

Ministry of Health updates COVID-19 isolation measures

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH), in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, has updated isolation measures for people infected with COVID-19 and those in contact with them.

'The ministry calls on all units of the administrative apparatus of the state and private sector companies to ensure health isolation of the infected and those in contact with them according to new procedures,' MoH stated.

An unvaccinated person who is in contact with a COVID-19 patient must isolate for seven days and undergo a PCR test on the eighth day. 'If the result is negative, isolation ends. But if the test result is positive, the isolation period will be extended to ten days.'

According to MoH, a vaccinated person who comes in contact with a COVID-19 patient and does not show any symptoms need not isolate. 'But if the person shows symptoms, a PCR test must be taken. If the result is positive, he/she must isolate for seven days and on the eighth day undergo a rapid antigen test. If it is negative, isolation ends, but if it is positive, ten days must be completed in isolation.'

Individuals showing symptoms of COVID-19 should undergo a PCR test. If the result is positive, they should isolate for seven days and take an antigen test on the eighth day. Isolation ends if the result is negative, but extends to ten days if positive.



► Unvaccinated people coming in contact with a COVID-19 patient to isolate for seven days and undergo a PCR test on the eighth day. Isolation ends if test is negative, but extended to ten days if positive.

► Vaccinated people, who come in contact with a COVID-19 patient and do not show any symptoms, need not isolate. For those with symptoms, a PCR test must be taken. If the result is positive, isolate for seven days and take a rapid antigen test on the eighth day. Isolation ends if the test is negative, but extended to ten days if positive.

Individuals - including travellers - who have no symptoms but test positive in a PCR test must isolate for 72 hours, followed by an antigen test. If the test is negative, isolation ends.

MoH urged all to adhere to health procedures and report any violations to limit the spread of COVID-19 in institutions. 'Most recommendations of WHO and the ministry on personal protective measures are based on controlling transmission from symptomatic patients, including patients with mild symptoms who are not easy to identify early on.'

An official at MoH informed that the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to assume that others around are infected and take preventive measures by keeping a safe distance and wearing a face mask.

MASNADA TAKES LEAD IN TOUR OF OMAN



Italian rider Fausto Masnada ended a long barren spell with a stylish solo Stage 4 (Al Sifah to Royal Opera House Muscat) success to jump to the top of the Tour of Oman standings on Sunday

See Also Page 16

141 blood donors save 1 patient: DBBS

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 141 donors contributed to saving the life of one patient, according to Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS).

A statement issued by DBBS said, 'In the past few days, 141 blood donors contributed to saving the life of one individual. The patient needed transfusion of

several units of blood (red blood cells, platelets and plasma).'

According to DBBS, some patients require large amounts of blood, including premature babies who need one to four units of blood, C-section deliveries - two to 11



units, hereditary blood diseases - one to three units, open-heart surgeries - two to six units, car accidents - four to 30 units, and cancer patients - two to six units.

Those interested can donate blood from Saturday to Thursday, 8am to

8pm, and on Friday, 3pm to 8pm, at Central Blood Bank in Bausher.

Blood banks in Oman require about 5,000 units of blood per month and the Central Blood Bank in Bausher needs 100-120 donors a day to meet the requirements of health institutions.

DBBS urged all to donate blood and work together to spread hope among patients.

Ministry studying prospect of workplace nurseries

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

With the rising cost of hiring nannies and domestic workers to look after children at home when parents are at work, employees in Oman are waiting for the day when workplace nurseries become a reality.

However, the situation begs the question how prepared are organisations to accommodate employees with babies and infants that need parental care and attention. Secondly, how effective will the contribution of such employees be at work?

According to H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, nurseries at workplaces is an excellent idea, and the ministry encourages and supports it. "There is a study on the possibility of creating a legal framework in this regard," she said in Oman TV's weekly talk show *With the Youth* on Thursday.

Since affording a maid to take care of the house and children is so expensive now, allowing parents to take babies to work is a great idea

SAWSAN AL AJMI

"Since affording a maid to take care of the house and children is so expensive now, allowing parents to take babies to work is a great idea. Authorities need to fast-track steps to provide on-site nurseries for our children. Doing so will be a win-win situation for both parents and employers," said Sawsan al Ajmi, a bank employee and mother of four.

Some employees are ready to pay for a babysitter in a workplace nursery provided it's affordable.

"I do not mind paying a small

fee for the babysitter because I know my baby will be in good hands. Moreover, I can take a few minutes off to check on my child. Also, it makes good sense for my child to be with other children and interact with them," a mother of a one-year-old said on the condition of anonymity.

H E Dr Laila said that a decision will be taken if there is no objection to implementing such a step in government institutions.

"There are set standards and basics for nurseries supervised by the ministry, and also there are guidelines in this regard, in addition to the rules and regulations governing them," she said.

"Both my wife and I go to work. It has become a necessity for women to work now with the rising cost of living to run a family unlike earlier when we could make ends meet with one of us working. I think the idea of workplaces offering babysitting facilities is great," said Hassan al Naamani, a call centre employee.

Omran to manage Bahla Fort and Oasis

Muscat - The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has inked an agreement with Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) for the management and operation of Bahla Fort and Oasis in Dakhliyah governorate.

The step is part of ongoing efforts to enrich the sustainable tourism development in the sultanate in line with the directions of the National Tourism Strategy 2040.

The agreement was signed by H E Ibrahim Said al Kharusi, Undersecretary for Heritage Affairs in the ministry, and Mohammed bin Salim al Busaidi, chairman of the Board of Directors of Omran Group.

Under the agreement, Omran will manage Bahla Fort and Oasis for a period of 15 years, including internal and external areas of the site.

Commenting on the develop-



ment, H E Kharusi said, "Bahla fort holds a unique place in Oman's rich history. It is the first historical landmark in the sultanate to be inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1987. The site is considered one of the main cultural and heritage destinations that attracts visitors and tourists from across the world.

"This agreement will aid the growth of the tourism industry in the country, by enabling it to

be a key contributor to the national economy. Based on the position of Bahla Fort as a unique cultural and historical landmark, the collaboration with Omran Group is a step that will further support the management and promotion of major historical and cultural sites. It will enhance tourism experiences and products to the highest standards, in addition to attracting more visitors from both within and outside the sultanate."

tanate."

Speaking on the agreement, Busaidi said, "This agreement complements the current cooperation and the successes accomplished by the Omran Group in managing and operating many heritage, geological and environmental sites. The group plays a strategic role in creating new tourism experiences and products in collaboration with the private sector. The objective is to maximise the economic and social returns as well as promote the cultural and natural treasures of Oman innovatively."

The collaboration is expected to improve the operational aspects of the remarkable historical site.

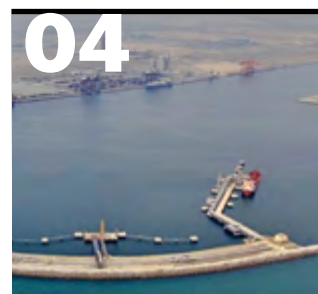
"Omran will collaborate with SMEs to take over the operational tasks of Bahla Fort and Oasis and work closely with them," Busaidi added.



H E Laila honours winner of art contest held in Egypt



Sultanate's insurance market seen to grow by 4% annually



Asyad starts direct shipping line to Malaysia, Singapore

JUST ANOTHER FLU?

Is it time to ease COVID-19 restrictions? Should we learn to live with the coronavirus as just another flu?

SEND US ON OUR
NEW
WHATSAPP NO
91953774

NOW ON WHATSAPP

Share your comment in not more than 50 words along with your full name, profession and front facing photo before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp

Reema Bhatia
Teacher

The virus is continuing to evolve quickly and pose new challenges. Some restrictions can be eased now; schools and colleges can reopen provided all precautionary measures are followed. Wearing mask, avoiding crowded areas and proper flow of air indoors should be ensured. But the uncertainty will continue.



Shaandar Bukhari
Private sector employee

Reminds me of Julia Roberts' movie from 1991, 'Sleeping with the Enemy', in which she has to learn to live and survive with her biggest enemy. WHO recently warned against treating COVID-19 like flu. It is clearly a life-threatening virus. We should abide by the SOPs.



Aasia Nikhat

It's still not time to ease COVID-19 restrictions as the virus is continuing to mutate. We need to know that the situation is still serious and COVID-19 can't be treated as just another flu. The way we live now is the new normal for everyone. A mask and maintaining social distancing are needed till there is no COVID-19 at all.



Mohan Anandan
Banking sector employee

The fact that COVID-19 has wreaked havoc world over causing unprecedented economic turbulence and taking millions of human lives calls for caution and forbearance. Of course, we are better equipped today to handle the situation with tools such as vaccination and more information, however the necessary precautionary measures should continue.



Rukseen S
Sales manager

No, still more time is needed before relaxing the existing COVID-19 precautionary measures. People must be cautious considering the virus is continuing to mutate.



Govind Arjan
Media and communications consultant

Restrictions can be gradually lifted if the cases plateau. People need to learn to live with the virus and its mutations. However, to treat it as 'just another flu' is dangerous - the virus has killed more than 5mn people globally. There should be no complacency in following COVID-19 appropriate protocols.



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

What other international events like Tour of Oman should be hosted to put the spotlight on the sultanate?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om Log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue



(Syed Fasiuddin/Muscat Daily)

Muscat decked out to woo love-struck couples

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Love is in the air. Now that Valentine's Day is here, the young and old and the married and unmarried struck by Cupid's arrow are devising conventional or creative ways to profess love.

Malls, restaurants, coffee shops and boutiques are decked out in bright lights, heart shaped objects of all kinds and flowers in every shade of red. Customers of all nationalities can be seen shopping for gifts to give their loved ones on Valentine's Day.

Maisa Abdel Hamid, assistant marketing manager at Aster Hospital and her beau plan to celebrate the day by being together after work. "Love is where you find a shoulder to lean on, when you always know that you are safe. When we first met a few months ago, I never thought that we will be together. It was fate for sure." Maisa, however, noted

that Valentine's Day is observed only once a year, but everyday is a celebration of love for the two.

To make the day special, Maisa plans to go for a long drive followed by a surprise dinner with her Valentine.

The best gift on Valentine's Day has always been flowers and Stella Timothy, manager of Flora D'Lite, knows what customers expect. "Flora D'Lite has 150-plus products, including flowers, especially for this Valentine's Day."

She informed that blue lilies, sunflowers, red roses, tulips and Colombian roses are the most sought after.

Most hotels in Muscat are prepared with special packages and offerings. Lobbies and reception desks are done up in



red in anticipation of love-struck couples.

Luca Medda, GM of Grand Millennium, is excited about the hotel's offerings. "This Valentine, rekindle the

romance with your precious one. Escape the hustle and bustle of city life and plan a rendezvous in a haven of privacy."

The hotel's 'Romantic Getaway' package offers a choice of accommodation, including a spacious Classic Room, Executive Suite or luxurious apartments. "To ensure an even more delightful experience, this package includes breakfast and dinner for two at Taybat Restaurant. A ten per cent discount on our Zanta Spa romantic package is also available on couples' treatments."

Photo shoots, long drives, creating couple videos and picnics feature in the plans of many couples in the city. Though a working day, it's not an excuse to not celebrate love for most.

Aakash Kumar, who is in a long-distant relationship, said, "No roses or long drives for us. My partner is in India and that's unfortunate. But we still plan to be together - online - in the evening and have dinner together."

Kumar has created videos to share with his Valentine as gifts. In exchange, he has already received a set of JBL wireless earbuds that was delivered via Amazon.



Complex heart procedure performed at Royal Hospital

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A medical team specialising in interventional electrophysiology at The Royal Hospital succeeded, for the first time in Oman, in performing a complex pacemaker implantation. The patient had a pathologic connection between the atria and ventricles after an open-heart operation to change the tricuspid valve on the right side of the heart.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Dr Najeeb bin Zahran al

Rawahi, senior consultant in interventional electrophysiology at National Centre for Cardiac Medicine and Surgery and head of the medical team, said the operation involved precision in inserting the wire conducting impulses into the left ventricle through the branches of the coronary sinus that drains into the right atrium.

"The operation was performed through a small incision of no more than 5cm, without the need of general anaesthesia, and took an hour and a half," Dr Rawahi said.

COVID-19 UPDATE

4,701 NEW CASES
Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday announced 4,701 new cases in a 72-hour period - Thursday, Friday and Saturday - taking the total number of COVID-19 cases registered in the country to 365,700. Thirteen deaths were reported in this period.

"There were 110 hospitalisations in the past 24 hours. The total number of COVID-19 patients currently in health institutions is 421, including 87 in intensive care units," MoH stated.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	23	16
Doha	23	14
Kuwait City	23	12
Manama	21	14
Muscat	23	19
Riyadh	22	9

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.24am
Sunrise	6.41am
Duhr	12.26pm
Asr	3.41pm
Maghrib	6.06pm
Isha	7.18pm

H E Laila honours disabled girl for winning art competition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed bin Awadh al Najar, Minister of Social Development, on Sunday honoured young Omani artist Saba bint Ahmed al Rashidi for winning the silver medal in a painting competition organised to celebrate 'Cairo, Capital of Culture in the Islamic World 2022'

Saba won the silver medal in the children's art competition held under the title 'Egypt in the eyes of the children of the Islamic world'.

The ministry added that Saba is a special education student and with the help of her family, she was able to develop her skills and talents and compete in this Arab-level competition.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ahmed al Rashidi, father of the girl, said, "We discovered my daughter's talent since the age of four. My daughter was suffering from slow learning and poor



movement, but I discovered her talent for drawing."

Rashidi said, "We provided her with art workshops and all the drawing tools to develop her talent. She participated in the Cairo competition in October 2021 and it was announced that she had won the second place in January 2022. The competition brought together the children of the Arab world where they sub-

mitted paintings of famous Islamic landmarks in the Arab Republic of Egypt. It was aimed at celebrating that Cairo as the capital of Islamic culture. My daughter's painting was of the Al Fattah Al Aleem Mosque and an Omani and Egyptian girl exchanging flags."

Saba's aunt, Umama al Rashidi, who is also an artist, held art workshops for one week to prepare her for the competition and to finish the painting. "My daughter has an Instagram handle called 'saba.alrashidi' that includes all her works. It includes about ten paintings," said Rashidi.

"I advise the parents of disabled children to thank God for blessing their children and to seek, discover and develop the talents of their children. I thank the Minister of Social Development for honouring my daughter. The honour will motivate her to develop her talent and continue to create more paintings," said Rashidi.



Pact signed to promote Omani products, exports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has signed a cooperation agreement with Ta'athur Technology Company to establish Oman Exports electronic platform.

The cooperation agreement was signed by H E Asilah bint Salem al Samsamiya, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in MoCIIP, and Thamer bin Ahmed al Marhoon, CEO of Ta'athur Technology Company.

It aims to create an electronic platform that contributes to the promotion of Omani products and Omani exports for those who wish to market their products through the electronic platform outside the sultanate.

It also aims to conduct studies and research on the export environment in the sultanate and improve the marketing of Omani products outside the country, as well as holding a virtual exhibition with the aim of bringing suppliers and concerned parties to one place.

"The establishment of the platform will support the ministry's role in promoting Omani exports. The ministry organises 'Made in Oman' campaigns, which is held annually in support of Omani products, and focuses on finding outlets for Omani products in supermarkets and malls spread in all governorates and allocating a special corner for marketing of Omani products," said H E Asilah.

According to H E Asilah, the platform will contribute to promoting trade between the sultanate and other countries, support the access of Omani exports in international markets, as well as support the national economy and contribute to increasing the gross domestic product of the sultanate.

She added that the platform will be managed by an Omani team working around the clock, seven days a week.

Feb 13: World Radio Day observed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To mark World Radio Day, observed on February 13 every year, Oman Airports launched a new Internal Radio service on Sunday. World Radio Day is celebrated to honour one of the oldest and widely consumed mediums of communication.

