



50
GLORIOUS YEARS

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37°C/28°C

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE GENTLE GIANTS OF THE OCEANS
GO TO PAGE 20 FEATURES



OIA launches Rawabet programme to enhance governance

Programme will help OIA's affiliated firms align their policies with Oman Vision 2040

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has launched a special programme 'Rawabet', which will act as a direct link between the authority and its companies to enhance their governance, besides linking all their policies and systems with the policies of OIA. The programme will also help OIA's affiliated companies align

their policies with Oman Vision 2040.

The programme has come into being in light of the recent meetings between the chairman of the board and president of OIA, with the chairmen of boards of its affiliated companies.

Rawabet also aims to shed light on the role that the private sector plays in developing the Omani economy and promoting successful partnership in local

value-added investments, in addition to promoting the securities markets, developing the national workforce, and working on the continuous development of different investment sectors in the sultanate.

In order to achieve the desired goals of the programme, OIA will involve all relevant sectors, such as investment, asset management, risk and compliance, human resources, procurement

and contract operations, asset allocation, finance, information technology, corporate communications, legal affairs, and auditing. This will ensure alignment of government companies with the national goals to positively contribute in achieving the Oman 2040 vision.

The Oman Vision 2040 focuses on developing sources of economic diversification and enhancing non-oil revenue contri-

butions to the national GDP and attract foreign direct investment to the sultanate.

Rawabet is expected to help enhance the performance of OIA's companies in achieving their goals and overcoming all associated challenges, in addition to creating a strong partnership with the private sector that supports the involvement of a bigger share of private sector establishments.

The programme will also help create a comprehensive plan to prepare these companies' investments in ICV initiatives and help create new job opportunities.

Rawabet will also work as a platform for the exchange of resources and expertise on best investment practices by planning joint team activities that can enhance their general performance.

Convention and exhibition centre coming up in Khasab soon



Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to place Musandam on the map of global tourism for conferences, Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry's Musandam branch will establish Khasab Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official at Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry Musandam, said, "The Khasab Convention and Exhibition Centre project will be an architectural icon added to Musandam governorate."

Elaborating on the project, he said, "Spread over 2,000sq m, the building will be divided into two parts, one of them with an area of 1,000sq m for multi-purpose halls with a green garden on the roof. The other section will consist of three floors with an area of 1,000sq m for office and commercial spaces for rent."

The project will be built in an area close to the chamber's branch office in Khasab.

"After the municipality issues

building permits, construction work will begin in the beginning of 2021," the official added.

Meanwhile, the tourism sector in Musandam saw significant growth in 2019. The number of tourists who visited the governorate was 332,489. The number of cruise ships that visited was 72 during the period.

The tourism sector in the governorate is one of the main aspects of economic development. The governorate's heritage and tourism elements make it a promising region for growth and contribution to the country's economy.

Musandam is known for its sites and elements which attract tourists from different countries of the world. These include marine creeks, prominent among these being Najd, Shamm, Al Hablain and Ghab Ali.

There are also diverse formations of coastal rocks which attract tourists. There are many islands scattered around the governorate such as Al Teer and Telegraph Island. Its beaches such as Qada, Mokhi, Bassa and Hyout are famous.



Divers pledge allegiance to HM the Sultan, raise awareness on preserving maritime heritage

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Paying tribute to the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said while pledging allegiance to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Anas al Raqadi, 21, from the wilayat of Bausher in Muscat and his team recently dived in the waters near Damaniyat Islands carrying the two lead-

ers' photographs.

The group's objective behind the dive was to raise awareness on the importance of preserving maritime heritage.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Raqadi said, "On September 10, five divers, including three Omanis, from the Omanta Scuba Diving Academy, dived in Damaniyat Islands carrying a photograph of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq."

The words 'Good successor to good predecessor', were written on the 1m x 1.5m photograph.

The dive was also aimed at promoting tourism sites in Oman and spread the culture of diving among members of the community. "Oman has many beautiful places for diving, such as the Damaniyat Islands and Al Halaniyat Islands. These

attract tourists from all over the world," Raqadi noted.

Expounding the benefits of diving, he said that while it's not easy and requires training, it has made him self-confident and helped his decision-making abilities.

He urged young people to learn diving and added, "We will continue to promote tourism and support domestic tourism with our diving activities."

SAYYID THEYAZIN MEETS INDIAN ENVOY



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tariq al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received in his office H E Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to Oman, on Sunday. The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations binding the two friendly countries and discussed aspects of existing joint cooperation in cultural, sports and youth fields, besides exchanging views on promoting such aspects of cooperation (ONA)

369 drowning deaths in 2019, experts call for caution

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulances (PACDA) has stated that 369 people lost their lives due to drowning in Oman in 2019, an increase of 138 per cent over the previous year.

Cases of drowning have fluctuated over the past few years with 268 reported in 2016, 173 cases in 2017 and 155 in 2018, according to PACDA.

Following the statement, experts urged people to be cautious, follow safety measures and avoid hazards while swimming.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Said Yahya al Thuhli, a free diving in-



Cases over the years

2016	268
2017	173
2018	155
2019	369

structor, said, "Cases of children drowning have increased. Unfortunate incidents happen when children are left swimming alone in wadis or farms."

He added, "People going out for adventure trips and swimming in wadis must follow guidelines, including wearing life jackets and going out only with well-known tourism companies

who provide the necessary tools and equipment. I urge parents to teach their children to swim."

A PACDA official said, "Some children jump from cliffs without knowing the depth of the water which lead to fatal injuries. Some do not abide by the precautionary regulations that prohibits swimming in places where water levels are constantly rising."

HOME HOLIDAYS

The travel restrictions due to COVID-19 has given rise to staycations, after all the best holidays are the ones close to home

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The travel restrictions due to COVID-19 has resulted in a growing trend of staycations. People turned inwards and options within cities to relax and unwind came up. The recent Eid holidays witnessed an increase in staycations in several hotels around the country. Unlike earlier years when most people travelled abroad during holidays, this season holidayers turned inwards.

Speaking about the trend, Gerald Chevasson, general manager of W Muscat, said, “The travel restrictions had a good impact on staycations. Some of the best holidays are the ones close to home and with travel restrictions in place, people have had more reason to explore locally.” W Muscat rolled out ‘a host of amplified events to deepen the staycation vibe’, he noted. “We have been thrilled with the response. Our day room offer has also been popular, perfect for kicking back by the pool and giving locals the opportunity to make the most of the sunshine before the days cool down.”

The hotel is all set to welcome guests after the travel restrictions have been eased. The property has taken ample precautionary measures including enhanced cleaning protocols, especially for food handling, surface areas, public spaces and guest rooms, social distancing, and increased frequency of cleaning with hospital-grade disinfectants.

“W Muscat has been partially open all year but it has been particularly refreshing to reopen the restaurants and pool and dive back into our W way of life. We have implemented all safety precautions in line with government regulations and have elevated our exacting standards and rigorous protocols to create a ‘new normal’ in hospitality to address the unique challenges presented by the current pandemic environment,” Chevasson informed.

W Muscat also offers mobile check-in and takes room service requests through the Marriott Bonvoy app for

added safety. Mobile applications have become significant aspects for consideration allowing guests to check in independently. The Marriott Bonvoy app allows guests to check in, enter their rooms and order room service for a completely contactless experience.

Wellness and health experiences along with relaxation and me-time have also been other motivating factors for guests to opt for staycations. Giuseppe Ressa, general manager of JW Marriott Muscat, said, “Since travelling abroad has not been possible, guests have been able to discover that life’s most meaningful moments can be made closer to home. In addition, with wellness more than ever top of mind, people are seeking experiences that promote health and well-being, and this, luckily, is JW Marriott’s whole philosophy. We have certainly enjoyed increased interest from local residents and our stay packages have been thoughtfully tailored to offer a range of wellness-inspired experiences.”

Ressa believes people need to find ways to replenish their body and mind now more than ever. “And that is why we have put every measure in place to promote the health and safety of our guests and associates. In the long term, we are incorporating our global Commitment to Clean by Marriott International. In the short term, we are finding ways of combining social distancing with the human connection for which hospitality is known. We want our guests to know that when they walk through our doors, they are in good hands, and that we will take care of everything so that all they have left to worry about is enjoying their stay,”

Ressa added.

Katrin Herz, general manager of Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, said, “With travel being limited, Oman residents have been rediscovering the amazing things that their local areas have to offer. There has been plenty of interest in our staycations from the first day of opening and we have been delighted with the response so far. While we are only opening a limited number of rooms and suites to guarantee social distancing and support our hygiene standards, these rooms are filling up, especially on weekends. Our lagoon rooms in particular, which offer direct access to the resort’s lagoon pools, are in very high demand.”

The property has implemented a variety of practices to ensure cleanliness and luxury service. Besides enhanced sanitisation, particularly in high traffic areas, there are signages throughout the hotel to remind guests to maintain social distancing, and limited occupancy and seating capacities in restaurants in compliance with local regulations.

“Our ladies and gentlemen are all mandated to wear protective equipment, and we have installed partitions at the front desk and at food and beverage service lines, all measures that accommodate the ‘new normal’. We were delighted to welcome guests back to the hotel once it was safe to do so and have done our utmost to ensure that they can enjoy their stay, worry-free. We have made several changes to the way our guests arrive, check-in and dine, and so far these have been very well received,” said Katrin.



Since travelling abroad has not been possible, guests have been able to discover that life’s most meaningful moments can be made closer to home

GIUSEPPE RESSA



With travel being limited, Oman residents have been rediscovering the amazing things that their local areas have to offer

KATRIN HERZ

W MUSCAT

Starts from RO65 per night and includes:

- Breakfast for 2 adults and up to 2 children under 6 years old
- Children from 6-12 years old enjoy 50% off breakfast
- Check-in as early as 11am and check-out at 5pm the following day
- Complimentary WiFi

Chill-time daytime offer starts at RO55 and includes:

- A Spectacular Room for up to 3 guests from 9am to 7pm
- Exclusive access to WET Deck
- 20% off on in-room dining

JW MARRIOTT MUSCAT

Suite package at RO69

- Stay in a Junior Suite overlooking the hotel’s landscaped gardens
- Complimentary breakfast for two
- JW Cheesecake as a welcome amenity
- 20% savings on all food and beverages
- JW Mindful Moment

AL BUSTAN PALACE, A RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL

Starts at RO70 + taxes per night, staycation package includes:

- Continental breakfast or floating breakfast in Lagoon Rooms
- 25% savings on all food and beverages
- Complimentary access to the spa ladies-beach (ladies only)
- Complimentary use of non-motorised watersports
- Early check-in and late check-out upon availability
- Children up to 6 years old dine for free throughout their stay (up to two children per room)
- Complimentary swimming classes for children (Thursday and Friday)
- Complimentary sunset yoga (ladies only) on Thursday and Friday
- Complimentary culinary workshop for two during stay





Pact signed for telecom services in rural areas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Space Communications Technologies (SCT) signed a contract with the Oman Broadband Company on Sunday to provide telecommunications services through satellite as part of the national initiative launched by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority to provide telecommunications and Internet services in 598 villages.

The contract was signed by Eng Salem bin Saeed al Alawi, executive director, SCT, and Eng Badr bin Saud al Zaidi, acting CEO of Oman Broadband Company.

Under the contract, SCT will provide and fully manage the infrastructure for satellite communications, with the aim of covering all parts of the sultanate, including offices of government agencies, health centres and more than a hundred schools.

Oman Broadband Company will coordinate with the telecommunications companies in the sultanate that offer fixed Internet services to provide the same to subscribers in the areas identified within the initiative.

Eng Alawi said that in order to

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority has launched a national initiative to provide telecommunications and Internet services in 598 villages

keep pace with the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its technical and educational requirements, the sultanate is heading to provide telecommunications services to all, including rural areas, which constitute a major challenge for telecommunications companies.

For his part, Eng Zaidi explained that the signing of the contract comes as a continuation of the initial step to implement the national initiative to bridge the digital divide in villages and rural housing complexes. He added that the existing partnership with SCT will contribute to achieving the desired goals of the initiative by employing the latest satellite technology.

Twitterati praise fisherman who rescued turtle stuck in plastic bag

This is a message to everyone not to throw waste into the sea: EA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A video of a fisherman rescuing a green turtle that was stuck in a plastic bag has evoked strong emotional public responses.

Ahmed al Harbi from Ras al Hadd became a hero when Mohammed al Harbi posted the video in his Twitter account.

Mohammed said, "All thanks and appreciation to the fisherman Ahmed al Harbi from Ras al Hadd for saving a green turtle that was stuck in a plastic bag. I say to everyone who wants to enjoy Oman's nature: Think and don't throw garbage overboard."

"God bless him and reward him for the noble humanitarian work he has done," said Malik al Yahmadi on Twitter.

He added, "He sends a message to those who dump their waste on beaches and into seas, causing damage to environmental components."

Another Twitterati, Rashid al Ghazali said, "Thank you my dear Ahmed al Harbi for saving this turtle, which is rare and in extinction. Some countries are interested in wildlife. The sultanate



Ahmed al Harbi rescued the green turtle in Ras al Hadd area (Supplied photo)

cares and preserves these living creatures. The Omani government has established a special reserve for them."

The Ras al Hadd Turtle Re-

serve was established as per the provisions of Royal Decree No 25/96.

Another person appealed, "We kindly ask the tourists to

keep the beaches clean."

Another person tweeted, "We ask the concerned authorities to set up instructional panels to clarify the disposal of trash. Last

weekend on Qurm beach, I saw a lot of rubbish like tobacco bags, coffee cups, plastic bottles, boxes and old shoes. We must protect the environment with its beauty."

Dr Abdullah al Amir, another Twitter user, said, "May God bless this positive spirit and enthusiastic love for the aesthetics of the sea and its components. Wonderful work from a great personality."

Another person tweeted, "We hope the employees and observers of marine and wild life at the Environment Authority that they increase their inspection campaigns to preserve this wealth, as well as plant trees in the mountain areas between the cities in all of Oman."

The Environment Authority (EA) on Twitter said, "Thank you very much to Ahmed al Harbi for saving the turtle and putting it back in the sea. This is also a message to everyone not to throw waste, especially plastic, into the sea, as it poses a threat to marine life."

The video can be seen at <https://twitter.com/i/status/1309429510207610882>

Violators booked for littering in Damaniyat Islands



Our Correspondent
Muscat

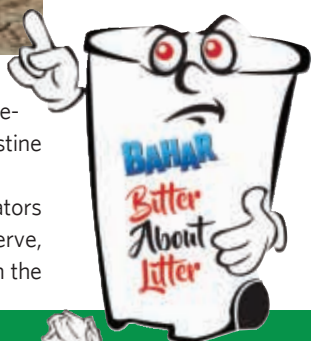
The Environment Authority (EA) has booked a group of people for unauthorised entry into the

Damaniyat Islands Nature Reserve and littering on the pristine reserve.

The authority said, "Violators left their waste in the reserve, which required specialists in the

reserve to clean the site and return to its natural state."

"We call upon everyone to follow the laws and regulations issued in connection with the Damaniyat Islands Nature Reserve and abide by them in the event of visiting the reserve to enjoy the beauty of the place," said EA.



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مبادرة

INITIATIVE

القمة

للإعلام

Al Bashayer imports livestock to boost meat supply in market

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to help the sultanate achieve self-sufficiency in meat production and supply good quantities to market, Al Bashayer Meat Co received 10,000 heads of livestock recently.

In a statement, the company said, "The company received 10,000 heads of marino sheep and 250 heads of fattening calves through the Port of Salalah." The livestock which came from South Africa are now in the company's farm in Thumrait.

With the imported shipment, the company aims to produce high-quality and healthy meat and supply it to markets for individuals and institutions and export the rest to neighbouring markets.

Al Bashayer is working to ensure food safety in the area of red meat. The company is the first integrated project for the production of red meat in the sultanate and the largest in the region. The company's strategy depends on importing live animals from several different



sources; they are quarantined upon arrival in the company's quarry approved by the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and

Water Resources and under its direct supervision.

At this stage, the animals are given all the necessary vaccina-

tions to raise the general immunity against infectious and endemic diseases, and after the quarantine period is over, they are entered into the fattening area, where they are fed with fattening feed consisting of natural feeds, nutritional concentrates and various vitamins that help in gaining weight and improving the quality of meat.

"The company adopts the implementation of all biosecurity and public health measures and attention to the safety of the herd to ensure the health of the animals from the first day until the product reaches the market and consumers."

Upon completion of all the facilities and components of the project, the animals will be slaughtered after the end of the fattening period in the advanced slaughterhouse of the company. It consists of two separate lines, one for the slaughter of sheep and the other for the slaughter of cows, and then the meat is sent to the packaging area to be packed and wrapped in an advanced, clean and healthy way, after which the meat is distributed to various local and foreign markets.

FOR SALE

Residential, Commercial
Land-with an area of 5000 m²,
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Highway/adjacent to Oman
Mall-South Al-Gubrah-Wilayat
of Baushar in Square phase2.
Building permit (ground + 4 floors)



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YOUR
SAY

BACK TO SCHOOL

How are you as a parent preparing to send your children
back to school starting November 1?

