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OMAN HOPEFUL OF OLYMPIC SPOT IN SAILING
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Mutual visa-free entry for citizens of Oman, China



Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said receives Wang Yi on Monday

Muscat - Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Wang Yi, State Councillor and Foreign Minister of China, on Monday.

Wang conveyed greetings of his country's leadership and best wishes of success to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the government, and further progress and growth to the Omani people.

The two sides reviewed the growth and progress of their relations and ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in all fields.

Memorial of Chinese traveller Zheng He to be built in Salalah

Mutual waiver of entry visas for citizens

Cooperation agreement in media, health and cultural fields

They also discussed current regional and international issues and developments.

Wang underscored the significance of his visit to Oman for the exchange of views on matters of mutual interest. He voiced his country's appreciation for the efforts undertaken by the sultanate, both in consolidating domestic development and fostering ties of friendship with all countries.

Wang also expressed his country's willingness to back efforts to enhance dialogue and understanding between countries of the world to help find fair solu-

tions to crises and ensure peaceful coexistence among all peoples so that they can focus on development in a climate of security and stability.

He commended the exchange of views between Omani and Chinese officials, noting that this will reflect positively on Oman-China relations.

Visa waiver for Omani citizens

A session of political discussions was held at the Foreign Ministry on Monday.

Continued on Page 03

Royal Decree amends College of Sharia Sciences' apparatus

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 31/2021 on Monday, amending some provisions of Royal Decree No 35/2014 on the establishment of College of Sharia Sciences and promulgation of its system.

Article 1 replaces the text of Article 1 of Royal Decree No 35/2014 with the following text:

'A scholarly institution to be named College of Sharia Sciences will be established, report to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation,

and be governed by the system (law) attached to this decree.'

Article 2 replaces the text of Article 4 of Royal Decree No 35/2014 with the following text:

'The Chairman of Board of Trustees of the College of Sharia Sciences will issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of provisions of this decree and its attached system. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions will continue to be enforced, but without prejudice to the provisions of this decree and its at-

tached system.'

Article 3 stipulates that the attached amendments will be applied to the system of College of Sharia Sciences promulgated under the aforementioned Royal Decree No 35/2014.

Article 4 cancels all that contradicts this decree or its attached amendments or contravenes their provisions.

Article 5 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on the day following its publication.

ONA

HM confers Order of Felicitation on PDO MD

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Order of Felicitation on Raoul Restucci, managing director of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), on Monday. The honour reflects His Majesty the Sultan's appreciation for the efforts and contributions of Restucci in his field of work.

The order was handed over by Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, when he received Restucci in his office on Monday.

The conferment ceremony



was attended by Dr Mohammed Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, the secretary

general and the two advisers at Sayyid Asaad's office.

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Motorists urged to avoid lockdown rush hour

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With night lockdown coming into effect sharp at 8pm, taking to the roads even at 6pm is increasingly becoming every driver's nightmare. For the second day running on Monday evening, several parts of the city witnessed traffic congestions.

"The night lockdown starts at 8pm. To avoid congestions, everyone should reach home before the lockdown comes into force. The ban on movement and closure requires everyone's support," an ROP official said.

He added, "Commercial establishments should stop activities at an appropriate time to ensure that their customers and employees can return home in time to avoid congestions. It's important that everyone is cautious to avoid accidents."

Nasser al Hosni, director of the Happy Line Transportation, told *Muscat Daily* that the last hour before the night lockdown sees traffic congestions on the roads.

"We need to spread awareness on the importance of completing shopping in time to avoid the rush hour," he said.

"We need to learn time management to avoid crowding,"



He also called for the immunisation of more people to fight COVID-19 and said if people are not committed and do not follow the decisions of the Supreme Committee, the country may face

a complete lockdown.

All mainline media and social media platforms should play a role in educating people on COVID-19 protocols, said Sultan al Rawahi, a company driver.



Saud al Samahi, a retired employee, said people should use morning hours to do their shopping and other work.

"The Supreme Committee has taken the decision for night lock-

down to limit gatherings and the spread of the pandemic. So we must take advantage of the morning period to meet our requirements by organising the time properly and return home

well before the lockdown. That way, we will not have to rush and cause accidents," he said.

Marhoon al Saadi, a private sector employee, said, "Unfortunately, people crowd in the mar-

Commercial establishments should stop activities at an appropriate time to ensure that their customers and employees can avoid congestions. It's important that everyone is cautious to avoid accidents

ROP OFFICIAL

kets and on the roads causing traffic jams. There is enough supply of basic food items in malls and other distribution centres. There is no need for worry or rush as measures are in place to tackle any shortage of essential items."

He added, "Overcrowding will lead to the easy spread of the virus. We have to help the government to stop the spread and the repeated closures."

"We urge citizens and residents to continue adhering to the directives and to report violators of the decisions of the Supreme Committee through 1099," the ROP official said.

ROP calls for cooperation as officers exert every effort for public safety

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

The current movement ban was enforced for the second night on Monday. Unlike thousands of us who can work from home or can afford to go to our residencies early, especially during the COVID-19 crisis that currently requires us to be home by 8pm, Royal Oman Police (ROP) officers are on the frontlines keeping the public safe.

During the ongoing pandemic, the role of the police has remained the same - enforce the law and serve the public.

However, because of their broad mandate they now have new responsibilities and that is to make sure that we all are home by 8pm for our own safety to curb the spread of the virus. And for this, they deserve a big 'Thank you' for spending sleepless nights.

ROP has said it will deal with people seriously who refuse to obey directives. But fortunately enough, it appears the public is obeying the orders so officers don't have to deal with too many problems yet.

"Our duty is to keep you safe and secure while your commitment is vital to make this country COVID-19 free. May you always be safe. Your commitment is a source of pride for Oman, and future generations will remember and value your efforts. So, thank you for your cooperation and support," an ROP official said.

Authorities in Oman have issued advisories tightening cer-



tain restrictions as part of the nation's efforts to stem the spread of COVID-19. Effective March 28 through April 8, a nightly 8pm to 5am movement ban is in force due to a recent spike in cases.

All nonessential travel is prohibited during the movement ban hours. Moreover, an existing nationwide directive requiring commercial premises to remain closed has been extended until at least April 8.

The measure does not apply to pharmacies, health institu-

tions, and other services deemed essential.

While police is always at the front lines of responding to societal problems, ROP officers are also tasked with responding to health crisis too. So for this, we need to respect them.

"We believe that your presence spreads peace and tranquility. Be safe so we all can take this country to safety. For your safety and for the sake of public good, cooperate with Royal Oman Police staff while performing their

duties to maintain security and safety of Oman. May God protect you," the ROP official said.

COVID-19 is now the most pressing problem we have faced in generations and our police will be there to respond. The role is the same, but their responsibilities now include having to be concerned with a new infectious disease while protecting the public.

"We are proud when we witness the desire and prudence of this great community to over-

come the pandemic of COVID-19," the official added.

Citizens and residents that *Muscat Daily* spoke to said the phrase 'thank you' is not enough and does not convey the immense gratitude of the people and the country for the ROP team.

"ROP officers stand on the roads during all hours to assure safety of all the road users. They are our heroes and they need full respect and cooperation from us. By doing so, we prove to the world that our homeland and citizens and residents are always safe in their hands," Khalfan al Khaldi, a retired government employee, said.

Others feel staying at home is necessary to curb the spread of the pandemic. "The virus is still present among us, so staying at home as much as possible is necessary. People need to understand that authorities are doing their best to safeguard our health," Vinod Raghavan, a resident businessman said.

Oman's land borders are also closed until further notice. The closure does not apply to commercial truck traffic.

Nevertheless, Oman's air and sea borders remain open.

However, a travel ban from 11 countries remains in place until further notice. The countries affected by the directive are Lebanon, Sudan, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, the UK, and Ethiopia.

@shadadm

796 new COVID-19 cases, nearly 14,000 still active



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday announced 796 new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), taking the total to 156,883. One death was reported during the same time.

The number of those who have recovered increased by 524.

The number of recoveries has increased to 142,944, while the number of deaths has reached 1,662, an MoH statement said, adding the rate of recovery is now at 91 per cent. With the

spike in new cases, the number of active cases has gone up to 13,939.

As of Monday, a total of 505 patients were admitted in health institutions while 161 patients were in ICU.

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 room as instructed. It said that social distancing also helps curb the spread of the virus.

MoH advises all citizens and residents to continue washing hands with water and soap.

Licensed fishermen allowed during night lockdown

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has called on fishermen to have valid fishing licences to operate during the night lockdown.

A statement issued by ministry read, 'In line with the decisions of the Supreme Committee dealing with COVID-19, which include preventing the move-

ment of individuals and vehicles from 8pm until 5am effective from March 28 to April 8, the ministry urges fishermen to abide by the decisions of the Supreme Committee. Those who practise the profession of fishing in the period of night lockdown should hold valid fishing licences.'

Fish transport trucks of three tonnes and more are exempted from the movement ban.

1. Boil noodles in boiling water (400ml) for 3 minutes
2. Mix the Seasonings into a serving bowl while noodles are being cooked
3. Take out noodles from water and drain well
4. Put the noodles into the serving bowl and mix it well

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12 divers come together to clean coral reefs in Daymaniyat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to preserve the marine environment, the Environment Authority, in cooperation with volunteer diving teams, carried out two campaigns to clean the coral reefs in the Daymaniyat Islands in the south of Batinah.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Issa al Yahmadi, director of the Environment Department in South Batinah, said, "The department has carried out two campaigns to remove fishing nets stuck in the coral reefs in the Daymaniyat Islands in cooperation with the Blue Water Divers team and Omanta Scuba Diving Academy.

"The cleaning drives were carried out on March 25 and March 27 for two hours, starting from 9am. About 12 divers participated in the drives removing 150m of trapped fishing nets and some other marine debris such as plastic items and cages."

He noted that the campaigns' objective - to rid the sea of pollu-



(Supplied photos)

tants and to preserve it - will ultimately help fishermen.

Through these efforts, the joint team also aims to spread awareness on the importance of

preserving the marine environment in the community.

The campaigns called for the volunteer teams to participate in cleaning the coral reefs and

beaches to protect the purity of Oman's nature and keep it free from any pollution, which in turn will attract tourists to enjoy the picturesque landscape of

the sultanate.

The campaigns also aimed to protect the wildlife.

Specialists in the Environment Department of South Batinah governorate are enthused to continue with their efforts to clean Oman's seas, besides sensitising fishermen about the need for keeping the sea clean.

"We hope fishermen abide by fishing laws. They shouldn't discard unwanted nets into the sea. We will continue to organise volunteer campaigns to preserve the Omani environment and protect it from any pollution," said Yahmadi.



(Supplied photo)

One dead, one injured in building fire in Seeb: PACDA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

One person died and another was injured in a fire that broke out in a building in South Ma'abala in the wilayat of Seeb on Monday, according to the Public Authority for Civil Defence and

Ambulances (PACDA).

"The firefighting and ambulance teams in Muscat governorate responded to a report of a fire in an apartment in a building in South Ma'abala area, which resulted in the death of one person and minor injury to another," PACDA said.



(Supplied photo)

Omifco joins MoE to provide tablets to students of low income families

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has signed an agreement with the Oman India Fertilizer Company (Omifco) to provide tablets to students of low income families in South Sharqiyah.

A statement issued by

Omifco said, 'To enhance students' abilities in ICT, and to keep up with the means of modern education and distance learning, Omifco has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education to support students from low income families in South Sharqiyah by providing them with tablets.'

'The project aims to enable school students to continue their education online under the current extraordinary situation because of the COVID-19 pandemic, besides developing students' abilities as part of Omifco's CSR initiatives to support education and capacity building of students,' it added.

Mutual visa-free entry for citizens of Oman, China

Continued from Page 01

The Omani side was headed by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, while Wang led his country's delegation.

The two sides reaffirmed their support to measures of advancing investments and tourism exchange within the context of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and with a view to realising mutual benefits for both countries.

The two sides welcomed the enforcement of a joint agreement for mutual waiver of entry visas for their respective citizens. They also welcomed a cooperation agreement in the field of science and technology.

Additionally, an executive programme for cooperation in media, health and cultural fields for the years 2020 to 2024 between the two countries was signed at a ceremony also held at the Foreign Ministry on Monday.

The programme was signed by Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, and Li Lingbing, Chinese Ambassador to Oman.

The session touched on bilateral cooperation in economic, scientific and cultural fields, as

well as the exchange of views on various regional and international issues of common concern. They reiterated the significance of resolving conflicts by peaceful means and through dialogue among the disputing parties.

Chinese traveller's memorial in Salalah

The two sides agreed to build a memorial of Chinese navigator Zheng He in Salalah. Wang and Sayyid Badr unveiled a model of the memorial monument commemorating the Chinese traveller's visit to Oman 600 years ago.

Originally name Ma Sanbao, Zheng was an admiral and diplomat who helped extend the maritime and commercial influence of China throughout the regions bordering the Indian Ocean. He commanded seven naval expeditions almost a century before the Portuguese reached India by sailing around the southern tip of Africa.

The session of talks on Monday was attended by Deng Li, Assistant Foreign Minister of China, and other high-ranking officials of both countries.

ONA

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Tibiaan-VL-002	Design Creation of Professional Real Estate Reports	01-April-2021	07-April-2021

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VAT next

With Oman soon implementing Value Added Tax (VAT), how will it affect the common person?

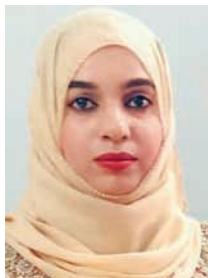
Saleh al Khaldi
Engineer

VAT directly affects the average man on the street, with consumers in the lower income brackets feeling the pinch. It will have a ripple effect on the market. Consumers will look to get more value at a lower cost.



Muna Basheer al Zadjali
Private sector employee

VAT will have more affect for those with limited income on their lifestyle. Consumers with limited salaries will opt for less expensive goods in smaller quantities to suit their financial capabilities. Consumers will look for the best goods and services at the most affordable price possible.



Mir Waheed
Banker

There are pros and cons of VAT. People need to try and buy the right goods and services to avoid being affected. However, on the whole I feel it is good for Oman because this money will return back to the people indirectly through the services we get from the government.



Sanjay Kumar Gupta
General manager

VAT may have an impact on the consumption and buying behaviour of the general people, especially during the present economic crisis due to COVID-19 when earnings have been drastically cut or reduced by employers. People are used to buying products at a certain price, but they'll now find that the prices have changed - five per cent more.



Ali Sheyadi
Teacher

VAT is very important because it will help the government provide services to the people. Although many items have been exempted from VAT, people with low incomes may still get affected.



Sultan al Rawahi
Private sector employee

VAT will affect many people who earn RO500 and less. The Consumer Protection Authority needs to make sure prices do not go up on account VAT because some businesses will take advantage. Also, with Ramadan around the corner when people buy in bulk, VAT will affect budgets.



Rachna Shankar Jha
Homemaker

Different income groups will be impacted differently with implementation of VAT. On the positive side, Oman is very kind in exempting basic necessities from VAT, which means our day-to-day expenses will not be affected. VAT will also encourage people to make informed and wise choices for luxury buys.



Govind Arjan
Media and communications consultant

VAT is coming to Oman at a time of significant reduction in oil income. This move will help in shoring up income and reducing both budget deficits and external borrowings. Five per cent is one of the lowest in the world and will not make much of an impact on an ordinary person's daily necessities as many items are exempted from VAT.



