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HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK SENT A CONGRATULATORY CABLE ON SATURDAY TO EBRAHIM RAISI ON HIS VICTORY IN THE IRANIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Night lockdown starts today at 8pm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has decided to impose a ban on movement of people and vehicles, and ordered the closure of all public places and commercial activities from 8pm to 4am starting Sunday until

further notice.

The decision allows home delivery services and exempts essential activities excluded from similar bans announced earlier, the Supreme Committee stated.

The committee reaffirmed that all health sector establishments, led by the Ministry of Health, are resolute in their effort to continue implementing the

National Immunisation Campaign against COVID-19 in accordance with the pre-set stages and segments.

The committee urged all target groups to take the initiative and get vaccinated to protect themselves, their families and the community from COVID-19. It appreciated the commitment of individuals in society and across

different establishments to the precautionary measures aimed at curbing the spread of the disease.

It expressed deep concern at the indifference of some individuals who continue to hold gatherings in stark violation of the approved procedures. The committee warned that the concerned departments are firm in undertaking punitive action.



Royal Decrees related to insurance laws issued

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued two Royal Decrees on Thursday reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 44/2021 amends some provisions of the Insurance Companies Law, after presenting the same before the Council of Oman.

Article 1 introduces the amendments attached (to this decree) to the aforesaid Insurance Companies Law promulgated under Royal Decree No 12/79.

Article 2 cancels all that contradicts the attached amendments or contravenes their provisions.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No 45/2021 amends some provisions of the Takaful Insurance Law (collaborative insurance), following presentation of the same before the Council of Oman.

Article 1 introduces the amendments attached (to this decree) to the aforesaid Takaful Insurance Law promulgated under Royal Decree No 11/2016.

Article 2 cancels all that contradicts the attached amendments or contravenes their provisions.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication.

ONA

Jabs for 45+ Omanis only

Decision to limit vaccines for expats to private hospitals on payment raises questions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In response to concerns raised with regard to streamlining the ongoing National Immunisation Campaign against COVID-19, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has started an online appointment-based registration system.

However, the decision to limit registrations to citizens has prompted questions as expatriates have now been left with no option but to pay for vaccines in private hospitals.

The ministry will start vaccinating individuals in the 45+ age group starting Sunday. In Muscat, one central vaccination centre has been set up at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) for the governorate, except for the wilayat of Quriyat.

The ministry calls on the target group (over 45 years) to book appointments in advance



I tried to register for vaccination. I was surprised that it's only for Omanis

AHMED ALI

through the mobile app Tarassud + or <http://covid19.moh.gov.om> before going to the approved immunisation centres in various governorates,' MoH stated.

The decision to limit online registration to Omani citizens has come as a surprise to many expatriates who were waiting to get vaccinated in MoH's immunisa-

tion programme.

Ahmed Ali, 48, an Egyptian expat working in the private sector, said, "I tried to register for vaccination. I was surprised that it's only for Omanis. The Ministry of Health has confirmed that vaccination is free for target groups. I hope the ministry announces that vaccination of ex-

pats is the responsibility of their sponsors.'

For Manohar MK, a businessman based in Wadi Kabir, the high cost of vaccines is a worry. "Imagine a family of five members. And what will blue-collar workers do? Such rules are hurtful. Most neighbouring countries are giving vaccines irrespective of nationality."

Mubarak Ahmed al Arai, an entrepreneur, believes "everyone should be treated equally in this pandemic" and that expats shouldn't be considered "a momentary labour force and employment policies should

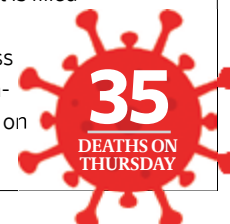
Surge in cases, deaths continues

Muscat - COVID-19 infections are surging with the daily case count now hovering over 2,000 everyday as hospitals face acute pressure. The number of deaths is also on the rise after 35 people succumbed to the virus on Thursday, the highest single-day toll so far. The previous highest - 33 - was reported on June 15.

On Thursday, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 2,015 cases taking the total number registered in the sultanate to 242,723, including 2,626 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 213,880, accounting for a recovery rate of 88.1 per cent.

Bed occupancy in the COVID-19 field hospital in Seeb surpassed 90 per cent and its intensive care unit is filled to capacity.

'The total number of inpatients across Oman has reached 1,306, including 382 in intensive care,' the MoH said in a statement on Thursday.



be reformed to support social inclusion".

Arai noted that expats work side by side with citizens. "If there's discrimination in administration of vaccines, the risk of infections rising will remain."

Ali al Sheyadi, a teacher, said that immunisation against COVID-19 must be free and available to everyone. "Expats are part of our society. If we vaccinate only Omanis, we will not be able to control the pandemic."

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an MoH official said that the ministry has distributed vaccines in the private health sector "so ex-

pats should contact these institutions to book and pay for appointments for the vaccines. The ministry will continue to provide vaccines to private health institutions".

Working hours for vaccination service at OCEC is 8am to 6pm on weekdays. On weekends, the centre will remain open between 9am and 4pm.

Al Sahel Health Centre in Quriyat will be open Sunday to Thursday, 8am to 2pm, while the drive-through service at Oman Automobile Association in Seeb has been suspended till further notice.

Ebrahim Raisi wins Iran presidential vote

Tehran, Iran - Ultraconservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi was declared the winner on Saturday of Iran's presidential election, a widely anticipated result after many political heavyweights were barred from running.

Raisi won 62 per cent of the vote with about 90 per cent of ballots counted from Friday's election, poll officials said, without releasing turnout figures, after the three other candidates had conceded defeat.

"I congratulate the people on their choice," said outgoing moderate President Hassan Rouhani, who has served the maximum of two consecutive four-year terms and leaves office in August.

Raisi (60) is set to take over at a critical time, as Iran seeks to salvage its tattered nuclear deal with major powers and free itself from punishing US sanctions that have driven a sharp economic downturn.

The head of the Iranian judiciary, whose black turban signifies direct descent from Islam's Prophet Mohammed, Raisi is seen as close to the 81 year old Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has ultimate political power in Iran.

Friday's voting was extended by two hours past the original



Ebrahim Raisi

midnight deadline amid fears of a low turnout of 50 per cent or less.

Many voters chose to stay away after the field of some 600 hopefuls including 40 women had been winnowed down to seven candidates, all men, excluding an ex-president and a former parliament speaker.

Three of the vetted candidates dropped out of the race two days before Friday's vote.

Populist former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, one of those barred from running by the Guardian Council of clerics and jurists, said he would not vote, declaring in a video message: "I do not want to have a part in this sin."

AFP

Omani photographer wins gold in FIAP contest

Muscat - Photographer Mohammed Sulaiman Nasser al Shaaili, 20, from Bahla in the wilayat of Ibri, has been adjudged Best Young Photographer and won a gold medal in an international competition organised by the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP).

The Salon Photo de Riedisheim international competition was launched in France online in April 2021 and the results declared later in the month.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Shaaili said, "I started photography in 2014. I like photographing people's faces and showcasing Oman's natural beauty and diversity to the world through my work. I entered five photos in the competition for which there were a total of 5,125 submissions representing 45 countries."

Shaaili has to date participated in international competitions in 13 countries and been feted at some of these. He is currently pursuing an engineering programme in University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibri.



Mohammed al Shaaili

Leading towards 'Authentic learning'



Dr Sivakumar Manickam

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, new chairman of the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman, is an academician, columnist, researcher, teacher and writer who has been living in Oman for the last 18 years. Having served in the Indian School Muscat management committee earlier, Manickam currently heads Oman Dental College's e-learning department.

"The COVID-19 crisis has stimulated creativity and innovation among our teachers and students. The board will certainly leverage this to make our system more inclusive and resilient," he tells **Hubert Vaz** in an exclusive interview.

As you take over the reins of the Board of Directors in the midst of the pandemic, what are your immediate thoughts regarding the road ahead?

I am humbled and honoured to take up the role of chairman of Indian Schools in Oman.

This is a time when meeting colleagues, teachers, students and parents happens only through devices and every one of us is experiencing some kind of stress or uncertainty. Stepping into the role of chairman at this time is indeed challenging. My colleagues on the board are experts in various fields; the board is capable of leading our system in the right direction.

I strongly believe in equity-focused and human-centred lead-



ership and our board will take the right decisions to ensure continuity and holistic education without compromising quality. Hurdles will always be there and repercussions of the ongoing pandemic on our society, economy and educational system are expected to continue for some more time. However, this crisis has brought out the potential of our system.

What key lessons have been learnt over the past year when students had to stay away physically from schools yet progress academically?

The prolonged online classes have completely transformed academic delivery. Teachers who were accustomed to conventional classroom teaching have flawlessly adapted to the new methods of imparting information through virtual platforms and students of all levels have become more independent learners. The COVID-19 crisis has stimulated creativity and innovation among our teachers and students. The board will certainly leverage this to make our system more inclusive and resilient.

What initiatives taken up during the term of your predecessor need to continue?

Every initiative of the board is implemented with the objective of facilitating overall growth of our students and teachers. We will enhance all those activities and continue to implement them in an efficient and suitable manner. Based on current requirements, modifying existing initiatives as well as introducing new ones will go side by side.

What new initiatives would you like to introduce to make this new order of distant education more meaningful for students?

We recently conducted an online survey to obtain feedback on ongoing classes amongst all schools in Oman. There were 10,336 students, 6,361 parents, 1,309 teachers and 21 principals who participated in the survey.

Using statistical analyses and triangulation of the data obtained, we arrived at several important conclusions. Critical issues like screen time, duration of break, etc were analysed

through the perspectives of students, teachers and parents. Based on survey data, many actionable steps were recommended for immediate action. The board's latest initiative - Samridhhi Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching - has been founded to fill in critical gap found in our system.

Once normalcy in school functioning returns, will there be need for any major changes with regard to hygiene, sanitation, seating arrangements, sports and group activities?

Each school's reopening strategy will include plans to continuously engage its parent community, and provide required resources for healthy and safe school environment. There will be a specific action plan to recover learning loss due to remote teaching. The safety of our teachers and students will be our utmost priority. All school activities and processes will be revisited based on the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education guidelines and all precautionary steps will be enforced strictly.

Do you foresee an additional financial burden in the wake of the new order? Will there be need to pass on the burden to parents?

Our schools currently have strained financials owing to falling student strength. But the board has not allowed any school to increase fees this year considering the difficulties faced by parents. Last year, no student was denied education due to non-payment of fees and fee concessions amounting to RO1.2mn offered to eligible parents.

The School Management Committees (SMCs) have been asked to allow parents to pay fees in easy installments and deserving parents are being given fee concessions. SMCs are also advised to take all possible measures for cost control.

Do you think the dynamics of education have received a major blow with respect to student-teacher and peer relationships considering students have been deprived opportunities to

socialise. What can be done to bring the losses in psychological development back on track?

Yes, undoubtedly remote learning during this pandemic has affected the mental wellbeing and overall growth of our children. We are able to provide continuity of education due to the foresighted policies of the previous board. Three years ago, I spearheaded the implementation of Indian School Oman Virtual Learning Environment (ISOVLE) and trained our teachers to inculcate online teaching. This helped our teachers a lot to move to teaching remotely.

As stated earlier, our reopening strategy will include a specific action plan to recover learning loss due to remote teaching. Special attention has also been given to students with learning difficulties since they are not able to have personal interaction with their teachers.

Our schools will be prioritising essential and non-essential subjects based on each student's level to ensure educational continuity. With the importance and usefulness of our curriculum content currently being challenged, our schools will engage in 'Authentic learning' by:

- Maximising learning outside the classroom
- Supporting students' independent learning
- Developing teachers' digital literacy skills

With a large number of Indian expatriates losing their jobs and moving back home, do you expect a further drop in student numbers? Will class sizes be reduced?

Yes, there is a decline in student numbers across all Indian schools in Oman and we expect a further drop post summer break. Although this could lead

to reducing the size of classes, there will be a deeper impact on each school's financial condition. We will come out with a detailed plan regarding (additional premises and) class size prior to opening of schools.

What is your general advice to the Indian student community as well as to the teaching staff in these disturbed times?

Students have quickly adapted to online learning and they are showing remarkable academic performance. Reading books, regularly exercising and spending time on hobbies help students focus on studies without distractions. Students should regularly communicate with teachers and classmates and practise mindfulness to reduce stress and anxiety.

The shift to online teaching pushed teachers to serious uncertainty requiring an adaptive approach and extraordinary perseverance. Teachers deserve sincere appreciation indeed for their efforts in handling this unprecedented situation. Several programmes are arranged to take care of their mental and physical health. Our counselors are regularly conducting dedicated sessions on overcoming issues like Zoom fatigue, mindfulness and social-emotional learning.

Students will, indeed, learn better in a three dimensional world consisting of teachers, classmates and activities. But COVID-19 has reshaped education with increased complexity, uncertainty and fragility. Our recent feedback survey helped us understand that remote learning is just a supplement and not a substitute for classroom instruction.

With the support of all stakeholders of our schooling system, I look forward to our academic year getting better as we move away from the COVID-19 past to a happier and more fulfilling future for our students.

Municipality issues new COVID-19 guidelines for Muttrah Fish Market

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has issued fresh guidelines for vendors and visitors at Muttrah Fish Market.

The guidelines include entry to the market must be through one gate with a separate gate for exit, the number of visitors should not exceed 30 per cent of capacity, and proper ventilation ensured at all times.

Workers in the market must wear disposable gloves, vendors must clean display counters frequently, visitors must not touch the fish, and unused display tables must be arranged to maintain a safe distance between vendors and cutters.

These guidelines are besides the regular precautionary measures including entry only to those wearing masks and body temperature below 37.5°C and maintaining social distancing of 1.5m.



5-star hotel fined for COVID-19 violations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

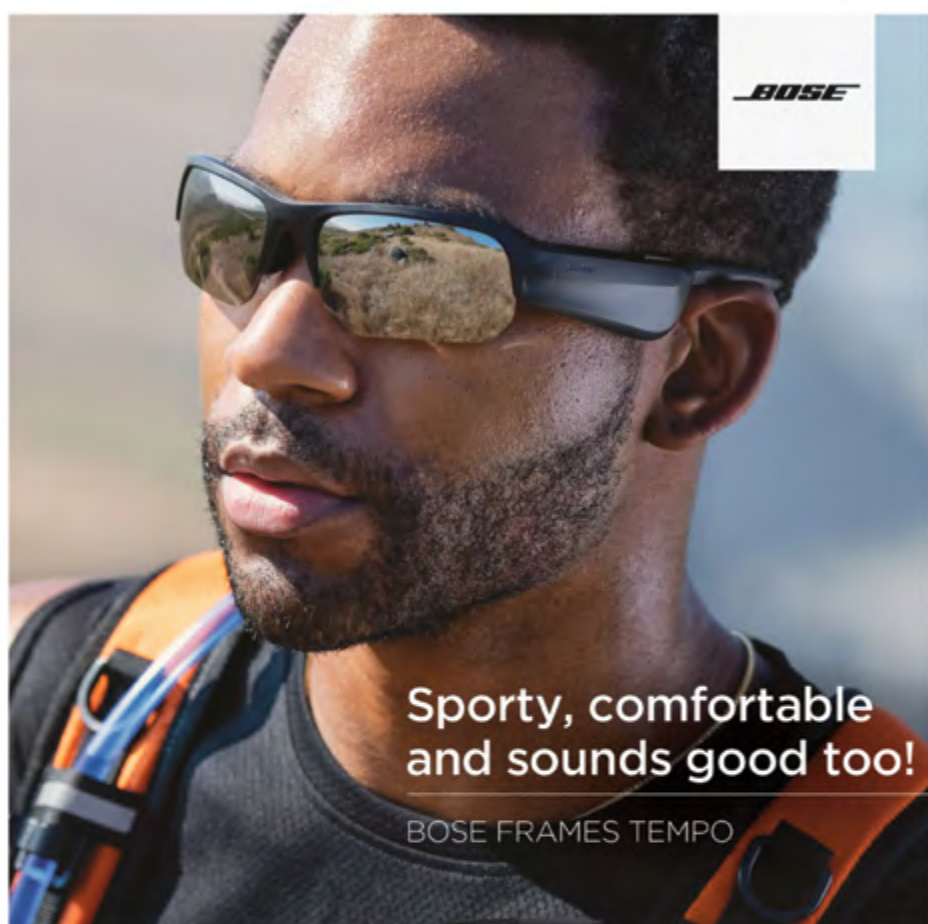
The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has penalised a five-star hotel in Muscat for violating COVID-19 precautionary measures.

