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WEDNESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2021

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ALLEZ! FENCING GETS A BOOST

GO TO PAGE 16 SPORTS

Envoys present credentials

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received separately at Al Barakah Palace a number of ambassadors of the sisterly and friendly countries accredited to the sultanate on Tuesday and accepted their credentials.

His Majesty the Sultan received credentials of the following ambassadors:

Ole Moesby, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, accredited to the sultanate.

Renatas Norkus, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Gitanas Nauseda of the Republic of Lithuania, accredited to the sultanate.

Dominique Mineur, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of King Philippe of Belgium, accredited to the sultanate.

Dr Juraj Koudelka, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Milos Zeman of the Czech Republic, accredited to the sultanate.

John Gerrard, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Michael Daniel Higgins of Ireland, accredited to the sultanate.

Shahin Shakur, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Dr Ilham Heydar Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accredited to the sultanate.

And Antti Rytovuori, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Sauli Niinisto of the Republic of Finland, accredited to the sultanate.

During meetings on the sidelines with His Majesty the Sultan, the ambassadors conveyed greetings of their countries' leaders



Dominique Mineur, Ambassador of Belgium, with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday

along with their best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty the Sultan and continuous progress and prosperity to the Omani people under the wise leadership of His Majesty. They also expressed their great honour and delight in presenting their credentials be-

fore His Majesty the Sultan. They affirmed to exert their sincere efforts to promote relations of their respective countries with the sultanate in various spheres in a manner that serves the joint interests of the Omani people and their countries' citizens.

His Majesty welcomed the

ambassadors, expressing his gratitude for their leaders' greetings and best wishes. His Majesty confirmed to them that they would receive all support from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people to facilitate carrying out their duties.

The credentials presentation

ceremony was attended by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, the Foreign Minister, the Head of the Royal Protocols, the Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman and the Military Aides to His Majesty the Sultan.

ONA

Continued on Page 02

Institutional isolation exemption for children, elderly



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has exempted certain categories of passengers arriving in the country from pre-confirmed hotel reservations and institutional isolation.

In reference to a circular issued on February 11, 2021, the CAA clarified that children under the age of 16 and the elderly over 60 are exempted from the decision, besides a few other categories.

'Diplomats working at foreign diplomatic missions accredited to the sultanate, and visiting diplomats and their families are spared from institutional isolation,' the CAA said in a statement addressed to airlines operating in Oman.

The CAA stated that airlines crews are also exempted from the precautionary measures issued by the Ministry of Health. 'Sick passengers who obtain an exemption in writing from the concerned health authorities due to their medical circumstances are also spared,' the CAA statement said.

The exemption includes holders of permits for private institu-

Toll-free No 1099 to report violations

Muscat - To strictly enforce decisions of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has set up a special toll-free number to report violations.

In a statement, ROP said, 'To report violators of the Supreme Committee decisions, please call the toll-free No 1099.'

Meanwhile, Dhahirah Governorate Police arrested an expatriate for violating the decisions of the Supreme Committee. The individual violated institutional quarantine, and legal measures have been taken against him.

tional isolation centres that are pre-approved by the Relief and Shelter Sector. 'All other requirements as stipulated in the previous circular remain valid,' the CAA stated.



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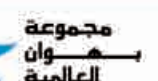
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Envoys present credentials

Continued from Page 01



Ole Moesby, Ambassador of Denmark



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Shahin Shakur, Ambassador of Azerbaijan



John Gerrard, Ambassador of Ireland



Dr Juraj Koudelka, Ambassador of Czech Republic



Renatas Norkus, Ambassador of Lithuania

ANNOUNCEMENT

Internal Tender Committee, Ministry of Labour, invites the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Establishments entitled to subscription and are registered with the board of tenders	Last date for electronic purchasing	Date of tender submission
01/2021	Providing cleaning services for the Ministry's Main building	Excellent Degree	Sunday 11/03/2021 at 02:00 pm	Sunday 28/03/2021 at 10:00 am

- Specialized establishments can obtain electronic documents from this link below, starting from wednesday 17/02/2021, 7:30 AM.
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>
- Each bid is to be attached with a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of (1% of the value of the tender for the Ministry of Manpower, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of the tender.
- Each electronic bid is to be attached with a copy of the bank guarantee and the original bank guarantee must be submitted at Internal Tender Committee, ground floor at the Ministry's Building at Airport Heights, no later than the date of submission.
- Tenders envelopes will be opened at 11:00am on Sunday 28/03/2021.

(The ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price of or any tender)

labour_OMAN

Farmers suffer due to export suspension, low local demand

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Many farmers have suffered financial losses during the COVID-19 pandemic as exports as well as demand in local markets dwindled, according to Saed Abdullah Rashid al Kharusi, chairman of Omani Agriculture Association.

Statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate a 10.71 per cent decrease in vegetable prices in January 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Kharusi said, "Vegetable prices fell this year due to the pandemic. Omani vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumber and pepper are available in abundance. Many farmers lost money due to the suspension of exports to some countries."

He attributed the exit of a significant number of expatriates from the country in the past year and the fact that many citizens don't savour vegetables among other reasons contributing to the farmers' losses.

"Many malls, restaurants and hotels are ordering less due to drop in sales. Omani farmers are



selling tomato cartons for 300bz now. This amount does not cover the costs of farming, packaging and marketing," Kharusi said.

He informed that to alleviate farmers' woes, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has reduced imports of some vegetables. "But the greatest hope is in exports. Our association expects that in the beginning of March, some Gulf states will require Omani veg-

Industrial Innovation Centre and some officials of the ministry conducted a field visit to the governorates of North and South Batinah on February 15.

The visit included farms in Sohar, Saham, Suwaiq and Musanah and aimed to learn about the application of safety and quality standards for vegetable products. They also discussed an agricultural marketing plan, including opening new markets in some wilayahs and a contract farming system.

Kharusi said that Omani Agriculture Association is exerting all efforts to strengthen the sector. "Currently, the association has branches in North Batinah, Dhahirah, North and South Sharqiyah, Dakhliyah and Dhofar to support Omani farmers."

Khamis Saleh al Salhi, who grows pepper on 21 acres of land in the wilayah of Suwaiq, North Batinah, said, "We exported to several countries, including Japan. But we are losing a lot of money now due to the suspension of exports. There is oversupply of vegetables in Omani markets as there is production but little demand. We hope this pandemic ends soon so we can start exporting."

COVID-19 cases in ICUs rising: H E Dr Sa'eedi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

There is a worrying increase in the number of patients in intensive care units (ICUs) with COVID-19, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, has said.

In an interview with Oman TV, H E Dr Sa'eedi said, "There has been a noticeable and worrying increase in the number of patients in intensive care with the coronavirus. The percentage of people recovering from COVID-19 has reached 94 per cent, but the number of intensive care patients rose by over 100 per cent in just two weeks to 41 on Monday. The Supreme Committee will take action against those who fail to adhere to its decisions."

In this context, the minister said, "The closure of North Sharqiyah governorate was due to a 100 per cent increase in intensive care cases in Ibra hospital, which was due to negligence on the part of some people."

Talking about the vaccine, H E Dr Sa'eedi said, "The turnout in some governorates is still low," and advised that the target groups should take the available vaccine.

Explaining the situation, the minister said, "Some patients in the intensive care units were offered vaccination, but they refused."

He added, "There is no scien-

Dhahirah expands target group for vaccination



Muscat - The Directorate General of Health Services in Dhahirah governorate has announced the expansion of the target group to receive the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine in the first phase of the national campaign for immunisation against COVID-19 in the

governorate.

A statement said, 'We confirm the new target group to receive the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine includes categories such as all the elderly aged 65 years and older (healthy or suffering from chronic diseases), aged 18 years and older who suffer from kidney failure and those undergoing dialysis and chronic lung diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, interstitial lung disease and asthma (with disease severity varying from medium to high).'

tific evidence that delay in taking the vaccine reduces its effectiveness. People who received the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will get the second dose and the delay will not impact efficacy of the vaccine."

H E Dr Sa'eedi asked citizens to avail the services and go for the vaccines at the earliest. Contrary to rumours, he assured, the vaccines are safe and there are no risks.

According to statistics issued by the Ministry of Health (MoH), the total number of those vaccinated with the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine dur-

ing the first phase of the national campaign for immunisation against COVID-19 reached 13,055 and 19,019 for Pfizer-BioNTech so far.

The ministry on Tuesday reported 337 new cases of COVID-19, taking the total to 137,929, with report of one death. The number of those that recovered has increased by 252.

'The number of recoveries has increased to 129,543, while the number of deaths has reached 1,544,' the MoH statement said.

As of Tuesday, a total of 141 patients were admitted in health institutions, including 28 in ICUs.

Tanzania in focus as Oman mulls halting flights from certain places

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments arising from the COVID-19 pandemic is studying the prospect of stopping flights coming from countries that have high prevalence of coronavirus infections, including Tanzania.

Speaking to Oman TV on Monday evening, H E Dr Sa'eedi said data shows that travellers arriving from Tanzania in the sultanate have a high number of infected passengers among them.

"Eighteen per cent tested positive for COVID-19, which is a very high number. The Supreme Committee is considering stopping flights coming from countries with high infection rates," he said.

According to an Agence France-Presse (AFP) report dated February 8, Tanzania has spent more than six months trying to convince the world that it has been cured of the coronavirus through 'prayer', while refusing to take measures to curb its spread. However, dissent is mounting, along with deaths attributed to 'pneumonia'.

"COVID-19 is killing people and we see a lot of cases but we cannot talk about the disease," AFP quoted a doctor as saying at a public hospital in Tanzania's biggest city Dar es Salaam, who like many asked not to be named



The Supreme Committee is considering stopping flights coming from countries with high infection rates

H E DR AHMED BIN
MOHAMMED AL SA'EEDI

for fear of reprisals.

AFP reported that Tanzanian President John Magufuli has continually played down the seriousness of the virus even as neighbouring countries shut borders and implemented curfews and lockdowns. The country last gave case figures in April 2020.

In Tanzania, people can occasionally be spotted wearing masks and some speak openly about their fears. "This thing is attacking and the government does not want to clearly come out and accept. Four people I know died

of what we are told is severe pneumonia and all passed on during a similar period," Kuthum Hussein, 28, told AFP.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, a businessman who arrived in Oman two weeks ago from Tanzania said life there is 'so normal'.

"I had gone to visit my family for a few weeks and while there, I observed that life is normal. Most people do not take preventive measures like wearing masks and are mingling with others. There is no data on the number of cases of the virus. Some people get sick

and even die without the government announcing the cause," the businessman said.

In January, Denmark's infectious diseases research institute Statens Serum Institut confirmed two cases of the South African virus variant, which is thought to be more contagious, in travellers returning from Tanzania. One woman in Dar es Salaam told AFP her cousin had died after a business trip to South Africa.

Magufuli said some Tanzanians had travelled abroad to take the vaccine but "they ended up bringing us a strange coronavirus".

With many Omanis having relatives in Tanzania, several of them have postponed visits to the country. "I have been visiting every year. I visited my relatives. But I didn't go last year. And I don't think I will go this year either," Abu Sufian, a retired Omani professional, said.

@shadadm

E-therapy can reduce anxiety, depression during virus pandemic

Muscat - A study conducted by a research team led by Dr Hamed al Sinawi, senior consultant - old age psychiatry at the Department of Behavioural Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University, has provided preliminary evidence to support the efficacy of e-therapy in ameliorating symptoms of anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 crisis in Oman.

E-therapy by therapists is superior to self-help e-therapy, however both could be considered as viable options. The research project, funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation within the COVID-19 Research Programme, aimed to assess the efficacy of therapist guided e-therapy versus self-help e-mail delivered therapy.

As a first phase, the research team surveyed a sample of 1,580 participants, out of which 30 per cent (474 participants) were found to suffer from anxiety and depression. In the second phase, the research team randomly selected 44 participants out of the 474 and tested the two types of therapy; 22 of them received one online session per week for six weeks from psychotherapists in the Arabic or English language,



Dr Hamed al Sinawi

while the other 22 received an automatic weekly newsletter through e-mail containing self-help information and tips to cope with distress associated with COVID-19. The psychotherapists utilised the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy interventions based on the therapist training background and best fit for the participant.

After finishing the sixth week, all the participants in both groups were assessed on their mood and anxiety symptoms.

The study found that symptoms of anxiety and depression reduced in both groups, yet a greater reduction was observed in the group that received the therapist guided e-therapy.



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MoE denies increase of COVID-19 cases among Dakhliyah students

Our correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Directorate General of Education in Dakhliyah governorate, has denied news circulating on social media about an increase in COVID-19 cases among stu-

dents in the governorate.

'The directorate denies news circulating on social media about the increasing spread of COVID-19 cases among students of Abu Obeida Basic Education School in Dakhliyah governorate,' said a statement issued by the General Directorate of Education in

Dakhliyah.

'We constantly communicate with the Directorate General of Health Services in the governorate in accordance with the health protocol to close any school if necessary. We urge people to take information from correct sources,' the statement added.

OPINION

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



This country has around 3,150km of coastline and the water which lies in a depth of 500m contains many minerals which can replace the revenues from oil

Having been in Oman for roughly forty years, I am amazed to discover everyday the natural wealth which exists in the sultanate but remains unnoticed.

This country has around 3,150km of coastline and the water which lies in a depth of 500m contains many minerals which can replace the revenues from oil. The country is filled with minerals which have hardly been extracted and could generate huge revenues. Some concessions have been given and no activity has taken place yet.

Oman has a long history, and its relations with East Africa could generate many additional revenues. In the past, people from the region, together with Iranians and Chinese were transporting chinaware from Iran to different ports in the region, and speaking - together - in Swahili language, which derived from Sahel to Sahel, (from coast to coast). They settled in Zanzibar and the language spread all over East Africa. A substantial proportion of Oman's population speaks the Swahili language and are not considered by East Africans as foreigners but as locals.

This is a huge advantage over other foreigners. Despite this advantage, Oman has only US\$8bn of trade with East Africa as against the UAE's trade volume of US\$38bn.

The country was on the Silk Road and enjoys excellent relations with so many countries, which itself is a real asset for the country. Its long history - more importantly during the 7th and 9th centuries, when the

Omanis settled in Africa - has left traces in the country's developments.

Some traces, like the coronations of the walls and towers by the Portuguese who wanted to control the slave trade, are not examples to follow today, since they represent the Portuguese presence. Omanis have never expressed aggressiveness. But there are many positive traces left, which simply need to be studied and amplified.

One other important asset is the country's population, which consists 75 per cent of people below 40 years, and which represents a real asset for the country.

However, they live in crowded areas, whereas the country is only using nine per cent of its land, the rest being wadis, mountains and dunes. If the seawater was used, the area of utilisation could double, provide land for agriculture and allow a better climate, which could boost tourism as well.

SITTING ON A GOLD MINE

The potential of the country is huge and must be shown and developed. It is not the role of the government, but the role of each individual, to study, discover, promote and show the world that these assets are real and available in Oman.