Sanjeet Sarkar
Marketing specialist

Oman's VAT rate - five per cent - is among the lowest internationally and its effects on individuals will be minimal, as it relies mainly on the averages and patterns of individual spending. VAT will provide an additional source of income for the country that will ensure the continued quality of public services.



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Is night lockdown helping in curbing the spread of COVID-19? Will a more aggressive vaccination campaign help prevent infections?

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

Oman's message of peace showcased in AFP film

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's role in spreading the message of peace and respect for human beings taken to the world through a unique exhibition that has travelled to 135 cities is the focus of an Agence France-Presse (AFP) documentary titled *Message of Peace from Oman*.

The film turns the spotlight on the history and culture of Oman and examples of coexistence of its people with other nations, showcasing how the sultanate has been able to present a universal model of dialogue and harmony between religious groups and reject all forms of violence and extremism.

The documentary, broadcast on March 27, lays emphasis on the 'Oman's Message of Islam' exhibition that has toured 135 cities familiarising people with the deep-rooted Islamic concepts of tolerance, coexistence and understanding.

The documentary features Dr Mohammed Said al Ma'amari, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Dr



'Oman's Message of Islam' exhibition at the National Library in Jakarta, Indonesia, in September 2019 (ONA)

Richard J Schmierer, former US ambassador to Oman and current head of the Middle East Studies Centre in Washington, Prof Suzanne Stetkevych, chair of the Arab and Islamic Studies Department at Georgetown University in Washington DC, and Dr Michael Harrower, associate professor of archaeology in the Department of Near Eastern

Studies, University of Maryland. The documentary highlights the sultanate's role in spreading the culture of dialogue and rapprochement among countries of the world. The specialists featured in it are sought after by news agencies and international television channels for their insightful views.

Message of Peace from Oman

underscores Oman's contribution to human civilisation by advocating peace and respect for human beings - their culture and beliefs - at all times and places.

The landmark exposition 'Oman's Message of Islam' takes these values to the people of the world and has been well received, reflecting the success of Omani diplomacy and the country's ef-

forts in the global arena.

The exposition has active coordination of various international organisations, including UNESCO and several centres interested in religious studies, in extolling the values of moderation, and the call for peace and coexistence among people belonging to different cultures and religions.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Argentina President says IMF debt 'unpayable'

Argentina President Alberto Fernandez said on Sunday that the crisis-hit country's debt with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is 'unpayable' in its original form.

Fernandez has been looking to renegotiate several multi-billion dollar debts ever since he took office in December 2019.

"The debt we inherited with the current terms is unpayable, and what we're looking at is how to negotiate with the Fund to obtain the best advantages," Fernandez told Del Plata radio station.

Fernandez said Argentina must pay US\$3.5bn this year, US\$18bn in 2022 and US\$19bn in 2023.

"What chance do we have of paying US\$18bn next year? None," he said.

Postpaid mobile subscriptions surge

Postpaid mobile subscribers base surged by 34% to 1.068mn

Prepaid mobile subscribers base decreased by 8.3% to 5.108mn

Fixed-line Internet subscribers grew by 7.1% to 510,961

Our Correspondent
Muscat

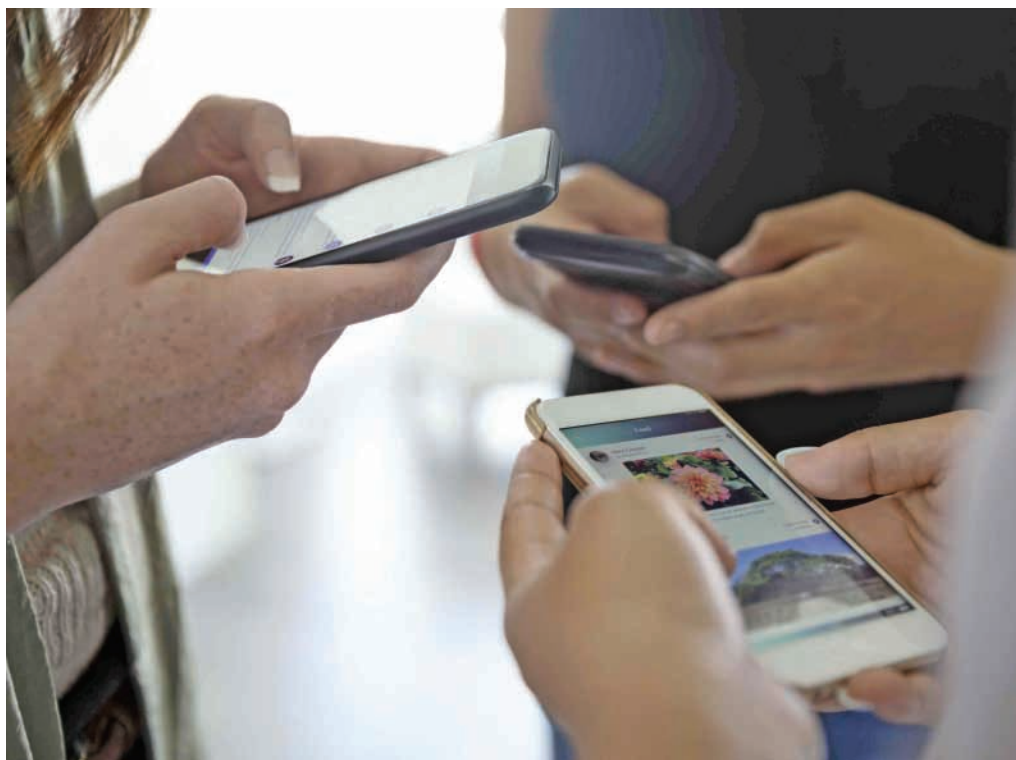
Oman's telecom operators have recorded a sharp increase in monthly bill paying phone subscribers and internet customers, thanks to the people migrating from prepaid to postpaid plans and increased demand for data usage amid the pandemic.

Total postpaid mobile phone subscribers base in Oman surged by 34 per cent to 1.068mn as of February 2021 compared to 797,517 subscribers in February last year.

This means service providers have added more than 271,000 new postpaid customers over the last one year, according to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority's (TRA) data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

However, this sharp growth in the postpaid mobile subscribers base, despite a big decline in expatriate population, could mean that a large number of prepaid mobile customers have migrated to postpaid plans.

The prepaid mobile subscribers base in the sultanate decreased by 8.3 per cent to 5.108mn as of February 2021 from 5.568mn in February 2020, a reduction of nearly 460,000



Picture for illustrative purpose only

subscribers over the year, the TRA figures showed.

Overall, total mobile phone subscriptions (prepaid and postpaid) in Oman decreased by 3 per cent to 6.177mn as of February this year against 6.366mn a year ago.

Telecom operators recorded a 10.7 per cent drop in number of subscribers at 4.043mn, while mobile resellers witnessed a 2.3

per cent rise in their subscribers base to 1.065mn.

In line with these trends, Omantel posted a reduction in number of total mobile subscribers in 2020.

As of the end of December 2020, Omantel's domestic customer base decreased to 3.27mn against a total customer base of 3.41mn a year ago.

"The domestic mobile market

growth was significantly impacted during 2020 due to the broader macroeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with this trend, Omantel posted a reduction in prepaid subscribers base by 11 per cent, which was partially mitigated by a healthy growth in postpaid mobile subscribers," Omantel said in its yearly report submitted to the Muscat Securities

Market (MSM).

However, Omantel successfully maintained its leadership position in 2020 with the largest market share in Oman. Omantel's mobile market share (including resellers) stood at 52.6 per cent with a revenue share of 58.5 per cent.

The company's fixed telephone (postpaid and prepaid) market share is 70.1 per cent with a revenue market share of 79.5 per cent, Omantel noted its report.

On the other hand, Ooredoo's subscribers base stood at 2.795mn at the end of December 2020. Ooredoo's mobile postpaid customer base surged by 52.5 per cent to 427,206 customers as at the end of 2020 compared to 279,467 customers a year ago, according to the company's yearly report submitted to the MSM.

Ooredoo in its report said that one of its key customer-focused initiatives in 2020 was the postpaid portfolio revamp which helped the company almost double its postpaid base in less than one year and increase customer market share by approximately 6.1 per cent.

Ooredoo's mobile prepaid customer base, however, decreased by 8.9 per cent to

2.199mn customers as at the end of 2020 compared to 2.415mn customers at the end of 2019.

Internet services

Total active mobile broadband subscriptions in Oman rose by 12 per cent to 5.155mn in February this year compared with 4.603mn a year ago.

The number of fixed-line Internet connections also grew by 7.1 per cent to 510,961 subscribers as of February 2021 against 477,260 subscribers in February 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in March last year, significantly increased the demand for high-speed data usage in Oman as people started working from home and students started online classes.

'Almost overnight, the people of Oman moved the majority of their work, studies, and lives to their homes, and there has been a much bigger reliance on the internet to keep people connected,' Ooredoo said.

As per the TRA statistics, total international Internet bandwidth capacity in Oman sharply expanded by 58.5 per cent to 1,651,777 Mbps as of February this year compared with 1,042,455 Mbps a year ago.

Joy as megaship 'MV Ever Given' refloated, Suez Canal traffic resumes

Suez, Egypt - The *MV Ever Given* was refloated and the Suez Canal reopened on Monday, sparking relief almost a week after the huge container ship got stuck during a sandstorm and blocked a major artery for global trade.

AFP correspondents observed tugboat crews sounding their foghorns in celebration after the *Ever Given*, a cargo megaship the length of four football fields, was dislodged from the banks of the Suez.

World oil prices eased on the news of the reopening of the waterway that connects the Mediterranean and Red Sea and through which more than 10 per cent of world trade passes.

The head of the Suez Canal Authority (SCA), Admiral Osama Rabie, around 3pm local time 'announced the resumption of shipping traffic in the Suez Canal', the authority said in a statement.

The SCA has cautioned, however, that it will take more than three days to clear the traffic jams of ships that were stuck at the northern and southern ends of the canal.

By the end of the drama, the tailback had reached 425 vessels.

Dutch company SMIT Salvage, which played a key role in the operation, said its 'team of experts, working in close collaboration with the Suez Canal Authority, successfully refloated' the ship at 3:05pm local time.

The operation, carried out under time pressure and 'the watchful eye of the world', required 13 tug boats and the dredging of approximately 30,000 cubic metres of sand, said a statement by Peter Berdowski, CEO of its parent company Boskalis.

The breakthrough followed what appeared to be a setback and came moments after the ship had temporarily settled back into the diagonal position it had been stuck in after running aground last Tuesday.

Maritime data company Lloyd's List said the blockage had



A grab from a video released by Egypt's Suez Canal Authority on Monday, shows tugboats pulling the Panama-flagged *MV Ever Given* container ship after it was fully dislodged from the banks of the Suez (AFP)

held up an estimated US\$9.6bn worth of cargo each day between Asia and Europe.

Tug boat flotilla

The Japanese-owned ship had been partially dislodged early on Monday, triggering immediate praise from Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al Sisi.

"Today, Egyptians have been

Salvage crews have been working around the clock ever since the accident which has been blamed on high winds and poor visibility during a sandstorm.

They had focussed on efforts to remove sand around the ship, which was cleared up to a depth of 18m, SCA spokesman George Safwat said on Sunday.

ration already scarce supplies.

Romania's animal health agency said 11 ships carrying livestock out of the country were also impacted, while the charity Animals International warned of a potential 'tragedy' affecting some 130,000 animals.

Global oil prices eased on Monday as traffic resumed on



Today, Egyptians have been successful in putting to an end the crisis of the stranded ship in the Suez Canal despite the enormous complexity surrounding the process

ABDEL FATTAH AL SISI

successful in putting to an end the crisis of the stranded ship in the Suez Canal, despite the enormous complexity surrounding the process," Sisi said.

Egypt was estimated to have lost some US\$12-14mn in revenue from the canal for each day it was closed, according to the canal authority.

After the 200,000-tonne ship was refloated, it was expected to take around three and a half days to clear the traffic jam of ships, Rabie said, praising rescue efforts.

The crisis had forced companies to choose between waiting or rerouting vessels around Africa, which adds 9,000km and over a week of travel to the trip between Asia and Europe.

Russia said it could give assistance on Sunday, following other countries including the United States that have made similar offers.

In a sign of the knock-on effects from the Suez blockage, authorities in war-racked Syria said the crisis had hit its fuel imports from Iran and forced it to

the Suez Canal. Crude prices had tumbled earlier after the ship was partially freed, but rebounded quickly afterwards when salvage experts said the hardest work was ahead.

But only hours later they managed to free the ship completely, and oil prices fell back. Oil traders also mulled Thursday's OPEC producers' meeting.

Despite the resumption of traffic, analysts say that it will take time for container transport to resume to normal.

AFP

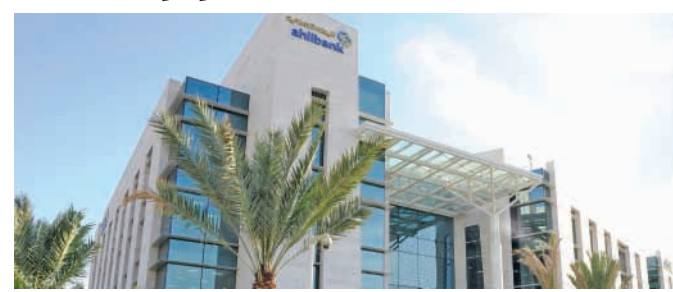
Ahli Bank AGM approves dividend

Muscat - Ahli Bank held its annual general meeting (AGM) on Thursday via the electronic platform for general meetings on Muscat Clearing and Depository Company's website. The AGM was presided by Hamdan Ali Nasser al Hinai, chairman of the board of directors of the bank.

Ahli Bank shareholders at the meeting approved the distribution of cash dividend of 5bz per share for the year 2020, according to a press release.

Recently Ahli Bank announced the closure of the rights issue that increased the bank's paid-up capital by RO30mn to RO194.965mn from RO164.965mn.

"Ahli Bank has successfully completed the rights issue of 300mn shares, with an oversubscription of 1.29 times. The purpose of the rights issue was to



strengthen the tier-1 capital of the bank and to meet the capital requirement for business growth," Hinai said at the AGM.

He said the bank was able to achieve positive results for 2020 despite the difficult local and global economic environment in light of the continuing impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the banking sector and the rest of the economic sectors.

Ahli Bank's total assets grew by 7.3 per cent to RO2.7bn in 2020, compared to RO2.51bn in

2019. Customer deposits went up by a whopping 12.4 per cent to reach RO1.92bn compared to RO1.71bn in the previous year. The bank's net loans and advances and financing grew by 8 per cent to RO2.21bn.

The bank's operating income increased by 2.6 per cent at RO71.5mn in 2020. Operating expenses increased by 9.1 per cent, while the profit for the period was lower by 22.6 per cent, largely due to the pandemic-related slowdown.

شركة زجاج مجان ش.م.ع. مجان MAJAN GLASS COMPANY S.A.O.G.

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Tel: +968 26751654/5/6, Fax: +968 26751658, E-mail: info@majanglass.com

NOTICE FOR ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of MAJAN GLASS (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the General Meeting, which will be held at 03:00 PM on 15/04/2021, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings, which can be assessed, through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Ordinary General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Ordinary General Meeting shall be held at 03:00 PM on 22/04/2021, to discuss the following agenda:

Ordinary Agendas:

- To elect members of the Board of Directors to fill the four (4) vacant seats therein. Any person who wishes to be nominated for the membership of the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in the director's nomination form prepared for this purpose and submit it to the Company at least five (5) days before the Ordinary General Meeting, no later than COB on Thursday, April 8, 2021. The candidate must satisfy the prescribed requirements for the Company's board membership.

