

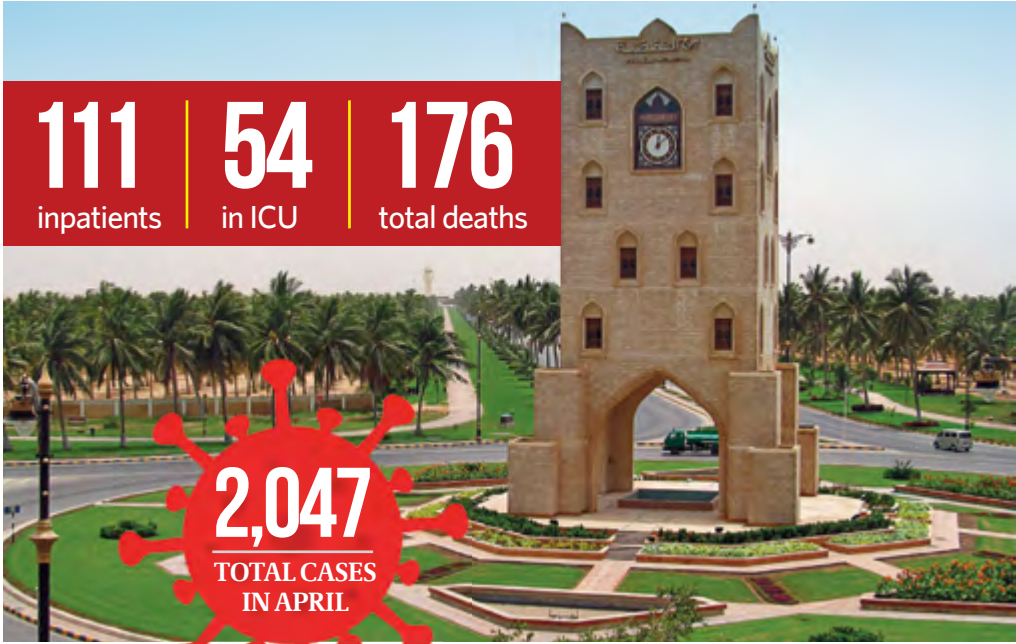


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FINAL FAREWELL TO PRINCE PHILIP
GO TO PAGE 09 WORLD

Dhofar in stricter night lockdown



Our Correspondent Muscat

With rising numbers of COVID-19 cases and spike in hospitalisations in Dhofar, the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the pandemic has extended the closure of commercial activities and ban on night movement in the governorate from 6pm to 5am starting Saturday until further notice.

ther notice.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) stated that it is ready to deal with the pandemic in the governorate and has increased capacity in all hospitals.

The committee, which met on Friday under the chairmanship of H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, hinted at more stringent measures - including complete closure

- to prevent the spread of the pandemic if the epidemiological situation calls for it.

The committee reviewed epidemiological reports from various governorates, which showed that Dhofar is witnessing a steady rise in cases while admitting a record number of patients for intensive care and deaths.

Continued on Page 03

Immunisation to be scaled in coming days

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman is in a race to ramp up its immunisation drive as the number of cases increases and worries of variants spread. So far, 173,789 doses of the two approved vaccines - Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca - have been administered in the country.

To meet the demand of vaccines, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said that 4,750,000 doses of the Pfizer jab will be supplied to the sultanate before the end of September, of which 1,350,000 will be supplied before the end of June. "Negotiations are

underway to obtain 250,000 shots this month," he said.

In an interview with Oman TV on a special Ramadan programme, H E Dr Sa'eedi said the country was among the first to join the international coalition COVAX comprising 190 countries, and was relying on it to obtain its requirement of doses.

"In some cases, production has been delayed by more than four months. It was hoped that thousands of doses would arrive in January and the months to follow, which did not happen. Six million vaccine doses are reserved for Oman. The problem is not the financial situation nor political reasons; Oman has good political relations with all countries," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

tries," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

Oman paid for ten per cent of the doses in October 2020 to the international coalition. So far, 265,000 doses have reached Oman and around 174,000 have been vaccinated.

H E Dr Sa'eedi informed that some companies have faced difficulties in clinical trials while others in the final stages did not prove their effectiveness or had to be withdrawn from the market.

According to H E Dr Sa'eedi, more than 90 per cent of workers in the health sector in Oman have been vaccinated, and before the beginning of the next academic year, all teaching staff, college students and children - 18 years and older - will be vaccinated.

VAT in effect, businesses cope with initial hiccups

Muscat - Value Added Tax (VAT) came into effect in Oman on April 16 prompting businesses to work in earnest to be prepared for the new tax regime. Supermarket staff worked overtime to replace price tags of products displayed on shelves.

"Putting new VAT applicable price tags in over 10,000 products on the shelves is a mammoth task," said Mohammed Iqbal, a supermarket manager in Ruwi.



Continued on Page 03

REGISTRATION WINDOW

Category	Persons having annual taxable supplies in rials	Mandatory Registration timeline	VAT implementation date
A	1,000,000 and more	Feb 1 to Mar 15, 2021	April 16, 2021
B	500,000-999,999	April 1 to May 31, 2021	July 1, 2021
C	250,000-499,999	July 1 to Aug 31, 2021	Oct 1, 2021
D	38,500-249,999	Dec 1 to Feb 28, 2022	April 1, 2022

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Suwaiq Charitable Team collects RO15,000 in 3 hours

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Suwaiq Charitable Team has launched a campaign to support needy families aptly called ‘Have you thought about those in need when preparing the iftar table in Ramadan’.

As part of its ongoing commitment to achieve social solidarity and spread love, the team of charity workers collected more than RO15,000 in three hours to help needy families.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Saeed al Badai, head of Suwaiq Charitable Team, said, “We operate under the umbrella of the Committee for Social Develop-

The volunteers included children and the team collected 34 food baskets, 20 sacks of flour, 2,220kg of dates and seven cartons of water

SAEED AL BADAI

ment in the Ministry of Social Development in Suwaiq. We launched the campaign on April 9 for only three hours, from 4pm to 7pm. The team sent volun-

teers of different age groups to 25 locations throughout Suwaiq to collect financial and food donations.”

The volunteers included children and the team collected 34 food baskets, 20 sacks of flour, 2,220kg of dates and seven cartons of water, besides the monetary donations, which will be distributed among 500 needy families during Ramadan.

“We also sponsor orphans and pay their house rent, electricity and water bills, and look after their nutritional needs. This year’s campaign aims to reduce the suffering of some families, including Omani employees who have been laid off. The team will

continue its charity work throughout the month and distribute gifts on Eid al Fitr,” Badai said.

In its efforts to help improve living standards of social security families and orphans, the team restored ten houses at a cost of RO10,535 and supported 49 children with RO10,050.

“We have received support from many people and want to cooperate with other volunteers and communities in Suwaiq to help needy families. We thank all the individuals and companies that have supported us.”

The team can be reached on Instagram and Twitter at @Suwaiq_team

LOW-KEY AFFAIR



Imam of a mosque in Muttrah breaks fast alone before the Maghrib prayer (Muscat Daily/Syed Fasiuddin)

Time to see beauty in everything

I always turn inwards, much more so than usual during the month of Ramadan. It’s a time to seek beauty in every form - part of my attempt at a spiritual renewal. It’s a spiritual process, but the first day is always the hardest.

For now, my body is already used to fasting and I no longer have symptoms of caffeine withdrawal in the morning at work. The headache that I used get because of dehydration has also started to subside. However, my brain has not started processing sentences as fast as I want it to.

But one thing I’m sure of is that Ramadan is here to teach us how to see beauty in everything. Whatever I do in Ramadan, I try as much as I can to see beauty in them.

Despite my efforts to stay healthy, on previous occasions I always forgot that walking and exercising are essential. But as I write this piece, I have come to realise it really matters and on this note, I’m happy to say that for the past three days, I have been successful in remembering to walk for at least an hour before iftar.

Please note that everything I say here may not be agreeable to all, but my words come from my experiences and may not be the same as others. There is debate over the merits and demerits of exercise while fasting but following the advice of those who have tried it, I see it works wonders.

In fact, while walking, my headaches seem to disappear. Walks make me feel energetic and the health experts I have consulted too have advised me to continue doing the same.

The point I am trying to make here is that Ramadan teaches us how to appreciate what we have and what we can do but we have to do these responsibly.

A point to remember is that since this Ramadan falls in the summer months, we have to fast longer hours. So, we have to drink lots of water in the evenings to remain hydrated. Again, we have to appreciate the abundance of drinking water that we have, hence making my point - seeing beauty in everything that we have.

Till we meet next, stay safe and see beauty in everything this Ramadan.

MY RAMADAN TAKE
Shaddad al Musalmi



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H E Munu Mahawar
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Restaurants, coffee shops bear the brunt of lockdown



(Muscat Daily/Syed Fasiuddin)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Night lockdown coupled with truncated business hours due to Ramadan is affecting restaurants and coffee shops. Most blue-collar workers too are in a fix.

Eateries, not open during the day time, used to make brisk business in the evening. But this time around, all such opportunities have dried up with night-time lockdown being enforced at 9pm.

Shahzad Khan, who runs a coffee shop in Ruwi, said he is facing serious problems because of the lockdown.

"The entire day we cannot open. During Ramadan all activities usually start immediately after iftar. But now, with the closure of business at 9pm we hardly get time for any sales. It is also taxing on our workers. We

are struggling to prepare iftars as well as regular food in a short period of time."

As a solution now they start work very early in the morning, he said.

He added that though there is

madans, we used to have people coming after iftar and sit for their dinners with grilled items but now we need to close everything by 8.30pm. It is tough."

Robiullal Mohammad, a Bangladeshi blue-collar worker,

restaurants used to function till late night. There was no problem finding food even after working and fasting all day. Things are different now. I think they should at least keep the takeaways open."

His friend Alam is diabetic and normally fasts for just a few days. But this year, he can't because of difficulty in arranging food.

"I used to fast for around ten days because of health issues, but this year I am not able to do that too in the fear of unavailability of food at night. I do my prayers only; I cook for my friends so that they can eat at night."

Most such workers either have their friends (even non-Muslims) who cook and keep a plate for them. Often when time permits, they too cook for themselves. Some even buy food in advance.

He added, "In previous years,

During previous Ramadans, we used to have people coming after iftar and sit for their dinners with grilled items but now we need to close by 8.30pm. It is tough

MOHAMMAD

a rush in the evening, it is difficult to serve customers because he and his staff too need to break fast and rush to serve simultaneously.

Mohammad, who sells grilled fish in Muttrah, said, "We start our work around 2. It's mostly takeaways. During previous Ra-

Sultanate opens door for all visa holders



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is allowing all visa holders to enter Oman except for those coming from the ten countries from which entry had been banned by the sultanate earlier.

The Supreme Committee had issued a decision on April 5 to restrict entry to the sultanate to citizens and residency visa holders only starting from April 8.

However, the Civil Aviation Authority on Friday said that after coordinating with the authorities, the earlier decision has been updated to allow all visa holders to enter Oman.

"All valid visa holders are welcome to Oman, regardless of the type and date of issue. Of course, except those coming from the ten countries that have been put on ban list," it said.

Travel advisory for India

New Delhi, India - The sultanate's embassy in New Delhi has advised against travel to India, except in unavoidable circumstances, due to the steady increase in COVID-19 cases in the country.

The Supreme Committee had issued a decision in February banning all arrivals from Sudan, Lebanon, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Ethiopia.

The ban also applies to arrivals from other countries who have passed through any of these countries within 14 days prior to coming to the sultanate.

VAT in effect, businesses cope with initial hiccups

Continued on Page 01

"We requested permission to work overnight during the lockdown which was denied," he informed.

Shakeer Hussain, manager at Grand Hypermarket in Ruwi, said, "We have 50,000 products on our shelves of prices ranging from 50bz to RO250. Replacing the price tags of such a large number of items is the biggest test of VAT implementation."

The timing of implementation, in the midst of COVID-19 measures when businesses are closing earlier and during Ramadan when work slows down, further added the challenge. "To avoid inconvenience to customers, we put a notice about the new tax and started price tag update process well in advance. We worked overtime to update the price tags," Hussain informed.

Disruption in supplies

"The last batch of supplies from

distributors was on April 14; hopefully they will restart on April 18," said Hussain. "But we pre-empted the situation and stocked supplies keeping the supply disruption in mind."

Pointing at his half-empty shelves, Iqbal said, "Our suppliers stopped taking orders saying they will restart once VAT is implemented."

Mubashir A M, field sales manager at Enhance Oman, a brand distribution and retail management solutions provider, described the timing of VAT implementation as 'perfect'. "We just needed to stop our services for one day on Thursday, April 15, and any case, we do not deliver on Fridays and Saturdays. We will start operations as usual from Sunday, April 18."

Enhance Oman started preparing for VAT implementation more than two months ago, Mubashir claimed. "The only challenge for us is the confusion of small players who are not yet

registered and do not know how to account the added VAT cost."

Adjustment of extra cost

M Abraham's business in auto spare parts comes under the lowest category, but most of his suppliers are in the RO1mn category which is in the first phase of registration. "While our category will be allowed to register at a later stage, our suppliers are already charging us five per cent VAT. We do not know how to adjust this extra cost we are paying till we get the VAT registration certificate," Abraham said.

Replying to a query on the registration timeframe of small businesses, Aastha Rangan, director of VAT Services at Crowe Oman, said, "Whether a business offers a service or buys goods from a taxable company, in both scenarios business owners can claim the VAT credit."

(Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin)

Dhofar under stricter night lockdown

Continued on Page 01

The committee stressed on strict adherence of guidelines on social distancing, wearing of face masks in public places and mosques, and avoiding funeral, wedding and iftar gatherings.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services in Dhofar, there were 111 inpatients,

54 in ICUs and ten on ventilators till April 15. The number of deaths recorded till now in the governorate is 176.

Dhofar registered 2,047 new cases in April, the highest this year, while March recorded 1,850 cases. In 2020, the number of daily cases peaked in July at 2,112, while it went over a

thousand in September (1,253) and October (1,223).

Reacting to social media rumours about the situation in Dhofar, MoH said that there is no truth in the reports regarding the lack of ventilators in Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah. It called upon all to receive correct information from official sources.



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Oman marks World Heritage Day today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate is celebrating the World Heritage Day with the rest of the world today.

Proposed by the International Council for Monuments and Sites in 1982 for a day to be marked as an International Day for Monuments and Sites, the Unesco General Assembly passed a resolution in 1983 declaring April 18 each year as World Heritage Day. The theme this year is 'Complex Pasts. Diverse Futures'.

Oman has a number of monuments and historical sites that have been the focus of international praise. Some of them have been included in the list of tangible and intangible heritage of the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (Unesco).

According to a statement from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the sultanate offers an important model in caring for the heritage and preserving it to protect the cultural and historical



(Supplied photo)

identity of the people in a world that is changing rapidly.

Heritage houses
The traditional houses in Oman are considered an important ar-

chitectural heritage because of their unique and varied elements. Traditional buildings often differ from one region to another. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has been undertaking

surveys and documenting heritage houses, with the aim of preserving them, and opening way for future architectural studies.

