



THURSDAY, 25 MARCH 2021
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30°C/21°C

OMAN'S ISLAMIC BANKING GROWTH ROBUST: FITCH
GO TO PAGE 06 BUSINESS

HM sends condolences to UAE, Saudi Arabia

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai on the death of his brother, Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid al Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai and Minister of Finance.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed soul in peace in paradise and grant Sheikh Mohammed and his family patience.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham has also sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the death of Prince Badr Fahd Saud al Kabeer al Saud.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed soul in peace in paradise and grant his family patience.

ONA



PDO's \$4bn long-term service contracts to create more jobs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) signed major service contracts worth US\$4bn, on Wednesday, covering project delivery, and maintenance and integrity work in the north and south of its concession area.

The agreements with Arabian Industries Projects (AIP) and Special Technical Services (STS) encompass the design and execution of more than 200 on-plot projects and will run for seven years with an optional three-year extension.

Current Omanisation levels will double over the life cycle of the contracts, resulting in several thousand additional employment opportunities for Omanis, with a focus on skilled jobs, supervisory and engineering positions.

A training-for-employment scheme has been introduced, enabling the training, re-skilling and upskilling of over 1,000 Omani personnel. About 1,500 more Omani employees of incumbent



Raoul Restucci, MD of PDO, and Amer al Sulaimani, MD of Arabian Industries Projects, at the signing ceremony on Wednesday (Supplied photo)

PDO contractors will be transferred and redeployed to the new contractors.

Local sub-contracting businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will also benefit with specific targets for both, besides an obligation on the part of the contractors to ensure and monitor their use.

Additionally, the deals include a strategy to develop a domestic

firm to execute maintenance and integrity tasks in a selected cluster in the PDO oil and gas portfolio within five years.

This further builds on the focus to introduce and mature domestic contractors for turn-arounds to carry out facility maintenance in scheduled shut-downs as recently endorsed by Oman LNG, OQ, OPAL and PDO.

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11 COVID-19 deaths in 24 hours, 116 admitted in ICUs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The COVID-19 pandemic is worsening in the sultanate with 11 deaths reported in 24 hours on Wednesday, taking the total death count to 1,644.

Infection rates are also rising, as reported by the Ministry of Health (MoH); 741 new cases were registered on Wednesday, taking the total number to 153,105. Sixty-eight patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours, accounting for a total of 373 inpatients, including 116 in intensive care units. The total number of cases that have recovered now stands at 140,220, which is 92 per cent of all the infected cases.

MoH, in the meanwhile, continues its nationwide immunisation



campaign, with 110,179 individuals having received the vaccine.

The Ministry of Education announced on Tuesday that students of Qantab School will attend classes remotely. 'Owing to the high number of COVID-19 cases in the sultanate, for the health and safety of students the Supervisory Committee of the

Directorate General of Education in Muscat and the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat decided to change the mode of learning for students of Qantab School in the wilayat of Muscat from blended education to online lessons starting March 28 until further notice,' the MoH said in a statement.

Additionally, the Ministry of Labour will temporarily suspend receiving customers at its Seeb office. 'The ministry would like to inform customers that services at the Seeb Labour Department is suspended from March 25 to April 8 as a measure to slow the spread of COVID-19. Customers can use online services offered on the ministry website (www.mol.gov.om) or call 24280631/24280630,' a statement said.

**عروض
نهاية
الأسبوع**

**WEEKEND
OFFERS**

من ٢٥ حتى ٢٧ مارس ٢٠٢١
From 25th to 27th March 2021

RIAL 0.170 Watermelon (Oman) per kg

RIAL 0.790 Avocado (Kenya) per kg

RIAL 0.475 Potato Small Bag

RIAL 1.490 Mango Taimoor Box

RIAL 0.390 Onion Small Bag

RIAL 0.190 Capsicum Green (Oman) per kg

RIAL 0.050 Cabbage White (Oman) per kg

RIAL 1.790 Apple Fuji Box

RIAL 2.190 Grapes White Family Pack

RIAL 1.250 Sheri Fish per kg



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FOOD PROCESSORS MIXERS

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IN STORE

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ON SELECTED TABLETS

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IN STORE

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BETTER
VALUE**

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IN STORE AND ONLINE



طقم مفك براغي أوتوماتيك (ساتا)
Sata cordless screw driver set

SAVE
62.58%
7 RIAL
990
2 RIAL
990



فاطعة سلطة (دايو)
Daewoo salad maker DFP453

200W
Multi
purpose
SAVE
50.36%
13 RIAL
900
6 RIAL
900



ماكينة عمل إسبرسو (دايو)
Daewoo espresso maker DES-484

800W
4 Cups

SAVE
50%
26 RIAL
900
13 RIAL
450



كرسي شاطئ قابل للطي
Camping chair

SAVE
50.06%
7 RIAL
990
3 RIAL
990



طقم طهي جرانيت (هاشيفير)
Hascevher granite cooking ware set
assorted

7 Pieces
SAVE
46.68%
29 RIAL
990
15 RIAL
990



طقم معدات شواء
BBQ galva offer pack

SAVE
33.39%
5 RIAL
990
3 RIAL
990



مشروب (بيبسي) ٣٢٥ مل متنوع
Pepsi drink 325ml assorted

24 Pieces
3 RIAL
990



أفخاذ دجاج (ساديا) ٩٠٠ غرام
Sadia chicken drumsticks 900g

2 Pieces
SAVE
50.64%
3 RIAL
900
1 RIAL
925



دجاج كامل (ساديا) ١١٠٠ غرام
Sadia whole chicken 1100g

10 Pieces
SAVE
36.99%
10 RIAL
300
6 RIAL
490



تفاح أحمر، إيران
Apple Red, Iran

PER KG
DISCOUNT
51%
0 RIAL
390
0 RIAL
190



بطيخ، عمان
Water melon, Oman

PER KG
DISCOUNT
64%
0 RIAL
280
0 RIAL
100



سمك بلطي طازج، مصر
Fresh Tilapia fish, Egypt

PER KG
1 RIAL
390



Oman launches national strategy to eliminate TB

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday launched the National Strategy to Eliminate Tuberculosis (TB) under the theme 'It's time to End TB' in conjunction with the World TB Day at the World Health Organization (WHO) office in Muscat. World TB Day is observed on March 24 every year.

The launch ceremony was held under the auspicious of H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, in the presence of Dr John Jabbour, WHO's representative in the sultanate, and a number of senior officials.

Every year, the sultanate participates in the celebration of World TB Day to raise public awareness on the devastating health, social and economic consequences of TB and to intensify efforts to end it.

The choice of the day comes in memory of the day in 1882, when Dr Robert Koch announced his discovery of the tuberculosis causing bacteria, paving the way for the diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

In this regard, H E Dr Sa'eedi pointed out that the number of TB cases registered in the sultanate decreased in the last ten years. In 2019, the number of infected cases slightly increased and this was attributed to the accuracy of diagnostic tools in the sultanate.

He added that most of the cases are among expatriates despite the examinations carried out for them before their entry into the sultanate.

The minister stressed that the sultanate pursued the diagnosis



Oman pursued the diagnosis and treatment of expatriates infected with TB for free, which contributed to reducing the domestic spread of the disease

H E DR AHMED SA'EEDI

and treatment of expatriates infected with TB for free, which contributed to reducing the domestic spread of the disease. He indicated that as for Omanis, TB was among the advanced age groups and those who are infected with other chronic diseases.

H E Dr Sa'eedi clarified that

the sultanate is one of the few countries and the only country in the East Mediterranean Region that was chosen to be a model in the elimination of TB.

He added that through cooperation with the WHO and other sectors, a strategy has been developed to eliminate tuberculosis before 2035. He also pointed out that in 2019 in a high-level meeting held in New York, the sultanate was chosen to be among three states to eliminate TB.

Dr Jabbour stated that the sultanate is one of the countries with a low rate of TB infection, which is a result of cooperation, combined efforts and harnessing available potentials to achieve the goal of elimination of the disease.

According to WHO, TB remains the world's deadliest infectious disease, with more than

4,000 people dying every day and nearly 30,000 others becoming ill, prompting the United Nations to include the eradication of TB initiative among the health goals set out in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Oman is considered one of the countries with a low incidence rate, which is less than ten cases per 100,000 people (8/100,000 in 2019) with a decrease of almost two per cent in the past ten years.

The aim of the National Strategy to Eliminate Tuberculosis, which will be implemented in stages, is to reduce the incidence rate to less than 100 per million by 2035 to reach the pre-elimination phase of tuberculosis by reducing the incidence rate by 90 per cent and mortality rate by 95 per cent compared to the epidemiological situation in 2015.

SAYYID THEYAZIN MEETS JAPANESE ENVOY



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received at his office on Wednesday H E Toshinori Kobayashi, Ambassador of Japan to the sultanate. The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on aspects of the existing cooperation in cultural and sports fields, as well as means of promoting cooperation (Supplied photo)

Jusoor to build physiotherapy unit in Shinas Health Centre

Muscat - Jusoor Foundation recently signed an agreement with the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), North Batinah, which is under the Ministry of Health (MoH), to establish a physiotherapy and rehabilitation centre in Shinas.

H E Sheikh Saif bin Humair al Malik al Shehi, Governor of North Batinah and chairman of Jusoor Board of Directors, signed the agreement on behalf of Jusoor, while the director general of Health Services in North Batinah, signed the agreement on behalf of MoH.

Funded by OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale, and implemented by Jusoor, the project aims at enhancing the quality and efficacy of health services in Shinas Health Centre.

Furthermore, it focuses on accommodating patients with physiotherapy and rehabilitation needs as well as avoiding the transfer of patients to referral hospitals or postponing their treatments. It intends to educate stakeholders about the new added services and encourage them to benefit from the centre.



H E Sheikh Shehi said, "This agreement reflects the organisation's commitment with its partners, OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale. The project is in alignment with the efforts and aspirations of Jusoor Foundation to achieve sustainable social development for Oman. At this foundation, we strongly believe in the importance of community participation in pursuing development in the governorates."

With a built-up area of 187.86sqm, the newly constructed building on the premises of Shinas Health Centre, will

be equipped with high-quality medical tools and devices necessary for providing top-notch physiotherapy and rehabilitation services. The cost of the project is estimated at RO85,000 and is anticipated to be completed in 12 months.

The project is aimed at providing the elderly, handicapped and patients with fractures, burns and accidents appropriate and timely treatment. The centre will consist of six diagnostic and rehabilitation clinics, a physiotherapy room and separate waiting rooms for males and females.

REGIONAL WEATHER			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
Abu Dhabi	38	23	Fajr	4.48am
Doha	31	22	Sunrise	6.06am
Kuwait City	32	19	Duhr	12.13pm
Manama	32	22	Asr	3.39pm
Riyadh	38	21	Maghrib	6.20pm
			Isha	7.50pm

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SUMMARY OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020					
(Amount in RO'000)					
ASSETS	2020	2019	LIABILITIES	2020	2019
1 Cash on hand	1,149	1,631	1 Capital and reserve	4,104	3,554
2 Deposit with Central Bank of Oman	110	110	2 Borrowings from banks	-	-
3 Precious metals	-	-	3 Balance due to branches	-	-
4 Balance due from banks	3,039	2,213	4 Balance due to money changers	129	86
5 Balance due from branches	-	-	5 Loans and advances payable	-	613
6 Balance due from money changers	589	361	6 Cheques and drafts issued outstanding	16	32
7 Cheques and drafts purchased	-	-	7 Other liabilities	1,173	658
8 Fixed assets	202	240			
9 Investments	-	-			
10 Other assets	333	388			
Total	5,422	4,943	Total	5,422	4,943
We certify that the above balances are in agreement with the books and records of the company as at 31 December 2020.					
CROWE MAK GHAZALI LLC, CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS 25 February 2021					

EJAAD Steering Committee reviews operational plan

Muscat - The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the Steering Committee of the EJAAD platform, held its first meeting for the year virtually on Tuesday, under the chairmanship of H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation at the ministry.

The meeting began with a welcoming speech delivered by Dr Saif al Haddabi, chairman of the Steering Committee of EJAAD. The agenda of the meeting included a number of topics, most notably the National System of Research and Innovation. Fields of scientific research were reviewed, the priorities in accor-

dance with Oman Vision 2040 were identified, and the global innovation systems were analysed at the meeting.

The meeting also discussed EJAAD as a platform, reviewing its cooperation with the industrial sector and the operational plan for the platform for this year, in addition to reviewing the decision to form EJAAD's Steering Committee. Through the meeting, it has been agreed upon to choose Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani as vice chairman of the Steering Committee of EJAAD, and to nominate Dr Sausan al Riyami as director of EJAAD. A working group was formed at the meeting.

Omani research project wins international recognition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A research project titled 'Feasibility of Solar Energy (Photovoltaic) Systems in Oman' by Dr Hussein A Kazem, chair of Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technology Research Group at Sohar University, has won several accolades.

Funded by The Research Council, which is now under the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in 2011, the research looks for an appropriate starting point and developments to use renewable energy in Oman that may lead to a zero-carbon scenario. It explores solar energy to produce electricity through a variety of methods, including photovoltaic



(Supplied photo)

(PV) systems, or solar cells, which have shown great success. Implementation of PV systems has shown that their reliability and efficiency depend on several factors, the most important being location (latitude, longitude and solar intensity), envi-

ronmental (temperature, wind, humidity, pollution, dust, rain etc), and type of PV used.

The research shows that prior to committing to large PV projects, a thorough investigation of the above factors is essential. Its observations are available as ref-

erence for any company planning to use PV systems in Oman, particularly in Sohar.

Achievements of the research project include publication in 33 papers and journals, listing in Web of Science and SCOPUS, and registration for a patent. The research is also helping train more than 200 Omani students on solar energy systems (design, operation and maintenance) in addition to establishment of a laboratory - Renewable Energy Lab - and installation of solar PV systems (standalone type, grid-connected type and solar tracking type).

Elaborating on the success of his research project, Kazem informed that it was also feted by the World Renewable Energy Congress 2016 in Indonesia and

that he received the 'Pioneer of Renewable Energy' award - one of the most prestigious awards in renewable energy for it.

Additionally, the Renewable Energy Lab was recognised by the World Renewable Energy Congress in 2014 and awarded the 'Outstanding Renewable Energy Lab' title by the United Kingdom.

Among the most important findings of the research are the optimal tilt angle for installation of PV cells in Oman, type of dust and their effect on solar PV systems, effect of Omani climatic conditions on PV systems, and the development of a computer programme to determine the optimal size of PV systems in the sultanate based on the type of electrical load.