According to Unesco, radio is a strong and powerful medium for celebrating humanity in all its diversity. Unesco is celebrating the 11th anniversary of World Radio Day and more than a century of the medium. The celebration is divided into three main sub-themes - Trust in radio journalism, Trust and accessibility and Trust and viability of radio stations.

On the occasion, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) conducted a study on the importance of radio.

The SQU study included a sample of Omanis and confirmed that more than half of the citizens who were included in the study like to listen to Arabic podcasts. The study also indicated that the Omani public prefers to listen to local news and details of



We believe in the role of radio stations in disseminating knowledge and exchanging information, and in supporting the activities of national institutions

OMAN AIRPORTS

government decisions, and also to listen to government officials' explanations about government decisions on radio.

The study confirmed that radio stations are heard more at the beginning of the week rather than the end. 'The Omani public prefers listening to radio programmes during the morning period, from 6.30am to 10am and 1pm to 4pm,' it stated.

The study also confirmed that the percentage of listeners to private radio in Arabic language is 62 per cent via car radio, 10.5 per cent via YouTube, and 7 per cent via Twitter among other sources.

Oman Airports in a statement said, 'We believe in the role of radio stations in disseminating knowledge and exchanging information, and in supporting the activities of national institutions. We are pleased to congratulate Omani radio stations on the occasion of World Radio Day.

'We are pleased to launch Oman Airports Internal Radio podcast, which will be a new platform for communicating with our internal audience.'

In January 2022, the Ministry of Information launched the Ayn platform, which is considered the largest Omani audiovisual content outlet.

The platform presents Oman's civilisation through its history, present and future to broaden the prospects and influence of media's message.

"The Ayn platform represents a complete shift in the field of modern electronic media services. It enhances Omani presence in various electronic mediums. It also sheds light on national achievements. Through its website and smart device applications, Ayn offers a unique experience, which is fun and easy to use," a statement issued by H E Dr Abdullah Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, on the occasion of the launch of the Ayn platform, said.

Ayn's library contains a huge collection of audiovisual content produced by Oman Radio and Oman Television over many decades.

SEND YOUR
COMMENTS TO

**muscatdaily@
apexmedia.co.om**

Oman LNG finances RO3mn for Sur park

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to sustain Oman's unique biodiversity and transform the coastal landscape of Sur, Oman LNG has extended its support to the community to finance the second phase of the Sur Public Park, in collaboration with the South Sharqiyah Governor's Office.

The estimated cost of the second phase is RO3mn and the park is set to be a public facility, attracting residents and visitors of Sur and South Sharqiyah governorate in general, according to a press statement.

The project has been planned to operate as a self-sustaining enterprise, providing exceptional opportunities for entrepreneurship. Additionally, the park will boost the tourism sector in the governorate.

The second phase of Sur Public Park builds on earlier support where Oman LNG had funded detailed consultancy services for



Oman LNG and its shareholders are determined to continue to play its pioneering role in the socio-economic fabric of Oman

TALAL AL AWFI

the design phase of the park, taking into consideration a number of important factors to accommodate all community needs.

The latest initiative by the company dovetails with His

Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's recent call for concerted efforts to ensure the development of the governorates, with emphasis on sustainable programmes that prioritise economic growth and social welfare.

This is aligned to the 'People and Society' pillar of the pivotal Oman Vision 2040, which aims to develop the health aspect of the society. Additionally, it addresses the family and community wellbeing and health objectives of this pillar. The latest initiative will also advance the company's effort to boost its environmental performance.

Dr Yahya al Ma'awli, Governor of South Sharqiyah, said, "It gives us great pleasure to continue the exceptional relationship and collaboration with Oman LNG, through supporting various social responsibility programmes and projects. Sur Public Park is an additional vital project and comes as a testimony to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's call to enhance and de-

velop services across the governorates of Oman. Additionally, such projects will include many benefits - from social, economic and touristic spectrums - offered to people and tourists."

On the occasion, Talal al Awfi, chairman of Oman LNG, said, "As a responsible company, Oman LNG and its shareholders are determined to continue to play its pioneering role in the socio-economic fabric of the sultanate and meeting community's aspirations."

From a global perspective, the Sur Public Park project ties in well with UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals, under the good health and wellbeing goal; the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for current and future generations by addressing the global climate challenges the world is facing.

Hamed al Naamany, CEO of Oman LNG, said, "We feel privileged to pursue this project that will provide many opportunities for SMEs."



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No.(4 /2022)

specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E- Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/21/093	2021/MM/QS-38-Recall-1	Reconstruction and Maintenance of Culverts In Muscat Governorate 2022 (E- Tender) (Recall)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	First
PRE/20/017	2021/MM/HQ-33-Recall-1	Construction of Storm Water Drainage Channel in AL Ghubrah North – Phase 1C (E- Tender) (Recall)	Rial 245	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Excellent
PRE/20/059	2022/MM/QS-2	Road Improvements of Dama Street in AL Seeb (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	First
PRE/21/108	2022/MM/QS-3	Site preparation for street vendors in Wilayat AL Amerat (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Second
PRE/22/008	2022/MM/QS-4	RFP for Annual maintenance Contract (AMC) of oracle E- Business HRMS & Financial System (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Specialiset
PRE/22/010	2022/MM/QS-5	Site preparation for street vendors in Wilayat Quriyat (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Second

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

Sultanate's insurance market seen to grow by 4% annually

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Insurance market in Oman is expected to reach US\$1.5bn in 2026, registering an annualized growth rate of 3.9 per cent over the next five years, according to Alpen Capital, a leading investment banking advisory firm in the Middle East.

The life insurance segment in the sultanate is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.8 per cent over the five-year period until 2026, the fastest in the region, according to GCC Insurance Industry report published by Alpen Capital.

'Growth in Oman's insurance market will be largely driven by a strong rise in population at a CAGR of 3.1 per cent between 2021 and 2026. Meanwhile, the non-life insurance segment is expected to grow at a CAGR of 3.7 per cent to reach US\$1.3bn in 2026,' the report said.

The implementation of mandatory health insurance from 2020 and continuation of health cover by Omani employers will support the growth of the non-life segment, Alpen Capital



The life insurance segment in Oman is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.8 per cent between 2021 and 2026, the fastest in the GCC region

added.

The sultanate's universal health insurance plan is being implemented in five stages with application of the mandate to foreign visitors in the first stage, foreign workers in the second,

companies by size and industry in the third stage, and nationals and their dependents in the fourth and fifth stages.

'While Oman opened its borders for tourism amid the ongoing pandemic, the country has

mandated health insurance for travel to and from Oman. These measures are likely to aid growth in the non-life segment,' the report said.

Moreover, rising awareness of insurance products as tools to hedge against risks and increased coverage by private sector employers bode well for the segment.

The property insurance line is expected to benefit from the series of construction projects undertaken by the government as

part of its economic diversification strategy, Alpen Capital report said.

'The Oman Investment Authority has announced 13 national projects valued approximately at RO3.5bn in 2021 alone covering a number of key sectors including energy, manufacturing, mining, health and tourism services. Such developments are expected to further expand the underwriting base for non-life commercial lines,' the report added.

Consequently, it said, the insurance penetration and density in the sultanate are expected to increase to 1.5 per cent and US\$274.4, respectively, by 2026.

Oman is amongst the smallest insurance markets in the GCC and ranked 77th globally during 2020, based on gross written premiums, Alpen Capital noted.

The sultanate's insurance sector remains oversupplied and faces stiff competition with around 20 players. The sector recorded a rise of 1.1 per cent CAGR between 2015 and 2020 to reach US\$1.2bn, the report added.



Asyad starts direct shipping line to Malaysia, Singapore

Muscat - Sohar Port on Sunday received its first direct container shipment via the new direct shipping line launched by Oman, represented by Asyad Group, with the Singaporean and Malaysian ports.

The opening of this direct shipping line feeds into the initiatives implemented by Asyad Group to promote the competitiveness of the sultanate's ports, enhance their operational efficiency and harness their logistics potential by linking them via direct lines with various global commercial ports.

These efforts by Asyad Group provide an added value to the national economy and ce-

ment Oman's position as a global logistics hub and transit gateway.

This new container shipping line is set to increase Oman's trade relations with Asian countries, provide competitive advantages to the local and regional business community, enhance all national exports to Singapore, Malaysia and neighbouring markets.

The new shipping line provides Omani traders with a fast, time- and cost-effective access to Singapore as an international distribution hub and subsequently to Southeast Asian markets. ONA

CANON SERVICE MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

For Canon Office Automation Products & Photo Video Products

Genetco Provides Full Service Maintenance Agreements (FSMA) - Annual Maintenance Contracts (AMC) - Spraes & Service Maintenance Agreements (SSMA) and On Demand Service For All Types Of Canon Mult Functional Devices, Photo Copiers, Laser Printers, Fax Machines & Cameras.

Competitive Price

Quick Response

Trained & Skilled Service Team

Genuine Spare Parts & Consumables

Scheduled Preventive Maintenance

Timely Upgradation of Latest Firmware

Enquiry & Booking

95646154

(Call & WhatsApp)

SERVICE TOLL FREE

800 70003

Atyab Food Industries launches new brand identity and products

Muscat - Atyab Food Industries, a homegrown Omani brand and one of the leading industrial bakeries in the Gulf region, has completed an extensive rebranding effort in response to accelerated company growth and a renewal of its corporate vision.

At the heart of the company's rebranding is an update to the corporate logo with 'Atyab' boldly on display - the updated brand identity under which the company aims to launch a host of new products to better serve its customers across the region.

Commenting on the launch of the new branding, the CEO of Atyab, Ali Kashoob said, "Atyab is truly a 'one-of-a-kind' industrial bakery that has served as an essential part of Oman's food industry for the past ten years, often clubbed as a trusted brand under 'Dahabi'.

As the market has continued to evolve, our authentic Omani taste and quality helped us connect with our customers and grow in popularity with each passing year. We now feel that Atyab is ready to serve the region's changing needs, bringing smiles to the faces of our customers across Oman and the region with the best, most nutritious, and tasty food we can offer under our own brand."

He said, "The launch of this new brand identity is, therefore, a major milestone for us as a

company. For this reason, we wanted to design a logo that would exemplify our passion for food and the level of care we put into every product we produce. Extreme thought and care were subsequently put into every aspect of our new logo, and I feel that, together with our new product offerings, our new brand identity completely embodies each of these aspects of our business in both emotion and design." Atyab's new brand identity and logo, which will eventually adorn the packaging of a range of new products as they are launched, features the name in clear, direct font signifying the company's magnitude.

Atyab's journey began in 2012 when the sultanate was largely importing products and services from around the world for its people. Atyab as a brand saw

this both as a challenge and an opportunity. With the help of sustained and sound investments, the brand built a state-of-the-art production facility and took great pride in manufacturing essential food products in-house. As a result, Atyab established itself as a truly homegrown Omani brand, one that provided an authentic and unmatched flavour.

From the very beginning, every aspect of the company's operations and products have been devoted to maintaining the highest standards of quality possible. The company even has an in-house research and development laboratory dedicated to this purpose.

With time, this dedication to quality coupled with the authentic taste of the company's products, enabled it to grow as a

trusted brand in the market; eventually expanding its business to the UAE, followed by Yemen, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq, and Hong Kong.

Today, the brand's products are distributed to all segments in Oman as well as the UAE, reaching more than 6,000 outlets through its fleet of over 200 vehicles that deliver the products fresh every single day.

"One of the secrets to our continued success, quality, and unique taste is the specially formulated 'Dahabi' flour, which is mixed exclusively for Atyab. With this flour, we continue to deliver only the tastiest, most nutritious, and highest quality food that our customers in Oman and beyond have come to expect from us. Under the new brand, we shall continue to expand our product line, offering new and improved foods that keep our customers healthy and always puts a smile on their faces," Kashoob said.

Atyab operates as one of the top industrial bakeries in the Gulf region that brings together more than 300 different fresh and frozen bakery products under one roof.

The company's industrial facility is spread over a plot area of 60,000 square meters in Barka. Atyab is a subsidiary of Atyab Investments, the investment arm of Oman Flour Mills Company.

new

Move over mayo!

PERinaise has arrived!

Distributed by

Please contact

+968 22060236/237

INTERVIEW

NATALJA KISSINA, HR VICE PRESIDENT FOR GULF, SCHNIEDER ELECTRIC

'Investing in employee wellbeing leads to increased productivity'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Natalja Kissina is the HR vice president and sustainability leader for Schneider Electric in the Gulf. Natalja is well-known for her dedication to improving employee experiences in the organisations and contributing to long-term business growth. She will be speaking at the Wellbeing at Work Middle East Summit which will take place during February 21-23, 2022 in Dubai.

As a leader based in the region, what are the main challenges you are facing when it comes to employee wellbeing?

Considering the ongoing pandemic and new hybrid work environment across the globe, one of the key challenges we face is the human connection aspect. Working from home has meant that most employees only see and interact with their co-workers and managers through a screen, which can be very challenging as human beings are social creatures who thrive on face-to-face interaction.

With this in mind, we ask our employees to come to the office three out of five days so they can benefit from seeing their colleagues and be together in safe working environment where they can collaborate, discuss and connect in-person. We also organised a successful mental health run late last year to highlight the importance of exercise and being outdoors for our employees' mental health.

To this end, another key challenge we face is promoting a more active culture in the workplace. Workloads and more online meetings mean that many employees across the region sit for long periods of time, which is not ideal. We try to encourage movement through our various runs and regular wellbeing sessions, covering mental health, yoga, meditation, and other key stress relief techniques.

What strategies have you seen developing in the region over the past 6-12 months during the pandemic to address health and wellbeing in the workplace?

I have seen a bigger push from many global and local companies in the region with regards to giving employees more flexibility with their work schedules. This is wonderful as it allows employees a better work-life balance and ensures that caregivers and parents - especially - can provide and care for their families and dependents and manage their work at the same time.

After all, flexibility is not solely about location; it is also about a series of arrangements to boost productivity while fostering inclusion and diversity in the workplace and realising that each employee has unique needs and different personal responsibilities.

I have also seen an uptake in the number of employee wellbeing and health related events and conferences taking place, which means these topics are becoming a key priority in the region, which is great to see. I also see a greater push for hybrid working plans by companies, both interna-



In my experience I have seen that investing considerably in employee wellbeing can lead to increased resilience, stronger employee engagement, reduced sickness-related absence and higher performance and productivity

NATALJA KISSINA

tional and local.

Why is employee wellbeing so important to you personally?

For me personally, wellbeing is extremely important because employees who are happy and healthy create a positive and nurturing environment for the company. It's quite simple: when our employees are doing well, so are we because they are the foundation of everything we do. Moreover,

in my experience I have seen that investing considerably in employee wellbeing can lead to increased resilience, stronger employee engagement, reduced sickness-related absence and higher performance and productivity. But for this to be successful, employee wellbeing priorities must be integrated throughout an organisation. It should be embedded in its culture, leadership and people management strategy, which is ex-

actly what we strive to achieve at Schneider Electric.

What are you most looking forward to about Wellbeing at Work Middle East Summit this month?

I am looking forward to connecting with like-minded individuals from the industry to sit down together and start a conversation on how we can support and increase the wellbeing of our employees given the new hybrid working environment we find ourselves in.

What is your vision for the workplace of the future, in terms of employee engagement, health and wellbeing?

I believe the workplace of the future is hybrid. In fact in 2021, Gartner announced from its research findings that there is no going back to the work model that prevailed before the pandemic. Companies that give employees the freedom to work from home are more attractive to potential employees and are not restricted to the local job market.

From a sustainability and cost perspective, there are also gains as firms as less burdened by office space and business travel overheads.

This set up also translates into an organisation that is eco-friendly and more sustainable and has a lower carbon footprint.