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

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

For further information, please contact on telephone No. 98082098 or email: fc@majanglass.com

CHAIRMAN

LEGAL ADVISOR

EXTERNAL AUDITOR

MSM index falls 0.45%; volumes surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) fell 0.45 per cent to close at 3,684.27 points on Monday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 71.41 per cent to RO2.17mn and volumes surged 109.33 per cent to 16.94mn shares.

While Financial index fell 0.7 per cent, Industrial and Services indices rose 0.15 per cent and 0.01 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah index closed down by 0.79 per cent at 530.69 points.

Market breadth remained negative as nine companies closed up, while 12 companies closed down.

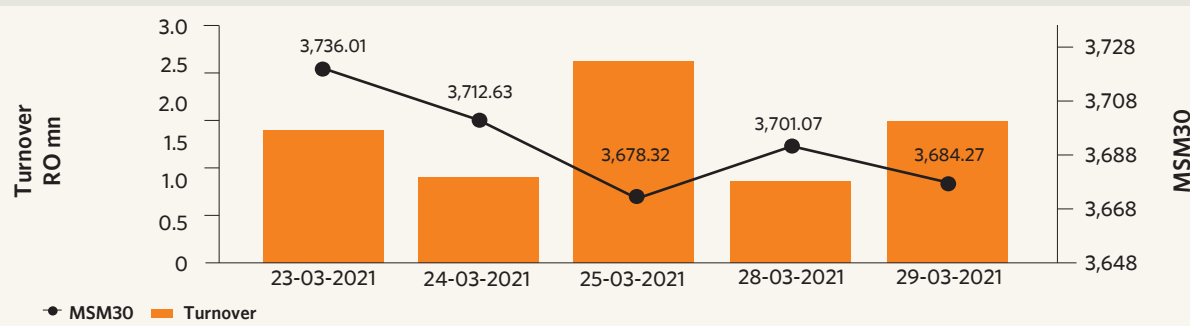
The rest 20 traded stocks closed flat for the day.



Top gainers were Oman & Emirates Investment Holding (4.35 per cent), Al Anwar Investment (3.66 per cent), Bank Muscat (2.66 per cent) and Galfar Engineering & Contracting (2.33 per cent).

Top losers were Ahli Bank (-4.55 per cent), Takaful Oman (-4.35 per cent), Al Madina Takaful (-3.33 per cent) and Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding (-2.56 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



US not yet ready to lift tariffs on China, says trade rep Tai

Washington, US – US President Joe Biden's new trade negotiator has said the United States is not yet ready to lift tariffs on Chinese imports, but could be open to talks with Beijing.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, whose appointment was confirmed earlier this month, told *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) she understood the levies were hitting some American companies and consumers, but they can also protect businesses.

In January 2020, then-president Donald Trump signed an accord between Beijing and Washington after a bruising trade battle that saw tariffs imposed by both sides.

"I have heard people say, 'Please just take these tariffs off,'" the 47 year old Tai told the WSJ in an interview published on Sunday.

But the former trade lawyer warned that suddenly axing the



levies could harm the US economy unless a policy reversal is 'communicated in a way so that the actors in the economy can make adjustments'.

She said it was essential for 'companies, traders, manufacturers or their workers' to be able to plan for the future.

Tai told the *Journal* that while she recognised the tariffs were taking a toll on some US businesses, they had been imposed 'to remedy an unbalanced and

unfair trade situation'.

She also cited tactical reasons for holding firm. "No negotiator walks away from leverage, right?" she said. "Every good negotiator is going to keep all of their options open."

Tai has already discussed Beijing's trade practices in calls with Japanese ministers, and in her confirmation hearings said she supported a 'holistic review on China'.

AFP

Boeing seals massive 737 Max order as US airlines eye recovery

New York, US - US carrier Southwest Airlines agreed to buy 100 additional Boeing 737 Max planes, the companies announced on Monday, in a vote of confidence for the aircraft after a 20-month grounding.

The order, which includes options on another 155 new Max planes, is the biggest for the model since regulators cleared it to resume service in late 2020 following two deadly crashes that sent Boeing into a crisis exacerbated by the industry downturn during the pandemic.

Southwest's order is worth US\$12.5bn at catalogue prices, which are almost never paid. The announcement means Boeing could build more than 600 new Max jets for Southwest through 2031, Boeing said.

"Southwest Airlines has long been a leader and bellwether for the airline industry and this order is a big vote of confidence for commercial air travel," said Stan Deal, president of Boeing's commercial division.

"As vaccine distribution continues to pick up, people are returning to the skies and fueling hopes for a full recovery and renewed growth across our industry."

Single-aisle planes like the Max, which are ideally suited for relatively short trips, have been seen as early beneficiaries of a post-pandemic recovery in which leisure and domestic



travel are seen as recovering well before international and business travel.

Southwest said the order followed a multi-year evaluation of its flying needs, pointing to advantages with the Max that include a 14 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency and quieter engines less disruptive to passengers. The announcement also illustrates the enduring quality of the domestic-oriented US carrier's relationship with Boeing despite a trying period during the Max grounding.

During that lengthy strategy, Southwest Chief Executive Gary Kelly had at times criticised Boeing's handling of the Max crisis, even hinting at times that Southwest could purchase planes from Airbus and change its status as an all-Boeing carrier.

But on Monday, Southwest said the agreement with Boeing was a 'cost-effective' vote in the

'operational efficiencies of all all-Boeing 737 fleet', according to a press release.

"Today's commitment to the 737 Max solidifies our continued appreciation for the aircraft and confirms our plan to offer the Boeing 737 series of aircraft to our employees and customers for years to come," Kelly said.

Major airlines continue to burn through cash due to low travel volumes, but improvement is expected in 2021 compared with a disastrous 2020.

Southwest said it "remains cautious" on its outlook due to COVID-19 and has not finalized travel schedules beyond May.

"The company will continue to plan for multiple fleet and capacity scenarios," Southwest said, adding that the Max order gives it greater flexibility to manage 'in a variety of economic environments'.

AFP

Suez closure shows Asia's reliance on Eastward oil flow, says IEA

Ankara, Turkey - The recent blockage of traffic through the Suez Canal illustrated the recent shift in the global oil trade towards Asia's developing economies rather than in oil transit from the Middle East to Europe or North America, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA) on Sunday.

A 400m-long container ship ran aground across a single-lane stretch of the canal earlier last week, halting transit in both directions on one of the world's largest seaborne trade chokepoints. However, the IEA said the blockade has not wreaked havoc on oil markets so far.

"While the inventory overhang that built up last year is gradually being worked off, crude and oil product stocks globally remain at comfortable levels. And some of the world's largest and newest tankers are anyway too big to use the canal," the agency said.

The Suez Canal was opened in 1869 to facilitate the movement of goods between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea while avoiding the need to venture south around the Cape of Good Hope, a journey that would require an extra seven to nine days.

The IEA said the closure of the canal underscored the recent changes in the global oil trade, clarifying that the vast majority of oil transiting through the canal is not from the Middle East



A photo released by the Suez Canal Authority on Monday shows tugboats pulling the Panama-flagged MV *Ever Given* container ship, lodged sideways impeding traffic across Egypt's Suez Canal waterway (AFP)

bound for Europe or North America, but Asia's developing economies.

According to the agency, while the canal can accommodate all traditional clean oil product tanker sizes, very large crude carriers (VLCC) can only transit the canal when loaded below their 250,000 tonnes capacity. It added that Suezmax crude tankers, which can carry up to 200,000 tonnes of crude oil, are specifically designed to navigate through the canal.

However, the agency said in recent years, the growing fleet of ultra-large crude carriers (ULCC), with deadweight ranging between 300,000 and

500,000 tonnes have reshaped crude oil routes as they can only load and offload at specially adapted ports and cannot transit fully laden through three of the world's major chokepoints - the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal.

The IEA emphasised the importance of the Suez Canal in the global oil trade, transiting 5 per cent of the world's crude oil, 10 per cent of oil products and 8 per cent of LNG.

The canal also has a symbolic significance, splitting the world into two distinct regions: East of Suez, which includes the Middle East and the Asia Pacific; and West of Suez, more commonly

known as the Atlantic Basin, comprising the Americas, Europe, Africa and the former Soviet Union.

While most oil trade takes place within its region, the agency said the size, direction and content of flows between them have undergone some changes over the last decade. 'Just 15 years ago, East of Suez was a net exporter of crude oil as Middle East crude production was 4mn barrels per day to 5mn barrels per day in excess of what they and Asia consumed. Europe and the US combined imported almost 5mn barrels per day of crude oil from the Middle East,' it added.

Anadolu Agency

'Majority of free zones operating as normal amidst pandemic'

Dubai, UAE - Free zones across the world are optimistic about their growth performance in the coming months as they prepare to become 'future ready' in a post-pandemic world, according to the latest indicators revealed by the Free Zones World Economic Barometer.

About 40 per cent of free zone organisations expressed positive outlook on their performance during the fourth quarter of 2020 and are looking at the first quarter of 2021 to be following the same trend, the World Free Zones Organization (World FZO) said in its report. The report further noted that in-

vestment, employment, and profitability of free zones showed improvement during Q4 compared to the previous quarter of the same year.

During the third quarter of the last year, 49 per cent of free zones surveyed by World FZO reported 'normal economic conditions', which then moved up to 53 per cent in the latest survey conducted in December 2020, according to a press release.

"Amidst the pandemic, free zones have been doing their best to ensure business continuity and resume normal activities. As with challenges, we also see the opportunities as economies



Dr Mohammed al Zarooni

work towards greater regional coordination and integration with the support of policy reforms and use of latest technologies," Dr Mohammed al Zarooni, chairman of World FZO, said.

"Alongside these developments, free zones can be the most 'future ready' if they focus on recovering in the most sustainable way based on greater transparency in their environment, social and governance commitment. Moreover, aligning their operations with the UN Sustainable Development Goals presents new opportunities to advance growth ambitions and societal development as well," Dr Zarooni added.

In line with its commitment to support the fast recovery of free zones, World FZO recently held a webinar themed 'The Way Forward - Towards a

Brighter Future', attended by nearly 500 participants.

The event witnessed the presence of Dr Samir Hamrouni, CEO of World FZO, along with key speakers, Dr Mohan Guruswamy, the chief knowledge officer at World FZO and Saskia Meuchelbock, economist at Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

The impact of COVID-19 on free zones and a new development model designed to enhance the future readiness of free zones were discussed during the webinar.

Dr Hamrouni explained, "We have created a range of certifi-

cation programmes and a range of unique resources that can help free zones flourish in different situations, considering a futuristic approach and long-term perspective."

"The pandemic has undoubtedly prompted all of us to become more proactive in our strategies, and these projects will assist free zones to achieve a new set of global norms that will benefit stakeholders worldwide," he said.

The speakers suggested that going digital and implementing a 'lean and mean' organisation can help prepare free zones to accelerate recovery amidst the

economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They introduced during the webinar the 'Free Zone of the Future' - the Free Zone 4.0 Program, a unique initiative which will help free zones to become 'future ready'.

Dr Guruswamy underscored that COVID-19 has paved the way for a new business environment to emerge, which requires free zones to undertake a strategic reorientation of their operations and processes.

"Our New World Model, which we also call the 'New Normal,' provides a path for businesses to emerge stronger from the crisis," he added.

Al Mouj Muscat and Oman Towers sign pact

Al Mouj Muscat has entered into a partnership with Oman Towers Company (OTC) for new telecommunications towers to be installed at the leading leisure and lifestyle destination, improving Internet speeds as well as mobile phone services coverage.

The exclusive infrastructure agreement means people and businesses are set to benefit from reliable, high-speed Internet access as well as enhanced mobile phone connectivity.

OTC's new tower works on an open access network basis meaning it can accommodate all service operators with different technologies which will be a great boost to the telecommunications infrastructure within the sultanate.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, says, "Signing this important agreement allows us to add to the excellent telecoms infrastructure already in place at Al Mouj Muscat to the benefit of those who live, work and run businesses here in our community."



"We are constantly exploring ways to make our community experiences better and next generation connectivity is another important feature of that improvement. Open access networks encourage competition between service providers with different technologies, lowering both the costs for subscribers and making it possible for new

service providers to enter the market."

Eng Majid al Kharoosi, managing director of Oman Towers Company, says, "We are proud to be collaborating with Al Mouj Muscat in an initiative that will be play an important role in the sultanate's fast paced telecommunications sector.

"As a company, we aim to

contribute to the development of the sector by providing sustainable telecommunication towers and related equipment, and by working together with licensed operators to help put in place infrastructure which can be used by multiple customers. Which we know will have a positive impact by supporting Oman's knowledge society."

Mazoon Electricity observes Earth Hour as part of campaign

Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, observed Earth Hour between 8.30-9.30pm on March 27 as part of its campaign.

Earth Hour is an initiative launched by the international wildlife and environmental body WWF where citizens and organisations around the globe show their support for action on climate change by turning off lights and appliances for one hour from 8.30pm.

The 2021 Earth Hour theme focused on 'Climate Change to Save Earth'.

In the build up to the day, Mazoon Electricity had encouraged its employees, customers, community and their families to take part in Earth Hour and commit to ongoing low-carbon habits in the workplace and at home.

Shabiba FM, be'ah, Diam, Sandan, GuTech and Environment Society of Oman had joined Mazoon Electricity's Earth Hour 2021 campaign as partners. More than 45 entities including Omani Women's Associations, sports clubs, and many others from the local community participated in the campaign.

The campaign involved sharing of relevant content on all so-



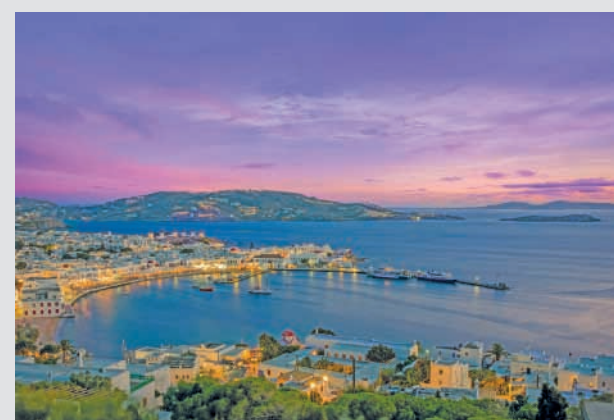
cial media platforms, participating in a special video, taking part in a radio interview conducted by Shabiba FM and participating live via social media accounts to promote Earth Hour activities.

Said Juma Said al Busaidi, manager - Communication and Sustainability of Mazoon Electricity said, "With millions of supporters across the globe, the annual Earth Hour initiative has emerged as one of the largest global campaigns to combat climate change. We were delighted to participate by turning off the lights for one hour at our premises. Our staff too participated in the Earth Hour event by switching off lights from their homes."

He added, "The purpose of Earth Hour was to persuade peo-

ple to embrace a responsible lifestyle in using electricity to support the country's efforts to decrease carbon emissions and safeguard natural resources to guarantee their availability for future generations."

During the Earth Hour 2021, Oman recorded a reduction of 3.15 MW in electricity in the country, equivalent to a reduction of 111.2 tonnes of carbon emissions. Mazoon Electricity is always in the forefront of using sustained business environmental excellence practices. It recently won the 'Environmental Upgrade of the Year' honour at the 2020 Asia Power Awards' in recognition for its successful environmentally friendly electrical transformers.



Athens, Mykonos packages by Qatar Airways Holidays

Qatar Airways Holidays, the leisure division of Qatar Airways Group, announced the launch of quarantine-free holiday packages for citizens and residents who completed their COVID-19 vaccination. Last summer, due to the current global pandemic, international travel was limited, and many stayed home.