Lulu kicks off Dream Drive 2021 campaign

Muscat - Lulu Oman has launched its Dream Drive 2021 campaign to reward valued customers during the month of Ramadan in celebration of the spirit of the season. The campaign, which commenced on March 21, will run till May 19, giving shoppers a chance to win eight Nissan Patrol 4WDs as grand prizes and 40 other gifts from Ikon, including smart TVs, cooking ranges, refrigerators and freezers. The campaign will go on in all branches of Lulu in the sultanate.

Like the previous editions of the campaign, Lulu is continuing its policy of being environment-friendly by digitalising the raffle draw process. Eight electronic draws will be held on different dates during the period, the last scheduled on May 23.

Customers can participate in the e-affle when they purchase goods worth RO10 or more in a single receipt at any branch of Lulu in Oman, followed by registering the transaction online. Raffle coupons for valid claims will be sent to customers by email or SMS within 48 working hours. Customers who have registered

once will be required to enter their mobile numbers for subsequent registrations. Online registrations will close on May 21.

Speaking about the campaign, Ananth A V, regional director of Lulu Hypermarkets - Oman, India and Sri Lanka, said, "We are happy to adapt to the new normal and break new ground in customer service excellence with our promotions and campaigns. The Dream Drive campaign is one of our several strategies to engage with our customers and we are happy to bring it back even during the challenging times such as this. This campaign has always been a platform for us to appreciate and thank our customers for their continued support and loyalty."

Shabeer K A, regional director - Oman, said, "Ramadan is the perfect time for us to show our gratitude to our beloved customers, and this campaign is truly a reflection of the spirit of the season. We encourage our customers to make use of the online delivery services. We wish all our customers a blessed month of Ramadan."

ROHM launches digital initiative

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has launched a new digital initiative called 'Min Darna le Darecom' or 'From Our House to Your Home'.

"The new digital initiative is a long-term artistic programme that offers world-class classical music to Omani and international audiences via the Internet," the ROHM said.

The initiative will kick off with three special concerts that were recorded sans audi-

ence, featuring the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra and the Muscat Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with the Opera Choir Group.

The concerts can be accessed on April 4, May 23 and June 20 at 7.30pm.

The concerts were recorded at ROHM, without audiences. This is in line with directions of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ROHM invites all to watch the concerts.

Muscat International Airport achieves IATA double certification

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat International Airport achieved a new milestone after it was awarded both the 'CEIV Pharma' and 'CEIV Fresh' certifications from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) for excellence in handling of both pharmaceuticals and perishables, according to a statement.

These come as recognition of the efforts undertaken by Oman Airports as an umbrella organisation to mitigate the challenges faced by the aviation sector dur-



ing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Muscat International Airport is the first airport in the world to receive both awards simultaneously working as a broad cargo community including Oman Air, Transom SATS, Transom Handling, and Swissport, alongside the airport team.

"This latest achievement by Muscat International Airport demonstrates the commitment of the management of Oman Airports to support the development of the air cargo network and capitalising on the strategic location of Oman in particular as a cargo hub, not only for import and export to serve the Omani economy, but also as a regional transfer hub linking the Middle East region, Africa, Asia and Europe," said Sheikh Samer bin Ahmed al Nabhani, commercial chief officer at Oman Airports.

PDO's \$4bn long-term service contracts to create more jobs

Continued from Page 05

The signings took place at an official contract awards ceremony at PDO's Mina al Fahal headquarters, which was attended by Raoul Restucci - managing director of PDO, Sadiq Sulaiman - CEO of AIP, Rejeesh Mani - CEO of STS, Amer al Sulaimani - managing director of AIP, and Alex Clark - managing director of STS.

On the occasion, Restucci

said, "These strategic agreements create a win-win culture for PDO, our partner contractors and Oman, in that they maximise capital efficiency, generate multi-million-dollar savings and enhance in-country value (ICV) opportunities. They represent a benchmark of best practice by capturing the lessons learnt over the past 17 years from engineering, maintenance and construc-

tion contracts across our concession area."

Restucci noted that a seamlessly transition is expected from PDO's existing on-plot deals in the coming months, working hand-in-hand with AIP and STS to deliver a large portfolio of projects safely, responsibly and efficiently. "Considering the sheer size and dimension of these contracts, embedding such improve-

ments within 15 months of the tendering period during the COVID-19 pandemic is an outstanding achievement.

"I congratulate and thank all those responsible for bringing these agreements to fruition, as they will generate exceptional value both for our company and the country," Restucci added.

The scope and scale of contracts are significant, spanning

over the maintenance, integrity, field improvement proposals, turnaround activities, and the delivery of brownfield projects.

Under the terms of the deals, AIP will carry out project delivery in the north of Block 6 and maintenance and integrity work in the south, while STS will be responsible for project delivery in the south and maintenance and integrity in the north.

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Promotion valid from 25th February 2021 to 24th May 2021. Raffle draws on 25th March, 26th April and 25th May 2021. Three draws in total. Winners will be intimated in 7 days from the draw date. Pictures shown are for illustrative purpose only. Actual may vary. Customers to retain purchase receipts and scratch coupons to claim the gift. Oasis Water Company employees are not eligible to participate in this promotion. Terms and conditions apply.

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MAZDA RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR FUEL PUMP CONCERN

Model	VIN From	VIN To	Year	No of Affected Vehicles
Mazda2	MM7DJ8HV1KW394915	MM7DJAHV2KW473360	2017 - 2019	94
Mazda2	MM7DLBSV1HW340722	MM7DLBSV1HW340722	2017 - 2019	55
Mazda3	JM7BN1SZ6K1243570	JM7BN1SZ0K1258825	2018 - 2019	67
Mazda6	JM7GL4S3XK1303908	JM7GL4S76K1305285	2018	95
CX3	JM7DKAW72K1408766	JM7DKAW73K1409408	2018	4
CX5	JM7KFAWL0K0231553	JM7KFAWL5K0236635	2018	13
CX9	JM5TCAWY4K0301198	JM5TCAWY3K0302648	2018	29
MX5	JM7NDAE74K0300039	JM7NDAE74K0300039	2018	1

Actions: Replace the low pressure fuel pump with a modified one

Contact information: Towell Auto Centre LLC, Tel: 244229100, CR No. 1/36465/0

***Note:** Not all vehicles in the above VIN range are affected. Hence, please contact Towell Auto Centre before visiting the workshop.

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www.m-jglobal.com

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

MARKET WATCH	
MSM30	3,712.63
BSE Sensex	49,180.31
FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	188.92
Pakistani Rs	405.97
Bangladeshi Taka	220.28
Philippine Peso	126.33
Sri Lankan Rs	517.19

*Rates as on March 24
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Intel to spend \$20bn on new chip plants

US chip titan Intel said it will invest US\$20bn in building two new plants in Arizona as part of a plan to ramp up production in the United States and Europe.

"Intel's investment will help to preserve US technology innovation and leadership, strengthen US economic and national security, and protect and grow thousands of high-tech, high-wage American jobs," secretary of commerce Gina Raimondo said.

Intel chief executive Pat Gelsinger announced the investment during a webcast about the company's strategy, as it faces pressure to come up with ways to fend off fierce competition.

"Intel is the only company with the depth and breadth of software, silicon and platforms, packaging, and process with at-scale manufacturing customers can depend on for their next-generation innovations," Gelsinger said.

Geely sets up new EV brand

Chinese automaker Geely on Tuesday set up a new electric vehicle (EV) brand with a registered capital of 2bn yuan (US\$307.2mn), according to company sources.

The new brand, named Zeekr, will be a joint venture between Geely Auto and its parent company Geely Holding Group, taking a stake of 51 per cent and 49 per cent in the new brand, respectively.

The first model of the new brand will be up for reservation in this year's Auto Shanghai, scheduled to be held from April 21 to 28, and delivered in the fourth quarter, according to Geely Auto.

In the next five years, Zeekr aims to launch at least one new product in the market each year.

According to Li Shufu, chairman of Geely Holding Group, the company is formulating plans to focus on energy-saving and new energy vehicles, as well as on smart EVs.

Tencent reports 28% revenue growth

Chinese Internet giant Tencent on Wednesday reported a 28 per cent year-on-year growth in revenue for 2020, raking in around 482bn yuan (US\$73.9bn).

The company's net profit, calculated on a non-IFRS basis in order to reflect its core earnings by excluding certain one-time or non-cash items, rose 30 per cent year on year to reach about 123bn yuan during the period, according to its financial statement.

In the final quarter of 2020, its financial technology and business services brought in 38.5bn yuan, nearly a third of the company's total revenue, registering a 29 per cent year-on-year increase.

In the fourth quarter of last year, players under the age of 18 accounted for 6 per cent of the company's domestic online gaming gross receipts, with gamers under the age of 16 accounting for approximately 3.2 per cent of Tencent's total online gaming income in China.

Bank Muscat shareholders approve 35% dividend

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Sheikh Khalid al Mashani

Bank Muscat shareholders have granted their approval to distribute 25 per cent cash dividend (25bz per share) and 10 per cent bonus shares (10 bonus shares for every 100 shares owned) for the financial year 2020. The bank's shareholders will thus receive a combined dividend of 35 per cent.

Bank Muscat held its extraordinary general meeting (EGM) and annual ordinary general meeting (AGM) of shareholders on Tuesday. The meetings were held through the electronic platform developed by Muscat Clearing and Depository Company and were presided over by Sheikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani, chairman of the bank's board of directors.

At the meetings, Bank Muscat shareholders agreed to increase

the authorised capital of the bank to RO450mn from RO350mn previously. The shareholders also approved the amendment of the bank's Articles of Association accordingly.

Speaking on the occasion, Mashani expressed his thanks and gratitude to the shareholders for their strong support and confidence in the board of direc-

Bank Muscat shareholders at an EGM agreed to increase the bank's authorised capital to RO450mn from RO350mn previously

tors of Bank Muscat and the bank's performance and progress. He stressed that Bank Muscat would continue to further consolidate its leadership and maintain its position in the banking sector, driven by its customer-centric strategy and continuing to achieve greater success and offering products and services that meet the needs of different customer segments while also

achieving added value for its shareholders.

Mashani noted that Bank Muscat board welcomed and supported the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority to strengthen the financial sector in the sultanate. He added that the achievements of the bank would not have been possible without the far-sighted and proactive economic policies of the government of Oman.

In particular, he expressed his happiness with the strong financial results achieved by the bank in the past year despite unprecedented challenges and strong competition in the banking sector.

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO163.36mn for the year ended December 31, 2020 compared to RO185.55mn reported for the year ended December 31, 2019.

Oman's Islamic banking growth robust, says Fitch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Islamic banking sector growth is likely to continue apace in 2021 and 2022 following strong momentum in 2020 despite the pandemic and lower oil prices, according to Fitch Ratings.

Islamic financing in Oman grew by 9.5 per cent in 2020 compared with the conventional banks' loan growth of just 2.1 per cent. 'This was driven by demand for Islamic products, support from conventional banks offering Islamic products through their Islamic windows, and regulations supportive of Islamic finance,' Fitch said in a note.

The market share of Islamic banking and Islamic windows increased to 14.3 per cent of total banking system assets in Oman at end-2020, with total assets of RO5.1bn, Fitch noted.

'This is high considering that Oman was the last GCC country to introduce Islamic banking in 2013. In contrast, Islamic banking has been present in Indonesia and Turkey for more than two decades but market shares there are below 8 per cent,' the ratings agency said.

Omani Islamic banks, Fitch said, are adequately capitalised with reasonable profitability and asset quality indicators, reflecting conservative regulation and relatively low-risk business models. Payment holidays and flexibility allowing banks not to classify financing as impaired when payments are deferred mask underlying asset quality.

'We expect the weakening operating environment to pressure profitability and asset quality in 2021-2022, particularly in the real estate, construction and manufacturing sectors,' Fitch said.

Global banks provide \$4tn to oil since climate deal: NGOs

Paris, France - The world's leading banks have provided the fossil fuel industry with US\$3.8tn in financing in the five years following the signing of the Paris climate accord, a group of non-governmental organisations said.

While financing dropped last year as oil output plunged thanks to the pandemic, the report found that it was still higher than in 2016, the year after the signing of the Paris Agreement where nations agreed to cut back CO2 emissions to limit the rise in global temperatures.

'The overall fossil fuel financing trend of the last five years is still heading definitively in the wrong direction,' said the report by NGOs including Rainforest Action Network, BankTrack, Oil Change International and Sierra Club.

The report called for 'banks to establish policies that lock in the fossil fuel financing declines of 2020, lest they snap back to business-as-usual in 2021'.

It found that US banks remained the top bankers to fossil

fuel companies last year, with JPMorgan Chase coming in first, followed by Citi and Bank of America.

If their financing for the fossil fuel industry dropped, French banks, in particular BNP Paribas, actually increased their support.

Italy's UniCredit earned top marks for policies to restrict financing for fossil fuels, although the report noted it earned only half the points possible.

It said the findings underscore 'that the banking sector remains far from committing to a complete exit from fossil fuel financing'.

The report also noted that many banks are making commitments reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, but have yet to provide plans that don't rely upon lots of offsetting and rosy assumptions about technological advances. 'No bank making a climate commitment for 2050 should be taken seriously unless it also acts on fossil fuels in 2021,' said the NGOs.

AFP

India's ACME Solar plans major green hydrogen project in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

India's leading clean energy platform ACME Solar Holdings on Tuesday announced that it has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Oman Company for Development of Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Tatweer) to set up a green hydrogen and green ammonia facility in Duqm with a total investment of US\$2.5bn.

According to Indian media reports, Tatweer and ACME have identified the land parcel in Duqm region to set up the facility that will produce 2,200 metric tonnes of green ammonia per day.

'ACME has opted for Oman for its first large-scale green ammonia commercial project, considering the strategic location of Oman, the support received from the government bodies, and high solar irradiation in the country,' ACME said in a statement as reported by media outlets.

As per the MoU signed between ACME and Tatweer, the



Picture for illustrative purpose only

project will produce hydrogen and ammonia from renewable energy. Green hydrogen is produced through electrolysis from renewable energy which becomes the raw material to make green ammonia.

'This is an exciting beginning of global alliances for producing green hydrogen and ammonia. This large-scale plant is strategically planned to cater to international markets for the supply of

green ammonia across Europe, America and Asia region. ACME is geared to take up such large scale partnerships, bring indigenous and cutting edge technology to make green hydrogen and ammonia accessible affordably. We believe we can offer viable solutions to existing gas-based power plants to reduce their carbon footprint and lower levelised cost of energy using green ammonia as fuel than current bat-

tery based storage solutions,' ACME Group founder and chairman Manoj Kumar Upadhyay said as reported by *The Economic Times*.

