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BAIDA IN WORLD TRIATHLON COMMITTEE

GO TO PAGE 12 SPORTS



Annual increment for state employees set at 50% to 100% in 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Finance issued a circular on Monday approving the disbursement of annual periodic increments for state employees for the year 2021.

The circular stated that the ministry aims to spare the lower income groups from the effects that may result from some of the measures taken by the government in light of the financial and economic situation the sultanate is going through.

'One hundred per cent disbursement will be issued to employees whose total monthly salary is less than RO900 and 50 per cent for employees whose total monthly salary is RO900 or more,' the circular said.

According to the Government Communication Centre (GCC), the circular is for periodic increments rather than increase of salaries. "This is only for one-time annual periodic increment



This is only for one-time annual periodic increment for the year 2021. In the previous years, the percentage was the same for all employees

GCC OFFICIAL

for the year 2021. In the previous years, the percentage was the same for all employees," a GCC official said.

The decision applies to all

government ministries, civil, military and security government units, public bodies and institutions, and government companies for the year 2021.

RO50,000 to refurbish 27 homes of orphans

Charity drive to raise the funds launched in Nov 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A charity has started refurbishing 27 homes of orphans in Dhofar. Bahja Omani Association for Orphans provides care and assistance to children in and outside its orphanages through several programmes.

The association launched a campaign in November to raise RO50,000 to refurbish homes of orphans which it accomplished within ten days.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Abdul Salem al Yafei, vice chairman and founder, informed that the Bahja Omani Association for Orphans is classified as a non-governmental charity for orphans and was established in 2014 in accordance with Ministerial Decision No 14/2000.

"We aim to exert all efforts needed to ensure comprehensive support and care for orphaned children. We have developed a number of programmes to this end, including one for integration of the children into society to ensure they are equal to their peers. We give the children access to all types of care, including monthly financial support, moral support, health-



care, education and social support. We are currently opening branches of the association in the other governorates of the sultanate."

The association launched an initiative called Baraka in August 2020, which aims to promote social solidarity with the participation of shops wherein 100b from each sale goes to orphan care. "We have the support of 139 shops so far. The association, in cooperation with some schools, has also distributed computers to families of orphans

and families with limited income to help children learn remotely," Yafei said.

"We have received financial support from many people and private sector companies. We seek cooperation with other volunteer teams and communities in Dhofar to help poor families and are grateful to the businessmen and private and government institutions for their support."

The association can be contacted on 23289966/92877577 or emailed at bahjah1.omani@gmail.com

Time to restructure and rationalise



In an exclusive interview with Muscat Daily, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, talks about the sultanate's priorities locally as well as globally in 2021. He also spoke on how the COVID-19 pandemic is going to affect Oman and the measures the country has taken to tackle the crisis

What would you say are the government's main priorities in the year ahead?

At a recent cabinet meeting, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave his endorsement for the implementation of Oman Vision 2040, which represents a framework for national development beginning in 2021.

This framework is underpinned by the measures the sultanate is putting in place to ensure appropriate fiscal balance. These measures are designed to rationalise public expenditure as a way of establishing the national economy on a new footing, in which the role of citizens in contributing to future development will be more central. This will involve a gradual step-by-step process of structural changes, in which some longstanding features of the national economy, such as subsidies will be phased out and new features - like personal taxation - will be introduced. Pensions will be designed to make sure that everyone can be taken care of in their retirement at a cost which can be realistically supported.

At the heart of the economy there are two principles - that those most in need of support will always receive it, and that those most able to contribute should always do so. To that end, the sultanate will be establishing a comprehensive structure for social security, and designing personal taxation in such a way as to ensure that those who enjoy wealth and privilege are able to make their full contribution to the collective good.

As a crucial part of this process, there is a steady and strong on-going drive to improve efficiency and performance as well as accountability.

Everyone should take full advantage of the knowledge and expertise of citizens and their representatives in shaping policy for the future. This is a renewal of the principle and practice of shura upon which decision-making in Oman has always been based.

How will the pandemic affect Oman next year?

It is difficult to predict. It is great news that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has arrived and its gradual roll-out through next year will help protect the population and, I hope, bring the virus under increasingly effective control.

The economic impact will, of course, continue to be felt. But I am confident that the direction of economic policy already underway, as part of the sultanate's rebalancing drive, will also prove effective as a way of making sure that Oman emerges from this crisis without lasting damage to the national economy and the long-term livelihoods of citizens.

I wish to join you and everyone in our beloved country to pay tribute to those heroes who have contributed to the national effort to combat the virus - the medical professionals and health workers, teachers, cleaners, drivers, retail and hospitality staff, delivery personnel and everyone, including volunteers, who worked so hard and tirelessly, in stressful and challenging

conditions. We salute you and owe you our heartfelt thanks.

What are the priorities for the Foreign Ministry?

The ministry is reviewing its structure as part of the government's restructuring process I referred to earlier. The goal is to ensure that the Foreign Ministry can make a dynamic contribution to economic policy, by supporting trade, investment opportunities, and cooperation with our regional and international partners. This is, of course, in line with the continuous development of relationships and in line with the requirements of strengthening the foundations of security, stability, peace and prosperity.

We must be optimistic about the new year, hoping that there will be some positive progress on many issues and challenges. In particular, we hope that the upcoming Gulf summit will witness a breakthrough in the rift between some countries and a renewed momentum for Gulf cooperation.

We are also hopeful of seeing the USA return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This would be a major step in support of regional and international security and stability.

We are looking forward to working with the new administration- the USA is one of Oman's best friends, and the opportunity to develop new shared approaches to international and regional problems is hugely welcome.

Muscat book fair likely to be postponed

Muscat - The 26th edition of Muscat International Book Fair is likely to be postponed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

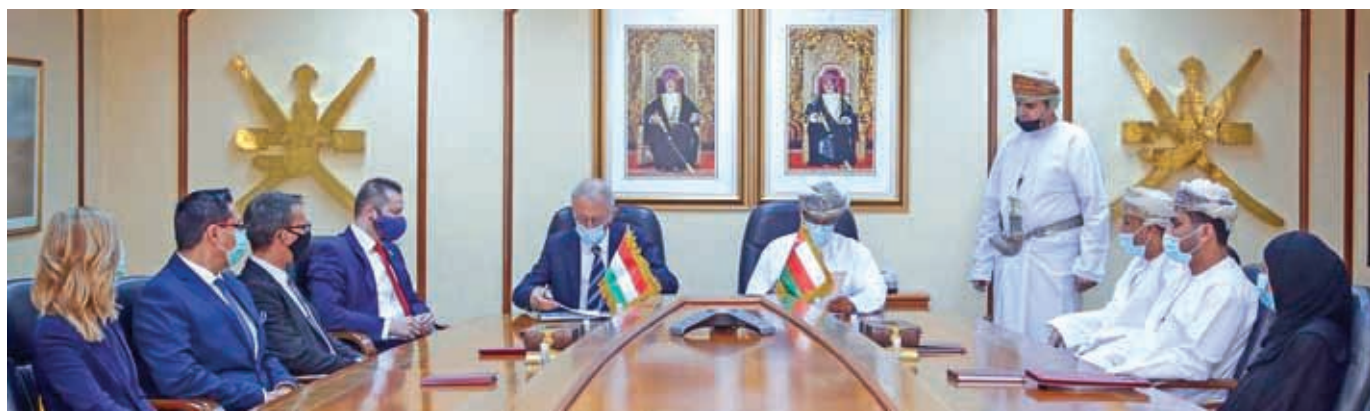
H E Saeed bin Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Culture in the Ministry of Culture,

Sports and Youth, said that the main committee has not convened so far. He added that whether to hold the book fair at its regular time is still under consideration by the Supreme Committee dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic taking

into consideration aviation and cargo movement as well as the available mechanisms for receiving visitors at the book fair.

However, it is likely to be postponed taking people's safety as priority.

Oman, Hungary ink agreement on enhancing economic cooperation



Muscat - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, signed an agreement with Hungary on Monday to enhance bilateral economic ties.

The agreement aims at promoting economic and technical cooperation between the public and private sectors in both coun-

tries, as well as establishing long-term economic relations and finding a conducive investment climate for the two sides.

The agreement includes forming a joint committee to foster diversification of economic cooperation in the fields of industry, energy, transport, communications, scientific research,

logistic services, tourism, agriculture, environment and health.

Further, the agreement encourages the exchange and training of specialists, scientists, technicians and students, besides enhancing cooperation among government institutions, business communities, and commerce and industry chambers.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the sultanate's government by H E Dr Saleh Said Mas-san, Commerce and Industry Undersecretary, whilst it was signed from the Hungarian side by H E Dr Tibor Szatmari, Ambassador of Hungary to the sultanate.

ONA



Omani-Belarus Friendship Group discusses work plan

Muscat - The Omani-Belarus Parliamentary Friendship Group held its first meeting for the second annual session of the seventh term, headed by Hon Dr Said bin Mubarak al Muharrami, in the presence of the group's members.

The agenda included discussing the committee's work plan for the second annual session of the seventh term, review-

ing the work system of friendship committees and their terms of reference, in addition to the report on bilateral relations between the sultanate and Belarus.

The group also reviewed a number of messages received, and the new work listed on its agenda, and appropriate decisions were taken in their regard.

It is worth noting that the parliamentary friendship groups

formed by the State Council in cooperation with Majlis A'Shura with a number of counterparts in brotherly and friendly countries play an important role in consolidating the relations of the Council of Oman with these councils. They also enable the exchange of information and experiences in a way that strengthens the sultanate's relations with these countries.

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Call for urgent donation of A negative blood



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) has appealed to community members of blood type A - to donate urgently at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher.

DBBS said in a statement, 'Due to low level of stock of blood group A-, we appeal to the

holders of this type to rush to donate blood at the Blood Bank in Bausher.'

The department also called for donation of other types of blood groups due to shortage of donors.

The blood donation time at the Central Blood Bank is from 8am to 8pm. The blood bank can be reached at 94555648.

Four arrested for massive forgery, embezzlement

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested four people on charges of forgery and embezzlement after a bank in Oman recently reported about the incident.

'The Economic Crime Control Department of the General Department of Criminal Investigations and Inquiry at ROP has arrested four people on charges of forgery and embezzlement of large sums of money, after a bank submitted a report about the incident,' stated ROP.

The ROP did not name the bank, but Oman Arab Bank notified Muscat Securities Market

(MSM) on December 22 that it had been hit by an embezzlement to the tune of RO6mn. The bank said it had filed a complaint with ROP, while reassuring its customers that 'this occurrence will not have any impact on them'.

In a disclosure on MSM, the bank stated, 'In furtherance to Article 291 and subsequent articles of Capital Market Executive Regulation issued by virtue of Capital Market Authority Decision No 1/2009 as amended, the bank hereby states that it has filed a criminal complaint at Royal Oman Police for suspicion of forgery and embezzlement of approximately RO6,000,000.'

Book documents five decades of RNO growth

Muscat - The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) recently published a book titled *RNO in Five Decades* which documents major historical events of the sultanate's Blessed Renaissance.

The book features 50 years of national action based on proper planning, armament and training that saw the evolution of the Omani navy into an advanced sea force that keeps abreast of modern day developments and has high capabilities, both in preparedness and equipment.

The RNO's growth, as detailed in the book, was envisaged by the Late Sultan Qaboos to realise the navy's ability to efficiently carry out its tremendous



national missions and duties.

The RNO book has been issued to mark the 50th anniversary of the Blessed Renaissance and in celebration of the Armed Forces Day. It narrates the progress made by the RNO until it developed into a fleet capable of restoring Omani naval glories.

ONA

Proceeds from Maqbool al Saleh's book sales donated to Dar al Atta'a

Muscat - Prominent corporate leader Maqbool al Saleh has donated RO5,000 to Dar al Atta'a in support of the charity's work in the community. With the release of his memoirs *A Long Walk - Memories of Life* in November, Maqbool had pledged to donate all proceeds from his book sales to charity in dedication to Oman's 50th year of the renaissance. This is the first of more donations that he expects to make to society.

Handing over the donation to Hon Maryam al Zadjali, chairperson of Dar al Atta'a, Saleh said, "I am delighted to present this donation to Dar al Atta'a, a voluntary organisation that is dedicated to the community providing the less privileged in society with basics that secure them a decent living. I appreciate their good work, and wish them well in their noble efforts. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have bought the book. I hope you have enjoyed reading and sharing my experiences and thoughts."



Receiving the donation, Hon Maryam said, "We express our thanks and appreciation to Saleh for his contribution. His life's work has been encapsulated in his memoirs, and that he has chosen to donate the proceeds

to charity is humbling and remarkable. Dar al Atta'a celebrates our association with Saleh and we wish him the very best." *A Long Walk - Memories of Life* presents a personal account of Saleh's long and inspiring journey

from humble beginnings to success, recounting a multitude of interesting experiences and defining moments that shaped his life through a long journey. The book is available at leading bookstores across Oman, in-

cluding Borders, WH Smith, Al Fair/Spinneys Supermarkets, and Souq of Oman at Muscat International Airport, priced RO10. Available in Arabic and English, all proceeds from sales will be donated to charity.



SQU honours scientists for their world recognition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) honoured scientists, who were counted among the top two per cent of scholars in a global list compiled by Stanford University, on Monday.

The ceremony was held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al Said, vice-chancellor of SQU.

The US-based Stanford University, in association with the publishing house Elsevier and SciTech Strategies, recently released the list of the top two per cent of the most-cited scholars (1,59,683) in various disciplines for 2019.

Forty-three scientists from the sultanate, including 23 from SQU

- five of whom are Omanis, have appeared on the coveted list.

The Omani scholars are Prof Dr Yahya bin Mansour al Wahabi, energy and chemical engineering; Prof Dr Sabah bint Ahmed al Sulaiman, environmental sciences; Prof Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saadi, botany and biology; Prof Dr Samir bin Hamad al Adawi, neurology; and Dr Mohammed bin Hamdan al Badi, energy sciences. This recognition reflects the quality of the scientific outputs from SQU and their use as reference across the world, the university stated.

Statistics indicate that the number of scientific publications from SQU has increased by 12.7 per cent in the past five years (2015-2019).

PIPELINE BURST IN AMERAT



A water pipeline burst near Amerat roundabout on Monday creating a pool of water. The waterflow caused a minor traffic congestion on the adjacent road (Muscat Daily)

Oman Met allays fears of tsunami

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A 5.3 magnitude earthquake was reported in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Salalah on Monday morning, triggering concerns of a tsunami.

'An earthquake of 5.3 magnitude in the Arabian Sea at 9.46am MCT was recorded at a depth of 10km. The earthquake was recorded 415km away from Salalah,' the Earthquake Monitoring Centre (EMC) at Sultan Qaboos University stated.

Oman Meteorology played down the fear stating, 'There is no potential of a tsunami due to the earthquake in the Arabian Sea.'

Oman Air, Qatar Airways ink code-share deal

Muscat - Oman Air has announced an expanded code-share cooperation with Qatar Airways that will boost connectivity and provide more flexible travel options for both airlines' customers.

The agreement is the first step in further strengthening strategic cooperation between the two airlines that first began in 2000. Sales of the additional destinations will commence in 2021.

Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, CEO of Oman Air, said, "We are delighted to expand our commercial cooperation with Qatar Airways. It will streamline flying for leisure travellers from around the world to enjoy Oman's cul-

ture, scenic beauty and hospitality, and facilitate travel for those who visit the sultanate for the fast-growing business opportunities across a diverse range of sectors. The expansion of our code-share agreement is just the first step, and we look forward to working with Qatar Airways to further strengthen our strategic partnership to enhance the business and leisure travel experience for our customers in Oman and throughout the world."

Akbar al Baker, group chief executive, Qatar Airways, said, "We are pleased to expand our code-share cooperation with Oman Air, one of the leading airlines in the Gulf region."

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The Ministry of Health's directorates in different governorates witnessed a flurry of activity on Monday as they administered the vaccine against COVID-19 to the most vulnerable category of people as identified by the ministry (Supplied photo)

91 new COVID-19 cases reported on Monday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday announced 91 new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), taking the total to 128,563.

There were no fatalities, while there were 206 recoveries on the day.

'The number of recoveries has increased to 121,182, while the number of deaths has reached 1,495,' an MoH statement said, adding that the rate of recovery is now 94.2 per cent.

As of Monday, a total of 86 patients were admitted in health institutions, including 37 in ICUs.

MoH calls upon all to adhere to the isolation procedures by staying in an isolated room with an attached toilet and serving the isolated person from outside the

CASES FROM DEC 22 TO DEC 28	
Dec 22	212
Dec 23	93
Dec 24	54
Dec 25 to 27 (Average of 60)	182
Dec 28	91

room. It said that social distancing helps curb the spread of the virus. MoH advises all citizens and residents to continue washing hands with water and soap, avoid touching the face, nose, mouth and eyes, and follow healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

Linguistic Heritage project funds three research studies

Muscat - The 'Linguistic Heritage' project, a landmark project aimed at recording, preserving and classifying oral linguistic material, as well as collecting archaeological linguistic writings on gravestones, rock walls and ancient inscriptions, is progressing well, according to the authorities involved in the programme.

It is considered one of the important projects in the Omani Cultural Heritage Strategic Research Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, being carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth. The linguistic phenomenon in Oman, with its richness and diversity, is an essential part of the culture and heritage of the country, as seen in its proverbs, poems, coined expressions and other ancient linguistic materials.

The project aims to record, transcribe and preserve linguistic texts before they disappear. It also seeks to support and encourage researchers interested in this type of studies and provide them with appropriate directions, in addition to enriching and revitalising language studies in the sultanate.

The project has funded three research studies:

Inventorying and documenting inscriptions, drawings and archaeological writings on rock walls, tombstones and building walls in the wilayat of Amerat

Dr Saif bin Yousef al Aghbari, head of the research project team, stated that the idea of the project started by searching for the beginnings of writing in Omani civilisation, which began with rock drawings, then evolved into inscriptions and symbols, and then into the current Arabic writing, and counting these discoveries, collecting and documenting them in accordance to the scientific classifications used in such studies.

"Its importance is evident in



(Supplied photos)

its historical value in terms of identifying the historical depth and the civilisational and cultural connotations of this region of Oman, as it reflects many aspects of the political, religious, economic, social and environmental life that the region lived through the different time periods," he said.

