

Oman's labour reforms will have positive impact on the economy: IMF

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's planned labour market reforms, in particular the recent removal of regulations that require employer consent – No Objection Certificate (NoC) – before expatriates switch employers, will have a 'positive impact' on the sultanate's economy, International Monetary Fund (IMF) has stated.

According to IMF, labour market reforms are important to raise competitiveness and foster the creation of private sector jobs.

'Adopting more flexible expatriate labour policies, the recent removal of regulations that require employer consent before expatriates switch employers is a welcome step,' IMF said in its *Article IV Consultation Staff Report*.

The report also stated that more comparable wages and compensation between the private and public sectors would reduce risks of skills mismatch or labour shortages in rapidly ex-



Jobseekers from North Batinah take a test conducted by Ministry of Labour on September 18 to fill a number of vacancies in government institutions

panding sectors.

'Plans to further reduce the wage gap between Omanis and expatriates by increasing fees for hiring expatriates should be implemented with caution to avoid undermining competitive-

ness. Further improving social protection, notably pension scheme for expatriates, would help attract more talent from abroad,' the report stated.

Omani authorities and IMF staff agreed on the key aspects

of the labour market reforms including promoting employment in the private sector.

'Incentivise Omanis to take private sector jobs; clear expectations about the limited prospects for future public-sector employment is helpful. The growth of public sector wages and benefits should not outpace that of the private sector,' the report said.

With regard to women employment, the report stated that measures that further improve working environment for women such as extending maternity benefits, improving childcare, and facilitating job searching would help better utilise the skills of women and promote inclusive growth.

'Encouraging female entrepreneurs under SME initiatives could generate positive effects to increase female labour participation.'

IMF also called for increasing the efficiency of public spending on education and vocational training.

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Is lack of transparency in executing projects slowing progress?

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As Oman embarks on a recovery path for the tourism sector following the COVID-19 pandemic, developing the sector should not be the responsibility of the government alone. Comprehensive development of any sector needs cooperation of all parties involved – private and public – calling for greater transparency and sharing of information.

At a meeting with tourism developers and the business community in Dhofar last month, H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, announced a tourism development plan for the governorate in order to bring the tourism sector back to pre-pandemic level as soon as possible.

According to H E Mahrouqi, to develop tourism destinations in Dhofar, the ministry is bracing to launch an investment management programme to the tune of RO6bn. The ministry's 'Comprehensive Tourism Development Plan' was unveiled at the meeting with few details on feasibility, scope, source of investment or initiatives targeted.



POTENTIAL OF THE TOURISM SECTOR AS THE BIGGEST EMPLOYER MUST BE EXPLORED

The minister, however, did state that the plan was drafted in coordination with the Oman Vision 2040 follow-up office and that it has been allocated massive investments through initiatives of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman Investment Authority and the Ministry of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotions.

Would it not be better for the authorities before announcing figures running into billions of rials to provide details of how such big-ticket investment projects will be financed? There is also a need to make follow-up announcements on such projects, informing the public as well as those looking to invest, on the progress made.

Oman has the requisite characteristics of a premier tourist destination – a diverse natural environment, unspoiled beaches, breath-taking mountains and a wealth of historical sites, including UNESCO World Heritage sites – all of which help to make the country a truly unique destination in the Middle East. To exploit this potential to the fullest, the concerned authorities need to do a lot more to achieve results as well as fulfil expectations in a short period of time.

Many believe that the slow progress and lack of transparency in executing big-ticket projects as well as endless workshops affect implementation of these projects.

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► NEWS BRIEFS

TWO-YEAR JAIL FOR USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS FOR PERSONAL PURPOSES: SAI
Muscat - State Audit Institution (SAI) has warned that anyone misusing public funds will face strict punishment.

A statement issued by SAI said, 'Use of public funds for personal purposes or in any way other than the purposes for which they are allocated is a crime and will be punishable with imprisonment of up to two years, removal from office and confiscation of funds.'

The institution, in cooperation with the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), recently conducted an awareness seminar on the importance of partnership in protecting public money, promoting integrity and preserving the nation's capabilities and gains.



Guidelines set for wedding halls to hold events



Oman crude price spikes to 3-year high on tight supplies

Landlords offer freebies to retain tenants

Compared to 1,712,798 expat workers at the end of 2019, there were 1,443,128 in Dec 2020

Muscat - With a large number of rental real estate properties lying vacant, tenants are becoming more demanding, while landlords are bending backwards and giving freebies to accommodate and retain tenants.

Some landlords are offering free WiFi and others are giving a one-two month rent waiver, while others are on their toes to provide any maintenance requirement immediately.

"The expectations of tenants are growing high due to oversupply of rental properties in the market. Now they expect the landlord to replace leaking taps in a day or two because they know they will find a cheaper and better property in the market," said Ihsan Kharouf, head of Savills Oman.

Mohammed Hidayatullah, building supervisor of Ahmed Industrial & Contracting Enterprises, said that his company includes full maintenance in rental agreements. "Keeping the market conditions in mind, we reduced rent by around ten per cent for all our tenants. We also offer discounts on rent if paid quarterly or yearly in advance."

The real estate market has felt the burden of the combined effect of the pandemic and mass exodus of expatriate workforce. Compared to 1,712,798 expat workers at the end of 2019, the number fell to 1,443,128 in December 2020, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).



Landlords must remember that there are around 70,000 plus empty units in the city. Even if they offer the property at below the market rate, there still will be many vacant units left to let

IHSAN KHAROUF

Retain and attract

Tenants are happy that landlords are more responsive to their grievances.

For M Ali, a Ruwi resident, the pandemic forced his company to reduce salaries compounding the misery of delayed salary transfers, which necessitated him to negotiate with his landlord.

"Surprisingly, the landlord's response was polite and understanding. For the first time our landlord visited and asked if any

maintenance was needed."

Ali got a reduction of RO20 in his monthly rent and a one-month rent waiver for renewing the tenancy agreement.

Another tenant, Abdul Salaam moved to a four-bedroom villa in Ghubra from a three-bedroom flat in Al Khuwayr recently. The apartment block in which Salaam was residing was almost empty and building maintenance was deteriorating by the day.

"Since the pandemic started, maintenance started taking longer and at times they removed fittings from the vacant flats to replace in the tenants' flats."

He finally decided to move out and found a villa which fits his needs and in the area of his choice.

"Nowadays, landlords are more flexible compared to the pre-pandemic times. With a little more money, we are living in a better environment. Since schools are online now, there is scope of some physical activity for kids and for us here."

Besides the economic slowdown and job losses due to the pandemic, the removal of electricity subsidies has added to the woes of landlords.

"People allocate a combined

budget for electricity, water and rent. When someone's electricity bills double, it is obvious they try to balance it and no one can cut the usage of electricity or water. The only option left is either re-negotiate the rent or move to a cheaper apartment to manage the budget," said a tenant looking to relocate to reduce his monthly outgoings.

Kharouf, from Savills, believes that landlords who are luring tenants survive and see a high occupancy rate.

"Landlords can choose whichever response they like. They can let properties at a somewhat higher rate than the market with 60 per cent occupancy, or if they wish 100 per cent occupancy they need to keep it slightly below the market rate."

Continued on Page 02

WHO backs antibody treatment for COVID-19

Paris, France - The World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday recommended the synthetic antibody treatment Regeneron for COVID-19, but only in patients with specific health profiles.

Persons with non-severe COVID-19 who are nonetheless at high risk of hospitalisation can take the antibody combo, as should critically ill patients unable to mount an adequate immune response, according to a WHO finding published in *BMJ*.

Regeneron is only the third treatment for COVID to be recommended by the global health authority, which added it to its "living WHO guideline" on drugs for COVID-19.

In July, WHO gave the nod to a class of drugs that act to suppress a dangerous overreaction of the immune system to the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID. These medicines work well in tandem with corticosteroids, which were first recommended by WHO for COVID patients in September 2020.

The Regeneron cocktail of synthetic antibodies - casirivimab and imdevimab - has been found to reduce the risk of hospitalisation for unvaccinated, elderly or immunosuppressed patients with COVID, according to three clinical trials that have yet to be peer reviewed, according to the *BMJ*.

For the second category of patient covered by the new WHO recommendation, another trial has reported a reduced number of deaths, and cases requiring mechanical ventilation, in patients taking the drugs.

"For all other COVID-19 patients, any benefits of this antibody treatment are unlikely to be meaningful," WHO concluded.

AFP

FRIDAY PRAYERS RESUME



Friday prayers in Oman resumed after more than 18 months on September 24. Mosques in Muscat strictly followed the new protocol while allowing the faithful for Friday prayers. Worshippers had to show their vaccination certificates, besides wearing face masks, carrying their own prayer mats and maintaining social distancing (Syed Fasiuddin/Muscat Daily)



(For illustrative purpose)

Decision to waive fees for private sector hailed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The head of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has praised the decision of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic to support private sector institutions and facilitate their recovery through a host of benefits and measures announced last week.

Eng Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman, OCCI, said that the exemption orders issued by the Supreme Committee, in addition to urging banks and finance companies to cooperate with affected borrowers, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and reschedule loans without fees, "will contribute to stimulating the economy and developing the private sector".

"This will ensure the continuity of companies, especially those that are going through a critical stage, helping them to withstand the situation and once more get going," he said.

The chairman expressed the OCCI's appreciation for the response of government agencies to the demands of the OCCI and the private sector to provide packages of support and facilities to private sector institutions.

The Supreme Committee, after studying the impact of the pandemic on the private sector establishments, decided to waive fines and fees for a number of businesses. Some of them are:

► Waiving fines charged against licences issued by government departments for various businesses included in Annex (1) of the decision, which have expired or are due to expire through the

ASMED initiative to support SMEs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has launched an initiative called Mazaya.

"The initiative aims to provide incentives and facilities to SMEs during the pandemic. The incentives include providing all services needed by owners of SMEs registered with the authority," an official at ASMED said.

"The initiative targets sectors such as real estate, finance, insurance, travel, tourism, hotels, healthcare, communications, interior design, education, management and others. There are about 22,571 small and medium enterprises that hold 'Riyada card' in the various governorates of the sultanate. The authority urges owners of these companies to register in this initiative."

Talking about ASMED's efforts, he said, "The authority recently signed an agreement with Al Noman China Wholesale Market to provide 16 outlets inside the market to

support SMEs in South Batinah."

According to the official, the agreement will provide a number of benefits for the owners of SMEs such as rent exemption for a period of four months, 45 per cent reduction in rent, and provision of technical support in the use of equipment imported from China.

On April 4, the authority also launched a new programme called Raqma - which translates to 'digitisation' - in partnership with Google Developer Group. The programme aimed to train 25 SMEs for a period of three months.

"The programme aimed to support and empower SMEs by changing their technology paths, accelerate digital transformation, enhance competitiveness in the sector, and provide high-quality products and services," the official said.

Meanwhile, the total number of SMEs registered with ASMED at the end of June 2021 stood at 54,726, compared to 44,448 in the same period of 2020, comprising a rise of 23.1 per cent, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

period from June 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021.

► Waiving fines charged against renewal of non-Omani labour

cards and associated fines for cards which have expired or are due to expire in the period from June 1, 2020 to December 31,

2021.

► Waiving fines accrued on various establishments and companies due to non-renewal of their commercial registers and licences, provided they do renew the registers and licences during 2021.

► Allowing employers to renew expired labour permits for workers who are still abroad, while at the same time waiving related fines resulting during the period from June 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021.

► Absolving SMEs of entrepreneurship card renewal fees charged against all expired commercial activities during 2021.

The committee also took the following decisions valid till December 31, 2021:

► Granting labour permits in lieu of workers who have already left for all segments and as per the prescribed fees set for each segment.

► Urging banks and financing firms to cooperate with 'affected' borrowers, notably SMEs (holders of Riyada business cards) by re-scheduling loans, without charging fees.

► Absolving SMEs of registration fees in 'Isnad' system affiliated to the Tender Board.

► Absolving SMEs of land usufruct (development) fees and postponing the repayment of outstanding dues.

► Postponing the repayment of SMEs' premiums for holders of Riyada business cards benefiting from the previous Al Raffd Fund financing loans.

► Waiving rental fees payable by owners of SMEs for the activities indicated in Annex (1) who rent real estate properties owned by government departments and authorities.

Is lack of transparency in projects slowing progress?

Continued from Page 01

It is prudent to have a complete plan of action, broken down into minute details, before announcing big projects to the public. Also, clarity on how such financial targets can be achieved will build confidence among investors and the public.

In Muscat, tourism projects worth more than RO15bn are being studied even as others have been approved in the governorate. According to the authorities, this will allow a variety of options while simultaneously continuing to implement high-level luxury projects that are wor-

thy of the capital, Muscat. However, since announcement of such projects, there has been no clarity or details.

Even though a number of key projects aimed at achieving the country's ambitious goals are in various stages of development across the sultanate, it is not clear how some other projects like the proposed redevelopment of Port Sultan Qaboos, which is likely to benefit tourism and trade in Muttrah, are moving forward. There is need for more clarity and transparency on unfinished projects from the authorities concerned.

There are many hurdles that

must be overcome if the sultanate wants to stake claim of being a top-class tourist destination. Aside from the need to enhance infrastructure, the sultanate also suffers a shortage of local skills in the tourism and hospitality industry, which needs to be addressed urgently.

The tourism sector has the potential of being the largest employer. A judicious approach towards educating and training national cadres to exploit the true potential of the sector will help solve the growing unemployment problem and also provide much needed impetus to the economy.



Nearly RO50,000 worth of honey sold in 8 days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An eight-day marketing event to promote and sell Omani honey saw three tonnes of honey worth RO49,423 being sold in Muscat.

A good turnout was witnessed at the marketing outlets that were established in two malls in Muscat and on the electronic platforms Asal Oman and Al Nahal, from August 24 to 31, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

A ministry official said, "Fifty-five beekeepers from various governorates participated in the marketing outlets, showcasing a variety of Omani honey."

Setting up marketing outlets to sell Omani honey is part of the ministry's drive to support beekeepers. The outlets were set up in Oman Avenues Mall and Muscat Grand Mall.

Oman stresses importance of Middle East free of weapons

Vienna, Austria - Oman has underscored the significance of activities and programmes undertaken by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to utilise atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

The sultanate pointed out that this approach contributes to the achievement of sustainable development goals.

This was stated in the sultanate's speech before the 65th round of IAEA General Conference held in Vienna on Thursday. The speech was de-

livered by Yousef Ahmed al Jabri, Oman's permanent representative to international organisations in Vienna.

The sultanate affirmed its stance on making the Middle East region free of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear arms.

"This can be achieved only through the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the application of the IAEA's comprehensive safeguards," Jabri said.

ONA

Landlords offer freebies to retain tenants

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"They must, however, remember that there are around 70,000 plus empty units in the city. Even if they offer the property at below the market rate, there still will be many vacant units left to let."