InterContinental Muscat was

fined for organising a banquet hall event in violation of the permitted capacity.

The ministry has stressed that all hotels and tourist establishments must adhere to the precautionary measures in order to avoid punitive action.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in cooperation with Royal Oman Police (ROP) has closed a facility in North Sharqiyah for violating decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the impact of COVID-19 on Thursday.



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Fajr	3.50am
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Duhr	12.08pm
Asr	3.26pm
Maghrib	6.56pm
Isha	8.26pm

Three days of battle douses Dakhliyah fire

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Tireless efforts made over three days by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) - in cooperation with the Police Aviation, the Royal Air Force of Oman and other teams from the Royal Oman Police - successfully put out a wildfire that broke out in Ras al Harq area of the wilayat of Al Hamra in Dakhliyah governorate on June 16.

The CDAA announced the end of the field operations on Saturday afternoon after a joint team of 250 personnel completely doused the fire that charred many trees and bushes spread over a large area.

"More than 250 personnel from different units were transported through five aircraft belonging to the Police Aviation and the Royal Air Force of Oman to douse the wildfire," a CDAA official told *Muscat Daily*, giving the details of the operations.

"The authority used the Police Aviation and the Royal Air Force of Oman aircraft to contain the fire as CDAA helicopters were unable to carry out operations



We urge tourists and visitors to natural sites to put out grill fires after camping, because drought, heat and wind can help speed up any fire, even if it is small

CDAA OFFICIAL

because of the rugged mountainous terrain and the lack of water

sources. The fire lasted for three days but did not affect any resi-

dential area as it was about 5km away from any habitat," he said.

"The fire started at the top of the mountain and winds helped spread it over a large area," he said, adding that "a committee is looking into the cause of the fire".

Ahmed bin Salem al Naabi, a legal researcher at the Environment Department in Dakhliyah, said, "The fire caused great



losses, affecting the wildlife and wild trees in that region. The area has many wild trees such as Al Aalan or juniper trees."

"We urge tourists and visitors to natural sites to put out grill fires after camping, because drought, heat and wind help speed up any fire, even if it is small," said the CDAA official. The Environment Authority

on Saturday said it would coordinate with the competent authorities to send experts to survey the area and the damage caused by the fires to wildlife, especially the vegetation cover that characterises the area. 'Causes of the fire and its spread will be studied, as well as to develop the necessary plan to rehabilitate the site at the earliest.'

'These shocking images of wildfires should remind us all about the fragility of our mountain ecosystems,' the Environment Society of Oman said.

'These mountains are home to juniper trees which, for many reasons, face limited regeneration. When visiting the mountains please ensure that you leave no trace behind.'

Private sector to offer 15,000 jobs on hourly contracts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Around 4,800 new jobs have been added in the private sector this year, while the process for another 5,200 jobs in both civil and military sectors is complete with final announcement to be made soon, Dr Mahad bin Said Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, said on Thursday.

Speaking to Oman TV, Dr Ba'owain said, "There are 15,000 job opportunities in the private sector on hourly contracts."

"The government will support these 15,000 part-time jobs with RO200 as salary, which is an additional help to the private sector in light of the current conditions," he said.

"Around 4,800 people entered the labour market for the first time in the private sector since the beginning of this year, and another 4,400 are currently under training for employment."

Dr Ba'owain added that the

Ministry of Defence offers jobs in medical field

Muscat - The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has announced a number of job opportunities in the medical and administrative fields in the Royal Armed Forces of Oman for which it will start receiving applications from Sunday.

The ministry said in an announcement that in order to accelerate the Royal Directive of His Majesty the Sultan to implement operational initiatives, the Ministry of Labour, in coordination with the Royal Armed Forces of Oman, announced the opening of recruitment for

citizens holding master's and bachelor's degrees (specialist doctors, general practitioners, nursing officers, medical and paramedical positions) to join the Royal Armed Forces of Oman in the medical services as officers.

Holders of nursing and general diplomas, health and medical assistants and those with administrative experience can also apply for certain positions, it added.

The MoD will receive applications from June 20 to June 29.

He said that the National Employment Programme (NEP) was working to solve the issue of unemployment.

The NEP targets the development of sustainable solutions in all of state sectors (civil, military and security), as well as private sector companies. The NEP analyses job seekers data on a regular basis till they join the labour market. It also seeks other options to fill the gap of knowledge and skills needed by the labour market so that the unemployed immediately get jobs when they are available.

The NEP is carried out as per a specific executive plan and time-frame linked to performance indicators that are monitored on a regular basis.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik last week gave directives to the departments concerned to empower the NEP and provide all means of support to the NEP so that it could achieve its objectives.

PDO holds graduation ceremony for 200 jobseekers completing Emdad training

Muscat - Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) on Thursday celebrated the graduation of around 200 young Omanis who completed the training under the Emdad initiative.

The trainees were the 17th batch to graduate from the programme which was launched in 2011 to create job and training opportunities for Omani jobseekers in the oil and gas sector and beyond, a PDO statement said.

They were enrolled in different technical and non-technical training-for-employment and on-job training programmes which are in line with the company's efforts to support the government's economic diversification drive.

The graduates are now quali-

fied to work in a range of sectors and trades including quality assurance/quality control engineers, planning engineers, commissioning engineers, mud engineers, HSE advisors and mechanical technicians.

The batch also includes 32 graduates with special needs who will be employed in administrative positions.

The virtual graduation ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Baisaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in the Ministry of Labour.

"We are proud of the ongoing commitment to create sustainable jobs for young Omani which

will enable them to build rewarding careers, support their families and play their role in fostering the nation's development," PDO managing director Raoul Restucci said.

"The success of these young graduates is another example of PDO's dedication to support the sultanate's economy and local employment. The provision of sustainable goods and services by Omanis in Oman is a core pillar of our In-Country Value programme which also includes social investment and the development of local community companies. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the graduates for their dedication and hard work," he added.

That Night: Muscat-based young writer's mystery book features on Amazon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

At 14, Zunaira Waheed, a student of The International School of Choueifat - Muscat, has not only written a novel but has also been successful in getting it featured on Amazon (both paperback and Kindle versions).

The 40-page *That Night* is a mystery book written from the perspective of a teenage girl who runs away from her home one night.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Zunaira said she started writing *That Night* in the beginning of this year and 'after a few months of proof-reading and editing it's finally done'.

"I worked on the cover with a professional."

Zunaira said, "I've been reading different genres for long but one that has always been my favourite is mystery. I love the way some of my favourite authors have written. So, naturally when I started writing, I wanted it to be a mystery novel."



The protagonist, after fleeing her home, gets a fake identity. She does everything she can to make sure she isn't found by the man whom she had seen on that unfortunate night. She is unaware of what he is seeking from her or what his purpose is. However, everywhere she goes, she can feel him following her.

An ardent writer of short stories and motivational articles, a number of Zunaira's articles

have been published in several countries - Oman, Pakistan, India and Malaysia.

"This year I got the opportunity to participate in a Bulgarian writing competition where I got the runners-up position in my age group. Earlier this year, my first work on poems *Blessings of life in 2020* was published," she said.

The editor of the popular online platform Monomousumi

that promotes creative young writers hand-picked *That Night* and published it on various platforms including Amazon.com.

She added that her articles and short stories have been appreciated by people.

"Being featured in Amazon is a good achievement and I have received encouraging reviews on the platform. People have appreciated my achievement by sharing it on social media, and media institutions from different parts of the world have reached out to me asking me to narrate my journey so it can motivate others," Zunaira said.

She thanks her parents and teacher Lorna Day for their constant support and motivation.

"I want to keep writing to make a positive change in people's lives. I'm impressed by the United Nation's initiatives helping mankind under its Sustainable Development Goals, especially spreading awareness about women's empowerment in different parts of the world including Pakistan," she said.



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- 3- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- 4- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

Omantel, Huawei to set up ICT training centre



(Supplied photo)

Muscat – Omantel and Huawei have collaborated to establish a regional ICT training centre to support talent development in the sultanate. The Huawei Regional ICT Training Centre aims to advance new technologies further and support achieving the country's Oman Vision 2040, of which building a knowledge-based economy is a key pillar.

The Huawei Regional ICT Training Centre will be located in Omantel's headquarters in Muscat where other tech facilities, including the Omantel 5G Exhibition Hall, Huawei HQ Online Exhibition Hall, and the Huawei ICT Academy in Oman are also housed. The centre will also collaborate with entities such as the Centre for Research and Innovation and the Duqm 5G Exhibition Hall.

On the occasion, H E Saeed bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said, "Partnerships between the public and private sectors are one of the key elements towards achieving our national digital transformation

plans. The collaboration between Omantel and a leading global technology company such as Huawei will strengthen our future generation's skills in the field of ICT, build the ICT ecosystem and in turn, boost our nation's digital economy."

On his part, Talal bin Said al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "We are pleased to partner with Huawei on establishing this centre as we both aim to upskill the youth of Oman and provide them with the necessary tools to participate in the country's development journey. We look forward to further strengthening our long-standing partnership with Huawei to develop Oman's ICT talent and support them in realising their full potential."

He added, "Omantel, as an ICT leader, has been playing a vital role in Oman's digital transformation. Oman Vision 2040 has set digitisation objectives with which Omantel has aligned its multifaceted strategic growth and investment. Omantel sees itself as an important enabler of change and a platform for knowledge, which will give the young

generation the power and expertise to propel Oman towards sustainable and holistic growth. This centre will be a milestone in Oman and Omantel's ICT goals."

According to Robin Chen, CEO of Oman Huawei, the training centre demonstrates Huawei's commitment to build and nurture local ICT talents in Oman for a 'fully connected intelligent society'.

"We are proud to establish the training centre at Omantel's headquarters, where we look forward to bringing our global expertise to build an ICT and talent pool ecosystem and contribute to the realisation of digital transformation ambitions of Oman Vision 2040."

Chen added, "The ICT training centre will provide training services not only to our local enterprise customers but also to our partners, customers and staff in the Middle East region, offering them the opportunity to learn and experience the latest advanced technologies, such as 5G, AI, IP and IT as part of our support for their digital transformation journeys."

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S



The culture of the country is its real asset. What is underground can be exploited and bring revenues for a certain period, but what remains is its culture. Its components needs to be identified, developed and translated into the modern language

The future of any culture rests on its past. Building the future can only be successful if it is based on its history and uniqueness.

Tourism in many countries is very often a copy of what others have achieved somewhere else. Tourists travel to see and discover the identity of the place they are visiting. Most of the hotels in the Middle East, for example, are copies of the Western world or the Far East's designs. Hospitality was not created in the Western world, but emanated from the Middle East. By neglecting our past, we block our own growth. When you travel to Japan, you want to learn about their culture, and not witness copies of other parts of the world. Far-Eastern countries have understood this better than others. China, Thailand, Japan and some other countries

Globally, the country which gets the most tourists is France. You would not go to a hotel which is of Chinese style, or Arab design, when you are in France. You want to see how they live.

In the Middle East, however, people believe that by imitating the other countries' style, we can attract tourists. Most of the hotels in Oman, are of course of very good standard and offer proper services, but they do not reflect the local culture. So the majority of the tourists coming to Oman, prefer camping or spending the minimum time in a hotel, and spend the rest of the time sightseeing.

To build the right culture, it needs to be accompanied by the right education. Those in charge of the country need to emphasise on the necessity of educating their future employees.

Centuries ago, starting from the 15th, the Portuguese were the principal traders of

slaves and throughout their zones of influence, including Oman, and in some East African countries, they were building forts and their colonial architecture was reflected in their fortified towers, which had coronations on top of their walls. That allowed them to defend themselves and shoot anybody attempting to steal their ships or materials from a secured location.

This 'defence architecture' component reflected in the next centuries. Centuries later, many buildings are constructed with coronations, inspired by the Portuguese culture and which has no relation with a friendly and welcoming country like Oman. Most of the ministries have their boundary walls designed with coronation.

How many people have made an effort to research about this in Oman? This happened because no efforts were made to do

CULTURE – THE REAL WEALTH OF A COUNTRY

research and identify the real elements which form the Omani, and more broadly, the Middle Eastern culture. Today, in some houses or office buildings, the designers are sadly still completing their facades with coronations or similar patterns.

The culture of the country is its real asset. What is underground can be exploited and bring revenues for a certain period, but what remains is its culture.

Its components needs to be identified, developed and translated into the modern language.

Even if the underground of the country is empty, its culture can create wealth for the coming centuries. This needs to be placed into the education programme, so that each individual in the country is aware of its ancestors' values and history and develop into defenders of its values. Educating the younger generation would mean building the future of the country.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

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MUSCAT DAILY

Oman, Indonesia mark 43 years of relations



Muscat - The sultanate and Indonesia celebrated 43 years of diplomatic relations on Thursday by holding a virtual forum titled 'Oman-Indonesia Partnership a Bridge to the World'.

H E Mohammed Irzan Djohan, Ambassador of Indonesia to the sultanate, commended the pace of development of bilateral relations and the constant contact between the two countries.

Meanwhile, H H Sayyid Nazar al Julanda al Said, Oman's Ambassador to Indonesia, valued the efforts undertaken by Jakarta to foster ties of joint cooperation.

On his turn, Agus H K, director of Middle East Department at the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, said the two countries enjoy robust relations and will shortly sign agreements in the field of air transport.

During the videoconferencing event, experts from Oman and Indonesia presented reports in areas of investment, tourism and energy. The event also saw a presentation on investment opportunities and incentives offered by the sultanate to foreign investors in these sectors.

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Health insurance records 19% annual growth in Oman: CMA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The health insurance market in Oman has overtaken motor insurance as the biggest insurance segment for the third consecutive year, thanks to rising demand and awareness for health insurance products in the country.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, H E Abdullah Salim al Salmi, executive president of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), said that the average annual growth of health insurance segment during the past eight years was 19 per cent, leading all other insurance segments by seizing 34 per cent of the gross insurance premiums in 2020.

However, the coronavirus pandemic and decline in business activity have had a negative impact on the growth of Oman's insurance market last year.

Total premiums of insurance companies in Oman decreased by 4.3 per cent to RO466mn in 2020 compared with RO486.6mn recorded in 2019, according to the CMA's statistics.

For the year 2020, health insurance segment represented the highest market share in total premiums of insurance companies.

H E Salmi affirmed that the



H E Abdullah Salim al Salmi (Muscat Daily)

amendments in the Insurance Companies Law and the Takaful Insurance Law promulgated under the recent Royal Decrees are related to the regulation of health insurance.