The project specifically focused on covering inscriptions, drawings and archaeological writings that are found in many sites in Amerat, such as Wadi al Meh, Wadi Adai, Wadi Sarin and other valleys due to the lack of documentation and research in these areas. Dr Aghbari maintained that the project is expected to achieve a set of results, such as providing the geographic and astronomical identification of sites that include archaeological drawings on rock walls in

Amerat as well as providing their descriptive data and documenting them.

Documentary research of the Kuzari language spoken vernacularly in the sultanate

Dr Dola al Gady, head of the research project team, explained that this project is considered the first study that takes a scientific approach to archiving and documenting the Kuzari language by a team consisting of academic researchers specialising in linguistic studies, in addition to involving individuals from the same language community and speakers of both Kuzari and Arabic languages.

The project idea is to document the Kuzari language spoken in Oman in the form of an electronic archive that includes various referred language mate-

The research will reflect the richness of Omani culture and enhance scientific diversity in the fields of Omani language and literature

DR DOLA AL GADY

rials (text, audio and visual) in order to make them available to the community, specialists and researchers for research purposes and to learn about this language and the culture behind it.

The importance of this research project also stems from the fact that it contributes to preserving knowledge related to spoken languages that can disappear in the sultanate, and are considered an invaluable intangible cultural heritage in Oman.

"The research will reflect the richness of Omani culture and enhance scientific diversity in the fields of Omani language and literature. It will also encourage specialists to document and publish stories and various forms of oral literature and children's stories, which will ensure the continuity of these languages for future generations and the

preservation of the cultural and literary diversity in the sultanate," she said.

Dr Dola added that this research project will produce a specific dictionary that includes at least 4,000 terms written in both English and Arabic. The vocabulary will be classified according to topics related to the geographical location, life and cultural aspects of Kuzari speakers.

Agricultural terms in the dialect of the people of Rustaq: A lexical study

Dr Zahir bin Marhoon al Dawoodi, head of the research project team, stated that the project traces agricultural expressions and studies them as a lexical study in the dialect of the people of Rustaq due to the city's interest in agriculture, diversity of its agricultural crops, and diversity of its agricultural and animal imports since ancient times.

He elaborated that the civilisational, urban and technological developments of recent times have contributed in the disappearance of traditional terms and idioms in agriculture. The project, therefore, seeks to trace these expressions and to frame them in a specific dictionary that deals with agricultural expressions in all their aspects in order to preserve them from being lost.

The Linguistic Heritage project stems from its importance in contributing to the preservation of the Omani linguistic heritage related to dialects, spoken colloquial languages and ancient writings. It also seeks to provide recorded and classified linguistic materials on them in order to preserve the archaeological linguistic writings from extinction, and contribute to the promotion of linguistic and dialectal studies, and to open the horizons for investing the linguistic heritage related to dialects and linguistic varieties in the sultanate in sustainable development and in strengthening the economy.

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Oman marks International Disabilities Day



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) on Monday.

The event was held under the auspices of H E Dr Mahad Said Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour,

and in the presence of H E Laila bint Ahmed bin Awadh al Najar, Minister Social development.

Hamoud al Shabibi, director general of Persons with Disabilities Affairs, in a speech said, "The theme of this year's IDPD is 'Building Back Better: Towards a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 World.' It is due to the outbreak

of the pandemic which has affected various aspects of people's lives in general and persons with disabilities in particular as they are more vulnerable to being impacted by this virus owing to many social and environmental barriers."

He added, "They are also vulnerable because of the closure of social and rehabilitative services

and the failure to provide them with information in an easily accessible way. Besides the health conditions of severely and multi-disabled people who are also vulnerable to infection with the virus due to their weak immunity, they also face difficulty in terms of applying the necessary physical distancing."

He said that the sultanate has taken a set of preventive measures at the national level to limit the spread of the virus among persons with disabilities, such as suspending schooling and rehabilitation programmes in governmental, and private rehabilitation centres, and translating awareness programmes and the official statements in sign language.

At the end of the ceremony, H E Dr Ba'owain honoured a few outstanding persons with disabilities for volunteering, sports, media, poetry, acting, and managing special projects, in addition to honouring retired people working in the field of disability.

New entry requirements to sultanate as travel resumes

Muscat - Pursuant to the decision of the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19, the suspension of departure from and entry into the sultanate (by air, land, or sea) was lifted from 12am on Tuesday.

Henceforth, all travellers to Oman from any country are required to have a certified negative result of a PCR test conducted within 72 hours of the scheduled departure to the sultanate.

The new entry requirements came after the resumption of commercial international flights to and from the sultanate from October 1. Since then, Oman Airports has continued to update its precautionary and preventive measures to ensure compliance with the decisions of the local competent authorities, while ensuring the general safety and health of passengers, employees, and users of its airports.



Oman Airports COVID-19 travel guidelines

- All travellers arriving in Oman are required to undergo a PCR test within 72 hours of their scheduled arrival and to present a certified medical certificate of a negative COVID-19 test result
- Travellers are required to pre-book the PCR test through <https://covid19.emushrif.om/traveler/travel>, pay RO25 test fee, and download the Tarrasud+ app prior to arrival
- All travellers arriving in Oman

from any country will be required to undergo another COVID-19 PCR test on arrival, wear the Tarrasud+ bracelet, and isolate for 7 days

- At the end of 7 days, travellers are required to undergo a new PCR test on the 8th day and if the test result is negative, the isolation period will end
- Test results will be available within 24 hours
- The test report can be viewed and printed electronically from <https://covid19.emushrif.om>
- Travellers arriving in Oman for a period shorter than 7 days are no longer exempt from the isolation requirements

- Airlines are required to ensure that all passengers adhere to the health requirements of the sultanate prior to departure
- GCC citizens, residents with valid residency permits, and travellers with a valid visa are allowed to enter the sultanate without prior approval
- All travellers arriving to the sultanate are required to have international health insurance covering the cost of COVID-19 treatment valid for one month, except for citizens, GCC nationals, and passengers with free treatment cards

- Children below 15 years old are exempt from the PCR test and Tarrasud+ bracelet requirements
- Diplomats working at foreign embassies accredited to the sultanate and diplomats visiting the sultanate are exempted from COVID-19 PCR test. Tarrasud+ and the bracelet, however, are subject to a seven-day quarantine
- Aircraft crew are exempt from the PCR test, Tarrasud+ bracelet requirements, the isolation requirements, and are subject to the precautionary measures issued by the Ministry of Health

MoH undersecretary visits South Sharqiyah health institutions

Muscat - The Ministry of Health's Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs H E Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi on Sunday visited a number of health institutions in South Sharqiyah governorate to follow up on the work progress in those institutions.

H E Dr Fatma's visit included Sur Health Polyclinic, Sur Specialised Diabetic Centre, Sur

Health Centre, Jalaan Bani Bu Ali Hospital, as well as a number of health institutions in the wilayat of Jalaan Bani Bu Ali.

She met the administrators and health workers of those institutions and urged them to make every effort to provide the necessary health services. Furthermore, she visited a number of under-construction health projects in the governorate to view the work progress.

In addition, she paid a visit to the Directorate General of Health Services of South Sharqiyah governorate and met the director general and other directors. The meeting addressed a number of issues to improve healthcare in the governorate.

The undersecretary was accompanied by Dr Khalid bin Said al Sadi, director general of Health Services of South Sharqiyah, and a number of senior officials.

NBC signs incubation pact with local skincare and fashion platform

Muscat - The National Business Centre (NBC), which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, has signed an incubation agreement with Keatha Platform - an online platform that displays local and international beauty, skincare, perfume and fashion products.

Managed by Omani cadres, the platform features products of emerging Omani companies with the same concept of products that are displayed by Keatha.

Rahma al Habsi, owner of Keatha, said that the project aims at creating a healthy lifestyle for users of the featured products and showcasing the trends in the skincare and fashion industry.



ion industry. Keatha also plans to hold training courses and live sessions with professionals from the industry.

NBC is an initiative launched by Madayn at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) to offer promising Omani entrepreneurs a platform to develop their business ideas and advance them into growing ventures.

The centre offers a premier platform for Omani entrepreneurs by providing business development support and guidance, training and mentoring, access to markets and industry experts, and state-of-the-art and fully equipped office space, meeting rooms and presentation facilities.

ELECTRONIC TENDER (S)

Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tenders

TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	GRADE	LAST DATE FOR BUYING	SUBMISSION DATE	TENDER PRICE R.O.
90/2020	NEW OUTGOING 11KV FEEDER, S FROM ASWAD PSS AT SHINAS IN NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	C	4/1/2021	12/1/2021	144 /=
91/2020	NEW OUTGOING 11KV FEEDER, S FROM AL KHUWAIIR PSS PHASE 2 AT SOHAR IN NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	C	4/1/2021	12/1/2021	102 /=
92/2020	REINFORCEMENT WORK AT VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN IBRI AREA AL DHAHIRAH GOVERNORATE	C	7/1/2021	19/1/2021	29 /=

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from E-Tendering Site <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee. The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in AL Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at Muscat in Al Mubailah -opposite to the industrial Area beside to Bank Suhar ,before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

The Completed signed and sealed commercial and technical offer with all tender documents should be submitted and uploaded online into the above mentioned E-Tendering website .The Hard copies of the tender document are not accepted.

For more information please contact Tel no.:24051501- 26944266
For any technical assistance please contact Helpdesk: +968-24166670
E-mail: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products & and have a High level percentage of Omanization.

The Company is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders.
"WITH ELECTRICITY WE PROGRESS PLEASE AVOID EXTRAVAGANCE IN CONSUMPTION"

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Al Jenaibi International Automobiles hosts iconic 2020 MINI City Rally



Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group in Oman, hosted the 2020 MINI City Rally last Saturday, an event exclusively curated for MINI customers.

Guests were able to experience an adventurous urban drive through some of Muscat's most picturesque surroundings including an exhilarating treasure hunt and full day of team activities.

Starting at 9am at the Crown Plaza in Qurum, guests picked up tags, t-shirts, and car stickers, before posing for a group photo and receiving the flag off to start the rally.

With challenges set, teams were deployed on various missions.

In true MINI style, tasks were designed to not only test driver ability, but also their creativity, humour, and quick thinking.

The day then took a change of pace as guests enjoyed a well-earned break at the Sifawy Boutique Hotel.

After lunch, customers took part in more competitive activities including foot golf, beach volleyball, and tug-of-war, followed by an awards presentation where MINI enthusiasts took home several exciting prizes.

The award categories consisted of The Best Photo of MINI at an Iconic Place in Muscat, the Best Maintained MINI, the Best Modified MINI, the Vehicle to Reach the Final Destination with the Least Mileage and lastly, the most successful All Female Team.

Salim Sabbagh, acting CEO Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, said, "We were delighted to see so many customers enjoying a fantastic day out, ending the year in true MINI style."

He added, "MINI is such a creative and vibrant brand, and through this exciting event, our guests experienced the enjoyment of driving a MINI while immersing themselves in the brand ethos."

"We are proud to offer our Oman-based MINI enthusiasts a platform to come together."

OPPO eyes exciting launches in 2021

Global technology brand, OPPO, wraps up an impactful year 2020 with several achievements, launches and accolades under its belt. Looking forward to an exciting 2021, OPPO already has a lineup of products, technologies and corporate developments in the works.

New power-packed devices such as the new OPPO Reno5 series, with its upgraded design language and advanced camera capabilities, are not far away.

In addition, OPPO will be one of the first to release a flagship smartphone featuring the new Snapdragon 888 5G Mobile Platform on OPPO's next Find X series. The industry-leading chipset will bring further enhancement to 5G, imaging, AI, and gaming experiences on OPPO's upcoming Find X series flagship devices.

OPPO will continue to strengthen its collaborations with Qualcomm Technologies and other leading technology partners around the world to accelerate global 5G deployment and the elevation of 5G experiences in 2021.

OPPO's product innovations, in both smartphones and IoT products, have always been inspired by the importance of human values.

Staying true to the company's vision of building great products for people, OPPO's new theme 'Technology for Mankind, Kindness to the World' will see an expanded product offering that is centered on insights of users' actual needs.



Ethan Xue, president of OPPO in the Middle East and Africa said, "OPPO has had a challenging but successful 2020 and we intend to continue the success in the coming year. Despite the challenges of the global pandemic, we launched three new smartphone series by being agile, adaptive, and most importantly, staying close to our customers and prioritising their needs. We were able to mark several milestones during the year that are a testament to our success. Our new theme for 2021, 'Technology for Mankind, Kindness to the World', reminds us yet again that the purpose of corporate innovation is people. Guided by this belief, we will continue to build great products created with heart and soul for every consumer."

OPPO's success in 2020 was endorsed by industry accolades including the 'Consumer Tech Company of the Year' award at the 2020 Gulf Business Awards and the 'Marketing Game Changer' award by Campaign Middle East. March 2020 saw global football star, Mohamed Salah, become MEA brand ambassador for OPPO as a way of engaging with the brand's energetic and passion users.

With innovative smart devices and strategic vision, OPPO maintained its regional position in the top 5 smartphone brand list, supported with several regional launches including the flagship Find X2 Pro and designed Reno4 series.

Connect from anywhere with Ooredoo, data2cloud's Bridge

Enjoy enhanced communications and collaborations, anywhere and anytime, with Ooredoo and data2cloud's cloud-based video conferencing solution, Bridge. Powered by data2cloud, hosted in Oman and accredited by the authorities, Bridge offers cutting-edge technologies and a host of great service features for companies big and small, all at affordable prices.

Helping to transform the way businesses connect, especially when facing the challenges of remote working, Ooredoo continues to position itself as the sultanate's data experience leaders.

Sultan bin Ahmed al Wahaibi, chief business and wholesale officer at Ooredoo, said, "Adding to our growing portfolio for businesses, our new video conferencing solution enables employees to meet face to face at the touch of a button. Thanks to it being locally hosted in Oman, our clients get the benefits of fast, uninterrupted service, the highest level of security and the reassurance of official compliance, all in one handy package. So even if businesses continue to operate from home, we are here to help them create a more productive and personal meeting experience with every conversation."



Using Bridge Video Conferencing, business customers can efficiently work together using the latest technology to comment, share or ask questions, and make decisions in real-time.

To find out more about Bridge, or any of Ooredoo Business products and services, visit ooredoo.om/business.

Ford receives global corporate sustainability honours

Ford Motor Company was recognised for leadership in corporate sustainability by CDP, securing a place on the global environmental nonprofit group's prestigious 'A List' for tackling climate change and protecting water security.

Climate protection and water management are key parts of Ford's comprehensive approach to long-term sustainability and helping transition to a low-carbon economy. This is the second straight year Ford, one of 270 global companies named to the A List, has been recognised by CDP for climate-change efforts. Ford has received A's from CDP for water reduction for six years in a row and is one of only 106 companies globally to earn such an award for water security.

"We are making real progress in reducing our impact on the planet," said Bob Holycross, Ford's chief sustainability, environment and safety officer. "Our people, customers and investors expect us to do more around climate change and we are up to the challenge, because we know that what's good for the planet is



good for our business."

Ford is the only full-line US automaker that has committed to reduce CO₂ emissions in line with the Paris Agreement for climate change. Earlier this year the company announced it intends to achieve carbon neutrality globally no later than 2050, while setting urgent interim targets to address climate change. Ford also led the way in reaching a voluntary agreement with California to adopt meaningful greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

Ford is investing more than US\$11.5bn in electric vehicles through 2022. In 2017 Ford achieved its goal to reduce the company's global carbon dioxide emissions from manufacturing operations by 30 percent per vehicle produced by 2025, eight years early.

Since 2000, the company has worked to conserve water through its global water initiative and has reduced operational water use by 70 percent, saving more than 11bn gallons of water.

Ford continues to incorporate more water-efficient processes and technologies, with a long-term goal of using zero drinkable water in its vehicle manufacturing. For example, the company uses internally treated and externally sourced non-potable water at its Irapuato Transmission Plant in Mexico.

To learn more, visit sustainability.ford.com.



Catch final week of OSN Original 'Yalla Neta'sha, Come Dine With Me'

Week nine of the OSN Original production *Yalla Neta'sha, Come Dine With Me* was the most hilariously dramatic and eyebrow-raising week since launch, closing the first series of the season with a big bang. Viewers are in for a big surprise with more laughter, gossip, sarcasm and unfiltered commentary than ever, available now to watch on OSN Ya Hala Al Oula and the OSN Streaming app.

Viewers are in for a fiery episode as events got heated in this final week between the contestants as they battled it out for

the cash prize. The week began with an eclectic mix of contestants, including a Tunisian Happiness Coach, a Lebanese health freak, a Jordanian foodie, and an Emirati pilot caught in between the fiery three ladies.

This week of *Yalla Net'asha* brought together Salma from Tunis; Nariman from Jordan; Remy from Lebanon; and Faisal from the UAE.

On his turn to host, Captain Faisal took his guests on a culinary flight, with his cooking landing very smoothly with his tough and critical guests, satisfying

even the most difficult houseguest Remy. In this episode tension rose between Salma and Remy, keeping the guests and viewers on the edge of their seats.

In Nariman's turn, the food fanatic decided to confidently ignore her guest's very picky food requirements, and bring a secret recipe to the table, to ease the tension between Remy and Salma.

Finally, Remy saw her guests' revenge on her harsh and critical behaviour throughout the week as they gave her low scores and

marked her harshly on her hosting skills. Tensions run high over the course of the week as Nariman revealed sinister plans and guests had to put up with Salm and her terrible temper. Don't miss out on all the action, tune in and find out how the week's drama unfolds.

Narrated by Egyptian comedian Khalid Mansour, audiences can catch these uncompromising hilarious yet heartfelt moments and much more of the 45-episode Arabic series on OSN Ya Hala Al Oula and the OSN Streaming app.



Live true to yourself with Mazda MX-30 electric crossover

With an aim to get closer to people's lives and to provide them with creative time and space, so that they can live a life that is true to their natural self, Mazda created the MX-30, a machine with a challenging spirit and a natural feel to it.