While some landlords are offering freebies, "heavy capital investments like providing ACs are not happening in older properties", Kharouf said.

Going forward

Hidayatullah's company manages around 400 flats and is doing well by offering freebies.

"Occupancy is almost 100 per cent, with only six flats vacant. We find new tenants in a maximum of three months," he added.

To retain and attract new tenants, Hidayatullah's company is planning to provide free AC maintenance and free Internet.

"We always provided free maintenance and now since the removal of electricity subsidies, we are even replacing old fittings with more efficient electrical fittings."

Ali remarked, "Acquiring new tenants is difficult in this current situation. I think landlords realised it now. This was not the case earlier."

For Kharouf, "whatever movement is happening in the rental real estate market is like musical chairs".

He is hopeful that with the resumption of flights, newly recruited expatriate workforce will start moving into the country bringing some relief for the rental real estate sector.

(Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin)

Guidelines set for wedding halls to hold events

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Supreme Committee has advised licensed wedding halls and hotel establishments to notify concerned municipalities at least 72 hours before holding events. Also, filling out a pledge form, with signatures of both guests and employees, is mandatory.

The committee has barred non-vaccinated employees and visitors from attending such events where a notice board must be placed at the entrance clearly indicating the risk of COVID-19.

'The facility will bear responsibility in the event that an attendee becomes infected with COVID-19,' the Supreme Committee stated.

The hotel facility will bear responsibility in the event that an attendee of an event becomes infected with COVID-19

SUPREME COMMITTEE

'Physical distancing between chairs must be maintained and records kept of employees' entry and exit time, besides ensuring they are fully vaccinated.'

There is also need to provide sanitisers and ensure the number of attendees does not exceed 50 per cent of capacity. 'There should be commitment to the procedures set by the Ministry of Health (MoH) regarding quaran-



tine and the time period for the same,' the statement said.

'Documentation of cleaning and disinfection operations in the work records is required, mentioning the disinfectant used, if possible. Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of common surfaces using appropriate materials at all times, focusing on door handles, stair handrails, chairs, tables, TV controls, air conditioners, projectors and speakers.'

To prevent spread of the virus, it is necessary to be vaccinated according to the MoH's protocol. 'There must be commitment to temperature checks of workers at the beginning of each shift and after every six hours of work, and keeping records of the same.'

Wearing face masks is mandatory for all employees and customers, the statement added.

Ministries launch initiative to document butterfly species

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) have launched an initiative to document the sultanate's butterfly species.

"The initiative will include two competitions - a butterfly photography competition and the second of recording the maximum number of butterfly species. The initiative is supported by Oman Indian Fertilizer Company (Omifco)," an MoHERI official said.

He added that the initiative aims to educate the community about indigenous butterflies species. "It will help classify and update scientific data about Omani butterfly species, besides promoting tourist destinations in the sultanate."

MoHERI launched the initiative



through an app called Tajmee. Anyone wishing to participate must share data and pictures of local butterfly species through the app. "The participant must be the copyright owner of the photos, which will become the property of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and MoHERI at the end of the competition and after announcement of the results," the ministry official said.

"The app will enable users to upload pictures of plants, animals and aquatic organisms,

too." December 15 has been set as the deadline to participate in the competition and results will be announcement at the end of the month.

"The last report published on the types of butterflies in Oman dates back to 1996," the official said.

"The report included species observed in the Governorate of Muscat in the period from 1993 to 1996 and those recorded in the National Insect Collection at the Natural History Museum."

MHT to hold workshop to support adventure tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To support and promote adventure tourism, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) will hold a workshop for travel and tourism offices in Muscat on September 27.

A statement issued by MHT said, 'The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will hold a workshop for travel and tourism agencies at 9.30am on September 27 in the ministry's building. The workshop aims to support adventure tourism and discuss providing safety and security methods for the same.'

Last month, H E Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, issued a decision (No 124/2021) to add organising adventure trips to the activities of travel and tourism offices.

The decision states that li-



censed companies must obtain a licence to organise tourist trips for groups or individuals inside the sultanate or abroad, according to programmes that include transportation or reservations in hotels or tourist establishments.

Services by these companies include selling tickets and facilitating transportation (air, marine and land). The companies can provide special services for tourists like getting entry and exit

visas, insurance services, and hotel reservations.

The licensed companies must have a certificate granted by the security and safety auditor to practise tourism activities, which include adventure trips. The decision states that it is not permissible to engage in the activity of organising adventure tourism trips, except after obtaining a licence.

'The licensed company, while

engaging in the activity of organising adventure tourism trips, must provide the tourist with detailed information about the trip, potential risks, and instructions. It must insure tourists against all risks involved,' it stated.

According to the decision, companies cannot organise adventure tourism trips in prohibited sites.

Meanwhile, MHT said that the tourism sector lost about RO1.3bn due to COVID-19.

The number of tourism sector employees decreased by 9.5 per cent from 157,227 in December 2019 to 142,247 in the same period in 2020.

'The ministry has developed a comprehensive plan for recovery consistent with several models, by gradually activating the tourism sector, as well as focusing on a package of projects and initiatives to stimulate domestic tourism.'

Oman's labour reforms...

Continued from Page 01

'Efforts to improve the quality of education and vocational training to afford jobseekers with necessary skills to enter the labour market and raise their productivity are important. The government's ongoing efforts to promote training and employment programmes in partnership with the private sector are welcome.'

To facilitate reallocation of workers from hard-hit sectors and help mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and fiscal consolidation on the vulnerable, IMF said authorities have taken several measures, including simplifying the multiple minimum wages linked to qualification levels to a single minimum wage of RO325 per month, a time-bound wage subsidy of RO200 per month for first time Omani jobseekers to facilitate private sector employment of Omanis (initially expected to cover about 15,000 persons) and hiring of 15,000 jobseekers in the public sector.

'The update to Oman labour law is ongoing and is expected to improve the flexibility of the labour market.'

With Oman Vision 2040, setting out the goal for a knowledge-based society and competitive national talents via inclusive education, lifelong learning, and scientific research, the reforms, if fully implemented, are expected to improve human resources and help improve labour productivity over the medium term.

22-year-old Omani shows what it takes to be a successful farmer

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Equipped with the latest farming techniques and modern greenhouses, an increasing number of citizens are venturing into farming. A young farmer in the wilayat of Al Qabel in North Sharqiyah governorate is now producing around 1,000kg of papaya every month and bearing fruits of an effort to diversify his crops.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mohammed Hilal al Harthi, 22, said he started growing papaya two years ago with the main goal to diversifying his income source.

"I followed experts' recommendations on expansion and diversification of crop production to boost food security, which has become a key goal for the country that targets self-sufficiency in domestic crops," he said.

"With papaya, I began in 2019 by cultivating less than an acre of land. In the next season, my project expanded with the government providing a lot of seedlings. I cultivated two acres, one for papaya and the other for cucumber. My farm currently has a monthly production of around 1,000kg of papaya."

Harthi visited several countries to gain knowledge and insights into the farming methods employed in papaya cultivation. "Today, farmers in the sultanate grow a wide variety of fruits all



We are working on six greenhouses in our farm. We grow papaya all year round. We rely on modern agriculture methods

MOHAMMED AL HARTHI

year round," he said.

"We are currently working on six greenhouses in our farm. We grow papaya all year round. We rely on modern agriculture methods, including drip irrigation. This reduces time and labour. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources offers us integrated programmes, helping us till the land and equipping us with modern irrigation systems and organic fertilisers."

According to Harthi, farmers

are able to grow crops in a controlled environment with the use of modern greenhouses. "This allows us to diversify crops or grow crops that are not normally suited to a particular climate. A key aspect to this is being able to maintain a stable root zone temperature that promotes healthy growth and oxygen retention within the nutrient solution."

He said that he was grateful to Omani Agricultural Association for its supports and for conducting meetings with farmers for exchange of experiences.

Harthi utilises social media platforms to sell his harvest to wholesale traders and retailers. He now plans to increase revenue from cultivating high-quality papaya to gain a competitive edge in the local market. "I hope to grow a lot of diverse crops and increase the cultivated area. I urge Omani youth and jobseekers to take up farming."

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Oman crude price spikes to 3-year high on tight supplies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With global oil prices rising for a third week in a row, Oman crude prices on Friday increased to a near three-year peak, boosted by tight global supplies.

At the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), Oman crude contract price (for November delivery) crossed US\$75 per barrel mark on Friday before closing at US\$74.89 - reaching a high last seen on October 31, 2018.

Global benchmark Brent oil prices also jumped on Friday to the highest level in almost three years, boosted by tight supplies particularly in the US, analysts said.

In late Friday afternoon deals, Brent North Sea crude (for delivery in November) hit US\$77.87 per barrel - the highest level since October 29, 2018.

"The price rise is being facilitated by limited supply coupled with robust demand, causing the oil market to tighten noticeably," said Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch.

Brent prices later stood at US\$77.68, up 0.6 per cent from Thursday.

The US oil benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude (for November delivery)



rose 0.4 per cent to US\$73.60 a barrel on Friday.

Global supplies have been disrupted because US production remains hampered by ongoing fallout from Hurricane Ida in the Gulf of Mexico and Louisiana.

The US is both the world's largest consumer and producer of crude oil.

"Underpinning the latest bout of price strength is a tightening supply backdrop," added PVM analyst Stephen Brennock.

"Latest weekly data showed

[US] domestic crude stocks fell to their lowest level in three years amid continued production outages in the Gulf of Mexico."

Brennock concluded, "Hurricane Ida may be long gone but it is still causing problems for the US."

With sharp increases in global crude prices this year, the average price of Oman crude during the first eight months of 2021 surged by nearly 48 per cent compared to the average price recorded in 2020.

The sultanate achieved an average price of US\$67.9 per barrel for its oil shipments during the January-August period of this year, which is 47.6 per cent higher against the average price of US\$46 recorded in 2020, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

As per the DME data, the average price of Oman crude in September so far has been at US\$72.73 per barrel. (With inputs from AFP)

Bank Nizwa raises RO70mn through rights issue

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank in Oman, on Saturday announced the successful completion of its rights issue of RO70mn which was open for subscription from September 7 until September 16.

Bank Nizwa had announced the rights issue of new 736.953mn ordinary shares at an issue price of 95bz per share, increasing the bank's capital by over RO70mn.

In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), the bank said the allotments of all subscriptions have been approved by the Capital Market Authority.

It said the final procedures relating to updating and listing of



new shares at Muscat Clearing & Depository Company and the MSX are being carried out. The new share capital will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange today.

Bank Nizwa's new issued share capital post-rights issue shall be increased to RO220mn, comprising 2,236,953,032 shares, the bank said.

"We would like to express our

utmost appreciation to all subscribers and shareholders for their continuous support, trust and confidence in Bank Nizwa," said Khalid al Kayed, chief executive officer of Bank Nizwa.

By increasing the capital, Bank Nizwa will be geared up for the next phase of growth and increase returns for shareholders, the bank said in August while launching the rights issue.

Oman Fisheries appoints new CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Fisheries Company has announced the appointment of Sulaiman Shutayiet al Ghanami as the new chief executive officer of the company.

"We are pleased to announce to our valued shareholders that the board of directors has approved the appointment of Su-

laiman Shutayiet al Ghanami as chief executive officer effective from October 1, 2021," Oman Fisheries said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Earlier in July, Dr Khalid Mansoor Sabeel al Zadjali had resigned from the position of CEO of Oman Fisheries Company due to personal reasons with effect from July 25.

Ghanami holds a master's

degree in business administration from Franklin University, US.

He has held several leadership positions in local and international companies. Ghanami has extensive experience in corporate finance, strategy, business management, external audit and strategy implementation with companies such as PwC, Oman Drydock Company and Oman Air.

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UK urges calm over shut fuel stations



An aerial view shows customers queueing in their cars to access an Asda petrol station in east London, UK on Saturday (AFP)

London, UK - The UK government on Friday urged the public against panic-buying fuel as some petrol stations closed pumps due to a lack of tanker drivers.

The Sun newspaper headlined its front page 'We're running on empty', as fears grew of a repeat of 2000, when protests over high fuel prices brought the country to a virtual standstill.

This time, the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit have created a shortage of lorry drivers, hitting the supply chain and leaving shelves empty at some supermarkets and shops.

But Transport Secretary Grant Shapps insisted there was no fuel shortage and the government would get more lorry drivers delivering stock.

"The advice would be to carry on as normal," Shapps told Sky News after a number of UK

petrol stations run by BP and ExxonMobil-owned Esso were forced to close.

Drivers were seen queuing outside some petrol stations, where some said they had run out of some types of fuel.

At Hildenborough in south-east England, a BP petrol station was closed entirely and its pumps wrapped in plastic. 'Sorry we're out of fuel. We are working hard to fix this', signs read.

At least 50 of BP's 1,200 service stations were out of at least one type of fuel, The Times reported, while BP told AFP a 'handful of sites' had temporarily closed.

Motorists have been told not to rush to fill up. 'There is no shortage of fuel in the UK and people should continue to buy fuel as normal,' Downing Street said on Thursday.
AFP

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX index declines as sluggish trend continues

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) continued to witness sluggish trend last week. The benchmark MSX30 index ended the week lower marginally by 0.20 per cent.

All the sub-indices closed in red territories for the week. Services, Industrial and Financial indices closed lower by 0.86 per cent, 0.63 per cent and 0.33 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index also closed lower by 0.66 per cent.

Local news

►Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) Yibal Khuff Project (YKP) has started pro-

duction, marking a key milestone for the landmark facility. The installation's first sour wells were opened earlier this month introducing sour oil to the YKP Central Processing Facility, and the project has already started exporting crude oil to the Main Oil Line. The plant's capacity will be ramped up over the coming months. Spanning an area of 1.68 sqkm, YKP is the second largest, and most technically complex project in PDO's history. The mega project will be delivering - when fully operational - 5mn cubic metres of gas per day and around 20,000bpd of

crude. Around 1,200 Omanis have been employed on site in the construction of the facilities, with a further 200 nationals deployed as fully qualified welders. Around US\$400mn were also awarded to Omani companies for the provision of goods and services. ►Expatriates who buy flats under Oman's usufruct scheme will continue to own their properties, even after they leave the country, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MOHUP) has said. "Non-Omani owners who buy real estate in multi-storey residential and commercial build-

ings can keep the property even when they return to their home countries on expiry of their work contracts at a company or an organisation in Oman," said a ministry official. The expatriates will also be able to rent the properties through a mediation office, a law firm, a realtor to manage, rent, or oversee their assets whether they are within or outside Oman. As of now, expatriates can buy properties in buildings in Amerat, these include Al Amerat Al Hashiyah 1, Al Nahda City phases 2, 3, 4 and 5, Al Amerat Al Muhaj phases 1 and 2. In Boushar,

expatriates can buy properties in the phases 1, 2 and 3, Misfah phase 2, Ghala Heights phases 1 and 2, Boushar Al Watiyah phase 2, and Al Khuwair phase 2. ►Oman unemployment rate stood at 3.2 per cent in August 2021 compared to the same rate in July 2021. Unemployment amongst females stood at 8.7 per cent while unemployment in males stood at 1.9 per cent in August 2021. Amongst the age group, 15-24 recorded the highest unemployment at 23.4 per cent, followed by 6 per cent for the age group 25-29

and 2 per cent for the age group 30-34.