"With the gradual lifting of restrictions, Qatar Airways Holidays provide our customers with fantastic packages for a much-awaited summer vacation in two popular Greek destinations."

Baker added, "Also, we are delighted to resume three weekly flights to Mykonos. Due to the global pandemic, last year we had to suspend this route, which since 2018 proved very popular with our customers. It is great to return to Mykonos and help complement Greece's efforts to restart tourism. We know the authorities in Greece are taking precautions to ensure public safety, and visitors will be required to adhere to public health measures put in place given the pandemic."

The news has been welcomed by the Greek Minister for Tourism, Harry Theoharis, who said, "I'm proud to welcome Qatar Airways back to Mykonos. It's very pleasing for us to have our luxury destination, including in the planning of the airline's new summer programme. In this difficult time, this development comes when all of our efforts have been put into the safe opening of Greek tourism."

Qatar Airways group chief executive, Akbar al Baker,

said, "I am hugely excited to announce the launch of the first quarantine-free holiday packages for citizens and residents who completed their COVID-19 vaccination. Last summer, due to the current global pandemic, international travel was limited, and many stayed home."

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Bank Muscat's Woqar package serves pensioners

Financial inclusion has been identified as a crucial enabler for a number of the Sustainable Development Goals for the global economy set by the United Nations in 2015. In line with its crucial role in the financial services sector in Oman and its pioneering achievements in social responsibility, Bank Muscat launched the Woqar Banking Package in 2020 after studying in great detail and understanding the needs of retirees who were earlier working in both government and private institutions.

Earlier, the pensioner segment in Oman was not served by any bank for flexible-term finance or credit cards based on their pension. Bank Muscat became the first bank in Oman to extend a financing solution for pensioners in the country in 2020. It must also be noted that apart from Woqar, the bank also helped retirees adjust to the challenges by restructuring their loans.

Abdullah Tamman al Mashani, deputy general manager - Institutional Sales & Products Development, Bank Muscat, said, "It is important for both individuals and businesses to have access to financial products and services that meet their needs like transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance, which are delivered in a responsible and



sustainable way. This is all the more important in the case of groups that traditionally fall short of the financial inclusion net.

"Through the launch of Woqar in 2020, Bank Muscat reiterated its commitment to provide innovative banking services to all members of society. The new banking package has been reinforcing the other supportive actions undertaken by the bank to help the retiree segment adjust to the challenges brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic."

Flexible-term loans starting at 3.75 per cent and with tenors ranging from one to 10 years are a key part of the Woqar banking package. Loan facilities are available for pensioners up to 70 years of age. The bank has been encouraged by the large number of queries and applications that have come from across the sultanate after the launch of this

new product.

By addressing the financial inclusivity needs of this customer segment, the bank hopes to further improve living standards for all segments of society. Customers can get more information about Woqar products by visiting any of the bank's branches across the sultanate or by contacting the call centre on 24795555 or going to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/details.aspx#wqar>.

The Woqar package and other measures to support pensioners including moratoriums on repayments and restructuring of loans is part of the bank's strategy to further improve financial inclusion in the country.

Bank Muscat is continuously debuting new financial products and services targeting different sections of society in line with the changing needs of its customers and the nation's progress and development. As the nation's leading financial services provider, Bank Muscat attaches great importance to social responsibility initiatives in close alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The bank's strategies are aimed at sustaining the country's progress and development and improving financial inclusion for different segments of society.



NBC signs incubation pact with GreenBird 3D Company

The National Business Centre (NBC), which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, has signed an incubation agreement with GreenBird 3D Company, which is a local company specialised in providing topographical survey, drone services, virtual reality, and 3D and voice over services.

The company will benefit from a range of services offered by NBC that will contribute to its growth while having access to intensive training, coaching and mentoring sessions.

It is worthwhile mentioning that 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.

SAI participates in Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

The State Audit Institution (SAI) is taking part in the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD), which is organised by the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA) of the United Nations.

The forum comes this year under the title 'Accelerating Progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID'. It is convened from March 29 to 31 from the capital of Beirut through video conferencing. The forum receives a wide international participation from different entities working in development; from governments, parliaments, academia, private sector enterprises, international and regional organisations as well as civil society and youth.

During the forum, SAI Oman



will present a paper on SAI's role in auditing the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs), as SAI has a critical responsibility in executing the 2030 Agenda.

Oman's SAI will also shed light on primary findings of readiness auditing processes carried

out by a number of Arab SAI's.

The forum agenda includes several primary themes that focuses on accelerating progress in achieving SDGs during recovery period from COVID-19 as well as discussing specialised areas of top priorities. The forum includes interactive sessions that demon-

strate the track of sustainable development and the impact of the pandemic on achieving the goals, particularly those relevant to poverty eradication and food security, as well as promotion of healthcare systems in the Arab region.

The forum will also discuss ef-

fective measures to overcome the pandemic, which has become one of the obstacles of achieving SDGs.

The AFSD, which is organised every year by ECWA in coordination with the League of Arab States and other organisations of the United Nations that work in Arab countries, is a platform to review sustainable development priorities in the Arab region as well as discuss the progress made and countries experiences in order to voice out the status of the region to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The forum adopts a comprehensive methodology that contributes to following up on the 2030 Agenda and reviewing the progress in the implementation.

Renault Oman announces door-to-door service facility

Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, has announced door-to-door vehicle service for its customers with prior service appointments.

With Renault Oman's door-to-door service, customers can get their Renault picked up and dropped off from the location of their choice for service appointments. As part of this service, customers can be assured of pick-up and drop off, contactless process, vehicle sterilisation and cashless payment. However, this facility is available only in Muscat governorate.

To book an appointment, customers can choose below options
►Call toll free number 80050011,
►SMS Type <Book>and send to 99825454,
►E-mail at appointment@sbigh.com
►or WhatsApp: 97692689.

A spokesperson for SBA said, "You and your family's safety has always been our top most priority. That is why we are proud to offer you an exclusive and unique service designed to ensure the wellbeing of both yourself and the people you love. Our door-to-door service gives you the assurance of having your Renault picked up from a location of your choice and delivered back to



your doorstep. As an added precautionary measure, our team will sterilise your Renault before and after your vehicle is serviced, giving you true peace of mind. All Renault customers can request for door-to-door service for their service appointments for added convenience. The service offering pick-up and return of serviced vehicles will be available for

customers in Muscat. "This facility is designed to offer hassle-free service experience and complete peace of mind to customers. Renault Oman's team will come to pick up the car at a chosen location and time convenient to the customer. Once the job is over, the team will get back the car to your doorstep. This facility is available

on prior appointment only." **SBA commitment** SBA is largely committed to supporting Renault Oman's growth in the sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of nine showrooms, 16 service centres & 23 spare parts outlets,

SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers. For more local information, you can visit the following website: <https://www.renault.com.om/> or call our Toll Free number on 80050011.

Khimji's House of Travel extends pact with Amadeus

Khimji's House of Travel, one of the leading travel companies in Oman, has extended its partnership with Amadeus to build momentum around its digital transformation and the development of integrated travel services. Since 2012, Amadeus has worked with the agency to strengthen its position in Oman's travel and tourism market as well as helping it expand across the region.

In addition to a growing team of travel experts, the agency's recent diversification strategy can be seen with the introduction of cutting-edge travel solutions for travellers and travel partners. These new developments in-

clude the corporate platform khimjicorptravel.com, the platform for local travel agents khimjiconnect.com, and the global B2B hotel and leisure platform tripsnstay.com. The agency's partnership with Amadeus will see it tap into Amadeus Web Services and its low fare search technology. This provides a single point of access to the entire range of Amadeus' comprehensive content and a cost-effective way to build and update the agency's customised travel booking applications. Khimji's House of Travel is also benefiting from leading digital solutions within Amadeus'



flagship portfolio. Most notably, MasterPricer travel board, Amadeus Online Corporate Traveller, and a set of automation scripts that are enabling the delivery of an enhanced cus-

tom experience for Khimji's travellers. Cashio Vettom, general manager of Khimji's House of Travel, said, "One of the pillars of our success has been an unwavering

focus on digital transformation and innovation. We have developed state-of-the-art service platforms with the support and expertise of Amadeus - a pioneer of the global travel industry. Our experience means we can completely trust Amadeus to offer solutions that ensure we exceed our customers' expectations." Ernesto Sanchez Beaumont, managing director of Amadeus Gulf, said, "Our priority in Oman has always been on maintaining strong, long-lasting relationships with our customers. Khimji's House of Travel is a great example of how trust built over time brings dividends."

Preparing students for world of work

The pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented shift in the education sector - almost all universities have had to adapt their teaching models to a hybrid format to ensure that students are prepared for an increasingly competitive job landscape. Employers are now actively seeking candidates that possess skills beyond the academic curriculum, primarily critical thinking, problem-solving and soft skills.

The purpose of a university education is often two-fold: preparing students for the future workplace and enabling them to secure lucrative jobs, as this is a core expectation of university graduates with a 'job-based outlook'. The second is to take a 'purpose-driven outlook', whereby universities help shape well-rounded graduates and broadly prepare them to be successful - empowering them to think critically, communicate clearly, and grow as enlightened individuals.

The hard truth of the matter is that it isn't an either-or situation. A modern educational institution needs to ensure it fulfils both objectives - preparing students to be future-ready, while also helping them find their own individual purpose. This, in turn, provides them with a definite direction in finding meaningful work.

In the current, increasingly complex work landscape, young graduates find themselves dealing with the rapid pace and scale of technology, the huge competition for a limited number of jobs as a result of the pandemic, and the ever-evolving world of workplace competencies. In this context, how can universities accomplish their core objectives?

Find 'WHY'

Students need to find answers to some questions early on: who they are, their strengths, weaknesses, and interests. This will help them make the most of their degrees. A large number of university students



find themselves changing their majors as they work through their programmes, learning more about who they are and what they're passionate about. When universities make a meticulous effort to help students identify their core strengths, it makes them more confident about choosing their career path and helps them to seek out and do more meaningful work. Discovering a student's 'why' can also be done using scientifically recognised tests, such as the Thomas International Personal Profile Analysis. This test assesses whether a student's choice of program matches their personality and allows them to know if they're on the right career path before they graduate.

Mentoring

"If you knew then what you know now, would you do anything differently?" This powerful question reminds us to appreciate the value of experience and hindsight. Early mentoring and coaching is key to providing students with the direction and guidance they need to make the choice.

Universities can create mentorship or coaching programmes with professionals. The 2020 Future of Jobs report by The World Economic Forum (WEF) found that 50 per cent of all employees will need reskilling by 2025. Interestingly, among the top 10 skills required in the next four years are problem-solving, self-management and people skills - essentially soft skills. - Andy Phillips, coo, University of Wollongong in Dubai

Ooredoo gives 1.5GB data free to customers

Ooredoo is at it again with even more bonus data on its 'More Internet' plans.

Prepaid customers can now get additional data of up to 1.5GB data absolutely free on RO1, RO2 and RO3 recharge bundles, with bonus data valid for 24 hours. Available until June 21, it's the perfect complement to Ooredoo's popular Shababiah plans, which offer a mix of flexibility, great value, simplicity and most of all, convenience.

Making for an all-round fantastic digital experience, the recharge journey is easier than ever before thanks to Ooredoo's revamped mobile app. Now users can save their bank card details to make quick recharges, anytime and anywhere, one of an ever-growing number of convenient features Ooredoo has added to make its customers' lives easier.

To subscribe to the offer, log in to the Ooredoo App, or simply dial *115*3* with a recharge card. For more information, download the app or head to www.ooredoo.om.

Coming soon to the Middle East: The new Volkswagen Golf GTI

The eighth generation of the sporty Golf is now on the way. The vehicle is sportier, more dynamic, more intuitive and more responsive than ever before.

Packed with pioneering technology, it features Volkswagen's most advanced connectivity and driver assistance systems, and an all-new digital dashboard, representing the biggest technical leap forward in the history of the model. The new Golf GTI significantly raises the bar in the



sporty compact class with its 2.0 TSI turbocharged engine generating 180 kW/245 HP. The Golf GTI will start to arrive across the region from April 2021.

The Golf GTI has been an icon among sports cars for almost 45 years. Now, this compact model is available with enhanced driving dynamics and an even larger number of connectivity solutions and digital features. Like its predecessors, the new Golf GTI is equipped with Volkswagen's

time-tested front-wheel drive system. Combining maximum dynamism and maximum comfort, agile driving, unmatched design and smooth ergonomics create the embodiment of the GTI.

The new Golf GTI has also become lower, more elongated and dynamic. The new exterior of the vehicle features an array of traditional and new GTI features. The infamous GTI strip has been redefined by a parallel LED cross-

bar and LED high taillights. The GTI has a turbocharged engine that generates 180 kW (245 HP) in terms of performance and the agility and sportiness has been perfected with the new, networked Vehicle Dynamics Manager.

A new GTI graphics layout for the standard Digital Cockpit has been developed with an active info display and it can be opened using the new View button on the steering wheel.

Al Rawabi doubles down on Isuzu trucks powered by OTE's VLC

Leading dairy products and fruit beverages manufacturer Al Rawabi is once again betting on the formidable reputation of the Isuzu brand of distribution trucks, suitably equipped with refrigeration units from Carrier Transicold, to get its immensely popular products safely to stores across the sultanate.

To this end, the dairy company has turned to Vehicle Leasing Company (VLC) for a one-stop and cost-effective solution that fully addresses the brand's transportation requirements.

VLC is the vehicle leasing arm



of OTE Group of Companies, a prominent Omani business house with diverse interests spanning automobiles, auto accessories, consumer electronics, vocational training services, and manufacturing. Muscat-based VLC specialises in crafting customised leasing and transport solutions that offer unmatched value to customers.

Under the arrangement, Al Rawabi recently took delivery of a brand new fleet of Isuzu trucks on lease from VLC. Fitted with refrigeration systems from Carrier Transicold, a global industry

leader in land transportation refrigeration solutions, the trucks offer an optimal, yet competitive, transport solution to Al Rawabi.

"Isuzu, unquestionably the world's No 1 commercial truck, together with Carrier Transicold, the globally preferred refrigeration transportation brand, made for a winning combination in the price and quality-conscious perishables transportation business. Our cost-effective leasing solution, underpinned by these two impeccable brands, ticked all of the boxes for Al Rawabi," said Rajesh Nair, VLC.

Myanmar protesters take to streets after bloodiest weekend

Yangon, Myanmar - Protesters and mourners took to the streets of Myanmar on Monday after the deadliest weekend since the military coup, as US President Joe Biden led international condemnation of the junta's ruthless crackdown.

Soldiers and police have killed hundreds in a brutal campaign against mass anti-coup protests demanding a restoration of democracy and the release of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

At least 107 people, including seven children, were killed on Saturday, the United Nations said, as the regime staged a major show of might for Armed Forces Day - an annual parade showcasing Myanmar's military prowess.

At least 459 people have been killed in the crackdown on protests since the February 1 coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) monitoring group, as security forces have used rubber bullets and live rounds to break up demonstrations.

Saturday was by far the deadliest day of the crackdown and AAPP said a further 13 people were killed on Sunday.

Despite the weekend violence, protesters turned out at dawn in towns and cities around the country.

Hundreds paraded through the town of Plate, in Mandalay region, with banners saying, "The people will never be defeated."

