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MADAYN LAUNCHES INVESTMENT COMPLEXES
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HM THE SULTAN, PM JOHNSON DISCUSS PROMOTING TIES



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at 10 Downing Street in London on Thursday. The meeting reviewed historical relations binding the two countries and ways of promoting these in various spheres to serve the joint interests of the Omani and British peoples. The two sides also exchanged views on current international issues of common concern (ONA)



MoH sets up more vaccination centres

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has stated that the number of COVID-19 vaccination centres is being expanded to cover all parts of the sultanate. This is in line with the ministry's efforts to maintain the health and safety of citizens and residents, and to stop the spread of the virus.

A statement issued by the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat said, 'Vaccination service for Omanis and expatriates will be available at different locations in the governorate.

'The vaccination service against COVID-19 is continuing for Omanis of the target group during official working days (Sunday to Thursday) at the following sites: Hayy al Jamea Health Centre (8am to 8pm), Al Khuwayr North Health Centre (8am to 8pm), Ruwi Health Centre (8am to 2pm), Muscat Health Centre, Al Amerat Health Centre and Al Sahel Health Centre (8am to 2pm).

Over 32,000 receive 3rd dose

MoH has confirmed that more than 32,412 individuals have received the third dose of COVID-19 vaccine, accounting for one per cent of the target group. Those vaccinated with one dose account for 93 per cent and two doses account for 86 per cent of the target group. The total number of doses administered in the sultanate is 6.42mn.

'Vaccination service for Omanis is also continuing in the old Muscat Airport building in Seeb (8am to 2pm). At this location, the vaccination service for expatriates and residents is held Sunday to Thursday from 8am to 2pm.'

MoH called on all to register through Tarassud + app or moh.gov.om.covid19 for vaccination.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُسْلِمُونَ إِنَّا نُنَادِيكُمْ بِأَنْ تَتَوَكَّلُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَتَتَّقُوهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْوَكِيلُ

صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our beloved founder,

Mr. Majid Al Futtaim

Mr. Majid Al Futtaim was a visionary entrepreneur who transformed the face of business across our region.

His lifetime achievements have been an inspiration for many, none more than the proud employees of his company.

His legacy lives on in our businesses and culture, which shall continue to create innovative brands, exceptional destinations, and spaces that incubate happiness for our people and our customers.

His passing is a tragic loss for our company, our communities and our region, and our thoughts and prayers are with his family and loved ones during this difficult time.

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

ماجد الفطيم
MAJID AL FUTTAIM

الموج
muscat

مول عمان
Mall of Oman

سيني سنتر
مسقط

سيني سنتر
الفرج

سيني سنتر
صفا

VOX
CHERRY

كارفور
Carrefour

ماجيك بلاانيت
magic planet



UN welcomes Oman’s role in tackling Yemen crisis

Muscat - The sultanate and the United Nations on Thursday held a meeting during which they reviewed developments of the situation in Yemen. The meeting took place in the office of Oman’s Permanent Delegation to the UN.

Oman’s delegation in the meeting was headed by its permanent representative to the UN, H E Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, while David Grisley, the UN’s coordinator for humanitarian affairs in Yemen, represented the international organisation.

Grisley reiterated that the UN welcomed the positive role of the Omani government in seeking ways to resolve the Yemeni crisis. The two sides explored means of alleviating the Yemeni people’s humanitarian suffering. They stressed the significance of en-

Oman and the UN called for a re-start of negotiations to settle the differences between Yemeni parties by peaceful means

gaging the global community so that it could exert more efforts and stand by the Yemeni people in their predicament.

While appreciating the international efforts made so far for the restoration of security and stability in Yemen, the two sides called for a re-start of negotiations to settle the differences between Yemeni parties by peaceful means.

ONA

EA invites bids to set up nurseries for wild saplings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to grow wild trees and increase green cover, the Environment Authority (EA) will establish three nurseries in different areas of the sultanate.

An official of EA said, “As part of the national initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in ten years started in 2020, the authority has offered a tender to establish three nurseries, one in the wilayat of Hamra in Dakhliyah governorate, one in the wilayat of Khasab in Musandam, and the third in Ibri in Dhahirah.”

The EA official added that the deadline for submitting bids is January 17, 2022.

Besides increasing the number of wild trees and green cover, EA hopes to raise awareness on the importance of preserving indigenous species among community members through the project.

In its efforts to plant 10mn wild trees, he said, “Last Tuesday, the Environment Department of South Batinah



governorate planted 2,200 mangrove seedlings in Khor al Hafri in the wilayat of Barka, while the Environment Department in Buraimi planted indigenous species of trees in a number of schools in the governorate with the participation of students on Monday.”

According to the EA official, in August, the authority, in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman, implemented a project to plant 1mn mangrove seeds in a wetland reserve in the wilayat of Mahout, Wusta governorate.

“The project was imple-

mented using drones for the first time in the sultanate in mangrove cultivation operations. The project aims to increase vegetation cover, protect ecosystems, preserve and protect environmental systems and rehabilitate degraded lands while spreading environmental awareness

EA will set up nurseries in Hamra in Dakhliyah governorate, Khasab in Musandam, and the third in Ibri in Dhahirah

among members of society.”

Mangroves are considered to have great benefits in maintaining ecological balance and preserving beaches from erosion while helping the growth of commercially valuable fish and other marine creatures, the EA official informed.

In January 2020, EA, in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman, launched the initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in the next ten years. The indigenous species include *ghaf*, *sumr*, *sidr*, *shue*, *tiq*, *talh*, *mitan*, *sarh* and *alalan*.

EA uses drones to survey coastal erosion in Batinah



Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to preserve the Omani environment, Environment Authority (EA) has implemented a programme to survey and study beach erosion in North and South Batinah.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an EA official said, “The authority has contracted a private company to use drones to survey and study coastal erosion in North and South Batinah.”

He explained that coastal erosion is a global problem that causes a lot of damage to coun-

tries and coastal areas. “Signs of erosion have appeared on some beaches of North and South Batinah governorates. The authority used drones at these sites for analysis and comparison with satellite images taken in the past years.”

He informed that EA recently

organised a workshop on the phenomenon of coastal erosion. The workshop aimed to present and discuss the results of the ongoing survey of beaches in North and South Batinah, and the exchange of experiences, causes and effects of the phenomenon.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C Invites Interested Companies To Participate In The Following Tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Sit Visit	No of Attendee	Tender Price (R.O)
MEDC-17/2021	Extension Of Electrical Distribution Network And Installation Of 5 Number 1600 Kva, 2 Number 2000 Kva To Feed Eagle Hills Muscat At Sarooj In Bousher Area	23/12/2021	11/01/2022	C and Above	26/12/2021 @9:00 AM at Zone 3 office Mawalleh	Two from each company with Full PPE.	105

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Executive Summary	- Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5 % VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - For payment procedure and to obtain the tender document, please contact us via e-mail Contract@medcoman.com 24588600 – Ext: 8577 - 8726
Purchase timing	Tender documents can be purchased at the official working time between 08:00 – 13:00 hours
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent using clarification available in the tender documents, one week before bid submission date - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	- Tenders should be submitted in a sealed and stamped envelope which contains two separate envelopes (Technical proposal and Commercial proposal) addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CO. marked only with tender number and the subject. - Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in clause 20.0 in Prime Document.
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should be included in the commercial proposal envelope only. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The name of the bidder, other marks or any reference must not be specified on the envelope - Tenders received after the deadline stated in the Invitation to Tender, including any extension thereof, for any reason whatsoever will not be considered - The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date - MEDC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - For projects whose value is less than OMR 10K, the priority to award will be given to registered companies that hold a valid certificate Of Reyadah. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.
Bid Placement	The Completed Tender should be deposited in the Tender Box No. 1 in the ground floor of MEDC Head Office building at Airport Heights, before 10 a.m. on the assigned date of tender submission



80070008
www.medcoman.com



TOURISM IN OMAN
GLOBAL ADVENTURE
Matching potential with experience

OFA hosts discussion on adventure tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To promote adventure tourism in the sultanate, an event titled ‘Tourism in Oman - Global Adventure’ was hosted by Oman French Association (OFA) at Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz-Carlton Hotel, on Wednesday.

The event was held under the auspices of H E Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France, to the sultanate. Almost 100 participants, including tour operators and adventure sportsmen, attended the event that discussed how to grow a strong, safe and respectful tourism industry with employment opportunities in Oman.

A team of athletes from France presented a video they shot in the sultanate following

their arrival recently exploring sites conducive for mountain biking in Oman.

This was followed by a panel discussion.

According to panelist Dr Khaled Abdul Malak, a Muscat-based dentist and explorer, the tourism industry “needs to involve more locals as guides and our main job must be to preserve the environment”.

He also noted the requirement of a programme wherein Omani youth go to France for training in the tourism industry. “When they return, they can bring their experiences and expertise to the field and help Oman evolve more as an adventure tourism destination.”

Also in the discussion, Thomas Manfe, project manager of Sidekick Company, a tour

operating company from France, suggested developing outdoor activities as an asset for Oman tourism, connecting these to big brands and adventure industries abroad.

Sophie al Wahaibi, co-owner of Muscat-based tour operating company Couleurs d’Oman, explained what French tourists look for in Oman and insisted on the importance of trained guides to ensure the safety of visitors.

OFA is a non-profit organisation registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supported by the French Embassy. OFA aims to provide a platform that promotes friendship, understanding and matters of mutual interest between French and Omani businesses and social communities active in the sultanate.

REGIONAL WEATHER					
ABU DHABI		DUBAI		MANAMA	
Max 28°C	Min 17°C	Max 28°C	Min 14°C	Max 26°C	Min 19°C
DOHA		KUWAIT CITY		RIYADH	
Max 26°C	Min 19°C	Max 21°C	Min 17°C	Max 28°C	Min 15°C

RO12mn worth agreements inked for agri projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed four agreements worth over RO12mn with local investors on Thursday.

On the occasion, H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said, "These projects will enhance and help achieve food security. The ministry will continue to increase the number of food projects and also job opportunities for young people."

The agricultural sector has already witnessed growth over the past years. This is the result of the continuous cooperation between the public and private sectors to utilise investment opportunities in the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

Integrated Agriculture

The agreements include a project billed 'Integrated Agriculture' for production of vegetables and medicinal plants at a cost of RO600,000 in the wilayat of Suwaiq, North Batinah, on an area of 50 acres. The project aims to produce an estimated 1500 tonnes of vegetables and medicinal plants annually and establish modern industries for the production of medicines.

Thyme cultivation

This project, worth RO344,000,



(Supplied photo)

The ministry will continue to increase the number of food projects and also job opportunities for young people

H E DR SAUD AL HABSI

is spread over an area of ten acres in the wilayat of Al Kamil W'Al Wafi, South Sharqiyah, to produce Omani thyme using modern agricultural systems and smart technologies. It is expected to provide 8 to 10 per cent of the sultanate's demand of thyme.

Rabbit breeding

Aiming to produce 14,400 live rabbits annually to supply the local market with white meat, this project worth RO100,000 is located in the wilayat of Sohar on an area spread over three acres of land.

Livestock breeding

A livestock breeding and fodder cultivation project will contribute to raising and fattening livestock of Omani species and producing red meat and improving meat quality at the local level. Worth RO11,387,000 and located in the wilayat of Mahdah on 574 acres of land, the project will produce 22,000 tonnes of meat annually.

UAE businessman Majid al Futtaim dies



Our Correspondent
Muscat

UAE businessman Majid al Futtaim passed away on Friday, according to a statement from the company he founded - Majid Al Futtaim Group that operates in different countries across the Middle East and North Africa, including Oman.

'We are deeply saddened to announce that our beloved

founder, Majid al Futtaim, passed away on December 17, 2021. He was a visionary entrepreneur who transformed the face of business in the entire region and his lifetime achievements have been an inspiration for many, and particularly for us at the Majid Al Futtaim group of companies, which was built around his clear sense of purpose and an unwavering vision,' the company said

in a statement.

It stated that Futtaim believed wholeheartedly in robust, world-class private sector institutions and the role they should play in driving sustainable economic growth and human development.

'His legacy lives on in Majid Al Futtaim's business and culture, which will continue to create outstanding businesses, and exceptional destinations.'

MoCIIP kicks off video, logo contest

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support Omani products, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced a new competition, which aims to support the 'Made in Oman' campaign.

"The competition consists of two parts: Production of a promotional video for Omani products and designing a logo for the 'Made in Oman' national campaign," a ministry official said.

Elaborating on the competition rules, he said the video should promote Omani products in an innovative way, and its duration should not exceed 90 seconds. The logo of the 'Made in Oman' campaign should not be



(Supplied photo)

similar to any logo or borrowed from any party or persons. Contestants must create a logo based on their own ideas.

"The last date for submitting entries is December 25, 2021 via invest@tejarah.gov.om," the official said.

MoCIIP confirmed that the

'Made in Oman' campaign continues in stores, supermarkets and malls across the sultanate.

The campaign is organised by MoCIIP in partnership with the Authority of Small & Medium Enterprises Development, Consumer Protection Authority, Madayn and Oman Chamber of

Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from the business community. It is designed to support local producers and manufacturers to encourage consumers across the sultanate to buy locally produced goods.

The ministry explained that one of the key goals of the campaign is to get consumers to see Omani products, produce and services in a new light, and do more than just talk about the GDP and how rials spent on local products help long-term growth.

Last week, MoCIIP launched an online investment licensing service via the 'Invest Easy' portal allowing all firms subject to the Foreign Capital Investment Law to obtain licences for their projects through self-service or service centres.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

TENDER NO. 19/2021

الهيئة العامة للمناطق الاقتصادية الخاصة والمناطق الحرة
Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones
Sultanate of Oman
سلطنة عمان



The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) invites the reputable and experienced Companies/Bidders to participate in the following tender:

Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) Digital Services Platform

Participating & Purchasing the Tender Documents:	send the payment tenders@opaz.gov.om
Start of Tender Documents' Sale (Date):	Sunday, 19 th December 2021 (9:00 AM)
End of Tender Documents' Sale (Date):	Thursday, 30 th December 2021 (3:00 PM)
Tender Closing (Submission) & Opening of Bids Date:	Thursday, 20 th January 2022 (3:00 PM)
Cost of Tender Documents:	OMR. 900 (Omani Rial Nine Hundred).
Payment method for purchasing the tender document:	OPAZ account – Bank Muscat 0423-0205-4603-0013 Code: BMUSOMRXXXX Branch Code: 0423

- Bidders must submit their bids online through OPAZ Tender email: **tenders@opaz.gov.om** addressed to the chairman of OPAZ Tender Committee (OTC), on the specified date and time.
- The Original Bank Guarantee from Local Bank in the Sultanate of Oman of not less than (1%) of the Tender Value, valid for (180) days from the Proposals submission date, should be submitted to OPAZ Tenders and Contracts Department, addressed to H.E THE CHAIRMAN, OPAZ Tender COMMITTEE (OTC) in the Proposals submission date during official working hours between 09:00 AM – 02:00 PM.
- No bid shall be accepted after the specified date and time of bid submission.
- OPAZ is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bid and reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.