For too long, the Middle Eastern countries have based their economy on oil. The value of this asset is not determined in the Middle-East, but in the West.

To highlight other values, educating the population and developing research can make the country a real paradise, but the willingness of the people to be proud of their country and its legacy must exist in order to achieve that goal.

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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23/2021	Modification of 11 kV Network by installing OHL Fault Indicators Various area at Dhahirah Governorate.	C	24/2/2021	2/3/2021	35 /=
24/2021	Meter Technical Data Collection for CRT Customers in Sohar Area	C	23/2/2021	2/3/2021	25 /=
25/2021	Meter Technical Data Collection for CRT Customers in North Al Batinah Area	C	23/2/2021	2/3/2021	25 /=
26/2021	Replace Of Existing 3mva Power Transformer (Tx-2) At Hailshi Primary Substation In Saham (North Batinah Governorate)	B	25/2/2021	9/3/2021	25 /=
27/2021	Installation Of Cross Tripping Scheme And Auto Transfer Scheme At Mjcc Primary Substations (North Batinah, Buraimi And Dhahirah Governorates)	A	25/2/2021	9/3/2021	43 /=
28/2021	Upgrade of Multaqa PSS from 2x20 MVA to 3 x20 MVA with 33kv Feeder (North Batinah Governorate)	A	1/3/2021	16/3/2021	685/=
29/2021	Construction of New Sur Al Abri 2 X 20 MVA Indoor Primary Substation with 33kv Interlinks (North Batinah Governorate)	A	1/3/2021	16/3/2021	562 /=
30/2021	Construction Of 33kv Interlink Feeder To Busaili Primary Substation (Dhahirah Governorate)	B	2/3/2021	23/3/2021	57 /=

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REGIONAL WEATHER

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Doha	25	17
Kuwait City	24	15
Manama	25	19
Riyadh	21	9

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.22am
Sunrise	6.38am
Duhr	12.26pm
Asr	3.42pm
Maghrib	6.08pm
Isha	7.19pm

Oman, Hungary discuss joint action in research, innovation

Muscat - H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), at a meeting with H E Dr Tibor Szatmári, Ambassador of Hungary to the sultanate, discussed potential collaboration opportunities in the areas of research and innovation.

The deputy head of mission and the commercial counsellor of the Hungarian Embassy also took part in the meeting that took place at the Innovation Park Muscat on Tuesday.

H E Dr Haddabi stressed that international collaboration is the main component of the research and innovation sector as it seeks to fill the gap in the ecosystem through its programmes, regulations and incentives.

The meeting consisted of a set of presentations by representatives of the Research and Innovation Sector at MoHERI, providing an overview of the Na-

International collaboration is the main component of the research and innovation sector as it seeks to fill the gap in the ecosystem through its programmes, regulations and incentives

H E DR SAIF BIN
ABDULLAH AL HADDABI

tional Innovation Strategy, the research funding programmes such as the Block Funding Programme, the COVID-19 Research Programme and the Strategic Research Programmes, EJAAD platform, Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid), and Innovation Park Muscat.

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PDO and IEA sign strategic energy partnership deal

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has signed a statement of cooperation agreement with the International Energy Agency (IEA) to strengthen collaboration between the two parties in the areas of energy transitions and policy dialogues.

The agreement, which covers oil and gas, water management and technologies, renewable energy, energy efficiency, hydrogen, emissions intensity, data and statistics, and training, will usher in intensified joint efforts across the energy sector to help Oman meet its clean and sustainable ambitions.

The International Energy Agency, a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organisation, works with countries around the world to shape energy policies for a secure and sustainable future.

The agreement was signed virtually by Abdul Amir al Ajmi, PDO's external affairs and value creation director, and David Turk, IEA's deputy executive director.

Through this agreement, PDO strives to leverage Oman's competitive advantage today in oil and gas exploration and production, established production and export facilities, abundance of renewable resources, and central-



Abdul Amir al Ajmi

ity in the global trade map into continued advantage for the future.

In a press statement, Ajmi said, "We are delighted to partner with the world's powerhouse - a major step that supports PDO's dedicated efforts in energy transition and sustainability. Such partnerships shall emphasise PDO's and Oman's aspirations to be at the forefront of the future energy sector".

Turk said, "The International Energy Agency is working hard to put clean energy transitions at the heart of everything we do. Oman is a key country in the world, with great opportunities to leverage its existing energy advantages to advance clean energy transitions. The IEA looks

forward to supporting a growing global consensus on the need for ambitious action to meet our energy and climate goals."

Dr Abdullah al Abri, hydrogen economy project manager at PDO, said the agreement between PDO and IEA will reinforce collaboration on joint projects, expertise sharing, technical foresights, applied research and development across the 'new' energies and technologies, and other areas of mutual interest.

The IEA is at the heart of global dialogue on energy, providing authoritative analysis, data, policy recommendations, and real-world solutions to help countries provide secure and sustainable energy for all.

Sohar Port and Hutchison Ports to conduct study for expansion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone and Hutchison Ports have agreed to jointly conduct a study for the expansion of Sohar Port.

In line with implementing the sultanate's aspirations to increase revenue from the logistics sector, in accordance with the objectives of Oman's Vision 2040, Sohar Port and Freezone has signed a development agreement with Hutchison Ports Sohar.

Hutchison Ports is the world's leading port investor, developer and operator with a network of port operations in 52 ports spanning 26 countries throughout Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Americas. Hutchison



Ports Sohar is a member of Hutchison Ports.

The agreement will see a joint study conducted for the expansion of Sohar Port alongside the addition of a new container terminal capable of receiving megavessels, Sohar Port and Freezone said in a statement issued on Tuesday.

The study will commence this year and will assess the social,

environmental, logistical, in-country value and economic impacts of any future expansion. Moreover, it will provide a clear roadmap for future expansion to meet the needs of the growing local and regional economy.

'Apart from enhancing the competitiveness of Sohar Port, at the regional and global levels, especially in containers and cargo handling, the expansion will fur-

ther contribute towards the generation of more local job opportunities,' the statement said.

Sohar Port said it is currently witnessing a growing occupancy rate and efforts should be enhanced to increase its capacity, to keep pace with future development. The addition of new areas will increase the attractiveness of the port and comprise the necessary infrastructure to attract important international shipping lines.

'The successful implementation of the expansion project is set to bring in sustainable economic and social benefits for the sultanate as a whole, and in particular the Governorate of North Batinah,' Sohar Port said.



Musandam Power Company SAOG

PO Box 228, PC 134, Al Qurum, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate Of Oman, www.musandampower.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Musandam Power Company SAOG (the "Company"), I have the pleasure to present the Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31st December 2020.

Musandam Power Company SAOG (the "Company") was registered and incorporated as a closed joint stock company in the Sultanate of Oman on 18th November 2014. Subsequently, the Company was converted to a joint stock company ("SAOG") and was listed on the Muscat Securities Market ("MSM") on 5th December 2019.

The Company is engaged in the design, construction, ownership, financing, operation and maintenance of a dual fuel power plant (the "Plant") with natural gas as the primary fuel and diesel oil as the alternative fuel with a capacity of 120 Mega Watt (MW) located in Wilayat Bukha in the Musandam Governorate, Sultanate of Oman (the "Project"). The Company is selling the electrical energy generated to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (the "OPWP"). Before listing, the Company was a subsidiary of Oman Oil Facilities Development Company LLC ("OOFDC") which is owned by OQ SAOC ("OO"), a closely held joint stock company incorporated in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Company commenced commercial operations on 17th June 2017.

Corporate Governance

The Company has a comprehensive system of internal controls in place with clear structure, delegated authorities and accountabilities.

During 2020, the Company continued to carry out a review of key internal policies and procedures in order to ensure highest standards of corporate governance and to ensure compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued from time to time by the Capital Market Authority.

As per Clause no 2(a) of the fourth principle of Corporate Governance Codes the Chairperson must arrange for appraisal of the performance of the Board impartially and independently by a third party appointed by the Annual General Meeting in accordance with a benchmark and standards set by the Board or general meeting. The selection of a third party is completed and will be presented to the shareholders for approval in the upcoming AGM.

Operational Results

The operational performance of the plant during the year was excellent, with 99.9% plant reliability against 98.00% planned one(2019: 99.97%). The plant witnessed a high plant load of 76.3 MW during the year (2019: 79.11). The total energy generated and delivered was 380,394 MWh (2019: 394,479), a decrease of about 3.6% over the previous year due to lower demand caused by the epidemic of covid-19. Plant successfully fulfilled 99.9% load demand from Tanweer throughout the year (2019: 99.9%).

The splendid plant reliability and fulfilling Tanweer load demand was achieved with a continued focus on excellence in Health, Safety, Environment and Quality Management. Plant achieved 1,307 days without any lost time accidents since initial COD. We acknowledge the excellent performance of our dedicated and diligent Operation and Maintenance Contractor's (Wartsila) team.

The Company duly met all the stringent environment permit conditions promulgated by Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs. All HSE activities planned successfully completed and all key performance indicators achieved.

The cyber security for the plant is being strengthened in association with our Operations & Maintenance Contractor and subject expert consultant in order to meet the regulations issued by the Authority for Electricity Regulation.

Gas availability from Musandam Gas Plant ("MGP") is declining due to lower gas reservoirs in Musandam as a result, the dependency on diesel operation is likely to be higher resulting in more expensive operation cost. The Company is protected under the NGSA to get reimbursed for any incremental fuel costs due to diesel consumption in the event of shortage or unavailability of gas. The Company is currently exploring various options with MEM for alternatives to diesel use.

Financial Results

Excellent plant availability and higher power generation has led to consistent revenue with the prior year however due to the reduction in the demand overall revenue was slightly decreased by 2%. The Company recorded a net profit of RO 2.335 million in 2020 compared to RO 2.637 million recorded for 2019. The net profit in 2019 was higher mainly due to higher one-time Other Incomes of RO 0.998 million from insurance DSU claim and reimbursement of the IPO costs from the founders. As a whole, the Company's overall profit from operation and after removing the impact of the Other Income is higher by RO 0.675 million as compared to 2019.

The Company has duly met all its commitments under the facilities agreement. Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP) continues to settle all invoices raised by the Company as per the payment provisions provided within the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) settlement is expected to be soon.

Finally, the Company's better operational performance till 2020 enabled it to declare and pay an aggregate dividend of 27.6 Baiza per share (with nominal value of share as Baiza 100 per share). This corresponds to 27.6% of the paid-up capital of the Company.

The share price of the Company stood at 306 Baizas per share on 31st December 2020.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The Company takes its role as a responsible corporate citizen seriously. As part of the settlement agreement between the Company and Wartsila the EPC Contractor, Wartsila is providing funds of USD 300,000 on behalf of the Company to install the solar power in schools in Oman and mainly in Musandam Governorate. This is planned to be implemented by the end of 2021. During the year 2020, the Company has shortlisted a vendor to execute the project in a school based in Musandam. The work will commence in Q1 2021. Apart from that, the Company contributed an amount of RO 20,000 to the Ministry of Health with respect to COVID-19 and donated RO 3,000 to Oman Breast Cancer Society.

Medium term Outlook

The Company continuously endeavors to identify and implement areas of improvement in plant operations. All reasonable measures are being taken by the management to maintain excellent operational performance during the year 2020 and improve the thermal efficiency of the plant despite the challenges faced due to COVID-19. Any change in the power supply and demand landscape in the Sultanate has limited impact on the financial performance of the Company since its profitability is mainly derived from plant's availability and reliability.

The Company and its Operation & Maintenance Contractor are making serious efforts to steadily increase the Omanisation, while ensuring smooth and reliable operation of the plant. Presently, the Company is on track to meet Omanisation commitment made to the Authority for Electricity Regulation and Ministry of Labour.

OPWP launched their Spot Market project in 2015 intends to further liberalize the Oman's power sector and encourage private sector participation in a broader

Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

Post Box 38, Mina Al Fahal, Postal Code 116, Sultanate of Oman

NOTICE FOR ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG (the "Company") is pleased to invite all shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company ("AGM") scheduled to be held at **3 pm on Thursday, 4 March 2020** through the electronic platform hosting Annual General Meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearance and Depository Company's website (www.mcd.gov.om). In case the number of the attendees does not meet the required quorum, the Annual General Meeting will be held at 3 pm on Monday 8 March 2021, to discuss the following agenda:

Agenda for Annual Ordinary General Meeting

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the Auditors' report on the Company's audited Financial Statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and sub-committees payable to the Board of Directors for the previous financial year and to determine the sitting fees for the next financial year.
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO 51,000 as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider the transactions that the Company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31 December 2021.
- To inform the general meeting about the expenditure in support of social services during the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the proposal of allocating RO 60,000 to support social services for the financial year ending December 2021.
- To appoint the Auditors for the Company for the year ending 31 December 2021 and fix their remuneration.
- To approve the criteria set out to appraise the Board of Directors' performance.
- To appoint an independent external consultant to evaluate the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending in 31 December 2021 and fix their remuneration.
- To elect new Members of the Board of Directors of the Company. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director's Nomination Form. The completed form should be delivered to the Company at least five (5) working days prior to the date of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company (by the end of working hours on Thursday, 28 February 2021). The Company will not accept any application received after this date. Candidates must meet the required conditions for board of directors' membership.

In accordance with the Company's Articles of Association and CMA's regulations on holding annual general meetings using the electronic platform, we would like to bring to your attention the following:

- Any juridical person is entitled to authorise any other natural person to attend the meeting and vote on their behalf through the electronic platform, provided that this natural person has an investor number in Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the agenda items mentioned in the notice commences 3 days before the date of the meeting and until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting. In case the shareholder's balance changes whether with increase or decrease, the voting is cancelled, and he/she shall vote again on the day of the meeting.

For further information, please contact Mrs. Nisreen Al Khanbashi on telephone number 24570100.



► www.shelloman.com.om
@Shell_Oman
shell_oman



Statement of financial position at 31 December 2020

	2020 RO '000	2019 RO '000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	71,924	73,883
Other receivables	-	253
Total non-current assets	71,924	74,136
Current assets		
Inventories	3,165	3,532
Trade and other receivables	12,741	11,068
Cash and bank balances	53	8,659
Total current assets	15,959	23,259
Total assets	87,883	97,395
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	7,039	7,039
Legal reserve	940	706
Retained earnings	2,006	1,848
Total equity	9,985	9,593
Non-current liabilities		
Senior facility loan - non-current portion	59,327	62,997
Lease liability - non-current portion	106	108
Deferred tax liability	2,653	2,193
Provision for asset retirement obligation	168	160
Provision for end of service benefits	-	6
Total non-current liabilities	62,254	65,464
Current liabilities		
Senior facility loan - current portion	3,733	3,571
Lease liability - current portion	3	3
Trade and other payables	11,908	7,090
Short term loan facility	-	3,000
Amounts due to related parties	-	8,674
Total current liabilities	15,644	22,338
Total liabilities	77,898	87,802
Total equity and liabilities	87,883	97,395
Net assets per share	0.142	0.136

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2020

	2020 RO '000	2019 RO '000
Revenue	17,658	18,017
Operating costs	(11,102)	(11,385)
Gross profit	6,556	6,632
General and administrative expenses	(646)	(964)
Finance costs - net	(3,136)	(3,438)
Other income	21	998
Profit before tax	2,795	3,228
Tax expense	(460)	(591)
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year	2,335	2,637
Basic and diluted profit per share for the year	0.033	0.037

COMMENTARY

VAT challenges for healthcare segment and medical supplies

The Sultanate of Oman under its Health Vision 2050 aims at strengthening its healthcare segment by facilitating paramount healthcare services to the citizens of the country. In the wake of the existing pandemic, it becomes even more important to modernise and equip the healthcare systems to manage the demand and supply cycle.