'Living True To Yourself' is the motto on four wheels that is the Mazda MX-30 electric crossover. Right from the start, the development team behind the Mazda MX-30 wanted to create a car that would become a partner to its owner. A car that would appeal to the driver every time they get behind the wheel. Everything about the model, from the styling that associates with a sense of freedom, to the open-feeling cabin interiors that sets the mind free, the MX-30 is designed keeping the user in mind.

Despite being an electric crossover with an electric powertrain, the MX-30 promises to still offer that iconic Jinba Ittai principle of having car and driver as one.

The Mazda MX-30 program manager, Tomiko Takeuchi had this to say about the philosophy behind the new electric crossover, "For those who desire a life with things that soothe and please the spirit; for those who want to live positively, actively choosing possessions and experiences that, by their own standards, are a match for their lifestyle; for those with the wisdom and inventiveness to tackle problems facing people, society and the earth in their own style, without overextending them-



selfes; and for those who wish to create good times together with the people around them and with people from all over the world. For those customers, the Mazda MX-30 offers a creative time and space that will allow them to live true to their natural selves."

The relationship between the driver and the car has changed over time. Keeping this in mind, Mazda put forward a 'Human Modern' concept for the MX-30, so that people could express their joy with their cars.

Based on Mazda's emphasis on beautiful shape and craftsmanship created with human hands, the MX-30 explores a new direction that closely matches a modern lifestyle. The MX-30 comes with a unique design that embodies 'KODO' extension through an unprecedented approach to expression. With the MX-30, Mazda hopes to offer not only a new choice for customers but

also new life-enriching ways of using and spending time with and in the car.

In addition to the above-mentioned values, the adoption of the freestyle doors not only enhances functionality but opens up a wide range of new and creative uses for the MX-30. Mazda hopes that, in addition to enjoying the drive, customers will use the car creatively and make it truly their own.

For the interior, Mazda valued a sense of openness. The interior space gives drivers a sense of unity, and you can find Mazda's attachment to the environment, and to interior comfort and craftsmanship, through materials such as Heritage Cork. On top of this, the space created through opening the free-style doors gives a further open-feeling, to stimulate the senses of both the driver and passengers. The MX-30 production team created an open-feeling cabin interior and

paid attention in particular to selecting the right materials and showcasing them in ways that bring out their best features.

Heritage Cork used in the console tray is designed to emphasise the texture and visual warmth of the material. The door trim features a fibrous material with a texture that seems to contain air, creating a material-based sense of openness within the cabin. Both of these materials are designed to be low-impact and sustainable. The door trim uses fibres made from recycled plastic bottles and the cork is harvested from the bark of trees without felling. On the whole, the comfortable interiors of the MX-30 are composed of environmentally friendly materials.

Talking about the interiors, Tomiko said, "Because the cabin helps you feel focused and positive, you can feel the joy of driving fully, from the bottom of your heart. The car responds faithfully to your steering inputs, and the ride feel is comfortable not only for the driver but for the passengers as well. Even on routine commutes, one can enjoy a pure driving experience that will revitalize both mind and body."

Mazda has brought quality to the roads of Oman, and Towell Auto Centre (TAC) has made owning a Mazda an absolute joy, thanks to their excellent after-sales service, availability of genuine parts for all Mazda models, their efficient staff, amazing promotions and innovative solutions for a better customer experience.

To find out more you can log on to www.mazdaoman.com

Future pastry chefs honoured by French Dairy Board

CNIEL - The French Dairy Board and the European Union, have once again proved its commitment to supporting the next generation of pastry chefs in the Middle East through the organisation of the Cream Spirit competition, which saw Jordanian, Sanad Jaber crowned the winner.

The competition, held at the International Centre of Culinary Arts (ICCA) Dubai, forms an integral element of CNIEL's commitment to training, educating, and teaching aspiring young and future pastry chefs in the GCC. As part of the campaign, they had the opportunity to learn from one of the world's foremost pastry chefs, Claire Heitzler, a protégé of the legendary chef Alain Ducasse.

Under the specialist eye of Chef Claire, and renowned Dubai-based pastry experts, brothers Chef Wassim and Chef Omar Orfali, the young chefs were challenged to take the classic French cream pastry, Saint Honoré, and add a modern twist.

A total of 11 budding pastry chefs from countries including the UAE, Jordan, Morocco, and India took part in the competition. Joining Jaber on the 'top table' were Intissar el Soussi from Morocco, and Sudhakshina Iyer from India.

Laurent Damiens, director, CNIEL, said, "Despite the difficul-



ties of the past year, we are committed to providing young chefs and future professionals with the opportunity to challenge themselves and learn from some of the best in the business."

"Every year, we are blown away by the talent from the region, and this year was no different. The creativity, taste, and presentation of what we have seen has been extraordinary," he added.

The competition was judged by Chef Claire Heitzler; Chef Mohamed Orfali, founder of Orfali Bros; social media influencer Samantha Wood, creator of Foodiva; food influencer Homan Asayo; ICCA course director

Shanaaz Rajaas; and Laurent Damiens.

As part of the competition, all aspiring chefs were treated to a demonstration by Chef Claire, who showcased her skills when making a Mont-Blanc, a classic of French pastry.

This was followed by a Q&A session where all competing chefs had the opportunity to learn more from Chef Claire and brothers Chef Wassim and Omar Orfali.

Concluding the day, a roundtable discussion was held to review the pastry industry with topics including sustainability, zero-waste, origin, and quality all discussed during the session.

The Green Planet welcomes 2021 by hosting special dinner

Bring in 2021 in style as The Green Planet prepares to host its spectacular Tropical New Year's 21' Dinner on December 31 between 7.30pm-1.30am. The incredible evening will give the guests the chance to experience once in a lifetime animal encounters, delicious all-inclusive food and beverages, and exclusive entry to Dubai's only indoor rainforest between 7.30pm-9.30pm.

The perfect way to celebrate with the whole family, guests can expect unlimited access to a mouthwatering BBQ buffet between 8pm-12am and feast on succulent burgers and delicious chicken, whilst enjoying a selection of premium beverages from 9pm onwards.

This phenomenal feast will be served at The Green Planet Rainforest Cafe purposely set up for the occasion, making it the most ideal and cosy setting for families or couples this New Year's Eve.

Over the course of this memorable evening, a DJ will be liven-



ing the atmosphere with a selection of crowd-pleasing beats, keeping guests thoroughly entertained until the clock strikes midnight.

Attendees will be able to take in breathtaking views of Burj Khalifa's stunning display of fireworks and enter 2021 in the most magical way.

Ticket prices will start at AED100 per child and AED250 per person, including soft drinks

and juices.

Guests can also opt for the AED450 package, comprising of unlimited house pouring beverages.

The Green Planet's Tropical New Year's 21' Dinner will have a maximum capacity of 150 people; therefore, we encourage you to book now to avoid disappointment. Enter the new year surrounded by nature at Dubai's only indoor rainforest!

Prescott Real Estate Development builds its reputation on quality

When it comes to purchasing or investing in affordable luxury property in Dubai, it is of the utmost importance that buyers take the time to research the market and put careful consideration into choosing the real estate developer they wish to do business with.

The developer they choose should be able to demonstrate a proven track record of consistency in delivering the highest standard of affordable luxury properties and guaranteeing absolute attention-to-detail through every step of the development process, from minute of the build, right through to the post-delivery plan.

Prescott Real Estate Development is a prime example of a company that has built its reputation on placing quality and attention-to-detail at the forefront of every project it develops, while simultaneously prioritising every buyer's peace of mind through

each phase of the negotiation, purchase and handover.

Consequently, the Prescott team's track record of success and longevity in the UAE market speaks for itself. In short, the Prescott has become synonymous with quality projects.

Having previously successfully delivered a host of well-known residential and business developments across the city, including Prime Villas, Prime Residency 1 and 2, and Prime Business Centre - Prescott's current focus is on Prime Views, a contemporary residential development of one and two-bedroom apartments located in the heart of Meydan Avenue.

Muhammad Shafi, chief executive officer of Prescott Real Estate Development, says, "Simply put, when purchasing property, buyers should never have to sacrifice quality for affordability, and vice versa. The Dubai property market is a highly competitive



one, which is a great advantage for buyers and investors, because it means they do not have to settle for sub-standard levels of quality in order to attain affordable luxury properties.

"As a buyer, it is vital that you carefully choose the developer you do business with and conduct your research into both the company you're dealing with and the market you're buying into. Do not just go for a convincing sales pitch or expensive marketing; go for the developer who has hands-on involvement in every aspect of the project - the one who has a portfolio of consistency and success and goes above and beyond to ensure your peace of mind at every point in the buying, handover and post-handover processes."

He adds, "At Prescott, our team can proudly stand behind our entire portfolio of property developments, because we have consistently delivered premium

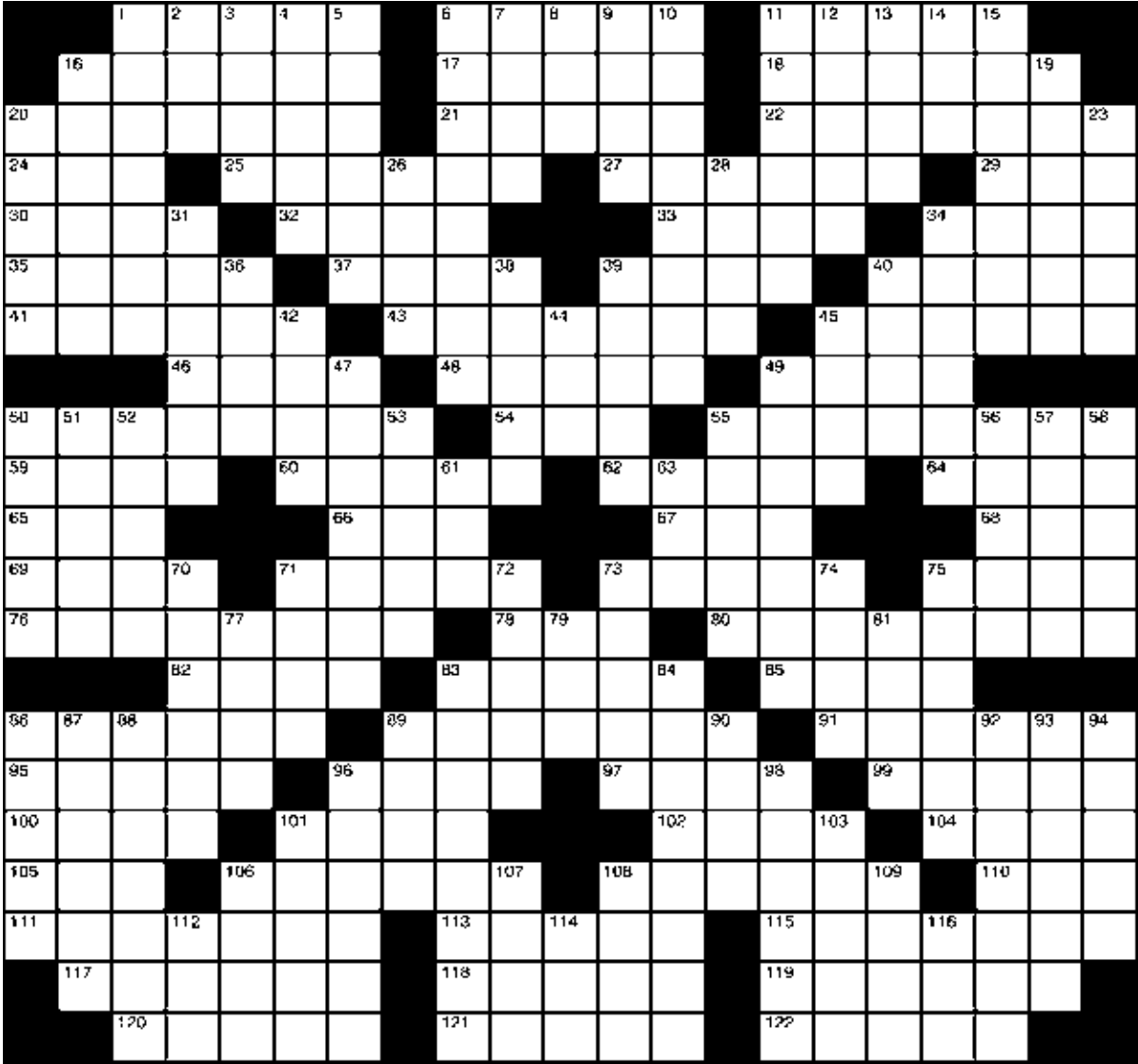
luxury at reasonable prices, while always ensuring we not only meet the expectations of each buyer, but exceed them. We do so by committing to each stage of our projects, scrutinising every detail, never compromising on quality, offering buyers transparency and approachability, and always building properties that we would be proud to own ourselves."

Located at the heart of Dubai, Prime Views gives residents a vibrant community right at their doorstep.

Just a stone's throw from the world-renowned Meydan Hotel and Racecourse, Prime Views is set against the unique backdrop of Meydan Avenue on one side and the amazing Dubai Skyline on the other.

Residents can explore some of the city's finest outdoor dining options, along with cafés, bistros, luxury retail, supermarkets, and much, much more.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**
1 Native West Indian
6 Word before book or opera
11 “West Side Story” heroine
16 Part of AD
17 Genus of ground beetles
18 Catkins
20 A Romance language
21 Principle or doctrine
22 White-flowering tree
24 Social insect
25 Make beloved
27 Greet the troops
29 “Castles in the ____”: 1970’s song
30 Prejudiced leaning
32 Jewish month
33 Role for Leslie Caron, 1953
34 First of 16 Across
35 On the level: sl.
37 Assam silkworm
39 Cold wind of the Adriatic
40 Pays to play
41 Tropical oleoresins
43 Increase in size
45 He condemned Jesus
46 Ms. Chase
48 Hillside dugouts
49 Mother of Helen and Pollux
50 Enzyme found in blood
- 54 Piece out a living
55 Underground vault
59 Algerian seaport
60 Stooges number
62 James Galway’s instrument
64 Case for small articles
65 Fond du ____, WI
66 Thames island
67 Burrows or Vigoda
68 SA country: abbr.
69 Goddess of the rainbow: Gr.
71 Malign or slander: inf.
73 Blade of grass, for one
75 Pure form of trona
76 Hybrid bison: pl.
78 Hasten
80 Aircraft launcher
82 Piecrust need
83 Relating to citizenship
85 Cole and Turner
86 Conditional freedom
89 1971 Woody Allen comedy
91 Coronets
95 San Antonio battle site
96 Lavish excess
97 List ender?
99 West Point freshman
100 Old Greek musical note
101 Chinese wax
- insect, Ericerus ____
102 Gelatinous culture medium
104 Pretty soon
105 Tate start?
106 Noted jockey
Eddie
108 Uses a carpenter’s tool
110 Printer’s units of measure
111 Seaport in Sicily
113 Brass or bronze
115 Variety of grape
117 Wise old counselor
118 Duck like water birds
119 Musical studies
120 Word with room or tire
121 Type of fund
122 Small drum
- DOWN**
1 Summer abode
2 Physicians’ grp.
3 Irritate
4 Without sense or meaning
5 Hobo’s burden
6 Island off California
7 Ancient Hebrew measure
8 Ice or wing follower
9 Angers
10 Shop-at-home manuals
11 Blotch on the skin
12 Valuable violin
13 Plexus
14 Once ____ lifetime
15 Peach State capital
16 Radcliffe or Craig
19 Small piano
20 Undersea message, e.g.
23 Part of a Stein line
26 NW France river
28 Spend them in Milan
31 Ape or monkey
34 Broad medieval dagger
36 Money drawer
38 Dramatist Edward
39 Law-case summary
40 Verdi heroine
42 Three-handed card game
44 Biblical boat
45 Rose of baseball
47 Humiliated
49 Pope’s cathedral as bishop of Rome
50 Infant’s complaint
51 Aussie palm cockatoo
52 Unspoken
53 Iroquoian-stock members
55 Having three dimensions
56 Japanese seaport
57 Work by Jose Sert
58 Narrow-minded zealot
61 Info at JFK
63 Once around the track
70 Daughter of Herodias
71 Pretty offended: inf.
72 River in Germany
73 Large fishing net
74 French state
75 College in New Jersey
77 French composer
Edouard
79 The yellow bugle
81 Waiter’s reward
83 Large waterfall
84 Chemical agent
86 Unreasoning fear
87 Spanish novelist
Mateo
88 Large flightless birds
89 Gaucho missile
90 Early Icelandic tale
92 Renovator
93 Nuclear weapons
94 Kind of philosophical data
96 Metric unit of area
98 Surgical knife
101 Former
103 Lariat
106 Temple wall part
107 Swan genus
108 Flower and poker containers
109 Pencil end
112 Poisonous viper
114 Comic Costello
116 Commotion

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
One of the most important lunations of the year arrives at your doorstep today. The full moon in emotionally rich Cancer emerges this evening, highlighting the current divide between your public life and private life. Long buried feelings or untold stories are bound to bubble up from deep within, specifically regarding family, domestic matters, and your personal past.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Be extra gentle with yourself. You’re processing some intense, subconscious material that’s stirring just beneath the surface. The full moon in sentimental Cancer bursts through this evening, a lunation that requires ample privacy and open-mindedness to navigate sanely. It’s an ideal day for a therapy session, a long reflective bath, or a free write that helps you get it all out.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
You’re building yourself from the ground back up this time of year. It’s not that you’re in ruins, its more that you’re in deep process of self-discovery. The full moon in deep-feeling Cancer emerges onto the scene this evening, pulling you away from the world of rugged individualism and thrusting you into a deep awareness of intimacy matters in committed relationships.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
It’s hard not to think of the big picture this time of year. As the year comes to a close, you find yourself reviewing new options for forward movement and self-expansion. The full moon in Cancer arrives, taking you out of this macro perspective and aiming your eye towards the micro. Look for stories to emerge around education, self-expression, and siblings.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
This time of year sets you apart from the rest of the pack. You’re gaining the confidence and skills to display your talents to the world! Tuesday’s skies pull you out of this self-concerned arena and direct your attention towards your social network, as the full moon in nurturing Cancer arrives. Look for new stories to be illuminated around friends, community, and your goals.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
It’s your time to shine. You’re knee-deep in the process of re-inventing your own identity—something you’ve been eagerly waiting to embrace! The cosmos pulls you out of this self-concerned headspace, as the full moon emerges in your opposite sign of nurturing. This lunation shines its spotlight directly onto the current stories happening in your closest partnerships.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
There’s always more to learn about love. You’ve only just begun to move through some treacherous intimacy terrain, yet today’s skies want to remind you of the importance of your own individualism. The full moon in nurturing Cancer arrives, shining its spotlight back onto your own resources, talents, and feelings of self-worth. Take a moment to lavish yourself in your own attention!