The ministry also launched a campaign for the maintenance

and reconstruction work of the Al Owainah Mosque in the wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid in North Sharqiyah governorate. The mosque is distinguished and known for its engraved heritage niches. The ministry also transferred the mosque's mihrab, with all its components, through a complex and delicate process to be displayed at the National Museum.

Historical location
Among the most important achievements in the recent past has been the discovery of the Aqeer al Shomous site in the wilayat of Yanqul, which is the first archaeological site associated with mining and producing soapstone in Oman and the wider Arabian Gulf.

The archaeological surveys carried out by the ministry, in co-operation with the Polish University of Warsaw, revealed three important archaeological sites in Qumayrah area in the wilayat of Dhank, whose history extends from the Neolithic period to the Islamic era.

MoC with PDO to save geo-heritage sites
The ministry signed a Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) with Petroleum Development Oman in January this year to protect and conserve several geological heritage sites in Oman.

The MoC aims to ensure the sustainability of these sites, which are considered important national heritage locations, and tourist destinations of global scientific significance.

The memorandum aims to establish a mechanism to rehabilitate some important Omani geo-heritage sites to protect and preserve them and to promote them as tourist destinations that highlight the diversity of Oman's rich geo-heritage.

The areas of collaboration also include providing scientific and technical support to protect endangered geological sites, as well as preparing files for geo parks in the sultanate and identifying them to register one or two sites subsequently in the List of Unesco Global Geoparks (UGGPs).



(Supplied photo)

Ministry uses drones to fight dubas bug

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to protect agricultural crops, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is using drones along with traditional methods to spray pesticides over large areas in order to combat dubas bug in palms in several governorates.

The ministry has started a pesticides spraying campaign to combat the spread of the bug in an area of 6,500 acres in the wilayats of North and South Sharqiyah.

An official at the ministry, said, "A team of specialists recently began a campaign against dubas bug in 6000 acres of the villages of Samail, Izki and Nizwa in Dakhliyah governorate." The team has also targeted 1,200 acres in Muscat, 470 acres in the wilayat of Mahdah in Buraimi.

"The ministry used drones to spray pesticides in some villages in Samail, Nizwa and Izki as part of its efforts to introduce modern technology in the speedy completion of tasks," said the official.

The ministry is cooperating with Wakan Tech to use drones in spraying operations.

Wilayat in S Batinah harvests 3 tonnes of wheat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Wheat farming is steadily growing in Oman as it is one of the important staple crops in the country. As a step to achieve self-sufficiency in food, a number of farmers in the wilayat of Wadi al Ma'awel in South Batinah governorate have begun harvesting three tonnes of wheat from seven acres.

The cultivation of wheat has proved to be successful in the sultanate as it grows in hot

weather and requires less fertiliser.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is seeking to encourage farmers to take an interest in cultivating wheat and provide technical support to them, an official said.

According to statistics of the ministry, wheat production in the sultanate reached 961.67 tonnes in 2018-19. Statistics indicate that the cultivated areas of wheat amounted to 1,167 acres, with 1,627 farmers engaged in the production.

The official said, "The wilayat of Ibbi recorded the highest production with 293.8 tonnes, followed by 142.3 tonnes in the wilayat of Bahla, 99.2 in the wilayat of Dhank, 93.2 in the wilayat of Yanqul and 55.1 tonnes in the wilayat of Nizwa. The wheat growing season started in mid February 2018 with harvesting done in March and April 2019."

Meanwhile, as part of its efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in agricultural crops and support local farmers, the ministry signed

a memorandum of cooperation with Oman Flour Mills. As per the pact, Oman Flour Mills buys wheat from Omani farmers at a rate of RO500 per tonne.

Oman Flour Mills company earlier in April received the first batch of Omani wheat, estimated to be weighing around 830 tonnes, which was harvested this season by 44 farmers. It was received at the company's factory in Muttrah and the flour produced from this Omani wheat will be available in the market soon.

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Bank Muscat's Q1 profit rises 42% on lower provisions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat's net profit for the first quarter of 2021 rose 41.8 per cent to RO47.15mn compared to RO33.25mn net profit recorded in the same period of 2020, according to the bank's preliminary unaudited financial results announced on Thursday.

The sharp rise in the first quarter net profit was mainly due to lower provisions recorded by the bank this year compared to the first quarter of 2020.

Bank Muscat's net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing increased by 3.1 per cent to RO83.74mn for the three months period ended March 31, 2021 compared to RO81.23mn for the same period in 2020. Non-interest income rose by 9.6 per cent to RO37.68mn in the first quarter of 2021 as compared to RO34.39mn for the same period in 2020.

The bank's operating expenses during the January-March period of 2021 decreased by 6.9 per cent to RO47.11mn as compared to RO50.60mn for the same period in 2020.

Bank Muscat said that net impairment for credit and other losses for the first three months of 2021 dropped at RO18.08mn



Bank Muscat's net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) increased by 2.2 per cent to RO9.278bn as of March 31, 2021 from RO9.076bn a year ago

as compared to RO25.73mn recorded in the same period of last year.

'The decrease in net impairment (for credit and other losses) is mainly attributed

to the precautionary and collective provisions created by the bank during the first quarter of 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the historic decline seen in global crude oil prices,' Bank Muscat said in a press statement.

The bank added that it remains vigilant of the continuing stress in the macroeconomic and

business conditions and its potential impacts.

Bank Muscat's loan-book grew by 2.2 per cent in the first quarter of this year as net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) increased to RO9.278bn as of March 31, 2021 from RO9.076bn a year ago.

Of total loans and advances, Bank Muscat's conventional loans and advances marginally increased by 0.8 per cent to RO7.960bn at the end of first quarter of 2021, while Islamic financing receivables substantially grew by 11.5 per cent to RO1.318bn.

Total customer deposits (including Islamic customer deposits) increased by 2.1 per cent to RO8.446bn as of March 31, 2021 against RO8.269bn a year ago.

Of total deposits, Bank Muscat's conventional customer deposits increased by 1.8 per cent to RO7.372bn in the first quarter of 2021, while Islamic customer deposits rose by 4.6 per cent to RO1.074bn.

Bank Muscat said its full results for the first quarter along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the board of directors at its meeting scheduled later during April.



Bank lending up 4% in February; deposits rise 5%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The total outstanding credit extended by Oman's banking sector grew by 4 per cent to RO26.9bn at the end of February 2021 compared to the same period a year ago, according to the monthly statistical bulletin issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Of the total outstanding credit, private sector accounted for RO23.1bn of total banking sector credit in February this year and registered a modest year-on-year credit growth of 1.4 per cent.

The shares of non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) in total private sector credit stood at 46.7 per cent and 45.2 per cent, respectively.

The share of financial corporations was 4.8 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.3 per cent of total private sector credit as of end-February 2021.

As per the CBO data, Oman's conventional banks recorded an year-on-year credit growth of 2.9 per cent as of end-February 2021. Islamic banking entities,

on the other hand, provided financing of RO4.4bn at the end of February 2021, recording a growth of 9.9 per cent.

The CBO data showed that total deposits held with the banking sector grew by 5 per cent to RO24.8bn at the end of February 2021. Of total deposits, private sector deposits increased by 10.7 per cent to RO17bn.

In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the share of households deposits stood at 51 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 32.4 per cent, financial corporations at 14.1 per cent and the other sectors at 2.5 per cent.

Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 4.1 per cent year-on-year to RO20.9bn at end-February 2021.

Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 10 per cent to RO3.8bn.

Total assets of Islamic banks and windows increased by 11 per cent on a year-on-year basis to RO5.4bn and constituted about 14.5 per cent of the banking system's assets as at end-February 2021.

Phase 2 of Al Mazunah Free Zone 90% completed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Mazunah Free Zone has recorded a 90 per cent completion rate on the phase 2 infrastructure development project, which will enable the free zone to attract and accommodate more companies.

Al Mazunah Free Zone, which is operated by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estate (Madayn), is located close to the Omani-Yemeni border. The strategic location of the zone makes it the Gulf gateway for transit trading to Yemen and the countries of East Africa.

As per the information pub-

lished in *Duqm Economist*, the quarterly magazine issued by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the management of Al Mazunah Free Zone has launched the services and facilities building project with a cost of over RO3mn. The building includes offices, shops and show-

rooms, and it is expected to be completed by mid-2022.

As per *Duqm Economist*, Al Mazunah Free Zone marked a remarkable growth during 2020. The total value of goods received in the zone during the first half of 2020 surged to RO334.4 mn as compared to RO143.4mn in the same period of 2019.

Likewise, the volume of goods, which entered into the zone increased from 129,000 tonnes in the first half of 2019 to more than 210,000 tonnes in the same period of 2020. The number of vehicles entering has doubled to 19,384 vehicles in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

CMA board of directors approves clearing and settlement regulation

Muscat - The board of directors of the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Thursday held its first meeting of 2021 under the chairmanship of H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and chairman of the CMA board.

The CMA board approved the issuance of the clearing and settlement regulations to match the best global practices in the field. The board took into account that the draft regulation would keep pace with the laws and legislations issued by the



specialised departments concerned.

The meeting endorsed audited closing accounts of the

CMA, investors fund, insurance emergency fund and casualties fund for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2020, as well as the

auditors' report.

The board also took note of the executive process towards the implementation of compulsory health insurance scheme (Dhamani) envisaged in the sultanate, following updates on co-ordination with the departments concerned.

The board also approved the cancellation of licence given to Al Maha Financial Services Company for operation in the field of securities (upon the firm's request).
ONA

OPEC+ will slowly increase oil output after April, says Alexander Novak

Moscow, Russia - The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, known as OPEC+, will gradually increase the oil production between May and July, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak was quoted by Interfax news agency as saying on Friday.

The former energy minister refers to a recent deal of OPEC+ ministers according to which the major oil producing countries will increase their output after April.



Alexander Novak

The group's production will increase by 2.1mn barrels per day (bpd) until the end of

July, easing the current production cut of 7.9mn bpd.

Novak also said that Russia's Energy Ministry was ready to support export curbs on oil products in order to bolster the domestic market.

The minister also said his country had drawn up a roadmap for how to integrate their oil industries.

"We have already signed a roadmap for electrical energy, while a roadmap for oil and oil products is waiting to be signed," Novak told a

news conference in Minsk as reported by Anadolu Agency.

A similar detailed strategy for Russian-Belarusian cooperation in the gas industry is being finalised, Novak said.

In 2019, Russia and Belarus agreed to develop approximately 30 'roadmaps' to facilitate integration across multiple spheres. The signing of the agreement marked the 20th anniversary of the two neighbours forming a Union State.
Agencies

BOSE

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so you can sleep better, all night long.

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX index edges down as financial stocks drop

MSX30, the benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), last week recorded a marginal decline of 0.03 per cent. Financial sector index closed in red i.e. down by 0.34 per cent, while Industrial and Services indices rose by 2.9 per cent and 1.1 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index was higher by 0.61 per cent.

Many companies listed on the MSX announced their initial financial results for the first quarter of 2021 on Thursday.

At the time of preparation of this report only 63 companies with year-end in December announced the results.

As of the first quarter of 2021, total market profitability stood at RO926mn compared to RO266mn in the fourth quarter of 2020 and RO55.2mn in the first quarter of 2020. Financial sector's net income stood at RO74.3mn, followed by industrial sector at RO15mn and services sector at RO2.6mn.

We have seen good recovery in industrial and service sector profitability compared to fourth quarter of 2020.

Local news

►Oman implemented value added tax (VAT) last week on April 16, 2021. The VAT is expected to raise about RO400mn annually and generate approximately 1.5 per cent of the value of GDP. The 5 per cent tax will be imposed on most goods and services, with the exemption of a specific set of goods and services, rendered to consumers at outlets

throughout the sultanate. It will also be imposed on imports of goods to the sultanate, except the ones exempted by law. The list of goods and services exempted from the VAT includes healthcare, education, financial services, and basic food items and supplies for persons with special needs, among other items and services.

►Al Hassan Engineering Company has announced an award of new project with Strategic and Precious Metals Processing Company, for services of C300 main works for approximately RO1.04mn.

The execution period will be 6 months starting from April 2021. The company expects reasonable profit from this project.

►ACWA Power announced that a steam turbine of its power plant was taken out of service for a planned outage up until April 9, 2021 to conduct routine maintenance and to identify the reason behind certain observations made on its generator during operation. Electrical tests of generator rotor and borescope inspection revealed the presence of open circuit in couple of its coils.

This situation required the generator rotor to be opened to assess the extent of problem and required remedial measures.

The repair is estimated to take ten weeks from now which will result a revenue loss of circa RO1.8mn in addition to the likely repair cost of RO0.5mn.

►Last week His Majesty Sultan



Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the principal committee of the National Program of Fiscal Balance.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed financial and economic developments in the country as a result of efforts made in implementing programmes and initiatives of the Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024). His Majesty expressed his satisfaction over procedures carried out by the government in this regard. His Majesty gave his Royal directives to all officials of the government to follow up on livelihood conditions of citizens in order to secure fair standards of decent living for them.

►A new food processing cluster, anchored by a flour mill, is being established in the Salalah

Free Zone - the latest in a series of food hubs in various stages of planning and implementation across the sultanate. The food sector is one of the fastest growing industries in the sultanate - its growth powered partly by the government's aggressive quest to secure the country's basic food requirements, and partly by the development of a wider ecosystem that, along with agro, fish and livestock processing, is fueling new investments into this rapidly expanding segment of the Omani economy.

►Total number of guests in hotel properties of the 3 to 5 star category in the sultanate fell 47.2 per cent to 169,465 in February 2021, compared to 320,816 guests for the same period of 2020. Meanwhile, the

occupancy rate slumped to 49.7 per cent, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Total revenues of these hotels also fell to RO6.515mn in February compared to RO23.35mn during the same period of the previous year.

►Oman's unemployment rate stood at 2.8 per cent in February 2021 compared to 3 per cent in January 2021.

Unemployment amongst women stood at 9.2 per cent while the same amongst males stood at 1.4 per cent in February 2021.

The age group 15-24, recorded the highest unemployment at 14.9 per cent, followed by 6.2 per cent for the

age group 25-29 and 2.1 per cent for the age group 30-34. In terms of unemployment by educational status, highest was at 10.1 per cent for the people with a higher diploma.

►The inflation rate in the sultanate, measured by movement in the average consumer price index (CPI), fell by 0.37 per cent in March 2021 compared to the same month of 2020, according to the latest data released by the NCSI.

The inflation rate in March increased by 0.5 per cent compared to February 2021.

Global news

Total OPEC crude oil production averaged 25.04mn barrels per day (bpd) in March 2021, up by 0.20mn bpd compared to the previous month.

Crude oil output increased mainly in Iran, Angola, Libya and Iraq, while production decreased primarily in Saudi Arabia.

The share of OPEC crude oil in total global production was down by 0.1 per cent in March to 26.9 per cent compared with the previous month.