The pandemic has undoubtedly influenced all areas of employees personal and professional lives. What are the key learnings from this period and what are your tips for supporting each other through the uncertainty?

I think the pandemic has definitely affected us all in all aspects of our lives whether that be in terms of health, travel, work and life in general. One key takeaway is definitely the potential for feelings of isolation and detachment when working predominately at home and on your own. Work gives us a sense of shared purpose and a connection with other people. No matter what industry you're in, a workplace is a community.

How has your organisation been leading the way over the last 12 months?

In the past year, Schneider Electric has shined brightly in terms of employee wellbeing and fostering a healthy work culture. In October 2021 we won two Future Workplace Awards: Best Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Best Employee Support Strategy.

Meanwhile, at the Happiness@Work Awards in November 2021 we were winners in the Best Workplace Wellness Programme category for the private sector, which was an absolute honour and a testament to all the hard work and efforts our team has put into wellbeing and wellness for our employees. These awards highlight our strong commitment to the happiness and wellbeing of our employees.

(Muscat Daily is the media partner of the Wellbeing at Work Middle East Summit. Readers can get a 25 per cent discount on tickets, use offer code MUSCAT25 and visit <https://wellbeingatwork.world/summit/wellbeing-work-summit-middle-east-2022/#Tickets>)

Saudi Arabia transfers Aramco shares to sovereign fund

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia has moved four per cent of Aramco shares worth US\$80bn in the world's biggest oil exporter to the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, authorities said Sunday.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's effective ruler, announced the move as part of efforts to recalibrate the oil-dominated economy.

The transfer is also the latest sign that Saudi Arabia wants to open up the oil giant and "crown jewel" of the Saudi economy.

The "transfer of four per cent of Aramco shares to the Public Investment Fund (PIF) ... is part of the kingdom's long-term strategy to support the restructuring of its economy," the crown prince was quoted as saying by the state SPA news agency.

Crown Prince Mohammed said he wants the investment fund to have one trillion dollars in assets by the end of 2025. The fund is the centrepiece of official



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

moves to end economic reliance on oil.

"The shares will bolster the fund's strong financial position and high credit ratings in the medium term, as the PIF relies on the value of its assets and the returns on its assets under management for its funding strategy," he said.

The crown prince stressed that the Saudi state would re-

main the dominant Aramco shareholder with a 94 per cent stake. Crown Prince Mohammed is also head of the PIF sovereign fund.

He said in April last year that Aramco was in talks to sell a one per cent stake to a foreign energy giant. "There is a discussion on the acquisition of one per cent (of Aramco) by one of the world's leading energy compa-

nies, and this will be a very important deal to boost Aramco's sales in that country," the crown prince said at the time.

Aramco previously sold 1.7 per cent of its shares on the Saudi bourse in December 2019, generating US\$29.4bn in the world's biggest initial public offering.

It raised six billion dollars in Islamic bonds in June last year, so that it could pay dividends to the new shareholders. But Aramco announced US\$30.4bn in profits for the third quarter of 2021, a massive rise from US\$18.8bn for the same quarter the previous year, as oil prices took off again.

In December, Aramco said it had signed a US\$15.5bn lease agreement for its gas pipeline network with a consortium led by BlackRock Real Estate of the United States and Hassana Investment Company, a Saudi-state-backed investment management firm.

AFP

UK economy grew by record 7.5% in 2021

London, UK - Britain's economy grew by a record 7.5 per cent last year on easing Covid curbs after a pandemic-driven collapse, official data showed Friday, but analysts warned that sky-high inflation clouds the 2022 outlook. The expansion, which was the fastest since records began in 1948, followed a record 9.4-per cent slump in 2020, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) added in a statement.

Economies across the world were slammed in 2020 by the

deadly pandemic, which sparked lockdowns and other public health restrictions that have since been largely removed.

The ONS added Friday that the UK economy increased by 1.0 per cent in the fourth quarter despite the emergence of the Omicron Covid variant, matching its expansion in the third quarter.

However, gross domestic product dipped 0.2 per cent in December on fallout from the rapid spread of Omicron - which is widely regarded as less dan-

gerous than previous variants but hit the travel sector.

"GDP fell back slightly in December as the Omicron wave hit, with retail and hospitality seeing the biggest impacts," said ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan.

"However, these were partially offset by increases in the Test and Trace service and vaccination programmes. Despite December's setback, GDP grew robustly across the fourth quarter as a whole with the NHS (Na-

tional Health Service), couriers and employment agencies all helping to support the economy," added Morgan.

British finance minister Rishi Sunak welcomed the data. "The economy has been remarkably resilient; with the UK seeing the fastest growth in the G7 last year," he said in a statement, noting it was boosted by the government's vast stimulus measures and speedy vaccination drive.

AFP



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة
Tender Notice

The Ministry of Transport, Communications & Information Technology Announces to all seafarers who wish to obtain certificate of competency (Management level) that the written exams in 2022 would be conducted as per following schedule:

Place/Time/ uniform	Exam date	Subject	Month	Type of examination	
Ministry of Transport, Communications & Information Technology - Training center Al-Khuwair 9:00 AM Official uniform	20/03/2022	General Engineering knowledge	March	Second Engineer	
	23/03/2022	Marine Diesel engine			
	24/03/2022	Marine steam turbines			
	07/08/2022	General Engineering knowledge	August	Chief mate	
	10/08/2022	Marine Diesel engine			
	11/08/2022	Marine steam turbines			
	21/03/2022	Stability	March	Chief mate	
	24/03/2022	Navigation			
	08/08/2022	Stability	August		
	11/08/2022	Navigation			

Therefore, seafarers who wish to apply for the exams are kindly requested to submit their application and pay prescribed fees through Directorate General of Marine Affairs Portal <https://esma.transport.gov.om/> not later than two weeks prior to the exams date.


[@mtcitoman](https://t.me/mtcitoman)

www.mtcit.gov.om



البنية التحتية للنقل
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology
2022

Alizz Islamic Bank wins ‘Mudharabah Deal Of The Year 2021’ Award

Reinforcing its position as one of Oman’s most dynamic Wholesale Banking Islamic banking institutions, Alizz Islamic Bank was recently conferred with the award for ‘Mudharabah Deal of the Year 2021’ at the Islamic Finance News (IFN) Awards 2021.

Alizz Islamic Bank announced that its landmark Investment Banking transaction: The RO52mn Ominvest perpetual sukuk has been recognised globally and has won the prestigious IFN award for Mudarabah Deal of the Year 2021. Alizz Islamic Bank said that it is honoured to have acted as the Joint Issue Manager on the deal along with Ubhar Capital.

IFN Awards are one of the most prestigious awards in the world of Islamic banking and finance. They acknowledge and recognise the contributions of Islamic banking institutions in the growth and expansion of the Islamic banking and finance sector.

Expressing the banks delight at winning the award, Sulaiman

al Harthi, the CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank said, “We are delighted to have worked on this pioneering sukuk transaction for Ominvest. The IFN award for the deal of the year is the testimony of Alizz Islamic Bank’s expertise in advising its clients on such innovative sukuk transactions and our efforts to develop a vibrant domestic Islamic capital markets. We would like to thank our clients and the investor community for their confidence and support. We are also grateful to our regulators – the Capital Market Authority and the Central Bank of Oman for their guidance and support.”

Ominvest is the first non-financial company to have issued perpetual instrument in Oman which provides a unique investment opportunity to investors looking for sharia’a-compliant instruments.

The issuance of the perpetual sukuk will enable Ominvest to further optimise its capital structure, channel the funds to make new long-term investments and enhance return on capital. It will



Sulaiman al Harthi

create value for Ominvest stakeholders through improved earnings, stronger liquidity and better return ratios. In line with the International Financial Reporting Standards, the sukuk will be classified as equity in Ominvest’s balance-sheet, making the company’s financial position stronger

Alizz Islamic Bank’s Wholesale Banking group provides a comprehensive range of sharia’a compliant solutions to corporate, commercial and government institutions. The bank’s highly experienced team help organisations achieve optimum efficiency, reliability, and above all, customer satisfaction. The bank has developed a variety of Sharia’a-compliant banking products and services that meet all the financing needs of government and corporate entities in Oman. It offers various structured financing solutions that are designed to meet all the development requirements in various sectors such as in the oil and gas, infrastructure, transport, manufacturing, education, healthcare, tourism and hospitality.

Ookla and TRA announce collaboration



Ookla, an internationally recognised leader in network testing and intelligence, and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) of Oman are engaging in a collaborative arrangement as part of TRA’s aim to leverage the latest technologies and up-to-date insights for understanding mobile and fixed broadband performance across Oman.

This comes at a time when 5G rollout in the country is gaining momentum, and Ookla’s enterprise solutions and first-party data is set to empower TRA in assessing the adoption of 5G networks in the sultanate. This collaboration should help drive network improvements in Oman, delivering significant new value to local mobile operators who build the networks and the consumers who rely on them.

“Millions of people use Speedtest to measure their internet performance every day,” said, Doug Suttles, Ookla co-founder and CEO. “With our consumer-initiated methodology,

powerful cross-platform testing engine and global network of high-throughput servers, Ookla is a definitive source for 5G network intelligence and measurement. We are thrilled to assist and support the TRA as they seek to drive the development of the telecommunications sector in Oman.”

“Ookla’s unique data insights will help TRA identify weak spots and consequently guide network operators to improve their networks, in turn creating a better experience for the Omani people,” said, Eng Ahmed Hassan al Haddabi, TRA executive manager, Strategic Planning Unit.

“We look forward to leveraging Ookla’s data to assist us in making informed decisions for advancing Oman’s ranking internationally.”

Nama Group launches Silah



In efforts to highlight the impact and importance of internal and external communication with employees, customers and stakeholders, Nama Group launched Silah programme inviting its community to ‘Be the Link’.

The programme concept was

formed to showcase the role of communication in the employees and customer journey in the water and electricity sectors for the process of improvement and continuous development

Silah programme wants to ensure communication reaches all target groups it focused on to

build data-driver approaches to develop a set of objectives to be achieved.

The said objectives are divided into several stages, which are translated to initiatives that will form the roadmap for the upcoming communication strategy.

Oman participates in Gulfood 2022

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), commenced its participation at Gulfood 2022 – one of the world’s largest annual food and hospitality events – at Dubai World Trade Centre in the United Arab Emirates.

Held from February 13 to 17, Gulfood 2022 features the participation of more than 4,000 exhibitors representing 180 countries.

This participation represents the kickstart of ‘Made in Oman’ activities for the current year through which Madayn aims to promote Omani products among consumers inside and outside the sultanate, build brand loyalty, and contribute to export growth.

Hamood al Balushi, assistant director general at Madayn, stated that Madayn has ensured to participate in Gulfood event for the tenth consecutive year as ‘this global event presents an ideal platform for the sultanate’s participants to promote the local



manufactured products to consumers and visitors from different countries, and explore new markets and collaborations’.

A number of Omani companies and factories representing the food industry are taking part in Gulfood 2022 under the umbrella of Madayn with the aim of strengthening their brands in

overseas markets and expanding their commercial activity. These include Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives, Oman Foodstuff Factory, Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives, Al Joudah Food Tech Lab, Dhofar Poultry Company, Nakheel Oman Development Company, Nizwa Food Industries, Gulf National Indus-

tries, Omani Euro Food Industries, and Overseas Food Industries.

Through Gulfood 2022, the participants have the opportunity to introduce their manufacturing lines to visitors from across the globe and explore new collaborations to expand their businesses overseas.

Madayn organises workshop

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by its Excellence and Organisational Transformation Department, organised a workshop for managers of Madayn’s digital transformation projects as part of the 2022 executive plan.

The workshop highlighted the methodology of Digital Project Management Office (PMO), reviewed the approved implementation plan, and elaborated on the adopted mechanism for managing Public Establishment for Industrial Estates’s digital transformation projects and related tasks.

This workshop follows a series of meetings held by the digital transformation project team last year that resulted in the adoption of Madayn’s digital transformation strategy, which was based on the main sources represented in Oman Vision 2040, the government’s digital transformation programme and Madayn Vision 2040.

Hawana Salalah’s natural design, resort-style amenities offer unmatched paradise for residents and visitors

Coconut-fringed beaches, mist-capped mountains, and balmy sub-tropical weather – Oman’s Southernmost governorate has all the trappings of paradise and at the heart of it is Hawana Salalah. Drawing residents and tourists from near and far, Muriya’s year-round destination is brimming with life, offering open space, natural surroundings, and a place to truly breathe.

From thatched cabins lining an unspoilt coastline, stunning villas overlooking the water to world-class luxurious hotels, it’s the perfect base from which to explore all that Dhofar has to offer.

A thriving community hub all of its own, there are plentiful opportunities for adventure on-site, with a range of water and land activities, vibrant restaurants and cafés and much more.

Whether looking for a family home, a relaxing vacation or a spontaneous staycation, Muriya has reimagined the everyday with this extraordinary destination.

Karim Boushra, Hawana



Salalah destination director, said, “Hawana Salalah is more than our flagship development, it’s the realisation of our vision to create authentic and sustainable experiences that reflect the vibrant

culture, generous nature and warm hospitality of the Omani people. As such, it continues to attract visitors from across the globe, and as Oman’s largest and fastest growing tourism destina-

tion, is an important part of Oman’s economic vision.”

“All the while, it maintains its local spirit and stays faithful to our goal to encourage well-being, family time, get-togethers and

connections,” he said.

Making resort living a lifestyle, Hawana Salalah offers opportunities to live and invest throughout a growing range of freehold properties.

At its heart is Laguna Gardens, an inspiring residential community designed as a celebration of the finer things in life. Proudly displaying its Omani-inspired architecture, a selection of one, two and three-bedroom single storey villas are clustered around lagoons and man-made canals, in addition to studios and simplexes with direct pool access.

Meanwhile, surrounded by five-star resort facilities which offer unique experiences for every season, it is a stone’s throw from the 577-room Fanar Hotel & Residences, the luxurious 422-room Salalah Rotana Resort, the 82-room Juweira Boutique Hotel and a hidden gem and one of the sultanate’s first sustainably built hospitality options, Souly Lodge.

The perfect place for a home in Oman, Hawana Salalah sits proudly alongside Dhofar’s majestic mountains, rolling desert, archaeological sites, and turquoise waters – an unmatched destination to be enjoyed for generations to come.

Bank Muscat extends its strong support to OAHI

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider, continues to extend strong support to disabled students studying in different educational institutions in Oman, in line with its efforts in the field of social responsibility. As part of its commitment to deliver long-term benefits to society, the bank recently partnered with the Omani Association of the Hearing Impaired (OAHI) to provide a number of hearing aids to school and university students in Oman. Accordingly, a number of hearing aids with special features were distributed to students at the premises of the Omani Association of Hearing Impaired in the presence of Talib Saif al Makhmari, manager, Community and Media Relations, Bank Muscat, Saif Humood al Busaidi, member of board of directors in the association, and Hamad Nasser al Amri, sign language translator.

Speaking on the occasion, Makhmari, said, "The bank is delighted to support and partner a number of civil society organisations and bodies in our endeavour to enhance the quality of life of all sections of our society." "We hope that these devices will help the students in their studies and their day-to-day lives by enhancing their skills and capabilities and their potential to contribute to our society. We would like to take this opportunity to specially thank and encourage the Omani Association of the Hearing Impaired for their dynamic and highly-motivated vision of supporting people with hearing disabilities and help them achieve success in their lives. We wish all the students here today the very best for their future."

Mohammed Mubarak al Amri, chairman of the Omani Association of Hearing Impaired



said, "We would like to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to Bank Muscat for its excellent role in supporting persons with disabilities over the years. The bank has been a strong supporter of the association and we are very happy with the support extended, which is making a world of difference to many young people in their pursuit to be productive citizens who are

actively contributing to the growth and development of our beloved nation."

