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OMANI WOMEN'S DAY
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Moody's upgrades outlook on Oman

S&P upgraded its outlook on Oman to positive, too, on October 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two weeks after S&P Global Ratings upgraded its outlook on Oman to 'positive' from 'stable', another global ratings agency Moody's has revised up its outlook on the sultanate.

Moody's Investors Service has changed the outlook on the Government of Oman's issuer rating to 'stable' from 'negative' and affirmed its long-term issuer and senior unsecured ratings at 'Ba3' for Oman.

"The upgrade of outlook to stable reflects the significant easing of government liquidity and external financing pressures, mainly as a result of significantly higher oil prices since mid-2020, and Moody's expectation that oil



prices will average above US\$60 a barrel during the next several years, increasing the likelihood that these pressures will remain contained," the ratings agency said.

S&P, the world's biggest credit rating agency, on October 1 upgraded its outlook on Oman to positive as it now believes that the sultanate's reforms programme and higher oil prices will narrow fiscal deficits and slow the increase in government debt. S&P also affirmed the sultanate's 'B+/B' long- and short-term for-

eign and local currency sovereign credit ratings.

In Moody's baseline scenario, higher oil prices and ongoing implementation of Oman's Medium-Term Fiscal Plan will also underpin a steady decline in direct government debt burden to the pre-pandemic level, restoring some of the lost fiscal space before the next shock.

Moody's estimates that higher oil prices will result in a sharp reduction in fiscal deficit to less than two per cent of GDP in 2021 from 18 per cent of GDP in 2020.

A narrower fiscal deficit and a rebound in nominal GDP, the ratings agency said, will drive the reduction in the government's direct debt burden to around 67 per cent of GDP in 2021 from nearly 80 per cent of GDP in 2020.

Moreover, in Moody's baseline scenario, Oman's debt burden could decline back to the pre-coronavirus level of around 60 per cent of GDP by 2024.

Similarly, S&P also estimated a material reduction in Oman's fiscal deficit to 4.2 per cent of GDP in 2021, from 15.3 per cent of GDP in 2020.

Moody's, however, warned that Oman will remain heavily exposed to declines in oil demand and prices. It estimates that in 2021 the hydrocarbon sector will account for around 40 per cent of GDP, around 73 per cent of government revenue, and 64 per cent of total exports of goods and services. This reliance is further exacerbated by Oman's high fiscal and external breakeven oil prices, which Moody's estimates at around US\$71 per barrel in 2021.

RO10mn allocated to develop each governorate in Five-Year Plan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and develop governorates, the Ministry of Economy held a meeting on Thursday to announce the 'Governorate Development Programme'.

The programme is being implemented in accordance with Royal Directives to allocate RO10mn to each governorate in the tenth Five-Year Plan - 2021-25. As part of the programme, the sum will be expended at the rate of RO2mn each year to spur the economy of each governorate as a minimum developmental ceiling.

The meeting was attended by H E Dr Nasser bin Rashid Al Mawali, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Economy, H E Abdullah bin Salim Abdullah al Harthy, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Finance, H E Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Murdas al Busaidi, Secretary General of Governorates Affairs, and a number of governors.

"The meeting is part of the ef-



forts made to achieve the tenth Five-Year Plan's objectives aiming to empower governorates, contribute to the process of decentralisation, and achieve comprehensive and balanced development for each governorate," said H E Mawali.

H E Busaidi added, "The meeting of the governors with the Undersecretary of Economy and Undersecretary of Finance will reflect positively on the development projects in the governorates."

The Ministry of Economy confirmed that 28 strategic programmes are being implemented during the tenth Five-Year Plan. These programmes will contribute to achieving the objectives of the plan and Oman Vision 2040.

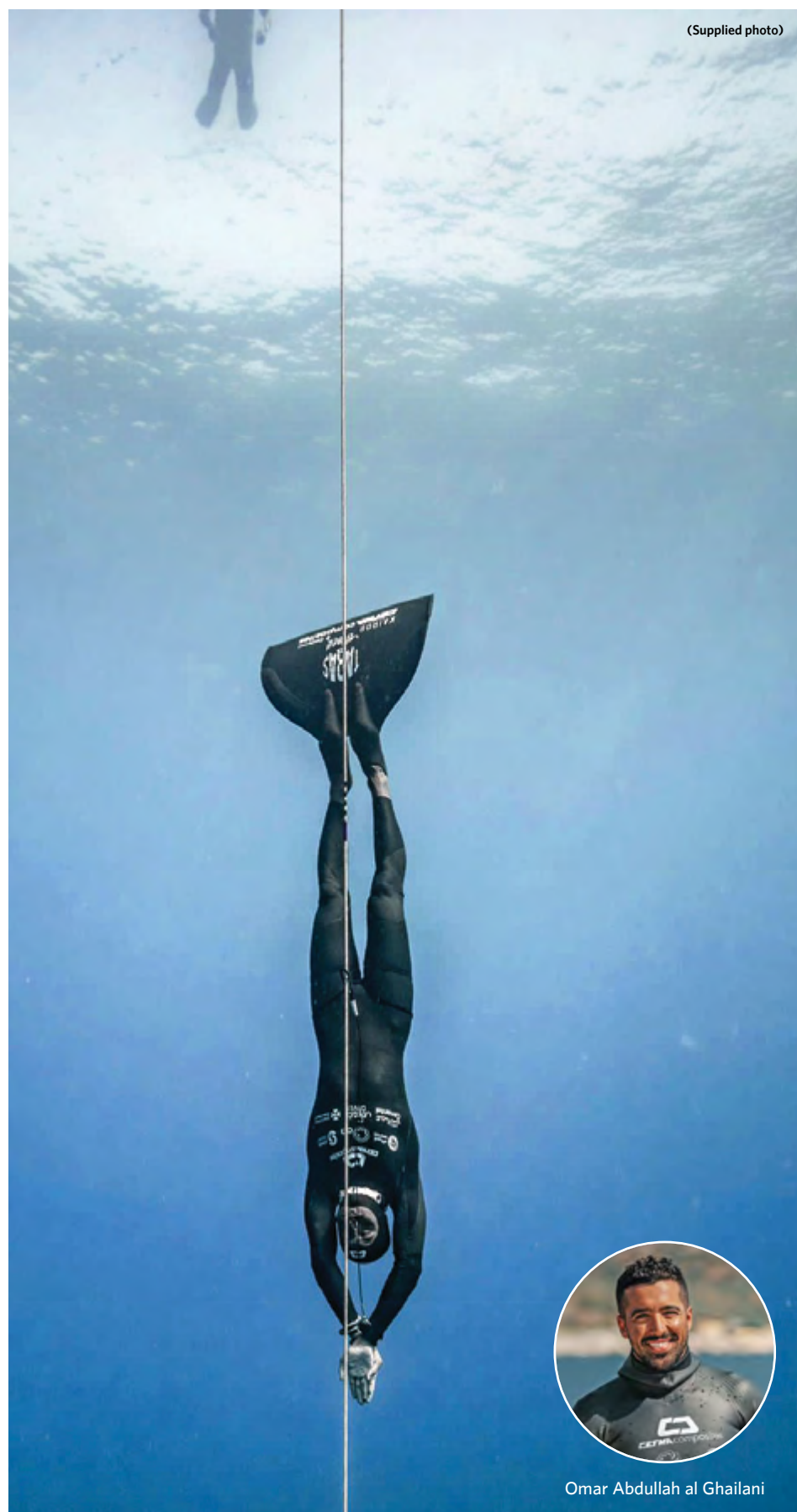
At the conclusion of the meeting, the governors exchanged views about the programme and reiterated the significance of drafting annual plans for the respective governorates. They also discussed proposals to address

challenges facing the governorates during the programme's implementation.

The Ministry of Economy recently released the 'Strategic Programmes Folder' for the tenth Five-Year Plan, which focuses on 14 national priorities and 430 strategic programmes chosen as per the priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

The Strategic Programmes Folder is an integral part and the main document of the tenth Five-Year Plan.

Omani freediver wins gold in World Cup held in Turkey



(Supplied photo)



Omar Abdullah al Ghailani

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani diver Omar Abdullah al Ghailani, from the wilayat of Sur in South Sharqiyah, has won gold and silver medals in the 4th Kas Baska Freediving World Cup Outdoor championship held in Turkey recently.

The competition saw participation of 50 divers from 22 countries, including the US, Italy, France, Spain, Croatia, Ukraine, Colombia, Slovakia, Kuwait, Iran, Lebanon and Czech Republic, besides Turkey.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ghailani said, "I won gold in free immersion (FIM) 101m category and silver in constant weight (CWT) 101m category."

According to Ghailani, besides the physical challenges, he faced the additional burden of securing financial support as the sport is very

expensive.

"Reaching the finals required immense concentration and determination," Ghailani said, adding that he prepared for the championship by training daily.

Elaborating on the sport and its technique, Ghailani said it is done without the use of any breathing apparatus.

He is keen to continue representing the sultanate at international meets and raising the Omani flag in different countries.

"I thank everyone who supported me in continuing my training in the past few days in these difficult times. And I hope to get financial support to continue participating in international events."

Ghailani also did Oman proud by winning the AIDA Freediving World Cup 2021 held in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, in July when he claimed four gold medals, including overall winner, and a bronze.

ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021: The day has finally arrived

OMAN TO PLAY PNG AS T20 WORLD CUP 2021 BEGINS AT OMAN CRICKET ACADEMY GROUND AT AMERAT TODAY

SAYYID THEYAZIN BIN HAITHAM, TOP BCCI AND ICC BOSSES TO GRACE OPENING CEREMONY

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The moment of history is here as Oman Cricket gets ready to soar into a new orbit where it will proudly claim hosting and launching the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021.

At 2pm on Sunday when the match umpires say 'Play' to set the ball rolling for the T20 World Cup, history will be made as Oman becomes the first Associate member country to host the global showpiece event.

It will be a double celebration for the hosts as they also take part in the World Cup in a second successive edition.

Oman take on debutants Papua New Guinea (PNG) to kick off the seventh edition of the T20 World Cup on the first day, while the other two teams in Group B of the First Round - Bangladesh and Scotland - meet in the second match this evening, starting at 6pm.

Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, other mem-

Oman Cricket Academy Ground at Amerat is hosting a World Cup. All the memories of how we built this venue, brick by brick, are coming back like a wave

PANKAJ KHIMJI



bers of the Royal Family, ministers, Indian cricket board (BCCI) chief Sourav Ganguly, International Cricket Council (ICC) CEO Geoff Allardice and other leading cricket and government officials will grace the opening ceremony, the first such being organised at an ICC World Cup event.

Ahead of the historic day for Oman Cricket, its chairman Pankaj Khimji was at a loss of words and termed it an 'emotionally charged moment'.

Pankaj, who led the remark-

able team of officials in realising a dream of every Oman cricket fan, broke down while thanking all who had made it possible.

"Oman Cricket Academy Ground at Al Amerat is hosting a World Cup. All the memories of how we built this venue, brick by brick, are coming back like a wave," he said.

Pankaj added, "We are delighted and proud to have Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham grace the opening ceremony of the T20 World Cup."

Continued on **Page 04**

OMANI WOMEN'S DAY

'NEED TO BREAK GENDER BARRIERS'

As the sultanate celebrates Omani Women’s Day today, *Muscat Daily* joins in acknowledging their valued role in nation building. On the occasion, women from different walks of life point out a number of areas where Omani women need to venture into and make their presence felt. Here’s what they said:



JANNAT SHAFAEI Marketing professional

Women have made incredible progress in joining the workforce and rising to the top of their fields. Manufacturing and food & beverage are the industries women are not usually associated with, yet our presence is steadily growing. Where we used to be underestimated in the type and quality of work because of our gender, now we are challenging the notion.

To encourage women to succeed in these fields, we have to invest and support entry-level female employees who want to succeed further. We also need to set positive examples. We need women at all levels, including the top, to shine a spotlight on the incredible work that women are doing in the industry.

My advice for those navigating through gender barriers is, keep persevering and never apologise for being a woman. We often forget just how powerful, capable and resourceful we are.



SAMAR AL LAWATI Relationship manager

Omani women have already proved themselves and their capabilities in many fields and industries. From the banking and finance perspective, although on a global scale it is traditionally a male-dominated field, in Oman it's probably one of the sectors that women have taken to the most. For example, at NBO, we have a female chairperson and director, and approximately 40 per cent of employees are women.

When we look at investment banking particularly, it is a relatively new field in Oman that we're still developing. Because of this, it's generally less popular and even though there is awareness, the path for us to enter isn't clearly defined.

This is being improved with a number of opportunities, like Etimad and other national leadership programmes that secure places for women. These opportunities should help women build the analytical and interpersonal skills they need to thrive in the field, while making them feel more welcome in it.



REEM NOOR AL ZADJALI Attorney

I believe that we have overcome the need to prove ourselves as women because I consider us equal to men in many aspects. In fact, other countries fight for equality and rights that we are granted, so I am very grateful for that. In Oman, women have achieved so much since his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may he rest in peace, took over and ever since, women have served in many positions of leadership in different sectors. However, we are yet to see the mere presence of women in the judiciary in Oman.





DR INTISAR KHALIFA AL BUSAIDI Researcher - Petroleum engineering

October 17 reflects the sultanate's belief in empowering Omani women to support and enable themselves socially to contribute to the country's progress as she takes part in Oman's constant development. Omani women have had equal opportunities in fields such as healthcare, education and politics. However, the contribution of Omani women in the engineering sector is still limited as most of them prefer to stay at home and do nothing regarding their qualifications. I think the lack of actual women role models in the engineering environment is the reason. Most of them believe that engineering is a challenging field and male-dominated that requires strenuous physical work, making it difficult to achieve a work-life balance.

In my opinion, we need to motivate women in this area using the power of social media, giving more exposure and talks to thousands of women about the nature of work in the engineering sector. Also, private sector companies should play a role in this field by offering flexible work schedules to create a positive workplace culture for women. More women will be attracted to this field if companies emphasise productivity and performance rather than hours spent at the desk. In addition, companies and organisations should actively encourage, nurture and foster women in leadership roles to promote more women into their workforce.



DR MOZA AL SHIYADI Media professional

Omani women have gone through many and varied experiences in various fields. They are also keeping pace with the great acceleration in the development sectors. There are many fields in which the government supports all members of Omani society - women as well - such as working in new technologies for the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, space sciences and nanosciences, in addition to supporting everyone in the scientific research sector.

The Omani woman is a mother, wife, housewife and more, so she needs a lot of attention based on the multiplicity and diversity of her roles. Omani women need support with scholarships, full-time studies, opportunities for advancement, independent ownership and more.

AMAAL AL LAWATI Chief people officer

Women in Oman are provided with the education and opportunities to succeed in different roles. I think we are privileged in that respect as we have the support needed to reach our potential.

We can see that within our company (Ooredoo), we have many women engineers, directors and department heads, even our CEO, all of whom are actively contributing to positive female leadership in

the country. I would hope that women in all sectors are celebrated and acknowledged as they are at Ooredoo.

