to further delay the tournament.

It left Argentina as the sole host, but a survey conducted by

New host Brazil is one of the countries in the world worst affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, with the second-highest death toll of over 460,000 so far and more than 16.5mn cases

phase of the pandemic so far.

Less than two weeks before the Copa America's scheduled start, Argentina is under a nine-day lockdown and experiencing record daily infections.

The government was hoping that the lockdown that began on May 22 would flatten the curve of infections ahead of the sports

pollsters Poliarquia among a representative sample of 1,274 city-dwelling adults, found that 70 per cent believe the country should withdraw.

Only 20 per cent believed the championship should continue on Argentine soil, and ten per cent were undecided.

AFP



Federer wins on Grand Slam return as Swiatek cruises

Paris, France - Roger Federer kicked off only his second French Open campaign in six years with an impressive dismissal of Denis Istomin on Monday, while reigning women's champion Iga Swiatek and men's second seed Daniil Medvedev both reached round two.

The 39 year old Federer, level with Rafael Nadal on 20 Grand Slam singles titles, saw off Uzbek Istomin 6-2, 6-4, 6-3, as he played his first Grand Slam for 16 months. "It's a great pleasure to return. It was important to have some rehabilitation and lots of training," said Federer, seeded eighth.

Poland's Swiatek, celebrating her 20th birthday, saw off her good friend Kaja Juvan 6-0, 7-5 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Medvedev, who had lost in the first round in all of his four previous appearances in the tournament, put his poor clay-court form behind him by beating the dangerous Alexander Bublik 6-3, 6-3, 7-5.

Federer arrived to Roland Garros having played only three matches since his Australian Open semifinal loss to Novak Djokovic last year, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The Swiss great lost to Pablo Andujar in his first clay-court match of the season earlier this month in Geneva, but struck 48 winners as he raced to victory over Istomin. But he has been keen to play down any thoughts that he can add to his 2009 Roland Garros title.

He is competing in the tournament for only the second time since 2015 and the first time since reaching the 2019 semifinals.

Swiatek, who became the first major singles champion from Poland last October, hit 22 winners in an impressive opening to her bid for a second straight Roland Garros triumph.

"I tried to put it behind me (being defending champion) and kind of use it in a positive way



Switzerland's Roger Federer returns the ball to Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin during their men's singles first-round match at the Philippe Chatrier court in Paris on Monday (AFP)

because I just know that I'm feeling good here," said the eighth seed, who was presented with flowers on court after the match for her birthday. "Obviously it's different. It's more stressful a little bit."

Miserable run ends for Medvedev

It is not just in Paris that Medvedev has struggled on clay. The Russian had lost eight of his previous nine matches on the surface dating back to 2019.

But the two-time Grand Slam runner-up was too strong for Kazakh Bublik, setting up a second-round tie against

US player Tommy Paul.

"It was a good match and I've been training really well," said the 25 year old Medvedev, who lost the Australian Open final to Novak Djokovic in February.

"I'd never won at Roland Garros before so I really wanted to win today. To win in three sets was a brilliant match on my part. I struggled in recent tournaments on clay, the balls are suiting me this week though and I hope I can go a long way."

Medvedev is bidding to take advantage of being in the opposite half of the draw to 13-time champion Nadal, Djokovic and Federer, while

fourth seed Dominic Thiem was knocked out on Sunday.

Elsewhere on Monday, sixth seed Bianca Andreescu was dumped out after losing a marathon first-round match with Slovenia's world No 85 Tamara Zidansek 6-7 (1-7), 7-6 (7-2), 9-7 while fourth seed Sofia Kenin withstood a comeback from former champion Jelena Ostapenko to win 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 and reach the second round.

Earlier on Sunday, Germany's Alexander Zverev battled back from two sets down to beat compatriot and qualifier Oscar Otte 3-6, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2, 6-0. AFP



Poland's Iga Swiatek returns the ball to Slovenia's Kaja Juvan during their women's singles first-round match in Paris on Monday (AFP)

Osaka withdraws

Paris, France - Naomi Osaka said on Monday she is withdrawing from the French Open following the bitter fall-out from her decision to boycott all media activity. "The best thing for the tournament, the other players and my well being is that I withdraw so that everyone can get back to focusing on the tennis going on in Paris," the world No 2 wrote on Twitter.

SEEDED PLAYER RESULTS

[x denotes seeding]

Men first round:

Jannik Sinner (x18) beat Pierre-Hugues Herbert 6-1, 4-6, 6-7 (4-7), 7-5, 6-4; John Isner (x31) beat Sam Querrey 7-6 (7-2), 6-3, 6-4; Casper Ruud (x15) beat Benoit Paire 5-7, 6-2, 6-1, 7-6 (7-4); Nikoloz Basilashvili (x28) beat Dusan Lajovic 6-4, 6-3, 0-6, 6-2; Reilly Opelka (x32) beat Andrej Martin 6-3, 6-2, 6-4.