Medication and preventive healthcare being necessities, the VAT law in Oman is carefully drafted in order to ease the burden of VAT on the common man. As per the articles of the law, there are two treatments for the segment;

(a) The healthcare services and related goods and services are exempted from VAT.

(b) The supply of medicines and medical equipment are subject to zero rate.

The Executive Regulation will spec-

ify the terms and conditions in detail for the applicability of the above relief.

It is interesting to note that despite healthcare institutions and suppliers of medicines falling under the same segment, the VAT treatments are different. Unlike the UAE and Saudi Arabia who have applied zero rate and standard rate on healthcare segment respectively, Oman has taken a distinct approach by exempting only the healthcare institutions. In case a service is exempt from VAT, the respective business has a disadvantage that it cannot claim VAT credit on the purchases made in supplying the exempted service.

Further, the law has zero rated medicines and medical equipment. As we know, the majority of the purchases for a health institution will be in the form of medical equipment and medicines, which is zero rated. This will reduce the impact of increase in the cost for the

healthcare institution as the major purchases for healthcare institution will be zero rated.

Though healthcare service providers are under exempt category, it is not

cess fat, then the same will be vat-able.

The Executive Regulation will provide conditions and categories for exemption. Hospitals or clinics need to ensure any cosmetic/elective treat-

The healthcare organisation needs to evaluate all the possible business scenarios with regards to applicability of VAT on such arrangements.

For an instance, hospitals may out-source doctors from other hospitals as visiting specialists on fee basis. In this scenario, the specialist doctor performs his function to treat the patient but his service is received indirectly by the patient and directly by the hospital.

Here it become important to evaluate the contract terms to ascertain if the arrangement is manpower supply, which will be subject to standard rate of VAT. There will also be service contracts between the hospitals and diagnostic centres and the same needs to be evaluated from VAT perspective.

In the healthcare industry, there are many ancillary services like providing food to the patients and attendees and providing additional beds which are likely to be taxed at standard rate as the

same is not directly related to the patients care, whereas ambulance services will be exempt as it constitute a core offering of the healthcare.

Although it can also be argued that ambulance services will fall under passenger transport, still it will be exempted. For healthcare institutions, it is very important to ensure that correct VAT treatment is applied on their supplies. The industry is going to witness mixed treatment for VAT on the services and hence it is necessary to have an initial VAT impact assessment study done before the VAT spools out in April 2021.

(Reader questions can be directed to davis.kallukaran@apexmedia.co.om)

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 Media Publication

AASTHA RANGAN

The writer is director, tax advisory services at Crowe Oman

necessary that every service will be exempted. It is likely that the preventive treatment will be exempt and any elective treatment will be taxed. For an instance, if an overweight patient undergoes an emergency surgery for heart complication, then the same will be exempt. Now, if the same patient undergoes liposuction to remove ex-

ment undertaken by a patient is subject to the standard rate of VAT.

Similarly, drugs and medicines related to cosmetic/elective treatment will also be vat-able at standard rate.

In the healthcare industry, there will be many contractual arrangements between the hospitals and specialist doctors for services.

MSM falls 0.35% on weak activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) fell 0.35 per cent to close at 3,554.14 points on Tuesday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 16.24 per cent to RO1.04 and volumes fell 38.77 per cent to 5.53mn shares.

All the sectoral indices closed in red territory. Financial index fell 0.36 per cent, Industrial index declined 0.22 per cent and Services index fell 0.44 per cent. The MSM Shariah index closed down by 0.19 per cent at 531.77 points.

Market breadth remained negative as four companies closed up, while 12 companies closed down. The rest 26 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

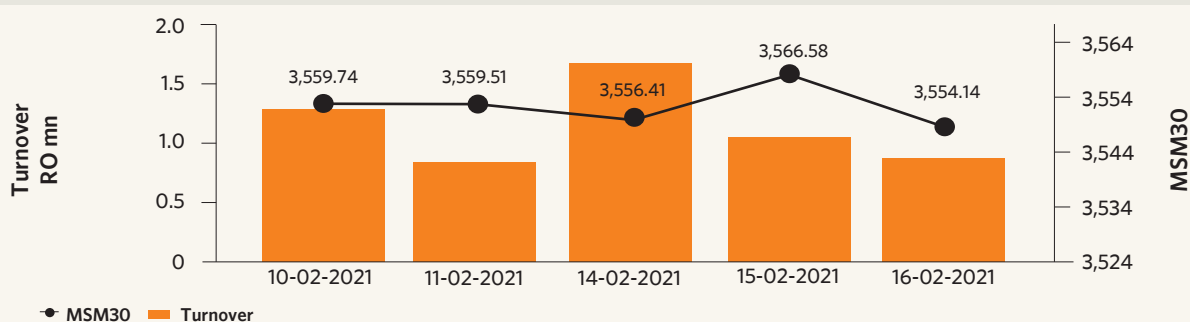
The four gainers were Oman Fisheries (2.33 per cent), Al Jazeera Services (1.76 per cent), Al Sharqia Investment (1.39 per cent) and Bank Muscat (1.01 per cent).

Top losers were SMN Power (-8.11 per



cent), Muscat City Desalination (-7.22 per cent), Al Omaniya Financial Services (-4.11 per cent) and Galfar Engineering & Contracting (-4.0 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Amazon to make devices in India for first time

Mumbai, India - Amazon will begin making Fire TV sticks in India, the US tech giant said on Tuesday, its first device manufacturing line in the country as it fights for a share of its booming e-commerce market.

Amazon is locked in a battle for dominance with Walmart-backed Flipkart and Reliance, owned by India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, as well as thousands of local traders who have accused the US firm of driving them out of business.

Its latest announcement comes as Prime Minister Narendra Modi ramps up his flagship 'Make in India' drive, aimed at urging foreign companies to manufacture goods in the South Asian nation and reduce imports.

"We are delighted to announce Amazon's first manufacturing line in India to produce hundreds of thousands of Fire TV Stick devices every year catering to the demands of the Indian customers," Amit Agarwal, head of Amazon India, said in a statement.

"This further reiterates our commitment to the government of India's 'Make in India' initiative," he added.

The announcement followed last year's pledge by Amazon owner Jeff Bezos to invest



US\$1bn in the country and create 1mn new jobs.

In the beginning of this month, Bezos announced that he would stand aside later this year as chief executive of Amazon. Bezos said he will transition to the role of executive chair in the third quarter, handing over the CEO role to Andy Jassy, who heads Amazon Web Services.

The firm will work with a subsidiary of Taiwanese manufacturer Foxconn to begin production of Fire TV sticks at a factory in the southern city of Chennai later this year.

Communications Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad welcomed the announcement, saying it would 'enhance domestic pro-

duction capacities, and create jobs as well'.

"India is an attractive investment destination and is poised to become a major player in the global supply chain in the electronics and IT products industry," he added.

The nation of 1.3bn people has seen huge job losses due to the coronavirus pandemic, with a months-long lockdown causing the economy to contract by nearly a quarter between April and June last year.

As infections have slowed however, hopes of an economic recovery have taken hold, with New Delhi forecasting 11 per cent growth in the 2021-22 financial year.

AFP

Saudi Arabia pushes companies to move headquarters to kingdom

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia on Monday heaped pressure on foreign companies to move their Middle East headquarters to the kingdom, saying it will stop signing contracts with firms with hubs in other countries from 2024.

The bold ultimatum could intensify competition for business and foreign capital between the kingdom and other Gulf states, especially its principal ally the United Arab Emirates, as they reel from an economic slump.

'Saudi Arabia intends to cease contracting with companies and commercial institutions with regional headquarters not located in the kingdom,' the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported, citing an unnamed official source.

'The cessation will include agencies, institutions and funds owned by the government and will take effect January 1, 2024.'

The decision seeks to 'create more jobs, limit economic leakage, increase spending efficiency



and guarantee that the main goods and services purchased by the different government agencies are made in the kingdom', it added.

Saudi Arabia, the biggest Arab economy, has been struggling to attract foreign investment, a key pillar of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's 'Vision 2030' economic diversification plan to boost non-oil revenue.

Many multinationals doing business in the kingdom prefer to have their regional headquarters

in the neighbouring UAE and other glitzy Gulf capitals that offer a relatively more liberal lifestyle.

Under a previous government initiative known as 'Programme HQ', Saudi Arabia offered multinational companies tax breaks and incentives to relocate their Middle East headquarters to the kingdom.

Twenty-four international companies declared their intent to relocate their headquarters to Riyadh at last month's Davos-

style Future Investment Initiative forum in the capital, SPA said.

Monday's announcement 'will not affect any investor's ability to enter the Saudi market or to continue their business with the private sector', SPA said.

But the decision will pile pressure on private sector companies heavily dependent on lucrative Saudi government contracts.

"Pressing multinationals to establish headquarters in Saudi Arabia centres upon the belief that foreign companies benefiting from the Saudi market should bolster their physical presence in the country," Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told AFP.

"This is ultimately a reevaluation of the sustainability of Saudi Arabia's economic development model and not an intentional commercial challenge to the UAE. If done successfully though, it is likely to have a commercial impact on the UAE."

AFP



Oman Cancer Association Invitation to attend the General Assembly meeting for the year 2021

The Oman Cancer Association (OCA), is pleased to invite honorable members to attend the annual general assembly meeting to be held virtually at 7:30 pm on Wednesday, 31st of March 2021.

The agenda for the meeting will include:

1. Board of Directors' report for the year ended and the draft plan of action for the New Year
2. The General Budget and closing account for the ended fiscal year and the draft budget for the new year.
3. The auditor's report
4. Election of Board of Directors for the year 2021-2023.
5. The appointment of the financial auditor and determine incentives and without prejudice to the provisions of the State Audit Institution
6. Membership should be more than 6 months to be eligible to vote.
7. The topics that the Board of Directors see to be presented to the General Assembly.

Whoever wishes to nominate him/herself to the Board of Directors must send an email to the below address or visit the association's headquarters to fill out the relevant form, or for those who wish to renew membership, as this will be closed at least twenty days before the meeting of the General Assembly, and no request will be considered after the mentioned date. Also, all above mentioned reports will be available at the association's headquarters, and all members will have access to them. If you have any inquiries, please contact (24498716) or email: info@oca.om.

For enquiries you have any questions please call 24498716

Dr. Wahid Al Kharusi FRCS
President
Oman Cancer Association

Usher in ‘Year of the Ox’ at Al Bustan Palace hotel

China Mood is inviting guests to celebrate the Year of the Ox with a specially designed menu for the entire month of February. The restaurant’s expert chefs have put together an array of mouth-watering delicacies and signature dishes showcasing the best of Chinese fine dining from Beijing to Guangdong. Savour a fine display of culinary artistry presented with theatrical ceremony in refined surroundings, as Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel sets the scene to usher in the Chinese New Year.

Nabil bin Abdul Wahab al Zadjali, general manager, Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, said, “We look forward to welcoming our guests to celebrate the Year of the Ox all month long with us. Our hand-picked team of Chinese chefs have put a lot of care and thought into the menu, taking diners on a journey that will delight their tastebuds. From our famous Peking duck, to the delicately wrapped Dim Sum, our ladies and gentlemen will surely make it a memorable evening.”

For RO35+ per person, guests can enjoy an exquisite four-course set menu full of dishes that are created to give blessings for the next year.



Start the meal with soft, pillowy dim sum with China Mood’s exclusive New Year platter, followed by a light lobster and prawn spinach wonton soup.

For the main course, guests can sample aromatic crispy duck and foie-gras roll, tender and flavorful braised oxtail, fresh grilled halibut, rich black bean lobster, and fluffy chicken and dry scallop rice.

Finish the meal on a sweet

note with a zesty Sudachi orange soufflé tart with praline tofu and mandarin sorbet.

As Muscat’s most renowned Chinese restaurant, China Mood continues to delight guests with creative menus that honour the art of fine Asian cuisine.

Authentic flavours and age-old rituals will transport diners to far-off lands, while the warm atmosphere and attentive service will have them feeling

right at home.

With plenty of space indoors and outdoors, and private rooms available too, China Mood is the perfect place for an intimate evening with friends or loved ones.

China Mood is open daily for dinner, from 6.30pm to 11pm.

For reservations, email Restaurant.reservation.albustanpalace@ritzcarlton.com or call +968 2476 4444.

Sri Lanka, Oman mark 40 years of diplomatic relations

Sri Lanka is celebrating 40 years of diplomatic relations with the Sultanate of Oman on February 17. Marking the occasion the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat has sent the following message of Sri Lanka’s Ambassador H E Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad.

Today Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman commemorate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. To mark this momentous occasion, Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Hon Dinesh Gunewardena, and the Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi have exchanged felicitation messages on this significant occasion in the bilateral relations between the two countries.

To commemorate this important occasion, a special event has been organised at the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman in Muscat to launch a commemorative ‘logo’. An agreement on the mutual exemption of visa requirements for holders of Diplomatic, Special, Service and Official Passports will also be signed during the event coinciding with this special occasion. The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat is organising a series of activities to commemorate this historic occasion throughout the year.



Tarik, in his then capacity as the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman, also visited Sri Lanka as a part of high level delegation.

A landmark Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Political Consultation between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries serves as a catalyst for the growing bilateral cooperation in multi-faceted fields between the two countries.

The establishment of Sri Lanka-Oman Parliamentary Friendship Association between the Parliament of Sri Lanka and the Shura Council of Oman paved the way for the exchange of high level visits between the two countries.

As the nations sharing the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka and Oman are well poised for greater connectivity and deeper economic engagement.

Given the bilateral relations between the two countries have diversified to encompass a wide range of areas for cooperation over the last four decades and the two nations have now embarked on an economic diversification drive, the time is ripe for both countries to focus on the enhancement of economic cooperation and partnership in the years ahead for the mutual benefits of both the peoples.

Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman enjoy long-standing historical and people-to-people relations. With the establishment of the diplomatic relations in 1981 and the opening of resident diplomatic missions of Sri Lanka and Oman in Muscat and Colombo in 1987 and 2013 respectively, the bilateral relations continued to thrive and achieved significant milestones over the past four decades.

