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## OMANI SAILORS SLIP TO SIXTH PLACE

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# Oman set for fastest growth in GCC in 2022

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

After plunging into a recession triggered by the twin-shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices last year, Oman's economy is expected to come roaring back to life this year and become the fastest growing economy in the GCC region next year.

The World Bank on Friday said Oman's economy is expected to grow by 2.5 per cent in 2021 and bounce back strongly next year with 6.5 per cent growth, the fastest growth among the GCC countries.

Forecasting a significant rebound of Oman's economy from last year's sharp contraction, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) too recently said that the sultanate's real GDP will grow by 1.8 per cent this year and 7.4 per cent in 2022, the highest growth forecast for any GCC country.

Oman's overall growth is projected to post a recovery of 2.5 per cent in

### GCC GROWTH FORECAST

|         | 2021 | 2022 |
|---------|------|------|
| Oman    | 2.5% | 6.5% |
| Qatar   | 3.0% | 4.1% |
| Kuwait  | 2.4% | 3.6% |
| Saudi   | 2.4% | 3.3% |
| Bahrain | 3.3% | 3.2% |
| UAE     | 1.2% | 2.5% |

Source: World Bank

2021 supported by the vaccine roll-out and the ease in lockdown restrictions. A backloaded rebound will see growth peak at 6.5 per cent in 2022 lifted by rising oil prices, and further development of the hydrocarbon sector, before declining to four per cent in 2023 in view of fiscal austerity measures,' the World Bank said in its GCC Economic Update note.

The World Bank noted that the sultanate's rapid and well-coordinated measures have limited the spread of COVID-19, but lockdown restrictions

weighed heavily on economic activity in 2020.

Despite attempts to restrain spending, the World Bank said, Oman's fiscal stimulus and relief measures in response to COVID-19 and the sharp shortfall in oil revenues have widened the fiscal deficit to over 17 per cent of GDP in 2020.

'A substantial increase in fiscal revenues (mainly driven by introducing five per cent VAT from this month) and a reduction in spending are expected to narrow the sultanate's fiscal deficit to less than seven per cent of GDP in 2021,' the World Bank said.

The World Bank said Oman's fiscal deficit is projected to keep declining to an average of four per cent over 2022-2023 aided by increased gas production and steady implementation of the fiscal reforms outlined in the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan.

The sultanate's current account deficit, according to the bank, is projected to show a modest decline of

eight per cent of GDP in 2021, before starting to narrow down further reflecting more favourable terms of trade.

The Word Bank, however, cautioned that downside risks may include the possibility of pandemic flare-ups, which would imply further strict lockdown measures and severely curtailed private sector activity.

S&P Global Ratings on Friday said it expects economic and fiscal pressures on Oman to ease from 2021, as the effects of the sharp drop in oil prices in 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic abate. Taking Oman's fiscal reform measures into account, S&P affirmed its 'B+/B' sovereign credit ratings on the country and maintained its stable outlook on the sultanate's ratings.

Similar to the IMF's and the World Bank's outlooks, S&P said economic activity will start to pick up in 2021 and Oman's economy is expected to recover slowly by 1.3 per cent this year and then accelerate to 5.2 per cent in 2022.

## Movement ban lifted from April 8

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the COVID-19 pandemic on Monday decided to extend the closure of commercial activities in all governorates of the sultanate while allowing movement of individuals and vehicles between 8pm and 5am with effect from Thursday, April 8, till the morning of the first day of Ramadan.

At the meeting, the Supreme Committee took cognizance of the widespread prevalence of the disease across the country and daily statistical reports indicating that the health sector is under pressure owing to the sharp rise in number of infections and hospital admissions, for intensive care in particular.

With these in consideration, the committee banned all commercial activities and movement of individuals and vehicles between 9pm and 4am throughout the month of Ramadan.

Special night prayers (Taraweeh) will not be held at mosques during Ramadan, and all gatherings, including iftars in mosques, tents and public assembly areas (sablah), are prohibited. The committee also banned all group activities, including sports and cultural gatherings, during the month.

► Complete closure during Ramadan from 9pm to 4am

► No special night prayers (Taraweeh) during Ramadan

► Entry only for citizens and residents into the sultanate from April 8



Starting 12 noon on Thursday, April 8, entry to the country is limited to citizens and residents.

Additionally, the committee urged private sector companies to implement remote work plans and reduce the number of employees who are required to work from office. It further urged all citizens to travel only for the most urgent necessity.

### Ramadan work hours announced

Muscat - Official working hours at ministries, public authorities and other departments of the state's administrative apparatus during Ramadan for 1442 AH will

be from 9am to 2pm.

The working hours at private sector companies for Muslims during the month will be reduced to six hours a day, equivalent to 30 hours a week.



## Beyond — beauty

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# 'Prospect of complete lockdown scary'

Business was slow but picking up when the night curfew announced on March 28 disrupted momentum

Muscat - Already bearing the brunt of a slowdown in the economy due to falling oil prices, followed by a lockdown last summer owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the current night curfew enforced since March 28, another lockdown could well sound the death knell for small businesses in the country.

The recent spike in COVID-19 cases, hospital admissions and deaths related to the disease is worrisome and playing on the minds of businessmen that it may prompt another set of tough measures to curb the spread of the virus.

## 'Big problem'

Talal al Zadjali, a gift shop owner in Muttrah Souq, is still reeling under heavy losses resulting from the first complete lockdown when all shutters in the souq were down for five months. Against all odds, he managed to pay the rent that was due for the lockdown period but he still owes suppliers. Business was slow but picking up when the night curfew was announced late March disrupting the momentum. Another complete lockdown will be a 'big problem' for him.

A gold business owner in Ruwi who *Muscat Daily* spoke with fears the worst. His business is down by 95 per cent.

"The current night curfew and the impending VAT being implemented soon are all compounding the situation. Keeping all these factors in mind, another full lockdown will force me to



*We hadn't yet recovered from the losses from the earlier lockdown when the night curfew was enforced starting last month adding to our financial burden. The prospect of another complete lockdown is scary*

**A DOCTOR IN RUWI**

consider closing down the business," he said.

As a consequence of busi-

nesses suffering, innumerable daily and low wage earners are affected. Salesmen, beauty par-

lour technicians and gym workers are among some of the worst hit by the situation.

Mohammed Aslam, a salesman in a gift shop on Ruwi High Street, said, "The biggest losers in the COVID-19 pandemic battle are the low wage earners. Our salaries are delayed, and when paid, it's in installments. For people like us returning from home, the mandatory institutional quarantine and multiple PCR tests amounts to two months of our

salary." He fears another lockdown will force his shop owner to shut down.

While looking forward to Ramadan in the hope for more sales, Hussnain Abbas, who works in a mobile shop in Qurm, also has a nagging thought considering the way cases are increasing.

Business was slowly picking up when the night closure was announced. In his estimation, another lockdown will be the

proverbial last straw to break the camel's back.

Among the diverse range of businesses and activities struggling to stay afloat are small clinics. A doctor in Ruwi said that her small clinic can't match the resources of corporate hospitals.

"We hadn't yet recovered from the losses from the earlier lockdown when the night curfew was enforced starting last month adding to our financial burden. The prospect of another complete lockdown is scary," she said.

The financial hardships resulting from the pandemic have also triggered mental health issues, which are often ignored or neglected owing to societal norms.

Myra, a sales assistant in a boutique in Shatti Qurm, said she feels psychologically pressured by the situation. "I understand my sponsor's situation. Sometimes, two-three days go by without any business. Of course, our salaries will be delayed. We are trying our best to manage and survive but the question is, until when? The pandemic is continuing wave after wave. There seems to be no end to it. And if there is a complete lockdown..." she trailed off fearing to utter the worst.

## 'Where is corona?'

In recent months, 'pandemic fatigue' has been attributed to people's callous and relaxed attitude towards the precautionary measures leading to the spike in cases.

"Many customers enter our boutique without proper masks. When I request them to wear their masks properly, they are offended and ask me, 'Where is corona? There is no such thing as corona.' In fact, some customers enter without wearing a mask at all," Myra said.

The doctor in Ruwi said she often sees people not following social distancing and maintaining hand hygiene. More surprisingly, she informed, she saw two patients in her clinic recently who had the symptoms of COVID-19.

"But they refused to accept it and follow the COVID-19 guidelines of isolation."

The spread of COVID-19 is controllable, she reiterated. "But only if we take it seriously. If we don't follow the precautionary measures, no authority can control the pandemic."

Zadjali advised only one member of the family to go shopping, while Aslam, the salesman on Ruwi High Street, pleaded with all to look around them to see the consequences of not observing health measures.

He fails to understand why people are being reckless. "I have seen officials issuing fines for not wearing a mask but you can still see people walking around with masks hanging around their neck. Why would any government wish to close down the country and ruin the economy?" he asked, adding that irresponsible people have caused the situation.

(Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin)



## Pact signed to provide many services for innovators

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Makers Oman, located in Innovation Park Muscat, has signed a cooperation agreement in the field of innovation and technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution with Mersal.

The agreement was signed by Hilal bin Nasser al Shibli of Makers Oman and Rashid bin Abdullah al Nasri, CEO of Mersal.

The agreement provides multiple services for entrepreneurs interested in manufacturing products needed in the field of innovation and technology in accordance with international best practices. It also provides a base for training and entrepreneurship in the Fourth Industrial Revolution through specialised courses

and workshops. This offers scope for innovation and continuous development for a large segment of Omani youth in the field of manufacturing digital panels for tablets and smart phones, as well as devices associated with this industry.

The cooperation will also allow rapid response to the continuous changes in the field of technology, besides encouraging competitiveness and enhancing quality of the services.

Nasri said, "The entry of Omani companies in the field of technology gives many added values and many benefits to the sultanate. Mersal, in keeping with its strategic vision, was able to go a long way in this field by providing smart products such as tablets, phones, etc.

"We seek through this partnership to create an integrated system to encourage emerging projects and provide the best training and development programmes in a manner that enhances competitiveness."

Shibli said, "We are working together to transform all ideas into reality, by enabling pioneers to develop their products in a way that meets market aspirations and are in line with the innovation goals of Oman Vision 2040.

"This agreement is an example of the constant pursuit of co-operation and integration between advanced manufacturing establishments such as Makers Oman and specialised companies that provide products of the highest specifications."

## Beware of fraud: CBO

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has warned the public not to disclose any banking or personal information to anyone or entity.

"CBO DOES NOT ask/require the disclosure of any banking or personal information to any source or entity," a statement from CBO said. CBO stated that all licensed banks and exchange companies operating in Oman do not request the disclosure of any banking information such as the password, card number or account number.

"Finance institutions do not ask for such information by calling or contacting through social media programmes or by sending text messages requesting direct access via links. Thus, whoever is exposed to such messages or communications must inform the authorities represented by the Royal Oman Police or their respective bank through the official contact details of such entity," CBO added.

Many people have been receiving messages and calls from unknown numbers asking them to update their accounts or their details.

## NATIONAL BLOOD DONATION DRIVE



The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Directorate General of Scouts and Girl Guides, launched a national blood donation campaign that will continue till Thursday (Supplied photo)

## SAS cybersecurity second cohort concludes

Muscat - The second cohort of SAS Accelerator for Cybersecurity, organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology through its SAS Centre for Entrepreneurship, concluded on Monday.

It was held in partnership with the UK-Oman Digital Hub, CyLon Spark, PDO and Oman National CERT.

This intensive virtual pro-

gramme aims to support fresh entrepreneurs by equipping them with the necessary commercial and technological knowledge to conduct business probably and efficiently.

The second cohort saw six ideas; their owners participated in the event of 12 weeks, starting from January 18 until April 5. They attended 25 sessions and lectures, which stressed the best

approaches for startup growth. Additionally, the participants benefited from 60 hours of virtual individual consultation sessions presented by 15 speakers and mentors specialised in cybersecurity. The final day included an investment demo. The participants showcased their projects, varying from security risk assessment tools to cyberthreat detection tools.

# Fried Series

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

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# Gearing up for Ramadan amid increase in COVID-19 cases

Shaddad al Musalmi  
Muscat

For the second successive year, Muslims will mark Ramadan in the midst of the pandemic. The spread of COVID-19 has impacted the world's population including Oman, with governments imposing lockdowns and strict measures to curb the spread.

While many have found ways to adapt to the 'new normal' and the roll-out of vaccines has helped in some countries, it is certain that Ramadan this year too will be affected.

Scheduled to begin next week, Ramadan is the most anticipated month in the Islamic calendar with many preparations taking place.

Some of the people that *Muscat Daily* contacted said Ramadan is the most sacred month and hence deserves adequate preparations.

Amour al Tauqi, whilst shopping for Ramadan, said, "Despite the uncertainty of social life, we believe Ramadan is the most sacred month. So, because of this we have to prepare in a number of ways including mentally. In any case, we welcome the month with eagerness. I'll finish all my shopping so that I can be free to observe the month."

Many use the week before Ramadan to stock up on ingredients to make traditional dishes for the duration of the month.

It seems that people are now more accustomed to the pandemic and do not engage in panic-buying.



*While many of us will not be able to physically be with our loved ones for the holy month, we are prepared for that. We will be celebrating only with our close family members*

AHMED KHALAF

Salim bin Ali bin Suleim al Hakmani, chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority, made an inspection tour recently at a number of shopping centres in order to find out the availability of goods and their prices, ensure supply, the commitment of suppliers to the laws and decisions issued by the authority before the beginning of Ramadan and the implementation of Value Added Tax starting April 16.

He stressed that price control will witness tightening during the coming period to ensure their stability. Merchants can-

not raise prices without justification or obtaining the approval of the authority, especially before the implementation of the tax.

"The authority has prepared a clear action plan in this aspect covering all the markets of the sultanate based on the existing database of commodity prices, especially those not included in the tax. Field work teams have also been formed to inspect shops and commercial centres so that they work in an integrated manner in the follow-up and control of commodity prices," he said.

However, Ramadan is not just about food. It is also a social occasion, in which family and friends come together. But as COVID-19 cases remain high, with night movement restrictions remaining in place, people will be unable to socialise.

"While many of us will not be able to physically be with our loved ones for the holy month, we are prepared for that and we will be celebrating Ramadan evenings only with our close family members. We have to accept this fact because it is the only way to get rid of this pandemic. It is always better to be safe than sorry," Ahmed Khalaf said. He added that he will not be having daily iftars at his parents home this year.

## 1,117 new COVID-19 cases, 10 deaths

On Monday, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported ten new

COVID-19-related deaths, taking the total death toll to 1,722.

The number of new infections reported during the same time was 1,117, taking the total number of cases registered in Oman to 164,274.

The number of hospital admissions is also increasing. As of Monday, a total of 606 patients were admitted in health institutions, including 189 patients in intensive care.

"While the number of deaths stands at 1,722, the number of recoveries has reached 147,539," an MoH statement said.

MoH has also said that a nationwide COVID-19 vaccination campaign is continuing.

The ministry confirmed that 152,036 individuals have been vaccinated with Oxford-AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines so far.

@shadadm

## Omani among 30 featured in book on entrepreneurship

Our Correspondent  
Muscat



Tariq Hilal al Barwani

Oman's well-known IT expert Tariq Hilal al Barwani is the only Omani who has been featured among 30 entrepreneurs in a recently launched book available in Amazon. Written by mindset coach and international speaker Cornell Thomas, the book is titled *Game Of Death: A Survivors Guide To Entrepreneurship*.

The book showcases a hidden gem of entrepreneurship - collaboration. Thomas asked 30 of his friends from all over the globe to share their knowledge and expertise. Entrepreneurs from Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the US shared how they overcome tough times with their expertise, skills and will-power. The featured experts include CEOs, GMs, directors, innovators, professionals from industries including the telecom, oil and gas, industry, technology, business, education, etc.

Barwani said, "We need to develop our skills and mindset in such a manner that there is no dependence on anyone for our source of livelihood. At these times of uncertainties, we have to make ourselves equipped with new learning and knowledges. It is a fast changing world and adaptability, will-power, vision and collaboration are the need of the hour. I am happy to be featured in this book and hopefully my inclusion will inspire more Omanis to be entrepreneurs."

Thomas has said, "If the year 2020 has taught us anything it's that the term 'job security' is just an antiquated pipe dream that doesn't actually exist. There have been millions of human beings that have been forced to not only create work, but also try to survive while doing so. If you do not have the ability to create and adapt, then you will always be at the mercy of the next thing that happens."

The preface to the book reads, 'Contrary to popular belief, entrepreneurship is NOT easy. Real entrepreneurs understand how valuable the mind is in relation to creating a business. It's the foundation of your business even before you start it. Without a strong foundation the first storm you experience will wipe it all away, and this unfortunately happens more times than not. This game of entrepreneurship is not one to be taken lightly, and despite the sheer beauty of it, it's also riddled with adversity, solitude, and hardship.'