The Omani Association of Hearing Impaired is run by a dynamic team of deaf and hearing-impaired volunteers and translators. It aims to cater to the needs of the people with hearing disabilities and supporting them in all aspects of their lives.

OAHI was established under a Ministry of Social Development Decision in 2013 to serve as a representative of people with hearing disabilities and impairments in the sultanate. Students who received the hearing aids expressed their happiness at receiving the devices and said that it would greatly improve the quality of their lives and their studies.

They hoped that the devices would help them do well in their studies so that they can play their rightful role in society and strengthen the Omani economy and society through their services.

Bank Muscat, which runs over ten long-term projects aimed at supporting different segments of Omani society, has always been a pioneer of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Oman. As a forward-looking financial institution, the bank is continuously working with a number of non governmental organisations, which dedicate efforts for the welfare of disabled people in Oman including the Oman Association for the Disabled and the Al Noor Association for the Blind.

Earlier in 2021, the bank also distributed BrailleSense devices and laptops to a number of visually-impaired students at Sohar University to support them in their studies and daily lives.

Bank Nizwa organises workshop with College of Shari'a Sciences

As part of its strategic corporate social responsibility, Bank Nizwa, Oman's first dedicated Islamic bank co-organised the 'Settlement of Islamic Finance Disputes by Conciliation and Arbitration' workshop in collaboration with College of Shari'a Sciences.

Organised in line with its efforts to support the national agenda of Oman Vision 2040, the workshop aimed at empowering the national cadres to manage and resolve disputes settlement in Islamic finance by following conciliation and arbitration methods.

Commenting on enhancing the Islamic banking industry, Dr Mansoor Ali al Qudah, head of Sharia'a Department at Bank Nizwa said, "The Sultanate of Oman has witnessed a remarkable development in the Islamic banking sector in recent times, and Bank Nizwa has played a vital role in stimulating the growth of Islamic banking. The bank continuously records outstanding financial results and provides Sharia'a-compliant products and services. However, the development of this industry has led to an increase in Islamic finance disputes due to conducting Islamic banking contracts and transactions. Therefore, rigorous efforts



must be made to qualify the national cadres to explore and dissolve disputes in Islamic banking by following the methods of conciliation and arbitration. At Bank Nizwa, we are committed to supporting the development of the Islamic banking landscape, and enhancing awareness of the Islamic finance role as it is one of the important sectors for building a sustainable national economy, as well as we endeavour to mark a positive impact on the comprehensive Islamic banking system, which will certainly witness promising growth in the near future."

During the three-day workshop, a number of papers were discussed and lectures were delivered by specialists in the field covering related issues of financial dispute resolutions in Islamic banks.

ISM conducts green harvest drive in Feb

Refurbishing the much-appreciated Hydroponics Initiative at Indian School Muscat (ISM), a green harvest drive was held yielding the hydroponically home-grown Greens, recently. The initiative helped students to grasp the basic concepts in agriculture, become sensitive towards the increasing urbanisation that accelerates food demand, resulting in the growing interest and need for vertical farming worldwide.

Students are equipped to face the challenges with soilless agriculture, producing the best of the greens packed with nutrients. In this method of hydroponics, we were able to save 80 per cent



water than conventional farming. Training and networking with the growers, Indian School Muscat said it is proud to be able to present the first instalment of the produce of this year. Showcasing dedication towards breeding, processing and transformation; distribution and consumption in an urban environment, students learnt cost effective ways to grow one's own greens.

The group of enthusiastic students and teachers working tirelessly under the guidance of Nanma Krishikootam at Indian School Muscat harvested - Mint, Basil, and Red and Green Lettuce - sold them during recess hours through the temporary sale-counters in the school premises. The proceeds were handed over to the Hydroponic Project.

Sachin Toprani, president, Indian School Management Committee was in all praises for the wonderful initiative and extolled students and the teachers saying, "Sowed goodness, reaped goodness in multiples, generating a reasonable yield hydroponically, opening new realms of expertise into daily life."

Praising and congratulating the students and the teachers for their energy and enthusiasm, Principal Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan said, "This is an era heralding, widening the scopes and horizons of education".

Finnish champ Räikkönen certifies Giulia GTA

To follow the testing session on the Giulia GTA and GTAm last fall, Kimi Räikkönen, the Finnish world champion was back at the Balocco Proving Ground recently to personally evaluate the work done on the highest-performing sports sedan the Italian brand has ever produced. His words leave no doubts in the mind, "I really like it. We're looking at a car that can be used on an everyday basis, but that can also be taken onto the track, one in which you can really enjoy yourself."

Räikkönen analysed the changes made to the car, specifically in terms of aerodynamics. He had already worked on this aspect in the first session, providing invaluable advice on the new appendages added both to the front - the new adjustable splitter built into the new front bumper - and to the rear - the addition of the new manually adjustable wing. More general changes have also been made to the overall balance guaranteed by the interaction of these new components with the extractor and the underbody fairing.



Räikkönen's judgment? "Of course, it's better at high speeds in terms of balance. It seems the front of the car is lower, making the steering faster. It's fast, easy to drive, and responsive."

Highlighting the features of the vehicle, Hatem El-Naggar, general manager at Dhofar Automotive, said, "The Alfa Romeo Giulia GTA is an addition to the 'Wild' version of the GTAm, and is inspired by the Giulia GTA launched in 1965, one of the motoring legends that achieved a remarkable achievement in the history of the brand. The new Giulia GTA is the epitome of elegance, mechanical mastery and driving pleasure."

Nissan Oman emphasises on regular after-sales service to ensure safety

Being a customer centric organisation, Nissan Oman has urged customers to go for regular after-sales service to ensure safety and functionality of the vehicle. Providing the best after sales experience to customers, Nissan Oman offers the best global customer service practices across Oman.

With service centres strategically located across Oman, there is always one near customers to serve their needs.

Nissan Oman uses a wide-ranging strategy to offer customer's a top after-sales experience through innovative technology and enhanced services. The strategy is about giving customers more choices and new services to make the ownership experience unique.

A senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA)

said, "To guarantee the Nissan philosophy of providing the best services to customers, we are dedicated to making continued efforts to offer services to our customers on multiple fronts."

He added, "Regular maintenance is vital to help keep your Nissan running efficiently. Our factory-trained technicians use advanced diagnostics and Genuine Nissan Parts, designed specifically for the vehicle. We employ fully factory trained service technicians and they work hard to provide top class service."

"There are plenty of routine car maintenance tasks that should be performed on a Nissan. Therefore, we encourage our customers to talk to our service professionals for a comprehensive list of important routine

maintenance tasks. We urge customers to schedule their service and give their Nissan the care it needs."



Nissan Express Service
In addition to regular after-sales service with an intention to cater to ever changing, evolving customer needs and expectations, Nissan Oman has launched Nissan Express Service wherein customers can bring in their car and take it back after a quick service. The 'wait and take service' offer is valid for minor periodic maintenance service without concerns and is available in select locations.



Nissan Express Service is fast, convenient and is executed by experts. Nissan Oman understands the importance of time, and that is why customers can now bring their car and take it back after a quick service. They can visit the designated service centres to experience this quick service programme and save

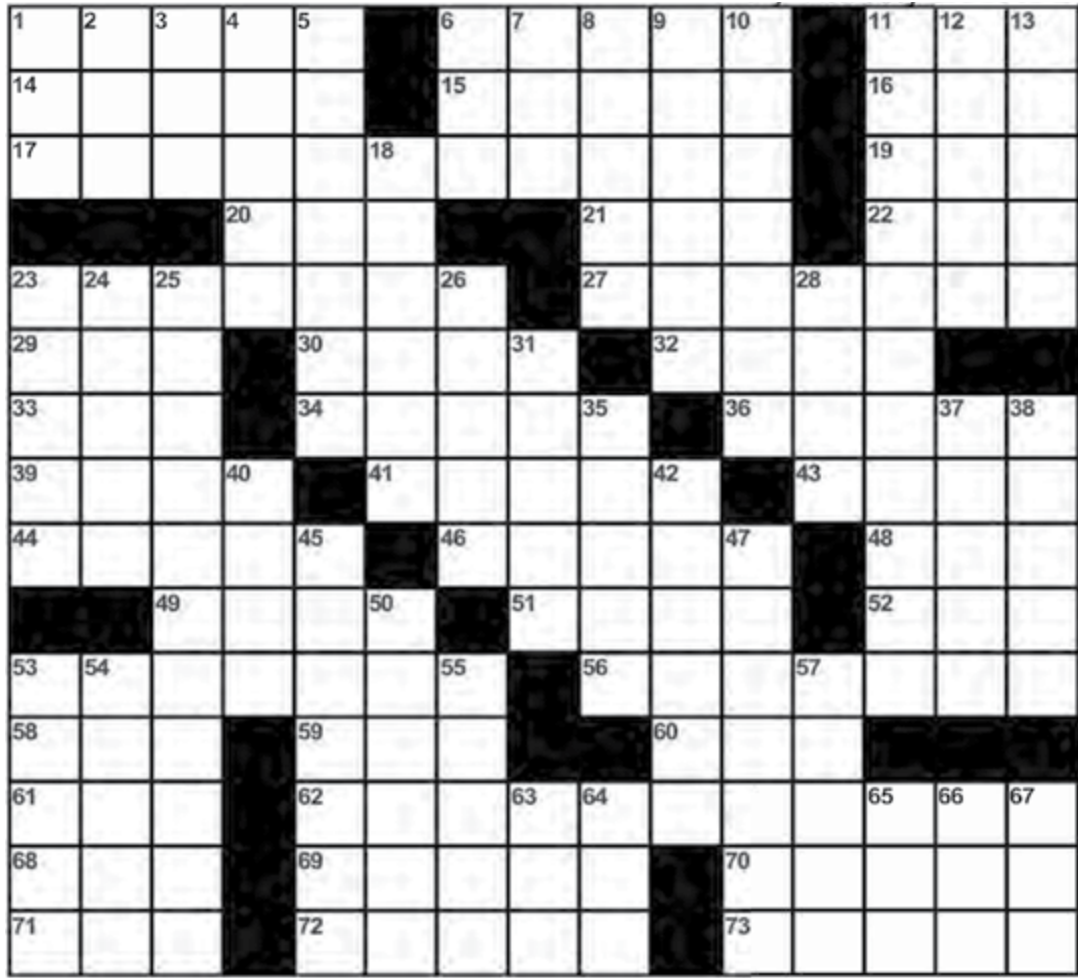
their precious time. Nissan Express Service takes the hassle out of vehicle maintenance by providing the service at customers' convenience. They just have to stop at Nissan service centre with prior appointment.

To book an express service, customers can call toll free number 80050011; or Type 'book' and send to 9982 5454, email to appointment@sbg.com or WhatsApp on 9769 2689.

Nissan Oman is extending a 'book a home test drive' service for its prospective customers. The service enables potential customers to schedule their test drive online as per their convenience.

A home test drive can be booked simply by logging on to the official SBA Nissan Oman website or through customer service toll free number 80050011.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Capital of Morocco
6) Shoppers' stops
11) Tire pressure fig.
14) Alpha's opposite
15) Notify of danger
16) Switzerland's _
Leman
17) Be an NFL offensive coordinator
19) "What _ bid?"
20) Cockpit prediction
21) Real ending?
22) "Silent Night" adjective
23) Ransom seekers
27) Chat
29) Online address, familiarly
30) Norwegian royal name
32) Class identifier
33) Place of many large schools
34) Spread seed
36) Leave no tip to
39) Handles the tab
41) Article of faith
43) Shrek, e.g.
44) Lots and lots
46) Philanthropist
48) Member of a historical horde

49) Hindu royal
51) Exec's note
52)_tac-toe
53) Catching sight of
56) Light cotton fabric
58) Floral gift, in one state
59) _ Beta Kappa
60) Child's stomach, when said twice
61) Period of history
62) Dramatization of Jesus' crucifixion
68) Voting "nay"
69) John of rock and pop
70) Do some winter airport work
71) Double standard?
72) Producers of school anxieties
73) Longfellow's Pilgrim

DOWN

1) Mythical "Arabian Nights" bird
2) Org. with real operators
3) "The Fresh Prince of_- Air"
4) Lace tip
5) Body designs
6) West of old Hollywood
7) Matterhorn, for one

8) Archaeological find
9) Cheap and tawdry
10) Thwarts
11) Theater notables
12) Pago Pago location
13) Cake topper
18) Woman of ill repute
23) Crescent features
24) "You're in for_ treat!"
25) Musical instrument that operates mechanically
26) Worked in a lumber mill
28) Defense alliance since 1949
31) Scorpion's output
35) Huge star in Cygnus
37) Some produce
38) It may be seen around the house
40) Rock from side to side
42) Kind of soup or sauce
45) Small excerpt
47) Round, domed building
50) Sample the air
53) Choose by popular vote
54) Asian goatlike antelope
55) Main points

57) Urge forward
63) Boozehound
64)_ and outs
65) Top for some containers
66) Winning serve
67) Japanese capital?

NOTE PAD

DOGSTARS HOMES
OVALITCH ERATO
DELE MARE RIGHT
GROWLIKEAWEEP
EDODOE ISLAND
MOTTOSEEDYLIE
ASSAGO PENS
FREETHROWLINE
ORALRAT SIP
TAIBETHS BEING
TUNDRAHOE NOR
BOOKKNOWLEDGE
CLONKEARLRIGA
PEWEEPATE IRIS
RISENINST CANE

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Stop worrying. First of all, you know how you get when you're stressed. It's not pretty, and it hasn't been what most often wins you friends, especially since you virtually wrote the book on the subject. Then there's the fact that if you play your cards right, you can make not just a new friend also but cross paths with someone who might be exactly right for you. There. Isn't that enough inspiration to keep you calm?

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You may not have absolutely everything you want, but you're close, aren't you? Close enough to see that one of your major goals is about to be realized, right? Don't be anxious. The universe is definitely on your side, and so is that certain someone you've been attracted to for what seems like forever. But don't try to rush things along. First off, it won't work. It never does. Nothing will happen until all conditions are right.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Someone you've been just dying to confide in, to confide your really deep, really meaningful feelings to, is absolutely wide open to those feelings right now. The time is right for you to sit down, have a nice, long chat with that person and subtly work your way toward the topic you want to cover. And don't be surprised if they open the discussion before you do. Just go with the flow and see how it goes.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Don't you dare ignore the phone, no matter who's been absolutely driving you crazy trying to chase you down and how hard you've been working to continue avoiding them. If they do happen to catch you, you'll think of a reason to hang up quickly. And if you get lucky, the person on the other end will be the one you've been thinking about for what seems like forever. It'll be worth it.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're golden now in several departments. For starters, career matters can go along exactly the way you planned provided you stick to your plan. When it comes to relationships, the news is even better. If you're attached, stay close to home and be sure your loved one knows how precious they are to you. If you're not in a relationship, don't be shy. Get yourself out there. The person you're looking for is on the hunt too.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

After all the good work you've done lately, asking for that raise, bonus or promotion should be a piece of cake. You're confident that you've earned it, but as usual, you're feeling a bit on the humble side and wondering why they haven't yet offered it to you. Well, remember that old adage about the squeaky wheel getting the grease? It's true. Step right up, tell your superiors that you deserve this, and do it in a startling, sudden fashion.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your way with words is famous. It's so famous, in fact, that you can keep company with just about anyone you want to, whenever you want to. That fact will go double right now, so do yourself a favour. Don't waste this energy. Gabbing with just about everyone is what you're famous for, but save the best for that certain someone who actually responds to your wit with some pretty keen comments of their own.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A difference of opinion doesn't necessarily signal a difference in morals, so it's important to respect those friends of yours who don't agree with how you feel about certain issues. Two people who disagree on something can both be virtuous. And people aren't always consistent. You have to keep an open mind and never assume that just because they think one thing, they must think another.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're convinced that it's finally time to bring up the topic you'd been avoiding, that elephant in the room that you and your sweetheart haven't been able to mention. Here's your opportunity. Clear your throat and start right back at the beginning. It might be tough to get the show on the road, but just imagine how relieved you'll both be when it's all finally been said.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your way with words is famous. It's so famous, in fact, that you can keep company with just about anyone you want to, whenever you want to. That fact will go double right now, so do yourself a favor. Don't waste this energy. Gabbing with just about everyone is what you're famous for, but save the best for that certain someone who actually responds to your wit with some pretty keen comments of their own.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

No one ever said that getting into a truly meaningful conversation with you was for the faint of heart, and it's a good bet that no one ever will. Still, though, it's only fair that you warn anyone who gets a little too close to a subject that's especially dear to you. Think of it this way: if they don't change the subject to something lighter, and if they can actually keep up with you, the two of you may have a future together.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If anybody is famous for being psychic, it's you. So when someone new crosses your path, especially if it's under coincidental circumstances, you pay special attention to everything about them. That's unless you're being distracted by something else you're famous for: romance. Both are due to come your way soon, and yes, it might be via the same person. Stay on your toes. This is your official notice.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The opening of the 2012 Summer Olympics had echoes of what event at the 1984 Olympic Games opening?