'This association is aimed towards achieving Oman Vision 2040 in alternative energy and has boosted our bilateral ties with India to a new level,' Tatweer CEO Salim al Sulaimani said as reported by the Indian media.

Eurozone economy returns to growth as Germany revs up

Brussels, Belgium - The eurozone economy returned to growth for the first time in six months in March, a closely watched survey said on Wednesday, as coronavirus lockdowns had little effect on manufacturing, especially in Germany.

'The eurozone economy beat expectations in March, showing a much better than anticipated expansion thanks mainly to a record surge in manufacturing output,' IHS Markit chief economist Chris Williamson said.

The firm's PMI index rose to 52.5 points in March from 48.8 points in February, breaking through the 50-point level which indicates growth.

IHS Markit's survey showed that a major pickup in activity in Germany, the eurozone's biggest economy, had lifted manufacturing output in the single currency bloc to 63 points, its highest reading since 1997.

The services sector however



still lingered in recessionary territory under the effects of the pandemic, but the rate of decline was weakening, IHS Markit said.

The acceleration in manufacturing also affected hiring as manufacturers saw headcounts rise at a rate not seen since August 2018. Services, which includes the hard hit tourism and hospitality sectors, only saw a far more modest rate of job creation, the survey said.

The doldrums felt in the services sector were expected to

continue, with the pandemic still bringing extreme difficulties to consumer-facing businesses.

'This two-speed nature of the economy will therefore likely persist for some time to come,' Williamson said.

IHS Markit also warned that the surge in demand for goods was 'stretching supply chains to an unprecedented extent' which could trigger some consumer price inflation in the coming months.

AFP

Yellen signals US tax hike

Washington, US - US Treasury secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday signaled that President Joe Biden is willing to hike corporate taxes to pay for his administration's priorities, while Fed chair Jerome Powell again downplayed fears that inflation would spike as the economy healed from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The comments from Yellen come as Washington lawmakers prepare for Biden's next move after Congress passed his US\$1.9tn American Rescue Plan earlier this month, a massive injection of spending intended to support businesses and workers in the world's largest economy, hard-hit by the pandemic.

Biden has vowed to soon propose a huge infrastructure package that will help the United States create jobs and fight climate change, but he is under pressure to offset the costs of what are reported to be two pricey bills.

In testimony for the House Financial Services Committee, Yellen indicated that the White



Janet Yellen

House would propose raising the corporate tax rate to 28 per cent, and find ways to get US corporations to move more of their business into the United States.

'I think a package that consists of investments in people, investments in infrastructure, will help to create good jobs in the American economy and changes in the tax structure will help to pay for those programs,' Yellen said.

'We've had a global race to the bottom in corporate taxation and we hope to put an end to that.'

US media reported on Monday that Biden is considering

spending US\$3tn on infrastructure in the United States, which would be split into two bills, although the White House disputed those reports.

The Rescue Plan bill was the third major package passed by the United States after the pandemic slammed the economy in March 2020.

Unemployment has declined in the months since and GDP growth is expected to rebound this year.

That recovery, along with the American Rescue Plan and a US\$900bn relief measure passed in December, has led stock markets and some economists to worry the strengthening economy will push prices up, leading the Fed to raise interest rates from their zero level sooner than expected.

'We do expect that inflation will move up over the course of this year,' said Powell.

'Our best view is that these effects on inflation will be neither particularly large nor persistent,' the central bank chief added.

AFP

TRA CEO pays a visit to Al Mazunah Free Zone



Eng Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, chief executive officer of Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), visited Al Mazunah Free Zone to explore the challenges related to telecom services facing the investors in the free zone.

Eng Ismaili was accompanied by a number of officials from

TRA and representatives of telecom service providers in the sultanate.

Received by Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, director general of Al Mazunah Free Zone, the delegation was briefed on the free zone and the current and future projects that are scheduled by Madayn in Al Mazunah.

The delegation was also familiarised with the status of telecom services in the free zone that are provided by the service providers including Omantel, Ooredoo, and Oman Broadband. The delegation then toured Al Mazunah Free Zone and got acquainted with the existing and ongoing projects.

Madayn is currently implementing a number of key projects in Al Mazunah Free Zone, which include the construction of the Facility Building that commenced lately in the free zone. While the ground and first floors of the Facility Building have been completed, work is underway on the second floor. This project is valued at more than RO3mn and it will comprise office space, exhibition space and commercial stores. The Facility Building is expected to be completed by mid-2022.

It should be noted that general incentives are offered to the investors in Al Mazunah Free Zone, including customs exemptions, 100 per cent foreign ownership, no minimum capital requirements, and Omanisation rate stands at 10 per cent. Other incentives include easy access of individuals and investors to the free zone without entry visas being required for Yemenis, facilitation of employing Yemeni workforce without work visa being required.



NBO launches mobile app for Badeel customers

Continuing to be at the forefront of innovation in the sultanate's banking industry, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has enhanced its Badeel prepaid card experience by launching a dedicated mobile app for non-customers, 'Badeel Prepaid' and Self-Service kiosks.

With the ability to manage all aspects of their Badeel prepaid cards in one place, users can order, print out, renew and reload their cards at the touch of a button. Customers will find these kiosks in the most convenient locations around the sultanate.

Maha al Raisi, head of Retail Product Division at NBO, said, "At NBO we are committed to

driving innovation while offering our customers modern solutions that make their lives easier, and especially given the current pandemic, safer.

"Our new kiosks mean users can easily order, replace, renew, personalise and instantly print their cards while waiting for their car to refuel. Alternatively, they can place their order through the Badeel Prepaid app and have the card delivered straight to their doorstep. Continuing to be one of our most popular products, Badeel firmly positions NBO as a leader in prepaid cards in the banking sector within Oman and across the Middle East."

As the sultanate's first ever

prepaid card, Badeel is the best alternative to cash. It uses the latest card security features and state-of-the-art contactless technology to help customers perform quick, easy payments while keeping control of family budgets and monitor transactions.

Customers have the ability to apply for up to six cards each, add nine currencies on to a single card, which can be used for local, international POS and online purchases.

For terms and conditions and to purchase a Badeel card, visit www.nbo.om, log into the app www.nbo.om/mb, or call the NBO Call Centre on 24770000.



Omantel enters into channel partnership with Huawei

Omantel has taken another step to boost its valued enterprise customers' capacities and push Oman's digital transformation. The leading integrated telecom and ICT services provider in the sultanate has entered into another channel partnership with Huawei, aimed at capitalising on the enormous changes the telecom and ICT sector in Oman in particular and the world in general, is witnessing.

Under this partnership, all of Huawei's enterprise products will be available to be sold by Omantel to provide advanced, safer, securer, simpler, and high-value end-to-end integrated solutions to enterprise clients, enhancing their operational abilities, productivity, and user experience.

Several factors have created market disruptions that have made the need to adapt quickly and capitalise on the fast-paced changes.

Huawei's next-generation solutions coupled with Omantel's ecosystem and its digital transformation vision will bring more innovative solutions that use new-age technologies, like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, Big Data and Analytics, Internet of Things (IoT), and 5G communications for enterprises.

This step further solidifies Omantel's position as a provider of integrated telecommunication solutions for private and public organizations in Oman with the latest innovations and technologies.

Omantel believes in the importance of offering simple yet practical solutions to enterprises for their applications. Omantel's robust infrastructural ecosystem will see the inclusion of high-end,

technologically advanced, high-efficiency Huawei enterprise products, giving its enterprise clients across various sectors more efficiency through integration, more satisfaction and better support.

One of the exciting new enterprise products under this partnership is the IdeaHub. This productivity office tool can effortlessly turn conference rooms, executive offices, and open areas into smart spaces.

They are designed like a sleek screen with an award-winning user-centric design, the IdeaHub bundles intelligent writing, High Definition (HD) video conferencing and wireless sharing.

It facilitates video conferencing in full 1080p HD, with 4K content sharing and makes real-time collaboration a real-world reality by sending whiteboard content and fresh ideas from the hub to remote sites with just a single tap.

Baha al Lawati, vice president of Omantel's Enterprise Business Unit, said, "We are leveraging Omantel's ecosystem by adding to it the latest technology from Huawei to offer our enterprise clients better and simpler solutions. This partnership with Huawei, which is recognised and relied upon for this technical prowess in the ICT sector, could not have come at a better time."

Robin Chen, CEO, Huawei Oman, said, "Omantel has been among our biggest partners in the Middle East. Oman's digital economy is showing great potential with its results already reflecting across sectors. Omantel is plays a prominent role in the sultanate's digital transformation and Huawei has always been a proud partner in this vision."

NBC signs incubation agreement with INNOVEX

The National Business Centre (NBC), which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, has signed an incubation agreement with Vertex Industrial Design and Consultancy (INNOVEX).

Through its Omani cadres, the company aims at understanding the client's problem or requirement and thus generate design and technical solutions, evaluate them to best suit the client's needs, then take it into implementation, which reduces the project's cost, increases its



efficiency and improves its quality. Specialised in industrial de-

signing, INNOVEX addresses the client's design specifications to optimise functionality, value, and

appearance of the desired project using a 3D CAD modeling software.

As per the incubation agreement, INNOVEX will benefit from a variety of services offered by NBC which include office space, access to intensive training, coaching and mentoring sessions, in addition to other services that aim at developing the entrepreneurial skills to allow the company to flourish, network, form partnerships and have access to business mentors.

It is worth mentioning that

NBC is an initiative launched by Madayn at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) to offer promising Omani entrepreneurs a platform to develop their business ideas and advance them into growing ventures.

The centre offers a premier platform for Omani entrepreneurs by providing business development support and guidance, training and mentoring, access to markets and industry experts, and state-of-the-art and fully equipped office space, meeting rooms and presentation facilities.

All-new Mitsubishi Xpander launched



Contributing to the expansion of the Mitsubishi line-up in Oman, General Automotive Company (GAC), the official dealership for Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, has launched the much-awaited Xpander - the all-new versatile 7-seat compact SUV that offers comfort, functionality, quality and value for money.

The Mitsubishi Xpander provides the best of both worlds. The interior enjoys plenty of cabin space, storage facilities and smart technologies, and the exterior's bold styling does not compromise on ground clearance, handling stability, or overall driving experience.

Commenting on the launch of the all-new Xpander, Manoj Ranade, general manager of GAC said, "Crossover utility vehicles and compact SUVs represent one of the fastest-growing segments in the market, primarily due to their practicality, fuel efficiency, and cost. As a result, a lot of fans have been waiting in

anticipation for the launch of the Xpander. As such, it brings me great pleasure to welcome this all-new model to our model range here in Oman."

The front of the Xpander has a futuristic look inspired by the Montero Sport, and features a chrome upper grille and incorporates auto LED headlamps as well as LED positioning lamps, together with Mitsubishi Motors' Dynamic Shield signature look. The stylish fenders and strong character line flow into the rear quarter and L-shaped rear combination lamps, which then extend into the tailgate. This, together with the 16-inch diamond-cut alloy wheels in a two-tone finish, and a shark fin antenna, complete the Xpander's strong sculpted look.

On the inside, the Xpander features a spacious cabin designed to reflect Japanese hospitality "Omotenashi" and provides comfort for all seven adult passengers thanks to sup-

portive seating, convenient amenities, and high-quality materials.

Noise and vibration in the cabin are effectively absorbed by using special materials, ensuring a supremely quiet experience for the driver and all passengers. The air conditioning system enjoys eight fan adjustment levels in the front and four in the rear - as well as four rear roof vents, to keep everyone on board comfortable.

Flexibility in the seating configuration to meet changing needs also allows for easy loading. The second-row armrest can be folded down and the second and third-row seats folded flat to accommodate lengthy loads. Furthermore, even with passengers in the third-row seats, luggage space remains sufficient to accommodate four 20lt water bottles.

Storage features in the Xpander, in addition to the glove box, include door pockets, drink

holders, seatback pockets, floor console box, passenger seat undertray, and underfloor luggage area. Smartphone and device charging is accessible to every passenger as each of the three rows has their 12V power supply adjacent to a convenient storage space.

Additionally, entertainment and hands-free operation are available via the large 7-inch Smartphone-link Display Audio (SDA), allowing intuitive operation of music, calls, and messages for a more enjoyable and safer driving experience.

Power is provided by a spirited and responsive 1.5lt 16-valve Dual overhead camshaft engine with advanced MIVEC - Mitsubishi Innovative Valve timing Electronic Control system - making it easy for the Xpander to carry seven adults uphill with ease. Excellent ground clearance for its class provides confidence on rough or flooded roads, while the reinforced suspension, coupled with high-performance shock absorbers and a rigid and lightweight body, ensure stability and comfort.

Safety performance is also significantly enhanced thanks to Mitsubishi Motors' Reinforced Impact Safety Evolution body or RISE, which efficiently absorbs energy and maintains high cabin integrity in the event of a collision. All four doors are also equipped with a support beam to increase protection by reducing door deformation in the event of a side collision.

For more information, visit GAC's Mitsubishi showrooms.



Ooredoo salutes employee for degree

Ooredoo congratulated Ahmed Abdullah al Abri, its chief technology and information officer, for obtaining his Doctoral degree in Business Administration from Glasgow Caledonian University, UK.

Abri has been part of the Ooredoo family for 15 years, and is credited with his role in driving the company's ambitious network expansion strategy. His Doctoral degree focused on the role of telecommunications regulations in promoting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Oman, a unique piece of research globally and one that complements Ooredoo's efforts to support the development of the sultanate's digital economy.

Abri's vast experience in the telecommunications industry covers a wide range of functions including network, technological and strategic planning, the implementation of telecommunications networks, information technology, digitalisation and technology project management, etc.

National Science Week covers variety of topics

The National Science Week 2021 continued its activities for the fourth day online on Wednesday through Google Meet under the slogan ‘Our sustainable environment’. It is covering a wide variety of topics throughout the week during morning and evening sessions every day.

The evening period on the third day included eight sessions. The first session was titled ‘Making and Decorating Fabric Bags’, the second session was ‘Peaceful Nuclear Techniques in the Fields of Environment and Agriculture’, the third session was titled ‘Oman’s Geological Ruins’, and the fourth session was ‘Nanomaterials from Nature’.

The four sessions were held at

the same time.

They were followed by the other four session which were ‘IoT Applications for the Environment around You’, the second was ‘How to create Your Own Environmental Project?’, the third was titled ‘Role of Individuals in Reducing Exposure to air Pollutants and Reducing Emissions’, and the fourth session was ‘Discover the IoT in Your Environment’.

The fourth day of the National Science Week STEM 2021 included six sessions in the morning period.