"The focus of amendments is on enhancing the regulatory readiness for the health insurance system to its increasing significance and rapid growth in the volume of health insurance market during the past period," H E Salmi said.

He said that the robust indica-

tors and future importance of health insurance and its distinctiveness from other branches of insurance requires enhancement of the efficiency of insurance companies which provide health insurance.

"These companies also need to be regulated to ensure that their financial abilities and human resources are capable of providing required financing for their customers' healthcare and adequate protection for health insurance policyholders," H E Salmi added.

He further said that the new amendments in laws separate health insurance from other insurance activities, making it independent after previously being considered as part of the general insurance business.

H E Salmi stated that the amendments are a breakthrough in the regulation of the Omani insurance market as they take the industry to a new phase of regulation and a higher level of quality in provided services.

"Such independence for this sector takes into consideration

the uniqueness of health insurance activity and the nature of insurance service as it is about the healthcare and lives of individuals.

"This requires the provision of legislative and technological systems that commensurate with such distinctiveness and at the same time cope with the international developments and standards of regulation, ensuring the soundness and quality of the services provided to health insurance policyholders," he said.

H E Salmi pointed out that the amendments in Insurance Companies Law and Takaful Insurance Law respond to the requirements of the current development phase of Oman's Vision 2040.

"The health insurance sector will contribute to the economic growth and in providing quality insurance and health services in the sultanate's various governorates. This sector will also help in creating job opportunities for the youth in both the public and private sectors."

He explained that the amendments in the Insurance Companies Law and Takaful Insurance Law were carried out with the participation of relevant entities in the public and private sectors to benefit from their views in order to build an integrated health insurance system.



Saudi Aramco raises \$6bn in debut sukuk sale

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Aramco has raised US\$6bn from its first dollar-denominated Islamic bond sale, as the energy giant seeks capital to fund its hefty dividend payments.

The three-tranche sukuk, or Islamic bonds compliant with the Muslim faith, are due in three, five and 10 years, the company said in a statement.

Aramco 'successfully raised US\$6bn, following the sale of US dollar-denominated sharia-compliant securities to leading institutional investors', the statement said.

The sale comes after two previous bond offerings that were not compliant with Islamic law - a debut US\$12bn sale in 2019 and an US\$8bn offering in November last year.

The company is raising money to help pay an annual dividend of US\$75bn, a key revenue source for the Saudi government, Aramco's biggest shareholder.

Aramco, the kingdom's cash

cow, pledged to pay the dividend when it sought to generate interest in its debut initial public offering on the Saudi bourse in December 2019.

But company finances came under pressure last year, when crude prices tanked as the coronavirus pandemic sapped global demand.

Last month, Aramco declared a 30 per cent jump in first quarter profit, thanks to a recovery in oil prices, but the company's free cash flow fell short of the US\$18.75bn dividend obligation for that period.

Aramco is pushing to raise cash as Riyadh faces a ballooning budget deficit and pursues multi-billion dollar projects to diversify its oil-reliant economy.

In April, Aramco said it had struck a US\$12.4bn deal to sell a minority stake in a newly formed oil pipeline business to a consortium led by US-based EIG Global Energy Partners.

AFP

UAE economy likely to grow by 2.4% in 2021: Central bank



Abu Dhabi, UAE - The UAE's GDP is expected to grow by 2.4 per cent in 2021 and 3.8 per cent in 2022 while the non-oil GDP to expand by around 4 per cent in both years, according to the Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE).

In its latest financial stability report, the CBUAE projects that the UAE economy is expected to gradually recover during 2021 and 2022 from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As per the central bank's findings, the Targeted Economic Support Scheme has been effective in mitigating the risks posed by the pandemic by ensuring a continued flow of credit and helping affected individuals and companies.

The CBUAE's financial stability report demonstrates that the UAE banking sector remains resilient, with sustained lending capacity. The effects of the pandemic resulted in banks' higher impairment charges, lower operating income and reduced profitability. The aggregate capital and liquidity buffers remain well above the regulatory requirements, it said.

Khaled Mohamed Balama, governor of the Central Bank of the UAE, said, "In line with the UAE's robust mitigation measures, including a swift rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, the CBUAE has worked tirelessly to ensure

According to CBUAE, the UAE economy is expected to gradually recover during 2021 and 2022 from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic

that vital sectors of the nation's economy are able to withstand this crisis.

"The CBUAE's introduction of the Targeted Economic Support Scheme came at the right time, ensuring that banks could mitigate funding and liquidity pressures and maintain their lending capacity, resulting in the provision of necessary aid to individuals and corporates alike."

He said that the central bank's support is ongoing as most support measures provided by the CBUAE will remain in place through 2021.

"Together with the UAE's financial sector, we pave the way for gradual economic recovery and remain vigilant towards the challenges ahead, as we continue to uphold the UAE's financial and monetary stability." WAM

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ELECTRONIC TENDER (S)

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

TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	GRADE	LAST DATE FOR BUYING	SUBMISSION DATE	TENDER PRICE R.O.
58/2021 Re Tender	Supply, Implement And Upgrade Hci Nodes, Network Switches, Backup Appliance In Main And Dr Site With Virtualization, Dr Failover & Backup System	Specialized	27/6/2021	6/7/2021	46 /=
73/2021	New 11 Kv Outgoing Feeder From Primary S/S Ghadfan-02 At Liwa Area At North Batinah Governorate	C	24/6/2021	13/7/2021	25 /=
74/2021	Rehabilitation Of 33kv Network Assets	B	4/7/2021	20/7/2021	25 /=
75/2021	Testing And Calibration Of Meters At Metering Workshop.	C	1/7/2021	20/7/2021	25 /=
76/2021	Extensions Of Power Supply To Several Houses Pol'ts At Ibr (Dhahirah Governorate)	C	5/7/2021	20/7/2021	25 /=
77/2021	Construction Of New 33kv Feeder Tapping From New Yanqul Grid Substation To Waqabah Primary Substation (Dhahirah Governorate)	B	28/6/2021	27/7/2021	202 /=

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts gains for third consecutive week

Continuing the upward trend which started in the beginning of June, the benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange posted gains for the third consecutive week. The MSX30 Index ended last week higher by 1.19 per cent.

All the sub-indices also closed in green territory for the week. Industrial Index led gains with 3.43 per cent rise on weekly basis, while Financial Index and Service Index closed up by 1.62 per cent and 1.03 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah Index was higher by 3.05 per cent.

Local news

►United Power Company's board of directors met on June 15 and approved to convert the company from a public joint stock company to closed joint stock company. The board is authorized to take all the necessary procedures to convert the company from a SAOG to SAOC.

►Space Communication Technologies Company (SCT) and Omantel have signed an agreement to provide satellite communications to the different verticals in the Omani market. Omantel will use this service to expand and enhance its reach for mobile network backhauling, in addition to providing connectivity services to their end-customers in different regions across the sultanate. Omantel sees this agreement as a push towards digitization that is

modernizing traditional ways of governance, education, business, services and administration by offering more efficient technologies and advanced solutions.

►HSBC Bank Oman and the SME Development Fund (SMEF) signed a collaborative agreement recently to provide small and medium sized enterprises in Oman with RO5mn in financing. The agreement was signed by Nasr al Asfoor, head of business banking at HSBC Bank Oman and Salah al Mawali, CEO of SMEF. This collaboration provides additional support to the SME development initiatives endorsed by the Omani government and will help accelerate the growth of SMEs throughout the sultanate by giving them access to financing at an attractive rate.

►Moody's rating agency placed on review for upgrade National Bank of Oman's (NBO) ba3 Adjusted BCA, Ba3 long-term deposit ratings, Ba3 senior unsecured ratings, Ba2 long-term local currency CRR and Ba2(cr) long-term CR Assessment. The rating action follows Commercial Bank of Qatar's (CBQ) recent offer to the shareholders of NBO to acquire an additional 15.2 per cent stake in NBO, which if successful would increase its shareholding in the bank to 50.1 per cent. Following the potential increase in shareholding CBQ would consolidate NBO as a subsidiary. The ratings affirma-



(Muscat Daily)

tion and stable outlook reflect Moody's expectation that following a successful acquisition of a controlling stake in NBO, the credit profile of CBQ would remain commensurate with its existing ba1 BCA despite increased exposure to Oman's more challenging operating environment and the slightly weaker financial profile of NBO. ►Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the sultanate's integrated sovereign wealth fund, has reaffirmed that state-owned enterprises (SOEs) operating under its auspices will not compete with the private sector. OIA president emphasised the primacy of the private sector in driving the local econ-

omy, noting that state-owned businesses will ally with, rather than challenge, privately owned firms in the marketplace.

GCC markets

Kuwait's gross domestic product (GDP) contracted 9.9 per cent in 2020, compared with a growth of 0.4 per cent in 2019, mainly because of last year's sharp drop in oil prices, state news agency KUNA reported last week. Preliminary estimates and statistics also showed the headline inflation rate increased to about 2.1 per cent in 2020 from about 1.1 per cent in 2019. Going forward, the IMF estimates Kuwait's economy to grow by 0.7 per cent

and 3.2 per cent, respectively, in 2021 and 2022.

Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa issued last week a royal decree extending a number of initiatives launched within the economic stimulus package worth BD485mn (US\$1.2bn) designed to reduce impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of support initiatives within the existing financial and economic package will be extended for an additional three months from June to August. The salaries of insured Bahraini private sector employees working in impacted sectors will be paid through the Unemployment Insurance Fund for a period of three months,

100 per cent for the first month and 50 per cent for the second and third months.

Global news

The US Federal Reserve held a meeting on Wednesday and announced the following measures:

►The Federal Reserve now forecasts at least two rate hikes by the end of 2023. Seven of the 18 members see the Fed possibly increasing rates as early as 2022.

►Fed also sharply increased its inflation forecasts for the year. It now sees inflation running to 3.4 per cent this year, above its previous estimate of 2.4 per cent.

►The Fed still estimates the unemployment rate will fall to 4.5 per cent in 2021.

►The Federal Reserve will continue to increase its holdings of treasury securities by at least US\$80bn per month and of agency mortgage-backed securities by at least US\$40bn per month until substantial further progress has been made toward the committee's maximum employment and price stability goals.

►Fed committee also decided to keep the target range for the federal funds rate between 0-0.25 per cent.

The OPEC crude oil production averaged 25.46mn barrels per day (bpd) in May 2021, up by 0.39mn bpd from the previous month. Crude oil output increased mainly in Saudi Arabia,

Venezuela and Iran, while production decreased primarily in Nigeria and Angola. The share of OPEC crude oil in total global production was up by 0.2 per cent in May to 27.2 per cent compared with the previous month. Global liquids production in May increased by 0.63mn bpd to average 93.67mn bpd compared with the previous month, and was higher year-on-year by 5.63mn bpd.

Recommendations

The US Federal Reserve's meeting outcome was the main event of last week.

Although initially the reaction was negative but post the announcement of Fed chairman, the market recovered a little when Fed chairman attempted to downplay the outlook on rates saying, 'Discussing lift-off now would be highly premature'.

He also said more data was needed for the Fed to expand on a timeline for trimming its bond purchases.

The GCC markets on the other hand remained more or less stable largely because of higher oil prices.

In Oman, the market remained buoyed with better turnover as well.

The markets will be preparing for the second quarter results now. We estimate, banking, ceramics and steel players to post better numbers in the coming quarter.

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US Fed downplays inflation fears, sees rate hikes in 2023

Washington, US - Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell on Wednesday once again tried to assuage fears of rising US inflation, even while a majority of central bank officials now believe interest rates will increase in 2023.

While widespread vaccinations have allowed the United States to rebound faster than previously expected from the COVID-19 pandemic downturn, the Fed's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) cautioned that 'risks to the economic outlook remain' in a statement following its two-day meeting.

But amid the accelerating rebound, Fed officials appear to have grown more hawkish, with 11 of the 18 committee members now expecting at least two hikes of the benchmark lending rate in 2023, according to updated quarterly economic projections. The March forecasts showed only seven officials expecting rate liftoff in 2023, but seven now expect one as soon as next year.

However, Powell stressed that those projections 'do not represent a committee decision or plan.'

Markets and analysts have been closely watching FOMC meetings in recent months as they weigh fears that the Fed's stance on rising prices is too passive, which could allow an upward price spiral that would force the central bank to aggressively raise rates - and crush economic growth.

Powell again tried to ease those worries, stressing that officials stand ready to alter policy if they see signs inflation moved



Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell

"materially and persistently beyond levels consistent with our goal."

Unmet goals

However, the FOMC said it will not begin to withdraw the stimulus measures implemented at the start of the pandemic until progress is made on reducing unemployment and keeping inflation above their two per cent goal.

And since inflation has lagged the bank's target for over a decade and unemployment remains at 5.8 per cent, achieving "substantial further progress is still a ways off," Powell told reporters in his press conference following the meeting.

He warned that the "recovery is incomplete" and improvement has been "uneven," with employment in hard-hit sectors well below pre-pandemic levels.

But some economists remain

skeptical the Fed can manage the policy dilemma smoothly, and US stock markets lost ground, with the Dow dropping 0.8 per cent.

"Certainly, some of the rise in inflation is temporary, but as we have argued, risks are rising that underlying inflation pressures are mounting," said Mickey Levy of Berenberg Capital Markets.

Tapering bond buying

The Fed officials' median forecast for annual inflation this year increased to 3.4 per cent from the previous 2.4 per cent in March, but they see the rate slowing to 2.1 per cent in 2022, according to the projections.

Committee members also boosted their growth outlook to 7 per cent from 6.5 per cent.

On inflation, Powell said, "What we are seeing in the near term is principally associated

with reopening of the economy, and not with a tight labor market or tight resource constraints."

Those temporary effects should "stop, and in fact it would reverse over time," he said. However, "we are not sure" about the timeframe.

The consumer price index jumped to 5 per cent for the 12 months ended in May, but Powell attributed that to "a perfect storm of strong demand and limited supply" for things like used cars.

The FOMC also said it will continue buying US\$120bn a month in bonds, thereby providing a steady flow of liquidity to the economy.

Powell said the committee is not focused on raising lending rates but has started discussions on when to taper the pace of bond purchases as its first move towards ending the pandemic measures.

He said the Fed will give plenty of notice before making any major changes, and "do what we can to avoid a market reaction."

Even after the initial steps, the Fed measures "will continue to deliver powerful support to the economy until the recovery is complete," Powell said.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said that while "taper talk is underway" Powell "wants to see what happens in the labor market after the summer."

However, he warned that "for someone preaching uncertainty, Powell is very confident the Fed won't fall behind the curve."

AFP

Microsoft gives more power to chief Satya Nadella

San Francisco, US - Microsoft named chief executive Satya Nadella as chair of its board, strengthening his grip on a pioneering US technology company he rejuvenated for a new age.

Nadella was unanimously elected head of the Microsoft board of directors, where he will guide the agenda 'leveraging his deep understanding of the business to elevate the right strategic opportunities and identify key risks,' the company said in a post.

Nadella, who took over from Steve Ballmer in February 2014, made Microsoft more relevant in a new tech world led by mobile-focused rivals such as Apple and Google.

When Nadella took the reins as chief of Microsoft, some feared the technology giant was becoming a dinosaur.



Satya Nadella (AFP)

Nadella is credited with bringing new energy to the company, founded in 1975, and long focused on packaged software for personal computers.

Early in his tenure, Nadella ordered a massive reorganization, cutting some 18,000 jobs - or 14 per cent of the workforce - under a plan aimed at simplifying the corporate structure and integrating the mobile division of Fin-

land's Nokia. Nadella, 53, made a priority of cloud computing, which has become a lucrative growth engine at the tech giant based in the Washington state city of Redmond.