## OCCI chairman hails automatic licence service

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has praised the automatic licence service launched by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Innovation Promotion.

Eng Redha bin Jumal al Saleh, chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, said that this initiative comes within the efforts aimed at achieving Oman Vision 2040, by contributing to creating a business environment that promotes economic growth and encourages the establishment of commercial projects and investment partnerships.

"The services provided by the Invest Easy platform will raise the sultanate's international indicators in the fields of trade and investment, especially as it allows the investor to obtain an automatic licence for more than 1,500 economic activities, which constitute 88 per cent of the economic activities conducted in the sultanate," said Eng Saleh.

He added that the private sector praises such initiatives that expand the national economy and stressed that improving the business environment comes at the forefront of the goals that must be achieved in order to reach sustainable economic development.

## Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tender:

| Tender No.      | Description                                                                                  | Tender Fee (Nonrefundable) | Tender Purchase deadline | Clarification deadline | Tender Submission Date |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| PDEN/2021/04/01 | Construction of a new filling station at Al Raki in Wilayat Yankul in Al Dhahira Governorate | 100.000                    | 12.04.2021               | 15.04.2021             | 21.04.2021             |

Bank Name & Account Number Bank Muscat (0319005687760012)

**The Conditions:**

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to [procurement@almaha.com.om](mailto:procurement@almaha.com.om). The tender may be collected on any working day between 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted in a sealed envelope and addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 02:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
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# Science centre set for year-end opening

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Liwa Science and Innovation Centre is set to be completed by 2021 end. It will enhance capabilities and develop competencies in the fields of science and innovation in North Batinah governorate.

The project is backed by OQ Company, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Jusoor Foundation. The total area of the centre will be 6,423sqm, with a building area of 2,740sqm, and cost over RO1.2mn.

The MoE, represented by the Directorate General of Education in North Batinah governorate, will be responsible for the operations and management of the centre.

According to Hamad bin Khalifan al Rashidi, director general of education in North Batinah, the ministry seeks to provide qualified administrative and technical staff to operate the centre's facilities to reach desired goals of



(Supplied photo)

training and developing the capabilities and skills of school, college and university students, expanding their cultural, scientific and innovative perceptions, as well as participation in local and international scientific competitions.

The Liwa Science and Innovation Centre will be a place to experience science and arouse passion among students and the local community in scientific knowledge and new technologies. In addition, the centre is expected to play a pivotal role in supporting and encouraging sci-

entific knowledge. The centre will enhance the national identity through workshops and cultural forums which it will conduct. The centre includes a learning resource centre and a fully equipped multi-purpose hall that can accommodate up to 300 people.

It will also include a public library serving different age groups, and a planetarium with modern astronomical devices and equipment to help students and those interested in understanding astronomical sciences.

# Artificial coral reef project in Dibba to be completed by July

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

As part of its efforts to develop aquatic ecosystems in various governorates of the sultanate, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources hopes to complete the artificial coral reefs project in Dibba in Musandam governorate by July.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official in the ministry said the Musandam Fisheries Department started the project in January 2019. The project is funded by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund.

The project includes designing, manufacturing and deploying artificial reef modules.

"The project is part of strategic plans to develop the fisheries sector. The ministry aims to enhance fish stocks and biological diversity in the sultanate's waters in a manner that ensures the sustainability and prosperity of natural fisheries," the official said.

Meanwhile, an artificial coral



reefs project of the ministry recently won the top prize at the Arab Scientific Society Organisation Awards for the best project in the Arab world in the field of environment in 2020. A total of 90 projects, submitted by individuals and institutions from 13 Arab countries, vied for the awards.

The ministry has implemented large-scale artificial coral reef projects in 14 wilayats of the

sultanate. A total of 13,906 artificial reefs were grown in these sites from 2003 to 2019. These projects aim to increase fish stock, provide an environment conducive for fishing and, consequently, increase income of fishermen.

The ministry also seeks to develop the tourism sector by creating an environment ideal for diving and related tourist activi-

ties, besides creating an environment suitable to carry out scientific studies.

In 2019, the ministry launched its largest artificial coral reef off the coast of Suwaiq spread over an area of 20kmx7km. The project, called Suwaiq Marine Farm Artificial Reef Complex, has 4,280 coral reef units. Besides benefitting Suwaiq's fishermen, it boosts tourism as well.

# ESO and Neal's Yard Remedies hold frankincense tree planting campaign

Muscat - The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) and Neal's Yard Remedies have concluded a campaign to promote awareness and preservation of frankincense trees in Dhofar.

As per a statement, since the start of the Frankincense Community Outreach and Tree Planting Campaign in August 2019, some 2,600 frankincense seedlings have been planted, 200 flyers were distributed which illustrate appropriate frankincense

planting and irrigation instructions in English and Arabic, and communities across the governorate have been provided with information on sustainable harvesting techniques. The campaign in Dhofar was conducted in eight different areas including 12 schools, as well as among women's associations, farmers and local community members.

Suaad al Harthi, executive director at ESO, said, "We are pleased with what this project



(Supplied photo)

has achieved in the past 18 months. Frankincense has been around for centuries, and remains one of the world's most treasured commodities, as well as being integral to the Omani identity. Yet, due to several factors putting the tree at risk, it has become increasingly important for us to bring back awareness to its ecological and cultural value, besides the adoption of sustainable harvesting techniques. We would like to thank our friends at Neal's

Yard Remedies, who, through this campaign, have helped us secure this sacred legacy for future generations."

Susan Curtis, director of Natural Health at Neal's Yard Remedies, added, "We believe that our mission to enhance and protect people's health and well-being starts with the very first seed. That's why we work with communities around the world supporting low-impact farming practices. Frankincense is known

for its many health and wellness giving properties and we are delighted to see that Oman plays an active role in its preservation."

Frankincense trees, or *Boswellia sacra*, are unique to Oman, South Yemen and North Somalia and play an important role in the sultanate's heritage, economy and culture. Harsh methods of tapping, over-harvesting, and climate change, have had a negative impact on their growth.

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## SAI takes part in GCC anti-corruption meeting



(Supplied photo)

Muscat - State Audit Institution (SAI) participated in the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the specialists' committee of the agencies responsible for integrity protection and fighting corruption in the GCC region.

The meeting was held on Monday through video conferencing from the headquarters of the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with the

participation of members of the committee.

The meeting's agenda included a review of the action plan dedicated to promote collaboration and coordination activities between international relations and cooperation departments at integrity and anti-corruption agencies. The agenda also covered reviewing proposals and views of SAI members relevant to the action plan.

### PRAYER TIMINGS

|         |         |         |        |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Fajr    | 4.35am  | Asr     | 3.36pm |
| Sunrise | 5.54am  | Maghrib | 6.24pm |
| Duhr    | 12.09pm | Isha    | 7.54pm |

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| MARKET WATCH                            |           |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|
| MSM30                                   | 3,699.77  |
| BSE Sensex                              | 49,159.32 |
| FOREX RATES                             |           |
| (RO1 equals)                            |           |
| Indian Rs                               | 190.15    |
| Pakistani Rs                            | 396.33    |
| Bangladeshi Taka                        | 220.01    |
| Philippine Peso                         | 126.02    |
| Sri Lankan Rs                           | 517.64    |
| *Rates as on April 05<br>Source: xe.com |           |

**BRIEFS**

**Greece reopens shops despite high infection rate**

Greece on Monday relaxed a nationwide lockdown by opening most retail shops despite a high level of COVID-19 infections and fatalities.

By allowing people to ‘decompress’ outside their homes as the weather improves, the government hopes to also stem damage to the economy that has taken a major revenue blow from reduced tourism.

Customers must pre-book appointments before visiting shops, and up to 20 people will be allowed inside at a time.

“We are fully booked till Saturday. It’s going to be a good month,” Filippos Hortis, an Athens sports store owner, told Skai TV.

Critics have noted the paradox of the lockdown being relaxed while new cases of the virus are reported at a rate of over 3,000 daily.

# Bank Nizwa plans to increase capital by RO75mn in 2021

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

To support its next phase of growth, Bank Nizwa, the fastest growing Islamic banking institution in Oman, is planing to increase its capital by RO75mn by issuing a rights issue this year.

“In line with the bank’s five years strategy up to 2025, to support the next phase of growth, and increase returns for the shareholders, the bank shall increase its capital by RO75mn, by way of a right issue in 2021,” Sheikh Khalid al Khalili, chairman of Bank Nizwa, said in a press statement on Monday.

He added that the bank is committed to further grow in the



Sheikh Khalid al Khalili

coming years, supporting Oman’s Vision 2040 and contributing to the development and recovery of the economy.

For the year 2020, Bank

Nizwa recorded the highest growth in the financial sector in Oman. The bank has played a very visible role in Oman’s path to economic recovery having partnered a number of significant government programmes and initiatives, according to the press statement.

Bank Nizwa recently held its annual ordinary general meeting (AGM) via the electronic platform for general meetings on Muscat Clearing and Depository Company’s website. The board of directors of Bank Nizwa disclosed and approved critical material and information for the year 2020, including the bank’s exceptional financial performance.

At the AGM, Bank Nizwa shareholders approved the distribution of cash dividend of 1.25bz per share.

Khalili noted that Bank Nizwa has demonstrated utmost resilience in one of the most challenging years for the world economy.

“I am proud to say that the bank has exhibited exceptional performance across all its departments even in the face of unprecedented challenges, recording consistent growth. Backed by digitalised processes and undeterred service to its customers, Bank Nizwa has been able to cement its position as the most trusted Islamic bank in Oman,” he said.

# PwC launches VAT compliance diploma in Oman



**Muscat** – As Oman gears up for value added tax (VAT) implementation, the organisations are facing a skills shortage of qualified tax professionals. To support businesses in implementing the nation’s new tax regime, PwC’s Academy, the talent and skills development business of PwC, has launched the Oman VAT Compliance Diploma.

Designed for professionals to navigate the new tax legislation, this globally recognised diploma, awarded by the Association of Taxation Technicians (ATT), covers the principles of VAT and in-depth knowledge and application of the GCC framework.

Run in partnership with Tolley, the leading worldwide provider of practical tax training, the programme will deliver comprehensive training for finance managers and tax professionals responsible for administration of

VAT, and for those in a VAT regulatory role in both public and private sectors.

In a press release, Amanda Line, partner at PwC’s Academy, said, “Our role at PwC’s Academy is to facilitate the upskilling needs in the region, particularly during this time of rapid change in tax policies. We have helped businesses prepare for VAT introductions across the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and the diploma has played a key role in ensuring professionals have a clear understanding of the requirements. Extending this qualification to specialised professionals in Oman will deliver the same for this market.”

The VAT diploma is delivered by highly experienced tax professionals and is a modular format, split into four manageable sections to accommodate the demanding schedule of working professionals.

# Duqm power and water plant begins trial operations

**Muscat** – The new integrated power and water plant at the Special Economic Zone in Duqm (SEZAD) has started trial operations after receiving the first consignment of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to operate the facility.

Being set up by Marafiq, the plant is considered a centralised utility facility in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm. The integrated plant includes 326MW power generation unit, a water desalination plant with the capacity of 36,000 cubic metres



per day, sea water suction units with supply capacity of 1.5mn cubic metres per day, and a 132KV electricity transmission

line from the plant to the oil storage tanks at Ras Markaz.

Eng Abdullah Mohammed al Hashmi, CEO of Marafiq, in

*Duqm Economist’s* latest edition said that the arrival of the first consignment of LNG to SEZAD is major news in the area. “The company began preparations for this event by late 2020 when all LNG-reception tasks were finalised in close coordination with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and OQ gas networks team.” Hashmi explained that, by the end of March 2021, Marafiq has completed 90 per cent of this strategic project in Duqm.

ONA

# Oman crude prices drop to \$62

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Oman crude prices at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Monday dropped by 37 cent to US\$62.07 per barrel (for June delivery).

The average price of Oman crude (for April delivery) has stabilized at US\$60.85 per barrel, which is US\$6.6 per barrel higher than March Delivery price, Oman News Agency reported.

Similarly, global oil prices slipped on Monday, paring

strong gains made in the previous session, after OPEC+ agreed last week to gradually ease some of its production cuts between May and July.

Brent crude futures (for June delivery) fell 0.5 per cent to US\$64.53 a barrel in London, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) benchmark (for May delivery) was at US\$61.20 per barrel, down 0.4 per cent.

On Thursday, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia and their allies, a group known as OPEC+, agreed to ease produc-

tion curbs by 350,000 barrels per day (bpd) in May, another 350,000 bpd in June and further 400,000 bpd or so in July.

Under Thursday’s agreement, OPEC+ cuts would be just above 6.5mn bpd from May, compared with slightly below 7mn bpd in April.

Most of the increase in supplies will come from the world’s top exporter, Saudi Arabia, which said it was phasing out its extra voluntary cuts by July, a move that will add 1mn bpd to global supply.

(With inputs from agencies)



# UAE approves AED30bn worth financial support for businesses

**Dubai, UAE** – Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, approved the Emirates Development Bank (EDB) Strategy to provide a sizeable AED30bn financial support to businesses and start-ups in a major step to drive the national economy.

Launched to support ‘Operation 300bn’, the EDB Strategy aims to leverage the bank’s role as a key driver of the national economy to provide the largest support network for the industrial sector.

Sheikh Mohammed said, “Advancing the national economy is a top priority that requires a joint

effort of all our economic entities in the coming phase.”

He added, “We must adopt a distinctive vision that meets global trends and sustains development to maximise the industrial sector’s revenue and boost the broader economy.”

“The Emirates Development Bank Strategy presents a giant leap that will leverage the bank’s role as a key driver of the national economy. Providing effective financial solutions will support the role of SMEs as main players in shaping our national economy.”

Sheikh Mohammed had launched Operation 300bn earlier in March as a ten-year com-

prehensive strategy to more than double the industrial sector’s contribution to the country’s GDP, positioning the UAE as a global industrial hub by 2031.

Under the strategy, EDB has allocated a portfolio of AED30bn to support priority industrial sectors over a period of five years, which will contribute to financing more than 13,500 SMEs and creating 25,000 jobs.

The bank will also launch an AED1bn investment fund for start-ups and SMEs in 2022 and targeting industrial companies in priority sectors that need financing and investment.