The first one was titled ‘Sustainable Creative Solutions’, the second was ‘Use of Augmented Reality Technology to Promote



and Teach Environmental Sustainability’. The two sessions were held at the same time.

The third session was ‘Omani Plants-Folklore and Scientific Fu-

ture’, and the fourth session was ‘Eco 3D Environment’. The fifth session was titled ‘Little Geologist’ and the sixth session was ‘Air Pollution’.



It is worth mentioning that the National Science Week 2021 organised by the Ministry of Education, aims to implant and develop the scientific capabilities

and skills of students of different age groups.

It also aims to increase awareness on science and technology, enhance students’ attitudes to-

wards science, keep pace with global trends based on the dissemination of science and technology, simplify science and spread scientific culture among all segments of society.

It also looks to consolidate the methodology of scientific thinking among students, and establish a link between students and specialists in science through discussion of scientific topics, in addition to changing society’s view of science. It links learning with entertainment, spreading the culture of fun education, encouraging and motivating all community members and arousing their passion for science, as well as creating positive trends to keep pace with future changes.

MINISTER OF ECONOMY MEETS HUNGARIAN ENVOY



H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, received on Wednesday in his office H E Dr Tibor Szatmári, Hungarian Ambassador to the sultanate. The meeting discussed the relations between the two countries and aspects of existing economic cooperation with great focus on the Agreement for Promotion and Protection of Mutual Investments between the two countries

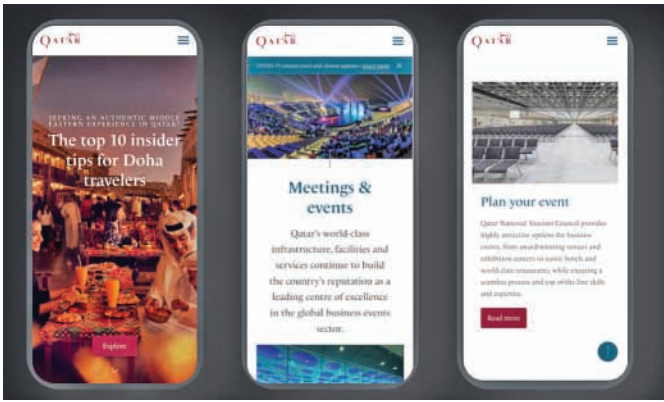
Visit Qatar: A new digital experience for one of region’s leading travel destinations

Visit Qatar, an initiative of the Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC), aims to boost their tourism industry with the launch of a new digital experience. The website shares Qatar’s rich cultural tapestry, experiences and adventures in an inviting online journey.

As Qatar continues its preparations for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the highly responsive and mobile-first website will become a vital tool in realising an ambitious goal: tripling the number of visits and doubling tourism revenue by 2030. Behind the scenes, the new marketing technology platform is one of the first in the world to use Adobe Experience Manager as a cloud service, highlighting Qatar National Tourism Council’s digital leadership and innovation in the region.

“The shared ambition and positive energy of this project is inspiring,” said Murat Ertugrul, VP MEA at Emakina.

“Visit Qatar’s ambition to position the nation as a hub to discover - where cultural authenticity meets modernity - is some-



thing to behold. Ensuring the best possible end-to-end experience for visitors to Qatar was at the heart of this particular project – and now that QNTC has full control over their new Adobe platform, they can maximize its functionalities in complete autonomy. We are looking forward to continuing this dynamic collaboration, contributing to the ambitious Qatar National Tourism Council Transformation Journey roadmap.”

The captivating design and rich content of the website allows visitors to start their journey online. The platform is also fully

integrated into Visit Qatar’s existing digital ecosystem, and includes interactive Google Maps and TripAdvisor content to help individuals plan their trip.

Darren Light, head of MEA for Adobe Experience Cloud, adds, “The new Visit Qatar website perfectly leverages Adobe AEM’s power for front and back-end development. Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced all experts to work from a distance, the fluidity and the efficiency of their teamwork was remarkable. And we can all be proud of the engaging state-of-the-art result.”

These new tools empower

QNTC to deliver more targeted, timely, and personalised digital communications. Addressing their audience’s needs through data-driven content helps Visit Qatar strengthen the country’s image as a leading destination.

Berthold Trenkel, COO of Qatar National Tourism Council said, “The new website created by Emakina and Adobe positions Qatar as a world-leading, international tourism destination for business and leisure, through a showcase of authentic experiences and family-focused activities. The experience is customer centric and powered by data, allowing for personalised messaging along the customer journey. It is an integral part of QNTC’s digital transformation journey and will no doubt have a positive impact on our tourism objectives.”

Home to world-class art galleries and iconic museums, Unesco world heritage sites and natural wonders, along with diverse landscapes across desert, beaches, and sea, and a modern capital, Qatar offers a range of unique experiences.

Abu Dhabi firm to build quantum computer

Work is underway to build a quantum computer in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, ushering an important milestone for the region in this breakthrough era in computing.

Technology Innovation Institute (TII), the dedicated ‘applied research’ pillar of Abu Dhabi’s newly established Advanced Technology Research Council (ATRC), announced that its Quantum Research Centre (QRC) team led by its chief researcher Prof José Ignacio Latorre, will construct the quantum computer in the UAE capital, in collaboration with Barcelona-based Qilimanjaro Quantum Tech researchers.

“We are at the cusp of a new era with the advent of quantum computing,” Faisal al Bannai, secretary general of ATRC, said. “We are proud to embark on building one of these wonderful machines which will help us in various fields, from discovering new medicines to making new materials to designing better batteries to various Artificial Intelligence applications.”

A quantum computer uses quantum mechanics phenomena such as ‘superposition’ and ‘entanglement’ to generate and manipulate subatomic particles like electrons or photons - quantum bits also known as ‘qubits’ - to create exponentially stronger pro-



cessing powers that can help perform complex calculations that would take much longer to solve even by the world’s most powerful classical supercomputers.

Prof Latorre explained that preparatory work has already begun. “The first step in the process is to build a laboratory, equip it and complete installation of the cleanroom equipment, all of which is on track. Once done, the first qubits will be prepared, characterised and benchmarked. We expect the first simple quantum chips ‘Made in Abu Dhabi’ should come by the end of the summer,” he said.

Prof Latorre said there are several technologies to construct quantum computers such as superconducting qubits, ion traps, optical qubits, and spin dots, adding QRC has opted to use superconducting qubits, which is the same technology that Google and IBM use in building their own quantum computers.

Hybrid concept Earth Of One Eight set to revolutionise retail landscape in Middle East

In a bid to bring customers up close and personal to their favourite retail brands and allow them to engage with the brands in insightful and fun ways, Earth Of One Eight (EOO8), an innovative new age hybrid retail concept, announced its Middle East launch, starting with Dubai.

The new age retail concept aligns seamlessly with the ambitious Smart Dubai 2021 initiative that aims to transform Dubai into a futuristic, world-leading destination city where government transactions are 100 per cent digitalised and the people are among the happiest in the world. EOO8 is set to offer smart brand retail solutions to brands with the aim to create luxury retail experiences.

Earth Of One Eight is an 9m x 3m walk-in mobile pod with an abstract geometric face that offers brands the opportunity and flexibility to connect with and immerse themselves in communities to dramatically increase awareness and brand recall. Retailers can showcase their products in the interior of the pod in a frictionless ambience.

The hybrid retail concept seamlessly blends online and offline retail experiences and enables brands to boost the elusive aspect of ‘audience delight’ that is largely absent in the prevailing hard-sell retail landscape. EOO8 elevates the retail experience and is able to track data for



brands such as walk-ins, interests, and products testing, among others.

Speaking on the radical retail development, Fareda Ali, founder of EOO8, explained her vision. “I have always been fascinated by the traditional trailer truck concept that brings exclusive brands into town to give the local community some exotic retail experiences. Earth Of One Eight was born through putting a sophisticated spin on this idea and introducing technology into the mix. In many ways, Earth Of One Eight is a nostalgic ode to

the bygone age of one-on-one retail – when retail was a more intimate and intuitive experience.

“With this game-changing pod, we hope to transform the way retail is consumed in the region. Manufactured right here in the UAE, and ensuring a frictionless approach, the breakthrough pods can be leased by retailers’ keen to understand what their customers think about their brand through introducing immersive experiences. EOO8 can also help test waters ahead of the launch of new products in the region, or simply assist in gaug-

ing the market penetration achieved. With the efforts to realise Smart Dubai 2021 gaining momentum and given the scaling up of digitalisation during the pandemic, I believe technology is here to stay in all aspects of our life – and will particularly transform the retail scene.”

For the very first time in the region, through leveraging cutting-edge technology such as a magic mirror, touch sensors, augmented reality, holograms, social media filters, motion mapping, and projection mapping, EOO8 offers retailers and brands

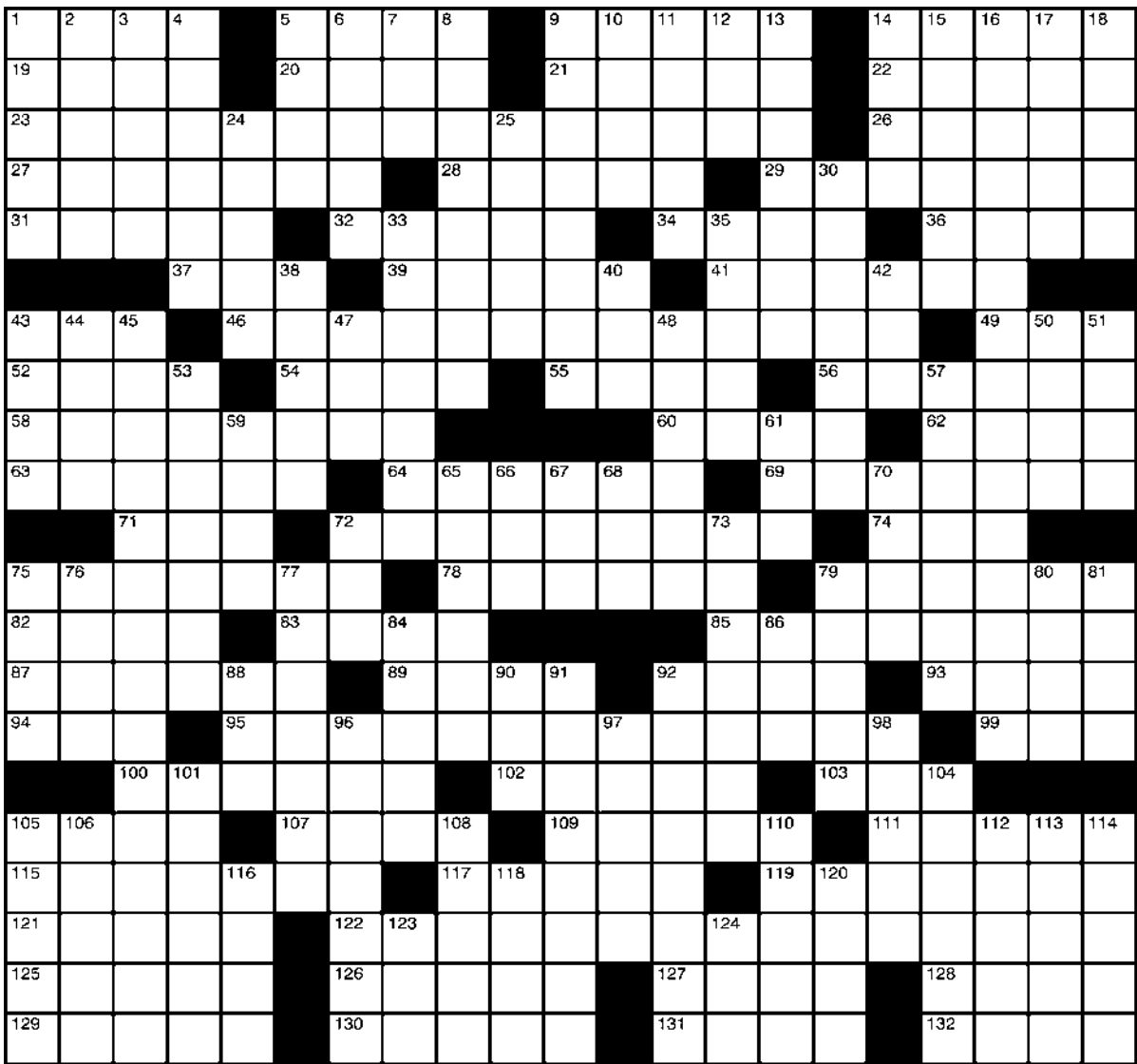
clear analytics on their customers’ preferences and interests captured through their engagement with the brand. This learning can significantly inform brand positioning and lead to greater flexibility and personalisation in promoting the brand from one community to the next.

Ali added, “Retail today is so much more than just buying and selling – it has the ability to inform, educate, create awareness and connect like never before. Imagine how much simpler your life would be if you knew exactly what your target customer is seeking and are able to meet this need without any confusion.

“We envision EOO8 appealing to the high-end luxury retailers who are not afraid to experiment with this revolutionary urban trend. Customers are already rejecting two-dimensional hard-core selling that is pushed at them purely for monetary gain. This user-friendly interface offers them enriching and memorable experiences that will make a world of difference.”