The annual inflation rate in the US jumped to 2.6 per cent in March of 2021 from 1.7 per cent in February, slightly above market forecasts of 2.5 per cent. It is the highest reading since August, 2018 with main upward pressure coming from energy (13.2 per cent in March vs 3.7 per cent in February), namely petrol (22.5 per cent in March vs 1.6 per cent in February) and utility gas service (9.8 per cent

in March vs 6.7 in February).

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic are weighing on prices since in March 2020 many businesses closed and lockdowns were imposed, denting economic activity. Also, a jump in commodities and material costs, coupled with supply constraints, are pushing producer prices up and some companies are passing those costs to clients.

Recommendation

Earnings season has kicked-off internationally as well as regionally. Internationally, big banks are reporting better than expected earnings. Inflation numbers in US were not as high as expected which led the markets to further new highs.

Regionally, investors are geared up for a recovery in company earnings as economies rebound from the worst of the coronavirus pandemic.

We see petrochemical companies announcing good numbers and the same is expected by the banking and other sectors.

In Oman, we advise investors to go through initial financial results disclosures in order to vet their investment focus on sectors which are expected to perform better in the economic recovery phase.

Most banks have reported a drop in net expected credit losses, further solidifying the recovery theme. Industrial firms are also doing well on the back of the rise in commodity prices.

By special arrangement with U Capital

China GDP grows record 18.3% in first quarter in coronavirus rebound

Beijing, China - China's economy expanded at a record pace in the first quarter as the country continued its rapid recovery from last year's pandemic-fuelled slump, official data showed.

The 18.3 per cent explosion in gross domestic product (GDP) growth was the fastest pace since quarterly records began three decades ago, but came off a historic contraction in 2020 during the depths of the pandemic.

It was also slightly short of forecasts in an AFP survey of economists.

While the coronavirus first emerged in central China in late 2019, the country was also the quickest to bounce back after authorities imposed strict control measures and consumers stayed home.

"The national economy made a good start," National Bureau of Statistics spokeswoman Liu Aihua told reporters.

The sharp spike was partly due to 'incomparable factors such as the low base figure of last year and increase of working days due to staff staying put during the Lunar New Year' holiday, said Liu.

Migrant workers were urged to remain in the areas where they work during the break owing to fears that the annual massive migration might lead to local outbreaks.

On a quarterly basis, GDP rose 0.6 per cent from the last quarter of 2020, slowing slightly, a shift analysts attrib-



An employee works at a speaker production line in a factory in Fuyang in China's eastern Anhui province on Friday (AFP)

uted to a wave of local virus outbreaks which triggered travel restrictions and lockdowns.

Retail outperformance

In a sign that the country's crucial consumer sector is getting back up to pace, the figures showed retail sales surged in March, bringing first-quarter growth to 33.9 per cent as life largely returned to normal.

Industrial output rose a less-than-estimated 24.5 per cent in the quarter.

The figures come days after officials announced that exports - and particularly imports - had rocketed in March.

Liu, however, warned that the international landscape still contained 'high uncertainties'.

While vaccines are being rolled out around the world, the distribution is uneven and a pick-

up in infections is forcing governments to reimpose containment measures, holding back recovery.

The urban unemployment rate, a figure analysts have been closely watching, ticked down slightly to 5.3 per cent.

But economists expect growth drivers could change in the months ahead and have warned of an 'uneven' recovery so far.

"Industrial production has been taking the lead in recovery last year, and it looks a bit tired now," said UOB economist Ho Woei Chen.

"There is expectation that with retail sales' outperformance and a recovering job market, that there is momentum picking up in private consumption," she told AFP, adding that this should take over the lead in growth later in the year.

AFP

EU-UK mega trade deal passes key vote

Brussels, Belgium - The ratification of the EU's massive trade deal with Britain easily cleared a key hurdle in the European Parliament, with MEPs demanding further reassurances on the thorny issue of Northern Ireland.

Meeting jointly, the trade and foreign affairs committees gave their approval with 108 votes in favour, one against and four abstentions, in a necessary step before a full session of parliament votes on the ratification of the deal.

The EU-UK trade pact has been provisionally applied since January 1, after nine months of tough negotiations and a last-minute handshake just before Christmas last year.

The UK parliament has ratified the deal. But European lawmakers were given until April 30th to have their say, with



tensions simmering over the consequences of Brexit on Northern Ireland where violence has erupted.

Ties between the EU and UK have not improved since the deal was clinched, with several cross-Channel arguments, including over access to stocks of the AstraZeneca vaccine against

COVID-19 pandemic.

MEPs are concerned about a protocol included in the Brexit divorce deal designed to prevent the emergence of a 'hard border' between Northern Ireland, which remains part of the United Kingdom, and its EU neighbour, the Republic of Ireland.

They are linking the outcome

of the border argument with their decision to carry out the trade deal's final ratification, which needs to take place before the end of the month or risk sowing economic chaos.

Lawmakers said political group leaders will decide this week whether the ratification will go to a full vote in time.

"The impact of Brexit has definitely real life consequences and I think the flare-up of violence in Northern Ireland has made this abundantly clear," said MEP Christian Hansen, who is leading the trade pact's ratification.

"While the protocol of Northern Ireland is certainly part of the complex mix of reasons for the flare-up, it is up to the UK government to own up to the agreement it has co-signed," he added.

AFP

Bezos says Amazon needs better 'vision'

San Francisco, US - Amazon founder Jeff Bezos told investors the e-commerce giant needs a better 'vision' for its workers, just days after an effort to create the company's first labour union was defeated.

Defending Amazon's treatment of employees, Bezos laid out a new goal for the company to be 'Earth's best employer and Earth's safest place to work', in his final letter as chief executive.

"Despite what we've accomplished, it's clear to me that we need a better vision for our employees' success," Bezos said in the letter.

Bezos will remain chairman of the board after he resigns as chief executive later this year, handing control of Amazon to



Jeff Bezos

Andy Jassy of the company's cloud services unit.

A contentious unionisation drive at an Amazon warehouse in the southern US state of Alabama failed as a vote count showed a wide majority of workers rejecting the move.

"Bezos's admission today demonstrates that what we have been saying about workplace conditions is correct," said Stuart Appelbaum, president of the union that vied to represent Amazon workers.

"But his admission won't change anything, workers need a union - not just another Amazon public relations effort in damage control."

Bezos contended that he took no comfort in the unionisation failure. "While the voting results were lopsided and our direct relationship with employees is strong, it's clear to me that we need a better vision for how we create value for employees," Bezos said in the letter.

He rejected news reports that

he said unfairly portray Amazon workers as 'desperate souls and treated as robots'.

"That's not accurate," Bezos said.

"They're sophisticated and thoughtful people who have options for where to work."

Unions and political leaders have argued that Amazon employees face constant pressure and monitoring, with little job protection, highlighting the need for collective bargaining.

Amazon has argued that most of its workers don't want or need a union and that it already provides more than most other employers, with a minimum US\$15 hourly wage and other benefits.

AFP

One winner gets RO100,000 in Ahli Islamic's Qitaf draw

Encouraging individuals to chase their dreams by saving more to win more, Ahli Islamic has announced one lucky winner of its first quarterly draw under the bank's Sharia'a-compliant 2021 Qitaf programme. The Ahli Islamic accountholder walked away with a generous prize money of RO100,000.

The draw was held by Al Wisal FM live stream.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, deputy general manager and head of Ahli Islamic said, "Qitaf reflects our efforts towards providing unique savings opportunities that suit the needs of our customers, and instill a culture of savings among them. The Sharia'a-compliant prize draw scheme rewards their commitment through quarterly, monthly, weekly and special event draws. As a progressive step in this direction, the bank has added new categories in its new 2021 Qitaf programme, to provide maximised chances of winning for its customers.

"Ahli Islamic will continue to offer innovative and attractive programs to reward its customers, while encouraging them to adopt positive financial practices to achieve their goals in the long term."

Qitaf prize scheme not only supports and encourages a culture of savings among the people of the sultanate, but also helps



them to invest their capital in profitable assets, in accordance to the bank's criteria that is based on the Islamic Mudaraba principles.

Rawahi added, "Ahli Islamic is on a consistent path of growth, delivering an innovative portfolio of products and services, that

meet the needs of its customers and benefits them in multiple ways - providing them a financially sound living, securing their future, and enabling their aspirations.

"On behalf of Ahli Islamic, I would like to congratulate the lucky winner of the first quarterly

Qitaf draw, Abdul Wahid al Mursidi. We hope this prize will help him achieve his dreams. We also invite our customers to continue saving to have greater opportunities to win."

Qitaf account holders are eligible to participate in the draws if they maintain an average min-

imum balance of RO50 for children dedicated draws and RO100 for monthly and weekly draws.

However, the minimum eligibility criteria for the quarterly draw is RO1,000. The Qitaf cash prize is decided through a draw system, subject to criteria set by the bank.

The 2021 Qitaf scheme will reward an increased number of customers with prizes totaling more than RO1,250,000, across its branches in the sultanate. Qitaf account holders automatically enter the main categories of draws.

A dedicated children's weekly prize draw have three winners from each branch rewarded with RO50 each; and another two general category winners from each branch winning RO250 each on a weekly basis.

In addition to the grand quarterly prize draw in March, June, September and December, in which the bank rewards four lucky winners with a total prize of RO400,000, the bank also conducts monthly draws within eight months of the year and offers cash prizes totaling RO160,000, distributed equally among eight winners (RO20,000 each).

The bank announces all details of the Qitaf prize scheme on its website and social media pages.



Fly to US with Oman Air and Qatar Airways

Oman Air announced that its expanded codeshare cooperation with Qatar Airways offers Oman Air guests the flexibility to fly to ten destinations in the USA with the ease and convenience offered by connecting flights in Doha, Qatar.

Now within easier reach from Muscat are New York (JFK), Houston (IAH), Chicago (ORD), Philadelphia (PHL), Los Angeles (LAX), Miami (MIA), Dallas (DFW), Boston (BOS), San Francisco (SFO), and Washington, DC (IAD).

Oman Air chief executive officer Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi commented on Oman Air's growing commercial cooperation with Qatar Airways as a win-win for both carriers, offering greater flexibility and seamless connec-

tivity for business and leisure travellers flying between Muscat and the USA.

"Our enhanced codeshare agreement with Qatar Airways, an airline with remarkable reach and reputation around the world, facilitates travel between Oman and some of the most celebrated cities in the US while at the same time offering travellers from North America an easy way to connect to Oman's breathtaking beauty, rich and diverse culture, and authentic hospitality."

Commercial cooperation between Oman Air and Qatar Airways began in 2000 with the aim to significantly increase the number of destinations. To date, Oman Air guests can fly to 66 additional points on the Qatar Airways' network.

Tally Solutions simplifies implementation of VAT for business community in Oman

Tally Solutions, an international business management software provider, recently hosted a virtual event 'Ask the Expert' to address queries on Value Added Tax (VAT) in Oman. Industry experts in the region were present to share insights and developments, as well as prepare the business community for the upcoming changes in the most effective way.

The session moderated by Vikas Panchal, business head-Middle East, Tally Solutions, witnessed the presence of industry and subject matter experts like Aastha Rangan, FCA director - VAT Advisory Crowe Oman, Santosh Kumar, FCA CFO, Oman Refreshment Company and Manoharan Palerichal, CEO, founding partner Emirates Chartered Accountants Group.

The discussion was attended by several small and medium business owners and focused on resolving queries around VAT registration processes, difference



Vikas Panchal

between the VAT in Oman as compared to other GCC countries, its long-term impact on business community, an evaluation post implementation, etc.

The attendees also engaged in a one-on-one conversation with the experts to clarify queries related to VAT.

Vikas Panchal, business head - Tally Solutions said, "Imple-

mentation of VAT will impact the finances and day to day operations, and it is important that business owners and entrepreneurs have comprehensive knowledge on the subject.

"We are relentlessly working towards educating them on the subject and providing right technology so they can seamlessly transition to the new regime. Over the next few months, our aim will be to assist them, in this journey through several such events, knowledge camps, webinars etc."

While the experts addressed several doubts of the audience, Tally emphasised on the role of technology in being compliant and simplifying the daily business operation for enhanced productivity.

The company has recently launched its VAT ready software TallyPrime, with an aim to assist the Oman business owners towards an easy transition to the new tax regime.

TallyPrime is available for purchase through Tally's strong network of partners on the ground who are trained on VAT compliance or by visiting their website at www.tallysolutions.com

Tally has been present in the GCC for over a decade which has enabled them to get a thorough understanding of the businesses and their requirements.

With the roll out of VAT in Oman, the company is hosting several educational events and webinars like Oman VAT Summit, VAT Chalk-Talk, etc with subject matter experts to resolve any apprehension of the business owners.

The company is committed to help Oman make a smooth transition to the new tax regime and remain VAT compliant.

Tally has focused on generating a high level of awareness on the significant developments surrounding VAT not only in Oman, but also in the UAE, Bahrain and KSA.

MHD ACERE launches Auto Expert

Well-known Omani business conglomerate - Mohsin Haider Darwish's (MHD) ACERE cluster announced that it has forayed into a new line of business with 'Auto Expert', an advanced diagnostic training and development centre, which has been launched with the aim to become a one-stop-shop for scheduled maintenance, service and repairs of all kinds of vehicles.

Located in Azaiba next to Super Plaza, Auto Expert offers quality services at cost effective prices keeping in mind the needs of individual as well as fleet customers and their vehicles. The facility caters to the accessorisation, detailing, polishing, window tinting, smart repairs, accident repairs, and paint jobs for all kinds of vehicle brands.

Speaking on the sidelines of the launch of the facility, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of Mohsin Haider Darwish's ACERE division commented, "With the transportation infrastructure needing an overhaul; and with new car sales going up each year, we re-



alise that there is quite a demand for quality repairs. Today's vehicle require sophisticated diagnostic equipment and trained technicians to maintain and repair them. The investment in equipment for this type of technology and team presents a great opportunity for us to aggressively market to customers who want affordable and convenient car care and repairs, through Auto Expert."

Some of the services offered at Auto Expert include Scheduled Maintenance Service: Engine oil and filter replacement, Standard Check point service, Auto Air condition Service: A/C performance test, check system pressure, check condenser and radiator cooling fan operation, inspect all A/C components for

wear, leaks and proper operation, evacuate and recharge system; Complete Cooling System Service: Check all hoses, belts; pressure test system, check heater, defroster and cooling fan operation, flush and recycle antifreeze, correct coolant mixture to a 50/50 mixture, check for leaks.

The facility also provides Engine Diagnostic Service: Fuel pressure test, code retrieval and vacuum testing; Brake System (front & rear): Remove and replace pads or shoes, resurface rotors or drums; inspect brake line and components and test parking brake; Engine Tune Up: Replace plugs, fuel filter, minor adjustment and scope test if needed; Transmission Flush: Hook up flush machine adding flushing cleaner to transmission, etc.

Happy customer shares his experience with JAC T8 Pick-up

The partnership of JAC Motors and Towell Auto Centre in 2008 has led to a realm of reliable and luxurious JAC commercial vehicles in Oman. Just recently Towell Auto Centre added an exciting range of JAC passenger and light commercial vehicles to their line-up.