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
This time of year takes you out of the public’s sight. You’re undergoing a process that requires privacy and peace, as you aim your attention inward towards your home and family life. This evening’s full moon in Cancer shines its illuminating light onto your reputation, helping you realise that a strong foundation is required before you can climb any higher on the career ladder.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Other people are likely to find you difficult to access this time of year. You’re going through a critical part of your annual cycle—one in which you need to clear out the cobwebs on the untold stories and long buried feelings in your mental attic. Today’s full moon in Cancer briefly pulls you out of this otherworldly realm, as it illuminates your relationship with your work circumstances.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
All eyes are on you today. This time of year typically finds you investing your energy into partnership concerns. Thus, the arrival of the full moon in your sign this evening offers you a chance to step back and prioritise your own wellbeing in a new light. Pay close attention to stories emerging around individuality, identity, and physical health!

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
There seems to be so many moving parts to this time of year. You’ve been busier than ever with your focus locked on to all the little details that make up your life. The full moon in Cancer arrives, helping you zoom back out to see your world from a big picture point of view. Pay attention to new stories trying to catch your attention around new forms of self-expansion!

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
In your heart of hearts, what is it you wish to pursue? These questions swirl about in your mind this time of year, as you’re asked to examine your long-term goals and the quality of the allies by your side. The full moon in Cancer emerges, refocusing your attention on your personal creative life and romantic arena. Look for stories to emerge around personal projects or lovers.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The market condition when goods and services are not freely available and thus the prices are relatively high is called

a. rights issue
b. sinking fund
c. seller’s market
d. recession

2. The language spoken in Sikkim are

a. Nepali, Hindi, Lepcha, Bhutani
b. Marathi
c. Bengali, Tripuri
d. Manipuri

3. The heads of government of the countries which are members of the Commonwealth meet

a. once a year
b. biennially
c. at intervals of three years
d. as and when necessary

Answers: 1: c, 2: a, 3: b

KIDS COLOURING

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

BOGGLER

F	T	A	E
F	Y	E	S
E	A	N	S
I	S	B	D

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (DECEMBER 28)

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Liverpool's Roberto Firmino (centre) heads wide past West Bromwich Albion's goalkeeper Sam Johnston during the English Premier League match at Anfield in Liverpool, on Sunday (AFP)

LIVERPOOL DROP POINTS

Tottenham stumble again at Wolves; Man City game at Everton called off

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Liverpool offered the chasing pack in the English Premier League (EPL) title race a late Christmas gift by throwing away two points at home to struggling West Brom in a 1-1 draw on Sunday, as Tottenham were also held 1-1 at Wolves.

The defending champions edged three points clear at the top of the table, but dropped points in the league at Anfield for just the second time in 34 games after failing to make the most of a dominant first-half performance.

Sadio Mane opened the scoring with a classy finish on 12 minutes as Jurgen Klopp's men had the Baggies camped inside their own half until the break, but eased off in the second-half and were made to pay.

Sam Allardyce was taking charge of West Brom for just the second time and the former England manager's excellent recent record at Anfield continued when Semi Ajayi rose to head home from a corner eight minutes from time and give the visitors a valuable point in their battle to avoid relegation.

Allardyce has now not been beaten in his last four away league games against Klopp's Liverpool with four different clubs. "It was our own fault," said Klopp.

"We gave them simple corners and that's the only thing they wanted to have tonight.

That's why it is only one point instead of three."

West Brom remain second bottom, but are now within five points of safety. "Every man today showed the spirit this team needs to get out of this position," said Allardyce. "I saw a lot of guts, a lot of determination and a lot of quality."

Tottenham lacked ambition: Mourinho

Tottenham moved up to fifth, but missed another chance to close on Liverpool as their winless streak in the league extended to four games.

Spurs got off to a dream start when Rui Patricio was slow to react to Tanguy Ndombele's strike from the edge of the box.

However, just like in a 1-1 draw

at Crystal Palace two weeks ago, Jose Mourinho's men sat on their narrow lead and were punished.

"We didn't have that ambition, that desire to go for more," said Mourinho. "One point against Wolves normally wouldn't be a bad result because they are a strong opponent, but scoring a goal in the first minute and having 89 minutes to score more goals, you feel frustrated."

Wolves dominated the second-half but lacked a goal threat with the injured Raul Jimenez sat in the stands recuperating from a fractured skull.

Nuno Espirito Santo's men did finally get their reward four minutes from time when Romain Saiss flicked home Pedro Neto's corner. Wolves even wasted a huge chance to win the game in

stoppage time when Fabio Silva headed straight at Hugo Lloris.

Man City report coronavirus cases

Meanwhile, Manchester City's EPL match at Everton on Monday has been postponed four hours before kick-off because of an outbreak of coronavirus at the club.

The latest tests have returned more positive results, in addition to those of Gabriel Jesus, Kyle Walker and two staff members revealed on December 25.

The City training ground will be closed for an 'indeterminate period'. City cited 'a risk the virus could spread' among the squad with the 'security of the bubble compromised'.

A statement added, "After the

latest round of COVID-19 testing, the club returned a number of positive cases, in addition to the four already reported on Christmas Day.

"Based on strong medical advice the Premier League, in consultation with both clubs, have decided to postpone the fixture."

It is the second EPL match to be called off because of coronavirus since the top flight's resumption in June. Newcastle's match at Aston Villa, scheduled for early December, was also postponed.

Barnes comes to Leicester's rescue

Also on Monday, Harvey Barnes 83rd minute strike cancelled out Wilfried Zaha's opener in 58th minute as in-form Leicester were held to a 1-1 draw by hosts Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park.

Barnes' low strike into the corner salvaged a point for Brendan Rodgers' much-changed side, who climb to second in the EPL table. Kelechi Iheanacho spurned a golden opportunity to give the visitors a first-half lead when his penalty was saved by Vicente Guaita.

The Nigerian's miss looked like it might prove costly when Zaha finished superbly from Andros Townsend's cross, but Barnes' second goal in as many games rescued a draw for the Foxes.

AFP

‘Barca is my life’ but Messi coy on his future

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Lionel Messi remained coy on his future at Barcelona in a long interview broadcast on Sunday in which he called the Catalan giants 'my life'.

Speaking to Spanish TV channel La Sexta, Messi insisted that he was 'excited' to play under coach Ronald Koeman this season despite trying to leave the club where he has played his entire senior career last summer.

He said that at the time he felt like he 'needed a change', but his attempted exit was blocked amid a spat with former Barca boss Josep Maria Bartomeu.

Messi's contract expires at the end of the season and from next month he will be free to negotiate a move away from Catalonia. "Barca is my life, I'm in love with the club. And the city, my children were born here," Messi said in an interview conducted earlier this month.

"It's true I had a bad time in the summer. It came from everything that happened before the summer, how the season ended, the burofax (how Messi communicated his desire to leave), all of that. "I carried that into the start of the season a little bit."

Bartomeu stepped down in October and a new Barcelona president will be elected on January 24, after which 33 year old Messi is expected to begin talks over whether to extend his career-long stay. "I feel good right now, ready to fight for everything. I feel excited," he said.

Barca situation ‘really bad’

Messi said he is under no illusions over the position Barca find themselves in, with the financial problems exacerbated

by the coronavirus pandemic likely to hamper player recruitment.

"I know the club is going through a difficult period and that makes everything surrounding Barcelona difficult, but I am motivated," he said.

He described Barca's situation as 'really bad' and poured scorn on the idea that Neymar could make a shock return to Catalonia.

"To do that you need money, and there is no money. Neymar would cost a lot," Messi said.

Much of the talk surrounding Messi's departure centred around the possibility he might reunite with Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, although there are also reports of him potentially lining up alongside Neymar at Paris Saint-Germain.

Messi won three La Liga titles and two Champions Leagues in his four seasons under Guardiola, and was full of praise for his former boss.

"Pep has something special. He makes you see things in one way: how he prepares for matches, defensively, how to attack," he said. "He told you exactly how the match was going to be, how you had to attack to win."

Star to miss last match of 2020

Messi will miss Barcelona's last match of the calendar year after the Catalan giants announced on Sunday that ankle treatment will keep him out of their midweek La Liga match with Eibar.

Messi has already missed two matches for Barca in December, as he sat out their Champions League fixtures at Dynamo Kiev and Ferencvaros.

AFP



Lionel Messi

Struggling Schalke hire Gross as coach

GERMAN LEAGUE

Munich, Germany - Struggling Schalke unveiled veteran Swiss coach Christian Gross as their new manager on Sunday as the German League's bottom side try to end a miserable run of league games without a win. "I am really happy to be able to welcome Christian Gross as our new head coach," sporting director Jochen Schneider wrote on the club Twitter account.

The 66 year old Gross becomes the fourth manager since late September at a club whose run of Bundesliga games without a win has stretched to 29. David Wagner was fired after the club opened the season with



Christian Gross

an 8-0 loss to Bayern Munich. Manuel Baum was in turn axed on December 18 after drawing four and losing six. Huub Stevens took over as caretaker and oversaw another Bundesliga loss and a cup win at fourth-tier Ulm. AFP

Norman returns to hospital for treatment

Miami, US - Australian golf legend Greg Norman returned to hospital for further treatment after testing positive for COVID-19, saying on Instagram he hoped it was his 'final update on this COVID saga'.

Norman had spent Friday in hospital after experiencing coronavirus symptoms, but the 65 year old Aussie, a former world No 1 who won the 1986 and 1983 British Opens, said on Instagram on Saturday he had returned home and was quarantining in his guest house in Jupiter, Florida.

Once his positive test was confirmed, Norman said on Sunday, he returned to the hospital to receive antibody infusion treatment but hoped to be back home later in the day.



Norman urged his social media followers to take the virus seriously.

"I am fit and strong and have a high tolerance for pain but this virus kicked the crap out of me like nothing I have ever experienced before," he wrote.

"Muscle and joint pain on

another level. Headaches that feel like a chisel going through your head ... Then my taste failed where beer tastes bad and wine the same. And finally at times struggling with memory of names and things. So please take care."

AFP

Landmark Group and Danmark triumph

LOCAL CRICKET

Landmark Group and Danmark CC recorded impressive victories over their respective rivals in Oman Cricket E Division T20 games at Al Amerat on Friday.

BRIEF SCORES

E Division: Ghantoot Group 139 all out in 20 overs (Nahas Theparambil 57; Hemant Magar 3-21, Ajay Kumar 2-27) **lost to** Landmark Group 141-4 in 13 overs (Kuganeswaran Ramar 57, Mohammed Tahir 45; Kamesh Maharaja 2-21).

E Division: Mazoon Up 190-8 (Bilawal Ali 56, Mohammed Ali 31; Doresh Devender 4-32) **lost**

to Danmark CC 191-6 in 19.5 overs (Unas Ali 72, Shankarlal 38; Fahad Mohammed 3-42, Mohammed Ali 2-28).

F Division (T20): BSI CT 194-6 (Usman Siddique 59, Saud Haroon Khan 49; Ameer 2-33, Martin Yesupaul 2-44) **beat** Mazoon Dairy Company 81 all out in 15.5 overs (Rakshan Acharya 5-16, Saud Khan 2-16).

F Division: Muscat Young Stars 107-6 (Tejas Rajeev 33, Shashank Ram Mohan 30; Jebin James 2-18, Rajan Anup 2-20) **lost to** ACT Cricworld 112-3 in 13.1 overs (Alif Hameed 51 n.o., Neil Paily 31).

India in complete control

AUSTRALIA VS INDIA
SECOND TEST: DAY THREE
Melbourne, Australia - India put themselves on the doorstep of one of their finest Test victories as the bowling attack again came to the fore at the MCG to dismantle an increasingly fragile Australia top order.

The success was shared equally, but Jasprit Bumrah could easily have had more than the one wicket for his efforts, while the spin duo of R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja combined with great effect.

For the majority of the time, they were without Umesh Yadav, who, after removing Joe Burns early, limped off with a calf injury and has since been taken for scans. The decision to pick five bowlers, therefore, paid off handsomely for India with Jadeja, following his vital half-century in the innings-defining stand of 121 with Ajinkya Rahane, taking two wickets as he and Ashwin allowed Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj to not be overbowled.

At the close of play, Australia had yet to score a half-century in the match. Steven Smith fell for his third single-figure score of the series - bowled behind his pads by Bumrah - and in a 66-over innings they had managed just seven boundaries.

There was a dose of controversy thrown in for good measure when Tim Paine was given out caught behind by the DRS, which left the Australia captain fuming as he walked off. But the protocols were followed to the letter when Snicko provided a spike where Hot Spot had not shown a mark.

At that point, Australia had lost three wickets for one run in 23 balls and were lurching



India's Ravindra Jadeja (left) and Ajinkya Rahane celebrate the dismissal of Australia's Matthew Wade on the third day of the second Test on Monday

towards a three-day defeat, but that was at least avoided as Cameron Green and Pat Cummins ground out 34 in 18 overs to ensure India would need to bat again, although it remained a long way from being a recovery.

A deficit of 131 was sizeable, but less than it might have been for Australia after they claimed India's last five wickets for 32 - following the run-out of Rahane when Jadeja chanced a single for his fifty - amid a barrage of short-pitched bowling at the lower order. However, it was a hefty enough difference that they would need at least 300 to give themselves a realis-

tic chance in the fourth innings but again they produced a limp performance that will leave much head-scratching ahead of the third Test.

Opener Burns failed for the third time in four innings across the two Tests as he edged an excellent delivery from Yadav. To make things worse, he wasted a review.

Matthew Wade battled against his natural instincts - impressively so - while Marnus Labuschagne scored most of the runs that were on offer but was undone by a wonderful piece of bowling from Ashwin, who slid one across him from around the

wicket, which took an edge to slip.

Ashwin, getting the ball to drift, bite and turn, nearly had Smith caught at leg slip in a repeat of the first-innings dismissal during another fascinating battle between the pair, but this time it was India's other leading man - Bumrah - who pulled off a perfectly-worked plan when he bowled Smith behind his legs that many bowlers have tried before him.

The ball just clipped the top of leg stump and Smith even set off for a run, scarcely able to believe what had happened. At 71 for three, still 60 behind, with the

two Lynchpin batsmen gone, India had made their opening.

Ten overs later came the clatter that will surely decide the game. Wade's 137-ball defiance ended when he played back to Jadeja and was beaten by one that slid on. In another tick to Rahane's captaincy book, Siraj struck with his first ball back when Travis Head edged to second slip to complete twin dismissals in similar fashion.

Then there was the wicket that lit up social media, Paine playing a forcing shot off the back foot against Jadeja, which was given not out by Paul Reiffel with Rahane quick to review. The

SCOREBOARD	
Australia 1st Innings: 195	
INDIA 1ST INNINGS	
M Agarwal	lbw b Starc 0
S Gill	c Paine b Cummins 45
C Pujara	c Paine b Cummins 17
A Rahane	run out 112
H Vihari	c Smith b Lyon 21
R Pant	c Paine b Starc 29
R Jadeja	c Cummins b Starc 57
R Ashwin	c Lyon b Hazlewood 14
U Yadav	c Smith b Lyon 9
J Bumrah	c Head b Lyon 0
M Siraj	not out 0
Extras:	(b 12, lb 6, nb 2, w 2) 22
TOTAL: 326 in 115.1 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-61, 3-64, 4-116, 5-173, 6-294, 7-306, 8-325, 9-325, 10-326	
Bowling: M Starc 26-5-78-3, P Cummins 27-9-80-2, J Hazlewood 23-6-47-1, N Lyon 27-1-4-72-3, C Green 12-1-31-0	
AUSTRALIA 2ND INNINGS	
M Wade	lbw b Jadeja 40
J Burns	c Pant b Yadav 4
M Labuschagne	c Rahane b Ashwin 28
S Smith	b Bumrah 8
T Head	c Agarwal b Siraj 17
C Green	not out 17
T Paine	c Pant b Jadeja 1
P Cummins	not out 15
Extras:	(nb 3) 3
TOTAL: 133 for six in 66 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-42, 3-71, 4-98, 5-98, 6-99	
Bowling: J Bumrah 17-4-34-1, U Yadav 33-0-5-1, M Siraj 12-3-1-23-1, R Ashwin 23-4-46-1, R Jadeja 10-3-25-2	

QUICK RUN

Kohli and Perry named cricketers of the decade

India captain Virat Kohli was named the ICC's men's cricketer of the decade on Monday as Australia all-rounder Ellyse Perry swept the top women's awards. Kohli and Perry were the big winners in the ICC's Awards of the Decade, while Australian batsman Steve Smith was crowned the best Test player. Kohli, who was also named ODI player of the decade. Meanwhile, Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan said he was 'speechless' after being picked as the men's T20 player of the decade. Former India captain M S Dhoni won the decade's Spirit of Cricket award for sportingly calling back England batsman Ian Bell after a bizarre run-out in the 2011 Nottingham Test. And Scotland's Kyle Coetzer and Kathryn Bryce were named the decade's best men's and women's cricketers from associate, or non-Test playing, countries.

Rabada returns to SA Test squad

Kagiso Rabada has been added to South Africa's squad after recovering from a groin strain that saw him miss the Boxing Day Test. Rabada was set to enter the biosecure environment before the start of the second session on Monday after clearing all COVID-19 protocols. Rabada's inclusion means that South Africa have a handy stock of seamers ahead of the New Year's Test against Sri Lanka.

Agencies

NZ dominate Pakistan



New Zealand's Neil Wagner celebrates the wicket of Pakistan's Fawad Alam during the third day's play on Monday

NEW ZEALAND VS PAKISTAN

FIRST TEST: DAY THREE
Mount Maunganui, New Zealand - Not even a broken toe could stop New Zealand's pace attack dominating day three of the first Test against Pakistan, but their efforts to quickly wrap up the innings were slowed by Mohammad Rizwan and Faheem Ashraf's late century stand on Monday.