WAM

| بنك برودا<br>Bank of Baroda<br>(Oman Branches)                                 |            |                |                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------|----------------|
| PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2020                   |            |                |                |
| Details                                                                        | (R.O.'000) | (2020)         | (2019)         |
| Gross Interest Income                                                          |            | 3,260          | 3,326          |
| Interest Expense                                                               |            | (1,758)        | (1,456)        |
| <b>Net Interest Income</b>                                                     |            | <b>1,502</b>   | <b>1,870</b>   |
| Other Operating Income                                                         |            |                |                |
| 1. Dividend Income                                                             |            | -              | -              |
| 2. Net Fee & Commission Income                                                 |            | 365            | 365            |
| a) Fee and Commission Income                                                   |            | 365            | 365            |
| Less: b) Fee and Commission Expense                                            |            | -              | -              |
| 3. Net Foreign Exchange Income                                                 |            | 93             | 135            |
| a) Income                                                                      |            | 93             | 135            |
| Less: b) Expense                                                               |            | -              | -              |
| 4. Net Income from dealing in securities                                       |            | -              | -              |
| a) Gain / (loss)                                                               |            | -              | -              |
| Less: b) Expense                                                               |            | -              | -              |
| 5. Net Income from Investment Securities                                       |            | 599            | 724            |
| a) Income                                                                      |            | 599            | 724            |
| Less: b) Expense                                                               |            | -              | -              |
| <b>Gross Income</b>                                                            |            | <b>2,559</b>   | <b>3,094</b>   |
| General Administrative Expenses                                                |            | (1,287)        | (1,401)        |
| Depreciation                                                                   |            | (56)           | (40)           |
| <b>Total Operating Costs</b>                                                   |            | <b>(1,343)</b> | <b>(1,441)</b> |
| Net Operating Profit (Profit on ordinary activities before provisions)         |            | 1,216          | 1,653          |
| Income from Subsidiaries                                                       |            | -              | -              |
| a) (Loss) from Islamic financing                                               |            | -              | -              |
| b) .....                                                                       |            | -              | -              |
| Income from Associate Companies                                                |            | -              | -              |
| a) .....                                                                       |            | -              | -              |
| b) .....                                                                       |            | -              | -              |
| Income from Other Licensed Activities                                          |            | -              | -              |
| - Investment Activities                                                        |            | -              | -              |
| Profit from sale of non-banking assets                                         |            | -              | -              |
| Bad debts Written off                                                          |            | (13)           | (76)           |
| ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances                               |            | (4,968)        | (3,238)        |
| ECL Allowance (net) charged for Investments                                    |            | -              | -              |
| ECL Allowance (net) charged for Placements                                     |            | -              | -              |
| ECL Allowance charged (net) for Off-balance sheet items                        |            | (166)          | (20)           |
| ECL Allowance charged (net) for Others (if any)                                |            | -              | -              |
| Provision for diminution / Gain in value of investments                        |            | -              | -              |
| <b>Profit for the year after loan loss provisions</b>                          |            | <b>(3,931)</b> | <b>(1,681)</b> |
| Taxation                                                                       |            | (55)           | -              |
| <b>Net profit after tax</b>                                                    |            | <b>(3,986)</b> | <b>(1,681)</b> |
| <b>Other Comprehensive Income for the year</b>                                 |            | <b>-</b>       | <b>-</b>       |
| - Movement in fair value of available for sale / FVOCI investment for the year |            | -              | -              |
| -Effect of currency translation for the year                                   |            | -              | -              |
| -Any other comprehensive income for the year (please specify)                  |            | -              | -              |
| <b>Total Comprehensive Income for the year</b>                                 |            | <b>(3,986)</b> | <b>(1,681)</b> |
| ASSETS AND LIABILITIES FOR THE THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2020                |            |                |                |
| Assets (Net of total ECL)                                                      | (R.O.'000) | 2020           | 2019           |
| 1. Cash                                                                        |            | 486            | 620            |
| 2. Balances with CBO                                                           |            | 15,715         | 7,760          |
| 3. Capital Deposit with CBO                                                    |            | 500            | 500            |
| 4. Government & other Securities                                               |            | 8,122          | 4,105          |
| 5. Treasury Bills & Other Bills                                                |            | 14,945         | 17,852         |
| 6. Due from H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad         |            | 3,586          | 2,688          |
| 7. Due from banks:                                                             |            | -              | -              |
| i) Placements                                                                  |            | -              | -              |
| ii) Loans & Advances                                                           |            | -              | -              |
| 8. Other Money Market Placements                                               |            | -              | -              |
| 9. Investments                                                                 |            | -              | -              |
| 10. Loans and advances                                                         |            | 51,882         | 64,569         |
| 11. Tangible Fixed Assets                                                      |            | 36             | 87             |
| 12. Losses carried forward                                                     |            | -              | -              |
| 13. Other Assets                                                               |            | 2,341          | 1,859          |
| <b>Total Assets</b>                                                            |            | <b>97,613</b>  | <b>100,040</b> |
| Liabilities                                                                    | (R.O.'000) | 2020           | 2019           |
| 1. Deposits (incl. Govt.)                                                      |            | 70,755         | 69,551         |
| a) Demand                                                                      |            | 16,434         | 17,087         |
| b) Savings                                                                     |            | 7,273          | 6,311          |
| c) Time                                                                        |            | 47,048         | 46,153         |
| 2. Certificate of Deposits                                                     |            | -              | -              |
| 3. Due to H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad           |            | -              | -              |
| 4. Due to Banks:                                                               |            | -              | -              |
| i) Placements                                                                  |            | -              | -              |
| ii) Borrowings                                                                 |            | -              | -              |
| 5. Other Money Market Deposits                                                 |            | -              | -              |
| 6. Borrowings from CBO                                                         |            | -              | -              |
| 7. Capital                                                                     |            | 20,500         | 20,500         |
| 8. Reserves                                                                    |            | 1,432          | 1,432          |
| 9. Retained Earnings                                                           |            | 1,174          | 5,160          |
| 10. Capital Bonds                                                              |            | -              | -              |
| 11. Other Liabilities                                                          |            | 3,752          | 3,397          |
| <b>Total Liabilities</b>                                                       |            | <b>97,613</b>  | <b>100,040</b> |

## MSM jumps 1.02% on improved activity

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose 1.02 per cent to close at 3,699.78 points on Monday. Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 103.03 per cent to RO3.25mn and volumes increased 42 per cent to 19.46mn shares.

Financial index rose 1.45 per cent, Industrial index climbed 0.55 per cent and Services index rose 0.46 per cent. The MSM Shariah index closed down by 0.03 per cent at 535.54 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 25 companies closed up, while five companies closed down. The rest 18 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Galfat Engineering &

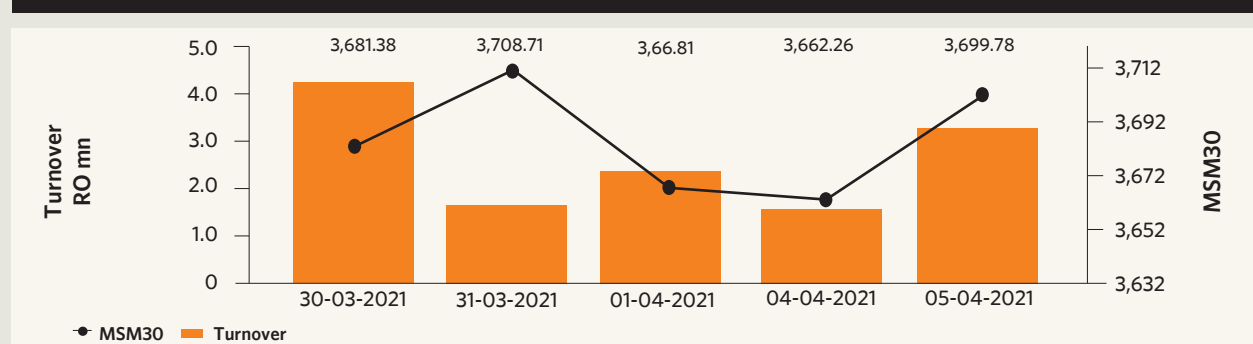


Contracting (4.17 per cent), HSBC Bank Oman (3.16 per cent), BankDhofar (2.91 per cent) and Ahli Bank (2.91 per cent).

Top losers were Gulf International

Chemicals (-2.8 per cent), Voltamp Energy (-1.82 per cent), Al Madina Takaful (-1.14 per cent) and Al Jazeera Services (-0.65 per cent).

### MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



## DME launches new oil trading platform

Dubai, UAE - The Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) announced the launch of Alternative Crude Ecosystem (ACE) - a new bilateral trading platform to enable participants to trade multiple crude grades through the exchange.

DME, which is based in Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), will make the platform available for all participants and will offer traders the opportunity to trade bilateral barrels of Dubai, Upper Zakum, Murban, Basrah Light, Basrah Heavy, Al Shaheen and Oman Sour versus the DME Oman Sour Crude Benchmark futures.

This new functionality allows Middle East Crude participants a way to execute multiple Over the Counter (OTC) crude grades as differentials against DME Oman futures.

The new service offered by DME will shed the light on the growing importance and the status of DME Oman as a strong and reliable Benchmark for the Middle East, representing consistent fair value for Sour Crude barrels to the East of Suez.

Commenting on the announcement, Raid al Salami, managing director, DME, said, "We are always looking to enrich our customers' experience and enable them to benefit from what the market has to offer. ACE is a unique platform where it combines Futures and OTC in one transparent window for the very first time, offering all participants opportunities to optimise



their trading activities and manage their exposure across multiple crude grades."

Arif Amiri, CEO of DIFC Authority, said, "DIFC would like to congratulate DME on the launch of ACE, which innovatively provides an opportunity to trade a range of crude grades as differentials to DME Oman. We are pleased to see DME continue to develop their position as the premier international energy futures and commodities exchange in the Middle East from DIFC, the leading global financial centre in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia region. Our enabling platform continues to provide opportunities for clients to innovate and together we are shaping the future of finance."

H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al Afri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Oman, said, "The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) support all continuous improvement

initiatives in the oil markets, as it enhances the price discovery and offers a fair price for the key commodity of the region. DME Oman has been the benchmark for us since 2007. We believe DME has successfully passed a major stress test in 2020 and presented itself as the natural benchmark for crudes produced in our region. With the launch of ACE, national oil companies across the region will have the opportunity to discover the fair price for grades based on the DME Oman benchmark."

The new initiative aligns with the objectives of DIFC which has helped contribute to the Dubai Plan 2021 by making the emirate a pivotal hub for finance in the global economy.

The DIFC platform provides clients with most enabling laws and regulations which are stimulating financial related innovation in the region.

WAM

## Islamic Development Bank lists \$2.5bn sukuk

Dubai, UAE - Nasdaq Dubai welcomed the listing of a US\$2.5bn sustainability sukuk by Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the multilateral lender which finances development across its 57 member countries.

This is the second AAA-rated sukuk issuance under the Sustainable Finance Framework of IsDB and is the bank's biggest US dollar public issuance to date. The five-year US\$2.5bn trust certificates were priced at par with a profit rate of 1.262 per cent, payable on a semi-annual basis. Proceeds of the sukuk will



be allocated to finance and refinance green and social development projects that are eligible under IsDB Sustainable Finance

Framework. The first of IsDB's current sukuk listings on Nasdaq Dubai was a US\$1bn instrument that listed in 2015. With this lat-

est addition, the total value of IsDB sukuk listed on Nasdaq Dubai is US\$17.14bn through 12 tranches.

IsDB's activities across its member countries include building partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society; increasing skills and knowledge sharing; focusing on innovation led solutions to development challenges and promoting global development underpinned by Sharia'a-compliant sustainable financing structures.

WAM

## MENA Desalination Projects Forum discusses \$50bn mega water projects

Dubai, UAE - The 2nd edition of the MENA Desalination Projects Forum kicked off on Monday at Movenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel in Dubai and virtually via bespoke virtual conferencing technology.

More than 200 high-level participants including Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA), Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority (SEWA), Emirates Water and Electricity Company (EWEC) and Acciona will attend across the two-day conference that sees 27 experts in the water sector from across the MENA region discussing the upcoming desalination projects and the progress being made towards the 2030 water agenda, according to a press release.

MENA Desalination Projects Forum is officially supported by key governmental bodies such as; Saline Water Conversion Corporation - Saudi, Ministry of Electricity and Water - Kuwait, Holding Company for Water and



Wastewater Egypt, National Office of Electricity and Drinking Water and International Water Management Institute.

The Forum is hosting 22 exhibitors displaying their latest technologies and innovations for the water desalination sector.

Dr Corrado Sommariva, chief executive officer, SWPC and chairman of MENA Desalination Projects 2021 said, "I chaired the MENA desalination project conference in 2019 and I have the privilege again to chair the 2nd edition this year. The forum is an exceptional gathering of key

players in the public sector and industry this is the first event that prepares for the post pandemic season in the water sector in the MENA region."

Topics being discussed in the jam-packed agenda include: Alternative energy and emerging technologies for sustainable desalination, optimising desalination sustainability, efficient desalination project planning and execution and PPP financing in water desalination infrastructure.

Asmae Hamidi, head of production at The Great Minds Group said, "We have worked

with senior experts in the desalination field to develop a program that provides an unparalleled learning platform for industry professionals and support the development of the industry in the Middle East and North Africa. The Forum presents some of the key projects in the region such as the NEOM desalination project, Morocco's 2030 water roadmap, and Kuwait's future water desalination projects."

In addition to the series of talks and panel discussions a series of country briefings will be taking place with the spotlight on United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Kuwait.

The 2nd edition of MENA Desalination Projects Forum comprises of two days of keynote speeches, panel sessions, scientific sessions, and an exhibition, along with plenty of opportunities for networking both physically and virtually.

## LG to close down smartphone business

Seoul, South Korea - LG Electronics, South Korea's second-largest appliance firm after Samsung, is closing down its mobile phone business, the company said on Monday, after the division lost billions in recent years.

The firm was once considered a pioneer of the Android operating system, collaborating with Google on the Nexus series in

the early 2010s.

But it has long struggled to increase sales, entering the market late and facing tough competition from emerging cheaper Chinese rivals such as Huawei.

It was regularly listed among the world's top ten smartphone manufacturers but according to tracker Counterpoint the last time it recorded a global market share of 3 per cent or

more was in the second quarter of 2018.

The unit has recorded losses for 23 consecutive quarters since 2015, with the cumulative deficit reaching about 5tn won (US\$4.4bn) by the end of last year. The division has 'failed to produce results' amid 'intensifying price competition among major competitors in the entry-level mobile phone market', the

company said in a statement.

The decision will enable the firm to 'focus resources in growth areas such as electric vehicle components', robotics and smart homes, it added.

LG reportedly held talks with Vietnam's Vingroup over a potential sale, but it broke down over price differences, according to local reports.

AFP

## Pressure at home: Chinese tech giants expand in Singapore

Singapore - Chinese tech giants are expanding in Singapore as they face a crackdown at home and growing pressure in other key markets - but they may struggle to find talent in the city-state.

Messaging-and-gaming behemoth Tencent is opening a hub and TikTok owner ByteDance is on a hiring spree after establishing a regional HQ, while e-commerce giant Alibaba is investing in property and recruiting.

The tech firms are shifting their focus to booming Southeast Asian markets as authorities tighten the screws at home amid concerns about the platforms' growing power.

Regulators have launched a blitz on the sector, hitting several firms with heavy fines, and threatening to slice up massive companies whose reach now extends deep into the daily lives of ordinary Chinese.

Meanwhile, festering tensions between Washington and Beijing after an assault on Chinese tech titans during Donald Trump's presidency make the United States an unattractive prospect, and problems abound elsewhere.

"Chinese tech companies are facing regulatory pressures and sanctions from governments in other countries, notably the US but also other nations such as

India," Rajiv Biswas, Asia Pacific chief economist at IHS Markit, told AFP.

India has banned a swathe of Chinese apps since a border clash last year, while the European Union and other Western powers recently imposed sanctions over China's treatment of the Muslim Uyghur minority, prompting retaliatory sanctions.

But Singapore, a prosperous financial hub, maintains good ties with Beijing and the West, and tech firms have come to view it as a safe bet to expand their operations without upsetting either side.

In the current climate of geopolitical uncertainty 'Singapore is considered as a more neutral country', Chen Guoli, professor of strategy at the Singapore campus of business school INSEAD, told AFP.

In addition, long-running turmoil in traditional rival Hong Kong may have dimmed its appeal, although observers stress other factors are likely more important.

The influx of Chinese cash will be welcome in Singapore, whose economy has been hammered by the coronavirus and which is seeking to build itself up as a tech centre.

It is already home to major offices of US tech titans Facebook, Google and Twitter, while

ByteDance recently moved into bigger offices in the financial district, and has launched a hiring drive.

Between September and February, a third of ByteDance's job postings were in Singapore, more than twice the ads it placed in China, with a focus on hiring specialised engineers, said Ajay Thalluri, an analyst with data and analytics firm GlobalData.

Meanwhile, Alibaba last year bought a 50 per cent stake in an office tower, where its e-commerce unit Lazada is the main tenant, while its affiliate, fintech giant Ant Group, won a licence to operate a wholesale digital bank in the city-state.

Alibaba 'is building teams in Singapore with significant key senior and mid-level job postings related to talent acquisition, product management, and legal compliance', said Thalluri.

ByteDance and Tencent, which announced its Singapore expansion plans in September, say they are primarily focused on growing their businesses in Southeast Asia, a booming region of 650mn, rather than avoiding tensions elsewhere.

By building up their Singapore presence, the tech giants are hedging their bets in case frictions with the West hit a new nadir, analysts say.

AFP

# Zubair SEC partners with Ominvest to train SMEs on managing VAT

To help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) be ready to manage the new Value Added Tax (VAT), Zubair Small Enterprises Center, has partnered with the Oman International Development and Investment Company 'Ominvest', in organising a comprehensive programme for entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises entitled 'Know your VAT'.

This initiative is considered to be the first initiative from the private sector to cover new value-added tax laws and procedures towards small and medium-sized enterprises, as the initiative aims to help entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises to develop their businesses through guiding them to be complied with the new VAT-related legislation and preparing them to be able to have smooth progress and introduction to the new value-added tax laws.

It is worth noting that, the sultanate will implement the value-added tax law as of April 16, according to Royal Decree No 121/2020 issued on October 21 of last year approving the implementation of the value-added tax law, and it applies to companies whose taxable turnover exceeds RO38,500, which includes the majority of the small and medium enterprises.

This matter will require an effort to spread the value-added tax culture and handhold entre-



preneurs and small and medium enterprises on complying with VAT, plus avoiding any implications.

Zubair Small Enterprises Center, in partnership with Ominvest, seeks to provide an approach for its members to prepare them for compliance with the new value-added tax system through the integrated programme. Ominvest has been an important key partner of Zubair Small Enterprises Center for several years, as they have cooperated in many entrepreneurial and SMEs-related programmes and initiatives.

Rashad bin Mohammad al Zubair, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Zubair Corpora-

tion, pointed out that the value-added tax is a new legislation that will be applied during this month on private sector enterprises.

There is no doubt that it will include small and medium enterprises whose sales volume exceeds RO38,500, hence entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises must be fully aware of the requirements of VAT, whether financial or a process related to their business, and the importance of timely registration and application.