For further enquiries, you may contact the below E-mail
tenders@opaz.gov.om

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Madayn launches investment complexes to attract investors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has announced the launch of Madayn Investment Complexes which will provide an ideal opportunity for local and foreign companies to invest in Oman's industrial cities.

Under the Madayn Investment Complexes project, companies shall develop specialised investment complexes through their real estate plans, and the designs shall be approved by Madayn, according to Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

"The developing companies will then promote the industrial and investment units with the facilities for the local and foreign companies to buy or rent these units for immediate operation, following the installation of production lines of the tenant or owner," Hasani said in a statement on Saturday.

Under the new scheme, the development opportunities will be announced for ten investment complexes in Suhar, Buraimi, Samail, and Sur industrial cities in a variety of sectors. The



activities of the investment complexes will represent a variety of sectors including multi industries, food, plastic, and logistics industries.

"These investment complexes shall support the industrial integration between small and large factories and contribute to encouraging local and foreign investments towards the complementary industries. This project shall also offer an opportunity for the SMEs to enter the industrial sector through these investment complexes. The SMEs will be able to buy or lease

real estate units with small areas that are compatible with their operational and production capacity," Hasani explained.

New industrial cities

Commenting on the executive position of the new industrial cities that were announced earlier by Madayn, Hasani elaborated that the project of establishing Thumrait Industrial City has entered the final stage of designing the infrastructure, identifying available investment opportunities for the private sector, and updating the economic

analysis. An environmental study, according to Madayn, was also conducted by a specialised environmental consultant and the environmental approval has been obtained from the relevant body.

Located about 9km away from Thumrait Air Base towards



These investment complexes shall support the industrial integration between small and large factories and contribute to encouraging local and foreign investments

HILAL BIN HAMAD AL HASANI

Madayn is also in the process of floating a tender for the one-stop shop in Ibri Industrial City, which will comprise a fuel station, hotel, public amenities, restaurants, and auto care services. The tender document is in the review stage and is expected to be floated before the end of this year.

With regard to Mahas Industrial City, the CEO of Madayn said that the industrial city has begun with its administrative work in the wilayat of Khasab in Musandam governorate in early October this year to offer serv-

ices to the factories that are localised in the industrial city.

Hasani added that work is currently in its final stages to award the tender for road and infrastructure construction of Mahas Industrial City on an area of 1mn sqm and at a cost of approximately RO6mn. The tender

is expected to be awarded by end of December 2021 and the project implementation to commence by the first quarter of 2022.

Madayn has also floated consultancy services tender for Al Mudhaibi Industrial City, which encompasses a detailed design for a total area touching 14mn sqm, and another detailed design for an area of 2mn sqm. It also includes planning of a number of warehouses and identifying 15 viable investment opportunities that depend on the governorate's natural resources.

Zain to sell towers in Jordan for \$88mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omantel's subsidiary Zain Group announced that its Jordan unit has agreed to sell and leaseback 2,607 towers to TASC Towers Company for US\$88mn.

'Zain Jordan, one of Zain Group subsidiaries, has signed an agreement for the sale and leaseback of passive tower structures and supporting facilities in Jordan with TASC Towers Company,' Omantel said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

'Under the agreement, Zain Jordan will sell 2,607 towers at a value of US\$88mn. This agreement will have a positive impact on the company's operations in Jordan and Zain Group,' Omantel said.

The company added that the accounting gain of this transaction before tax is expected to be approximately US\$50mn and it will be recognised once realised.

Earlier this month, Zain Group also received a US\$1.3bn acquisition offer for 100 per cent stake of Zain Sudan and Kuwait Sudanese Holdings from Sudan's leading business group DAL Group.



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US Fed likely to raise rates in March

Washington, US - With inflation expected to remain high for some time, the US central bank is likely to raise interest rates soon after it ends its bond-buying program in March, a Federal Reserve board member said on Friday.

The Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced a more aggressive stance to quell the wave of price increases that has affected cars, housing, food and other goods in the United States and become a political liability for President Joe Biden.

The central bank's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) announced it will accelerate the phase out of its stimulus measures to end them in March, which would then allow it to as soon as May deploy its most powerful weapon against inflation by raising lending rates.

Fed governor Christopher Waller said the decision announced on Wednesday gives policymakers the ability to respond quickly with an increase in the benchmark lending rate, which he expects 'will be warranted shortly after our asset purchases end' in the spring.

Asked to be more precise about the timing, Waller said, "We'd like to put March on the table as a possible date to start lifting (interest rates) if we need to."

Quarterly forecasts from Fed policymakers also released last week signalled the likelihood of



three interest rate hikes next year, and most economists expect the first one in May as officials try to keep inflation under wraps.

But opening the door to a more rapid move in March - at what would be the Fed's second policy meeting of the year - was the 'whole point' of the decision announced this week, Waller told the Forecasters Club of New York.

Inflation "is alarmingly high, persistent and has broadened to affect more categories of goods and services, compared with earlier this year."

He said he expects the economy to grow strongly in coming months and rapidly return to full

employment - a key criteria for the Fed before it will lift rates off zero, where they have been since March 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

However, "One big uncertainty about this outlook, of course, is the Omicron variant," he cautioned. The new variant could force new restrictions that might slow the economy, but also 'exacerbate labour and goods supply shortages and add inflation pressure'.

It will take some months to see if inflation is moderating as expected, he said.

Waller noted that the Fed adapted quickly to the unprecedented nature of the global pandemic and its impact on the

economy and financial system.

However, the crisis posed huge challenges for forecasters trying to predict the severity of the downturn and the speed of the recovery, including the supply chain bottlenecks that have frustrated businesses and added to the price pressures.

"Like others, I expected that markets would adjust quickly and that these problems would be fixed," he said.

"We are learning that the long and complex supply chains that have facilitated trade and driven down production costs in recent years are quite fragile and are taking longer to repair than I would have expected."

AFP



GOOD FOR YOU!

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts weekly gains as financial stocks rise

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) last week closed higher after financial stocks recorded significant increases during the week.

The MSX30 index increased 0.56 per cent for the week. While Financial index gained 1.05 per cent during last week, Industrial and Services indices dropped by 1.0 per cent and 1.3 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah index closed lower by 0.18 per cent.

One of the most important developments during previous week was the announcement of budget estimates for fiscal year 2022. Oman's government is planning to increase total public spending to RO12.1bn in the fiscal year 2022 as public revenues are expected to rise by 6 per cent. The estimated total public spending will be 2 per cent higher in 2022 over what is expected to be spent by the end of this year, the Ministry of Finance announced on Sunday.

Total spending in Budget 2022 is over 11 per cent higher compared to the RO10.8bn spending estimated in budget for 2021.

Local news

►The chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) said last week that more than 110 investment projects are being implemented in 2021 and 2022 and the volume of actual investments in 2021 stood at RO2.6bn. In 2022, the volume

of spending will be RO2.9bn through the expansion of current projects and setting up new ones. In 2022, the volume of investments in the tourism sector is expected to be RO193mn, RO57mn in the mining sector, RO116mn in the logistics sector, and RO156mn in communications and information technology. This is in addition to RO99mn in the food sector, RO54mn in fisheries, RO1.41bn in the energy sector, RO803mn in the general services sector and RO52mn in other sectors.

The OIA chairman informed that state-owned companies will operate themselves to cover their expenses without the help of the Ministry of Finance.

►The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has instructed commercial banks in Oman to end the long-standing practice of offering prizes against savings deposit schemes with effect from January 1, 2022.

The measure came in a circular issued by the CBO's executive president H E Tahir Salim al Amri. The Circular 1811 directs licensed banks to scrap prize schemes while taking steps to enhance interest rates on deposits, among other measures to boost deposit mobilization.

►Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has commenced operations at its new central warehouse in Al Sawadi, with the support of its long-term partner, Al Madina Logistics



Services (ALMS). The 2,900 sqm facility has the capacity for 4,500 pallet positions, serving to accommodate the increasing demand for OOMCO's lubricants across Oman while helping the company continue to deliver on its 'You Trust We Care' promise.

"The new centralized warehouse in Al Sawadi will ease our lubricants supply chain processes.

With direct access from the main road of Al Batinah Highway and the expressway, the location will allow us to expand our reach beyond the populated areas in Muscat and permit shorter delivery times," said Talib Omar al Maadi, supply chain general manager at Oman Oil Marketing Company.

►Omantel disclosed that Zain Jordan, one of Zain Group (Omantel's subsidiary), has signed an agreement for the sale and leaseback of passive

tower structures and supporting facilities such as power generators, fuel tanks and protection kiosks (towers) in Jordan with TASC Towers Company (In which Zain Group owns 25 per cent). Under this agreement, the company will sell 2,607 (towers) at a value of US\$88mn. This agreement will have a positive impact on the company's operations in Jordan and Zain Group.

The accounting gain of this transaction before tax is expected to be approximately US\$50mn and it will be recognized once realised.

►Sohar International has acted as the financial adviser to the popular on-demand delivery service major, Akeed, on raising its equity capital from investors. Reiterating its strong market position, investor confidence

and as part of its ongoing efforts to extend support to local startups and promote in-country

value (ICV) within the sultanate, this strategic initiative reflects Sohar International's strong internal capabilities through a well-experienced team as well as a strong network and reaches to market such investment opportunities to existing and potential investors whether locally, regionally, or internationally.

►Port of Salalah, in close partnership with ROP customs, have successfully tested sea-air connectivity with a priority shipment destined for Qatar during the second week of December. The shipment, a 40FT Maersk container loaded from Antwerp, upon discharge in Salalah, was successfully moved on customs bond to Muscat airport for air freight to Doha in a record time of 15 hours.

This included tracking the shipment movement process from the seaport to the airport in Muscat at every step. The ROP extended extraordinary support in making this trial a successful one with seamless operation at both ends.

►Total number of guests in hotel properties (3 to 5-star category) in the sultanate increased 37.9 per cent to 834,255 in the first nine months of 2021, compared to 604,940 guests for the same period of 2020.

The occupancy rate increased to 35 per cent, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the Na-

tional Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), compared to 27.3 per cent last year. Total revenues of these hotels fell by 11.7 per cent to RO59.27mn during January - September period of 2021, compared to RO67.2mn during the same period of the previous year.

Regional and global developments

Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 7 per cent in the third quarter of 2021 compared with the same period a year earlier, the highest growth since 2012, data issued by the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) showed. The GDP also rose by 5.7 per cent compared with the second quarter of 2021.

The authority attributed the growth to the increase in oil activities by 9.3 per cent year-on-year and 12.7 per cent quarter-on-quarter. In addition, non-oil activities grew by 6.3 per cent year-on-year. The government activities rose by 2.7 per cent year-on-year.

The US Federal Reserve indicated it sees as many as three rate hikes coming in 2022, as the central bank contends with a recent surge in inflation.

The Fed also expects to raise rates twice more in 2023, followed by another two rate hikes in 2024. The central bank hiked its inflation outlooks for 2021 and 2022 as well.

For 2021, Fed sees inflation

rising to 5.3 per cent, up from a previous forecast of 4.2 per cent. For 2022, it expects inflation of 2.6 per cent, up from an estimate issued in September. The Fed chairman said the Omicron variant is a risk to economic growth, but it does not impact the central bank's plans to accelerate its tapering of pandemic-era aid.

The Fed chairman also said that although the unemployment rate has been dropping quickly, labour force participation has been 'disappointing'. He also said the policymakers considered it the suitable approach to dial back its bond buying program.

Recommendations

Global markets followed sell rumour and buy news strategy, despite the US Fed choosing to be more aggressive in their approach toward tapering. Overall, the global markets took it well and many asset classes bounced back.

Regionally, the markets also followed suit and rallied in response to overall improved global sentiments. Oil also bounced back after a big draw down of inventories in the US.

Locally, the market remained mostly range bound.

We advise investors to vet the news of Saudi Arabia and Oman MoUs as we believe the outcome will be very beneficial in the long run for both countries.

By special arrangement with U Capital

US hits China with new trade curbs, sanctions

Washington, US - The United States on Thursday unleashed a volley of actions to censure China's treatment of the Uyghur minority, with lawmakers voting to curb trade and new sanctions slapped on the world's top consumer drone maker.

The United States has ramped up pressure on China, with President Joe Biden's administration a day earlier targeting producers of painkillers that contributed to America's addiction crisis. The US Senate unanimously voted to make the United States the first country to ban virtually all imports from China's Xinjiang region over forced labour concerns.

"We know it's happening at an alarming, horrific rate with the genocide that we now witness being carried out," said Senator Marco Rubio, a driver behind the act, which has already passed the House of Representatives, and which the White House says Biden will sign. After prolonged negotiations to secure its pas-

sage, Rubio lifted objections and the Senate confirmed veteran diplomat Nicholas Burns as ambassador to China.

Some US businesses had voiced unease about the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act, which bans the import of all goods from the region unless companies offer verifiable proof that production did not involve slavery. An estimated 20 per cent of garments imported into the US each year include some cotton from Xinjiang.

Beijing has said it 'firmly opposes' the US move and will take 'all necessary measures' to protect Chinese companies.

"The US has overstretched the concept of national security and fabricates all kinds of excuses to abuse export control measures to unreasonably suppress Chinese institutions and firms," said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin. "It has reached a stage where they stop at nothing."

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Bank Muscat rewards 61 winners with RO415,000 at special Al Mazyona draw

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, continues to bring joy and happiness to its customers by holding its Al Mazyona monthly draw. The draw for November 2021 was held at a grand event at the Radisson Blu Hotel Sohar recently in the presence of H E Dr Saif bin Mohanna bin Saif al Hinai, Wali of Sohar, and Taya Bait Sabeea, assistant general manager - Branches Interior Regions, Bank Muscat. The event focused on Al Mazyona customers from the Governorate of North Batinah. Draws were also conducted in the Asalah Priority Banking, Al Jawhar Privilege Banking and monthly Mega draw categories, with a total of RO415,000 being given away in prizes to 61 lucky winners.

A total of 30 winners won prizes of RO500 each in the monthly draws for the Governorate of North Batinah, while one lucky winner won the monthly mega prize of



RO50,000. All customers who maintained a minimum balance of RO100 were automatically entered into the monthly draws for governorates while the winner of the mega draw was chosen from

amongst customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO1,000. Also, ten Asalah customers won RO25,000 each and 20 Al Jawhar customers won RO5,000 each in the other

draws. It must be noted that all Asalah customers who maintained a minimum balance of RO30,000 and Al Jawhar customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO10,000 were auto-

matically entered into these monthly draws.

Sabeea congratulated all the winners of the monthly prize draws and said that the prizes would enable them to realise

their dreams. He stressed that all bank customers have the opportunity to win valuable and exciting prizes by regularly saving. He added that the November prize draws are a forerunner to the highly-anticipated End-of-Year Al Mazyona special draw that features over RO1.5mn in prize money. He encouraged all customers to continue a healthy and regular savings habit and save more so as to get more chances to win in the End of Year draw.

All customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts will be automatically entered into the draws to select the winners of the two RO250,000 mega prizes in the Al Mazyona End-of-Year draw. High savings Asalah Priority Banking customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO30,000 will be entered into the special draws for ten prizes of RO50,000 each with a total of RO500,000 reserved in prizes for them. Al Jawhar customers

maintaining a minimum balance of RO10,000 will be eligible to win one of the 10 prizes of RO20,000 each, which adds up to a total of RO200,000. Also, 70 winners will be chosen from among customers across the Sultanate having a minimum balance of RO1,000. Each winner will get RO5,000 in the prize draw, which will give away a total of RO350,000 in prizes to customers from different governorates.

In total, more than RO1.5mn has been reserved for the bank's customers from over 140 personal banking branches spread across the Sultanate. With RO11mn to be given away in 2021, the country's biggest savings scheme is all set to create further excitement in the coming weeks as the year draws to a close. This year's programme is giving away a record 7,470 prizes compared to 6,677 last year, a 12 per cent increase in the number of winners.

Oman Air wins World's Leading Airline Award

Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, has received internationally acclaimed recognition at the 28th Annual World Travel Awards. The airline was named 'World's Leading Airline - Customer Experience 2021'.

Commenting on the World Travel Awards, Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, chief executive officer, Oman Air, said, "Oman Air remains committed to a safe and exceptional journey for all its valued guests, and we are delighted to once again be recognised for delivering on that commitment. Any win at the World Travel Awards is an honour; we're extremely proud to take home a win in the Customer Experience category, and this from among many of the world's leading airlines. It confirms that everything we do-and continue to do as a premium airline-translates into memorable journeys with Oman Air.

This achievement is a testament to the dedication



and professionalism of our pilots, cabin crew and ground staff and is particularly significant at a time when airlines around the world are facing unprecedented challenges."

This latest award follows previous Oman Air wins in the World Travel Awards Middle East Programme. In 2020, it won 'Middle East's Leading Airline 2020: Business Class and 'Middle East's Leading Airline 2020: Economy Class'.

The airline has been awarded

the Middle East's Leading Airline: Business Class title every year since 2016, as well as in 2014; and the Middle East's Leading Airline: Economy Class title for 6 years running - from 2014 to 2020. On December 1 this year, it earned a Five-Star rating in the Major Airline category by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), the second consecutive year it has won the award. Oman Air has also earned a Five-Star COVID-19 Airline Safety Rating from Skytrax.

Moosa al Jadidi appointed as chief executive of Oman Housing Bank

The board of directors of Oman Housing Bank (OHB), has announced the appointment of Moosa al Jadidi as the chief executive officer of the Bank.

Jadidi is a seasoned banker with extensive industry knowledge armed with more than two decades of experience in the banking and financial industry across the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC.

As an award winning banker, he is renowned for having expert knowledge of both conventional and Islamic banking, notably retail banking, corporate credit, wealth management & private banking investments coupled with his focus on continuous improvement and exemplary performance. He is also an expert in digital customer experience and strategic operational management and planning.

Prior to joining Oman Housing Bank Jadidi was the chief operating officer of Alizz



Moosa al Jadidi

Islamic Bank.

Jadidi has extensive international and regional banking experience as he previously worked for the Royal Bank of Canada, the European Financial Group Bank as vice president - Global Private Banking, Dubai

Bank as vice president - International Business Development and several local banks such as Bank Muscat and National Bank of Oman (NBO). His professional journey has shaped Jadidi professionally to become a key player in the development of the bank's financial markets business and driving the growth of assets and net profits.

Jadidi has a Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Bedfordshire & is a graduate of the Senior Executive Program from London Business School in the UK. He is also an associate of the Canadian Institute of Bankers and a certified private banker.

Speaking on this announcement, Salaam Said al Shaksy, chairman of the board of Oman Housing Bank said, "On behalf of the board of directors of Oman Housing Bank and members of the executive management, I am pleased to welcome Moosa al Jadidi as CEO of

Oman Housing Bank and wish him the best of luck and success in his new position and look forward to seeing the enhancements that he will bring to the organistaion. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Adnan Haider Darwish, the former CEO of Oman Housing Bank, for his hard work and the great effort that he put towards the banks objectives in the past years."

Oman Housing Bank aims to support the developmental movement in the country according to the requirements of Omani nationals within the framework of the plans laid down by the government for the housing sector.

OHB is one of the most significant developmental pillars that was established by the government with the aim to contribute to the enhancement and progress of the developmental renaissance by providing home finance for citizens.

2022 Renault Koleos is built to demand attention, make heads turn

The Renault Koleos 2022 is the perfect choice for those looking for a spacious SUV with elegant styling or a companion for adventurous off-road trips. The incredible model is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort. Featuring a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies Renault Koleos fully embodies the values of the top of the Renault line-up

The overall profile of the 2022 Koleos appears solid and athletic because of the well-defined edges. A great combination of power and refinement, the Koleos makes its presence felt with large shoulders and muscular side panels that are further enhanced by a robust frontend; broad, smart-looking tires; and a distinctly large wheelbase.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "Renault's first SUV the

Koleos remains a favourite among customers and those looking for something different, which speaks volumes about the innovativeness that the car was built on. With its athletic profile, robust front end, roomy seats, taut lines underscored with chrome, Renault Koleos allows owners to take their journey with confidence."

The all-mode 4x4-i transmission results in a car that promises owners all the power and comfort they would require on the road. The engine can be switched between two- and four-wheel driving giving drivers the liberty and flexibility to choose their own experience.

The car is engineered to mirror the comfort of being home, with spacious leg space, ventilated memory seats, a breathable cabin. With a choice of colours for the seats, owners can choose what defines them the best - for a roomier feeling, one can opt for lighter shades, while darker ones can be picked for more assertive looks. The 2022 Koleos also comes with all-new black titanium trims that replace



its predecessor's wooden trims.

The car's ambient lighting, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity, R-LINK 2 all make for a memorable drive each time. The 2022 Renault Koleos is certainly a notch above when it comes to contemporary SUVs that set out to offer a bit of everything to cater to all customers, no matter their drives.

The 2022 Renault Koleos

also comes with additional features, such as rich acoustics with the BOSE audio system, lighting options, multimedia, navigation, Bluetooth and driving assistance systems in addition to easy park assist.

Renault Koleos is loved for its charismatic, features rich and packed with safety attributes. If you are looking for a spacious SUV with elegant styling and un-

paralleled four-wheel drive technology, Renault Koleos is the car to buy.

Rafeeq Mustafa from Sohar said, "Renault Koleos particularly amazes car enthusiasts who value distinctive design, advanced technology, high reliability and superior performance. Koleos exudes elegance with its strong lines and signature Renault design cues. The carefully

sculpted bonnet on the Koleos flows seamlessly from the stylish, chrome-highlighted grille to the sweeping taillight design."

Nazil al Amri loves to take Renault Koleos through beaten track. "It's all mode 4x4-i technology, swap between 2WD mode, Auto mode and 4x4 (lock) mode is really impressive. It offers an ideal balance of torque between the front and rear wheels for perfect grip in all circumstances," he said.

Amit Sharma from Muscat calls Renault Koleos an outstanding car. He said, "I particularly like its blind spot warning with flank protection warning, auto park assists and remote start engine with timer option. Koleos extends a variety of features that are among the most capable in the market."

Aamir Zedjali loves the model for its great features. "Renault Koleos has a 2,705mm wheelbase - for a total vehicle length of 4,673mm - counts amongst the longest in the class and allows Koleos to boast record-breaking interior space to position itself as a D-segment SUV," he said.

The brand's easy trunk access and hand-free function has impressed Buthaina Balushi. She said, "It is very practical when your hands are full when returning from office or shopping. With a sensor located under the bumper, all you need is a simple gesture with your foot to open the boot with ease."

The model features powerful, efficient engines, safety attributes and on-board technologies. The SUV is marked for its fuel efficiency and infotainment options too.

Renault Koleos LE model has LED fog lamps with chrome borders, new 19-inch Kavea alloy wheels and resplendent new front grill. The Renault Koleos SE has been augmented with Sand Grey leather seats, tilt adjustment front headrests, one touch easy folding rear seats with two step reclining and power seats, electric power seats for driver and passenger, 18-inch Argonaute two tone alloy wheels, auto folding rear view mirrors with door lock, auto-dimming rear-view mirror. It also supports Apple car play and android auto.

MEDRC announces winners of Omani Young Water Researchers Award and Eco School Prize 2021

MEDRC has announced the winners of the 'Omani Young Water Researchers Award 2021' and the 'Eco School Prize' at an official ceremony held under the auspices of H E Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Oman.

Established by MEDRC and sponsored by the Omar Zawawi Establishment and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Oman, the Omani Young Water Researchers Award highlights the exceptional work of young water researchers at undergraduate and postgraduate level in Oman.

Speaking at the award ceremony, MEDRC Center director, Ciarán Ó Cuinn said, "Supporting the talents of young Omani researchers and the researchers of tomorrow is such an honour for us at MEDRC.

The academic excellence and commitment to environmental sustainability on show is simply fantastic."

H E Kloth said, "There is a recurring essence that flows through the history of Oman and the Netherlands binding its people together: water. Both nations continue to face challenges when it comes to water and water management. Therefore It is important for us to share our knowledge with each other and



this is why Netherlands promotes its research in the field of water to continuously improve water efficiency and protection from water, thereby contributing to SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation)." The winners announced this year are as follows:

Postgraduate category:

1st Place: Amira Sulaiman al Ga-

reebi, Sultan Qaboos University for the research paper titled 'Functionalized carbon nanotubes from local biomass for improving the performance of membrane distillation for water desalination'.

2nd Place: Alya Abdulla al Buisaidi, Sultan Qaboos University for the research paper titled 'Bimetallic photocatalytic material CdxZn(1-x)O for the degradation of antibiotics present in

aqueous solutions under solar light irradiation'.

Undergraduate category

1st Place: Abdulrahman Mohammed al Musalami, International Maritime College Oman for the research paper titled 'Production of potable water by thermal desalination technique on utilizing the waste heat exhaust

from a diesel engine'.

2nd Place: Fatema Faham al Muqbali and Amal al Balushi, International Maritime College Oman for the research paper titled 'Sustainable desalination and bioelectricity generation using green technology of microbial desalination cell'.

The Eco School Prize ceremony was held jointly on the same day, where Alajiah school was announced as the overall

winner of the prize. Sponsored by Oman LNG Development foundation and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and supported by The Ministry of Education and Sultan Qaboos University's College of Engineering.

The prize which was designed to build greater water and energy awareness among school students in Oman saw five schools from South Sharqiyah compete

for the prize.

Through a series of different activities, the students showcased the importance of water and energy and why conservation of both resources is vital for sustainable development.

To highlight the learning and understanding developed by the students throughout the competition, they worked on creating engaging short videos for social media distribution. Sesban Nasser al Alawi, a student of Alajiah School, won the award for best video for her work on a thoughtful and educational animation with Salma Salim al Sarhani from AlKhansa school and Abdulaziz Amar AL-Oraimi from Ahmed bin Majid school tying for second place.

The Young Omani Water Researchers Award winners received a paid trip to participate in Expo 2020 Dubai while the winning prizes for the Eco school prize included vouchers of up to RO150 at an electronics store.

Among the distinguished guests present at the ceremony were Sabrin al Badaai, representative of Oman LNG Development Foundation and Sulaiman al Qasmi, COO of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company.

IO Kitchen and NHI join hands to develop local talent

IO Kitchen, the first Omani cloud kitchen for online deliveries announced a strategic partnership with the National Hospitality Institute (NHI) to deliver a tailor-made programme that focuses on developing, training, mentoring and hiring Omani talent that will support its growth and expansion plans in Oman.

Through this partnership, the nine-month training programme will see young Omani talent trained in hospitality and fast-tracked upon joining the company into various brand champion schemes. They will also receive mentorship opportunities by culinary experts and exposure to the latest disruptive innovations in the cloud kitchen industry.

Hisham Hasan, CEO of IO



Kitchen, said, "As the first Omani-owned cloud kitchen concept, we are proud to be introducing programmes that seek to support Oman's socio-economic agenda by attracting, training, developing, mentoring and hiring local talent to join our ever-growing team. We are always seeking new, innovative ways to change the way F&B

businesses operate in a hyper-digitised economy."

"We are delighted to be partners in this exciting new business venture which is at the cutting edge of new trends in eating. We look forward to working with IO Kitchens and help them develop young Omanis for their business," said Robert MacLean, Principal of NHI.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds wins Signature Luxury 100 Award

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 260 outlets spread across ten countries, has won the 'Signature Luxury 100 Award' for the sixth time in a row. The award was conferred in the category 'Iconic Jewellery Brand of 2021' and was received by Muhsin P, branch head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds - Oman from H E Thomas Friedrich Schneider - Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Oman in the presence of Atulya Sharma- CEO, United Media Services at a private event held in Oman.

The Luxury 100, a unique initiative that recognises the country's and the region's



only list of iconic luxury brands of the year, is a consolidated list that embodies the spirit of luxury. It is after months of research that the editors of United Media Services,

renowned luxury specialists, lifestyle journalists and a select mix of readers and industry experts get together to create this list that features brands that have proven their luxury

credentials. The categories range from personal luxury goods to luxury cars, luxury hospitality and bespoke banking.

'We are extremely proud and honoured to be receiving this prestigious 'Signature Luxury 100 Award' for the sixth time in a row. With innovation being at the core of our products, we have always strived to deliver a world class experience to our customers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our customers for this remarkable achievement & will continue to focus our efforts on becoming the world's most preferred jewellery retailer,' said Najeeb K - regional head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Oman on the achievement.

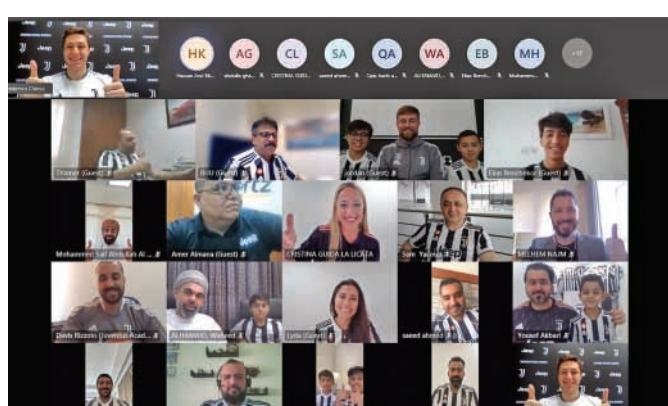
Jeep Oman partners with Juventus to introduce Jeep owners to football icons

Jeep Middle East has partnered with legendary Italian football club Juventus F C to introduce Jeep owners to their football heroes through digital meet and greet sessions.

The virtual meet and greet is something unique that Juventus organises exclusively for Jeep customers. Since the pandemic has made travel difficult for many, the team has decided to launch these virtual meetings to be closer to their fans and let them experience something special - creating a one-to-one opportunity to meet with one of the players in which guests can ask a question and have a chat directly with their football hero.