Recommendation

Globally markets went higher after a key unit of China's Evergrande Group said it would make a coming interest payment on its bonds. In the US, Federal Reserve announced that it could begin to reduce its bond purchases soon and raise interest rates as early as next year.

Oil price witnessed a good rally and was closer to its year-to-date high of US\$77.16 per barrel. Some of the international oil giants also announced

that demand would be seen close to pre-pandemic level as early as 2022.

The regional markets' performance remained mixed. On-going IPOs in Saudi Arabia and UAE witnessed a sizable interest. Adnoc Drilling raised its IPO size as well on the back of sizable interest from the investors.

In the local market, market turnover and volumes remained low in the market owing to absence of news and catalysts. However, things are expected to heat-up in coming weeks once the third quarter results season kicks-in.

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China declares all cryptocurrency activities illegal



Beijing, China - China's central bank on Friday said all financial transactions involving cryptocurrencies are illegal, sounding the death knell for the digital trade in China after a crackdown on the volatile currencies.

The global values of cryptocurrencies including Bitcoin have massively fluctuated over the past year partly due to Chinese regulations, which have sought to prevent speculation and money laundering.

"Virtual currency-related business activities are illegal financial activities," the People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in an online statement on Friday, adding that offenders would be 'investigated for criminal liability in accordance with the law'.

The notice bans all related financial activities involving cryptocurrencies, such as trading crypto, selling tokens, transactions involving virtual currency derivatives and 'illegal fundraising'.

Bitcoin, which had already been falling before the announcement, sank by as much as 8.9 per cent to US\$41,019 in European afternoon trading before recovering slightly later in the day.

The central bank said that in recent years trading of Bitcoin and other virtual currencies had become 'widespread, disrupting economic and financial order, giving rise to money laundering, illegal fund-raising, fraud, pyramid schemes and other illegal and criminal activities'.

This was 'seriously endangering the safety of people's assets', the PBOC said.

While crypto creation and trading have been illegal in China since 2019, further crackdowns this year by Beijing warned banks to halt related transactions and closed much of the country's vast network of bitcoin miners.

Friday's statement by the central bank sent the strongest yet signal that China is closed to crypto.

Analysts say China fears the proliferation of illicit investments and fundraising from cryptocurrency in the world's second-biggest economy, which also has strict rules around the outflow of capital. The crypto crackdown also opens the gates for China to introduce its own digital currency, already in the pipeline, allowing the central government to monitor transactions.

AFP

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OAB launches new direct remittance service

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced the launch of the ‘iSend’ feature for money remittance, further enhancing the portfolio of innovative digital banking facilities and products that it provides. The new service is a secure, fast, and easy way of sending money internationally, anywhere and at any time, through the OAB Online App and is underpinned by Mastercard’s proprietary remittance solution – Mastercard Send.

Commenting on the new feature, Rashad al Shaikh, head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB said, “iSend is an exclusive remittance solution that enables our customers to carry out money transfers within seconds, effortlessly and conveniently. As compared to the traditional swift, this new service offer more convenience, value addition and is also aligned with our key strategy of enhancing digital financial inclusion. Through iSend, we can help citizens and customers abroad send money through our secure and real-time payment infrastructure. To encourage more customers to utilise this feature, we are offering it as a complimentary facility to all our customers for a limited time. As we look forward to our phase one roll-out, we continue to enrich our offerings to improve overall customer experience.”

Through Mastercard Send, financial service providers can seamlessly process digital payments leveraging its global network through a single con-



nection. Furthermore, these cross-border payments can reach almost anywhere in the world with certainty and predictability, and without back-end charges. Mastercard’s platform plays a key role in improving world-wide connectivity, by providing new and enhanced innovation across the global digital ecosystem.

Nadia Ghissassi, country manager, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait & Iraq, Mastercard, said, “As Oman Vision 2040 is underway, the ability to make fast, frictionless cross-border transfers is crucial in driving the country’s digital transformation efforts. Oman Arab Bank customers will now be able to send money to their family and friends across

the world with increased convenience and peace of mind. As a trusted technology partner, Mastercard is committed to empowering consumers to connect to the digital economy in simpler and more secure ways.”

With the new feature, customers with an Oman Arab Bank account can send money to friends and family abroad with just a few taps, from the comfort of their home or office. During phase one, the bank has launched the service as an account-to-account solution and will add more options in subsequent phases.

Currently, the transfer service is available to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Singapore, UAE, and the EU SEPA (coun-

tries that use Euro as their currency). Phase two will see the extension of the service to the Philippines, Egypt, Morocco, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate.

Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 53 branches and representative offices with 160 ATMs spread across Oman. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services through its OAB Online App. Customers can now digitally open an account and benefit from several other services, directly from the convenience of their mobile phones.

Korean embassy awards colouring contest winners

The Embassy of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman held an award ceremony on September 20 for the 2021 Colouring Contest organised by the embassy.

A total of 256 artworks were submitted for the ‘2021 Colouring Contest’ which was held from July 15 to August 18.

The artworks were divided into three groups (children, teenage, adults) and from each group 1st, 2nd and 3rd winners were selected plus some participation prize winners.

H E Kim Chang-kyu, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, invited the winners of three groups to the embassy and conferred them with the certificate and prizes.

The 2021 Colouring Contest was held in a way which allowed



people to participate with their families at home under the COVID-19 situation.

The art images could be downloaded by the link provided by the embassy and the final artworks, using various art mediums, were submitted to the embassy by the participants.

As the relationship between

the Republic of Korea and Oman goes back 1,200 years, for the colouring contest, two buildings which were chosen to commemorate this long-standing friendship between the two countries, were: ‘Anapji’, an artificial pond in a Royal Palace of Shilla and ‘Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque’.

New Maserati Grecale global premiere on November 16

Maserati announced the date: the Global Premiere of Grecale will be November 16 in Milano.

An explosion of colours anticipates the power of a new breeze. Grecale is a wind that turns the every day into something exceptional and will blow across the Maserati range.

The countdown to the discovery of the new model bearing the name of an intense, revolutionary and exceptional

wind has therefore officially begun. Maserati has a long-standing practice of naming its cars after the world’s most famous winds. It all started in 1963, with the legendary Mistral. This was followed by Ghibli, Bora, and Khamsin.

And, in 2016 with Levante, the brand’s first SUV.

Now Grecale, which will play a key role for the brand and transform the everyday

driving experience into something outstanding and extraordinary.

Maserati produces a complete range of unique cars with an amazing personality, immediately recognisable anywhere. With their style, technology and innately exclusive character, they delight the most discerning, demanding tastes and have always been a global automotive industry benchmark.



Ministry of Social Development and Meethaq sign MoU

In line with its pioneering role in providing Islamic financial services and products in the Sultanate of Oman, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to open a Social Takaful account for the Ministry of Social Development.

Under the terms of the agreement, Meethaq will provide the necessary facilities for collecting contributions, donations and aid to the ministry through various channels, which include its large network of branches, ATMs, CDMs as well as through Meethaq’s Internet and Mobile Banking platforms.

The MoU was signed by Hilal al Hosni, assistant director general for Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development, and Hamed Lal Bakhshi al Balushi, head of Meethaq Corporate Banking Services. The signing of this memorandum will also serve to enhance the bank’s role in Public-Private Partnership in various fields and sectors.

On this occasion, Hamed Lal Bakhshi al Balushi, head of Meethaq Corporate Banking Services, said, “Meethaq is delighted to sign this Memorandum of Understanding to provide all the necessary facilities that can help the Ministry of Social Development in achieving its dif-

ferent goals. Meethaq Islamic Banking is keen to strengthen its partnership with institutions and corporates in the sultanate to provide the best banking services and facilities which are compliant and in accordance with the principles of Islamic Sharia’a.”

He stated that Meethaq has always been a pioneer in providing cutting-edge banking solutions to both individuals and organisations, and would in turn help them support the national economy.

Meethaq extends support to all key economic sectors with innovative Sharia’a-based products. It is well positioned to provide Islamic financial expertise to all segments and thereby promote the good of society as a whole. With 24 branches and over 40 ATMs and CDMs spread across different governorates, Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in the sultanate, catering to the varying needs of individuals, corporates and SMEs.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Sharia’a-compliance certification by its Sharia’a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman. Meethaq plans to continue expanding its services and products in response to customer needs and continuous feedback.

Most affordable 5G Nokia phone, Nokia G50 launched

HMD Global, the home of Nokia phones, announced a new member of the G-series family. The Nokia G50 is the most affordable 5G Nokia smartphone yet, packing the signature Finnish quality for a phone that can go the distance.

Florian Seiche, CEO at HMD Global, said, “Our mission from day one has been to make quality mobile technology accessible to everyone around the world. With Nokia G50, we are proud to put 5G in the pockets of even more people, supported by trusted partnerships for best-in-class experiences. And not only today, but for years to come too thanks to our regular software updates and quality materials. We want to empower people to feel good about keeping their smartphone for longer and combat the upgrade culture so we can all reduce our carbon footprint.”

Sanmeet Kochhar, vice president of India and MENA at HMD

Global, said, “Nokia phones have stood the test of time, and our commitment to delivering reliable and trustworthy products remains unwavering. At HMD, we are empowering people to

avoid early device replacement and encouraging a more sustainable consumption through our longevity promises. Nokia G50 smartphones builds on this promise, with reliable software

and hardware that Nokia phone fans have come to know, love, and experience with our premium design that they can be proud of.”

Superfast 5G for less

With 5G networks expected to cover 40 per cent of the world by 2024, handling 25 per cent of all mobile data, Nokia G50 is a phone that’s equipped for what’s to come. Featuring the Qualcomm Snapdragon 480 MP that’s designed to optimise future technology, it’s future-proofed with 5G for tomorrow at a price that won’t break the bank today for AED969

A smartphone that considers future

Whether it’s today or two years from now, you can count on Nokia G50 to be up to date with the latest software. It’s already prepared to welcome Android 12 and beyond, so you always have

access to the most modern features. The monthly security updates are guaranteed for at least three years, so your best ideas and favourite moments are protected for your complete peace of mind. Handled in a Finland-based data centre your data is protected by strict European regulations with GDPR as foundation.

Nordic excellence

The two-day battery life means you can trust that Nokia G50 will see you through even the most demanding of days. Plus, with 18W fast charging, you won’t waste any time by the outlet. For reassurance, the Nokia G50 also comes with a one-year warranty at no extra cost.

Capture the beauty

Featuring a 48MP triple-lens camera with AI smarts, the Nokia G50 will fully equip you to capture everything.



Video previews A R Rahman’s Firdaus Orchestra ahead of expo

Expo 2020 Dubai has released an exclusive video showing the Firdaus Orchestra performing for the first time, capturing the talent and creativity of Oscar-winning composer A R Rahman’s pioneering all-women ensemble.

With just a week to go before doors open to the world’s greatest cultural gathering, the footage highlights the artistic prowess of the 50 musicians from across the Arab world, as they prepare to debut a fusion of styles and genres at Expo 2020 next month.

Starting from October 23, the concerts will also feature works composed by A R Rahman for the orchestra’s inaugural performance on the global stage.

Celebrating the region’s culture and diversity, Expo 2020’s



in-house orchestra, which has appointed Yasmina Sabbah as its conductor, is made up of intermediate to semi-professional musicians of 23 nationalities and ages ranging from 16 to 51, demonstrating how music is accessible to and for everyone.

Rahman said, “It’s been an honour and privilege to have



founded and mentored the Firdaus Orchestra for Expo 2020 Dubai. This ensemble has a very unique character as it’s symbolic of our changing world and evolution in music, particularly in the Middle East. The voices of the Firdaus Orchestra, comprising of artists from more than 23 nationalities across the region, are so

different from anything we’ve heard in the West or the East; they represent a whole new sound which is very exciting.

“This has been a dear project for me and I’m grateful to H E Reem al Hashimy whose support and guidance have made this extraordinary ensemble possible. I’m proud to say that the Firdaus

Orchestra is a world-class collective of musicians. Witness their artistry at the Expo 2020 Dubai.”

Noura Sulaiman, spokesperson, Firdaus Orchestra, said, “It’s really exciting to be part of the Firdaus Orchestra team, and see female musicians from across the Arab world come together to collaborate.”

NBO partners with Alfardan Hotels and Resorts

National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed a strategic partnership with Alfardan Hotels and Resorts to provide finance facilities for buyers interested in purchasing a property within The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat.

Buying a dream home at one of Muscat's most luxurious destinations is now easier than ever thanks to NBO's unique housing loan offerings, with up to 90 per cent funding of the property value including registration fee, mortgage charges and insurance premium starting at as low as 4.99 per cent p.a. reducing balance rate.

With quick approvals and doorstep service, it's easier than ever to turn dreams into reality.

Tariq Atiq, chief retail and digital banking officer at NBO, said, "We're delighted to be joining hands with Alfardan Hotels and Resorts, adding to our growing portfolio of international partnerships. Nowadays people are looking for homes in prime locations, and these highly sought-after properties offer plenty of



options for buyers. Whether young newlywed couples or growing families, we're here to support them every step of the way, while adding value to their overall banking experience."

A beachfront address running along an incredible 360m-long coastline, The Residences at The

St Regis Al Mouj Muscat features an array of luxury apartments, duplexes and townhouses.

An ideal real estate investment opportunity in Oman, the project will entitle its residents to a freehold title deed upon purchase.

K C Dalal, deputy CEO of Alfardan Group, stated, "We are pleased to partner with the National Bank of Oman to facilitate attractive financing options for prospective buyers and residents looking to purchase their luxurious property at The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat.

"Oman is a fast-growing and highly lucrative market for real estate and offers great potential to owners and investors."

Faisal al Shanfari, country manager of Alfardan Properties Development LLC, added, "We are delighted to tie up with the National Bank of Oman to further

contribute to the development of the luxury real estate market in the country. The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat provides an extraordinary escape stretching along 360m of Al Mouj Muscat's beachfront, and providing buyers with an exclusive opportunity for investment."

In addition to the access to The St Regis signature lifestyle and first-class services ranging from private butler service, 24-hour concierge to à la carte offerings, residents can benefit from exclusive access to a modern health club, deluxe wellness centre and spa, spacious swimming pools, and a kids club alongside high-end meeting rooms, a grand ballroom, and a well-appointed business centre.

Furthermore, the project will be the destination for several specialty restaurants along the coast, offering unparalleled exciting experiences for prospective buyers and hotel visitors.