As intermittent showers and an unseasonal hail storm disrupted proceedings at Mount Maunganui, the Black Caps' pace foursome took five for 50 in the first two sessions before Pakistan rallied to be all out for 239 at stumps, still 192 in arrears.

Rizwan and Ashraf provided a face-saving partnership for Pakistan with 107 for the seventh wicket before Rizwan was run

out for 71 by Mitchell Santner's smart underarm throw from square leg.

Ashraf soldiered on to a career-best 91 before he was the last wicket to fall.

Kyle Jamieson returned the best figures for New Zealand with three for 35, while Neil Wagner ignored the pain from a broken toe to charge in for 21 overs to take two for 50.

He hobbled off at stumps describing it as one of the toughest days of his career and revealed he needed pain killers to keep going. "After the first rain break I just went 'dammit I can't bear the pain' and I got a jab and that took the pain away a little bit... but it started wearing off pretty quickly," said Wagner, who broke a toe on his right foot when batting on day two.

"Injuries happen and it's unlucky but I can still do things and run and it's not going to stop me. It's sore and it's bloody uncomfortable but it's just one of those things you've got to deal with and I still felt that I didn't want to let my teammates down."

New Zealand need to win both Tests against Pakistan to be in with a chance to make the World Test Championship final in June.

When Pakistan resumed the day at 30 for one, Abid Ali and nightwatchman Mohammad Abbas put on just nine runs in 74 balls while Wagner was kept out of the early attack.

The partnership was broken by Jamieson who hurt Abid Ali with the last ball of his first over which smacked into the batsman's fingers.

Two balls into Jamieson's next over Abid kept his hands out of the way from a ball wide of off stump, only to see it jag back and he was bowled for 25.

In the following over Trent Boult, who had troubled Abbas with a succession of short balls, found an edge with a full delivery and Ross Taylor held the catch at first slip.

Azhar Ali and Haris Sohail stayed together for 50 deliveries but contributed only nine runs before both went in one Tim Southee over.

Wagner tested his foot with three overs before lunch and continued with a seven-over spell after the break, during which he took the only wicket to fall in the middle session with a trademark bouncer that Fawad Alam edged to wicketkeeper BJ Watling.

Jamieson had remarkable figures of two for nine off 17 overs at tea but as the Rizwan-Ashraf partnership took its toll he ended the day with three for 35 off 23.1 overs. Along with Wagner's pair, Southee finished with two for 69 and Boult took two for 71.

AFP

SCOREBOARD	
New Zealand 1st Innings: 431	
PAKISTAN 1ST INNINGS	
S Masood	c Watling b Jamieson 10
Abid Ali	b Jamieson 25
M Abbas	c Taylor b Boult 5
Azhar Ali	c Watling b Southee 5
H Sohail	c Nicholls b Southee 3
F Alam	c Watling b Wagner 9
M Rizwan	run out 71
F Ashraf	c Watling b Jamieson 91
Yasir Shah	b Boult 4
S Afridi	c Latham b Wagner 6
Naseem Shah	not out 0
Extras:	(b 3, lb 4, nb 1, w 2) 10
TOTAL: 239 in 102.2 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-39, 3-43, 4-51, 5-52, 6-80, 7-187, 8-196, 9-235, 10-239	
Bowling: T Southee 26-7-69-2, T Boult 26-4-71-2, K Jamieson 23-2-13-35-3, N Wagner 21-5-50-2, M Santner 6-2-7-0	

Du Plessis and South Africa punish injury-hit Sri Lanka

SOUTH AFRICA VS SRI LANKA

FIRST TEST: DAY THREE
Centurion, South Africa - Sri Lanka's injury-hit cricketers took a pounding from South Africa's batsmen and bowlers on the third day of the first Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Monday. Former captain Faf du Plessis led the batting assault, hitting 199 as South Africa took a commanding 225-run first innings lead.

Then fast bowler Lungi Ngidi struck twice at the start of Sri Lanka's second innings to leave the tourists struggling on 65 for two, still 160 runs behind.

Sri Lanka's injury woes continued and at one stage three of their five regular bowlers were off the field as South Africa amassed a first innings total of 621. Kasun Rajitha, who suffered a groin injury at the start of the innings on Sunday, did not take the field again and fellow fast bowler Lahiru Kumara suffered a similar injury soon after lunch after bowling a single ball in a new spell. He also did not return.

Debutant leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga was off the field for part of the afternoon after falling on the ball trying to make a diving save on the boundary. But he returned to finish with four wickets, albeit at the high cost of 171 runs.

At one stage, Sri Lanka had four substitutes on the field, while captain Dimuth Karunaratne and Kusal Mendis were called into action as emergency bowlers.

Du Plessis and the other South African batsmen took advantage with a free-scoring display. Du Plessis made his highest Test and first-class score



South Africa's Faf du Plessis celebrates upon reaching 150 on Monday

and appeared to be cruising to a double century before he tried to loft Hasaranga over his head and hit a simple catch to Karunaratne at mid-on.

Du Plessis shared partnerships of 179 for the fifth wicket with Temba Bavuma (71) and 133 for the seventh wicket with Keshav Maharaj, who made a Test-best 73.

Bavuma's innings ended unusually when he flashed at a ball from the medium-paced Dasun Shanaka and immediately started walking back to the dressing room as the ball carried to wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella. Replays showed there had been no contact between bat and ball. A clear gap was visible as the ball went past the bat.

The boundary which brought up Du Plessis' century also made the former captain the ninth South African to reach 4,000 Test runs. His hundred was scored off 151 balls and included 15 fours.

Ngidi bowled the left-handed Karunaratne in the third over of the second innings. He followed up by having Mendis caught at

first slip. Kusal Perera and Dinesh Chandimal saw Sri Lanka through to the close.

AFP

SCOREBOARD	
Sri Lanka 1st Innings: 396	
SOUTH AFRICA 1ST INNINGS	
D Elgar	c & b Shanaka 95
A Markram	c Shanaka b Fernando 68
R van der Dussen	
	c Dickwella b Kumara 15
Faf du Plessis	c Karunaratne b Silva 199
Q de Kock	c sub (L Thirumane) b de Silva 18
T Bavuma	c Dickwella b Shanaka 71
W Mulder	c Dickwella b de Silva 36
K Maharaj	c de Silva b Fernando 73
A Nortje	c Dickwella b Fernando 0
L Sipamla	lbw b de Silva 0
L Ngidi	not out 2
Extras:	(b 9, lb 18, nb 7, w 10) 44
TOTAL: 621 in 142.1 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-141, 2-200, 3-200, 4-220, 5-399, 6-476, 7-609, 8-610, 9-611, 10-621	
Bowling: V Fernando 31-1-3-129-3, K Rajitha 21-0-16-0, D Shanaka 28-5-2-98-2, W Hasaranga 45-5-171-4, L Kumara 21-0-103-1, D Karunaratne 6-5-0-36-0, K Mendis 7-0-41-0	
SRI LANKA 2ND INNINGS	
D Karunaratne	b Ngidi 6
K Perera	not out 33
K Mendis	c van der Dussen b Ngidi 0
D Chandimal	not out 21
Extras:	(b 4, nb 1) 5
TOTAL: 65 for two in 12 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-22	
Bowling: L Ngidi 6-0-28-2, A Nortje 3-0-23-0, W Mulder 3-0-10-0	

'Will work to get more and more women involved in the sport'



Baida al Zadjali

Oman's Baida al Zadjali elected to the Women's Committee of World Triathlon

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Oman's Baida al Zadjali's election to one of the key committees of World Triathlon, the governing body of triathlon, is a shot in the arm for not just sports in the sultanate but also for the region.

The 38 year old triathlete and a member of the Oman Triathlon Committee (OTC) was recently elected to the World Triathlon's Women's Committee. She is one of the only seven members on the panel. Last month, Ms Marisol Casado was re-elected as president of World Triathlon at the 33rd World Triathlon Congress in a virtual vote, which was attended by 136 national federations.

For Baida, the election as a member to one of the ten committees is a huge honour as the sport is gaining popularity across the globe and is one of the sports at the Olympic Games.

The Women's Committee is responsible for advising the

World Triathlon executive board, committees, members and associate members on the development and implementation of their policies and for promoting equal opportunity for women to participate in all aspects of the sport of triathlon, paratriathlon and its related multisport.

In her exclusive remarks to *Muscat Daily*, Baida said, "It is a matter of great pride to be elected to the World Triathlon Women's Committee. I am honoured to represent Oman at the highest level. It also means a lot of responsibility and I am happy to play my role that has been entrusted upon me.

"We all know that triathlon sport is yet to pick up among women in this region. I will work to get more and more women involved in the sport. This is my main mission. Being a triathlete myself, I understand and realise the challenges in getting women into this sport in the region."

Baida added, "The goal is to create an environment where women can look forward to participating in more triathlons. We have started to run programmes to create awareness about the sport and are hopeful of making it popular."

One of the few active Omani women triathletes, Baida has been into sports from her schooldays. Be it basketball or netball, she has played them at competitive levels and is also an



I am honoured to represent Oman at the highest level. It also means a lot of responsibility

BAIDA AL ZADJALI

avid hiker. She was one of the three in an all-women expedition that crossed the Oman's side of the Rub'al Khali (Empty Quarter) desert in 2018-19. Baida had teamed up with Atheer al Sabri and Janey McGill and covered nearly 800km in 28 days.

The expedition started from Al Hashman in the Dhofar governorate on December 22, 2018, and concluded at Ibri fort on January 18, 2019.

Baida has also competed at the Ironman 70.3 and Ironman 5150 in Muscat and trekked in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Madagascar and Kenya.

Besides Baida, the other members of the Women's Committee are Michelle Cooper (Australia), Ann-Charlotte

Dupont (France), Bernard Hanratty (Ireland), Josefa Martinez (Chile), Tomoka Wada (Japan) and Eva Werthmann (Germany).

Baida also revealed that Oman's bid to host the 2021 Asia Triathlon Cup in Muscat has been given the nod by the Asian Triathlon Federation. The top-class event is expected to be held on December 10, 2021.

The OTC was formed in June 2019 with Mohammed al Obeidani as the chairman.

In a short span of time, OTC has made significant strides with the hosting of successful national-level triathlon competitions and the latest news of Baida's election is certain to give a boost to the OTC.

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Australian Open: Federer to miss for the first time

Melbourne, Australia - Twenty-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer will miss the Australian Open for the first time in his career as he continues his recovery from two rounds of knee surgery, organisers said on Monday.

The 39 year old Swiss has been out of action since February but recently resumed training and was on the entry list for year's opening Grand Slam, which will make a delayed start on February 8.

Federer, a huge favourite with the Melbourne crowds, hasn't missed the Australian Open since his debut in 2000, winning the trophy six times.

"In the end Roger ran out of time to get himself ready for the rigours of a Grand Slam and he's very disappointed he won't be coming to Melbourne in 2021," said tournament chief Craig Tiley. "We wish him all the best as he prepares for his comeback later in the year and look forward to seeing him in Melbourne in 2022."

Federer sat out most of the COVID-disrupted 2020 season

after losing to Novak Djokovic in the Melbourne semis in January, his last competitive match.

He underwent keyhole surgery on his right knee in February, before needing a follow-up operation and calling off his season to recover.

The Swiss could only watch as Rafael Nadal matched his all-time men's record of 20 Grand Slam singles titles with a 13th victory at the French Open.

Federer will now concentrate on getting himself ready for the rest of the 2021 season, which includes the Tokyo Olympics and the chance of his first singles gold medal. "He has made strong progress in the last couple of months with his knee and his fitness," his agent Tony Godsick said in a statement. "I will start discussions this coming week for tournaments that begin in late February and then start to build a schedule for the rest of the year," Godsick added.

Federer's absence will be felt at the Australian Open, despite a top-quality field led by world number ones Djokovic and Ashleigh Barty. US superstar Ser-

ena Williams, Federer's contemporary at 39, is also on the entry list as she again attempts to equal Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles.

The opening Slam of the year, which will be played in front of at least 50 per cent of normal crowds, has been pushed back three weeks to February 8 over difficulties caused by the coronavirus. All players must undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine on arrival, during which they will constantly be tested for COVID-19 but allowed to train for five hours a day in a bio-secure bubble.

The men's and women's qualifiers will be held in Doha and Dubai respectively from January 10-13, with players arriving in Melbourne from January 15 on special charter flights. Melbourne only emerged from a months-long lockdown in October following a second wave of COVID-19, complicating planning for the Grand Slam and how to allow so many players and support staff to enter the country safely.

AFP



TESLA COMING TO INDIA

Electric-car maker Tesla Inc will come to India early next year, country's Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari told national daily the *Indian Express* on Monday

MARKET WATCH

MSM30	3,624.54
BSE Sensex	47,353.75

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	191.21
Pakistani Rs	417.83
Bangladeshi Taka	220.67
Philippine Peso	124.94
Sri Lankan Rs	488.92

*Rates as on December 28
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Commerzbank to sink €610mn into job cuts

Germany's second-largest lender Commerzbank said Monday it will set aside €610mn the final quarter of 2020 to cover sweeping job cuts as it restructures its operations.

Like its crosstown rival Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt-based Commerzbank is slashing thousands of roles as customers switch to online banking and cashless payment options, reducing the need for bricks-and-mortar branches.

The troubled lender has reached an agreement with its works council to reduce 2,300 positions between 2021 and 2024, the managing board said in a statement.

As a result, Commerzbank will book €610mn in additional provisions in the fourth quarter, the statement said.

Oman's oil output decreases 2% this year, exports drop 7%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The coronavirus pandemic and global economic recession had a limited overall impact on Oman's total petroleum production volumes this year as the sultanate sharply boosted its condensates output during the last three quarters of 2020.

Oman's total oil production decreased by just 1.8 per cent to 318.62mn barrels in the first 11 months of 2020 compared to 324.30mn barrels a year ago, according to the latest figures released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Of the total oil output, crude oil production decreased 8.9 per cent to 256.45mn barrels in the 11 months to November, while condensates production sharply rose by 45 per cent to 62.17mn barrels this year against 42.91mn barrels in the same period of 2019.

The sultanate's daily average oil production decreased by 2 per cent to 951,100 barrels per day during the January–November period of 2020 compared to 971,000 barrels per day



recorded for the same period of last year, the NCSI data showed.

Oman sold its crude at an average price of US\$46.5 per barrel during the first 11 months of 2020, which is 27 per cent lower compared with the average price

achieved last year at US\$63.9 per barrel. On Monday, Oman crude contract price at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange slightly decreased to US\$51.22 per barrel (for February 2021 delivery).

In the face of the global recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted global energy demand, Oman's total oil exports recorded a 7 per cent decline during the January–November period of 2020.

Total oil exports decreased to 262mn barrels during the first 11 months of 2020 from 281.8mn barrels in the same period of 2019, the NCSI data showed.

However, the demand for Oman's crude in China, the biggest destination for the sultanate's oil shipments, remained robust even this year despite the pandemic decimating oil demand worldwide.

Oil exports to China, which purchased about 87 per cent of Oman's total oil shipments during the January–November period of 2020, increased by 3.6 per cent to 227.65mn barrels this year compared to 219.71mn barrels in the same period of 2019.

While Oman's oil exports to China rose this year despite the pandemic and weak global

Oil exports to China increased by 3.6 per cent to 227.65mn barrels this year compared to 219.71mn barrels a year ago

demand, exports to other countries sharply fell. Exports to Japan and South Korea fell by 88 per cent and 33 per cent to 2.6mn barrels and 5mn barrels in the first 11 months of 2020, respectively.

Bank Muscat wins two elite awards from JP Morgan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat has once again been recognised by global banking giant JP Morgan for its best in class Straight-Through Processing (STP) rates for its US dollar clearing operations.

In a press statement, Bank Muscat said it is a matter of great pride that the awards won by the bank recognise the ultimate level of performance by client banks.

The MT 103 Elite Quality Recognition Award won by Bank Muscat is only given to clients who achieve STP of 99 per cent or more with a minimum debit volume of 10,000 MT 103 transactions. The MT 202 Elite Quality Recognition Award won by the bank is only given to clients who achieve STP of 99.7 per cent or more with a minimum debit volume of 8,000 MT 202 transactions.

Recipients of these awards have to demonstrate superior

transaction processing leading to higher efficiencies, faster payments, cost reductions and honouring of commitments to operational excellence to their customers. Bank Muscat won the accolades after exceeding the elite benchmarks in both categories.

Bank Muscat's exceptional quality of SWIFT messages on dollar payment and an outstanding error-free rate for remittances were highlighted by the two awards.

Saudi discovers 4 new oil and gas fields

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy, announced that Saudi Aramco has discovered four new oil and gas fields in the kingdom.

He said that non-conventional oil has been discovered in al-Reesh oil field, north-west of Dhahran. Al-Reesh Well No 2 has 4,452 barrels per day of Arab extra light crude oil, along with 3.2mn standard cubic feet of natural gas.

To determine the field's size, Aramco has drilled al-Reesh Well No 3 and Well No 4. Well No 3's initial production has



Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman

reached 2,745 barrels per day of the same oil type, along with 3mn standard cubic feet of gas per day. Well No 4's daily flow of Arab extra light crude oil amounts to 3,654 barrels per

day, along with a daily 1.6mn standard cubic feet of natural gas.

Non-conventional gas has also been discovered in al-Sarrah reservoir at al-Minahaz well, south-west of the Ghawar oil field, and at al-Sahbaa well, south of Ghawar. Gas from al-Minahaz well amounts to 18mn standard cubic feet daily, along with a daily 98 barrels of condensate, and out of al-Sahbaa well a daily rate of 32mn standard cubic feet.

Oil has also been discovered in al-Ajramiyah Well No 1, which lies to the north-west of the city

of Rafhaa in the Northern Borders Province. The well test shows a rate of 3,850 barrels of oil per day.

The Minister of Energy pointed out that the discovery at al-Reesh field is especially important as it shows that it is possible to produce Arab extra light crude oil at the Tuwaiq Mountain Formation.