The first bilateral engagement began with the visit of former Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka late Lakshman Kadirgamar to the Sultanate of Oman in 1996. This visit paved the way to an official visit of a high level delegation from the Sultanate of Oman led by H H Sayyid Thuwainy bin Shihab al Said, Personal Representative of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, to Sri Lanka in 1997. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin



Oman Oil enhances customer experience with Steers burger

With customer-centricity in mind, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) welcomed the first branch of internationally renowned burger chain, Steers to its SQU service station.

This step goes in line with OOMCO’s efforts to provide quality services and products across all its service locations and transform its service stations into versatile hubs for shopping, dining, and services.

“We are excited to include Steers under our umbrella of internationally recognised brands,

and to bring the Middle East’s first Steers into the sultanate. We are always working to energize our customers’ journey throughout all our service stations, with a host of services that provide a holistic experience for all customers,” said Ramzi bin Ali al Mejri, SFS marketing manager.

“We are working to completely transform our service stations to serve as one-stop-shops for all customer needs.”

Steers is praised for its 100 per cent beef flame-grilled burg-

ers, and operates more than 580 branches in South Africa and 54 international branches.

The restaurant’s menu ranges from their 100 per cent real flame-grilled burgers, handmade chips, and many other items to satisfy every craving.

It is worth noting that Steers is only one great example of the many international brands OOMCO is partnering with to bring the best services to its customers; starting with Café Amazon, Debonairs Pizza, and now Steers.

Microsoft brings Compliance Manager tool to cloud customers in Oman

Microsoft announced that its Compliance Manager tool, part of Microsoft 365, will now empower Omani businesses to adhere to their legal obligations more easily while continuing to innovate at a time when remote working is inducing rapid changes across industries.

The move comes as an increasing number of companies in the sultanate implement hybrid-working models to balance employee safety with business continuity.

A survey of GCC business leaders in March showed 35 per cent of organisations in the Gulf had either implemented hybrid workplaces or were in the process of doing so. In May, Oman’s Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19 issued a decision that obligated employers in certain sectors to “implement remote home-working and introduce technology to facilitate home-working as much as possible”.

“The pandemic has unquestionably accelerated digital transformation to unprecedented levels,” said Saif Hilal al Hosni, country manager, Microsoft Oman and Bahrain.



“We have seen years of innovation taking place in mere months and the trend continues to gather steam. However, businesses still must meet regulatory requirements such as PCI DSS, and this can be difficult if you do not have the skills or time to effectively manage compliance. Microsoft Compliance Manager takes a lot of complexity and labour out of this process, delivering a useful blend of control and automation that allows inno-

vators to return to the business of business.”

Microsoft Compliance Manager helps reduce risk while alleviating the complexity of a company’s obligations to industry and legal standards by enabling quick delivery of policies tailored to individual operating models.

Business stakeholders can prioritise tasks while building best-practice frameworks that evolve with the regulatory landscape.

“Regulatory frameworks exist to protect businesses, their customers and their partners from the losses associated with data and identity theft.” Hosni added.

“As such, they are critical to the success of economic initiatives in line with Oman’s Vision 2040. Microsoft remains committed to showing businesses how they can leverage the power of the intelligent cloud to balance regulatory compliance with innovation in the new normal.”

Badr al Samaa introduces maternity and delivery programme

Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals launched Badr Maternity & Delivery Program in an online event attended by expecting mothers, doctors, senior management among other dignitaries. Dr Deena al Afsoor, head Clinical Committee, Oman Women’s Association, was the guest of honour.

Badr Maternity & Delivery Program is a comprehensive package which in the special journey towards motherhood aims at covering everything from the time of conceiving and delivering in a professional and caring manner. It is a comprehensive one covering both antenatal care and delivery.

Shamnath Aman, branch head of Badr al Samaa Hospital, Barka, welcomed the guest of

honour, panelists, senior management, doctors and attendants to the launch event of Badr Maternity & Delivery Program.

Speaking on this occasion, Sameer PT, group CEO said, “Badr Maternity & Delivery Program will ensure utmost comfort and special care for pregnant ladies. Single point of contacts in every branch will ensure all necessary information and assistance is given to enrolled expecting mothers. Badr al Samaa Group has experienced obstetricians and complete facilities to handle all sorts of complications in deliveries.”

Dr Deena said that out of all women in Oman 50 per cent is in the reproductive age, so the need for multidisciplinary care to cater to all types of expecting mothers



becomes important.

She said programmes like Badr Maternity & Delivery Program are much suited to this de-

mand as it is not just comprehensive and flexible but affordable at the same time. She appreciated the efforts of Badr al

Samaa Group for exemplary contribution to health and wellness of Omani women.

Asif Shah, head Branding and

Communication, and host of the event presented the overview of the programme.

He said this affordable programme, available at all centres of Badr al Samaa Group, will have flexibility to join in any trimester and pay in installments. All routine investigations including viral markers, consultation with obstetricians, ultrasound scans, growth scans, NST (non stress test) scans and deliveries will be covered under this programme which is starting at RO250. At the time of enrollment special points of contacts will provide special counseling sessions to expecting mothers.

Dr Tahira Kazmi, senior consultant (visiting) gynaecologist, Badr al Samaa Hospital Ruwi, in her keynote speech on woman’s

health from puberty to menopause explained the type of care to be given at each stage.

Every stage in women’s life is important as there are different threats and risks associated to it.

Dr Smitha Mohan, specialist gynaecologist at Badr al Samaa Hospital, Al Khoudh, discussed various ways to ensure healthy pregnancy. She gave valuable advices on diet, do’s and don’ts, exercises, work and travel during pregnancy.

Jacob Oomen, group COO, in his vote of thanks expressed his gratitude to the Board of Directors Abdul Latheef and Dr PA Mohammed for their support and inspiration to launch newer medical programmes. He also thanked the guest of honour and all other panelists.

Grand Millennium hotel offers perfect outdoor dining option

Grand Millennium Muscat, a five-star luxury hotel situated at the heart of Muscat City, has a secret gem inside its premises – Mazaj Terrace & Lounge is perfect for social distancing with very spacious seating and tables, and good venue to meet-up with friends you haven't seen for a long time while enjoying the nice and cool ambiance under the blue skies.

Mazaj Terrace caters to a well-curated delectable menu of freshly oven-baked pizzas, scrumptious burgers & sliders, a varied selection of tea or coffee with sweet & savory delights, and fruity mocktails prepared by our talented chefs and baristas.

You can always recharge and energise your souls with your friends and families, and get the most out of your evenings over a scrumptious meal till sundown without having to be in a now-crowded place.

Not only that, but it also offers high-quality sheeshas where you can enjoy while watching the daily football streaming on the city's biggest 178 inches 2-way outdoor screen.



Mazaj Terrace & Lounge offers daily pizzas to order and unlimited sliders every Wednesday to complete that idyllic, relaxing afternoon or evening you've been looking forward to.

"Grand Millennium Muscat aims to provide an outdoor dining experience and warm hospitality yet at an affordable price to sit and engage in conversations or to unwind with friends and families during this period and we believe that the Mazaj Terrace & Lounge is a perfect place where comfort and safety will be achieved," said Luca Medda, cluster general manager, Grand Millennium Muscat, and Millennium Executive Apartments Muscat.

He added, "With the help of our talented and passionate chefs and baristas, we have come up with a well-curated menu that guests can enjoy sumptuous and lavish meals that will surely satisfy their cravings."

For reservations and inquiries, please call us on +968 95831072 or drop us an email at restaurants.gmm@millenniumhotels.com.



AbdulHakeem al Muslahi



Abdullah al Kindi

Datamount, IFS sign partnership agreement

IFS, the global enterprise applications company, and rapidly growing data centre and enterprise cloud service provider Datamount have entered into a strategic channel partnership to serve joint customers in Oman and the Middle East.

One of the key factors in the decision to establish the partnership between IFS and Datamount was their shared passion for providing products and services tailored for the specific industry needs of their customers.

"IFS has a proven track record in its focus sectors, including manufacturing, energy and utilities, and aerospace and defense," said AbdulHakeem Amur al Muslahi, CEO of Datamount. "The depth and breadth of ex-

perience in the IFS team means they have a unique understanding of the processes that an organisation relies on to create value. IFS has also been very supportive in further enriching Datamount's knowledge through their international service and support organisation."

Abdullah al Kindi, Oman country manager, IFS, added, "The Omani government has in recent years invested heavily in specific sectors in order to realise its 2040 vision, including food and beverage, energy, manufacturing and logistics. These industries align well with IFS's and Datamount's expertise and we look forward to leveraging our combined skills to offer customers unparalleled value and service."

OSN announces latest addition to its Original productions

OSN, the Middle East's leading entertainment hub, has announced the launch of the latest of its original productions, a captivating psycho-thriller drama series *Kayd Majhool* (Anonymous) which will debut on the OSN Ya Hala Al Oula and OSN Streaming App on March 18.

The star-studded series features Basel Khayat and Abdelmonem Amayri in intense roles and marks the latest addition to OSN's roster of authentic local content created with OSN's world-class production infrastructure.

Directed by Alsadeer Masoud and written by Mohamed Abu Laban and Lewa'a Yazajy, *Kayd Majhool* (Anonymous) is an eight-episode psychological thriller that follows two parallel stories shockingly intertwining at the end of the season. The first story highlights the investigations of two high profile murders, led by the sharp and meticulous investigator, Khaldoun (played



by Ehab Shaabaan). The second storyline introduces the audience to Samir Abdulrahim (played by Abdelmonem Amayri), a tailor and taxi driver who is experiencing the pain of financial misfortune and is on the brink of mental collapse. The two stories slowly begin to link together as the investigation reveals the perpetrator of the murders.

And in a step aimed at reaching wider segments of audience in the region and allow everyone to enjoy this quality production,

OSN will make the series available with English subtitles as well as English dubbing.

Rolla Karam, interim chief content officer at OSN said, "*Kayd Majhool* (Anonymous) is the first Arabic psycho-thriller added to our portfolio of originals launching this year. We are excited to be launching this fifth Original Production, further cementing OSN's mission to bringing local content to Arab and non-Arab viewers alike, as we're confident that the series will appeal to a wide audience across the region."

OSN Originals aims to support regional producers, screenwriters, and talent, providing opportunities to connect with audiences across OSN's expansive network in over 20 countries. OSN Originals represents a long-term strategic direction for the entertainment network, following months of research into the wants and needs of the regional customer.

Key features give vivo V20 unique edge

As smartphone devices buck the trend and continue to grow unabated around the world, consumers now use their devices for varied tasks, from professional purposes to entertainment and everything in between.

Due to the increasing competition in the smartphone industry as well as the rapid uptick in technology, companies are now spending more on research and development, to scale up innovation and bring to the table cutting-edge products that satisfy customer's changing needs.

As a company that puts consumers at the core of its operations, vivo's V20 offers advanced camera capabilities, a modern and user-friendly design and interface, as well as an all-round strong performance. Here are some of the V20's key features that give it a unique edge among others in its class.

The Ultimate Camera Phone

Vivo's V series of smartphones are widely acclaimed for their camera features and the V20 re-



mains true to this DNA as is clear from its front and rear cameras.

One of the V20's USPs is its 44MP Eye Autofocus (AF) Front Camera – as its name suggests, this feature enables rapid eye autofocus tracking when taking pictures and recording videos. Through an algorithm developed independent by vivo, eye positions and orbits are accurately outlined in real-time, allowing

users to produce high-quality visual content with a clear focus on the subject.

The rear camera of the V20 comprises a 64MP main camera, an 8MP multi-function camera and a 2MP mono camera. The main camera reveals vibrant details that are clear even after vigorous zooming, while the supporting rear cameras create wide perspectives, in addition to super macro scenarios, bokeh and black-and-white film effects.

A Modern and Trendy Smartphone

The V20 possesses a vibrant and sleek design – measuring 161.30X74.20X 7.38mm and weighing just 171g. Using AG Matte Glass technology, a chemical-based treatment applied directly on the surface of glass, the smartphone boasts anti-glare properties – making it easy to use even in bright sunlight.

This coating also makes the smartphone resistant to scratches and fingerprint smears. Yet another interesting aspect of the device is the Super

AMOLED FHD+ Halo Screen that helps bring vibrant colours to life, offering magnificent colour harmonisation for photos, videos, and gaming.

The V20 is available in two trendsetting colours, Midnight Jazz and Sunset Melody. Midnight Jazz is black – a strong signature colour that creates a streamlined look, while Sunset Melody is blue and warm with tropical hues reminiscent of sunset beaches.

A Robust Performance

The 8 nm octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 720G processor powers the V20 with a strong combination of features that deliver a smooth performance for applications. 8GB of RAM allows consumers to run multiple apps simultaneously, while 128GB of ROM provides ample storage for large games and videos. The 4,000mAh (TYP) battery with vivo's 33W FlashCharge technology offers solid durability and rapid charging, resulting in a more convenient mobile experience.

Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat goes fast, literally and figuratively

The new 2021 Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat goes fast, both literally and figuratively. After opening for orders in November, Durango SRT Hellcat production is officially sold out.

Although Dodge has closed new customer orders, a small number of dealer-allocated units will be available for a limited time. Dodge will build a total of 2,000 2021 Durango SRT Hellcats.

"The 2021 Durango Hellcat is only a single model-year run, ensuring that it will be a very special, sought-after performance SUV for years to come," said Tim Kuniskis, Dodge Brand and Interim Chrysler Brand chief executive officer – Stellantis.

"Based on anticipated demand, all dealer allocations have already been reserved, but there is still some time to secure an unsold dealer order."

The most powerful SUV ever is exclusively available for the 2021 model year and comes with a starting US manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP) of



\$80,995 (excluding \$1,495 destination).

The Dodge Durango is coming off of a successful 2020 with the new 2021 Durango being crowned the SUV of Texas, as well as Full-size SUV of Texas for

the sixth time by the Texas Auto Writers Association (TAWA).

The Durango SRT Hellcat is the most powerful SUV ever, delivering 710 horsepower and 645 lb.-ft. of torque from the proven supercharged 6.2lt HEMI Hell-

cat V-8 engine paired with the quick-shifting TorqueFlite 8HP95 eight-speed automatic transmission.

The Durango SRT Hellcat has a 0-60 miles per hour (mph) time of 3.5 seconds, a quarter-

mile elapsed time of 11.5 seconds as certified by the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) and a top speed of 180 mph.

No SUV in the world can tow more or carry more with a faster quarter-mile time than the Du-

rango SRT Hellcat.

The Durango has the best-in-class towing capacity across its lineup. The supercharged 6.2lt HEMI Hellcat V-8, legendary 392-cubic-inch HEMI V-8 and classic 5.7lt HEMI V-8 with the Tow N Go Package outhaul every full-size, three-row SUV on the road, with a towing capability of 8,700 lbs. The award-winning 3.6lt Pentastar V-6 engine has a towing capability of 6,200 lbs.