I think we would benefit from more international exposure if we shared our knowledge and were offered platforms through which we can exchange our experiences with other nationalities. By sharing our success stories, we will inspire others to step up and do the same.



WAFAA SALEEM AL MUSALHI Training coordinator

Women in Oman have great opportunities to prove themselves in all kind of areas and sectors. A few sectors that need to be explored by women include real state, innovation, tourism and trading. These sectors are not specified for a certain gender and both men and women have the chance to take the advantage of business facilities and services in the country. This will help the market to be improved and raised to higher levels of creativity and success.

This success will not be limited to women alone; it will benefit the

whole society. So, I encourage all women to stand up and grab these opportunities and be part of the country's progress.

Women need ways to stay motivated and encouraged to progress further. A sense of appreciation is an essential element of motivation and rewarding achievements will surely highlight the women who have taken huge steps towards success. Focusing on success stories will show the way for other women to start and enhance their capabilities and explore their plans and apply it successfully.



FAWZIA ABDULAZIZ Oil & gas professional

I feel Omani women need to focus on taking on operational roles. Currently, I see only a small percentage of ladies have taken core operational roles in the sultanate.

Nothing is impossible, especially when it comes to women power! We have proved that we can do even better in those specific roles which we always thought can be only managed by men. And I am sure that with a little more self-motivation and external support, no one can stop Omani women from growing in this area.

With regard to senior leadership, I see a gender inequality - it is still a challenge for Omani women. However, it's not that they don't want such positions, rather it is about how organisations perceive the ability and capability of women.

Probably in most organisations, we may not find the right kind of support for women to take up senior roles. But, self-motivation is a big weapon, and women must try hard to reach where they deserve to be. Similarly, some women are lucky to have huge support from their peers/senior management and the overall organisation. Organisational support makes a big difference to push women to take senior roles and grow alongside men.



SUAD AL HAIMLI Reservations manager

I believe we are all equal and there is no reason for anyone to be held back, simply because of our gender. Women are now present more than ever before across the hospitality industry, and are proving themselves worthy leaders in lots of different departments. There are certainly a few areas where representation has room for improvement, for example in F&B, housekeeping and revenue. That's why it's my dream to become the first Omani woman revenue director. There is a perception that these areas are more demanding and that they're not conducive to family life. But those of us working in these areas are proving that's not the case, that work-life balance can be achieved and that it shouldn't hold you back.

Overall, we do need more opportunities that specifically focus on attracting women into less popular areas, and recognise those who have succeeded. But ultimately, it depends on us as individuals, on our motivation, our passion, and our determination to follow our dreams.



TAHIRA FIDA Artist

One of the gifts of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said was to mark a day for Omani women to celebrate the welfare of women in terms of services and programmes, the positive effect of which reflect their plight and participation alongside men in the nation-building process.

I believe that having a centre to guide the talented young generation is what we need now as there are many young girls who are talented in different fields, such as writing, painting, music,

even cooking, which needs support and guidance. Some of them have already started their own small businesses but lack the appropriate knowledge and support to run these small online shops. Most of them do not know how to advertise or control income and maintain the quality of customer service. I recall, the Minister of Higher Education had mentioned that we will soon have a Capacity Development Programme in this regard. I hope to see the results soon.



MUNA BASHEER AL ZADJALI Customer relations officer

Entrepreneurship gives a lot of Omani women the freedom to work on what they love to do. There are many Omani women who are opening new ventures in sectors like food, fashion designing, craft etc. This is because they are active and manage the business themselves. Further motivation can be offered to women by providing low-interest loans for starting new businesses.



BARKA SHAHBAL AL BAKRI Social activist

Omani women have come a long way in most fields. This includes business, finance and politics. However, the challenge lies in specialised areas like medical and scientific research. Over centuries, we were a seafaring nation, anchored in many ports. We married and came back with our children, not to mention the 1970s returnees.

This makes us a unique nation with continuous integrated new blood. Our shores and oceans have a lot that are not yet fully exploited. While benefit of research is slow, it will open new economic areas that will assist in the diversification of the economy. We need to slowly but surely move away from heavy dependence on oil.

Aid convoy to tour cyclone-affected areas today

Muscat - Ahd Foundation - a frontrunner in Oman's charity missions - is organising an aid distribution programme on Sunday, coinciding with Omani Women's Day that falls on October 17 every year.

According to a press statement, the foundation, which firmly believes in the importance of social and humanitarian work, "will organise an aid convoy 'Ahd al Khair' reflecting the foundations' concern for society".

It aims to provide women and children in the cyclone-affected

areas with emergency requirements, the statement added.

The convoy will have collection points, through which the staff of Ahd Foundation, female representatives from women associations, volunteers from different units of the Royal Court Affairs and civil associations will distribute aid items and supplies to the targeted groups of females and children in the affected wilayats.

"With an aim to cover all the affected wilayats, the convoy will depart from Muscat gover-

norate. It will continue to wilayat of Mussanah in South Batinah, and Suwaiq, Khabourah and Saham in North Batinah governorate. It will also go to the wilayat of Ibri in Dhahirah governorate," the statement said.

The Honorable Lady is keen to activate the role of Omani women's associations throughout the sultanate by participating in the 'Ahd al Khair' convoy.

She affirms that every hand is needed in times of crisis where the efforts of all sectors are essential.

Omani firm delivers medicines in Shaheen-stricken areas using drones

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani firm has succeeded for the first time in delivering medicines in areas affected by tropical cyclone Shaheen using drones.

According to an official at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Wareed, a digital platform that provides doorstep healthcare in cooperation with UVL Robotics and the support of the ministry, Civil Aviation Authority and Royal Oman Police, delivered medicines in cyclone-stricken areas using drones.

Commenting on the development, Salim Amer Mosbeh al Balushi, a citizen of the wilayat of Khabourah, said, "We thank the authorities for this great effort to



provide medicines using drones in these areas that experienced difficult circumstances."

He added that the service will help the elderly who cannot venture out to get their medicines.

Funded by Oman Technology Fund, Wareed delivers medicines for chronic conditions such as diabetes, blood pressure and

heart disease.

Title deeds replaced for free

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has announced that it will help people in Batinah who lost their title deeds during cyclone Shaheen to obtain new deeds for free.

In a statement, the ministry directed people of North and South Batinah who lost their title deeds to visit the housing directors of their areas to obtain new title deeds free of charge.

Avoid using well water

The Food Safety and Quality Centre (FSQC) has warned people in areas affected by Shaheen not to use or drink well water.

A statement issued by FSQC said, "The centre warns people in the affected areas to avoid using well water for drinking or domestic use owing to the possibility of contamination caused by cyclone Shaheen to ground water. Examining the water is necessary to ensure that it is free of contamination."

MoL, MoH launch training programmes for 900 jobseekers in nursing, paramedics

Muscat - The Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) embarked on a cooperation programme on Thursday that seeks to provide training to Omani graduates and undergraduates so that they can replace expatriates in nursing and paramedical professions.

This year, the programme seeks to provide employment to 900 jobseekers, among them 610 have already been ap-

pointed, while 134 are undergoing appointment procedures and 156 are to be appointed later after joining an employment-linked training programme, according to a statement.

The year-long programme (renewable) is supported by the MoL's monthly training grants in nursing and paramedical jobs segments. In turn, MoH will supervise the implementation of the programme from a technical



point of view.

The MoH will follow up the assessment of trainees.

The agreement for this cooperation programme was signed by H E Sayyid Salim Musallam al Busaidi, MoL's Undersecretary for Human Resources Development, and H E Dr Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH's Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs.

MoL inks pact with Retail Academy

MoL also signed an agreement with Retail Academy on Thursday to train jobseekers for key jobs in the retail sector. The agreement for the implementation of the programme to be funded by the ministry was signed by H E Busaidi and Maimouna Sulaiman al Shaybani, general manager of Retail Academy.



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The day has finally arrived

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"What we have achieved in this short time to fulfil the ICC conditions to host the World Cup is only because of Sayyid Theyazin's support and the blessings of our patron-in-chief His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik," Pankaj Khimji said.

Pankaj's father, the Late Kanak Khimji, was the founding member of Oman Cricket. His role was key to where the game has reached today. Over the past many decades, cricket in Oman has grown by leaps and bounds and on Saturday, Pankaj was confident in saying that 'we are going to Dubai'.

Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah are the other venues of the T20 World Cup that will host matches from the Super 12s stage to the finals.

The top-two teams in Group B here will advance to Super 12 and Pankaj said that Oman's players under coach Duleep Mendis have the potential to advance as the best two from Group B.

"That will be the cherry on our cake and I am quite confident that our boys can achieve it," he said.

Venue all done up

The Oman Cricket Academy Ground is all done up like a bride with a sea change visible at the venue achieved in the past 90 days or so.

Seating capacity has been raised to accommodate 4,500 fans, while the floodlights installed are said to be one of the

Seating capacity has been raised to 4,500, while the floodlights are one of the brightest installed in any cricket stadium in the world

brightest in any cricket stadium in the world. A brand new press box and media centre, besides 24 corporate hospitality boxes, have been set up.

OC has managed to convince ICC for a short opening ceremony that will also mark the Omani Women's Day.

Muscat Daily had first reported that the all-women Royal Cavalry mounted band will perform, though without horses, on the ground. However, around 21 caparisoned horses of the Royal Cavalry will line up at the boundary with 16 riders holding the participating teams' flags. The ICC T20 World Cup trophy is expected to be brought to the ground on horseback.

The T20 World Cup will be played from October 17 to November 14 with a total of 45 matches to be played by 16 teams.

Pankaj hoped that #Oman trends across the world and the T20 World Cup is just the beginning of many more bigger and world-class games to be held at the venue.

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CMA tells insurers to speed up cyclone claim settlement

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Capital Market Authority (CMA), which regulates the sultanate's insurance sector, has instructed insurance companies in Oman to adopt specific procedures and speed up settlement of claims for damages caused by Cyclone Shaheen earlier this month.

Tropical Cyclone Shaheen, which affected Oman during October 3-4, was one of the largest weather events to hit the sultanate since Cyclone Gonu in 2007. The intensity of Shaheen resulted in damages initially from the cyclone and subsequent floods caused by the heavy rains brought by it.

'Within the national efforts to deal with the impact of the Cyclone Shaheen, the CMA instructed the insurance companies to take specific procedures to ease and speed up the settlement of claims of policyholders who incurred damage due to the cyclone,' the CMA said in a statement. The Capital Market Authority issued the instructions in coordination with the Ministerial Committee for assessment of the damages caused by the cyclone.

Cyclone Shaheen inflicted horrendous damage in North and South Batinah and Muscat governorates, ravaging roads, public facilities, homes, vehicles and businesses. Insurance companies will likely take a



An aerial view shows the aftermath of tropical Cyclone Shaheen in Khabourah on October 4 (AFP)

The CMA has instructed the insurance firms to promptly settle the claims in the affected wilayats within not more than 14 days for cash compensation from the date of assessment of the damage

major hit on account of damage to the properties, businesses and vehicles during the cyclone.

The CMA has instructed the insurance companies to promptly settle the claims in the affected wilayats within not more than 14 days for cash compensation from the date of assessment of the damage. The regulator has also asked insurers to increase the staff at-

tending to the assessment of damage and claims settlement as soon as possible, and to send repair orders in not more than seven days from the date of the survey.

The CMA instructed the insurance companies to open multiple channels through their offices and branches and employ modern technology to receive and decide in the claims to ensure swift compensation and

flexibility. It also advised insurers not to ask for ROP report to open claim files and not to charge any claim charges upfront but deduct them at the time of compensation.

'The insurance companies are obliged to provide cover for the perils and losses incurred by policyholders as means for tackling the impact of the expected perils to protect their properties as per each insurance policy,' the Capital Market Authority said.

The CMA also emphasised that the standard motor vehicles insurance policy covers natural calamities in the comprehensive insurance as basic benefit and as optional benefit in third party insurance policies.

Bank Muscat profit rises 24% to RO140mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the sultanate, has reported a 23.8 per cent year-on-year growth in its net profit for the nine months period ended September 30, 2021, mainly due to lower impairment charges this year.

The bank posted a net profit of RO140.16mn for the first nine months of 2021 compared to RO113.21mn reported during the same period in 2020, according to preliminary unaudited results released on Thursday.

Bank Muscat's net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing increased 5.2 per cent to RO252.48mn for the nine months period ended September 30, 2021 compared to RO240.07mn for the same period in 2020.

Non-interest income grew by 9.4 per cent to RO105.85mn for the nine months period ended September 30, 2021 as compared to RO96.72mn for the same period in 2020.

Bank Muscat said its operating expenses for the nine months period this year came at RO144.33mn as compared to RO137.19mn for the same period in 2020, an increase



of 5.2 per cent.

The bank's net impairment for credit and other losses for the first nine months period of 2021 dropped at RO46.77mn as against RO64.82mn for the same period in 2020.

'The decrease [in impairment charges] is mainly attributed to the precautionary and collective provisions created by the bank during the first half of 2020, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the historic decline seen in global crude oil prices. The bank remains vigilant of the continuing stress in the macroeconomic and business conditions and its potential impacts,' Bank Muscat said.

Net loans and advances [in-

cluding Islamic financing receivables] increased by 2.9 per cent to RO9.156bn as of September 30, 2021 compared to RO8.895bn a year ago.

On the other hand, Bank Muscat's customer deposits [including Islamic customer deposits] decreased by 1.1 per cent to RO8.698bn this year from RO8.795bn as of September 30, 2020.

Bank Muscat said its full financial results for the nine months ended September 30, 2021 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the board of directors at its meeting scheduled for late October.

Port of Salalah and Maersk to launch new service for Yemen

Salalah - Port of Salalah, a major Arab Gulf regional gateway port and transshipment hub on the Arabian Sea, partnered with Maersk to launch a new multimodal transport solution to Al-Mazyunah Free Zone as part of their regional strategy. It aims to support the growth of SMEs in Oman and Yemen and attracting new investors.

Designed to facilitate inland services, the new offering extends beyond the port and includes securing customs clearances and bonded trucking services to Salalah and Al-Mazyunah Free Zone hubs under carrier haulage. The new service reduces lead time and allows access to multiple markets.

'We're excited to be expanding our inland service capabilities to help support customers beyond the port with as part of our commercial efforts focused on our regional strategy which includes Yemen,' said Mark Hardiman, CEO of Port of Salalah.

Port of Salalah, acts as a facilitator in anchoring Salalah as a gateway to Yemen and the current initiative, in partnership with Maersk, ensures seamless cargo movement where the customer gets a single window service till



the final delivery location. This will not only ensure increased efficiency to the customer but also has the potential to eliminate unexpected costs including line demurrage and port storage as an example.

The dedicated team of experienced customer service personnel are always on call to ensure cargo is delivered safely and on schedule. In addition, the partnership offers multiple transport options allowing customers to access Mukalla, Aden and other inland destinations in Yemen.

Christopher Cook, managing director at Maersk UAE, Oman and Qatar said, 'Our ambition is to serve our customers with end-to-end, integrated solutions which will simplify their supply

chains. Our joint efforts with Port of Salalah aim to achieve this and we look forward to unlocking new value for our customers across the Middle East and North Africa region.'