Currently targeting the retail sector, EOO8 has its sights set on other industries in the future based on demand. EOO8 has for its overarching goal the objective of extending novel ways of brand engagement and customer delight through redefining personalised, seamless, efficient, and impactful experiences at every touchpoint.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Actor Baldwin
- 5 Roe source
- 9 Silk fabric
- 14 Photo finish
- 19 ___ avis
- 20 Ubangi tributary
- 21 Shelter
- 22 Assyrian chief deity
- 23 Faye Dunaway
- celestial movie?
- 26 "___ clock scholar..."
- 27 Will supplement
- 28 "Do You Know the Way ___ Jose?"
- 29 Banes
- 31 Concerning
- 32 Pointer's clue
- 34 Review quickly
- 36 Primitive
- 37 Understand
- 39 Law's partner
- 41 Confer priesthood
- 43 Col.'s junior
- 46 William Holden
- celestial movie?
- 49 Abet's complement
- 52 Son of ___
- 54 Yemen capital
- 55 Box
- 56 Theater district
- 58 Changes the wall coloring
- 60 Dramatist David from Dubuque

- 62 College boards, briefly
- 63 Three-legged stand
- 64 Desire
- 69 Fatty
- 71 Road coat
- 72 "The ___", Muni-Rainer movie
- 74 Trolley unit
- 75 Apiary
- 78 Not as messy
- 79 TV adjunct
- 82 Re fields: Comb. form
- 83 Misses the mark
- 85 After-dinner beverage
- 87 Hound type
- 89 Attention-getter
- 92 Buddy or Max
- 93 Wolfish look
- 94 Annex
- 95 "The ___" Gazzara-Mimieux
- celestial movie?
- 99 Blue
- 100 Really likes
- 102 Loos' "___ Like I"
- 103 Danielle Steel's "Message from ___"
- 105 Farm unit
- 107 Venezuela copper center
- 109 Skin problems

- 111 Cabal
- 115 Jackie, Joan or Judy
- 117 German city
- 119 Port-au-Prince native
- 121 Aka
- 122 Ava Gardner
- celestial movie?
- 125 "It Ain't ___ Rain No Mo"
- 126 Curtain material
- 127 Tale-teller
- 128 Easy gait
- 129 Rye fungus
- 130 Chips in chips
- 131 Plasm start
- 132 Flanders river
- DOWN**
- 1 Betel palm
- 2 Attack
- 3 Former Met conductor
- Alberto
- 4 Framework
- 5 Mystic ascetic
- 6 ___ Angels
- 7 In the manner of
- 8 Atom nucleus
- 9 Castigates
- 10 Vishnu incarnation
- 11 Actor Maurice
- 12 For each
- 13 Tangle
- 14 Distaff title
- 15 Re stars: Prefix

- 16 Tyrone Power
- celestial movie?
- 17 Adjusted
- 18 Jagged
- 24 Double quartet
- 25 Sonata movement
- 30 Stood
- 33 Regains
- consciousness
- 35 Bazaar performer
- 38 U.N.'s U in 1970
- 40 Tear
- 42 O, U companions
- 43 Trading area
- 44 Ripener
- 45 Esther Williams
- celestial movie?
- 47 NYC time
- 48 "No Exit" author
- 50 "Play ___ It Lays": 1972 film
- 51 Be overly fond
- 53 Arizona Indians
- 57 Garb
- 59 Yesterday, in Roma
- 61 Scrooge expletive
- 65 Japan's largest island
- 66 Chemical suffix
- 67 Cartoonist
- Gardner
- 68 Made a lap
- 70 Champagne bucket
- 72 Neth. neighbor

- 73 Molasses
- 75 Notable Ali
- 76 Victorian expletive
- 77 Old-timer
- 79 Pinafore
- 80 On the briny
- 81 Nobleman
- 84 "Midnight Cowboy" role
- 86 Defeat at bridge
- 88 British musician
- Brian
- 90 Bambi's aunt
- 91 Really big weights
- 92 Marine crustacean
- 96 "___ non grata"
- 97 Neck piece
- 98 Son of Indira
- 101 Part of FDR
- 104 In a silent way
- 105 "Nor iron bars ___"
- 106 Blush
- 108 Ten percenter
- 110 Young hog
- 112 Spanish baby boys
- 113 Moleskin color
- 114 Goose genus
- 116 "The wolf ___ the door!"
- 118 Plains Indian
- 120 Mod hairdo
- 123 Author Anaïs
- 124 ___ jacet

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Keeping things on a lighter note now paves the way to smooth communication. If you want to address some heavy stuff, that's your prerogative. Before you get into it, though, make sure you have what you want to say crystal clear in your head. Thinking it through one extra time wouldn't hurt. While you think your position is the only viable one, don't be surprised if you get an argument about it.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Any social event you're able to grace with your presence is lucky to have you right now. You're polite, funny, and smart. Don't be surprised if you encounter people who match you in all areas of your interests. Make sure you get all those people's contact information. You're making great new friends, maybe more.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

A ghost from the past could make an appearance just as you're getting comfortable with things. Adding your own collision of emotions on top of it equals a fairly overwhelming situation. It's time to rely on your support system of family, friends, and maybe a favourite co-worker. You may feel a little out of control, but it's only temporary, and your people will help ground you.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Indecision may not be your usual state of being, but you can make it look good on you. Spin it as an impulsive, exciting mindset in which anything goes, the odder and newer the better. Those around you will find it noteworthy and even thrilling when you start to diverge from your preset itinerary. And if they go along for the ride, well, they might be surprised by what you have to say.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're good with the details now, and any logic problems are a total snap. When it comes to looking at the overall scenario at work, in a relationship, or financially, you're not quite as on top of it at the moment. Try to do your best with this big-picture stuff now. It's quite possible you're not seeing the forest for the trees.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Most people respond to a tragic situation by looking at the bright side. You're smart enough to know when it makes more sense to face reality. Get rid of the things that are muddying the waters and clouding your thoughts. This might include unsolicited advice, excess chatter or unnecessary information. Let your mantra be "simplify, simplify," and watch as clarity follows.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Expect lots of motion in your world, backward, forward, lateral, even exciting loop-the-loop manoeuvres. While it can be a bit chaotic, you're just the type who thrives amid chaos, converting it into fun and opportunities to shine. Watch for a chance meeting that could lead to an intriguing discussion. This, in turn, could inspire the generation of some great ideas. Make some notes so you don't forget!



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A lighthearted chat could suddenly take a deeper turn now. You're in a sharing mood, and that includes some emotions you don't generally talk to anyone about. The people you share with could be rather surprising as well, and the connection you make or deepen may be unexpectedly sweet. The intensity might even have some romantic overtones, but where you take it is up to you.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're all over the map right now, from socialising to errand running to some rather interesting romantic developments. Losing your head is one response, and so is getting so stressed out you can't enjoy the good elements of this busy time. Luckily, your powers of communication are at a peak, letting you vent in ways that keep those around you intrigued and amused.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Between the internal discussion you have going on and all the input you're getting from the outside, not to mention a pending deadline or project, you may be feeling a bit overwhelmed. Find a good way to blow off a little steam. Get some exercise, have a late night with a good friend. Heck, maybe you can do both!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A little part of the big picture you're not taking into consideration right now could really trip you up. Read the fine print, watch out for hidden fees, check carefully between the lines, and be hyper-vigilant about the seemingly insignificant stuff. If it's an interpersonal situation, one of your best friends is waiting to help you see the angle you're missing.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Being at home nesting probably sounds better to you than going out, and you should definitely heed your instincts. Even if you get an invitation to go out and about, you probably won't be able to decide whether it'll be fun or not. Still, the moment you're home alone with your coveted peace and quiet, you'll probably pick up the phone to chitchat.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. When and where was weightlifting introduced in Olympics?

- a. 1986 at Athens
- b. 1988 at Seoul
- c. 1924 at St. Louis
- d. 1908 at London

2. What is the range of missile 'Akash'?

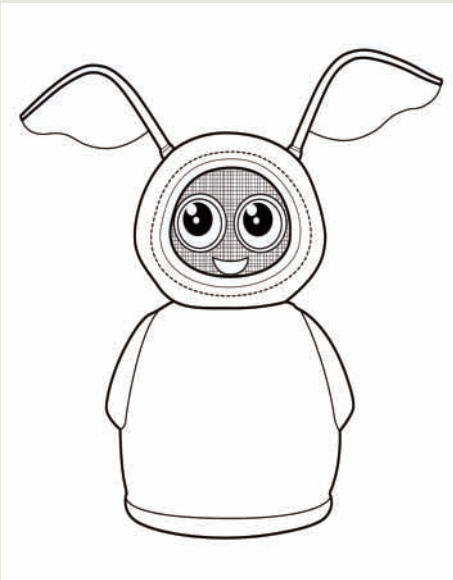
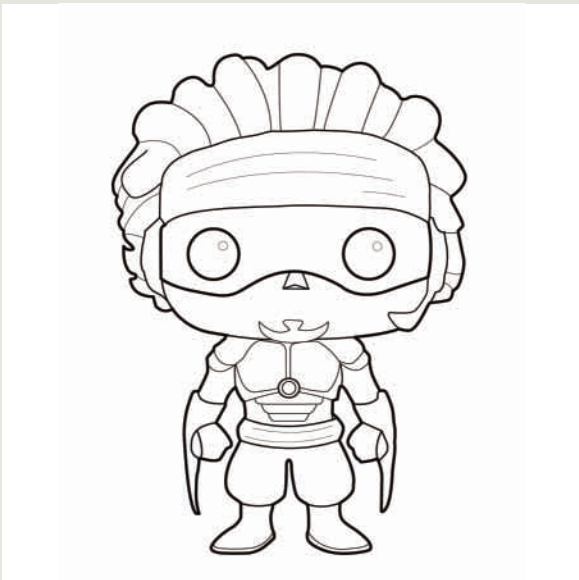
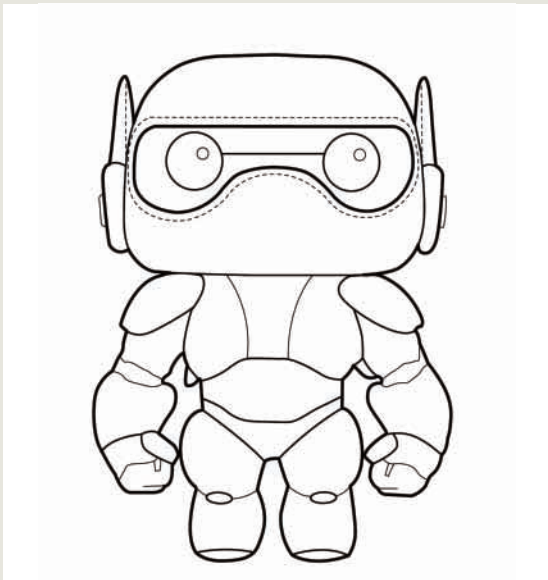
- a. 4km
- b. 25km
- c. 500m to 9km
- d. 150km

3. What is the function of a dynamo?

- a. To convert heat energy into light energy
- b. To convert light energy into heat energy
- c. To convert mechanical energy into electrical energy
- d. To convert electrical energy into mechanical energy

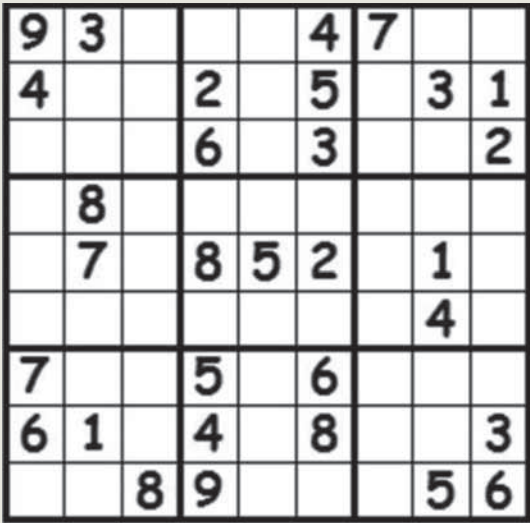
Answers: 1: a 2: b 3: c

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



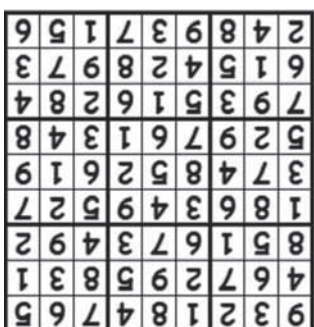
BOGGLER



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 (MARCH 24)



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



Storm pushes ship to block Suez Canal

Cairo, Egypt - Tug boats worked on Wednesday to free a giant container ship stuck in the Suez Canal after it veered off course in a sandstorm, creating huge tail-backs on one of the world's busiest trade routes.

Egypt's Suez Canal Authority said it was doing all it could to re-float the Taiwan-run but Panama-flagged *MV Ever Given*, a 400m long and 59m wide vessel, which was lodged at an angle across the waterway.

Historic sections of the canal have been reopened in a bid to ease the bottleneck of backed up marine traffic, with dozens of ships waiting on both the Mediterranean and Red Sea sides. The SCA said the ship was caught up in a gale-force sandstorm, a common occurrence in Egypt's Sinai desert at this time of year, which blotted out light and limited the captain's ability to see.

It was 'mainly due to the lack of visibility due to the weather conditions when winds reached 40 knots, which affected the control' of the ship, the SCA said in a statement.

Ship operator Evergreen Marine Corp told AFP that the Rotterdam-bound vessel 'ran aground after a suspected gust of wind hit it'.



The Taiwan-owned *MV Ever Given*, a 400m long vessel, lodged sideways impeding all traffic across the waterway of Egypt's Suez Canal on Wednesday (AFP)

Storms with dense dust clouds carrying fine sand have been sweeping across much of the Middle East since Tuesday.

'Stuck sideways'

Shipping monitors MarineTraffic recorded that the vessel had been in the same position since at least Tuesday afternoon.

SCA chairman Admiral Osama Rabie said in a statement on Wednesday morning that

'rescue and tug units are continuing their efforts' to free the *MV Ever Given*, involving at least eight tugs.

Bloomberg reported it had caused a build-up of more than 100 ships seeking to transit the canal.

"There was a grounding incident," Alok Roy, fleet director of BSM Hong Kong, the *Ever Given* ship manager, told the news agency.

Photographs released by the SCA also showed excavators on-shore digging soil from the canal's bank, with the earth-moving equipment dwarfed by the giant hull towering above.

The canal, which links the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, was opened to navigation in 1869, and was expanded in 2015 to accommodate larger ships.

MarineTraffic showed a map

with large clusters of vessels circling at both ends of the canal - in the Mediterranean off Port Said, and stretching far southwards into the Red Sea.

Instagram user Julianne Cona posted a photo of the grounded ship from the Maersk Denver, which was forced to wait behind the *Ever Given*.

'Ship in front of us ran aground while going through the canal and is now stuck sideways,'

she wrote. 'Looks like we might be here for a little bit.'

The Suez Canal is one of the world's most important trade routes, providing passage for ten per cent of all international maritime trade.

The journey between ports in the Gulf and London, for example, is roughly halved by going through the Suez - compared to the alternate route via the southern tip of Africa.

'Domino effect'

Even a short closure of the route has a big impact on 'just in time' logistic chains, said Camille Egloff, transport and logistic expert at Boston Consulting Group.

While Egloff said the ship was in a 'hyper-controlled environment' and suggesting it would be 'a matter of hours' before traffic was moving freely again, the costs would add up.

"It costs a lot of money, because it blocks the traffic behind," she said.

"There will be a domino effect in all the European ports in the coming days."

Nearly 19,000 ships passed through the canal last year carrying more than one billion tonnes of cargo, according to the Suez Canal Authority (SCA).

It has been a boon for Egypt's struggling economy in recent years, with the country earning US\$5.6bn in revenues from the canal in 2020.

President Abdel Fattah al Sisi unveiled plans in 2015 for an expansion designed to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships using the canal daily by 2023.

Container ships account for more than half of the canal's total traffic.