In Sagaing region, hundreds of mourners lined the street to pay tribute to 20 year old nursing student Thinzar Hein, who was



This photo taken and received from an anonymous source via Facebook on monday shows protesters during a demonstration in Yangon's South Dagon township (AFP)

shot dead while helping rescue workers provide first aid to injured protesters.

As child casualties mount, 60 youngsters in a town in eastern Karen state staged their own protest parade accompanied by their mothers, local media reported. In Yangon, a one-year-old girl is recovering from surgery after being shot in the eye with a rubber bullet while playing near her house on Saturday - her birthday.

'Shameful, brutal'

President Biden condemned the weekend's events as 'terrible', while UN rights envoys slammed the 'shameful, cowardly, brutal' actions of the security forces.

"It's absolutely outrageous and based on the reporting I've gotten, an awful lot of people have been killed totally unnecessarily," Biden told reporters.

China added its voice to a chorus of international concern, calling for restraint from all sides. "Violence and bloody clashes do not meet the interests of any party. The victims are the Myanmar people," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the junta's celebration of its armed forces day had been blighted by 'a day of horror and of shame'.

But so far, weeks of repeated pleas for restraint and even inter-

national sanctions have not persuaded the generals to ease off.

Military-run broadcaster Myawaddy TV gave Saturday's death toll as 45 and said the crackdown was necessary because protesters had used guns and bombs against security forces.

Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing had issued a threat to the anti-coup movement on Saturday, warning that acts of 'terrorism' were unacceptable.

On Monday, the British Foreign Ministry advised its nationals in Myanmar to leave as soon as possible, following 'a significant increase in the level of recent violence'.

The authorities have sought to

clamp down on reporting of the protests, shutting down local media outlets and detaining journalists - with two more held on Monday.

The number of journalists arrested since the coup has reached 55 and 25 are still detained, a local monitoring group says.

Airstrikes in Karen state

An estimated 3,000 people fled through the jungle to seek safety across the border in Thailand on Sunday evening following targeted aerial assaults in eastern Myanmar's Karen state, the Karen Women's Organisation civil society group said.

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha told reporters in Bangkok on Monday the military was preparing for further arrivals.

"Thailand's going to treat them as people fleeing fighting, which means they'd be allowed to temporarily stay until Thailand decides to kick them out again," Human Rights Watch deputy director Asia division Phil Robertson told AFP.

According to Hsa Moo, an ethnic Karen and human rights activist, the weekend airstrikes - the first in the state in 20 years - killed four people and left nine injured.

The airstrikes targeted the Karen National Union (KNU), one of the country's largest non-state armed groups.

There are fears that the Myanmar military may launch a major operation against Karen rebels, which could force more people to flee their homes.

AFP



Indonesian police from an anti-terror unit conduct a raid at a house where the two attackers lived, in Makassar on Monday (AFP)

Indonesia's church suicide bombers were newlyweds

Jakarta, Indonesia - Two suicide bombers who blew themselves up at an Indonesian cathedral on Palm Sunday were newlyweds who belonged to a pro-Islamic State extremist group, police said on Monday, as they raided the couple's home.

About 20 people were wounded in the powerful explosion outside the church in Makassar city on Sulawesi island while worshippers celebrated the start of Holy Week.

Both suspects were killed instantly when they rode a motorbike into the compound of the church, setting off an improvised explosive device known as a pressure-cooker bomb, police said.

On Monday, Indonesian authorities said the pair had been married for about six months and that the man was in his mid-twenties. They were identified only by their initials.

"The investigation is ongoing including looking at whether there were others involved," National Police spokesman Argo Yuwono said.

Counter-terror units raided the couple's home and other lo-

cations in Makassar, a port city of about 1.5mn, as well as in the capital Jakarta, as they searched for bombs, weapons and other evidence, police said.

A local resident said the male suspect was a street food seller who lived in a rented home near his parents' residence.

"As a kid he was nice... But as he grew older he didn't really socialise around here," Nuraini, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told AFP.

Police said the couple were members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), an extremist group blamed for series of attacks, including 2018 suicide bombings in Indonesia's second-biggest city Surabaya.

On Monday, officials said 15 people remained in hospital, although the extent of their wounds remained unclear. Four had been discharged, they added.

Sunday's explosion at the main Catholic cathedral in Makassar happened just after congregants finished celebrating Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week, which commemorates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. AFP

Lebanon approves crisis fund to avert power cut

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's parliament approved US\$200mn in emergency funding on Monday to stave off a national power cut the Energy Minister warned would otherwise hit by the end of March.

Caretaker Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar said three weeks ago that the country would plunge into 'total darkness' if no money was secured to buy fuel for power stations.

The state-run Electricity of Lebanon (EDL) faces dire cash shortages, as the country grapples with its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

On Monday, 'parliament approved... a US\$200mn advance' for EDL, the National News Agency reported.

The decision came a day after one of the country's largest power plants, Zaharani in south Lebanon, stopped operating because it ran out of fuel.

EDL said the closure was caused because a fuel ship could not be immediately off-loaded because of logistical problems.

Meanwhile, another cargo ship scheduled to arrive from Kuwait has been held up due to the stuck container ship blocking the Suez Canal, it added.

AFP

Egypt arrests 8 over fatal train crash, revises death toll

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt has arrested eight people over a train collision last week, prosecutors said in a statement on Monday that also revised the death toll down to 18 people.

A speeding train on Friday hit another in the Tahta district of southern Sohag province, sending a carriage hurtling into the air and also leaving 200 people injured.

"The prosecutor general ordered that the two drivers... their two assistants, the guard of a traffic control tower, the head of traffic control in Assiut and two other guards ... be remanded in custody," the prosecutor said.

Security and judicial sources said the eight had been arrested on Friday and Saturday and placed in provisional detention for four days.

The toll from the crash - one



This file photo shows people around the wreckage of two trains that collided in the Tahta district of Sohag province, 460km south of the Egyptian capital Cairo, reportedly killing at least 18 people, on March 26 (AFP)

of several rail disasters in Egypt in recent years - was revised down to 18. It had already been adjusted down to 19 from 32 by Health Minister Hala Zayed on Saturday. The prosecutor's

statement also cited additional 'body parts' that had not been identified, without elaborating and revised the toll for the injured to 200, up from 185 cited by the Health Minister.

It said investigators had spoken to 133 of the injured, most of whom suffered fractures, as well as ten rail officials, station staff and three police officers 'in charge of the security of trains'.

Barack Obama's Kenyan 'granny' passes away aged 99

Nairobi, Kenya - Sarah Obama, the grandmother of former US president Barack Obama, has died aged 99 in western Kenya, her daughter told AFP on Monday.

"It is true she has gone to be with the Lord, she passed on this morning," said an emotional Marsat Onyango, her daughter.

Sarah Obama, popularly known as Mama Sarah, had been admitted to the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital in Kisumu.

Family spokesman Sheikh Musa Ismail said she had been unwell for a week, but had tested negative for COVID-19.

Ismail said the former president had 'sent his condolences'.

Once a simple country



This file photo shows then US senator Barack Obama with grandmother Sarah Obama at their rural home in Siaya, on August 26, 2006 (AFP)

woman, Sarah Obama was for a long time best known for the hot porridge and doughnuts she served at a local school.

But she rose to world fame with the 2008 election of her step-grandson Barack as the first black US president.

Already a national celebrity after the former Illinois senator Barack Obama visited Kenya in 2006, Sarah's modest homestead became a tourist attraction with Obama's November 2008 election triumph.

Born in 1922 in a village on the shores of Lake Victoria, Sarah was the third wife of Hussein Onyango Obama, President Obama's grandfather, a herbalist and a village elder who fought for the British in Burma, now called Myanmar.

Onyango Obama, who died in 1975, is said to be the first man to swap goatskin clothing for trousers in his village. He returned from the war in Burma with a gramophone and a picture of a white woman he claimed to

have married.

Although not a blood relation, President Obama often referred to Sarah as his grandmother, calling her 'granny'.

On his trip back to Kenya as US president, he met with her among other family members in Nairobi.

After leaving office, he travelled to her home in the village of Kogelo in 2018, joking he had been unable to do so in 2015 as his jet was too big to land in Kisumu.

Obama is linked to his Kenyan family via his father Barack senior, a pipe-smoking economist who Obama has admitted he 'never truly' knew.

He met Barack Obama's mother, Ann Dunham, in Hawaii.

But he walked out when Obama was just two and died in a car crash in Nairobi in 1982, aged 46.

Obama senior had worked in the government of Jomo Kenyatta, who led Kenya at independence from Britain until his death 14 years later in 1978.

The two men did not get on well, with Kenyatta - the father of Kenya's current president Uhuru Kenyatta - sacking Obama senior, and blackballing him for further government jobs, an ostracisation that would help fuel alcoholism.

Kenyatta said on Monday the country had 'lost a strong, virtuous woman. A matriarch who held together the Obama family and was an icon of family values'. AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Report finds COVID-19 likely jumped to humans from bats

Geneva, Switzerland - An international expert mission to Wuhan concluded in a report seen on Monday that COVID-19 likely first passed to humans from a bat through an intermediary animal, with investigators all but ruling out a laboratory leak.

The intermediate host hypothesis was deemed 'likely to very likely', while the theory that the virus escaped from a lab was seen as 'extremely unlikely', according to a copy of the long-awaited final report obtained by AFP before its official release.

As countries rush to vaccinate and stem the spread of COVID-19, the mystery at the very heart of the pandemic - how the virus that causes the disease first jumped to humans - remains unsolved. The report from the international mission to Wuhan has therefore been keenly anticipated ever since the expert team left China more than a month ago.

Cold trail?

Delays in the publication of the findings, drafted in collaboration with the team's Chinese counterparts, had been blamed on coordination and translation issues, even as a diplomatic tug-of-war raged in the background over the report's contents.

The repeated delays sparked renewed criticism of the UN health agency's slow actions in getting the team to Wuhan in the first place.

The experts tasked with probing COVID-19's origins only arrived there in January, more than a year after the first cases surfaced in the Chinese city in December 2019, sparking fears the trail had gone cold. In the 15 months since the coronavirus emerged, the pandemic has engulfed the planet, killing nearly 2.8mn people and shredding the global economy. During a lengthy press conference in Wuhan on February 9 at the end of the mission, the



This file photo shows a vendor selling bats at the Tomohon Extreme Meat market on Sulawesi Island, where bats, rats and snakes are sold, despite calls to take them off the menu over fears of COVID-19 link (AFP)

experts and their Chinese counterparts made clear that they could not yet draw any firm conclusions. But they said they had worked to rank a number of hypotheses according to how likely they were.

'Missing link'

Experts believe that the SARS-

CoV-2 virus that causes the COVID-19 disease originally came from bats.

One theory examined was that the virus jumped directly from bats to humans. The final report determined that this scenario was 'possible to likely'.

A more likely scenario, the report found, was that the virus

had first jumped from bats to another animal, which in turn infected humans.

'Although the closest related viruses have been found in bats, the evolutionary distance between these bat viruses and SARS-CoV-2 is estimated to be several decades, suggesting a missing link,' the report said.

'The scenario including introduction through an intermediary host was considered to be likely to very likely,' it said, although it did not conclude which animal may have first allowed the virus to jump to humans.

The report meanwhile did not rule out transmission through frozen food - Beijing's favoured theory - since the virus appears to be able survive at freezing temperatures, saying that 'introduction via cold/food chain products is considered possible'.

'Extremely unlikely'

Finally, the report examined the idea of a lab leak from, for instance, the Wuhan Institute of Virology - a theory promoted by former US president Donald Trump's administration.

It pointed to the fact that there was no record of any virus resembling SARS-CoV-2 in any laboratory before December 2019, and stressed

high safety levels at the labs in Wuhan.

'A laboratory origin of the pandemic was considered to be extremely unlikely,' the report said.

Already during the Wuhan press conference, the experts had said the lab-leak theory was considered the least likely.

But back in Geneva, WHO boss Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus had then insisted following the mission that all hypotheses remained on the table, and the organisation has urged patience as work continues to get to the bottom of the COVID origins mystery.

The experts also concluded their report with a call for 'a continued scientific and collaborative approach to be taken towards tracing the origins of COVID-19'.

Determining the source of the pandemic is deemed vital to better protecting against future outbreaks.

AFP



Workers unload Macedonia's first batch of AstraZeneca vaccines sent under the UN-backed Covax scheme, at Skopje's airport on Sunday (AFP)

WHO warns against gap in jab distribution

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Monday against a widening gap between numbers of coronavirus vaccines in wealthy countries and those distributed to poorer nations through the global Covax initiative.

"The gap between the number of vaccines administered in rich countries, and the number of vaccines administered through Covax is growing every single day," UN health agency chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"The unequitable distribution of vaccines is not just a moral outrage, it's also economically and epidemiologically self-defeating," Tedros added, during a virtual conference hosted by the United Arab Emirates to address global immunisation.

"As long as the virus continues to circulate anywhere, peo-

ple will continue to die, trade and travel will continue to be disrupted, and the economic recovery will be further delayed."

It follows criticism by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres of nations creating a 'stockpile' of COVID-19 vaccines, calling on them to share to help end the pandemic.

Health officials have rolled out more than 510mn coronavirus vaccine doses around the world.

Tedros had called for all countries to begin vaccinating within the first 100 days of the year, but as that deadline nears, 36 countries are still to receive a single dose.

Sixteen of those are scheduled to receive their first doses through Covax within the next two weeks, but the other 20 countries are expected to miss out.

AFP

England resumes outdoor gatherings as curbs ease

London, UK - England entered the second phase of its lockdown easing on Monday thanks to a successful vaccination drive, but the government is urging vigilance as another wave of coronavirus sweeps Europe.

After schools reopened on March 8, England's stay-at-home order has been relaxed to enable outdoor gatherings of up to six people, or two households, in what newspapers have dubbed 'Happy Monday'.

While elite sports such as Premier League football have continued during the latest lockdown - minus fans - the new rules will allow amateur team sports to resume, along with tennis, golf, basketball and outdoor swimming.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he hoped that Monday 'will kick-start a Great British summer of sport - with people of all ages reunited with teammates, and able to resume the activities they love'.

But in a video message posted on Twitter, he urged people to enjoy their new freedoms cautiously.

"It's vital that we don't overdo it and risk all the progress we've made," Johnson said, in a nod to Britain's much-reduced coronavirus infection, hospitalisation and death rates compared to earlier this year.

"Please follow the new rules



People chat over cups of coffee, as England's third COVID-19 lockdown restrictions ease, allowing groups of up to six people to meet outside, in London's Hyde Park on Monday (AFP)

carefully so that we can gradually get back to normal together."

In the third phase of reopening from April 12, the government plans to allow outdoor drinking in pub gardens, while hairdressers and non-essential retail will open in England.

Limited indoor mixing in hospitality premises will be allowed from mid-May, while many other remaining restrictions will be lifted on June 21, if the outlook remains positive.

The devolved governments of the UK's other nations - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - are moving at their own pace.

'Roadmap to freedom'

With more than 126,000 deaths, Britain has one of the world's worst mortality rates from the pandemic.

But the level of new infections has been falling since early January and is now averaging around 5,000 cases a day.

Meanwhile on Sunday the country passed the milestone of inoculating more than 30mn adults with a first coronavirus vaccine dose.

Britain has so far been using two jabs, developed by Oxford University/AstraZeneca and BioNTech/Pfizer.

The first batch of 17mn doses

of US company Moderna's vaccine is set to be delivered next month, easing concerns about an imminent shortfall in supplies. The government has insisted it is on course to hit its target of offering a first jab to all adults by the end of July, and that follow-up second doses are also on target.