NBO's personal and housing loans are part of the bank's commitment to delivering hassle-free, competitive financial solutions to fit all.

Processed quickly and efficiently, the bank also provides borrowers a host of benefits including flexible payment terms, additional financing, and much more. Loan rates may vary depending on salary, length of employment and loan duration.

Jusoor signs construction, supply contracts for social projects

Seeking to enhance local value added by supporting SMEs through assigning them various social projects that range from construction to consulting to supply, Jusoor Foundation on Tuesday signed contracts for four social projects that are jointly funded by OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale Oman at a total investment of RO330,000.

The first project was the establishment of a Digital Educational Studio at the Directorate General of Education in North Batinah governorate in Sohar.

This project, which will be completed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education represented by the Directorate General of Education in North Batinah governorate, aims to use the studio to produce digital educational content for students and teachers in high quality to benefit from digital education.

The digital educational studio project has been assigned to the Innovative Technology for Educational Solutions, with construction expected to take four months.



The second project was the implementation of the Mobile Mammography Unit in the North Batinah governorate in cooperation with the Oman Cancer Association. This project aims to activate and promote awareness in the community about breast cancer and the importance of early mammogram detection through periodic examinations across various wilayats of North Batinah. This will increase the

early-diagnosed cases and consequently reduce the mortality rate caused by breast cancer.

The third project, the Physical Rehabilitation Center, targets the elderly and patients with disabilities. It also deals with the rehabilitation of post-accident fractures, burns, and sports injuries. The project will improve the quality and efficiency of health services provided by the Shinas Health Complex to the

people of the wilayat.

The fourth project is the second phase construction of the Plant Genetic Resources in collaboration with the Agricultural Research Center in North Batinah governorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources. The contracts were signed by Sheikh Saif Hamyar al Malek Al Shihi, Governor of North Batinah and Jusoor Board of Directors chairman.

Kohli, Pollard, Maxwell launch ICC T20 World Cup campaign

Fans around the world are invited to 'Live the Game' with the global premiere of the official anthem and promo film for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021. The 16-team tournament is the biggest sports event ever in the UAE and Oman and takes place between October 17 and November 14.

Composed by renowned Bollywood music director Amit Trivedi, the animated film features young fans from all over the world immersed and engaged in explosive T20I cricket and features some of the sport's biggest superstars.

Host nation and India captain Virat Kohli, leads the group of players brought to life as 'avatars' in the animation, that interact with each other throughout. Kohli is joined by fellow captain Kieron Pollard of the reigning champions, West Indies as well as Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell and Rashid Khan of Afghanistan. Launched in collaboration with ICC's global broadcast partner Star Sports, the film premieres worldwide



across ICC, BCCI, and Star Sports' social media handles.

The animation features a brand-new broadcast technology that blends both 3D and 2D effects to create the stunning film. A production team of over 40 people, including designers, modellers, matte painters, animators, lighters, and composers, worked round-the-clock to produce the final version.

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup is the pinnacle of the shortest format of cricket and returns for the first time in five years on October 17. The tournament promises high-octane cricket and entertainment for everyone, including families and those new to

the game, with matches taking place in a safe COVID-19 environment across the UAE and Oman. 16 countries, featuring the sport's biggest names and best teams, will compete in global cricket's biggest event since the pandemic.

The opening fixture of the tournament takes place on Friday, October 17 as Oman take on ICC Men's T20 World Cup debutants Papua New Guinea at Muscat's Oman Cricket Academy. Sharjah Cricket Stadium and Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium are two of the three remaining host grounds, while Dubai International Stadium will be the backdrop for the final on Sunday, November 14.

Renault Master: A blend of space, versatile interior, segment-leading features

Setting a benchmark with its efficient engine to help business users and trades to do their work more effortlessly and efficiently, Renault Master L4H3 is a top choice among customers in Oman.

The Renault Master L4H3 MY2021 is a mix of practical space, adaptable interior, handy features and low running costs. Serving the Oman market perfectly, it combines great value for money with high levels of driver and passenger comfort. In addition to the L4H3, Renault Master is also available in two other variants including L1H1, L2H2.

Khamis al Aufi says class-leading safety technology and a feature-packed cabin has made Renault Master L4H3 a favourite among customers.

He says, "Master Van provides loads of space and ability and suits delivery needs competently."

Moosa al Hajri is astounded with its safety attributes such as driver and passenger airbags, emergency brake assistance, tyre pressure monitoring system.

He also adds, "The Master Van sets a new benchmark for practicality with style. Its exterior

features include new front grille, new bumpers, and front wings which is very impressive."

Hilal Brashdi likes that the Master Van is fitted with a rear-view camera so you can reverse with confidence whether you are loading, parking, or manoeuvring tight spaces.

He says, "Renault Master continues to offer businesses and trades remarkable flexibility. It sets the bar very high and is powerful, economical and safe. Its engines and myriad innovations are designed to make life easier for the owners every day."

Hussain al Lawati admires Renault Master's comfort features such as electric front window (driver & passenger), electric mirrors, C-shaped DRL, rear glazed doors with 270° opening and heated rear window, floor anchorage points and side anchorage points in the load area.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "The dynamic performance of the Renault Master makes it one of the best in the market. It has a capacity of 2,299 cc, power 92 Kw (125Hp), four cylinders, 16 valves, Euro 3 and transmission



of rear wheel drive and gearbox of 6 MT. Thanks to its undeniable practicality, robustness and versatility, the LCV line-up has generated a high demand. Renault Master L4H3 is equipped with the 2.3lt Diesel dCi 125hp engine."

Great loading capability

Renault Master L4H3 has a bench with storage on the centre back seat and rotating tablet, full

steel bulkhead (without window), ESP, C shape daytime running lights, rear steel doors with 270° opening, right sliding door, electric mirrors and electric front window (driver & passenger).

With greater loading and towing capabilities, the Renault Master RWD is a great best partner to transport significant loads over regular and soft ground. Its loading benefits includes greater permissible rear axle load, available in L4 Panel van with the

biggest load length (4.38m). Its traction and grip benefits include better traction with heavy loads, on a steep slope and on soft ground to limit the risk of getting stuck. It also has better obstacle-clearing capacity, differential locking as an option, twin wheels for greater grip and a higher rear-axle load.

Embodies efficiency

With its strong and dynamic front end, the Renault Master

embodies efficiency. Expressive lights, grille, dynamic logo, updated lines and a wide bumper maximizing the bodywork protection, it is modernity personified.

Pleasant journeys

Renault Master's cockpit is designed for a driver's and two passengers' comfort. Ergonomic controls, adjustable seat and steering wheel to adapt the driving position, air conditioning, optimized soundproofing, multiple storage compartments make long journeys pleasant and relaxing.

You can call Renault Master is a true office on wheels with numerous storage areas.

All the comfort of a passenger vehicle in the cockpit and modern features: storage on upper centre console, glove box, storage on the centre backseat with a rotating tablet. L4H3 has 270 degrees opening rear cargo doors, bulkhead with or without window.

For navigation and communication, Renault Master brings the Media Nav2.0, a simple, functional system, with an integrated 7" touch screen.

Dynamic comfort

The latest-generation ESP comes as standard on the whole New Master range and has been combined with recent innovations such as Extended Grip and Hill Start Assist. Extended Grip optimises your road-holding ability on loose road surfaces such as sand and mud. Hill-start assist helps you pull away smoothly even with a full load.

Master offers even more dynamic comfort with the load adaptive control where the ESP takes into consideration whether the vehicle is empty or partly or fully loaded. With the electrohydraulic power-assisted steering, the electro-pump unit improves the vehicle's manoeuvrability at low speeds and reduces the amount of effort required.

The differential locking is avoiding problems with slippery surfaces. Optional on the RWD versions of the Renault Master, the differential locking system improves your traction. Below 30 km/h, it is automatically triggered if a wheel starts to skid. The Renault Master has an optimum passive safety system: driver and passenger front airbags, driver side airbag, etc.

Iraqi Kurdistan conference pushes for normalisation of ties with Israel

Arbil, Iraq - More than 300 Iraqis, including tribal leaders, attended a conference in autonomous Kurdistan organised by a US think-tank demanding a normalisation of relations between Baghdad and Israel, organisers said on Saturday.

The first initiative of its kind in Iraq, where Israel's sworn enemy Iran has a very strong influence, the conference took place on Friday and was organised by the New York-based Center for Peace Communications (CPC).

The CPC advocates for normalising relations between Israel and Arab countries, alongside working to establish ties between civil society organisations.

Iraqi Kurdistan maintains cordial contacts with Israel, but the federal government in Baghdad does not have diplomatic ties with the Jewish state.

Four Arab nations - the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan - last year agreed to normalise ties with Israel in a US-sponsored process dubbed the Abraham Accords.

"We demand our integration into the Abraham Accords," said Sahar al Tai, one of the attendees, reading a closing statement in a conference room at a hotel in the Kurdish regional



Iraqis, including tribal leaders, numbering over 300 attend the conference of peace and reclamation organised by US think-tank Center for Peace Communications in Arbil, the capital of northern Iraq's Kurdistan autonomous region, on Friday (AFP)

capital Arbil.

"Just as these agreements provide for diplomatic relations between the signatories and Israel, we also want normal relations with Israel," she said.

"No force, local or foreign, has the right to prevent this call," added Tai, head of re-

search at the Iraqi federal government's culture ministry.

However, Iraq's federal government rejected the conference's call for normalisation in a statement on Saturday and dismissed the gathering as an 'illegal meeting'.

The conference 'was not rep-

resentative of the population's (opinion) and that of residents in Iraqi cities, in whose name these individuals purported to speak', the statement said.

The 300 participants at the conference came from across Iraq, according to CPC founder Joseph Braude, a US citizen of

Iraqi Jewish origin.

They included Sunni and Shiite representatives from 'six governorates: Baghdad, Mosul, Salaheddin, Al-Anbar, Diyala and Babylon', extending to tribal chiefs and 'intellectuals and writers', he told AFP by phone.

Other speakers at the confer-

Participants included Sunni and Shiite representatives from six governorates: Baghdad, Mosul, Salaheddin, Al-Anbar, Diyala and Babylon, extending to tribal chiefs and intellectuals and writers

JOSEPH BRAUDE



ence included Chemi Peres, the head of an Israeli foundation established by his father, the late president Shimon Peres.

"Normalisation with Israel is now a necessity," said Sheikh Rissan al Halboussi, an attendee from Anbar province, citing the examples of Morocco and the UAE.

Kurdish Iraqi leaders have repeatedly visited Israel over the decades and local politicians have openly demanded Iraq normalise ties with the Jewish state, which itself backed a 2017 independence referendum in the autonomous region.

AFP

Iran hails teen who died saving women

Tehran, Iran - Iran paid tribute on Saturday to a teenager who died of severe burns after having rescued two women neighbours trapped in a fire in their apartment building.

Fifteen-year-old Ali Landi died of his injuries on Friday, two weeks after he helped the women escape their burning home and tried to throw a gas cylinder out of the window to stop the fire spreading, Iranian media said.

The teenager died of '90 per cent burns', said Imam Kazem hospital in Isfahan, central Iran, where he was transferred from his hometown of Izeh in the country's southwest.

The two neighbours, a woman in her eighties and her daughter, suffered superficial burns in the September 9 blaze, local media said. Iranians saluted the teenager's courage online, with many urging the education ministry to incorporate his story in school materials.

On Saturday, a photo of the smiling adolescent was splashed across the front pages of most Iranian newspapers.

The office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei contacted Landi's family to offer condolences, official news agency IRNA reported.

AFP

Shocked: Hundreds hold vigil after London woman found dead in park

London, UK - Hundreds of people gathered in southeast London on Friday night at a vigil for Sabina Nessa, a 28 year old woman who was found dead in a park, the latest case to spark public concern about women's safety.

The primary school teacher disappeared a week ago after leaving her home to go to a bar just five minutes' walk away.

Her body was found by a member of the public the following day hidden in a pile of leaves.

The young woman's death, like that of 33 year old Sarah Everard in March this year, has galvanised public opinion over the safety of women in public spaces.

Carroll, a 35 year old teacher who attended the vigil carrying lilies, told AFP that Nessa's death had caused her to fear for her own safety.

"She's a woman and a teacher so I feel kind of close to her," she explained. "I usually walk through that (park) to go to the



Well-wishers light candles amidst floral tributes during a vigil for Sabina Nessa, at Kidbrooke in southeast London on Friday (AFP)

gym. It could have be any one of us that day, so I'm still shaking. I'm still panicking."

In response to Nessa's death British Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote on Twitter that his 'thoughts are with the family and friends of Sabina Nessa at this deeply distressing time'.

"I will be thinking of them tonight as people come together to pay their respects. We will do

everything we can to prevent these abhorrent crimes and make our streets safer," he added.

As she paid her respects to Nessa, Emma Thomas (27) from the nearby London area of Peckham said she had been left 'completely devastated and angry' by the killing.

Echoing criticism that has come from some quarters, she

said Nessa, a British-Bangladeshi, had received less attention in news bulletins in comparison to the reaction to recent disappearances of white women.

"I think that white women are often covered more in the media, the whole kind of missing white woman syndrome issue," she said.

"Of course they're all tragic events but I think it's really important that we ensure that everyone gets the same kind of attention and outrage," Thomas added.

At a news conference on Friday Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe said police were looking for a man seen near where Nessa went missing on CCTV.

Two men arrested on suspicion of murder in recent days have now been released pending further investigation while detectives remain keen to trace the third captured in on camera.

AFP

Morocco gets first batch of Turkish armed drones: Report

Rabat, Morocco - Morocco took delivery earlier this month of Turkish combat drones, the Far-Maroc unofficial website dedicated to military news reported.

The report, also carried by several local media outlets, comes as tensions have spiked between Morocco and neighbouring Algeria in recent weeks.

The two countries are mainly at odds over the disputed Western Sahara territory, and Algeria severed ties with Morocco in August claiming 'provocations and hostile' action by its neighbour. Relations took another blow this week when Algeria on Wednesday said it has closed off its airspace to all Moroccan civilian and military traffic.

According to Far-Maroc, the North African kingdom ordered 13 Bayraktar TB2 drones from Turkey in April and a first batch of the unmanned aircraft arrived this month.

Rabat, said the report, seeks to 'modernise the arsenal of the Moroccan Armed Forces (FAR)



Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drone at Gecitkale military airbase (AFP)

in order to prepare for any danger and recent hostilities', but did not elaborate on these topics.

It did however add that Moroccan military personnel have trained in Turkey in recent weeks to work with the drones.

Media reports said Morocco signed a US\$70mn contract with the private Turkish company Baykar.

The firm is run by one of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-laws and has been exporting its Bayraktar TB2 model to Ukraine, Qatar and Azerbaijan for some years.

According to the company's

website, the Bayraktar TB2 is a 'medium altitude long endurance tactical unmanned aerial vehicle capable of conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and armed attack missions' with a range of up to 27 hours.