Among JAC's dynamic range of vehicles is the power packed, high octane T8 pick-up.

Having the slogan of "Get more done for an unbelievable price", the JAC T8 Pick-up 2.0lt Turbo surely lives up to its reputation. It is available in 2WD or 4WD and in Classic or Luxury configurations, enabling a powerful, fun-filled performance for off-road enthusiasts and an excellent business transport solution for those living and working

in the sultanate's cities and rural areas.

Consumers vouch on JAC T8's affordability and fantastic specifications such as Cruise Control, Bluetooth, 360 degree camera, Central Locking, Active Steering and ABS (Anti-lock Brake System) among others.

In the T8, owners get the legendary reliability of JAC's commercial range coupled with its built to last looks.

We recently had the pleasure of hearing from a happy and satisfied T8 customer.

Majid Hamed al Hasani got his JAC T8 Pick-up from TAC almost three months back. He uses it for his stable requirements that is for carrying horse feed, water and transporting horses.



His JAC T8 is also used during competitions specifically for carrying the horse trailer.

When asked how his experience has been with the vehicle, he said, "I am extremely satisfied with my JAC T8. It has excellent performance and is extremely powerful, very smooth and absolutely comfortable."

"My daily usage is rough and I work with tight schedules; the T8 perfectly accommodates the same. I am very content and satisfied with the after sales service of Towell Auto Centre who are very punctual and organised. One of T8's most unique attributes is that it is economical and consumes very less fuel."

"My personal and professional life both have been elevated courtesy my JAC T8. To

add to all this its elegant design is super impressive. It is a multi-purpose product and can be used for my office needs, family, farm and leisure."

Keen to have a look at JAC's vehicles?

Towell Auto Centre would be thrilled to have you experience their latest JAC range at one of their authorised dealerships located across the country.

To find out more about each model visit www.jacoman.com.

In Oman, TAC is recognised as a trusted name in customer service and a pioneer in the automobile business since 1972. A group company of the W J Towell Group, TAC takes off from the principle of its parent company and ensures the easy availability of high quality motor products.

Infiniti Oman extends greetings for Ramadan

Infiniti Oman has extended its warm wishes to its customers and members of the community on the special occasion of Ramadan.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, said, “May this holy month of Ramadan be a month full of blessings for all of you. We wish you and your family peace, harmony, happiness, good health and prosperity.

“We hope this holy month bring with it abundance of benevolence, harmony and kindness. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to our customers for their brand loyalty over the years.”

He added, “We also urge upon everyone to observe the month following the COVID-19 protocols to enable this occasion to augur health and happiness. Closely following the guidelines and recommendations of the Supreme Committee which supervises developments arising from the coronavirus, Infiniti Oman continues to implement important measures in order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

SBA commitment

SBA is largely committed to supporting Infiniti Oman's growth in the sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of more than 40 showrooms, service centres and parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers.

About Infiniti

Infiniti Motor Company Ltd is headquartered in Hong Kong with representations in 50 markets around the world. The Infiniti brand was



launched in 1989. Its range of premium automobiles is currently built in manufacturing facilities in Japan, the United States, United Kingdom and China. Infiniti design studios are located in Atsugi-Shi near Yokohama, London, San Diego and Beijing.

Infiniti is in the middle of a major product offensive. The brand has been widely acclaimed for its daring design and innovative driver-assistance technologies.

From the 2016 season, Infiniti is a technical partner of the Renault Sport Formula One team, contributing its expertise in hybrid performance.

More information about Infiniti and its industry leading technologies can be found at www.infiniti.com.

You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and see all our latest videos on YouTube.

Make healthier choices this Ramadan with A'Safwah

Revered as a trusted brand in dairy and beverages, A'Safwah has decades of experience in the local market and has amassed a large and loyal customer base. Its premium quality, fresh and healthy products have been much loved by consumers, not just in the sultanate but even overseas.

As a 100 per cent Omani company, A'Safwah reserves a good understanding of the local market and the preferences of its people. Interestingly, during Ramadan, A'Safwah sees a rising demand for its fresh laban drinks.

“We have noticed that consumers generally prefer Fresh laban, Jeera laban and Laban Drinks during the period of Ramadan and the consumption goes much higher but each region has its own preference in the category of consumption. We ensure that our wide range of products reach all parts of the sultanate so everyone can have a happy and healthy Ramadan,” said a company spokesperson.

A'Safwah lays a keen focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle amongst the people. In line with this, the company has taken various initiatives to encourage con-



sumers to go for healthier food options especially during Ramadan.

Laban contains several nutritional components and is known to improve digestive health. It is one of the best summer drinks that one can have, not only because it cools the body, but it also helps get rid of the general discomfort and dehydration caused by the loss of water and fluids due to fasting or sweating.

Commenting further on healthy food consumption, spokesperson said, “During iftars, it is essential to hydrate the body and replenish its electrolytes. Instead of opting for fizzy drinks that are high on

sugar, go for fresh juices. Yoghurts and labans are good for suhoor, as they keep your body cool through hot summer days.”

A'Safwah has 100 per cent sugar-free juices in apple and orange flavours that are not just refreshing but also offer a significant number of nutritional benefits. A'safwah's 100 per cent orange juice contains a huge amount of Vitamin C and A, both of which work as an antioxidant in the body, cleansing it from toxins. Orange juice contains folate, which is one of the B vitamins, and which supports in the process of making red blood cells, that enhance blood circulation in the body.

Mustafa Sultan Exchange opens in Misfah

Mustafa Sultan Exchange Co LLC, one of Oman's oldest and leading money exchange houses, inaugurated a new branch in Misfah. The new branch was inaugurated by Akber Mustafa Sultan, vice chairman of the Mustafa Sultan Enterprises group. With this, the branch network of Mustafa Sultan Exchange in the Sultanate of Oman stands at 20.

Speaking on the occasion, Akber Mustafa Sultan, said, “We are glad to have our presence in Misfah and become a part of Oman's development under the 2040 vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.”

Cherishing the long-standing partnership with State Bank of India, he also expressed happiness at the strong commitment of State Bank of India in supporting the exchange's services in Oman.

Commenting on the opening, Rajeev Sharma, Group CEO, Mustafa Sultan Enterprises said, “The opening of this branch gives me immense satisfaction. It brings us closer to our customers and gives us the opportunity to offer them a best-in-class service experience. This is has been our topmost priority since the commencement of our operations in



1988. We remain committed to delivering happiness to our customers and their families back home.”

K J Prabu, general manager, Mustafa Sultan Exchange added, “A branch in Misfah has been long overdue for us. With this addition, we are now a step closer to our valuable customers in Misfah and the surrounding area.” Prabu also highlighted the company's commitment towards customer service and fair business practices whilst ensuring strict compliance to the COVID-19 precautionary measures laid by the government.

The Misfah branch complements the group's vision to provide safe and reliable remittance and currency exchange services with added value and convenience to its customers. In addition to the convenient payment solutions available at the branches, the new branch is also equipped with Flash Services that allows Instant Credit to beneficiary accounts in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to name a few.

Managed by India's largest bank the State Bank of India, Mustafa Sultan Exchange offers fast and reliable remittance serv-

ices worldwide and foreign exchange services through Direct Drawing arrangements with major banks and partners in countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.

The relationship has now entered into its 33rd year which clearly speaks volumes of the mutual trust and understanding.

Mustafa Sultan Exchange is also working on its mobile app which will have various features including instant online transactions, payment tracking in real time and payment history, among others.

Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross comes with benefits

General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributors of Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, is offering unbeatable benefits to customers purchasing an Eclipse Cross this Ramadan. These include cash gifts of up to RO2,800, zero per cent financing for up to two years, special trade-in bonuses of up to RO300 and more. In addition, GAC will be offering six years/unlimited kilometres warranty and roadside assistance and free registration.

Commenting on the new Ramadan Offer, Manoj Ranade, general manager of GAC, said, “The Eclipse Cross is a near perfect vehicle for families offering a near perfect balance of space, practicality, affordability, and performance. Furthermore, its range of high-tech safety features makes it amongst the safest vehicles in its class, as well as amongst the best looking. Our ongoing Ramadan offer only further adds to its appeal.”

Customers who purchase a Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross during the Ramadan Offer period, which is available till June 3, will enjoy a range of benefits including cash gifts ranging from a minimum of RO2,600 up to RO2,800, to-



gether with the option of 0 per cent interest financing for up-to two years and trade in bonuses of up to RO300. Customers will also benefit from free registration for the first year together with six years/unlimited kilometres warranty and roadside assistance.

The Eclipse Cross is a nimble-yet-capable CUV that cuts a striking figure on the road with signature Mitsubishi styling, technology and driving confidence. It stands out from the crowd thanks to its distinctive coupe-like form, wedge-shaped profile, strong beltline, sculpted character line, a steeply forward-raked rear window distinguished

by a horizontal division across it, and Mitsubishi's signature Dynamic Shield design upfront.

Inside, the cockpit-style interior of the Eclipse Cross wraps around the driver for a sporty, engaging feel. High-grade interior materials are accented by piano-black surfaces and luminous silver accents, which are now standard on all trim levels.

Eclipse Cross boasts an available high-resolution seven-inch touchscreen monitor, to control the audio system and other functions. It also offers a full-colour Head-Up Display (HUD) that provides the driver with real-time vehicle information. In the back, the Eclipse Cross features spa-

cious and comfortable rear seats that also offer multiple seating adjustments to accommodate passengers and/or cargo. It also features an optional panoramic dual-pane sunroof with a large power front glass panel with tilt and slide capability, which can open up to 17 inches.

Under the hood, the Eclipse Cross comes standard with a 1.5lt direct-injection turbo engine that offers a compelling combination of drivability, performance, and efficiency. This turbo technology provides both strong torque and better fuel efficiency with 152 horsepower at 5,500 rpm and 184 lb-ft. of torque at 2,000 rpm.

Together with its powerful sporty powerplant, the Eclipse Cross is available with Mitsubishi's proprietary, advanced S-AWC (Super All-Wheel Control) system to ensure safety and driving pleasure. The system enhances both straight-line stability and cornering performance by precisely controlling the torque supplied to each of the four wheels. Beyond the S-AWC, the Eclipse Cross also sports other advanced safety technologies including intelligent sensors.

Qatar Airways introduces bespoke iftar meal bags

Qatar Airways is delighted to extend its tradition of celebrating the customs of the holy month of Ramadan with passengers on board by offering bespoke Iftar meal bags, consisting of Middle Eastern delicacies to break their fast during this holy month.

The Iftar bag, designed in-house, is a colourful modern execution of an Arabic pattern that you may see within a Fanous. The Fanous has become a popular symbol to represent the holy month as it adds to the magical and serene atmosphere that one experiences during this time.

Each bag contains a selection of sweet and savoury delicacies that will be offered on selected routes across Algeria, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

On flights departing from Doha, the Iftar bag will contain a bottle of water, fresh Laban, Medjool Dates, Chicken Musakhan Wrap, Falafel Wrap and Baklava. For inbound flights to Doha, passengers will be of-



fered the same selection with a Chicken Shawarma and a Muhammara Wrap.

Qatar Airways group chief executive, Akbar al Baker, said, “With heart-warming greetings, we wish all our passengers Ramadan Kareem. We are delighted to invite all our passengers this holy month, to share an iftar meal together on board. The holy month of Ramadan is an important time for a great number of our customers, and we are excited to provide a service that is tailored to the needs of those who are fasting.”

Travelling between time zones can be challenging for the fasting travellers; thus Qatar Airways cabin crew will make an announcement before the commencement of this service and

serve the Iftar meal bags at the appropriate time during the flight.

Passengers at Hamad International Airport can also experience the spirit of Ramadan with a traditional iftar or suhoor at Qatar Duty Free's Harrods Tea Room. Along with the traditional menus, passengers will be offered dates and laban, traditionally served before iftar and suhoor during the holy month of Ramadan. To ensure a contactless dining experience, travellers will be able to digitally access the iftar and suhoor menu through their smartphones via QR codes.

Qatar Airways recently became the first global airline in the world to achieve the prestigious 5-Star COVID-19 Airline Safety Rating by international air transport rating organisation, Skytrax. This follows HIA's recent success as the first and only airport in the Middle East and Asia to be awarded a Skytrax 5-Star COVID-19 Airport Safety Rating.

For full details of all the measures that have been implemented, please visit qatarairways.com/safety.

'Premature to know if talks will succeed'

Talks on Iran’s nuclear programme resumed on Saturday, a day after it said ‘producing uranium at 60% purity’

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden said on Friday it was too early to know whether indirect talks underway with Iran would succeed in reviving a nuclear accord.

Biden said the United States does ‘not think that it’s at all helpful’ that Iran this week ramped up uranium enrichment, a move taken in response to sabotage on a nuclear facility believed to have been carried out by Israel.

“We are nonetheless pleased that Iran has continued to agree to engage in discussions,” Biden said at a joint news conference with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. “I think it’s premature to make a judgment as to what the outcome will be, but I think we’re still talking,” he said.

Biden reiterated that he supported the 2015 agreement negotiated when he was vice president but would not make ‘major concessions’ to return to it. Former president Donald Trump trashed the agreement - under which Iran was promised sanctions relief in return for major curbs on its nuclear program - and instead imposed sweeping economic punishment including a unilateral ban on other nations buying its oil.

Talks in Vienna

Talks on Iran’s nuclear programme aimed at salvaging a



Abbas Araghchi, the political deputy at Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, arrives at the ‘Grand Hotel Wien’ for a closed door meeting with the diplomats of the European Union, China and Russia, in the Austrian capital of Vienna on Friday (AFP)

2015 nuclear deal resumed on Saturday, a day after Tehran said it had started producing uranium

at 60 per cent purity. The Islamic republic had declared it would sharply ramp up

its enrichment of uranium earlier this week, after an attack on its Natanz nuclear facility that it

blamed on arch-foe Israel. The incidents cast a shadow over talks in Vienna aimed at res-

cuing the nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers that then US president Donald Trump abandoned almost three years ago.

The European Union said Saturday’s talks would involve EU officials and representatives from Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and Iran. The talks are aimed at determining which sanctions the United States should lift and the measures Iran

Tasnim news agency. Iran has repeatedly insisted it is not seeking an atomic bomb, but at that rate of production, it could take the Islamic republic 322 days to produce the amount of 60 per cent enriched uranium needed to make one bomb, based on the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) criteria. But this would require Iran to have a sufficient amount of 20

We are nonetheless pleased that Iran has continued to agree to engage in discussions. I think it’s premature to make a judgement as to what the outcome will be

JOE BIDEN

has to take to come into compliance with the accord.

The Russian Ambassador to Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, spoke of ‘slow but steady progress in the negotiations on restoration of the nuclear deal’ on Twitter.

Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, confirmed Iran was now producing uranium enriched to 60 per cent purity, taking the country closer to the 90 per cent level required for use in a nuclear weapon.

“The enrichment of uranium to 60 per cent is underway [in Natanz],” he said, quoted by

per cent enriched uranium, which it does not have, according to the latest IAEA data.