While conceding that continental Europe's latest wave of COVID-19 could hit Britain within weeks, Johnson said at the weekend: "And as things stand, I can see absolutely nothing in the data to dissuade me from continuing along our roadmap to freedom."

AFP

Australia's Brisbane enters snap lockdown

Brisbane, Australia - More than two million people in Brisbane entered a three-day lockdown on Monday after a cluster of coronavirus cases was detected in Australia's third-biggest city.

It is the second snap lockdown of the greater Brisbane area this year, and comes after seven people tested positive for COVID-19 - the first significant community outbreak in Australia in weeks.

"This is the UK strain. It is highly infectious. We need to do this now to avoid a longer lockdown," Queensland state Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said.

"We've seen what's happened in other countries. I don't want to see that happen to Queensland, I don't want to see that happen to Australia."

Australia has been relatively successful in curbing the spread of COVID-19, with just over 29,000 cases and 909 deaths during the pandemic to date.

However, the country's vaccine rollout has been sluggish, with just over 500,000 shots administered so far in a country of 25mn - falling far short of a government target to vaccinate four million by the end of March.

Palaszczuk said lockdowns would 'be part of the Australian way of life until everyone is vaccinated'.

AFP

India dampens down festival fever as coronavirus cases pass 12mn

Mumbai, India - Indian authorities clamped down on one of the country's biggest festivals on Monday as the country passed 12mn coronavirus cases with financial hub Mumbai recording its highest-ever rise in daily infections.

Public celebrations to mark Holi - a popular festival where people smear colour on each other - were banned in some states and territories, including the capital Delhi, over fears they could become 'super-spreader' events, with police patrolling streets in Mumbai to prevent large gatherings.

Despite the restrictions, revellers still gathered in neighbourhoods across the country,

banging drums and hurling coloured powder at each other.

"We are aware of the pandemic, but we can not ignore the wishes of the people who want to celebrate the festival of colour," TV actor Debud Ghosh, who is campaigning for an election in West Bengal state, told AFP in Kolkata.

Many people also took to the streets in the northern city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh state, the country's heartland of 1.3bn people. "Had it not been a festival, I would not have stepped out," septuagenarian B K Tiwari told AFP as he carried his colour-smeared facemask.

The muted celebrations went ahead despite a nationwide



People wearing protective suits - as a preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19 - celebrate Holi, the spring festival of colours, in the eastern Indian metropolis Kolkata on Monday (AFP)

surge in coronavirus cases.

India reported 68,020 new daily infections on Monday - a significant rise from below 9,000 in early February - taking the total number of cases to more than 12mn.

"If the outbreak grows at that pace - about five times in five weeks - that's worrisome," virologist Shahid Jameel told AFP, adding that the lack of mask-wearing and social distancing was fuelling the surge.

Mumbai reported more than 6,900 new cases - a record for the city of 20mn and more than double last year's peak.

The western state of Maharashtra, home to Mumbai, is mulling a full lockdown to tackle

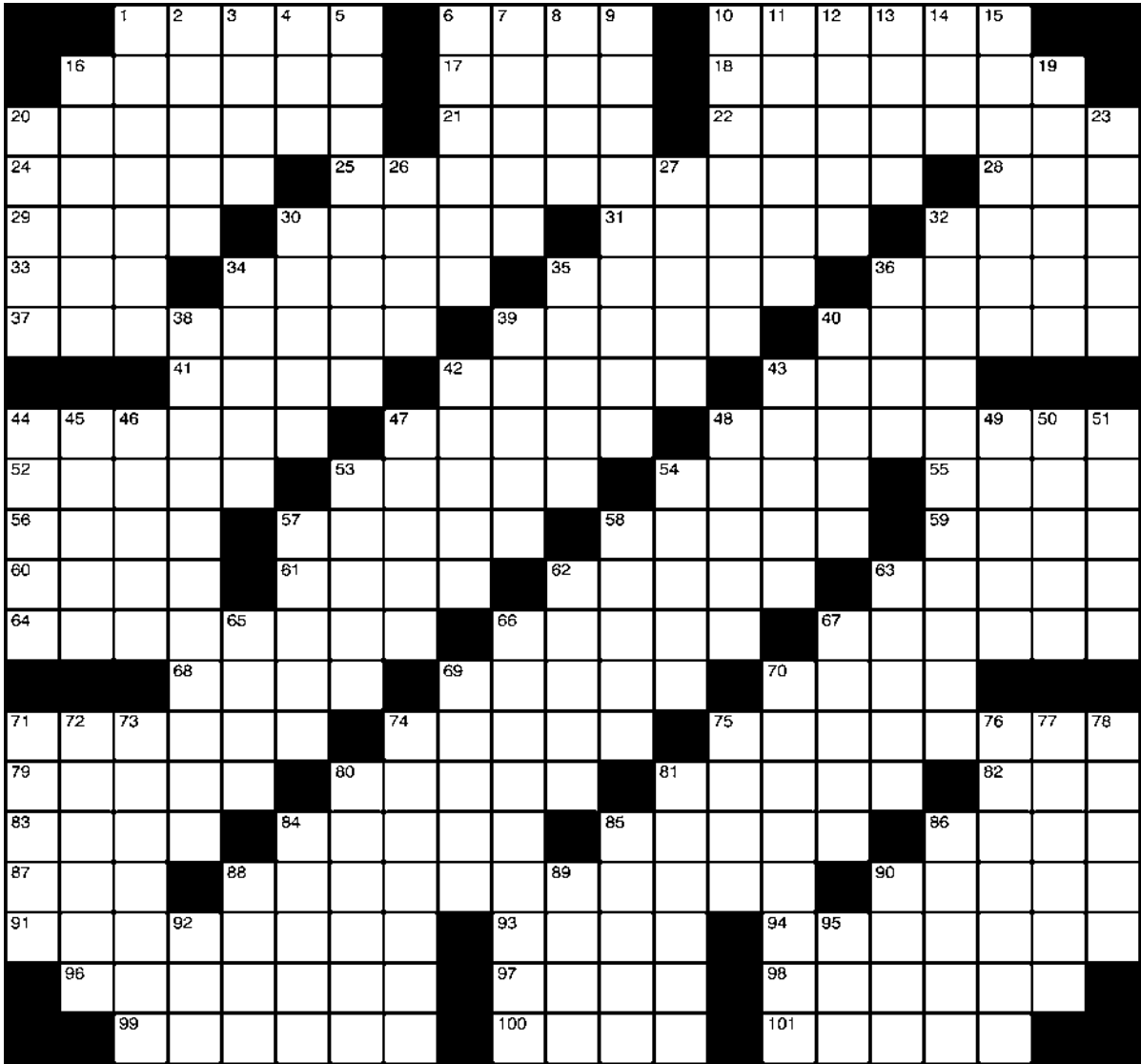
the spread of the disease after imposing nightly curfew from Sunday.

India - the third-most infected nation - has shied away from harsh restrictions to combat COVID-19, after gradually lifting one of the world's strictest lockdowns last year to revive the devastated economy.

Optimism that India's vaccine drive would ease the impact of the virus faced challenges with sluggish inoculation rates. More than 60mn shots have been administered since mid-January, a slower pace than needed to reach the ambitious target of vaccinating 300mn people by the end of July.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Struggles for breath
- 6 English monkhistorian
- 10 Figured to be totaled
- 16 Place in another pew
- 17 Coll. reunion prospect
- 18 Word with black or blue
- 20 Musical composition
- 21 Cable
- 22 Religious rebel
- 24 Aquatic mammal
- 25 Diamond award
- 28 "Da Vinci Code" author Brown
- 29 Marina area
- 30 Concur
- 31 Male honeybee
- 32 Await a decision
- 33 Hiver's opposite
- 34 Metal refining process
- 35 Common Sense author
- 36 Therefore
- 37 Biden's State
- 39 Dull finish
- 40 Lightly washed
- 41 Diminished by
- 42 Holds for the

future

- 43 Alert
- 44 Aesop's tales
- 47 Caught sight of
- 48 Freed
- 52 Slanting
- 53 Mixture
- 54 Telephone
- 55 Son of Claudius
- 56 Spree
- 57 Clue
- 58 Late
- 59 Hackney's gait
- 60 Pilaster
- 61 Brief nap
- 62 Years
- 63 Newlywed
- 64 Knowledge acquisition
- 66 Hardship
- 67 Sang the blues
- 68 Receipts
- 69 Donnybrook
- 70 Powder
- 71 Honors a debt
- 74 Cut
- 75 Laughed nervously
- 79 Muslim holy men
- 80 Referred to
- 81 Moral customs
- 82 ___ Marie Saint
- 83 Ripped
- 84 Chair seat repairman
- 85 Strong winds
- 86 State as true

87 Language teachers' org.

- 88 Fall classic
- 90 Pinch pennies
- 91 Divide
- 93 Among
- 94 Baltimore's boys of summer
- 96 Campaign confrontations
- 97 Citrus fruit
- 98 Staffed
- 99 Long-snouted animals
- 100 British gun
- 101 Tended a border

DOWN

- 1 Well-mannered
- 2 Fall flower
- 3 Char
- 4 Lady Bird's successor
- 5 Lumbers
- 6 Balanchine's forte
- 7 Abridge
- 8 Beach feature
- 9 Corrected a text
- 10 Mother-of-pearl source
- 11 State under oath
- 12 Herd
- 13 Gaelic
- 14 College basketball tourn.
- 15 Insulates

- 16 Kwi, emu or moa, e.g.
- 19 Bearing
- 20 Handled the situation
- 23 Finished
- 26 Filet border
- 27 Southern corn dish
- 30 Accumulate
- 32 88 Across preliminary
- 34 Sugary
- 35 Covered with asphalt
- 36 Employ
- 38 Mid-season baseball classic
- 39 Pine Tree State
- 40 Recovery
- 42 Tiny bit
- 43 Joins metallicity
- 44 "___ Attraction"
- 45 Solitary
- 46 Regional flora and fauna
- 47 Colloquial speech
- 48 More unusual
- 49 European finch
- 50 Rust
- 51 Lavished affection on
- 53 Salty solution
- 54 Dugout
- 57 Teases

- 58 Combative person
- 62 Heaped
- 63 Nuts' partners
- 65 Negative votes
- 66 Setbacks
- 67 Partners
- 69 Distributed by measure
- 70 Boring
- 71 Ceremonies
- 72 Played the ham
- 73 Protective wall
- 74 Like Adam and Eve before the fall
- 75 Enameled metalware
- 76 Cursed
- 77 Made equal
- 78 Pub game
- 80 Jimmy or Dixie
- 81 Young girl
- 84 Raccoon's cousin
- 85 Soil
- 86 Make amends
- 88 Outer garment
- 89 Give off
- 90 Tell all
- 92 Lawyers grp.
- 95 High praise among teens

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your creativity is on fire, leading you to make different choices than you usually do. Friends who are expecting you to act one way might have a hard time believing it when you want to act in another way, but they're definitely going to like what they see. Today should be all about letting the deepest sides of your personality out into the world. You'll be loved and celebrated.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today a friend's emotional turmoil could really get in your way. You need to value the relationship you have with them by supporting them through tough times, but you also need to be honest with them if their drama is getting to be too much for you. Get to the heart of the matter and be direct in what you say. You need to make sure you make an impact.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're getting awfully sick of the scenery around you, which means that it's time for a change! This attitude, combined with a little bit of free time, makes today an ideal day to start making some new travel plans, and you get bonus points if they involve a destination outside the country. Do some research on far-flung places and find out what the best time to visit.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

People aren't listening carefully. There's a lot of distraction, so be warned that what you say might be misinterpreted. When you speak the truth in a direct manner, some folks might think you're coming off as pushy. It stinks that you have to exert extra energy to make sure they don't read you wrong. By putting forth the extra effort to make things clear, they'll give you a huge reward.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Let your sense of humour guide you through any sticky situations that might pop up. Celebrate the fact that you have a sharper wit than most people by using it every chance you get. With one quick quip, you'll be able to get the upper hand without anyone even realising it, and this will enable you to win any argument without breaking a sweat. The key is to be flexible.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You've been flattered by someone who's been making a bold play for your attention, but there's also been something bugging you about them. Listen to that nagging voice in your head and avoid giving this person what they're asking for just yet. You don't want to make them think that they've got your trust until they actually do. Others may appear as something they aren't.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It won't feel like a risky endeavour to reach out to others for help today. You'll find like-minded people everywhere you go, and they'll know what you need almost before you say it. Usually, wearing your heart on your sleeve can leave you feeling vulnerable, but right now it will only be a wonderful way to connect with people who want what you want. Don't be shy about your feelings.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There's a lot of positive energy in the air today, but it's up to you to reach out and grab it! No one else can improve your mood or make you be more confident that things will work out fine. Only you can convince yourself that your hopes and wishes have a chance at coming true. Visualise success in your next big challenge, and start practicing that acceptance speech.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're looking for some inspiration to feed your creativity and energy, you can certainly go to your usual sources: music, books, or the beauty of nature. But you'll probably get everything you need even faster by seeking it from another person. Observe one of the newer people in your life, and watch how they treat others. Integrate some of their techniques into your own way of interacting.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Try not to censor your impulses. Let yourself be as outrageous as you want! When you let loose and get a little bit crazy, you knock down a few mental walls and let new inspiration shine in. And if anyone is watching, they won't laugh at you. They'll want to get in on the good times that you're so obviously having. Your behaviour will set the tone and help everyone else shake loose the cobwebs.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you're still preoccupied by a career issue, you need to have a conversation with someone you trust before it turns into a career crisis. These concerns aren't going to go away unless you share your woes. Keeping it all bottled up inside will only increase your stress and make the problem seem bigger than it is. Get a fresh perspective from someone who has been there before.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Great days like today don't come around very often, so try to enjoy every minute of it! Reach out into the world and find out what adventure you can be part of. If you feel like going off and taking a nice long hike, do it! This is a great day to indulge yourself and ignore whatever chores are awaiting you at home, if you can get away with it without leaving anyone in the lurch.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. When did China explode first atomic device?

- a. 1962
- b. 1963
- c. 1964
- d. 1965

2. When and where was basketball introduced in Olympics as a medal event?

- a. 1992 at Barcelona
- b. 1928 at Paris
- c. 1936 at Berlin
- d. 1900 at Athens

3. When was first test tube baby - Louise Brown born?

- a. 1939
- b. 1958
- c. 1981
- d. 1978

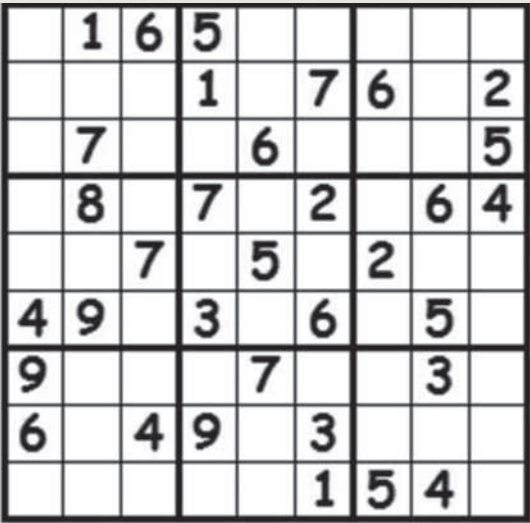
Answers: 1. c 2. c 3. d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (MARCH 29)



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



STAGE ACT

SECURE SINGING

Singing opera in a surgical mask

No one loves wearing a mask at work, but spare a thought for the chorus of the Paris Opera, having to project through multiple layers of cotton and polyester. When they took the stage recently for a rehearsal at the Bastille opera house, the 70 or so chorus members certainly did not appear to have lost any of their sonorous beauty. But having a mask strapped across one's face is far from ideal for a singer.

