



THURSDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2021

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HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK SENT A CONGRATULATORY CABLE TO KUWAITI EMIR SHEIKH NAWAF AL AHMED AL JABER AL SABAH ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF KUWAIT.



Honourable Lady pays tribute to nation's teachers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, paid tribute to educators on Teachers' Day, celebrated on February 24, thanking them for imparting knowledge and driving the nation towards advancement and progress.

In a message, she said, "Gratitude for imparting knowledge, which for scholars is the ultimate goal and the path to nations' edification, advancement and progress. We are delighted on this day, Teachers' Day, as we relish abundant bounties in our country, to offer our most heartfelt greetings, sincere wishes and blessings to all knowledge bearers who exert efforts and impart knowledge, ardently and resourcefully to our children.

"You have eradicated ignorance, illuminated minds and elevated the value of all, who stand in ovation to your virtuous, praiseworthy contributions to our dear homeland. Wish you a Happy Teachers' Day and happy returns of this day, which we wish finds you adorned in robes of dignity and veneration."

On the occasion, Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniah, Minister of Education, said, "Education in the sultanate enjoys great importance and diligent follow-up by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Consequently, the Supreme Committee in charge of tackling the impact of the

You have eradicated ignorance, illuminated minds and elevated the value of all, who stand in ovation to your contributions to our dear homeland

THE HONOURABLE LADY, SPOUSE OF HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN

COVID-19 pandemic on the sultanate made the decision to apply a blended learning curriculum with focus on distance education."

In a statement, the Ministry of Education said it greatly values the generous gesture of the Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan. 'All

teachers of the sultanate are honoured by the gratitude and appreciation of His Majesty the Sultan and the Honourable Lady. His Majesty the Sultan's attention towards education is unceasing. The constant care, follow ups and generous support motivate all workers in the educational sector to do their best to impart knowledge, share experiences and improve educational methods to serve the sultanate.'

The statement also referred to the generous support the school education sector in the sultanate enjoys from the government of His Majesty the Sultan. It said the confidence reposed in the sector inspires all educators to move forward, determined to build the country further, consolidate its gains and renew efforts to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

"The next stage requires teachers to continue the educational process with efficiency and competence. We need to consolidate the progress we have made, build on it by multiplying efforts to improve educational practices and devise advanced methods of self-learning for students," Dr Madiha added.

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF ITALY



H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office in Al Murtafaa Camp on Wednesday H E Federica Favi, Ambassador of the Italian Republic to the sultanate. The meeting reviewed relations between the two friendly countries and exchanged views on matters of common concern (ONA)

Oman second most food secure nation in Arabia

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is ranked second in the Arab world and 34th globally in the Global Food Security Index (GFSI), developed by The Economist Intelligence Unit, released on February 23.

With an overall score of 70.2, Oman is second to Kuwait which is ranked 33rd globally. Qatar is ranked 37th, Saudi Arabia 38th, UAE 42nd and Bahrain 49th.

GFSI considers four broad categories - Food Affordability, Availability, Quality and Safety, and Natural Resources and Resilience - across 113 countries to rank them. In addition, the index is a quantitative and qualitative benchmarking model constructed from 59 unique indicators that measure the drivers of food security across both developing and developed countries.

Oman has done remarkably well in the categories of Affordability (rank 12th, category score 88.5), Availability (rank 55th, category score 59.1), Quality and Safety (rank 31st, category score 83.7) and Natural Resources and Resilience (rank 84th, category score 43.8).

The sultanate has been highlighted for its 'strengths', which the index defines as any indicator score above 75 from a total of 100.

Oman's strengths that have



(For illustrative purpose)

been listed include Proportion of population under global poverty line (score 100), Food safety net programmes (100), Nutritional standards (100), Market access and agricultural financial services (95.9), Food safety (89.1), Protein quality (88.5), Change in average food costs (87.5), Micronutrient availability (87.1) and Food loss (86.3).

This current edition of GFSI incorporates the 'Natural Resources and Resilience' category into the main index. This category assesses a country's exposure to the impacts of changing climate, its susceptibility to natural resource risks, and how the country

is adapting to these risks, all of which impact food security.

The category was first introduced in GFSI in 2017 as an adjustment factor and, given its increasing importance, has been mainstreamed for the first time this year.

"Incorporating the Natural Resources and Resilience category as part of the main index highlights the impact of climate-related factors on food systems and food security," said Pratima Singh, project lead for GFSI at The Economist Intelligence Unit. "It is critical that climate risk becomes a core part of the dialogue on food security. We hope this will

ARAB WORLD RANK

Kuwait	33
Oman	34
Qatar	37
Saudi Arabia	38
UAE	42
Bahrain	49

SULTANATE'S PERFORMANCE

Category	Rank	Score
Affordability	12	88.5
Availability	55	59.1
Quality & Safety	31	83.7
Natural Resources and Resilience	84	43.8

drive much-needed action on developing policies that can build a stronger and more sustainable global food system."

For the third consecutive year, the North America region leads the world in food security. Europe is a close second, accounting for eight of the top ten countries. Using the new methodology, Finland tops the list while last year's leader, Singapore, drops down to 19th place. Ireland retains its second rank position, followed by Netherlands, Austria, Czech Republic, United Kingdom, Sweden, Israel, Japan and Switzerland in the top ten, while the United States is at 11th place.

Passenger arrivals in Oman dropped 75% in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Passengers arriving in Oman dropped 75 per cent in 2020, while departures fell 73 per cent, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

An NCSI report took into account arrivals and departures through all airports till the end of December 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.

The report added that 39,353 flights landed and departed from Muscat, Salalah, Duqm



(Supplied photo)

and Sohar airports in 2020 till the end of December, carrying a total of 4,565,676 passengers (arrival, departure

and transit).

The total number of passengers in 2019 at the four airports was 17,750,697.

Muscat International Airport saw the number of passengers fall from 16,021,755 in 2019 to 4,085,499 in 2020, Salalah from 1,366,137 to 386,658, Sohar from 304,345 to 68,714, and Duqm from 58,460 to 24,805.

The report added that the majority of passengers at Muscat International Airport in 2020 were Indian nationals (30,592 departures and 25,404 arrivals), followed by Bangladeshi nationals (15,622 departures and 8,745 arrivals) and Pakistani nationals (9,977 departures and 8,105 arrivals).



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Suez wins €120mn PDO contract in Rima



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HM'S Cup: Bausher upset defending champions Al Nasr

KHANJAR HADD MARITIME EXERCISE



Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), visited the site of maritime exercise 'Khanjar Hadd' (Sharp Dagger) which is being conducted by the RNO in Batinah maritime region with the participation of a group of vessels belonging to the navies of a number of friendly countries with the support of Royal Air Force of Oman (ONAF)

Sayyid Badr holds consultations with his Saudi counterpart

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Wednesday conducted bilateral consultations with Prince Faisal Farhan al Saud, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia.

The two sides expressed their pride over the historic, fraternal and strong relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples.

They also expressed keenness of the two wise leaderships to promote the bilateral relations in various spheres to achieve mutual benefits and open new and diverse horizons to support opportunities of trade, investment and tourism and develop scientific cooperation. The two sides also discussed promoting cooperation in sectors of energy, technology, transport, cyberse-



curity, health, agriculture, fisheries and environment.

The two ministers also exchanged views on a range of regional and international issues.

They reaffirmed the importance of joint action within the

GCC framework and following up outcomes of the Alula Summit hosted by Saudi Arabia on January 5. They stressed on the importance of supporting efforts to consolidate pillars of security, stability and peace in the region.

Sayyid Badr speaks to Blinken

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi received a phone call from Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State on Wednesday. During the call, the two sides stressed the strategic relations between the two friendly countries in various areas.

Earlier, the Saudi minister and his delegation were received upon their arrival by H E Sayyid Badr and Dr Khalid Said al Jaradi, acting head of the Protocols Department in the Foreign Ministry. ONA

OPINION

Situation well managed: One year of COVID-19 in Oman

By Shaddad al Musalmi

One year since the first two cases of COVID-19 were detected in Oman, many in the sultanate, including myself, have learnt to focus on staying safe while coping with the situation. For now, we need to refocus. Instead of pondering on the negatives and problems, let's think of the positives and solutions.

Initially, when the first cases were reported on February 24 last year, it felt like it would be a short-term problem. In fact, we had told ourselves, and our children, that it would be over by summer. But that feeling was short-lived as numbers rose day by day. As weeks turned to months, it became very clear that the pandemic had its own timeline.

As a journalist who has covered the COVID-19 pandemic in Oman, I would say the sultanate is well placed to tackle the situation especially after the setting up of the Supreme Committee dealing with the impact arising as a result of the disease. With due respect to all, I would say the hero of the year-long campaign is Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, who has worked day and night to keep us safe - I salute you Sir.

I remember in one of his press conferences, Dr Sa'eedi reiterated His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's directives to co-exist, adapt and adjust to the disease, and said that this could not be achieved without the commitment to health instructions and cooperation of all.

"The virus has changed many of our daily life practices, which may continue for a long time. We have to adapt to the situation in a safe way," he said.

Dr Sa'eedi reiterated that life would have to go back to normal in one way or another, and I fully agree with him. The health sector in Oman is intact, solid and coping with the pandemic, thanks to the strong support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham, which is evident in the Royal attention accorded not just to the pandemic but all aspects that affect the lives of his people.

His Majesty the Sultan has also hailed the efforts of various media platforms and all those involved in the national effort to deal with the pandemic and has emphasised that the main

goal is to protect all citizens and residents, minimise the impact of COVID-19, protect the Omani economy and ensure the continuity of the private sector with minimal damage.

Owing to absence of adequate treatment for the virus until now, His Majesty the Sultan said it has become important to coexist and adapt to the new situation gradually, which can only be achieved with the cooperation of all members of society in following the necessary precautions and preventive measures. Thank you Your Majesty.

After initially limiting the spread of COVID-19 with lockdowns in many parts of the country last year, the Supreme Committee has since allowed reopening of almost all activities and businesses.

During the year of COVID-19, high risk of infection and uncertainty of the future led to anxiety and physiological pressure manifest as stress, depression and insomnia.

Among those affected were healthcare workers. According to experts, support is needed from everyone to stop the spread of the virus. The public needs to play its role in staying safe.

"The number of medical staff who suffer from anxiety, insomnia and need psychological care increased. There is a limit to what medical staff can deal with," Dr Feryal bint Ali al Lawati, head of the Communicable Disease Control Unit at The Royal Hospital, had said.

There are reasons for people in every age group to be cautious, health experts say. In Oman, the youth as well as the elderly have succumbed to the virus and many needed ICU care.

As for social life, COVID-19 has not spared it either. With the ban of gatherings continuing, some have taken advantage of the situation to save wedding expenses that involve big halls, food for many people and related expenses.

I should not end here without saying that Oman is proud of its Royal Oman Police (ROP) personnel for all their efforts during these hard times.

Our heroes were away from their families during the holy month of Ramadan and Eid to ensure the safe passage of citizens and residents. Our homeland, citizens and residents are always safe in their hands. Saying 'Thank You' is not enough once, so I have to say it again, 'Thank you ROP'.

@shadadm

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Our Correspondent Muscat

With an aim to support persons with disabilities, the Ministry of Social Development and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) on Wednesday signed an agreement to finance the construction of the Al Wafa Centre for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in the wilayat of Adam.

'The centre will be built at a cost of RO122,000,' said a statement issued by the ministry.

'Al Wafa centres provide a number of services, including necessary care for persons with disabilities, and social and psychological rehabilitation,' it said.

The agreement - signed by H E Sheikh Rashid bin Ahmed bin Rashid al Shamsi, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Social Development, and Eng Abdul Amir bin Abdul Hussein al Ajmi, External Affairs and Value Creation di-



rector, PDO - is an extension of the existing partnership and social investment commitments between the ministry and PDO.

It comes within the framework of constructive cooperation to serve all segments of society in the various governorates of the sultanate, the ministry said.

Al Wafa centres provide necessary care for persons with challenges such as simple and moderate mental disability, hearing and mobility impairment and autism, besides providing social

and psychological rehabilitation services and rehabilitation programmes to improve mobility, functional abilities and speech abilities from an early age. They also provide academic skills development programmes.

'The centres work to help persons with disabilities to be qualified to join educational, training and rehabilitative institutions according to their aptitude and abilities, in addition to implementing programmes to develop their skills.'

Oman exports first food consignment to Saudi Arabia using TIR system

Muscat - The sultanate has exported the first consignment of foodstuff to Saudi Arabia through the application of the international road transport system - Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR), thereby cutting customs fees by 30 per cent and time by 50 per cent, compared to the ordinary transport system.

The accomplishment cele-

brates efforts exerted by Asyad Group in cooperation with the Directorate General of Customs, Royal Oman Police, to facilitate cross-border transport and eventually promote commercial exchange between the sultanate and the world.

The system's launch also seeks to market the sultanate as an international logistics hub offering integrated services

and competitive incentives to its clients. The logistics sector plays a major role in supporting other economic sectors in the sultanate. By activating TIR, Asyad aims to back Omani exports heading to neighbouring countries, save time and cost of export and encourage Omani industrial establishments to benefit from the system. ONA



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TREASURES OF OMAN

FATMA HUMAID AL MAHROOQI is a graduate in Urban Planning and Architectural Design and is currently working in 23 Degrees North, an architectural consultancy in Muscat

One could argue, 'Why should someone struggle to restore an old house while there are plenty of opportunities to own a modern structure fulfilling the desired motive?'

Well, this could be taken as a light argument, but the facts tell a different story.

It would serve the community better to understand the significance of old buildings before thinking about how to revive them.

Have we ever asked ourselves why some countries are more popular globally and others aren't? Why are some cultures more familiar and the others less? How can we develop a country's image from what it is, to how we want it perceived? What differentiates one country from the other?

It is how we utilise our resources that matters

Buildings being among the physical products of a specific era, they provide a great deal of information and fulfillment during sightseeing as they are full of details. Traditions, abilities, creativity, strength, beliefs, knowledge, wealth, to mention but a few can all be visualised and astonish an observer with an indescribable feeling. These kinds of messages are the ones that people love to explore, locals love to take pride in and nations entitled to benefit from.

Economic benefits are always an interesting side of any topic. Revival of old buildings is achieved in a number of phases in which each phase requires specialists. From surveyors, engineers, architects, manufacturers, transporters and the traders all are entitled to employment and profits if such projects come to pass. Don't we have unemploy-



Birkat al Mouz ruins

ment issues that exist? Can't this be a strong reason for adopting old buildings?

