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**WHO WILL BE THE JUDGE OF CLIMATE PLANS?**  
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## BUDGET 2022

Total spending increased to **RO12.1bn**

Revenues estimated at **RO10.58bn**

Average oil price estimated at **\$50** per barrel

Budget deficit expected at **RO1.5bn**

# PROMISING OUTLOOK

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The sultanate's government is planning to increase total public spending to RO12.1bn in the fiscal year 2022 as public revenues are expected to rise by six per cent.

The estimated total public spending will be two per cent higher in 2022 over what is expected to be spent by the end of this year, the Ministry of Finance announced on Sunday. Total spending in Budget 2022 is over 11 per cent higher compared to the RO10.88bn spending estimated in budget for 2021.

At a media briefing on Budget 2022, H E Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, informed that the state's total public revenues for the next fiscal year are estimated at RO10.58bn, an increase of six per cent over what is expected to be collected by the end of 2021.

Oil and gas revenues are likely to account for 68 per cent of total revenues, while non-oil revenues will represent the remaining 32 per cent of the total, the minister added. The sultanate's budget for 2022 is based on an average oil price assumption of US\$50 per barrel.

H E Habsi confirmed that the periodic bonus for state employees will be included in Budget 2022. He said that the government is currently re-studying the pricing of electricity and water services, which will be announced later.

He also informed that in the coming days, the Ministry of Finance will issue an emergency fund system to deal with natural disasters and crises. He noted that the expected cost of damages due to Cyclone Shaheen is around RO200mn, including works related to infrastructure and aid.



*The Ministry of Finance will issue an emergency fund system to deal with natural disasters. The expected cost of damages due to Cyclone Shaheen is around RO200mn*

H E SULTAN AL HABSI

### Deficit to shrink

Budget 2022, as per the ministry's announcement, estimates a lower deficit of RO1.5bn, mainly due to an expected increase in oil and gas revenues.

The estimated deficit - which is well within the limits of deficits estimated in the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan - represents



*Among the most important pillars of the budget are maintaining safe and sustainable levels of public spending and continuing to raise non-oil revenue*

H E ABDULLAH AL HARTHY

sents 15 per cent of total revenues and five per cent of Oman's GDP.

Around RO1.1bn of the estimated deficit will be covered by domestic and external borrowings, while the remaining RO400mn will be drawn from reserves, according to the ministry.

H E Habsi added that the cost of repay-

ing government loan instalments next year is expected to reach about RO2.7bn. The sultanate's total public debt is expected to reach 75 per cent of GDP, which is less than the 86 per cent expected earlier.

"It is hoped that Oman's credit ratings will gradually improve over the coming years with the implementation of the tenth Five-Year Plan and financial procedures and policies aimed at controlling financial conditions and achieving financial sustainability," H E Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance, said.

### Priority for productive sectors

According to H E Harthy, among the most important pillars of Budget 2022 are maintaining safe and sustainable levels of public spending, continuing to raise non-oil revenue contributions, and giving priority to the implementation of projects related to the productive sectors.

He said estimated expenditures of the civil ministries in Budget 2022 stand at RO4.3bn, of which RO3.2bn are for salaries of state employees.

The sultanate's investment spending in the energy sector is estimated at RO1.410bn for 2022. Investment spending for the tourism sector is estimated to reach RO193mn, while mining and logistics sectors will get RO57mn and RO116mn, respectively.

Investment expenditure for the communications and information technology sector is estimated to be RO156mn, while the food and fisheries sectors will account for RO99mn and RO54mn in spendings, respectively.



## HM to visit UK on Tuesday

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will embark on a private visit on Tuesday to the United Kingdom (UK).

This was announced in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, reading as follows:

'His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a private visit to the UK lasting several days, with effect from Tuesday, December 14.

'During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a delegation comprising Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nua'mani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Oman's Ambassador to the UK.

'His Majesty's visit aims to upgrade the advanced relations between Oman and the UK, to serve the two countries' joint interests and achieve aspirations of their peoples. The visit will also touch on regional and international topics of common concern.'

ONA

## Third dose for 18 years and older to start soon: SC

Muscat - The Supreme Committee (SC) in charge of dealing with COVID-19 announced that the third dose of vaccine against COVID-19 will be given to those 18 years and older.

The Ministry of Health will announce the target groups and the approved plan for an immunisation drive.

In light of SC's earlier announcement regarding vaccination as a condition to allow entry to all government units and pri-

vate sector facilities, it said it has adopted a unified mechanism for dealing with unvaccinated people. 'The competent authorities will inform of the guidelines to all.'

The committee emphasised the continuation of adoption of precautionary measures as well as utilising only 50 per cent of the capacity in wedding and event halls, activities of mass nature, including sports activities and exhibitions of all kinds.

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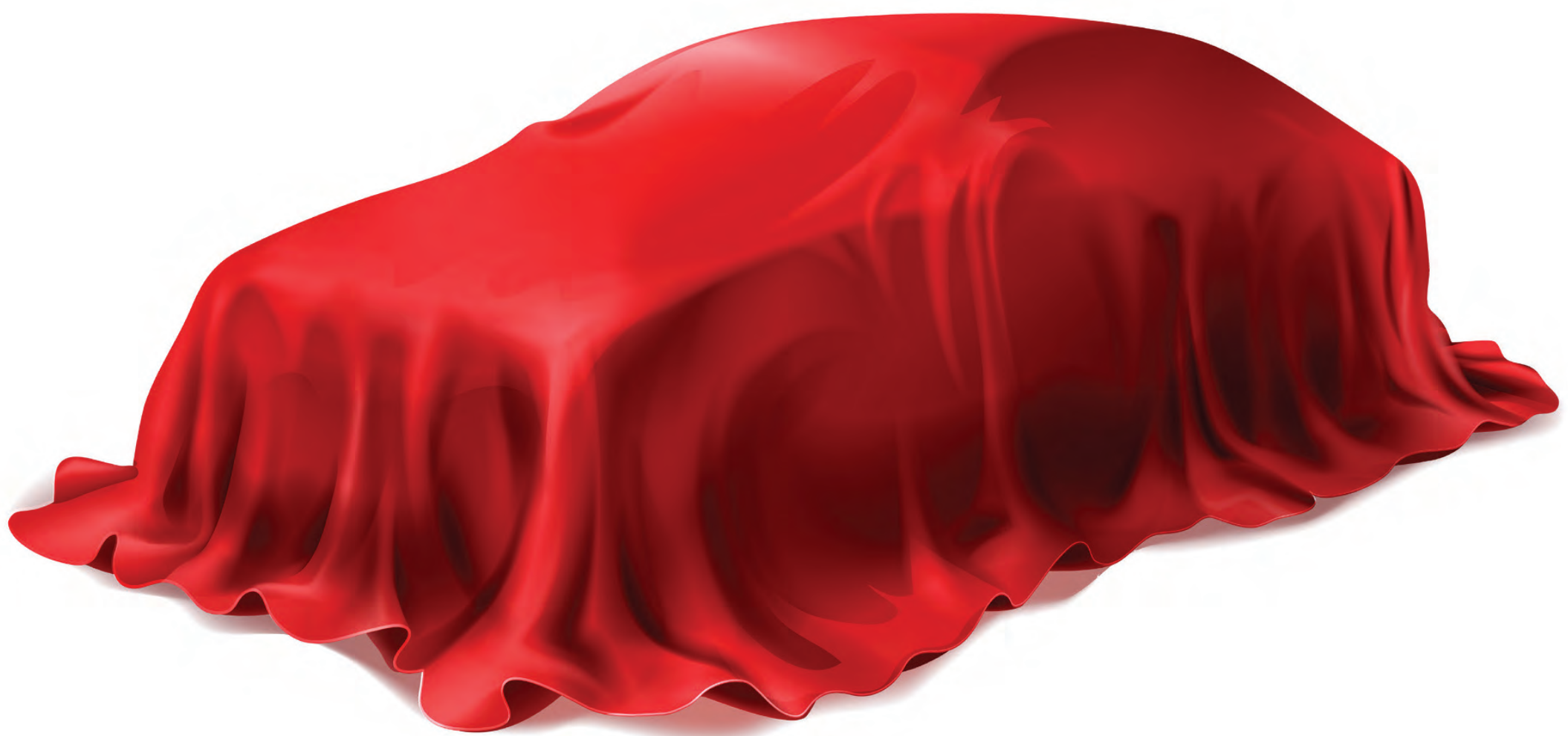
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**YOUR SAY**

# CARROTS AND SWEETENERS

**How can Oman position itself as a hub for foreign investment?**

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**Salaah Abdullah**  
Auditor

There is need to focus more on how to increase the availability of skilled manpower by making it easier to bring in foreign workforce. Omanisation may be good but there is need for skilled labour which Omanis can get from an expat labour force.



**Ruskeen S**  
Sales manager

This can be done by having simplified visa procedures, more economic zones, enhanced logistics and allowing even small investors with easy investment facilities.



**Jayatee Choudhury**  
Student

Foreign investors can be encouraged through policies of liberalisation and globalisation, and the establishment of free zones. Single-window and hassle-free processes for administrative certification, efficient transportation and connectivity, and coherent use of social media to persuade investors will help position Oman as a hub for foreign investment.



**Jay Prakash**  
Private sector employee

Tax exemptions, golden visas and permanent residency for investors in all sectors to help owner-operators feel at home away from home will attract foreign investors. Implementing such policies could make Oman the No 1 foreign investment hub in the GCC.



**Mohan Anandan**  
Banking sector employee

With the new Foreign Investment Law, Oman has already put in place the requisite legal framework to attract foreign investment whereby 100 per cent ownership is granted to foreign entrepreneurs. The focus must now be on increasing the availability of skilled manpower and providing financial support.



**K M Gurnani**  
Private sector employee

By giving tax holidays for five to ten years depending on the kind of investment, incentives like land for long term lease at cheaper rates, subsidised rates on electricity, and freedom to import labour from anywhere, Oman can certainly be a hub for foreign investment as the country has ample land.



## ? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

### Should Oman consider a shorter workweek like the UAE? Will it help the economy?

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](mailto:muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om) Log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue

## OIA holds 4th forum on Rawabet programme

Muscat - Oman Investment Authority (OIA) started the fourth forum of its institutional connectivity programme 'Rawabet' on Sunday.

The programme aims to link the policies of OIA's affiliate firms with its overall approach to goals of Oman Vision 2040 targeting the development of sources of economic diversification, the consolidation of the volume of non-oil revenues in the gross domestic product and the attraction of direct foreign investments to Oman.

The two-day conference is being attended by ministers, undersecretaries, chairmen of boards of directors of OIA firms, CEOs and other specialists.

The first day's activities included the launch of a programme of in-country value for



OIA firms, identified as the aggregate in-country spending benefiting businesses, contributing to the development of human resources

and motivating productivity of the Omani economy. The forum also touches on the role of OIA firms in empowering small and medium

enterprises so that they contribute to economic diversification in the country.

With a view to exchanging ex-

pertise available in OIA companies, the forum's workshops focus on major challenges and best practices to address these, the organisation of joint activities and the development of a clear-cut plan of action on ideal initiatives to be implemented.

The forum explores the march of Rawabet programme since its inception and its outcomes like integrating corporate governance policies, ICVs, social investment policies, research and innovation.

Rawabet was launched by OIA in September 2020. Since then, it has conducted more than 400 events involving the contribution of more than 300 employees of its affiliate firms. It also organised three workshops with chairmen of boards of directors and CEOs.

ONA

## Marhaba Oman showcases tourism potential to Saudis

Muscat - Tourism sector players in Oman and Saudi Arabia joined the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to kick-start Marhaba (welcome) Oman event on Sunday.

The two-day event being held at Kempinski Hotel Muscat aims to attract major tourism companies of the Saudi market, find common channels of communication to enhance areas of cooperation and shed light on tourism opportunities and competitive experiences.

H E Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqi, Undersecretary for Tourism in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that Marhaba Oman aims to open a new effective page in Oman-Saudi bilateral ties and the solid

ground that unites them in various fields. "This event is culmination of the visit of Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, and the official delegation accompanying him.

"The opening of the direct Rub al Khali road linking the two countries will reflect positively on the growth of tourist movement between the sultanate and the kingdom. It will help the development of programmes and tours, and new experiences that will enrich festivals and tourism seasons in the two brotherly countries."

Marhaba Oman includes discussion and dialogue sessions on topics related to the tourism sector and its development.

### 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman - 2021 Golf Tournament.

## 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman - 2021 Golf Tournament

Organised by Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman in Collaboration with the Ghala Golf Club

11th December 2021

**Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman in Collaboration with the Ghala Golf Club 11th December 2021**

Mr Faiz Mohammed Riaz (Board Member - Ghala Golf Club, Managing Director - Mohammed riaz & Partner LLC), Mr Ahmed Al Lamki (winner), Mr Fayaz Thaha (Sir Lanka airline), H.E Omar Lebbe Ameerajwad (Ambassador of Sri Lanka), H.E Humid Al Maany, Khalil Al Wahaibi (General Manager - Ghala Golf)

## New initiative to support 50 SMEs

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

With the aim of supporting owners of 50 small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the Authority for SME Development (ASMED) has launched a new initiative.

The initiative will provide specialised resources in human resource management available via the <http://hrfactoryapp.com> platform, an official at ASMED said. "The initiative targets 50 SMEs and startups for a period of six months without any fees. It aims to help entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized enterprises manage their projects by providing all the necessary information on human resource management," he added.

The initiative also targets institutions working in industrial and technical fields. ASMED stated that institutions wishing to participate must have more than ten employees. They can register via <https://bit.ly/3oqPjcb>

The total number of SMEs till the end of September 2021 stood at 58,683, a 26 per cent increase over the same period of 2020.

# Residents of Misfat al Abriyeen set up climbing wall to attract tourists

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Residents of Misfat al Abriyeen in the wilayat of Hamra in Dakhliyah have set up an outdoor climbing wall to further promote their village as a tourist hotspot.

Abdul Rahmanal Abri, who is spearheading the project, said it was done in cooperation with Canyon Adventure and Tours company. The project, which began a month ago, was officially opened on Friday.

"The wall has been set up against an 8m tall boulder and it has three climbing tracks. These have been designed to suit children, adults and adventure lovers," Abri said.

People can access it at weekends from 9am to 5.30pm for an entrance fee of RO3, Abri said, adding that tourist groups can reserve it on weekdays as well.

"The climbing wall is operated and managed by Omani youth from Hamra. They have undertaken a training course in the field of security and safety."

According to Abri, the project aims to promote tourist sites in Misfat al Abriyeen, attract tourists and create recreational areas for families in the Governorate of Dakhliyah. The project will attract adventure lovers, es-



pecially during the tourist season, which extends from October to April.

Talking about the development of Misfat al Abriyeen, he said residents, in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and some private parties, have developed many areas there. Misfat al Abriyeen has been chosen as one of the 'Best Tourism Villages' by UN World Tourism Organization.

"Bank Muscat, in partnership with the ministry and Al Misfat al

components of the development project include restoration of the main gate of Misfat al Abriyeen and preserving its original features.

"The village's iconic mud houses were also restored, and a bakery and restaurant serving authentic Omani cuisine for tourists set up. This development work in Misfat al Abriyeen was completed in November 2020."

Of future projects, he said, "The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Al Misfat al Ahlia

*The wall has been set up against an 8m tall boulder and it has three climbing tracks. These have been designed to suit children, adults and adventure lovers*

ABDUL RAHMANAL ABRI

Ahlia, had launched a project to develop the area. The project included the development of the old Misfat village. It created a unique tourism experience focusing on the old village, highlighting Oman's tourism strategy based on a sustainable development model that benefits local communities and preservation of the country's environment and cultural heritage."