AFP



Temporary shelters set up for displaced Rohingya refugees days after a fire devastated their camp in Ukhiya, on Wednesday (AFP)

Bangladesh defends use of fences in camp

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh - Bangladesh on Wednesday defended the use of barbed-wire fences around vast camps holding almost a million Rohingya refugees, after a major fire left at least 15 people dead and nearly 50,000 homeless.

The fire, which gutted some 10,000 refugee shanties, was the deadliest since more than 740,000 Rohingya fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 that UN investigators concluded was executed with 'genocidal intent'.

The UN, aid groups and Rohingya leaders said that the fences erected by the military hampered rescue work and caused injuries during Monday's 12-hour blaze in the maze of bamboo-and-tarp huts.

'Rescue efforts proved to be challenging as a result of the presence of perimeter fencing,' a joint statement from the United Nations, local and international aid agencies said

'In some instances, refugees themselves cut through the fence to escape the fire,' it said.

Bangladesh refugee commissioner Shah Rezwana Hayat defended the fences, which were built in recent months amid a worsening law and order situation in the vast settlements.

"I don't believe these fences have hampered rescue efforts. There were enough roads in the camps and the hundreds of our officials, policemen and volunteers were there to rescue them," he told AFP.

AFP

Myanmar junta frees 600 detainees, photo journalist after fresh outrage

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar freed more than 600 coup detainees on Wednesday, including an Associated Press photographer arrested while covering rallies, following fresh outrage over brutal crackdowns on protesters.

The regime has unleashed a deadly wave of violence as it struggles to quell nationwide protests against the February 1 ouster and arrest of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The 75 year old was due to have a court hearing on Wednesday in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw, on criminal charges that could see her permanently barred from political office.

But her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said the hearing was adjourned until April 1 because of problems with video conferencing caused by a junta-imposed internet shutdown.

In commercial hub Yangon, AP photographer Thein Zaw (32), who was arrested last month while covering a protest, was freed from Insein prison.

"I'm now on my way back home to meet with my mum. I'm in good health," Thein Zaw told AFP. "The police officer who sued me withdrew his charge - that's why they released me unconditionally."

The AP's vice president for international news Ian Phillips said the agency was 'deeply relieved' at Thein Zaw's release.

He had been charged with 'spreading false news', along



Associated Press photographer Thein Zaw walks out of Insein prison, where he had been held with others detained for taking part in demonstrations against the military coup, in Yangon on Wednesday (AFP)

with five other journalists who were arrested the same day and are still in custody.

'Silent strike'

Thein Zaw's release came hours after more than 600 people held for protesting against the coup were freed from the same jail.

"We released 360 men and 268 women from Insein prison today," a senior prison official told AFP, before the AP photographer's release.

Lawyer Khin Maung Myint, who was at Insein prison for the hearing of two other clients, said

16 busloads of people left the jail at 10.00am local time.

"Some clients called me (after) informing me of their release," he told AFP.

Local media showed images of the prisoners on the buses flashing the three-fingered salute - a sign of resistance for the anti-coup movement - as people waiting outside the prison waved at them and returned the gesture.

Activists called for a nationwide 'Silent Strike' on Wednesday, and streets were bare in the cities of Yangon and Naypyidaw. In the southern city of Myeik,

rows of dolls were set up along roads, holding up tiny signs reading 'We need democracy' and 'We wish for Mother Suu to be healthy'.

There was chaos overnight in Mandalay with barricades burning, arrests, homes raided by security forces, beatings and machine guns ringing out over multiple neighbourhoods, local media reported.

Three people were killed on Tuesday including seven-year-old girl Khin Myo Chit, shot dead at her home in Mandalay.

AFP

Ethiopian rights body says over 100 killed in Tigray

Nairobi, Kenya - The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said on Wednesday that Eritrean soldiers massacred over 100 civilians in the war-torn region of Tigray in November, in what may amount to crimes against humanity.

The findings by the government-affiliated but independent body corroborate separate investigations by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) into bloodshed in the historic town of Axum.

"Information collected during this preliminary investigation confirm that during the two days of November 28 and November 29, grave violations of human rights were committed and that in Axum, over one hundred residents... were killed by Eritrean soldiers," the commission said.

"As these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes, it underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into (the) overall human rights situation in Tigray region."

The report was published just a day after Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted for the first time that Eritrean troops had crossed the border into Tigray. He suggested they may have been involved in abuses against civilians.

Abiy sent troops into Tigray on November 4 after he blamed the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, for attacks on federal army camps. Subsequent reports of rape, looting and murder by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces prompted fears that possible crimes against humanity could be unfolding.

AFP

China accuses EU of 'hypocrisy' after sanctions over Uyghur

Beijing, China - Beijing accused the EU of 'hypocrisy' on Wednesday after the two sides summoned each other's envoys in an escalating row over the treatment of China's Muslim Uyghurs.

France, Germany and other EU nations called in Chinese ambassadors to protest against sanctions imposed by Beijing targeting their citizens, including five members of the European Parliament as well as two EU bodies and two think tanks.

The sanctions were a tit-for-tat response after the EU, Britain and Canada blacklisted four former and current officials in China's Xinjiang region.

Rights groups say at least one million Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in camps in Xinjiang, where authorities are also accused of forcibly sterilising women and imposing forced labour. China has strongly denied the allegations, saying training programmes, work schemes and

better education have helped stamp out extremism in the northwest region and raise income.

"The EU only allows itself to arbitrarily smear and attack others, and even arbitrarily imposes sanctions based on false information and lies, but does not allow the Chinese to talk back or fight back," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a press briefing. "This in itself is double standards, a manifestation of bullying and hypocrisy."

Washington, which had already imposed sanctions on two of the Chinese officials in July 2020, extended them to two others.

It is leading a drive to form a united front against China on issues from rights abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong to Beijing's claims over the South China Sea.

China had until recently enjoyed relatively cordial relations with the EU, which has been muted over alleged rights abuses

as it hunts a trade pact with the world's second largest economy.

The European Union and China in December approved 'in principle' a major investment pact after seven years of painstaking negotiations - but it is still expected to take months to be finalised and fully ratified as a legal text.

Hua said China did 'not accept the unreasonable practice of some European countries in summoning Chinese ambassadors'.

The tensions come as the EU seeks to formulate a strategy on China at a time when tensions between Beijing and Washington are emerging as the world's number one geopolitical issue.

Beijing also released a report on Wednesday detailing what it said were human rights abuses committed in the US, citing gun crime, violence towards ethnic minorities and the way Washington has tackled the COVID-19 outbreak.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

AstraZeneca backs its jab as nations battle surges

Washington, US - AstraZeneca has said it is standing by its coronavirus vaccine after a US agency raised concerns about trial results that showed the shot to be highly effective in preventing COVID-19.

As immunisation programmes gather pace around the world, another vaccine ran into trouble on Wednesday when Hong Kong and Macau suspended the Pfizer-BioNTech jab over what authorities said were packaging problems.

The uncertainties are a blow to scientists' hopes for a quick rollout of what they say is the best hope of ending a pandemic that has killed 2.7mn people.

AstraZeneca had published results from its US trials on Monday, showing the vaccine to be 79 per cent effective in preventing COVID-19, but the US National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Diseases raised concerns that the results were outdated.

The firm backed its shot on Tuesday, saying a review found the interim results it had announced were 'consistent', and that it would release new analysis and data 'within 48 hours'.

The AstraZeneca shot had been hailed as a potential game-changer in the fight against the pandemic, as it is cheaper and easier to store and transport than many of its rivals.

But public confidence in the drug has tumbled after more than a dozen countries temporarily suspended its rollout because of isolated cases of blood clots - even though the World Health Organization (WHO) and regulators have found no link with the shot.

AstraZeneca has also struggled for months with production and supply chains, delivering only 30 per cent of the doses it promised the European Union for the first quarter and sparking fury in Brussels.

The European Commission on Wednesday will revise trade rules to strengthen its hand when it comes to preventing exports of vaccines produced in the bloc. The already stumbling vaccination programmes in Hong Kong and Macau also ran



A medical worker takes a vial of the AstraZeneca vaccine at a vaccination centre outside Rome's Termini railway station, on Wednesday (AFP)

Shopping coupons for vaccinated in Beijing

Beijing, China - A Beijing suburb is giving out discount coupons for supermarkets to residents who have received a COVID-19 jab, as China tries to boost the uptake of its vaccines.

China aims to vaccinate 40 per cent of its population against the coronavirus by the end of July. The national health commission on Wednesday said that only 82.8mn vaccine doses have been administered so far.

But vaccinating the world's most populous country has been slower than ex-

pected due to mistrust owing to past safety scandals as well as a lack of urgency among the public confident in China's early success in curbing the virus.

Daxing, a district in the south of Beijing with over 1.8mn residents, rolled out its 'rewards for jabs' campaign on Wednesday, handing out coupons worth eight to 30 yuan (US\$1.23 to US\$4.6) to people who have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. The coupons can be used when shopping at any supermarket in the district.

Second French Minister hospitalised with virus

Paris, France - France's Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot has been hospitalised after testing positive for COVID-19 over the weekend, a source close to the minister told AFP on Wednesday.

The worsening symptoms for Bachelot (74) comes after the announcement on Monday that her Cabinet colleague Elisabeth Borne, the 59 year old Labour Minister, had also been hospitalised with the coronavirus.

"Her condition is stable and is not worrying," the source said, adding that

Bachelot's doctor ordered 'increased surveillance at hospital for a few days'.

Paris and its suburbs are seeing a surge in cases that prompted the government last week to close non-essential businesses in a third lockdown since the pandemic began, though with less strict stay-at-home orders.

On Tuesday, the government issued new guidelines for companies in Paris and other regions placed on maximum alerts, urging them to have a maximum number of employees work from home.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrives for question time at the Bundestag - lower house of parliament, in Berlin on Wednesday (AFP)

Merkel reverses Easter virus shutdown plan

Berlin, Germany - German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday admitted a plan for a strict Easter virus shutdown was a 'mistake' after agreeing with regional leaders to reverse the measure.

"This mistake is mine alone," Merkel told reporters in Berlin, adding that she bore 'the ultimate responsibility' for the decision, which had led to fierce criticism. "The whole process has caused additional uncertainty, for which I ask all citizens to forgive me," she said.

Merkel on Wednesday reversed a planned strict Easter shutdown, amid massive criticism of the government's pandemic management.

Merkel and the leaders of Germany's 16 states had agreed at marathon talks on Monday that almost all shops were to be closed on April 1-5, with only grocers allowed to open on Saturday April 3.

But they have now scrapped that measure, instead appealing to the public to stay home over the Easter weekend, CDU chief Armin Laschet told a regional parliament meeting in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

The leaders had agreed the measure was 'a mistake and not enforceable in this form', he said.

Merkel had called an unexpected crisis meeting on Wednesday morning as a backlash over the pandemic measures sent her CDU party's ratings plummeting.

Ahead of a Merkel press conference at 1130 GMT, *Der*

Spiegel news magazine said the chancellor had also admitted the Easter shutdown was a 'mistake'. The leaders were expected to 'talk very critically about what happened two days ago', Laschet said ahead of the meeting.

Daniel Guenther, the state premier of Schleswig-Holstein, told the DPA news agency the meeting would focus on 'implementation problems' around the measures agreed over Easter.

'Wrong priorities'

The toughened shutdown had prompted fierce criticism, with the *Bild* daily calling the government's pandemic management a 'mess'.

'Merkel and the (regional leaders) have lost sight of the real problem,' it said.

Der Spiegel called the measures a 'scandal', claiming the government had 'completely the wrong priorities' and should instead focus on improving its vaccination campaign and test strategy.

Infection numbers continue to rise in Germany, with 15,813 new cases reported in 24 hours on Wednesday by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) health agency.

As well as ordering the Easter shutdown, Merkel and the regional leaders agreed on Monday night to extend existing virus measures including keeping cultural, leisure and sporting facilities shut through to April 18.

AFP

Blogger fined \$100,000 for defaming Singapore PM

Singapore - A Singaporean blogger was ordered on Wednesday to pay almost US\$100,000 in damages for defaming the Prime Minister by sharing an article on Facebook linking the leader to a corruption scandal.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had accused Leong Sze Hian of spreading false claims about him over the article related to the money-laundering scandal at state fund 1MDB in Malaysia.

Critics say the case is the latest example of the tightly-regulated city-state's government being heavy-handed and seeking to silence dissent online.

Singapore's leaders have frequently turned to the courts to take on critics, ranging from political opponents to foreign media outlets, and insist such action is necessary to protect their reputations.

High Court Judge Aedit Abdullah found in Lee's favour, and ordered Leong to pay him S\$133,000 (US\$99,000). Lee had sought S\$150,000.

"I am of course disappointed," Leong, a financial advisor, said

afterwards.

"Whilst I am glad that my... ordeal has come to this point, I hope that this is the last time that any politician will sue ordinary citizens for defamation."

He also appealed to the public to donate to cover the cost of the damages.

Leong's lawyer Lim Tean described the verdict as a 'wrong and deeply flawed decision'.

The Prime Minister took the stand at the start of the trial in October and accused Leong of making 'malicious and baseless' allegations, which had undermined the government's 'integrity and honesty'.

The article that Leong shared, originally published in a Malaysian news portal, alleged that Lee was the target of an investigation in neighbouring Malaysia over the 1MDB state fund.

Billions of dollars were looted from the investment vehicle in a scandal that involved Malaysia's former leader Najib Razak and his inner circle.

AFP

Taliban slam Afghan President's proposal for polls

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban on Wednesday rejected a proposal by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to hold elections later this year, after months of peace talks between the two warring sides have made little progress.

Although he hasn't made details public, Ghani will announce the election plan at a stakeholder conference in Turkey next month, according to two government officials.

The move is likely an attempt to undercut a US proposal - supported by Russia - for the formation of an interim government involving the Taliban to rule the country once the last US troops withdraw.

"The government will go to Turkey with a plan for an early election which is a fair plan for the future of Afghanistan," one senior official told AFP.

The Taliban immediately rejected the proposal.

"Such processes (elections) have pushed the country to the verge of crisis in the past," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said of Ghani's plan.



Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai (left) and Abdullah Abdullah, the chairperson of the High Council for National Reconciliation steering peace talks on behalf of the Afghan government, attends an international conference on Afghanistan over the peaceful solution to the conflict, in Moscow on March 18 (AFP)

"They are now talking about a process that has always been scandalous," he told AFP, saying any decision on the country's future must be hammered out in ongoing talks between the two

sides.

"We will never support it."

The United States is due to withdraw the last of its troops by May 1 under a deal hammered out with the Taliban last year, al-

though President Joe Biden said earlier this month the deadline would be 'tough' to meet.