He also said that Saudi Aramco continues to work on determining the size and volume of discovered fields and estimating the amount of oil, gas, and condensate in these fields. SPA

AMF launches full operations of regional payment system

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) on Monday announced that Buna, the regional cross-border payment system owned by the AMF, is currently in full operation and settling cross-borders payment transactions in multiple currencies.

This milestone comes as an accomplishment of Buna's success to properly finalise the different key phases of its focused strategy and business plan to create the payment platform of choice across the Arab region and beyond, the AMF said in a press statement.

'Beginning with the launch of its technical platform back in February 2020 and followed by building and growing its diversified network of participant banks and settlement currencies, this new step marks the completion of the phased go-live approach of Buna,' AMF said.



Buna first live payment was executed in UAE dirhams between Mashreq Bank in the UAE and Banque Misr in Egypt. It announced Buna's entry in full operations and demonstrated Buna's operational and technical readiness to operate and perform cross-border payments, in compliance with international standards. This success paves the way to continue expanding Buna's network of participants, which will start with the onboarding in production of all participants that have fulfilled the requirements and signed the participation agreement.

Dr Abdulrahman al Hamidy, director general and chairman of the board of AMF, said, "We are proud and happy to announce that Buna payment system is now fully operating, and capable to perform as a multi-currency platform that process cross-border payments in eligible Arab and international currencies in real-time. The successful first live payment transaction is a

strong testament of our commitment to deliver on time and demonstrate Buna's ability to function within the set requirements and as by the promised high-level standards, despite unprecedented difficult times and global challenging conditions."

Dr Hamidy added, "This milestone step would not have been possible, without the continuous support of the Arab central banks. We are looking forward to continuing growing our network of participants and currencies. Our focus will always be to offer modern payment solutions, across the Arab region and beyond, within the highest standards of information security and in compliance with international standards."

Mashreq Bank and Banque Misr were amongst the early banks in UAE and Egypt that connected to Buna and were the first banks to successfully complete a live transaction.

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MSM index rises on improved activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose 0.26 per cent to close at 3,624.54 points on Monday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 115.5 per cent to RO1.05mn and volumes increased 101.15 per cent to 6.03mn shares.

The gains in the main index were supported by all the subindices. While Financial index rose 0.31 per cent, both Industrial and Services indices climbed 0.21 per cent each. The MSM Shariah Index closed up by 0.35 per cent at 516.93 points.

Market breadth remained positive as nine companies closed up, while six companies closed down. The rest 23 traded



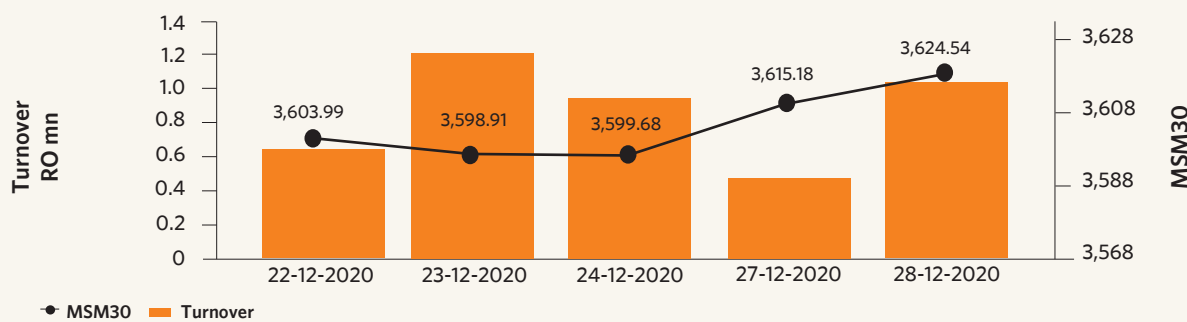
stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Gulf Investment Services (5.81 per cent), Al Sharqia Investment Holding (4.48 per cent), Al Jazeera Services (3.59 per cent) and Oman Investment and Finance (3.53 per

cent).

Top losers were Al Hassan Engineering (-12.5 per cent), Sharqiyah Desalination (-10.0 per cent), Phoenix Power (-1.89 per cent) and Al Madina Takaful (-1.33 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Sharjah increases 2021 budget by 12% to AED33.6bn



Sharjah, UAE - Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, approved the general budget of AED33.6bn for the Emirate of Sharjah for the fiscal year 2021.

According to Sharjah Finance Department (SFD), the budget spending has been increased by 12 per cent compared to the final 2020 budget with the aim to achieve the strategic vision of the emirate in economic and social development, enhancing financial sustainability, and stimulating the macroeconomic environment.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Saud al Qasimi, chairman of the Sharjah Finance Department, said, "The general budget for this year is the largest in the history of the

emirate. The budget of the emirate has adopted many strategic and financial objectives and priorities, which reflected the high directives of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah and his comprehensive and renewed vision, as well as the directions of the executive council and the strategic vision of the Central Finance Department, which works to achieve the highest levels of financial sustainability and efficiency in managing government financial resources and supporting the capabilities of government agencies."

Salaries and wages account for 47 per cent of the total operating budget for 2021, while 43 per cent of the budget is allocated for developing and improving infrastructure in

the emirate, with an increase of 40 per cent over the 2020 budget.

The budget also witnesses an allocation of 29 per cent for developing the economic sector, while 21 per cent on social development to support scientific, cultural and heritage services, as well as stimulating creativity, innovation and scientific research, and ensuring an ideal healthy environment.

The capital projects budget accounts for 32 per cent, with an increase of 46 per cent over the 2020 budget to enhance infrastructure and ensure the development and improvement of the transport network, tunnels, tourism facilities and various other service facilities.

WAM

Iran exports €500mn worth of goods to five EU countries in 10 months

Tehran, Iran - Iran has exported €493mn worth of goods to five European countries in 10 months prior to November 2020, which shows a 7 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

According to Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, Iran has exported €223.1mn of goods to Germany, €110.3mn to the Netherlands, €84.7mn to Italy, €45.2mn to Spain, and €30.4mn to Belgium, which show between 5 per cent to 40 per cent increase compared to the same period previous year.

The main exported goods to the mentioned countries included food products, livestock, chemicals, mineral fuels, industrial goods, and raw material.

Iran's imported goods from the five European countries were



worth about €2.372 billion: €1.2276bn from Germany, €474.7mn from Italy, €298.5mn from the Netherlands, €206.6 from France, €165.4mn from Spain, which show between 5 per cent to 40 per cent increase compared to the same period

previous year.

Iran's main imported goods from the mentioned countries included machinery, transport equipment, chemicals, food, livestock, industrial goods, and raw material.

Iran has traded 110mn tonnes

of goods worth of about US\$52bn with other countries in the first nine months of the Iranian year (starting on December 20). Iran's exports have been 58.2mn tonnes and its imports have been 25mn tonnes.

IRNA

Turkey begins electricity export to Iraq

Ankara, Turkey - Turkey, through its Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EMRA), began electricity exports on Monday to Iraq through the Silopi-Zakho transmission line.

EMRA opened electricity export applications to Iraq last month, which resulted in an amendment to the power supply licence with Aksa Aksen Enerji

Ticaret AS to include supplies to other markets i.e. Iraq, in conjunction with the Turkish domestic market.

Based on the amended licence, exports of 150MW to Iraq began on Monday and set to run until November 1, 2021.

"Turkey, once an electricity importing country, is now exporting power to its neighbours,"

EMRA head Mustafa Yilmaz told Anadolu Agency.

"Turkey's electricity system has enough capacity to export power to neighbouring countries. Our cross-border electricity trade continues to grow and I think this volume will increase further in 2021," Yilmaz said.

Anadolu Agency

DP World selected as preferred bidder to operate multipurpose terminal in Angola

Dubai, UAE - DP World, a global provider of smart logistics solutions, has been selected as the preferred bidder to enter into discussions with the government of Angola for a 20-year concession and operation of the Multipurpose Terminal (MPT) at the Port of Luanda.

Following an international tender process and subsequent announcement last month of DP World's selection by the evaluation committee set up by the Angolan Ministry of Transport, DP World and the Angolan Government have now entered into formal discussions on the concession agreement.

DP World plans to invest US\$190mn over the 20-year period of the concession, with plans to rehabilitate existing infrastructure and acquire new equipment to bring operations in line with global standards and improve the efficiency of the MPT.

It aims to increase the annual throughput to approximately 700,000 TEUs per year. The plan also includes the training and development of existing staff.

The MPT at the Port of Lu-



anda handles both containers and general cargo. It has a quay of 610m with a depth of 12.5m and a yard of 23 hectares. This will be the first seaport terminal located on the western coast of Southern Africa to be operated and managed by DP World, and will further extend the company's footprint in Africa.

"We believe in Angola's

strong potential for further economic growth and are keen to play our role in the country's development. Angola's location on the Atlantic Ocean in Southern Africa means it has the opportunity to benefit from flows of trade into the surrounding region," Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, group chairman and chief executive officer of DP World,

said.

He added, "DP World has a strong track record in Africa and across the world, of operating ports and logistics businesses to the highest standards, creating trade corridors, and contributing to the economic growth in the countries in which we work."

WAM

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Trump signs \$900bn COVID-19 relief bill

West Palm Beach, US - After delaying for nearly a week and under pressure from all sides, US President Donald Trump finally signed a massive US\$900bn stimulus bill on Sunday, in a long-sought boost for millions of Americans and businesses battered by the coronavirus pandemic.

The package 'providing coronavirus emergency response and relief' is part of a larger spending bill that, with Trump's signature, will avoid a government shut-down on Tuesday.

"I am signing this bill to restore unemployment benefits, stop evictions, provide rental assistance, add money for PPP (Paycheck Protection Programs), return our airline workers back to work, add substantially more money for vaccine distribution, and much more," the President said in a statement from his Christmas vacation at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

The turnaround came after a day marked by calls from all sides of the political spectrum for action to avert an economic and social disaster, especially for America's vulnerable populations.

Two federal unemployment benefit programmes approved in



US President Donald Trump (AFP)

March as part of an initial COVID-19 relief plan expired at midnight on Saturday, cutting off an estimated 12mn Americans, according to The Century Foundation thinktank.

The relief package, which was first passed by Congress on De-

cember 21, extends those benefits as well as others set to expire in the days ahead.

But for days, Trump had refused to put his signature on it, calling the bill a 'disgrace' and catching both Democrats and Republicans off guard with his

complaints, which came after months of negotiations.

Influential Republican senator Mitt Romney said he was 'relieved' at the signing. 'Help is now on the way to workers, families, and small businesses across the country who are desperately

I am signing this bill to restore unemployment benefits, stop evictions, provide rental assistance, return our airline workers back to work, add more money for vaccine distribution, and much more

DONALD TRUMP

in need,' he tweeted.

Earlier Sunday, he had urged Trump to 'immediately sign or veto the COVID-19 relief package so Congress can act before it's too late'.

Crucial aid

In his statement on Sunday, the President continued to push for the US\$600 direct payments to US taxpayers spelled out in the bill to be more than tripled, and argued the legislation included too much excess spending on unrelated programmes.

He has not said why he waited

until the bill was already approved to make his views known.

The new stimulus package extends federal aid to the unemployed until mid-March, and provides guaranteed loans and billions of dollars in aid to small businesses, restaurants, hotels, airlines and other companies.

It extends the moratorium on evictions of people unable to pay their rent, suspends foreclosures and provides funds for the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

The aid is essential to the world's largest economy, hit hard by restrictions put in place to halt the spread of COVID-19.

'I applaud the President's decision to get billions of dollars of crucial COVID-19 relief out the door and into the hands of American families,' tweeted Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell.

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi called the bill 'a down payment on what is needed to crush the virus, put money in Americans' pockets and honour our heroes'.

'We must quickly take further action,' she added in a tweet.

'Chaos and misery'

Romney was not the only politician to have urged the

President to change course on Sunday.

"I understand he wants to be remembered for advocating for big checks, but the danger is he'll be remembered for chaos and misery and erratic behaviour if he allows this to expire," Republican Senator Pat Toomey told Fox News on Sunday.

Senator Bernie Sanders said that 'what the president is doing right now is unbelievably cruel'.

"Many millions of people are losing their extended unemployment benefits," he said on ABC. "They're going to be evicted from their apartments because the eviction moratorium is ending."

Sanders said increased direct payments could be approved in the coming days.

Democrats in Congress sought on Thursday to approve a measure to increase the direct payments in line with what Trump wants, but Republicans blocked it.

It was seen largely as a theatrical move with little hope of passage designed to expose the rift between Republicans and the outgoing President.

AFP



Ant Group asked to return to online payment roots

Beijing, China - Chinese fintech giant Ant Group has been ordered by regulators to drastically change its business model and return to its roots as a payment services provider, as the state squeeze continues on the once unbridled empire of tech tycoon Jack Ma.

China's central bank summoned Ant executives over the weekend and demanded the company 'strictly rectify' its lending, insurance and wealth management services, according to a statement released on Sunday.

The edict comes just weeks after Ant Group's record-breaking IPO was halted at the last minute by Beijing, which has been ruthless in its takedown of a company once vaunted as the poster child for Chinese technology.

Last Thursday regulators also launched an anti-monopoly investigation into Alibaba - of which Ant Group is a subsidiary - sending the share price of the e-commerce giant tumbling and intensifying the troubles of its billionaire founder Ma.

Alibaba's dropped nearly 9 per cent in Monday trading in Hong Kong, as investors grow increasingly nervous over a company in the teeth of Beijing's regulators.

Ant Group made its name via its main product Alipay, the online payments platform and super-app that is now deeply embedded in China's economy.

But the company also expanded into offering loans,

credit, investments and insurance to hundreds of millions of consumers and small businesses, spurring fear and jealousy in a wider banking system geared more for supporting state policy and large corporations.

Xinhua news agency reported Ant Group is now 'strictly prohibited from unfair competition' and is urged to redress its 'illegal' financial activities.

The online payment titan's problems include alleged flaws in corporate governance, poor legal awareness and a lack of regulatory compliance, while it stands accused of 'leveraging market dominance to exclude competitors'.

Its reach into the daily spend of Chinese has also caused anxiety over the potential for personal debt to turn sour and poison the wider economy.

As global demand for the dual Hong Kong-Shanghai listing pushed the IPO toward record valuations - potentially handing Ma and Ant Group even more funding, legitimacy and clout - Chinese regulators acted.

The outspoken and charismatic Ma - a former teacher - had previously lashed out at China's outdated financial system, calling state-owned banks 'pawn shops' in an October speech that led to him being summoned for regulatory talks shortly before Ant's IPO was suspended.

He has edged away from the limelight since the IPO collapsed.

AFP

Post-Brexit trade agreement gets EU green light

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union (EU) gave the green light on Monday to its post-Brexit trade deal with the UK, clearing the way for it to come into effect in the New Year.

The British parliament will have to ratify the deal later this week, but Brussels will apply it provisionally, cushioning the economic shock of the divorce.

Customs and regulatory controls on cross-Channel commerce will still come into effect on January 1 after Britain leaves the EU single market.

But there will be no immediate return to a regime of tariffs and quotas that could have disrupted trade after Britain's decision to quit the club.

Sebastian Fischer, spokesman for the German presidency of the EU, said, "EU ambassadors have

unanimously approved the provisional application of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement."

Under EU procedure, the decision by ambassadors from the 27 member states to endorse the plan will take effect at 3:00pm (1400 GMT) on Tuesday.

But there is no expectation that any EU members will now slow the adoption of the trade deal, the fruit of a tortuous 10-month negotiation.

Germany holds the rotating EU presidency and Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said the coalition government has no objection to the text.

"Germany can accept the negotiated accord," she said.

The European parliament will want to study the deal even after



its provisional application and was expected to convene a session in the first half of next year to ratify it.

But on Monday, MEPs were discussing the possibility of pushing that date back further to give themselves more time to

study the text and to watch how relations develop.

The member states' provisional approval will last until the end of February, but EU parliamentary leaders asked on Monday for a few more weeks to arrange a vote in March or April.

Bolstered by virus, tech titans face scrutiny

Paris, France - Accelerating the transition to an ever more digital existence, the coronavirus pandemic has tightened tech giants' grip on billions of customers' lives.

Governments and users are belatedly coming to terms with the power held by the likes of Apple and Amazon, particularly in focus this year thanks to their role in everything from setting up video meetings to doing our shopping for us.

Most of the planet has spent at least part of 2020 in lockdown, and as Western consumers clicked through Google and Facebook, hundreds of millions of Chinese users turned to Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent or Xiaomi.

These 'superstars' of online capitalism 'have given the impression, in this world where so many things that seemed solid are now fragile, that they are above it all and even invincible', said Paris-based economist Joelle Toledano.

While governments are spending trillions of dollars to avoid widespread bankruptcies and mass unemployment, shares of these companies have been rising since January: Facebook's

stock is up 35 per cent, Amazon 67 per cent and Apple 68 per



cent.

Zoom, created in 2011 by a Californian engineer, has watched its share price jump 600 per cent in 2020, while Airbnb's share value doubled on the day of its IPO.

Meanwhile Chinese apps, long confined to the local market, are exploding in app stores around the world: Notably TikTok but also SHEIN for clothes shopping and another video sharing platform, Likee.

Taking back control

The pandemic may have strengthened these high-flying

digital giants, but it has also energised calls to regulate the conglomerates which continue to expand through hundreds of acquisitions.

"Until 2017, the benefits, especially in terms of innovation, were considered to outweigh the damage," said Toledano, who has written a book about taking control back from Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple.

That has changed, however, as they now stand accused of not paying enough taxes, unfair competition, stealing media content and spreading fake news.

The European Union has un-

veiled an ambitious set of new rules to clip their wings, ranging from limits to their power over the market to cracking down on hate speech and requirements for transparency over algorithms.

Drawing lessons from past failures - delayed and drawn-out procedures and weak penalties - the Digital Services Act could see companies face crippling fines or even bans from the EU market for breaches.

The bloc's competition chief Margrethe Vestager has said the draft laws would bring 'order to chaos' online, reining in the massive 'gatekeepers' who dominate markets.

The US is also acting on competition concerns, with US federal and state antitrust enforcers filing suits against Facebook on December 9 seeking to overturn its acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp.

"For nearly a decade, Facebook has used its dominance and monopoly power to crush smaller rivals and snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users," Letitia James, New York's attorney general, said.