This year five guests from Oman were invited to meet player meet Federico Chiesa, the young Italian winger that has joined Juventus last season.

Commenting on the occasion, Marco Melani, managing director of American Brands at Stellantis Middle East, said, "Jeep's philosophy is to enable Jeep owners to 'Go anywhere, do any-



thing', which is why we make it our mission to create some of life's most extraordinary journeys for our customers. This partnership with Juventus, one of football's most iconic clubs, is one way in which we can bring these unforgettable experiences to Jeep owners in Oman. Jeep and Juventus are two icons in the history of their respective worlds, making them ideal brand partners, as both have in their DNA values such as authenticity, passion and the ability to take on any challenge, on the field, on road and off road."

Hatem El-Naggar, general manager at Dhofar Automotive, the official dealers of Jeep in Oman said, "It was a truly unique experience for our customers! The name Jeep is synonymous with a relentless pursuit for being at the top of its class, and therefore it shares this passion for excellence with the prestigious Juventus Football Club. I would like to thank all Jeep fans in Oman for their wonderful interaction with this groundbreaking event and to congratulate the five winners who have received this exceptional opportunity to

speak directly with the stars of the legendary Italian club."

Jeep is the authentic SUV with class-leading capability, craftsmanship and versatility for people who seek extraordinary journeys and freedom for the soul. Jeep provides vehicles that support a lifestyle of boundless freedom, responsible adventure and are reliable, safe, fun and environmentally friendly.

The Jeep brand has been a partner with Juventus since 2012, and is proud to partner with a team that shares its passion and drive for success. They are united not only by their iconic style - the striking black and white stripes of the Bianconeri and the signature seven-slot grille of Jeep - but also by their rich history, power and tenacity.

Founded in 1897 in Turin, Italy, Juventus Football Club competes in the Serie A, the top tier of the Italian football league system. 'Juve' has won 38 official league titles, 14 Coppa Italia titles and nine Supercoppa Italiana titles.

OBITUARY



P. SAJEEVAN PUTHEN

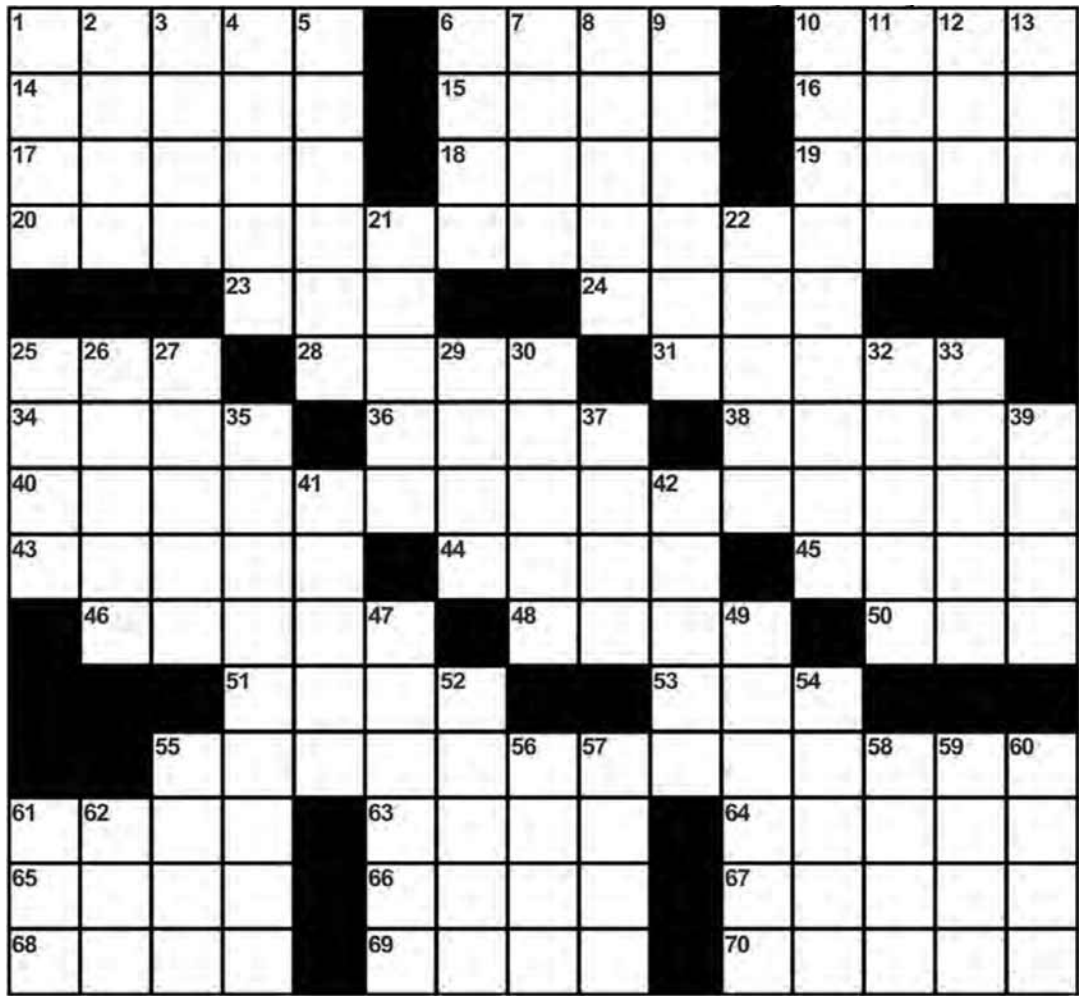
May his soul rest in eternal peace

**The management and Staff of
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Trading Agencies LLC**

**would like to express their condolences to the
family members on his sad demise.**



DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Purple flower
6) Bugs on a hill
10) Dreadful day for Caesar
14) Preserved or reserved
15) Bimonthly tide
16) Evening hour
17) Enjoyed dinner at home
18) Chihuahua bull
19) Again from the start
20) Angry fit on Everest?
23) Diamond, e.g.
24) Counterfeit token
25) "Be Prepared" org. for boys
28) Some farm critters
31) Promotes one's music
34) Bedevilers
36) Ardor
38) Barely perceptible amount
40) Sailing vessels are fans of Lassie?
43) Search, as for talent
44) State with confidence
45) "Sweater Girl" Turner

46) Elephant's quartet
48) "Phew!" inducer
50) Like a debtor's ink
51) Hawk among gods
53) Born, in the society pages
55) Exclusive circle of insects?
61) Ceramic piece
63) Pakistan language
64) Eddy or Allman of music
65) A good way away
66) Breakfast choices
67) Van Halen on guitar
68) Delivery org.
69) Wine sediment
70) Things done by 25-

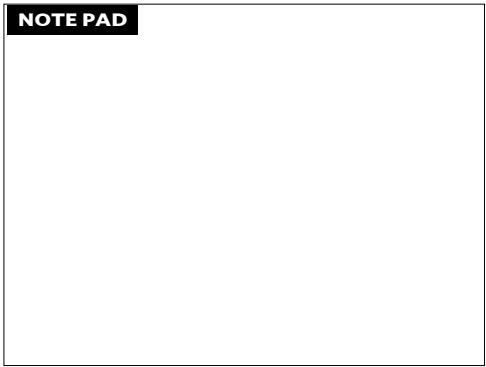
DOWN

1) Rich, dark soil
2) "And lead us not_ ..."
3) In _ of (instead of)
4) Breezing through, as a test
5) Shaq played it
6) Prefix with "skid" or "thesis"
7) Gas light
8) Infield coverings
9) Pampered to a fault (var.)
10) Address every four years

11) Eat well
12) Compass point between N and S
13) Start on one's wardrobe?
21) Astonish
22) Repeat word for word
25) Lobster eaters' accessories
26) Kiss sound
27) Cook's cover-up
29) Clifflike, flat-topped elevation
30) Twenty-one-gun salute, e.g.
32) Air-traffic control device
33) Scottish quick bread
35) Rats
37) Wasn't truthful
39) "Ods bodkins!"
41) Areas of human development
42) Danish currency
47) "Rocky II," e.g.
49) Like a usable clarinet
52) Protector in the office
54) Conservatory assignment, maybe
55) Appreciate a

performance
56) Result of honing
57) Press lips
58) Put on, as cargo

59) "Idylls of the King" character
60) Calls, in poker
61) Fraternity "T"
62) Preconditions



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You've held off making that business deal because it was the only strategy that made any sense. You can put that waiting to an end now, though, and cut loose any old grudges you were carting around. Your hard work can begin to pay off now. And while you generally dwell in the electric excitement of the current moment, you recently managed to give the future some thought. That will turn out to be to your advantage as well.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Power is in the stars, and it's a very malleable thing at the moment. Where you may expect roles to be set and rules to be put down in black and white, you might just find hard to interpret shades of gray and shaky boundaries. On the one hand, this kind of uncertainty and shifting is difficult to get a handle on. On the other, it means there are lots of opportunities to put yourself where you want to be.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your hotheaded side is easily launched into full conflagration right now, perhaps by some frustrating little details that you feel someone else really should have taken care of. The temptation to let them have it verbally is a strong one, but will it really be productive? Things said in the heat of the moment can be difficult to forgive, not to mention forget. Back off and cool off. Come back to this situation at a later time.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Feeling as grounded as you do now gives you the stability and confidence you need to truly shine, as well as make big progress in pretty much any arena you like. Want to jump-start your career? Feel the need to enhance your romance? Perhaps some changes around the house are a bit overdue. With your thorough, practical approach, now is the time to get it done. Keep your successes to yourself, though, at least for the most part.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A lot can be achieved by way of a little soul-searching right now. There's some stuff going on with you on a level that's deeper than the everyday, perhaps regarding an important relationship, and it's definitely worth some thought. Meditating and writing in a journal might help you to get some free-form feelings down. Then you can begin to apply your trademark powers of analysis. Clarity is right around the corner.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

How about letting a few of those sweet feelings slip out? Put your innate reserve aside and get a little mushy. If you're coupled up, renew and reinvigorate the romance by reiterating why it is you're involved. If you've got a crush, well, they're not going to realise you're interested by sheer intuition. Ask some in-depth questions about them, and express how fascinated you are by the answers and by them in general.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You'll need all the powers of concentration you can muster to cut through some complications that are arising now. You're more than equal to the task, but you're also a little prone to avoiding issues, which will only cause a snowball effect at the moment. Tune in (a good first step is to listen up) and focus on the important stuff. Regard any advice you get with a critical eye. After all, you'll want to consider the source.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

The spirit of compromise is alive and well with you as its representative right now. You realise that cooperating is both efficient and fun than competing at the moment, and you're building alliances that will prove mighty useful down the road. Any kind of conflict just seems to dissipate in your presence, because you diplomatically create a completely different kind of atmosphere in which all points of view are valid.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Watch for something from the past to resurface now. While you're a champion at expecting the unexpected, this might actually catch you by surprise. After all, these kinds of 'coincidences' don't happen every day. Even better, this one offers you the chance to make a discovery you missed the first time around. Look to the most peculiar element of the situation for the biggest clue.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Even for someone with changeable moods, you've been having more than your fair share of ups and downs lately (sometimes within moments of each other). The good news is that, right now, a positive perspective is offering itself to you and all you have to do is take it. Why not? You'll get along better with others, you'll enjoy yourself more, and you might just be surprised by how good rose-colored glasses look on you.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you're sensing a potential ambush, you're probably right. There's some friction happening, maybe a little competition, definitely some intensity, and someone involved would like nothing more than to take you by surprise. Little do they know that with your built-in awareness, that's a very difficult thing to do. Evading whatever sneakiness they're cooking up shouldn't be a problem, and you'll come out of it smelling like a rose.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

How's the view from cloud nine? A mellow, affectionate mode should be all yours right now, with plenty of warm and fuzzy feelings. If you've got a love interest, they're likely to get something special now - some kind of gorgeous, creative communication from you. Otherwise, the world may be the object of your affection. You'll be responsive to art and music. Enjoy the dreaminess, and consider capturing it in a poem.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The height of the net in the centre of the tennis court is

- a. 2 ft 10 inches
- b. 2 ft 11 inches
- c. 2 ft 1 inch
- d. 3 ft 2 inches

2. The largest airport in the world is

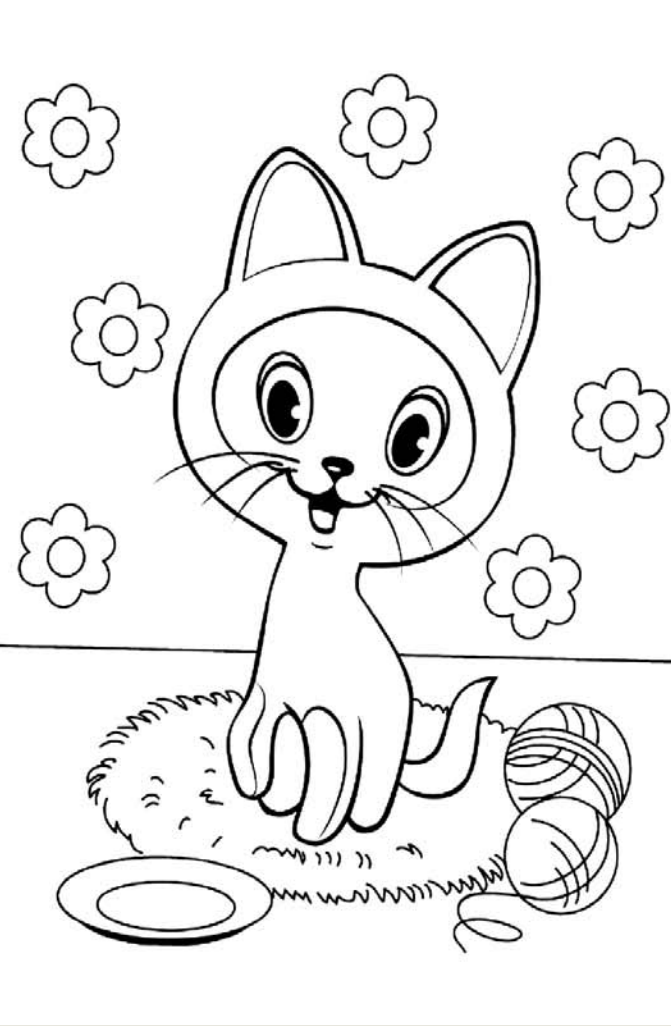
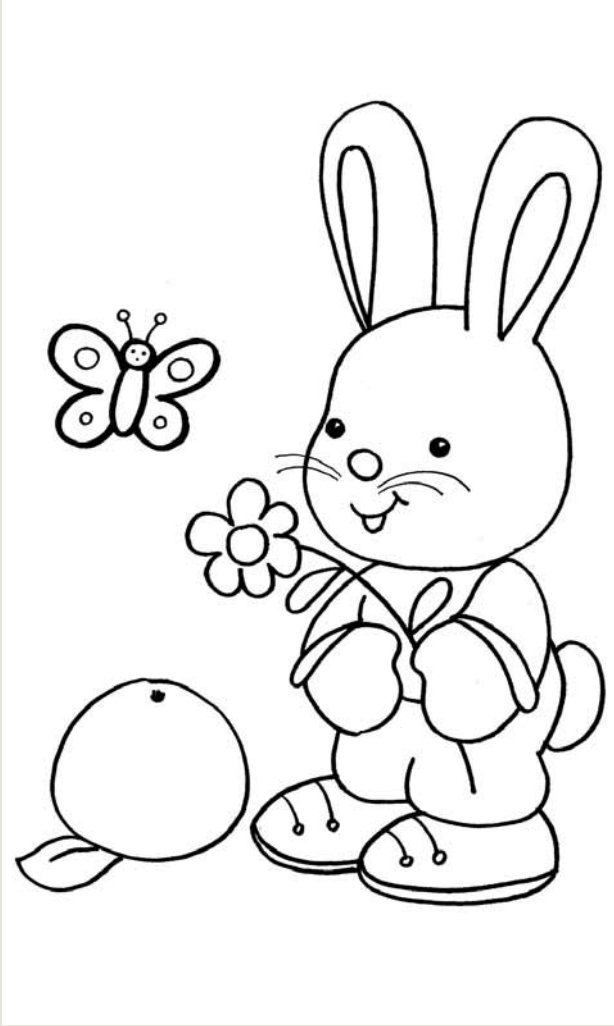
- a. Palam Airport
- b. Indira Gandhi International Airport
- c. Cochin International Airport
- d. King Khalid International Airport

3. The increased use of groundwater for irrigation purposes has led to

- a. salinisation
- b. lowering of the water table
- c. water logging
- d. All of the above

Answers: 1. d 2. b 3. d

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	S	D	E
A	A	K	E
O	N	H	N
M	Y	S	E

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Iran talks nearing end of road: European powers

Iran has requested a new pause in the Vienna talks, which aim to bring the US back into the 2015 deal

Vienna, Austria - Western powers on Friday reported some progress in talks to save the landmark Iran nuclear deal, but European diplomats warned that they were 'rapidly reaching the end of the road'.