A. The US Army Band formed the Olympic rings
B. A flight over the stadium by someone in a one-man jetpack
C. Children held balloons that burst simultaneously
D. Balloons were released, to carry a set of Olympic rings and a camera up to the mid-stratosphere

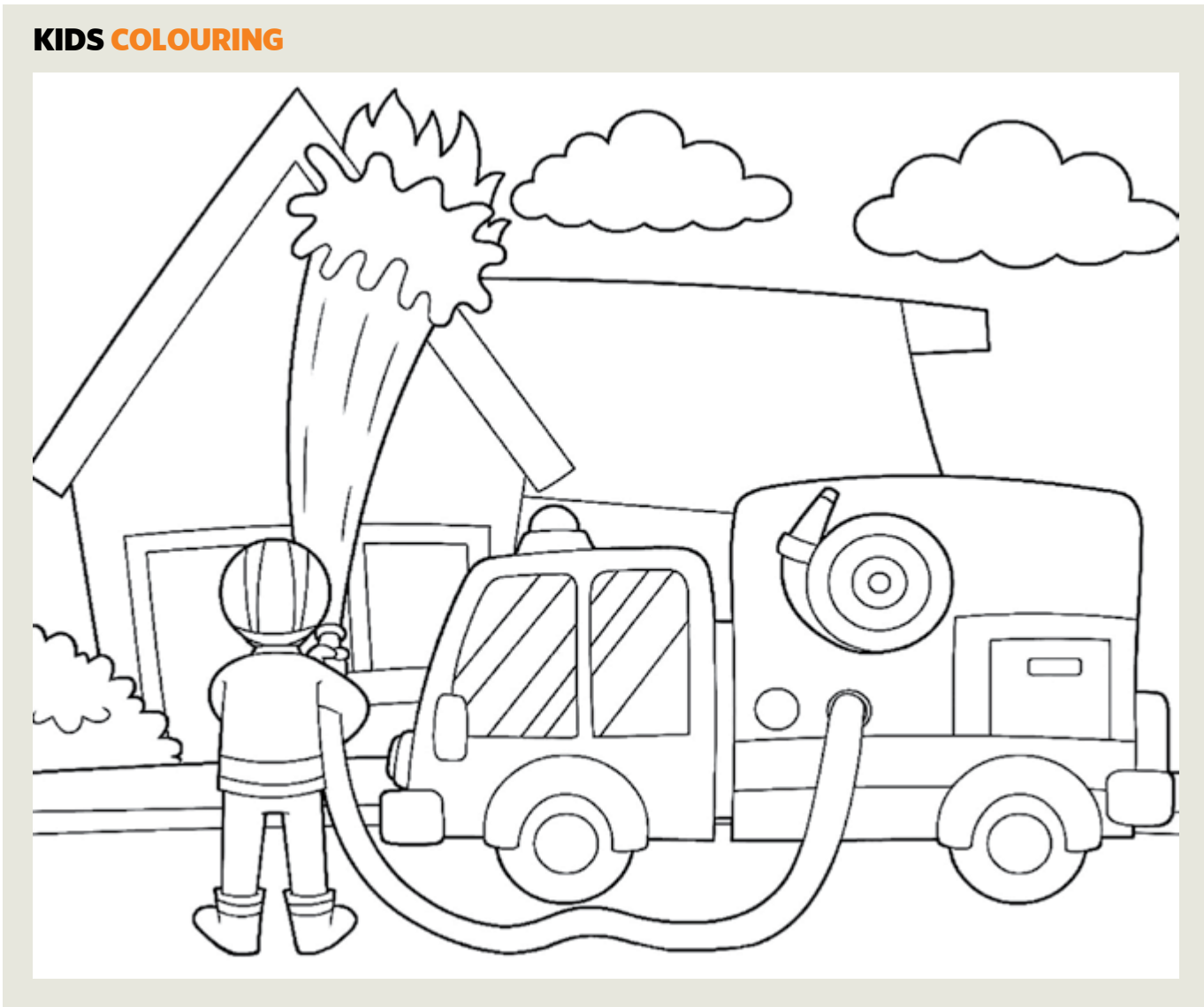
2. What is the name for a mixture of clay, sand and silt?

A. Peat
B. Loam
C. Gravel
D. Sludge

3. Who wrote the poem "O Captain! My Captain!"?

A. Alan Ginsberg
B. Walt Whitman
C. Robert Frost
D. Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Answers: 1. b 2. b 3. b



BOGGLER

U	I	S	O
D	E	D	E
T	L	N	S
W	K	O	S

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

ABBL
EBS
LS

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Ukraine crisis overshadows Blinken's Asia trip

The third pan-Pacific round of diplomacy was meant to reassert the on-off US ‘pivot’ to Asia in politics

Honolulu, US - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Japanese and South Korean counterparts declared their unity on confronting security threats in the Asia-Pacific on Saturday, even as Washington was intensely occupied by the possibility of war in Eastern Europe.

Blinken, South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong, and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa met in Honolulu for a day of talks focused on North Korea's nuclear threat as well as the China challenge.

Washington organised the meeting as the third stop of a pan-Pacific round of diplomacy meant to reassert the on-off US ‘pivot’ to Asia in politics and security. Blinken first attended a meeting of the Quad in Melbourne, the alliance of Australia, Japan, India, and the United States aimed at blunting Beijing's expansive military policy in the Asia-Pacific.

The top US envoy then traveled to Fiji for a virtual meeting of representatives of 17 Pacific Island nations who are also experiencing China's economic, political and military ambitions.

US officials said the trip was to assure countries across the region that Washington is still deeply attentive to their issues.

During the weeklong trip, the White House released its strategy for what it has rebranded the ‘Indo Pacific region’, an 18-page document that stresses the centrality of the region in US policy. “That strategy reflects the fundamental truth that more than any other part of the world,



(L-R): South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa hold a joint press meeting following their meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii on Saturday (AFP)

what happens in this region is going to shape the lives of Americans and people around the world,” Blinken said in Honolulu on Saturday to close out the week.

Ukraine, Ukraine, Ukraine

At every stop, however, the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine had nearly all of Washington's attention, and drew con-

cerns from its counterparts.

Blinken spent much of his travel time liaising with allies and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on the crisis.

And at each press conference, meant to showcase the US' dedication to Asia-Pacific affairs, attention instead fixed on Blinken's statement that Russia could attack Ukraine within days.

Yet Blinken's message was well-received.

Rise of the Quad

In Melbourne, four Quad countries sought to deepen their alliance, expanding it from the original Malabar naval exercises and COVID vaccine distribution to other areas including climate change, cyber security, infrastructure and disaster relief.

They also underscored in repeated statements that they were ready to work with ASEAN, the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations, right in the centre of the Chinese advance.

In Fiji, Blinken said the US was ready to spend more money to support the Pacific Islands, and announced the restoration of a US Embassy in the Solomon Islands, where China is now embroiled in politics and local security.

The US closed its embassy in the Solomon Islands in 1993, and re-opening it would serve as a state-

N Korea's series of missile launches 'destabilising'

Honolulu, US - The top diplomats of Japan, South Korea and the United States declared their unity against North Korea on Saturday after a series of ballistic missile launches by Pyongyang.

After a day of meetings in Honolulu, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong, and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa condemned the series of seven launches by North Korea as ‘destabilising’ in a joint statement.

Pyongyang needs ‘to cease its unlawful activities and instead engage in dialogue,’ they said.

“The DPRK is in a phase of provocation,” Blinken told a press conference alongside his fellow foreign ministers, using the acronym for the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea.

“We continue to work to find ways to hold the DPRK accountable,” he said, citing the most recent sanctions slapped on eight people and entities tied to the North Korean government.

The three diplomats reiterated their commitment to the denuclearisation of the entire Korean Peninsula, and readiness to resume talks with Pyongyang, which has not responded to overtures from the administration of US President Joe Biden in the past year.

“The Secretary and Foreign Ministers emphasised they held no hostile intent towards the DPRK and underscored continued openness to meeting the DPRK without preconditions,” they said in the statement.

AFP



The Thai metal band Defying Decay performs during a concert at Lido Connect in Bangkok on Saturday (AFP)

Thai metal band rocks against draconian laws

Bangkok, Thailand - Hundreds of headbanging metalheads rock out to the roaring guitars and thundering drums of Thai band Defying Decay, chanting along to their latest politically charged tune.

The group's single *The Law 112: Secrecy and Renegades* is a raucous, defiant anthem with a taboo-defying message - challenging Thailand's draconian lese majeste laws.

Criticising the royal family is punishable by up to 15 years in jail, but calls for royal reform - once completely off-limits - spilled into the open during a series of major youth-led street protests against the junta in 2020.

Saturday night's energetic Bangkok crowd was the first in Thailand to see a live performance of the song, which had already found an audience on US rock stations in November.

The 112 of the title refers to the lese majeste section of Thailand's criminal code, but the song's lyrics avoid criticising any person or institution by name.

“I like to have the lyrics open for interpretation and for everyone to have their own meaning... when I write my songs,” vocalist

and lyricist Poom Euarchukiat told AFP.

A line in the song about corruption could also find support from royalists or the police, not just anti-government protesters, said the 25-year-old frontman.

Despite the song's contentious title, the main source of inspiration comes from the plot of fantasy video game ‘Dark Souls’, in which corruption is a major theme, Poom said.

Political music

The protests calling for political reform that rocked Bangkok in 2020 exposed a generational split in Thailand between youngsters yearning for change and a more conservative older generation.

Poom said his mother was not happy when news of the song's contentious title emerged.

“My mother originally said ‘you can't do this’. But then I showed her the lyrics and she was fine with it,” he said.

Defying Decay are the latest Thai band to use their music to challenge the establishment.

Released more than three years ago, Rap Against Dictatorship's *Prathet Ku Mee* (My Country Has) made headlines at

home and abroad with its politically driven lyrics and aggressive rhymes, narrating a slew of corruption cases.

The hip-hop collective's in-your-face music video, which includes a re-enactment of a notorious 1976 student massacre, also sent a powerful message to the global audience about the country's dark past.

With a limited market for their brand of alternative metal in Thailand, the seven-member band mainly focuses on touring overseas.

Calls for reform

At its peak in the second half of 2020, the protests demanding royal reform and the resignation of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha - who took power in a 2014 coup - drew tens of thousands to the streets of Bangkok.

But the movement petered out as coronavirus restrictions hampered rallies and demonstrators were hit with lese majeste charges.

There have been 170 individuals charged under the royal insult law since November 2020, according to the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights organisation. AFP

Tunisia's Saied extends powers over judiciary

Tunis, Tunisia - Thousands of Tunisians protested on Sunday, hours after President Kais Saied officially replaced a judicial watchdog and gave himself powers to sack judges and ban them from going on strike.

Hours after the decree was published early on Sunday morning, more than 2,000 protesters gathered in central Tunis, many waving flags and chanting slogans in support of an independent judiciary.

“Freedom! Freedom! The police state is finished,” some chanted.

Saied's decree came a week after he said he would dissolve the High Judicial Council (CSM), prompting a nationwide shutdown of courts by judges saying the move would infringe on judicial independence.

Sunday's ruling, establishing a new 21-member ‘Temporary Supreme Judicial Council’ - nine of whom are appointed by the



A woman holds a copy of the Tunisian constitution during a demonstration in the centre of the capital Tunis on Sunday (AFP)

cial independence.

Sunday's ruling, establishing a new 21-member ‘Temporary Supreme Judicial Council’ - nine of whom are appointed by the

president - also gives him powers to dismiss ‘any judge failing to do his professional duties’.

Moreover, ‘it is forbidden for judges of all ranks to go on strike

or hold any organised collective action that could disturb or delay the normal working of the courts’, it read.

Saied last July sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized a range of powers before moving to rule by decree, sparking fears for what had been seen as the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring uprisings. Saied had long accused the CSM of blocking politically sensitive investigations and being influenced by his nemesis, the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party.

He has insisted he has no intention of interfering with the judiciary, but rights groups and world powers have criticised his move.

AFP

Iran's books shrink as US sanctions bite

Tehran, Iran - For literature lovers in sanction-hit Iran, a new novel has long provided a brief respite from a grinding economic crisis triggered by international pressure imposed over Tehran's contested nuclear programme.

But now losing yourself in a good book is becoming harder, as cash-strapped publishers struggle because the price of paper is soaring.

“If a 200-page novel sold for 400,000 rials (US\$1.60) last year, its price today is 1,000,000 rials (US\$4.10), most of which is the cost of production,” said Reza Hasheminejad, who runs the Ofog publishing house.

Iran does not produce its own paper pulp for publishing so relies on imports, and while those are not under sanctions, they must be paid for in foreign currency. That means the price of a book depends directly on the fluctuation of Iran's rial.

So publishers are not only slashing the number of titles published, but also cutting the



A member of staff prepares publications for transfer to bookshops, at Iran's Houpa publishing house in Tehran, on January 29 (AFP)

number of pages of those they do print by shrinking the font size.

“Publishing has suffered a major crisis - which could become existential,” said Emily Amrai, collection director at the Houpa publishing house. While publishers worldwide face growing challenges to the way people read and consume literature, Iran is facing an extra problem.

The United States, under for-

mer president Donald Trump, unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from a landmark accord to prevent Iran from acquiring an atomic bomb - a goal Tehran has always denied pursuing - with Washington then reimposing tough economic sanctions.

“As soon as the US sanctions were reinstated in 2018, the price of paper rose,” Amrai said.

Long-running negotiations to

revive a deal with Iran continue in Austria, but until an international agreement turns the page, the impact of sanctions grows worse. “The devaluation of our currency against the greenback, the global rise in the price of paper paid in dollars and the increase in the cost of transport - also paid in foreign currency - has plunged publishing into the doldrums,” said Hossein Motevali, owner of Houpa, which specialises in children's books.

Because book prices are fixed in Iran, profits are pegged to the rapidly fluctuating price of paper.

“Between receiving the manuscript, laying it out, and setting the price of the book, I can lose everything if the price of paper has gone up suddenly,” Hasheminejad said. “That happens because I'm at the mercy of the fluctuation of the currencies.”

As for the authors, they are paid by the number of the pages in the book, whether they are famous or not.

AFP

Ukraine vows to keep airspace open despite Russian threat

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine on Sunday vowed to keep its airspace open to international travel despite Western warnings that Russian troops conducting drills near its borders could invade at any point.

The Dutch carrier KLM on Saturday became the first major airline to indefinitely suspend flights to the former Soviet republic because of the rising risks.