While unemployment can be tackled to an extent with such a move, tourism is another sector that benefits. A tourist visiting any country would be keen to observe and experience things that are either new or unique. Things that really

HOW DO WE BRING BACK LIFE TO OLD BUILDINGS OF OMAN?

define that place and distinguish it from the others. Malls would never be among places to explore, while local markets would be considered an important element of tourism promotion. The interest will be on buying local items, exploring rare things and taste local food knowing that they are only available within and not beyond the borders.

If the focus is pointed towards cultural and social benefits, historical buildings do enhance the image of the community and their pride which also

nurture traditions. People are determined by their traditional differences and so our devotion towards it should not be questioned. If these buildings can define our traditions then our duty towards them should never stop.

A People without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture, is like a tree without roots

- Marcus Garvey

Exploration of history and culture of a place is fascinating and even the citizens become proud of promoting what they own since they do hold great pride in their country and all that is in it.

In this context, cultural and historical aspects are vital and so is their proper deployment since they can influence a country's recognition swiftly.

As far as history is concerned, plenty of written information is available in books, journals, websites and so forth. Sharing of information can be done in plenty of ways, however the actual experience is hardly gained without the



Exploration of history and culture of a place is fascinating and even the citizens become proud of promoting what they own since they do hold great pride in their country and all that is in it

physical existence of related items.

Clearly, revival of old buildings have environmental benefits as well.

If we imagine an old settlement abandoned, then we should imagine the quantity of old material accumulated on the ground and the quantity of new materials used daily in constructing new structures. How much energy is used in producing these materials and their cost? What about the paved roads that are left without life? All these can be avoided if old buildings are back into use where there will be no dead areas, no unused roads and no wasted money.

The benefits are many and a strong enough reason to trigger our consciousness on restoring and reusing the old buildings. So, let us make an effort, embrace their value and utilise them correctly.

That time is now and not in the future.

(Thoughts and comments can be posted on Instagram at fatma_humaid_almahrooqi)

Municipality updates rules for beauty parlours



(Supplied photo)

Muscat - Muscat Municipality has stipulated certain requirements for businesses involved in hairdressing and beauty salons for women. The new list of requirements is intended to maintain the public health.

Requirements for women hairdressing and beauty salons:

- Place a ladies-only sign at the entrance of the facility in Arabic and English
- Make sure there is a reception and waiting area for customers, a place to carry out the hairdressing and beauty sessions, a makeup room, a toilet
- The front of the shop must be made of materials that block vision
- Provide a sufficient number of towels and a basket to collect the used towels. Towels should not be used more than once without washing

Waiting area specifications:

- The area should not be less than 9sqm. The waiting area should be at the entry of the shop
- In the waiting area, there should be at least three seats for every customer (one seat for every customer being served)
- Hairdressing shops in four- and five-star hotels may be excluded from providing a customer lounge if the service is limited to hotel visitors only and with a pre-booking system

Hairdressing area structural requirements:

- The hairdressing area should commensurate with the volume of work, not less than 16sqm, and that the place should be equipped with tables and mirrors while leaving a 1.5m distance between the seats
- The site should be equipped with a hand washbasin with hot water supply. Hairdressing shops located in tourist complexes and hotels of four to five stars may be excluded from providing toilets provided that women's toilets are not more than 20m away from the shop
- Make-up rooms must be fitted with comfortable seating or beds, with at least 1.5m distance between each chair, in an area of not less than 6sqm around

each chair

Hairdresser responsibilities:

- Only women should be employed, while salons located in four-star hotels or higher, or in areas of tourist use (tourist complexes) can employ men, provided they do the medical examinations on an annual basis, proving their medical fitness, and be free from infectious diseases
- In addition, allocation of at least two special uniforms for workers in the shop which should be cleaned constantly. Workers must be qualified (with a proof) to carry out the work, especially in activities that require knowledge and know-how of the profession specified by Muscat Municipality

Prohibitions:

- Workers' housing attached to the facility
- Use of laser devices, Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) or other similar devices in the facility unless authorised by the competent authority
- Offering, selling or using chemicals unless authorised by competent authorities
- Injecting Botox or dermal fillers, such as Restylane, Perlane or others
- Perform medium or strong depth skin peeling operations
- Sale and use of recipes for therapeutic purposes
- Perform liposuction or fat-removal procedures
- Offering tattooing or body-piercing services
- Perform any operations which require medical intervention or supervision
- Perform any skin penetrating procedures
- Taking pets
- Installing cameras in all facilities
- Admission of men during work hours

Muscat Municipality has urged owners and workers of these businesses to comply with the health requirements before establishing the business and while providing the services, stressing at the same time to adhere to the controls taken to prevent further spreading of COVID-19 pandemic.

FINCORP AL AMAL FUND

Notice For Annual Ordinary and ExtraOrdinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of FINCORP AL AMAL FUND (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held at 03:00 PM on 15/03/2021, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be assessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held at 03:00 PM on 21/03/2021, to discuss the following agenda:

Extra Ordinary Agendas:

1. To discuss and approve the amendment of some of the provisions of the Fund's article of association

Ordinary Agendas:

1. Study and approve the fund management report for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2020
2. Study the auditor's report and approve the balance sheet and profit and loss account for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2020
3. To approve the sitting fees of the fund's management body meetings paid to them for previous financial year, and to determine the sitting fees for the next fiscal year
4. To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2020
5. To consider and approve the transactions will enter into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2021
6. To appoint the fund's auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2021 and to approve their fees.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

1. Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
2. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No 92923107 or email: harsha@fincorp.org

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MARKET WATCH	
MSM30	3,587.48
BSE Sensex	50,781.69
FOREX RATES	
(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	188.31
Pakistani Rs	412.37
Bangladeshi Taka	220.36
Philippine Peso	126.57
Sri Lankan Rs	504.42
*Rates as on February 24 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Chair of Japan automaker Suzuki to step down

Suzuki's chairman Osamu Suzuki will retire after more than four decades at the helm of the Japanese carmaker, the company said on Wednesday.

The 91 year old, who married into the firm's founding family, will leave the post after a shareholder meeting in June and become an advisor, it said.

After he became company president in 1978, Suzuki expanded the automaker's business in India, where it has had enormous success, and steadily increased its share in Japan's small car market.

He became chairman in 2000 and his eldest son, Toshihiro Suzuki, assumed the role of president in 2015.

The carmaker, which had once tied up with General Motors and Volkswagen, forged a capital alliance with Toyota in 2019.

No one will replace him for now, while Toshihiro Suzuki will remain president.

UK bank Lloyds logs profit slump on virus hit

Britain's Lloyds Banking Group (LBG) on Wednesday reported a slump in 2020 profit due to 'significant' economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Profit after tax nosedived 65 per cent to £865mn last year, from £2.46bn in 2019, LBG said in a results statement.

The bank took a huge £4.2bn impairment charge which reflected a 'significant deterioration in the economic outlook' as a result of the COVID-19 health emergency.

Pre-tax profit tumbled 72 per cent to £1.2bn, while income tanked by around one third to £29.2bn.

Suez wins €120mn PDO contract

Suez will implement a major environmentally friendly water treatment system in Rima

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Suez Group, a France-based utility giant which operates largely in the water and waste-water management sectors, on Wednesday announced that it has signed a major industrial contract in Oman to implement a natural and environmentally friendly water treatment system for Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

'SUEZ has been awarded by PDO a design, build, own, operate and maintain (DBOOM) contract for the treatment of 40,000m³ each day of produced water coming from oil fields located in Rima, about 700km South of Muscat. This 20-year contract is worth €120mn (approximately RO56mn) in total revenues,' Suez said in a statement posted on its website.

This major contract aims at implementing alternative techniques to treat and dispose produced water, which is the oily wastewater generated during the extraction and recovery of oil, Suez said.

A large quantity of produced water is being generated from oil



Picture for illustrative purpose only

fields and depending on the oil field, one barrel of oil produces five to ten barrels of water. To ensure that this water is treated and disposed safely without harming the environment, Suez will implement an innovative treatment system to avoid deep well aquifers contamination, reduce energy consumption and enhance biodiversity.

Within this contract, Suez, main shareholder with 51 per

cent and its partners, Merit National Investments and Al-Shawamikh Oil Services, with a 24.5 per cent stake each, will be financing, constructing and operating for 20 years, the large wetland system and evaporation ponds over a surface of more than 400 hectares.

A series of basins will be built over a period of two years, seeded with different species of algae. The produced water will be circulating through these

basins and purified by biological actions which consist of biodegradation by microalgae and bacteria.

The succession of varying wetland environments, with different flow speeds and depths of water, develops these different mechanisms for pollutant absorption and will naturally treat the produced water.

Once cleaned, the produced water will be disposed into 300 hectares ponds to be naturally

evaporated beneath the Omani desert sun.

This natural and environmentally friendly treatment system, Suez said, will avoid the disposal of hydrocarbon-polluted produced water in the deep well aquifers.

'It will also significantly reduce the oilfield's carbon footprint with 180 tonnes of avoided carbon dioxide emissions equivalents per day, or 65,700 tonnes per year.

"We are very proud of this innovative project which strengthens our position in the Middle-East's industrial market. This contract is in line with Suez's strategy in the region to seize growth opportunities with industries and particularly in the energy sector. It is also reflecting the group's new value proposition to offer our customers a portfolio of high added-value solutions that are 100 per cent sustainable with positive impact on environment, biodiversity and climate," said Ana Giros, senior executive vice president of Suez in charge of the APAC (Asia, Australia and India) and AMECA (Africa, Middle East, Central Asia) regions and industrial key accounts.

According to Suez, this PDO project will also generate 82GWh savings in energy per year, compared to the conventional, energy-intensive disposal method of pumping the water into deep aquifers under high pressure.

Additionally, this project will enhance biodiversity in the desert and create a habitat for wildlife species providing sustainable living conditions for flora and fauna.

Sohar Islamic completes issuance of Oman's first perpetual sukuk

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of Sohar International Bank, has successfully completed the issuance of RO6mn perpetual sukuk al Mudaraba trust certificate by Takaful Oman Insurance.

The perpetual sukuk has an initial yearly profit rate of 8.5 per cent, payable semiannually through Takaful Sukuk Specialized Purpose Company (SPC) established by Takaful Oman for this specific programme.

As the issue manager and financial advisor, Sohar Islamic played a pivotal role in ensuring the successful issuance and completion of the entire activity, Sohar International Bank said in a press statement. The placement of the issue was done



Ahmed al Musalmi

through a private placement to select investors whilst receiving a strong interest from institutions, fund managers, and wealth management clients of the bank.

Ahmed al Musalmi, chief executive officer of Sohar International, said, "With a strong purpose that puts winning at the heart of everything done, we continue to deliver superior banking services showcasing our aspiration to bring the best of in-

ternational to Oman. As part of our agile growth strategy, we have been pursuing more opportunities ultimately contributing positively to Oman's economy. The bank strives to bring more value to the market and the current issuance is a testament to the same despite the challenging economic headwinds."

The transaction represents a first-of-its-kind perpetual sukuk programme established by a takaful company. Unfamiliarity with Mudaraba structures in the Omani sukuk market and the way the deferral of profit payments is structured under the programme added significant complexity to the transaction. Together with the support of the Capital Market Authority and Trowers & Hamlin as legal advisors, the issue was initiated and completed with immense suc-

cess on all fronts.

Representing Takaful Oman, Sayyida Rawan Ahmed al Said, chief executive officer, said, "The success of this issue illustrates investors' strong confidence in Takaful Oman's strategy and growth potential. It also underpins the large untapped growth potential in the Omani insurance sector in both traditional as well as the takaful space. The proceeds of the issue will be used to support growth in underwriting new business thereby contributing positively to the economy as a whole."

The net proceeds of the certificates shall be used by Takaful Oman to strengthen the quality of its capital and for general corporate purposes. The securities are listed and admitted to trading on the Muscat Securities Market.

Vodafone readies to float \$18bn European tower business

London, UK - British mobile phone giant Vodafone on Wednesday said it planned to partially float its European telecoms towers business, Vantage Towers, on the Frankfurt stock market before the end of March.

Headquartered in Germany and estimated to be worth €15bn (US\$18bn), Vantage 'is focused on deploying the full potential of its market-leading tower infrastructure to serve the increasing demand for connectivity across Europe, driven by data growth, 5G roll-out and regulatory coverage obligations', Vodafone said in a statement.

The initial public offering (IPO) on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange 'is expected to be before

the end of March 2021', Vodafone added.

Analysts believe that up to €4bn could be raised from floating a minority stake, helping to cut Vodafone's debt.

Vantage Towers chief executive Vivek Badrinath said the IPO 'sets the foundations for the next stage of our growth within the dynamic towers industry'.

"We will be looking to capture the exciting value-creating opportunities the sector has to offer and to build on our position as a leading tower infrastructure company in Europe," Badrinath added.

Vantage Towers' portfolio includes towers, masts and rooftop sites.

AFP

US Fed chief pledges to keep rates low

Washington, US - US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell attempted to tamp down rising inflation concerns, and again has pledged to keep benchmark lending rates low until jobs recover and prices have risen consistently.

The COVID-19 pandemic remains the key factor determining how quickly the world's largest economy can recover, but Powell said vaccine rollouts offer hope things can return to normal quickly and the Fed has the tools to deal with price increases.

With Congress moving towards approving President Joe Biden's US\$1.9tn rescue plan, the central bank chief on Tuesday remained steadfastly noncommittal about the package, but he did downplay the need to address the US\$3tn US government deficit immediately.

Amid growing fears on markets that a quick recovery from the pandemic - fueled by more government stimulus on top of nearly US\$3tn last year - will lead to higher interest rates and hinder the ability of companies to borrow, Powell tried to reassure



Jerome Powell

skittish investors during the first day of his semi-annual testimony before Congress.

He insisted that the Fed will keep rates at the current level near zero until the economy reaches 'maximum employment and inflation has risen to 2 per cent and is on track to moderately exceed 2 per cent for some time'.

However, he cautioned, "The economy is a long way from our employment and inflation goals, and it is likely to take some time for substantial further progress to be achieved."

Powell said inflation is ex-

pected to pick up and will be 'volatile' this year, after declines during the past year of the pandemic, and as Americans begin to spend more.

However, he told the Senate Banking Committee those price increases are unlikely to be large or persistent.

"We've averaged less than 2 per cent inflation, over the last 25 years," Powell said. "Inflation dynamics do change over time but they don't change on a dime."

And he stressed that the Fed is prepared to handle whatever comes its way, so 'if it does turn out that unwanted inflation pressures arising are persistent and we have the tools to deal with that'.

In more than a decade following the 2008 global financial crisis, inflation barely cracked the Fed's 2 per cent goal, even when unemployment reached a 50-year low of 3.5 per cent in early 2020.