In October the Justice Department and 11 states launched proceedings against Google, accusing it of having illegally

strengthened its monopoly on online searches and advertising.

In China, meanwhile, authorities have been tightening regulation of content for several months, and recently announced new rules for e-commerce.

Little economic damage

Despite public outcry over their failings to rein in misinformation or hate speech, among other things, tech firms have seen little impact on their bottom line.

In the US, Facebook was boycotted in July by a hundred or so advertisers against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement, without any major economic damage.

Ride-hailing platforms Uber and Lyft, which refused to take on their thousands of drivers as employees as required by California law, managed to convince voters there to support them in a crucial referendum in November.

And in France, Amazon is accused of destroying small business, exploiting its employees and promoting over-consumption with disregard for the environment - yet the French branch of Jeff Bezos' company made record sales during the 'Black Friday' sales bonanza.

AFP



A file photo released on the Facebook page of Saudi activist Loujain al Hathloul on August 6, 2019 (AFP)

Saudi activist Hathloul jailed for over 5 years

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - A Saudi court on Monday sentenced prominent activist Loujain al Hathloul to five years and eight months in prison for terrorism-related crimes, according to local media allowed to attend her trial.

The women's rights activist was convicted of 'various activities prohibited by the anti-terrorism law', the pro-government online outlet Sabq and other media cited the court as saying.

They added that the court suspended two years and ten months of the sentence 'if she does not commit any crime' within the next three years.

The reports did not explain whether the sentence included time served or say when she may be released from custody.

A motion to appeal can be filed within 30 days.

Hathloul (31) was arrested in May 2018 with about a dozen other women activists just weeks before the historic lifting of a decades-long ban on women drivers, a reform for which they had long campaigned.

After being tried in Riyadh's criminal court, her trial was

Hathloul (31) was arrested in May 2018 with about a dozen other women activists just weeks before the historic lifting of a decades-long ban on women drivers, a reform for which they had long campaigned.

transferred last month to the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC), or the 'anti-terrorism court, which campaigners say is notorious for issuing long jail terms and is used to silence critical voices under the cover of fighting terrorism.

Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told AFP that Hathloul was accused of contacting 'unfriendly' states and providing classified information, but her family said no evidence to support the allegations had been put forward.

While some detained women activists have been provisionally released, Hathloul and others remain imprisoned on what rights groups describe as opaque charges.

The pro-government Saudi media has branded them as 'traitors'

and Hathloul's family alleges she experienced sexual harassment and torture in detention. Saudi Arabia denies the charges.

Spotlight on human rights

Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy, has faced growing international criticism for its human rights record.

But the kingdom appears to be doubling down on dissent, even as US President-elect Joe Biden's incoming administration could intensify scrutiny of its human rights failings.

Aside from a host of international campaigners and celebrities, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations have demanded the 'immediate and unconditional release' of Hathloul.

The detention of women activists has cast a spotlight on the human rights record of the kingdom, which has also faced intense criticism over the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in its Istanbul consulate.

Hathloul began a hunger strike in prison on October 26 to demand regular contact with her family, but felt compelled to end it two weeks later, her siblings said.

'She was being woken up by the guards every two hours, day and night, as a brutal tactic to break her,' Amnesty said last month, citing the activist's family.

'Yet, she is far from broken.'

The Specialised Criminal Court was established in 2008 to handle terrorism-related cases, but has been widely used to try political dissidents and human rights activists.

In a report earlier this year, Amnesty International said the secretive court was being used to silence critical voices under the cover of fighting terrorism.

AFP

Egypt security officials in Tripoli for rare visit

Tripoli, Libya - Egyptian security officials met on Sunday with representatives of Libya's Government of National Accord, a first delegation in nearly six years from Cairo, considered a backer of a rival camp in the conflict-hit country.

Interior Minister for the UN-recognised GNA, Fathi Bachagha, held 'a high-level meeting' with the Egyptian delegation, which included the deputy intelligence services chief, his office said.

Imed Trabelsi, head of the Libyan general security body, also attended the meeting.

The talks covered 'ways of strengthening security cooperation' and support for a ceasefire signed in October between rival Libyan sides under UN auspices, the ministry added.

Libya has been riven by violence since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Two rival administrations have vied for control of the oil-rich country for years, with the Tripoli-based GNA - supported by Turkey - pitted against forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar, backed by Egypt, Russia and the United Arab Emirates.

Turkish support for the GNA



This file photo shows Libya's UN recognised GNA government's Interior Minister Fathi Bachagha (right) upon his arrival at Mitiga International Airport, east of the Libyan capital Tripoli on August 29 (AFP)

earlier this year helped repel a 14-month offensive against the capital by Haftar launched in April last year.

The ceasefire the two sides struck in October has set the stage for elections at the end of 2021.

Sunday's visit was the first made by an official Egyptian delegation to Tripoli since 2014, when Egypt closed its embassy in the Libyan capital due to violence.

The delegation also met with the GNA's Foreign Minister, Mohamed Taha Siala.

The aim of the talks was to work to 'normalise diplomatic relations' between Tripoli and Cairo and to discuss 'cooperation in various areas', said Mohamed Elgeblawi, spokesman for the GNA Foreign Ministry.

According to Elgeblawi, the delegation pledged to reopen the Egyptian consulate 'as soon as possible' and to re-establish air links between the two capitals, which have been interrupted for several years.

The visit comes days after Haftar said in a speech that his forces would 'prepare to drive out the occupier by faith, will and weapons', referring to Turkish troops operating in support of the GNA.

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar was in Tripoli on Saturday and vowed that any attack by Haftar on Turkey's personnel in Libya would be met with force.

AFP

Azerbaijan says one soldier dead in Armenian ambush

Baku, Azerbaijan - Azerbaijan said on Monday that one of its soldiers was killed during a skirmish with Armenian separatists, in an apparent escalation of hostilities undermining a recent Russian-brokered ceasefire.

The Defence Ministry said in a statement that an illegal group of Armenian fighters in territory adjacent to the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region carried out the ambush on Sunday.

'As a result of the attack, a soldier of the Azerbaijan army... was killed,' it said, noting another serviceman was wounded but in a stable condition.

A peace deal mediated by Russia ended in early November

six weeks of fighting between Azerbaijan and separatists backed by Armenia for control of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

More than 6,000 people were killed in the conflict before the peace agreement that saw Armenia cede swathes of territory it had controlled for decades to its longstanding rival.

Azerbaijan said on Monday that six Armenian fighters died in the attack near the village of Agdam, which was captured by Baku's army in November.

The Defence Ministry vowed to take 'decisive measures' if repeat attacks were carried out by Armenian troops.

A Russian peacekeeping force of around 2,000 soldiers deployed to Karabakh as part of the terms of the November accord.

The mission reported earlier this month that one Russian soldier died during a mine-clearing operation but says the peace deal is largely holding.

Azerbaijan revealed earlier in December that at least six servicemen had died since the November 10 peace accord was agreed.

Separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh broke from Azerbaijan's control in a war in the 1990s that killed some 30,000 people.

AFP



A photo of Reuters cameraman Kumerra Gemechu from his family album

Reuters condemns arrest of cameraman

Nairobi, Kenya - Ethiopian police arrested a Reuters cameraman from his home in Addis Ababa last week and have held him in custody without charge, the international news agency said on Monday.

Kumerra Gemechu (40) was handcuffed and taken away in front of his family last Thursday by ten armed federal police officers who did not give a reason for his arrest, Reuters said.

'At a brief court hearing on Friday, where no lawyer was present, a judge ordered Kumerra's detention for a further 14 days to give police time to investigate,' Kumerra's family said

as quoted by Reuters.

Reuters editor-in-chief Stephen J Adler said the agency was not aware of any basis for Kumerra's detention, and praised his fair and impartial reporting.

'Journalists must be allowed to report the news in the public interest without fear of harassment or harm, wherever they are,' Adler said on Twitter on Monday. 'We will not rest until Reuters cameraman Kumerra Gemechu is freed.'

His phone, a computer, and other electronic and personal items were seized during the arrest, his family said.

AFP

Sudan to deploy troops in Darfur after clashes

Khartoum, Sudan - Sudan is to send troop reinforcements to the south of its Darfur region after 15 people were killed in tribal clashes, the official news agency SUNA said.

The governor of South Darfur state, Musa Mahdi, announced 'the deployment of a large number of military forces in order to arrest those involved in the clashes and to collect the arms', it reported on Sunday.

'The era of reconciliation conferences is over and the era of implementing the law has started,' Mahdi said, referring to talks in recent months, as quoted by SUNA.

A local official, also cited by the agency, said a dispute between the Massalit and Fallata tribes in the Gereida area had led to armed clashes in which two members of the Fallata were killed.

The Fallata mounted reprisal attacks that left 13 dead and 34 wounded among the Massalit, SUNA said, without specifying when the violence broke out.

Gereida has been the frequent scene of deadly clashes between the rival tribes over the past two years, but this was the first since a reconciliation meeting held in October.

It comes less than a week



This file photo shows a displaced Sudanese woman walking past a UN-African Union mission to Darfur (UNAMID) vehicle at the Kalma camp for internally displaced people in Darfur's state capital Nyala on October 9, 2019 (AFP)

after the United Nations Security Council agreed to end the UN and African Union's long-running peacekeeping mission in Darfur, UNAMID, when its mandate expires on December 31.

Conflict in the vast Darfur region of western Sudan has largely eased in recent years apart from confrontations, mostly over land and water re-

sources, between nomadic tribes and farmers.

The withdrawal of UNAMID - deployed since 2007 and which had 16,000 peacekeepers at its peak - will begin January 1 and is expected to be completed by June 30.

The termination was requested by the Sudanese government and backed by China,

Russia and African members of the Security Council.

Sudan's 'transitional government is committed to providing security and stability for all citizens of the Darfur states,' the Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

'It will continue its efforts to address the roots of the problem and consolidate the foundations

of tribal reconciliation and lay the foundations for transitional justice and the rule of law,' it said.

Darfur was the scene of a bitter conflict that broke out in 2003 between African minority rebels, complaining of marginalisation, and forces backed by the government of now ousted president Omar Bashir.

AFP

China trial of 'Hong Kong 12' begins

Shenzhen, China - The trial in China of a group of Hong Kong pro-democracy activists who tried to escape the city by speed-boat for sanctuary in Taiwan opened on Monday, as the United States urged the immediate release of dissidents it says 'fled tyranny'.

Ten of the so-called 'Hong Kong 12' were in court in the southern city of Shenzhen facing charges linked to an illegal border crossing.

Chinese authorities took them into custody after their boat was intercepted on August 23.

The hearing began as scheduled on Monday afternoon, AFP understands, and was likely to run into the evening, although it was not immediately clear when the verdict would be delivered.

Court officials stayed tight-lipped about the case and the trial - like many in China's opaque legal system - was not open to foreign reporters or diplomats.

At least two of the group face around seven years in jail for organising the attempted escape from a city where democracy activists last year led massive protests against Beijing's rule.

Some of the group were already facing prosecution in Hong Kong, where China has imposed a draconian national security law that has stamped out the city's protest movement.

"Their so-called 'crime' was to flee tyranny," a US Embassy spokesperson said, ahead of their scheduled court appearance. Urging their 'immediate release', the spokesperson said, "Communist China will stop at nothing to prevent its people from seeking freedom elsewhere."



A protester holds up signs outside China's Liaison Office calling on China to free the 12 Hong Kong democracy activists facing trial in China, in Hong Kong on Monday (AFP)

The US has used Hong Kong's evaporating freedoms as a stick to beat China with in recent months.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs went into a familiar attack mode over the US comments.

Washington must 'immediately stop interfering in China's internal affairs through the Hong Kong issue and immediately stop interfering in China's judicial sov-

ereignty', spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters.

Secret trial

Families of the accused - the youngest of whom is just 16 - have called for the hearing in the Shenzhen court to be broadcast live, after they were unable to attend due to the short notice for the trial and COVID-19 requirements.

They were only notified of the trial date on Friday, while their lawyers have been barred from meeting with the detainees.

Authorities instead have appointed state-approved legal representation.

In a joint letter over the weekend, the families said they 'strongly condemn' the authorities' decision to hold the trial in 'de facto secret' at Yantian Dis-

trict People's Court.

"We urge governments to send embassy personnel to the hearing to guarantee a proper and fair trial by the courts in Shenzhen," they said, noting that those detained include British, Portuguese and Vietnamese nationals.

The security law that now blankets Hong Kong gives authorities sweeping powers of

prosecution for acts deemed terrorism, secession, subversion or collusion with foreign entities.

The city had enjoyed unique freedoms since its handover from former colonial power Britain in 1997, with a deal promising a 'one country, two systems' arrangement for 50 years.

Beijing says the new security law was needed to restore peace and stability but critics have con-

They have so far been deprived of their basic rights, including the right to defend themselves through legal representation of their own choosing

LAM CHO MING

demned it as a fatal attack on Hong Kong's freedoms.

China has a history of putting dissidents on trial around the Christmas and New Year period to avoid Western scrutiny.

Amnesty International said there was little chance the group would receive a fair trial.

"They have so far been deprived of their basic rights, including the right to defend themselves through legal representation of their own choosing," Amnesty Hong Kong's Programme Manager Lam Cho Ming said in a statement.

Eight of the group are accused of an illegal border crossing, while two are suspected of organising for others to cross the border.

Two minors face non-public hearings.

Since Beijing imposed the security law in June, Taiwan has emerged as a sanctuary for Hong Kong activists - quietly turning a blind eye to dissidents turning up without proper visas or paperwork. The self-ruling island opened a new office in July to deal with Hong Kongers wanting to move to the island, including those seeking to stay in Taiwan for 'political reasons'.

AFP

17 fishermen feared dead after boat sinks in Arctic

Moscow, Russia - Seventeen fishermen were missing and feared dead on Monday after a Russian boat capsized during a storm and sank in the freezing waters of the Barents Sea.

Officials said that two people had been rescued during a search-and-rescue operation, but that bad weather conditions had complicated efforts to find survivors.

The privately-owned boat, called *Onega*, sank near the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in the Barents Sea, with authorities becoming aware of the accident at 7.30am, officials said.

"As a result of the accident, 19 people ended up in the water," said the Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, adding two people were rescued.

A source told the Interfax news agency that there was little hope of finding survivors due to strong winds and low temperatures. "During the sinking, temperatures were as low as 30 degrees (Celsius) below zero," the source was quoted as saying.

"It's practically impossible to hold out even with wet suits on."

Officials believe that ice had built up on the Russian-flagged vessel, which had been operating since 1979. "The disaster struck during a strong storm when the crew was hauling out a net with the catch," the source said.

"People were literally swept off from the deck by the sea." The trawler sank so fast that crew did not have time to activate their life rafts, the source said.

AFP

Guinea communal clashes leave 11 dead

Conakry, Guinea - Two days of communal clashes in southeast Guinea have left at least 11 people dead and more than 40 wounded, officials said on Sunday.

The violence between mostly Muslim Tomas Mania and mostly animist Tomas was sparked on Saturday by the unveiling of a new house for the Tomas patriarch in the town of Macenta, local sources told AFP.

Police reinforcements from neighbouring towns failed to stop the fighting Sunday and several of their number had been injured, a prefectural source said.

Witnesses said many residents had fled and taken shelter

in the surrounding forest.

Eleven corpses were brought to the local hospital between Saturday and Sunday, according to regional governor Mohamed Ghare.

Kaba Conde, the director of the hospital, said most could not be identified due to injuries sustained from machetes, clubs and stones.

The rival sides had also used hunting rifles against each other, he added.

The Tomas and Tomas Mania both claim to have founded the town of Macenta, and clash regularly, often over land issues, according to the official.

AFP

Bangladesh moves more Rohingya to controversial island in Bay of Bengal

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh - Bangladesh on Monday started moving a second group of Rohingya refugees to a controversial flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal despite opposition from rights activists.

More than 1,600 of the Muslim minority from Myanmar were taken to Bhashan Char earlier this month, and Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen said just under 1,000 were in the latest batch heading for what he called a 'beautiful resort'.

Buses took the Rohingya from camps in Cox's Bazar, where nearly one million refugees are packed, to Chittagong port where they will be taken to the barren island.

"They are going voluntarily. They are very eager to go Bhashan Char because they have heard from their relatives, those who have gone to Bhashan Char, that (it) is an excellent place," Momen told AFP.

He claimed the island was '100 times better' than the camps, and that the refugees had



A convoy of buses carries Rohingya refugees relocated to an island in Ukhia, Bangladesh, on Monday (AFP)

'appealed' to be taken there.

"Bhashan Char is a beautiful resort. It is an excellent resort. And once anybody goes there, they will love it," he added.

Two Rohingya men in the latest group told AFP they were going to the island willingly.

Nur Kamal, a Rohingya from

the giant Kutupalang refugee camp, said he was going to be with relatives already at Bhashan Char. "What is the point of staying here (in the camps) without them?"

Serajul Islam said he was going with five family members and was not being forced.

"The way the international community is handling our issue, I don't see any future in the camps," he told AFP from the bus taking him to Chittagong.

"It is better I go and live the rest of my life there in better housing. At least I won't have to think about floods during the

rainy season and unbearable heat in the summer."

More than 700,000 Rohingya packed the camps in Bangladesh in 2017 after a deadly Myanmar military clampdown that the United Nations has said could be genocide.

After the first transfer on December 4, several Rohingya told AFP that they were beaten and intimidated to agree to move.

The Bangladesh government eventually wants to put 100,000 Rohingya on the 56sqkm island, despite criticism from rights groups because Bhashan Char is so isolated.

The UN said it has not been involved in the process.

"Allegations from within the community about cash incentives being offered to Rohingya families to relocate to Bhashan Char as well as use of intimidation tactics are making the relocation process questionable," said Amnesty International's South Asia campaigner Saad Hammadi.

AFP

Power outage, plane delays after storm hits France

Rennes, France - Tens of thousands were left without electricity and planes were delayed or forced to re-route on Sunday as Storm Bella caused torrential rain and heavy winds in France.

Brittany and Normandy in the north and west of France were the first regions to suffer power cuts, but '18,000 households were reconnected' later on Sunday, said power company Enedis.