Microsoft next week is to unveil a new generation of its Windows operating system, which market trackers say powers nearly three-quarters of the world's desktop computers.

Microsoft built its empire on software such as Windows and Office - licensed to computer makers or sold in packages for installation on machines in homes or workplaces.

Under Nadella, Microsoft has put more focus on renting software and services hosted at data-centers in the computing cloud, bulking up its Azure platform.

AFP

EU struggles for unity on global tax

Luxembourg, Luxembourg - EU finance ministers worked Thursday to find European unity on striking an international deal on taxation, with low-tax countries Ireland and Hungary needing cajoling to stay on board.

Finance ministers from the G20 countries will meet in Venice next month in hopes of agreeing a broad outline on new rules for worldwide taxation that would include a minimum tax on the world's biggest companies.

That proposal has caused ructions in some EU countries such as Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland and Hungary that have relied on low tax rates to attract multinationals and build their economies.

"There are still states to be



Bruno Le Maire (AFP)

convinced, but the best way to convince them is to talk to them," said French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire as he arrived for a two-day meeting with his EU counterparts.

Le Maire said he would raise the matter with Irish Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe and

fly to Poland on Sunday to talk with his counterpart there.

He said he would also hold meetings with Chinese, Indian and Russian officials next week.

"We know change is coming, we want to be part of that change," Irish Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe told reporters.

However, he argued that Ireland lacked "the advantages of scale and location" of bigger member states and that taxation can be "part of a competitive offering".

Ireland, the EU home to tech giants Facebook, Google and Apple, has a corporate tax rate of 12.5 per cent, lower than the current proposal for a minimum global tax of 15 per cent.

AFP

Sohar International introduces real estate Escrow Accounts

Further enhancing investor confidence whilst facilitating financial services for developers, Sohar International has introduced Escrow Accounts.

This financial solution comes in line with Royal Decree No. 30/2018 promulgating the law on escrow account for real estate development and Ministerial Decision No. 72/2019 issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

As the country witnesses key legislative reforms with new laws and regulations, as well as the introduction of strict measures to ensure implementation of good governance, Sohar International is keen to contribute and support the government's efforts in providing impetus to the real estate sector.

The introduction of escrow account is key to this objective, as it protects deposits of investors following the purchase of real estate developments within the country.

Commenting on the introduc-



tion of Escrow Account, Khalil al Hedaifi, chief retail banking officer at Sohar International said, "Keeping pace with recent intricate and sophisticated development of Omani real estate sector and supporting the government's efforts in regulating the sector, our new financial product aims at enhancing confidence of real estate developers, investors, as

well as vendors, whilst protecting their interests."

Opening up an Escrow Account with Sohar International requires a few easy steps. Once the account is active, it can then be communicated to the potential investors by the developers which will not only increase the investors' confidence, but will also regulate and ensure

the developers are paid on time which will enhance the overall experience.

It is important that the developer interested in opening the Escrow Account submits all the necessary documents in any of the bank branches.

The regulations under Escrow enhance control and provides confidence to the buyer, espe-

cially for those investing in under-construction projects. The developer, too, is ensured of such comfort.

With several commercial, tourist and residential projects underway and in-pipeline in the sultanate, Escrow is an essential to provide stimulus to the burgeoning sector, as it protects the public by minimising the risk prevalent in any real estate purchase.

This will significantly contribute to the long-term socio-economic development in the country.

Sohar International is committed to providing new products, services, features that further enhance customer's banking experience.

The bank effectively continues to cater the needs of all its customer segments and the new Escrow account services comes in the framework of enabling all parties to grow and deliver enhanced performance enabling them to win.



Over RO300,000 worth prizes in Ahlibank's draw

Promoting financial freedom and wise spending habits among the people of Oman, Ahlibank continues to hold its popular Wafra prize draws rewarding more winners, with more prizes. The bank is all set to conduct this year's second quarterly draw at the beginning of July.

Winners from the bank-wide customer base will walk away with a total cash prize of more than RO300,000, including one winner who will receive a whopping RO250,000 in 'Salary for Life' draw. The bank will announce the names in a live broadcast on its official social media pages.

Speaking about the importance of banking initiatives and programs that help customers realize their dreams, through prudent financial choices, Muneer al Balushi - AGM, head of Retail Distribution, Ahlibank, said, "Ahlibank is taking a firm approach focused on meeting the evolving customer requirements. Under the current circumstances in the world, programmes that help our customers move forward and plan their future accurately to avoid any potential crisis had to continue. In this sense, we are pleased to conduct our grand draws for the second time this year, inviting our customers and encouraging them to adopt a path of

financial stability, for greater savings, doubling their chances to win. Ahlibank's draws have helped to change the lives of many winners, thereby bringing about a mass positive change and happiness among the public in the local community."

The 2021 Wafra prize scheme aims to reward more than 1,600 customers across Ahlibank's branches in the sultanate, with a total cash prizes of more than RO2mn.

"Ahlibank's team constantly researches to find the latest opportunities that can contribute to adding value to our customers' banking experience. Our team always works towards employing these opportunities to match the need of our customers' lifestyle effectively. The new Wafra prize scheme, which includes different categories of customers and a greater value of prizes in this year, demonstrates the importance we attach to upgrading our services and products. This comes in an effort to maintain our position as one of Oman's most preferred local banks."

The bank has allocated special quarterly draws to reward five lucky winners across the entire network with a cash prize of RO25,000, equivalent (RO5,000 each), and another prize of RO 25,000 for one Al Nukhba and exclusive winner.



Asawer Real Estate, Muscat Hills begin smart offices project

Asawer Real Estate and Muscat Hills Joint Development celebrated the start of construction of 'Muscat Pavilion' for smart offices located in Muscat Hills, under the patronage of H E Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, and in the presence of a number of their excellencies, media professionals and journalists.

Eng Siham bint Ahmad al Harthy, co-founder of Asawer Real Estate, said, This project represents the values added to the efforts to develop the real estate sector and enable it to attract investments, especially since foreigners are allowed to freehold in it, in addition to entertaining specifications, whether in terms of its strategic location or the features it contains, as well as high-quality finishes. Such projects contribute to attracting foreign investments into the sultanate, and it convinces foreign investors in them, which is in line with Oman's Vision 2040 which seeks to create a stimulating environment for various economic sectors, leading to reviving the market and creating jobs for the citizens."

Eng Siham confirmed that the project comes to meet the requirements of the Omani market and its need for offices with high-quality specifications, characterised by privacy and tranquility in a strategic location, and contributes to the growth and development of businesses.

Asawer Real Estate company will market the project and sell the offices and stores it contains according to a well-studied marketing plan that includes individuals and companies inside and outside the sultanate, where distinguished facilities will be provided to those wishing to own

office units, including soft payments during the construction stages, without interest, and financing facilities from one of the local banks in the sultanate.

Those wishing to pay the price of the office unit in one go will receive a discount of 5 per cent.

From his part, Dawoud al Hinai, CEO of Al Mukhatit Real Estate Company, stated that the project is characterised by modern features, and a luxurious architectural design that goes in line with its strategic location, taking into account the smallest details through the office design inspired by the Omani heritage, and international specifications in decorations and accurate investment of spaces, in a way that meets the needs of a business owner.

In addition it provides public facilities in the building, which would facilitate the movement and speed of employees to their distinguished work environment, which contains modern technologies and advanced equipment. He noted that the building consists of nine floors along with three floors for smart parking underground, which can accommodate up to 550 cars. Smart office prices start from RO39,000, and shops start from RO21,000, and it is hoped that the project will be complete within 24 months.

Ownership in the Muscat Pavilion project is considered an exceptional and unique investment for the investor. This is due to the smart specifications of these offices, which are the first of their kind in the sultanate, and the provision of free ownership for foreigners with permanent residence, in addition to the guaranteed material return that exceeds 8 per cent and the ease of ownership and resale, and achieving financial return from it.

Mazoon Electricity encourages customers to use bill calculator

To help better understand their electricity consumption pattern, Mazoon Electricity, the leading electricity provider in Oman, urges its customers to use the electricity bill calculator.

The company has provided the calculator for self-assessment and ease of use. The electricity bill calculator allows consumers to estimate their electricity cost in a simple way.

With the help of the bill calculator, customers will get a sense of their electricity consumption, and get additional information and bill details.

The bill calculator can be easily accessed on Mazoon Electricity website using the link [https://mzec.nama.om/en-](https://mzec.nama.om/en-us/Pages/billcalculator.aspx)



us/Pages/billcalculator.aspx.

Once the customers click the link, they have to select their bill type (residential, tourism, agriculture, commercial) and then enter the 'from' and 'to' date they

want the bill to be calculated.

They must also enter their previous and current meter reading. Once they click the calculate button, the calculator will show the total amount.

Renault Megane: Compact car that offers comfort

Blending striking good looks and stunning performance, Renault Megane, the vibrant and chic saloon, has been making a statement in Oman. Admired for its driving performance, owners are praising Renault Megane for its driving comfort, technology and safety features.

Tariq al Khalil who has been driving Renault Megane for the last three years says, "The charismatic Renault Megane is a real head-turner. With its sedan body, dynamic lines and generous proportions, it has a style of its own, both lively and elegant."

Khalid al Salmi appreciates Renault Megane for its daring expressive design and assertive style. He says, "With its sleek silhouette, high-tech cockpit and sophisticated styling, Renault Megane combines elegance and versatility."

Sulaiman al Amri likes the car for its driving comfort and safety features. He explains, "Attractive and dynamic, Renault Megane makes a bold statement, unveiling its performance excellence and high-tech interior."

Mansoor Sami compliments Renault Megane for its evolutionary look. He says, "With this vehicle you will enjoy the benefits of a host of advanced technologies."

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "Its energetic lines and substantial proportions add to its in-



creasing popularity with car aficionados in Oman. Megane presents a high-class driving experience, thanks to its technologies, design, and roominess. Renault Megane, which is available in 2.0lt engine configuration along with 1.6lt variant, is a popular car and much-loved car in the sultanate."

Acclaimed expertise

Renault's designers have drawn upon their acclaimed expertise to seamlessly incorporate 503 dm³ VDA of boot storage capacity without compromising the vehicle's aesthetic appeal. Its generous dimensions (4.63m

long and 1.81m wide, with a record wheelbase in its class of 2.71m) underscore its status-enhancing credentials and provide additional room for occupants. Its sleek profile is the result of painstaking work on the proportion of glass to metal (one-third / two-thirds), as well as its low height (1.44m) and ground clearance (13cm).

Fitted as standard either across the range or in the higher-end versions, chrome detailing (grille, side mouldings, door window strips, door handles and exhaust tailpipes) point to the model's quality and reinforce its status-enhancing appeal. Its

1.57m front and rear track - the widest in its class - and its range of wheel sizes up to 18 inches imbue it with a striking stance. Its broad, sculpted shoulders express its sportier style.

Megane is available in a choice of eight exterior colours. Its seven metallic options include Pearl White, Mercury, Mink Brown, Cosmos Blue, Comet Grey, Flame Red, Dune Beige. It is one non-metallic finish: Glacier White.

Unique features

The Megane shares many styling features with its larger sibling Renault Talisman, including its

lighting signature which is visible night and day: The front C-shaped lighting signature features LED 3D-effect light guides. Available as option on the top version of the Megane are full LED (LED Pure Vision technology) head lights. The rear LED lights form a unique horizontal 3D-effect signature featuring Edge Light technology. The slender brush stroke-like lines emit a deep red light.

Carefully appointed 'cockpit'-feel

The carefully appointed 'cockpit'-feel cabin exudes an unmistakable 'cockpit'-feel thanks to sculpted, enveloping seats and features such as a configurable colour 7-inch TFT data display, or a portrait-format 8.7-inch multimedia tablet, R-Link 2 which supports Apple carplay and Android Auto.

Furthermore, the positioning of all the vehicle's technological features has been thought through to facilitate their everyday use.

Travelling comfort is further enhanced by the careful attention that has been paid to the interior finish, to the quality of the soft-to-the-touch materials, which are within easy reach of the driver and passengers.

For more local information, you can visit the following website: <https://en.renault.com.om/> or call our Toll Free number on 80050011.

Bank Muscat continues COVID-19 vaccination drive for employees

In line with its strong commitment to ensuring the health and safety of employees and stakeholders as well as its social responsibility to the nation, Bank Muscat in coordination with the Ministry of Health, is at present carrying out a massive vaccination drive for the benefit of its 3,781 employees. The vaccination drive has had an excellent response and so far more than 50 per cent of the bank's employees have been vaccinated in the first two weeks of the vaccination campaign.

As the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, Bank Muscat always goes the extra mile to ensure that its employees remain safe and healthy so as to be able to serve the community in the best manner possible.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the bank has implemented a number of safety measures including the forma-



tion of an internal committee to oversee the planning and response of the bank to the fast changing situation brought about by the pandemic. It has been rigorously implementing the directives of the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19 and

the Ministry of Health. The bank has effected deep-cleaning protocols at its branches and facilities, and continues to distribute safety equipment to its employees. Checking of body temperatures before entry and daily inspections of facilities and em-

ployees by a special team to ensure social distancing, correct wearing of masks and the following of hygiene protocols are among the various measures that are followed. It is also continuously carrying out awareness drives among its employees and customers in this regard.

The bank has previously contributed RO2mn to the sultanate's efforts to combat COVID-19, including RO1mn for the vaccination of people in Oman. Going forward, the bank will continue to coordinate with the relevant authorities and take all appropriate measures, which are needed to ensure the health and safety of all.

Bank Muscat also takes the opportunity to thank the Ministry of Health, officials and medical staff across the country for their proactive and tireless efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19 and to provide the best healthcare possible across the country.



OTC meets industry partners for academic programme review

As part of its continuous commitment to enhance the quality of its academic programmes, Oman Tourism College (OTC), represented by the Department of Tourism and Management Studies, recently held a meeting via Microsoft Teams.

This was set up to review and update the academic programmes offered by the college to prepare a well-trained and qualified national workforce. The meeting saw the presence of 45 participants from across the tourism, hospitality, events and aviation sectors.

Commenting on the importance of holding the meeting, Dr Abdulkarim Sultan al Mughairi, dean of OTC said, "Such meet-

ings are integral in bridging the gap between the offered academic programmes and the requirements of the labour market. This is because it represents the link between the academic institution and hotel and tourism establishments to come together and discuss various aspects related to the academic programmes that are offered and the skills, expertise and knowledge that is required by the labour market.

"During the meeting, several topics were touched upon, including industry trends and labour market needs in the fields of tourism, hospitality, marketing and event management. Graduate employability skills, the role of

foreign languages in enhancing job opportunities and the importance of internships for graduates were also discussed. The meeting further shed light on the challenges facing the industry given the current circumstances and means to deal with them."

"I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to all the participants of this meeting. Through each of their cooperation and good efforts, we can look forward to the progress and prosperity of the tourism sector in the future," he added.

Oman Tourism College is the leading academic institution that offers various study programmes related to tourism and hospitality in the sultanate.

Prime Advertising begins digital, social learning programme

With an objective to empower its team, Prime Advertising LLC, Oman, a communications agency powered by its purpose to 'be better', embarked on a 10-week Digital and Social Learning Programme in May 2021.

The programme included comprehensive learning and covered a host of topics from basics to advanced level.

Among the themes covered at the sessions were Google Discovery ads, Paid and Organic Search, Google Search and Display Console, Google algorithm, SEO with Black Hat and White Hat techniques, Advanced Community Management, Reporting and Analytics, Conversion tracking that lends ROI to Inbound Marketing, User Generated Content and marketing via Amazon platform.