Abri added that the main

will set up a zipline. The project will include a 250m zipline for children and a 1,100m zipline for adults."

Misfat al Abriyeen is a mountainous village located 1,000m above sea level in the foothills surrounding Hamra. It has become a tourist attraction in recent years due to its location as well as picturesque setting among old and ruined houses built atop solid rock foundations.

## Law to be amended to combat corruption

Muscat - The Council of Ministers has endorsed a study on amending the Law on Protecting Public Funds and Conflict of Interests promulgated under Royal Decree No 112/2011.

The statute seeks to enhance transparency and government procedures on combating corruption, according to a statement issued by the council reading as follows:

'In light of the constant attention accorded by the government to update laws, revise legislative and auditing procedures, and develop measures of accountability so that they constitute the cornerstone of justice in the future and consolidate the government's ability to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040, the Council of Ministers has endorsed a study on amending the Law on Protection of Public Funds and Avoiding Conflict of Interests promulgated under Royal Decree No 112/2011, with a view to enhancing transparency and procedures undertaken by the government to combat corruption.'

'The State Audit Institution will coordinate with the authorities concerned about amendments to be introduced to the enforced law and institute better public funds protection.'

ONA

## Research study outlines clinical characteristics of COVID-19 cases

Muscat - A research project funded within the COVID-19 Research Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MOHERI) has revealed the clinical characteristics of confirmed cases of COVID-19 admitted at Al Nahdha Hospital from the day of admission until the day of discharge or transfer to another tertiary care hospital for critical care.

A total of 102 admissions were included in this study, led by principal investigator Dr Saud al Harthi, diabetes and endocrinology specialist at Al Nahdha Hospital.



*Diabetes and hypertension were found in 39.2 per cent and 36.3 per cent of the study sample, respectively*

DR SAUD AL HARTHI

According to Dr Harthi, the main objective of the study was to describe the sociodemographic, clinical, laboratory and radiological characteristics, as well as the treatment and clinical outcomes of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 at Al Nahdha Hospital. Additionally, factors associated with the severity of the disease were identified. The required data for the study were retrieved from the electronic health information system from March 3 to May 9, 2020.

Dr Harthi explained that the team studied several parameters, including demographic data (age, gender, nationality, employment, and referring institute), risk factors (history of travel, smoking and alcohol consumption, obesity), and medical history of comorbidities (diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, asthma, chronic kidney disease, heart failure and any other chronic disease). The examined treatment measures included antibiotics, antiviral therapy, corticosteroid therapy, respiratory support, and other supportive therapies according to the COVID-19 national guideline.

The research study stated that most patients, representing 84.3 per cent of the total sample, had no history of travel to countries with COVID-19 outbreaks.

"The majority of the patients were non-smokers (85.3 per

cent) and teetotalers (87.3 per cent). Obesity was reported in only 15.7 per cent of patients, of which only two per cent had co-existing diabetes," Dr Harthi said.

"Diabetes and hypertension were found in 39.2 per cent and 36.3 per cent of the study sample, respectively, and common symptoms were dry cough (78.3 per cent), fever (76.5 per cent), and shortness of breath (69.6 per cent).

"Around 19 per cent of the study population required critical care and diabetes and chronic artery disease were significant predictors for requiring critical care," Dr Harthi added.

"Despite some variations in the initial symptoms, most COVID-19 patients had respiratory symptoms. Depending on disease severity, treatment included antibacterial, antivirals, heparin and steroids."

Results from this study can be directed to screen for the vulnerable patients who may require critical care and initiate the required preventive management plans.

## Rising cost of production in agricultural sector a deterrent to growth: OAA Secy

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Rising agricultural production costs act as a hindrance to increasing agricultural land and result in reluctance of Omani farmers to fully utilise the available farmland.

"The agricultural sector cannot grow and contribute to economic diversification in light of the increasing cost of production," Ghosn al Rashidi, secretary of Omani Agriculture Association (OAA), told *Muscat Daily*.

"Unfortunately, lately, many Omanis have stopped cultivating half of their lands due to the cost of agricultural production. The cost includes the increase in the prices of imported fertilisers, transportation and seed prices. There are other reasons such as the lack of expatriate workers and the high taxes on agricultural supplies."

He added that some Omani farmers are resorting to cultivating grass instead of crops because the cost of its cultivation is lower.

Abdul Malik al Hinai, an economic analyst, said the "agricultural sector cannot grow in light of the increasing direct or indirect production costs", and the "absence of clear mechanisms for marketing agricultural products".

"The agricultural sector in many countries receives great government support due to its strategic importance," he said.

"Some people talk about expatriate workers in this sector, and about the competition of imported products with local products. I believe that the growth of



## MAFWR to hold forum to support farmers

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support farmers and livestock breeders, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will hold their second

forum on December 16.

It will be held at the headquarters of OCCI's branch in North Sharqiyah governorate under the auspices of H E Dr Ahmed Nasser al Bakri, Undersecretary in MAFWR.

Ali bin Salim al Hajri, vice president for Financial and Administrative Affairs in OCCI's

branch in North Sharqiyah, said this year's forum is titled 'Agricultural marketing and post-harvest operations'.

The forum aims to spread the culture of agricultural work among young people, and exchange of experiences between farmers, agricultural engineers and livestock breeders to devise

modern solutions for agricultural and animal marketing.

The forum will have participation of specialists in the agricultural and livestock sector, in addition to representatives of government and private agencies and community members who own projects in the agricultural and livestock sectors.

the agricultural sector does not depend on reducing expatriate workers in it and reducing imports from abroad, because this will raise the cost to the consumer. The development of agriculture needs the reduction of the cost of production and providing support to the sector."

Khalid al Salih, a citizen, said,

"I think the use of modern technology in agriculture and harvesting methods, modern irrigation systems, and reducing the electricity bill will help reduce the cost significantly."

Abdul Karim al Hinai said the country needs food industries that can buy agricultural products and convert them into products

with a longer shelf life. "Most agricultural products face the problem of shelf life after harvest, especially vegetables and fruits."

Another citizen, Nasser al Hosni, said he thought the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources should set up a mechanism to help Omani farmers produce more than 160,000

tonnes of wheat annually to achieve self-sufficiency and encourage Omani companies to purchase Omani crops.

Last week, the Services and Social Development Committee of Majlis A'Shura held a meeting to discuss reducing electricity tariffs for the agricultural sector.

## 35 new COVID-19 cases in three days

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 35 new cases of COVID-19 registered in the last three days in Oman. There were

no related deaths in this period.

With the 35 new cases, the total number in the country rises to 304,714. The total number of COVID-19-related deaths remains at 4,113, and MoH statement said.

It added that 30 COVID-19 patients recovered in the last three days, accounting for a total of 300,096 recoveries. Six patients are admitted in healthcare institutions, including two in intensive care units.

## RO2.7bn Liwa Plastics project set to open on December 20

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

As part of celebrations marking the 51st National Day of the Renaissance, Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC), a transformational project of OQ – the global integrated energy group of the sultanate – will witness the official commissioning ceremony at its site in Sohar Industrial Port on December 20.

The successful implementation of the mega petrochemicals project, with an investment of RO2.7bn, exemplifies the Omani government’s efforts to diversify revenue sources, support local manufacturing opportunities, and most importantly, to add value to the country’s natural resources by opening up avenues for investments in downstream petrochemical industries.

Liwa Plastics achieved an in-country value (ICV) contribution amounting to approximately RO578mn during the construction phase through the localisation of various goods and services procured from Omani companies, including small and medium enterprises.

LPIC consists of four EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) contracts, of which the second, third and fourth EPCs have been launched, while the first EPC (Steam Cracker Unit) is at commercial commissioning.

This phased launch is in line with the delivery programme prepared by project management teams to enable the overall



*Liwa Plastics Industries Complex will boost the industrial sector through the annual production of 838,000 tonnes of polyethylene and about 215,000 tonnes of polypropylene*

complex to reach the full production capacity by the first quarter of 2022.

Kamel bin Bakheet al Shanfari, acting CEO of OQ Downstream, said, “LPIC is the biggest of OQ Group’s current investments with the potential to position OQ as a major global petrochemicals producer.

When fully operational, Liwa Plastics will contribute to a significant increase in OQ’s portfolio of petrochemicals and

associated chemical commodities. This includes a momentous increase in its polymer output, which will be targeted at local and global markets.”

The project, he further noted, will boost the industrial sector through the annual production of 838,000 tonnes of polyethylene – a raw material used in nearly 40 per cent of plastics-based products and commodities produced globally, and about 215,000 tons of

polypropylene.

Output of these two polymers will eventually rise to 1.4mn tonnes annually.

Since the start of soft operations earlier this year, Liwa Plastics roughly achieved a total output of 474,000 tonnes of petrochemicals as of October-end 2021, he stated.

The complex, he explained, consists of a number of key components, including a gas extraction plant located in Fahud, which is linked to the main plant within Sohar Industrial Port by a 300km-long, 14-inch pipeline.

At the heart of the main plant is a Steam Cracker Unit that processes the light hydrocarbon gases produced by OQ’s other plants in Sohar as well as rich gas coming from Fahud. Inte-

grated into the complex are polymer plants designed to produce High Density Polyethylene (HDPE), Linear Low Density Polyethylene (LLDPE), and polypropylene. The overall project has been designed and constructed in line with international best practices and standards, and comparable with petrochemical projects in its class anywhere in the world.

Incorporating the latest technologies, the LPIC project also meets the most stringent international benchmarks for environmental safety – standards certified by an environmental consultancy firm accredited by the Environmental Authority. The certification has also being endorsed by various experts and the project’s financiers, he added.

## PDO-S signs its first contract with Tethys Oil

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman Services (PDO-S) signed its first commercial contract with Tethys Oil Oman Onshore Limited for the seismic acquisition in Block 56.

PDO-S is a subsidiary company of PDO. It was established in 2021 to commercialise PDO’s strong technical capabilities, inherent capacity and competitive edges in niche areas such as enhanced oil recovery (EOR), Geosolutions, innovative technologies and others.

The deal was signed on Sunday by PDO managing director Steve Phimister and Tethys Oil Oman Onshore’s managing director Dr Fredrik Robelius.

Valued at over US\$14mn, the agreement involves 3D seismic acquisition of an area covering approximately 2,018 sqkm. The primary objective of this acquisition is to produce high-quality 3D seismic images for the eastern flank of South Oman and tertiary basins in Block 56 which is operated by Tethys Oil Oman Onshore.

Phimister said, “Signing this contract with Tethys Oil Oman Onshore is a great milestone for PDO-S achieved in a relatively short time after its establishment. It is a true demonstration of how PDO-S is delivering its key value drivers by filling supply chain gaps in the oil and gas market in Oman.”

Dr Robelius commented, “We are delighted to have this opportunity to work with PDO-S that



offers state-of-the-art technology to help us unlock the great potential in Block 56.”

The signed contract reflects the value and capability of resources and expertise available in-country. It will also pave the way for further collaboration opportunities between PDO-S and other oil and gas operators in Oman in different applications.

PDO’s new business development manager Dawood al Qassabi said, “We thank Tethys Oil Oman Onshore for their trust in PDO-S and for the collaborative approach they showed in finalising this contract. It is an invite to other oil and gas operators in Oman and beyond to tap into PDO’s decades of experience in geosolutions, EOR, learning and development, project management, in-country value, technology and others.”

PDO-S operates locally, regionally and internationally. Locally, PDO-S is focusing on establishing new supply chains and complementing and filling capability gaps in the Omani market.

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## Shell shareholders back plan to shift to UK

The Hague, Netherlands – Shell shareholders on Friday overwhelmingly backed plans to switch the oil giant’s headquarters from the Netherlands to Britain after a century and drop Royal Dutch from the name.

Chairman Andrew Mackenzie hailed the ‘resounding support from shareholders’ after they voted 99.77 per cent in favour of the plan at a meeting in Rotterdam.

Europe’s biggest energy firm says the move will simplify its tax and share arrangements, and speed up its transition from fossil fuels that cause climate change.

The Dutch government has said it was ‘unpleasantly surprised’ by the plan, while Britain has hailed it as a vote of confidence in the British economy post-Brexit.

The move ‘will strengthen Shell’s competitiveness and accelerate both shareholder distributions and delivery of its strategy to become a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050, in step with society’, Mackenzie said in a statement.



Shell’s board must formally approve the plans before they come into effect ‘as soon as reasonably practicable’, it said.

During questions from shareholders, Mackenzie had earlier denied the move was motivated by a Dutch court ruling earlier this year that Shell must cut its emissions.

But he admitted a Dutch government decision to drop plans for the scrapping of a dividend tax on big companies was a factor.

“We have always been and will continue to be very proud of how important the Netherlands is to our heritage,” he added.

### Blow to Dutch prestige

Under the plans, Shell will switch its tax residence and move its top executives including CEO Ben van Beurden from The Hague to London. Its 8,500 staff in the Netherlands will remain.

The loss of the Netherlands’ biggest company is a major blow

for the Dutch government, which had positioned itself as a key venue for investment after Brexit.

It is be the second big firm to depart for London after Unilever last year.

Royal Dutch Shell was formed in 1907 from a merger of Koninklijke Nederlandsche Petroleum Maatschappij and British firm Shell Transport and trading.

The ‘Shell’ name and logo came from seashells imported in the 19th century by the father of Marcus and Samuel Samuel, the brothers who founded the British firm.

But pressure for change has been building, particularly from the activist investor Third Point, which has demanded Shell be broken up, bolster low-carbon investment and return more cash to shareholders.

The landmark court victory for climate activists earlier this year that Shell must slash greenhouse gas emissions also came as a major blow.

Several shareholders quizzed the Shell top brass on whether their plans would do enough to address climate change.

Mackenzie insisted the London move would make the company more ‘flexible’ as it transitioned away from fossil fuels, and said it would not ‘impact’ on the court’s decision.

The Shell chairman also sought to play down his comments in November that the company was also ‘driven to go to the UK’ by Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte’s decision in 2018 to abandon plans to scrap a tax on big companies’ dividends.

“It is not dominated by considerations about the dividend withholding tax,” he said, adding that there were ‘many factors’ in the decision.

The tax hit to the country from Shell’s departure could amount to billions of euros, local media said.

In return, the Dutch parliament could insist on a ‘departure tax’ that Shell has previously put at around €400mn.

Mackenzie however said he thought there was a ‘low probability’ that Dutch MPs would back such a penalty.

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# ExxonMobil, Qatar Energy sign Cyprus gas contract

Nicosia, Cyprus - US giant ExxonMobil and Qatar Energy signed a contract on Friday for oil and gas exploration and production-sharing off the divided island of Cyprus despite Turkey's opposition to the deal.

Cypriot Energy Minister Natasa Pilides, Varnavas Theodosiou, CEO of ExxonMobil Cyprus, and Ali al Mana, director of Qatar Energy's International Upstream and Exploration, signed the contract in Nicosia.

It is the second gas exploration contract that the consortium has signed for Block 5 in the island's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

In February 2019, the consortium discovered a huge natural gas reserve off Cyprus in Block 10, the island's largest find to date, holding an estimated five to eight trillion cubic feet.

The consortium plans to drill an appraisal well on Block 10 in late December, with results expected by the end of February.

Oil and gas drilling off Cyprus has been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Despite the increasingly difficult working environment for the global oil and gas industry, today we are taking a decisive step towards enhancing our mutually beneficial partnership," Pilides said at Friday's signing ceremony.

Asked about Turkey's negative reaction to the licensing of Block 5, Pilides said, "We proceed based on international law and the Law of the Sea; this has always been our principle."