"It really disturbs the delivery," said Sylvie Delaunay, who has been with the chorus for more than 20 years. "When one sings opera, there are deep inhalations and deep exhalations, so if breathing is restricted, we get tired very easily."

With all cultural institutions in France shut due to the pandemic, the chorus of the Paris Opera was preparing for a new staging of 'Faust' by 19th-century French composer Charles Gounod, to be screened on television and online from Friday.

The chorus has learned what works and what doesn't. And the high-filtration FFP2 masks proved difficult, said Delaunay.

"As soon as you take a breath, you swallow it!" So the chorus has opted for stiff surgical masks, in stylish black for the actual performance.

The need for such protective equipment was highlighted this week when it was found that Culture Minister Roselyn Bachelot was carrying COVID-19 when she attended one of the last rehearsals for 'Faust' and tested positive the following morning.

Extremely demanding

This is the third time that the Paris Opera -- shut for more than a year, first because of strikes, then because of the coronavirus lockdowns - has live-streamed its performances, following Verdi's 'Aida'

When one sings opera, there are deep inhalations and deep exhalations, so if breathing is restricted, we get tired very easily

SYLVIE DELAUNAY



Having a mask strapped across one's face is far from ideal, says chorus member Sylvie Delaunay. Photo: AFP



From the dress rehearsal of Faust, an opera by Charles GounodWorking in a tight-knit group, the choral artists of the Paris Opera have agreed to sing wearing facemasks, in addition to undergoing regular PCR tests. Photo: AFP

and Mozart's 'The Magic Flute' earlier this season.

For opera fans, such internet broadcasts offer nowhere near the thrill of a seat in the auditorium. But the house is least able to reach a global audience for the first time.

Each new staging has been subtly transformed by the circumstances: Aida - in a controversial new production by Dutch director Lotte de Beer starring German tenor Jonas Kaufmann - was a largely stationary

affair because of social-distancing constraints.

By contrast, the new staging of Gounod's 'Faust' by German director Tobias Kratzer with a star-studded line-up including Albanian soprano Ermonela Jaho and French tenor Benjamin Bernheim, and conducted by Lorenzo Viotti, includes a bustling - albeit masked - nightclub scene, a setting that might have a nostalgic edge for some in the current climate.

Soloists have been permitted to perform without

a mask, albeit with daily COVID-19 tests. But while the chorus was bunched together for the final show, they had to socially distance throughout rehearsals.

"We're less able to hear each other. We hear our neighbours... but the sound of the group is more distant. It's not at all the same," said Delaunay.

Masks mean some of the articulation is lost, said chorus master Jose Luis Basso, "The job of a chorus singer is all about exaggerating the pronunciation of words. But still the results aren't too bad."

In opera, the chorus often takes centre stage, as in ever-popular set pieces like 'Va, pensiero' from Verdi's 'Nabucco' or the Gypsy Chorus from 'La Traviata'.

In 'Faust', perhaps one of the best-known French operas alongside Bizet's 'Carmen', their opportunity to shine is in famous choruses such as 'Wine or Beer' and 'Immortal Glory of our Ancestors'.

Basso says the current crisis has underlined the importance of the chorus. He hates the idea that its members are sometimes dismissed as 'people who failed to become great soloists'.

"The tests to join the Opera are extremely demanding," he said, requiring a mastery of multiple languages, musical styles and technique.

Despite the difficulties, it has been vital to keep working, said Alexander Neef, Paris Opera's director-general. "If we don't perform, we don't exist," he said.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

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

Indian male, 32yrs MBA-Marketing, 8yrs Oman exp, looking for suitable job - sales, operations and project (Now working as a operational manager) NOC and driving licence available. Contact 98469481

Indian, MBA Finance 3 years Oman experience in Accounting. NOC Available. Contact 79396446. Email: sheroofsabu@gmail.com

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

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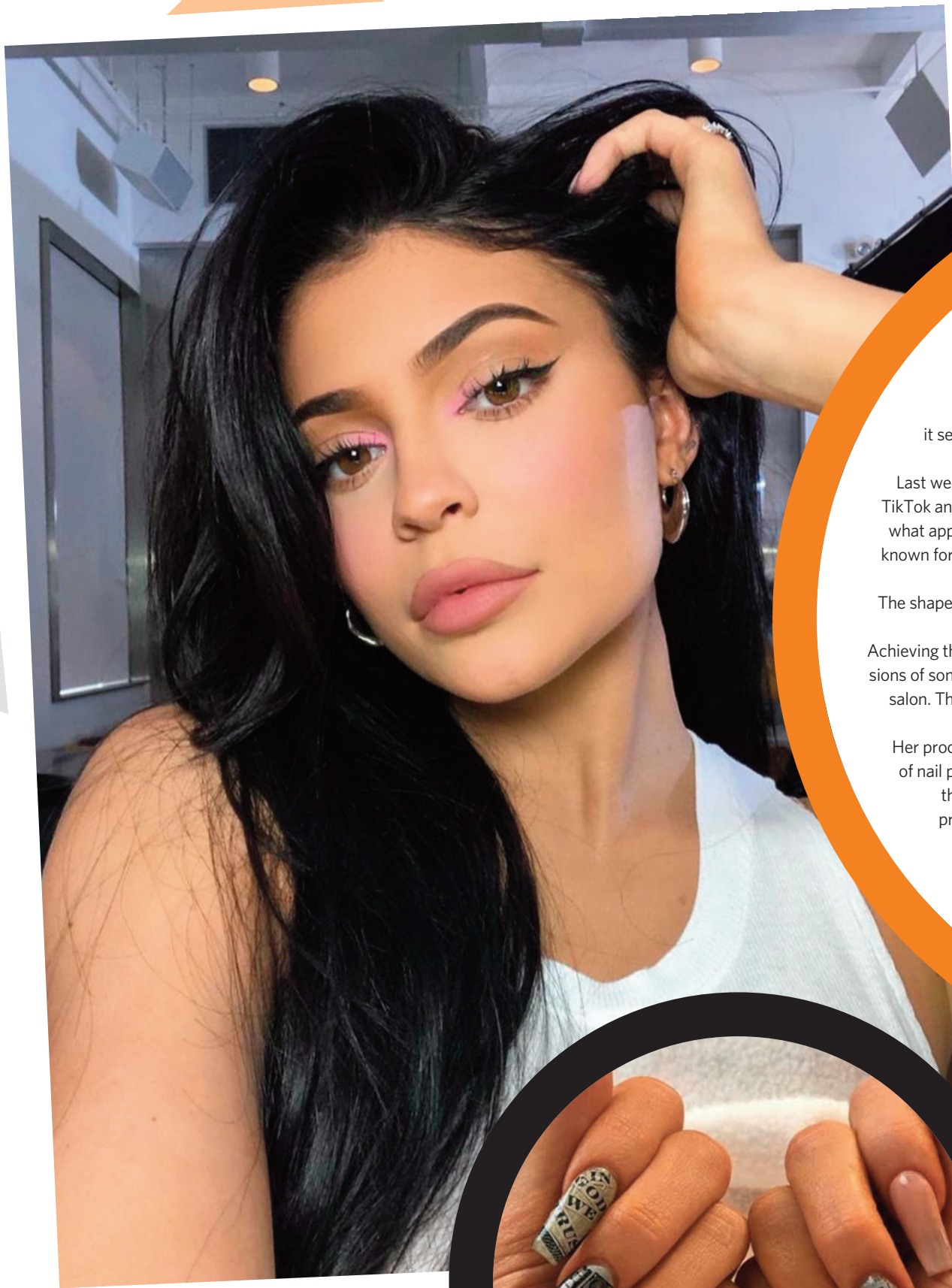
71509370

1. Save this number to your contact list.

2. Send "start" to receive news updates

maximalist MANICURE

Kylie Jenner
blends trends in
nail design



While fashion buffs were contemplating which spring nail art to try out this year - French tips, multicoloured digits, or retro swirls - Kylie Jenner, it seems, thought miles ahead. The American diva combined them all into one seriously enviable design.

Last week, Jenner revealed her latest manicure (as churned out by nail artist Chaun Legend) on TikTok and Instagram Stories. A recent article in Vogue Arabia revealed that this look is painted on what appears to be gel extensions or acrylics in the lengthy, rectangular shape Jenner's long been known for. Each nail has a multi-coloured retro swirl design that's only on the tips — and each nail's swirl pattern has a different colour scheme.

The shape, the colours, the negative space? Truly, the only way this manicure could get more trendy was if Legend stuck some flower designs or dots or crystals on there.

Achieving this exact look at home is going to be difficult without the help of a nail technician and extensions of some sort — and you absolutely should support your local nail artists if you feel safe going to a salon. That swirly pattern, however, is definitely doable. As nail artist Sigourney Nuñez puts it, it's more about the technique than the product or tool you use.

Her process is to soften the bristles of a fine-line brush with some acetone, and then pour a drop of nail polish onto a piece of foil. Instead of dipping her brush straight into the polish, she drags the brush through it, going in different directions to fully saturate the bristles. After practising her line work on that same piece of foil, she begins drawing her squiggles from bottom to top.

This whole thing just gets one thinking about what other nail-art trends one could combine. Calligraphy and polka dots? Stripes and foils? Colourblocking and negative space? The possibilities are endless...

Original spin

You'd be forgiven for thinking that Dua Lipa is a fan of a low-key nail look after seeing the subtly '90s nude manicure (Bio Sculpture's gel formula in Heart and Soul, if you're wondering) she sports in British Vogue's February issue.

The truth is that Lipa is a nail chameleon and oscillates between all manner of designs on her nails, courtesy of her manicurist Michelle Humphrey. "Usually Dua has a look that she fancies and she'll pull images," Humphrey explains over Zoom. "And then we'll either do that, or sometimes I'll add something or take something out, then it becomes its

own thing."

From glitter-loaded tips for Lipa's recent Studio 2054 performance, to crystals for an appearance on Jimmy Fallon's show or music video-ready orange floral patterns, the duo's creative trademark is nails that are pure joy to look at.

"I love [nail] appointments with individuals like Dua or actresses and other personalities - something where they want a look. It's so nice and rewarding when you can be creative," says Humphrey. "There's a transformation, and you can see a real before and after. A manicure is always a transformation anyway

- nails will be cleaner, tidier and neater - but when you put some boujis glitter on it and make it fun, that's what it's all about."

Other than Lipa (who she sees every one to two weeks whenever schedules allow), Humphrey's fun designs - and the more simple ones - have appeared on the nails of everyone from Adele to Lily Allen, Naomie Harris to Cate Blanchett, and she's also a regular on editorial shoots.

How does she come up with ideas? "I've always been very artistic - something will pop into my head, I will visually see it in my brain, and then I play



with it," she says of her process. "Sometimes I'm inspired by a product, brand or trend, or sometimes it will be something on Instagram that looks fun. I always like to put an original spin on things, though." Either way, she says, nails are all about expressing your personal self - find inspiration from where you can: "It's free and easy!"

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Spain's Dani Olmo celebrates after scoring against Georgia during their World Cup qualifier in Tbilisi, Georgia, on Sunday



England's Mason Mount scores past Albania goalkeeper during their World Cup qualifying match in Tirana, Albania, on Sunday

Olmo comes to Spain's rescue

Italy, Germany, England toil to victories in Balkans; Denmark drub Moldova 8-0 in Copenhagen

2022 FIFA WORLD CUP EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Paris, France - Dani Olmo's injury-time strike saved Spain in a 2-1 win against Georgia on Sunday, while France also rebounded from an opening draw in World Cup qualifying by beating Kazakhstan.

Elsewhere, England, Italy and Germany all had to work hard in the Balkans to gain their second victories in two matches.

Denmark also stayed perfect as they made a double statement, protesting the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar before putting eight goals past Moldova, while Switzerland eked out a victory over Lithuania in a game delayed because one of the goals was too big.

Spain, who had been held to an embarrassing home draw by Greece in their opening game in Group B, fell behind to a goal by Khvicha Kvaratskhelia just before half-time.

Ferran Torres of Manchester City levelled in the 56th minute with his fifth goal from just six starts.

Spain's second-half pressure

finally paid off in injury time.

Olmo's rasping strike from 25 metres flew into the top corner.

"It was perhaps one of the games where I suffered the most, but, for the joy at the end, it was worth it," said Spain coach Luis Enrique. "I'll sign to suffer if in the end we win but we saw the spectre of qualification getting very complicated."

In Tirana, Kane ended his six-game England goal drought as he inspired a 2-0 win in Albania in Group I.

Gareth Southgate's side struggled to break down the well-organised underdogs until the Tottenham striker netted late in the first half.

It was the England captain's first international goal since he scored against Kosovo 500 days ago in November 2019.

He set up England's second for Mason Mount in the second period. "As a striker you go through spells where things don't go your way," Kane told British broadcaster ITV. "You have to stay focused on doing your job for the team and we're grateful to get the three points."



Germany's Serge Gnabry (right) celebrates with his teammates after scoring against Romania in Bucharest on Sunday

Serge Gnabry gave Germany the lead against Romania in Bucharest after 17 minutes.

The visitors dominated much of the game, but had three narrow escapes in the closing minutes before winning 1-0.

"We should have scored the second goal, so we would not have been in danger of losing two points," said German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, in remarks reported by FIFA. "We are lacking coolness, cleverness, maybe a bit of will inside the box."

The win leaves Germany top of Group J by just a single goal

ahead of Armenia who also won their first two games.

"If there's anything to criticise, it's the way we used our chances," said Germany head coach Joachim Loew, who will step down after the Euro 2020 finals this summer.

In Bucharest on Sunday, the German team briefly reversed their shirts before kick-off with the numbers facing forwards.

The cryptic message was intended to draw attention to the United Nations's 30-point declaration of Human Rights.

The German FA account

posted 'We are 30!' over a picture of the team on Twitter.

"We all stand for fair play, not only on the pitch but also off it," said Germany captain Neuer. "And we stand for the 30 articles. We wanted to show that again."

Italy kept their campaign on track with a 2-0 win over Bulgaria.

'Getting chills'

Andrea Belotti scored the first goal from the penalty spot just before the break with Manuel Locatelli sealing the win with his

OTHER RESULTS

Group B: Kosovo 0 Sweden 3

Group D: Ukraine 1 Finland 1

Group F: Israel 1 Scotland 1,

Austria 3 Faroe Islands 1

Group I: San Marino 0

Hungary 3,

Poland 3 Andorra 0

Group J: Armenia 2 Iceland 0,

North Macedonia 5

Liechtenstein 0

supports CHANGE' as they lined up for a photograph before the game. The Danish Football Union said the shirts would be put up for sale and the money given to migrant workers in Qatar.

Kick-off in Switzerland's home game against Lithuania in St Gallen was delayed by 15 minutes on Sunday because one of the goals was too big. When played started, Xherdan Shaqiri scored after just two minutes as the hosts on 1-0.

Ousmane Dembele scored the opening goal as holders France won 2-0 in Kazakhstan to claim their first victory in Group D after drawing at home to Ukraine in their opener.

Sergei Malin put through his own net for France's second goal before half-time but Kylian Mbappe had a second-half penalty saved after coming off the bench. "People might have thought Kazakhstan would let us score five goals but no, they played well," Paul Pogba, who returned to the starting line-up, told broadcaster TF1. "We got the result and we can be happy." AFP

Injured Lewandowski to miss England clash

Warsaw, Poland - Robert Lewandowski will miss Poland's 2022 World Cup qualifier against England with a right knee injury, the Polish Football Association said on Monday.