That deal also paved the way for the Taliban and Afghan government to negotiate a peace

plan and hammer out an agreement on how the country should be ruled, but those talks - held since September in Doha, Qatar - have made little headway.

Afghanistan has a troubled history at the polls, with elections beset by rampant fraud, low turnout and insurgent violence.

The Taliban's response comes hours after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told NATO that Washington is still weighing up whether to withdraw its troops by the May 1 deadline.

The Afghan government is keen to keep US forces in the country for as long as possible for the vital air cover they provide, with violence raging in recent months.

The United States, Russia and other stakeholders however want to see some form of transitional government take power in Afghanistan, but Ghani has insisted leaders can only be chosen at the ballot box.

Having made enormous gains on the battleground, the Taliban appear to have little to gain from either strategy.

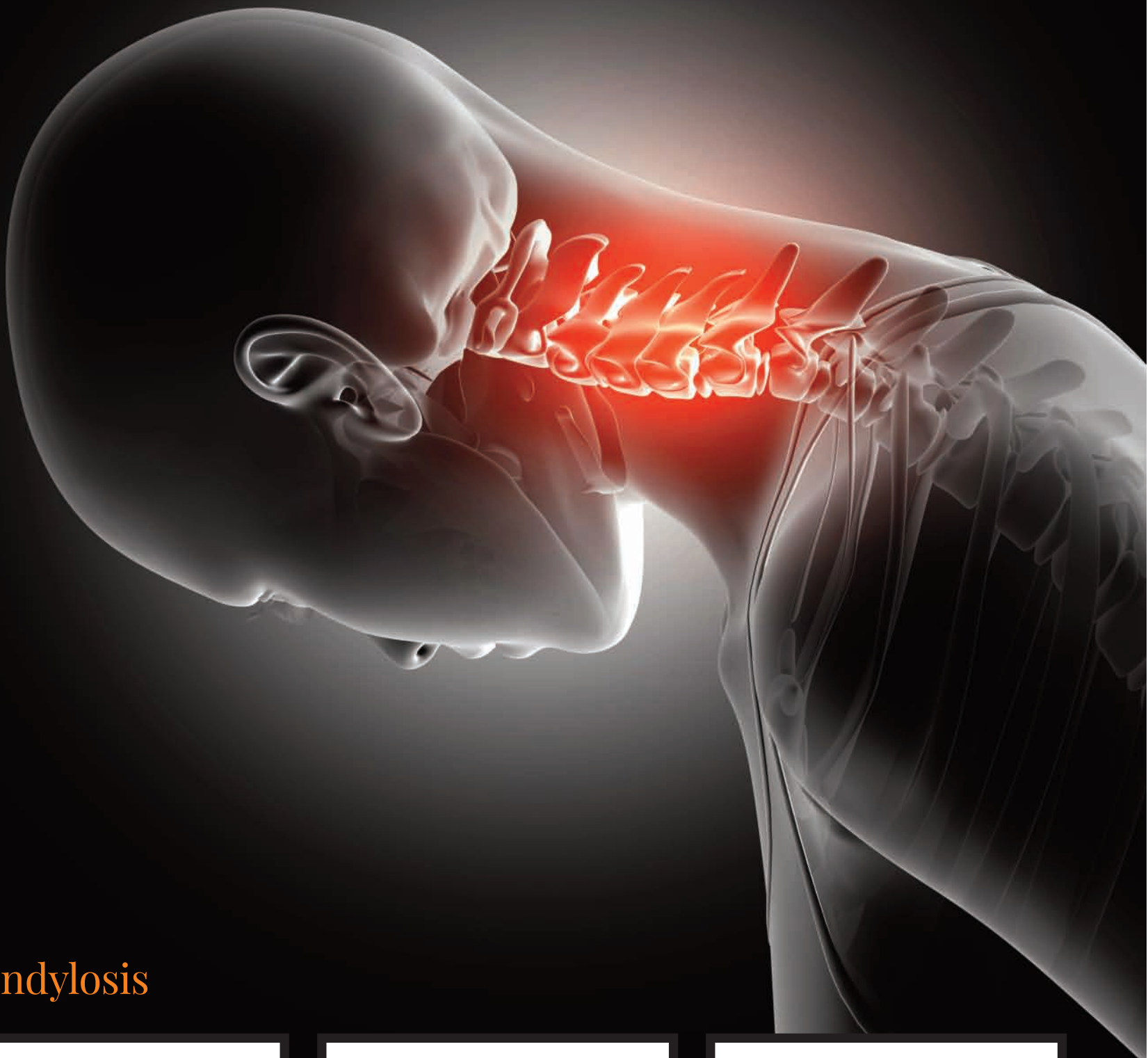
AFP

PAIN IN THE NECK?

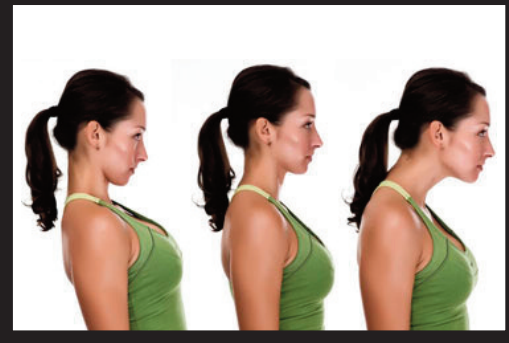
Cervical spondylosis is a disorder which concerns wear and tear in the spinal disks in your neck. As the disks dehydrate and shrink, signs of osteoarthritis develop, including bony projections along the edges of bones (bone spurs). Cervical spondylosis is very common and worsens with age. It is very common and worsens with age. More than 85 percent of people older than age 60 are affected by cervical spondylosis.

For most people, cervical spondylosis causes no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they typically include pain and stiffness in the neck. Sometimes, cervical spondylosis results in a narrowing of the space needed by the spinal cord and the nerve roots that pass through the spine to the rest of your body. If the spinal cord or nerve roots become pinched, you might experience tingling, numbness and weakness in your arms, have lack of coordination and difficulty walking, or even loss of bladder/bowel control.

A person can ease the symptoms of cervical spondylosis with a few simple neck exercises.

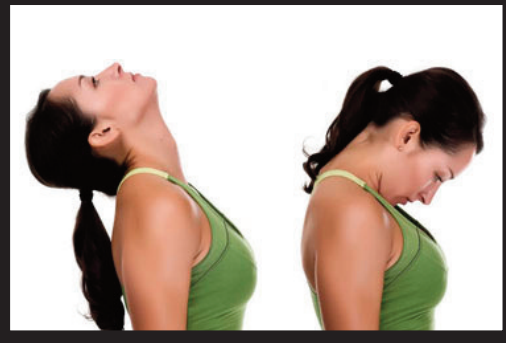


Exercises for cervical spondylosis



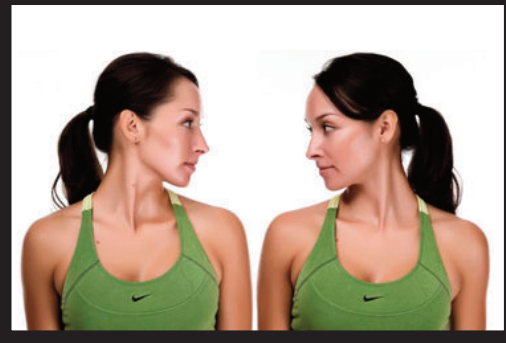
Neck stretch

- Keep your body straight.
- Push your chin forward in a way that stretches the throat.
- Softly tense the neck muscles.
- Hold this for 5 seconds.
- Return your head to its center position.
- Push your head back with the chin held high, and hold for 5 seconds.
- Carry out 5 repetitions.



Neck tilt

- Tilt your head forward so that the chin touches the chest.
- Softly tense the neck muscles.
- Hold this for 5 seconds.
- Return the head to a neutral position.
- Carry out 5 repetitions.



Neck tilt (side-to-side)

- Lean your head down towards either shoulder, leading with the ear.
- Softly tense the neck muscles.
- Hold this for 5 seconds.
- Return your head to the center and repeat on the other shoulder.
- Carry out 5 repetitions.



Neck turn

- Turn your head to one side as far as it remains comfortable, being sure to keep your chin at a level height.
- Tense your neck muscles for 5 seconds.
- Return the head to a central position.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Repeat this exercise 5 times on each side.

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DR BISWAJIT DUTTA BARUAH
Consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman Hospital



POOR POSTURE

Modern lifestyle is conducive to a variety of physical ailments, and improper posture often causes a host of disorders that might seem to stem from other specific incidents. “Back pain starts with poor posture and that association is not clear because it is slow and happens over time,” says **Dr Biswajit Dutta Baruah**, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman hospital

When we talk about vacation, a common image that appears in our minds is of a person flopped on a beach chair with his legs propped up, enjoying the cool summer breeze. With the onset of the pandemic, work from home has become the norm, and it’s not uncommon for people to do the same at home. May be, our idea of relaxation is to sit that way, or possibly, for many of us it is a matter of habit. It’s not only office goers who are prone to this poor posture. You also find this commonly in teenagers who are slouching on a sofa, eyes glued to their screens and fingers moving furiously on their consoles. Or the receptionist who’s bent over her table, pecking away lazily at the keyboard with her fingers.

Seahorse symmetry
When viewed from the side, the human back bone (spine), a stack of blocks of bone called vertebrae, has three curves. The spine gently curves forward at the neck (cervical spine) and the lower back (lumbar spine) while curving backwards at the region of the chest (thoracic spine). The best way to visualise this is to think of an erect seahorse and its S-shaped body. These curves help maintain balance and flexibility and are supported by the surrounding muscles. When seen from the front, the spine must be straight with symmetrical shoulders and hips. A balanced spine exerts the least amount of strain on the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the spine, allowing us to function efficiently. Slouching, on the other hand, leads to exaggeration of the backward curve of the upper back (thoracic spine) and reversal of the forward curve of the lower back (lumbar spine), resulting in a C-shaped curve. This leads to imbalances, asymme-

try and low back pain.

Right posture
So, what is the right posture that one should maintain? When sitting, the buttocks must be way back in the angle of the chair, with the back touching the chair’s back, shoulders relaxed and pulled slightly back, head held upright and the computer screen at eye level with the keyboard at least at an arm’s length away. Getting up frequently from your chair to grab

a cup of coffee or stretch yourself and move your head or arms around is a good way to maintain flexibility in the spine and its associated muscles. Maintaining good posture also needs good abdominal and back muscle strength. So sitting up straight is not just enough. In fact, it may be difficult to do so for a long time when muscles are weak. Maintaining a good core is important to sit erect. Core body is the part of the body between the neck and waist. Regular core strengthening exercises are necessary.

At times one may need the help of a physical therapist and go through a personal training plan involving core strengthening. Stretching every 30-60 minutes is good to relieve the tension on the ligaments that hold the spine together. This relieves bad posture patterns and helps muscles return to their neutral position. Studies have shown that good posture not only helps prevent low back ache, it also builds confidence. Those who sit erect have better self confidence and perform tasks more efficiently.

Sitting – the new smoking

Sitting constantly in the same position, by itself makes certain muscle groups shorten and over-stretches other muscle groups. This leads to asymmetry that promotes poor posture and adds to the problem. Hamstrings, the muscles on the back of the thighs, become tight indicating poor posture and are often associated with back pain. This has led a few doctors to claim sitting as the new smoking.

Many therapists therefore promote standing when at work, standing desks being popular once upon a time among software developers. However, prolonged standing has its own set of problems like varicose veins and muscular fatigue.

Most patients who come to the doctor with back pain speak about an activity, like lifting something heavy when bending for-

wards, that resulted in their pain, presuming that to be the source of their discomfort. That is not the case. Back pain starts with poor posture and that association is not clear because it is slow and happens over time. The effect of poor posture is cumulative and happens in small measures over time. By the time poor posture raises its ugly head, the damage is already done.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

Newly-crowned Oman Cricket A Division champs ARTT hope to make an impact in Premier Division next season

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

It was a mission accomplished. Having begun their campaign in the 2020-21 Oman Cricket A Division with an aim to reach a step higher - a spot in the top-flight Premier Division - Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) not only achieved their goal in style but have already begun chalking out their plans for the new challenge following their title success in the Oman Cricket A Division (50-over-a-side) recently.

The A Division title rewards ARTT with a place in next season's Premier Division where they would make their debut and compete against the sultanate's best bunch of cricketers.

A delighted team owner, Ali Anwar, told *Muscat Daily*, "My team began the season with a single mission - to be the A Division champions. I am very happy that my players accomplished what they set for and this success is a result of their hard work and team spirit."

For team skipper Ahmed Khan, 'the never-say-die attitude reflected the true character of my players'.

He said, "Zawawi Powertech was the standout team in our division and the way we fought



The victorious ARTT team after winning the concluding game against Zawawi Powertech to claim the A Division title at Al Amerat recently

and won against them in the concluding league game just after suffering two successive defeats made me really proud of my players."

The A Division title was a three-way battle between ARTT, Zawawi Powertech and SARCO.

ARTT went into the game against Zawawi Powertech knowing that the match winner will seal the title.

Team's vice-captain Pranav Mehta said, 'it was like a final'. "Either us or Zawawi [Powertech] would be the champions. We have a group of experienced and young players and we produced our best when it mattered the most. In the final,

VS Shiju was exceptional and his five-wicket haul was the game-changer."

Put to bat, Zawawi Powertech fell to a mesmerising spell of left-arm spinner Shiju as they were dismissed for paltry 66. It was a sensational debut for Shiju, a former player of the Premier Division champion Assarain, after his recent return to Oman.

A small target can be tricky at times but ARTT's Shehbaz Nasar's 32 off 27 deliveries ensured that there was no such hiccups as the team romped home to a nine-wicket win in 12 overs to end their campaign in a spectacular fashion.

All the three teams - ARTT,

SARCO and Zawawi Powertech - finished with ten points in the eight-team league. ARTT emerged winners on better net run-rate (NRR) with a score of +2.31 NRR. Runner-up SARCO had NRR of +1.04 while Zawawi Powertech was third with +0.78.

Speaking about the team's plans ahead, Mehta said, "We are thrilled to have achieved our goal - a spot in the Premier Division. We will now prepare ourselves in the coming months for the top-flight league. We plan to hire few players from India and Pakistan as we are keen to give a good fight to the experienced teams. Our aim now is to make an impact in the

Premier Division next season."

Mehta said Shiju along with experienced players like Zeeshan Siddiqui, Syed Amir Ali and Aqil Khan will form the team's backbone in the coming season.

BRIEF SCORES

Zawawi Powertech 66 in 25.5 overs (Manikandan Govind 14; Shiju 5-17, Ibn Eameen 2-8, Aqil Khan 2-12) lost to ARTT 67-1 in 11.5 overs (Nasar 32 n.o.).