That caused the central bank to rethink policy, and say that rather than raise the lending rate as unemployment falls to head off inflation, it will hold fire until

inflation actually breaks through the target level for an extended period.

But given the prospect for more stimulus fuelling a rapid bounceback in economic activity, some economists have raised concerns that prices could spiral.

The yield on 10-year Treasury bonds - a key red flag on inflation - has spiked in recent weeks. That in turn has hit stock prices due to concerns the Fed will have to raise interest rates more quickly than expected in an economy already awash in debt.

In addition to keeping the key interest rate low, Fed also will continue to buy bonds 'at least at their current pace (of US\$120bn a month) until substantial further progress has been made toward our goals', Powell said.

Government spending and the Fed keeping its foot on the gas has helped the economy stabilise and begin to recover, although it still has a way to go, Powell said. "The path of the economy continues to depend significantly on the course of the virus," he said.

AFP

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat,
hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O.	Grade In Tender Board Registration
RE- TENDER 18/2019	Supply	Construction And Design Of Bowling Alley Facilities To Muscat Sports Club	25/- OMR	Excellent & First Grade
1/2021	Service	Cleaning Services To Entire Campus And Facilities To Ministry's Various Buildings At Muttrah Willayat For The Period Of 1st May 2021 To 31st December 2021	25/- OMR	Excellent Grade
2/2021	Service	Cleaning Services To Entire Campus And Facilities To Ministry's Various Buildings At Bausher & Seeb Willayat For The Period Of 1st May 2021 To 31st December 2021	25/- OMR	Excellent Grade
3/2021	Service	Maintenance Of Landscaping Works To Ministry's Campus At Ruwi For The Period Of 1st May 2021 To 31st December 2021	25/- OMR	First Grade
4/2021	Service	Maintenance Of Landscaping Works To Ministry's Campus At Al Khuwair For The Period Of 1st May 2021 To 31st December 2021	25/- OMR	First Grade
5/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance Of Electro-Mechanical And Air-Conditioning Units To Ministry's Facilities At Muttrah Willayat For The Period Of 1st May 2021 To 31st December 2021	25/- OMR	First Grade
6/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance Of Electro-Mechanical And Air-Conditioning Units To Ministry's Facilities At Bausher & Seeb Willayat For The Period Of 1st May 2021 To 31st December 2021	25/- OMR	First Grade

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 13/03/2021.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 10:00am 05/04/2021

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24166670 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

China's CanSino and Sinopharm unit seek approval for vaccines

Beijing, China - China's CanSino Biologics and a unit of Sinopharm said on Wednesday they have applied for public use of their COVID-19 vaccines, and announced efficacy rates.

Sinopharm affiliate Wuhan Institute Of Biological Products said in a statement its vaccine's efficacy rate was 72.51 per cent, while the overall efficacy for CanSino's stood at 65.28 per cent after 28 days.

If their applications are successful, it would mean four of China's domestically developed vaccines are approved for public use.

Earlier this month, China's drug authorities gave conditional approval to Sinovac's CoronaVac jab, while the first green light went to another Sinopharm product in December.

The published efficacy rates of China's vaccines, however, remain behind rival jabs by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, which have 95 per cent and 94 per cent rates respectively.

China has been racing to de-



A file photo shows a prepared syringe with the COVID-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinopharm (AFP)

velop homegrown jabs, and set a goal to vaccinate 50mn people by mid-February - with more than 40mn doses given as of February 9.

Its vaccination programme has initially been targeting key groups such as medical workers and people who work and study abroad, according to state media.

Wuhan Institute Of Biological Products cited late stage clinical trial data when releasing its vaccine's efficacy rate, saying it met the World Health Organization's 'relevant technical standards'.

In a separate filing, CanSino Biologics said interim data analysis of more than 40,000 subjects has been done.

It said its single-shot vaccine

had 68.83 per cent protective efficacy against all symptomatic cases after 14 days, and this dropped to 65.28 per cent after 28 days.

The protective effects against severe disease was 95.47 per cent after 14 days of receiving the jab and 90.07 after 28 days, said the company.

AFP

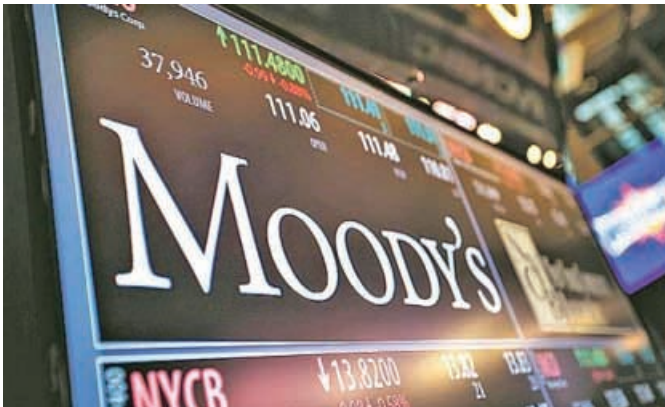
'Islamic banking to expand across Southeast Asia'

Singapore - Islamic banks in South and Southeast Asia have sufficient capital and liquidity to meet increased demand for financing as economies recover from the pandemic, while young, growing populations and government efforts to develop the sector will support long-term growth, according to a new report by Moody's Investors Service.

"Although Islamic banks' profitability in these regions weakened in 2020, their capital buffers remain mostly robust, supported by government measures to soften the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Strong capitalisation will in turn enable Islamic banks to meet increased demand for financing as economies recover," Tengfu Li, a Moody's Analyst, said in a press release.

Moody's said strong capitalisation and liquidity will help Islamic banks meet increased demand for financing as economies recover from the pandemic.

Liquidity has also eased or remained stable because of strong



growth in low-cost deposits as consumers and businesses cut spending, and as central banks relaxed reserve requirements and carried out open market operations.

Moody's expects Islamic financing will continue to expand faster than conventional loans across South and Southeast Asia, increasing the share of Islamic financing in total financing. Prime-age populations, or people aged 25-54 years, will boost the long-term expansion of Islamic banking, especially given these countries' large untapped market.

'Rising demand means growth

of Islamic financing will outstrip that of conventional loans in these countries,' the ratings agency said.

Key to the growth of Islamic banking are efforts by governments of major Islamic banking markets in South and Southeast Asia to develop the sector, given its role in increasing financial inclusion and inherent alignment with environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles, which are growing in relevance amid the pandemic. Additionally, Islamic banking is part of a halal ecosystem governments want to create to spur economic development.



UK agrees more time for EU to ratify post-Brexit pact

Brussels, Belgium - The UK government has agreed to allow the European Union (EU) more time to formally ratify the post-Brexit trade deal which came into effect on January 1.

"We have agreed to extend the deadline for the EU to ratify the deal until 30 April," a British spokesman said, after Brussels requested a delay.

According to the trade agreement under which Britain completed its withdrawal from the EU single market, the EU's ratification was supposed to be done this week.

But EU member states have requested more time to prepare legally valid translations of the treaty so it is usable in all 24 official languages of the bloc, and the European parliament wants to examine it before voting.

It is currently in force under provisional authorisation in the EU.

Britain already ratified the agreement on December 30. MPs approved the agreement on the same day they received it.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government has been reluctant to allow Brussels more time.

"It is disappointing the EU has not completed its internal processes in the agreed timeframe," the British spokesperson said, warning of uncertainty for cross-Channel businesses.

"We expect the EU to meet the new timeline."

Earlier on Tuesday, Germany's minister for European Affairs Michael Roth said ahead of a meeting of EU ministers that the process would continue.

"We are in the process of ratifying the trade and cooperation agreement which has already been provisionally applied since January 1," he said.

"We will prolong this provisional application until the end of April in order to allow for the consent of the European parliament and the conclusion of the legal 'scrubbing' of all language versions."

In a letter to EU vice president Maros Sefkovic, who is representing the bloc in implementation talks, senior UK minister Michael Gove complained about the delay.

"Provisionally applying the Agreement was not the United Kingdom's preferred outcome given the uncertainty it creates for individuals and businesses," he said.

"Extending the period of provisional application prolongs that uncertainty."

British exporters and cross-Channel freight hauliers have encountered severe delays and disruption since Britain departed the EU market.

But European leaders see this as the inevitable consequence of the UK government's decision to pursue a clean break from EU rules in the wake of the 2016 Brexit referendum.

AFP

FAA orders deeper testing after Boeing engine scare

New York, US - US aviation regulators on Tuesday ordered inspections of all Pratt & Whitney engines similar to the one that broke up on a Boeing 777 passenger plane over Denver at the weekend, directing the tests be carried out before any return to service.

The spectacular accident, in which an engine burst into flames and scattered debris over a Denver suburb shortly after takeoff for Honolulu, led to scores of Boeing 777s being grounded worldwide. No one was injured.

'US operators of airplanes equipped with certain Pratt & Whitney PW4000 engines [must] inspect these engines before further flight,' the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said.

The engine maker said it would comply, examining 125 planes with blades similar to those that failed on the Boeing 777, using Thermal Acoustic Imaging (TAI) inspection 'to confirm airworthiness'.

'Pratt & Whitney is coordinating all actions with Boeing, airline



An American Airlines Boeing 777 sits on the tarmac at Tulsa International Airport in Tulsa, Oklahoma (AFP)

operators and regulators. The safe operation of the fleet is our top priority,' the company said in a statement.

The regulator said it was issuing the order 'as a result of a fan-blade failure that occurred Saturday on a Boeing 777-200 that had just departed from Denver International Airport'.

The FAA explained in a statement that 'TAI technology can detect cracks on the interior surfaces of the hollow fan blades, or in areas that cannot be seen during a visual inspection'.

Metal fatigue has emerged as the chief suspect in the engine failure.

FAA chief Steve Dickson said on Tuesday it was 'fortunate there were no fatalities or injuries'.

The near-miss over Denver was a fresh setback for Boeing, which only recently resumed deliveries of the long-grounded 737 Max following two fatal crashes.

It also raises fresh questions about the FAA, which was roundly attacked for its oversight of Boeing in the certification of the Max jets, and about whether maintenance was adequate on the plane, aviation experts said.

Even before the Denver incident, US air safety regulators had been weighing stricter inspec-

tions on the jets and their Pratt & Whitney engines, US officials said on Tuesday.

The FAA reviewed inspection records and maintenance history after a Japan Airlines fan blade incident on December 4 last year 'to determine the cause of the fracture and was evaluating whether to adjust blade inspections', an FAA spokesman said on Tuesday. The flight landed in Japan without injuries.

Following a February 2018 incident on another United jet, the FAA reviewed 9,000 fan blade inspection reports and issued an airworthiness directive setting new rules on inspections.

In a briefing on Monday, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said it was too soon to know if the issue in Denver was similar to those in the Japan Airlines flight, or the February 2018 incident, which involved another Boeing 777 and a Pratt & Whitney engine.

"A preliminary on-scene exam indicates damage consistent with metal fatigue," NTSB chair Robert Sumwalt said.

He said two fan blades fractured on the number two engine on the Boeing 777-200 on Saturday. One of them was later found on a soccer field, while the other remained lodged in the engine.

The NTSB also plans to look at the inspection record on the United plane to see 'who knew what when, what could have been done and what should have been done', Sumwalt said.

"Fatigue means that you can have a crack in the material and when you load it again and again, the crack slowly grows," said Robert Kielb, a professor at Duke University's school of engineering. AFP

Heathrow airport dives into losses

London, UK - London's Heathrow airport dived into a pre-tax loss of £2bn last year, a result that 'underlines the devastating impact of COVID-19 on aviation', it said on Wednesday.

The loss, equivalent to US\$2.8bn, reflected a 73 per cent plunge in passenger numbers, Heathrow said in a statement.

The airport, one of the world's busiest hubs, recorded a pre-tax profit of £546mn in 2019.

Heathrow chief executive officer John Holland-Kaye, who said passenger levels shrunk in 2020 to levels last seen in the 1970s, voiced optimism for the year ahead with Britain vaccinating millions of adults and preparing to exit its virus lockdown.

"We can be hopeful for 2021, with Britain on the cusp of becoming the first country in the world to safely resume international travel and trade at scale," he said in the earnings statement.

"Getting aviation moving again will save thousands of jobs and reinvigorate the economy."



Passengers are seen seated at the London Heathrow Airport in west London on May 09, 2020 (AFP)

Heathrow last year had 22mn passengers compared with 81mn in 2019.

More than half of the 22mn travelled in the first two months of last year, before the pandemic took hold and governments worldwide implemented national lockdowns.

Heathrow's revenue meanwhile tumbled 62 per cent to £1.2bn in 2020, while cargo volumes slid 28 per cent.

Heathrow said it has £3.9bn of liquidity, enough to see it

through until 2023.

The airport's last financial year was notable also owing to Britain's Supreme Court ruling that it could build a third runway.

The court in December struck down a Court of Appeal ruling that the UK government had failed to take into account climate change commitments when in 2018 it approved the new runway.

Heathrow on Wednesday said it remains 'focused on decarbonising aviation'.

The airport is owned by a consortium led by Spanish construction giant Ferrovial.

It also includes sovereign wealth funds from China, Singapore and Qatar as well as North American shareholders.

Heathrow was last year overtaken by Paris Charles de Gaulle as Europe's top hub in terms of passenger numbers - blaming its relegation on delayed coronavirus testing and travel restrictions.

AFP

German economy bounced back in Q4

Frankfurt, Germany - The German economy grew much faster than first thought in the last three months of 2020, bouncing back strongly from the coronavirus pandemic downturn, official figures showed on Wednesday.

Germany, Europe's most powerful economy, expanded 0.3 per cent in the three months to December compared with the preceding quarter, the Destatis official statistics agency said.

Destatis had said previously that the economy grew 0.1 per cent in the fourth quarter when the government introduced fresh restrictions in an effort to curb a rise in new cases.

For full-year 2020, the German economy shrank 4.9 per cent, compared with the initial estimate of 5 per cent, Destatis said.

AFP

InterContinental Muscat wins award, showcases luxurious suites to public

InterContinental Muscat won the award titled ‘The Best Luxury Hotel in Oman’ for 2021 while it opened its doors to showcase its refurbished suites to the public.

Such an award confirms the hotel’s affirmed position in the luxury market for Oman and the region.

“We are pleased to have our new Club Lounge, and Club Suites refurbished and reopened with new technologies to enhance our guests’ experience. Hotel rooms across all room categories in the InterContinental Muscat are now fully renovated and we are ready to welcome our valued guests into these new rooms,” said IHG Oman’s area general manager Anna-Marie Dowling.

Despite the lockdown in the sultanate, the InterContinental Muscat continued to renovate the rooms and Club Lounge to allow guests to experience a higher level of luxury. The hotel now has 270 new rooms including the Club Suites that overlook



the beautiful Qurm Beach sea, Royal Opera House Muscat, and Hajjar mountains.