However, some 34,000 households in the east and cen-

tre of France were still without power.

Over a third of flights from France's main airport of Charles de Gaulle north of Paris had suffered delays of an average of 50 minutes due to the storm.

However, airport operator ADP said 'air traffic has now returned to normal'.

Three flights heading to the airport were re-routed to Paris Orly airport south of Paris, while an Aeroflot flight landed in Ams-



High waves and strong winds hit the coast of Le Becquet, in northwestern France as Storm Bella hit the country on Sunday (AFP)

terdam and a plane heading from Luxemburg turned back.

A top flight rugby clash between Pau and Stade Francais scheduled for the afternoon was delayed by three hours after the storm prevented the Paris-based team from taking off.

The winds and rains abated in some areas by the late afternoon, but heavy snow was forecast on higher ground in the south of the country heading into Monday.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

'Small delay in Pfizer vaccine deliveries to 8 EU countries'

Madrid, Spain - Pfizer has postponed the delivery of new batches of its coronavirus vaccine to eight European nations including Spain, the Spanish Health Ministry said on Monday, a day after the EU began its immunisation campaign.

The Spanish branch of Pfizer informed Madrid on Sunday night of the delay in shipments to the eight nations due to a 'problem in the loading and shipment process' at its plant in Belgium, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

It did not specify which European nations aside from Spain were affected, but said Spain's next delivery would be on Tuesday, a day later than expected.

"Due to a minor logistical issue, we have rescheduled a limited number of our deliveries," Andrew Widger, Pfizer's director for media relations said.

"The logistical matter has been resolved and those deliveries are now being dispatched. There are no manufacturing issues to report."

Asked about the delay during an interview with radio station Cadena Ser, Spain's Health Minister Salvador Illa said it was due to a problem 'linked to the control of the temperature' of the shipments which was 'apparently fixed'.

The vaccine must be stored at ultra-low temperatures of about -70°C before being shipped to distribution centres in specially designed cool boxes



The Catalan regional government officials unpack the first batch of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, in Barcelona on Sunday (AFP)

filled with dry ice.

Once out of ultra-low temperature storage, the vaccine must be kept at two Celsius to eight Celsius to remain effective for up to five days.

Spain is scheduled to receive 350,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine per week over the next three months.

Most European Union nations began their immunisation campaigns against the virus this weekend with the Pfizer-BioN-

Tech jab, beginning with the elderly, health care workers and politicians.

US surpasses 19mn cases

The United States surpassed 19mn coronavirus cases Sunday, figures from Johns Hopkins University showed, adding 1mn new cases in less than a week.

The US recorded 165,151 new cases in 24 hours at 8.30pm, the Baltimore-based institution said, bringing the overall total to

19,107,675 cases. The grim new milestone comes just six days after the US crossed the 18mn case threshold.

The US also has a total of 333,069 virus-related deaths. Both the caseload and death toll are by far the highest in the world.

Coronavirus cases have been surging at an alarming rate in the US in recent months. The world's largest economy has added at least one million new cases per week since early No-

vember, according to an AFP tally of Johns Hopkins data.

And on Saturday, Johns Hopkins calculated that one in 1,000 Americans have died of COVID-19.

More than a million Americans have received the first dose of their COVID-19 vaccines, a milestone in the biggest immunisation drive in US history, but officials admitted the pace of rollout was slipping behind schedule.

AFP

Saudi's suspension of flights extended

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia has extended its suspension of commercial passenger flights by at least one week and possibly two amid concerns over a new variant of the coronavirus.

Saudi Arabia will however allow flights in 'exceptional cases', an Interior Ministry official said according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) on Sunday.

Foreigners will be allowed to depart the kingdom and cargo movement will be permitted, it added.

Saudi Arabia on December 20 had halted international flights and suspended entry through its land and sea ports for at least a week, after a new fast-spreading strain of coronavirus appeared in Britain.

The official Saudi Press Agency then had said that the kingdom was 'temporarily suspending all international flights - except in exceptional cases - for a period of one week, which can be extended by another week'.

'Saudi Arabia decided to extend the aforementioned measures for another week to continue assessing the situation and to ensure safety of citizens and expatriates,' said the latest SPA report.

Earlier this month, the kingdom kicked off a COVID-19 vaccination campaign, using the Pfizer-BioNTech jab.

Saudi Arabia has so far recorded over 362,000 cases, including 6,000 deaths.

AFP

Security team for Philippines' Duterte gets unauthorised jabs

Manila, Philippines - Members of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's security team have received a Chinese-made coronavirus vaccine, officials said on Monday - the first people in the country to be officially immunised despite no regulatory approval.

The Philippines is in talks with several pharmaceutical firms, including Britain's AstraZeneca, US company Pfizer and China's Sinopharm, to secure 60mn doses for a vaccination drive starting as early as the second quarter of 2021.

No vaccine has been approved by the country's Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which is required before



Members of President Rodrigo Duterte's security team received the vaccine despite no regulatory approval

it can be rolled out across the country of 110mn people.

But the Presidential Security Group (PSG) - which is tasked

with protecting Duterte - said some of its personnel have already been inoculated.

"The PSG administered

COVID-19 vaccine to its personnel performing close-in security operations to the President," unit chief Brigadier General Jesus Durante said in a statement, without specifying how many got the drug.

Asked if Duterte had been immunised, Durante said the president was still waiting 'for the perfect or appropriate vaccine'.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the Sinopharm drug was given to the soldiers, confirming Duterte's comments at the weekend that 'a select few' had been inoculated with the Chinese vaccine.

AFP

Chinese citizen journalist jailed for Wuhan virus reporting

Shanghai, China - A Chinese citizen journalist was jailed for four years on Monday for her reporting from Wuhan as the COVID-19 outbreak unfurled, her lawyer said, almost a year after details of an 'unknown viral pneumonia' surfaced in the central China city.

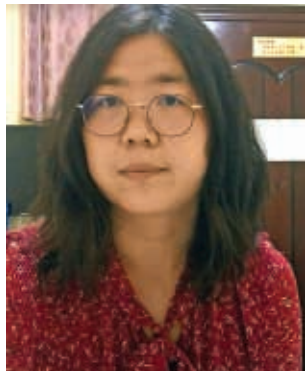
Zhang Zhan, a former lawyer, was sentenced at a brief hearing in a Shanghai court for allegedly 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble' during her reporting in the initial stages of the outbreak.

Her live reports and essays were shared on social media platforms in February, grabbing the attention of authorities, who have punished eight virus whistleblowers so far as they defang criticism of their response to the outbreak.

Beijing has congratulated itself for 'extraordinary' success in controlling the virus inside its borders, with an economy on the rebound while much of the rest of the world stutters through painful lockdowns and surging caseloads a year on from the start of the pandemic in Wuhan.

Controlling the information flow during an unprecedented global health crisis has been pivotal in allowing China's communist authorities to reframe the narrative in their favour, with President Xi Jinping being garlanded for his leadership by the country's ruling party.

But that has come at a serious cost to anyone who has picked holes in the official storyline. The court said Zhang



Policemen (right) try to stop journalists from recording footage outside the Shanghai Pudong New District People's Court, as Chinese citizen journalist Zhang Zhan (left) is set for trial, in Shanghai on Monday (AFP)

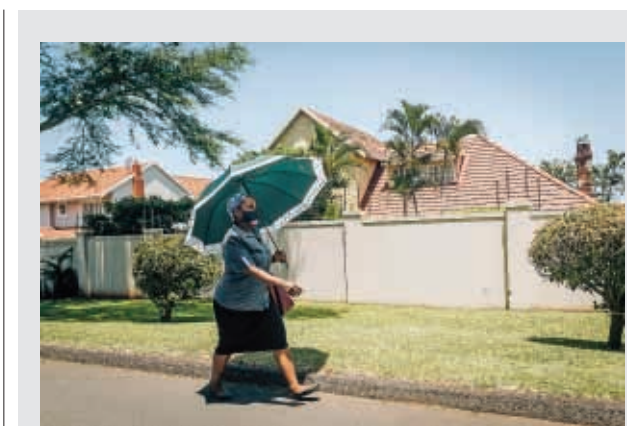
Zhan had spread 'false remarks' online, according to one of her lawyers Zhang Keke, but the prosecution did not fully divulge its evidence in court.

"We had no way of understanding what exactly Zhang Zhan was accused of doing," he



added, describing it as 'a speedy, rushed hearing'.

In return the defendant 'didn't respond [to questions]... She refused to answer when the judge asked her to confirm her identity'. The defendant's mother sobbed loudly as the verdict was



This file photo shows a woman walking home from work during the COVID-19 restrictions, in Durban on December 19 (AFP)

South Africa logs million virus cases

Johannesburg, South Africa

- South Africa logged its millionth case of COVID-19 and South Korea on Monday became the latest country to detect the new coronavirus variant, as the pandemic showed no signs of letting up.

Global infections have raced past 80mn with nearly 1.8mn deaths, even as vaccination drives gather pace in North America and Europe, with a top US expert warning that the pandemic might get even worse in the coming weeks.

The explosion of cases worldwide in recent weeks has prompted the return of many unpopular restrictions, including some lockdowns, and concerns have grown after the detection of a new virus variant experts believe could be more transmissible.

South Africa became the first African nation to log one million cases, official data showed on Sunday, as authorities considered reimposing restrictions to battle a second wave of infections driven by the new variant.

South Korea detects new strain

Three cases of a particularly infectious coronavirus variant that recently emerged in Britain have been confirmed in South Korea, health authorities said on Monday.

The three individuals are members of a London-based family who arrived in the country on December 22, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCPA).

They have been placed in isolation since testing positive for COVID-19 on arrival, the KDCPA statement said.

The new strain of the virus emerged earlier this month in Britain and has already

South Africa became the first African nation to log 1mn cases, as authorities considered reimposing restrictions to battle a second wave

reached several European countries, as well as Canada, Jordan and Japan, prompting over 50 countries, including South Korea to impose travel restrictions on Britain.

Sydney bans New Year crowds

Plans to let thousands of frontline workers ring in the new year around Sydney Harbour were ditched on Monday as authorities work to suppress a growing cluster of virus cases in Australia's most populous city.

Ordinarily, hundreds of thousands of eager partiers flock to vantage points for the midnight fireworks launched from the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Although allowing the usual hordes of revellers had been ruled out this year, officials had plans to welcome around 5,000 workers to the foreshore as a token of thanks for their work against the pandemic. But that idea has now been axed.

"We've abandoned our plans in terms of any foreshore viewing of the fireworks from the Sydney CBD, so that won't be allowed," the state leader of New South Wales, of which Sydney is the capital, Gladys Berejiklian, said.

AFP

AMERICA'S SHELTER DOG MAKEOVERS OF 2020

FURRY TALES

If you're leaving town for holidays, make sure your pets are well taken care of. And if you're leaving Oman for good, due to circumstances beyond your control, make arrangements to take your pet along. Abandoned pets face a horrible time on their own until they get rescued...and after that, their mental trauma never really goes away after you've left without a

conscience! Most abandoned pets of varied breeds are not equipped to rough it out like wadi dogs in Oman. They need attention, physical care, food, and above all, love within a home. Once abandoned their physical appearance itself turns pitiable and most need a complete makeover to

be able to survive without their owners. While many people added a furry family member to their home in 2020, when they need more fun and activity during confinement within their homes, there are still many homeless pets (dogs and cats) awaiting good souls to give them a new home. Sadly, these deserving animals are often perceived

as 'damaged goods' just because of their appearance. Here are some shelter dog makeovers of 2020 in America. A similar plight exists for many abandoned pets in Oman. If you cannot provide a home for any abandoned pet, here's what you can do: just visit a shelter and pay for the treatment or grooming of any of the pets.



Winston

Winston's story did not begin as a happy one. The loyal pup was kicked out of his home, but kept returning only to be rejected again and again. Alone and with nowhere to go, thankfully, a good Samaritan took pity on Winston and brought him to a rescue. After grooming and vet care, Winston went to a foster family which immediately cherished him. He's now sharing his love with people who appreciate it.





Chloe

Chloe was rescued from a high kill shelter. Her fur was so severely matted she could barely see through the hair covering her eyes. After hours of careful grooming, most of her matted coat came off in one piece. What emerged was a pretty pup ready to rock a photo shoot. She now lives with a loving forever family that gives her the pampering she deserves.



Patterson

Patterson came to his rescue with a jaw that was broken in several places. For weeks, he wore a soft muzzle that left his skin irritated and his fur matted. His first grooming was a delicate process, but Patterson was a trooper and everyone was amazed by his adorable makeover. He now lives with a loving forever family, and they don't care one smidge that he's a bit of a messy eater.



Buddy

Buddy had a great start to life, and was a loving playmate to a little girl. Unfortunately, as the little girl got older Buddy went from playing tea party to being tied up outside every day. His owners finally decided he deserved better and turned him over to a rescue where he could get nutritious food, medical care and grooming. Buddy's life is great once more, as an elderly gentleman adopted him.



Toko

Toko was turned over to his rescue in a rabbit cage, after years of neglect. He could hardly walk because of horrible mats that would pull on his red and raw skin. While he needed the relief of a good grooming, he was scared to let anyone touch him. Thankfully, a dedicated groomer worked wonders and Toko instantly became a different dog running and playing around the shop.



Barbie

Barbie and her beau Ken were brought into the shelter as strays. Both were matted and dirty, but poor Ken also had a severe leg injury that required amputation. While recovering from surgery, Ken refused to eat without his true love by his side. Once reunited, these freshly groomed and healthier dogs became a true golden couple. Thankfully, they were adopted together and now live in a happy home.



Truman

Truman's harrowing rescue saved him from a criminal abuse case. He was so badly neglected that his coat was a shell of matted fur and feces, and he couldn't move without being in extreme pain. After shaving off nearly five pounds of fur, Truman had to regain the use of his legs. Thankfully, however, it wasn't long before he was running and playing again. Truman's new family is now spoiling him overtime.



Stein

Stein's original owners bought him from a breeder as a puppy, but soon decided they didn't have time for him. Stein spent much of his life alone and outside until his owners agreed to surrender him. Once rescued, and after some medical care and a grooming makeover, Stein flourished. This handsome dog is no longer alone and lives with a family that loves him.



Scruffy

Scruffy was found along the side of a road by a passing driver, who then called the rescue organisation. On the phone, the driver said Scruffy was matted, but no one was prepared for the extent of his neglect. Under his shell of fur, groomers found a harness, sticks and other debris. Once cleaned up, his transformation into a handsome little guy with a big heart was truly remarkable.

(BPT)



WINTER FOOTCARE

PEDICURE AT HOME

It's winter, and with the dry cold weather comes the unpleasant prospect of cracks on the feet and other problems that simply won't go away until the weather changes. And, if you are wary about exhibiting not-so-good looking feet in a salon, how about a winter pedicure routine at home?

There are numerous procedures for footcare and some do need medical attention or hands of a pedicure specialist, but if you do not have any serious problems, here's how to take care of your feet in winter. And get started, before any problems arise.

You can do your pedicure in the shower itself because some steps do need water and it might be easy to multi task while conditioning your hair or waiting for the prescribed time for hair colour to set. It is also good to soak your feet in warm water in a tub or in the shower.

First, begin by removing your nail polish. Use acetone or any nail polish remover for removing nail polish and let this procedure be quick. Acetone wipes are better than using remover with cotton pads because the pads may need extra friction to get the polish off completely.

Once you begin your shower, make sure to have a stool handy to sit. Use a pumice stone to rub your heels to get rid of dead skin and rough edges. If you do this regularly in the shower, you will not have to spend much time on it each time you do a pedicure. While showering, use exfoliating mitts to scrub your body and spend a little extra time on your feet, especially around your ankles which can get a bit dry.

Then use a cuticle remover on your toe nails. This is more effective once the dry skin has been scrubbed off. (Make sure to place the cuticle remover in your bathroom - you don't want to skip this step). Use the cuticle remover all over your foot, including your heel and around toe nails. Wait for 30 seconds, then start scrubbing your foot with the mitts again.

After rinsing off the cuticle remover, use an oil-based salt scrub all over your feet and legs. You don't need to scrub your feet much if you've already done the previous steps, just get the oil into the skin to make your feet feel softer later on.

Once out of the shower, do put some lotion on your feet, the one you use for your body. Apply it all over quickly and leave it on. After the shower, don't be in a hurry to apply nail polish. Clean the nail surface of all residual lotion with an alcohol-based cleaner and do a base coat first. Do the final coat only after the base coat has dried completely.

Your own pedicure kit

If you need to do a pedicure routine at home, you will need pumice stone, nail brush, loofah, file, nail cleaner, cuticle pusher, cuticle remover, a moisturising lotion, nail cutter, acetone, a tub of hot water, oil based salt scrub and towels.



Remedy for tired feet

If you have tired and aching feet and suffer from varicose veins, then the following foot remedy might be helpful:

- Take 2 litres boiled water and add in 2 cups pine needles (leaves), 2 cups rose petals and 2 tsp peppermint oil.
- Massage the feet with castor oil and then soak them in this soothing brew for about 10 minutes.
- Add marbles or small pebbles in the tub and roll your heels on them to relax tired aching feet.
- Dry briskly with a towel and rub in a good lemon massage cream.



Remedy for cracked heels

You can avoid getting cracked heels in winter, if you follow your own pedicure routine regularly all year round. However, here's an easy remedy:

- Clean the feet well with a pumice stone and nail brush and pat dry.
- Massage the feet well with a heavy duty cream or sesame and sandalwood oil until the skin has absorbed most of it.
- Melt a candle in a double boiler and when slightly cool, brush it on the heels and allow it to solidify.
- This remedy is best followed at night. Put on cotton socks and go to bed. In the morning, remove the socks and peel off the layer of wax. Follow it daily for a week and you will find a huge difference in the way your feet look and feel.



Remedy for chipped nails

- Mix 1 tsp of gelatine with half a glass of water and drink it daily for two weeks.
- Keep the nails short and well-trimmed to strengthen the base.
- Let your nails breathe and if at all they have turned yellow due to regular use of nail colour, please let them breathe. Wear open shoes.
- Rub lemon slices on the toe nails daily and allow the juice to soak in. They will regain their natural healthy colour in no time.



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