He explained that small and medium enterprises in most cases will not be ready to introduce value-added tax in their commercial projects and will

need support and guidance to deal with it.

AbdulAziz al Balushi, group CEO, Ominvest, said, "The implementation of VAT is expected to help the economy by generating revenue of around RO400mn per annum. While larger companies have the teams and systems in place to seamlessly manage their VAT, SMEs may not be as well-equipped for that. Our partnership with Zubair SEC through this new initiative aligns very well with Ominvest's purpose of 'Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies' - by having a more resilient SME sector, our chances for economic recover get better on the short and long run."

He added, "We have been strategic partners of Zubair SEC's Direct Support Programme since 2017 and due to the significant impact that the Centre has managed to create by supporting small businesses in the country, we've renewed our support year on year. We are proud to be working with Zubair SEC on this new initiative, which will add value and help young entrepreneurs have better control of the sustainability of their businesses."

Said al Sahib, director of the Zubair Small Enterprises said, knowing that SMEs in most cases will be unprepared for the introduction of VAT, we are happy to partner with Ominvest to provide

some handholding for our members to prepare them for the new VAT regime through our programme 'Know Your VAT'.

"We thank Ominvest for their support and they have always been an important partner for many of our programmes related to entrepreneurship. Ominvest has been a strategic partner of Zubair SEC's flagship Direct Support Programme (DSP) for a number of years."

He added, "The 'Know Your VAT' programme is a first-of-its-kind private sector initiative launched by us. Both Ominvest and Zubair SEC are happy to work together to introduce the new VAT laws and procedures to members and SMEs. The participants should benefit greatly through this programme and they would be better prepared to handle the new VAT rules."

The 'Know Your VAT' programme is planned to deliver a comprehensive training to help SMEs understand VAT and its implementation. It includes three integrated modules such as webinars, animated videos and VAT document booklet. The webinars will explain and educated on VAT law, compliance issues and implementation.

The animated videos in Arabic should explain the VAT concept such as how to obtain registration, how to raise a proper tax invoice under VAT among other topics.



## SHAREit showcases window of opportunity

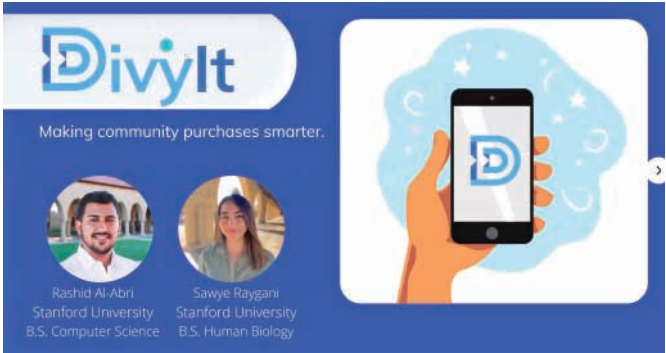
SHAREit, the global gaming, file sharing, and content streaming application, has released an insightful guide highlighting why Ramadan is the perfect time for marketers to connect with their customers through the world of online entertainment.

Essential Guide for a Mobile Ramadan 2021 in MENA brings the latest consumer insights, statistics, and fresh perspective together, showcasing the significance of the holy month of Ramadan and why businesses should push for various marketing objectives like launching products, accelerating sales, enhancing brand reputation, or sparking engagement with customers new and old to capitalise on this huge business opportunity.

Karam Malhotra, partner and global vice president, SHAREit said, "As we adapt to the new normal, today's Ramadan observer is empowered by mobile to stay connected, shop, share religious content, entertainment and so on. As such, marketers can identify customer motives, understand the reasoning behind them, and plan their campaigns to meet customer expectations and subsequently ensure maximum returns on investment (ROI) with support from a trusted advertising partner."

As per the guide, digital users in the MENA region spent over 50 per cent of their time consuming online entertainment via apps during Ramadan 2020. There was also twice the number of entertainment app downloads as users looked for more ways to enjoy digital content throughout the holy month last year.

Grocery and food delivery apps witnessed peak usage, with the latter experiencing a surprising upward trajectory as many sought breakfast meals from their favourite restaurants at home. Furthermore, all MENA region countries spend over four hours using mobile internet daily, 82 per cent of Ramadan shoppers primarily use their smartphones for online shopping, 62 per cent of respondents said they would spend more time on their smartphones this Ramadan, and 56 per cent insisted that they will spend more time playing mobile games. This special period presents marketers with a unique opportunity to develop an emotional connection with consumers.



## OAB concludes its first virtual Innovation Hub

Upon the completion of the 24-hour virtual hackathon, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced the final results of the Innovation Hub 2.0, which was organised virtually, for the first time in the sultanate. The hackathon saw the participation of over 550 participants, who were divided into three categories, students, Fintech/professionals and OAB employees. Each of them had to present innovative solutions under the three main themes; Fintech, tourism, and cybersecurity.

Commenting on this event, Rashad al Musafir, CEO of OAB, said, "Each of the participants showcased immense passion for innovation and were eager to take part, despite the circumstances. We are extremely proud of their determination and innovative spirit. I strongly believe that many of the participants will play a significant role in shaping the future of the banking sector in the sultanate. We, are delighted to pave the way for them to in shape the future."

The virtual Innovation Hub 2.0 kicked-off at 12pm on Friday, April 2 and continued until 5pm on Saturday, April 3, with the names of the winners being announced by the judges at the event. Team 'DivyIT' achieved first place in the student category, winning a cash prize of RO2,500, an innovation internship programme at the bank and the opportunity to be employed

by the bank in the future.

In the Fintech/professionals category, team 'Ebina', came in first place and won a RO2,500 cash prize as well as an opportunity to potentially collaborate with the bank to implement the solution. The OAB Staff winners were team 'Digital Artist', which included four employees from the Retail Banking Division. They were awarded a cash prize of RO2,500 and will be able to join the Innovation Lab to work on their innovative ideas.

Leen al Atassi, head of Innovation at OAB said, "The competition was intense, but we were truly amazed by the talent, passion for innovation and the immense potential that our youth and young professionals demonstrated during the 24-hr challenge. We were also very pleased to see the number of participants increase every year, which gives us a lot of motivation and determination to continue to run these platforms. I would like to thank all our participants for joining the virtual Innovation Hub hackathon this year, and we are looking forward to working closely with the winning teams over the next few months to bring their ideas to life in our newly established Innovation Lab, but most importantly we are looking forward to hearing more about the participants' innovation journeys after the hackathon."

## Bank Muscat strengthens its e-channels

In line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday', and commitment to promoting financial inclusion across the sultanate, including the remotest parts of the country, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, is continuously undertaking new measures to improve financial inclusivity amongst all demographic segments. This drive for financial inclusion is closely aligned with national growth and development goals as envisaged by Oman Vision 2040. The bank's electronic and digital channels are playing a key role in facilitating this.

As the largest financial services provider in the country, Bank Muscat had 173 branches and 794 devices including 469 Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), 129 Cash Deposit Machines (CDMs), 167 Full Function Machines (FFMs), 19 statement printers and 10 Business Cash Deposit Machines (BCDMs) spread across all governorates of the Sultanate as of date. A number of new ATMs and CDMs are currently being installed in different governorates.



Also, many more locations are being currently identified for new installations as the bank tries to improve financial inclusivity in remote locations across Oman.

As part of its customer centric vision, the bank continuously takes feedback from its customers, conducts surveys and identifies fresh installation sites. The final decision to install new devices are made on the basis of various inputs including the feedback from bank officials, customer feedback and the footfalls in that particular location, especially if it is within a business hub.

Bank Muscat's e-channels like ATMs, CDMs, FFMs, BCDMs and Statement Printers offer a

number of services for the benefit of customers. ATM services include Fast Cash, Cash Withdrawal, Balance Enquiry, Card Linked Account Fund Transfer, Setting /resetting the debit and credit card PIN, minis statements, bill payments, mobile top ups and submission of requests for cheque books.

CDM services include cash deposit, payment of utility bills, credit card payments, remittances, mobile top ups and payment of school fees. FFMs offer the services of both ATMs and CDMs from a single device while BCDMs make it easy for businesses to deposit cash without visiting a branch. The Statement

## Renault Dokker: Utility vehicle with great design

A functional commercial vehicle, Renault Dokker combines the best features of space, comfort, and dynamic performance. Its functional utility vehicle and great design has found Renault Dokker many a fan in Oman.

Businessman Saeed al Hinai from Nizwa says, "Renault Dokker Van competently rises to the challenge of meeting my day-to-day needs. Its 750kg payload is invaluable for a businessman like me." Hinai also likes its easy loading feature. "The Dokker Van comes with one or two sliding side doors and the loading width stands at 703mm! The asymmetrical rear doors, meanwhile, open to a width of 1.08m which is especially useful. Its lashing rings



on the floor holds fragile items perfectly in place," he says.

Mahmood al Jaafari from Sur is impressed with its generous loading space which does not compromise comfort.

"The 'Easy Seat' is foldable and removable; the passenger

seat shows its full ingenuity when the backrest folds down to form a temporary desk. When fully removed, it frees up extra space, increasing the loading volume to 3.9m³," he explains.

Zaid al Balushi from Muscat enjoys the relaxed and safe drive

Renault Dokker offers.

"It is sturdy and reliable, and the best part is Renault Dokker adapts to all circumstances. Its features including ABS & BA, ESP, TPMS, dual airbags make it a top range car," he says.

Suliman al Jabri from Ibra appreciated the strong performance of the vehicle's engine.

"The 1.6lt 85hp Euro 4 engine that powers Dokker shows consumption levels among the lowest in its class, without having to resort to expensive and complex technologies or sacrificing performance," he says.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles said, "Renault Dokker is a very efficient

and dynamic vehicle. That is why it has found so many fans. Its 1.6 MPI 85 hp engine is efficient both in consumption and cost of usage. The engine allows for a very dynamic driving at a cost that is amongst the most frugal."

### Packed with benefits

Renault offers you a vehicle up to 3.9m³, equipped as a saloon car, as robust as a utility vehicle and as practical as a Dokker van. Accessibility, loading volume and driving comfort - the Renault Dokker Van is packed with benefits and nice surprises.

For more information, visit <https://www.renault.com.om/> or call Toll Free number on 80050011.

# Ultimate Range Rover: SV Bespoke introduces exclusive new editions

Land Rover Special Vehicle Operations has launched a pair of exclusive new Range Rover special editions created by its SV Bespoke personalisation team.

The new Range Rover SVAutobiography Ultimate editions represent the pinnacle of Land Rover’s luxury SUV family, elevating the range-topping SVAutobiography and SVAutobiography Dynamic models even higher with a suite of complementary hand-finished SV Bespoke features.

Curated by the SV Bespoke commissioning experts at the Special Vehicle Operations Technical Centre in the UK, the Ultimate editions showcase the full range of personalisation touches that can be applied to the timeless Range Rover design. Key to the exclusive Ultimate edition design theme is the combination of newly formulated satin-finished Orchard Green paintwork complemented by a Narvik Black roof and copper detailing.

The SV Bespoke team’s attention to detail extends to the Gloss Black knurled infill and copper-edged metal Range Rover badging on the bonnet and tailgate, a copper-plated and black enamel SV roundel on the B-pillar, SV roundels embroidered on all four headrests, plus illuminated Ultimate edition treadplates. The finishing touch is a ‘SV Bespoke Ultimate edition’ commissioning plaque on the centre console, complete with copper-finished SV roundel.

Mark Turner, commercial director, Land Rover Special Vehicle Operations, said, “Range Rover has defined the luxury SUV segment for more than half a century, with our SVAutobiography models offering customers a world-class travel experience – whether driving, or being driven.



These new Ultimate editions elevate that refinement and sophistication even further.”

Clare Hansen, director, Land Rover Vehicle Personalisation, said, “Our SV Bespoke commissioning experts have taken the classic combination of a green and black exterior and given it a thoroughly modern twist, using a contemporary satin paint finish and copper detailing. This elegant combination is strengthened further with the recommended Vintage Tan interior themes available.”

The long-wheelbase SVAutobiography provides first class travel with serene refinement, including power-closing rear doors. Reclining airline-style heated and cooled semi-aniline leather Executive Class Comfort-Plus rear seats provide over 1.2m of rear legroom, hot stone massage function, plus calf and footrests for rear occupants. A full-length centre console with integrated Zenith timepiece, refrigerated compartment and deployable tables creates the perfect space to work and relax on the move.

The recommended Ultimate edition specification features Vintage Tan leather interior trim and Copper Weave Carbon Fibre finishers. Customers can also opt for leather upholstery from the Italian artisans at Poltrona Frau for a truly cossetting experience.

This flagship model is available with a choice of powertrains, including the 565PS Supercharged V8 petrol and highly efficient P400e plug-in hybrid, which is capable of up to 40km (25 miles) of all-electric driving and provides overall CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as low as 75g/km.

The exclusively 565PS Supercharged V8 petrol SVAutobiography Dynamic is the most driver-focused of the pair. Available only as a standard-wheelbase vehicle, the suspension geometry and steering calibration are optimised to provide more agile responses. Land Rover’s advanced Dynamic Response active roll control system also enhances composure, while the ride height is lowered by

8mm – delivering more engaging on-road driving dynamics and a more purposeful stance.

Forged 22-inch alloy wheels feature a five split-spoke design finished in Gloss Dark Grey with contrast Diamond Turned finish, while side vent, bonnet finisher, grille and front bumper accents are all finished in Graphite Atlas. Inside, a knurled finish for the rotary shift controller, starter button and pedals, plus anodized Red paddle shifters, underline the performance focus of SVAutobiography Dynamic.

The recommended SVAutobiography Dynamic interior theme features Ebony / Vintage Tan trim with diamond-quilted semi-aniline leather seats, an Ebony headlining and Steel Weave Carbon Fibre finishers.

For details about the price of the New Range Rover SVAutobiography Ultimate edition with 565PS Supercharged V8 and the SVAutobiography Dynamic equivalent, visit your nearest Land Rover retailer.



## Majan Electricity adopts manual for archives management

Majan Electricity Company- a member of Nama Group- has adopted the Records and Archives Management Manual which consists of the records’ retention schedules and the records classification in the company.

The signing ceremony was enacted by Dr Hamed bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, chairman of National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), Adil bin Ismail al Raisi, CEO of Majan Electricity Company, in the presence of Eng Omar bin Khalfan al Wahaibi, CEO of Nama Group.

This agreement shows the diligence of the National Records and Archives Authority to implement a modern system of managing records of companies in which the government contributes towards the capital by 25 per cent. The signing of the agreement was a step to comply with Documentation and Archiving Law, endorsed by Royal Decree No 60/2007, as Nama Group and

Majan Electricity Company have collaborated collectively with the Technical Team in NRAA to prepare the Record and Archives Manual of Majan Electricity Company, in accordance with the law.

The manual comprises of different types of documents of Majan Electricity Company, which involves its business and its activities, in addition to a system to classify these documents.

This indexing system would help in saving the similar documents under one category that is distinguished by a single classification code, which will make the process of retrieving and searching for the documents quicker. The manual also covers the schedules of records’ retention periods that clarify the legal period of storing documents in offices or in stores specialised to keep intermediate documents. It also decides whether these documents will be destructed or perpetually saved in NRAA.

## SNC-Lavalin’s Atkins business expands engineering services

Atkins, a member of the SNC-Lavalin Group, is expanding its design and engineering services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to meet the needs of the country’s growing mixed-use developments, leisure and entertainment industries. This sees the appointment of new senior positions to support the company’s existing projects and new market opportunities.

David Manfredi, director of Architecture and Building Engineering, Saudi Arabia, is leading Atkins’ KSA-based Building Design team, working closely with the regional business and global team of experts to understand and deliver clients’ visions. David is an award-winning architect possessing a uniquely balanced range of conceptual, project delivery and business skills. His approach embraces design concept and critique, technical delivery, studio culture and team development, and the exploitation of digital transformation. He has 25 years of experience, 18 of which have been in the Middle East. He has run his own practice, has been a tutor and lecturer in design, construction, and professional practice, and has worked on projects across the GCC, Asia and Australia.

“We are pleased to announce Bradley Caruk to the newly formed role of creative project director, Saudi Arabia. Working closely with Atkins’ Design teams, Bradley brings international expertise in spearheading major innovations in the creative themed leisure and entertainment destinations, championing cutting-



edge technologies and concepts that redefine the customer experience and setting new industry standards. This will help set a new precedent for Atkins’ creative services in the theming and entertainment sectors.’

Bradley comes with 25 years’ experience across the US, Asia Pacific and the Middle East, and has founded several creative companies over the past decades. More recently leading a team of writers, designers and architects, he conceptualised the show design for seven major attractions for the Ocean Flower Island currently under construction off the north coast of Danzhou, Hainan, China. He also provided his creative expertise to Sony Entertainment, Walt Disney Studios, EA, Activision, LucasArts, Paramount Studios & Universal Studios, to name a few.