Morocco already uses drones for intelligence and surveillance operations along its borders, according to military experts.

The Western Sahara dispute pits Morocco against the Algeria-backed Polisario Front which fought a war of independence with Rabat from 1975 to 1991.

AFP

Volcanic eruptions shut airport on Canaries La Palma island

Madrid, Spain - Clouds of thick black ash from volcanic eruptions in Spain's Canaries archipelago forced the closure of the airport on La Palma island on Saturday, authorities said.

The Cumbre Vieja volcano came to life a week ago and has intermittently spewed out lava and ash leading to the cancellation of all seven flights on Friday.

"The airport is closed because of the accumulation of ash," said state-owned airport operator Aena.

"Clean-up operations have begun but the situation can change at any moment," it added.

More evacuations were also ordered on Friday at the town of El Paso as large explosions and new openings were reported at the volcano.



The Cumbre Vieja volcano is seen from Los Llanos de Aridane on the Canary island of La Palma in Saturday (AFP)

"Given the increased risk for the population due to the current

eruptive episode," the regional government said, an obligatory

evacuation order was issued for several districts.

That pushed the number of people forced to leave their

homes so far to more than 6,200, including 400 tourists.

The flight cancellations began on Friday.

'It is not yet possible to say when we can resume flights,' Spanish carrier Binter said on Twitter.

According to the European Union's Copernicus Earth Observation Programme, lava has so far destroyed 420 buildings and covered more than 190 hectares of land.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced La Palma would be declared 'a zone affected by a catastrophe', which opens financial aid to residents.

The speed of the lava flowing from the crater has steadily slowed in recent days, and experts hope it will not reach the coast.

If the molten lava pours into the sea, it can generate clouds of toxic gas into the air, also affecting the marine environment.

No casualties have been reported so far but the damage to land and property has been enormous, with the Canaries regional head Angel Victor Torres estimating the cost at well over €400mn (US\$470mn approx).

The eruption on La Palma, home to 85,000 people, was the first in 50 years.

The last eruption on the island came in 1971 when another part of the same volcanic range - a vent known as Teneguia - erupted on the southern side of the island.

Two decades earlier, the Nambroque vent erupted in 1949.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Back from UN, Brazil President son tests coronavirus positive

Brasilia, Brazil - Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro's lawmaker son said on Friday he had contracted the coronavirus - the third member of his country's delegation to the UN General Assembly in New York to test positive.

Eduardo Bolsonaro (37) said on Twitter he was feeling well and had 'started to treat myself' without specifying what he was using.

He cited his infection as evidence in his campaign against the coronavirus vaccine passport recently introduced in some Brazilian cities.

'We know that the vaccines were developed faster than is usually the case. I received the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine and I got COVID,' he said.

'Does this mean the vaccine is useless? No. But I believe it is another argument against the health passport.'

Brazil's Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday after attending the assembly and had to quarantine in a hotel in New York. The third positive test was in a diplomat who arrived in New York a day ahead of Jair Bolsonaro.

President Bolsonaro, who has survived COVID-19, appeared without a mask on several occasions during his UN trip despite refusing to get the vaccine.

He caused a stir on social media after a photograph showed him taking few precautions as he ate a slice of pizza from a New York street vendor with other members of the Brazilian delegation.

Since his return, the president



A United Nations employee cleans the microphones after Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro spoke at the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly on September 21. President's son Eduardo Bolsonaro (in the inset), who got COVID-19, was part of Brazil's delegation to the UN (AFP)

I received the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Does this mean the vaccine is useless? No. But I believe it is another argument against the health passport

EDUARDO BOLSONARO

has been self-isolating at his official residence for having had contact with Queiroga, and is due to undergo a PCR test this weekend.

Family differences

Bolsonaro opened the General Assembly with a speech in which he made several misleading or inaccurate statements, several related to the pandemic,

according to AFP's Factcheck team.

The President has minimised the virus as a 'little flu', fought lockdowns, questioned face masks and rejected various offers of vaccines for his population while pushing unproven drugs such as hydroxychloroquine.

Bolsonaro has said he will be the 'last' Brazilian to get the vac-

cine. But in an interview with *Veja* journal published on Friday, he revealed that his wife Michelle had received the vaccine while in New York this week for the UN trip.

"Getting vaccinated is a personal choice. My wife, for example, decided to get vaccinated in the United States. Me, no," he said. Bolsonaro is under fire at home for his handling of the pandemic, which has claimed nearly 600,000 lives there, and the revelation about his wife prompted further criticism.

Epidemiologist Pedro Hallal told broadcaster G1 that the decision showed 'contempt for the public health system and all Brazilians'.

"It shows a lack of confidence," Hallal said.

Bolsonaro critic Senator Omar Aziz congratulated Michelle Bolsonaro for getting the vaccine, but said 'she could have got vaccinated here; showing Brazilians that she was getting vaccinated could have set a good example'.

The government later issued a statement saying that the first lady had been offered a vaccine as she was doing a COVID-19 PCR test, and so had said yes as she had been planning to get vaccinated anyway. The statement said she reiterated 'her admiration and respect for the Brazilian health system'.

AFP



A health worker inoculates a woman sitting inside a car at a drive-through vaccination camp, in Vashi near Mumbai (AFP)

India to export 8mn COVID-19 jabs in October

New Delhi, India - India will export eight million coronavirus vaccine jabs by the end of October after ending its ban on sending doses abroad, a top foreign ministry official said on Saturday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to resume exports at a meeting of leaders from the so-called Quad in Washington as India, Japan, Australia, and the US try to counter growing Chinese influence across the Asia-Pacific region.

Foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla told reporters on Saturday that most of the eight million doses of the Johnson & Johnson single-shot vaccine will be sent to Asia-Pacific countries.

"This would be ready by the end of October. This is an immediate delivery, from the Quad into the Indo-Pacific re-

gion," Shringla told reporters.

India is one of the world's biggest vaccine producers and had pledged earlier this year to export one billion COVID-19 jabs by December 2022.

But New Delhi halted exports in May after a devastating coronavirus wave ravaged the country.

India lifted its vaccine export ban this week with new COVID-19 infections and deaths slowing down.

The country suffered weeks of vaccine shortages as a coronavirus surge between March and May killed at least 250,000 and infected tens of millions of people.

It has now administered nearly 840mn vaccine doses. Nearly half of the adult population has had at least one jab and with 16 per cent receiving a second dose.

AFP



Pro-democracy Buddhist monks and other supporters take part in a demonstration against the junta while commemorating the 14th anniversary of the 2007 Saffron revolution, in Mandalay on Saturday (AFP)

Buddhist monks march against Myanmar's military regime

Yangon, Myanmar - Scores of pro-democracy Buddhist monks took to the streets of Myanmar's second-biggest city on Saturday, rallying against the military coup in demonstrations that coincided with the 14th anniversary of previous clergy-led mass protests.

Myanmar has been in turmoil and its economy paralysed since February when the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government, ending a ten-year experiment with democracy.

Around the country an anti-junta resistance has taken root, prompting the military to unleash a brutal crackdown on dissent.

More than 1,100 civilians have been killed and 8,400 arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

Historically, monks in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar have been seen as a supreme

moral authority, organising communities and at times mobilising opposition to the military regimes.

But the coup has exposed a schism in the monkhood, with some prominent clerics giving the generals their blessing and others supporting the protesters.

On Saturday, dozens of monks in their bright orange and crimson robes marched through the streets of Mandalay with flags and banners and threw colourful streamers in the air.

"Monks who love the truth stand on the side of the people," a protest leader told AFP.

The monks chanted for the release of political prisoners including members of Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, which won a landslide in last November's election.

Some monks carried upside down alms bowls - ordinarily

used to collect food donations from the community - in a symbol of protest to reject the junta regime, which calls itself the State Administration Council.

"We have to take risks... to protest as we can be arrested or shot at any point," a 35 year old monk said.

"We are not safe to live in our monasteries anymore," the monk added.

In 2007, Buddhist monks led huge demonstrations nationwide against the previous military junta regime - an uprising that kicked off after a sudden hike in fuel prices.

The 'Saffron Revolution' posed a severe legitimacy crisis for the then 35 year old dictatorship, which responded with brutal crackdowns that killed at least 31 people and saw hundreds of monks defrocked and arrested.

AFP

They won't stop me: Haitians stuck in Colombia's Necocli keep sights on US

Necocli, Colombia - Halfway on their perilous journey to the United States, news reaches a Haitian mother and son near the Colombian border with Panama that American officials are deporting their newly arrived compatriots by the thousands.

But Benedictine and Roberth Point Du Jour are undeterred by the disturbing images of Haitian border-crossers being detained on arrival in Texas from Mexico.

"My goal is to get there and they cannot stop me," said the mother (42), who began the journey with her son on August 6 from Chile, where many Haitians found refuge after a devastating earthquake in 2010.

With economies struggling from the fallout of the coronavirus epidemic and travel restrictions being lifted, many are now making their way north through Central America with dreams of a better life in the United States.

The Point Du Jours find themselves stuck in the coastal town of Necocli in northwest Colombia with some 19,000 other undocumented migrants, mainly Haitians, trying to enter Panama.

Some have been stranded here for weeks, waiting for seats on boats that cross the Gulf of Uraba to Acandí on the Panama border.

There are only 250 boat tickets available every day.

From Acandí, they will start on foot - and armed with machetes, lanterns and tents - the dangerous trek of at least five days to Panama through the Darien jungle, battling snakes, steep



A stranded Haitian migrant woman and her child in Necocli, Colombia, on Friday (AFP)

ravines, swollen rivers, tropical downpours and criminals often linked to drug trafficking.

In a recent report, Doctors Without Borders (known by its French acronym MSF) said criminal gangs in the jungle prey on migrants, and assaults and rapes are common.

Fear of drowning

Still in Necocli, Roberth Point Du Jour on Thursday recounted his biggest fear: Drowning on the 60km journey across the gulf.

"The second (fear) is that they will deport me," he said, "because the thing I want most is to make something of myself in life."

The US government came in for much criticism over images of mounted border patrol officers wielding long leather reins and confronting a slew of migrants crossing the border from Mexico. Many have been driven back,

and some 1,400 others repatriated to Haiti on a series of flights.

"It's a shame but my goal is... to get there, no matter what," Benedictine insisted, stubbornly.

Waiting their turn, she and her son are renting accommodation in Necocli - a town of some 45,000 people - for US\$10 a night.

Many other migrants have no choice but to camp on the beach.

"It's too late to go back now," said Frank, a 38 year old Haitian who also made the trip from Chile and withholds his family name for fear of reprisals from authorities along the way.

Six countries still separate him from the United States, where friends and family await.

Frank is travelling with five relatives including a baby of six months.

Under an agreement between the governments of Panama and

Colombia, no more than 650 migrants are allowed to cross the border every day, contributing to the bottleneck.

Some 11,500 people have managed to buy tickets to make the boat trip to Acandí by October 13, and a further unknown number of people are trying to make the crossing on "illegal" vessels, according to Colombia's human rights ombudsman Carlos Camargo.

All this despite US officials insisting in recent months that undocumented migrants will not be allowed entry.

"Do not come," Vice President Kamala Harris said in June. "You will be turned back."

Last year, a steady influx of migrants from Colombia northward dried up due to coronavirus travel restrictions and border closures.

AFP

Joe Biden seeks ‘free and open’ Pacific with Australia, India, Japan in new Quad summit

Washington, US - President Joe Biden and the leaders of Australia, India and Japan promised on Friday to work together for a stable, open and democratic Indo-Pacific in a veiled dig at China during their first in-person summit together.

In Biden's latest effort to cement US leadership in the face of a rising China, the so-called Quad agreed to move ahead on a joint plan to provide COVID-19 vaccines around Asia, launched a new climate initiative and said the four nations would begin holding annual summits.

Without any explicit mention of China, the leaders of the four democracies in a joint statement said they were committed to 'promoting the free, open, rules-based order, rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion'.

"We stand for the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values and territorial integrity of states," they said.

'Free and open' has become code for expressing worry about swelling Chinese economic, diplomatic and military presence - including threats to vital international sea lanes.

Australian Prime Minister



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) and US President Joe Biden (centre) listen during a Quad Leaders Summit with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide in the East Room of the White House, in Washington, DC, on Friday (AFP)

Scott Morrison, speaking as the talks opened, said that the four 'liberal democracies' were working to build a 'strong, stable and prosperous region'. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the summit showed the four nations' 'common vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific', while Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the Quad's 'shared

democratic values'.

While the leaders carefully avoided public mention of China, Suga voiced 'strong concern' during the talks about Beijing's assertiveness at sea, its trampling of Hong Kong's special status and its mass incarceration of the Uyghur minority, Japanese foreign ministry spokesman Tomoyuki Yoshida said.

Quad on vaccines

Biden, who often talks about democracies needing to prove their capability in an age of powerful autocracies in Russia and China, sought to show the Quad was about action.

"We're four major democracies with a long history of cooperation. We know how to get things done and we are up to the

challenge," he said.

India said it would export eight million one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccines by the end of next month.

"This is an immediate delivery from the Quad into the Indo-Pacific region," Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla told reporters, vowing to supply 'quality and affordable' vaccines.

While modest in number - Biden promised earlier this week that the US would donate an extra 500mn doses to the world - it represents the return of India's giant pharmaceutical industry after New Delhi stopped exports to handle the country's own severe COVID-19 outbreak.

During virtual talks in March, the Quad leaders said they would supply more than one billion vaccines by the end of 2022, with India providing production, Japan and the United States financing and Australia the logistics.

On another key priority for Biden, the Quad leaders said the four nations would all make 'ambitious' announcements at the upcoming Glasgow climate summit with an aim of bringing the warming planet to net zero emissions by 2050.

India has so far only committed to reducing its carbon intensity, not necessarily its emissions, arguing that sweeping cuts are unrealistic for an emerging economy that is not historically responsible for most of the world's warming.

In one key area of work, the Quad leaders said they would set up a task force to work to slash emissions by 2030 in shipping,

coordinating among the key ports of Los Angeles, Mumbai, Sydney and Yokohama.

No military component

India has been the most cautious about perceptions it is ganging up on China despite mounting tensions following deadly border skirmishes last year.

US officials stressed that they did not see the Quad as a military alliance even as they sought to broaden cooperation.

The United States just last week announced another alliance - AUKUS - with Australia and Britain that will include sharing of sensitive nuclear technology.

Under AUKUS, Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines. Although delivery is years away, the announcement sent waves around the world, angering China and separately causing a furious row with France which saw its previously negotiated contract for selling Australia conventional submarines thrown out.

Morrison called the Quad a 'very practical initiative' but said it was part of building 'a region that we wish to be always free from coercion'.