The various popular social media platforms, its content and management were included in the initial phase of learning itself.

Adopting a holistic approach to advertising, digital marketing, social media, public relations, events, branding and media services, Prime Advertising delivers integrated campaigns that

drive and deliver results in the digital and analogue communications world.

Fervent about work that communicates and persuades, as an agency, Prime Advertising aims to 'deliver better work, compared to the previous day'.

It seeks 'to serve its clients' better, compared to the previous day'. Its team tries to 'be better as co-workers and help one another, fostering personal and professional growth'.

A spokesperson of the agency elaborated, "We get better by being a learning organisation. Our ultimate objective is to serve our clients better and for employees to enjoy the process of discovery and learning.

"We live in a digital age where knowledge is ever expanding and there is a need to know more, learn and grow. The digital and social learning programme did us immense good.

"It is no longer digital marketing that is required by clients. It is in fact, planning and marketing for a digital age."

He added, "Hence creative employees, apart from media and account management were

a part of the learning journey, including learning of analytics.

"Agencies now need hybrid executives who have a combined definitive knowhow of a brand, digital and social technology employed, and with a creative inclination.

"It is most important for an agency to democratise digital knowledge amongst all its employees, including creative and account management, and not just restrict it to digital media executives.

"We are happy to have imparted an entire gamut of the best in class digital and social learning to all."

Creating meaningful brand experiences for the connected consumer, Prime Advertising has been delivering strategy and creative content, since 1978, for some of the finest national and international brands.

Consistently garnering successful outcomes for its clients, takes effort and learning every moment.

To walk the talk, Prime Advertising constantly initiates experiential learning opportunities for its team through talks, presentations and forums.

Muscat University signs pact with the British Council to become IELTS centre

Muscat University hosted the British Council for the signing of an agreement for the University to become an IELTS Test Registration Centre. The Muscat University vice chancellor Professor Khamis al Yahyaee signed the agreement along with the British Council country director Helen Mehta.

Professor Yahyaee said, "We are delighted to sign this agreement with the British Council to become an IELTS Test Registration Centre. This agreement further exemplifies the flourishing partnership we have with the British Council to provide examinations to Omanis and residents at the university."

The signing of the contract signals the next step in a very successful partnership with the British Council which delivers most of its Muscat-based English language examinations such as IELTS at the university. Test candidates are now able to register for the IELTS exam and then take the exam at Muscat University. As well as hosting English language exams in partnership with the British Council, Muscat University recently provided its high-quality IT suites for stu-



dents sitting the ACCA examinations. The university was happy to support the British Council hosting ACCA exams as this aligns well with the University's own programmes in Accounting and Finance.

He added, "The university always looks forward to increasing partnership opportunities with the leading institutions operating in the sultanate and meeting their needs in accordance with

the principle of exchanging common interests and in line with the aspirations of both sides in providing global education."

Helen stated, "The accreditation of Muscat University as a British Council IELTS registration centre is an exceptional addition to the list of licensed centres in Oman. The partnership is an important step that reflects the British Council's commitment to continue supporting the coun-

try's higher education institutions."

The IELTS test is the most popular test in the world to assess English language proficiency for non-native speakers, and it is internationally recognised by more than 10,000 institutions and universities around the world.

The exam is also recognised by the leading universities inside and outside of Oman.

Jordan Aviation low-cost airline starts flights between Muscat and Amman

Jordan Aviation, Jordan's favourite budget airline has received landing rights to operate weekly two flights between Muscat and Amman effective June 28. Their first flight from Amman to Muscat is all set to take off with overwhelming response on both destinations.

Marmul International Travel, a flagship division of Marmul Travel & Tours has been appointed as the General Sales Agents to this Airline in Oman.

Speaking on the occasion Mebal Pinto, group general manager of Marmul Group of Companies, said, "This new airline will be a valuable bridge between two beautiful countries - Oman and Jordan, and will definitely enhance Oman's position in the list of Jordan Aviation's 11th international destinations - Dubai, Sharjah,



Cairo, Dhaka, Istanbul, Baghdad, Antalya, Aqaba, Sharemshaikh."

Reiterating the objective behind starting the flight operations, Osama Quntar, vice

president - Commercial, Jordan Aviation, said, "It is a privilege to have Jordan Aviation, Jordan's favourite airline, as a partner in Oman. The representation of this

Airline in Oman will definitely increase the visibility of the brand in the market and attract even more clients. More importantly it will enhance the Economic activ-

ities between the two friendly countries."

Today, Jordan Aviation is a name to reckon within the aviation business in Jordan and in the

region. The airline has made flying affordable for more Jordani's than ever before.

Airline offers nonstop flight connecting Muscat and Amman two days a week. The airline also plans to connect Muscat to Cairo and Istanbul, and many more destinations as well.

The airline connects its network with an impressive fleet of Boeing 737-400 aircraft. Over the years, their fleet has increased to offer a range of aircraft types to suit the needs of the markets they serve - Today they have the Airbus A320 aircraft that has joined their Boeing 737 aircraft and these can be seen operating to the Far-East, Africa and Northern Europe. Their wide body aircraft have ETOPS capability and operate around the globe to destinations in the Far East, Indian Sub-Con-

tinent, Middle East, Africa and Europe and across the South Atlantic to countries such as Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela and various Caribbean nations.

They also provide aircraft on Wet Lease operations to a number of airlines in Europe, the Middle East, Northern & Central Africa.

They have a range of passenger flights with holiday charter flights operating under the prefix JAV also with the ongoing development of their scheduled services operating under their R5 flight prefix as allocated by IATA.

For further information on booking, passengers can contact Marmul Travel located at Al Khuwayr Service Road and also at their large corporate office at Al Khuwayr Souq opposite to Bank Muscat, and also at all their branch offices all over Oman.

Amnesty calls for Ebrahim Raisi to be investigated for rights violation

Nicosia, Cyprus - Ultraconservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi, who was declared Iran's next president on Saturday, should be investigated for alleged crimes against humanity and a 'spiralling crack-down' on human rights, Amnesty International said.

'That Ebrahim Raisi has risen to the presidency instead of being investigated for the crimes against humanity of murder, enforced disappearance and torture, is a grim reminder that impunity reigns supreme in Iran,' Amnesty said in a statement.

Amnesty said Raisi was a member of the 'Death Commission' that forcibly disappeared and extrajudicially executed in secret thousands of opposition prisoners in 1988 while serving as Tehran's deputy prosecutor.

Asked in 2018 and again last year about the executions, Raisi denied playing a role, even as he lauded an order he said was handed down by the Islamic republic's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to proceed with the purge.

Amnesty said the 'fate of the victims and the whereabouts of their bodies are, to this day, systematically concealed by the Iranian authorities, amounting to ongoing crimes against humanity'.

The London-based pressure group said Raisi had 'presided over a spiralling crackdown on human rights' while serving as Iran's judiciary chief for the past two years.

It said the crackdown had seen



Iranian cleric Ebrahim Raisi gives a news conference after voting in the presidential election, at a polling station in the capital Tehran, on Friday (AFP)

'hundreds of peaceful dissidents, human rights defenders and members of persecuted minority groups arbitrarily detained'.

'Under his watch, the judiciary has also granted blanket impunity to government officials and security forces responsible for unlawfully killing hundreds of men, women and children.'

It had also subjected 'thousands of protesters to mass arrests and at least hundreds to enforced disappearance, and torture and other ill-treatment during and in the aftermath of the nationwide protests of November 2019'.

'We continue to call for Ebrahim Raisi to be investigated for his involvement in past and

ongoing crimes under international law, including by states that exercise universal jurisdiction,' it said.

Amnesty called on the UN Human Rights Council's member states to take 'concrete steps to address the crisis of systematic impunity in Iran'.

It said they should establish 'an impartial mechanism to collect and analyse evidence of the most serious crimes under international law committed in Iran to facilitate fair and independent criminal proceedings'.

Raisi's victory was confirmed on Saturday when he received the congratulations of the incumbent and the three other candidates - ultraconservatives

Mohsen Rezaei and Amirhossein Qazizadeh Hashemi, and reformist Abdolnasser Hemmati.

Khamenei hailed the election saying that 'the great winner ... is the Iranian nation because it has risen up once again in the face of the propaganda of the enemy's mercenary media'.

'Save the people'

On election day, pictures of often flag-waving voters dominated state TV coverage, but away from the polling stations some voiced anger at what they saw as a stage-managed election.

"Whether I vote or not, someone has already been elected," scoffed Tehran shopkeeper Saeed Zareie. "They organise the

elections for the media."

Enthusiasm was dampened further by spiralling inflation and job losses, and the COVID pandemic that proved more deadly in Iran than anywhere else in the region, killing more than 80,000 people by the official count.

Among those who queued to vote at schools, mosques and community centres, many said they supported Raisi, who has promised to fight corruption, help the poor and build millions of flats for low-income families.

A nurse named Sahebiyan said she backed him for his anti-graft credentials and on hopes he would 'move the country forward... and save the people from economic, cultural and social

deprivation'.

Raisi, who holds deeply conservative views on many social issues including the role of women in public life, has been named in Iranian media as a possible successor to Khamenei.

To opposition and human rights groups, his name is linked to mass executions of political prisoners in 1988. The US government has sanctioned him over the purge, in which Raisi has denied playing a part.

Asked in 2018 and again last year about the executions, Raisi denied playing a role, even as he lauded an order he said was handed down by the Islamic republic's founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to proceed with the purge.

'Maximum pressure'

Ultimate power in Iran, since its 1979 revolution toppled the US-backed monarchy, rests with the Supreme Leader, but the president wields major influence in areas from industrial policy to foreign affairs.

Rouhani's landmark achievement was the 2015 deal with world powers under which Iran agreed to limit its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.

But high hopes for greater prosperity were crushed in 2018 when then-president Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the accord and launched a 'maximum pressure' campaign against Iran.

AFP

27 miners killed in Peru bus accident

Lima, Peru - A bus carrying miners plunged into a ravine on a mountain road on Friday in southern Peru, killing at least 27, their employer said.

The Ares Mining Company said the bus was headed from a pit near the Nasca Lines archaeological site to the city of Arequipa.

The bus fell all the way to the bottom of a 400m ravine, leaving bodies scattered across the slopes of a hill in the desert region, press reports said.

One official said the driver may have fallen asleep at the wheel.

The miners had been on the job for weeks and were headed home to rest, the company said.

There were 16 injured being treated at Nasca hospital, RPP radio said.

"My brother was ejected through the window and fell on stones. He is wounded and cannot move his body. They are going to transfer him to Lima [to continue his treatment]," a woman named Adriana Cruz Taipei told reporters.

The mining company initially said all of those killed were miners but a prosecutor in the town of Puquio, Jhonny Romero, said the fatalities included the driver of the bus, who he said may have fallen asleep.

"This is a very dangerous area. Sleep may have been the cause of the accident," Romero said.

A total of 17 people died last week when a bus plummeted into a ravine in the La Libertad region, 500km north of Lima.

AFP

US cutting forces, missile batteries in Middle East

Washington, US - The Pentagon said on Friday it was cutting the number of troops and air defence units deployed to the Middle East, confirming a report published by *The Wall Street Journal* that said eight Patriot batteries were being moved out from the region.

The move comes as President Joe Biden's administration seeks to ease tensions with Iran after they heated up in 2019 and saw a strong escalation in the US military presence across the region.

The Wall Street Journal said the Patriot anti-missile batteries were being removed from Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and that a separate anti-missile system, called THAAD, was being transferred from Saudi Arabia as well.

Each battery requires hundreds of troops and civilians to operate and support them.

Pentagon spokesperson Commander Jessica McNulty said



The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz transiting Strait of Hormuz (AFP/US Navy)

that some of the units were being redeployed to other countries and some were returning to the United States for maintenance.

She would not say where the redeployed units were being moved to. 'This decision was made in close coordination with host nations and with a clear eye on preserving our ability to meet our security commitments,' McNulty said in an email.

'We maintain a robust force posture in the region appropriate

to the threat and are comfortable that these changes do not negatively impact our national security interests,' she said.

'We also retain the flexibility to rapidly flow forces back into the Middle East as conditions warrant.'

The US military is rapidly adjusting its global footprint as it pulls out of Afghanistan entirely and sees a greater threat from China in the Asia-Pacific region.

AFP

Rights group urges Egypt to commute death penalties for Brotherhood members

Cairo, Egypt - Human Rights Watch on Friday called on Egypt to commute death sentences against 12 Muslim Brotherhood members, saying their trial had been a 'mockery of justice'.

The ruling this week effectively ended a case linked to a 2013 mass killing by security forces at an Islamist sit-in following the overthrow of the then president Mohamed Morsi.

'Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi should immediately commute the death sentences for 12 protesters, including prominent Muslim Brotherhood leaders,' HRW said in a statement.

"The Rabaa trial was a mockery of justice, so it is outrageous that the highest court has upheld these 12 death sentences," said Joe Stork, HRW deputy Middle East and North Africa director.

Following Morsi's ouster in July 2013 amid mass protests against his rule, his Muslim



The Muslim Brotherhood supporters during clashes with police close to Rabaa al-Adawiya Square, in Cairo on November 22, 2013 (AFP)

Brotherhood supporters staged a massive sit-in at Rabaa al Adawiya Square in eastern Cairo to demand his return.

The following month, security forces raided the square and killed some 800 people in a single day.

Authorities said at the time that protesters were armed and the forced dispersal was a vital counter-terrorism measure.

It marked the start of a long

rulings were final and could not be appealed.

The court also reduced sentences for 31 other members of the outlawed Brotherhood, according to the source.

But HRW said that the Egyptian president could pardon the defendants or commute the death sentences within 14 days of the ruling, in line with the country's criminal procedure code.

"President Sisi should seize this moment to void their execution and put an end to Egypt's profligate use of the death penalty," Stork said.

The New York-based rights watchdog said the trial, which had started with more than 600 defendants, had been 'grossly unfair' and 'marred with abuses'.

"To move forward, Egypt needs to address the crimes committed by security forces, including Rabaa and the mass killings of protesters," Stork said.

AFP

Four dead after plane carrying parachutists crashes in Siberia

Moscow, Russia - Four people were killed and four others seriously injured on Saturday after a plane carrying parachutists crashed in Siberia, Russian authorities said.

The L-410 plane carrying 19 people crashed around 10.00am local time during a training flight at the Tanay airfield in the Siberian region of Kemerovo - also known as Kuzbass - authorities said.

The TASS news agency cited the local prosecutor's office as saying that the failure of one of the plane's engines caused the crash.

An image published by the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes in Russia, showed debris strewn across a field with an ambulance parked nearby.

'At the moment it is known that as a result of the accident four people died. Information about other victims is being specified,' the Investigative Committee said in a statement.

The committee said it had opened a probe into violation of traffic safety rules and the operation of air transport.

Kemerovo regional governor Sergei Tsivilyov said on Insta-



This handout photo shows the wreckage of a L-410 plane that crashed near the Tanay aerodrome, which provides parachuting services, in Russia's Kemerovo Region on Saturday (AFP)

gram that of the 19 people on board, four had died, four were in serious condition and the other 11 were injured.

Anton Duzhik, spokesman for the Kuzbass Centre for Disaster Medicine, told AFP that the four people in serious condition had been evacuated by helicopter and were being treated.

He said the 11 others who were injured did not suffer anything 'demanding' and were examined at the site of the crash.

TASS reported that the Tanay airfield hosts an amateur

parachuting centre.