Line-up

Dodge Durango, the ultimate "no-compromise" SUV and the Charger of the three-row SUV segment raises the bar for 2021 with the new aggressive exterior styling, a new interior with a Challenger-inspired cockpit and more performance than ever with six distinct models – SXT, GT, Citadel, R/T, SRT 392 and the new 710-horsepower Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat – the most powerful SUV ever.

The Challenger and Charger muscle car exteriors are re-

flected in the Durango's new, aggressive exterior, which features a new front fascia, LED low/high projector headlamps, LED daytime running lamp (DRL) signatures, grille, rear spoiler and wheels.

The Durango interior is significantly upgraded for the 2021 model year with a new performance-inspired cockpit, including a redesigned instrument panel, center console and front doors, and five-times-faster Uconnect 5 with the largest-in-class available 10.1-inch touchscreen.

With all of the updates, the interior feels more driver-oriented, modern and refined than the outgoing model. The new Tow N Go Package on the 2021 Durango R/T AWD leverages its 5.7lt HEMI V-8 engine performance, SRT's menacing looks, best-in-class towing of 8,700 pounds, an improved top speed of 145 mph, Track, Sport, Snow and Tow drive modes and SRT-tuned performance exhaust with an iconic Dodge exhaust rumble.

UN slams deadly Iraq rocket attack

Arbil, Iraq - The United Nations warned on Tuesday that Iraq could spin out of control after a rocket attack on the Kurdish regional capital Arbil killed a foreign contractor for the US military and wounded several other people.

The attack late on Monday was the first time in nearly two months that Western military or diplomatic installations have been targeted in Iraq after a series of similar incidents last year that were blamed on pro-Iranian Shiite factions.

The United Nations' top representative in Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, slammed the attack on Tuesday morning.

'Such heinous, reckless acts pose grave threats to stability,' she posted on Twitter, calling for 'restraint' and cooperation between the federal and regional governments on a probe.

On Monday evening, more than a dozen 107mm rockets - the same calibre used in attacks in Baghdad - were fired from around 8km west of Arbil.

They appeared to be targeted at a military complex in Arbil airport that hosts foreign troops deployed as part of a US-led coalition helping Iraq fight extremists since 2014.

But they struck all over the northwest of the city, including residential areas where they wounded five civilians, the Arbil health directorate told AFP.

Coalition spokesman Wayne Marotto said three rockets hit Arbil airport, killing one foreign civilian contractor who is not an American national.



A worker cleans shattered glass outside a damaged shop on Tuesday following a rocket attack the previous night in Arbil, the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region (AFP)

Another nine people were wounded, including eight civilian contractors and one US soldier, he said.

By Tuesday morning, the remnants of the rockets had been cleared, leaving small craters in the paved streets of Arbil and in the plaster walls outside homes.

"Of course this bombing affected us - it put our lives at risk," said resident Nariman Mohammad (51). "I don't see any meaning to any of this. We're also people, and we want to live."

After being closed to flights throughout the morning, Arbil airport resumed its normal schedule at midday, a government spokesman told AFP.

US 'outraged'

Late on Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was 'outraged' by the attack and pledged US support in holding those responsible to account.

"I have reached out to Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani to dis-

I have reached out to Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani to pledge support for all efforts to investigate and hold accountable those responsible

ANTONY BLINKEN

cuss the incident and to pledge our support for all efforts to investigate and hold accountable those responsible," he said.

Barzani had earlier con-

demned the attack 'in the strongest terms', while Iraqi President Barham Saleh called it a 'dangerous escalation and a criminal terrorist act'.

Western military and diplomatic facilities have been targeted by dozens of rockets and roadside bombs since late 2019, but most of the attacks have been on Baghdad, not Arbil.

Several of the attacks have been deadly, with both foreign and Iraqi personnel killed.

Iraqi and US security officials have blamed hardline pro-Iran factions, including Kataeb Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq, which are both vehemently opposed to the US presence in Iraq.

Late on Monday, a shadowy group calling itself Awliyya al-Dam (Guardians of Blood) said it carried out the attack but security officials have told AFP they believe it to be a front group for those same prominent pro-Iran factions.

Authorities have struggled to hold them to account.

Last year, an attempt by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi to arrest more than a dozen members of Kataeb Hezbollah accused of rocket attacks ended in the swift release of all but one of the fighters.

Instead, then US president Donald Trump ordered several rounds of bombing raids on Kataeb Hezbollah in response to the deaths of US service members.

Troop drawdown

Before leaving office in January, Trump had threatened that any further fatal attacks would prompt a mass bombing campaign, with Iraqi sources telling AFP that more than 100 sites would be targeted.

Iraqi and even US officials have told AFP in recent weeks that it was not clear whether the Joe Biden administration would pursue the same 'tripwire'.

Since Iraq declared victory over the Islamic State group in late 2017, the coalition presence has been reduced to fewer than 3,500 troops, 2,500 of them American.

Most are concentrated at the military complex at Arbil airport, a coalition source told AFP.

AFP



Indian rescue team members search for survivors as a crane pulls out a bus that plunged into a canal killing at least 37 passengers, in Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh state in central India on Tuesday (AFP)

At least 39 killed in India as bus plunges into canal

New Delhi, India - At least 39 passengers were killed when a bus plunged into a canal in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday, police told AFP as recovery efforts continued.

The accident happened when the bus, which was carrying more than 50 passengers, veered off the road and into the water near the village of Satna early on Tuesday morning.

It was unclear what caused the bus to swerve, but India's vast network of roads is poorly maintained and notoriously dangerous.

Local media reported the bus was completely submerged, and images showed officials in orange life jackets using rescue boats to look for survivors.

According to media reports, seven people, including the driver, managed to swim to safety.

"We have so far found 39 bodies and they have been sent for autopsy. Search and rescue operations are underway," said district police superintendent

We have so far found 39 bodies and they have been sent for autopsy. Search and rescue operations are underway

DHARAMVEER SINGH

Dharamveer Singh.

The state government has ordered an inquiry into the accident.

An initial investigation suggested the driver lost control of the bus, reports said. The bus then hit a bridge before crashing into the water.

Local officials stopped the release of water into the canal, which sped up the rescue operations and allowed two cranes to pull the bus out, reports said.

The Times of India newspaper quoted sources saying it took three hours to lift the vehicle out.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's office tweeted that the families of those killed would receive ₹200,000 (US\$2,750 approx) in compensation.

"The entire state is standing with those affected," Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said in a video message.

High-speed vehicles jostling with motorbikes, pedestrians and cyclists combine with poor infrastructure and poorly maintained vehicles to make India's roads treacherous.

In 2019 more than 150,000 people died - 410 every day or 17 an hour - in almost half a million accidents, according to the government.

The United States sees nearly five times more accidents than India every year but the number of deaths in India is four times higher, according to the Times of India.

The main causes are excessive speed, not wearing helmets - sales of two-wheelers far outstrip those of cars - and not using seatbelts.

AFP

Battle for Marib threatens millions of Yemenis, warns UN

Dubai, UAE - The UN's humanitarian chief said on Tuesday he was 'very alarmed' by a Huthi rebel advance on the Yemeni government's last northern stronghold, saying an assault on Marib could endanger millions of civilians.

The Iran-backed Huthis have this month resumed an offensive to seize oil-rich Marib, some 120km east of the rebel-held capital Sanaa.

The city's loss would be a major blow for Yemen's government, which is backed by a Saudi-led coalition, but also for the civilian population and the hundreds of thousands of displaced people sheltering in desolate camps in the region.

"I'm very alarmed about the military escalation in Marib and its impact on the humanitarian situation," Mark Lowcock, the UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, said in a tweet.

"An assault on the city would put two million civilians at risk, with hundreds of thousands potentially forced to flee - with unimaginable humanitarian consequences."

The rebels have advanced



Saudi-backed government troops fire towards Huthi rebels, Marib on Sunday (AFP)

sequences. Now is the time to de-escalate, not to add even more to the misery of the Yemeni people.'

Military officials told AFP that the rebels had advanced towards the city on two fronts overnight after heavy fighting with government forces.

Dozens from both sides have been killed in the past 24 hours alone, they said. The total casualty toll from the battle for Marib is unknown but reports indicate it is now in the hundreds.

The rebels have advanced

north and west of the city after seizing Al-Zor (in Sirwah district) up to the western sides of Marib dam, and tightened their grip on hills overlooking supply lines for several fronts,' one of the officials said.

The military coalition, which entered Yemen's conflict in 2015, has been pounding rebel positions, and the Huthi-run Al-Masirah television on Tuesday reported 13 airstrikes in several areas in Marib.

The fighting is endangering sprawling camps for internally

displaced people, many of whom have fled several times before ending up in Marib, the only part of the north not in Huthi hands.

Until early 2020, Marib city was spared the worst of Yemen's six-year-old conflict, due to its strategic importance with its rich oil and gas reserves, and also because of its location near the border of regional power Saudi Arabia. It became a sanctuary for many in the early years of the war, taking in those hoping for a new start.

AFP

UK set for new laws to protect free speech

London, UK - Britain is set to introduce new laws guaranteeing freedom of speech in universities to counteract what the government called 'unacceptable silencing and censoring' on campuses.

As part of the plans, the government is considering appointing a 'free speech champion' to investigate possible breaches of the right to expression, while academics who lose their jobs in similar disputes may be able to claim compensation.

"I am deeply worried about the chilling effect on campuses of un-



Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson (AFP)

acceptable silencing and censoring," said Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson.

"That is why we must

strengthen free speech in higher education, by bolstering the existing legal duties and ensuring strong, robust action is taken if these are breached."

However, the government was accused of exploiting culture wars, after itself launching a pushback against the toppling of slavery-era statues and efforts to educate Britons about their colonial past, in the wake of last year's Black Lives Matter protests.

Just six events out of almost 10,000 involving an external speaker were cancelled over the speakers' views in 2019-20, ac-

cording to a survey in December by the group Wonkhe, which analyses higher education policy.

"The government has tapped into a wider push by conservatives, right-leaning libertarians and 'classical liberals' to combat 'cancel culture' and the supposed 'woke left' agenda that they claim has led to a crisis of free speech in Britain," Australian historian Evan Smith wrote on the Wonkhe site. He added that 'similar claims (are) being made in the US, Australia, Canada and France'.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Zero COVID: Possible or pipe dream for European countries?

Paris, France - Hit the virus quick and hard, undergoing drastic short-term measures in order to allow life to return to normal. Several nations in Asia and Oceania have pursued 'Zero COVID' strategies.

Can European countries do likewise?

‘Three-fold advantage’

In Auckland, two million New Zealanders have been confined to their homes since Monday because of three confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Across Europe, tens of thousands of cases are confirmed every day, yet very few cities are in lockdown.

As vaccine schemes stutter across the continent, more and more experts are pleading for states to follow the example of New Zealand and others and move to stamp out the virus.

“There’s a three-fold advantage for countries who have adopted [the Zero COVID approach],” said Antoine Flahault, an epidemiologist from the University of Geneva.

“On a disease level they are the uncontested world champions in terms of number of deaths per inhabitant. On a social level they have resumed: bars, restaurants, cultural and sporting activities, schools and universities are open as normal.”

“Distancing measures are virtually non-existent,” he said.

“And from an economic



A pedestrian walks past a COVID-19 poster in Manchester, northern England, on Tuesday (AFP)

point of view, places like Taiwan and China have seen positive GDP growth in 2020.”

He said this approach was preferable to the ‘mitigation strategy that most Western nations had adopted’, that is ‘organising between waves how to live with the virus’.

For Martin McKee, professor of European Public Health at the London School of Health and Tropical Medicine, ‘living with the virus’ is not an accurate term. “What does that actually

mean?” he told AFP.

“We don’t think it’s acceptable to have a situation (where) you’re trying to keep it under control but not succeeding, you’re continually having resurgences and more lockdown, because we don’t see how anybody can plan ahead for holidays, wedding, investing in a new restaurant, for anything.”

What’s more, the more the virus is allowed to circulate the greater the chances of a meaningful mutation emerging, such

as the British and South African variants that are more transmissible. “We don’t think we can keep going on with a third, forth, fifth, fifteenth, twentieth wave,” said McKee, who believes that Zero COVID is the ‘only alternative’. So why have so many nations not even attempted to stamp out COVID-19?

Conditions matter

Archie Clements, Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Australia’s Curtin

University, said a variety of factors made Zero COVID harder to pursue in Europe.

These include the greater degree of travel among European nations, higher urban population density, and the fact that Europe is a major global travel destination.

“Our advantages in Australia (and New Zealand) are natural advantages that cant be replicated elsewhere,” he told AFP.

“In particular, our isolation and lack of land borders, the fact

that we aren’t major travel hubs or destinations, and the fact that we can maintain our economies without a lot of cross-border travel are inherent to our success.”

For Flahault however, none of these are reasons not to try.

“When Britain was registering higher mortality than Germany, Switzerland or France, we didn’t say that it was Britain’s isolation that caused its poor performance,” he said.

And, as McKee pointed out, countries such as China and Taiwan have high urban population density and still managed to squash COVID-19.

He also rubbished the theory that Zero COVID is possible because Asian populations tend to be more compliant with rules including disease control compared with Europeans.

“That’s quite an imperialist point of view,” he said.

Too late for Europe?

Clements said that while Zero COVID was not impossible, it was likely already too late for Europe, given its apparent inability to develop robust test, trace and isolate systems.

“Europe missed the chance to adopt a Zero COVID strategy at the end of the first lockdown,” said Flahault.

He said governments and people ‘prefereed to enjoy their summer’ rather than controlling the pandemic.

AFP

North Korea ‘tried to hack’ Pfizer: Reports

Seoul, South Korea - North Korean hackers tried to break into the computer systems of pharmaceutical giant Pfizer for information on a coronavirus vaccine and treatment technology, South Korea’s spy agency said on Tuesday, according to reports.

The impoverished, nuclear-armed North has been under self-imposed isolation since closing its borders in January last year to try to protect itself from the virus that first emerged in neighbouring China and has gone on to sweep the world, killing more than two million people.

Leader Kim Jong-un has repeatedly insisted that the country has had no coronavirus cases, although outside experts doubt those assertions.

Seoul’s National Intelligence Service ‘briefed us that North Korea tried to obtain technology involving the COVID vaccine and treatment by using cyberwarfare to hack into Pfizer’, MP Ha Tae-keung told reporters after a parliamentary hearing behind closed doors. North Korea is known to operate an army of thousands of well-trained hackers who have attacked firms, institutions and researchers in the South and elsewhere.

AFP

Dutch court orders government to lift nationwide COVID curfew

The Hague, Netherlands - A Dutch court on Tuesday told the government to immediately lift a nationwide coronavirus curfew that sparked the worst riots in the Netherlands for decades.

The government wrongly used emergency powers to bring in the first curfew since the Nazi occupation in World War II, a judge at The Hague district court ruled.

The case was launched by the Viruswaarheid (Virus Truth) group, which has led a series of protests against coronavirus measures in the Netherlands.

‘The curfew must be lifted immediately,’ the court said in a

statement. ‘The curfew is a far-reaching violation of the right to freedom of movement and privacy... This requires a very careful decision-making process.’