Jayakrishnan V
Project manager

Though children have become accustomed to online classes, it will never be the same as normal physical classroom learning. It should be a give and take approach when normal classes start. Schools must gear up to have all precautions in place as stipulated by the Supreme Committee and parents must tell children about the safety measures to be adhered to. With joint efforts, let's together make a 'new beginning'.



Elizabeth Saju Varghese
Teacher

We are still fearful; really nervous about the reopening. We have to follow instructions and train children about the precautions to be taken, proper way of wearing masks, social distancing, hand sanitising, etc. Though sharing is important, during the pandemic they must only use their personal belongings. Teach them not to panic but be very cautious and alert all the time.



Vandana Anoop
Civil engineer

As a parent, I'm obviously worried about exposing children to social interactions knowing very well that they are very likely to disregard the pandemic protocol. But it looks like we have to live with this situation for a few years at least and children need normal social interaction for healthy growth – emotional and intellectual. A vaccine would largely alleviate the worry.



Bhaskara Rao
Attorney

Though I am not a parent myself having school going children, my neighbour says their son has already completed his syllabus and so going to school now is of not much use. Still she is equipping him physically and mentally, stressing on following all mandatory health protocols, starting with wearing mask, face shield, gloves, using hand sanitiser, maintaining social distance, not touching eyes, face and nostrils, not shaking hands, etc.



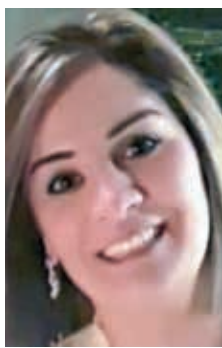
Anand Toprani
Investor

As parents, we have to take extra precautions while sending children to school. When children return from school, they must immediately go for a bath. If parents go personally to pick up children, they should keep sanitisers in their cars. We should instruct and explain to children what they need to do.



Omnia Abdelrahman
Mother of two boys

The number of cases is rising again; the situation is quite worrisome. Children must be kept safe, specially the ones with asthma. I have found online classes ok. Online classes are better than risking their lives.



Mubeen Ahmed
Sales manager

Making children aware of the things they can control like how to wear mask correctly, proper handwashing, social distancing, etc before school starts and talking about how it will work in school rather than the list of things they can't possibly know or control is the best way to prepare them.



Kiran Choudhury
Homemaker

I have started preparing the children by discussing the changes with them. Safety norms such as social distancing, wearing masks and proper hand washing implemented at home must be continued in school. Simple vocabulary and discussions on the situation will hopefully make them more aware and alert.

TENDERS
ANNOUNCEMENT

Al Ghubrah Power & Desalination Company (GPDC) invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tenders below;

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	TIME & LAST DATE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION	TENDER FEE (OMR)-EXCLUDED TRANSFER CHARGES
GPDC/05/2020	Sale of Desalination Inventory Spare Parts in GPDC	27-OCT-2020	11-NOV-2020	100/-
GPDC/06/2020	Dismantling of OETC 132 kV GIS and MEDC 33kV switchgear assets and buy back (Purchase) of Assets by Bidder in GPDC premises as per project scope and deliverables stipulated in the Tender document (RFP)	15-OCT-2020	26-OCT-2020	100/-

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception before 12.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on 11-NOV-2020 for tender No. (GPDC/05/2020), and on 26-OCT-2020 for tender No. (GPDC/06/2020).
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee of GPDC". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- GPDC is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Al Ghubrah Power & Desalination Company, Bank Muscat, 0423011069510017 (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- Bidders to send the deposit slip to: Yasmeen.allawati@holding.nama.om.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307), Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 277
E-Mail: Yasmeen.allawati@Holding.nama.om

? NEXT ON
YOUR SAY

Starting from October 1, Oman will levy a 50 per cent tax on
sweetened beverages. How significant is this move?
Do you think it will lead to people having healthier lifestyles?

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

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

People in Oman need
further incentives

This refers to your article on the Ministry of Labour deciding to extend the incentive package to the private sector till the end of year (*Muscat Daily*, page 1, Sep 24).

The reduction of resident card renewal fees from RO301 to RO201 and waving off fees and fines for non-Omani workforce in the event of final departure from the country are welcome steps taken by the Ministry of Labour. It is laudable and commendable.

Similar steps must be taken by other ministries and bodies too. There are certain charges levied by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Finance, Muscat Municipality, Tender Board and others. These are very high and they include annual membership fees, registration charges, vendor registration charges, tax card fees, fines and others.

It is a fact that during the pandemic, which has affected various industries and the private sector in Oman, expenses are increasing at a phenomenal rate. Any reduction of fees and fines will be a big relief for people.

I request concerned authorities in government departments to look into either reducing or eliminating various charges.

Hiten Dutia
Via email



Topfruit
NO ADDED
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OPAL to facilitate coronavirus tests for scholarship students

Muscat - Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL), the sultanate's first and only oil and gas/energy society, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation to support the conduct of COVID-19 tests for students abroad for the academic year 2020/21.

As per a statement, the agreement comes within the framework of OPAL's efforts to support a programme presented to the community and the competent authorities during the pandemic period.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Bakhit bin Ahmed bin Suhail a Mahri, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation,



(Supplied photo)

and Abdulrahman bin Humaid al Yahyaei, CEO of OPAL. The agreement aims to provide free tests for 650 male and female scholarship students who are abroad according to the lists specified by the ministry.

Commenting on the signing of the agreement, H E Dr Mahri pointed out the importance of the role of private sector institutions in supporting the ministry's efforts to provide basic services to students to face the excep-

tional circumstances that the country and the world are witnessing in light of the spread of COVID-19.

On the occasion, Yahyaei affirmed OPAL's constant keenness to support all categories of society.

He added, "The agreement between OPAL and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation is an extension of OPAL's continuous determination to support the national efforts of the sultanate in limiting the spread of COVID-19 and helping the concerned authorities contribute to easing the burden on the nation. We are undoubtedly very happy to provide this support to students on scholarships who study outside the sultanate."

Industry leaders to speak in webinar on Dhofar

Muscat - Prominent industry leaders will be speaking in the webinar 'Dhofar - The Future Roadmap' on September 30 on Zoom.

Leading industry bodies including Madayn, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Oman Manufacturer's Association are endorsing the webinar. The webinar dedicated on Dhofar's future development is supported by Bank Dhofar, Raysut Cement Com-

pany, Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding, Port of Salalah, Dhofar Insurance Company, Octal, Transom and Muscat Overseas Group as the strategic partners.

The key speakers include Hussain Hathith al Buthari, chairman, OCCI Dhofar Branch and head of Industry Committee; Said al Rashdi, CEO, Oman Manufacturers Association; Mohammed al Mashani, GM - Corporate Affairs, Port of

Salalah; Omar Ahmed Abdullah al Shaikh, deputy CEO, Dhofar Insurance Company; Joey Ghose, CEO, Raysut Cement Company; and Himansu Mohapatra, group general manager - Investment, Muscat Overseas Group. The webinar will be moderated by Akshay Bhatnagar, group managing editor, United Media Services.

The webinar will focus on how Dhofar is continuing to move ahead on the path of sustainable

development with the expansion of infrastructure and promotion of export oriented industries in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. It will also address the challenges faced by Dhofar and how it could overcome them with its competitive environment and a host of attractive business opportunities for investors.

To attend, register on https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register?WN_TDa5Gle6Seq4p8xwJFLg

Urgent appeal for blood donation

Muscat - The Department of Blood Banks Services in Bausher has appealed to people to come forward and donate blood as there is a sharp decrease in supply.



It is also calling on groups who perviously organised blood donation campaigns to initiate the move again with all the precautionary measures in place.



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH
TENDER NOTICE

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
12/2020	Electromechanical And Telecommunications Contracting And Maintenance	Maintenance & Operation Of Electro-Mechanical Services, Civil, Cleaning And Pest Control Services at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex At Bausher From 1/1/ 2021 To 31/12/ 2022	200/- OMR	Excellent

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 08/10/2020. The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 9:00am 09/11/2020

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone **24166670** or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

HOTLINES

24-hour pharmacies
Scientific Pharmacy: Qurum 24566601, Ruwi 24702850
Muscat Pharmacy: Ruwi 24702542, Salalah 23291635
Al Hashar Pharmacy: Ruwi 24783334

Hospitals and Clinics
Al Hayat International Hospital, Al Ghubra- 22004000, 94267068 / 97049520
94442000 (Emergency)
Al Raffah Hospital: Muscat - 24618900/1/2/3
Sohar - 26704639/49/50
Apollo Hospital Muscat, Hamriya: 24787766, 24782666, 24787780
Abeer Hospital, Ruwi, Muscat 24770800, 90999335, 90999334 (Emergency)
Starcare Hospital: 24557200
Emergency number: 24558333
Dr Harub's Clinic: 24563217, 2456381, 99254940 (Emergency)
Emirates Medical Center: 24604540
KIMS Oman Hospital: 24760105
Lama Polyclinic: CBD 24799077, 24788881, 24788577, 24707566, 24799655, Al Khuwayr 24478817, 24478818, Sohar 26751128
Muscat Eye Laser Centre: 24691414
Muscat Private Hospital: 24583600
Health4All Medical Centre: 24486005, 24483009

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	39	25
Doha	41	27
Kuwait City	40	27
Manama	37	27
Riyadh	39	22

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.43am
Sunrise	5.58am
Duhr	12.03pm
Asr	3.27pm
Maghrib	6.02pm
Isha	7.12pm

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (RO)
1	57/2020	Supply & Installation of Pedestrian Additional Gates at OETC Grid Stations.	12/10/2020	03/11/2020	Local companies with Experience in same field, Have a valid Tender Board Registration Certificate.	112/=
2	58/2020	Supply and Implementation of Industrial Cyber Security Threat Detection and Response Solution Project.	12/10/2020	03/11/2020	Local companies with Experience in same field, Have a valid Tender Board Registration Certificate.	180/=
3	59/2020	Supply, Installation and commissioning of 132kV GIS CTs and VTs and providing Main Tariff Meter, Cabling, Wiring, Integrating at Windfarm Grid station for as Harweel Bay as per MDEC-Grid Code.	12/10/2020	03/11/2020	Local companies with Experience in same field, Have a valid Tender Board Registration Certificate.	100/=

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.
Buying the Tender:	The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender through the official working days of the hour from 8.00 am - 01.00 pm .
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The complete bid documents should be deposited in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 4230 Block No: 321 - GSM: 91777378, 99105413, 93201558
Email Website:	omangrid.com www.omangrid.com



Oman Electricity Transmission Company s.a.o.c.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2428 3000 | Fax: +968 2230 9046
www.omangrid.com

إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (رع)
١	٢٠٢٠/٥٧	توريد وتركيب بوابات إضافية للمشاة في محطات الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء	٢٠٢٠/١٠/١٢	٢٠٢٠/١١/٠٣	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	١١٢/=
٢	٢٠٢٠/٥٨	توريد وتنفيذ حلول كشف الثغرات والاستجابة بالأمن السيبراني	٢٠٢٠/١٠/١٢	٢٠٢٠/١١/٠٣	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	١٨٠/=
٣	٢٠٢٠/٥٩	توريد وتركيب وفحص محول وحول (VT) جهد خلفي (CT) تيار الخابض (GIS) الكهربائية مع كافة الملحقات مع عداد تعرفه والتوصيلات ومحطة ظفار لطاقة الرياح خط هارويل حسب المواصفات المعتمدة (MEDC- Grid Code).	٢٠٢٠/١٠/١٢	٢٠٢٠/١١/٠٣	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	١٠٠/=

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة إرسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب.
طريقة الشراء	يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إلى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود. وذلك للتأكد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك من خلال أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ١:٠٠ م.
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للاستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	تقدم العروض في مغاريب مغلقة ومعونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط
الشروط والضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المطلوب. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء. - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (١٪) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء. - ومعنوياً بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء. - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن يتظر فيه. - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات.
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالح رقم السكّة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣٠ - هاتف - ٩٣٢٠١٥٥٨, ٩٩١٠٥٤١٣, ٩١٧٧٧٣٧٨
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com

الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش.م.ع.م
ص.ب : ١٣٨٩. الخوض. الرمز البريدي : ١٣٢. سلطنة عمان
الهاتف : +٩٦٨٢٤٢٨٣٠٠٠ / الفاكس : +٩٦٨٢٢٣٠٩٠٤٦
الموقع الإلكتروني : www.omangrid.com





Ahli Bank opens new branch in Ghubra

In line with its vision to offer the best in banking services, Ahli Bank has opened a new branch in Ghubra to cater to the needs of the customers in and around the wilayat of Bausher.

The new branch has state-of-the-art infrastructure, well-trained team of banking professionals to address the needs of the customers and a spacious waiting area. Customers in Ghubra and surrounding areas will have access to the bank's wide portfolio of services and products and can enjoy the services of the bank and interact with the customer service team for all their banking requirements.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM – head of Retail Distribution, said, "We are keen to provide our customers with access to products and services through our strategic locations. The Ghubra branch will play a pivotal role in addressing the banking needs of our customers."

The opening of the Ghubra branch comes within the framework of Ahli Bank's commitment to strengthen its branch network to bring banking services closer to its customers across the sultanate. It is aimed at providing the highest levels of convenience and enhanced banking facilities to clients.

"The ongoing expansion of branches is in line with the bank's long term strategy to offer top-notch services and ensuring that all the services are easily available to retail and commercial customers across the sultanate," Balushi added.

The branch will offer its full range of services to individuals and institutions in Bausher and surrounding areas, offering a full-range of banking services for customers. The new branch too is characterised by its novel design embodying the prestigious brand.

Become a seasoned diamond professional with GIG course

Always wanted to tell if that diamond was real or how many carats it is? Well now is your opportunity to become an all-around diamond pro with Oman's GIG (Gulf Institute of Gemmology) graduate diamond grader programme. Ladies, this is your opportunity to choose your own ring, your own diamond jewellery and make sure it is worth the investment.

The GIG Graduate Diamond Grader Program examines the technical expertise needed to grade, buy, and sell diamonds with the insight of a seasoned professional. This programme explores the diamond grading procedures to assess the 4Cs and how they affect diamond value.

Students use professional diamond grading equipment for the purposes of examining a diamond's quality characteristics to grade.

In Lab Sessions students have the chance to practice with real diamonds, natural and synthetic, untreated and treated.



Programme number and title: DG20 Graduate Diamond Grader Programme
Clock hours and instructional weeks: 112 clock hours (52 frontal online lessons and 60 lab sessions on campus)
Final qualification: GIG International Diploma
First Available Date: October 5
Occupations may include: Auction House Jewellery Specialist, Diamond Buyer, Diamond Sorter/Grader, Jewellery Business Owner, Retailer, Wholesaler.

For further information please contact secretariat@gulfgemology.com. Call or WhatsApp: +968 9173 6811

colour, and the role cut plays in the marketplace and important sectors of the diamond industry, including dealers, cutters and manufacturers.

Coursework also includes detecting treated diamonds, laboratory-grown diamonds and diamond simulants. Other topics covered include the effect of fluorescence on diamond body

Samsung announces availability of Galaxy Z Fold2 5G in Oman

Samsung Gulf Electronics announced that the highly anticipated Galaxy Z Fold2 5G is now available for purchase from Samsung stores and authorised online and offline retail stores across Oman. The latest addition to the foldable category has generated widespread attention in the build-up to its official launch.

Now that Samsung's newest iteration has arrived, consumers finally have the opportunity to explore the many next-generation tools and features that seamlessly integrate to enhance the Galaxy ecosystem and empower users personally and professionally.

"At Samsung, we are delighted that the period of patient anticipation among Galaxy enthusiasts for this ground-breaking device is finally over," said Osman Albora, senior director – Mobile Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics.

"We are certain that the Galaxy Z Fold2 5G will expand the popularity of its predecessors and ultimately overtake them due to the various upgrades and features that have been engineered into this smartphone. Delivering innovations that bring new experiences to consumers was at the forefront of every stage of the design process. We look forward to witnessing the impact of the Galaxy Z Fold2 5G on the smartphone market over the coming months as it elevates user experiences to amazing heights."

The Galaxy Z Fold2 offers ultimate productivity by combining the portability and flexibility of a smartphone with the screen size of a tablet, as per feedback and recommendations from customers. Whether folded or unfolded, the premium design and futuristic capabilities perfectly complement the dynamic lifestyles of the modern consumer. Ensuring a mobile experience like no other, the Galaxy Z Fold2 5G boosts creativity, enhances viewing and interaction on every occasion, and takes gaming to a whole new level.

Stylish look and world-class design

Introducing consumers to a product that caters to needs and demands of today's dynamic lifestyles was at the forefront of every stage of the development process.

Through this vision, Samsung has succeeded in delivering a smartphone that provides an elegant look and sophisticated feel. The flawless design seamlessly integrates within every other component of the smartphone, with the end result being absolute satisfaction throughout every interaction with the device.