Ukraine's budget airline SkyUp said on Sunday that its flight from Portugal to Kyiv was forced to land in Moldova because the plane's Irish leasing company had revoked permission for it to cross into Ukraine.

SkyUP added that European leasing companies were demanding that Ukrainian airlines return their planes to EU airspace within 48 hours.

Ukraine's infrastructure ministry responded by holding an emergency meeting aimed at maintaining foreign travel and keeping the country from becoming more isolated in the heat of the crisis. "The airspace over Ukraine remains open and the state is working on preempting risks for airlines," the ministry said after the meeting.

Industry analysts believe other international airlines may soon also ban flights into Ukraine because of the growing cost to travel insurers.

The travel industry is still haunted by the memory of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 being shot down while flying near eastern Ukraine's conflict zone in July 2014.

All 298 passengers aboard the Amsterdam-Kuala Lumpur flight died.

Ukraine's infrastructure ministry acknowledged that 'some carriers are facing difficulties linked to fluctuations on the insurance market'.

"For its part, the state is prepared to support airlines and provide them with additional financial guarantees in order to



Travellers wait at the departures board ahead of their flights at the Boryspil airport some 30km outside Kyiv on Sunday (AFP)

Ukraine's Zelensky to speak to Joe Biden

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky will speak to US President Joe Biden 'in the coming hours', his office said on Sunday, as Western fears grow that Russia is about to invade the ex-Soviet state.

"In the coming hours, President Volodymyr Zelensky will discuss the security situation and current diplomatic efforts to de-escalate with US President Joe Biden," Zelensky's press secretary Sergiy Nikiforov said on Facebook.

The talks come one day after the White House re-

ported there had been no breakthrough during a one-hour phone conversation between Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Washington warned on Friday that Russia had amassed sufficient forces around Ukraine to stage an offensive 'any day'.

Russia denies planning an invasion but wants the US-led NATO alliance to immediately respond to its demands for new security guarantees.

Russia wants NATO to pull its forces out of eastern European and pledge to never ex-

pand into Ukraine.

Washington has rejected those demands while raising the prospects of striking a new European disarmament agreement with Moscow.

The US also wants Russia to pull back its forces as a gesture of goodwill.

Moscow calls Washington's response insufficient.

A flurry of urgent phone consultations and meetings have so far failed to calm one of the most heated standoffs between the West and Russia since the Cold War.

AFP

SUVs leaving various parts of the conflict zone because of the staff's need to comply with their respective governments' travel advisories.

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Sunday that the mission's partial withdrawal caused 'serious concern' in Moscow because the move further ramped up tensions. The Ukrainian government has been trying to preempt the flood of foreigners leaving the country by calling for calm and criticising US warnings of war breaking out 'any day'.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday that 'all this information is only provoking panic and not helping us'.

Zelensky's office stressed on Sunday that 'the sky over Ukraine remains open'. "The European Union Aviation Safety Agency also has not issued any recommendations to limit flights over Ukrainian airspace," Zelensky's deputy chief of staff Kyrylo Tymoshenko wrote on Facebook.

AFP



A Palestinian man (centre) confronts a plainclothes Israeli policeman in the east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah on Sunday (AFP)

Controversial Israeli lawmaker's visit to Jerusalem inflames tensions

Jerusalem - Israeli police clashed with Palestinians in the flash-point east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah on Sunday, as a visit by a controversial far-right Jewish lawmaker inflamed tensions.

Police said two people were arrested as they tried to contain 'a violent riot', in the area of annexed east Jerusalem that has emerged as a symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli control of the city.

Scuffles broke out as Itamar Ben Gvir of the far-right Religious Zionism alliance opened a parliamentary office in Sheikh Jarrah, in what he described as an effort to show support for its Jewish residents.

More than 200,000 Jewish settlers live in east Jerusalem, in communities widely regarded as illegal under international law.

Efforts by settler groups to expand the Jewish presence in east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as their future capital, have further fuelled hostilities.

Ben Gvir, a Jewish nationalist with a long history of incendiary comments about Palestinians, accused police of failing to react to alleged arson attacks on a settler home in Sheikh Jarrah.

"Jewish lives have become worthless," Ben Gvir charged in a tweet before his

visit.

He told reporters in Sheikh Jarrah on Sunday that he would remain there until police 'looked after the security of the (Jewish) residents.'

The Palestinian Authority, based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, condemned Ben Gvir's visit as a 'provocative and escalating move that threatens to ignite... violence that will be difficult to control'.

Tensions that erupted in Sheikh Jarrah last year - as several Palestinian families faced eviction by settler groups - in part sparked the May conflict between Israel and armed groups in Gaza.

Hamas, the Islamists who control Gaza, warned there would be 'consequences' over Israel's repeated 'attacks' on Sheikh Jarrah.

Palestinians across east Jerusalem accuse Israeli police of using heavy-handed tactics to quell protests.

Six people were arrested in the neighbourhood during unrest in the neighbourhood late on Saturday.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six Day War and later annexed it, in a move not recognised by most of the international community.

AFP



A few Iraqi lawmakers attend a parliament session in Baghdad last week to choose a new president for Iraq (AFP)

Iraq's apex court rules Hoshyar Zebari out of presidential race

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq's Supreme Court on Sunday ruled out a bid by veteran politician Hoshyar Zebari to run for president after a complaint filed against him over corruption charges.

Zebari, 68, who served as foreign minister for a decade after the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, was previously 'suspended' from the race on February 6, on the eve of the scheduled date for a presidential vote in parliament in which he was the favourite.

MPs submitted a complaint against Zebari before the supreme court, on the grounds that his participation would have been 'unconstitutional' because of the outstanding corruption charges and on the basis of reputation.

"The Federal Court decided in its verdict to invalidate the candidacy of Hoshyar Zebari to

the post of president of the republic," according to state news agency INA.

On Tuesday, parliament announced the reopening of registration for candidates to the largely ceremonial post of president that is reserved for Iraq's Kurds, after a delay for lack of a quorum.

Zebari, also a former finance minister, was initially tipped as a favourite out of a total of 25 candidates, along with incumbent President Barham Saleh.

The complainants cited Zebari's 2016 dismissal from the post of finance minister by parliament 'over charges linked to financial and administrative corruption'.

Public funds worth US\$1.8mn were allegedly diverted to pay for airline tickets for his personal security detail.

The complaint also cited at least two other judicial cases

linked to Zebari.

"I have not been convicted in any court," Zebari said in a television interview last week, as the charges resurfaced on the eve of the scheduled election, alongside forecasts that he would unseat Saleh for the four-year posting.

A new date for MPs to elect a president has yet to be announced, and no fresh candidate list has been released.

Iraqi politics have been in turmoil since general elections were held in October.

The polls were marred by record-low turnout, post-election threats and violence, and a delay of several months until final results were confirmed.

Intense negotiations among political groups have since failed to form a majority parliamentary coalition to name a new prime minister to succeed Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

AFP

Peru's Pedro Castillo ditches iconic hat

Lima, Peru - Peruvian President Pedro Castillo has adopted a unique measure in a bid to lift his falling popularity and resolve a series of political crises: he has ditched his iconic white cowboy hat.

The hat has been an important feature of Castillo's humble rural-school teacher image that helped propel him to the presidency. But for three days running this week, Castillo has appeared in public without his 'sombbrero'.

Having been forced into a fourth cabinet reshuffle in just six months as president and with his disapproval rating hitting 60 per cent, Castillo allegedly sought the advice of Saul Alanya, a leadership and self-improvement coach.

"I suspect that the image 'coach' advised him that he had to change and should start with the hat," political analyst Augusto Alvarez Rodrich told AFP.

"The problem is that he has taken off the hat but not the ideas that were beneath it."

Castillo has come under fire during his short presidency with critics blaming his political inexperience and lack of management skills for the instability of his successive cabinets.

The 52-year-old says he is the victim of a campaign by political opponents and some media actors to try to force him from power, hitting out at 'anti-democratic attitudes of certain sectors that just want to destabilise the



This file photo shows Pedro Castillo (centre) accompanied by his family, having breakfast during the election day at his house in Chugur, Cajamarca region, north east of Peru on June 6, last year (AFP)

country." In December, he survived an attempt at impeachment, but earlier this month a far-right party announced it would file a new motion to remove him.

Prosecutors are also investigating him and his associates in three separate graft cases.

Amidst the political turmoil, Castillo appears to have decided that the iconic headwear that contributed to his humble man-of-the-people image has got to go.

'Kidnapped'

The hat was a prominent feature on the campaign trail, although it turned Castillo into the butt of jokes by his opponents and some sections of the press.

He was said to only ever remove it when entering church,

and was even pictured wearing it at breakfast on election day last June, alongside his likewise sombrero-clad parents.

He wore it in cabinet meetings, in talks with foreign dignitaries and even at the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Peruvians saw their new president without his sombrero for the first time on Tuesday when swearing in his new cabinet, before subsequent hatless appearances on Wednesday and Thursday.

He had briefly been deprived of it last week when meeting Brazil's far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, who stole it off his head while laughing and posing for pictures.

"Help me, Bolsonaro's kidnapped me," joked Castillo.

However, Castillo has not always been so attached to his sombrero. He did not wear it when he first came to national prominence in 2017 as the leader of a striking teachers union.

Guido Bellido, a politician from Castillo's ruling Peru Libre (Free Peru) party, claimed last year that he was the one to suggest the hat would make a good political identity.

On the campaign trail, Castillo traveled to every corner of Peru wearing his hat and even sometimes riding on horseback.

He took part in election debates clad in his white hat, and so the legend was born.

Castillo's tall wide-brimmed straw hat is typical of those worn by peasants in his home region of Cajamarca, in northern Peru.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Knock on the door: Virus stalks athletes at Beijing Olympics

Beijing, China - For athletes at the Beijing Winter Olympics, testing positive for COVID-19 is one of their worst nightmares, and it can begin with a knock on the door in the middle of the night.

"It was insane, it was a roller-coaster," said Kim Meylemans, a skeleton racer from Belgium.

The 25-year-old posted a tearful video on Instagram last week from isolation which highlighted the perils of competing in the middle of a pandemic.

Meylemans said she tested positive about a month ago, before arriving in the Chinese capital, but 'here things just went from bad to worse'.

"A positive test, then negative, then positive again in the middle of the night and a quarantine hotel," said Meylemans, whose turbulent Games ended on Saturday when she came 18th in the skeleton.

"I tested negative twice each day in the quarantine hotel and then it took longer to get out of that hotel and I was shipped to another quarantine hotel."

It is unclear how many of the nearly 3,000 athletes in Beijing have tested positive, but there have been 429 COVID-19 cases in the 'closed loop' bubble in which the competitors and about 65,000 others are co-cooned.

Among the most high-profile



Members of a medical team stretch during an ice hockey competition in Beijing on Sunday (AFP)

cases is the American figure skater Vincent Zhou, a silver medalist in the team event in Beijing who was ruled out of the men's singles competition only one day before it started.

Suddenly, the moment he had been working up to for four years was snatched away and there was nothing he could do about it. "I've taken all the precautions I can. I've isolated myself so much that the loneliness I felt in the last month or two has been crushing at times," an

emotional Zhou said in a video on Instagram. The 21-year-old added, "I've already lost count of the number of times I've cried today."

Bobsleigh pilot Elana Meyers Taylor said just being able to compete was a win in itself after being isolated - including away from her two-year-old son - because of a positive test in Beijing.

"Yesterday was the first day I didn't bawl my eyes out," said the American.

Everyone in the bubble is

tested daily for COVID-19. Competitors who produce a positive result are moved to an isolation facility if they show no symptoms and a hospital if they are unwell. In the case of the former, they will be tested every day and can get out of isolation with two consecutive negative PCR tests.

There are also rules in place for those deemed close contacts of someone with COVID-19, but it does not generally stop athletes competing.

Some have complained about the conditions in isolation, including the food, while Meylemans criticised the poor communication, saying she did not know what was happening to her. The International Olympic Committee says it has made attempts to address athletes' concerns.

Nathan Chen, who won figure skating gold last week after dethroning Japanese icon Yuzuru Hanyu, avoided the opening ceremony of the Games over COVID-19 fears. He has been practising in a mask.

For Keegan Messing, another figure skater, COVID-19 nearly torpedoed his Games before they even began when he tested positive just before travelling.

The Canadian then faced a mad dash to make it after being cleared to come, flying from Vancouver via Montreal, Frankfurt and Milan before arriving on the eve of competition.

"Keeping the mental health side of things strong was very, very difficult," said Messing, who came 11th in the singles event.

Alessandro Haemmerle from Austria, who won men's snowboard cross gold, said the 'super exhausting' worries about catching COVID-19 started weeks before flying to China.

AFP



French anti-riot policemen detain a man on the Champs Elysees in Paris on Saturday (AFP)

Paris police hold 81 people over banned anti-vaccine convoy

Paris, France - Paris police said they arrested 97 people who defied a ban on a Canada-style protest convoy over coronavirus regulations to try block traffic in the capital, with 81 still in custody on Sunday.

Thousands of demonstrators from across France attempted to block traffic in the capital on Saturday in a self-proclaimed 'freedom convoy' of cars, trucks and campervans. Hundreds of them continued on to Brussels on Sunday.

In Paris, more than 100 vehicles managed to converge on the Champs-Elysees avenue, where police used teargas to disperse protesters in scenes reminiscent of the 'yellow vest' riots of 2018-2019. Dozens of people remained on the famous avenue and in the nearby Bois de Boulogne forest park until early on Sunday.

latest in a series of anti-freedom measures in our country - we have freedom of movement in Europe, yet we're being stopped by the police, we don't have the right to be here and carry a flag," Daniel Bravo, 61, told AFP.

Over 400 vehicles camped out at several sites around Paris overnight, and organisers have called for people to head for Brussels for a major demonstration on Monday, a police source said.

However not all are expected to make the trip, the source said.

Belgium has banned the protest, and its Prime Minister Alexander de Croo has urged would-be attendees to 'go and protest in your own country'.

'Fatigue' and anger

The demonstrations, with convoys setting out from cities across France, come two months before presidential elections in which Macron is expected to seek re-election.

On Friday, Macron said he understood the 'fatigue' after two years of the pandemic.

"This fatigue also leads to anger. I understand it... But I call for the utmost calm," he told the *Ouest-France* newspaper.

The government has said it plans to relax face mask mandates by February 28, and is hoping to end the vaccine pass requirement by late March or early April.

Some 24,000 more people demonstrated in other parts of the country on Saturday, the authorities said, including in the southern city of Montpellier, where radical fringe activists broke the glass facades of two banks.

AFP

Storm, music fail to dislodge New Zealand protesters

Wellington, New Zealand - Cyclone Dovi caused power outages, mudslides and evacuations across New Zealand on Sunday, but neither the storm nor the music of Barry Manilow could dislodge anti-vaccine protesters camped outside parliament.

Instead, hundreds of protesters - inspired by the 'Freedom Convoy' of trucks in Canada - danced in the mud to the tunes meant to force their dispersal.

Not even a tongue-in-cheek offer of help from singer James Blunt could end the stand-off in the capital Wellington, which entered a sixth day with no sign of ending. Deputy Prime Minister



Protesters gather near the parliament in Wellington on Saturday (AFP)

Grant Robertson told Television New Zealand there was a 'sad element' to the protest.

"Every New Zealander has a right to peaceful protest, the

problem is they have gone well beyond that," he said.

"I do find the rhetoric of these protests highly disturbing... there is a sad element to it, there

is a conspiracy theory element that people have been sucked in by." The New Zealand protesters object to the strict COVID-19 restrictions. Their resolve hardened after police moved in on Thursday and arrested 122 people, an attempt to end the sit-in. Police have since backed off making arrests, and authorities have attempted to drench the makeshift settlement into submission by turning on water sprinklers. This only saw the manicured lawns in front of the parliamentary buildings churned into a muddy morass even before Cyclone Dovi hit.