With IHG’s long commitment to maintaining the highest global hotel cleanliness and hygiene standard, the hotel group introduced updated measures last year to elevate cleanliness standard across all properties to ensure our guests feel that they are in the safest environment possible during the pandemic.

InterContinental Hotels Group has seven properties across three brands in Oman including InterContinental Muscat, Crowne Plaza Muscat, Crowne Plaza Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, Crowne Plaza Sohar, Crowne Plaza Duqm, Crowne Plaza Salalah and Holiday Inn Seeb. IHG is a global organisation with a broad portfolio of 17 hotel brands, including InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, Hotel Indigo, Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts, Holiday Inn Hotels & Resorts, Holiday Inn Express among others.



RAW Coffee comes to Oman

UAE’s favourite coffee roasters, RAW Coffee Company has officially expanded their footprint in the GCC region by partnering with DHL and launching a GCC wide distribution of their freshly roasted specialty coffee beans. Countries included in the delivery route are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

The decision to extend their delivery offering into their markets came in response to the demand from consumers outside the UAE. RAW’s online sales over the last 12 months have increased by 70 per cent and thus, they realised the need to bridge the gap and provide customers with a smooth and efficient delivery solution.

Craving for a freshly brewed cuppa? Customers can simply visit the RAW website and place an online order via <https://raw-coffeecompany.com/>

RAW started off as bootleggers, bringing coffee beans to Dubai in suitcases from their favourite roasteries around the world.

It was established in July 2007 as founder, owner & managing director, Kim Thompson, and owner and CEO, Matt Toogood decided it was time to fill the gap for freshly roasted specialty coffee. The coffee beans used at RAW are all organically certified, roasted in small batches, and available to sample from their warehouse roastery, either as single origins or blends.

Bank Muscat extends support to Sayyid Abbas Golf tournament

In line with its commitment to promoting sports and community activities, Bank Muscat extended strong support to the prestigious Sayyid Abbas Golf tournament, which was recently held at the Ghala Golf Club.

The tournament, which is now held annually in memory of the club’s former chairman, the late H H Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal saw the participation of some of the top golfers in the country. As many as 115 players took part in the tournament across different categories in the championship,



which was first started in 1979.

Abdulnasser al Raisi, deputy general manager - Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, gave away prizes to the winners in different categories. Bank Muscat has been a strong supporter of the tournament for many years now and this partnership follows its strategy of encouraging sports and commitment to building the capabilities of Omani youth across a wide spectrum of activities.

Expressing his happiness at the continued collaboration and support for the tournament, Raisi

said, “Bank Muscat is very happy to partner with Ghala Golf Club to support the Sayyid Abbas Golf Championship, which is one of the oldest sports tournaments in the country.

“The bank attaches great importance to supporting initiatives that contribute to the country’s progress and development in all areas. It places particular emphasis on sports activities especially for the youth of the country and supports many activities and youth championships across the country.”

He added that the bank remains committed to shouldering its social responsibilities and supporting all segments of society in line with its vision of serving society and customers better every day. Bank Muscat offers Private banking clients a complete suite of investment options and wealth management solutions through experienced Relationship Managers.

More details are available at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/premierbanking/Pages/details.aspx#private>.

Sony launches FX3 full-frame camera with cinematic look

Sony announced the FX3 (model ILME-FX3) camera that combines the best of Sony’s industry-leading digital cinema technology with advanced imaging features from Alpha mirrorless cameras to create the ultimate cinematic look.

As the latest addition to Sony’s Cinema Line, the FX3 delivers a cinematic look and professional operability and reliability all in one device that answers the needs of young creators who are looking for new ways to express their creative vision. The new model provides outstanding image quality and usability for small scale and one-person shooting. The FX3 boasts first-class focus performance, optical image stabilisation, handheld shooting design and advanced heat dissipation for extended recording times. All this in a compact, lightweight body that provides the performance and mobility to meet the growing demands of today’s content creators.

“The FX3 was designed to turn creative vision into reality,” said Murat Gebeceli, head of Digital Imaging, Sony Middle East & Africa. “It allows creators to bring their visual expression into the world of cinema through immersive content. We will continue to support the world’s creators through Sony’s Cinema Line Series.”

Cinematic look

The FX3 flaunts Sony’s industry-leading image sensor technology to achieve high processing



speeds and outstanding image quality. The full-frame, back-illuminated Exmor R CMOS sensor full-frame 10.2 megapixel (approx. effective) count for movie recording (and 12.1 effective megapixels for stills) and the BIONZ XR image processing engine team up to ensure high sensitivity with low noise. The standard ISO range is 80 to 102,400 (expandable to 409,600 when shooting a movie), and dynamic range is an impressively wide 15+ stops.

In response to a growing need for more expressive depth, the FX3, along with FX9 and FX6 Cinema Line cameras, allows users to create a cinematic look without post-production using S-Cinetone. Based on the colour science inspired by Sony’s flag-

ship VENICE camera, S-Cinetone delivers natural mid-tones, plus soft colours and smooth highlights that are essential to cinematic look. Create movies with in-camera 4K recording at up to 120 frames per second. Extraordinarily smooth slow-motion imagery (up to 5x) at QFHD (3840 x 2160) resolution with autofocus provides new expressive capability.

Designed for solo-shooting

The most compact and lightweight Cinema Line camera is ideal for handheld shooting, gimbal and drone-mounted work. It weighs just 715 grams, including the battery and memory cards, and the body is 77.8mm high, 129.7mm wide and 84.5mm

deep - without protrusions. The camera grip has been carefully designed to provide optimum flexibility, stability and comfort for long shoots.

Designed for mobility and efficiency, the FX3’s body features five thread holes (1/4-20 UNC) to easily attach compatible accessories while remaining light enough for handheld shooting and making it easy to carry and set up. The supplied XLR handle unit securely attaches to the body via the Multi Interface Shoe without any special tools and provides three additional thread holes for accessories: two on the top and one on the end. External monitors, recorders, wireless microphone receivers, the accessory shoe kit (cold shoe plate), or other add-ons can be securely attached.

To enable high quality audio, the XLR handle unit includes two XLR/TRS audio inputs to the FX3. With an optional XLR microphone, digital audio data can be directly transferred to the camera for outstanding audio quality. Camera settings provide audio recording formats, including 4-channel 24-bit recording. Because the XLR adaptor is integrated into the handle and does not require any additional cables or batteries, it offers stress-free set up. The FX3 offers Fast Hybrid autofocus (AF) by using the 627 points focal plane phase-detection system during movie recording.

The FX3 will be available in the Middle East and Africa from March 2021.



Qatar Airways Cargo joins Validaide as premium member

The membership is a key step for the airline as part of its digitalisation strategy. The airline’s customers are able to make informed decisions and lane assessments to plan the most optimal routing for their time and temperature sensitive pharma shipments at the click of a button.

Qatar Airways Cargo has joined Validaide Capabilities Platform as a premium member. Through the membership, the cargo carrier is able to digitally manage and share its station capabilities for pharmaceuticals and healthcare products. Customers will be able to easily review the airline’s pharma handling capabilities at all the airports throughout its extensive network.

Qatar Airways Cargo has also joined the Advisory Board of Validaide which allows it to contribute to further developments to the platform and customise its features to benefit the end user. Qatar Airways Cargo and Validaide both pursue digitalisation projects within the broader air cargo industry.

Guillaume Halleux, chief officer Cargo at Qatar Airways said, “Digitalisation is the need of the

hour. Our premium membership with Validaide, the leading digital platform for special cargo gives access to our customers, logistics providers and pharmaceutical shippers to easily define and search for special cargo handling capabilities. Customers can also create lane assessments when transporting pharmaceuticals on our flights. We are easing the way for our customers do business with us, providing convenience and speed to market, which are the key benefits of going digital.”

Eelco de Jong, CEO at Validaide, said, “There is a strong need in the industry for collaboration and data sharing as transparency on transport and storage conditions is essential for the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. We are very happy to add Qatar Airways Cargo to the Advisory Board as we share a strong support for collaboration and transparency in the industry.”

Natalie Niers, head of Capabilities Platform at Validaide said, “Working closer together with Qatar Airways Cargo will help us create a better future. Firstly, easy access to the cargo carrier’s capabilities will be important for

global forwarders in order to comply with regulatory requirements for pharma shipments. Secondly, Qatar Airways Cargo will play a key role in our community model and help us define the development roadmap.”

The airline’s product QR Pharma provides temperature-controlled air freight for pharmaceuticals, offering both active and passive solutions in cold chain logistics. Expertly-trained staff at every pharma destination ensure the cool chain is unbroken. In December 2020, Qatar Airways Cargo was awarded IATA’s Centre of Excellence for Independent Validators (CEIV) certification in pharmaceutical logistics at its hub in Doha.

Qatar Airways Cargo has invested considerably in its pharma solution through quality handling, infrastructure, facilities, people and procedures at each of its pharma stations including the Doha hub, adhering to high operating standards for transporting temperature-controlled products.

Due to this, the cargo carrier’s volumes for pharmaceutical shipments has grown by 18 per cent in 2020 over 2019.

Maserati MC20 makes its debut in Oman

The Maserati MC20, the brand's new super sports car, made its debut in Oman. After its regional debut in the UAE in January, the car makes its first appearance in Oman.

The MC20 private preview in Oman was held at Alfardan Motors, where a number of top VIPs, guests and media enjoyed exclusive one-on-one private viewing sessions. The event followed a thorough COVID-19 safety protocol, in line with Oman's Supreme Committee advisories on the pandemic.

Domenico La Marte, general manager, Maserati Middle East and Africa, said, "We are proud to launch the MC20 and Fuoriserie Program in Oman, as part of the roadshow in the Middle East and Africa. With the MC20, we inaugurate a new era in the only way we know: with audacity, energy and always focusing on our goal to deliver one of the most exclusive experiences to our clients."

MC20 is the first step in the new era, paving the way for the



future of Maserati with its innovation, uniqueness and audacity. The supercar's strikingly elegant

design is achieved by finely balancing a series of opposites: a blend of craftsmanship and engineering, elegance and performance, racing spirit and pleasure at the wheel.

The MC20 is a car with incredible aerodynamic efficiency, which conceals a sporty soul,

with the new Nettuno engine, a 630 horsepower V6 with torque of 730 Nm that delivers 0-100

km/h acceleration in under 2.9 seconds and a top speed over 325 km an hour.

The brand's new era also embraces the personalization of its cars. The new Maserati Fuoriserie program offers clients the opportunity of a unique experience in the new "car tailoring" shop, which will be at the Modena headquarters.

To help customers to find their way around the thousands of possible combinations, three collections are available as a starting-point: Corse, Unica and Futura. Each collection expresses the brand's power and represents its values, uniting breath-taking performance with elegance and innovation.

A one-off Quattroporte, designed thanks to the creative collaboration between the Maserati Centro Stile and the Garage Italia team, will be part of the Fuoriserie Program roadshow. It is designed by combining pure white with rainbow mica that reflects the entire colour spectrum.

OC to receive condolence messages for late chairman

Mourning the death of Kanak Khimji, its late chairman who died on February 18, Oman Cricket (OC) will continue to receive condolence messages at its head office in Amerat till March 2 and has placed a condolence book at the reception.

People from all walks of life, including founding OC members, have been coming to OC office to pay their respects and offer condolences to OC officials.

"We have kept a condolence book for anyone wishing to record their final condolences for our late chairman during office hours (9am to 5pm) till Tuesday, March 2. Ambassadors of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have already visited our office while many more dignitaries from public and private sectors are expected to arrive in the coming days," said an OC official.



Apart from being one of the most renowned business leaders in Oman, Khimji was known and respected for his outstanding contribution to the game of cricket since 1979 when he became the founding chairman of Oman Cricket along with other founding members.

Recognising his efforts, International Cricket Council awarded him the ICC Award for Lifetime Service in 2011.

Having made remarkable progress under his leadership, Oman is now ranked among the top 20 nations in T20 Internationals and One-Day Internationals with top class cricket infrastructure.

FERG announces new office bearers

The Foreign Exchange and Remittance Group (FERG), a non-profit organisation comprising of companies engaged in the business of money exchange and remittances in the UAE, announced its new office bearers that were selected by the committee members during the group's first committee meeting of the year held at the Pullman Dubai Downtown on Sunday.

The newly elected office bearers are as follows: **Chairman:** Mohamed Ali al Ansari **Vice chairman:** Adeeb Ahamed **Secretary:** Rajiv Raipancholia **Treasurer:** Antony Jos **Joint treasurer:** Imad ul Malik **Advisory board member:** Osama al Rahma

FERG's committee members were elected in November 2020 and announced during the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The committee members include Al Ansari Exchange, Al Fardan Exchange, Al Ghurair



Exchange, Al Razouki International Exchange, Al Rostamani International Exchange, Joy Alukkas Exchange, Index Exchange, Lulu International Exchange, Orient Exchange, Redha al Ansari Exchange and Wallstreet Exchange.

The newly elected committee members will continue to play a key role in liaising with regulators and law enforcements on behalf of FERG members. They will also contribute to the growth and expansion of the Group along with the foreign exchange and remittance industry in the UAE.

FERG has frequently taken up

concerns and recommendations that have led to favourable policy amendments by various authorities in the UAE. FERG's role in working alongside its members and the authorities were instrumental in gaining government approvals and allowing exchange houses to continue its business during the COVID-19 lockdown last year.

As the representative of exchange houses in the UAE, FERG has continuously worked to enhance learning and development initiatives to maintain the highest standards of security and compliance in the industry, which has in turn helped deter money laundering and other dubious financial transactions. The Group has carefully designed training modules, to train staff of member organisations at different levels across departments to better equip them to safeguard the interests of customers and other stakeholders.

On-demand laundry, dry cleaning platform Laundryheap sees a year of huge growth

Laundryheap, the world's fastest growing on-demand laundry and dry cleaning platform, has announced a US\$3.5mn Series A round led by Sova VC. The round was joined by the SidebySide Partnership.

Founded in 2014, and present in the Middle East since 2018, Laundryheap offers door-to-door laundry and dry-cleaning services to consumer and business customers, including major brands, returning items to users within 24-hours.

This raise follows years of steady growth where Laundryheap has focused on building a sustainable model that centres around repeat custom. A surge in interest following the outbreak of the pandemic has fuelled further market growth and led to a series of successful expansions to new markets during 2020, including: the Middle East, Singapore, Sweden and the USA. The platform now has a presence across eleven international markets.

Within the Middle East market, Laundryheap has reported particularly rapid growth since March, with the company expanding into new markets and customer growth hitting 60-80 per cent month-on-month.