Available in Mystic Black and Mystic Bronze, these two new colour options have not been seen with a smartphone until now, adding to its irresistible demeanor and helping solidify its status as a must-have device.

Increased creativity and gaming prowess

Samsung enthusiasts are always eager to demonstrate their creative skills and enjoy gaming with greater capabilities. And thanks to their recommendations and feedback, the flexible display designed specially for the Galaxy Z Fold 5G is the most advanced ever to be created – simultaneously serving as an immersive theater and incomparable creative workstation and game room.

Whether tackling work-related tasks or playing games on the 5G network, experiences are boosted through the intelligent battery, which can last all day long.

Users are guaranteed to never be interrupted or distracted in their work and play endeavors due to inconvenient loss of power – ensuring productivity and proactivity whenever and wherever required.

Incredible viewing experiences

Greater immersion than ever before is made possible through the Galaxy Z Fold2 5G's 6.2-inch Cover Screen featuring Infinity-O Display and 7.6-inch Main Screen, both of which bring newfound appreciation for viewing experiences.

The combination of Infinity Flex Display and an in-display cutout for the front-facing camera takes users on a cinematic smartphone journey like no other, enabling Samsung lovers to view content with audio and visual capabilities never before witnessed in the foldable category.

Besides the Main Screen featuring a 120Hz default refresh rate to provide smoother scrolling and an enhanced gameplay experience, adaptive refresh rates ranging from 11 to 120Hz simultaneously maximize performance and ensure the battery is saved while using particular apps.

Next-generation Hideaway Hinge

The Galaxy Z Fold2 5G's Hideaway Hinge possesses many of the innovations that were instrumental to the success of its predecessor, but with invaluable upgrades to ensure the device stands out in a league of its own in the foldable category. Because the Galaxy Z Fold2 5G's form factor is entirely new and different, the CAM mechanism has been redesigned with more detents and springs to provide a smooth and stable experience when folding and unfolding the device.

The hinge allows the device to stay open at a range of angles.

The Galaxy Z Fold2 5G is available for purchase at a price of RO798.



Renault Symbol preferred choice for corporates and families

Renault Symbol continues to be the most preferred choice for corporate entities, rent-a-car fleets as well as families. Packed with top-notch technology and innovation, Renault Symbol offers an enjoyable ride, significant power while maintaining low levels of fuel consumption. It is fitted with an automatic gearbox and a 1.6lt 16V engine, placing it among the highest size of engines available on the B Sedan segment.

The compact sedan offers spacious interior with seating for five adults, a 510 litres boot space, and the possibility to increase it up to 1,257lt with the rear bench seat folded. With its excellent design inside and out, combined with low fuel consumption feature, Renault Symbol is loaded with competitive advantages such as roominess, boot space, advanced equipment and engine displacement to make the sedan stand out from the crowd.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "Renault Symbol is a preferred choice for new car buyers and offers outstanding value for money. The Renault Symbol is also a perfect sedan for everyone looking for luxury, status and style.

"It offers a range of advanced technological, comfort and safety features along with higher level of satisfaction during every single journey. The sedan has many pluses that make it popular in Oman where value for money, safety and exterior design are the top selling points."

Renault Symbol also offers plenty of safety features. It is equipped with front driver and passenger airbags, driver seat-belt unlock alarm, ISOFIX attachments for child seats, three points rear seatbelts with three rear headrests in addition to a central locking system and a speed sensitive door lock. It also boasts as standard front fog lights, daytime running lights, and most importantly an Antilock Braking System (ABS).

To top it all, Renault Symbol is available in various colours to satisfy all customer preferences and desires.

It comes with Radio Arkamys 3D Sound CD / MP3 / USB and Bluetooth, steering wheel controls, a cruise control and speed limiter. It is also furnished with an automatic air-conditioning system that was tested to meet the challenges of the region's harsh climate conditions.

The Media Nav multimedia system also gives easy access to highly practical features thanks to its 7" touchscreen: GPS, audio streaming music, as well as access to your phonebook and call history through Bluetooth.

The car in the Renault line-up has been specially designed to meet the needs of customers who want an elegant, spacious, low-maintenance family car.

Modern equipment specification and engine range ensure it has all the ingredients to make it a hit with customers in the region.



BAIC X65 - spacious urban crossover

To make the ownership journey enjoyable, Gulf Great Sands LLC, the exclusive importer of BAIC in Oman, is extending a low EMI on BAIC X65 Basic, the stylish and spacious urban crossover based on SAAB technologies.

Customers can avail as easy monthly instalment of RO80 on BAIC X65 2WD Crossover Basic variant (2.0T, 174 HP 6AT) for six years loan tenure (terms and conditions apply).

A spokesperson for Gulf Great Sands LLC said, "We are delighted to extend these affordable EMI rates on the extraordinary BAIC X65. The BAIC X65 is very stylish and spacious urban crossover embedded with unlimited features which offers the needs of today's car buyers. Demanding attention with its energetic attributes, the attractive SUV is equipped with 2.0lt turbo engine which produces 174hp mated with six speed automatic transmission. The wheel base of 2670 mm offers maximum interior space for comfortable driving experience."

Offering space of an MPV and comfort of a sedan, the 2WD crossover stands out for its stunning design, advanced technology and empowering performance. Ever since its launch in Oman, BAIC X65 has been impressing customers with its performance, features and value for money. Known for its practicality and performance, the urban crossover BAIC X65 comes in two variants - basic and comfort.

The exceptional vehicle offers leading technology with first-class performance. Additionally, it offers smart configuration and safety features to meet requirements of our customers for a high-performance SUV. Apart from remarkable performance and the smart configuration, BAIC X65 has inherited the SAAB safety concept and design criteria of the European luxury brand ensuring that every trip is hassle free.

One of China's top three auto groups, BAIC boasts of 60 years of engineering expertise. The company, which was established



in 1958, has eight major production bases and a cumulative output of 12mn cars. Gulf Great Sands LLC (GGS) is a part of the Bahwan International Group Holding Company (BIGH), an exclusive distributor of BAIC and many other reputed international

automotive brands in Oman.

Low monthly installment

The monthly installment on the basic variant of BAIC X65 is: RO80 on X65 Basic Crossover, 2.0lt Turbo Engine, 174 hp with 6

Speed Automatic Transmission. Monthly instalments are calculated based on 20 per cent down payment at flat rate of interest 3.1 per cent for 72 months period. It is also subject to credit approvals from banks only.

SAAB technologies powered

As the first urban crossover based on SAAB technologies, the key features of BAIC all-new X65 Comfort are 2.0lt Turbo Engine with 174 hp, 6 Speed Automatic Transmission, 17" Alloy wheels, DRL, Panoramic Sunroof, 8" Display Screen, Rear View Camera, Reverse Parking Sensors, Front Side Airbags, Bluetooth, Power Driver seat-ways, Outside rear view mirror-Electric Fold, Leather Seats, Cruise Control, Bluetooth, Paddle shift, Rear AC, 6 Speak-

ers, Electric power steering, ABS+EBD+ESP+TPMS and Rear Wiper.

The X65 crossover Basic grade is also loaded with Exterior features which includes, Sunroof, 17-inch alloy wheels, headlight automatic lights, DRL, roof rail and rear spoiler, tire 225/60 R17 and rear wiper. BAIC X65 has many interior features for driver comfort like keyless entry and push button start, Cruise and Audio controls in steering wheel, Leather seats, six speakers, AUX/USB/MP3 and power window. Safety features include ABS+EBD, HPS, dual airbags, ESP and TPMS, parking sensor, central locking, theft-deterrent alarm system and immobilizer.

The crossover BAIC X65 has European safety standard, Bosch ESP and tyre pressure monitor-

ing system (TPMS) and five-star rating safety level ranked by China New Car Assessment Programme.

European engineering and safety standards

BAIC acquired SAAB (Svenska Aeroplan Aktiebolaget) which is a North European brand from Sweden. At the end of 2009, BAIC Motor took over the SAAB's core assets, including its 9-5/9-3 vehicle platform, turbo engine transmission, R&D, manufacturing and supplier systems. The SAAB unique front wheel drive and steering technology was also inherited by BAIC.

The unique reindeer horn body structure is sourced from SAAB's "Safe Cage" patented technology. The integrity of the

passenger compartment is ensured using collapsible IP beam support design to reduce engine penetration in the passenger compartment.

Gulf Great Sands has a state-of-the-art service centre in Ghala, Muscat, spread over more than 2,900sq m to provide after-sales services to BAIC customers. GGS has already tied up for Periodic Maintenance Services in many cities including Salalah, Sohar, Sur, Nizwa, Ibra and Barka, etc. BAIC offers 5 years or 100,000km manufacturer warranty on all passenger vehicles in Oman.

For more information and to book test drives, call BAIC Oman Toll free number 80050800, WhatsApp on 79005800 or visit our showroom in Wat-tayah.



Webinar held on Thai, Mideast jewellery trade

Thai Trade Centre Dubai under The Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP), Thailand Ministry of Commerce in partnership with The New Jewellery International Group hosted a webinar recently.

"Thailand & Middle East Jewellery Trade: Strengthening the Bond" was the theme of the webinar.

Moderated by Chandu Siroya, vice chairman of Dubai Gold and Jewellery Group and managing director of Siroya Jewels, the webinar featured keynote speakers from Thailand and the Middle East. Dubai Gold and Jewellery Group (DGJG) has a long and

cordial relationship with the Thai jewelry industry and also continually support DITP in various activities over these years.

Panot Punyahotra, DITP director of the Thai Trade Centre in Dubai, opened the webinar by commenting on the special relationship between Thailand and the UAE. The two countries are celebrating 45 years of diplomatic relations.

Punyahotra said, "The UAE is the number one trading partner with Thailand in MENA countries. Some 43 per cent of all jewellery exports to the MENA region is to the UAE."

He also praised the efforts of

the UAE during the COVID-19 period. UAE has sent medical equipment to Thailand and also allowed special flights to repatriate Thai nationals.

Although the 66th edition of the Bangkok Gems and Jewelry Fair (BGJF) had been postponed until February 2021, Punyahotra confirmed that the DITP would be organising a Special Online Exhibition during November 2-4 2020.

He invited gems and jewelry companies from the UAE and the wider MENA region to attend the 66th edition of the BGJF, which will have an emphasis on silver products.

MEDC rearranges overhead lines

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), a member of Nama Group, continues its efforts to rearrange the overhead line service connections of old premises in order to enhance the public safety and ensure the connection points in these houses meet safety standards.

This initiative comes in line with MEDC's obligation to ensure customers safety and protect them against electrical hazards.

In 2019, MEDC modified 2,380 overhead line service connections in Muscat; as part of its plan to accomplish 3,000 installations in 2020, MEDC had already completed 2,770 up to date, bringing the total number of modifications in Muscat governorate to 5,150 connections/houses.

It is worth noting that the overall number of connections targeted exceeds 20,000; MEDC had subcontracted these tasks to qualified contractors to implement old overhead service connections in Muscat governorate over different phases.

MEDC seek homeowners' co-operation for successful completion of this project.



OOC committee reviews upcoming participations

Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) Planning and Following-up Committee held its third meeting this year headed by Mohsen bin Hamad al Masrouri.

It discussed the impotence of reprogramming and scheduling of strategic goals set in light of the amendments made to the dates with sports tournaments being postponed because of COVID-19.

The meeting also focused on the framework of the existing coordination between OOC, federations and sports committees to ensure the continued preparation of national teams in preparation for participating in regional, continental and international tournaments in the next year.

In this context, the committee

reviewed the importance of participating in these sessions in an appropriate manner after knowing what is available for the teams in terms of qualifying competitions within the plans and objectives set by the sports federations and committees.

The committee said it should be notified about the modified dates of the courses that are supposed to be held in the current year but will be postponed to the next year.

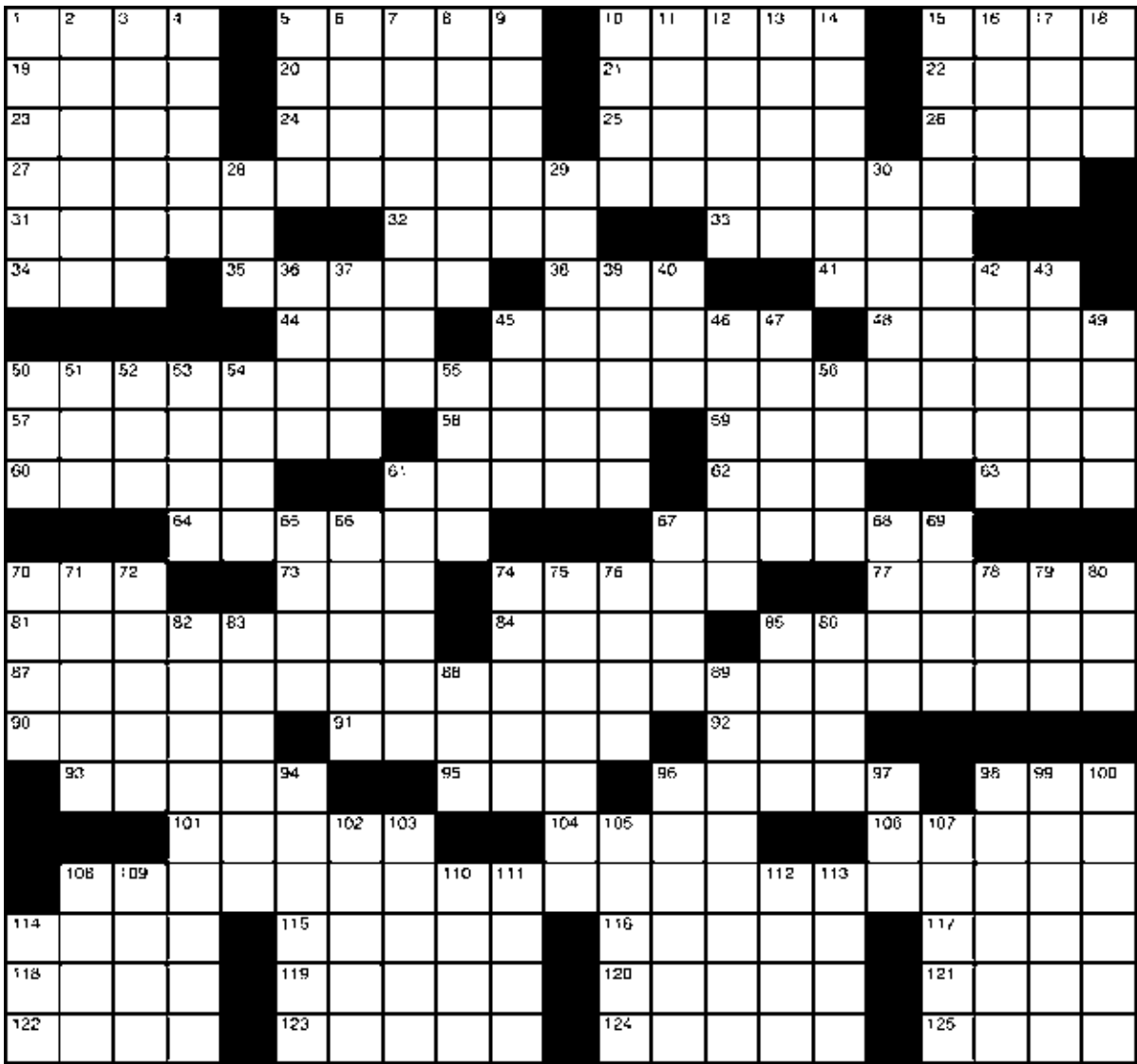
The upcoming events include the 32nd Olympic Games (Tokyo 2021), the Asian Beach Games (Sanya - China), the third GCC games (Kuwait), in addition to the fifth Islamic Solidarity Games (Turkey), and Indoor Asian Games (Thailand), and finally the Asian Youth Games

(China).

The committee raised the appropriate recommendations to OOC Board of Directors to confirm participation in the aforementioned sports tournaments in accordance with the technical standards and principles established and approved for external participation.