Sunday:

Botic van de Zandschulp beat Hubert Hurkacz (x19) 6-7 (5-7), 6-7 (4-7), 6-2, 6-2, 6-4; Stefanos Tsitsipas (x5) beat Jeremy Chardy 7-6 (8-6), 6-3, 6-1; Pablo Carreno Busta (x12) beat Norbert Gombos 6-3, 6-4, 6-3; Marcos Giron beat Grigor Dimitrov (x16) 2-6, 4-6, 7-5, 3-0 - retired.

Women first round:

Elise Mertens (x14) beat Storm Sanders 6-4, 6-1; Polona Herczeg beat Kiki Bertens (x16) 6-1, 3-6, 6-4; Marketa Vondrousova (x20) beat Kaia Kanepi 4-6, 6-3, 6-0; Sorana Cirstea beat Johanna Konta (x19) 7-6 (7-5), 6-2; Belinda Bencic (x10) beat Nadia Podoroska 6-0, 6-3.

Sunday:

Victoria Azarenka (x15) beat Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-4, 2-6, 6-3; Madison Keys (x23) beat Oceane Dodin 6-3, 3-6, 6-1; Veronika Kudermetova (x29) beat Amanda Anisimova 7-6 (7-5), 6-1.

French Open embraces cancer survivor Suarez Navarro

Paris, France - Carla Suarez Navarro begins an emotional final French Open on Tuesday, less than a year after she was diagnosed with cancer.

The popular Spaniard, a former world No 6 and two-time quarterfinalist in Paris, was told in September 2020 that she was suffering with Hodgkin's lymphoma.

But almost nine months later, and after gruelling sessions of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, the 32 year old is fit, healthy and ready to face former US Open champion Sloane Stephens for a place in the second round.

"I enjoy every day, enjoy the moments on the court. And try to enjoy these last months on the tennis circuit together with my tennis family as I think I have done these years," said Suarez Navarro, a winner of two WTA titles. She hasn't played a match since she faced former two-time Wimbledon winner Petra Kvitova in Doha in February last year.

"As a person, she has always been one of the most sympathetic girls on the tour. Pretty



A file photo of Carla Suarez Navarro

humble, down to earth," said Kvitova. "I saw her in Madrid and in the situation I didn't really know what to do. I said, Carla, can I hug you? She said, 'Yeah'."

When Suarez Navarro was first diagnosed, she was inundated with messages of support from the world of sport - Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Garbine Muguruza as well as world rally winner Carlos Sainz and Barcelona club.

"I think I'm a positive person, not pessimistic. In the world of tennis, everyone talked to me,

everyone put things on Twitter and Instagram.

"That for me was very positive, a lot of strength, a lot of energy," said Suarez Navarro.

This will be her final appearance at the French Open, the first stop on a farewell tour which will also take in Wimbledon, the US Open and possibly the Olympics in Tokyo.

"I am tremendously excited to be able to participate in Roland Garros.

"I have been working in recent months to give myself the

opportunity to compete one last time in Paris. I am looking forward to taking the court and feeling again how special this place has always been for me."

When she tweeted news of her recovery just five weeks ago, a photo showed her with cropped hair - a legacy of eight chemotherapy and 15 radiotherapy sessions.

"She's a fighter. She's an amazing person," said former world No 1 Victoria Azarenka.

"I sent a message to Carla every week to see how she was doing, because I felt really close to this emotion.

"I had an occasion in my family where somebody's battling through cancer, and sometimes you feel helpless. But that one moment of encouragement makes a difference in somebody's day, and I'm so proud of her.

"I'm so happy that she picked up her racquet again and she's competing here. I'll be watching her play and I'll be cheering for her for sure."

AFP



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Aguero to join Barca on a two-year deal

SPANISH LEAGUE

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona announced on Monday that they had agreed to sign Sergio Aguero on a deal until 2023, after the Argentina forward quit Manchester City following a decade at the Premier League club.

In a statement, Barca said that Aguero will become their player once his contract with Manchester City expires at the end of next month, adding that there is a buy-out clause 'set at US\$122mn'.

Aguero was unveiled as a Barca player later on Monday, after signing the contract and was presented on the Camp Nou pitch. The 32 year old's signing for Barca comes two days after he missed out on winning the Champions League with City, Pep Guardiola's side losing this season's final to Chelsea.

His final appearance for City was as a substitute for Raheem Sterling late in the final in Porto as the Premier League champions tried in

vain to win Europe's top prize for the first time. He leaves City as their all-time record goalscorer with 260 goals, and with the most goals scored for a single club in Premier League history - 184 goals in 275 appearances.

His move to Barcelona had been long in the offing, with Guardiola saying a week ago that he was close to a deal with the Catalan giants.

Aguero returns to Spain after spending five years with Atletico Madrid between 2006 and 2011, during which time he won the 2010 Europa League.

Barca will hope his arrival in Catalonia helps to convince his friend and fellow Argentine Lionel Messi to stay, as the club faces up to declining performances on the pitch and a worrying financial situation.

Ronald Koeman's side finished third in La Liga this past season and have debts of US\$1.46bn.