In a blow to European mediators, Iran requested a new pause in the talks in Vienna, which aim to bring the United States back into the 2015 agreement and roll back nuclear activities.

The Islamic republic stepped up its nuclear projects after the US withdrawal.

The talks had just resumed in late November after a five-month break following the election of a new hardline government in Iran.

'There has been some technical progress in the last 24 hours, but this only takes us back nearer to where the talks stood in June,' Britain, France and Germany, known as E3, said in a statement.

'We are rapidly reaching the end of the road for this negotiation,' the statement said.

Underlying Western concerns are fears that Iran will soon have made enough progress that the 2015 accord - under which it was promised economic relief in re-

turn for drastic curbs on its nuclear work - will be obsolete.

Enrique Mora, the EU official chairing the talks, called for a 'sense of urgency' and for talks to resume before the end of the year.

"We are not talking anymore about months, we are talking about weeks," Mora said.

Limited progress

Former US president Donald Trump pulled out of the deal in 2018 and imposed sweeping sanctions including a unilateral US ban on Iran's oil sales, vowing to bring the US adversary to its knees.

President Joe Biden supports a return to the agreement negotiated by predecessor Barack Obama, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, but has been frustrated by the pace of resurrection efforts.

"It's not going well in the sense that we do not yet have a pathway back into the JCPOA," Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, said of the talks.

"We are paying the wages of the disastrous decision to leave the deal back in 2018," he said.

But Sullivan, speaking at the



Enrique Mora, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service (EEAS), speaks to journalists after a meeting of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna on Friday (AFP)

Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, said recent days 'have brought some progress at the bargaining table'.

Another US official said the latest round was 'better than it

might have been' and 'worse than it should have been'.

The official called for a 'very significant acceleration' and said the United States was ready to return before New Year's.

"If it takes this much time to agree on a common agenda, imagine how much time it will take to resolve the issues on that agenda," he said.

Russia, which along with

China is also in the talks, said negotiators agreed to start from where they left off in June before Iran requested a break for its elections.

The latest round was 'successful in a sense that it prepared sound basis for more intensive negotiations', envoy Mikhail Ulyanov wrote on Twitter.

Tehran's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri said there were 'hard and intense negotiations' to agree on the 'bases' for further talks which will take place 'in the near future'.

'Plan B' of pressure

The Biden administration has said it is willing to lift sanctions but only if the Islamic Republic returns to compliance.

Amid the deadlock, the United States has increasingly spoken of a 'Plan B' of pressure if talks fail.

A group of former officials including Obama's defence secretary Leon Panetta and retired general David Petraeus in a joint statement urged Biden to arrange high-profile military exercises or other actions to strike fear into Iran.

'Without convincing Iran it

will suffer severe consequences if it stays on its current path, there is little reason to hope for the success of diplomacy,' they wrote, while also backing humanitarian assistance.

Earlier this year, Tehran also began restricting some inspection activities by the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Tehran and the Vienna-based IAEA announced Wednesday that they had reached agreement on replacing the cameras at the TESA nuclear complex in Karaj, west of Tehran, after they were damaged in a June attack Iran blames on Israel.

IAEA director general Rafael Grossi on Friday voiced concern that a camera memory unit remained missing from the nuclear complex.

"This is why we are asking them, 'Where is it?' I'm hopeful that they are going to come up with an answer because it is very strange that it disappears," Grossi said.

"We have ways to try to reconcile the facts on the ground with what Iran is going to be telling us," he added.

AFP



Ukrainian servicemen take position in a trench on the front line with Russia-backed separatists near Svitlodarsk, on Saturday (AFP)

Russia demands talks on US, NATO containment

Moscow, Russia - Russia on Friday unveiled proposals to contain the United States and NATO in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, calling for urgent negotiations with Washington as it amasses forces near Ukraine.

The United States said it was ready to talk but stated upfront that it disagreed with much in the far-reaching proposals, as it renewed warnings of painful reprisals if Russia invades Ukraine.

Russia released unfinished security documents - an unusual move in diplomacy - that call for US-led NATO alliance not to bring in new members or establish bases in ex-Soviet countries.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Russia was ready to hold security talks with the US as early as Saturday.

"We are ready to immediately, even tomorrow - literally tomorrow, on Saturday - go for talks with the US in a third country," he told reporters, suggesting Geneva as a venue.

President Joe Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, said the United States was 'fundamentally prepared for dialogue' and would coordinate closely with European allies.

"Russia has now put on the table its concerns with American and NATO activities; we're going to put on the table our concern with Russian activities that we think harm our interests and values," Sullivan said at the Council on Foreign Relations.

"That's the basis of reciprocity upon which you would pursue any kind of dialogue."

Another US official told re-

porters that the US would respond 'sometime next week' on a format for talks and said that Russia should already know that Russia should already know that parts of the proposal will be 'unacceptable' to Washington.

"If there is any further aggression against Ukraine, that will have massive, massive consequences and will carry a high price," the official said.

'Prevent incidents'

The West says Moscow has readied some 100,000 troops near Ukraine, which has been battling a pro-Moscow insurgency in its east since 2014.

Sullivan said the US does not assess that President Vladimir Putin, who blames NATO for the rise in tensions, has made a decision on whether to invade.

The Russian draft document addressed to NATO says its members should 'commit themselves to refrain from further enlargement, like the accession of Ukraine as well as other states'.

It also insists that alliance members not conduct military activity in Ukraine or other countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Moscow and NATO, the document said, should limit the deployment of missiles, set up an emergency telephone hotline and also work to 'prevent incidents' in the Baltics and the Black Sea.

The draft said Washington should block NATO membership of any former Soviet country - a reference to Ukraine as well as Georgia, which have both infuriated Moscow after Western tilts.

AFP

Taliban govt resumes issuing Afghan passports in Kabul

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghanistan's Taliban authorities said on Saturday they will resume issuing passports in Kabul, giving hope to citizens who feel threatened living under the rule.

Thousands of Afghans have applied for new travel documents to escape a growing economic and humanitarian crisis described by the United Nations as an 'avalanche of hunger'.

Authorities will start issuing the documents from Sunday at Kabul's passport office, Alam Gul Haqqani, the head of the passport department in the Interior Ministry, told reporters.

The Taliban stopped issuing passports shortly after their August 15 return to power, as tens of thousands of people scrambled to Kabul's only airport in a bid to catch any international flight that could evacuate them.

In October authorities reopened the passport office in Kabul only to suspend work days later as a flood of applications caused the biometric



A Taliban fighter inspects documents of people queuing up to enter the passport office in Kabul on Sunday (AFP)

equipment used there to break down. "All the technical issues have now been resolved," Haqqani said, adding that initially travel documents will be given to those who had already applied before the office suspended work.

New applications will be accepted from January 10, he said.

Many Afghans who wanted to visit neighbouring Pakistan for medical treatment have been blocked for months in the absence of valid passports.

"My mother has some health

issues and we needed to go to Pakistan a long time ago, but we could not because the passport department was closed," said Jamshid, who like many Afghans goes by only one name. "We are happy now that... we can get our passports

and go to Pakistan."

Issuing passports is also seen as a test of the Taliban's commitment to the international community to allow eligible people to leave amid the growing humanitarian crisis.

The Taliban are pressing donors to restore billions of dollars in aid that was suspended when the previous Western-backed regime imploded in the final stages of a US military withdrawal.

The abrupt withholding of aid has amounted to an 'unprecedented' fiscal shock for an economy already battered by drought and decades of war, according to the United Nations Development Programme.

The crisis has forced many in the capital to sell household possessions to buy food for their families.

International flights, mainly to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, have slowly resumed at Kabul airport after the facility was trashed in August when crowds of people scrambled to evacuate.

AFP

Former United States policewoman weeps on stand describing how she shot an African-American driver

Washington, US - A US former police officer on trial for the death of a young African-American man wept in court on Friday as she described how a routine traffic stop descended swiftly into chaos.

Kim Potter (49) is charged with first degree manslaughter over the fatal shooting of Daunte Wright (20) in Brooklyn Center, a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota, in April this year.

She claims the shooting was an accident, saying she mistakenly grabbed her gun instead of her Taser.

"We were struggling, we were trying to keep them from driving away. And then it just went chaotic, I remember yelling 'Taser Taser Taser'. And nothing happens, then he told me I shot him," Potter said, bursting into tears.

She said the moments that followed were largely a blank.

"They have an ambulance for me and I don't know why. And



A protester holds a sign seeking justice for Daunte Wright outside the Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota (AFP)

then I went, then I was at the station. I don't remember a lot of things afterwards," she said.

On April 11 this year, the white policewoman was patrolling with a colleague who decided to

look up the driver of a white Buick that had committed a minor traffic violation.

After realising that the driver was the subject of an arrest warrant, the police officers decided to arrest him. Potter described that as a potentially dangerous situation.

"Sometimes there's guns in the car. Sometimes there's uncooperative people, you don't know who you're stopping," she told the court.

Wright, who was unarmed, resisted being handcuffed and restarted his car to try to flee. Potter then drew what she said she thought was her Taser.

On a recording of the scene, Potter can be heard shouting 'Taser' several times, before shooting with her gun and fatally wounding Wright.

The incident came during the trial of white policeman Derek Chauvin who had asphyxiated George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 by kneeling on his

neck for some nine minutes.

Floyd's death sparked nationwide protests against racism and police brutality.

Wright's death also triggered several nights of protests and unrest in Brooklyn Center before Kim Potter's own arrest calmed tensions.

Potter's lawyer, Paul Engh, argued that Wright's death was a result of human error and the stress that his client was under, maintaining that she was attempting to protect a fellow officer as Wright tried to drive off.

But for prosecutor Erin Eldridge, Wright died because of Potter's reckless handling of her weapon and the negligence of an officer with 26 years on the force.

Ben Crump, the lawyer for Wright's family, said in a statement that Potter's testimony showed that 'Daunte Wright's killing at Potter's hands was absolutely preventable'.

AFP

Super typhoon wreaks havoc in Philippines; over 30 dead

Surigao City, Philippines - At least 33 people were killed in the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year, official tallies showed on Saturday, with a charity reporting 'alarming' destruction on islands that bore the brunt of the storm.

More than 300,000 people fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Typhoon Rai ravaged the southern and central regions of the archipelago, knocking out communications and electricity in many areas, ripping off roofs and toppling concrete power poles.

Rai was a super typhoon when it smashed into the popular tourist island of Siargao on Thursday, packing maximum sustained winds of 195km per hour.

Aerial photos shared by the military showed widespread damage in the town of General Luna, where many surfers and holidaymakers had flocked ahead of Christmas, with buildings stripped of roofs and debris littering the ground.

"Everything was flying, it was as if it was the end of the world," Raphy Repdos, a tour operator visiting the island when the storm hit, told AFP.

The neighbouring island of Dinagat had been 'levelled to the ground' by the storm, Governor Arlene Bag-ao wrote on Facebook, saying houses, boats and fields were destroyed.

"Walls and roofs were torn and blown off by Odette like paper," Bag-ao said, using the local name for the typhoon.

"We have a dwindling supply of food and water. Electricity and telecommunications are down."

Rai's wind speeds eased to 150km per hour as it barrelled across the country, dumping torrential rain that flooded villages, uprooting trees and shattering wooden structures.

It emerged over the South



Destroyed houses after a super typhoon barrelled over the Philippines, in Surigao City in Surigao del Norte province on Friday (AFP)

China Sea on Saturday and was headed towards Vietnam, the state weather forecaster said.

Severe damage

"This is indeed one of the most powerful storms that has hit the Philippines in the month of December in the last decade," Alberto Bocanegra, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the Philippines, told AFP.

"The information we are receiving and the pictures we are receiving are very alarming." The overall death toll was least 33, according to official tallies.

The latest figures come after a disaster official in the central province of Negros Occidental confirmed 13 people had died, most by drowning, and that another 50 were missing in a flood-hit area.

"We started urging people to evacuate as early as on Wednesday but many were reluctant to

leave," Salvador Mesa told AFP.

More than 18,000 military, police, coast guard and fire personnel will join search and rescue efforts in the worst-affected regions, Mark Timbal, spokesman for the national disaster agency, told AFP.

"There has been severe damage" on Siargao island and the northern tip of the southern island of Mindanao, Timbal said, referring to areas that took the full force of the typhoon as it slammed into the country.

There are around 100,000 residents on Siargao, but the population swells with tourists drawn to its beaches and big waves.

'Everything was destroyed'

The Philippine Coast Guard has shared photos on social media platforms showing widespread destruction around Surigao City on Mindanao.

Aerial footage showed swathes of rice fields under water.

At least three people were killed and dozens injured in the storm, Surigao City Mayor Ernesto Matugas told broadcaster ABS-CBN.

Shattered glass from smashed windows, sheets of corrugated iron roofing, power lines and other debris were scattered in the street.

The vice governor of Dinagat said at least six people had been killed there.