It also highlighted the need to study and analyse the technical levels of the players to implement the plans precisely as a result of the exceptional circumstances. Also discussed was conditions available to compensate for the partial interruption of the training of national teams within the framework of a joint work programme and close co-operation with the sports federations and committees.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Equestrian pastime
5 Gold coin of yore
10 Banana leafstalk fiber
15 Showed up
19 Great Barrier Island
20 Literary Arden
21 Fiddler and pianist
22 Melville title
23 Courts
24 Relative of the serape
25 Comes down hard
26 Broadway's "King"
27 Start of 4-line topical verse
31 Beethoven's "Fur ____"
32 Learning method
33 Fabled hare
34 Poetry's rose
35 Hangar area
38 "Downtown Abbey's" network
41 ____ dig: beneath one's dignity
44 Campaigned
45 Lao-tse follower
48 Symbols of hardness

- 50 Second line of the verse
57 Tot's aversion
58 City on the Oka
59 Coop males
60 Greek theater
61 Nourishes
62 Wright wing?
63 Collection
64 Delay
67 Scarab
70 Narrator of "Great Expectations"
73 Charlemagne's domain, for short
74 Double quartet
77 ____ the hills
81 Cordial flavoring
84 Herring's cousin
85 "Amadeus" character
87 Third line of the verse
90 Five Dynasties capital
91 New Testament book
92 Attila was one
93 Muscular
95 Samovar
96 More extensive
98 Elect. unit
101 Challenges
104 Henry James biographer
106 Author ____

- Calvino
108 Last line of the verse
114 Composer ____
Stravinsky
115 Singer Potter
116 Greek meeting place
117 Not fooled by
118 Oaf
119 Made slippery
120 French income
121 Decorticate
122 Desires
123 "Pagliacci" heroine
124 Guest of poetry
125 "Ring" goddess
DOWN
1 Talc
2 "Lion in Winter" star
3 Shooting star
4 Hot spots
5 Tryout disc
6 Sloth
7 Face
8 Director's call
9 U. ____ of the UN
10 Oppositionist
11 Borscht base
12 Re space
13 Jazz group
14 St. Francis's birthplace
15 Fadeproof

- 16 In the center of
17 That 70's ring
18 Long, long time
28 Biblical affirmative
29 Adulterated
30 Sharapova's's forte
36 Hyde Park sight
37 Country balladeer
Collin
39 Lawn game
40 Twice LI
42 Covers with frost
43 Tow, in Turin
45 Fatigue
46 Main or Wall
47 Oarlock
49 Before emic or olic
50 Blood group system
51 "Old ____": Satan
52 HST follower
53 "Believe ____ Not"
54 ____ qua non
55 Moved soil
56 Blockhead
61 San Joaquin Valley town
65 Van Gogh's brother
66 Enthusiasm
67 Fictional Adam
68 Relax
69 Writer/director
Kazan
70 Trail
71 ____ water:

- threatened
72 Watts's instrument
74 Coveted award
75 TV choice
76 Seamen
78 Coming-out girl
79 Julio's hoop
80 Knightly title
82 Flags
83 Group of nine
85 Poker type
86 Topnotch
88 Ostrich's kin
89 Capital of Assam
94 Knight's nemesis
96 Stuck
97 Cruise port
98 Memorable comic
Gilda
99 On cloud nine
100 Society of Jesus founder
102 Eagle's perch: var.
103 Burn
105 "Wreck of the Mary ____"
107 Figure of speech
108 Give the wolfish eye
109 Both hands up time
110 Served perfectly
111 Mother of Castor
112 Ionian gulf
113 Buddy or Bugs
114 Far from cordial

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

As an energetic Aries, you don't often know when it's time to stop. Today's skies make it easy to recognise that you're in need of recharge, as the moon floats through blissed-out Pisces. This helps you unwind and reconnect with yourself.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Don't miss your opportunity to shine. Venus spends the day receiving a supportive assist from Mars—helping to draw people to your self-expression. While externally you seem to glow, internally you may be aware of a deep sensitivity bubbling up.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're likely to feel torn between two modes of action. On one hand, the Pisces moon has you wanting to stay close to home and take restorative action. On the other, energetic Mars pairs up with Venus, boosting the natural vibrancy in your self-expression.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Taurus people instinctively know how to put their head down and plough through life—whatever the circumstance. Today's skies remind you to look up and reconnect with the people in your life who care about you, as the moon dips into Pisces.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's easier to share the more vulnerable side of yourself. The moon floats into your opposite sign of Pisces, centering your attention around partnership matters. Luna's sweet link to your ruler, Mercury, opens up the channels for communication.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

As a Capricorn, it can be difficult for you to be honest and direct about your feelings. Today's skies work to unlock your self-expression through the written or spoken word, as the emotionally-rich Pisces moon aligns with Mercury.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Get after it today, Gemini! You're at your most public and career-oriented time of the month, so try to devote some energy toward getting ahead with your ambitions. You can appeal to a larger audience and express your feelings.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today's cosmos make it easy to get down to business. The moon treks into Pisces and eases herself into a supportive alignment with Mercury. It's time for a well-balanced union of head and heart. Exercise and productive action will keep you afloat today.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Try to spend the morning devoting some energy to your workflow. The moon happily floats through Pisces and aligns with agile Mercury on her path, helping form a steady flow of communication and making it easier to maintain your focus.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The universe is touching on your potential. The moon wanders through Pisces, pushing you to get out of your routine and into uncharted territory. Luna's link to Mercury makes it easy to express yourself and activate your creative potential.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Don't be shy about asserting yourself in the workplace. Your natural magnetism is increased due to your ruler, Mars, making a sweet connection to appealing Venus. Speak with your superiors about getting ahead or involving yourself in a career project.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You tend to give to others without thinking. Today's skies focus their energy on recharging your personal needs and re-affirming your boundaries. As the moon slips into your sign, it's easier to assert yourself, and make right connections in the workplace.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1) Ecology deals with?

- a. Birds
b. Cell formation
c. Relation between organisms and their environment
d. Tissues

2) Filaria is caused by?

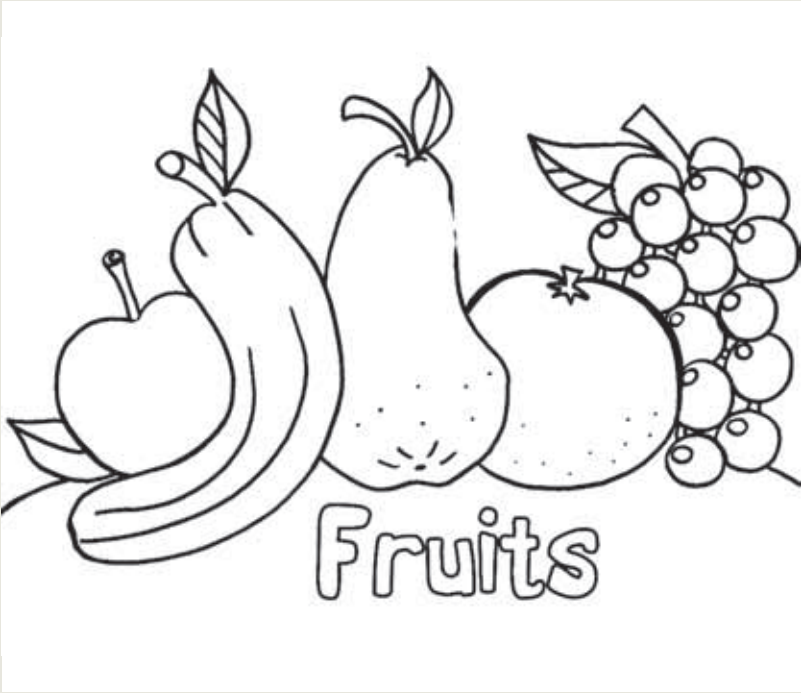
- a. Bacteria
b. Mosquito
c. Protozoa
d. Virus

3) Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) was established in?

- a. 1958
b. 1957
c. 1956
d. 1955

Answers: 1: c 2: b 3: b

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

BOGGLER

V	K	A	B
S	O	R	S
V	E	R	O
Y	I	T	O

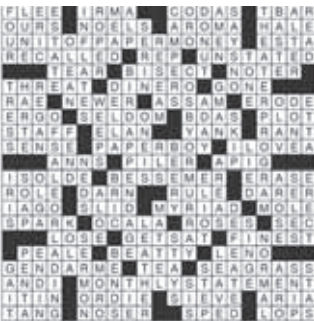
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (SEPTEMBER 27)



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



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Bottas claims ninth career win after Hamilton penalty



Mercedes' Finnish driver Valtteri Bottas acknowledges the applause during the podium ceremony after the Formula One Russian Grand Prix in Sochi on Sunday

FORMULA ONE RUSSIAN GRAND PRIX

Sochi, Russia - Valtteri Bottas took full advantage of a troubled day for his Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton to claim the ninth win of his career with a measured drive to victory in Sunday's incident-packed Russian Grand Prix.

The Finn swooped to take second place at the start and inherited the lead when the runaway series leader and six-time champion took an extended pit-stop to serve two five-second penalties for irregular pre-race practice starts.

A disgruntled Hamilton, aiming to win and equal Michael Schumacher's record of 91 Grand Prix triumphs, re-joined in 11th place, but fought back to finish

third behind Bottas and Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

His second win in Russia and second this season reinvigorated Bottas' challenge for the drivers' title and reduced Hamilton's lead to 44 points.

Sergio Perez came home fourth for Racing Point ahead of Renault's Daniel Ricciardo, who had to take a five second penalty for an infringement, and Charles Leclerc, who was sixth for Ferrari. Esteban Ocon was seventh for Renault ahead of local hero Daniil Kvyat and his Alpha Tauri team-mate Pierre Gasly and Alex Albon, who was also given a five-second penalty, in the second Red Bull.

Hamilton did not want to talk about his penalty. "It doesn't matter. It's done now. I'll take the

It's very nice to get a win. It's been a while! I need to try and keep the momentum. I've managed to squeeze a few points over Lewis

VALTTERI BOTTAS

points and move on, but congratulations to Valtteri.

"A big thank-you to the fans here this weekend - spasio," he said. "It's not the greatest day, but it is what it is..."

Bottas said: "It's very nice to get a win. It's been a while! I need to try and keep the momentum. I've managed to squeeze a few points over Lewis, but there's still quite a few races to go so you never know. I'll keep pushing. I won't give up."

Verstappen said: "We split the Mercedes again so that is good - and we can be happy with that."

All three drivers wore their racing overalls on the podium after the race, obeying the latest revised rules from the sport's ruling body not to wear any items carrying 'political' messages. Hamilton had made a solid start from his record 96th pole and fended off Bottas, who had passed Verstappen's Red Bull.

radio. "Those starts, going to the grid, we got five seconds for each - out of position," he was told.

"Where is that in the rule book?" said a disgruntled Hamilton. "Anything to slow me down, but it's ok. I can take it."

Hamilton was also given two more penalty points on his racing licence and, with a total of ten in 12 months, moved within two of an automatic one-race ban. He reacted by pushing to open a 2.5 seconds lead on Bottas before pitting on lap 17 for hard tyres and his combined ten-seconds penalty. "This is ridiculous, man," said a disgruntled Hamilton before re-joining 11th.

At the front, Bottas reeled off fastest laps to open a clear lead before pitting on lap 27, retaining his advantage ahead of Leclerc's Ferrari with Verstappen, having pitted earlier in third. By lap 32, Bottas was in command with a 12 seconds lead over Verstappen and Hamilton up to third after slicing through the field, many of whom had pitted.

The charge had given entertainment to the 30,000 spectators, the first significant crowd at a sports event in the COVID-19 era. With 20 laps to go, he was 22 seconds behind Bottas and ten off the Dutchman, but his prospects of a 91st win had gone. The other record-chaser Kimi Raikkonen finished 14th for Alfa Romeo on the day when he equalled Rubens Barrichello record of 322 race starts.

AFP



DRIVER'S CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS (TOP-TEN)

1	Lewis Hamilton	(205 points)
2	Valtteri Bottas	(161)
3	Max Verstappen	(128)
4	Lando Norris	(65)
5	Alexander Albon	(64)
6	Daniel Ricciardo	(63)
7	Charles Leclerc	(57)
8	Lance Stroll	(57)
9	Sergio Perez	(56)
10	Pierre Gasly	(45)



Quartararo takes Catalonia victory, goes top of world championship

Barcelona, Spain - France's Fabio Quartararo produced a thrilling and perfect ride to claim a resounding victory at the Catalonia MotoGP on Sunday, his third of the season which sends him top of the world championship standings.

Joan Mir came through to take second and is now eight points behind Quartararo in the standings while Alex Rins completed the podium.

The race began in dramatic fashion with Andrea Dovizioso, who led the title race by a single point from the Frenchman and Maverick Vinales, taken out in the opening lap after tangling with Johann Zarco.

Quartararo, on a Yamaha, won the opening two races of the season but has struggled since then, failing to reach the podium in the last five races. But the Frenchman was back to his best in Barcelona. "The race was very hard for me," said Quartararo after the race. "I went step by step and I am very happy."

Starting from pole, alongside the fellow Yamahas of Franco Morbidelli and Valentino Rossi, he set a fierce pace which put the pressure on the field, especially those trying to close him down.

One who suffered was Rossi who had taken advantage of a wobble by Morbidelli with 11 laps to go to move into second spot. Two laps later, however, trying to make up ground on the flying Quartararo, the 41 year old slid into the gravel on turn two, his race over. Morbidelli could not hold off Mir who swept past him with two laps to go. He then lost a place on the podium as Rins, who started down in 13th, put the gloss on an excellent race.

Quartararo heads the standings with 108 points, eight clear of Mir.

AFP

Saudi's Al Ahli and Pakhtakor reach quarters



Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli's players celebrate after defeating UAE's Shabab Al Ahli in Al Wakrah, Qatar, on Saturday

ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Doha, Qatar - Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia defeated Shabab Al Ahli Dubai 4-3 on penalties to progress to the quarterfinals of the AFC Asian Champions League on Saturday.

They were joined in the last-eight by Uzbek giants Pakhtakor, who bounced back from a goal down to edge out Iran's Esteghlal 2-1 in a late match.

After 120 minutes of frenetic action produced a 1-1 draw at the air-conditioned Al Janoub Stadium, it was twice runners-up Al

Ahli who proved lucky in the shootout which saw Shabab Al Ahli's Ahmed Khalil and Abdullah al Naqbi misfiring from the spot. Talismanic Syrian striker Omar al Somah had scored the equaliser for the Saudi side from a penalty in the second half, but watched in agony as his shot hit the post in the tie-breaker.

But that didn't matter as Naqbi of Shabab also missed, sparking celebrations in the Al Ahli camp bench.

Earlier, Shabab Al Ahli's Azizjon Ganiev tested the Saudis

with a fine run from the right in the 26th minute but his fine effort was thwarted by goalkeeper Mohamed al Owais. Owais foiled another Ganiev effort a minute later but was not lucky a third time as the Uzbek midfielder fired a long-ranger.

After receiving a pass from Mohamed Juma in the 28th minute, Ganiev took some time to line up his shot before unleashing a powerful drive from 27 yards that took a slight deflection from Abdulbaset al Hindi and beat Owais all ends up.

Ganiev, however, went from hero to villain early in the second half by bringing down Muwashar in the box and Somah made no mistake from the spot to restore parity. Both sides missed several chances after that with the match eventually going to penalties.

Also at the Al Janoub Stadium, Pakhtakor fought their way past Esteghlal after Ali Karimi had put the Iranians ahead with a curling free-kick from just outside the box in the 32nd minute after Mehdi Ghaedi was fouled by Khojiaqbar Alidjonov. The enterprising Uzbeks got back into the match in style, Serbian striker Dragan Ceran producing a strong header from close off a cross from Alidjanov two minutes before half-time.

And it took them less than two minutes after the break to get ahead, Swiss forward Eren Derdiyok drilling a half-volley from just inside the box following a great move featuring a series of passes on the right flank.

Late in the match, Esteghlal had their last chance to restore parity, but Malian forward Cheick Diabate inexplicably sent the ball wide after beating his marker and having the goal all to himself.

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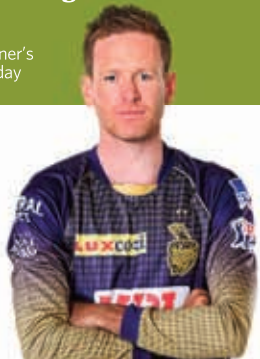


IPL 2020

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I didn't have to tell [Shubman] Gill a great deal to be honest, beautiful to watch. He's good kid, very hungry to learn and I would love to bat with him once again.

Eoin Morgan,
Kolkata batsman, on his batting partner's man-of-the-match display, on Saturday







TODAY'S MATCH

DUBAI, 6PM



ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE vs MUMBAI INDIANS

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
DC	2	2	0	0	4	+1.100
RR	2	2	0	0	4	+0.615
KKIP	3	1	2	0	2	+1.498
MI	2	1	1	0	2	+0.993
KKR	2	1	1	0	2	-0.767
CSK	3	1	2	0	2	-0.840
RCB	2	1	1	0	2	-2.175
SRH	2	0	2	0	0	-0.730

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

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

TEWATIA: GAME CHANGER

Rajasthan Royals complete highest run chase in IPL history; Agarwal's ton in vain

Sharjah, UAE - As it unfolded, it felt like a match that defied logic in every way possible. But by the time the Rajasthan Royals were done mowing down a target of 224 - an IPL record - the scorecard reflected one bit of cold, hard T20 logic: the team that hits more sixes wins.

Kings XI Punjab hit 11 sixes - seven coming off the bat of Mayank Agarwal, who made a scintillating 106 off 50 balls - and the Royals hit 18.

Sanju Samson hit seven of those sixes while scoring a second successive half-century for the first time in his IPL career. His 42-ball 85 was more reward for the intense training he did during cricket's COVID-19 hiatus, which enabled him to take his natural ball-striking ability and turn it into an instrument of almost scientific precision.

Samson put on 81 for the second wicket with Steven Smith in just 40 balls, putting the Royals well in touch with their asking rate.