In addition, Edward McIntosh, who is leading Atkins’ Architectural Design team in the Middle East, is currently based in Saudi Arabia to support the design business expansion and provide in-country strategic advisory to major projects. Edward has 18 years of experience leading inter-

national architectural design teams and projects in sports, commercial, retail, residential, and hospitality markets in South America, UK, China, South East Asia, and the Middle East.

He started his career in Ecuador where he delivered several commercial and hospitality projects incorporating innovative low-carbon construction materials. He also worked for 6 years at Populous in London where he successfully led the design of more than two dozen arena, stadium and sports masterplan projects. He also led the Grimshaw’s South East Asia design team focusing on retail, hospitality, workplace, transit-oriented development and sports projects.

Vasushree Mohta, design director, Master Planning, Middle East, has been with Atkins for 12 years and has led the urban design team to deliver world-class projects across the GCC. She is leading flagship master plan projects in the kingdom including King Abdullah Financial District and Diriyah Gate project that aim to create the leisure, culture and entertainment focal points within mixed use urban precincts.

Atkins is spearheading urban master plans that emphasise on user experience and draw in design experts early in the process to create urban districts that are cohesive, synergetic and deliverable with a clear focus on the project vision as the main driving force. With over 50 years’ presence in the Middle East, Atkins has established a proven track record of designing some of the region’s most iconic projects.

## Gulf Air is back at Singapore Changi Airport

Gulf Air - the national carrier of Bahrain - celebrated its new direct service to and from Singapore which was operated by the airline’s flagship Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner. Flight GF165 landed in Singapore Changi Airport at 12.25pm Singapore local time on April 4.

Gulf Air’s acting chief executive officer Captain Waleed al Alawi said, “We’re happy to land in Singapore and expand our network with direct flights connecting Bahrain and the Far East. This



is a great opportunity for everyone to try our state-of-the-art

Dreamliner and explore our latest boutique and premium

leisure destination.”

The direct flights feature 26 Falcon Gold seats and 256 economy class seats; all equipped with latest comfort technology and inflight entertainment system featuring blockbuster movies and rich content selection.

Flights can be booked online at gulfair.com, by calling the airline’s 24 hour Contact Centre on (+973) 17373737, or through any Gulf Air sales offices and approved travel agencies.

## Celebrate Ramadan with unbeatable offers and cash gifts from Mitsubishi

General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributors of Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, has announced the launch of their highly anticipated Ramadan Offer. This year, GAC will be offering its customers a wide range of benefits that include cash gifts of up to RO3,500, zero per cent financing for up to two years, special trade-in bonuses of up to RO500 and more. In addition, GAC will be offering six years/unlimited kilometres warranty and roadside assistance and free registration.

Commenting on the new Ramadan Offer, Manoj Ranade, general manager of GAC, said, “As with every Ramadan our new offer has been designed to offer our customers a real sense of value with an extra special deal, one they certainly shouldn’t miss. With a combination of



high-value cash gifts together with trade-in bonuses, zero per cent interest financing, free service and insurance, unlimited mileage warranty, roadside assistance, and more, our Ramadan offer this year really stands out, guaranteeing that regardless of which Mitsubishi you choose, it will be an especially rewarding purchase.”

Customers who purchase any Mitsubishi during the Ramadan Offer period, before it comes to

a close on June 3, will enjoy the benefits of range of benefits including cash gifts ranging from a minimum of RO1,300 up to RO3,500 and zero per cent interest financing for up-to two years.

Select models will also be available with trade in bonuses ranging from RO200 to RO500, free Insurance for one year, and a 2-year/20,000km free service package. Select variants of the L200 will also be available with a 4-year financing option at an at-

tractive interest rate of just 2.99 per cent. All vehicles will also come with free registration for the first year together with six years/unlimited kilometres warranty and roadside assistance.

For more information on the promotion, visit GAC’s Mitsubishi showrooms in Azaiba, Barka, Sohar, Nizwa and Salalah or follow ‘MitsubishiMotorsOman’ on Facebook or @mitsubishioman on twitter to learn more.

# Israel's Netanyahu on corruption trial

Jerusalem - Israel's legal and political dramas converged on Monday, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in court for his corruption trial as the president launched talks on forming a government.

Netanyahu, ordered to appear in person for opening arguments, sat in the Jerusalem District Court wearing a black mask as the prosecution accused him of misusing his office to advance his political interests.

Netanyahu denies wrongdoing in the case, in which he has been charged with accepting improper gifts and seeking to trade regulatory favours with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage.

Lead prosecutor Liat Ben-Ari told judges that Netanyahu was involved in 'a serious case of government corruption'.

He 'made illegitimate use of the great governmental power entrusted to him', in his dealings with media executives 'in order to advance his personal affairs - including when he faced his desire to be re-elected', she said.

As Ben-Ari laid out the criminal case against Israel's longest-serving leader, across the city President Reuven Rivlin began meetings that could determine



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (centre) leaves the district court hearing the arguments in his corruption trial, in Jerusalem on Monday (AFP)

Netanyahu's political fate.

Israel's March 23 election was its fourth inconclusive vote in less than two years, prolonging the worst political crisis in the nation's history.

Netanyahu's rightwing Likud party finished first, winning 30 seats in the 120-member parliament, but his ability to form a

stable governing coalition is precarious, a reality that has plagued him for several years.

Rivlin on Monday began two days of consultations with party officials to determine who has a plausible path towards a 61-seat majority, in a parliament bitterly divided between those who back Netanyahu and those committed

to ending his 12-year tenure.

Before his first meeting, with Netanyahu's envoys from Likud, Rivlin said he would seek to nominate a candidate who has 'the best chance of forming a government that will have the confidence of the new Knesset'.

Customarily, Rivlin gives the leader with most recommenda-

tions from individual lawmakers a 28-day window to form a government. That can be extended by 14 days at the president's discretion.

Rivlin confirmed that Likud had endorsed Netanyahu, as expected.

The Prime Minister is also likely to win the backing of the 16

lawmakers representing Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties as well as six from the far-right Religious Zionism alliance.

That makes a likely total of 52 - nine short of the absolute majority needed.

Because the ideologically divided anti-Netanyahu camp has no agreed leader, Netanyahu may receive the most recommendations.

Within the anti-Netanyahu bloc, the centrist Yesh Atid party, led by former television host Yair Lapid, won the most seats with 17.

Lapid's envoys were next to meet the president.

An anti-Netanyahu alliance would require a tightrope deal among Lapid, Likud defector Gideon Saar, Netanyahu's estranged protege Naftali Bennett - a hardline religious nationalist - and a group of centrist and left-wing parties.

## Long legal process

In an unprecedented twist for Israeli coalition politics, it appears impossible for either camp to form a government without support from the conservative Islamic Raam Party, which controls four seats.

Leader Mansour Abbas has

said he is open to hearing from all sides, but the far-right Religious Zionism party has ruled out sitting in a government with Raam, further complicating Netanyahu's coalition hopes.

It is also far from certain that the anti-Netanyahu bloc can unite, raising the prospect of a fifth election in less than three years. Rivlin will select a leader on Wednesday charged with trying to form a government.

If they fail to do so, the president will then move on to the next name on his list.

Dozens of anti-Netanyahu protesters, who dub him the 'Crime Minister', were at the court on Monday, taunting the Prime Minister as he entered.

Netanyahu's supporters were also on hand.

Netanyahu left the courtroom shortly after Ben-Ari's opening arguments, after judges had said he did not have to be physically present for witness testimony.

The trial enters a more intensive, evidentiary phase on Monday but a ruling is still several months off. Netanyahu would not be compelled to resign as Prime Minister unless he is convicted with all appeals exhausted.

AFP

## More than 100 dead in Indonesia, East Timor floods, dozens missing

Lembata, Indonesia - Tropical cyclone Seroja pounded Indonesia and East Timor on Monday after torrential rains triggered floods and landslides that have killed at least 113 people and left dozens missing.

Packing heavy winds and rain, the storm heaped more misery on the Southeast Asian nations after Sunday's disaster turned small communities into wastelands of mud and uprooted trees and forced thousands of people into shelters.

Downpours are expected over the next day as the storm triggers offshore waves as high as six metres, Indonesia's disaster agency said.

The cyclone, which was picking up strength as it moved toward the west coast of Australia, hampered efforts to reach trapped survivors.

Indonesia's disaster agency said at least 70 people have been killed, with another 70 missing.

In East Timor, at least 21 people have been killed according to an official in the tiny half-island nation of 1.3mn that lies between



Rescuers look for survivors in Nelemamadike village in Indonesia's East Flores, after torrential rains triggered floods and landslides in Indonesia and East Timor, on Monday (AFP)

Indonesia and Australia.

Many of the deaths were in Timor's inundated capital Dili, where the front of the presidential palace was transformed into a mud pit.

In Indonesia's remote East Flores municipality, torrents of

mud washed over homes, bridges and roads, while strong waves have prevented search teams from accessing the hardest-hit areas.

On Lembata, an island east of Flores, parts of some villages were swept down a mountain-

side and carried to the shore of the ocean. Soon after flash floods began tearing into resident Basir Langoday's district in the early morning, he heard screams for help from a nearby home covered in rubble.

AFP

## Afghan President prepares new peace proposal: Officials

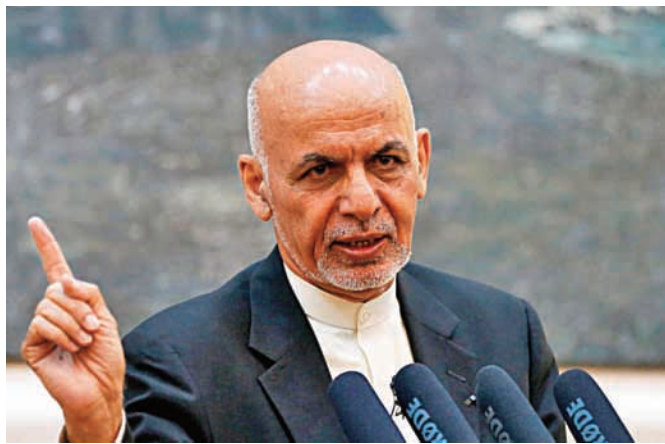
Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has drawn up a new proposal for peace with the Taliban ahead of an international conference aimed at jump-starting faltering talks between the two warring sides, official sources said.

It comes after the United States - backed by Russia and other stakeholders - said in its own leaked proposal that it wants to see some form of transitional government involving the Taliban, although Ghani has insisted leaders can only be chosen at the ballot box.

According to official sources, Ghani intends to present his three-stage plan at a United Nations-backed conference in Turkey to be attended by the United States, Russia and other key regional countries.

A date for the event has not been finalised.

The United States is just weeks away from a May 1 deadline to withdraw all foreign troops from Afghanistan as part of a deal agreed with the hardline group last year - a date US President Joe Biden has said will be



Afghan President Ashraf Ghani

tough to meet.

Ghani's three-stage proposal, key elements of which have been obtained by AFP, includes reaching a political settlement with the Taliban and announcing an internationally monitored ceasefire.

He then proposes holding an early presidential election in which the Taliban could take part to form a 'government of peace'.

That would lead to a slew of development programmes across the country, followed by rebuilding the constitutional framework.

Ghani has already shared his

plan with several international diplomats, officials said.

Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation said on Sunday it would pull together its own proposals after collecting 30 documents from different political parties and civil society members, as well as from Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the council. The Taliban, a hardline Islamist movement ousted from power by a US-led invasion in 2001, have consistently refused to participate in any kind of elections.

AFP

## Turkey detains ten retired admirals over open letter

Ankara, Turkey - Turkey on Monday detained ten retired admirals after they openly criticised a canal project dear to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a country where the hint of military insubordination raises the spectre of past coups.

The official approval last month of plans to develop a 45km shipping lane in Istanbul comparable to the Panama or Suez canals has opened up debate about Turkey's commitment to the 1936 Montreux Convention.

The pact is aimed at demilitarising the Black Sea by setting strict commercial and naval rules on passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits leading to the Mediterranean.

In their letter, 104 retired admirals said the existing treaty 'best protects Turkish interests'. 'Recently, the opening of the Montreux Convention to debate within the scope of the authority to withdraw from international treaties and the Canal Istanbul project is a cause for concern,' the letter read.

The Ankara chief public prosecutor's office said arrest warrants had been issued for the ten and ordered four other suspects to report to Ankara police within three days, opting not to detain them because of their age.

They are accused of 'using force and violence to get rid of the constitutional order', NTV broadcaster reported.

AFP

## Australians released from Myanmar house arrest

Yangon, Myanmar - An Australian couple was released from house arrest in Myanmar and allowed to leave the country, as protests against the military junta continued on Monday.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February 1 coup ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and derailed the country's experiment with democracy.

Business consultants Matthew O'Kane and Christa Avery, a dual Canadian-Australian citizen, tried to leave the country on a relief flight in late March but were barred from departing and placed under house arrest.

'I am of course incredibly relieved to have been released and to be on my way home with my husband Matt,' Avery said in a statement.

'Even though I knew that I had done nothing wrong it was very stressful being held under house



A Myanmar migrant living in Thailand holds a portrait of detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi while she and others hold up their mobile phone lights during a night protest, in Chiang Mai on Sunday (AFP)

arrest for two weeks, not knowing what was going to be the outcome of the questioning.'

The couple said they were incredibly sad to leave Myanmar, which was their home for eight

years, and hope the country stabilises soon.

A spokesperson for Can-

berra's foreign affairs department said Australian diplomats had 'provided support for their departure from Yangon on 4 April'.

The couple ran a bespoke consultancy business in Yangon.

A third Australian, economist Sean Turnell, was arrested a week after the putsch and remains in custody.

The university professor and advisor to Suu Kyi was the first foreign national arrested following the coup. He has been charged with a violation of state secret laws, along with Suu Kyi late last month.

More than 2,500 people have been detained since the coup, according to local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

It also recorded the death toll as 564 as of Sunday, as security forces continue to use lethal force against protesters.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

# India tightens curbs as cases hit record

New Delhi, India - India's worst-hit state ramped up its coronavirus restrictions as nationwide the daily infections exceeded 100,000 for the first time on Monday.

The United States is the only nation that has regularly registered so many cases in one day. Brazil recorded triple digits once in March.

In India, hopes at the start of the year that the outbreak may be subsiding in the vast nation of 1.3bn people have been dashed in recent weeks as a fresh wave pushed the national total to 12.5mn infections and 165,000 deaths.

Maharashtra, the worst-hit state and home to India's financial and entertainment capital Mumbai, recorded nearly 60,000 cases in the last 24 hours.

Struggling state authorities on Sunday tightened the evening curfew to allow only people involved in essential services out of their homes from 8.00pm to 7.00am.

The region of 110mn people



A health worker sanitizes the bags of a recovered patient held by medical staff wearing protective gear inside the premises of a quarantine centre following restrictions imposed by the state government of the western Indian state of Maharashtra, in Mumbai on Monday (AFP)

will also see weekend lockdowns, with gatherings of over four people banned and places of worship and restaurants shut.

In Mumbai over the week-

end, one of Bollywood's biggest stars, Akshay Kumar, became the latest celebrity to test positive.

On Monday, shooting of the

religious epic *Ram Setu* that Kumar was making was halted after 45 crew members also tested positive.

"How long shooting remains

halted depends on Akshay Kumar's recovery. We can replace all our crew members, but we cannot replace the star of the film," Ashok Dubey from the

Federation of Western India Cine Employees told AFP.

Kumar (53) tweeted meanwhile that he had been hospitalised 'as a precautionary measure under medical advice'.

## Awareness

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is anxious to avoid imposing a new national lockdown after a shutdown in March 2020 caused widespread human and economic misery.

Modi on Sunday chaired a high-level meeting and a statement afterwards announced an awareness campaign from April 6-14 'with emphasis on 100 per cent mask usage, personal hygiene and sanitation at public places/workplaces and health facilities'.

In the capital New Delhi, the Chief Minister has ruled out a new lockdown despite the surge in cases. Police say they are issuing more fines to people not wearing masks.

"The fear of COVID-19 has gone away."

"Most people don't wear masks properly, including many of my passengers," auto-rickshaw driver Surjit Singh (68) told AFP.

Rajesh Mohan Bindlish (34), a bank executive in NOIDA outside the capital, said that police should be stricter but that the government should avoid another lockdown.

"The economy will be hit very hard and it won't be good for all of us."

"We can't afford to disrupt our economic recovery as so many jobs depend on it," Bindlish told AFP.

"The cases have risen because the people outside became too lax about the entire situation. If fines are increased and there is strictness in their implementation, things will improve," he said.