As one of the world's most efficient transshipment ports, the new offering is well positioned to offer a range of customers a consolidated, digital, streamlined service. Port of Salalah delivers world-class terminal capabilities including containers, liquid and dry bulk handling.

The Port of Salalah currently serves large volumes of multiple commodities through Al-Mazyunah Free Zone. The port continues to actively contribute to Oman's 2040 vision and objectives and support Oman's economic diversification strategy.

Oman participates in IMF, WB meetings

Muscat - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Finance, is currently taking part in the annual joint meetings of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for 2021.

The sultanate is represented in the four-day virtual meetings by Nasser Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, with the participation of the executive president of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The meetings, hosted in Washington, DC, discuss a range of topics, notably studying the financial situation of the WB, the IMF and their affiliated organisations as of June 30, 2021. The meetings also review the developments of the financial and economic situation in the world.

On the sidelines of the meetings, Arab ministers of finance will hold their annual meeting with the President of the World Bank. The meeting will cover a range of financial and economic topics, as well as development prospects in the Arab world.

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX closes slightly lower amid earnings season

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX30) ended last week slightly lower by 0.14 per cent as the companies announce their financial results for the third quarter of 2021.

All the sub-indices ended lower except Financial index which gained 0.40 per cent. Services and Industrial indices closed lower by 0.88 per cent and 1.48 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index also closed lower by 0.02 per cent.

Local news

►Galfar Engineering & Contracting Company has been awarded a new contract worth RO21mn by the Tender Board for Rehabilitation of the Southern Runway and Air Corridors of Muscat International Airport Project. The firm said that the estimated value of this project, which will be executed for the Civil Aviation Authority, is approximately RO21mn. The execution period of the project is 16 months from the issuance of the work commencement order. Galfar said this new project is expected to contribute to the company revenues and strengthen its presence in such vital infrastructure projects.

►The sultanate's budget deficit dropped to RO1.05bn in the first eight months of 2021 from

RO1.96bn in the same period of 2020, a reduction of more than RO900mn, according to data released by the Ministry of Finance.

►According to the Ministry of Finance, Oman recorded a 13.9 per cent increase in government revenues in the first eight months of 2021 as oil and gas prices during this period remained higher compared with the same period a year ago. Total revenues rose to RO6.330bn during the January-August period against RO5.554bn recorded in the same period of 2020. By the end of August 2021, total public spending amounted to RO7.38bn, a decrease of 1.7 per cent compared with RO7.51bn in the same period in 2020. 'Drop in deficit would be taken positively by foreign investors and we might see more inflows in Oman in coming period,' the Ministry of Finance said.

GCC markets

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) issued its estimates for the GCC countries last week. The IMF forecasts the GCC region's nominal GDP (current prices) to increase by 18.8 per cent in 2021 and 4.6 per cent in 2022, owing to higher oil prices and hike in production as per OPEC production



plan. In terms of real GDP (constant prices), the IMF expects that Saudi Arabia's 2021 real GDP will grow at 2.8 per cent for 2021 as compared to the earlier forecast of 2.4 per cent, while Kuwait's will grow at 0.9 per cent as compared to the earlier estimate of 0.7 per cent. Oman's estimates have not been revised by the IMF. Bahrain, UAE and Qatar's GDP growth estimates have been revised downward for 2021. For 2022 and beyond, UAE, Qatar and Kuwait's growth estimates

have been revised upward.

The UAE Cabinet approved the general budget for the years 2022-2026, with federal spending of AED290bn. The Cabinet, chaired by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, also approved the general budget for 2022, that foresees expenditure of AED58.93bn. The Cabinet also approved the new government strategic approach that serves as a framework to lay the founda-

tions of work for the next 50 years.

The largest share of the UAE's 2022 budget was allocated to the development and social benefits sector at 41.2 per cent, out of which 16.3 per cent is for the education sector, 6 per cent for social development, 8.4 per cent for health, 8.2 per cent for pensions and 2.6 per cent for other services. Some 3.8 per cent of the budget has been allocated to the infrastructure and financial resources sector.

Global news

Total OPEC crude oil production averaged 27.33mn barrels per day (bpd) in September 2021, higher by 0.49mn bpd on a month-on-month basis. Crude oil output increased mainly in Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The share of OPEC's crude oil in total global production increased by 0.3 percentage points to 28.5 per cent in September compared with the previous month. Preliminary data indicates that global liquids production in September increased by 0.61mn bpd to average 95.93mn bpd compared with the previous month.

US inflation rate rose to a 13-year high in September as rising costs for food and shelter pushed the rate up to 5.4 per cent. Higher prices for food and shelter made up half of the increase in the overall rate, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics said in a release. But the biggest individual category increase was energy, the cost of which has risen by almost 25 per cent in the past year.

Economists were expecting the number to come in at around 5.3 per cent, which would have been the highest rate since 2013. But the figure ended up being higher than it's been since 2008, right before the financial crisis.

On a monthly basis, the US consumer prices advanced 0.4 per cent, above forecasts of 0.3 per cent, with the indexes for food and shelter contributing more than half of the monthly increase. The core index which excludes food and energy went up 0.2 per cent on monthly basis and 4 per cent year-on-year, the same as in August and in line with forecasts.

Recommendation

Global markets remained volatile during the last week. Inflation numbers kept the investors on their toes. Nevertheless, investors remained focused on the upcoming results season.

Oil prices continued to remain above US\$80 a barrel, supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement that oil can comfortably cross US\$100 per barrel in the coming period.

Regionally, the markets' performance was mostly positive across the GCC as higher oil prices and earnings season kept investors focused.

Locally, the market continued to be swayed by the earnings season. Still many companies in insurance and telecom are yet to announce the results.

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China growth dips in Q3 on energy woes



Workers maintain a high voltage converter station in Xuancheng, China's eastern Anhui province on Monday (AFP)

Beijing, China - China's economic growth is expected to have slowed further in the third quarter, according to an AFP poll of analysts, with a mounting energy crisis and property market tremors casting a pall as the country's post-COVID recovery lost steam.

While the world's number-two economy bounced back quickly from the coronavirus outbreak last year, with gross domestic product growth returning to pre-pandemic levels, economists say further slowdown is 'inevitable'.

Growth is forecast to come in at 5 per cent on-year for July-September by the 12 analysts polled by AFP, representing a sharp slowdown from the 7.9 per cent clocked in the previous three months.

They also downgraded their full-year growth expectations to 8.1 per cent, from the 8.5 per cent predicted in a July poll. Official figures will be released on Monday.

Analysts said China's growth slowdown mainly stems from policy tightening this year in key areas including the property sector and a drive to cut emissions.

Residential real estate activity

has slowed with tightened regulations and credit policies for developers, along with guidance to banks to slow mortgage lending, according to Oxford Economics.

The travails of property giant Evergrande - which is struggling under a mountain of debt worth more than US\$300bn - is dragging down sentiment among prospective buyers, it added.

Power rationing, along with surging raw material costs and climate push, have led to reduced mining activities and manufacturing production

Christina Zhu, of Moody's Analytics, said a slowdown in property investment and house prices could hit growth as real estate investment accounts for a large share of fixed asset investment, which she said accounts for more than 40 per cent of total GDP.

"The two major risks for the remainder of the year are the

property market debt problem and power shortages," Zhu added.

Power rationing in recent weeks, along with surging raw material costs and the government's climate push, have led to reduced mining activities and manufacturing production.

Such disruptions 'will not only put pressure on [the] domestic labour market and consumption, but also have ripple effects on global trade and prices', Zhu warned.

Despite still-strong foreign demand, factors like extreme weather and fresh virus outbreaks, on top of energy shortages and the cooling housing market have all weighed on China's economy, said Gene Ma, head of China research at the Institute of International Finance.

Flooding shuttered coal mines earlier this month, while extreme weather has destroyed crops and a series of regional lockdowns have brought large cities to a standstill with just a handful of COVID-19 cases.

"China's remarkable post-COVID-19 recovery ran out of steam by the summer of this year," he added.

AFP

Fed officials lean towards stimulus pullback as soon as November

Washington, US - Unless the US economic situation changes dramatically, Federal Reserve officials are leaning towards cutting back on monetary stimulus as soon as November, according to a central bank document.

The date when the Fed will pull back on its monthly bond purchases has been a closely watched topic for months, and the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) last month indicated the time could come 'soon'.

The minutes of the FOMC meeting released on Wednesday showed officials speaking positively of plans to begin cutting back on the bond purchases as soon as after their next meeting scheduled for November and end it by mid-2022.

Officials indicated that 'provided that the economic recovery remained broadly on track, a gradual tapering process that concluded around the middle of next year would likely be appropriate', according to the minutes.

If the FOMC makes the decision at the next meeting then 'the process of tapering could commence with the monthly purchase calendars beginning in either mid-November or mid-December'.

The central bank currently buys US\$80bn in Treasury bonds and US\$40bn in mortgage-backed securities each month, a policy implemented early last year as the pandemic caused an unprecedented downturn. But the policy has increas-



ingly been questioned in recent months amid rising inflation.

The minutes showed participants favoured a plan to cut purchases of Treasury bonds by US\$10bn a month, and reduce mortgage-backed securities by US\$5bn a month.

With inflation spiking through much of this year, central bankers' forecasts released at last month's meeting showed interest rates could be hiked off zero as soon as next year.

According to the minutes Fed officials acknowledged inflation

could worsen.

'Most participants saw inflation risks as weighted to the upside because of concerns that supply disruptions and labour shortages might last longer and might have larger or more persistent effects on prices and wages than they currently assumed,' the minutes said.

Fed officials also discussed the ongoing impact of COVID-19, noting that the increase in labour force participation expected once vaccines were rolled out 'had not yet materialised'.

Employers nationwide have struggled to fill open positions, even though the economy remains about 5mn jobs short of its pre-pandemic total.

'Various participants suggested that a complete return to pre-pandemic conditions was unlikely' since many people had decided to leave the workforce through retirement and other means, the minutes said.

AFP

China central bank says Evergrande risks 'controllable'

Beijing, China - China's central bank said that the risk of spillover from embattled property giant Evergrande to the financial sector was 'controllable', breaking its silence on the company's debt troubles, state media reported.

Concerns are mounting that the cash crunch at Evergrande - which is struggling with more than US\$300bn in liabilities - could lead to contagion for the wider Chinese economy.

Authorities are 'carrying out risk disposal and resolution work in accordance with the principles of rule of law and marketisation', People's Bank of China (PBOC) official Zou Lan said at a briefing, according to an outlet under the Xinhua state news agency.

Zou went on to say that the company had been poorly managed, and had not operated 'cau-



A general view of the Evergrande Center building in Shanghai, China (AFP)

tiously' within the confines of the changing market, *Shanghai Securities News* reported.

"Instead, it blindly diversified and expanded, causing the serious deterioration of operating and financial indicators, and eventually an explosion of risk," said Zou, who heads the PBOC's

financial market department.

"On the whole, the risk of spillover into the financial sector is controllable," he added.

Authorities will also help ensure that financial support is provided for the resumption of work on Evergrande's property projects, he said, stressing that the

real estate sector remained 'generally healthy'.

The firm's liquidity crisis came as the country's property sector found itself under tightened scrutiny, after regulators announced caps for three different debt ratios in a scheme dubbed 'three red lines' last year.

It was reported to have missed a trio of offshore bond payments worth almost US\$150mn on Monday, triggering a fresh round of downgrades for two Chinese property developers' ratings.

Evergrande's Shenzhen-listed unit Hengda Real Estate has another 121.8mn yuan domestic bond payment due on Tuesday, while Evergrande has a separate US\$14.25mn offshore bond due October 30.

AFP

Apollo Hospital ties up with Oman Cricket

Apollo Hospital Muscat signed an agreement with Oman Cricket as a healthcare partner recently. The agreement was signed officially by VT Saileshwaran, managing director of Apollo Hospital and Pankaj Khimji, chairman, Oman Cricket. We are extremely grateful to the management of Apollo Hospitals for collaborating with Oman Cricket as its official 'Healthcare Partner' and supporting our efforts to promote Oman as a sporting destination,"

said Khimji. Saileshwaran reiterated their support saying, "We have a strong team in sports medicine and we are happy to join Oman Cricket, the official governing body of cricket in Oman, in making the sport reach and maintain its international standards by providing the best of medical support." Apollo Hospital Muscat is a well-known healthcare provider in the Sultanate of Oman which provides the most modern state-

of-the-art healthcare services under one roof with highly motivated and dedicated professionals. The multi-specialty hospital is looking at development in the sports field with enthusiasm and has its facilities and experience steered for the new role. K P Shobha, CEO, Apollo Hospital Muscat, said, "We look forward to providing holistic healthcare services including prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and health education for the players. We offer approximately

thirty specialty clinics and we can proudly claim that we are one of the hospitals in the sultanate, offering regular super specialty consultation clinics under the expertise of visiting doctors from India, Germany, and Jordan in the field of Spine, Orthopedics, Urogynaecology, Urology and Neurosurgery." The Hospital team is well equipped and prepared to provide prompt and emergency healthcare services from the cricket academy grounds to the

hospital, according to internists Dr Dilip Kumar Singhvi and Dr Wahid Khan, besides orthopedics at Apollo Hospitals Muscat. "The most common injuries that occur during fielding in a cricket match, are those when trying to catch the ball, which sometimes could cause finger fractures. Most players are prone to what is called 'on field injuries' which would need primary healthcare attention - from preliminary examinations to clear the player, if they are fit enough

to proceed with the game. In case of a sprain or ligament tear, the players would be shifted to a hospital with immediate management of the injury. Whatever the injury is, we have the facilities to manage the treatment," Dr Raghavan, Orthopedic Surgeon, assured. Dr Saseendar Shanmugasundaram, orthopaedic and sports surgeon of Apollo Hospital Muscat, explained that common injuries during cricket also comprise ligament tears of the

knee (ACL, PCL, meniscus tears, shoulder dislocations (Bankart tear), as well as ankle ligament tears. "Injuries from cricket can range from minor to major - finger injuries to knee or shoulder dislocations. We manage all these injuries with a goal of getting them back to performance at the earliest," he said. Treatment of an athlete is different from treating regular patients. A sports person is all about performance, not just pain management, the hospital asserts.