Superintendent Scott Fraser said police were continuing 'to

explore options to resolve the disruption', while parliamentary Speaker Trevor Mallard had the music of Barry Manilow, the 1990s pop song *Macarena*, and government COVID-19 messages blasted at the protesters.

British singer James Blunt weighed in on the strategy on Twitter, telling NZ Police 'give me a shout if this doesn't work'.

By Sunday afternoon, Blunt's *You're Beautiful* had been added to the playlist. But the protesters drowned out the government music with their own favourites, which included heavy metal band Twisted Sister's *We're Not Gonna Take It*.

AFP

Killed for witchcraft, Scotland's forgotten victims find a voice

Dundee, UK - Claire Mitchell and Zoe Venditozzi are fighting for pardons for all those executed for witchcraft in Scotland, the vast majority of whom were women, and for a memorial to those forgotten by history.

"Between the 16th and 18th century in Scotland, approximately 4,000 people were accused of witchcraft," explained Mitchell, a lawyer who founded the campaign group Witches of Scotland.

In total, more than 2,500 people were executed for witchcraft in Scotland, four-fifths of them women. They were mostly strangled and then burned, after making confessions that were often extracted under torture.

"People would take turns interviewing them, keep them awake for days and days and days, and ask them about witchcraft," Mitchell told AFP at a graveyard in the city of Dundee.

The victims were forced to confess that 'they were dancing with the devil', she added.

"And those confessions were used by the courts in Scotland...

to prosecute these women for witchcraft."

They are recognised in the windblown 16th-century cemetery by a small column nicknamed the 'Witches' Stone'.

Passers-by often leave flower petals and coins as a tribute to those executed who include Grissel Jaffray, strangled and burnt in 1669.

In a city centre street, a mosaic depicting a cone of flames commemorates Jaffray, the woman known as 'the last witch of Dundee'.

Double toil and trouble

Mitchell founded Witches of Scotland on March 8, 2020 - International Women's Rights Day - after discovering the harrowing consequences of the Witchcraft Act.

This 1563 law approved capital punishment for those guilty of witchcraft and was in force until 1736.

Witch hunts were enthusiastically promoted by Scotland's King James VI, who became also king James I of England in 1603.



Claire Mitchell (left) and Zoe Venditozzi in the Howff Cemetery in Dundee, Scotland, on January 30 (AFP)

His obsession found voice in William Shakespeare's 'Scottish play', featuring three witches who lead Macbeth to his doom. Mitchell's association is calling for three things: A pardon for all those convicted of witchcraft, an official apology from the authorities, and a national monu-

ment to remember the victims.

Co-campaigner Zoe Venditozzi, 46, said that she knew 'nothing' about the witch hunts until recently despite growing up in Fife, a hotbed of executions.

She discovered that 'anyone could be accused' and that it was 'generally ordinary people, often poor people' who could not stand up for themselves or were seen as being odd in some way.

"In those days, people believed really, really strongly in the devil," she said, and that women were seen as 'vessels' that the devil could manipulate.

The devil's work

Natalie Don, an MP with the Scottish National Party, the pro-independence party that holds power in Edinburgh, intends to introduce a bill in the Scottish Parliament to obtain a pardon for all those convicted.

"In several countries across the world people are still accused and punished for practising witchcraft," she told AFP.

"Scotland should lead the way in acknowledging the horrors of

our past and ensure that these people do not go down in history as criminals."

Scotland was particularly prone to witch hunts, according to Julian Goodare, emeritus professor of history at Edinburgh University, who has overseen the creation of a database to record them.

With 2,500 people executed in a population of two million, the rate was around five times higher than the average in Europe, he said at Edinburgh Castle, the site of many public executions.

It was driven in part by Scotland's drift away from the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation, which saw a rampant 'fear of ungodliness', and accelerated after an alleged plot to bewitch King James in the 1590s.

Authorities viewed witch hunts 'as part of a cosmic battle between God and the devil', Goodare said.

He also favours a monument to this history, "There's nothing we can do to change the past, but we can learn from it."

AFP

DOWN UNDER

FORTRESS AUSTRALIA TO OPEN

Australia will reopen its borders to vaccinated international tourists from February 21, ending a two-year spell of strict closures



Precautionary measures

Inbound visitors to Australia will need to present proof of being fully vaccinated upon check-in to their flights and may be asked to show the evidence again to border officials upon entry. The vaccines must be from an approved list, which includes AstraZeneca, Janssen, Pfizer, Moderna, and Sinovac.

According to informed sources, Paper and digital certificates issued by government authorities or accredited vaccination providers are accepted and must have a name matching the one on the passport, a date of birth or passport number, the vaccine brand, and dates the dosages were completed. Additionally, they must be in English, or accompanied by a certified translation.

In addition to vaccination status, foreign visitors must also have a negative pre-departure test, either a nucleic acid amplification (NAA) test, which includes polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests performed within three days of departure by a lab, or a rapid antigen test (RAT) performed within 24 hours by a medical practitioner.

The Australian Department of Health also specifies that masks must be worn for the duration of the flight and says to put on a fresh one every four hours or if and when it gets wet. Those refusing to wear masks may not be allowed to board flights, the sources said.

Traveling down under will soon be a reality again - the long-awaited Australia border opening is finally round the corner.

The government announced last week that the country's border restrictions, which have been in place since March 2020, will be lifted on February 21, reopening Australia to vaccinated foreign visitors.

Australia will reopen its borders to tourists from February 21, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced last Monday, ending some of the world's strictest and longest-running pandemic travel restrictions.

"It's almost two years since we took the decision to close the borders to Australia," Morrison said, announcing borders will reopen to all visa holders on February 21 this year. "If you're double vaccinated, we look forward to welcoming you back to Australia," he said.

Australia's ports and airports had slammed shut to tourists in March 2020 with the aim of protecting the island continent against the surging global pandemic. Since then, Australians have mostly been barred from leaving and only a handful of visitors have been granted exemptions to enter.

The rules have stranded nationals overseas, split families, hammered the coun-



Melbourne

try's multi-billion-dollar tourist industry and prompted often bitter debates about Australia's openness to the rest of the world.

"Bout time," said Melbourne resident Marshall McDonald. "It's exciting. It almost feels like the end of a period of hermit kingdom-ness ending."

Every month of 'Fortress Australia' policies has cost businesses an estimated US\$2.6bn, according to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"Our borders will have been closed to

international tourists for 704 days," the chamber said in a statement. "This decision will allow our flailing tourism sector to recover, saving businesses and saving livelihoods."

In recent months, rules have been gradually relaxed for Australians, long-term residents and students. The latest decision will see almost all remaining caps lifted.

It comes after the country's long-standing 'Covid-zero' policy was abandoned, vaccination rates rose and the once stellar track-and-trace system collapsed under a

wave of Omicron cases. Only a handful of countries remain closed to tourists - among them Japan, China, New Zealand and several Pacific Island nations.

Come visit

For Australia's travel and tourism sector - which struggled as visitor numbers fell almost 98 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels - the news brought elation.

"We're very excited about being able to reopen," said Tony Walker, managing director of the Quicksilver Group, which operates cruises, diving and resorts across the Great Barrier Reef. "The last couple of years have been incredibly difficult for us," he told AFP, urging people overseas to come visit.

Over the course of the pandemic, the firm went from 650 employees down to the 300 it has today. Walker said he expected it will take some time to recover from the past two years.

Many tourism operators around Australia are experiencing staff shortages, given how few backpackers and working holiday-makers are coming.

Despite the announcement, travel within Australia will still be restricted.

The vast state of Western Australia remains closed to most non-residents. It is currently easier to travel from Sydney to Paris than from Sydney to Perth.

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Sales executive having experience in printing chemicals industry of more than 5 years in GCC can speak Arabic & English fluently, with GCC DL call: 78696534

MATRIMONIAL ALLIANCES

Parents of a South Indian Sunni Muslim family, seeking suitable alliance for their son, an ACCA professional, 27years, 171cm . Early marriage. Send profile.WhatsApp 78595254

Send your request for Birthday/ Anniversary wishes to wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)

WJ Towell Group Company



Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

SITUATION VACANT

Required for an Electrical & Building Material Company in Muscat:

(1) Sr. Accountant with at least 5 years of work experience and must be well versed with Tally Erp. Must be able to join immediately. Email Resumé:

sales.moderneverest@gmail.com

VAT

VAT Registrations, Quarterly Returns, Taxation Consultancy & Audit

Gulf Center Consultancy&Audit Chartered Accountants

Contact: 92469602/93949235

Offices at Muscat, Salalah, Sohar & Sur

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories: **Situations Wanted/ Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/ Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)** Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346

VALENTINE'S DAY

Love is in the air

It's time for flowers, chocolates, stuffed toys, trinkets
If you want to express your love to someone today, get going and buy a surprise gift

Saint Valentine's Day may now be celebrated worldwide but traditions are often very different - and sometimes have nothing at all to do with romance. In Oman, too, the young and the not-so-young will express their love and admiration for people they consider 'special' in many different ways.

Shop windows in branded stores in hypermarkets and shopping arcades have dressed up in red (the colour of love) and hung hearts, stuffed toys and festoons signifying the arrival of the 'month of love' (February) while restaurants and hotels have already floated a string of special dinners and stay-cations for people to celebrate in style.

In Europe, however, it's all about couples cosying up, while in the United States it is as much about schoolchildren celebrating friendship. In Japan, women give chocolates to their bosses. From a pagan festival to a marketing ploy, Valentine's has become a great pretext for socialising as well as seasonal business.

Rituals and carnivals

Valentine's Day was once a rather violent affair. Its origins are thought to go back to the Roman purification festival of Lupercalia when young men would conduct rituals that were meant to enhance fertility in young ladies. Down the centuries, that evolved into only slightly less raucous lotteries that paired young men off with young women at medieval carnivals.

Martyr to his heart

The day is also, of course, associated with the cult of third century Roman Christian martyr Saint Valentine who literally lost his head over love on the orders of the Emperor Claudius, for secretly performing weddings. According to the legend, Valentine cured his



jailer's blind daughter and the day before his death slipped her a note signed 'Your Valentine'. Unfortunately, there was no happy ending.

Love letters, spoons

In England, the exchange of messages known as 'Valentines' on February 14 developed with the rise of the postal service in the 19th century, with the sender often signing off 'Your Valentine'.

They did things differently across the border in Wales. Their festival of love is held on January 25 and celebrates a fourth-century Welsh princess called Saint

Dwynwen. Unlucky in love, broken-hearted Dwynwen sought solace in religion and became a nun, praying for others to find true love.

Among the gifts traditionally exchanged between lovers, and would-be ones, are carved Welsh wooden love spoons.

Commercial turn

The celebration took a commercial turn in the mid-19th century in the US, with the invention of mass-produced greeting cards. Promoters quickly got the idea to ex-

tend the tradition beyond lovers, with schoolchildren now expected to bring a Valentine card for every one of their classmates.

Today, it has become a US\$20bn business and has even spawned Galentines Day, when 'gals' go out together and eat waffles.

Chocolates for bosses

The Japanese Valentine tradition began after World War II when confectionery makers thought up the wheeze of having women offer chocolates to their bosses and boyfriends on February 14.

A half-century later, the practice has become an annual ritual, with millions of Japanese women giving pralines or ganaches to show affection, friendship or professional respect. But not any chocolate will do. The 'giri choco', for example, are standard chocolates reserved for work colleagues while the superior 'honmei choco' are the sign of true love.

Restrictions

Valentine's Day is, however, considered an alien tradition in some parts of the world where it was seen to clash with cultural sensibilities. In some parts of some countries, including India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, this tradition is not well received and often sparks localised uproars from certain social welfare outfits which pose as 'moral police'.

Although the day is very popular in Iran, people have to show their affection modestly. In some countries, the sale of heart-shaped balloons, cards bearing the words 'Valentine's', or other branded merchandise that promote the observance is often frowned upon by traditionalists.

AFP





Odermatt silences critics with Olympic grand slalom gold

Yanqing, China - Switzerland's Marco Odermatt finally lived up to expectations by holding his nerve in snow and fog to win gold in the men's Olympic giant slalom on Sunday.

Odermatt put the disappointment of two underwhelming outings in speed events behind him to clock a combined total of 2min 09.35sec over the two legs down the "Ice River" course in Yanqing, north of Beijing.

Slovenia's Zan Kranjec claimed silver thanks to the fastest second leg, 0.19sec off the pace, while reigning world champion Mathieu Faivre of France took bronze, 1.34sec behind the winner.

"It was a hard day, with the conditions, with such a long wait between the two runs," said Odermatt.

"It was more than five hours for me, it was such a long time to re-think everything and it was hard to stay focused. I tried to sleep some minutes in between."

Odermatt had come into the Beijing Games as current World Cup overall leader and one of the big favourites.

But he has disappointed on the artificial snow in China, finishing seventh in the downhill and skiing out of the super-G, a race in which he was expected to challenge for the Olympic title.

'Risky everything'

The giant slalom was a different ballgame, however, and only



Gold medalist Switzerland's Marco Odermatt poses on the podium during the men's giant slalom victory ceremony at Beijing Winter Olympic (AFP)

eight racers got within two seconds of Odermatt, many struggling with the heavy snow and increasingly foggy conditions that drastically reduced visibility.

"It was challenging, I really

risky everything in the second run because I wanted not just the medal, I wanted the gold medal," he said.

"It's difficult because you can lose everything, but today it paid

off. It was a very hard race for everyone."

The 24-year-old Swiss racer, who has won four of five World Cup giant slalom races this season, had been fastest down the

first leg, just four-hundredths of a second ahead of Stefan Brennsteiner. But the Austrian was one of three big names in the top eight, alongside Austrian outsider Manuel Feller and Italy's

MEDALS TABLE				
	G	S	B	T
Norway	9	5	7	21
Germany	8	5	1	14
United States	6	5	1	12
Netherlands	6	4	2	12
Sweden	5	3	3	11
Austria	4	6	4	14
Russian OC	4	5	8	17
China	4	3	2	9
Switzerland	3	0	5	8
France	2	6	2	10
Italy	2	5	4	11
Japan	2	4	5	11
Slovenia	2	2	2	6
Canada	1	4	9	14
South Korea	1	3	1	5
Australia	1	2	1	4
Finland	1	1	2	4
Hungary	1	0	2	3
Czech Republic	1	0	1	2
New Zealand	1	0	0	1
Slovakia	1	0	0	1
Belarus	0	1	0	1
Spain	0	1	0	1
Belgium	0	0	1	1
Latvia	0	0	1	1
Poland	0	0	1	1

G

Gold

S

Silver

B

Bronze

T

Total

slid wide on one turn, losing more than a second, and eventually finished eighth.

"Marco did almost what I did in the pitch in the first run, but he's so in the flow that it doesn't really matter that much, he can catch it back," Kristoffersen said.

"When you're in the flow you can do that; when you're not 100 percent in the flow, like I am at the moment, then mistakes are costly."

Kranjec secured bronze to make up for his fourth place four years ago. "You never know if you will get another chance to fight for a medal," said the Slovene who was eighth fastest in the first leg. "After the first run I said maybe it's over, I don't have any more chance. But my second run was really good."

American River Radamus came in fourth, just ahead of French duo Thibaut Favrot and two-time Olympic bronze medalist Alexis Pinturault, who tied for fifth.

Faivre was elated about making the podium. "It was very tough conditions with the surface, but I finished the day with a bronze medal and I'm so happy with it," he said.

Radamus was in no doubt the right person bagged gold.

"Marco's the best in the world right now so I think he deserved to win today, what with the pressure he had on his shoulders there," he said.