India has so far administered almost 80mn vaccine shots.

Last week, it opened up vaccinations to all those over 45 years old to speed up its flagging national inoculation drive. AFP

## Britain all set to restart international travel

London, UK - Britain is all set with plans to restart international travel, using a 'traffic-light' system as the country cautiously emerges from lockdown.

The UK has set a tentative date of May 17 to relaunch foreign travel, currently banned except for a handful of permitted reasons. This has created massive pent-up demand for summer holidays abroad.

Travel destinations will be ranked green, amber or red according to virus risk, Downing Street said late Saturday, with the government to provide more details on Monday.

"We are doing everything we can to enable the reopening of our country... as safely as possible," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said.

The government said the new system 'will help ensure the UK's vaccine progress isn't jeopardised and provide clear guidance for travellers'. People heading to low-risk 'green' countries will simply take a virus test before and after they travel, the government said.

But those going to amber or red countries will have to self-isolate or quarantine afterwards.

Health Minister Edward Argar said as cases surge on the European continent, Britain would have to be 'very careful' as it considered further restrictions.

"One of the things we don't want to see - and just as the vaccination programme is working so well - is getting new variants or risking new variants getting imported into this country," he said.

Currently people arriving in the UK from abroad are required to self-isolate for ten days. British nationals who arrive from a banned 'red list' of high-risk countries face costly quarantine in government-approved hotels.

The government urged people not to book summer holidays, saying it was 'too early to predict', which would be the green-lighted countries.

The government has announced it will allow a number of people to attend public



This file photo shows a passenger walking through the arrivals hall of the London Heathrow Airport, in London on January 15 (AFP)

*We are doing everything we can to enable the reopening of our country... as safely as possible*

BORIS JOHNSON

events such as football matches from this month in trials of a virus certification system.

## Virus passports?

But it has not made clear whether it will issue 'virus passports' for international travel, an idea backed by many tourism-dependent countries and airlines but opposed by more than 70 UK MPs.

Argar said the government was still considering measures like Israel's green passes, which allow COVID-vaccinated people access to hotels, bars and other services.

"I think it is right that we look at this and see if there is a way that, while balancing all of those practical, ethical and fairness considerations ... could in the short-term, speed up our reopening of the country," Argar said.

The UK has already given out more than 31mn first vaccine doses and over 5mn second doses.

The rollout has far outstripped popular holiday destinations such as France.

This has boosted the public

mood after more than 126,000 people died from the virus in the United Kingdom, the highest toll in Europe.

On Monday in Scotland, where the devolved government in Edinburgh has set its own coronavirus restrictions, hairdressers and some non-essential retail were allowed to reopen for the first time in four months.

In Glasgow, salon owner Anne Ferguson told AFP it was 'fantastic' to return to work, adding that she was flooded with appointments.

"Getting into the space and making it come alive again. That's just a huge, huge thing. It's just been very strange," she said.

## Rapid virus tests

Non-essential shops are set to reopen in England on April 12 and pubs and restaurants can start serving outdoors as part of plans to ease restrictions that Johnson is expected to sign off on at a Monday Cabinet meeting.

From Thursday, those living in England will be able to access two free rapid virus tests per week, a measure aimed at curbing symptom-free virus spread. This will make such tests far more accessible than currently.

'More cases will be detected, breaking chains of transmission and saving lives,' the government said on Monday.

AFP

## Portugal reopens museums, café terraces

Lisbon, Portugal - Portugal on Monday reopened museums, café terraces and secondary schools nearly two months after tightening curbs following a wave of cases early this year.

There was an explosion of cases following Christmas and New Year festivities which led to overstretched hospitals and the government imposed a general lockdown in the middle of January and closed schools a week later.

There have been nearly 16,900 coronavirus deaths and 823,335 cases so far, according to an official tally on Sunday.

Primary schools reopened on March 15. Monday's easing comes with some guidelines. Only four people will be able to sit together at a table in café ter-



People work at the esplanade of the Pena Palace before the reopening of museums and monuments, in Sintra near the capital Lisbon (AFP)

aces while museums can change their opening hours.

Group training sessions at gyms and sports venues remain banned.

"We are expecting very few

visitors [due to the paucity of foreign tourists]," Antonio Nunes Pereira, director of the Palace of Pena in Sintra, outside Lisbon, told AFP. "We expect a return to normal next summer..."

when the vaccination process advances in Europe," he said.

The museum is one of Portugal's most visited sites and drew over 2mn visitors in 2019. Eighty-five per cent of them were foreigners.

The government has launched mass COVID tests and started vaccinating teachers. It plans to start reopening high schools, universities and auditoriums and concert halls later this month and restaurants in May.

The situation is being reviewed every two weeks and the government can tighten restrictions in municipalities with a high number of cases. Portugal has suspended flights to and from Brazil and Britain. AFP

## Inquiry in France over 'clandestine' dinners organised to defy restrictions

Paris, France - A report by a French television channel alleging 'clandestine' luxury dinners in Paris despite the pandemic has sparked an investigation and a political furore over the claims the elite were brazenly ignoring rules they themselves had set.

The M6 private channel on Friday broadcast a reportage based on footage recorded with a hidden camera purportedly from a clandestine restaurant in a high-end area of Paris where neither the staff nor the diners were wearing masks.

All restaurants and cafés remain closed in France for eating in and the country this week began a new limited nationwide lockdown to deal with surging COVID-19 infections.

The hashtag #OnVeutLesNoms (We Want the Names) went viral on Twitter, as speculation swirled over who may have attended such dinners.

Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz said on Sunday that a criminal probe had been opened after the reportage into putting the lives of others at risk.

The investigation would assess 'if these evenings were organised in defiance of health rules and to determine who



Patients wait in the hippodrome turned into a vaccination centre, in Marcq-en-Baroeul on Sunday (AFP)

were the possible organisers and participants'.

One source interviewed by M6, whose identity was not revealed and whose voice was distorted, told the channel that such evenings had taken place and guests present had even included ministers.

The source was later identified by media and bloggers as Pierre-Jean Chalencon, who runs the luxury Palais Vivienne event venue in the centre of Paris. In statement sent to AFP through his lawyer late Sunday, Chalencon implicitly acknowledged he was the source but also appeared to retract the

claim ministers were involved, saying he was only showing 'humour' and the 'sense of the absurd'.

But the report was no laughing matter for members of the government, days after President Emmanuel Macron ordered new restrictions including a brief closure of schools to keep cases down before the effects of the vaccine drive kick in.

Chalencon had been recorded saying in February that government spokesman Gabriel Attal, a rising Cabinet star, would be attending such a dinner. Attal vehemently denied the claim.

But deputy interior minister Marlene Schiappa told French TV that if ministers or lawmakers were involved 'they should be fined and penalised like any other citizen'.

Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire insisted, "All the ministers, without exception, respect the rules." Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said those involved in such dinners should be prosecuted if the allegations in the report were true.

"There are not two types of citizens - those who have the right to party and those who do not," he said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD

|     |    |    |    |    |     |    |    |    |    |     |    |    |    |    |     |    |    |    |
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| 17  |    |    |    |    | 18  |    |    |    |    | 19  |    |    |    |    | 20  |    |    |    |
| 21  |    |    |    |    | 22  |    |    |    |    | 23  |    |    |    |    | 24  |    |    |    |
| 25  |    |    |    |    | 26  |    |    |    | 27 |     | 28 |    |    |    | 29  |    |    |    |
|     |    |    | 30 | 31 |     |    |    |    | 32 | 33  |    |    |    | 34 |     |    |    |    |
| 35  | 36 | 37 |    |    |     |    |    | 38 |    |     |    | 39 |    |    |     | 40 | 41 | 42 |
| 43  |    |    |    |    |     |    |    | 44 |    |     |    | 45 |    | 46 |     |    |    |    |
| 47  |    |    |    |    |     |    | 48 |    |    |     |    | 49 |    | 50 |     |    |    |    |
| 51  |    |    |    |    | 52  |    |    |    |    | 53  |    | 54 |    |    | 55  |    |    |    |
|     |    |    |    |    | 56  |    |    |    |    | 57  |    |    |    |    |     |    |    |    |
| 58  | 59 | 60 | 61 |    | 62  |    |    | 63 | 64 |     |    |    |    |    | 65  | 66 | 67 | 68 |
| 69  |    |    |    | 70 |     | 71 |    |    | 72 |     |    |    |    | 73 |     |    |    |    |
| 74  |    |    |    |    | 75  |    | 76 |    |    |     |    |    | 77 |    |     |    |    |    |
| 78  |    |    |    |    |     | 79 |    | 80 |    |     |    | 81 |    |    |     |    |    |    |
|     |    |    |    | 82 |     |    |    | 83 |    |     | 84 |    |    |    |     |    |    |    |
| 85  | 86 | 87 |    |    | 88  |    |    |    | 89 | 90  |    |    |    |    | 91  | 92 | 93 | 94 |
| 95  |    |    |    |    | 96  |    |    | 97 |    | 98  |    |    |    |    | 99  |    |    |    |
| 100 |    |    |    |    | 101 |    |    |    |    | 102 |    |    |    |    | 103 |    |    |    |
| 104 |    |    |    |    | 105 |    |    |    |    | 106 |    |    |    |    | 107 |    |    |    |

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ACROSS

- 1 Native of Belgrade
- 5 Taro roots
- 9 Boutique
- 13 Walked
- 17 Emotion
- 18 Gave temporarily
- 19 Ring of light
- 20 Surf sound
- 21 Consumer
- 22 \_\_\_ facto
- 23 Wicked
- 24 \_\_\_ Vista: search engine
- 25 Seed
- 26 Balls of cord
- 28 First lady
- 29 Tree home
- 30 Dostoyevsky
- novel, "The \_\_\_"
- 32 Progenitors
- 35 Usefulness
- 38 Devotee
- 39 Furnished
- 43 Natural organic substances

- 44 Sharp sounds
- 46 Order of business
- 47 Share out
- 48 Macerates
- 50 Golf pro
- 51 Claim on property
- 52 Ripped
- 53 Theater signs
- 55 People: Prefix
- 56 Temper type
- 57 Three in music
- 58 Easter treat
- 62 Indian
- 64 Wary
- 65 Spouse
- 69 Separate
- 71 Sketch
- 73 French knife
- 74 Grain
- 76 Fire
- 77 Pertinent to thought
- 78 Stress
- 80 Time period
- 81 Instruction books

- 82 N. African city
- 84 Hires, in TV land
- 85 Nip
- 88 Fish
- 89 Moral
- 91 Comb wool
- 95 Mind
- 96 Product of environment
- 98 Graceful dance
- 99 Layer of the iris
- 100 Norse deity
- 101 Actress Wilson
- 102 Appian Way for one
- 103 Fuzz
- 104 Direction
- 105 Social climber
- 106 Body fluids
- 107 Norse poems

DOWN

- 1 Clout
- 2 Misplace
- 3 State
- 4 Red
- 5 Draws out
- 6 Dispose
- 7 Beginning

- 8 Store
- 9 \_\_\_ & Him: band
- 10 To hem and haw
- 11 Fruit
- 12 Cornmeal dish
- 13 Rise above
- 14 Characterization
- 15 Horse feed
- 16 Mild oath
- 27 Exactly
- 31 Impress forcefully
- 33 Corner
- 34 Duds
- 35 Asian Mountains
- 36 Low-caste Hindu
- 37 \_\_\_ of Man
- 38 Penalty
- 40 Joint
- 41 Kind of cheese
- 42 Decorative wall part
- 44 Hazardous
- 45 Navigation aid
- 48 Musical direction
- 49 Persistent attack
- 52 Uncle: Sp.
- 54 Essay
- 58 Agreement

- 59 Fencing sword
- 60 Work for
- 61 Foreboding
- 63 A solvent
- 64 Descendant
- 65 Very small
- 66 Court proceedings
- 67 River ducks
- 68 Elf kings
- 70 The end
- 72 Unrestrained
- 73 Impression
- 75 Followers of Paul Bunyan
- 77 Makeup item
- 79 Vitamin
- 81 Post-office client
- 83 Muse of poetry
- 84 Slide
- 85 Flatboat
- 86 Plow through
- 87 Showy flower
- 90 "\_\_\_ Old House"
- 92 Overeager
- 93 Tear
- 94 Facts
- 97 Bit

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Reach out to an introverted person. Only you will be able to draw them out, and they'll need to be drawn out or the two of you will never get anything accomplished. Turn on your charm and show this shy person that they have nothing to fear. It's long past the time for you to expand your circle of conversational partners. Try to connect with someone you normally wouldn't even notice.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

A fresh energy surrounds you today and helps you feel more centred than you've felt in a long while. You've been asked to take sides-by both sides! And a lesser human being would consider it an impossible position to be in, but not you. Early on, you'll see a way to navigate through this sticky situation without offending or annoying anyone. You'll find a common thread.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You shouldn't be shy about taking credit for something you did. If you're worried that someone will get jealous of you, stop. How they react to your adulation is their issue. You should never turn down praise unless it's undeserved. If someone has a problem with that, they need to bring it up with the people heaping all the accolades your way, not you.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

The friendly competition you've been enjoying with another smart and fun person is starting to evolve into a not-so-fun power struggle! There is a huge streak of jealousy coming into the picture, and it might belong to you! Before things get too serious, you need to stop competing with them. Shake hands and just walk away. There is no value in continuing this fight.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You should try to be a driving force for achieving the group's goals, whether the group is your family, work team, or gang of friends. Your charms are powerful, and people are eager to comply with what you want once you show them what's in it for them. You're a skilled salesperson today, so it won't take too long to help people understand why your plan is the best one.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The power that you want so badly now will come to you, but only if you stop wanting it so much! You have to focus on what you want to achieve and how to make it happen. Then you'll discover your ability to do so. Waiting to be given power is only going to remind everyone just how powerless you think you are. Assume power. Step up and start doing what you want to do.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Things are slowing down in your life, and your to-do list is starting to dwindle down to nothing. This is good news. Before the end of the day you're going to get that break you've been yearning for! This might be the perfect time to investigate a new hobby, research a new vacation spot, or look further into a new investment opportunity. This isn't the right day to move forward on anything.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A recent conversation has got you thinking hard about making some changes in your life. It's an exciting feeling. But before you begin, you should think about your approach clearly. Ask yourself if you're going to make one big change or many small ones. It's important to be organised and have a plan even if the change you want to make in your life is to try to be more spontaneous!



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Why hide your affection for someone just because you're worried that they don't feel the same way? How they feel doesn't have to affect how you feel, so tell the truth as you feel it. Take those deep feelings you have and bring them up to the surface. All that daylight and oxygen will help them grow and flourish. It's natural to fear rejection, and everyone does get rejected at some point.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's a better time to play than it is to focus. It's not necessarily that you aren't capable of getting serious right now; it's just that there are going to be way too many fun things going on! You can try to resist the call, but you probably won't make it past noon before you've got to give. You can get the rest of your work done tomorrow. You deserve a chance to enjoy yourself!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A recent dream may have included some confusing visions that left you worried, but why? They aren't going to come true, and they aren't foretelling anything. Your subconscious was just entertaining itself while you slept, so don't let those weird images distract you. You've got a lot of wonderful things going on right now, and it would be a shame to not fully enjoy them.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Standing up for yourself today might be a little difficult, but it's absolutely necessary. You have a reputation for being a very flexible person who likes to find compromise, but unfortunately, some people may see that as an opportunity to treat you like a doormat. Stand up to the users and abusers. They'll fold up and give in as soon as they see that you're someone with backbone.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What were the main factors responsible for World War I?
- a. Nationalism and imperialism
- b. Militarism and entangling alliances
- c. Mutual rivalry, hatred and distrust within the countries
- d. All of the above

2. When did Christopher Columbus discover the West Indies?
- a. 1455 AD
- b. 1492 AD
- c. 1139 AD
- d. 1556 AD

3. When did the USSR formally disintegrate into 15 republics?
- a. 1991
- b. 1992
- c. 1993
- d. 1994

Answers: 1. d 2. b 3. a

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

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

BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| N | G | O | I |
| I | R | I | U |
| O | S | O | T |
| D | N | W | S |

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

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS ( APRIL 05 )

|         |             |          |       |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------|
| RAZE    | ADAM        | PUMP     | DANK  |
| ADIM    | ORISI       | SAMAR    | ASEP  |
| HOPPI   | INGMA       | CLIPPET  | THOR  |
| ENDUE   | RAINS       | PIATEN   |       |
| AGRES   | KILLS       | LALO     |       |
| CROP    | ABET        | GERENELL |       |
| GHART   | HOPSCOTCHES | DOI      |       |
| HES     | PALP        | ORAD     | TWOR  |
| ENS     | MEDD        | HOPPER   | CEIAS |
| REHOUSE | ERDISE      | GENNER   |       |
| OBITIS  | ANGRY       | DADEO    |       |
| IMPILLS | ADRIAC      | AGATHA   |       |
| LASE    | GRAIN       | HOPPER   | ORI   |
| INSE    | WALT        | LIES     | RPM   |
| KORT    | TABLE       | HOPPER   | CEPER |
| ENSTALS | BRJA        | ACER     |       |
| RIDE    | DANTE       | CIAPER   |       |
| GUANO   | DURO        | MAORI    |       |
| HOPPER  | IGARS       | HOPSKIT  | PAINT |
| ATOP    | PITLET      | ELLES    | TREI  |
| TAINS   | SEER        | SAIS     | SEWE  |

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



# Jordan's Prince Hamzah strikes defiant tone amid palace turmoil

Amman, Jordan - Jordan's Prince Hamzah, accused of a 'wicked' plot against his elder half-brother King Abdullah II, has struck a defiant tone, insisting he will not obey orders restricting his movement.