Residents on the island of around 128,000 people were 'trying to repair their houses because even our evacuation centres were torn down', Nilo Demerey told ABS-CBN.

"These people can't seek refuge anywhere else... everything was destroyed."

Vice President Leni Robredo was in Cebu province where she tweeted photos of motorbikes

crowded around a petrol station and people lined up for drinking water.

Bocanegra warned that the disruption to electricity would affect the water supply, besides raising concerns about hygiene and disease.

Rai hit the Philippines late in the typhoon season - most cyclones typically develop between July and October.

Scientists have long warned that typhoons are becoming more powerful and strengthening more rapidly as the world becomes warmer because of human-driven climate change.

The Philippines - ranked as one of the world's most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change - is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons every year, which typically wipe out harvests, homes and infrastructure in already impoverished areas.

AFP



Supporters raise boards at the 2021 Legislative Council General Election Committee Constituency Candidate Forum, in Hong Kong on Friday (AFP)

Hong Kong accuses activists of inciting election boycott

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong has issued arrest warrants accusing five overseas activists of urging voters to boycott Sunday's polls for the legislature - the first to take place under Beijing's 'patriots only' rules.

Voters in the Chinese finance hub will pick new lawmakers under rules that have cut the number of directly elected seats in the legislature to 20 from a total of 90 seats.

Most of the city's traditional pro-democracy opposition have either been jailed, barred from standing, declined to take part or fled overseas.

Authorities accused Britain-based campaigner Nathan Law of inciting people to boycott the vote during a web conference held earlier this month.

It is not illegal in Hong Kong to cast spoiled ballots or refrain from voting, but this year it became a crime to incite others to a boycott or cast invalid ballots.

Offenders face up to three years behind bars and a fine of HK\$200,000 (US\$25,600).

The warrants also named Sunny Cheung, Timothy Lee, Carmen Lau and Kawai Lee - all of whom have left Hong Kong.

The group hosted a livestream on social media on Thursday during which they allegedly urged voters to stay home.

Authorities also cited social media content posted by Che-

ung, who is currently seeking asylum in the United States.

Cheung earlier told AFP that Hong Kongers should not 'endorse the autocratic regime and help the regime to pursue a pseudo-democratic veil'.

Last month Hong Kong issued similar arrest warrants for two other overseas activists including former lawmaker Ted Hui.

A further ten people have been arrested inside the city and two formally charged.

Hong Kong's anti-corruption agency said investigations were ongoing and it would take resolute enforcement action.

Law was invited to speak at a summit organised by the United States last week in which President Joe Biden hosted representatives of more than 100 countries to advance the cause of democracy.

His remarks at the meeting were denounced by Hong Kong officials but were not cited in the arrest warrants.

Beijing says Hong Kong's new voting system will put Hong Kong back on track after the city was rocked by huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago.

Critics counter that China has all but banned opposition politics and violated promises it made to maintain Hong Kong's freedom and autonomy.

AFP



Robert Scott Palme as seen in videos and photos wearing an American flag jacket

Trump supporter gets 5 years in prison for Capitol assault

Washington, US - A Donald Trump supporter was sentenced to five years in prison for assaulting police officers during the attack on the US Capitol, the harshest punishment yet handed down in the investigation into the January 6 violence.

Robert Scott Palmer (54) was seen in videos and photos wearing an American flag jacket decorated with pro-Donald Trump patches and a hat reading 'Florida for Trump' as he threw boards, a fire extinguisher and other objects at police outside the Capitol.

He had tried to enter the Capitol but was ultimately pushed back by pepper spray deployed by security officials.

After that he continued to throw things at officers, until he

was hit by a rubber bullet.

Federal judge Tanya Chutkan rejected Palmer's arguments for leniency of a troubled childhood and a handwritten apology that said that he and others had been duped into attacking the Congress by the former president, whom he called 'tyrannical' and 'desperate to hold on to power'.

'I realise that we meaning Trump supporters had been lied to,' he wrote.

Prosecutors pointed out that even after his October 4 guilty plea, Palmer continued to defend his actions, labelling police the aggressors on a fundraising website page he set up.

"Palmer purposefully joined a large group of rioters with the specific intent of interfering with the nation's electoral process,"

the prosecutors told the court in a sentencing memo.

"Palmer's violence was in pursuit of his political goal of subverting a democratic election and the peaceful transition of power."

The previous stiffest sentence in the Capitol attack was 41 months, given to two men who were charged with obstructing an official proceeding but were not accused of assaulting law enforcement.

More than 700 people have been charged in the attack, most of them for minor offences like illegally entering the Capitol.

But several dozen face assault and deadly weapons charges as well as conspiracy, which could lead to heavy sentences.

AFP

Suspect critical as fire kills 24 in Japan clinic

Tokyo, Japan - A man seen by police as a potential suspect in a deadly fire at a Japanese mental health clinic was in a critical condition on Saturday, reports said, a day after the blaze claimed 24 lives.

The 61-year-old former patient of the clinic in Osaka was being treated in hospital, public broadcaster NHK reported, citing police sources.

The fire raged for half an hour on Friday morning, gutting the fourth floor of the narrow commercial building where the clinic, which also provided general medical care, was located.

Police were investigating a link with a small fire that had occurred at the man's home 30 minutes earlier, NHK and the Asahi Shimbun daily said.

An official at the city's fire department confirmed the death toll of the clinic fire, which police are reportedly treating as possible arson.

"A total of 24 people died and four were injured. Whether their condition is critical or not is unclear," the official told AFP.

Japanese media said most of the victims were believed to have suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning, and may have been trapped inside the unit with the exit blocked.

Some patients saw a man placing a paper bag containing a flammable liquid next to a heater, which he then kicked over to ignite, the reports said.

The father of the doctor who runs the clinic said he did not yet know if his son was among the



Flowers are placed in front of an office building, where a fire broke out the previous day, in Osaka on Saturday (AFP)

dead.

"I hope (my son) is safe and alive. That's all I want," he said in comments reported by several major newspapers.

The doctor had been having a hard time with many patients

wanting certificates to apply for unemployment insurance, his father added.

Osaka in western Japan is a major economic hub and the country's second-biggest metropolis after the greater Tokyo

A total of 24 people died and four were injured. Whether their condition is critical or not is unclear

FIRE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL

region.

Deadly fires are unusual in Japan, which has strict building standards, and violent crime is rare.

One year ago, a man was charged with murder over a 2019 arson attack on a Kyoto animation studio that killed 36 people, the country's deadliest violent crime in decades.

The attack sent shockwaves through the anime industry and its fans in Japan and around the world. And in recent months there has been a string of assaults involving fire and knives on and around the country's train network.

A 24-year-old man was arrested in Tokyo on Halloween for attempted murder after he allegedly stabbed a passenger and started a fire inside a moving train, wearing an outfit reminiscent of infamous comic villain the Joker.

That incident reportedly inspired a 69-year-old man to try to start a fire inside a running Shinkansen bullet train in the southwestern Kyushu region. No injuries were reported.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Europe aggressively vaccinating children

Portugal, France begin jabbing younger children as the continent fight spread of Omicron variant

Lisbon, Portugal - Several European countries have mobilised their resources to vaccinate younger children, as the latest variant of the coronavirus spreads across the globe in a new wave of pandemic.

Europe is currently battling to rein in the spread of the highly mutated Omicron variant of the virus, believed to be much more infectious, and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen has warned the new strain could be dominant in Europe by mid-January.

Portugal, one of the countries with the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates worldwide, began inoculating over-fives on Saturday, and France said it was ready to roll out jabs for them from next week.

A number of countries have already opened up their immunisation drives to younger children, even though the EU's health agency has warned that jabs alone will not be sufficient



A child receives a dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, in France's capital Paris on Friday (AFP)

to stop the variant's rise.

In Portugal, where 88.9 per cent of the population is vaccinated, more than 60,000 children aged between five and 11 were set to receive their first jab of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine this weekend.

And in France, health minister Olivier Veran said that jabs will start to be administered to children in the same age group from Wednesday.

"If all goes well, we will start vaccination of children on the afternoon of December 22 in specially adapted centres," he told France Inter radio.

Omicron to be 'dominant' in France

French Prime Minister Jean Castex on Friday likened the spread of the Omicron variant in Europe to 'lightning', adding it would be the dominant strain in France from the start of 2022.

Castex added that while much remains unknown about

the variant 'it does not seem to be more dangerous than the Delta variant and available data indicate that complete vaccination coverage with the booster dose protects well against severe forms of the disease'.

Nearly 3,000 people are in intensive care with COVID-19 in France as per latest figures.

Meanwhile people will become eligible for booster jabs four months from the date of their second vaccination down from five, Castex added.

And he said the government would announce new measures to tackle non-vaccination from next year. "While we have given a lot of time for those French people who were hesitant and had doubts, in January we will strengthen the incentive for vaccination, because it is not acceptable that the refusal of a few million French people to be vaccinated, puts the life of an entire country at risk," he said.

AFP

'Not scared': Danish children queue up for vaccination

Taastrup, Denmark - Waiting for his first COVID-19 jab at a vaccination centre in a suburb of Denmark's capital, seven-year-old William shows off to his little brother.

"I'm not scared, I've already done it 100 times," he says, while around him nurses reassure children who have come to be inoculated against the virus.

Inside a converted commercial warehouse in Taastrup, one young patient struts around the waiting room confidently, while another clutches a comforter, looking anxious.

Denmark was one of the first European countries to open vaccination to all over-fives on November 26, though it is not compulsory.

Twenty per cent of children born between 2010 and 2016 have already received a first dose in the Scandinavian country of 5.8mn inhabitants.

Samuel Christiansen (8) says he has come to boost his immune system after a first bout of COVID-19, especially now the Omicron strain is spreading.

"I don't really want to be sick [again with Omicron]," he says. His father, Henrik Jansen, says



this file photo shows an 11-year-old girl receiving a shot of vaccine at an inoculation centre in Amagar, Denmark on November 28 (AFP)

The campaign is going well. In the fifth wave of the virus, the most important tool is still vaccines, even in the fight against Omicron

HELENE PROBST

the family is there to 'protect the elderly, the older members of the family, Granny and Grandad'.

The EU's medicines watchdog last month approved the

Pfizer-BioNTech shot for five- to 11-year-olds, an age group experiencing high virus infection rates across Europe.

Austria has also started offering jabs to its under-fives,

while Portugal started on Saturday, and France is to begin next week.

Helene Probst, the joint head of Denmark's national health agency, said the campaign was going well.

In the fifth wave of the virus, 'the most important tool is still vaccines, even in the fight against Omicron', she said.

The Scandinavian country has said it will close cinemas, theatres and concert halls and restrict restaurant opening hours from Sunday over a record number of daily COVID-19 cases in recent days.

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said people should limit their social contacts.

Fayrouz Ben Alaya said she did not hesitate to vaccinate her eight-year-old daughter, Camelia Fourati.

"I didn't do it for her, but to lay down one more stone to stem the spread of the virus," said the worker in the pharmaceutical sector.

Camelia was more than happy to get the jab. "Everybody in the family was vaccinated, I was the last one," she said.

AFP



This file photo shows a police officer receiving vaccine during the flag-off of the second phase of vaccination, in Nigeria's capital Abuja (AFP)

Erdogan pledges 15mn vaccine doses for Africa

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey will send 15mn COVID-19 vaccine doses to Africa, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Saturday at a major summit of the continent's leaders, adding that the low vaccination rates there were a blot on humanity.

Ankara has invested heavily in developing trade and diplomatic ties with the world's poorest continent during Erdogan's rule as prime minister and then president since 2003.

In opening remarks to dozens of African leaders and ministers, Erdogan said Turkey would ship 15mn COVID-19 vaccine doses to Africa, where cases are rapidly rising and vaccination rates are low.

"We are aware of the global

injustice in accessing the COVID-19 vaccine and Africa's unjust treatment," Erdogan said.

"It is disgraceful for humanity that only six per cent of Africa's population has been vaccinated."

Turkey is developing its own vaccine, known as Turkovac, which is in the process of receiving emergency use approval.

Following any authorisation, it will be shared with Africa, Erdogan said.

It was not immediately clear from his remarks whether Turkey would first send some doses of the internationally approved vaccines it was currently using, including those developed by Pfizer-BioNTech.

AFP

Egypt has first three cases of Omicron

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt on Saturday said it had detected its first three cases of the coronavirus Omicron variant, at the height of the economically vital tourist season.

Three Egyptians tested positive on their return from overseas, the health ministry said without specifying where they had travelled from.

One of them had mild symptoms and the other two had none, it added.

The country's air and tourism sectors, which suffered under lockdowns for the past two years, had just started to recover and were counting on end-of-year holiday visits.

Omicron is the biggest threat to global public health, the G7 group of economically developed democracies said this week. Scientists remain uncertain how dangerous the highly mutated Omicron variant is, but early data suggests it can be more resistant to vaccines and is more transmissible than the Delta variant.

From December 1, Egypt stepped up measures to control the spread of the virus.

It barred officials and students not vaccinated against COVID-19 from government offices and universities unless they show a negative PCR test.

The country has officially recorded 373,509 coronavirus cases, including 21,277 deaths.

Egypt's vaccination campaign, after initially lagging, has accelerated in recent months with mobile units deployed.

Around 40 per cent of the more than 102mn Egyptians have now received at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the government, but only 14mn of those have had two doses.

AFP

Reclusive Laos to re-open for foreign travellers from January

Bangkok, Thailand - Laos has announced plans to partially re-open to foreign travellers in the new year, throwing a lifeline to the tourism industry after borders were sealed for more than 18 months.

Fully vaccinated visitors on pre-booked tours will be able to enter from January 1 and visit the capital Vientiane, eco-tourism hotspot Vang Vieng and Unesco World Heritage-listed Luang Prabang, state media reported Friday.

Further destinations will be opened up in April and July as vaccination rates increase.

But entry will only be available to tourists from 17 nations, mostly Southeast Asian and European countries as well as China, the United States, Australia and Canada.

All visitors will also need to

test negative for COVID-19 before arriving.

The reclusive communist nation this month opened a US\$6bn Beijing-built railway that connects its capital to the southwestern Chinese city of Kunming.

Health authorities are now rushing to deliver COVID-19 booster shots to people living in tourist spots along the train line in anticipation of an influx of travellers.

Laos was receiving about 4.7mn foreign tourists each year before the pandemic.

But COVID-19 led to an 80 per cent downturn in international visitor numbers in 2020, with the economy in the doldrums despite very few coronavirus cases in Laos in the early stages of the pandemic.

Economic growth declined to



This file photo shows an open air restaurant on the banks of the Mekong river in Laos' capital Vientiane (AFP)

0.4 per cent in 2020, the lowest in three decades, according to the World Bank.

Hopes for a rebound in 2021 were dashed after infection numbers skyrocketed in recent months.

Above Laos Ballooning Adventures, based in Vang Vieng, said it used to run two hot-air balloon flights a day during the high season.

But these days the small business is lucky to receive a single booking even at the weekend, manager La Noy said.