The Bayern Munich forward suffered the injury during Sunday's 3-0 win over Andorra in Warsaw in which he scored two goals but had to leave the field in the 63rd minute.

"Healing from this type of injury usually takes between five and ten days. Therefore Robert Lewandowski will return to the club where he will undergo further rehabilitation," the statement said.

Lewandowski's absence is a blow to Poland, who will have been counting on their star striker lining up against England in what is the toughest match of their qualifying campaign.

Poland are currently third in Group I on four points, two behind Gareth Southgate's leaders and level with second-placed Hungary following a 3-3 draw in Budapest and



Robert Lewandowski during the match against Andorra on Sunday

Sunday's win. Lewandowski has scored three times in those two matches, twice against Andorra and a stunning late leveller against Hungary.

Bayern had initially said that the 32 year old would not be released to play in Wednesday's match at Wembley but changed its mind due to a change in Germany's COVID-19 travel restrictions.

The reigning European champions will be hoping that he will be back in time for the

first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal with Paris Saint-Germain, which will be played at Bayern's Allianz Arena on April 7.

Lewandowski is also hoping to break Gerd Mueller's Bundesliga record of 40 goals in a single season, as he sits on a total of 35 with eight league games still to play.

The Polish side has already been hit by coronavirus infections.

AFP

SA fail to qualify after defeat in Sudan

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa failed to qualify for the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations after losing 0-2 to Sudan on Sunday in their final Group C match in Omdurman.

Saifeldin Malik gave the hosts a fifth-minute lead in a clash of former African champions by heading past goalkeeper Ronwen Williams off a free-kick.

Mohammed Abdelrahman doubled the lead on 31 minutes, taking advantage of hesitancy by captain Thulani Hlatshwayo before firing past Williams at his near post.

South Africa coach Molefi Ntseki took off star forward Percy Tau just past the hour and surprisingly replaced him with defender Sifiso Hlanti, given the desperate need for goals.

Ghana defeated Sao Tome e Principe 3-1 in Accra in a match played at the same time to finish first with 13 points, followed by Sudan (12), South Africa (10) and Sao Tome (0).

South Africa have gradually faded as a Cup of Nations force after hosting and winning the competition in 1996 and finishing second and third in the following two editions.

Failure to qualify for the 2021



Saifeldin Bakhit of Sudan heads in to score during their Africa Cup of Nations qualifier against South Africa on Sunday

tournament in Cameroon means Bafana Bafana (The Boys) will miss the finals of the marquee African competition for the fourth time in seven editions.

The latest failure is sure to pile pressure on the national football association to ditch Ntseki, with the group phase of 2022 World Cup qualifying starting on May 31.

South Africa are in the same group as Ghana, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia and only the winners of the six-matchday mini-league advance to the final round.

Ghana have proved consis-

tently superior to South Africa in recent years, including winning at home and drawing away in 2021 Cup of Nations qualifying.

Former national U17 coach Ntseki was a shock choice to succeed England-born Stuart Baxter two years ago given he had never handled a senior-level team.

Crystal Palace forward Jordan Ayew was among the scorers for Ghana against Sao Tome, the only team among the 48 in the group phase to lose all six matches.

Tunisia beat Equatorial

Guinea 2-1 in Rades in a match between countries who had already qualified from Group J while Tanzania edged Libya 1-0 in Dar es Salaam in the same section.

Guinea, who secured a place at the 24-team tournament earlier this week, surrendered an unbeaten Group A record when losing 1-2 to Namibia in Windhoek.

Captain Peter Shalulile was the Namibian star, scoring in each half after Mamadou Kane had given Guinea an early lead.

AFP

PLAYERS 'COOKED' IN BUBBLE LIFE: KOHLI

Pune, India - Virat Kohli says cricketers are suffering after months of bio-secure 'bubble' life during the coronavirus pandemic as they head into the high-stress environment of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Kohli, one of the game's most disciplined captains, raised his concerns after his India side edged England by seven runs in a thrilling decider to clinch the one-day international series 2-1 in Pune on Sunday.

Players from both the sides moved on immediately to join their squads for the world's richest franchise Twenty20 tournament, which starts on April 9, and all will have to go through restrictions again in the IPL 'bubble'.

"Scheduling needs to be looked at in future, because playing in 'bubbles' for so long, two to three months, is going to be very, very difficult going forward," Kohli said.

"You can't expect everyone to be at the same level of mental strength. Some times you do get cooked and you do feel like a bit of a change.

"I am sure things will be discussed and things will change in the future as well.

"But a different tournament, it brings fresh challenges heading into the IPL."

Kohli will join the Royal Challengers Bangalore squad on April 1, two days after the team begins their training camp in Chennai. The Royal Challengers will play their initial set of matches, including the IPL tournament opener on April 9 against defending champions Mumbai Indians, in the city.

It is understood that Kohli would need to undergo the mandatory week-long quarantine put in place by the IPL as part of the guidelines to operate in the bio-secure environment. On Monday, Kohli quit the bubble in Pune.

Most international players have been restricted to staying inside bio-secure 'bubbles' since August, with only small breaks.

From September until January, India's players went through



Virat Kohli

similar quarantine and isolation regimes in the delayed 2020 IPL in the UAE and their tour of Australia before having a short break ahead of the home England series which comprised four Tests, five T20Is and three one-day internationals.

England's rest-and-rotate policy ensured players had breaks during their three months touring Sri Lanka, where they played two Tests, and India.

Bubble and back

England beat Sri Lanka 2-0 but went down to India 3-1 in Tests and 3-2 in the T20I series.

England players including Ben Stokes, Jos Buttler (both Rajasthan Royals), Jonny Bairstow (Sunrisers Hyderabad) and Sunday's batting hero Sam Curran (Chennai Super Kings) are staying on to join the IPL.

Buttler said he was 'excited' to take part in the tournament which lasts until May 30. He said England management had kept players in top mental and physical shape.

"It's been great that everyone's health has been really looked after and whenever it's possible to get out of the 'bubble' and back in," said Buttler, who

stood in as captain for injured Eoin Morgan in the last two one-day internationals.

"So we are all very thankful of that to help with those situations and also it's about how we plan moving forward. That's going to be part of player welfare."

Curran, who said he had come back 'refreshed' after going home during the four Tests, hit a valiant unbeaten 95 in the final ODI.

"It's another learning series for me, really enjoyed it and I feel like it has given me lot of confidence going into the IPL," said Curran after his man-of-the-

match performance just failed to produce a stunning victory for England who had fallen to 200 for seven chasing 330 to win.

England, who have already played six Tests in 2021, have an intensive calendar ahead and are scheduled to play another 12 Tests by January 2022, five at home against India, two against New Zealand and five away Ashes Tests in Australia.

They will also have limited-overs series at home against Sri Lanka and Pakistan before they return to India for the Twenty20 World Cup in October.

AFF



A file photo of Sri Lankan allrounder Thisara Perera

Thisara Perera becomes first Sri Lankan to smash six sixes in an over

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Thisara Perera, the allrounder, became the first Sri Lankan to hit six sixes in an over in any form of professional cricket, on Sunday.

En route to his unbeaten 13-ball 52, he also smashed the second-fastest half-century in List A cricket, for Army Sports Cricket Club in SLC's Major Clubs tournament.

The record for fastest fifty is held by former Sri Lanka allrounder Kaushalya Weeraratne, who smashed a 12-ball half-century for Ragana Cricket Club against Kurunegala Youth Cricket Club in November 2005.

That knock, an 18-ball 66, consisted of two fours and eight sixes, including five off a single over. Perera, leading Sri Lanka Army Sports Club, walked in to bat at No 5 with 20 balls remaining in their innings that was truncated to 41-overs-a-side.

Part-time off-spinner and experienced first-class cricketer

Dilhan Cooray, playing for Bloomfield Cricket and Athletic Club, was the bowler at the receiving end of Perera's onslaught. Cooray went on to concede 73 in four wicketless overs. For the record, the match was abandoned with Bloomfield struggling on 73 for six in their chase of 318.

Perera is the second cricketer, after West Indies T20I captain Kieron Pollard, to achieve this feat in 2021.

Pollard achieved the feat just three weeks prior to Perera's, when he hit Sri Lanka's Akila Dhananjaya for six sixes in a T20I in Coolidge.

Overall, Perera is part of a small list of nine to have achieved this feat in professional cricket, after Garfield Sobers, Ravi Shastri, Herschelle Gibbs, Yuvraj Singh, Ross Whiteley, Hazratullah Zazai, Leo Carter and Pollard.

Cricinfo

England will not panic despite India tour defeats, says Buttler

Pune, India - Consecutive Test, Twenty20 and One-Day series defeats would be enough for most cricket nations to ring the changes, but not England, according to team stalwart Jos Buttler.

India captain Virat Kohli said after claiming the ODIs with a seven-run win in a tense decider on Sunday that it had been 'sweet' to beat old rivals England in every contest on the three-month tour.

Kohli predicted 'exciting times' ahead for his side who are now expected to depose England as the world's top one-day side in the ICC rankings before they host the Twenty20 World Cup this year.

The Tests, won 3-1, saw India showcase a devastating new spinner in Axar Patel, while Prasidh Krishna was unleashed as a new pace threat in the ODIs.

Buttler, who stood in for injured captain Eoin Morgan, said however that England's rivals should not read too much into the defeats.

"We have been a brilliant side for a long period of time now."

Buttler and Morgan believe



Jos Buttler

that exposing new players to India's bedevilling sun-baked pitches will benefit England at the T20 tournament in October and again in 2023 when they defend their 50-over World Cup title in India.

The unbeaten 95 by No 8 Sam Curran and two aggressive innings by one-day debutant Liam Livingstone caught the eye of England's management.

"Any time we expand the player pool, that creates competition, that creates better performances and that creates the upward trajectory we are always after," said Buttler.

The England wicketkeeper-batsman said Curran had been put in a unique position coming in so low in the order and nearly securing an unlikely win.

"Many guys are never really

exposed to that situation in their whole career so he will take great learning from that," said Buttler.

"He is still only 22 and the scope of where he can take his game to is massive so we are all very excited for him."

Livingstone also impressed with his unbeaten 27 in England's emphatic six-wicket win on Thursday followed by his 36 on Sunday.

"Liam coming in and playing in those two games the way he has, it shows that we are doing things right," said Buttler.

"Liam is obviously a very attacking, aggressive batsman and we want him to play in exactly that fashion when he comes in," he added.

"It is brilliant to see someone like Liam come in and play straight away in the fashion that we would like people to play in."

"That shows that we are doing things right, the message is getting through to people and we will continue to play in that way."

England may not have won a series in India but Buttler said, "We are in a really good place as a side."

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Oman hopeful of Olympic spot

Omani quartet in fray for lone Asian berth in 49er class for Tokyo Games at Mussanah Open Championship

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Sail officials have expressed high hopes on the two Omani teams that are vying for the only remaining Asian qualifying spot for the Tokyo Olympic Games in the 49er class when the Asia-Africa Olympic Qualifier are held during the Mussanah Open Championship at the Mussanah Sports City from April 1-8.

Oman Sail is organising the crucial regatta in a bio-secure bubble in view of the COVID-19 pandemic and a total of 102 men and women sailors from 16 countries will be in action chasing a dream Olympic berth in Laser, Laser Radial, 49er, 49erFX and RS:X sailing and windsurfing classes.

Oman will be having high hopes from the two pairs in the 49er class - Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi, and Abdul Rahman al Mashari and Ahmed al Hasni.

With the advantage of competing in home waters, the quartet are eyeing a place in Oman's sporting history as a qualification will make them the first sailors from the sultanate to achieve the feat.

In his remarks to the media on Monday, Rashid al Kindi, Oman Sail's director of sailing, said, "This is an incredibly important event in the sailing calendar and we are looking forward to a week of intense competitive sailing. Our own sailors are competing and despite the disruptions caused due to the pandemic, it is time for them to give their best and hopefully, make history by qualifying for Tokyo Games.



Oman's Waleed al Kindi and Musab al Hadi after a race in the 49er class during an international regatta

"We have worked with them for the past five years in this class and the sailors have now the chance to make us all proud by securing a spot at the Tokyo Olympic Games in July-August."

He added, "The Mussanah Open Championship is the last opportunity for our Omani sailors and they are up against a tough competition. I am hopeful that one of the two Oman teams will make history at home."

Kindi said, "Mussanah has proven to be an excellent host in the past. Due to COVID-19 disruptions, World Sailing and the Asian Sailing Federation (ASAF) selected Oman to host

the event. We have created a bio-secure bubble for all athletes and delegates with strict measures in place to ensure the safety of everyone involved.

"We are grateful to the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth and the Oman Olympic Committee for their continued support in organising the qualifier.

"We also thank the Millennium Resort Mussanah, National Mineral Water Company and the International Maritime College Oman (IMCO) for their support to this event."

Each day of action will be divided into a coach briefing in



Oman's 49er sailors who are attempting to qualify for Tokyo Games at the forthcoming event in Mussanah



The Mussanah Open Championship is the last opportunity for our Omani sailors

RASHID AL KINDI

the morning with racing in the afternoon, giving all competitors the opportunity to familiarise themselves with their equipment as well as the judging criteria and regulations.

Racing at the Mussanah Open Championship will begin on April 3 and the prize giving and closing ceremonies will take place on April 8.

As events were cancelled and rescheduled due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, Oman sailors' preparations for Olympic qualification took them to training camps in Vilamoura, Portugal, during late 2020.

All sailors, coaches and delegates are currently on site and currently making final preparations for the event which will serve to bolster Oman's image as one of the world's most exciting sailing hosts.



Vinales wins season-opening Qatar MotoGP

Doha, Qatar - Dad-to-be Maverick Vinales of Spain won the season-opening Qatar MotoGP on a Yamaha on Sunday pushing France's Ducati rider Johann Zarco into second despite windy, sandy conditions. Italy's Francesco Bagnaia, on another Ducati, came third on his first ride in the factory team after starting on pole, beating reigning champion Joan Mir of Suzuki back into fourth in the final moments of the race.

"I felt the potential, I was taking everything calmly," Vinales, 26, said after his win.

"I tried to be very smart, very calm... finally I opened a gap and I was trying to get the power.

"I can say nothing more other than to say thank you to my family, especially my close family."

"You know my wife and I are waiting for a baby," added Vinales, who married girlfriend Raquel and announced earlier this month that the couple are expecting their first child.

Vinales overcame a slow start in which he and the other Yamahas were left standing by



Maverick Vinales celebrates with the trophy after winning the season-opening Qatar MotoGP on Sunday night

the Ducatis, before gradually advancing on the Italian bikes.

He took the lead with eight laps to go, seeing off Bagnaia while Mir made up six places with four laps remaining after starting in tenth place.

Despite his best efforts, Fabio Quartararo could not match Vinales' tenacity on his debut as a Yamaha factory rider.

Spaniards Alex Rins (Suzuki), Aleix Espargaro (Aprilia) and Pol Espargaro (Honda), Australian

Jack Miller (Ducati) and eye-catching rookie Enea Bastianini (Ducati-Avintia), last year's Moto2 champion, completed the top-ten.

With one lap left, Vinales had a comfortable lead of more than

I felt the potential, I was taking everything calmly. I tried to be very smart

MAVERICK VINALES

a second and a half, more than enough for victory, while Zarco, Bagnaia and Mir fought for the podium.

"I'm really happy - it's been a good race and a long race, the end was quite difficult," said Zarco.

"I felt I can still have some space to follow (Vinales).

"I tried to catch Vinales... thanks to my engine I could only save second position."

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