They then promoted Rahul Tewatia - their only left-hander - to No 4, and the move was beginning to look like one of the most ill-judged tactical interventions in IPL history when he struggled to hit the ball off the square and crawled to eight off 19 balls. But the six-hitting ability that he possesses came into

view just when the Royals seemed out of it. Tewatia smacked Sheldon Cottrell for five sixes in a match-turning, match-defining 18th over, and an improbable 51 off 18 balls turned into a far more straightforward 21 off 12.

While Shami got Robin Uthappa out on the first ball of the penultimate over, Jofra Archer hammered two sixes off the next two deliveries before Tewatia hit one more to notch up his fifty, bringing bring down the winning target to two runs.

Although he got out on the final ball of the 19th over and Muralugan Ashwin bowled a dot and took a wicket off Riyan Parag,

Curran hit a four on the third ball of the final over to seal a sensational four-wicket win, creating a record for the highest successful run-chase in the IPL history.

Earlier, put in to bat, Punjab were off to a flying start as Mayank Agarwal and KL Rahul pretty much matched one another shot for shot. The two good friends were in for some fun and it was Rajasthan who wore the brunt of it as the duo marched towards sixty at the end of powerplay, with Agarwal and Rahul scoring 29 and 26 runs, respectively.

Punjab continued to score at a rapid pace. While Agarwal got a reprieve in the seventh over de-

spite a fine fielding effort from Riyan Parag near the boundary rope, he continued to attack, hitting two sixes and a four in the next over bowled by Rahul Tewatia.

The merry ways continued for Agarwal as he then went after his Karnataka teammate - Shreyas Gopal - in the ninth over, slamming two sixes to bring up his fifty and team's hundred.

While Rahul completed his fifty in the 12th over, Agarwal had moved past 80. The two, then completed the 150-run stand in the 14th over.

Agarwal, who had scored 89 during their first game against Delhi Capitals, then completed

his first IPL ton, hitting the final delivery of the 15th over for four.

Royals, though managed to stop the Agarwal-Rahul juggernaut over the course of the next three overs.

While Tom Curran dismissed Agarwal after his 50-ball 106-run knock, which included ten fours and seven sixes, Ankit Rajpoot got Rahul out for 69 on the final ball of the 18th over.

However, Punjab still managed to score 29 off the last two overs as Nicholas Pooran hit an unbeaten 25 and Glenn Maxwell was not out on 13 to take them to 223 for two, the highest team score in the IPL 2020.

Agencies

SCOREBOARD

KINGS XI PUNJAB

KL Rahul	c Gopal b Rajpoot	69 (54)
M Agarwal	c Samson b Curran	106 (50)
G Maxwell	not out	13 (9)
N Pooran	not out	25 (48)
Extras	(b 1, nb 1, w 8)	10

TOTAL: 223 for two

Fall of wickets: 1-183, 2-194

Bowling: J Unadkat 3-0-30-0, A Rajpoot 4-0-39-1, J Archer 4-0-46-0, S Gopal 4-0-44-0, R Tewatia 1-0-19-0, T Curran 4-0-44-1

RAJASTHAN ROYALS

J Buttler	c Khan b Cottrell	4 (7)
S Smith	c Shami b Neesham	50 (27)
S Samson	c Rahul b Shami	85 (42)
R Tewatia	c Agarwal b Shami	53 (31)
R Uthappa	c Pooran b Shami	9 (4)
J Archer	not out	13 (3)
R Parag	b Ashwin	0 (2)
T Curran	not out	4 (1)
Extras	(b 1, lb 1, w 6)	8

TOTAL: 226 for six in 19.3 overs

Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-100, 3-161, 4-203, 5-222, 6-222

Bowling: S Cottrell 3-0-52-1, M Shami 4-0-53-3, R Bishnoi 4-0-34-0, J Neesham 4-0-40-1, M Ashwin 13-0-16-1, G Maxwell 3-0-29-0

Rohit: Learnt the art of valuing teammates from Ponting



A file photo of Australian great Ricky Ponting (left) and Rohit Sharma

New Delhi, India - Rohit Sharma, one of the most successful captains in the IPL, says he learnt the art of making teammates feel important from Australian great Ricky Ponting.

The India opener has led IPL side Mumbai Indians to a record four titles after being appointed

Ponting's successor in the 2013 season of the Twenty20 tournament.

"I want to make sure the ten guys who are playing and the other players on the bench, I should be talking to them and make them feel important," Rohit, who has also captained

India in the absence of regular skipper Virat Kohli, told India Today TV.

"And that is something that I learned from Ricky Ponting."

Ponting, currently coach of Delhi Capitals, stepped down as captain of Mumbai midway into the sixth IPL edition and Rohit

eased into the role to help the team clinch its first title.

The 33 year old Rohit led by example with his high-scoring role as opener with Mumbai winning three more IPL titles in 2015, 2017 and 2019.

It was last year that Mumbai trumped three-time IPL champions Chennai Super Kings, led by MS Dhoni, in the final to emerge as one the most successful T20 franchises across the cricketing world.

Rohit, who has played 224 ODIs, 32 Tests and 108 T20 matches for the national side, believes in giving youngsters freedom to perform.

"Those players will come out good or will be at their best when they are not under pressure," said Rohit.

"When there is not too much talking going on about them in the squad. They get to know all these things."

AFP



MODERN EXCHANGE

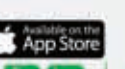
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Wawrinka knocks Murray out, Halep sails into second round



Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka returns the ball to Britain's Andy Murray during their men's singles first-round match on Sunday



Simona Halep celebrates after winning her first round match

Paris, France - Former champion Stan Wawrinka brushed aside Andy Murray 6-1, 6-3, 6-2 in the marquee match-up on the opening day of Roland Garros on Sunday.

Wawrinka, the 16th seed who took the title in 2015, had also come out on top when the two last met in Paris in a five-set semifinal in 2017. Murray, who needed a wild card to play in Paris this year, was competing in a clay court tournament for

the first time since that clash.

Wawrinka fired 42 winners past the former world No 1 and will take on Dominik Koepfer of Germany for a place in the last-32.

The Grand Slam got underway in the 'ridiculous' chill and damp of Paris on Sunday with former world No 1 Victoria Azarenka walking off court, complaining that it was 'too cold' to play.

The French Open, which was

pushed back from its traditional May-June slot due to the coronavirus, began in steady drizzle and temperatures struggling to reach 10°C. It was all too much for Belarusian Azarenka who left the almost deserted Court Suzanne Lenglen after just three games against Danka Kovinic of Montenegro.

"I don't see the point of sitting on the court when it's eight degrees," fumed two-time major winner Azarenka.

On court she complained: "We are sitting like ducks. It's too cold, it's eight degrees, I live in Florida. This is getting a little ridiculous. I'm not waiting," she said before storming off to seek shelter.

She returned to complete a 6-1, 6-2 win, playing in black leggings and a tracksuit top.

"Does it increase the risk of players getting injured? Absolutely, I think that it does," she added ahead of a week in

which the cold, wet conditions are forecast to continue.

There were no such problems, however, for top seed and former champion Simona Halep who swept into the second round with a 6-4, 6-0 victory over Spanish world No 70 Sara Sorribes Tormo. Playing under the new roof of Court Philippe Chatrier, second-ranked Halep, who won the 2018 title, trailed 2-4 but claimed the final ten games to progress in 82 minutes.

On Court Simonne Mathieu, Belgian 16th seed Elise Mertens and Russia's Margarita Gasparyan twice left the arena after also halting play due to the slippery conditions.

Also, Venus Williams said she was 'not looking forward yet' to 2021 after suffering a third successive first round exit with a loss in straight sets to Slovakia's Anna Karolina Schmiedlova.

The 40 year old Venus, runner-up at Roland Garros to

sister Serena in 2002, lost 4-6, 4-6 to an opponent who snapped a 12-match Grand Slam losing streak.

It marked Venus' third first-round defeat in a row at a Slam after exiting the US Open and Australian Open at the same stage.

Italian teenager Jannik Sinner had the honour of claiming the first ever win under the roof, demolishing Belgian 11th seed David Goffin 7-5, 6-0, 6-3.

The 19 year old Sinner reeled off 11 games in succession as he defeated Goffin for the second time in as many meetings.

Another early winner was Sebastian Korda, the son of 1992 Roland Garros runner-up and 1998 Australian Open champion Petr Korda, who saw off Andreas Seppi of Italy 6-2, 4-6, 6-3, 6-3.

SEEDED PLAYER RESULTS

(x denotes seeded player):

Men first round: Taylor Fritz (x27) beat Tomas Machac 7-5, 7-6, (7-2), 1-6, 2-6, 6-3; Marco Cecchinato beat Alex De Minaur (x25) 7-6 (11-9), 6-4, 6-0; John Isner (x21) beat Elliot Benchetrit 6-4, 6-1, 6-3; Kei Nishikori beat Dan Evans (x32) 1-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7-3), 1-6, 6-4.

Women first round: Maria Sakkari (x20) beat Ajla Tomljanovic 6-0, 7-5; Ekaterina Alexandrova (x27) beat Maddison Inglis 6-3, 6-3; Elise Mertens (x16) beat Margarita Gasparyan 6-2, 6-3.

AFP

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Vardy treble stuns Man City

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Manchester, UK - Jamie Vardy hit a hat-trick as Leicester exposed Manchester City's defensive flaws with a stunning 5-2 win in their English Premier League (EPL) game at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola's side went ahead after just four minutes thanks to Riyad Mahrez's thunderous strike. But that was as good as it got for City as Vardy tore Guardiola's creaky defence to pieces with his pace and superb movement. Kyle Walker's foul on Vardy led to a penalty that the striker converted himself before the break.

Vardy struck again with a fine finish in the second half and net-

ted another spot-kick after being fouled by Eric Garcia. James Maddison's brilliant strike added Leicester's fourth before Nathan Ake scored his first City goal.

Youri Tielemans' penalty made it five, sealing Leicester's third successive victory and leaving City bruised after their most embarrassing league defeat under Guardiola since a 4-0 loss at Everton in 2017. For the first time ever, Guardiola saw one of his teams concede five goals in his 686th game as a manager with City, Bayern Munich and Barcelona.

It was the first time City had conceded five goals in a home league game since 2003 against Arsenal.

Leeds blunt Blades

Patrick Bamford scored a dramatic late winner as EPL new boys Leeds snatched a 1-0 victory at Yorkshire rivals Sheffield United on Sunday. Marcelo Bielsa's promoted side earned their second successive league win thanks to Bamford's header with just two minutes left.

'Nonsense' penalty

Newcastle manager Steve Bruce said the stoppage time penalty that allowed his side to snatch a 1-1 draw at Tottenham on Sunday was a 'nonsense' in another EPL clash decided by the controversial interpretation of the handball rule.

Spurs had just Lucas Moura's

goal to show for a dominant first-half display and were made to pay when Eric Dier was penalised after a VAR review as the ball brushed his arm in challenge with Andy Carroll.

Callum Wilson converted the penalty with Newcastle's first shot on target, prompting Jose Mourinho to march down the tunnel before the full-time whistle had been blown.

Harry Kane was the creator when Spurs did finally break the deadlock on 25 minutes as

Moura bundled home his first EPL goal since December from Kane's low cross.

Hugo Lloris got a hand to Wilson's penalty, but could not keep it out.

Chelsea fightback

Earlier on Saturday night, free-spending Chelsea came from 0-3 down to salvage a 3-3 draw at newly-promoted West Brom.

West Brom's Callum Robinson pounced on errors from Marcos Alonso and Thiago Silva to fire twice beyond Willy Caballero, who replaced Kepa Arrizabalaga in the Chelsea goal. Kyle Bartley then made it 3-0.

Chelsea came up with second-half fightback as Mason Mount scored off a long-range effort. Substitute Callum Hudson-Odoi then swept home 20 minutes from time and Tammy Abraham secured a point in stoppage time with an equaliser.

AFP



Leicester's Jamie Vardy celebrates after scoring Man City on Sunday

Bayern's 23-match winning streak ends

GERMAN LEAGUE

Berlin, Germany - European champions Bayern Munich suffered their first defeat since December when their 23-match winning run was ended by a shock 1-4 German League (Bundesliga) defeat at Hoffenheim on Sunday.

Hoffenheim, the current league leaders, raced into a 2-0 lead with early goals by defender Ermin Bicakcic and striker Munas Dabbur.

Although Joshua Kimmich gave Bayern a lifeline just before the break, Croatia international striker Andrej Kramaric netted a second-half goal and converted a penalty to seal the victory.

It was the first time Bayern have lost under head coach Hansi Flick in any competition since going down 1-2 to Borussia Moenchengladbach on December 7, 2019.

Elsewhere, Schalke said on Sunday they have sacked head coach David Wagner.

Other results: French League: Saturday: Marseille 1 Metz 1, Saint-Etienne 0 Rennes 3; **Sunday:** Bordeaux 0 Nice 0, Nimes 1 Lens 1, Monaco 3 Strasbourg 2, Dijon 2 Montpellier 2, Angers 3 Brest 2.

Scottish Premiership: Sunday: Motherwell 1 Rangers 5, Celtic 3 Hibernian 0, Ross County 0 Aberdeen 3.

AFP



Bayern Munich captain Manuel Neuer (right) consoles defender David Alaba after Sunday's shock 1-4 defeat at Hoffenheim

Suarez scores twice off bench as Atletico trounce Granada

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Luis Suarez scored two and set up another in a sensational 20-minute debut for Atletico Madrid on Sunday as his new team started their Spanish League (La Liga) season with a thumping 6-1 victory over Granada.

Suarez set up a goal two minutes after coming on as a substitute, his sumptuous pass finished off by Marcos Llorente, before scoring himself with a powerful header at the back post.

He then added another in injury time following up his own shot to make it six for rampant Atletico at the Wanda Metropolitan. Diego Costa had earlier given the home team the lead. Angel Correa and the impressive



Luis Suárez (right) celebrates with Saúl Íñiguez after scoring on Sunday

Joao Felix, who was perhaps the best player on the pitch put Granada out of sight, before Suarez stole the show.

Ramos nets winner

Earlier on Saturday night, Sergio Ramos scored a late

penalty as Real Madrid came from behind to scrape a 3-2 win against ten-man Real Betis, their first Liga victory of the season.

Betis were ahead at half-time after two goals in two minutes from Aissa Mandi and William Carvalho overturned Fede Valverde's opener for Madrid.

But Betis defender Emerson, scored an own-goal and then was sent off for knocking over Luka Jovic. VAR again intervened in Madrid's favour in the 82nd minute as Marc Bartra was adjudged to have cleared with his arm, leaving Ramos to score.

Other results: Saturday: Elche 0 Real Sociedad 3; **Sunday:** Eibar 1 Athletic Bilbao 2, Osasuna 1 Levante 3.

AFP



BMW SEES GROWTH IN CHINA
Germany's BMW expects car sales to grow this year in China as consumption revives from COVID-19. Jochen Goller, head of BMW China, said the carmaker expects 'single digit growth'

BUSINESS

Bank Nizwa signs financing deal with Nakheel Oman

The RO10.4mn strategic investment will boost the post-harvesting activities of the One Million Date Palm Plantation Project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Nizwa has signed a strategic financing deal worth RO10.4mn with Nakheel Oman Development Company. The Musharaka financing from Bank Nizwa is slated to be used for the development and construction of the dates processing industrial complex in the wilayat of Nizwa. This strategic investment in dates processing industrial complex will boost the post-harvesting activities of the sultanate's One Million Date Palm Plantation Project.

The transaction signing ceremony was attended by Sheikh Khalid al Khalili, chairman of Bank Nizwa, Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and R Narasimhan, general manager of wholesale banking at Bank Nizwa whereas from Nakheel Oman Development Company the ceremony was attended by Dr Saif Rashid Saif al Shaqsi, chairman, Sheikh Rashid Saif al Mardhoof al Saadi, vice-chairman and Ali Said Ali al Araiimi,



general manager of Nakheel Oman Development Company. Khalili said, "As one of the leading Islamic finance institutions in Oman, Bank Nizwa will continue to invest in projects that not only promise great returns but also positively impact the communities we operate in. The financing of Nakheel Oman Development Company is a testa-

ment to our commitment to the principles of Islamic finance, and Bank Nizwa will play a significant role in supporting the government's diversification plan as well as its endeavours on food security. Under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, we are confident that the One Million Date Palm Plantation Project will lead to the eco-

nomical and social well-being of our country." In 2009, an announcement was made for planting of one million date palm trees in Oman. The Diwan of Royal Court initiated and now manages this project through the Directorate General of Million Date Palm Plantation Project. Nakheel Oman Development Company

was established by the Diwan of Royal Court represented by the Directorate General of Million Date Palm Plantation Project and Oman National Investments Development Company (Tanmia) to invest in an array of endeavours related to date palm products and by-products including post-harvesting activities, logistics, marketing and retail.

Dr Shaqsi, chairman of Nakheel Oman Development Company, said, "The development of a national strategic framework on Date Palm Management and Sustainability is critical to the long-term economic and cultural vision of Oman. Omani dates are a benchmark in taste and quality, and we are content to have Bank Nizwa join us on the journey of continuing Oman's rich heritage, sustaining its natural assets and building a strong path to progression. The project not only underpins economic growth, but also supports the people of Oman by preserving their culture, legacy, and generating employment opportunities."