Fieldwork on Block 5 will



(L-R): Varnavas Theodosiou - CEO of ExxonMobil Cyprus, Cyprus's Minister of Energy Natasa Pilides and Ali al Mana - director of Qatar Energy's International Upstream and Exploration pose for a picture after signing a contract regarding hydrocarbons exploration on Friday (AFP)

begin in the second half of 2022, she said.

Turkey has threatened to prevent ExxonMobil's search for oil and gas off Cyprus after Nicosia awarded it the rights to Block 5.

Last week, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said a sector of the licensed area violates Turkey's continental shelf in the eastern Mediterranean.

"Turkey will never allow any foreign country, company or ship to engage in hydrocarbon exploration activities in its maritime

jurisdictions," the ministry said.

Ankara would 'defend' its rights and those of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), it said.

The breakaway TRNC, recognised only by Ankara, lays claim to energy resources discovered off its coast, insisting the island's natural resources belong to both communities.

The eastern Mediterranean has become an energy hot spot, with significant natural gas finds for Cyprus, Israel and Egypt.

Ankara was accused of 'gunboat diplomacy' in February 2018 when the Turkish navy prevented a ship leased by Italy's ENI from reaching its drilling target in Cyprus's Block 3.

The European Commission has urged Turkey to de-escalate and vowed to defend the interests of member states Greece and Cyprus.

Turkey was widely condemned for sending its own drillships into Cypriot waters for energy exploration, with the EU

slapping sanctions on Ankara.

In the first half of 2022, ENI and France's Total are expected to drill in their licensed blocks.

Cyprus has been divided since Turkey invaded and occupied its northern third in 1974 in response to a Greek-engineered coup aiming to annex the island.

Nicosia has pushed ahead with offshore energy exploration despite the collapse in 2017 of UN-brokered talks to end the country's decades-long division.

AFP



## S&P lowers Turkey outlook to negative on 'rising risks'

Washington, US - S&P Global Ratings has changed its outlook for Turkey's credit rating to negative from stable, as the country struggles with high inflation and a depreciating currency.

Turkey's annual inflation has surged above 20 per cent to its highest level in three years after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan installed loyalists at the central bank who share his unorthodox vision that high borrowing costs cause inflation rather than slow it down.

The move was part of Erdogan's strategy to revive his sagging approval numbers ahead of an election due by 2023.

In justifying its outlook downgrade, S&P pointed to both price increases and the lira currency's loss in value as risks.

"The negative outlook reflects what we view to be ris-

*In justifying its outlook downgrade, S&P pointed to both price increases and the lira currency's loss in value as risks*

ing risks to Turkey's externally leveraged economy over the next 12 months from extreme currency volatility and rising inflation, amid mixed policy signals," the ratings agency said.

S&P made no change in its ratings of Turkey's debt.

But it warned that could change if the government's policies 'further undermined the exchange rate of the lira and worsened the inflation outlook, heightening the risk of banking system distress'.

AFP

## TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

| Sr.No | Tender No. | Tender Name                                                                                                                              | Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents | Closing Date | Grade                                                                                              | Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO) |
|-------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1     | 66/2021    | Supply and Installation of UPS Batteries                                                                                                 | 20/12/2021                               | 04/01/2022   | Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate, | 91.875                                      |
| 2     | 68/2021    | Supply & Installation of HDPE Pipes with required Fittings and Modification of Existing Fire Fitting System Layout at SUR 3 Grid Station | 27/12/2021                               | 25/01/2022   | Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate, | 76.387                                      |

|                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Participation:</b>                  | Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Buying the Tender:</b>              | The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender during the official working days <b>from 8.00 hr am - 01.00 pm hr.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Fees:</b>                           | Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>The deadline for clarification:</b> | Before (21) Days from closing date.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Submission:</b>                     | Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Terms and conditions:</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope.</li> <li>The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date.</li> <li>The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC).</li> <li>Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted.</li> <li>OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Offer:</b>                          | The complete bid documents should be deposited in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Company Address:</b>                | Muscat - Al Mawaleh<br>Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 -<br>Contact Details: <b>93515198 - 99105413</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Email Website:</b>                  | <b>tenders@omangrid.com</b><br><b>www.omangrid.com</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |



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## إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

| م | رقم المناقصة | عنوان المناقصة                                                                                            | آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة | الدرجة                                                                                    | آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات |
|---|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ١ | ٢٠٢١/١٦      | توريد وتركيب بطاريات حفظ الطاقة UPS                                                                       | ٢٠٢١/١٢/٢٠                           | الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول . | ٢٠٢٢/٠١/٠٤               |
| ٢ | ٢٠٢١/١٨      | توريد وتركيب أنابيب HDPE مع توفير التعديلات والقياسات والمواد المناسبة في نظام اطفاء الحريق في محطة صور ٣ | ٢٠٢١/١٢/٢٧                           | الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول . | ٢٠٢٢/٠١/٢٥               |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>الاشتراك</b>             | يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة إرسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>طريقة الفراء</b>         | يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إلى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود . وذلك للتأكد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك في أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ١:٠٠ م .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>الرسوم</b>               | مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد . ( الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>آخر موعد للإستفسارات</b> | قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>تقديم العروض</b>         | تقدم العروض في مغلف مغلقة ومعنونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>الشروط و الضمانات</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف.</li> <li>أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء .</li> <li>إرفاق تأمينا في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (١٪) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنونا بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء .</li> <li>كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه .</li> <li>الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.</li> </ul> |
| <b>العرض المقدم</b>         | يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>عنوان الشركة</b>         | عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج<br>رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٠ -<br>تفاصيل التواصل ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨ - ٩٣٥١٥٤١٣ /                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>البريد الإلكتروني</b>    | <a href="mailto:tenders@omangrid.com">tenders@omangrid.com</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>الموقع الإلكتروني</b>    | <a href="http://www.omangrid.com">www.omangrid.com</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |



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# Bank Muscat wins prestigious ‘Bank of the Year’ award

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has won the Bank of the Year (Oman) award from *The Banker*. The award was presented to the bank after a thorough evaluation by the judges based on a number of different criteria including the product mix, financial performance, asset and revenue quality, customer satisfaction, and digital offerings.

The prestigious award adds to the list of accolades and achievements by the bank and is the result of the bank’s adoption of global best practices and its customer-centric approach in banking.

Today, Bank Muscat leads the financial services sector in the sultanate with over RO12bn in assets, 174 branches and more than 800 ATMs and CDMs spread across the country making it the preferred choice for customers. The bank has a good presence even in remote areas and is greatly enhancing financial inclusion in Oman. In keeping with technological developments, the bank’s digital chan-



nels including Mobile and Internet banking have been witnessing tremendous growth over the recent past.

With about 2mn customers, Bank Muscat is a clear leader in the banking sector in Oman and has the largest portfolio in the country across the retail, corpo-

rate, wholesale and Islamic banking space.

Bank Muscat, which has the largest network of e-channels in the country, continues to demonstrate its leadership traits and continuously contributes to the growth and development of the sultanate’s economy not only

through banking, but also through pioneering initiatives that promote sustainable development.

Bank Muscat has won multiple awards in the recent past including being chosen as the Best Bank in Oman by the editors of a number of prestigious interna-

tional journals and publications. Award winners were chosen by financial editors after extensive consultations with corporate financial executives and bankers, banking consultants and analysts across the world. The award criteria included growth in assets, profitability, geographic reach, strategic relationships, new business development and innovation in products.

Notably, in June 2021, Bank Muscat was recognized as one of the ‘Top 100 Companies in the Middle East’ and as one of the ‘Top 50 banks in the Region’ by *Forbes Middle East*. The bank was also well appreciated for its performance across its various lines of business and operations and won a number of awards from prestigious international publications like *Global Finance*, *Eurromoney*, *Asiamoney* and *EMEA Finance* for its different lines of business in 2021. The bank posted a net profit of RO140.16mn for the nine months ended September 30 2021 compared to RO113.21mn reported during the same period in 2020, an increase of 23.8 per cent.

## NBO’s wealth management honoured

In recognition of its achievements in pioneering best-in-class banking services, National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Sadara Wealth Management has been awarded Highly Acclaimed status at the Global Private Banker Innovation Awards 2021. The awards also celebrated NBO’s relationship manager – Private Banking, Jamila Rangaswamy, who was named Female Private Banker of the Year - Middle East.

Impressing judges in the Outstanding Wealth Management Offering for Affluent Clients category, the bank’s personalised products and services available through Sadara Wealth Management meet the sophisticated needs of high net worth clients. The suite of unique products, including the Systematic Investment Plan and Yield Enhancement Structured Products, provide customers with better ways to build and manage their wealth. The bank’s clients also benefit from personalised advice from dedicated wealth managers like Jamila. As an Omani national and seasoned private banker, Jamila joined the bank five years ago, after working in several leading European financial institutions where she held senior relationship management roles and has won multiple awards across her private banking career for beating stretch targets on AUM and revenues.

“We are delighted to have our impressive drive to better serve high net worth clients recognised by the private banking industry. Jamila is well deserving of this award, having cemented herself as a valuable member of our Wealth Management team and ensuring that our clients receive outstanding service and sound financial direction year after year,” said Wessam al Asfoor, head of Premier Banking at NBO.



Jamila Rangaswamy

“The products offered by NBO have been well received by our customers since launch and we are always looking at new ways to maximise return and offer higher levels of service and access to investment, wealth management and financial planning opportunities. To be held in such high esteem by senior figures within the financial sector is a great honour and will inspire the bank to continue evolving its products to keep setting the standard for wealth management in the sector.”

NBO’s Sadara Wealth Management offers a comprehensive suite of products, tailored service and industry-leading financial advisory to assist with every aspect of private banking. Through personalised investment opportunities, preferential rates, exclusive privileges and benefits, including a dedicated personal relationship manager, NBO is the only bank in Oman to offer such a wide range of wealth management product solutions to meet the banking and investment needs of customers.

The Global Private Banking Innovation Awards are the world’s most authoritative and transparently judged private wealth awards.

## Mercedes-Benz announces car care packages

Making sure its vehicles stay flawless for every journey, Mercedes-Benz Oman has announced its brand new Car Care packages. Starting at just RO370 incl VAT, drivers can leave their vehicles confidently in the hands of trusted Mercedes-Benz professionals, who will attend to any minor paintwork damage and dents, applying cutting-edge methods quickly and reliably.

With three excellent value packages to choose from depending on individual requirements, customers will have the peace of mind that their Mercedes-Benz car will be restored to pristine condition.

“Mercedes-Benz drivers take



pride in their vehicles. We know they don’t want to ignore even the smallest of flaws, and neither do we. With our Car Care packages, we are ensuring they can get even the minor blemishes seen to quickly and easily, without having to worry about how much its going to cost them each time. It’s just one way we are ensuring our customers can continue to enjoy their vehicle to the fullest,” said Shaun Michael, chief executive officer at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

Benefiting from the highest standards of care, Mercedes-Benz owners can choose from a variety of options starting with the Lite Package at RO370 incl

VAT, which is valid for one year and includes three scratch repairs and five paintless dent removals. Also available is the Classic Package for RO695 incl VAT, which is valid for two years and includes six scratch repairs and ten paintless dent removals.

Or, for the ultimate protection, customers can choose the RO970 incl VAT three-year Premium Package, which includes 12 scratch repairs and 15 paintless dent removals. Plus, all scratch repairs include a polish. Combining next-level luxury with excellent after-sales care, it’s part of Mercedes-Benz Oman’s commitment to offer a first-class experience for every journey.

## Oxy Oman celebrates launch of SQU Centre for Students with Disabilities

Occidental of Oman (Oxy Oman) representatives recently attended the launch event to celebrate the unveiling of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Centre for Students with Disabilities, coinciding with the International Day of Disabled Persons.

The centre, which will serve as a specialised unit for academic support for students with disabilities at the university level, is sponsored exclusively by Oxy Oman.

The event was held at SQU under the auspices of H E Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, with the attendance of Stephen Kelly, president and general manager of Oxy Oman, and H H Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al Said, Vice Chancellor of SQU, and other senior executives from Oxy Oman.

Attendees toured the completed centre and viewed the planned services and technologies available for all students with disabilities attending the university.

The centre is equipped with assistive technologies such as electronic Braille readers, thermal printers, zooming devices, and other electronic screens.

The centre will serve as a rehabilitation centre for students to enhance their independence in



their academic lives, as well as a research centre for studies relating to students with disabilities.

“We are incredibly excited to launch the SQU Centre for Students with Disabilities, which we hope to aid students in their scholarly pursuits and personal growth,” said Kelly.

“Through our ongoing collabora-

tion with Sultan Qaboos University, we aim to increase the capabilities and proficiencies of students with disabilities by establishing this specialised unit. We hope the centre’s technological advancements and specialised staff will support students in overcoming the challenges and difficulties they face in academic life, and prepare

them for their future careers,” he added.

This agreement falls under the umbrella of strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders and is part of Oxy Oman’s endeavour and long-term commitment to support programs that enhance educational advancement in Oman’s communities.



## Saudi female racing driver Reema to share her journey at ABLF Talks

Saudi Arabian racing idol and women empowerment icon Reema Juffali who recently made headlines when she was announced as the Race Ambassador by organisers of the Formula One Saudi Grand Prix, will share her incredible journey and the road ahead for women’s participation in sports in Arab nations during a special session at the ABLF Talks, the monthly leadership series being held at the Dubai Cares Pavilion at the Expo 2020 Dubai.

The conclave, held as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the ABLF Series, will be organised on December 14 under the patronage of Sheikh Nahayan Mabararak al Nahayan, Cabinet Member and Minister of Tolerance and Co-existence, UAE, and in association with the UAE Ministry of Economy and Dubai Cares, a UAE-based global philanthropic organisation.

Aside from Reema’s inspiring session, a focus on creating a

tech-driven society where opportunities are open to all and crises are jointly tackled will dominate discussions at the ABLF Talks. The role of the pandemic as a catalyst for a tech-led future will be the topic of the panel discussion headlined by tech entrepreneurs Melda Akin, founder & CEO of D14.AI, and Noor Alnahhas, CEO & co-founder of Nybl who will shed light on their experiences of leading their respective organisations through a period of volatility while sharing insights on AI’s potential for economic growth.

The highlight of the conclave will be an exclusive chat with humanitarian stalwart Giuseppe Saba, CEO, International Humanitarian City, UAE, as he shares insights on how to achieve inclusive growth and wider participation for a sustainable future.

The leadership series that serves as an influential platform for leaders to confer on immedi-

ate challenges and propose innovative solutions to the burning socio-economic issues facing the world, is supported by a prestigious line-up of industry heavyweights including the India-based Aditya Birla Group, a \$45bn conglomerate, Zand, the first digital bank in the world to provide retail and corporate banking, UAE’s DP World and Etisalat, the world’s fastest mobile network.

As always, the event will be streamed virtually to an audience of 30,000 through the ABLF City, the cutting-edge virtual platform, while the in-person sessions will have a well curated audience comprising top industry leaders from the GCC and beyond.

The ABLF is brought to you by a powerful line-up of partners, CNBC Arabia (Broadcast Partner) and *Hindustan Times*, *Khaleej Times*, *Muscat Daily*, *Al Bayan* (Media Partners), Unicef and FICCI (Strategic Partners).

# OPAZ signs pact to develop environmental aspects in economic zones, free zones

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Environment Authority signed a technical co-operation programme on Sunday aimed at strengthening and developing cooperation in environmental aspects in the special economic zones and free zones.

The programme was signed by H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, Chairman of Environment Authority.