Kalyan Jewellers opens at Lulu Souk in Ruwi

Kalyan Jewellers, one of the leading jewellery companies, launched its new showroom in Muscat at the Lulu Souk on Ruwi High Street. The brand-new showroom promises to emerge as a new and opulent jewellery shopping destination for shoppers in the city. The showroom was inaugurated virtually by TS Kalyanaraman, chairman and managing director, along with the executive directors Ramesh Kalyanaraman and Rajesh Kalyanaraman. As part of the launch, the jewellery brand has announced mega offers, which includes up to 25 per cent cash back on making charges of gold jewellery. On diamond jewellery up to 20 per cent cash back and on precious stone/uncut jewellery up to 20 per cent cash back will be applicable on stone charges. Customers will be able to maximise value of their purchases by availing the benefits of these offers until 30th November across all showrooms in Oman. For customers looking at

shopping later in the year, gold rate protection can be availed by paying 10 per cent advance on intended purchase value. Talking about the new showroom, the chairman said, "We are extremely delighted to launch our new showroom in Oman. It is a part of our strategy to strengthen our retail footprint and also make the brand more accessible to our customers. Our journey from a single showroom to becoming a global brand has been based on the core values of trust and transparency. "Over the years, Kalyan Jewellers has been able to craft a distinct identity among consumers with our impeccable hyperlocal designs, assured quality, transparent pricing and service-backed shopping experience. With the launch of the new showroom, we want to continue with our endeavour of offering best-in-class buying experience, while ensuring the safety and health of our patrons and the community at large by providing a safe, hygienic and personalised shop-

ping environment." As part of Kalyan Jewellers' 'We Care' COVID-19 guidelines, the company has instituted the highest level of safety and precautionary measures across operational showrooms to safeguard the health and safety of both customers and staff alike. These measures include 100 per cent vaccinated staff, mandatory use of hand sanitisers at entry points, providing masks and gloves to all staff members and customers, as well as regular deep cleaning and sanitization across the showrooms at multiple times throughout the day. This includes disinfecting common areas such as counter tops and doors within the showroom. The company has also gone one step further in appointing a 'Safety Measure Officer' across showrooms to make certain that COVID-19 safety protocol guidelines are strictly followed. Customers will also be able to avail the benefits of Kalyan's new 4-Level Assurance Certification on gold jewellery.

MoSD and Omantel sign cloud pact

The Ministry of Social Development and Omantel have signed an agreement under which Omantel will set up a centre for cloud services for the Ministry. H E Dr Laila Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development and Talal bin Said al Mamari, CEO, Omantel signed the agreement. As per the agreement, Omantel will set up an integrated contact center for cloud communications to provide IT solutions and services within a secure, high-quality, and flexible cloud environment. Services covered by this agreement include cyber protection, digital data storage, and the issuance of periodic reports. The call centre will also be linked to the ministry's CRM system and will speed up transactions besides adding more accuracy in dealing with existing files. These integrated solutions will help the ministry's officials access regular reports on performance of the units and the call centre employees. Such reports will enable them to follow up the performance indicators in line with administrative policies related to the public sector. Commenting on the signing of this agreement, Dr Laila said, "Through this agreement, we in-



tend to upgrade the services and operational processes of the ministry. We seek to benefit from the solutions and cloud services provided by Omantel, which are known for being flexible and of high quality and most importantly meet the Ministry's requirements." She added, "These solutions and technologies will make the process of receiving inquiries, reports, complaints, family counseling and beneficiary services in a flexible, fast, accurate and se-

cure manner. They will also facilitate following up on files from different departments and digital storage for long periods. The move will contribute towards updating the ministry's systems and services to support e-government." Mamari added, "Signing this agreement reflects the confidence of our customers in the advanced services provided by Omantel. Today, we are pleased to have Ministry of Social Development join the list

of government agencies benefiting from our state-of-the-art ICT solutions. "Omantel is keen to provide the latest technologies and communications solutions and leverage its vast experience and capabilities to ensure that the ministry achieves the maximum benefit from this project. I am confident that this cooperation will enhance government's efforts towards digitizing governance and will link various public organisations."

SQU moves higher in QS Arab World Rankings

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) moved up in its ranking at the 2022 QS Arab World Rankings which were launched in Dubai at the 'Enhancing Arab Excellence: A new vision for higher Education In the region' conference. Sultan Qaboos University was once again ranked among the top 10 universities and saw its position improve to No 7, from no 8 which it held for the last two years, in this highly competitive ranking. This year 181 Arab universities were ranked from 18 countries. On the sidelines of the rank-

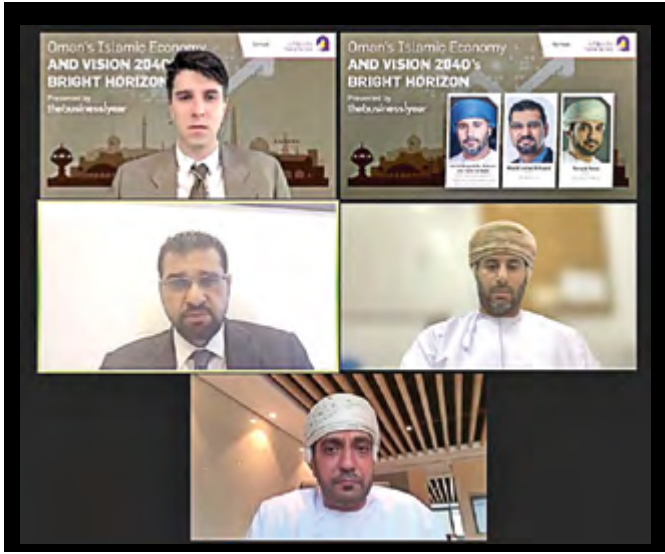
ings, the conference brought together 40 heads of Arab universities together to discuss the challenges facing universities in region and how the future should be planned. H H Dr Fahad al Said, vice chancellor of SQU, highlighted that SQU takes its ranking very seriously and is devoting a lot of time and effort for the purpose. He also pointed out that the Vision 2040 requires more Omani Universities to work their way into the top 500 universities in QS Rankings. And SQU would like to support and assist its



fellow Omani universities in whatever way possible in quest for achieving this national goal, he said.

H H Dr Mona Fahad al Said, Assistant VC for international cooperation, emphasised that SQU has developed its interna-

tional ranking in a sustainable fashion. International Ranking is a part of the SQU's strategic plan 2021-2040 and also a part of the 10th 5 year plan, she said. Dr Tariq Mohiuddin, director of the SQU Ranking project, who represented SQU at the conference, highlighted that SQU is progressing steadily towards the goal set for it by the Oman Vision 2040. "Education and research which are the basis of rankings can be affected drastically very quickly as we have seen with the pandemic recently," he said.



The Business Year hosts digital roundtable on Islamic finance

The Business Year (TBY), a global media group that has been providing investors, businesses, and governments with first-hand insights into the world's most dynamic markets for over a decade, hosted a digital roundtable on October 12 to debate the current state and future potential of Oman's Islamic banking sector. The event was presented by the TBY team, including Benjamin MacShane, associate editor, and Andrea Tsiachtsiri, country director for Oman. It also included H H Dr Adham al Said, CEO and co-founder of The Firm for Business and Economic Consulting, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa, and Tariq al Farsi, CEO of National Finance Co, who discussed the role that Islamic finance is having at a regional and international level. Oman has the 15th largest Islamic banking sector globally.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the downturn in oil prices, Islamic banking sector growth is likely to continue apace in 2021-2022, following its strong momentum in 2020, when it expanded by 10%. The roundtable underlined the main features of Islamic finance and the reasons behind its success. Since its arrival in Oman in 2012, the concept has created a whole new mindset, underlining social responsibility and risk sharing, Islamic principles, and Sharia compliance. The main infrastructure challenges were also discussed, along with issues surrounding sustainable production and innovation, liquidity management, and the growing role of SMEs. The speakers discussed the role of the government, as well as the potential of Islamic finance to help mitigate economic strains.



Sheraton Oman Hotel celebrates 5th anniversary

Sheraton Oman Hotel celebrated five years of its re-opening at a function las Wednesday. Speaking during the event, Samir Messaoudi, general manager of Sheraton Oman Hotel said, "The property has played a key role in shaping the hospitality sector in Oman since it first started business in 1985. We have seen, endured and successfully passed every challenge, ups

and downs and have come victorious and we have made a successful mark in the country and re-establish its name. "To add to that COVID-19 has changed the situation all over the world. Strategies to flatten the pandemic curve such as community lockdowns, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, travel and mobility restrictions significantly decreased the demand for hospi-

talities industry. Sheraton Oman Hotel, however, successfully undertook every precaution to deal with the crisis." The 14-storey tower, which dominates the skyline in Muscat, was closed for nearly 10 years, from 2006 until 2016 and reopened its doors five years ago, on October 13, 2016. The hotel is also a winner of few international awards.

Good France 2021 from Nov 2

On the initiative of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the famous French Chef Alain Ducasse, Goût de/Good France 2021 is once again celebrating French gastronomy and its actors in France and around the world through a series of events organised to support the entire sector. Following the unprecedented health crisis which dominated 2020 and forced food industry stakeholders to constantly reinvent themselves for several months, now is a time for resilience, an eagerly-awaited time for renaissance to celebrate together the new face of gastronomy. This sixth edition is marked by the tenth anniversary of the Gastronomic Meal of the French on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list.

A new highlight for 2021, Goût de/Good France is back in Oman and all around the world with the aim of helping the profession in its sustainable transition and supporting Chefs in their new role as ambassadors for more eco-friendly gastronomy, both from a human standpoint as well as regarding health, the environment and taste education. A celebration of the best of the food sector, this event will showcase French food throughout Oman. Patronised and coordinated by the French Embassy, this new edition will mobilize Chefs from all over the country to prepare and serve 'French-style' meals from 2nd to 12th November in restaurants participating and at the residence of the French ambassador - H E Véronique Aulagnon.



EU diplomatic chief ‘ready’ to meet Iran on nuclear deal

“I’m ready, I’m ready to do that,” said Josep Borrell. “But time is pressing.”

Washington, US - The European Union’s diplomatic chief Josep Borrell said on Friday he was ‘ready’ to meet Iranian leaders in Brussels as part of efforts to revive the faltering 2015 nuclear deal, but warned Tehran it was time to fully return to the negotiating table.

Wrapping up a trip to Washington, Borrell also brushed aside the notion of a ‘Plan B’, or a possible military option as suggested this week by the United States and Israel, should Tehran fail to rejoin the accord aimed at keeping it from developing nuclear weapons.

“I know that the Iranians want to have some kind of previous talks with me as coordinator and with some members of the board of the JCPOA,” Borrell told reporters, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the deal is formally known.

“I’m ready, I’m ready to do that,” said Borrell. “But time is pressing.”

EU envoy Enrique Mora was in Tehran on Thursday to press for a firm date for resuming talks on the deal between the Islamic republic and world powers, which have stalled since June.

Tehran said following the discussions that Iran and the EU had agreed to hold further dialogue in



EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell (left) along with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the State Department, in Washington, DC, on Thursday (AFP)

Brussels within days.

“I cannot tell you a precise date. I am ready to receive them, if needed,” said Borrell, who met a day earlier with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, with Iran on the agenda.

“I don’t say this is absolutely needed but you know I have to have a certain strategic patience on this issue, because we cannot afford to fail,” he added.

‘Too much at stake’

The United States, China, Russia, Germany, France and Britain reached the JCPOA agreement with Iran on its nuclear programme in 2015.

Then-US president Donald Trump pulled America out of the deal in 2018, reinstating sanctions that Washington had lifted as part of the agreement.

Since then, Tehran - which in-

sists its nuclear programme is for civilian purposes only - has also retreated from many of its commitments under the accord.

Current US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to return to the agreement if the Islamic republic renews those commitments at the same time.

Indirect negotiations between the two foes began in April in Vienna via the other signatories to

the deal but have been at a standstill since June, when a new Iranian president was elected.

Borrell said he understood that the new government in Tehran ‘requires time to study the file, to instruct the negotiation, but this time has been already passed’. “It’s time to go back to the negotiation table.”

Accord signatory France issued a parallel warning on Friday

for Iranian authorities to ‘urgently’ put a stop to all violations of the 2015 accord, which it said were of an ‘unprecedented seriousness’.

“Time is working against a potential agreement, because Iran is using that time to aggravate its nuclear violations, which make a return to the JCPOA ever more unlikely,” said a French foreign ministry spokeswoman.

AFP

Iran halts execution after appeals

Tehran, Iran - Iran has again postponed the planned execution of a man arrested at age 17, media in the country reported on Saturday, after international appeals for his life to be spared.

“Arman Abdolali’s sentence which was to be carried out this morning... has been stopped again, and the young man was sent back to prison last night,” Etemad newspaper said.

It is the second time within a week that the execution of 25 year old Abdolali - who was arrested in 2014 and subsequently convicted of murdering his girlfriend - has been postponed, according to Iranian media. The Hamshahri newspaper had said this week that the death sentence had been postponed until Saturday, adding that he would ‘probably be executed soon’.

Amnesty International had said on Monday that Abdolali was moved to solitary confinement in a prison in Karaj, west of Tehran, in preparation for his execution on Wednesday.

The London-based rights group said he had been sentenced to death twice for murdering his girlfriend but that the execution was stopped both times following an international outcry. “The Iranian authorities must immediately halt all plans to execute Arman Abdolali,” Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty’s deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa, said in a statement.

UN human rights experts also appealed to Iran to halt the execution. “International human rights law unequivocally forbids imposition of the death sentence on anyone under 18 years of age,” said the Geneva-based UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

AFP

Security review after British MP stabbed to death in ‘terror’ attack

Leigh-on-Sea, UK - The fatal stabbing of British lawmaker David Amess was a terrorist incident, police said on Saturday, as MPs pressed for tougher security in the wake of the second killing of a UK politician while meeting constituents in just over five years.

Veteran Conservative MP David Amess (69) was talking with voters at a church in the small town of Leigh-on-Sea east of London when he was stabbed to death on Friday.

Police said they arrested a 25 year old suspect and were investigating ‘a potential motivation linked to Islamist extremism’.

Police have said the investigation is in the ‘very early stages’, though multiple UK media outlets, citing sources, reported that the suspect was believed to be a British national with Somali heritage.

The Sun tabloid reported that the attacker stabbed Amess multiple times in the presence of two women staff, before sitting down and waiting for police to arrive.

Police said they believed the attacker acted alone and carried out searches at two addresses in the London area.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited the scene to pay his respects on Saturday, laying floral wreaths outside the church with the leader of the opposition, Labour leader Keir Starmer in a rare show of unity, along with the Speaker of the House of Commons Lindsay Hoyle and Home Secretary Priti Patel.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson (right) and opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer carry floral tributes as they arrive at the scene of the fatal stabbing of lawmaker David Amess, in Leigh-on-Sea on Saturday (AFP)

Members of the public also came to lay bouquets next to the police tape surrounding the crime scene.

One bouquet enclosed a handwritten note saying: ‘RIP Sir David. You did not deserve this.’

Britain’s politicians were stunned by the highly public attack, which recalled the murder of a pro-EU lawmaker ahead of the Brexit referendum.

In June 2016, Labour MP Jo

Cox was killed by a far-right extremist, prompting demands for action against what lawmakers said was ‘a rising tide’ of public abuse and threats against elected representatives.

Home Secretary Patel on Friday ordered police across the country to review security arrangements for all 650 MPs.

At the same time the interior minister insisted the attack would not stop MPs from holding face-

to-face meetings with residents in the areas they represent.

“We will carry on... We live in an open society, a democracy. We cannot be cowed by any individual,” she told Sky News after the wreath-laying.