The government has accused Hamzah of involvement in a seditious conspiracy to 'destabilise the kingdom's security', placed him under house arrest and detained at least 16 more people.

But 41 year old Hamzah, who says he has been ordered to stay inside his Amman palace, vowed he would defy orders limiting his movement and communications, in an audio recording posted on Twitter late on Sunday.

'I don't want to make moves and escalate now, but of course I'm not going to obey when they say you can't go out, you can't tweet, you can't communicate with people, you're only allowed to see your family,' he said.

Hamzah - a former crown prince who was stripped of that title by Abdullah in 2004 - has emerged as a vocal critic of the monarchy, accusing Jordan's leadership of corruption, nepotism and authoritarian rule.

In a video he sent to the BBC on Saturday he bemoaned 'incompetence that has been prevalent in our governing structure for the last 15 to 20 years and has been getting worse'.

He charged that 'no-one is able to speak or express opinion on anything without being bullied, arrested, harassed and threatened'.

## 'Wicked slander'

Hamzah denied being involved in any 'nefarious' plot, but said he



This file photo shows Jordan's King Abdullah (second from right), Queen Noor, widow of the Late King Hussein (right) and Queen Rania (left) with Prince Hamzah, half-brother of King Abdullah, and his new wife Princess Basma Otoum during their wedding ceremony at the Royal Palace, in Amman on January 12, 2012 (AFP)

had been placed under house arrest, with his phone and internet cut, by Jordan's military chief, General Youssef Huneiti.

In the recording released Sunday, Hamzah said that 'when the head of the joint chiefs of staff comes and tells you this ... I think it's kind of unacceptable'.

He added that when Huneiti visited his home, 'I recorded what he said and sent it to my friends abroad and to my family, in case anything happens'.

King Abdullah (59) named Hamzah crown prince in 1999, in line with their father's dying wish, but stripped him of that title five

*This sedition was nipped in the bud. The plotters had linked up with foreign parties to carry out wicked plans aimed at destabilising the kingdom*

AYMAN SAFADI

years later and named his own son Prince Hussein, now 26, heir to the throne.

Hamzah's mother, American-born Queen Noor, defended her son, tweeting that she was 'praying that truth and justice will prevail for all the innocent victims of

this wicked slander'.

Jordan's official *Al-Rai* daily said in an editorial on Monday that the country 'has avoided a chapter of unrest thanks to the expertise of the Jordanian leadership and security services'.

It blamed Hamzah, arguing

that 'the King tried to solve some problems within the Hashemite family, but his brotherly desire to solve the problem ... was not received positively'.

Analyst Ahmad Awad said that the events were 'a first' in Jordan's history.

"This is the beginning of a crisis and not the end," said the head of the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics research institute in Amman.

"This shows that there is a need for political, economic and democratic reforms."

The crisis has laid bare divisions in a country usually seen as

a bulwark of stability in the Middle East.

Washington, major Gulf powers, Egypt and the Arab League were all quick to pledge their support for Abdullah and all his steps to ensure stability.

Jordan has only 10mn people but outsized strategic importance in a turbulent region. It borders Israel and the occupied West Bank, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

It host US troops and is home to millions of exiled Palestinians and more than half a million Syrian refugees.

*The Washington Post* had first

reported on Saturday that Hamzah had been 'placed under restriction' amid a probe into an alleged plot.

"This sedition was nipped in the bud," Jordan's Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ayman Safadi said on Sunday, charging that the plotters had linked up with foreign parties 'to carry out wicked plans aimed at destabilising' the kingdom.

Among those arrested were a former finance minister, Bassem Awadallah, who was chief of the royal court in 2007-08, and Sherif Hassan bin Zaid, a junior member of the royal family.

Safadi declined to identify the alleged foreign parties, but said authorities acted because the alleged conspirators were 'talking about timing'.

He also charged that an individual 'with links to foreign intelligence services' had offered to spirit Hamzah's wife out of the country by plane.

An Israeli who said he is a close friend of Hamzah, Roy Shaposhnik, said in a statement he had indeed 'extended an invitation for the prince's wife and children to stay at his home in Europe'. He said he had made 'this benign, humanitarian' offer after the prince had described a 'dynamic situation in Amman' and voiced 'concerns about the safety of his family'.

Shaposhnik stressed that he had 'never served in any capacity with any intelligence branch in Israel or any other country for that matter' and that he had 'no knowledge of, or any involvement with, events that are allegedly transpiring in Jordan'.

AFP

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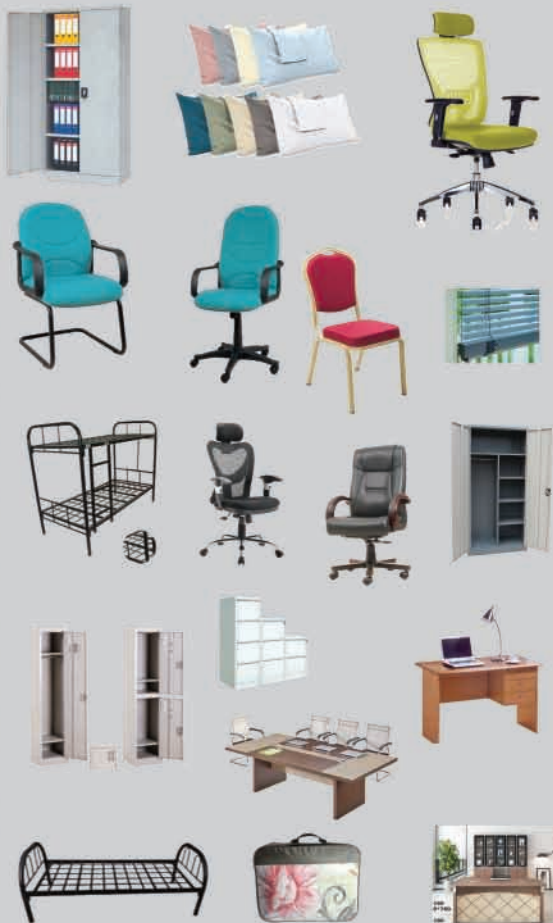


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SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

# NOT GREEN ENOUGH

Eric Randolph

Fashion's biggest firms are making slow progress in meeting promises to improve their environmental and social impact, according to a damning sustainability report released recently. The inaugural Sustainability Index by the *Business of Fashion* magazine, the first to offer direct comparisons between the industry's top firms, found they were often falling far short of their ambitious rhetoric on going green. "The global economy has ten years to avoid catastrophic climate change and an urgent duty to improve the welfare of the workers who make it tick," said the report, which was put together by a panel of sustainability experts from around the world. "Time is running out and simply stating an ambition to change is no longer good enough."

It graded the biggest 15 fashion companies across six areas: Transparency, emissions, water and chemicals, materials, workers' rights and waste.

Not one company scored more than 50 out of 100, with Swiss firm Richemont and US firm Under Armor faring worst with scores of just 14 and nine overall. They did not respond to requests for comment.

The best performers were French luxury house Kering and Nike, who scored 49 and 47 respectively.

"Many of fashion's biggest companies still don't know or don't disclose where their products come from, and the further down the supply chain you go, the more opaque things become," the report said.

"That enables exploitation and human rights abuses and creates difficulties measuring the industry's environmental impact."

## Just not working

A 2019 study by the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion found that fashion was the second-biggest consumer of water, and responsible for eight-to-10 per cent of global carbon emissions - 'more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined'.

The new Sustainability Index said many firms had targets to reduce emissions but little information on how they were faring.

Three firms - Richemont, Under Armour and LVMH - had not set emissions targets at all, it said.

Fewer than half were found to have clear goals on reducing the use of water and hazardous chemicals, and only four had a time-bound target to replace oil-based polyester - the most commonly-used fabric in the world - with recycled alternatives.

The worst results were on the issue of waste, with the report citing a recent Ellen MacArthur Foundation study that found 40 million tonnes of textiles were sent to landfills or incinerated every year.

"Companies are talking more about circularity than they are embracing it," it said. Scores on workers' rights were also dismal.

"We have been stuck with the current state of play for more than ten years and the discourse is still way ahead of the action," Anannya Bhattacharjee of the Asia Floor Wage Alliance was quoted as saying in the report.

"No matter how many committees are set up in factories, they are just not working," she added. "Commitments to a living wage are meaningless if buying prices do not cover the cost of living wages."

Nonetheless, the report sought a constructive tone, saying it was not designed to chastise or praise individual companies, but to encourage innovation.

"Environmental sustainability is bigger than any one brand, supplier or retailer. We all have to work together," wrote another of the authors, Edwin Keh, of the Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel.

AFP



# UNILEVER REMOVES WORD ‘NORMAL’ FROM BEAUTY PRODUCTS

Unilever announced last month that it was dropping the word 'normal' from its beauty products in an effort at a more inclusive and equitable image of its personal care brands.

The word 'normal' is often used in beauty products to describe what type of skin - normal to oily skin for example - is recommended for any product or brand.

'The decision to remove 'normal' is one of many steps that we are taking to challenge narrow beauty ideals, as we work towards helping to end discrimination and advocating for a more inclusive vision of beauty,' the consumer goods giant said in a statement.

'It comes as global research into people's experiences of the beauty industry reveals that using 'normal'



to describe hair or skin makes most people feel excluded.'

The company added that in addition to removing the word 'normal' as part of its Positive Beauty strategy, Unilever will not 'digitally alter a person's body shape, size, proportion or skin colour in its brand advertising, and will increase the number of advertisements portraying people from diverse groups who are under-repre-

sented'.

Sunny Jain, the head of Unilever's beauty business, said the aim was to get rid of stereotypes and to have a 'far more inclusive definition of beauty'.

"We know that removing 'normal' from our products and packaging will not fix the problem alone, but it is an important step forward," Jain added.

AFP

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

# Nobody should write off Real, says Zidane

Madrid, Spain - Zinedine Zidane believes Real Madrid are being underrated ahead of the first-leg of their Champions League quarterfinal against Liverpool on Tuesday.

Madrid have endured a patchy season but remain alive in the Champions League and La Liga, with the gap to Atletico Madrid down to three points with nine games left.

And if they can overcome Liverpool, they will have a semifinal to come against either Chelsea or Porto and be within sight of a 14<sup>th</sup> European triumph.

"I think my team has been underestimated," said Zidane in a press conference on Monday.

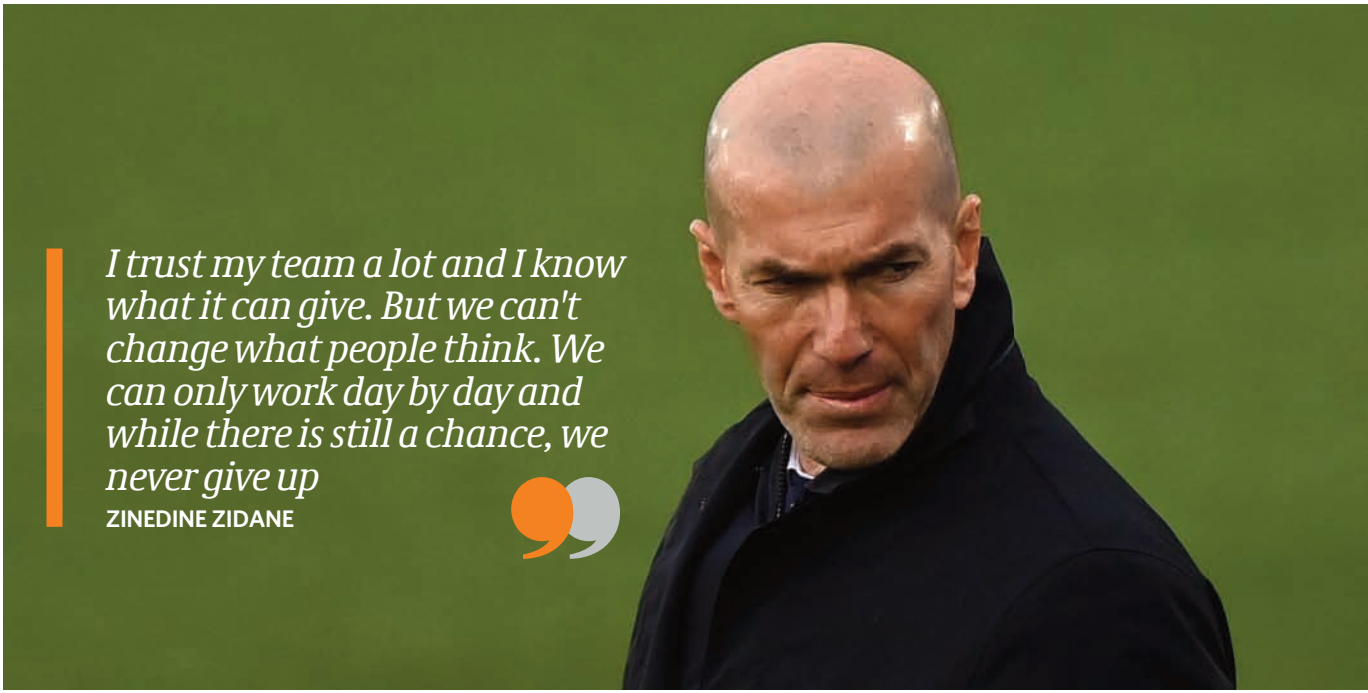
"I trust my team a lot and I know what it can give. But we can't change what people think. We can only work day by day and while there is still a chance, we never give up.

"We are going to fight for everything. We have had difficult moments this season and now we are better but it doesn't mean anything tomorrow."

Zidane raised the possibility of Eden Hazard being involved in the first-leg in Madrid on Tuesday, even though the Belgian has missed the last three weeks with a pelvic injury. Hazard trained at Valdebebas, on the outskirts of Madrid on Monday morning.

"We have talked a lot about this, Hazard has to be calm. The important thing is that he has recovered," said Zidane.

"If the player is well, I want him with the team. We are going



Real Madrid's French coach Zinedine Zidane during the Spanish League match against Eibar in Valdebebas, on the outskirts of Madrid, on Saturday (AFP)

to do things little by little and we'll see what happens."

Madrid will be without their captain Sergio Ramos, who injured his calf on international duty last month with Spain.

Ramos played a key role as Real Madrid beat Liverpool in the Champions League final in 2018, after his challenge forced Mohamed Salah to be substituted in the first half.

"I know Sergio, he is a teammate, a friend," said Madrid defender Nacho Fernandez. "It's a shame, nobody likes to be injured in moments as important as this and even more so when you know Sergio, who is the captain. "I'm sure that not just Salah but everyone from Liverpool will want to take revenge

and win the game, just like us."

Liverpool bounced back from their defeat in Kiev by winning the Champions League and Premier League over the next two seasons but, like Madrid, they have wavered since, falling behind Bayern Munich and Manchester City.

"We don't think about the past," said Zidane. "It's a big game for them and it's a different game from the final in Kiev. We're preparing for a different game."

"We are at a club where every day, every minute we live with pressure," added Nacho. "We know how to handle it, we try to use it in the best possible way, which is to lift a trophy at the end of the season."

## Injuries take a toll on Reds

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool are in a scrap just to make it into next season's Champions League via a top-four finish in the English Premier League.

Injuries have taken their toll. Captain Jordan Henderson and centre-backs Virgil Van Dijk, Joe Gomez, Joel Matip will all miss both legs of the Real tie and are unlikely to play again this season. The signings of Thiago Alcantara and Diego Jota last summer were designed to build from a position of strength, but both have also missed a large part of the campaign through injury.

However, there could yet be a happy ending to a difficult season. Saturday's comprehen-

sive 3-0 win at Arsenal was Liverpool's most complete performance of 2021.

AFP



UEFA  
CHAMPIONS  
LEAGUE

TUESDAY'S  
QUARTERFINALS  
FIRST-LEG

Manchester City  
vs Borussia Dortmund

Real Madrid vs Liverpool

(Both matches kick-off at 11pm,  
Oman time)



Man United's Marcus Rashford (C) scores past Brighton's goalkeeper Robert Sanchez (R) during the English Premier League match on Sunday

## Man United post comeback win against Brighton

### ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Manchester, UK - Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted he had to awaken Manchester United from their slumber as the Red Devils came from behind to beat Brighton 2-1 on Sunday.