Just two short years since its entry into the region, Laundryheap is now operational in four countries and six cities across the GCC, including the UAE



(Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi), Bahrain (Manama), Qatar (Doha) and Kuwait (Kuwait City), with plans for further expansion in the pipeline in the coming year.

During the pandemic, Laundryheap introduced new 'virus wash' services and extra-hot cleaning offerings, as well as expanded support for its B2B clients. The company has also focused on making its supply chain more sustainable through green

cleaning techniques and low-carbon transport.

This investment was led by Sova VC, a London based venture capital firm launched in December 2020 with plans to invest over €50mn of capital in building a portfolio of more than 20 early-stage technology companies.

Laundryheap will use the funding to accelerate its expansion across existing and additional international markets, whilst retaining its focus on sustainable growth and profitability.

Deyan Dimitrov, CEO & founder of Laundryheap, said, "We've never focused on the kind of 'growth at any cost' expansion that other on-demand businesses have and our approach to fundraising reflects this. We bootstrapped for the first few years of our operation and didn't raise our Seed round until we were confident in our model. That's why this is a really exciting chapter for us. We're raising this Series A because it's the right time to focus on more rapid expansion and the round will enable us to consolidate our position as the best on-demand laundry platform in the market. We're delighted that Sova VC has led this round and we're looking forward to working with them closely over the coming months and years."

Alexander Chikunov, partner at Sova VC, said, "Laundryheap stood out to us as a company with excellent unit economics, the ability to scale (even during a difficult period), and an impressive senior leadership team. It's a great example of the type of company we want to work with, and fits perfectly with our focus on high-potential technology companies with a particular emphasis on B2B and B2B2C marketplaces and software platforms."



Adlife Hospital joins hands with ARTT Cricket Team

Adlife has joined hands with ARTT Cricket Team. ARTT CT is one of the championship contending team, which participates in the A Division League of Oman Cricket. While, Adlife Hospital is a part of Al Adrak Group, with 64-bed multi-speciality hospital located in Amerat with all modern facilities for treatment.

Since the death of one of the top Australian cricketers Phil Hughes, there is an utmost priority on player safety, where the medical industry has a big part to play.

ARTT has a glamorous and star studded team, which is allowing it to dominate the A division circuit of the 50 over league.

Pranav Mehta, co-owner of Team ARTT said, "A few years back we lost a player while play-

ing a match. Since then, we are always concerned about health and safety of our players, who give in everything for the team at the grounds. Adlife Hospital, would not only be maintaining the records and health standards of our players, but also putting them on the right diet, which is so essential. We would also get the benefit of their brilliant state-of-the-art facilities, highly qualified doctors and surgeons, which are just on a two-minute drive from the ground.

Aadil Thomas Alexander, MD of Adlife Hospital, said, "We have strategically positioned to provide the best possible medical facilities to the people of Oman. Though our target would primarily start with Amerat and then extend to Muscat, but our facilities would attract people

from all over Oman. Adlife is a part of Al Adrak Group, and at Al Adrak, we have always put humanity and quality service first."

Varsha Sarah Roy, finance director of Adlife Hospital, added, "We see great interest in ARTT, since they are more than a cricket team. Their young talent development programme is an amazing initiative. A platform, which will allow the new upcoming youngsters to learn directly for the best in business, by playing alongside them."

Captain and co-owner of Team ARTT Ahmed Khan, wholeheartedly thanked Adlife Hospital and its management, for joining hands with Team ARTT. "Adlife's hand on our shoulder would make our players feel more confident while walking into the field," he said.

Displaced families face new exodus as Yemen fighting shifts again

Marib, Yemen - As the sound of gunfire grew closer, Mahfouz Ahmed knew to scoop up his children and run, before getting caught in the line of fire between Yemen's warring sides.

The Al-Zor camp where they had been living for four years was no longer safe, as the Iran-backed Huthi rebels drew near in a major offensive against the northern city of Marib and its nearby oil fields.

The family collected what few possessions they had, including a small television, a cooking burner and a few pots and pans, and headed to Jaw al-Naseem, another camp closer to Marib, which is the Saudi-backed government's last northern bastion.

"We were about 600 families living in Al-Zor camp, and now they have dispersed," Ahmed told AFP, as he sat on the floor of a green tent in Jaw al-Naseem, just 3km from the city.

"Some are living with relatives and others - three or four families, sometimes even seven - are living in one tent. Only God knows what kind of situation this is."

Ahmed and his family first fled their home in the battleground city of Ta'izz in 2016, part of a huge exodus of Yemenis for whom Marib province became a sanctuary of sorts in a country ravaged by years of war.

Around 140 sites have sprung up in the region to provide basic shelter for the displaced, who number up to one million according to some estimates.



This file photo shows Yemeni children at the Jaw al-Naseem camp for internally displaced people on the outskirts of the northern city of Marib, on February 18 (AFP)

Fighting menaces camps

Al-Zor is among a cluster of 14 displacement sites in Marib's Sirwah district - a flashpoint area on the road to capital Sanaa.

Marib has been menaced by fighting in recent weeks as Saudi-backed government troops struggle to defend the city.

All the camps could be forced to empty as the Huthis intensify their campaign for the province, a huge prize that would consolidate their control of the north and give them possession of Yemen's richest oil and gas fields.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has said that Sirwah has been hit hardest since the rebel offensive resumed this month, with some 1,048 families - averaging six members each - displaced so far.

Ahmed's wife, Huriya, said the situation has become unbearable for the couple and their four children.

"They do not study. We can't find schools or teachers, and we don't know what to do for them," she told AFP, as two girls sat on the bare floor watching cartoons.

"We are two families in one tent with the bathroom and kitchen inside," said Huriya.

One-time sanctuary

Until early last year, life in Marib was relatively peaceful despite the civil war that erupted in 2014.

With its proximity to the Saudi border, the province was largely untouched by the first years of conflict, and even flourished as those who sought sanctuary opened businesses and restaurants.

But as the front lines shift, and air raids by Saudi Arabia and its allies pound the area, there is new peril for civilians, whether they are in dismal camps, lodging with relatives, or sheltering at other informal sites including abandoned buildings.

The fighting shows no signs of abating despite heavy losses on both sides.

The United Nations warned last week of a potential humanitarian disaster if the fight for Marib continues, saying it has put 'millions of civilians at risk'.

Yemen is already enduring what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with famine again stalking the country.

Nationwide more than 3.3m people have been displaced, making them vulnerable to outbreaks of cholera, malaria and dengue fever due to lack of proper sanitation and healthcare.

At Jaw al-Naseem camp, the most basic of services are absent. Children run around barefoot, some playing on a makeshift swing set, others with sand.

"The situation is dire and most households are in urgent need of shelter and non-food items, water and sanitation, health and food assistance," said IOM spokeswoman Olivia Headon.

"My children have gotten sick... we don't have blankets or water tanks," said Ali al Tahami about the life in Jaw al-Naseem.

AFP

Courts close in on Syria government

Paris, France - A German court on Wednesday jailed a former Syrian intelligence agent for complicity in crimes against humanity in the world's first prosecution over state-sponsored torture by the Syrian government.

It is just one of a growing number of cases being brought against loyalists of President Bashar Assad in jurisdictions around the world. Here is a look at some of the others.

In Wednesday's landmark judgment in the German city of Koblenz, Eyad al Gharib (44), a former low-ranking member of the intelligence service, was sentenced to four years and six months in prison for being an accomplice to crimes against humanity while helping to arrest protesters and deliver them to a detention centre in Damascus in autumn 2011.



Syrian defendant Eyad al Gharib hides his face as he arrives in the courtroom to hear his verdict, in Koblenz, Germany, on Wednesday (AFP)

The trial - the first in the world of figures allegedly involved in abuses by the Syrian government - opened in April 2020.

A second former intelligence agent, Anwar Raslan, who was

arrested with Gharib, is still awaiting the verdict of the Koblenz court after judges decided to split the proceedings in two.

The 58 year old is accused directly of crimes against humanity, including overseeing the murder of 58 people and the torture of 4,000 others. Raslan's trial is expected to last until at least the end of October.

Seven Syrian torture survivors and a human rights group had previously filed a criminal complaint in Germany against other Syrian officials in 2017, but that has yet to come to trial.

The case, filed in Germany, was lodged on behalf of victims of a 2013 sarin attack in Eastern Ghouta and a 2017 attack using the same nerve agent in Khan Sheikhun, according to the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression. In September 2015, a Paris prosecutor opened a preliminary inquiry into crimes against humanity over allegations of abduction and torture.

AFP

President Biden, Iraqi PM discuss rocket strikes on US Embassy

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi spoke about this week's rocket strikes on the US Embassy in Baghdad, the White House said on Tuesday, with both leaders saying those responsible should be 'held fully to account'.

The conversation came just days after Biden marked one month in office.

'The President affirmed US support for Iraq's sovereignty and independence and commended the Prime Minister's leadership,' the White House statement said.

On Monday, at least three rockets targeted the US Embassy in the high-security Green Zone of Iraq's capital Baghdad, in an attack the United States blames



US President Joe Biden (left), Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi

on Iran.

'(Biden and Kadhemi) discussed the recent rocket attacks against Iraqi and Coalition personnel and agreed that those responsible for such attacks must be held fully to account,' the White House said of the two leaders' call.

AFP

Body of Italian ambassador killed in DR Congo returns home

Rome, Italy - The body of the Italian ambassador killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo arrived in Rome late on Tuesday, as Rwandan Hutu rebels denied accusations they were behind the attack and instead blamed the armies of the DRC and Rwanda.

Luca Attanasio (43) died on Monday after a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy was ambushed in a dangerous part of eastern DRC.

The envoy's Italian bodyguard, Vittorio Iacovacci, and Congolese driver Moustapha Milambo also died on the field trip.

An Italian military plane carrying Attanasio and Iacovacci's flag-draped coffins was met at Rome's Ciampino airport by Prime Minister Mario Draghi.

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio and Defence Minister Lorenzo Guerini joined him to meet Attanasio's widow and three daughters, who flew home with the bodies.

DRC President Felix Tshisekedi and his wife had earlier made a 'condolence visit' to the family at the Italian ambassador's residence.

The DRC's Interior Ministry on Monday blamed the killings on 'members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)' - a Rwandan Hutu rebel group that has plagued the region for more than a quarter of a century.

But the FDLR rejected the allegation, blaming the Rwandan army and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) in a statement



Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio observes a minute of silence during an address to the Senate on the death of Ambassador Luca Attanasio in an attack in DR Congo, in Rome on Wednesday (AFP)

received on Tuesday.

It said the ambassador's convoy was attacked near the Rwandan border, 'not far from a position of the FARDC'.

'The responsibility for this despicable killing is to be found in the ranks of these two armies and their sponsors who have forged an unnatural alliance to perpetuate the pillaging of eastern DRC,' it said.

Authorities in both countries have not reported the presence of any regular Rwandan troops in the DRC.

An expert at the Kivu Security Tracker (KST), a US monitor, told AFP the Hutu rebel group, however, has a known presence in the region.

"The FDLR are near the place where the attack took place. It's in the realm of possibility that the

Rwandan rebels are responsible," the expert said.

Scores of militias roam the DRC's four eastern provinces, many of them a legacy of wars in the 1990s that sucked in countries around central-southern Africa and claimed millions of lives. Some of the FDLR's founders were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide during which the Hutu majority slaughtered 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis but also Hutu moderates.

The group is opposed to the current Rwandan government, but has not launched any large-scale attacks in Rwanda since 2001.

Monday's attack occurred north of the North Kivu capital of Goma on a road next to the porous border with Rwanda.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

EU chief seeks 'amicable' solution to vaccine delays

London, UK - European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen insisted on Wednesday that new problems dogging the supply of AstraZeneca's vaccines can be resolved, after the group admitted it could deliver only half the expected amount to the bloc in the second quarter.

"The vaccine manufacturers are our partners in this pandemic and they have also never faced such a challenge," she told the German regional daily *Augsburger Allgemeine*.

"New questions are always arising that we can generally resolve amicably," she said on the eve of a virtual EU summit on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Von der Leyen added that she advocated 'working together with the companies to ensure global production is improved'.

AstraZeneca said on Tuesday its EU supply chains would only be able to deliver half of an expected supply of COVID-19 vaccines to the bloc in the second quarter - but that it would look to make up the shortfall from elsewhere.

A spokesman for the British-Swedish drugs group told AFP AstraZeneca was 'working to increase productivity in its EU supply chain' and would use its 'global capability in order to achieve delivery of 180mn doses to the EU in the second quarter'. "Approximately half of the



This file photo shows European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen addressing a press conference on the threat of new coronavirus variants at the European Commission Headquarters, in Brussels on February 17 (AFP)

expected volume is due to come from the EU supply chain [while the remainder would come from its international supply network]," he added.

The announcement follows controversy over deliveries of the AstraZeneca-Oxford University jab to the European Union in the first quarter, which has caused tension between the bloc and the pharmaceutical company.

Diplomatic tensions

Ahead of the EU's approval of the vaccine at the end of January, the company sparked fury among European leaders by announcing that it would miss its target of supplying the EU with 400mn doses, due to a shortfall at the firm's European plants.

The disagreement also caused diplomatic tensions with Britain, which definitively left the EU after 40 years of mem-

bership following a transmission period at the end of 2020 - with Brussels implicitly accusing AstraZeneca of giving preferential treatment to Britain at the expense of the EU.

The UK government has vaccinated millions of Britons with the AstraZeneca jab since late last year. But the company only began shipping it to the EU in early February, after the bloc's drug regulator took its time over

recommending its use.

The AstraZeneca vaccine has suffered a number of other setbacks - it was temporarily excluded from South Africa's immunisation campaign because of concern it was less effective towards new virus variants there; and Germany's vaccine commission recommended it only for people aged 18 to 64 years old.

AFP



A medical worker receives a dose of COVID-19 jab in a hospital in the small Ukrainian town of Brovary, on Wednesday (AFP)

Ukraine kicks off vaccine campaign

Kiev, Ukraine - Ukraine on Wednesday launched a nationwide campaign to inoculate its population against the coronavirus, following delays that sparked anger against the government in one of Europe's poorest countries.

The ex-Soviet republic of 40mn people has struggled to keep up with other European countries in sourcing vaccines to begin inoculating its population.

Oleksandr Skichko, governor of the central Cherkasy region, announced that Ukraine's vaccine rollout had officially begun on Wednesday after a medical professional in his region was given the jab.

"We have vaccinated the first doctor," Skichko said.

Ukraine received 500,000 doses of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine on Tuesday, marketed under the name Covishield and produced at the Serum Institute in India.