Tehran has gradually rolled back its nuclear commitments since 2019, a year after Washington withdrew from the accord and began imposing sanctions.

The 2015 deal, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), gave Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme. Under the accord, Iran had committed to keep enrichment to 3.67 per cent.

AFP

Russian security service detains Ukraine envoy in St Petersburg

Saint Petersburg, Russia - Russia’s FSB security service said on Saturday it had detained a Ukrainian diplomat, accusing him of receiving sensitive information from a Russian national.

In recent years Russia has detained a number of Ukrainian nationals on suspicion of spying but the detention of a diplomat is rare and seen as a sign of sharply rising tensions.

“A Ukrainian diplomat, a consul of Ukraine’s Consulate General in Saint Petersburg, Alexander Sosonyuk, has been detained by Russia’s FSB,” the security service said in a statement, using the Russian language spelling of his name. He had been detained on Friday, the security service said.

Kiev confirmed the diplomat had spent several hours in detention and was now back in the Ukrainian diplomatic mission. Russia’s domestic intelligence agency said Sosonyuk had been caught ‘red-handed’ during a



This photo has been released by a journalist with the National Public Broadcaster of Italy covering post-Soviet world, as he reports the arrest of Alexander Sosonyuk ‘on charges of spying’ on Saturday (@danioloeliatweet)

meeting with a Russian national as he sought to receive ‘classified’ information.

“Such activity is not compatible with his diplomatic status and is of clearly hostile nature towards the Russian Federation,”

the FSB said. “In conformity with international law, measures will be taken against the foreign diplomat.”

In Kiev, Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko chalked up the incident to raging

tensions between the two countries.

‘This is yet another provocation amid Russia’s destabilising activities,’ he told AFP in a statement.

AFP

Troops in Ethiopia’s Tigray will withdraw, vows Eritrea

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Eritrea has acknowledged its troops are participating in the war in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region but has vowed to pull them out amid mounting international pressure.

The first explicit admission of Eritrea’s role in the fighting came in a letter posted online on Friday night by the country’s information minister, written by its UN ambassador and addressed to the Security Council.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray in November to disarm and detain leaders of the region’s once dominant political party, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).

For months the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments denied Eritreans were involved, contradicting testimony from residents, rights groups, aid workers, diplomats and even some Ethiopian civilian and military officials.

Abiy finally acknowledged the Eritreans’ presence in March



Displaced children from Western Tigray wait for meal in the school where they are sheltered, in Tigray’s capital Mekele on February 24 (AFP)

while speaking to lawmakers, and vowed soon after that they would leave.

On Thursday UN aid chief Mark Lowcock told the Security Council that despite Abiy’s earlier promise, there had been no evidence of a withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the region.

Eritrea’s Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel said on Saturday that Asmara had summoned the UN’s resident coordi-

nator in Eritrea and the local head of the UN humanitarian co-ordination office to protest ‘wayward practices and fallacious reports... on basis of opaque networks/affiliations with TPLF’.

Abiy declared victory in Tigray in late November after federal forces took the regional capital Mekele, but the TPLF vowed to fight on and fighting has continued.

AFP

Britain falls silent in tribute as Queen bids farewell to Prince Philip

Windsor, UK - Queen Elizabeth II on Saturday led Britain in a one-minute’s silence in memory of her late husband, Prince Philip, as she bid him a final farewell at a funeral restricted by coronavirus rules but reflecting his long life of military and public service.

The 94 year old monarch, dressed in mourning black and a black face mask, sat inside St George’s Chapel at Windsor Castle, as the Duke of Edinburgh’s coffin arrived on a bespoke Land Rover which he designed himself.

A military gun was fired to signal the start of the solemn tribute, which was observed in shops, railway stations and at sporting events across the country.

The ceremony with just 30 mourners took place entirely behind the castle’s stately walls,

with the public urged to stay away because of the pandemic.

But small crowds still gathered in Windsor town centre, and on the sweeping Long Walk to the castle gates, behind barriers patrolled by uniformed police.

Ieuan Jones (37) travelled to the town from his home in the Welsh capital, Cardiff, and called Philip ‘a strong man, a true hero (who) did so much for this country and the royal family’.

“It’s really a shame that because of the pandemic we can’t pay a wider tribute to the exceptional man he was,” he told AFP.

At Buckingham Palace, the Queen’s central London home, Cardiff-born chef Santosh Singh laid purple tulips to mark the end of an era.

“I love the royals. I think they’re amazing... It’s sad be-



Members of the King’s Troop Royal Horse Artillery ride up the Long Walk to Windsor Castle in Windsor, west of London, for the funeral of Britain’s Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on Saturday (AFP)

cause in time, all this will change,” the 57 year old said.

Ceremonies were earlier held in Sweden and Denmark, while birds from the Royal Pigeon Racing Association were released from the National Memorial Arboretum in central England. The Duke of Edinburgh - described by royals as ‘the grandfather of the nation’ - died on April 9, aged 99, just weeks after being released following a month-long stay in hospital for treatment of a heart condition and an infection.

‘Huge void’

Britain’s longest-serving royal consort was an almost constant presence at the Queen’s side during her record-breaking reign that began in 1952 as Britain rebuilt from World War II and as its global empire began to unravel.

His death, after 73 years of marriage, has left a ‘huge void’ in her life, the couple’s second son, Prince Andrew, said last weekend. The Queen released a touching personal photograph of herself with Prince Philip, both looking relaxed and smiling in the Cairngorms National Park in Scotland in 2003.

Images of key moments in the couple’s marriage were also shared on the royal family’s social media accounts, as most newspapers reflected on her deep personal loss.

At the service, the Dean of Windsor, David Conner, will pay tribute to Philip’s ‘unwavering loyalty’ to his wife, who turns 95 next week, the country and the Commonwealth, as well as his ‘courage, fortitude and faith’.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Global deaths over 3mn; India cases surge

Paris, France - The global COVID-19 death toll passed 3mn on Saturday as the pandemic continues to speed up despite vaccination campaigns, leading countries like India to impose new lockdowns to fight spiralling infection numbers.

It is the latest grim milestone after the novel coronavirus surfaced in central China in December 2019 and went on to infect more than 139mn people, leaving billions more under crippling lockdowns and ravaging the global economy.

An average of more than 12,000 deaths were recorded globally every day in the past week, shooting the overall toll past 3mn at around 0830 GMT on Saturday, according to an AFP tally.

For comparison, 3mn people is more than the population of Jamaica or Armenia, and three times the death toll of the Iran-Iraq war which raged from 1980-1988.

And the pandemic is showing no sign of slowing down: The 829,596 new infections reported worldwide on Friday is the highest number yet, according to AFP's tally.

The daily average of 731,000 cases registered over the last week is also close to being a record.

India's capital New Delhi went into a weekend lockdown on Saturday as the world's second-most populous nation recorded 234,000 new cases and 1,341 deaths.

India now has three times the daily cases of the United States, the world's worst-hit nation, and families are clamouring for drugs and hospital beds.

Hopes that South Asian countries might have seen the worst of the pandemic have been dashed, with India recording over two million new cases this month alone and Bangladesh and Pakistan imposing new shutdowns.

Udaya Regmi of the international Red Cross said the 'truly frightening' South Asian surge was a 'wake-up call to the world'.

"Vaccines must be available to everyone, everywhere, rich and poor to overcome this terrible pandemic," Regmi added.

Richer countries that have waged mass inoculation efforts have seen their virus numbers plummet. Britain, which has



Relatives and friends offer prayers during the funeral of a COVID-19 victim at a graveyard in India's capital New Delhi, on Friday (AFP)

given 60 per cent of the population at least one vaccination dose, now records around 30 deaths a day - down from 1,200 in late January.

The virus continues to impact events elsewhere in the world.

In Brazil, the country with the third-highest death toll in the world, night shifts have been added to several cemeteries as diggers work around the clock to bury the dead.

One of these is Vila Formosa, the largest cemetery in Latin America and a showcase for the lethal cost of the pandemic in Brazil, where more than 365,000 people have died from COVID-19.

"We try not to get upset in our work, but it is sad, it is a lot of people," one of the gravediggers there said after a long shift.

Despite the high infection rate, the government of Brazil's most populous state Sao Paulo announced it will allow businesses and places of worship to reopen from Sunday.

'Cautious optimism' in Europe

But there was better news in Europe, where some countries are

easing their lockdowns in response to not only fatigue, but falling infection numbers and progress with vaccinations.

Italy announced on Friday it will ease coronavirus restrictions for schools and restaurants from April 26.

Expressing 'cautious optimism', Prime Minister Mario Draghi said his government was taking a 'calculated risk'.

Italy will also allow up to a thousand spectators at outdoor events from May 1, when it eases its stadium fan ban in regions less affected by the coronavirus.

In more good news for Britons after the partial reopening of society this week, Germany on Friday removed the United Kingdom from the list of risk zones for coronavirus infections, meaning that travellers will no longer need to quarantine upon arrival.

Spain meanwhile extended the mandatory quarantine of passengers arriving from 12 countries in South America and Africa, including Brazil and South Africa, over concerns about more transmissible variants.

AFP

Thousands rush for free tests as Thailand sees spike in numbers

Bangkok, Thailand - Hundreds waited in grim silence at a Bangkok stadium to get free COVID-19 tests on Saturday as a spiraling infection rate gripped Thailand, on a fourth consecutive day of more than 1,000 new cases.

The capital appears to be the epicentre of the kingdom's third wave, after infections were traced back to a nightlife district earlier this month.

In the past 10 days, the national infection total has jumped from 29,900 to more than 40,500 - the sharp increase probably due to a highly infectious variant of the virus originally found in Britain.

"Nearly 10,000 new cases



People (left) wait in a queue to get their samples taken, as medical workers (right) take swab samples from others during a mass testing event at a sport complex, in Thailand's capital city of Bangkok on Saturday (AFP)



water fights on the streets, but Bangkok was quiet this week - with bars, restaurants and night markets closed early.

New restrictions will bite from Sunday, including a liquor ban in restaurants and bars, while entertainment venues will be shuttered across the country for two weeks.

Political opponents of Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha have criticised his administration's handling of the virus, and the slow roll-out of the vaccine - which has been plagued by delays.

By Saturday, 605,000 doses of both Sinovac and AstraZeneca vaccines had been administered.

AFP

variant) spreads fast," said one woman who received the test, adding that she was worried about going outside.

Authorities have instated inter-provincial travel restrictions right before Songkran new-year festivities this week - usually a period when Thais vacation or return to their hometowns.

The holiday is also marked by

Myanmar junta chief to join ASEAN summit

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing will join a special ASEAN summit next week, the Thai Foreign Ministry said on Saturday, his first official trip since masterminding a coup which deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The February 1 putsch triggered a massive uprising, bringing hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets to demand a return to democracy, while civil servants have boycotted work in a bid to shutter the junta's administration.

The military has deployed lethal force to quell the anti-coup movement, killing more than 720 people and detaining some 3,100 activists, journalists and dissidents, according to a local monitoring group.

The international community has largely condemned the generals for use of force against unarmed civilians - imposing targeted sanctions against top military brass, their families and army-linked businesses.

But regional leaders have sought to open communications with the regime, and on Saturday Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that a summit of Southeast Asian leaders in Jakarta on Myanmar's situation will include the senior general.

"Several leaders have con-



A file photo of Myanmar military chief General Min Aung Hlaing (AFP)

firmed their attendance including Myanmar's MAH (Min Aung Hlaing)," said spokesman Tanee Sangrat in a message to reporters.

The meeting of the ten-country bloc of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is expected to address the ongoing crisis in post-coup Myanmar, and will be on April 24 in Jakarta. The announcement drew dismay from activists, who have long beseeched foreign leaders not to recognise the junta.

"#ASEAN do not legitimize the Myanmar Military junta as a government by inviting MAH to attend the summit," said prominent activist Wai Wai Nu on Twitter. "(The) Junta is illegitimate and illegal."

The military has consistently

streets for city-wide water fights.

Instead, activists sloshed crimson paint in Yangon to symbolise the bloodshed, while protesters wore red across the country in nationwide demonstrations. More violence erupted on Saturday in the central gem-producing city of Mogok, when security forces cracked down on protesters.

According to an AFP-verified video filmed by a resident, soldiers crouched on a street as their commanding officer shouted that he wanted 'deaths'.

A rescue worker told AFP at least one had died. "He was shot in the stomach," he said, adding that six others injured had to be rushed to the hospital.

Despite the threat of violence, protesters have continued to gather across the country in defiance of the junta, carrying posters demanding for Suu Kyi to be freed.

Some demonstrations - like in Yangon and central Monywa city - also touted support of the so-called 'National Unity Government', a shadow administration formed by ousted MPs working in hiding to thwart junta rule.

"It has been more than 70 days since the coup... we can no longer see our future and goals," said 19-year old Max in Yangon.

AFP

French nationals in Pakistan refuse embassy call to leave

Islamabad, Pakistan - The French community in Pakistan is torn between disbelief, fear and annoyance in reaction to their embassy's call for them to leave the country after Francophobic rioting this week by an extremist party.

Most, it seems, have decided to stay put.

In a terse three-line email, accompanied by the words 'urgent', the Embassy in Islamabad on Thursday recommended its nationals and French companies temporarily leave Pakistan, because of 'serious threats'.

The email, which did not specify the nature of the risks, caused shock and consternation among the few hundred-strong French community.

Jean-Michel Quarantotti, who has taught French at the American school in Islamabad for three years, was first alerted to the embassy advisory by a student.

"I won't hide from you that at first I felt a little bit of fear, panic," he told AFP. "It's not my first foreign country - I did a lot before arriving in Pakistan - but I was really shocked. I didn't expect to go through this."

His first thought was to pack up and leave, but after discussing



Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) party supporters at an anti-France rally in the Barakahu neighbourhood of Islamabad on April 13 (AFP)

the situation with colleagues he said reason took over from emotion. "The Pakistanis around me advised me to stay," he said. "They told me that they would protect me."

"It was very touching to see the solidarity around me, from people who told me: 'We are here for you, do not worry, we will defend you.'"

The embassy announcement came after days of violent protests orchestrated by the radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) after the arrest in Lahore on Monday of leader Saad Rizvi, who had called for a march on the capital to demand the expulsion of the French ambassador.

Four policemen were killed in the rioting.

Another French national Julien - an assumed name because he does not wish to divulge his identity - has also chosen to stay put.