It added that the plane belonged to the Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation and Navy of Russia, which describes itself as a sports and defence organisation.

The director for the organisation's Kemerovo region branch, Viktor Shemokhanov, told TASS that the plane did not have any known issues.

"The plane was making its fourth flight of the day, and, of course, was in good condition," he said.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Palestinians cancel deal to trade vaccine doses with Israel

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - The Palestinian Authority said on Friday it cancelled a swap deal that would have seen Israel provide it with one million COVID-19 jabs, as the doses were 'about to expire'.

Israeli officials earlier on Friday had announced the deal, saying the Jewish state was to provide the doses to the Palestinian Authority as their expiry date loomed.

The PA, based in the occupied West Bank, had confirmed the delivery 'in the coming days' of a million vaccine doses, without mentioning an agreement with the Jewish state.

The Palestinian Health Ministry had said in a statement that Pfizer was behind an initiative to 'accelerate the vaccination campaign'.

But PA spokesman Ibrahim Melhem said later on Friday that an initial delivery of some 90,000 Pfizer doses failed to conform 'to the specifications contained in the agreement, and accordingly prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh instructed the minister of health to cancel the agreement'.

'The government refuses to receive vaccines that are about to expire,' he added, in a statement carried by the official WAFA news agency.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office had said earlier



This file photo shows a Palestinian health worker administering a dose of COVID-19 vaccine to elderly Palestinians in the village of Dura near Hebron in the occupied West Bank (AFP)

that 'Israel has signed an agreement with the Palestinian Authority, and will supply approximately one million doses of Pfizer vaccine that are about to expire', without specifying the use-by date. 'Israel will receive the same amount of doses of Pfizer in September/October 2021, on behalf of what is destined for the Palestinian Authority,' the Israeli statement read.

Melhem said the PA would instead wait for the vaccines it had ordered from Pfizer to arrive

directly. He did not specify the expiry date of the vaccines Israel had supplied.

Neither the Israeli Health Ministry nor COGAT, the Israeli military body that administers civilian affairs in the occupied Palestinian Territories, responded to AFP requests for comment.

Virus 'knows no borders'

Israel launched a sweeping vaccination campaign after obtain-

ing millions of doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

More than 55 per cent of Israel's population - some 5.1mn people - have received both doses of the vaccine.

On the Palestinian side, just over 270,000 people have received their two doses in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

Earlier on Friday, Israel's new Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz had said on Twitter

that the 'coronavirus knows no borders and does not differentiate between people'.

"This important exchange of vaccines is in the interest of each party," he said, adding he hoped for 'cooperation between Israel and its Palestinian neighbours in other areas'.

Horowitz did not reply to a request for comment later Friday.

The developments come amid high tensions between the Jewish state and the Palestinians, with violations of a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Gaza's rulers Hamas.

The truce went into effect on May 21, ending 11 days of heavy fighting.

Late on Thursday, Israeli fighter jets carried out air strikes on Gaza for a second time since the ceasefire.

The military said they were in retaliation for three days of incendiary balloons launched from the Palestinian enclave.

Last month's fighting crippled the coronavirus response in the Gaza Strip, where airstrikes also killed two doctors.

Palestinian health officials have officially recorded more than 312,000 novel coronavirus cases, including around 3,540 deaths. Israel has recorded nearly 840,000 cases, including more than 6,420 deaths.

AFP



Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin (centre) accompanied by Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin (right) and visits the Kommunarka infectious diseases hospital, outside Moscow on Friday (AFP)

Moscow records pandemic high for cases for 2nd consecutive day

Moscow, Russia - Russia's capital Moscow on Saturday reported a pandemic high for new coronavirus cases for the second consecutive day, as the city's hospitals are flooded with new patients due to the Delta variant.

The city registered 9,120 new coronavirus infections in 24 hours, according to government figures, a second consecutive high topping the previous day's total of 9,056 cases.

Those figures have ballooned from just 3,000 daily just two weeks ago, with Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin saying on Friday that the highly infectious Delta variant first identified in India represents nearly 90 per cent of new cases.

The new wave of infections come as Russia's second city of Saint Petersburg, the country's worst COVID hotspot after Moscow, is slated to host seven Euro 2020 matches - including a quarter-final on July 2 - expected to draw thousands of European football fans.

Having claimed the worst of the pandemic had passed over winter, officials are now scurrying to reintroduce pandemic restrictions and roll out new beds dedicated to coronavirus patients after months of near-normal life.

On Monday, Saint Petersburg announced a tightening of restrictions including no food sales in its Euro 2020 fan zones.

Measures have been more drastic in Moscow, where Sobyenin on Friday shuttered

the city's fan zone, banned gatherings of more than 1,000, suspended all mass entertainment events and closed dance halls.

Vaccinations must

The most drastic measure Sobyenin introduced this week was ordering mandatory vaccination for residents of the Russian capital working in the service industry, saying some 60 per cent would have to be fully inoculated by August 15.

Although free jabs have been available to Russians since December, just 19.5mn out of a population of some 146mn have received at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the Gogov website which tallies COVID figures from the regions and the media.

In Moscow, only 1.5mn of the capital's roughly 12mn people have been fully vaccinated.

Sobyenin also extended several measures that he had announced last weekend, like the closure of food halls in malls, zoos and playgrounds, and of bars and restaurants from 11.00pm to 6.00am.

Sobyenin, who has taken a leading role in Russia's response to the pandemic, has said the measures are necessary because the capital's hospitals were inundated with COVID patients within days.

On Thursday, he said that in just five days 13,000 free hospital beds had been 'eaten up' and that the city has since expanded to 17,000 beds.

AFP

South China airport cancels flights after COVID case

Beijing, China - The airport in China's southern city of Shenzhen cancelled hundreds of flights and tightened entry controls on Saturday after a restaurant employee tested positive for the Delta coronavirus variant.

Anyone entering the facility must show a negative virus test from the last 48 hours, Shenzhen Airport Group said in a statement on its official WeChat social media account.

City health officials said a 21 year old waitress at Shenzhen Baoan International Airport had been infected with the Delta variant of the virus.



This file photo shows passengers, bound for Shenzhen, queuing up to board a plane at Tangerang airport in Indonesia, June 8 (AFP)

The woman tested positive during a routine test for airport staff conducted on Thursday, they said.

Shenzhen, a mainland Chinese city neighbouring Hong Kong, is home to some of Asia's biggest tech companies including telecoms equipment maker Huawei and gaming giant Tencent.

China on Friday reported 30 new coronavirus cases, including six local transmissions in the southern province of Guangdong where Shenzhen is located.

The airport entry restrictions

came into effect from 1.00pm local time on Saturday.

Nearly 400 flights to and from the airport were cancelled Friday, data from flight tracker Variflight showed. Dozens of flights scheduled for Saturday morning were also dropped.

Passengers would receive refunds on their tickets without penalty, the airport authority said.

Millions of Shenzhen residents have been tested for the virus in recent weeks after a small outbreak at the city's port earlier this month.

AFP

Myanmar protesters wear flowers to mark Suu Kyi's birthday

Yangon, Myanmar - Anti-coup protesters in Myanmar donned flowers in their hair on Saturday to mark the birthday of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains under house arrest and is due to face court again next week.

Suu Kyi's elected government was overthrown in a February 1 coup that sparked mass protests and renewed clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in border regions.

Flowers tucked into a bun have long been a signature look of Suu Kyi, who turned 76 on Saturday.

Many replicated the floral hairstyle and uploaded pictures onto social media across Myanmar for the occasion.

Among them was Myanmar Miss Universe beauty queen Thuzar Wint Lwin, who wore red flowers in her hair and wrote: 'May our leader be healthy'.

In Yangon's north, protesters put up posters on power lines wishing Suu Kyi a happy birthday and expressing solidarity.

'Happy Birthday Mother Suu.



A protester holds up a painting of Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi to mark her birthday during a demonstration in Yangon on Saturday (AFP)

We are right behind you,' the signs read. Some marched with black umbrellas and banners that read 'freedom from fear' alongside pictures of Suu Kyi.

In the border region of Karen state, some rebel soldiers were photographed holding their guns and yellow, white and purple

posies, as well as single flowers tucked behind their ears.

Demonstrators in the southeastern city of Dawei made a giant pink birthday cake and brought it to their street protest.

The Noble Peace Prize Laureate's international reputation was damaged after she defended

Myanmar's military over allegations of genocide against the ethnic minority Rohingya population in troubled Rakhine state in 2017.

Back in court

Not all Myanmar flower protest participants were full of praise for Suu Kyi.

"I am involved in this campaign because now she is unfairly detained by the military and her civilian rights... and freedom is denied," a 35 year old activist told AFP, adding it wasn't personal support.

"After she is free from her detention, she will have to take full



A woman wears a rose as part of a campaign to mark the birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi (AFP)

responsibility over her silence concerning the suffering of Rohingya and other ethnic groups."

Czech Republic Prime Minister Andrej Babis sent birthday wishes to Suu Kyi from afar.

"I wish you all the best for your health and strength... We stand with the people of Burma," he said.

The civilian death toll since the coup is estimated to be at least 870 people and close to 5,000 protesters are in deten-

tion after being arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

The UN General Assembly on Friday took the rare step of calling on member states to 'prevent the flow of arms' into Myanmar, part of a non-binding resolution condemning the military coup in the violence-wracked country.

The resolution - which did not go so far as to call for a global arms embargo - also demands that the military "immediately stop all violence against peaceful demonstrators".

It was approved by 119 countries, with 36 abstaining including China, Myanmar's main ally. Only one country, Belarus, voted against it.

Suu Kyi is due back in court next week and has been hit with an eclectic raft of criminal charges, including accepting illegal payments of gold and violating a colonial-era secrecy law.

She went on trial for sedition on Tuesday, but journalists were barred from observing proceedings.

AFP

ACROSS	52 Exhausting	94 Lion's pride	23 Bounds	70 Skeleton
1 Italian physicist	56 Choose	95 One of the Three	26 Germ	organization: Mil.
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27 Pitcher	67 More delicate	DOWN	46 French river	Attica
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48 Negligent	91 Escape	20 Goddess of	67 Renown	
51 Throes	92 Obscure	vegetation	69 Interdiction	

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 20 As you travel down the road of life, don't lose sight of your destination. Distractions abound, and it could seem like a harmless thing to take a detour for a while, but don't get off the track you're on! No matter what tantalising or rewarding invitations you get, you have to stay on your mission today. You simply can't afford to be pushed off your route.	LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22 A partnership could hit a tough spot today, but it's one you can get through if you're thinking the best of each other. The two of you are suddenly facing a challenge that's turning out to be bigger than you thought it would be. The going will be slow, but you will make progress. You have to readjust your expectations.	SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 19 Today could be a wacky kind of day, but it sure will be a heck of a lot of fun! You can expect a lot of missed connections, misunderstandings, and mismatched pairs in your life right now. They won't make things simple, but the unpredictability they add to your day will be more amusing than frustrating. As long as you stay flexible and positive, you can sort things out.
TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20 Today, the truth will be too obvious to hide, and your little secret will be a secret no longer! But the joy this revelation brings to the world around you will be much greater than any risk involved in telling people what the real deal is. Let your feelings be known. Stop holding back your happiness. There is no longer any need to keep things to yourself.	VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22 There is good news coming for your overstuffed schedule: it's going to slim down very soon! Your willingness to be flexible is paying off as people ask for postponements or rain checks on a few events. You're going to get just the right amount of breathing room, enough to feel more relaxed but not so much that you feel like you're missing out on the action.	CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19 Friendships are all about acceptance and support, so don't succumb to pressure from a pal who is being too demanding about how much time you spend with them. If they can't understand that you just can't hang out when they want to hang out, then you need to reevaluate their role in your life. You can't rearrange your life at the whim of other people.
GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21 As soon as you start your day, you'll start to see new possibilities and feel more and more confident about taking a few risks this time. There is a light shining on you now, and it's like a guardian angel protecting you from people who don't think the best of you. You won't fall for their lines, and they won't succeed in distracting you, no matter what tricks they pull.	LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22 There are a lot of confusing things going on right now, and while you're up for the challenge of figuring them all out, you need to get comfortable with the idea that you might never come up with all the answers. But that's okay! Leaving a mystery or two for someone else to figure out is no crime. Think of it as your way of giving someone else the chance to prove how awesome they are.	AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18 Let your sense of humour guide you through a delicate negotiation today. If you can keep a positive attitude, the other person will too. There could be an unexpected sticking point eventually, but it will probably be due to a silly misunderstanding. Again, if everyone's already smiling and laughing, this bump in the road could almost seem delightful.
CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22 If you've been given a risky-sounding opportunity, the universe says you need to gather up some courage and jump right into it! After all, the bigger the risk, the better the payoff could be. This kind of heart-pounding activity could be just what you need to inject some brighter energy into your life. It will also earn you some attention in the eyes of some very important people.	SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21 Are you hungry for a more intellectual connection with that new cutie in your life? Start getting comfortable with the idea that it just might not happen. If the attraction doesn't go much deeper than the physical, you can't push it. But at the same time, if that's not enough for you, then you need to be ready to move on.	PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20 Your day will be like a jigsaw puzzle that's missing one piece, but at least you know it ahead of time! Not knowing every single detail shouldn't be an excuse to put all of your plans on pause, though. Simply use your imagination to create a complete picture and solve the mystery. You've got plenty of ingenuity, flexibility, and smarts to navigate any uncertainties with ease.

1. It is easier to roll a stone up a sloping road than to lift it vertical upwards because

- a. work done in rolling is more than in lifting
- b. work done in lifting the stone is equal to rolling it
- c. work done in both is same but the rate of doing work is less in rolling
- d. work done in rolling a stone is less than in lifting it

2. The absorption of ink by blotting paper involves

- viscosity of ink
- capillary action phenomenon
- diffusion of ink through the blotting
- siphon action

3. Siphon will fail to work if

- a. the densities of the liquid in the two vessels are equal
- b. the level of the liquid in the two vessels are at the same height
- c. both its limbs are of unequal length
- d. the temperature of the liquids in the two vessels are the same

Answers: 1. d 2. b 3. b

A black and white line drawing of a smiling girl with pigtails, wearing a dress, standing next to a large tree. The background includes a sun, clouds, and a simple horizon line.



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

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

E	A	R	B
E	U	R	Y
L	S	E	K
Y	P	E	M

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

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

CAVE	SCOWS	CHAM	SKRAT
ATIAN	YKKER	CODA	STILLE
AVANE	MARTIN	CHUIZZ	LEWITT
RE	WASPI	CH	WIT
DECAPIES	PIED	YEMPIES	
BAILE	ITEM	BAMAKO	
TONYMARTIN	MATTIN	NAIS	
RE	WASPI	CH	WIT
RAGE	AGGLE	ELIZABETHS	
ATE	ERERATE	SARIT	
SETH	MARTIN	SHENSEN	NARC
ALL	ERGISTS	ITSA	MADE
AGILE	ENT	ELI	BERTIA
ARYMARTIN	DEAN	MAIMATTIN	
PRE	AD	BRO	MEEDLES
TADMIT	BRO	MEEDLES	
TRAP	AGHE	AGORA	EST
TRAP	INLUITH	GRING	STATE
AL	WELL	MAISE	USE
NEON	WELL	MAISE	USE

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





(Photo: Syed Fasiuddin/ Muscat Daily)

Hubert Vaz

Shazia Mohd Ghulam, an Omani citizen with Indian roots, is on a self-styled path of helping women in Oman realise their own potential, handle their dilemmas in a rational manner, and follow their own dreams with renewed vigour.