House of Commons Speaker Hoyle promised no ‘knee-jerk reactions’. “We will take further measures if we need to.”

Tobias Ellwood, a Conservative MP who tried to save a stabbed police officer during a 2017 terror attack near the Houses of Parliament, on Twitter urged ‘a temporary pause in face to face meetings’ until the security review is complete.

Increasing threats

MPs and their staff have been attacked before, although it is rare.

But their safety was thrown into sharp focus by Brexit, which stoked deep political divisions and has led to often angry, partisan rhetoric.

Cox’s killer repeatedly shouted ‘Britain first’ before shooting and stabbing the 41 year old MP outside her constituency meeting near Leeds, northern England.

A specialist police unit set up to investigate threats against MPs in the aftermath said 678 crimes against lawmakers were reported between 2016 and 2020. Most (582) were for malicious communications, although other crimes included harassment (46), terrorism (nine), threats (seven), and common assault (three).

AFP



Hippos at a care centre in Doradal, Antioquia Department, northeast of Bogotá, on Friday (AFP)

Colombia sterilises 24 hippos on former estate of drug lord Escobar

Bogotá, Colombia - Twenty-four out of 80 hippopotamuses roaming on the former ranch of the late Colombian drug kingpin Pablo Escobar were sterilised due to the ‘uncontrolled’ spreading of this ‘invasive’ species, authorities said on Friday.

Before he was shot dead by police in 1993, the notorious Escobar had purchased a number of exotic animals to live on his ranch, including flamingos, giraffes, zebras and kangaroos.

After his death, all but the hippos were sold to zoos.

Escobar originally acquired a single male and female hippos. They were left to roam on his Hacienda Napoles estate, which has since been converted into a theme park, as they were considered to large to try to move, but since then

The presence of these animals in an ecosystem that is not their own, brings consequences such as the displacement of local fauna

DAVID ECHEVERRI

their numbers have multiplied.

The hippos were shot with darts to inject them with a medicine called GonaCon, according to a bulletin by Cornare, a regional environmental protection organization in the northwest of Colombia.

“It’s a contraceptive that is effective in males and females” and cheaper than surgical ster-

ilisation, said Cornare.

“However, it’s complicated because experts suggest giving three doses.”

Another 11 hippos were previously sterilised by more traditional means.

Experts believe this to be the largest herd of hippopotamuses outside of Africa and it has led to problems.

“The presence of these animals in an ecosystem that is not their own, brings consequences such as the displacement of local fauna,” said David Echeverri, a Cornare expert.

The hippos are also responsible for ‘changing ecosystems’ and attacks on local fishermen.

Escobar became one of the richest men on the planet, according to Forbes, thanks to the drug trafficking empire he built.

AFP

IS claims attack on Afghan mosque



A Taliban fighter takes position on top of a Shiite mosque, after a suicide bomb attack killed at least 41 people and injured 74 others, in Kandahar on Saturday (AFP)

Friday’s assault was the first by IS-K in Kandahar, and the fourth mass casualty massacre since the Taliban took the capital Kabul

Kandahar, Afghanistan - The Islamic State (IS) group on Saturday claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack on a Shiite mosque in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar that killed at least 41 people and injured scores more.

The Friday assault came just a week after another IS-claimed attack on Shiite worshippers at a mosque in the northern city of Kunduz that killed more than 60 people.

In a statement released on its Telegram channels, the militant group said two Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) suicide bombers carried out separate attacks on different parts of the mosque in Kandahar - the spiritual heartland of the Taliban - while worshippers prayed inside.

UK-based conflict analysis firm ExTrac said Friday’s assault was the first by IS-K in Kandahar, and the fourth mass casualty massacre since the Taliban took Kabul.

ExTrac researcher Abdul Sayed told AFP the attack was ‘challenging the Taliban claims of holding control on the country. If the Taliban can’t protect Kandahar from an IS-K attack, how could it protect the rest of the country?’

Inside the mosque, after the blast, the walls were pockmarked with shrapnel and volunteers swept up debris in the ornately painted prayer hall. Rubble lay in an entrance corridor.

In the wake of the explosions, Kandahar police chief Maulvi Mehmood said, “A brutal attack has been witnessed on a Shiite mosque as a result of which a



Distraught Afghan men sit in a courtyard after the attack (AFP)

Inside the mosque, after the blast, the walls were pockmarked with shrapnel and volunteers swept up debris in the prayer hall

huge number of our countrymen have lost their lives.”

In a video statement, Mehmood said security for the mosque had been provided by guards from the Shiite community but that henceforth the Taliban would take charge of its protection.

Hafiz Abdulhai Abbas, director of health for Kandahar, said 41 people had been killed about 70 wounded, according to hospital information.

At least 15 ambulances were seen rushing to and from the scene, as Taliban security cordoned off the area.

“We are overwhelmed,” a doctor at the city’s central Mir-wais hospital said.

“There are too many dead bodies and wounded people brought to our hospital. We are expecting more to come. We are

in urgent need of blood. We have asked all the local media in Kandahar to ask people to come and donate blood.”

Eyewitnesses spoke of gunfire alongside the explosions, and a security guard assigned to protect the mosque said three of his comrades had been shot as the bombers fought their way in.

Sayed Rohullah said, “It was the Friday prayer time, and when we were preparing I heard shots. Two people had entered the mosque.”

“They had opened fire on the guards and in response the guards had also opened fire on them. One of them committed a suicide blast inside the mosque.”

Other bombs were detonated in crowded areas outside the main building, he and other witnesses said.

US offers to pay relatives of ten killed in botched drone strike

Washington, US - The United States said on Friday it has offered to pay unspecified compensation to relatives of ten people in Afghanistan including seven children who were killed by mistake in a US drone strike as American forces were completing their withdrawal.

In a statement the Pentagon also said it was working with the State Department to relocate to the United States any of those relatives who wish to leave Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

The offer to pay these people was made on Thursday in a meeting between Colin Kahl, the under secretary of defence for policy, and Steven Kwon, the founder and president of an aid group active in Afghanistan called Nutrition and Education International, the Pentagon said.

That organisation employed Ezmarai Ahmadi, who was wrongly identified as an Islamic State militant by US intelligence on August 29 during the final days of the chaotic US evacuation from Kabul.

AFP

Russia says chased out US navy ship from its waters, Washington denies

Washington, US - Moscow said on Friday that one of its warships chased away a US Navy destroyer after it attempted to violate Russia’s territorial waters in the Sea of Japan, but Washington denied this.

The incident took place as Russia and China were conducting naval exercises in the area.

The Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement that at around 5pm local time (0800GMT), the destroyer *USS Chafee*, which had been operating in the Sea of Japan for several days, ‘approached the territorial waters of the Russian Federation and attempted to cross the border’.

Russia’s *Admiral Tributs* destroyer issued a warning to the US ship ‘about the inadmissibility of such actions’.

However, the *USS Chafee* ignored the warning and ‘took action to violate the national border of the Russian Federation’, according to the Russian Defence Ministry.



A file photo of US Navy’s *USS Chafee* destroyer in South Korea (AFP)

“Acting within the framework of the international rules of navigation, the *Admiral Tributs* set a course for ousting the intruder from the Russian territorial waters.”

After that, the *USS Chafee* turned around and set off ‘on the

opposite course’ when it was less than 60m away from the Russian ship.

The US Navy dismissed the Russian account as ‘false’.

It said in a statement that its ship ‘was conducting routine operations in international water in

the Sea of Japan’ when a Russian destroyer came within approximately 65 yards of the *USS Chafee* ‘while the ship was preparing for flight operations’.

“The interaction was safe and professional,” the US navy said.

The US Navy acknowledged that Russia had notified it that it was conducting manoeuvres in the area, but the notice ‘was not in effect at the time of the interaction’.

The US ship ‘conducted operations in accordance with international law and custom’, the statement read. “The United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate where international law allows.”

Incidents involving the Russian Navy are rare in the Pacific. The region is dominated by China, which takes a dim view of the United States and its allies patrolling the region’s international waters to assert their right to freedom of navigation.

AFP

Earthquake kills three, injures seven in tourist hotspot Bali

Jakarta, Indonesia - Three people were killed on Saturday when an earthquake struck the Indonesian tourist island Bali, the disaster agency said.

The 4.8 magnitude quake struck at a relatively shallow depth of 10km northeast of the town of Banjar Wanasari. Shallow quakes tend to do more damage than deep tremors.

Two people died when the quake triggered a landslide that buried their house in Bangli regency while another person was killed in the port town of Karangasem, officials said.

The death toll was not expected to rise, they added.

“The quake was felt strongly for five seconds,” said disaster agency spokesman Abdul Muhari. “People were panicking and ran from their houses when the quake hit.”

The tremor’s epicentre was far from the main tourist hub in Bali, which is slowly reopening to international visitors after a pandemic shutdown.

Indonesia experiences fre-



A resident sits near houses at the site of a landslide triggered by an earthquake at Trunyan village in Bangli, Bali island on Saturday (AFP)

quent quakes due to its position on the Pacific ‘Ring of Fire’, an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

In January, more than 100 people were killed and thousands left homeless by a 6.2-

magnitude quake that struck Sulawesi island, reducing buildings to a tangled mass of twisted metal and chunks of concrete in the seaside city of Mamuju.

A 7.5-magnitude quake and a subsequent tsunami in Palu three years ago left more than 4,300 people dead or missing.

AFP

‘Just me and the fabric’: Vietnam artist finds success with cloth creations



Artist Tran Thanh Thuc (left) talks to a visitor about her artworks made from fabrics in her home studio in Hanoi on Wednesday (AFP)

Hanoi, Vietnam - In a hot and stuffy room in Hanoi, Tran Thanh Thuc holds up a delicate silk scarf and begins snipping it into tiny pieces, ready to paste onto her works of art.

For four decades, Thuc has been recreating Vietnamese landscapes using vibrant shades of fabric cut from scarves, traditional ao dai (a long split tunic) - or whatever material she could find during years of poverty in the 1980s.

Tran Thanh Thuc has been recreating Vietnamese landscapes using vibrant shades of fabric cut from scarves and traditional tunics for decades

“At that time, I tried to look for woollen string, velvet cloth or other very simple pieces to make my first pictures,” she says.

“Now sometimes I cut them from the very beautiful silk scarves sent from my friends

abroad.”

Often using hundreds of thousands of pieces of cloth to shape trees, rivers and patches of sky, the 61 year old artist doesn’t dare to cool her home studio with fans or air conditioning, even in the

boiling summers of the Vietnamese capital.

“If the fan is on, the details will get blown away,” she says.

“So when I work, the environment is tough... it’s just me and the fabric.”

For most of the years that Thuc has worked with cloth, she has also kept a day job as a civil servant and only had time ‘to do what she loved’ during the night.

But her fortune began to change when an American col-

lector bought a work in 2000 and started a decade ago she found to be invited to exhibitions and her work began to sell.

Now her creations sell for between US\$1,000 and US\$5,000 and she has taken part in shows around Vietnam.

“My works are a summary of the passion and the beauty that I experienced after travelling across this land.”

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Vaccine stand-off between mayor and police hits US courts

Chicago, US - A Chicago judge on Friday banned a police union president from making public statements on the city's COVID-19 policy as a stand-off over vaccine mandates sparked dueling lawsuits.

The dispute between mayor Lori Lightfoot and police union head John Catanzara has made the city the latest flashpoint in a deeply polarised debate over vaccines and whether governments have the right to mandate them.

Lightfoot sought and received an injunction against Catanzara on Friday when the judge issued a ten-day restraining order that bans him from making statements that encourage members not to report their vaccination status.

The police union filed its own lawsuit on Friday against Lightfoot and Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown that seeks to force arbitration over the matter.

Like all city employees, Chicago police officers have been mandated to report their vaccine status to an online portal by midnight Friday. Those not vaccinated will be subject to twice-weekly testing.

Those who refuse to disclose their status have a few days' grace to explain themselves - but face being placed



US President Joe Biden greets Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot (left) as he disembarks from Air Force One upon arrival at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago on October 7 (AFP)

on unpaid leave and eventually fired.

In two videos released last week, Catanzara urged police officers to ignore the order and risk loss of pay.

On Tuesday, he predicted

that if a large number of officers refused to be tested or report their vaccinations, Chicago would have a 'police force at 50 per cent or less for this weekend'.

Lightfoot responded by say-

ing, "I cannot and will not stand idly by while the rhetoric of conspiracy theorists threatens the health and safety of Chicago's residents and first responders."

She also said Catanzara was 'encouraging a work stoppage or strike'.

Both state law and the union contract prohibits Chicago police from striking.

The union responded with a tweet on Friday saying, "President John Catanzara has never engaged in, supported, or encouraged a work stoppage."

Since issuing the mandate, Lightfoot's approach has softened. Backing down from a rule that mandated vaccination for city employees, she has since agreed to give the unvaccinated an alternative: Twice-weekly tests for the rest of the year.

According to the Officer Down Memorial Page, 228 US police officers have died from COVID-19 so far this year, making it by far the leading cause of death in the line of duty among the 356 fatalities recorded.

The Chicago stand-off comes as the city once again leads the United States in murders, with 639 homicides this year through October 13 - up 55 per cent from two years ago.

AFP

Russia tops 1,000 daily virus deaths for first time

Moscow, Russia - Russia on Saturday topped 1,000 deaths over 24 hours for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, with the country's jab drive at a stand-still and few restrictions in place.

An official government tally showed 1,002 deaths and 33,208 new infections, setting a high for both fatalities and cases for the third day in a row.

The surging outbreak has come with just 31 per cent of Russians fully inoculated as of Saturday, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID-19 data from the regions.

A lack of tough restrictions



Medical staff members carry out a person from an ambulance at the COVID-19 infected patients section at the Kommunarka Hospital outside the Russian Capital Moscow on Friday (AFP)

has allowed the virus to spread unchecked, though a number of regions have re-introduced QR codes for access to public places.

The Kremlin has avoided re-introducing major restrictions

despite calling the country's vaccination rate 'unacceptably' low, saying this week authorities have to ensure 'the economy continues working'.

It also said that Russia's medical system is prepared to

take in the rising number of patients, describing it as not 'overwhelmed'.

Authorities have blamed Russians for the growing outbreak.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko pointed to their 'behaviour', while Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said everything had been done to give the public the chance to 'save their lives by getting vaccinated'.

Russia's fatalities from COVID-19 now stand at 222,315 - the highest toll in Europe - even as authorities are accused of downplaying the severity of Russia's outbreak.

AFP

Chinese astronauts arrive at space station for longest mission

Beijing, China - Three astronauts successfully docked with China's new space station on Saturday on what is set to be Beijing's longest crewed mission to date and the latest landmark in its drive to become a major space power.

The three blasted off shortly after midnight (1600 GMT Friday) from the Jiuquan launch centre in northwestern China's Gobi desert, the China Manned Space Agency said, with the team expected to spend six months at the Tiangong space station.

The space agency declared the launch a success and said the crew 'were in good shape'.

The Shenzhou-13 vessel carrying the three completed its docking with the radial port of the space station less than seven hours after the launch.