Signing this cooperation programme comes within the framework of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, in cooperation with the Environment Authority, to exchange experiences that



serve the public interest in various fields, including the implementation of the environmental protection and pollution control laws, protection of drinking water resources from pollution, preserving natural reserves, wildlife and biodiversity, and the system for handling and using chemicals.

In addition, the programme aims to review the procedures

related to issuing licences and environmental controls, as well as proposing enhancements to those procedures.

Further, the programme stipulates strengthening the coordination between the two authorities in the legislative and supervisory aspects and cooperation in conducting awareness programmes aimed at spreading awareness and instilling concepts and requirements for dealing with the environment among all segments of society, including organising environmental events.

Moreover, the programme urges implementing the decisions of international agreements related to common environmental affairs to which the sultanate is a party. It also supports the joint coordination in reviewing the applications for projects whose environmental impact extends in the areas affiliated with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

The programme included joint coordination on environmental accidents and disasters, ways to enhance pollution control programmes, study the mechanism of dealing and organising the transport of hazardous and non-hazardous waste, chemicals and radioactive materials between projects located within the special economic zones and free zones.

Besides, it recommends studying the procedures for initiating electronic connection of all monitoring stations (air, water, soil, and radiation quality monitoring stations) located within the boundaries of OPAZ.

## Tibiaan Properties appoints new CEO

Tibiaan Properties announced the appointment of Younis al Harrasi as its new CEO, with effect from January next year. His last position was the VP of operations in the company after a fruitful career filled with achievements and developments.

Harrasi has managed several departments in Tibiaan and has shown excellent leadership in managing the company projects and introducing innovative work approaches that matches the latest trends which our valued clients look up to. Through his various roles, Harrasi has managed to bring success to the company in countless aspects including property sales, investments and property management. Furthermore, he will be working to achieve sustainable development, enhancements and overall developments of Tibiaan.

After 18 years of founding, Tibiaan has succeeded to consolidate its presence in the Omani market with a rich journey in providing excellent and quality services which has extended to the various governorates of the sultanate with a team that has an Omanization rate of 80 per cent. In an effort to export this Omani brand to the world, Tibiaan Properties will open its first international office in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, through which it will serve the interests of investors in both countries to continue its successes.



Younis al Harrasi

In addition to providing consultancy and business development in Oman, Fahad al Ismaili will lead the operations in the new branch in UAE.

The company had recently announced its celebration of its largest real estate brokerage deal for the year 2021, with a value of RO17.5mn, as a result of thriving and continuous work of the company's team, which enabled to bring direct foreign capital to the sultanate, proving the confidence of investors and belief in the Omani market and the opportunities that exist in it.

It is worth noting that Tibiaan manages today more than 1,600 different residential and commercial units, and provides several services such as real estate brokerage, including sale and leasing, property management and facilities, valuations and advisory services.

In addition to that, during the next stage, it will introduce new services that will create an exceptional addition to its customers in the sultanate.



## Manar Alizz hosts postgraduate students

As part of Manar Alizz initiative, Alizz Islamic Bank, represented by the Sharia'a Compliance and Audit Department and the Learning and Development Department, welcomed a group of postgraduate students from the College of Sharia'a Sciences to learn about the bank's Islamic banking activities.

This is part of a larger programme to spread awareness about Islamic finance and its developmental role, while highlighting the role of Islamic banks in driving sustainable economy and providing researchers and scholars with important knowledge on Islamic economy in general and the Omani experience in this sector.

During the visit, Issa al Riyami, head of Sharia'a Audit and Compliance at Alizz Islamic Bank, delivered a presentation to highlight key differentiators between conventional and Islamic banking.

Riyami further elaborated on the strategic objectives of Manar Alizz initiative, which has been designed to attract international researchers and scholars to learn about the Omani experience on Islamic banking, educate members of the society about Islamic banking products, encourage banking innovation, and enable the bank's experts to generate and share knowledge in their various fields of expertise. He explained that knowledge is the most valuable intangible asset that Alizz Islamic Bank is keen to develop through this initiative, acknowledging its vital importance in the world of finance and business as a platform to drive and build sustainable partnership.

"By devising innovative approaches and initiatives like 'Manar Alizz' we make sure to benefit the society and fulfil the mission of Islamic banking. There are many other interesting initiatives that we are launching soon as part of our drive to make the community at the center of all that we do and offer. We believe in giving back, which will not only bring about positive change in the communities in which we live and work, but will have more far reaching impact to enable individuals and businesses to thrive," stated Riyami.

Students also commended the role of Alizz Islamic Bank towards reinforcing collaboration and solidarity in the community as part of its CSR commitment. To remain as close as possible to its customers and members of the society, and provide exceptional Islamic banking experience, Alizz Islamic Bank launched various activities in various governorates and wilayats across the sultanate.

## Sri Lankan gloves manufacturing firm to set up plant in Sohar



Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman facilitated Lalan Rubbers (Pvt) Ltd which is Sri Lanka's largest gloves manufacturing company, for setting up its re-exporting plant of medical disposable gloves at the Sohar Port and Free Zone in Oman.

Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman H E Ameer Ajwad recently visited Sohar Freezone together with the Lalan's chief executive officer Manjula Mahadanaarachchi, and officially presented the project proposal to the Sohar Freezone executive manager Hilal al Adawi with a view to initiating the project. Lalan's Oman representative Damith De Alwis made a presentation on the details of the project to the freezone authorities. Senior commercial officer of the freezone Sara al Bahrani also participated during the meeting. Lalan delegation led by the ambassador also inspected the plot of land allocated for the Lalan's gloves re-exportation plant in the Sohar Port and Freezone.

H E Ajwad stated that Lalan Group would set up its own re-exportation plant of medical disposable gloves which are imported from Sri Lanka, in the Sohar Port and Freezone in order to capitalise on market opportunities in the sultanate as well as in the region. This is the first ever Sri Lankan-owned packing plant together with ETO facility and laboratory unit under one roof, in a freezone of Oman. The plant would also produce value-added surgical gloves as well as industrial gloves, ambassador added.

Lalan Group which is an 80-year-old Sri Lankan family-owned conglomerate of 52 companies in seven sectors employing over 7,500 persons, and conducting business in over 105 countries, is centered around vertically integrated core business of rubber. They manufacture gloves, mattresses, pillows, rubber bands and so on.

## Bank Nizwa's 'Masoliyati' team honoured for community initiatives

As a bank that has invested in the welfare of the community, Bank Nizwa has been steadfast in implementing meaningful CSR activities that have a long-term, sustainable impact on the lives of the people. In line with the Islamic value of 'giving', the bank's 'Masoliyati' programme has undertaken a number of initiatives to extend a helping hand to those in need.

With the aim to continue to promote the spirit of community service amongst its employees, the bank recently conducted a gathering to recognise and honour the efforts of the team members who have played an active role in the various volunteer initiatives conducted throughout the year. The event was attended by the CEO of Bank Nizwa, Khalid al Kayed, along with other members of the executive management. Members who played



exemplary roles and rendered their services for voluntary work in the past year were handed out appreciation certificates and recognized for their efforts.

"As the leading Islamic bank in the country, Bank Nizwa upholds strong values of philanthropy, public service and community involvement. Our 'Masoliyati' team mirrors these values and has shown utmost dedication in going the extra mile to help enrich the lives of those less fortunate. Apart from the ongoing pandemic, the devastating effects of cyclone Shaheen had also severely impacted the community. From offering financial support to providing hands-on services to help alleviate the plight of those affected, our Masoliyati team members have recorded over 900 hours of service to date," said Kayed.

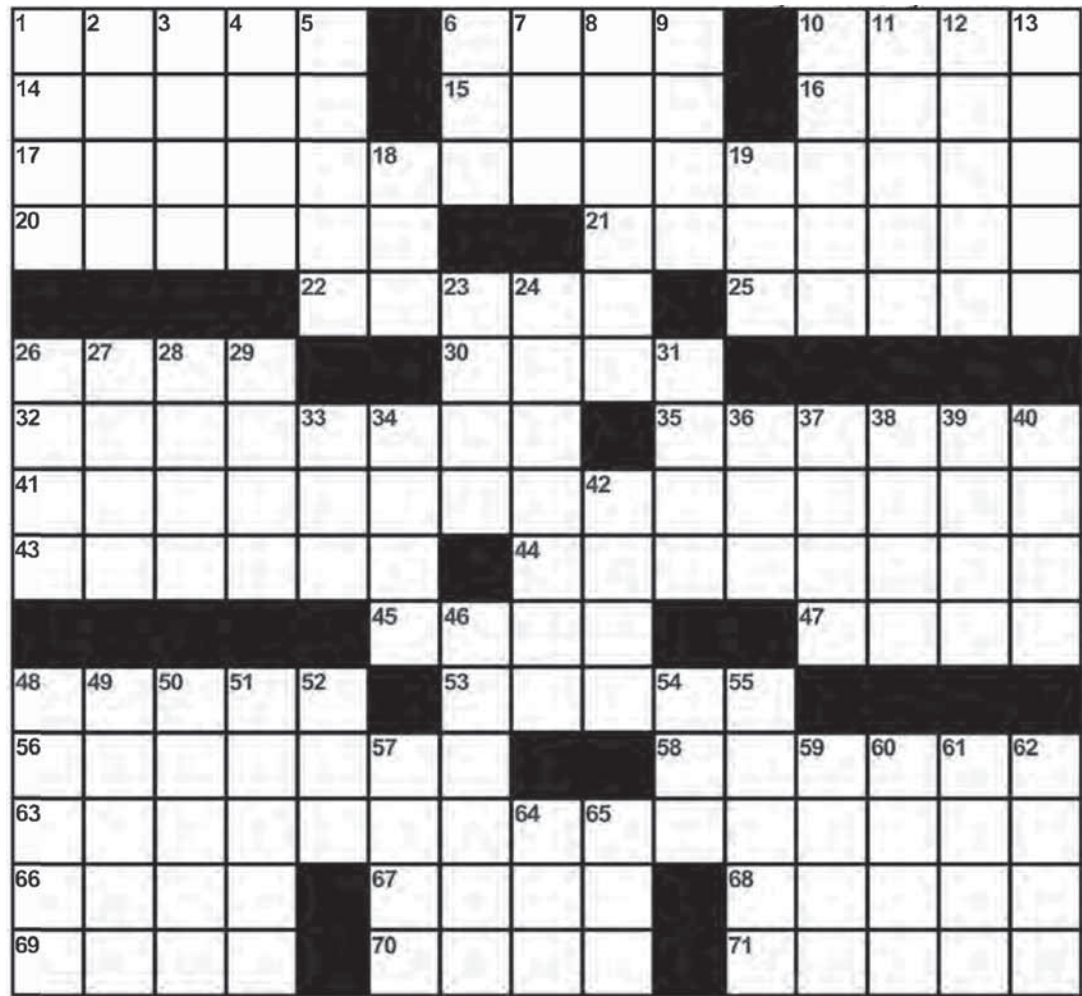
"At Bank Nizwa, the values of being of service to society are deeply embedded within day-to-day operations and our employees have been proactive in seeking out opportunities to assist those in need. We are indeed proud of the commendable efforts of our 'Masoliyati' team and will continue to encourage them to spearhead yet more initiatives that are geared towards benefiting the community."

In 2021, Bank Nizwa's 'Masoliyati' team organised an extensive food distribution campaign during Ramadan. While food packets were distributed in the wilayats of Seeb and Muscat, the team also organised iftars at its branches. The 'Masoliyati' team members were also there to offer aid during the flooding in Sur, while an extensive team of volunteers stepped forward to spearhead a number of relief operations in the wilayats affected by cyclone Shaheen.

As a bank that believes in growing with the nation and its people, its strategic CSR initiatives have played an instrumental part in contributing to the betterment of society. With new 'Masoliyati' ambassadors and leaders injecting fresh ideas into the program, the platform has helped people from different segments of society with varying needs.

Playing its part as a responsible corporate citizen, Bank Nizwa's 'Masoliyati' programme has been a successful platform that has encouraged its staff members to assume a proactive role in identifying volunteer opportunities. The team's enthusiasm, dedication and acts of selfless service have further helped the bank strengthen its relationships with the community.

## DAILY CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- 1) Luxurious country dwelling
- 6) "Touched by an Angel" star Downey
- 10) Having wings
- 14) Dodge
- 15) Some small batteries
- 16) South American nation
- 17) Shortened weapon
- 20) Went after
- 21) College course outlines
- 22) Even a trey beats it
- 25) "Blowin' in the Wind" singer Bob
- 26) Autumnal birthstone
- 30) Verbal feistiness
- 32) Backslides
- 35) Freetown currency units
- 43) Bone-related
- 44) Electric-motor part
- 41) Gulf Coast fish
- 45) Volcanic output
- 47) Chilly powder?
- 48) '70s dance ha! I
- 53) Computer language
- 56) "1984" location
- 58) Motley, as an army

- 63) Became important to the police
- 66) Paving block
- 67) Strauss of pants fame
- 68) "Hammerin' Hank" of baseball
- 69) Winged god of love
- 70) Genesis locale
- 71) Like Santa Claus
- DOWN**
- 1) Ming valuable
- 2) Three-time French Open champ
- Lend!
- 3) Rock-bottom prices
- 4) In\_ of (rather than)
- 5) Tacked on
- 6) Churchill's "so few" (Abbr.)
- 7) Clumsy guy
- 8) Holy Communion celebrations
- 9) Covered with soot
- 10) In a fitting way
- 11) Permitted by law
- 12) Caribbean cruise stop
- 13) Encounter with the law
- 18) "To a .... " work

- 19) Like an octogenarian
- 23) Like auction merchandise
- 24) Source of tapioca
- 26) Approximately
- 27) Invigorates (with "up")
- 28) What little things mean?
- 29) "Better\_ than never"
- 31) In baseball, it's grand
- 33) Bake sale sponsor, sometimes
- 34) Be a successful pitcher?
- 36) Airport listing, for short
- 37) Doggie-bag contents
- 38) Sentence necessity
- 39) Money of the Continent
- 40) Beef dish
- 42) Important times in history
- 46) Degraded
- 48) Seek water, in a way
- 49) More frosty and slippery
- 50) Brief brawl
- 51) Tilts to a side
- 52) \_ in a million
- 54) Keogh plan relative

- 55) Source of chocolate
- 57) Land in the ocean
- 59) Snatch
- 60) It can wear on you while traveling
- 61) "Famous" cookie

- maker
- 62) Chromosome constituent
- 64) Time before anything
- 65) Loud noise



## YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



### ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today's astrology is packed with cosmic shifts, as both Mercury and Mars move into a new sign. With Mars as your ruling planet, you'll feel especially impacted by its move into Sagittarius. These vibes will put you in an optimistic and adventurous mood in the coming weeks, inspiring you to pursue your goals and follow your passions. Meanwhile, Mercury will bring things back down to earth, as the planet of communication sets up camp in Capricorn.



### LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Big changes are coming to your image and creative life, Leo, as Mars makes its way into Sagittarius. This placement will activate the sector of your chart that rules fun and personal expression, permitting you to let loose while getting artsy. These vibes are great for pursuing passion projects. Thanks to Mercury's newfound placement in Capricorn, you'll be able to stay organized within your tasks.



### SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Don't feel bad about strutting your stuff and letting your ego out to play today, as the Aries moon illuminates the sector of your chart that rules personal expression. You'll feel a rush of energy and motivation as well when passionate Mars moves into your sign. This planetary placement is all about putting yourself first and working tirelessly toward your goals, which you should focus on heavily in the coming weeks.



### TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

With the Aries Moon shining brightly in the sector of your chart that rules the subconscious, today will have you analysing your emotions, thoughts, and behavioural patterns. A desire to change in the new year will put you in a reflective space as you consider how you can move forward in 2022. Luckily, we'll have two planetary shifts today as Mars moves into Sagittarius and Mercury sets up camp in Capricorn.



### VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You'll experience a major shift within your priorities, dear Virgo, as Mars moves into fun-loving Sagittarius, and Mercury finds its way into serious Capricorn. You'll feel Mars' influence within your home life, as this passionate planet inspires you to mix things up within your domestic surroundings. Mercury, your ruling planet, will ask you to play with your creative side. It might be time to redecorate your interior design choices.



### CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Take some time to focus on domestic chores and projects, as the Aries moon activates the sector of your chart that rules the home. Even if your to-do list has piled up, you should be able to knock out your tasks fairly quickly-and your mood will become lighter because of it. Mars, the action planet, enters Sagittarius today while triggering your twelfth house. Pay attention to your behaviours over the next several weeks.



### GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Don't feel bad if you get a little cutthroat right now, dear Gemini. Your ruling planet, Mercury, moves into Capricorn, putting you in the headspace to set boundaries while getting serious about what is and isn't working for you. Meanwhile, Venus and Pluto will share a cosmic alliance throughout the day, pushing you to take steps toward nurturing yourself - even if it means letting go of people or situations that aren't promoting your wellbeing.



### LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

The moon moves through Aries today, freshening up the collective vibe while bringing excitement and passion to your love life. This is the perfect time to flirt with that cutie at work, ask out your crush, or liven things up within your existing relationship. On a personal level, you'll feel a significant shift, dear Libra, as Mars makes its way into daring Sagittarius. Use the energy from this planetary placement to pursue your goals.



### AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If there are any conversations you've been avoiding or putting off, now would be the time to initiate them. The Aries moon wants you to embrace your bravery, especially when it comes to social exchanges and important discussions. Mercury, the planet of communication, moves into Capricorn, triggering the sector of your chart that rules the subconscious. Your mind will be in an introspective place in the coming weeks.



### CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

With the Aries moon blazing through the sector of your chart that rules career, you'll feel energised and motivated to take on the new workweek by storm. However, this sentiment doesn't come without its challenges. Mars enters Sagittarius, galvanising your motivation to take care of professional business. Mercury's entrance into Capricorn will raise questions on how your job is affecting your relationships and ability to practice self-care.



### SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today will feel high energy for you, dear Scorpio, thanks to the moon's placement in Aries and two planetary shifts. Mars, your ruling planet, will begin its journey through adventurous Sagittarius, bringing the focus to your bank account. There's potential to see significant growth within your finances over the next several weeks, but you'll need to take a proactive approach toward your monetary goals.



### PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's okay if you want to treat yourself today, dear Pisces, as the Aries moon burns a hole in your pocket while activating the sector of your chart that rules money. Though you'll likely find yourself in the mood to shop, avoid impulsive purchases and make sure you stick to a reasonable budget. Luckily, your career is likely to see a boost in the coming weeks, as Mars moves into Sagittarius today.



## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

### 1. The Asian Games took

Place in 2002 at

- a. Bangkok, Thailand
- b. Busan, South Korea
- c. Hiroshima, Japan
- d. Beijing, China

### 2. The important minerals of Assam are

- a. coal and limestone
- b. petroleum
- c. copper and mica
- d. manganese, gold and quartzite

### 3. The headquarter of Lalit Kala Academy are at

- a. New Delhi
- b. Chandigarh
- c. Pune
- d. Kolkata

Answers: 1. b 2. b 3. a

## KIDS COLOURING



## BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| D | O | N | K |
| D | E | U | I |
| S | D | E | C |
| C | E | L | A |

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

## 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

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

## 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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

# Israeli PM heads to UAE for historic visit

Bennett will meet Abu Dhabi Crown Prince to discuss economic and regional issues

Jerusalem - Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett took off for the United Arab Emirates on Sunday for the first official visit by a prime minister of the Jewish state, after they established diplomatic ties last year.

The trip announced by Bennett's office comes with Israel making a renewed diplomatic push against resumed international talks with its arch foe Iran over the Islamic republic's nuclear programme.

Bennett on Monday meets Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan to discuss 'deepening the ties between Israel and the UAE, especially economic and regional issues', the Prime Minister's office said.

There was no immediate comment from the UAE on the visit.

Just before 4:30pm (1430 GMT), Bennett's office announced his plane had taken off from Ben Gurion Airport in central Israel on what the premier called a 'historic' visit and 'first of its kind'.

"The visit is aimed at deepening the cooperation between the countries, in all fields," Bennett said before boarding the plane.

"The relations are excellent and extensive, and we must continue to nurture and strengthen



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett chairs the weekly Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem on Sunday (AFP)

them, and build the warm peace between the people," he said in a video issued by his office.

The UAE last year became the third Arab nation to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel after Egypt and Jordan.

Bahrain and Morocco then followed as part of a series of deals brokered by then US president Donald Trump. Sudan also

agreed to normalise ties with Israel under the so-called Abra-

ham Accords, but full relations have not yet materialised.

The agreements were negotiated by Bennett's predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, who said they would offer Israel new regional allies against Iran and bolster its diplomatic efforts to stop Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Iran and world powers have resumed negotiations on the frayed 2015 nuclear deal that of-

fered Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, which Tehran says is civilian in nature.

Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the nuclear deal in 2018 and stepped up sanctions against Iran.

Talks in Vienna now aim to bring the United States back into the deal and return Iran to full compliance with its commitments.

*The visit is aimed at deepening the cooperation between the countries, in all fields. The relations are excellent and extensive, and we must continue to nurture and strengthen them, and build the warm peace between the people*

NAFTALI BENNETT

Bennett has called for the Vienna talks to be halted, accusing Tehran of 'nuclear blackmail' and charging that it will use any revenue from sanctions relief to bolster a military arsenal that can harm Israel.

UAE National Security Advisor Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed al Nahyan earlier this month visited Tehran, where he met Iran's ultra-conservative President Ebrahim Raisi.

The trip was the first of its kind since relations between the two countries were downgraded in 2016.

Bennett's Abu Dhabi visit comes on the heels of a trip to Washington by Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz, who has repeatedly stressed that military options must be ready if negotiations with Iran collapse.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid was also in London and Paris last month, where he called for tighter sanctions against Tehran.

Since the Abraham Accords were signed, Israel and the UAE have inked a series of deals on economic and trade cooperation.

In November, Israeli weapons maker Elbit Systems launched a new venture in the UAE, after Emirati and Israeli air force commanders visited each other's nations.

The Abraham Accords were strongly condemned by the Palestinians as they broke with decades of Arab League consensus against recognising Israel until it signs a peace establishing a Palestinian state with a capital in east Jerusalem.

While Bennett is the first Israel Prime Minister to visit the UAE, Lapid made a landmark visit there in June, opening an embassy in Abu Dhabi and a consulate in Dubai, while the UAE established an embassy in Tel Aviv.

AFP



Hildemar Diniz

## Samba symbol Monarco dead at 88

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Brazilian singer and composer Hildemar Diniz, known as Monarco and considered one of the most important figures of samba music, died on Saturday aged 88.

His death was announced by Portela, one of the most famous samba schools in Rio de Janeiro where he served as president.

"It is with deep sadness that Portela reports the death of our honorary president, Monarco," who had been hospitalized since November in the city "to undergo bowel surgery," the school said on its website.

It said he died from complications during the surgery.

Monarco was one of the great samba composers and headed Portela, which holds 22 Rio carnival parade titles, the most in history.

He started composing when he was just 17, before recording his first solo album in 1976 and proceeding to collaborate with some of Brazil's biggest samba artists, such as Marisa Monte and Paulinho da Viola.

'Monarco was always a born teacher, with a generous personality who liked to share his knowledge and stories,' Monte wrote on Twitter after his death was announced.

She described him as 'a living testimony of the history of samba'.

In 2015, he won a Brazilian Music Award in the Best Samba Album category and in 2019 was nominated for Best Samba/Pagode Album at the Latin Grammy Awards.

AFP

## Libya delays candidate list raising new doubts over election

Tripoli, Libya -Libya's election commission on Saturday delayed publication of a final list of candidates for a presidential election scheduled in less than two weeks.

It is just the latest twist in a UN-led effort targeting December 24 presidential polls intended to help the oil-rich North African country move past a decade of violence.

The process has been undermined by bitter divisions over the legal basis for the elections, their dates, and who should be allowed to run, with a string of controversial figures stepping forward.

Analyst Jalel Harchaoui of the Global Initiative think-tank said



Omar Abdel-Aziz Bushah, vice-president of Libya's Higher Council of State, speaks ahead of the upcoming elections, in Tripoli on December 8 (AFP)

the 'inevitable' consequence of the latest procedural delay was the postponement of polling day.

The first round of the presidential election 'cannot take place on December 24 because

the candidates have the right to two weeks of official campaigning after the publication of the definitive list', Harchaoui said.

The election commission did not give a new date for issuing the list.

Rules governing the ballot - which would be the first time a Libyan head of state is chosen by universal suffrage - say the commission should publish the list of candidates two weeks after final court rulings and appeals related to candidacies.

On December 2 a Libyan court reinstated Seif al Islam Gadhafi, a son of slain dictator Moammar Gadhafi, as a candidate.

A day earlier, an appeals court

in Tripoli rejected petitions against the candidacy of interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, who heads the Tripoli-based unity government established in March and charged with leading the country to presidential and legislative elections.

Another main contender is eastern Libya strongman Khalifa Haftar.

The coordinator of the UN mission in Libya, Raisedon Zenenga, met with elections commission chief Emad al Sayeh on Saturday to discuss the 'current state and trajectory of the electoral process', the UN mission said.

He commended the commission for the progress it had made

on technical preparations but 'stressed the importance of addressing emerging political and technical challenges that could disrupt progress'.

A statement on the election commission's website said it must still adopt a series of judicial and legal measures 'before proceeding to the publication of the definitive list of candidates and the start of their electoral campaign'.

It added that success of the electoral process cannot be borne solely by the elections commission 'since the results will cast a shadow over the present and future of the country'.

AFP

## WikiLeaks publisher Assange suffered 'mini-stroke' in prison

London, UK - WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange had a mini-stroke during his battle to avoid extradition from Britain to the United States, his fiancée Stella Moris said.

Moris, the mother of Assange's two young children, said it happened in late October on the first day of a US government appeal against a ruling blocking his removal.

'He needs to be freed. Now,' she tweeted late on Saturday.

The Mail on Sunday newspaper said it was a transient ischaemic attack, in which the blood supply to part of the brain is temporarily interrupted.

It left Assange (50) with a drooping right eyelid, memory loss and signs of neurological damage, and he was now taking medication, the weekly said.

Moris was quoted as saying she was concerned it could lead to a more major stroke and raised fears about his ability to withstand the extradition process.

"I believe this constant chess game, battle after battle, the extreme stress, is what caused Julian's stroke on October 27," she added.



Stella Moris, fiancée of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, makes a statement outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London on Friday (AFP)

The United States wants to put Assange on trial for WikiLeaks' 2010 publication of thousands of top-secret military documents about the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

His supporters' hopes were raised in January after a district judge in London blocked the extradition on the grounds that he was a suicide risk if transferred to US custody.

But they were dashed on Friday when two appeal judges overturned the decision after accepting US government assurances he would receive appropriate treatment and not be held in punishing isolation in custody.

Assange's lawyers say they will take the case to the Supreme Court.

His lawyers have previously raised concerns about the effects of his lengthy incarceration on his physical and mental health in a bid to halt the extradition.

Assange spent seven years in Ecuador's London Embassy until 2019 after jumping bail in connection with sexual assault allegations in Sweden.

He was then jailed for 50 weeks for breaching bail in that case, which was later dropped, but detained ever since on the grounds he was a flight risk.

AFP

## Two gunmen kill policeman guarding polio vaccination team in Pakistan

Peshawar, Pakistan - Gunmen shot dead a policeman guarding a polio vaccination team in Pakistan's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday, authorities said, the second such killing in two days.

"Two gunmen riding a motorbike opened fire on a policeman who was guarding a two-member female polio vaccination team in the Sheikh Uttar area, killing him on the spot," Tank district police chief Sajjad Khan said.

Another local police official, Amanat Ali, confirmed the incident and said the assailants had escaped.

No one has taken responsibility for the killing, which comes a day after an attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban in which two men gunned down a policeman who was guarding a vaccination team in the same area.

The fighters on Friday ended a ceasefire with Pakistan's government mediated with the help of the Afghan Taliban, accusing authorities of violating the terms of the one-month truce.

No progress had been made in fresh negotiations with Pakistan's government, according to



Pakistan is one of the only two countries where polio remains endemic (Unicef)

an audio message released late Friday by Pakistani Taliban leader Noor Wali Mehsud.

Prime Minister Imran Khan announced in October that the government was in talks with the group for the first time since 2014, facilitated by the Afghan Taliban, who seized power across the border in August.

The Pakistani Taliban - a separate movement from Afghanistan's new leaders but which shares a common history - plunged Pakistan into a period of horrific violence after forming in 2007.

Police guards protecting vaccination teams in Pakistan have come under attack in the past,

mostly from homegrown fighters.

Pakistan is one of only two countries where polio remains endemic, though just one case has been reported this year after 84 in 2020, according to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

AFP



G7 foreign ministers pose for a group photograph ahead of their talks at the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers meeting in Liverpool, northwest England on Saturday (AFP)

# G7 ministers issue strong warnings on Iran and Russia

Liverpool, UK - The G7 on Sunday said time was running out for Iran to agree a deal to curb its nuclear ambitions, and warned Russia about the consequences of invading Ukraine.

Foreign ministers from the world's richest nations have held a two-day meeting in Liverpool, northwest England, seeking to present a strong, united front against global threats.

On Iran, G7 host Britain said resumed talks in Vienna were the Islamic Republic's 'last chance to come to the negotiating table with a serious resolution'.

"There is still time for Iran to come and agree this deal," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told a news conference as talks wrapped up.

Negotiations restarted on Thursday to try to revive the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers, which the United States withdrew from under Donald Trump in 2018.

Iran claims it only wants to develop a civilian capability but Western powers say its stockpile of enriched uranium goes well beyond that, and could be

used to develop a nuclear weapon.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to return to the agreement and Iranian officials maintain they are serious about committing to the talks.

But Western powers have accused Tehran of backsliding on progress made earlier

*There is very much a united voice... that there will be massive consequences for Russia in the case of an incursion into Ukraine*

LIZ TRUSS

this year and are playing for time.

Truss' comments are the first time a signatory to the original deal has given an ultimatum for the talks.

## Russian troop build-up

Britain, which hands over the G7 presidency to Germany next year, portrayed the two-day conference in Liverpool, northwest England, as a chance to stand up to authoritarianism around the world.

As well as Iran, Russia's build-up of troops on the border with Ukraine dominated talks, given fears of a possible invasion of the former Soviet state.

Truss said there was 'very much a united voice... that there will be massive consequences for Russia in the case of an incursion into Ukraine'.

A senior US State Depart-

ment official on Saturday said 'a large number of democratic countries' were ready to join the G7 nations of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States in taking action.

Biden earlier this week held a virtual summit with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to voice Western concerns.

He is sending his top diplomat for Europe and Eurasian affairs to Kiev and Moscow next week to try to end the stand-off by diplomatic means.

Russia says the military build-up is a defensive measure against Ukraine moving closer to NATO.

## China looms

From Liverpool, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken flies on to southeast Asia as part of Washington's push for 'peace, security and prosperity' in the Indo-Pacific region.

Britain's G7 presidency this year has been dominated by responding to Beijing's alleged widespread domestic rights abuses, as well as creeping authoritarianism in its former colony, Hong Kong.