The government can challenge the decision but any appeal would not suspend the judge’s order, a spokesman for the court was quoted as telling the ANP news agency.

The 9:00pm to 4:30am curfew started on January 23 and was extended last week until March 2.

Three nights of riots erupted after the curfew began, with police using water cannon and tear gas against protesters in cities



People in costumes dance in the street, in Heerlen, in the southeast of the Netherlands, on Sunday (AFP)

including Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Eindhoven. There was no immediate response from the government - which is currently sitting in a caretaker capacity ahead of elections on March 17 after resigning over a child benefits scandal.

rently sitting in a caretaker capacity ahead of elections on March 17 after resigning over a child benefits scandal.

‘Not legitimate’

The court said that the ‘introduction of the curfew did not invoke the special urgency

required’ to use the emergency laws that it used to bring in the restrictions without going through the lower and upper houses of parliament.

Curfews were for use in sudden emergencies such as a dyke breach, the judge said.

The judge said the fact that the curfew was discussed ahead of its imposition meant that the government had enough warning to go through the proper process. ‘Therefore, the use of this law to impose curfew is not legitimate,’ the court said.

The curfew was approved by a majority of Dutch MPs before it was introduced but did not go

through the senate.

The Viruswaarheid group - formerly known as ‘Viruswaanzin’ (Virus Madness) - organises demonstrations against COVID measures and holds regular live Q&A sessions via Zoom, that are published on Facebook and YouTube.

It was founded by Willem Engel, a dancing teacher who has since become one of the most influential actors against coronavirus restrictions.

Engel has said on social media that the current situation in the Netherlands is a ‘dictatorship’.

AFP

Suu Kyi hit with second charge as Myanmar junta tightens grip

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar’s deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi was hit with another charge on Tuesday, after the military imposed a second straight overnight Internet shutdown in an attempt to grind down an anti-coup uprising.

In the two weeks since the generals ousted Suu Kyi and put the civilian leader under house arrest in the administrative capital Naypyidaw, big cities and isolated village communities alike have been in open revolt.

The military justified its power seizure by alleging widespread voter fraud in November elections that Suu Kyi’s party won.

After her detention in a dawn raid on February 1 - the day of the coup - she was charged under an obscure import and export law, over walkie talkies that were found in her home during a search.

The Nobel laureate’s lawyer told AFP on Tuesday she had

been hit with a second charge, of violating the country’s disaster management law.

“She was charged under section 8 of the Export and Import law and section 25 of the Natural Disaster Management law as well,” Khin Maung Zaw told AFP.

While it was unclear how the disaster law applied in Suu Kyi’s case, it has been used against deposed president Win Myint - also arrested on February 1 - relating to a campaign event that the junta alleges broke coronavirus-related restrictions.

Khin Maung Zaw added that Suu Kyi and Win Myint, both of whom he has yet to have any contact with, were expected to appear via video conference during a March 1 trial.

Both defendants were in a ‘safer place’ and ‘in good health’, according to military spokesman Zaw Min Tun.

“It’s not like they were arrested - they are staying at their



A protester holds up a sign calling for the release of detained Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in Naypyidaw on Tuesday (AFP)

houses,” the general, who became the country’s vice-minister of information after the coup, said during a press conference on Tuesday.

More than 420 people have been arrested since the coup, according to a list of confirmed detentions from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group. There are numerous unconfirmed reports of other arrests.

‘We didn’t sleep the whole night’

The Security forces have used increasing force to quell huge nationwide street protests and a disobedience campaign encouraging civil servants to strike.

Troops have fanned out around the country in recent days. They fired rubber bullets to disperse one rally in Mandalay, Myanmar’s second-largest city, hours before authorities again cut Internet access.

“They shut down the Internet because they want to do bad things,” said 44 year old Win Tun, a resident of commercial capital Yangon.

“We didn’t sleep the whole night so we could see what would happen.”

The Internet blackout came after another day of protests in Yangon and Mandalay, where police used slingshots against protesters and fired rubber bullets into the crowd. At least six were injured in the clashes.

Crowds returned to the streets of Yangon and around the country on Tuesday morning.

“I want more people to join the protests, we don’t want to be seen as weak,” said university student Thwe Ei Sann.

A large crowd blocked railway tracks outside Mawlamyine to prevent a Yangon-bound train from leaving the port city.

Many of the country’s train drivers have joined the anti-coup

work boycotts, frustrating junta efforts to restart the national railway network after a COVID-19 shutdown. Yangon residents at the weekend used tree trunks to block police vehicles sent to take striking rail workers back to their stations.

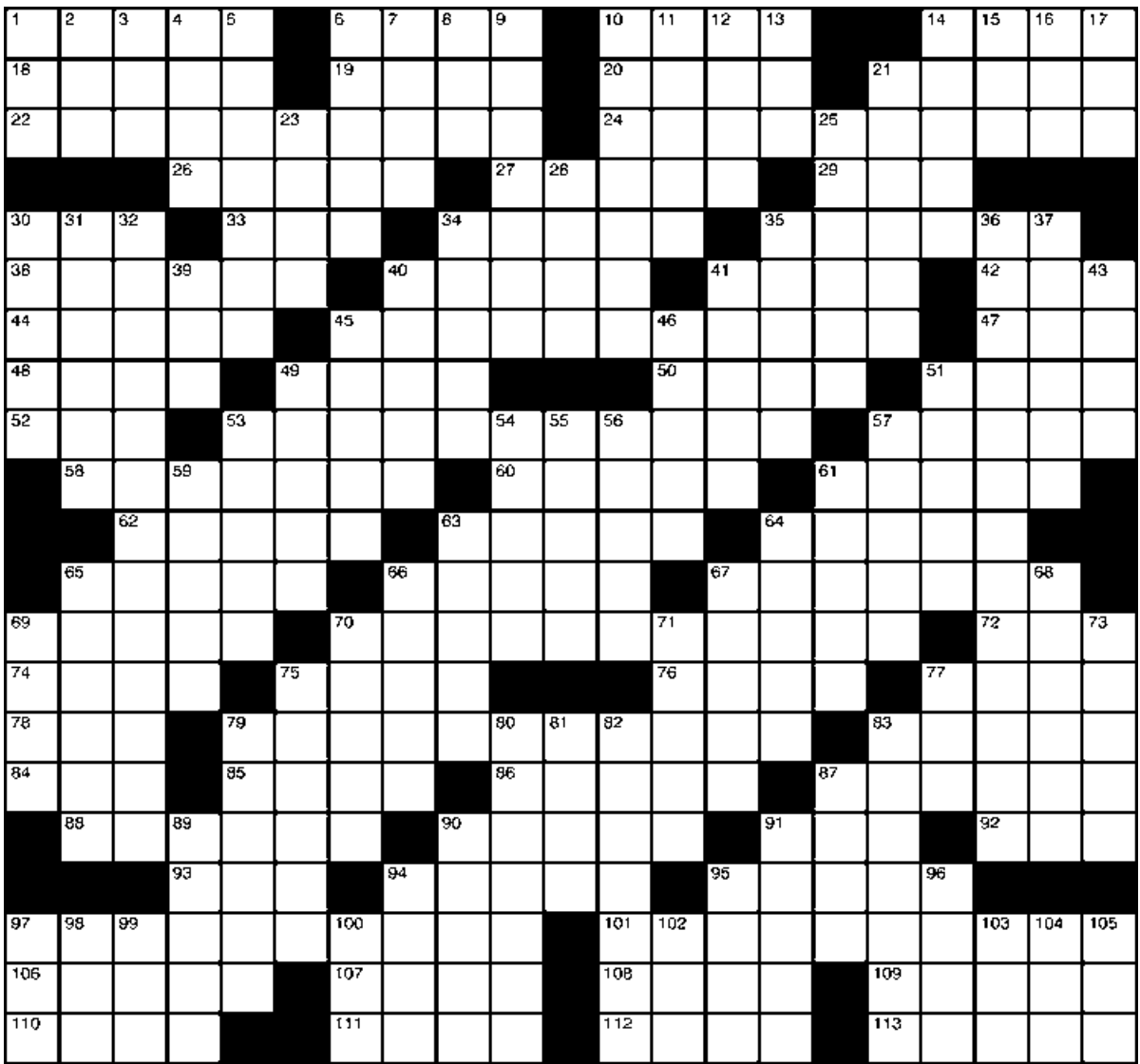
The international community has unleashed a torrent of condemnation against the leaders of Myanmar’s new military administration, which insists it took power lawfully.

UN Ambassador Christine Schraner Burgener spoke to junta number two Soe Win on Monday and warned him that the regime’s network blackouts ‘undermine core democratic principles’, according to a spokesman.

UN special rapporteur Tom Andrews on Monday said he did not expect Suu Kyi’s court hearing to be fair. “There’s nothing fair about the junta. This is theatre. It’s just theatre,” he said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Rhyme scheme
- 6 Military acronym
- 10 Decorticate
- 14 Turkey tip
- 18 Was prolix
- 19 Portuguese yard
- 20 Upper Thames
- 21 Musical syllables
- 22 Eating place known for beans
- 24 Eating places known for steaks
- 26 Side with
- 27 Couples
- 29 Letters
- 30 Part of RSVP
- 33 Adjective ending
- 34 Cum grano ____
- 35 Horrid
- 38 Mature ones
- 40 Canary's cousin
- 41 Golf bag item
- 42 Large U.S. union
- 44 Football units
- 45 Nathan's is a famous one
- 47 Compass point
- 48 Viva ____
- 49 ____ Lounge
- 50 Diminished
- 51 CPA's concern
- 52 Numerical ending

- 53 Eating places for families
- 57 Twinges
- 58 Scratched
- 60 Jewish religious leader
- 61 Very adhesive
- 62 Leaks
- 63 Summer months
- 64 Teacher of Aristotle
- 65 Whimpered
- 66 Ump's calls
- 67 Typewriter parts
- 69 Czech statesman
- 70 Place for espresso
- 72 Wee one
- 74 Decomposes
- 75 Golf stroke
- 76 Limbs
- 77 Headliner
- 78 Exist
- 79 Eating places for service
- 83 This: Fr.
- 84 Male title
- 85 Beanery sign
- 86 Small lakes
- 87 Thick soups
- 88 Largest continent natives
- 90 Combos
- 91 Bern's river

- 92 Quiet!
- 93 3rd cent. date
- 94 Culpability
- 95 On the move
- 97 Eating places for offices
- 101 Eating places for short orders
- 106 States
- 107 Nine
- 108 He: It.
- 109 Cathedral city of Italy
- 110 Stockton's river
- 111 Crewman
- 112 Lose one's cool
- 113 Makes go

DOWN

- 1 Jeanne D' ____
- 2 ____ humbug!
- 3 Babylonian god
- 4 ____ Raton
- 5 Socks
- 6 ____ garde
- 7 Engage in
- 8 ____ y plata
- 9 Whistle holder
- 10 Selecting
- 11 Fireplace debris
- 12 Branco y Bravo
- 13 Dr. Rhine's interest
- 14 Secure tightly
- 15 Calls one's own
- 16 Pub offering

- 17 Had one's day
- 21 Bring ____, recall
- 23 Takes the cake
- 25 Wading birds
- 28 Mishmash
- 30 Balm
- 31 Dunderheads
- 32 Eating places for stores
- 34 Religious leader
- 35 Leaves of ____
- 36 See 32 Down
- 37 North Carolina county
- 39 Famous U.S. general
- 40 Stalwart
- 41 Where's the ____ ordered?
- 43 Rains on
- 45 Makes keen
- 46 Disgusting ones
- 49 Conveyed, in a way
- 51 Not to be ignored
- 53 Benumbs
- 54 Guttural
- 55 Eastern royalty
- 56 Too many cheese burgers?
- 57 Winglike
- 59 Characterizations
- 61 Tumbler
- 63 Part of Israeli city

- 64 Excellent things
- 65 City on Illinois River
- 66 Shoddy: Br.
- 67 Dessert wines
- 68 Tickets
- 69 Arm: Fr.
- 70 Heaves
- 71 Employees
- 73 Original
- 75 Cap of a sort
- 77 To be: Sp.
- 79 Is responsive
- 80 Soared
- 81 Stir up
- 82 Not this one
- 83 Like George
- 87 Route
- 89 Champagne buckets
- 90 Malay titles
- 91 ____ in the dark
- 94 Singer Vanelli
- 95 Org.
- 96 Uncultured
- 97 Siamese
- 98 St. sign
- 99 Consideration
- 100 Dissident, for short
- 102 ____ rule
- 103 Trespass
- 104 Outcome
- 105 French pronoun

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It could be time for a closet purge. You've got too much stuff cluttering your life! You may need to do some targeted shopping to get back in balance. Your innate charm generally brings you what you wish. It is a specific piece of jewellery that has caught your eye and you may need to enlist the covert aid of a good friend to steer your honey in the right direction if you want it.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your reputation is on the line, but in a good way. It's a question of whether it gets the boost it deserves or stays steady. You don't have to do much, but you can help it along a bit if you want. Resolve to give equal value today for what you're getting. Trade patio furniture with a friend. Swap books with your neighbour. Remember, if you want nice fresh straw, you must pay a fair price.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

It's the little stuff that makes your life more interesting, so dive into the details even if they seem boring at first. You are sure to learn more and more about what's really going on. You can be overly sweet. Try to break out of that pattern. Serve the best black coffee with your rich, sweet dessert, and compliments will abound regarding your skills as a hostess.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your intensity can sometimes be hard to manage, but now you can feel that things are all lined up in the right direction. It's a good day for you to check in with your partner or family. Today your secret pal will reveal themselves, and you will be amazed at how thoughtful someone you didn't care much for actually has been. A sweet vase of flowers is a great way to return their good will.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your philosophical feelings are starting to manifest themselves in the real world, so make sure that you're focused on problems that actually matter to you. A friend offers a clue. Satisfaction comes from a job well done even when it is something as simple as remembering to water a plant. When your amaryllis bud opens your breakfast table is graced with beauty.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your romantic side is fully engaged today. You could be single and loving it! If you're in a relationship, show off for your partner! In either case, you're having a blast! That sound your car is making means something. Just because it is wildly inconvenient to notice it, does not mean you shouldn't. Make and appointment and take your car in for service.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Patience is not one of your primary virtues, but don't worry. You've got others! Today, though, you need to wait for something or someone, and if you can do so gracefully, it's a win! You have a knack for turning something extra into wow! Pint-sized glass vases are great for serving cereal, growing mini plants and making a lantern filled with flowers and a tealight. Your creativity is expansive.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You attract interesting new people into your orbit, and should find that at least one of them is perfect for a cause or need you have. Your ability to convince them to sign up is unparalleled. Your helper will return from the store with everything on your list, and you are one special woman who knows how to celebrate that event! Bring the extra hot pads and trivets later.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your history doesn't usually interest you as much as your future, but today you need to make sure that you're paying attention to your past activities. Things are getting better, but you still need to watch. Setting the timer then putting your feet up with a meaty mystery novel will seem like a good idea. Double check it, though, in case you fall asleep.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your ability to mix domesticity and socialising should come in handy. Invite others to an informal gathering and wow them with the way you live your life behind the scenes. This is a time to finish what you have already started -- avoid new projects. Ask a housemate hold the hank of yarn while you roll it into a ball so you will be able to finish the everyone's knits without snags.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You have to open up even more or things won't ever quite click. Honesty and forthrightness are what you need to ensure that the day runs along smoothly. Encourage others to do the same. Friendship at its best is a spontaneous conversation and easily switched roles -- taking care of and caring for. What would happen if you stopped playing your role?