The mission, which is expected to last twice as long as a previous 90-day visit, will involve the crew setting up equipment and testing technology for future construction on the Tiangong station.

Mission commander Zhai Zhigang (55), a former fighter pilot who performed the country's first spacewalk in 2008, said the team would undertake 'more complex' spacewalks than during previous missions.

The crew include military pilot Wang Yaping (41), who is the first woman to visit the space station after becoming China's second woman in space in 2013.

The other team member is People's Liberation Army pilot Ye Guangfu (41).

Pictures released by the space agency showed the three astronauts waving to wellwishers who held up slogans of encouragement at a send-off ceremony before the launch.

A previous record-breaking crew - making the first mission to Tiangong - returned to Earth in September after spending three months on the space station.

China's heavily promoted space programme has already seen the nation land a rover on Mars and send probes to the moon.

Tiangong, meaning 'heavenly palace', is expected to operate for at least ten years.

Its core module entered orbit earlier this year, with the station expected to be operational by 2022.

The completed station will be similar to the Soviet Mir station



A Long March-2F carrier rocket, carrying the Shenzhou-13 spacecraft, lifts off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in the Gobi desert in northwest China on Saturday (AFP)

The six-months long mission will involve the crew setting up equipment and testing technology for future construction on the Tiangong

that orbited Earth from the 1980s until 2001.

The latest mission is set to 'expand China's technological boundary' and verify the space station system's capacity for a longer duration of human occupation, Chen Lan, an independent space analyst at GoTaikonauts, told AFP.

"I don't think it is very challenging, as China's technologies [are] quite mature, though anything in space is always challenging," Chen said.

Saturday's blast-off came shortly after China launched its

first solar exploration satellite into space, equipped with a telescope to observe changes in the Sun.

The Chinese space agency is planning a total of 11 missions to Tiangong through to the end of next year, including at least two more crewed launches that will deliver two lab modules to expand the 70-tonne station.

China's space ambitions have been fuelled in part by a US ban on its astronauts on the International Space Station (ISS), a collaboration among the United States, Russia, Canada, Europe and Japan.

The ISS is due for retirement after 2024, although NASA has said it could potentially remain functional beyond 2028.

Chinese space authorities have said they are open to foreign collaboration on the space station, although the scope of that cooperation is as yet unclear.

The country has come a long way since launching its first satellite in 1970.

AFP

Myanmar junta chief Hlaing excluded from ASEAN summit

Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei - Myanmar's junta chief will be excluded from an upcoming Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit, the group said on Saturday, a rare rebuke as concerns rise over the military government's commitment to defusing a bloody crisis.

Foreign ministers from the ASEAN agreed at an emergency meeting late Friday that a 'non-political representative' for Myanmar would be invited to the October 26-28 summit, current ASEAN chair Brunei said in a statement.

The decision effectively excluded junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

The Myanmar junta slammed the decision on Saturday evening, accusing ASEAN of breaching the bloc's policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its member states.

"We can also see the interfer-

ence from the other [non-ASEAN] countries," junta spokesman brigadier general Zaw Min Tun told the BBC Burmese section.

He seized on talks between the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and ASEAN special envoy, Brunei's Second Foreign Minister Erywan Yusof, ahead of the meeting and also singled out EU pressure.

The bloc, widely criticised as a toothless organisation, took a strong stand after the junta rebuffed requests that a special envoy meet 'with all stakeholders' in Myanmar - a phrase seen to include ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The statement noted 'insufficient progress' in the implementation of a five-point plan agreed by ASEAN leaders in April to end turmoil following a coup in February.

It also said that the situation in Myanmar 'was having an impact



Myanmar armed forces chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (right and also in the inset top) waves during the inauguration of a new military coastguard in Yangon on October 6 (AFP)

on regional security as well as the unity, credibility and centrality of ASEAN'.

Richard Horsey, Myanmar adviser to Crisis Group, predicted the 'non-political' representative would be someone below the

level of minister or deputy minister.

Singapore's Foreign Ministry described the move as a 'difficult but necessary decision to uphold ASEAN's credibility'.

Mustafa Izzuddin, global af-

fairs analyst at consultancy Solaris Strategies Singapore, called the exclusion 'a political stopgap measure for ASEAN to assuage international criticism'.

It sent a 'political signal' to the junta 'that ASEAN is not one to

be pushed around', Izzuddin added.

And independent Myanmar analyst David Mathieson said that 'in ASEAN terms this is a real slap in the face'.

Thorn in ASEAN's side Myanmar, mostly ruled by the military since a 1962 coup, has been a thorn in ASEAN's side since it joined in 1997.

Elections in 2015 overwhelmingly won by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party ushered in the start of civilian rule - but this was cut short

by the coup.

ASEAN has been under international pressure to address unrest that erupted after the putsch, including massive protests; renewed clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in border regions; and an economy spiralling into freefall.

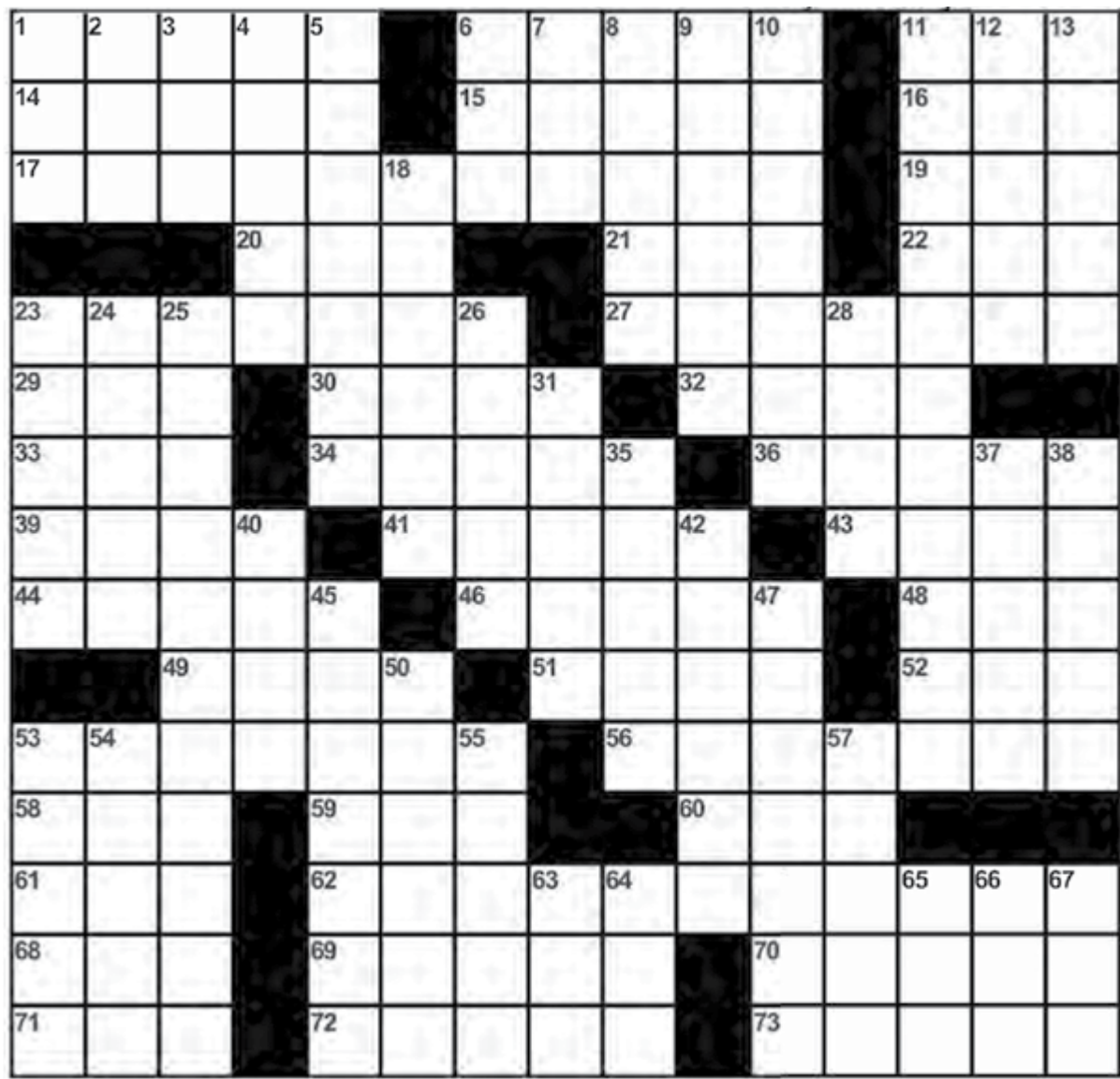
The bloc has expressed disappointment at a lack of cooperation from the junta, which continues to crack down brutally on dissent. More than 1,000 civilians have been killed, according to a local monitoring group.

Part of the consensus was to allow a long-delayed visit by a special envoy, Brunei Second Foreign Minister Yusof.

ASEAN has insisted that he meets with all parties concerned, but the junta rejected any proposed meetings with people on trial, among them Suu Kyi, who is facing various charges.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) God-America link
6) Worthy of the booby prize
11) Play section
14) Dressing type
15) Opposite of persona
16) Hee's go-with
17) How nags make commands
19) Archaic "before"
20) Strings for a lei person
21) Organ with a drum
22) What cake candles signify
23) Trash
27) Checked for fit
29) Early afternoon hour
30) And others, for short
32) Utah's lily
33) Burning evidence
34) Sharply accelerate
36) Tips, as one's hat
39) Hood's Marian, for one
41) Prevent from progressing
43) Octagonal sign
44) Assembly of church leaders
46) Less antiquated

DOWN

1) Sis's relative
2) Brit's bathroom
3) Shreveport-to-Tupelo dir.
4) Cancel, as a mission
5) Less stable
6) Roll of bills

48) Rage
49) Wee amount of liquid
51) Construction locale
52) Multiple guys
53) Decides not to quit
56) Least cluttered
58) That gentleman
59) Antelope preyed on by crocodiles
60) A Bobbsey sister
61) Org. for some court figures
62) Viewed suspiciously
68) Prefix with "solve" or "respect"
69) Certain Greek letter
70) Josh or rib
71) Beast of burden
72) Prepare to start a football game
73) Real suckers use it

7) The avant-garde's Yoko
8) Beam fastener
9) Badmouths
10) Left slowly and hesitantly
11) When to make a reservation
12) Ship's goods
13) 12-year-old, for one
18) Fit one inside another
23) Goes hither and yon
24) Retract a statement
25) Where one's true identity may be hidden
26) Place of sanctuary
28) They cause head swellings
31) Mandolin's cousins
35) Plover relative
37) Golf course warnings
38) Lightened one's wallet
40) Small boat
42) Eyeball membrane
45) Strong revolution
47) Edits for publication
50) Clyde's crime partner

53) Criminal
54) It travels from one joint to another
55) Gently elbow
57) Coastal passage
63) Tall, flightless bird

64) Urban music genre
65) Rower's blade
66) Miss with a crown
67) Morning droplets

NOTE PAD

ALSO SPATE SAP
NEAR LEASES ACNE
TAKE IN THE SIGHTS
IRE ROSY CAMEO
TORY TRIPods
RIPENS TRICE
ODIN FRILL ESP
DOES A DOUBLE TAKE
ELS NURSE OVEN
ATLAS SHREWD
HARSHLY KHAN
AWAKE TOOL OVA
TAKE MY WORD FOR IT
CREW FEARED RENO
HES ARRAY BOOM

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A rude or insensitive person could cause you some complications this morning, but at the same time they will help give you a fresh perspective on your life - they'll show you who you don't want to be! You are doing perfectly fine with your choices lately, so don't listen if this person criticizes you or gives you unsolicited advice. Smile sweetly, and then ignore them.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

The past is coming back, not to haunt you but to thrill you! Whether it's an old flame returning to town to see what you're up to, an old photo you find that stirs up some hilarious memories, or even just a song on the oldies station that reminds you of summer camp, your past is suddenly very present. This is a wonderful day to travel down memory lane.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Even without trying, you are going to be a source of inspiration for someone today, and they won't be shy about letting you know it! You might feel embarrassed at first by the fawning attention, but you'll get used to it eventually. Don't miss your chance to soak up the spotlight that they're shining on you! This is your time at center stage, and it won't last long.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Be careful of other people who seem too good to be true today, because they probably are. Your instincts about people are usually dead on, so if you fear that someone who is making big claims is full of hot air, alert those in power about your reservations. There is nothing wrong with demanding proof before you buy into anyone's story.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Running around at a frantic pace is not going to help you get more stuff done, it will only give you stress. Today, you need to move away from multitasking and just try to focus on one thing at a time. When you talk on the phone, just talk and listen. Don't force yourself to deal with driving in heavy traffic and grocery shopping at the same time!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Are you being too idealistic about a new person in your life? If there's someone in your social group everyone dislikes but you, then maybe you should give this person another objective review. Your tendency to see the good side in people is charming, but it's not always useful for keeping yourself protected against those who might not be healthy for your life.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Right now it's your emotional nature that is going to be your driving force in life, but that needs to start changing. You need to think more with your brain and less with your heart. It isn't steering you wrong, but it could be sending you in circles. Being practical might not feel cool, but it's definitely the intelligent to do! Temptations soon disappear when you look at them critically.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Try to make exploring with people from other cultures your new hobby today, different beliefs and customs can offer you some fresh new ideas and inspire you to find a way around a problem that's been plaguing you. New ways of thinking and a foreign perspective will give your creativity a boost. They will give you the drive you've been lacking for a while now.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Checking in with the people you like spending time with is what you need right now to stay grounded. Your friends might know what is best for you right now, so follow their advice as closely as possible. Your pace may get you where you want to go faster, but it could also be leaving a few people behind. So slow down and spend more time with the people you care about.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You will be doing yourself a service by taking your time today, especially in terms of any decisions you have to make. From what kind of coffee you want to order to what investment fund to buy, you need to think things through! Your gut seldom lets you down, but your gut could be tied up in some distracting (albeit exciting) emotional stuff right now. Get help thinking things through.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Try to avoid making any impulse buys right now, especially on big-ticket items. Throwing your money around without thinking it through, could chip away at the careful balance you've been working so hard to achieve. Shift from relying on your credit cards to using cash. That way, you'll always understand that you are giving something up every time you make a purchase.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Why do you have to take the rules of someone who is in authority today at face value? Dissent is not only acceptable in this situation, it is wise if you have an issue with what they are decreeing, then step up to this person and say so. Of course, make sure you communicate in the most respectful and diplomatic way possible!

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Light Year is related to

a. energy
b. speed
c. distance
d. intensity

2. Liquid asset is

a. a type of asset that is in cash in the current account of the commercial bank
b. a type of asset that is in the form of a deposit in the current account of the commercial bank
c. either of these
d. None of the above

3. Jeevan Rekha (Life line) express is

a. first hospital on wheels in the world
b. first railway express
c. oldest train
d. None of the above

Answers: 1.c 2.c 3.a

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

G	O	N	O
R	I	I	O
M	I	D	T
A	R	S	M

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

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

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

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

AUTUMN SALON

‘I See Music’, the Autumn Salon 2021 which opened at Matti Sirvio Art Gallery on October 9, is a musical feast where the melodies flow forth via invisible artistic waves, and each frame demands attention to its distinct yet distinguished presence.