Earlier last week, a panel of human rights experts and lawyers said China had committed genocide in its Xinjiang

region by imposing population controls on minority Muslim Uyghurs.

Beijing rejected the report, accusing it of 'anti-China' bias.

Truss said she and her counterparts were concerned about China's 'coercive economic policies' and there was a need to counter them with their own initiatives as an alternative.

"What we want to do is build the investment reach, the economic trade reach of like-minded freedom-loving democracies," she added.

"That is why we're stepping up our investment into low and middle-income countries," Truss said.

At a G7 leaders' meeting in June in Cornwall, southwest England, the grouping unveiled plans for what it said was a more equitable global infrastructure fund than China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The Chinese trillion-dollar scheme has been widely criticised for saddling smaller countries, particularly in Africa, with unmanageable debt.

AFP

## Armed man at bank shot dead by police in London

London, UK - Police on Saturday said that armed officers shot dead a man in the British capital but the incident was not being treated as terrorism.

A specialist unit was called out after reports of a man seen with a firearm at a bank and a bookmakers in the Kensington area of the city shortly after 3pm (1500 GMT).

Some 20 minutes later, the unit stopped a vehicle and shots were fired. Paramedics, including an air ambulance, were called but the man was pronounced dead just before 4:10pm.

'Efforts are under way to confirm the man's identity and to inform his next of kin,' the Metropolitan Police said in a statement.

'The Met's Directorate of Professional Standards has been informed and the incident has been referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct.'

It added, 'The incident is not being treated as terrorism.'

British police are not routinely armed and shootings are rare.

The most recent data suggests there were 30 homicides committed by shooting in England and Wales in the year ending March 31, 2020, accounting for four per cent of all homicides.

A total of 80 per cent of the victims were male.

In 2020-21, there was just one fatal shooting by police in England and Wales, the lowest figure since 2014-15, according to the Independent Office for Police Conduct.

Britain recently raised its terror threat level to the second-highest category after a botched bomb attack in Liverpool, northwest England, in November.

A serving member of parliament was also stabbed to death as he met constituents near Southend, east of London, the previous month.

Police and prosecutors linked both attacks to extremism.

AFP

## S Africa's Zuma releases book to 'set record straight'

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma, accused of orchestrating the systematic plunder of government coffers during his rule, launched a new book on Sunday in which he intends 'to the set record straight'.

Titled *Jacob Zuma Speaks*, the book comes after the 79-year-old was released from prison in September due to ill health, just two months into a 15-month sentence for continually refusing to appear before a corruption inquiry into his 2009-18 presidency.

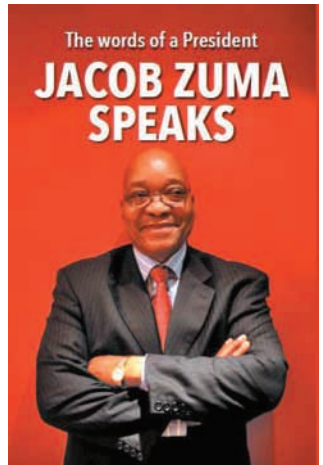
His spokesman Mzwanele Manyi said the book can be bought for US\$19 or US\$62 for a signed copy - at 'Car Boot sales' in Johannesburg on Sunday.

Manyi and the ex-president's daughter Dudu Zuma-Sambudla would be at a McDonald's in the city's upmarket Sandton suburb selling the books, he tweeted.

Zuma was found guilty in June after refusing to obey a court order to appear before a commission probing 'state capture' - the siphoning off of national assets, which occurred on a massive scale under his nine-year tenure.

Since being released on medical parole, Zuma has returned to his estate in Nkandla. He looked healthy in a video appearance on Friday promoting the book.

In the video he lashed out at



the 'untruth about the work that we have done', emphasising the importance for society 'to know what has happened'.

"There is no use to create stories because you have a powerful machinery to do so," he said, sitting in front of a stack of his books, arms crossed and smiling.

Zuma is accused of pocketing bribes from French defence giant Thales and faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering.

*Jacob Zuma Speaks*, written in the third person, contains testimonies from former allies who have since fallen silent, spokesman Manyi said.

"All has been said about the presidency of Jacob Zuma. A lot of falsehoods, a lot of untruths have been told. This book is about setting the record straight," he said.

AFP

## British Prime Minister accused of breaching own COVID-19 rules

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Sunday faced fresh questions about alleged government breaches of coronavirus restrictions after a photo emerged of him at a Christmas event last year.

Johnson has faced a barrage of criticism and calls to quit over claims of an illegal Downing Street party on December 18, 2020.

He has repeatedly said he was assured the gathering complied with social distancing restrictions in place at the time and has ordered an internal investigation.

But the *Sunday Mirror* pub-



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson holds a press conference for the latest COVID-19 update in the Downing Street on December 8 (AFP)

lished a photograph of Johnson said to have been taken three days before that party, at a 'virtual quiz' for his staff, in which four teams of six people took part to raise funds for charity.

Christmas lunches and parties that were 'primarily social activity' were banned at the time, as Britain - one of the worst-hit countries by COVID-19 - battled a surge in cases of the Delta coronavirus strain.

Mixing of more than two people from two households indoors was banned, scuppering Christmas plans for millions after months of tight restrictions, including lockdown.

The left-leaning *Sunday Mirror* said Johnson took part for up to 15 minutes and asked questions as quizmaster in one round. Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi dismissed the latest report, telling Sky News television, "Many people would have had similar Zoom quiz nights around the country."

But the main opposition Labour party said it showed Johnson presided over 'a culture of disregard for the rules at the heart of government', after a slew of claims that parties were held across Whitehall last Christmas.

An Opinion poll for *The Ob-*

server put Labour nine points ahead of Johnson's Conservatives, and suggested 57 per cent of people think he should quit - up nine points from just two weeks ago.

Johnson's popularity rating fell to -35 per cent, down from a record low of -21 per cent in the same period, the newspaper said.

The claims of double-standards have put Johnson's position under threat at a crucial time.

MPs vote this week on the government's latest proposed restrictions to curb the spread of the Omicron variant, with

many Tories unhappy at plans to introduce mandatory vaccine passports.

Johnson also faces a by-election in a safe Tory seat vacated by an MP found to have illegally lobbied ministers on behalf of two companies that had him on their payroll.

A significant rebellion in the House of Commons and either a defeat or substantial loss of majority in Thursday's by-election could see calls for Johnson to go reach fever pitch.

One commentator said the by-election was effectively 'a referendum' on his premiership.

AFP

# Powerful tornadoes kill 83 across six US states

It’s a tragedy. We still don’t know how many lives are lost and the full extent of the damage: Biden

Mayfield, US - Rescuers were desperately searching for survivors early on Sunday after dozens of devastating tornadoes tore through six US states, leaving at least 83 people dead, dozens missing and towns in ruin.

President Joe Biden called the wave of tornadoes, including one that travelled more than 200 miles, ‘one of the largest’ storm outbreaks in American history.

“It’s a tragedy,” a shaken Biden, who pledged support for the affected states, said in televised comments. “And we still don’t know how many lives are lost and the full extent of the damage.”

Scores of search and rescue officials were helping stunned citizens across the US heartland sift through the rubble of their homes and businesses overnight.

More than 70 people are believed to have been killed in Kentucky alone, many of them workers at a candle factory, while at least six died in an Amazon warehouse in Illinois where they were on the night shift processing orders ahead of Christmas.

“This event is the worst, most devastating, most deadly tornado event in Kentucky’s history,” said state governor Andy Beshear, adding he fears ‘we will have lost more than 100 people.’

“The devastation is unlike anything I have seen in my life, and I have trouble putting it into words,” he told reporters.

Beshear has declared a state of emergency.

The tornado that smashed through Kentucky had rumbled



Destroyed homes after a tornado ripped through a residential area, in Mayfield, Kentucky on Saturday (AFP)

along the ground for over 200 miles, Beshear said, one of the longest on record.

The longest a US tornado has ever tracked along the ground was a 219-mile storm in Missouri in 1925. It claimed 695 lives.

### ‘Like a bomb’

The western Kentucky town of Mayfield was reduced to ‘matchsticks’, its mayor Kathy O’Nan told CNN.

The small town of 10,000 people was described as ‘ground zero’ by officials, and appeared post-apocalyptic: City blocks leveled; historic homes and buildings beaten down to their slabs; tree trunks stripped of

their branches; cars overturned in fields.

Some Christmas decorations could still be seen by the side of the road.

Beshear said there were 110 people working at the candle factory when the storm hit, causing the roof to collapse.

Forty people have been rescued, but it would be ‘a miracle if anybody else is found alive’, he said.

CNN played a heart-rending plea posted on Facebook by a factory employee.

“We are trapped, please, y’all, get us some help,” a woman says, her voice quavering as a co-worker can be heard moaning in the background.

“We are at the candle factory in Mayfield... Please, y’all. Pray for us.”

The woman, Kyanna Parsons-Perez, was rescued after being pinned under a water fountain.

“It looks like a bomb has exploded,” 31 year old Mayfield resident Alex Goodman said.

David Norseworthy, a 69-year-old builder in Mayfield, said the storm blew off his roof and front porch while the family hid in a shelter.

“We never had anything like that here,” he said.

In one demonstration of the storms’ power on Saturday, when winds derailed a 27-car



Mangled building material wrapped around a tree at the Mayfield Consumer Products Candle Factory (AFP)

train near Earlinton, Kentucky, one car was blown 75 yards up a hill and another landed on a house. No one was hurt.

### ‘Pretty much destroyed’

Reports put the total number of tornadoes across the region at around 30.

At least 13 people were killed in other storm-hit states, including at an Amazon warehouse in Illinois, bringing the total toll to 83. In Arkansas, at least one person died when a tornado ‘pretty much destroyed’ a nursing home in Monette, a county official said.

Another person died elsewhere in the state.

Four people died in Tennessee, while one died in Missouri. Tornadoes also touched down in Mississippi.

Biden said he planned to travel to the affected areas.

He said that while the impact of climate change on these particular storms was not yet clear, “We all know everything is more intense when the climate is warming, everything.”

More than half a million homes in several states were left without power, according to PowerOutage.com.

### Amazon workers trapped

One of the tornadoes hit the Amazon warehouse in the

southern Illinois city of Edwardsville, with around 100 workers believed to have been trapped inside.

“We identified 45 personnel who made it out of the building safely, one who had to be airlifted to a regional hospital for treatment, and six fatalities,” Edwardsville fire chief James Whiteford told reporters.

But he said the operation had turned from rescue to focus ‘only on recovery’, fuelling fears the toll could yet rise.

Amazon chief Jeff Bezos said he was ‘heartbroken’ at the deaths, tweeting: ‘Our thoughts and prayers are with their families and loved ones.’

AFP



This handout photo shows a four-storeyed building, which collapsed following a gas explosion, in Ravanusa on Sunday (AFP)

## Three dead, six missing in Sicily buildings blast

Rome, Italy - Three people were killed and six were missing after an explosion caused multiple residential buildings to collapse on the Italian island of Sicily, authorities said on Sunday.

Two women were recovered alive from the rubble in the southern town of Ravanusa after the collapse on Saturday night, and rescuers and sniffer dogs were searching to locate the missing.

The death count from the disaster shifted throughout the morning, and Sicily’s regional civil protection unit confirmed at 10:07 GMT on Sunday on its Facebook page that three people were confirmed dead and not four, as they had reported earlier.

Television images showed a mass of rubble, wooden beams and mangled steel in a large empty space in Ravanusa’s centre, with neighbouring buildings charred and damaged.

It was not immediately clear how many buildings collapsed in the explosion. Initial reports cited one apartment building but Sicily’s regional civil protection

unit said on its website that ‘four buildings were involved’ in the incident.

Local news reports said as many as 10 buildings were affected.

### ‘Huge shock wave’

Firefighters sorted through the tall pile of concrete, in which various ovens, air conditioners and other domestic appliances could be seen.

A ‘huge shock wave’ from the explosion was felt 100m away, said Salvatore Cocina, head of Sicily’s civil protection unit.

The explosion, which occurred around 1930 GMT on Saturday, was likely caused by a gas leak, said authorities, who have opened an investigation.

“The gas probably found a cavity in which to accumulate,” the head of firefighters in the province of Agrigento, Giuseppe Merendino, told the Rainews24 TV channel.

“This pocket of gas would then have found an accidental trigger: A car, an elevator, an electrical appliance.”

AFP

## Indian PM’s Twitter hacked again by crypto scammers

New Delhi, India - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Twitter account was hacked on Sunday with a message declaring his country had adopted bitcoin as legal tender and was distributing the cryptocurrency to citizens.

Modi is a prolific tweeter and is the world’s most popular incumbent politician on the platform, with more than 73mn followers on his main account.

A swiftly deleted tweet from



Narendra Modi

his main @narendramodi handle said the Indian government had officially bought 500 bitcoin and was ‘and distributing them to all residents of the country’, along with a scam link.

His office tweeted that the account was ‘very briefly compromised’ and that Twitter had since restored control.

It was the second time one of Modi’s Twitter accounts was hacked, after another was taken

over last year to send out a tweet urging the public to donate to a fake coronavirus relief fund.

Sunday’s hack ironically comes as India prepares to clamp down on a flourishing cryptocurrency trade with a new law likely to be introduced in parliament this month. Details of the legislation remain unclear but the government has flagged a broad ban on private digital currencies. The local crypto market has

boomed since the Indian Supreme Court overturned a previous ban last year, with Bollywood actors and cricket stars fronting ad campaigns for local exchanges. Modi himself said last month that cryptocurrencies could ‘spoil our youth’ and the central bank has repeatedly warned they could pose ‘serious concerns on macroeconomic and financial stability’.

AFP

## New Caledonia rejects independence from France

Noumea, France - Islanders on the Pacific territory of New Caledonia voted overwhelmingly on Sunday to remain part of France in a third referendum that was boycotted by pro-independence groups, raising fears of new tensions.

With all ballots counted, 96.49 per cent were against independence, while only 3.51 per cent were in favour, with turnout a mere 43.90 per cent, results from the islands’ high commission showed.

“Tonight France is more beautiful because New Caledonia has decided to stay part of it,” President Emmanuel Macron said in a recorded video message that made no direct mention of the boycott.

Police reinforcements have been sent to the territory known as ‘the pebble’, which is of strategic importance to France and part of a wider tussle for influence in the Pacific between Western countries and China.

The boycott and crushing nature of the ‘No’ vote will raise fears of protests as well as questions about the democratic legitimacy of the referendum on the archipelago, 2,000km east of Australia.



A woman casts her ballot for the referendum on independence at a polling station of the City Hall in Noumea, on the French South Pacific territory of New Caledonia on Sunday (AFP)

Macron noted ‘the high abstention rates’ but said France could be ‘proud’ of a more than 30-year process designed to settle the islands’ status under which residents were asked in three separate referendums if they wished to break away.

Having rejected independence in 2018 and then again last year, inhabitants were called on Sunday to answer one last time whether they wanted New Caledonia ‘to accede to full sovereignty and become independent’.

Pro-independence campaigners boycotted the vote, saying they wanted it postponed to September because ‘a fair campaign’ was impossible with high coronavirus infection numbers.

### Loyalist joy

The result could exacerbate ethnic tensions, with the poorer indigenous Kanak community who generally favour independence staying away from polling booths on Sunday.

The wealthier white commu-

nity turned out in large numbers.

“We have decided in our souls and consciences to remain French,” Sonia Backes, a senior pro-France figure, told supporters on Sunday evening.

“The sad dreams of an independence at the cost of ruin, of exclusion and misery have crashed on the reef of our pioneering spirit, our resilience and our love for our own land.”