"After marriage, women often bury all their dreams and passions under an ocean of responsibilities. But I always thought out of the box. I always believed that there should be no age limit or any kind of restrictions on how far you can educate yourself," she says pointing out that at the age of 38 she completed an MBA with majors in Human Resource Management from Jaipur International University (Distant Education). In the same year, she also acquired an IATA certificate from NHI Oman, besides doing a Train the Trainer programme from NTI which is certified from EAL UK.

Shazia has started a counselling programme whereby she listens to the problems of women who seek support and guidance to get out of their doldrums and take on the challenges of life with a new spirit. She has a blog where she shares motivational articles as well as responds to specific problems shared with her by those who need help. She firmly believes that education is one sure tool to rise higher in life and that age is not a deterrent for adding new skills to one's personality.

"I feel, any person, irrespective of his/her age and gender, should never stop learning and improvising. When I used to train my daughter for story telling competitions, I realised that I had a potential to speak and express myself through words and actions. Eventually I developed a passion for speaking and motivating people, especially homemakers. I always felt that homemakers like me are always demotivated and underestimated. I wanted to break that taboo," asserts Shazia who is also a successful toastmaster in Muscat.

Through her hard work and support from her

MEET THE 'FLAWSOME' AGONY AUNT

I feel, any person, irrespective of his/her age and gender, should never stop learning and improvising

SHAZIA MOHD GHULAM

husband, she won the SAB Toastmasters club and area contest for International and Humorous speeches. She subsequently reached up to the division level contest and acquired third position in both, Humorous and International speech contests.

An avid blogger in Oman (her website - "http://www.shazzughulam.com"), Shazia says, "When I start typing, I simply cannot stop. Writing is my passion as well. I am very active on social media, especially Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. I make motivational and inspirational videos. Many people recognize me through TikTok where I

have 14.8K followers from different countries all over the world."

Shazia says she has noticed that many married women, single mothers, young teenage girls, widowers, and divorcees suffer in silence and are not able to express themselves or share their troubles with anyone. For them, she has created a separate email id (seekretbox@gmail.com). Women are encouraged to contact her on that email to share their problems and get free advice and guidance.

So far, many women have approached Shazia with their problems and have gained fulfilling resolution to their problems. She had helped them rediscover their capabilities, fight their fears and take on challenges with determination. Many have come back to her to express their gratitude on being able to start new chapters in their lives, she said.

"My main aim is to make a difference in their lives. I often speak to them without any compulsion to reveal their identity. If necessary, I even meet them in person and help them out through their tough times," says Shazia, adding, "I always wanted

to do a lot for my country and its people. I have been an active part of breast cancer awareness programmes and organisations like Al Noor Association for the Blind and Dar al Atta."

Exemplifying her own struggles in life and how she overcame them with sheer determination, Shazia calls on all women in Oman to never give up on their dreams - it is never too late to do anything, she stresses. She also pointed out the importance of making space for some 'Me time' everyday, after completing all their daily tasks, because that's the way they can attend to their own needs and not neglect themselves to the point of a breakdown.

Acknowledging the fact that problems are part of life, she says we need to work towards resolving the problems with a cool mind rather than running away from them or giving up in despair. No one is perfect or enjoys a perfect life, we have to work towards making it meaningful, she asserts.

"If I could describe myself in a single word, it would be - 'flawsome' - as I am perfect in my imperfections, strong in my weakness, and happy in my sadness," Shazia quips.

Tale of an artist



An interesting exhibition of unique artworks by ten members of the Al Sumt art group concluded at the Art and Soul Gallery in Water Front mall at Shatti al Qurm yesterday.

The fortnight-long exhibition, titled 'Tale of an artist' showcased different interpretations of the time spent by artists during the lockdown period in Oman in view of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The artists, all belonging to Al Sumt, are also members of the Oman Society for Fine Arts, as well as The Youth Studio, for over 20 years.

The current exhibition provides the viewer a window into the past two years when artists

have gone through trying times when they were unable to exhibit their art or participate in exhibitions as well as went through personal tragedies and losses due to the uncertain situation prevailing all over the world. Despite upheavals in their own lives, they have created art that reflects not just the hapless plight of many but also brings rays of hope for the world.

The artworks on display were brimming with emotions and most of the participating artists attributed their talent as a 'gift from God' to express their innermost feelings and thoughts without giving up hope.



Rodriguez winner in Argentina win



Argentina's Guido Rodriguez celebrates after scoring against Uruguay on Friday

Brasilia, Brazil - Guido Rodriguez scored the only goal of the game as Argentina edged past fierce local rivals Uruguay in a disappointing Copa America clash on Friday. The victory sent Argentina joint top of Group A with Chile on four points while Uruguay remain without a point.

These two sides have won the Copa 29 times between them but familiarity can breed caution and for much of the encounter they canceled each other out.

Six-time *Ballon d'Or* winner Lionel Messi had the first real chance, cutting in from the right onto his favoured left foot to

force a full stretch save from goalkeeper Fernando Muslera, who was relieved to see Lautaro Martinez unable to turn in the rebound.

Moments later, Cristian Romero rose highest in the area to meet a Rodrigo De Paul cross but Muslera made a comfortable save.

The pressure was relentless in the early stages and Argentina took a deserved lead on 13 minutes as Messi got to the byline and stood up a cross to the back post where Rodriguez rose above his marker to

head home off the far post.

Despite enjoying the lion's share of possession, Uruguay were unable to test Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez.

Despite boasting Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani up front, Uruguay struggled to create any chances of note.

Earlier, English-born Ben Brereton was the unlikely hero as Chile beat Bolivia 1-0. The 22 year old Blackburn forward was born in Stoke-on-Trent to an English father and Chilean

mother, and only made his national team debut on Monday when he came off the bench in Chile's 1-1 draw with Argentina.

But Brereton, who has played his entire career in the English Championship, was in the right place at the right time to finish off a rapier counter-attack and hand Chile victory.

The goal came after Bolivia were caught out by a lightning counter-attack on ten minutes, with Eduardo Vargas squaring to Brereton, who calmly took one touch to beat a sliding defender and then slotted home with his second.

AFP



Indian athletics legend Milkha Singh dies at 91

New Delhi, India - India on Saturday mourned the loss of track legend Milkha Singh, who overcame childhood tragedy to seek Olympic glory, after he died aged 91 following a long battle with COVID-19.

Singh, a four-time Asian Games gold medallist who was dubbed the 'Flying Sikh', passed away at a hospital in the north Indian city of Chandigarh late Friday. His wife and former India volleyball team captain Nirmal Kaur had also died from the virus earlier in the week. He was cremated with full state honours in Chandigarh.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the tributes for Singh, writing that India had 'lost a colossal sportsperson, who captured the nation's imagination and had a special place in the hearts of countless Indians'. Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar said 'Singh's legacy would live on'. "Rest in Peace our very own 'Flying Sikh' Milkha Singh ji," he tweeted.

"Your demise has left a deep void in every Indian's heart



pro golfer Jeev Milkha Singh.

Singh was born in 1929 in Govindpura, in what is now Pakistan. He lost his family during the tumultuous partition of British-ruled India at independence in 1947, when it was divided into Pakistan and India, before going on to become one of the young country's first athletic heroes.

Singh won gold medals at the 1958 and 1962 Asian Games.

However, he shot to fame at the 1960 Olympics in Rome when he finished fourth in the 400m, 0.66 seconds behind Otis Davis of the US who set a new world record of 45.07sec to win.

Singh was devastated but his time of 45.73sec stood as an Indian national record for almost 40 years. He never fulfilled his dream of winning an Olympic medal.

His rise to elite athlete made Singh a national hero and inspired a Bollywood film in 2013 called *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (Run, Milkha, Run).

AFP

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EURO2020



QUICK RUN

Denmark's Eriksen discharged from hospital

Christian Eriksen has been discharged from hospital after a 'successful' operation to fit a heart-starting device on Friday. The 29 year old Denmark midfielder suffered cardiac arrest during his side's defeat by Finland in Copenhagen on June 12. He visited the team on Friday and will now return home with his family. "Thank you for the massive number of greetings," Eriksen said in a statement. "It has been incredible to see and feel. The operation went well, and I am doing well under the circumstances. "It was really great to see the guys again after the fantastic game they played last night. No need to say, that I will be cheering on them on Monday against Russia."



'Struggling Kane still world's best striker'

Luke Shaw insists England captain Harry Kane is still the 'best striker in the world' despite his dismal start at Euro 2020. Kane has been substituted twice after producing lethargic displays and failing to score in England's Group D matches. He finished Friday's 0-0 draw against old rivals Scotland at Wembley looking a forlorn figure on the bench after exiting 15 minutes from full time. Asked if he was worried about Kane's performances, England left-back Shaw replied, "No concern at all, for me personally I think he is the best striker in the world. "He is a very important part of the team, in fact the most important part. I think whether he has not been at his best or not he is a massive part and a crucial player for us. We need him whether his performances are as people expected or not, but this happens in tournament football. "You can score a goal at any moment and he is such a crucial player, not just on the pitch but off the pitch, he has got all of our backing and I'm not worried at all." England's underwhelming display against Scotland leaves them with four points and a draw against the Czech Republic in their final group game on Tuesday will take them into the last-16.

AFP

Griezmann saves France

Hosts Hungary earn a point against world champions at Puskas Arena



France's Antoine Griezmann (R) celebrates after scoring the equaliser against Hungary at Puskas Arena in Budapest on Saturday (AFP)

Budapest, Hungary - Antoine Griezmann salvaged a 1-1 draw for France against Hungary in Budapest as the world champions missed the chance to clinch a place in the Euro 2020 last-16 on Saturday.

Hungary threatened to blow Group F wide open when Attila Fiola gave the hosts a shock lead in first-

half stoppage time after catching out the France defence. But Griezmann, the Golden Boot winner at Euro 2016, equalised on 66 minutes as an unconvincing France avoided a first competitive defeat since June 2019.

Didier Deschamps' side top the section with four points while Hungary earned

their first point.

France stay in Budapest for their final game against Portugal, while Hungary travel to Munich to take on Germany.

Contending with stifling temperatures in excess of 30°C and a crowd approaching 60,000 at the Puskas Arena, the only Euro 2020 venue without capac-

ity restrictions due to COVID-19, France controlled much of the first half.

Having lived up to their billing as tournament favourites in a 1-0 win over Germany, France dominated Hungary early on, creating numerous chances.

Peter Gulacsi clawed away Karim Benzema's low drive, reacting sharply to

keep out Griezmann's follow-up, despite the Barcelona star being flagged for offside.

Lucas Digne, brought into the side for Lucas Hernandez as the only change made by France coach Deschamps, then picked out an unmarked Kylian Mbappe whose glancing header flashed narrowly wide.

Hungary lost captain Adam Szalai to injury midway through the first half, and the hosts were living dangerously as Benzema sliced badly from a superb flick by Mbappe before the Paris Saint-Germain forward dragged wide himself.

France captain Hugo Lloris had warned of over confidence against a team expected to finish bottom of the group, and *Les Bleus* were punished for a brief lapse just before half-time.

Fiola collected Adam Nagy's crossfield ball and played a one-two with Roland Sallai, outpacing Benjamin Pavard and hold-

ing off Raphael Varane to side-foot beyond Lloris at his near post.

Deschamps had waited until the 89th minute before making a substitute in the opener against Germany, but the introduction of Ousmane Dembele for Adrien Rabiot on the hour nearly brought an immediate equaliser as the Barcelona forward rattled the post.

France pulled level when a long kick upfield by Lloris sailed over the head of Nagy, with Mbappe latching onto it ahead of Hungary's Paris-born Loic Nego.

His ball across goal was deflected into Griezmann's path by Willi Orban, allowing the forward to slam in his seventh European Championship goal.

Gulacsi produced a fine save to turn away a fierce shot from Mbappe as France pressed for a victory that would have sent them through to the knockout phase. Instead, they must wait until Wednesday's clash with Portugal.

AFP

GROUP F

HUNGARY VS FRANCE

1 - 1

Germany stun Portugal in a six-goal thriller

Munich, Germany - Germany got their Euro 2020 campaign back on track - and blew Group F wide open - with a 4-2 romp against Portugal at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Saturday.

France's 1-1 draw with Hungary earlier in Budapest and Germany's win mean there is all to play for in Wednesday's final group games when the Germans host Hungary and the French meet holders Portugal.

After Cristiano Ronaldo claimed his 107th international goal, leaving him two short of Ali Daei's all-time record, to give Portugal an early lead, the Germans roared back with four unanswered goals.

German pressure forced own goals by Ruben Dias and Raphael Guerreiro to put the hosts 2-1 up at half-time.

A Kai Havertz goal underlined Germany's dominance before left-back Robin Gosens capped his man-of-the-match display by heading in Germany's fourth goal to add to his two assists.

Portugal hit back when Diogo Jota tapped in Ronaldo's hooked volley to make it 4-2 with 23 minutes left.

The match began at a frantic pace amid sweltering conditions in the Bavarian capital. The Germans had a



Germany's Robin Gosens (L) scores off a header against Portugal in Munich on Saturday

goal disallowed after five minutes when VAR spotted Serge Gnabry was offside as Gosens hit a spectacular volley. However, sloppy Germany defending saw Portugal take the lead.

With only Gosens and Havertz defending at a German corner, Bernardo Silva started a counter-attack, then picked out Jota in the area with a world-class pass.

The Liverpool forward squared to Ronaldo, who sprinted into the box to slot the ball past Germany captain Manuel Neuer with less than 15 minutes gone. It was Ronaldo's first goal against Germany to extend his record tally to 12 goals

GROUP F

GERMANY VS PORTUGAL

4 - 2

at five Euro finals.

However, two own goals inside four minutes turned the game. Germany drew level when another Gosens volley was flicked towards the net by Havertz, with Dias getting the final touch as the ball flew past Rui Patricio on 35 minutes.

The second goal soon followed when Guerreiro turned Kimmich's cross into

his own net while trying to stop the ball reaching the on-rushing German forwards.

Gosens caused Portugal problems all afternoon on the left flank. His low cross was tapped in by Havertz six minutes after the break.

The Atalanta player then capped a superb display by powering in a close-range header from Kimmich's cross on the hour mark.

Portugal pulled a goal back when Guerreiro's free-kick was hooked back by Ronaldo and turned in by Jota.

This is the first time Portugal have conceded four goals since losing 0-4 to Germany at the 2014 World Cup.

AFP

TODAY'S MATCHES

GROUP A

ITALY VS WALES
(8pm, Oman time)

SWITZERLAND VS TURKEY
(8pm, Oman time)

STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
GROUP A								
Italy	2	2	0	0	6	0	6	6
Wales	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
Switzerland	2	0	1	1	4	-3	1	
Turkey	2	0	0	2	0	5	-5	0
GROUP B								
Belgium	2	2	0	0	5	1	4	6
Russia	2	1	0	1	1	3	-2	3
Finland	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Denmark	2	0	0	2	1	3	-2	0
GROUP C								
Netherlands	2	2	0	0	5	2	3	6
Ukraine	2	1	0	1	4	4	0	3
Austria	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
North Macedonia	2	0	0	2	2	5	-3	0
GROUP D								
Czech Republic	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
England	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
Croatia	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1
Scotland	2	0	1	1	0	2	-2	1
GROUP E								
Sweden	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
Slovakia	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Spain	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Poland	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
GROUP F								
France	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	4
Germany	2	1	0	1	4	3	1	3
Portugal	2	1	0	1	5	4	1	3
Hungary	2	0	1	1	1	4	-3	1



India's Virat Kohli plays a shot on the second day of the World Test Championship final against New Zealand at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton, UK, on Saturday (AFP)

KOHLI KEEPS KIWIS AT BAY

Bad light curtailed the second day to just 64.4 overs after the first day was washed out. India, asked to bat by New Zealand, were 146 for three at stumps

WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL: DAY TWO

Southampton, UK - India captain Virat Kohli held firm in the face of accurate New Zealand pace bowling as the inaugural World Test Championship (WTC) final at Southampton eventually got going on Saturday.