Tanweer develops RO23mn worth of projects in SEZD

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), a member of Nama Group, is making significant efforts to develop and upgrade the electrical network infrastructure in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZD) at a total cost of RO22.6mn.

Tanweer's projects in SEZD include; transformer stations, electrical networks in the areas for heavy and light industries, fish industries and exhibition areas, according to a press statement issued by the company.

The company is also upgrading the power station in South Duqm and Duqm North Switching Substation 1. In addition, Tanweer is currently supervising the construction of HV distribution

network with a total route length of 67km spread across SEZD planned areas. These projects contribute significantly in the development of Duqm's electrical infrastructure to meet the current and future electricity demand in the area.

Tanweer recently completed the construction of the primary substations for the Port of Duqm Industrial Lands and Duqm North Switching Station 2. The company is currently in the final commissioning tests stage to complete the primary substation in the light and medium industries area, which will feed the Karwa project and the Chinese Industrial City area. Tanweer's regional office in SEZD is also constructing extension projects in planned areas with a total cost of RO1mn.

Raysut Cement announces new appointments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's largest cement manufacturer, Raysut Cement Company on Sunday announced a significant corporate revamp bringing on board young leaders from within the organisation to new roles at key positions of the top management.

In a statement, the Muscat Securities Market-listed company said bringing new leaders to steer the company has been done at a time of crucial regional and global expansion of Raysut Cement into new and diverse markets of Eastern Europe, East Africa and Asia, which necessitates strong and competent young managers who can complement the company's vision to be one of the leading global cement players.

"We are confident that the new young leaders will bring in fresh perspectives to Raysut Cement's growth and help catalyse the company's target to raise output to 10mn tonnes by 2022 and to eventually scale it up to 20mn tonnes in the near future," Joey Ghose, chief executive officer of Raysut Cement said.

As part of the management restructuring, Salim Ahmed Alawi al Ibrahim has been promoted as acting deputy group CEO, who will now support and complement the leadership of Raysut Cement's group CEO. Ibrahim has been with Raysut Cement since 2014 and has been contributing significantly to the company in his earlier role in the sales department.

Additionally, Mohammed



Salim Ahmed al Ibrahim



Mohammed Ahmed Aided

Ahmed Aided has been promoted as the acting general manager of Raysut Cement. Aided has been working with Raysut Cement since 2009, starting his career as a sales representative and moving up to managerial positions subsequently.

"The two young professionals are taking on the new mantles at a time when Raysut Cement has already expanded its footprints into new markets and they will have a robust role to play in this dynamic business scenario," Ghose added.

OOMCO signs deal with Al Madina Logistics

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has signed an agreement with Al Madina Logistics for the management of OOMCO's new central warehouse. The integrated logistics solutions and services company will take over handling and maintaining storage of all products, along with operations of the new storage facility in Al Sawadi, OOMCO said in a press statement.

This partnership with Al Madina Logistics allows OOMCO to build on its reputation as the most customer-centric fuel marketer in both consumer and business-to-business aspects, and allows it to invest in local human capital and fully satisfy customer needs.



"We are always working on building long-term and equally beneficial partnerships with local companies. Our latest agreement with Al Madina Logistics is a great addition to this portfolio, and their expertise, equipment and information technology will certainly be an added value to our operations," said Ali

Muqaibal, general manager of strategy, business development, marketing and digital at OOMCO.

Mahmood Sakhi al Balushi, CEO of Al Madina Logistics, said, "Our 3PL logistics partnership with OOMCO has spanned several years, and we welcome this opportunity to extend our 4PL

warehouse management services to them as a continuation of the trust OOMCO has placed in us. Al Madina Logistics has seen solid growth in the warehouse management sector, showing that the model works and provides the cost efficiencies needed to allow customers to focus on their core business

functions and be more competitive."

OOMCO presently maintains a network of 225 service stations and 108 Ahlain Convenience Stores located throughout all the regions of the sultanate and aims to be among the top five fuel marketers in the GCC by 2025.

Combining OOMCO's customer-centric approach with Al Madina Logistics' leading solutions will improve the logistics support for our products and provide excellent service to our clients, Talib Omar al Maadi, general manager of supply chain at OOMCO said. "As a company with a large service portfolio, we continuously focus on enriching the experiences of our business and consumer clients and fulfilling their needs as best as we could."

OPEC turns 60 at 'critical moment' for virus-hit oil

London, UK - OPEC faces a critical moment in its 60-year history with the coronavirus crushing crude demand and prices, discord among its members, and threats from a world seeking cleaner fuels.

Founded on September 14, 1960, by Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela who sought to control crude oil output, OPEC currently comprises 13 members including nations from Africa and Latin America.

The 60th anniversary 'comes at a critical moment in its history', UniCredit analyst Edoardo Campanella said in reference to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

"Its ability to steer the oil market in its favour has never been put in question to the extent it is now," he noted.

The Vienna-based institution convenes for regular meetings to assess the state of supply and demand in the marketplace, and its pronouncements can still spark major price swings.

That ability has dimmed in recent years however, prompting it to join forces with ten non-OPEC producers including Russia to curb their collective output.

OPEC+ essentially wanted to counter surging energy supplies from shale rock in the United States and help clear a stubborn supply glut on world markets.

Today, OPEC pumps about one third of global oil - but OPEC+ accounts for almost 50 per cent, giving it greater clout.

Carlo Alberto de Casa, trader at Activtrades, insisted that the cartel retains a 'relevant' function in the market, dismissing talk the



organisation was a 'has-been'.

"They are slightly less influential compared to the past, also due to production of non-OPEC countries and new extraction techniques. But I still see a role for OPEC," he told AFP.

This despite the larger OPEC+

in March failing to agree on a new strategy - with Russia refusing cartel kingpin Saudi Arabia's request to cut their collective output and combat a virus-fuelled slump in crude demand.

In response, top global exporter Saudi Arabia slashed its

prices and raised output to preserve market share in the face of Russian opposition.

The Saudi-Russian price war, in tandem with the worsening COVID-19 pandemic, sent oil prices off a cliff - and even caused New York's light sweet crude contract to briefly turn negative in April - meaning producers paid buyers to take the oil off their hands.

After the unprecedented market crash, OPEC+ in May slashed up to a fifth of its output - a move that triggered a sharp rebound in crude prices to current levels around US\$40 per barrel.

Added to the supply back-draw, the United States, now the world's biggest oil producer, curbed the pace of costly shale extraction.

AFP

China expands foreign access to capital market

Beijing, China - China has further opened up its domestic capital market to foreign investors by introducing revised rules for the country's major inbound investment schemes.

Foreign investors will enjoy easier market access and broader investment scope when investing via the dollar-denominated qualified foreign institutional investors (QFII) and the yuan-denominated renminbi qualified foreign institutional investors (RQFII) schemes, according to the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC).

The new rules, published by the CSRC, together with the People's Bank of China and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, have combined the previous two separate sets of regulation for the QFII and RQFII schemes into one, lowering entry requirements and simplifying procedures to facilitate foreign investment.

The new rules, set to become effective on November 1, will allow foreign investment into more areas such as stocks listed



on the National Equities Exchange and Quotations, financial futures and private investment funds, said the CSRC.

The rule revision would also enhance regulation including cross-market and cross-border

regulation and strengthen punishment for irregularities, it said.

The QFII and RQFII programmes, introduced in 2003 and 2011, respectively, allow overseas institutional investors to move money into China's cap-

ital account to encourage controlled flows. In a bid to further open up the financial market, China scrapped quota restrictions on the QFII and RQFII schemes earlier this year.

Xinhua

US restricts tech sales to Chinese semiconductor giant SMIC: WSJ report

Washington, US - Washington has ordered US companies to seek permission before selling their technologies to Chinese semiconductor giant SMIC, its latest salvo in the battle for technological dominance over Beijing, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported.

The Department of Commerce 'has told US computer-chip companies that they must obtain licenses before exporting certain technology to China's largest manufacturer of semiconductors', according to the business daily.

The new rules were announced in a letter to the industry, which says that 'exports to Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp or its subsidiaries risk being used for Chinese military activities', the report continued.

The newspaper said the administration of US President Donald Trump has 'grown more concerned about Beijing's practice of leaning on private companies to advance its military aims'.

The Commerce Department would not comment on the mat-



ter specifically, but a spokesperson with its Bureau of Industry and Security said they are 'constantly monitoring and assessing any potential threats to US national security and foreign policy interests' and 'will take appropriate action as warranted'.

The report comes as the White House says it will not back down from a plan to ban new US downloads of TikTok, the popular Chinese-owned video-sharing app, over what it says are national security concerns, setting up a court showdown ahead of a Sunday deadline.

For years China and the United States have been scrapping for tech dominance.

SMIC is key to Beijing's ambition to someday achieve semiconductor self-reliance. Analysts say China's dependence on foreign - including US-made - chips hinders that national goal.

The issue was brought into stark relief earlier this year by the US campaign to hobble Chinese telecom giant Huawei, which Washington fears could allow China's security state to tap into global telecoms networks.

The US Commerce Department in May announced plans to cut off Huawei's access to global semiconductor supplies, which the company said would threaten its 'survival'.

AFF



People wearing protective face masks shop in a vintage market in east London, UK on Saturday (AFP)

Fitch holds UK debt at AA-, keeps outlook negative

Washington, US - Fitch Ratings left Britain's debt rating unchanged at AA- and the outlook at negative, after downgrading both in March on fears of economic damage from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The affirmed negative outlook 'reflects the impact the coronavirus pandemic is having on the UK economy and the resulting material deterioration in the public finances, with Fitch forecasting the fiscal deficit to materially widen this year and government debt set to increase to well over 120 per cent of GDP over the next few years', the agency said in a state-

ment.

Fitch saw Britain's deficit climbing to 17.7 per cent of GDP this year from 2.2 per cent in 2019, an increase well above that seen during the 2008-2010 global financial crisis, which the agency blamed on the slowdown in economic activity and government measures to fend off the pandemic.

The deficit is predicted to drop back to about 12 per cent of GDP by next year and below 10 per cent of GDP in 2022.

The forecast comes after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson earlier last week announced a raft of new restric-

tions in England, mirrored to varying extents in other UK nations, to try to curb a rise in coronavirus cases.

Such measures 'are modest and, in our view, could slow but not stall the economic recovery', Fitch said, though they could be tightened if COVID-19 cases don't decrease.

Adding to the uncertainty is Britain's process of negotiating a new trade agreement with the European Union following its departure from the bloc, which Fitch predicted is 'likely to curtail the pace of recovery' for the rest of the year.

AFF

Ex-Audi boss Stadler to stand trial for 'dieselgate' scandal

Frankfurt, Germany - Former Audi boss Rupert Stadler on Wednesday becomes the first to stand trial in Germany over the 'dieselgate' emissions scandal, five years after parent company Volkswagen (VW) admitted responsibility.

Stadler (57) faces charges of 'fraud, falsifying certifications and false advertising' according to an indictment to be read out before the Munich district court.

He is in the dock alongside former Audi and Porsche manager Wolfgang Hatz and two Audi engineers.

Not a single senior executive has been convicted in Germany so far in connection with the scandal that erupted in September 2015 when the Volkswagen group acknowledged it had installed cheating software in 11mn diesel engines.

The so-called defeat devices made the cars appear to pollute less in lab tests than they did on the road.

Media interest in the opening hearing is expected to be high, prompting court officials to move proceedings to a justice building in a Munich suburb.

Because of coronavirus restrictions however, seating inside the hearing room will be limited, a court spokesman told AFP.

'No wrongdoing'

Stadler had been Audi's chief executive for 11 years when he was arrested in June 2018.

He spent four months in pre-trial detention owing to concerns



Rupert Stadler

he could try to influence witnesses.

A career Audi man, he joined the luxury car maker in 1990 and was named CEO in 2007.

Prosecutors say Stadler knew about the emissions scam by the end of September 2015 'at the latest' but nevertheless allowed thousands more vehicles fitted with defeat devices to be sold.

His three fellow defendants stand accused of having developed diesel engines equipped with the manipulating software, which were installed in cars sold as far back as 2009.

The charges against the men cover a total of 434,420 VW, Audi and Porsche vehicles sold in Europe and the United States.

Stadler has consistently denied the accusations.

Co-accused Hatz, whose past roles at the VW group include research and development chief at its Porsche unit, also rejects

Rupert Stadler is facing charges of 'fraud, falsifying certifications and false advertising'

any wrongdoing.

His lawyer said Hatz would respond to the charges 'in detail'.

The large, complex trial is expected to run until the end of December 2022.

The indictment alone, to be read out loud on Wednesday, is more than 90 pages long.

The defendants face up to ten years in prison if convicted.

'Dieselgate' bill

Stadler is not the only top exec-

utive bracing for his day in court.

A regional tribunal in Brunswick, near VW's Wolfsburg headquarters, ruled earlier this month that Martin Winterkorn, former chief executive of the VW group, must stand trial on charges of fraud and stock market manipulation.

The group's current chief executive officer Herbert Diess and supervisory board chair Hans Dieter Poetsch had faced similar accusations of failing to inform shareholders in a timely manner of the pollution scam.

But those proceedings were dropped after VW agreed to a settlement that cost it €9mn.

Five years after the crisis erupted, the German car giant is still one of the world's biggest automakers, but it remains engulfed in costly legal woes.

The group has already paid out more than €30bn in fines, legal costs and compensation to car owners - mainly in the United States.

In April, VW settled Germany's biggest lawsuit in an out-of-court settlement in which it agreed to pay around €750mn to 235,000 customers, or between €1,350 and €6,250 per car.

And the final 'dieselgate' bill is far from settled after a top German court in May ordered VW to buy back a rigged diesel from its owner, setting the stage for similar transactions with thousands of other claimants.

AFF

Alibaba fintech arm eyes record IPO with HK-Shanghai listing

Hong Kong, China - The financial arm of Chinese e-commerce titan Alibaba is planning the biggest initial public offering (IPO) in history, raising as much as US\$35bn in a joint listing in Hong Kong and Shanghai, according to a report.

And in a sign of Ant Group's confidence in the share sale, it will not seek cornerstone investors - large institutions that agree to hold the stock for an ex-

tended time to provide confidence and stability in new listings.

The firm is looking to raise the cash - which would be far higher than the US\$29bn chalked up by Saudi Aramco in December - in a split float between the two Chinese cities, said Bloomberg News, citing unnamed sources. The plan values Ant Group at about US\$250bn, it added.

The company runs Alipay, one

of the two dominant online payment systems in China, where cash, cheques and credit cards have long been eclipsed by e-payment devices and apps.

After getting approval from the Shanghai Stock Exchange for a listing last week, the Hangzhou-based firm is now seeking to have a listing hearing with Hong Kong stock exchange as early as next week, with an eye on a debut in October.

With huge funding demand driven by the mega IPO seeing vast amounts of cash shift into the city, its de facto central bank the Hong Kong Monetary Authority has been forced to intervene multiple times in currency markets to weaken the local currency and maintain its peg to the US dollar.

Ant declined to comment but in its filing in August, the firm said it will use the proceeds to

expand cross-border payments and enhance its research-and-development capabilities.

The decision not to list in New York is a major loss for US markets and comes as Washington ramps up scrutiny of Chinese tech firms.

A number of high-profile Chinese firms - especially those in tech - have looked to Hong Kong as they shun New York over the tensions between Washington

and Beijing. The US is considering plans to impose stricter rules on firms listed in the country to open up their audit papers to US accountants, which could lead to Chinese companies forced out. And that could push them towards Hong Kong or Shanghai.

In June, mainland e-commerce giant JD.com tech firm NetEase raised almost US\$7bn between them in separate listings in Hong Kong.

Recently, Chinese courier service giant ZTO Express raised US\$1.27bn in a second listing in the city. Its shares are also traded in New York.

The spate of IPOs is also a shot in the arm for Hong Kong as fears mount over the potential fallout of Beijing's imposition of a new national security law on the city banning subversion and foreign interference.

AFF

Azerbaijan, Armenia go on war footing as heavy fightings unleash



This image grab taken from a video made available on the Armenian Defence Ministry website, shows destruction of Azeri military vehicles in Nagorno-Karabakh on Sunday (AFP)

Yerevan, Armenia - Armenia and Azerbaijan put themselves on a war footing after heavy fighting erupted on Sunday between Azerbaijan and Armenian separatists claiming military and civilian casualties on both sides, including at least one child.

The worst clashes since 2016 have raised the spectre of a fresh large-scale war between arch enemies Azerbaijan and Armenia that have been locked for decades in a territorial dispute over Nagorny Karabakh.

In a televised address to the nation, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev vowed victory over Armenian forces.

"Our cause is just and we will win," Aliyev said, repeating a famous quote from Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's address at the outbreak of World War II in Russia.

"Azerbaijani army is fighting on its territory," he said.

[France] with its Russian and American partners, reiterates its commitment to reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict with respect for international law

FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTRY

Both Armenia and the break-away region of Nagorny Karabakh declared martial law and military mobilisation.