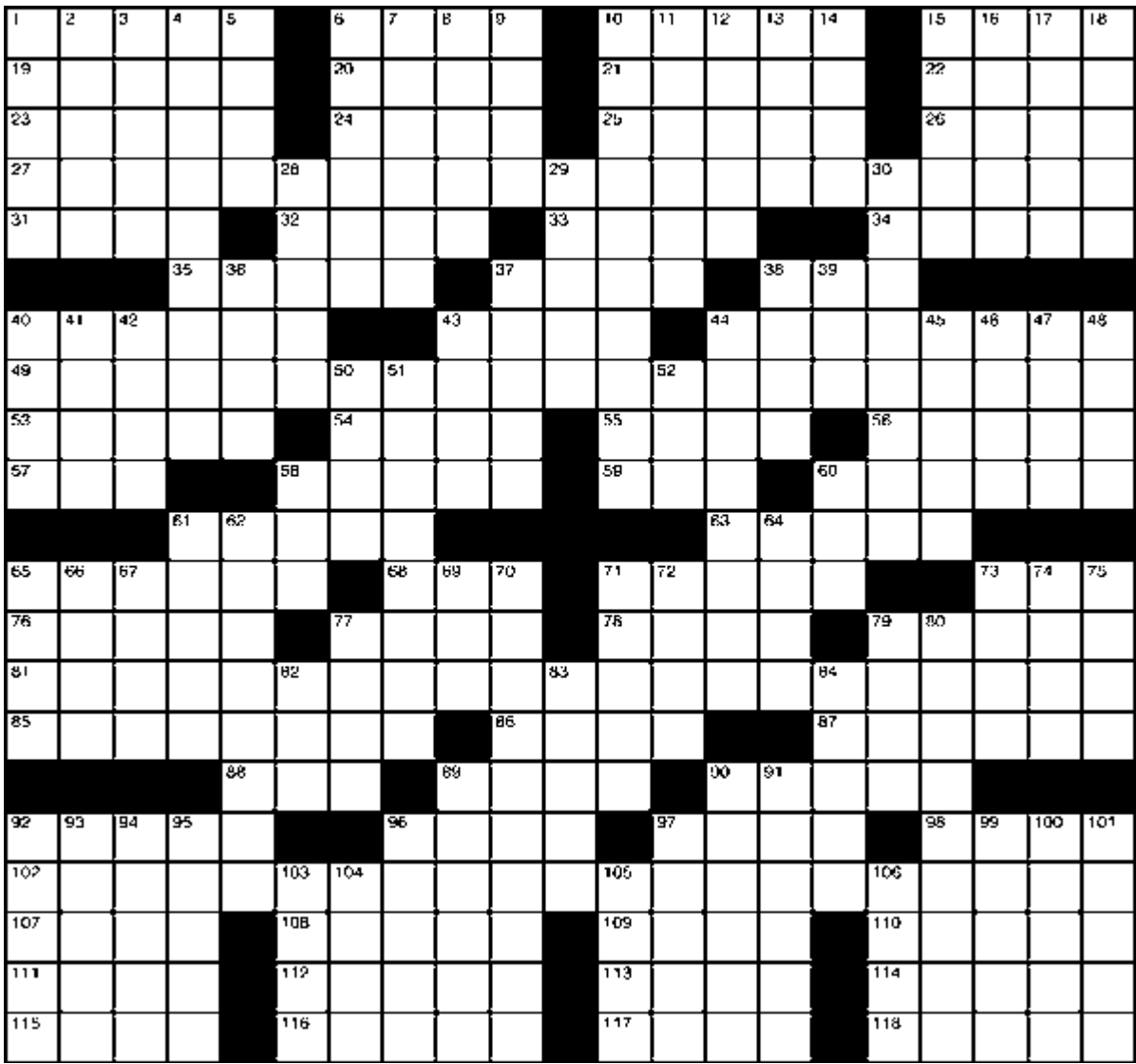
"It's a recommendation, so I won't leave," he told AFP.

He also refused his employer's offer to repatriate him to Europe or put armed guards outside his home.

"Anyway, since October, November, it's been all ups and downs. So we'll wait for it to calm down," the Islamabad resident said. "The watchword is vigilance," added Laurent Cinot, a consultant for the World Bank who arrived in the capital less than two months ago.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- 79 Bullets and such
- 80 Begin again
- 82 FedEx competitor
- 83 Host
- 84 Like some mansards
- 89 Close at hand
- 90 Brethren, in Brest
- 91 Relax, troops!
- 92 Actor Lew ___
- 93 River at Orleans
- 94 Moon-related
- 95 Confound
- 96 Vocalize, in a way
- 97 Soul
- 99 Get up
- 100 Mr. Marner
- 101 Headliners
- 103 Dozes
- 104 See 16 Down
- 105 "Oh, dear"
- 106 Reality

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's going to be a fun-filled time for you as of right now. The stars are making you a lot more willing to try something new. Of course, you've never needed much prodding in that department, so you'll be even more fiery, hotheaded and impulsive for the duration. Yes, that really is saying something, and yes, you'll enjoy it, especially now that you've got a legitimate excuse.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

What a decision! Do you hang out with the usual suspects, your tried-and-true friends for years now, or follow your curiosity and spend some time with a whole new crew? Oh, and let's sweeten the pot by adding the obvious interest of a certain person who belongs to that whole new crew? This is where it gets interesting. Think you've got enough time and energy to spend on both?



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're in the mood for nothing less than an entirely new experience, at least one. Along the way, you won't be afraid to speak your mind to anyone who suggests that you should be less reckless, regardless of whether they're offended or shocked by what you say. Oh, well. Anyone who knows you ought to be used to raising their eyebrows every now and then.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Nobody likes shopping as much as you do. That's a proven fact. You've probably been trying to go easy in that department ever since the shopping extravaganza you enjoyed last month, but now it's time to jump back into it and show the world just how skilled you are at comparing and being in the right place at the right time to scoop the perfect deal. Oh, stop sighing.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You could be dealing with some changes at work. You'll soon have the first hint of what's coming up, but don't worry about it. The worst that could happen is that certain higher-ups have had their eye on you for a while, and because you've done so well they want to give you more responsibility. The best that could happen? A nice, fat raise and a great reason to celebrate.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're due for a big spending spree. No, that's not your usual style, and you're not known for being an impulse shopper either, but for right now that could change. Instead of being someone else's minder and reminding them of what they "should" be spending their money on, you might need to ask someone to monitor you instead.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You could be extremely emotional today, and this might knock you for a loop. This isn't what you're usually known for. In fact, you're far better at expressing ideas than feelings, in public, at least. But this onslaught of feelings is going to be for nothing but the best of reasons. Keep that in mind when you feel your eyes begin to well up with tears, and don't be embarrassed.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Ready for yet another day of passion, tender whispers, and loving glances? Sure it's tedious, but you do have your reputation to think of, so you'll probably do your best and bear up under the pressure just fine. Oh, and by the way, this is brought to you courtesy of the stars, who have plenty more of it in store. Sure is rough being you. Pardon your pals if they're not all that sympathetic to your plight.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's going to be quite a day for you, a delightful one. The fun starts immediately! Get started on planning that big get-together that's been in the back of your mind for weeks. And along with your celebratory mood, you should also be prepared to feel especially rebellious, outrageous, and willing to shock and amaze the masses. Even more so than usual.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Here's a mixed bag: you're feeling especially secretive and especially chatty at the same time. There's obviously only one thing to do, which is find yourself someone you've both confided in and been a confidant to in the past, sit them down, and ask them to listen. You're usually the very soul of sympathy, the one everyone comes to with their problems. Well, it's your turn now.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Starting today, you'll be extremely interested in the welfare of your family members, the older ones in particular. You'll also need some time off from the world to prepare for all the time you'll be spending taking care of them, so you'd better take it now. Of course, there's a very sensual energy working hard to get you involved on a more intimate level with someone.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You have your hands full. Full of secrets: secret meetings, secret admirers, and secret conversations. And while the "secret admirer" part doesn't sound too bad at all, you'll have to be careful with the rest of it. There's no one more trustworthy than you, and no one more compassionate. That's a proven fact. But little does the rest of the world know how passionate you can be.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which amongst the following has the lowest metabolic rate of oxygen consumption (mm³/g hour)?

- a. Dog
- b. Elephant
- c. Horse
- d. Man

2. Which of the following causes Poliomyelitis?

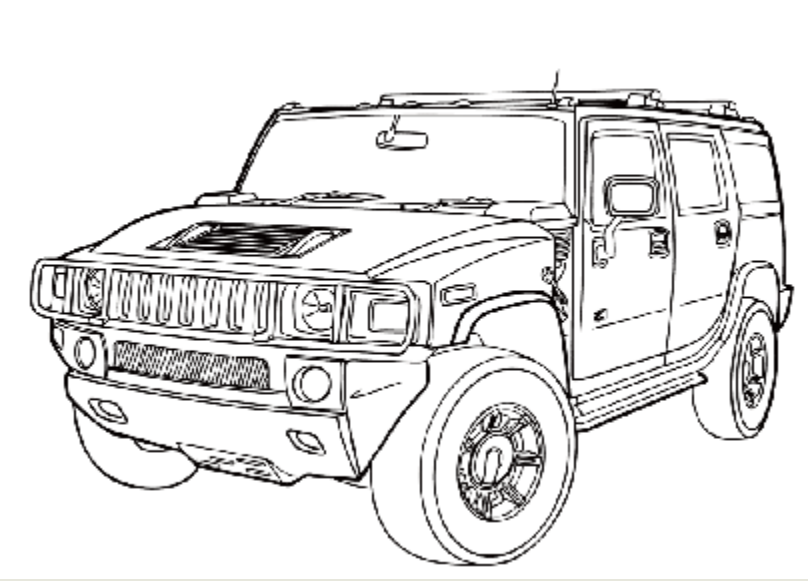
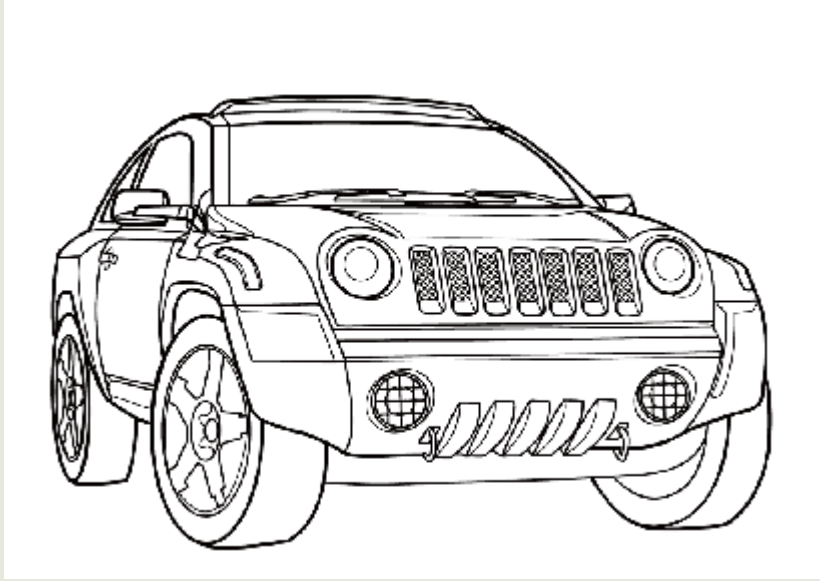
- a. Dengue virus
- b. Enterovirus
- c. Mumps virus
- d. Rhabdovirus

3. Where is the BARC's Research Centre?

- a. Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre, Kolkata
- b. Nuclear Research Lab, Kashmir
- c. High Altitude Research Lab, Gulmarg
- d. All of the above

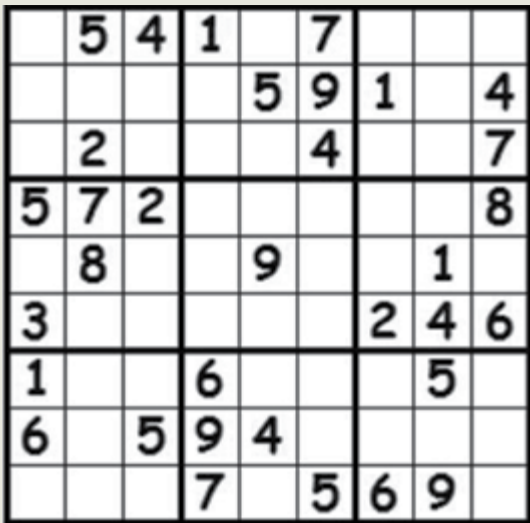
Answers: 1: b 2: c 3: d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (APRIL 15)



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



VIRTUAL ART

FIGURE IT OUT

Hubert Vaz

Indian artists in Oman are keeping the lamp of art burning bright, despite the spate of restrictions in movement in view of the pandemic, and have put together the fourth installment of their virtual art exhibition series, titled Figure it out, which will open for viewing at 7pm on April 24.

Curated by senior Indian artist in Oman, Tarini Agarwal, this exhibition features the works of 16 different figurative artists and comprises a mixed bag of delightful depictions of an array of human sentiments and emo-



Figurative art is a form of artwork that has existed for thousands of years in cultures all around the world. It can be made in any media and in a variety of styles. The heart of this exhibition is taken from the 1500 era of the history of art

TARINI AGARWAL

tions on canvas.

"Figurative art is a form of artwork that has existed for thousands of years in cultures all around the world. It can be made in any media and in a variety of styles. The heart of this exhibition is taken from the 1500 era of the history of art," says Agarwal.

She further added, "Most of our group of artists work in realism. This exhibition is an effort of the bravehearts who are ready to experiment and explore, and push their art practice to unknown levels. It's been a giant leap of faith, where the process of creating and playing has over ridden the end product."

Acknowledging Agarwal's effort in curating this exhibition, Sushmita Gupta, convenor of the group, added, "A huge applause to Tarini Agarwal for taking us all on a journey of self exploration and self discovery. Some of us felt satisfaction and some, perhaps, defeat. But then, only when we face challenges do we break barriers. Only when we break barriers do we grow. Like with anything in life, where we put our focus and where we put our effort, we expand. So it is with art."

(Reproduced below are the works of six artists. The works of the rest can be viewed at the virtual exhibition from Saturday.)



Aneesha B S
Frontliner

I've dedicated my figurative painting to the medical professionals, who sacrificed everything in the time of this pandemic. It is understood that many health care workers stayed away from their families for months, this painting is a tribute to all those on the frontline against the invisible enemy which took more than 2.5mn lives worldwide.



Elizabeth Davis
Come play with me

During the pandemic, many children have had no one to play with them. Here, a little girl asks her shadow to play with her. There is a hint of surrealism in the painting as the shadow instead of mimicking the figure, raises the opposite hand. This painting is inspired from my little granddaughter.



Showbi Nowshad
Lost souls

In my figurative painting, I chose to portray the harsh and cruel looks, words and actions, a woman faces throughout her lifetime, from her first breath to her last. I hope through my art, I can spread awareness of the issues women face, which are often ignored or considered as normal by society.



Shalini Varma
Out of the Blue

This painting was created as I started playing with colours of my choice on the canvas. Blue created a mood and seemed to have aroused an emotion. Shapes and forms arose and 'out of the blue' my muse started appearing. Blue is associated with imagination, inspiration, tranquillity and balance of self-expression.



Tarini Agarwal
Rising above the noise

Today we are drowned by information and an overload of data about the pandemic and its effects on the world. The back and forth in information is creating deep and underlying fear, frustration and confusion. Here, I'm trying to show an effort by us to rise above the negative towards light and make positive shifts in the current world situation.



Sushmita Gupta
The empty boat

I used the 'empty boat' metaphor literally to convey the famous Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu's teaching on the blame game. Here's a girl wading through dark waters who herself is kind and learns not to blame anybody for her miseries, whatever they be.