After Friday's first day was washed out without a ball bowled, India were 146 for three when the third of the day's stoppages for bad light led to an early close.

Kohli was 44 not out, with the star batsman having hit just one boundary in 124 balls faced.

Meanwhile, Ajinkya Rahane was 29 not out after adding an unbroken 58 for the fourth wicket with Kohli.

Towering quick Kyle Jamieson ended the day with remarkable figures of one for 14 in 14 overs.

Only 64.4 overs out of 180 scheduled for the first two days have so far been bowled.

But under a special provision for this final, match referee Chris Broad can add an extra day onto the standard maximum five for a men's Test if he decides

such an extension is needed to compensate for time lost to bad weather earlier in the game. The winners will be crowned the first Test world champions but if no result is a possible the two teams will be named joint winners.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson won the toss in overcast conditions that favoured his five-man pace attack.

But Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill batted impressively in an opening stand of 62.

India, however, lost three wickets either side of lunch to be 88 for three.

Their position might have been worse had Kohli been given out caught behind down the legside off left-arm quick Trent Boult on 17.

But amid some on-field confusion, an umpire review led to replays that indicated Kohli had not hit the ball.

India's openers made a fine start amid New Zealand's swing and seam.

Rohit confidently clipped the first ball of the match, from Tim Southee, off his pads for three

while Gill showed his class by driving Jamieson down the ground for four.

Stylish Rohit

Rohit brought up the 50 stand with a stylish cover-driven four off allrounder Colin de Grandhomme. The openers' form was all the more impressive given this was India's first Test since March whereas only last week New Zealand completed a 1-0 series win over England with a victory at Edgbaston.

But Rohit's 68-ball innings, featuring six fours, ended when he edged a late-swinging delivery from Jamieson to third slip where Southee held an excellent low catch, diving to his right. Gill followed soon afterwards for 28, edging aggressive left-armer Neil Wagner to BJ Watling in what the New Zealand wicketkeeper has said will be his last match before retirement.

It took Cheteshwar Pujara 51 minutes and 36 balls to get off the mark, a cut four off medium-pacer de Grandhomme greeted by huge cheers from India fans in the crowd. But, as happened several times during India's come-from-behind series win in Australia this year, Pujara was hit on the helmet by a bouncer after missing a pull off Wagner.

Pujara's painstaking eight off 54 balls ended when he was lbw to a Boult inswinger that cut back sharply off the pitch.

The umpires frustrated the

crowd by thrice taking the players off the field for bad light either side of the tea break even when the floodlights were on, despite regulations that allow play to proceed when conditions are 'not ideal'. Play stopped for the final time on Saturday at 4:53 pm (1553 GMT) but it was not until more than an hour later, at 6:10 pm (1710) that the umpires called stumps.

The same group of match officials were criticised for a similarly strict interpretation of what constituted bad light during an England-Pakistan Test at the Hampshire Bowl last year.

This match, the culmination of two years of series between the leading Test nations, is worth US\$1.6mn to the winners and US\$800,000 to the runners-up.

The India team wore black armbands Saturday as a mark of respect for Milkha Singh following the national track athletics legend's death from COVID-19 at the age of 91.

AFP

SCOREBOARD

INDIA 1 st INNINGS			
Rohit Sharma	c Southee b Jamieson	34	
S Gill	c Watling b Wagner	28	
C Pujara	lbw b Boult	8	
V Kohli	not out	44	
A Rahane	not out	29	
Extras:	(lb 2, nb 1)	3	
TOTAL:	146 for three in 64.4 overs		

Fall of wickets: 1-62, 2-63, 3-88
Bowling: T Southee 17-4-47-0, T Boult 12.4-2-32-1, K Jamieson 14-9-14-1, C de Grandhomme 11-6-23-0, N Wagner 10-3-28-1

Elgar leads from front as SA recover against WI

WEST INDIES VS S AFRICA

SECOND TEST: DAY ONE

Gros-Islet, Saint Lucia - Dean Elgar's five-hour occupation of the crease in compiling an invaluable 77 lifted South Africa from the depths 37 for three to the comparative comfort of 218 for five on the opening day of the second Test against the West Indies on Friday.

Elgar's disciplined knock of 77, which spanned 237 deliveries and included eight fours, was exactly what was required of the Proteas captain. He had seen three wickets go down in a rain-interrupted morning session under grey skies and on a seaming pitch where the early moisture contributed to the ball beating the bat on numerous occasions.

His watchful style contrasted sharply with the manner of the other left-hander in the tourists' batting line-up with Quinton de Kock following on Test-best unbeaten 141 in the first Test with a similarly positive knock of 59 not out off 103 balls.

Their partnership for the fifth wicket realised 79 runs and



Dean Elgar of South Africa celebrates his half-century on Friday

ended when Elgar was deceived and bowled by the clever medium-pace of all-rounder Kyle Mayers in the last hour of the day.

South Africa's skipper had earlier received sturdy support from Kyle Verreynne in a fourth-wicket stand worth 87.

Verreynne, a compact right-hander eventually fell in the final over before tea for 27, getting a faint touch to an attempted hook off Shannon Gabriel for wicket-keeper Joshua da Silva to take the catch down the leg-side.

Home captain Kraigg Brath-

waite did not hesitate to bowl first on winning the toss again. It proved justified with Gabriel, who missed the first Test through injury, relative newcomer Jayden Seales and senior seamer Kemar Roach taking a wicket each.

Gabriel enjoyed success here with Aiden Markram slashing at a short, wide delivery before he had scored to give Roston Chase a comfortable catch at backward-point.

Keegan Petersen attempted to settle down in partnership with Elgar but then edged a

SCOREBOARD			
SOUTH AFRICA 1 st INNINGS			
D Elgar	b Mayers	77	
A Markram	c Chase b Gabriel	0	
K Petersen	c Holder b Seales	7	
R van der Dussen	b Roach	4	
K Verreynne	c da Silva b Gabriel	27	
Q de Kock	not out	59	
W Mulder	not out	2	
Extras:	(b 9, lb 18, nb 3, w 12)	42	
TOTAL:	218 for five in 82 overs		

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-26, 3-37, 4-124, 5-203

Bowling: K Roach 16-6-33-1, S Gabriel 12-3-47-2, J Seales 13-4-28-1, J Holder 14-5-25-0, R Chase 11-3-20-0, K Mayers 11-3-24-1, K Brathwaite 5-0-14-0

full-length delivery from Seales for former captain Jason Holder to snare the catch at second slip.

Rassie van der Dussen struggled to get bat on ball and then fell to his own error of judgement, offering no shot to Roach only for his off-stump to be knocked back.

West Indies must win this match to avoid an eighth consecutive Test series defeat to the Proteas since pulling off victory in their historic first-ever Test match encounter, a one-off meeting in Barbados in 1992.

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OMAN FAVOURITES AGAINST SOMALIA



Oman players train ahead of their FIFA Arab Cup qualifying match against Somalia in Doha on Sunday

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

FIFA ARAB CUP 2021 QUALIFIERS

The gulf in rankings between the two nations – Oman and Somalia – is huge and as far as the distance between the two countries. Oman are ranked 80th in FIFA world ranking while African minnows, Somalia, are placed 197th in the world.

So when the two teams meet each other at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar, on Sunday in a FIFA Arab Cup 2021 qualifier, Oman start as firm favourites. The match kicks off at 9pm, Oman time.

The FIFA Arab Cup 2021 features 23 teams and 14 of the

lower-ranked teams are playing the qualifiers, which got underway on Saturday.

The qualifiers will conclude on June 25. Besides Oman and Somalia, the other 12 teams in the qualifiers are Lebanon, Djibouti, Jordan, South Sudan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Mauritania, Yemen, Palestine, Comoros, Libya and Sudan.

In fact, Oman is the highest ranked team among the 14 teams in the qualifiers.

The seven winners will join hosts Qatar, Iraq, Tunisia, UAE, Syria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Algeria in the main tournament that will be held from November 30-December 18.

This will be the first pan-Arab

FIFA tournament, with the final set to be played on the same day the World Cup final will unfold one year later – December 18, Qatar's National Day. The participating teams will also get to play at six World Cup venues.

A win for Branko Ivankovic's Red Warriors on Sunday will take them to Group A where Qatar, Iraq and winner of Bahrain and Kuwait awaits them.

Speaking on the eve of the match, Ivankovic said, "We respect the Somalia team. They are not an easy team as I found out after watching their matches against Eritrea and Djibouti. Our aim is to win and we will go for it tomorrow."

Oman have been in good form during the recently-concluded



Branko Ivankovic

FIFA World Cup and Asian joint second round qualifiers, which concluded on June 15 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Oman qualified as one of the best five runners-up team for the final round of the World Cup

Asian Qualifiers, which comprise 12 teams.

The Reds' also sealed a place in the AFC Asian Cup 2023 in China. They have appeared in four of the last five AFC Asian Cups (2004, 2007, 2015, 2019), with their best performance coming in 2019 when they reached the round-of-16. Prior to that, Oman won two Gulf Cup titles (2009, 2017).

Buoyed by the recent performances, Oman are expected to have little difficulty against the east African side, who have not played an international match since 2019 but did play a friendly against Djibouti last week.

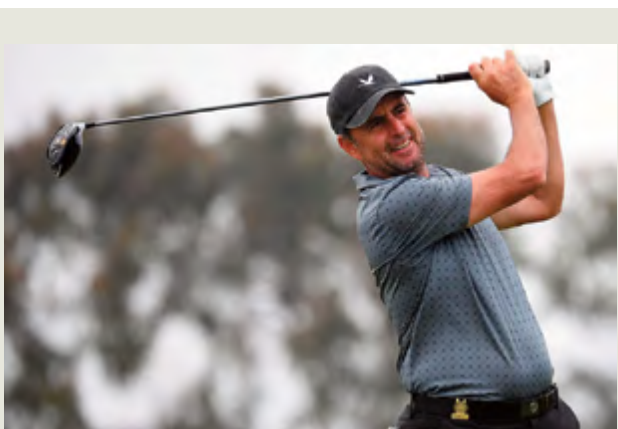
Somalia will see this match as a huge opportunity to showcase themselves on a big stage. The Ocean Stars' hopes of qualifying for Qatar 2022 ended in the first round of African qualifying after defeat to Zimbabwe in September 2019. They have appeared in regional competitions such as the CECAFA Cup and featured at the Pan Arab Games in 1985.

Oman would be looking to continue their good run, having lost just one of the last seven matches under manager Ivankovic.

The Croatian may opt to give an opportunity to his young players who impressed when he fielded them during their 3-0 win against Bangladesh in World Cup qualifier last week.

A victory will conclude a successful mission for Ivankovic's Oman in Doha, which began on June 1 with a preparatory camp and then followed by the World Cup Qualifiers.

@ashokmuscat



Richard Bland of England

Bland, Henley share lead at halfway stage

US OPEN GOLF

La Jolla, US - England's Richard Bland and American Russell Henley, an unlikely pair of major pace-setters, shared the lead after Friday's second round of the US Open with South African Louis Oosthuizen one stroke adrift.

Henley, on a four-year US PGA win drought and never a top-ten major finisher, lipped out a two-foot par putt on his final hole to fire a one-under 70 and settle for a share of the 36-hole clubhouse lead on five-under-par 137.

"I feel good about my game," world No 63 Henley said. "I've never been in this position before in a major. Just feel like I'm going to learn something no matter what happens."

Bland won his first European Tour title at last month's British Masters after 478 starts over 25 years, becoming the tour's oldest first-time winner at age 48.

After shooting 67 on Friday, he's a threat to become the oldest winner in US Open history, breaking the mark of 45 set by American Hale Irwin in 1990 at Medinah.

"I'm feeling pretty good,"

Bland said. "I've been driving the ball good for five or six weeks now, which is the cornerstone if you're going to put a fight up for a US Open."

Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open champion with five major runner-up efforts since winning at St Andrews, fired 71 to share third on 138.

Alongside Oosthuizen was 22 year old American Matthew Wolff, last year's US Open runner-up who is coming off a two-month mental health hiatus.

Two-time Masters champion Bubba Watson and third-ranked Jon Rahm of Spain shared fifth on 139.

Phil Mickelson, who won the PGA Championship last month at Kiawah Island at age 50 to become the oldest-ever major winner is trying to complete a career Grand Slam this week. The American shot 69 to share 30th on 144.

Defending champion Bryson DeChambeau shot 69 to share 13th on 142.

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy struggled to a 73 to share 21st on 143.

World No 1 Dustin Johnson shared 30th on 144 after a 73.

AFP

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WHAT'S
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French rider Zarco on pole for German MotoGP

Sachsenring, Germany - Despite a spectacular fall, Frenchman Johann Zarco landed his sixth MotoGP pole position of the season Saturday for the German Grand Prix.

Ducati-Pramac rider Zarco, currently second in the overall rankings, edged out compatriot and the championship leader so far this season, Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha. Zarco fell after setting the fastest time but soon got to his feet. Spain's Aprilia rider Aleix Espargaro completes the front row of the grid.

Six-time world champion Marc Marquez also qualified, taking a season's best fifth place as he comes back from a long injury absence. He came in just behind Australian Ducati racer Jack Miller, currently third in the standings. Catalan Grand Prix winner and Portuguese KTM rider Miguel Oliveira will complete the second row of the grid after placing sixth in qualifying.

AFP

Verstappen pips Hamilton for pole

FORMULA ONE FRENCH GRAND PRIX

Le Castellet, France - Max Verstappen claimed pole on Saturday for the French Grand Prix with Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes alongside the Red Bull driver on the front row to lay the foundations for another gripping instalment of this season's delicately-poised title battle.

Valtteri Bottas in the other Mercedes starts on the second row with Verstappen's teammate Sergio Perez.

Verstappen leads Hamilton by just four points in the Formula One word championship ahead of the seventh race of the season at the Circuit Paul Ricard on Sunday.

Hamilton won from pole the last two races staged at Le Castellet in 2018 and 2019, but Verstappen had approached qualifying as the man to beat after dominating the final two practice sessions.

Verstappen, claiming his first pole since the season-opener in Bahrain, is anxious to translate pole into a win after a shredded tyre robbed him of almost



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen speaks to the press at the end of the qualifying session on Saturday (AFP)

certain victory in Baku last time out.

"So far it's been a really positive weekend, on a track that is normally difficult for us. To get pole position was really nice.

"Great day for us but we have to finish it off tomorrow and get 25 points - which we lost in Baku. Great promise from our side."

After struggling to keep tabs

with his Red Bull rival in practice Hamilton was relieved to narrow the gap between them to 0.258s.

"We'll keep pushing, keep fighting and giving it everything. Their long-run pace is a tenth or two quicker than us, but the car's in a much different place now," said the seven-time world champion.

Carlos Sainz for Ferrari posted

the fifth quickest time in qualifying to seal a third row spot with Pierre Gasly's Alpha Tauri joining him.

Then came Sainz's teammate Charles Leclerc and McLaren's Lando Norris with Fernando Alonso (Alpine) and Daniel Ricciardo (McLaren) completing the top ten.

AFP

Every day, all day!