Did you hear an accordion bellow forth a jazz number or hear the beats of a tabla unleash a rhythmic frenzy... Was there something sinister about the symphonies hidden behind the abstract splashes of colour or a more intense meaning to the intricate patterns with nail and string. Your stride within the gallery suddenly gets manipulated without your own consent and you soon realise getting trapped in a realm where you see music in a new avatar.

There’s a soothing choral ensemble, the deadly hiss of a vicious serpent, melancholic melodies camouflaged with earthy hues, pleasant sounds from nature, and you feel the rain, you see through the thicket, you ascend the hills and soar to the skies, and nothing stops you. A walk around this unique exhibition is not just a treat to the eyes, it’s music to the ears. You need to stop by and hear – no, see music!

Curator and proprietor of the gallery, Matti Sirvio, known for his penchant for the extraordinary and bizzare, went through crazy weeks conceiving, delegating, sorting through, and settling for his final score. On display are the works which not just conformed to his brief but also automatically slipped into their appropriate spot. There are also a few which, perhaps, jostled with his own reckoning and demanded inclusion – and he let them in with a wink.

“Music is a sophisticated way of communication. It’s much more powerful than what we are used to think. I just returned from Finland - during the summer, I had a lot of opportunities to hike in the nature and listen to the heart beat of my motherland. I heard the birds sing and the mosquitoes buzz.

But a different kind of music filled the hills, trees and the rivers. It was the music that you cannot hear, but you could see it. I saw the sound of the nightless nights, the choirs of the grass growing together. I saw the silence of the arctic ocean, beating it’s presence to the shores. This is what our latest exhibition is about,” he said, adding, “Artists from fifteen different countries are visualising their encounter with music.”



I SEE MUSIC

About the musical mandate for entries, Sirvio said, “The artists were asked to imagine beyond musical symbols and pictures of instruments. Some of the works received are beautiful examples of an artistic talent to go beyond the superficial concepts and representations.”

He had a special liking to some of the works which included those of Majid Juma al Amri, Rasha al Adali and Bushra al Harthy who aptly captivated the concept in their works. The same was about the work of Rebeca Nigrinis from Columbia, Nikosadat Mirzaghavami from Iran, Alma DeVille from Bosnia and Dr Shalini from India, he said.

Some of the artists also took delight in sharing their own take on the exhibition. Shrikant Akojvar said, ‘Rhythm/Taal’ symbolises (here) the traditional Indian music instrument ‘tabla’. I have used canvas as a medium to balance the form with other design elements. The scattered golden stripes, depict the sound vibrations coming out of the instrument.”

Shrikant admits that he always wanted to pursue music and art since childhood and this exhibition brought forth a semblance of both.

Dr Shalini added ‘Splashes of Life’ to the collection. She says, “Life is all about splashes of sorrow, difficulties, happiness, luxuries, and ups and downs but if you take it positively, you feel music around yourself all the time. This is what I wanted to depict in my painting. To me music is something which soothes your soul. Listening to good music is like meditation which allows you to experience joy – the same is with good art.”

Salamah Zainul Abideen said, “My painting title was ‘Burn’. I think everything we see on a daily basis has music in it. My painting was my way to show there is music in everything, even in the burn. It shows love for loud, deep music.” He adds that the experience taught him a new way to look at art.

Another participating artist, Muna Khalfan said, “My first photo reveals a heart with two lovers within – it makes me feel a love story. My second photo indicates a snakes tone – it gives me a sense of music even while viewing a cobra. Both these works are aerial views which give you a feel of music and are openers to one’s imagination.”



Nikosadat Mirzaghavami



Shrikant Akojvar



Muna Khalfan



Dr Shalini Gupta



Salamah Zainul Abideen

Double delight for Yashaswini

Indian paddlers dominate as WTT Youth Contender Series concludes in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Talented Yashaswini Deepak Ghorpade claimed a grand double at the WTT Youth Contender Muscat 2021, which concluded at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC) on Friday night.

Having won the U17 girls title on Thursday, Yashaswini took her second crown with a victory in the U19 final over Uzbekistan's Markhabo Magdieva on Friday.

In fact, both the finalists had also featured in the U17 final with Yashaswini emerging victor.

Yashaswini defeated Indian colleague Lakshita Narang (11-8, 7-11, 11-7, 11-7) and Lebanon's Mariam El Habech (11-3, 14-12, 12-10) to waltz into the semifinals.

She then outplayed another Indian compatriot, Anargya Manjunath (13-11, 11-9, 11-6), before downing Markhabo (11-6, 11-8, 11-4).

Speaking after the match, Yashaswini said, "I felt good after the U17 win. I was confident, and I played well. The theme of WTT events is very well organised, and all the staff here are kind."

"It is very nice for younger generations to see events that support us in our development. Next, I hope to perform well in India's national championships, beat the world's best-ranked players."

Another Indian girl who

dominated was Suhana Saini as she claimed the U15 title, which comes one month after her title success at WTT Youth Contender events in Tunis (Tunisia) and Otocec (Slovenia).

Chalking up two 3-0 victories in the group stage, Suhana continued her perfect opening as she beat Iran's Baran Arjmand (11-7, 11-8, 11-5) and India's Sayali Rajesh Wani (11-9, 11-5, 11-7).

She met another Indian teammate at the final hurdle, seeing off U13 champion Hansini Mathan Rajan 3-1 (11-5, 7-11, 11-6, 11-8) to lift her third trophy in succession.

Uzbekistan's Arujan Kamalova also enjoyed a successful day, finishing top of the class in the U11 girls' event.

Arujan outclassed Kazakhstan's Dilyora Davletova 3-0 (11-2, 11-4, 11-6). She secured the top spot, defeating Lebanon's Bissan Chiri in her second fixture (11-4, 11-2, 11-7).

H H Sayyid Fatik bin Fahir al Said was the guest of honour and gave away the awards in the presence of Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) chairman Abdullah Bamakhalf.

Earlier on Thursday, Oman's girls - Al Hoor al Jassasi, Noor al Farsi and Retaj al Abri - made their debut.

All the three local paddlers lost all their respective group games but were satisfied to have played against much skillful and experienced opponents.



India's Yashaswini Deepak Ghorpade in action during the U19 final match against Uzbekistan's Markhabo Magdieva at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Friday



H H Sayyid Fatik bin Fahir al Said (fourth from left) with the winners and runners-up in girls event of the WTT Youth Contender Series Muscat on Friday

Speaking at the conclusion of the event that attracted 100 paddlers from 16 nations, OTTA chief Bamakhalf said, "The hosting of the international events in Oman helps us boost the game in the sultanate. We are keen to spread the game. Such international tournaments also help in promoting Oman as a sporting destination."

He added, "We will soon appoint a new national head coach and that will help our players improve and do better in international competitions in future."

Favourites Zverev, Tsitsipas crash out

INDIAN WELLS MASTERS

Indian Wells, US - Olympic gold medalist Alexander Zverev and French Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas slumped to shock quarterfinal exits in the ATP Indian Wells Masters, losing in three sets at the main stadium on Friday.

American Taylor Fritz survived two match points to come from behind and eliminate third seeded Zverev 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) while second seeded Tsitsipas was shown the door 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 shortly after by world No 36 Nikoloz Basilashvili.

The exits of Zverev and Tsitsipas means Great Britain's Cameron Norrie, who is seeded 21st, is the top seed left in the final four.

The semifinals are now set with 31st seeded Fritz facing Basilashvili and Norrie going up against 23rd seeded Grigor Dimitrov for a spot in championship match at the Tennis Garden in the California desert.

This was just the second loss for Zverev since losing in the fourth round at Wimbledon.



Taylor Fritz of the US plays a forehand against Alexander Zverev of Germany on Friday (AFP)

Zverev is 20-2 over that stretch.

Tsitsipas also fell in three sets to the 29th seeded Basilashvili, who recorded one of his biggest career wins.

Georgia's Basilashvili beat Tsitsipas for the first time in



Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia plays a forehand against Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece during their quarterfinal match in Indian Wells, US, on Friday. Basilashvili won the match (AFP)

three career meetings and recorded his first win over a world No 3 player.

Azarenka in final against Badosa

Victoria Azarenka, who is hoping

to become the first three-time WTA winner in Indian Wells, punched her ticket to Sunday's final by rallying to beat former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 on Friday.

Two-time Australian Open winner Azarenka continued her solid play in the California desert as she goes for her first title of 2021 and 22nd of her career.

The 32-year-old arrived in the semifinals without dropping a set

and after losing the first one to Ostapenko on Friday night she settled in and found her form.

Azarenka will face Spaniard Paula Badosa, who defeated Ons Jabeur in straight sets 6-3, 6-3.

Azarenka is seeking to win the tournament for the third time after victories in 2012 and 2016.

She is the only former champion left in either the women's or men's field, and with another victory can separate herself from the list of women who have won the trophy twice - which includes Martina Navratilova, Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova.

Azarenka clinched victory on her first match point when Ostapenko slammed a forehand into the net.

This was the second career meeting between the two but the first on hardcourt, so it took Azarenka time to feel her opponent out and figure out her weaknesses.

"She was playing really incredible in the first set, not giving me much," said Azarenka. AFP

Neuville in control as Ogier loses ground

SPANISH RALLY

Salou, Spain - Thierry Neuville continued to control the Spanish Rally in Salou, Spain, on Saturday as Elfyn Evans kept alive his chances of catching Toyota teammate Sebastien Ogier in the title race.

Neuville, who won the last three stages on Friday, reeled off all three on Saturday morning.

Ogier, who entered the rally leading Evans by 24 points in the standings, was fourth in every stage. Evans finished ahead of the Frenchman twice.

The Welshman stayed second and, while he lost ground to Neuville, dropping to 9sec back, he increased his advantage on Ogier, who is third, to 23sec.

Ogier had another problem. With the Hyundais seemingly growing stronger on the asphalt roads, their Spanish driver Dani Sordo, in fourth, closed to 0.2sec behind Ogier with second place and a 6.1sec gain on the final stage of the morning. AFP

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Abdullah, Abdulmajeed, Mohammed claim gold

Except for one windsurfer from India, the event featured only participants from Oman

Our Correspondent

Muscat

ASIAN WINDSURFING CHAMPIONSHIPS

It was a good start to the hectic sailing season for Oman Sail and Oman sailors. With a series of Asian and world championships scheduled at the Mussanah Sports City over the next couple of months, the results of the Asian Windsurfing Championships at the same venue are certainly a boost for the domestic sailors and the event organisers - Oman Sail.

Amid ideal conditions for windsurfing, Oman sailors swept the three gold medals at stake to conclude a fruitful championship on Saturday afternoon.

However, the championship turned out to be more of an all-Omani affair except in one class where there was participation of an Indian sailor - Sachin Ganesh.

Ganesh was the only overseas competitor while the other ten surfers were from Oman. The Techno293 class had only three sailors in fray including India's Ganesh.

Abdullah al Sarhi won 12 of his



Action from the Asian Windsurfing Championships at the Mussanah Sports City on Saturday



Abdulmajeed al Hadhrami receives the trophy



Mohammed al Sarhi receives the trophy on Saturday

second and third places.

Later on Saturday, the award ceremony was held under the auspices of the Governor of Al Batinah South, Issa al Azri, in the presence of Mohammed al Busaidi, Omran chairman and Khamis al Jabri, Oman Sail CEO.

Jabri said, "At a time when international travel is restricted for so many in the Asian region, we are delighted that such a young fleet was able to perform at a high level. The addition of the Formula Foil to the Asian Windsurfing Championships added an exciting new dimension to the event and we hope that the class will continue to grow."

Sultan al Balushi, Oman's windsurfing coach said, "The windsurfing programme at Oman Sail has the potential to make the nation a force on the global stage in the coming years. Our young surfers showed a high level of technical ability and great composure throughout the competition and the set of core skills they possess will serve them well throughout their careers on the water."

At the awards ceremony, Oman Sail also honoured the national team sailors who excelled at the Nastro Rosa Tour and Star Sailors League in Europe. The team comprised captain Nasser al Mashari, Hussain al Jabri, Ali al Balushi, Haitham al Wahaibi and Akram al Wahaibi, Hashim al Rashdi, Yassir al Rahbi, Waleed al Kindi, Musab al Hadi, Ahmed al Hasani, Abdulrahman al Mashari and Raad al Hadi.



Man United's striker Cristiano Ronaldo (C) is helped up by Leicester's goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel (R) during the match on Saturday (AFP)

Man United lose, Liverpool drub Watford 5-0

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Manchester, UK - Manchester United succumbed to a first away league defeat for 30 games by losing 2-4 at Leicester as Liverpool stormed to the top of the English Premier League with a 5-0 demolition of Watford on Saturday. Manchester City moved into second with a 2-0 win over Burnley.

United led at the King Power thanks to Mason Greenwood's spectacular strike, but were quickly pegged back by Youri Tielemans' dinked finish beyond David de Gea. A flurry of four goals in the final 12 minutes then condemned Ole Gunnar Solskjær's men to a first defeat on the road since January 2020.

Caglar Soyuncu put Leicester in front before Marcus Rashford equalised on his first appearance of the season after shoulder surgery. Straight from kick-off, United's leaky defence was breached once more as Jamie Vardy smashed home and Patson Daka's first Leicester goal in stoppage time sealed the win for Brendan Rodgers' men.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Haaland scores twice for Dortmund

Berlin, Germany - Erling Haaland marked his return from injury with two goals on Saturday as Borussia Dortmund beat Mainz 3-1 to go top of the Bundesliga overnight. Victory sent Dortmund top of the table, leapfrogging Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen, who meet on Sunday. Fellow top-four hopefuls RB Leipzig lost further ground on the leaders as they were held to a 1-1 draw away to unbeaten Freiburg. Leipzig also remain behind Freiburg and Union Berlin, who moved up to fifth with a 2-0 win over Wolfsburg.

Further down the table, Hertha Berlin recorded a 2-1 win at Eintracht Frankfurt and bottom side Greuther Fuerth lost 0-1 to fellow strugglers Bochum.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Rangers held by Hearts

Glasgow, UK - Rangers conceded a last-minute equaliser to draw 1-1 at home to Hearts and remain just one point clear of the Jambos at the top of the Scottish Premiership on Saturday. Celtic took advantage of Rangers' slip-up to move within four points of their Glasgow rivals with a 2-0 win at Motherwell.

Dundee United remain above Celtic in third after they thrashed Hibernian 3-0 at Easter Road. St Mirren held off a Ross County comeback to win 3-2 at Dingwall, while Livingston were 3-0 winners at St Johnstone.