Health Minister Maksym Stepanov told reporters ear-

lier on Wednesday that the first of those doses had been despatched to regions outside the capital.

His ministry has set out a five-stage jab rollout beginning with 367,000 people in priority groups who will be administered the vaccine by mobile teams.

The first group includes healthcare workers treating COVID-19 patients and the elderly with chronic illnesses. The ministry said vaccinations will be voluntary.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had faced criticism for failing to obtain vaccines for his country whose ageing public health system has been under strain during the pandemic.

Health officials have so far recorded over 1.3mn cases and more than 25,000 deaths from the virus.

Zelensky blamed the delay on wealthy Western countries which he said had reserved the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in bulk.

AFP

Mafia eye health, recovery projects in virus-hit Italy

Rome, Italy - In coronavirus-hit Italy, mafia groups are eyeing the health sector and EU-funded infrastructure projects as their next big money spinners, police warned in a report on Wednesday.

'Significant criminal investments are conceivable in companies operating in the so-called health chain,' Italy's anti-mafia investigative police (DIA) wrote in a bi-annual report to parliament.

Potential targets include

building and renovating hospitals, the production and supply of medical equipment, hospital waste disposal, and sanitary and funeral services, DIA said.

Police also said it was 'very likely' that mafia organisations would 'try to intercept the new financing channels' set to be made available to upgrade Italy's infrastructure and modernise its economy.

That is a reference to the more than €200bn Rome expects to receive from the Euro-

pean Union's post-coronavirus Recovery Fund over the 2021-2026 period.

DIA called for the 'utmost vigilance' on companies bidding for health sector public tenders, pointing out that recent corporate changes in ownership, structure or office location may be a sign of mafia infiltration.

They also said that talk of streamlining public tender procedures - to minimise the risk of delays in EU-funded projects --

'should be accompanied by careful and swift anti-mafia monitoring'.

Italian organised crime groups like the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and Cosa Nostra in Sicily have a proven track record of infiltrating major public works projects, often through political connections.

In its report, the DIA noted that the 'Ndrangheta and Cosa Nostra have exploited the economic crisis brought about by the pandemic for loan-sharking

to struggling business owners.

They have also curried favour with the poor by distributing food aid or offering casual, black-market employment to people left jobless by the crisis, the report added.

Last year, Italy's economy shrank by nearly nine per cent, in the worst recession since World War II, and nearly 450,000 people - mostly women, younger workers and the self-employed - lost their jobs.

AFP



Pedestrians walk past a street art piece titled *Vax Populi* by Italian street artist Mauro Pallotta, in Milan on Monday (AFP)

Amnesty strips Navalny of 'prisoner of conscience'

Moscow, Russia - Amnesty International said on Wednesday that it no longer recognises jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny as a prisoner of conscience because of past 'advocacy of hatred' comments but vowed to still push for his release.

Navalny's arrest at a Moscow airport in January sparked widespread condemnation from rights groups in Russia and abroad as well as from Western leaders who are expected to impose sanctions on Moscow in response.

But Amnesty said it took the decision to rescind his status of prisoner of conscience 'in relation to comments he made in the past'. The London-based activist group did not cite any specific remarks made by Navalny, but he triggered criticism with anti-immigrant statements at the beginning of his political career more than a decade ago.

'Some of these comments, which Navalny has not publicly denounced, reach the threshold of advocacy of hatred, and this is



This screen grab shows Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny inside a glass cell during a court hearing, in Moscow on February 20 (AFP)

at odds with Amnesty's definition of a prisoner of conscience,' it said.

Amnesty added however that it would continue to demand Navalny's release.

'Navalny has not, to the best of our knowledge, made similar pronouncements in recent years and this decision does not change our resolve to fight for his immediate release,' Amnesty said.

It added that the group last week delivered 200,000 signatures to the Russian authorities

demanding Navalny's immediate release.

The opposition leader's team responded to Amnesty's decision by accusing the group of having caved to a pressure campaign waged by a columnist associated with Russian state media.

Navalny's right-hand man Leonid Volkov wrote on Twitter that Amnesty, with the decision, had announced it 'was fed crap and we liked it'.

AFP

Political crisis brings welcome boom in orders for Nepal's flag makers

Kathmandu, Nepal - Since Nepal's Prime Minister dissolved parliament in December, chaos has engulfed the Himalayan nation, with huge protests and the ruling party split into two warring factions.

But for printing shop owner Umesh Babu Shrestha the crisis has brought a welcome boom in orders, after he was unable to pay his rent for nine months because the pandemic dried up business.

Now the flags of Nepal's different parties - and factions within them - from across the complex and fractious political spectrum dangle drying in every nook and cranny of his Kathmandu shop. "Business has really improved. This has given a hope that we can pay off our dues now, otherwise there isn't a lot of other work," Shrestha told AFP.

The smell of paint fills the air as red stars are stamped on one newly-cut cloth after another, before they are hung up in long rows wherever there is space.

The country's demonstrations,



A worker prints Nepali Congress party flags at a workshop, in Kathmandu on February 15 (AFP)

which at times have descended into ugly clashes with riot police firing water cannon, are a sea of colourful flags and banners.

The items are must-have accessories whether the demonstrators back or oppose Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli (69), a wily former political prisoner who rose to power in 2018 promising an end to years of instability.

Flags, said Hem Bahadur

Shrestha, a local political leader, are 'a signal of my identity and indicator of my ideology'.

"Followers of other political parties might carry a different flag. We are with the Nepal Communist Party and this is our flag," he said at one recent demo.

Another printing shop owner, Kailash Shah, had no work for a whole year but has now hired four new workers after receiving

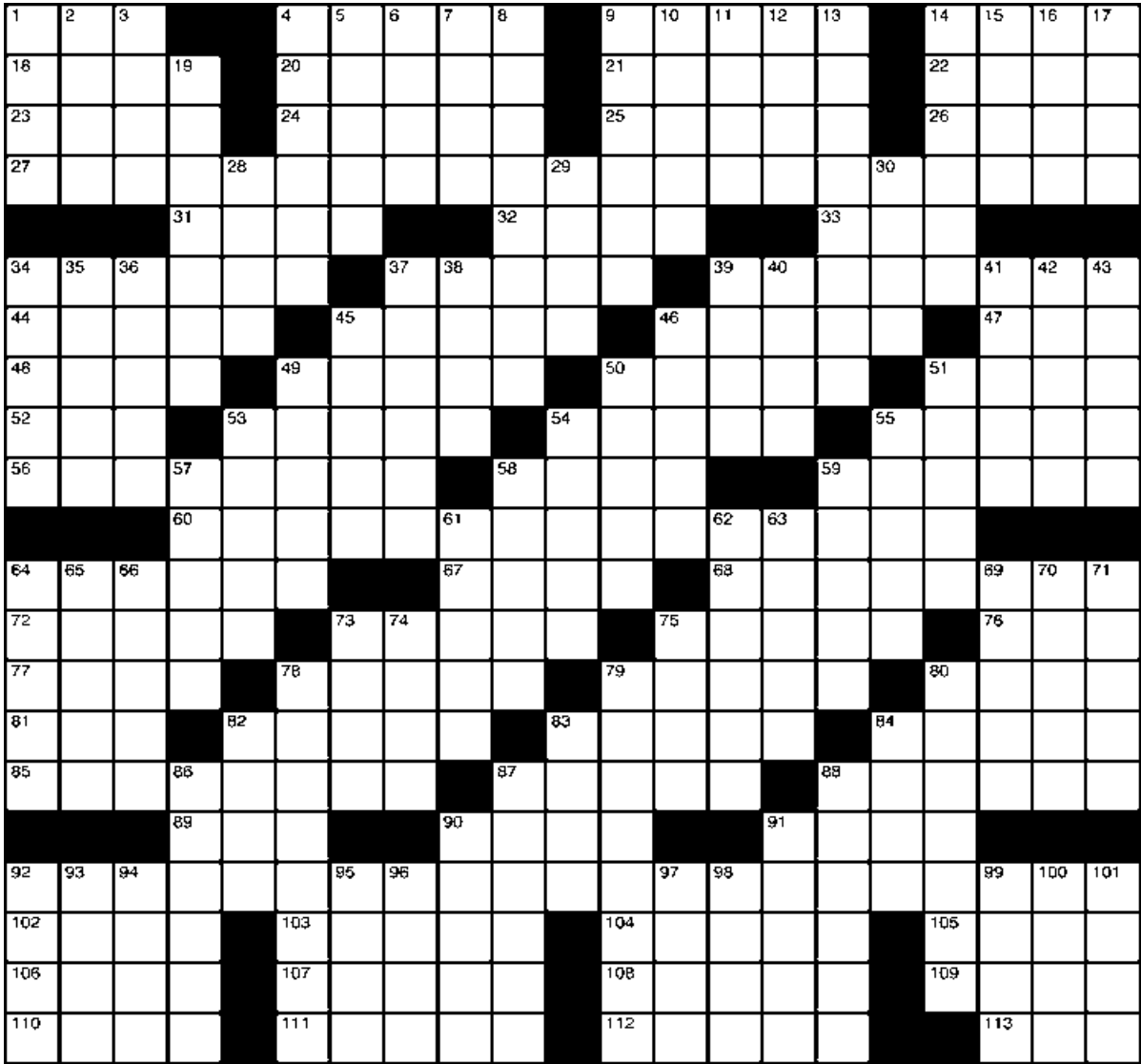
flag orders from all across the country of 29mn.

Major shops are now selling up to 3,000 flags a day, and demand is expected to stay strong even after the Supreme Court on Tuesday reinstated parliament.

Oli's dissolution of the legislature came after months of wrangling with former Maoist rebel leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- 103 Mountain nymph

- 104 Uncanny
 - 105 African lily
 - 106 Jagged branch
 - 107 Long range
 - 108 Speak
 - 109 Show boredom
 - 110 Wise one
 - 111 Comforted
 - 112 Orchestra section
 - 113 Actress Charlotte ____
- DOWN**
- 1 Highland Scot
 - 2 Asian nanny
 - 3 Erato, for one
 - 4 Very nearly
 - 5 Adolescent years
 - 6 Earl's daughter
 - 7 Map giant
 - 8 Comparison example
 - 9 Lariats
 - 10 Suffix, meaning government
 - 11 French father
 - 12 Arrow poison
 - 13 Portray verbally
 - 14 Enrobe
 - 15 Tibetan priest
 - 16 Long time spans
 - 17 Circumspect
 - 19 Majestic
 - 28 Vanished
 - 29 Trickle
 - 30 Gratify

- 34 Garden flower
- 35 Twilled fabric
- 36 West Point student
- 37 Chair of state
- 38 Ice pellets
- 39 Common backyard bird
- 40 Camouflage
- 41 Tropical tree
- 42 Plant insect
- 43 Fruit rinds
- 45 Vamoose
- 46 Po river city
- 49 Operatic solos
- 50 Dinner side
- 51 Bouquet
- 53 Coastal birds
- 54 Medieval weapons
- 55 Characteristic
- 57 Brother of Moses
- 58 Sacred tome
- 59 Southern beauty
- 61 Marsh birds
- 62 Awaits with anxiety
- 63 Immediately available
- 64 French count
- 65 Foreign
- 66 Broke a fast
- 69 Trade name
- 70 Cliff shelf
- 71 City in West

- Germany
- 73 Floor covering
- 74 Baltic Sea tributary
- 75 Pharmacist's measure
- 78 Algonquin tribal chief
- 79 Magnificence
- 80 Ship's entrance
- 82 Old-time dagger
- 83 Snap or lima
- 84 Bits of thread
- 86 Declare to be true
- 87 Exchanged goods
- 88 Los Angeles team
- 90 OK native American
- 91 Attempted
- 92 Religious ceremony
- 93 Frog genus
- 94 Jagged rock
- 95 Assam silkworm
- 96 Sparks and Beatty
- 97 Apportion
- 98 Italian craft ability
- 99 Wing-shaped
- 100 Hawkeye State
- 101 Hawaiian goose

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If you've got kids, today is all about them. The good news is that your energy is in sync with little ones. If you don't have any, find a friend who does and offer to babysit. Now that this project has gotten off the ground, you can let someone else step in and handle some of the details. Letting others take over isn't easy, but it will result in more quality time with people who matter.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your self-confidence is a shining beacon in the night, so light the way for those who are too timid or doubtful to make a move. You can make almost anything happen if you believe in it. Why not try reinventing your persona? It's fun to be a different person every now and then. Not only will it keep you and your partner from getting bored, but it'll give you plenty to talk about later on.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Is this your lucky day? It depends on what you need and what you count as luck. If you're single, you may bump into your next flame. If you need work, you may discover a hidden talent. Your synapses are firing on all cylinders, and your partner wouldn't have it any other way. They love demonstrations of your intellectual horsepower, and you're more than willing to oblige.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- Weight of an object put in a satellite orbiting in space around the earth is
a. the same as on the earth
b. slightly more than that on the earth
c. less than that on the earth
d. reduced to zero
- To which country did the first Secretary-General of the UN belong?
a. Austria
b. Sweden
c. Burma
d. Norway
- War of the Roses was
a. civil war in England
b. religious-cum-political war between the Lutherans Catholics in Germany
c. war between Syrian and Roman forces
d. None of the above

Answers: 1. d 2. c 3. a



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your self-confidence is blowing up out of proportion in others' eyes, so try to just calm down and let others sing your praises, even if it takes them too long to get tuned up. You're craving something deeply frivolous and nutrition-free, like a shopping spree, a thousand cookies, or a flirtatious conversation with an ex. Can you divert this feeling into some guilt-free activity instead?