AFP



People take part in a rally in support of Afghan women and children at a park in Quezon City, suburban Manila on Saturday (AFP)

India raises tone, Pakistan urges to work with Taliban

Washington, US - India on Friday upbraided Pakistan both in Washington and at the United Nations as Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan appealed to the world to work with Afghanistan's triumphant Taliban.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised concerns about Pakistan during talks with US President Joe Biden as well as a broader four-way summit with the leaders of Australia and Japan, according to Indian officials, who said the others concurred.

"There was a clear sense that a more careful look and a more careful examination and monitoring of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan - Pakistan's role on the issue of terrorism - had to be kept," Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla told reporters after the White House talks.

Khan, addressing the UN General Assembly, said that the Taliban have promised to respect human rights and build an inclusive government since taking over last month, despite global disappointment in a caretaker Cabinet.

"If the world community incentivises them, and encourages them to walk this talk, it will be a win-win situation for everyone," Khan said.

"We must strengthen and stabilise the current government, for the sake of the people of Afghanistan."

Khan spent much of his

speech defending the record of Pakistan, which was the main supporter of the Taliban's 1996-2001 regime that imposed an ultra-austere interpretation of Islam and welcomed Al Qaeda, triggering the US invasion after the September 11 attacks.

Khan, a longstanding critic of the 20-year US war ended by President Joe Biden, blamed imprecise US drone strikes for the flareup of extremism inside Pakistan and pointed to Islamabad's cooperation with US forces.

"There is a lot of worry in the US about taking care of the interpreters and everyone who helped the US. What about us?" Khan said in a speech, pre-recorded by video due to COVID-19 precautions.

"At least there should have been a word of appreciation. But rather than appreciation, imagine how we feel when we are blamed for the turn of events in Afghanistan."

US officials have long accused Islamabad's powerful intelligence services of maintaining support for the Taliban, leading Biden's predecessor Donald Trump to slash military aid.

Biden has yet to speak let alone invite Khan, although Secretary of State Antony Blinken met on Thursday on the UN sidelines with his Pakistani counterpart and offered thanks for help repatriating US citizens from Afghanistan.

AFP

Merkel makes final push for successor in knife-edge elections

Aachen, Germany - Chancellor Angela Merkel on Saturday urged Germans to give her would-be successor Armin Laschet the vote to shape Germany's future, in a last-ditch push to shore up his beleaguered campaign 24 hours before Germans vote.

Laschet (60) has been trailing his Social Democrat challenger Olaf Scholz in the race for the chancellery, although final polls put the gap between them within the margin of error, making the vote one of the most unpredictable in recent years.

Merkel had planned to keep a low profile in the election battle as she prepares to bow out of politics after 16 years in power. But she has found herself dragged into the frantic campaign schedule of the unpopular chairman of her party, Laschet.

In the last week of the campaign, Merkel took Laschet to her



German Chancellor Angela Merkel at a campaign rally for CDU leader and chancellor candidate Armin Laschet, in Aachen on Saturday (AFP)

constituency by the Baltic coast and on Friday headlined the closing rally gathering the conserva-

tives' bigwigs in Munich.

Merkel tugged at the heartstrings of Germany's predomi-

nantly older electorate on Friday, calling on them to keep her conservatives in power for the sake of stability - a trademark of Germany. "To keep Germany stable, Armin Laschet must become chancellor, and the CDU and CSU must be the strongest force," she said.

A day before the vote, she travelled to Laschet's hometown and constituency Aachen, a spa city near Germany's western border with Belgium and the Netherlands, where he was born and still lives.

"It is about your future, the future of your children and the future of your parents," she said, urging strong mobilisation for her conservative alliance.

She underlined that climate protection will be a key challenge of the next government, but said this would not be achieved 'simply through rules and regulations'.

"For that we need new technological developments, new procedures, researchers, interested people who think about how that can be done, and people who participate," she said.

Laschet is a 'bridge-builder' who will get people on board in shaping Germany to meet those challenges, she said.

Hundreds of thousands of people had descended on the streets on Friday urging change and greater climate protection, with a leading activist calling Sunday's election the vote 'of a century'.

With the clock ticking down to the election, Scholz was also staying close to home at the other end of the country to chase down last votes.

Scholz will be holding 'dialogues on the future' with voters in his constituency of Potsdam - on the outskirts of Berlin.

AFP

Iceland votes amid prediction of no clear majority

Reykjavik, Iceland - Icelanders began voting on Saturday in an election that could see its unprecedented left-right coalition lose its majority, despite bringing four years of stability after a decade of crises.

With the political landscape more splintered than ever, the process of forming a new coalition could be more complicated than in the past.

Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir, whose Left-Green Movement had never led a government before, is seeking a second mandate but the large number of parties could stand in her way.

Opinion polls suggest a record nine parties out of ten are expected to win seats in the Althing, Iceland's almost 1,100-year-old parliament.

That makes it particularly tricky to predict which parties could end up forming a coalition.

First results were expected shortly after polling stations close at 10.00pm, but a clear picture was not expected to emerge until Sunday.

Jon Sigurdsson, a 47 year old



Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir is seeking a second mandate

entrepreneur, was among the first to cast his ballot in the capital Reykjavik. "There are a lot of parties threatening to raise taxes and I think that is not the right thing to do. Enough already!" he told AFP, refusing to disclose who he voted for.

'Different options'

With 33 of 63 seats, the outgoing coalition is made up of the conservative Independence Party,

the centre-right Progressive Party and the Left-Green Movement.

Some opinion polls suggest it will manage to secure a very narrow majority but others say it will fail. "Because there are so many parties, I think there will be a lot of different opportunities to form a government," Prime Minister Jakobsdottir told AFP in an interview this week.

While she is broadly popular, her party is hovering around 10-

12 per cent in the polls and risks losing several seats.

During her four-year term, Jakobsdottir has introduced a progressive income tax system, increased the social housing budget and extended parental leave for both parents.

She has also been hailed for her handling of the COVID-19 crisis, with just 33 deaths in the country of 370,000.

But she has also had to make

concessions to keep the peace in her coalition, including a promise to create a national park in central Iceland which is home to 32 active volcano systems and 400 glaciers.

This is only the second time since 2008 that a government has made it to the end of its four-year mandate on the sprawling island. Deep public distrust of politicians amid repeated scandals sent Icelanders to the polls five times from 2007 to 2017.

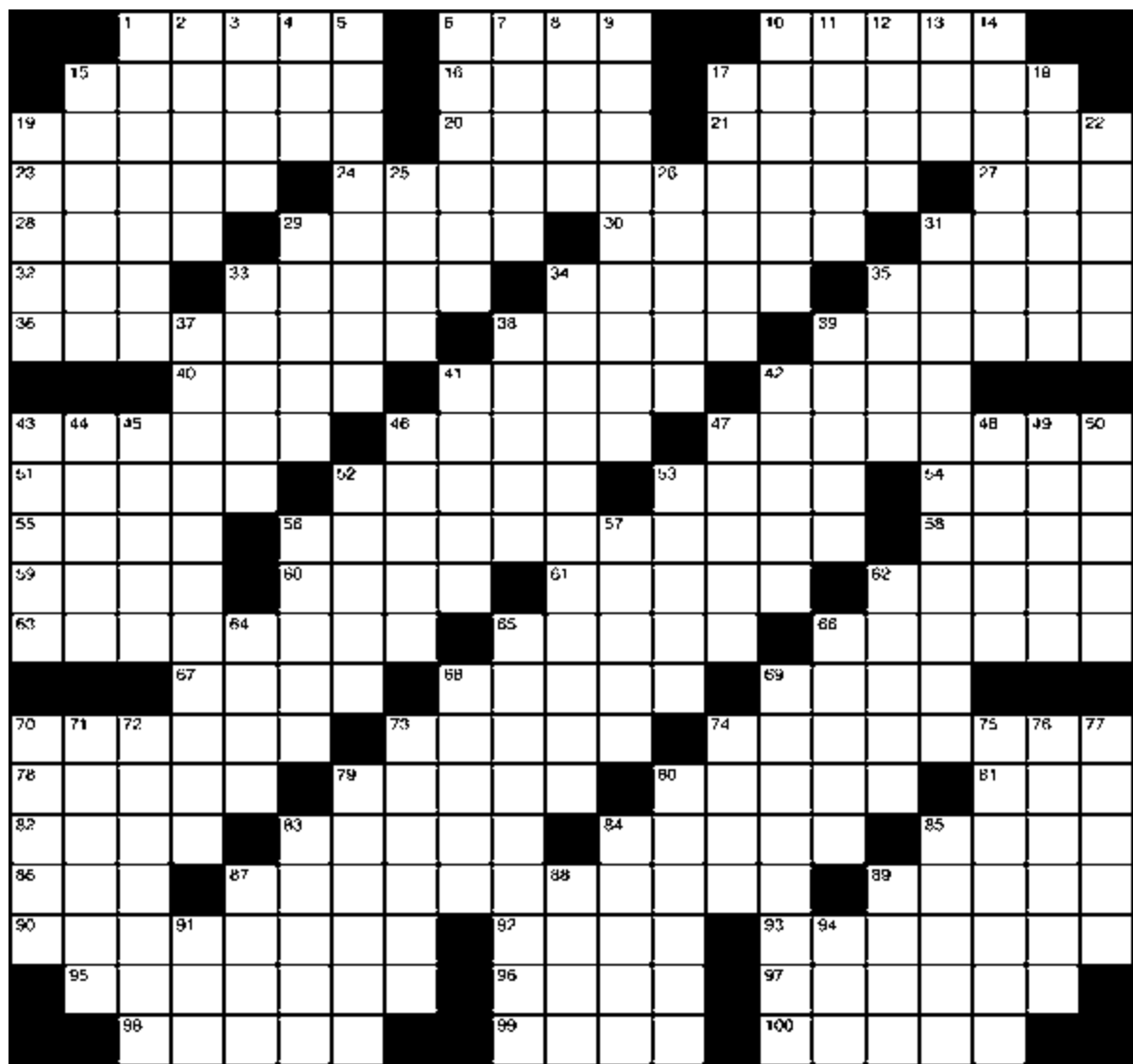
The Independence Party, which polls credit with around 20-24 per cent of votes, also risks losing seats but is expected to remain the largest political party.

Its leader, Finance Minister Bjarni Benediktsson, is a former prime minister who comes from a family that has long held power on the right. He is eyeing the post of prime minister.

Benediktsson has survived several political scandals, including being implicated in the 2016 Panama Papers leak that revealed offshore tax havens, and is standing in his fifth election.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 Baggy pants

6 Jewish month

10 Sudden descent

15 Adulterate

16 Theater seating

17 Undaunted

19 Storyteller

20 Awl or lathe

21 Maine's symbol

23 Italian cookie flavor

24 Have a new owner

27 Liquid container: abbr.

28 Struggle with

29 Duty

30 Vidal and Al

31 Islamic weight

32 Greek letter

33 Indelicate

34 Disliked

35 Selassie

36 Fragrant

38 Passé

39 Fabrics

40 19th cent. US cartoonist

41 Mallet

42 Is supine

43 Postpones

46 ___ in: made aware

47 Rambled

51 Vibrant

52 West African republic

53 Serenity

54 Lowland

55 Roof material

56 Help wanted

58 Collier's access

59 Right to property: law

60 Hither

61 Showy flower

62 Screen

63 Neighbor of Virginia

65 Contributed a share

66 One who takes a part

67 Cease moving

68 English royal house

69 Scottish river

70 Unruffled

73 Lowest point

74 Those who beguile

78 Sheeplike

79 Soviet premier

80 Catlike Asian mammal

81 Fed. elder network

82 City division

83 Assault

84 Religious booklets

85 Bow

86 Netherlands city

87 Constantly

89 Agenda

90 Supply additional energy

92 Roman statesman

93 Cooped up: var.

95 Performed leading role

96 Famous garden

97 Made a speech

98 Direct

99 Progeny

100 Titled

DOWN

1 Flight landing area

2 Reduce in rank

3 Fixed charge

4 Compass pt.

5 ___ Ivory production

6 Platforms

7 Blackmore's "Lorna"

8 Excitedly

9 Consigned to lesser position

10 With a backbone

11 Magician's props

12 Bauxite and lithium

13 Mel of baseball

14 Precook

15 Indicate

17 Exercised lenience

18 Provoke

19 Grand Prix car

22 Les femmes

25 Multitude

26 Lodging

29 Garnish plant

31 Made an effort

33 St. ___ of Assisi

34 Be a participant

35 Dug

37 Universally

38 Subdue

39 Ivy-covered

41 Flash

42 Beam

43 Fact

44 Children's author ___ Kleven

45 Office employee

46 Musical grouping

47 Made way slowly

48 Police detection device

49 Suppress

50 Stop

52 Belgian port

53 Join

56 Marcellus ___

57 John Jacob

62 Yell

64 Dilatory

65 Theater patrons

66 Fish

68 Former coin of India

69 Consecration

70 Planter

71 Dodges

72 Commands

73 Required

74 Queen of Carthage

75 Infuriated

76 Fought

77 Cut

79 Dawdle

80 Hums a lullaby

83 French/German river

84 Customarily

85 Baseball or vegetable

87 Long-eared mammal

88 Pedestal part

89 Entrapment play

91 Chapeau

94 FDR legislation

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If anyone decides that it might be fun to see just how far you can be pushed, they are in for a serious lesson. At this point, you're not willing to go very far at all. If people came with warning labels (how did that get skipped?), yours would say 'Danger -- Do not exceed capacity.' Of course, with your fiery energy, this situation isn't exactly rare, so the next best thing is to shut all doors.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your friends live by one simple rule: When you're happy, everyone's happy. Your fiery nature just doesn't allow anyone to be depressed in your vicinity. At the moment, you're feeling pretty great, which means you do your very best to make everyone around you as happy as they can be. It's a great way to celebrate that well-deserved streak of luck you're currently enjoying!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Generosity and excess are dangerous qualities to tote around in tandem, and it takes a very special kind of person to pull it off. For the most part, you're up for the challenge, and pretty happy about it, too! Still, you really need to make sure that everyone you're near appreciates what you're doing for them, and that they don't just take you for granted.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Making a new friend isn't easy for anyone, especially if we enjoy privacy. You may be feeling even more secretive at the moment, however, so if you decide to let someone in on your feelings and plans and how you've reached this point, they need to understand just how special that makes them. If they didn't, though, you probably wouldn't have let them this close to start with!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you're not sure quite how you should handle a certain situation that's a little too delicate for prime time, then hold off on mentioning it to anyone, at least for the time being. You know perfectly well that there are still interlocking issues to be resolved, and until then, silence is the best strategy. You're in charge, and you know it -- so call a meeting if you must.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

No matter what the subject or where you happen to be, you are rarely shy about expressing an opinion. You're not exactly shy now either, but you may start to feel a bit of unusual emotional interference coming on, so remind yourself that if anyone has the right to be confident, it's you. You've been so diligent and hardworking for so long, so relax.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You know full well how wonderful it is to have entertaining friends. You've spent plenty of time assembling just such a crew, and you take their affection seriously. You don't just invite any old person into that circle without considering what they're likely to add to it. If you're ready to open the books, be sure that someone lets this fortunate newcomer know just how special the invitation is.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Relationships are almost always your number one priority, but at the moment, nothing else can even come close! Your lucky mate - or prospective mate, or even your latest crush -- should enjoy all kinds of attention, aimed simply at ensuring that they know how deeply and securely you care for them. You expect your feelings to be returned, but it's still vital to have the conversation anyway.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're worried that you might say or do something to offend someone, especially if you know what's coming, take a friend along for the ride who's well equipped to mediate when necessary. You know who you need to ask. Remember, though, that it's not you they're watching out for -- it's anyone who gets in your way or challenges your opinions.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've always had a decent relationship with your bosses, teachers and other authority figures. In fact, they have often treated you as an equal. That's exactly how you feel now when higher-ups actually come to you for advice. If you hear gossip, try not to get too stressed about it. Everyone needs someone else to talk about!