Alex Tran, owner of the Camellia Hotel in Vang Vieng, said revenue was down 95 per cent due to the border closures.

"Many hotels in Vang Vieng are empty and have closed temporarily for around two years, as there are no tourists," he said.

AFP

Fear of communism: Chile's rich vote right

Santiago, Chile - In Santiago's upper-class neighbourhood of Lo Barnechea with its Ferraris, mansions and luxury retailers, 51.68 per cent of people voted for far-right, candidate Jose Antonio Kast in Chile's first presidential election round in November.

It is one of two neighbourhoods out of dozens in greater Santiago where Kast, an apologist for Chile's brutal dictator Augusto Pinochet, amassed more than half the votes out of the seven candidates then in the race.

His rival in Sunday's runoff, leftist lawmaker Gabriel Boric, won the most neighbourhoods, mainly in middle-class areas, but did not break the 50 per cent ceiling in any of them.

Kast's defenders are vociferous in Lo Barnechea. The neighbourhood is notable for also having gone against the stream last year to vote 'No' in a referendum on whether Chile should approve a new constitution to replace the one enacted under Pinochet.

"One of the most serious issues is that it (the left) endorses violence," said entrepreneur Sergio Aday (52), referring to anti-inequality protests and clashes with the police in 2019 that caused dozens of deaths.

The resulting 'uncertainty and fear' risks causing an outflow of capital, he said.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the top one per cent of the population of Chile holds a quarter of the wealth.

More money, more fear

Kast is a defender of Pinochet and the neoliberal economic system he left behind.

The candidate wants to cut



Demonstrators pull up grass and flowers planted by campaign team members of presidential candidate Jose Antonio Kast, at Plaza Italia square in Santiago on Friday (AFP)

taxes and social spending, contrary to Boric - who wants to increase them and represents a leftist alliance that includes Chile's Communist Party.

For 53-year-old teacher Maria-Luisa Galleguillos, another resident of Lo Barnechea - an area with golf and equestrian clubs some 20km northwest of central Santiago - Kast will 'give us security'.

"I have children who recently started working. I want that they can live in their country, that they

don't need to go to other countries to work," she told AFP at an up-market mall.

She said Kast's image has suffered due to 'misunderstandings' spread by a 'leftist' media, and explained that she was grateful to Pinochet for making Chile a relatively rich country in Latin America. "If it wasn't for Pinochet... we would have been like Venezuela today," Galleguillos said.

There is 'much, much, much fear of communism here,' said Francisca Olivares (48), a lawyer

who told AFP she was 'an exception' in Lo Barnechea for not supporting Kast.

In the neighbourhood there is 'more money, therefore there is more fear of losing it', she said.

"We are an extremely divided country in terms of class. And that generates a lot of fear of the other, a lot of hatred of the other."

Class divide

In the neighbourhood of Nunoa in Santiago's voting district 10, where Boric had his highest first-

round turnout with 39.4 per cent, voters say they are driven by civil rights and social equality.

Chile's social uprising was sparked in late 2018 by a rise in the price of metro tickets, but soon transformed into a revolt against the country's status as one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Nunoa resident Karla (25), who did not wish to give her full name, said she supports Boric because of 'what he stands for in terms of rights, social equality'.

The student said she is particularly concerned about Chile's private pensions system, which costs workers an arm and a leg, yet leaves them with little to retire on.

But for Aday, the entrepreneur, more accessible health-care, education and fairer pensions, amount to handouts and are harmful to the economy.

He referred to the hardship Chileans suffered - due to US economic blockades - under the rule of Salvador Allende, Latin



A man walks after destroying flowers planted by campaign team members of Kast, in Santiago (AFP)

Jose Antonio Kast's image has suffered due to misunderstandings spread by a leftist media. I am grateful to Pinochet for making Chile a relatively rich country in Latin America. If it wasn't for Pinochet, we would have been like Venezuela today

MARIA LUISA GALLEGUILLLOS

America's first elected Marxist president who was ousted by Pinochet in a coup d'etat.

"I think it is better to have a debit card than a ration card, which is what we had under the government of Allende," he said. AFP

Johnson takes 'personal responsibility' for by-poll disaster

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday he took 'personal responsibility' for a crushing by-election defeat in a constituency never previously lost by his Conservative party, which has prompted questions about his leadership after weeks of scandals.

The historic loss in a seat Johnson's ruling Tories held with a massive majority just two years ago came as, the government reported more than 93,000 new COVID-19 infections.

The figure was the third consecutive record daily tally as fears mount over the potential impact on the health system of the soaring case numbers.

"I take personal responsibility," the embattled Johnson said in a clip for television news, calling the vote in the North Shropshire constituency in central England that handed victory to the Liberal Democrats 'very disappointing'.

The electoral drubbing is likely to intensify the mutinous mood among Conservative MPs.

"In all humility, I've got to accept that verdict," Boris Johnson said, insisting he understood 'people's frustrations' and 'what the voters are saying in North Shropshire'.

The 57-year-old was already reeling from a series of scandals and setbacks, including around 100 of his lawmakers rebelling in parliament on Tuesday against the government's introduction of vaccine passes for large events.

His authority has also been hit repeatedly in recent weeks by claims of corruption and reports that his staff broke coronavirus restrictions last Christmas.

'Kicking'

The Tories lost the safe rural seat, where they had a 23,000-strong majority since 2019, by almost 6,000 votes as the Lib Dems enjoyed a swing of 34 per centage points.

"The people of North Shropshire have spoken on behalf of the British people," winning candidate Helen Morgan said in her victory speech.



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in Downing Street in London on Thursday (AFP)

"They have said loudly and clearly 'Boris Johnson, the party is over'."

The shattering defeat drew an immediate backlash from some Tory MPs and predictions that letters of no-confidence in their leader could be dispatched to

trigger an internal party vote to remove him.

The same process saw his predecessor Theresa May ousted in mid-2019 after MPs, including Johnson, voted against her Brexit deal in parliament.

"The Conservative Party has a

reputation for not taking prisoners. If the prime minister fails, the prime minister goes," long-serving lawmaker Roger Gale told BBC Radio. "Johnson has to prove that he's capable of being a good prime minister and at the moment it's quite clear that the

public don't think that that's the case."

'Electoral asset'

However, others cautioned that surging COVID-19 infections could buy the Prime Minister time to turn around his fortunes.

"It doesn't mean the end, and it certainly doesn't mean leadership challenges," said Charles Walker, the vice-chairman of the party's 1922 Committee, which collates no-confidence letters and manages any leadership contest.

"The Conservative Party is not going to have a leadership challenge as we are heading into potential further restrictions around COVID," Walker added.

Party chairman Oliver Dowden, also a government minister without portfolio, said North Shropshire's voters were 'fed up and they gave us a kicking' but that 'we've heard that loud and clear'.

"The Prime Minister is an electoral asset for the Conservative Party," he insisted to Sky

News.

"On the big calls, (he) has the vision and the direction to get us through this difficult period."

Dogged by controversies

However, Britain is also suffering spiralling inflation as a result of big borrowing during lockdowns, high energy prices and bottlenecked supply chains.

Tax rises also loom from next April, which could further irritate the electorate.

Johnson - who won voters' overwhelming backing in 2019 on his promise to 'Get Brexit Done' - has been dogged by controversies for weeks.

It began with his unsuccessful attempt to change parliament's disciplinary rules to spare MP Owen Paterson a suspension after he was found to have breached lobbying rules.

Paterson, who had held the North Shropshire seat since 1997, then quit, forcing Thursday's vote.

AFP

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I want the viewer, in watching it, to cry and to say to themselves that they are capable of leading an anti-racist fight

Lazaro Ramos

A DYSTOPIAN MOVIE

In the Brazil of the near future, the government has found what it calls the answer to righting the wrongs of slavery: Send its black citizens to Africa.

That dystopian premise is the point of departure for the new film *Executive Order*, which is generating controversy in the Brazil of the present over allegations it is being censored by far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's government.

The film, the directorial debut from acclaimed actor Lazaro Ramos (*Madame Sata*), has won praise at a series of international festivals, from Moscow to Memphis.

But it does not yet have a release date in Brazil, where there are mounting accusations against the National Cinema Agency (Ancine) of dragging its feet on green-lighting films deemed uncomfortable for the Bolsonaro administration.

"I can't say whether it's bureaucracy or censorship, but both are barriers to culture," Ramos said when the picture screened at the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival, which wraps up on Sunday - for now, the only time the movie is scheduled to play in Brazil.

Executive Order stars Ramos' wife, Tais Araujo, renowned actor and singer Seu Jorge (*City of God*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*), and Anglo-Brazilian star Alred Enoch (the *Harry Potter* franchise, *How to Get Away with Murder*).

Araujo and Enoch play Capitu and Antonio, a doctor and lawyer with the trappings of professional success.

Capitu 'is a black woman who doesn't really want to talk about racism at first - she just wants to live', said Araujo.

"But then life comes calling, and she has to dive deep [into the issue]."

Accentuated melanin

The 'executive order' of the film's title requires all black people - or people with 'accentuated melanin', in the script's Orwellian language - to hand themselves in to the authorities to be removed to Africa.

Through Capitu, Antonio and his cousin Andre (Seu Jorge), viewers see how Afro-Brazilians organise a resistance to this mass deportation as the security forces begin arresting people in the streets.

The film is flush with references to structural racism in present-day Brazil, the



last country in the Americas to abolish slavery, in 1888.

"The idea of the film is to make people aware," Ramos told AFP. "I want the viewer, in watching it, to cry and to say to themselves that they are capable of leading an anti-racist fight," he said.

"It was very moving," said Araujo.

Some authorities in its fictional government also bear strong resemblance to real members of the Bolsonaro administration.

In April, Bolsonaro ally Sergio Camargo, head of the Palmares Cultural Foundation, called for a boycott of the film.

"It's pure victim mentality and a defamatory attack on our president," said Camargo, a black Brazilian who has sparked controversy in the past by saying slavery was 'beneficial for Afro-descendants'.

It is unclear when Ancine will clear the film for release in Brazil.

The production team says it completed its application for funds to distribute the film in November 2020 and has yet to receive the official response.

Ancine says the application is 'under review' and that it is following the 'standard procedure'.

Marighella precedent

It is not the first such case to cause controversy.

Another Brazilian film that won applause on the international festival circuit, *Marighella*, faced a similar delay.

Directed by *Narcos* star Wagner Moura, the film is a biopic on a leftist guerrilla leader who fought Brazil's military dic-

tatorship (1964-1985).

Bolsonaro, a former army captain, is a fervent admirer of the former military regime, despite its large-scale human-rights abuses.

Marighella had its application to Ancine rejected twice in 2019, before finally being cleared for its Brazilian premiere last month.

Shortly after taking office in 2019, Bolsonaro said he wanted to 'filter' Brazilian film productions. "If there's no filter, we're going to get rid of Ancine," he said.

Ramos is undeterred.

"We're not going to stop debating this issue, or thinking about how this country was built," he said.

"Art is powerful, we can't give that up." AFP

Lazaro Ramos and his wife, actress Tais Araujo, pose during the photocall of the preview of his debut film as director, *Medida Provisoria* (Executive Order), during the Rio Film Festival, in Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday (AFP)

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Abraham gives Roma thumping win

Bergamo, Italy - Tammy Abraham struck twice as Roma ran out 4-1 winners at fancied Atalanta on Saturday, in the biggest win for Jose Mourinho since re-turning to Serie A.

English striker Abraham opened the scoring with less than a minute on the clock at the Gewiss Stadium and rounded off the match late on as Roma closed the gap between them and the Champions League places to five points.

"What a win, what else can I say? A lot of people doubted us today but this is by far one of the best wins we've had this season," said Abraham to DAZN.

"We needed to win and what a win."

Nicolo Zaniolo and Abraham's countryman Chris Smalling also netted in an impressive win, their first against one of Italy's top teams this season, which took them fifth and dented third-place Atalanta's burgeoning title hopes.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side sit third, six points behind champions and league leaders Inter Milan who crushed Salernitana 5-0 on Friday.

They will drop to fourth if



AS Roma players celebrate at the end of their Italian Serie A match against Atalanta, at the Gewiss Stadium in the northern city of Bergamo in Italy on Saturday (AFP)

Napoli win at fellow title-chasers AC Milan on Sunday following a defeat in which they dominated

proceedings for large spells but were punished by Roma who were clinical in a classic Mour-

inho style.

Roma's goals came from five shots on target after having less

than 30 per cent possession and no corners.

"There was a great spirit. It's

clear that playing against Atalanta you can never be in control of the match for 90 minutes... the

team was great in every department today," said Mourinho, who won the treble with Inter in 2010.

"I think Inter are on another level to everyone else but to beat the top teams like Milan, Napoli and Atalanta you can't just have good organisation or tactics, you need a certain type of character which we had today."

Roma took the lead in an odd fashion when, after charging into the box, Abraham poked a close-range finish which looped high off Marten de Roon and into the net.

The away side were pinned back in their own area for long periods but, like Villarreal who performed their own smash-and-grab in Bergamo a few days ago, Roma struck on the break through the marauding Zaniolo to double their lead against the run of play in the 27th minute.

It was the Italy forward's first Serie A goal since July last year.

Atalanta continued to push and got back into the game in first half stoppage time when substitute Luis Muriel's low drive took a wild deflection off Bryan Cristante and left Roma goalkeeper Rui Patricio with no chance.

AFP

Lindstrom strikes again as Frankfurt continue to rise

BUNDESLIGA

Berlin, Germany - Eintracht Frankfurt continued their rise up the Bundesliga table on Saturday with a sixth win in seven games as Danish forward Jesper Lindstrom scored for the third match in succession to seal a 1-0 victory over Mainz.

Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich started the weekend nine points clear after thrashing Wolfsburg 4-0 on Friday, but second-placed Borussia Dortmund can trim the gap when they face Hertha Berlin away later Saturday.

Frankfurt broke into the top five, having started last weekend 12th, as Lindstrom added to goals he scored in wins over Moenchengladbach and Leverkusen last week.

Japan veteran Makoto Hasebe snapped up a loose Mainz pass in the first half which resulted in Rafael Borre getting in behind the defence.



Frankfurt midfielder Jesper Lindstrom (left) scores during an earlier match in Frankfurt (AFP)

The Colombia striker chipped the on-rushing goalkeeper, straight into the path of Lindstrom who tapped in the winner on 35 minutes. The clubs passed each other in the table as Mainz

dropped to eighth. Union Berlin went sixth - and level with Frankfurt on 27 points - thanks to former Germany striker Max Kruse, who scored the only goal in a 1-0 win at Bochum.

Fourth-placed Hoffenheim snatched a 1-1 draw at home to Borussia Moenchengladbach after defender Kevin Akpoguma tapped in a last-gasp equaliser.

AFP

Eight-man Nancy survive French Cup siege

Paris, France - Second-division Nancy had three players sent off but still hung on to beat Ligue 1 Troyes on penalties in the French Cup last 64 on Saturday.

Nancy, bottom of Ligue 2 was left to play a few seconds three-men down before the game ended 1-1. They won the shootout 4-2 to advance.