AFP

Heavy snow disrupts many events

Zhangjiakou, China - Heavy snow fell throughout Sunday at the Beijing Olympics disrupting several events and forcing athletes to battle through treacherous conditions.

Californian-born Chinese sensation Eileen Gu was among the competitors affected when her bid for a second gold medal was temporarily derailed by the postponement of qualifying for the freestyle slopestyle.

The second of three training runs for the women's downhill skiing was cancelled and women's freestyle skiing aerials qualification was also postponed.

Environmentalists in the build-up to the Games in the Chinese capital had voiced concern about an Olympics taking place in one of the driest parts of China and relying almost entirely on man-made snow.

But on Sunday it was the opposite problem - too much snow, together with freezing fog and temperatures plunging to minus six degrees Celsius by evening.

The women's biathlon 10km pursuit did go ahead in Zhangjiakou, outside Beijing, but Norway's Tiril Eckhoff, who took bronze, said conditions were "very heavy". "There was a lot of snow. It was a tough race and I had to work myself to get a medal," she said.

Silver medalist Elvira Oeberg of Sweden said it was "one of the hardest pursuits I've ever raced".

AFP

Abdi strikes first Olympic blow for Saudi Arabia in ski quest

Yanqing, China - An Olympic alpine ski racer from Saudi Arabia might read like a misnomer, but Fayik Abdi defied the odds by achieving just that on Sunday.

Just a year after taking up racing, Abdi successfully competed in the men's giant slalom at the Beijing Games in the first step to what he hopes will be an Arab revolution of the truly snowy kind.

Abdi is the sole representative from the Gulf kingdom, not known so much for its mountain pistes as the vast hinterlands of the Empty Quarter, the vast Rub' al-Khali desert in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

The 24-year-old's introduction to skiing, needless to say, did not start in his homeland, but instead Lebanon, where he spent many winters as a child.

Winter camps in Switzerland followed before Abdi upped

sticks in 2016 to the US state of Utah, where he further honed his skills.

He graduated from the University of Utah in Salt Lake City four years later, returning home "hoping to make a connection between skiing and Saudi Arabia".

Abdi said he was approached by authorities in the new city of Neom, in northwestern Saudi Arabia on the border with Jordan, to test snow conditions ahead of the construction of a ski resort in mountains there.

"I could never imagine I would be able to ski in Saudi Arabia," said Abdi, who last year was fast-tracked by the country's winter-sports federation for participation at these Games, taking part in qualifying races in Austria, Sweden, Italy and Montenegro.

"I lived in Saudi for 10 years and Saudi does have snow, we



Saudi Arabia's Fayik Abdi reacts after competing in the second run of the men's giant slalom during the Beijing Winter Olympic Games (AFP)

just don't have enough snow to be maintained for skiing."

To compensate, two huge indoor ski complexes are planned for the capital Riyadh and the Red Sea port city of Jeddah.

I tried my best. It could have gone better for sure. The fact we finished is definitely a plus

FAYIK ABDI

"But they are building something similar to this (Yanqing) in the north-west of Saudi. I was there, I have already skied in Saudi, so it's definitely possible."

In testing conditions including heavy snowfall and limited visi-

bility, Abdi finished 51st out of 54 finishers in the first leg of the giant slalom. Thirty-three racers failed to finish.

He successfully made it down the second leg, as eight more skiers fell to the wayside, eventually finishing 44th, more than 37 seconds slower than the gold medal winner from Switzerland, Marco Odermatt.

"Our goal wasn't just to finish, our goal was to ski as best as we could," Abdi said.

"I am happy I tried my best. It could have gone better for sure. The fact we finished is definitely a plus."

The Saudi insisted his result was much more than an individual goal. "I don't want it to be about me, I want it to be about Saudi and inspiring and encouraging Saudis to do what they love and to find a passion," he said.

AFP

Olympic slalom champion Vlhova to miss rest of Beijing Games

Yanqing, China - Slovakia's newly crowned Olympic slalom champion Petra Vlhova will skip the downhill and alpine combined at the Beijing Games after picking up an ankle injury, it was confirmed Sunday.

Vlhova's brother Boris Vliha told AFP that the 26-year-old

had opted to rest her left ankle and "prepare for the remainder of the season".

Vlhova is current world silver medalist in the combined and would have been one of the favourites for Thursday's race.

Vlhova is also the reigning World Cup overall champion,

standing second in this season's rankings 17 points behind American Mikaela Shiffrin.

Female racing on the World Cup circuit resumes with a super-G and giant slalom on March 5-6 at the Swiss resort of Lenzerheide.

AFP



Slovakia's Petra Vlhova competes in the first run of the women's slalom during Beijing Games (AFP)

Sixth place for Harthy and Oman Racing in Asian Le Mans opener

Ahmad al Harthy took the opening stint and delivered a strong drive from sixth on the GT class grid

Dubai, Abu Dhabi - Oman's Ahmad al Harthy and teammates Charlie Eastwood and Sam De Haan began the Asian Le Mans Series with a top six finish during the first race of the new season at Dubai Autodrome on Saturday, February 12 - and the Oman Racing drivers are now aiming higher for race two on Sunday.

In a competitive and challenging four-hour race in the United Arab Emirates, the No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GT3 took the chequered flag just 0.4 seconds shy of the fifth placed McLaren 720S GT3 in the action-packed GT class.

Harthy took the opening stint, beginning at 16.30 local time, and delivered a strong drive from sixth on the GT class grid. Although losing some ground early on, the Omantel, OQ and MHD-ITICS backed racer settled down well and 30 minutes into the race he was back inside the top six.

Under immense pressure during the latter stages of the second half of his stint from the No.6 Mercedes-AMG, Harthy produced faultless laps and didn't put a wheel wrong to maintain position and importantly keep the rival car at bay.

Moving up into fourth position before the first round of pit-stops, Harthy handed over the Oman Racing car to British teammate Sam De Haan early in hour two and when the race order settled De Haan held fifth place.

Slipping back to sixth position, he stayed there to the second pit-stop which came in hour three when Aston Martin 'works'



The No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GT3 took the chequered flag just 0.4 seconds shy of the fifth place

driver Eastwood climbed behind the wheel and maintained the top six placing after the order had once again settled down.

Staying sixth up to a Full Course Yellow cautionary period near the end of the hour, East-

wood pressed for seventh place during the closing laps, Eastwood couldn't quite make the breakthrough but eighth - and very importantly a healthy and undamaged Aston Martin - was a good start to the champi-

"It's a very competitive championship, a very tough race, but we knew that coming into the weekend and it's why we're here," said Harthy. "Finishing the opening race in a decent position was our priority from the outset, and also to look after the car as much as possible with two races back-to-back this weekend and then two more next weekend."

"We achieved what we set out to do in both respects, and we all drove the best we could. It's a good start to the Asian Le Mans Series for us, the whole team did a great job, and now the objective is to have a good race two here in Dubai and hopefully challenge for an even better finish."

Round two of the Asian Le Mans Series got underway on Sunday, at Dubai Autodrome.

Finishing the opening race in a decent position was our priority from the outset, and also to look after the car as much as possible with two races back-to-back this weekend and then two more next weekend

AHMAD AL HARTHY

wood pitted for a final time and then returned to the track in eighth position in GT where he ultimately remained to the chequered flag.

onship. Post-race, though, driving time infringement penalties for a couple of rival entries meant Oman Racing was classified in sixth position.



UAE register back-to-back wins in Quadrangular T20 series

Muscat - The United Arab Emirates beat Ireland by 13 runs in the fourth game of the quadrangular T20 series at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Sunday.

Put into bat first after losing the toss, the UAE lost both openers well inside the powerplay. Muhammad Waseem, dealing exclusively in boundaries, was dismissed in the third over and five balls later in-form Chirag Suri followed suit.

It was the fourth wicket partnership however, that defined the UAE innings. Vriitya Aravind, 19, showed maturity well beyond his years, refusing to back down under pressure and counter attacking the Irish bowling unit at every possible opportunity.

The other end was marshalled by Rohan Mustafa, whose robust yet measured knock provided the perfect foil for Aravind to inflict maximum damage.

This 94-run partnership



Rohan Mustafa starred with his measured knock of 54 in 43 balls

placed the UAE in pole position to finish with a flourish at the death, a proposition that enticed Kashif Daud. He smashed two sixes and two fours off Mark Adair's final over, propelling the score from a competitive 155 after 19 overs to a daunting 178

at the end of 20.

Craig Young was Ireland's star performer with the ball, picking up four wickets for 28 runs. Ireland's chase got off to an extremely unfortunate start, as a running mix-up between the openers meant that Paul Stirling

was back in the changing room after just five balls. Despite that setback, Gareth Delany and captain Andy Balbirnie retaliated, and punished the UAE's bowling attack in the powerplay.

Delany was dismissed in the sixth over, but Ireland managed to keep the run rate above 10 for the next three and looked on course to complete a successful run chase.

Those hopes were dashed in the 10th over as spinner Meiyappan picked up the prized scalp of Balbirnie. With that, the Irish challenge started to fade. Curtis Campher made 40 runs but took 39 balls to do so, looking extremely out of sorts in the middle. He was unable to step on the gas at any point of his innings and eventually, was unceremoniously run out in the final over.

Shane Getkate and Lorcan Tucker chipped in with useful knocks but couldn't keep up with the sky-high asking rate. Ulti-

mately, the demolition job performed by Kashif Daud in the first innings had no Irish peer, and the UAE claimed a hard-fought but well-deserved 13 run victory in the end.

With this win the UAE stand atop the table, having continued their rich vein of form from the ODI series against Oman earlier this month. Ireland fought hard, and having beaten the hosts just 17 hours prior, have every right to assign the blame for this loss to fatigue. All eyes now turn to the tournament concluding double header on Monday, with Oman facing UAE and Ireland taking on Nepal.

BRIEF SCORES:

UAE 178/5 in 20 overs (Rohan Mustafa 54 (43) 6 x 4, 1 x 6 Vriitya Aravind 50 (36) 3 x 4, 2 x 6 ; Craig Young 28/4) beat Ireland 165/7 in 20 overs (Andy Balbirnie 42 (27) 2 x 4, 3 x 6 ; Palaniapan Meiyappan 23/2) .

SPECIAL DISCOUNT

RD 50 ONLY
31.50% discount

RD 20 ONLY
28.57% discount

- Hot & Cold Dispenser
- 2 Full Bottles
- 25 Refill Coupons
- White Tap Dispenser/ Tap Dispenser/ Manual Water Pump/ Cradle with Tap
- 2 Full Bottles
- 15 Refill Coupons

BUY & WIN
310 PRIZES

Get your raffle coupon on

- Purchase of RD 20 or RD 50 offer or
- Coupon book worth RD 20

- Gold Coins
- Gift Vouchers
- Oman Oasis Water Coupons

Register your raffle coupon number at www.omanoasis.com/discount2022 to win.

CALL TOLL-FREE 800 71 222 or GSM: 9275 5522

Special discount valid from 1st January 2022 to 31st March 2022. Conditions apply.

Scan QR Code to Register
C.R.No.: 1365452 HPM 05/14/2022

Sifr

SODIUM FREE DRINKING WATER

The healthy choice

Call Toll-Free 800 71 222 or GSM 9275 5522

OmanOasis
 OmanOasisOfficial
 OmanOasisWater
 www.omanoasis.com

C.R. No.: 1365452

TOUR OF OMAN 2022



Top ten after four races

RANK	RIDER	TEAM
1	Fausto Masnada	Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team
2	Anthon Charmig	Uno-X Pro Cycling Team
3	Jan Hirt	Intermarché - Wanty - Gobert Matériaux
4	Mauro Schmid	Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team
5	Rui Costa	UAE Team Emirates
6	Elie Gesbert	Team Arkea - Samsic
7	Kevin Vermaerke	Team Dsm
8	Henri Vandenabeele	Team Dsm
9	Rein Taaramäe	Intermarché - Wanty - Gobert Matériaux
10	Denis Nekrasov	Gazprom - RusVelo

Competition heats up as final race draws near

Fausto Masnada took the solo win and the red leader's jersey after stage four victory



Muscat - The Tour of Oman, in its 11th edition, is witnessing a heated competition among the participants as the final stage draws near. Fausto Masnada, of the Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team, took the solo win and the red leader's jersey after a thrilling stage from Al Sifah to Royal Opera House Muscat on Sunday.

The rolling route saw action from the start until the finish, with a 119.5km dominated by the Wolfpack's collective strength. Masnada's partner Mauro Schmid opened things up early in the stage and eventually dominated the sprint in the seven-man group that finished 1'07" behind the Italian climber, including the former leader of the race Anthon Charmig (Uno-X Pro Cycling Team). Masnada is the fourth leader of the Tour of Oman 2022 ahead of the ascent of Jabal Akhdhar on Monday.

It was a sunny start on the coast for the 98-man peloton but they proved to be in a hurry to battle rather than enjoy the views of Al Sifah. Attacks flew from the start, but it took 13km for a group of three attackers to settle at the front: Samuele Zoccarato (Bardiani-CSF-Faizane'), Julien Irizar (Euskaltel-Euskadi) and Michael

Kukrle (Gazprom-RusVelo). **Crazy early battles**

Already part of the breakaway on stage three, Zoccarato dominated the first intermediate sprint (km 27) and the following climb (km 31), but Team DSM were already putting the hammer down to try and turn the race upside down.

The early attackers were caught at km 37, the pace didn't drop down and the group around Anthon Charmig (UnoX Team) was quickly down to nine riders.

Mauro Schmid (Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team) kept the aggressive racing going with another attack at km 44. The young Swiss talent, only trailing by 17" overall, was joined 13km later by Team DSM's Soren Kragh Andersen and Jonas Hvideberg, Groupama-FDJ's Antoine Duchesne and Gazprom-RusVelo's



Italian rider Fausto Masnada with the winner's red jersey

Marco Canola.

Non-stop action

The ever-attacking Zoccarato bridged the gap on the first ascent of Al Jabal Street (Bousher-

Amerat, km 74.5). The reduced peloton trailed by one minute, with UAE Team Emirates and Intermarché-Wanty-Gobert Matériaux doing most of the work. Schmid went solo on the



following ascent of Al Jabal Street (km 89), where Fausto Masnada and Jan Hirt (Intermarché-Wanty-Gobert Matériaux) launched new attacks alongside Arkea-Samsic's Elie Gesbert and Team DSM's Kevin Vermaerke and Henri Vandenabeele.

Masnada's final push

A small group got back together behind Schmid as they headed for the final ascent of Al Jabal Street, to be summited with 15km to go. Kevin Vauquelin (Arkea-Samsic) set off in pursuit of Mauro Schmid and went over the top with a 10" gap to a seven-man group: the race leader Charmig, Masnada and Schmid, Vermaerke and Vandenabeele, Costa, and Hirt.

Vauquelin was caught with 12km to go, and Masnada immediately launched a new attack. Charmig tried to limit his losses but Masnada flew to victory with a 1'07" gap on the line.

Today, the fifth stage (150.5 km) will kick off from the Wilayat of Samail to the finish line in Jabal Akhdar.

The sixth and last stage will start Tuesday from Al Mouj Muscat to Muttrah corniche.



Jeep®



A LEGEND REDESIGNED

THE FIRST-EVER SEVEN-SEATER GRAND CHEROKEE L

Exceptional capability, stunning looks, the latest technology and complete comfort for all seven passengers. The all-new three-row Jeep Grand Cherokee L will turn every journey into a wildly civilized adventure.

**Visit our showrooms across Oman
to book a test-drive today.**

BOOK A TEST DRIVE

THE ALL-NEW
QX55

UNFOLLOW THE CROWD



LEARN MORE



INFINITI



9496 5500



TOLL FREE
800 50011

سهيل بهوان للسيارات ش.م.م.
Suhail Bahwan Automobiles LLC

Bahwan
International
Group



مجموعة
بهوان
العالمية