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your people are pushing too hard. Your energy just isn't up to the task of keeping them all in line, and you may have to tell someone close to take a hike. Speculate about what the future holds all you like, but what really counts is the present. If you have too many irons in the fire, it's just as bad as not having any. It's time to think about what you want to focus on.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your people could be extra sneaky, and at least one of them is making claims they almost certainly can't back up. You don't have to ferret out every falsehood, but you do need to be skeptical. In every relationship, there's a time and a place to have those big talks, but you really have to choose the moment. Banter and light conversation are your speed than anything heavy.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your idea of fun is debating hot topics and trying to get deep inside the minds of those who disagree with you. It's all a good time to you, but at least one other person may not feel that way. Communication is easier than usual, but it might not be as focused as you'd like. It's a good time to cover lots of ground, rather than go in depth on any one topic. You'll have more fun that way.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You need to become even more socially active. Your people need you more than ever, but it shouldn't feel like work to help them. Getting in touch with your moods goes a long way toward alleviating and managing the symptoms. Plus, if you examine them, you may not take those feelings out on anyone else, like co-workers or your partner. So ask yourself where your head is.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You could be fixated on one big idea, but now isn't the time to be single-minded! You need to make sure that you're as flexible as can be when it comes to work or family issues. Assemble a mental "greatest hits" compilation of your relationship in your head. Pretty good, huh? When you find yourself hitting a rough patch, just think about all that you two have to offer each other.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's time for an upgrade. Maybe you need a new phone, maybe you need a new love life, but in either case, you know just where to go, but at least one other person may not feel that way. Believe half of what you see and none of what you hear, especially if you're in a highly emotional state. Better yet, ask your partner to come along and survey the situation. Then get their opinion.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You've got an ego -- but who doesn't? Today brings out all kinds of challenges to your sense of self, but also to other's feelings. Try not to escalate any delicate situations. Your unique take on events makes your partner laugh. A wicked sense of humour is extremely sexy, and you'll find that yours is having a definite and desirable effect. The best part? You're hilarious without trying.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

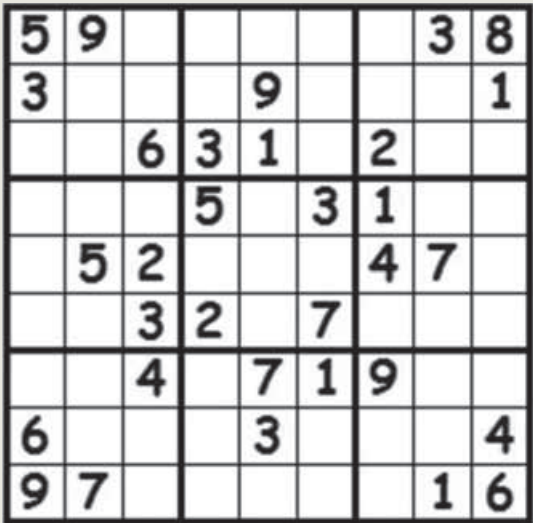
You have to mind your own business today, but that should be fairly easy. With one exception, your people are mostly lying low, so you don't have too much drama to deal with. It's not just about words. How you say something and whether you're looking your partner in the eye is just as important as the message itself. For that matter, consider the medium.

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



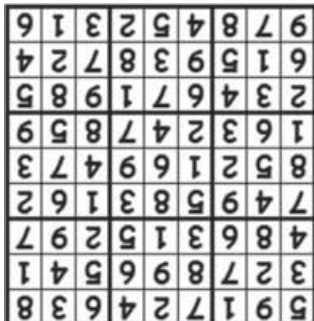
BOGGLER



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 (FEBRUARY 24)



WORD BUILDER

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

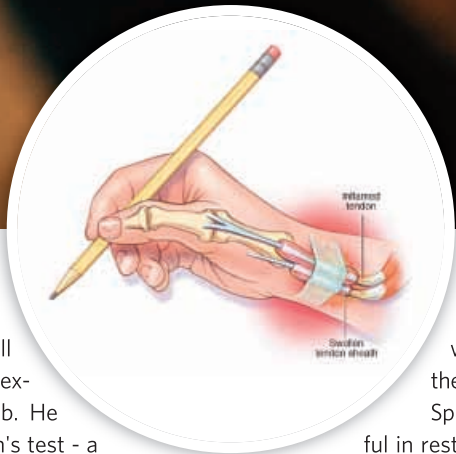
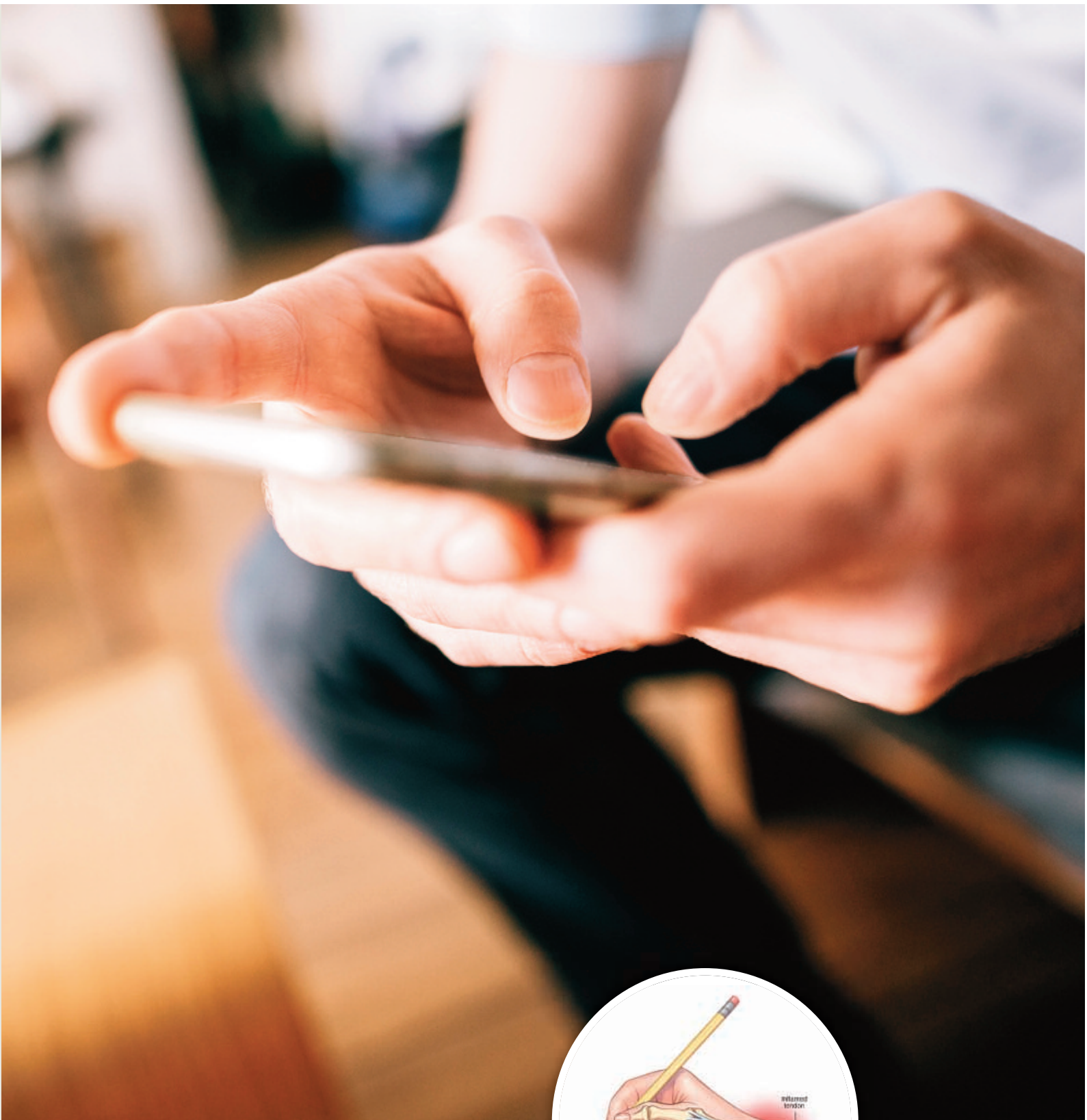
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count



REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Texting Thumb

Texting thumb is a condition experienced due to repetitive activities of daily living that involve a clenched fist and thumb. **“Most patients present with pain along the base of the thumb, mostly along the tendons extending up to the level of the wrist. The condition is self limiting and will resolve with time,”** says **Dr Biswajit Dutta Baruah**, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman hospital



DR BISWAJIT DUTTA BARUAH
Consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman Hospital

Texting thumb refers to a repetitive strain injury (RSI) or overuse injury caused by frequent use of the thumb in operating smartphones and mobile devices. The medical term for the condition is De Quervain's tenosynovitis named after the Swiss surgeon Fritz de Quervain, who first described the condition in 1895.

On the back of the thumb lie two tendons that connect the muscles in the forearm to the bones that make up the thumb. The tendons are covered by a sheath of tissue (tenosynovium) that secretes an oily material (synovial fluid) for lubricating the tendons. The rope-like tendons also pass through tunnels at the region of the wrist whose roof is made of a thick fibrous sheath (extensor retinaculum).

Most patients present with pain along the base of the thumb mostly along the tendons extending, at times, up to the level of the wrist. Pain is usually not present all the time, but aggravates with certain activities. However the pain is sharp and disabling at the time of occurrence. Some doctors feel that the thumb does not possess the dexterity of the other four fingers, and is not particularly well suited

for high-speed typing. This puts a strain on the tendons that run through the thumb leading to pain.

A second group of people in whom it is common are women who are pregnant or who have recently delivered a baby. Repetitive strain is likely when a mother has to wash, feed, clothe or even just pick up the baby, explaining why it is common in them. The occurrence in pregnancy, however, questions this hypothesis.

A second likely explanation is fluid retention which is common in pregnancy. Examination of tissue under the microscope (histopathological examination) has revealed degenerative changes in the tissues surrounding the tendons including collection of jelly-like substances (myxoid deposits). It is commonly accepted that the condition is more degenerative than inflammatory.

Activities that incite pain

Pain is felt acutely in activities of daily living that involve a clenched fist and thumb. Activities that incite pain are wringing clothes, opening a bottle cap, hammering a nail, gripping a pen or golf club.

A visit to the orthopedic surgeon becomes nec-

essary when the pain is worsening. The surgeon will take a history and proceed to examine the wrist and thumb. He may perform the Finkelstein's test - a clinical test to confirm the diagnosis.

As the tendons pass close to the wrist bone (radial styloid process), most patients feel that the bone is the source of pain. However, bone is not involved in this condition and x-rays are unnecessary. In a much older person, arthritis of the thumb joints (CMC joint) may mimic the pain of tenosynovitis. In such a situation xray will be helpful in detecting arthritic changes in the joint. Ultrasound can help confirm the condition.

Treatment options

It is important to understand that, in almost all cases, the condition is self limiting and will resolve with time. In persons with continued pain, the surgeon may prescribe anti-inflammatories.

In pregnant women, this may not be appropriate, and likely the surgeon will prescribe paracetamol instead. Applying ice to the area and avoiding

the repetitive movements will make it easier on the patient.

Splinting the thumb can be helpful in resting the tendons and restrict use of the thumb. Ultrasound can also be useful for treatment purposes.

Other physical therapies in the form of deep tissue massage, exercises to stretch the thumb muscles and strengthening exercises by the physiotherapist can help alleviate pain. If pain still persists, steroid injection may be helpful for short time relief from pain.

Last option

Surgery will be resorted to when non-operative measures fail to relieve pain. Postoperative care is usually limited with light dressing. Patients are advised light activities, and within two weeks after removal of sutures (stitches), they are able to resume their day to day activities. RSI patients may continue to experience mild swelling and tenderness at the surgical site for a few months.

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EXERCISES FOR LOWER BACK PAIN



Are you suffering from lower back pain and doing nothing about it? Visit your doctor to find out the cause of your discomfort. But, in the meantime, doing a few exercises to strengthen the lower back can help reduce the discomfort caused by lower back pain.

According to research, exercise increases blood flow to the lower back area and this helps in reducing stiffness as well as aiding healing.

Performing exercises to work the core muscles can prevent injury, increase stability, and improve flexibility. However, people with lower back pain should also pay attention to their general posture and how they carry heavy objects to identify movements that may be responsible. Here are a few exercises that strengthen the spine and help you manage lower back pain:



BRIDGES

Bridges work a person's gluteus maximus - the large muscle of the buttocks. People engage this muscle when they move their hips, particularly when they bend into a squat. The gluteus maximus is one of the most important muscles in the body, and keeping it strong can help support the lower back.

To do a bridge:

Lie on the ground with your knees bent and placing the feet flat on the floor

Press the feet down, keeping the arms by the sides.

Raise the buttocks off the ground until the body forms a straight line from the shoulders to the knees.

Squeeze the buttocks with the shoulders remaining on the floor, then lower and rest for a few seconds.

Repeat 15 times. Rest for a few minutes, then repeat.



KNEE TO CHEST STRETCHES

This exercise is good to help elongate the lower back, relieving tension and pain.

To perform this:

Lie on your back, knees bent, keeping both feet flat.

With both hands pull one knee toward the chest and hold for 5 seconds..

Keep your abdominals tight and press the spine into the floor.

Return to the starting position and repeat with the opposite leg.

Do 2-3 times with each leg.



LOWER BACK ROTATIONAL STRETCHES

The lower back rotational stretch relieves tension in the lower back, besides working the core muscles to improve stability.

To perform this:

Lie back on the floor with bent knees and feet flat on the ground.

Keeping the shoulders firmly on the floor, gently roll both bent knees over to one side.

Hold the position for 5-10 seconds, then return to the starting position.

Repeat the same on the other side and return to the starting position.

Repeat 2-3 times on each side.



DRAW-IN MANOEUVRE

The draw-in manoeuvre works the transversus abdominis - the muscle on the front and side of the abdomen, stabilising the spine and lower back.

To perform this:

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat, arms by the sides.

Breathe in deeply.

While breathing out, pull the bellybutton toward the spine, tightening the abdominal muscles

Hold the position for 5 seconds.

Repeat 5 times.



PELVIC TILTS

The pelvic tilt exercise releases tight back muscles and keeps them flexible.

To perform this:

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat, arms by the sides.

Gently arch the lower back and push the stomach out.

Hold for 5 seconds, then relax.

Flatten the back and pull the bellybutton in toward the floor.

Hold for 5 seconds, then relax.

Do 5-6 repetitions. Increase the number of repetitions daily.



LYING LATERAL LEG LIFTS

Lying lateral leg lifts work the hip abductor muscles. These muscles support the pelvis and can help reduce strain on the back. Keeping these muscles strong is essential, as they help a person maintain their balance.

To perform this:

Lie on one side with the legs together.

Keep the lower leg slightly bent.

Draw the bellybutton into the spine to engage the core muscles.

Raise the top leg about 50cm, keeping it straight and extended.

Hold the position for 2-3 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Turn onto the other side of the body and repeat, lifting the other leg.

Perform 3 sets on each side.



CAT STRETCHES

The cat stretch can help lengthen the back, make it stronger, and ease tension in the muscles.

To perform this:

Get onto the hands and knees with the knees hip-width apart.

Arch the back, pulling the bellybutton up toward the spine.

Slowly relax the muscles and allow the abdomen to sag toward the floor.

Return to the starting position. Repeat 3-5 times twice a day.



SUPERMANS

A person needs strong back extensors to maintain good posture. These muscles run along either side of the spine. To enhance pelvic support, doing a Superman can help.

To perform this:

Lie face down on the ground with arms stretched out in front

Raise both the hands and feet, aiming to create a gap of about 15cm from the floor.

Pull in the bellybutton, lifting it off the floor to engage the core muscles.