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ORIENTAL MEMORY

VETERAN'S VISION

Hubert Vaz

The Art & Soul Gallery in Water Front mall, in Qurm, currently has a unique solo exhibition of Iranian-Australian artist, Dr Nasser Palangi, on display. The exhibition, titled *Oriental Memory*, which is on from April 14 to 25, features his latest paintings depicting thought-provoking images of his varied experiences in the Middle East over the past few decades.

A comprehensive, fully-illustrated, art book titled *Oriental Memory* has been released on the occasion. The book includes artwork about life and traditions in Oman, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Sudan, and Egypt. Last evening, Dr. Palangi delivered an inspiring 'Art Talk' at the gallery reviewing his artworks and providing inspiring insights into contemporary art the way he views it. On april 22, he will be sharing the essence of his work and philosophy in an 'invite-only' private workshop organ-

ised by the gallery.

Through *Oriental Memory*, Dr Palangi explores the theme of expressionism and figurative art inspired by his sojourns in different countries in the Middle East, including Oman. In his work, the popular artist and lecturer seeks inspiration from the living – the movement of life forces through brush strokes and colours - the transience of people, heritage and culture.

Dr Palangi's artistic style is quite unique in its content as well as format. It transcends borders, bridging Persian poetic vision with western expressionism. He transcribes the essence of his being onto the canvas with bright flashes of colours and forms. In some of his works, he places himself at the centre, rather than the edge, of the canvas.

"Every family and country has its own heritage, history, objects, patterns and culture. I try to create the personal vision to tell the Middle East's visual stories by using mixed media techniques to bring heritage and history to life.

These artworks have been created to offer audiences insights into the nature of memory and how it might be articulated via heritage, history, everyday life and family stories," says Dr Palangi, adding, "I will continue with the process of travel and research looking for information related to the collections of forms and colours in the Middle East, applying patterns and concepts, selecting the forms and colours, to explain aspects related to heritage and everyday life in the Middle East.

Dr Palangi has been a distinguished and influential teacher of contemporary Iranian art for many years. He was the founder and director of the Private University of Visual Arts at the University of Art - Sureh and the Shahed Art College. He has also been the author of many educational books and videos including 'The Method of Creative Imagination' and 'The Method of Artistic Anatomy' which are sources of teaching in the art faculties in Iran. He currently works as an associate professor, teaching visual arts at the Scientific College of Design in Muscat.



Algebra via art

In an exclusive interview with *Muscat Daily*, **Dr Nasser Palangi** reveals the essence of his flair as an artist

What is the theme of the exhibition and what message does it convey to the viewer?

The subject of my exhibition is the people, traditions and lifestyles in the Middle East. I try to re-imagine how people relate to themselves and their culture and their customs using different colours, textures, and different techniques, with a visual poetic expression. I paint in different layers in my paintings.

This exhibition consists of a collection of works that will be exhibited for the first time in Oman, while the book consists of my previous and recent works. My effort is to show the rich culture and heritage of the Middle East.

In your career as an artist and lecturer, what has been the most fulfilling moment?

Over the last 20 years, I have painted more than 200 paintings. As an artist who has been in the Middle East for many years, and traveled the world, I have portrayed figures of wars, immigration, loneliness, happiness, traditions, heritage, separation, customs and more which express the feelings, emotions and mood of the people, especially in the Middle East, which has long involved all the people of the world.

I have tried to use a style of expressionism to express my feelings on this subject and to show the creation of stillness and movement using visual elements as well as human beings in the context of time and place, forms, colours, and textures which represent an unintended algebra of human conditions today.

As a teacher, with thirty years of experience teaching art in different countries, it was the most beautiful feeling to witness the flourishing of my students' artistic talents. For an artist, the most glorious moment is when a work of art is created. In fact, an artist creates artworks and artwork create the artist, at the same time."

What is your opinion about the evolution of art in the middle east and, in particular, Oman?

Today's modern world needs spirituality. Perhaps the task of today's artist is to achieve contemporary spirituality by discovering the magic of spirituality in ancient art, and reusing it in the modern world.

One of the aims of Middle Eastern artists is to pay attention to their own identity. Middle Eastern art has always been influential to the world in these works.

The art movement in the Middle East has been developing rapidly for more than two decades, and as a new phenomenon in world contemporary art, it has found a new place. Middle Eastern artists have presented their work in museums and galleries around the world.

How do you view Oman as a conducive environment for art and artists?

In my opinion, Oman needs to create spaces suitable for international standards in order to display the works of artists and art education at different levels of education, whether in schools and universities or in institutions of international standard.

Do you have any unfulfilled ambitions?

As an artist, I pursue and my artistic aspirations, dreams, and goals, and sometimes I have achieved them. Between 1985 till 1999, I have coordinated three art museums and two private art colleges in Iran, besides publishing art educational books and videos. In 2001-2005, I had started the Memory Mural Painting Movement in Canberra, Australia, besides many other ventures.

In Oman, I have started the Method of Creative Imagination classes and Art projects with new art ideas and projects, events and exhibitions. This will be announced soon. I will continue to work towards this, so that audiences get acquainted with more artistic issues and artistic movements in Oman.



SOUL CONNECTION WITH LIFE

H H Afra Talal Tarik al Said, artist and art collector, who inaugurated the exhibition on April 14, in her speech on the occasion, noted that Dr Palangi follows simple principles that have unity, contrast, shape, emphasis, movement, repetition and rhythm, which give an idea that 'he loves sharing, and has a soul connection with life.'

"We've all heard someone say, 'God works in mysterious ways...' I con-

sider myself lucky to have crossed paths with Dr Nasser Palangi. I've noticed some incredible detailed artwork at the stall that he had painted, and nobody can deny that his passion is on another level. His pencil, paint brush strokes and shadows bring life to his work, as if composing music in his mind, like a melody that takes you back in time and walks you through this journey of mystery, beauty, and form," she observed.

HAMILTON EARNS 99TH CAREER POLE

FORMULA ONE
EMILIA ROMAGNA GP
Imola, Italy - Lewis Hamilton claimed his 99th career pole position in qualifying on Saturday for the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, with Red Bull's Sergio Perez starting alongside the seven-time world champion's Mercedes at Imola, Italy.

Max Verstappen, runner-up to Hamilton at the season-opening race in Bahrain last month, will begin third on the grid in the other Red Bull as the top three were separated by less than one-tenth of a second.

"The day's been great obviously," said Hamilton.

"I definitely didn't expect us to be ahead of the two Red Bulls. They've been so quick this weekend.

"There were times when they were six-tenths ahead and we didn't really know where we'd be. But the car was already feeling a lot better from the beginning this weekend."

"I knew going into qualifying and especially that last lap, it was going to take something special," he added.

"It really had to be the most perfect lap and a little bit more to beat the Red Bulls because they really have been so fast all weekend. And I didn't honestly know whether we could do it."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc qualified in fourth ahead of Pierre Gasly, Daniel Ricciardo and Lando Norris, who was heading for second but had his lap time



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton drives during the qualifying session on the eve of the Emilia Romagna F1 GP in Imola, Italy, on Saturday (AFP)

deleted for exceeding track limits.

Hamilton's Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas could only manage eighth, with Esteban Ocon and Lance Stroll rounding out the top-ten.

Carlos Sainz failed to make it to Q3 and will start in 11th position in the second Ferrari.

Two-time former world champion Fernando Alonso was a disappointing 15th, six places behind Alpine teammate Ocon.

Hamilton edged out Perez by 0.035 seconds, the Mexican in turn sneaking ahead of Verstappen by 0.052sec in just his second race with his new team.



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton reacts after the qualifying session on Saturday

"I didn't expect to be here but I should have been on pole - I did a mistake on my final corner, but tomorrow is what matters," said

Perez, after securing his best qualifying position to date ahead of a 193rd Grand Prix start. Japanese rookie Yuki

Tsunoda, who impressed by coming ninth on his F1 debut in Bahrain, planted his Alpha Tauri into the wall coming out of a chicane in Q1 and will set off from the back on Sunday.

"First of all, the body feels OK - no issues," said the 20 year old Tsunoda.

"Just pushing too much in entry. I had massive instability in entry, massive slap and couldn't control that car and just spun into the barrier.

"The car was amazing and it was just a huge mistake. Really sorry for the team, and I'm just going to have to come back tomorrow."

AFP



French rider Fabio Quartararo competes during the MotoGP qualifying session of the Portuguese MotoGP on Saturday (AFP)

Quartararo clinches pole in record time, Marquez returns

PORTUGUESE MOTOGP

Portimao, Portugal - France's Fabio Quartararo, on a Yamaha, claimed the qualifying honours in style in Portimao on Saturday to take pole for the Portuguese MotoGP with returning six-time world champion Marc Marquez on the second row of Sunday's grid.

Marquez has wasted no time getting back in the thick of things nine months after his crash in the Spanish Grand Prix which ruled him out of the entire 2020 season, and the first two races this year.

Quartararo, winner of the Doha MotoGP last time out, secured the 11th pole of his career with a new lap record time of 1min 38.862sec, at the main expense of Alex Rins (Suzuki) and early championship leader Johann Zarco (Ducati-Pramac).

Honda star Marquez shares the second row with Ducati's Australian rider Jack

Miller and Italian Franco Morbidelli for the Yamaha-SRT team. Italian Francesco Bagnaia had set the quickest time but he had his lap wiped off the time sheets because of a yellow flag warning after a Miguel Oliveira crash, leaving Quartararo to suggest that 'it doesn't feel like pole' and Bagnaia down in 11th.

The third row is occupied by the Aprilia of Aleix Espargaro, Luca Marini, the half-brother to Valentino Rossi, and defending champion Joan Mir. Rossi qualified in only 17th. Honda-LCR's Japanese rider Takaaki Nakagami (Honda-LCR) skipped qualifying after his crash on Friday in practice and will determine if he is race fit on Sunday morning.

Saturday practice was marred by a sickening crash that saw Jorge Martin (Pramac Racing) stretchered off the track straight to hospital for further medical checks.

AFP



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Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece

Andrey Rublev of Russia

Tsitsipas meets Rublev in final

MONTE CARLO MASTERS

Monaco - Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece defeated Britain's Dan Evans 6-2, 6-1 in the semifinals of the Monte Carlo Masters on Saturday and will face Andrey Rublev of Russia for the title.

Fourth seed Tsitsipas needed just over an hour to dispatch Britain's Evans, who knocked out world No 1 Novak Djokovic in the last-16.

Tsitsipas has yet to drop a set

in Monte Carlo this week and is through to his third Masters 1000 final.

He finished runner-up in Canada in 2018 and Madrid the following year.

"I am indeed pleased with the performance," said Tsitsipas.

"I found ways to play at my best. It was really difficult to maintain my level of consistency and I am really happy I managed to deal with all the different

moments during the match."

"It's a dream of mine to be playing in the final," he added.

Rublev beat unseeded Norwegian Casper Ruud 6-3, 7-5 to advance to his first Masters 1000 final, ensuring there was no letdown after his elimination of 11-time champion Rafael Nadal in the quarterfinals.

"It is an amazing feeling. It is my first (ATP Masters 1000) final, so I am really happy," said

Rublev. "We will see what is going to happen. I will try to do my best."

Rublev trailed by a break in both sets but recovered to beat Ruud for the fourth time in as many attempts.

Ruud, 22, knocked out 2019 winner Fabio Fognini to make the last four in Monte Carlo 24 years after his father Christian had reached the quarterfinals.

AFP



Fried Series





1
Boil noodles in boiling water (400ml) for 3 minutes



2
Mix the Seasonings into a serving bowl while noodles are being cooked



3
Take out noodles from water and drain well



4
Put the noodles into the serving bowl and mix it well



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QUOTE OF THE DAY
Makes me feel very old and it has been a very long journey [on playing 200 matches for CSK]. It started in 2008 - played in SA, Dubai, and back home

MS Dhoni
Chennai skipper, after leading his side to win against Punjab Kings, on Friday



Mumbai bowlers excel

Chahar, Boult, Bumrah keep Hyderabad winless by defending 150 in Chennai

MUMBAI VS HYDERABAD
Chennai, India - Taking inspiration from two successive successful defences of middling totals at Chepauk, Mumbai Indians became the first team in this IPL to choose to bat and defend successfully.

Their 150 for five landed in the middle of the 152 and 149 defended in the two previous matches, but Jonny Bairstow, opening this time, threatened to run away with the game taking three of the powerplay overs for 52 runs. However, the crafty Mumbai Indians bowling rallied around Jasprit Bumrah, who went without a boundary in his four overs for the fourth time in the history of the IPL.

Rahul Chahar broke the back of the Sunrisers Hyderabad with three wickets in the middle overs, and then Trent Boult came back to wipe off any resistance, with a little help from Bumrah again.

For the Sunrisers, it was another case of Warner-Bairstow or bust, and not for the first time since the start of the last IPL.

Bairstow left the scene with 84 to get in 82 balls, which became 61 off 51 balls when Warner ran himself out, a fourth captain getting run out taking a quick single this IPL.

Vijay Shankar, who had taken two wickets but dropped Kieron Pollard in the 19th over before Pollard caused the damage, kept the Sunrisers alive with 28 off 25 but Bumrah and Boult were too good in the end on a slow pitch.

Powerplay tussle
On this pitch, you do all your scoring in the powerplay, but



Rahul Chahar
3WKTS
19 BALLS

also be mindful you don't lose too many wickets trying to do so. With Quinton de Kock struggling for his touch, Rohit Sharma took on the onus of scoring, scoring 31 off 23 in the powerplay. At 53 for no loss, however, no side could claim the honours.

Squeeze on
As soon as the field spread, the game changed completely. Shankar used the slowness in the surface to have Rohit caught at deep midwicket, and did the catching himself for the dangerous-looking Suryakumar Yadav.

The Sunrisers didn't mind that

Rashid Khan enjoys a great match-up against Pollard and Hardik Pandya. They used him from overs eight through 12 for just 17 runs. When Mujeeb Ur Rahman came on to replace Rashid, he removed de Kock, caught at deep midwicket for a 39-ball 40. Mumbai 98 for three in 14 overs.

Middle-order wobble
Khaleel Ahmed, Rashid and Rahman stifled the lower middle-order. Rahman got Ishan Kishan caught behind, and Ahmed got Hardik. Leading up to the last two balls of the innings, no sixes had come in the last 27 balls.

Between them, three of the four new players, Shankar, Ahmed and Abhishek Sharma bowled eight overs for 48 runs and three wickets.

Pollard, dropped in the 19th over, finally found a Bhuvneshwar Kumar delivery in his slot and hit it for a six. The last ball wasn't in the slot but had enough pace on it for Pollard to send it over deep midwicket.

Bairstow show
Sunrisers' dropped Wriddhiman Saha and promoted Bairstow to the top of the order. It nearly proved right as he laid into the New Zealanders, Boult and

Adam Milne. He hit three fours and four sixes in 15 balls in the first five overs to lead his team to 55 for no loss in five overs.