The main indigenous pro-independence movement, the FLNKS, had called the govern-

ment’s insistence on going ahead with the referendum ‘a declaration of war’.

At stake in the vote was one of France’s biggest overseas territories which is home to about 10 per cent of the world’s reserves of nickel, which is used to make stainless steel, batteries and mobile phones.

The territory is also a key part of France’s claim of being a Pacific power, with New Caledonia granting France rights to the surrounding ocean, as well as serving as a military staging post.

Experts suspect that an independent New Caledonia would move closer to Beijing, which has built up close economic links and political influence on other Pacific islands.

“A period of transition is beginning. Free from the binary choice of ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, we must now build a common project, while recognising and respecting the dignity of everyone,” Macron added in his message.

France has 13 overseas territories, home to 2.7mn people, which are generally poorer and have higher unemployment than the mainland, leading to long-standing accusations of neglect.

AFP

# Who will be the judge of climate plans?

Paris, France - Countries have until the end of next year to ensure their climate commitments meet the Paris agreement's cap on global warming. But who will check that their promises really do stack up?

The question is so sensitive that, for now, the answer is: The countries themselves.

While nations have agreed to a global target aimed at avoiding the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, fossil fuel and other greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise when they should be falling.

And there is no formal organisation tasked with making sure individual nations are on track.

"There are no 'police' to check; this is a weakness of the process," climatologist Corinne Le Quere said.

Nearly 200 countries signed up to the landmark Paris deal in 2015, committing to halt warming 'well below' 2°C above pre-industrial levels, preferably limiting it to 1.5°C.

And in November at the COP 26 climate summit in Glasgow, nations called for all governments to ensure their emissions plans for this decade align with the Paris temperature goals, strengthening them if necessary, by the end of 2022.

But each country will effectively mark its own climate homework.

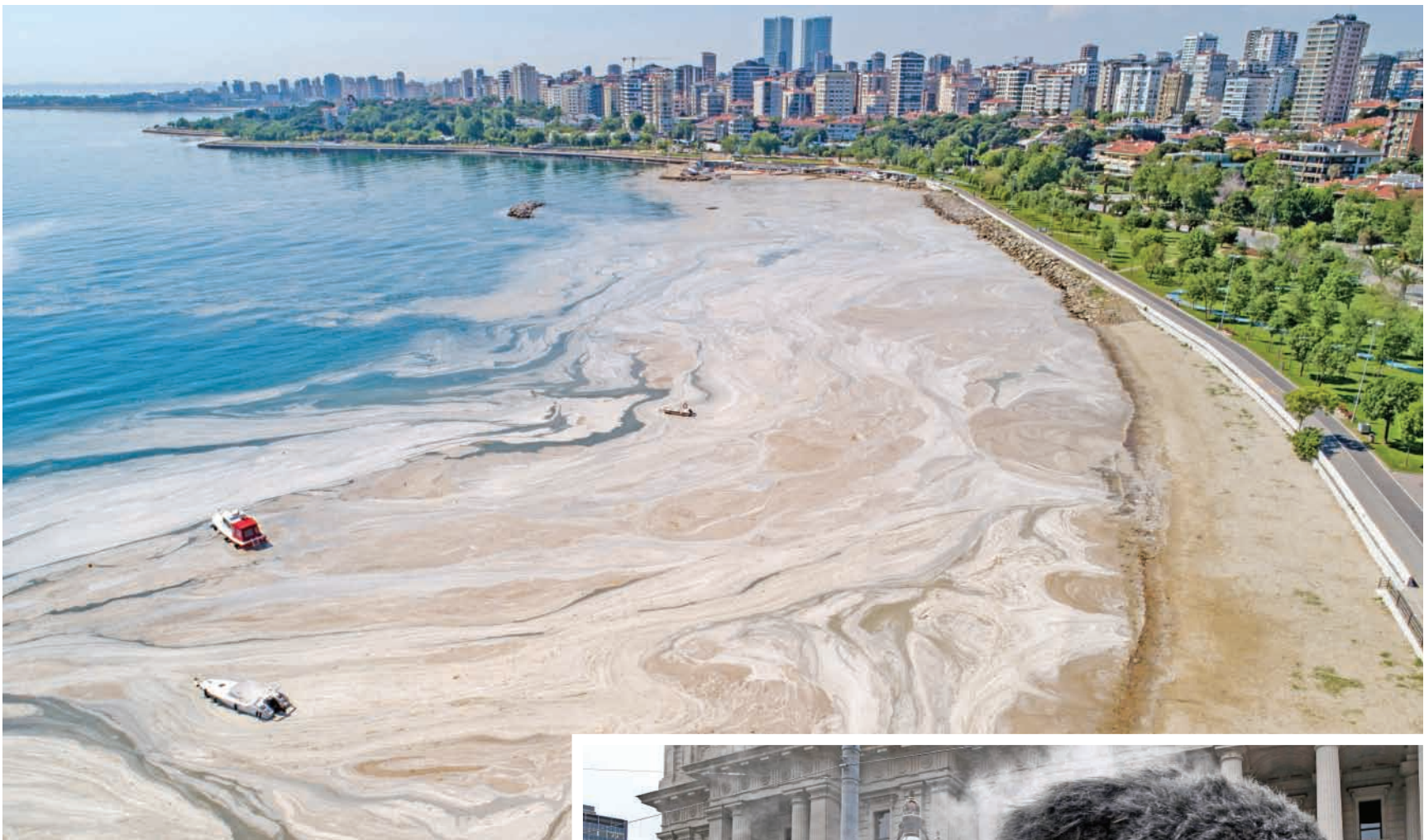
The process means countries can move forward 'at the pace suited to their political system', said Le Quere.

So far, it has not pulled down emissions nearly fast enough.

**'Peer pressure works'**

At a global level, the United Nations' climate change body estimates that countries' 2030 emissions reduction plans will lead to warming of a devastating 2.7°C.

A separate annual analysis by the UN Environment Programme



Turkey's Marmara Sea is seen covered in mucilage, a layer of slime that develops on the surface of the water due to the excessive proliferation of phytoplankton, gravely threatening the marine biome (AFP)

(UNEP), which looks at the gap between climate commitments and actual reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, drills down into slightly more detail.

It includes a particular focus on richer nations from the G20, responsible for around 80 per cent of emissions.

"We don't name and shame but we do point to the G20 members that are definitely not on track" like Australia and Mexico, said Anne Olhoff, one of the authors of the UNEP report.

But going further would be 'so political, I don't see it happening in a UN context to be quite honest', she said.

In fact, experts doubt that nations would agree to any formal

external scrutiny.

"We heard very clearly in Glasgow, countries like the US say that they - and they alone - will determine what is a 1.5°C pathway for their country," said Bill Hare, of the research group Climate Analytics.

And the United States are by no means the only ones.

"I don't think the onus in this case is on the EU because we are on track to stay well within Paris," European Commission vice president Frans Timmermans told AFP during the COP conference in Glasgow.

**"We can prove it with facts."**

There are a few independent



An art piece depicting a burning koala is displayed during a climate change protest in Melbourne on December 9 (AFP)

analyses like Climate Action Tracker (CAT) which calculate countries' estimated trajectory - towards 1.5°C, 2°C, 3°C, or worse.

Hare said CAT, which his organisation partners with, and other assessments will spark 'a lot of discussion and disagreement' in 2022 as the deadline looms.

"There needs to be a certain

amount of naming and shaming of countries for progress to happen," said Hare.

"At least the visible risk of being named and shamed helps some countries focus on what they need to do to do the right thing."

Even the most ambitious countries will have to 'sharpen their arguments' to convince people that their numbers add up, said Lola Vallejo, from the IDDRI thinktank.

Civil society, the media, and even other nations will all push governments to do more.

"Countries that are not in line with the Paris agreement will feel they are in the hot seat. Peer pressure works," said one Western diplomat.

## Fair share

Even the most ambitious emissions cutters will not be able to rest on their laurels.

Olhoff said richer nations will likely face questions over 'the historical emissions burden and of fairness and equity'.

The Paris agreement underlines the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' according to national situations.

So some believe that wealthy countries, largely responsible for global warming, have a duty towards the poorest, and should therefore do more to achieve a 'fair' contribution.

There are multiple ways to measure this: Historical emissions, emissions per capita, carbon footprint that takes into account emissions generated by imported goods, aid to poor countries.

But essentially the key message remains the same, said Olhoff. If they hope to curb global warming, she said, "All countries need to go back and see if there is anything we can do more and quicker."

AFP

# South Africa pays tribute to last apartheid leader De Klerk

Cape Town, South Africa - South Africa on Sunday paid an official tribute to F W de Klerk, the final president of white rule, who freed Nelson Mandela from prison and steered the country from apartheid to democracy.

De Klerk died on November 11 aged 85 following a battle with cancer. Four days of national mourning were declared in his honour.

He served as president from 1989 to 1994 and is remembered most for leading South Africa's transition from white-minority rule to the first multi-racial elections in 1994.

De Klerk also shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mandela in 1993 after freeing him from prison in 1990. Mandela then became South Africa's first black president after his African National Congress party won the 1994 election.

President Cyril Ramaphosa attended Cape Town's Protes-



Elita Georgiades (left), wife of former South African president F W de Klerk, and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, during de Klerk's memorial service at the Groote Kerk church in Cape Town on Sunday (AFP)

tant Groote Kerk - one of South Africa's oldest churches - on Sunday morning to deliver a eulogy in De Klerk's honour.

"He was often misunderstood due to his over-correctness," De



A portrait of the Late F W de Klerk as placed during his state memorial service at the Groote Kerk church on Sunday (AFP)

Klerk's widow Elita Georgiadis told around 200 attendees.

"I shall never forget this man who mesmerised me, who made me want to help him achieve this huge task ahead of him."

A private mass and the national anthem preceded the ceremony, which featured a portrait of De Klerk between two candles and a choir decorated with white flowers.

Despite a positive reputation abroad, De Klerk divided opinion in South Africa and his death prompted mixed reactions.

Critics say he remains inseparable from apartheid-era crimes and could have been held accountable for them had he lived longer.

De Klerk represented the Na-

tional Party, which in 1948 formally established apartheid's racial segregation and disenfranchisement of South Africa's non-white majority.

Outside the church, a small group of protesters held signs saying 'Justice denied' and 'Justice for apartheid victims' and were swiftly led away by police.

The surrounding area was closed to traffic and placed under high security. Comments in his final years also tarnished De Klerk's image amid criticism for his failure to apologise officially for the crimes of apartheid.

In 2020, he denied apartheid was a crime against humanity before retracting the statement and apologising.

De Klerk's foundation issued a posthumous video apologising 'for the pain, hurt, indignity and damage that apartheid has done' to South Africa's non-white populations.

AFP

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ILLEGAL

YET

ESSENTIAL

Migrants recycle Istanbul's waste

Istanbul, Turkey - Shrouded by acrid smoke, a young Afghan crouches sorting waste he has pulled from the trash bins of Istanbul, anxious that Turkey will soon strip him of even this subsistence.

"I start at eight in the morning and finish at eight at night," said Issam Raffur, who has spent four of his 20 years in Turkey.

"It is very hard and poorly paid, but I have no choice," he shrugged, smoke billowing from a fire barely warming his makeshift sorting centre on a soggy winter day.

Considered the poorest of Turkey's poor, Afghans have joined Kurds, the Laz, Roma and other ethnic minorities and undocumented migrants in doing work others snub.

For less than US\$10 a day, they roam the streets of Istanbul, a megalopolis of nearly 16mn people straining under the weight of a currency crisis and a flood of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other conflict-riven states.

Diving headfirst into dumpsters, they dig up plastic bottles, glass and other waste they then sort and sell in bulk - a self-organised, unregulated business that keeps the city clean, and men such as Issam fed.

But as public sentiment turns against migrants and other foreigners in Turkey, the state-appointed prefecture of Istanbul has declared this work bad for 'the environment and public health'.

Issam and his friends suspect that what Turkish officials really want is to put this potentially profitable business under the control of a few, well-connected recycling firms.

"If the big companies take over, they will saw off our last branch of support," said Mahmut Aytar, a Turk who manages one of the small recycling centres on the Asian side of Istanbul. "They will throw us in the ravine."

Speaking to AFP, Deputy Environment Minister Mehmet Emin Birpinar did little to ease Aytar's concerns.

"Waste can be bought and sold, so we have started to view it as a raw material with other uses," he said. "After the price of raw materials increased, the value of recycled goods has risen."

Women and children

Born in multi-ethnic southeastern Turkey, Aytar (28) launched his recycling business out of desperation after failing to find work befitting his biology degree.

"This job does not require experience or training. Anyone can do it, but it is mostly the people excluded by the system who get involved," he said while watching his press machines crush plastic bags and empty bottles.

After being shrunk into tidy bales, the plastic waste is loaded onto trucks of small, independently run recycling operators who convert them into granules.

Aytar said he runs one of 2,500 or so impromptu recycling depots in Istanbul, receiving dozens of trash collectors - called *cekceki* (pronounced 'chekchekchi' and roughly translating as those who pull carts) - every day.

Tugging white, muddied carts filled with paper, cardboard, plastic and bottles, they dart between honking cars and pedestrian streams, earning 80-120 liras (US\$6-US\$9) a day.

Women and minors specialise in cardboard boxes, which they find after the shops close at night, their babies sometimes riding along in the carts' lower folds.

Each kilogramme of waste is worth about a lira, and the bravest collect about 150 kilogrammes of waste a day.

"They probably don't realise it, but by being impoverished, they contribute to protecting the environment," said Aytar. "They are helping society."

'Harassment'

They do so while living in destitution and depend on the whims of the police.

In early October, security forces rounded up more than 250 *cekceki* in one day, releasing them after a few hours but keeping their precious cargoes of waste.

"It's harassment," said Elrem Yasar, who started managing his own depot after collecting trash for 12 years.

"Each confiscation costs me about 560 liras, which I earn in three days."

Istanbul prefecture officials defended their crack-down.

"These *cekceki* work illegally," one official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"It is up to the city to take care of recycling and to collect revenues from it."

Conceding that his work has no legal status, collector Ekrem Yasar said he would be happy to pay taxes if ever given the chance.

"We are not asking for state handouts, but if they take away our jobs, tens of thousands of people will be left with nothing," he said, pinning his hopes on the first *cekceki* union, which is still in the process of being set up.

Most of the trash collectors and warehouse workers live on-site in crudely arranged containers, huddling around open fires in Istanbul's industrial zones.

"Imagine, life in the city," Yasar said with a bitter laugh. "You think we are making money? Look, we only have one teaspoon between us," he said while serving tea.

AFP

This job does not require experience or training. Anyone can do it, but it is mostly the people excluded by the system who get involved

MAHMET AYTAZ

This file photo shows Afghan refugees collecting waste at a makeshift dumping ground, in Istanbul on November 18. Considered the poorest of Turkey's poor, Afghans have joined Kurds, the Laz, Roma and other ethnic minorities and undocumented migrants in doing work others simply refuse (AFP)





## FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

# Salah spoils Gerrard's return; Chelsea saved

Liverpool, UK - Mohamed Salah scored the only goal as Liverpool spoiled Steven Gerrard's return to Anfield as Aston Villa manager as the Reds, Manchester City, Chelsea and Manchester United all needed penalties to win on Saturday.

City edged 10-man Wolves 1-0 thanks to Raheem Sterling's controversial winner, Chelsea required two Jorginho spot-kicks to see off Leeds 3-2 and Cristiano Ronaldo made sure United did not slip up with a 1-0 win at bottom-of-the-table Norwich.

Gerrard was given a subdued reception at Anfield as the former Liverpool captain faced his old side for the first time in his playing or coaching career.