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You look as good as can be now, so enjoy it! You may find that at least one head is turned when you walk by, even if you're part of a long-term couple. Get ready for some jealousy! Sitting in front of the TV is a good place to finish the last of your craft projects. Sticking pins in sequins and securing them with a dot of glue makes the time pass quickly.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Thomas Cup is associated with

- a. badminton
- b. billiards
- c. lawn tennis
- d. table tennis

2. Vitamin B12 is most useful for combating

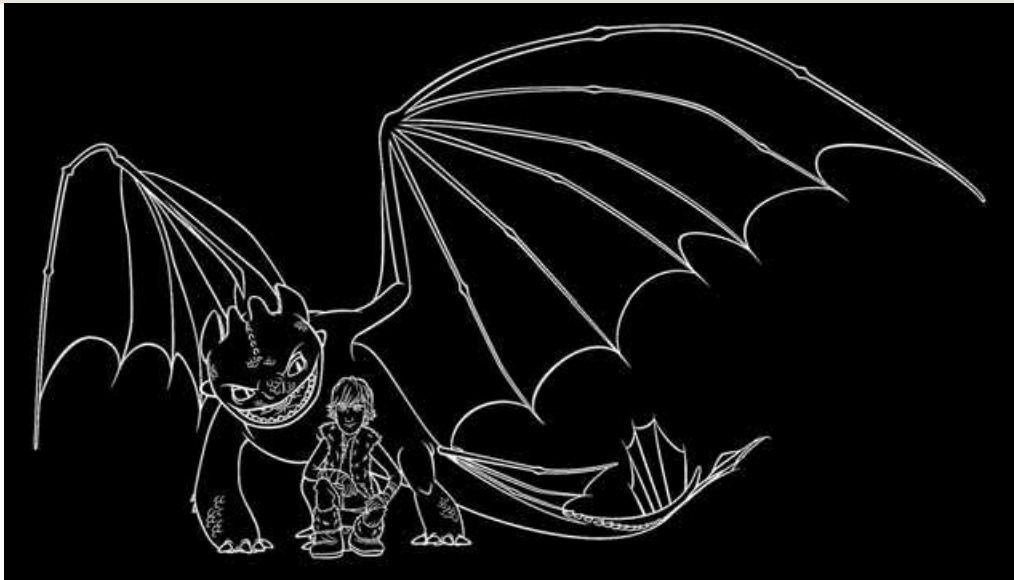
- a. anemia
- b. goitre
- c. night blindness
- d. rickets

3. To prevent loss of weight plants reduce transpiration by

- a. shedding of leaves
- b. reducing the size of leaves
- c. developing hair around stomata
- d. All of the above

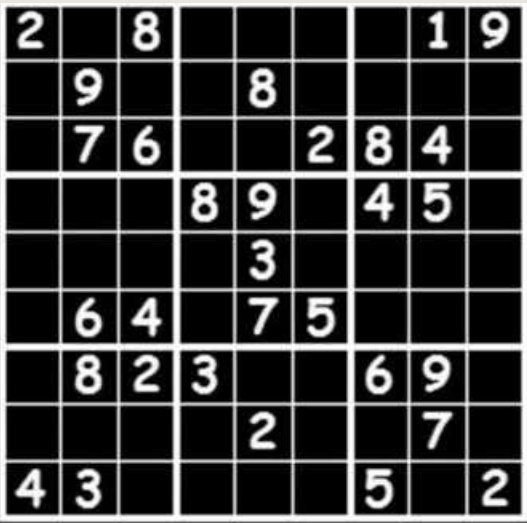
Answers: 1: a 2: a 3: d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



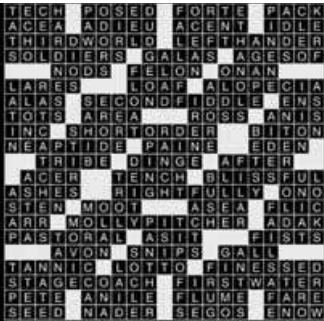
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (FEBRUARY 16)



WORD BUILDER

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

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



KNOW
YOUR
ONIONS

Most Asian kitchens aren't quite complete if the ingredients at their disposal do not include onions. The most humble ingredient, onions add texture and flavour to a variety of foods, whether in a soup, a rice or noodle dish, or even in a meaty sizzler. Onions have a unique pungent taste if eaten raw in a salad, and they can be soft and sweet when caramelised and have turned a beautiful golden brown. But do you know how to make onions the star of a dish? Here are two such recipes wherein onions are the main ingredient:

Onion Rings

Ingredients

1 large white onion, cut into half cm thick slices
1¼ cups all-purpose flour, 1tsp baking powder
1tsp salt, 1 egg, 1 cup milk, ¾ cup bread crumbs
½tsp paprika, salt to taste, oil for deep frying
Ketchup or any dip – to serve

Method

Separate the onion rings from the slices. Now prepare the breading by combining the flour, baking powder, salt and paprika. Mix well and coat each onion ring with the mix before shaking to remove excess flour.

Next, in another bowl, combine the milk and the egg and beat until well combined. Dip the floured rings into the batter to coat, then place on a wire rack to drain until the batter stops dripping. The wire rack may be placed over a sheet of aluminium foil for easier clean up. Spread the bread crumbs out on a plate. Place rings one at a time into the crumbs and coat well on all sides. Repeat with all the rings and set aside.

In a wok, heat oil for deep frying and fry the rings, a few at a time, for 2 to 3 minutes or until golden brown. Remove on paper towels to drain. Sprinkle with salt and serve with ketchup or any favourite dip.



Sausage Stuffed Onions

Ingredients

6-8 medium sized red or white onions
250g chicken sausages - minced
2 tomatoes - minced, 1 green chilli - minced
1tsp minced garlic, 1tsp minced ginger, 1 cup tomato sauce
¼tsp turmeric powder, ½tsp red chilli powder
2-3tbsp grated cheese (any), 1tbsp oil, salt and pepper – to taste

Method

Preheat oven to 180° C. Peel the onions and cut off a slice from the top of each onion; also, trim off a thinner slice from the bottom end so that they stand upright. Place the onions in a microwave-safe dish, add ½ cup water, cover and microwave on High for 10 to 12 minutes - until onions are tender. Remove onions from dish, cool slightly and carefully remove inner layers of onions with a paring knife, leaving about a half cm thick shell. Chop and reserve 1 cup of the scooped out onion.

Spray a baking dish with cooking spray, place 1 cup tomato sauce in the bottom of the dish. Place the onion shells on the sauce and sprinkle with salt and pepper.

In a pan, heat oil, add minced ginger, garlic and green chilli, followed by the chopped onion. Add the turmeric, red chilli powder, salt, and mix well. Then add the minced tomatoes and minced sausages. Mix well and cook on medium flame for 5-6 minutes until all the gravy dries up. Carefully spoon mixture into the onion shells. Sprinkle shredded cheese over the top. Cover dish with aluminium foil and bake for 12-15 minutes. Serve hot garnished with more cheese.

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



MUHAMMAD Z KAZI

February 17

Wishing you a
Happy Birthday.
From family and
relatives

SITUATION WANTED

Female ACCA qualified member, 4+ years work experience in Oman, driving licence, NOC available, looking to join a finance and accounts team. Contact 95785272

Looking for a driver Job

in Muscat, has got 9 years experience. Contact 78944897

FOR SALE

Hitachi 8 Kg fully automatic washing machine with 10 year motor warranty (bill will be provided) used by family of 2 members only so in good condition. Price RO65. Contact 91104880

Sales Executive

with 8 years exp in Oman, looking for suitable job. I have Oman D/L & car. Indian, male NOC available. Contact 94261611

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2. Send "start" to receive news updates



BREAD



Two brothers bake Indian flatbread for 34 years in Al Khuwayr

Hubert Vaz

At 11.00am everyday, the world around diminishes for two manual bakers in Al Khuwayr as they get down to an arduous, routine task of transforming a huge mass of dough into scrumptious bread. The fruit of their labour would ultimately feed hundreds of eager customers in the form of freshly baked, hot and crisp, tandoori rotis everyday.

Mohammed Rafi, an Indian expatriate hailing from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh (in northern India), and his younger brother Siraj Ahmed have been working at this manual bakery, located in a lane opposite Jasmine Complex in Al Khuwayr (near Muscat Pharmacy) for over 34 years. All through the past three and half decades the baker duo have been involved in the same monotonous task of baking unleavened Indian bread in two sizes in a small shop equipped with just an electric kneader and a gas-fuelled furnace.

Though the task at their hands has been simple, the brothers are well known for their friendly, courteous nature towards patrons, the rock bottom prices of their bread, and, of course, the most appetising taste of hot and crisp tandoori rotis, which some call 'naan'.

It's not uncommon to see their patrons tuck into the rotis – some while walking away with the bread under their arms, others while in their cars itself. You don't immediately need an accompaniment, though a hot cup of 'Karak tea' or a bowl of 'Aloo-mutter' would be great to dunk the crisp rotis into. But, since the bread itself is the 'hero', the side-dish hardly matters. The hot and crisp tandoori rotis, however, go well with dishes like Dal Fry, Mutton Masala, Butter Chicken, or steaming hot Haleem.

"We have been running this manual bakery in the very same place since 1986 and over the past 34 years we have seen the city change immensely. Today, there is development everywhere and shops, bakeries, supermarkets and restaurants have mushroomed in every nook and corner. While all this bodes well for the city and the people, somehow, it has sounded the death knell for us," said Mohammed, adding that business has been on a downswing for the past few years and it only seems to be getting worse every passing day.

Siraj, however, strikes an optimistic note recalling the good old days when their bakery was in good demand. He said, "There was a time when we had no time to spare and had to work non-stop from morning to night to cater to the demands of our patrons. We would knead many sackfuls of flour everyday and produce hundreds of rotis all day as people came in to buy them morning, noon and night."

Mohammed added that the quality and prices of their bread have remained unchanged for decades despite the fact that prices of flour, gas, electricity, rent, etc have gone up manifold. The produce of their bakery is, however, still in good demand by some long-time patrons who regularly frequent their shop for their daily bread as well as to cater

Sold for a song

Price of rotis
50baisa and 100 baisa

Ingredients
Flour, all purpose flour, salt and water

Preparation time
2 minutes per roti

Daily quantum
50-60kg dough

Daily output
100-300 rotis

Timing
11.30am – 2.30pm;
5pm to 11pm

Unique selling point
Prompt, friendly service



Mohammed Rafi (left) with Siraj Ahmed on the daily grind

to guests at home parties or to carry along bread for picnics and outings.

Prepared with just a few ingredients like flour, all-purpose flour, salt and water, the rotis are flattened by hand, mounted on a padded cloth cushion and then stuck to the internal sides of a gas-fuelled furnace that resembles the coal-based tandoors which are used till date in homes as well as eateries in northern India. Initially, the baker brothers used a coal-based tandoor in their shop but later switched to a gas-based one as it was more economical and convenient. "The taste of bread baked in a coal furnace, however, is much better," Siraj pointed out.

As we talked with the brothers about their daily task, cars kept stopping by and honking to get their daily supplies, sold literally for a song. "I am a regular buyer," said one of the customers, as he handed out a few hundred baisas and immediately went on to savour his

favourite bread at the shop itself. "I just love to have it hot," he winked, adding, "you cannot get this taste at the finest restaurant or even at any of the popular bakeries in town. Try it!"

There were others who called in to place orders which they would subsequently pick up. But, the brothers admitted that the volume of business has gone down drastically over the past decade. They hope to continue doing their task with the same zeal and interest but lament that it wouldn't be long before they would have to bid goodbye to the city if business did not pick up.

"We work hard for our daily bread. And our job is to provide bread on the tables of scores of people in Muscat. God willing, we would love to continue doing this for many more years. If someone does recognises our talent and gives us another promising opportunity, things might become different for us," Mohammed added hopefully.

Patel five-for seals crushing India victory to level series



India's Axar Patel (right) is all smiles after picking up a five-for against England on the fourth day of the second Test in Chennai on Tuesday

SCOREBOARD		
India 1st Innings 329		
England 1st Innings 134		
India 2nd Innings 286		
ENGLAND 2ND INNINGS		
R Burns	c Kohli b Ashwin	25
D Sibley	lbw b Patel	3
D Lawrence	st Pant b Ashwin	26
J Leach	c Rohit b Patel	0
J Root	c Rahane b Patel	33
B Stokes	c Kohli b Ashwin	8
O Pope	c Ishant b Patel	12
B Foakes	c Patel b Kuldeep	2
Moeen Ali	st Pant b Kuldeep	43
O Stone	lbw b Patel	0
S Broad	not out	5
Extras	(b 6, lb 1)	7
TOTAL:	164 in 54.2 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-49, 3-50, 4-66, 5-90, 6-110, 7-116, 8-116, 9-126, 10-164		
Bowlings: Ishant Sharma 6-3-13-0, A Patel 21-5-60-5, R Ashwin 18-5-53-3, M Siraj 3-1-6-0, Kuldeep Yadav 6.2-1-25-2		

INDIA VS ENGLAND SECOND TEST: DAY FOUR

Chennai, India - India cruised to victory in a little over a session on the fourth day at Chepauk on Tuesday, Axar Patel collecting a five-wicket haul on debut as England went down by a crushing margin of 317 runs - emphatic retribution after the tourists had gone 1-0 up on this ground less than a week earlier. The margin was India's largest win by runs in Tests between the two sides. Having seen his side dominate the match from toss to finishing tape, Virat Kohli's satisfaction was as palpable at his disgruntlement after the first Test. On a