Mumbai claw back
Rohit went to Bumrah to close the powerplay out. He nearly got Bairstow out with a slower ball, but a two-run over meant the Sunrisers still had work to do. Unfortunately, though, Bairstow's back foot slipped onto the base of his wicket as he looked to ramp Krunal Pandya, making him the fifth Sunrisers victim out of 13 hit-wicket dismissals in the IPL. Chahar, coming off a star

SCOREBOARD		
MUMBAI INDIANS		
Q de Kock	c sub (J Suchith)	40 (39)
	b Mujeeb Ur Rahman	
Rohit Sharma	c Singh b Shankar	32 (25)
S Yadav	c & b Shankar	10 (6)
I Kishan	c Bairstow b Rahman	12 (21)
K Pollard	not out	35 (22)
H Pandya	c V Singh b Ahmed	7 (5)
K Pandya	not out	3 (3)
Extras	(lb 6, nb 1, w 4)	11
TOTAL:	150 for five in 20 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-55, 2-71, 3-98, 4-114, 5-131		
Bowling: B Kumar 4-0-45-0, K Ahmed 4-0-24-1, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 4-0-29-2, A Sharma 1-0-5-0, V Shankar 3-0-19-2, Rashid Khan 4-0-22-0		
SUNRISERS HYDERABAD		
D Warner	run out	36 (34)
J Bairstow	hit wicket b K Pandya	43 (22)
M Pandey	c Pollard b Chahar	2 (7)
V Singh	c Yadav b Chahar	11 (12)
V Shankar	c Yadav b Bumrah	28 (25)
A Sharma	c Milne b Chahar	2 (4)
A Samad	run out	7 (8)
Rashid Khan	lbw b Boult	0 (1)
B Kumar	b Boult	1 (2)
M Ur Rahman	not out	1 (1)
K Ahmed	b Boult	1 (2)
Extras	(lb 3, w 2)	5
TOTAL:	137 in 19.4 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-67, 2-71, 3-90, 4-102, 5-104, 6-129, 7-130, 8-134, 9-135, 10-137		
Bowling: T Boult 3.4-0-28-3, J Bumrah 4-0-14-1, A Milne 3-0-33-0, K Pandya 3-0-30-1, R Chahar 4-0-19-3, K Pollard 2-0-10-0		

TODAY'S MATCHES



ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE VS KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

CHENNAI, 2PM



DELHI CAPITALS VS PUNJAB KINGS

MUMBAI, 6PM

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
MI	3	2	1	0	4	+0.367
RCB	2	2	0	0	4	+0.175
CSK	2	1	1	0	2	+0.616
DC	2	1	1	0	2	+0.195
RR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.052
KKR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.000
PBKS	2	1	1	0	2	-0.909
SRH	3	0	3	0	0	-0.483

P: Played, W: Won, L: Lost, NR: No Result, PTS: Points, NRR: Net Run-Rate

CSK: Chennai Super Kings
RCB: Royal Challengers Bangalore
DC: Delhi Capitals
KKR: Kolkata Knight Riders
PBKS: Kings XI Punjab
MI: Mumbai Indians
RR: Rajasthan Royals
SRH: Sunrisers Hyderabad

for an inexperienced middle order, and Virat Singh and Abhishek holed out in Chahar's last over.

Shankar efforts in vain
With 47 required in five overs and the fifth bowler's quota done, Rohit still went to Krunal to avoid bowling Milne at the end. Shankar hit two big sixes to keep the Sunrisers breathing, but Bumrah's mix of slower balls and yorkers on the slow pitch raised the asking rate high enough for Boult to take advantage of the batters who had no option but to hit out at him.

Cricinfo

OUTSIDE IPL

Azam hails 'complete team effort'

Pakistan secure ODI and T20I double against South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA VS PAKISTAN FOURTH T20I
Centurion, South Africa - It might have hung in the balance for longer than was necessary, but that made Pakistan's T20I series win in South Africa all the more pleasing for captain Babar Azam.

When Mohammad Nawaz smacked a six to square leg with two balls to go on Friday, it sealed for Pakistan a rare double - ODI and T20I series wins in South Africa.

"I'm very happy with how the team performed," Azam said after the game.

"It was a complete team effort rather than a one-man show. The way we started the one-day series was testament to that. The way Fakhar [Zaman] performed stood out obviously, but I think we should pay credit to the bowlers, too.

"This might have been a batsman-friendly series, but overall, the bowlers did a decent job. The only thing missing was early wickets up top, but the way we kept coming back was outstanding, and you have to credit the bowlers for that. There are some mistakes that we need to rectify, but day by day when you keep working on your flaws, your results invariably improve."

The 3-1 scoreline may look commanding, but Azam



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam plays a shot during the fourth T20I match against South Africa at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Friday (AFP)

admitted there was still work to do on certain aspects of Pakistan's game.

This looked like the most one-sided contest of the tour half an hour before the finish, with Pakistan having racked up 92 runs in the first nine overs for the loss of just one wicket, needing just 53 in the final eleven.

What should have been a cakewalk, though, turned into a scrap once Zaman and Azam fell

in quick succession. The next six wickets fell for 37 runs as Pakistan's middle order crumpled in the face of pressure, and a game that should have been wrapped up long before time headed into the final few deliveries. Azam defended the middle order from criticism, though, saying quick wickets changed the game's dynamics instantly.

"We were disappointed when

so many set batsmen got out, which put pressure on the middle order. Lots of wickets fell, and we just needed some partnerships, which unfortunately didn't happen. Throughout, the match went well, the bowlers were in control, and we kept then under control in the powerplay and restricted them at the end to just 144.

"We'll get a lot of confidence. When you win a series against South Africa in South Africa, that gives you a boost. We'll have to learn where we made mistakes and what we need to work on. We need to give everyone confidence. Not everyone performs, but what we need to do is capitalise on form. Now we have to go to Zimbabwe and then the [T20] World Cup, so the preparation is in full swing. We're looking to get everything finalised by the World Cup."

Pakistan's win in South Africa has no doubt bucked a historical trend, but it didn't escape anyone's notice that South Africa had to front up without most of their frontline options. Five players are currently in India with their IPL franchises, while the hosts were beset with injuries to a handful of others, with Temba Bavuma ruled out of the T20I leg and Rassie van der Dussen only fit for the final two games.

Cricinfo



Stokes set to miss NZ Tests

London, UK - Ben Stokes looks set to miss England's Test series against New Zealand in June after the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said that he would require surgery on his broken finger, putting him out for up to 12 weeks.

The England allrounder underwent an X-ray and CT scan on Thursday and will fly home from the IPL on Saturday after fracturing his left index finger in Rajasthan Royals' opening game. The first Test of the summer, against New Zealand at Lord's starting on June 2, is just over six weeks away.

Stokes had initially indicated he wanted to stay with the Royals to provide 'valued support and inputs off the field', but he will now return to the UK for an operation in Leeds on Monday. He had already been ruled out of the IPL by the injury, which he sustained while diving to take a catch against Punjab Kings. A 12-week rehabilitation process would mean Stokes returning to fitness in time for the start of the Hundred in mid-July.

Cricinfo

India to grant visas to Pakistan players for T20 World Cup: BCCI

New Delhi, India - Pakistan's cricket players will get visas to compete in the upcoming T20 World Cup in India this October, the BCCI's apex council has been told by the board secretary Jay Shah following 'government assurances'.

Shah spoke to the council in a video conference meeting held on Friday, where it was also decided that the mega-event will be staged across nine venues, with Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium hosting the final. The other venues are Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Dharamshala and Lucknow.

"The visa issue of Pakistan cricket team has been sorted. However, whether the fans can travel across the border to watch matches is still not clear," a council member told PTI.

"It will be decided in due course of time. However, we had promised ICC that it will be sorted. The secretary announced during the meeting."

India and Pakistan have not played bilateral cricket for close to a decade now due to diplomatic tensions between the two countries; Pakistan last toured the country for a bilateral series in 2012.

Cricinfo



A file photo of a T20I match between India and Pakistan

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Magpies boost survival bid

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Newcastle, UK - Newcastle moved closer to English Premier League (EPL) survival after Joe Willock's late goal capped a thrilling 3-2 win against ten-man West Ham that dented the visitors' bid for a top-four finish in the EPL.

Steve Bruce's side had squandered a two-goal lead in the closing stages at St James' Park, but Willock came off the bench to snatch a priceless winner.

Newcastle are nine points clear of the relegation zone with just six games remaining in a turbulent season on Tyneside.

The Magpies had taken control in the first half thanks to Issa Diop's own goal and a blunder from West Ham keeper Lukasz Fabianski for Joelinton's strike.

West Ham defender Craig Dawson was sent off for two bookings in between those goals.

But the Hammers set up a tense finale when Diop got one back before Jesse Lingard equalised with a penalty ten minutes from full-time.

On-loan Arsenal midfielder Willock settled a pulsating encounter with his thunderous header, putting Newcastle in position to avoid relegation.

Staying up would be an

impressive achievement for Bruce, who has battled with dressing room rifts and distracting takeover talk.

"I'm not going to take anything for granted. I've always said it's the accumulation of points, and 35, in my opinion, is not enough, so you won't get me jumping and hollering at the moment," Bruce said.

"We've still got six games to play. Can we beat last year's points tally of 44? We'll try our utmost."

The defeat was a big blow for West Ham as they chase an unexpected place in next season's Champions League. David Moyes' side remain fourth, but Chelsea are just one point behind with a game in hand, while fifth-placed Liverpool would go above the Hammers if they beat Leeds on Monday.

"I wouldn't say it was a chance lost, it was an opportunity for us to pick up three points," Moyes said.

"We like talking about the Champions League, we love the sound of that when everybody says it, but we're realistic."

Newcastle took the lead in the 36th minute when Dawson, in his attempts to recover from a heavy touch, felled Joelinton on



Newcastle's Joe Willock (C) reacts after scoring against West Ham during their Premier League match in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, on Saturday (AFP)

halfway. He could only look on as Allan Saint-Maximin sped away, twisted his way past the retreating Mark Noble and then saw his weak shot bundled over the line by Diop as referee Kevin Friend allowed play to continue.

Dawson's misery was com-

pounded when, having already been booked for a 12th-minute foul on the Brazilian, he received a second yellow card.

Joelinton was gifted his third by Fabianski when he spilled Matt Ritchie's 41st-minute corner, leaving the Brazilian striker

with a tap-in that he couldn't miss. However, Diop headed the Hammers back into it with 17 minutes remaining.

West Ham draw level when, after a VAR check, Ciaran Clark was penalised for handball and on-loan Manchester United mid-

fielder Lingard struck from the spot for his ninth goal in ten games. But there was a sting in the tale as Willock, who had only been on the pitch for seconds, thumped his header past Fabianski from Ritchie's cross in the 83rd minute.

Ankle injury clouds Kane double

Earlier on Friday, England forward Harry Kane suffered a worrying ankle injury ahead of next week's League Cup final after scoring twice in Tottenham Hotspur's 2-2 draw away to Everton. Gylfi Sigurdsson also grabbed two goals for Everton in a result that did little for either side's European hopes.

Kane went off in stoppage time towards the end of the match after rolling his ankle when challenged in the box at an Everton corner. "It is too early to say something," Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho told Sky Sports when asked afterwards about Kane's injury.

Kane's 20th league goal of the season put Spurs ahead in the 27th minute at Goodison Park only for Sigurdsson to equalise soon afterwards from the penalty spot. It was the reverse story in the second half, Sigurdsson getting his second in the 62nd minute before Kane levelled six minutes later.

Mourinho said of Kane's double: "It was great finishing. Two beautiful goals but not a surprise for the ones who see him do it every day in training."

AFP

Bayern Munich go seven-points clear

GERMAN LEAGUE

Wolfsburg, Germany - Teenager Jamal Musiala netted twice on Saturday as Bayern Munich sealed a 3-2 win at Wolfsburg to open a seven-point gap at the top of the Bundesliga table which leaves the holders on the verge of a ninth straight league title.

Bayern bounced back from their Champions League quarter-final exit on Tuesday by racing into a 2-0 lead with early goals by Musiala, 18, and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting.

Wout Weghorst pulled a goal back for Wolfsburg, but Musiala made it 3-1 at half-time with a towering header to leave him on four Bundesliga goals this season. Maximilian Philipp gave hosts Wolfsburg hope when he flicked home a cross just after the break. The away win could have come at a price as Bayern defender Lucas Hernandez limped off late on.

With five games to go, Bayern



Bayern Munich's Jamal Musiala (R) celebrates after scoring on Saturday

can wrap up the league title within a fortnight having extended their lead in the table after Leipzig's goalless draw with Hoffenheim on Friday.

Leipzig had a last-minute goal ruled out and were held.

Leipzig thought they had won the game at the death when Yusuf Poulsen headed in but he was penalised for handball after the referee consulted the pitchside monitor.

OTHER RESULTS

Saturday: Union Berlin 2 VfB Stuttgart 1, Borussia Moenchengladbach 4 Eintracht Frankfurt 0, Freiburg 4 Schalke 0.

FRENCH LEAGUE

Friday: Lille 1 Montpellier 1; **Saturday:** Angers 0 Rennes 3, Marseille 3 Lorient 2.

AFP

Flick wants to quit as Bayern coach at end of season

Wolfsburg, Germany - Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick said on Saturday he wants to leave the club at the end of the season. Flick told Sky he 'wants to be released' from his Bayern contract, which expires in 2023, after Saturday's win at Wolfsburg.

The 56 year old, who steered Bayern to last season's treble which included the Champions League title, said he had already informed the squad. "I told the team that I informed the club during the week that I want out of my contract at the end of the season," Flick said. "It was not an easy decision for me."

AFP

Roma's Smalling 'very shaken' after armed robbery at home

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Rome, Italy - Roma's former England defender Chris Smalling said on Saturday he and his family were 'very shaken up' after being threatened by armed burglars during a robbery at his home in the Italian capital.

The 31 year old centre-back was forced to open a safe and hand over watches and jewellery at gunpoint in the early hours of Friday morning.

"I'd like to thank everyone for your well wishes and support," Smalling said in a post on Twitter.

"My family although very shaken up are luckily unharmed! "Hoping these people can find a more meaningful way to live their lives without causing such harm and distress to others."

Smalling was in his Rome home with his wife and son and other family members.



Chris Smalling

Because of a knee injury he did not play in Thursday night's home 1-1 Europa League tie against Ajax, which saw the Italian side qualify for the semifinals where they will meet Smalling's former club Manchester United.

In the autumn, Roma coach Paulo Fonseca and Lazio Rome

player Joaquin Correa were also victims of burglaries while they were away with their teams.

Smalling, who earned 31 caps for England, joined Roma from United in October 2020 on a permanent deal, having spent the previous season on loan.

Fonseca said on Saturday that Smalling was back training. "We are assessing his situation every day. He's started training out on the pitch again," said Fonseca.

"Let's see. When he has confidence in his ability to return, he will return. But I think he is doing a lot better."

Seventh-placed Roma travel to Torino on Sunday in Serie A looking to close in on the European places.

OTHER RESULTS

Saturday: Crotone 1 Udinese 2, Sampdoria 3 Hellas Verona 1.

AFP

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