"I had to accept it was going to be emotional for me and my family," said Gerrard. "For me, it was trying to control that, trying to control the outside noise and be respectful to Aston Villa."

Villa were largely outplayed, but stayed in the game thanks to a combination of dogged defending, good goalkeeping from Emiliano Martinez and a couple of calls in their favour from referee Stuart Attwell, who dismissed two first-half appeals for a Liverpool penalty.

However, Gerrard's men did not escape for a third time when Tyrone Mings pulled down Salah inside the box 25 minutes from time. Salah smashed home his 21st goal in 22 games this season to ensure Liverpool remain just one point behind City at the top of the table.

"The first 75 minutes was in-



Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (second from left) scores from a penalty his team's opening goal past Aston Villa's Argentinian goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez during the English Premier League football match at Anfield, in Liverpool on Saturday (AFP)

credible football," said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp. "We played in the spaces we wanted to play but we did not finish the situations which is tricky."

## 'Crazy decision'

City had fortune on their side to see off Wolves thanks to Sterling's 100th Premier League goal.

Wolves boss Bruno Lage was furious as Raul Jimenez was dismissed for two quickfire yellow cards before half-time.

The Mexican was booked for a trip of Rodrigo and then sent off for preventing the Spaniard taking a quick free-kick.

"The first yellow card is a crazy decision for me, in my opinion. A hard decision to accept," said Lage. The visitors' anger was compounded by the origin of the winning goal as Joao Moutinho was judged to have handled Bernardo Silva's cross despite the ball appearing to come off the Portuguese midfielder's body onto his upper arm.

Sterling showed no mercy as he coolly slotted home from the spot to bring up his century of Premier League goals.

## Late drama

Chelsea needed late drama at

Stamford Bridge to prevent their title challenge stumbling for the fourth time in six games.

Leeds took the lead through a penalty of their own, converted by Raphinha.

Mason Mount levelled for the European champions and order seemed to have been restored when Jorginho slotted home the first of his two spot-kicks just before the hour mark.

However, an injury-ravaged Leeds hit back once more when teenager Joe Gelhardt came off the bench to level with his first touch seven minutes from time.

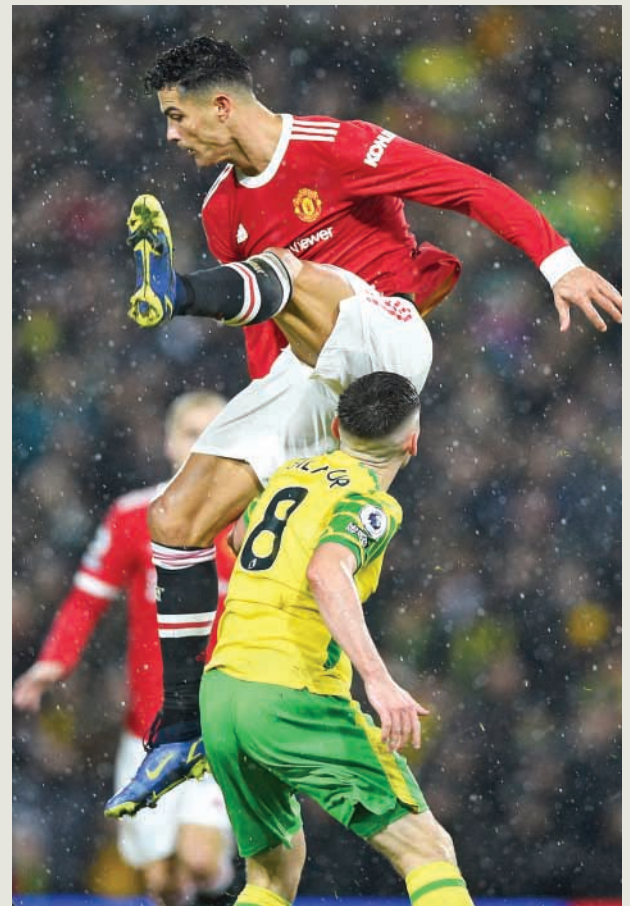
But four minutes into stop-

page time a third penalty of the game was awarded for Mateusz Klich's challenge on Antonio Rudiger.

Jorginho has missed a number of high-profile penalties for Italy of late, but is yet to miss for his club this season and converted to keep Chelsea just two points off the top.

The Red Devils moved level on points with fourth-placed West Ham after riding their luck at Carrow Road as De Gea denied Teemu Pukki and Ozan Kabak either side of Ronaldo's thumping finish from the spot.

AFP



Manchester United striker Cristiano Ronaldo (up) vies with Billy Gilmour during a match against Norwich City, in Norwich (AFP)

## Spot on Ronaldo fires Man Utd to victory at Norwich

Norwich, UK - Ralf Rangnick questioned Manchester United's body language after Cristiano Ronaldo's penalty clinched a 'lucky' 1-0 victory at struggling Norwich on Saturday.

Ronaldo won and converted the second half spot-kick that gave Rangnick a second successive Premier League victory since he re-

man aims to haul his club back into the Champions League places.

## United must improve

While United must improve significantly on this mediocre display against the Premier League's bottom club, Rangnick will take heart from successive clean sheets - a stark contrast to the woeful defending seen in the 4-1 loss at Watford that ended Solskjaer's reign.

Rangnick, who kept faith with the team that beat Crystal Palace 1-0 in his first match last weekend, wants to introduce a high-tempo pressing style to United.

But after making 11 changes from the midweek Champions League draw with Young Boys, there was a noticeable lack of energy about United at times.

Norwich were without several players after boss Dean Smith hinted at coronavirus concerns in the squad on Friday, but they still matched United stride for stride.

United were inches away from an early lead when Alex Telles' free-kick deflected off the Norwich wall and cannoned off the crossbar.

While United had the star power and greater resources, there was nothing to separate two misfiring teams in the first half. There was a scare for United when their defender Victor Lindelof was forced off after falling to the turf holding his chest.

Lindelof seemed to have recovered as he walked off and, as ever, it was Ronaldo who was the catalyst as United finally made the breakthrough in the 75th minute. Norwich could feel aggrieved that they didn't earn a point.

AFP

*It was a very intense game, very physical. We need to be able to compete on that kind of level*

RALF RANGNICK

placed the sacked Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

United found it difficult to impose themselves for long periods and it took several fine saves from David de Gea to keep them on level terms before Ronaldo's 13th goal since rejoining the club from Juventus in August.

"It was a very intense game, very physical," Rangnick said. "We need to be able to compete on that kind of level. There's still room for improvement in this area."

"The second half was a little bit better but at the end we were lucky to have a clean sheet. It's another clean sheet but still a lot of work to do."

"It's also a question of body language and physicality and this was one of the major issues that we could have done better."

Rangnick's side sit in fifth place in the Premier League, level on points with fourth-placed West Ham, as the Ger-

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## Bayern down Mainz to go six points clear in the Bundesliga

Berlin, Germany - Bayern Munich extended their lead at the top of the Bundesliga to six points on Saturday as teenager Jamal Musiala grabbed a late winner to seal a 2-1 comeback victory at home to Mainz.

Second-half goals by Kingsley Coman and 18-year-old Musiala sealed the victory behind closed doors at Munich's Allianz Arena after Mainz's shock early lead.

Bayern are on target to win the German league for a tenth straight season as second-placed Dortmund drew 1-1 at Bochum.

Bayern boss Julian Nagelsmann chalked up his 100th Bundesliga win as a coach and confirmed match-winner Musiala, who had previously opted not to be vaccinated against COVID-19, has now received a vaccine.

"I am pleased that he is vaccinated and hopefully we won't have any more problems in the second half of the season," Nagelsmann added after Musiala had been one of five players



Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski (left) falls while vying for the ball during a Bundesliga match against Mainz, in Munich on Saturday (AFP)

quarantined last month as contact cases.

Bayern made a slow start at the end of a busy week after last Saturday's 3-2 win at Dortmund and Wednesday's 3-0 win over Barcelona to secure a sixth win from six in the Champions League's group stages.

Mainz took a deserved lead when Karim Onisiwo headed past Manuel Neuer after 22 minutes, but Bayern levelled when Corentin Tolisso's long

pass found Coman, who fired past Mainz goalkeeper Robin Zentner.

Bayern sealed the win 16 minutes from time when Musiala took his marker out of the game with a superb first touch and slotted past Zentner.

Dortmund suffered a Champions League hangover, four days after their 5-0 thumping of Besiktas, when they were held 1-1 at Bochum.

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This photo shows sailors at the just-concluded 2021 ILCA 6 World Championships at Barceló Resort Mussanah (Supplied photo)

- The flagship event - spread across five days - is featuring over 350 sailors coming from 64 countries
- Focus on sustainability with environmental education programme and training for competitors and staff

Muscat - The 50th edition of the prestigious Youth Sailing World Championships began in Mussanah on Sunday evening after a thrilling practice race.

Considered World Sailing's flagship event for youth sailors, the championships is featuring 350 sailors coming from 64 countries for the mega event

spread across five days.

Barceló Hotel Group's iconic Barceló Mussanah Resort has been chosen as the exclusive host venue for the event that will run until December 18, said a press statement.

'Spectators and sailing enthusiasts can look forward to a thrilling racing event structured

to include five days of racing featuring over 350 sailors from 64 nations taking to the waters of Mussanah in separate male, female and mixed competitions,' it said ahead of the inauguration of the event.

Situated on the beachfront in the south of Al Batinah region, the four-star resort's 308 rooms

have been made available for competitors, coaches, officials and all event staff involved in the regatta alongside a range of restaurants and sports and leisure facilities.

The property offers state of the art sailing facilities for competitors, coaches and equipment providers with a fully staffed workshop and facilities for sanding, spray, fiberglass and engine repairs. Additionally, Barceló Mussanah Resort's quality 54-berth marina, managed by Oman Sail, provides dockside support and first-class facilities including boat cleaning, assistance upon arrival, and a fuel dock.

"Mussanah is internationally recognised as a leading destination for international sailing events in the region," Dermot Birchall, general manager of

Barceló Mussanah Resort was quoted as saying.

Having successfully hosted seven regional and world championships in 2021, he said, "we as Barceló Hotel Group are honoured to welcome more of the world's finest young sailors to the beautiful shores of the Sultanate and experience our world class facilities at Barceló Mussanah Resort."

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "To host the 2021 Youth World Sailing Championships is an incredible honour for Oman and Oman Sail."

"We look forward to welcoming the very best young sailors and future stars of the sport to the country for a week of exciting competition," he added.

Oman's reputation as a world class host has grown significantly

in recent years and the facilities at Barceló Mussanah Resort have been a major component to attract the very best events in sailing to the country, the Oman Sail CEO said.

"The benefits to the community are numerous and we look forward to once again sharing Oman's famed hospitality with visiting sailors, coaches, officials and media."

In line with Oman's Vision 2040, the tournament will have a "thorough environmental education programme to raise awareness on preserving Oman's natural landscape".

Elite sailors will visit schools, promote the event and encourage all to sign up to the UN Environment Clean Seas Campaign: #CleanSeas.

Training on environmental

awareness will be delivered to all event staff and volunteers with a pre-environmental online survey issued to all participants to benchmark their green awareness before and after the event, the statement added.

"Barceló Hotel Group have implemented various innovative solutions to create a sustainable and environmentally conscious hospitality experience for our guests," Raquel Lopez, vice-president of Sales & Marketing at Barceló Hotel Group in GCC, said.

"The staging of Youth Sailing World Championships 2021 will drive greater awareness on the importance of environmental sustainability and ensuring Oman's natural landscape is protected for future generations," he added.



Federica Brignone competes in the Women's Super G race at St Moritz on Sunday (AFP)

## Brignone wins second St Moritz Super-G, Gut-Behrami crashes

St Moritz, Switzerland - Italy's Federica Brignone edged teammate Elena Curtoni to win the second of two World Cup Super-G races in St Moritz on Sunday as Swiss Lara Gut-Behrami crashed out.

Olympic giant slalom bronze medallist Brignone topped speeds of 97km per hour as she clocked 57.81 seconds down the Engiadina course on a track shortened because of high winds.

It was the 31-year-old's 17th victory on the World Cup circuit and fifth in the super-G.

Curtoni was 0.11sec off Brignone's pace, while American Mikaela Shiffrin followed up on Saturday's podium showing with another third-place finish 0.32sec adrift.

Late starter Alice Robinson of New Zealand grabbed fourth (+0.52sec), just ahead of Austrian Ramona Siebenhofer.

In a remarkable day's skiing for Italy,



Saturday's second-placed finisher Sofia Goggia, Marta Bassino and Francesca Marsaglia ensured five Italian skiers in the top nine.

There was early drama, however, as the winner on Saturday and home favourite Gut-Behrami suffered a

heavy crash.

Leading the interval timings at the time, the Swiss skier skidded through two sets of safety netting.

After a lengthy period of on-piste treatment, Gut-Behrami was able to stand and walk away.

The weekend's racing was an unclassified success for Shiffrin in particular, the American slalom specialist honing her speed event skills in perfect timing ahead of February's Beijing Winter Olympics.

The four-time world slalom champion and double Olympic gold medallist won bronze in the super-G in the world championships in February this year and has said she wants to try to win more speed events this season. Her two third-placed finishes see Shiffrin consolidate her place atop the overall standings on 525 points with Goggia in second on 435.

AFP

## Three jockeys in hospital, two horses die in Hong Kong race fall



Yuga Kawada riding Loves Only You (left) beats Hishi Iguazu (centre) and Russian Emperor (right) to win the Hong Kong Cup international horse race at the Sha Tin race course in Hong Kong on Sunday (AFP)

Hong Kong, China - Three jockeys were taken to hospital and two horses died after a horror fall marred the Group One Hong Kong Sprint on Sunday, one of the highlights of the prestigious International Races at the famous Sha Tin track.

The distressing incident, in the fifth contest on Hong Kong's biggest day of racing, came as Lyle Hewitson's mount Amazing Star broke down as the field turned to enter the home straight in the 1,200 metre (six furlongs) contest.

Gallopers Lucky Patch, ridden by Zac Purton, Naboo Attack under Karis Teetan and Pixie Knight with Yuichi Fukunaga on board were caught in the melee and sent sprawling in distressing scenes.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club confirmed that Purton, Hewitson and Fukunaga were all in a stable condition after being taken to the

nearby Prince of Wales hospital.

Sadly, Amazing Star and Naboo Attack both had to be euthanised humanely as a result of their injuries.

Teetan walked away unscathed and was able to fulfil the rest of his rides.

The Caspar Fownes-trained Sky Field went onto to win the Sprint under Australian jockey Blake Shinn, who was understandably subdued after the race.

"I have mixed emotions for winning this race today," said Shinn after landing his first Group One victory in Hong Kong.

"Obviously the first emotion is that my feelings are with the fallen jockeys and horses out there. It's a real bitter-sweet win and in a way it's a hard win to take in the circumstances."

Golden Sixty lived up to his billing as the city's one true superstar in the Group One Hong Kong Mile.

Regular rider Vincent Ho Chak-yiu blew his rivals away in the straight to become the first horse to win 19 races in Hong Kong. "Well 19 (wins) is quite a lot but every race starts from zero so the next race is another uncertain race. When everything is over we'll see how great he is," Ho said.

The Japanese raiders were typically dominant, matching their output at last year's meeting with two victories.

Glory Vase won the Hong Kong Vase and Loves Only You lifted the feature Hong Kong Cup. Glory Vase, under star Brazilian jockey Joao Moreira, took out the Vase for the second time in three years.

Yoshito Yahagi's superstar mare Loves Only You bid the perfect farewell to racing with her third Group One victory of the year.

AFP

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