AFP



Oman's experienced striker Abdulaziz al Miqbali training along with his teammates during the national team's external camp in Dubai, UAE, last week

Oman all set for FIFA World Cup qualifiers

National team coach Ivankovic names 29-member squad for Doha trip

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

National team coach Branko Ivankovic on Monday announced a 29-member Oman squad for the final camp in Doha, Qatar, ahead of the joint 2022 FIFA World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup qualifiers.

The 29 players will arrive in Doha, Qatar on Tuesday for a five-day camp before Oman competes in the Group E of the second round of the qualifiers, starting on June 7.

Besides Oman, the Group E qualifiers comprise 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh.

Oman are currently second in the group with 12 points from five games while Qatar lead the standings with 16 points from six games. Afghanistan are third with four while India have three and Bangladesh have one points from five games each.

There were hardly any surprises in the list of Red Warriors announced by coach Ivankovic on Monday.

There was no comeback for Oman's former captain Ahmed Mubarak 'Kano', who was earlier left out from both the training camps in Dubai, UAE, in April and May. An experienced midfielder, Kano is Oman's most-capped international footballer with 180 caps and currently plays for Qatar's Al Markhiya Club.

Talented striker Al Monther al Alawi's recovery is complete and was back in the squad. He will be a key player along with the experienced 32 year old forward, Abdulaziz al Miqbali, in the attack along with Mohsin al Ghassani and Khalid al Hajri.

Ivankovic's squad comprises 14 players who are aged 25 and below with Miqbali, Faiz al Rusehidi and Mohsin Jawhar among the seniors, all aged 32.

Oman will be led by goalkeeper Rusheidi, who was also the captain in the recent two wins during the international friendlies against Thailand and Indonesia respectively in Dubai.

During the recently-concluded camp in Dubai, Oman had recorded a 1-0 win over Thailand in the first of the two friendlies with Abdulaziz al Miqbali finding the net.

In the second friendly, Oman



Branko Ivankovic of Croatia

There was no comeback for Oman's most-capped player and former captain Ahmed Mubarak 'Kano', who was earlier left out from both the training camps in Dubai

defeated Indonesia 3-1 with Khalid al Hajri notching a brace and Mohsin al Ghassani scoring the other goal.

Both Thailand and Indonesia are ranked much below Oman in the latest FIFA rankings with

Ivankovic's men placed 80th. Thailand is ranked 106 while Indonesia is placed at 173rd spot.

The second round of the qualifiers returns after more than 18 months of inactivity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with

Group E games to resume on June 3 with India taking on Qatar and Bangladesh facing Afghanistan.

The battle for top spot in the group appears to be between Qatar and Oman while Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh will fight it out for the automatic places in the third round of qualifying for the Asian Cup.

With Qatar qualifying automatically for the FIFA World Cup as tournament hosts, their involvement revolves largely on securing their berth at the Asian Cup as they look to defend the title they won in the UAE in 2019.

Should Qatar win the group, the runners-up will be in a fight with the other second-placed teams across the eight groups in the second round hoping to have a good enough record to advance to the next phase of World Cup qualifying. With seven group winners advancing to the third round, five of the best second-placed finishers would join them in going through.

It will be a major test for Croatian Ivankovic, whose Red Warriors are already in a strong position to claim one of the runner-up spots, with 12 points and games against Qatar, Afghanistan and Bangladesh remaining.

Oman take on Qatar on

June 7 and then meet Afghanistan on June 11 before rounding off the second-round campaign on June 15 with a match against Bangladesh.

Due to travel restrictions because of COVID-19 pandemic, the Group E matches will be played in a bubble at one venue in Qatar.

It will also be a chance for Qatar to test their preparations for the hosting of next year's FIFA World Cup as work continues on completing the venues and the related infrastructure for next November's tournament.

All the Group E matches will be played out at a site not being used for the FIFA World Cup - the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in the Al Sadd district of the city.

The venue is situated close to the Khalifa International Stadium, which will host matches during the World Cup.

Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium was used as one of the venues when Qatar hosted the AFC Asian Cup finals in 2011 and was also a venue during the 2016 AFC U23 Championship.

With a capacity of 13,000, the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium boasts an early example of the cooling technology which is being installed in all of the venues used for the World Cup.

[@ashokmuscat](#)



Oman players during a training session in Dubai, UAE, recently

OMAN SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Faiz al Rusheidi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini.

Defenders:

Khalid al Breiki, Juma al Habsi, Mohammed al Musalami, Fahmi Said, Saud al Habsi, Abdulaziz al Ghailani, Amjad al Harthi, Ali al Busaidi.

Midfielders:

Omran al Heidi, Mohammed al Ghafri, Abdullah Fawaz, Omar al Fazari, Zahr al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi, Mohsin Jawhar al Khaldi, Harib al Saadi, Salah al Yahyaie, Yaseen al Shiyadi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Arshad al Alawi.

Strikers:

Issam al Subhi, Yazeed al Mashani, Abdulaziz al Miqbali, Mohsin al Ghassani, Khalid al Hajri, Al Monther al Alawi.

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