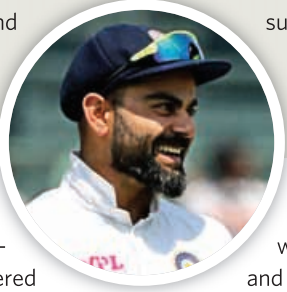
classically subcontinental surface, England twice could barely match the individual contribution of India's first-innings centurion, Rohit Sharma, and were left with precious few scraps with which to slink off to Ahmedabad ahead of the day-night encounter, their six-match winning run in away Tests at a halt. The only slight regret for another enthusiastic crowd came in the absence of another R Ashwin landmark for them to acknowledge - he finished with eight for 96, narrowly short of becoming only the fourth man to score a century and take ten-for in a Test. England's task on their return

to the ground was a near-futile one, but there was the potential to spend time in the middle against India's spinners and salt away knowledge for the battles ahead. As it was, only Joe Root spent any significant amount of time at the crease - even 33 from 92 balls was modest by his recent standards - and barely a shot was played in anger until Moeen Ali decided to go down swinging with five towering sixes before being last man out, stumped off Kuldeep Yadav. Fittingly for a Test that saw some grumbling about the pitch but was more memorable for the displays of high-class wicket-keeping, the game ended with

the ball in the hands of Rishabh Pant. This was only the sixth time in Tests that a match had featured five or more stumpings - and India's march to victory on the fourth morning began with another, as Dan Lawrence charged at Ashwin only to be nutmegged, leaving Pant to seal his fate after collecting brilliantly down the leg side. That dismissal brought out Ben Stokes, searching for pointers in his ongoing duel with India's off-spinner. Despite digging in as the ball ripped and spun - one delivery from over the wicket nearly took him on the chin before Pant collected it

It was the perfect game for us: Kohli

Chennai, India - There was sharp turn, there was uneven bounce, and there were explosions of soil when the ball landed on its surface. As difficult as it was to bat on, though, Virat Kohli believes the pitch at the MA Chidambaram Stadium for the second Test was a fair one in terms of competitive balance between the teams. With plenty of help for the spinners right from day one, he felt the toss didn't influence the result to the extent that it did in the first Test. Kohli said, "I think our application with the bat was outstanding in this game. The conditions were challenging for both sides, but we showed more application and grit and determination to battle it out, we didn't panic out there, looking at the amount of turn and bounce on that pitch. We trusted our defence, and we got into the game, and we scored 600 [615] runs total in two innings combined, so if you put up that kind of a batting performance, and you string up those important partnerships, then we know that our bowlers are going to do the job in our home conditions, so yeah, it was the perfect game for us. On the support of the Chennai crowd, Kohli said, "It was a bit strange in the first game, to be honest, playing at home without the crowd in the stands. I think the crowd makes a massive difference, when the fans are behind you, obviously you push more as a team, and this game was an example of that grit and determination we've shown as a side, and we continue to do that, and the fan support is a big part of that." Cricinfo



'Defeat a bit of an education for England'

Chennai, India - Joe Root has urged England to learn their lessons quickly following a chastening defeat in the second Test against India in Chennai. "We were outplayed in all three departments this week," the England skipper said after the game. "It's a bit of an education. We've got to learn from this because sometimes these are the conditions that you come up against. "We've got to find a way of scoring runs in these conditions, finding ways of building pressure for long periods of time with the ball, and in bowling six balls at one batter. Credit to India, they made that very difficult for us." "On day one, we could have probably been a little bit tighter and squeezed the game a little bit more, restricted them and made



England skipper Joe Root

it a little bit harder for them to score as freely as they did," he admitted. "And then, with the bat, it was obviously quite a challenging wicket from day two onwards, but we're going to have to be quite smart about how we're going to score runs out here, how

we're going to build an innings, and we've got to learn from the opposition who played very well in these conditions." Asked his opinion of a Chennai surface that has been the focus of intense scrutiny throughout the match, Root ac-

knowledgeed that the pitch had been 'challenging', but stopped short of outright criticism. However, Root insisted that England were still very much in contention with two Tests to play, including the unknown quantity of the day-night Test at Ahmedabad next week, which will be played with a pink SG ball - a match for which James Anderson and Jofra Archer are expected to return, after Anderson was rested and Archer missed out with an injury. "We are one-all in the series, with two very important games to come and we're very excited about that because of how well we played in the first game. "We're very much in the series," Root added. Cricinfo

Moeen opts to leave Test tour

Chennai, India - Joe Root has confirmed that Moeen Ali is to leave England's Test tour of India. While Moeen is expected to return for the white-ball section of the tour, he will not be available for the final two Tests of the series. The news is a significant blow to England. Not only did Moeen take eight wickets in the second Test, he also top-scored in England's second innings. The timing is not ideal, either. While England had promised their all-format players a break from the bio-bubble at some stage, Moeen had just returned to the Test team - this was his first game for 18 months - after contracting COVID-19 at the start of the Sri Lanka tour, a development that caused him to



Moeen Ali

spend two weeks in quarantine and miss out on selection for that leg. "Moeen's chosen to go home," Root confirmed after the Test. "Obviously it's been a very tricky tour for him, and as mentioned at the start [of the tour], if players feel they need to get out of the bubble, then that's been an

option and it's important that we stand by that. "From the squad, Moeen is the only one going home," he added. "It wasn't about asking him if he wanted to stay, it was a decision that he chose. Of course we want as many players to stay available as long as possible, but we also want them to be comfortable here. He wants to be at home with his family and we respect and understand that. "It's been a very difficult tour for him, having to deal with Covid and being in his room for such long periods of time. You come to a point where you want to get out of the bubble and that's absolutely fair. I'm sure it wasn't an easy decision for him, but it's one that we respect." Cricinfo

'Fresh look and fresh feel' as Kings XI Punjab renamed Punjab Kings

IPL New Delhi, India - The Kings XI Punjab will now be called Punjab Kings. The idea behind the change is to 'add a fresh look and fresh feel', Mohit Burman, one of the co-owners of the IPL franchise, said. According to Burman, the

franchise, which also has Ness Wadia, Preity Zinta and Karn Paul as the other owners, will also unveil a new logo on Wednesday as part of its rebranding strategy. Burman, who is vice-chairman at Dabur India Pvt. Ltd, said the plan to re-name the team had been in the

works for at least a year. Burman said that the franchise decided to change the name following not just in-house feedback but also from fans. "We put it to research, both with fans and with closed groups and have finally arrived at the new name," Burman told

ESPNCricinfo. "The idea behind the new name is to add a fresh look and a fresh feel to the franchise. As with any product/service, everything has its own life cycle and we believe given the changing ethos and the audience taste we thought it was apt for the brand to go through

a complete new refresh." The franchise has timed the rebranding exercise in the week of the IPL auction. In fact, the new name and the logo will be unveiled the day before the auction - a small one this year - where a total of 61 slots are available for the eight franchises

to fill their teams up. The Kings are the second franchise to opt for a new name. In 2018, the Delhi Daredevils re-branded themselves as the Delhi Capitals after Indian business conglomerate Jindal South-West (JSW) Group bought a 50% stake in the franchise,

which is co-owned by GMR Sports Private Ltd. KPH Dream Cricket Private Limited, the consortium that owns Kings XI, recently also purchased the Caribbean Premier League team St Lucia Zouks about a year ago. Cricinfo

Allez! Fencing gets a boost

Oman Fencing Committee signs partnership agreement with six clubs to develop the sport



A file photo of an Omani fencer in action during a regional tournament

Our Correspondent
Muscat

One of most common term in fencing is French word, *Allez*, which means 'go' and is used by the referee to start a bout of fencing.

On Monday evening, six leading Omani clubs declared *Allez* as they signed an agreement with the Oman Fencing Committee (OFC) to introduce and promote the sport, a move that is bound to help fencing gain a cutting edge in the sultanate.

The agreement will also facilitate a group of talented fencers from the national team to be adopted by the six clubs.

The clubs that signed the deal with the OFA are Oman, Ahli-Sidab, Al Nahda, Al Bashayer, Quriyat and Salalah.

The signing ceremony took place at Seeb Sports Stadium, which serves as the headquarters of the Oman Fencing Centre.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalid al Shuaibi, OFC chairman said, "Today is the beginning of the spread of this wonderful Olympic game throughout Oman, and this is an important historical moment. Since the establishment of the committee (January 2019), we have not

for the game of fencing." The signing ceremony had Khalifa bin Saif al Issaei, director-general of sports activities at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, as the guest of honour.

Shuaibi said that the national team in a short span of time has

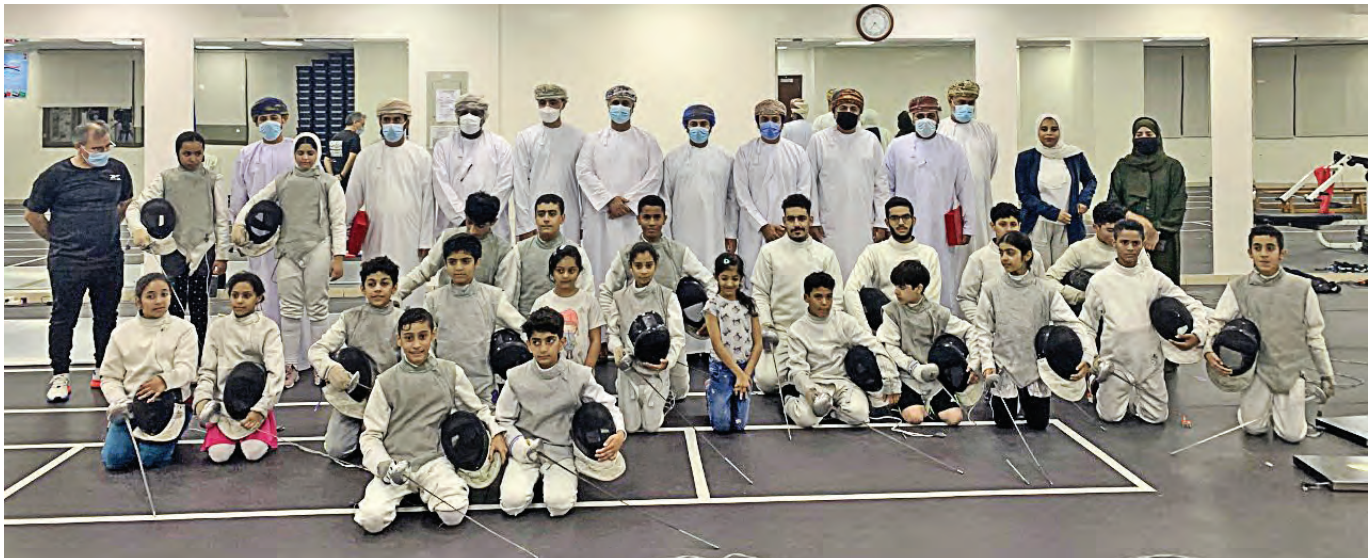
The clubs are the best platforms to promote sports activities and the OFC has adopted the right philosophy by seeking cooperation with them to develop fencing

KHALIFA BIN SAIF AL ISSAEI

stopped working despite all the challenges, and today's achievements, and what will be achieved, are only the beginning of a journey of success. This determination and ambition come from a strong foundation, which is our passion and love

achieved encouraging results and the OFC has managed to get recognition from the world governing body, FIE.

Speaking at the ceremony, Sayyid Saeed bin Sultan al Busaidi, chairman of Oman Club, said, "With this agreement with



OFC officials and president of six clubs with Oman fencers after the signing ceremony held at the Seeb Sports Stadium on Monday

the OFC, the clubs have to strengthen and develop this sport along with OFC and create the right environment for the players. Diversification of the sports and activities in the clubs are required and this will assist us to create a new generation to

be equipped in a different sport. Diversification is one of the main goals at our club and it is one of the many recommendations we have received from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth."

Issaei said the initiative of OFC to sign an agreement with

the clubs is a 'positive step' towards development of fencing sport in Oman.

"The clubs are the best platforms to promote sports activities and the OFC has adopted the right philosophy by seeking cooperation with

them to develop fencing," he said. The senior ministry official added, "Seeb Sports Complex is equipped with all facilities for fencing and the ministry plans to develop another facility, depending on the growth of the sport in the sultanate."

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Werner ends goal drought as Chelsea revival gathers pace

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Timo Werner ended his English Premier League (EPL) goal drought as the Chelsea forward sealed a 2-0 win against Newcastle that lifted the Blues into fourth place on Monday. Werner netted late in the first half at Stamford Bridge after setting up Olivier Giroud's opener for Thomas Tuchel's revitalised team.

It was a cathartic moment for Werner, 24, who had gone 14 league games without a goal since scoring against Sheffield United in November. His only goal in his previous 19 games in all competitions had come against Morecambe in the FA Cup.

Elsewhere on Monday, West Ham boosted their unexpected bid to qualify for the Champions League with an emphatic 3-0 victory against lowly Sheffield United.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Barak scores Verona's 1,000th top flight goal Milan, Italy - Antonin Barak headed in Verona's 1,000th Serie A goal on Monday in a 2-1 come-



Chelsea's Timo Werner in action against Newcastle in London on Monday

back win over Parma. The Czech midfielder struck just after an hour to get Verona back winning after back-to-back defeats.

Verona became the 19th team to reach the 1,000 goal mark in the Italian top flight.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Bayern held at home by Bielefeld

Berlin, Germany - Robert Lewandowski claimed his 25th Bundesliga goal this season with a brilliant volley as Bayern Munich needed three second-half goals to salvage a 3-3 draw

at home to strugglers Arminia Bielefeld in heavy snow on Monday. "It was a tough game, regardless of the weather, but we showed a fighting spirit, so a 3-3 draw is okay," said Bayern forward Eric Choupo-Moting.

Despite the draw, Bayern are still five points clear at the top of the Bundesliga. Bayern needed second-half goals by Lewandowski, Corentin Tolisso and Alphonso Davies to draw.

OTHER RESULT

SPANISH LEAGUE: Cadiz 0 Athletic Bilbao 4.

Suwaiq win thriller, in semis

Al Ittihad book spot in last-four on aggregate after 2-0 win over Al Nahda

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

HIS MAJESTY'S CUP

QUARTERS: SECOND-LEG

Former Oman goalkeeper Mazin al Kasbi was Al Suwaiq's hero as the three-time champions survived a scare from Ibri to book a spot in the semifinals of the 2020-21 His Majesty's Cup Football Championship on Tuesday.

Trailing 0-1 ahead of hosting the return-leg quarterfinal against OFA First Division club Ibri at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex, Suwaiq were on the verge of exit as they failed to find a much-needed equaliser till the 90th minute. With the match in the injury-time, Suwaiq, under their new coach Hakeem Shaker of Iraq, got a lifeline when Khalid al Alawi got



Al Suwaiq's goalkeeper Mazin al Kasbi (C) is congratulated by his teammates after scoring the decisive spot kick

the equaliser in the 92nd minute of the match to force extra-time, which failed to break the deadlock. In the shootout, both the teams went level till the fifth shot before Kasbi made a brilliant save of Ibri's sixth penalty kick taken by Ahmed al Mujaini. Kasbi then slammed home the sixth goal to give Suwaiq a heart-stopping 6-5 win.

In the other quarterfinal game of the evening, hosts Al Ittihad sealed the final spot to complete the semifinal line-up as they beat Al Nahda 2-0 in the return-leg to advance on aggregate 3-2 score.

Ittihad had lost the first-leg to Al Nahda in Buraimi 1-2 on February 6.

At home on Tuesday, Ittihad

won, thanks to goals from Abdulmajeed Shamas and Brazilian import Junior who converted a penalty kick.

Al Ittihad and Suwaiq join defending champions Dhofar and Omantel League winners Seeb in the semifinals, the draw of which will be held on Wednesday.

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