FRENCH LEAGUE

PSG scrape victory with Mbappe penalty

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe converted a soft late VAR penalty award to give a Paris Saint-Germain side missing Lionel Messi and Neymar a 2-1 win over Angers in Ligue 1 on Friday. PSG had to come from behind, with Danilo Pereira heading in the equaliser midway through the second half after Angelo Fulgini had given the away side the lead at the Parc des Princes.

Mbappe then finished emphatically from the spot with three minutes left after Angers defender Pierrick Capelle had been penalised for a handball only seen by the referee following a review of the images.

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ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021

Fancied Bangladesh to face buoyant Scotland

SCOTLAND VS BANGLADESH

Muscat - There's very little history between Bangladesh and Scotland, but going by the lead up to this tournament, Scotland will come in buoyed as they meet in Group B first round match at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Sunday.

In the warm-ups, Scotland registered wins in a high-scorer against Namibia and in a low-scorer against Netherlands, while Bangladesh were downed by Sri Lanka and Ireland.

That said, Bangladesh have T20I series wins over Australia and New Zealand, from the last three months, to draw confidence from. Together with their 2-1 win over Zimbabwe in July, they are enjoying their best period as a T20I team, and they will want to translate that into a big T20 World Cup campaign. Scotland, and then PNG and Oman, stand in their way to begin.

The reliable trio of captain Mahmudullah, Mushfiquur Rahim and Shakib al Hasan - the latter hopped over to Muscat overnight after the IPL final in Dubai - will have a big say in Bangladesh's progress. But the likes of Liton Das, Soumya Sarkar



George Munsey (left) of Scotland and Mahmudullah of Bangladesh (Cricinfo)



and Mustafizur Rahman have also been on the international stage long enough to be expected to get them big wins.

Then there's Mohammad Naim, a developing white-ball opener, while Afif Hossain and Nurul

Hasan are the type of big-hitting finishers that this batting line-up has been missing previously. They also have all-rounders Mahedi Hasan and Mohammad Saifuddin who are exciting talents. Bangladesh will face

a Scotland side that has had a mixed bag in T20Is of late, with three defeats in their last five T20Is, including a home series loss to Zimbabwe in September, but, given their results in the warm-ups, head coach Shane Burger believes his side is peaking at the right time.

Experienced batters like Richie Berrington, Kyle Coetzer, George Munsey and Calum

MacLeod, of course, have crucial roles to play. Alasdair Evans and Safyaan Sharif will head the fast bowling attack, while leg-spinner Chris Greaves, who took a four-wicket haul against the Netherlands, could surprise Bangladesh given his ability to spin the ball both ways.

Of course, on this big stage, nerves also play a big part. Bangladesh might have more experience in such situations, but Scotland will be determined to show what they've got.

In the spotlight

Mahmudullah: He will not only dictate terms in the field as the Bangladesh captain, but his batting could make or break big finishes too. He was the only batter to get a half-century in Bangladesh's T20I series win over Australia and was also their top-scorer against New Zealand.

George Munsey: Scotland will look for quick, early runs from him. With a T20I career strike rate of 153.36 it speaks volumes of his big-hitting ability. The left-hand batter with the low grip can clear the infield with ease, both against pace and spin.

The buzz

Bangladesh: Soumya Sarkar's form puts him ahead of Mohammad Naim, who hasn't looked in good touch lately. Playing three seamers in Muscat may be the way to go, which would leave Nasum Ahmed out of the XI. Shoriful Islam's variety may be preferred over Taskin Ahmed.

Scotland: They have the option of leg-spinner Greaves after his four-for against Netherlands in the practice match. Hamza Tahir, the left-arm spinner, wicket-keeper-batter Craig Wallace and fast bowler Brad Wheal are also options available to them.

TEAMS (LIKELY)

Bangladesh: Soumya Sarkar, Liton Das, Shakib al Hasan, Mushfiquur Rahim, Mahmudullah (c), Afif Hossain, Nurul Hasan (wk), Mahedi Hasan, Mohammad Saifuddin, Shoriful Islam, Mustafizur Rahman.

Scotland: George Munsey, Kyle Coetzer (c), Matthew Cross (wk), Richie Berrington, Calum MacLeod, Dylan Budge, Michael Leask, Mark Watt, Safyaan Sharif, Josh Davey, Alasdair Evans.

Cricinfo



Rahul Dravid

Dravid in line to become India's head coach

Mumbai, India - Rahul Dravid is, by a distance, the frontrunner to be the next chief coach of the Indian men's team, and is in line to take over once Ravi Shastri finishes up at the end of the upcoming T20 World Cup, *ESPNCricinfo* has learnt. If things fall in place, he will head the backroom staff for the home series against New Zealand starting late November.

Dravid has always been the BCCI's favoured candidate to take over the job from Shastri, who is ineligible to reapply for the position when his term expires, owing to age-restriction norms currently in force.

The question was always about Dravid's inclination and, according to BCCI sources, he has been persuaded to take the job. There will still be a formal process of inviting applications, but if Dravid chooses to apply, the BCCI is unlikely to look beyond him, *ESPNCricinfo* understands. Paras Mhambrey, Dravid's long-term associate both at the NCA as well as the India A and U19 set-ups, is a favourite to take over as the Indian bowling coach.

Cricinfo



Chennai Super Kings celebrate with the trophy after defeating Kolkata Knight Riders in the final of the IPL 2021 at the Dubai International Stadium in the UAE on Friday

We have to decide what is good for CSK: Dhoni

2021 IPL CHAMPIONS

Dubai, UAE - MS Dhoni has not shut the door on continuing as a player with Chennai Super Kings (CSK) beyond IPL 2021, though he said that the final decision would be taken keeping in mind what would work best for the franchise, given the upcoming auction will offer franchises - including two new ones - the chance to majorly revamps their squads.

"We have to decide what is good for CSK, you know. It's not really about me being there in the top three or four, whatever the retained number of players is," Dhoni told host broadcaster Star Sports, after having lifted his fourth IPL trophy with a 27-run win against Kolkata on Friday.

"It's about making a strong core and making sure the franchise doesn't really suffer, because it will be an auction where you have to make a team for the next ten years. Definitely in 2008, the core group carried

on for more than ten years. We'll have to have a hard look as to... in the next ten years, who are the people who will contribute in a similar manner."

The BCCI hasn't yet released details of the retention rules for the eight existing franchises ahead of this mega auction, and how much of the auction purse retaining players will eat into.

Given the cycle of mega auctions, the next one after 2022 is unlikely to take place before 2025, and Dhoni seemed to be suggesting that Super Kings ought to make a pragmatic decision and retain those players around whom a long-term core could be built.

However, when congratulated on the legacy he was leaving behind at Super Kings - with four titles, nine appearances in the final, and qualification for the playoffs in every season they participated in except 2020 - Dhoni enigmatically said, "But

still, I haven't left [it] behind!"

Earlier this season, too, Dhoni had said: "You'll see me in yellow next season but whether I'll be playing for CSK you never know."

Reflecting on the period of sustained success he and the franchise have had, Dhoni said being clinical in the playoffs had been crucial.

"Every final is special. But also, if you start looking at the stats, you may say we are the most consistent team that loses in the finals. Because that is also a fact. But there have been a few finals where we lost because of that one brilliant performance or a span of 15 minutes where something happened and we lost the game."

Cricinfo



Chennai lift fourth title

Dubai, UAE - Chennai Super Kings made good on their promise to erase last season's aberration, as one comeback story trumped another in the IPL 2021 final: MS Dhoni and his team put an end to Kolkata Knight Riders' rollicking second half of the season as they picked up their fourth IPL title.

No team, barring Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2016, has won the title after finishing outside the top-two since the playoffs system was introduced in the IPL, and Kolkata didn't come close to turning that around. Having elected to bowl, they endured one of

their worst evenings in the field in the UAE leg, with Chennai's top order not letting their spinners settle down and taking plenty off their pacers.

Faf du Plessis led the charge, making 86 as he anchored half-century stands for each of the three wickets that fell during the course of Super Kings' 192. Robin Uthappa and Moeen Ali played their parts with the bat before Shardul Thakur ended Venkatesh Iyer's innings - and a dangerous opening stand - to cut Kolkata's middle order open and consign them to their first defeat in an IPL final.

Brief scores: Chennai 192-3 (Du Plessis 86, Moeen 37; Sunil Narine 2-26) beat Kolkata 165-9 (Shubman Gill 51, Venkatesh Iyer 50; Shardul Thakur 3-38, R Jadeja 2-37).

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

We are hopeful of making a winning start. We have played against PNG in the past. We are well-prepared for the match

Aqib Ilyas

Oman's allrounder, ahead of the opening game against PNG, on Saturday



ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021



A file photo of Oman captain Zeeshan Maqsood (C) and his teammates celebrating a dismissal during a match

Confident Oman take on debutants PNG

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

OMAN VS PNG

GROUP B: FIRST ROUND

There was a distinct spring in the steps of Oman players while training at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Friday ahead of their clash against Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the opening match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 on Sunday. And the chatter among the players exhibited confidence as they look to carry the hopes of the whole nation at the global event.

Duleep Mendis' boys will be appearing in the T20 World Cup for the second time in a row, five years after they made ripples in the cricketing world by upsetting Test-playing Ireland at the picturesque north Indian city of Dharamshala during their T20 World Cup debut.

Much has changed since the epic win except for the core of the team, and the boss [Mendis]. The team, under the former Sri Lankan great, still aspires to create upsets in the cricketing world and believes they are capable of doing against even the best. It is with this belief that the hosts will enter the seventh edition of the T20 World Cup with a clear target - to qualify



A file photo of Papua New Guinea players

into the Super 12 stage.

The hosts will be making history on Sunday as they will become the first Associate nation to not only host the T20 World Cup but also play in the event.

With nearly 4,500 fans expected to cheer the home side, a victory against the debutants PNG will set them on course for a possible berth in the Super 12s. The top-two teams in Group B will advance with Bangladesh and Scotland the other teams in the fray.

All the four teams will be involved on the three matchdays, starting on Sunday, and will be

followed by double-headers on Tuesday and Thursday.

Oman, captained by experienced allrounder Zeeshan Maqsood, made one change in the final 15 with allrounder Kashyap Prajapati coming in place of Khurram Khan.

On the eve of the match on Saturday, Oman's allrounder Aqib Ilyas, who has been in good form over the past few matches, said, "We are confident of making a winning start. We have played PNG few times and have won against them. We will give our best on our home ground."

"It is a proud moment for

Oman to host the World Cup and play at home. It is a dream come true: playing in the opening match of the T20 World Cup."

Oman have had an extensive preparations for the event since August as they took part in the ICC World Cricket League (WCL) 2 back-to-back tri-series as well as competing against the Mumbai Ranji Trophy squad over a T20 and one-day series.

Earlier this month, they hosted T20 World Cup-bound Sri Lanka team for two matches and also fielded a reserve team against Bangladesh.

Oman won against Namibia, another T20 World Cup side, in the first of the official ICC warm-up games in Dubai before losing to the Netherlands in the next.

PNG, meanwhile, have endured a tough second wave of the pandemic. Having qualified for their first-ever World Cup, they want to use the tournament as a platform to bring smiles back on their people's faces. After all, they will be playing in front of a televised audience back home for the first time.

PNG too have had a decent build-up, having arrived in Oman early September.

They have played eight ODIs in all, two each against USA and Nepal, apart from four World

Cricket League Division 2 matches against Scotland and Oman. In between, they had two intense camps and have topped off their preparation by playing in two ICC warm-up games: they lost to Ireland and Sri Lanka.

Speaking ahead of the opening match, PNG skipper Assad Vala said, "We believe in ourselves. We want to play to the best of our abilities."

"We want to express ourselves. We want to make it to the second round to test ourselves against the best teams in cricket. We don't want this World Cup to be a one-off."

TEAMS

OMAN

Zeeshan Maqsood (c), Aqib Ilyas, Jatinder Singh, Khawar Ali, Mohammad Nadeem, Ayaan Khan, Suraj Kumar, Sandeep Goud, Nester Dhamba, Kaleemullah, Bilal Khan, Naseem Khushi, Sufyan Mehmood, Fayyaz Butt, Kashyap Prajapati.

PNG

Assad Vala (c), Charles Amini, Lega Siaka, Norman Vanua, Nosaina Pokana, Kipling Doriga, Tony Ura, Hiri Hiri, Gaudi Toka, Sese Bau, Damien Ravu, Kabua Vagi-Morea, Simon Atai, Jason Kila, Chad Soper, Jack Gardner.

@ashokmuscat

ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

ALL YOU WANTED TO KNOW

THE HOSTS:

The BCCI are the hosts but the matches, involving 16 teams, will be played in the UAE and Oman from October 17-November 14. The decision to move the tournament out of India was taken in June, keeping in mind the COVID-19 situation in the country and the possibility of a third wave of infections.

THE FORMAT:

The tournament will be played in two rounds. The first round will feature eight teams, split into two groups: Each team will play every other team in its group once. After 12 matches at Oman Cricket Academy Ground, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, the top-two teams from each group will progress to the next round, the Super 12s, where they will join the eight top-ranked T20I sides. In the

GROUP A



Sri Lanka, Ireland, the Netherlands and Namibia

GROUP B



Bangladesh, Scotland, Papua New Guinea and Oman

Super 12s phase, the teams will once again be divided into two groups. Again, teams will play each of the others in its group once. This round will comprise 30 matches, to be played in Sharjah, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The top two teams from each group will progress to the semifinals.

GROUP 1



England, Australia, South Africa, West Indies, A1 and B2

GROUP 2



India, Pakistan, New Zealand, Afghanistan, B1 and A2

Points system

In both rounds, a team will get two points for a win; one point for a tie, no result or abandonment; and zero for a loss. If two or more teams finish on equal points in their group, the following parameters will be considered, in the order below, to break the deadlock:

- Number of wins
- Net run rate
- Head-to-head result (points first, then net run rate in that game)
- Original first-round/Super-12 seedings

DRS to be available

Yes, for the first time a men's T20 World Cup will have reviews. Each team will be allowed a maximum of two unsuccessful requests per innings, as has been the case in T20Is since cricket resumed after the pandemic.

What happens if a match is tied?

The teams will play a Super Over. If the Super Over is also tied, the teams will keep playing Super Overs until one wins. If the Super Over is not possible because of, say, weather conditions or time constraints, the match will be declared a tie and the teams will be awarded a point each.

If a result cannot be achieved during a semifinal (or the match is abandoned), then the team that finished higher in its Super 12 group will progress to the final. In the event of similar happening in the final, both teams will be declared joint winners.

Prize-money

The winners get US\$1.6mn, the runners-up US\$800,000, and the losing semifinalists US\$400,000 each.

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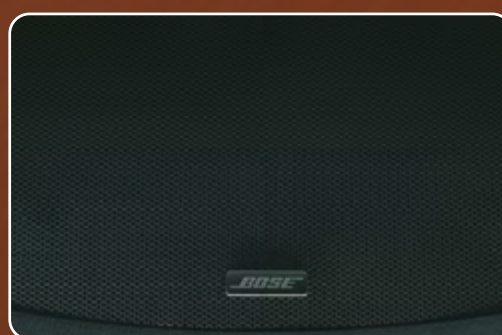
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