'Get ready to defend our sacred homeland,' Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Facebook.

Karabakh's leader Araik Harutyunyan told an emergency parliament session in the enclave's main city of Stepanakert that he had 'declared martial law' and a mobilisation of all those fit for military service.

Armenia said earlier on Sunday that Azerbaijan attacked civilian settlements in Nagorny Karabakh including Stepanakert,

with the attacks killing of a woman and child.

Azerbaijan's Defence Ministry said it had launched a 'counter offensive to suppress Armenia's combat activity and ensure the safety of the population', using tanks, artillery missiles, combat aviation and drones.

"There are reports of dead and wounded among civilians and military servicemen," the spokesman for the Azerbaijani presidency, Hikmet Hajiyev, said.

Karabakh's ombudsman Artak Beglaryan said 'there are civilian casualties' among the region's population.

Russia, France urge ceasefire

Ethnic Armenian separatists seized the Nagorny Karabakh region from Baku in a 1990s war that claimed 30,000 lives.

Talks to resolve one of the worst conflicts to emerge from the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union have been largely stalled since a 1994 ceasefire agreement.

France, Russia and the United States have mediated peace efforts as the "Minsk Group" but the last big push for a peace deal collapsed in 2010.

A major confrontation between the ex-Soviet Caucasus neighbours would draw in big regional players Russia and Turkey.

Russia called for an immediate ceasefire as did France.

"We are calling on the sides to immediately halt fire and begin talks to stabilise the situation," Moscow's Foreign Ministry said.

France called for separatists

from both sides to 'immediately cease hostilities and resume dialogue'.

France, 'with its Russian and American partners, reiterates its commitment to reach a negotiated and durable settlement to the conflict' with 'respect for international law', the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement, adding it was 'deeply concerned about the large-scale confrontations'.

Karabakh leader blames Turkey

Azerbaijan's ally Turkey blamed Yerevan for the flare-up and promised Baku its 'full support'.

'We strongly condemn the attack by Armenia against Azerbaijan,' Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Twitter.

'Armenia violated the ceasefire by attacking civilian locations,' he said.

The Karabakh leader, Haru-

Iran ready to facilitate Armenia-Azerbaijan talks

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Sunday called for an end to the fighting between arch-foes Armenia and Azerbaijan and said it was ready to facilitate talks and a ceasefire between its two neighbours.

Iran 'is closely following the military conflict between the republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia with concern', Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a statement.

Tehran is ready 'to use all of its capacities to establish ceasefire and start talks between the two sides', he said and called for 'an immediate end to the conflict'.

Peace talks have been largely stalled since a 1994



Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh

ceasefire agreement, with the last big push for a peace deal collapsing in 2010.

Iran has an Azeri-speaking community of over ten million as well as an Armenian community of just under 100,000.

AFP



ICRC Director for the Near and Middle East Fabrizio Carboni (centre, left) and UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths (centre, right) with Houthi prisoner exchange committee members (left) and Yemeni government delegation members at the end of a week-long meeting, in Glion, Switzerland, on Sunday (AFP)

Yemen warring sides agree to swap prisoners

Glion, Switzerland - Both sides in Yemen's war have agreed to exchange more than 1,000 prisoners, the UN mediator said on Sunday following talks in Switzerland.

"I am personally extremely pleased to be here to announce that you have reached a very important milestone," UN envoy Martin Griffiths told reporters.

Speaking at a short ceremony held inside a cabin at the Swiss village of Glion, overlooking Lake Geneva, Griffiths hailed the decision to release 1,081 prisoners as the largest such operation during Yemen's conflict.

He also congratulated the government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, and Iran-backed Huthi rebels for renewing their 'commitment to the full implementation of the Stockholm agreement', a 2018 peace

deal reached in Sweden to exchange some 15,000 detainees.

The two sides have since carried out sporadic prisoner swaps, but the release of hundreds of loyalists and insurgents - if it materialises - would mark the first large-scale handover since the war erupted in 2014.

'What matters to us is implementing the deal, not only signing it,' senior rebel commander Mohamed Ali Al-Huthi tweeted on Saturday.

Sources on both sides had told AFP late on Saturday that a deal had been reached for the prisoner exchange, indicating it was due to be implemented within two weeks.

The deal includes the release of 681 rebels, and 400 government forces (and allies), among them 15 Saudis and 4 Sudanese', a member of the government

delegation told AFP.

The talks began on September 18, and had been aimed at agreeing the release of 1,420 prisoners, including the brother of Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi.

Griffiths did not provide details on which prisoners specifically would be exchanged under the agreement reached in Glion. But the government delegation member told AFP on Saturday that the release of General Nasser Mansour Hadi from the hands of the rebels 'has been postponed'. The International Committee of the Red Cross will oversee the return of detainees to their families.

Fabrizio Carboni, head of ICRC's Middle East and Near East operations, was also at the ceremony. AFP

Lebanon reels after PM designate's efforts to form government collapse

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon was left reeling on Sunday without the slightest prospect of ending multiple crises, after its Prime Minister designate stepped down following the failure of talks to form a government, despite international pressure.

Mustapha Adib's resignation on Saturday ended efforts to hammer out a reformist government in the wake of a colossal August 4 explosion in Beirut that killed 190 people, injured thousands and ravaged large parts of the capital.

Political parties had pledged in early September, during a visit to Lebanon by French President Emmanuel Macron, to form within two weeks a cabinet of independent ministers tasked with ending the country's economic malaise.

"As the efforts to form a government reached their final phase, it became apparent to me that this consensus... was no longer there," Adib said on Saturday.

Under the Lebanese constitution, the President must now hold further talks to nominate another prime minister to form a government, but it is a process that risks dragging out and even failing.

"I don't expect a government anytime soon," said Sami Atallah, who heads the Lebanese



Candles light-up photos of victims of August's deadly Beirut blast during a commemoration concert in the gardens of the damaged 19th-century Sursock Palace in Achrafieh, in Lebanon's capital on September 20 (AFP)

Centre for Policy Studies.

"There was a chance, there was a lot of pressure to form a government and it didn't happen," he said, adding there was a 'bigger problem' of geopolitical tensions, especially between the United States and Iran.

Adib's efforts were hampered by the claims of two Shiite formations, the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, and its ally Amal, led by parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who demanded the finance portfolio.

According to observers, the Shiite allies dug in their heels after recent US sanctions imposed on a minister of the Amal

party and two companies affiliated with Hezbollah.

Adib's decision to step aside 26 days after his appointment has left the people of Lebanon feeling as though they are back to square one.

"The page of Mustapha Adib has turned," the French-language *L'Orient-Le Jour* newspaper declared on Sunday.

It described the return to the drawing board as 'a leap into the unknown, even a highway to hell'.

Earlier this week, Lebanese President Michel Aoun warned the country was headed to 'hell' unless all political parties stepped up and facilitated the

formation of a government.

The Arabic-language newspaper *Annahar* warned of 'grave repercussions', and said all eyes were on Macron, who is due to hold a news conference on Sunday evening.

Even before the devastating Beirut port blast, the country was already mired in its worst economic crisis in decades and mass protests that toppled and replaced the government.

Following the August 4 blast, the country's worst peacetime disaster, the government stepped down and Abid was appointed to form a new one.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Curfew to be lifted in Australia as global deaths near a million

Melbourne, Australia - An overnight curfew in Australia's second-largest city will be lifted this week, officials said on Sunday, even as the global coronavirus toll inched towards one million dead.

Despite the number of infections worldwide passing 32mn - with the US state of New York reporting a fresh spike - more than 10,000 anti-lockdown protesters demonstrated in central London ahead of the re-imposition of restrictions there.

In more positive news, residents of the Chinese city of Wuhan - where the virus emerged last year - reported a hesitant return to normalcy.

In Australia, Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said Melbourne residents would be free from Monday to leave their homes for work, exercise, shop for essentials, or provide care after active cases in the state fell below 400 for the first time since June 30.

The relaxation of the curfew, imposed on August 2, comes after 16 new infections and two deaths were reported on Sunday. People will still be confined to within 5km of their homes, and fines for breaching other restrictions will be increased to almost A\$5,000 (\$3,515).

Andrews said several other restrictions, including on religious services and childcare centres, will also be lifted.



People exercise at a park along the Yarra River in Melbourne on Saturday as a decision has been taken to lift an overnight curfew from the Australia's second-biggest city this week (AFP)

Anti-lockdown protests in Madrid
Hundreds of people protested in Madrid on Sunday against partial lockdown measures imposed on parts of the region, mainly in densely populated

low-income neighbourhoods. Since September 21 some 850,000 people have been confined to their neighbourhoods and unable to leave except for work, school or medical reasons although they are able to move freely within their own areas. Parks in the affected areas are closed and restaurants and

other businesses must shut at 10.00pm. From Monday another 167,000 people in the region of some 6.6 million people will be confined to their neighbourhoods. 'It's not confinement, it's segregation!' the crowd chanted outside of the parliament of the

regional government of Madrid in the southern district of Vallecas, one of the mainly southern neighbourhoods affected by the partial lockdown measures which came into effect last week. Protesters called for the resignation of conservative Madrid regional leader Isabel Diaz

Ayuso, who drew criticism for saying that the 'lifestyle' of people in the affected areas was partly to blame for the rise in COVID-19 cases. "They don't confine the rich," was among one of the signs on display at the protest which drew groups young people, retired couples and young parents

pushing baby strollers. The Madrid measures fall short of a demand by Spain's leftist central government, which has urged the region to impose city-wide restrictions, a view shared by many of the protesters. "It makes no sense that you can go to work in a wealthier area but can't go have a drink. Infections are rising everywhere, the rules should be the same for everyone," Marcos Ruiz Guijarro, a 27 year old electrician who went to the rally with a group of friends, told AFP. Many demonstrators complained that the regional government was failing to improve public healthcare or doing anything to address the problem of an overcrowded transport system where they said the virus could easily spread. Madrid and the surrounded region is at the epicentre of a second wave of coronavirus that is sweeping Spain. The virus has claimed over 31,000 lives and infected over 700,000 in Spain, the highest infection rate in the European Union. In India, infections closed in on six million on Sunday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on people to keep wearing face masks in public. AFP

Ten arrested as police break up London rally

London, UK - London police said they arrested ten people and four officers were injured as they broke up a thousands-strong demonstration against British coronavirus restrictions on Saturday.

Skirmishes broke out as officers moved in with batons to disperse the more than 10,000 protesters gathered on central Trafalgar Square, who were not sticking to infection control measures, the Metropolitan Police said on Twitter. 'Sadly, four of our officers have been injured, two require hospital treatment,' the Met wrote.

A dozen officers were injured in a similar protest last week. Among the Saturday crowd was David Icke, a prominent conspiracy theorist who has drawn attention in the past by



Police personnel move in to disperse protesters at a 'We Do Not Consent!' mass rally, in Trafalgar Square in London on Saturday (AFP)

suggesting the world is secretly governed by reptilian humanoid, including the British royal family. Some people in the crowd carried signs opposing any potential vaccine against the coronavirus. Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Saturday pledged new sup-

port for the World Health Organization's effort to develop a vaccine and called those rejecting a potential inoculation 'nutjobs'. Local infection control restrictions now extend to one in four people in Britain. AFP

Some 1,000 daily cases in NY state

New York, US - New York state, the onetime epicenter of the US novel coronavirus epidemic, has seen case numbers rise to more than 1,000 a day, local officials said on Saturday.

These high figures have not been seen since June 5, according to statistics released by the office of Governor Andrew Cuomo. 'Of the 99,953 tests reported yesterday (Friday), 1,005 were positive,' Cuomo tweeted. 'It's vital that New Yorkers continue to practice the basic behaviors that drive our ability to fight COVID-19 as we move into the fall and flu season,' he added in a statement. 'We'll continue to closely monitor the data and keep New Yorkers updated so they can make educated decisions for themselves and their families.' Overall the health situation in New York state has nevertheless improved since the height



This file photo shows people protesting against the 'unsafe and inequitable' reopening of schools amid the coronavirus pandemic at Washington Square Park, in New York City on September 18 (AFP)

of the virus crisis in the spring. Restaurants in New York city, which are currently serving customers outdoors, will be allowed to welcome diners indoors

starting Wednesday at 25 per cent capacity. Overall the United States on Friday registered 7mn confirmed cases since the start of the pandemic.

The disease has also killed nearly 205,000 people in the country, according figures from Johns Hopkins University. AFP

Libyans caught between fear of pandemic and scepticism

Tripoli, Libya - Haytham, tall and well-built, turns away customers without masks from a shop entrance in Libya's capital, telling them to return with a covering or buy one on the spot. "We do our best, at the risk of being insulted by unhappy customers who don't understand this is all in their interests, not ours," the imposing security guard shrugged.

His job at a large supermarket in the west of Tripoli, one of the country's COVID-19 hotspots, is something of a thankless task.

The policy is set by management, which does not skimp on precautions - free anti-bacterial gel, disinfectant-soaked mats and even a disinfection gate where incoming customers are sprayed with a cleanser.

It is impossible to gauge the

full extent of the epidemic in Libya, a country mired in chaos since 2011 when an uprising backed by the West toppled dictator Moammar Gadhafi. But it is clear there has been a surge in cases in recent weeks, heaping further pressure on overburdened services. More than 30,000 coronavirus cases have been confirmed in Libya and over 470 deaths, among a population of less than 7mn, according to official figures. With hospital bed space scarce, in one way 'we are lucky that around 80 per cent of positive cases are asymptomatic, because all they have to do is self-isolate until their recovery is complete', said Ibrahim el Deghayes, a member of the National Centre for Disease Con-



This file photo shows a Libyan medical worker talking to a shopkeeper during an awareness campaign on COVID-19 at the Friday market in the capital Tripoli, on September 10 (AFP)

trol (NCDC). But the instruction to self-isolate brings its own problems. Without running water or electricity, it is impossible to

convince many to stick to the rules, Deghayes said, lamenting the indifference of some Libyans towards the pandemic. "The prioritisation of tests

targets people at risk, like older people and those with chronic diseases," he said. The NCDC's head of communications, Mohamad al Ja-

zoui, organises education campaigns in the capital, where its testing strategy also targets venues that are 'most exposed, like grocery stores, cafés and bakeries'. These initiatives are judged insufficient by many Tripoli residents, who have to wait several days for test results, heightening the risk of infecting relatives. Wearing a mask in public - outside, as well as inside - is compulsory in Libya's capital and transgressors risk hefty fines. But shop owners still struggle to enforce measures. Mayssoun Trabelsi and her sisters live with their grandparents in the suburb of Tajoura, after fleeing heavy fighting in their home district of Ain Zara in the capital's southeast last December.

The fighting pitched troops loyal to a UN-recognised government against eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar, who in April 2019 launched an offensive against the capital, only to be repulsed earlier this year. Trabelsi, who works in a clothes shop, fears for her 'old and fragile' grandparents. She describes herself as 'terrorised' by the risk that she will infect them with coronavirus, due to close contact with customers who refuse to wear masks. Clients 'take offence' if she reminds them of their hygiene obligations. And then there are the steadfast sceptics, like Salem. "We have survived bombing, rocket fire and wars - a virus will not kill us!" he contended. AFP

Greece warms to EU asylum pact but refugee groups rage

Athens, Greece - Greece's government has cautiously welcomed a plan from Brussels to reform the EU's shaky asylum system, but charity groups working with refugees on the ground have blasted a continued 'outrageous containment policy'.

The 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' was unveiled on Wednesday and calls for a tougher stance on returning migrants who do not have the right to stay in the EU, and ratcheting up border controls.

Such moves are music to the ears of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' conservative government, which has been operating a harsh migration policy since taking power over a year ago.

The only flaw from Greece's perspective is the Commission giving up on quota-based redistribution of asylum seekers among EU countries - a plan first mooted during the migration crisis of 2015 but which foundered on opposition from several member states.

Wednesday's pact 'goes in the right direction, our main positions are included, but we're disappointed on redistribution, we'd have preferred a different model', Greek asylum service secretary Manos Logothetis told ERT public television. Mitsotakis himself has reiterated calls for a 'balanced asylum policy' and highlighted 'the need to share responsibilities in a fair way'.

'Enough is enough'

Like Italy and Spain, Greece's position on the EU's southern edge makes it one of the major points of arrival in the bloc for migrants. Its geography has made it a



This file photo shows children of migrant families stand behind barbwire at a quarantine area in the new temporary camp near Mytilene on the Greek island of Lesbos, as more than 200 people were diagnosed with COVID-19 in the area on September 19 (AFP)

relentless defender of the idea that asylum seekers - who arrive almost daily on the country's Aegean Sea islands from neighbouring Turkey - should be shared out fairly.

The Greek government has long struggled to manage overcrowding in camps on the five islands most affected by the arrivals, especially since the

Moria camp on Lesbos burned down on September 8 and 9.

Half of the 24,000 migrants packed into Greek camps remain on Lesbos. Authorities rushed to set up a provisional site for those left without shelter by the blaze, but charity groups are already incensed at conditions there.