Final standings [A Division]:

1 ARTT, 2 SARCO, 3 Zawawi Powertech, 4 Awtad International, 5 ACT, 6 EY, 7 Basta CT, 8 OCT Muscat.

@ashokmuscat



VS Shiju: Five-wicket haul



I am very happy that my players accomplished what they set for

ALI ANWAR,
TEAM OWNER



Our aim now is to make an impact in the Premier Division next season

PRANAV MEHTA,
VICE-CAPTAIN



The win in the concluding game after two successive defeats made me really proud of my players

AHMED KHAN,
CAPTAIN



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FIFA extends ban on Blatter and Valcke

Lausanne, Switzerland - FIFA said on Wednesday it had extended the ban on its former president Sepp Blatter and former secretary-general Jerome Valcke by six years and eight months, in relation to the receipt of huge bonuses.

Blatter, who is 85, received US\$24.6mn in 'extraordinary bonuses' linked to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and the 2014 World Cup in Brazil as well as the Confederations Cup tournament in Brazil that preceded it, FIFA's Ethics Committee said in a statement.

Valcke, the 60 year old



Valcke (L) and Blatter

Frenchman who was Blatter's right-hand man during his 17-year reign at the head of football's world governing body, received US\$32mn over the same period, the committee said.

The new bans will only come into force when the current bans on Blatter and Valcke, which last till October this year and October 2025, end.

The Ethics Committee said it had also fined each man US\$1.07mn.

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Oshada Fernando (left) and Lahiru Thirimanne of Sri Lanka during the third day's play against West Indies on Tuesday

Oshada and Thirimanne lead Sri Lanka fightback

WEST INDIES VS SRI LANKA FIRST TEST: DAY THREE

North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda - Oshada Fernando and Lahiru Thirimanne led a Sri Lankan fightback as the tourists reached 255 for four in their second innings, a lead of 153, at close of play on the third day of the first Test against the West Indies in Antigua on Tuesday.

With the other Fernando in the team, fast-medium bowler Vishwa, doing just what was required in the taking the last two West Indies first innings wickets at the start of the day to dismiss the home side for 271, it was the fluent middle-order batsman Oshada who starred with an innings of 91 in a 162-run second wicket partnership with Thirimanne.

Oshada, in just his eighth Test, came to crease in the fifth over of the innings when his captain Dimuth Karunaratne, failed for the second time in the

match, driving loosely at Kumar Roach to give John Campbell a straightforward catch at third slip. The 28 year old Oshada was given a life on 17 when he was dropped at leg-slip by Jason Holder off off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall but looked assured throughout his innings which spanned 149 deliveries and included 11 fours.

A key feature of Oshada's innings was his use of the feet, whether it was coming down the track to the spin of Cornwall or moving back and across against the seamers. He also used the sweep and reverse sweep liberally, and rather successfully too, on the way to his second Test fifty. Oshada appeared destined for a second Test hundred until West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite, in what was either a moment of inspiration or desperation, brought on Kyle Mayers as his seventh bowler of the innings.

The occasional medium-pacer met with instant success as Oshada pushed at his first ball, a full-length delivery just outside off-stump, and edged a catch to wicketkeeper Joshua Da Silva.

Mayers then removed Dinesh Chandimal in almost identical fashion two overs later. When Roach returned for another spell and bowled the obdurate Thirimanne for 76 to follow his first innings top score of 70, Sri Lanka were wobbling at 189 for four.

Just when the West Indies might have sensed a chance to sweep away the rest of the Sri Lankan batting, Dhananjaya de Silva and debutant Pathum Nissanka featured in an unbroken fifth-wicket partnership of 66 and will resume on the fourth morning seeking to extend their overall lead beyond 250 to give themselves a fighting chance of pulling off a come-from-behind victory.

"I think this is a good batting

pitch because it has flattened out nicely," said Mayers in assessing the day's toil, even with his double-strike.

"They had the upper hand today but the game is still evenly poised.

"We just need to pick up two early wickets (on the fourth day) and things can look very differently."

Earlier, West Indian hopes of extending their 99-run overnight lead ended in the second over of the day when Vishwa Fernando bowled Cornwall for a top score of 61 and then trapped last man Shannon Gabriel leg-before without scoring.

Suranga Lakmal missed out the tail but ended with career-best Test innings figures of five for 47, an improvement on the fast-medium bowler's previous best of five for 54 against New Zealand in the Boxing Day Test in Christchurch in 2018.

Agencies

SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA 1 ST INNINGS 169	
WEST INDIES 1 ST INNINGS	
K Brathwaite c de Silva b Lakmal	3
J Campbell c Dickwella b Chameera	42
N Bonner lbw b Embuldeniya	31
K Mayers c de Silva b Lakmal	45
J Blackwood b Lakmal	2
J Holder b Lakmal	19
J Da Silva c Dickwella b Chameera	46
A Joseph c Chandimal b Lakmal	0
R Cornwall b V Fernando	61
K Roach not out	5
S Gabriel lbw b V Fernando	0
Extras: (b 1, lb 6, nb 9, w 1)	17
TOTAL: 271 in 103 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-69, 3-95, 4-120, 5-133, 6-169, 7-171, 8-261, 9-271, 10-271	
Bowling: S Lakmal 25-9-47-5, V Fernando 17-6-52-2, D Chameera 22-1-71-2, L Embuldeniya 28-6-64-1, D de Silva 11-2-30-0	
SRI LANKA 2 ND INNINGS	
L Thirimanne b Roach	76
D Karunaratne c Campbell b Roach	3
O Fernando c Da Silva b Mayers	91
D Chandimal c Da Silva b Mayers	4
D de Silva not out	46
P Nissanka not out	21
Extras: (b 10, nb 4)	14
TOTAL: 255 for four in 86 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-170, 3-178, 4-189	
Bowling: K Roach 13-3-28-2, S Gabriel 11-2-30-0, J Holder 14-4-22-0, A Joseph 12-2-46-0, R Cornwall 25-3-85-0, K Brathwaite 7-1-24-0, K Mayers 4-0-10-2	

Iyer out of England ODIs; set to miss at least first half of IPL

Mumbai, India - Shreyas Iyer has been ruled out of the remaining two England ODIs after hurting his left shoulder in the field during the series opener on Tuesday night in Pune.

ESPNcricinfo understands Iyer, who dislocated his shoulder, is set to miss the first half of the IPL where he is the captain of the Delhi Capitals. On Tuesday Iyer was taken for scans immediately after he walked off the field during the eighth over of England's chase. In a flash medical update at the time the BCCI said Iyer had 'subluxated' (partially dislocated) his left shoulder.

It is understood that the injury will take several weeks to heal, putting in doubt Iyer's return for the IPL. It is understood that Iyer is likely to undergo surgery on the left shoulder which he has injured thrice since the 2020 IPL.

Iyer's absence is unlikely to



Shreyas Iyer

hurt India's gameplans for the remaining two ODI matches considering there is more than one option on bench in Suryakumar Yadav and Shubman Gill. It is the Capitals who will feel the pain of Iyer's injury considering he is not only their leader but also a key batsman in the top order. It is likely that Rishabh Pant, who is the vice-captain, will lead the Capitals until Iyer returns.

Cricinfo

Shoaib, Adnan star in Maniz Azad win



Shoaib Ismail of Maniz Azad



Adnan Ul Haq of Maniz Azad

LOCAL CRICKET

Allround performances by Shoaib Ismail and Adnan Ul Haq led Maniz Azad International to a 46-run victory over Bank Muscat in an Oman Cricket Senior Division T20 Knockout Tournament game at Al Amerat on Friday. Adnan hit a half-century (51) while Shoaib made quickfire 34 to help their team post 161 for seven. Mohammed Umar picked up three for 29.

Shoaib's excellent form continued with the ball as he claimed five for 19 while Usman Asghar and Adnan took two wickets each to bowl Bank Muscat out for 115 in 18.5 overs. Abbas al Balushi top-scored with 44.

In other Senior Division games, there were victories for Orient Travels/Gitacs, Douglas OHI and OCT Al Hail-A.

BRIEF SCORES

Maniz Azad International 161-7 (Adnan 51, Shoaib 34; Umar 3-29, Vinoth Thangavel 2-35) beat Bank Muscat 115 in 18.5 overs (Abbas 44; Shoaib 5-19).

Khalsa United CT 127-9 (Sushil Kadam 32; Nadeem Karamat Ali 3-31, Rafique 2-18, Umar Rahman 2-13) lost to Orient Travels/Gitacs 129-4 in 16.1 overs (Ibrar Hussain 55, Karamat Ali 39; Mohammed Parvez 2-29).

Douglas OHI 167-8 (Waleed Rahim 65, Ismail al Balushi 32; Salman Khan 2-27) beat Ideal International 133 in 18.4 overs

(Salman Khan 38, Wasim Jamadar 32; Viplav Kumar 3-37, Rajender Kumar 2-22, Mohsin Alimamad 2-24).

OCT Al Hail-A 165-8 (Abdul Jalil 62; Arif Khan 3-17, Ruwan Rupa 3-27) beat Zubair CT 106 in 15.5 overs (Fazal Khan 24; Abdul Ghani 3-18, Suhaib Abdul 2-15, Hisham Shafi 2-24, Ismail Balushi 2-27).

Junior T20 knockout

BRIEF SCORES

Sam Royals 149-8 (Shaji Shanu 43; Mohammed Arif 2-27) lost to Aflag Group CT 153-4 in 18.1 overs (Haris Alam 58, Junaid Iqbal 51; Vijith Ravi 3-19).

Israr Ghala 226-6 (Sagheer Mohammed 72, Wajid Mohammed 39; Sooraj Raj 3-42, Arun Kumar 2-45) beat Ideal Technology 155 in 19.5 overs (Vijesh Vijayakumar 38; Yasir Jamal 4-22, Amir Munir 3-20).

Pitspot 153-9 (Wajid Ali 27, Mushir Nazir 34) beat Safara International 117 in 19.1 overs (Hardik Toprani 22; Mohazin Moosa 2-21, Anzil Nazumudeen 2-17).

Vanderlande 189-7 (Vignesh Kumar 36, Prasanth Reddy 30; Washil 4-31, Yesupaul Martin 2-39) beat Sketch International 96 in 18.2 overs (Manish Bhatia 38; Vignesh 3-17, Aasim Mohammed 2-18).

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Iachini replaces Prandelli at Fiorentina

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Giuseppe Iachini has been named as Fiorentina coach just over four months after being sacked following the surprise resignation of Cesare Prandelli, the Serie A club announced on Wednesday.

Prandelli took over in early November from 56-year-old Iachini who had been in the post less than a year. "(Iachini) will direct training and will resume contact with the team this morning," the Tuscany outfit said.

La Viola dropped two places under Prandelli and are 14th, seven points above the relegation zone, with their next game at Genoa on April 3.

Prandelli stood down on Tuesday with the former Italy coach explaining in a letter he was unable to follow the current rhythm of football.

"I came here to give 100 per cent, but as soon as I had the feeling that this was no longer possible, for the good of all I decided to take my step back," the



Giuseppe Iachini

63 year old said. "I am aware that my coaching career can end here, but I have no regrets and I don't want to have any.

"In recent months, a shadow has grown inside me that has also changed my way of seeing things."

Ex-Fiorentina player Iachini has managed Italian teams including Sampdoria, Palermo, Sassuolo and Udinese.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP Aberdeen appoint Glass as new boss

Glasgow, UK - Scottish Premiership side Aberdeen hired their former midfielder Stephen

Glass as the club's new manager on Tuesday.

The 44 year old, who has been working as head coach of Atlanta United's reserve team in the US, succeeds Derek McInnes at Pittodrie. Former Scotland international Glass played for Aberdeen 131 times in the 1990s.

After eight years in charge, McInnes left Aberdeen by mutual consent earlier in March.

Aberdeen are currently fourth in the Scottish Premiership. AFP

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R.O 9.000

11KG R.O 7.995  Sadia Chicken 10x1100gm	4PCS R.O 0.995  Nada UHT Milk 4x1 Ltr	20KG R.O 8.500  Taj Mahal Rice 20kg	2.25KG R.O 4.250  Nido Pouch 2.25kg
3LTR R.O 1.950  Sunflow Sunflower 2x1.5ltr	3KG R.O 3.700  Tide Detergent Powder 6kg	2PCS R.O 4.250  Dettol Antiseptic Liquid 2x1 Ltr	12PCS R.O 0.750  Barzman Water 12x1 Ltr

R.O 5.990  Asian Casserole Ambient 10000ml	R.O 12.500  Pigeon 7pcs Gift Set Earthy Brown Marbelloset Earthy Brown Marbello	R.O 23.900  Bissell Upright Vacuum Cleaner Helix N	R.O 19.900  Korkmaz Grill Grey
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MORE OFFERS AVAILABLE IN STORES
AZAIBAH, AL KHUWAI, AL HAIL, BARKA, SOHAR, FALAJ

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*TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLIED



رمضان كريم Ramadan Kareem

Mar 25 - Apr 07, 2021

Fresh Offers From Mar 25-27, 2021

1KG R.O 0.650 Apple Royal Gala South Africa	1KG R.O 0.550 Grape White India	1KG R.O 0.275 Orange Valencia Egypt	1KG R.O 0.395 Pears Sempre South Africa	1KG R.O 0.395 Rock Melon Oman
1KG R.O 0.375 Short Beans Oman	1KG R.O 0.140 Cucumber Oman	1KG R.O 2.990 Somali Lamb With Bones	1KG R.O 2.690 Indian Beef Mince	1KG R.O 1.890 Apricot Jam Syria

-SPECIAL-OFFER-

RAMADAN FAMILY BASKET

R.O 9.000

11KG R.O 7.995 Sadia Chicken 10x1100gm	4PCS R.O 0.995 Nada UHT Milk 4x1 Ltr	20KG R.O 8.500 Taj Mahal Rice 20kg	2.25KG R.O 4.250 Nido Pouch 2.25kg
3LTR R.O 1.950 Sunflow Sunflower 2x1.5ltr	3KG R.O 3.700 Tide Detergent Powder 6kg	2PCS R.O 4.250 Dettol Antiseptic Liquid 2x1 Ltr	12PCS R.O 0.750 Barzman Water 12x1 Ltr

R.O 5.990 Asian Casserole Ambient 10000ml	R.O 12.500 Pigeon 7pcs Gift Set Earthy Brown Marbelloset Earthy Brown Marbello	R.O 23.900 Bissell Upright Vacuum Cleaner Helix N	R.O 19.900 Korkmaz Grill Grey
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