The four other early matches obeyed the logic of league position. Toulouse, second in Ligue 2, beat Nimes, eight places below them 4-1. Second division Bastia beat fifth-division amateurs Hauts Lyonnais 3-1, as Versailles edged AS Panazol on penalties.

AFP



Nancy's goalkeeper tries to stop the ball, in Troyes on Saturday (AFP)

Villa-Burnley match postponed as Premier League reels from virus chaos

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Aston Villa's home match with Burnley was postponed shortly before kick-off on Saturday after a coronavirus outbreak in the Villa camp, leaving only one Premier League fixture on the day's schedule.

Just four games are now due to be played in total this weekend out of the original 10, with the growing COVID-19 crisis causing chaos during the busiest time in the English football calendar.

"Due to more positive cases in the Aston Villa squad today, the Premier League Board has regrettably had to postpone the club's home fixture against Burnley, due to kick-off at 3.00pm (1500 GMT) this afternoon," the league said in a statement.

"After reviewing all the new information provided by Aston Villa this morning and receiving separate medical advice, the board approved the request as a result of the club not having



Burnley's New Zealand striker Chris Wood (AFP)



Aston Villa's English defender Tyrone Mings (AFP)

enough players to field a team."

Villa, managed by Steven Gerrard, acknowledged and apologised for the late postponement, which came a little over two hours before the match was due to kick off, but said they acted as quickly as they could.

A club statement read: "The results of PCR tests, which were taken yesterday prior to training as well as lateral flow tests, were received this morning and con-

firmed further depletion of our playing squad which was already impacted upon for our trip to Norwich in midweek.

"All individuals who tested positive are now isolating in line with Premier League and government guidance and protocols."

Omicron surge

The British government on Friday reported 93,045 new coronavirus cases, a third consecutive record daily tally, as the Omicron variant fuels a surge in infections across the country.

Premier League clubs are due to meet on Monday to discuss what action to take, with a busy schedule of matches over the Christmas and New Year period.

Some managers have voiced concerns over potential harm to the integrity of the competition, with teams deprived of key players and some training grounds closed.

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England collapse again as Australia take 282-run lead in Adelaide Test

THE ASHES

Adelaide, Australia - England were staring down the barrel of another sorry defeat on Saturday, dismissed for 236 then forced to watch as Australia battered again and stretched their lead in the day-night second Ashes Test in Adelaide.

Joe Root and Dawid Malan had survived the opening session of day three unscathed, building a 128-run stand as they chased Australia's imposing first-innings 473 for nine declared.

But it all came crashing down after the dinner break with both players removed in quick succession, Root for 62 and Malan for 80, sparking a collapse that saw England slump from 150 for two to 236 all out.

Making matters worse, they did so against a second-string attack with Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood both missing.

Stand-in Australian skipper Steve Smith could have enforced the follow-on, but chose to rest his bowlers and send in the openers to turn the screw with two days left. They negotiated some 75 minutes for the loss of David Warner for 13, needlessly run out after a disastrous mix-up with Marcus Harris, who remains unbeaten on 21.

Nightwatchman Michael Naser was on two as Australia reached 45 for one, building their lead to 282.

Hostile pace from Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon's dangerous spin did the damage to England, complemented by Cameron Green, who bagged Root for the second consecutive time. Starc claimed 4-37 and Lyon 3-58.



Nathan Lyon (centre) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of England batsman Ollie Robinson on the third day of the second Ashes Test, in Adelaide on Saturday (AFP)

SCOREBOARD		
Australia 1 st Innings 473/9d		
ENGLAND 1 st INNINGS		
H Hameed	c Starc b Naser	6
R Burns	c Smith b Starc	4
D Malan	c Smith b Starc	80
Joe Root	c Smith b Green	62
Ben Stokes	b Green	34
Ollie Pope	c Labuschagne b Lyon	5
Jos Buttler	c Warner b Starc	0
Chris Woakes	b Lyon	24
Ollie Robinson	lbw b Lyon	0
Stuart Broad	c Head b Starc	9
J Anderson	not out	5
Extras:	(lb 6, nb 1)	7
TOTAL:	236 all out in 84.1 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-12, 3-150, 4-157, 5-164, 6-169, 7-202, 8-204, 9-220, 10-236		
Bowling: M Starc 16.1-6-37-4, J Richardson 19-4-78-0, M Naser 11-0-33-1, N Lyon 28-11-58-3, C Green 10-3-24-2		
AUSTRALIA 2 nd INNINGS		
D Warner	run out	13
M Harris	not out	21
M Naser	not out	2
Extras:	(lb 8, nb 1)	9
TOTAL:	45 for one in 17 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-41		
Bowling: J Anderson 4-3-2-0, S Broad 3-0-9-0, O Robinson 4-1-12-0, C Woakes 4-2-13-0, J Root 2-1-1-0		

Malan rues missing out on century again



Adelaide, Australia - Dawid Malan said he was gutted to again fail to convert a 50 into a century on Saturday.

The England number three built a strong partnership with skipper Joe Root. But it fell apart after the first session when Root fell for 62 and Malan went

for 80 in quick succession. "In the last match both Rooty and myself were in a position to score hundreds and we didn't do it, and we were in the same position here and both times we've been found short as a batting unit compared to the Australian batting unit," he said.

Root's 1,600 Test runs in calendar year



Adelaide, Australia - Joe Root became just the fourth player in history to chalk up 1,600 Test runs in a calendar year Saturday - and the first since 2008 - but a maiden century in Australia again eluded him.

The England captain has been in brilliant form in 2021,

arriving for the Ashes with 1,455 runs from 12 Tests, including six centuries, at an average of 66.13.

Root wrote another chapter to his incredible season, joining an elite few to make 1,600 Test runs in a calendar year.

AFP

Australia 'hold the cards'

England crashed by nine wickets in the first Test at Brisbane and if they go 2-0 down in Adelaide the Ashes are as good as gone, needing to win all three remaining Tests.

Australia bowled repeat maidens at the start of the second session and Root looked increasingly uncomfortable against Green, who was starting to find movement with the pink ball. Having passed 1,600 Test runs in a calendar year - only the fourth

player in history to do so - Root poked at a Green delivery and got an edge to Smith at slip, leaving him still searching for an elusive first-ever century in Australia. Malan soon followed, slashing at a Starc thunderbolt that took a nick, again into Smith's safe

hands. Malan has now scored nine Test 50s but only converted one into a century.

"We let it meander a little bit through the first session," Starc said, while heaping praise on all-rounder Green. "He's a serious talent for a young kid, he's a great

addition to our bowling attack, he was extremely good in that session after the break."

Starc added, "We hold all the cards in terms of when we want to bowl and how big a lead we want to have, we've certainly got a few options on the table."

Like in Brisbane, England's batting folded. Ollie Pope survived a bat-pad review but only lasted two more balls, charging down the wicket to Lyon and edging to Marnus Labuschagne at short leg on five.

AFP

American Bennett takes stunning first World Cup win at Val Gardena

Val Gardena, Italy - Bryce Bennett claimed his first ever alpine skiing World Cup victory on Saturday after stunning the field to win the downhill event at Val Gardena.

American Bennett topped the times early on in the Italian Dolomites with a run of two minutes, 2.42 seconds to pip Austria's Otmar Striedinger by 0.14sec, with Niels Hintermann 0.32sec back in third.

It was a first ever World Cup podium for Bennett, 29, whose previous best finishes had all come in Italy, fourth at Val Gardena in 2018 and 2020 and at Bormio in 2018.

"I've never been on the podium before and now I've won here in Val Gardena... it's incredible," said Bennett.

"I had a clear plan in my head and for the downhill and I went to the starting gate with a relaxed mind. I didn't have very high expectations for the race and that makes the win even better."



Bryce Bennett (also in the inset with the trophy) reacts after competing in the men's FIS Ski World Cup Downhill event in Val Gardena in the Italian Alps, on Saturday (AFP)

Bennett benefitted from pre-race favourite Aleksander Aamodt Kilde dropping out following an error when he was

0.86sec faster than his rivals through the top section.

Norway's Kilde, the overall champion in 2020, was looking

for a fourth straight World Cup win after claiming the super-G on Friday and a super-G and downhill at Beaver Creek, Col-

orado at the start of the month.

The 29-year-old lost control at a jump as he fizzed down the slope, allowing Bennett to hold on to top spot as the rest of the field all fell short.

Matthias Mayer had the chance to move top of the overall standings but also struggled to keep his footing after a jump and finished over a second off the pace in 16th.

Mayer retained his lead in the downhill standings, with the Austrian on 195 points, 30 ahead of Feuz Beat who moved into second in front of Kilde after finishing fifth. But Marco Odermatt, who did not compete on Saturday, retains first place in the race for the overall title with 453 points, 48 ahead of Mayer.

AFP

CELEBRATING OMAN 51st NATIONAL DAY

العید الوطني العماني 51

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Oman Sail wraps up sailing season

Spectacular Youth World Sailing Championship comes to end

Muscat - Oman Sail's 2021 sailing season came to a close with the successful hosting of the Youth World Sailing Championship, the Oman Sailing Festival and a new world record set at the beach clean-up event at Barceló Resort Mussanah.

A fleet of 433 sailors from more than 60 nations competed in 11 events with blue skies and winds of 8 - 10 knots rounded off five days of world-class competition, a press communiqué said.

Away from the competition, Oman Sail has set a Guinness World Records title for the Most Nationalities Collecting Litter. Participants at the Youth Sailing World Championships, including sailors, Oman Sail officials, staff at Barceló Mussanah Resort and members from the OMRAN Group broke a new record with 73 nationalities collecting over 344kg of litter at Mussanah public beach on 15 December.

Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "This has been an excellent end to a momentous season for sailing in Oman."

"The successful delivery of a series of world and Asian cham-



pionships held in Mussanah, the return of Sailing Arabia - The Tour, and the nationwide Sailing Festival, has seen some of the very best sailors in the world compete on these shores and inspire communities and future sailors across the country."

On the new world record on the collection of litter, Jabri said, it "underlines Oman Sail's dedication to sustainability and preserving our beautiful coastline for generations to come".

"We hope that the impact will

be felt in increased environmental awareness and sporting prowess in the future," he added.

Jabri expressed gratitude to "the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information and the support from Oman TV and Oman TV Sport, the Royal Navy of Oman, the Royal Oman Police, OMRAN, the technical delegates, race management and officials, and boat manufacturers, as well as all of our strategic partners" for their roles in several

events held during the season.

"Oman Sail is certainly proud to host a spectacular event and welcome more than 1000 to mark the 50th edition of this prestigious sailing championships, the first to be held in Middle East."

This season has seen the eyes of the global sailing community turning towards the sultanate as Oman Sail hosted the 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships, Mussanah Race Week, the 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 Asian

Championships and the 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 World Championships from 16-21 November. Sailing Arabia - The Tour 2021, set entirely within Oman returned this year while the 2021 ICLA Radial World Championships ran concurrently in Mussanah, from November 29 to December 6.

The latest stop in the Oman Sailing Festival was also at the Barceló Mussanah during the Youth World Sailing Championship, where over 160 visitors



of all ages took the opportunity to try sailing and windsurfing for free. The festival also featured a market showcasing local products designed and made by Omani entrepreneurs.

To date, the Oman Sailing Festival has introduced over 2000 people to the sport, with many returning to take lessons at Oman Sail's Sailing Schools in Sur, Marina Bandar al Rowdha and Al Mouj Muscat.

The Oman Sailing Festival continues in January with two

more stops. Hawana Salalah from January 6 to 8 and Duqm from January 11 to 15.

The festival is supported by platinum sponsor OQ, gold sponsors Oman Air and Salsabeel, and environmental partners be'ah and the Environment Society of Oman, the Oman Sail stated.

To pre-register for Oman Sailing Festival events, one may visit www.omansail.com/sailing-festival-activities or search #Sail-WithUs on social media, it added.

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Goggia scripts magnificent 7 in Val-D'Isère downhill



Italy's Sofia Goggia celebrates after winning the Women's Downhill event at the FIS Alpine skiing World Cup, in Val-d'Isère on Saturday (AFP)

Val-d'Isère, France - Italy's Sofia Goggia took the lead in the World Cup overall standings after extending her winning run in the downhill to seven in taking the honours at Val-d'Isère on Saturday.

The 29-year-old Olympic downhill champion produced a superb second half of the race to seal victory edging Breezy Johnson of the United States by 27 hundredths of a second. Austrian Mirjam Puchner finished third 91 hundredths off the pace.

"I had so much pressure on me today," Goggia told Rai Sport.

"I tried to hide it but I felt it, because here there was so much competition and so little margin for error. I had to push myself beyond my usual limits. I have skied better in the past but I put my

heart into it."

Johnson was delighted with her performance although at one point she thought she could bring Goggia's superb run to an end.

"I really thought I could catch Goggia, even if she is skiing phenomenally at the moment," said Johnson. "I believe she knows that it is going to be a real battle and that she has to produce her best skiing every day."

"If she skips a beat then I hope I will be there to benefit," added the 25-year-old smiling.

Goggia's victory took her to 535 points in the overall standings, 10 points ahead of American star Mikaela Shiffrin - the latter did not compete in the downhill but they will renew rivalry in the Super-G on Sunday. One of Goggia's main rivals

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP ALPINE SKIING RESULTS

After the downhill at Val-d'Isère:

1. Sofia Goggia (ITA) 1min 41.71sec
2. Breezy Johnson (USA) 1:41.98
3. Mirjam Puchner (AUT) 1:42.62
4. Ramona Siebenhofer (AUT) 1:43.04
5. Ilka Stuhec (SLO) 1:43.08
6. Corinne Suter (SUI) 1:43.14
7. Ragnhild Mowinckel (NOR) 1:43.15
8. Nadia Delago (ITA) 1:43.16
9. Elena Curtoni (ITA) 1:43.23
10. Michelle Gisin (SUI) 1:43.32

WORLD CUP STANDINGS DOWNHILL:

1. Sofia Goggia (ITA) 300 pts
2. Breezy Johnson (USA) 240
3. Mirjam Puchner (AUT) 152
4. Corinne Suter (SUI) 145
5. Ramona Siebenhofer (AUT) 124

OVERALL

1. Sofia Goggia (ITA) 535pts
2. Mikaela Shiffrin (USA) 525
3. Petra Vlhova (SVK) 340
4. Lara Gut (SUI) 298
5. Breezy Johnson (USA) 293
6. Federica Brignone (ITA) 256
7. Mirjam Puchner (AUT) 234
8. Ramona Siebenhofer (AUT) 227
9. Elena Curtoni (ITA) 212
10. Andreja Slokar (SLO) 210

Swiss Lara Gut-Behrami was absent due to testing positive for COVID-19.

The 30-year-old will miss the rest of the weekend and the two giant slaloms at the French resort of Courchevel on Tuesday and Wednesday.

AFP



Sofia Goggia competes in the Women's Downhill event, in Val-d'Isère in the French Alps, on Saturday (AFP)

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