"The Commission promised 'no more Moria', while building a

new containment camp in Lesbos, where conditions are dire," tweeted the Legal Centre Lesbos, which provides legal information and assistance to migrants on the island.

Other groups working with migrants on the ground pointed out the arduous lines people must stand in to receive one meal per day, the lack of mattresses

and the impossibility of respecting coronavirus infection control measures like social distancing.

"We have continuously exposed the human cost of this outrageous containment policy to leaders in European capitals, to commissioners in Brussels and to citizens through the media, but nothing seems to lead to a desperately needed radical

policy change," tweeted Christos Christou, the president of the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) - popularly known as Doctors Without Borders.

'Enough is enough. No more lies,' he added.

MSF is one of only a few organisations allowed by Greek authorities to come to the aid of asylum seekers left to sleep by the side of the road after Moria was destroyed.

So far almost 9,400 people have moved into the new temporary camp on Lesbos, the Greek section of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said. Authorities must 'put an end to the precarious situation for thousands of refugees in the Greek islands and... accelerate their safe and orderly transfer to suitable accommodation in the mainland', spokeswoman Stella Nanou said.

Greece has already transferred thousands off the islands since early 2020, but the camps remain under intense pressure.

On Wednesday, Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi said a camp hosting 1,000 vulnerable refugees on Lesbos would be closed, as well as a volunteer-run accommodation known as Pikpa.

The Pikpa camp was founded in 2012 by migrant champion Efi Latsoudi, a joint winner in 2016 of the UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award. It currently hosts around 100 people, offering refugees access to medical care, education and legal assistance.

"Such alternative accommodation facilities should be maintained until a more viable solution is secured," UNHCR spokeswoman Nanou said.

AFP

QUICK RUNS

15 dead in Pakistan bus accident

At least 15 people were killed when a passenger van travelling in southern Pakistan crashed and caught fire, officials said on Sunday.

The van was carrying passengers from Karachi to Hyderabad city when it struck an object and careered off the road late on Saturday. "The death toll in the unfortunate accident has reached 15," Owais Shah, the Transport Minister of Sindh province, said.

Five other people were injured, three of them critically, he said.

Most of the bodies were burned beyond recognition, said Faisal Edhi, head of the non-profit Edhi Foundation which runs the morgue where the bodies were taken.

16 killed by CO in Chinese coal-mine

Sixteen workers died and one is in a critical condition after being trapped underground in a coal mine in southwest China on Sunday.

A conveyor belt caught fire in the early hours of the morning, state news agency Xinhua cited the government as saying, which produced dangerous levels of carbon monoxide (CO). Medics are fighting to save the life of the remaining survivor, CCTV reported.

The cause of the accident is still under investigation, said the Qijiang district government on social media platform Weibo.

The facility, Songzao Coal Mine, is owned by state energy firm Chongqing Energy and located just outside the city of Chongqing.

N Korea warns Seoul over body search

North Korea on Sunday warned the South Korean navy to stop crossing into its territorial waters as ships search for the body of a Seoul official shot dead at sea by Pyongyang's soldiers.

State media said the North will begin its own search for the body and warned that the South's naval operations threatened to raise tensions.

The fisheries official was shot dead by North Korean soldiers on Tuesday - the first killing of a South Korean civilian by Pyongyang's forces in a decade - prompting a rare public apology from leader Kim Jong Un.

Seoul's military has accused the North Korean soldiers of pouring oil over the man's body and burning it after shooting him.

The death was an 'awful case which should not have happened', the North's official KCNA news agency said.

AFP

It is clear Lukashenko has to go, exhorts French President

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday that Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko must step down, after the EU refused to recognise him as the legitimate president of the former Soviet country.

"It's clear he has to go," Macron told French weekly the Journal du Dimanche ahead of a trip to EU states Lithuania and Latvia, which border Belarus.

"It is a crisis of power, an authoritarian power that cannot accept the logic of democracy and which is hanging on by force. It is clear that Lukashenko has to go."

Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in Belarus since August 9 elections which opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya says she won,



Opposition supporters gather during a rally to protest against the presidential inauguration, in Minsk on Sunday (AFP)

despite Lukashenko's insistence he took a landslide victory.

The embattled leader has launched a brutal crackdown against the protesters -- drawing condemnation from the West, but support from Moscow.

This week he triggered new demonstrations and fresh Western criticism when he held a secret inauguration for himself.

Macron on Sunday said he had been 'impressed by the courage of the protesters'.

"They know the risks they are taking by demonstrating every weekend, and yet, they are pushing forward with the movement to make democracy come alive in this country that has been deprived of it for so long," he said.

"Women in particular, who march every Saturday, command our respect," he added.

More than 90 people - most of them women - were arrested on Saturday at opposition rallies, according to one NGO.

Fresh protests were sparked by the surprise announcement on Wednesday that Lukashenko had been sworn in for a sixth term in office.

The European Union said the strongman's inauguration lacked 'democratic legitimacy'.

AFP

Sri Lanka sends back containers of illegal waste to Britain

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka has shipped back to Britain container-loads of waste that the government said was brought into the island in violation of international laws governing the shipping of hazardous material.

The 21 containers - holding up to 260 tonnes of rubbish - first arrived by ship in the capital Colombo's main port between September 2017 and March 2018, customs officials said, adding that they departed Sri Lanka on Saturday.

They were meant to carry used mattresses, carpets and rugs, but had also contained hospital waste, officials said.

"The shipper had agreed to take back these 21 containers," customs spokesman Sunil Ja-

yaratne said. "We are working to secure compensation from those responsible for getting the containers into the country."

Customs did not reveal the type of hospital waste, but previous illegally imported containers had included rags, bandages and body parts from mortuaries.

Another 242 containers from Britain, which the government said was carrying illegal garbage in violation of international law, remains abandoned at the same port and at a free trade zone outside the capital. They arrived in 2017 and 2018. The government is currently engaged in legal action against the shipper to have the 242 containers removed from the country.

AFP

Nine IS-linked suspects killed in hunt for 'terrorists': Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanese police have killed nine suspected members of the Islamic State group in the hunt for 'terrorists' linked to several deadly attacks, including on soldiers, a security source said on Sunday.

Saturday's operation came more than a month after the army and security forces launched a manhunt for suspects in the August 21 killing of two municipal policemen and the son of the mayor of the northern village of Kaftoun.

Police intelligence units raided a house in the northern region of Wadi Khaled where 'suspects



A Lebanese army soldier stands guard by a tracked-vehicle, near a scooter that was used by armed assailants in an overnight attack that killed two army soldiers, near the northern city of Tripoli on Sunday (AFP)

linked to the IS' group had been holed up, 'killing all the terrorists inside', the Internal Security Forces (ISF) said in a statement.

A security source said 'at least nine members of the group were killed'. But the source said the death toll could rise as more bodies could be buried under the rubble of the house, part of which was blown up during the police operation.

The ISF statement said the 'terrorist cell' was made up of more than 15 suspects.

It added that three had been arrested in previous raids.

Following the August murders

in Kaftoun, the army and police launched operations to track down the assailants.

On September 14, the army said four soldiers were killed while attempting to arrest suspected 'terrorist' Khaled al Tallawi at his north Lebanon home, though he was eventually shot dead.

Meanwhile, two Lebanese soldiers were killed overnight in an attack on an army post in the locality of Arman-Minyeh, also in the north of the country, the army said on Sunday.

'Two soldiers were killed, in addition to one terrorist,' it said

in a statement.

An attacker 'riding a motorbike tried to enter the army post, and army members confronted him, killing him instantly', it added.

They found grenades and an explosives belt on him, the last of which it said 'he had intended to detonate inside the post'.

Wadi Khaled and the Arman-Minyeh region are near second city Tripoli, which has been rocked by violence involving extremists over the years, including as part of the fallout from the conflict in Syria.

AFP



PLAN YOUR NEXT TRIP

As travel restrictions begin to slowly lift, you might want to plan your next trip. Now's the time to get started

After being tied down to your home and routines for over six months, preparing for your next vacation can be almost as enjoyable as the vacation itself. Whether it's with friends, a partner or the whole family, travel planning allows you to stay socially connected while remaining physically distant. Organising your next vacation will help lift spirits and build excitement around what is to come. Consider these ideas for your next trip:

Decide on the type of trip

Many people may shift travel plans from big cities to more open spaces where you can explore nature. Travellers are also looking to drive instead of fly, so there might be a great revival of road trips around the world. Open roads and beautiful scenery make the journey to some destinations even better than the destination itself. In small towns, all levels of outdoor opportunities attract everyone, from young families to expert-level adventure seekers.

- Explore natural wonder and take a mineral-rich soak at hot springs or cool waterfalls
- Enjoy world-class mountain biking in countries which offer suitable terrain for biking adventures



- Hit the water on a boat, float trip or take up river rafting
- Whether a novice or expert, hiking within national forests and reserves provides unforgettable moments.

Explore new possibilities

In anticipation of your next vacation, ex-

plore travel websites, including state tourism sites, to get a taste of what adventures your next trip has to experience. You can explore the country's history, attractions and unique information, including virtual tours of monuments, museums and parks.

You can even make this a fun project for

kids to get them involved in the planning process. They can share what adventures they're most interested in, and build on the excitement of the next family vacation.

Create a travel dream board

For hands-on fun, consider using a poster board or other large pieces of paper or

cardboard to add pictures, phrases and information on the destination you want to visit. Each person can have their own or you can build one as a family. Hanging your dream board in a location you see often will help build excitement around your next trip.

Explore accommodation options

Choose a destination that offers a variety of accommodations with flexible travel options throughout the year. Whether it's a traditional hotel with ample amenities or campgrounds and cabins. Guest ranches are another fun option, offering the opportunity to live out the western way of life, even for just a short time. It all depends on the level of excitement you are seeking.

Select a versatile destination

As no one knows when travel will fully rebound, choose a destination that excites you and your travel group with activities for every season: outdoor adventures in the summer, hunting and hiking in the fall, skiing and snowmobiling in the winter, and fishing and festivals in the spring.

Be sure to check for updates on any closures and restrictions to your destination while planning. (BPT)

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OASIS

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Sodium Free
Drinking
Water

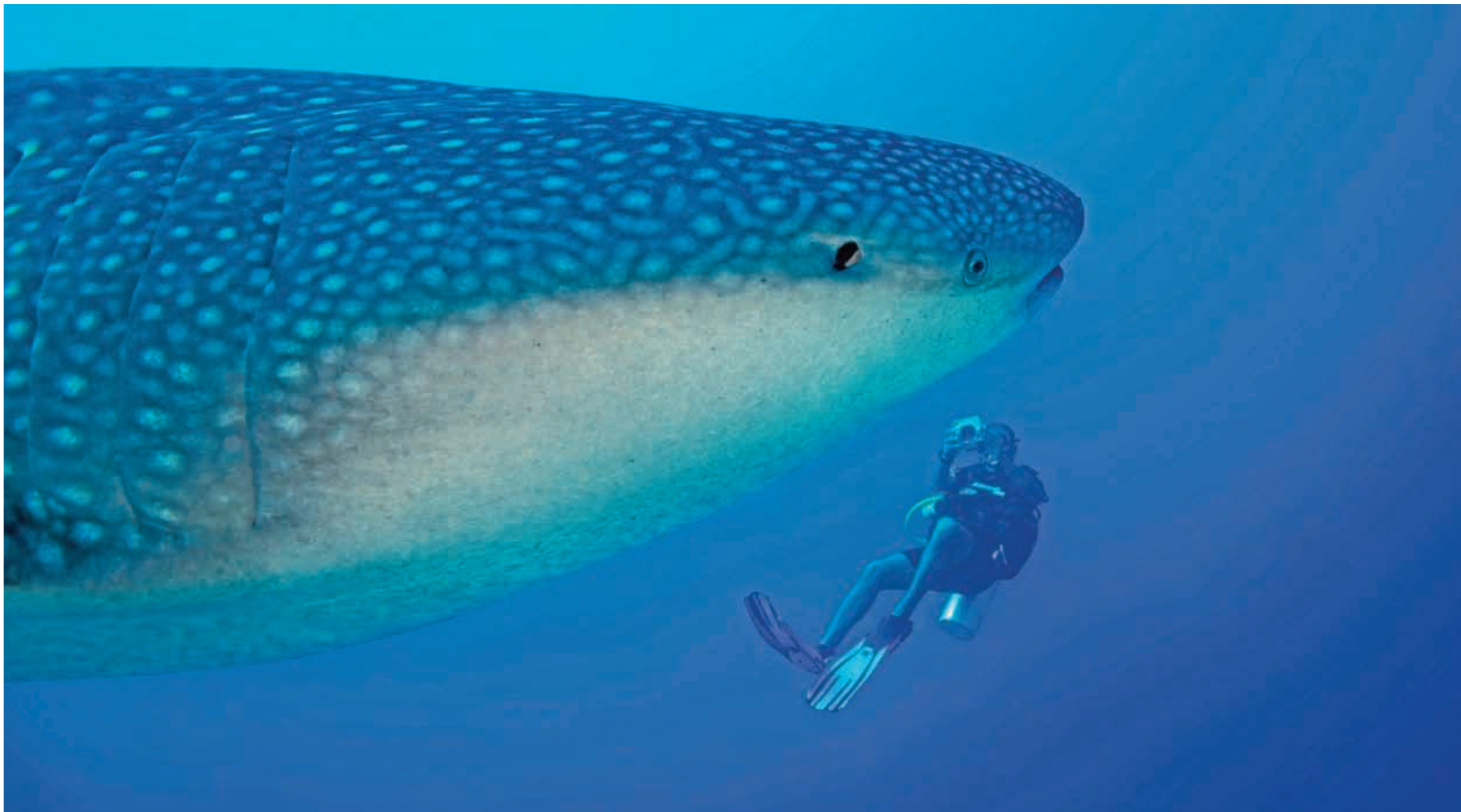


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Picture courtesy: SeaOman

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE GENTLE GIANTS OF THE OCEAN

No amount of reading about how gentle and safe these mammals are can prepare you for the moment you are going to meet one face to fin

Mark Rix

We all have certain things we would love to do in our lifetimes, a bucket list, perhaps?

An ambition on my own list was to one day swim with a whale shark. A few years ago I started Scuba diving and this goal was always in the back of my mind. Until last weekend these amazing gentle giants of the sea had remained elusive to me.

The whale shark is found in open waters of the tropical oceans and rarely found in water below 21 °C (70 °F). A whale shark's lifespan is between 80 to 130 years. They have very large mouths and are filter feeders, which is a feeding mode that occurs in only two other sharks – the megamouth shark and the basking shark. They feed almost exclusively on plankton and small fishes, and pose no threat to humans.

It is truly awe inspiring to witness 'Rhincodon Typus' in their natural

habitat. (I was truly appalled years ago in Dubai, when Atlantis Hotel captured a whale shark and put it in their hotel aquarium. After a sustained local and international campaign, 'Sammy' the shark was allegedly tagged and released, but then he disappeared!)

My wife and I were guests on a two-day excursion to the Daymaniyat Islands, some 18km off the coast of Seeb (service provider of the trip - SeaOman). September to November is the annual whale shark season in Oman, where these sharks and their pups migrate south to the warmer waters of the southern hemisphere. During this period, there is a very good chance of an encounter.

Sure enough, as we reached the halfway point, the boat's skipper, Mansoor, started yelling that there were three whale sharks ahead. In a flash he and I, and our host, were ready to jump from the boat alongside what can only be described as a giant shark. No amount of reading about how gentle and safe these

Expert tips

There are important things to bear in mind when swimming with whale sharks, namely:

- Although non-aggressive towards humans, these are huge and powerful creatures. Their dorsal fins could definitely cause you an injury.
- Keep a 3m distance.
- It is believed that the whale sharks can sense sun cream and may react adversely to it, so wash that off before you swim with them.
- Do not attempt to touch the shark or hold on to its fins.
- Always be aware of the position of your boat and others in the vicinity as you don't want to risk injury or worse from propellers.

mammals are can prepare you for the moment you are going to meet one face to fin.

We were very careful to enter the water some 5m away and if it hadn't already, the adrenalin really kicks in once you are in the open ocean and swimming underwater with masks and snorkels. As the bubbles cleared, I saw the first whale shark approach-

ing from below, with its huge mouth open filtering water for plankton, it was mesmerising as it glided past, and with a deft flick of its 6ft dorsal fin, cruised away.

If that had been the last time I experienced such a moment, it would have been totally fulfilling. However, after a wonderful evening in a quiet, sheltered inlet beside one of the nine

islands that make up Daymaniyat, we set off for Al Mouj Marina.

The sea was quite calm and visibility was good and as we caught sight of the coast, three boats had gathered nearby. Upon investigation we were completely astounded by what we witnessed next. A school of 23 whale sharks were feeding and appeared to be happy circling the boats. Within seconds we were in the water and filming and photographing these incredible creatures at close range.

Our seasoned captain remarked that he had never seen so many whale sharks in one place. We were truly humbled in their presence and will always cherish the experience of what can only be described as a rare privilege in sharing their space for a fleeting moment.

See my short video of this experience:

SCAN ME
to see video