Danny Welbeck headed the Seagulls in front against his former side as Brighton dominated the first-half at Old Trafford.

However, for the eighth time in the league this season, Solskjaer's men came from behind to close the gap on Premier League leaders Manchester City to 14 points thanks to second-half goals from Marcus Rashford and Mason Greenwood.

"We couldn't find our rhythm. We needed half-time to compose ourselves," said Solskjaer.

"Sometimes after the international break it takes time and then maybe the fireworks have to be lit at half-time."

Only an almighty collapse from Manchester City will deny Pep Guardiola's men a third Premier League title in four years with the runaway leaders needing just 11 points from their remaining seven games to become champions. But

Solskjaer can match United's best league finish since Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013 by claiming second place.

Victory opens up a four-point cushion over third-placed Leicester, while United hold a commanding 11-point lead over fifth-placed Tottenham and Liverpool to close in on Champions League qualification next season.

"It doesn't really matter what anyone else does, as long as we win and we get our points, we're in second place," added Solskjaer. "It's a long way up (to City) but we want to consolidate second place."

Just like in their previous meeting this season when United snatched a 3-2 win with a penalty awarded after the full-time whistle had been blown, Brighton were left to rue what might have been.

"I believe in the players and what we're doing and our performances have been consistently good. It's turning them into results that's the challenge," said Brighton boss Graham Potter.

### OTHER RESULTS

Aston Villa 3 Fulham 1.  
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# Sevilla hand Atletico title blow

### SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid stumbled again in La Liga on Sunday as they were beaten 0-1 by Sevilla, giving Barcelona the chance to move to within a point of the top of the table on Monday.

Marcos Acuna headed in the winner for Sevilla at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, with Atletico's grip on first place loosening even further and their in-form rivals primed to take advantage.

Real Madrid are only three points behind after they beat Eibar on Saturday and Barcelona will reduce their deficit from four points to one if they can win on Monday at home to Real Valladolid.

It means Spain's title race suddenly appears wide open, two months after Atletico sat 10 points clear of both Barca and Madrid, with a game in hand. They have managed only four wins in 12 games since then, with defeats to Chelsea costing them their place in the Champions League and regular slips in La Liga potentially squandering



Sevilla's Marcos Acuna (second from left) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal against Atletico Madrid in Seville on Sunday (AFP)

their shot at the title.

"Honestly I don't think it's about nerves," said Atleti coach Diego Simeone. "It's about having to play better, being a strong block, finding our best version."

After a narrow 1-0 win over bottom-club Alaves two weeks ago, Simeone might have hoped the international break would offer his team a chance to refresh and reset. Instead, they returned to another setback against a determined Sevilla side, who

strengthened their own hold on fourth place.

Sevilla deserved their victory and it might have been more comfortable had Lucas Ocampos not missed a first-half penalty, Atletico's Jan Oblak again coming to the rescue after Jose Gimenez fouled Ivan Rakitic.

But Acuna struck with 20 minutes left, heading in a looping Jesus Navas cross, even as Atletico protested against an Ocampos handball that had oc-

curred almost a minute before.

Mario Hermoso spurned a golden chance from close range and then Luis Suarez did brilliantly to set up Angel Correa late on but Sevilla's Bono, the goalkeeper who scored against Real Valladolid a fortnight ago, this time preserved the points with a crucial save.

### OTHER RESULTS

Elche 1 Real Betis 1, Cadiz 2 Valencia 1.

### FRENCH LEAGUE

#### Marseille beat lowly Dijon

Paris, France - Marseille condemned bottom side Dijon to an 11<sup>th</sup> defeat in a row but coach Jorge Sampaoli said there was lots of room for improvement following Sunday's 2-0 victory in Ligue 1.

Leonard Balerdi powered in a header at a corner in first-half stoppage time and Alvaro Gonzalez nodded in a second from another Dimitri Payet cross on 79 minutes. Marseille climbed to within a point of

fifth-placed Lens, who drew 1-1 with title hopefuls Lyon on Saturday.

### OTHER RESULTS

Angers 1 Montpellier 1, Bordeaux 2 Strasbourg 3, Lorient 1 Brest 0, Nantes 1 Nice 2, Reims 2 Rennes 2, Nimes 0 Saint-Etienne 2.

### SCOTTISH CUP

#### Rangers set up clash with Celtic

Glasgow, UK - Rangers set up a Scottish Cup fourth round clash with Celtic after thrashing League One Cove Rangers 4-0 on Sunday.

The Glasgow giants were paired together in the draw for the last-16, offering Celtic a chance to avenge Rangers winning the Scottish Premiership for the first time in ten years. The tie will take place on the weekend of April 17-18.

### OTHER RESULTS

#### GERMAN LEAGUE

Stuttgart 1 Werder Bremen 0 Union Berlin 1 Hertha Berlin 1.  
AFP



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# DE KOCK UNLIKELY TO FACE ANY SANCTION

Pakistan's Zaman run-out dismissal during second ODI sparks a controversy

## SOUTH AFRICA VS PAKISTAN SECOND ODI

Johannesburg, South Africa - Quinton de Kock did not intend to deceive Fakhar Zaman when the batsman was run out in the second ODI between Pakistan and South Africa on Sunday, and is not in breach of Law 41.5.1 on fake fielding.

That is the conclusion match officials are believed to have come to after reviewing footage of Sunday's match, in which Zaman was dismissed on 193 in the final over, with Pakistan 30 runs away from victory.

At the time, Zaman was pushing for a second run to keep strike and de Kock gestured towards the bowler's end, but a direct hit from Aiden Markram at long-off caught Zaman short of his ground at the striker's end.

ESPNcricinfo understands that in a post-match meeting, which officials regularly have to discuss the game, match officials re-looked at the dismissal and on studying all frames, were happy that de Kock called 'bowler's end', even before the first run was complete.

Although the law states that 'it is unfair for any fielder willfully to attempt, by word or action, to distract, deceive or obstruct either batsman after the striker has received the ball', de Kock's actions were not deemed to have been a trick, with officials satisfied that he was indicating for the throw to go to the bowler's end even as it came in at his end.

Tabraiz Shamsi tweeted that de Kock was calling for a fielder to back up the throw at the non-striker's end.

In the immediate aftermath of the game, Zaman agreed with that assessment and said it was his 'own fault', that he slowed down in completing the second run, because he looked back to see whether his partner, Haris Rauf, was safe.

Zaman chose not to blame de Kock. "The fault was mine as I was too busy looking out for Haris Rauf at the other end as I felt he'd started off a little late



South Africa's Quinton de Kock (left) appeals for a run-out dismissal of Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman in Johannesburg on Sunday

## Khan out of remainder of Pakistan's tour

Johannesburg, South Africa - Shadab Khan will play no further part in Pakistan's ongoing tour of South Africa and Zimbabwe because of a left toe injury he sustained while batting in the second ODI against South Africa in Johannesburg on Sunday, which has sidelined him 'for up to four weeks'.

A PCB statement on the matter said, "X-rays conducted following the match revealed an 'intra articular communicated fracture' though there is neither any displacement nor angulation. The injury will be treated conservatively and Shadab will undergo a four-week rehab."

Khan made useful contributions with ball and bat in the first ODI, which Pakistan won



Shadab Khan

by three wickets. He was less effective in the second game, returning none for 64 from nine overs and then scoring a 23-ball 13 in a steep chase.

The 22 year old has had a rough time with injuries in recent times, and was out with groin and hamstring problems most recently. Just a couple of weeks ago, Khan attributed his falling returns with the ball to

his struggles with fitness, saying, "I know I wasn't up to the mark and haven't done well with the ball lately. That is mainly because of the groin injury. My bowling action takes a lot of energy and causes pain and was directly affecting it."

Khan had missed the home white-ball series against Zimbabwe late last year after first complaining about the groin injury but recovered in time for the New Zealand tour. The problem, however, got worse during a tour game in Christchurch, but he was cleared to lead Pakistan in the T20Is after Babar Azam picked up a finger injury. Khan was later ruled out of the Test series, and remained with the squad for his rehabilitation.

Cricinfo

don't think he broke the rules in any kind of way. It was a clever piece of cricket.

"Maybe some people might criticise it for maybe not being in the spirit of the game. But it was an important wicket for us. Zaman was getting close to our target. Yeah, it was clever from Quinny."

Before that ball, Pakistan needed an unlikely 31 from six balls. They went on to lose by 17 runs, but if de Kock's act had been deemed illegal, Pakistan would have been allowed the two runs they attempted as well as five penalty runs, and the ball would have to be re-bowled, leaving them with 24 to get from six balls.

It wasn't the only point of contention towards the closing stages of the match. In the 47<sup>th</sup> over, Bavuma dropped a chance from Zaman, only for the ball to touch his hat, which had fallen off. The umpires didn't award any penalty runs, which is in line with the law (28.2.2), which states that it is 'not illegal fielding if the ball in play makes contact with a piece of clothing, equipment or any other object which has accidentally fallen from the fielder's person'.

Cricinfo

## RCB's Padikkal in quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19

### 2021 IPL

Bangalore, India - Devdutt Padikkal, the Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) opener, is in quarantine at his home in Bengaluru after testing positive for COVID-19 on March 22.

Padikkal, 20, is 'feeling well' and will 'join the RCB bio-bubble once his RT-PCR tests are negative', the franchise said in a statement. "The RCB medical team is in touch with Devdutt ensuring his safety and well-being." The rest of the squad is in the biosecure bubble in Chennai.

The news means Padikkal is all but set to miss the Royal Challengers Bangalore's first game of IPL 2021, the tournament opener against the Mumbai Indians in Chennai on April 9. The Royal Challengers' second match is on April 14, against the Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Padikkal was the leading

run-scorer for the RCB in IPL 2020, his debut season, scoring 473 runs at an average of 31.53 and a strike rate of 124.80. Coming into this season, he had a stellar Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy too, where he tallied 218 runs in six innings at an average of 43.60 and a strike rate of 134.56.

Padikkal's is the third case of an IPL player testing positive come to light. Apart from Padikkal, the Delhi Capitals' Axar Patel and the Kolkata Knight Riders' Nitish Rana too have tested positive for COVID-19.

Patel had checked into the team hotel in Mumbai on March 28 after arriving with a negative COVID-19 report, but returned a positive test after that. Rana, meanwhile, has tested negative and joined the team training sessions after an extended 12-day quarantine, also in Mumbai.

Cricinfo



## Quartararo races to victory in Doha

### DOHA MOTOGP

Doha, Qatar - Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha won the Doha MotoGP on Sunday with French compatriot Johann Zarco of Ducati-Pramac finishing second.

Spanish rookie Jorge Martin, the teammate of Zarco, was third after starting the race on pole position.

It was the first time two French riders had been on the podium in the sport's elite class since 1954 when Pierre Monneret won and Jacques Collet was third on home soil in Reims.

Quartararo joked modestly that he 'will enjoy the moment with a nice McDonald's tonight' following his win.

"It is easy to say I've not won a lot of races - but wow!" he added.

"I came from eighth, the pace and track were totally different from the fourth practice and warm-up.

"I always dreamed to win in Qatar, unfortunately I was not the first (this season)."

Zarco's second-place finish was enough to put him on top of the world championship after two rounds.

He has 40 points with Quartararo in second, just four points behind.



Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha celebrates his win in Doha on Sunday

### 'Happy for both of them'

"I was pretty happy that Jorge (Martin) took the pace, after half a race he had the pace - but I was still able to stay behind him," Zarco said.

"He was so clean in the style. It was this situation in four laps

to the end, Fabio came in the right place to overtake Jorge.

"I tried to overtake Fabio but I could not pass him. 'I'm so happy for both of them - victory of a French rider and podium for a teammate.'"

Spain's Alex Rins, on a Suzuki, and Yamaha's Maverick Vinales,

the winner of the season-opening Qatar MotoGP on the same Losail track last week, filled out the top-five.

Valentino Rossi, the seven-time MotoGP world champion, was 16<sup>th</sup> on the Yamaha-SRT, after starting in 21st place, the Italian's worst ever qualifying performance.

Italy's Francesco Bagnaia, on a Ducati, defending world champion Joan Mir of Spain on a Suzuki, South Africa's Brad Binder, of KTM, Australia's Jack Miller, on a Ducati, and Spanish Aprilia rider Aleix Espargaro completed the top-ten.

Miller had a second ninth-place finish in as many weeks despite a strong showing in free practice, with a bump with Mir dominating his race. The two exchanged words heatedly for the duration of the subsequent straight.

Martin was visibly delighted with the result, describing it as 'a difficult race - I am a rookie!'. "I think I did a really mature race. The passing was so difficult, if it was another rider (than Zarco) I would have taken him back for sure.

"I'm happy with third position, my first podium finish."

AFP



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# Hadi, Kindi slip to sixth spot

India's pair of KC Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar clinch the lead in 49er class at midway stage

Ashok Purohit  
Muscat

## 2021 MUSSANAH OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

Three days of racing, three different teams at the top. Such is the intense competition in the 49er class at the ongoing 2021 Mussanah Open Championship, an Olympic Qualifier for Asia and Africa, at the Millennium Resort Mussanah.

Oman's Olympic hopefuls, Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi, who were on top of the 49er leaderboard at the start of the day on Monday, failed to repeat their Sunday's display as they slid from the top to the sixth spot at the end of the day, which also marked the halfway stage of the competition.

Three more races were held on Monday to complete a total of nine and with Hadi and Kindi failing to claim a single podium finish on Monday, they have a nett score of 43 and trail the leader by 17 points.

If Sunday was Hadi and Kindi's best show so far in the event, with two first places and one second, the nearest they could achieve on Monday was a fifth. Earlier in the day, the pair recorded a poor 13<sup>th</sup> after beginning the day with a ninth place finish.

Clear blue skies welcomed the sailors on Monday with winds up to 15 knots blowing throughout the day. The ideal conditions seemed to go down well with India's pair of KC Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar, who hit a purple



Sailors in the 49er class line-up ahead of the start of a race during the Mussanah Open Championship at Millennium Resort Mussanah on Monday. Photo right: Thailand's Natthapong Phonoppharat competes in RS:X men class



patch with three podium finishes, including a win in the eighth round and a runner-up spot in the concluding race of the day.

Their display led the Asian Games bronze medallists to the top of the rankings after nine races with a nett score of 26, having been at the third place on the previous two days.

China's Hong Wei and Chao Xiang had claimed first day's honours while Hadi and Kindi sizzled on the second day. With three different leaders on each day, the next three days are expected to produce some

*Overall, we are happy with how the event is progressing and we want to stay focused and keep improving each day*

KC GANAPATHY  
INDIAN SAILOR

thrilling action with the teams battling for the lone spot in the class for the Tokyo Olympics.

South Africa's Benjamin Danile and Alex Burger are placed second (35 nett) while Wei-Xiang are third (36 nett). Thailand's Don Whitcraft and

Dylan Whitcraft are at fourth. Hong Kong's Akira Sakai and Russel Aylsworth are at fifth (43 nett), the same score as the Omani pair, but ahead on the basis of more race wins.

The other Omani team in the class - Ahmed al Hasani and

Abdul Rahman al Mashari - are struggling at 13<sup>th</sup> among the 14 competitors.

In his comments at the end of day's action, India's Ganapathy, said, "We started off the event a bit shaky, we hadn't raced for a year and a half coming into this, but my coach and I have been working each day to correct the previous day's mistakes. So, overall, we are happy with how the event is progressing and we want to stay focused and keep improving each day."

Elsewhere, in the RS:X men class, Oman's trio of Abdulma-

jeed al Hadrami, Faisal al Qutaiti and Al Mukhtar al Mujaini, continued with their modest performances, though Hadrami improved from his overnight 11<sup>th</sup> to ninth spot, while Qutaiti and Mujaini stay at the bottom. Thailand's Natthapong Phonoppharat remained the leader for the third successive day.

In the women's RS:X class, Charizanne Napa from the Philippines holds a narrow from Singapore's Amanda Ng Ling Kai and India's Ishwariya Ganesh.

The top-two in the 49er FX class switched places from Sun-

day with the team of Molly Highfield and Sandy Wing Chi Choi from Hong Kong taking over at the top from China's Ye Jin and Chen Shasha.

In the Laser Standard class and Laser Radial class rankings remain unchanged on Monday. In the Laser Standard, Singapore's Ryan Lo Jun Han leads Keerati Bualong of Thailand and India's Vishnu Saravanan and in the Laser Radial, India's Nethra Kumanan leads Dutch Emma Savelon with Indian teammate Ramya Saravanan in third.

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