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You know how to make awesome plans and see them through to the end, never even thinking about aborting the mission. You're a planner and a plotter, containing equal parts detective and analyst. Today's plan is just about perfect from beginning to end -- so much so that you should be confident about sharing it with anyone. Don't lose sight of your own needs.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You may not be in the mood for shopping at the moment, but that doesn't mean there isn't something out there that's so appealing that you don't go to any extremes to have it delivered to your door within 24 hours. If you're not sure you can afford it, call the one wisest person you know who can talk you out of it without making you feel like you're cheating yourself.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. Primary rainbow is formed when light suffers**
- a. two internal refractions before emerging out of the drop
 - b. one internal refractions before emerging out of the drop
 - c. no internal refraction
 - d. either one or two internal refractions before emerging out of the drop
- 2. The chief constituent of gobar gas is**
- a. ethane
 - b. methane
 - c. hydrogen
 - d. carbon dioxide
- 3. The chief purpose of crop rotation is to check the loss of top soil**
- a. by water erosion
 - b. by wind erosion
 - c. by weathering
 - d. of its mineral content

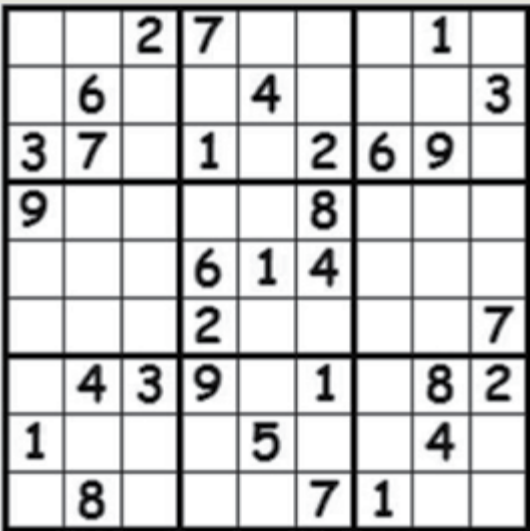
Answers: 1.b 2.b 3.d

KIDS COLOURING

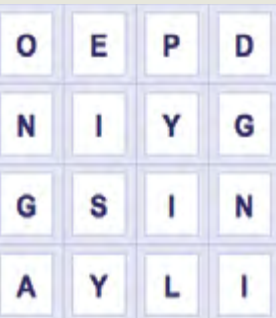


DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



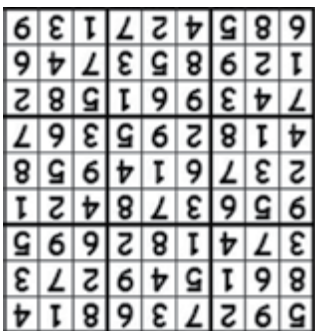
BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



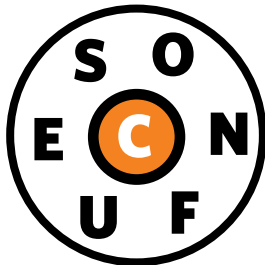
DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (SEPTEMBER 23)



WORD BUILDER

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

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



VIRTUAL EXHIBITION

100 SIMPLY

Three senior artists came together to curate the 9th virtual exhibition for Rangrez with an open theme



Tarini Agarwal – Once upon a time
I have tried to capture the timelessness of the story of Arabia. The past still exists in the present. I've tried to show this feeling in the painting



The paintings that came up carried a lot of intrinsic meaning and covered a myriad of topics, from spirituality to current affairs, abstract to hyper-realism

UMA GOPINATH

Hubert Vaz

The ninth virtual art exhibition by Rangrez, the Art Group of Indian Social Club Muscat, which was inaugurated by Muscat's popular Colombian artist Rebecca Nigrinis, was a huge success, marking yet another milestone for Indian artists in Oman.

Nigrinis upheld the spirit and cohesiveness of the Indian artist group that has not missed a single month of displaying art through this year which was mostly ravaged by the dreaded pandemic. This virtual exhibition marks their collective input for September.

Unlike the eight preceding virtual exhibitions this year, where each month belonged to a single curator, September saw three artist members co-curating. These were Uma Gopinath, the single



person behind the smooth running of the group, Soubam Priyananda, the artist who creates the most beautiful posters for most of the exhibitions, and Sushmita Gupta, convenor of Rangrez and the brains behind this series.

The exhibition, titled 'Simply 100', indicates the fact that a canvas is really a diary on which an artist expresses his/her thoughts with tools like paints, brushes, pencils, charcoals, paper, scissors and what have you, asserts Sushmita.

"The backstage people of Rangrez - Uma, Soubam and me - agreed to turn joint curators for the

Two paintings caught my attention – The Clipper of the Seas by Shashi Hemant with many stories woven within it, and Sanctuary by Asawari Deoras, which is a manifestation of nature's beauty that co-exists in harmony

SOUBAM PRIYANANDA

month of September and decided to go big and unbridled with the theme. Just about any thought was alright, as long as the canvas/paper size was a metre by a metre," she said.

"While each one of us works singly in our solitary confinements none of us are really isolated from our surroundings. We end up hearing similar songs and stories. We are exposed to the same cultural and natural crises. But each one is affected differently and therein lies our uniqueness," she further pointed out.

"When the theme is 'just about

any,' one gets a true glimpse of the mind and heart of the artist and that is what this exhibition has sought to do."

There was an overwhelming response from the artist group. Around 42 artists participated with 48 paintings. Uma Gopinath's two - 'Equus' and 'Memories of the Sea,' Asawari Deoras' three - 'Sanctuary I,' 'Sanctuary II,' and 'Unfathomable Treasures', and Sushmita Gupta's four - 'Transient,' 'It's Complicated,' 'Nuclear' and 'Whirlpool' were some of the key exhibits. The other artists submitted a painting each.



When the theme is 'just about any', one gets a true glimpse of the mind and heart of the artist and that is what this exhibition has sought to do

SUSHMITA GUPTA,
CONVENOR



Dr Dipty Shrivastava – Omani Essence
My painting 'Omani Essence' depicts the traditional rose harvest from the green mountain of Oman - Jebel Akhdar where it is then distilled to produce rose water



Anuradha Shanbhag – Peace - Love Nature
My art conveys the message of peace, love, and harmony. When there is peace within, then nature also reciprocates



Abdullah al Rawahi and his co-driver
Ata al Hmoud in action on day one of
Cyprus Rally on Saturday

Rawahi third on day one, Wahaibi suffers setback

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

CYPRUS RALLY 2021 MERC: ROUND FOUR

Oman's talented Abdullah al Rawahi and veteran Hamed al Wahaibi made a solid start to the 2021 Cyprus Rally but the latter suffered a setback on the third stage to retire on the first day of the 2021 Cyprus Rally, the fourth round of the 2021 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) in Nicosia on Saturday.

For Rawahi and his co-driver Ata al Hmoud of Jordan it was consistency that marked their display as they clocked top-seven times in all the five stages held on Saturday to be placed overall third after day one.

Stage six was cancelled later following an incident involving Qatar's defending champion Nasser al Attiyah and Matthieu Baumel. Late reports confirmed that Attiyah went off the road and his car was consumed in flames leading to cancellation of the stage.

After the day one action, local driver Simos Galatariotis and his navigator Antonis Ioannou, who



L-R Hamed al Wahaibi, Nasser al Attiyah and Abdullah al Rawahi in Nicosia during the Cyprus Rally on Saturday

won all three of the Saturday morning special stages, lead the overall classification of the 49th Cyprus Rally.

In second place, 26 seconds behind, is another Cypriot pair - Alexandros Tsouloftas and Stelios Elias. Both the leaders are driving a Volkswagen Polo GTI.

Following the accident of Attiyah and Baumel in stage six,

Rawahi and Hmoud in their Ford Fiesta moved up to third spot, having initially finished fourth overall in the MERC category.

Wahaibi made an impressive return to international competition after a decade, and along with New Zealand co-driver Tony Sircombe, set up fifth and fourth fastest times in the opening two stages.

However, they suffered an incident on the third stage and were forced to retire for the day. Fortunately they were safe and their Škoda Fabia 1.6 car didn't take much damage. The pair is expected to restart for the final day action.

"Unfortunately we were not able to finish the stages on the first day," said Wahaibi. "We

slipped off the road entering a narrow corner. Tony and I are still learning with the new car and we will try and find out where the error occurred, maybe in the pace notes. We performed well before the accident. The car is in good condition and we can return for the last day."

Rawahi, who recorded consistent top-six times, except in stage three when he was seventh, was happy with the first day's action. The 24 year old, who is competing in Cyprus for the fourth time, said, "We managed to finish the first loop, that was our aim for the beginning. We can now do a little bit of adjustments. So far, so good, for a first day and hopefully we can finish the second loop in a good position."

Earlier, the ceremonial start of the 49th Cyprus Rally was given on Friday evening in front of the Old Town Hall in Eleftheria Square. Teams will tackle three sinuous stages of 13.01km (Lythrodontas), 19.02km (Ayios Epifanios) and 10.96km (Ayia Marina) on two occasions on Sunday.

@ashokmuscat

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

City end Chelsea's unbeaten run as United pay penalty

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Manchester City ended their Chelsea hoodoo on Saturday, beating the European champions 1-0 while Bruno Fernandes missed a last-gasp penalty in Manchester United's shock 0-1 defeat by Aston Villa.

Gabriel Jesus' second-half strike proved decisive for Pep Guardiola's men, who gained a measure of revenge for three consecutive defeats by Chelsea, most notably in last season's Champions League final.

The win lifted the defending champions to 13 points alongside Liverpool, Chelsea and United, who conceded a late goal to Villa defender Kortney Hause before suffering the agony of the missed spot-kick.

City's key moment came in the 53rd minute when Jesus got the break City deserved to open the scoring as his effort deflected off Jorginho to leave goalkeeper Edouard Mendy flat-footed.

Fernandes miss

Villa arrived at Old Trafford with a woeful record of one win in their previous 45 Premier League games against Manchester United, including 33 defeats.

United were on top early on, but Villa missed two great chances to take the lead.

The home side had chances of their own through Harry Maguire and Paul Pogba but Hause made no mistake, heading in Douglas Luiz's corner with two minutes remaining. Hause then conceded a penalty in stoppage time, handling a cross, but Fernandes - normally so reliable from the penalty spot - fired over.

OTHER RESULTS:

Everton 2 Norwich 0, Leeds 1 West Ham 2, Leicester 2 Burnley 2, Watford 1 Newcastle 1.

SPANISH LEAGUE

Atletico shocked by Alaves

Madrid, Spain - La Liga's reigning champions lost to the bottom club on Saturday as Atletico



Man City's players celebrate after scoring against Chelsea in London on Saturday (AFP)

Madrid's rocky start to the season continued with a shock 0-1 defeat at Alaves. Victor Laguardia's header in the fourth minute was enough for an unexpected victory for Alaves, who sat 20th at kick-off, after losing all their first five games.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Maldini's first Milan goal on full debut

La Spezia, Italy - Daniel Maldini followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps on Saturday by netting his first AC Milan goal on his full Serie A debut. Over 12 years since his father, club legend Paolo last played for the seven-time European champions, Maldini junior headed Milan into the lead at Spezia two minutes after half-time. Milan won the match 2-1.

OTHER RESULTS

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Dundee 0 Rangers 1, Heart of Midlothian 3 Livingston 0, Motherwell 1 Ross County 1.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Union Berlin 1 Arminia Bielefeld 0, Bayer Leverkusen 1 Mainz 0, Eintracht Frankfurt 1 Cologne 1, RB Leipzig 6 Hertha Berlin 0, Hoffenheim 3 Wolfsburg 1. AFP

McLaren's Norris takes maiden pole at Russian Grand Prix

FORMULA ONE

RUSSIAN GRAND PRIX

Sochi, Russia - McLaren's Lando Norris took his maiden Formula One pole in a shock outcome to Saturday's qualifying for the Russian Grand Prix. Norris is joined on the front row by the Ferrari of Carlos Sainz with Lewis Hamilton starting on the second row in his latest attempt at reaching 100 wins.

Hamilton was looking good for pole after topping the timesheets in Q1 and Q2, but he then suffered late drama with three minutes left of Q3 when he hit the pit wall requiring a hastily fitted new front wing to his damaged Mercedes.

A spin on his re-emergence out onto the circuit on slick tyres left the door open for 21-year-old Norris to steal the show at



McLaren's British driver Lando Norris celebrates taking the pole (AFP)

Sochi with a flying last lap of 1min 41.993sec.

The refreshingly different complexion of the top of the grid was completed by George Russell of Williams. He posted the third quickest time to start alongside seven-time world champion Hamilton, his teammate when he relaces Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes next season. Max Verstappen, who

leads Hamilton by five points ahead of this 15th round of the season, starts from the back of the grid due to an engine change penalty on his Red Bull.

Hamilton meanwhile will be counting on exploiting Verstappen's penalty to the fullest at the circuit on the shores of the Black Sea where he has already won four times with Mercedes undefeated since it first ap-

peared on the calendar in 2014.

Stuck on 99 since Silverstone on July 18 the Mercedes world champion will hope his car's race pace will see him finally become F1's first century man. Qualifying got underway as scheduled after a dramatic improvement in conditions following torrential rain which washed out the morning's final practice. AFP

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(It's free of cost)

BIRTHDAY WISHES



MANJUSHA
September 26

Dear Manjusha..
Wish you life's finest things today and forever.. Have a fabulous fun-filled golden birthday.. You make 50 look AMAZING

From your
Rugged Roadies
buddies



QUOTE OF THE DAY

I thought the total was chaseable but we lost too many wickets and weren't able to get any momentum in our chase

Sanju Samson
Rajasthan skipper after his team's defeat to Delhi on Saturday



OUTSIDE IPL

Scotland rout PNG in WCL 2 tri-series

Our Correspondent Muscat

A solid 78-run opening wicket partnership between Scotland's Matthew Cross (70) and Kyle Coetzer (23) laid the foundation of the team's six-wicket victory in the opening match of the ICC World Cricket League (WCL) 2 tri-series against Papua New Guinea (PNG) at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Saturday.