Keep the head straight and look at the floor.

Hold the position for 2-3 seconds.

Return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times.

Patel's six-for puts India on top

INDIA VS ENGLAND
THIRD TEST: DAY ONE
Ahmedabad, India - Axar Patel claimed six wickets as India gained the upper hand in their crucial day-night 'pink ball' third Test against England on Wednesday, bowling out their rivals for 112 and then getting within 13 runs of taking the lead.

Only the loss of captain Virat Kohli in the final over spoiled the opening day for India as they moved to 99 for three at the world's biggest cricket stadium with Rohit Sharma on 57 and Ajinkya Rahane on one.

Spin bowlers again dominated with Patel taking the starring role while England's Jack Leach claimed two wickets, including Kohli for 27.

The Indian captain saw one tough chance dropped by Ollie Pope on 24 but soon after played Leach's left-arm spin onto his stumps and walked off visibly furious with himself.

Patel said the pink ball 'skids' more off the pitch giving him more opportunity to get more lbw decisions. Three England victims went leg before.

After taking five wickets on his debut in India's crushing win in the second of the four Tests, Patel said he had carried his 'confidence' into the pink-ball game.

With the series poised at 1-1 England won the toss and chose to bat but survived only 48.4 overs.

Patel linked up with R Ashwin, who took three wickets, while fast bowler Ishant Sharma, playing his 100th Test, claimed one.

Amid a general collapse, Zak Crawley, returning after missing two tests through injury, top-scored with 53.

Captain Joe Root (17) Ben Foakes (12) and Jofra Archer (11) were the only others to get into double figures.

Crawley put up some resistance with his fourth Test fifty and a 47-run third-wicket stand with Root.



India's Axar Patel celebrates after dismissing England's Zak Crawley on the opening day of the day-night third Test in Ahmedabad on Wednesday



India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot during his unbeaten knock of 57 on the opening day against England

Rohit's fifty and pitch invader

Ashwin claimed the England captain with another lbw.

Root reviewed the call but replays showed the ball would have hit the top of leg stump and he left the field to loud cheers

from the home crowd.

Crawley said England's batting specialists had let down their bowlers.

"I don't think it will require a miracle actually," he added, however, on the prospects of an England fightback. Things will have to go our way, we are going to have to play extremely well but we are very capable."

Crawley predicted that the pitch will continue to break up which could help England's bowlers.

"If we bat well in the third innings and put a bit of pressure on them we can defend anything if the pitch continues to get worse."

England hit back with two wickets after Jofra Archer sent back Shubman Gill for 11 and Cheteshwar Pujara fell for a duck off Leach.

But Rohit stood firm for his 12th Test fifty and put on 64 runs with Kohli, delighting the crowd at India's revamped venue with a capacity of 110,000 fans.

Only half the tickets have been put on sale due to the coronavirus pandemic and a turnout of over 30,000 was reported on the opening day.

India's innings witnessed drama after the new LED lights went off for two minutes in the second over and then for 30 seconds in the 12th over.

A young pitch invader also made his way onto the field in the final session and attempted to get close to Kohli before being escorted away by security guards.

England were frustrated by two TV umpire calls, including a stumping chance of Rohit, on 53, and a Ben Stokes catch that was turned down early in the innings.

Root had a long conversation with the on-field umpire on both occasions. He was heard calling for 'consistency'.

AFP

SCOREBOARD		
ENGLAND 1 st INNINGS		
Z Crawley	lbw b Patel	53
D Sibley	c Rohit b Ishant Sharma	0
J Bairstow	lbw b Patel	0
J Root	lbw b Ashwin	17
B Stokes	lbw b Patel	6
O Pope	b Ashwin	1
B Foakes	b Patel	12
J Archer	b Patel	11
J Leach	c Pujara b Ashwin	3
S Broad	c Bumrah b Patel	3
J Anderson	not out	0
Extras	(b 1, lb 2, nb 3)	6
TOTAL	112 in 48.4 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-27, 3-74, 4-80, 5-81, 6-81, 7-93, 8-98, 9-105, 10-112		
Bowling: Ishant Sharma 5-1-26-1, J Bumrah 6-3-19-0, A Patel 21.4-6-38-6, R Ashwin 16-6-26-3		
INDIA 1 st INNINGS		
Rohit Sharma	not out	57
S Gill	c Crawley b Archer	11
C Pujara	lbw b Leach	0
V Kohli	b Leach	27
A Rahane	not out	1
Extras	(b 2, w 1)	3
TOTAL:	99 for three in 33 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-33, 2-34, 3-98		
Bowling: J Anderson 9-6-11-0, S Broad 6-1-16-0, J Archer 5-2-24-1, J Leach 10-1-27-2, B Stokes 3-0-19-0		

World's biggest cricket stadium renamed after Indian PM Modi

Ahmedabad, India - The world's biggest cricket stadium was renamed after India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a surprise move on Wednesday hours before its inaugural day-night Test match between India and England.

The 110,000-seater stadium was the pet project of Modi who was chief minister in Gujarat state, where Ahmedabad is the main city, before taking over as head of government in 2014.

The new name was announced by Indian President Ramnath Kovind during a ceremony ahead of the third Test.

"This stadium was the dream of the prime minister and he had during his stint as chief minister here floated the idea of building the world's largest stadium," Home Minister Amit Shah said at the event. The US\$100mn, perfectly round venue, with seats in the blue and saffron of the Indian team, promises unobstructed views from every angle. It eclipses the 100,000-seat MCG in Australia, which dates back to 1853.

President Kovind said the stadium will be just one part of a Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave that will house amenities for 33 Olympic sports. The former Motera stadium was inaugurated as the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Cricket Stadium by Modi in February 2020.

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

BAYERN ROUT LAZIO

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

LAST-16: FIRST-LEG

Rome, Italy - Holders Bayern Munich brushed off their recent poor domestic form by throwing down a Champions League marker with an emphatic 4-1 win at Lazio in Tuesday's last-16 first-leg to take a 'huge step' towards the quarterfinals.

Robert Lewandowski gave Bayern an early lead before 17 year old Jamal Musiala scored his first Champions League goal on only his fourth appearance in Europe. Stuttgart-born Musiala, who turns 18 Friday, is now the youngest English goalscorer in Champions League history.

A Leroy Sane strike gave Bayern a three-goal half-time cushion at the Stadio Olimpico before Francesco Acerbi scored an own goal just after the break.

"We are a huge step closer to the quarterfinals," Bayern coach Hansi Flick told Sky.

Joaquin Correa pulled a goal back early in the second half to give the scoreline some respectability for Lazio. "We were aggressive from the start and went full throttle," Bayern midfielder Leon Goretzka said after his first appearance since testing positive for COVID-19.

Simone Inzaghi's Lazio need a near miracle in the return game in Munich on March 17 to reach the last-eight.

"Bayern are the world champions," said Inzaghi. "They definitely did not need our mistakes to make it even easier for them."

Flick pulled a surprise by starting Musiala in place of Thomas Mueller, who was sidelined after testing positive for COVID-19.

Despite dropping five points in the Bundesliga last week and bringing a depleted squad to



Bayern Munich's Jamal Musiala celebrates after scoring against Lazio during their Champions League last-16 first-leg match in Rome on Tuesday

Rome, Bayern needed less than nine minutes before Lewandowski pounced on a mistake in the Lazio defence. The Poland star snapped up a weak back-pass by Mateo Musacchio - who was subbed off soon after - to dribble around Lazio's veteran goalkeeper Pepe Reina and fire into an empty net.

It was Lewandowski's 72nd Champions League goal, taking him solo third on the all-time list ahead of Real Madrid great Raul.

Musiala then showed maturity beyond his years to calmly drill past Reina to make it 2-0 on 24 minutes.

The lead was extended just before half-time when Kingsley

Musiala opts for Germany seniors

Berlin, Germany - Less than 24 hours after becoming the youngest Bayern Munich player to score in the Champions League, England U21 midfielder Jamal Musiala confirmed on Wednesday he will switch allegiances to play senior football for Germany.

Musiala has dual nationality and, at 17 years, 363

days the Stuttgart-born also qualified for England having moved to London as a child and came through the Chelsea academy before joining Bayern in 2019.

He made his England U21 debut last November, but has decided to shun The Three Lions and play senior football for Germany.

AFP

Coman's shot was parried and Sane tapped in the rebound.

There were two goals in the

space of three minutes just after the break, with Acerbi turning the ball into his own net as

Bayern counter-attacked from a Lazio corner.

Lazio were in danger of matching their heaviest home defeat in Europe having lost 4-0 to Chelsea in the 2003-04 group stage.

But Bayern's defence has often crumbled in recent weeks and Lazio forward Correa took advantage of poor marking to fire past Manuel Neuer in the 49th minute.

Bayern are now unbeaten in their last 18 Champions League games, with only a 1-1 group stage draw at Atletico Madrid last December denying them a perfect record of wins.

AFP



Chelsea's Olivier Giroud (C) celebrates after scoring against Atletico Madrid in Bucharest, Romania, on Tuesday

Giroud overhead kick gives Chelsea edge over Atletico

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

LAST-16: FIRST-LEG

Bucharest, Romania - Olivier Giroud's magnificent bicycle kick broke Atletico Madrid's resistance and earned Chelsea a crucial away goal on Tuesday, a 1-0 victory giving Thomas Tuchel's side a slender advantage in the Champions League last-16.

Giroud's acrobatic strike was initially ruled out for offside but stood after VAR showed Mario Hermoso had got the final touch, delivering a huge blow to Atletico's hopes of reaching the quarterfinals. "I didn't know what to think about the goal, I just focused on hitting the ball," said Giroud. "I love an overhead kick and I was just pleased to see the ball hit the back of the net. I had no clue about being offside or not."

Diego Simeone's side had put on a typically disciplined defensive performance until that point but Giroud's moment of genius means they will have to score in London on March 17 if they are to avoid an early exit. It also continues a worrying dip for Atletico, whose lead in La Liga is also under threat after one win in four matches.

"If you'd said to me in September we'd lose this first-leg 1-0 and be top of the league, I'd have signed for that for sure," said Simeone.

"The results aren't going for us so we have to work, work, work and work."

Giroud's goal in the 68th minute was only the third Atletico have conceded in 14

home legs of the Champions League knockout stages under Simeone, even if this fixture was at home only in name.

Restrictions imposed by the Spanish government meant the game had to be played in Bucharest instead of Madrid, despite the return match remaining at Stamford Bridge in three weeks' time.

Tuchel admitted the switch gave his side an advantage but Simeone refused to complain on Monday, insisting he felt fortunate to play during the pandemic, 'however and wherever that might be'.

Their defeat makes it three home losses out of three for Spain's teams in the Champions League last-16 so far, after Barcelona were thrashed by Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Sevilla were beaten by Borussia Dortmund last week.

The game looked destined to finish goalless only for Atletico to briefly lose shape, allowing the instinctive Giroud to take advantage.

Alonso had raced away from Marcos Llorente down the left and his cross was diverted backwards to Giroud, who brilliantly bicycle-kicked into the corner, but looked offside, only for the replay to show it was Atletico's Hermoso who had given him the assist. The goal stood and Chelsea's players celebrated, seemingly as surprised as anyone and delighted with a precious advantage.

AFP

Australia and Qatar pull out of 2021 Copa America

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Australia and Qatar have pulled out of the 2021 Copa America starting in June, South American football's governing body CONMEBOL said on Tuesday.

CONMEBOL's deputy general secretary Gonzalo Belloso said that the two members of the Asian Football Confederation

(AFC) would not be able to participate due to a clash with World Cup qualifying dates.

"The Copa America is absolutely going ahead. But Qatar and Australia, who had asked to take part, will not be able to come," Belloso told Argentine radio *La Red*. "The Asian confederation has programmed World

Cup qualification on the same dates as the Copa."

The news was confirmed by both the Australian and Qatari football federations. "It is with great disappointment that Australia cannot feature at the Copa America in 2021," said Football Australia CEO James Johnson.

Although Qatar are hosting

the 2022 World Cup, they're taking part in the preliminary campaign because it is doubling up as qualification for the 2023 Asian Cup in China. The AFC has scheduled qualification matches for June 11 and 15.

The Copa, which was postponed last year due to the coronavirus pandemic, begins on

June 11 and will be played in Argentina and Colombia. "This decision not to play Copa America has been made after the AFC decided to postpone the joint qualifiers' dates for the AFC Asian Cup 2023 and FIFA 2022 World Cup," said the Qatari association in a statement.

AFP

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Lennon quits as Celtic manager

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Glasgow, UK - Neil Lennon resigned as Celtic manager on Wednesday with the Scottish Premiership club 18 points behind bitter rivals Rangers in their bid to win a historic tenth consecutive league title.

The Northern Irishman took charge for a second spell in February 2019 and led the club to two league titles, two Scottish Cups and a League Cup.

"Celtic Football Club today announced that Neil Lennon has resigned from his position as football manager with immediate effect," said a club statement.

"Neil has served the club with distinction as both player and manager, delivering numerous successes, most recently completing the domestic treble in December."

Lennon, 49, said in the statement he had worked hard but had been unable to turn the club's fortunes around.

"We have experienced a difficult season due to so many factors and, of course, it is very frustrating and disappointing that we have not been able to hit



Neil Lennon

the same heights as we did previously," he added.

Assistant manager John Kennedy will take interim charge of the team until a permanent successor is appointed.

Lennon, who won ten league titles with Celtic as a player and manager, stepped in two years ago initially on a temporary basis when fellow Northern Irishman Brendan Rodgers left to take charge of Premier League side Leicester. He saw Celtic over the line in the league and won the Scottish Cup to complete a third consecutive treble of domestic trophies.

AFP



Leeds's Patrick Bamford (C) celebrates after scoring against Saints on Tuesday

Leeds down Saints

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Leeds, UK - Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl branded his side's second-half performance a disaster as Leeds ran riot thanks to goals from Patrick Bamford, Stuart Dallas and Raphinha for a 3-0 win on Tuesday that took them into the top half of the English Premier League.

After topping the table earlier in the season, Saints are not yet safe as they have taken just one point from their last eight league games.

Bamford continued his excellent season with a calm finish from Tyler Roberts' pass two minutes into the second period for his 13th goal of the season.

A typically energetic counter-attack killed the game off 12 minutes from time.

Raphinha's run distracted the Southampton defence to create the space for Dallas to fire home Helder Costa's pass from the edge of the area.

When Costa was then taken down on another dangerous break six minutes later, Raphinha dispatched the resulting free-kick low into McCarthy's right-hand post to round off a brilliant individual display with a goal.

Victory takes Leeds above Arsenal in the table and to within five points of sixth-placed Liverpool. Southampton remain in 14th.

AFP