Hosts Oman take on PNG in their first match of this tri-series on Sunday.

Having restricted PNG to 197 in 47.4 overs, Scotland reached victory with six wickets in hand in 43 overs to pick up valuable two points in the seven-nation tournament and stay at third place with 11 points from nine games. Oman lead the standings with 22 points from 14 games with 11 wins.

The tri-series is the second of the back-to-back WCL 2 event in Oman after the ICC resumed the qualifiers to the 2023 World Cup in India. In the first tri-series that concluded last week, Oman emerged on top with Nepal and the USA the other participating teams.

Scotland and PNG are also in Oman's group along with Bangladesh in the first round of the T20 World Cup that begins next month.

Scotland put PNG to bat first and had them on the backfoot with early strikes as PNG were 58 for three in ten overs. By the next ten overs, PNG were 92 for six. At the halfway stage they were tottering at 105 for seven. It was only a ninth-wicket stand between Chad Soper (46 n.o.) and Damien Ravu (32) that took them around 200. Pacer Gavin Man and spinner Hamza Tahir picked up three wickets each.

In reply, the opening wicket stand was followed by another half-century stand of 58 between Cross and Calum MacLeod (45). George Munsey's unbeaten 27 took the team home in 43 overs. Cross was adjudged the man-of-the-match.

Brief scores: PNG 197 in 47.4 overs (Assad Vala 28, Soper 46, Ravu 32; Main 3-33, Tahir 3-36) lost to Scotland 198-4 in 43 overs (Cross 70, MacLeod 45, Munsey 27; Soper 2-20, Assad Vala 2-30).

CLINICAL CAPITALS OUTPLAY ROYALS



Shreyas Iyer
43
32 BALLS

Anrich Nortje
2 WKTS
18 RUNS



DELHI VS RAJASTHAN
Abu Dhabi, UAE - What appeared at the innings break like a small mountain to climb soon looked like Everest to a struggling Rajasthan Royals batting lineup as Delhi Capitals turned in a disciplined team bowling effort led by Anrich Nortje to comfortably defend 154, winning by 33 runs in Abu Dhabi on Saturday afternoon.

Royals were always behind in the chase after losing three wickets in the powerplay as the

overseas pair of Liam Livingstone and David Miller fell cheaply to dent Royals chances.

Sanju Samson could have been the fourth to fall in the sequence but was reprieved by DRS. He waged a lone battle through the rest of the innings, ending unbeaten on 70 off 53 balls but receiving little support at the opposite end. Mahipal Lomror's 19 served as the only other score to get into double-digits as the Capitals strangled the scoring rate from

start to finish to seal a victory that puts them two points clear of Chennai Super Kings into sole possession of first place in the IPL points table.

Tyagi strikes
Royals were buoyant early when Kartik Tyagi struck with his very first ball of the match after entering in the fourth over as he bowled Shikhar Dhawan for eight.

The lack of boundaries created enough pressure for Prithvi Shaw to throw away his wicket

soon after as well, beginning the fourth over shoveling a catch off Chetan Sakariya to Livingstone at mid-off to make it 21 for two.

Shrey-yes
In what proved to be the most important partnership of the match, Shreyas Iyer was joined by Rishabh Pant for a 62-run third-wicket stand. Iyer delivered a pair of crunching blows in the tenth and 11th over. Rahul Tewatia was the first victim as Iyer punched him back over his head

SCOREBOARD	
DELHI CAPITALS	
P Shaw	c Livingstone b Sakariya 10 (12)
S Dhawan	b Tyagi 8 (8)
S Iyer	st Samson b Tewatia 43 (32)
R Pant	b Rahman 24 (24)
S Hetmyer	c Sakariya b Rahman 28 (16)
L Yadav	not out 14 (15)
A Patel	c Miller b Sakariya 12 (7)
R Ashwin	not out 6 (6)
Extras	(b 2, lb 1, w 6) 9
TOTAL:	154 for six in 20 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-21, 3-83, 4-90, 5-121, 6-142	
Bowling: M Rahman 4-0-22-2, M Lomror 1-0-5-0, C Sakariya 4-0-33-2, K Tyagi 4-0-40-1, T Shamsi 4-0-34-0, R Tewatia 3-0-17-1	
RAJASTHAN ROYALS	
L Livingstone	c Pant b Khan 1 (3)
Y Jaiswal	c Pant b Nortje 5 (4)
S Samson	not out 70 (53)
D Miller	st Pant b Ashwin 7 (10)
M Lomror	c Khan b Rabada 19 (24)
R Parag	b Patel 2 (7)
R Tewatia	c Hetmyer b Nortje 9 (15)
T Shamsi	not out 2 (4)
Extras	(lb 1, w 5) 6
TOTAL:	121 for six in 20 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-6, 3-17, 4-48, 5-55, 6-99	
Bowling: A Khan 4-0-29-1, A Nortje 4-0-18-2, R Ashwin 4-0-20-1, K Rabada 4-0-26-1, A Patel 4-0-27-1	

TODAY'S MATCHES



CHENNAI SUPER KINGS VS KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

ABU DHABI, 2PM



ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE VS MUMBAI INDIANS

DUBAI, 6PM

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
DC	10	8	2	0	16	+0.711
CSK	9	7	2	0	14	+1.185
RCB	9	5	4	0	10	-0.720
KKR	9	4	5	0	8	+0.363
PBKS	10	4	6	0	8	-0.271
MI	9	4	5	0	8	-0.310
RR	9	4	5	0	8	-0.319
SRH	9	1	8	0	2	-0.637

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

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

Shami, Bishnoi help Kings prevail

PUNJAB VS HYDERABAD
Sharjah, UAE - Punjab Kings kept their slim hopes of making the playoffs alive after a tidy bowling performance helped them defeat Sunrisers Hyderabad in a low-scoring match on Saturday.

The win helped Punjab climb to the fifth spot to keep their hopes alive for the playoffs while Hyderabad were eliminated from the race.

Mohammed Shami's new-ball breakthroughs to remove David Warner and Kane Williamson hurt Sunrisers early in their chase of 126, after which they failed to find a batter who could change gears in the middle overs.

Sunrisers made just 20 in the powerplay - their lowest score for the period in IPL history - and never recovered.

Leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi then made the most of the rising asking rate by bowling googlies and taking a three-wicket haul in



Punjab Kings' players celebrate after a dismissal of a Hyderabad batsman

his first match of the renewed season.

An unbeaten 47 by Jason Holder threatened to take the match away from Punjab as the West Indian smacked a six in Bishnoi's final over and then hit back-to-back sixes off debutant Nathan Ellis. He smashed another six in Shami's final over to keep the team in chase.

Arshdeep Singh got Rashid Khan caught in the 19th over with score 105. With 17 needed off final over, Holder cracked a six off Ellis on the second ball. Two dot balls and a wide means seven were needed off the final ball and a six for a Super Over. Ellis kept his calm in giving a single run off a slower full toss to help Punjab emerge victorious.

Earlier, Hyderabad made regular strikes with the ball as Kings could manage only a meagre 125. Punjab didn't get the best of the starts with only 26 runs scored in four overs by KL Rahul and Mayank Agarwal. Both were dismissed by Holder, who picked three for 19.

West Indies power hitters - Chris Gayle and Nicholas Pooran - failed to fire and departed early. Aiden Markram, dropped on three, was a lone ranger for Punjab till he holed out to long-off on a full toss from Abdul Samad in the 15th over.

Holder had his third wicket when Deepak Hooda's loft was snapped by substitute fielder J Suchith flying to his left to complete a one-handed catch.

Ellis smacked Bhuvneshwar Kumar for a six on the first ball of the final over but Kumar had his revenge on the next as Ellis sliced to third man before a boundary

SCOREBOARD	
PUNJAB KINGS	
KL Rahul	c sub (Suchith) b Holder 21 (21)
M Agarwal	c Williamson b Holder 5 (6)
C Gayle	lbw b Rashid Khan 14 (17)
A Markram	c Pandey b Samad 27 (32)
N Pooran	c & b Sandeep Sharma 8 (4)
D Hooda	c sub (Suchith) b Holder 13 (10)
H Brar	not out 18 (18)
N Ellis	c Pandey b Kumar 12 (12)
M Shami	not out 0 (0)
Extras	(b 1, lb 3, w 3) 7
TOTAL:	125 for seven in 20 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-26, 2-27, 3-57, 4-66, 5-88, 6-96, 7-118	
Bowling: S Sharma 4-0-20-1, B Kumar 4-0-34-1, J Holder 4-0-19-3, K Ahmed 3-0-22-0, Rashid Khan 4-0-17-1, A Samad 1-0-9-1	
SUNRISERS HYDERABAD	
D Warner	c Rahul b Shami 2 (3)
W Saha	run out 31 (37)
K Williamson	b Shami 1 (4)
M Pandey	b Bishnoi 13 (23)
K Jadhav	b Bishnoi 12 (12)
A Samad	c Gayle b Bishnoi 1 (1)
J Holder	not out 47 (29)
R Khan	c & b Arshdeep Singh 3 (4)
B Kumar	not out 3 (4)
Extras	(b 1, lb 2, w 4) 7
TOTAL:	120 for seven in 20 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-10, 3-32, 4-56, 5-60, 6-92, 7-105	
Bowling: M Shami 4-1-14-2, Arshdeep Singh 4-0-22-1, N Ellis 4-0-32-0, H Brar 4-0-25-0, R Bishnoi 4-0-24-3	

from Harpreet Brar took Punjab past 120.

Cricinfo

India to play one Test in England in 2022 summer

London, UK - England and India have confirmed plans to play a Test in England, in the summer of 2022. The match replaces the fifth Test at Old Trafford which was abandoned earlier this month.

It has not been confirmed at this stage whether the match will be a standalone game or complete the series started in August, but it will avert the majority of financial losses incurred by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) due to the abandonment in Manchester.

It may also avert any further disagreements between the ECB and the Indian board (BCCI) about the reasons for the abandonment and who should take responsibility for it.

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The winners...



CATEGORY: ARTS

HH Sayyida Meyyan Shihab Tariq al Said

HH Meyyan Shihab al Said, an Interior Design graduate from Virginia Commonwealth University Qatar, who also has an MA in Design Strategy and Innovation Management from the University of Brunel London, is in the business of transforming spaces.

Her wide range of experience has had her serve on the design teams for many real estate projects in Oman, such as the W hotel, Hilton Garden Inn Hotel and Al Sharq Master Development.

Member of the Photographic Society of Oman, she won the ‘Best Photo Award’ at the Female photographers exhibition in 2016. In 2018, she was elected president of the Oman Design Society and was also chosen as a speaker in the IDF exhibition in 2020 to give a design talk on Hospitality Interior Design.

Her artwork has been displayed in cafes, magazines, and multiple corporate publications, though her first solo exhibition was held at the Mall of Muscat in January 2021 where she displayed 30 of her photographic artworks, the proceeds of which were pledged for charity.

“I believe that with having the right attitude towards tasks and building good habits throughout your day can help you achieve whatever it is that you seek. Staying positive, practising a certain skill you have daily, and keeping a curious mindset to learn something new every day is what keeps me going,” says HH Meyyan, adding, “When facing challenges, I think it’s important to take a step back and look at the challenge you are facing from all perspectives possible; this’ll help in giving you a wider outlook on things.”

HH Meyyan uses her hobbies like swimming and illustrating as a therapeutic practice to refine the body and mind. In fact, she says, her first solo exhibition broadened her vision and made her want to continue on a path of ‘Art Philanthropy’. And if there is something that always fuels her zeal, it is the oft repeated words of her father - ‘Stop dreaming and start doing’ which always propels her into action.



CATEGORY: LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Dr Kaltham al Zadjali

Dr Kaltham bint Mohammed bin Ali al Zadjali, an expert media public authority for radio and television, is considered one of the pillars of the Ministry of Information in Oman.

Fondly known as Mama Kaltham, because she has been providing Omani women, youths, and families with hope and happiness, and instilling in them a love for their homeland, Dr Kaltham had started her career in the Ministry of Information in 1975 (at the age of only 14 years), and was able to prove herself, until in 1983 she became the anchor of children’s, family and variety programmes until she retired in 2020.

“The key to success lies in a person loving what he does, besides self-confidence and determination. Challenges generate determination to achieve success while obstacles in life serve as motivators,” she says adding that these are the attributes that affected her personality and gave her a determination to work hard.

Being part of a large joint family comprising 13 brothers and sisters, she had always supplemented the family income and helped her father in maintaining the family budget, besides her role in society in brightening up people’s lives. She gains immense joy in equipping youths with skills to become entrepreneurs and run small and medium enterprises.

She is an honorary member of a number of charitable societies in the sultanate, including the Oman Association for the Disabled, Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disability, Omani Women’s Association, Oman Cancer Association (OCA) and member of several voluntary community groups. She holds a PhD in globalisation and its impact on Omani youth.

Greatly inspired by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Mama Kaltham says, “His Majesty taught us the meaning of persistence, challenge, love of the homeland, and the importance of giving. At the beginning of the Renaissance, when HM called for equality between men and women in building Oman, that’s when I started work, full of hope. And I realised that actions transform into miracles, only if we have a strong will.”

CATEGORY: COVID WARRIOR

Dr Fannah Abdullah al Fannah al Araiimi

Dr Fannah Abdullah al Fannah al Araiimi, a public health consultant and family physician, who chairs the Oman Public Health Society, affiliated to the Oman Medical Association, has had an illustrious journey of excellence in the field of medicine over the past two decades.

Besides medical practice, during the past year, Dr Fannah has also been organising live radio workshops (daily and weekly) to educate the Omani community on all health issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. She also conducts regular field visits to various governorates in the sultanate to promote public health among women, especially topics related to precautions concerning the pandemic.

“Working with infected cases during the pandemic, I dealt with various groups of patients belonging to diverse backgrounds and I am continuing to do so even now,” says Dr Fannah who has seen patients go through various stages of fear, concern, and anxiety related to being infected until they emerge happy when finally rid of the disease.

“I have always been a natural leader, right from my household to my professional career. I think, the ability to lead is crucial for success, besides being able to give a patient ear to the views of others. I am able to go through things, even when they are tough, by reminding myself that it is just a fleeting moment in life,” she says, asserting that she always tries to delve on the brighter side of every situation.

As a fulltime doctor and mother, Dr Fannah says she has to shoulder multiple responsibilities but always finds fulfilment in her work at home as well as in the hospital.

“My motivation in life is to ensure that the health of all children is taken care of, something which inspired me to become an IMCI Expert,” she says, adding that her own children are her biggest support and motivators. As for the current pandemic which brought out the best in her, she looks at it as an eye-opener for the entire world.



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